

# Aid, Conflict and Peacebuilding in Afghanistan

What Lessons  
Can Be Learned?

Haneef Atmar and Jonathan Goodhand

# INTERNATIONAL ALERT

International Alert is an independent non-governmental organisation which analyses the causes of conflict within countries, enables mediation and dialogue to take place, sets standards of conduct that avoid violence and helps to develop the skills necessary to resolve conflict non-violently. International Alert conducts policy-orientated research and advocacy aimed at promoting sustainable peace.

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## **Note to Reader**

**This report summarises and comments on the status of international aid engagement in Afghanistan prior to the events of 11th September 2001. Evidently, the picture has now changed. At the time of writing, significant financial commitments had been made by the donor community to support post-conflict humanitarian assistance and long-term social and economic reconstruction, both in Afghanistan and in the wider Central Asia region. In the light of these changed circumstances, International Alert and the report's authors believe that the issues and recommendations in this report have, if anything, greater relevance than before, if the promised aid is to be effective. International Alert confidently expects that by recognising past failures, and by learning and applying the lessons of pre-September 11th engagement, the positive impact of the international community's long-term engagement in Central Asia can be assured.**

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## Glossary of Terms

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ANGO	Afghan Non-Governmental Organisation
APB	Afghanistan Programming Board
APP	Associated Press of Pakistan
ASG	Afghanistan Support Group
ATF	Afghanistan Task Force
ATTA	Afghan Transit Trade Agreement
BAAG	British Agencies Afghanistan Group
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CARE	Co-operation for American Relief Everywhere
CDA	Collaborative for Development Action
CPAU	Co-operation for Peace and Unity Network
CPE	Complex Political Emergency
DACAAR	The Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees
DfID	Department for International Development
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IIGA	Interim Islamic Government of Afghanistan
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
ICRC	International Committee for the Red Cross
IDP	Internally displaced person
ISI	Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence
JUI	Jamiat-ul Ulema-i Islam
MSF	Medicins Sans Frontiers
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NWFP	North-West Frontier Province
OIC	Organisation of the Islamic Conference
PDPA	People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan
RC	International Red Cross
RC	Red Crescent Movement
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNSMA	United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WFP	World Food Programme

## FOREWORD ON EVENTS SINCE SEPTEMBER 11th

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The dynamics of the Afghan conflict have been transformed as a result of recent events. In the space of three months the negative military and political stalemate of the previous three years has been shifted. From being an 'orphaned' conflict, Afghanistan has become the focus of world attention. For the first time in the history of the war there appears to be the collective will and the promise of sufficient resources to get to grips with the dynamics of the conflict.

The chain of events which culminated in the fall of the Taliban started when, on September 9th, Ahmad Shah Massoud, a leading military commander of the United Front, was assassinated by suicide bombers in North Eastern Afghanistan. Attacks two days later on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon, allegedly by Al Qaida focused world attention on Afghanistan. Military strikes began on October 7th with the twin objectives of destroying Al Qaida's networks and undermining the Taliban's military capability.

On 9th November, Mazar-i-Sharraf fell to the United Front which was quickly followed by Kabul, the capital and the main provincial cities, with Kandahar being the last major centre to fall in early December. This marked the military and political defeat of the Taliban. The security situation, however, remained fluid and uncertain. At the time of writing Osama Bin Laden, many of his foreign fighters and the Taliban leadership, including the leader Mullah Omar had not been captured. War-lords from the pre-Taliban years have re-emerged and established themselves as de facto power holders in many areas. Tensions between Pakistan and India have increased following an attack on the Indian parliament on 13th December by radical Islamic groups thought to have bases in Pakistan. Furthermore, there is uncertainty over whether the 'war on terrorism' will be extended to include other 'rogue states' such as Iraq and Somalia. In addition to the security and political crisis there is a profound humanitarian crisis. The World Food Programme has estimated that between five to seven million people are in danger of starvation during the winter months due to a combination of factors; including a three year-old drought and internal displacement resulting from military activity, which has in turn prevented effective aid delivery.

Following talks in Bonn an Interim Authority, led by Hamed Karzai, came into power on 22nd December. This will be in place for six months until a loya jirga (Grand Council) decides on the composition of a Transitional Authority, which will hold power until elections take place within two years. Discussions are also taking place, led by UNDP and the World Bank, with the aim of developing a long-term reconstruction plan for Afghanistan.



## PROSPECTS

While there is room for cautious optimism given the current international alignment behind the peace agreement, a broad-based government and a reconstruction package, this optimism should be tempered by a realistic assessment of the task ahead. The underlying causes and dynamics of the conflict have yet to be addressed. These include the competing agendas of regional powers, the continuing Talibanisation of Islamic groups in Central and Southern Asia (in spite of the demise of the Taliban), an expanding war economy, the crisis of states within the region and deepening poverty. Unless these interlocking crises are addressed, violent conflicts will continue to be a feature of an extremely volatile regional conflict system.

Winning the peace therefore necessitates an approach which addresses root causes and entails a transition from peacemaking to peacebuilding. Peace processes elsewhere have often not been sustained as key actors have failed to look beyond the peace settlement. Evidently, peace involves more than simply ending the fighting, and peacebuilding must involve a debate around what kind of peace should be built: How is it defined? Who is involved in this debate?

Experience from elsewhere (and the lessons of past failures in Afghanistan) suggest that these debates should be as inclusive as possible – peace processes which marginalise groups in society are likely to generate grievances which lead to renewed conflict.

Given the deep-seated nature of the regional conflict system, there is unlikely to be a smooth transition from war to peace in Afghanistan. The most likely scenario, in our view, is chronic political instability for a number of years to come. In many 'post conflict' settings there has been a shift from militarized violence to wide spread social violence, as has been the case for instance in South Africa. The worst case scenario (apart from a major armed confrontation between Pakistan and India) would be a return to the warlordism of the mid-1990s. There are indications that this is already occurring with war lords establishing their power bases and reports of road blocks, robberies and the looting of aid in a number of areas.

Which scenario is acted out will depend to a great extent on whether international engagement is sustained and whether it is the right kind of engagement. In the past, international action has often been part of the problem rather than the solution. It has been half-hearted, unco-ordinated, often one-sided and has frequently created the wrong kinds of incentives. Continued support by the international community for a UN-led peacebuilding process is essential. If Western powers are not in this for the long haul, and international attention moves on, the competing interests of neighbouring powers and the negative dynamic of the war economy will reassert themselves. The track record of the international community is poor in terms of the gap between the promise and the delivery of reconstruction packages.

Even if international attention is sustained, it must be the right kind of engagement. There are dangers that a major injection of aid resources into a conflictual and resource-scarce environment will exacerbate tensions and renew the cycle of violence. Aid actors should avoid at all costs the mistake of recreating the Afghan rentier state, in which a small group of 'shareholders' benefit from the peace dividend.

## IMPLICATIONS

This report emphasises the contingent, complex and historically rooted nature of the Afghan conflict. We also highlight the past failures of international engagement. The international community has limited understanding of why states collapse, and even less about how to put them back together again. The need for realism and humility should therefore be emphasised – international action cannot engineer long-term peace, but the right kinds of intervention may increase the probability of this happening.

Although our focus has been primarily on the international community, we recognise that the key actors are the Afghans themselves. International support should be geared towards creating the pre-conditions which enable legitimate representatives of the Afghan people to make decisions about their future without external interference.<sup>1</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this report to map out in any detail the short-term and long-term priorities. However, all forms of intervention – whether in the security, political, socio-economic or humanitarian spheres – need to apply the following peacebuilding principles:

**Provide sustained support:** The key question is, are the Western powers in this for the long haul? Can the diplomatic and political momentum be sustained? We are not talking here about two year programmes but a decade or more of sustained and consistent support – politically and financially. In 1992 there was transient support for an Afghan Interim Government. Similarly, in 1993 the UN developed comprehensive reconstruction plans. But neither initiative stood a chance without coherent and robust international engagement. The major powers must make concrete commitments for long-term support, which they should be held accountable to.

**Tackle underlying causes:** Whilst the war has changed over time, leading to new dynamics and incentive systems, the central task remains the reconstitution of a legitimate state with a monopoly of force. It was the crisis in the legitimacy and capacity of the state which led to the outbreak of war in the first place and, if unaddressed, is likely to contribute to renewed violence. Short-term priorities should not distract attention from the central task of rebuilding institutions (a political transition), transforming the war economy into a peace economy and dealing with the legacy of violence (a socio-economic transition).

**Address the regional dynamics:** Our analysis has highlighted the regionalized nature of the Afghan conflict, and peacebuilding strategies must be developed within a regional framework. The right kinds of incentives and disincentives must be applied to ensure that the regional powers do not continue to pursue short-term, self-interested strategies in relation to Afghanistan. Robust support for attempts to resolve neighbouring conflicts (eg. Kashmir) and to prevent renewed or emergent conflicts (eg Tajikistan, Ferghana Valley) should be provided. This must be complemented by efforts to address the conditions which continue to create instability in the region including state crises, Talibanisation and growing poverty.

**A comprehensive approach:** Previous efforts at peacemaking and peacebuilding lacked coherence – policies tended to undercut one another, creating the wrong types of incentives/disincentives. Efforts must be directed towards developing a common analysis, leading to a comprehensive and coherent peacebuilding framework. This does not mean repeating the mistakes of the Strategic Framework which attempted to create a monolithic management framework. There needs to be room for separate but complementary approaches and initiatives. However the overall vision and rationale of the SF remains valid – a patchwork of unrelated and unco-ordinated

interventions in the name of 'independence' and 'flexibility' is simply not good enough. The UN agencies and NGOs must be prepared to sacrifice a level of sovereignty to ensure better co-ordination. There will be new actors entering the field (not least the Afghan state, but also new international donors), leading to overlapping co-ordination and accountability mechanisms. Strong UN leadership and particularly the role of Brahimi will be central, as will the development of a centralised funding mechanism, perhaps in the form of a Strategic Recovery facility.

**Conflict sensitivity:** All forms of assistance should be designed and implemented so that they are sensitive to the dynamics of conflict and peace. Peacebuilding is not necessarily synonymous with development; the wrong kind of development may be conflict producing. Conflict sensitivity is likely to mean a range of things and could include: developing the capacity to conduct high quality analysis; monitoring the distributional effects of aid (particularly impacts on inter-group tensions), building in ownership and inclusiveness to aid programmes, developing 'do no harm' and peace and conflict impact assessment (PCIA) tools, disseminating information through the media about peacebuilding efforts.

**Accountability, ownership and learning:** Our previous analysis highlighted the lack of accountability and learning as systemic problems within the international system. In the rush to establish programmes and profile, there is a danger that agencies will not place a sufficient premium on understanding the context or reflecting on lessons from the past. The Strategic Monitoring Unit (SMU) established in 2000 to improve learning and accountability should be a central player, but it is likely to be sidelined by new and more well-resourced actors. We recommend that sufficient political and financial backing be provided to the SMU so that it has the profile and capacity to ensure that learning and accountability are built into the aid effort from the beginning. We have already pointed to the dangers of a small group of 'shareholders' being the main beneficiaries of the potential peace dividend. Donors need to develop high standards of accountability and transparency for themselves. Similarly they must set clear standards in terms of governance to ensure that the new Afghan state is accountable and responsive to its citizens.

This paper focuses on aid, conflict and peacebuilding in Afghanistan. It examines the history of humanitarian assistance (HA), maps out some of the key actors and main characteristics of the aid system, and analyses the interaction between aid provision and the dynamics of violent conflict. In particular, it asks whether and how HA can support efforts to promote conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The report is one in a series of four working papers which consist of three country studies (Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Liberia) and a synthesis report that provides a comparative analysis and overall recommendations for aid actors.

Afghanistan represents a potent example of the challenges and dilemmas facing the international community in the so-called 'new world disorder'. Neither an inter-state war nor a classic civil war, the Afghan conflict has moved through several phases and might now be characterised as part regional proxy war and part civil war. After more than twenty years of fighting leading to over one and a half million dead, mass displacement and the break down of the institutions of state and civil society, Afghanistan appears to be no closer to a resolution of the conflict.

The humanitarian aid programme over the last two decades has constituted a major part of the international response to the Afghan crisis. There has however, compared to many other protracted crises, been limited research and writing on humanitarianism in Afghanistan. This report represents an attempt to highlight some of the experiences and lessons from Afghanistan which have wider relevance and could usefully inform current debates and attempts to improve humanitarian practice in war zones.

The report is divided into the following five sections:

## **I. History of the Afghan Conflict and the Diplomatic and Humanitarian Response**

An historical overview is provided of the Afghan conflict, which highlights its complex regionalised and enduring nature. It is argued that in the post Cold War phase of the conflict, economic agendas have become increasingly important as the war economy has expanded, and this in turn has had a destabilising effect on economies and politics in the region.

The United Nations has played the lead role as peacemaker in the region, but has experienced limited success due, in the main, to a lack of concerted international support and the 'spoiler' role played by neighbouring powers. These problems were compounded by the limitations of traditional diplomacy in a constantly changing environment characterised by multiple, 'free wheeling' elements who were often unaffected by diplomatic sticks and carrots.

The humanitarian response to the conflict has matched the waxing and waning of international interest in Afghanistan. During the Cold War years, aid was the non-lethal component of the war against communism. In the post Cold War period, Western interest declined and humanitarianism became the primary form of international engagement. In recent years, the Taliban, narcotics and terrorism have put Afghanistan back on the map leading to a new foreign policy consensus. Humanitarian assistance is very much part of this emerging consensus, and with the advent of the

Taliban there has been a 're-politicisation' of aid as Western donors have attempted to place new conditions on humanitarian assistance linked to human rights criteria and behavioural change within the Taliban.

## 2. Mapping the Aid System

An overview of the main aid actors and forms of assistance are outlined. The majority of aid provided to Afghanistan continues to be short-term relief assistance. There is limited, long-term donor funding and particularly in recent years, donors have been reluctant to support capacity building activities in the belief that this may legitimise or strengthen the capacities of the Taliban regime.

The UN-led Strategic Framework (SF) and Principled Common Programming (PCP) processes have been given mixed assessments by those involved. Some argue that they represent an innovative attempt to develop a more coherent approach to Afghanistan, which overcomes the historical disconnection between the political and humanitarian responses. However, in practice the focus has almost solely been on the humanitarian strategy with almost nothing being done to develop a robust political track. 'Coherence' in practice has meant that humanitarian assistance should be coherent with the political agendas of western powers. Political agendas, it is argued by aid workers, are a corrupting influence on aid as assistance is no longer provided on the basis of humanitarian need but on political agendas determined in Washington, Moscow or London. To a great extent aid has become the primary policy instrument because political leaders are unwilling to get to grips with the political dynamics of the conflict.

Dealing with the Taliban has presented the aid community with the challenge of engaging with the "unlike-minded". Taliban policies relating to terrorism, human rights, gender, international humanitarian law, drugs and pursuit of a military solution are fundamentally incompatible with the world view and strategic interests of the international community. Aid has been used as one of the primary instruments to encourage behavioural change within the Taliban. However, confrontational conditionalities and political pressures on aid workers have, by and large, proved counter-productive.

## 3. Humanitarian Assistance and Peacebuilding

Two broad approaches to conflict reduction and peacebuilding amongst aid donors and operational agencies are identified: **Working in Conflict** and **Working on Conflict**. The former relates to agencies attempting to develop a conflict-sensitive and principled approach to delivering humanitarian assistance. The latter relates to agencies with an explicit conflict reduction/peacebuilding agenda. Aid agencies have focused on developing programmes which are more principle-centred and sensitive to peace and conflict dynamics. Few, however, have adopted an approach which involves working more explicitly 'on conflict'. Initiatives with peacebuilding objectives tend to be quite small-scale and disparate.

Donors and operational agencies have a limited understanding of the impact of aid, both in terms of achieving its immediate objectives, and its wider impact on conflict and peace. The lack of strong contextual analysis continues to prevent the development of more intelligent approaches from donors and aid agencies.

The overbearing influence of donors on the aid system comes out very clearly in Afghanistan. The lack of downwards accountability is a systemic problem that needs to be tackled. Since NGOs have moved increasingly towards service delivery, relying on official aid flows, their ability to conduct independent analysis and challenge donor positions has been eroded. This 'crisis of conformity' within the NGO sector also means that Afghan voices are not sufficiently heard and accounted for in aid policy and programming.

#### **4. Case Studies of Humanitarian Action in Practice**

Two case studies are described and analysed:

Case-study 1: WFP Kabul Bakery Project: A food distribution programme for vulnerable groups in Kabul.

Case-study 2: Norwegian Church Aid Peacebuilding Programme: A developmental programme involving peacebuilding and capacity development of Afghan NGOs.

The two case studies are illustrative of the political and operational constraints on aid agencies in Afghanistan, whether they are working 'in' or 'on' conflict. They also highlight the importance of a pragmatic approach which involves a heightened sensitivity to conflict dynamics and an ability to adapt responses to changing contexts.

#### **5. Conclusions and Recommendations**

It is argued that humanitarian aid cannot be viewed in isolation from wider international policies towards Afghanistan. The over-riding policy response from the Western powers in the post Cold War years has been either one of strategic withdrawal and containment or an aggressive single issue focus. The focus on excluding, rather dealing with a 'pariah state', is a short-sighted policy based on a poor analysis of the situation. It is not possible to ring fence the problem. The long-term costs of not engaging have not entered the calculations of Western governments, or at least not sufficiently to change the current policy of strategic disengagement.

Aid by default has therefore become the main policy instrument by which the international community engages with Afghanistan. It is argued that policy coherence has little meaning in practice if there is no long-term political or economic strategy to address the underlying dynamics of the Afghan conflict. A robust track one process and a substantial development package are an absolute precondition for a meaningful peacebuilding process in Afghanistan. Humanitarian aid cannot by itself create the preconditions for peace.

Recommendations are divided into those for (1) International governments who have an important influence on the formulation of donor policy, (2) Aid donors and (3) Operational agencies who influence how donor policy is implemented in practice.

##### **5.1.1 Recommendations to Governments**

##### **Engage with carrots, as well as sticks**

Sanctions, missile diplomacy and aid conditionalities fail to get to grips with the political dynamic of a complex, multi-layered conflict system. There is a need to rethink current sanction regimes and explore how they might be complemented by providing positive incentives for peace. Current policies on drugs for instance focus on tightening controls, but not on providing viable alternative livelihoods to poor farmers. The international community needs to take a system-

wide and regional approach. We support recent recommendations that UNSMA should explore with Afghan actors the options for institution building and reconstruction and the international conditions for assistance.<sup>2</sup>

### **Provide long-term and sustained support**

International and neighbouring powers have based their policies towards Afghanistan on short-term, expedient interests. This has often backfired on these actors, particularly since Afghanistan has become a major exporter of drugs and radical Islam. Afghanistan requires long-term and sustained support in the interests of structural stability. International and regional governments must develop joint strategies based on the long-term interests of the region, rather than short-term, self-interested agendas.

