



Resilient Livelihoods Project

Midterm Review Report

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Charkint and Khulm Districts

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Afghanistan

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Acronyms

AACRS	Australia Afghanistan Community Resilience Scheme
AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
AFN	Afghani
AUD	Australian Dollar
CIG	Common Interest Group
CDC	Community Development Council
DAIL	Directorate of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DoLSAMD	Department of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyred, and Disabled
DoWA	Department of Women Affairs
FFS	Farmer Field School
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HHs	Households
IPM	Integrated Pest Management
MAIL	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock
MELF	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
MTR	Midterm Review
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NPP	National Priority Program
PwD	People with Disability
PQ	Program Quality
RLP	Resilient Livelihood Project
ToT	Training of Trainers
SG	Solidarity Group
USD	United States Dollar
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association
WMC	Water Management Committee

Executive Summary

CARE has been implementing the Resilient Livelihoods Project under Australia Afghanistan Community Resilience Scheme (AACRS) since January 2015. This project contributes to access to sustainable livelihoods for, and strengthened resilience of, vulnerable rural communities in Charkint and Khulm Districts of Balkh Province. This project improves agricultural practices and production, ensures that households can access agricultural related information and networks, provides skills and resources to landless and labour-constrained households to become resilient to shocks, enable landless and labour-constrained households to supplement their diet with nutritious food and sell excess produce, and ensure that needs of vulnerable groups are addressed in decision-making forums.

CARE conducted the mid-term review of the project to review and assess the project effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, sustainability and to provide recommendations to guide the final 11 months of the project's implementation. The evaluation is also aimed to identify the project potential for scale-up and identification of new components to be included in a potential next phase of the project. This report presents the mid-term evaluation of the project and is based on the literature review of the project documents, MTR workshop discussions, and data collection through focus group discussions and interviews with the project stakeholders. The findings and achievement of the project reflected in this report are covering the period of January 2015 to November 2016. The MTR data collection took place in November 2016 while the report as per the MTR plan was prepared in December and January 2016.

Overall, the MTR shows that the project is on track in terms of achieving the targets set in the performance measurement framework. Some targets have not been achieved, such as Common Interest Group establishment, and linkage of village savings and loans associations with extension services, relevant district and provincial-level businesses, and governments departments, such as DoWA and DoLSAMD, due to drawbacks in the approach, lack of clarity in the process, and cultural barriers. Nevertheless, there have been overachievement in some targets, such as distribution of improved wheat seed, village savings and loans associations establishment, solidarity group formation and elders training,. This is mainly due to availability of resources and interest of the project participants.

In terms of effectiveness, progress was made towards achieving the end of project outcomes to some extent, and a platform has been put in place to enhance livelihoods through wheat farming, animal husbandry, thereby ensuring food security, and improving social and economic positions. The crop cut survey report showed the yield of improved wheat seed variety distributed by the project was more than two times higher compared to the local variety. The project has established 37 VSLAs with 690 members. The FGDs findings reveals that project participants were able to purchase calves, sheep or chickens, open small businesses, and start handicraft businesses as a result of taking loans from VSLAs. The project reports indicate that so far 245 female VSLA members have taken an amount of 1,027,900 AFN (equivalent to AUD 19,972) as loans out of which 626,420 AFN (equivalent to AUD 12,171) has been reimbursed. Meanwhile, the FGD participants mentioned that as a result of VSLAs, their household income has increased, women's understanding of business and income generating activities has increased, and the VSLA members feel economically empowered.

The project has been marked as relevant to AACRS Program Impacts, to the strategic objectives of Australia's aid program in Afghanistan, and to the CARE 2020 program strategy indicators. In terms of efficiency, the measures and conditions applied in project implementation created job opportunity for local residents and increased communities' acceptance towards CARE operation in the target areas and the project resources were used in a way to result in improved economic conditions of beneficiaries. A platform has been put in place for sustainability purpose by working on building

capacity at different levels, focusing on strengthening the linkages of project beneficiaries with service providers and government, making efforts to popularise new agriculture techniques and practices, and hand over of activities to respected entities and DAIL.

In term of partnership and coordination, based on the interview findings, coordination and cooperation exists with CARE and DAIL, and respected entities at district level. Coordination meetings are held among AACRS NGO partners. However, to make improvement further, it is suggested to hire a Scheme Coordinator to manage communications and partnership across AACRS partners, and make sure all NGO partners conduct their planned cross visits and other learning sessions.

Midterm Review Rational and purpose

The purpose of this mid-term review was to assess the project effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, sustainability and to provide recommendations to guide the final 11 months of the project's implementation. The evaluation was also aimed to identify the project potential for scale-up and identification of new components to be included in a potential next phase of the project.

Midterm Review Key Objectives

The key objectives of the review are as below:

- To assess the project progress toward planned interventions and expected outcomes.
- Assess the project's effectiveness in improving the economic and social position of women.
- To assess if the project has the potential to be scaled-up and/or replicated.
- To identify new components to add value in the potential next phase of the project.
- Make recommendations for changes to activities and approaches that will help to increase the project's impact.

Methodology

The midterm review was conducted in three stages, which consisted of desk review of project documents, discussing project progress, achievements and challenges through a two-day workshop, and collecting data from project beneficiaries, government officials, and project partners.

The project documents such as project design, baseline report, MELF, project progress reports (annual, Interim, and monthly), field visit reports and project plans were reviewed thoroughly. A two-day workshop was organised for project staff, including Field Supervisors, Community Mobilisers, Project Supervisor, Project Manager, and team from CARE's program quality unit to discuss project progress against planned actions and assessed the project based on measures of effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, and sustainability.

Two male and two female staff from RLP project were trained in how to moderate Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with project beneficiaries in Khulm and Charkint districts. Discussions were held with project beneficiaries, government officials, and NGO partners regarding project interventions through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews.

Table 1: Summary of MTR participants

Name of Province and Districts	Male FGDs			Female FGDs			Interviews with government and NGO partners						Total
	Elders	Farmers	Kitchen Garden	Kitchen Garden	VSLA & Livestock	Solidarity	District Gov.	Provincial Gov.	AKF	Oxfam	World Vision	Action Aid	
Khulm	8	8	8	8	8	8	2						50
Charkint	8	8	8	8	8	8	2						50
Balkh								1					1
Kabul									1	1	1	1	4

Midterm Review Findings:

Progress to date:

The project progress outlined in the MTR has been consolidated using project monitoring reports, outcomes of FGDs with project participants, interview with DAIL staff, and outputs from a two-day MTR discussion workshop with the project staff. Progress against planned activities is reflected in Table 1. below and as indicated by the project team, the over achievement in certain components is due to availability of resources as a result of exchange rate gain (AFN against USD), interest by the project participants, the project team's awareness of the context, and the effective mobilisation efforts in the target areas.

