

III. Afghanistan

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Background

In January 2006, the Afghanistan Compact and Interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy (I-ANDS) was released. It outlined the government's vision for reconstruction and development of the country in the medium to long term. The full Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) was launched in June 2008. The adoption of this programme represents an important transition from the interim framework established at the meeting in Bonn, Germany of major Afghan factions in December 2001.

The capacity of the national government is weak and has limited reach outside of Kabul. The country is currently facing increased threats from opium and the insurgency, increasing the concerns about corruption and amplifying popular discontent. These threats require short-term action, but it is clear from the recent experience of Afghanistan and other states in situations of fragility that long-term solutions will only come from comprehensive improvements in governance and service delivery, and the emergence of a stronger state that is accountable to its citizens (OECD, 2008). Initiatives like the Partnership for Democratic Governance (PDG) have an important role to play in helping to accelerate the development of core capacities and accountability within government, especially in the early phase of implementation of the ANDS.

Official Assistance and Aid Effectiveness

Official assistance to Afghanistan increased rapidly after 2001 with new commitments reaching USD 3.3 billion a year by 2005 (see Table 3.1). Support has remained at this level since then. Disbursements have also risen sharply and, since 2006, have been in the range of USD 2.5 billion a year (see Table 3.2). Development and technical assistance have emerged as the predominant forms of assistance. By 2006, new commitments of the latter amounted to about USD 2.8 billion a year.

The experience over the past six years has raised questions about the effectiveness of aid in Afghanistan. The bulk of the assistance has made use of expatriate expertise and has been concentrated on meeting the immediate security, humanitarian and reconstruction needs of the country. The contribution of these programmes to long-term capacity building has been mixed; there has been good progress in building capacities in some of the core areas of government and in several sectors, but results in other key areas have been disappointing. Various reviews of aid effectiveness in Afghanistan have drawn attention to the following concerns (OECD, 2006; Ministry of Finance, 2007; Byrd, 2008; Nixon, 2007; Waldman, 2008):

- ▶ Donors account for the bulk of the public resources that are available for development programmes in Afghanistan. Domestic revenue mobilisation is improving, but still remains low.
- ▶ Three-quarters of spending on development programmes has been undertaken by donors outside the framework of the national, provincial and district budgets, raising questions about government ownership of these programmes and their contributions to capacity building.
- ▶ The presence of more than 60 donors has led to fragmented, small-scale projects that do not fit into a sector strategy or programme framework, and that pay little attention to building local capacities that can be sustained. The lack of co-ordination has also led to uneven allocations of aid among the population, giving rise to frustration in the areas that have been overlooked.
- ▶ While there have been significant achievements over the past five years, the reality is that many functions for which the government is responsible are still performed by the international community, or not performed at all.
- ▶ Within the donor community the early reliance on “lead donor” arrangements for particular sectors was a serious impediment to reform in some sectors. In more recent years, these arrangements have largely been abandoned.
- ▶ Quick impact interventions by donors in response to particular local situations often have not given sufficient attention to the medium-term implications of such interventions. A common example has been the failure to take full account of the life-cycle costs of decisions and investments that turn out to be unaffordable and do not deliver expected results.
- ▶ The failure to achieve the desired results is due, in part, to conflicts between short-term political agendas and long-term state building processes. The latter have often been hindered by the acute short-term need for donors to respond to threats of insurgency, opium and popular discontent with interventions that were not built on collective ownership by the Afghan society. In other cases, the effectiveness of individual programmes has been jeopardised because donors did not take adequate account of gaps in the legal framework (*e.g.* land ownership issues).

