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What does it mean to take context seriously for village-level governance? Lessons from community development councils in Afghanistan

This policy brief looks at why aid practitioners' governance reforms in Afghanistan failed to understand or engage with existing village-level governance structures.

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Between 2001 and 2021, community development councils (CDCs) were the vehicle through which Afghanistan was supposed to be transformed through grassroots inclusive participation in governance. Billions of dollars were spent on this new organisational arrangement, which was the vehicle delivering the government's "flagship" development programme. But CDCs had a mixed record as a conduit for funds for local projects. They failed totally to build a new, democratic Afghanistan or greater state legitimacy.

This brief looks at the importance of understanding village-level governance structures in Afghanistan and how engaging with this 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.

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