

Prospects for peace, reconstruction and rehabilitation, and development in Afghanistan

German aid organisations take stock after one year

2008



VENRO Policy Paper

In October 2007, the aid organisations belonging to the Association of Development German Non-governmental Organisations (VENRO) operating in Afghanistan¹ under the title “Prospects for Peace, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation, and Development in Afghanistan” called on the German Federal Government to change its strategy in Afghanistan. This had been prompted by concern that the international efforts towards peace, reconstruction and rehabilitation, and development in Afghanistan were threatening to fail. Then, just like today, the NGOs based their analysis on their own experience as well as reports from their Afghan partners and the population. Unlike the German Federal Government, which above all justifies its involvement in Afghanistan by referring to the struggle against international terrorism, we set out in our engagement from the extreme plight of Afghan society.

One year later, in the run-up to the forthcoming extension of the German OEF and ISAF mandates by the Federal Parliament, we note that no shift in strategy and priorities has occurred in German and international involvement in Afghanistan. The security situation has further dramatically worsened, and the Afghan population are increasingly critical of international engagement. The situation is precarious. More than ever before, international attempts towards a peaceful reconstruction and rehabilitation of the country prescribed by the Afghanistan Compact are threatening to fail.

We therefore reaffirm the demand we made a year ago that unconditional priority be given to civil reconstruction before the employment of military means. The social, economic and political rights and needs of the population have to be at the centre of all reconstruction measures in Afghanistan. We call on the German Federal Government to make this long overdue change of course and also stand up for it within the International Community and vis-à-vis the Afghan Government.

Bonn, 6th October 2008

1 including Caritas international, Welthungerhilfe, Malteser International, medico international, medica mondiale, Misereor and Afghanistan-Schulen.

1. Breaking through the vicious circle of violence

In 2007, VENRO demanded that Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and hence also German involvement in this operation, be terminated. In addition, ISAF was to be put under the control of UN leadership and the ISAF mandate be predominantly oriented on supporting the Afghan armed forces and on disarming the Taliban and the warlord militias. At the same time, intermingling of civil and military aid, especially as reflected in the concept of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), was to be ended.

Instead of a transfer from military to civil involvement, we are witnessing the opposite today: increased and frequently inappropriate military operations of the international and Afghan armed forces that are turning into open warfare with a significant growth in the numbers of victims, also among the civilian population. ACBAR, the umbrella organisation of the aid organisations operating in Afghanistan, estimates that alone this year, including July, 1,000 civilians were killed as a result of armed conflict. Military operations of international and Afghan armed forces are responsible for around a third of these fatalities.

We note that the military approach itself is creating massive counter-violence in the population, thus posing one of the factors contributing to the overall increase of violence in Afghanistan.

The German Government has primarily responded to the deteriorated security situation by intensifying military involvement. Additionally, the PRT concept has been extended by Provincial Advisory Teams (PATs) staffed by the military. This has happened despite both the military and the development benefit of these instruments becoming increasingly questionable given the actual developments in Afghanistan.

Mixing military and civil activities is increasingly jeopardising the activities of NGOs. Some NGOs have already suspended their activities for security reasons.

This is why we demand that

- German involvement in OEF be terminated;
- that the German Federal Government seek to put ISAF under control by UN leadership, ISAF's mandate be predominantly oriented on supporting the Afghan armed forces, all military operations in the context of the ISAF mandate be strictly aligned to International Law standards and the protection of the civilian population be given absolute priority;
- illegal militia be consistently disarmed in the framework of the ISAF mandate;
- military operations and civil emergency relief and development aid be strictly separated; as a consequence, the PRTs and PATs have to be dissolved;
- a realistic exit strategy from military intervention be developed.

2. Giving priority to civil aid and sustainable reconstruction

A second central demand in 2007 was to reject the primacy of the military, i.e. to eliminate the discrepancy between military and civil involvement. Priority should clearly be given to civil reconstruction and rehabilitation, with the development and economic safeguarding of rule of law and civil society Afghan structures being at the forefront of efforts.

A year later, it has to be noted that while German expenditure on civil reconstruction and rehabilitation has been slightly raised, together with the efforts of other donors, it is still far from sufficient to secure basic supplies for the Afghan population as a prerequisite for sustainable development.

Progress made in some areas such as education, health, power and water supply, etc. is put into perspective by population growth, rural exodus and returning refugees. According to the latest UN estimates, around 4.5 million people are suffering from a massive lack of food and drinking water – above all the result of the previous very harsh winter as well as droughts and extreme price increases. More than a million infants and around half a million women throughout the country are threatened by malnutrition.

Since 2007, Karzai's Government has once again lost credibility among the Afghan population, and within it above all among the ethnic minorities. Corruption and involvement in international drug trafficking are also causing international faith in the Afghan Government to diminish.

This is why we demand

- that the volume of emergency relief and development aid be significantly raised and effectiveness be improved, for example through better coordination with the Afghan Government and with other donor countries in the framework of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB);
- that aid be oriented in terms of its contents on the needs of the Afghan population and development requirements, and not on the political or security interests of the donor countries;
- more investment in the education sector as a crucial basis for viable social development;
- that the Afghan authorities be given more support in combating corruption and in developing corresponding capacities;
- that the Afghan Government be required to give transparent account of how aid money has been used;
- that given the current food crisis, in addition to immediate aid, more long-term investment in supporting rural development in Afghanistan is provided.

3. Protecting human rights, promoting reconciliation

In 2007, the demands for increased civil reconstruction and rehabilitation also included promoting democracy and the sustainable realisation of human rights. Here, special emphasis was to be placed on realising the rights of girls and women. At the same time, the culture of violence was to be broken through, and the inner Afghan process of reconciliation was to be started by strengthening Afghan civil society, making use of traditional structures and ensuring the involvement of ethnic and religious minorities.

Today, we note that the protection of human rights and the establishment of rule of law principles by the Afghan Government have made hardly any progress. Instead, an amnesty law has been adopted that explicitly grants war criminals protection.

Entering a peace and reconciliation process for Afghanistan is additionally being impeded by unresolved, heightening regional conflicts and multilayered, antagonistic geostrategic interests.

In the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS)², which is also being supported by Germany, local peace and conflict resolution procedures are not given further attention.

² The Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) was presented by the Afghan Government at the Paris Donor Conference in June 2008; it serves the implementation of the Afghanistan Compact goals.

This is why we demand

- the Afghan Government commit itself to a sustainable realisation of human rights and rule of law principles, especially with a view to the rights of girls and women;
- the protection and the rights of girls and women in general as well as their participation in society be established;
- seek a repeal of the amnesty law;
- the German Government stand up for the development of a comprehensive national strategy for local peace activities vis-à-vis its alliance partners and the Afghan Government and actively promote this process;
- a peace and reconciliation process for Afghanistan generally be treated in a wider regional context, i.e. with inclusion of the conditions in the neighbouring states and societies (above all Iran and Pakistan).

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