



# UNESCO

Netherlands National Commission for UNESCO

## **Culture, Education and Media Projects in AFGHANISTAN What lessons can be learned**

A quick-scan of challenges experienced and ‘good practices’ implemented by Dutch NGOs and governmental institutions operating in conflict and post-conflict zones of Afghanistan in the UNESCO sectors of culture, education and media.

## PREFACE

This report offers a quick scan of ‘lessons learned’ and ‘good practices’, as experienced by Dutch experts in reconstruction projects carried out in Afghanistan in the sectors culture, education and media. It follows from two international meetings hosted by the Netherlands National Commission for UNESCO on cultural reconstruction projects in post-conflict and post-disaster situations. The cases presented at those meetings reflected on a broad range of experiences with reconstruction policies and practices from Georgia to South Africa, from Iraq to Bolivia, from Sumatra to Kenya, and many places in between. To complement the findings of those meetings, the Netherlands National Commission for UNESCO decided to conduct further research in one specific context, Afghanistan, linked to just one other context: the Netherlands. Of course this Afghan-Dutch context is not defined by just bilateral relationships; however, this focus offers a valuable starting point to discuss approaches to post-conflict and post-disaster situations.

For this research on Afghanistan, we broadened the scope to include education and media. The reason for this is that interventions in the education and media sector both have cultural impacts, linking these two fields with the field of culture in its broad sense. Also, we wished to follow UNESCO’s policy of a sector-wide approach, as formulated in the Medium-Term Strategy for 2008-2013 and manifested in the establishment of an inter-sectoral platform for post-conflict and post-disaster situations in 2008.

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We present this report to UNESCO’s PCPD Platform, other National Committees, Dutch stakeholders and their Afghan partners. We hope it may serve as a contribution to policy debate on the institutionalising and sharing of ‘lessons learned’, and thus will help to further develop and strengthen UNESCO’s inter-sectoral approach to post-conflict and post-disaster situations.

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## CONTENT

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>1. Introduction</b>  | <b>4</b>  |
| 1.1 Background  |           |
| 1.2 Purpose   |           |
| 1.3 Constraints and scope   |           |
| 1.4 Sources   |           |
| 1.5 Contents of this paper  |           |
| <b>2. The Afghan context</b>  | <b>8</b>  |
| 2.1 The political background  |           |
| 2.2 The Afghan development landscape  |           |
| 2.3 Conflict or post-conflict?  |           |
| 2.4 Culture   |           |
| 2.5 Education   |           |
| 2.6 Media   |           |
| <b>3. The military dimension</b>  | <b>14</b> |
| 3.1 Civil or military?  |           |
| 3.2 Reconstruction from the PRT: the 'Dutch approach' in Uruzgan            |           |
| <b>4. Challenges and good practices</b>                                     | <b>18</b> |
| <b>5. UNESCO's framework for interventions in PCPD situations</b>           | <b>24</b> |
| 5.1 Institutional framework and objectives                                  |           |
| 5.2 The case for categorization   |           |
| 5.3 UNESCO and 'lessons learned'  |           |
| <b>6. Conclusions and Recommendations</b>                                   | <b>27</b> |
| <b>7. Sources</b>   | <b>29</b> |
| 7.1 Bibliography  |           |
| 7.2 Acknowledgements and resource persons                                   |           |
| <b>Boxes</b>  |           |
| 1. Brief Overview of UNESCO's main activities in Afghanistan                | 13        |
| 2. Culture interventions: The Centre for International Heritage Activities  | 19        |
| 3. Education interventions: Agricultural education by Wageningen University | 20        |
| 4. Media interventions: Press Now and journalism in rural areas             | 22        |
| 5. Summary of 'lessons learned' and 'good practices'                        | 23        |
| 6. Expected Results for UNESCO's Inter-sectoral Platform on PCPD            | 26        |

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of this study

This study was commissioned by the Netherlands National Commission for UNESCO. In 2007 the National Commission established a working group that convened regularly to discuss and report on the role of culture in reconstruction interventions in post-conflict and post-disaster (PCPD) situations. These national expert meetings were complemented by two international expert meetings, held in 2007 and 2010, respectively.

The last international expert meeting, held in February 2010, focused on the role of culture in different PCPD situations. Three important conclusions were arrived at during the meeting. First was the conclusion that post-conflict and post-disaster situations<sup>1</sup> differ from each other in several respects, and that different approaches and instrumentalities are required for each. In post-disaster situations, regular political and social structures are still in place, while in post-conflict situations these structures are still fragile and not yet firmly rooted in society. Another distinction is the time-frame in which disasters versus conflicts emerge and disappear; while a disaster has a clear beginning and a more or less defined end, a conflict can drag on and destabilise a society for decades. To achieve sustainable results, post-conflict interventions require a much longer time-frame than post-disaster situations. A third difference is that in a conflict situation, culture, education and media may be used by warring factions as a war strategy tool, 'incriminating' or targeting these fields. As a consequence of these differences, the National Commission decided to study post-conflict and post-disaster situations separately, and in more detail, in the context of a specific case study.

