

UN ROLE IN REBUILDING AFGHANISTAN

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Rebuilding war-ravaged regions is inevitably going to be difficult. Even a superficial look at the history of such exercises is enough to establish the inherent complexity involved. And when the war-torn country in question is Afghanistan – a country whose unfortunate destiny it has been to serve as a battlefield for imperial ambitions since 1978 – then it becomes a tougher task altogether.

More recent cycles of violence in Afghanistan, in the Cold War era and beyond, can be categorised in four interrelated yet distinct chronological phases:

1. Soviet invasion and consequent US-supported mujahideen resistance (1979-1989);
2. Destructive civil war amongst mujahideen factions after US withdrawal (1989-1994);
3. Alliance between the Taliban and al-Qaeda, leading to the 9/11 attacks on US soil (1994-2001); and finally,
4. The global war on terror, which has seen the Taliban, as a militant group, pitted against a new Afghan government and NATO-led coalition forces (2002 onwards).

While Afghanistan has seemed fated to be embroiled in constant war and civil strife since the dawn of its history, the dimensions of warfare in this age necessitate less fanciful analyses. The norms of war have changed drastically, and taken up a more global perspective than ever before; proxy wars have resulted as an outcome, and Afghanistan has been one of the great sufferers from such a counter-narrative in practice.

It served as the last battleground for the Cold War at the end of the last century, and then became a theatre of war for the US and its allies in a global war on terrorism, suffering economically, materially and physically in both cases. Afghans have gone through almost three decades of continuous war and destruction, and there appears to be no end to their miseries. Much of the country's infrastructure has been destroyed and hundreds of thousands of people have died, and many survivors have fled to neighbouring countries, particularly Iran and Pakistan.

After thirty-two years of conflict, Afghanistan is predictably amongst the poorest and least developed countries in the world. In 2009, it ranked 181 out of 182, above only Niger, on the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI) that ranks countries using social and economic variables. Hence its rebuilding means more than simply rebuilding its state. Afghanistan needs to be rebuilt economically, politically and socially - failure in any one form can lead to further collapse of the state. Needless to say, the situation is precarious at best and involves multiple stakeholders - the UN being one of these - which together are attempting to avert disaster of an unprecedented scale.

Consequently, while the role of the UN is important, it cannot be treated in isolation. Rather, its relevance and effects need to be addressed from an all-encompassing view that looks at a number of actors from the 'international community'. Although the UN has maintained some anonymity and circumvented itself from playing a leading role in Afghanistan, as for instance it did in the UN-administered Serbian province of Kosovo and in East Timor, its contributions cannot be underestimated.

It has, through substantial cooperation with other actors, tried to ensure that the Afghan people, specially the victims and casualties of never-ending turmoil, receive at least the minimum support needed for survival throughout the war years. This commitment was made early on; in October 2001, former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, in his address to the UN General Assembly session on terrorism said, 'As we summon the will and the resources needed to succeed in the struggle against terrorism, we must also care for all the victims of terrorism. That is why I have launched an alert to donors about the potential need for much more generous humanitarian assistance to the people of Afghanistan'. Similarly, present Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, is pushing for efforts towards rebuilding the country and rehabilitating its citizens through all possible means.

Its multifaceted role is not surprising given the number of organisations under the UN banner and their vast collective mandate. Essentially, it is helping Afghanistan to achieve its development goals, comprising of the Afghanistan Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and those defined by the Interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy (I-ANDS).

The UN is playing a major part in developing basic social services (health, education, water and sanitation), sustainable livelihoods (agriculture and food security and income opportunities) and infrastructure; aiding in landmine clearance, governance and institutional capacity-building as well as in rural development. In this regard, the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), and UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in addition to UNICEF and the UN World Food Programme (UNWFP) are ever-present in various aspects of Afghanistan's social and economic life.

However, the situation is inevitably complicated. Given the resources it has access to, and the respect it occupies within the development sector, it is essential that its effects to such a conflict and post-conflict scenario be adequately analysed. In doing so, this paper will address the following key questions: How have various UN agencies, particularly UNAMA, fared in their efforts in the country? What are the changes it has been able to bring to the lives of the poor segments of society? And what challenges are being faced by the agencies in carrying out relief and development activities in post-Taliban Afghanistan?

Introduction

Afghanistan became a member of the United Nations in 1946 and while the organisation has remained active in the country in one way or the other ever since, it has been more extensively involved since around 1980. With the signing of the Geneva Peace Accord in 1988, leading to Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the UN pledged an active presence in the country and its institutional structures have been working accordingly. It keeps separate offices for political and peace processes and for humanitarian and reconstruction operations, and was thus able, in the civil war of the 1990s, to push for a peace agreement that could allow for sustained development.

