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# Afghanistan's Early Aid Architecture and How It Has Changed

In the midst of the discussions around timing and agenda for the second Kabul conference of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB), I was approached to write a piece on the Afghanistan Development Forum (ADF) for this volume. The ADF was organised in 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2007. I remembered it from when I headed the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR),<sup>1</sup> and NGOs and other civil society organisations prepared statements and discussion papers for the various development forums. When searching for documents and talking to people I knew had attended the meetings, I realised that the events themselves had left only a very thin paper trail and had made very little impression on those present at that time.

The ADF at the time represented part of the process to ensure greater Afghan ownership of the post-Taleban aid coordination mechanisms, and to understand its role, one first needs to go back to the beginning.

The first discussion on a new aid architecture took place at a senior officials meeting in Washington, DC, at the end of November 2001 to prepare for the upcoming reconstruction effort. Since there

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<sup>1</sup> ACBAR was created in August 1988 in response to the demand of the many aid agencies and their donors for a coordinated approach to assistance in Afghanistan. Membership of ACBAR consists of national and international NGOs. The author was director of ACBAR from August 2003–April 2009.

was no official Afghan representation that could represent the interests of the Afghan people – the government was not yet established<sup>2</sup> – the proposed structure would take on the role of the Afghan government in the interim.<sup>3</sup>

Out of the November meeting came two new aid fora: first, the Afghanistan Reconstruction Steering Group (ARSG), chaired jointly by the United States, European Union, Japan and Saudi Arabia, which was to give overall direction to the reconstruction process and resolve political issues; and second, the Afghanistan Reconstruction Implementation Group (IG), co-chaired by the Asian Development Bank, the Islamic Development Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, and the chairs of the ARSG, created at the ministerial meeting in Tokyo in January 2002. The IG was intended as a Kabul-based forum for the implementing organisations on the ground.<sup>4</sup>

After the establishment of an internationally acknowledged representation with the

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<sup>2</sup> Under the Bonn Agreement of 5 December 2001, an Interim Authority came into power on 22 December 2001. The Bonn Agreement is officially titled, 'Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-Establishment of Permanent Government Institutions'.

<sup>3</sup> Alastair J McKechnie, 'Humanitarian Assistance, Reconstruction and Development in Afghanistan: A Practitioners' View', CPR Working Papers No. 3, 2003, 12.

<sup>4</sup> McKechnie, 'Humanitarian Assistance', 13 (see FN3).

establishment of the Afghanistan Interim Authority (AIA) on 22 December 2001, the Afghan government claimed its role as the main coordinating body already during the first Implementation Group meeting in January 2002 in Tokyo.

In February 2002 the interim government established the Afghan Assistance Coordination Authority (AACAA) to attract, guide, facilitate and coordinate the flow of international humanitarian, reconstruction and economic assistance to Afghanistan. The AACAA was formalised by presidential decree in April 2002.<sup>5</sup> At the second IG meeting in April 2002 the AACAA presented the country's first draft of the National Development Framework (NDF). The NDF stated, 'The Government will not insist that all monies spent on reconstruction in Afghanistan go through our channels, but we expect donors to fund and implement only those projects consistent with the goals and strategies outlined in the NDF.'<sup>6</sup>

The NDF identified 12 national priority programmes and three national security programmes under three pillars: human capital and social protection; physical infrastructure; and private sector development, security and rule of law.<sup>7</sup>

To develop the programmes outlined in the NDF further, the AACAA established twelve programme working groups, each headed by a lead ministry and with the technical support of a programme secretariat. However, this mechanism was deemed ineffective by line ministries and donors alike and by the end of 2002 the AACAA had established a new mechanism of 13 Consultative Groups (CGs).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Arne Strand, 'Aid Coordination in Afghanistan', Bergen, CMI, Commissioned Report, 2002, 10. The AACAA was governed by a board that consisted of a chairman, the ministers of finance, foreign affairs, planning and reconstruction, the head of the Central Bank, and several key players from the public sector. The AACAA had an aid coordination structure responsible for supporting line ministries to communicate reconstruction priorities, coordinate aid and implement the national development budget process and maintained the Donor Assistance Database (DAD) which tracked donor support within and outside the budget. Dr Ahraf Ghani Ahmadzai was appointed director of the AACAA. He retained this position after his appointment as minister of finance two months later. In July 2003, he was replaced by an acting director, Malik Mortaza.

<sup>6</sup> 'National Development Framework', version 2, 2002, 6.

<sup>7</sup> 'Afghanistan: Rebuilding our Nation', government publication, 2003, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Pillar 1 included refugee and IDP return, education and vocational training, health and nutrition, livelihood and social protection, cultural heritage, culture and sports.

According to the government's information booklet 'Afghanistan – Rebuilding our Nation', dated March 2003, the CGs were responsible for

- Preparing public investment programmes;
- Ensuring consistency of recommendations with the NDF;
- Tracking of aid flows in support of the budget;
- Monitoring progress in programme areas; and
- Incorporating cross cutting issues and reporting back to the CG Standing Committee.

The Consultative Groups were supplemented by Advisory Groups, established to mainstream cross cutting issues within the budget (gender, environment, human rights, humanitarian affairs and monitoring and evaluation). Each CG was chaired by a lead ministry with support from a CG focal point. The whole process was overseen by the CG Standing Committee. The CGs prepared plans and budgets that were presented to the ADF on an annual basis.