A second conclusion of the meeting was the view that culture should be incorporated as an integral and essential element in all phases of interventions, whether relief, reconstruction, or community development interventions. Culture can play an important role in peace-building efforts, bridging gaps and fostering understanding between different ethnic groups. However, having not yet perceived such a role for culture, most donors and NGOs continue to focus their efforts on pressing humanitarian needs such as healthcare.

Thirdly, the expert meeting concluded that there is a clear need for a more coherent and institutionalized approach to 'lessons learned' in PCPD situations. The 'lessons learned' by many international organizations and NGOs working in the difficult environment of PCPD countries are often not shared with others working in the same field. As a result, these institutions do not profit from the experiences of others and sometimes reinvent the wheel.

As follow-up to the expert meeting, an analysis of 'lessons learned' in a specific conflict or post-conflict situation was commissioned. For this case study Afghanistan was selected, the reason being that both UNESCO and the Dutch Government have experience with reconstruction projects in this country.

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<sup>1</sup> In this context 'disaster' is interpreted as a *natural* disaster, such as an earthquake or volcanic eruption).

## **1.2 Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to identify ‘lessons learned’ and ‘good practices’ as experienced by Dutch experts in reconstruction projects carried out in Afghanistan in the sectors culture, education and media.

This paper should be read as a quick-scan that aims to contribute to a broader discussion on the institutionalizing and sharing of ‘lessons learned’. It focuses on a specific situation and a specific study group, and does not offer an inclusive list of do’s and don’ts in a conflict or post-conflict setting. It will benefit from studies by others on ‘lessons learned’ in different areas, and the experiences of other experts.

We hope that the information shared in this paper may be of use to UNESCO, and that it will ignite a discussion within both UNESCO and National Commissions for UNESCO in countries with comparable experiences, on the institutionalization and sharing of ‘lessons learned’ in PCPD situations.

## **1.3 Constraints and scope**

This study started off as research on literature, with the purpose to provide a detailed list of written sources on ‘lessons learned’ in Afghanistan. We had hoped to compare the experiences of Dutch organizations with those of UNESCO’s field office in Kabul, as recorded by UNESCO in annual reports or internal documents on ‘lessons learned’. This turned out to be too optimistic. After an initial search and discussions with key informants, we came to the conclusion that the key problem with ‘lessons learned’ is that they are not documented or shared with external parties. None of the Dutch NGOs working in Afghanistan in the three selected fields, or UNESCO’s field office in Kabul, could provide us with written reflections on ‘lessons learned’ or documentation on experiences that form the basis of their policy for operations in Afghanistan. Fortunately, this does not apply to all actors. Reports commissioned by the Dutch Government on developments in the province of Uruzgan provided important contributions to this paper. Reports commissioned by UNESCO-IIEP on education in Afghanistan also provided useful information.

The lack of written sources limited the scope of this study. Information on which this paper is based is primarily derived from interviews with Dutch experts working in Afghanistan in the fields of culture, education and media. Due to the security situation, it was not possible to visit Afghanistan and hold face-to-face interviews with experts who are based in Afghanistan. As a result, the number of resource persons on which the data in this paper is based is limited.

Furthermore, while working on this report it once again became evident that much of the information on development in Afghanistan is politicized. This can be attributed to the presence of international military forces in the country. Information provided by government actors in one way or another often relates to their military presence in Afghanistan; information provided by NGOs also inevitably deals with their particular relationship with these military forces. This makes it difficult to make a ‘neutral’ assessment of the situation in Afghanistan.

The research area was broadly defined to include the three fields of culture, education and media. These are the main sectors covered by UNESCO’s cross-sectoral PCPD approach. We assumed that a cross-sectoral approach would be feasible and would provide general

findings that could be applied in UNESCO's PCPD policy. However, because of the limited sources, it was not possible to study these sectors in their totality.

Thus, in this paper the terms 'culture', 'education' and 'media' are narrowly defined, in relation to the specific cases that were studied. For example, the term 'culture' as addressed in UNESCO's cultural policies, is a broad term that refers to cultural heritage, values, customs, creative expressions, etc. In our paper this term solely refers to cultural heritage, as the 'lessons learned' we recorded were experienced in this specific context. Similarly, references in this paper to 'education' refer to primary education as well as vocational training and not higher education.

