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An Assessment of Development Policies for Poverty Reduction

The Case of Afghanistan 2002 - 2021

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Preface

The global south is struggling to withstand the hardship of the extreme poverty phenomenon. The global south carries on the burden of an insufficient nutritious diet, insignificant healthcare services, and lack of schools' buildings, human capital, and infrastructure in addition to natural disasters such as floods, drought, earthquakes, landslides, and avalanches, which lead to manufactured disasters such as war, violence, criminality, corruption, and state fragility. This dire condition results in deaths from curable diseases, the underperformance of the public sector, and a chaotic situation out of the management of the national public institutions, the government, and conceivably mass migration. These circumstances prevent the significant development and accomplishment of individuals and states in which millions of fellow men, women, and children struggle to survive. However, the global south was the recipient of international assistance. Notably, the Multilateral International Organizations (MIOs) such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Bank (WB) introduced many initiatives to attract countries, international organizations, and individuals to support fellow men, women, and children with a motto to *leave no one behind!*

The global south includes Afghanistan, my birthplace. Afghanistan has intertwined with the complex and utmost severity of the extreme poverty phenomenon, an outcome of natural catastrophe, decades of the ongoing war, widespread corruption, and inadequate performance of the legislative, executive, and judicial bodies. Therefore, it is sustainable to involve academics and practitioners from Afghanistan to bring the possible changes and prevent curable deaths, improve livelihoods and amenities, and improve the lives of households in poverty. Like many individuals who attended school and university in Afghanistan, I intend to join the journey of looking after fellow men, women, and children, researching the phenomenon of extreme poverty in the case of Afghanistan, and doing my part. Many individuals, institutions, and organizations helped me during this course of study until I reached this point. I warmly extend my appreciation and gratitude to as many of them as possible.

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Sincerely,

Khwaja Mohammad Akbar Borran

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1 Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Motivation

The period from 2002 to 2021 marks a critical phase in Afghanistan's modern history, during which the country underwent extensive reconstruction efforts with the support of the United Nations, the international community, and the people of Afghanistan from both inside and abroad. Following decades of conflict, these actors came together with a shared vision to rehabilitate, reconstruct, and establish socio-economic institutions to foster peace, state, trust, and market-building. The ultimate goal was to set Afghanistan on a path toward self-sufficiency, ensuring long-term stability and economic prosperity.

During this time, the international community pledged and donated billions of dollars, providing both technical and financial assistance to facilitate Afghanistan's recovery. Various development policies were introduced to reduce extreme poverty, strengthen governance, and rebuild infrastructure. However, despite these extensive efforts and significant financial investments, poverty rates remained stubbornly high, and sustainable economic development remained elusive.

This dissertation aims to critically assess the development policies implemented in Afghanistan during this period, focusing on their effectiveness in reducing poverty. It will explore the extent to which these policies contributed to economic growth, social welfare, and institutional resilience. Furthermore, the research will analyze structural challenges, governance issues, and external dependencies that may have hindered the achievement of self-sufficiency.

By examining the successes and shortcomings of development policies in Afghanistan from 2002 to 2021, this study seeks to provide valuable insights for future post-conflict reconstruction efforts in fragile states. It is imperative to understand why, despite substantial international engagement, Afghanistan struggled to achieve meaningful poverty reduction and economic sustainability. This research will contribute to the broader discourse on international development, governance, and conflict resolution, offering recommendations for more effective policy frameworks in similar contexts.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Poverty is a multifaceted issue requiring a systematic approach to data collection, evaluation, and analysis to reach policy frameworks and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) viable in Afghanistan. Understanding the persistent state of extreme poverty in Afghanistan's rural and urban households necessitates comprehensive assessments, including risk assessment, needs assessment, health and environmental evaluations, education and financial reviews, cultural assessments, and performance evaluations (Coudouel et al., 2002). Additionally, evaluating the effectiveness of projects, programs, policies, and interventions is crucial to identifying the root causes of poverty, measuring progress, recognizing domestic sources of growth, and making informed decisions for policy improvements. However, despite these efforts, poverty has continued to rise (Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17, 2018). A study by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 2002 assessed Afghanistan's poverty situation based on Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) standards, setting the poverty threshold at one United States dollar per person per day (Afghanis¹ 1,200 per person per month) and a calorie intake of 2,453 kilocalories per person per day (Asian Development Bank, 2002). The study found that nearly 80 percent of Afghanistan's total population, including children, women, and men, lived below the poverty line (Asian Development Bank, 2002). Investment of a decade by all stakeholders, such as the UN, the international community, and the Government of Afghanistan, is alarming. Findings of the National Nutrition Survey (NNS) surfaced disturbing malnutrition rates in which 24.6 percent of children under five were underweight, 45 percent suffered from anemia, and 41 percent experienced chronic malnutrition (WHO, 2013). Over half the population remained illiterate, and access to essential services such as clean drinking water, healthcare, electricity, and education was limited. High maternal and infant mortality rates, child labor, and widespread economic hardship further exacerbated poverty levels. As of 2016, two out of five Afghanistan citizens lived below the national poverty line (Central Statistics Organization, 2016). Afghanistan's national poverty line has historically been lower than the international poverty threshold, depending on exchange rate fluctuations between the United States Dollar (USD) and the Afghani (Afs).

¹ Exchange rate in 2002: \$1 = Afghanis 40

1.3 A brief History of Development Policy in Afghanistan

The United Nations' global development agendas have influenced Afghanistan's national policies. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), adopted in 2000 by UN member states and MIOs, were intended to reduce extreme poverty by 2015 (United Nations, 2000). Following this, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were introduced in 2015 with a broader target of eliminating all forms of poverty and was intended to last until 2030 (United Nations, 2015). The government of Afghanistan integrated these global initiatives into its national development strategies, but delays hindered their effectiveness. It took 10 years for Afghanistan to align its policies with the MDGs, by which time the UN had already shifted focus to the SDGs. Similarly, integrating the SDGs into national policy took four years, leading to significant gaps in implementation.

Since 2002, Afghanistan has introduced several national policy frameworks for poverty reduction. The National Development Framework (NDF) focused on investing in human capital and social policies to combat extreme poverty (National Development Framework, 2002). This was followed in 2004 by Securing Afghanistan's Future (SAF), which emphasized economic self-sufficiency, financing national operations, and strengthening the security, social, and infrastructure sectors (Securing Afghanistan's Future, 2004).

The Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), developed through a planning and survey phase beginning in 2005 (I- Afghanistan National Development Strategy, 2005), became a five-year development policy from 2008 to 2013 (Afghanistan National Development Strategy, 2008). The Provincial Development Programs (PDPs) within ANDS used National Risk and Vulnerability Assessments (NRVA) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) data to create localized poverty reduction strategies (Afghanistan National Development Strategy, 2008). The ANDS also served as Afghanistan's official PRSP and presented to the UN and MIOs such as the WB and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to secure debt relief and financial assistance (Afghanistan National Development Strategy, 2008).

Following ANDS, Afghanistan introduced the National Priority Programs (NPPs)-a set of 22 programs designed to align with ANDS and support state policies for poverty reduction (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). These programs were succeeded by the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF I and II). The first phase of ANPDF (2017–2021) aimed at

establishing peace, reducing extreme poverty, and improving welfare, while the second phase (2021–2025) sought to expand these efforts (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2018b; 2020a).

Over the years, billions of U.S. dollars in Official Development Assistance (ODA) have been pledged and flowed into Afghanistan to fund these policies, programs, and projects. However, extreme poverty has persisted, primarily due to Afghanistan’s fragile situation and high-risk economic environment. Although military spending provided short-term employment opportunities, it was not a sustainable solution for long-term poverty reduction. Additional challenges, such as internal displacement, returnees, and natural disasters (floods, droughts), further strained development efforts. Moreover, Afghanistan’s electoral process often influenced development policies, as political candidates manipulated policies for electoral gains. This led to inconsistencies in policy implementation, continuity, and prioritization. As a result, despite continuous efforts, extreme poverty rose from 30 percent in 2005 (National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment Afghanistan-2005, 2007) to 54.5 percent in 2016. The depth and severity of poverty also worsened during this period², as illustrated in national poverty assessment reports in Table 1 (Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17, 2018).

Table 1: *Severity and depth of extreme poverty line*

Poverty Indicator	NRVA 2007-08	NRVA 2011-12	ALCS 2016-17
Poverty Headcount	33.7	38.3	54.5
Poverty Gap	7.2	9.9	15.0
Squared Poverty Gap	2.3	3.6	5.6

Source: Based on Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17 (2018).

² The poverty headcount increased from 33.7 percent in 2007-08 to 38.3 percent in 2011-12 and 54.5 percent in 2016-17, indicating worsening economic conditions. The poverty gap, which measures the depth of poverty, also grew from 7.2 percent in 2007-08 to 15.0 percent in 2016-17, showing that those in poverty have become increasingly deprived. Additionally, the squared poverty gap, which reflects inequality among people experiencing poverty, rose from 2.3 percent to 5.6 percent over the same period.

1.4 Research questions

The UN, in collaboration with the international community, initiated a comprehensive process to facilitate peacebuilding, state-building, and market-building in Afghanistan (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2020a). The primary objective was to establish functioning state institutions capable of maintaining law and order, delivering essential services, and fostering economic development to improve the living conditions of rural and urban households. These efforts were undertaken in the context of Afghanistan's long history of war, political instability, and deep social fragmentation based on ethnicity, language, religion, and geography. The country's susceptibility to natural disasters has also exacerbated extreme poverty and further complicated development efforts.

Following the collapse of state structures due to decades of conflict, an agreement was reached among diverse Afghanistan factions to create an interim governing framework. The Afghanistan Interim Administration (AIA) was established in 2002, followed by the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan (TISA). These transitional governance structures aimed to facilitate the adoption of a new constitution, promote an open-market economy, and establish a democratic system to foster peace and economic growth. The 2004 constitution introduced a governance model based on the Islamic Republic with administrative divisions at the provincial, district, and village levels (Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17, 2018; Pinney, 2004; Report on Findings From the 2003 NRVA in Rural Afghanistan, 2004). This transition marked a shift from a semi-centralized economy, where the state-dominated economic production and service delivery, to a more open economic system intended to foster private sector engagement and employment generation.

However, despite these reforms, the governance transition was fraught with challenges. Elections were held at the presidential, parliamentary, and provincial council levels, but district and municipal elections did not occur. Electoral fraud and governance failures deepened public distrust in state institutions. Corruption, weak public administration, and an unattractive investment climate further hindered economic growth, exacerbating social inequalities and undermining poverty reduction efforts (Afghanistan National Development Strategy, 2008).

Afghanistan's state-building process was structured into two key phases by the UN and the international community. Each decade of development has been marked by technical and financial assistance from the international community and MIOs. The state-building process primarily focused on establishing functional institutions, ensuring the basic security of rural and urban households, and formulating development policies aligned with ODA. These efforts led to notable

improvements in human development and socioeconomic indicators, including higher school enrollment rates, advancements in healthcare, reductions in maternal mortality, and increased access to electricity, the internet, and telecommunications services such as mobile cellular subscriptions (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2020a; Afghanistan National Development Strategy, 2008). There was also optimism that Afghanistan could eventually achieve self-sufficiency. However, despite these advancements, poverty reduction remained vague. The extreme poverty rate continued to rise, disproportionately affecting both rural and urban households, thereby undermining the broader development gains achieved over the years:

1. Transition Period from 2002 to 2014 – Focused on constructing basic state institutions, mainly under international supervision.
2. Transformation Period from 2015 to 2024 – Aimed at achieving self-sufficiency with Afghanistan leadership guiding national institutions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018; Dudgeon, 2014; Cgeon, 2014).

During the transition phase, international experts dominated governance and development programs, guiding Afghanistan’s policy directions toward peacebuilding and poverty reduction. National experts were gradually integrated into the administration to sustain development efforts. However, throughout the transformation period, governance shortcomings persisted, limiting Afghanistan’s ability to achieve self-sufficiency. Institutional weaknesses, poor public service delivery, and widespread corruption hindered the effectiveness of state-building efforts. Furthermore, the absence of reliable statistical data further impeded policy development, leading to inefficient allocation of resources and duplication of efforts in poverty reduction programs (Pinney, 2004).

Despite substantial ODA inflows, the effectiveness of foreign aid in reducing poverty remained questionable. Corruption and weak governance structures led to inefficiencies, misallocation of resources, and duplication of development efforts, which often failed to produce sustainable results (Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17, 2018; National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, 2007/08). Additionally, Afghanistan’s economic volatility—marked by fluctuating Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rates and dependence on foreign aid—created further challenges for poverty reduction (Central Statistics Organization, 2016/17).

Despite persistent conflict and political instability, Afghanistan demonstrated resilience by gradually integrating into global development initiatives. The country aligned its national policies with the MDGs and later with the SDGs, emphasizing poverty eradication as a key priority (United Nations, 2015; United Nations, 2000)-theoretically, globalization, trade liberalization, and market openness present opportunities for economic growth and poverty reduction. However, Afghanistan's engagement with international trade and economic integration has remained limited due to security concerns, weak infrastructure, and institutional inefficiencies.

Historically, Afghanistan's economy relied heavily on agriculture-based trade with neighboring countries. The country exported surplus agricultural products while importing essential food such as wheat and rice. However, prolonged war conditions severely disrupted cross-border and regional trade. Many neighboring countries imposed strict travel and trade restrictions, contradicting the principles of globalization and limiting Afghanistan's ability to participate in regional markets (Rodrik, 2011, pp. 236–246; Easterly, 2003). Additionally, Afghanistan's inactive participation in regional economic organizations, insufficient transportation infrastructure, and inefficiencies in customs administration further hindered its potential to benefit from globalization (Rodrik, 2011, pp. 236 – 246). In other words, Afghanistan's development trajectory has been shaped by a combination of state-building efforts, international assistance, and globalization forces. While the country has partially made progress in establishing governance structures and economic policies, persistent institutional weaknesses and governance failures have hindered poverty reduction efforts as expected. Despite the influx of foreign aid and international support, systemic corruption, inefficient public administration, and political instability continue to pose significant challenges.

Furthermore, Afghanistan's limited participation in global trade and its restricted access to regional markets due to ongoing conflict and infrastructural deficiencies have prevented it from fully capitalizing on globalization's potential benefits. Addressing these challenges requires strengthening national institutions, improving aid effectiveness, and fostering greater trade integration to create sustainable economic growth and reduce extreme poverty.

In contrast, other Asian countries have successfully leveraged globalization to stimulate economic growth, reduce poverty, and improve social conditions through increased regional trade and investment. Afghanistan's challenge lies in overcoming its historical economic isolation and integrating effectively into regional and international trade frameworks.

Given Afghanistan's heavy reliance on ODA, its persistent governance challenges, and the potential benefits of globalization, This study contributes to a broader understanding of poverty reduction strategies in post-conflict settings, offering insights that can inform future development policies and international assistance programs. By investigating the roles of institutions, aid, and globalization, this research aims to provide practical solutions for Afghanistan's ongoing struggle against poverty and economic instability by examining three key research questions that are fundamental to understanding and addressing poverty reduction:

1. Institutional Effectiveness: How to understand role of national institutions on poverty reduction policies in the case of Afghanistan?
 - Examining the role of governance in shaping effective policies to reduce poverty.
 - Identifying the structural weaknesses in public institutions that hinder development efforts.
2. Aid Efficiency: How can ODA be made effective for poverty reduction in the case of Afghanistan?
 - Analyzing how ODA has been utilized and whether it aligns with Afghanistan's national development priorities.
 - Investigating governance failures that have limited ODA effectiveness and identifying strategies for improvement.
3. Globalization and Trade: What is the relationship between globalization and poverty reduction in the case of Afghanistan?
 - Assessing whether trade liberalization and regional connectivity have contributed to poverty reduction.
 - Exploring how Afghanistan can integrate into global markets and leverage trade to foster economic growth.

Further, this study operates under the hypothesis that “globalization-driven trade liberalization and openness positively impact poverty reduction by increasing access to regional and international markets and fostering economic growth in Afghanistan.”

By addressing these research questions, the study aims to comprehensively analyze the institutional, external, and structural factors affecting poverty reduction and contribute to the broader understanding of effective poverty reduction strategies in fragile and conflict-affected states. Additionally, it seeks to identify policy recommendations that can enhance the effectiveness of governance, aid utilization, and trade liberalization in fostering economic development in Afghanistan.

1.5 Chapter Highlights: A Quick Overview of Each Section

The chapters in this dissertation provide a structured analysis of Afghanistan's development trajectory, covering its governance, economic landscape, poverty reduction efforts, theoretical frameworks, research methodology, key findings, and critical discussions.

Chapter One: Introduction outlines the motivation behind this study, the statement of the problem, and a brief historical overview of development policies in Afghanistan. It also introduces the research questions and hypotheses that guide the analysis.

Chapter Two: Country Background provides insights into Afghanistan's governance system, national poverty line, socio-economic development, and social protection programs. Additionally, it examines the characteristics of households in extreme poverty and assesses the country's readiness for graduation from the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) category.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Background delves into conceptual and theoretical frameworks relevant to Afghanistan's development, highlighting key issues such as landlocked geography, corruption, and the impact of globalization. It synthesizes existing literature and provides a historical overview of poverty reduction policies.

Chapter Four: Methodology explains the research approach, design, and methods used in the study. It discusses the integration of qualitative and quantitative research methods, including data collection techniques and analytical processes.

Chapter Five: Results presents the study's findings, focusing on governance, policy implementation, state and non-state actors, public sector performance, and international organizations' role in poverty reduction. It also explores systemic issues such as corruption, institutional discrimination, and the effectiveness of ODA and globalization.

Chapter Six: Discussion interprets the results in relation to existing literature and policy implications. It highlights key challenges and opportunities in Afghanistan's development landscape, emphasizing policy coordination, accountability, and long-term sustainability. Further, it concludes by summarizing key insights, proposing improvements for future policy formulation, and identifying areas for further research.

2 Chapter Two: Country Background

2.1 Afghanistan Governance System

The governance system is based on a decision-making process through informal and formal institutions in Afghanistan (Simonsen, 2004). The informal and formal institutions have been based on male dominance and an atavistic governance approach (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2020a; Manganaro & Alozie, 2015; Nijat, 2014; Simonsen, 2004). In an atavistic governance approach, representation has not been inclusive (Simonsen, 2004). This governance approach operates in the framework of an expediency regime through the elderly male part of the society irrespective of relevant educational qualifications and proficiency, and on some occasions, informal education or no education which, in this context, women, youth, minorities, and vulnerable communities have rarely heard or have no voice (Manganaro & Alozie, 2015; Nijat, 2014; Simonsen, 2004). Therefore, the international community and the state of Afghanistan determined to reform the governance system into inclusive national and subnational governance to give a voice to vulnerable groups and people experiencing poverty. Table 2 shows the formation of national and subnational governance and summarizes the governance system and categorized it into 8 economic regions, 34 provinces, 399 districts, 165 municipalities, and around 45,538 villages with the recognition of production potential and pursue resilience and sustainability (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2018a; Afghanistan National Development Strategy, 2008).

Table 2: *State Hierarchy through eight economic zones with development potentials*

Region	Provinces	Population	Production/Focus
Capital	Kabul, Panjshir, Kapisa, Wardak, Parwan	7,179,727	Water and Forestation
East	Nangahar, Kunar, Nuristan, Laghman	4,371,640	Agriculture (rice), Mining, Timber and Tourism
Southeast	Paktia, Khost, Logar, Paktika, Ghazni,	3,222,428	Oil and Gas, Small water Dams, Agriculture and Mining

South	Kandahar, Helmand, Nimroz, Uruzgan, Zabul,	4,358,192	Water, Agricultural Mechanism, Air Corridor for trade and Industrial Hub
Center	Bamyan, Daikundi, Ghor	2,022,789	Honey, Potatoes, Mining, Transport and Tourism
West	Herat, Badghdis, Farah	4,040,631	Transit Hub, Agriculture (wheat), Wind Energy, Industrial Development, Oil and Gas
North	Balkh, Samangan, Jawzjan, Saripul, Faryab	4,474,397	Oil and Gas, Transit, Electricity Transfer, Agriculture (wheat) Amo River beach Wind Energy and Carpet
Northeast	Kunduz, Takhar, Baghlan, Badakhshan	4,545,303	Electricity Transfer, Agriculture (wheat and rice), Amo River, Cotton, Gas and Oil and Transit
8	34	34,215,107	

Source: Author's compilation from Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2020a), Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2018a), Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (n.d.).

The International community and the state of Afghanistan reformed the features and coverage of the Ministry of Interior Affairs (MoIA) to improve effectiveness and performance of the sub-national governance level. Historically, the sub-national governance has been operated through the MoIA pertinent to security and civilian sectors. However, the reform separated the security sector from the civilian sector. As a result, the MoIA withheld the security sector. The civilian sector was delegated to be implemented by a newly established entity, the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG), in 2007. Hereafter, subnational governance was organized through a multi-

tiered system overseen by the IDLG. It includes 34 provinces, districts, and over 165 municipalities, each with designated administrative and judicial representatives. At the village level, Community Development Councils institutionalized under the NSP and Citizens' Charter programs served as the primary local governance structures as in Table 3.

Table 3: *Sub-national governance reform and line of communication*

Department Office	Summary
National	IDLG was created in 2007 to manage the civilian aspects of subnational governance. All provincial, district, and municipal entities report through IDLG to the President.
Regions	Seven primary regions of Afghanistan correspond to our military and police corps. We seek to develop corresponding economic agencies to promote regional economic growth for these seven regions, as well as an additional economic agency for the central region.
Provinces	Afghanistan has 34 provinces. For each province, there is a provincial governor and directors from line ministries. There are also representatives from the judicial branch located within each provincial headquarters.
Districts	District administration include[s] district governors, tertiary units' officials, security and defense officials as well as representatives from the judicial branch
Municipalities	There are more than 165 municipalities in Afghanistan, which are governed under a 2000 Municipal Law.
Villages	The NSP and Citizen's Charter program have helped to institutionalize village shuras/Community Development Councils as a primary governance structure at the local level.

Source: Adapted from Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2018a).

The civilian sector operation was delayed or halted due to conflicts of interest among national entities such as the Ministry of Rural, Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) and local

governance authorities. For example, the construction of secondary and tertiary roads, bridges, and other development projects accidentally had a complementarity role due to the absence of significant and adequate coordination and collaboration mechanisms. Coordination and collaboration are prerequisites to enhancing the effectiveness of the development projects and programs among the national and sub-national governance authorities to reach a level of good-enough governance to provide basic amenities and livelihood for households in extreme poverty.

The international community and the state of Afghanistan are expected to make the governance system inclusive, unfold domestic sources of growth, and reduce the severity of extreme poverty through national and sub-national governance reform. An inclusive governance system aims to establish an accountable regime where different sections of the society shall take part in political processes, have a voice, make a recommendation, develop policies, improve amenities and livelihood, increase resilience among vulnerable groups, and decrease the severity of extreme poverty among poor households and utilize domestic sources of growth and avoid being the recipient of the ODA. The ODA graduation may be viable through domestic sources of growth where fulfill the gap in domestic production and consumption. In the industrial policy of Afghanistan, the agriculture sector and hydrocarbon sector are evaluated as having the potential to help reduce extreme poverty, reach self-reliance, and gradually graduate from the ODA.

The state of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (IRA) had targeted three objectives to reach its potential, resilience, and sustainability such as peace-building, state-building, and market-building (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2020a). Under these objectives, the potential for resilience focused on seven target areas such as agriculture, energy, extractive, manufacturing, regional connectivity, digital economy, and human capital to decrease aid dependency and reach self-sufficiency (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2020a).

- a) The agriculture sector takes into consideration the agri-business value chain, production, forestation, irrigation, pasture management, and livestock,
- b) The energy sector considers solar, gas, hydro, and wind,
- c) The extractive sector focuses on gold, copper, iron, zinc, and emeralds,
- d) The manufacturing sector focuses on value-chains, construction based on mining contracts and import reduction,

- e) The regional connectivity drags on transport and transit by the construction of roads, railroads, and ports,
- f) The digital economy focuses on transparency, corruption, recognition of illicit economic activities, and anti-money laundering, and
- g) The human capital development sector considers education and higher education, Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVeT), healthcare, and social protection programs pertinent to pension programs for the martyred and disabled groups (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2020a).

There are two essential kinds of cereal in the agriculture sector, with the highest consumption and demand rate in Afghanistan. These primary sources of food are wheat and rice. Wheat is a vital food source, and annual wheat consumption per capita reaches 160 kilograms (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2020b). Afghanistan demands 7 million metric tons of wheat annually, and the production goes to 4.4 million metric tons on a normal year with a deficit of 2.2 million metric tons, which have been imported each year (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2020b). Wheat has been produced mainly in Herat, Balkh, and Kunduz provinces and nurtured in rain-fed and irrigated forms. A 2.2 million metric tons deficit has been imported from the region, mainly Kazakhstan and Pakistan.

Rice takes second position on the food list in Afghanistan (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2020b). Between 2001/02 and 2013/14, average rice consumption was 0.4 million tons, and 73 percent was produced in Kunduz, Baghlan, Takhar, Nangarhar, and Laghman provinces. Rice per capita consumption was 17 kilograms between 2003 to 2014, and it has been mainly imported from Pakistan (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2020b).

The hydrocarbon sector has two main basins, the Amu Darya and the Afghan-Tajik. The Two basins are located on 515,000 square kilometers (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2020b). The primary findings were in 1959, with an estimated 150 million barrels of oil reserve and above 4,500 billion cubic feet of gas reserve (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2020b). There have been 29 fields on the Afghanistan side of the Amu Darya and Afghan-Tajik basins. Recent findings highlighted that these two basins have almost 1.6 billion barrels of oil and 440 billion cubic meters of natural gas (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2020b). Further, Afghanistan minerals are expected to reserve more than 2.2 billion metric tons of iron ore, 1.3 billion metric tons of marble, 30 million metric tons of copper, 1.4 million metric tons of rare-earth, and 2,700 kilograms of gold (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2020b). These potential areas may help the national and sub-

national governance unfold domestic sources of growth, gradually graduate from dependency to ODA and reduce extreme poverty.

2.2 Afghanistan National Poverty Line

The poverty line is a mechanism that measures minimum food and nonfood requirements to attain basic human needs or achieve a minimum level of well-being (Wieser et al., 2018). The poverty line is categorized into an international or global poverty line and a national poverty line, each determined by monetary and non-monetary metrics. While the international poverty line is mainly intertwined in monetary value, the national poverty line is intricately tied to a country's specific context and the efficacy of its state institutions (Gentilini & Sumner, 2012). In the case of Afghanistan, a committee was established to measure monetary and non-monetary poverty lines based on consumption (National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, 2007/08). The state ministries and stakeholders established this committee to recognize non-monetary items and determine the monetary level of the national poverty line in Kabul in 2007/08 (National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, 2007/08). This committee is called the inter-ministry Poverty Estimate Technical Committee (PETC), with the key members from the Ministry of Economy (MoEc), Central Statistics Organization (CSO), MRRD, Ministry of Finance (MoF), Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MLSAMD), and members from the MIOs such as the WB, European Commission (EC) and Department for International Development (DFID) (National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, 2007/08). The PETC developed an approach based on food and nonfood items which comprised 91 items such as cereals, meat, dairy, and eggs, as well as shelter, energy, medical services, education, transportation, and clothing (National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, 2007/08). The PETC set a benchmark for the food poverty line at 2100 kilocalories per person per day which was a determination of per capita minimum requirement, while the national median food poverty line was estimated at 2441 kilocalories per person per day (Central Statistics Organization and World Bank, na). The nonfood poverty line required a comprehensive dataset compared to setting a food poverty line with a threshold justified to the amount of daily consumption. Meanwhile, nonfood expenditures were not straightforwardly measurable. Therefore, 10 percent above and 10 percent below the food poverty line; the nonfood poverty line was accepted based on necessary data from 14 regions (Central Statistics Organization and World Bank, na). Consequently, the inter-ministry Poverty Estimate Committee set a food poverty line at

2100 kilocalories or 46 cents per person per day (Afghanis³ 690 per person per month), and the nonfood poverty line was at 10 percent around the food poverty line. The national poverty line, as per the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2007/08, sat at 83 cents per person per day or 1.255 Afghanis⁴ per person per month to attain 2.100 kilocalories and nonfood basic needs (National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, 2007/08). This single-dimensional national poverty line was updated in 2016. The state and stakeholders on poverty reduction reflected the inflation into the national poverty line. Therefore, there was a 68 percent increase in the cost of basic food items, which added to the previous 2100 kilocalories per person per day, and a 58 percent in the cost of nonfood basic needs which increased to a total of 2,064 Afghanis⁵ per person per month (Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17, 2018) and this process continued in 2020 surveys. This addition considered the inflation rate in the national poverty line calculations.

Furthermore, this single-dimensional poverty line, which focuses on a single consumption dimension, has been subdivided into the healthcare sector, school enrolment, and living standards to measure poverty from a multidimensional aspect. This multidimensional poverty measurement was introduced to the cabinet member of the IRA in 2018. The state and poverty reduction stakeholders found that the requirements of each community and each region are different. A single-dimension poverty index is inadequate in comparison to a Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). Therefore, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) and its significance were introduced to members of the cabinet for approval and application to prioritize and sequence the needs of each region. For example, in some regions, the absence of healthcare services such as a clinic building was not constructed, the agricultural sector was affected by flood or drought, and food shortage was a challenge, but a school building was constructed. An effective response to the various needs of each community and each region was misleading through the single-dimensional poverty index based on consumption. Thus, the state and the stakeholders of poverty reduction consider the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) comprehensive and synchronized with the MIOs and appropriate in the case of Afghanistan.

Figure 1 illustrates the progressive adjustment of Afghanistan's national poverty line across four survey periods, reflecting changes in consumption costs and living standards. In 2007/08, the

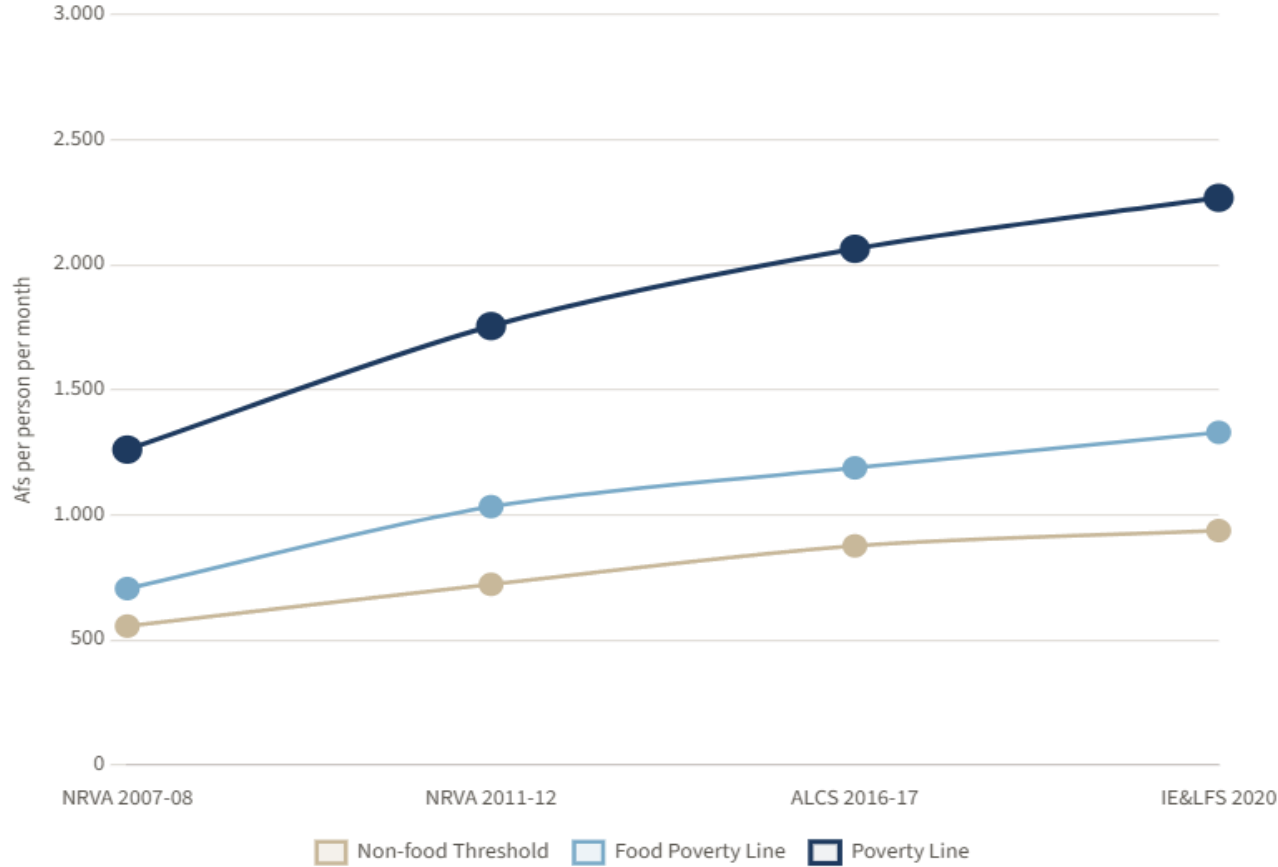
³ Exchange rate in 2007: \$1 = Afghanis 50

⁴ Exchange rate in 2007: \$1 = Afghanis 50

⁵ Exchange rate in 2016: \$1 = Afghanis 66.5

poverty line was set at 1,261, comprising a food poverty line of 705 and a non-food threshold of 555. This threshold increased to 1,755 in 2011/12 (1,033 food; 722 non-food), and further to 2,064 in 2016/17 (1,188 food; 876 non-food). By 2020, the total poverty line had risen to 2,268, including 1,330 allocated to food and 937 to non-food expenditures. The consistent upward trajectory across survey rounds suggests significant inflationary pressures and rising minimum consumption requirements necessary to meet basic needs over time.

Figure 1: Trends in national poverty line estimates

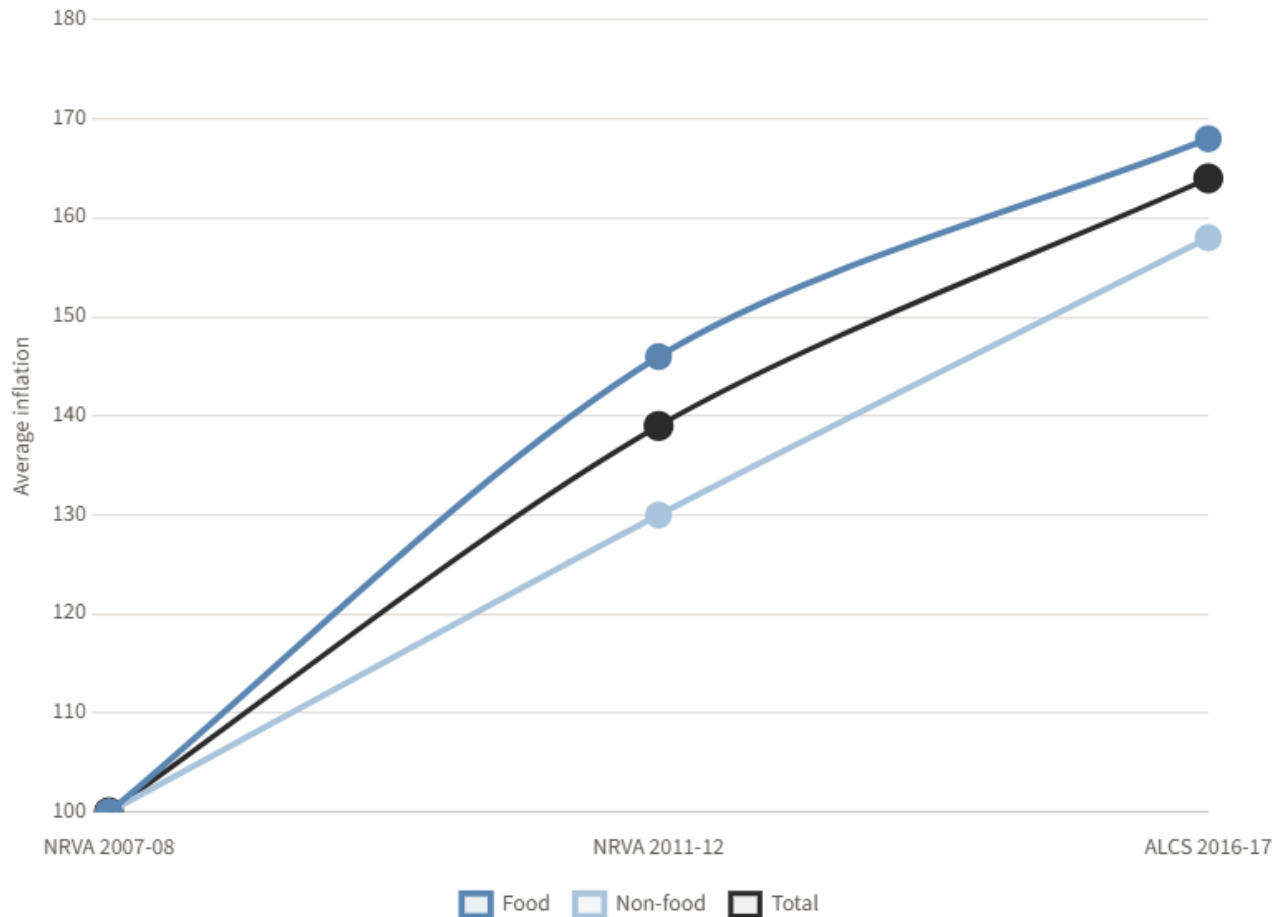


Source: Adopted from Income and Expenditure & Labor Force Surveys 2020 (2021).

Figure 2 demonstrates the adjustment of the national poverty line in response to cumulative inflation across successive survey periods. Using 2007/08 as the base year (index = 100) for food, non-food, and total components, substantial increases are observed in subsequent years. By 2011/12, the food price index had risen to 146, the non-food index to 130, and the overall index to 139, indicating stronger inflationary pressures on food commodities relative to non-food items.

This upward trend continued in 2016/17, when the food index reached 168, the non-food index 158, and the total index 164. The differential increases between food and non-food components highlight the disproportionate impact of food price inflation on poverty thresholds, underscoring the importance of inflation-adjusted poverty lines to ensure accurate measurement of real consumption and living standards over time.

Figure 2: *Inflation adjustment of the national poverty line*



Source: Adopted from Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17 (2018).

2.3 Afghanistan National Surveys

Afghanistan national surveys were not conducted for decades due to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) invasion that was followed by years of civil war. In this dark era, the main goal of the citizens was to survive, and national surveys were impossible to be conducted. However, the CSO conducted the national census survey in 1978 (National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment,

2007/08). This situation is consequent to the absence of statistical data nationwide. As a result, the national and international organizations developed policies, programs, and projects based on estimations and administrative data of the MIOs, which were small in scope, had limited coverage, and were not at the position to meet the comprehensive requirement of the poverty reduction at the country. On the contrary, many state officials claim that such circumstance is common in a war-affected country.

The national survey was re-conducted after two and half decades with the assistance of the UN. The UN, through the World Food Program (WFP) department of the Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM) Unit, supported the initial round of the NRVA surveys based on its database (Pinney, 2004). The WFP conducted household surveys and developed a nationwide database to distribute food packages and essential items during the years of war (National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, 2007/08). Consequently, the WFP was able to assist with the socioeconomic database and enhance the initial stage of national surveys. The first step was the transformation of the socioeconomic database from the WFP and other stakeholders to the MRRD and the CSO. As a result, the NRVA surveys were conducted, in 2003, (Pinney, 2004). The socioeconomic or national surveys were regularly conducted every two years with the ownership of the state of Afghanistan, specifically the CSO. However, the ownership of the CSO was managerial and administrative, but it remained vulnerable to financial and technical support from the international community. The first household survey in 2003 was financed by the DFID, and the remaining surveys were funded by the European Commission (EC).

The National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) survey focused on the socioeconomic aspect of the lives of rural and urban households, intending to observe, recognize and measure extreme poverty and vulnerability and effectively apply findings to offer policy recommendations for relevant ministries (Pinney, 2004). The NRVA expected to offer policy recommendations and conducted seven surveys from 2003 to 2020. The surveys were conducted in 2003, 2005, 2007/08, 2011/12, 2013/14, 2016/17, and 2020. In 2013/14, the survey stakeholders decided to change the title of the surveys to convey development information and census. Therefore, the NRVA Survey series were renamed to the Afghanistan Living Condition Survey (ALCS) and recognized an optimal title by the survey stakeholders. These surveys were conducted nationwide, and due to security restrictions and coverage of territory by the state of Afghanistan, coverage of the surveys and the number of districts were subject to change in each round of data collection. The CSO or the National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) wanted a better timeframe for the data

collection and publications. The data collection took one year for synthesis and publication, another year, and a total of two years. Due to outdated statistical data, this statistical process could not meet the expected goal of adding value to the policy development process. This issue was raised to the European Commission (EC) as a funder and survey stakeholder with a recommendation to collect the data in six months and finalize in another six months and publish three statistical reports such as the ALCS, Income and Expenditure and Labor Force Survey (IE&LFS) in one year. The European Commission has not approved this recommendation and stopped funding. Though, in 2020, the ALCS was categorized as Income and Expenditure & Labor Force Surveys (IE&LFS) (2021) conducted through the initiative of the NSIA. Table 4 shows the coverage of the NRVA Surveys, ALCS, and Income and Expenditure & Labor Force Surveys (IE&LFS 2020). In 2005, two additional provinces, Daikuni and Nooristan, were included in the survey. Coverage at the district level has been variable, as it is influenced by security conditions, with some areas falling under partial or no state control. As a result, reported coverage may fluctuate depending on accessibility and local governance.

Table 4: *Features and coverage of the national surveys*

Survey/Year	2003	2005	2007/08	2011/12	2013/14	2016/17	2020
Province	32	34	34	34	34	34	34
District	368	392	395	342	364	342	329
Village	1853	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cluster	-	2597	2572	2040	2100	1929	1835
Wealth Group	5559	-	-	-	-	-	-
Households	11757	30822	20576	20828	20786	19838	2100
Persons	85577	221586	152252	159224	157262	155680	153300

Source: Author's compilation from NRVA, ALCS, and IE&LFS Surveys.

2.4 Afghanistan Socio-Economic Development

Afghanistan's strategic location has historically made it vulnerable to invasions, including those by the British Empire and Tsarist Russia in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Soviet Union in 1979, and subsequent conflicts involving the United States and other forces in 2001. These invasions, coupled with ongoing civil wars, have devastated the country's infrastructure, economy, and social fabric, turning it into a safe haven for terrorist organizations. However, Afghanistan's strategic location also holds the potential to make it a critical player between Central and South Asia, facilitating trade routes, energy pipelines, electricity transmission, and extraction of mineral mines. Unfortunately, ongoing instability and insufficient investment have left many inhabitants reliant on subsistence agriculture, with limited prospects for foreign aid.

Afghanistan's economic development is based on primitive subsistence agricultural farming. Primitive subsistence farming has been practiced among village households in Afghanistan for centuries. The village households pertinent to a farmer and his family or community engage in small plots of agricultural land with primary tools and the use of animals. The primitive subsistence farming of Afghanistan has been prone to drought and floods. The mountainous condition makes it harsh for the village households and the local communities with primitive tools to expand agricultural land and irrigation networks. In addition, the landlocked situation, as shown in Figure 3, adds to the harshness of insufficient resources, decreasing the chance of accessing the international trade corridors. The insufficiency of resources leads to internal displacement, criminality, and corruption, expanding to uncertainty and instability. Further, the population growth rate exceeds the economic growth rate. The population growth rate is 3.3 percent, and the economic growth rate is 2.1 percent, which that makes unstable the GDP growth rate (Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17, 2018; Central Statistics Organization of Afghanistan, 2016/17). In addition, millions of returnees make the economic condition more fragile. The GDP annual growth rate was at its highest in 2007/08 at 16.7 percent and the lowest in 2015/16 at (-2.4) percent due to the withdrawal of the international security forces and months of delay in the announcement of the presidential elections results (Central Statistics Organization of Afghanistan, 2016/17).

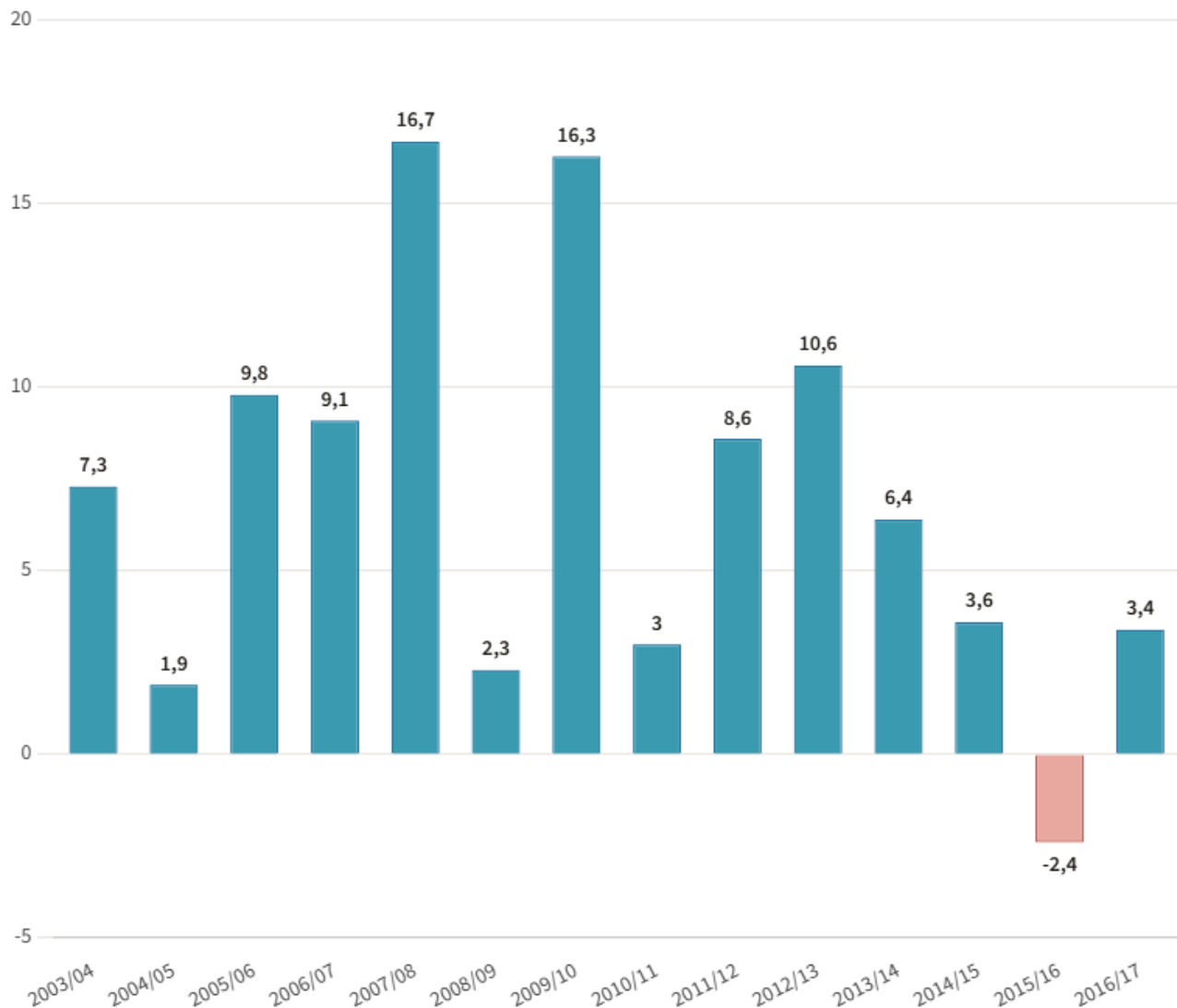
Figure 3: *Afghanistan Map*



Source: Smith (2011).

In 2014, international security forces transferred military and security responsibilities to the government of Afghanistan. This transition led to a significant reduction in international security personnel and a decline in military spending and contracts. As a result, many rural and urban households that depended on military-related employment and logistics faced job losses and income instability. The transition also coincided with delays in the presidential elections due to allegations of fraud, ultimately resulting in two parallel presidential oath ceremonies on the same day, with reports of firearms being discharged near the venues. These governance challenges contributed to political uncertainty and instability, further undermining public trust in state institutions and negatively impacting the national economy, resulting in a negative GDP growth rate in 2015/16, as in Figure 4.

Figure 4: *Afghanistan Gross Domestic Product Annual Growth Rate*



Source: Based on Central Statistics Organization of Afghanistan (2016/17).

The GDP could not meet the domestic demand. The underperformance of domestic production sources created a gap between domestic production and domestic consumption. Domestic production could produce a nearly 17 percent of the national budget, and more than 80 percent of the national budget financed through the ODA (Ministry of Finance & World Bank, 2011). A study by the MoF and the WB found that the national revenue reached 17.5 percent, which was entirely for the security sector Operations and its Maintenance (O&M), which was a total sum of USD 3.5 billion (Ministry of Finance & World Bank, 2011). In this total sum of the USD 3.5 billion, a significant share is from the illicit opiate production and exportation but not reflected in the official

state studies.

The civil service wages, civilian O&M, and development budgets were more than 80 percent of the total national income (Ministry of Finance & World Bank, 2011). This deficit has been funded by the ODA and soft loans (Ministry of Finance & World Bank, 2011). The deficit between national revenue and the total budget was financed by the ODA since the establishment of the Interim Administration of Afghanistan (IAA) in 2002. The influx of the ODA and soft loans have been flown to Afghanistan for the transition decade and partially for the transformation decade.

During the transition decade, basic informal and formal institutions were reconstructed and constructed, and for the transformation decade, a self-sufficient and free-of-foreign aid establishment targeted through addressing agricultural development for poverty reduction, extractive industries, and transportation development to reach sustainable development and an ambitious goal for an Afghanistan as an economic hub for the region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, 2017; De Janvry, & Sadoulet, 2009). The ODA has improved the living standard and well-being of rural and urban households. Especially the effect of ODA is tangible in the GDP per capita income. The GDP per capita increased from the USD 117.4 in 2001 to 669 dollars in 2016 (World Bank, 2018).

Table 5 summarizes trends in ODA between 2008/09 and 2016/17, disaggregating pledged and disbursed amounts of aid and loans in billion USD. The data indicate substantial variation in aid pledges over the period, with a notable peak of 16.8 billion USD in 2010/11, while disbursements consistently lagged behind pledged amounts. Loan commitments remained comparatively marginal throughout the period. The total committed percentage, reflecting the proportion of disbursed funds relative to pledges, exhibited considerable fluctuation, attaining a maximum of 98.7 percent in 2014/15, indicative of efficient disbursement, whereas earlier years, such as 2008/09, showed markedly lower fulfillment (34.1 percent). Inclusive, the table underscores temporal variability in both ODA pledges and actual disbursements, highlighting the complexities of translating commitments into realized financial support.

Table 5: *Official Development Assistance and soft loans from 2008/9 to 2016/17*

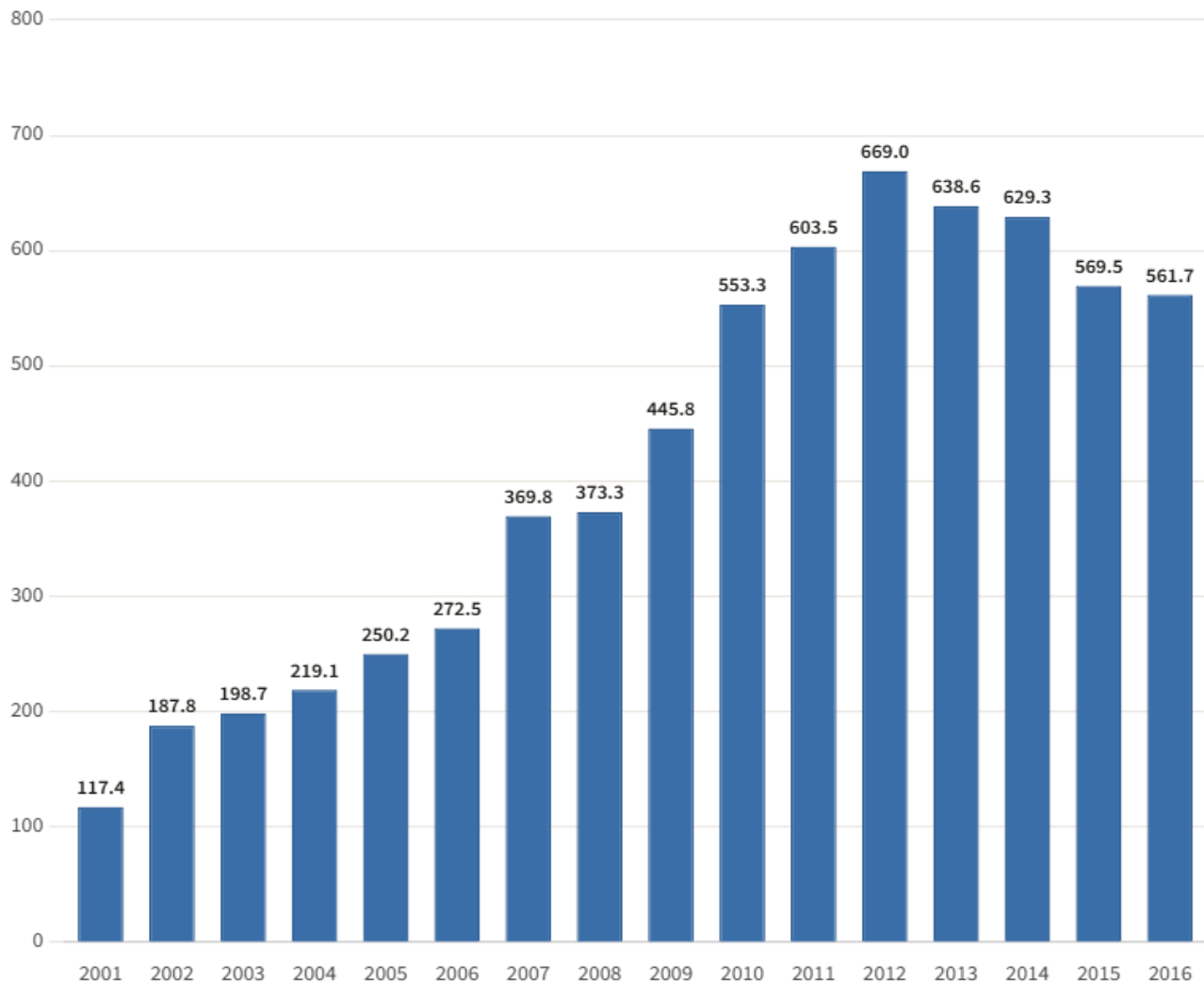
ODA Amount in Billion USD					
	Aid		Loan		Total Committed %
	Pledged	Disbursed	Pledged	Disbursed	
2008/09	8.62	2.87	0.06	0.06	34.11
2009/10	5.06	1.784	0.116	0.116	36.7
2010/11	16.8	10.9	0.085	0.085	65.4
2011/12	9.206	6.011	0.048	0.048	65.3
2012/13	6.26	3.89	0.046	0.046	58.6
2013/14	4.77	2.84	0.035	0.035	59
2014/15	4.06	4	0.013	0.013	98.7
2015/16	4.36	3.73	0.019	0.019	85.64
2016/17	2.9	2.06	0.016	0.016	71.5

Source: Author's Compilation from Central Statistics Organization from 2008/09 to 2016/17.

The international community and the state of Afghanistan presume that the facilitation of transit trade between Central Asia and South Asia and vice versa minimizes the national budget gap and gradually replaces the ODA. The regional flow of goods, services, and movement of persons under the mechanism of globalization and regional integration offer opportunities for the young generation to have access to the educational program in the region, gain vocational training and know-how, engage in economic activities, and facilitate the flow of energy resources from Central Asia to South Asia. Globalization and regional integration may attract regional and global investors to invest in Afghanistan, creating employment opportunities and sources of income to improve rural and urban households' well-being and living standards. This process may enhance poverty reduction by making more viable options available to rural and urban households that maintain or increase the GDP per capita income. The state of Afghanistan has made it a priority to deploy skilled labor to Gulf region countries as part of its poverty reduction strategy. This approach mirrors the pattern followed by South Asian countries poverty reduction programs by sending their workforce to the Gulf countries. Similarly, Central Asian countries deploy their labor to the Russian Federation to benefit from remittances. To achieve similar outcomes, Afghanistan has signed

Memorandum of Understandings (MoU) with Gulf countries to facilitate the deployment of skilled labor and address parts of the national budget gap through remittance inflows and a legal framework shall also be established to protect Afghanistan nationals already working in Gulf countries and ensure their rights and well-being in the labor market. Figure 5 shows that Afghanistan's GDP per capita increased significantly from USD 117.4 in 2001 to USD 669 in 2012, indicating a period of economic recovery and intensified international financial support. However, the subsequent decline to USD 561.7 by 2016 reveals the fragility of these gains. Assessment from a policy perspective, this pattern suggests that growth during the post-2001 period was heavily aid-driven and insufficiently anchored in productive domestic sectors. The reversal highlights structural weaknesses, including limited private sector development, high aid dependency, and institutional constraints. Consequently, while short-term improvements were achieved, the absence of sustainable and inclusive growth strategies limited long-term poverty reduction outcomes.

Figure 5: *GDP per capita income in USD from 2001 to 2016*



Source: Based on WB (2018).

2.5 Social Protection Programs

The state of Afghanistan and the development stakeholders initiated the Social Protection Programs (SPPs) to support vulnerable groups and households in poverty. SPPs aim to reduce severity of extreme poverty, create some income opportunities, and increase the capacity and productivity of the farmers and gardeners. SPPs are designed and supported technically and financially at the initial stages by the international community. The SPPs aimed to offer minimum amenities to vulnerable groups and households in poverty to attain a minimal income through creation of employment opportunities. The employment opportunities included seasonal jobs, canal digging, and other temporary job opportunities. In addition, the households that did not have a breadwinner or head

of the family were unable to work due to sickness, addiction, and or old age; there was a food aid program distributed from the food bank at the village level. Furthermore, the SPPs offers technical assistances such as subsidies in the agriculture sector like trainings, seasonal calendar for cultivation, awareness of agricultural pests and diseases, and irrigation for the farmers and the gardeners to participate in economic and social development through increasing quantity and quality of production.

Social Protection Programs (SPPs) were conducted in rural and urban areas through different national entities to reduce extreme poverty. These entities were pertinent to the Office of Disaster Management (OoDP), Directorate of Kuchies (DoK), Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA), Ministry of Border and Tribal Affairs (MoBTA), Ministry of Refugee Repatriation (MoRR), MoLSAMD, Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) and MRRD.

Since 2003, the MRRD has played a pivotal role in SPPs and extreme poverty reduction. The MRRD has been at the forefront, conceptualizing and executing various programs within SPPs. These initiatives encompass: the National Solidarity Program (NSP), National Emergency Employment Program (NEEP), National Area Based Development Program (NABDP), Rural Water and Sanitation Program (RuWatSan), Micro-Finance Support Facility of Afghanistan (MISFA) and Food Aid (FA) (Pinney, 2004).

The MRRD has been focusing on extreme poverty reduction programs by increasing resilience to shock in rural areas by designing and implementing economic and social programs parallel to the SDGs in 2015. In this period, the MRRD implemented the NSP, National Area Based Development Program (NABDP), National Rural Access Program (NRAP), Regional Program (RP), Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Program (AREDP), and National Rural Water Supply, Sanitation, and Irrigation Program (Ru-WatSIP) (Ministry of Rural, Rehabilitation and Development 100-Day Plan, 2015). Following extreme poverty reduction programs, the MRRD is obliged to extend its operation in urban areas. The MRRD initially covered rural development; however, due to an increase in the level of extreme poverty percentage intertwined with millions of repatriations from neighboring countries, the MRRD operated beyond its initial areas of focus and operation. Therefore, the MRRD extended its operation in the urban areas as well through extension of the NSP to the Citizens' Charter National Priority Program (CCNPP) in 2016. The CCNPP aimed to reduce extreme poverty, improve the socio-economic circumstances of the

communities, and identify the causes of the migration of young generations (Ministry of Rural, Rehabilitation, and Development Programs, 2018). This program has been focusing on developing rural areas, such as villages, and urban areas, such as cities. Other programs and projects added to the social protection programs such as the Comprehensive Agriculture and Rural Development – Facility (CARD-F), Afghanistan Sustainable Energy for Rural Development (ASERD), Livelihood Improvement in Tajik-Afghan Cross Border Areas (LITACA), and Returnees Enterprise Development (RED) (Ministry of Rural, Rehabilitation, and Development Programs, 2018). However, a robust process to discuss graduation mechanisms from these SPPs or each project has not been available or developed. These programs and projects are designed based on nondimensional aspects with an absence of complementary roles with other similar development programs and projects, and are time-bound and expected that the reducing exposure to hazards and resilience building achieved by the implementation among households in extreme poverty.

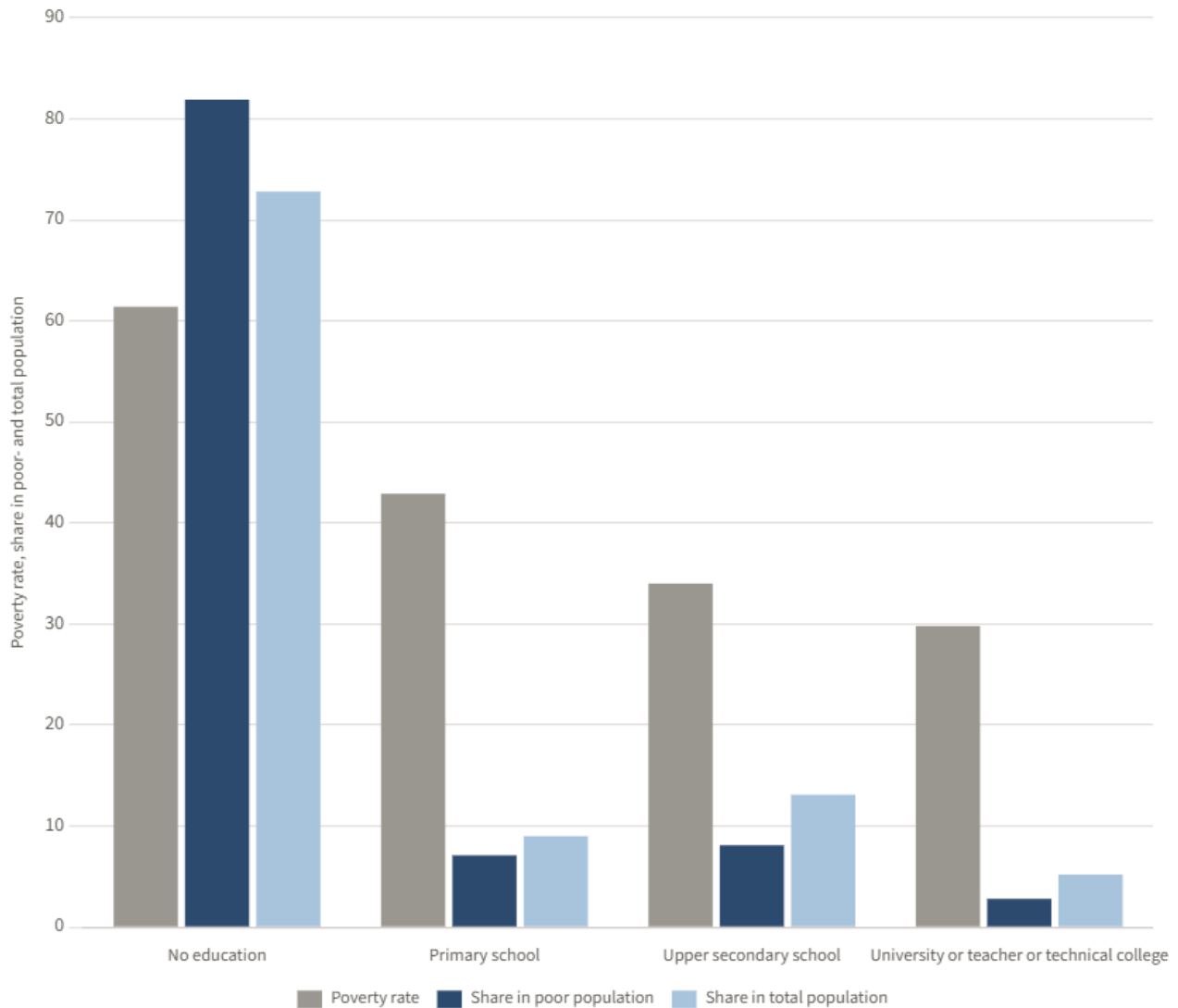
2.6 Characteristics of households in extreme poverty

The households in extreme poverty are characterized based on several traits predominant in Afghanistan. The households' characteristics in extreme poverty depend on the households' level of education, such as literate or illiterate, the gender of the head or breadwinner of the family, the number of generations living in the same household in an extended structure form, the location of the household in rural or urban areas, followed by macro-economic instability, corruption, war, and natural hazard.

Literacy and education are tangible features of income sources and the household's poverty level. The literacy rate for adults is 36.0 percent, with 50.4 percent for males and 21.7 percent for females (Income and Expenditure & Labor Force Surveys 2020, 2021). For the youth population, the literacy rate is 54.0 percent, comprising 68.8 percent for males and 40.1 percent for females (Income and Expenditure & Labor Force Surveys 2020, 2021). A household with a literate head is 27.6 percent in extreme poverty, whereas a household with an illiterate head is 41.6 percent in extreme poverty (Central Statistics Organization, 2014). In a household with an illiterate head, due to a high level of extreme poverty, children could not attend school between the age of 7 to 12 years old (Central Statistics Organization, 2016). On the other hand, the household with a literate head had a 20 percent chance to attend to all children in this age group (Central Statistics Organization, 2016).

Figure 6 illustrates a clear inverse relationship between educational attainment and poverty incidence in Afghanistan. Individuals with no formal education experience the highest poverty rate (61.4 Percent) and constitute the overwhelming majority of the poor population (81.9 Percent), reflecting both their large population share (72.8 Percent) and structural vulnerability. Poverty declines progressively with higher education levels: from 42.9 Percent among those with primary schooling to 34.0 Percent for upper secondary graduates, and further to 29.8 Percent among individuals with university, teacher training, or technical education. These patterns highlight education as a critical protective factor against poverty and underscore the importance of expanding access to post-primary and tertiary education in poverty reduction strategies (Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17, 2018).

Figure 6: Poverty rate and education attainment



Source: Adopted from Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17 (2018).

The breadwinner gender of the household in extreme poverty determines the level of survival and school attainment of the children. A breadwinner is necessarily not always the head of the family. Though, a male breadwinner considers resilient in comparison to a female breadwinner. This resilience results from prolonged and heavy working hours in a possibly distant location or migrating as laborers to other provinces and, in some instances, joining the combats to earn an income, a rare practice for a female breadwinner in the context of Afghanistan, however, a rural female breadwinner has rare chances to find and secure an income source in comparison to an urban female breadwinner due to engagement of business in the urban areas and markets.

Nevertheless, the female breadwinner households estimated 45 thousand families nationwide with a higher proportion of vulnerability and are predisposed to extreme poverty and deprivation (Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17, 2018).

The household's breadwinner in poverty searches for job opportunities throughout the year, and this group is identified as a seasonal migrant. The seasonal breadwinner seeks an opportunity for an unskilled daily job, which is rare due to the high availability of unskilled daily laborers in each community. As a result, the seasonal migrant breadwinner has a higher extreme poverty rate than the non-migrant labor force. The extreme poverty rate is 38 percent among the seasonal labor force, while the non-seasonal labor force has a rate of 32 percent (National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, 2007/08). Seasonal migration is intertwined with the agricultural production process for most rural labor forces and higher chances of income in goods during the cultivation season. The breadwinner of the rural household moves to major cities and urban areas to achieve unskilled jobs, day laborers on a construction site, pulling or pushing carts or shoveling in vegetable fields, or collecting fruits. The breadwinner of the rural household, in some cases, migrates together with other family members, children pull out of school, and previous infrastructure such as irrigation networks, clinics, schools, and development at the village level and district level remain idle, waste, and domestic sources of income from agriculture decline.

The breadwinner engages another family member to expand the income source in which the family's child member must leave school forever. A survey report shows that at least 1.2 million children are actively engaged in the labor market from 266 thousand of families in poverty (National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, 2007/08). To add to that, poverty headcount in the labor market was 20 percent higher in the household with a daily laborer head, self-employment, or unpaid family work than in salaried household heads or breadwinners in the public or private sector (Central Statistics Organization, 2016; National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2011/2012, 2014).

Table 6 indicates that employed-headed households constitute the largest share of both the total population (61.4 Percent) and the poor (57.6 Percent), with a poverty rate of 51.1 Percent. Underemployed heads show the highest poverty rate (63.0 Percent), followed by unemployed (58.8 Percent) and inactive (57.2 Percent) groups. Although their population shares are smaller,

underemployed (17.6 Percent), unemployed (13.9 Percent), and inactive (10.8 Percent) households together account for a substantial proportion of the poor population.

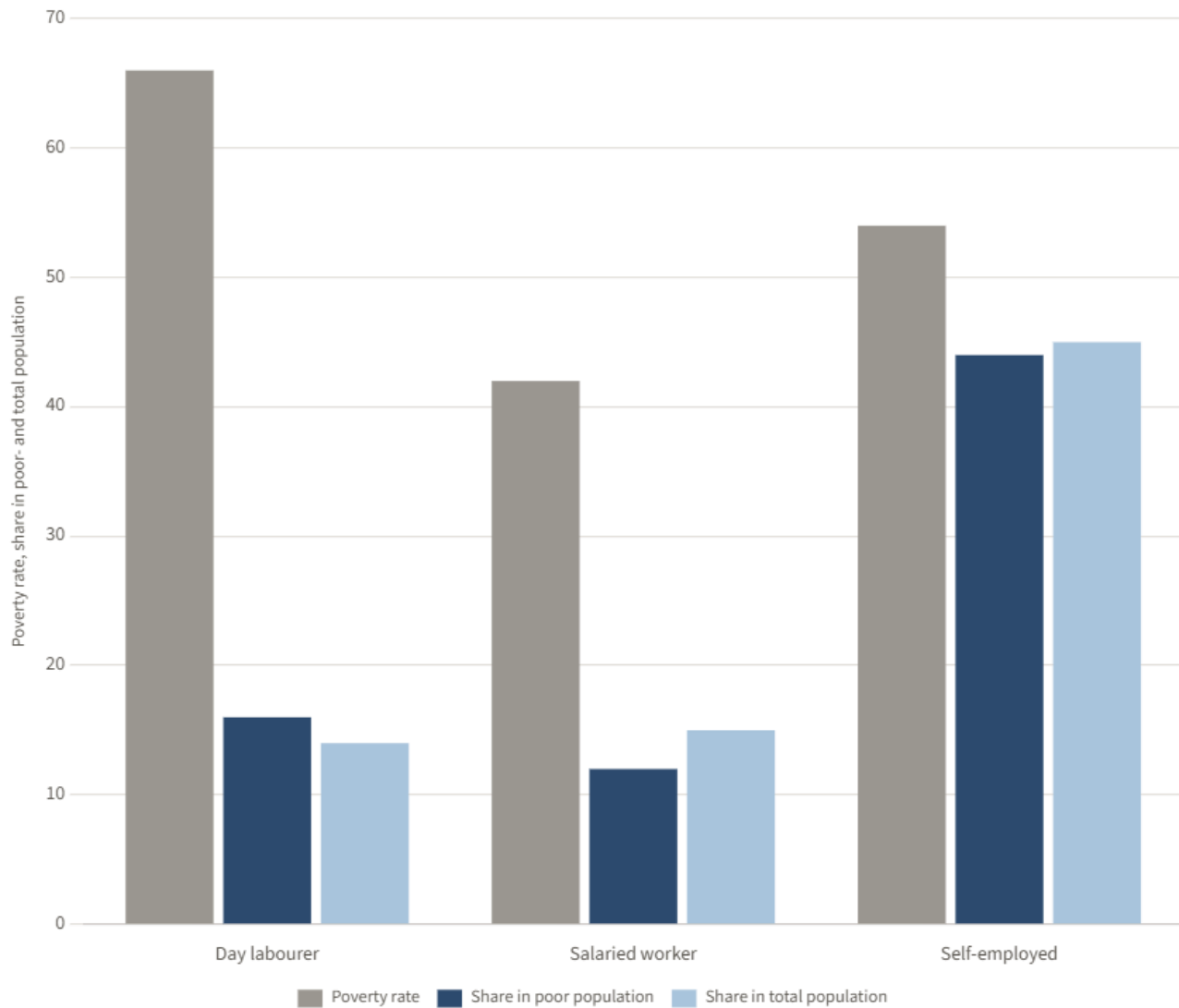
Table 6: *Economic engagement of the family head or the breadwinner*

Economic Activity status of head of household	Poverty rate	Share of poor population	Share of total population
Employed	51.1	57.6	61.4
Underemployed	63.0	17.6	15.2
Unemployed	58.8	13.9	12.9
Inactive	57.2	10.8	10.3

Source: Based on Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17 (2018).