In the post-Taliban era, its work has taken on more dimensions than before; the most prominent personality in creating this role has been Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi of Algeria, the Undersecretary General for special assignments. Appointed by Kofi Annan as a special representative with a 'widened mandate entailing overall authority for the humanitarian and political endeavours of the United Nations in Afghanistan' on October 3, 2001, he has been responsible for giving a vision to the UN vis-à-vis its role in Afghanistan. Ambassador Brahimi drafted a new UN mandate for the country in order to project the nature of future UN missions, reflecting realities on the ground and availability of resources.

The ambassador headed the UNAMA - which was established by the UN Security Council in its resolution 1401 of March 2002 - until 2004, after which he was succeeded by Mr. Jean Arnault, who had been one of his deputies. Brahimi's vision for a developed Afghanistan saw him taking the support of the German government when he arranged a meeting in Bonn from November 27 to December 5, 2001, bringing together representatives from four rival Afghan factions and UN officials as well as officials from other governments and experts from various sectors.

The negotiations at Bonn, leading to the Bonn Agreement, were wrapped up with an accord on 'provisional arrangements in Afghanistan, pending the re-establishment of permanent government institution'. The agreement was supported by the UN Security Council in its resolution 1383 in 2001. Under UN patronage, Afghan partakers congregated to prepare a process for a possible political transition in Afghanistan and as a result, set up an Afghan Interim Authority (AIA) on December 22, 2001.

The AIA comprised of thirty members and was headed by current President Hamid Karzai as its Chairman. The agreement called for the convening of an 'emergency loya jirga', a traditional Afghan assembly, within six months of the establishment of the AIA and this was subsequently held in June 2002, replacing the AIA with a 'transitional authority'.

The Bonn Agreement also called for the convening of a 'constitutional loya jirga' within eighteen months of the establishment of this transitional authority, in order to adopt a new constitution for Afghanistan. Accordingly, a constitution was approved at a constitutional loya jirga in January 2004 as the process was implemented in the time-span envisaged by the UN-led agreement.

Hamid Karzai was elected president of Afghanistan in October 2004 and parliamentary and provincial elections were held in September 2005 as the political process progressed. Recommendations were not limited to politics however, since the agreement also called for the establishment of a Supreme Court and a Judicial Commission. It anticipated significant levels of collaboration between the UN and governments and organizations all over the world in both political and non-political areas that included reconstruction, elections, narcotics, crime, and terrorism. UN efforts to achieve these ends, under both Brahimi and his successor, led to scores of donor conferences in addition to the one at Bonn; the effects of some of these will be examined in the following section.

UN-administered conferences

As part of its efforts in Afghanistan, the UN organised a series of donor conferences with the help of international stakeholders leading to decisions regarding reconstruction and development. A summary of these donor conferences is provided below in order to highlight funding sources, number of stakeholders, coordination activities and the sheer diversity of problems that Afghanistan faced.

Islamabad conference

UNDP, in collaboration with the World Bank (WB) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) arranged a three-day conference on 'Preparing for Afghanistan's Reconstruction' in Islamabad on November 27, 2001. Over 350 participants, including a large contingent from Afghanistan, took part in the conference where all three sponsors agreed to work together in consultation with the Afghans and the donor community. The main purpose was to identify priorities and likely challenges and opportunities for the reconstruction and development process. In this regard, UNDP, WB and ADB hoped to gather more information incorporating a systematic review of Afghanistan's post-conflict reconstruction requirements.

Bonn conference

Sponsored by the UNDP, the conference was held on December 22, 2001 in Bonn, Germany. The interim government formed under the Bonn agreement, which has already been examined in some detail, put forward reconstruction plans at the conference, where participants, including country representatives and international NGOs, pledged financial support through a trust fund established by the UNDP.

Tokyo conference

The conference at Tokyo was organised by Japan, the US, EU and Saudi Arabia on January 21-22, 2002. Although the UN was not a co-host, Secretary General Kofi Annan attended and addressed the participants, presenting a framework for funding priorities in Afghanistan to prospective donors.

The conference reviewed a 'preliminary needs assessment plan for recovery and reconstruction for the country from 2002-2006', and the UN presented its own Immediate and Transitional Assistance Programme, containing ideas for supporting Afghanistan in the short-term. UN role in the country was lauded, and UNDP leadership at early recovery efforts was widely acknowledged.

