Q. 2:
I was Governance Coordinator for SIKA, I was facilitating and coordinating efforts related to the local governance between the IDLG and SIKA program. I was there from February 2012 till August 2015.

Q. 3:
The objective of SIKA was to promote stability in key areas by supporting and strengthening the Government of Afghanistan at the district level, recognizing and supporting the role of the Government at the provincial level. To implement community-led development and governance initiatives that respond to the population’s needs and concerns in order to build confidence and stability and increase the delivery of basic services.

Q. 4:
The program was initially planned together with the MRRD but it wasn’t well aligned with the Afghan government National Priority Plans to support the main agenda of government stabilization. The program was not a government driven approach, and didn’t consult the local government in the design phase of the program. The program was implementing together with MRRD but later IDLG become a prime partner for the program when USAID and MRRD felt that it would be difficult for them to implement the program without IDLG support.

Q. 5:
SIKA program was somehow effective during the course of implementation in the targeted areas but after the program officially closed the activities were not that much sustainable as the government expected. The good example is SIKA North, after exiting SIKA from the districts in Kunduz, almost more than half of the districts went to back to the hands of Taliban and become totally destabilize. It also happened in East, South and West, the questions is why this happened? Because the approach was very project based not as government priority approach, if the program was aligned and linked with the NPP then it would have larger effect since government has plans to take care of their priorities.

The national government partners as well as local government were focusing and insisting to support the capacity Development initiatives but it always delayed by the implementing partners. The good example is SIKA north where the implementing partner just launch their CDP at the closing of the SIKA program which wasn’t effective at all. IDLG developed a CDP for SIKA west but they didn’t deliver what it was planned effectively.

Since the SIKA program was focusing on the Local Governance related issues (Limited Issues) and Community Development Projects, the things left behind the SIKA program are community development projects.
Q. 6:

I think the key challenges that affected the program effectiveness in the long-run were several. First, most of the implementing partners didn’t have relevant experiences, for example, AECOM was implementing the Stabilization program but they didn’t have experiences in jointly working with the local governance, stability and community development, all the same time. Second, most of the times USAID designed programs without full involvement of the government. USAID programs didn’t follow the government agenda in the relevant sector. Large part of the cost used to go to the operation, if you analyze the SIKA program, more 50% got to the operation cost which affected the program delivery. In the case of SIKA, it is written in the documents that the Afghan partner ministries will be in the lead but in real the whole program was managed by the implementing partners, operations, human resource, finance, sub-contracting and procurement was all done by the IP. According to the agreement, the ownership of the program was with the Afghan government but in fact, everything was managing by the IP with the consultation of the USAID. On one occasion the government proposed to bring IP in to the government compounds to work closely with its counter parts in the government. But the IP and USAID rejected the idea and the IP worked independently in the center and in the provinces.

Another issue was with the cost effectiveness of the program, it was not cost effective. The program only focused on highly insecure districts and never piloted the program in the relatively secure districts to see how the program works in both types of districts. The program focus also shifted from stability to development kind of projects, for example in the SIKA East they funded small poultry farming at the household level.

The biggest problem was the modality of the program, SIKA was implemented in all four regions very differently; the model for stabilization was not unified. The implementing partners didn’t have a bigger agenda for the program to support stabilization.

Q. 7, 8:

The community development projects worked well temporarily but didn’t support the initiative of stabilizations. SIKA was a very complex program and their focus was really scattered. This is important for US Government to do research and find what really worked well for stability. Because there was no specific definition for stabilization in Afghanistan.

The framework to understand the source of instability worked really well where the local people identified sources of instability at their community level. But the problem was that SIKA never responded to all those sources of instability which were identified. In most cases the project staff influenced the decision of the local people in the project identification phase.

Since the education level of the local people is not that high, therefore in many communities they didn’t understand the source of instability, and it was difficult for them to figure out the sources of instability at their community.
Q. 9:
Taliban just resolve disputes according to their procedures and in an ad-hoc basis. They don’t have proper system and procedures. So, I won’t agree that their dispute resolution was linked to the relatively stability they had. I don’t much but I cannot say that their model was a success.

Q. 10:
This might not be the case to say that absence of government is an important source of instability, this is not source of instability. We can call it as weakness of the government. There are districts where the government is present but still the district is instable and has not proper services like education, community development, access to justice, service delivery, transparency and access to information, and much more. So, I think just presence of government would have not help without having the rest of the services.

Q. 12:
Advantages of working in the insecure districts was that the government was getting support from new areas, and citizens were able to access services provided by the government. It was also helping to build trust of the people because they got some services.

The disadvantages were that it was difficult to manage the implementation of the programs in insecure districts properly. Quality of the projects was also difficult to monitor in insecure places, and we also didn’t know about the sustainability of the work we were doing.

Q. 13:
We proposed to the SIKA program to cover some of the relatively secure districts under the SIKA program. This would have helped to pave way for expansion of the program to the insecure districts. But it was not agreed upon. On the government side there was the thinking that work must be done in both insecure and relatively secure districts.

Q. 15, 16:
I think an important criteria for stability programs could have been the ability of the district officials and residents to move safely in the district from their homes to work and back home also between the district and the provincial center.

Stabilization needs a long time and each stability program should have been followed by a program that was linked to the objectives and outcomes of the previous one. The US government should have designed programs that they can complement each other, but it was not the case on the ground. For example, SIKA program come to an end, now is there no other programs that builds on the achievement or efforts of the SIKA. There are always some good outcomes from the programs, the important things is how to sustain those good things for longer term.
Q. 17:

Most of the time the problem was with the leadership and ownerships of the program, US official didn’t want the Afghan government to be in the lead for the Stabilization programs. While Afghan government always received the message that it is their program, this was creating frustration.

Q. 18:

I will recommend that any stability program in any other place must consider recommendation of the local government. The local government should be consulted, this should happen right from the design and program development stage. Because the government is there on the ground and probably have better understanding of the needs of people and the government.

Keep the government in the lead of the program implementation, let the government develop implementation plan or at least lead the IP in the process. IP must provide the technical support in the planning process of the program development.

US Government financial laws and procedures are complex and they always delay the implementation of the programs, therefore some ways must be found to avoid delays in the start of the programs. The US government contracting system must favor those IPs that have experiences in stabilization, just lower price or a strong proposal should not be the criteria for granting the contract. Ideal situation will be to support the on-budget program rather than going for off-budget programs, but the complexities of the local government’s laws and regulations should be assessed well before doing so. If the government already has already planned national programs they must be considered while developing and designing stability programs.