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## Community Monitoring for Postwar Transformation: Afghanistan

In many ways, corruption in Afghanistan is a bigger detractor to stability and progress than the insurgency. Many Afghans face violence at the hands of the insurgency. But every Afghan experiences corruption, sometimes at the hands of government officials, whom they are expected to trust over the insurgents.

—*NATO secretary-general Anders Fogh Rasmussen,  
“NATO-ISAF Takes Steps to Prevent Corruption”*

Corruption in war-torn Afghanistan is now considered a clear threat to peace and development.<sup>1</sup> It is undermining government legitimacy as well as national and international efforts for reconstruction, poverty reduction, and the provision of basic public services. A survey conducted in 2008 found that 64 percent of Afghans believed that aid efforts were tainted by corruption.<sup>2</sup> In August 2011 a special Pentagon task force estimated that \$360 million in US contracting funds ended up in the pockets of the Taliban, criminals, or power brokers with ties to both.<sup>3</sup> Corruption is also enabling a flourishing drug trade that is a source of revenue for warlords as well as the Taliban, according to a confidential communication, with the Taliban exchanging drugs for weapons.<sup>4</sup>

For citizens, it adds a persistent burden. In a 2010 poll, 83 percent of Afghans said corruption affects their daily lives.<sup>5</sup> A 2013 report from the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) stated that while some progress has been made, Afghans considered corruption to be the second most important issue for their country after insecurity.<sup>6</sup> Not surprisingly, the Taliban is recruiting new members from among the

marginalized population oppressed by unrelenting graft, poverty, and unaccountability. Mafia networks, often intertwined with the state and insurgents, operate on the ground.

### **Context**

In 2002 a French student, Lorenzo Delesgues, came to Afghanistan to conduct political science research. He already spoke Dari and since 1996 had traveled extensively through Iran, Pakistan, and Central Asia. In October 2005 Delesgues together with Yama Torabi, a former university classmate, and Pajhwok Ghooori, a young civic actor, founded Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA), the first civil society organization (CSO) focusing on corruption. Its overall mission is to “put corruption under the spotlight by increasing transparency, integrity, and accountability in Afghanistan through the provision of policy-oriented research, development of training tools, and facilitation of policy dialogue.”<sup>7</sup> It seeks to enhance in-country research capacity, empower citizens to hold public institutions to account, and contribute to the formation of a coherent civil society movement, Delesgues explained.<sup>8</sup>

By 2006 the young men concluded that they wanted to go beyond producing reports while sitting in Kabul. They decided to involve those most affected by the dire conditions—everyday people—and the way to start was at the local level. “This is where things are happening and things can change,” Delesgues observed. He and Ghooori began going into rural settings and listening to the locals. They heard many grievances, such as not being consulted about what they need, witnessing bad-quality development projects but feeling powerless to do anything, not having a chain of communication with the government, feeling afraid to speak with officials, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) being unresponsive to their input and demands. As importantly, Delesgues and his colleagues found that people wanted to go beyond the corrupt “collusion network” in their area and play a “citizen’s role,” but didn’t know how in such situations.

Delesgues took inspiration from a variety of sources, including the pioneering social audit strategies and tactics of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) Right to Information movement in India, the achievements of nonviolent social movements, and the social accountability initiatives developed by the Aga Khan Foundation. The Afghan National Solidarity Programme, created in 2003 by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, also pointed to the role of communities in upholding integrity. At that time, the program was, accord-

ing to Delesgues, “one of the few successes of reconstruction.” Ghoori and Delesgues brainstormed. They held some informal conversations with an international civil society expert on accountability in reconstruction. Through these efforts, they drew the parameters of a new citizen empowerment and community-monitoring initiative, born out of Afghanistan’s conflict environment.

## **Civic Initiative**

### *Vision, Objectives, and Definable Outcomes*

Through citizen empowerment and action, the young civic leaders envision a society where the interaction between the state and the people is not one of ruler and subject but one in which the state is an ally of the people and a regulator for the common good. Their overall objectives were to make aid and service provision accountable to citizens, give them a say over the reconstruction of their communities, and bring together the key parties involved in postconflict development—namely, the populace, government, and international community. They outlined two clear outcomes: in the short term, to prevent corruption and improve projects that were being monitored by communities; in the medium term, to develop a model that could be carried out in other parts of the country.

