

DFID Afghanistan Consultation

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the future direction of DFID's programme in Afghanistan. Cardno has a long history of working in Afghanistan. Our current focus areas include: land titling; economic restructuring; river basin management; irrigation; horticulture and livestock; and assistance through European Commission and DFID Framework Contracts and the AusAID program.

We commend the measured involvement of DFID in Afghanistan. In particular, we support the use of development practices to ensure:

- Financial commitments are matched by expertise provided in all sectors.
- Emphasis on Afghan ownership through a strategy of supporting government decision makers at all levels, from department heads to ministers.
- Emphasis on progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.
- Wide consultation including the joint donor review of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy.

Nonetheless, significant challenges remain. Progress has been limited when measured against the huge investment made by the donor community. This note addresses several of the issues for consultation based on our experience in practice.

We advocate stronger local level engagement so that communities can see their government and donors working for them

Within Afghan society, decision making and political engagement occurs at multiple levels; therefore activities to build civil society need to address all levels. To date, the focus has been on Kabul structures. This assumes that devolution and capacity will grow in the provinces as opportunities for decision making are offered through economic growth and project investments. An opportunity exists for greater engagement with all levels of government and civil society.

Under the AusAID-sponsored Development Assistance Facility, in Uruzgan we promote unifying approaches which will open the discussion with community groups not previously in contact with the Australian development presence. This approach offers evidence of state structures working for rural communities that feel left out of the discussion about economic development.

Under the USAID-sponsored Land Titling and Economic Restructuring program, we actively seek to work with municipalities and communities to implement our tenure formalisation programs. We have supported over 30 shuras (local councils) and 112 community property clarification boards representing 30,600 households. This community-based decentralised approach has resulted in greater ownership of plans by local government and communities.

Equally important is society's understanding of democratic processes. Civil society organisations such as farmer cooperatives, water user groups (under the anticipated water law) and forest or natural resource management groups provide interfaces for rapid extension of democratic processes. They also offer improved technical practices which increase financial returns to members. Civil society initiatives are relatively inexpensive but can do much to secure the peace in areas where there is an opportunity for development work.

Increased local engagement should go hand in hand with capacity development at the central level

Our discussions with the Ministries of Rural Rehabilitation and Agriculture indicate interest in staff capacity building in 'high risk' provinces (Uruzgan, Kandahar and Helmand). In these provinces, communities desire effective government interventions and the government desires increased recognition of its legitimacy. At the same time, it is acknowledged that capacity in the central offices has to be strengthened to enable management of programs in the high risk provinces.

Simple tools can be extremely useful. For example, through an AusAID-sponsored program we have facilitated two courses on logframe analysis and proposal writing for Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock staff. The USAID-sponsored land titling program has facilitated high-level study tours and conferences to advance learning and development. For example, in 2007, fifteen senior Afghan officials from institutions involved in land administration visited France, the Netherlands and Denmark to explore ways to improve land administration through the standardisation, integration and circulation of land information. This study tour was followed by the first national land conference on cadastral reform in Kabul in April 2008.

Making donor assistance to Afghanistan more effective requires organisational change

DFID can drive an increase in development effectiveness by being a pioneer through its activities and its research. Sharing knowledge through donor coordination forums and documenting good practice examples is important. For example, we consider DFID's White Paper to be a useful reference on governance issues.

Cardno is embracing development effectiveness across its entire operations: from people to activity management to systems and processes. Effectiveness cannot be achieved simply through monitoring and evaluation; it requires an organisation-wide commitment. We are seeking to build a robust culture around effective aid delivery. For instance, we have set performance targets for our activities in relation to development objectives.

Donor coordination is important at the policy and activity level. There have been promising signs of donor coordination at the policy level, particularly with the formulation of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy. Coordination at the activity level will also lead to greater aid effectiveness. For example, land policy workshops supported by the US-sponsored land titling program have highlighted the need for a donor coordination group that focuses on the formalisation of informal settlements in Afghanistan.

Promoting gender equality requires targeted approaches

We have found that the promotion of equality between men and women requires lateral thinking in the context of Afghan culture. For instance, women are not able to travel without being chaperoned by male relatives, in accordance with Mehran cultural requirements. Therefore, events such as training programs involving travel can often have no female participants.

Nonetheless, we have been able to raise the profile of Afghan women through specially targeted activities. For example, on an AusAID-sponsored program we facilitated neonatal resuscitation training for anaesthetists in Central Kabul public hospitals. The intake of women in anaesthesiology departments is generally high because of the Afghan preference for women being treated by women. Combined with active promotion of the course by heads of departments, half of the course participants were women. Improved neonatal resuscitation provides real and immediate benefits to women and results in dramatic improvements in neonatal survival. It is essential that such initiatives are extended to women in remote areas where basic social services are extremely poor.

Equal property rights for women and men are fundamental to social and economic equality. However, women often face challenges in formal, informal and customary systems of land tenure. In Afghanistan, women only gain access to land through male relatives and often only exercise subordinate rights. This makes them vulnerable in the case of a breakdown in a relationship, death of a spouse or the changing priorities of male land owners.

Women participate significantly in our tenure formalisation projects both throughout the community mobilisation process and as project staff. For example, women's participation has been sought to help build institutional capacity in the informal settlements by hiring women from the same community. This contributes to securing family livelihoods through employment generation for women, and improving household well-being through women's empowerment and changes in gender roles.

Further information

Contact: Melissa Wells

Email: melissa.wells@cardno.com

About us

Cardno's Emerging Markets Division was formed by bringing together the international development assistance businesses in Cardno – with registered companies in Colombo, Jakarta, Brisbane and Melbourne (formerly Cardno Acil), Brussels, Oxford and Washington (Emerging Markets Group), Nairobi and Oxford (formerly Cardno Agrisystems), and Port Moresby (Cardno PNG). Our combined experience spans over 40 years in more than 70 countries and includes partnerships with bilateral agencies (DFID, AusAID, USAID) and the European Commission, multilateral agencies (World Bank, ADB), host governments, and non-government organisations.

In Afghanistan, we currently manage the following:

- **Provision of Technical Assistance in Support of the Amu Darya River Basin Management Programme:** EC--sponsored and managed by Cardno Emerging Markets (UK).
- **Afghanistan Horticulture and Livestock Productivity Project:** World Bank-sponsored and managed by Cardno Emerging Markets (UK).
- **Land Titling and Economic Restructuring in Afghanistan Project:** USAID-sponsored and managed by Cardno Emerging Markets USA.
- **Development Assistance Facility for Afghanistan:** AusAID sponsored and managed by Cardno Emerging Markets (Australia).