

### Who Are We?

**Afghanaid is an international non-governmental organisation and has been present in the country since 1983.** It has more than 400 staff, over 90 percent of them Afghans, operating from 18 field offices across four provinces: Badakhshan, Samangan, Ghor, and Nuristan. Our work is spread in 2000 villages. We work in partnership with rural poor Afghan children, youth and adult and support them to claim their rights, rebuild their livelihoods, have better food security for their families and communities, reduce income poverty, and live a life with human dignity. We do this through a variety of ways.

**We have transferred skills to thousands of Afghan farmers** and equipped them with capabilities to grow improved wheat, vegetables, fruit orchards and in better animal care. We support 3000 Afghan women and men to become effective producers and entrepreneurs by building their skills in business development, linking them with markets and financial services, and by supporting them to organize themselves in groups to pool savings and set up small financially viable businesses. We plan to scale up this work to include another nearly 8000 village women and men in this programme.

**We are among the few who work directly with thousands of Afghan women** living in remote villages. We support them in building their skills in food processing and in value addition processes of vegetables and fruits grown on the family farm so that their family has food during winter months to eat and to sell the surplus to earn cash income. Similarly, we give training to Afghan women to set up poultry farms as an enterprise and support village women to become vaccinators and community based veterinary workers. Over the last two years, we have supported about 2000 village women to set up their saving groups and many of them today run their businesses. Women are critical member of the community based and local governance institutions which Afghanaid helps communities to establish. We have built leadership and organisational skills and competencies of thousands of women to run their grassroots institutions effectively.

**An important and a rather innovative piece of our work is with Afghan children and youth** who make up of over 50% of the country population and as such an important driver of change. We understand that by working today with the young generation and instilling in them the value of tolerance and democracy, and promoting respect for fundamental human rights will give the country more responsible future citizens and leaders.

**Afghanaid's values of neutrality and independence are the foundations of all our work in Afghanistan.** These guiding values have helped us over the past two decades to build a strong relationship of mutual respect and trust with local communities. The neutrality and independence of our operations guarantee the protection of our staff, and ensure us an equal access to most vulnerable groups among the local population,

and political identity and affiliations. We bring  
d poor families and communities. And we work with  
full transparency including reporting to the provincial and central government on our  
work and accounts. Where necessary and required, tribal elders engage the armed  
opposition to seek understanding and support for our programmes. Our staff move  
without armed protection.

## **The Humanitarian and Development Challenges in Afghanistan**

**Eight years after the overthrow of the Taliban and billions of dollars spent on aid and military operations**, the situation in Afghanistan remains mired in extreme poverty and deeply insecure due to the ongoing war that is rapidly expanding and growing in its intensity. Meanwhile, millions of Afghans are fast losing hope; there is mounting sense of frustration and fear, their expectations from their own government and promises of change by the international community are not met. The story of the unmet needs of Afghans is fascinating considering the billions that have flown in for their assistance.

**Many things changed in late 2001.** Together with Millions of war weary Afghan women, men and children, Afghanaid hoped for peace, security and stability and a situation allowing humanitarian actors to wind down their assistance activities with development and reconstruction taking over. The first 3 to 5 years saw encouraging progress, be it on hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugee return from neighboring Pakistan and Iran; in the Security sector with the creation of professional security forces through establishment of Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police; the Health sector with a comprehensive Primary Health Care strategy or on Education, with millions of Afghan children, many of them girls, returning back to school. Similar progress was made on elections, physical infrastructure, telecommunication, and the emergence of a free media and other actors of civil society, including the establishment of an Independent Human Rights Commission. However, sectors such as agriculture, livestock and irrigation, in a society where nearly 70% of the population directly or indirectly depends on agriculture for their income and food security and primary livelihoods were completely neglected. So was the capacity development and engagement with the civil society and the sub-national governance structures and authorities at district and provincial level.

**The situation in Afghanistan started deteriorating rapidly** from the occasional asymmetric attack in the south in 2003, to more intense, often conventional fighting spreading from the south, to today pretty much each and every of the 34 provinces. A good indicator is, for example, the number of improvised explosive devices, IEDs. They were reported a few in 2004, 4000 in 2008 and 9000 extrapolated for 2009. Similarly, another indicator is the US command in Afghanistan's assessment that the country needs additional 40'000 troops and a doubling of the Afghan Security Forces to 400'000 to defeat the growing numbers of armed opposition.

**More recently, while the newspaper headlines in the UK and more globally remain focussed on** the aftermath of Afghanistan's presidential elections, mounting losses of British troops, and President Obama's impending decision on United States

...op reinforcements, the humanitarian challenge is steadily growing and becoming ever more serious. Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world; it is no more a **post-conflict context but rather a humanitarian context**. With growing and deepening instability now spreading from the South and the East to the previously more stable North and West, delivering a development dividend is becoming increasingly difficult. The recent rapid increase of arming of all sorts of tribal and former militia outfits by government and its international partners adds complexities in the context.

