

Afghanistan since the Bonn Agreement

Tasks, Opportunities and
Barriers for Peacebuilding

A Discussion Paper

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INTERNATIONAL ALERT

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This paper is based on research and consultations with agencies; including a discussion forum held on April 17th, 2002 in London with the participation of a number of UK-based NGOs operating in Afghanistan.

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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1. Introduction

In the context of the post September 11 'War Against Terrorism', the international military intervention in Afghanistan led to the fall of the Taliban regime and the subsequent establishment of an Afghan Interim Authority (AIA) as a result of UN talks in Bonn in November-December 2001.

The participants of the 'Bonn Agreement' have strongly expressed their determination to end the tragic conflict in Afghanistan and to promote national reconciliation, respect for human rights, and lasting peace and stability. At the same time, they have urged the international community, which has a critical role to play in supporting the Afghans to build a brighter future, to make concrete its commitment to assist with the rehabilitation, recovery and reconstruction of Afghanistan in co-ordination with the Interim Authority. Only by monitoring the implementation of that commitment is it possible to comment on how the wider objectives of redevelopment and peacebuilding are being realised.

Based on input from agencies on the ground, IA offers to provide a framework for such a monitoring with a view to identifying possible gaps between the stated aim of the reconstruction process and the direction in which the current intervention seems to be leading. This paper takes the first step in that direction by highlighting the main tasks and opportunities presented by the 'Bonn Agreement' recovery process as they relate specifically to the overarching aim of peacebuilding. The overall goal of the Bonn Agreement being sustainable peace, this paper deals only with issues of relief and reconstruction, which are seen to have a direct bearing on creating the conditions for peace.

The paper maps out the recovery tasks ahead and identifies the opportunities and barriers which agencies face in dealing with these tasks. On the basis of this initial exploration, focus areas inviting further comments from agencies engaged in work on the ground are identified. Agencies' input regarding these areas will allow monitoring the implementation of the international community's commitment to achieving sustainable peace, and provide a basis for future policy and practice real-time recommendations.

2. Recovery Tasks

Despite the recent pledges and focus of the international community on Afghanistan, the recovery tasks remain immense: Afghanistan lies devastated by more than two decades of war which have led to missed development opportunities, a huge human rights deficit, and massive population displacements. In addition to human-made crisis, natural disasters have contributed significantly to the pain and suffering of the Afghan population as the worst drought in living memory presented Afghans with a disastrous famine.

During the years of conflict, the national governmental and non-governmental institutions either totally collapsed or were significantly weakened due to the lack of financial and/or human resources. In April 1992, the national army fell apart and the soldiers were either absorbed by political armed parties or merged into civil society. As a result of the continued conflict, law and order enforcement agencies disappeared, local economic structures were severely damaged and the level of food production dropped to a minimum.

To sum up, 23 years of war combined with drought has destroyed almost all social, physical and economic life supporting structures, and a wide-ranging recovery process is needed. It is also important to note that despite the removal of the Taliban, many structural causes of conflict have yet to be addressed and a comprehensive approach addressing material as well as security needs is required. A post-Taliban comprehensive conflict analysis to inform the planning and implementation of the relief/reconstruction efforts of the international community therefore needs to be carried out.

Among the areas that require immediate attention, though not an exhaustive list, the following which could have a direct bearing on peacebuilding come to mind:

Emergency responses: Provision of relief aid to fulfil the needs of vulnerable populations, taking into account that relief aid must revolve around life-saving activities with an aim to promote self-reliance and the ability to withstand future humanitarian threats, avoid dependency and support long-term development objectives. Even when planning and implementing short term relief, long term development considerations have to be taken into account. IA research furthermore indicates that the way in which relief is provided has an impact on the dynamics of conflict in terms of feeding into conflict or helping create the conditions for peace.

Basic Services: Restoration and improvement of basic and comprehensive public services, in particular health and education. This will provide a breathing space for peace.