The conference called for the creation of a Single Trust Fund administered by the World Bank. While responsibility of decisions regarding allocation of finances was given to UNDP, WB, ADB, and the Islamic Development Bank, this was to be done through close cooperation with the Afghan government, and in consultation with the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General to the country.

Berlin conference

German Federal Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer and his counterpart, the Afghan Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah co-hosted a conference on April 1, 2004 in Berlin, Germany. Titled 'Afghanistan and the international community- a partnership for the

future', the conference was attended by Mr. Jean Arnault on behalf of the UN, along with sixty-five representatives from donor countries and international organisations.

The major agenda was firstly, to raise funds for reconstruction, review achievements of the last two years and plan for the future; secondly, to seek long-term commitment from the international community, and thirdly, to begin serious planning for the post-Bonn phase of reconstruction.

The UN in collaboration with the WB and ADB, presented a document on securing Afghanistan's future (SAF) which evaluated various sectors of the country and drafted its main objectives for a state reconstruction plan where the main priority was to lift eighty percent of the population out of poverty within seven years.

The document divided reconstruction in three pillars: human capital and social protection including health, education and social security; physical capital including infrastructure and essential services; and security, law, private sector development and public administration. The funds required for these were estimated to be \$7 billion, \$13 billion and \$7.5 billion respectively. The UN envoy welcomed a pledge of \$8.2 billion made by donor countries for the next three years, and acknowledged the commitment shown to the Afghan cause.

London conference

Hosted by the UK and co-chaired by Kofi Annan and Hamid Karzai, this conference was held in London on February 1, 2006. The Afghan government and members of the international community signed the Afghan Compact, or London Agreement, which was drafted to provide a framework for development work for the next five years. The government also presented its Interim National Development Strategy that outlined priorities for development that included increased security, tackling drug trade, and strengthening governance. A significant pledge of \$10.5 billion was made at the conference.

Paris conference

An 'International Conference in Support of Afghanistan' in Paris was co-chaired by the Foreign and European Affairs Minister Bernard Kouchner, Afghan Minister Rangin Dadfar Spanta and UN Special Representative for Afghanistan Kai Eide, on June 12, 2008. The conference is significant since it was at this platform that the UN Special Representative asked for a new and enhanced partnership between the international community and the Afghan government that covers a number of social, political and economic concerns.

In this regard, the conference accentuated the following key elements and steps as vital for the security and well-being of the Afghan people:

1. Strengthening democracy in Afghanistan;
2. Supporting the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS);
3. Stimulating investment in infrastructure, agriculture and energy;
4. Creating opportunities through private sector growth;
5. Strengthening Afghan institutions and improving delivery of services;
6. Improving aid effectiveness;
7. Combating corruption;
8. Intensifying counter-narcotic efforts;
9. Ensuring greater civil society participation in the nation-building process;
10. Promoting respect for human rights for all Afghans, and
11. Strengthening regional cooperation.

Mr. Eide called for greater coherence in the assistance being provided and urged the need for more funds to secure adequate resources for the Afghan population. The conference asserted the expanded role of the Special Representative as well as

UNAMA in all aspects of coordination and strongly put forward the case for heightened donor coordination.

Hague conference

A conference titled 'International Conference for Afghanistan: A Comprehensive Strategy in a Regional Context' was co-hosted by the UNAMA and Dutch government on March 31, 2009 at Hague. Mr. Ban Ki-Moon reaffirmed UN commitment to Afghanistan and noted that his special envoy would continue to work with the government and international bodies to help the country strengthen its institutions, improve governance and food security, establish rule of law, and combat corruption.

Mr. Eide added that a reform project for the agriculture sector would soon be presented, noting also that vital work was ongoing in private sector development. Echoing the Secretary General, he confirmed UN commitment to the Afghan cause and said that the organization was ready to expand its presence across the country.

The Hague conference essentially called for a more direct agenda for Afghanistan, emphasizing sustained civilian capacity and institutions that were needed in key areas such as security, governance and economic growth. The conference supported a central role for UNAMA as a checker of international action and assistance, and attempted to build up a consensus on regional cooperation in dealing with the situation in Afghanistan.

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London conference

At the latest conference in London, co-hosted by the UN, UK and the Afghan government on January 28, 2010, there emerged an agreement regarding the need for a comprehensive plan for phased transition to Afghan ownership, provided certain conditions are met by late 2010 or early 2011. It was agreed that the government had to take control of over half the total funds spent in the country, provided that it is able to tackle corruption.