### **Develop a more balanced approach**

The current response is unbalanced with its focus on aid conditionalities as a substitute for robust and sustained political action. Different donor governments and different policy instruments tend to undermine one another and even within the UN, the Security Council, UNSMA and UNOCHA are pursuing three mutually conflicting policies.<sup>3</sup>

It may be time to revisit the original objectives of the Strategic Framework and examine how greater complementarity can be developed between different policy instruments. Aid can play a supportive role within a wider response, but it should complement rather than lead a peacebuilding process

## **5.1.2 Recommendations to International Donors**

### **Develop systems of consultation and accountability**

Accountability within the international response system is a systemic problem. Mechanisms need to be developed to ensure that Afghan voices are heard and that there is much greater downwards accountability and transparency within the aid system.

This problem might be rectified by examining the potential of an aid ombudsman, with the setting of standards and codes of conduct and a complaints procedure. More work should be done to develop a rating system for assessing the quality of aid and to provide comparative analysis of donor performance. Finally, mechanisms should be developed which ensure much greater public consultation with Afghans, both inside and outside Afghanistan.

### **Strengthen analysis and learning**

Donor and agency analysis has improved, but more value needs to be attached to developing understanding; adequate time and resources should be allocated for this purpose. Coherent approaches require a more coherent and joint analysis.

Donors should be prepared to pay for better analysis by providing resources for pre-project and post project assessments. They should also allocate more money to give staff adequate time to generate and share lessons. Finally, more resources should be allocated to system wide evaluations, which put an emphasis on learning rather than on making funding decisions. The Strategic Monitoring Unit could represent an opportunity to put some of these ideas into practice; we would strongly recommend that it be seen as a learning resource for the aid community, rather than a watchdog or monitor.

## **Develop internal and external capacities**

The sheer lack of manpower is a major constraint for most donor agencies. Unless donors take Afghanistan more seriously – and this means putting more people on the job – none of these recommendations can be put into practice. A related problem is a lack of deep regional expertise. Careers in aid are often too shallow, involving frequent moves from one ‘hot spot’ to the next. Donors should encourage, within their own organisations and their partners, the development of a cadre of regional specialists with deep experience and understanding of the South and Central Asian region.

## **Develop more flexible approaches**

Donors need to look at new funding mechanisms. Agencies are continually trying to develop longer-term approaches, but with the wrong kind of funding. There is a need for donors to develop more flexible, long-term funding, which enables agencies to make longer-term commitments to communities and develop more innovative approaches. This may mean rethinking standard operating procedures that have been applied in other contexts. The World Bank, for example, could reconsider its ‘watching brief’ and support a proactive investment package in Afghanistan.

### **5.1.3 Recommendations to Operational Agencies**

#### **Develop conflict-sensitive approaches**

Agencies should continue to work on developing intelligent and conflict-sensitive approaches. We have argued for a pragmatic approach involving an ability to respond flexibly, match responses to changing contexts and to grasp opportunities. More work should be done on developing monitoring and evaluation systems which analyse the interactions between aid and the dynamics of peace and conflict.

#### **Strengthen capacity development activities**

Agencies have made more progress in recent years in the area of service delivery than in the area of capacity building. The unhelpful (and politically driven) distinction between relief and development activities should be challenged. Whilst recognising the real constraints, there are enough examples of successful capacity building with local government, Afghan NGOs and community-based organisations that could be learnt from and used to develop a more systematic approach.

#### **Strengthen advocacy work**

Aid agencies should develop the capacity to conduct independent analysis and use that analysis to challenge the policy consensus on Afghanistan. It is recognised that aid agencies are doing this, but in a rather piecemeal and often reactive manner. A more strategic, joined-up and proactive approach is required in which aid agencies draw upon their ‘on the ground’ knowledge to challenge policies that are being formulated in Geneva, New York, Moscow or London. Aid agencies could also develop a more proactive approach in engaging with the media to challenge negative stereotypes of Afghanistan and Islam, which in turn have an important influence on policy formulation.



# Introduction

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This report represents a contribution to a wider International Alert study that explores the role of humanitarian assistance (HA) in areas of violent conflict.<sup>4</sup> This is one of three case studies which aim to contribute to and develop current understandings of the nature and impact of humanitarian interventions on the dynamics of violent conflict and peace. More specifically, it addresses the question of whether HA can contribute to long-term stability and peace. Currently there are broadly two schools of thought on this issue. First, the ‘humanitarian maximalists’ argue that agencies need to expand their mandates to address the underlying causes of complex political emergencies (CPEs). Conflict reduction and peacebuilding are the ‘missing ingredients’ that need to be mainstreamed into humanitarian policy and practice. Second, the ‘humanitarian minimalists’ argue for a return to traditional ‘pure’ humanitarianism, based on the Red Cross principles and international humanitarian law. It is argued that a ‘back to basics’ approach is the most appropriate, realistic and honest approach in situations that require political solutions from state and military actors.

Afghanistan was chosen as a case study as it helps bring these debates into focus. The conflict currently lacks empirical studies exploring both the potential for, and the practical constraints on, a more expansive approach to HA. Afghanistan is a country that has been under-researched, which is surprising since it represents a potent example of the challenges and dilemmas facing the international community in the so-called ‘new world disorder’. Neither an inter-state war nor a classic civil war, the Afghan conflict has moved through several phases and might now be characterised as part regional proxy war and part civil war. After more than twenty years of fighting leading to over one and a half million dead, mass displacements and the breakdown of the institutions of state and civil society, Afghanistan appears to be no closer to a resolution of the conflict.

Since the early 1980s HA has constituted an important part of the international response to the Afghan conflict. Delivering HA to Afghanistan over the last two decades has provided the international community with a variety of challenges and experiences which have wider relevance. These include:

- co-ordination of a major relief effort in a collapsed state context
- delivery of relief to the world’s biggest caseload of refugees, in camps that became a rear base for militant groups
- implementation and monitoring of semi-clandestine cross border operations
- negotiating access with competing warlords
- politicisation of aid by state and non-state actors
- achieving gender equity in an environment where such principles are systematically denied
- attempts to develop more co-ordinated and coherent approaches through a UN Strategic Framework process

There is evidently a great deal of rich empirical material to be mined from Afghanistan. In some respects, it illustrates many of the worst aspects of the international response to violent conflict and in other respects some of the most innovative and 'cutting edge'. It offers both positive and negative scenarios from which lessons can be learnt. There are perhaps few other places where the constraints have been so great or the clash between theory and practice quite so jarring.

This study was conducted over a six month period in 2000 and 2001, involving field work in Afghanistan and Pakistan and a UK-based desk survey. It has drawn extensively upon a DFID-funded research project conducted by the University of Manchester/INTRAC entitled, 'The contribution of NGOs to peacebuilding in complex emergencies', in addition to a number of recent studies of aid in Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup> It also incorporates learning generated from several related International Alert research projects on HA and conflict impact assessment.

The paper is structured as follows: In Chapter 1, we provide an historical analysis of the Afghan war and diplomatic and humanitarian responses to the conflict. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the aid system in Afghanistan, mapping out the key actors and the defining features of the system. Chapter 3 analyses humanitarian assistance through a conflict reduction and peacebuilding lens and maps out a number of emerging policy positions and responses. In Chapter 4, we analyse two case studies of humanitarian action in practice and attempt to draw out some wider lessons for policy. Finally in Chapter 5, in the light of our previous analysis, we outline our key conclusions and provide a number of tentative recommendations in terms of donor policy and practice.

# Chapter One: History of the Afghan Conflict and the Diplomatic and Humanitarian Response

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## 1.1 Background on Afghanistan

Afghanistan is largely a mountainous country situated at the Western edge of the Himalayan massif. The country consists of six major ethnic groups: The Pashtuns, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkomans, Hazaras and Baluch. Although Islam has been a unifying factor, there are tensions, particularly between the Sunni Muslim majority and the Shia Muslim minority. Agriculture is the predominant activity and in 1978, the year before the Soviet invasion, an estimated 85% of the population lived in rural areas.<sup>6</sup>

Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world; it was ranked 170 out of 174 in the 1995 UNDP's Human Development Index. Subsistence takes place within an economy dominated by war and under a collapsed state unable to provide basic services for its population. The conflict has led to the loss of nearly one and a half million lives and the displacement of roughly eight million people.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 1: Vital Statistics**

Total population:	20.1 million
Life expectancy:	43 years
Literacy rate:	Men 45%    Women 13%
Under 5 mortality rate:	257 per 1,000 births
Infant mortality rate:	165 per 1,000 births
Access to safe drinking water:	Rural 5%    Urban 39%

Source: UN 1998 consolidated appeal

## 1.2 The Emergence and Phases of the Afghan Conflict

The history, causes and dynamics of the Afghan conflict have been analysed more extensively elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> An analysis of the Afghan conflict should be based upon an understanding of the history of state formation and state-society relations in Afghanistan. The legitimacy of the Afghan state has always been shaky.<sup>9</sup> In its present form, Afghanistan originated when the great powers drew its borders to create a buffer between the British and Russian empires. Like other buffer states, its identity has reflected the relations of force and strategic needs of the imperial powers, rather than the political or social structures within its borders.<sup>10</sup>

The Afghan state that developed in the first half of the twentieth century was centralised but weak and dependent on external resources. Its power was circumscribed by the traditionalist power structures in rural areas; conflict between rural and urban elites is a recurring feature in Afghan history. The contradictions inherent in the process of state formation produced a growing radicalism, which by the early 1970s had resulted in the emergence of the socialist and Islamist movements. These became the contending forces in the Afghan conflict.<sup>11</sup>

The conflict is deeply rooted in Afghan history. This is often not sufficiently appreciated by commentators who begin their analysis in 1979 with the outbreak of the war. As illustrated in Table I, the Afghan war can be viewed as having four main periods since 1979. The table also maps out the main characteristics of the humanitarian response and attempts at conflict resolution during these four periods.

**Table I The Phases of the Afghan Conflict and the International Response**

CONFLICT PHASE	MILITARY/POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS	HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE	PEACEMAKING/PEACEBUILDING INITIATIVES
1979 - 1988: Jihad in a cold war context.	Afghan rural resistance, supported by USA, Saudi and Pakistan, fights Soviet-backed Kabul regime; Geneva agreements of 1988 pave the way for Soviet withdrawal; Sunni parties set up an Interim government from which Shia parties are excluded.	Commissariat for Afghan refugees co-ordinates the assistance programme in Pakistan; NGOs start aid programmes in refugee camps in liaison with the Peshawar-based seven party alliance; Cross border NGOs provide relief and rehabilitation assistance in Afghanistan working with local level commanders; aid is politicised and viewed as part of the war effort; poor monitoring and evaluation and acceptance of high "wastage" levels.	Bilateral talks between US and Russia. UN sponsored talks lead to the 1988 Geneva Accords. NGOs lack an analysis of peace and conflict or are tied up with a "pro-war" agenda.
1989 - 1992: Jihad among Afghans.	Internal war between Najibullah's Soviet supported government and various Afghan factions; Russian and American military support continues; power balance broken in 1992 when Dostam and his Uzbek militia switch sides from the Kabul regime to the mujahideen, who enter the capital.	Post Geneva accords, expansion of operations in Afghanistan, particularly the East and South East; Formation of UNOCA and ACBAR to co-ordinate UN and NGO operations respectively; Proliferation of Afghan NGOs (ANGOs) in the late 1980s and early 1990s; Trend towards professionalisation and developmental approaches within the aid community.	Failure of UN plans for a transitional government - 1992 Peshawar Accords and 1993 Islamabad agreement.  Although agencies move towards longer term approaches, peace-building not part of their analysis.
1993 - 1996: Factional war among Afghans	Mujahideen government is fractured by internal power battles and shifting alliances among the major party leaders; in late 1994 the Taliban begin to emerge, first in Kandahar in the south, with a stated objective of restoring stability; September 1996 they take Kabul.	Fighting in Kabul, leads to increased emphasis on NGO programming in the provincial cities and rural areas, particularly the West and North; Some refugees return to rural areas; As the emphasis moves to rehabilitation and development, agencies attempt to identify and support local forms of governance.	UN and OIC brokered peace agreements dishonoured. Aid agencies move away from Cold War and factional policies.
1996 - present: Regional proxy war	Regional power interests reassert themselves and the conflict assumes the characteristics of both a regional proxy war and a civil war.	1997 meeting in Ashkabad, leads to the initiation of UN-led Strategic Framework and principled common programming process. Although security improves in rural areas, agencies are increasingly constrained by Taliban strictures and donors' conditionalities. 1998, after US air strikes UN and many NGOs forced to withdraw from Afghanistan. Increased emphasis on more expansive approaches including a focus on principled programming, human rights and peacebuilding.	Brahimi introduces "Six plus two" but continued failure of UN sponsored talks. Individual country initiatives such as Pakistan's shuttle diplomacy in 1999. Peacebuilding becomes more central to aid agency analysis through the Strategic Framework and the introduction of Do No Harm.

### **I.3 Understanding the Contemporary Conflict**

Although an in-depth analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, a number of points need to be born in mind by international actors responding to the current conflict. Firstly, the conflict presently combines the characteristics of a proxy war and civil war and this necessitates an analysis which captures the international, national and local dimensions of the conflict. Secondly, the conflict is both a result of, and a precipitation of institutional, human rights, and human development crises. It has had profound humanitarian consequences, including the death of over a million people, the displacement of a further six million and the impoverishment of the majority of the Afghan population. There have, however been significant winners in this conflict who have profited from the power vacuum and the new opportunities created by the war economy. This necessitates a careful calculation of the benefits, as well as the costs of war and an understanding of the incentive systems that continue to drive the conflict. Thirdly, violent conflict has resulted in an acceleration of the processes of social change. Afghanistan has been fundamentally changed by war, in terms of social formations, belief systems and ideologies; peace will not come by trying to recreate the status quo ante. Finally, the fluidity of the conflict and its capacity to mutate make long-term predictions about its future course or eventual resolution extremely difficult.

Although commentators tend to talk about “the Afghan war” as though there is one conflict, there are in fact several taking place at different levels within a very complex conflict system. We need to be clear in what we are talking about; if we are trying to build peace, we need to have a clear understanding of what we are trying to influence in that conflict system. Events at one level of the system can have a cascade-like effect on other levels of the system. The key to improved analysis appears to lie in understanding the complex networks that operate across the conflict system (for example the links between Islamic groups in Afghanistan and Chechnya) and the vertical linkages between the different levels of the system (for example between the poppy farmer, the opium trader and the drug mafia). There are still many gaps in our analysis of the Afghan conflict and to an extent, in both the diplomatic and humanitarian communities, action has got ahead of understanding.

### **I.4 Peacemaking in Afghanistan**

Attempts to resolve the crisis have been ongoing; actors and strategies have changed as the conflict itself has changed. Mediation has occurred at several levels involving state and non-state actors. In the Cold War years the diplomatic focus was on the US and Soviet Union, with support roles played by Pakistan and the Afghan regime. In the post Cold War years, the focus has been on the neighbouring regional powers. There have also been a number of civil society and diaspora-led initiatives. However, the primary role has been assumed by the UN, which operates in Afghanistan without either major collaboration or competition from other inter-governmental organisations. Unlike in Europe, Africa, or Latin America, regional organisations have tended to be weak throughout Asia.<sup>12</sup>

### **1.4.1 United Nations**

The UN has been engaged in finding a solution to the conflict in Afghanistan since the General Assembly passed resolution ES-6/2 on January 14, 1980, calling for the “immediate, unconditional and total withdrawal of foreign troops.”<sup>13</sup> Several rounds of UN-facilitated talks finally led to the signing of the 1988 Geneva Accords. The Accords, however, did not constitute a comprehensive settlement to the Afghanistan problem and instead merely provided a curtain behind which the USSR could beat a disreputable retreat.

The UN's role has changed over the years in response to new phases of the conflict and changes in the global environment. Essentially, there has been a shift from the bi-polar approaches of the Cold War years to multi-polar approaches in the post Cold War years. The “Good Offices Mission” of the late 1980s and early 1990s became the UN Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) in 1996. Since 1997, more attention has been focused on the regional dimensions of the conflict with the initiation of the 6 + 2 talks (the six neighbouring powers plus the US and Russia).

UN strategy aims to: (a) achieve a cessation of hostilities, (b) seek a regional political consensus in support of the peace process, and (c) seek direct negotiations between all parties on a political settlement.<sup>14</sup> In order to achieve these objectives, UNAMA has been pursuing a three-track strategy for negotiation and mediation. This involves, the “Central Track” (dialogue between the main Afghan warring parties), “Parallel Track” (engagement with non-UN peace-making initiatives) and the “External Track” (dialogue in the form of the Six-plus-two arrangement).<sup>15</sup> Through regional consensus building and intra-Afghan dialogue, the UN is essentially aiming at establishing a durable cease-fire, enforcing a comprehensive arms and ammunition embargo, forming a broad-based representative government and starting a reconstruction process for the country. In terms of achieving these policy objectives, the UN peace process has been a failure, and Afghanistan has proved to be a “graveyard for UN negotiation”.<sup>16</sup>

Maley (1998) identifies three main reasons behind the failure of the UN mission:

- (1) The inherent weakness of traditional peace-making in contemporary wars: Orthodox mediation is based on the premise of inter-state relations and dialogue. Bilateral negotiations or talks within the 6 + 2 framework, however, have a limited impact because of the transnational and non-state entities that are an integral part of the conflict. Such “non-state actors may deny the authority of the very framework of rules and norms within which conversations between states occur”.<sup>17</sup>
- (2) The history of UN involvement in mediation: The UN has limited credibility with the different actors because of its previous failures, its limited capacities (both in terms of individual performance and political muscle) and, on occasion, a perceived bias.
- (3) The focus of UN mediation: The UN has often failed to understand that the crisis in Afghanistan runs deeper than the mere composition of the government. As one NGO worker commented, UNAMA are “looking at any people who will sit round a table and talk to each other”. We still hear a familiar refrain of the need for the “set piece response” of calling a cease fire, forming a broad-based government, holding elections and moving into reconstruction. How this peace package will address the interests of the non-state entities is not clear however, since they have little interest or need of a unitary Afghan state.

Furthermore, a critical issue of any peace plan is how the Afghan public views the UN proposed peace formula. Peace-making (or consensus building as it is often referred to) among the regional powers and between warring parties is not necessarily the kind of peace the majority of Afghans aspire to. While regional consensus has implications for Afghans' basic right to self-determination, peace between warring parties, who have yet to account for their war crimes against humanity, will not necessarily be a just peace.

Although one can be critical of the UN role, it is important to note that without the political will of the international community, its impact was always going to be limited. As the UN Secretary General commented in 1997: "It could be argued that...the role of the United Nations in Afghanistan is little more than that of an alibi to provide cover for the inaction – or worse – of the international community at large".<sup>18</sup> Ironically, the Taliban, Osama Bin Ladin and the US bombing of 1998 have put Afghanistan back "on the map". The UN Security Council, led by Russia and the US, focusing entirely on Bin Ladin has imposed sanctions on the Taliban only. This has undermined the position of UNSMA as a neutral mediator between the Taliban and the United Front.