Table 1: Achievement against planned activities

S/N	Activity	Planned	Achieved	Remarks
End of Project Outcome 1: Poor wheat farming households have improved food security, income and resilience.				
1	Intermediate Outcome 1.1: Improved agricultural practices and production.			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distribution of improved wheat seed 	300 farmers	369 farmers	<p>Selection of improved seed (rain fed and drought resistant varieties) and fertilizer was coordinated and completed with the approval of DAIL and MAIL. The project contributed to strengthening the local market as the seed and fertilizer were procured locally from the local companies recommended by DIAL in Balkh as being trusted companies. The project was able to support 69 additional farmer beneficiaries as a result of exchange rate gains and the interest shown by the farmers.</p> <p>Based on the agriculture session, first distribution of improved wheat seed took place in the last quarter of 2015, and the yield results were measured through a crop cut survey conducted during the harvesting period which is later in Charkint compared to Khulm, due to geographic location. The crop cut survey report</p>

				showed the yield of improved wheat seed variety distributed by the project was more than two times higher compared to the local variety . The project reports show that the second distribution and cultivation took place from November 2016. According to farmers, the yield of improved wheat seed from 2016 has been used for family consumption and saving of seed for cultivation in the next agriculture session. Small number of farmers have sold a portion of yield to other farmers within the same district.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of improved wheat seed demonstration plots 	120	120	In addition to wheat seed and fertilizer, farming beneficiaries who agreed to establish demonstration plots, also received financial and technical support for ploughing, threshing, and weed control.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field days 	30	7 (as of November 2016)	<p>Field days and exposure visits were conducted at district and provincial levels. However, the project did not manage to meet the targets set at the time of reporting due to the delays resulting from the late startup of the project and other on-going parallel activities (e.g. distribution of inputs, capacity building of farmers). The late startup of the project delayed the distribution of wheat and cultivation of land. So not all the planned exposure visits could be organised due to the lack of cultivated land.</p> <p>Field days and exposure visits are events that strengthen farmers' engagement and improve their experience and skills concerning the best agriculture practices, new agriculture technologies, and services offered by DAIL and other extension service providers.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farmer Field School (FFS) 	30	42	<p>Forty-two FFS have been formed with 960 members (60 more than planned), and trained on new agricultural topics, including integrated pest management, agriculture cycle, etc. Members of the FFS are linked with traders, cooperatives, service providers, and shopkeepers, to work with them in the future.</p> <p>The reason the project established more FFSs than the target is due to farmers' keen interest and high numbers of farmers in one village,</p>

				meaning it wasn't effective to organise them into one large FFS.
2	Intermediate Outcome 1.2: Access to agricultural related information and networks.			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of Common Interest Groups (CIG) 	30	10	This component was underachieved due to the project staff's lack of capacity to implement the approaches. This was compounded with the farmer's lack of interest as they felt constrained by their inability to contribute financially to a collective effort, which was part of the CIG approach. The delay in the preparation of the manuals to build the capacity building of the staff to facilitate the approach also added to the underachievement of this component.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducting ToT trainings 	6	6	<p>145 participants participated in the training conducted by the RLP staff. The project developed manuals and trained government extension department staff, extension staff of NGOs operational in the field of agriculture in Balkh, and the project staff in six agriculture topics (FFS, wheat cultivation, IPM, irrigation, kitchen gardening, and agriculture extension). The participants who attended the six ToTs gained skills and knowledge in the aforementioned topics. DAIL has commended the project technical team on the quality of the training.</p> <p>The result of post-assessments from the ToTs conducted reflects that participants were satisfied with the topics covered in the ToTs, and declared that there were many misunderstandings and misinformation that were clarified in the ToTs. Participants committed themselves to apply the learnt knowledge and skills in their workplace and transfer them to farmers and extension workers.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Construction and rehabilitation of small scale irrigation 	12	13	Due to availability of budget and request from the project participants, one additional small-scale irrigation structure was constructed.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment and training of Water Management Committees 	12	8	Irrigation structures have benefited two or three communities each, so the project selected Water Management Committees (WMCs) members from those communities and established one WMC from with representatives from the two or three

				communities that share the irrigation structure. As a result, eight WMCs were established instead of 12, as eight fulfilled the need.
End of Project Outcome 2: landless and labour-constrained households are more resilient to food insecurity and have greater access to social and economic opportunities.				
3	Intermediate Outcome 2.1: Landless and labour-constrained HHs have skills and resources that make them more resilient to shocks.			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formation of Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) 	30	37	Due to the keen interest of beneficiaries and savings in the project budget, the project established an additional seven VSLAs.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distribution of livestock 	120	120	Distribution of livestock took place in the 2 nd year of the project. While the initial plan had been to distribute 60 goats to households in Charkint, this was changed to dairy cows as per the request of the beneficiary households. The 120 female beneficiaries also received training on essential skills in feeding, treatment, and vaccination of livestock.
4	Intermediate Outcome 2.2: Landless and labour-constrained HHs able to supplement diet with nutritious food and sell excess.			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of kitchen gardens 	100	90 (77 female, 13 male)	The project is on track and the remaining ten households will be supported in the 3 rd year of the project. The beneficiaries were provided with certified vegetable seeds, fertilizer and toolkits, and supported with technical advice on water management and food processing so that the excess produce can be stored for the winter and/or marketed.
End of Project Outcome 3: Vulnerable groups are able to influence decision making processes.				
4	Intermediate Outcome 3.1: Vulnerable groups' needs are being addressed.			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Solidarity group formation 	30	33	The project team declared that due to savings in the project budget, and willingness of beneficiaries, an additional three SGs were established. Trainings on Child Protection, Gender Awareness and Conflict Resolution was provided to 148 office bearers (this is 28 more than planned due to request from the community).
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Elders and influential training 	120	248	Due to willingness of elders, effective selection of the training modules and availability of budget the project target increased. These same officer bearers are also involved in decision making at the community and household levels.

Additional findings from the MTR:

EoP Outcome 1: Poor wheat farming households have improved food security, income and resilience

Intermediate Outcome 1.1.: Improved agricultural practices and production

The FGD findings reveal farmers are satisfied and happy with the improved wheat seed distribution as their yields have increased to more than two times compared to local varieties. Their knowledge has increased in agriculture best practices, such as using machinery in agriculture activities, crop rotation, proper cultivation and land preparation; cooperation and coordination among farmers has strengthened as the farmers are now using the FFS as a platform to share information and exchange experiences with each other. The project reports and crop cut survey have indicated that the yield of improved wheat seed distributed by the project is two to three times higher than the local variety. This increase in yield is expected to be a drawcard factor for continued use of the certified seeds. The exposure visits that have taken place has created the opportunity for farmers to link with extension services and wheat seed companies. In addition, DAIL stated in the interview that the intervention of RLP is beginning to have positive results in Khulm and Charkint districts; and technical expertise is in place. The project has created employment opportunities for 193 men who worked as skilled and unskilled labourers and earned wages during the construction of the irrigation structures.

The training activities related to water management, operation and maintenance were adjusted based on number of WMCs and this has strengthened the exit strategy for the irrigation component of the project.

Table 2: Project Performance against target outputs in the MELF, intermediate outcome 1.1

Output and output indicators	Mid-term target (planned)	Mid-term target (achieved)	Variance between achieved & planned target
Short term Output 1.1.1.1: Farmer Field Schools developed and operational			
# of existing agricultural training modules adapted to meet new trends.	6	6	
# of agricultural trainings held.	180		This indicator is not clear and the project staff is not able to collect the required data. It is not clear whether it is number of participants or number of trainings. If it is number of trainings, the project will not be able to conduct 180 trainings for beneficiaries in agriculture. It is recommended that the indicator be revised to: # of FFS groups trained on agriculture best practices, with a target of 30 groups.
# of wheat seed demonstration plots established.	120	120	

# of exposure or field days for participant agriculture HHs.	30	7	The reason the project staff stated in the MTR workshop is due to busyness with other project activities, such as distribution of inputs, formation of group structures, and so they were not able to meet the target.
Short term Output 1.1.2.1: Seed and fertilizer distribution.			
# of farmers receiving improved wheat seeds.	300	369	Due to exchange rate gain, the project was able to support 69 additional beneficiaries with distribution of improved wheat seed and fertilizer.
Short term Output 1.1.2.2: Small scale irrigation and water saving structures.			
# of small scale irrigation and water saving structures constructed and/or rehabilitated.	12	13	Due to availability of budget and request from the project participants, one additional small-scale irrigation structure was constructed.

