

Beyond Provincial Capital Cities

District municipalities as key parts of the national urban spatial structure

This discussion paper examines Afghanistan's district municipalities (DMs). It presents draft findings from the land and housing analysis of 26 strategic DMs. It shows that over half of these DMs are larger and more influential than half of the provincial municipalities, yet their staffing and capacity has not kept pace with their growth. This indicates the importance of considering these DMs in urban programming and sub-national governance, making decisions on the actual dynamics of municipalities (e.g. population, land area, etc) rather than administrative definitions.

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A network of municipalities

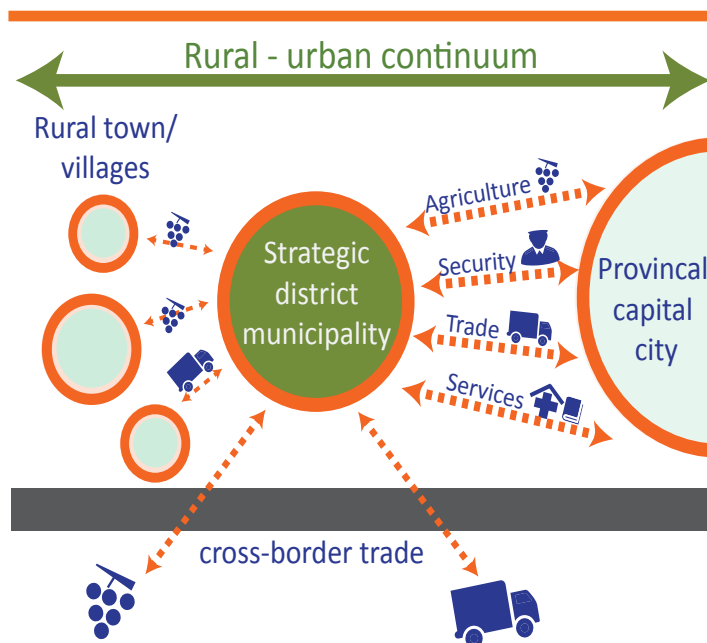
Afghanistan has over 150 municipalities. 34 of these are the 'provincial municipalities', the capital city of each of the 34 provinces, which are widely known and were studied in detail in the State of Afghan Cities 2015 Report. Less well known, but equally important, are the 120 'district municipalities', typically the main urban centre in their respective rural districts.¹

The legal basis for district municipalities is the same as that for provincial municipalities, principally the Municipal law (2000).² The Law (Chapter 2, Article 7) states that "Municipalities shall be established in the centres of local administrative units (provinces and districts) with due regard to the following conditions: (1) In the centre of administrative units having a population of more than 5,000 people; (2) In the centre of an administrative unit where implementation of urban master plan is feasible." District centres that wish to become municipalities must meet the above criteria and apply for municipal status through the Provincial Governor and Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG).³ The Deputy Ministry of Municipal (DMM), under IDLG, is also responsible to oversee and guide district municipalities.

Not all are equal

District municipalities vary considerably in terms of population, size, function, etc. DMM has identified 25 'strategic' district municipalities based on selected criteria: (i) expansion capabilities; (ii) current municipal revenues; and (iii) geographic location (e.g. key border towns).⁴ There are also a handful of other DMs that are strategic given their location in the five main 'city regions', proximity to the Kabul or the Regional Hub cities of Herat, Kandahar, Mazar-i-Sharif and Jalalabad, and/or they are key points along the national ring road (see paper #1)⁵. The map on the following page shows the 26 DMs that are being analysed in the Future of Afghan Cities Program (FoAC).

These 26 DMs are important for several reasons. First, they play an important economic role in connecting Afghanistan to neighbouring countries, especially in terms of trade through key border crossings, for example Torkham with Pakistan and Islam Qala with Iran. Second, they are important for security reasons, as recent events in Kunduz Province have demonstrated, where a provincial capital was more vulnerable and insecure when its surrounding district centres were not secure. Third, they are key links on the urban-rural continuum, playing an important role in the transit of agricultural goods and value addition, both within and outside the country. Fourth, those located near to large cities, such as Injil in Herat, can play a role in reducing inward



urbanisation pressure to the major cities and promoting an orderly growth of major cities.