#### **1.4 Sources**

Interviews were held with representatives from the Netherlands government, Dutch NGOs operating in Afghanistan in the fields of culture, education and media, and UNESCO's Inter-sectoral Platform PCPD. Informants were asked which obstacles they encountered in their work in Afghanistan, and which 'good practices' they had adopted to minimize these obstacles. In total 20 persons were interviewed for this paper. The NGOs that participated in this research are the Centre for International Heritage Activities, Culture in Development, Dutch Consortium for Uruzgan, FreeVoice, Press Now, Prince Claus Fund, Save the Children and Van Hall Larenstein (Wageningen University)<sup>2</sup>. Except for Save the Children, all these NGOs are 'newcomers' in Afghanistan, having started operations in Afghanistan after 2004.

The experiences of the resource persons relate to different regions in Afghanistan and to different circumstances. Within Afghanistan there are enormous regional differences in security, dictating different approaches to reconstruction interventions and resulting in different experiences and 'lessons learned'. While some regions can be considered relatively safe and termed 'post-conflict', other areas are extremely unstable and should be considered conflict areas. Most experiences recorded in this paper refer to conflict zones. This is due to the fact that between 2006 and 2010, Dutch troops were based in the southern province of Uruzgan, drawing Dutch NGOs and development interventions to this volatile and highly unstable province.

#### **1.5 Content of this paper**

The next chapter of this paper outlines the context of development interventions in Afghanistan. This chapter addresses the political background to the conflict in Afghanistan, the Afghan development landscape and the framework for development cooperation, and zooms in on the three UNESCO sectors of culture, education and media. Chapter Three focuses on the military component, and addresses the strategies for development aid as employed by Dutch military and civilian actors in the southern province of Uruzgan. The scope of this chapter is more general than the domains of culture, education and media. Some of the strategies mentioned in this chapter may also apply to NGOs; most, however, are specific to the dimension in which the military operate. Chapter Four gives an overview of the challenges and 'lessons learned' relating to the Afghan context as identified by our resource persons. These are general experiences that apply across the three sectors of culture, education and media. Where applicable, 'good practices' embraced by the

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<sup>2</sup> A list of resource persons is annexed to this report.

informants to overcome these challenges are mentioned. Chapter Five addresses UNESCO's framework for interventions in PCPD situations. Chapter Six sets out recommendations which may serve as a contribution to further policy debate on the issue of 'lessons learned'. Appendix 1 presents an overview of the organizations that were interviewed for this research. Appendix 2 is a first inventory of Afghan cultural projects in the Netherlands. This Appendix serves as an illustration of the echo that the Afghan-Dutch cooperation in Afghanistan found in The Netherlands, showing how collaboration in culture, education and media projects stimulated cultural exchange.

## 2. THE AFGHAN CONTEXT

### 2.1 Political background

The war in Afghanistan is often presented as a ‘war on terror’, a conflict with one enemy, the Taliban. In reality it is an extremely complex conflict, with several underlying causes and destabilizing factors operating at different levels. Among these destabilizing factors are:

Ethnic, religious and regional identities and affiliations. Afghanistan is a tribal society. Its population of 30.9 million inhabitants consists of Sunni and Shia groups, of which the Pashtun, Turkmen, Uzbek, and Hazara are the largest. It is also a ‘centrifugal’ state. The members of its ethnic groups as a rule consider themselves culturally and politically more affiliated with the same ethnic group across the border than with other Afghan groups. Afghan Pashtun share a culture with the Pashtun in Pakistan; Uzbeks with inhabitants of Uzbekistan; Tajiks with people living in Tajikistan; and the (Shia) Hazara with Shia Iranians. Inside its borders, Afghanistan has never been a nation state in the sense of a country with a united people.

Three decades of war. Afghanistan has experienced conflict for more than three decades. Between 1979 and 2001, warring factions of mujahedin and Taliban fought Russian occupation forces and each other, destroying the country’s already fragile infrastructure. The fall of the Taliban regime in 2001 has made large-scale development projects in Afghanistan possible but has not ended the conflict. While some areas in the north and centre are relatively stable, the situation in the southern and south-eastern provinces is still extremely precarious. Almost two generations of Afghans have grown up not knowing peace.

War economies. The Afghan drug mafia and illegal opium trade have a major destabilizing effect on Afghanistan. While Afghanistan produced opium well before the fall of the Taliban regime, new records were set after 2001, especially in the unstable southern provinces. Currently 80% of the world’s opium is grown in Afghanistan. The southern province of Helmand, which is largely controlled by insurgents, is responsible for 54% of Afghan opium<sup>3</sup>.

Interference by the international community and bordering states. The presence of international troops in Afghanistan since 2001 has not contributed to an overall improvement of the security situation in the country. The reality is that in places these troops have been a destabilizing factor and have contributed to a deterioration of security. At the time of writing 144,000 international troops from 48 countries were engaged in NATO (ISAF) or US-led Coalition Forces (‘Operation Enduring Freedom’) operations in Afghanistan<sup>4</sup>.