Intermediate Outcome 1.2: HHs are accessing agricultural related information and networks.

The project under achieved with regards to the formation and training of CIGs. The project documents reveal that formation of 30 CIGs was planned for year one. However, according to the report of November 2016, only ten CIGs were established and received training on CIG methodologies and agro-business skills, to date. Progress was slow as the CARE project team were unfamiliar with the approach to CIG formation, CIG management and facilitation, as it was a new experience for CARE Afghanistan. Additional challenges included delays in project start-up, late development of tools and procedures, which were required for the setup and facilitation of CIGs, and lack of staff capacity, all contributed to slow progress.

The FGD findings also reveal that the CIGs have had no significant results to show yet, as the groups are newly established and trained. FGD participants revealed in the discussion that CIG members are poor and cannot save to jointly procure the required agriculture inputs. In the MTR workshop the project staff declared that since there is no material or input allocated for the members besides trainings, CIG members were less interested to become part of CIGs. The project will need to increase its efforts to engage the farmers and understand the potential benefits of the CIGs.

Table 3: Project Performance against target outputs in the MELF, intermediate outcome 1.2

Output and output indicators	Mid-term target (planned)	Mid-term target (achieved)	Variance between achieved & planned target
Short term Output 1.2.1.1: Common Interest Groups formed and trained.			
# of CIGs formed and trained by CARE.	30	10	Due to drawbacks in CIG approach and constraints in the field, the project was not able to meet the

			target. It is recommended the project continue to support the ten established CIGs to see whether the CIG can become a viable model, but do not establish any more CIGs under this project.
Short term Output 1.2.2.1: Identification and analysis of extension services.			
Evidence of number of government agriculture and veterinary extension workers present in Khulm and Charkint and analysis of their capacity.	0	25	Analysis was conducted in the first year (2015), where it was identified that 25 extension workers were working in Khulm and Charkint.
Short term Output 1.2.2.2: Agricultural and veterinary best practices developed.			
# of agriculture Training of Training (ToT) modules developed.	6	6	
# of veterinary Training of Training (ToT) modules developed.	6	0	Development of six ToTs modules on different veterinary topics will be conducted in 2017.
Short term Output 1.2.2.3: Agricultural and veterinary extension workers are trained in best practices.			
# of agricultural and veterinary extension workers receiving Training of Trainers.	12	6	The target of 12 here refers to the number of agricultural and veterinary ToT trainings conducted. The target number of extension workers to be trained should be revised to 180.

End of Project Outcome 2: Landless and labour-constrained households are more resilient to food insecurity and have greater access to social and economic opportunities.

Intermediate Outcome 2.1: Landless and labour-constrained HHs have skills and resources that make them more resilient to shocks.

The project has established 37 VSLAs with 690 members (which is 240 members more than planned). The project team in the workshop declared that because of context awareness, cooperation from stakeholders, availability of resources, and willingness of vulnerable women, seven additional VSLAs were formed in the target communities. The FGDs findings reveals that the project participants were able to purchase calf, sheep or chickens, open small businesses, and start handicraft businesses as a result of taking loans from VSLAs. The project reports indicate that so far 245 female VSLA members have taken an amount of 1,027,900 AFN (equivalent to AUD 19,972) as loans out of which 626,420 AFN (equivalent to AUD 12,171) has been reimbursed. Meanwhile, the FGD participants mentioned that as a result of VSLAs, their household income has increased; women's understanding of business and income generating activities has increased; and the VSLA members feel economically empowered.

The project has also met its target and distributed 120 dairy cows to vulnerable women and provided them with training on animal husbandry and technical advice on veterinary related topics. As revealed by the FGDs participants, by owning livestock the vulnerable women will be able to generate income through dairy products and selling of livestock in the future. Currently, the livestock recipients are using dairy products such as milk and yogurt for family consumption and selling some of it in the local market and earned an average amount of AUD 52, and spent the earned money on procurement of feed for their dairy cow and for their family basic needs. However, the recipients have raised the fact that providing feed for the livestock in the winter would be a challenge for some of them since they are poor and not in a position to fulfill the required feed needs of the dairy cow. The project staff advised the livestock holders to take loans from VSLAs as an option to cope with needs during winter. The project reports indicate that 69 livestock beneficiaries have repaid an amount of 844,430 AFN (equivalent to AUD 16,407) as their 20% contribution in the cost of livestock to the VSLAs.

The project is yet to conduct training on animal husbandry to para-vet and field veterinary units due to time constraints resulting from the need to complete the distribution of livestock and provision of livestock related training to the target beneficiaries. Furthermore, the project was not able to link the VSLAs with extension services since the women were culturally constrained since it is the men that traditionally make the linkages to anyone outside of the household and community. The project will select men from the target communities as representatives for VSLA members to conduct the linkage and the male representatives will transfer information to VSLA members after the linkage is made.

Table 4: Project Performance against target outputs in the MELF, intermediate outcome 2.1

Output and output indicators	Mid-term target (planned)	Mid-term target (achieved)	Variance between achieved & planned target
Short term Output 2.1.1.1: Formation and training of VSLAs.			
# of training modules in savings and loan methodology updated and developed.	6	6	
# of VSLAs formed.	30	37	Due to interest of beneficiaries and savings in budget, the project established seven more VSLAs.
# of landless and labour constrained women trained in VSLA methodology.	450	690	Due to increase in number of VSLA, the VSLA member's number also increased.
# of landless and labour constrained women participating in VSLAs.	450	690	Same as above.
Short term Output 2.1.1.2: Livestock distribution.			
# of women s receiving cows.	60	120	Initially it was planned to distribute sheep to beneficiaries in Charkint, but later on during beneficiary selection, beneficiaries selected cows instead of sheep. As a result, the number of cows distributed increased.
# of women receiving sheep/goats.	60	0	Refer to comment above.

Intermediate Outcome 2.2: Landless and labour-constrained HHs able to supplement diet with nutritious food and sell excess.

As per the MELF, 100 kitchen gardens were planned in the first two years of the project however, as of November 2016, only 90 kitchen gardens were established. The female and male beneficiaries have received kitchen garden toolkits, certified vegetable seeds, fertilizer, and other necessary items. The kitchen garden keepers were provided with technical advice on water management, and food processing. The findings also revealed that linkages between kitchen garden keepers with extension services and input providers have been established.

As a result of the kitchen gardening, 152,880 AFN (AUD 2,970) has been earned as income from selling vegetable products. The produce has also been used for consumption within the families.

Table 5: Project Performance against target outputs in the MELF, intermediate outcome 2.1

Output and output indicators	Mid-term target (planned)	Mid-term target (achieved)	Variance between achieved & planned target
Short term Output 2.2.1.1: Establishment of kitchen gardens for vulnerable groups.			
# of kitchen gardens established for vulnerable women (60) and # of kitchen gardens established for vulnerable men (40).	100	90	

EoP Outcome 3: Vulnerable groups are able to influence decision-making processes relating to their livelihoods.

Intermediate Outcome 3.1: The needs of vulnerable groups are addressed in decision-making.