Preliminary findings from GIS analysis

The Future of Afghan Cities programme (FoAC) has analysed 26 district municipalities using the same approach as the State of Afghan Cities (SoAC).⁶ It has used high-resolution satellite imagery to map the existing land use and count individual dwellings.

Overall, the findings confirm the importance of these district municipalities in terms of population size and land use, and give a reliable dataset for decision making. Key findings include:

1. Many District Municipalities are **larger in built-up area and estimated population than many of the Provincial Capitals**. For example, Spin Boldak has an estimated population of 120,000 people, making it the 14th largest city in the country, larger than 21 Provincial Capitals. This challenges prevailing assumptions and urban discourse in Afghanistan, which has largely focused on Kabul and the large Provincial Capitals.
2. An assessment of municipal staffing for these DMs shows that **staffing levels do not always reflect the size and importance of these DMs**. For example, Shindand DM in Herat Province has an estimated population of 57,000, the same as Asad Abad Provincial Capital of Kunar. However, Shindand has only 25 staff (7 Tashkeel and 18 contracted staff) where as Asad Abad has over double: 64

¹A B Popal (2014) Municipalities in Afghanistan. IDLG: Kabul. "A total of 181 municipalities are on record at GDMA, but some are not functional due to a lack of security in rural areas, or because they cannot generate enough revenue to operate." p.22

²UN-Habitat (2015) Municipal Governance: a vital piece of the sub-national governance puzzle. Discussion Paper #7; UN-Habitat: Kabul. <http://unhabitat.org/municipal-governance-a-vital-piece-of-the-sub-national-governance-puzzle/>

³The draft new Municipal Law addresses this issue of establishing municipalities and uses the same criteria as the existing law. The Sub-National Governance Policy, however, suggests that a municipality has a minimum land area of 50km² and a minimum population of 20,000.

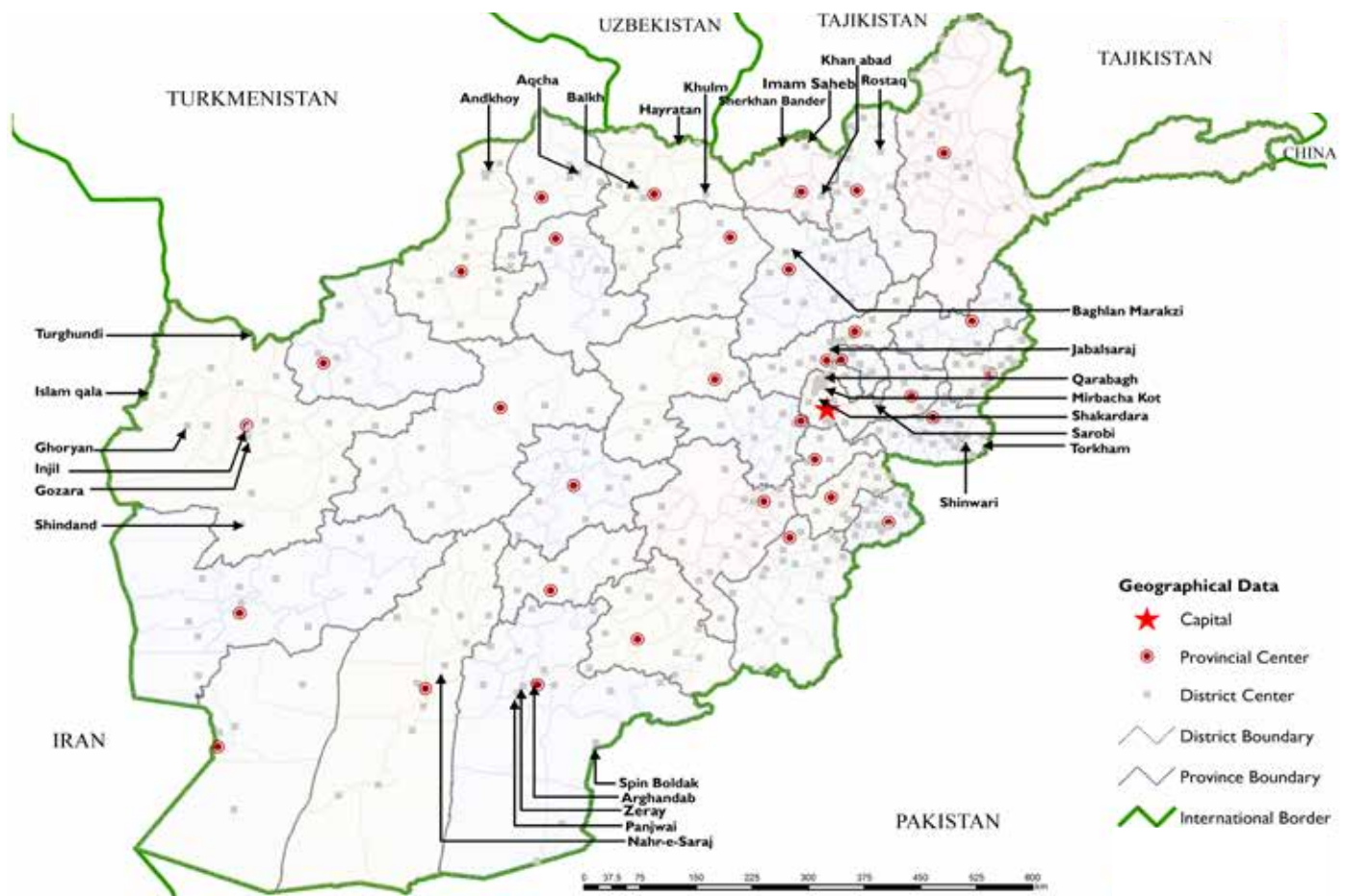
⁴22 of these are included for analysis in FoAC. Three (Garmsir (Helmand); Khashrod (Nimroz) and Aaqine (Faryab)) are not included as they are smaller and not part of the five 'city regions' of FoAC.

