Q. 2:

Before going to the details of Afghanistan Social Outreach Program (ASOP) I should say that this program started exactly in January 2008. Before that a thinking got developed in the government that the distance that is created between the government and the people should be decreased. Specifically people in the IDLG thought that this distance must be decreased by addressing the problems at local level in a logical manner. This thinking made some friends, colleagues who had political and social understanding worked on this and developed a program for this on paper. They proposed a very wise and logical plan, which mentioned that poor government, slow service delivery and ever increasing insecurity needs to be prevented. Not only this plan, but actually the constitution also suggests to establish district councils. We should have elected them by 2010. But because of the insecurity district councils couldn’t be elected therefore the ASOP was started in 2008.

Q. 3, 4:

In the start of the program, I was not there. I joined later after the pilot phase of the program was already implemented in Wardak province. I joined in second phase, in second phase the USAID provided financial support. In the second phase there was a change, the USAID said that they want to work jointly with the government and see from close that what helps to provide and understand the issues that are important. This was the reason that USAID closely worked with IDLG and provided funding. So I can say that USAID wanted this program as we wanted it. This was a government program, led by the government. USAID and its implementer didn’t interfere with the program, they provided funding and technical support. The whole management was with the IDLG, so I can tell you that presence of the implementing partner and USAID was symbolic. But besides this USAID provided technical support according to what the government wanted. Because the director in the leading position was an Afghan. Decision making in the program was done by the government, others were not allowed to interfere, yes they provided financial and technical support.

Q. 5:

The program was important beyond doubt, its first phase was successful. People found that this is a social program, they perceived the program to have no political objective. Problems were assessed and precisely analyzed and solutions identified. The ASOP councils had some authorities, it had office in the district besides the district governor. The council used to oversee the daily activities of the district governor’s office and note problems of the people. The council didn’t have any executive authority, but they were able to discuss things with the district governor and also have meetings to find solution for the problems in their communities.

I think if these council had strong people in its composition it would be more successful. Although they (council members) used to meet with the influential people, with the Ulema and religious leaders but for good governance both sides must agree and cooperate. We were not relying only on the ASOP councils completely that it will solve all our problems, no some
responsibilities belonged to the government and some to the council and people. In the districts 
were these councils were active the program was effectives, in places where security was not 
good the council and the government had problems. But as a whole the ASOP councils were 
effectives. When the program discontinued in the end of 2011, numerous phone calls and 
enquiries were made by the people to ask why the program discontinued. People said that this 
was a useful program, it helped government to reach out to the people, and it helped to people to 
talk about security, development and governance issues. We couldn’t continue the program but 
person continued to keep in contact with us through the system that was there. Even now, if you 
ask people in the districts where these councils were established, you will find things that people 
have continued. As the district and provincial governors were involved in the program and led 
the process, even after the discontinuation of the program they used the mechanism to 
communicate to the people. Because they had found that it was useful. The program helped a lot 
to decrease the distance between the people and the government unfortunately it discontinued.

Q. 6:

Before AECOM the program was implemented by the Asia Foundation, it implemented the first 
phase of the program. Asia Foundation was not close with the government, the second phase was 
implemented by AECOM, and it was relatively closer with the government.

I don’t think that there were any serious challenges and complications between us, yes they were 
providing funds and technical support but the program was led by the director and his team that 
were appointed by the government. The government team was a capable team, all the direction 
and consultation came from IDLG. The team was solving its problems through IDLG, in some 
cases if there were problems with the donor or implementer IDLG intervened and solved it. So I 
can’t say or remember any serious challenges working with the program.

We had field problems, we had district where we couldn’t establish a council in 6 months. Those 
problem were related to the local issues among people, their local differences and problems. For 
example in some places people were divided into villages in some other they were divided based 
on shares. It was different in different places. The other challenge was that we used to have 
open election for the head and secretary positions of the council, but at the local level old 
competitions based on political and tribal affiliations and that was posing a challenge to the 
implementation of the program. But in many districts we expected a lot of problems but after 
communication and talking to people we were successful to achieve objectives of the program 
and implement it successful. Management capacity of the implementer was a key to the success 
of the program. We were able to establish these ASOP council in 148 districts in 22 provinces, 
most of them were insecure districts like Marjah, Nad Ali, Khas Uruzgan. People were happy 
with the councils and these councils were useful.

1 The sentence he used was that” in some places people were divided based on Wand”. Wand means ‘share’. This 
is a system of participation in social and development and sometimes security issues in some villages. For example, 
if a work could be completed by 100 men, one part of the village will provide 60 men another part will provide only 
40. To calculate this ‘wand’ or share, they use collective capacity of a cluster of households not just the number of 
the households.
Q. 7:
These councils were more successful in two areas. After electing the ASOP councils, we used to establish three sub-committees in these councils for conflict resolution, development and security sub-committee. The conflict resolution and development sub-committees were the successful part of these councils. Many problems and conflicts had no other solution except elders to come together and solve them, the conflict resolution sub-committee help. Also the development sub-committee was successful to have an oversight of the development activities in the districts. They also used to report the actual situation of the services like education and health to the responsible authorities.