### 2.2 The Afghan development landscape

Around 90% of Afghan public expenditure is accounted for by international development aid<sup>5</sup>. After the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, Afghanistan was catapulted to the top of the development agenda. Large amounts of funding became available for reconstruction projects.

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<sup>3</sup> National Geographic February 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Number of foreign troops in Afghanistan as per October 2010. A large majority (104,000) consists of US troops.

<sup>5</sup> Falling Short: Aid effectiveness in Afghanistan. Matt Waldman (Oxfam International), 2008.

The US is Afghanistan's largest donor, having contributed roughly one-third of all development aid to Afghanistan since 2001<sup>6</sup>.

Much has been achieved since 2001. Afghanistan has a working central government and parliament, with 64 of the parliament's 249 seats reserved for women. Roads and government structures have been rebuilt. Since 2001, infant and under-five mortality rates have fallen by 25%<sup>7</sup>. School enrolment has increased eightfold to more than 7.2 million children, 38% of whom are girls<sup>8</sup>. In the last decade a diverse media landscape has emerged, bringing voices and opinions to all corners of Afghanistan. And much has been done to restore Afghanistan's damaged cultural treasures, such as the National Museum in Kabul and the Bamiyan Buddhas.

However, much remains to be done. The central government is still weak, especially at the provincial level. Personal and tribal interests prevail and corruption is widespread. Most reconstruction interventions have been directed at Kabul or other urban centres; consequently, the rural areas, where two-thirds of the Afghan population lives, remain underdeveloped<sup>9</sup>. The 2010 UN Human Development Index places Afghanistan in the bottom ranks of developing countries, at 155<sup>th</sup> of a total of 169 countries. Average life expectancy is less than 45 years. Only 26% of adults can read and write. For women this figure is 12%, which is the lowest female literacy rate in the world<sup>10</sup>. Fifty per cent of children still do not attend school. At the same time, Afghanistan is one of the fastest growing countries in the world, with a very young population: 50% of its population is under eighteen.

The leading framework for development policies in Afghanistan is the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS). This strategy was developed by the Afghan government for the period 2008-2013. The UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2010-2013 builds on ANDS, and sets out the priorities of the UN in Afghanistan. These priorities focus on three areas: 1) good governance, peace and stability; 2) sustainable livelihoods (agriculture, food security and income opportunities); and 3) basic social services (education, health, water and sanitation).

Education is well addressed in ANDS. The section on culture and media, however, is rather basic, covering only two pages. The section on culture deals almost exclusively with cultural heritage and museums. Intangible culture, which can be an important instrument for peace-building in conflict and post-conflict situations, takes up only one sentence in ANDS.

### **2.3 Conflict or post-conflict?**

On paper it may seem straightforward. During a crisis or conflict, interventions should first focus on emergency relief. Once the 'post-conflict stage' is reached, development agencies can focus on reconstruction, state building and development; and when peace and stability is restored, external organizations can plan their exit strategy.

The Afghan reality is that development is not a linear process. Afghanistan is neither a 'post-conflict' nor a 'conflict' state: it is both at the same time. Emergency relief operations, reconstruction projects, quick impact projects, 'hearts and minds' operations and state building

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<sup>6</sup> Falling Short: Aid effectiveness in Afghanistan. Matt Waldman (Oxfam International), 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Unesco Country Programming Document 2010-2011.

<sup>8</sup> Source: Afghan Ministry of Education, in a panel discussion in The Hague on 10 March 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Falling Short: Aid effectiveness in Afghanistan. Matt Waldman (Oxfam International), 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Source for literacy rates: Unesco Country Programming Document 2010-2011.

programmes are carried out in parallel<sup>11</sup>. This can be attributed to differing levels of security, which may require different approaches to reconstruction in different regions. Another cause of this parallel process is the diversity of development agencies that influence the Afghan development agenda.

The improved political climate after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001 and the steep increase in foreign development funds that followed it sparked an influx of international organizations and NGOs. In the provinces, international military forces set up 'Provincial Reconstruction Teams' (PRT) to assist the Afghan government in securing and developing these regions. The need for local partners for these different international actors spawned the birth of many Afghan NGOs.

This proliferation of national and international development agencies has added a problem to Afghanistan's list of challenges: that of competition and overlap between development agencies. The lack of coordination between the many development agencies in Afghanistan has become a persistent problem. A report on aid effectiveness in Afghanistan states that interventions by the international donor community have in many cases been wasteful and ineffective. Donors insufficiently coordinate with the Afghan government or with each other, resulting in parallel structures and organizational chaos<sup>12</sup>.