Figure 7 shows that day labourer households face the highest poverty rate (about 67 Percent), representing roughly 18 Percent of the poor while comprising 12 Percent of the total population. Salaried workers have a lower poverty rate (about 41 Percent) and account for about 11 Percent of the poor and 15 Percent of the total population. Self-employed households make up the largest shares of both the poor (about 43 Percent) and the total population (about 44 Percent), with a poverty rate of around 52 Percent. Overall, poverty is most severe among day labourers, while the self-employed constitute the largest share of both the poor and the total population.

Figure 7: *Share of poor and share of the total population in the type of jobs*

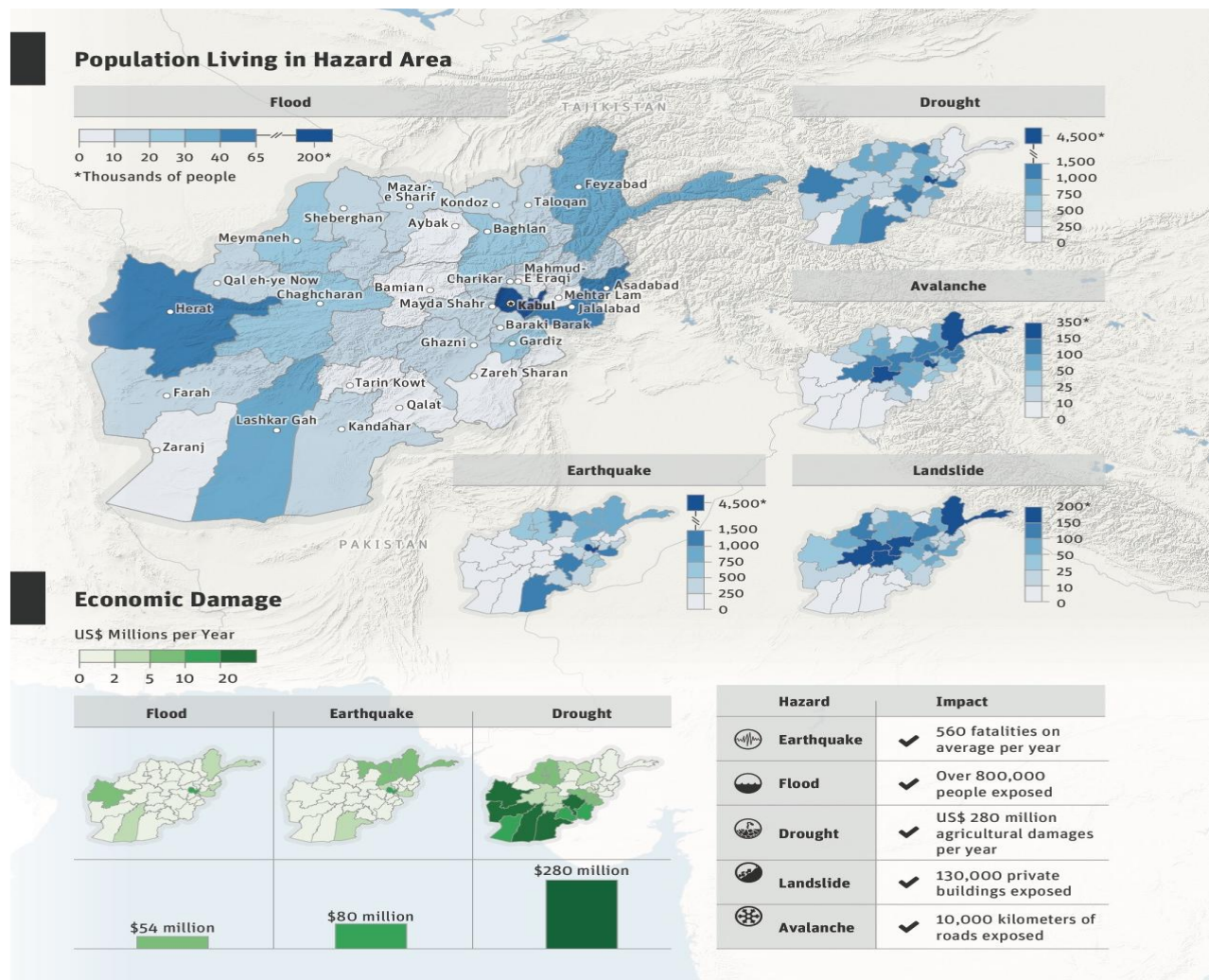


Source: Adopted from Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17 (2018).

The breadwinner of the seasonal migrant type may return home empty-handed with unachieved goal. The breadwinner’s seasonal migration intertwines in agricultural performance, and in case the agriculture sector is affected by natural hazards and shocks, there is a rare chance of income earnings. The primitive subsistence agricultural economy of Afghanistan is prone to natural hazards and shocks. In Afghanistan natural hazards and shocks are floods, earthquakes, drought, avalanches, and landslides as in Figure 8 (Ranghieri et al., 2017). On an annual basis, the economic damage from a flood is USD 54 million, from an earthquake is USD 80 million, and from droughts USD 280 million (Ranghieri et al., 2017). The impact of an earthquake is 560 fatalities on average

in a year, and more than 800 thousand people are in danger of flood and drought damages equal to a worth of USD 280 million; often, this damage is to the agriculture sector (Ranghieri et al., 2017). In addition, it is estimated that 130 thousand of private houses are in danger of landslides, and it is estimated that 10 thousand kilometers of roads are unprotected from avalanches (Ranghieri et al., 2017). This annual natural hazard damage intensifies the severity of extreme poverty among rural and urban households.

Figure 8: Afghanistan Natural Hazard Map



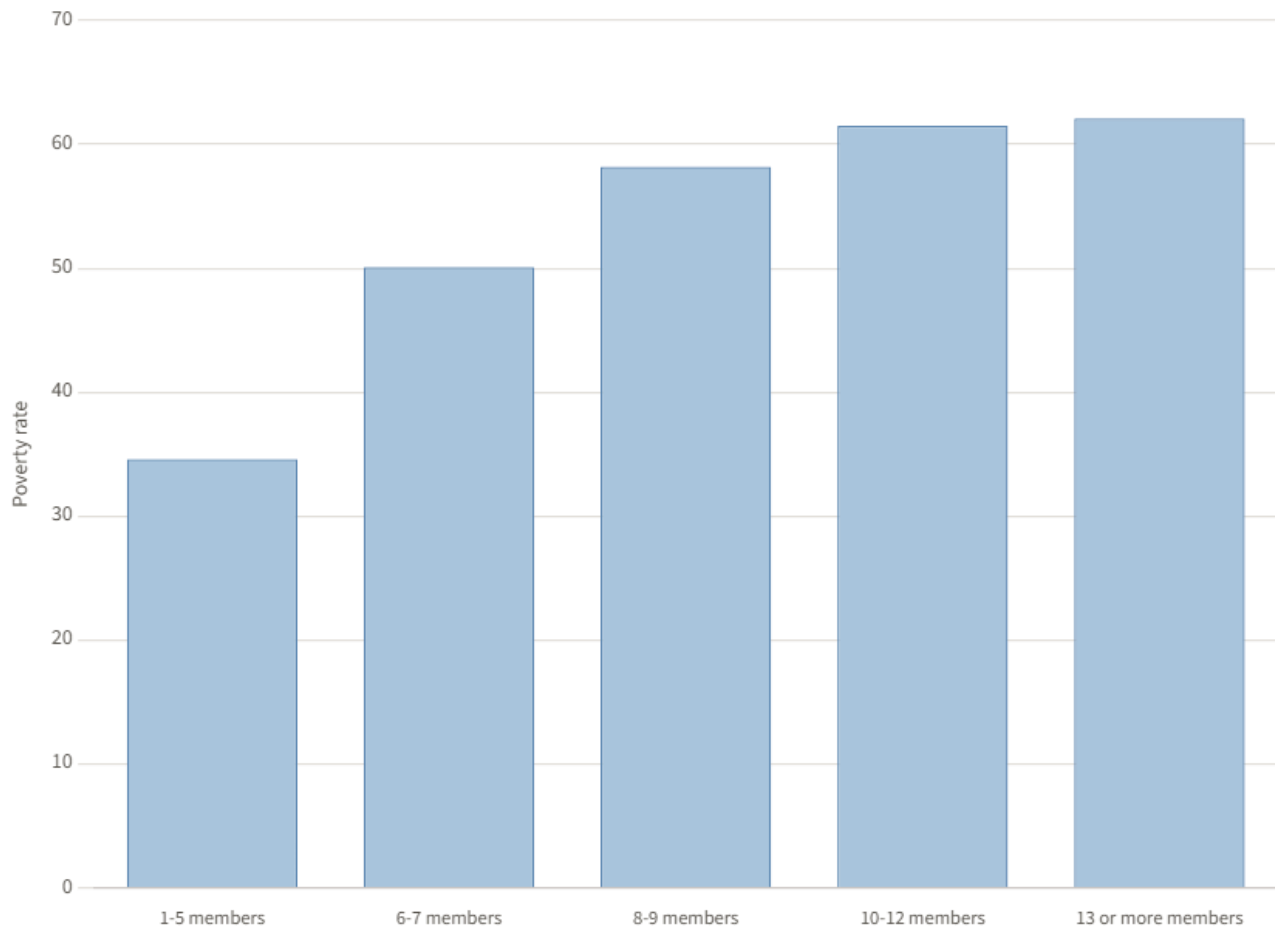
Source: Ranghieri et al., (2017).

Households have an extended family structure in rural and urban areas. The extended family households include many generations, such as parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins in

the same household. An aunt frequently leaves the house when she marries but returns with few children when her husband dies, which adds to the number of the family. An average family size consists of 7.7 persons though the extension structure makes family members higher (Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17, 2018; Central Statistics Organization, 2016). In addition, 47.7 percent of the family members are under 15 years old and dependent on the family breadwinner (Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17, 2018; Central Statistics Organization, 2016). The extreme poverty rate is higher with such a family structure (Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17, 2018; Central Statistics Organization, 2016). Not only is the breadwinner unable to meet the household's needs at the microeconomic level, but also at the macroeconomic level, the economic level could be more significant. The average economy growth rate was 2.1 percent between 2013 and 2016, whereas the population growth rate was 3.3 percent (Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17, 2018). The underperformance of the economy with a lower growth rate and high population fertility consequent to food insecurity for the total population in the urban and rural households.

The population resides in a combination of rural, urban, and nomadic lifestyle households. The household in rural areas reaches beyond half of the population. Urban households extend above 7 million, and around 1.5 million have a nomadic lifestyle (Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17, 2018). The level and depth of extreme poverty vary among each group based on usual traits in the context of Afghanistan, such as literacy rates, occupation, income opportunities, and surrounding environment, such as the intensity of war, drought, and flood. Figure 9 demonstrates that poverty rises steadily with family size. Households with 1 to 5 members record the lowest poverty rate (34.6 Percent), increasing to 50.1 Percent for families with 6 to 7 members and 58.2 Percent for those with 8 to 9 members. The incidence is highest among large households, reaching 61.5 Percent for families with 10 to 12 members and 62.1 Percent for those with 13 or more members, highlighting greater vulnerability among larger families.

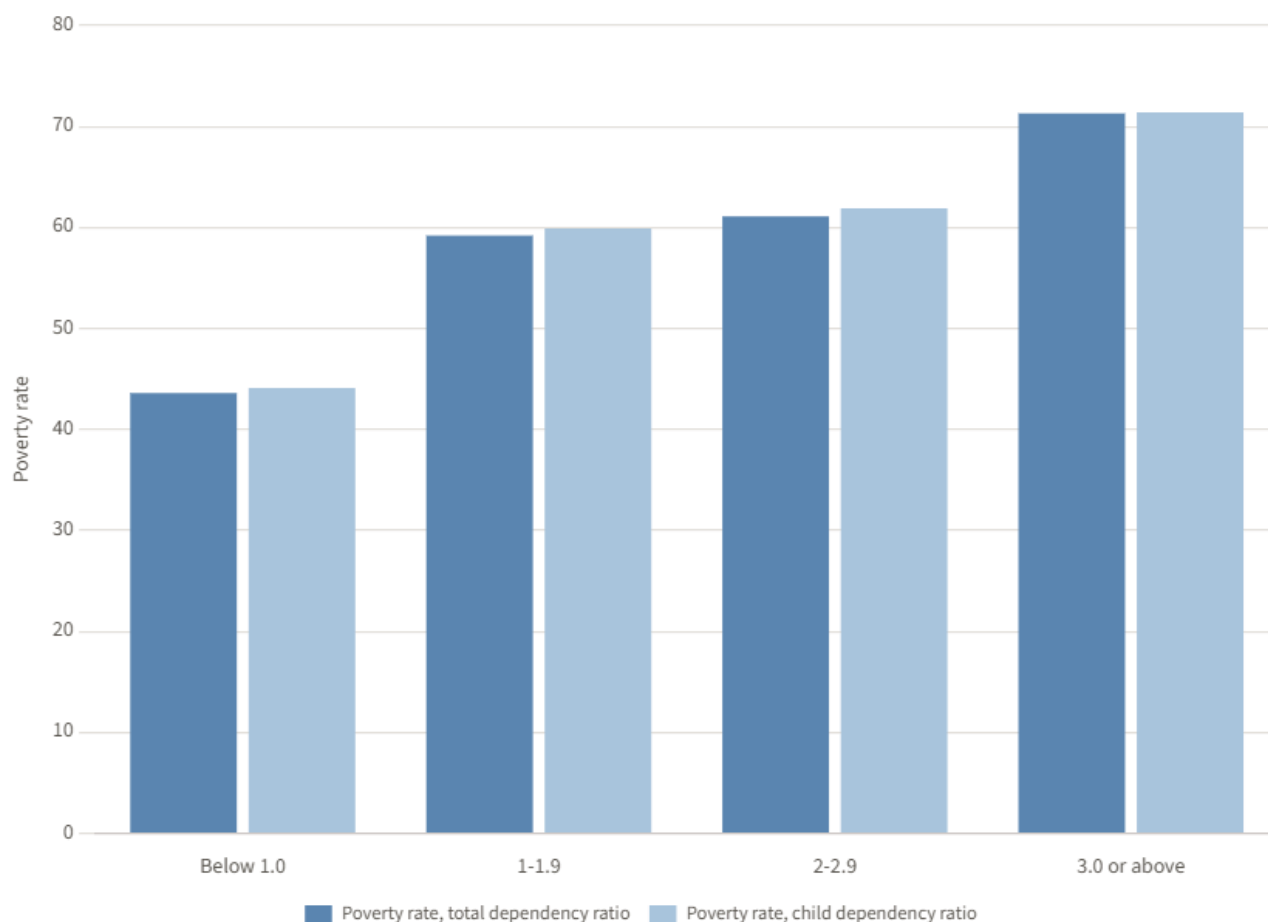
Figure 9: Family size and the poverty rate (in percentages)



Source: Adopted from Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17 (2018).

Figure 10 indicates that poverty rates increase consistently with higher dependency ratios. For households with a dependency ratio below 1.0, the poverty rate is 43.6 Percent based on the total dependency ratio and 44.1 Percent based on the child dependency ratio. The rate rises to 59.2 Percent (total) and 59.9 Percent (child) for ratios of 1.0-1.9, and to 61.1 Percent (total) and 61.9 Percent (child) for 2.0-2.9. Households with a dependency ratio of 3.0 or above experience the highest poverty rates, at 71.3 Percent (total) and 71.4 Percent (child), showing a strong positive relationship between dependency burden and poverty.

Figure 10: *Poverty rate and dependency ratio (in percentages)*

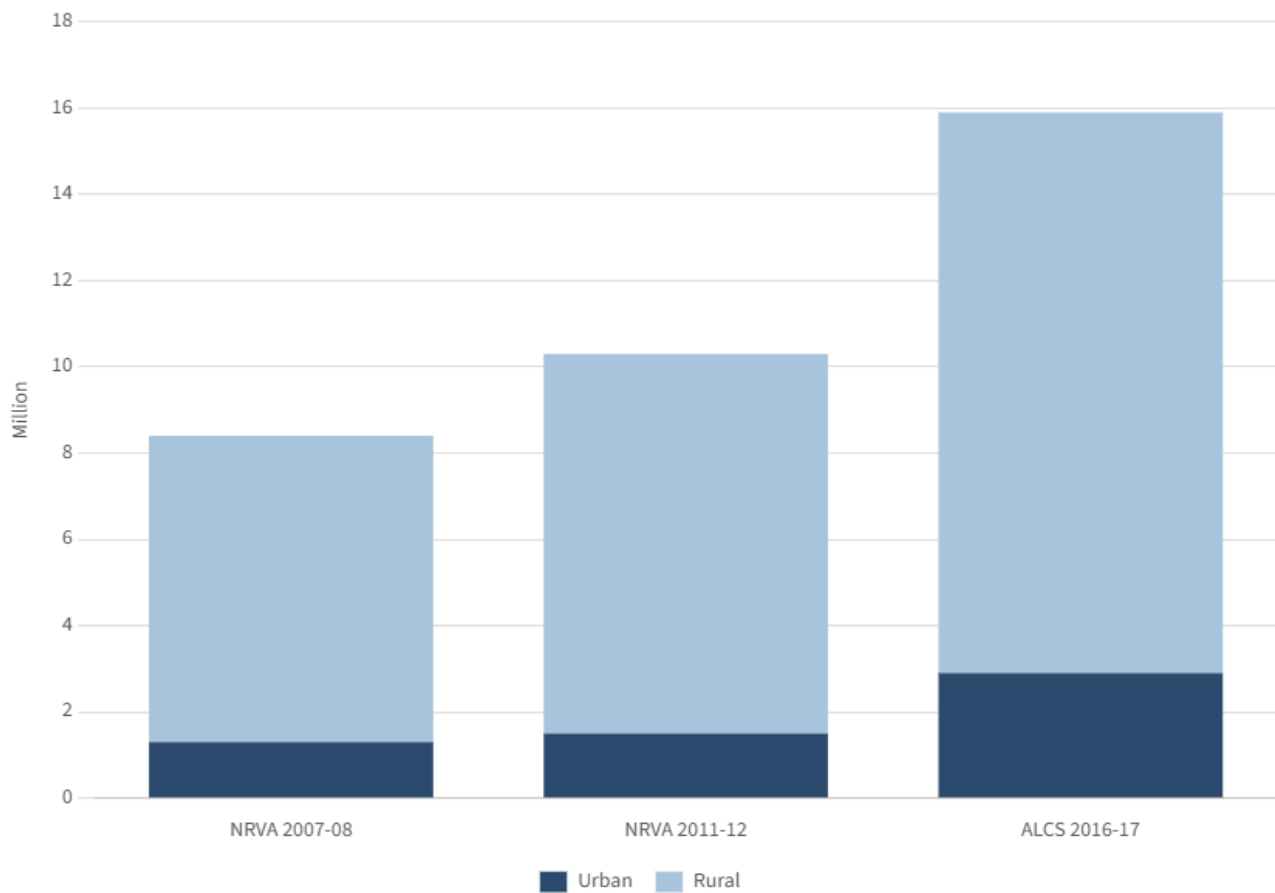


Source: Adopted from Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17 (2018).

Rural households engage in primitive subsistence agriculture to survive and attain basic amenities. The rural household's well-being and survival rate determine based on the effect of floods and drought. In case, in a year, there is sufficient rainfall, then primitive subsistence agriculture has good products which create income sources for the vulnerable and poor groups. However, if there is drought and flood or a family member of the rural household is sick, extreme poverty gets harsher and takes years to recover. On the other hand, the urban household in extreme poverty earns basic amenities through engagement in the market. The urban households work as daily laborers, construction workers, cart-puller-pusher, selling telephone cards, water, and drinks, and or similar business, in which extreme poverty levels depend on daily earnings (Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17, 2018).

The nomadic households' earnings mainly rely on livestock (Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17, 2018). Consequently, 54.5 percent of the total population lives below the national poverty line, the poverty gap is 15.0 percent, the squared poverty gap is 5.6 percent, and the Gini Index is 0.31 percent (Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17, 2018) which turn Afghanistan to a fragile state, high-risk context, and a continuously increasing level of extreme poverty. Figure 11 shows a rising trend in extreme poverty in both rural and urban areas over time, with rural poverty consistently much higher. The NRVA 2007/08 estimated 1.3 million urban poor households compared to 7.1 million rural poor households, increasing to 1.5 million (urban) and 8.8 million (rural) in 2011/12. By ALCS 2016/17, the number had risen sharply to 2.9 million urban poor households and 13.0 million rural poor households, highlighting the growing and predominantly rural nature of extreme poverty.

Figure 11: Rural and urban households in extreme poverty (in millions)



Source: Adopted from Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016/17 (2018).

2.7 Assessing Afghanistan’s Readiness for LDC Graduation

Afghanistan remained in the category of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) for more than half a century due to its low Gross National Income (GNI) per capita. According to recent data published by the UN, Afghanistan’s GNI per capita stands at USD 513, significantly below the graduation threshold of USD 1,222 and the LDC inclusion threshold of USD 1,018 (United Nations, 2021; United Nations, 2020). Based on income alone, for a country to graduate from LDC status, it may reach a GNI per capita of USD 2,444, which Afghanistan is far from achieving. Comparatively, the average GNI per capita for all LDCs is USD 1,274, while for developing countries, it is USD 6,666 in which this stark contrast highlights Afghanistan’s economic challenges as shown in Table 7 (United Nations, 2021).

Table 7: Afghanistan Country Profile in the list of LDCs since 1971

Gross National Income (GNI) per capita:

Category	Value
EVI Index (Afghanistan)	\$ 513
LDCs Average	\$ 1,274
Developing Countries Average	\$ 6,666
Inclusion Threshold	\$ 1,018
Graduation Threshold	\$ 1,222

Source: Based on United Nations (2021).

Afghanistan’s Economic and Environmental Vulnerability Index (EVI) stands at 44.8, significantly above the graduation threshold of 32 and higher than the average for LDCs at 39.1 and developing countries at 33.6. This indicates that Afghanistan remains highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks (United Nations, 2021). Agriculture, forestry, and fishing contribute 25.8 Percent to the GDP, with an index value of 42.1, reflecting a heavy reliance on primary industries. Afghanistan’s landlocked geography and remoteness (index 51.9) create trade challenges, while merchandise export concentration (index 31.8) suggests a lack of diversification. Additionally, export instability (index 22.6) increases economic uncertainty (United Nations, 2021). On the environmental side, 99 Percent of Afghanistan’s population lives in drylands (index 99.0), making the country highly susceptible to climate change and droughts. Agricultural

instability (index 25.6) and a high disaster victim index (85.9) further highlight the country's exposure to environmental risks as illustrated in Table 8 (United Nations, 2021).

Table 8: Afghanistan Economic and environmental Vulnerability index (EVI)

Overall index and thresholds:

Category	Value
EVI Index (Afghanistan)	44.8
LDCs Average	39.1
Developing Countries Average	33.6
Inclusion Threshold	≥ 36
Graduation Threshold	≤ 32

EVI Indicators

Indicator	Value	Index	Source
Share of agriculture, forestry and fishing in GDP	25.8	42.1	UN/DESA, Statistics
Remoteness and landlockedness	51.5	51.9	CDP
Merchandise export concentration	0.37	31.8	UNCTAD
Instability of exports of goods and services	11.3	22.6	UN/DESA, Statistics
Share of population in low elevated coastal zones	0.0	0.0	CIESIN
Share of population living in drylands	99.0	99.0	CDP
Instability of agricultural production	6.2	25.6	FAO
Victims of disasters	3.41	85.9	EM-DAT

Source: Based on United Nations (2021).

Afghanistan’s Human Assets Index (HAI) stands at 42.0, significantly lower than the LDC average of 57.6 and developing countries’ average of 78.1. The graduation threshold is 66 or above, indicating that Afghanistan faces severe challenges in human development. Key indicators highlight significant concerns in health and education. The under-five mortality rate (index 69.5) and maternal mortality rate (index 47) reflect poor healthcare access. Additionally, 36.3 Percent of children suffer from stunting (index 32.5), showing widespread malnutrition. In education, Afghanistan has a gross secondary school enrollment ratio of 55.4 (index 50.5), while the adult literacy rate is only 43.0 (index 24.0), far below international standards. Gender disparity remains a significant issue, with a gender parity index for secondary school enrollment of 0.57 (index 28.5), indicating limited educational opportunities for women as shown in Table 9 (United Nations, 2021).

Table 9: Afghanistan Human Assets Index (HAI)

Overall Index Comparison:

Category	Value
EVI Index (Afghanistan)	42.0
LDCs Average	57.6
Developing Countries Average	78.1
Inclusion Threshold	≥ 60
Graduation Threshold	≤ 66

HAI Indicators

Indicator	Value	Index	Source
Under-five mortality rate	60.3	69.5	UN IAG for Child Mortality Estimation
Prevalence of stunting	36.3	32.5	UNICEF / WHO / WB
Maternal mortality rate	638	47.0	UN IAG for Maternal Mortality

Gross secondary school enrollment ratio	55.4	50.5	UNESCO
Adult literacy rate	43.0	24.0	UNESCO
Gender parity (secondary school enrollment)	0.57	28.5	UNESCO

Source: Based on United Nations (2021).

The current Least Developed Countries (LDCs) category comprises 46 nations with a combined population of 880 million, representing 12 percent of the world’s total population. Extreme poverty and malnutrition are most prevalent in these countries, making the selection and implementation of effective development policies crucial to mitigating these challenges (United Nations, 2020). However, addressing these issues has been particularly difficult due to limited capacity, scarce resources, and political interference. To oversee and support the progress of LDCs, the UN assigned the Economic and Social Council to establish the Committee for Development Policy (CDP), responsible for reviewing and monitoring the status of LDCs both before and after graduation (United Nations, 2020). Despite these challenges, six countries have successfully graduated from the LDC category: Botswana in 1994, Cape Verde in 2007, Maldives in 2011, Samoa in 2014, Equatorial Guinea in 2017, and Vanuatu in 2020 (United Nations, 2020).

3 Chapter Three: Theoretical Background (with special Reference to Afghanistan)

3.1 Introduction

The poverty phenomenon is a complex and profoundly entrenched that has stricken societies across the globe for centuries. In the case of Afghanistan, a nation marked by invasions followed by decades of conflict, political instability, and economic fragility, poverty has been revealed in particularly severe and complex features. This complex phenomenon demands rigorous examination to gain insights and guide effective policies, as it impacts the well-being and livelihoods of a significant portion of the population. Afghanistan's poverty reduction dynamics and strategies constitute a critical area of academic inquiry and concern for policymakers, international organizations, and rural and urban households.

This literature review delves into the extensive body of research, policies, and programs aimed at poverty reduction within Afghanistan. It seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the various dimensions of poverty in the country, exploring its principal causes, indicators, and the massive challenges faced in addressing it. Furthermore, this review assesses the effectiveness of different poverty reduction strategies, from state initiatives to international aid programs, highlighting successes and shortcomings.

This literature review investigates the complex factors influencing the depth and severity of poverty in the case of Afghanistan. These encompass historical, cultural, political, economic, and geographical elements that have significantly shaped the nation's experience of poverty and continue to affect policy formulation and implementation. By examining past research, reports, and analyses, this review offers fresh insights into extreme poverty reduction and poverty-related policies, drawing from diverse sources, including books, scientific research, international institutions, and UN initiatives similar to the context of Afghanistan. The aim is to provide a comprehensive resource for researchers, policymakers, and those interested in understanding the intricate terrain of poverty reduction in Afghanistan. This study primarily assesses development policies in Afghanistan, technical and financial assistance from the UN and the international community, MIO, and the state of Afghanistan for poverty reduction efforts.

3.2 Conceptual framework

This conceptual framework explores the complexities of poverty in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) by examining economic structures, poverty classifications, measurement approaches, and intervention strategies. It integrates theoretical perspectives and empirical data to understand the causes, persistence, and potential solutions to poverty in rural and urban settings. LDCs primarily operate within a subsistence economy highly vulnerable to natural and human-made disasters. Challenges within the public sector include infrastructure deficiencies such as inadequate roads, electricity, communication, education, healthcare, and agricultural support. The private sector faces constraints such as a limited cash-based agricultural economy, weak rural enterprises, and restricted access to microfinance. Furthermore, geographical constraints contribute to economic fragility, as reliance on cereal-based economies makes these regions particularly susceptible to environmental shocks, including droughts, floods, and epidemics (Liu et al., 2010; Sachs, 2008).

The definition of poverty varies across different theoretical perspectives. The monetary approach defines poverty based on income thresholds necessary for minimum welfare, whereas the capability approach conceptualizes poverty as deprivation of basic human capabilities. The social exclusion perspective views poverty as exclusion from socially accepted living standards, while institutional perspectives emphasize bureaucratic inefficiencies and structural barriers as key constraints to poverty alleviation. Poverty traps are self-reinforcing cycles in which capital per person declines due to population growth, lack of investment, and socio-political instability. External interventions, particularly ODA, play a crucial role in overcoming constraints in subsistence economies, though corruption and inefficiencies in aid distribution and resource misallocation hinder its effectiveness. Through trade policies within the framework of globalization, poverty may be reduced, and the country can reach self-sufficiency.

Poverty classifications range from extreme poverty, characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs such as food, water, healthcare, and education, to moderate poverty, in which individuals inconsistently meet basic needs and remain vulnerable to external shocks. Relative poverty is determined by insufficient income and resources compared to societal standards.

The measurement of poverty follows both unidimensional and multidimensional approaches. Unidimensional measures assess poverty through income-based and consumption-based evaluations, including the Cost of Basic Need (CBN) method. Multidimensional measures include the Human Development Index (HDI), Inequality-Adjusted HDI, Gender Development Index,

Gender Inequality Index, and the Multidimensional Poverty Index, collectively providing a more holistic understanding of poverty levels. The international poverty line, set by the WB, offers a benchmark for comparing poverty across countries, with thresholds adjusted over time to reflect inflation and cost-of-living changes.

Efforts to reduce poverty in LDCs follow several pathways. Economic development initiatives focus on pro-poor policies, transitioning from subsistence to cash-based economies through infrastructure investment and financial inclusion. Social policies strengthen education, healthcare, and vocational training to enhance human capital. Governance and institutional reforms seek to reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies and improve service delivery, while sustainable external assistance strategies emphasize aligning aid with long-term investment plans to promote self-sufficiency through increasing exports level. The discussion presented in this conceptual framework comprehensively examines these interconnected dimensions, offering an in-depth exploration of poverty and its multifaceted nature.

The least developed countries (LDCs) operate within a subsistence economy highly susceptible to natural and human-made disasters. From a monetary perspective, Ravallion (2010) defines poverty as “the money an individual needs to achieve the minimum level of welfare to not be deemed poor.” The challenges associated with a subsistence economy are multifaceted. In the public sector, significant obstacles include the construction of essential infrastructure such as primary road networks, electricity distribution, and communication systems, as well as the establishment and maintenance of primary education, healthcare services, agricultural support, and vocational training institutions to develop a skilled workforce. Meanwhile, the private sector faces difficulties in fostering a cash-based agricultural economy, enhancing rural enterprises, and expanding access to microfinance (Liu et al., 2010; Sachs, 2008, p. 222). Additionally, geographical constraints further exacerbate economic vulnerabilities, as LDCs often rely on cereal-based economies that are particularly prone to droughts, epidemics, agricultural pests, floods, and mudslides (Sachs, 2008, p. 222).

Poverty is traditionally understood as a condition affecting individuals in impoverished communities, characterized by hunger, unemployment, addiction, and heightened vulnerability to natural disasters, organized crime, and systemic corruption (Banerjee et al., 2006, p. 235; Sen, 2001, p. 31). Additionally, the state’s bureaucratic structure and operational inefficiencies are often

viewed as obstacles to development, hindering the effective delivery of essential services and the provision of basic needs (Sen, 2001, p. 31). The state shall deliver services and provide basic needs to element hurdles such as poverty, ineffective economic performance, organized social depreciation, intolerance, and exploitation (Robinson & Acemoglu, 2012, p. 446; Sen, 2001, p. 38). Henceforth, impoverished individuals in rural and urban household settings overcome deficiency and laziness to learn skills, use opportunities and approach viable options to access basic amenities, necessities, and livelihoods (Addae-Korankye, 2014; Bradshaw, 2007). Otherwise, individuals in poverty might be unable to utilize possible or reachable opportunities, especially when rural and urban households have been trapped in poverty. Therefore, individuals cannot reach amenities and necessities due to the poverty trap in which individuals cannot escape poverty without an external arrangement such as an improvement in the economy and or ODA (Dercon & Christiansen, 2011; Sachs, 2005a, pp. 19 - 20) because “a poverty trap is any self-reinforcing mechanism which causes poverty to persist” (Azariadis & Stachurski, 2005). In other words, the poverty trap deemed a situation in which capital per person declined when the population grew faster than the amount of accumulated capital, or it was due to depreciation, wear and tear, the passage of time, and the death of the skilled workers or civil wars (Collier, 2008, pp. 17 – 37; Sachs, 2005a, p. 65). In case the external assistance is efficient and increases capital stock and moves rural and urban households beyond the subsistence economy, then the poverty trap discontinues in which rural and urban households might secure utilization of possible opportunities and natural resources (Collier, 2008, pp. 38 – 52; Sachs, 2005a, p. 56). Hereafter, the rural and urban households keep savings, leading to taxation payments that strengthen public investments and change external assistance from welfare handout to investment and self-sufficiency (Sachs, 2005a, pp. 56 - 84). On the contrary, a remarkable share of the resource of the aid industry wasted due to unnecessary bureaucracy, lengthy procedures, duplication of efforts, top-down attitude, and one size-fits-all approach within the aid industry. For example, a sum of USD 4.3 trillion has been allocated in the form of international assistance from 1960 to 2011 and assisted 520 million people out of poverty, which means that a sum of USD 8,000 helped one person out of poverty (Feeny & McGillivray, 2016).

The subsistence and least developed economies have been a sophisticated extreme poverty situation in which the rural and urban households were barely able to achieve necessities such as food, healthcare services, drinking water and sanitation, education, shelter, and clothing to survive (Azevedo et al., 2013; Perez-Moreno, 2011; Hossain et al., 2009; Sachs, 2005a, p. 20). The absence

of bare life essentials plunged households into poverty due to natural and manufactured disasters, the fragility of the state, and other principal causes of poverty specific to each community, province, and country. Accordingly, the poverty phenomenon types shall be explored based on each country's specific features, such as the least developed landlocked countries, the least developed mountainous countries, small islands, low-income countries, middle-income countries, and high-income countries. These economic and geographic specifications intertwined with types of poverty phenomena, including extreme, moderate, and relative poverty (Sachs, 2005a, p. 20). In addition to multidimensional poverty and correlation-sensitive poverty indexes.

Unidimensional measurements have conventionally measured poverty, focusing on income and expenditure or consumption based on a threshold to attain basic amenities and services to survive (World Bank, UNDP and UNICEF, 2021). The unidimensional poverty measurements were a mechanism for states and MIOs to assess the effectiveness of poverty reduction programs and monitor and evaluate a PRSP.

The Unidimensional poverty measurements are divided into an income-based or minimum wage approach and a consumption-based measurement or the CBN approach. The income poverty approach studies the income of a family head based on the income threshold (Azpitarte, 2010; Boltvinik, 1999). The developed economies defined a threshold or a minimum wage that specifies the living standards and well-being of the citizens (Azpitarte, 2010; Kakwani, 2003). The living standard and well-being threshold differs from country to country (Azpitarte, 2010; Kakwani, 2003). In the least developed economies, such a mechanism partially exists, which can apply to the urban areas or fails to exist. Because the source of income is from time to time available and from an informal resource such as helping another village man in traditional agriculture and receiving a few kilograms of vegetables or fruits, daily labor, construction works, pulling and pushing carts, and others. A threshold to specify minimum consumption or set a minimum standard based on income is impractical in the context of the least developed economies (Kakwani, 2003). Therefore, calorie intake based on consumption can be measured on the CBN approach. The CBN approach measures calorie intake to maintain a healthy lifestyle and actively engage in daily routines, tasks, and contributions within society as a healthy person (National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, 2007/08). In reference to the studies by many scholars in the area of extreme poverty reduction, including Rowntree (1901), Ravallion (1994; 1998), Ravallion and Bidani (1994), and Ravallion and Sen (1996), the CBN measurement was recommended by the PETC to the state of Afghanistan

which approved and applied (Central Statistics Organization and World Bank, na). Primarily, the IRA, the WB, and the UN have comprehensively focused on unidimensional measurements and monetary aspects for poverty measurements and gauging economic development. Afghanistan, as a least developed economy, has been struggling to survive and cope with severe conditions in which drought, flood, fragile state, and high-risk situations to earn basic amenities at the rural and urban economy, which in this situation has been the minimum necessary to survive and maintain human dignity (Sachs, 2015, p. 140).

The concept of poverty has been described by scholars, institutions, and the state of Afghanistan from diverse perspectives, which will be illustrated upon in the following sections:

Adam Smith portrayed poverty throughout his work and highlighted on commodities and customs of a country *“by necessities I understand, not only the commodities which are indispensably necessary for the support of life, but whatever the custom of the country renders it indecent for creditable people, even of the lowest order, to be without”* (Smith, 1776, p. 491). Karel Marx had a relativist rather than absolute stance on understanding poverty, as reflected in the work of Wood (1988): *“our needs and enjoyments spring from society; we measure them, therefore by society and not by the objects of their satisfaction. Because they are of a social nature, they are of a relative nature”* (Sanchez-Martinez & Davis, 2014).

Seebom Rowntree, in 1901, illustrated primary poverty as minimum earnings and efficiency as *“total earnings are insufficient to obtain the minimum necessities for the maintenance of merely physical efficiency as being in primary poverty”* Townsend (1979, p. 33). A relativist perspective illustrated by Peter Townsend (1979, p. 88) as *“the lack of the resources necessary to permit participation in the activities, customs and diets commonly approved by society”*.

Amartya Sen (1983) defined poverty as an extreme and relative in the form of capabilities and commodities or characteristics as *“poverty is an absolute notion in the space of capabilities, but very often it will take a relative form in the space of commodities or characteristics”* (Sen, 1983).

The WB has offered various definitions of poverty focusing on extreme poverty to survive and maintain dignity, physical security, and political voice as such that: *“poverty is associated not only with insufficient income or consumption but also with insufficient outcomes with respect to health, nutrition, and literacy, and with deficient social relations, insecurity, and low self-esteem and*

powerlessness” (Coudouel, et al., 2002). Followed by “poverty is assessed using household per capita expenditure on consumption or household income per capita as measured from the national sample surveys. Households are ranked by consumption (or income) per person. The distributions are weighted by household size and sample expansion factors. Thus our poverty counts give the number of people living in households with per capita consumption or income below the international poverty line” (Chen & Ravallion, 2010).

The European Commission (EC) defined poverty, emphasizing relative poverty pertinent to exclusion from social and cultural activities as: *“people are said to be living in poverty if their income and resources are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living considered acceptable in the society in which they live. Because of their poverty they may experience multiple disadvantage through unemployment, low income, poor housing, inadequate health care and barriers to lifelong learning, culture, sport and recreation. They are often excluded and marginalised from participating in activities (economic, social and cultural) that are the norm for other people and their access to fundamental rights may be restricted” (European Commission, 2004).*

The UN defined poverty in 1998 and updated it in 2005, exploring extreme, moderate, and relative poverty as in the following: *“Fundamentally, poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to, not having the land on which to grow one’s food or a job to earn one’s living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households, and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation” (United Nations, 1998). Followed by “Poverty has various manifestations, including lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increased morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments; and social discrimination and exclusion. It is also characterized by a lack of participation in decision-making and in civil, social and cultural life” (United Nations, 1995)*

The UN and the state of Afghanistan defined extreme poverty as a dire situation in which rural and urban households cannot meet basic daily calorie intake, healthcare services, and education attainment. The UN defined extreme poverty as: “*a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to services.*” (United Nations, 2005). The state of Afghanistan defined extreme poverty as: “*a condition of deprivation characterized by a lack of food, clothing, shelter, and a possible other array of human needs*” (National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, 2007/08).

As mentioned earlier, the definitions of poverty have posed challenges in measurement. Nonetheless, the poverty line assists in refining “*poverty measurement generally assumes that there exist predetermined and well-defined standards of consumption - called ‘poverty lines’ - which must be reached if a person is not to be deemed ‘poor’*” (Ravallion, 1992), with specific thresholds being presented.

Extreme poverty is assessed through severe deprivation of fundamental human needs among children and youth, encompassing food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education, information, and access to services (Gordon, 2005). This classification denotes severe deprivation when food deprivation results in a Body Mass Index of 16 or below (or 18.5 or below), water deprivation limits access to surface water like rivers, ponds, or open wells and springs within a 30-minute round trip, sanitation facilities are lacking pertinent to lack of any toilets private or communal or latrines of covered open or buckets; health deprivation involves women without access to healthcare services of severe illnesses, antenatal care, or birth assistance including a tetanus inoculation during her pregnancy, men lacking access to healthcare for recent serious illnesses, both groups being unaware of HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention, shelter deprivation occurring when 3 to 4 or more people share a room with mud floor, or inadequate roofing, education deprivation when youth have never attended or not completed primary school and are illiterate, and information deprivation when there is no access to newspapers, radio, television, computers, or phones at home (Gordon, 2005).

Measuring extreme poverty involves a global monetary approach and a national poverty line strategy. The WB has been instrumental in introducing and updating an average global poverty line

since 1990 (Lustig & Silber, 2016; Ravallion et al., 2009). The international poverty line serves as a unified metric to assess the minimal nutrition, clothing, and shelter requirements in countries facing extreme poverty. The international poverty line was initially set at USD 1 in 1990, based on the purchasing power of 1985; it was subsequently adjusted to USD 1.25 in 2005, 1.90 in 2015, and 2.15 in 2022 (Jolliffe et al., 2022; Ferreira et al., 2016; Lustig & Silber, 2016; Ravallion et al., 2009). In case purchasing power of a household has been above the average global poverty line per person per day, the household is deemed not to be extremely poor as per the WB Institutions based on income classifications (Jolliffe et al., 2022; Ravallion et al., 2009). However, the purchasing power is below this monetary measurement. In that case, the household is deemed poor, although the national poverty line is measured in addition to a monetary value with a non-monetary value as in table 10 (Jolliffe et al., 2022; Ravallion et al., 2009).

Table 10: *Updating global poverty lines with harmonized national poverty lines*

Income Classification	(A) <u>Original 2011 PPP</u>			(B) <u>Revised 2011 PPP</u>			(C) <u>2017 PPP</u>		
	Median	Mean	N	Median	Mean	N	Median	Mean	N
Low	1.91	2.23	33	1.85	2.22	33	2.15	2.42	28
Lower-middle	3.21	3.88	32	3.21	3.89	32	3.63	3.95	54
Upper-middle	5.47	5.62	32	5.65	5.64	32	6.85	7.05	37
High income	21.70	21.19	29	21.70	21.31	29	24.36	23.36	38
Observations			126			126			157

Source: Based on Jolliffe et al., (2022).

The UN measured extreme poverty based on consideration of the Human Development Index (HDI). Extreme poverty or human development has been measured by consideration of a long and healthy life expectancy, acquiring knowledge in years of schooling, and a decent standard of living by per capita income (Human Development Report, 2016). HDI has been focusing on four key areas to measure extreme poverty and human development as below:

1. “The inequality adjusted HDI highlights the extent of inequality,
2. The Gender Development Index compares female and male HDI values,
3. The Gender Inequality Index evaluate women’s empowerment and

4. The Multidimensional Poverty Index shed light on non-income dimensions of poverty” (United Nations Development Program-Human Development Report, 2016).

The lower-middle-income and upper-middle-income countries have exercised various national poverty measurements to gauge the well-being of the households in poverty based on the moderate poverty threshold (Azevedo et al., 2013; Hossain et al., 2009). The WB has launched a set of poverty measurements for middle-income countries since 2017. The WB has proposed that USD 3.20 per person per day to measure the well-being of lower-middle-income countries and the USD 5.50 to measure the well-being of the upper-middle-income countries (World Development Indicators – Poverty and Inequality, 2018).

This moderate poverty measurement is above the measurement for extreme poverty, which has been USD 1.90 (World Development Indicators – Poverty and Inequality, 2018). Moderate poverty might meet the basic needs and amenities, though the progress or development for the people in moderate poverty is deemed slow and prone to shocks.

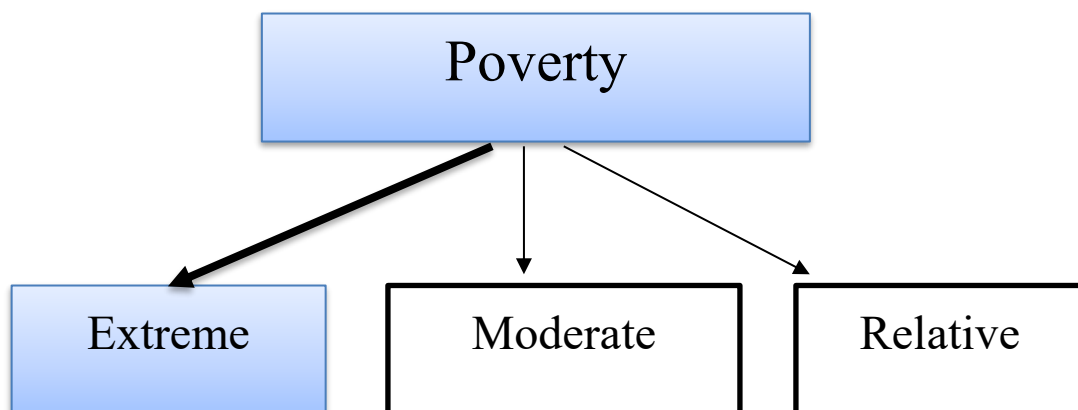
The people in moderate poverty have been surrounded by a condition in which basic needs are achieved from time to time (Sachs, 2005a, p. 20) depending on weather conditions such as drought, flood, harvesting quantity and quality, stability and certainty, and income of the breadwinner of the family. For example, a study by the WB found that the moderate national poverty line of Bangladesh was in the vicinity of the USD 1.25 while the moderate national poverty line of Peru was bordering the USD 4 near the poverty line of the United States of America (Azevedo et al., 2013).

The well-being of a household in a society is measured based on the distance between the households with an income in the middle and those with an income at the bottom of the income distribution. A household in such a condition is considered relatively poor in each society. The household with an income at the bottom of society is considered relatively in poverty to the household with an income in the middle of the income distribution, which has been a standard measurement for poverty reduction in Europe (Eurostat, 2020). Relative poverty is classified as a circumstance when the household’s disposal income has prevailed less than 50 percent of the median in each country (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020). Relative poverty is deemed as a condition in developed economies in which rural and urban

households' income have been lower than the given proportion of average national income that the poor lack access to cultural goods, entertainment, recreation, quality healthcare, education, and social mobility (Sachs, 2005a, p. 20) or a relative poverty form considered a constant proportion of income, consumption and or social inclusion (Shepherd et al.,2014; Ravallion, 2010; Hossain et al., 2009; Addison et al., 2008). The strategy for Europe in 2020 pursued to help reduce poverty by securing the lives of at least 20 million people from the “risk of poverty or social exclusion” related to households with an income below 60 percent of the national median (Eurostat, 2020; Rippin, 2012). The people at risk of poverty or social exclusion came into three sub-sections pertinent to households at risk of poverty after social transfers and taxes to adjust households' arrangements, lack of material like a Television set, washing machine, absence of pollution and noise, and households with low work intensity (Eurostat, 2020; Rippin, 2012).

As illustrated in Figure 12, this study is situated within the broader context of extreme poverty in least developed economies, with a specific focus on Afghanistan. The emphasis on extreme poverty is particularly relevant because it represents the most urgent development challenge in the country, where a large proportion of the population struggles to meet basic needs. International poverty benchmarks also prioritize minimum subsistence levels, especially in fragile and conflict-affected contexts where data limitations make the measurement of moderate or relative poverty more complex. Furthermore, both humanitarian interventions and government policies primarily target life-threatening deprivation, making extreme poverty reduction the central empirical focus of this research.

Figure 12: *Analytical Focus of the Study*



Note: Developed by the author.

The unidimensional poverty measurements such as income threshold, minimum wage or consumption threshold, or CBN based on monetary measures might only cover some aspects of the well-being of a household in poverty (World Bank, UNDP and UNICEF, 2021). For instance: the Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2020 Report of the WB found that over a third of the households experiencing multidimensional poverty was uncaptured by the unidimensional monetary headcount ratio (World Bank, 2021). Therefore, unidimensional poverty measurements shall extend to cover multi aspects of the household in poverty. The UN has expanded the measurement from a unidimensional poverty aspect to a multidimensional poverty approach and has officially adopted the multidimensional poverty indicators for the SDGs for the 2030 agenda (World Bank, UNDP, and UNICEF, 2021). The multidimensional poverty measurement adopted to pertain monetary measures and:

1. *“To measure of poverty that captures deprivations in education and access to basic infrastructure in addition to income or consumption at the \$1.90 international poverty line,*
2. *A means to capture the complexity and persistence of poverty by highlighting additional deprivations experienced by the poor in addition to the extreme poverty threshold of \$1.90.”* (World Bank, 2021).

The global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) introduced by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and published annually by the OPHI and the Human Development Reports (HDR) of the UN since 2010 (Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, 2019). The multidimensional poverty approach focuses on the well-being of households in poverty by considering elementary human requirements such as health, education, and standard of living (Alkire & Santos, 2010). In the multidimensional poverty measurement, *health* has been divided into child mortality and nutrition, *education* divided into years of school attendance, and child school presence and *standard of living* focused on electricity, drinking water, sanitation, flooring, cooking fuel, and assets (Alkire & Santos, 2010).

In the multidimensional poverty approach, the values are summarized from different dimensions into a single value and multiplied by headcount to intensity of poverty within urban and rural settings with characteristics of each community and their relevant needs (Alkire & Foster, 2011). This measurement has been a mechanism to offer simplicity for policy developers to recognize and

prioritize the need of each community in rural and urban settings since this measurement has been depth in coverage and comprehensive in usage compared with unidimensional poverty measurements (Dotter & Klasen, 2017). In addition, the multidimensional poverty measurements developed based on the data covered by the WB for poverty reduction since 1980s.

The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) was introduced to the Cabinet of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (IRI) members in 2018. However, a robust databank has yet to be gathered, and the index may have restrictions in case of approval and implementation in Afghanistan.

The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), despite the wide publicity and adaptation by the UN and the WB, claimed to have methodological shortfalls. The MPI was developed to measure and calculate people's belongings in poverty households with weighted items the households have not owned (Rippin, 2011). For example, the index might consider a household in poverty with a weighted item of at least 30 percent which would change the poverty rate and country ranking (Rippin, 2011). Therefore, it was asserted that the MPI had four methodological weaknesses which consequent from the simplicity of calculations:

1. The MPI counts the number of items which a household does not possess and assumed that there is no correlation between the items. However, proper sanitations and clean drinking water are related to health and education indicators,
2. The MPI disregards inequality or relative poverty. In case items transfer from a poor to a less poor household, this does not change the poverty index and considers both households poor,
3. The reduction to a level of 30 percent is a consequential decision, and any changes would affect the poverty rate and country ranking,
4. The MPI has a structure that results in distortion and inflation in poverty rates. The index increases poorer households in a country, leading to further constraints in its budget and making the life of the people in need harsher (Rippin, 2011).

Consequently, Rippin (2010) outlined weaknesses of the MPI and recommended the Correlation Sensitive Poverty Index (CSPI) to address these methodological weaknesses. The CSPI shared the simplicity of the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), but it did not cut off or exclude

households from the calculations (Rippin, 2011; 2010). The CSPI weighted each household based on the absence of an item which consequent to a set of advantages:

1. *“The CSPI is able to capture the correlation between the poverty indicators,*
2. *The CSPI captures inequality among the poor; it increases whenever items are transferred from a poor to a less poor household,*
3. *The CSPI does not require the arbitrary cut-off but instead provides policy makers with the opportunity to deliberately choose the level of importance they want to attribute to inequality among the poor,*
4. *Finally, the new index avoids the inflation of poverty rates for poorer countries and puts a greater emphasis on the neediest of the needy in those countries than the MPI” (Rippin, 2010; 2011).*

In response to the above assertion on the critical weaknesses of the MPI, the OPHI appreciated constructive academic debate on the important issues. They offered counterarguments that Rippin (2010) claimed to pertain to mistakes and misunderstandings about the MPI (Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, n.d.). The OPHI has summarized and addressed Rippin (2010) four critiques as follows:

1. *“There are several reasons why the MPI treats indicators independently. Not only is this consistent with Sen’s capability approach, but it also reflects the fact that correlations between indicators are low in practice and no evidence exists to favor one type of relationship over others between MPI indicators,*
2. *While the MPI does not directly capture inequalities, a key benefit of the measure is how easily it can be broken down by indicator, region, and intensity. Such analysis – some of which has already been carried out, with more in-depth work ongoing – shows inequalities in how the intensity of poverty is distributed among the poor,*
3. *The MPI cutoff reflects the purpose of the measure – to be an internationally comparable measure across developing countries that reflects those living in acute multidimensional poverty (those that experience multiple deprivations simultaneously),*
4. *The MPI involves no under or over estimation of poverty – instead it provides a consistent picture of the prevalence of acute poverty across different countries and can be used to focus attention on the ‘poorest of the poor’” (Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, n.d.).*

Extreme poverty is a condition of severe deprivation in which households struggle to maintain existential stature, often the national economies have deficiencies in providing basic amenities for the households in rural and urban areas, and technical and financial assistance such as ODA of the international community allocated to prevent humanitarian disasters. Technical and financial assistance flow allocates to the poorest of the poor in each community within the least developed economies. ODA or development aid is defined as: “aid is a large and fungible source of assistance to recipient country” (Boone, 1996) and “developmental aid (DA) as aid expended in a manner that is anticipated to promote development, whether achieved through economic growth or other means. Non-Developmental Aid (NDA) is defined as aid of all other kinds.” (Minoiu & Reddy, 2010). The progress and effect of the ODA have focused on four principles set forth below:

1. *“Focus on results: Investments and efforts have a lasting impact on eradicating poverty and reducing inequality, on sustainable development, and on enhancing country capacities; they are aligned with the priorities and policies set out by countries themselves.*
2. *Country ownership: Countries define the development priorities and model they want to implement.*
3. *Inclusive partnerships for development: Sustainable development depends on the participation of all stakeholders and benefits from the diversity of roles and complementarity of contributions.*
4. *Transparency and mutual accountability: Development co-operation efforts are transparent and accountable to all relevant stakeholders, including all citizens”* (OECD/UNDP, 2016).

3.3 Theoretical framework

The poverty phenomenon relevant to Afghanistan is examined through various theoretical perspectives⁶ and economic schools of thought. The theories⁷ encompass relativist, moderate, and extreme poverty circumstances, reflecting the diverse conditions since the 18th and 19th centuries. The country's classification as the least developed, mountainous, landlocked country and in a state of war introduces additional complexities related to improving sustenance and well-being for rural and urban households. The selection of a theoretical framework should account for these multifaceted issues relevant to extreme poverty in Afghanistan, considering country contexts such as norms, customs, culture, structural factors, legal circumstances, and issues about peacebuilding, state-building, market-building, widespread corruption, trade, and transit-trade.

Various economic schools of thought have put forth theories on poverty, encompassing perspectives on relativist, moderate, and extreme poverty, as outlined below. Classical Theory emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries, pertinent to theories on value and distribution by assessment of assumptions, hypotheses, and conclusions pertinent to the work of Adam Smith and David Ricardo (Davis & Sanchez-Martinez, 2015; Sanchez-Martinez & Davis, 2014). Classical thought believed that a market mechanism is sufficient for prosperity in which a landlord receives rent, workers receive wages, and investors receive profit; therefore, poverty is considered an

⁶ A theoretical framework is described “as any empirical or quasi-empirical theory of social and/or psychological processes, at a variety of levels (e.g., grand, midrange, explanatory), that can be applied to the understanding of phenomena” (Anfara & Mertz, 2015, p.15). In other words, a theoretical framework is characterized as a guide, support, and structure to focus on philosophical, epistemological, methodological, and analytical to a holistic approach of a dissertation (Osanloo & Grant, 2016) with a definition borrowed from Eisenhardt in which a theoretical framework such as “a structure that guides research by relying on a formal theory[...]constructed by using an established, coherent explanation of certain phenomena and relationships” (Osanloo & Grant, 2016; Eisenhardt, 1989).

⁷ A theory is defined as “a set of interrelated constructs, definitions, and propositions that presents a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting phenomenon” (Anfara & Mertz, 2015, p.2) or it is “a general framework with core principles and concepts that enable (a) predictions and specific testable implications across a range of settings and/or (b) explanation of specific cases” (Brady, 2019). Further, in a qualitative approach, a theory is narrowed down to four aspects pertinent to “(1) clarification of epistemological dispositions, (2) identification of the logic behind methodological choices, (3) building theory as a result of research findings, and (4) a guide or framework for the study” (Collins & Stockton, 2018).

outcome of deficiency and ineffective choices made by a poor individual. Supporting the well-being of an individual in poverty through welfare was seen as an economic inefficiency by creating a poverty or welfare trap and dependency without considering vulnerable categories such as elderly, sick, youth, and single parenthood. The focus of the classic poverty theory was formulated based on Western middle-class values in an individual research methodology in which the sub-culture of the poor groups was not acceptable to the rest of the poor groups. Whether poverty is an outcome of weakness or inappropriate behavior, it should result in a constructive shift in the individual's behavior (Davis & Sanchez-Martinez, 2015; Sanchez-Martinez & Davis, 2014).

The Neoclassical Theory advent was mainly considered from the publication of Principles of Economics explaining price by the intersection of supply and demand by Alfred Marshal in 1890 (Davis & Sanchez-Martinez, 2015; Sanchez-Martinez & Davis, 2014). The neoclassical theory was built based on the classical tradition and emphasized the role of unequal endowments of talents, skills, and capital, which determine the productivity of an individual in reducing poverty within a competitive market economic system. Market failures pertinent to externalities, moral hazard and adverse selection, asymmetric information, and uncertainty were considered causes and drivers of poverty. In addition to Alfred Marshal, John Maynard Keynes as early neoclassical believed in diminishing marginal utility across income that one extra unit of income added more value to an individual experiencing poverty compared to an individual out of poverty. The neoclassical theory recognizes causes of poverty by monetary metrics, which enable the purchasing power of individuals experiencing poverty to access resources and non-market goods and services. Further, the absence of assets and access to finance, market failures and access to credit markets, human capital pertinent to education, training and mobility, minorities, and health and demographics are considered causes of poverty based on neoclassical theory (Davis & Sanchez-Martinez, 2015; Sanchez-Martinez & Davis, 2014).

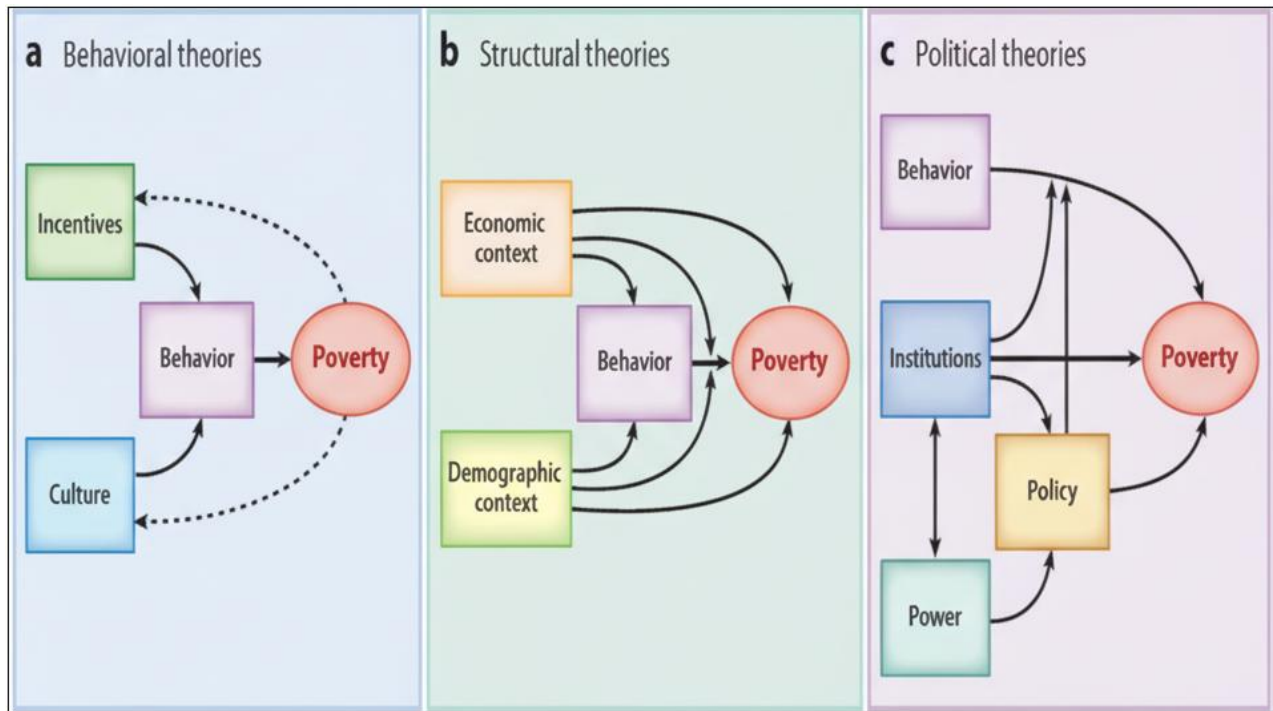
The Keynesian or Liberal Theory based on market distortion and complex underdevelopment that leads to causes of poverty and suggests that the government at the macroeconomic level intervene through fiscal and monetary policy to facilitate growth in order to promote development and, therefore, to reduce poverty (Davis & Sanchez-Martinez, 2015; Sanchez-Martinez & Davis, 2014). The liberal theory categorized underdevelopment in a country in the areas of human capital pertinent to health, skills, and education; business capital such as machinery and buildings; infrastructure including transport, power, and sanitation; natural capital like land; public

institutional capital similar to the rule of law and security and knowledge capital such as know-how to increase productivity. The liberal theory core focuses on the macro level rather than the micro level, encompassing the effect of unemployment, inflation, debt, and market bubbles affecting poverty circumstances (Davis & Sanchez-Martinez, 2015; Sanchez-Martinez & Davis, 2014).

The Marxist or Radical Theory considered capitalism and its social and political elements encompassing class division led to poverty (Davis & Sanchez-Martinez, 2015; Sanchez-Martinez & Davis, 2014). This school of thought claims that the market mechanism dysfunction and the capitalist economies compensate a lower labor cost compared to the created value with the threat of unemployment, and in such societies, to tackle poverty is to intervene in the market mechanism by introducing the minimum wages, for example. Radical theorists in political economy believe that poverty is an outcome of structural factors pertinent to the classification of the labor market, prejudice, discrimination, and corruption. The radical theory's core focus is on improving the labor condition and encouraging higher wages through state regulations (Davis & Sanchez-Martinez, 2015; Sanchez-Martinez & Davis, 2014).

David Calnitsky (2018) and David Brady (2019) elaborated on structural and individualistic theories of poverty and theories of causes of poverty, respectively. Calnitsky (2018) divided poverty into individualistic approaches and two macro-level of poverty. In the individualistic approaches, a need for macro-level appraisal of the subject existed. One person is more prone to poverty than the other but defocused that considering separate individuals to reach the expected macro-level. Further, two macro-level perspectives as macro-structural explanations suggest that poverty arises from systemic gaps that individuals fall through, while situational occurrences emphasize conditions that lead to specific poverty-generating behaviors (Calnitsky, 2018). Furthermore, Brady (2019) assessed the causes of poverty into three major branches: behavioral, structural, and political theories. The behavioral theories' core focus is on individual choices based on motivations and culture, the structural theories foundation is based on demographic and market context, which lead to behavior and poverty, and the political theories assess governance and institutions develop policy which causes poverty and facilitate the relationship between choices and poverty as presented in the Figure 13 (Brady, 2019).

Figure 13: Behavioral, Structural and Political Theories of Poverty



Source: Brady (2019).

Bradshaw (2007) and Vu (2010) studied the causes of poverty from individual and societal levels to formal national institution levels. In addition, they discussed the poverty phenomenon from local governance to a national governance perspective. Bradshaw (2007) characterized the theory of poverty from five dimensions such as an individual, a cultural, a political-economic structure, a geographic, and a cumulative and cyclical as follow:

1. An individual theory of poverty is grounded on the overall behavior and or condition of an individual such as lack of skills, motivation, wrong choice, and handicap,
2. A cultural theory of poverty established upon norms and traditions which are not productive, prevents development and prosperity,
3. A political-economic structure theory of poverty connected to a discriminatory system create hurdles for the poor to have security, healthcare services, education, job, shelter, and voice,
4. A geographic theory of poverty bound to remote mountainous areas and societal disadvantages and,

5. A cumulative and cyclical theory of poverty intertwined many dimensions of poverty pertinent to individual inadequacies such as income, shelter, health, skill and education, and self-confidence with a connection to community shortfalls such as loss of a business or source of income, insufficient schools, lack of capacity and resources to offer social services (Bradshaw, 2007).

Vu (2010) elaborated on the economic theory of poverty and focused on the economic aspect of the poverty phenomenon. The economic theory of poverty explored the underdevelopment of markets intertwined with a minimal level of agricultural products, the absence of opportunities in communities, and the lack of skills due to a shortage of necessary resources to build the required skills to attain employment opportunities (Vu, 2010). In some circumstances market operated to a degree to fulfill the basic domestic needs of the rural and urban households, and partially skilled laborers were employed; however, other events or factors, namely elections in case of fraudulent voting or corruption, affected the market performance and as result sources of income disappeared among many individuals through loss of employment opportunities and or entrepreneurial activities. In case of market dysfunctionality, the state is obliged to offer welfare programs to distribute basic amenities though such programs often lead to moral hazard and laziness (Vu, 2010). Hence, Vu (2010) referred to Blank and considered six causes of the economic theory of poverty as in below:

1. Economic underdevelopment is considered an inadequacy of the economic market in rural areas to demand agricultural products and open opportunities for investment and development within the communities,
2. Scarcity of skills and resources caused by poor education and might result from shortcomings of resources which decrease chances of market competition or low-wage jobs or continuously remaining unemployed and could not sustain basic amenities,
3. Market dysfunction resulted from establishing a new economy without updating skills which cannot fulfill the demand of the market; the employment opportunities decrease for unskilled and or low-skilled individuals, and poverty increases,
4. Social and political processes intertwined in economic development, political will, corruption, racism, and discrimination which affect the market outcome and decrease

market opportunities, social status, and political participation for the public or people in poverty,

5. Social welfare programs consequent to a moral hazard encourages laziness and provide a disincentive for the poor to seek employment but remain on welfare (Vu, 2010). Further, cash transfer programs are considered a trap and keep people in poverty because, in some cases, cash recipient prefers welfare assistance to employment and remain in poverty, especially female-headed families, and
6. Individual behavioral characteristics and choices could lead to economic stability; however, individuals might choose a lifestyle prone to the danger of poverty. This lifestyle, for example, could include nonattendance of school or attaining education and single parenthood. The combination of no education or insufficient education and single parenthood especially, single mothers carry the burden of poverty to upcoming generations (Vu, 2010).

The theory of change was applied to projects, programs, and policies to structure poverty reduction efforts in addition to the theory of poverty and the economic theory of poverty. The theory of change is deemed as a description and an illustration of the how and the why of an expected change in each context (Boillat, 2018; Center for Theory of Change, 2011). The theory of change has described missing information between constructs or change initiatives and how the desired goal is achieved. Further, this theory is characterized based on the recognition of desired long-term goals in an iterative process to identify the condition in which outcomes lead causally to each other and how to achieve the goals in the form of an outcome's framework. The outcome framework followed a foundation for identifying intervention, which had been identified as a precondition to achieving long-term goals (Boillat, 2018; Center for Theory of Change, 2011). In other words, the theory of change has been "describing the whole chain of influences (from outputs to impacts) of a project or program up to its intended contribution to improving the lives of people in poverty" (Goodier & Apgar, 2018; Goodier et. al., 2018).

The UN perspective on the theory of change has been the identification of "the immediate, underlying and structural/root causes of the high-level changes related to multidimensional poverty, inequalities and discrimination, and the reasons why particular groups are left behind"

(UNDGDOCO, 2017).

The WB through the Operations Evaluation Department (OED) has described the advantages of the theory of change evaluation as below:

1. “A theory of change evaluation allows evaluators to give early word of events without having to wait until the end of the whole program sequence,
2. The evaluators can identify which assumptions are working out and which are not. They can pinpoint where in theory, the assumptions break down. This should enable the program to take corrective action before too much time goes by,
3. The results of a theory of change evaluation can be more readily generalized across programs. Seeing the successes and the failures between closely linked assumptions, such as between greater parental attention to children and better child behavior, is easier than between, say, parenting education programs and better child behavior” (Weiss, 2001, p. 106).

The discussed theories on poverty interrelate by addressing various dimensions of its causes and solutions, spanning individual, structural, economic, and political perspectives. Classical Theory emphasizes market mechanisms, proposing that poverty stems from individual deficiencies and poor choices. This approach contrasts with the Neoclassical Theory, which refines Classical thought by focusing on unequal individual endowments, such as skills and talents, impacting productivity and poverty within competitive markets.

The Keynesian or Liberal Theory diverges by highlighting market imperfections and underdevelopment as root causes of poverty. It advocates for government interventions via fiscal and monetary policies to stimulate growth and promote equitable development. Similarly, the Marxist or Radical Theory critiques capitalism, arguing that systemic class divisions and market dysfunctions perpetuate poverty, necessitating interventions like minimum wage regulations to address labor exploitation.

Calnitsky (2018) and Brady (2019) integrate structural, behavioral, and political dimensions into poverty analysis. Calnitsky underscores macro-structural gaps and situational triggers of poverty, while Brady categorizes its causes into behavioral choices, structural market dynamics, and

political governance. Bradshaw (2007) expands these perspectives by framing poverty within five dimensions, from individual to cumulative. Vu (2010) complements these theories by focusing on the economic underpinnings of poverty, particularly market underdevelopment and skill deficits. Together, these theories present a comprehensive, multifaceted understanding of poverty's causes and solutions. However, a broader perspective shall apply in the case of Afghanistan to peacebuilding, state building, and market building in fragile and high-risk contexts to maintain basic physical security. In this condition, it has been rare for the national economy to provide basic amenities, sustenance, and employment opportunities. In both cases, transitioning from war to peace and from an informal economy to a formal economy is considered a condition in which the sub-national and national governance could not maintain development pace and sustainability (Venida, 2000). Therefore, the harsh environment for development in the least-developed-mountainous-landlocked countries in war or postwar condition required technical and financial assistance from the international community and the MIO. The least-developed-mountainous-landlocked countries in war or post-war might generate domestic sources of growth through collaboration from the technical and financial assistance from regional neighbors to global level support for peacebuilding, state building, and market building. However, the experiences of the developed economies guided developing economies to decrease poverty in a single generation and transform subsistence economies into resilience and self-sufficiency (Yifu, 2012, pp. 85 - 97). The developed economies invested resources on the development trajectory, sustainability, and transformation from a subsistence economy to reach self-sufficiency and prosperity. Though, the transformations of subsistence economies to prosperity did not occur in the groups of landlocked states. Therefore, the UN established a specialized office called the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) to focus on the least developed spectrum. The landlocked states had taken a high burden on international inland trade costs in comparison to their maritime neighbors because the landlocked states grow on an average 1.5 percent slower than maritime neighbors per year (Vienna Program of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024, 2014; MacKellar et al., 2000).