#### **1.4.2 Non-UN Initiatives**

In recent years, there have been a number of non-UN peace initiatives, some by Afghans and others by non-Afghans. Examples of the Afghan peace-making efforts recently are the "Zahir Shah Initiative" in Rome (September 1999) calling for Loya Jirga, the "Cyprus moots" with its last meeting in September 1999 and an Afghan moot in Germany (September 1999). In addition, there have been a series of initiatives taken by Pakistan (the last one in August 1999), Iran, OIC (currently) and others. Such efforts have faced the twin challenges of legitimacy and practicability. The former relates to where these groups of Afghans locate themselves within Afghan society and which constituencies they represent (or exclude) from that society. Secondly, none of the initiatives so far appear to have had any practical effect on the ground situation, either because they have limited legitimacy or they have limited leverage over the conflict entrepreneurs. In spite of these weaknesses, such Afghan initiative may play a vital role in the future by building links between different parties and opening up new spaces for negotiation.

#### **1.4.3 Conclusions on Diplomatic Initiatives**

The over-riding policy response from the Western powers in the post Cold War years has been either one of strategic withdrawal and containment or an aggressive single issue focus. Both are equally short-sighted. First, one cannot 'ring fence' the Afghan conflict, and the spill-over effects of the drugs trade, smuggling and radical Islam are becoming more evident with every year the conflict continues.<sup>19</sup> Second, the single issue focus of the US and several European powers on terrorism, pipelines or gender, generates more heat than light; it prevents the key issues from being addressed and diverts attention from the serious business of resolving the conflict. In addition the neighbouring powers, particularly Pakistan and Iran are attempting to extend their zones of influence, and base their Afghan policy on short-term partisan interests. While governments are unwilling to provide the political and economic muscle to affect incentives systems and structures driving the conflict, the problem is likely to grow. The stakes in the conflict system grow year by year, as do the opportunity costs of not acting to resolve the problem.



## **1.5 History of Aid in Afghanistan**

In parallel to the diplomatic response to the Afghan war, there has been a major humanitarian aid program. The aid program was a response to massive humanitarian need, but it also became entangled with Cold War and post Cold War political agendas. The following section provides a brief overview of the evolution of the aid system in Afghanistan. This background is important as the legacy of the past continues to influence current aid policy and practice.

### **1.5.1 The 'Alms Pipeline'; aid in the Cold War years**

Aid in Afghanistan has a long history of politicisation. In the 1980s, refugee and cross border programmes were seen by many as the non-lethal component of aid to the Afghan resistance. During this period, total assistance to Afghan refugees in Pakistan on average amounted to something in the order of \$300 million per year.<sup>20</sup> The Pakistani Government set up a Commissariat for Afghan refugees with the responsibility of administering relief programmes for refugees. The principal aid actors were UNHCR, WFP, ICRC and a variety of international and national NGOs. These could be further categorised as international, Islamic, solidarity and Afghan NGOs.<sup>21</sup> The refugee camps were clearly a rear base for the Mujahideen, illustrated by the fact that refugees had to register with one of the seven political/military parties approved by the Pakistani government.

Virtually all Western development programmes were terminated in Afghanistan after the Soviet occupation at the end of 1979. Until 1988, both the UN and ICRC were constrained by sovereignty issues from providing aid in Mujahideen held areas. NGOs therefore became the principal means by which humanitarian relief and rehabilitation assistance was provided in such areas. NGOs, as in a number of other contexts, became the 'vehicles of choice' for a semi-covert, cross border relief operation. This was linked to the broader military strategy of keeping the civilian population inside Afghanistan to provide support to the Mujahideen. Conversely, the Russians attempted to systematically destroy rural infrastructure to depopulate such areas.

By 1990, between 50 to 60 NGOs were working cross border spending in the order of \$200 million per annum.<sup>22</sup> There was considerable secrecy as to the involvement of bilateral donors and NGOs were seen as convenient middlemen, obscuring the original source of funding. This dilution of accountability standards probably contributed to the slow rate of professionalisation among NGOs involved in cross border operations.<sup>23</sup> A significant proportion of funding was channeled through cash for food programmes, which were often poorly monitored. SIDA, for example, is reported to have accepted 'wastage levels' of up to 40% on such programmes.<sup>24</sup> Eastern Afghanistan tended to be the main recipient of humanitarian assistance because of close proximity to Peshawar and agencies' political ties to local commanders connected with the dominant Mujahideen parties. Apart from the politicisation of aid during this period, another important legacy was the location of the aid community in Peshawar and Islamabad. The fact that the aid community has continued to exist at a 'step removed' from the Afghan context has impeded the development of approaches that are more consistent with local realities.

### **1.5.2 Aid in the Post Cold War Years**

The Geneva Accords included an agreement that under UN auspices, the international community should undertake a substantial programme of relief and rehabilitation in all areas of Afghanistan. The UN Secretary General appointed Sadrukkin Aga Khan to head the newly-formed United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian and Economic Assistance Programmes for Afghanistan (UNOCA). This was followed by the launching of a consolidated Appeal by the Secretary General to fund the programme (known as Operation Salam). UNOCA and Operation Salam in turn catalysed the NGOs to form the Agency Co-ordinating Bureau for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) to facilitate co-ordination and communication between NGOs and the UN system.<sup>25</sup> Shortly afterwards, the Southern and Western Afghanistan Baluchistan Association for Coordination (SWABAC) was formed. By 1991, there were four NGO co-ordinating bodies: ACBAR, SWABAC, the Islamic Co-ordination Council (ICC, which has an International Islamic NGO membership) and the Afghan National NGOs Co-ordinating Bureau (ANCB, which has an Afghan NGO membership).

These developments occurred at a time when the political effort of the UN had lapsed and since the political and strategic stakes were unclear, humanitarianism emerged as an all-round response to state collapse and protracted conflict. UNOCA and Operation Salam resulted in a substantial increase in the resources being provided inside Afghanistan.<sup>26</sup> It also played a critical role in 'opening up' Afghanistan to humanitarian assistance.<sup>27</sup> As a result of the UNOCA operation, aid was delivered both to Mujahideen and government held areas and the principle of 'humanitarian encirclement', i.e. delivering aid from a variety of entry points in neighbouring countries, led to a wider geographical spread of aid programmes. NGOs were used as implementing partners for the UN operation, and in 1990 there were 67 NGO partners. However, there were still capacity limitations within the NGO sector and limited coverage of areas in Western, Northern and Central Afghanistan. The early 1990s saw a UN-induced growth of Afghan NGOs and the development of new programmes in the West and North. From 1992 onwards many NGOs moved to Kabul, although most subsequently withdrew when fighting erupted between the various Mujahideen parties.<sup>28</sup>

In rural areas, a number of aid agencies began moving towards longer-term programming. There was a shift away from humanitarian relief into rehabilitation programmes and developmental activities in the agricultural and education sectors. This led to the challenge of finding local institutions or partners to engage with, and a number of agencies, like for example IRC, began to experiment with district development shuras. This was also a period of professionalisation and 'Afghanisation' within the aid community. Agencies invested heavily in training, organisational development and improving their monitoring and evaluation systems. There is some evidence therefore that the aid community learned from experiences gained in the 1980s. There is general agreement that aid programmes now are better designed, managed and evaluated than they were twenty years ago.<sup>29</sup> Less progress, however, appears to have been made in the area of 'Afghanisation'. Although there was a proliferation of Afghan NGOs in the early 1990s, few of them have developed into robust and sustainable institutions. Moreover, there is still very limited Afghan participation within the international aid system. Few Afghans are in senior decision making positions, and a common criticism of the Strategic Framework process has been the lack of Afghan ownership.<sup>30</sup>

In 1993, UNOCA was replaced by UNOCHA with a revised humanitarian mandate and UNDP taking responsibility for rehabilitation programmes. The institutional split between humanitarian and rehabilitation functions has been an unhelpful and often confusing one and in 1997 they were brought back under UNOCHA and a single co-ordinator.<sup>31</sup> In 1995, when the Rabbani government came to power, the issue of NGO regulation was raised in the first Memorandum of Understanding, agreed between NGOs and the Ministry of Planning. Also during this period, the Kabul Emergency Programme (KEP) was initiated as an umbrella for co-ordinating emergency activities in Kabul at a practical level.<sup>32</sup> In many rural areas, the situation remained fluid, particularly in the South, where there remained a complex mosaic of competing warlords. Agencies found travel and the transportation of materials increasingly difficult as warlords established road blocks where they charged heavy taxes on commodities.<sup>33</sup>

In 1994, the Taliban entered the political scene. The emergence of an assertive Islamic traditionalism has placed new obstacles in the way of international humanitarian and peacemaking programmes. Taliban edicts, especially those regarding women, contradict international principles and make it impossible for many programmes to reach their intended beneficiaries. In the Pashtun South East, the Taliban's edicts clash less with local practices and they have usually been less harshly applied. However, outside their heartland areas, particularly Kabul, the Taliban have applied their strictures more rigidly. These on-going tensions over principles have been punctuated by a series of incidents, including the proposed relocating of NGO offices to the Polytechnic in Kabul in 1998, US air strikes which led to the mass withdrawal of aid agencies in the same year, and the latest ransacking of the UN office in Kandahar by the Taliban.

While aid agencies have been buffeted by external events, there have also been major internal changes with the UN reform process in Afghanistan. The Strategic Framework and Principled Common Programming processes are explored in more detail below.

## Chapter Two: Mapping the Aid System

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The section provides an overview of the current aid system in Afghanistan. Aid can not be viewed in isolation from the wider foreign policy objectives of donor governments. We therefore first attempt to identify the broad policy objectives, which provide the overall framework (and set the limitations) for the aid programme in Afghanistan. We then map out the key humanitarian actors and the principle features of the aid programme. This is followed by an exploration of current challenges facing the aid community including co-ordination, the Strategic Framework and Principled Common Programming, engagement with Taliban and the politicisation of aid.

### 2.1 Donor Policy Objectives & Instruments

As Van Brabant and Killock (1999) note, the donor community is agreed on its key policy objectives: Peace through a negotiated settlement, respect for human rights, maintaining the integrity of aid and the security of aid staff, counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism. We have also identified refugee return and reintegration as an additional area of priority.

We have divided these objectives into those which relate primarily to foreign policy and those concerned with humanitarian aid. In practice the divisions between the two often become very blurred, which has led in recent years to the ‘re-politicisation’ of aid in Afghanistan. Although there may be broad agreement, in principle, on key policy objectives, there is often a lack of consistency in how they are applied in practice.

Moreover, as broad policy objectives and instruments are pushed down the aid chain by donors, they often encounter resistance from the UN, NGOs and others. An analysis of humanitarian action therefore must take a system wide view which looks at the decision making processes at different locations and levels within the aid system.

#### 2.1.1 Foreign Policy Objectives

Table 2 summarises the main policy objectives and instruments currently used by donor governments

**Table 2. Donor Policy Objectives and Instruments**

	<b>Peace, stability, good governance</b>	<b>Respect for Human rights</b>	<b>Counter-narcotics</b>	<b>Counter terrorism</b>	<b>Refugee containment/ return</b>
<b>Key features</b>	Cessation of hostilities; direct negotiations; formation of broad-based, representative government. An underlying agenda for some actors is access to new oil fields and transit routes for oil pipelines (see Rashid, 2000).	Specific concerns about (a) women's basic rights (b) war crimes (c) rights of ethnic minorities (d) protection and access to civilians.	World's largest opium producer (80% of heroin solid in Europe comes from Afghanistan). Recognised that it has developmental and law enforcement dimensions.	Sheltering and training of various Islamic groups including Osama bin Laden and militants from the Middle East, North Africa, Kashmir; Pakistan, Chechnya, Central Asia and China. Donor states pushing for extradition of Osama bin Laden.	Refugee return from Afghanistan /Iran; 'illegal' refugees in Central Asia, Russia, North and Europe.
<b>Instruments:</b> <b>-Diplomacy/ politics</b>	Support for UN 6 + 2 negotiations; Withholding of international political recognition; bilateral initiatives e.g. Japanese and Swiss.	UN special rapporteur on human rights; documenting abuses; deployment of UNSMA Civil Affairs Officers.	Denunciation and withholding international political recognition; US government support to Central Asian governments to tighten border security.	Ongoing attempts at negotiation; alliance building e.g. Russian and Central Asian states; cruise missile attacks by US in 1998; recent threats by Russians of missile strikes.	Negotiations with host countries to promote refugee rights and voluntary repatriation; EU Council Common Position of January, 2000; tightening of border controls and refugee law in Europe.
<b>- Trade</b>	Attempts to stem weapons flows. Negotiations with oil companies.	UN Security Council Trade Sanctions in October, 1999.		UNSC Resolution in October 1999.	
<b>- Aid</b>	Aid conditionality. Support for good governance, civil society strengthening. Community level mediation.	UN Special Advisors on human rights and gender; human rights training for aid agencies; attempts to mainstream rights-based programming; protection role of aid agencies.	Poppy clause in aid programmes; negative and positive conditionality; mainstreaming drug control objectives; UNDCP rehabilitation programmes.		Aid used as a 'carrot' to prevent refugee outflows and encourage voluntary return; refugee aid the 3rd largest sector of aid operations; food aid within Afghanistan.

### 2.1.2 Humanitarian Strategy Objectives

Table 2. is illustrative of how aid has become enmeshed with wider foreign policy concerns. This was also the case in the 1980s when, as previously mentioned, aid was the non-lethal component of the war against communism. However by the early 1990s, the broader strategic interests were less clear and humanitarian concerns were de-linked from wider political agendas. Institutionally this was reflected in the disconnect between UNSMA and UNOCHA. However, the Taliban, narcotics and terrorism have put Afghanistan back on the map leading to a new foreign policy consensus. Humanitarian assistance is very much part of this emerging consensus. Assistance resources are an important instrument in their own right (in many respects they have been the leading or only policy instrument) which contribute to foreign policy goals.

One of the explicit goals behind the Strategic Framework is to overcome the disconnect between the political and humanitarian responses to the Afghan conflict. It aims to facilitate a more coherent and co-ordinated response from the international community. One can interpret this convergence of humanitarian and wider political agendas in two ways. On the one hand, this policy consensus that conflict is best approached through a number of connected, ameliorative measures contains a persuasive logic. Some argue that the Strategic Framework approach represents an innovative attempt to make a reality of 'joined-up government'. Others, however, are more sceptical. First, it is argued that aid is not an effective tool in the Afghan context to influence incentives or disincentives for peace or conflict. In relation to the wider political and economic forces driving the conflict, aid is relatively insignificant and therefore, conditionalities are unlikely to have an impact. Second, political agendas are a corrupting influence on aid; assistance is no longer provided on the basis of humanitarian need but on political agendas determined in Washington, Moscow or London. In a worst case scenario, aid becomes the primary policy instrument because political leaders are unwilling to get to grips with the political dynamics of the conflict.

By its endorsement of the Strategic Framework (SF) through a series of Afghan Support Group (ASG) meetings and after an extensive process of consultation, the donor community has collectively subscribed to the five key objectives of the assistance strategy for Afghanistan. There is some consensus among donors, UN and NGOs over the key objectives of the assistance strategy of the SF. With the exception of Counter-terrorism, all donor foreign policy objectives are directly or indirectly reflected in aid programmes with varying degrees of emphasis.

## 2.2 Types of Assistance Actors

The current assistance community for Afghanistan largely consists of (a) official state donors (bi- & multilateral), (b) United Nations family agencies, (c) NGOs (national and international) and (d) the International Red Cross / Red Crescent Movement. The sections below attempt to describe some of the key features of these actors, including their type, number, funding size, etc.

### 2.2.1 Official Aid Donors

There are various types of official state donors who have provided humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan over the past years. A broad classification includes (a) bilateral state donors, and (b) multilateral, inter-governmental donors. The latter generally includes EC (DG External Relations, DG Development and ECHO) and UN agencies (UNDP, UNOCHA, WFP, etc.). Although the UN funds NGOs and other UN agencies, their back donors are primarily bilaterals in the region with some additional core funding through their respective head offices.

The EC is therefore the only real multi-lateral donor that is included in this section. Between 1997 and 1999, thirty five aid donors contributed to the assistance programmes for Afghans inside Afghanistan and in the region:

**Table 3 Aid Donors to Afghanistan 1997-1999**

1 Canada	10 Sweden	19 Hong Kong	28 Spain
2 Denmark	11 Switzerland	20 India	29 Greece
3 EC	12 UK	21 Ireland	30 Jordan
4 Finland	13 USA	22 Italy	31 Morocco
5 France	14 Australia	23 Luxembourg	32 OPEC
6 Germany	15 Austria	24 New Zealand	33 Turkey
7 Japan	16 Belgium	25 Russia	34 Pakistan
8 Netherlands	17 China	26 Saudi Arabia	35 Poland
9 Norway	18 Egypt	27 South Korea	36 Others

Source: Compiled from Afghanistan Appeal 1998, 1999 & 2000

Based on a set of broad criteria of assistance continuity and volume, the following donors, by ranking of their assistance volume, are the major assistance providing countries as documented in the Consolidated Appeals:

**Table 4 Key Aid Donors to Afghanistan 1997-1999**

Donors	Year 1997 Contributions US\$	Year 1998 Contributions US\$	Year 1999 Contributions US\$	Total 1997-1999 US\$
EC	45,399,080	17,935,788	22,109,922	85,444,790
USA	15,690,648	8,710,973	57,315,259	81,716,880
Sweden	12,572,815	13,603,324	11,631,685	37,807,824
UK	13,782,773	13,409,926	4,392,526	31,585,225
Canada	13,096,784	5,309,537	8,831,681	27,238,002
Netherlands	13,830,464	7,569,220	5,507,757	26,907,441
Japan	11,013,912	2,563,468	11,988,930	25,566,310
Norway	9,864,144	5,500,681	7,793,826	23,158,651
Germany	4,465,617	3,328,367	3,127,119	10,921,103
Denmark	1,954,851	4,190,946	3,272,650	9,418,447
Finland	2,350,222	2,749,450	1,442,546	6,542,218
Switzerland	1,193,918	3,447,079	1,338,824	5,979,821
France	2,169,779	162,508	1,021,061	3,353,348
Others <sup>34</sup>	69,319,998	115,208,198	76,077,892	260,606,088
<b>Total</b>	<b>216,705,005</b>	<b>203,689,465</b>	<b>215,851,678</b>	<b>636,246,148</b>

Source: Compiled from Consolidated Appeal documents 1998, 1999, 2000

It is thought that estimates of the global assistance to Afghanistan, contained in the Appeals is low and total aid disbursements have amounted to around US\$300 million per annum.<sup>35</sup> Many of the donors interviewed did not have detailed, updated financial information available for external use on their fund disbursements between 1997-1999. We therefore used a secondary source, i.e. Afghanistan Consolidated Appeals 1998, 1999 and 2000. The financial information in the Appeal documents, however, does not cover the whole assistance brought into the country and all contributions made by the donors. There were complaints that some information was deliberately not given to UN Appeals; reference was made to donors who did not want the UN to track down some disbursements.<sup>36</sup>

There are also technical problems. The Appeal document is, for example published before the end of a fiscal year for some donors. This may have also led to some information not being included. The difference between the Appeal information and what we received from some donors was in some cases significant. For instance, in a paper dated November 1999 circulated by the EC, their aid to Afghanistan between 1997-1999 roughly amounts to US\$129 million against US\$85 million in the Appeals. The USA contribution in 1999 was calculated at around US\$57.3 million in the Appeal 2000, whereas we received from their official a round figure of US\$70 million for that year. These differences do not, however, change the overall picture significantly for the purpose of this study. The EC, USA, Sweden, UK, Canada, Netherlands, Japan, Norway, Germany and Denmark still remain the largest aid donors to Afghanistan over the past three years.