The review findings revealed that the project was able to achieve all the targets, which were planned under expected Intermediate Outcome 3.1. The project established 33 Solidarity Groups, which is three times higher than planned, and completed the targeted four trainings in topics such as the role of Office Bearers, Child Protection issues, Gender Awareness, and Conflict Resolution. The training was provided to 248 elders, which is 128 more than planned due to willingness and request from community members.

The FGD findings indicate that while the Solidarity Group members are involved in decision-making at the community and household level to some extent; it is too early to determine changes that have taken place as a result of the training.

Table 4: Project Performance against target outputs in the MELF, intermediate outcome 3.1

Output and output indicators	Mid-term target (planned)	Mid-term Target (achieved)	Variance between achieved & planned target
Short term Output 3.1.1.1: Formation and training of solidarity groups.			
# of solidarity groups formed.	30	33	Due to savings in budget line and willingness of beneficiaries, and additional three Solidarity Groups were established.

# of training modules developed for solidarity groups.	6	5	According to the project staff, five modules were planned for second year of project; the remaining modules will be developed and delivered in the third year of the project.
# of solidarity group members trained.	450	531	Due to the increased number of SGs.
# of trainings provided.	900	0	It is not clear whether in this indicator the intention is number of beneficiaries or the number of trainings. This indicator reflects neither the number of participants nor the number of trainings according to outcome. It is recommended to revise the indicator to: # of trainings provided to Solidarity Groups, with a target of six.
Short term Output 3.1.2.3: Training for community leaders.			
# of training modules developed for power holders, and decision makers.	6	5	Elders training modules are the same as for the SGs, so the elders will receive the remaining training in the third year of the project.
# of trainings provided.	360	0	It is not clear whether in this indicator the intention is beneficiary or the number of trainings. This indicator reflect neither the number of participants nor the number of trainings according to outcome. It is recommended to revise the indicator to: # of trainings provided to community leaders, with a target of six.
# of leaders trained.	120	248	Due to willingness of elders, effective selection of the training modules, and availability of budget, the number of elders participating was increased.

Review of Project progress toward DAC Criteria

This section elaborates on the findings of midterm review against DAC criteria: effectiveness, relevance, efficiency and sustainability.

Effectiveness

The MTR workshop results and FGDs findings indicated that, Field Farmer School members have learned new skills and agriculture techniques. Farmers became familiarised with traders, cooperatives, service providers, and shopkeepers, to work with them in the future. They acquired skills in agro-business, market assessment, and business development. Farmers have started to use improved seeds instead of local varieties as they are now aware that improved seeds produce greater yield. As FGD indicates, farmers use 25 kilograms of improved seed as input for cultivation of one Jerib of land, while prior to the project intervention, they had used 35 kilograms of local variety seed for cultivation of the same size of land. The FGDs also revealed that, most of farmers used their harvested wheat for family consumption and as their production increases they will be able sell the excess produce to wholesalers to make increased profits. Farmers, traders, and suppliers have made preliminary introductions to each other, however there has been no transaction between them as yet. The Water Management Committees that were established are now able to prevent wastage and ensure efficient use of water while increasing the availability of irrigated water for agricultural land in Khulm district.

In terms of food security at the household level, the FGD findings from Charkint and Khulm reveal that, most food items come from other districts and cities to be sold in Charkint and Khulm. The exception to this is produce that is grown locally, including wheat, dairy, fresh fruit, and some dried fruits. During winter and due to snow, the road that connects Charkint district with Mazar city is closed, and the price of food goes up. While all kind of foods are available in the market, only the wealthy have the purchasing capacity to buy food from the market throughout the four seasons. As the rate of unemployment goes up during winter and family income goes down, ordinary and poor people cannot purchase every sort of food at the market. The majority of people in both districts consume vegetables in place of meat and fruit as it is cheaper, but it becomes difficult to source vegetables during winter. As a result, families are only able to purchase the most basic food items which will not ensure their required nutrition needs are met. At the time of reporting, it is too early for the targeted beneficiaries to meet all four dimensions of food security (food availability, accessibility, consumption, and stability) as the interventions will take time to show results.

However, in response to the above situation, the project has introduced a range of interventions that are improving communities' food security and increasing the availability and accessibility of food for families. For example, kitchen gardens were established for landless households. These households received kitchen garden supplies, such as certified vegetable seeds, fertilizer, and toolkits. Based on FGD findings, fresh vegetables grown in kitchen gardens are now available for household consumption. The project also provided food processing training to kitchen garden beneficiaries who received training in drying vegetable products through the use of a drying machine, which has resulted in beneficiaries drying vegetables, such as tomatoes and peppers that can be consumed during the winter months. As a result, these households do not need to purchase vegetables from the market. The money that is saved is spent on other essential family expenses. Kitchen garden keepers share vegetables with their neighbours and relatives, which is part of the tradition to share food, if possible. Farmers stated that they learned new ways of growing vegetables and showed their satisfaction with this support which has increased their livelihood and provided them with nutritious food. To generate

more income through kitchen gardens, the production of vegetables should be increased so that a certain portion of products can be sold while vegetable requirement of households is also met.

Women who constitute landless households in target communities were organised into village savings and loans associations (VSLAs) where they can access informal savings and take loans when needed. The selected project beneficiaries also received livestock, and were equipped with essential skills in feeding, treatment, and vaccination of livestock. VSLAs provide social and economic opportunities for women. As FGD participants indicated, being a member of the VSLA has had a positive impact on their morale since their household income and economic condition can potentially increase (it is too early in the project to see results for some). For instance, a woman said, "I took a loan from the VSLA and bought a calf and when it becomes a cow, I will sell it to make money". Since most young people are jobless, paying for food and other basic needs is a big concern for every household. VSLA provides an opportunity for women to earn money and support their family. Some women earned money through purchasing livestock, rearing it for a while and selling it, using the loan taken from VSLA. The profit made by women was spent to address the urgent needs of their families. As one of VSLA members said, "I bought a young sheep by 4,000 AFN and reared it for a while and sold it for 8,000". Women took loans for different purposes such as to open a shop for their son, to buy a sewing machine to prepare clothes for sale, or for other income generating activities, including starting their own business in shop keeping, poultry and honey production, that support their families financially. VSLAs provide a good opportunity for women to earn money and this model is accepted by community members, as there is no interest attached to the loans.

Another positive aspect of VSLA is the use of the savings box where every VSLA member can see use and see it, which increases the skills and capacity of women in financial management. Women received training in the procedure of setting up, running and managing VSLAs, and business development. Women are now wanting to receive some vocational trainings to start small business, as one of the FGD participants said, "I need to learn how to make carpets for sale and generate income for my family", and another women said, "I know basic tailoring but I want to learn more to prepare clothes". However, the purpose of VSLA is not yet clear for some VSLA members as they want to receive loans without having a plan to reimburse it. As one of the FGD participants said, "to address my family financial problem, I can take a loan from VSLA". The project intends to correct this perception in the coming months.

Those who received livestock said that milk and yogurt from their livestock is used for family consumption, while the dung of animals is used as burning material to heat their house during winter. Women indicated that they received training on livestock rearing, livestock sanitation, and dairy sanitation, and they expect to receive more training on animal husbandry. Some women showed concern regarding feeding their livestock and said that they do not have money to buy food for their livestock. They expect CARE to provide food assistance for their livestock. To address this issue, the project will continue to advise that these beneficiaries are eligible to take loans from VSLA, as the women who received livestock are also VSLA members.