### *Strategic Analysis*

In examining why the reconstruction effort has fallen short of expectations, Delesgues asserts that traditional, top-down efforts did not perceive much of a role for grassroots civil society, and donors initially thought they could achieve change by building state institutions. “In countries where the state is weak and the ‘top’ has little credibility, top-down doesn’t work so well,” he commented.

A detailed strategic analysis was conducted from the outset, including investigating the following factors:

- Social, political, and economic conditions.
- Those who would support and those who would be against them.
- Who could be potential “conflict engines.”
- Sources of possible violent conflict.
- Risks and repression.
- Challenges to engaging citizens, such as fear, lack of skills, and illiteracy.

- How to best mobilize people.
- How to interest donors in the initiative and be transparent about projects that would come under community scrutiny.

The young leaders realized that if the citizen initiatives were characterized as anticorruption, they would fail for several reasons. Because project information and site access were needed, doors would have closed on them, and those benefitting from graft could retaliate, even with violence. Moreover, as rule of law is weak, identifying all the corrupt players and seeing them tried and jailed are impossible. “Weak governments can raise objections, create obstacles, not release information, and repress, but they have trouble enforcing the law,” noted Delesgues.

In these contexts, corruptors can be more susceptible to social pressure than a punitive approach. The villagers needed to increase the (social) costs for being corrupt—something one organization or a few cannot do, but that requires pressure from many. Consequently, community monitoring was strategically framed in terms of getting projects done according to plan and making development efforts and donors accountable to the people’s needs. IWA could approach and negotiate with the various players involved in reconstruction—donors, multilateral development institutions, governments, military, the confusing mix of international and Afghan contractors and subcontractors, NGOs, and the national and provincial governments.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, the linchpin of their strategic plan was that the entire effort be community-driven—civic initiatives led by regular citizens who decide whether their village will participate, who will conduct the monitoring, and which projects will come under scrutiny. They made demands, performed surveys and inspections, interacted on the ground with various project interlocutors and state reconstruction officials, and engaged in other nonviolent tactics to exert people power.

Local ownership of the initiatives was critical to overcoming obstacles and resistance from powerholders, including the government and some donors and multilateral aid agencies. For example, Delesgues reported that when a provincial governor raised objections, arguing that NGOs should not examine reconstruction projects, IWA justifiably countered that it was the citizens—the intended beneficiaries—who were engaged in monitoring.

### *Planning*

Efforts began on two fronts: securing a minimal level of government acquiescence and setting up a pilot program. The first turning point unex-

pectedly came in May 2008, when an official from the Ministry of the Economy, who had some responsibility for monitoring reconstruction, agreed to cooperate with IWA, thereby enabling the CSO to state that the program had support from the authorities. Establishing contacts with other government agencies and overcoming the apprehension of villagers to take action were extremely important. At the very least, IWA's nominal agreements with state institutions were enough to create leverage for the grassroots initiatives, bolster demands for project-related information, embolden citizens, and expand civic space—that is, the arena for public expression and dissent.

Ghoori and Delesgues initially made contact with communities in the general vicinity of Jabulsaraj (approximately one hundred kilometers from Kabul), which was neither the toughest nor the easiest scenario. This area did not have the overwhelming security problems that plagued other parts of the country, and it was the target of significant aid efforts. Yet citizens were poor and frustrated, as reconstruction was not bringing what was promised or what they needed. Locals were not civically engaged, and they lacked hope and confidence that they could bring forth change. Still, they were not completely downtrodden. According to Delesgues, they were ready to try something but needed someone to make a convincing proposition. Ghoori played a key role in these interactions. “He was there on the ground. He understood how the corrupt system was working, could put players together, and could mobilize people,” said Delesgues. The second turning point of the entire program came toward the end of 2007 and early 2008, when ten villages decided to participate in community-monitoring initiatives and IWA subsequently launched the pilot in the district of Jabulsaraj, Parwan province.

### *Defining Method*

Delesgues considers community monitoring a derivative, rather than a replica, of social audits. In the civil resistance realm, community monitoring is also a defining nonviolent method, a series of sequenced nonviolent actions that together wield people power, consisting of a principal tactic around which a host of nonviolent tactics revolve. Each community-monitoring initiative lasted for the life cycle of the development project, normally one year, and encompassed the following steps:

- *Election.* Election of two local volunteer monitors for each monitored project. The voting process was determined solely by each locality. Initially, some monitors wanted to be paid, but IWA told them they

would receive no compensation other than for modest out-of-pocket expenses incurred while conducting their duties. This approach ran counter to the prevailing donor-and-NGO culture that had developed, where people expect to be reimbursed for whatever they do.

