

Better Development

Summary

Poverty is the reality the majority of Afghans face in their everyday lives. But development aid in Afghanistan is too often reduced to a security issue – a matter of winning 'hearts and minds' in the short term for military objectives. This undermines what must be Canada's main development assistance goals in Afghanistan - reducing poverty and supporting good governance across the country.

Background

Canada has pledged \$1.2 billion dollars between 2001 until 2011 for development and reconstruction in Afghanistan. Most of these funds will be channeled through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and spent on Official Development Assistance (ODA) for Afghanistan. Under current rules of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), ODA cannot be used by military forces in support of military objectives. Development assistance must be distributed according to need not political ties or military objectives.

The Government of Canada estimates it spent \$ 600 million on development assistance, between 2001 and March 31 2007, for Afghanistan. Prime Minister Stephen Harper pledged another \$200 million last February for development and reconstruction in Afghanistan this year. Of this, \$50 million will be channeled through the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) for counter-narcotics and policing activities, and \$150 million through CIDA.

The Issue

Poverty is the pervasive reality of daily life in Afghanistan. Statistics are hard to come by, but Afghanistan ranks 174th of 178 countries in the UNDP's Human Development Index. Poverty in Afghanistan is not just about income. Inequality of access to assets and social services, poor health and nutrition, limited access to education, displacement, vulnerability to natural disasters such as floods and drought, gender inequities, conflict, and political marginalization all contribute to deepen poverty. Populations in the southern region also suffer from increasing violence between ISAF/OEF operations and anti-government and Taliban forces. The violence in turn inhibits both delivery of vital humanitarian assistance and much needed development activity.

The centre and northern parts of the country are relatively more stable, although violent attacks by the Taliban and others still occur. Poverty levels are extreme. Most Canadian non-governmental organizations operate here, undertaking development work focused on literacy and education, livelihood and income generation, health and hygiene and support for widows and women's empowerment. It is critical that effective development of this kind continues in the daily lives of Afghans in these regions as a crucial step toward reducing poverty throughout the country. CCIC members call on the Government to focus its ODA for Afghanistan explicitly on poverty eradication and good governance. Working to empower the most vulnerable citizens, including women, the displaced, widows, the elderly and disabled must also be a priority.

Success in reducing poverty and delivering on development to the people of Afghanistan is a challenge, but long term peace and stability will be impossible without it. Unfortunately, development assistance in Afghanistan has all too often been defined by political imperatives and military objectives of donors. This is not only unethical, it has proven to be ineffective. Afghans have seen foreign interveners with ulterior military motives come and go for the last 30 years - they saw the Soviets build roads and electrical towers for military purposes in the name of development. The benefits escaped them. After decades of war, Afghanistan requires true and effective development aid. Canada must ensure its aid meets that test.

What is better, more effective aid?

Better or effective aid,

- focuses on poverty reduction and is carried out in ways that do not cause harm to the local population or put them at risk of being targeted in times of conflict.
- establishes medium and long term priorities based on the expressed needs of the people living in poverty.
- is based on the principle that development strategies are locally owned, not determined by donors like Canada. This is the foundation for effectiveness and sustainability.
- focuses on strengthening local capacity to be sustainable and self-sufficient.
- holds donors and governments accountable for results and requires consultation with national and international stakeholders.

Recommendations

- Canada must take the lead in ensuring activities of international forces and wider political and military objectives do not undermine humanitarian space and development goals of reducing poverty and supporting good governance.
- CIDA must make Canadian and Afghan civil society participation a priority in aid effectiveness. This should be based on local ownership, in particular the voice and interests of women.
- The Canadian Government should take the lead in ensuring that humanitarian agencies have access to vulnerable populations.
- Canada should adopt Bill C-293 which outlines a clear mandate for Canadian ODA, and for CIDA, by making poverty eradication the exclusive focus of its ODA.
- Canada must commit to increasing its ODA to meet the UN target of 0.7% of our GNI within ten years. This will allow CIDA to balance its essential commitments to Afghan development with our obligation to reduce poverty in other developing countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa.