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What does it mean to take context seriously for engaging in markets?

Lessons from Afghanistan

This policy brief looks at why millions of dollars of aid and investment failed to transform Afghanistan's economy.

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Throughout 2001–2021, many millions of dollars were spent on an economic transformation of Afghanistan that never happened. Investment was based on an implicit theory of how markets worked and how markets could drive the economy, which did not match the reality on the ground. Economic and agricultural development policy can't work without understanding how Afghan markets work.

This brief looks at how understanding Afghanistan's market context might have changed the focus or scope of aid interventions. It is part of a series on the importance of **taking context seriously** in aid programming.



A local bread maker prepares stacks of bread for shipment to the several Afghan Uniformed Police precincts they serve, Nawa, Helmand province, Afghanistan
Credit Image by ISAF Public Affairs - CC BY 2.0

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