This was a significant conference since it came after a new strategy for the Afghanistan war, that attempted to incorporate military-led operations in conjunction with civilian control, had been announced by President Obama. It was decided that attempts would be made to persuade erstwhile Taliban insurgents back to normal life with financial incentives; this was part of an effort of the UN and its co-hosts to encourage civilians to shun violent groups and gain positions in various sectors of the country.

The government was to set up a national council for peace, reconciliation and reintegration to achieve these ends. This would supervise the waterway of development funds to provide alternate livelihoods to those Taliban fighters who agreed to surrender arms. The programme itself would be financed by an international fund, for which \$140 million was promised for first year. The conference called for regional cooperation to counter terrorism and the drug trade, as well as to increase trade, cultural exchange and create a conducive environment for the return of refugees.

The main purpose of conducting these conferences was to devise comprehensive and cohesive plans through which to bring stability to Afghanistan. The implication also was to raise the issue of human rights, as relevant to the country, in the eyes of the international community. A further motivation for the UN was a new vision it could provide for sustainability in Afghanistan in its political, social and economic spheres. For this, in addition to organising conferences and raising funds, it also established the aforementioned United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to help in its multifaceted endeavours.

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)

UNAMA was set up on March 28, 2002 under UN Security Council Resolution 1401. Created as 'political and integrated mission' directed by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, it was mandated by the Security Council to help execute the Bonn Agreement. As a result, it was tasked with a number of responsibilities that included managing relief, recovery and reconstruction activities, holding elections, and providing political and strategic advice for the peace process.

UNAMA coordinates all activities of the eighteen agencies which make up the UN country team in Afghanistan. It has eight regional offices and twelve provincial offices and is also a co-chair of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB), which handles mechanisms of implementation of two agreements - namely the 2006 Afghan compact and the 2008 Afghanistan national development strategy. It also harmonises functions of the international community and the Afghan government.

Afghan compact

Adopted at the February 2006 conference in London, the Afghan compact provided a five-year timeline (2006-2011) to enhance security, governance, rule of law, human rights, economic and social development, while also calling for the elimination of the narcotics industry. The compact is based on the Interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy (I-ANDS), which aimed to promote economic growth, generate wealth, and reduce poverty and vulnerability and was architected to create a long-term joint venture between Afghanistan and the international community.

Afghan national development strategy (ANDS)

ANDS was presented by the government on June 12, 2008 in a conference at Paris and was based on the Afghan Compact. It is a plan within the UN Millennium Development Goals and aimed to serve as an Afghan Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) document. It mainly includes the following fundamental development goals: security, infrastructure and natural resources, good governance, education and culture, health and nutrition, agriculture and rural development, social protection, economic governance and private sector development.

UNAMA and the August 2009 elections

The UNAMA chief and UN envoy to Afghanistan, Mr. Kai Eide, on the eve of elections in the country, stressed in an editorial titled 'Afghanistan's critical elections', that 'the elections for the country's next president and provincial council members is not just about choosing the country's leaders but more about "legitimacy of leadership."'

The August 20, 2009 presidential elections were the first elections fully run by the Afghan Independent Election Commission (AIFC), with support from UNAMA and UNDP, which played a significant role in helping the Afghan state in carrying out the registration and candidate nomination process. The UN mission also helped to resolve various controversies on dates, and questions about the powers of the president when the presidential term expired. It provided technical support and handled all those actors who were directly or indirectly linked to the process, including government officials, candidates, supporters, electoral officials and media and international representatives both during and after the elections.

Successful completion of this electoral process was almost a requirement for the UN in its effort to bring healthy politics to Afghanistan, and to be able to claim that its years of work had shown substantial results. While many irregularities were reported, these should not be seen as a failure of the UN since this was a laudatory attempt to build a foundation for a future state based on solid institutions.

Apart from the support provided in the election process, UNAMA has also facilitated in the Civil Service Commission in developing a standard curriculum across five common functions within the civil service. These include accounting, procurement, human resources, project management and policy development, and over 15,000 civil service members will be trained with this curriculum over the next two years. Earlier, different donors had offered curricula based on their own perceptions instead of showing relevance to the Afghan context. The drafting of a single curriculum provided a more synchronized and contextualised approach to capacity building, and is clearly a much needed initiative.