⁵Six are included in FoAC, including the District Municipalities of Shakardara (Kabul), Merbacha Kot (Kabul); and the district centres of Panjwai, Zerat and Arghandab (Kandahar); and Hayratana (Balkh).

⁶GoiRA (2015) The State of Afghan Cities 2015. GoiRA: Kabul. <http://unhabitat.org/books/soac2015/>

Afghanistan's municipal spatial structure

Overview of Provincial Municipalities, District Municipalities and Strategic District Municipalities



staff (24 Tashkeel and 40 contract)⁷.

3. The existing **land use largely reflects their function and location**.

District Municipalities on the periphery of large cities, such as Injil and Gozara in Herat, and Shakadara in Kabul, have a large percentage of 'vacant plots', reflecting the demand for residential plots close to the hub cities.⁸ Border towns have a considerable percentage of land for institutional, mainly for customs activities. The 'rural hub' district municipalities, such as Shindand (Herat Province) and Kholm (Balkh Province), which are far from the main cities in their city region and function as key district hubs for agriculture, have larger percentages of residential and agricultural land, with little land for commercial and institutional uses.

4. **Almost all dwellings are 'irregular'**, with very low prevalence of regular and hillside housing across all DMs.

Typologies of DMs

The findings enable the categorisation of DMs into typologies which can help to easily understand their dynamics and aid in policy making for the upcoming Urban National Priority Programme (UNPP), Urban Solidary Programme (USP) and Citizens Charter (CC). Three typologies of District Municipalities is proposed:

1. **'Border towns'**, such as Islam Qala, Torkham, Spin Boldak,

Torghundi, etc. These DMs have a disproportionately large percentage of institutional land which is used for customs and associated activities. They also have higher municipal revenues compared with their (relatively low) resident populations, given their ability to generate income from rents and leases from institutional land and properties.

2. **'City extensions'**, such as Injil, Shakadara, Jebal Siraj, Gozara. These DMs are located adjacent to large cities (e.g. Herat city and Kabul city) and essentially function as an extension of the urban built-up fabric of these cities. As noted above, 'city extension' DMs have relatively larger percentage of land used for industry as well as having more vacant plots, given the demand for residential development close to the major cities.

3. **'Agricultural hubs'**, such as Kholm, Balkh, Shinwari, and Shindand, are mainly located on national ring road and are functionally separate from the large provincial capitals. They function as hubs for their surrounding districts, especially in terms of agriculture, trade and transit.

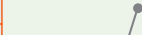


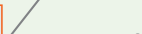
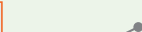
The value of discerning these typologies is that each requires a unique approach and prioritisation of interventions, especially in a context of limited resources and capacity. For example 'city extension' DMs should prioritise undertaking strategic urban

⁷GDMA (2014) An Assessment of Municipalities. IDLG:GDMA. Annual average between 2012-2014.

