



Development for Afghans

Missing Measurements and Missed Opportunities

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Notwithstanding academic and professional controversy, development, however defined, is about people's well-being. A web of deprivation adversely affects human well-being. It generates and perpetuates poverty. Human, social and institutional capital development can be instrumental in breaking webs of deprivation and poverty. The most common forms of deprivation that human and social capital development addresses are lack of access of the disadvantaged to education, health services, employment and income and unequal opportunities for women. Institutional capital development is also necessary for promoting human and social capital development, as it builds the capacity of state institutions that can target human development and well-being.

Content of the Brief

This policy brief presents a concise review and assessment of the impact of investment of aid resources on human development and well-being in Afghanistan. The brief addresses the following questions: Have international aid investments successfully created human, social and institutional capital in Afghanistan? What does a review of human development


At a glance...

- *Human development programs and projects in Afghanistan generally lack the results frameworks required to assess their effectiveness.*
- *With exception of the health sector, development programs have been designed without results monitoring and evaluation in mind.*
- *Aid efforts have bypassed Afghan institutions, which remain incapable of assuming their formal roles and responsibilities – a missed opportunity.*

and well-being and institutional capacity building programs in Afghanistan reveal?

Reported Decline in Human Well-Being in Afghanistan

In 2006, assessments of multinational reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan indicated that little progress had been made in a number of areas. By late 2008, the seventh year of these efforts, security conditions were at their worst since 2001. Social and economic advances made between 2001



and 2005 appeared to have halted. The 2007 Human Development Report on Afghanistan indicated declining human well-being. There seems to be little concrete evidence that aid activities are having a positive impact on the lives of Afghans. Despite deployment of vast efforts, impact on the ground appears inadequate, especially in terms of human, social and institutional development.

These reports raise a number of questions. Could this be an indicator of inefficient use of aid resources? Have international investments in Afghanistan been effective in breaking webs of deprivation in the form of lack of entitlements to education, health and, thus, jobs and income? Do systemic barriers to equitable distribution of opportunities for women continue to be reinforced by stark inequalities in access to resources and capacity-development opportunities and potentials? Are Afghan state institutions, which must take the lead in delivering human well-being, allowed opportunities and resources to manage, make policies and strategies, and implement well thought out actions that can address priority poverty reduction targets? How effective has technical assistance been?

Best Practices in Planning and Monitoring of Results in Public Health Sector Ensure Fair Impact Assessment

The public health sector, which sets an example of good planning and results-monitoring practices, has progressed in the provision of basic health services that make a significant contribution to human development and well-being. Afghan health programs have allowed 85% of the population to access basic health services. Health outcomes have improved, as reflected in a 26% decline in the mortality of children under the age of five years. These encouraging trends, unfortunately, do not appear sustainable according to most recent statistics that register a rise in child mortality. Several reasons, including insecurity preventing delivery of services, are cited. Nonetheless a sound results framework allows performance measurement of health

sector programs and ongoing collection of information on the health status of the population.

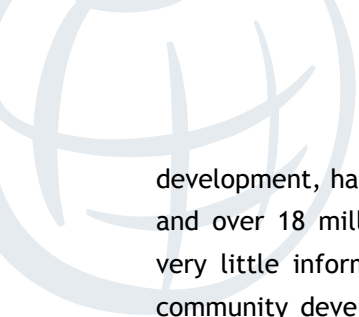
Does the Basic Education Program Contribute to Sustainable Human Capital Development?

On the other hand, the basic education sector program developed no results-monitoring framework and only collects statistics on outputs. These statistics indicate that over 9 million children are enrolled in schools. Hundreds of new schools have been built and teachers are being trained. However, in the absence of an appropriate results-monitoring system, any claim to sustainable human capital development remains unsubstantiated. It cannot be determined how many children stay enrolled and graduate from primary schools. Are the trained teachers teaching in schools? How many of the schools are fully operational, with students, teachers, books and supplies? How many schools are secure for children to attend? Without measuring these critical factors, an assessment of the impact of investments in basic education on human capital development remains inconclusive.

Does the Micro-Credit Program Generate Income?

Similarly, assessments of income generating programs, mainly the flagship micro-credit program, remain inconclusive. Statistics on number of clients, number of provinces wherein the programs are operational, and the amount of loans recovered are not indicators of income generation. Is the flagship micro-credit program contributing to poverty reduction by generating income? Are clients actually investing loans they are granted in income-generating micro-enterprises? Without answers to these questions, any claim of the micro-credit program's contribution to poverty reduction lacks credible foundation.

Attempts to assess the impact of aid investment in creating opportunities and entitlements encounter similar disappointment. The National Solidarity Program (NSP), designed to promote social capital



development, has reached the country's 34 provinces and over 18 million villagers. Once more, however, very little information is available on how the NSP community development activities are impacting on the well-being of the vulnerable. Will the projects completed provide sustainable benefits? While there is some evidence of NSP generating public trust and confidence in the Afghan government, little data has been collected on the social and economic effects of the NSP on communities.

