

Kansas National Guard

Agribusiness Development

in Afghanistan

by Eric Peck and Lynndee Kemmet

National Guard Agribusiness Development Teams are playing a critical role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. The Agribusiness Development Team (ADT) is based on programs developed by the National Guard in its state partnership programs and a program to bring development to Latin America while providing training opportunities for National Guard units. The concept was created nearly 20 years ago to form partnerships with developing nations and to foster ongoing relationships to assist in post-disaster and post-conflict reconstruction. National Guard teams now operate through various Department of Defense programs or operations in many nations around the world.

The concept has since been transported to Afghanistan, where teams from states in the U.S. with significant agribusiness capacity are operating on the ground. The ADTs consist of National Guard Soldiers and Airmen who have backgrounds and expertise in various sectors of the agribusiness field. ADT members also bring personal ties and relationships that allow them to leverage the assets and expertise of land grant universities and cooperative extension services within their home states.

Because ADT members are also combat trained, they are able to operate in areas where the risks exceed acceptable standards for civilian staff from such agencies as the U.S. Departments of State and Agriculture (USDA) or non-indigenous staff members from non-governmental organizations (NGOs). As a complete unit, the ADT has the capacity to provide security, hold an area, and assist local governments or community leaders in improving the economic conditions of the local population, which makes the ADT one of the best models for economic development assistance in

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the least-developed, most insecure regions.

By its very nature, the ADT is a collaborative mission. Although the ADT takes the lead in agricultural reconstruction efforts, it works closely with other military units and civilian agencies. The initial goal of the ADT is to transfer the reconstruction mission to civilians with domestic and international government agencies and civilian aid organizations. The ultimate goal is to transfer the mission to local, regional, or national governments.

Building this collaborative effort, however, is not without its challenges. These challenges include improving information-sharing among the many military, government, and civilian entities operating on the ground and coordinating development efforts among these many different entities engaged in reconstruction and economic development. Along with this, ADTs often face the challenge of building collaboration among local population groups that are often in conflict with one another.

This article reviews the efforts and lessons learned from the ADT program by examining the initial Kansas National Guard ADT deployment to Afghanistan.

Collaboration is the First Step to Success—Kansas ADT 1

In May 2009, Kansas Adjutant General Major General Tod Bunting assigned Colonel Eric Peck to build the team that would deploy to Afghanistan. Success required constructing an entire collaborative network that would extend back into the U.S.

Peck possessed military and civilian skills, a background in both business and agriculture, and post-conflict and post-disaster response and reconstruction experience. Peck's relationship with subject matter experts (SMEs) at Kansas State University (KSU), gained through his father's lifetime of service to the KSU Cooperative Extension Service, proved critical to the ADT's success. KSU faculty and staff

provided agricultural training for ADT team members and consulted with ADT members in Afghanistan via the Internet, phone calls, and video teleconferences.

Creating the ADT required collaboration among military branches. National Guard ADTs draw from both Army and Air National Guard units. Team members can also come from outside hosting states. States allow a National Guard member in a state that does not have an ADT to transfer to the National Guard of a state with an ADT. Finding a method that would

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allow non-military SMEs to join the team is still a challenge in constructing ADTs. The Kansas ADT sought to take agricultural experts from KSU to Afghanistan but was not successful in doing so.

Once assigned to its deployment region, the first Kansas ADT made contact with the military-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) already on the ground in Laghman Province. Kansas ADT members established close working relationships with specific PRT team members, particularly the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) representative Jodi Rosenstein and the USDA representative Jim Green. Rosenstein and Green provided insight as the members conducted the team-building and training processes.

Team Building as Part of Pre-Deployment Training

A key factor in the success of ADTs is building a unit that deploys as a cohesive team. The Kansas ADT had only eight months from formation to deployment. While eight months may seem like a long time, one must consider that a National Guard unit trains only two days per month. In the case of the first Kansas ADT, training consisted of approximately four weeks of pre-mobilization training in Kansas just prior to mobilization, which included annual training days and additional allocated training days. With the assignment of personnel to the newly created ADT beginning in October 2009, the team's leadership developed a plan to carefully build the team while accomplishing all individual training tasks and 75 percent of the collective tasks.

To enhance team building, the ADT conducted a guided military decision making process during the first drill weekend. This exercise was designed to get team members

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working together in smaller groups and introducing them to the non-standard mission of an ADT. It was an interesting process that showcased the broad spectrum of experience from privates just out of advanced individual training in the security force platoon to majors and lieutenant colonels with extensive staff experience from the agricultural SME section. The exercise proved to be a fun, demanding,

and excellent learning experience for all 58 team members.