3.3.1 Being landlocked

Adam Smith, in 1776 observed widespread poverty in the landlocked African and Asian countries, and a study of the HDR in 2002 acknowledged that parts of Africa and Asia had been the least economically developed states of the world in which “Nine of the twelve countries with the lowest Human Development Index scores are landlocked, thirteen landlocked countries are classified as ‘low human development’ and not one of the non-European landlocked countries is classified as ‘high human development’” and Afghanistan was included among the least developed countries and low in the human development index (Vienna Program of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014–2024, 2014; Faye et al., 2004).

A convention declared on transit in 1965 had defined a landlocked country as:

“‘landlocked state’ is any contracting state which has no sea-coast and a ‘traffic in transit’ is the passage of goods including unaccompanied baggage across the territory of a Contracting State between a landlocked State and the sea when the passage is a portion of a complete journey which begins or terminates within the territory of that landlocked state and which includes sea transport directly preceding.” “A transit State is any Contracting State with or without a sea coast, situated between a landlocked State and the sea, through whose territory ‘traffic in transit’ passes” (Convention on transit trade of landlocked states, 1965)

The landlocked countries were in widespread poverty because of inland distant transportation-related costs, good governance, and performance of formal institutions (Collier, 2008, pp. 58 - 62; Faye et al., 2004). The landlocked countries’ economic development was interrelated and dependent on features of relationship with the neighboring countries, specifically on four essential areas such as:

1. “dependence on transit infrastructure,
2. dependence on political relations with neighbors,
3. dependence on peace and stability within transit neighbors, and
4. dependence on administrative processes in transit” (Collier, 2008, pp. 18-75; Faye et al., 2004).

The landlocked countries’ dependency on transit-and-coastal countries had made them vulnerable to a high rate of poverty due these states were disposed to governance and managerial failure of their neighboring countries (Faye et al., 2004). For instance, landlocked African countries are adversely affected by the conflict of their neighboring states (Faye et al., 2004; Stewart et al., 2002).

The dissolution of the Soviet Union led to civil war in Central Asia (Faye et al., 2004); except for the case of Afghanistan, which was at war before and after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Figure 14 illustrates the recently developed transit route through Chabahar in Iran, providing Afghanistan with an alternative trade corridor to India. Traditionally, Afghanistan transit goods moved primarily through ports in Pakistan. The development of the Chabahar Port aims to facilitate mineral extraction and the export of Afghanistan's mining products to international markets, particularly India, thereby enhancing trade connectivity and reducing transit dependence.

Figure 14: *Afghanistan Transit Map*



Source: Mutfi et al., (2018).

The landlocked least developed states had taken the burden of long inland transportation-related costs for international trade, which had a volatile economic development compared to their coastal-neighboring states and increased the poverty rate and low human development. The least developed economies are intertwined with low human development, poor education systems, uneven life standards, and low resources to meet basic needs. Therefore, the least developed economies needed

more capacity to create employment opportunities for Rural Non-Farm (RNF) labor, unskilled labor, and skilled laborers (UNCTAD, 2013; Easterly, 2007; Harrison, 2007).

The rural non-farm involved in seasonal agricultural labor migration and unskilled labor might assure employment opportunities in case of flow of capital, supply of products in a wide range of markets, or to use employment opportunities in other states with a higher income and fewer work hours in the context of globalization (UNCTAD, 2013; Easterly, 2007; Harrison, 2007). The phenomenon of globalization might provide more choices for impoverished households through the free movement of goods and products (Easterly, 2007; Harrison, 2007). The households in poverty should be considered in the development policies and trade reforms. The policies and reforms should be initiated and designed to reflect the necessities of the poor, ease regional integration, and tackle extreme poverty beyond national economies (Bhagwati & Srinivasan, 2002; Krueger, 1983). In the regional integration settings for the landlocked states, there has been a demand to focus on transit routes such as improving infrastructure in coastal neighbors, custom procedures, eliminating check-point payments, decreasing inland transport time, and maintaining low prices (Page, 2011).

The households in poverty might not have a comparative advantage where more than one factor and many goods were involved (Davis & Mishra, 2007). In this circumstance, in case the trade reform has not safeguarded a transition provision in which the domestic markets products supplied by the poor, henceforth, the poor can no longer survive due to the influx of imports; a realignment of the trade reform has been a prerequisite to increase robustness to imports and decrease adverse characteristic of the globalization (Davis & Mishra, 2007). Attracting demand for traditional agricultural products in the regional and global markets might decrease poverty (Davis & Mishra, 2007). The household in poverty might increase income through a careful transition and elimination of trade barriers which encourages capital inflow through increasing national and international investment in which a long-term sustainable development improves well-being and provide sustenance (Arestis & Caner, 2009; Prasad et al., 2007; Sala-i-Martin, 2006; Dollar & Kraay, 2001).

The elimination of trade barriers and trade openness led to poverty reduction under some specific circumstances. However, macro, and micro economic modeling and the Neoclassical Growth

Model found that trade openness reduced poverty by considering the share of the poor in the trade reform, and it was skeptical about decreasing poverty in a general reform because this was not tangible in the case of China and Morocco (Ravallion & Chen, 2007). The trade reforms were effective in case policies designed to directly target poverty reduction in a context of pro-poor development to involve output of the poor such as agricultural products and employment opportunities for rural non-farm labor, unskilled labor, and skilled labor in the economies of the least developed countries (UNCTAD, 2013; Bhagwati & Srinivasan, 2002; Krueger, 1983). Further, the Neoclassical Growth Model (NGM) found that if the output was the same, but the income was different, then the effect of globalization was positive due to the increase in income of the poor by abolishing barriers to international trade which increased per capita income due to capital flow to the least developed countries (Easterly, 2007). On the other hand, if the framework of this mechanism was affected by external productivity, then globalization had no effect or adverse effect on poverty reduction due to capital outflow (Easterly, 2007).

3.3.2 Corruption

The economic development of least developed countries (LDCs) is significantly undermined by pervasive corruption, which diminishes the effectiveness of globalization in reducing poverty. Corruption impedes economic progress by discouraging domestic and foreign direct investment, deteriorating public infrastructure, reducing tax revenues, and distorting public expenditures, all of which are critical determinants of economic performance (Chetwynd et al., 2003; Wei, 1999; Mauro, 1995). More broadly, corruption hampers economic growth by misallocating resources, distorting growth patterns, and exacerbating income inequality (Blackburn et al., 2006; Li et al., 2000). Additionally, corruption exacerbates poverty by weakening taxation systems, misdirecting SPPs, limiting asset ownership, and restricting investments in human capital and education. A comprehensive strategy, including civil service reforms, may be necessary to mitigate corruption's detrimental effects (Chetwynd et al., 2003; Gupta & Abed, 2002; Gupta et al., 2002).

Corruption is commonly defined as the “abuse of public power for private benefit” (Tanzi, 1998; 2000). It involves the misuse of public resources by officials through mechanisms such as nepotism, fraud, extortion, embezzlement, bribery, and the manipulation of public contracts and procurements (Al-Sadig, 2009; Schudel, 2008; Tanzi, 2000). By enabling officials to exploit their authority for personal gain, corruption significantly hampers economic growth, reduces

opportunities for foreign aid, and leads to governance failures (Schudel, 2008; Acemoglu & Verdier, 2000). Moreover, corruption negatively affects key economic indicators and social services, including healthcare quality and educational standards (Al-Sadig, 2009; Tiongson et al., 2000), thereby exacerbating wealth inequality (Gupta et al., 2002; Li et al., 2000). Public investments in infrastructure, including roads and construction, also suffer due to corrupt practices, further stifling economic development (Tanzi & Davoodi, 1998; Mauro, 1995).

The WB and the IMF define corruption as “the abuse of public office for private gains” (Wei, 1999). While some argue that corruption may accelerate bureaucratic processes and stimulate entrepreneurial activity, empirical evidence suggests otherwise. A one-unit increase in the corruption index has been found to decrease economic growth rates by 0.545 percentage points, with political instability accounting for nearly 53 percent of the negative impact on growth (Aidt, 2009; Mo, 2001). Ultimately, corruption remains a fundamental barrier to sustainable economic development, social equity, and effective governance in LDCs.

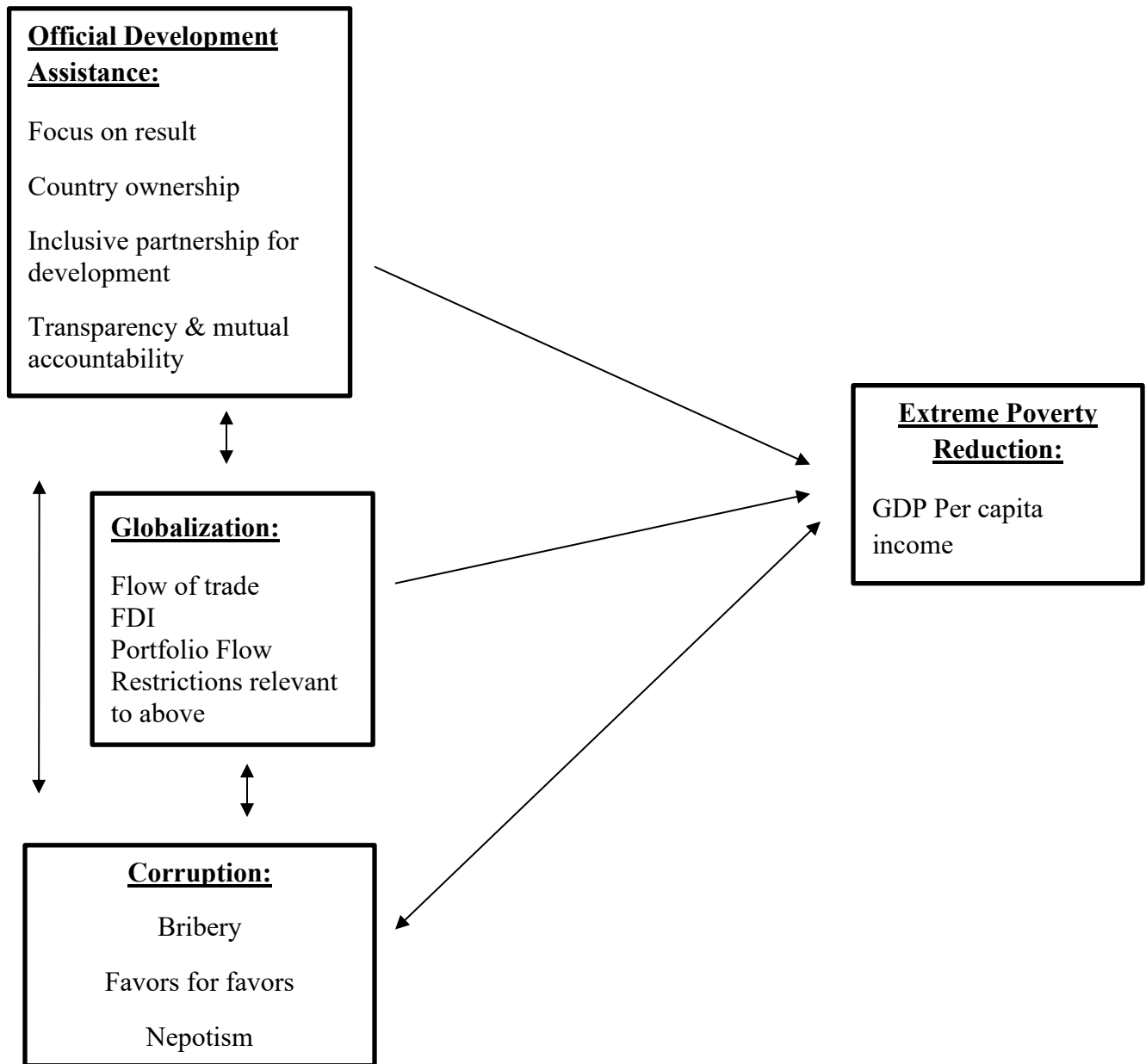
Literature, as mentioned earlier, leads to a narrative that the developed economies support the least developed economies for extreme poverty reduction efforts. The developed economies offer technical and financial assistance to rehabilitate, reconstruct, and construct primary state institutions to provide services, facilitate development trajectories, and avoid human catastrophe among impoverished households. Therefore, international community assistance is allocated for a specific timeframe and an occasion in which the sustainability of the achievements has to be maintained through recognition of the domestic sources of growth, production, export, and import mechanisms in the globalization framework. Globalization eases transit trade and international trade, the flow of goods, movements of persons, know-how, and expertise. Conversely, corruption has been a hurdle toward poverty reduction in the least developed economies and hinders extreme poverty reduction efforts. It affects the bilateral flow of assistance and the globalization process. Figure 15 shows the relationship between the ODA the globalization phenomenon with its components on extreme poverty reduction. However, corruption affects the entire process of extreme poverty reduction efforts.

The impact of globalization on corruption was not significant in least-developed economies, primarily due to low per capita income. Globalization has focused mainly on economic and international integration in these economies, with only a limited effect on corruption control

(Asongu, 2014; Lalountas et al., 2011). In contrast, globalization has had a more pronounced impact on corruption in middle- and high-income economies, where higher per capita income has shifted the focus towards political and social dimensions, thereby contributing positively to corruption control (Asongu, 2014; Lalountas et al., 2011). Furthermore, corruption has negatively affected ODA, as recipient countries with high corruption levels have received less bilateral aid. For instance, Scandinavian donor states have assessed recipient countries' governance quality when allocating aid, whereas the United States has prioritized democratic factors in its disbursement decisions (Schudel, 2008; Alesina & Weder, 2002).

The ODA effectively absorbed in an economy to tackle corruption as well as other mechanisms such as standard organization of program inputs, monitoring, evaluation, auditing, output, and the inexistence of appropriate fiscal, monetary, and trade policies (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009; Burnside & Dollar, 2000). Henceforth, ODA strengthened the development of the least developed economies through the MDGs, effectively reducing poverty in rural and urban areas, while globalization subsequently increased household productivity, especially among households in poverty (Karras, 2006; Addison et al., 2005b; Gomanee et al., 2005; Dalgaard et al., 2004; Tarp & Hansen, 2003; Burnside & Dollar, 2000). The ODA supports the least developed economies in establishing basic economic institutions, know-how, and expertise for a specific period. Technical and financial assistance aims for the least developed economies to deliver basic amenities for the households' in poverty in rural and urban areas. The sustainability of poverty reduction efforts promotes export and facilitates bilateral and regional economic integration under the framework of globalization.

Figure 15: *Effect of variables on extreme poverty reduction*



Source: Based on Kamariah Kamaruddin & Mohamed Udin (2009).

Globalization is defined as: “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (Giddens, 2013, p. 64). In other words, “globalization is conceptualized as a process that erodes national boundaries, integrates national economies, cultures, technologies and governance, and produces complex relations of mutual interdependence” (KOF Index of

Globalization, 2018). The globalization phenomenon measured as per (The KOF Index of Globalization “Konjunkturforschungsstelle (KOF) Economic cycle research institute”) on economic, political, and social aspects of democracy which this process focused on actual economic flows, economic restrictions, data on information flows, data on personal contact and data on cultural proximity (Dreher et al., 2008; Dreher, 2006). The current study considers economic globalization to measure “flows of trade, foreign direct investment and portfolio flow and restrictions in relevance to above flows” (Shangquan, 2000).

As a result, in such challenging economic conditions, Foreign Direct Investment tended to remain minimal, even though it is vital for Afghanistan’s economic development by creating employment opportunities and sources of income (Pashtoon, 2017; Al-Sadig, 2009). Therefore, the effect of the globalization provisions and the ODA on extreme poverty reduction efforts have been reduced by a corrupt public sector with an insignificant performance. However, the phenomenon of globalization sustained poverty reduction efforts through investment in human capital, infrastructure, promotion of credit, technical assistance to farmers, and stabilization of macroeconomic policy (Asongu et al., 2015; Rahim et al., 2014; Harrison, 2007). In addition, the globalization process facilitates international economic relations and eases trade transactions based on the future-oriented value of products, thorough use of high technological information, sharing among customs and ports such as the Single Window, Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA) and others (Reyes, 2001a). Globalization and trade liberalization improved economic growth in many Asian countries intertwined in extreme poverty historically, including China, India, and Vietnam, and substantially reduced the ratio of the population living under the poverty line (Rodrik, 2017; Lee & Vivarelli, 2006). Hence, the incorporation of the theory of globalization, trade policies, and poverty reduction is integral to the framework of this study, given its pertinence to the Afghanistan context. The theory of globalization, trade policies, and poverty reduction cover all aspects of current research (Reyes, 2001a). It considered regional and multilateral agreements, global and social integration, concepts of autonomy of states, and means to interact with one another (Reyes, 2001a). This theory best suits cross-countries studies, country case studies, and institutions (Srinivasan, 2008). Additionally, the theory offers an economic standpoint on how globalization affects poverty reduction efforts in developing countries (Harrison, 2006). In the case of Afghanistan, peacebuilding, state building, and market building required international and regional technical and financial assistance and collaboration and two

decades of development targeted by the UN and the people of Afghanistan to reduce poverty, keep it sustainable through transit-trade, trade liberalization and pursue development pace with their the region. However, globalization is a broad concept, which in this research, the focus is on two aspects of globalization such as (i) international trade in goods and (ii) international movement of capital pertinent to foreign investment, portfolio flows, and aid (Harrison, 2006). Globalization has exercised a significant influence on national economies, producing at least three fundamental outcomes: accelerated economic growth, substantial reductions in poverty, creating a more favorable environment for the development and consolidation of democratic governance (Griswold, 2000). There have been two assumptions for globalization, trade policies, and poverty reduction taken into consideration for the current study:

1. “Least developed countries from lower standards achieve a significant advantage in attracting global capital and gaining export markets” (Griswold, 2000).
2. “With more standardization in technological advances, more and more social sectors will be able to connect themselves with other groups around the world. This situation will involve the dominant and non-dominant groups from each nation” (Reyes, 2001b).

3.4 Synthesis of literature

In the least developed economies, providing essential public sector services takes time and effort. The primary service of the public sector might be physical security, safety, food security, healthcare sector, education, and other areas of need of rural and urban households. The challenge of malfunctioning or, in some cases, rehabilitation, reconstruction, and construction of primary state institutions invested large-scale UN resources and the international community in the least developed economies. Consequently, the state institutions either reach their goal to provide and deliver essential services and reach prosperity or fails and increase extreme poverty. In case state institutions development fails to achieve its goals, henceforth, the state institutions cause low economic output, lack of skills, low level of knowledge, absence of employment opportunities, small markets, and exploitative elite groups and an extractive state in which the rural and urban household in extreme poverty suffer for generations (Rodrik, 2014; Robinson & Acemoglu, 2012, pp. 73-151; Banerjee & Duflo, 2011, pp. 427-442). Further, the least developed economies may trap in fragile and high-risk living conditions in which basic physical security of the rural and urban

households turns to the focus of the development policies, and the development trajectory and poverty reduction goals get fragile and unobtainable (Collier, 2008, pp. 17 – 37). However, these deficiencies could be improved through inclusive market engagement, which allows the combining of talents and ideas to create business and enhance productivity (Robinson & Acemoglu, 2012, p. 77).

The economic development policies and strategies encountered many hurdles in Afghanistan, such as natural disasters such as floods and drought, manufactured disasters such as war, political uncertainty, macroeconomic instability, and economic underperformance due to corruption, impunity culture, and high population growth rate. These hurdles led to a fragile, high-risk context and duplication of efforts, wasting opportunities and resources and increasing extreme poverty (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). The transformation and modernization from a poor donor-recipient state to a sustainable market-integrated economy was set target by the state of Afghanistan and the international community through corruption and volatile economic development in Afghanistan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). This volatility of economic development prevented, to a large extent, domestic sources of growth to secure the well-being and improve the living standards of fellow men, women, and children (Kanto & Pain, 2010).

A Group of 8 (G8) meeting addressed the fragile and high-risk context states. Through a finance minister meeting, the G8 pledged to support fragile, high-risk context states to achieve poverty reduction goals, targets, and indicators (International Monetary Fund, 2016a; 2016b). Group 8 initiated a mechanism for debt relief for the poor states in which this Group allocated funds for the poor states under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative and Multilateral Debt Relieve Initiative (MDRI) mechanisms through the WB, IMF, and African Development Bank (AfDB) (International Monetary Fund, 2016a; 2016b). The debt relief was allocated in parallel to technical and financial aid through the ODA mechanism to the poor states by the MIO and the international community (Reality of Aid, 2014). These assistances aimed to avoid human disasters through emergency response and to support the economy, society, and polity in reducing extreme poverty, sustaining the development trajectory, and nurturing domestic sources of growth. On the other hand, the sustainability of domestic sources of growth is affected by several factors, including internal factors pertinent to the quality of production, unskilled day labor, and primitive sustenance agricultural production to reach a certain level to supply for national markets, regional markets, and beyond. In addition, lack of proper infrastructure and malfunctioning public institutions add to

internal factors and external factors such as transit trade routes, neighboring countries' infrastructure, and features of implementation of trade agreements considered crucial issues for the least developed landlocked states (Collier, 2008, pp. 17 – 75). However, regional economic integration and cooperation organizations developed platforms such as low tariffs, easy visa access, vocational training, and scholarships to minimize hurdles and accelerate economic development (Reyes, 2001 a). Further, the World Trade Organization (WTO) also facilitated international trade, decreased trade hurdles, and reduced the cost of living (Peet, 2009). The WTO membership assisted the poor states in improving the well-being and living standards of their respective countries' rural and urban households (Peet, 2009). The rural and urban households benefited from membership in the WTO when the development policies focused on pro-poor development, such as the employability of non-skilled labor, semi-skilled labor, and improvement of primitive sustenance agriculture facilities (Peet, 2009). Furthermore, the poor states might increase the rural and urban households' well-being by improving the labor market and increasing education enrolment, employment, healthcare, and sanitation through comprehensive SPPs (Peet, 2009). SPPs prevented human disaster by engaging the rural and urban poor households economically productive. SPPs may constantly update and increase productivity levels among rural and urban households to reach a resilience point to recognize a specific exit strategy or graduation mechanism (Medellín et al., 2015; Villa & Niño-Zarazúa, 2014). An exit strategy or a graduation mechanism from the SPPs probably encourages the engagement of vulnerable groups to improve resilience and be productive in the economy, focus on self-sufficiency, and minimize dependency rate on external assistance (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018).

3.4.1 Official Development Assistance

The ODA has been a turning point for the reconstruction of West Europe since it was established after the Second World War (WW II) (Sachs, 2015, p. 171). Numerous scholars and institutions anticipate that the flow of ODA will play a pivotal role in reconstruction of postwar states and effectively reducing extreme poverty in least-developed economies. ODA serves as a critical mechanism for enhancing the resilience of vulnerable populations, particularly households in extreme poverty across both rural and urban settings. As recipients of ODA, these households are expected to transition from dependency on aid to self-sufficiency by fostering domestic economic growth, contributing to local and national markets, and enhancing production capacities to meet

export standards for regional and international markets. However, the critiques of the ODA argued that the flow of the assistance led to several problems pertinent to ineffectiveness, waste, corruption, and fraud. Since the 1950s, a narrative was presented that international assistance has not been practical because it has been invested in non-productive areas in which the coordination process was too dimmed, and it undertook the national sources of growth in the least developed economies (Action Aid, 2012). Further, the ODA claimed to have a market distortion and negative impact on the domestic source of growth. It was argued that international assistance negatively impacted the development trajectory, kept households in extreme poverty dependent, and was a principal cause of corruption from design, allocation, and implementation (Action Aid, 2012; Bräutigam & Knack 2004; Burnside & Dollar, 2000).

The international assistance, on the other hand, in the form of ODA enhanced development through economic growth or other means (Minoiu & Reddy, 2010). The international assistance has been absorbed appropriately in case primary state institutions were in operation and the recipient states identified the needs and priorities. A significant share of the international assistance is allocated to the maintenance of security-related expenses in the context of fragile and high-risk settings in which checks and balances of stakeholders on extreme poverty reduction remain incapable of being inspected. For example, the effect and impact of international assistance on non-fragile states have had a positive effect on economic development and extreme poverty reduction in the continent of Africa (Karras, 2006; Gomanee et al., 2005; Addison et al., 2005a; Dalgaard et al., 2004; Tarp & Hansen, 2003; Burnside & Dollar, 2000). The positive effect of ODA was viable to those economies which developed effective fiscal, monetary, and trade policies (Burnside & Dollar 2000) or a stable macroeconomic policy had led to a positive impact of the ODA on economic development trajectory (Girma, 2015). Even if international assistance has been allocated for the operation of the state, the effect and impact of international assistance have been positive in the short run; however, in the long run, due to appearances of other factors, the impact of international assistance turned to be negative nevertheless, if the international assistance allocated for the state operation in the areas of education and healthcare sector then it might have a positive impact in the long run (Aghoutane & Karim, 2017).

The UN has tended to the positive spectrum. The UN has been optimistic about the positive impact of the ODA on growth, development, and extreme poverty reduction. The ODA has been an initial

seed to help the poor states to get on the development ladder and reduce extreme poverty effectively and sustainably (Sachs, 2015, pp. 171 – 175; 2005a, p. 69; 2005b; Sachs et al., 2004). Therefore, the Millennium Declaration of 2000 underscored the imperative for developed economies, as donor states, to commit unreservedly to liberating humanity—men, women, and children alike—from the severe and dehumanizing conditions associated with extreme poverty (Reality of Aid, 2014). The UN considered the MDGs progress and measurement as an effective program surrounding extreme poverty reduction (Millennium Development Goal Monitor, 2017). As per the above mandate, the UN set a target to allocate the USD 180 billion per annum for the era of post-2015 development goals to reduce extreme poverty in all forms (Reality of Aid, 2014). Further, the UN portrayed a 70 percent reduction encompassing extreme poverty worldwide as a high achievement between 1990 to 2015. The least developed economies need to integrate into the regional and global economies by improving product quality and easing border crossing and travel for goods and persons to expand employment opportunities and sources of income to sustain the extreme poverty reduction achievements from 1990 to 2015 (Millennium Development Goal Monitor, 2017).

3.4.2 Globalization

Integration of the least developed economies into the global economy is debated from a positive and a negative dimension. The effect of globalization on the poverty phenomenon considered with a positive impact on the economy in the existence of policies to focus the investment on human capital, infrastructure, promotion of credit, technical assistance to farmers, and stabilization of macroeconomic policy (Asongu et al., 2015; Rahim et al., 2014; Harrison, 2007). Globalization and or economic integration focuses on the facilitation of trade, foreign direct investment, the flow of financial capital, the flow of information, and labor mobility, which might affect the income of the household in poverty (Bharadwaj, 2014; Rahim et al., 2014; Bergh & Nilsson, 2011). Globalization could benefit the poor from the flow of capital, supply of products in the wide-range market, and joining labor forces of other countries with a possibility of high payment and fewer work hours because, in the least developed countries, the share of the poor in the economy is unskilled labor which in the context of globalization the poor were better off due to free movements of goods and products and availability of more choices (Easterly, 2007; Harrison, 2007). Based on this intuition, trade reforms are required to be pro-poor so that the share of the poor in the economy is considered to reduce extreme poverty (Bhagwati & Srinivasan, 2002; Krueger, 1983). However, it was not a comparative advantage for the household in extreme poverty where more than one

factor and many goods were involved, for example, a change in the price as a consequence of the trade reform, which the product of the poor could not compete with imports, then, the poor negatively impacted by the trade reform (Davis & Mishra, 2007). The trade reform required realigning and increasing the real income of the poor by considering agricultural products produced by the poor; then, globalization and trade reform led to the reduction of extreme poverty and improved the living standard of the poor (Davis & Mishra, 2007). In specific circumstances, trade openness led to reducing poverty. Though, a general trade agreement may not lead to extreme poverty reduction, for example, in the case of China and Morocco (Ravallion & Chen, 2007). However, there was a positive impact between export activity and poverty reduction in cases of Colombia, Mexico, India, and Poland, and it had presumed that the more the barriers were dismantled, the further extreme poverty was reduced (Harrison, 2007). Abolishing barriers to international trade led to an increment in the per capita income of the poor due to capital flow to the least developed economies (Easterly, 2007) because a decrease in trade barriers might attract capital inflow by encouraging the national and international investments, which might lead to sustainable long-term growth and increase income opportunities among the households in extreme poverty (Arestis & Caner 2009; Prasad et al., 2007; Sala-i-Martin, 2006; Dollar & Kraay, 2001). On the other hand, if the framework of this mechanism had been affected by external productivity, then globalization had no effect or adverse effect on poverty due to capital outflow (Easterly, 2007). In addition, globalization has adversely affected the low-paid laborers in the import sectors since many of them could not transfer to other sectors because of strict labor laws (Harrison, 2007).

Globalization decreased extreme poverty effectively in case the informal and rural sectors were larger, fulfilling the national market demand (Bergh & Nilsson, 2011). Moreover, the supply could reach the regional markets and beyond with fewer trade restrictions (Bergh & Nilsson, 2011). In return, a more significant information flow, know-how, and equipment, henceforth, extreme poverty tend to reduce gradually (Bergh & Nilsson, 2011). To add to that, in the short run and long run, globalization illustrated to have a positive impact on extreme poverty due to the higher trade flows, enhancement of human development, encourage gender equality, women's rights, access to tools of communication like telephones, internet, media, tourism, promoted acceptance toward different lifestyles, and a living standard away from extreme poverty (Tchamyou, 2017; Potrafke, 2015; Bergh & Nilsson, 2011).

Globalization and ODA can contribute to poverty reduction for a certain period. However, this impact may turn negative over time due to the transition from localization to globalization—a shift

from local self-sufficiency to global interconnectedness in trade, culture, and governance. In this process, many local producers struggle to meet the increasing demands and complexities of global markets, ultimately leading to their economic decline and deeper poverty (Aghoutane & Karim, 2017; Tchamyoun, 2017; Stampini et al., 2016; Potrafke, 2015; Bergh & Nilsson, 2011; Albala-Bertrand, 2007). In order to consider the effectiveness of globalization and the ODA on poverty reduction, a graduation mechanism shall be designed for social projects and programs. SPPs ought to be designed and implemented to strengthen the households in poverty with the production capacity and or expansion of the domestic sources of growth through the design and implementation of these projects and programs. A graduation mechanism or an exit strategy from the SPPs measured in a manner when the households crossed the income threshold that differentiates between the poor and non-poor or when the per capita income of the poor had risen above the poverty line (Medellín et al., 2015; Villa & Niño-Zarazúa, 2014).

Afghanistan's socio and political economy have changed since 2001 (Robinson & Acemoglu, 2012, pp. 450 – 455). The Afghanistan economy under the Taliban regime was transformed from wheat to poppy agronomy and from livestock trade to the opium trade; however, the post-Taliban regime supported by the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) to improve security, sub-governance institution building and enhancing reconstruction efforts to accelerate Afghanistan's transition to self-reliance (Mitchell, 2015; Gauster, 2008; Goodhand, 2000). The Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) was a capacity building and infrastructure building in the provinces and communities to help impoverished households, build trust and improve social capital between the households in the communities in Afghanistan (Narayan, 2002). The Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) had partially upgraded the socio-economic situation from a severe poverty condition where in many parts of the country, powerholders, tribal and clan chiefs have control over some territory with the assistance of their private armies (Mitchell, 2015; Rietjens, 2008; Gauster, 2008). In often cases, these had occupied official state positions as governors, ministers, or lawmakers; however, the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) had met on the ground to find out solutions for the common good to contribute to reconstruction efforts in a fast, flexible, and sustainable manner (Mitchell, 2015; Rietjens, 2008; Gauster, 2008).

Afghanistan's economic development has been measurable by comparing the household's socio-economic situation and living standards before and after 2001. Two scenarios could clarify this

notion, a) a life standard under the Taliban regime and b) a change in regime after 2001. Under the Taliban regime, Afghanistan risked becoming a hub for poppy agronomy, opium trafficking, and widespread atrocities. The country could have fallen under the control of tribal leaders and clan chiefs, leading to a struggle for survival among women, the younger generation, and an overall bleak future marked by mass migration and extreme poverty. Although the regime change brought improvements to the socio-economic living standards of both rural and urban households, it also laid the groundwork for a democratic society where women, the youth, and men have a choice and a voice. However, despite these advancements, economic development, as measured by GDP, has remained volatile, with a long trajectory ahead to achieve the living standards of neighboring countries and the broader region.

The literature has not discussed a graduation mechanism and exit strategy in the context of fragile and high-risk states (Medellín et al., 2015; Villa & Niño-Zarazúa, 2014). This knowledge gap had been evaluated from the perspective of the landlocked countries with a focus on perspective and the case of Afghanistan. Nonetheless, fragmented development efforts surrounding extreme poverty reduction were unsustainable and failed to achieve poverty reduction goals. However, the MIOs and the international community have invested a remarkable share of humanitarian aid and development aid to support poverty reduction efforts in Afghanistan (UNAMA, 2018). Therefore, a literature review based on an integrative review of the poverty reduction phenomenon has been conducted. This integrated revision focused on the current situation in Afghanistan, which emerged on themes of extreme poverty reduction. The poverty reduction pledged and achieved remarkable technical and financial assistance under the ODA mechanism to support the poor states and make the poor rural and urban households economically productive to supply products and services in the national markets, regional markets, and beyond in the framework of regional integration and globalization.

3.5 A brief general history of poverty and poverty reduction policy

The development trajectory has affected features of extreme poverty in the past two centuries. The development of the healthcare sector, agriculture sector, education enrolment, and or industrialization principally affected the severity of extreme poverty. Extreme poverty was widespread worldwide in 1800 when most of society struggled to survive though a small fraction and the privileged group could have a decent standard of life. In this era, a minor elite group had sufficient resources based on current extreme poverty measurements above the extreme poverty line (Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2013). Though, despite of widespread extreme poverty level, the world population was increasing. The world population has grown from one billion people in 1800 to 7.9 billion inhabitants today (Roser et al., 2019). The population growth rate in the last two centuries led to industrialization and optimization of productivity as well as improvement of the global healthcare sector and global education enrolment, consequent in a remarkable reduction of extreme poverty at the global level (Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2013). Though, the population growth rate has begun to have a decreasing slope lately. The world population growth rate was 2.2 percent around the 1970s and decreased to one percent in 2019 (Roser et al., 2019). Accordingly, among other global actors on poverty reduction, the UN and the WB have taken a leading role in data collection, initiatives, and initiations of projects, programs, goals, targets, and indicators on poverty reduction at the global level. Therefore, this segment illustrates main historical evidence on poverty reduction and the global programs, processes, and actions taken by the UN and the WB for poverty reduction. However, the poverty economic history has been presented elsewhere by Moatsos (2020) and Alfani (2020).

In 1945, after the Second World War (WW II), the UN invited the head of 50 countries to a world summit in Copenhagen in Denmark for acknowledgment and maintenance of peace to reach social development and social justice (United Nations, 1995). This summit aimed to declare the significance of social improvement, identify the importance of social development and human well-being as a high priority and address social problems such as poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion (United Nations, 1995). Because, more than a billion people have been living in extreme poverty, and more than a hundred million people have been unemployed or underemployed in which; women, people with disabilities, refugees, internally displaced people, and the young generation with formal education have been in poverty and had limited access to income, resources, healthcare services, and nutritious meal (United Nations, 1995). Extreme

poverty condition intertwined with chronic hunger, malnutrition, illicit opiate cultivation, production, transportation, organized crime, widespread corruption, armed conflicts, terrorism, intolerance, incitement to racial, ethnic, and religious hatred, and communicable and chronic diseases (Goodhand, 2008; Stewart et al., 2002; United Nations, 1995). However, the development experiences of many countries made progress in life expectancy, literacy, primary education, access to the basic healthcare sector, family planning, and reduction in mortality rate, which gradually consequent in the reduction of extreme poverty (United Nations, 1995). In addition, globalization has enabled countries to share these development experiences, lesson-learned, cultural values, and aspirations to reduce extreme poverty, manage unemployment, and improve social disintegration (United Nations, 1995). Therefore, poverty reduction, unemployment, and social exclusion might change through the framework of globalization in which human mobility, communication, trade, capital flow, and technological enhancement facilitate sustainable economic development in the least developed economies and reduce extreme poverty (United Nations, 1995).

In 1959-1961, the deadliest famine occurred in China. The state of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has drastically shifted from the agriculture sector to the industrial sector, which introduced the Great Leap Forward (GLF) in 1958, a set of policies to implement a planned economic system. The GLF drastically modified the agriculture sector, prohibited farm ownership, and initiated industrialization favoring iron and steel production (Slawson, 2022; Dodd, 2020). The outcome of the GLF policies and drought caused a significant reduction in grain production, leading to nationwide food scarcity (Slawson, 2022; Dodd, 2020). The nationwide shortage of food took the lives of 25 to 50 million people due to malnutrition, diseases, and starvation during the famine years and reached 70 million deaths post-famine years - this deadliest dramatic industrialization process known as the Great Chinese Famine (GCF) (Slawson, 2022; Dodd, 2020). The GCF was documented as the deadliest famine or the greatest fabricated disaster in history (Slawson, 2022; Dodd, 2020).

In 1964, the United States of America (USA) declared war on Poverty. The war on Poverty was a set of initiatives, namely healthcare and food programs. The healthcare sector programs focused on retired individuals, widows, people with disabilities, and students' audience; the food programs focused on the creation of employment opportunities and study-work programs, and the elementary and secondary education programs subsidized school areas with a significant share of disadvantaged students (Matthews, 2014). The war on poverty initiatives have reduced Poverty

from 1967 to 2012, from 26 percent to 16 percent, and the food program alone kept 4 million out of Poverty in 2012 (Matthews, 2014).

In 1966, the Green Revolution (GR) flourished crop cultivation and production and reduced extreme poverty. The Green Revolution (GR) was a combined agriculture and economic development initiative focusing on scientific research for genetic improvement of major crops such as wheat, rice, and maize which suited various geographic locations and weather conditions (Pingali, 2012). Plant breeding served as a cornerstone strategy of the Green Revolution (GR), facilitating significant advancements in wheat improvement at the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) in Mexico and rice development at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines. These efforts were subsequently augmented by the formation of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), which was established to support the least developed countries by promoting the dissemination and adoption of agricultural technological innovations (Pingali, 2012). The agricultural productivity growth and poverty have high elasticities based on extensive econometrics literature, which used cross-country or time series data. The findings of these studies estimated that, in Asia, each one percent increase in crop productivity decreased the number of people in poverty by 0.48 percent, and for the case of the low-income countries, there was a more significant impact on poverty headcount to a factor of 2.3 times from agriculture sector growth in comparison to other sectors (Pingali, 2012).

In 1970, there was a diversion between people in extreme poverty and non-poor people (Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2013). In this period, the number of people in extreme poverty was nearly 1.77 billion though the number of non-poor has increased since then (Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2013). Nevertheless, the Western European Countries were the leading region that reduced extreme poverty almost to zero by the late 1970s (Moatsos, 2018). West Europe earned this success because of fertile soil, suitable geography which maximized agricultural productivity, food surpluses, and efficient institutions for development and poverty reduction; in contrast, other parts of the world suffer from unsuitable geography, diseases, weak and inefficient institutions that have relatively led to weak economic performance and insignificant poverty reduction (Bhattacharyya, 2017).

In 1971, Afghanistan was recognized as a Least Developed Country (LDC) by the UN under the General Assembly resolution number: A/RES/2768(XXVI). The UN started a process to recognize vulnerable countries with the lowest indicators of socioeconomic development and named this

category as the LDCs in the 1960s (United Nations, 2020). In 1971, the General Assembly of the UN established the category of the LDCs in order to facilitate international assistance for the vulnerable and least-developed members (United Nations, 2020; General Assembly, 1971). To monitor and measure the progress, the UN held the first conference on the least developed countries in 1981, the second conference was held in 1990, the third conference was held in 2001 and extended the LDCs to the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN–OHRLLS), the fourth conference was held in 2011, and the fifth conference was planned to be held in 2022 (United Nations, 2020; United Nations, 2011; United Nations, 2001; United Nations, 1991; United Nations, 1982).

In 1981, the WB initiated a program to collect data on households in extreme poverty at a global level (Peer, 2021). This WB program emphasized conducting a household survey and found out that 44 percent of the world’s population was living in extreme poverty (Peer, 2021).

In 1990, the WB introduced a mechanism to measure extreme poverty. This measurement featured the well-being of an individual based on spending power to one or less than one dollar per person per day (World Development Report 1990 English, 2008). Based on this measurement, around 50 percent of the world’s poor lived in developing countries, and almost 50 percent of those in extreme poverty lived in South Asia (World Development Report 1990 English, 2008). Further, in the category of South Asian Countries, Afghanistan, as a low-income country, sharply declined to 40 percent of school enrollment due to war and civil unrest caused by the Soviet Union Invasion between 1980 and 1985, which increasingly deepened the severity of extreme poverty (World Development Report 1990 English, 2008).

In 1992, the UN adopted an agenda to emphasize a bottom-to-the-top approach at the conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in, Brazil. The conference named the program ‘Agenda 21’ to prominence on domestic policies of developing countries to reduce extreme poverty (United Nations, 1992). Extreme poverty reduction has prioritized as a high responsibility of the states through domestic development plans, strategies, policies, and actions in which the UN plays a pivotal role in coordinating and collaborating with the international cooperation, international, regional, sub-regional organizations, non-governmental organizations, and public participation to add to extreme poverty reduction efforts (United Nations, 1992).

In 1992, the UN declared October 17 as the international day to eradicate poverty (General Assembly, 1992). On October 17, 1987, over a hundred thousand people assembled in Paris, France's capital, to commemorate lives lost due to extreme poverty, violence, and hunger (UNESCO, 2018). The participant of this gathering chose this date to be identical to 1948, when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was signed and proclaimed that poverty is a violation of human rights and acknowledged so that these rights should be respected (UNESCO, 2018). Therefore, people gathered on October 17 every year to reassure commitment and solidarity with impoverished people. Consequently, the General Assembly of the United Nations declared October 17 as the International Day for Eradication of Poverty (UNESCO, 2018; General Assembly, 1992).

In 1995, the UN initiated several phases based on a decade timeframe for poverty reduction. The first UN decade for poverty reduction was from 1997 to 2006, the second decade covered from 2008 to 2017, and the third decade is planned to cover from 2018 to 2027 (United Nations, 2019; Secretary-General, 2018; Secretary-General, 2008; United Nations, 2008; Secretary-General, 2007; United Nations, 1997).

The first decade of poverty reduction was considered inclusive and people-centered. People were positioned as the main factor for sustainable development and identification of poverty's multidimensional and complex nature through national development policies and frameworks (Secretary-General, 2007; United Nations, 1997). The outcome of the first decade was many summits and conferences such as the Millennium Declaration, the Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Finance for Development, and the 2005 World Summit, which the outcome caused poverty reduction in some regions, though poverty raised in some countries, especially among women and children (Secretary-General, 2008; United Nations, 2008). The second decade of poverty reduction has emphasized the importance of financial mobilization, resources for development, rising productivity, facilitating a suitable environment for private sector investment, and encouraging entrepreneurship to improve living standards (Secretary-General, 2008; United Nations, 2008). The third decade for poverty reduction has highlighted accomplishments in creating employment opportunities, gender equality, education enrolment and quality, the healthcare sector, social protection measures, agriculture and rural development, and climate change adaptation and mitigation (United Nations, 2019; Secretary-General, 2018). However, Sub-Saharan Africa and the least developed countries hosted 783 million people in

extreme poverty in 2013; more than 50 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa and nearly a third lived in South Asia (United Nations, 2019; Secretary-General, 2018). In addition, the third decade of poverty reduction has identified the principal cause of extreme poverty and hunger intertwined with conflicts, drought, and disaster (United Nations, 2019; Secretary-General, 2018; Stewart et al., 2002).

In 2000, the UN established the MDGs, a comprehensive development framework aimed at addressing critical global challenges, including the reduction of extreme poverty. These goals, accompanied by specific targets and measurable indicators, were designed to guide, and monitor progress from 2000 to 2015, using 1990 as the baseline year for evaluation (WHO, 2018). In 2000, world leaders committed to reducing extreme poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, and discrimination against women, reducing child mortality rate, improving maternal health, and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, other diseases, and environmental degradation. As a result, developing countries have reached a certain level of progress in extreme poverty reduction and cope undernutrition (WHO, 2018).

In 2010, the UN achieved an extreme poverty reduction rate of 50 percent based on the 1990 baseline, five years earlier than the expected timeline for the MDGs (Peer, 2021). However, the MDGs achievements were unevenly obtained in various parts of the world regions (WHO, 2018). For example: in the case of Afghanistan, it took ten years to unify and adopt the MDGs into the national development policies, strategies, and action plans. The MDGs, Targets, and Indicators for extreme poverty reduction were presented subsequently.

In 2012, the UN adopted a resolution under the title of ‘the future we want’ with the head of the states, governments, high-profile representatives, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to commit to sustainable economic, social, and environmental for present and future generations and future of the planet (Secretary-General, 2012). The agenda of the future we want was concerned that one in five persons or over a billion people live in extreme poverty, and one in seven persons, or 14 percent is undernourished (Secretary-General, 2012). In addition, public health issues pertinent to pandemics and endemics remain an omnipresent threat to human security (Secretary-General, 2012). The participants of the future we want committee acknowledged that the world population might exceed 9 billion people by 2050; therefore, the committee emphasized on increasing efforts for sustainable development, especially on poverty reduction, hunger, and preventable diseases (Secretary-General, 2012).

In 2015, the WB updated the global poverty line measurement from the USD 1.25 to the USD 1.90 (World Bank, 2015). The WB has considered the cost of basic food, clothing, and shelter based on 2011 prices for the cost of living at the global level and added the USD 0.65 to the 2005 global poverty line and raised the real value for 2015 which in this period 700 million people lived in extreme poverty (World Bank, 2015). In parallel, the UN have introduced the SDGs, Targets, and Indicators to reduce all forms of poverty to 3 percent from 2015 to 2030. The SDGs, Targets, and Indicators for poverty reduction have illustrated the latter.

In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic caused tens of millions of people to fall into extreme poverty. The Covid-19 pandemic weakened economic growth globally (Mahler et. al, 2021). The high-income and low-income countries partially and wholly locked down the national economies to prevent the further spread of the Covid-19 virus (Mahler et. al, 2021). The economic lockdown resulted in unemployment, work closure, travel bans, increase in food prices, rising debt level, and decreased income level, which caused extreme poverty to rise (Mahler et al, 2021). Consequently, the Covid-19 pandemic pushed 97 million people into extreme poverty around the globe in 2020 (Mahler et. al, 2021). The low-income countries and fragile regions expected to see a further increase in extreme poverty and may not be able to manage the Covid-19 pandemic appropriately, and the Covid-19 pandemic effect is expected to have a long-term effect (Mahler et. al, 2021).

The MDGs was initiated as a set of development goals to reduce extreme poverty and signed by 191 member states accompanied by 22 MIOs such as the WB, the IMF and the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (DAC-OECD) (Nancy & Yontcheva, 2006; United Nations Development Group, 2003; United Nations, 2000). The Millennium Development Agenda (MDA) was pertinent to 8 goals, 21 targets, and 60 indicators (UNICEF, 2014). Among others, extreme poverty reduction was goal number one, with three targets and nine indicators (UNICEF, 2014). Indicators have been used to help states and stakeholders establish effective implementation and monitoring strategies and measure the progress and result of the goals (Targets, indicators and monitoring, n.d.).

Table 11 outlines the targets and indicators for MDG One: Poverty Reduction. The goals include halving the proportion of people living on less than USD 1 per day, achieving full and productive employment for all, and reducing hunger by 2015. Key indicators track income poverty,

employment patterns, and nutritional status, such as the poverty gap ratio, employment-to-population ratio, and prevalence of underweight children under five.

Table 11: MDG One: poverty reduction - targets and indicators

Targets	Indicators
1. “Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day”	1. “Proportion of population below \$1 (PPP) per day 2. Poverty gap ratio 3. Share of poorest quintile in national consumption”
2. “Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people”	4. “Growth rate of GDP per person employed 5. Employment-to-population ratio 6. Proportion of employed people living below \$1 (PPP) per day 7. Proportion of own-account and contributing family workers in total employment”
3. “Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger”	8. “Prevalence of underweight children under five years of age 9. Proportion of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption”

Source: Adopted from UNICEF (2014).

The MDGs laid a foundation to sustain and expand poverty reduction achievements. Therefore, the General Assembly of the UN introduced the SDGs in Resolution 70/1 in 2015. The SDGs included 17 goals, 169 targets, and 230 indicators that were fully adopted by member states and MIOs (United Nations, 2016; Pogge & Sengupta, 2015; United Nations, 2015). The SDGs set priority number one to ending all forms of poverty with seven targets and twelve indicators by 2030.

Table 12 presents the targets and indicators for SDG One: No Poverty, which aims to eradicate extreme poverty and reduce multidimensional poverty by 2030. The targets emphasize expanding social protection systems, ensuring equal access to economic resources and basic services, and strengthening resilience to economic and environmental shocks. The indicators measure poverty levels, social protection coverage, access to services and land rights, disaster-related impacts, and government resource allocation toward poverty reduction and pro-poor development policies.

Table 12: SDG One: poverty reduction - targets and indicators

Targets	Indicators
1. “By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day”	1. “Proportion of population below the international poverty line, by sex, age, employment status and geographical location (urban/rural)”
2. “By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions”	2.1. “Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age 2.2. Proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions”
3. “Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable”	3.1. “Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, by sex, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable”
4. “By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance”	4.1. “Proportion of population living in households with access to basic services 4.2. Proportion of total adult population with secure tenure rights to land, with legally recognized documentation and who perceive their rights to land as secure, by sex and by type of tenure”

5. “By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social, and environmental shocks and disasters”	5.1. “Number of deaths, missing persons and persons affected by disaster per 100,000 people 5.2. Direct disaster economic loss in relation to global GDP 5.3. Number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies”
A. “Ensure significant mobilization of resources from a variety of sources, including through enhanced development cooperation, in order to provide adequate and predictable means for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, to implement programs and policies to end poverty in all its dimensions”	A.1. “Proportion of resources allocated by the government directly to poverty reduction programs A.2. Proportion of total government spending on essential services (education, health, and social protection)”
B. “Create sound policy frameworks at the national, regional, and international levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies, to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions”	B.1. “Proportion of government recurrent and capital spending to sectors that disproportionately benefit women, the poor and vulnerable groups”

Source: Adopted from UN (2016).

As per the above table, targets one to five have been time-bound to 2030; however, tiers A and B have been time unbound. Target number one has focused on extreme poverty reduction based on the international poverty line featured on a monetary value. However, each state’s national circumstances, such as security, political stability, and macroeconomic certainty, affect poverty reduction efforts and how each state defines poverty. Target numbers two to five focused on national aspects of poverty reduction in various forms (United Nations, 2016).

The MIOs discovered that the least developed states could not follow the development pace in a specific timeframe. The least developed economies are restricted due to domestic challenges

including, inadequate human and financial resources, which delay the unification and implementation of the progress of the development goals, targets, and indicators. Therefore, the WB and IMF launched an initiative to ease the development pace. The WB and the IMF developed the HIPC concept jointly. This initiative aimed to relieve the debts on states that cannot manage depth burden (International Monetary Fund, 2016a).

This initiative accelerated poverty reduction efforts and enhanced social policies through depth relief (International Monetary Fund, 2016a). However, each HIPC had to complete specific assignments at the national level to reach the eligibility criteria for the HIPC Initiative (International Monetary Fund, 2016a). The eligibility criteria for depth relief are set forth below:

1. Borrow soft loans and grants for the poorest countries from the World Bank's International Development Agency (IDA) and IMF section for poverty reduction and growth trust,
2. Have a debt burden that traditional debt relief cannot facilitate,
3. Have developed effective reform and policies in coordination with the WB and IMF assistance,
4. Have initiated inclusive PRSP,
5. Have good performance following the WB and IMF loan programs,
6. Have implemented reform and cooperation at the primary stages with the WB and IMF,
7. Have initiated and implemented a PRSP for at least one year (International Monetary Fund, 2016a).

The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative promoted to the Multilateral Debt Relieve Initiative (MDRI). The MDRI was proposed by the G8 to offer 100 percent debt relief through the WB, the IMF, and the African Development Fund (AfDF) (International Monetary Fund, 2016b). The MDRI aimed to accelerate development with clear eligibility criteria (International Monetary Fund, 2016b). The MDRI criteria were pertinent to poor countries reaching the completion point for the HIPC Initiative, all countries with below USD 380 per capita income, as well as implemented macroeconomic policies, developed PRSP and management of public expenditure (International Monetary Fund, 2016b).

For the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HICP) initiative, it estimated USD 76 billion was allocated, and for the MDRI, it estimated the USD 3.4 billion was allocated (International Monetary Fund, 2016b). Afghanistan was part of the two depth relief initiatives (International Monetary Fund, 2016a; International Monetary Fund, 2016b; International Monetary Fund, 2010). As a

result, Afghanistan's debt relief was estimated USD 571.4 million (International Monetary Fund, 2010).

The debt crises were relieved through other initiatives in the least developed states in Latin America. Washington-based institutions such as the WB, the IMF, and the Department of Treasury adopted macroeconomic policies known as *the Washington Consensus* (Williamson, 1990, 1993, 2009). The Washington Consensus was initiated as a set of macroeconomic policies to deal with the debt crises and to stabilize, liberalize and privatize the economy of the least developed states in Latin America (Williamson, 1990, 1993, 2009). The latter, the WB, IMF, and the Department of Treasury had accepted the Washington Consensus as a development package for policy reform for least developed economies in other parts of the globe to apply justified policies and a shift from a state-led to market-oriented policies (Rodrik, 2006; Gore, 2000). This transition from an informal institution based on norms, customs, and traditions to good enough governance and good governance took three hundred years for the West economic development (Yifu, 2012, pp. 242-246; Grindle, 2002; 2011; Williamson, 2000). This development trajectory emerged in a four-layer of societal, economic, and political development as below:

1. customs, traditions, and religion,
2. politics, judiciary, and bureaucracy,
3. a setup of governance structure and its interaction and
4. reach prices and quantities or market-oriented policy (Williamson, 2000).

The experience and lessons learned from the development and poverty reduction trajectory from the West economic development might help the least developed and developing countries decrease the timeframe and push households out of extreme poverty. For example, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, Mauritius, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam received the development trajectory and transitioned well. As a result, these states improved subsistence economies, effectively utilized comparative advantage, and moved millions of people out of extreme poverty (Yifu, 2012, pp. 85 - 97).

3.6 Conclusions and implications

Over the past two centuries, the global landscape of extreme poverty has undergone significant transformations. Industrialization, coupled with population growth and advancements in productivity, has driven substantial improvements in living standards. Enhancements in healthcare and widespread education enrollment closely tied these changes to poverty reduction on a global scale (Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2013). Among the significant actors driving this progress, the UN and the WB have played pivotal roles by initiating, developing, and implementing frameworks, goals, and programs specifically targeting extreme poverty reduction.

The introduction of the MDGs by the United Nations General Assembly marked a milestone in global poverty reduction efforts. Ratified by 191 member states and 22 international organizations, the MDGs embodied a collective commitment to address extreme poverty and avert human catastrophes by focusing on the needs of vulnerable populations in least-developed economies. These goals were succeeded in 2015 by the SDGs, which broadened the scope of poverty reduction to encompass multiple dimensions, aiming to eliminate all forms of poverty by 2030 (United Nations, 2015; United Nations, 2000). With three specific targets, nine indicators under the MDGs, and seven and twelve indicators under the SDGs, these frameworks provide clear, measurable benchmarks for assessing global progress (United Nations, 2016; UNICEF, 2014).

Despite these determined global commitments, the progress of least-developed economies, including Afghanistan, could be faster and more balanced. The UN recognized delays in implementing poverty reduction targets, attributing underperformance to multiple factors, particularly the overwhelming debt burdens these economies face. In response, developed nations and multilateral organizations such as the WB, the IMF, and AfDB introduced the HIPC initiative, which offered debt relief to help these economies meet development goals. The HIPC initiative later expanded into the MDRI proposed by the G8, which sought to provide 100 percent debt forgiveness through mechanisms facilitated by the WB, IMF, and African Development Bank (International Monetary Fund, 2016a; 2016b). The HIPC and MDRI programs collectively allocated USD 76 billion and USD 3.4 billion, respectively, in debt relief globally. Afghanistan benefited significantly, receiving USD 571.4 million under these initiatives, enabling a reallocation of resources toward development efforts (International Monetary Fund, 2016a; 2016b; International Monetary Fund, 2010).

The poverty reduction challenges faced by Afghanistan are deeply rooted in its socio-economic structure, characterized by a subsistence economy. Households experiencing poverty rely on small-

scale agricultural production or informal labor markets, which offer limited and unstable income opportunities. Subsistence agricultural products, being perishable and vulnerable to market fluctuations, provide insufficient earnings to meet basic needs. Similarly, competition for unskilled labor in local markets forces breadwinners to seek precarious employment, often through irregular means such as daily construction work, informal workshops, or illegal mining activities (UNCTAD, 2013). Such circumstances perpetuate poverty and limit household capacity to access education, healthcare, and other essential services.

To assess and address these challenges, Afghanistan and its stakeholders adopted the CBN approach to measure household consumption and evaluate the depth and severity of poverty (National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, 2007/08). This method provided critical insights into the consumption patterns of rural and urban households, enabling policymakers to design targeted interventions. However, the reliance on mono-dimensional poverty measurement limited the scope of analysis, prompting the subsequent introduction of the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). This framework allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of poverty by incorporating various aspects of well-being, such as health, education, and living standards. Despite these methodological advancements, extreme poverty in Afghanistan remains on an upward trajectory, highlighting persistent gaps in policy implementation and program effectiveness.

Afghanistan's poverty reduction programs have targeted rural and urban households with initiatives to improve livelihoods. Farmers, for instance, received technical training, awareness programs, improved seeds, and equipment to enhance agricultural productivity. However, these efforts often lacked a precise graduation mechanism, leaving beneficiaries dependent on continuous aid without achieving sustainable self-sufficiency (Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2013). A robust graduation framework is essential to ensure that households transition from reliance on aid to long-term productivity, resilience, and economic independence. Such a mechanism would help identify the specific needs of impoverished households, minimize duplication of efforts, and mitigate vulnerabilities to corruption, waste, and fraud. Additionally, it would address challenges posed by natural shocks like droughts and floods, which frequently derail poverty reduction initiatives as well as projects around military engagement of the international forces.

Despite these efforts, systemic factors such as instability, insecurity, and economic uncertainty have undermined the effectiveness of poverty reduction programs in Afghanistan. The fragile socio-economic environment has exacerbated vulnerabilities, leaving many households unable to benefit from development projects fully. Moreover, the absence of comprehensive value-chain

integration in agricultural and industrial sectors has limited the impact of interventions, preventing sustainable growth.

Afghanistan should reassess its development policies and strengthen collaboration with international stakeholders to overcome these challenges. Policies may prioritize long-term sustainability, focusing on building resilience among rural and urban households. Effective poverty reduction requires a multidimensional approach that combines targeted interventions, robust graduation mechanisms, and inclusive economic policies. Additionally, international aid programs should align closely with national priorities to avoid fragmentation and enhance the overall impact of development efforts.

In conclusion, the efforts of extreme poverty in Afghanistan highlight the need for tailored, context-specific strategies that address both immediate needs and structural challenges. Afghanistan can make meaningful progress toward reducing poverty and fostering sustainable development by adopting a comprehensive approach that integrates global frameworks like the SDGs with localized interventions. Collaborative efforts between the government, international organizations, and local stakeholders will be critical to achieving these objectives and ensuring a brighter future for the country's most vulnerable populations.

4 Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This research employs a nested mixed methods design that strategically emphasizes the qualitative component to explore the intricate process of poverty reduction while nesting the quantitative component to evaluate the outcomes of these efforts. This methodological framework is thoroughly crafted to address the challenges inherent in Afghanistan's unique socio-economic and political landscape.

At the core of this study is a qualitative research approach, which is given precedence due to its ability to deeply investigate the complex processes driving poverty reduction. The nested mixed methods design, where qualitative inquiry is dominant and quantitative analysis is integrated within, not only adapts to the budgetary, temporal, and security constraints but also underscores the importance of understanding the underlying causes, results, and indicators that shape poverty reduction.

In line with an interpretive and deductive approach, qualitative research is guided by a theoretical framework designed to explore and test hypotheses related to poverty reduction. In-depth interviews with key stakeholders-including policymakers, representatives from international organizations, and academic experts-unveiled the primary causes and contributing factors of poverty reduction in Afghanistan, taking into account the country's historical, cultural, political, and socio-economic context.

Although the study is predominantly qualitative, the deductive approach ensures that the quantitative component plays a critical role in providing a comprehensive understanding of the impacts and outcomes of poverty reduction initiatives. Given the constraints of the research, including a limited budget, a tight schedule, and security concerns, the data collection was carefully planned and confined to a specific four-week period in Kabul. Prior to the fieldwork, interviews, and discussions were carefully scheduled with informants and participants to ensure the security and well-being of all involved. This detailed planning allowed the research to be both effective and secure, addressing the inherent challenges of conducting research in Afghanistan.

4.2 Research approach

The environment to research⁸ the phenomenon of poverty requires detailed study due to the complexity of the research problem in the case of Afghanistan. The development trajectory and tranquility of the rural and urban households are challenged due to decades of the ongoing war, which lead to the absence of statistical data. The CSO was unable to conduct census surveys since 1978, which causes an absence of statistical data to initiate projects, and programs and build economic development policies or strategies to reduce extreme poverty (National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, 2007/08). Though, the process of statistical data collection was reinitiated in 2002 with a number of shortfalls.

The UN and international organizations assisted the state of Afghanistan in restarting the process of population census and surveys based on the WFP, department of VAM data and statistics (Pinney, 2004). The VAM conducted surveys and collected data to distribute food packages nationwide during the war. The VAM data was transferred to the MRRD and the CSO (Pinney, 2004). In addition to the UN, other organizations have collected data for the distribution of humanitarian assistance and administrative purposes, which recognized that it is small in scope and coverage that could not meet the needs of the nation-building and state-building processes in Afghanistan.

The CSO conducted several surveys, such as the NRVA Surveys, ALCS, and the IE&LFS. In parallel, the CSO was renamed to NSIA. These assessments and surveys were outsourced to an international organization that collected the data in one year and analyzed the data in the following year. The data was not used as input for policy development due to being outdated. In addition, the statistical data was political manipulated to favor the ruling party to win the elections and distribute the national budget, attracting international financial packages and the ODA. The ruling party assigned key executive body entities and departments to pursue procedures of the international organization's requirements and follow goals, targets, and indicators of the UN and the Washington Consensus to gain assistance. The policy development and poverty reduction strategy circles have been targeted to meet the eligibility criteria to be qualified for the privileges of the IMF and the

⁸ A research approach is conducted through words, numbers, or a combination of both depending upon the complexity of the research problem and features of field study and environment for a phenomenon under research. Research can be conceptualized as a meticulous and methodical endeavor that examines, investigates, and reconfigures existing realities, theories, and applications (Jamshed; 2014).

WB for the release of financial packages as well as the privileges of the UN for the flow of the ODA. Therefore, outdated data and manipulation data are consequent to under question validity, objectivity, and reliability of the statistical assessments and surveys.

Afghanistan's development efforts often lack the coordination, coherence, and contextual appropriateness to enable sustainable domestic sources of growth effectively. National and international organizations usually collect project-based data and statistics, but these efforts result in fragmented and inconsistent findings. National and international organizations frequently develop independent datasets for individual projects, leading to significant disparities among the findings. For instance, comprehensive project cycles, including baseline surveys, follow-up surveys, end-line surveys, and impact assessments, are rarely completed. Instead, reports were generally publish with a primary focus on recipient or beneficiary satisfaction, leaving critical gaps in understanding the broader impacts of these initiatives.

Addressing a multifaceted phenomenon such as poverty requires a robust methodological approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative dimensions. A qualitative approach is indispensable for uncovering the underlying causes of poverty, identifying barriers to effective development processes, and evaluating the contextual dynamics. Meanwhile, a quantitative approach is essential for systematically analyzing the drivers of poverty and quantifying its devastating impact on the lives of rural and urban households. This combination enriches the understanding of poverty and facilitates the development of evidence-based and practical recommendations for effective poverty reduction initiatives (Halcomb & Hickman, 2015).

4.3 Research Design

This study intends to assess the development policies for poverty reduction and offer an alternative agenda for the poverty reduction stakeholders on poverty reduction policies in the case of Afghanistan.

This single case study research conducted through thorough, in-depth interview analysis to explore authentic information to recognize principle-causes of poverty and drivers of poverty in the case of Afghanistan (Ponelis, 2015; Tuli, 2010). Furthermore, within the social sciences division, case studies play a vital role in empirical research, facilitating the identification of themes and categories related to a phenomenon by collecting and analyzing data from diverse sources and considering multiple factors (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016; Piore, 2006; Rowley, 2002). In this case study, a comprehensive consideration extended to the poverty phenomenon to realize the view of each stakeholder, sector line ministries and entities, and academia, to apprehend the poverty reduction process and results of efforts on extreme poverty reduction and recognize the principle cause of poverty through one on one in-depth interview (Creswell, 2014, p. 231) in which a qualitative case study consider to study extreme poverty in its natural context (Starman, 2013; Baxter & Jack, 2008) with a quantitative component to recognize the effect of globalization and flow of the ODA on extreme poverty reduction in the context of Afghanistan (Ivankova et al., 2006).

Yin (2003; 2009) and Creswell (2013; 2014) provided extensive insights into case study research, highlighting that in a single case study, six to eight interviews may be conducted to achieve the research objectives, and data shall be collected from diverse sources until relevant themes emerge. However, in some single case studies, researchers have conducted as many as 15 to 30 interviews to ensure data saturation is reached (Marshall et al., 2013, p. 13). A data saturation pattern may affect the subjectivity of statistical data and expected an objective and authentic unbiased research to offer an alternative agenda on extreme poverty reduction (Saunders et al., 2018; Hennink et al., 2017; O'reilly & Parker, 2013; Mason, 2010; Bowen, 2005; 2008; Guest et al., 2006). The current case study considers a saturation pattern during the data collection phase of this research process. This approach aligns with the context of Afghanistan, where state-building challenges affect research and development due to the lack of impartial statistical data, the absence of a baseline, and the division of the public sector between the president and the prime minister, resulting in the political manipulation of the development process and trajectory.

4.4 Research Methods

The choice of a research methodology is based on the research question, the research purpose, and the researcher's intention to reach the expected outcome (Opoku et al., 2016). In addition, parameters such as availability of resources, time, logistics, and given context of a case study and geography determine the selection of an appropriate methodology for mixed methods research approach (Venkatesh, et al. 2016; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Hanson et al., 2005; Creswell et al., 2003). Oun and Bach (2014) defined a *research method* as “[...] research method is a particular way of studying something in order to discover new information about it or understand it better”. To understand the complexity of poverty in the case of Afghanistan, it is necessary to employ a mixed-methods research approach, such as the concurrent nested method. This methodology integrates qualitative and quantitative perspectives, enabling a comprehensive understanding of poverty's complex nature and fundamental dynamics. In a concurrent nested mixed methods approach embed or nest qualitative data in a quantitative strategy or quantitative data in a qualitative strategy (Yu & Khazanchi, 2017; Terrell, 2012; Creswell et al., 2003). The concurrent nested mixed methods strategy prioritizes the primary data collection phase of the research process and placed less emphasis on the nested approach (Terrell, 2012). The concurrent nested mixed methods approach is a flexible method in which the researcher may decide to collect the data before, during, and after the intervention (Creswell et al., 2003). Unlike sequential approaches, the concurrent nested mixed methods approach nest or embed an approach in an unequal style, emphasizing one method with a component of the following method (Yu & Khazanchi, 2017; Creswell et al., 2003). The concurrent nested mixed methods strategy may or may not specify the design through a theoretical perspective. However, the strategy of this method focusses on:

1. “Primarily purpose is [to gain] a broader perspective than could be gained from using only the predominant data collection method,
2. [A] secondary purpose is [the] use of embedded method to address different research questions or garner information from different groups or levels within an organization” (Terrell, 2012).

The concurrent nested mixed methods approach has the advantage of simultaneously collecting qualitative and quantitative data, and the collection of two types of data enriches the perspective of each data strand and provides a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Terrell, 2012). Further, the nested mixed methods design is considered an appropriate method in case of unavailability of time, resources, and logistics though challenging to integrate answer different questions with the integration of two methods or to answer the same question with different data sets (Creswell et al., 2003). However, the data shall be transformed to allow the integration phase of the research process during the analysis stage, which may lead to concerns in resolving discrepancies between the qualitative and quantitative data. In addition, absence of sufficient literature may exist in this area, and “results may be biased by differing priorities assigned to research design results” (Terrell, 2012).

The following section will elaborate on the nested mixed methods approach for the qualitative strand, the quantitative strand, and data analysis, interpretation, and mixing strategies for both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The qualitative research approach focusses on essential qualitative elements pertinent to the qualitative method, a guideline for the interviews, followed by interview questions, and a data collection strategy. Henceforth, the quantitative research approach emphasis on a fundamental aspect of the quantitative research approach, included to the quantitative method, units of measurement, and testing the hypothesis. Consequently, both the qualitative and quantitative research approaches merge at the analysis phase of this nested mixed methods research process.

4.5 The qualitative research method

A qualitative research method⁹ is widely applied in different academic fields, especially in the social sciences, to comprehensively understand and realize human behavior and the consequences which lead to a specific behavior chosen by an individual (Oun & Bach, 2014). In other words, a qualitative research method is traditionally characterized as induction, discovery, exploration, theory or hypothesis generation, which the researcher primarily considers as an instrument for data collection and qualitative analysis; on the other hand, a quantitative research method is traditionally characterized as a deduction, confirmation, theory or hypothesis testing, explanation, prediction, standardized data collection and statistical analysis (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Notably, a qualitative research method study and reply to questions such as how, where, what, when, and why an individual behaves in a specific manner regarding a particular matter (Oun & Bach, 2014). The research question and the matter under study determines the effectiveness of a research method approach based on philosophical traditions to “study nature of knowledge and the methods of obtaining it” (Harper, 2011) to generate in-depth and illustrative information to understand the research problem from multiple perspectives (Queirós et al., 2017; Jamshed, 2014) in which some researchers:

1. “Focus on individual subjective experience,
2. Investigate social processes,
3. Examine the societal realm” (Harper, 2011).

The qualitative research method may use a crucial case to demonstrate a phenomenon to the readers since a limited number of in-depth case studies are conducted to explore a phenomenon through a single case information and or conduct a cross-case comparison analysis (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie,

⁹ Queirós, Faria, and Almeida (2017) defined the qualitative research method as such that the “[...] qualitative research works with the universe of meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values, and attitudes, which corresponds to a deeper space of relationships, processes, and phenomena that cannot be reduced to the operationalization of variables”. In addition, Oun and Bach (2014) defined qualitative research method from a universal perspective as such the “qualitative research is a method of inquiry employed in many different academic disciplines, traditionally in the social sciences, but also in market research and further contexts” and as an empirical perspective as “*the researcher collects sense data about the phenomenon under study and works on them in some way organizes them, and hold them up against ideas, hypotheses, and categorical definitions as a way of testing them. As a result of how focused this method is, a small number of participants is legitimate as [a] source of information*”.

2004). In this situation, due to the qualitative method's density of the text or image, the researcher may be able to consider some of the most relevant information but shift the pattern to combine the data into themes (Creswell, 2014, p. 195). Further, the qualitative research method may study dynamic processes pertinent to documenting sequential patterns, changes, and causes of a particular event to respond to the stakeholders' local situations, conditions, and requirements (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In this context, the researcher in a qualitative method is assigned as an instrument possibly under political and ethical pressure for sincere data collection, data analysis, and presentation (Creswell, 2014, p. 195; Lincoln, 1995).