What we see in all these cases are deficiencies in planning and monitoring of results of major reconstruction programs in Afghanistan. Suggestions that human and social capital development projects have been successful are not backed by concrete and documented evidence. Perhaps results have been achieved. But it is currently impossible to determine the impact of these development programs with certainty. Planned activities have been undertaken and most of them are nearing completion. But monitoring tools are focused on activities rather than their actual impacts because projects have not been planned with outcome results monitoring in mind. With no indicators set at the project planning stages to measure progress during implementation, systematic collection and recording of data, particularly to measure qualitative impacts on people's lives, remain undone.

Inappropriate Alternative Livelihood Programming Fails to Reduce Cultivation of Poppy


The problem is even more serious when one examines investments made in generating an alternative to poppy cultivation for poor farmers. The concept of alternative livelihood is misunderstood and improperly applied. This, in turn, leads to poor programming and ineffective efforts to reduce poppy cultivation. A proper understanding of the meaning of "alternative livelihood" was never developed and nurtured among Afghan institutions or the donor community.

In Afghanistan, alternative livelihood has been interpreted as programming for, and implementation of, small, fragmented and isolated livelihood projects, such as poultry raising, kitchen gardening, or alternative crop promotion. These fragmented activities do not produce revenues that compete with the income earned from cultivating poppy yields and are thus failed efforts.

Successful alternative livelihoods practices reveal that programming must embrace integrated rural development. Integrated rural development aims to improve a community's general quality of life through assistance in the agriculture sector. It focuses on alternative cropping, supported with the provision of agricultural extension, a supply of improved varieties of seeds, fertilizers, irrigation facilities and access to market and non-agriculture items addressing basic human needs, such as health services, water and sanitation facilities and basic education. Meant to move farmers away from illegal cultivation activities by bringing about qualitative changes in life conditions, integrated rural development would not eliminate poppy cultivation overnight. But past experiences show that farmers choose not to grow an illegal crop if they have assurances that planned and broad-based development interventions will improve the general quality of their lives. In fact, integrated rural development programs have been successful in Thailand, India, Pakistan, Bolivia and Peru in containing spread of poppy cultivation. No evidence-based programming on alternative livelihoods has been followed in Afghanistan, with no results achieved in terms of promoting farming households' well-being.

Lack of Indicators to Measure Gender Inequality Weakens Gender Programming

Gender inequality is one of the most pervasive structural inequalities that impede human development. It typically takes the form of an unequal burden sharing



between women and men. Gender inequality should be monitored with indicators. Although some gender-related development indicators are used in Afghanistan – notably, those linked to the Millennium Development Goals – other forms of gender inequality are not monitored. If human and social capital development objectives are to be attained, a list of indicators must be developed and applied to measure progress in reduction of inequality of opportunities encountered by women. Based on an appreciation of Islamic values and Sharia Law, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs should determine which indicators are realistic or practicable in Afghanistan and apply these.

Donors are currently avoiding these issues. Monitoring of gender inequality has not been made a priority. Many donors attempt to address gender inequality concerns only by filling a standard checklist. Unfortunately, these checklists do not address basic factors that lead to gender inequality. A better understanding of the impact of structural gender inequalities must be made a priority and programming must be adapted accordingly. Efforts are also required to develop large, national gender specific programs rather than existing Gender Funds that dilute limited resources in small and often non-strategic projects, with little sustainable results or large scale impact at the societal level.

Institutional Capital Development Neglected

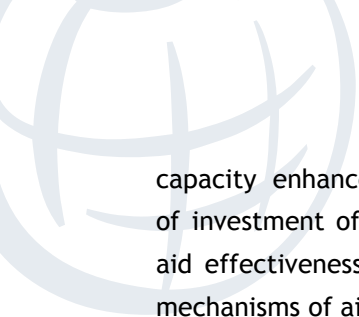
Having reviewed the above instances of ineffective aid investment in human development and well-being, we turn to institutional capital development, considered central to making aid investments effective. Institutional capital development necessitates a focus on the capacity enhancement of state institutions, specifically, a state’s ability to spend funds effectively to achieve indigenously identified (instead of donor identified) development results. This requires aid to be delivered in ways that can strengthen a state’s capacity to produce demonstrable development results

that serve the people. This capacity is essential for effective aid utilization.

Are aid donors helping to build this capacity? Findings show that in many fragile states, donor interventions have undermined states’ efforts to move from fragility to stability. This is because donor aid policies, mechanisms, delivery channels and programs can weaken the partner state. Donor financing often deliberately bypasses the state and creates non-state operated parallel mechanisms of aid delivery, which deprive the state of control over its development programs and budget. Not only do such aid policies and programs incapacitate the state, but they risk increasing aid dependency by preventing the state to learn to plan, deliver and be accountable.

