

Ten Years Later: An Assessment of Uruzgan Province a Decade After the Dutch Military Departure



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Table of Contents

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
2. METHODOLOGY	4
3. SECTORS	5
3.1. GOVERNANCE.....	5
3.1.1. <i>Gender Balance</i>	6
3.1.2. <i>District-level</i>	7
3.2. SECURITY	8
3.2.1. <i>Government vs. Taliban Control</i>	9
3.2.2. <i>Road Security</i>	11
3.2.3. <i>Afghanistan National Security Forces</i>	12
3.2.4. <i>Provincial Mood</i>	13
3.3. EDUCATION.....	14
3.3.1. <i>Institutions</i>	14
3.3.2. <i>Attendance</i>	15
3.4. HEALTH	17
3.4.1. <i>Facilities and Staffing</i>	17
3.4.2. <i>Health Indicators</i>	18
3.4.3. <i>District Level</i>	18
3.5. ECONOMY/LIVELIHOODS.....	19
3.5.1. <i>Agriculture</i>	20
3.5.2. <i>The Opium Economy and Poppy Cultivation</i>	22
3.6. DEVELOPMENT	22
3.6.1. <i>Infrastructure</i>	23
3.6.2. <i>Actors and Access</i>	23
3.6.3. <i>Energy</i>	24
3.6.4. <i>Telecommunications</i>	24
4. CONCLUSION.....	24

1. Executive Summary

This rapid assessment was conducted by The Liaison Office (TLO) over a two-month period from August 22nd to October 22nd, 2020. It provides CORDAID and partners a snapshot of key governance, service provision, economic, development, and security indicators ten years after the departure of Dutch military forces and the start of a decline in Dutch foreign aid. The assessment finds:

- Positive security and development efforts achieved during the 2006-2010 timeframe mostly continued on an upward trajectory in the five years after the departure of Dutch forces. However, following the assassination of Provincial Chief of Police, Matiullah Khan, in 2015, the ensuing security and governance vacuum was exploited by the Taliban.
- The period from 2015 to the present has been characterized by high turnover in key governance and law enforcement positions, intra- and inter-tribal conflict, and a divided provincial government. Residents say that bright spots – a particularly responsive department of agriculture for instance – have not been enough to offset a general decline in governance.
- Today the Taliban control anywhere from 80% to 90% of provincial territory, though the population under their control is not commensurate given widespread displacement from the districts to the provincial center of Tirin Kot and regional hub of Kandahar City.
- Since signing a peace agreement with the United States in February 2020, the Taliban stepped up attacks across the province while also adopting a slightly more lenient approach to *some* government or external aid, development, and services in *some* areas under their control. Locals find this contradictory and uneven approach confusing and dangerous.
- More than occupying territory, Taliban influence is exerted through control of all major roads inside the province and linking Uruzgan to Kandahar. Control of roadways is limiting access to health and education, stunting the economy, and forcing Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF) to rely on inefficient air resupply to maintain a foothold at the district level.
- ANSF-Taliban clashes are occurring in all districts. In 2020, the heaviest fighting has been in the districts of Chenartu, Gizab, and Deh Rawud. In late October and early November the Taliban captured the district center in Gizab and burned much of it and captured the district center bazaar in Deh Rawud and surrounding areas. Clashes are also ongoing at ANSF check posts ringing the provincial center.
- While the Government of Afghanistan retains a small presence in all five districts, this is often confined to the district center or, in some cases, to the immediate vicinity of the ANA forward operating base. Outside of Deh Rawud and Gizab, civilian district government officials (sub governors, line department staff, judges and prosecutors) are mostly operating from Tirin Kot.
- Today the number of open schools has dropped slightly below 2010 levels, largely due to closures over the last year in Tirin Kot, Gizab, and Khas Uruzgan due to insecurity.

Though the Taliban have recently allowed some schools to re-open, they have maintained a strict prohibition on girls' education, and residents say that continued insecurity is keeping schools closed and children at home regardless of the Taliban's stance.

- Functional health facilities have more than doubled since 2010, the number of health workers across all key positions has also more than doubled, and the percentage of women occupying these posts has increased. As a result, a higher percentage of women are today receiving ante-natal and postpartum care and giving birth in facilities staffed by skilled medical professionals. Yet chronic insecurity continues to disproportionately affect women's access to health care and limit vaccination efforts.
- The provincial economy has struggled in recent years. ANSF-Taliban clashes and related road closures make it harder and more costly to get goods to market in and outside the province. Economic development projects have declined sharply. The agro-economy has struggled with disease and drought compounded by a growing share of fallow land due to insecurity and displacement. Though on a more positive note, Uruzgan wheat yields continue to outperform the national average.
- The opium economy has also suffered over the last two years due mainly because of exogenous market factors like a contraction in the Iranian economy, the devaluation of Iranian currency, as well as a tightening of national borders due to COVID19 and more aggressive interdiction in Iran. The Taliban continue to tax land under cultivation in their areas. Afghan government attempts at eradication have ceased.
- Despite these setbacks, residents point to efforts by the department of agriculture to build greenhouses even in insecure areas as a bright spot and say that with the decline in poppy cultivation there is an appetite for substitute cash crops like Aloe Vera.

2. Methodology

TLO enumerators based in Tirin Kot conducted a total of 50 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with key informants from all five of Uruzgan's districts and the administrative unit of Tirin Kot from August 22nd to October 22nd, 2020. With the exception of Chenartu and Shahidi Hassas, interviews were conducted in the districts. Interviewees were selected using a purposive sampling method for their ability to provide insight on issues of governance, development, service provision, and security, and included: former district governors, serving Afghanistan National Police officers, teachers, former mujahideen commanders, public health workers, former Taliban insurgency cadres, and tribal elders. Interviews were structured around a six-part questionnaire developed with input from CORDAID. Each interview lasted an average of three hours.

To draw temporal comparisons, findings were assessed against past qualitative assessments conducted by TLO for the Dutch government in July 2006, September 2009, and September 2010. These assessments roughly coincide with the start and end of Dutch military engagement and the expansion and contraction (though not end) of the Dutch civilian presence and development assistance. To triangulate qualitative findings, we drew upon quantitative data for Uruzgan province collected in the yearly "Survey of the Afghan People" conducted by the Asia

Foundation and statistical yearbooks compiled by Afghanistan's National Statistics and Information Authority.

3. Sectors

3.1. Governance

“Uruzgan province has provided a particularly acute example of low capacity and bad governance over the past four years.”

A Survey of Uruzgan Province. The Liaison Office. July 2006.

“The sustainability of the Dutch comprehensive approach is limited if the Afghan state cannot free itself from the influence of political entrepreneurs....”

Three Years Later: A socio-political assessment of Uruzgan Province from 2006 to 2009. The Liaison Office. September 2009.

“Right now, everything in Uruzgan is multiplied by zero.”

Tribal elder, Khas Uruzgan District, September 15, 2020.

Conflict and competition rooted in access to and control over land and resources continues to define politics and governance throughout the province. Government positions, particularly the provincial Governor and Chief of Police posts, are still viewed primarily through the lens of resource capture. This situation predated the Dutch military deployment, challenged the 2006-2010 period, and continues to define the province today.

Looking back, interviewees remember Popalzai strongman Matiullah Khan's tenure as Provincial Chief of Police (2011-2015) as a period of relative political stability. Matiullah consolidated power by controlling formal and informal security forces, carrying out governance functions above the provincial governor, and channeling patronage more effectively than the strongmen that came before (or after) him. This consolidation of power tamped down political competition at the provincial level and mitigated, but did not resolve, long-standing land and resource conflicts. In fact, the absence of any formal reconciliation and the continued existence of underling conflict drivers – namely, who has the power to control land, access to markets, and resources – meant these rivalries exploded violently when Matiullah was killed in a suicide bombing in Kabul in March of 2015.