### **2.2.2 United Nations Humanitarian Agencies**

Over the past years, 14 UN humanitarian agencies have worked for Afghans both inside Afghanistan and in the region. Based on the information provided in the Appeal documents 1998-2000, the major actors in terms of size were WFP, UNOCHA, UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNOPS, UNCHS, FAO and others. With the exception of UNCHS, these agencies collectively constitute one of the largest donors to NGOs. Twenty-two per cent of NGO funds in 1998 (US\$125.6 million) and thirty-three per cent of NGO funds in 1999 (US\$138.2 million) were provided by the UN agencies.<sup>37</sup>



**Table 5 UN Agencies' Funds 1997-1999**

Organisation	Funds 1997 US\$	Funds 1998 US\$	Funds 1999 US\$	Total Funds US\$
1 WFP	52,566,591	40,932,548	52,621,395	146,120,534
2 UNOCHA	20,132,748	22,720,502	18,564,150	61,417,400
3 UNICEF	13,668,182	8,829,446	12,424,762	34,922,390
4 UNHCR	6,297,503	7,575,930	17,289,739	31,163,172
5 UNOPS	6,781,980	5,242,000	6,247,319	18,271,299
6 UNCHS	6,474,329	2,564,500	2,747,934	11,786,763
7 FAO-Crops	4,912,000	2,737,099	3,704,159	11,353,258
8 UNDP	2,172,000	5,691,018	3,470,617	11,333,635
9 WHO	1,809,494	2,570,000	6,247,401	10,626,895
10 FAO-Livestock	3,912,157	3,088,333	2,479,448	9,479,938
11 UNDCP	5,838,172	-	308,095	6,146,267
12 CDAP	2,202,143	947,101	1,713,586	4,862,830
13 Off. UN Co-ord.	-	-	1,932,063	1,932,063
14 Others	-	462,963	748,898	1,211,861
15 UNFPA	-	560,546	530,000	1,090,546
16 UNESCO	5,600	113,000	70,000	188,600
<b>Total</b>	<b>126,772,899</b>	<b>104,034,986</b>	<b>131,099,566</b>	<b>361,907,451</b>

Source: Compiled from Consolidated Appeal documents 1998,1999, 2000

The main areas of UN agencies' work include: Food security (emergency food aid, food production, animal health, etc.); emergency response; mine action; delivery of social services to general and specific vulnerable sections of the population (e.g. children and disabled); refugee protection, care, return and reintegration; livelihood, community development; rural and urban infrastructure rehabilitation and cultural heritage as well as inter-agency co-ordination.

### 2.2.3 Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs)

The NGO community in Afghanistan is extremely diverse, making classification difficult. We have, however, divided NGOs into three broad categories: International, Afghan, and Islamic NGOs. This classification draws on the following criteria: (a) how NGOs perceive themselves and their identities, (b) their origins, (c) their primary constituencies and stakeholders, and (d) their legality as reflected in the legal documents. Two hundred and fifty-two NGOs are members of one of the five NGO Co-ordination Bodies.<sup>38</sup> If one includes non-members there are roughly 300 NGOs working with Afghans.

For the purpose of this study, we have consulted the ACBAR Directory of Humanitarian Agencies Working for Afghans 2000, which covers 160 NGOs of all categories. From 17 countries, these NGOs have 23,413 staff members on their payroll (22,377 Afghans, 705 Pakistanis and 331 expatriates) and their total expenditure for the three years amounted to US\$376.4 million (US\$120.5m in 1997, US\$117.7m in 1998 and US\$138.2m in 1999). Their 1999 budget

(US\$138.2m) came from the UN (33%), the EC (20%), bilateral donors (20%), Overseas International NGOs (20%) and others (7%). In 1999, 91% of their budget was spent for Afghans inside Afghanistan and 9% for the refugee programmes outside the country.

In terms of funding volume and number of staff, it appears that out of the 160 NGOs above, 45 are the largest (14 Afghan, 4 International Islamic and 27 International Western). Collectively, they have 73% of the total NGO staff and 75% of the total NGO budget in 1999. Table 3.4 gives an overview (for details, refer to Annex I).

**Table 6 Key Afghan and International NGOs in 1999**

Type of NGO	No. of NGOs	No. of staff 1999	Total Expenditure 1997-1999 US\$
1 Afghan	14	7,299	80,693,171
2 International Islamic	4	1,247	10,706,010
3 International Western	27	8,587	210,480,694
<b>Grand total all key NGOs</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>17,133</b>	<b>301,879,873</b>

Source: ACBAR Directory of Humanitarian Agencies Working for Afghans, 2000.

The major areas of NGO work include health services, mine action, education, food security (agriculture, irrigation, livestock, etc.), emergency response, rehabilitation, shelter, income generation, infrastructure, environment and community development work (involving one or combinations of the above). Areas like human rights (one NGO), capacity development services (two support NGOs), conflict resolution training (an Afghan Network), women and development (an Afghan Women Network) and co-ordination (five NGOs) are also covered in NGOs' portfolio. NGOs are, however, increasingly trying to incorporate themes like human rights, peace and conflict assessment, gender and capacity development into their mainstream work.

#### 2.2.4 International Red Cross / Red Crescent Movement (RC/RC)

The fourth member of the assistance community is the International Red Cross / Red Crescent Movement (RC/RC) in Afghanistan. The movement has three members, i.e. ICRC (International Committee for the Red Cross), IFRC (International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) and ARCS (Afghan Red Crescent Society). The three organisations work together within the framework of the 1997 Seville Agreement and have, excluding ARCS, over 1,000 staff.<sup>39</sup> An indicative figure for the total budget of the organisation was given in the Appeal documents as follows:

**Table 7 RC/RC Funds 1997-1999 (indicative)**

Organisation	Funds 1997 US\$	Funds 1998 US\$	Funds 1999 US\$	Total Funds US\$
ICRC / IFRC	37,693,723	40,000,000	19,515,409	97,209,132

Source: Consolidated Appeal documents 1998, 1999, 2000

## 2.3 Key Features of the Assistance Programme

### 2.3.1 Types of Assistance

The vast bulk of donor assistance to Afghanistan is 'humanitarian', consisting of both life saving and life sustaining natures with short time frames. A very small proportion of the assistance is labelled as 'development', mainly community development with multiple-year commitments. Of 11 bilateral and multilateral donors interviewed, only three (Norway, Netherlands and Switzerland) stated that they had development assistance frames for Afghanistan, though a very small proportion of their funding to NGOs and UN agencies comes from such frames with a multiple-year time frame. The few projects and programmes mentioned included a range of activities in the areas from food security to refugee reintegration, community development and strengthening civil society organisations (primarily Afghan NGOs). The largest of these programmes is the P.E.A.C.E.<sup>40</sup> initiative of UNDP and its partners, a multi-sectoral community-based programme in 23 rural districts and six urban environments.

Most assistance programmes fall somewhere in the 'grey area' between relief/emergency and rehabilitation/development. Take the example of food aid, which may apparently seem to be an entirely relief-type activity. Food aid is used for a range of activities that fall under sectors like relief (food through bakeries and food to disaster affected people), agriculture (food-for-seed), health (emergency feeding), rehabilitation (food-for-work), education (food-for-education), etc.<sup>41</sup> In the non-relief areas, food aid is used for 'quasi-development' work that encompasses a range of activities to promote food security from production of improved seeds to rehabilitation of essential rural and urban infrastructure.

The two main reasons given for the lack of development programmes are the environment of insecurity and the absence of a legitimate government to act as an interlocutor. In these circumstances it is argued that development assistance is neither feasible nor appropriate. Since 1992, development assistance through government has never been an issue for the international assistance community since there has not been a legitimate, internationally recognised and functional state in the country. Between 1980 and 1992, the Afghan communist government received some 'development' assistance – in the conventional sense – from primarily the former Soviet Union and some other socialist states, mainly in the areas of industry, infrastructure, communication, agriculture, etc.

The United Nations system has, in some respects, become a 'surrogate government' or, at least, a 'Ministry of Planning in waiting'.<sup>42</sup> Although the UN system institutionalised the relief-rehabilitation dichotomy by dividing responsibility between UNOCHA and UNDP, in practice, experience

in Afghanistan does not fit any easy labelling of the conventional relief-development dichotomy.<sup>43</sup> As early as 1995 and 1996, two studies by the Overseas Development Administration (ODA)<sup>44</sup> and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) of the United Nations<sup>45</sup> offered potent arguments why the distinction between "humanitarian" and "development" activities was unhelpful in the Afghanistan context. The latter study<sup>46</sup> suggested: "There is a need for the international community to recognise and establish arrangements to respond appropriately to what might be called "protracted crisis situations" where, despite localised bouts of fighting, there is no immediate threat to the lives of large numbers of people (therefore no "emergency") but where state institutions are fragmented or non-functional, food/livelihood insecurity is high, access for large sections of the population to basic services is substantially reduced, and the overall situation is precarious with a significant risk of

Practitioners argue that, though there may be political sensitivities, there are still opportunities in relatively stable areas of the country where one can carry out long-term development programmes.

### 2.3.2 Sectors of Operations

An analysis of the information contained in the Appeal documents, 1998-2000, indicates that donor funding went to programmes and projects in 16 major assistance sectors and areas. UN agencies, NGOs and ICRC/IFRC have been the principal operational partners to donors. The table below provides details on sectoral allocations with food aid, relief, refugee repatriation and reintegration, mine action, health, co-ordination, education and water/sanitation as the largest among the sectors and areas of work.

**Table 8 Sectoral Resource Allocations by Donors**

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Year 1997</b>	<b>Year 1998</b>	<b>Year 1999</b>	<b>Total 1997-1999</b>
1 Food Aid	52,871,591	38,972,333	56,073,772	147,917,696
2 Relief	33,776,467	23,831,433	17,319,926	74,927,826
3 Refugee (repatriation and reintegration)	25,657,526	7,193,316	32,641,219	65,492,061
4 Mine Action	24,773,512	16,298,515	17,501,961	58,573,988
5 Health	23,591,833	20,238,607	10,803,328	54,633,768
6 Co-ordination	3,381,373	6,103,700	2,240,292	11,725,365
7 Education	2,594,531	2,949,754	5,970,411	11,514,696
8 Water/Sanitation	4,281,663	4,633,529	1,351,399	10,266,591
9 Agriculture	3,310,607	506,329	5,457,845	9,274,781
10 Community Development	1,846,774	3,572,245	3,466,252	8,885,271
11 Others	1,530,405	2,654,290	2,921,218	7,105,913
12 Narcotics	5,838,172	0	238,095	6,076,267
13 Shelter	1,117,410	2,403,927	607,836	4,129,173
14 Livestock	1,389,157	833,333	1,705,900	3,928,390
15 Income Generation	1,871,158	0	1,574,994	3,446,152
16 Human Rights	806,452	0	325,050	1,131,502
<b>Total sectors</b>	<b>188,638,631</b>	<b>130,191,311</b>	<b>160,199,498</b>	<b>479,029,440</b>
<b>Sector not tracked down</b>	<b>28,066,375</b>	<b>73,498,154</b>	<b>55,652,180</b>	<b>157,216,709</b>
<b>Grand Total year</b>	<b>216,705,006</b>	<b>203,689,465</b>	<b>215,851,678</b>	<b>636,246,149</b>

Source: Consolidated Appeal documents 1998, 1999, 2000

There are, however, discrepancies between the Appeals documents and information provided in the 1997-1998 ACBAR Directories (see the table below). There are two possible reasons for this: First, NGOs and UN agencies have had funding from other sources, in addition to the funding from the donors in the region, some of which may have not been documented in the Appeals. Second, NGOs, in particular, have a different sectoral view of the work they have carried out. For instance, food aid does not appear in the ACBAR directories as a sector or particular type of activity since food aid, as explained above, is widely used in various types of activities ranging from 'pure' relief to 'emergency rehabilitation' and 'development'.

Refugee return / repatriation is, in fact, a multi-sectoral assistance covering a spectrum of activities from repatriation package (e.g. food aid, transport, etc.) to reintegration work (shelter, education, health, agriculture, livelihood, etc.). Co-ordination of assistance activities received a significant amount of money (US\$ 11.7m) over the past three years and, hence, is the sixth largest sector. The bulk of this money has gone to UN (UNOCHA and the Office of the UN Co-ordinator) and some to ACBAR. Of this, a significant amount was also been spent on issues related to SF and PCP.

**Table 9 NGO Sectoral Expenditure 1997-1999**

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Year 1997</b>	<b>Year 1998</b>	<b>Year 1999</b>	<b>Total</b>
Health	39,907,000	32,480,000	24,233,000	96,620,000
Mine	15,767,000	20,462,000	25,212,000	61,441,000
Education	12,062,000	13,731,000	31,524,000	57,317,000
Agriculture/Irrigation	24,011,000	17,348,000	9,997,000	51,356,000
Others	9,403,000	7,662,000	12,531,000	29,596,000
Emergency-Rehab	6,589,000	10,131,000	8,295,000	25,015,000
Shelter	9,704,000	6,182,000	6,460,000	22,346,000
Relief	4,161,000	7,635,000	9,522,000	21,318,000
Infrastructure	6,474,000	3,434,000	4,551,000	14,459,000
Income Generation	6,105,000	4,648,000	2,694,000	13,447,000
Livestock	-	1,924,000	1,983,000	3,907,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>134,183,000</b>	<b>125,637,000</b>	<b>137,002,000</b>	<b>396,822,000</b>

Source: ACBAR Directory of Humanitarian Agencies Working for Afghans 1998, 1999 & 2000

### 2.3.3 Main Trends of Donor Funding

The level of global assistance to Afghanistan per annum, between 1997 and 1999, does not show any big differences except for a small decrease in 1998. This decrease may be due to a series of political and military events that disrupted the assistance work that year. The funding per annum was US\$217 million in 1997, US\$204 million in 1998 and US\$216 million in 1999. As explained elsewhere in this report, it is thought that the above estimates of the Appeals of the global assistance to Afghanistan are low. Aid disbursements to Afghanistan have amounted to around US\$300 million per annum.<sup>48</sup> The generally steady level of funding to Afghanistan between 1997 and 1999 means that despite the controversies within the assistance community over this period, there does not seem to be any significant reduction of global donor funding to the country.

Since 1992, however, the UN Consolidated Appeals have consistently remained under-funded, sometimes severely. Over the last three years, more funds came through outside the Appeals.

**Table 10 Pledges and Contributions through Appeals Against Requirements in US\$ million**

Appeals	1992	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1997	1998	1999
Total appeal requirements	179.7	198	168.5	124	133.3	157	184.7
Amount received through appeals	85.2	88.2	104.2	65.2	56	53	78.2

Source: Consolidated Appeal documents 1998, 1999, 2000

Despite consistent levels of funding over the past three years, the Appeals documents argue that the funds made available by donors were less than the amount required. Reasons cited for the less 'generous' responses by the donors ranged from donor fatigue, resulting from general disappointment with the on-going conflict, human rights violations, authorities' interference, to the "failure of the UN and its partners to convince donors" that proposed work will achieve its objectives.

Of particular concern, while the shorter-term, relief-oriented activities (e.g. food aid, mine clearance, refugee return, healthcare, etc.) are more or less adequately funded, the longer-term work (e.g. reconstruction in sectors of education, agriculture, water and sanitation, livestock and livelihood) has received very limited funds. In 1999, for example 97 per cent and 67 per cent of the requirements for refugee return and alleviation of human suffering (mine action, food aid, emergency response, etc.) were covered respectively. Conversely, in the same year, only 27 per cent and 18 per cent were received respectively for the provision of social services and livelihood reconstruction. Despite all the heated political debates around human rights, none of the projects of the Human Rights Thematic area were funded in 1999. It is argued that the donor approach of leaning towards short-term, life-saving assistance will not help the Afghan communities avoid further social collapse and vulnerability. This point is an important one to bear in mind when considering programmes that come under the rubric of good governance, capacity building and peacebuilding. Although they may be issues generating a lot of debate, they are receiving little hard cash to make a reality of the rhetoric.

## 2.4 Co-ordination among the Actors

This section briefly looks at co-ordination mechanisms and strategic issues relating to co-ordination among donors, UN agencies and NGOs.

### 2.4.1 Donor Co-ordination

Currently, the main mechanism for donor co-ordination is the Afghanistan Support Group (ASG). This was formed in 1997 as an outcome of the Ashkabad Conference of donors, UN agencies and NGOs working in Afghanistan. ASG has 16 members of which one is an inter-state donor organisation and the rest are bilateral donors providing humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan (Australia, UK, Canada, Denmark, EC, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland and USA). Normally, ASG meet twice a year with its last two meetings in Stockholm in June 1999 and Ottawa in December 1999, both chaired

by their respected governments. The current chair of ASG is Switzerland. The donors collectively interact with UN, NGOs and other assistance actors; they work through the latter's participation at ASG meetings, but also through the Strategic Framework and Principled Common Programming (PCP) processes.

While donors have put consistent and firm pressure on UN and NGOs to better co-ordinate in taking the Strategic Framework and PCP processes forward, there are concerns about their own co-ordination in general. The current debates point to the contradictions and inconsistencies in donors' responses and approaches. Two studies, DAC<sup>49</sup> and DANIDA,<sup>50</sup> indicate that donors have inconsistent and sometimes conflicting policy positions on a number of critical issues, including the Strategic Framework and PCP. At times, their individual priorities take precedence over their common interests. Such contradictions and inconsistencies, as is argued, have undermined co-ordination efforts among UN and NGOs, inhibited effective progress of PCP and constrained the ability of UN and NGOs to respond properly to the challenges and dilemmas on the ground.

Areas in which donor co-ordination needs to be improved were identified as follows: The PCP, agreement on responding to the Appeals, issues of conditionalities, operational guidelines, security, engagement with Taliban, strengthening Afghan civil society including Afghan NGOs, return of refugees, long-term development funding, etc.