Influencing decision-making is an area for advocacy and Solidarity Groups have been established to advocate for the rights of vulnerable groups. The purpose of the Solidarity Groups is to increase the opportunity for women to raise their voices about community issues. To due to this, the project has delivered trainings to the Solidarity Groups on topics including in gender, human rights, wife and husband rights and responsibilities, conflict resolution, child rights, and negative impact of beating of children. Group members have learnt to attend group meetings on time, listen to each other actively, and respect each other opinions. Some FGD participants have suggested that trainings on human rights should be from the perspective of Islam, and should be given to male and female members of the community. According to a member of a Solidarity Group, the main decision-making individuals

are elders, the heads of male and female Community Development Councils, Mullah Imams, and religious scholars. Women expect that all planned activities of Solidarity Groups should be shared and discussed with male members of the community and their opinions should be respected to gain their support for the groups. It was mentioned by FGD participants that decision-makers now pay more attention to the priorities of women, however there was not any example reflecting a decision that was made based on the priorities of women. It was considered that decision-making bodies are responsive to community people, however it was not obvious whether community people are aware of the role, responsibility, accountability, transparency and responsiveness of decision-making bodies based on civic law.

Men and women's illiteracy, the high volume of housework for women, and indirect involvement of women in decision-making at the community level are the main concerns for Solidarity Groups. Some women indicated that being illiterate is one of their big concerns and they want to learn how to read and write to be successful in their life. It was mentioned in the FGDs that illiterate men do not allow their wives to participate in Solidarity Groups while literate men are supportive of this initiative. Other women said that they could not attend every meeting of Solidarity Groups because of their high volume of housework, including taking care of small children. Indirect involvement of women in community decision-making is a concern while the ideal scenario for women is that they become involved in all community decision-making directly. Traditionally, this is not acceptable that women and men who are non-family members hold any sort of discussions together. Therefore, women discuss their problems among themselves but separately from men. The conclusion would be shared with men through representatives of the group afterwards. Women can share their thoughts about community issues through their male family members to decision-making bodies but there are not currently enough opportunities for women to put forward their own argument and opinions with male members of decision-making bodies directly.

To influence decision-making processes, it requires a range of steps to be taken sequentially. These steps include raising awareness, building capacity, and promoting decisions of Solidarity Groups to be taken at community level and supported by influential individuals. The advocacy component proposed under "Recommendations for project scale-up and additions" section will outline steps to reach the overall objective.

Relevance

The project's long-term and short-term objectives are relevant to the strategic objectives of AACRS, the National Priorities of Afghanistan, and CARE's 2020 Program Strategy. The project three end-of-project outcomes which are: 1) poor wheat farming households have improved food security, income and resilience; 2) landless and labor-constrained households are more resilient to food insecurity and have greater access to social and economic opportunities; and 3) vulnerable groups are able to influence decision making processes relating to their livelihoods, are very relevant with the two AACRS Program Impacts: 1) households are better able to address their own needs; and 2) community decision-making structures are more responsive and inclusive.

In addition, the first and third outcome of RLP contributes to third Strategic objectives of Australia's aid program in Afghanistan (2015-16 to 2017-18) which is 3) building resilience and supporting at-risk populations.

All outcomes of RLP are relevant to CARE's 2020 Program Strategy indicators. For instance, kitchen garden interventions relate to one of CARE's humanitarian assistance global indicators, which is "obtained adequate food quantities and quality, and/or adopted adequate nutritional practices". VSLA interventions relate to CARE's women's economic empowerment global indicator, which is "% of

women who are active users of financial services". Similarly, advocacy interventions through Solidarity Groups relates to other global indicator under women's economic empowerment, which are "% of women who (report they) are able to equally participate in household financial decision-making", and "# and % of women with union, women's group or cooperative membership through which they can voice their labour rights".

Efficiency

Project reports and MTR workshop findings revealed that variety of economical approaches were applied such as recruitment of project staff from the project target area, usage of rental vehicle instead of office vehicle, renting of office space for a specific time based on project needs, office equipment of other project was borrowed and utilised in RLP, while attainment of ultimate result of the project was always remained a purpose to be reached.

Some project staff including the Veterinary Officers and Agriculture Support Officers were hired in the second year of the project, as the livestock distribution and agriculture related activities took place mostly in the second year of the project. Procurement and logistics are made locally at the district or provincial level and generally, the required items are purchased from Balkh province, instead of purchasing them from Kabul. While recruitment of staff for field operation positions occurred, priority were given to local residents of each target area and fortunately, qualified individuals were found at the local level to fill the vacant positions.

Office space in Khulm district was rented only in the first and second year of the project, with the project implementation in Khulm district to be managed from Balkh provincial office in the third year of the project. As the scale of the project in the third year will be reduced compared to the first two years, and the reduction in the number of field staff required to achieve the project plan, it was considered most efficient to close the office in Khulm district. The sub-office in Mazar, Balkh province, also operates other projects from this location. The rental office space in Charkint district remains functional as Charkint district is very far in terms of distance and the road is blocked during winter season. Therefore, it is hard to manage project implementation remotely from other locations. Office equipment of CARE's earlier projects which have closed, including the NSP (National Solidarity Program) (a government program led by Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD)), and DIBP-funded ESRAR-2 (Economy and social reintegration of Afghan returnee, IDPs and host community phase-2) projects were handed over and are now utilised in this project. New equipment was purchased only if there was a lack of items in the office. Rental vehicles and drivers are hired from local communities and one of the conditions for their employment is that they have good knowledge of the context and know how to access each community quickly and safely.

Baseline survey and midterm review of the project were conducted locally by staff of CARE's Program Quality Unit instead of hiring external consultant. This also reduced the cost while the objectives have been achieved.

Sustainability

A set of procedures and actions to strengthen sustainability have been applied during project implementation. These activities contribute to sustainability and ensure that benefits from this project continue after the CARE project ends. These includes:

- strengthening linkages between project beneficiaries and stakeholders;
- introduction of new agricultural techniques and practices;
- formation of Common Interest Groups;

- building of capacity of community members through FFS and SG, as well as building capacity of government extension workers; and
- planned handover of the project to DAIL and Community Development Councils at the community level.

Project staff have organised visits and discussions among project beneficiaries, relevant government departments, service providers, and wheat seed suppliers. Through these discussions, beneficiaries receive information regarding available services. Project beneficiaries have explained their agricultural situation, the challenges they face and the services and support they need. Some commitments were made for future cooperation and collaboration by government representatives and service providers. Several opportunities for learning and exchange of experiences was provided to project beneficiaries, community members and government staff.

Farmer Field Schools and ToTs have been the approaches applied by the project to collectively enable farmers to learn agricultural best practices and apply them in their own agriculture fields. Some individual sessions were also organised to discuss specific problems or issues which were not covered in the collective sessions and where technical advice is required by farmers. Additionally, demonstration plots were established to examine new agricultural practices and technologies. Results of these examinations were shared with community members, NGOs, and government staff during Field Days to attract their attention and increase their interest in new agricultural practices.

Improved wheat seeds were distributed to farmers to cultivate and who experience increased productivity. This has encouraged the project beneficiaries and other farmers to use improved wheat seed for their cultivation and this it is expected that this practice will continue beyond the project.

Formation of community-based groups has been considered a good tool to unify community members to work jointly on a project that results in positive and constructive collaboration. Water Management Committees are one of the community-based entities that were established to manage the operation and maintenance of small-scale irrigation structures at the community level. Orientation sessions were provided to Water Management Committee members, who committed themselves to be responsible for operation and maintenance of the small-scale structures beyond the project lifetime. To ensure the sustainability of these groups and their capacity to ensure the maintenance of the structures, maintenance costs will be paid for by contributions made by community members. Skilled labourers who have worked on the construction of these structures are from these communities and will be paid a wage for future maintenance work on the irrigation structures.