UNAMA, as a coordinator of humanitarian assistance, initiated a \$604 million humanitarian action plan for helping the poorest Afghans and on the eve of 'UN day' on October 24, 2009, the UN launched \$4 billion UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for Afghanistan. In this way, not only has UNAMA managed to become part of the policy-making arena, it has played a leading role in raising finances and awareness, and integrating with the government to revive an active political process in the country.

UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF)

UNDAF was prepared through collaboration of national and international partners. The framework is to be implemented through cooperation with the JCMB and accordingly, the UN will provide assistance worth \$ 4 billion between the years 2010 and 2013. Three priority areas have been charted out by the UNDAF from within the ANDS:

Governance, peace, and stability

In order to improve governance, peace and stability, the UN works with various ministries in Afghanistan. With the assumption that poor governance leads to substantial instability, it has focused on interventions at sub-national government structures in addition to providing assistance to the central state. The intention is to develop institutions for local needs so that a solid foundation for large-scale provision of security and social services is established. The plan also aims to develop the capacities of various civil society organisations and promote a culture of accountability.

The motives are based on three expected outcomes: greater stability, improved public services, and strengthened democratic institutions.

The UN has devised a three-pronged approach for dealing with instability. One, it has the advantage of working on some severely destabilizing factors such as border management, policing, law enforcement, drug trafficking, and disarmament; two, it has promoted local initiatives for human rights; and three, it attempts to work on the reintegration of groups into established institutions

For improved public services, the UN has facilitated the government to develop multiple policies and regulatory frameworks, in particular for employment. It also provides support in administration and capacity-building of civil servants and promotes female participation, while requiring regional teams to build coordination mechanisms at the provincial level.

In order to strengthen democratic institutions, the UN helps in training members of the National Assembly, elected councils and other independent bodies that together make up the state. In addition, public-private partnerships, empowerment of the civil society and the media and enabling a culture of transparency has also been sought.

Sustainable livelihoods: agriculture, food security and income opportunities

The UN helps the state in creating and implementing policies that stimulate economic growth in agriculture and other areas. Particularly, improved wheat seed and the Comprehensive Agriculture and Rural Development (CARD) facility has been supported substantially as the UN continues to reduce poverty levels through specialised programmes.

The UN endorses joint coordination mechanisms in order to increase agricultural output and access to diversified food at the household level. This is done through developing the means of production - specifically, irrigation networks, quality seeds, plant protection, animal feed and health services - and by executing food security programmes through the education system. It also attempts to efficiently manage natural resources and hazards to reduce vulnerabilities to disasters.

Diversifying and expanding livelihood opportunities, in particular for the poorer segments by linking rural development, private sector revitalisation and vocational training, has been a significant part of UN activities. Accordingly, partnerships have been developed with multiple ministries in order to train members to be more effective in serving their countrymen.

Basic social services

The UN is helping the Afghan government in providing basic social services including education, sanitation, health, and access to safe water. Adopting a two-pronged strategy, the UN works with relevant ministries and partners to build systems for access to quality services and also brings on board key stakeholders including shuras and religious leaders through its community development committees. Using these, it seeks

to encourage active participation by individuals, families and communities in managing and acquiring education and health opportunities.

The \$4 billion UNDAF project, providing support to the government-proposed national strategy (ANDS), is a significant development on the part of the UN. However, actual implementation of is likely to face numerous hurdles since it requires building an effective partnership with what is largely seen as a corrupt state system. The UN country team needs to comprehensively monitor the funds, using the help of local governments in the process, to monitor implementation. Thirty-two UN agencies, after collectively drafting the document, are now individually playing their roles in implementation. The work of some of the most important of these agencies is examined below.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

UNDP has played an active part in Afghanistan since a peace process began in 2002. It has made key contributions, particularly in the political arena where it assisted in the convening of the 'loya jirga' (grand political council - a meeting to settle key political matters and disputes), helped in preparing the constitution and provided comparative experience through consultants and advisors. Through the UN Office of project services (UNOPS), the UNDP supervised and managed both the first presidential election, and the parliamentary and provincial elections.

Other achievements include its focus on institutional development when, along with UNAMA, it helped establish an Independent Electoral Commission, and its work in getting the Meshrano Jirga (Upper House) and Wolesi Jirga (Lower House) operational in 2004. Through the UNDP, members of the parliament and senate have gained international exposure and trainings to equip them with better knowledge of their constitutional role, rights and responsibilities as well as elements of the legislative process.

During the initial recovery phase in Afghanistan, the UNDP helped in re-establishing essential parts of the justice system which included the UN-administered Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOFTA). In addition, it has helped the treasury department

of the Ministry of Finance to prepare a policy-based national annual budget of \$2 billion in 2008.