Displaced Populations: Repatriation/return and protection of refugees and internally displaced populations. The rate of return is an indicator of the population's confidence in peace and high return rates will accelerate the process of normalisation and the creation of a safe environment conducive to peace.

Community Reconciliation: Rebuilding and strengthening inter-communal relations to support reconciliation and peacebuilding.

Institutional Capacity Building: Enhancing national and local authorities' governance and management skills including strengthening, using and supporting local civil society institutions to become better peace advocates.

Security Sector Reform: Rebuilding a national security force (army and police) and demobilising, disarming and reintegrating ex-combatants into their respective communities.

Human Rights: Discouraging human rights abuses through consistent constructive advocacy and eradication of the prevalent violence culture through education, bearing in mind religious and cultural sensitivities.

It is imperative for the international community to ensure that emergency responses - even while focused on the short term - are carried out with a thought to longer term redevelopment and peacebuilding. While humanitarian activities are unlikely to in and of themselves cause either war or peace, the provision of aid without due regard to existing dynamics of conflict may inadvertently contribute to fuelling conflict. Humanitarian and development activities therefore need to rest on comprehensive and ongoing conflict analysis to minimise the risks of conflict and maximise the opportunities for peace.

3. Current Opportunities for Peacebuilding

While the tasks are daunting, the current operational context in Afghanistan also offers some opportunities in terms of improved security, more international support and better access. These conditions provide opportunities for both the international community and local actors to identify and address the challenges they face in rebuilding Afghanistan.

Monitoring progress in the following areas may indicate the extent to which the international community is seizing and building upon these opportunities to address the challenges:

Security: The signatories of the 'Bonn Agreement' have pledged their commitment to do their utmost to provide security and law and order throughout the country; including ensuring the safety of IGO and INGO staff. While there is a continuing climate of insecurity in large parts of the country due to the overt or covert presence and operation of fragmented, armed groups and high crime rates, the political change reflected in the 'Bonn Agreement' has generated a sense of optimism amongst the Afghan population. The deployment of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to Kabul has furthermore enhanced the feeling of safety in Kabul and surrounding areas.

However, despite the removal of the Taliban, many structural causes perpetuating and accentuating conflict have yet to be addressed and fighting continues in many areas. Therefore, it is particularly important that aid programmes are planned and carried out in a 'conflict sensitive' manner. IA will seek to monitor the extent to which this is the case and whether the present opportunity for improving the security environment is being built on to support the creation of a stable environment for peace.

International Support: Contrary to experiences of the past two decades, the AIA enjoys strong political support from international and regional powers. At the International conference held in Tokyo in November, 2001 the international community signalled its commitment to provide the required resources to begin the long, complex task of recovery and peacebuilding in Afghanistan. According to UN reports, pledges totalling more than US\$ 4.5 billion were made against the preliminary needs assessment, which was conducted by the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme and the Asian Development Bank.

In order to take maximum advantage of the opportunities offered by these pledges, it is imperative that all stakeholders continuously reassess and review their policies, strategies and approaches to ensure that efforts are managed equitably and transparently and with due regard to conflict dynamics. Monitoring the extent to which pledges are being made on the basis of agreed common priorities and whether interventions overlap will form the basis for commenting on the international effort to support peace in Afghanistan.

Access: There are initial indicators that the operational space for humanitarian agencies has widened. Agencies confirm that they are provided access to all segments of the population regardless of geographical location, ethnicity or gender, and there are confirmed reports that all former Taliban restrictions on women's education and employment have been removed.¹ This increased geographical reach and the removal of barriers to equitably addressing the needs of women and different ethnic groups could provide a much firmer base for making progress on reconstruction and peacebuilding.