#### **2.4.2 UN Co-ordination**

The evolution of UN co-ordination arrangements has been outlined above. A DHA<sup>51</sup> study and DANIDA evaluation<sup>52</sup> concluded that the institutional aspects of UN co-ordination in Afghanistan have suffered from three main problems: The unhelpful relief-development divide, the increased role of the UN in a country with a fragmented state and the plethora of agencies with a variety of mandates and funding relations. At a strategic level, it was argued that within the UN system there was no clear vision of what it was trying to achieve and how it intended to do it.<sup>53</sup>

Since 1997, however, co-ordination of the UN has evolved with the two processes of Strategic Framework and Principle Common Programming. The former has been a UN headquarters-driven process, whereas the latter has been a more field-driven initiative. UN co-ordination now takes place with the key role of the UN Co-ordinator through various institutional arrangements of PCP, i.e. APB (Afghanistan Programming Body), RCBs (Regional Co-ordination Bodies), Thematic Groups and the Consolidated Appeal process. The DANIDA study argues that through these processes, significant improvements have been brought to UN co-ordination at three levels: programme, principles and strategic co-ordination. However, a series of systemic problems (mandate and institutional interests, programme overlap, mandate creep, lack of shared strategies, etc.), as well as donors' inconsistencies and conflicting policies remain the major obstacles to effective UN co-ordination in the country.

#### **2.4.3 NGO Co-ordination**

As outlined earlier, there are five NGO co-ordinating bodies: ACBAR, SWABEC, ANCB, ICC, NCB. Collectively, these bodies offer a range of services, from the strategic level (advocacy, representation, policy debate and formulation), and the programme level (information sharing, standards setting, surveying, etc.), to the more technical level (postal, printing, etc.). Despite the varying degrees of success in NGO co-ordination, primarily at programme level in the field,

current debates point to a number of major obstacles that have hampered the efforts made for NGO co-ordination on programmes, principles and strategies, as well as co-ordination with UN agencies. Among other things, three factors particularly stand out:

- Huge diversity characterised by (a) belonging to different constituencies and (b) having inconsistent visions, differences of mandates, different institutional interests, multiple partnerships, diverse needs and funding mechanisms, etc.
- Narrow (un-strategic) cost-benefit analysis for co-ordination.<sup>54</sup>
- Inability of the co-ordination bodies to be responsive, in terms of their services, to the evolving strategic and practical needs of the NGO community in a rapidly changing context.

The latter has especially been at the centre of current debates, triggered by among other things the evolution of PCP. Some argue that the bodies duplicate one another and that a merger is required.<sup>55</sup> Others argue that each body has its own specific constituency and role.<sup>56</sup> Clearly, however, there is a need for improved co-ordination at all levels, but particularly at the strategic policy-making level.

## **2.5 Strategic Framework (SF) & Principled Common Programming (PCP)**

The “overarching goal of the United Nations in Afghanistan is to facilitate the transition from a state of internal conflict to a just and sustainable peace through mutually reinforcing political and assistance initiatives”.<sup>57</sup> The SF, therefore, brings together the three strategies, i.e. political, assistance and human rights, of the UN in order to enhance synergy between these and promote greater effectiveness and coherence in the international response to the Afghanistan crisis. It thus embraces the entire range of the UN’s activities and ideally, the activities of all external actors. As a tool and process, SF defines the principles, general policies and institutional arrangements for a coherent and effective response.<sup>58</sup>

By contrast, the PCP applies only to the assistance sphere of the international response; it is a mechanism for establishing the assistance community’s priorities, programmes and projects, based upon agreed goals, principles and the expressed needs of Afghans’.<sup>59</sup> The PCP seeks to work within the broad strategy set out in SF. It elaborates assistance principles and proposes a co-ordination structure with seven RCBs (Regional Co-ordination Bodies) and an APB (Afghanistan Programming Body) at the national level. All such organisations are included, as well as representatives from the assistance actors.

These two processes have led, to some extent, to greater clarity within the assistance community on goals, principles, policies and strategies, as well as to increased participation and ‘speaking with one voice’ of the various assistance actors. However, the processes have hit a number of external and internal obstacles. The following is an attempt to capture some of the central debates vis-à-vis SF and PCP:

### **2.5.1 Strategic Framework**

- The Strategic Framework sets the overall goal of the UN as building peace through its political and assistance strategy. However, the SF takes it for granted that there is consensus among the UN Security Council over Afghanistan beyond the common stand towards Taliban and that there is adequate support from the UNSC for its political strategy. Second, SF ignores the role of the non-state regional and national actors who may well be benefiting from the



conflict rather than peace. Third, in its laudable but ambitious goal, it seems that SF overestimates the political and economic importance of the UN and that of the community of external actors even when well co-ordinated.

- Perhaps to avoid having to deal with these vexed questions, the focus of SF has almost entirely shifted to the 'assistance leg', which has resulted in limited development of the political strategy and a greater focus on PCP. The link between political and assistance strategy has not yet been defined. There is therefore, as mentioned earlier, a danger that political responsibility is delegated to the assistance actors leading to the increased politicisation of aid.<sup>60</sup>
- Most donors interviewed stated that they support both the SF and PCP processes. However, two donors were more explicit in saying that they supported PCP and were less sure about the SF. The message was: "we just want a better co-ordination of the assistance actors to minimise wastage of resources. The UN should scale down their ambitions and expectations" (aid donors).

### **2.5.2 Principled Common Programming**

- Conceptually, there is unease over the method of co-ordination, i.e. whether by consensus or by control and PCP has yet to resolve this tension. While co-ordination by consensus has been regarded as highly problematic by the advocates of PCP, co-ordination by control has been strongly rejected by the main actors who state that this will reduce their independence and flexibility.<sup>61</sup>
- There is a perception of growing politicisation and manipulation of the PCP process. As one NGO director stated: "The political aspects of human rights have received more attention than the human aspect of humanitarian assistance". Although the PCP philosophy is to make humanitarian assistance demand-driven, according to another NGO director, some donors have managed to make it donor driven. Donors fail to take their hands off the micro-management and operational side of the work, which is the domain of NGOs and UN agencies. This effectively paralyses the whole system, especially when donors are poorly informed about the situation on the ground. Moreover, different actors within the system do not play to their comparative advantages. The UN, for instance, monopolises the high-level engagement with the authorities and yet the NGOs tend to have better contacts and understandings of the situation in the field (NGO director).
- Finally there are problems relating to the implementation of PCP. Many believe that PCP has gone on for too long in Islamabad and Peshawar, with very little to show for it (NGO director). A greater field involvement would perhaps help get around the 'unhelpful level of abstraction'<sup>62</sup> of current debates.

## **2.6 Engagement with the Taliban & Politicisation of Aid**

Dealing with the Taliban has presented the aid community with the challenge of engaging with the "unlike-minded".<sup>63</sup> Taliban policies relating to terrorism, human rights, gender, international humanitarian law, drugs and pursuit of a military solution are fundamentally incompatible with the world view and strategic interests of the international community.

Although various instruments have been used by donor governments, their impacts on the Taliban have been limited. As already mentioned, aid has been one of these instruments; however, a recent study concluded that "attempts to use aid incentives and disincentives to influence policies in Afghanistan have not been effective."<sup>64</sup> Aid agencies have long argued that the

effectiveness of aid should not be assessed in terms of achieving foreign policy objectives. It should be seen in its efforts to meet the humanitarian objectives in accordance with the International Humanitarian Law and the international Code of Conduct,<sup>65</sup> and with the principles set out in the Strategic Framework. Confrontational conditionalities and political pressures on aid workers have by and large proved counterproductive.<sup>66</sup> A critical question, which we turn to next, is whether peace-building should be part of the humanitarian mainstream, or should it stay within the realms of foreign policy?

## Chapter Three: Humanitarian Assistance and Peacebuilding

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### 3.1 **Current Donor Strategies & Approaches to Conflict Prevention & Peacebuilding**

We can identify two broad approaches to conflict reduction and peacebuilding amongst aid donors: Working in Conflict and Working on Conflict.<sup>67</sup> The former relates to agencies attempting to develop a conflict sensitive and principled approach to delivering humanitarian assistance. Its primary focus is on mitigating conflict-related risks so that programmes are not negatively affected by, or have an adverse effect on, the dynamics of violent conflict. Working on conflict refers to agencies with an explicit conflict reduction/peacebuilding agenda. This means actively seeking opportunities to mitigate violent conflict and support peacebuilding processes. This is based on the assumption that aid can have a positive effect on the structures and incentives systems that drive violent conflict.

### 3.2 **Working in Conflict**

This approach is characterised by a range of reactive and proactive policies that donors have adopted for the delivery of conflict sensitive and principled assistance.

#### **3.2.1 Delivery of Conflict Sensitive & Principled Assistance**

Donors and NGOs have come a long way since the 1980s when, as one NGO worker candidly admitted, “we started off by carrying bags of dollars to commanders. Agencies have learnt from their experiences of fuelling conflict, when aid directly fed into the war economy”.<sup>68</sup> The accountability, management and delivery of aid has improved since the cold war years. In recent years, donors have encouraged agencies to take monitoring and evaluation, humanitarian principles and conflict sensitivity more seriously. Through a combination of practical experience (sometimes of ‘doing harm’) and debates within the aid community, encouraged through the Strategic Framework and PCP framework, there has been a growing convergence on what constitutes good humanitarian practice in Afghanistan. These include investing in conflict analysis and security management, developing principles and ethical frameworks, encouraging community consultation and supporting local livelihoods, coping strategies and institutions. These approaches are based on the following assumptions:

- the primacy of the humanitarian imperative i.e. responding to humanitarian needs in an impartial and appropriate manner.
- aid may inadvertently do harm and it is incumbent on agencies to ensure they minimise the potentially negative impacts.
- in the Afghan context, aid is not the right instrument for bringing peace and there are limited opportunities to ‘do good’. It is unrealistic and inappropriate to stretch the mandate of humanitarian aid to include peacebuilding. This leads to the distortion of the humanitarian imperative and the politicisation of aid.

In Afghanistan, although ‘do no harm’ has been widely disseminated, most donors have interpreted it in a narrow way; they have picked up on the potential for aid to do harm, but

not on its potential to 'do good'. Donors have tended to take a minimalist approach that advocates avoiding fuelling the conflict through "resource transfers" and "implicit ethical messages". It has also been tied up with a trend towards aid conditionality. The two policy trends merge around the issue of the Taliban and the challenges they presented to the international community. This merger found expression in the key principles and policies of the assistance community as illustrated below:

- "4. Rehabilitation and development assistance shall be provided only where it can be reasonably determined that no direct political or military advantage will accrue to the warring parties in Afghanistan.
5. Institution and capacity-building activities must advance human rights and will not seek to provide support to any presumptive state authority which does not fully subscribe to the principles contained in the founding instruments of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and International Humanitarian Law."<sup>69</sup>

Whilst few would disagree with the above statements, how they are interpreted in practice can be problematic. There is a danger, for example, that 'do no harm' principles can be used as a pretext for 'doing nothing'. Support for water and sanitation programmes in Kabul is a case in point. Some argue that this represents a life saving humanitarian programme, while a number of donors argue that since it is implemented through the local administration, it represents a form of capacity building indirectly supporting the Taliban and in this sense is 'doing harm'. The difference between life saving, life sustaining and capacity building aid has become increasingly blurred as conditionalities are applied indiscriminately. Supporting a water supply department to provide potable water for a population or assisting a government-owned hospital are, therefore, seen as capacity building and are to be avoided. Apart from the ethical questions this raises, it has also had limited effectiveness in terms of producing behavioural change on the part of the Taliban.

### **3.2.2 Donor Concerns about Peacebuilding**

Although most donors recognised that conflict-sensitive aid could help ameliorate conflict at a community level, few believed that humanitarian assistance was the right policy instrument to use for peace building. As one aid donor commented: "Aid seems to be a major instrument by default". As a general rule, the further one goes down the aid chain, the greater the level of scepticism. Field staff working at the 'sharp end' tended to have a more pragmatic view about peacebuilding opportunities, than those based in Islamabad (who in turn had a more pragmatic view than those framing policies at Head Quarters). The following concerns were expressed by donors about the peacebuilding agenda:

*Definition:* Evidently, peace cannot be divorced from politics and various political leaders have introduced a discourse of peacebuilding and reconciliation for short-term interests, to mobilise support or facilitate strategic truces. Najibullah's national reconciliation programme in the early 1990s was a case in point. Peace evidently means different things to different people and whereas for a Pashtun man in Kandahar, the Taliban may have brought peace, for a Kabali woman they have brought oppression. Interestingly, research indicates that the majority of the population still defines peace within a national framework,<sup>70</sup> which is at odds with the analysis of some external commentators who believe peace will only come through dividing Afghanistan into regional entities. It is precisely because peace is such a contentious and political issue that

many donors are reluctant to engage with it seriously. There is also a lack of conceptual clarity in current debates on peacebuilding. Some of the ‘champions’ of peacebuilding tend to use the term very loosely, while the ‘sceptics’ often confuse peacemaking with peacebuilding. Different donors often use the same terminology to describe very different things.

*Ethics:* Humanitarian action is mandated to reduce human suffering and it can not be used as a policy instrument to substitute political action to be taken by the international community. “We do not believe in using food aid as a weapon. It is clear that cutting off aid to women and widows will not help stop the war” (aid donors). Another donor argued that peacemaking should be left to the “diplomats” and not “aid workers”. This perhaps also reinforces the above point that donors are not clear about the terminology and are using very different concepts and terms interchangeably.

*Effectiveness:* Donors are sceptical about the impacts and efficacy of re-focusing programmes on peacebuilding. While all recognised the importance of good development practice, few felt that this kind of work had a cumulative impact. As one aid worker commented, “its like planting trees in a nursery, which are then washed away in a flood.”<sup>71</sup> It makes little sense therefore to re-focus programmes which have such a limited and transitory impact. It is better, the argument goes, to focus on the core business of humanitarian aid until the macro environment changes. Although aid work may ameliorate local conflicts over resources, this does not address the wider dynamics of the conflict. Aid appears to have an extremely limited impact at the macro level, whether in the form of advocacy, conditionality or otherwise.<sup>72</sup> As argued earlier, aid has limited economic leverage in relation to the regional war economy. A recent World Bank study<sup>73</sup> of transborder trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan, estimated that the value of this trade amounted to US\$ 2.5 billion per annum. Similarly, revenue generated through the opium economy amounts to US\$ 1.25 billion per annum at the point of export to Pakistan.<sup>74</sup> The war economy has created strong vested interests in the continuation of conflict and aid; by itself it is not going to tip the balance towards a ‘peace economy’.

*Assessing impact:* A final reason for scepticism amongst donors was the problem of measuring impacts. These problems may be no different from the ones associated with measuring the impact of social development programmes. However, as in many other aid contexts, which are dominated by the humanitarian community, there is a bias towards what is considered “technical” and “quantifiable”. The lack of a “methodological tool” was seen as a serious impediment. As one donor commented, it is hard to have a “quantifiable indicator” for measuring impact, to “set targets” and to establish “causality”.

### 3.3 Working on Conflict

A small number of donors such as Norway, Netherlands and Switzerland, have been consciously attempting to support their partners to mainstream conflict reduction and peacebuilding strategies into humanitarian and community development work. The key partners to these donors are NCA (Norway), Novib (Netherlands) and the UNDP (Switzerland), with its PEACE Initiative.

Donors and agencies employ a number of strategies and approaches designed to exploit peacebuilding opportunities. At present, these represent a collection of disparate strategies and activities rather than a coherent, joint approach. These are mapped out below in Table 11. In practice, many of these approaches overlap with one another; however, we have attempted to isolate the key features, assumptions and constraints related to each one. We have also divided

the approaches into those which may have an indirect impact on peacebuilding processes i.e. peacebuilding is mainstreamed into on-going relief and development work and those which have an explicit and sole focus on peace.

**Table II Donor Approaches to Conflict**

APPROACH	FEATURES	ASSUMPTIONS	CONSTRAINTS
INDIRECT APPROACHES:  Community development/ empowerment	Longer term community development programming which aims to empower communities by providing alternative livelihoods, developing community-based organisations, strengthening social capital and building good governance, e.g. UNDP PEACE Initiative, Habitat Community Forum and community development programmes of NCA and its Afghan partners.	Community development will contribute to peacebuilding by creating sustainable livelihoods, decreasing competition over resources and developing alternative forms of leadership and governance. Peacebuilding is in effect 'just' good development practice.	Positive initiatives at the community level may not have a cumulative impact and are likely to be destroyed by top-down violence. Suspicion from Afghan communities at outside attempts at social engineering.
Civil society strengthening	Capacity building support for intermediary organisations such as Afghan NGOs, community Shuras or Forums e.g. NCA and Habitat.	Supporting intermediary organisations will help mobilise countervailing voices in civil society and contribute to the development of social capital or 'peace' capital in Afghan society.	Lack of legitimacy of Afghan NGOs. Social capital in Afghan society is based on informal, kinship structures, rather than the formal, rule-based organisations that donors support. Macro leverage of NGOs is insignificant as horizontal linkages at macro level are given no priority.
Do no harm	Incorporating 'do no harm' methodology into on-going relief and development activities – but looking for peacebuilding opportunities as well as mitigating risks e.g.. USAID, NCA.	All societies contain 'connectors' and local capacities for peace. Aid agencies can programme in such a way that they support 'pro-peace constituencies'.	Danger of overstating the leverage and impact of aid and of integrative social engineering. In extreme application, tensions between this and the humanitarian imperative. It is difficult to see how agencies who have adopted 'do no harm' methodologies have actually changed their practice.
Protection/human rights	Incorporating rights-based approaches into on-going relief and development programmes e.g.. CARE,	Helping create an environment where basic rights are respected and promoted will in the long-term	Aid has had a limited effect on behavioural change of the parties guilty of human rights abuses – its leverage on

	Save the Children (US) and SCF(UK).	help create sustainable peace.	such actors is limited. Because of security concerns, aid agencies have had to evacuate when their watchdog role was most needed.
Co-operation on IHL & public welfare	The warring parties have been brought to a negotiation table in Switzerland to discuss common concerns on humanitarian access and public welfare and to agree on how co-operate on these.	Humanitarian access and public welfare are common concerns of the warring parties and therefore they will potentially attract the parties to co-operate with each other.  Negotiation and the resultant collaboration on humanitarian concerns have potential impact on peace negotiation and settlement.	Political and military agendas of the parties have always taken precedence over humanitarian concerns.  Acting with impunity and unaccountability make it possible for the parties to turn a blind eye to the humanitarian situations. The strategies and policies of the warring parties are set by their patronage system rather than merely by themselves.
Tranquillity days of immunity	Calling a temporary cease-fire between warring parties for humanitarian activities e.g. UNICEF national immunisation campaigns.	Such events will not create peace per se but create opportunities to broker cease fires and establish a level of understanding and respect for IHL.	Although they help secure access they have little impact on the wider dynamics of the conflict.
<b>DIRECT APPROACHES:</b> Conflict resolution training	Training for NGO workers and community members in conflict resolution and mediation techniques e.g. CPAU.	Conflict is the result of a breakdown of communication. Conflict resolution skills will facilitate better communication and help ameliorate or prevent violent conflict.	Ignores the political and economic factors driving conflict. Inappropriateness of western models. Subversive messages in relation to violence perpetrators. Problems related to mainstreaming – what happens after the training?
Peace education	Peace education through schools, literature and the radio e.g. BBC New Home, New Life.	Peace education counters the 'militarisation of the mind'. It imparts peace messages to the next generation and represents an investment in the future.	By itself it cannot address the underlying political economy of the conflict.
Peace conditional aid	Offering the carrot of large-scale reconstruction and development aid on the condition of a durable peace e.g. Japan and EU.	Poverty and the lack of economic alternatives to warfare are driving the conflict. Reconstruction funding will provide an incentive to warlords to stop fighting.	The package is not sufficient to wean warlords away from the war economy. The warring factions have limited interest in 'putting the state back together'.