Progress in improving aid effectiveness has been, and can be, achieved by harmonising donor involvement and aligning assistance to effective government-led national programmes. Notable examples include the Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS), implemented mainly by non-government providers, and the expansion of mobile telecommunications through competitive private sector development with regulation. The recent meeting of the High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness organized by the OECD and the World Bank may give impetus to the push for improved aid effectiveness in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Role of Technical Co-operation

Technical co-operation has accounted for almost 40% of the development assistance received by Afghanistan. During 2004-2006, new commitments averaged about USD 885 million a year. At the outset, many believed that gaps in government capacities could be bridged in 2-3 years. International

consultants on short-term contracts were brought in to train and coach their replacements while performing line functions. These assumptions proved to be overly optimistic. In many cases, the consultants were preoccupied with line responsibilities; the training and development of national staff capacities was minimal or non-existent. Moreover, the higher salaries and benefits offered by donors drew Afghan nationals away from the government and bid up the cost of scarce domestic talent.

A common view is that much of the technical assistance is not co-ordinated with the Afghan government and is “poorly co-ordinated among the donors themselves”(OECD, 2006, 10-13; Ministry of Finance, 2007, 11). A recent World Bank review of technical assistance concluded that “the widespread use of uncoordinated and non-strategically targeted technical assistance is neither fiscally nor politically sustainable.” (Michailof, 2007, 2)

Given the various categorisations used by donors to report their activities, it is difficult to determine the amount of their technical assistance that has been directed at building the capacities for core government functions and for particular sectoral programmes. A number of programmes have been successful in building capacities and strengthening governance: for example, increasingly reliable public financial management systems (PFMs) are in place, thanks in part to heavy infusions of temporary capacity provided by international firms (ADF, 2005; World Bank, 2008b). There has been some progress in reducing dependence on these expatriate services, but the Ministry of Finance recognises that further improvements are required in the PFM systems. Nonetheless, a widely held view within the government is that very little donor technical assistance has been directed specifically at building government capacities for programme delivery and for increased public accountability. The perception, therefore, is that ineffective technical support has contributed to the weakening of local ownership and leadership of the development agenda for the country and has inhibited efforts to build capacities within the national government.

Lessons Learned from Experience with Technical Assistance

As the government moves forward with the above-mentioned ANDS programme, a key question is whether continued large amounts of development and technical assistance can make a more effective contribution to strengthening service capacities and the accountability of the government. What then are the lessons from experience in Afghanistan that can contribute to successful technical assistance interventions in the future? A range of suggestions have emerged from recent reviews (Byrd, 2008).

- ▶ The experience with the Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS), microfinance, and other successful programmes demonstrates that sound national programmes can be developed and can achieve good development results.
- ▶ Although different models of the role of the state and service delivery have been used in the various sectors, the most important determinant of performance appears to have been the strength and cohesion of Afghan leadership in individual ministries. Cohesive, proactive government leadership at the ministry level is important for ensuring effective use of aid.
- ▶ Where there are severe capacity constraints, effective government leadership can buy-in capacity to oversee and administer programmes and contract out implementation to non-government entities. Building capacities for central procurement is an example.

- ▶ Technical assistance needs to be responsive to the requirements of ministry leadership, with foreign advisers reporting to ministry management—rather than to donors—and working as a cohesive team with ministry managers.
- ▶ With the translation of ANDS into a realistic programme for action over the next five years, international assistance should be aligned with and support national programmes, rather than relying on parallel, donor-executed programmes. Co-financing and pooled financing mechanisms can harmonise programme and sector assistance.
- ▶ Effective leadership at the ministerial level should be combined with a commitment to the government's stated goals and objectives in the sectors for which the ministry is responsible.
- ▶ There is a need for donors to provide larger amounts of assistance through government channels. The increasingly effective PFM system is playing an important role in ensuring that funds are utilised as programmed, thereby reducing the risk that funds are diverted or misused.
- ▶ Building on successful programmes is more effective than mandating success from the top. Successful programmes can be expanded, scaled-up, and as appropriate, replicated more widely.

One area of concern that has not been emphasised in the various reviews of aid effectiveness is the role of performance benchmarks that may be jointly agreed upon by government and donors at the design stage of a programme. To what extent do performance benchmarks have a role in the subsequent implementation of particular programmes? Under what circumstances might donors cut back or discontinue support for a programme that consistently fails to meet the agreed performance standards?