Technical Assistance Fails to Build Afghan National Capacity

Expanding the capacities of a post-conflict state characterized by extremely limited human resources requires externally financed technical assistance and expertise, along with a simultaneous capacity building program. This dual track constitutes a practical and balanced approach. At the outset, it was hoped that external expertise would help train national Afghan civil servants, who could in two to three years time replace expatriates. After seven years, however, many critical state functions continue to be performed by international experts or high-salaried Afghans financed by the international community. The capacity of the Afghan civil service has not been built. It remains weak, with inadequate capacity to deliver public services, outside of enormous international support. This continues to undermine local ownership and leadership principles which are critical for making aid and development effective. With an expenditure of over \$1.6 billion in seven years, little capacity building in government institutions is visible in Afghanistan. This shows that aid effectiveness and



capacity enhancement are not simply derived out of investment of large sums of aid dollars but, that aid effectiveness is also linked to the channels and mechanisms of aid delivery chosen by donors.

Ineffective Aid Delivery Mechanisms Used

Extraordinarily ineffective delivery mechanisms have been used in Afghanistan for years. Donors have paid little attention to these deficiencies. Donor controlled aid delivery mechanisms give the Afghan government little control of the aid resources and prevent the government from managing its own development priorities. To change this undesirable situation, donors must reconsider the utility of the traditional aid delivery mechanisms and channels, and replace these with appropriate financing methods that will more likely confer ownership to Afghan state institutions. A simultaneous program of enhancing the capacity of the state institutions must also be implemented.

But, one may ask, is it too late after seven years to change the course? Donors are resisting change. This is reflected in the admission by the top UN envoy in Kabul that donors are not responding to his call for aligning their financing and development activities with government initiated and designed and state owned programs.

The conclusion drawn from a summary review of a selected group of human and social capital development programs and the state of institutional capital development is that effectiveness of aid to Afghanistan will ultimately be judged not by the total amount of funds disbursed and quantities of donor investment in various activities, but by the qualitative impacts of such aid investments have on Afghan state institutions and on people's lives. Lack of concrete evidence of outcome results achieved in these areas is serious.

Weak Results Planning and Monitoring Hobbles Donor Accountability

Lack of concrete evidence weakens donor accountability to its public and the partner country, as well. How does Canada intend to collect evidence of effective utilization of aid in Afghanistan to address accountability requirements? A start has been made by the Afghanistan Task Force in formulating an accountability framework to measure performance with the use of benchmarks and progress indicators. But what does a review of these benchmarks for measuring progress reveal? Our government's recently announced six priorities in Afghanistan and associated benchmarks and progress indicators – with a few exceptions – can hardly qualify as good measures of positive changes contributing to human, social or institutional capital development, and the benchmarks are not consistently focused on outcome results.


Room for Improvement in Canada's Afghan Mission Benchmark Framework

A number of Canadian benchmarks for human and social capital development are focused on inputs and outputs, rather than on outcomes. For instance, in the basic services sectors, benchmarks include the number of infrastructure projects completed, the number of schools built, the number of teachers trained, the number of community groups identifying and implementing infrastructure projects and the number of micro-credit clients served. None of these indicators help to determine if Canadian investments are making a difference in the lives of ordinary Afghans. Canadian indicators gloss over important outcome-oriented questions such as: How many of the schools built are fully operational, with students enrolled, teachers deployed and books and supplies provided? To what extent have Canadian funds helped operationalize a system of universal primary education

in Afghanistan? To what extent has road construction successfully promoted secure market access? And have micro credit programs effectively generated income for the poor and contributed to poverty reduction?

Better Planning, Design and Use of Results Frameworks Required Allowing Fair Assessments of Aid Investments

The selected sectoral programs cursorily reviewed above show less than satisfactory performance in building human, social and institutional capital development. In most instances, poor design and lack of planning for results monitoring prevent a fair impact assessment. One exception is the health sector, which has a sound results framework in place and ample provisions for ongoing results monitoring. The problem of inadequate attention to results monitoring is a serious one, plaguing many of the large donor programs, including programs managed by multilateral organizations. Despite the millions spent in staff deployment at various levels of projects and programs, and in the provision of national and international technical assistance, planning and results-based monitoring deficiencies prevent us from going beyond activities monitoring.

It is clear that, due to design deficiencies and inadequate attention to appropriate methodologies for planning and monitoring of results, projects that are conceptually strong are losing ground. These projects are unable to provide evidence of results, which is limiting their ability to gain public support in Afghanistan or among donor states and agencies. Furthermore, little time has been devoted to building the capacity of Afghan institutions to address the challenges of measuring results and setting indicators. Urgent attention must be paid by donor agencies and the Afghan government in addressing these weaknesses on an immediate basis in order to ensure and sustain effectiveness of aid investment. 

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