The qualitative research method provides scholars with various choices throughout the data collection, including grounded theory practice, shadowing, storytelling, ethnography, or narratology. All these data collection methods involve direct one-on-one contact with informants or group interactions. Standard data collection methods include individual interviews, group discussions, observations, and action research in which theory utilize as a preliminary guide to design and data collection in the framework of an iterative process for data collection, data analysis and final presentation of the research (Oun & Bach, 2014; Jamshed, 2014; Walsham, 2006). Furthermore, the qualitative research method depends on several factors, such as the data collection process and research features, including the research quality, the data's relevance to the research, the researcher's ability to observe and interpret, and the accurate recording of phenomena. Data collection and analysis are significant components of qualitative research. The process begins with field interviews and data collection, followed by thorough data analysis to materialize the concept (Oun & Bach, 2014; Jamshed, 2014; Qu & Dumay, 2011).

The data analysis phase is viewed through different lenses by Creswell (2014) and Oun and Bach (2014). Creswell (2014) emphasizes on qualitative research designs, and Oun and Bach (2014) highlighted procedures. Creswell (2014) categorized the data analysis phase through general procedures to analyze the data and specific steps to analyze the data through the perspective of four qualitative research designs as follows:

1. A narrative analysis considers insights of the interview participants in each interview setting, the experience of the interviewee, and the climax,

2. The phenomenological analysis reflects the significance of verbal illustration and behavioral data to classify statements, summarize units of meaning, and explore the fundamental nature of exploration.
3. Grounded theory analysis narrowed down to three steps:
 - 3.1) open coding, a primary arrangement of data to generate meaning,
 - 3.2) axial coding, interlinked area of categories of codes with placement in a theoretical framework, and
 - 3.3) selective coding, shaping the report from the connection of these categories.
4. Case studies include a detailed illustration of a setting or an interview participant, preceded by data analysis to generate themes or issues (Creswell, 2014, p. 196).

Oun and Bach (2014) classify data analysis techniques into three primary categories: interpretive, recursive abstraction, and mechanical methods. The interpretive approach focuses on understanding human actions, intentions, and beliefs within specific cultural and contextual frameworks. This method emphasizes deriving meaning through human engagement with the data, making it central to qualitative research methodologies.

The interpretive data analysis process often involves coding, a technique designed to organize and systematize data to facilitate interpretation. Coding requires the researcher to thoroughly review the data, marking and delineating significant segments during this process. Each segment is assigned a code, typically a word or short phrase, to differentiate it within the coding framework. These codes are subsequently synthesized into a cohesive analysis, enabling the researcher to identify the data's patterns, themes, and relationships. This process typically unfolds below distinct phases of data analysis:

1. “Comparing units of meaning across categories for inductive category coding;
2. Refining categories;
3. ‘Delimiting the theory’ by exploring relationships and patterns across categories; and Integrating data to write theory” (Oun & Bach, 2014).

An interpretive technique applies to gain from flexibility, open-endedness, and sensitive data collection and analysis in which complexity, details, process, and context are assumed to be effective in this technique (Deem, 2002). The recursive abstraction is mainly on summarizing the data in steps and redoing this process until it reaches a compact summary maintaining accuracy

and distinctiveness. The mechanical techniques known as content analysis rely on a computerized method for analyzing, scanning, summarizing, and reducing extensive qualitative data sets that a human may find incredibly challenging to analyze (Oun & Bach, 2014).

The interpretive technique focuses on human understanding from a structured given context by the shared belief system, which constitutes the culture of that group (Oun & Bach, 2014). Particularly, the interpretive qualitative research paradigm is presumed suitable to uncover the reality of the phenomenon of extreme poverty from within the society and take into consideration the experience and ideas of the participants to ensure confirmability (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Creswell et al., 2006) to depend on the interviewee participants' idea and establish a condition where they can construct meaning of the situation to address the 'process' for poverty reduction (Creswell, 2014, p. 8; Creswell, 2007, p. 21). In addition, in the context of Afghanistan, the inexistence of reliable data, insignificant knowledge generation, and fragmented economic development process is resulted from decades of internal misconduct, civil unrest, and the ongoing war in which many hurdles are expected for future researchers (Goodhand, 2004). To reduce expected hurdles for the current research, an interpretive technique may be appropriate because an interpretive qualitative research paradigm may recognize the principal causes and drivers of extreme poverty in this case study by gathering stakeholders' experience, understanding, and perceptions of extreme poverty reduction rather than solely focusing on numbers. Further, the qualitative interpretive research approach pursues knowledge, and it has been a common technique for analyzing qualitative data. Therefore, this technique is considered plausible for this case study in a philosophical research tradition to acknowledge the existence of nature and procedure to pursue and generate knowledge on the poverty phenomenon (Thanh & Thanh, 2015; Oun & Bach, 2014; Al-Saadi, 2014; Kaplan & Maxwell, 2005).

4.5.1 Philosophical background

The philosophical research traditions are categorized as epistemological or ontological assumptions or positions (Al-Saadi, 2014). Harper (2011) defined these philosophical research positions as “epistemology concerns what it is possible to know whereas ontology concerns what there is to know in the world ‘out there’”. Seeking knowledge to answer these questions is discussed differently across various philosophical traditions, depending on the typologies of qualitative methods. These typologies are as numerous as the authors in the qualitative methods strand and are shaped by the specific philosophical positions a researcher adopts in each context (Al-Saadi, 2014; Harper, 2011). In addition, epistemology act as a philosophical theory of knowledge, and through this philosophical approach, knowledge is categorized either under opinion or beliefs within the following four sections:

1. “Intuitive knowledge: based on belief, [and]faith, and does not rely on hard facts,
2. Authoritative knowledge: based on information gathered from people in [the]forms of word of mouth or books,
3. Logical Knowledge: based on reasoning and advancing from the initial point to the new knowledge point,
4. Empirical knowledge: based on demonstrable objective facts, relying on observations and experimentation” (Oun & Bach, 2014).

Harper (2011) explore philosophical positions of epistemology, ontology, and methodology by offering examples from Guba and Lincoln (1994), which divided each position into ‘positivism’, ‘post-positivism’, ‘critical theory’ and ‘constructivism’ and further simplified these categorizations as ‘realism’, ‘phenomenology’ and ‘social constructionism’. These philosophical positions are distinguished from many aspects that focus on qualitative data revealing reality and are often termed the ‘realism-relativism continuum’ (Harper, 2011).

The realism and the relativism positions determine frameworks for the researcher to understand the reality through the data and to what extent a researcher can interpret the data to reflect reality.

Harper (2011) specified realism and relativism positions as such “realism is the position that the data collected mirror reality [and] relativism [...] is the position that there are many valid interpretations of the same observation and so data are not seen as directly mirroring reality”. The social world of individuals is studied by focusing on the meaning and interpretations because

“meanings are social constructed by the social actors in a particular context” (Al-Saadi, 2014), and every social actor expect a particular outcome of the research process. For instance, a policymaker might focus on the implications and outcome of research and whether the study is generalizable to other populations (Harper, 2011).

Researchers explore the traditions of realism, phenomenology, and social constructionism based on their distinct conceptual frameworks within qualitative research methods. The category of realism traditions intends “to generate valid and reliable knowledge about a social and or psychological phenomenon which exists independently of the researcher’s awareness of it” (Harper, 2011). A remarkable number of quantitative research comes under realist traditions and divided into direct realism (scientific realists); emphasis on the status of objectivity and evidence in which suppose that the data mirror reality, and critical realism (post-positivists); emphasis on the status of testing empirically the theories against observation which called deductive reasoning in which considered ontological realists and supposed that the data may reveal reality and presume not as direct mirroring (Al-Saadi, 2014; Harper, 2011).

The phenomenological traditions focus on subjective experience bound to the perspective of the research participants. The phenomenology traditions are considered in the middle of the realism-relativism axis and divided into descriptive and interpretive. The descriptive phenomenologists avoid reflecting the researcher’s categories and theories, though, echoing participant’s subjective experience, essential elements, and terminology, and the interpretive phenomenologists consider more than what the research participants add and interpret the experience, elements, and terminology to extract them in a meaningful manner. The social constructionism tradition focus on how a phenomenon is noticed rather than a phenomenon itself, and social constructionists have been willing to know how knowledge is generated (Harper, 2011).

The “social constructionist[s] are sceptical of the universal knowledge claims characteristic of direct realists, particularly in the social sciences, preferring more local and provisional claims” (Harper, 2011). Social constructionists and phenomenologists consider a social phenomenon from a different perspective. The social constructionists view experiences as interpersonal and societal functions meaning constructed through social interactions, while the phenomenologist understands descriptions of experiences as windows onto individual thoughts and feelings (Al-Saadi, 2014; Harper, 2011).

The social constructionism tradition is narrowed down into two sections, a relativist social constructionism, and a critical realist social constructionism. The relativist social constructionists take a cautious position and avoid making comments about the nature of reality as there is no direct contact through what people say (Harper, 2011).

The relativist social constructionists focus on what is there in the text and avoid interpretations. The relativist social constructionists are usually epistemologically or methodologically relativists, though necessarily not ontologically relativist, which means that the relativist social constructionists are relativists on what we know about the world, but the relativists social constructionists are not relativists whether there is a world at all (Harper, 2011). The relativist social constructionists may claim ontologically that “I do not know if there is a world or, indeed, that there are many worlds” and epistemologically may treat the world as it exists and might claim that “the focus of research should be on what is actually available to us (e.g. transcripts of talk) rather than abstract entities (like thoughts or feelings) which we can reach only via an inferential leap” (Harper, 2011).

The critical realist social constructionism traditions take a moderate constructionist or critical theory approach. The critical realist social constructionists adopt this standpoint alongside understanding the significance of conducting qualitative data in detail considering historical, cultural, and social context setting and adding a level of interpretation that retain the ideals of researcher objectivity and the researcher plays a passive role for collection of data and expert interpreter of data (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017; Harper, 2011; O’Brien, 1998).

The interpretive research traditions emerge in the social sciences to remove limitations set by positivism with a focus on the social meaning of concepts and language characterized by a subjective-based reality influenced by history and culture (O’Brien, 1998).

The Interpretive research traditions appear ahead of “discussions of [a] firm, fixed, or consensually derived criteria [and the] interpretivist[s] see criteria not as abstract standards, but as an open-ended, evolving list of traits that characterize what we think research should do and be like” (Lincoln, 1995). Historically, the interpretivist approach traced back to German idealism in social theory in which Immanuel Kant’s 1797 idea was that mind contributes to construction of knowledge and social reality exists in spirit or idea though not in concrete facts (Putnam & Banghart, 2017). The interpretivists are assigned “to elaborate what lies beyond epistemology and beyond the idea that there are special, abstract criteria for judging the quality of research” (Lincoln,

1995). However, interpretivism scholars are claiming that they have not been relativists or subjectivists to validate any idiosyncratic meaning for constructing reality, though these scholars emphasize the features of diverse intersubjective meanings which align and interact with each other in order to socially construct organizations (Putnam & Banghart, 2017).

Walsham (2006), based on an interpretive position, argue that “our knowledge of reality, including the domain of human action, is a social construction by human actors. Our theories concerning reality are ways of making sense of the world, and shared meanings are a form of intersubjectivity rather than objectivity”. Walsham (2006) reinforced this epistemological view, further established beyond this view, and acknowledged the plausibility of the ontological position for the critical realist, which assure the existence of objective reality. Walsham (2006) argues, “I see critical realism as one possible philosophical position underpinning interpretive research, along with others such as phenomenology and hermeneutics”. Critical realist social constructionists have a similar position as critical realists under the realism debate described above, in which ontological claims focused on available material that influences discourse based on social constructionist ideas. Thus, critical realist social constructions are categorized as ontological realist and epistemologically relativist (Harper, 2011). This research adopts a critical realist social constructionist tradition as the philosophical framework for studying poverty reduction in Afghanistan. This approach incorporates historical, cultural, and social contexts while integrating a layer of interpretive analysis and maintaining the researcher’s objectivity.

4.5.2 Interview guideline

The interview is a critical element in research for the data collection process to gather reliable and comparable qualitative data for analysis and interpretation (Jamshed, 2014; Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The interview in a qualitative research method is a form of construction in the practices and standards recorded, achieved, challenged, and reinforced and classified as unstructured, semi-structured and structured interviews (Oun & Bach, 2014; Jamshed, 2014).

The unstructured interviews suggest conducting long-term fieldwork, permitting informants to convey the responses as convenience with a minor input of the interviewers to the responses (Jamshed, 2014). In other words, unstructured interviews are considered more than interviews and framed as controlled conversations in which the outcome fulfills the interviewer's interest (Oun & Bach, 2014; Jamshed, 2014). The unstructured interviews are labeled as non-directive interviews, focused interviews, and informal or conversational interviews in which the non-directive interviews collect in-depth information and usually lack a set of pre-planned questions; the focused interview is conducted in a manner where the interviewer knows the respondent and when the respondent deviate from the main subject, the interviewer refocus toward the main issue; and the informal or conversational interview initiated based on an unplanned set of questions that are created instantly throughout the interview. For instance, ethnography researchers have been utilizing unstructured interviews to collect data from the field respondents through observation, recording, taking notes, and involving themselves as informants (Jamshed, 2014).

The semi-structured interview is conducted to collect data where the interviewer expressed pre-planned questions to answer open-ended questions to provide reliable, comparable qualitative data and categorized it as semi-structured and in-depth interviews (Jamshed, 2014; Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The open-ended questions encouraged the interview participants to elaborate on the subject and share relevant insights and ideas (Sansoni, 2011; Colosi, 2006).

The semi-structured and in-depth (lightly structured) interview formats are utilized to collect data from an individual (individual interview) or a group (focus group), and it takes 30 minutes to more than an hour (Oun & Bach, 2014; Jamshed, 2014) with emphasize on the following characteristics:

1. "The interviewer and respondents engage in a formal interview,
2. The interviewer develops and uses an 'interview guide'. This is a list of questions and topics that need to be covered during the conversation, usually in a particular order,

3. The interviewer follows the guide, but is able to follow topical trajectories in the conversation that may stray from the guide when he or she feels this is appropriate” (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

The semi-structured interview format employs an arrangement of a paper-based interview guideline in which the interviewer presents and explores the questions or topics to stay focus and collect the data systematically, comprehensively and accentuate to reach the desired outcome (Jamshed, 2014; Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

The structured interview format begins with the researcher’s introduction, followed by standardized questions for all participants. This format allows for comprehensive input from interviewees, with minimal researcher intervention to redirect data collection and discussions when necessary. The researcher maintains objectivity throughout, avoiding bias related to personal interests, gender, history, or societal status (Creswell, 2014, p. 187), particularly considering the sensitivity of these issues in Afghanistan.

The interview guideline effectively explores core and sub-core questions connected to the central question, which is refined during the pretest phase of field research (Jamshed, 2014). In addition, recording is considered a practical set of activities in order to capture the interview data significantly for generating verbal prompts for analysis; however, on some occasions, tape or video recording of the interview process reflects controversy among the interviewer and the informants. Though hand-written notes are considered comparatively inaccurate, especially, poor notes may lead to misapprehending vital points (Jamshed, 2014; Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). In addition to the one-on-one interview format, the focus group is deemed a data collection format in which a group is invited to participate in a discussion session facilitated by a moderator for generally 90 minutes (Oun & Bach, 2014; Jamshed, 2014). The focus group may have the advantage of openly discussing vital issues related to the topic and may have the disadvantage of focusing on limited issues, which may be consequent to fewer initiatives and suggestions for the phenomenon under study (Jamshed, 2014).

For this case study, four pretest telephone interviews were conducted with participants from Kabul and Bamiyan Province to refine the interview guidelines and ensure clarity in terminology.

Participants were encouraged to share their perspectives, experiences, and ideas on poverty reduction efforts in Afghanistan at their own pace and in their preferred manner. Following these pretests, the guidelines were adjusted and simplified to enhance comprehension. The interview structure transitioned from general to specific questions, enabling a thorough exploration of central and subordinate themes. Key stakeholders in poverty reduction were strategically selected as participants, including state officials, representatives of MIOs, and academics from Kabul University (KU) and the American University of Afghanistan (AUAF).

Initial participants were selected from members of the PETC, which had been tasked with defining Afghanistan's first official national poverty line. This effort represented a foundational phase in unifying global poverty concepts and establishing a national framework for poverty reduction (Central Statistics Organization and World Bank, n.d.). Additional participants were identified through the Secretariat of the High Council on Poverty Reduction (S-HCPR), followed by snowball sampling, wherein interviewees recommended knowledgeable informants for subsequent interviews. Ultimately, 22 field interviews were conducted with stakeholders engaged in poverty reduction.

Interviews were conducted in English and Afghanistan's official languages, Persian and Pashto, based on participant preference (see Annexes 1a, 1b, and 1c). The duration of interviews varied, influenced by participants' availability, expertise, and the security status of specific locations within Kabul's green, grey, and red zones. Interviews ranged from 22 minutes to one hour and 15 minutes. The primary focus was on open-ended qualitative questions to identify drivers and barriers in poverty reduction, complemented by closed-ended quantitative questions to assess policy outcomes.

The interviews took place over approximately one month, concluding when data saturation was achieved, ensuring no additional insights emerged from further interviews. Sessions were held in diverse settings, including libraries, restaurants, participants' offices, and virtual platforms such as Skype. For instance, scheduling an interview with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) required extensive email correspondence and rescheduling due to security constraints, ultimately resulting in a Skype session involving three officers. Similarly, two European Union officers participated in a shared interview session, offering contrasting perspectives, while most sessions followed a one-on-one format.

Participants chose the interview locations due to security risks and agreed to be contacted for clarification during transcription. Many expressed willingness to provide additional input, with one

participant requesting a review of their transcript before finalization. This request was fulfilled, while others requested for a final version of the dissertation. The iterative and collaborative nature of the process, alongside the inclusion of diverse perspectives, strengthened the validity and depth of the collected data.

4.5.3 Data collection and data analysis phases

In the current case study, the interview questions are designed with an open-ended format to facilitate an in-depth exploration of qualitative aspects, enabling a nuanced understanding of the data and its contextual intricacies (Hoffmann, 2007). A quantitative component complements this approach, analyzing the poverty phenomenon within Afghanistan. The qualitative data collection focuses on extreme poverty reduction efforts, gathering insights from key stakeholders. This broader perspective mitigates the potential disadvantages of the concurrent nested mixed methods design, ensuring the study's rigor.

The interview participants contribute valuable insider perspectives on poverty. Simultaneously, closed-ended questions are employed to test hypotheses within a deductive framework, investigating the relationship between globalization, trade policies, and poverty reduction. This analysis examines the theory suggesting that trade openness enhances economic opportunities for populations in extreme poverty. Additionally, it posits that least-developed economies benefit from the movement of people, capital, technology, and expertise, provided that agricultural products produced by impoverished communities are integrated into development policies (Asongu et al., 2015; Rahim et al., 2014; UNCTAD, 2013; Ravallion & Chen, 2007; Harrison, 2007; Bhagwati & Srinivasan, 2002; Krueger, 1983).

State entities in Afghanistan serve as the primary stakeholders, offering data relevant to the “process” of poverty reduction efforts. In-depth interviews focus on uncovering qualitative insights into extreme poverty, while the closed-ended components ensure unbiased, reliable quantitative data. In certain instances, technical and professional domains are subject to political manipulation by influential state actors, which adds complexity to the evaluation process. As a result, qualitative data collection is prioritized to assess the “process” of poverty reduction initiatives, followed by quantitative data collection to evaluate their “outcomes”. Both data strands are collected concurrently.

Data collected in English and the official national languages of Afghanistan, Persian, and Pashto, based on participants’ preferences and comfort levels. Each session is audio recorded, with brief notes taken to safeguard against technical failures as in table 13. The recordings and notes are subsequently unified in English through an iterative translation process (Regmi et al., 2010), ensuring thoughtfulness and trustworthiness in capturing the perspectives of the target population (Squires, 2009). This meticulous process maintains the integrity and accuracy of the data while presenting it comprehensively for analysis¹⁰.

Table 13: *Pretest and field interviews*

Title	Format	Record Folder	Record date	Duration
11/2018 Field Interview Participants’ Names and Titles				
	MP3	FOLDER01	11/13/2018	1:06:43
	MP3	FOLDER01	11/1/2018	1:08:16
	MP3	FOLDER01	10/24/2018	36:17
	MP3	FOLDER01	10/9/2018	37:54
	MP3	FOLDER01	10/25/2018	1:15:18
	MP3	FOLDER01	10/8/2018	38:30
	MP3	FOLDER01	10/27/2018	32:57
	MP3	FOLDER01	10/16/2018	44:20

¹⁰ The transcription of all interviews and corresponding audio recordings is submitted to the examination committee to ensure transparency, verification, and academic integrity.

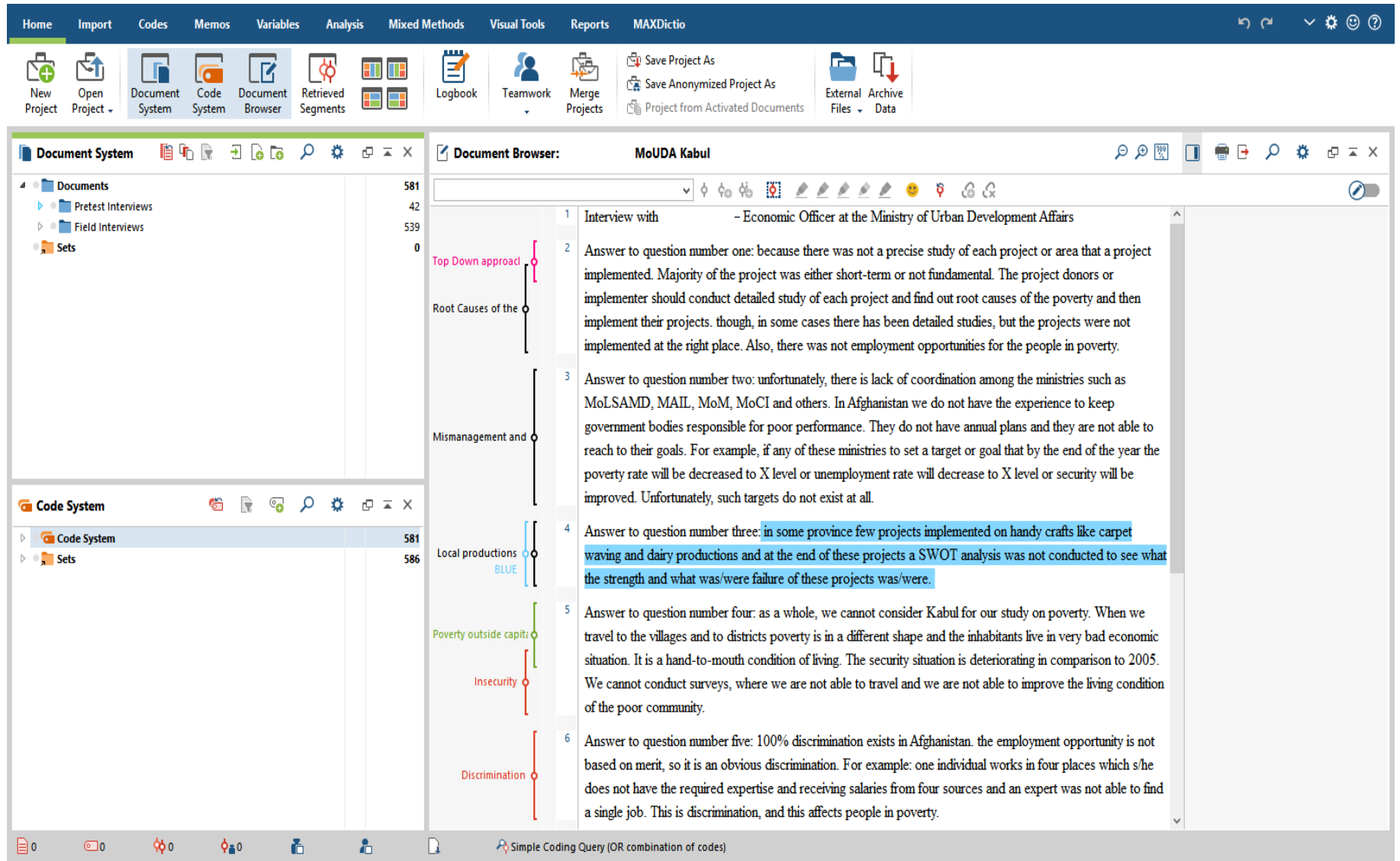
Title	Format	Record Folder	Record date	Duration
	MP3	FOLDER01	10/9/2018	51:52
	MP3	FOLDER01	10/6/2018	59:41
	MP3	FOLDER01	10/29/2018	16:04
	MP3	FOLDER01	10/9/2018	26:35
	MP3	FOLDER01	10/8/2018	46:20
	MP3	FOLDER01	10/5/2018	37:50
	MP3	FOLDER01	10/30/2018	29:55
	MP3	FOLDER01	10/27/2018	34:39
	MP3	FOLDER01	10/7/2018	46:18
	MP3	FOLDER01	10/6/2018	39:17
	MP3	FOLDER01	10/29/2018	40:23
	MP3	FOLDER01	10/24/2018	6:53
	MP3	FOLDER01	10/24/2018	36:37
	MP3	FOLDER01	10/16/2018	30:41
	MP3	FOLDER01	10/5/2018	40:06
	MP3	FOLDER01	10/16/2018	44:40
09/2018 Pretest Interview Participants'				

Title	Format	Record Folder	Record date	Duration
Names and Titles				
	MP3	FOLDER01	9/17/2018	22:11
	MP3	FOLDER01	9/12/2018	23:26
	MP3	FOLDER01	9/10/2018	42:58

This phase employed a chronological and thematic analysis framework to examine data on extreme poverty reduction efforts and policies during the “Decade of Transition” (2002–2014) and the “Decade of Transformation” (2015–2024). Comprehensive data collection facilitated the identification of patterns and insights, leading to the organization and interpretation of findings (Kawulich, 2004). Data was systematically organized and restructured through coding, summarization, categorization, and theme development (Oun & Bach, 2014; Kawulich, 2004).

The analysis process used MAXQDA software (versions 2018 and 2020) for qualitative data analysis. Pretest and field interview files were stored in separate folders, each categorized by themes relevant to the research problem and objectives. A rigorous coding procedure was employed, resulting in 581 codes synthesized into 15 themes directly addressing the research topic and problem. This coding process is depicted in Figure 16, illustrating the comprehensive and systematic approach to data analysis.

Figure 16: Code system and theme generation on MAXQDA Software



4.6 The quantitative research method

Quantitative research methods are considered empirical studies or statistical studies and categorized as experimental studies, quasi-experimental studies, pretest-posttest designs, and others in which the requirements regard to control of variables, randomization, and valid and reliable measures to generalize the sample to the population (Newman et al., 1998). On the other hand, qualitative research methods include case studies, field studies, document studies, observational studies, interview studies, descriptive studies, naturalistic inquiry, grounded theory, and ethnography which in the social sciences focus on the phenomenological basis of a study in order to elaborate description of meaning for a phenomenon in regard to sample population and or culture under study (Newman et al., 1998). In particular, a quantitative research method incorporates an explanation of a phenomenon through data in the form of numbers and analysis via mathematic methods or statistics (Sukamolson, 2007). The quantitative research methods monitor and evaluate an intervention's impact and factors leading to the outcome (Creswell, 2014, p. 156). This process focuses on four principal forms: participants, materials, procedures, and measures (Creswell, 2014, p. 167). The appropriate number of participants involves a level of statistical significance and power of the research, which is discussed as high, medium, and low to test the null hypothesis with sample data in case of a false null hypothesis and the difference between the control and experimental groups of means and deviation of units (Creswell, 2014, p. 169). In addition, a quantitative research method needs a large sample size which, in developing countries, such resource base or statistical data rarely accessible or does not exist (St-Pierre, 2001).

Queirós, Faria, and Almeida (2017) have categorized the quantitative research method as field experiments, simulation, surveys, correlation study, and multivariate analysis such as:

- a) field experiments conducted to cover real-life settings in which one or more variables are isolated or manipulated to test the effect. In a real-life setting, the researcher observes more natural behavior and several variables to consider, and this approach is applied in sociology and applied science such as bioengineering and medicine;

- b) simulation conducted in the adaptation of specific mathematical techniques through a computer system which imitating any the of operation or process of the real-world setting

which consequently, the simulation represents an operation of the natural system through engaging models. The simulation might be used to illustrate the feature of the system, build theory or hypotheses considering observations, and the model may help to predict future behavior;

c) surveys used to collect data through direct interaction from an individual involved in the research process by asking a set of organized questions. The surveys are considered one of the most widespread quantitative techniques for the data collection on a given phenomenon through designing questions that reveal opinions, perceptions, and behavior of a group of individuals;

d) correlational study conducted primarily as an exploratory technique to determine if a relationship exists between two or more variables in which the variables might not be manipulated through an investigation to an extent so that the variables related; and

e) multivariate analysis pertinent to set of methods that might be used in case multiple measurements put into perspective for each individual or object of one or more samples. The methods used in a large group of descriptive and inferential statistics cover market research, process optimization, and quality control (Queirós et al., 2017).

The data collection and data analysis techniques under the quantitative research method include advantages and disadvantages, which Queirós, Faria, and Almeida (2017) have illustrated as:

a) field experiments have advantages in comparison to a laboratory experiment in which there is a natural setting rather than an unnatural laboratory and this data collection technique may facilitate to observe a large group of people for better representativeness. However, in this technique for data collection, control of variables is more complex, and replication of the same condition is challenging; therefore, unexpected behaviors might occur that may harm both the subject and the participants;

b) simulation deemed a suitable method to analyze a complex and prominent problem in case a mathematical model unable to do so. This method is considered a time-saving approach and convenient to investigate promptly the effect of a change in real life context. Also, it is a prerequisite to building a model for the field, which demands profound knowledge and might take time and burden high cost;

c) survey considered the advantages of high representativeness of the entire population and cost-effective method in comparison to the other alternatives, however, reliability of survey data knotted to survey structure and accuracy of answers collected from the respondents;

d) correlational study has the strength to characterize the direction of the relationship and correlation coefficient might easily quantify observational data. In addition, a wide range of data collected from many domains at one time and may study interrelations among the variables, although correlation might not indicate causation due to association between two variables which a third variable may explain, and

e) multivariate techniques facilitate the environment for researchers to explore relationships between variables utilizing a suitable method for each condition. Therefore, the statistical process might be adjusted to the environment under analysis, and these techniques are deemed complex, challenging, and demand specialized statistical software and might have a high cost (Queirós et al., 2017).

For the quantitative data collection in this study, a pretest telephone interview was conducted before the fieldwork to ensure necessary refinements in the quantitative section, mirroring the adjustments made in the qualitative section. The quantitative component was administered concurrently with the qualitative component to the interview respondents, enabling a comprehensive exploration of the research objectives. The closed-ended quantitative survey questions were designed to assess the degree of agreement among respondents regarding the effectiveness of development policies, ODA, and globalization in addressing poverty reduction efforts in Afghanistan. This integrated approach ensured a robust analysis by placing alongside

qualitative insights with measurable quantitative data. A set of 5-point Likert Scale questions was embedded in the qualitative section.

The Likert scale, introduced by Rensis Likert in 1932, is a widely adopted survey tool used in social science and attitude research to measure respondents' attitudes, opinions, emotions, and behaviors (Allen & Seaman, 2007). This method provides valuable insights into various phenomena by capturing not only the presence of an opinion but also the intensity of that opinion. Likert scale surveys are particularly effective for gauging sentiment and analyzing the underlying dynamics that contribute to specific attitudes. Moreover, they offer a rapid, efficient, and cost-effective means of data collection, making them a preferred choice for researchers seeking to assess public perception and behavioral trends (Croasmun & Ostrom, 2011; Allen & Seaman, 2007). In analyzing data from Likert scales, the Cronbach Alpha formula is frequently employed to assess internal consistency and reliability (Croasmun & Ostrom, 2011). The 5-point Likert scale, commonly ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree), with 3 representing a neutral response, is often analyzed for reliability using the Alpha coefficient, a metric introduced by Lee Cronbach in 1951 to measure internal consistency on a scale from 0 to 1 (Croasmun & Ostrom, 2011; Cronbach, 1951). This metric is integral to evaluating the validity and reliability of assessments and surveys, enabling researchers to ensure accuracy and validity in interpreting research data (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The significance of the Cronbach Alpha lies in its role as an index of test reliability, influenced by factors such as test length and dimensionality. However, certain assumptions, including the essentially tau-equivalent approach, shall be met for the Alpha coefficient to provide meaningful results. Failure to satisfy these assumptions can result in a low Alpha value (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Despite criticisms of its overuse or misuse, the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient remains an effective tool for reliability assessment when applied carefully, considering its prerequisites (Cho, 2016; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). These prerequisites, alongside the appropriate use of Alpha, are explored in detail below beginning with the Cronbach Coefficient Alpha Formula:

$$\alpha = \frac{k}{k-1} \left(1 - \frac{\sum \sigma_i^2}{\sigma_T^2} \right)$$

Where:

- α = Cronbach's Alpha
- k = number of items
- σ_i^2 = variance of each individual item
- σ_T^2 = total variance of the test

The existing literature suggests that Alpha is severely misused. However, Alpha was overused in the past, and organizational researchers turned from Alpha to other reliability coefficients obliged to recent methodological studies, which hindered the application of Alpha (Cho, 2016). A group of researchers underlined to be clear on the limitations of Alpha and discuss it with other statistical measures, for example, on the outcome of factor analysis (Taber, 2018) to analyze internal consistency or reliability, intercorrelation, and validity through other measurements such as Jacob Cohen Coefficient or Kappa test, McDonald's Omega - the Greatest Lower Bound or Omega, the Pearson correlation coefficient, and the Spearman-Brown formula (Ravinder & Saraswathi, 2020; Peters, 2014; Eisinga et al., 2013; McHugh, 2012; Croasmun & Ostrom, 2011; Allen & Seaman, 2007; Gliem & Gliem, 2003; Cohen, 1960).

Alpha shall be used appropriately to avoid wrongly discard of a test or scale and securitization for the absence of generating reliable results (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011) because the application of Alpha has been showcased by the prestige of the journals and specific standards, including examination of Alpha assumptions (Cho, 2016). In addition, Taber's (2018) findings recommended that the researchers use Cronbach's Alpha to explain internal consistency and the relevance of Cronbach's Alpha to their research. The researchers ought to interpret the value of Alpha, the dimensionality expected to be measured, and the total number of items involved in the measurement or scale. Moreover, the researchers may consider the audience, especially the reader, to offer the sight of the items pertinent to an instrument in order to ease judgment by the readers on how a particular scale or instrument may be targeted at the same knowledge aspect (Taber, 2018).

The appropriate application of the Alpha coefficient necessitates a thorough understanding of its foundational concepts, including internal consistency, homogeneity, and unidimensionality. Internal consistency pertains to the degree of interrelatedness among test items within a sample, while homogeneity is closely linked to unidimensionality. A measurement is deemed unidimensional if its components collectively assess a single latent trait or construct (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Internal consistency or reliability refers to the degree that all the elements in a test or scale calculate the same concept or construct and, consequently, the concept or construct linked to the interrelatedness of the elements within the test. Internal consistency shall be concluded prior to conducting a test for research purposes to ensure validity. It is required, although not adequate condition to measure homogeneity or unidimensionality in a sample of test elements, and the concept of reliability presumes that unidimensionality occurs in a sample of test elements, and in case this assumption violated its origin, a main undervalue of reliability. Further, reliability estimates illustrate the magnitude of measurement error in a test. Particularly, the interpretation of reliability stands for the correlation of the test with itself; squaring this correlation and subtracting from 1.00 leads to the index of measurement error (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). If the elements in a test are deemed correlated to each other, then the value of Alpha increases. However, a high coefficient alpha necessarily may not consistently mean a high degree of internal consistency because Alpha is affected by the length of the test, and if the length of a test is short, then the value of Alpha reduces (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). In order to increase more related elements testing, the same concept or construct shall be added to the test as well as to note that Alpha is considered a property of scores on a test from a particular sample that the researchers shall avoid published alpha estimates and instead shall measure Alpha each time the test is conducted (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Likewise, a multidimensional test necessarily does not have lower Alpha than a unidimensional test; therefore, a rigorous view of Alpha is that it may not be interpreted as an index for the internal consistency of a test. Thus, Alpha is not a measurement for the unidimensionality of a set of items; however, it can be calculated to confirm whether or not a sample of elements is unidimensional. If a test encompasses multiple concepts or constructs, reporting a single Alpha coefficient for the entire test may not be appropriate. The inclusion of a more significant number of questions, mainly those measuring distinct constructs, can artificially

inflate the Alpha value, potentially compromising its validity as a measure of internal consistency (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Fundamentally, Alpha shall be assessed for every concept and construct rather than a thorough test or scale, and for comprehensive assessment pertinent to heterogeneous and case-based questions, Alpha shall be calculated for each case. To add to that, Alpha is based upon 'tau equivalent model' that presumes that each test element measures the same latent trait on the same scale; thus, in case multiple factors or traits underlie the elements on a scale, as surfaced by the factor analysis, this assumption is violated, and Alpha underestimates the reliability of the test (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Similarly, in case the number of test elements is minimal, then it will violate the assumption of tau-equivalence and will underestimate reliability, and if the test elements fulfill assumptions of the tau-equivalence, henceforth, Alpha reaches a reasonable estimation for reliability (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Practically, Cronbach's Alpha is considered as a "lower-bound estimate of reliability because heterogeneous test items would violate the assumptions of the tau-equivalent-model. If the calculation of 'standardized item alpha' in [the Statistical Package for Social Sciences] (SPSS) is higher than 'Cronbach's alpha', a further examination of the tau-equivalent measurement in the data may be essential" (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The value of Alpha in a test is affected by element interrelatedness and dimensionality and the number of test elements in which an acceptable value of Alpha is reported ranging from 0.70 to 0.95 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Alpha is not measuring test homogeneity or unidimensionality, though, as test it is a function of test length, in which a longer test increases the reliability of a test regardless of whether the test is homogeneous or not and a high value of Alpha (> 0.90) may recommend redundancies and shall the test length be reduced (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The low value of Alpha might be due to a low number of questions, poor interrelatedness between elements, or heterogeneous constructs, and in case a low alpha is tied to poor correlation between elements therefore, some ought to be amended or removed. A simple method to recognize that is to compute the correlation of each test item with the total score test, and elements with low correlations or approaching zero are omitted in case alpha is too high; then some elements might be redundant as they test the same question though in a distinct form in which a maximum alpha value of 0.90 recommended (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). This study employs the SPSS to analyze data and evaluate the hypothesis systematically. The results chapter presents the Likert Scale findings in

detail. Then, the hypothesis's outcomes will be interpreted, ensuring a comprehensive analysis that connects the results to the study's principal objectives and conclusions.

4.7 Point of integration of the qualitative method and the quantitative method

The point of integration between the qualitative and quantitative components occurs to a certain extent at a specific stage of the research process, driven by the recognition of the complex nature of the research phenomenon (Cook & Kamalodeen, 2020, p. 59; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). The qualitative component and the quantitative component in a single study are characterized as mixed methods research that the integration of qualitative and quantitative findings takes place either sequentially or concurrently in each phase of the research process (Östlund et al., 2011; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The purpose of mixing qualitative and quantitative components within the case study is to understand a complex phenomenon and generate a comprehensive description of the research problem (Cook & Kamalodeen, 2020, pp. 59 - 60; Halcomb & Hickman, 2015; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

A multifaceted phenomenon like poverty demands a rigorous and critical approach to understand its complexities comprehensively. Over time, the researcher's explorations pertain to the complex issue from different viewpoints, considering multiple purposes under a single central purpose (Cook & Kamalodeen, 2020, p. 59). The critical approach is ultimately specifying the indicators of the outcome during an examination of a complex issue in which Cook and Kamalodeen (2020, p. 59) borrowed the definition of complexity in research from Poth (2018) as such that it "is characterizing the behavior of a research system whereby its components (such as research participants, researchers, their environments) interact in multiple, nonlinear ways without direction. The outcomes of these interactions are impossible to predict with any accuracy, yet patterns of behavior from the system can be documented retrospectively".

The goal of integration or mixing, in many cases, is not only corroboration, though; it is an expansion of one's understanding (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) and or "the overall goal of mixed methods research, of combining qualitative and quantitative research components, is to expand and strengthen a study's conclusions and, therefore, contribute to the published literature." (Schoonenboom and Johnson, 2017). In the mixed methods literature, three distinct approaches existed for mixing the qualitative and the quantitative components: integration, connection, and embedding (Halcomb & Hickman, 2015). Halcomb and Hickman (2015) presented these three characteristics for

1. integration “qualitative and quantitative data are collected concurrently and analyzed separately. Integration occurs during the interpretation”;
2. connection, “one approach is built upon the findings of the other approach,” and
3. embedding, “the analysis of one type of data is embedded within the other. Commonly, this involves a small qualitative component nested within a quantitative study”.

In addition, based on consideration of paradigm emphasis, case study research conducted to extend the same importance to qualitative component and or quantitative component or a dominant status to one paradigm (Cook & Kamalodeen, 2020; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) in which “an embedded design uses one type of data to support the other data type” (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). The combination of the qualitative and the quantitative components and their dominant status lead to the advantages of the mixed methods approach for assessing the process and outcome of the research stages (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). The advantages of the mixed method approach include complementary, practicality, incrementality, enhanced validity, and collaboration, in which complementarity describes a condition where words and numbers or qualitative and quantitative approaches complement each other (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). The practicality illustrates a method that optimally addresses the research question using a single method from the mixed methods approaches; incrementality characterizes each method of the research process, such as a particular sequence or order to reach a desired outcome, enhanced variability is a condition that the researcher is confident on the validity of the data due to support of the hypothesis through multiple data types, and collaboration allows the researchers to conduct qualitative and quantitative approaches on a similar research problem in a collaborative nature (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018).

The mixed methods research approach involved more than one point of integration, typically called the point of interface, to integrate the qualitative and the quantitative components (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017) stated that integration is “any point in a study where two or more research components are mixed or connected in some way.” The integration or mixing of qualitative and quantitative approaches has been feasible within and across various stages of research in which a single study may pertain to three stages such as research objective, collection of the data, and the analysis or interpretation of the data phases (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The integration or mixing strategy may occur during the research’s data

collection phase, analysis, or interpretation stage (Östlund et al., 2011; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). To add to that, Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017) have presented two points of integration based on Morse and Niehaus (2009) that occur at the results point of integration and at the analytical point of integration in which the results of the first components written followed by the result of the second component finalized and integrated. At the analytical point of integration, the first analytical stage of the qualitative component is completed and proceeds with the second analytical stage, in which the topics of the first component are quantitized (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Further, Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017) discussed more possible integration points based on Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), which take place at the conceptualization stage, the methodological experimental stage (data collection), the analytical, experimental stage (data analysis), and the inferential stage. The involvement of qualitative and quantitative components become significant in a single study for favorable evaluation of research proposals with more than one method that may effectively contribute to generating and analyzing data (Mason, 2006). The integration points might take place within the following stages of the research process:

1. “Merging the two data sets,
2. connecting from the analysis of one set of data to the collection of a second set of data,
3. embedding of one form of data within a larger design or procedure, and
4. using a framework (theoretical or program) to bind together the data sets” (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017).

The embedded mixed methods data analysis approach mixes the qualitative data set and the quantitative data set at the analytical stage in order to reach a comprehensive perspective developed from both data sets after both forms of data are transformed into qualitative data or quantitative data to conduct a merging stage of the research process (Östlund et al., 2011). In this embedded mixed-method study, a dominant status was given to the qualitative component to assess the process of developing policies for poverty reduction efforts (Sutton, 1999).

Poverty reduction within the context of Afghanistan is proven to be an outcome of multifaceted and intricate phenomenon, necessitating an inclusive approach that combines qualitative and quantitative methodologies. A holistic strategy is employed to recognize the limitations of a

singular method to yield significant outcomes, integrating qualitative insights with quantitative data. This mixed methods research allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities inherent in Afghanistan's poverty situation (Bazeley, 2009).

The qualitative aspect of the study utilized MaxQDA (Maxweber Qualitative Data Analysis) software, which enabled the systematic development of codes, the identification of emerging themes, and a comprehensive analysis of qualitative data. Simultaneously, the quantitative component employed SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software to process the data and conduct statistical tests designed explicitly for the Likert Scale questions. During the analysis phase, embedding qualitative and quantitative data facilitate a nuanced understanding of the complex nature of poverty in Afghanistan. This approach allows for identifying critical factors and formulating actionable recommendations to address the challenges. The primary objective of this study is to contribute to reducing extreme poverty and improving the livelihoods of vulnerable populations within Afghanistan's rural and urban economies. From an academic perspective, this research significantly contributes to the existing knowledge on poverty reduction initiatives. The study provides nuanced insights into this critical subject by incorporating an insider perspective and grounding its findings in empirical evidence. Moreover, the research offers practical guidance for formulating effective policies, potentially influencing the entire policy cycle—from conceptualization to implementation—within Afghanistan's distinct sociopolitical and economic context.

5 Chapter Five: Empirical Results

5.1 Introduction

This section presents an empirical assessment of household well-being in both rural and urban areas, highlighting their distinct economic roles. Given that Afghanistan is predominantly an agricultural economy, rural households serve as key production hubs, while urban households primarily engage in the services and manufacturing sectors.

The empirical analysis focuses on three critical areas: the policies of formal institutions for poverty reduction, the effectiveness of ODA in reducing poverty, and the role of globalization in fostering regional and global connectivity to facilitate the transition from aid dependency to self-sufficiency.

A central component of this analysis is the evaluation of state-led poverty reduction policies, which encompass accountability mechanisms for both state and non-state actors, coordination among institutions, public sector service delivery, and the role of international and non-governmental organizations. Additionally, factors such as institutional discrimination, corruption, insecurity, and resilience-building strategies are explored within the UN's broader objective to reduce poverty to 3 percent by 2030.

Furthermore, the study examines Afghanistan's commitment to reducing its reliance on ODA by enhancing national production and integrating it into regional trade networks as an alternative to aid dependence. The empirical findings aim to provide a comprehensive analysis of how globalization may contribute to poverty alleviation by fostering economic resilience.

Lastly, this chapter introduces the integration of qualitative and quantitative analyses, setting the stage for a critical discussion in the following section. The discussion will synthesize empirical observations, policy studies, and scholarly research to assess whether the empirical findings reinforce, challenge, or complement existing theoretical and policy perspectives on poverty reduction.

5.2 Accountability of the state and non-state organizations

The poverty reduction stakeholders were accountable through impeachment, monitoring, evaluation, and assessment. The national governance authorities, and the executive institutions, were assigned to develop policies, allocate budgets, and implement programs and projects to facilitate essential services, access to basic amenities and sustainable livelihoods, and reduce extreme poverty. The legislature institution, or the National Assembly, were one of the foremost authorities to impeach the ministers if less than 50 percent of the budget was disbursed, measure the progress of on-budget state projects, and keep the state officials accountable for their operation and service delivery. Additional authorities were provincial, district, and village development councils, which had the authority to keep the state operation accountable in their line of work at the sub-national governance level. In addition, political parties and pressure groups such as CSOs and the mass media were included as groups who could keep the state officials accountable for the features of the operating entity through information sharing, analysis of state operations, and service delivery structures. This approach has been practical in using soft power, keeping the officials accountable, and decreasing corruption through civil society activities and media coverage.

The state has decentralized parts of the national budget to practice transparency and accountability. The decentralization of the national budget was called ‘sustainable fiscal policy’ to ensure provincial representation to discuss project prioritization and allocation of the national budgets. The provincial representatives were invited to the capital Kabul to present and discuss parts of the projects-based priorities of the villages and districts to reduce extreme poverty.

Mr. Poya highlighted that “the state decentralized the budget development process for accountability and to hear the people’s voices in extreme poverty. The state especially attempted to hear the voices and needs of the people in extreme poverty from rural areas to reduce poverty among rural households. Additionally, the state of Afghanistan committed to the MIO, namely the WB and the IMF, to decentralize the national budget. Because the state institutions, among others, are tasked to initiate socio-economic development policies to tackle extreme poverty and distribute resources fairly among rural and urban households.” Pursuing collective interest through formal and informal structures required the incentive to know about development programs in rural and

urban areas. Henceforth, at the sub-national and national governance, these structures might keep the state institutions accountable to minimize the severity of extreme poverty in the lives of rural and urban households. In coordination with the stakeholders and the beneficiaries, the state institutions contributed to designing, organizing, allocating, and implementing policies and efforts to reduce extreme poverty and maintain resilience among vulnerable groups in the villages and districts. Vulnerability and extreme poverty have been widespread among rural households in remote villages, districts, and provinces. In remote areas, it has been a challenge for the state and the stakeholder to offer services specifically in the winter season. For example, Badakhshan Province is mountainous and heavily snow-peaked during winter, making accessibility to some villages and districts impossible.

Further, in Badghis Province, drought heavily harmed the subsistence agriculture sector, and many households have fallen into food insecurity. These households in search of food migrated to the urban areas and searched for daily labor or other types of unskilled-labor jobs to ensure a hand-to-mouth condition to survive. However, traditionally, rural households have been the leading producers of agricultural products and had an active part in the economy. The rural households have engaged in agricultural occupations, handicrafts such as embroidery, poultry, and carpet waving. Migration of rural households to major cities might minimize the severe effect of drought and access to food in the short run. Nevertheless, domestic sources of growth might gradually shrink in the long run, which makes the national economy dependent on importing consumer goods from neighboring countries. Importation of consumption goods was mainly food items such as cooking oil, flour, grains, eggs, meat, and others.

In parallel, the state constituted the public procurement system centralized through a lengthy process under the direct supervision of the President and the Prime Minister. The president and the prime minister met weekly with relevant ministries and entities to discuss Public Procurements. The centralization of the public procurement process decreased the effect of decentralization of the so-called sustainable fiscal policy, budget allocation, and impeachment of the ministers at the National Assembly (NA). For instance, the National Assembly (NA) impeached a minister for underperformance, ineffective management, and organization of development programs and projects. During the impeachments, some ministers claimed that the delays were due to insecurity, unavailability of the budget at the right time, pending the lengthy public procurement process, but

not professional or technical reasons. The impeachment process was followed by casting votes for the ministers and heads of independent directorates. On some occasions, the votes were cast in favor of personal interests rather than national or collective interest, in which many members of the National Assembly (NA) tradeoff the votes. The influential and wealthy figures ensured a vote of confidence in each round aside from transparency and accountability.

Furthermore, major cities have reached an excess capacity due to seasonality, internally displaced people, and the repatriation of refugees. The inflow of returnees has substantially increased extreme poverty in major cities such as Kabul, Nangarhar, Herat, and Mazar-e-sharif. For example, over a million returnees came to Afghanistan from neighboring Pakistan, Iran, and Europe in 2016. This condition led to a repatriation shock in the economy. The state and stakeholders needed to prepare to manage returnee shock, which required emergency assistance with an immediate impact. Humanitarian assistance packages were distributed to the recipients of the returnee groups. These welfare handouts were pertinent to wheat, kitchen packages, tents, and blankets. In some instances, there were irregularities in the distribution of aid bundles, in which the influential actors in the counties or village elite groups gave preferences to relatives, friends, and others. These resources have been limited, and widespread corruption, waste, and fraud caused people in poverty to suffer more. The system has been in favor of elite groups.

The state did not favor the distribution of aid handouts because it would encourage laziness, along with a political reason that the welfare handout might be distributed based on preferences. It surfaced after the NSP evaluation was conducted. The evaluation showed that this program was conducted in favor of the elite group in the villages. The village council's elite group tremendously influenced the council's operation and programs. The vulnerable groups and poor households remained isolated and unable to achieve basic amenities. Mr. Rasooli added that "the village councils were re-established, and members of ninety percent of the villages were reelected through elections to allow vulnerable groups and people in poverty to share their voices and needs. The CCNPP aimed to minimize discrimination toward impoverished people in rural and urban areas." Further Minister Mastoor the MoEc noted that "the state had initiated policies for people in extreme poverty and categorized them into three areas such as:

1. Poverty reduction through overall development,

2. Poverty reduction through the establishment of social safety nets, identification of people in extreme poverty and distribution of food handouts and,
3. Poverty reduction through the involvement of Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), especially in the humanitarian sector.”

Most projects have been implemented through NGOs and CSOs at the time of need and urgency. The NGOs and CSOs focused on development in Kabul rather than poor and remote provinces such as Nooristan, Nemroz, and Kapisa. Most NGOs and CSOs are based in Kabul. The NGOs have developed fragmented projects with little extreme poverty reduction efforts. The state’s extreme poverty reduction policies had to be comprehensive and coordinated to ensure timely project implementation and good enough evaluation and monitoring of poverty reduction projects. The state programs are conducted separately, and coordination has been inconsiderable, especially since the importance of social safety nets has yet to be recognized among policy developers and tackle corruption within the development councils in parallel to the re-election of the members.

5.3 Awareness programs for Poverty reduction and policy development

The awareness programs for poverty reduction policies might assist the poverty reduction stakeholders and people in extreme poverty to make better choices. The awareness program could decrease cultural and social dogmatism toward justice, human rights, and women's rights, recognize the principal causes of poverty, and minimize the severity of extreme poverty.

The origin of extreme poverty is intertwined in traditions, norms, and health reasons in addition to economic factors and manufactured and natural disasters; which classification of households helps to distinguish the principal causes of extreme poverty among the village households and aware them to minimize unnecessary expenditures. The awareness programs could have been conducted through development councils, mosques, the Mass media, and social media. However, the major poverty reduction stakeholders such as the MRRD, the MAIL, the MoEc, the IDLG launched several awareness programs to identify principal causes of poverty, categorize people in poverty and develop policies, programs, and projects. The struggle of all stakeholders has been extreme poverty reduction and securing food items at the village and later at municipal level.

The MRRD has designed, developed, and implemented several policies to improve the livelihoods of rural households. The MRRD aimed to reduce extreme poverty and deliver services to communities and vulnerable groups. The MRRD had developed and worked with the development councils at the community and village level and classified vulnerable groups into clusters of women, disabled, displaced, and children. Therefore, the NSP was initiated as a social cohesion or community-based infrastructure with the objective of extreme poverty reduction. The NSP targeted rural residents and covered five thousand villages. This program targeted rural households to engage in the development process. However, a similar mechanism to consider urban households was unavailable within the NSP framework. Consequently, the state and the stakeholders on poverty reduction identified the need for urban households to also participate in policy development on poverty reduction. Henceforth, the NSP was enhanced into the CCNPP. The CCNPP provides essential services to each village through development councils and counties through municipalities.

The CCNPP organized, coordinated, and facilitated meetings among village and district council members with the chamber of commerce. Activities and tasks of each stakeholder were drafted and approved by extreme poverty reduction stakeholders, namely the village council, the CCNPP, the IDLG, MIOs, and chambers of commerce as donors. The chamber of commerce might facilitate the exportation of products to the regional markets and beyond, as well as attract remittances to distribute basic food bundles for people in extreme poverty. In addition, the CCNPP has been the state's concept and promise to reach self-sufficiency.

The CCNPP was created to target the poverty phenomenon through a forecastable and sustainable mechanism to reduce extreme poverty and improve rural and urban households' economic and social life. The CCNPP was established through a mobilization process to engage village and county households in awareness of need identification and prioritization. The need identification and prioritization process were through gatherings on a quarterly and biannual base. This process was facilitated and supervised in the cities under the supervision of the IDLG. Further, through an awareness program, the CCNPP set a ceiling on unnecessary expenditures. The unnecessary expenses were dowry, lavish wedding ceremonies, before and after Haj pilgrimage expenses, costly deceased ceremonies, charities, and emulations. The awareness program drew a picture of these expenses, which the village households could avoid and reduce extreme poverty and improve food insecurity and calorie intake.

The awareness of identification and prioritization of basic needs was based on the well-being of village households. The classification and level of well-being of the village households were provided that up to 60 percent of village households' participation was a prerequisite to minimize the role of village elites. Therefore, the awareness helped categorize village households as rich, medium, poor, and poorer, such that if a village household owned a hectare of land, a car, and few animals, then categorized as wealthy households in the village. This criterion has been a ceiling for classifying the village household's well-being followed by medium, poor, and poorer households. Other mechanisms of the awareness program were to measure the well-being and socio-economic engagement of a female within a village household, such as female access to services, destination a female walked alone to reach to service centers, destination a female accompanied by other

females, and destination a female needed a male to accompany and children school attainment within the village households, number of children and calorie intake per child per day considered in village households. Consequently, these classifications led to the draft of the village development plan and sub-committee establishment. The Subcommittees included health, education, agriculture, youth, women, and vulnerable groups. This process has been conducted through an electoral process in which each village is divided into a few localities, a male and female representative runs each locality, and the head of each locality is composed village development council. The village development council had a plan and specific responsibilities. Once the problem of a village is identified, households ought to solve the problem by developing an action plan implemented by the subcommittee within a specific timeframe. For example, among other poverty reduction stakeholders, the CCNPP usually resolved two vital problems of a village, namely the construction of a drinking water system, transportation system, electricity network, and or irrigation canals. The CCNPP has funded several such projects in the villages. However, this program could only fund some projects through the program team. The awareness program mechanism informed other state and non-state organizations to fund the remaining projects.

The CCNPP and village development council followed a primary goal to decrease extreme poverty and initiate resilience for the village households toward food insecurity. Food insecurity was a target through the creation of short-term employment. As described by Mr. Rasooli “the CCNPP initiated a few approaches to improve resilience toward food insecurity, with which a primary target was internally displaced people in 14 districts and 7 to 8 provinces. The program launched short-term maintenance and construction projects to generate employment opportunities. The primary target of these projects was displaced people, poor and poorer households in the villages. The employment opportunities were for a minimum of 40 days. The 40-day employment opportunity for a poor member household covered the essential expenditure of a poor household for four months. This four-month program was mainly developed based on a seasonal calendar to cover seasonal conditions such as winter. This 40-day employment project targeted unskilled laborers who could not find daily labor. With such an opportunity, they could pass the winter with minimum amenities but still survive. Within this categorization, there were poorer groups that were unable to work. The Poorer groups were recognized as village households that were headed by a

female, elderly, and or an addicted which was unable to work. There was a budget for the poorer group, called a ‘social inclusion grant,’ funded to support the food banks in the villages. There were 2500 food banks established nationwide, and 70 thousand families were beneficiaries of this initiative. This initiative was implemented under the Youth Sub-Committee in the village development council. In addition, the village councils regularly met at the district level to establish contact with chambers of commerce and expatriates and refugees abroad to help the food bank through charities and remittances.” Such awareness programs and information-sharing programs could minimize the severity of extreme poverty in poor and poorer households. This awareness program, through such initiatives, encourages the villages to resolve food insecurity issues, solve immediate necessities and avoid seeking assistance from the state, which the state may invest in developmental programs and projects with long-term effects.

The MRRD recognized the needs of women in rural areas and established a specific program for women. The ministry established the Women Economic Empowerment Rural Development Program (WEERDP) to target the participation of women in the economy to increase the share of women in the GDP. The women were economically unproductive due to cultural and social barriers and could not join the workforce. This program assists women in developing common saving groups. Each group member had the right to take a loan to carry on business initiatives and reduce extreme poverty within the family and or community level. Consultation sessions at the community level helped create opportunity, avoid loss, and a source of income. Furthermore, the ministry established a program to improve tertiary roads between the villages. This initiative is named the NRAP. Mr. Temori said: the NRAP implemented the projects and kept beneficiaries aware of the project’s routes not to harm. The NRAP kept consultation sessions with communities in many stages of selection of projects, place of projects, trajectory of the projects, and implementation of projects with a focus on offering employment opportunities for local households. This program had a protection mechanism to avoid destroying or damaging canals, streams, springs, shrines, and cemeteries. For example, a farmer-owned a walnut tree harvested per year worth up to 30 thousand Afghanis in Nejrab District, Kapisa Province. Through this protection mechanism, the farmer met the program team and mentioned that the implementation of a road project damaged the walnut tree. The project was redesigned to avoid cutting that walnut tree. Though, in case the project causes damage, then compensation might be offered.”

The MAIL launched an awareness program to improve farmers' products for national markets and export. The MAIL, in coordination with the FAO of the UN, has established a mechanism to aware the farmers about the monthly agricultural calendar and market demand. Mr. Rahman noted that "a descriptive seasonal calendar has been offered with an activity log to the farmers' households to be aware of each task for each month. The farmers' households have been given tasks to removing leaves, disaster, giving fertilizers, and regular irrigation. The final stage was an evaluation in case the market standard has been met to supply the products within the national or regional markets. If a product has been well nurtured and met the market standard, it is a sign of reducing poverty, and gradually sustenance emerges. On the other hand, a failure or misconduct in the activity log or a natural disaster might cause the rise of extreme poverty due to the purchase of improved seeds, fertilizers, and equipment. Henceforth, the debt burden remains for the farmer households for several years."

The MoEc supervised a provincial structure under the governor's supervision for the province's development. The governor and provincial development stakeholders have been collecting and unifying data and aware Kabul to integrate it into the national development plan. According to Mr. Bahman "the provincial development members discuss the development features of their relevant province and evaluate progress or shortfalls monthly, followed by submitting a progress report to the MoEc. The MoEc integrates provincial reports and submits them to the cabinet meeting, the high economic council, or the high minister meeting. These reports have covered general development at the sub-national governance level and are reflected in state ministers' and officials' national development policies and decision-making."

5.4 Coordination mechanism among state and non-state organizations

The coordination mechanism required sufficient stability among state institutions and non-state organizations. The instability of a functioning coordination mechanism might lead to a conflict of interest, delays, wastes, indifferences, and, lately, rivalries among state institutions, specifically with an increasing trend during the National Unity Government (NUG).

The coordination and communication have been conducted through an old-hierarchical state system or unofficial networks in the public sector. In an official procedure, the counterparts at the ministries have been communicating through a lengthy hierarchical system. If a director, for example, at the MoEc required information from the MRRD, the director had to write an official letter and submit it in the hierarchical system of ministry to be signed by the minister and mailed to a recipient ministry. Hereafter, at the recipient ministry, received by the minister and send down in the hierarchical system to the relevant directorate. They then followed the same procedure to give feedback. This procedure has been time-consuming and took resources. An alternative has been that many public sector employees attempt to bypass this system through personal contacts and networks. Therefore, it was necessary to consider establishing coordination procedures on developmental mechanisms, policies, and processes at the state level. As argued by Ms. Saqib “the state coordination and communication were either through extensive hierarchical procedures or unofficial networks. A culture of teamwork, organizational behavior, and organizational culture should be defined, established, and practiced to pursue a common goal in the public sector. The public officials held many sessions to sign a MoU to improve collaboration and coordination. These sessions took 40 to 50 percent of the officials’ time. However, a spirit of teamwork was not encouraged, and the outcome of these sessions were unable to meet the expectations to reduce duplication of efforts, delays, and waste. On some occasions, high priority was given to personal image, hierarchy, and sometimes budget, seldom reducing extreme poverty.”

An impediment to improving coordination was the generational gap within the public sector. Ms Saqib pointed out that “a group of young talented with higher education attained from various countries had joined the public sector, in which a small number of this group has been interested in improving the system and bringing necessary changes to increase effectiveness. However, these efforts escalated resistance from within the system. The young talents who attempted to improve coordination or structural changes encountered numerous hurdles, and some lost their jobs. The remaining share of this young group tended to give up and avoid conflicts or rivalries but attempted to climb up the hierarchy ladder and reach higher positions within the old-fashioned hierarchical system because the state formation had been based on political division rather than merits.” The coordination gap was widened after the presidential elections in 2014. The result of the presidential

election was not accepted between the two leading candidates. Thus, the USA facilitated and established a non-constitutional state, divided the public sector into half, and called the NUG. Under the NUG, the public sector was divided into 50 percent to the president and 50 percent to the prime minister. This decision has deepened coordination challenges, established parallel structures, and created conflict of interest among various entities and ministries in the public sector. The programs and projects were politicized, and inter-factional rivalries led to duplication of efforts and prevention coordination so that the state institutions could not deliver expected essential services.

The National Unity Government (NUG) hire, and fire policy was based on affiliation with the two teams. A high turnover rate was typical in the public sector, and acting ministers or candidates filled many positions. A minister, a deputy minister, and a general director were replaced frequently. The cycle of setting vision, mission, and coordination needed to be re-established, and it was essential to set continuity in the development trajectory. The necessity for coordination could have been improved at the policy and operation levels, though the absence of essential capacity further deepened this gap. The national economy was underperforming; the public sector was not integrated; different sectors were moving at different speeds, and more than half of the population dropped under the national poverty line. However, the NUG initiated specific poverty reduction platforms. Under this platform, the extreme poverty reduction's diverse causes required the involvement of all sectors to coordinate, improve the rural economy and create employment opportunities. With this aim, a High Council on Poverty Reduction (HCPR) was established under the supervision of the president at the MoF. In reference to Ms. Sarabi "the high council aimed to recognize measurable poverty indicators, targets, and principal causes of extreme poverty and establish a coordination mechanism." In parallel, the Office of the state minister for Disaster Management and Humanitarian Affairs was established under the supervision of the prime minister as an independent entity. This office aimed to reduce disaster, respond to a disaster and establish coordination-nonetheless, more than these were required to improve coordination and reduce extreme poverty. The NUG sorrowfully damaged the basis of national institutions, and as observed by Mr. Mowahed "the operation of the state institutions is comparable with a car. A car has four wheels, and the wheels should have the coordination to move in the same direction and speed;

simultaneously, then the car can move from point A to point B. However, if the car wheels have no coordination, move in opposite directions, or at different speeds, the car will be unable to reach its destination, and it will be seriously damaged any time it starts to operate. A state system is like a car. All ministries and departments should coordinate and move in the same direction to follow goals and complement each other. Though, each ministry chose different approaches and implemented programs and projects that were unintegrated on social and economic impact; therefore, the outcome of such a pattern is rare to improve the living condition of the people and escape out of extreme poverty.”

At the National Unity Government (NUG), the MoF was under the ticket of the president, and the MoEc was under the ticket of the prime minister. This division affected the operation of the development budget and operational budget. The coordination of the development budget and projects was authorized by the Ministry of Planning (MoP) in the previous state formations, and the MoF was assisting the operational budget. The later MoP changed to the MoEc in the transition decade. Then, the MoF authorized to disburse operational and development budgets, and the MoEc on development strategies. The MoEc needed more executive authority to convince ministries or departments to participate and be accountable in the round of coordination sessions to develop strategies for the on-the-budget programs and projects.

The MoEc attempted to boost coordination among state ministries to consider job creation, complementary roles in programs and projects, and extreme poverty reduction. The ministries implemented programs and projects within the line of authority and coverage, needing more coordination with other ministries to improve the development of the rural economy. The ministries have coordinated, coincidentally, development programs and complemented agriculture farms and rural industries to benefit from road development. Suppose a systematic coordination mechanism has been used to coordinate development projects, share goals, and merge projects at the initiation or planning stage. Then, the development trajectory might be balanced in case development programs and projects complement one another.

The coordination of programs and projects complemented each other when an agricultural project of the MAIL was initiated parallel to a secondary and or tertiary road constructed by the MRRD - The National Rural Access Programs (MRRD - NRAP). The NRAP has developed action plans

and, based on that, operates and implements development projects. As pointed out by Mr. Temori “the projects were practical and sustained the development by connecting farms and industries with the markets. For example, A 30-kilometer road project was implemented in Suzma Qala District in Sar-e-Pul Province. The road connected Suzma Qala District to Sar-e-Pul primary market, increasing the rural households’ income. Before the construction of the road, 7 kilograms of high-quality grapes were sold for 7 to 8 Afghanis in the local market; after the completion of the project, the villagers supplied the exact amount and quality grapes in the main market, which cost 35 Afghanis. In another example, a bridge construction increased market access for rural households in Takhar Province. In the ‘Bodana Shirato’ area, residents transported watermelons and melons by animals such as donkeys, mules, and horses to the markets. After the bridge’s construction, the villagers drove small trucks to transport products from the field to the market, saving farm owners resources, time and increase income.”

The Kabul University (KU) recognized the absence of coordination, the incompatibility of the education curriculum, and the employment market requirements in the public and private sectors. In the words of Prof. Halimi “the Kabul University (KU) initiated a session to consider public and private sector market requirements within the curriculum. The ministries have requested to assign their policy developers to participate in a session to discuss features of curriculum development in alignment with the market demands. The invitees were many ministries pertinent to the economy, commerce, finance, private sector, and banks to participate in the brainstorming discussion session. The aim was to constructively question and scrutinize the current curriculum, propose suggestions, and offer recommendations. Unexpectedly, the public sector assigned junior staff who were not in the position to make concrete recommendations. The public sector representatives’ contributions were inconsequential due to the lack of necessary capacity to meet the aim to get insight, recommendations, and suggestions to adjust the curriculum based on their organizational vision and mission and minimize the market gap for the future. The public sector did not coordinate to assign policy developers to the session to qualify for the protocol with an expected outcome and meet the market demand by improving the curriculum system.”

The state and the non-state organizations developed an inconsistent coordination mechanism for

development. A necessity was there to improve and recognize factors as obstacles to the coordination. These factors were intertwined with reliability, capacity, and widespread corruption. Mutually, there was a reliability dilemma between the donor organizations and the state of Afghanistan. The state's obstacle was due to a lack of capacity and corruption. This obstacle was gradually solved after the international conferences on Afghanistan, including London, Tokyo, Brussels, and Geneva. These conferences created a mutual accountability mechanism between the state and the donor organizations. In addition, the need for more capacity to align and coordinate development trajectories among national and international organizations took more time and wasted resources. Each entity considered one's criteria to disburse the budget on projects in Afghanistan. Though, the coordination mechanism and discussion on budgeting were raised at an international conference on Afghanistan in London in 2014. Thus, the donor countries and the multilateral organizations aligned their donations with the state development policies and programs.

A coordination mechanism was in operation and called Joint Monitoring and Coordination Body (JCMB). Under the JCMB mechanism, many working groups have been established, achieved goals, and completed. One of these working groups was named Aid Effectiveness Organization. This working group met monthly to discuss budgeting at the MoF: the budget development process and attraction of donations. Then, a necessary capacity was built at the MoF on how to construct a budget and how to allocate or disburse the budget. This importance increased the confidence of some of the donors to spend donations through On-the budget mechanism.

This aid effectiveness program established a mechanism between the donor community and the state to fund projects in alignment with the national development policies. Though, On-the-budget projects were less than 50 percent. For example, the CCNPP allowed priority number four open to be funded through the off-the-budget mechanism. This mechanism followed a trajectory to prevent overlapping specific projects and no funds for other projects under the Off-the Budget mechanism. Because for many years, the state and the international community had formed development plans for Afghanistan without coordination and collaboration at the national level. Gradually, these efforts improved coordination at the national level; however, at the community level, the development trajectory required a longer time. Data was submitted to the MoF to unify off-the-budget projects at the community level. Unification due to duplication was high, and a lack of

necessary capacity in the public sector made coordination at the community or implementation levels stubborn.

5.5 The public sector service delivery capacity and performance

The state institutions, namely the education sector and healthcare services, which help human capital development, have been remarkably damaged during decades of the ongoing war in Afghanistan. The scarcity of human capital has been an inevitable condition in a war-affected country such as Afghanistan. The war-affected states intend to reconstruct and construct institutions, build trust, build capacity, and improve devastating conditions to increase state productivity, efficiently utilize resources, reduce extreme poverty, and reach self-sufficiency.