Given its broad mandate, its multifaceted work is not surprising. Apart from political processes, institutional development and aiding in the justice system, UNDP has also made contributions in the area of sustainable livelihoods. In 2002, it partnered the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation in a joint programme, the National Area Based Development Programme (NABDP), with the aim of reducing poverty and improving livelihoods in rural Afghanistan.

The NABDP has created considerable capacity in the provincial government, having presence in all thirty-four provinces of the country. Around 900 projects have either been completed or are currently being implemented and most are in the form of small-scale infrastructure and physical facilities. UNDP has positioned itself as the administrator for the international community in Afghanistan, handling large funds for donors and governments on behalf of the development sector and the UN.

UN World Food Programme (WFP)

The UNWFP has been working in Afghanistan since 1963 and is active in all provinces. It has transformed from its role as an agency providing emergency assistance to the overall rehabilitation and recovery of Afghanistan. It fed around 9 million Afghans in 2009, mainly servicing those communities living in food-insecure rural areas.

The UNWFP has launched a School Meals Programmes to help rebuild the educational system. This project gave 1.4 million students take-home food rations to encourage enrolment; these included 568,600 girls who received vegetable oil as a bonus to reduce the gender gap.

The UNWFP has also initiated another programme called Food for Training to help the poor acquire marketable skills to gain better livelihoods. It provided 180,000 Afghans with rations when they attended classes in literacy, handicraft production, carpentry, plumbing skills and childcare in 2009 alone. It also lends a hand to more than 4.4 million

people through its Food for Work programme, where it delivers food to workers as they build or repair community assets, roads, bridges, reservoirs, and irrigation systems.

UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

UNIFEM launched itself in Afghanistan in 2002 after the fall of the Taliban regime. Its objective here, as in other countries, is to empower women and increase the opportunities available to them in all sectors of life. In addition, it provides financial and technical assistance through innovative programmes and strategies that promote women's rights, political participation and economic security.

UNIFEM has its main office in Kabul and extension offices in six other provinces- Herat, Jalaabad, Parwan, Kapisa, Panshir, and Ghazni. There are also coordination offices based in Herat, Ghazni, and Parwan. The organization supports a UNESCO-initiated literacy programme in Afghanistan called the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE), and works closely with the UNAMA and the state in various joint programmes including the Afghanistan Integrated Functional Literacy Initiative and the Girls Education Initiative.

UNIFEM activities in Afghanistan comprise different programmes to achieve its objectives. The Gender and Justice programme, for instance, attempts to protect women from all kinds of violence and enable them to be participants in rural and urban political processes. Accordingly, UNIFEM has endorsed efforts in legislative and policy reform that protect women rights and attempt to create opportunities for Afghan women to make their voices heard.

The Community Empowerment and Economic Development unit of UNIFEM back women's economic security in six provinces, through which poor women are trained in skills of their interest to earn a livelihood. UNIFEM has also initiated an Institutional Capacity Building programme under the auspices of the Ministry of Women Affairs (MOWA), wherein the aim is to make the processes, systems, policies and budgets of government institutions and ministries relevant to the needs of both genders. Subsequently, UNIFEM has provided technical assistance in the development, implementation and monitoring of a ten-year National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) and aided in the mainstreaming of gender in the ANDS.

United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF)

UNICEF has revealed that it is building twelve new schools in the Baghlan province in northern Afghanistan to educate 12000 children. It has also signed a working plan with the Ministry of Public Health for supporting national priorities regarding immunization, school health, and maternal health.

UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

Following the steps of other UN Agencies, the UNODC has made a contribution of sixty used computers to the Afghanistan Women and Children's Rights Association for the benefit of girls' schools around Kunduz in north-eastern Afghanistan.

UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)

With the cooperation of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, FAO has started to implement a \$2 million project in the north-eastern province of Baghlan to assist poor farmers. As a part of the project, 6,600 fruit trees, including almond, apricot, peach, and plum were distributed in over a hundred gardens covering 110 acres of farming land.

The FAO has also implemented a dairy project which aims to increase income levels of 1,600 Afghan families as much as five-fold. The dairy project in Kabul and in the provinces of Logar, Wardak, Mazar and Kunduz has helped in enhancing household incomes from \$130 to \$650 a year. Having started in 2003, this project has been a success story for FAO and reached out to large number of families.