- *Education.* IWA trained the local monitors, providing skills, standards, and tools for monitoring, conducting site inspections, and so on. The volunteers also signed a code of conduct outlining the way they would execute their work and underscoring their commitment to the community to report findings regularly, refuse bribes, and maintain integrity.

- *Project selection.* Each community chose the project that was important to it. IWA developed basic selection criteria in order to facilitate this process, including priority for ongoing infrastructure projects, rather than less demonstrable outcomes, such as carpet weaving. IWA also provided a list of donor projects slated for the community, based on information obtained from provincial planning departments. However, the people had the final say, and in some instances they picked projects not on the list. Schools, roads, clinics, irrigation channels, and flood walls were common targets of scrutiny.

- *On-the-ground information collection and assessment.* Local monitors collect project documents; make weekly site visits; document the reconstruction process, inputs, and outputs; engage with the project engineers and other implementers; and present their information and findings to their community, project implementers, and powerholders. Over time, these interactions with authority figures often led to productive relationships, even friendships, that won support for communities. In one case, a village gathered household donations and asked the contracting company to undertake extra measures in order to improve the project.

- *Weekly community forums.* Local monitors subsequently presented their findings every Friday at a community forum, often associated with the weekly gathering at the mosque for prayer. This setup built accountability into the monitoring process and promoted enthusiasm and unity among fellow citizens.

### *People Power*

When the monitors found problems, the communities demanded changes. First they would use dialogue to come to a resolution. If that didn't work, they would ratchet up the pressure. This often involved expanding sources of input and monitoring. For instance, in 2009, to put pressure on a recalcitrant contracting company building a school near

Jabulsaraj, locals convinced both an official engineer from the provincial government and the donor's (UNICEF) engineer to check the project. The civic initiatives also tried to garner support from outside the community, such as state authorities, clerics, donors, and elected representatives. A third tactic was inviting project implementers or state officials to community meetings or site visits, which creates social pressure and can win over people from within the corrupt system. Finally, locals flexed their civil resistance muscles through other collective actions, such as protests, speaking in assemblies, petitions, letter writing, and garnering media coverage. In the very first campaign in Jabulsaraj, when monitors discovered low-quality bricks were being used to build a school, villagers launched a sit-in at the construction site and refused to budge until the company brought in new, higher-quality bricks.

Community members also directly provided support to local monitors, often in the form of technical know-how, facilitating contacts, and joining site visits. "The communities got involved, used their own knowledge, and went to others who had expertise they lacked. This was not about two local monitors working in isolation," said Delesgues. He cited an example of a local monitor who could not read and got literate villagers to help him for the duration of the initiative.

### *Tactical Innovations*

Delesgues came up with the idea of having the villages conduct *community-led surveys*, which he called a "strategic instrument" designed to gain cooperation from the various development actors. IWA developed a set of thirty standard questions. Following the election of local monitors, a village representative would canvas a representative group of approximately 10 percent of households. They produced directly relevant data that donors did not collect in their own evaluations, could be used by the media, and often served as a source of leverage with disobliging state authorities.

After the pilot program, the young civic leaders realized that they needed to foster dialogue among the various actors involved in the projects being monitored. They fashioned an innovative solution—provincial monitoring boards—where people can meet regularly to talk about project problems, visit reconstruction sites, and find solutions. All decisions and commitments are recorded to ensure follow-up. Board members include representatives from the Ministry of the Economy, relevant reconstruction departments, donors, contractors, local monitors, and the media.<sup>10</sup> The first one was established in 2009, and others are now functioning in Balkh, Herat, Nangarhar, and Parwan.

## **Civic Initiative Attributes**

### *Multiple Actors*

The community-monitoring initiatives were composed of the following sets of actors:

- Communities.
- Local monitors (two volunteers per village).
- Community notables, such as elders, mullahs, mayors.
- State representatives.
- Reconstruction implementers (donors, contractors, subcontractors).
- Provincial monitoring boards.
- IWA local representatives.
- IWA Kabul.