CIGs is another community-based structure where farmers can jointly purchase agricultural inputs and supplies as well as can sell their products as a collective. The group model has the potential to unify farmers and enable them to reduce procurement costs through bulk purchasing and receive high quality supplies. Some training on business development was provided to members of this group to increase their skills in marketing and coordination. As there has been a low uptake in engagement in the CIG due to the lack of materials inputs provided by the project to the groups, CARE will continue working with the ten CIGs already established, and will train them to link them with extension services and build the sustainable viability of the groups. However, CARE will not establish more CIGs under this project.

VSLAs are another type of community-based entity with the potential to be sustainable beyond the life of the project. CARE's approach to VSLA establishment is a well-accepted model that is appropriate for the Afghanistan context as it is an only-female-group, which is traditionally well accepted, and the no interest loans available for VSLA members is appropriate for the religious context. This has encouraged the female members of target communities to participate in VSLAs to

deposit money and take loans when needed. The paid back loans go back into the VSLA box where other VSLA members can access those funds for a loan, thereby not requiring further inputs or support required by the project.

The project plans to handover all the established groups, including the VSLA, CIG, and SGs, to DAIL and respected entities at community level to sustain the outcomes of the project after its completion. A final report of the project will be shared with DAIL during the handover process for DAIL to follow up those activities at the district level.

Partnership

Based on interviews conducted with representatives of DAIL in Balkh province, the quality of implementation of CARE's agriculture project is very good, and has positively affected people's lives. CARE implements its project in consultation with the relevant government departments in both districts. Fortunately, there is no security concern in target areas of where CARE operates in both districts and it is possible to monitor the project on a regular basis. Staff from the district government in both districts have benefited from capacity building training provided by CARE.

Similarly, interviews were conducted with NGO AACRS partners such as ActionAid, Oxfam, World Vision, and AKF. The findings revealed that, all the NGO partners make efforts to ensure that their activities contribute to the government of Afghanistan's National Priority Programs (NPPs). A partnership agreement between the organisations involved in the AACRS implementation was made to strengthen the coordination and collaboration between partners and to provide opportunities for learning and sharing of experiences. The partnership agreement was made at a high level between DFAT, MAIL, AACRS NGO partners and it was expected that this partnership would strengthen the linkages between NGO partners and government departments, and provide opportunity for sharing of technical expertise and best practice with each other. This was considered a means for partner NGOs to share their successes and best practices with each other to improve project implementation.

However, while World Vision visited AKF project area and observed project implementation, no other partner had conducted an exposure visit. If exposure visits occur, project beneficiaries will become aware of the development situation in other AACRS target locations, and will certainly learn new approaches. While this issue has been mentioned in a number of coordination meetings, NGO partners have not considered it learning opportunity. Some NGO partners indicated concern regarding traveling from their own target areas to partner target areas, due to the security situation. While there are four to five coordination meetings per year, some partners stated that "this is not sufficient if the purpose of meetings is to share best practices and learn from each other".

The added-value and potential of the AACRS partnership has been reduced due to the unavailability of the Scheme Coordinator, low commitment of NGO partners in conducting exposure visits, and in sharing tools, approaches, or best practices with each other. It is suggested that the partnership agreement be updated and amended based on current requirements.

Some AACRS partners indicated that they have a good professional relationship with CARE. If CARE wants to improve its approach to sharing and learning across the AACRS program, it was suggested that CARE go back to the original partnership/inception workshop documentation and identify whether there was a topic that hadn't been addressed by other agencies to take the lead on. It is recommended that CARE conduct their planned exposure visits to enable good learning opportunities for NGO partners and project beneficiaries. It is suggested that all NGO partners focus on practical learning rather than theoretical discussions during coordination meetings.

In summary AACRS program interventions are addressing communities' needs and contribute to all NGO partners' overall goals and strategic objectives of poverty alleviation and empowerment of marginalised groups. To make further improvements, it is suggested the new Scheme Coordinator to manage communications and partnership across AACRS partners and ensure all NGO partners conduct planned exposure visits and other learning sessions.

Recommendations for scaling up of activities in Resilient Livelihoods Project Year 3

As CARE's RLP End of Project Outcome 3 is focused on influencing decision-making processes at the community level, an advocacy intervention that encompasses the community level, power-holding individuals, government authorities, and project staff is proposed to be added in year 3 of the project. The long-term outcome of the proposed components is "Promoted inclusive-decision making process at the community level". Stakeholders and influential groups will be mapped to understand their social position and power level. Areas and issues for advocacy activities will be identified to advocate on, and a platform for advocacy will be identified through which advocacy interventions can be performed. A strategy and implementation plan for advocacy work will be developed which outlines steps for regular dialogue on promotion of inclusive decision-making, development of topics for advocacy trainings, strengthening coordination, building linkages, and regular monitoring on advocacy work.

To achieve the expected outcome of advocacy interventions, multiple approaches will be used while working with each category of people as follows:

Project Staff:

- Approaches
 - Advocacy training to project staff through workshops in Balkh province.
 - Refresher training sessions including technical activities related to advocacy.
- Expected Results
 - Skills and capacity of project staff built on advocacy and how to facilitate community based advocacy training.
 - Development of a strategy and implementation plan for advocacy work jointly with community groups.
 - Ensure that community groups implement the advocacy plan through regular participation and coaching by project staff.

Government Authorities:

- Approaches
 - Organised regular dialogue of project staff and representatives of community advocacy groups with government authorities to gain their support to address community needs.
 - Develop an action plan on agreed points.
 - Follow up to ensure the agreed points are met.
- Expected Results
 - Promoting process of accountability and responsiveness of CDC and district government.
 - Changed type of decision-making processes from closed to invited approach.
 - Expanded space for inclusive-decision making at the community level.

Community People:

- Approaches
 - Training on women's/human rights, community-based advocacy and inclusive governance.
 - Conducting practical sessions on development of advocacy strategic plan.

- Organising roundtable and showcase sessions for advocacy achievement and discuss areas for follow up.
- Expected Results
 - To understand their rights and social positions to represent their rights based issues in community decision-making.
 - Sustained regular interaction and dialogue among community members and authorities on community needs.
 - Develop a unified community-based advocacy group (including Solidarity Group members) to integrate the identified needs into local planning and decision-making.

For the third year of RLP, it is recommended to increase the understanding of VSLA members of the main aim of VSLA establishment, as some of the beneficiaries interviewed did not have a clear idea of the purpose of VSLA, expecting they could take loans without needing to contribute their savings to the VSLA as well.

AACRS NGO partners recommended reviewing the partnership agreement to update and amend it based on current requirements. In addition, it was recommended that in the next year CARE would conduct its planned cross-visits to enable good learning opportunities for NGO partners and project beneficiaries.

For the next phase of AACRS, it was identified through the MTR interviews and FGDs, that beneficiaries recommended vocational training as an effective intervention, which would enable women to learn skills to start and manage a small business. Women, particularly, were requesting to receive vocational trainings so that they could start small businesses, as one of the FGD participants said, "I need to learn how to make carpets for sale and generate income for my family", and another women said, "I know basic tailoring but I want to learn more to prepare clothes".