The capacity and performance process started from the overwhelming condition and steadily grew better in the context of Afghanistan. Public sector employees were categorized as qualified, partially qualified, and unqualified to meet the necessary qualifications and eligibility criteria for a public sector position. This condition resulted from low-calorie intake in the rural and urban areas, poor education system, and frequent curriculum change entwined to frequent regime change. Therefore, an alternative was to hire international experts and pay a high salary and a team of nationals with less expertise to fit within the public sector salary scale. The international experts were tasked to operate the public state institutions and offer on-the-job training for the national employees. This process was partially successful in the capital Kabul but needed to be done more for the communities. Few international experts or advisors could not reach many public sector employees nationwide. Thus, the state of Afghanistan and the international community-initiated programs especially to build the capacity of the public servants. The WB initiated a project called “Capacity Building for Results” (CBR). The CBR aimed to improve the capacity of public sector employees for seven years from 2011 to 2018. The CBR expanded the coverage and named Tackling Afghanistan’s Government Human Resource Management and Institutional Reforms (TAGHIR). TAGHIR was projected to cover three years from 2018 to 2022. These projects and devotion encouraged young talented nationals to join the public sector. A new wave of young nationals post-graduates studied in America, Europe, and the region had joined the public sector at the policy level with a similar salary to an international organization. This layer’s capacity was

strong compared to a country of a similar income level. The capacity is dramatically felt at the service delivery and community levels. In addition, the poor education system and calorie intake were more severe problems at the community level.

Public sector employees' capacity building was criticized for lacking sustainability and continuity. As demonstrated by Mr. Mowahed "these capacity-building projects might have an impact in the short run, but neither the state nor the international community sustains continuity for the long run. Through these projects, highly educated national experts are targeted to be hired to increase the performance of public institutions. In other words, these projects launched a competition in the national job markets with the MIO, International Non-governmental Organizations (INGOs) and the private sector. For example, if a director is hired with a high salary through capacity-building projects paid by international organizations, the state cannot sustain a budget for the salaries and achievements of the department at the end of the projects. Because the central personnel might rarely be interested in working in the public sector salary scale framework, the entire formation shrinks or collapse and might generate a considerable challenge in a ministry or a department when they leave." Further, Mr. Mowahed argued that "capacity building was a long-term process that needed continuation and improvement. The continuation and improvement of capacity building have been achievable through the Ministry of Education (MoE). The ministry requires the necessary capability, school building, teaching materials, and adequate knowledge delivery to increase students' performance. School students attended schools partially nationwide, but the capacity and performance needed to be at the level to be productive and capable of performing appropriately to meet the demand of the public or private sectors." Though, the state institutions had no presence in the rural areas to offer educational services, especially those under the control of the armed opposition groups. The essential services were delivered by the local NGOs, including basic literacy classes in which girls were excluded from attaining education at the community level in most parts of the country.

The vulnerability of the communities was considerable and prone to basic shocks. The initiatives were unsustainable and rarely survived even minor shocks. This fragility was tangible and observable in the communities, but it was challenging to observe the insignificance at first glance

in cities due to injections of hundreds of millions of USD. Further, Afghanistan, as a war-affected country, was demolished from moral, social, and economic perspectives, resulting in a malfunctioning system and severe extreme poverty. In line with Mr. Aqa “the political institution has been fragmented after nearly two decades of development. The state institutions have been unable to offer good enough governance and essential services nationwide. Rural households have been involved in traditional agriculture, affected by natural hazards such as drought and floods, and have yet to achieve the required calorie intake. However, the UN initiated projects to minimize vulnerability to minor shocks at the community level. The UNDP and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FOA) initiated capacity-building programs and resilience for rural households in the communities.”

The UNDP has involved minority groups and vulnerable groups at the design stage to hear the voice of people experiencing poverty and offered capacity building for community initiatives to maintain and sustain basic amenities. As Mr. Jamshed emphasized “UNDP has engaged in livelihood and income generation projects dedicated to human development and capacity building. A rural agriculture project, for example, assisted in the sustainability of an initiative through training on the operation of a business, business development plan, market access, analyzing market demand, and supplying appropriate amounts and access resources. In addition, a similar capacity-building project offered vocational training and skill building for returnees and repatriate groups.” In addition, the FAO offered services at the community level, focusing on the quality of products and creating a value chain among local producers and suppliers of local agricultural products. The organization according to Mr. Aqa “assisted rural households in agriculture, livestock, animal nursery, and dairy production. Each group has been categorized in a specific classification to efficiently offer technical assistance and establish a sustainable value chain among each group.” The organization and partially the public sector entities have been at the policy level. However, at the implementation and operation level, NGOs have conducted almost all these projects due to lack of state’s authority in communities.

5.6 The Role of Multilateral International Organizations and NGOs in poverty reduction

The MIO and the NGOs had a complementarity role with the state to initiate, design, plan, and implement programs and projects in responding to areas of emergency and development. The MIO usually offered technical expertise, know-how, and financial resources, and the INGOs and grassroots national NGOs implemented and delivered services in the case of Afghanistan. Among them, the MIO were pertinent to the WB, the IMF, the ADB, the European Union (EU), and the UN with several departments on extreme poverty reduction. The MIO initiated and funded many state development programs under the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF).

The MIOs initiated development programs to help the state commit to self-sufficiency in the transformation decade. Self-sufficiency was a commitment to strengthening the national economy to encourage domestic sources of growth through production, increase export, urging the state to raise taxes and tax to the GDP ratio to reduce dependency on the ODA. An initiative of the state was enacting a tax on telephone top-up cards. The NUG imposed a 10 percent telecommunication service tax on end-users. This initiative was presented as a commitment toward self-sufficiency to reduce the share of ODA in the economy-however, the consequence of imposing a 10 percent tax discouraged telecommunication among people experiencing poverty.

The NGOs as implementing partners included international and national organizations. The project implementation aimed to provide immediate assistance, reduce poverty, create employment opportunities, social cohesion, recover economic development, and increase domestic production. In Principle, NGOs operate in emergency response and development areas based on a specific mandate reflecting organizational vision and mission. Specifically, the manifesto has been to emergency response. According to Mr. Safi “it was challenging to draw a clear line between emergency response and development, and some of the NGOs implemented projects between emergency response and development. Moreover, a NGO is a not-for-profit entity. However, on several occasions, the NGOs diverged from the mandate, and some founders violated this Principle and earned millions of USD. This earning was noticeable when the state officials founded a NGO and implemented numerous projects. This engagement misused official affiliations and deviated from the nonprofit Principle of a NGO manifesto. However, many NGOs took the risk and

delivered services in insecure areas.” These implementing partners were the CSOs and the NGOs, namely the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the Welthunger Hilfe (WHH) – (World Hunger Aid), the Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) International, the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (OXFAM), the Swedish Committee (SC), the Norwegian Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), and dozens of the grassroots national organizations.

The NGOs were offering service delivery nationwide, in the areas in and out of control of the state. A remarkable share of the healthcare services, for example, was implemented by NGOs. The NGOs, the Agha Khan Development Foundation (AKDF), and grassroots implementing partners were assisting the state in the implementation of the CCNPP to reduce extreme poverty in the rural and urban areas.

The grassroots NGOs’ operations and service deliveries covered state-controlled and non-controlled areas. In accordance with Mr. Saleem “the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) could not deliver services in Uruzgan, an insecure province. It was assisted and delivered by the local NGOs and community councils. In addition, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the WFP outsourced the transfer of aid handouts to beneficiaries in many insecure provinces to the local NGOs.”

Outsourcing projects are categorized into effective, less effective, and ineffective. The state wanted more than the ratio of budget and outcome of projects on poverty reduction. Because annually, hundreds of millions of USD are funded by the MIOs and implemented by NGOs, and the functioning value chain and production cycle has yet to be in operation. Therefore, the state addressed the MIOs and the NGOs at a national conference in Kabul. A conference was held on Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development (PRSD) in 2018. In line with Minister Mastoor “NGOs implemented a sum of USD 850 million in 2016 and a sum of USD 880 million in 2017. However, the effect is not visible in the lives of impoverished people due to fragmented implementation manner.”

The state emphasized carefully considering extreme poverty reduction issues, focusing on less developed areas and creating employment opportunities: the state prioritized education improvement, the healthcare sector, agriculture development, and infrastructure. The state did not specify the projects’ location, project types, and investment area to have a high economic impact

on extreme poverty reduction. Even after poverty reduction stakeholder mobilization, the projects remained offered-based rather than need-based due to the aid politics of each donor agency or country. Further, other factors such as drought and floods resulted in an emergency in the domestic economy, which adversely affected project implementation by the NGOs, which had less effect on poverty reduction as well as the state was unable to institute basic physical security to encourage households' initiatives.

The NGOs operation depends on many factors, including types of projects, thematic areas of projects, geographical locations, and level of security intensity—ongoing caused restrictions on the feature of delivery by the NGOs. In addition, the level of need was excessively high to be fulfilled by the NGOs operation. Some of these projects were partially aligned with the national development policies and programs, though some were implemented fragmentedly, resulting in insufficient and insignificant outcomes. In addition, the projects bore high administrative costs due to hiring international professionals with excessive salaries, expensive equipment, heavily secured offices, and protection and transportation costs inside Afghanistan. Further, most of these projects were funded through an Off-the-budget mechanism in which the state could not inspect and audit the NGOs operations. Some of them were reporting false information in the annual report.

International INGOs allocate a high share of the budget for administrative-related issues and a leftover allocated to the program part in which the ineffective share reaches the beneficiaries. For example, an informant who worked for an International Non-governmental Organization (INGO) added that an awareness project for the widows had a one-million USD budget. The beneficiaries desperately needed employment to feed their children, but the project was an awareness of the right of women to work. The effectiveness of these projects intertwined with the aid politics of the donor agency or country, which the beneficiaries, such as widows in this project, could not have improved their well-being. Each aid agency had specific aid politics. Aid politics highlighted avoiding an awareness budget to invest in infrastructure areas and without an infrastructure budget, getting 100 people out of poverty would be difficult.

Additionally, misuse of aid was above the line of authority and responsibility of recipient states. The aid industry is designed to change non-for-profit principles of NGOs to profit. As described by Ms. Saqib “the donation mechanism of the USA considered one’s founders for project

implementation in which a founder was either an American Company or an American NGO. This process has been defined in the Federal Authority Regulation (FAR). The FAR allowed each NGO that took funds for a project from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) could deduct 25 percent of the fund as a contractor or as an implementer. This 25 percent deduction mechanism was often ongoing, as the projects were subcontracted to an American NGO. Thus, this deduction systematically decreased the projects' efficiency and effectiveness due to the implementation's insignificant budget. During the implementation phase, a remarkable share of the fund was allocated to security-related costs, international experts' high salaries, and the purchase of avoidable expensive equipment. An insignificant amount was left to conduct the program-related issues, and a limited amount was reached to the beneficiaries.”

The success stories were in the areas of skill-building and vocational training. The NGOs were influential in vocational training. In the rural areas, poor households received training from NGOs in alignment with the state strategies. The alignment to state strategies, programs, and projects should consider both On-the-budget and Off-the-budget mechanisms. The state strategy was to train the unskilled, less skilled, and semi-skilled in rural areas. As remarked by Mr. Ghafoori, “the NGOs implemented skill-building projects such as carpentry, masonry, mechanic, or any other vocational skills intending to increase productivity. This initiative was a joint effort of the MRRD, the MoLSAMD, and the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ). As a result, the TVeT Authority was established as an independent entity with 300 to 400 schools. These schools have been offering short-term and long-term vocational training nationwide. This vocational training has been a successful project that sustains the development trajectory to reduce extreme poverty and encourage domestic growth, fulfilling transformation decade commitments.”

5.7 Graduation Mechanism from Social Protection Programs

Protection of a household in poverty has been inevitable to prevent human disasters in rural and urban areas. Household in extreme poverty has been prone to minor shocks that require longstanding protection programs in the societies and communities. SPPs ought to target the reduction of vulnerability and severity of poverty by enhancing resilience against shocks such as

drought and flood, securing some sustainable daily jobs, and mainly focusing on education and healthcare sectors so that a household in poverty can be economically productive within the society and avoid dependency and idleness. This socioeconomic protection mechanism for households in poverty has been a commitment of the state and the poverty reduction stakeholders so that people experiencing poverty earn basic amenities and establish a decent livelihood. In the case of Afghanistan, there have been four stages of the SPPs foreseeable to reach a level where the households in poverty are economically productive by combining humanitarian and development assistance. SPPs have had characteristics of early recovery, recovery, development, and reaching graduation threshold and self-sufficiency.

The development trajectory in Afghanistan was affected by two critical incidents in 2014 – the withdrawal of the international security forces from Afghanistan and handing over security responsibility to the Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF) and presidential elections. As described by Ms. Kreshnan “the withdrawal of the international security forces left a gap in the economy because military spending offered employment opportunities and sources of income for a bulk of rural and urban households. A significant share of the economy was developing around military-related projects and development partners, mainly in the urban areas or vicinity of the military bases. There were job opportunities around international security sector spending, such as transit, procurement, and military contracts. After the international security forces withdrew, employment opportunities and sources of income were reduced or vanished.” In addition to security circumstances, political conditions led to macroeconomic uncertainty and underperformance, which caused the economic growth rate to decrease remarkably due to the presidential elections. Fraudulent presidential elections resulted from internal mismanagement and external meddling, which formed a non-constitutional government after months of delays in announcing final election decisions. As a result, a ‘National Unity Government’ was established and immediately engaged in internal conflicts and maladministration in which the population growth surpassed the economic growth rate. This political instability resulted in ineffective state service delivery due to a lack of coordination, collaboration, waste, and fraud. The public sector was split between the president and the prime minister. As mentioned earlier, the MoF was under the ticket of the president, and the MoEc was under the ticket of the prime minister, which required more effective coordination.

This chaotic governance approach further deepened extreme poverty severity and a fragile initiation and implementation of the SPPs. Thus, three focus areas have been illustrated comprehensively for graduation from the SPPs. Hurdles in the agriculture sector and rural development are considered factors of poverty, followed by an emergency status in the rural and urban economy affected by the insecurity-related causes and establishment of poverty policies, programs, and projects from the top to the bottom and bottom to the top approach from communities and villages to Kabul and vice versa.

5.7.1 Poverty Factor

The agriculture sector has been an inclusive part of the economy and a main occupation and source of survival for rural households. In the agriculture sector, wheat has been a well-eminent harvest among farmers compared to other crops and products because wheat has been characterized as a non-thirsty, rain-fed crop and cultivated on big plots of land and mountainous terrain. The farmers engaged in the fields in the spring and summer and harvested the crops in the fall, and due to agricultural returns, the effect of extreme poverty has been moderate in the harvesting seasons. Therefore, this outcome revealed that extreme poverty had knotted agricultural harvest and characterized a seasonal type of poverty in Afghanistan, whose severity increases in winter. Therefore, the state took retroactive measures to reduce extreme poverty among the farmers and rural residents through the MAIL and the MRRD. In addition, poverty reduction stakeholders such as the MIO and NGOs have been engaged in poverty reduction efforts.

The MAIL and the MRRD have conducted several surveys to recognize the principal causes of extreme poverty and took possible preventive measures nationwide. In words of Mr. Rahman ‘the MAIL conducted a house-to-house survey in each village to identify the villagers’ source of income or livelihoods. Based on the source of income, such as livestock, farming, and gardening, the villagers were classified into 11 to 30 members in each group for effective reach out and productivity. Every 15 days a field school training was conducted for these target groups, and three categories were classified:

- A. The food-insecure families in this category needed regular assistance. These classifications included orphans or single-headed families, widows, public servants with a low salary and or ownership of unproductive small plots of land,
- B. The farmer families with the capacity to produce for the national markets, this category was pertinent to those families who could supply products partially to the market and decrease imports. The inexistence of value chains, cold storage, and greenhouses made the economy unable to meet domestic needs sustainably, even though domestic production could supply a few agricultural products for the domestic markets. For example, in Bamiyan province, 7 kilograms of potato during the cultivation season cost 45 Afghanis, but in the capital Kabul, 3 kilograms of raw-French fries cost 450 Afghanis. These 3-kilogram raw French fries were imported from the State of Virginia in the USA. However, it failed to supply potatoes from Bamiyan Province to Kabul.
- C. The farmers’ family with the capacity to produce beyond the national markets was pertinent to those families who could produce at high quality for exportation at the regional and global markets.”

The MRRD employed a methodology analogous to that of the MAIL to classify households experiencing poverty in rural areas. The MRRD conducted a nationwide house-to-house survey in each village to explore poverty factors and sources of income. The findings of this survey according to Mr. Rasooli “categorized rural households into rich, medium, poor, and poorer families. In case a household owned a hectare of land, a car, and a few animals, then this family is considered a wealthy family; in case a household owned a small plot of land and a few animals, then the family is considered medium, in case a household owned a breadwinner working in a construction site or someone else’s field, then, the family considered poor, and in case a household headed by a lady (widow), a disabled, a significantly older person and or an addict, then, the family considered poorer. The findings of village surveys led to a seasonal calendar to offer employment opportunities to minimize the severity of extreme poverty in the winter season. A mechanism was developed to offer employment opportunities for 40 days off-season for poor households. This employment

opportunity was customarily offered to cover the expenses of a low-income family for four months in the winter. The poorer families could not use this employment opportunity but received food items directly from the social inclusion grant budget. This grant established food banks in villages nationwide. There were 2500 food banks for the off-season, such as winter, and 70 thousand households were beneficiaries of this grant and expected to increase emergency food aid programs by encouraging remittances.” In another study, the MRRD depicted unnecessary household expenses in the villages. The MRRD surveyed the analysis of avoidable expenses of households and features of female access to primary service centers. In line with Ms. Sarabi “the analysis was called the Defect Pot; in Farsi, it is Kuza-e-Surakh. A Pot has been a well-understood kitchen belonging to rural and urban households in Afghanistan. Traditionally, it was used to carry drinking water from spring, process milk to butter, and there are remarkable poems and stories in the literature and stories in the school subjects. Therefore, the MRRD displayed preventable costs as a hole in the pot to the village ladies. The avoidable costs were dowries, luxurious wedding celebrations, circumcision ceremonies, and charitable deeds. In addition, the defect pot analysis studied female members of a rural household’s access to services and school attendance. In the rural areas, a concern has been women’s access to service centers and children’s attendance at school, in which a woman’s access to service centers was based on the distance a woman walked to reach service centers.” In words of Ms. Sarabi “the defect pot analysis focused on how far a woman can walk alone, how far a woman can walk with other women, and how far a woman can walk to need a male to accompany her to access service centers. Further, it considered how many children of a woman attend school. Typically, male children have had less problem attending official or unofficial education than female children. Female children could not attend schools after a certain age in rural areas due to a lack of female instructors, which led to the availability of a limited number of female teachers, nurses, and midwives in rural areas. This vicious circle deepened the high rate of illiteracy.” In addition, the population growth rate was high despite the limited number of female personnel in the healthcare sector. A high number of populations led to a high rate of extreme poverty. However, the MRRD considered the dilemma, established a baseline, and restructured the development councils. The development councils have had sub-committees on health, education, agriculture, youth, women, and vulnerable groups to encourage access to services and school attendance and minimize the severity of extreme poverty. However,

a parallel provision or SPPs was needed to support the rural and urban households with more family members. A mechanism was necessary to offer essential services and protect households from falling into extreme poverty. The service delivery was accumulated in the major cities and the capital. An informant working for the state has excused the argument that rural households live in a scattered lifestyle, and delivering services fragmentedly has not been viable. The rural residents lived sporadically in the mountainous areas. The cost of primary service delivery has been incredibly high in an open manner for a fragile economy and such an economy could not fund primary service delivery from the national income.

The agriculture sector trend has distorted together with population growth. Traditionally, farmers have cultivated wheat in vast plots of land. The farmers' family grew in number, and the family expansion needed more resources to meet the diverse needs of the heirs. The agricultural land was divided among the heirs and decreased the size of the agriculture; some of the heirs followed the ancestors and continued cultivating wheat, but others constructed a house, sold the land, financed wedding expenses, paid education costs, and an array of other needs. Thus, the small plots were less productive than before, and the expansion of the residential areas wasted all previous investments, including water supply and irrigation systems. Henceforth, as remarked by Mr. Rahman "the farmers shifted the trend from wheat production to fruits and vegetables in small plots with consumption of the underground waters. The underground water has been thoughtlessly unearthed and needs replenishment and constantly decreases. In parallel, the plants were under the pasture of animals, and the bushes were either cut, burnt, or damaged by floods and droughts. The lack of plants and bushes caused dry conditions, more underground water consumption, and escalated natural hazards. This trend of farmers and the lack of preventive action of the state made the rural economy prone to natural hazards such as floods and drought, in which drought has damaged 22 out of 34 provinces, and its impact was high on livestock due to lack of pasture in 2017 and 2018."

The state might utilize regulatory mechanisms to protect the farmland with its previous infrastructure, with public land compensation, or take preventive measures against foreseeable natural hazards. The public land was rarely used for agricultural purposes, infrastructure

development, or industrial parks to produce and generate wealth in the economy and encourage domestic growth. In addition, the energy cost was high in Afghanistan, and many international and national investors were demotivated to invest in long-term projects with higher economic impact. A substantial amount was paid for electricity importation from the neighboring countries of Central Asia and Iran. This situation discouraged investment in the country, and many international and national investors left their capital outside Afghanistan. Consequently, production decreased, unemployment and underemployment increased, and underemployment had a high relationship with extreme poverty rate from the category of unskilled labor and family size with five or above members. These groups were vulnerable to shocks and severe conditions of hand-to-mouth livelihood. Therefore, the poverty factors include droughts, floods, low productivity, lack of necessary skills, and unsustainable or no subsidies from the state. Family-high-growth rates trapped rural and urban households in extreme poverty, which the SPPs and a safety net to protect households against shocks needed to establish.

5.7.2 Insecurity

Insecurity has significantly hindered economic development, investments, and comprehensive policy implementations. This restriction has interrupted development, discouraged investments, increased administrative costs, and challenged public and private efforts, including individual initiatives and capacity building. This situation restrained investment in high economic impact areas from improving the circumstances of unemployment, underemployment, temporary employment, and opportunities to keep individuals out of extreme poverty by implementing the SPPs.

A remarkable share of the budget for extreme poverty reduction programs and projects has been allocated to the security of the staff and office buildings. An inconsequential sum of the budget was allocated to provide basic needs like healthcare services, education, sanitation, and shelter. The impact of these projects could have been more significant in boosting domestic economic development in case of investing more budget share to achieve the actual target. As noted by Minister Mastoor “the ongoing war has been a factor that directly affects extreme poverty and worsens the improvements that have been made. This condition led to a macroeconomic shock with a widespread impact on extreme poverty.” In addition, Ms. Sarabi reflected that “the ongoing

war caused thousands of internally displaced people in Southwest Afghanistan. This condition affected the displacement of 24 thousand of people from Farah, Ghor, and Badghis Provinces to Herat Province in 2018.” In reference to this incident Mr. Temori highlighted “the households in these provinces lost almost all their agricultural income or supplied the products in the market far below-fixed costs. Significantly, economic loss was staggering among the farmers. One kilogram of cucumber was one Afghani in Farah Province. Cucumber was sold in local markets, and transportation was impossible outside this province due to ongoing war and lack of tertiary road networks. The state could not react accordingly and deliver necessary services on an emergency basis. Malperformance of the economic security shock and social shocks made it difficult for the state, the poverty reduction stakeholders, and the farmers to decrease extreme poverty.” Successively, insecurity was beyond the scope of extreme poverty reduction programs and projects, exceeding the state’s authority, which was not in complete control of the air and soil territory of the country. Thus, insecurity has been a foremost factor in all these inadequacies, and the situation progressively was out of control of the programs and projects and gradually out of government control. Accordingly, projects had a minor economic impact. Additionally, insecurity and poverty exacerbated the situation in which rural and urban households could not attain basic amenities. According to Mr. Rahman “this situation caused the absence of investment, unemployment, and increased extreme poverty and vice versa. It has been the chicken or the egg problem, or this condition has been like the two sides of the same coin, which one affects the other one. Insecurity has led to poverty and hunger, and if there has been food security, then the rate of violence and criminality would decrease, followed by maintaining physical security, food security, and encouraging investment. This phase could be an initial step toward early recovery, recovery, and development. Further, wealth needed to be distributed fairly, avoiding crises, especially unemployment. Unemployment encouraged youths to join the insurgent groups as a breadwinner to earn some income and attain basic amenities for their family.”

This unpredictable security situation discouraged investors from investing in the agriculture and productive sectors. Therefore, the investors focused on areas with immediate revenue and invested in consuming goods in the major cities for immediate earnings. As demonstrated by Mr. Niru “if an investor wants to invest a million USD, a primary interest is to invest in constructing a wedding hall. The construction of luxurious wedding halls, a non-productive common investment area, was

a venture based on imported luxury goods, increasingly making the economy poorer.” A wedding hall is a lavish investment and cannot create employment opportunities compared to investing in a productive firm, on the other hand, the poverty reduction stakeholders should have considered an investment in labor-intensive areas. Ms. Saqib noted “the poverty reduction stakeholders focused on the superstructure, and efforts were extended to training and workshops with an incomplete cycle. For example, employment opportunities were neglected because a feasibility study was not conducted on need identification, implementation manner, impact study, and priority of the society. The trainees and attendees were unemployed after the training completion, all the investment in this process failed, and the skills were forgotten over time.” Mr. Saleem illustrated the effect of insecurity through comparing Afghanistan with neighboring countries in South Asia. “A ten million USD project has been considered a small project in Afghanistan. However, projects with the same amount have been enormous in neighboring Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India. The reason has been security costs and Afghanistan’s high extreme poverty rate. Therefore, there has been insignificant economic impact and less reached to the beneficiaries. For instance, in most provinces, up to 60 to 70 percent of a project has been allocated to security and admin costs. Besides, this shift in the project budget was due to insecurity, the state institutions’ focus on military establishments, and the militarization of police forces. Therefore, economic development was pushed to the margins to create income sources and decrease extreme poverty. Specifically, there was an increase in the extreme poverty rate and insecurity from 2008 onward.”

The insecurity circumstances underscored the economic development and monitoring. Insecurity circumstances caused inadequate monitoring and evaluation of projects in rural areas. For example, a third-party audit organization was hired to monitor and evaluate features of project implementation in remote areas. The field staff needed to reflect accurate facts and figures, and due to insecurity, the surveyors could not visit the projects’ sites. A rough approximation report was submitted as a monitoring and evaluation in Kabul. Based on that, policy and budget development were formed for upcoming programs and projects. This approach should have considered basic needs, economic impact, and sustainability of the programs and projects with a clear baseline. In addition, private initiatives could play a vital role in tackling extreme poverty and should be encouraged to be involved in poverty reduction.

The volatile security condition could not guarantee the lives of the entrepreneurs, investors, and

their families. Prof. Halimi noted that “the state had to create and facilitate an appropriate business environment, a basis of physical security, access to finance, and more to attract investors. In many countries, private sector initiatives helped reduce extreme poverty; however, they failed to do so due to insecurity and political uncertainty in Afghanistan. An investor considers a suitable business environment for steady development and long-run investment. Henceforth, establish initiatives, employment opportunities, and sources of income and steadily reduce extreme poverty. However, the NGOs partially filled the gap and offered healthcare and education services for vulnerable groups in rural and remote areas. Due to devastating insecurity, the NGOs left or decreased field operation coverage, which accompanied the absence of income sources and employment opportunities for rural households experiencing poverty.” On the contrary, Mr. Aqa emphasized “insecurity considered as a barrier to some extent but to prevent all types of activities said to be a pretext. The FAO implemented dairy projects, food safety projects, and the construction of irrigation networks in the most insecure parts of the country.”

5.7.3 Top-to-down and bottom to the top design for poverty reduction

The MoEc and the IDLG established a provincial development committee to assess and evaluate priority projects of each community or locality based on the provincial planning guidelines. This committee followed provincial development goals to determine and realize each province's diverse needs and integrate them into the national development policy in a bottom-to-the-top development design. Consequently, a development report was submitted to the MoEc. The ministry integrated provincial reports with an expectation to adjust the development policy based on this bottom-up approach report and to inform the cabinet meeting, the high economic council, and the high minister meeting through presentations. In addition, Minister Mastoor added that "the MoEc was preparing the Afghanistan-Sustainable Development Goals (A-SDGs) with its poverty component in a partially top-down and bottom-up approach. The A-SDGs team was conducting consultation sessions with vulnerable groups and people in poverty in many provinces." In words of Ms. Saqib "this process was considered successful because the implementation organizations such as the GIZ, the Aquaculture Center for Training Education and Demonstration (ACTED), and other poverty reduction stakeholders aligned developmental funds and projects with the state programs. Specifically, this process was a bottom-to-the-top approach that recognized the needs and successfully achieved its target." However, in the urban areas, there was no official mechanism to enhance the role of people in extreme poverty and vulnerable groups in the development policy on poverty reduction. It was noted by Mr. Omari that "a town hall meeting was not held to hear the voices and needs of people in extreme poverty in urban areas. This mechanism still needed to be established."

The provincial bodies meetings reflected by Mr. Bahman that "the provincial development committee met once a month under the chairmanship of the governor. Members of this committee were provincial directors of line ministries, provincial councils, private sector, and Civil Society Organizations (SCOs). The provincial committee held consultation sessions and discussed development features, recognition of shortfalls, and assessment and evaluation of progress at the provincial level."

A consultation session with the end beneficiaries is crucial to designing need-based poverty reduction projects. Disregarding consultation with end-beneficiaries formed more problems for rural and urban residents. In some instances, the basic needs of rural and urban residents have been

determined with flaws due to the absence of statistical data, baseline, unrealistic assessment, monitoring, and evaluation of projects. A field study was restricted due to security circumstances, or a consultation session was not held with the end beneficiaries to identify and prioritize the substantial needs. Offering projects from Kabul to the provinces was an eminent practice in which an international expert designed a project and consulted with a minister or deputy minister. The projects developed with rough assumptions and false projections, and rarely were the end beneficiaries contacted. Designing and implementing projects led to less impact on people experiencing poverty and economic development.

Decisively, a consultation process started in the provinces to recognize the specific needs of each community and allocate parts of the development budget. A provincial consultation session was established to recommend and prioritize development projects in the provinces. This consultation process decentralized the provincial budget to help the villages and remote areas design and implement small projects with significant impact. The process was called “community-owned projects”. Through this process, rural residents had the right to allocate and implement a part of the provincial budget and participate in designing, planning, and implementing the development projects. In the view of Mr. Bahman “The ‘community-owned projects’ process was submitting reports to a provincial committee to minimize the differences from previous project implementations and insufficiency in the villages and remote areas. A development study of the 34 provinces was conducted in four seasons to identify the basic needs of each province in each season. The study was conducted on a two-year rotation to receive recommendations from provinces to the capital Kabul in a bottom-to-the-top approach to minimize the disparity between the needs and projects.”

The national and international experts needed help to identify each locality’s production factor and comparative advantage and reflect feedback and recommendations of end-beneficiaries in the projects, programs, and policy development to have a significant impact. Nevertheless, like the initial stages of provincial development, a discrepancy might appear between the needs of rural and urban residents, production capabilities, and estimation for poverty reduction projects, programs, and policies. However, the experts focused on short-term projects with immediate impact due to insecurity, lack of statistical data, and absence of a baseline. Recognition of the potential basic requirements of each province was minor in the poverty reduction policies by the

experts in the capital, Kabul. To minimize this difference, the pattern needed to change further and increase the input share of the recommendations from the provinces to the capital, Kabul. In addition, there was a need to improve inclusive membership in this decision-making process in case a sufficient budget is available. The furthest aim of these efforts was to develop a PRSP for Afghanistan for 2021 to 2030 and comprehensively determine the characteristics of the SPPs graduation mechanism.

In most cases, a Khan, a local leader, or a commander put their interest ahead of people in extreme poverty and vulnerable groups and manipulated the development process. An electoral mechanism was established to minimize the influence of the powerholder at the community level. Later, members of the development councils were elected through elections in each community. This process made it sustainable for the Women Network, Youth Foundations, and Farmers Cooperatives to take part and consult on the development policies in each community in the rural areas because, in some cases, it was rare to consult the development projects with the community members or in a transparent manner. As evidenced by Prof. Halimi “a road project was implemented in a village in the capital, Kabul, without consultation and identification of the villagers’ needs. Nonetheless, constructing a road project was neither a need nor facilitated transportation and connectivity for the villagers. However, the capital was a relatively secure zone and could hold many consultation sessions to identify needs and recommend a priority project. However, this road project was designed and implemented to asphalt a rough road with a budget of USD 23 thousand. This road was constructed for lightweight vehicles. Nonetheless, the rough road was a route for heavy trucks transporting mining and extracting stone from a nearby mountain. After a while, the road was ruined, transportation was even more difficult than before, the money was wasted, and the need still needs to be solved. the villagers needed cold storage to save agricultural products during the harvest season and supply them in the market at an appropriate time in the winter.” Microfinance was a similar failure but mainly from the side of the beneficiary. The microfinance projects were a practice to assist vulnerable groups in reducing extreme poverty. Prof. Halimi argued “Microfinance enhanced investment in productive areas to create wealth and increase income, such as building effective irrigation systems using improved seeds, chemicals, non-chemical fertilizers, light machines, and types of equipment for low-income farmers or Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Microfinance was a successful initiative for poverty reduction,

and it was invested in appropriate areas to name in Bangladesh and African Countries. However, microfinance was misunderstood in Afghanistan, and it was invested in non-productive areas and in consuming goods such as wedding party expenses, motorcycle purchases, a Television set, and a refrigerator. Such an approach added a debt burden and expanded the depth of extreme poverty among impoverished people and farmers.”

5.8 Sustain Resilience in households experiencing poverty

The state and the international community endeavored to sustain development and enhance resilience against unexpected challenges to help the households who escaped poverty remain out of poverty. A possibility to create resilience was through recognition of village potential and empowerment because villages have been production hubs and sources of domestic growth. The villages required connectivity to the cities and markets to decrease the inflow of consuming goods. The essential elements to generate income by creating employment opportunities for the off-season and achieving the goal of sustaining resilience were intertwined to connect secondary and tertiary road networks.

The state institutions have been established and partially started operations and service delivery in the main cities. The institutions’ presence and performance gradually improved compared to the late 1990s. Henceforward, it has been the assignment of the state to keep the institutions in operation and increase performance following the vision to maintain and sustain the achievements of the transition decade for transformation decade and beyond. The state vision was to establish a sustainable mechanism for empowering the subnational governance at the localities to keep households out of poverty. The state-relevant departments were tasked to follow up with the farmers to recognize and minimize the effect of shocks, create off-the-season employment opportunities, and assist those who left poverty to stay out of poverty until people experiencing poverty reach resilience, in which the farmers produce to export quality. The farmers required assistance until reaching to produce for the national markets and should be encouraged through technical subsidies to expand production levels. Hereafter, the farmers might reach a level where they focus on producing for the export markets. In line with words of Mr. Jerian “as a policy development and implementing entity, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) has been

mandated to create a particular economic growth environment to promote exports. The MoCI pledged to offer many production and export inputs, including land distribution, easy access to finance, energy supply, and other factors necessary for production. The ministry mandate was to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and access to commerce. For commerce, Afghanistan had access to limited markets, which could result in vulnerability to the market policies of those countries, which in turn affected the markets of Afghanistan. If a household in rural and urban areas leaves poverty, regional or international markets policies adversely affect them, and they could return to poverty.” This factor was beyond state institutions’ control, but improving the households’ hand-to-mouth condition may prevent falling into the first stage by offering employment opportunities. The off-the-season high unemployment rate among households experiencing poverty in the communities was a shock. The state planned and conducted projects to create employment opportunities for three to four months of off-the-season. According to Mr. Temori “the rural households received particular job offers for specific maintenance of public projects intending to combat extreme poverty in the winter season and avoid falling back into the poverty trap. These opportunities could keep the households experiencing poverty out of poverty and maintain a life standard above the national poverty line for 9 to 10 thousand Afghans per month to afford stationery, cloths and travel.” These job opportunities in some thematic areas required vocational skills, which were needed to train the job seekers in the communities.

Vocational training and skill learning have been vital for the long-term sustenance of the rural and urban economy and income for households experiencing poverty. The need for more skilled labor has been a challenge in the economy. Mr. Ghafoori noted “there has been a high demand for skilled labor in the rural and urban economies, attracting skilled labor from the region and consequent cash outflow. Vocational training and skill building have been a dynamic project but a continuous process to fill the demand of junior, medium, and senior-level professionals. To name a few, skills such as carpentry and sewing have been assisting poor households in attaining basic amenities, education, and essential healthcare services.” The state pledged to offer vocational training with essential machinery and equipment. These projects were training sessions on the use of specific machinery or equipment, the cultivation of improved seeds at specific times of the year, and the distribution of relevant equipment and improved seeds to the beneficiaries. Due to budget limitations, these projects needed a high level of prioritization, coordination, and collaboration. It

has not been straightforward to create employment opportunities where state revenue covers 30 percent of the national budget, and the international community has funded 70 percent of the national budget as the ODA. The budget deficit has been discussed among national and international stakeholders since 2002.

A significant share of the budget was allocated to security sector investments and a minor share to civilian sector development and sustenance of resilience among households experiencing poverty. The civilian sector share needed to be more significant to maintain basic amenities or enhance sustainable development. However, it was a joint commitment of the state and the international community to help establish primary public institutions, maintain peace, and reduce extreme poverty. The later civilian sector received a lesser budget than the security sector. In addition, the influx of ODA encouraged idleness and increased expectations among rural and urban households. Additionally, the lack of subsidies and market distortion of donations such as wheat and floor obliged most farmers to cultivate illicit opiates to survive. Wheat and floor have been distributed as aid packages to help poor households. These wheat and floor sold in the national markets much cheaper than the fixed costs of the farmers. Henceforth, most farmers grew illicit opiates and supplied them to survive in the national and international markets.

Illicit opiate has had a substantial share in the GDP. A large share of the GDP emerged from illicit opiate and opium production. The poverty reduction stakeholder has been evaluating farmlands on a four-year interval and considered farming trends to discover if the farmers cultivated wheat, opium, or Saffron, which Saffron has been introduced as a substitute for opiate.

The Opiate cultivation acreage decreased, and Saffron increased in 2012 and 2013. The latter, the trend changed the other way around. The farmers could not survive droughts and floods by cultivating Wheat or Saffron. This change in the trend revealed that other kinds of agricultural products could not help the farmers to have sufficient income to manage shocks. The farmers were required to have a different approach to receiving assistance. The existing technical and financial assistance mechanism to farmers needed to improve to avoid making them prone to shocks due to focusing on instant remedies. Likewise, drought had affected the farmers in the remote areas, and many of this group who left poverty dropped to the first stage due to a minor shock. These shocks originated from many unforeseeable problems pertinent to disease or sickness. If two household

members were sick, it took a large amount of household income that the household could not recover for many years. Even though semi-development and development projects were implemented in these areas, the issue of food insecurity still needed to be solved. Thus, households resettled in urban areas in which all the infrastructure investments, such as irrigation networks, schools, and clinics, remained unoccupied in the remote areas.

Furthermore, international organizations and NGOs have increased expectations of job seekers by paying remarkably high salaries compared to the national salary scale. Many job seekers had worked with international organizations and were paid four or five times above the national salary scale for several years. The expectation of this group has increased, and they have yet to be interested in working based on the national salary scale within the national organizations or state departments. However, many people from this group had established private initiatives to maintain basic amenities and household livelihoods. These initiatives required technical and financial support from the state, the MIOs, and the NGOs with a complete production cycle and value chain. Many development projects were instant remedies and avoided considering the sustainability dimension. A complete project cycle was required to be established at the initiation stage. In each project, one or two components failed, and there was fear of insignificant completion or not fully reaching beneficiaries due to insecurity. Insecurity had twice as many adverse effects, and it took a significant share of the budget and wasted poverty reduction investment efforts; it also discouraged national and international direct investments. Poverty reduction has been a gradual process and viable in certainty and stability, which insecurity and fragility make it challenging to complete the project cycle or a complete value chain to have tangible outcomes on the life of the household experiencing poverty. Tragically, the households experiencing poverty were rarely willing to accept changes from a psychological perspective.

The households experiencing poverty have lived in poverty from generation to generation. Therefore, this chronic poverty status institutionalized a mentality among households experiencing poverty in which there have been rare improvement perspectives. As demonstrated by Mr. Behzad “from a psychological perspective, the households in the rural and urban areas depicted a static situation of the current circumstances in which the households believed to keep living in this status quo. The households in rural and urban areas were convinced that the situation could not be

improved. This mentality formed from the extensive ongoing war, discrimination, corruption, and bad governance.”

Additionally, illiteracy has been considered a vital factor in tackling poverty because the household needs to read, write, and calculate to be on the same level in planning and coordinating with the stakeholders. Further, there was a high demand for many essential services, and efforts needed to be increased due to a lack of technical expertise, insecurity, infrastructure, and financial resources to meet the needs. Thus, the social factors affected the scope of poverty reduction efforts. The social norms, customs, and values retarded poverty reduction efforts. As Mr. Sakhizadeh illustrated “a processing factory was built, but it should have built more human capacity to operate and repair the machinery and equipment of the factory. The same shortfall was there in the agriculture sector. The agriculture sector has been conducted traditionally with minor improvements. The farmers demanded agricultural techniques, machinery, and equipment to be more productive in a sustainable manner and build resilience against shocks through the social safety net.” A minor shock dropped the farmers back to poverty due to the absence of a social safety net. The poverty reduction stakeholders distributed improved seeds to the farmers in a few places and helped farmers stay out of poverty for a short time. These poverty reduction stakeholders may cooperate and establish a social preventive net to protect the households falling back to poverty. Such a protective mechanism to safeguard the sustainability of the vulnerable groups’ initiatives was needed to boost resilience and avoid the depth of extreme poverty among households experiencing poverty. For establishing a social safety net, conducting a feasibility study of the projects for extreme poverty reduction nationwide has been a prerequisite to recognizing features of poverty reduction projects. The projects should be categorized based on areas such as urban or rural, short-term or long-term length, and alignment of the funding resources such as national or international. As viewed by Mr. Afzal “those who left poverty required sessions to follow up, monitoring, regular monitoring, and close monitoring. For example, if a cow or a sheep has been distributed to a farmer, it is essential to have a vaccination plan and consider shocks such as drought. Further, the sustainability and marketability of the projects expect a thorough study at the initiation stage, planning, and implementation to safeguard those who escaped poverty and stay out of poverty.” Furthermore, the social safety net was expected to help agriculture projects and farmers reach sustainability. Some farmers planted seedlings expecting to cultivate the products within the next three to four years. It

has been challenging for the farmers to survive, from seedlings to cultivations. These farmers required a source of income, a subsidy, or an insurance system to survive this stage by the poverty reduction stakeholders. Notably, the household in poverty initiatives needed assistance to be sustainable and resilient toward shocks. In support of this Mr. Niru mentioned “suppose a skill has been taught and led to output; a market for the product sought to be identified. The inputs supplied ought to reach an affordable rate and assume the household needed land for the initiative. In that case, the land should be distributed long-term until the initiative has been sustainable and keeps the households out of poverty.”

5.9 Institutional discrimination toward households experiencing poverty

The households experiencing poverty have been, as remarked by Mr. Ghafoori, “widely spread nationwide among each race, sect, area, and language group. Most of these groups have been engaged in subsistence agriculture, livestock, animal nurseries, and handy crafts. Embroidery, carpet waving, and pottery have been eminent handy crafts products of impoverished households” These households were allegedly not discriminated against by the executive body, legislative body, or at the operation level of the state structures.

The state, with the assistance of the MIOs such as the WB, the UN, the European Commission (EC), and ADB had intended to reduce poverty with the motto ‘leave no-one behind’. The state had established budgetary units for households experiencing poverty through the MoLSAMD, which was largely funded by the international community. Ms. Saqib demonstrated that “the MoLSAMD had a budget for the martyrs’ families, people with disabilities, and orphans on a regular annual basis.” Further added by Mr. Temori, the MAIL, the MRRD, the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA), and the WFP distributed aid handouts pertinent to drinking water, distribution of packages for kitchens, tents, blankets and tons of wheat to the households experiencing poverty and in drought-affected areas. The subsistence agriculture sector has been prone to drought and flood, primarily affecting the agriculture sector and livestock in 22 out of 34 provinces in 2018.” The severity of this drought was high, resulting in a lack of grass to foster livestock, which led to slaughtering livestock and selling meat at an insignificant price. At this juncture, no clear discrimination was evident toward drought-affected households but

irregularities at the operation level. There was a high level of irregularities and discrimination at the village councils in which the elite influenced the process at the expense of the people in extreme poverty. As evidenced by Mr. Rasooli “aid handouts and resources were distributed to the village elite as a priority and then to the vulnerable groups—such tendency for discrimination referred to as shortfalls grounded on insecurity, remoteness, state, or donor preferences. Consequently, the aid packages and the resources were unequally distributed in each province.” The absence of capacity in a few provinces affected the implementation of the development projects. In some parts of the country, at the implementation layer, there were shortfalls in some provinces and districts compared to others, which intertwined with insecurity and inaccessibility, led to failure in implementation.

The implementation and operational flaws favored powerholders, influential, Khan, and elite groups, and the development process had deviations to favor the above groups. However, Mr. Ghafoori said “the MRRD attempted to restructure the village councils to minimize discrimination against households experiencing poverty.” In line with this Ms. Sarabi noted that “a road design route was changed to please a powerholder or a Khan, or construction of a road was pending due to the security of a powerholder or a Khan house. This manipulation adversely affected a project’s resources, economic viability, and the opportunity cost of road construction.” The powerholders owned more resources than most of the households in the communities. In support of this Mr. Rahman noted that “the economic system made the rich richer and the poor poorer because the economic system did not follow a development trajectory to facilitate development for various categories of society. The economic system operated based on an emergency to tackle floods and drought and offered flash appeal aid packages often unfairly distributed nationwide.” Mainly, operations in emergency modus could not build bases for society or economic system. In this circumstance, many layers of public officials misused authority and discriminated against the households experiencing poverty due to the absence of proper assessment, monitoring, evaluation, and impunity culture. Therefore, the burden of this discrimination was carried by the people in extreme poverty, incredibly remote villagers who had confronted extreme poverty due to a lack of essential services and were persuaded to move to the major cities on a macro scale. The unfair and unbalanced distribution and allocation of the resources in the cities were an outmoded style of distribution to show which donor agency or country has funded these projects. In reference to Mr.

Bahman “off-the-budget assistance has been mainly invested in the main cities, and an insignificant share has been allocated to the remote villages. The absence of sufficient resources has caused massive internal displacement. Remote villagers have moved to the major cities to access primary services such as education, healthcare, road networks, and electricity. This condition has resulted in the overpopulation of main cities such as Kabul for the past two decades. The internal displacement decreased and diminished domestic sources of production. The agricultural products and production cycle shrunk due to migration to the major cities from the villages and districts. Thus, these production hubs, such as villages and districts, have been underproducing to fulfill domestic consumption and an insignificant amount to export.” This subsistence economy had gradually turned into an import economy and caused extreme poverty to rise. Mr. Omari described the situation that “the state entities were required to establish a mechanism to fairly distribute aid packages in the provinces, districts, and remote villages to consider market distortion, have a quick impact, solve long-run needs, and create nexus with the development assistance because there was a lack of nexus between humanitarian assistance and development assistance to have an impact. In some parts of the country, it was only possible to distribute humanitarian assistance by implementing development assistance. Implementing a development project might not have an impact in the short run, but an impact expected in the long run or facilitate the distribution of humanitarian assistance. For example, delivering services and welfare handouts in Badakhshan Province during the winter was challenging. The roads were snow-peaked, mountainous, narrow, and impossible to consider land transportation as a choice to deliver services. In some cases, the transportation of assistance was through Neighboring Tajikistan.”

The on-the-budget proposal was approved with months of delay due to unfair budget allocations. The national budget was designed on a provincial base rather than a program base, and the National Assembly (NA) modified the proposal of the executive body by approving the national budget. There have been few accountable National Assembly (NA) members who followed the national priorities such as economic development, facilitating employment opportunities, increasing domestic sources of income, and finally reaching the poverty reduction stage. These members attempted to alter the executive body’s discriminatory unbalanced provincial budget at the National Assembly (NA). On the contrary, several members of the National Assembly (NA) had cast votes for approval or rejection of the national budget with the political intention of meeting the

satisfaction of the constituencies in order to be reelected. Therefore, the national budget has been approved or rejected primarily based on a provincial preference in parallel to pursuing personal agendas such as manipulating the public recruitment process and paving the ground for reelection for the next term. Prof. Halimi observation on discrimination was in regard to the national budget approval in which he noted “the National Assembly (NA) members cast votes to attract or refute the national budget for a specific province in which discrimination was evident during the process of the national budget approval.” There was a province-based allocation of resources and development projects in which the legislative body was one of the leading national entities legally authorized to keep the executive body accountable, and there were continuous tensions between these two bodies. In addition, discrimination was evident in the recruitment process at the executive body entities. The employment opportunities were offered to some National Assembly (NA) and Provincial Councils (PCs) member parties or a powerholder or share of a specific province. This flaw was at a higher rate in the public sector than in the private sector and international community organizations. Mr. Talash pointed out that “the employment opportunities in the public sector have not been based on merit to a large extent. The applicants with merit have been discriminated against, and they could not achieve a simple single job. However, some well-connected individuals were employed faster than well-educated applicants. The well-connected individual worked in more than two positions and many sources of income, which lacked eligibility criteria and necessary expertise.” On the other hand, a well-educated applicant from a low-income household with no connection to the powerholders could not use a single employment opportunity with the necessary expertise. The consequence of the discriminatory and nepotistic employment approach made service delivery of the public sector below the minimum to meet good enough governance standards. Therefore, the motivated and enthusiastic young generation who could improve and maintain the past two decades achievements left the country after facing difficulty and the lack of employment opportunities and future perspectives. The young experts could maintain and improve public institutions’ performance, facilitate development, and leave people out of extreme poverty. The young experts have been intellectual resources that nurtured, invested in, and helped to build a state to serve the people and get involved in the development theater in Afghanistan. However, unluckily, there has been a high rate of brain drain due to internal mismanagement, insecurity, discrimination, unemployment, and the severity of poverty.

5.10 Widespread corruption in the system:

The inauspicious phenomenon of corruption has been rampant and emerged boldly as part of the system since 2002 in Afghanistan. The state building main pillars were built based on connections and networks rather than meritorious prospects. This circumstance impacted features of the state performance and development trajectory pertinent to public and private operations such as production, commerce, and service delivery. The outcome led to the employment of kleptocrats in different layers of the state entities, which brought the state-building process to a fragile status and at the edge of collapse.

The existence of kleptocrats retarded public sector performance and development due to widespread waste, fraud, mismanagement, misuse of resources, and nepotism. In line with Mr. Behzad “the high state officials had preferred a specific region, religious sect, or linguistic ties. Ministers, governors, and heads of entities had expected official state positions as a privilege and a source of income rather than a responsibility. If an individual climbed the hierarchy ladder to a minister position, governor, or head of a police department or mayor, the entity changed to favoritism and nepotism of a specific region or sect”. Therefore, this condition led to a stagnant state operation, a lack of employment opportunities and sources of income, and diminished sources of domestic growth, which caused insecurity, insurgency, and poverty to rise nationwide. However, in principle, noted Mr. Safi “it was a responsibility to implement projects and deliver expected objectives to the beneficiaries with a high level of trustworthiness to decrease extreme poverty and ease the development trajectory”. Due to unprofessionalism and unmeritorious employment in the state recruitment system, the public sector policy developers needed help recognizing needy households’ potential requirements. The public carried the unbearable burden of favoritism and unmeritorious recruitment onto especially vulnerable groups. The unmeritorious recruitment had caused a deviation in the development trajectory to sustain achievements and confront extreme poverty. According to Ms. Saqib “the unmeritorious recruitment process made service delivery insignificant, and hiring from low-income households or poor people in the public sector was an uneasy endeavor. Those with a network or connection were hired irrespective of merit or field of study. The politically recruited officials manipulated the public sector departments, including the procurement section, resulting in massive implementation shortfalls, and the expected outcome was not achieved to maintain basic amenities for rural and urban poor households”.

The MAIL and the MRRD had attempted to “reelect members of the village councils and development councils to involve diverse groups in the system and minimize corruption. The councils were engaged in implementation, management, monitoring, and evaluation to utilize the state funds for local projects and offered to the village councils to implement and hire local laborers to improve impoverished households and reduce corruption. There was evidence of unfair distribution of a bag of wheat, fertilizers, cement, or stone, which was not noticed as a systematic corruption” described by Mr. Ghafoori. However, such corruption affected impoverished urban households more than impoverished rural ones due to improper project design, implementation, and service delivery. Further, the impoverished rural households comprised large family sizes and engaged in the traditional subsistence agriculture sector. The impoverished rural households owned a plot of land to engage in agricultural or gardening production relevant to cultivating wheat, maize, vegetables, and fruits to earn basic livelihoods or part of annual consumption. These households had the entire production cycle, and the impoverished urban households had no option.

The impoverished urban households were daily laborers on a construction site, establishing private initiatives to fix bicycles, motorcycles, or generators, selling phone top-up cards to ensure basic amenities, and relying on public sector employment opportunities. Further, poor urban households were recipients of aid handouts. Aid handouts were distributed to poor households in rural and urban areas with flaws and mismanagement. Occasionally, a group of aid handout recipients had decent living conditions compared to households experiencing extreme poverty. This group lived in the cities but built a slum in a poor area following a distribution schedule and receiving humanitarian assistance. The absence of contentment among poor groups and such misuse minimized the chances of well-being improvement of the impoverished urban households compared to the impoverished rural households. This mismanagement has been ongoing in the public sector and the aid system for many years. Finally, this group was caught, and they interpreted this misbehavior and the absence of contentment as receiving “windblown resources of the outsiders”.

Impoverished rural households tended to have larger family sizes than impoverished urban households, resulting in smaller land sizes, with an average family size exceeding persons in rural areas, in contrast to persons in urban areas. The family size in the rural areas was a collective and

family-oriented lifestyle; many generations lived in the same house. This lifestyle was adopted to engage in a traditional subsistence agriculture sector to survive by attaining livelihood collectively for the rest of the household. The households were expected to earn basic amenities for one year. In this context, the effect of corruption might be insignificant on calorie intake per person per day because the entire cycle has been in households surrounding. However, state service delivery was even less accessible for impoverished rural households than for impoverished urban households. Further, the households in rural areas have been growing, and the size of agricultural land has been getting smaller due to the division among farmers' children.

The public procurement process needed to be more transparent and manipulated in various aspects, from the policy to the operational level. Even if the eligibility criteria were met, companies could not secure a project through a transparent public procurement process. The projects were offered to companies owned by an insider, a relative, a friend, or a significant share given to the kleptocrats or insiders. In view of Mr. Temori "low-ranked officials facilitated the share from the procurement process for high-ranked officials, and the entire network was safeguarded through an impunity culture".

The manipulation of public procurement and disruption of service delivery led to an unfair society, and many national and international investors flew out of the country. Consequently, there was more room for the politically recruited state officials to misuse public resources and systematically expand a vicious circle. For example, once a contractor or supplier enters the system, it becomes a win-win situation for the vicious circle. The quality of projects decreased, and an insignificant quantity was delivered to vulnerable groups. Through this network, the vicious circle earned millions of USD, followed by expensive electoral campaigns, and succeeded to climb in the higher hierarchy level and governing the system as a lawmaker. These electoral campaigns were pertinent to presidential, parliamentary, and provincial councils' elections. There was a high rate of corruption and fraudulent votes in each of the elections, and each round cost millions of USD, and in parallel, Afghanistan reached the lead among corrupt countries in the global ranking. In the same society in which elections and electoral campaigns cost millions of USD, vulnerable groups, especially children, searched for food from garbage cans, and the breadwinners of the households were selling body organs to survive. The elite groups prioritized not securing basic amenities and

avoiding children eating from the garbage cans and adults selling body organs. This insufferable and suffocating situation widened fragile trust among various groups within the state, fueling a never-ending war, cruelty, and criminality and causing enormous fatalities, internal displacement, and mass migrations.

Corruption caused investments to decrease due to official and non-official payments. Entrepreneurs were dissatisfied with bribery and other corruption in transporting goods in the export sector. As demonstrated by Prof. Halimi “a national exporter company exported melons from Kunduz province in Afghanistan through Torkham Gate to neighboring Pakistan. The merchant gave a bribe of ‘one’ melon, around 7 kilograms per truck, to each police checkpoint in addition to official customs duty. On this journey, there were 50 police checkpoints, and several official state customs controls from Kunduz to Torkham Gate. Therefore, the exporter paid 7 kilograms at 50 police checkpoints, which, in total, the exporter company paid 350 kilograms of melons in a journey, excluding official tax, to the customs offices. This corruption discouraged the exporter company from participating in the export and import business.” In addition to export and import business, dissatisfactions and discouragements were among farmers, gardeners, businesspeople, and investors due to the high corruption rate at the customs departments and police checkpoints.

There were different types and forms of corruption at the customs offices, from trim-level bribery, falsified customs clearance documents, and replacing luxury goods to essential goods and overloaded transportation lorries. The lorries were carrying standard weight per axle and road standards outside Afghanistan. However, inside Afghanistan, the lorries were overloaded to minimize transportation costs but ruined nationwide primary and secondary road networks. Furthermore, the corruption in the customs departments decreased the national income, and the state remained mainly dependent on ODA. The corruption was systematic within the customs departments. The low-ranked officials facilitated corruption in the system and paid a specific share to the high officials. The high officials were involved in this vicious circle and were aware of corruption within the entity. The vicious circle was safeguarded through an impunity culture similar to the procurement section in other state institutions. In reference to Prof. Halimi “a container imported with USD 20 thousand worth of goods for customs charges but paid in the corrupt system USD 2 thousand and escaped a sum USD 18 thousand from the national budget. This betrayal affected the

state service delivery, which most vulnerable groups and poor households rely upon; in this scenario, the people with higher income gained at the cost of the vulnerable groups and households in poverty”. Therefore, the state could not survive and continue without ODA. Even the state could not pay public servants’ salaries from the national income. It has been explicable that if the resources were distributed unfairly in a high-income country, a group gains more at the cost of another group. Although Afghanistan is a low-income country, the unfair distribution of wealth led to a human crisis. It increased insecurity and unjust society, causing many to be insurgents and join the armed groups to have some income. The war industry was an income source for many poor rural and urban households, in which unemployment fueled wars and vice versa. Further, this situation and the high severity of extreme poverty initiated a social pandemonium, increased criminality, and widened distrust among the public and the state bodies and entities.

The public sector corruption and the condition of donor agencies caused numerous obstacles in the development trajectory for poverty reduction. A complicated condition of donor organizations has led to waste, mismanagement, and a shallow implementation favoring donor countries’ prime. In principle, the effectiveness of the projects and ownership of the recipients was a high priority of the international community; nonetheless, this has been misinterpreted in the case of Afghanistan when the projects were subcontracted several times. The quality of projects decreased tremendously when the projects were subcontracted three to four times to implementing NGOs or companies for which this budget deduction needed to be improved for effective poverty reduction. There were many NGOs or SCOs engagements from the initiation to implementation stages. In this process, rough calculations and projections caused waste, fraud, and corruption, and it was unpredictable to reduce poverty in Afghanistan. Based on the donor country or donor agency policy, the bid winner NGOs was privileged to subcontract a project and get up to 25 percent of the initial budget.

The budget shrank due to subcontracting, which paved the way for systematic corruption. In some cases, the suggestion of the state officials provoked the donor agencies to avoid funding projects and cut ties. The MIOs and the donor organization imposed strict conditions that paved the way for favoritism to a prime Non-governmental Organization (NGO) or a prime company. For example, the national surveys were funded by the European Union (EU). The European Union (EU) has been a significant development partner in Afghanistan, and the development of the projects aligned with

the state of Afghanistan. However, evidenced by Mr. Mowahed shows an unconventionality in the mandate of the EU as such that “the ALCS was funded by the European Union (EU) with a budget of 2 to 2.5 million Euros per term and implemented by an international consulting company. Each survey cycle required two years to complete—one year for data collection and another year for data analysis. These outdated surveys did not significantly contribute to effective policy development. Recognizing this shortfall, the NSIA proposed an improvement to reduce the survey cycle to one year. The proposed structure involved breaking the ALCS into three distinct surveys: a labor force survey, an income and expenditure survey, and an Afghanistan development survey. Each survey would allow six months for data collection and six months for data analysis. This approach aimed to provide more timely and relevant data for policy development. However, the international consulting company rejected this proposal, citing concerns over the compressed timeframe. Consequently, the European Union (EU) decided to cut the funding for the project”.

5.11 Reduction of poverty to 3 percent by 2030

A political will was essential to establish an inclusive environment including all walks of life, such as engaging effectively women share in the development process to reduce poverty. Poverty reduction was intertwined with improving crucial areas such as improvement within the political foundation, allocation, and operation of the ODA, commitment, contentment, proper planning, and optimism in the society with substantial efforts of many generations to reach the goal.

The state of Afghanistan was in massive demand, and it was necessary to nationalize and localize development goals and strategies for a practical impact to meet the need. Reasonable international assistance was waiting around, but there needed to be more coordination to ensure the continuity of efforts. Human and social factors were crucial to ease the severity of extreme poverty nationwide, affecting service delivery in various provinces based on geographical, political, and economic conditions. Society was significantly isolated due to traditional norms, customs, values, and habits, which were connected and illustrated as religious bases to keep the masses silent. Women were a significant part of society, and either this group was economically idle or unproductive to influence poverty reduction. This condition has been a major socio-economic

dilemma for society and the economy compared to states where women and men contribute equally significantly to economic development.

Additionally, commitment and incentive to service delivery were distinct. The households required optimism and a pious incentive to extreme poverty in a single generation. There was a need for individuals with conscientious motivation, commitment, and relevant expertise to lead public sector departments to minimize the severity of extreme poverty by developing a coping mechanism against manufactured disasters, natural disasters, and geography and avoid deviation from straight paths, the complication of project implementations, and increasing budgets from unforeseeable factors.

The state of Afghanistan and the international community were committed to harmonizing and aligning the development process. The development process initiated with the first step for state building. The state-building process started with rehabilitating and rebuilding semi-formal political institutions, traditional socio-economic structures with broken social textures, inadequate public sector resources accompanied by widespread corruption, ongoing war, and a long journey to normalization and stabilization. In this process, there have been policy directions, strategies, and projects to reduce extreme poverty with the technical and financial assistance of the international community in a two-decade timeframe—a decade of transition to rehabilitate and rebuild primary state institutions to establish and maintain law and order, deliver essential services, and enhance national solidarity. This development phase was followed by the transformation decade to improve progress and achievements based on the transition decade with minor international community assistance by increasing domestic sources of growth. However, the state of Afghanistan has adopted numerous international development goals for national development. The state of Afghanistan had invested remarkable time in this process to align the global goals into the national context. The international development goals were pertinent to the MDGs, the SDGs, and the package of Washington Consensus (WC). The SDGs designed and set a milestone to eliminate all forms of poverty or to reduce poverty to 3 percent by 2030, in which the state of Afghanistan is a signatory. Reduction of poverty to 3 percent sounds demanding and requires stakeholders' commitment in the case of Afghanistan.

The state of Afghanistan had adopted the international development goals relatively later than the effect date, for example, the MDGs. Minister Mastoor pointed out that “the MDGs were adopted in 2004, and due to a lack of dynamic capacity and necessary arrangements at the public institutions, this process took ten years to align with the national programs to have the Afghanistan-Millennium Development Goals (A-MDGs)”. Additionally, the delay was due to the state’s focus on military aspects, such as the peace process and enhancement of the national security forces, rather than civilian sector development and alignment of the international development goals to the national programs that needed to be initiated. However, if national programs have existed to align with these international development goals, then the process might not take an exceptionally long time. Minister Mastoor noted that “the SDGs took around four years to align with the national programs to have the A-SDGs. Consequently, Afghanistan has designed programs in alignment with the international development goals to restart production at the village level and an Afghanistan-Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (A-PRSP), which is expected to come under effect from 2021 to 2030”. In addition, Mr. Rasooli described that “the state of Afghanistan developed a concept to increase domestic sources of production through engagements of the households at the village level in the agriculture sector and handicrafts. The villages have been the production hubs historically, and the state vision was to restart production from the villages”. Therefore, efforts and initiatives were launched in the framework of the national development goals. The A-SDGs and the A-PRSP were introduced as potential road maps to reduce extreme poverty through the reactivation of production hubs in the villages and sources of domestic income and growth. The state’s vision required a reasonable timeframe until the villages reach a sustainable production stage to enhance livelihood earnings and increase domestic sources of income and growth. There was sufficient fertile soil but idle due to a lack of know-how to use technology and insufficient improved seeds, which required proactive engagement, commitment, and efforts from the households in the villages. Mr. Bahman argued that “the state needed to prioritize projects based on the most impact areas and avoid scattered implementation. In addition, in coordination with the international community and other poverty reduction stakeholders, such as the village households, to reach full potential in case of prioritization of the projects.” Although the sufficiency of basic needs was improved compared to the era before the interim administration, efforts were extended to the groundwork, which paved the way for upcoming gradual development by identifying the

national minimum requirements and the village potentials. The projects with high impact should focus on creating employment opportunities, food security, and extreme poverty reduction. Further, most rural and urban households needed more access to basic needs such as water, food, shelter, healthcare services, and education. These priority areas needed project initiation, design, and implementation for the village households.

The public sector has been unable to employ or create opportunities, and the private sector has limited capacity to offer employment opportunities. The international assistance was scattered and distributed, in which a value chain needed to be established in the regional and central economy to create employment opportunities. The regional and central economies needed subsidies to absorb the workforce and create employment opportunities. Mr Omari noted that “there was a demand of around 400 thousand job seekers per year, of which nearly 24 percent could secure employment, but the remaining were unemployed, igniting ongoing war. The public sector has been saturated, and a fragile private sector could not meet the market demand to offer employment opportunities on a macro scale. Low-level private sector investment was insignificant, and national, regional, and international investors were less likely to invest in labor-intensive areas without an incentive from the state or the international community. Investment in the agriculture, industry, and extraction industries may decrease unemployment.” The underperformance of the national economy has led to severe challenges to the GDP growth rate compared to the population growth rate. The international assistance filled the national budget income allocation difference. International community investments ought to lead actual economic development and economic growth to reach resilience and sustainability and finally graduate from receiving international assistance. The economic growth rate was below the population growth rate, and a significant share of the national budget was injected through ODA. The national economic performance was unable to meet the necessities of the rural and urban households. This financial disparity was supported through international assistance; even a share of the regular budget was covered by the international community’s assistance, which reflected a stagnant domestic economy. The ODA mechanisms were insignificant in improving coordination’s mechanism and prevention of investment in the same projects. The insignificant was due to the high international personnel turnover rate, security constraints, unconformity among the national and international poverty reduction stakeholders, and

diversity of needs. Economic underperformance, lifestyle, and high population growth rate increased extreme poverty nationwide.

The international assistance was allocated for administrative costs, humanitarian assistance, and partially for development. If no value is added to international assistance to generate wealth and offer sustainable employment opportunities, the development severely collapses and deepens the severity of extreme poverty. However, an option to boost employment opportunities was the deployment of the workforce to a foreign land, mainly in the Middle Eastern countries. Ms. Saqib illustrated that “this option was under discussion and negotiation with the state counterparts. This option might create wealth and decrease extreme poverty through remittances and the need to establish a system to follow the inflow of remittances”. In support of this Mr. Omari noted that “nearly 100 thousand labor force in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with identifications from other countries, though this group regularly sent remittances to their families in Afghanistan. An arrangement was under discussion and negotiation to offer the official Afghanistan Passport for identification, follow the flow of remittances, and impose taxation charges”. Indeed, it was essential to consider domestic development sources to reduce extreme poverty and maintain some physical security of the workforce, investors, and village households to employ possible opportunities to reduce extreme poverty.

The domestic sources of growth were viable to change the structure of the economy in a manner that the households could have access to and benefit from the development of a pro-poor policy orientation. The development was feasible to invest in infrastructure, improve service delivery mechanisms, and normalize security circumstances so that households and job seekers could utilize employment opportunities and attract investors. This phase could follow by improving the quality of human capital to increase productivity. Mr. Khushbeen illustrated that “human capital has been an essential aspect of sustainably reducing extreme poverty to three percent by 2030” and properly managing resources to help boost the effect of the PRSP and establish resilience in the villages. Henceforth, the village households might produce enough for household consumption, supply the surplus in the domestic markets, and minimize cash outflow due to the importation of essential goods. Achieving this goal might help Afghanistan in economic development, peace, and security.

If there were a reasonable number of employment opportunities and increased food security, households would avoid engaging in wars. Thus, security could be preserved with less budget and consequent to maintaining food security and extreme poverty reduction. Mr. Poya noted that “currently, insecurity causes a massive brain drain. This problem was irrespective of capacity-building programs and deployment of the labor force abroad.” In addition, Mr. Rahman observed that “households’ living standards and the perception of poverty have changed in the past two decades. For example, Shurba, a well-known soup cooked from lamb or beef mixed with bread, was a high-class household meal served for lunch or dinner for high-income households few decades ago. Nowadays, it is considered a regular dish, and it has been devalued to an ordinary, affordable dish for medium-income and low-income households”.

Political instability, macroeconomic uncertainty, and underperformance widened national resources’ idleness and deepened poverty’s severity. The land as capital has remained unproductive, and investors could not establish agricultural farms or other productions. An inertia to combine the resources was absent to help state institutions deliver essential services. Ms. Saqib illustrated that “land idleness was one of the state’s underperformances. The private land was partially idle, but the public land was idle to a large extent. There was no system to change traditional ownership of land documents to official property deeds to be used as collateral at the banks for taking loans and generating wealth. The state was required to have a specific plan to distribute land for cultivation by the farmers or the agricultural companies. The state had insignificantly supported such initiatives, and the national resources remained out of the production cycle. Domestic production required subsidies and safeguarding toward massive import flow. National production, such as carpet and dairy production, was endangered due to the large importation of similar products due to membership in regional and global organizations. Afghanistan’s membership in the WTO made it difficult for domestic production units to withstand and survive” the massive importation competition and high fixed costs.

5.12 Effectiveness of the ODA for poverty reduction

Since 2002, Afghanistan has been a prominent recipient of ODA, experiencing a substantial influx of assistance to support its development endeavors. The effective impact of ODA intertwined with Afghanistan contexts such as the peace-building process, political formation, instability, institutional capacity to absorb the influx of aid inflow, drought, flood, waste, fraud, and corruption, and donor agency or country procedures pertinent to dense paperwork, offer based rather than need-based aid disbursement, off-the-budget allocation, shallow coordination, and market distortion. The ODA flew to Afghanistan immediately, and this scale of assistance was unusual for the households, the communities, and the system to absorb effectively.

The allocation of ODA encompassed various sectors, including peace-building, the military, and a residual portion channeled towards the civilian domain, with the aim of poverty reduction. The ODA pledged USD 10 billion annually from 2002 to 2012. Subsequently, this amount saw a reduction to USD 9 billion in 2013. A portion of this reduced sum was designated for extreme poverty reduction. Notably, a significant allocation was directed towards superstructural aspects rather than infrastructure development within the civilian sector. More investment in infrastructure share was needed to construct primary, secondary, and tertiary road networks, railroads, electricity, and regional economic connectivity, which might improve pro-poor development, encourage domestic sources of growth, and create employment opportunities. In line with Mr. Mowahed “the public sector reform transitioned from a centralized command economy to an open-market economy. The public servants required a specific capacity to meet the requirements of public sector reform. Public sector servants were accustomed to providing and delivering essential services based on the central command economic system. The overall environment and transition stubborn the system to embrace an open market economy. The open market economy needed infrastructure, a functioning economy, and a system based on public sector institutions. The capacity of the public sector has required more human resources to meet the requirement for state performance and diverse demands as a regulator. Not only was performance and service delivery a challenge, but the absorption of ODA could have been more effectively used to have an effective impact. The involvement of regional and international experts bridged this gap. These professionals were hired with high salaries, taking much money from the economic cycle. Further, in an open market economy, the state facilitated and regulated the operation of the private sector. This scenario

presented a challenge for public servants who were not accustomed to promoting and overseeing private sector development. The private sector's role in generating employment opportunities and delivering services was hindered by factors like insecurity, unskilled labor, insufficient state protection, and limited capacity within public sector institutions. Consequently, this environment challenged to achieve the objectives of attracting investments, expanding employment prospects, and improving overall economic conditions. Furthermore, the tariff was low due to membership in regional and global trade and transit organizations. This condition led to massive importations of consuming goods, demolished newborn national industry, and was prone to predatory exportation of goods and products to the national economy. The state had a deficit in the trade balance for the transition and transformation decades, which was filled with ODA that had more weight on the humanitarian side or consuming goods". The ODA offered exclusive significant time to formulate poverty reduction programs and policy direction to decrease extreme poverty. The inexistence of programs and policies was rooted in need for more numbers and statistics. An alternative was to initiate short-term projects with immediate impacts. The short-term projects were scattered and implemented, although gradually improved into programs. The national programs were instituted in 2004, focusing on poverty reduction programs to target the healthcare sector, rural development, and education sector. For example, the NSP was initiated to rehabilitate community solidarity and reduce extreme poverty, followed by the CCNPP to cover urban and rural households. The ODA was relatively effective, especially in the healthcare sector, decreased the mortality rate at birth through preventive measures initiated during the birth cycle, and as a result, the child mortality rate decreased. Normalization of the birth mortality rate led to the population growth rate. The population growth rate increased the size and number of families, although the income level of the families remained the same. The family's breadwinner was unable to meet the needs of a large family; thus, this caused food insecurity and needed parallel development in other sectors to avoid extreme poverty.