There was little variation between interviewees in describing the chaotic period following Matiullah's death. “After the assassination of Matiullah Khan, all the tribes tried to seize central power which was the Chief of Police position,” an elder from Mehrebad recounted.

“Competition was especially fierce between Barakzai and Popalzai tribal elders. These rivalries gave the Taliban more influence in the region and they brought more areas under their control.”¹

¹ Interview #2, Tirin Kot, September 11, 2020.

In retrospect, those interviewed were less likely to dwell on the often-violent *means* by which Matiullah marginalized rivals in his drive to consolidate power, than the *ends* of relative political stability during his tenure. Even among interviewees from districts with a contentious, if not outright violent, relationship with Matiullah, such as Gizab, there was a uniform assessment that his death marked a new phase of political instability that paved the way for a Taliban resurgence in the province.

In particular, the Taliban exploited the security vacuum that ensued when Matiullah's brother and apparent successor, Rahimullah, clashed with parliamentarian and Barakzai tribal elder, Obaidullah Barakzai, for control of the province. Interviewees listed a range of malfeasance on both sides of this conflict—from the looting of the ANP's provincial stockpile of light arms to selling police check posts to the Taliban. This conflict reached down into the districts and also pulled in national authorities from above, contributed to high rates of turnover in key government positions, including five Chiefs of Police in as many years, and, crucially, disrupted the patronage system that Matiullah had been running.

While not the only explanation for the Taliban's resilience, the link between internal conflict and poor governance, and the resulting acquiescence to Taliban-imposed stability has been well-documented by TLO and others throughout Afghanistan. If it is true that international civil-military funding and engagement at the provincial level never helped to resolve this conflict dynamic—or in some cases made it worse—the absence of outside involvement and the decline in money and attention has not necessarily led to improvements either.

3.1.1. Gender Balance

Uruzgan has still never had a female provincial or district governor. This is disappointing but not surprising. There is not a single woman governor in any of the country's 34 provinces and only four female deputy governors. Out of approximately 389 districts, there have only been three women appointed district governor since 2001 and only two women mayors.² IDLG representatives report difficulties recruiting qualified women in Uruzgan since a Bachelor's degree became a pre-requisite for provincial line department positions about three years ago. Among elected officials, one of Uruzgan's three parliamentarians and one of nine provincial council members is a woman, figures in line with other provinces based upon mandated quotas.

Excluding medical staff and teachers, there are total of 57 women working for the Afghan government in Uruzgan province in both civilian and security capacities, all based in Tirin Kot: 45 Afghan National Policewomen, and 12 civil servants (two at the Director of Women's Affairs, including the provincial department head, the highest ranking female civil servant in the province; six in the statistics department; three in the public health department, and one department of education administrator). In general, line department and ANP figures are in line with other rural provinces of similar size. Nationwide, there were 3,346 female Afghan National

² "From Discussion to Resolution: Fostering the Role of Women in Local Governance in Afghanistan" UNDP. October 2019 <https://www.af.undp.org/content/afghanistan/en/home/stories/RoleofWomeninLocalGovernance.html>

Police as of May 2020.³ This works out to about 98 women per province, or double the current number in Uruzgan. However in practice, hubs like Kabul, Herat, and Mazar-e Sharif tend to have a greater share of policewomen than rural provinces like Uruzgan. For example, in neighboring Helmand province there are only 35 women on the police force.

3.1.2. District-level

As in 2009, where government is present, it is mostly confined to the district center or the grounds of the district compound. Many of the appointed district governors, and line department and judicial representatives operate on a full-time basis from Tirin Kot. Until recently, Afghan government presence outside Tirin Kot remained mostly unchanged since the late 2000s. However, in late October and early November the Taliban overran the district center of Gizab and the district bazaar in Deh Rawud.

In Chenartu, the district governor and chief of police remain in the district but have been forced from the government compound by the Taliban and are under the protection of family members and unable to leave the district. Government representation in both Chora and Khas Uruzgan fluctuates between a limited presence when security is good, to a more reduced presence when Taliban-related insecurity increases.

Though there are half a dozen tribal shuras and an ulema shura in Tirin Kot, often composed of residents displaced from their districts, only Taliban shuras are functioning at the district level with the exception of Gizab district where an Hazara shura is active. It has been approximately three years since the National Solidarity Program was concluded in Uruzgan, and though we received unconfirmed reports that representatives from the NSP's successor program, the Citizens' Charter, were attempting to revive dormant Community Development Councils at the district level, no public announcements or visible progress had been reported. Instead, residents displaced from the districts have started their own small shuras based in Tirin Kot in an attempt to coordinate and channel aid and development to their home districts.

Table 1: Government of Afghanistan District-level Presence in 2009 and November 2020

District	2010	2020 (November)
Shahidi Hassas	Government presence reduced to a radius of 5 km around the district center. There are no government decision-making bodies and the district governor operates from Tirin Kot.	No Change. The appointed district governor and chief of police have offices within an ANA compound but operate from Tirin Kot. No line department or government justice presence.
Deh Rawud	A district governor, chief of police, court, line departments, and three district shuras are present and active	Decline. District Governor, Chief of Police, and line dept. reps are all present on a full-time basis, though the district's assigned prosecutor and judge have been based in Tirin Kot for the last five years. The Taliban captured the district

³ “Enhancing Security and Stability In Afghanistan: Report to Congress. Department of Defense. June 2020.” https://media.defense.gov/2020/Jul/01/2002348001/-1-1/1/ENHANCING_SECURITY_AND_STABILITY_IN_AFGHANISTAN.PDF

		center bazaar and government officials retreated inside the ANA base in November.
Chora	A district governor, chief of police, court, and line departments are all present. Two shuras meet regularly.	Decline. District governor is present, partial line department presence due to recent insecurity. Judge and prosecutor have been working from Tirin Kot for the last four years. No shuras are functioning.
Gizab	No government presence. Pashtun areas are under a Taliban system and Hazara areas are self-governed through a 20-person district council.	Decline. A district governor is appointed but does not reside in the district. The agriculture line department representative is present. An appointed district judge works from Tirin Kot. A district tribal shura is active and resolving disputes. The Taliban captured the district center in early November and burnt government buildings.
Khas Uruzgan	A District Governor, Chief of Police, four-person district council, four-person ulema shura and a two-judge court exist.	Decline. District governor is present for half of each month in the district center, however he cannot leave the district compound because all of the areas in the district are inaccessible to government employees, including the district center bazaar. Line department and judicial representatives work from Tirin Kot.
Chenartu	A district governor and Popalzai tribal shura are active. [Line department staffing is absent due to the fact that Chenartu only officially became an administrative unit in 2008.]	Decline. A district governor and chief of police are present in the district but the area is under siege and the Taliban have control of the district center. Approx. six line department representatives for the district operate from Tirin Kot.

3.2. Security

“While insecurity was mostly confined to the mountainous districts of Gizab, Khas Uruzgan and Shahidi Hassas until 2005, it has now spread to all districts.”

A Survey of Uruzgan Province. The Liaison Office. July 2006.

“The worst areas in Uruzgan are those that are heavily contested. As of early 2009, these are Khas Uruzgan, and selected areas in Tirin Kot, Chenartu and Chora. The local population here fears insurgency pressure as much as aerial bombings and armed battles, all which have led to temporary and more prolonged internal displacement.”