## **2.4 Culture**

Many projects in the culture sector in Afghanistan focus on cultural heritage. Over the past thirty years, Afghanistan's historic sites and buildings have been damaged and looted. The illegal trafficking of cultural artefacts constitutes a major problem. UNESCO and ICOM have undertaken important steps to stop the illegal trafficking of antiquities, for example by establishing the red list for Afghan antiquities at risk. However, the Afghan government does not have sufficient capacity to guard its many historical sites and stop its national treasures from being smuggled abroad.

During the Taliban regime, pre-Islamic art was targeted and deliberately destroyed. A sad example of this is the destruction of the two giant Buddha statues in Bamyan. These statues were blown up by the Taliban not only because they were pre-Islamic, but also to manifest the Taliban's power over the Hazara Shia majority in Bamyan. As such, the Taliban perceived and used culture as a weapon of war.

However, culture can also have an important binding force in a post-conflict situation, and contribute to peace and stability. A good example is the reconstruction of the National Museum in Kabul and its surrounding gardens. While the museum brings artefacts from all cultural regions together, showing the diversity of the Afghan nation through the ages, it also brings together Afghans who are drawn to the gardens for picnics and may visit the museum at the same time. A similar strategy is used by the Centre for International Heritage Activities in the reconstruction of the palace of Kholm<sup>13</sup>. Priority was given to the rehabilitation of the palace gardens, with the aim of reinstating the function that the garden had traditionally had in Afghan society: a pleasant and peaceful meeting place.

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<sup>11</sup> All but one of the resource persons interviewed for this paper defined their work in Afghanistan as 'reconstruction and development'. The Prince Claus Fund Cultural Emergency Response Programme (CER) is the only organization that focuses on emergency relief in Afghanistan. This refers to 'new' and specific emergencies endangering cultural heritage, not damage caused by years of underdevelopment.

<sup>12</sup> *Falling Short: Aid effectiveness in Afghanistan*. Matt Waldman (Oxfam International), 2008.

<sup>13</sup> See Box 2 on p. 18 for the activities of the Centre for International Heritage Activities in Afghanistan.

Culture has yet to receive its place on the Afghan development agenda. While many reconstruction and development projects address culture implicitly, there are only few organizations that focus exclusively and explicitly on culture as a development instrument<sup>14</sup>. Unfortunately, the organizations and donors that operate in this sector have not been coordinating well with each other and with the Afghan government. This has resulted in gaps and overlaps in programmes. UNESCO is the only international organization that operates in the culture sector. As such, it could play a leading role in this sector, combining its advisory role to the Afghan government with a coordinating role to streamline the international community's efforts in this sector and lobby for a greater role to be given culture in reconstruction projects. In October 2010, UNESCO's Kabul office convened an international conference on the safeguarding of Afghanistan's cultural heritage, the first such conference since 2003.

## **2.5 Education**

Since 2001, major achievements have been made in the education sector in Afghanistan. Between 2002 and 2010, primary school enrolment increased from 0.9 to 7.2 million school-age children, 38% of whom were girls. During this period, approximately 9,000 schools were built<sup>15</sup>. Still, almost half of Afghanistan's school-age children do not attend school, a majority of whom are girls. Also, there are large differences in school enrolment between the urban centres and provinces. While average school attendance in Afghanistan as a whole is 50%, in Uruzgan it is only 20%<sup>16</sup>.

Education can be an important binding factor in post-conflict situations. It can give a sense of normalcy and routine to children that have lived through conflict. It also has a cultural dimension, bringing children of different cultural backgrounds together in one classroom. In addition, schools can function as a platform for local communities to address issues and settle disputes. Four-hundred Afghan schools in insecure areas were recently re-opened owing to negotiations with and within the local community<sup>17</sup>.

Development of the education sector faces two major challenges: capacity and insecurity. Capacity problems extend to both school buildings and qualified teachers. Insecurity hampers many children in areas that are not controlled by the government from going to school. In 2009, 65% to 81% of schools in insecure areas were closed because of deliberate attacks, or the risk of attack, on children, teachers and school buildings<sup>18</sup>. Between April 2008 and January 2009, 139 students and teachers were killed in attacks on Afghan schools, 122 school buildings were destroyed and 651 schools closed because of insecurity<sup>19</sup>. Schools for girls run a higher risk of being targeted because of the insurgents' conservative views on women's education.

The local community plays an important role in the security of schools. Home-based or community-based schooling is a complementary education model that proved to be effective during the Taliban regime, especially for the education of girls. Community-based schools provide a certain level of protection from attack because of the commitment of and ownership

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<sup>14</sup> Main actors in this field in Afghanistan are the Centre for International Heritage Activities, ICOMOS, the Prince Claus Fund, Turquoise Mountain, and the Agha Khan Foundation.

<sup>15</sup> Source: Afghan Ministry of Education, in a panel discussion in The Hague on 10 March 2011.

<sup>16</sup> The Dutch Engagement in Uruzgan: 2006 to 2010. TLO, August 2010, p.20.