The state establishment required various needs in the rural and urban areas. According to Ms. Sarabi "humanitarian aid and development aid were allocated to meet the immediate needs of rural and urban households. The rural and urban households were in a chaotic living situation, with rapid, short-term projects or humanitarian assistance merely possible options to avoid human disasters". In parallel to the chaotic living situation, Minister Mastoor described that "the absence of baseline,

numbers, and statistics has been a primary concern for poverty reduction stakeholders. Subsequently, the projects were initiated based on rough estimations. These estimations needed to be more comprehensive to identify the site, type, and time of the year when poverty peaked. Therefore, ODA was allocated to meet various needs scattered and possibly less effective to increase domestic sources of growth”. For example, Mr. Safi compared the ODA with the irrigation system in Afghanistan as such that “the ODA had shortfalls, wastes, and deviations like irrigation networks. The Afghanistan irrigation network has been constructed less effectively and plainly in which only 30 percent of water might reach from the origin to the field, with 70 percent of waste. The same problem was there in the donation industry. Nearly 30 percent of assistance met the target with a 70 percent waste. This problem has emerged from weak management and less or no prioritization of needs, complex paperwork, and preferences of the donor entity. The underlying triggers of extreme poverty remained unidentified, and there was no assessment of absorptive capacity. Despite this, assistance was injected into the economy to mitigate extreme poverty and achieve prosperity”. These areas needed immediate action by the state and the international community funding for sustainable development. The developmental path began from ground zero or even below, and a considerable journey lay ahead. This was due to the fact that vital primary and secondary infrastructures had been demolished or were nonexistent, posing challenges to the facilitation of the development process.

The village councils and the sub-national governance institutions were devastated. A mechanism was unavailable to interact between the state and the rural and urban households in earlier stages of the transition decade. In addition, the fraudulent presidential elections of 2009 and 2014 inflated uncertainty, and many investors, businesswomen, and businessmen left their capitals outside Afghanistan. Political dispersion has prevailed after 15 or 16 years of institutional development. The political distribution was rooted in the western-schooled technocrats in one block in coemption with powerholders in another league. The Western-schooled technocrats were a possible choice to replace local powerholders from the political theater gradually. However, the Western-schooled technocrats needed to be made aware of the features of living standards in the communities, cultural sensitivity, social textures, and governance. They required more political experience to operate a sensible country in high need.

However, governance and political systems were finally a combination of the technocrats and powerholders in which the output, outcome, and result of this system were insignificant to rehabilitate and reconstruct social textures and absorb international assistance to investment in the areas with the most effect to decrease extreme poverty steadily. These factors caused the influx of ODA, which needed to be more efficient in the economy because the state of Afghanistan was entwined with internal rivalry and unable or capable of managing the flow of assistance. Moreover, the withdrawal of the international security forces left a massive gap in the economy, like the absence of a source of income, employment opportunities, and trust, which caused many national and international investors to leave their capitals outside Afghanistan. This circumstance solely increased the demand on state institutions and the ODA. Even though there was necessary capacity in some sectors, it needed properly managed assistance in the areas with high impact due to political preferences.

Further, political uncertainty caused a high turnover rate in the public sector. The appointment of a public sector head disregarded merit and professional qualifications, leading to their resignation or enforced resignation within a few months of assuming the role. A similar pattern applied to replacements, where individuals starting from scratch were chosen, and their effectiveness was contingent on their educational and qualifications background. These replacements faced comparable outcomes of being hired, dismissed, or compelled to terminate their roles during transition and transformation decades.

The agriculture trend has shifted from non-thirsty crops to thirsty crops, and the size of agricultural fields decreased due to the construction of houses and the agricultural fields distributed among heirs. The population has been growing, affecting the rural households' decision ability to cultivate or construct homes for their heirs. The population growth rate was positive, but the land size remained constant. Small agricultural land was rugged for mechanization, and more was needed to achieve sufficient livelihoods. In a limited agricultural space, the utilization of machinery posed challenges despite introducing enhanced seeds and fertilizers through imports. This condition increased farmers' fixed costs, prompting a shift towards horticulture activities.

A mechanism to offer subsidies was insignificantly operating or did not exist. Rural households were prone to high fixed costs and insignificant returns. Therefore, this situation caused massive internal displacement and migration to the cities. Traditional subsistence agricultural engagement

decreased considerably, and the economy shifted from production to consumption, increasing the dependency rate on international assistance. For example, Afghanistan was importing consuming goods worth USD 2 billion and exporting USD 800 million annually. Furthermore, in regions like Bamiyan Province, the absence of cold storage facilities for potatoes posed a significant issue. Potatoes were exported to Pakistan during the cultivation season and subsequently re-imported during winter, leading to a recurring annual economic decline.

Wheat production was a common crop forty years ago. Wheat has been a non-thirsty crop. However, wheat cultivation was replaced with vegetables and fruits. Vegetables and fruits require more working hours and more water than wheat. In this process, many members of the family of farmers and or gardeners tried to have fruitful outcomes. Many farmers and gardeners cultivated vegetables and fruits with a surplus supply in the markets. The income needed to be more to maintain the variety of needs and livelihood of the farmers and the gardeners. On the other hand, the irrigation of vegetables and fruits heavily relied on the extraction of underground water. Natural resource management was often approached with short-term considerations, neglecting long-term sustainability. The reckless utilization of underground water on a large scale occurred without proper recharging. This reckless extraction could potentially exacerbate issues and result in a scarcity of drinking water and environmental hazards stemming from depleted natural resources in the forthcoming years.

In addition, the plants have been utilized as grazing areas or animal pastures, while bushes have been cut, burnt, or compromised by floods. This depletion of bushes and plants has resulted in arid conditions, droughts, and escalated underground water consumption. This prevailing agricultural trend has posed a formidable hindrance to reducing extreme poverty. Importantly, such an approach to mitigating severe poverty had to be cautiously managed to prevent the amplification of manufactured hazards. Essentially, households might make well-informed decisions that alleviate extreme poverty and reduce other risks. In this context, the ODA could only partially address some pressing needs.

The ODA was offer-based rather than need-based. The poverty reduction projects were designed without direct contact and data collection from the beneficiaries or the households in extreme poverty. The poverty reduction projects were at the discretion of the donor agency, and the recipient

state departments could not influence this process. The ODA was allocated to fund training, workshops, and consultative sessions to reduce extreme poverty. Ms. Saqib demonstrated that “the superficial poverty reduction projects focused on the implementers’ expertise rather than the end beneficiaries’ needs. The donors’ funded projects were based on the expertise of the NGO. The NGO highlighted the areas of expertise in the proposal for a project to meet the requirements of the donor agency. These parties focused more on project requirements and expertise rather than the needs of the beneficiaries and minimizing the severity of extreme poverty. The NGO evaluated secondary data and identified a need. Henceforth, the NGO initiated, designed, and implemented a project based on the secondary data. The secondary data required updating to reflect the current needs of households facing extreme poverty. Additionally, the implemented projects demonstrated reduced effectiveness in some instances. In certain regions, genuine needs were acknowledged, and projects were launched; however, these initiatives were left unfinished and incomplete due to prevailing insecurity. Further, these projects were outsourced to a third-party implementation NGO in which an assessment and monitoring were impossible due to insecurity. Information on implementation progress was based on the reports submitted by the implementing NGO. The reports were accurate or flawed depending on the security situation, project location, expertise of implementing NGOs, and year’s season. A third-party impact study could not acknowledge the progress due to security restrictions.”

The ODA had market distortion on agricultural products. The humanitarian assistance harmed the lives of the farmers. Agriculture was crucial in reducing extreme poverty by providing a remarkable share of the basic amenities for poor households and supplying a percentage of the domestic markets. The low-income families have lived in the villages and engaged in agriculture. Subsistence agriculture was performed traditionally, dependent on primary inputs such as irrigation, which depended on the amount of rain usually affected by droughts and determined features of poor households’ earnings. Further, factors such as unskilled labor, corruption, and lack of proper and transparent resource management determined poor households’ economic engagement. The production cycle was affected by the supply of aided wheat. Wheat was distributed in the welfare handouts to low-income families, and the aided wheat was sold in the black market either through recipients or beneficiaries. In reference to Prof. Halimi “a substantial quantity of donated wheat, beans, peas, and lentils was provided as aid, but a significant portion

was supplied in the black market. In this scenario, seven kilograms of grain were sold for 30 to 40 Afghanis, whereas a farmer's fixed cost was around 100 Afghanis for the same quantity. As a result, farmers struggled to survive and became disheartened to engage in a legitimate production. This situation led some farmers to switch to illicit production, while others opted to migrate to urban areas. Domestic production sources were severely affected, and this avenue of the national output was damaged through assistance distribution due to a lack of state regulatory mechanisms". A mechanism needed to be initiated by the state to avoid and prevent the selling of aided wheat in the black markets. The state could not perform as a regulator to safeguard the farmers and keep the domestic source of growth in operation.

The donor agencies required dense paperwork, complicated procedures, and high administrative costs. A significant portion of funds was earmarked for administrative expenses, encompassing security and protection expenditures. Mr. Mowahed pointed out that "international consultants were enlisted to oversee projects with substantial salaries, reflecting the Afghan context. Notably, these consultants often hailed from the donor country. In certain instances, the aid did not reach Afghanistan; instead, the pledged resources were transferred among accounts in the donor countries. This complicated process led to reduced effectiveness of the ODA." In addition, the returnees burdened the communities and the economy. Many returnees have returned from neighboring countries that have yet to be considered in the planning phase of a fiscal year. The state and the international community were unaware of such shock and had to respond on an emergency basis, which might have flaws in the implementation phase and reduce the effectiveness of the ODA.

The ODA was partially aligned and coordinated with humanitarian assistance and development aid. The international community and donor agencies have invested much money to tackle humanitarian needs, hunger, malnutrition, and development projects. Some areas needed dramatic and immediate action to minimize risks and avoid human disaster. Consequently, alignment and coordination were disregarded at this stage, and projects were duplicated from many donor entities. In addition, alignment and coordination could have been more effective due to a lack of necessary capacity at the public institutions and widespread corruption. However, coordination mechanisms were initiated by the state and international community, including donor agencies, donor countries,

and MIOs. ARTF was established as a coordination mechanism in 2002. This mechanism aimed to coordinate and align national and international efforts to prevent scattered project implementation and avoid duplication of efforts. This coordination mechanism was followed by the JCMB. The JCMB was endorsed at an International Conference on Afghanistan in 2006. This coordination mechanism was established for mutual accountability, boosting coordination, collaborating on policy development, and aligning projects and programs. The JCMB has been jointly chaired by the MoF of Afghanistan and the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). Despite these coordination mechanisms being established and efforts allocated for strategic management of the ODA, 80 percent of the ODA was invested Off-the-budget for the transition decade from 2002 to 2014. Some projects overlapped, some areas attracted many donors to fund, and some were not funded. The main excuse of the donor entities to fund projects through On-the-budget was a high rate of corruption and a lack of necessary capacity at the public sector institutions. However, improvement in the state institutions resulted in the prioritization of the programs and sequence of the development, which international assistance had aligned with the national budget. Further, the achievements have been tangible in the transition and transformation decades. An improvement has been made in the education sector, rural development, agriculture sector development, commerce, private sector operation, rehabilitation, and reconstruction of the public sector institutions. The situation has improved in comparing Afghanistan of today with Afghanistan before 2000.

The ODA was allocated through the off-the-budget mechanism to target extreme poverty reduction at the beginning of the transition decade. During this time, a major share of international assistance was funded through unaligned approaches. The state needed to be made aware of priority areas and the development sequence to meet the beneficiaries' needs. It was a situation of a post-war country; however, war has still been ongoing in parts of the country. In accordance with Mr. Rahman "for the past four decades, schools have been targeted and destroyed, leaving individuals uneducated and devoid of essential skills. The limited years of schooling have resulted in meager incomes, contributing to the enduring poverty experienced by both rural and urban households. This educational gap has fueled a high illiteracy rate, rampant unemployment, and entrenched extreme poverty. This vulnerable demographic has been exploited as a pool of expendable resources, readily drawn upon for various conflicts."

The ODA has been improved and in symphony with the state of Afghanistan during the transformation decade by a few of the MIO. The MIO have aligned projects with the state's priorities but needed more focus with high impact. The coordination mechanisms could focus on aligning and developing the ODA to invest in focused economic development to have a higher effect in which the ODA could prioritize high-impact projects. However, it was possible in a few parts of the country due to ongoing war but not nationwide. The ongoing war took the opportunity from the households in the rural and urban areas to engage in some kinds of economic activities to achieve basic amenities or individual initiatives. The ongoing war was moderate for a few years during the transition decade, but it was gradually refueled, damaging, and wasting previous achievements.

Further, political preferences were also a factor that wasted On-the-budget assistance. Only some National Assembly (NA) members cast votes and influenced the process of where the national should be invested, which aligned with the off-the-budget and had a higher effect. These political preferences disregarded the effectiveness of contributions, which determined the feature of poverty reduction endeavors. Furthermore, the state hired many public servants at the localities, provinces, and ministries, irrespective of merit. The hiring system that lacked merit was founded on the engagement of individuals in the election campaigns of presidential and assembly candidates. This group of public servants needed help to absorb the ODA. Therefore, the ODA was invested in projects and programs based on an off-the-budget mechanism. Around 80 percent of the projects and programs were directly funded by the donor countries or agencies from 2002 to 2014. After that, less than 50 percent of the ODA was spent through the on-the-budget mechanism. This budget allocation mechanism needed to be more significant in establishing a symphony among economic development and population growth rate. Therefore, extreme poverty increased during this time, although there was economic development. The economic development was based on the ODA allocation and military transit, procurement, and contracts. This economic boom busted after the withdrawal of the international security forces. The ODA was not at that scale to fill the gap and prevent a high rate of extreme poverty. Moreover, the pre-existing shortfall in development efforts was compounded by factors such as inadequate coordination, the influx of returnees, internal displacements, a high population growth rate, and fraudulent elections. These additional challenges further exacerbated the prevalence of extreme poverty across the nation. However, some MIO had

fully aligned the projects and programs with the state policies for higher impact. Mr. Halimi illustrated that “the ADB has focused operations on supporting agriculture, energy, and transportation. These sectors have been fully aligned with the state’s priorities and funded through an On-the-budget mechanism. The ADB granted nearly USD 4 billion and offered almost USD 800 million to the state of Afghanistan”.

5.13 The relationship of globalization and poverty reduction in Afghanistan

The examination of the relationship between the phenomenon of globalization and the reduction of extreme poverty has been approached through a dual methodological framework encompassing qualitative and quantitative sections. Within the qualitative domain, a comprehensive assessment has been undertaken, researching into the realisticness of development policies, the effectiveness of ODA, and the relationship of globalization in influencing the trajectory of extreme poverty reduction in Afghanistan. This qualitative inquiry has been driven by structured and semi-structured interviews with knowledgeable informants from the public sector, MIO and academia, facilitating the findings, insights, and perspectives. The informants, through their contributions, have provided insights and perspectives that manifest across a spectrum of consent, uncertainty, or dissent within each delineated section.

Concurrently, the quantitative section of the research is embedded in the qualitative domain, which has entailed the application of a Coefficient Alpha (Cronbach's Alpha) test. This test serves as a pivotal instrument to establish the reliability and consistency of concerted efforts directed towards the reduction of extreme poverty. In this results phase, particular attention has been directed towards assessing the reliability of the development policies scale for poverty reduction, the effectiveness of ODA interventions and impacts. The integration of these quantitative findings has evolved in the identification of fundamental points of interface, as well as the mixing strategies and synergistic approaches.

The mixed methodological framework, combining qualitative discourse and quantitative assessment, holistically reveals the complex dynamics underpinning the complex relationship between globalization and the reduction of extreme poverty in the case of Afghanistan. This complex exploration not only offers a comprehensive comprehension of the prevailing landscape on Afghanistan context but also serves as a base for informed development policy preparation and efficient intervention strategies for poverty reduction.

5.13.1 Realisticness of development policies on extreme poverty reduction

5.13.1.1 Consent on Realisticness of development policies for poverty reduction.

Consent emerged among informants who agreed that the development policies had reduced poverty. Expressly, 45 percent of the interview participants agreed that based on the features characteristic of the project and program initiation and subsequent implementation, the formulated development policies were realistic in their intent to reduce extreme poverty. These informants echoed that the poverty reduction stakeholders hold regular consultation sessions with the beneficiaries of the development policies at the initiation stage in most parts of the country. Predominantly, the initial emphasis was on conducting an array of consultation sessions and fostering coordination mechanisms to facilitate the development of the capital city, Kabul. This development phase was achieved through the execution of small-scale projects that were dispersed across various locations. The agenda for the consultation sessions have been based upon features of a selection of a project, site of a project, trajectory of a project, implementation of a project, and possible employment opportunities for the beneficiaries to transition toward a program approach or a cluster approach to increase the effectiveness of extreme poverty reduction endeavors. In this process, a social study was conducted before a technical analysis to assess, evaluate, and monitor to minimize possible adverse impacts of the projects and programs on the lives and sources of income of the beneficiaries, such as the establishment of a protection mechanism to safeguards canals, streams, springs, shrines, cemeteries, and agricultural fields.

The MRRD and the MAIL launched several projects and programs to identify the weaknesses and strengths of vulnerable groups and effective poverty reduction. A sequence of sessions was organized in collaboration with the NSP and the CCNPP. The NSP was designed with an objective and a component on poverty reduction and established a mechanism to facilitate communication between the citizens and the state through community councils and development councils to hear the voice of the households in poverty in rural areas. The NSP extended the CCNPP to urban areas to establish town hall meetings.

The beneficiaries were consulted at the village, district, and provincial levels to put into perspective agricultural development, including agricultural infrastructure such as irrigation systems and networks. Additionally, a section of consultation sessions was skill building for the farmers and the gardeners in the agriculture sector. This circumstance was pertinent to the effectiveness of land

usage, irrigation approach, type, kind, and quantity of fertilizers, and improved seeds to improve the economic income return of the households. An agricultural annual plan or a calendar was introduced to the farmers to know the time and date for irrigation, removal of grapes and pest leaves, and improvement of the quality of products based on market demand. This calendar has effectively improved outcomes based on market demand, which sustains household operation and attain basic amenities. It has been significant to harmonize agricultural engagement with an economic perspective to significantly assist vulnerable groups and people in extreme poverty in minimizing the severity of extreme poverty.

Moreover, these consultation sessions played a pivotal role in establishing a foundational understanding and identifying vulnerable demographics along with their distinct requirements. These necessities encompassed essential infrastructure such as school buildings and supplies, provisions for shelter and safety, healthcare amenities including clinics and hospitals, as well as addressing the energy and electricity sector. These sessions led to recognizing and classifying poor groups. As an illustration, a subset of the impoverished population stands at a notably elevated risk compared to other underprivileged groups. This particularly vulnerable subset includes women, people with disabilities, and households displaced due to various circumstances, particularly those with dependent children. Providing support to these vulnerable groups necessitates collaboration with diverse entities, including specialized organizations, and the active engagement of state institutions. Additionally, the involvement of various stakeholders in poverty reduction initiatives was imperative to address these at-risk populations' needs effectively. For example, grassroots organizations or civil society groups such as the women's network, youth foundations, and the Mass Media could link the state and people in extreme poverty. These social institutions could engage in the development process and inform citizens' rights and needs during policy development and decision-making to reduce the severity of extreme poverty. These programs have been realistic and viable by reflecting the needs of the vulnerable groups to improve the livelihoods of the households in extreme poverty in the mid and long term.

5.13.1.2 Uncertainty on Realisticness of development policies for poverty reduction.

A group of informants articulated a desire for greater certainty regarding the realistic nature of the development policies aimed at poverty reduction. Within this context, 41 percent of the interview participants indicated a degree of uncertainty regarding whether the development policies had

effectively contributed to the reduction of extreme poverty. These informants were doubtful that the development programs were partially effective based on implementation features, geographical location, and commitment of the personnel involved in the project. Establishing a well-structured system or a robust bureaucracy was imperative to ensure the optimal functioning of public institutions. Among public servants, there existed a perception that the efficacy of these institutions hinged on the qualifications and attributes of the individual in a leadership role. The accomplishments and advancements of public institutions were inherently linked to the qualities of the individuals constituting their workforce. If an individual possessed charismatic attributes, firm qualifications, proactivity, and a genuine commitment to progress, the public institution operated effectively, yielding tangible and discernible progress. Conversely, a notable number of qualified job seekers exhibited disinterest in pursuing positions within public institutions, given the compensation structure aligned with the national salary scale. Many public sector employees were required to possess the capacity, commitment, and motivation to improve. Consequently, the least qualified individuals employed in public institutions led to a kakistocracy, which deepened underperformance, corruption, and the severity of extreme poverty. Moreover, the persistent shortage of skilled and semi-skilled labor stood out as a prevalent and acknowledged challenge. However, this deficit was eventually reduced as skilled laborers stepped in to bridge the gap from the region, capitalizing on employment prospects that caused a remarkable cash outflow.

Outdated statistical data was a massive problem in addition to a need for good-enough bureaucracy based on systems rather than individuals and qualified skilled and semi-skilled laborers. A comprehensive study covering all 34 provinces was undertaken biennially to ensure the regular updating of statistics and numerical data. The provincial priorities were transmitted to the capital to allocate a portion of the budget, facilitating the subsequent implementation phase through sub-national governance authorities. However, the outdated studies and surveys were unrealistic and inaccurate, which led to insignificant outcomes in many instances, even in the capital, Kabul.

A section of the development could have improved features of programs, production strengths of the communities, and minimized distortions. Due to the absence of an explicit poverty reduction program to reduce extreme poverty, the development process required to be more proactive to consider a value chain and a complementarity role of projects or programs in the communities. The system necessitated a thorough analysis of lessons gathered from previous programs, facilitating

the adaptation of schedules in alignment with the evolving needs and progress of ongoing initiatives. Further, the structure should improve from individual and personnel-centered to system-centered and community-centered and effective institutions' performance. For example, certain provinces undertook projects like handicrafts encompassing carpet weaving, embroidery, and dairy production. However, it was worth noting that a comprehensive Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis was not conducted to inform future initiatives and programs and to ensure the sustainability of the progress achieved. Further, a traditional definition and understanding of a road network have been that constructing a road in a village is practical to help villagers access other facilities and centers like schools and clinics, transport products to the market, and offer daily labor. This typical understanding needed to be more viable in each project. For example, road construction was designed and implemented in a village without consultation and prioritization of the village households. The road was destroyed a few months later due to rock transportation, though cold storage, which the village households need, should have been addressed.

The development initiatives within communities necessitated a role of complementarity, accompanied by a notable degree of uncertainty regarding the sustainability of these developmental efforts. The NSP was a community block run for community-based infrastructure beneath. The NSP targeted local infrastructure development, facilitating jobs, minimum daily wage, and some sources of income for poor households and was interpreted as a poverty reduction program. This developmental phase led to an incidental reduction in poverty due to the concentration of low-income families residing in communities and rural areas. The effectiveness of the NSP was not shared or discussed due to a lack of baseline or numeric data by the general director of the succeeding program. The NSP expanded to the CCNPP to engage with households through the mobilization process to be involved in the decision-making process to reduce poverty and improve the social lives of families in the rural and urban areas-the same approach applied by the IDLG. The CCNPP conducted two analyses at the village level to improve rural households' economic and social lives. A well-being analysis considered the households' income and categorized them based on income, followed by another expense analysis named the Defect Pot (Kuza-e-Surakh). The defect pot analysis displayed unnecessary expenses tied to the traditions and norms, specifically to the female members of households in rural areas.

The community households received remarkable technical and financial assistance from the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and the international community. This development and poverty reduction intervention created a dependency among the households and a high expectation compared to the public institutions' delivery and services. The sub-national and national governments were unable to meet these expectations. In addition, the international community and MIO had requested the state to implement a cash-transfer project to reduce the severity of extreme poverty. The request was declined because it could elevate the expectations of impoverished households and foster a sense of dependency and laziness within the communities. The implementation phase of this project could have taken corruption to the next level in case of operationalization. However, implementation challenges were inevitable in many projects and remote areas left without essential and substantial assistance, and the households lived insufferably. Consequently, these deficiencies and under achievements across various developmental domains and levels have cast doubt on the extent to which the development policies have been truly realistic in effectively reducing extreme poverty.

5.13.1.3 Dissent on Realisticness of development policies for poverty reduction.

A group of informants voiced disagreement regarding the perceived realistic nature of the development policies aimed at poverty reduction. Within this group, 14 percent of the interview participants held the opinion that the formulated development policies needed to be sufficiently realistic in their potential to reduce extreme poverty effectively. These informants' perspective was grounded in the observation of inadequate capacity within sub-national and national government entities, shallow coordination, internal rivalry, a superficial understanding of public procurement savings, and the oversight of domestic revenue sources.

The shortage of essential capacity within public state institutions has been acknowledged as a significant challenge. A substantial proportion of employees in these institutions possessed a rudimentary grasp of data, numerical information, and analytical techniques. While provincial requirements were communicated to the capital through data and figures, ministries required assistance to conduct a comprehensive analysis, prioritize initiatives, establishing sequences, and facilitate smooth implementation. An intellectual genius and the requisite capacity have been absent in the communities and among the state institutions to emerge inclusive development policies with a substantial effect on extreme poverty reduction. Due to the development interaction

between the communities and the public institutions, there has been a discrepancy among ministries and entities on development projects. At the development stage, the development policies have rarely received contributions from grassroots organizations or CSOs; however, at the implementation stage, these organizations seldom monitor and evaluate development policies. This deficit was recognized by the MIOs. Consequently, the WB and the IMF recommended that the state of Afghanistan develop a pro-poor budget and involve CSOs in the development process. The state established a set of primary arrangements to create a pro-poor budget, invite community representatives in the capital, and engage CSOs. The provincial delegates were coming to the capital, Kabul, to prioritize and request some parts of the sub-national governance development projects to be included in the national budget. This budget development mechanism was not acceptable to most beneficiaries because of the selection of the delegations. The representation of provincial delegates and selection of attendees were based on affiliations and personal preferences but were not inclusive. In addition, beneficiaries were not satisfied with the project implementation due to long delays and the approval of the national authorities. Subsequent sessions for developing pro-poor projects took place in the provincial centers. As a result, provincial development plans were subsequently submitted to the MoEc. The MoEc had aligned, merged, and presented regional development projects to the Ministerial Cabinet Meeting (MCM) or the National Economic Council (NEC). Hereafter, the MCM and the National Economic Council (NEC) holistically discussed the economic viability of each project and submitted a finalized version to the National Assembly (NA) for approval and implementation of the pro-poor projects and budget along with other national development programs. The National Assembly (NA) conducted deliberative sessions, assessed and endorsed the national budget, and provided suggestions and enhancements, frequently leading to extended and delayed project implementations. Further, the president issued a decree to centralize the Public Procurement Process and directly supervised and managed the public procurement. Several state high officials, including the president, the prime minister, the MoF, the MoEc, and relevant ministries and entities, attended this process to discuss the effectiveness of the public projects and programs. The aim was to increase savings, avoid unnecessary expenses, and tackle corruption. This stage was a lengthy process that held weekly sessions, showing a need for more trust and reliability of the previous effort by sub-national and national authorities. This approach was a less prudent decision, as it concentrated excessively on a

phase that failed to stimulate the growth of domestic revenue sources, national income, and wealth accumulation. This approach was noteworthy, considering the state's official objective and slogan, which aimed to transition from an aid-receiving nation to self-sufficiency. Regrettably, the potential for generating domestic income and wealth was largely unexplored, owing to the substantial budget allocation through international aid channels. Furthermore, the project development and budget development needed to be aligned. The provincial development projects were channeled through the MoEc, each under a specific ministry. Due to a lack of coordination and effective communications, ministries needed to be made aware of projects channeled through the MoEc. The MoF struggled to align the allocation of the ministerial budget, provincial budget, the province's share, and which entity has been selected as an implementing body. Although the MoEc attempted to establish a mechanism to coordinate development policies and avoid contradiction among entities, more was needed. A long-term development policy with short-term goals might be realistic to improve coordination and prevent denial among the national governance, sub-national governance, and implementation entities.

5.13.2 The Efficiency of ODA

5.13.2.1 Consent on effectiveness of the ODA for poverty reduction.

A group of informants expressed agreement with the utilization of ODA, acknowledging that it has exhibited a visible degree of effectiveness in its investment pursuits. Among the interview participants, 48 percent asserted that ODA had proven effective in reducing extreme poverty. Initially starting from a rudimentary baseline of zero or even below, these investments have played a pivotal role in driving progress across a diverse array of sectors. The development has been visible in infrastructure, superstructure, healthcare sector, agricultural development, education system, and girls' enrolment in the schools. These achievements resulted from the effective investment of the international community's efforts by implementing the ODA.

A few platforms initiated to organize, coordinate, and manage international assistance, such as the ARTF, The JCMB, the Kabul Process – Heart of Asia (KP-HA), and the Istanbul Process (IP) in the context of Afghanistan. Afghanistan experienced several continuous decades of conflicts in which primary and secondary infrastructure pertinent to the physical and soft structures, like

councils, sub-governance, and national governance institutions, were destroyed. Therefore, a functioning mechanism was not in place so that the central state communicated and interacted with the communities and vice versa. Further, the absence of necessary expertise in the country obliged the national authorities and the international community to establish an expedient and participatory state from the western-schooled-technocrats and national-military-commanders and powerholders. Efforts were undertaken to address capacity shortcomings by engaging Western-educated technocrats and enlisting the expertise of international and regional professionals. Although this course of action was deemed necessary at the time, it was not a sustainable solution to sustain the gradual trajectory of development.

This state formation was underperforming due to incompatible personnel delegated authority to lead the state institution, followed by unpredictability, improper collaboration, and weak cooperation. The latter 2014 presidential elections harmed economic development, ongoing war, high population growth rate, and natural disasters such as floods and drought, substantially damaging the agriculture sector and complicating the development trajectory even further. A fragile bridge of trust was established between the state and the international community. Consequently, widespread corruption led to reluctance within the international community towards directing ODA through the national budget. However, the ADB as a Multilateral International Organization (MIO) had 100 percent aligned the ODA to the state development policies, and all the funding was facilitated through the on-the-budget mechanism.

Establishing a comprehensive databank was anticipated to boost the measurement of progress and the execution of impact assessments for development projects and the effectiveness of ODA. While existing data primarily originated from individual projects, presenting a project-centric perspective, there was a discernible need to create a nationwide databank. This databank would serve as the foundation for conducting baseline surveys, subsequent follow-up surveys, end-of-project evaluations, and impact assessments. Therefore, assumption and projection were the only possible choices for publicizing and distributing project reports. Such endeavor aimed to establish a mechanism in addition to a specific sector, say road construction, but a databank to illustrate the needs of rural areas. Hence, as the development project was complementary to market access, establishing it was necessary. This phase might encourage domestic sources of growth by

effectively implementing the ODA. In addition to the ODA, a share of the economy in the rural and urban areas benefited from military transit, procurement, and contracts, creating a short-term income source. However, the returnee and internal displacement shock devastated rural and urban economies, mainly for vulnerable groups, including children and women. For instance, in some areas of the country, pregnant women faced challenges accessing healthcare service centers for childbirth due to the absence of a comprehensive tertiary road network. These multifaceted circumstances have contributed to relatively limited investments in specific areas. However, a comparative analysis of Afghanistan's development trajectory from 1998 to 2018 reveals a noteworthy and substantial advancement.

5.13.2.2 Uncertainty on effectiveness of the ODA for poverty reduction.

A group of informants conveyed a sense of anticipation for enhanced understanding regarding the vital role of necessary capacity within rural and urban economies to utilize ODA effectively. Within this group, 31 percent of the interview participants expressed uncertainty regarding the extent of effectiveness associated with ODA. This capacity encompassed the ability to identify, prioritize, manage appropriately, and reduce deviations and inefficiencies. A prolonged and intricate endeavor undertaken jointly by the international community and the state for investments in human capital followed essential services, such as education, healthcare, access to clean and safe drinking water, electrification, and sanitation. These investments have held paramount significance for healthcare enhancement and overall productivity. However, it is worth noting that realizing substantial outcomes in these areas has required a long-term commitment and a considerable allocation of ODA.

There has been a substantial dependency rate on ODA, with some share from the spending around military contracts and insignificant input of the domestic sources of growth for the humanitarian and development spheres. The progress was across military contracts with PRTs and operation of the NGOs as contractors and development partners, including the poverty reduction stakeholders and the international community. An average household was rarely able to engage in the development trajectory due to these groups' lack of necessary eligibility criteria.

The international community and the state allocated parts of the development to direct the economic growth for pro-poor, considering inclusively poor households and offering employment

opportunities. The efforts included seasonal job offers to impoverished families experiencing poverty, such as daily laborers, construction workers, and the canal digging workforce. In addition, the agriculture sector has been an inclusive part of the economy, but it has been hostile due to floods and droughts. If the agriculture sector has yet to produce enough to meet the domestic demand, it needs to arrange, and supply imported goods. The involvement of the agriculture sector carried a substantial fixed cost burden due to the importation of machinery, fertilizers, and improved seeds. Furthermore, the existing subsidy system needed to be more inclusive in its distribution and thoroughly established. The unintegrated development projects lacked a complementary role with other initiatives, and the MRRD predominantly prioritized social aspects over economic impacts. A crucial share of the socioeconomic segment remained idle, even in the social aspect. Society is composed of females to the extent of nearly 50 percent. The female percentage of the GDP has been insignificant due to a lack of equivalent acceptance compared to the male segment in society. Partially, females had engaged in agriculture but rare in other sectors such as mining, trade and commerce, restaurants, and services.

Engagement in the agriculture sector was the only possible survival for rural households and remote mountainous areas. However, droughts have limited agricultural productivity, and international assistance's distortion to the agriculture sector was disappointing-the international aid was composed of agricultural packages such as wheat, beans, peas, and lentils. The market distortion has been unnoticed and, as a result, has damaged the agriculture sector and the local market business. These products were supplied in the black market at a low price. Many households left the agriculture sector and either moved to the cities to engage one or two family members as breadwinners or shifted to cultivate illicit opiates. Additionally, the agricultural plot of land went under construction, and with that choice, all the previous infrastructure investments were wasted. This condition has resulted from a need for coordination among poverty reduction stakeholders. In some instances, some of the projects overlapped, and some were not funded. Many of the projects had short-term goals and immediate impact. These projects had high admin and security costs. Henceforth, poverty reduction efforts decreased significantly in this sector, and this disparity was filled by the ODA. The state needed to accord a high priority to nurturing domestic sources of growth, particularly within the agriculture and mining sectors. This emphasis was essential to meet domestic demand effectively and reduce the substantial importation of consumer goods. This

enormous level of imports caused the GDP to shrink, extreme poverty to increase, and increased dependency on ODA. Additionally, the urban and rural economic development was adversely affected due to widespread corruption and hindered the development trajectory.

The choice of end beneficiaries and investors led to less effectiveness of the ODA. The choices made by the end beneficiaries led to less effectiveness of poverty reduction efforts. For example, the microfinance initiative was a well-known poverty reduction program in Bangladesh and Africa. The microfinance beneficiaries invested in microfinance loans in productive sectors, but the same initiative failed in Afghanistan due to the wrong choices. This program was used to pay the expenses of a wedding party and purchase a motorbike, a Television set, and a refrigerator, but not in the areas to create wealth and increase income. In parallel, private investors invested in constructing a wedding hall rather than productive sectors such as a factory to produce, decrease imports, and offer employment opportunities.

Insecurity and continuous wars limited economic development and decreased the effectiveness of ODA. The environment for all civilian actors to use a possible employment opportunity, attract FDI, or an initiative that generates income were partial potential in some parts of the country with high costs. Further, the withdrawal of the international security forces led to a psychological effect in which many investors and business actors left Afghanistan. This situation adversely affected the public sector as well. This status quo led to political instability and lack of job certainty, and crises have been ascending. A public official has resigned, was obliged to leave, and or fired in a few months, followed by someone else who has been starting everything from the beginning and the same procedures repeated. Despite recruitment practices often deviating from merit-based criteria, personal connections and involvement in electoral campaigns were prioritized and held a greater significance. Moreover, a significant challenge lies in need for consistent project, program, and policy continuity. This deficit adversely impacted state institutions' performance and contributed to ODA inefficacy.

5.13.2.3 Dissent on the effectiveness of the ODA for poverty reduction.

A group of informants voiced skepticism concerning the assertion that ODA rapidly entered Afghanistan and yielded limited effectiveness in attaining its intended goals. Within this group, 21 percent of the interviewees disagreed with the notion of the effectiveness of ODA. This influx had

limited effectiveness in reducing poverty due to several factors, including inadequate data, statistics, and baseline information to formulate meaningful indicators for poverty reduction. Developing a practical project and program was unfeasible in an ongoing war country.

The absence of effective coordination caused duplication of efforts in many areas where the ODA was invested widely in every area rather than those concentrated areas to enhance sustainable development such as road network construction, railroad construction, electrifications, and regional economic integration infrastructure and mechanizations. Therefore, it needed to be more apprehensive about recognizing poverty's location, type, and time. Thus, project initiation, measurements, and implementations were based on rough estimations. The rural and urban economy was in an emergency with high humanitarian and development assistance demand. Further, there were additional influences such as ongoing war, political instability, unmerited recruitment at the sub-national governance, the national government, frequent replacement of the development policy, unskilled labor force, corruption and wastes, fraudulent presidential elections in 2014, complicated and dense paperwork and high admin cost of the donor agencies have been factors which had affected extreme poverty to rise and less effectiveness of the ODA.

Members of the National Assembly (NA) influenced development policies and budgets based on regionality and ethnicity rather than technicality and effectiveness. Additionally, the peacebuilding process and presence of the international security forces offered direct and indirect sources of income and employment opportunities for many rural and urban households. The withdrawal of the global security forces left a massive disparity in the economy, which neither the national economy nor the ODA could compensate for.

The agriculture sector has been a traditional occupation and source of income for village households and a source of national growth. The agriculture sector improvements could have been more satisfactory to meet the domestic needs due to floods, droughts, market distortions, and construction of houses on the agricultural fields. A level of need to this extent and improper coordination, management, and allocation of resources made the effect of the ODA insufficient. In addition, unaligned development resulted in triumph in one area but trial and tribulation in others. Healthcare sector development projects were successful and resulted in a decreased mortality rate at birth. However, the income of the households did not increase, which affected food security and undernutrition problems in the family and the future, together with disease and misery.

ODA was predominantly funded based on the expertise of NGOs rather than being driven by the genuine needs of the beneficiaries. NGOs often identified opportunities by analyzing secondary data and assessing available funding in specific areas. This procedure led to the initiation of projects, with well-crafted proposals designed to secure ODA funding. Once approved, these projects were put into motion. Subsequent audits and impact studies were conducted to shed light on the characteristics of the implementation. This approach was categorized as an ‘offer-based project’, wherein the allocation of ODA was directly handed over to third-party entities for implementation. Such projects were frequently selected based on available offers rather than addressing actual needs. Remarkably, around 80 percent of ODA disbursed between 2002 and 2014 was directed to these third-party entities, while the remaining 20 percent was routed through the On-the-budget mechanism.

Most of these projects received funding primarily to support consultative sessions or tasks more focused on a superstructural or demonstrative nature, such as workshops and training programs. Furthermore, allocating funds towards expatriate salaries and acquiring unnecessary equipment contributed to a significant outflow of resources from the ODA. In this context, the state encountered limitations in exerting its influence and effectively steering the course of implementation. Nonetheless, state officials were deeply entrenched in corrupt practices, and a substantial portion of the projects were conducted through mechanisms operating outside the official budgetary framework. However, in some areas, there were need-based projects. A field study was conducted, and the need was identified, and the projects implemented. In some other regions, insecurity was a significant hurdle to meeting all requirements. Therefore, the projects were subcontracted many times, and there was a deduction from the initial budget and a small budget left to conduct the actual project. Moreover, a notable portion of the ODA was redirected back to the donor country through arrangements involving a primary company or a NGO. This approach placed the onus of responsibility on the recipient state and the intended beneficiaries while failing to harness the full value of the assistance to break the cycle of extreme poverty and effectively utilize the ODA.

5.13.3 Effect of the phenomenon of globalization on extreme poverty reduction

5.13.3.1 Consent on the positive outcome of globalization for poverty reduction.

A group of informants acknowledged and agreed with globalization's positive impact on reducing poverty. A notable 62 percent of the interviewees expressed their agreement with this perspective. Globalization has played a pivotal role in enhancing Afghanistan's political, diplomatic, and economic development. Afghanistan's official recognition within the UN framework, renewed regional and international connections, facilitated cross-border mobility, and the inflow of technological products and ideas have collectively contributed to the nation's advancement. This connectivity has empowered end-users with a broader array of choices, access to updated technology, and the opportunity to reconnect with the global community, increase domestic sources of growth, and gradually reduce extreme poverty. Consequently, after considerable anticipation, a monumental project involving Afghanistan has finally entered the implementation stage. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Gas Pipeline (TAPI – Gas Pipeline) is a substantial regional endeavor that traverses a significant section of Afghanistan. Recent discussions have centered around implementing this mega project within Afghanistan's borders. The potential impact of this mega project is far-reaching, as it can generate numerous employment opportunities and serve as a source of income for countless households. Furthermore, the project's implementation has necessitated the cultivation of new skills related to vocational training and expertise in pipeline installation, transformation, and maintenance.

The State of Afghanistan and the MIOs, such as the European Union (EU) and the WB, have initiated a project to create an environment for economic opportunities in the cities. This project was named “Eshteghal Zaiee - Karmondena (EZ-Kar)” to create employment opportunities, improve the condition and infrastructure of the markets, and provide a suitable regulatory system to investors to reduce extreme poverty. This project has focused on capacity, human, and vocational skills development to increase the resilience of the beneficiaries or vulnerable households. The demand for vocational training and skilled labor nationwide was a prompt necessity, and the state and the international stakeholders, especially the German Institutions, invested in skill-building and vocational training programs.

The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung ‘BMZ’) and the German Corporation for

International Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit ‘GIZ’) have been supporting the TVeT authority of Afghanistan. Based on national demand, the skill building and training were in carpentry, masonry, mechanics, sewing, and other vocational training. The trainees have been supported with the necessary basic machinery and equipment to increase the sustainability and self-sufficiency of the beneficiaries of the vocational training. This young industry has been on a trajectory to gradually fulfill domestic needs and add new gas pipeline installation and maintenance skills.

Withing the framework of globalization, Afghanistan has endeavored to extend its commercial interactions beyond the regional markets. Previously, Afghanistan had access to limited markets, which resulted in vulnerability and dependency. However, accession to the WTO and membership in many international organizations facilitated and supported the development trajectory in Afghanistan. The vulnerability to market policies of the neighboring countries, which have already come under international sanctions, the landlockedness of Afghanistan, and the dumping strategies of the region countries have consequent challenges for Afghanistan in the areas of commerce. Still, accession to international organizations improved commercial restrictions to some extent. Additionally, the MoCI, in coordination with the MAIL, focused on supporting impoverished households. A joint initiative was established to focus on the well-being of rural families. For instance, a cow was offered to women in extreme poverty to achieve livelihoods and participate in the economy. Henceforth, the MoCI signed a MoU with the dairy association to purchase these women’s products to help them sustain production. This initiative focused on domestic revenue-generating areas to boost sustainability and impact effectiveness.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) was also considering other options to move toward self-sufficiency. The options were to create a particular economic growth environment and offer inputs such as land, agriculture techniques, know-how, machinery, easy access to finance and energy, facilitate an accessible environment for the establishment of SMEs, employability, attracting FDI and commerce. Collaborative endeavors between the MoCI and the MAIL could foster investment across a diverse spectrum of products. These collaborative efforts could encompass the cultivation of staples such as wheat, rice, vegetables, gardening produce, and livestock products. By focusing on these sectors, the aim would be to meet domestic demand,

reduce poverty, and enhance export opportunities within the framework of globalization. Further, this approach through globalization mechanism might help Afghanistan decrease the Balance of Payment (BoP) gap. Afghanistan required a political commitment to enforce social justice, improve coordination among states' departments, prioritize needs, align programs, and pave the way for sustainable development to appropriately manage the overwhelming deficit in the BoP. On an annual basis, above USD, 9 billion has been paid for consuming goods, mainly food items, and USD 2 billion for services and exports level has reached a level of USD 800 million. This situation has resulted from an inconvenient environment due to war, insecurity, and natural disasters such as floods and drought.

5.13.3.2 Uncertainty on the positive outcome of globalization for poverty reduction.

A group of informants exhibited skepticism regarding the favorable consequences of globalization on poverty reduction. This group constituted 17 percent of the total interviewees. The effect of globalization on poverty reduction might be practical in the case of the availability of domestic sources of growth and quality production. The poverty reduction projects and programs were designed with restrictions and deficiencies due to challenges caused by security, budget, or capacity. War and insecurity caused moving many farmers and rural households to the cities. The relocation of the production hubs, such as villagers and rural families, dramatically minimized domestic sources of growth and production. Even in regions marked by security, it remained imperative for poverty reduction stakeholders to empower production hubs. This step involved identifying the inherent potential within villages, introducing mechanization into the agricultural system, promoting sustainable production practices, establishing robust market linkages, and ultimately striving to attain the overarching objective of diminishing imports and reaching self-sufficiency. Such efforts, grounded in the economic principles of globalization, could exert a substantial and meaningful impact on poverty reduction.

The ongoing war and insecurity have created many internal displacements, and returnees reached the country from the region and beyond, lowering globalization's economic efficacy. This condition led to a humanitarian emergency in the rural and urban economies. Even some kind of development boosts resilience levels but not to an extent to be able to cope against shocks such as internal displacements, returnees, drought, and flood. This situation has caused many households

to inhabit the major cities due to the harsh effects of drought and flood on agriculture and livestock. Previous investments in villages, such as schools and clinics, have few attendees or visitors. The scope of needs has been extensive, leading to raised fixed costs for service delivery at the villages. The dispersed nature of rural households has increased the expenses associated with delivering services, including establishing roads, providing electricity, operating schools, and access to healthcare services. As a result, efforts that have been extended to help households leave the extreme poverty cycle drop back to poverty due to the fragility and vulnerability of the poverty reduction efforts and shocks and uncertainty on the positive effect of globalization on poverty reduction endeavors. Indeed, there was a necessary mandate to elevate the productivity level to fulfill domestic demands. This requirement called for introducing cutting-edge technologies and pioneering agricultural techniques to achieve this goal. To address national market demand, an innovative agricultural approach was introduced – the establishment of greenhouses on small plots of land. This strategic measure was aimed at strengthening domestic production to accommodate to the needs of the national markets. Farmers and gardeners could fulfill national demand throughout all four seasons by adopting this method. This initiative significantly contributed to the availability of a diverse range of fruits and vegetables within the national markets. However, this method needed to be more sustainable and avoid damaging natural resources. Massive underground-water has been consumed and has yet to be refilled. Anticipations of such an outcome indicated the potential for a challenging environment in the future. In reaction to this challenge, many discussions and initiatives centered around capacity development were launched throughout the transition and transformation decades. These programs were designed with the intention that targeted training could empower beneficiaries to establish sustainable operations and secure essential amenities and livelihoods. However, realizing this objective has faced obstacles, primarily hindering from the raised risk levels and the fragility of rural and urban economies.

The poverty reduction projects and programs needed to be more comprehensive and consider the characteristics of each village. Each village's unique features and requirements presented a diverse landscape, unintentionally neglecting the strengths and weaknesses inherent to these communities. Consequently, the effectiveness of poverty reduction interventions warranted a more pronounced impact, as a more tailored and nuanced approach was necessary to address the multifaceted challenges across these distinct contexts. The extreme poverty reduction programs had to

proactively recognize the needs of the households with inputs from the beneficiaries at the village, district, and provincial levels, followed by the formulation of the national development plan with long-run, short-run, and mid-run objectives. Some villages had a specialty in carpet weaving and embroidery, some villages in pottery, and some villages' agricultural products and livestock. These efforts required further in-depth attention and investment. Weaknesses were vulnerability to shocks because of the traditional agricultural and livestock system. Additionally, the expectation of jobseekers increased, in which former employees of international organizations or international NGOs were rarely interested in working for a low state salary scale. This group expected to receive the same high income from the national institutions to meet the high cost of living. This condition increased poverty and the poverty gap. However, these employment options were rarely available to the public but to those with a network or connection with an insider or an influencer. Furthermore, a notable hurdle to practical poverty reduction endeavors has been the need for more operational insurance companies. The prevailing business environment has been characterized by elevated risks, making attracting domestic and international investors challenging. In this context, globalization serves as a facilitator for trade, marking a subsequent stage after production. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that if production experiences setbacks, the globalized economy can transition into a consumption-oriented one. This transformation, coupled with the importation of consumer and luxury goods, can exacerbate the severity of extreme poverty, undermining sustainable development efforts.

5.13.3.3 Dissent on the positive outcome of globalization for poverty reduction.

A group of informants disagreed that globalization had produced favorable results in effectively reducing poverty. Within this group, 21 percent of the interview participants highlighted various challenges and obstacles that impeded the significant impact of globalization on extreme poverty reduction. The progression of globalization was hindered by an array of challenges, including insecurity, widespread corruption, inter-border delays, and the extensive presence of illicit opiates across the nation. Amidst these substantial impediments, the ongoing state of war and insecurity has remained a formidable hindrance to development. Further exacerbating the situation, illiteracy has entrenched itself as a pervasive obstacle among rural and urban households. Particularly striking was the elevated illiteracy rate among impoverished families, manifesting in an inability to grasp essential reading and writing skills in the native language.

The lack of adequate educational infrastructure in the provinces, compounded by a shortage of teachers, particularly female educators, has contributed to denying educational opportunities, especially for girls. This dilemma was mirrored in the healthcare sector, with a shortage of nurses and midwives increasing the cycle of poverty and vulnerability many households face. Regrettably, this self-perpetuating cycle of disadvantage has continued to expand incrementally over time.

The Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD) initiated a poverty reduction program through skill buildings and vocational training nationwide. There were attempts to establish a viable mechanism to be acceptable in a sensitive environment. The skill buildings, vocational training projects, and programs encountered significant challenges at the initiation stage due to high sensitivity and budget restrictions. There was some progress at the practical stage by hiring a female trainer and under the direct supervision of a journeyman. However, the budget of the MoLSAMD was limited in comparison to meeting a high rate of demand pertinent to the sensitivity of the environment toward female participation in the education and healthcare sector. The vocational training required a lengthy process to come to an effect considering ongoing war, insecurity, high illiteracy rate, and sensitive environment. However, establishing the TVeT, an independent budgetary unit overcame budgetary and program restrictions to some extent.

Globalization integrated the region countries through the flow of energy resources, but the input of Afghanistan has been a consuming market. This regional integration for Afghanistan had a consuming role where Afghanistan imports electricity from the Central Asian countries and the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). Electricity importation has reached above 70 percent of Afghanistan's national consumption, which has been a source of cash outflow from the economy. This level of electricity importation caused the GDP to shrink, increase dependency on ODA, and raise the severity of extreme poverty. Further, this situation has cost the private sector and entrepreneurs high operational costs in which many Small and Medium Entrepreneurship (SME) operations and business initiatives might fail to survive in the long run. However, Afghanistan has been suitable for solar energy production since the sunshine reaches around 300 days per year. Small and medium decentralized solar grids could meet domestic demand to a certain level, decrease cash outflow, minimize operational costs of entrepreneurship, and be a step toward domestic sources of development, sustainability, and self-sufficiency.

The execution of the globalization mechanism required a sound environment, superstructure, and infrastructure that were not rehabilitated, reconstructed, or developed in Afghanistan. Widespread corruption was affecting many layers of the public sector institutions. The employment at public institutions was based on an unmerited hire system connected to ethnicity, region, party, a specific group, and or self-interest of the high-rank officials. A common approach for corruption was the lower rank public officials facilitated the way for the higher rank officials. Therefore, poverty reduction efforts failed to meet the target, and the plans and strategies needed to be consistently aligned and coordinated with the SDGs. In addition, the necessary budget was not available to apply the SDGs, Targets, and Indicators for the case of Afghanistan. Furthermore, the cultivation, production, and transportation of illicit opiates have resulted in a complex situation that hinders cross-border trade flow with nearly all neighboring countries of Afghanistan. Trades of goods and products on the road had continuous delays. Bilateral trade and transit agreements, regional trade cooperation, and the WTO could not ease strict border controls in the region due to illicit opiates, transportation of illegal ammunition, smuggling, and human trafficking. As an illustration, the delay at border controls led to the unfortunate spoilage of perishable agricultural goods. In some instances, refrigerated trucks were utilized during these delays to prevent product spoilage. Still, this precaution became problematic, causing fixed expenses to escalate considerably. Consequently, investors and transporters found it challenging to generate substantial income or even faced losses, ultimately prompting some to exit the business altogether. In this circumstance, the MAIL and the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) encouraged rural households to invest in Saffron cultivation, production, and exportation. Among the agricultural products, saffron was one of the items that could replace opiates and ease the inter-border trades in the long run. This situation might be a source of domestic growth, encourage the flow of exports from Afghanistan, and promote trade and transit at the bilateral, regional, and international levels. It has been an onus of the state to maintain physical security and food security and develop extreme poverty reduction programs at the national and sub-national governance levels through the facilitations of globalization.

The present state of globalization has been characterized by a significant influx of consumer goods, including items such as cell phones, cars, and luxury items. This circumstance has led to the import-driven cash outflow, disrupting the economic cycle. Unfortunately, this approach has yet to position

Afghanistan to harness economic globalization to reduce extreme poverty. Nevertheless, a comparative analysis of living standards before and after 2002 reveals that Afghanistan has reaped some benefits from globalization. In the pre-2002 period, Afghanistan was in complete isolation, needing more international recognition and engagement. Interaction with the international community was primarily confined to humanitarian assistance. Educational opportunities abroad were limited to a handful of students. The country lacked adequate infrastructure, and its financial system was characterized by chaos, with at least five types of national currencies circulating within the economy. The fragile achievements witnessed today have been underpinned by the collective commitment of the Afghan state and the international community, predominantly through ODA and regional integration efforts as part of the broader globalization initiative.

5.13.4 Relationship of the globalization and extreme poverty reduction

The reliability of efforts aimed at reducing extreme poverty was rigorously evaluated through the utilization of a Coefficient Alpha (Cronbach's Alpha) test. This comprehensive examination centered on the evaluation of a scale designed to measure critical dimensions of the assessment of Development Policy and the effectiveness of ODA within the framework of globalization in driving extreme poverty reduction. The outcome of this thorough analysis yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.695, signifying a noteworthy degree of reliability in the variance of the scores obtained.

As such, these findings carry substantial implications. They provide robust evidence that the formulated development policy has yielded tangible results in extreme poverty reduction. The coherence and applicability of the policy framework have manifested in practical outcomes that have demonstrably contributed to improving the difficulty of the impoverished. Moreover, the resounding reliability in the assessment of ODA effectiveness accentuates the significance of external support mechanisms in fostering progress.

In essence, this assessment substantiates the multifaceted nature of poverty reduction efforts. It underscores the importance of not only crafting policy that is attuned to the realities on the ground but also the necessity of deploying resources in a targeted and effective manner. The convergence of development policy realism and the effectiveness of ODA mark a pivotal step forward in the process towards reducing extreme poverty in the case of Afghanistan.

Table 14 assess the internal consistency of the survey items; a reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha. The results indicate that all 29 cases were valid, with no missing or excluded responses. The reliability statistics produced a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.695, while the Cronbach's Alpha based on standardized items was 0.698 for the two-item scale measuring perceptions of development policy and ODA effectiveness in relation to poverty reduction.

Although slightly below the conventional threshold of 0.70, the obtained reliability coefficient can still be considered acceptable for exploratory research, particularly in studies with a limited number of items. The scale consisted of two variables: *Development Policy on Poverty Reduction* and *ODA*

Effectiveness and Poverty Reduction. The mean scores for these items were 3.31 and 3.28, respectively, indicating a moderate level of agreement among respondents regarding the role of development policy and international assistance in poverty reduction.

The inter-item correlation coefficient of 0.536 suggests a moderate positive relationship between the two variables, indicating that respondents who perceive development policy as important for poverty reduction are also likely to view ODA as effective. Furthermore, the corrected item–total correlation value of 0.536 for both items demonstrates that each item contributes meaningfully to the overall scale. The scale statistics show an overall mean score of 6.59, with a variance of 1.751 and a standard deviation of 1.323, reflecting moderate variability in respondents’ perceptions.

Overall, the reliability results suggest that the two-item scale demonstrates moderate internal consistency and is sufficiently reliable for exploratory analysis within the context of this study. Given the concurrent nested mixed-method design and the complementary role of the quantitative component, the reliability level is considered adequate to support the qualitative findings and contribute to the triangulation of results.

Table 14: *Reliability Statistics for the Development Policy and ODA Effectiveness Scale*

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach’s Alpha	Cronbach’s Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.695	.698	2

Globalization has been widely assumed to foster increased cross-border trade, encompassing the exchange of capital, commodities, technologies, and services. This phenomenon is believed to have positive implications for the well-being of both rural and urban households. The theoretical framework proposes that globalization has historically led to enhanced international trade, triggering economic development and subsequently reducing extreme poverty in various parts of the world. This theoretical premise extends to Afghanistan, suggesting that globalization could yield similar positive impacts on poverty reduction within the country. To scrutinize the validity of the claim that “globalization has increased cross-border trades, flow of capital, technologies, and

services, resulting in a positive effect on poverty reduction in Afghanistan,” a series of four scale run tests was administered:

a) The One-Sample Runs Test: The findings indicated that at a 5 percent significance level, there was substantial evidence to support the claim, with a significance level of .734. The test did not reveal a significant difference between the observed and random orders. The null hypothesis was not rejected, and the evidence was deemed insufficient to reject the claim.

b) The One-Sample Binomial Test: The test showed that at a 5 percent significance level, there was evidence with a significance level of .265 to support the claim. The null hypothesis was not rejected, signifying that the evidence did not sufficiently support the rejection of the claim.

c) The One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test: The results indicated that at a 5 percent significance level, there was a substantial difference with a significance level of .003 to reject the claim. The evidence provided sufficient grounds to reject the claim.

d) The One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normal Test: With a mean of 3.41, a standard deviation of .82450, and a significance level of .000 at 5 percent significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. There was ample evidence to reject the claim.

The outcomes derived from the scale-run tests¹¹ offer a multifaceted interpretation. Among the tests conducted, specific results yielded inadequate evidence to warrant the rejection of the claim under scrutiny. Conversely, other tests furnished a solid foundation for refuting the claim. This divergence in outcomes underscores the intricate nature of evaluating the influence of globalization on poverty reduction. It underlines the imperative of a comprehensive analytical approach that considers an array of problematic variables and factors that are inextricably intertwined.

¹¹ A comprehensive report, including the results of these tests, has been shared with the examination committee for review and consideration.

Ultimately, this highlights the intricate web of dynamics that shape the complex relationship between globalization and its impact on poverty reduction.

5.14 Point of Interface and Mixing Strategies

The point of mixing between the qualitative and quantitative domains in the effect of globalization on poverty reduction in Afghanistan is illustrated at this point. In this context, the qualitative section of the research found a diverse range of perspectives concerning the impact of globalization on poverty reduction. A significant proportion of the interviewees, 62 percent, believed that Afghanistan's living conditions improved compared to the pre-2002 and post-2002 periods, citing factors such as recognition by the UN, facilitated cross-border travels, and increased access to technology and trade flows. However, concerns were raised about the country's alarming BoP deficit, which highlighted substantial imports to exports. In this group, Minister Mastoor noted that "per annum, Afghanistan has imported consuming goods above USD 9 billion, services around USD 2 billion, and the total export level reached around USD 800 million, which the national economy heavily dependent to the ODA".

Uncertainty was expressed about the positive impact of globalization on poverty reduction, including a group of informants pertinent to 17 percent of interviewees. This group pointed to challenges stemming from security issues, ongoing conflicts leading to displacement, and resultant decreases in domestic production. These concerns were linked to budgetary limitations and insufficient capacity, which affected the potential of rural villages to transition from subsistence to commercial agriculture. In secure areas, though, the potential for producing various goods existed, such as carpets, embroidery, pottery, agricultural products, and livestock. Moreover, the study found that shocks, including displacement, returnees, droughts, and floods, hindered sustainable development in rural and urban economies. The high cost of delivering services to scattered housing in villages posed an additional challenge. Opening borders, it was argued, could transform Afghanistan's economy into a consumer market for imported goods, thereby impeding self-sufficiency efforts.

Furthermore, skepticism about the positive impact of globalization was expressed by 21 percent of interviewees, citing challenges such as security concerns, high illiteracy rates, illicit opiate production and smuggling, regional inter-border delays, and widespread corruption. Notably, extreme poverty was observed to be more predominant among female groups due to sensitivity toward female presence in society and limited access to education and healthcare services,

rendering them unable to capitalize on economic opportunities fully, and poverty might transform from generation to generation and challenging to discontinuity of the deadlock.

In the quantitative domain, globalization is hypothetically assumed to have positive impact on poverty reduction due to increased cross-border trade, capital flow, technological exchange, and services. Four scale-run tests were conducted to validate that globalization has positively impacted poverty reduction in the case of Afghanistan. The One-Sample Runs Test and the One-Sample Binomial Test showed insufficient evidence to reject the claim. At the same time, the One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test and the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normal Test provided more substantial grounds to reject it. The contrasting outcomes observed in this research emphasize the sophisticated nature of evaluating the relationship between globalization and poverty reduction within the context of Afghanistan. The relationship of multifaceted dynamics, ranging from internal rivalry and economic and social factors to geopolitical location, complexities, and international security forces presence and expenditure with the effect on the economy, contribute to the complex network of interactions that shape the impact of globalization on poverty reduction outcomes in Afghanistan. These divergent outcomes emphasize the need for an aligned comprehensive and multidimensional development policy considering a pro-poor approach when analyzing the relationship between globalization and poverty reduction; such an approach might illuminate the nuanced pathways through which globalization influences poverty reduction efforts and highlight the challenges and opportunities that arise in the process in sophisticated contexts such as the unique case of Afghanistan.

5.15 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed examination of the efforts to reduce extreme poverty in Afghanistan through various national policies and initiatives. The findings highlight the challenges and successes shaping the country's development trajectory. From the decentralization of the budget development process to the impact of globalized trade, the key findings reveal both the progress made and the hurdles that remain. This conclusion synthesizes the key findings, explores the broader implications of these efforts, and offers a key takeaway regarding Afghanistan's future development.

The government of Afghanistan decentralization of the budget development process aimed to increase accountability and ensure the voices of people living in extreme poverty, particularly in rural areas, were heard. This reform was a response to international organizations' requirements, including the WB and the IMF. It sought to address disparities between rural and urban households, exacerbated by the displacement of rural populations due to ongoing conflict. Rural populations, mainly engaged in agriculture and handicrafts, were especially vulnerable to economic instability and food insecurity, worsened by a shrinking domestic economy and reliance on imports. Migration from rural areas to urban centers, seeking work, led to short-term survival strategies rather than long-term economic empowerment. These findings underscore the importance of addressing both immediate humanitarian needs and long-term structural reforms to achieve sustainable poverty reduction.

Programs like the CCNPP aimed to address food insecurity and reduce extreme poverty, especially for the poorest rural households. Through initiatives such as short-term employment and food banks, CCNPP provided essential support. For instance, the 40-day employment opportunities allowed vulnerable populations to meet their basic needs, particularly during harsh seasons like winter. However, while these programs offered temporary relief, their long-term sustainability was questioned. Many vulnerable groups, including the elderly, female-headed households, and those affected by addiction, were able to use from the food bank structures.

The role of government coordination, such as the JCMB, is also crucial in understanding the challenges of poverty reduction in Afghanistan. Coordination between state institutions and international organizations is essential to successfully implement poverty reduction programs. The

JCMB and its working groups aimed to improve the budget development process and aid allocation efficiency. However, political instability, inefficiencies, and unclear communication among stakeholders often undermined the effectiveness of these mechanisms. Research showed that while a formal coordination system existed, it was frequently disrupted by internal conflicts and political rivalries. The lack of teamwork and a culture of impunity, particularly in recruitment processes, posed significant barriers. These issues suggest that improving government institutions' capacity and fostering a more collaborative working environment are crucial for successful poverty reduction efforts.

A key finding from this research is the mixed opinion surrounding globalization's role in reducing poverty in Afghanistan. While many interviewees believed that globalization had positively impacted the country's political, diplomatic, and economic development, others were skeptical of its effectiveness in poverty reduction. Globalization was expected to boost trade, encourage capital flow, and foster technology and service exchange, which would drive economic growth and reduce poverty. However, statistical tests indicated that globalization's positive impact on poverty reduction was inconclusive. While some tests supported its effectiveness, others rejected the notion that globalization had significantly contributed to poverty reduction. This suggests that while globalization may have some positive effects, it alone cannot be relied upon as a solution to poverty. More targeted interventions, addressing local economic needs and structural challenges, are essential for meaningful poverty reduction.

The study also explored the role of the public sector in fostering development and reducing poverty. The transition from a centralized economy to a market-based system introduced both opportunities and challenges. While a market economy offered more flexibility, it exposed weaknesses in public sector institutions' capacity to effectively regulate and support the private sector. Despite capacity-building programs such as the World Bank's CBR and TAGHIR, the performance of state institutions remained inconsistent. A lack of experience and skills to manage the transition, compounded by political instability, meant public sector reforms often failed to deliver expected results. This underscores the need for long-term capacity building at both the government and community levels to ensure that public servants can effectively implement policies and foster sustainable economic development.

External aid, particularly ODA, has played a significant role in supporting poverty reduction efforts. However, its effectiveness has been questioned due to the overwhelming reliance on foreign aid and its focus on humanitarian assistance rather than long-term development. Many interviewees expressed concerns about the sustainability of ODA-driven initiatives, especially as Afghanistan remains heavily dependent on imported goods, with a fragile domestic economy. The decline in military-related jobs after the withdrawal of international security forces left the country vulnerable to external economic shocks. This suggests that while ODA has been essential for immediate relief, it cannot replace the need for structural reforms that promote economic independence and sustainability.

The political landscape of Afghanistan, particularly the establishment of the National Unity Government (NUG), significantly shaped the country's development trajectory. The creation of the NUG, arising from a contentious election process, entrenched political instability and diverted attention from development goals. The lack of effective governance and persistent political rivalries hampered the implementation of poverty reduction policies, undermining efforts to improve security and public sector performance. This highlights the importance of political stability and effective governance in ensuring the success of poverty reduction strategies.

The key takeaway from this research is that while the shift from a centralized economy to a market economy has brought some improvements in Afghanistan's development and poverty reduction efforts, it is not a complete solution. Political instability, inefficiencies in public sector coordination, and over-reliance on external aid continue to present significant challenges. For sustainable poverty reduction, Afghanistan may invest in long-term capacity building, improve governance, and move toward a more decentralized political structure. A federal governance system could help minimize political fragmentation, improve security, and create a more inclusive framework for poverty reduction. Ultimately, a comprehensive approach addressing both immediate humanitarian needs and long-term structural reforms is essential for reducing extreme poverty and ensuring a more resilient and sustainable future for Afghanistan.

6 Chapter Six: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a critical discussion of the findings related to poverty reduction policies and institutional frameworks. The discussion examines the role of formal institutions, the effectiveness of poverty reduction programs, and the broader geopolitical and economic implications. By situating the findings within the existing literature and policy frameworks, this chapter aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the key challenges and opportunities in poverty reduction efforts.

The discussion begins with an exploration of the policies of formal institutions for poverty reduction, focusing on the accountability of state and non-state organizations, awareness programs, and coordination mechanisms. This is followed by an evaluation of the capacity and performance of the public sector, as well as the contributions of multinational and non-governmental organizations in addressing poverty. The chapter then delves into the graduation mechanisms from SPPs and the importance of sustaining resilience among households facing poverty. Issues such as institutional discrimination, systemic corruption, and the ambitious goal of reducing poverty to 3 percent by 2030 are also examined.

In addition, the effectiveness of ODA in poverty reduction is assessed, alongside an analysis of whether trade and regional openness can contribute to economic improvements. The relationship between globalization and poverty reduction in Afghanistan is explored to identify potential pathways for economic recovery and sustainable development. Followed by a conclusion, recommendations for improvement, identifying areas for further study, and acknowledging the study's limitations.

Given the political instability in Afghanistan, this section also reflects on the implications of the collapse of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in August 2021. The regime's dissolution exacerbated economic hardship, hunger, and trade disruptions, while the freezing of assets deepened the crisis. The geopolitical shifts, including the roles of China and Russia, the impact on Western credibility, and the expansion of illegal drug markets, are also considered in the broader discussion of poverty and development challenges.

6.2 Accountability of the state and non-state organizations

A formal and informal dual framework exists at national and sub-national governance levels to ensure accountability in state and non-state organizations. The formal mechanisms, as outlined by Fox (2005), include elected bodies such as the National Assembly (NA) and the Provincial Councils (PC), which are responsible for overseeing state institutions. Additionally, political parties, CSOs, pressure groups, and the Mass Media play fundamental roles in ensuring transparency and accountability. The informal accountability structures, however, are more deeply rooted in rural communities, where local authorities such as Mullahs and Mawlawis engage directly with households. These informal structures complement formal accountability mechanisms by addressing immediate needs at the grassroots level, especially in weak state oversight cases (Murtazashvili, 2016).

The focus of poverty reduction stakeholders has predominantly been on formal institutions, particularly policy-level institutional reforms. While this approach aligns with international best practices (Fox, 2005), it has often neglected the role of informal institutions in facilitating social accountability and ensuring that poverty reduction efforts are effectively targeted. The contradiction between formal oversight mechanisms—such as impeachment trials within the National Assembly—and their effectiveness in holding state institutions accountable raises concerns about the practical impact of such processes. While ministers and senior officials have been questioned for failing to meet budgetary targets, these trials have only partially supported the goal of ensuring accountability, as the underlying structural issues—such as delays in public procurement and corruption—remain largely unaddressed.

Historically, state institutions have initiated policies, coordinated programs, and delivered services through horizontal and vertical structures (Joshi, 2007). However, the 2004 constitutional restructuring supplemented this approach by separating policy formulation and service delivery from project implementation, which was often outsourced to NGOs and CSOs. This shift, in alignment with international development frameworks, was intended to enhance efficiency. However, the effectiveness of these poverty reduction initiatives has been mixed, mainly due to contradictory practices in public procurement and project execution. While decentralizing parts of the national budget was aimed at increasing local participation and accountability, the

centralization of procurement processes led to bureaucratic delays, hindering the timely implementation of projects.

Another critical challenge in Afghanistan's governance system has been the contradiction between formal accountability measures and the socio-political realities on the ground. Despite formal mechanisms such as impeachment trials and centralized financial oversight, issues such as corruption and inefficiency have persisted. In some cases, members of the National Assembly themselves have been implicated in corrupt practices, further undermining public trust in these institutions. Consequently, many rural and urban households perceive impeachment trials as ineffective, raising concerns about the sustainability of the formal accountability framework (Joshi, 2007).