Q. 8:
Until public awareness on the importance of a program is not raised people will not pay attention to the objectives of the program. Second reason could be that people have some urgent needs, which people wanted to address them first even if it were not related to the stability issue. But in our case, program people were able to discuss objectives of the program with people and explain to them the objectives and negative and positive sides of the program. Probably before the program people didn’t know anything about the program. But once we talked to them and discussed with them the objectives of the program and explained to them the program, people started to understand and cooperate. Even in some case the government didn’t understand, for example in Nangarhar the government people said that they already have councils. So we had to explain to them that this is a government program after which they used to ask for it. So we cannot deny importance of these councils and their connection to the stability. I can confidently see that ASOP councils were very much effective and related to stability in a districts, may be their relevance was above 60 percent.

Q. 9:
Yes, I think in the places where there is no security development cannot be effective. Security is important, it must be the prime priority for everyone, because without it one cannot even worship or pray. But when we talk about the government’s development and other programs, people actually needed those development initiatives. People needed to have access to health, education and social services. When you talk about Taliban they didn’t had anything else, they were left only with conflict resolution and yes that is right that they were able to solve conflicts, but it was done without a court, while the government has to solve problems in the light of law. In case of Taliban only two people used to decide on a conflict and convince both sides on the decision. What government did was the right things, as a government it had to do things logically right and as people needed it. Unfortunately lack of security, and presence of some circles of people that used to criticize the government for every action was a problem and I think that was more a local and a time problem. But people wanted good governance and they need it all the time. I think if the government can bring right people to the local level, I think more than half of the problem both in the security and other areas will solved. Because people will stand by anyone who can bring good governance, development and happiness to them.

Q. 10:
I say that anywhere, government runs over the hearts of the people. I mean that until we don’t know the indicators that make people happy we cannot succeed. People want good governance, rule of law and services, everyone likes it. I say if government has the capacity to provide this to people, it will bring security, people will stand by the government and it will bring stability. Government must have support of the people, in some place people may not be able to even say the name of the government, but it depends on the government to use those tactics and technics that to establish a servant and just government and provide services in all areas. In that case it will be helpful, people will decide the side that is the right side and will support it.

Q. 11:

I do not agree at all with the approach to start programs from the insecure districts. Programs should have started from the relatively secure districts and should have expanded to the insecure areas. By the time it reach the insecure areas people of the insecure places would already know about the programs and their importance. It should have been expanded step by step. Because people need to know effectiveness of the program, legitimacy of the government and results of good governance. Afghanistan different from other places, here most of the things depend on the ethnic and tribal affiliations. If a tribe is convinced that they want something then government can go there provide security and services. If people are not sure, if they are looking towards something with suspicion and they are not happy, it will be very difficult for the government to do anything.

Q. 12, 13:

It is possible that in different areas there will be different pictures, but Afghanistan has quite a different geography. For example the government should know and have a logical approach how to get into the remote and difficult-to-reach districts. But if purpose is just to spend money without looking to the results that means that we are just creating problems. Indicators of how to reach an area and how succeed must be identified before going to a new place. When you go to a place that you don’t know it will be difficult to implement anything. So I think all problem should be understood and analyzed before going to a new place.

Q. 14:

In some provinces local police program started along with the ASOP program, which was a successful approach in some provinces but in some others it had challenges. I think the reason was that one of the responsibilities of the ASOP was to introduce the right people to the local police, which was successful in some places. It was difficult in places where relations undermined principles and a number of people got into the local police who created problems for the local people.

I think the security situation of a district has more influence on peoples support to the government. For example presence of local police is not acceptable to the insurgents, so the local police must not be a problem by themselves. They must be right people which will give hope to the people and get their support. Because they will know that now there is another force in the area in support of the existing police force. As the local police is supposed to be in their village
and they know the situation very well in their district therefore they can defend their village and protect common interest institutions in the districts. It can very helpful, but if the right people are not there in the local police then as I said it will backfire.

Q. 15:

I say that if in a district government officials have a relatively better sense of responsibility, and know that it is his job to know which areas in his district is insecure and why and what are the reasons of the insecurity. Specifically the security agencies must know the situation. If they have an analysis of the security situation in the district I think that will help to know when to bring a program to the district. These information could be achieved through having good contacts with the communities, there must be meetings, information sharing and communication with the people in a district about good governance, their problem and solutions. It is responsibility of the government officials to know their districts well and know their problems.

Q. 16:

I think I already talked about this, I wish the local councils program was implemented before any stability program. It would have facilitated stability programs. If good and standards local councils were established first, and stability program were handed over to them, I think that was a logical solution. Unfortunately many programs had started before the local councils. For example, development councils were already there before the ASOP.

The duration of ASOP must have been longer, it was stopped untimely. It was effective, a lot of effort went into it and people wanted it to continue so it should have continued.

Q. 17:

In ASOP program my team didn’t meet with USAID or other US officials, we didn’t had any problems with the US officials. As a government programs we discussed our problems with the IDLG, we didn’t need to discuss our issues with the US officials. Yes they were providing financial support, which we are thankful to them other than that this was an independent program.

Q. 18:

Problems and lessons learned from Afghanistan need to be noted in detail and bitter experiences must not be repeated. The problems we faced here should be noted so that other people don’t make the same mistakes. Second, government and governance depends on the local conditions of a place. Solution will different in other places, so I think stability program should be decided according to the local issues. Help and assistance will be appreciated everywhere, but interferences in the local issues brings challenges. No one likes interference in his work. Programs are acceptable without too much interferences.