⁸'Vacant plots' is defined in the same way as in the State of Afghan Cities 2015 Report. GoIRA (2015) The State of Afghan Cities 2015. GoIRA: Kabul www.unhabitat.org/books/soac2015

A hierarchy of Afghan municipalities

The diagram below shows the draft findings on the strategic district municipalities compared with the 34 Provincial Capitals in terms of estimated population and built-up area.

PROVINCIAL CAPITALS			DISTRICT MUNICIPALITIES			
*Ordered by dwellings	#Dwellings	Built Up (Hectares)		#Dwellings	Built Up (Hectares)	
Kabul (KBL)	396,095	40,143		Spin Boldak	16,899	3,433
Herat (HEA)	89,790	9,476		Andkhoy	10,303	2,061
Mazar-i-Sharif (MRZ)	77,615	7,546		Injil	10,296	665
Kandahar (KAN)	61,902	11,291		Najir Sary	9,755	1,367
Jalalabad (JAA)	39,586	5,481		Aqcha	8,456	1,091
Lashkar Gah (LKG)	30,709	6,122		Shindand	7,733	715
Kunduz (KDZ)	29,877	3,059		Iman Sahib	6,926	757
Taluqan (TQN)	28,691	2,781		Gozara	6,926	2476
Pul-i-Khumri (PLK)	24,586	4,373		Ghoryan	6,239	1245
Sheberghan (SHB)	19,511	3,237		Rostaq	6,089	862
Zaranj (ZAJ)	17,878	2,158		Baghlan Markazi	5,714	978
Maimana (MMZ)	16,560	1,500		Khan Abad	5,608	689
Ghazni (GZI)	15,931	3,335	Shakardara	5,518	766	
Khost (KHT)	11,787	1,870		Kholm	5,211	715
Charikar (CHK)	10,671	1,304		Shinwari	5,149	616
Faiz Abad (FBD)	10,605	1,485		Qarabagh	5,133	416
Tarinkot (TRK)	7,956	1,255		Balkh	5,095	750
Gardez (GDZ)	7,849	1,796		Mir Bachakot	4,341	407
Qala-i-Naw (QLN)	7,125	777		Islam Qala	4,265	859
Aybak (AYB)	6,983	787		Jabl-ul-Siraj	3,986	639
Asad Abad (ASD)	6,350	695		Arghandab	3,087	692
Sar-i-Pul (SRP)	5,675	711		Zeray	2,694	486
Mahmood Raqi (MMR)	5,610	514		Turghundi	2,663	338
Qalat (QAL)	5,462	937		Panjwai	2,222	850
Farah (FAH)	5,299	1,831		Sorobi	2,135	282
Bamyan (BIN)	4,435	635		Shirkhan Bander	1,833	343
Mehterlam (MHT)	3,661	710		Hayratan	1,444	852
Ferozkoh (FRK)	3,474	669		Torkham	876	344
Bazarak (BAZ)	2,747	168				
Pul-i-Alam (PLA)	2,546	710				
Nili (NIL)	1,994	239				
Sharan (SHR)	1,739	1,472				
Maidan Shahr (MSR)	1,585	991				
Paroon (PAR)	183	25				

Draft data; pending final checking

⁹ Cities Alliance (2014) Managing Systems of Secondary Cities. Cities Alliance: Brussels.

¹⁰ Boex, J., Buencamino, G., and Kimble, D. (2010) An Assessment of Afghanistan's Municipal Governance Framework. IDG Working Paper No 2011-03. August 2010.

Beyond Provincial Capital Cities

extension' DMs should prioritise undertaking strategic urban planning that is aligned with their neighbouring major city, with a view to improve access to land for housing and reducing urban sprawl, especially on prime agricultural land. Border towns should prioritise the improvement of security and connectivity through strategic infrastructure investment. Agricultural hubs should prioritise interventions that improve agro-processing, value chains, and connectivity of agricultural products to local and regional markets.

Time to think again

The findings clearly show the need to re-orientate thinking away from 'urban' being only Kabul and the major cities. The question of how best to support district municipalities remains an important one.