In addition to efforts being made by the aforementioned agencies, there are also others making vital contributions in the development of Afghanistan. These include, for instance, the UN Office for Project Services, which has, with the cooperation of the Swedish embassy, built a road between Sar-i-Pul and Sosma Qala, and UNESCO, which has, in cooperation with the Italian government, launched a \$1 million plan to develop the capacity of educational radio and television.

Hence, all the UN aid agencies apart from their collective efforts are also individually making critical contributions in rebuilding the lives of Afghan people in their own ways, often through collaborations with other organizations and donors. However, this does not mean that the work has come easy; indeed, both the aid agencies and their funded programmes are facing multiple challenges that are constantly being addressed. In the following section, an assessment of these challenges and how these are being overcome, will be given due attention.

Challenges to the UN

Successful post-conflict rebuilding and development is only possible when the work being carried out is provided an enabling and secure environment. Unfortunately, this has not been the case in Afghanistan as security challenges remain a major hurdle for UN agencies. There were numerous threats and warnings given to UN staff at the time of elections in September 2009, and the threat has not been limited to that particular period. Indeed, aid agencies have suffered numerous attacks and lost both human and material resources.

Two UNAMA staff-members were killed, and another was injured in a vehicle-borne suicide bomb attack on an international military convoy in Kabul on September 18, 2009. Five other UN members were killed and numerous injured in an attack on Bakhtar Guesthouse in Kabul, where thirty-four UN officials were staying. After this incident, the UN pulled out some of its foreign staff from the country.

The situation seems to be worsening since 2009 has been the most violent year for Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. There averaged 960 security incidents per month in 2009, as compared with 741 the year before and civilian casualties in December 2009 increased by more than 50 percent compared with December 2008.

The security situation exacerbated further in January 2010, with the number of security incidents 40 percent higher than in January 2009. Because of this deteriorated security situation, fifty members of the UN staff left Afghanistan in 2009, leaving behind many gaps in the process.

Recruitment for UNAMA is another dilemma facing the UN because of its bureaucratic recruitment procedures handled in New York. In spite of funds being available, it takes about a year to appoint new staff for UNAMA in order to expand its mandate in Afghanistan, thus preventing it from utilizing its resources fully. .

Limited human capital is another major challenge that prevents it from accomplishing its ambitious mandate in Afghanistan. To find the right people for specific tasks assigned at the local level has proven to be immensely difficult; problems of training, capacity building, corruption and trust all play their part in local initiatives being delayed or shelved altogether.

Corruption is perhaps the biggest problem that the Afghans are facing. The UN Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), in a survey in January 2010, reported that 59 percent of Afghans consider corruption as the greatest problem causing insecurity. Unfortunately, this curse is not confined to the Afghan people since it has also become part of the UN, which is facing corruption even within members of its aid agencies.

For instance, UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) head, Gary K. Helseth (2002-2006), was accused by the UN Procurement Task Force of mismanaging funds of half a million dollars from roads, schools and clinic to fund his lifestyle. There are even reports that a number of projects of the UNOPS are below par, and on the verge of falling apart. While such cases of grand corruption may be rare, petty corruption remains common; regardless, the UN needs to act immediately to counter such mismanagement of finances from within its own ranks so that it can adequately address larger issues in Afghan society.

The problem of inconsistent funding for projects is another major issue confronting the UN, and a growing gap has been observed between the funds pledged and the amount delivered by international donors. As a result, projects fail to be sustainable and even promising ideas lose appeal over a short period of time.

Another aspect of the aid sector troubling the UN has been its insufficient coordination and cooperation in the use of funds. EU, NATO Senior Civilian Representative and UNAMA are the three coordinating civilian structures present in Afghanistan that recommend finances for projects. Lack of coordination between these in any Afghan province sometimes delays or jeopardises the implementation of entire projects and causes much concern for all stakeholders.

Recommendations

A trustworthy security situation is necessary for carrying development work and there is a dire need to improve security in Afghanistan before aid agencies such as the UN can achieve their given mandates. For this, a number of steps need to be taken by the international community which needs to win the hearts and minds of the local people in order to counter a rise in insurgency more effectively,

For instance, there needs to be a complete reformation of the army and police structures. While there is work being done towards training Afghan forces, a negative image of the police continues to persist. According to reports filed to UNAMA field offices, there are complaints that the police are involved in smuggling, kidnapping and extortion. When security forces seem to be providing no security at all, and instead only intimidating the population, it is not surprising that frustration rises and adds to the ranks of insurgent forces.