The Afghanistan Development Forum was considered to be the overarching national Consultative Group and the forum where Afghan government, UN agencies, international organisations and NGOs discussed the progress of the National Priority Programmes, future priorities and the national budget.

But how important was the ADF? Despite all the effort that went into organising the different forums, the gatherings were mostly overshadowed by the many large international aid coordination meetings that took place between the Bonn Conference of December 2001 and the Paris Conference of June 2008.<sup>9</sup>

As a consequence, the focus of the ADFs shifted; it became more about process, reporting and funding than about being a platform for policy dialogue, which the organisers had initially intended it to be. This was illustrated by the remarks of Jean Arnault, then UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) special representative of the secretary-general, at the opening session of the third ADF in 2005: 'The organisers of this year's Forum have requested to stay away . . . from the recitation of past

Pillar 2 included transport, energy, mining, and telecommunications, natural resource management and urban management. Pillar 3 included trade and investment, public administration and security and rule of law.

<sup>9</sup> In this period, 10 international high-level meetings on aid coordination were held. This does not include all the preparatory meetings and minor conferences that took place outside Afghanistan during that period.

accomplishments and contributions by donors and to engage in serious dialogue around future strategic priorities.<sup>10</sup>

One important outcome of the 2005 ADF was the agreement that the government of Afghanistan would start the process of formulating an Afghan Poverty Reduction Strategy, which the government named the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS). At the London 2006 Conference, the Interim ANDS (I-ANDS) was presented. The outcome of the London Conference, the Afghan Compact<sup>11</sup> and the endorsed I-ANDS, marked the end of the aid coordination structure under the NDF. In the aftermath of the London Conference, it was decided that there was no need to organise an ADF in 2006.

The new post-London aid coordination structure was governed by the by the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB), which was established to provide overall strategic coordination of the Afghanistan Compact.<sup>12</sup> The work of the JCMB is supported by three standing committees, which correspond with the priorities of the ANDS: social-economic development, governance and rule of law, and security.<sup>13</sup>

The fourth and last ADF in 2007, as a result, functioned merely as a sounding board to gather feedback for the final ANDS document, which was presented to the international community at the Paris Conference in June 2008.<sup>14</sup>

Currently the implementation of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy is focused around five clusters with a total of 22 National Priority Programmes.<sup>15</sup> The Afghan government and the international community agreed on the current

structure for donor coordination at the London and Kabul conferences in 2010. This is referred to as the Kabul Process.

Under the Kabul Process, the role of the JCMB and the standing committees have been again changed, but the old structure of working groups has not been replaced by a formal new structure. Consultation with the international community is now organised around the development of the National Priority Programmes and 100-day progress reports.

The system is far from perfect. There are the old complaints that there are too many meetings, accompanied by requests for even more meetings; that too little attention is paid to substantial policy dialogue and that the focus is too much on process. On the positive side, there seems to be a greater willingness from both sides to stick to the process and to let it evolve and improve as it moves forward.

The 'Kabul Conference Communiqué' of July 2010 echoed the issues and concerns that had troubled the aid coordination in Afghanistan from 2001 onwards: Afghan ownership, alignment of donors with government priorities<sup>16</sup> and requests for on-budget support to encourage effective and efficient programme delivery to the Afghan people. And as in 2001, the National Priority Programmes are still seen as the main vehicle to achieve these objectives.

The Bonn II conference on 5 December 2011 has only reaffirmed the commitment of the Afghan government and the international community to the Kabul Process. Now it is a matter of just carrying on and trying to make it all finally work.

<sup>10</sup> Statement by Jean Arnault at the opening session of the 2005 ADF, which took place from 4–6 April 2005, *Afghan Links* Issue 13–14 (April 2005).

<sup>11</sup> The Afghanistan Compact was a document outlining a five-year framework for cooperation between the Afghan government, the UN and donors.

<sup>12</sup> The Afghanistan Compact, London 2005, 15.

<sup>13</sup> *A-Z Guide to Afghanistan Assistance*, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2009, 41.

<sup>14</sup> The priorities of the ANDS were organised under three broad pillars: first, security; second, governance, rule of law and human rights; and, third, economic and social development. The document comprises strategies for 17 sectors under eight sub-pillars and strategies for six cross-cutting issues.

<sup>15</sup> The five clusters are agriculture and rural development, infrastructure development, human resource development, private sector development, and governance and security. The clusters group different ministries that are relevant for the sector and are each headed by a cluster coordinator.

<sup>16</sup> 'Kabul Conference Communiqué', article 8, 2–3, available at [www.unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/Documents/Kabul%20Conference%20Communique.pdf](http://www.unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/Documents/Kabul%20Conference%20Communique.pdf).

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## ABOUT THIS CHAPTER

This chapter is part of a larger volume called *Snapshots of an Intervention: The Unlearned Lessons of Afghanistan's Decade of Assistance (2001–2011)*, edited by Martine van Bijlert and Sari Kouvo. The volume is a collection of 26 short case studies by analysts and practitioners, each with long histories in the country, who were closely involved in the programmes they describe. The contributions present rare and detailed insights into the complexity of the intervention and, in many cases, the widely shared failure to learn necessary lessons and to adapt to realities as they were encountered.

The chapters and full document can be found on the AAN website ([www.aan-afghanistan.org](http://www.aan-afghanistan.org)) under publications.

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