



PEACEBUILDING: LESSONS FROM AFGHANISTAN

A new paradigm for post-conflict donor intervention was put at test in Afghanistan: adjusting to complex political, military and economic imperatives. One major lesson stands out: without a functioning justice system rebuilding a state after a conflict will not succeed.

After the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, Afghanistan received pledges for aid totalling 4.5 billion USD. A recent study, led by CMI, evaluates the humanitarian and reconstruction assistance from Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom in the period 2001 to 2005 (see last page for details). Aid to post-Taliban Afghanistan presented important new challenges. This was not just another humanitarian operation. Under continued conditions of conflict, donors have had to respond to both an urgent need for humanitarian and reconstruction assistance and the reunification and creation of a functioning democratic state. Objectives of humanitarian aid and development co-operation had to be combined with broad foreign and domestic policy agendas. Some of the donors actively participated in installing the new regime. It was politically important, therefore, to make sure that the new government was in the driver's seat leading the process towards democracy and market economy. However, the country lacked sufficient human and organisational resources to take this lead. What are the main lessons from this first phase of

donor intervention to build a new state in Afghanistan, and in reconciling disparate donor policy objectives?

A NEW PARADIGM FOR DONOR INTERVENTION

The aid intervention took place within a new paradigm that begun to emerge in the early 1990s and was dramatically reinforced with the 9-11-2001 attack: the need for a more integrated and comprehensive policy framework for aid in conflict situations. Whereas earlier interventions either addressed the humanitarian imperative of helping disaster victims or the poverty-related needs of economic and social development, the new paradigm for donor intervention rests on a complex set of political, humanitarian and military imperatives:

International political imperatives:

- The 'war' against terror.
- The prevention of large movements of refugees to donor countries.
- The struggle against organised international crime, including drugs trade.

National political imperatives:

- The introduction of democracy in the recipient country, often implying the creation of a new political culture.
- The promotion of human rights, including gender equality.

Economic imperatives:

- The creation of an open market economy,
- and a lean and efficient state.

The military imperative:

- The need to mobilise armed forces in civilian activities; securing peace and delivering humanitarian and development aid.

Donor interventions in Bosnia, Kosovo, Cambodia, East Timor and Iraq have faced similar complexities, and more cases are likely to follow. This brief presents 10 general lessons learned in Afghanistan that should be considered by international donors when intervening in similar situations.

1. THE RULE OF LAW: JOB NUMBER ONE

The breakdown of social norms following a violent conflict and a subsequent regime change harbours an inherent risk of corruption, political clientelism, and national and international organised crime. As a result, it is not enough to concentrate on creating the traditional



minimal prerequisites for a lean and efficient state. The establishment of an impartial, transparent and efficient justice sector must be addressed immediately. It is of prime importance to prioritise the rule of law and respect for human rights. The new justice sector must build on prevailing religious and customary laws, but also be in line with international legal norms. A legitimate and effective police force depends on a functioning judiciary.

2. EMPLOYMENT FOR EX-COMBATANTS

The Afghanistan example suggests that the strategy of co-opting potential militarily "spoilers of peace" into the new system, represents a risk of promoting the growth of crime. It weakened the new state's ability to reform governance and legal structures and reduced its legitimacy towards its citizens. To reduce "spoiler"-influence and crime employment opportunities for ex-combatants should be an immediate priority, limiting the numbers returning to violence as a survival strategy.

3. ENCOURAGE STATE-BUILDING FROM WITHIN

Rebuilding the state apparatus was of primary importance for the new regime, not least to maintain its support from and recognition by the international community. More importantly, however, the new regime must have legitimacy in the eyes of its own population. Experience from Afghanistan shows that local ownership and control can be overlooked in donor's

eagerness and political rush to portray the new regime as a new, independent, and worthy representative of the new nation. Ambitious state-building objectives that do not pay enough attention to the need for local capacity building may be detrimental to the viability of a new regime.

It may be harmful to state-building efforts if civil servants are identified with the former regime and thus perceived as illegitimate. At the same time, the new regime should make use of valuable human resources despite links to the ousted regime. New incumbents often lack the professional skills required and citizens may experience a long frustrating period without basic public services. In post-conflict situations with substantial influx of aid, donors have a tendency to assume that aid can compensate for the lack of management capacity within the regime. However, new regimes are prone to corruption and aid can distract processes of building a well-functioning state apparatus from within.

4. THINK LONG-TERM

The ambitious democratisation process set in motion in Afghanistan has succeeded in completing a rushed time table for elections, but, to become sustainable, it requires long-term efforts to build a national understanding of democratic governance and a continued debate on how this new political system might be improved. To move in this direction, training of the newly elected members of Parliament and the Provincial councils is

an immediate priority. Furthermore, long-term donor commitments to reconstruction and development should build on strategies involving:

- Systematic capacity building of civil servants, including introduction of new skills required.
- Promotion of a viable and articulate civil society which is able to represent the views of common people towards the new government and the international community.
- Agreed benchmarks for the rehabilitation and development process, allowing donors, the government and the civil society to jointly monitor and adjust the process.