People with Disability Inclusion

The inclusion of people living with a disability was not a focus of AACRS at the initial stage, however during the first year AACRS, DFAT requested the NGO partners to include PwDs as project participants in relevant interventions in their projects. Through reviewing the project beneficiary selection criteria, it has been found that the focus on PwD have been given appropriate focus by CARE in RLP. The project reports reveal that CARE has supported and benefitted 18 PwDs directly and 45 PwDs indirectly, through kitchen gardening, VSLA, livestock distribution, and agricultural activities. The project hired one staff who is living with a disability.

The technical assistance to be provided by Handicap International to the AACRS partners through the leadership of DFAT will assist NGO partners in the identification and selection of activities for improvement in disability inclusive programming.

Project M&E System

The project has formats for data collection, reporting and datasheet for data processing for each intervention in RLP. However, main attention has been on collection and reporting of output level data while the project has collect to some extent outcome level data from the field. Monthly reports were generated from the data collected from the field and datasheets were updated on quarterly basis. Photos and stories are collected as evidence of progress and results of the project interventions, however this needs some improvement as some photos were not of good quality and some stories remained untranslated.

The monitoring visits reports indicate that the project staff and CARE senior management have conducted monitoring visits from the project implementation in Balkh. Nevertheless, monitoring visits have been mainly focused on implementation of the project activities while no structured monitoring to reflect outcomes of the project activities has been conducted. The MELF of the project has been updated in the baseline and during annual reports. However, there are indicators that are not measurable, refer to proposed project amendments section for detail.

Implementation challenges/issues

CARE Afghanistan has been implementing CIG approach for the first time in the RLP project and it has been found that so far this intervention has not delivered the anticipated outcomes. As revealed in the FGDs, the main reason is the poor economic condition of the project participants, they cannot save money and procure big amounts of agriculture inputs to market in CIGs while on the other side the project has not considered distribution of inputs for CIGs, and only focused on training of CIGs members. This issue caused the farmers to show less interest in participating in CIGs and fulfill its requirements. CARE would need to review the CIG methodology and seek suggestions and feedback from other NGOs implementing this approach to achieve the target results. Further, CARE to consider provision of inputs for CIGs like agriculture inputs, cash or farming tools that farmers could not provide on their own due to their economic situation as encouragement for farmers to keep CIGs functional.

Exposure visits and farmer field days are activities intended to create networks among farmers for farmers to share their lessons learnt and experiences in those events and improve their skills and capacity. However, the project reports indicated that the target output has not been fully achieved. Since exposure visits are a good opportunity for farmers to learn and observe practical changes, the project needs to seek ways to effectively implement this activity.

Cultural barriers have hindered linkage of VSLA members to extension services. So far, no linkage has been conducted among the VSLA members and extension service providers. The project needs to identify alternatives to create linkage among VSLA members and extension services, for example to select male representatives who can deliver the message to VSLA members.

Proposed Project Amendments

The following output indicators are not measurable nor realistic, and need amendment or be removed from the project performance measurement framework and MELF. The reason why these indicators to be revised or removed are stated in progress to date section.

Indicator	Target	Revised Indicator	Revised Target
Intermediate outcome 1.1			
# of agricultural trainings held	180	# of FFS groups trained in agricultural best practices.	30
Intermediate outcome 1.2			
# of agricultural and veterinary extension workers receiving Training of Trainers	12	# of agricultural and veterinary extension workers receiving Training of Trainers	180
# of women receiving sheep/goats	60	Delete indicator as beneficiaries received cows instead based on beneficiaries' request.	
Intermediate outcome 3.1			
# of trainings provided	900	# of trainings provided to Solidarity Groups.	6

# of trainings provided	360	# of trainings provided to community leaders.	6
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Recommendations

- Refresher orientation training to be conducted to CIG, FFS, VSLA, SGs members to ensure the beneficiaries understand fully the purpose of the respective community group structures and work towards maturity of the structures.
- Awareness and civic education should be given to project beneficiaries about available social and economic opportunities at community, district, and provincial level and how to access them.
- Food security should be explained and availability of food, accessibility of food, utilisation of food, and stability of food should be discussed with project participants.
- More consultation and support should be provided to kitchen garden keepers to increase amount of vegetable product so the gardeners can sell their product and generate income, in addition to its consumption by household.
- Further consultation and support should be provided to farmers to increase wheat productivity so farmers can sell their product and generate income, in addition to its consumption by household.
- Linkages of CIGs with cooperative, traders, and other wholesalers should be strengthened and further facilitation by CARE should be increased so farmers can support each other to increase their harvest and market their products and access quality seeds.
- Advocacy element within the project to be scaled up during implementation in year 3 of the project to ensure the project will achieve project End of Project Outcome 3 – that is focused on influencing decision-making processes at the community level.
- AACRS partnership agreement to be updated and amended based on current requirements.
- CARE to conduct its planned cross-visits to enable good learning opportunities for AACRS NGO partners and project beneficiaries.

Annexes

Annex I (TERMS OF REFERENCE)

Background: CARE International has been operational in Afghanistan since 1961. CARE started its work in the country by providing health services and professional training for Ministry of Public Health staff. Currently CARE implements two programs for Afghanistan – Resilience Enhancement Program and Women and Girls Empowerment Programs. With staff capacity of nearly 504 national and three international staff, CARE implements its programs in Balkh, Ghazni, Kabul, Kapisa, Khost, Paktya, and Parwan provinces. CARE’s mission is to bring positive changes in the lives of poor, marginalised and vulnerable people in Afghanistan.

Resilient Livelihoods Project (RLP): CARE’s ‘Resilient Livelihoods Project’, funded by the Australian Aid Program, is aimed at improving the lives of asset poor and vulnerable households across the two disadvantaged districts of Charkint and Khulm in Balkh Province. The project aims to reach 1,450 households and involve 30 villages across the two selected districts. The overall goal of the project is to contribute to promote sustainable livelihoods for, and strengthened resilience of, vulnerable rural communities in Charkint and Khulm Districts of Balkh Province. The project duration is three years starting on 1 January 2015 and ending 31 December 2017. The project total fund is AUD2,500,000 over the three years. The project seeks to strengthen community resilience among vulnerable households by achieving three End of Project Outcomes: 1) poor wheat farming households have improved food security, income and resilience; 2) landless and labour-constrained households are more resilient to food insecurity and have greater access to social and economic opportunities; and, 3) vulnerable groups are able to influence decision making. This project also contributes to the Australia Afghanistan Community Resilience Scheme (AACRS) overall goal of improved community resilience and livelihoods in rural Afghanistan through improved sustainable on-farm livelihoods and diversified coping mechanisms, reinforced by equitable access to networks and services, and improved social inclusion. Additionally, CARE’s project links to all four impacts as identified in the AACRS Theory of Change with a direct connection to **Impact 1** (Households are better able to address their own needs) and **Impact 2** (Community decision-making structures are more responsible and inclusive).

1. Rationale and purpose

The purpose of Mid-Term Review is to *assess the project effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, sustainability and to provide recommendations to guide the final 15 months of the project’s implementation.* The evaluation is also aimed to identify the project potential for scale-up and identification of new components to be included in a potential next phase of the project. The primary users of the mid-term review will be the CARE Afghanistan project team. The results of the mid-term review will also be made available to CARE Australia, DFAT and AACRS partners.

2. Key objectives

- To assess the project progress toward planned interventions and expected outcomes.
- Assess the project’s effectiveness in improving the economic and social position of women.
- To assess if the project has the potential to be scaled-up and/or replicated.
- To identify new components to add value in the potential next phase of the project.
- Make recommendations for changes to activities and approaches that will help to increase the project’s impact.