Members continued the team-building process by proposing a mission partnership with KSU for obtaining ongoing agricultural expertise from the university's faculty and staff and for training ADT agricultural experts. After the ADT presented the mission, KSU agreed to support the training and "reachback" support for agribusiness expertise. During the training, KSU faculty explained general agricultural subjects and conducted several one-on-one sessions that helped to build relationships and solidify mission participation.

Throughout the deployment, the ADT and KSU faculty exchanged information via emails, phone calls, and video teleconferences. KSU faculty members widely shared "Good News Stories," a series of briefing slides with captioned pictures showing projects and week-by-week progress, to highlight the concrete results of the forward mission they were supporting.

The Benefits of Pre-Established Relationships in Team Building

Collaboration among military and civilian entities on the ground in Afghanistan is critical for the success of reconstruction and economic development efforts. But this collaborative effort must first exist within an ADT itself. The training of military units traditionally emphasizes a team approach both within a unit and in the relationship of that unit to other units. This same focus was part of the ADT training mission, and it was aided by that fact that National Guard members operate mostly within their states and over time develop contacts with many other members of their state's National Guard.

Because of this, most of the members of the Kansas ADT had either worked directly with or knew of the other team members from previous training, administrative, or mission interaction.

This was another important factor in the capability to build a strong, cohesive team for this unique mission. Many of the team members had served together in previous deployments to Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, or Afghanistan, but none had experience with an agricultural development mission. However, many members of the team had performed domestic response missions in support of response and recovery operations for hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, or winter storms, and this experience proved valuable in the ADT's reconstruction mission.

Security Self-Sufficiency is Critical for ADT Success in Unstable Regions

During deployment, ADTs operate within a geographic area that is under the control of a more traditional combat unit known as the "battle space owner." In addition, the military-led PRTs also operate within the same geographic area and have their own reconstruction missions. The ADT coordinates its actions with the battle space owner and the PRT, but each of these entities is engaged in pursuing its own mission and often cannot provide support to the ADT mission. For that reason, the capability of the ADT to provide its own security was a significant factor in mission success.

Despite this need for some level of self-sufficiency, the ADT did coordinate its actions and conduct missions to support the goals and objectives of partners, such as the Afghan government, International Security Forces, the PRT, and the USAID. However, the ADT's focus on the agribusiness sector and the Afghan government support of the agribusiness sector drove the ADT to limit its activities to agricultural training, agricultural infrastructure improvement, or meetings with locals on specific agricultural issues. Other partners with which the ADT interacted had their own focus areas that in some cases were not compatible with the ADT mission sets. Attempting to balance all the competing missions would have been difficult

had the ADT not had its own security personnel and equipment, such as vehicles, radios, and weapons systems. The ability to have this security personnel and equipment is at the heart of what makes the ADT a potential model for reconstruction and economic development in regions that are in great need of assistance but too insecure for traditional aid entities.

The ADT focused on the following general agribusiness areas:

- Education—lifelong agribusiness education
- Production—agronomy and livestock
- Storage—preventing loss after harvest
- Processing—food safety concerns
- Marketing—local first then progressing to more distant markets

Establishing education as a basis for improvements in all other areas is a critical focus and can be approached in a number of ways. The Kansas ADT chose to start with

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college-educated citizens and used them to work with the secondary education system and then the primary education system through 4-H-like programs. In addition, the ADTs used an intern program to reach farmers at the production level through an extension program very similar to extension programs in the United States. ADTs conducted much of this training at the primary provincial demonstration farm or on farmer-owned demonstration plots. ADT personnel provided input (seeds, fertilizer, etc.), and the farmer provided labor using new ADT-taught

techniques. ADTs conducted this training using several crops including saffron, wheat, corn, and grapes and fruit orchards.

Host Nation Collaboration

Because it is a military unit, the ADT risks appearing to be an invasive military force when providing reconstruction and development assistance in other nations. Such a stigma has the potential of inhibiting the success of an ADT in building collaboration with the local civilian population and the host government. Such collaboration is vital for the ADT to transfer the reconstruction and development effort to civilian control.

From the start of the first Kansas ADT mission, the team ensured that Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers participated in missions. This collaborative participation included planning, rehearsing, pre-combat checks, pre-combat inspections, mission performance, and

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after-action reviews. The ADT had to depend on its personal relationships with the embedded officers and noncommissioned officers of both the local ANA unit and the NATO training team embedded within it to gain full participation. Personnel from both the ADT and the ANA gained an appreciation for not only the military mission of protecting agricultural experts, but also of the overall agricultural mission and its contribution to general security. As part of the

relationship-building strategy, both sides did more than just perform the mission together. ADT members and ANA leaders shared meals and collaborated in establishing a school where ADT members taught English, reading, and writing skills, and ANA counterparts tutored ADT members in Pashto. The ADT also collaborated with Afghan local, district, and provincial officials on ADT missions, which progressed to more integrated planning and project execution by Afghan government officials.