**The number of civilian casualties** as a result of suicide attacks, airstrikes, roadside bombs and night raids has increased dramatically and is relatively well publicized. Over 2000 civilians are killed by all combating sides alone in 2009 (IRIN 12th November 2009). According to various international sources, the total accounted number of civilian killings since the beginning of the war stands today at 6,584 (with 3,956 by anti-government forces, 2,139 by govt. and international forces and 489 by other sources; source: UNAMA 2009). British soldiers killed in Afghanistan as of 19th November are 235 (compared to 179 in Iraq: Guardian 19th November 2009), whereas, the number of severely injured is estimated to be at least five times higher.

**However, less known, with insecurity spreading, are the numerous and daunting humanitarian and development challenges** which have surfaced over the last 2 to 3 years and effecting millions of vulnerable Afghans in their fight for a dignified survival. Vulnerable Afghans living in the most insecure areas have almost no access to the assistance. This has triggered a vicious cycle: the insecurity is preventing reconstruction and humanitarian assistance to reach these areas and this in turn is fuelling the local communities' distrust of both the international community and of their government.

**As new areas are falling under armed opposition control and/or influence**, the communities living in these areas rapidly lose access to services and conditions ensuring human security. Security is not just threatened by a roadside bomb or an air strike; it is a much more integrated concept. Millions of Afghans are not able to claim their fundamental constitutional rights to access basic social services, water, food, education, health care, have economic survival, and be able to express and move freely. Afghanistan is ranked at 181 out of 182 countries in Human Development Index (HDI)<sup>3</sup>. More than 7.1 million Afghans are today food insecure<sup>4</sup>. Job opportunities are declining, more and more people are displaced, some even back over the borders to Pakistan and Iran, which still host several million Afghan refugees. Lack of access to safe water and sanitation has further pushed millions of Afghans in to perpetual cycle of impoverishment, due to illness, increased medical expenses, and loss of productivity and income. 16 million of country's population (approx 65%), who live in rural areas, out of total 25 million, do not have access to safe and potable drinking water. There is widespread state of under nourishment and malnourishment among the population, in particular rural.

**A recently published State of the Children report of UNICEF identifies**

place for children to grow with the highest infant deaths per 1,000 live births. The Child Protection Action Network in the country handled nearly 1500 cases in 2008, but we can be certain that it is only the tip of the iceberg. Children are also being used as suicide bombers. Afghanistan today has over 50 percent of its population less than 15 years in age. If the present demographic profile continues, in 10 to 15 years, it is expected that 75 per cent of the Afghan population will be younger than 18 years in age. It is extremely important to stress the sense of urgency to protect Afghan children and youth against the impact of war on their lives and future. If we don't act now we shall lose yet another generation in Afghanistan. We must give young people hope and equip them with education, skill and respect of human rights so that they can have a better life than what their mothers and fathers are living. This is also important to stop youth becoming easy fodder to fuel and keep the armed conflict alive in the country; the conditions of deprivation under which children and youth are growing up are important drivers of radicalisation of the society.

**Neutral and independent NGOs like Afghanaid** have started experiencing increasing challenges to protect our space and operational access to most vulnerable Afghan communities needing our humanitarian and development assistance, in areas which were earlier safe. While we continue to work in these areas the risks to our staff and communities who we work with have increased. The new military and aid strategy of "shape, clear, hold and build" is ill understood by both the civilian population, regardless of whether they live in remote rural areas or urban towns, for which the proximity to any arms carrier means insecurity, and not, as projected by the new military doctrine, their protection.

**Whilst the state building agenda is critical, a more flexible, innovative and pragmatic response to Afghanistan's current situation is now imperative**, for helping Afghans to get their country out of the current quagmire. This response should recognise the importance of a balanced, inclusive and broad based development and must be designed to meet the most immediate humanitarian needs as well as the more long term development priorities of the millions of Afghans. The aid money must not be tied with the military, security and political agenda and must not be spend disproportionately in the provinces with insecurity, where countries like the UK have their national troops deployed. Rather, to win hearts and minds of the Afghans, it is imperative that aid is seen to be given based on needs and vulnerability, delivered through both the government and the independent aid organisations. Also, there is an urgent need to strike a better balance between ODA and military allocation and spending. Current estimates suggest that while international community is spending approximately 100 billion dollars a year on military operations, less than 10% of this amount is coming to the country under ODA.

**The donor countries including the UK must learn from its recent lessons and work in partnership with independent aid agencies, and not exclusively with the government**, like the Afghanaid and use their local knowledge, decades of

every, organisational and technical competencies, communities to build Afghan economy, society and better governance. NGOs should not be perceived as a threat to the private sector or to the government institutions, but rather as a partner by businesses and government to reach rural communities, producers and have access to remote markets and deliver basic services. One can develop jointly strategies that do not risk jeopardising nascent markets or create dependency, and instead facilitate the community's sense of involvement and ownership.