Three Years Later: A socio-political assessment of Uruzgan Province from 2006 to 2009. The Liaison Office. September 2009

“The security situation is very bad. Almost every night the Taliban attack police check posts and there are air strikes in return. Currently the Taliban control access to health, education and agriculture in the districts. My district of Chenartu has been under Taliban siege for about three months. It is almost impossible to leave the district and the Taliban have blown up cell towers so we don’t have any accurate information about what is going on.”

Tribal elder, Chenartu District, September 11, 2020

Without exception, interviewees characterized the security situation as bad and getting worse, noting that insurgent control in all districts and along all roads was at the highest level since 2001. Interviewees date the decline in security to the death of Matiullah Khan in 2015. “It has been about six years since [former Chief of Police] Matiullah Khan was killed and about four

years since the Taliban have been able to influence every part of the province, but the security started to deteriorate right after Matiullah's death. We had so many police chiefs in such a short period of time and none of them had good relations with the community so they couldn't bring security and the Taliban took advantage of this.”⁴

Following Matiullah's death, interviewees say coordination with international military forces fell off and, more adversely, there was a breakdown in command and control of ANSF throughout the province. Matiullah's brother, Rahimullah Khan, attempted to replace his brother as Chief of Police but his efforts were met with resistance among the Ministry of Interior in Kabul and among tribal rivals and parliamentarians Uruzgan. In the end, Rahimullah was appointed Deputy Chief of Police but acted as the de facto Chief. His tenure was marred by corruption, and inter-tribal and internal ANSF conflict—a reminder that in Afghan society tribal and/or familial succession is not a forgone conclusion and can be a source of instability. These factors, combined with the deterioration in governance and rekindling of political and tribal rivalries detailed above, hastened the Taliban's expansion.

The low point in security since the Dutch departure occurred in September 2016 when the Taliban launched an offensive against Tirin Kot, reaching within a hundred meters of the police headquarters and the governor's compound, forcing both the governor and the police chief to evacuate through the Tirin Kot airport, before retreating in the face of an ANSF counter-offensive backed by U.S. airstrikes. The withdrawal of the last of the U.S. military forces and the weakening of ANSF stationed outside of Tirin Kot have accelerated the Taliban's recent advances. Taliban attacks on key check posts⁵ surrounding Tirin Kot have escalated since the Taliban began negotiating with the US and have continued unabated as intra-Afghan dialogue commenced in September 2020.

3.2.1. Government vs. Taliban Control

The Taliban control between 80% to 90% of the province, according to an average of the estimates provided by all interviewees. However, this represents territory and not necessarily population given the large number of persons displaced from insecure or Taliban-controlled districts into the provincial center. Current displacement to Tirin Kot includes 200 families from Mehrebad, 400 from Darafshan, 200 from Chenartu, 100 from Gizab, 500 from Shahidi Hassas, 100 from Chora, and an unknown number from Nesh district in Kandahar province, most living in rented houses or with family members in Tirin Kot. Additionally, 50 families from Chenartu have relocated to the Aino Meena neighborhood of Kandahar City, 350 families from Shahidi Hassas are in Kandahar and another 150 fled to the neighboring district of Deh Rawud.

Government control remains fluid and contested in all districts. In late October and early November as this report was being finalized, the Taliban overran the district centers of Gizab and Deh Rawud, forcing civilian government representatives to retreat to Tirin Kot or nearby ANA forward operating bases. Today, durable government security extends in about a 4 km ring around the provincial center and in small pockets immediately surrounding the district centers of

⁴ Interview #4, Tirin Kot, September 13, 2020.

⁵ Check posts that have come under recent attack are located in Khan Aqa, Sachkhali, Sad Morda, Talani, Tora, Kotwaal and Surkh Oba

Khas Uruzgan and Chora, and in the immediate vicinity of ANA installations such as those in Mehrebad and Shahidi Hassas. The assassination of the provincial deputy director of Afghanistan's intelligence service, the National Directorate of Security, on June 29, 2020, at the Kandahar-Uruzgan bus station in central Tirin Kot, was cited by numerous interviewees as indicative of the Taliban's grip on the province beyond just control of physical territory. "When the heart of Tirin Kot is not secure, how can the outskirts and the villages be secured!" an exasperated resident responded.⁶

On a district-by-district basis, government control has either declined or remained the same since 2010. The areas with the sharpest decrease in control have been in the administrative unit of Tirin Kot (75% to 20%), and the districts of Deh Rawud (85% to 1%), Chenartu (30% to 5%), and Gizab (50% to 5%). And yet the government has managed to hold on to a portion of all districts over the last ten years by establishing ANA outposts and undertaking costly and slow aerial resupply. While residents were habituated to Taliban influence or outright control in many of Uruzgan's remote districts, the biggest change in recent years has been the increased Taliban presence in the Tirin Kot administrative unit where the Taliban have been attacking ANSF check posts ringing the provincial center.

Table 2: Estimated Government Control by District: 2006, 2010, and October 2020

District	2006	2010	2020 (Oct)	Government controlled locations
Tirin Kot	30-40%	75%	20%	Provincial Center, Khanaka, Sarchakhlay, Tora and Talani areas
Shahidi Hassas	2%	2%	1%	Only an ANA base in the area of Oshai which also houses ANP and a makeshift office for the district governor; the district center Bazaar, district government compound and police headquarters are all under Taliban control.
Deh Rawud	20%	85%	1%	From the district center to the villages of Zartalay, Leblan, and Lundiana. All areas from the district center eastward are either contested or under Taliban control.
Chora	20%	45%	10%	Bazaar Kalachi, Inam, Ghaochak, Qaito, Popalzai, Denarkhil, half of Qala Raq, Kakoza, Saidano.
Gizab	0%	50%	5%	North of Gizab Central Bazaar to Naikabaad Bazaar, Daighairo Dasht, Malizai, Chaharbagh, and Sang Sheikh; South Gizab Central Bazaar to Chawni Bazaar, Dara-e-Saidaan, Qizilbash, Rubat and Boomi; West of Gizab Central Bazaar to Bazma, Kamarak, Dahan-e-Qol and Bairai.
Khas Uruzgan	30%	15%	5-8%	District Center Bazaar
Chenartu	part of Chora	20-30%	5%	Sor Kareez, Lewanyano Kareez, Mir Khail, Pai Nawa Gudai Bazaar, Soro Wiala, Shah Joi, Loi Masjid

⁶ Interview #7, Tirin Kot, September 12, 2020.

3.2.2. Road Security

Critically, main roads running in all directions from Tirin Kot are now under Taliban control. Control of roads, more so than control of individual villages, is what gives the insurgency power, allows it to control access to education and health, and limit ANSF resupply to infrequent and costly airdrops. Interviewees say the Taliban has controlled Mehrebad⁷, Pai Nawa, and Darafshan to the east and northeast of Tirin Kot, for much of the last four years. Taliban control has had adverse health and economic consequences. A trip from Mehrabad to Tirin Kot that once took 15 to 20 minutes, now takes two to three hours on circuitous back roads.

Taliban control of roads is most acutely felt in the district of Chenartu where the Taliban has blockaded the only road leading out of the district since June of 2020, resulting in at least 30 civilian deaths, mostly children, elderly residents and at least four pregnant women, due to food shortages, and the inability to access medical services, according to multiple interviewees from Chenartu.⁸ Residents noted that a child died from diarrhea and that “people are eating grass because there is no food.”⁹

The Tirin-Kot Kandahar highway, the main access road to the province, is also outside of government control from Sorkh Oba, about ten km outside of the provincial center, through Shah Wali Kot district of Kandahar province to the village of Damana in Arghandab district.