IWA has a locally recruited staff person in each district, which encompasses approximately ten to fifteen projects. The local representatives function as a direct link between IWA and the communities, creating strong bonds and stimulating mobilization. Delesgues explained, “If Afghans come from the city, they are respected. But if the person is a local, someone they can relate to, he’ll get an audience that makes things happen.” They serve as a focal point for the communities, meeting weekly with the volunteer monitors and troubleshooting any emerging difficulties. IWA thus ensures that the monitoring is conducted properly and volunteers are following the code of conduct. The local representatives also function as an on-the-ground resource for the communities—arranging appointments with project players and powerholders, forwarding project documentation and photos to IWA Kabul for safekeeping, solving problems with the state, and raising concerns with IWA Kabul when resolution seems difficult.

In the early stages, Ghori and Delesgues were the main contact persons with the communities. Although based in Kabul, they spent much time on the ground, learning from the villagers and talking together with them as equals. Hence, they earned the locals’ respect and trust. Although foreign and an initial curiosity to people, Delesgues was accepted due to his familiarity with Afghan society and fluency in Dari. He believes that being an international was not automatically a disadvantage, given the partnership with Ghori. “We were complementary; we played upon each other’s strengths in the eyes of the people,” he said.



### *IWA's Role*

From the outset, Ghoori and Delesgues saw IWA as an animator and enabler of citizen empowerment and action. "There is a distinction between trying to nurture community capacity versus controlling or directing it," said Delesgues. The CSO's decisionmaking focused on overall strategy, while the villages had control over monitoring initiatives and took their own decisions on the ground. IWA's only requirements were that the initiatives stay nonviolent and that monitoring activities be documented.

In many respects, IWA served as a coach to the communities, providing tangible as well as intangible support. Tangible elements included

- *Creating the overall plan.*
  - *Developing a monitoring methodology and tools* that could be used by rural and peri-urban Afghans, who often were underprivileged, lacking in formal education, and relatively isolated.
  - *Education and capacity-building*, through the volunteer monitors' training.
    - *Access to information from donors and powerholders*; in order to conduct the monitoring, communities need to obtain the project's "statement of work," which consists of detailed information such as blueprints, budgets, donors, contractors, and so forth.
    - *Placing a locally hired staff person on the ground*, to serve as a liaison, troubleshooter, and resource.
    - *Creating a bridge among all interlocutors*, by facilitating contacts and direct dialogue and cooperation among the communities, the donors and military, the national government, and the provincial government—informally and formally, as is the case with the provincial monitoring boards.
    - *Overcoming powerholder obstacles*—for instance, when a provincial government tries to thwart monitoring by sending low-level or unsuitable interlocutors to deal with the local monitors.
    - *Fostering exchanges among local monitors from different villages.*
- After the pilot project, in addition to the regular trainings, IWA began bringing new monitors together with veteran monitors in order to add another dimension to their education. "You get someone who has done it and can explain things in a way that [new monitors] can relate to and isn't abstract," said Delesgues. As well, these gatherings allow monitors to exchange experiences, learn from one another, and build ties across communities.
- *Providing a centralized repository to store and make available all information collected by the communities.*

Intangibles were equally important to the tangible elements such as

- *Surmounting people's doubts*, and fears of reprisals, rejection, and failure.
- *Building confidence in people's abilities and self-worth* so they could interact with educated professionals and state authorities.
- *Encouraging a sense of agency*—that people have the power to change their circumstances.
- *Fostering unity* through collective objectives and responsibility for the monitoring initiative. Through its close interactions with communities, IWA was able to discern social divisions and thus take steps to overcome possible obstacles to unity. For example, it organized meetings in places where many people gathered. IWA's local representatives kept tabs on local leaders to ensure that they were gathering the bulk of their communities together for meetings and votes. IWA tried to get women involved, but given the highly patriarchal and traditional nature of Afghan society, it was difficult. However, the CSO conducted surveys to get their views. A few women were elected as local monitors, but they felt uncomfortable on construction sites. Women voted for local monitors, often attended community forums, and even spoke up. Last but not least, they participated in the aforementioned school sit-in.

### *Nonviolent Discipline*

IWA continuously emphasized the need for communities to be nonviolent, which was also a key point of the local monitor trainings. In this postwar environment, the civic leaders were concerned that violence could quickly escalate from a small altercation, which would damage the entire monitoring program and result in blacklisting. However, through close interactions with the villagers, Ghouri and Delesgues found that people readily understood the arguments for nonviolent discipline. "Coming out of a postconflict context where violence was so prevalent, people knew its consequences and they are more reluctant to engage in violence," said Delesgues. However, the civic leaders also understood that they needed to show people that nonviolent methods would yield results. "To be nonviolent in a violent environment, you need to be effective," he added.