<sup>17</sup> Source: Afghan Ministry of Education, in a panel discussion in The Hague on 10 March 2011.

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO monitors these attacks. See: Education under attack (2010) and Protecting education from attack (2010).

<sup>19</sup> Education and Fragility in Afghanistan. Morten Sigsgaard, 2009, p. 18.

by community members. An analysis of attacks on schools<sup>20</sup> suggests that schools that were built at the request of the local community run less risk of being targeted than other schools. The challenge is to align this concept within the government education system.

Insecurity is not the only barrier to school access; cultural and social barriers also play a significant role. Cultural barriers that specifically hinder girls from attending school are the distance from home to school, the absence of sanitation facilities, and the lack of female teachers. Only 30% of teachers are women<sup>21</sup>; it is especially difficult to find teachers willing to work in insecure areas such as Uruzgan. To improve school attendance for girls, these constraining factors will also have to be taken into account<sup>22</sup>.

## 2.6 Media

Between 2001 and 2010 the media landscape in Afghanistan underwent an impressive transformation. Before 2001 only one radio and television station operated in Afghanistan, the state-controlled Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA). After the fall of the Taliban regime, a large number of private television and radio networks sprung up. This has resulted in a multiform media landscape that is one of the freest in the region.

However, the development of the media sector in Afghanistan still faces considerable challenges<sup>23</sup>. Conservative leadership at the Ministry for Information and Culture has undermined the development of truly independent media. Human Rights Watch reports that the Afghan government has become increasingly repressive towards critical journalism. In such a restrictive environment, it is difficult for the media to fulfil its function of watchdog.

Furthermore, Afghanistan's media sector is heavily dependent on donors. Most Afghan media cannot finance their operations from advertisements and must turn to external donors to finance their operations; international donors, local warlords or the Taliban. This gives external parties that take part in the conflict the power to influence reporting and blurs the line between independent broadcasting and propaganda. The international community has two contradicting media objectives in Afghanistan. On one hand, efforts are made to generate and support an independent media landscape; on the other hand, under the term 'psychological operations', the international forces also broadcast programmes that are geared towards influencing public opinion. ISAF, USAID and UNAMA each broadcast their own radio programmes.

It is no surprise, then, that the media in Afghanistan are viewed as 'partial'. A study by TLO<sup>24</sup> indicates that FM radio reporting is generally distrusted in Uruzgan, as these channels are used by the international community. The perception that all media take sides constitutes a problem for the safety of journalists. Afghan and international journalists are regularly threatened, attacked or killed while carrying out their work. This insecure environment makes it extremely difficult for independent journalists to gather information, especially in the insecure areas in the south and south-east of the country.

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<sup>20</sup> Knowledge on Fire: Attacks on Education in Afghanistan. M. Glad 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Source: Afghan Ministry of Education, in a panel discussion in The Hague on March 10 2011.

<sup>22</sup> Source for this section: Barriers to accessing education in conflict-affected fragile states. Case-study: Afghanistan. Save the Children, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Information in this section is derived from interviews and from the websites of Human Right Watch and Reporters Without Borders.

<sup>24</sup> Three Years Later. TLO 2009, p. 10.

Female reporters are an especially fragile group, as they encounter resistance from conservative forces in all layers of Afghan society. One NGO interviewed for this paper had to stop its cooperation with the state media organization Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) because its female TV presenter had been threatened by conservative elements from within RTA. The presenter had to flee and now lives abroad<sup>25</sup>.

**Box 1. Brief overview of UNESCO's main activities in Afghanistan**

UNESCO's field office in Kabul was established in 2002. It is relatively small (8 international staff) in relation to UNESCO's objectives and ambitions in Afghanistan. In line with UNESCO's policy, most of its activities focus on facilitating the government in development planning and capacity building. However, UNESCO Kabul also implements projects on the ground.

**Culture**

The Culture sector of UNESCO's field office in Kabul works closely together with the Ministry of Information and Culture, assisting the Afghan government with planning and policy formulation, such as the Policy Framework for the Development of the Museum Sector. It is assisting in the reconstruction of the National Museum in Kabul and the Museum of Islamic Art in Ghazni, providing materials and training to museum staff and experts. It has carried out restoration and conservation interventions in Bamyan, Herat and Jam, helping to safeguard cultural heritage as well as promoting public awareness of the importance of cultural diversity.

**Education**

One of UNESCO's most important contributions in the education sector is assisting the Afghan government in the development of the National Education Strategic Plans (NESP) 2006-2010 and 2010-2014. The NESP serves as a framework and coordinating mechanism for all foreign interventions in the education sector. UNESCO also helped develop and implement several programmes in the field of literacy and non-formal education. The Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) provides the framework for actions to be taken by ministries, international organizations and NGOs geared toward improving literacy. Within this framework, UNESCO carries out a large-scale literacy programme, Enhancement of Literacy in Afghanistan (ELA). This programme envisages the literacy education of 300,000 youth and adult illiterates between 2008 and 2012.

UNESCO shares the field of education with UNICEF and NGOs such as Save the Children. While these organizations focus on primary education, UNESCO focuses on capacity building and research. UNESCO's Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) has made valuable contributions to the Afghan education sector in this regard.

**Media**

The Media section of UNESCO's Kabul office served as a main facilitator of the Media Law Group, working with the Afghan government and international community to develop a policy framework aimed at strengthening independent media in Afghanistan. It also assisted in the rehabilitation of public service broadcasting, by supporting Radio and Television Afghanistan (RTA) with the refurbishment of its premises and the development of editorial and production skills. Furthermore, the Kabul office assisted in the re-establishment of Educational Radio and Television (ERTV), and facilitated capacity training of journalists.

Source: UNESCO Country Programming Document Afghanistan, 2010-2011

<sup>25</sup> The 'lesson learned' by this NGO was that the selection of a sound local counterpart is essential. In 2006, when the programme started, the media landscape was still limited, and state TV seemed an obvious partner. Now, the organization selects its partners for programmes in developing countries almost exclusively from non-state media actors.

### 3. THE MILITARY DIMENSION

#### 3.1 *Civil or Military?*

There are 25 Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Afghanistan, manned by troops from 48 countries<sup>26</sup>. Their objective is to help the government of Afghanistan to extend its authority and to facilitate the development of a stable and secure environment.

The Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) is a relatively new concept, based on the NATO principle of '3D'. This integrated approach of Development, Diplomacy and Defence is inspired by lessons learned in conflict and post-conflict situations. The basis of this concept is that security and development go hand in hand and should be carried out in an integrated approach.

The PRT consists mainly of military staff, but also hosts diplomats and development workers. Much development work is done from the PRT. As each nation applies a different strategy, priorities for development differ from PRT to PRT. Where a handover takes place or where different nationalities are present in the same region, the local population may become confused about the role and tasks of the PRT<sup>27</sup>.

In theory, the PRT is to act as a vanguard for the NGOs. PRTs are to be established in areas where NGOs cannot work because of insecurity. They are not to replace NGOs, but to attract them by providing security in the region<sup>28</sup>. The PRT in the southern province of Uruzgan seems to have had this desired effect. In 2006 only few NGOs operated in this volatile area; in 2010, more than fifty international and local NGOs were carrying out development operations in this province. This influx of aid organizations should, however, also be seen in the light of the development funds that were made available by states with a military presence in this province. It is to be hoped that these fifty aid organizations will be able to continue their operations after the withdrawal of the international forces from Uruzgan. After withdrawal, they may have to deal with a relapse into insecurity as well as a decrease in funds, as donor states will no longer have a direct stake in the region.

The development projects carried out from the PRT are based on both the needs of the local population and the need of the military to gain acceptance for its presence in the PRT area. These are two quite different objectives, and there is a clear field of tension between the two. 'Hearts and minds operations' and 'quick impact projects' are designed to generate visible and quick results. Their objective is to foster acceptance of the troops by the local community and to gather intelligence. Sustainable development projects are often 'invisible' and require a much longer time span. The question arises whether the PRT is well suited to implement such long-term projects, as the duration of a military mission is often not determined by the achievement of its objective – lasting stability – but by the willingness of the home front to continue to sustain a high-risk military mission.

In theory, military troops and aid workers can profit from each other's presence in a certain region. Both NGOs and the military benefit from sharing information and observations. The military can support NGOs by providing a security umbrella for their operations and assisting

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<sup>26</sup> Number of PRTs and nations with military operations in Afghanistan as per October 2010.

<sup>27</sup> An overview of the different PRT models is presented in 'Principles and Pragmatism: Civil-Military Action in Afghanistan and Liberia' by Frerks et al.

<sup>28</sup> Principles and Pragmatism: Civil-Military Action in Afghanistan and Liberia', Frerks et al.

with logistical operations. In areas that NGOs consider too dangerous to travel to, the military could play a role by monitoring development projects<sup>29</sup>.

However, most NGOs in Afghanistan wish to stay clear of the military. By associating with the military, they fear they will lose their neutrality and may become targets for the insurgents. This is a legitimate concern as the Taliban have declared all parties working with the international military forces to be targets. Since 2001 many attacks on NGO staff and development projects have occurred, killing both Afghan and foreign development workers. Many NGOs consider keeping a low profile and a clear distance from the military a more effective safety strategy than protection by the military. MSF, an NGO that had been operational in Afghanistan for 24 years, pulled out of the country in 2004 because of the militarized context in Afghanistan, stating that this context endangered the lives of its staff and impeded its work in Afghanistan<sup>30</sup>.