Previously it took two to three hours of driving to reach Kandahar province via Tirin Kot-Kandahar highway, now it takes about 7 hours. No government security caravan has travelled the road in years. The costly tarmac road connecting Gizab to Tirin Kot is also under Taliban control and heavily mined. The Taliban force non-affiliated commuters (i.e., those with no connection to either the government of Afghanistan or the insurgency) onto circuitous mountain roads, but individuals working for or associated with the government are not allowed passage on either the main or mountain roads. The three hour trip now takes eighty to nine hours and no government security caravan has made the trip along from Tirin Kot to Gizab in the last five or so years.

Table 3: Government vs Taliban control of Key Roads as of October 2020

Road	Government-controlled	Taliban-controlled
Tirin Kot-Kandahar Highway	From Bazaar area of Tirin Kot to Surkh Oba	From Surkh Oba till Shah Wali Kot district of Kandahar
TK- Deh Rawud	From Tirin Kot Bazar to Pai Nawa (Yake Langa, Talani)	From Yake Lenga to Zar Tale Pai area of Deh Rawod district

⁷ Within the Mehrebad area, the villages of Naoji and Neyak, are under government control due to the presence of 150-200 Afghanistan National Army (ANA) soldiers. While repeated Taliban attempts to overrun the ANA have been thwarted, including an attack of almost 100 Taliban in August 2020, ANA forces are now under siege and unable to extend security beyond the 60 or so households in the immediate vicinity.

⁸ See also this report from early September, which cites a slightly lower casualty figure. Sharifullah Sharafat and Abubakar Siddique. “Taliban siege Cuts off Remote Afghan District.” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. September 11, 2020. <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/taliban-siege-cuts-off-remote-afghan-district/30833633.html>

⁹ Interview #1, Chenartu District, September 11, 2020.

TK- Chora	From TK to Wana/Khanaka	From Wana/Khanaka to the Chora District Centre
Deh Rawud – Shahidi Hassas	From Deh Rawud Bazar to Manan bridge (Toor Nasir area)	From Bazar Manan bridge (Toor Nasir area) to Shahidi Hassas Bazar
Tirin Kot - Khas Uruzgan	TK to about half of Nichin area	Half of Nichin to the Khas Uruzgan district center
Chora-Gizab	Center of the Gizab District, to the top of the Dara-e-Saidano, and the road within the Chora Bazaar.	From the beginning of Dara-e-Saidan to the center of Chora district, and from the center of the Chora district to Sha Mansoor village (Dara-e-Sinjad, Chishmak, Chaparai, Khilij Kotal)
Shahidi Hassas - Gizab	Roads within the Gizab and Shahidi Hassas district center bazaars	Outside the Gizab district center to edge of the Shahidi Hassas district center

3.2.3. Afghanistan National Security Forces

Though the number of provincial ANA and ANP has increased since 2010, A simple increase in the number of government forces has not, in-and-of-itself, had any meaningful impact on the insurgency which is as strong, or arguably stronger, in 2020 than in 2006. The presence of ANA and ANP keep the provincial center from being overrun and holding tiny slivers in each district—either districts centers, or, in the case of Shahidi Hassas and Chenartu, areas immediately surrounding ANSF forward operating bases. While this presence has allowed the government to credibly claim that that the Taliban does not fully control these districts, and provide for a strictly limited civilian government presence in some areas, these forces are under siege and dependent on costly and infrequent air resupply for food and ammunition.

As in years past, locals were more satisfied with ANA and NDS performances but continued to complain about ANP drug addiction, behavior towards locals, and indiscriminate use of force and civilian causalities when engaging the Taliban in firefights. Several interviewees favorably cited past efforts by foreign military forces to professionalize ANSF as one of the few lasting legacies of foreign intervention. Often in the same breath, these same respondents noted that without the practical aspects of international firepower and air support, increased professionalism was not translating into battle field success. Other respondents said local perceptions of ANSF were less a measure of their behavior and professionalism than of the strength and staying power of their insurgent adversaries. “Our confidence in the ability and the legitimacy of government security forces grows less and less mainly because we see that the Taliban are stronger than the government and will remain in the province forever.”¹⁰ Indeed, one of the most telling statistics about the staying power of the Taliban and the cost to ANSF is that three of the six current district chiefs of police have had their brothers killed by the Taliban.

3.2.4. Provincial Mood

Looking back at the period described above, The Asia Foundation Survey of the Afghan People shows that, on a provincial basis, residents describing themselves as “very happy” reached a high point in 2016 and then declined sharply and flatlined below national and regional averages between 2017 and 2019, which generally tracks with increasing instability and related economic stagnation. However, the picture becomes less straightforward when looking at the percentage of provincial residents who say the country is going in the “Right Direction”. These figures increased throughout the period of Dutch involvement and then hit a high point in 2013 before dropping sharply throughout 2014 and 2015 and then rising slightly again in recent years as the Taliban has grown in strength and insecurity has increased.

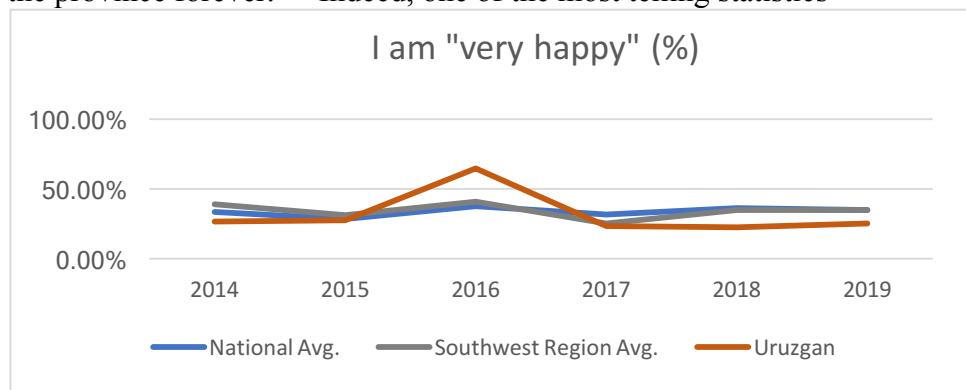


Figure 1: Provincial Mood from 2014 to 2019. Source: The Asia Foundation Survey of the Afghan People 2014- 2019 (note: no data exists before 2014)

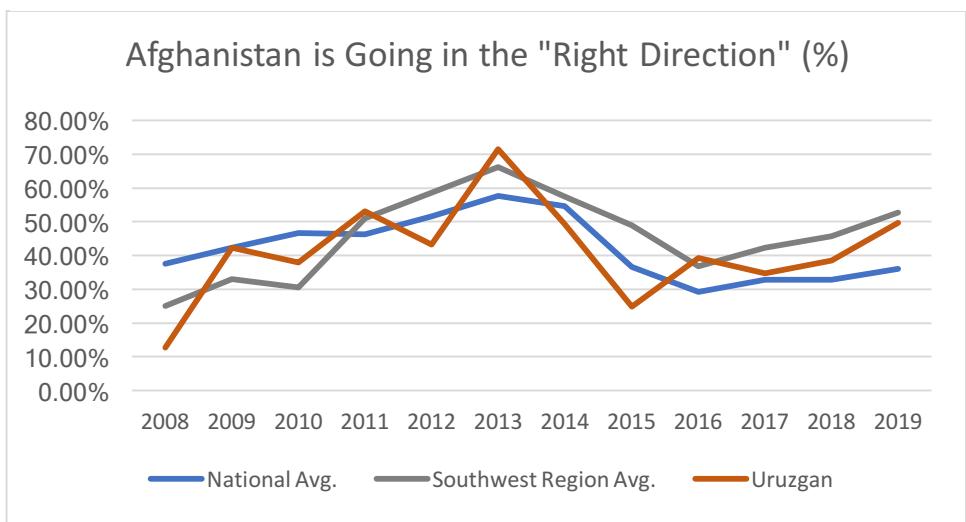


Figure 2: Percentage of Residents Saying Afghanistan is going in the Right Direction: National, Regional, and Provincial Comparison. Source: The Asia Foundation Survey of the Afghan People 2008-2019

¹⁰ Interview 2, Tirin Kot, September 11, 2020

3.3. Education

“Operating schools have more than doubled over the past three years.”