At the sub-national level, Provincial Councils (PCs) and District Development Councils (DDCs) play essential roles in governance by overseeing development initiatives and representing marginalized groups. These councils complement the broader governance system by providing localized oversight and conflict resolution mechanisms. However, their effectiveness has been limited due to structural weaknesses, a lack of resources, and challenges in coordinating with national-level institutions. Furthermore, the reliance on formal election-based mechanisms to ensure institutional accountability has contradicted the reality that social accountability mechanisms-such as community-led performance assessments-may be more effective in measuring the impact of poverty reduction initiatives (Joshi, 2007).

The international community has historically followed a formal model for holding state of Afghanistan institutions accountable. While this model aligns with governance principles applied in other low-income countries, its long-term sustainability remains questionable, particularly in the absence of continuous ODA. Benequista (2010) argues that the informal relationship between the state and society plays a significant role in governance, a factor that international actors unnoticed during the early stages of state-building in Afghanistan. The contradiction between externally driven formal accountability mechanisms and existing informal structures has often led to ineffective poverty reduction interventions.

Moreover, poverty reduction initiatives have often been implemented in a top-down manner, without sufficient consultation with local communities. This approach has contradicted participatory development principles, leading to misalignment between projects and the actual needs of beneficiaries. Had these initiatives incorporated community engagement and awareness programs, their effectiveness could have been significantly enhanced. A more balanced approach—supplementing formal mechanisms with informal structures—could have ensured better responsiveness to local needs while maintaining oversight and accountability. Whereas formal institutions have played a central role in Afghanistan’s governance and poverty reduction strategies, their effectiveness has been constrained by structural limitations, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and political influences. The contradictions between formal and informal accountability structures highlight the need for a more integrated approach that complements formal oversight mechanisms with community-driven, bottom-up accountability measures. Moving forward, a strategic shift towards leveraging both formal and informal governance structures may offer a more sustainable and locally relevant framework for poverty reduction in Afghanistan.

6.3 Awareness programs for policy development and poverty reduction

Awareness programs are critical tools for educating rural and urban households about their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. These initiatives are instrumental in transitioning individuals from a sentimental decision-making state, influenced by customs, norms, values, and honor, to a rational decision-making state informed by knowledge and awareness. By disseminating essential information, these programs support households in making informed choices that enhance their resilience to vulnerability and improve their overall well-being. Moreover, awareness initiatives supplement policy development by considering formal and informal institutional structures, fostering a more inclusive state-building process (Pearce et al., 2011).

Existing literature supports the argument that awareness programs play a pivotal role in fostering effective citizenship development, which includes knowledge of legal rights, institutional procedures, civic networks, social engagement, and independent media (Kabeer et al., 2010). These factors reduce the influence of predatory and manipulative elite groups, reinforcing transparency and public accountability. The contradiction between the state's intent to empower citizens and its reliance on externally supported institutions raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of these efforts. While international assistance has been instrumental in building capable institutions, state policies have often failed to fully complement the needs of vulnerable populations, particularly women, in both rural and urban economies (Shayan, 2015; Beath et al., 2013; Benequista, 2010; Shaw, 2004).

Historically, the state's traditional role in supporting low-income households, including female-headed families, has involved direct food distribution. However, since adopting the Afghanistan Constitution in 2004, the state has transitioned towards a regulatory role, facilitating operations for private sector entities, NGOs, and CSOs. This shift, however, has been contradictory in practice, as the necessary institutional infrastructure has not been adequately established. Persistent challenges such as ongoing conflict, high illiteracy rates, subsistence economies, and widespread hunger have further supplemented the barriers to effective governance. In low-income settings, irrational choices, shaped by deep-rooted customs, norms, values, and honor, continue to support cycles of poverty rather than break them.

Many rural and urban households continue to operate within a subsistence agricultural economy, relying on ancestral practices that have been transferred from generation to generation. While this approach has ensured survival, its slow evolution limits socioeconomic mobility. The national poverty line remains below one USD per person per day, exacerbating economic vulnerability. The absence of a robust social safety net has further contradicted efforts to foster resilience, leaving households exposed to economic shocks. Deep-seated cultural practices, such as preventing girls from receiving an education and encouraging early marriage, have had profound socioeconomic implications for individuals, families, and society as a whole. The contradiction between these customs and the broader objectives of poverty reduction highlights the urgent need for targeted awareness programs.

The lack of awareness and access to information among impoverished families supplements their socioeconomic challenges, reinforcing their entrapment in cycles of extreme poverty. Awareness programs are essential tools for supporting informed decision-making, enabling individuals to access available resources, and improving overall living conditions. Without adequate knowledge and education, marginalized populations remain vulnerable to economic hardship and social exclusion. Despite years of investment in education, skills development, and professional training, the contribution of women to the GDP remains negligible. The persistent contradiction between formal education initiatives and systemic socio-cultural barriers underscores the inefficacy of existing interventions. Highly educated women continue to face similar challenges as their counterparts, emphasizing the need for structural transformation.

Traditional gender roles continue to support a division of labor where men are expected to be the primary breadwinners while women remain confined to domestic responsibilities. Over time, this structure has complemented the socioeconomic disempowerment of women, disconnecting them from professional opportunities. Consequently, their potential to alleviate the impact of extreme poverty remains unrealized. While various efforts have been made to supplement economic participation for women, visible and invisible resistance persists. This resistance is often rooted in elite-controlled social structures involving dignitaries, clan leaders, Khans, and commanders, who have historically benefited from maintaining the status quo. Extreme poverty, high illiteracy rates, and widespread corruption have further supported these power dynamics, enabling profiteers to

manipulate vulnerable communities for personal gain. As a result, international assistance has been primarily allocated to administrative and security costs, while critical infrastructure, education, and public services remain underfunded (Robinson & Acemoglu, 2012, pp. 450-455).

The absence of effective awareness programs and the prevalence of irrational decision-making have contradicted the objectives of poverty alleviation. Awareness campaigns can support rural households by encouraging them to reduce unnecessary expenditures, such as extravagant weddings, high dowries, circumcision ceremonies, and prolonged funeral observances. Additionally, these programs can supplement policy development by identifying grassroots issues, beneficiary needs, and localized solutions. Mass Media is a crucial platform for disseminating information, bridging the gap between the state and citizens, and complementing efforts to restore public trust. Furthermore, religious and community leaders, including Masjids and Mullahs, can play an active role in addressing unconscious, irrational choices that perpetuate poverty cycles.

Engaging local communities in the planning phases of poverty reduction projects ensures that development efforts align with the people's real needs. A participatory approach minimizes the contradiction between policy formulation and ground realities, enhancing the effectiveness of poverty reduction strategies. Local ownership of development projects fosters sustainable solutions and complements broader governance frameworks.

Cultural and religious practices, including Friday prayers, offer significant opportunities to convey messages about poverty reduction, social responsibility, and economic empowerment. Religious scholars can play a transformative role by advocating for gender-inclusive education and dispelling misconceptions that hinder female participation in formal schooling. The contradiction between religious conservatism and the imperative of economic progress necessitates a balanced approach that supplements traditional values with modern educational and economic opportunities. By leveraging the influence of respected religious figures, communities can be guided toward more progressive socioeconomic frameworks, ensuring that poverty reduction efforts align with both cultural sensitivities and developmental priorities.

Awareness programs are essential in supporting poverty reduction by providing education, information, and economic opportunities. However, their effectiveness is contingent on complementing formal governance structures with informal community-based mechanisms.

Addressing the contradictions between traditional practices and contemporary development goals is crucial for achieving sustainable progress. A strategic approach that supplements economic policies with grassroots engagement, religious advocacy, and media campaigns can bridge the gap between theoretical projections and practical realities. By integrating formal and informal accountability mechanisms, awareness programs can support a more inclusive and practical framework for poverty reduction in Afghanistan.

6.4 Coordination among state and non-state organizations

Effective coordination between state departments and MIOs is essential for achieving sustainable development in Afghanistan. Manning-Thomas and Atta-Krah (2016) support this argument, emphasizing that a well-defined organizational culture prioritizing coordination over hierarchy, budget constraints, and institutional image is crucial. However, contradictions emerge when examining the operational realities where these priorities are often overshadowed by bureaucratic inefficiencies, leading to duplication of efforts and poor implementation (Manning-Thomas & Atta-Krah, 2016). Larsen (2010) supplements this perspective by highlighting that coordination entails an information flow on programs to prevent redundancy and ensure complementary roles among state institutions, fostering effective governance.

Despite international efforts, coordination among MIOs remains problematic due to a high turnover rate of experts, typically deployed for only six months. This short tenure limits their ability to grasp project intricacies, navigate bureaucratic processes, and contribute effectively to long-term strategies. Larsen (2010) complements this argument, illustrating how the UNAMA, the European Union (EU) Special Representative, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Senior Civilian Representative frequently rotate personnel, which disrupts policy continuity and weakens strategic coherence. In addition, Candel and Biesbroek (2016) contradict the assumption that coordination merely requires improved structural mechanisms, arguing that the absence of policy integration exacerbates social unrest, unemployment, and inadequate nutritional intake, underscoring the need for systemic, long-term engagement.

Tensions surrounding coordination responsibilities among state institutions have further complicated development efforts. Lister (2007) supports this claim, noting that conflicts over coordination roles, particularly between the MoEc, the MoIA, and the MRRD, have led to inefficiencies. Furthermore, the IDLG has emerged as an additional stakeholder in rural development, further fragmenting coordination efforts. The transformation of the MoEc from the former MoP aimed to centralize project coordination; however, in practice, the lack of an integrated approach has led to fragmented program implementation, with social and economic impacts remaining largely unaddressed.

A significant issue arises in the rural development sector, where uncoordinated projects have resulted in suboptimal outcomes. For instance, agricultural farms, gardens, and animal husbandry initiatives have been established without the necessary road networks to connect them to urban markets. Giovacchini (2011) and Lister (2007) supplement this observation by detailing how a lack of infrastructure planning has led to wasted resources and unmet rural expectations. Conversely, road construction projects have been implemented without thorough economic impact assessments, leading to excessive maintenance costs that surpass national budget capacities. Robinson and Acemoglu (2012, pp. 450–455) support this view by asserting that an imbalance between social and economic priorities often leads to ineffective development policies.

International aid has played a crucial role in Afghanistan's development trajectory, with the UN and other global actors supporting governance reforms and state-building initiatives. However, this assistance has not been without challenges. While the UN has contributed significantly to establishing a democratic regime, promoting girls' education, and encouraging women's socio-economic participation, Shayan (2015) and Shaw (2004) contradict the notion that external intervention alone can drive sustainable change, highlighting persistent structural issues such as corruption, elite capture, and lack of institutional capacity. Additionally, Beath et al. (2013) and Benequista (2010) supplement this discussion by demonstrating that while international funding has supported poverty reduction initiatives, the transition of responsibilities from international actors to national institutions has been poorly managed, leaving governance structures ill-equipped to sustain these programs. Moreover, a lack of statistical documentation and baseline assessments has contributed to misaligned development efforts. Lister (2007) supports this claim by emphasizing that the absence of comprehensive data has hindered effective decision-making, particularly in rural areas where extreme poverty is most acute. From 2014 onward, internal political fragmentation—marked by a division of ministries between the President and Prime Minister—further deteriorated coordination efforts. Candel and Biesbroek (2016) complement this perspective by illustrating how policy instability has weakened institutional trust and exacerbated governance failures. The frequent dismissal of high-ranking officials under the NUG through presidential or ministerial decrees has also created an environment of political uncertainty, impeding long-term planning and sustainable development.

An integrated coordination mechanism is necessary for connecting rural agricultural projects with secondary and tertiary road networks, thereby enhancing economic viability. This aligns with Giovacchini (2011), who emphasizes the importance of holistic development strategies that consider both socio-economic and political dimensions. However, a persistent challenge has been the public sector's limited capacity, particularly in aligning education with job market demands. Manning-Thomas and Atta-Krah (2016) supplement this argument by highlighting the importance of educational institutions in bridging theoretical knowledge with practical skill requirements. Kabul University (KU) has attempted to address this issue by incorporating state ministry recommendations into its curriculum, yet this effort has been largely ineffective due to insufficient stakeholder engagement and low public sector salaries, which deter highly qualified professionals from entering government service.

The disparity between experienced and inexperienced employees has led to a dysfunctional bureaucratic system, with many highly skilled professionals preferring MIOs over state institutions due to higher salaries and better working conditions. This has resulted in a kakistocracy, where less competent individuals occupy critical government positions, weakening state performance and coordination. Beath et al. (2013) and Benequista (2010) support this argument by demonstrating how institutional capacity deficits contribute to policy inefficiencies and exacerbate extreme poverty. Furthermore, Robinson and Acemoglu (2012, pp. 450–455) complement this discussion by emphasizing the role of elite capture in perpetuating ineffective governance structures.

Ultimately, improving coordination mechanisms among stakeholders is crucial for sustainable development. A complementary approach that integrates socio-economic planning, governance reforms, and local engagement can enhance project sustainability and poverty reduction efforts. Establishing an effective coordination mechanism between ministries, local governments, and international partners shall be prioritized to ensure that Afghanistan's development trajectory moves beyond short-term poverty alleviation toward long-term economic resilience.

6.5 The capacity and performance of the public sector

Capacity development has been a primary focus of public sector reforms in Afghanistan following the regime change in 2001. Several initiatives have been implemented to improve capacity and performance, including increasing enrollment in primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Additionally, on-the-job training programs, facilitated by international experts and advisors, were introduced to enhance the skills of state employees. Specific projects were launched to strengthen state ministries and departments, with a principal goal of improving human resource systems and promoting merit-based employment within the public sector.

Numerous strategies were adopted to enhance institutional capacity. A key intervention was the deployment of international experts and advisors during the early years of the transition decade. These experts not only assumed critical state functions but also trained national employees to sustain service delivery. De Grauwe (2009) supports this approach, arguing that capacity-building programs shall be comprehensive and not restricted to major urban centers. However, contradictions arise when assessing the actual impact of these efforts, as many programs were confined to Kabul and other major cities, failing to reach rural and remote areas where capacity deficits were most pronounced. Lister (2007) supplements this view by highlighting that state-building efforts often disregarded the complex socio-political dynamics in rural Afghanistan, leading to uneven development outcomes.

The World Bank's CBR project, implemented from 2011 to 2018 and later extended as TAGHIR until 2022, aimed to institutionalize merit-based recruitment and improve productivity. While this initiative sought to modernize human resource management in state institutions, its implementation revealed significant challenges. Many highly educated young professionals-holding post-graduate degrees from institutions in America, Europe, and neighboring countries-entered the public sector. However, despite their academic qualifications, Beath et al. (2013) contradict the assumption that education alone translates into improved institutional performance, arguing that systemic inefficiencies, political interference, and lack of accountability diminish the impact of new talent. Robinson and Acemoglu (2012, pp. 450-455) complement this critique, suggesting that state capacity development may extend beyond human resource improvements to include governance reforms, decentralization, and stronger institutional frameworks.

Despite capacity-building efforts, state institutions—particularly at the operational and service delivery levels—continue to struggle. In rural and remote areas, state capacity has deteriorated significantly. Candel and Biesbroek (2016) support this observation, asserting that ineffective coordination mechanisms prevent state institutions from addressing localized needs. Moreover, the lack of a bottom-up approach hinders the integration of district-level concerns into national development plans, exacerbating disparities between rural and urban areas. Lister (2007) supplements this view by noting that poor governance structures and fragmented decision-making have further impeded public sector performance.

Geographical constraints also exacerbate service delivery challenges. Afghanistan's mountainous terrain, coupled with harsh winters, renders state interventions ineffective in remote provinces. Giovacchini (2011) complements this argument, emphasizing that infrastructure limitations restrict access to essential services, reinforcing cycles of poverty and underdevelopment. Additionally, natural and man-made disasters further strain public sector capacity, making it difficult to design, implement, and distribute resources effectively across provinces and districts.

Political interference has also played a critical role in undermining capacity development. Shayan (2015) and Shaw (2004) contradict the notion that institutional reforms alone can drive sustainable development, arguing that corruption, elite capture, and clientelism significantly distort public sector performance. The politicization of administrative appointments and the widespread use of informal patronage networks have diverted resources away from merit-based governance, further weakening state effectiveness. Consequently, the inability to equitably distribute resources has widened socio-economic disparities, particularly in impoverished communities.

The education sector has been identified as a key driver of public sector improvement. De Grauwe (2009) supports this perspective, arguing that strengthening the education system is essential for overcoming extreme poverty and fostering institutional development. The government of Afghanistan, in collaboration with international partners, allocated substantial resources to the education sector to establish a foundation for long-term development. A major milestone was the re-enrollment of millions of students, including girls, after a seven-year hiatus (1994-2001). According to Presidential Palace-ARG (2014), total enrollment reached 11.5 million pupils, marking a significant achievement.

However, doubts regarding the accuracy of these enrollment statistics have emerged. TOLONews (2015) contradicts official reports, revealing that corruption within the education sector has inflated figures, with funds allocated to nonexistent schools, ghost teachers, and fabricated student enrollments. This misallocation of resources severely undermines development efforts, with millions of U.S. dollars wasted on fraudulent activities rather than genuine educational improvements. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (2015) supplements this critique by detailing how USAID allocated USD 769 million to the education sector, of which USD 599 million was off-budget, making financial oversight difficult and increasing the risk of mismanagement.

The long-term impact of corruption in education is profound. Beath et al. (2013) and Benequista (2010) support the argument that a highly corrupt education system weakens human capital development, perpetuating poverty and reinforcing structural inequalities. Furthermore, rising illiteracy rates and deteriorating public trust in government institutions further erode the prospects of sustainable development. Bruce (2007) complements this view by emphasizing the need for administrative and legal reforms to create an education system that genuinely empowers individuals in skills, knowledge, and minimization of the cost of unnecessary traditions and strengthens institutional capacity in administrative and legal boundaries to design and implement policies to overcome extreme poverty.

Recognizing these challenges, both the government of Afghanistan and the international community have acknowledged the need for pro-poor development policies that prioritize capacity-building at both the individual and institutional levels. Commission on Legal Empowerment of the Poor (2008) supports this argument, advocating for policy frameworks that enhance access to education, skills training, and governance reforms to reduce extreme poverty. However, Stern et al. (2006, p. 90) contradict the assumption that policy design alone is sufficient, arguing that without institutional accountability and transparency, development initiatives will continue to disproportionately burden those in extreme poverty—forcing them to pay bribes for basic services and limiting their access to opportunities.

Moving forward, a complementary approach integrating education, governance reforms, and institutional capacity-building is essential. Strengthening human resource management in public

institutions should be accompanied by anti-corruption measures, transparent public expenditure, and decentralized governance structures that empower rural communities. Additionally, bridging the gap between education and employment will be crucial for enhancing public sector performance and ensuring that investments in capacity-building translate into tangible improvements in service delivery. Ultimately, Afghanistan's development trajectory will depend on a holistic, well-coordinated strategy that integrates state-building, poverty reduction, and governance reforms-ensuring that capacity development efforts are inclusive, transparent, and sustainable.

6.6 Role of Multilateral International Organizations and NGOs on poverty reduction

MIOs are dedicated to reducing extreme poverty by providing financial assistance, technical expertise, and policy guidance, particularly in low-income countries. Their focus often lies at the macro-policy level, while implementation of poverty reduction programs is generally carried out by INGOs and grassroots national NGOs (SIGAR, 2021). This aligns with the UDHR, particularly Articles 25 and 26, which establish the right to a standard of living, security, and education.

1. “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control”
2. “Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection”.

The endeavors aimed at poverty reduction through education to foster global peace and harmony among nations are derived from Article 26, Sections One and Two:

1. “Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit”
2. “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace” (UN General Assembly, 1948).

MIOs play a crucial role in stabilizing governance by providing technical and financial support to fragile states. They encourage governments to develop a PRSP to address extreme poverty and guide public sector reform (Grindle, 2002; 2011). This framework has proven essential in post-

conflict states like Afghanistan, where weak public institutions, corruption, and limited capacity hinder service delivery (Clist et al., 2012). However, Grindle (2011) contradicts the assumption that PRSPs alone can drive institutional change, arguing that their effectiveness depends on accurate data, political stability, and government commitment. In Afghanistan, the PRSP approach has suffered from incomplete implementation, unreliable statistics, and a lack of accountability, reducing its overall impact (SIGAR, 2021).

Beyond institutional reforms, MIOs have contributed to economic development by investing in vocational training to enhance employment opportunities and productivity in rural and urban areas. Programs have focused on carpentry, masonry, mechanics, embroidery, and livestock management to provide sustainable income sources. The indirect approach of export promotion strategies and public-private partnerships aims to expand markets for national products and reduce extreme poverty. However, Banks and Hulme (2012) contradict the effectiveness of such initiatives, arguing that weak public sector institutions, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and corruption hinder the success of vocational training programs. Similarly, Chowdhury (2012) supplements this critique, noting that the impact of vocational training is often short-lived unless accompanied by broader economic policies that integrate trained individuals into formal employment sectors.

NGOs emerged as key implementation partners for MIOs and national governments, particularly in conflict-affected and remote areas (Banks & Hulme, 2012; Chowdhury, 2012). They have played a significant role in service delivery, advocacy, and empowerment of vulnerable groups, especially women, through projects such as handicrafts, carpet weaving, and dairy production. These initiatives have provided women with economic opportunities, particularly in rural areas where extreme poverty is most pronounced.

Despite these contributions, Cordeiro and Nyaruwata (2016) contradict the notion that NGOs always act in the best interests of impoverished communities. They argue that some NGOs deviate from their original mandates due to misaligned incentives, donor-driven priorities, and financial mismanagement. Chowdhury (2012) supplements this view, highlighting that some NGOs become self-serving entities that prioritize sustaining their own operations over genuine poverty reduction.

While NGOs were initially community-centered, not-for-profit initiatives, a discrepancy exists within their operational mechanisms. The Federal Authority Regulation (FAR) allows USAID

prime contractors to deduct up to 25 percent from total project budgets, reducing the funds available for beneficiaries. Furthermore, at the national level, state officials have established NGOs for personal gain, violating transparency and governance principles. This system predominantly benefits high-ranking individuals rather than impoverished households, reinforcing structural inequalities (SIGAR, 2021).

Beath et al. (2013) contradict the assumption that NGOs always serve as efficient service providers, arguing that without stronger oversight mechanisms, they can become channels for corruption. Similarly, Benequista (2010) supplements this critique, emphasizing the need for re-regulation and stricter financial accountability to ensure that poverty reduction funds reach intended beneficiaries.

To enhance the effectiveness of MIOs and NGOs in poverty reduction, several key reforms are necessary. Strengthening governance and accountability is essential, with policies focused on reducing corruption, increasing transparency, and improving financial oversight within these organizations (Shaw, 2004). Additionally, improving data collection and monitoring is crucial, as accurate baseline data and performance indicators are necessary for measuring the impact of PRSPs and other poverty reduction initiatives (Stern et al., 2006). Enhancing public-private collaboration can further support poverty reduction efforts by developing partnerships that integrate vocational training graduates into formal employment sectors (Giovacchini, 2011). Moreover, decentralizing poverty reduction efforts by strengthening community-led development and local governance participation ensures that solutions are context-specific and responsive to local needs (Lister, 2007). Ultimately, while MIOs and NGOs have made significant contributions to poverty reduction, a multi-faceted and well-regulated approach is required to ensure that poverty reduction strategies translate into sustainable improvements for the most vulnerable populations.

6.7 Graduation Mechanism from the Social Protection Programs

The concept of graduation from Social Protection Programs¹² (SPPs) is widely recognized as a strategy to transition individuals and households out of extreme poverty and toward self-sufficiency. The existing literature provides substantial evidence supporting this approach while also presenting contradictions regarding its effectiveness in conflict settings, supplementing the discussion with additional mechanisms, and complementing broader poverty reduction strategies.

Numerous studies support the argument that SPPs play a crucial role in poverty reduction by providing direct cash transfers, productive assets, vocational training, and livelihood opportunities to vulnerable populations (Alderman, 2016; Devereux, 2016; Kim & Sumberg, 2015). These interventions enhance food security, promote economic stability, and foster resilience among recipients, ultimately leading to their graduation from SPPs (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2015; Devereux & McGregor, 2014; Devereux et al., 2011).

Further, graduation mechanisms are designed to build long-term resilience by improving economic and social assets, particularly in fragile contexts like Afghanistan (Daidone et al., 2015; Katzman, 2010). Several Afghanistan-specific interventions—such as agricultural support, livestock distribution, microfinance, and skill development—align with these principles and are integral to ensuring sustainable poverty reduction. Studies highlight that targeted investments in education, healthcare, and employment creation enable individuals to transition out of dependency on social assistance, supporting the viability of SPP graduation strategies (McCord & Slater, 2015; Samson, 2015).

Despite these supportive arguments, contradictions arise concerning the effectiveness of SPP graduation mechanisms in conflict-affected environments. McIlvaine et al. (2015) argue that exogenous approaches—where SPPs are time- or age-bound—are often ineffective in fragile states like Afghanistan due to high levels of economic stagnation, social restrictions, and illiteracy. The study found that many beneficiaries struggle to maintain basic amenities after program support ends, highlighting the limitations of a rigid timeframe for graduation.

¹² The social program is a substantial mechanism to facilitate access to income through employment opportunities, decrease inequality, minimize migration, enhance welfare, and reduce extreme poverty (United Nations, 2010, p. 156).

Additionally, the top-down nature of many SPPs contradicts the principle of local ownership. Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2007) critique the reliance on donor-driven initiatives, arguing that these programs fail to integrate grassroots perspectives, leaving beneficiaries with little control over their own development. The sustainability of SPPs is often dependent on external funding and international priorities rather than local needs, further limiting their long-term impact (Béné et al., 2012). This contradiction is evident in Afghanistan, where beneficiaries face barriers to employment and limited access to markets, preventing them from utilizing SPP opportunities effectively.

While contradictions exist, research also supplements the discussion by introducing alternative graduation strategies tailored to Afghanistan's unique challenges along with the poverty factors, ongoing war, international terrorism, earthquakes, landslides, and avalanches add to extreme poverty in Afghanistan (Ranghieri et al., 2017). Roelen (2015) highlights the importance of intergenerational graduation mechanisms, which take into account family size, childcare, and seasonal employment fluctuations. In Afghanistan, where agriculture is a key livelihood, addressing seasonal poverty through targeted SPP interventions during lean periods could improve program outcomes.

Furthermore, studies suggest that enhancing agricultural market linkages could help small-scale farmers avoid cycles of extreme poverty. Farmers in Afghanistan often lack access to market information, leading to overproduction and price drops that diminish household income. By incorporating real-time market assessments and storage solutions, SPPs could better support sustainable economic transitions (Brown, 2019; Klasen & Waibel, 2015; Narayan et al., 2000). Additionally, strengthening vocational training and entrepreneurship programs could expand employment opportunities beyond agriculture, ensuring more diversified income sources for rural and urban households (Narayan & Petsch, 2002).

The discussion on SPP graduation mechanisms is further complemented by research emphasizing broader socio-political and structural factors. Devereux and Ulrichs (2015) note that while graduation programs aim to transition beneficiaries toward economic self-sufficiency, some stakeholders prioritize protection mechanisms over exit strategies. These approaches focus on

ensuring individuals maintain access to basic services rather than solely measuring program success by graduation rates.

Complementing these perspectives, Risner and Gadhavi (2015) stress the need for institutional capacity-building and national-level policies to support sustainable graduation mechanisms. Lessons from other countries suggest that establishing national frameworks for socioeconomic classification and poverty identification could enhance real-time monitoring of SPP beneficiaries (Sabates-Wheeler et al., 2015a; Wheeler et al., 2015; Sabates-Wheeler et al., 2015b). In Afghanistan, where political instability and lack of job market policies hinder sustainable employment, such frameworks could ensure a more adaptive approach to graduation (De Haan, 2014).

Moreover, investing in long-term development sectors, such as renewable energy, extractive industries, and vocational education, complements the existing SPP structure by creating lasting employment opportunities. The potential for Afghanistan laborers to participate in projects like the TAPI Gas Pipeline or solar energy stations remains untapped due to the lack of skilled workforce development initiatives. Addressing these gaps through targeted training programs and strategic labor market policies could reinforce SPP graduation efforts while ensuring sustainable poverty reduction.

The debate on SPP graduation mechanisms demonstrates a complex interplay between supporting evidence, contradictions, supplementation, and complementary approaches. While existing literature supports the effectiveness of SPPs in fostering economic resilience, contradictions emerge in fragile-state settings like Afghanistan, where beneficiaries struggle with employment barriers and lack ownership of program outcomes. Supplementary strategies, such as intergenerational graduation models and agricultural market linkages, provide practical solutions to these challenges. Moreover, complementing SPP interventions with broader economic and policy frameworks ensures a more sustainable transition out of extreme poverty. Ultimately, for graduation mechanisms to succeed in Afghanistan, a multi-dimensional and context-specific approach is essential. This approach may integrate poverty classification systems, local governance involvement, and long-term employment opportunities to create a sustainable pathway toward economic self-sufficiency. By aligning real-time poverty monitoring with skill-building and job

market reforms, Afghanistan can move toward a more effective and resilient SPP framework, reducing extreme poverty and enhancing social welfare.

6.8 Sustain Resilience among households in poverty

Enhancing the living standards of impoverished households is an enduring process that demands responsiveness to household needs and active engagement with relevant stakeholders. While the persistence of poverty has impacted rural and urban communities for generations, creating deeply rooted mindsets resistant to change, research supports the idea that transformation is possible through an integrated approach involving education systems, awareness programs, and strategic campaigns (Chen, 2012; Jütting & de Laiglesia, 2009). However, this assertion is contradicted by challenges in fragile economies where the effectiveness of interventions is often compromised by political instability and market distortions (Collier, 2003). To supplement this discussion, scholars highlight the need for broader poverty reduction strategies such as the PRSP, which aligns stakeholder actions and ensures a coordinated approach to employment creation, wealth distribution, and national economic sustainability (Pedro, 2004). Furthermore, these initiatives are complemented by international partnerships and infrastructure investments that facilitate Afghanistan's integration into regional and global markets (Burt, 2011).

Numerous studies support the argument that sustaining resilience among impoverished households requires a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. The PRSP framework prioritizes fair wealth distribution, job creation, and agricultural sector development, all of which contribute to reducing extreme poverty (Chen, 2012; Pedro, 2004). In Afghanistan, where subsistence agriculture is the predominant source of income, transitioning from traditional farming methods to a semi-commercial agricultural system could significantly enhance resilience (Jütting & de Laiglesia, 2009). For instance, implementing intercropping and mechanized farming techniques may generate year-round income, reducing reliance on illicit opium cultivation and lowering the risks associated with natural disasters like floods and droughts (Burt, 2011). Additionally, vocational training and skill development programs equip individuals with marketable skills, increasing employment prospects in both the formal and informal economies (Alter Chen, 2005).

Despite these supportive arguments, contradictions emerge concerning the effectiveness of poverty alleviation efforts in fragile economies like Afghanistan. The distribution of aid—such as wheat and flour—has inadvertently distorted local markets, compelling farmers to sell their products at significantly lower prices and, in some cases, forcing them into illicit activities to survive (McLeod & Davalos, 2008; Collier, 2003). Additionally, unskilled laborers in Afghanistan often struggle to secure stable employment, as job opportunities are frequently occupied by skilled foreign laborers from neighboring countries (Braithwaite et al., 2016). This one-way flow of cash out of Afghanistan exacerbates poverty and limits the economic mobility of local workers. Furthermore, informal employment remains a key survival mechanism for impoverished households, yet it lacks legal protections, workplace safety, and social security measures, placing workers in precarious conditions (Chen, 2012; Brozen, 1958).

Another contradiction arises in the reliance on international aid for economic stability. Afghanistan faces a substantial budget deficit, with approximately 70 percent of its national budget funded by international donors. While this external support enables basic service provision and governance, it has also created a disparity in income expectations, where employees of international organizations earn significantly more than those in national employment, disincentivizing local workforce participation (Collier, 2003). Moreover, the withdrawal of international security forces has led to economic stagnation, suspended investment activities, and heightened uncertainty, further destabilizing the job market and reinforcing the poverty-conflict trap (Braithwaite et al., 2016).

To address these contradictions, scholars propose supplementary strategies that focus on sustainable employment creation and long-term economic stability. One key approach is reshaping assistance programs to improve resilience against risks and shocks. Rather than relying solely on short-term aid, developing infrastructure projects—such as tertiary road networks connecting rural areas to markets—can significantly enhance economic opportunities and facilitate trade (Pedro, 2004). Similarly, investments in vocational training tailored to Afghanistan's economic needs can equip workers with skills relevant to domestic industries, reducing dependence on foreign labor and retaining economic benefits within the country (Burt, 2011).

Another supplementary measure is the promotion of legal and professional extraction of mineral resources. Afghanistan possesses vast untapped mineral reserves, yet the lack of formalized extraction policies limits its ability to capitalize on these resources (Piece, 2012). Establishing regulated mining operations could create employment opportunities, generate national revenue, and reduce reliance on international aid (Pedro, 2004). Additionally, expanding renewable energy sources—such as hydroelectric and solar power—would not only reduce operational costs for local industries but also serve as a vital input for irrigation systems, increasing agricultural productivity and stability (Collier, 2008, pp. 53- 63).

The discussion on sustaining resilience among impoverished households is further complemented by Afghanistan’s regional and global economic integration efforts. Over the years, Afghanistan has pursued active memberships in international organizations to strengthen trade relations and economic resilience. These include:

1. Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO): Afghanistan became a member of the ECO in 1992 and has actively participated in its activities since 2001. The ECO focuses on regional economic integration, trade facilitation, and development.
2. Islamic Development Bank (IsDB): Afghanistan has been a member of the IsDB since 1976, with its first operational activities beginning in 2004. The IsDB supports economic and social development in member countries, including Afghanistan.
3. Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program (CAREC): Afghanistan joined the CAREC in 2005. CAREC promotes regional cooperation among Central Asian countries to improve trade and infrastructure connectivity.
4. South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC): Afghanistan became a member of the SAARC in 2007. SAARC aims to promote regional cooperation and development among South Asian countries.
5. International Standard Organization (ISO): Afghanistan became a member of the ISO in 2014, which is significant for ensuring that Afghanistan products adhere to international quality and safety standards.
6. World Trade Organization (WTO): Afghanistan became a member of the WTO in 2016, facilitating its participation in global trade and setting rules for international trade.

7. Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO): Afghanistan has held observer status at the SCO since 2012, enabling it to engage with SCO member countries in various areas, including economic cooperation.

These initiatives complement national poverty reduction efforts by creating new market opportunities, attracting foreign investment, and fostering economic stability. For example, membership in the WTO enhances Afghanistan's ability to export goods competitively, while participation in CAREC facilitates infrastructure improvements necessary for trade efficiency (Burt, 2011). Furthermore, complementary policies shall address border and water disputes, as these issues significantly impact Afghanistan's economic stability. Diplomatic tensions over water resources and trade routes can disrupt market access, affecting both rural and urban households (Collier, 2008, pp. 53-63). By engaging in diplomatic negotiations and leveraging international platforms, Afghanistan can ensure greater economic integration and conflict resolution mechanisms, ultimately fostering sustained poverty reduction and resilience.

The discourse on sustaining resilience among impoverished households underscores a dynamic interplay between supporting evidence, contradictions, supplementation, and complementary approaches. While poverty reduction strategies such as PRSPs, vocational training, and semi-commercial agriculture support long-term economic stability, contradictions arise in aid dependency, market distortions, and informal labor exploitation. To supplement these efforts, scholars advocate for infrastructure development, legal mining operations, and energy sector reforms that enhance job creation and economic self-sufficiency. Additionally, regional and global economic integration complements national poverty reduction initiatives, expanding trade opportunities and investment prospects. Eventually, sustaining resilience against poverty in Afghanistan requires a multi-dimensional, stakeholder-driven approach that integrates domestic economic reforms, international partnerships, and infrastructural advancements. By aligning poverty reduction strategies with market-oriented policies and regional cooperation efforts, Afghanistan may enhance its economic resilience and ensure that households escaping poverty remain outside its scope.

6.9 Institutional Discrimination toward households in extreme poverty

Institutional discrimination¹³ in Afghanistan's poverty reduction efforts presents a complex challenge, as it is often concealed in policy design but becomes evident during implementation. Although poverty reduction frameworks appear inclusive, systemic biases contradict the stated objectives by favoring particular regions, ethnicities, or urban areas over marginalized communities. This contradiction is particularly evident in the allocation of resources, budget distribution, and hiring practices within state institutions, leading to disparities that perpetuate cycles of poverty. However, efforts to support inclusivity have emerged through initiatives like the Developmental Social Protection Program (SPP), which seeks to supplement poverty reduction efforts by addressing the welfare needs of vulnerable groups, including orphaned children, disabled individuals, and families of martyrs. Despite these efforts, gaps in social protection policies continue to undermine equitable poverty reduction.

Similarly, Afghanistan's predominantly subsistence-based agriculture sector, crucial for rural livelihoods, has been significantly impacted by natural disasters, such as the severe 2018 drought, which affected 22 of the 34 provinces. In response, the state of Afghanistan and international organizations provided aid, supporting relief efforts with food and essential supplies. However, assessments by the MRRD indicate that powerful village elites, such as Khans and local influencers, have manipulated the allocation of aid and infrastructure projects, contradicting the intended goal of supporting vulnerable populations. Furthermore, donor agencies' preferences for urban-based projects have supplemented this urban-rural divide by attracting rural migration to major cities, thereby weakening domestic agricultural production. As a result, instead of complementing economic resilience, these biased interventions have inadvertently contributed to a shift from a subsistence-based economy to a consumption-driven economy, increasing dependency on food imports and exacerbating poverty.

¹³ Discrimination is a process in which a dominant group uses a system or resources to maintain privileges at the cost of other groups (Feagin & Feagin, 1978). Discrimination characteristics are based on gender, disability, age, race, class, antipathy, distaste, and negative beliefs toward a specific individual or a group (Lang, 2011; Reskin, 2011; Belle & Doucet, 2003; Schiller, 1971).

Efforts to support poverty reduction in Afghanistan are supplemented by state and international initiatives. For instance, the MoLSAMD manages budget allocations for vulnerable groups. While this initiative supports the economic needs of families of martyrs, individuals with disabilities, and orphaned children, a gap exists when orphans turn 18, at which point they no longer receive assistance. At this point, these groups are often left unattended and homeless, forced to sleep in temporary accommodations around Pul-e-Kheshti Mosque and nearby shops and street corners. This limitation contradicts the principles of long-term poverty reduction, as these young adults often become homeless and highly vulnerable. Female orphans, in particular, face increased discrimination, reinforcing the need for a Developmental Social Protection Program (SPP) to complement existing measures and ensure ongoing support for disadvantaged groups.

Discrimination also exists within Afghanistan's National Assembly (NA), responsible for approving the national budget. Though the NA's role in evaluating financial allocations and overseeing governance supports poverty reduction, political agendas and provincial biases contradict national priorities, often delaying budget approval. Moreover, nepotism in public sector employment has supplemented institutional inefficiencies, as unqualified but well-connected individuals secure multiple positions, while skilled individuals struggle to find a single opportunity. This flawed recruitment system reduces state performance, discourages merit-based employment, and complements existing economic disparities by reinforcing gender pay gaps and limiting employment opportunities for vulnerable groups, including female-headed households (Stein et al., 2016; Belle & Doucet, 2003). Implementing gender-blind pay systems could support economic empowerment for women, raising household incomes and reducing extreme poverty (Roberts, 2015; Hausmann et al., 2012; Barko, 2000). Additionally, policies aimed at reducing poverty shall complement employment initiatives by addressing healthcare needs, particularly for impoverished women and children, ensuring a holistic approach to economic empowerment (Romero et al., 2002).

Mismanagement in the recruitment process further contradicts effective governance, as individuals with irrelevant qualifications are frequently appointed to key positions. The assignment of medical doctors and engineers to economic sectors, economists to security and medical fields, and even hairdressers to diplomatic roles illustrates the lack of accountability in public appointments. These

inconsistencies supplement Afghanistan's governance challenges, weakening the effectiveness of poverty reduction strategies. Moreover, the widespread unmerited employment system has led to a brain drain, with skilled professionals seeking opportunities abroad, further diminishing the country's human capital. The persistence of these issues highlights the urgent need for systemic reform in Afghanistan's legislative and executive bodies, as strengthening merit-based recruitment and ensuring transparency are essential steps to support long-term poverty reduction.

6.10 Widespread Corruption in the system

Corruption has become a fundamental and profoundly concerning aspect of Afghanistan's development narrative. It supplements other structural issues, such as weak governance, systemic discrimination, and inefficiencies in public institutions, all of which have significantly hindered the country's development efforts (Riddell, 2009; Collier & Dollar, 2002). Corruption is pervasive throughout the public sector, influencing institutions such as law enforcement agencies, the justice system, security forces, local governance bodies, the customs sector, and service providers (Pike & Brown, 2011; Hall, 2011; Bisogno, 2010; Chêne & Hodess, 2007a). Although some efforts have been made to combat corruption, these measures often appear insufficient, as they fail to complement broader governance reforms necessary to reduce extreme poverty.

The underperformance of public institutions and the prevailing culture of impunity support an environment in which corrupt networks can exploit state structures for personal gain at the expense of marginalized populations (Negin et al., 2010; Haggard et al., 2008; Chêne & Hodess, 2007b). Public sector employees often perceive hierarchical positions as opportunities for career advancement rather than as platforms for accountability. This dynamic contradicts the principles of meritocracy and responsible governance, as public servants prioritize personal enrichment over institutional efficiency. The Civil Servants Law of 2008 based on the Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (MEC) report, which initially sought to create a structured and fair salary scale, has failed to complement other necessary reforms. Consequently, disparities between low-ranking public servants and high-ranking officials have widened, fostering disillusionment and reducing trust in public institutions.

Table 15 presents the public sector salary scale in Afghanistan, categorized by grade and step levels, with salaries reported in USD. The table shows that salaries increase progressively across both grades and steps, reflecting seniority and experience within the public administration system. Higher grades, such as Grade 1 under line B, receive relatively higher salaries compared to lower grades under lines D and E, illustrating the hierarchical structure of compensation in the public sector. However, when considering a five-member household with a single breadwinner employed in the public sector, the salary levels indicate that many families may still experience economic hardship or poverty. Even at mid-level grades, the income may be insufficient to cover basic household needs such as food, housing, healthcare, and education, highlighting the broader challenges of income adequacy and living standards in the country.

Table 15: *Afghanistan Public Sector Salary Scale in (USD)*

Line	Grade	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
B	1	346	363	380	396	414
	2	234	247	260	273	285
C	3	166	175	185	194	204
	4	126	132	139	145	152
D	5	102	106	110	113	117
	6	83	86	89	92	96
E	7	71	73	75	77	79
	8	64	65	66	68	69

Source: Based on Karimi (2020).

For instance, the stark contrast in salary structures supports the notion that systemic corruption benefits the elite at the expense of the lower-income population. In 2013, a low-ranking public servant earned between 6,500 and 30,000 Afghanis¹⁴ per month (USD 127.45–588.23), while a minister received 200,000 Afghanis (USD 3,921.56). This discrepancy contradicts the idea of an equitable governance system that fairly distributes resources to all public employees. High-ranking officials further enjoyed additional privileges¹⁵, including diplomatic passports, luxury housing,

¹⁴ Exchange rate in 2013, \$ 1 = Afghanis 51

¹⁵ This budget was known as (Pul-e-destarkhwan) which means *meal money* or *dinning expenses*.

and security details, while the general public endured insecurity, malnutrition, and extreme poverty. The stark economic divide complements existing social inequalities, as the wealthiest individuals consolidate power and resources while the most vulnerable struggle for basic survival.

A related challenge is the relationship between Afghanistan's legislative and executive bodies. The National Assembly (NA) is constitutionally mandated to evaluate and approve the national budget, oversee government functions, and vote on high-level appointments. In theory, cooperation between the NA and executive officials should complement national priorities such as economic development and job creation. However, in practice, many NA members engage in corrupt dealings, such as securing personal financial gains from ministerial nominees in exchange for votes of confidence. This behavior contradicts the intended role of the NA as a guardian of public interest and supports a system where political appointments are based on financial transactions rather than competence (Callen & Long, 2015; Allen, 2013; De Lauri, 2013).

The inability of the state to enforce anti-corruption measures has pushed individuals toward alternative governance structures, including illicit economic activities and informal arbitration mechanisms. Many individuals have resorted to cultivating and producing opiate drugs as a survival strategy, further exacerbating poverty and instability (Allen, 2013; De Lauri, 2013; Pike & Brown, 2011; Bisogno, 2010). This development supplements Afghanistan's already fragile economic landscape, reinforcing a vicious cycle in which corruption fuels poverty, and poverty, in turn, increases the appeal of illicit economic activities.

The detrimental impact of corruption extends beyond the public sector and into private enterprise. Systemic corruption contradicts the principles of fair market competition and discourages SMEs from engaging with state institutions. Addressing corruption in the public sector could support SME development, which, in turn, would create employment opportunities and reduce poverty. Despite the fact electronic governance systems have the potential to minimize corruption, their effectiveness is limited in Afghanistan due to weak institutional capacity and budgetary constraints. However, raising national commitment to transparency and responsible governance could complement existing reform efforts, even in the absence of advanced digital infrastructure.

Despite the establishment of multiple anti-corruption entities, such as Afghanistan's High Office of Oversight (AHOO), the Supreme Audit Office (SAO), the Afghanistan Ombudsman Office

(AOO), the UNAMA, and the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), their efforts have rarely yielded optimal results. The persistent influence of insurgency and armed conflict has been cited as a justification for weak public sector performance, yet evidence suggests that corruption itself fuels insecurity (Hall, 2011; Bisogno, 2010). The failure of anti-corruption institutions to hold officials accountable contradicts their foundational objectives and allows corruption to persist unchecked.

International assistance, which aims to support Afghanistan's development, has also been plagued by inefficiencies and corruption. Bureaucratic delays in project approvals, favoritism in selecting prime contractors, and subcontracting complexities often result in misallocated resources. For instance, major companies or NGOs involved in aid projects frequently deduct a substantial percentage of the budget before subcontracting tasks to local implementers. This multilayered process results in only a fraction of the allocated funds reaching the intended beneficiaries. Such inefficiencies contradict the principles of aid effectiveness outlined in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA) (OECD/UNDP, 2016; Roberts, 2009).

The disparities in aid distribution further highlight the systemic flaws within the governance and assistance frameworks. Though approximately USD 800 million is allocated annually through NGOs, the distribution is highly uneven. For instance, Kabul alone receives between USD 250 to 300 million, whereas Nouristan Province, one of the most impoverished and remote regions, receives only USD 2 million. This imbalance contradicts the principle of equitable resource allocation and supplements existing urban-rural divides. The education sector, often cited as a success story of international aid, has also been significantly impacted by corruption, further eroding public trust in institutions (Hall, 2011).

To address these challenges, it is crucial to complement existing governance mechanisms with enhanced transparency measures, anti-corruption enforcement, and equitable budgetary allocations. Reaffirming commitments to international aid principles, such as those outlined in the Paris Declaration, could support efforts to strengthen accountability and efficiency in aid distribution (OECD/UNDP, 2016; Roberts, 2009). Moreover, ensuring that a more substantial proportion of project funds directly benefit impoverished rural and urban households is essential to improving the effectiveness of development initiatives.

Corruption in Afghanistan is deeply entrenched in both the public and private sectors and aid system, contradicting efforts to build an equitable and sustainable governance system. The stark economic divide between privileged elites and the general population supplements existing social inequalities and reinforces cycles of poverty. Although anti-corruption measures and international aid initiatives have aimed to support development, inefficiencies, mismanagement, and political corruption have often weakened their impact. Addressing these systemic challenges requires a holistic approach that complements governance reforms with stronger enforcement mechanisms, improved institutional accountability, and equitable economic policies.

6.11 Reduction of poverty to 3 percent by 2030

Afghanistan has signed and adopted significant development frameworks, including the MDGs, the SDGs, and the Development Package of the Washington Consensus. The international community has provided technical expertise and financial support to assist in aligning and implementing these development goals. This support supplements national efforts by hiring international professionals, improving the qualifications of public servants, and procuring necessary accessories and equipment. However, the contradiction between long-term development goals and the ongoing instability in Afghanistan has hindered progress. The simultaneous processes of capacity building, vocational training, and recognizing the growth potential within rural and urban economies have contributed to gradual progress in achieving these objectives. The development trajectory needed to improve current trends in the instruments, institutions, and policy regimes is critical, as impoverished populations primarily reside in fragile states. Therefore, the transformation of fragmented poverty reduction programs into unified and adequate SPPs is essential for achieving sustainable development (Desai, 2015; Yoshida et al., 2014).

Political commitment is fundamental to enforcing social justice and implementing development goals that can empower people experiencing extreme poverty. Whereas political leadership can complement economic initiatives, reducing poverty requires a steady and gradual process, factoring in political uncertainty, internal rivalry, war, border disputes, labor rights, agricultural sector improvements, and amplifying the voices of vulnerable populations (Razavi, 2016; CEPAL & UNICEF, 2013; Narayan et al., 2000). In addition to state actors, civil society plays a vital role in

supporting development efforts. Engaging citizens in governance structures, ensuring institutional accountability, and addressing corruption in program design and implementation are critical to achieving these goals. A bottom-up approach that fosters transparency and inclusivity can lead to more effective poverty reduction initiatives. On a global scale, extreme poverty was reduced to 22.4 percent in 2008, with projections estimating further reductions to 9.9 percent in 2020, 5.4 percent in 2030, and around 386 million individuals remaining in extreme poverty by the SDG completion deadline (Chandy et al., 2013a; Chandy et al., 2013b; World Bank & Fonds, 2012). These global trends support Afghanistan's development aspirations, yet the country faces unique challenges that necessitate localized strategies.

Globally, one billion people live in poverty, with 800 million residing in rural areas, of whom 600 million work in the agricultural sector (World Bank & International Monetary Fund, 2015; Desai, 2015; McArthur, 2015; International Monetary Fund, 2014). Similarly, in Afghanistan, millions of rural and urban households depend on agriculture for survival. The MAIL, with the technical assistance of the FAO, found that nearly 10 to 12 million farmers and their families rely on agriculture. These findings complement the studies conducted by the MoEc, which emphasize increasing village productivity by integrating local economies into national development plans. For example, the A-SDGs and the A-PRSP serve as supplementary policy frameworks aimed at boosting domestic growth and tackling extreme poverty. However, Afghanistan's complex socio-political landscape necessitates a detailed investigation of each village's unique dynamics, particularly in addressing illicit agricultural production. Although licit crops such as wheat, rice, and corn are insufficient to meet national demand, illicit opium cultivation remains a lucrative sector, contributing to economic inconsistency and fueling insurgency. This contradicts sustainable poverty reduction efforts and highlights the need for alternative livelihood programs to promote licit agriculture and stabilize rural economies.

Afghanistan's top-down governance approach has yielded limited results, contradicting the necessity for decentralized administration in a diverse society. A strong central government has failed to accommodate the unique needs, skills, and natural resources of local communities, making it premature to expect the successful implementation of the A-SDGs and A-PRSP. Disregarding regional diversity in poverty reduction strategies has led to ineffective policies, reinforcing the

necessity for a complementary decentralized governance model. Historically, Afghanistan has been divided into regions with localized leadership structures. Regional power holders have played significant roles in conflict resolution and, at times, have provided security and basic services. However, some of these figures have also misused financial and technical assistance from the central government, diverting resources away from poverty reduction efforts. Recognizing and respecting Afghanistan's diversity requires strengthening local accountability and ensuring equitable institutional representation. This approach supports the need for locally driven development initiatives that prioritize community needs. Moreover, delegating administrative and financial authority to lower levels of governance could enhance service delivery and bolster poverty reduction efforts.

Addressing insecurity is foremost, as poverty and insecurity are deeply intertwined. Insecurity contributes to rising poverty, though poverty fuels further instability. Insecurity remains a major obstacle to development and project implementation, directly linking to unemployment, hunger, and extreme poverty. Additionally, the state's limited capacity to implement civilian-led governance has exacerbated these challenges. Successfully achieving development goals necessitates leveraging domestic growth sources at the village level while considering external support mechanisms.

Several structural barriers hinder poverty reduction efforts, necessitating urgent reforms to unlock Afghanistan's full potential. Harnessing the skills of the younger generation, systematically utilizing untapped mineral resources, and learning from other countries' experiences in poverty reduction are crucial strategies. However, global trends indicate that achieving a 3 percent extreme poverty rate by 2030 remains highly unlikely. Cilliers et al (2014) support this by arguing that eradicating extreme poverty or a decrease to 3 percent at the global level by 2030 is unrealistic due to the development path of different countries. Contradicting optimistic projections, studies suggest that eradicating extreme poverty based on a USD 1.25 per person per day threshold (adjusted for 2005 purchasing power parity) would take at least 100 years (Reddy & Kvangraven, 2015; Woodward, 2015). The historical impact of financial crises, environmental shocks, and governance failures further underscores this challenge. For instance, setbacks during the 1980s and 1990s financial crises slowed poverty reduction, suggesting that maintaining the current trajectory would

require approximately 50 years to achieve significant progress (Ravallion, 2013). These findings support the argument that Afghanistan may implement structural reforms and adopt best practices from other nations to accelerate development.

Despite extensive international assistance, Afghanistan's economic trajectory has experienced a downward trend during the transition decade, highlighting the challenges economies face when caught in prolonged cycles of decline. Addressing this issue requires coordinated efforts by key institutions such as the MoEc, the High Economic Council (HEC), and the HCPR. While reducing extreme poverty to 3 percent by 2030 is an ambitious and highly challenging goal, it remains an essential priority for the well-being of vulnerable populations. To effectively support poverty reduction, strategies shall focus on strengthening national interests over personal gain, enhancing security, promoting good governance, and fostering economic diversification.

Complementary measures include developing Afghanistan's mineral extraction sector and hydroelectric power infrastructure, ensuring the transparent and corruption-free utilization of international development assistance, and mechanizing agriculture while investing in improved seed varieties. Additionally, strengthening domestic markets through microfinance programs and dairy industry development can empower small businesses and promote self-sufficiency. Promoting national unity through electronic governance can further enhance transparency and efficiency in public administration. Moreover, leveraging Afghanistan's geographical position as a regional economic hub presents valuable opportunities for trade and investment, contributing to long-term economic stability and sustainable poverty reduction.

6.12 Effectiveness of the ODA for poverty reduction

Afghanistan's economy faces severe challenges, including chronic Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations (FCS), prolonged high-intensity conflict, and widespread extreme poverty, with over 50 percent of the population dependent on international assistance (Corral et al., 2020, p. 72). The role of ODA in fragile states is widely debated, with some scholars arguing that ODA supports economic stabilization and poverty reduction. However, others contradict this view, emphasizing its limited effectiveness due to conflicting interests between donor countries and recipient states. The lack of political will among elite groups and the persistent influence of international actors in shaping reforms further weaken the impact of aid (Zürcher, 2012; Roberts, 2009).

Moreover, Afghanistan's economic transition from a centrally controlled system to an open-market economy has supplemented preexisting governance challenges rather than resolving them (Rodrik, 2011, p. 33). While an open-market economy theoretically enhances economic dynamism, in practice, it has allowed predatory public officials to exploit the system, consolidating power and wealth. The elite groups have structured the state in a way that complements their own political and financial interests, prioritizing resource allocation from international aid rather than fostering domestic wealth generation. This pattern aligns with Afghanistan's characterization as a fragile rentier state, surviving primarily on foreign assistance rather than internal productivity (Meininghaus, 2016; Verkoren & Kamphuis, 2013; Suhrke, 2013; Rodrik, 2011, p. 33).

Table 16 presents the volume and structure of international assistance disbursed to Afghanistan between 2002 and 2013, underscoring the central role of external aid in sustaining the country's post-2001 reconstruction and fiscal stability. Total pledged assistance reached approximately USD 89.9 billion, with USD 56.8 billion disbursed between 2002 and 2010, of which only 18 percent was channeled on-budget and 82 percent delivered off-budget. The United States was by far the largest donor, followed by Japan, Germany, the European Union, and the WB, among others.

While this substantial inflow of aid was fundamental to financing security, governance, and development expenditures, its long-term effectiveness remains uncertain. Heavy reliance on predominantly off-budget external funding, without parallel institutional strengthening and structural reform, poses challenges to fiscal sustainability and the development of a self-reliant

economy. This highlights the need for a restricted aid framework aligned with domestic priorities and sustainable poverty reduction strategies.

Table 16: International Assistance by Country from 2002 to 2013-Amount in Million \$

Rank	Donor			Total disbursement	2002-2010		2002-2010	
		2002- 2013	2002-2011		On-budget disbursement	Off-budget disbursement	On-budget disbursement	Off-budget disbursement
		Pledged	Commitment				(%)	(%)
1	USA	56,100	44,356	37,118	2,455	34,663	7	93
2	Japan	7,200	3,152	3,152	900	2,252	29	71
3	Germany	5,029	2,130	762	287	475	38	62
4	EU/EC	3,068	2,883	2,594	774	1,820	30	70
5	United Kingdom	2,897	2,222	2,222	861	1,361	39	61
6	WB	2,800	2,137	1,700	1,700	0	100	0
7	ADB	2,200	2,269	1,005	955	50	95	5
8	Canada	1,769	1,256	1,256	491	765	39	61
9	India	1,200	1,516	759	0	759	0	100
10	Norway	938	775	636	232	404	36	64
11	Netherlands	864	1,015	1,015	426	589	42	58
12	Italy	753	645	540	212	328	39	61
13	Iran	673	399	377	0	377	0	100
14	Denmark	533	438	438	252	186	58	42
15	Sweden	515	635	635	171	464	27	73
16	Australia	369	744	656	112	544	17	83
17	Spain	308	220	194	84	110	43	57
18	UN	305	446	182	2	180	1	99
19	Pakistan	289	5	0	0	0	0	0
20	Saudi Arabia	268	140	103	25	78	24	76
21	China	252	139	58	0	58	0	100
22	Russia	239	151	147	4	143	3	97
23	Switzerland	197	118	102	7	95	7	93

24	AKDN	190	140	140	0	140	0	100
25	Finland	152	160	160	48	112	30	70
26	Turkey	143	213	180	0	180	0	100
27	France	134	323	174	62	112	36	64
28	UAE	97	134	117	0,4	117	0	100
29	IsDB	87	70	17	17	0	100	0
30	South Korea	85	116	83	6	77	7	93
31	Others	327	305	283	59	224	21	79
Total		89,981	69,252	56,805	10,142	46,663	18	82

Source: Based on Bizhan (2017).

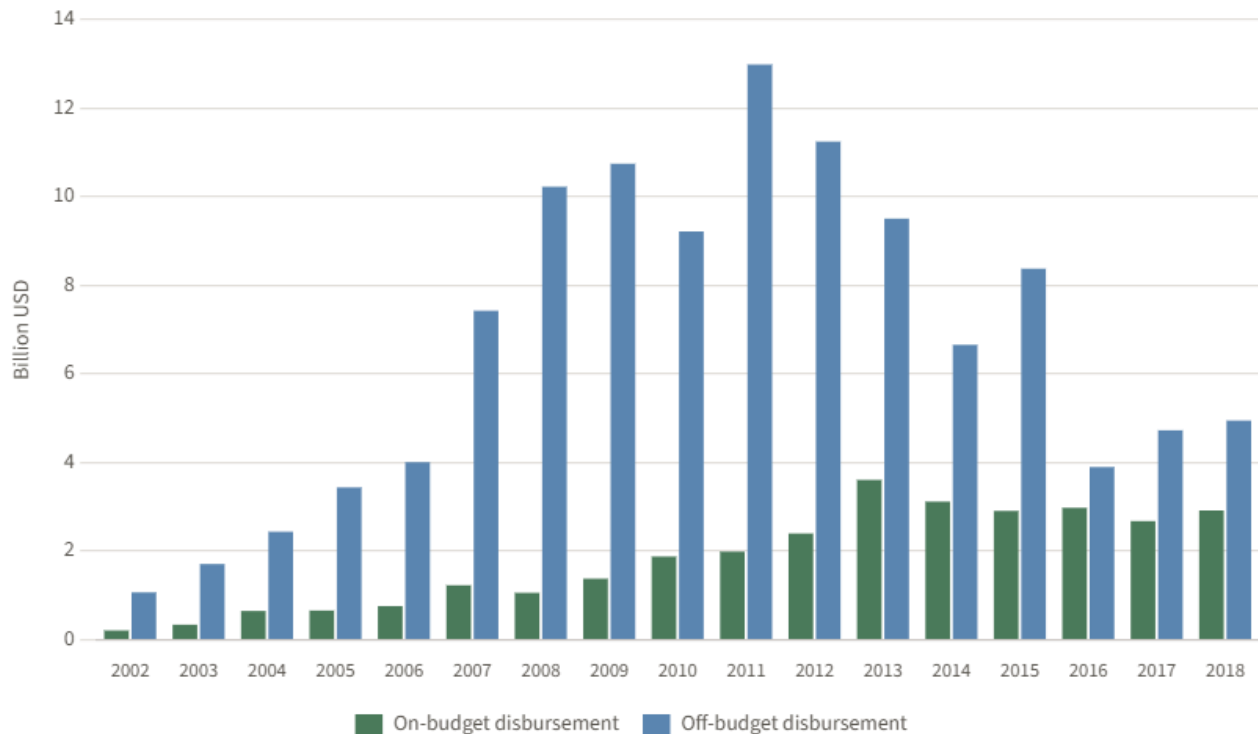
Efforts to reduce extreme poverty in Afghanistan have faced significant challenges, particularly the absence of a cohesive mechanism for effective collaboration among key poverty reduction stakeholders. Although international conferences and declarations on Afghanistan have aimed to address these challenges, the persistent lack of trust between the state and the international community contradicts efforts to establish a unified strategy. Effective coordination, communication, and cooperation among these stakeholders are crucial to enhancing the impact of poverty reduction initiatives. Strengthening these aspects would complement broader development goals by ensuring that aid reaches vulnerable populations and is utilized efficiently.

One major factor influencing aid effectiveness has been the mismanagement of public funds, a lack of technical expertise, corruption, favoritism, waste, and governance inefficiencies. These challenges have led to donor agencies allocating the majority of international assistance through off-budget mechanisms, bypassing direct state management. Specifically, supporting this argument, Karimi (2020) highlights that from 2002 to 2018, approximately 79 percent of the total USD 113 billion in international assistance was allocated off-budget, while only 21 percent-equivalent to USD 31 billion-was managed through on-budget mechanisms, as illustrated in Figure 17.

Despite efforts to identify updated datasets for the post-2018 period, no comparable or methodologically consistent source was available. Consequently, the data presented in Figures 17–19 constitute the most recent dataset feasible for the purposes of this study.

While these off-budget allocations supplement poverty reduction efforts by reducing the risks associated with public sector inefficiencies, they also contradict the objective of strengthening Afghanistan’s national institutions, which are essential for long-term development and economic self-reliance. Addressing extreme poverty in Afghanistan requires a recalibrated approach that complements international support with institutional capacity-building efforts. A shift towards greater transparency, improved governance, and enhanced state legitimacy is necessary to ensure that aid mechanisms not only alleviate immediate poverty but also contribute to sustainable economic development.

Figure 17: *On and off-the-budget aid disbursement in billion (USD) (2002 – 2018)*



Source: Based on Karimi (2020).

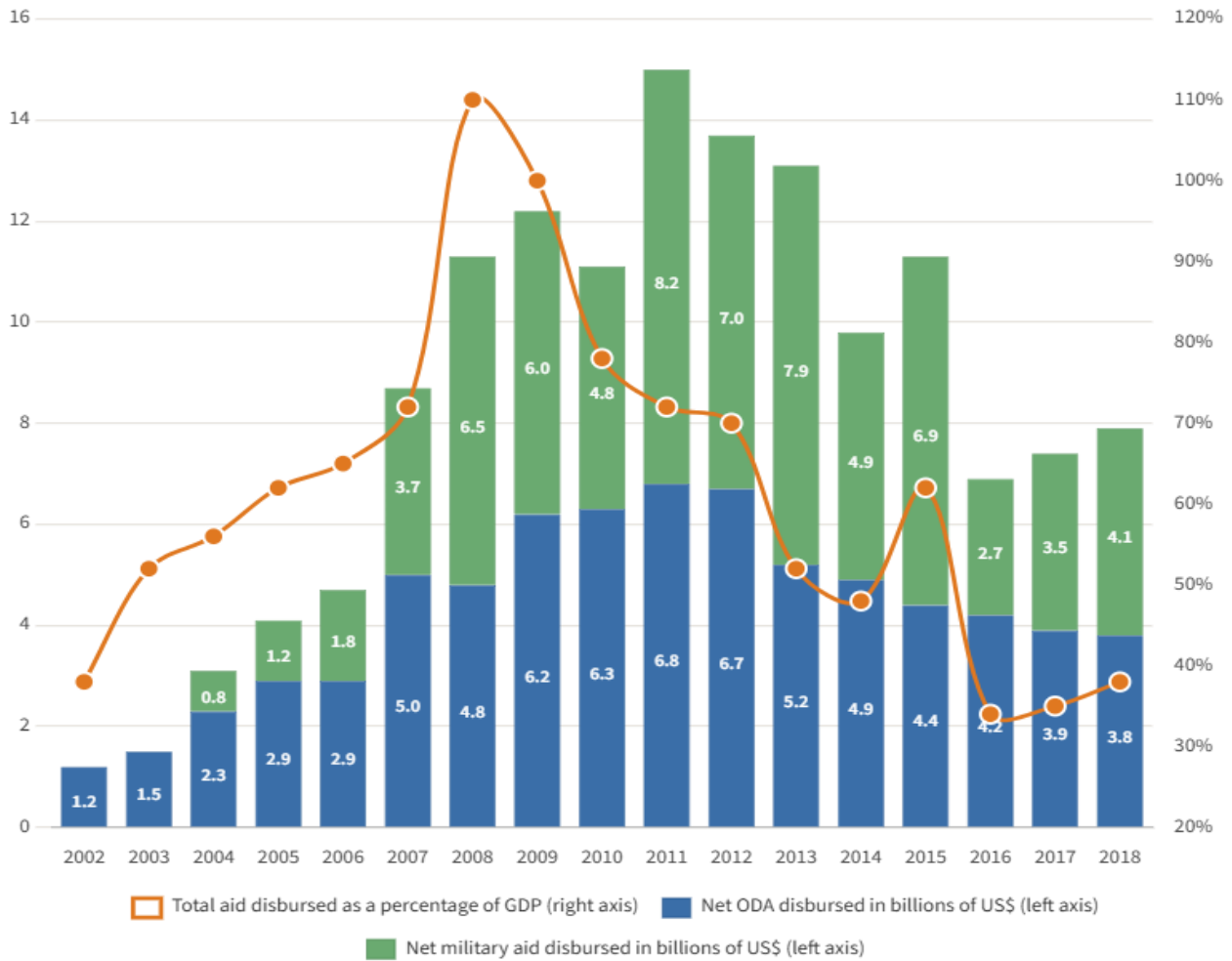
The allocation of substantial international assistance to Afghanistan’s security and defense sectors has been a longstanding practice. Although these efforts aim to combat insurgency and maintain stability, the challenging socioeconomic conditions—such as limited access to education, insufficient skills development, and a lack of employment opportunities—have contradicted these security-driven approaches by inadvertently pushing many young people into both formal and informal state security forces or opposition groups as a means of survival. This complex dynamic highlights the necessity of addressing security concerns alongside holistic development initiatives to provide viable economic alternatives, thereby contributing to both stability and poverty reduction.

Supporting this argument, Goodhand (2002) explains that insecurity in Afghanistan has been perpetuated by actors who benefit from conflict, utilizing a top-down deployment approach to gain control over markets. Simultaneously, households experiencing extreme poverty have often

resorted to conflict involvement as their only source of income. This reality underscores the cyclical nature of conflict and poverty, where economic desperation fuels instability, which, in turn, hampers sustainable development efforts.

Furthermore, the trend of escalating conflict intensity has led to an increased allocation of international assistance toward military expenditures. Supplementing this perspective, Karimi (2020) provides a financial breakdown of aid disbursement between 2002 and 2018, showing that while USD 73 billion was allocated as ODA for civilian development, a nearly equal sum-USD 70 billion-was directed toward security and defense sectors, as illustrated in Figure 18. Whereas defense funding has been essential in countering insurgency, it has also contradicted long-term poverty reduction efforts by diverting resources away from economic growth initiatives. Balancing security expenditures with socioeconomic investments is essential for breaking this cycle. A strategic shift towards development-centered policies would complement security initiatives by reducing the economic drivers of conflict and fostering a more sustainable pathway to stability and poverty reduction.

Figure 18: *Assistances for the Civilian and Security Sectors (in current value)*



Source: Based on Karimi (2020).

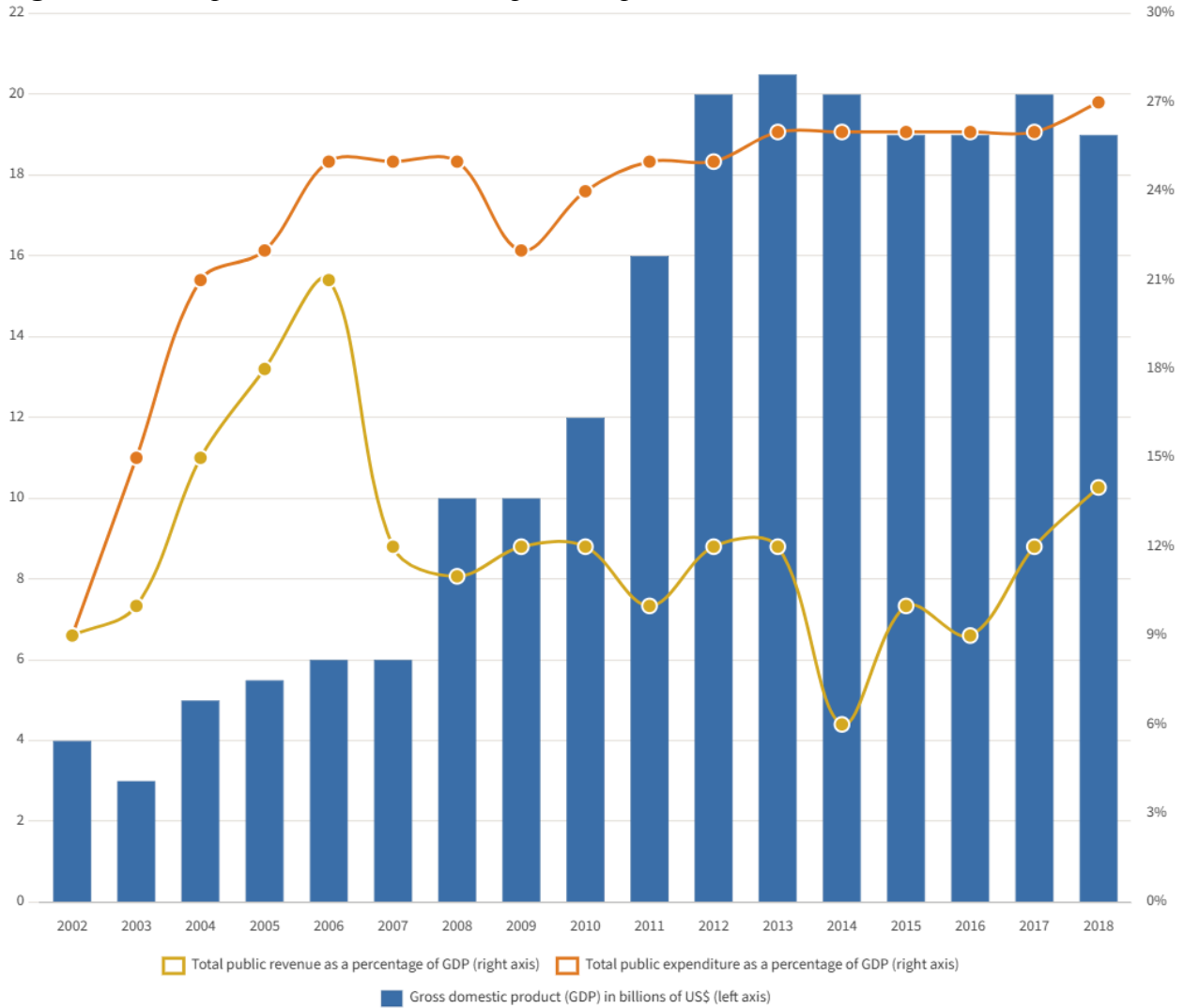
Ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan have created beneficiaries, often at the expense of the wider population. Various actors, including armed groups, warlords, and corrupt officials, have profited from the conflict through illicit means such as the drug trade, extortion, and economic resource control in conflict-affected areas (Le Billon, 2003). Though some individuals and groups have amassed wealth and power from these activities, the broader population has suffered from insecurity, displacement, and deepening poverty. This reality supports the argument that conflicts have reinforced economic inequalities rather than reducing poverty.