These observations indicate that there are clear opportunities for effective international backing of the recovery process in the massively devastated country. However, in the present fragile post-conflict situation, the complex inter-relationship between relief, reconstruction and longer-term development is critical. These activities should be pursued concurrently rather than separately and in co-ordination so that they are mutually reinforcing and support the recovery and peacebuilding processes. This requires longer term donor engagement to allow programmes to be led by the actual progress of recovery rather than time frames and objectives decided on elsewhere. Achieving synergy between relief, rehabilitation and development efforts furthermore demands a wider awareness of the status of current international intervention in Afghanistan and an ongoing information exchange amongst key actors.

Monitoring the extent to which the above opportunities are being seized and how progress is being made in the identified areas is the necessary basis for providing recommendations on aid delivery and recovery programmes and for developing good practice guidelines for humanitarian intervention in Afghanistan. IA proposes to provide the framework for such a monitoring process by inviting comments from agencies involved in operations on the ground with a view to making real-time recommendations.

¹ However, there are also indications that awareness of gender issues is lacking in the way that development and relief efforts are carried out. For example, empowering widows is a critical issue (particularly in this post-conflict situation) as widows are uniquely equipped to cross ethnic divides for common goals of a peaceful future for their children. This issue, however, is currently largely overlooked.

4. Barriers

In addition to these opportunity areas, a number of barriers characteristic of post-war contexts present themselves. These barriers - if not tackled - may pose serious risks to the success and sustainability of reconstruction and peacebuilding in Afghanistan, and monitoring these is important. The potential barriers relating specifically to the achievement of sustainable peace include:

Lack of a common, co-ordinated operational framework: The existence of unclear agendas and inconsistent aims and objectives, a lack of clear and co-ordinated operational and capacity building strategies and spirits of negative competition among actors at various levels would be a serious challenge to the integration of relief and reconstruction efforts to promote an environment conducive to sustainable peace.

Undermining the roles of local institutions: Narrow thinking and inflexible mandates may lead to an undermining of the role of local and national structures. This would have an impact not only on longer-term service delivery and sustainability, but would also raise serious questions of legitimacy. Unless legitimate local and national structures are built and supported, the long-term potential for reconstruction and peacebuilding will not be realised. Building the capacities of local institutions and communities to be better advocates for peace is essential.

Lack of transparency and unclear accountability structures: Accountability does not merely apply to the relationship between INGOs and donors, but should also guide the relations between INGOs and local partners (both ways). Lack of transparency and insufficient accountability may lead to losses and misuses of financial resources and can create an environment conducive to the continuation of corruption and crime. This would at best lead to a divergence of resources from those in need and could at worst feed directly into negative conflict dynamics. Monitoring transparency and accountability structures in the aid system operating in Afghanistan is therefore important.

Relief culture: A reluctance to resume reconstruction or long-term development programmes and continuation (and unnecessary expansion) of relief activities may prolong the recovery process,² and would be at odds with the objectives of the Bonn agreement.

Weakening Confidence: Deepening gaps between policy and the realities on the ground, creation of unrealistic expectations and little contribution toward real changes would contribute to an environment where confidence in the international community's role in reconstruction and peacebuilding would be severely diminished.

Over-concentration: The presence of a large number of aid actors in a particular geographical area targeting a particular group can have a negative impact on the recovery process and may deepen existing regional and ethnic tensions.

² For example, free food distribution to 7.5 million people (almost ten times greater than before September 11) and educational incentives in the form of food packages to one million school children (out of one and half million) are contributing to creating a relief culture, which is problematic in terms of promoting long-term development.

Uneven security: While the presence of ISAF forces in Kabul contributes to some feeling of safety, there is continuing insecurity in other areas due to warlord strife and high crime rates. This situation risks feeding into existing urban-rural differences. In addition, political and military support to specific warlords involved in the 'War against Terrorism' and differing military mandates and objectives could constitute a substantial barrier to peacebuilding.