### **3.3.1 Analysis of Attempts to Work on Conflict**

The activities outlined above represent a very small share of the overall funding allocated to Afghanistan. The lion's share of funding is in the form of short-term relief and food aid. The Appeal is consistently under-funded for longer-term, capacitybuilding activities.

#### **Indirect Approaches**

The main donor agencies attempting to mainstream peacebuilding are UNDP (PEACE programme), HABITAT (Community Fora) and NCA in their work with Afghan NGOs, such as ADA. The experience of ADA shows that sensitive long-term donor support combined with strong NGO leadership and a community based approach, sensitive to the dynamics of conflict, can yield important benefits. ADA's 'transformation by stealth' approach has helped support local leadership, create alternative livelihoods and nurture social capital. However, because it is so difficult to assess impacts, debates on peacebuilding tend to be based largely on assumptions and anecdotes, rather than hard evidence. The same applies, it might be added, to programs with social development objectives; agencies often have as poor an understanding of programme impacts on sustainable livelihoods as they do of impacts on the dynamics of peace and conflict. This, however, makes it difficult to prioritise and make programming choices. It is hard to justify allocating resources to an activity where one can only speculate about the eventual impact.

It is still unclear, therefore, what mainstreaming means in practice. Although some agencies have adopted a 'do no harm' policy, it is sometimes unclear how their practice has changed. The central challenge of mainstreaming appears to be the one of simultaneously pursuing multiple objectives. This inevitably leads to tensions and tradeoffs, between pursuing, for example, humanitarian needs, human rights and peace. The question of how you prioritize what may sometimes be contradictory goals is one that many agencies struggle with. The question of gender, for example, has been a particularly thorny one, particularly for agencies operating in Kabul where Taliban gender policies are applied more strictly. Many have had to balance the principles of meeting humanitarian needs versus principles of justice and equity; with some agencies, like Oxfam, putting an emphasis on the latter which meant stopping their programmes.

A second major challenge is that of capacity building. If agencies are to have long-term impacts on local institutions, leadership and social capital, they need to think less about service delivery and more about creating social energy and institutional entrepreneurship. Although village level institutions have been remarkably resilient at the level above the village, with the collapse of the state and local government there is an institutional vacuum. Agencies need to make a serious and strategic investment in building local governance. This may not in itself build peace, but it will increase the resilience of communities to survive external shocks and help prepare the ground for a future peace.

Finally, there appears to be more potential to incorporate peacebuilding into education and media programs than has been tried to date. Aid agencies have a poor record in the area of education, both in terms of co-ordinated approaches and in terms of investing in a culture of peace. NGO textbooks in the past included exercises like counting AK 47s and were very much part of a pro-war agenda. The innovative BBC radio programme New Home New Life Media reaches a wide audience inside Afghanistan and incorporates peace messages into its on-going drama. This model could perhaps be built upon and exploited more by aid agencies than has been done to date.



## Direct Approaches

There are very few initiatives which focus solely on peacebuilding and community reconciliation. There have been a number of training workshops focusing on imparting mediation and conflict resolution skills to NGO staff. However, these tend to be stand-alone initiatives, which do not link into a wider framework. Such activities tend to be ghettoised and have a limited impact on thinking and practice within the wider aid community. Direct approaches may be limited conceptually because they create a separate sphere of activity called 'peace and reconciliation'. This tends to depoliticise activities as they are de-linked from wider political issues such as justice, human rights and equity. There is a need to think more carefully about how such activities might be linked to mainstream aid work.

In conclusion, efforts to work 'on conflict' were rather disparate and fragmented and were given limited donor support. Owing to this and the limitations imposed by the wider political environment, it is unlikely that such activities can have a cumulative impact. At best they represented a holding operation and an investment in local institutions; leadership is likely to be of increasing importance in the event of a peace settlement.

## 3.4 Constraints on Improving Donor Practice

### 3.4.1 Understanding and Impact Assessment

Donors employ a range of different systems and mechanisms to collect and interpret information, such as internal reports, field visits, diplomatic missions, evaluations and the international and local media. Donors, however, still have a limited understanding about the impact of aid both in terms of its immediate objective (of life-saving for instance), and its wider impact on conflict and peace. This is due to the following reasons:

*Financial and human resource constraints:* Many donors stated that it was difficult to maintain current levels of funding. With most funding being allocated for humanitarian needs, it is difficult to justify spending money on the 'luxury' of strategic studies and impact assessment in relation to peace and conflict. Many donors and NGOs frequently complain about the sheer lack of time. This is not an individual problem, but a systemic one that has to be tackled as such. It may partly be related to donor priorities and how resources are allocated. The majority of the donors for instance complained about their limited capacity. It is rare to find a full time strategic manager and policy maker with a portfolio for Afghanistan. Evidently, this limits the capacity of donors to collect adequate information, carry out accurate and objective analysis, or form a good foundation of understanding before making or changing an aid policy that more often than not carries a social cost. One of the troika chairs of the ASG explained, "Of the 16 members of ASG, only 4-6 visit the country regularly and the rest do not."

*Constraints on analytical capacity:* No single donor was satisfied with the adequacy of evaluation and strategic impact assessment and studies. Evaluations often take place on an ad hoc basis. More often than not they look at programmes, rather than strategies and strategic assessment, and are therefore more for control purposes than learning. As found elsewhere, when evaluation is linked to funding, mistakes are pushed underground and opportunities for learning are lost. The DANIDA study<sup>75</sup> stated that Afghanistan is perhaps one of the most under-researched countries.

Almost all donors agreed on the need for more strategic and system-wide studies providing a global picture of the political and humanitarian context. A promising development is taking

place as the donors are moving ahead with the idea of SMU (Strategic Monitoring Unit), which may be able to address the need for strategic understanding and analysis.

*Quality of information and information blockages:* Donors have not invested sufficiently in improving their information systems. What is sent up the system is more often than not information concerning outputs, rather than impacts (concerning humanitarian action) and recycled information, rather than rigorous and objective analysis (in both humanitarian and political spheres).

Information has also become politicised. For instance, according to some field-based actors, the Feminist Majority and the human rights special rapporteurs are in fact spreading out disinformation with biased analyses that are extremely influential in shaping donor policies. While the field and even Islamabad-based actors do not necessarily agree with all of what is fed into the system, they are unable to filter it. Communication among poorly informed actors does not lead to high quality information and analysis.

### **3.4.2 Advocacy and Peacebuilding**

There is a growing recognition that the aid community has been weak in the area of advocacy.<sup>76</sup> In many respects the aid system has been less than the sum of its parts in terms of applying leverage to generate positive changes in the regional conflict system. There are a number of emerging debates and ideas within the Afghan aid community relating to how pressures might be applied more strategically to have a positive influence on the dynamics of conflict and peace. These include:

- Increased accountability on the part of the UN Security Council for its actions and inaction to address the conflict and its associated evils in Afghanistan.
- Imposition of an effective and transparent arms embargo.
- Increased pressure on regional states to act according to the declaration of the six-plus-two and other UN resolutions on withdrawing support for the Afghan warring parties. In the event of non-compliance, serious use of various policy instruments (political and economic) should be made.
- Establishment of an international mechanism to mobilise the international community in (a) giving prominence to the Afghanistan crisis, (b) demanding accountability on the part of influential states in relations to Afghanistan, and (c) prevention of war and war crimes by taking practical measures.
- Mobilisation of solidarity groups, civil society organisations and campaigns aimed at influencing policy makers and decisions makers.
- Support for a regional reconstruction fund which would be sufficiently large to be an incentive for peace.

While aid agencies played a very effective role lobbying for the Afghan cause during the Cold War years, they no longer assume such a role. The battle for hearts and minds has been lost to the likes of the tabloid press and the Feminist Majority with their simplistic portrayals of anarchy and a 'return to barbarism'. These images do have an important influence on policy as shown by the impact of the Feminist Majority campaign on US foreign policy. The aid community has been slow to respond to and counteract the strategies of such groups who have learnt to

‘punch above their weight’. Part of the problem may be related to the shift from solidarity during the 1980s to service delivery in the 1990s. This shift has induced what has been described as a ‘crisis of conformity’<sup>77</sup> within the NGO sector. As NGOs increasingly become the contractors for official donors, their room for manoeuvre, innovation and creativity becomes increasingly stifled. More importantly, their ability to critique and influence donors diminishes. In Afghanistan, the overwhelming dependence of the NGO sector on official donors comes out very starkly. The current thrust of NGO advocacy for example, is directed towards protecting ‘hard’ institutional interests, such as funding and operational policies, rather than the ‘soft’ issues of strategic accountability, local ownership and participation. The ‘dissident voices’ that might otherwise critique donor policies have in a sense been ‘bought out’ and silenced. This is a very unhealthy development.

### **3.4.3 Donor Accountability**

Although donors have been largely responsible for driving the debate on NGO accountability, their own accountability mechanisms are extremely underdeveloped. Despite the increased level of donor transparency and sharing through ASG, APB and the whole process of SF and PCP, there has still yet to appear a mechanism for holding donors accountable for their policy decisions and the consequences. In response to the Taliban dilemma, donors often resorted to conditionality and the consequent politicisation of aid. While many do understand the conditions that triggered responses and sympathise with donors to some extent, what appears to be questionable is often the type of response, its effectiveness and consequences. Examples include politicisation of gender, security, institutional support/capacity building and, worse, suspension of programmes, as well as sanctions and ill-designed funding mechanism.

A study argues that:

“It seems possible that the absence of UN international staff from the country since August 1998<sup>78</sup> and the stopping of ECHO funding to projects in Kabul may have had adverse humanitarian impacts. What is noteworthy in this context is that there appears to be no mechanism of donor accountability for this.”<sup>79</sup> It later continues:

“Debates about accountability, for instance, rarely encompass donor accountability, for failure to reform inefficient and ill-designed funding procedures or for the humanitarian impact of conditionalities’.<sup>80</sup>

A striking example of how donors ignore the impact of their policies is their unwillingness or failure to assess the humanitarian impact of the sanctions imposed by the UNSC last year. In the section above, we mentioned that assessment of strategic and even programme level impact of aid is not given sufficient priority by many donors.

One area of accountability that has received the least attention is accountability of aid by policy makers to Afghans at large. One donor frankly admitted:

“Accountability to the Afghan communities is very important. But, we are sitting in Islamabad and it is hard to establish realistically what level of accountability we could establish to Afghans. However, we have not properly discussed it” (aid donor).

There is much talk about Afghan ownership of PCP and the need for accountability, but there has never been made a serious effort to look at innovative ways of involving Afghans beyond the symbolic presence of a handful of Afghan aid workers at ‘higher level’ meetings. After all,

the Afghan aid workers are part of the system; the aid system needs to look at ways of becoming more inclusive and involving a wider spectrum of Afghan civil society leaders, both inside and outside the country, within the aid policy making system. There is a need to move beyond symbolism or tokenism. It is about giving a voice to Afghans of different backgrounds and interests, to feed back how policies, actions and inaction have impacted on their lives. There are currently two separate discourses going on: The international discourse and the Afghan discourse. As long as this remains the case, aid policy will rarely be consistent with local realities. This disconnection is heightened by the fact that the aid community is located in a neighbouring country and has little understanding of the daily reality of the Afghan context. Donors need to explore ways of involving, listening and being more receptive to Afghan voices (male and female) so that the gap between these two discourses is narrowed. This may mean employing more Afghans in decision-making positions and developing spaces and mechanisms to listen and consult more with Afghan groups. It should also involve a greater commitment to spending time inside Afghanistan. The transfer of the UNSMA offices to Kabul was a positive step in this regard. Policy, however, continues to be developed by those who are several steps removed from the people who will benefit from, or suffer the consequences of, such policies.

One should not ignore the need to develop accountability in other parts of the aid system. There are evident accountability problems with the donors' implementing 'partners'. We know of no mechanism, again beyond symbolism, by which the aid agencies account for their decisions, actions or inaction to the Afghan public. There is no 'aid ombudsman' that the Afghan public can go to and make their complaints. There is no 'aid court' to hear cases of aid agencies failing to fulfil their mandate and respect International Humanitarian Law. As a result, aid workers and agencies have de facto impunity. Had it not been so, there would have been better responses to the Code of Conduct and SPHERE standards, to disaster affected populations in recent years, or better protection for refugees, IDPs and civilians.

The starting point for any debate on peacebuilding has to be 'who defines peace?' The aid community has not seriously engaged with this question in Afghanistan and until it develops mechanisms that create greater downward accountability, it is unlikely to do so.

## Chapter Four: Case Studies of Humanitarian Action in Practice

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How do the constraints and dilemmas described in sections two and three play themselves out in practice? How can aid agencies work more effectively in conflict? What does it mean, in practice to work ‘on’ conflict? The following section aims to address these questions through an examination of two case studies. The first focuses on a WFP Bakeries Project in Kabul, which in many respects represents an attempt to work ‘in’ conflict, while the second examines Norwegian Church Aid’s work with Afghan NGOs, which has an explicit focus on peacebuilding.

### 4.1 Case-Study 1: WFP Kabul Bakery Project

#### 4.1.1 General Context

The WFP Kabul Bakery Project was selected as a case study for several reasons. Firstly, it is located in Kabul, where many of the most acute challenges and dilemmas are faced by aid agencies. Secondly, the project is significant in terms of its size and outreach; around 57,000 Afghan families directly benefit from this project. Thirdly, in addition to its humanitarian impacts, the project may have sufficient size and profile to have an impact (positive or negative) on the wider political context.

While many other areas in Afghanistan might be categorised as ‘development settings’, the humanitarian operation in Kabul is overwhelmingly a relief programme. From being an island of relative affluence and privilege in pre-war Afghanistan, Kabul has become a political and economic backwater. Multiple displacements (there are 160,000 IDPs in Kabul), a lack of access to land, a high dependency ratio and the availability of aid have contributed to a high concentration of ‘hard core’ urban poor in the capital city. The collapse of state services and the imposition of international sanctions compound these problems. It is thought that people in Kabul are dependent on humanitarian aid. This situation has been worsened by the prevailing drought that has affected 12 million Afghans, three to four million severely, and left the country with a record high cereal deficit exceeding 2.3 million tons.<sup>81</sup>

Kabul is therefore an area of great humanitarian need, and it receives more aid than any other province in Afghanistan. In addition to WFP’s relief programme, ICRC and CARE alone provide relief aid to 120,000 and 60,000 people respectively. For a significant proportion of the population, humanitarian aid is an essential part of their coping strategies. While the needs are great, the operational constraints on aid agencies in Kabul are more pronounced than in other parts of the country. Taliban policies and strictures have tended to be applied more strictly here, and there have been a series of confrontations over a range of issues from access to women, to the location of offices, to the employment of staff. As one relief worker noted, “mentally, Kabul is harder than anywhere else I’ve worked”. It is the combination of overwhelming humanitarian need with the constant battle to ensure that humanitarian needs can be met in an effective and principled way that makes Kabul such a difficult programming environment.

#### **4.1.2 Background on WFP and the Kabul Bakery Project**

WFP is one of the largest multilateral donors to Afghanistan, with a budget of US\$235 million, 1997-2000 (1997:US\$53m, 1998:US\$41m, 1999:US\$53 and 2000: US\$88m). WFP aims to assist 1.8 million Afghans through a combination of relief (e.g. Bakery Project, Emergency Feeding, Institutional Feeding, Repatriation Assistance, IDP Assistance) and rehabilitation/development assistance (e.g. Food for Education, Training, Work and Seed). An emphasis is placed on gender equity and over 57 per cent of the total beneficiaries in 2000 were women.

WFP has built an extensive logistical infrastructure both inside and outside the country, shipping commodities in via a southern route (Pakistan) and a northern corridor (Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan). Collaborative links have been developed with UN agencies (UNHCR, HABTAT, FAO and WHO) and national and international NGOs (ACTED, MCI, PRB, ACBAR, GAA, OXFAM, etc.). In addition, WFP collaborates on specific projects in limited areas with government departments (Ministries of Planning, Social Affairs, Public Health and Rural Development).

The Kabul Bakery Project started in 1994 and is one of the three Bakery Projects in the country, with the other two in Jalalabad and Mazar. 28,000 MT food, around 25 per cent of WFP's total 2000 assistance for the country, was distributed through the Kabul Bakery project. The project provides food relief to 53,000 households (19 per cent of the total households in Kabul), of which 7,000 are widows or female-headed families (49 per cent of the total beneficiaries). These families receive 2 kg of bread a day from the bakeries at a highly subsidised rate, i.e. five per cent of the market price. The programme is delivered through seven NGOs (one international and six Afghan<sup>82</sup>). Excluding the WFP staff, some 1,500 personnel have been involved in the operation.

#### **4.1.3 The Challenge of Working 'in' Conflict**

The project involves the delivery of significant resources in a resource-scarce and highly politicised environment. The primary challenge is one of ensuring that humanitarian needs are met while minimising the potentially negative side effects of such a project. In other words, how can one work effectively 'in' conflict?

##### **Meeting humanitarian needs**

By any standards, the Kabul Bakery Project is a significant one, with 19 per cent of the entire Kabul city population and 49 per cent of the widows receiving assistance. An emphasis has been placed on identifying and reaching the most vulnerable within a context of chronic poverty and insecurity. How successful the project has been in achieving this is difficult to determine. The lack of formal and consistent efforts to examine the impact of food aid of the bakery project Kabul is part of a wider concern, that WFP impact assessment is often confined to the numbers of beneficiaries and does not attempt to understand the post-distribution use of food aid.<sup>83</sup>

There is, however, some consensus among aid workers and beneficiaries that the 'nan card' constitutes a substantial part of family income. To take the figures provided by the field staff and VAM analysis, a typical Kabuli family of six requires a minimum income of US\$36 a month (US\$6 per person per month) to purchase their minimum food and non-food requirements. The two kg of bread a day is worth US\$0.35 (US\$11 a month), which constitutes 31 per cent

of the required minimum income. The average income of a low rank civil servant is roughly US\$7 a month. Highly subsidised bread (nan) allows a significant part of a family income (31 per cent) to be spent on other basic requirements for survival.

Interviewees claimed that between 80 to 90 per cent of the current beneficiaries meet the basic criterion of minimum income and are therefore eligible. "If they (the beneficiaries) use the card to feed their family, then they need it. The better-off would not be prepared to accept the 'social stigma' associated with the Nan Card and the daily effort to get nan from the bakeries" (a field worker).