Additionally, powerholders and profiteers who benefit from ongoing wars have shown an interest in perpetuating violence to sustain illicit economic gains. Supplementing this perspective, Le Billon (2003) and Goodhand (2002) argue that these actors have relied on the opium trade and the smuggling of consumer goods to evade taxation, further weakening state revenues and public services. Such economic distortions have impeded Afghanistan's transition toward sustainable development.

Moreover, Fishstein and Wilder (2012) identify multiple conflict drivers, including corruption, predatory officials, factional rivalries, and high unemployment. Their findings complement earlier studies by highlighting external factors such as international security forces' civilian casualties, night raids, cultural insensitivity, and the interference of neighboring countries. These elements have exacerbated grievances and fueled persistent cycles of conflict.

Despite extensive financial investments in Afghanistan's civilian and military sectors, as illustrated in Figure 19, extreme poverty has continued to rise. The persistent national income deficit and limited economic opportunities contradict the intended outcomes of international assistance, underscoring the complexity of poverty reduction in a fragile and conflict-affected environment.

Figure 19: Total public revenue and total public expenditure



Source: Based on Karimi (2020).

The management of international aid in Afghanistan has largely prioritized bureaucratic processes over the actual impact on poverty reduction. The lack of an auditable system to track the final beneficiaries of aid has facilitated manipulation and widespread corruption, supporting Zürcher (2012) and Roberts (2009), who argue that aid inefficiency stems from mismanagement. Despite 95 percent of ODA being provided as grants with no repayment obligations (Karimi, 2020; Robb, 2003), the international community failed to recognize the crucial role of poverty stakeholders in preventing aid programs from failing. This disconnect was exacerbated by conflicting agendas,

weak institutional capacity, and a lack of coordination among national and international actors, as highlighted by Wood and Sullivan (2015), Goodhand and Sedra (2010), and Roberts (2009).

Although aid efforts primarily targeted awareness programs, capacity building, and social capital development (Narayan, 2002), these interventions had only a marginal impact on poverty reduction and food security. For example, while awareness campaigns on women's rights provided information, they did not directly address the economic challenges faced by widowed women who served as primary breadwinners. This supplements the argument that a more comprehensive approach—one that includes capacity-building, employment opportunities, and resource allocation—is necessary to empower impoverished households. However, many NGOs and international organizations focused on short-term, measurable outcomes, which failed to align with the long-term needs of vulnerable populations. Consequently, neither the government of Afghanistan nor the beneficiaries could exert sufficient influence to reshape ODA policies into a more inclusive and need-oriented framework.

Despite international agreements such as the Paris Declaration, the Accra Declaration, and the Afghanistan International Conference on Economic Growth and Development, efforts to bridge the gap between poverty reduction stakeholders have largely failed. Corruption and misalignment of projects with national priorities have hindered significant progress in reducing extreme poverty. The decentralization of the national budget allowed civil society representatives and subnational authorities to contribute to development planning. However, the contradiction between decentralizing budget authority and centralizing the public procurement process under the direct supervision of Afghanistan's president and prime minister created inefficiencies, excessive delays, and continued mismanagement. Whereas the government argued that centralizing procurement was necessary to combat corruption and enhance public savings, in practice, biases in resource allocation served political interests rather than collective development.

During the transition decade, effective governance required balancing humanitarian aid, rehabilitation efforts, and long-term development strategies in partnership with stakeholders at multiple levels, including national and subnational governance, powerholders, and community councils (Roberts, 2009; Goodhand, 2002). However, the imposed institutional structures by the international community did not align with Afghanistan's local political dynamics, allowing elites

to manipulate these systems for their own gain (Schmeidl, 2016). This reality complements the broader argument that sustainable development and poverty reduction require governance models that reflect local sociopolitical contexts rather than externally imposed frameworks.

The dysfunction within Afghanistan's government further compounded economic challenges. Conflicts between the executive and legislative branches, as well as internal rivalries within the executive itself, disrupted effective governance. Legislative negotiations over the national budget often took months, delaying salaries for public sector workers and further destabilizing state institutions. Additionally, power struggles between the president and prime minister led to retaliatory firings, which weakened ministerial effectiveness and discouraged private sector investment. The resulting economic stagnation widened the gap between public revenue and expenditure, particularly given population growth and the urgent need for infrastructure rehabilitation. As a consequence, extreme poverty deepened, and SMEs were disincentivized from investing in long-term economic projects. The failure to create an enabling environment for economic growth contradicts the intended objectives of international assistance, underscoring the need for a more effective strategy to promote self-sustaining development.

Despite these challenges, Afghanistan's healthcare sector emerged as a relative success. The introduction of the Essential Package of Hospital Services (EPHS) and the Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) ensured standardized care delivery, particularly in rural areas (Wright, 2015; Dalil et al., 2014; Newbrander et al., 2014; Newbrander et al., 2011). BPHS, implemented through NGOs, improved access to primary healthcare, especially for vulnerable groups such as women, newborns, and children (Newbrander et al., 2014). The international community's collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) proved effective, leading to a decline in maternal and child mortality rates (Frost et al., 2016; Dalil et al., 2014; Newbrander et al., 2014). These achievements support the notion that well-structured international aid programs, when properly managed, can yield tangible positive outcomes.

However, whereas progress in healthcare improved life expectancy and population growth rates, as shown in Tables 17 and 18, addressing poverty requires a broader economic strategy. Table 17 presents key child mortality indicators for 2019. The infant mortality rate was 46.51 deaths per 1,000 live births, while the neonatal mortality rate stood at 35.86 per 1,000 live births. The under-

five mortality rate was higher at 60.27 per 1,000 live births, indicating significant child survival challenges during the early years of life.

Healthcare gains requirement be complemented by sustainable economic policies that promote domestic industries, create employment opportunities, and reduce dependence on international assistance. Integrating healthcare advancements into a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy under the A-PRSP would ensure that economic well-being progresses alongside public health improvements. The case of Afghanistan illustrates that though international assistance has formed some sectoral successes, widespread corruption, governance failures, and a lack of strategic economic planning have hindered broader poverty reduction efforts. To achieve meaningful progress, future development initiatives necessity focuses on inclusive governance, sustainable economic diversification, and long-term structural reforms tailored to Afghanistan’s unique sociopolitical landscape.

Table 17: *Afghanistan Healthcare Observation-Mortality Rate*

Indicator	FactNumericValue First Period
Infant mortality rate (probability of dying between birth and age 1 per 1000 live births)	46.51 - 2019
Neonatal mortality rate (per 1000 live births)	35.86 - 2019
Under-five mortality rate (probability of dying by age 5 per 1000 live births)	60.27 - 2019

Source: Based on WHO (2020).

Table 18 highlights significant gaps in essential health service coverage and financial protection. Several preventive and treatment indicators remain at moderate or low levels, including antenatal care with at least four visits (20.9 Percent), antiretroviral therapy coverage among people living with HIV (9 Percent), and measles second-dose immunization (43 Percent). While some childhood immunizations (Hib3 at 70 Percent and PCV3 at 68 Percent) show relatively better performance, overall coverage remains below optimal universal health coverage benchmarks. In addition, only

about half of the population (50.5 Percent) has access to basic sanitation services. Financial risk protection is also a concern, with 14.63 Percent of households spending more than 10 Percent of their income on health.

These gaps can directly and indirectly intensify poverty. Low coverage of maternal, child, and infectious disease services increases morbidity and mortality, reduces labor productivity, and raises long-term household vulnerability. Higher health spending exposes households to problematic expenditures, which can push near-poor families into poverty or deepen existing deprivation. Limited sanitation access further increases disease burden, creating a cycle of poor health and economic hardship.

Table 18: Afghanistan Healthcare Observation from 2013 to 2020

Indicator	FactValueNumeric	First Period
Neonates protected at birth against neonatal tetanus (PAB) (%)	63.00	2020
Rotavirus vaccines completed dose (RotaC) immunization coverage among 1-year-olds (%)	62.00	2020
Estimated antiretroviral therapy coverage among people living with HIV (%)	9.00	2020
Tuberculosis effective treatment coverage (%)	62.80	2017
Antenatal care coverage - at least four visits (%)	20.90	2016-2018
Average of 13 International Health Regulations core capacity scores	41.78	2017
Measles-containing-vaccines second-dose (MCV2) immunization coverage by the nationally recommended age (%)	43.00	2020
Median availability of selected generic medicines (%) - Public	81.10	2007-2013
Population using at least basic sanitation services (%)	50.50	2020
Pneumococcal conjugate vaccines (PCV3) immunization coverage among 1-year-olds (%)	68.00	2020
Hib (Hib3) immunization coverage among 1-year-olds (%)	70.00	2020
Population with household expenditures on health greater than 10% of total household expenditure or income (SDG 3.8.2) (%)	14.63	2013
Population with household expenditures on health greater than 25% of total household expenditure or income (SDG indicator 3.8.2) (%)	2.01	2013

Source: Based on WHO (2020).

Afghanistan has been one of the primary recipients of both humanitarian and development aid from the international community during the transition and transformation decades. Afghanistan's economic situation has reached a critical point, particularly in its rural and urban areas, and a cut of international assistance is expected. There is a need to invest in domestic sources of growth, followed by a transition from relying on humanitarian assistance to focusing on development assistance. Efforts to reduce poverty in Afghanistan shall be intensified, focusing on allocating international assistance more effectively, promoting domestic economic growth, generating employment opportunities, and fostering wealth creation in rural and urban areas. While these goals are essential for shifting the economy towards self-sufficiency and reducing extreme poverty, they have encountered numerous challenges along the way. Natural disasters such as droughts and floods have frequently disrupted the development progress achieved with international assistance, which complements the efforts made by local actors but also contradicts the broader goal of sustainable growth. The return of refugees and internally displaced persons, mainly driven by conflicts, has posed significant challenges to extreme poverty reduction efforts, which supplement the strains on available resources and opportunities. The intensity of conflicts has been on the rise, and the population continues to grow, leading to more families struggling to access essential food items and becoming vulnerable to extreme poverty. Consequently, the impact of ODA has been limited and often unsustainable due to natural and manufactured hazards, dense paperwork and bureaucratic inefficiencies, poor governance, and widespread corruption.

6.13 The relationship between globalization and poverty reduction in Afghanistan

The development trajectory in Afghanistan has been guided by time-bound goals and objectives set by the international community and the state of Afghanistan. The development goals aim to achieve self-sufficiency and sustainability in various aspects of development, including good enough governance, economic growth, regional connectivity, and extreme poverty reduction (Mwasha, 2011). These objectives support the broader global development frameworks such as the MDGs and the SDGs (United Nations, 2000; 2015).

The transition decade (2002–2014), a United Nations-led period for state-building, and the transformation decade (2015–2024), an Afghanistan state-led period (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, 2017), complement the broader development agenda by focusing on self-sufficiency and reducing reliance on ODA. The emphasis on agricultural development, extractive industries, and transportation infrastructure aligns with regional integration efforts to foster economic independence. However, the dependence on international aid and security interventions contradicts the aim of self-sufficiency, as the state continued to rely on foreign assistance for critical services and governance reforms (World Bank Group, 2016).

Regional integration and globalization have been considered as mechanisms to supplement Afghanistan's development by enhancing trade, employment opportunities, and investment flows. The economic potential of inter-regional trade under globalization is evident in its role in attracting foreign investment and creating employment opportunities (Nissanke & Thorbecke, 2007; Harrison & McMillan, 2007). However, fragile state contexts, such as Afghanistan, often struggle to complement globalization-driven economic benefits due to limited institutional capacity, security concerns, and infrastructure deficits (L'Huillier, 2016; Garfalo & L'Huillier, 2014).

Extreme poverty reduction efforts have been closely linked to globalization and regional integration, as they offer poor households access to social services, education, and economic opportunities. The institutional development of good enough governance (Nissanke & Thorbecke, 2007) and investment in SPPs have played a role in poverty alleviation. However, economic policies focusing on capital-intensive industries contradict poverty reduction goals, as they primarily benefit skilled labor while excluding unskilled workers and those in extreme poverty (World Bank Group, 2016). Conversely, direct investment in agriculture and rural economies

supports poverty alleviation by creating immediate livelihood opportunities for impoverished communities (Parkinson, 2010).

Environmental challenges, such as frequent droughts and land disputes, have exacerbated poverty levels in Afghanistan (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies - Annual Report 2019, 2020; UNFCCC, 2017). Additionally, land and water disputes have been significantly registered in Afghanistan's traditional dispute resolution system (Gaston & Dang, 2015). Further, Afghanistan's fragile economy, high unemployment, and social unrest contradict the expected positive impact of globalization, as many of its benefits remain inaccessible to vulnerable households (L'Huillier, 2016; World Bank Group, 2016). Recognizing these challenges, international stakeholders have supplemented development efforts through vocational training programs and capacity-building initiatives, such as the Afghanistan TVeT authority, which is supported by the BMZ and GIZ.

Similarly, initiatives like "Eshteghal Zaiee - Karmondena (EZ-Kar)" and the CBR project, funded by the European Union (EU) and the WB, have complemented efforts to enhance employment opportunities and governance reforms. The continuation of these efforts through the TAGHIR project reflects a commitment to sustainable governance and institutional strengthening. However, the overall effectiveness of these programs has been contradicted by persistent corruption, security concerns, and political instability (World Bank Group, 2016).

Since the establishment of the Interim Administration in 2002, Afghanistan has adopted multiple national development policies inspired by global frameworks such as the MDGs (2000–2015) and SDGs (2015–2030) (United Nations, 2000; United Nations, 2015). The implementation of macroeconomic stabilization policies under the Washington Consensus (Gore, 2000; Agenor, 1998; David, 1985) supports economic liberalization and privatization, yet its impact on poverty reduction remains debated. Although these policies have complemented trade liberalization and foreign investment, they have also contradicted poverty reduction efforts by prioritizing market-driven growth over direct social interventions.

A list of key policy directions, strategies, and policies since the Interim Administration as follow:

1. The National Development Framework (NDF) was an initial policy direction paper to enhance human capital and social policy to reduce extreme poverty (National Development Framework, 2002).
2. The Securing Afghanistan's Future (SAF) was drafted during the Afghanistan Transitional Authority 2004 aimed for a self-sustaining country to finance its operations, build, and maintain security sector, social sector, infrastructure, and reduce extreme poverty through national income (Securing Afghanistan's Future, 2004).
3. The ANDS was an extensive in-scope national development strategy which consulted at the design stage with the subnational governance stakeholders. An interim ANDS started the initiation, planning, and surveying phase in 2005 (I- Afghanistan National Development Strategy, 2005), and the implementation phase was from 2008 to 2013. The ANDS, PDPs developed based on the NRVA and the UNFPA to create a poverty-based perspective related to opportunities for poverty reduction in each province. The ANDS focused on security, governance, and economic and social development with apparent action items and time frames for each section (Afghanistan National Development Strategy, 2008). It was presented as a PRSP of Afghanistan to qualify for debt relief and soft loans to the international community and MIOs mainly to the IMF (Parkinson, 2010; Afghanistan National Development Strategy, 2008). The ANDS, as a PRSP, considered broad aspects of development for Afghanistan, focusing on peace and security, and a section highlighted poverty reduction. Though, for specific poverty reduction strategy, the MoEc has facilitated consultation sessions at the national and sub-national governance levels to comprehensively focus on poverty reduction and determine characteristics of graduation mechanisms from the SPPs. This PRSP has been planned to come under operation from 2021 to 2030. Further, the ANDS has had massive implementation shortfalls due to budget projection and allocation discrepancies. The ANDS initial budget was estimated at USD 50.1 billion, and the actual budget was USD 15.6 billion, in which there was a difference of USD 34.5 billion (Government Media and Information Center, 2018). From this total of USD 15.6 billion, the state of Afghanistan contributed USD 4.9 billion from the national budget, and the international community funded a sum of USD 10.7 billion (Government Media and

Information Center, 2018). Additionally, it is essential to recognize that the ANDS prioritization of security aspects by the state of Afghanistan and the international community has inadvertently contributed to increased insecurity and insurgency. Paradoxically, for many impoverished households, engagement in war-related activities has become a means of survival and a source of income in which:

1. The security sector budget was at the leading position of the national budget with a share of 40 percent per year.
2. The civilian sector budget had a share of:
 - a) Infrastructure 20 percent,
 - b) Education sector 13 percent,
 - c) Healthcare sector 5 percent,
 - d) Agriculture and rural development allocated 7 percent pertinent to the Afghanistan Independent Land Authority (AILA), Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), Ministry of Counter Narcotics (MoCN), and
 - e) Social Protection Programs (SPPs) allocated 5 percent pertinent to the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA), Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA), Ministry of Border and Tribal Affairs (MoBTA), Ministry of Refugee Repatriation (MoRR), Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs, and Disabled (MoLSAMD) and DoK, (Ministry of Finance, 2016).
4. The ANDS was narrowed down to 22 NPPs with the prospect of each ministry, authority, or directorate in line with the remaining mandate of the ANDS to support government policies and articulate perspective to reduce extreme poverty efficiently (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). During the implementation of the NPPs, a framework was under process to consider peace and development.
5. The Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework one and two (ANPDF I & II). The ANPDF I focused on establishing peace, reducing extreme poverty, and improving

the welfare of rural and urban households (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2018b). The ANPDF is planned for implementation from 2017 to 2021 for phase one and phase two from 2021 to 2025 (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2018b ;2020 a).

A projection study by the MoF and the WB found that national revenue accounted for 17.5 percent of total expenditures, covering only the security sector's O&M costs, which amounted to USD 3.5 billion (Ministry of Finance & World Bank, 2011). This finding supports the argument that Afghanistan's fiscal sustainability remained heavily dependent on ODA and soft loans, as civil service wages, O&M, and development budgets exceeded 80 percent of total national revenue (Ministry of Finance & World Bank, 2011).

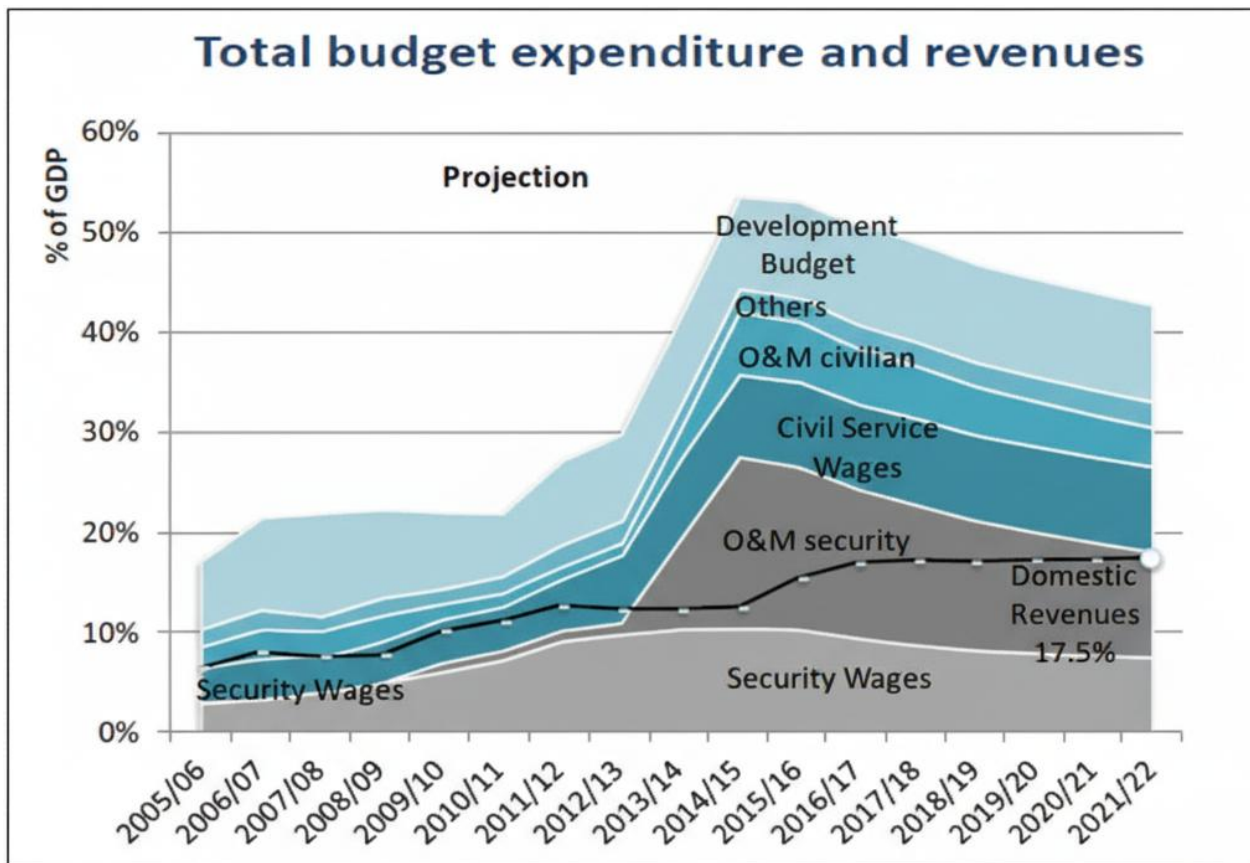
Furthermore, literature on fragile economies suggests that corruption and economic underperformance hinder poverty reduction efforts (World Bank Group, 2016; Nissanke & Thorbecke, 2007;). The case of Afghanistan complements this perspective, as widespread corruption significantly obstructed efforts to improve the livelihoods of impoverished households. Additionally, economic globalization has been linked to increased employment opportunities and poverty reduction (Harrison & McMillan, 2007). However, in Afghanistan's context, the underutilization of globalization benefits contradicts this general trend, given the limited absorption capacity for unskilled labor and households in extreme poverty (L'Huillier, 2016; Garfalo & L'Huillier, 2014).

Moreover, while some studies emphasize that investment in extractive industries can foster economic growth (World Bank Group, 2016), the case of Afghanistan supplements this by highlighting that direct investments in agriculture have a more immediate impact on extreme poverty reduction. Vocational training initiatives such as Eshteghal Zaiee - Karmondena (EZ-Kar) and civil service capacity-building programs like the CBR and TAGHIR project further support the role of human capital development in poverty alleviation (World Bank, 2018).

Despite these initiatives, the state's struggle for self-sufficiency remained unattainable due to an overreliance on ODA, weak domestic revenue generation, and persistent governance challenges. This aligns with broader concerns in development economics that highlight the vulnerability of aid-dependent economies to financial instability and external shocks (Agenor, 1998; Gore, 2000). Given these constraints, achieving fiscal independence and sustainable economic growth in

Afghanistan remains improbable, as illustrated in Figure 20 in which shows that in 2005/06, national revenue was sufficient to cover security wages, civil service wages, and a small portion of civilian O&M. However, in later years, although national revenue increased, it was only enough to finance security wages and the O&M of the security sector along with civil service wages. Civilian O&M, other expenditures, and the development budget continued to rely heavily on international assistance.

Figure 20: National revenue and national budget



Source: MoF and the WB (2011).

ODA has played a crucial role in financing Afghanistan's development since the establishment of the Interim Administration. The reliance on ODA to bridge the gap between national revenue and total expenditures supports findings from the WB and IMF, which emphasize the significance of external assistance in fragile economies (International Monetary Fund, 2019; World Bank Group, 2016). Afghanistan's dependency on billions of USD in aid, particularly during the transition and

transformation decades, aligns with studies on aid-dependent economies that highlight challenges in achieving self-sufficiency (Nissanke & Thorbecke, 2007; Gore, 2000).

However, the literature also warns that excessive aid reliance can contradict long-term economic sustainability, as it discourages domestic revenue generation and fosters financial vulnerabilities (L'Huillier, 2016; Agenor, 1998). This challenge is evident in Afghanistan, where national revenue covered only 17.5 percent of the national budget, leaving the remainder funded by ODA. Although soft loans and pledged (see Table 5) aid have supported various projects, the overreliance on external funding raises concerns about fiscal sustainability, particularly in light of declining donor commitments post-2021 (Ministry of Finance & World Bank, 2011).

Globalization has facilitated Afghanistan's alignment with global development frameworks such as the MDGs and SDGs, a process that complements broader economic integration efforts (United Nations, 2000; United Nations, 2015). Access to global markets and digital connectivity has reshaped expectations in both rural and urban communities. This shift supplements research on globalization's role in raising living standards and expanding economic aspirations, particularly in developing countries (Harrison & McMillan, 2007). However, Afghanistan's ability to capitalize on these benefits has been hindered by insecurity and limited economic opportunities, aligning with studies that emphasize the constraints fragile states face in fully integrating into global trade networks (World Bank Group, 2016).

To address Afghanistan's persistent budget deficit and USD 9.2 billion annual trade imbalance, investment in domestic production is essential. Key areas include cultivating oil grains, livestock, animal husbandry, and gardening, which can significantly reduce the need for imports and save substantial amounts of money. Moreover, Afghanistan benefits from expanding investments in high-value crops such as saffron, pomegranates, and dried fruits. Enhancing farming techniques, processing, and packaging, focusing on organic farming, can meet the growing global demand for these products. Establishing cold storage facilities nationwide would help reduce post-harvest losses and improve farmers' incomes. Additionally, improving the quality, branding, and marketing of handicrafts like carpets and embroidery is vital. Promoting the production and consumption of construction materials such as cement, bricks, and tiles is also essential for boosting domestic industries and reducing reliance on imports. Even though ODA has been instrumental in

financing Afghanistan's development, its overdependence contradicts the principles of economic self-sufficiency. Investment in domestic economic sources, coupled with strategies to integrate into regional and global markets, can supplement aid-driven development efforts and promote long-term sustainability.

Conclusion

This dissertation has explored the multifaceted dynamics of poverty reduction in Afghanistan, focusing on the interplay between state-led initiatives, international assistance, and broader political and economic factors. This study highlights Afghanistan's successes and challenges in its efforts to combat extreme poverty through a detailed analysis. While significant strides have been made, primarily through decentralization efforts and targeted poverty reduction programs, the research underscores that substantial barriers persist due to political instability, weak state institutions, and the continued reliance on external aid.

A key finding of this study is the limited success of transitioning from a centralized command economy to a market-based system in promoting poverty reduction. While some positive changes in economic performance and service delivery occurred, the overall impact of these reforms was mitigated by persistent political conflicts, weak institutional capacity, and inefficient coordination among state institutions and international partners. The research concludes that for poverty reduction to be sustainable, Afghanistan may arrange establishment governance structures, improving institutional effectiveness, and addressing political fragmentation.

The research also examined the role of globalization in Afghanistan's poverty reduction strategies. While globalization has facilitated increased trade and access to international resources, its impact on poverty alleviation has been mixed. The study suggests that globalization alone cannot drive poverty reduction. Instead, targeted local interventions addressing the specific economic needs of rural areas are essential for fostering sustainable development. The research highlights the importance of diversifying the domestic economy, enhancing infrastructure, and promoting localized growth as crucial elements of long-term poverty reduction strategies.

Furthermore, the role of ODA in supporting Afghanistan's poverty reduction programs has been significant yet problematic. While ODA has provided essential resources for humanitarian aid and short-term poverty reduction, it has fostered a dependency that hampers the development of a self-sustaining economy. The research highlights the critical need to shift from donor-driven programs to more sustainable, domestically driven development strategies to reach self-sufficiency. This shift will require strengthening Afghanistan's capacity to generate domestic resources and reduce its reliance on foreign aid.

The transition period from 2002 to 2014, referred to as the transition decade, was focused primarily on building foundational public institutions with the financial and technical assistance of the international community. During this period, the primary goal was establishing the necessary structures for governance, public administration, and service delivery. However, the challenges encountered during this decade were profound. Afghanistan faced political instability, poor public sector performance, coordination difficulties, excessive bureaucratic processes, the proliferation of parallel structures, widespread corruption, and ongoing conflict. These challenges significantly hindered progress, contributing to the persistence of extreme poverty and the worsening conditions for vulnerable groups.

Following the transition decade, Afghanistan entered the transformation decade in 2015, a phase expected to last until 2024. The transformation decade was intended to build upon the progress made in the transition period and further develop the country's economic and institutional structures. However, the challenges faced during the transition continued to persist, exacerbating the difficulties of the transformation decade. Political instability, weak governance, and a lack of effective coordination between various actors remained significant obstacles to sustainable development and poverty reduction. The inefficiency and mismanagement within the public sector also continued to undermine efforts to address poverty effectively.

Over the past 10 to 15 years, Afghanistan has experienced a severe trade imbalance, with approximately 90 percent of its national trade balance in deficit. Annual spending on consumer goods has been consistently high, reaching around USD 9.2 billion, and this figure has continued to rise. This dependence on imports has contributed to the fragility of the Afghanistan's economy, making it vulnerable to external shocks and limiting the growth of domestic industries. The research highlights the need for a robust policy initiative to promote and enhance domestic production as a crucial step toward addressing the trade deficit and fostering long-term economic stability. Expanding domestic industries will help reduce reliance on imports, generate employment opportunities, and improve Afghanistan's overall economic resilience.

In light of these findings, it is clear that Afghanistan may adopt a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to poverty reduction. The country needs to implement poverty-driven economic policies (PRSP), diversify its economy, and prioritize infrastructure development. These

strategies will be essential in bridging the income gap, fostering long-term development, and achieving reasonable economic stability. Additionally, policies that prioritize expanding healthcare services, enhancing nutrition programs, increasing access to quality education, and promoting gender equality will be fundamental in addressing the root causes of poverty and ensuring that development benefits reach the most vulnerable populations. Strengthening climate resilience and improving investment opportunities will also play an important role in mitigating vulnerabilities and supporting progress toward Afghanistan's graduation from LDC status.

In conclusion, while Afghanistan has made significant progress in poverty reduction through a combination of state-led efforts and international support, the path to sustainable development remains complex and challenging. Political instability, weak governance, and an over-reliance on foreign aid continue to hamper progress. For Afghanistan to achieve lasting poverty reduction, it may focus on decentralizing political power in a federal structure, building stronger state institutions, improving coordination among stakeholders, and fostering a more self-reliant economy. Henceforth, shifting from a centralized economic country may focus on diversifying its economy, enhancing domestic production, and investing in human capital to achieve long-term development and ensure sustainable poverty reduction efforts.

This dissertation calls for a more integrated approach to development that combines short-term humanitarian aid with long-term, sustainable poverty alleviation strategies. Afghanistan can create a foundation for sustainable growth, enhanced social welfare, and greater resilience against future challenges by strengthening institutions, improving governance, and diversifying the economy.

Notwithstanding the collapse of the previous political regime, the findings of this study remain crucial for Afghanistan's current and future economic and social policies despite the political regime change. The study offers key lessons from past development strategies, provides critical insights into policy effectiveness, economic dependencies, structural challenges, evaluating both successes and failures in poverty reduction, ODA management, and trade integration in a fragile state context. These insights provide valuable guidance for current and future policymakers to design strategies that mitigate past shortcomings and enhance economic resilience. Furthermore, Afghanistan's economic dependencies and structural vulnerabilities remain largely unchanged, particularly its reliance on ODA, trade, and regional integration. Understanding how past policies

influenced economic stability can help develop strategies to reduce dependence on foreign aid while fostering self-sufficiency through domestic production and trade diversification. Additionally, the fundamental challenges of extreme poverty, food insecurity, and limited economic opportunities persist, making the study's findings crucial for addressing these issues through evidence-based policy recommendations. By analyzing Afghanistan's past development trajectory, this study also provides insights for potential policy reforms and institutional adjustments, ensuring that economic recovery efforts align with the country's long-term stability and sustainability goals.

Beyond Afghanistan, this study has broader implications for other fragile and conflict-affected states (FCS) and aid-dependent economies. Many countries experiencing political instability, external aid reliance, and post-conflict reconstruction can benefit from Afghanistan's experience in managing development programs under fluctuating governance structures. The study provides lessons on the effectiveness of ODA-driven development models, helping policymakers in other countries determine how to maximize foreign aid without fostering long-term dependency. Similarly, Afghanistan's experience with trade liberalization, regional economic integration, and globalization offers a comparative framework for other nations seeking to leverage international trade for sustainable economic growth. Additionally, the study highlights how political shifts impact economic policies and social welfare, providing a useful reference for governments navigating regime changes or post-conflict recovery, ensuring continuity and adaptability in their development programs.

In conclusion, the collapse of Afghanistan's previous regime does not diminish the relevance of this study; rather, it underscores its importance. The research offers critical policy insights applicable to Afghanistan's new governance framework and to other fragile economies facing similar challenges. By analyzing past development policies, ODA efficiency, and globalization's impact on poverty reduction, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how development strategies can be designed to withstand political upheavals and foster long-term economic resilience.

Improvement and further study

Achieving stable development in Afghanistan is crucial to relieve the impact of widespread extreme poverty on the daily lives of rural and urban households. The state and households shall commit to this goal and exercise strategic patience to attain tranquility and prosperity. This mutual commitment can pave the way for more effective poverty reduction efforts. However, it is crucial to recognize that the development trajectory in Afghanistan is a lengthy process that involves state building, institution building, trust building, and capacity building, all within the context of an emergency. The emergency conditions in Afghanistan have been the result of several factors, including invasions followed by decades of ongoing war, frequent natural hazards such as floods and droughts, rooted norms and customs, a low-quality education system, high illiteracy rates, a large population of unskilled laborers, and a population growth rate that outpaces economic growth. Despite significant investments of time, human resources, and financial support by the state of Afghanistan and the international community to establish good governance, ensure physical security, and deliver essential services and law and order, the country still faces a high rate of extreme poverty. This situation is intensified by the fragile state of development in Afghanistan and the limited sustainable domestic sources of economic growth. However, there are areas where households, the state, and the international community can make improvements to reduce the severity of extreme poverty in Afghanistan:

Households should prioritize essential needs over unnecessary expenditures to attain basic amenities in rural and urban areas. These excessive expenses are deeply entrenched in customs, norms, and traditions, leading to lavish wedding ceremonies, high dowries, luxurious circumcision celebrations, and extended funeral rituals that can last for at least a year. Such traditional practices have perpetuated extreme poverty across generations, worsening its severity. The persistence of these costs is a significant reason poverty remains a pressing issue. Instead, rural and urban households should invest in more productive areas, such as children's education, healthcare, skill-building, and vocational training. To support this shift, Village Councils (VCs), Community Development Councils (CDCs), District Development Councils (DDCs), and PCs should assist households in curbing unnecessary expenses and discourage the organization of extravagant ceremonies through mutually accepted mechanisms. These entities should also play a crucial role in encouraging, motivating, evaluating, and monitoring children's enrollment in schools,

participation in skill-building and vocational training programs for the labor force, and identifying the needs of villages and communities.

To address the costs rooted in customs, norms, and traditions that contribute to the spread of poverty, several approaches can be implemented to shift social practices and encourage more productive use of resources. Public awareness programs, utilizing media, and local leaders such as Khans, village heads, Mullahs, and mosques, can play a crucial role in setting limits on the number of invitees and the budget for ceremonies, redirecting the financial burden of lavish events toward education, healthcare, and skill development. Subsidies should be offered to those who invest in productive areas rather than extravagant ceremonies, with examples including scholarships, healthcare vouchers, and vocational training discounts.

These activities can be coordinated under a national initiative, such as the CCNPP, to analyze strengths and weaknesses and minimize waste, flaws, and deficiencies. Moreover, the CCNPP, in collaboration with the IDLG and the Afghanistan Scholar Council (ASC), should unite the efforts of development councils from the village to provincial levels. These bodies can offer criteria or mechanisms to set a ceiling on expenses and hold necessary ceremonies within a limited budget, ensuring household satisfaction while avoiding the deepening of extreme poverty. At the community level, VCs, CDCs, and other local bodies can establish guidelines or agreements to limit spending on ceremonies, such as capping dowries, restricting the scale of weddings, and simplifying funeral rites. These efforts can be reinforced through legal mechanisms, with national bodies introducing legislation that sets maximum limits on dowries, restricts the number of guests at weddings, or limits the duration and scale of ceremonial events, penalizing non-compliance with fines or other legal consequences.

In the long term, this cultural shift should be integrated into school curricula, along with community workshops and seminars to discuss the benefits of modest ceremonies and the importance of investing in future generations. Emphasis should be placed on financial literacy, traditional practices' socio-economic impact, and poverty's persistence. Additionally, promoting savings accounts, microfinance, and investment schemes tailored for education, healthcare, and skill development will encourage households to allocate resources to these areas instead of non-essential

ceremonies. Such a commitment to investing in future generations will reduce poverty and ensure a brighter future for Afghanistan.

Introducing new norms, including cost-effective and more straightforward ceremonies, should be normalized and socially recognized. Community-based monitoring can ensure adherence to these new guidelines, allowing members to report non-compliance so that penalties and fines can be imposed, reinforcing these norms. These approaches are not intended to undermine household choice through a top-down approach; they represent a collective mechanism to reduce traditional practices that cause unnecessary costs, promote sustainable financial practices within households, and reduce the severity of extreme poverty at the national level in Afghanistan. By participating in these collective efforts, each individual contributes to a more significant, impactful movement toward a more financially sustainable future.

The state's mandate is to establish comprehensive long-term economic development policies that include clearly defined short-term goals, strongly emphasizing ending corruption and banning the culture of impunity. These policies should prioritize enhancing domestic growth sources by improving financial performance through strategic investments in human capital. This includes expanding opportunities in primary, secondary, and tertiary education and vocational training. By addressing these critical areas, the state can build a more robust foundation for sustainable economic growth and reduce the impact of corrupt practices on development outcomes. Additionally, creating employment opportunities for unskilled and semi-skilled laborers is essential. By prioritizing human capital development, the state can reduce extreme poverty and stabilize security by generating income sources for poor households. Many breadwinners in impoverished families have resorted to joining military groups to earn a minimum income to support their families, contributing to a cycle of violence, loss of lives, and the preservation of criminality. This, in turn, increases fear and limits potential development opportunities. Therefore, the state shall deliver essential services, particularly in education, vocational training, healthcare, clean drinking water, sanitation, and electrification, with the long-term goal of transitioning from regional imports to domestic production and employment opportunities. This transition holds the promise of not only economic growth but also stability, offering a hopeful future for all citizens.

To ensure the coherence and effectiveness of these policies, a Long-Term Policy Initiation and Development Committee should be established under the stewardship of the MoEc. This committee, with its focus on preventing fragmented policy development and implementation, would be responsible for improving coordination mechanisms among various ministries and entities. By fostering a complementary role among ministries, the state can enhance efficiency and effectiveness in critical sectors such as infrastructure, agriculture, and economic development, ensuring that roads, farms, and markets are interconnected. This approach would allow poor households, particularly those reliant on unskilled labor and traditional agricultural products, to access markets and achieve sustainable development and livelihoods. Development efforts in this manner will create immediate employment opportunities, such as local road rehabilitations, irrigation projects, and small-scale community initiatives, which are vital for local households.

The MoEc should be central in organizing and coordinating sustainable development efforts, ensuring a conducive environment for stakeholders involved in poverty reduction. For instance, the MoEc should collaborate with the MAIL to boost agricultural production, with the MRRD to enhance rural development, and with the MoCI to foster a favorable environment for private sector investment and job creation. This coordinated approach will help transition the economy from reliance on ODA to self-sufficiency. Furthermore, the MoE and the TVeT should align their curricula with national job market priorities and requirements, ensuring that semi-skilled and skilled laborers possess the necessary hands-on skills to meet market demands. However, the MoE and TVeT currently operate under an outdated system that fails to address the growing number of students and the evolving demands of the job market. These entities require reengineering, restructuring, and modernization to meet contemporary needs effectively. By doing so, they can better prepare the workforce for the challenges and opportunities of the current economy, ultimately contributing to the overall goal of sustainable development and poverty reduction. To achieve development objectives, a range of policy instruments should be employed, including a firm commitment to ending corruption and banning the culture of impunity to prevent the persistence of poverty. Public-private partnerships can drive innovation and investment, while targeted subsidies can support vulnerable populations and stimulate key sectors. Educational reforms are essential for building human capital, and infrastructure investments will facilitate economic activities and improve living standards. Together, these instruments will bolster the

state's broader strategy of fostering economic growth, reducing poverty, and ensuring long-term stability and prosperity for all citizens.

The international community shall align, coordinate, and collaborate with the state of Afghanistan's long-term development policies, particularly in the allocation and use of ODA. Historically, many international organizations have directed ODA through off-budget mechanisms, leading to overlapping projects in some areas while neglecting others. Although these projects were often interpreted as need-based by the international community, recipients and state departments sometimes viewed them as offer-based, resulting in unsustainable outcomes in extreme poverty reduction efforts. The duplication of efforts and inefficiencies in these initiatives has limited their impact on poverty reduction and failed to support the growth of domestic income sources effectively. For instance, domestic production has consistently fallen short of meeting basic consumption needs, including essential agricultural products like wheat and flour, leading to an annual import of goods worth over USD 9 billion. This reliance on imports underscores Afghanistan's dependency on external assistance to fulfill basic needs.

The high turnover rate among international organizations and donor agencies in Afghanistan significantly hindered development efforts. Experts were often sent on six-month missions, a duration far too brief to allow them to understand the local working culture, build relationships, or complete meaningful projects. This rapid rotation of personnel created a substantial challenge, leading to a disconnect between donor agencies and the long-term development needs of Afghanistan. The short-term deployments prevented the continuity and depth of engagement necessary for effective program implementation and sustainable development, further exacerbating the gap between international assistance and the country's progress.

Compounding these issues are widespread corruption in public sector institutions, a lack of necessary qualifications and capacity to absorb ODA effectively, and the ongoing conflict, which has severely hindered the development trajectory. Additionally, the national economy has struggled to address internal displacements, returnees, droughts, and floods, all of which have exacerbated the severity and depth of extreme poverty. The state's inability to meet these challenges has necessitated a significant reliance on ODA to cover operation and maintenance costs, emergency

budgets, and humanitarian aid. While the international community has provided substantial assistance during Afghanistan's transition and parts of the transformation decade, the negative impacts of ODA have been underestimated. Although focused on addressing the immediate needs of households, ODA has often led to market distortions and an increased dependency on international aid, undermining local production and economic sustainability. For example, the influx of wheat distributed as aid, which was often sold on the black market at prices lower than those of locally produced wheat, negatively impacted local farmers, forcing many to abandon traditional agriculture. Consequently, some farmers migrated to urban areas in search of basic services and income, while others turned to cultivating illicit opiates as a coping strategy in the face of drought, flood, and market distortions. This shift not only contributed to the drug addiction crisis among millions of Afghanistan's citizens but also perpetuated economic instability and hindered development. The continuous flow of ODA also created unrealistic expectations among households and public officials, many of whom believed that this support would be endless. This perception led to the reckless initiation, design, and implementation of projects intended for poverty reduction, further exacerbated by the complex bureaucracies of international organizations and the limited capacity of national entities to navigate these processes.

Several policy instruments should be employed to support the effective absorption of the ODA. Reforms are needed to reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies in the absorption of ODA and to extend the duration of expert missions, allowing for a deeper understanding of local needs and development processes. Additionally, legal frameworks should be strengthened to bolster domestic production, prevent market distortions, and ensure the effective allocation of ODA. These measures will foster economic growth, reduce poverty, and contribute to long-term stability by aligning international aid more closely with the developmental priorities of Afghanistan. These recommendations align with the context of a centralized republic regime, which has repeatedly collapsed in Afghanistan. Given this recurring pattern, it is crucial to minimize such deterioration by transitioning to a federal state system. A federal structure would distribute authority more effectively across different governance layers, helping to stabilize the political landscape, manage poverty and, prevent future collapses.

Limitation

Several potential limitations were associated with this study, primarily hindered by the challenging conditions in Afghanistan. The ongoing war and prevailing insecurity were critical factors that affected the nature of this research and the selection of research methods. In a volatile and fragile environment, significant constraints, limitations, and physical threats impeded access to key officials, experts, and essential resources necessary for this study. These challenges extended to state ministries and entities, international community organizations, and academia, which hindered conducting interviews in an atmosphere conducive to open and fruitful information exchange. Despite extensive planning and preparation, interviews faced multiple disruptions. Some interviewees postponed sessions repeatedly, while others changed the format from face-to-face interviews to virtual formats such as Skype or phone calls. Additionally, certain experts were unable to participate in the interview sessions altogether. These limitations overshadow the research process, affecting the smooth data collection.

The research process involved contacting national and international experts associated with various organizations and initiatives related to poverty reduction. These experts were approached through email and phone communication. Despite reaching out to more than 60 experts, the research resulted in four pretest interviews via phone calls and 27 field interviews over a span of four weeks, as per the Nested Mixed Methods approach. The pretest interviews aimed to refine the questions to ensure they were easily understandable and appropriate for the informants and participants. Following the pretest interview sessions, the questions were refined. However, some experts who participated in the field interviews expressed that the questions were deep-rooted and focused on specific aspects of poverty context pertinent to informal and formal institutions. This focus was, in fact, with a purpose, as the study aimed to assess the root causes of extreme poverty in Afghanistan thoroughly. However, this diverse group of experts provided valuable insights and perspectives that enriched the study's findings.

The Nested Mixed Methods facilitated the qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously to have a holistic conclusion on the extreme poverty phenomenon in Afghanistan and minimize the biasedness of available data and policies. Often, the data manipulated, the policies changed, and the process exploited with a political motivation mainly to favor electoral campaigns, personal or

tribal gains over collective interest, with a deceptive endeavor to assure international support and flow of the ODA. Greater emphasis has been placed on the qualitative aspects of this Nested Mixed Methods approach to assess the process and evaluate the potential for manipulation to address continuity deficit and exploitation issues. The primary objective of this approach was to identify instances of underperformance and potential failures within the economic development processes for poverty reduction during both the transition decade and a portion of the transformation decade. Therefore, a wide range of national and international experts were contacted to participate in the interview sessions to explore and elaborate holistic principle causes of the extreme poverty phenomenon in the case of Afghanistan.

Developing a comprehensive statistical data bank is crucial, especially considering the limitations in the depth of available secondary data, primarily covering the transition and transformation decades. MIOs assist the state of Afghanistan in building statistical data-driven from project-based and administrative data. These data were limited in scope or outdated due to the donor agency's code of conduct and procedures. There needed to be regular censuses and collection of statistical data for over two decades, which affected arrangements of research studies and the academia in Afghanistan and the study in which the quantitative section was pertinent to the same number of attendees in qualitative interviews. The quantitative interviews were conducted simultaneously with the qualitative interview sessions. However, the number of interview attendees' was optimal for the qualitative interviews to reach the data saturation point and recognize the political orchestration of the influencers in the state institutions and biasedness in the stages of initiation and planning of economic development policies and or specifically the PRSP toward vulnerable bottom households of the rural and urban areas. However, the qualitative interviews were conducted in the capital, Kabul, and the sub-national governance level remained out of the coverage of this study due to security circumstances, the limited timeframe of four weeks, and insufficient budget, which were determinant factors for the choices to be made for this study. However, limited coverage to the capital, Kabul, and timeframe did not adversely affect the quality and scope of this study. This study reached the optimum saturation point, identified the principal causes of extreme poverty in the case of Afghanistan, and offered viable recommendations to the households, the state of Afghanistan, and the international community to reduce the severity of extreme poverty. Furthermore, the quantitative sampling was restricted to the same number of participants from the

qualitative interview sessions, which utilized a non-probability sampling technique due to the earlier restraints. In the event that security restrictions are lifted in Afghanistan, it is greatly recommended to undertake a study to collect data from the Village Council (VC) especially, farmers and beneficiaries of the poverty reduction projects and programs in the rural areas to assess factors that could significantly improve the livelihoods of both rural and urban households and have a lasting, positive impact on the issue of extreme poverty. Moreover, it is advisable to employ an exploratory sequential mixed methods research design for a similar study. The exploratory sequential mixed methods design was initially selected for this research, which might allow a comprehensive exploration of poverty reduction dynamics but adjusted to Nested Mixed Methods due to restraint in the context of Afghanistan. It is proposed that the study should conduct field interview sessions beyond the scope of the capital city, Kabul, in regional hubs across Afghanistan, including Bamiyan, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, Nengarhar, Khost, and Kunduz Provinces. This expanded geographical scope can provide valuable insights into the diverse factors contributing to extreme poverty in different regions of Afghanistan.

Notice on Dissolution of Regime of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (IRA) dissolution occurred during this study's final stages. The IRA was established in 2001 through a peace process mediated by the UN with the support of the international community and the active participation of the people of Afghanistan. This process aimed to create a functioning state capable of ensuring the physical security of its citizens, delivering essential public services, and improving the socio-economic conditions of households across Afghanistan. Over two decades, these stakeholders invested billions of USD in projects and programs to achieve these objectives.

The state-building initiative in Afghanistan was a comprehensive effort involving the rehabilitation, reconstruction, and establishment of various public institutions. These efforts spanned legal, political, economic, diplomatic, security, and defense sectors. The international community provided substantial technical and financial assistance to develop these sectors, aiming to foster self-reliance by promoting domestic sources of growth. However, this ambitious process faced numerous challenges, including ongoing conflict, widespread criminal activities, underperformance, widespread corruption, and a deeply entrenched culture of impunity. These issues collectively undermined efforts to establish a resilient state.

In 2020, a renewed peace process was initiated between the United States of America (USA) and the Islamic Emirate of the Taliban (IET) in Doha, Qatar. The negotiations were aimed at ending the decades-long war, facilitating the withdrawal of International Forces, releasing Taliban prisoners, and paving the way for a political power-sharing arrangement that would include diverse representation, such as women and members of Afghanistan's various ethnic, religious, and linguistic communities. Despite months of dialogue, the Islamic Emirate of the Taliban (IET) refused to engage directly with the IRA, labeling it a puppet regime of the United States. The Taliban intensified military operations during the negotiations, employing asymmetric warfare tactics such as ambushes and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). These actions allowed the Taliban to seize control of critical infrastructure, including key ports and highways, which further destabilized the IRA regime.

The IRA government collapsed within two weeks following the withdrawal of International Forces. This rapid disintegration was a profound shock to Afghanistan citizens and the international

community alike, creating widespread panic and triggering a mass exodus. In response, the international community organized an airlift operation from Kabul International Airport (KIA), facilitating the evacuation of over 120,000 individuals within two weeks. The evacuated individuals included Afghanistan nationals deemed at risk under Taliban rule, such as former government officials, diplomats, journalists, musicians, and other vulnerable groups, as well as foreign nationals residing in Afghanistan.

The Taliban declared a general amnesty for former government officials to encourage them to remain in the country and contribute to its governance. However, credible reports soon emerged of persecution, arrests, torture, and extrajudicial killings of individuals affiliated with the IRA. These actions highlighted the deceptive nature of the proclaimed amnesty and created an atmosphere of fear and mistrust. Many former IRA officials were forced into hiding, continuously relocating to evade capture and seeking refuge through networks of friends and family abroad.

The disbandment of the Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF), which had comprised approximately 350,000 personnel, created a significant security vacuum. Military equipment valued at an estimated billion 50 USD, including light and heavy weaponry, armored vehicles, helicopters, and aircraft, was left unsecured. This equipment reportedly ended up in neighboring countries such as Pakistan and Iran. Within the Taliban regime, internal disputes regarding leadership and governance further complicated the transition. Reports on social media suggested that disagreements among high-ranking Taliban officials escalated to physical altercations, including an incident where watermelons were reportedly thrown during a meeting. Amid this turmoil, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) chief made an unannounced visit to Kabul, likely to mediate disputes and coordinate efforts against resistance forces, such as the National Resistance Front (NRF) in Panjshir Province. The NRF, composed of remnants of the disbanded ANSF, local residents, and other resistance fighters, has since engaged in ongoing combat operations against the Taliban regime.

The collapse of the IRA has plunged Afghanistan into a severe economic and humanitarian crisis. The country faces economic devastation, compounded by financial sanctions, a prolonged drought, and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Approximately 90 percent of the population now lives in extreme poverty, with many households resorting to desperate measures to survive.

Families have been forced to sell their possessions, including furniture and equipment, to buy food. Sometimes, families have resorted to selling their children to alleviate crushing debt burdens. Under the previous IRA regime, extreme poverty had already driven some households to sell their organs, such as kidneys, to sustain their livelihoods. Tragically, the worsening conditions have led some breadwinners to take their own lives, highlighting the profound human toll of the crisis.

The financial challenges facing the Taliban regime are immense. The regime inherited a substantial budget deficit, with only a few hundred million USD remaining in circulation from the IRA government's funds. The country's annual operational and development budget requirements are estimated to range between billion 9 USD and billion 12 USD. However, international financial institutions such as the WB and the IMF have imposed sanctions on the Taliban regime, freezing approximately billion 9 USD in assets held by Afghanistan's central bank. These measures and the regime's lack of international recognition have severely constrained its ability to address the country's economic challenges.

The international community has refused to formally recognize the Taliban regime, citing its failure to meet fundamental criteria for legitimacy. These criteria include adherence to democratic principles, such as holding elections, ensuring the rights and freedoms of all Afghanistan citizens regardless of ethnicity, religion, or gender, and promoting women's education and participation in public life. The Taliban's refusal to commit to these principles has raised serious concerns about human rights violations and further isolated Afghanistan from the global community. This isolation mirrors the country's challenges during the 1990s, heightening uncertainty and threatening stability and development.

Afghanistan's current situation underscores the urgent need for structural reforms. The country needs transition from a centralized governance model to a decentralized federal system that effectively empowers regional authorities to address local needs. Such a shift is crucial to prevent further collapse, stabilize the nation, and mitigate the worsening humanitarian crisis. Without meaningful reforms and greater international engagement, Afghanistan risks perpetuating cycles of poverty, conflict, and underdevelopment, mass migration, with dire consequences for future generations.

As a final point, the collapse of the government of Afghanistan in August 2021 had significant regional and global repercussions across multiple dimensions. The breakdown of government services further exacerbated hunger and economic hardship, necessitating large-scale international aid efforts. Economically, regional trade was disrupted due to political instability and border closures. At the same time, the USA and international financial institutions' freezing of Afghanistan's assets deepened the economic crisis and deterred foreign investment. Geopolitically, the Republic of China and the Russian Federation capitalized on the power vacuum, expanding their diplomatic and economic engagement with the Taliban, particularly in infrastructure and resource extraction. Further, the chaotic United State withdrawal undermined confidence in Western commitments to allies, influencing global strategic alignments, particularly concerning Taiwan and Ukraine. Additionally, despite the Taliban's initial pledges to curb opium production, Afghanistan's drug trade continued to expand, fueling illegal markets worldwide. The collapse of the regime had widespread effects on security, migration, regional stability, and global counterterrorism efforts, with long-term implications for South and Central Asia.

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List of Acronyms

Accra Agenda for Action	Afghanistan-Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
(AAA) -----269	(A-PRSP) ----- 178
Afghani	Afghanistan’s High Office of Oversight
(Afs) -----3	(AHOO)-----267
Afghanistan Independent Land Authority	Afghanistan-Sustainable Development Goals
(AILA) -----286	(A-SDGs) -----178
Afghanistan Interim Administration	African Development Bank
(AIA) ----- 1, 32	(AfDB) ----- 37
Afghanistan Living Condition Survey (ALCS)	African Development Fund
----- 15	(AfDF)----- 80
Afghanistan National Development Strategy	Agha Khan Development Foundation
(ANDS) -----4	(AKDF) -----146
Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority	American University of Afghanistan
(ANDMA) -----167	(AUAF) -----103
Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework One (ANPDF I) -----5	Aquaculture Center for Training Education and Demonstration
Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework two	(ACTED)-----159
(ANPDF II)-----287	Asian Development Bank
Afghanistan National Security Forces	(ADB) -----3, 167
(ANSF)-----150	Balance of Payment
Afghanistan Ombudsman Office	(BoP) -----208
(AOO)-----267	Basic Package of Health Services
Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund	(BPHS)-----280
(ARTF)-----145, 244	Capacity Building for Results
Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Program	(CBR)-----142
(AREDP)----- 21	Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program
Afghanistan Scholar Council	(CAREC)-----260
(ASC)-----298	Central Statistics Organization (CSO)----- 15
Afghanistan Stimulus Package	Citizens’ Charter National Priority Program
(ASP) ----- 10	(CCNPP) ----- 21
Afghanistan Sustainable Energy for Rural Development	Civil Society Organizations
(ASERD)----- 21	(CSOs)----- 75
Afghanistan-Millennium Development Goals	Committee for the Development Policy
(A-MDGs) -----177	(CDP)----- 72
	Community Development Councils
	(CDCs) -----297
	Comprehensive Agriculture and Rural Development – Facility

(CARD-F)-----	21	(FCS) -----	274
Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research		German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development	
(CGIAR) -----	71	(BMZ) -----	284
Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere International		German Society for International Cooperation	
(CARE)-----	146	(GIZ)-----	149
Correlation Sensitive Poverty Index		Global South	
(CSPI) -----	58	(GS)-----	32
Cost of Basic Need		Great Chinese Famine	
(CBN) -----	56	(GCF)-----	70
Department for International Development		Great Leap Forward	
(DFID)-----	11	(GLF)-----	70
Department of Social Affairs		Green Revolution	
(DESA)-----	LXVI	(GR) -----	71
Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development		Gross Domestic Product (GDP)-----	16
(DAC-OECD) -----	76	Group of 8	
Developmental Aid		(G8) -----	37
(DA) -----	59	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries	
Directorate of Kuchies		(HIPC)-----	37
(DoK)-----	20, 286	High Council on Poverty Reduction	
District Development Councils		(HCPR)-----	138, 273
(DDCs) -----	235, 297	High Economic Council	
Economic Cooperation Organization		(HEC)-----	273
(ECO)-----	260	Human Development Index	
Essential Package of Hospital Services		(HDI) -----	53, 54
(EPHS) -----	280	Human Development Report	
European Commission		(HDR) -----	44
(EC)-----	11	Income and Expenditure and Labor Force Survey	
European University of Flensburg		(IE&LFS) -----	15
(EUF) -----	III	Independent Directorate of Local Governance	
Federal Authority Regulation		(IDLG) -----	7, 131
(FAR)-----	148	Interim Administration of Afghanistan	
Food Aid		(IAA) -----	17
(FA)-----	21	International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center	
Food and Agriculture Organization		(CIMMYT) -----	71
(FAO)-----	3	International Monetary Fund	
Foreign Direct Investment		(IMF) -----	37
(FDI)-----	162, 203	International Non-governmental Organizations	
Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations		(INGOs)-----	143
		International Rice Research Institute	
		(IRRI)-----	71

International Standard Organization (ISO)-----	260	(MoCN) -----	286
Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) -----	260	Ministry of Economy (MoEc) -----	11, 136
Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (IRA) -----	9	Ministry of Education (MoE)-----	143
Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI)-----	211	Ministry of Finance (MoF)-----	11, 17, 138
Istanbul Process (IP) -----	199	Ministry of Interior Affairs (MoIA) -----	7, 239
Joint Monitoring and Coordination Body (JCMB)-----	141	Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs, and Disabled (MoLSAMD)-----	20, 149
Kabul Process – Heart of Asia KP – (HA) -----	199	Ministry of Planning (MoP)-----	139
Kabul University (KU) -----	103	Ministry of Public Health (MoPH)-----	280
Least Developed Country (LDC)-----	71	Ministry of Refugee Repatriation (MoRR) -----	20, 286
Livelihood Improvement in Tajik-Afghan Cross Border Areas (LITACA)-----	21	Ministry of Rural, Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD)-----	8, 20
Max Weber – Qualitative Data Analysis (MAXQDA) -----	111	Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA) -----	20, 286
Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) -----	19	Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) -----	12, 56, 57
Micro-Finance Support Facility of Afghanistan (MISFA) -----	21, 35	Multilateral Debt Relieve Initiative (MDRI)-----	37
Millennium Development Agenda (MDA)-----	76	Multilateral International Organizations (MIOs) -----	11
Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) -----	3	National Area Based Development Program (NABDP) -----	21
Minister of Justice (MoJ) -----	234	National Assembly (NA) -----	82, 129
Ministerial Cabinet Meeting (MCM) -----	198	National Development Framework (NDF)-----	4
Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL)-----	20	National Economic Council (NEC)-----	198
Ministry of Border and Tribal Affairs (MoBTA) -----	20, 286	National Emergency Employment Program (NEEP) -----	20
Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) -----	162	National Nutrition Survey (NNS)-----	3
Ministry of Counter Narcotics		National Priority Programs	

(NPPs)-----	4	(PRTs)-----	67, 197
National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment		Regional Program	
(NRVA)-----	1	(RP)-----	21
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(NRAP)-----	21	(RED)-----	21
National Solidarity Program		Rural Non-Farm	
(NSP)-----	20, 21	(RNF)-----	45
National Statistics and Information Authority		Rural Water and Sanitation Program	
(NSIA)-----	15	(RuWatSan)-----	21
National Unity Government		Second World War	
(NUG)-----	136	(WW II)-----	63
Neoclassical Growth Model		Secretariat of the High Council on Poverty	
(NGM)-----	46	Reduction	
Non-Developmental Aid		(S-HCPR)-----	103
(NDA)-----	59	Shanghai Cooperation Organization	
Non-Governmental Organizations		(SCO)-----	260
(NGOs)-----	127	Single Window, Automated System for Customs	
North Atlantic Treaty Organization		Data	
(NATO)-----	239	(ASYCUDA)-----	48
Office of Disaster Management		Small and Medium Enterprises	
(OoDP)-----	20	(SMEs)-----	161
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(O&M)-----	17	South Asian Association for Regional	
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(OED)-----	42	(SAARC)-----	260
Oxford Committee for Famine Relief		Special Inspector General for Afghanistan	
(OXFAM)-----	146	Reconstruction	
Oxford Poverty and Human Development		(SIGAR)-----	267
Initiative		Statistical Product and Service Solutions	
(OPHI)-----	56	(SPSS)-----	125
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(PETC)-----	11	Threats	
Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development		(SWOT)-----	196
(PRSD)-----	147	Supreme Audit Office	
Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper		(SAO)-----	267
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(PDPs)-----	4	Reforms	
Provincial Reconstruction Teams		(TAGHIR)-----	142

Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVeT) -----	149	(UDHR) -----	73, 245
The KOF Index of Globalization Konjunkturforschungsstelle (KOF)-----	60	Village Councils (VCs) -----	297
Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan (TISA)-----	1	Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM)-----	34
Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI)-----	255	Women Economic Empowerment Rural Development Program (WEERDP) -----	135
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) -----	19	World Bank (WB)-----	4
United Arab Emirates (UAE) -----	180	World Food Program (WFP) -----	14
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United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) -----	239, 267	World Trade Organization (WTO)-----	38, 207
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United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA)-----	146		
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United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) -----	44		
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United States Dollar (USD)-----	3		
United States of America (USA)-----	70		
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Annexes

Interview questions

1a: English version

- 1) Although much money has been spent on extreme poverty reduction, why have these costs had a minor effect?
- 2) To what extent is there a degree of coordination and relative capacity between different state departments on extreme poverty reduction?
- 3) Which poverty reduction awareness programs have been successful at extreme poverty reduction, and can we build on their success?
- 4) Which institutional structures empower individuals living in extreme poverty to ensure that the state and non-state performers are accountable for their performance, and is there institutional discrimination against those in extreme poverty?
- 5) Do you think corruption has increased extreme poverty in Afghanistan?
- 6) What is the performance of non-state organizations in handling extreme poverty, and how do they do it?
- 7) What is the graduation mechanism from extreme poverty reduction or social protection programs?
- 8) What cost-effective measures would safeguard that those who outflow extreme poverty remain out of poverty?
- 9) What are the efficient, cost-effective involvements to end to extreme poverty over the life course or in a single generation?
- 10) Can you agree that the development policy helped reduce Afghanistan's extreme poverty?
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neither agree nor disagree
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree
- 11) Did the flow of official development assistance from 2002 until now in Afghanistan effectively reduce extreme poverty?
 - a) Strongly agree

- b) Agree
- c) Neither agree nor disagree
- d) Disagree
- e) Strongly disagree

12) Did globalization help Afghanistan reduce extreme poverty?

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Agree
- c) Neither agree nor disagree
- d) Disagree
- e) Strongly disagree

13) Who else do you recommend being able to answer these questions?

1b: Persian version

پرسشنامه فارسی

۱. با وجود اینکه پول زیاد در راستای کاهش فقر شدید به مصرف رسیده، چرا این مصارف تاثیر اندک بجا گذاشته است؟
۲. تا چه حد هماهنگی و ظرفیت نسبی روی کاهش فقر شدید میان ادارات مختلف دولتی وجود دارد؟
۳. آیا برنامه آگاهی کاهش فقر را سراغ دارید که به اساس آن برنامه های بعدی را پلان گذاری نمود و با استفاده از کدام شیوه میتوان افراد فقیر را شامل در روند پلان گذاری کرد؟
۴. کدام نوع نهاد های دولتی به افراد فقیر کمک می کند تا اطمینان حاصل شود که مقامات دولتی و غیر دولتی در قبال آنها و در ارایه خدمات به آنها پاسخگو هستند و آیا تبعیض های سازمان یافته در مقابل افراد فقیر وجود دارد؟
۵. آیا شما فکر می کنید فساد باعث افزایش فقر شدید در افغانستان شده است؟
۶. چگونه سازمان های غیر دولتی ارایه خدمات روی کاهش فقر شدید انجام میدهند و چگونگی تطبیق پروژه ها را چی شکلی ارزیابی مینمایند؟
۷. کدام چارچوب میتواند مفید واقع شود تا مستفید شوندگان از برنامه های حمایه اجتماعی فارغ گردند؟
۸. چه نوع اقدام موثر میتواند افراد که از دایره فقر شدید فارغ شده اند را محافظت مسئولون نماید تا بیرون از دایره فقر باقی بمانند؟
۹. چگونه میتوان با سرمایه گذاری موثر فقر را در طول حیات یا یک نسل پایان بخشید؟
۱۰. آیا موافق هستید که طرح های انکشافی واقعا به کاهش فقر شدید کمک کرده است؟
 - الف) کاملا موافق
 - ب) موافق
 - ج) نه موافق نه مخالف
 - د) مخالف
 - ی) کاملا مخالف

۱۱. آیا جریان کمک های انکشافی از سال ۲۰۰۲ تا کنون در افغانستان، برای کاهش فقر شدید موثر بوده است؟

الف) کاملاً موافق

ب) موافق

ج) نه موافق نه مخالف

د) مخالف

ی) کاملاً مخالف

۱۲. آیا روند جهانی سازی به افغانستان کمک کرده تا فقر شدید را کاهش دهد؟

الف) کاملاً موافق

ب) موافق

ج) نه موافق نه مخالف

د) مخالف

ی) کاملاً مخالف

۱۳. آیا شما کسی را پیشنهاد میکنید که قادر به ارایه پاسخ به این پرسشنامه باشد؟

پښتو پوښتنپاڼه

۱. سربيره پردې چې د غربت د کچې د کموالي په برخه کې زيات لگښتونه شوي دي، اما څه ددې لامل شو چې ددې لگښتونو اغيز ډير کم دی؟
۲. د شديد غربت د راکمولو په برخه کې د بيلابيلو دولتي ادارو نسبي وړتيا او همغږي ترکومي کچې ده؟
۳. ايا د غربت د راکمولو په اړه پروگرام لری د کوم له مخې چې دنورپروگرامونو پلانونه جوړ کړی او له کومې لارې کولای شي چې غريبه طبقه د پلان جوړونې په پروسه کې دخيل کړو؟
۴. کوم ډول دولتي بنسټونه له غريبو خلکو سره مرسته کوي ترڅو ډاډمن شو چې دولتي او غير دولتي چارواکي د هغوي په وړاندې د خدمتونو په تر سره کولو مکلف دي او ايا په ټوله کې په سازمان شوي توگه د غريبو خلکو په وړاندې تبعيض وجود لري؟
۵. ايا تاسې فکر کوی چې فساد په افغانستان کې د غربت د کچې د لوړوالي لامل شوی دی؟
۶. د شديد غربت د کچې په کموالي کې د غيردولتي بنسټونو خدمات څنگه ارزوی او هغوی په دې برخه کې کوم کارونه کوي؟
۷. له کومې لارې کولای شو چې د ټولنيز خونديتوب د ملاتړ له پروگرامونه څخه رابهر شو؟
۸. په کوم ډول اغيزمنې لارې چارې چې خلک يې د شديد غربت له دايرې رابهر کړي خوندي کړو ترڅو دوی بيا د غربت دايرې ته لار نشي؟
۹. څنگه کولای شو چې د اغيزمنې پانگوني له لارې غربت د يو نسل د ژوند په موده کې له منځه ويسو؟
۱۰. ايا موافق ياست چې پراختيايي پروگرامونو په حقيقت کې د شديد غربت په راکمولو کې مرسته کړي ده؟
(الف) بالکل موافق

(ب) موافق

(ج) نه موافق نه مخالف

(د) مخالف

(ی) بالکل مخالف

۱۱. ایا له ۲۰۰۲ کال راپدېخوا د شدید غربت د راکمولو په برخه کې نړیوالې پراختیایي مرستې اغیزمنې وې؟

(الف) بالکل موافق

(ب) موافق

(ج) نه موافق نه مخالف

(د) مخالف

(ی) بالکل مخالف

۱۲. آیا دنړیوالتوب پروسې له افغانستان سره د شدید غربت په راټیټولو کې مرسته کړې ده؟

(الف) بالکل موافق

(ب) موافق

(ج) نه موافق نه مخالف

(د) مخالف

(ی) بالکل مخالف

۱۳. آیا تاسو کولای شئ مونږ ته یو کس په ګوته کړئ چې پورته پوښتنو ته وکولای شي غوره ځوابونه ورکړي؟

List of interview participants

2a: Pretest Interview Participants:

Due to concerns regarding the security of the pretest interview participants, the contents of this table have been omitted from this section. However, a complete list has been shared with the examination committee.

No.	Name	Title	Entity	Location	Date
1					
2					
3					
4					

2b: Field Interview Participants:

Due to concerns regarding the security of the field interview participants, the contents of this table have been omitted from this section. However, a complete list has been shared with the examination committee.

No.	Name	Title	Entity	Location	Date
1					
2					
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Declaration (Erklärung)

Ich erkläre hiermit an Eides Statt, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit selbstständig verfasst und andere als in der Dissertation angegebene Hilfsmittel nicht benutzt habe; die aus fremden Quellen (einschließlich elektronischer Quellen, dem Internet und mündlicher Kommunikation) direkt oder indirekt übernommenen Gedanken sind ausnahmslos unter genauer Quellenangabe als solche kenntlich gemacht. Zentrale Inhalte der Dissertation sind nicht schon zuvor für eine andere Qualifikationsarbeit verwendet worden. Insbesondere habe ich nicht die Hilfe sogenannter Promotionsberaterinnen bzw. Promotionsberater in Anspruch genommen. Dritte haben von mir weder unmittelbar noch mittelbar Geld oder geldwerte Leistungen für Arbeiten erhalten, die im Zusammenhang mit dem Inhalt der vorgelegten Dissertation stehen. Die Arbeit wurde bisher weder im Inland noch im Ausland in gleicher oder ähnlicher Form einer anderen Prüfungsbehörde vorgelegt. Auf die Bedeutung einer eidesstattlichen Versicherung und die strafrechtlichen Folgen einer, auch fahrlässigen, falschen oder unvollständigen eidesstattlichen Versicherung und die Bestimmungen der §§ 156, 161 StGB bin ich hingewiesen worden.

Flensburg, 25.03.2025

Khwaja Mohammad Akbar Borran