### *Communications*

IWA also developed a communications strategy and plan. The objectives were to target the actors involved in reconstruction and win them over to the notion of community monitoring. The targets were donors,

the Afghan state, communities that could potentially join the initiative, civil servants, and parliamentarians. Rather than focus on the negative (corruption and impunity), the principal message was positive: transparency in reconstruction is beneficial because it allows communities to scrutinize projects, thereby helping to ensure that projects are completed successfully, aid is spent properly, and recipients actually benefit from reconstruction efforts.

The provincial media is particularly important as it garners local publicity for the civic initiative, increases transparency, and indirectly pressures powerholders and other top-down players. IWA undertook a concerted effort to engage with the provincial media, making a strategic decision to invite journalists to attend and cover the provincial monitoring board meetings. In general, the national and international media were viewed more as a means to amplify people's voices to powerholders and the public in donor countries. It also helped external actors understand the power of the grass roots. In some cases, foreign coverage abetted cooperation from disinclined Afghan officials and international actors.

### *International Support*

IWA was fortunate to have hard-core support from Making Integrity Work (TIRI) and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), which was flexible enough to allow the allocation of a modest amount (US\$30,000) for developing and planning the initiative and launching the pilot with ten villages. Following the pilot's success, other donors became interested, which enabled IWA to both meet grassroots demand among communities and to expand in different provinces. By 2010 the community-monitoring program's budget increased to US\$120,000. In order to maintain neutrality, IWA does not accept money from the international military, although it cooperates with them so that communities can monitor their reconstruction projects.

IWA was one of the CSOs involved in setting up the Network for Integrity in Reconstruction (NIR), originally launched in 2005 by the international NGO (INGO) Integrity Action (then called TIRI [Making Integrity Work]). It fosters exchange and in-country visits among civic actors. Delesgues reports that the network is a valuable source of ideas, information, approaches, practices, and encouragement.

### **Outcomes**

What began in 2007 with ten villages had expanded to almost 400 civic initiatives in several provinces by 2013: Badakhshan, Balkh, Bamyan, Panjshir, Parwan, Nangarhar, and Shindand, the latter two with particu-

larly grave security problems.<sup>11</sup> The first wave of monitoring was done solely in rural settings. In the second and third waves, communities on the periphery of urban locales also took part.

Delesgues estimates that in approximately one-third of the civic initiatives, the problems were solved through strong community pressure. For example, between 2010 and 2011, the *Majbura Abad Shura* community launched a monitoring campaign for the construction of a new building for the overcrowded *Nangarhar* high school (8,000 students), funded by the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA). In spite of “rigorous” donor monitoring, serious problems were detected, including exposed electrical wiring and lower-quality bricks, which were rectified.<sup>12</sup> The latter would not only have reduced overall longevity by 80 percent, but would have impacted structural soundness, a concern given that the area has been struck by earthquakes, most recently in 2009. In about another third of the cases, locals didn’t find problems or the project implementers were open, accessible, and cooperative in settling issues. Consequently, in two-thirds of the localities, change was accomplished through civic action. Among the remaining third, success was not forthcoming. Either the problems weren’t detected, access to the project site proved impossible to secure, or the communities were not organized and mobilized enough to wield people power on powerholders or implementers blocking the monitoring.

A network of over 600 local monitors voluntarily serves as resources after their term, including a few from peri-urban areas with professional backgrounds—for instance, in *Nangarhar*, a medical student and a teacher who graduated in computer science. According to Delesgues, IWA is working on pulling such people together to meet and exchange with one another, and to mobilize new communities.

According to IWA, communities that have gone through the civic monitoring initiative become more autonomous and effective in problem-solving and less dependent on local powerholders.<sup>13</sup> A local monitor in *Nangarhar* said, “It was a good experience to create collaboration. It belongs to us. It is up to us to make a good country.”<sup>14</sup>

New forms of community monitoring are being launched in other realms rife with corruption: justice (monitoring courts), budgets (tracking expenditures), and mining (companies pledging social investments).

The World Bank and IWA initiated an innovative form of cooperation. They came to a monitoring agreement whereby in July 2011 the CSO opened a field office in the province of *Badakshan*, in order to begin empowering interested local communities to monitor World Bank-funded reconstruction projects.<sup>15</sup> IWA is also developing a com-

prehensive educational package nicknamed the Integrity Box. Delesgues reports that the plan is to “put all the tools together for other groups to use.”

