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SNAPSHOT

All change for 6 local bodies down south

Photo: RAMP UP-SOUTH

Municipal officials learn how to prepare a real-time budget

Officials in Tirin Kot, Kandahar, Zaranj, Nili, Qalat and Lashkar Gah were crucially able to identify all available revenue streams and allocate money to programs that the local people badly needed

Six municipal authorities in southern Afghanistan have made history of a sort by submitting their budgets in time and preparing them in a realistic and accurate manner. The result: The financial plans put forward by Tirin Kot, Kandahar, Zaranj, Nili, Qalat and Lashkar Gah received the provincial governor's approval in record time and all six municipalities are well on their way to balanced budgets that better meet local needs.

Much of the credit must go to the raft of embedded revenue-generation advisors and budgeting experts who worked with municipal officials as part of USAID's Regional Afghan Municipalities Program for Urban Populations (RAMP UP)-South. The advisors helped the local officials reconcile finances. They also taught them how to use revenue-collection software and budgeting tools.

Key members of staff were trained on-the-job, learning spreadsheet-based budgeting and financial planning. This meant that officials in six municipal authorities were able to factor in current service-delivery activities as well as anticipated maintenance and operations costs, even as they efficiently allocated resources to badly-needed programs such as solid waste management. The officials were also, crucially, able to identify all available revenue streams and plan for enhanced revenue collection.

The six municipalities are something of a beacon in a part of the country that has historically been plagued by inefficient municipal government. Traditionally, municipal budgets have been handwritten documents, rife with errors and with limited, if any, internal control mechanisms.

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