**There is a sense of urgency in the country:** there is no time to lose, especially if the aid effort is to contribute in recovering the country from its current challenges. This change can not be brought through the "quick impact projects" alone, run by the private sector contractors and the Provincial Reconstruction Teams of the international military forces. Quick impact projects are designed to get immediate results, and often are not informed by the local priorities or respond to the needs of most vulnerable communities, they don't develop local capacities and institutions to ensure maintenance and sustainability of the systems and services after completion of the project, and sadly, end up doing more harm than good. We have also experienced that aid delivered by non-humanitarian actors has blurred the lines between the neutral and independent humanitarian actors and the military and contractors vis-à-vis the local communities perception of aid agencies and aid effort. This has dangerous consequences, not least is the significant damage to the reputation of aid sector per se, and affecting the relationship between the Afghan communities and the independent aid organisations operating on the basis of trust and acceptance.

**In addition, the costs of aid projects,** such as building schools or clinics or water reservoirs, delivered through the non-humanitarian actors is disproportionately higher compared to costs spend on similar projects by humanitarian and development actors. Projects delivered by military PRTs and private contractors lack management oversight, and monitoring and evaluation, resulting into poor quality outcomes. A normal NGO Land Cruiser costs around 17 to 18,000 pounds, whereas armoured B6 Land Cruiser costs 180'000. Add into this the cost of close protection security regime. Afghans are more vulnerable to bombs than anybody else. ISAF data shows that a school built by them, or their contractors, costs on average 200'000, whereas most NGOs can build it for a tenth, 20'000. There is an urgent need to stop militarization of aid.

**It is equally important to build and strengthen the capacity of Afghan civil society institutions** including NGOs, media, and rights groups and support some of them to become independent "watchdog" groups to monitor the extent of government compliance with the principles of good governance such as transparency, accountability and cost-effectiveness of its conduct, spending and programmes.

**As said before, both the government of Afghanistan and the major donor countries, including the UK government, failed in the last 8 years to fund and**

...r food security and national economy of  
...ns and analysts believe that this neglect pushed  
farmers, in the poppy growing areas, to turn to poppy cultivation, where the best  
functioning extension programmes for farmers are operated by opium traffickers,  
including giving farmers access to improved seeds, fertilizer, cultivation and  
agricultural credit. It is imperative that this failure is urgently addressed and that a  
balance in focus is maintained between engagement at central and sub-national  
level, to ensure direct benefits reach farmers and the rural economy.

**Many bilateral donors (including the UK government) channel the bulk of their government funds through the Government of Afghanistan, PRTs or private contractors.** However, some bilateral donors<sup>5</sup> have continued to fund NGOs, usually their own national NGOs, to do programmes that complement efforts of the Government. This policy has helped to support the partnership role that their national NGOs play in achieving a balanced development programme, and place importance on sustaining this role. However, unfortunately, the British government does not follow this policy towards British NGOs and, hence, not benefiting from the strengths of an important and strategic partner in its drive to bring change in the country.

### Conclusion

These days, the word ‘surge’ has assumed disproportionate importance and relevance for Afghanistan. There is no doubt that what Afghans need today from us is a surge of attention and a surge of commitment of the international community to renew our engagement and partnership with ordinary Afghans and together find a lasting solution out of the current quagmire. We must learn from mistakes made over the past 8 years and have better informed future strategies, the key one among them is **demilitarisation of aid**, stop using aid to achieve military and security objectives, and, secondly, we must protect space for independent civilian aid action. The cost of neglecting and failing to engage with a principled, equitable, balanced and inclusive assistance to bring tangible positive change is already evident in the country; and the price for disengagement from the country can be considerable, as Afghanistan has historically shown. We must not forget that there are no quick fixes on the route to stability in this country, and that elections don’t make democracies, democracies make elections.

### Footnotes:

- 1 - This briefing event was organised by Baroness D’Souza and The Associate Parliamentary Group on Afghanistan on 23 November 2009 in the Committee Room 3A of House of Lords.
- 2 - Farhana Faruqi Stocker has spent 10 years living and working in Afghanistan since 1995. She started her work in Afghanistan as Regional Advisor for Management and Development with Save the Children Fund-UK’s Regional Office for South and Central Asia from early 1995 to 1997. Subsequently, she worked as Technical Officer with World Health Organisation from late 1997 to 1999, and thereafter with OCHA till December 2002, as the United Nations Regional Coordinator and the first Area Coordinator and Head of Office of UNAMA for the Northern Region, based in Mazar-e-

in UNAMA Kabul office. During the Afghan crisis  
at Turkmenistan and then to Termez Uzbekistan for  
cross border operation, leading the UN team for northern Afghanistan. From 2003 to late  
2008, she worked as Country Director of Oxfam-GB in Pakistan before returning back to  
Kabul in October 2008 as Managing Director of Afghanaid, a British charity working in  
Afghanistan for last 27 years.

3 - UN Human Development Report 2009

4 - National Vulnerability and Risk Assessment, 2008. MRRD, CSO. According to  
Government of Afghanistan statistics an estimated 31% of country's total population are  
food insecure, which is attributed to a combined effect of escalating insurgencies limiting  
populations access to production services, infrastructure and markets, two years of  
consecutive drought in 2007/08 and its after effects, the food price hike of 2007/08 and  
low investment and priority given to agriculture growth in the country for last 8 years.

5 - For instance the Scandinavian countries.

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