## Case Analysis

### *People Power Dynamics*

Even in a violent conflict setting with limited institutional capacity and state authority, people power can generate surprising pressure on powerholders, state and nonstate, by

- Acts of disruption of the corrupt status quo (for example, information gathering and site inspections).
- Gaining a modicum of support and cooperation from powerholders (through formal and informal agreements, public pledges, or institutional cooperation via IWA’s provincial monitoring boards).
- Winning people over from within the corrupt system (including donors and officials who can wield institutional power even if they themselves are not considered senior powerbrokers).
- Cultivating social legitimacy—of the cause, actors (local citizens), and nonviolent methods (monitoring, mobilization, and dialogue). Legitimacy in turn can enhance social pressure and help minimize reprisals and repression from the tangled web of overlapping, interconnected corrupt state and nonstate interests. IWA’s community-monitoring initiatives accomplished legitimacy through the strategic framing of the grievances, unity of the people and objectives, and grassroots ownership of the campaign. The community-monitoring program changed power relations between the grass roots and elites. Through monitoring, mobilization, site visits, and the provincial monitoring boards, regular citizens raised their voices and made demands directly to powerholders. For many locals, who are accustomed to being marginalized, this change in the power equation was revolutionary. To grasp this transformation, one only needs to picture a board meeting at which a village volunteer first presents proof of inferior construction to government officials, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) personnel, engineers, and the media, and then goes on to make recommendations that these powerholders actually adopt.

### *Intangibles*

Ghoori and Delesgues deemed it essential that communities feel ownership over the civic initiatives and strategically took measures to instill

it. “We were just planting the seed and creating the conditions for the seed to grow,” said Delesgues. As a result, each civic initiative developed its own character, depending on, for example, the personalities and capacities of the volunteer monitors, the manner in which the villagers organized themselves, local leadership, and approaches to problem-solving. IWA’s community-monitoring program was created out of the social and cultural realities of poor communities and the conflict conditions on the ground, instead of the application of standardized social accountability approaches or the replication of campaigns and movements from other countries. As a result, the community-monitoring initiatives resonated with citizens and fostered their participation.

### *Strategic Considerations*

The young civic leaders understood that they needed to start small. Overambitious goals at the outset would have led to failure. Thus, they began with a modest pilot program and outlined a series of steps and accomplishments along the way that would set a precedent, slowly build a winning record of success, and gain credibility for the overall initiative. They applied this same strategy with the provincial monitoring boards. After succeeding to establish one, they pointed to it when approaching powerholders in other provinces.

IWA’s strategic assessment identified the various powerholders impacting reconstruction: relevant national ministries and agencies, provincial departments, donors, the military, contractors and subcontractors, and the media. Within these pillars they assessed who had decisionmaking authority as well as those who had institutional power that could be tapped. The civic leaders wanted the overall program to gain strong allies and momentum before corruptors understood its impact, attempted to thwart it, or retaliated. Hence, the initial focus on donor projects was a deliberate move. It enabled IWA to minimize objections from national and provincial authorities and to maintain that IWA’s involvement would benefit the state. Communities began monitoring state reconstruction projects in 2009.

The process of wielding people power through community monitoring calls to mind the Kingian (nonlinear) six-step strategy for developing a nonviolent campaign, namely, personal commitment, education, information gathering, negotiation, direct action, and reconciliation—the latter reflected in how donors and even some government officials began to recognize the valuable role of organized citizens in reconstruction and development.

## Lessons Learned

### *Empowerment*

IWA's community-monitoring initiatives offer several lessons for citizen empowerment and action. First, grassroots anticorruption initiatives build democracy from the bottom up, not in the abstract, but through practice, in this case, through informal elections, citizen-led surveys, and regular reporting activities on the part of volunteer monitors that instilled their accountability in their fellow villagers.

Consistent with the civil resistance literature, not all within the corrupt system are equally loyal to it—that is, not all are venal or equally wedded to maintaining the status quo. Thus, securing dialogue and cooperation with some powerholders and mobilizing external actors to apply top-down pressure can reinforce the voices and capacities of local communities and complement bottom-up pressure.

Third, NGOs and CSOs can catalyze civic initiatives, but “there’s a distinction between trying to nurture community capacity versus controlling or directing it,” noted Delesgues. While they are not substitutes for civic campaigns and social movements, such nonstate actors can empower the grass roots through education and training, developing methodologies and tools regular people can use, fostering grassroots networks, brokering contacts with powerholders and external actors for strategic dialogue and negotiation, and sourcing external and top-down pressure to complement people power.