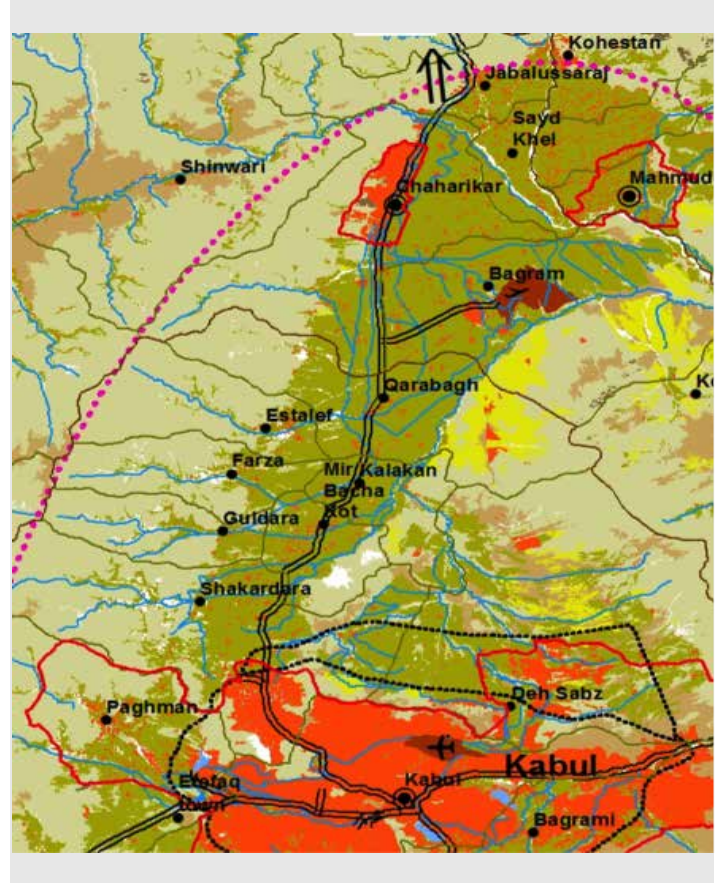
Serious consideration needs to be given to the spatial structure of human settlements in Afghanistan, especially and the secondary and tertiary cities. International experience has shown the importance of secondary cities in terms of managing urban growth and reducing the negative impacts of informal and rapid urbanisation.⁹

The Urban National Priority Programme (U-NPP) currently under development should reflect this spatial reality in its design to avoid it becoming 'Kabul-centric'. Furthermore, a national 'Urban Solidarity Programme' should consider implementation in large district municipalities as well because, as demonstrated above, they have more in common with prevailing 'urban' dynamics than 'rural' villages.

More consideration could be given to the political and institutional relationship between IDLG and the district municipalities.¹⁰ Opportunities exist for inter-municipal coordination, particularly in 'city extension' DMs in the areas of urban planning and solid waste management. Furthermore, inter-municipal exchange could be beneficial, whereby larger provincial municipalities could play an intermediary role between IDLG and the district municipalities, sharing experiences and expertise.

The ribbon of development from Kabul to Jebel Siraj

Map showing the existing situation between Kabul city to the District Municipality of Jebal Siraj. It highlights the complex spatial interplay of Provincial Capitals; District Municipalities; and District Centres along this “ribbon” of development.



Ways forward

- Define administrative boundaries of strategic district municipalities to support improved urban planning and management;
- Re-orientate thinking on these settlements to see them as part of the 'urban' spatial structure of Afghanistan and consider including them in upcoming urban programming (e.g. Urban Solidarity Programme);
- Develop a national urban spatial plan to promote a 'network of cities' where these district municipalities are included;
- Strengthen municipal capacity of district municipalities, including through city-to-city exchange;
- Address the variation in the Tashkeel staffing across DMs compared with Provincial Capitals;
- Continue efforts to standardise municipal operations and ensure DMs are included in municipal government reforms.



The Future of Afghan Cities (FoAC), is a government-led programme of MUDA, IDLG/DMM, Kabul Municipality and ARAZI that focuses on the development of a Urban National Priority Programme (U-NPP) that will set Afghanistan's urban priorities for the coming decade. To support this, FoAC will also undertake a detailed analysis of five city regions and at least 20 strategic district municipalities to provide key data and recommendations for policy and programme design.