5. MILITARY WORKS BEST AS PROVIDERS OF SECURITY

The overall rationale for the foreign military presence in crisis situations is that the military can fight spoilers who have not been co-opted into the power-holding coalition; enforce stability and extend government authority; and implement various civilian projects. The experience in Afghanistan is that military intervention worked best when armed forces stuck to its area of comparative advantage: provision of security.

Armed forces should, therefore, only embark on civilian activities upon request of humanitarian actors and in relation to small, quick impact projects. The chief exception is emergency situations, where the armed forces may be the only possible aid providers. Even so, one should avoid the pitfall of letting military considerations determine humanitarian and development action. Excessive use of military power can easily prove counterproductive in relation to peace enforcement.

6. BE AWARE OF TYPICAL AID DISTORTIONS

The difficulties in distribution of aid in insecure and conflict-ridden areas often lead to geographical distortions in public investments. This may in-turn fuel opposition against central government and increase the level of conflict. Because of limited ability to assess the development in areas away from the capital awareness of this problem may be limited within donor agencies. In Afghanistan, because the agricultural sector has not been prioritised, opium production or renewed labour migration to neighbouring countries remains the main avenue to survival for many rural Afghans.

A second distortion concerns the impacts of aid on a relatively limited market of services, goods and skilled manpower. Aid flows easily become accompanied by steep cost inflation and tough competition for limited staff resources, which harm the public sector.

7. INVOLVE EXPERIENCED NGOS

Donors should draw on NGOs' past project experiences, staff, networks and community acceptance and, in the early transition period, explore the possibility of their inclusion within government plans to assist in capacity development (instead of external consultants, as is currently the case). The aim should be to develop cooperation between NGOs and public institutions, while avoiding the creation of an NGO elite which out-competes the public sector for staff because of its better remuneration.

Government, together with international donors and the local NGO community, need to find ways to regulate NGOs; to foster self-reliance and at least partly independence of donor funding, to develop profiles of NGOs to avoid misuse of the NGO concept, and to establish mechanisms for self-regulation. One simple question to be addressed is: what can NGOs do better? Some donors have prioritised the military rather than their own national NGOs to deliver humanitarian assistance, seemingly disregarding the lack of relevant experience in the military.

8. CONSIDER THE ROLE OF THE DIASPORA

Before a prolonged conflict leads to an international crisis response, often millions of people have become refugees. While the vast majority of these generally remain in neighbouring areas, a substantial minority makes its way to more distant and more affluent countries. With immigration increasingly a key issue for their electorates, European governments tend to impose stricter asylum and immigration rules. This leads donors to prioritise interventions that ensure:

- Refugees remain in areas neighbouring their country or region of origin;
- Refugees return as soon as possible, from neighbouring areas and from Europe (including financial incentives);
- Rejected asylum seekers are returned to their country of origin, although this may be difficult when identification and security concerns are respected.

While some Diaspora return to attractive positions in their country of origin, the prevailing tendency is for refugees who have reached affluent countries to remain there. Financial incentives seem to be relatively ineffective in this context. From a capacity building point of view, this is regrettable since refugees often possess skills that are desperately needed in their country of origin. However, allowing them to stay on for a limited period of time to obtain higher education or specialised job experience could help to generate valuable human resources for the home country.



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Financial remittances is an important additional source of income for their country of origin, as numerous studies of remittances in post-conflict situations have established. The Diaspora, moreover, may visit their country of origin and undertakes construction and business activities. In addition, the creation of a new 'local, global elite' has important societal effects, defining young people's aspirations and encouraging further emigration. Recognising the opportunities and limitations of the Diaspora will remain a major challenge. Further research and increased understanding of the complex pros and cons is needed in order to make use of the human resources people in Diaspora represent.

9. DO NOT FORGET INEQUALITIES

In a complex and often initially chaotic post-conflict situation, where high priority is given to political and market economy imperatives, the needs of the poor and vulnerable sections of the population are often neglected.

In Afghanistan aid has been unevenly distributed between regions and communities. The Afghan state is quite centralised and democracy, development and security have not reached far beyond the borders of Kabul. Women and women's rights, allegedly an important reason for the international intervention, have been neglected, especially outside Kabul. Indicators showing that the female suicide rate has increased are a sign of how desperate the situation is for many women, coupled with a deep felt disillusionment after seeing that high hopes are not being met.

10. IMPROVE THE KNOWLEDGE BASE

There is a need for strengthening the knowledge base and analytical capacity to deal with complex aid interventions, like in the case of Afghanistan. Aid agencies must have sufficient numbers and adequately experienced staff. Donor countries must improve their systems of knowledge management, building networks with relevant external resources, and accumulating lessons from earlier interventions, also those that have been run by other actors, such as NGOs. Research must be undertaken to establish facts and inform decision making processes. There is a need for a wider framework of policy coordination involving all relevant sector agencies dealing with foreign affairs, development, humanitarian aid, defence and immigration.