Another lesson is that IWA understood the difference between imposing externally designed projects to stimulate civic engagement versus on-the-ground immersion and partnership with communities that cultivated know-how, problem-solving skills, and autonomy. IWA did not attempt to formalize social accountability, that is, people power. What was consistent was the set of standards and tools for the monitoring process, which were derived bearing in mind the users (Afghan villagers and peri-urban dwellers), the powerholders, and the sociocultural context in which they would be used.

Fifth, the grass roots—communities and citizens—have traditionally been viewed as subjects of donor projects and passive recipients of top-down anticorruption programs designed by experts, namely, elites and external actors. The impact of the community-monitoring initiatives demonstrates how regular people, even in deprived, violent, and often isolated settings, can become drivers of accountability, sources of information and insights, and partners in development.

*People Power Building Blocks*

Presented as a mathematical equation, one could say that unity plus ownership equals legitimacy. Unity is essential not only for gaining numbers (citizen participation) but for the legitimacy of the campaign or the movement's cause and its tactics. In turn, legitimacy can help mute repression, make it backfire if it occurs, sow doubts, shift loyalties, and win support among those within the corrupt system.

Another lesson is that the community-monitoring initiatives were built upon the existing social infrastructure—the social structures, social relationships, and culture of Afghan communities—rather than on “foreign” social systems interposed by external actors.

*External Actors*

In reconstruction and peacebuilding settings, a plethora of top-down actors can result in confusion, replication, and working at cross purposes, however unintentionally. By holding top-down actors to account, strong, organized, and strategically planned people power initiatives can be a balancing counterpoint.

Similarly, mobilized communities can be the eyes and ears of reconstruction and development efforts, as well as a source of information and practical recommendations. These communities can play a particularly vital role in conflict, postconflict, and natural disaster scenarios, where rule of law and institutions are weak and corruption is endemic.

Finally, third-party actors involved in development and peacebuilding can enhance prospects for civic campaigns and movements to emerge organically without impinging on them. This activity can involve

- Flexible support for CSOs to pilot new initiatives that require modest funding. In this way, CSOs can see what works and what needs fine-tuning, how best to expand (if at all) in order to have a lasting impact, and how to meet capacity-building needs.
- Reconceptualizing the management of small grants and developing new patterns of interaction with the grass roots that affirms its autonomy. The structure and administration of grants programs are often geared to big projects that entail high costs and top-down design and supervision. In such cases, donors don't know how to deal with independent civic initiatives and nonviolent campaigns.
- Access to information and transparency of reconstruction strategies, efforts, and interlocutors within the state and private sector.



## Notes

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3. Richard Lardner, “Official: US Dollars Ending Up in Taliban Hands,” Associated Press, September 15, 2011, [www.miamiherald.com](http://www.miamiherald.com).

4. Jerome Starkey, “Drugs for Guns: How the Afghan Heroin Trade is Fueling the Taliban Insurgency,” *The Independent*, April 29, 2008, [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk).

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6. *Corruption in Afghanistan: Recent Patterns and Trends* (Vienna: UN Office of Drugs and Crime and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption, December 2012).

7. “About IWA,” Integrity Watch Afghanistan, [www.iwaweb.org](http://www.iwaweb.org) (accessed October 12, 2013).

8. This chapter is based on interviews, conversations, and subsequent written communications with Lorenzo Delesgues, cofounder, Integrity Watch Afghanistan, October 2010 and April 2011.

9. The term “military” in this chapter refers to NATO’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The UN Security Council approved the first resolution authorizing ISAF on December 20, 2001.

10. “Community Based Monitoring: For an Aid Effective and Sustainable Reconstruction,” Integrity Watch Afghanistan leaflet, [www.iwaweb.org](http://www.iwaweb.org).

11. IWA brochure, provided to author on October 3, 2013.

12. “Case Study: Community Mobilisation—Succeeding in Impacting Your Future,” Integrity Watch Afghanistan, March 2011, [www.iwaweb.org](http://www.iwaweb.org).

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

15. “CBM to Monitor World Bank Projects,” *Integrity Watch Afghanistan Newsletter* 11, no. 7 (July 24, 2011), [www.iwaweb.org](http://www.iwaweb.org).