Three Years Later: A socio-political assessment of Uruzgan Province from 2006 to 2009. The Liaison Office. September 2009.

“Education at provincial level has improved significantly over the last ten years. However, in the last four years, given that the Taliban have taken control of all areas, there has been no progress in the field of education and training. Ongoing fighting has caused hundreds of youth to be deprived of attending schools and the state of education to decline.”

Chora District Resident, September 12, 2020

3.3.1. Institutions

The number of open schools across the province has declined from 168 in 2010 to 165 as of September 2020, including 19 girls’ schools.¹¹ All districts saw a decline in open schools between 2019 and 2020, according to the provincial Department of Education. Half of Gizab’s schools closed in the last year, in Khas Uruzgan the number of open institutions dropped from 57 to 45, in Tirin Kot from 85 to 47, in Chenartu from 12 to 4, in Chora from 30 to 22, in Tirin Kot from 85 to 38, and in Deh Rawud from 30 to 23. Only Shahidi Hassas saw no change in open schools over the last year.¹² Additional education institutions not included in the table below are: 5 professional and vocational training centers; 4 teacher training and teacher support centers; and one multi-vocational institute and one undergraduate university.

Table 4: Active Department of Education Schools and Madrassas: 2006, 2010, and September 2020

District	2006	2010	2020 (Sept)
Shahidi Hassas	1	1 (1 Primary)	12 (12 Primary)
Chenartu	1	9 (7 Primary, 1 Secondary, 1 High)	4 (2 Primary, 1 Secondary, 1 High)
Chora	11	13 (7 Primary, 3 Secondary 2 High, 1 Madrassa)	22 (11 Primary, 6 Secondary, 4 High, 1 Madrassa)
Deh Rawud	8	18 (11 Primary, 3 Secondary, 3 High, 1 Madrassa)	23 (11 Primary, 6 Secondary, 6 High, 1 Madrassa)
Gizab	15	38 (26 Primary, 9 Secondary, 3 High)	12 (7 Primary, 2 Secondary, 3 High)

¹¹ Open girls’ schools: Tirin Kot: 4-Primary, 2-Secondary, 1-High School; Chora: 1-Primary; Gizab: 1-Primary, 1-Secondary, 1-High School; Khas Uruzgan: 1-Primary, 3-Secondary, 4-High School.

¹² Note: Following COVID19 closures across Afghanistan over the spring and summer of 2020, public and private schools reopened country-wide on August 22nd. However, the order opening all schools was quickly amended to only public high schools and private schools. As such, during the field collection period for this assessment, public primary and secondary schools in Uruzgan were closed. However, on October 3rd COVID19 restrictions were lifted on all schools in Uruzgan.

Khas Uruzgan	27	48 (22 Primary, 16 Secondary, 7 High, 3 Madrassa)	45 (15 Primary, 16 Secondary, 14 High)
Tirin Kot	13	41 (27 Primary, 5 Secondary, 6 High, 3 Madrassa)	47 (20 Primary, 10 Secondary, 8 High, 9 Madrassa)
Total	76	168	165

3.3.2. Attendance

The recent and rapid school closures make it difficult to get an adequate grasp of just how many youths are currently attending school. In some cases when schools have closed, as in Tirin Kot, students and teachers have been displaced to open schools. However, more often than not when schools have closed teachers and students have not been able to relocate to open schools and have remained at home. In many cases girls' schools remain technically open, but families have stopped sending their daughters due to Taliban threats, insecurity, and freedom of movement concerns, or some combination of these factors. In Chenartu, residents say the Taliban has stopped destroying schools as they had done in years past and are now using some of the buildings as command posts and weapons depots. In Shahidi Hassas, where the insurgency has had significant control for over a decade, the Taliban have allowed boys schools to remain open but continue to prohibit girl's education.¹³ Parents in Shahidi Hassas say that despite the Taliban's directive, continued Taliban-ANSF clashes prevent them from sending their kids to school, a sentiment that was echoed in other districts, such as Khas Uruzgan and Gizab. As in years past, attendance in Hazara areas of Gizab and Khas Uruzgan is relatively higher, especially for girls, than Pashtun areas of both districts.

About 58,343 children (8,013 girls) are in the classroom as of September 2020 compared to 48,006 (6,774 girls) in 2010, according to department of education figures. This is an absolute increase in total attendance but a decline in both absolute and relative (14.1% to 13.7%) terms for girls. These figures also represent a slight decline in overall enrollment as a share of the total provincial population from 15.1% in 2010 to 13.3% in 2020. In addition to full-time government-administered schools and madrassas there are another 16,495 children (9,667 male, 6,828 female) attending a range of government and NGO-supported learning programs, including the Afghan Government's Basic Literacy Program, the Basic Education and Employable Skills Training (BEST) program, and the multi-donor-supported¹⁴ Empowerment Center for Women (ECW) program.

¹³ TLO received conflicting accounts in regards to the Taliban's stance on girls' schools with some interviews saying that girls education was prohibited outright and others claiming that the Taliban allowed girls up to grade 3 to remain in school in areas under their control. This seems to reflect a lack of uniformity across the province. In either case, all interviewees were clear that insecurity (combined with Taliban policy ambiguity) were responsible for driving down female school attendance province-wide.

¹⁴ ECW donors and supporters include: Counterpart International, The Asia Foundation, Democracy International, Free and Fair Election Forum of Afghanistan, Afghan's Women Network and the Afghan NGOs Coordination Bureau.

Table 5: Extra-curricular Education Attendance as of September 2020

District	Basic Literacy	BEST	ECW	Total
Shahidi Hassas	234	0	0	234
Chenartu	193	0	0	193
Chora	0	0	0	0
Deh Rawud	317	3471	1784	5,518
Gizab	284	4814	0	5,098
Khas Uruzgan	230	0	0	230
Tirin Kot	487	2965	1716	5168
Total	1745	11,250	3,500	16,495

According to the Department of Education, in 2010 there were a total of 1,126 teachers (1,059 male and 67 female) across the province. As of September 2020 there 1,361 teachers (1,273 male and 88 female).¹⁵ The percentage of female teachers has thus increased slightly from 5.95% in 2010 to 6.4% in 2020. According to a 2017 Human Rights Watch report, seven out of 34 provinces had less than 10% female teachers, and 17 provinces had less than 20%. Residents from a number of districts said that prior to Taliban resurgence in the last three or four years they had noticed an improvement in teacher quality and training. As many interviewees noted, the main issue was not the absence of trained teachers per se but the chronic insecurity hindering access of teachers to the districts where schools are located.

There were conflicting accounts of the Taliban's current stance on education. When the Taliban began retaking district territory during the 2016-2018 period they shut down schools and beat teachers. However, after reaching a peace agreement with the U.S. in February 2020 some residents say the Taliban have loosened their rules, allowing boys schools to open in their territory. This more lenient posture was, however, not being applied equally across the province. Interviewees in Chenartu noted that Taliban had shuttered schools and was using buildings for command posts and weapons depots. Regardless of the Taliban's stance on education, there was agreement among those we spoke with that children were being kept at home due to continued and widespread fighting between the Taliban and ANSF throughout the province.

¹⁵ Permanent positions = Male: 863, Female: 27; Contract positions = Male: 410, Female: 61.