3. Key questions

- How effective is the project in achieving its intended outputs and outcomes?
 - Review and assess progress of key activities and outputs against the project design and work-plans – considering cost (against stated budget), timeliness (against the year one and year two work-plans), current relevance, appropriateness, their contribution to outcomes, the sustainability of both the activities and the outcomes they contribute to, opportunities for transition to local management and ownership.
 - How effective is the project in addressing needs of people living with disabilities?
 - Make recommendations that will strengthen current or future phases of the project's implementation and increase their impact on the lives of asset poor and vulnerable households.
 - How effective is the project in its response to gender and in improving the economic and social position of women?
 - How effective is the project in improving the economic and social position of women? Assess the approaches used.
 - Assess and make recommendations to improve the extent to which women are benefiting from project activities and outcomes – considering the extent to which women have been involved in designing project activities, participating in project management and advisory roles (both within CARE and through community structures and key partnerships), the extent to which women have benefited directly from project resources and opportunities, the extent to which outcomes are distributed equally between men and women.
 - Does the project have the potential to be up-scaled and/or replicated? Which component(s) of the project would offer the best opportunity for replication or up-scaling?
 - Which new components, currently not being implemented, could add value to a next phase?
 - How has the project added value in terms of its decision to directly implement activities and its collaboration with other NGO partners and government agencies? What is the level of sustainability in the current interventions; how will the project ensure the sustainability by the end of the project?
4. **Scope, approach and methods:** All key documents of the project such as project proposal, reports, Vulnerability Assessment report and Baseline reports should be reviewed. Data should be collected from project staff (such as current and previous manager of the project, district field supervisors and community workers), community members in Balkh, relevant government authorities, CARE's gender advisor, advocacy advisor, partnership advisor and M&E supervisor, through conducting workshops, interviews and focus group discussions. Instruments for the midterm review, list of potential interviewees, FGD participants and the individuals will participate in a workshop in Kabul to jointly review the project progress and discuss what was expected to happen, what actually happened, what went well, and why, what can be improved, and how and what are the lessons that can be used in the future. A plan of action should be prepared and shared with the project staff for their review and comment prior to commencement.
5. **Allocated budget and time:** An estimated budget of USD 2,500 is allocated for this MTR that covers cost of flight tickets, per-diems of staff travelling from Balkh to Kabul, rent of hall for workshop, stationary, transportation and field operations. In case the estimated budget does not cover the MTR expense, there is possibility of allocating more budget to cover the expense. The estimated number of days for the MTR to be completed is 25 full days but if other priorities are given to the evaluator (MEL coordinator) by ACD and PCs, the MTR may last longer.

6. Key deliverables, responsibilities and reporting arrangements

- A mid-term review plan.
- Full final Mid-Term Review report no more than 20 pages, in English.
- Raw data either soft or hard copies, including interview notes, FGD notes, etc.
- A presentation of the findings to the program management team in CARE Afghanistan headquarters.

Annex II (FGD Questions)

- What food items are needed for residents of this neighbourhood and to what extent these foods are available in the market? If yes, from where it comes? If not available, why not? To what extent residents of your community have access to the food items which are available in the market? What food items are consumed in this community mostly and why?
- To what extent food's availability, accessibility and utilisation that you mentioned above are always the same? What change usually happens in food's availability, accessibility and utilisation over period of time and why? What coping methods are used by residence of your community during shortage of resource such as food, burning material and income?
- To what extent have the residence of your neighbourhood seen their capacity for coping with shocks increase? To what extent has the residence of your community found they are experiencing less shortages of food as a result of the project?
- How much increase or decrease are you seeing in production of the wheat? To what extent the support provided by this project has caused increase in quantities of the wheat which the farmers sell? To what extent the farmers can sell their wheat production in the market? To what extent the project has been able to link farmers with the market traders to improve market linkages and sales of wheat? What are the challenges/obstacles for farmers to sell their wheat in the market?
- What are the agricultural practices which farmers have learnt through this project? What agriculture resources have become accessible to the wheat farmers? What benefits of improved wheat seeds have you seen? What changes/benefits have occurred as a result of participating in the CIG? How could the CIG be strengthened?
- What are the challenges that you have faced while participating in this project. What benefits will people get from kitchen garden? What items for kitchen gardening were distributed by this project? To what extent families benefit from growing vegetables in their kitchen gardens?
- What are families doing with the vegetables grown in the kitchen gardens? To what extent are families processing the foods grown through the vegetable gardens? What changes have you seen in your life as a result in participating in the VSLA group? How helpful it is for your family to take a loan from the VSLA group?
- What type of change you see in your income as result of participating in the VSLA groups? What are the aspects of VSLA that women and men can benefit from? Have you received livestock through the project? If yes, what have been the benefits/challenges of having the livestock? To what extent the training helped you to look after your livestock better? What are the barriers and challenges to attending and participating in community decision making? Who are the decision-making bodies in your community and how do you judge their performance, accountability and responsiveness? To what extent you are involved in community decision-making processes and local level planning? Have there been any changes in the decision-making processes and are there different people involved in community decision making? What has been the benefit to becoming part of a solidarity group (Advocacy Group) and what have you learnt as a result of being part of a solidarity group (Advocacy Group)? To what extent the decision-making bodies have focused on priorities of vulnerable groups and what are the examples that priorities of vulnerable groups are addressed?
- What do you think about the Solidarity groups (advocacy Group) that have been established in your community? What do you think about activities of advocacy Groups and what changes

have you noticed in the women who are participating in the groups? What was the community members' reaction about advocacy groups? How can we gain more positive support from the community and leaders for advocacy groups?

- What are the challenges that the project beneficiaries has encountered as being part of project beneficiaries?

Annex III (Interview Questions for Government)

- What other NGOs are working in this district and what type of project do they implement?
- To what extent do people benefit from the project NGOs are implementing in your district?
- What was your experience working with CARE? To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied about the work CARE has been doing in this district? Why you are satisfied / dissatisfied?
- What are the successes that CARE and other NGOs achieved in this district so far?
- What are the challenges that CARE and NGOs faced in this district so far?
- Do you think there is an NGO in this district with whom CARE can do partnership in implementation of this project? If yes, please give more details about it.
- Considering the current context and security situation, to what extent has the situation affected government representatives capacity to engage in the project?
- What changes have occurred for the government as a result of engaging with the project?
- What is your suggestion for CARE to make improvement in its project implementation?

Annex IV (Interview Questions for NGO Partners)

- I understand there is an AACRS partnership agreement? Is this partnership agreement still valid? Has it been useful? Do NGOs suggest that changes could be made to it?
- In your opinion, what has been the value of AACRS partnership overall for the other NGOs? Any example of partnership across the NGOs?
- How has this partnership increased each partner's capacity (organisation and staff)?
- What impact has the partnership had on the target community/ies or long-term goals of the [Name of NGO partner]?
- Was there sufficient communication and reviews/meetings? /how often?
- What has been the key learning from this partnership?
- Has CARE been an active contributor to the AACRS program? If yes, what was its contribution?
- What has CARE's contribution been to learning across the AACRS program?
- How could CARE improve its approach to sharing and learning across the AACRS program?
- Has learning and sharing by CARE with other AACRS partners resulted in changes, for example, in use of models or programming, by the other AACRS partners, for example?
- Any suggestion if you have, can share it with us?