An indirect economic benefit of the project, for the entire city population, is often assessed in its ability to control the market prices of the staple food without adversely affecting local producers (Kabul traditionally imports food). Some aid workers associated with the project stated that in 1999 the project was closed for three days; during the three days, the price of one bag of flour (around 100 kg) soared from Afs 1.1 million to Afs 1.3 million.

The project has been criticised, by some, for giving humanitarian handouts for six years and creating 'dependency'. Some argue that more efforts should have been put into addressing food insecurity and developing sustainable livelihoods. This criticism, however, is based on an unrealistic assessment of what humanitarian aid can and should be expected to achieve in such a context. This project is primarily about decreasing vulnerability and helping poor families to spread risks.

### **Principled aid: The gender question**

One of the main dilemmas facing all aid agencies in Afghanistan, particularly in Kabul, is how to deliver aid to the most needy in a principled way. The principle of gender equity has consistently been challenged. Although the denial of women's rights is not unique to the Taliban, it has been the only party to make gender discrimination a matter of policy. In July 2000 for instance, Mullah Omar passed decree number 8 resulting in a ban on all female employment in aid agencies, apart from within the government health sector.

WFP's strategy and policies on gender are set from Rome and have been characterised by strict programme conditions on gender equality in terms of beneficiary targeting and participation. This partly reflects the general donor climate, which has tended to be quite confrontational and ideologically driven. It has been argued that this approach has done little to advance the practical or strategic needs of women; "various programmes have been curtailed or restricted because of the inability to fulfil Rome's conditions".<sup>84</sup> Interviewees admitted that a quota-based approach to gender had serious practical short-comings: "It is not possible for WFP to design food-for-work activities, which include 25 per cent women as direct participants".<sup>85</sup>

A more pragmatic approach has emerged involving first, an emphasis on progressively increasing the number of women as direct beneficiaries in total rather than imposing quotas for individual projects. Second, the food-for-work project is directed at community activities where assets created produce outputs at least equally shared between women and men. Third, food-for-work training and education is provided in a way in which women's rights to education, health and work are advanced. This will be coupled with advocacy efforts with the Taliban and the use of WFP's economic muscles as leverage for policy and behavioural change. Fourth, in order to expand WFP's access to women, it has emphasised increasing female (national and international) staff recruitment and capacity building.

It has been argued that decree number 8 may have been precipitated by WFP's recruitment of a large number of Afghan women for a city-wide survey. This forced the closure of WFP women bakeries' in Kabul on 17 August 2000, although, perhaps as a result of pressure from the media, the bakeries were re-opened in 24 hours.

### **Ensuring aid does no harm**

Whether aid 'does harm' is difficult to determine since WFP does not examine its programmes from a peace and conflict perspective. There is some awareness that food aid should be delivered in such a way that it does not increase inter-group tensions, based partly on experience of poorly monitored food aid programmes in the 1980s.

At a micro level, the project may inadvertently feed inter-group tensions in a number of ways. Food aid may, for instance, feed the patronage networks of the Wakil-e-Gozars (neighbourhood representative assigned by the local municipality), or be diverted by the authorities to maintain their support base. Some interviewees also pointed to cases of favouritism in terms of the selection of project beneficiaries. Whether this occurs in practice is irrelevant; the mere perception that these practices are prevalent can lead to inter-group tensions and conflicts. In one instance, a district municipal administrator halted the bakery nan distribution to 4,000 families for 20 days and allowed the operation to continue only when he got some coupons for his friends and relations. Although such examples may have a limited impact on the macro dynamics of conflict and peace, they may play a role in undermining community level social cohesion and trust between communities and the aid system.

Whether the Kabul Bakery Project has an impact on conflict dynamics at a macro level is more contentious. It might be argued, as the following interviewee does, that a project of this magnitude can have significant 'substitution effects':

"We are in a dilemma of choosing between a response driven by a humanitarian imperative and one based on political analysis. WFP spends an average of US\$50 million on food per annum. If we didn't do it, the Taliban would be in a dilemma to choose between buying bullets or food for the starving population they control. The Taliban now sends people's requests for assistance to us; they would need to consider such requests themselves, if we were not present... no authority can function without some kind of political response to the needs of the population under their rule. We make it easier for them to continue their war...."

This view, perhaps, overestimates the value of humanitarian aid in relation to other resources that warring groups use to sustain the war effort and their patronage networks. One interviewee claimed that the Taliban allocate roughly one million US dollars per year on the government health budget, whereas they spend roughly the same amount per week on the war effort. Whether these figures are accurate or not, the point is that aid has a limited leverage and the Taliban do not place a priority on the welfare of the population under their control. Because they rely on coercion and have external and internal lines of support, they are relatively impervious to the sticks and carrots that can be applied by aid actors. Therefore, the withdrawal of aid, in addition to being ethically unsound, is unlikely to lead to policy and behavioural change by the authorities.



#### **4.1.4 The Challenge of Working ‘on’ Conflict**

Does the Bakery project have peacebuilding impacts? Are there opportunities for such a programme to work more explicitly ‘on’ conflict? Field workers pointed to three areas where the project may support peacebuilding processes at a micro level:

- The assistance provided by the project may have provided a safety net to chronically vulnerable groups who would otherwise have resorted to conflict related coping strategies, i.e. serving as soldiers, displacement, criminality, etc.
- The project has maintained an international presence in Kabul, which may work as a disincentive to rights violations, and helped bring the attention of the international community to the plight of the Kabulis.
- In addition to the international presence, aid projects have provided employment for educated Afghans who would otherwise have left the country. The role of aid agencies in keeping a future Afghan leadership in ‘cold storage’ until the return of peace should not be underestimated.

These three roles – providing non-warring alternatives, performing a witnessing role and nurturing a future Afghan leadership – are important indirect benefits of the programme. Would a more explicit focus on peacebuilding be desirable and operationalisable? Could WFP, because of its size and profile in Kabul do more to exert pressure on the Taliban in relation to gender equity and other human rights issues? We do not know enough about internal decision making mechanisms and incentives within the Taliban to come to definitive conclusions. Based on experience to date, however, it appears that little can be gained from confrontational stances aiming to change Taliban policies head-on. Greater success has been experienced by low key approaches attempting to change practice at the local level by working alongside local Taliban officials. A pragmatic, ‘transformation by stealth’ approach, therefore makes the most sense in the current operating environment.

#### **4.1.5 Conclusions on the Kabul Bakery Project**

The WFP project highlights the constraints on aid agencies working in Kabul. While there may be more room for manoeuvre in other parts of the country, in Kabul the main challenge is one of meeting humanitarian needs, while ensuring that unintended negative impacts are minimised. Critical lessons emerging from this case study are:

- Be realistic about the ability of humanitarian aid in engineering wider political or economic change. In Kabul, the overwhelming priority is one of meeting humanitarian needs; if more expansive approaches run the risk of detracting from this objective, they should be resisted.
- Be more conscious of a project’s potential for doing harm or doing good; develop monitoring systems which explicitly take peace and conflict dynamics into account.
- Place a strong emphasis on analytical and listening skills. A greater emphasis on monitoring and evaluation, community consultation and stronger political analysis are required by agencies working in chronically unstable, politicised environments.
- Develop flexible policies, which reflect the situation on the ground. Inflexible policies developed in Rome (or New York, London and Geneva), with little consultation from the field, are part of the problem.

## 4.2 Case-study 2: Norwegian Church Aid Peacebuilding Programme

The case study of Norwegian Church Aid offers a contrast to that of WFP. This study examines an organisation that has, in many respects, adapted a 'humanitarian maximalist' approach involving an explicit focus on developmental, long-term approaches, peacebuilding and the capacity development of Afghan NGOs. For these reasons, the NCA study provides an interesting contrast with the more relief focused, high input WFP project.

### 4.2.1 Norwegian Humanitarian Assistance

Norway has been one of the key humanitarian donor countries, both in its size and continuity of assistance to Afghanistan, since 1979. Between 1997-2000, Norway's assistance to Afghanistan has amounted to around US\$28 million<sup>86</sup> channelled from the MFA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and NORAD (Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation). The former focuses on short-term (maximum one year) humanitarian assistance and the latter on medium to long-term (three to five years) community development assistance. Aid has also been provided to UN assistance programmes (e.g. UNOC, UNDP, FAO, UNOCHA, UNHCR and WHO) and the two Norwegian NGOs, NCA (Norwegian Church Aid Afghanistan Programme) and NAC (Norwegian Committee for Afghanistan).

The Norwegian government has adopted policy positions on a range of issues including: Linking relief to long-term solutions, gender equality, community development approaches, local community ownership, involvement of local authorities in assistance work and co-ordination of donors, UN and NGOs. An explicit link is made between humanitarian action and conflict and peacebuilding. According to a Norwegian government official in Islamabad, "Peacebuilding is not just a macro level engagement. It is also a community development process that entails, among other things, issues of human security, awareness and institution building". Norwegian policies differ from most other donor countries, which are reticent to get involved in long-term development or capacity building work with the local authorities.

### 4.2.2 Norwegian Church Aid Afghanistan Programme (NCA)<sup>87</sup>

NCA arrived in Pakistan in 1979 and up until 1994 was directly operational in refugee and cross border programmes. After 1994, NCA changed its focus towards Afghan NGO support, with the bulk of its resources being spent on long-term rehabilitation and recovery in rural and urban communities inside Afghanistan. NCA worked mostly with Afghan NGOs and to a lesser extent with other international NGOs and UN agencies.

In financial terms, NCA is among the top ten international NGOs working in the country, with a budget of over US\$ 10 million between 1997 and 2000. Of this, roughly 22 per cent has gone into emergency activities and the rest into reconstruction and development work. Also, roughly around 70 per cent of the funding has been channelled through Afghan NGOs and the rest through international NGOs and UN agencies only in emergency situations. Twenty-five per cent of the funding has been disbursed for community development work within a three to five year time frame. Seventy-five per cent of the funds have generally been disbursed within a frame of 12 to 18 months.

NCA's main policy objectives are: (a) Strengthening of local organisations, (b) food security, (c) development of social services, (d) strengthening of emergency preparedness, (e) strengthening conflict management and reconciliation, and (f) improving political operating conditions.

Particular emphasis has been placed on:

- a. Playing a non-operational support role towards its NGO partners, which in practice means provision of resources for partners' humanitarian/development programmes and for their institutional capacity development and advocacy work. Of the 31 largest Islamic and Western International NGOs working for Afghans, three agencies combine a mix of operational and donor modalities (IRC, CARE and NAC) and three are entirely donors (NCA, Novib and Christian Aid). The rest are primarily operational.
- b. Strengthening local capacities in conflict management, reconciliation and peace building. NCA and Novib are perhaps the only two international NGOs with such policy objectives and active programmes related to the policy.

NCA has been able to adopt the approach described above (which in the Afghan context is fairly unusual) because of the relationships that it has established with its back donor and with its Afghan partners.

Firstly, the Norwegian government and NORAD have actively supported and encouraged NCA's focus on longer-term development, institutional development and conflict prevention and peacebuilding. This goes against the grain of most donor thinking, which have involved policy conditionalities on development assistance, a reticence to support Afghan organisations and scepticism about peacebuilding approaches.

NCA has also established strong relationships with its Afghan partner NGOs. NCA distinguishes between two categories of Afghan NGO partners, i.e. the NGO partners with whom it has institutionalised a long-term partnership and those in the early stages of developing a relationship. The former includes the following four NGOs: ADA (Afghan Development Association), NPO/RRAA (Norwegian Project Office/Rural Rehabilitation Association for Afghanistan), CoAR (Co-ordination of Afghan Relief) and ATA/AP (Anti-TB Association Afghanistan Programme), while the latter category includes seven other Afghan NGOs. Particularly for the first category of organisations, there has been a long-term programme of intensive support and mentoring. This has involved an investment in organisational development and the development of shared policies and strategies as well as projects (including policies on conflict prevention and peacebuilding).

#### **4.2.3 PeaceBuilding Initiatives of NCA and its Partners**

To what extent has this commitment to peacebuilding at a policy level translated into activities and impacts at the programme and project level?

A range of activities has been supported by NCA, which aim to sensitise the aid community to conflict issues and promote informed debates around aid, conflict and peace in Afghanistan. This includes a number of conferences, workshops and research projects on conflict, do no harm and peacebuilding. NCA was instrumental in supporting a series of 'do no harm' workshops and training, which led to the development of the CPAU (Conflict, Peace and Unity) network of Afghan aid workers. The purpose of CPAU is to continue the process of training aid workers in "Do No Harm" and conflict prevention and management methodologies.

To build upon these activities, NCA has identified three broad programming areas in the category of conflict prevention and peacebuilding:

*Education of assistance actors:* This work encompasses education of policy makers, managers and practitioners of NGOs and UN agencies on Do No Harm and Working With Conflict in assistance work. The key partner of NCA in this work is CPAU. Currently, over 15 assistance agencies are involved in this work.

*Mainstreaming of “Do No Harm” methodology:* With support from LCPP, USA, NCA and four of their Afghan partners, CPAU, RRAA, CoAR and ADA, are working to mainstream the ‘Do No Harm’ analytical tools into their assistance work. There are two purposes in applying the analytical tools to all programmes: To ensure that the assistance work does not exacerbate the on-going conflict and to support local pro-peace efforts and processes. This work has been implemented in Saidabad, Wardak and Khoshi, Logar.

*Support to local pro-peace efforts:* The main premise of this strategy is to enable Afghan partner NGOs to engage with local communities in long-term assistance work. Such assistance work is concerned with helping local communities organise themselves to work towards their recovery priorities, as well as to manage and resolve local disputes and conflicts of social, economic and political natures. Key features of this work are: Long-term engagement and relationship building with local communities and their institutions, deeper understanding of vulnerabilities, recovery priorities, power structures and dynamics of local conflicts and involvement of local authorities.

A separate initiative has been created to support peace education for Afghan children in a context where pro-war indoctrination (during the 1980s) has been an objective of school education. SIEAL has been the key partner to NCA in the publication of peace literature through a national magazine, Rangeen Kaman, and children books. A peace education programme involving thousands of Afghan children is also being carried out by this agency in Pakistani refugee schools.

#### **4.2.4 Impact of NCA Peacebuilding Initiatives**

What has been the impact of NCA’s activities? To assess this properly would require a longer-term study, which tracks NCA’s impacts over time and compares them with other NGOs that have not adopted a peacebuilding approach. It is not possible to reach definitive conclusions on impacts, but in the following section, we highlight some of the critical questions and issues that arise from an examination of impacts.

##### **Education of assistance actors**

Assessing NCA’s success in this area highlights the problem of attribution. To what extent can changes in thinking and practice within the aid community be attributed to the activities of NCA? Can one isolate the impacts of NCA’s work from a range of other factors that have caused shifts in aid policy and practice? The fact that donors and operational agencies are talking about “do no harm” and peacebuilding to a much greater extent now than they were five years ago is due to a complex mix of issues, many of which have been outlined earlier. Most interviewees felt that NCA had played a positive role in sensitising the aid community to peace and conflict issues and in promoting the capacities and interests of the Afghan NGO sector – particularly as few other international agencies fulfilled this role. One should, however, also keep this role in perspective; relatively few international agencies have changed their strategies and practice to incorporate conflict management and Afghan NGO capacity development. A major challenge still to be addressed by NCA and other international NGOs is that of donor education and

advocacy. NCA has been able to take a more expansive approach to peacebuilding and capacity development because of the relatively enlightened approach of its back donor. More advocacy work is needed with the donor community, since it is often their rigid conditionalities and confrontational stances that get in the way of good practice.

### **Mainstreaming “do no harm” methodology**

NCA was instrumental in introducing “do no harm” concepts to aid agencies in Afghanistan, and they are currently playing an important role in mainstreaming them into agency practice. It is too early to assess whether this has had an impact in terms of changed practice.

### **Support to pro-peace efforts**

NCA has perhaps had the greatest impact through its direct work with partners in terms of influencing thinking and practice. NCA’s partners have all adopted community development approaches, incorporated “do no harm” analysis and developed monitoring and evaluation systems sensitive to the dynamics of violence. The box below provides an example of how this translates into practice at a project level:

#### **Figure 2 CoAR's Experience with Community Conflict Resolution**

The prevailing drought in the country (1999-2000) dried Karezes (underground water channel) of Takar Khail and Khar villages, both of Pashtoon ethnicity, in Saidabad of Wardak province. As a result, like thousands of other villages, the two villages lost their crops and faced an extreme shortage of drinking water. While expansion and rehab of the two Karezes to tap new aquifers was the only way to get some water, a decade-old dispute between the two villages prevented such an action, despite the offer of assistance from CoAR.

As both Karezes originated from the same highland and any unplanned expansion of one Karez would have effects on the other, for years the villagers disputed over their water rights and did not allow each other to embark on Karez expansion. The dispute was taken to courts, from lower to higher, and millions of Afghanis were spent from both sides, but no satisfactory settlement was produced. About two years ago, Taliban intervened, resulting in the injuries of numerous villagers and Taliban soldiers.

CoAR offered its mediating role, as well as its technical assistance to study the hydro-geological aspects of the issue. After quite a lengthy process of negotiation by the Jirgas (local elders’ assembly) of the two villages, facilitated by the well-respected staff of CoAR, the two sides agreed to allow CoAR’s technical study to suggest potential solutions. A technical study by CoAR staff and the Jirga elders of the two villages came up with an acceptable solution, i.e. expansion in different directions for different aquifers. A joint work by the three (the two villages and CoAR), backed up by resources from all sides, managed to expand and deepen the Karezes, bringing down to the villages a flow of water adequate at least for drinking.

Key factors, as described by CoAR Staff, that made the resolution of the dispute possible included: (a) Timing of the intervention at a critical point when both sides critically required drinking water, (b) the fact that both villages trusted CoAR, for the agency has been working in the area for over seven years, (c) the technical solution was in the interest of both, (d) people’s trusted institutions (Jirgas) led the negotiation and settlement process and participated in and learned from the technical study, and (e) all earlier attempts, negotiations and law processes had been manipulated to extract money from the two sides, and this had exhausted the villagers.

Source: Atmar 2000

The case of COAR illustrates the value of a “do no harm” approach at a local level; however, one could also argue that COAR’s approach represents nothing more than good development practice. Most NGOs, it might be argued, have developed a sensitivity to these issues, without going on “do no harm” training courses. Furthermore, these local conflicts and tensions over resources have been perennial features of Afghan life for years and may be unconnected to wider conflict dynamics. Addressing these issues may not contribute to peacebuilding on a wider scale. Perhaps at best, such projects can strengthen local leadership and institutions, which to an extent makes communities less vulnerable to external shocks and may also help them create alternatives to the war economy. This is an argument less for peacebuilding than for long term community development work with a heightened sensitivity to peace and conflict dynamics.