3.4. Health

The health sector has made significant gains in both infrastructure and staffing since 2010 but continues to lag in other areas. Though the Taliban have been more accommodating to government health care providers working in their areas, continued insecurity is nonetheless limiting access to health care overall.

3.4.1. Facilities and Staffing

Functional healthcare facilities more than doubled from 20 in 2010 to 59 in 2020, with increases across all districts. Additions of note include a district hospital in Deh Rawud, a CHC+ in Shahidi Hassas, a CHC in Tirin Kot, and 33 new Sub Health Centers. Another 304 new Health Posts were also established between 2010 and 2020, bringing the provincial total to 469 of which approximately 420 are operational today.

Table 6: Operational Health Facilities by District: 2006, 2010 and September 2020

District	2006	2010	2020 (Sept)
Tirin Kot	2	4 (1 Provincial Hospital, 1 CHC, 1 BHC, 1 drug treatment center and 69 Health Posts)	12 (1 Provincial Hospital, 2 CHC, 1 BHC, 1 drug treatment center, 6 sub health centers; and 121 Health Posts and 2 Mobile Health Teams)
Deh Rawud	1	4 (1 CHC, 2 BHCs, 1 drug counselling center and 37 health posts)	8 (1 District Hospital, 1 CHC, 1 BHC, 5 SHC; and 73 Health Posts)
Shahidi Hassas	1	2 (1 CHC, 1 BHC and 17 health posts)	14 (1 CHC+, 2 CHC, 1 BHC, 10 SHC; and 52 Health Posts)
Chora	1	3 (1 CHC, 1 BHC, 1 drug counselling center and 24 health posts)	5 (1 CHC, 1 BHC, 3 SHC; and 52 Health Posts)
Khas Uruzgan	2	3 (1 CHC, 1 BHC, 1 Health subcenter and 26 health posts)	9 (1 CHC, 1 BHC+, 4 BHC, 3 SHC; and 102 Health Posts)
Gizab	3	3 (1 CHC, 2 BHC and 29 health posts)	8 (1 CHC, 1 BHC+, 2 BHC, 4 SHC; and 60 Health Posts)
Chenartu	0	1	3 (1 CHC, 2 SHC and 9; Health Posts)
Total (excluding Health Posts)	10	20	59

The absolute number of medical workers has more than doubled from 87 in 2010 to 196 (121 male, 75 female) in 2020. This includes notable increases in the total number of nurses (from 25 to 96, including 17 women) and registered midwives from 13 to 56. In 2006 there were 130 trained community health workers (CHW), by 2010 this number had increased to 300, of which 100 were women. As of September 2020, there were 450 CHWs including 177 women. The percentage of women in key medical positions has increased from 20.6% in 2010 to 38.2% in 2020 and the portion of health facilities with at least one female medical professional has increased from 46% in 2010 to 95% today.

Table 8: Medical Staff: 2006, 2010, and September 2020

Position	2006	2010 (women)	2020 (Sept)
Doctor	19	31 (1)	25
Nurse	25	25 (4)	96
Midwife	5	13 (13)	56
Anesthetist	0	0	5
Lab Technician	12	18	14
total	61	87	196

Table 8: Male/Female Medical Staff as of September 2020

Position	Male	Female	Total
Doctor	23	2	25
Nurse	79	17	96
Midwife	0	56	56
Anesthetist	5	0	5
Lab Technician	14	0	14
total	121	75	196

3.4.2. Health Indicators

The 2010-2020 period has seen gains in key health indicators.

Table 9: Key Health Indicator: 2006, 2009, and September 2020

Indicator	2006	2009	2020 (Sept)
Number of consultations per person per year	0.6	1.2	0.9%↓
Proportion of all pregnant women receiving at least one antenatal care visit	45%	%61	70%↑
Proportion of deliveries attended by skilled workers in the facilities	2.6%	%12	70%↑
Cesarean section rate among deliveries in the facilities	0	%1.1	3%↑
Number of current users of contraceptives	1035	1425	1800↑
Proportion of pregnant women receiving at least two doses of tetanus toxoid	29%	%72	81%↑
TB detection rate	0	%20	40%↑
Treatment completion rate among TB cases detected	0	%26	65%↑
Proportion of children <5 receiving growth monitoring	81%	%100	95%↓
Proportion of children 0-11 months receiving DPTHb1	71%	%100	90%↓
Proportion of children 0-11 months receiving DPTHb3	25%	%91	82%↓
Proportion of health facilities with at least one female health worker	40%	%46	95%↑
Number of Surgeons	0	2	4↑
Total number of female doctors	0	1	2↑
Total number of midwives	2	12	56↑
Total number of nurses male/female	3	5	79/17↑
Number of CHWs completed 3 rd phase training	60	232	453↑
Number of female CHWs completed 3 rd phase training	11	67	180↑
Completeness of HMIS reporting	100%	%100	90%↓
Proportion of postpartum visits (within 6 weeks after delivery)	4.2%	%16	45%↑
Malnutrition rate in growth monitoring	2.4%	%3.2	55%↑
Transportation availability (for the districts)	40%	%54	50%↑
Referral percentage of patients to higher level	0.5%	%2	51%↑

3.4.3. District Level

The positive effects of increased medical infrastructure and staffing are being felt unevenly across the districts, with differences often a function of how contested and insecure a district is and not strictly a measure of Taliban control. Interviewees in Shahidi Hassas said that access to

healthcare for both men and women had increased due to the construction of new clinics and that the Taliban was not impeding access. Unlike in years prior the Taliban allow doctors to travel freely from Tirin Kot to the Shahidi Hassas; though residents report that polio vaccination has not taken place for the past two years because it is “against the principle of Islam” according to the Taliban. In neighboring Gizab district, vaccinations are allowed by the Taliban but residents are told to send their children to the mosques as vaccinators are not allowed to go door-to-door. Child immunization rates in Uruzgan remain among the lowest in the nation. A 2018 survey found that Uruzgan had “staggering low levels” of immunization for children when compared to other provinces.¹⁶

Women in Gizab also reported increased access to healthcare, primarily through female nurses and midwives in the Gizab district center. A BHC in the Taliban-controlled area of Gizab is still functioning and treating Taliban fighters. However, several interviewees in Gizab were disappointed in the new NGO administrator of the BPHS. As one interviewee noted: “In the past, the previous contractor NGO established the health posts, they trained people in the first aids, during the training course they were paying each individual volunteer AFN500 and they were supplying each health post medicines on the 20th date of each month, but the current contractor reduced the wages of volunteers. In addition to this, they do not supply the medicines to health posts for six months or even a year. It would be true to say that most of the health posts are closed now.”¹⁷

By contrast, residents in Chora said that access to healthcare had decreased somewhat in recent years due to ongoing fighting and particularly due to Taliban control of the main road from the provincial to the district center which has increased the cost of medicine and decreased the number of female medical staff active in the district. These shortages along with insecurity has led to particularly adverse consequences women. As one resident of Chora explained: “In years past, 30 to 40 women and girls would go to the clinic in the Chora district center and others would go to health posts on a daily basis, now less than 10 are going on a daily basis.”¹⁸ Taliban control of arterial roads in and out of Chora is both a cause of casualties and an impediment to treatment as another resident explained: “My mother walked over a bomb and got injured. Intense fighting was going on in Chora district. It was impossible to travel by car to Tirin Kot. I am grateful to an ANA commander, he transferred my mother by helicopter to Tirin Kot, but the required treatment was impossible. I took my mother to the Kandahar. My mother had her limb amputated.”¹⁹

3.5. Economy/Livelihoods

“An analysis of the economy in Uruzgan is complicated by the size of the illicit economy, which has considerably grown in the last years.”

A Survey of Uruzgan Province. The Liaison Office. July 2006.