The final step of turning all planning and execution over to Afghans is yet to be realized; however, the process to achieve this capacity is in place and, over time, will be implemented. One of the critical programs in this area was the intern program established by the ADT in conjunction with Nangarhar University and the Director of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (DAIL) for the province. The basic premise was to provide hands-on training for university students involving several sessions over a couple of months, hire some of these students as extension agent interns, and then use these interns to teach various subjects and hands-on techniques to local farmers. The interns worked for both the DAIL and the ADT, and by the end of the first Kansas ADT mission, the interns, accompanied by the DAIL or his staff, were teaching classes each Sunday in different local communities. These “young professionals” were well received by local farmers.

Lessons Learned in Building Collaboration

The ADTs in Afghanistan still face many challenges in building collaboration with the many military, government, and civilian entities operating on the ground and engaged in reconstruction and economic development efforts. Most ADTs have at least a half dozen or more different entities working in their areas

of operations. Coordination among all these various military units, foreign and domestic government agencies, and civilian NGOs is challenging and efforts frequently overlap. A joint research project involving researchers from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point's Network Science Center and the Kansas National Guard, with involvement by university researchers and other National Guard ADT units, is working to address these challenges and find solutions.

ADTs have been operating in Afghanistan for several years, and their experiences point to some lessons in building collaboration to help achieve mission success. Gathering information on the lessons learned is part of the joint West Point–Kansas National Guard research project. Succeeding Kansas ADTs have successfully built on the following lessons learned by the first Kansas ADT.

Build relationships with other units and organizations in the area of operation

The first Kansas ADT managed to develop a strong relationship with the PRT and USAID staff operating in its area of operations. This relationship led the PRT and USAID to assist it in collaborating with personnel from USDA, which in turn, provided the ADT with access to USDA subject matter experts. Although the ADT could reach back to agriculture experts through its links with KSU, the relationship with USDA provided access to experts on the ground with the ADT. Other relationship-building lessons include the following:

- Collaboration that leads to strong relationships, continuity, and synchronization of effort is key to achieving mission goals.
- Building relationships requires routine and persistent interaction.
- In particular, building relationships with the Afghan people and with Afghan government officials at the national, provincial, and

district level is best accomplished through daily interaction.

- Some method of project management is vital when working in an interagency/intergovernmental/NGO mission area.
- The ADT itself must maintain team integrity, meaning all team members must contribute and often in more than one skill set.
- Development actions, public affairs (both local and at home) and relationships are exponentially more critical than military actions.

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Put a focus on Afghan participation

As a military unit operating in a foreign nation, ADTs face a greater challenge in winning over local support for mission success than does an NGO or even a foreign civilian government entity. Making ADT missions a collaborative effort with Afghan counterparts is critical for mission success. The ingredients for this success include:

- Determining which local Afghan leaders are the right leaders with whom to collaborate.
- Engaging local government and assisting in the development of local governance, which is an important component of reconstruction and development.
- Encouraging participation from the host country's future generation of young professionals and helping to empower them

in playing a leading role.

- Mentoring and involving local veterinary graduates to build an important local resource for agriculture development.

Develop a strategic communications plan

It is vital that ADTs communicate and share information with numerous other entities. Despite its importance, this can be very challenging because as military units, ADTs often store and share information on secure military networks that are not available to host country units or to civilian government and aid agencies. ADTs and the West Point–Kansas National Guard research project are addressing these information-sharing challenges.

Conclusion

A key lesson learned from many years of interaction with local communities during natural disaster response and recovery operations is that all successful operations start with a local focus that has community members and community leaders making decisions in prioritizing tasks, actions, and results. It is important to assist through advice, ask the right questions at the right time, and provide resources that either are not readily available or have been lost through the disaster. It is critical that the community determine where it is going, how it is going to get there, and how it will provide its share of the required resources. This process applies in all areas—security, governance, economics, and infrastructure. The ability of all partners (coalition, U.S. government, NGOs, and Afghans) to provide this kind of assistance in a coordinated manner will, over time, provide the outcome all desire—a nation that is self-sufficient, educated, and capable of providing a promising future for its citizens. The ability of all the entities involved in the operation to work together within the resource constraints of time and funding toward accomplishing the goal of self-sufficiency will determine how effective the operation will be. **IAJ**