Lessons Learned: Implications for the PDG Agenda

Building capacities in Afghanistan is a long-term task that will require sustained support from the donor community for another decade or more. Afghanistan's experience over the past five years, as well as lessons from other states in situations of fragility, provide insights into how PDG resources may be deployed in Afghanistan in support of improved governance and public accountability. The guidelines for PDG initiatives indicate that for the immediate future at least, the substantive agenda of the PDG would focus on key governance functions that are typically the responsibility of national government: core legal services, revenue, tax, audit, customs, central procurement, central banking, budget execution and other core policy functions. A PDG programme could therefore concentrate on strengthening core functions of the executive branch of government and provide support for well-defined capacity-building programmes in one or two key sectors. The following principles could guide such a programme:

- ▶ Interventions undertaken by the PDG should be consistent with and supportive of the government's long-term objectives. The PDG programme should be built around an overall strategy for service delivery and capacity building for the country, as set out in the ANDS, rather than be undertaken as piecemeal responses to individual requests from the government.
- ▶ The programme should be linked to or included in the state budget to ensure adequate government input into its design and to promote Afghan ownership.⁵

Strengthening Core Functions of National Government

There are three specific areas in which the PDG may be able to make an important contribution: (i) support for the preparation of a comprehensive programme of technical support for service delivery and improved government accountability; (ii) public administration reform (PAR); and (iii) public finance management (PFM).

An important part of a viable capacity-building strategy would be the preparation of a comprehensive programme of technical support for service delivery and improved government accountability. The earlier-mentioned comprehensive ANDS statement of strategic objectives now needs to be translated into a specific set of prioritised programmes for the medium-term, along with the preparation of provisional capital and recurrent cost estimates for each programme. The programme should be built around the following five themes: (i) strengthening core functions of the executive branch of government; (ii) promoting selective capacity building in sectoral programmes of the national government; (iii) supporting the legislative and judicial branches of government; (iv) supporting capacity building at the sub-national level; and (v) offering technical support that strengthens the capabilities of the media and civil society. These programmes could then be incorporated into the state budget, or proposed for funding directly by donors, in a manner that takes full account of government and donor budget constraints and implementation capacities. The design work and costing could be provided by international technical inputs, but should be guided and managed by the Afghan leadership to ensure ownership. The PDG could consider support for the preparation and/or implementation of one or more of the above five core elements of the capacity-building programme.

In the case of PAR, the government recently embarked on a major reform of the civil service pay and grade structure, which is important for attracting and retaining quality human resources. Implementing this programme will be a challenge in the face of widespread patronage and corruption. Improved civil service performance and service delivery will also require further reforms in ministry roles, functions, structures and processes (World Bank, 2008a). There may be an important role for the PDG in these areas. One option could be support for the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission (IARCSC), the organisation that is mandated to lead civil service reform. Alternately, the PDG might provide support for change in one or two line ministries.

In the case of PFM, there has been good progress in improving control in budget execution over recent years, but a substantial agenda remains to be addressed (World Bank, 2008b).

- ▶ Capacity development in line ministries, as the executing agencies of expenditures, is critical. Compared with the progress in the Ministry of Finance, developments in most line ministries lag behind: for example, cash management and payment scheduling procedures in line ministries have not improved.
- ▶ There has been limited progress on internal audit, except in the Ministry of Finance. Internal audit is operational for most national government entities, but except in the Ministry of Finance, the work is not done to a recognised professional standard, and there is little follow-up on audit recommendations. Training of staff is required and most internal audit manuals are outdated and need to be revised based on current internal audit practices. The proposed Audit Law can lay the foundation for revised external audit rules based on international standards.
- ▶ Capacity building in public procurement is now underway, but should be accelerated so that line ministries can take greater responsibility for procurement activities. A particular

priority is improving procurement based on the new legal and procurement policy framework that has been put in place.

- ▶ To mitigate future fiscal risks that may result in significant contingent liabilities, the accounting and reporting of the municipalities and State-Owned Enterprises must also be strengthened through capacity-development programmes.