¹⁶ Afghanistan Health Survey: 2018. Royal Tropical Institute. April 2019. <https://www.kit.nl/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/AHS-2018-report-FINAL-15-4-2019.pdf>

¹⁷ Interview #1, Gizab District, September 12, 2020

¹⁸ Interview #5, Chora District, September 15, 2020

¹⁹ Interview #4, Chora District, September 12, 2020

“Locals have responded positively to...Dutch efforts to improve the agro-economy [which] have centered on improved seeds, technology, training, marketing, and micro-financing...The [Afghan] government is presently too weak and too entangled in the trade to aggressively enforce a ban on either cultivation or trade” of poppy and opium.

Three Years Later: A socio-political assessment of Uruzgan Province from 2006 to 2009. The Liaison Office. September 2009

“The economic situation of the people is very bad. Since the Taliban gained strength and intensified their attacks on Afghan security forces, most of the lands have left uncultivated and people need food in their daily lives.”

Gizab District Resident, September 12, 2020

“Right now, I can make more money from my onions than my opium.”

Resident of Pai Nawa, September 12, 2020.

Agriculture remains the chief livelihood for the majority of Uruzgan’s residents. Interviewees described a decline in the sector in recent years due to insecurity and drought, while also noting a range of positive efforts initiated by the provincial department of agriculture. There are four banks operating in the provincial center (Azizi Bank, Islamic Bank, Kabul Bank, and Da Afghanistan Bank) with no branches in any districts and no ATMs in the province. There are two flights a week to/from Kabul to Tirin Kot operated by Kam Air. The UN also operates two non-commercial weekly flights. Interviewees say some women are doing handicrafts from their homes in Tirin Kot, however in the districts economic opportunities remain limited. In some Taliban areas women are not allowed to shop at local bazaars without a male family member as an escort. In Darafshan the Taliban “sold” government land to locals to establish a new market and are now collecting monthly taxes from the newly established shops.

3.5.1. Agriculture

Anecdotally, there is less land under cultivation due to a combination of insecurity, environmental (disease, drought) issues, and falling or stagnating crop prices. The downturn has hit Uruzgan’s orchard sector especially hard. As a farmer from Chora explained: “Four years ago I was harvesting at least 4,500 kg of almonds from my orchards and about 5,000 Kg apricots. For four years ago I have not harvested 100 Kg of both. Because of war we cannot irrigate our orchards....Due to closed roads farmers cannot bring their products to the provincial center.”²⁰ Accessing land near frontlines requires permission from both the Taliban and ANSF. A farmer from Tirin Kot with land near the frontlines estimates that his property currently makes about half of what it did 10 years ago. Within their territory, the Taliban are taxing crop yields (*ushr*), though resident say the tax is now higher and more variable than the once consistent 10%.

²⁰ Interview # 4, Chora District, September 12, 2020.

When asked to assess the lasting impact of external aid and development to the agriculture sector, numerous interviewees in Chora cited the paving of the road from Chora to Tirin Kot as having greatest economic impact for farmers and traders from this area. However, the positive economic benefits of infrastructure improvement have been negated by Taliban control or closure of main roads. Another interviewee noted that when the Taliban closed the roads to his area in Chora, ANSF responded by blocking irrigation canals leading into Taliban held areas, which further crippled the agriculture sector. Other residents cited improved wheat seed distribution, crop diversification, and cold storage, as projects that have had a positive effect on individual lives and the agro economy more broadly, even if their current impact is diminished by insecurity and access issues. Further, while the total area under wheat cultivation in Uruzgan has stayed mostly the same or slightly declined in recent years, wheat yields in the province began to consistently outperform the national average from 2015 onward, according to the Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook and the Uruzgan department of agriculture.

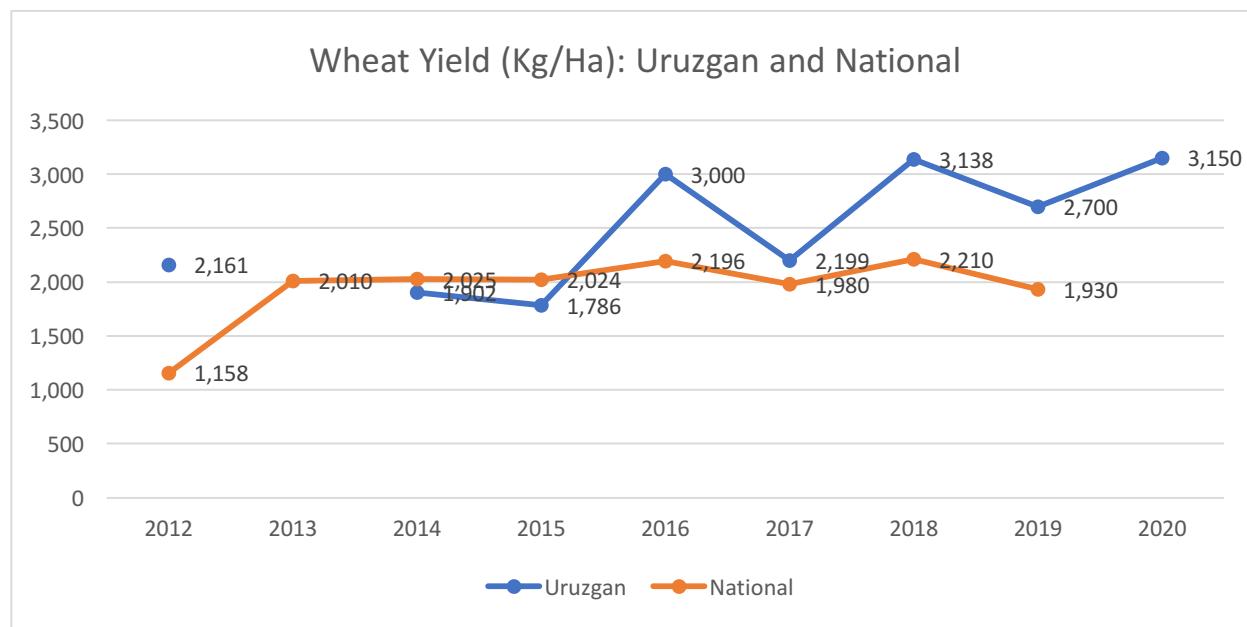


Figure 3: Wheat yields in kilogram per hectare for Uruzgan Province in comparison to the national average. Figures are derived from the Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook. Note: Uruzgan figures for 2020 are provided by the provincial department of Agriculture, national figures for 2020 have not been published; provincial data for 2013 was not openly available.

Though international agriculture development projects have all been shut down according to those we interviewed, residents cited the National Horticulture and Livestock Project (NHLPP) and its construction of 93 greenhouses and nurseries since 2018 and support to orchard crops in the districts and even in Taliban controlled areas as a bright spot to build upon. In May 2020, the Ministry of Agriculture announced at a ceremony in Tirin Kot that 52 new warehouses and storages facilities would be constructed throughout the province. According to provincial agriculture officials, the government will subsidize 90% of the storage costs for local farmers. The provincial department of agriculture also reported a 10% increase in honey production as the result of the expansion of beekeeping training and materials. Additionally, 40 fish farms have been constructed throughout the province since 2017. On the other hand, farmers throughout the province continued to report graft in the government's distribution of improved seeds.