This in turn makes it difficult for the UN to continue with its work. This does not mean that the UN itself does not have the need to act more effectively. Indeed, it needs to make better use of given funds, spending on projects that shape the lives of a large number of people in the sectors that require the most immediate attention. For example, it should work harder to build and repair infrastructure, especially roads and schools that provide technical education to students, and also increase its presence in the agriculture sector.

Moreover, the UN needs to adapt to specific needs of post-conflict Afghanistan, reserving a part of funds for those children who have lost their parents and are now

supporting entire families. This could be done, for instance, by providing them skills and education, and simultaneously offering them reasonable finances on a daily bases, with the condition that they continue to attend school.

Most importantly, given its institutional significance, the UN needs to adequately address the matter of corruption that exists in its agencies. It should ensure that money is not being misused or embezzled by recipient offices and must seek to adopt alternative approaches for increased transparency. This could be done, for instance, by involving local people or by ensuring that all finances go through an additional body created for this one purpose.

An issue of immense global significance has been drugs; implications of this problem mean that the UN, with its own vast mandate, is the only body equipped to deal with narcotics. In fact, it has shown some positive results in reducing poppy cultivation; UNODC revealed in February 2010, on the basis of a survey of farmers' intentions at planting time, that it is foreseen that eight additional provinces (Baghlan, Faryab, Sari Pul, Badakhshan, Kabul, Kunar, Laghman, and Nangarhar) may become poppy-free in 2010 if assistance is delivered immediately.

Opium cultivation has declined by 36 percent over the past two years but much work still needs to be done if it is to be controlled or even eliminated. The UN should increase its agricultural assistance to farmers as much as it can and provide education towards diversifying agricultural produce to include alternative crops such as wheat, maize and fruit. Apart from livelihood sustenance, low cultivation of opium will also help counter militancy as opium trade is a major source of funding for insurgents.

UNAMA, in its position of leadership, needs to work out improved coordination mechanisms both within UN agencies, as well as with international donors and other major actors involved in the rebuilding process. This will ultimately lead to more efficient use of resources, and allow the agencies to work on specific tasks more comprehensively.

As an innovative step, especially as far as Afghanistan is concerned, the UN needs to target influential religious people from local areas – the respected 'mullahs' whose support is needed for gaining the trust of millions. Getting such personalities on board

will allow a safe passage to its work, provide respect and prevent needless delays in implementation of projects. Indeed the benefits could well work both ways, since such cooperation may also lead to a situation wherein religious leaders could promote a positive, non-violent vision of religion to the youth, which is the most important demographic group as far as the development of the country is concerned.

Unless radicalisation, or potential radicalisation, of a young and frustrated population is not stopped, the UN as well as the international community will fail in its mission in Afghanistan. Respected and learned teachers of Islam can also be added to the UN ranks in order to work with its staff in various projects – such as schools and curriculum - where religion becomes a sensitive area for many Afghans. These UN-employed teachers could help in changing mindsets, become active players in the reconciliation process, and replace or even convince influential religious people to lead the youth towards a peaceful and harmonious version of Islam.

Conclusion

Rebuilding Afghanistan would be difficult at the best of times; the UN is doing its best to restructure a number of areas in a difficult terrain under unfavourable conditions. The ultimate challenge in carrying out development activities is the prevalence of violence and the overall security situation in Afghanistan, which is preventing much-needed work from being completed and even leading to a withdrawal of personnel.

Yet, the UN is showing great commitment in helping the Afghan people since UNAMA and other UN agencies are playing significant roles to achieve their respective and collective ends. However, there is still a long road ahead; as instability rises, so does the need for aid, development and reconstruction. The mission in Afghanistan then, demands even more commitment and the UN should focus on increasing the capacity of locals at both public and private realms.

Domestic manpower in Afghanistan is essential for the completion and handing over of different projects being carried out by the UN. Currently, much of the labour comes from abroad; investing in human capital development could work wonders not just for employment opportunities, but also for effective projects, implementation, sustainability, and an efficient use of resources. In the London 2010 conference, it was agreed that the

government be given control of some of the funds provided for development; however, before this is done, the UN should devise a strict monitoring mechanism to counter possible corruption.

Moreover, the UN must ensure that the execution of its long term projects such as the UNDAF is carried out practically, without falling prey to corrupt and needless bureaucratic structures both within and outside UN ranks. However, rebuilding Afghanistan politically, economically and socially is a great challenge that the UN is not equipped to face on its own. The support of international and local actors is a necessary pre-requisite; true and long-term commitment to supporting the people of Afghanistan needs to come from all stakeholders before the numerous and significant challenges in the country can be met successfully.

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