A PDG programme along these lines that results in sustainable improvements in capacity and accountability may bring two additional benefits. Tangible progress in building core capacities at the centre may increase the willingness of donors to channel a larger share of their aid resources through the state budget. It may also facilitate greater interaction between donors and government about the objectives, design and implementation of projects and programmes that continue to be financed by donors outside the framework of the state budget. Progress on these two fronts could then lead to the development of a combined sources budget that includes both government- and donor-funded activities, perhaps along the lines of the budget systems that were developed in Timor-Leste from 2002-2007.

Capacity building in selected sectors

The PDG guidelines indicate that support for some sector-specific functions may also be considered where there is considerable experience with contracting out. Although the national government has limited capacities to deliver services throughout the country, well-managed ministries have achieved considerable progress in building capacities and delivering services. Ministries lacking leadership and a cohesive management team have struggled and have achieved less progress; examples of the latter include the energy sector and most other areas of infrastructure, as well as urban services and agriculture. Considerable social protection has been provided under humanitarian assistance programmes, but without a strong capacity-building strategy or effective government programmes. Education has seen a big increase in access, especially for girls, but there are concerns about the quality of education that stem, in part, from weak teacher training programmes. Reliance on the traditional, highly centralised government service delivery model that includes teachers having the status of civil servants has also raised questions about fiscal sustainability, accountability and efficiency.

Should the PDG decide to provide interim technical support for one or two sectors, the design of such a programme could be built around two key objectives: (i) increase the capacity of the ministry or ministries responsible for the sector to deliver services to the intended beneficiaries; and (ii) strengthen the capacities of these ministries to co-ordinate donor activities within their sectors of responsibility.

Lessons Learned: Ensuring that National Government is More Accountable to Citizens

There has been very limited attention given by donors to strengthening external mechanisms that can ensure government accountability. A recent World Bank report says that public accountability is the least advanced element of the government's PAR strategy (World Bank, 2008a). While improved internal controls in government - such as better financial management - can strengthen public accountability, many successful states have recognised the importance of external controls on executive power, formally through the judiciary and parliament, and informally through the role of civil society and the media.

Support for the legislative and judicial branches of the state

Improved accountability requires that the national parliament and the justice system are strengthened. The National Assembly has begun to assert its role of oversight on executive power. Nonetheless, the development of this role faces a number of constraints: for example, stronger legislative capacity and skills in legislative methods and techniques are required in the Assembly, members are largely unfamiliar with the presentation of public financial management information, and there is no established system of scrutiny of public expenditure and response to the annual reports on the audit of government accounts by the Control and Audit Office.

Justice institutions are widely regarded as the least developed among the formal oversight organisations. Confidence in the formal justice system is low. Customary law is widely used throughout the country, and most disputes are settled in non-state forums. Customary law and informal justice systems are biased against women, who are not represented. Strengthening the court system will require transparency of the courts' operations and procedures, uniform application of law with predictable and credible decision-making, and improved capacity of the courts to deliver services and manage resources. The role of the judiciary, especially the Supreme Court, in enforcing the constitutionality of laws and regulations and reviewing the legality of administrative decisions needs to be strengthened.

If the PDG strategy is to concentrate on the capacity building of core functions within the executive branch of government, the programme will not necessarily lead to improved external oversight and accountability, unless it is complemented by other donor or state programmes. In these circumstances, should the PDG consider support for say, the legal system, and pave the way for greater donor support for these institutions?

Strengthening oversight capacities in the media and civil society

The oversight role of the media and civil society organisations (CSOs) also requires strengthening. Most CSO activities centre on project implementation rather than promoting public accountability. A majority of the population depends on radio for news and information. Accountability of government institutions has received marginal coverage in the media, with more than half of published information attributed to government sources. There is little contact and communication between the media and CSOs. Reporting by the media of the activities of the many *shuras*, associations, and NGOs is minimal. Moreover, these groups do not use the media to voice their concerns.