#### **4.2.5 Conclusions on the NCA Peacebuilding Programme**

A number of lessons can be highlighted from the NCA case study. These include:

- The problems of mainstreaming a peacebuilding approach: NCA has implemented a wide range of activities holding peacebuilding objectives; however, it has struggled to meld them into a coherent programme that is greater than the sum of its parts. There is still work to be done to develop peacebuilding as a cross-cutting issue, rather than a separate ‘add on,’ which currently tends to be the case.
- The lack of systematic monitoring and assessment of impacts: Agencies must be able to make informed programming choices based on hard evidence about the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches. Without the ability to track and demonstrate impacts over time, it is difficult to make a strong argument for peacebuilding approaches.
- The critical role of donors: NCA was able to experiment with alternative approaches, which are exceptional within the Afghan context, primarily because of more enlightened donor support. This, in turn, translated into longer-term partnerships with Afghan organisations.
- A ‘third way’ approach?: NCA’s community development approach can be contrasted with the WFP relief programme. The context, to an extent, dictates what is desirable and what is possible. In Kabul an explicit focus on peacebuilding may not be possible or desirable if it detracts from meeting urgent humanitarian needs. In a number of areas where NCA and its partners are operational, the space for longer-term, more expansive approaches may be greater. Recent events in relation to the drought, however, have highlighted the importance of retaining an emergency response capacity. The two cases, therefore, do not represent arguments for a minimalist or a maximalist approach, but instead highlight the importance of a more pragmatic ‘third way,’ which involves greater sensitivity to conflict dynamics and an ability to adapt responses to changing contexts.

# CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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## 5.1 Conclusions

### 5.1.1 Afghanistan; an 'Orphaned Conflict'

Afghanistan, compared to many other conflict zones, has received limited attention from researchers and analysts. This is surprising because, as mentioned earlier, Afghanistan brings into focus many of the challenges and dilemmas facing the international community in the 'new world disorder'. Policy makers, diplomats and aid workers have struggled to develop appropriate responses in a context characterised by state breakdown, competing military structures, a growing black economy and widespread destruction and humanitarian distress.

Our analysis of the international response to Afghanistan explicitly demonstrates that the international community does not know how to deal with dysfunctional states, particularly those of limited strategic interest. As Boutros-Ghali noted, "Afghanistan has become one of the world's orphaned conflicts – the ones that the West, selective and promiscuous in its attention happens to ignore in favour of Yugoslavia".<sup>88</sup> The over-riding policy response from the Western powers in the post Cold War years has been either one of strategic withdrawal and containment or an aggressive single issue focus. The focus on excluding, rather than dealing with a 'pariah state' is a short-sighted policy based on a poor analysis of the situation. It is not possible to ring fence the problem. Although, in many respects, a country on the periphery of the global economy, Afghan non-state actors clearly benefit from close links to global markets.

Transnational criminalised networks are undermining economies and politics within the region and beyond. The long-term costs of not engaging have not entered the calculations of Western governments, or at least not sufficiently to change the current policy of strategic disengagement.

Although there is an emerging international consensus that future security or 'structural stability' relies in promoting good governance and human rights, how this translates into practice in countries like Afghanistan is unclear. The gulf between rhetoric and reality is a large one.

### 5.1.2 Foreign Policy and Aid: Tensions and Trade-offs

We have stressed that humanitarian aid cannot be understood in isolation from wider political processes. We have attempted to adopt a system-wide analysis, which explores the links between HA, the political economy of the conflict and the political economy of the wider international system of which aid is one part. To establish a sense of proportion, it is important to place aid in a wider context. Firstly, aid has limited leverage over the regional war economy and the incentive systems sustaining the Afghan conflict; one needs to be realistic about the potential and the limitations of aid as a lever for positive change in the conflict environment. Secondly, aid is also linked to wider foreign (and domestic) policy interests and agendas; aid is not delivered into a political vacuum, nor does it come out of a political vacuum. We have attempted to map out some of the underlying interests and agendas that have influenced the delivery of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. As noted in other contexts, the international community has "attempted to use humanitarian assistance to implement a particular political agenda, not simply alleviate suffering".<sup>89</sup>

Afghanistan is illustrative of an emerging orthodoxy of policy coherence within the international community. It also demonstrates the problems of translating such a policy into practice. The idea that political and humanitarian policies should complement and mutually reinforce one another, as propounded in the Strategic Framework, is in essence what the coherence agenda is about. It can be argued that the collapse of old and unhelpful distinctions between aid and politics, relief and development, and aid and human rights is a positive advance. What coherence means in practice however, is that at best, aid has to cohere with wider foreign policy agendas and at worst, it becomes the only policy response from Western powers unwilling to engage. As noted by Ofstad; “To argue that humanitarian and political action always should be co-ordinated, therefore implies that the humanitarian actors – and their state sponsors – as a rule should buy into whichever political logic happens to prevail in particular ‘strategic frameworks’”.<sup>90</sup> Far from complementing other forms of engagement to support structural stability, aid becomes a substitute for them, a smoke screen for inaction or withdrawal.

Much can be learned from Afghanistan about the tensions and trade-offs caused by the pursuit of multiple objectives, both within and between donor governments. Within a donor government like UK, for instance, in spite of attempts at ‘joined-up government,’ there are important tensions between the priorities of Home Office (refugee inflows), the Foreign Office (drugs and terrorism) and DfID (humanitarian and development aid). The boundaries between domestic and international foreign policy are becoming increasingly blurred. The impact of the Feminist Majority on American foreign policy is a case in point. Foreign policy may increasingly be dictated by the short-term time exigencies of Western government’s electoral cycles.

Developing coherence between governments has been similarly problematic. Although there is a level of convergence on the key policy goals, different positions have emerged in terms of how they should be implemented in practice. The USA and UK for instance have taken a harder line in relation to the Taliban than the Scandinavians. These differences came out during the ASG meeting in Japan in 1999 with the USA and UK applying pressure on other donor countries to adopt a ‘coherent’ position (coherence in this case meant falling in line with the USA).

Although we have been critical of the UN, in the final analysis it is only as strong as the western powers allow it to be. The UN has suffered in Afghanistan from both a crisis of expectations and a crisis of capacities. During the Cold War years its credibility was undermined by the super powers and more recently it has become the vehicle through which western governments enforce ‘policy coherence’. The Strategic Framework process that was supposed to support synergies between the political process and the aid programmes, has foundered, largely because there is no political process. Aid, by default, has become the main policy instrument by which the international community engages with Afghanistan.

### **5.1.3 Aid and Peacebuilding**

The debate on aid and peacebuilding needs to be understood against this background of policy shifts within the international community. New conditions and properties are attached to aid; either it can be withheld to promote behavioural change or it can be applied to support peace and reconciliation. This has posed ethical and practical problems for humanitarian agencies. Firstly, there is the perception that aid has shifted from being needs driven to increasingly politically driven. Humanitarian aid, which has traditionally been immune to political considerations, is now having conditionalities applied. Although some donors distinguish between life saving and life sustaining aid, in practice this is a grey area as the issue of providing water to the



population in Kabul through the local administration demonstrates. Secondly, the politicisation of aid has affected perceptions of aid agencies on the ground, compromising their neutrality and impartiality. Thirdly, the practical impact of conditionalities in terms of affecting behavioural change has been limited. It is based on a misreading of the situation on the ground and a failure to understand incentives systems.

As these policies are pushed down the aid chain, they encounter resistance. The closer one gets to the field, the greater the level of scepticism about the potential for aid to build peace in Afghanistan. Agencies have developed their capacities to work 'in conflict' more effectively, but few feel that the preconditions are there to justify a major investment in attempts to work 'on conflict'. If there is no process happening further up the political chain, then aid investments can only have a transitory and limited impact. On the whole we agree with this analysis, in the current political framework, aid can only have a limited impact on the dynamics of peace and conflict. As the case studies demonstrate, whether we are talking about building sustainable livelihoods or sustainable peace, in a collapsed state context it is difficult to scale up and sustain interventions beyond the micro level.

We feel that the 'politicisation of aid' and humanitarian minimalist arguments can be taken too far and there is a danger of drawing the wrong conclusions from the Afghan case. Firstly, it is not true to say that aid has recently become 'politicised'; aid in Afghanistan has always been tied to political agendas and has never been delivered purely on the basis of humanitarian need. Aid agencies in the 1980s, for example, only delivered aid to mujahideen-held areas, when there were also major humanitarian needs in government held areas. It is disingenuous of aid agencies to complain that their neutrality and impartiality have been compromised by a 'new donor agenda'. Aid, in the eyes of most Afghans has always been tied to certain political agendas and interests. Secondly, we should keep the so-called new 'peacebuilding agenda' in perspective. In reality, the vast majority of funding in Afghanistan still goes to life saving, relief programmes. The Consolidated Appeal has failed to raise money for longer-term activities in areas like capacity building, human rights and community development. Thirdly, while it may be true to state that aid cannot be a substitute for political negotiations, conversely, political negotiations by themselves will not be sufficient to resolve the Afghan conflict. The Afghan war cannot simply be declared over; a complex package of measures will be required, which transform economic relations, as well as political incentives. As is currently being explored, a major reconstruction and humanitarian package may be essential parts of the equation in transforming the war economy into a peace economy.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, in our view the original assumptions underlying the Strategic Framework remain sound i.e. that there should be closer co-ordination and synergy between the political and assistance strategies. A blinkered humanitarianism that attempts to ring fence aid from the 'messy' world of politics may be as misguided as the 'wishful, try-to-do-everything' ambitions of the humanitarian maximalists. For this reason, approaches must be based on a realistic assessment of what is possible and what is desirable. In practice this will probably mean occupying the middle ground, somewhere between the 'minimalist' and 'maximalist' approaches, something that might be termed a humanitarian pragmatism. For aid agencies this means incrementally continuing to improve practice, rather than a radical change of approach.

## 5.2 Recommendations

A conflict resolution process must be holistic and multi-levelled. In order to influence the state and transnational non-state actors, it must include interventions at the international and regional levels. At the national level it should work to help reconstitute state structures and at the local level to support non-warring constituencies within civil society.<sup>92</sup> The policy coherence debate has tended to focus attention on the internal dynamics of the conflict. It encourages a view that peace can be built from the inside out, through the judicious application of aid to support good governance and community-based reconciliation. However, most analysts of the Afghan conflict recognise that without affecting the international and regional dynamics of the conflict, there can be no substantive changes to the ground situation within Afghanistan.

Aid donors represent just one small element in a very complex equation. Although this report's primary focus is on aid donors, recommendations for improved practice can not be made in isolation from upstream and downstream actors who have important influence on donor policy and practice. Therefore, our recommendations are divided into three sections: (1) Recommendations for international governments who have an important influence on the formulation of donor policy, (2) recommendations for aid donors themselves, and (3) recommendations for operational agencies who influence how donor policy is implemented in practice.

### 5.2.1 Recommendations for Governments

#### **Engage with carrots, as well as sticks**

The Afghan conflict can not be ring fenced. Sanctions, missile diplomacy and aid conditionalities fail to get to grips with the political dynamic of a complex, multi-layered conflict system. There is a need to rethink current sanction regimes and explore how they might be complemented by providing positive incentives for peace. Current policies on drugs, for instance, focus on tightening controls, but not on providing viable alternative livelihoods to poor farmers. We have contrasted the international response to Kosovo and East Timor, with the response to Afghanistan. The international community needs to take a system-wide and regional approach. Just as Kosovo needs to be treated within a wider Balkans framework, Afghanistan has to be part of a regional solution. This will have fiscal implications and will require major investment in the regional economy. We support recent recommendations that UNSMA should explore with Afghan actors the options for institution building and reconstruction and the international conditions for assistance.<sup>93</sup>

#### **Provide long-term and sustained support**

International and neighbouring powers have based their policies towards Afghanistan on short-term, expedient interests. This has often backfired on these actors, particularly since Afghanistan has become a major exporter of drugs and radical Islam. Afghanistan requires long-term and sustained support in the interests of structural stability. International and regional governments must develop joint strategies based on the long-term interests of the region, rather than short-term, self-interested agendas.

## **Develop a more balanced approach**

The current response is unbalanced and unrealistic. It focuses on sticks rather than carrots and uses aid conditionalities as a substitute for robust and sustained political action. Different donor governments and different policy instruments tend to undermine one another and even within the UN, the Security Council, UNSMA and UNOCHA are pursuing three mutually conflicting policies.<sup>94</sup>

It may be time to revisit the original objectives of the Strategic Framework and examine how greater complementarity can be developed between different policy instruments. The question is, how can aid complement other forms of intervention, rather than, as is the case now, become a substitute for them. Aid can play a supportive role within a wider response, but it should complement rather than lead a peacebuilding process

### **5.2.2 Recommendations for International Donors**

#### **Develop systems of consultation and accountability**

Accountability within the international response system is a systemic problem. Recent events in Afghanistan have shown that donors, with their virtual monopoly over power and resources, can be a law unto themselves. The SF and PCP mechanisms have failed to adequately address this problem, and in fact may have accentuated it by further centralising decision-making and control. There is a lack of Afghan ownership and involvement in the process, which brings us back to the question of who defines peace, who is part of the dialogue and whose voices are listened to or ignored? Mechanisms need to be developed to ensure that Afghan voices are heard and that there is much greater downwards accountability and transparency within the aid system.

This problem might be rectified by examining the potential of an aid ombudsman, with the setting of standards and codes of conduct and a complaints procedure. Another idea that might be explored could be to conduct reverse evaluations; i.e. that operational agencies and aid recipients evaluate the performance of their back donors. More work could perhaps be done on developing a rating system for assessing the quality of aid and to provide comparative analysis of donor performance. Finally, mechanisms should be developed which ensure much greater public consultation with Afghans, both inside and outside Afghanistan.

#### **Strengthen analysis and learning**

Although donor and agency analysis has improved, more value needs to be attached to developing understanding; adequate time and resources should be allocated for this purpose. There are many gaps in current analyses of the conflict and the link between aid and the dynamics of conflict. Coherent approaches require a more coherent and joint analysis. As already mentioned, many of the debates on peacebuilding and aid are based on assumptions, rather than on rigorous analysis and empirical evidence. Frequently the wrong assumptions lead to the wrong strategies.

Donors should be prepared to pay for better analysis by providing resources for pre-project and post-project assessments. They should also allocate more money to give staff adequate time to generate and share lessons. Finally more resources should be allocated to system-wide evaluations, which put an emphasis on learning rather than on making funding decisions. If evaluation is always closely linked to funding, mistakes will be pushed underground and the opportunities for learning lost. The Strategic Monitoring Unit could represent an opportunity to put some of these ideas into practice; we would strongly recommend that it be seen as a learning resource for the aid community, rather than as a watchdog or monitor.

## **Develop internal and external capacities**

If donors and their partners are to improve analysis and conflict sensitivity, there is a need to invest in capacity development. The sheer lack of manpower is a major constraint for most donor agencies. Unless donors take Afghanistan more seriously – and this means putting more people on the job – none of these recommendations can be put into practice. A related problem is a lack of deep regional expertise. Careers in aid are often too shallow, involving frequent moves from one ‘hot spot’ to the next. Donors should encourage, within their own organisations and their partners, the development of a cadre of regional specialists with deep experience and understanding of the South and Central Asian region.

## **Develop more flexible approaches**

Donors need to look at new funding mechanisms. Agencies are continually trying to develop longer-term approaches, but with the wrong kind of funding. As one agency director commented, “there’s a lot of relief masquerading as development”. There is a need for donors to develop more flexible, long-term funding, which enables agencies to make longer-term commitments to communities and develop more innovative approaches. This may mean rethinking standard operating procedures that have been applied in other contexts. The World Bank, for example, could reconsider its ‘watching brief’ and support a proactive investment package in Afghanistan.

### **5.2.3 Recommendations for Operational Agencies**

#### **Develop conflict-sensitive approaches**

Agencies should continue to work on developing intelligent and conflict-sensitive approaches. We have argued for a pragmatic approach that constitutes a middle-ground between the maximalist and minimalist positions. The abilities to respond flexibly, match responses to changing contexts and grasp opportunities are critical. More work should be done on developing monitoring and evaluation systems which analyse the interactions between aid and the dynamics of peace and conflict.

#### **Strengthen capacity development activities**

Agencies have made more progress in recent years in the area of service delivery than in the area of capacity building. The international community has a poor record in terms of supporting and nurturing Afghan organisations; it is time that they bite the bullet and tackle this sensitive area more systematically. The unhelpful (and politically driven) distinction between relief and development activities should be challenged. Whilst recognising the real constraints, there are enough examples of successful capacity building with local government, Afghan NGOs and community-based organisations that could be learnt from and used to develop a more systematic approach.

#### **Strengthen advocacy work**

The danger of the ‘crisis of conformity’ has been highlighted. It is essential that aid agencies develop the capacity to conduct independent analysis and use that analysis to challenge the policy consensus on Afghanistan. It is recognised that aid agencies are doing this, but in a rather piecemeal and often reactive manner. A more strategic, joined-up and proactive approach is required in which aid agencies draw upon their ‘on the ground’ knowledge to challenge policies

that are being formulated in Geneva, New York, Moscow or London. Aid agencies could also develop a more proactive approach in engaging with the media to challenge negative stereotypes of Afghanistan and Islam, which in turn have an important influence on policy formulation.

## **Key Principles of Strategic Framework**

Through an extensive process of consultation, the donors, UN agencies and NGOs have agreed on a set of principles in the Strategic Framework, though some disagreements exist on interpretation and ways of application of these principles:

1. Life-sustaining humanitarian assistance shall be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, universality, impartiality, and neutrality.
2. Assistance shall be provided as part of an overall effort to achieve peace.
3. International assistance will be provided on the basis of need; it cannot be subjected to any form of discrimination, including of gender.
4. Rehabilitation and development assistance shall be provided only where it can be reasonably determined that no direct political or military advantage will accrue to the warring parties in Afghanistan.
5. Institution and capacity building activities must advance human rights and will not seek to provide support to any presumptive state authority which does not fully subscribe to the principles contained in the founding instruments of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and International Humanitarian Law.
6. Assistance activities must be designed to ensure increasing indigenous ownership at the village, community and national levels and to build the country as a whole.
7. Assistance activities must attain high standards of transparency and accountability, and must be appraised, monitored, measured and evaluated against clear policy and programmatic objectives.

# Endnotes

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- 3 Ibid.
- 4 The goal of this research is the development of recommendations proposing a policy framework for donors and NGOs, on how to gear humanitarian action (HA) towards conflict prevention, peacebuilding and structural stability [within the context of existing policy development by International Alert and others]. Specific research objectives are to:
  - a) Provide an overview of humanitarian action in three countries, with particular reference to its impact on long term processes of peace and stability
  - b) Develop 'good practice' recommendations which outline in practical terms how humanitarian action can become more conflict sensitive and support peace-building processes where possible
  - c) Develop policy frameworks which can be employed by donors to ensure that humanitarian action is better geared towards conflict prevention and peace-building.
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- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Although it has been noted that UNOCHA and UNDP are 'joined at the head' rather than merged in terms of programmes (Wiles et al 1999)
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- 33 Atmar, Barakat & Strand. *From Rhetoric to Reality*, 1998.
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- 70 See Goodhand, 2000
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 This will be discussed later in the report.
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- 75 DANIDA. Danish Humanitarian Assistance, UK, 1999.
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