3.5.2. The Opium Economy and Poppy Cultivation

Anecdotally, poppy cultivation has declined in Uruzgan over the preceding two years. Residents cite a number of factors for the downturn. Farm gate and bazaar prices have fallen, with farmers blaming an economic downturn in Iran and, more recently, COVID19-related border tightening, as well as crop disease. Two years ago, 4kgs of opium was worth 100,000 PKR (\$622), today the price has dropped to between 20 and 30 thousand PKR (\$124 - \$186), according to the farmers we spoke with. This anecdotal reporting from Uruzgan, tracks with UNODC estimates that opium production decreased nation-wide by 29 per cent from 2017 to 2018, that land under cultivation and yields decreased, that farm gate prices fell to their lowest levels ever recorded when adjusting for inflation, and that conditions in Iran, both the economic downturn and seizures, are affecting the Afghan opium economy.²¹

There is also now some confusion on the Taliban's stance on cultivation. "The Taliban is telling everyone that their government is about to come and they will not allow anyone to grow opium when they take control," a farmer from Darafshan said. Despite this potential future policy change, at present, planting and cultivation continues in Taliban-held and the Taliban continue to poppy yields like they do all crops. In Chora, residents say the Taliban has actually sold off government land to farmers willing to cultivate poppy so the insurgency can further increase its tax base. Past government-sponsored eradication schemes have all ceased, less as a matter of policy but because the government no longer controls enough territory to enforce an eradication scheme. Finally, and hopefully, numerous interviews from across the province said that unlike in year past the time was ripe for the introduction of alternative cash crops. Several interviewees expressed interest in Aloe Vera as an alternative cash crop, citing favorable word-of-mouth from neighboring Helmand about its return on investment.

3.6. Development

"[I]nternational and credible national NGOs are practically absent from the province."
A Survey of Uruzgan Province. The Liaison Office. July 2006.

"[O]n the whole reconstruction and development has improved in Uruzgan and is more equally distributed today than in 2006, with more services reaching non-Popalzai communities."
Three Years Later: A socio-political assessment of Uruzgan Province from 2006 to 2009. The Liaison Office. September 2009

²¹ "Afghanistan opium survey 2018: Challenges to sustainable development, peace and security" UNODC. July 2019. https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afghanistan_opium_survey_2018_socioeconomic_report.pdf; "World Drug Report 2020". UNODC. https://wdr.unodc.org/wdr2020/field/WDR20_Booklet_3.pdf

“In the past four years, reconstruction projects have mostly been confined to the provincial center. Very little reaches any of the districts nowadays.”

Resident of Khas Uruzgan District, September 15, 2020.

3.6.1. Infrastructure

By all accounts, the period between 2010 and the return of Taliban control in many districts in 2016 saw a continuation of forward momentum created by the Dutch presence in key districts such as Chora and Deh Rawud. However, Taliban control at the district-level has stopped most large-scale infrastructure development with notable exceptions in/around the provincial center, including a hydro-generator/flour mill by GIZ, flood protection walls by Citizen’s Charter (the NSP successor program), and a drinking water scheme by the Department of Rural Rehabilitation and Development with funding from UNICEF in Pai Nawa in 2018/19. Residents in the districts say that some agriculture infrastructure (greenhouses) were completed in recent years by the government and that government schools were still being constructed in some areas of Gizab and Khas Uruzgan. In Gizab and Chora residents report that the Taliban have been constructing roads and, in Chora, have been rebuilding some bridges damaged by fighting in recent years. Residents in all districts were able to recall important NSP- and PRT-sponsored infrastructure that happened in years past, most often citing roads, bridges, culverts and river flood protection retaining walls. Retaining walls were also cited as the type of large infrastructure project that was most in need of repair.

3.6.2. Actors and Access

In 2010 TLO counted 56 Afghan and International NGOs and International Organizations active in the province. In 2020 at least 20 of these are still active. Many of the organizations no longer present had focused on issues related to governance, rule of law, agriculture and business development, and stabilization. Those remaining tend to have a greater focus on education, health, women’s empowerment, and humanitarian response. Afghanistan Health and Development Services, a long-time implementer of the Ministry of Health’s Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) program in the province, is now responsible for implementing the Citizens’ Charter program, the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Developments follow on effort to the National Solidarity Program, in Tirin Kot and Chora. According to AHDS, the Citizen’s Charter program has only been implemented in Tirin Kot and the Taliban have blocked implementation in Chora. Several tribal elders said negotiations with the Taliban were ongoing to allow the program to expand to other districts.

There is hope, if few consistent examples, that the Taliban’s approach to development in their areas is changing following their agreement with the United States. We received scattered reports from those living in Taliban-controlled areas that the Taliban were allowing development and humanitarian NGOs to operate *if* these organizations gained permission and paid off the local insurgents and didn’t stray from a narrow set of health, male education, and infrastructure efforts. In practice, getting any project implemented outside of Tirin Kot requires local connections and an ability and willingness to engage with the Taliban. This is no different than any time since the Taliban first re-emerged in Uruzgan following the regime’s ouster in 2001. A

former district governor of Khas Uruzgan described a familiar story of navigating both the government and the insurgency to get a project to his district: “Last year, I was awarded a project to distribute chickens and wheat and dig wells in my district. At first the government didn’t want to give me the project—they were saying ‘implementing the project will be impossible’. When I was able to get everything done, the governor and the director of the department of rural rehabilitation and development said ‘you must have given all the supplies to the Taliban instead of to the locals’. Of course I gave a portion to the Taliban! The Taliban are the locals of the district too. But it is a lie to say I gave the Taliban everything.”²²

3.6.3. Energy

In the provincial center, electricity is supplied mainly to government offices by diesel generator at 45-50 AFN per kilowatt, a cost that makes it prohibitive to most other residents. In all districts, private and commercial interests continue to rely on a mixture of solar, small hydroelectric dynamos, and gasoline-powered generators. Residents of Khas Uruzgan noted the destruction of hydro-electric power station due to fighting in recent years.

3.6.4. Telecommunications

While access to energy has remained more-or-less constant in recent years, telecommunications have regressed sharply due to Taliban destruction of cell phone towers in many districts beginning three to four years ago when they began re-taking territory throughout the province. In Chora, the Taliban burnt the Salaam telecom tower and the three AWCC towers are inactive. In Deh Rawud, a number of towers were destroyed, leaving only an AWCC tower in the district center operational from 6am to 6pm daily. In Khas Uruzgan the two AWCC towers have been disabled by the Taliban. Locals in all districts say they rely increasingly on Public Call Offices in districts bazaars to make calls. Regardless of telecom infrastructure, locals in Taliban-controlled areas say they are afraid to carry cell phones because the Taliban search phones for suspect contacts and confiscated sim cards.

4. Conclusion

Ten years after the Dutch military withdrawal, a range of international aid and development initiatives are still intact and locals are appreciative of these efforts. Residents pointed to the lasting impact of roads, bridges, improved seed distribution, and electricity in addition to health and education infrastructure. But there was a sadness and a frustration that the real potential of these efforts was unrealized due to insecurity.

The story of Uruzgan over the last five years is a reminder that stabilization in Afghanistan is chiefly a political endeavor. If politics and governance fall into place, this sets the conditions and the framework for security. Aid and development can reinforce this process but they cannot, in and of themselves, lead it. Those we spoke with in Uruzgan had a better understanding of this

²² Interview #2, Khas Uruzgan, September 15, 2020

dynamic—namely, the limits of aid and development in active conflicts but their imperative over the long term nonetheless—than many of the well-meaning external actors who have tried and failed to stabilize Afghanistan since 2001.

In the continued absence of a national political agreement between Afghans in Doha, Uruzgan is unlikely to stabilize itself. A political solution would, practically speaking, allow farmers from Chora to get goods to market on internationally-funded roads and expectant mothers in Chenartu to reach midwives, nurses and doctors in Tirin Kot trained through international programs. As the international community convenes virtually for the quadrennial Afghanistan donor pledging conference in Geneva on November 23rd and 24th, this rapid assessment of Uruzgan is timely reminder of what is at stake, what we've learned, and what is possible.