Timely and reliable information is essential for public accountability. In the case of Afghanistan, it can be argued that expectations of the populace have not been managed well by government or the donor community. Inflated expectations have been exacerbated by high-profile meetings, numerous high-level visits and public announcements of large amounts of assistance requested, available or pledged. This area of communications has not received enough attention. There has been fragmentation in communications, with little co-ordination. The consequence has been an increase in disappointed expectations among the populace. There is a clear need for the donor community and government to place greater emphasis on the publication of information about activities and programmes. Positive messages have not been emphasised strongly enough, nor repeated often enough to have a commensurate impact on perceptions.

Table 3.1. Annual Commitments of Donor Assistance to Afghanistan

Commitments (in USD millions)	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Development Assistance							
<i>Technical co-operation</i>	9.3	9.5	304.9	706.6	848.2	1,212.0	772.0
<i>Investment and other assistance</i>	25.0	64.1	282.3	1,074.6	1,474.0	1,293.0	2,072.6
<i>Sub-total</i>	34.3	73.6	587.2	1,781.2	2,322.2	2,505.0	2,844.6
Emergency relief and refugee support							
<i>Technical co-operation</i>	7.4	68.7	87.5	94.4	22.4	10.6	6.2
<i>Emergency assistance and support</i>	86.6	300.1	748.9	542.6	366.1	529.5	442.7
<i>Sub-total</i>	94.0	368.8	836.4	637.0	388.5	540.1	448.9
Other Assistance							
<i>Budget and commodity assistance</i>	3.9	6.7	133.9	22.6	157.3	241.3	28.5
<i>Debt relief</i>	-	-	44.1	-	-	-	-
<i>Donor administrative costs</i>	-	0.2	3.1	1.9	2.4	0.1	0.3
<i>Unallocated/unspecified</i>	0.3	2.3	6.9	13.3	4.0	6.4	2.0
<i>Sub-total</i>	4.2	9.2	188.0	37.8	163.7	247.8	30.8
Total							
<i>Technical co-operation</i>	16.7	78.4	395.1	810.4	880.5	1,223.6	779.5
<i>Other assistance</i>	115.8	373.2	1,216.5	1,645.6	1,993.9	2,069.3	2,544.8
<i>Total</i>	132.5	451.6	1,611.6	2,456.0	2,874.4	3,292.9	3,324.3
Share of Technical Co-operation (%)							
<i>In Development Assistance</i>	27.1	12.9	51.9	39.7	36.5	48.4	27.1
<i>In Total Assistance</i>	12.6	17.4	24.5	33.0	30.6	37.2	23.4

Table 3.2. Annual Disbursements of Donor Assistance to Afghanistan

Disbursements (in USD millions)	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Development Assistance					
<i>Technical co-operation</i>	167.0	76.5	97.9	1,039.4	867.0
<i>Investment and other assistance</i>	145.3	582.2	1,058.7	930.0	1,257.0
<i>Sub-total</i>	312.3	658.7	1,156.6	1,969.4	2,124.0
Emergency relief and refugee support					
<i>Technical co-operation</i>	86.6	77.5	10.4	8.7	9.4
<i>Emergency assistance and support</i>	455.7	299.2	303.1	331.9	353.6
<i>Sub-total</i>	542.3	376.7	313.5	340.6	363.0
Other Assistance					
<i>Budget and commodity assistance</i>	3.4	55.1	59.3	38.9	47.1
<i>Debt relief</i>	44.1	-	-	-	-
<i>Donor administrative costs</i>	0.3	1.6	2.1	1.0	0.9
<i>Unallocated/unspecified</i>	9.7	71.2	18.5	6.8	8.9
<i>Sub-total</i>	57.5	127.9	79.9	46.7	56.9
Total					
<i>Technical co-operation</i>	254.0	155.0	115.5	1,050.5	874.4
<i>Other assistance</i>	658.1	1,008.3	1,434.5	1,306.2	1,669.5
<i>Total</i>	912.1	1,163.3	1,550.0	2,356.7	2,543.9
Share of Technical Co-operation (%)					
<i>In Development Assistance</i>	53.5	11.6	8.5	52.8	40.8
<i>In Total Assistance</i>	27.8	13.3	7.5	44.6	34.4

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