In addition to these potential barriers, the lack of national socio-economic and demographic statistics constitutes a serious operational constraint on appropriate and proportional allocation of resources. The last national census in Afghanistan took place in the late 70's, and although UN agencies and other organisations have gathered a considerable amount of data in various areas relevant to their activities over the past few years, the collected data is fragmented and of dubious quality. This may hamper the effectiveness of relief and reconstruction efforts and in turn have a negative impact on the prospects for peacebuilding.

5. Focus Areas for Monitoring

Commenting on how the wider objectives of reconstruction and peacebuilding are being realised requires monitoring the implementation of the international community's commitment to building sustainable peace in Afghanistan. With a view to producing real-time recommendations, International Alert invites comments from agencies engaged in work on the ground on the following five, broad areas which constitute 'good practice focus points' for achieving sustainable peace in Afghanistan:

Governance: Support the putting in place of a working governance structure including establishing/re-building the national army and police, comprised of Afghans based on criteria of non-political affiliation and non-involvement in acts of rivalry.

Long term reconstruction: Re-build the confidence of Afghans by bringing about real and long-term changes in the economy. This requires turning pledges into contributions and undertaking long-term social and physical reconstruction programmes while simultaneously equitably addressing short-term relief needs in a way which does not undermine longer term development.

Accountability: Enhance aid agencies' accountability to beneficiaries and strengthen the involvement of local communities and organisations in decision making at every stage of the recovery and reconstruction process.

Co-ordination of aid: Conduct critical assessments of co-ordination strategies at donor levels and put in place a mechanism to ensure a coherent approach to co-ordination.

Capacity building: Empower local civil society actors to be better peace advocates and build their capacity to influence the decision making of donors and INGOs.

These five areas, though not exhaustive, constitute focal points for action by the international community which are critical to the success of reconstruction and peacebuilding in Afghanistan. Monitoring developments in these areas - through input from aid agencies engaged in work on the ground - will enable International Alert to put forward future real time recommendations which can be fed back into the planning and implementation of the ongoing intervention. We therefore, strongly urge agencies operational in Afghanistan to forward their comments to us.

6. Relevant Publications & Initiatives

Development and Peacebuilding Programme, IA:

Goodhand, Jonathan & Haneef Atmar, 2002: *Aid, Conflict and Peacebuilding in Afghanistan. What Lessons Can Be Learned?*, The Development and Peacebuilding Programme, International Alert, London.

Goodhand, Jonathan with Philippa Atkinson, 2001: *Conflict and Aid: Enhancing the Peacebuilding Impact of International Engagement. A Synthesis of Findings from Afghanistan, Liberia and Sri Lanka*, The Development and Peacebuilding Programme, International Alert, London.

These publications, and others covering similar themes can be downloaded from:
www.international-alert.org/publications.htm

Forthcoming publications include:

Quinn, Mick, August 2002: *More than Implementers: Civil Society in Complex Emergencies*, International Alert, London.

Quinn, Mick, August 2002: *Humanitarian Assistance and Conflict: Maximising the Peacebuilding Impact of International Engagement*, International Alert, London.

Lilly, Damian, August 2002: *The Peacebuilding Dimension of Civil-Military Relations in Complex Emergencies*, International Alert, London.

Women Building Peace Campaign (secretariat at IA):

The Brussels Proclamation, Afghan Women's Summit for Democracy, 4-5 December, 2001

The European Parliament Resolution on Women in Afghanistan, 13 December, 2001

These documents can be downloaded from: www.womenbuildingpeace.org

The Afghan Civil Society Forum:

A large group of representatives of Afghan civil society came together at the Second Civil Society Conference in Kabul on May 15-18, 2002. The goal of the process is to ensure the active participation of Afghan civil society in strengthening the peace process and in the rebuilding of Afghanistan. A report including key messages and recommendations for the Afghan Government, Loya Jirga and the international community is forthcoming. In the meantime, a summary of these is available upon request from Maria Lange at mlange@international-alert.org.

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