### **3.2 Reconstruction from the PRT: the 'Dutch Approach' in Uruzgan**

Between 2002 and 2010, The Netherlands government invested 617 million euros in Afghanistan. Roughly forty per cent of this amount went to the Afghan government via the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund. Education, culture and media were not high on the list of intervention priorities; together these sectors received only 2% of the total budget (8.8 million euros for education and 3.5 million euros for culture and media combined).

Twenty per cent of the Dutch contribution was spent on one province: Uruzgan. Between August 2006 and August 2010, the Netherlands was responsible for the operation of the Provincial Reconstruction Team in this province. After the national debate on whether the mission to Afghanistan should be prolonged led to the fall of the Dutch government, the Dutch military withdrew from Afghanistan in August 2010. Command of the Uruzgan PRT was handed over to the US.

This section provides a short overview of the intervention strategies of the Dutch government in Uruzgan. The information in this section is derived from two studies carried out for the Dutch government by the Afghan NGO The Liaison Office (TLO)<sup>31</sup> and interviews held with Dutch government officials.

TLO states that, between 2006 and 2010, security and development improved considerably in Uruzgan, including in the domains of education and media. In 2006, only 34 schools were operational in the province; four years later, this number had risen to 159. Before 2006, there was no TV in Uruzgan, and only one Afghan radio station. By 2010, the media landscape had expanded to seven radio and three TV stations<sup>32</sup>.

These improvements are not solely attributable to Dutch interventions. Separate security and development operations were carried out by American and Australian military forces in Uruzgan. However, TLO is positive about the 'Dutch approach' in Uruzgan: 'At the end of their four year mission, the Dutch leave knowing that during their mission advances in both security and development were made in Uruzgan, especially in comparison to other southern provinces

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<sup>29</sup> Principles and Pragmatism: Civil-Military Action in Afghanistan and Liberia', Frerks et al.

<sup>30</sup> Le Monde, July 29 2004.

<sup>31</sup> 'The Dutch Engagement in Uruzgan: 2006 to 2010. A TLO socio-political assessment', August 2010, and 'Three Years Later. A socio-political assessment of Uruzgan Province from 2006 to 2009', 2009.

<sup>32</sup> In Uruzgan no reconstruction projects were carried out specifically aimed at culture or cultural heritage.

such as Kandahar, Helmand and Zabul. This can be attributed to, among other things, the Dutch approach focusing on a bottom-up development strategy that engages community leaders. It was also facilitated by an investment in research and analysis, which helped to tailor operations and projects to the local context and take into account the fractures in the social and political landscape<sup>33</sup>.

This 'Dutch approach' in Uruzgan is characterized by five key elements:

1. 'As civilian as possible, as military as necessary'

Under the motto 'as civilian as possible, as military as necessary', military and civilian tasks were separated as much as possible. The role of the military was to provide security and create room for civil society organizations; reconstruction and development projects were carried out by civilian actors and not by the military. TLO concludes that this seems to have been an effective strategy. In 2006 only five NGOs were operating in Uruzgan; in 2010, more than 50 aid organizations, both NGOs and international organizations, operated in Uruzgan<sup>34</sup>.

2. Comprehensive context analysis

Without an in-depth understanding of the local political and tribal context, intervening parties run the risk of becoming pawns in the local power game. A considerable investment was made in research and analysis to understand the tribal and political dynamics of Uruzgan and tailor operations to local realities. This comprehensive context analysis was based on surveys carried out by the Afghan NGO TLO, information from social and political analysts, and discussions with key government officials and tribal leaders.

3. Outreach to all key leaders

A foreign intervention in a conflict situation is never neutral; there is always a group that benefits from the intervention, at the cost of the power or influence of another group. Efforts were made to involve all parties in dialogue. Not only the powerful elites, but also marginalized groups were invited to participate in decision-making. TLO reports that respondents in Uruzgan appreciated this approach of consultation with all tribal elders.

4. 'Under the radar' approach / enhancing local ownership of development projects

This strategy allowed reconstruction projects to take place in areas that were under Taliban control and out of reach of the PRT. Village communities received a maximum of USD 4000 to implement a project deemed urgent by the local community. This amount was large enough to have a positive effect at the local level, but too small to attract the attention of the Taliban or other insurgents. The projects were overseen and implemented by five local NGOs (one in each of the five districts). Between 2006 and 2009, three hundred of these 'under the radar' projects were implemented in Uruzgan<sup>35</sup>. This strategy was also successful because it gave communities a measure of autonomy and decision-making powers. Local communities were mobilized to work together and jointly define development priorities.

5. Joint command

To optimally integrate the military and civilian components, the PRT was directed by a management team consisting of the military commander and the civilian representative. While the military commander was primarily responsible for security issues and the civilian representative for reconstruction and governance, all important decisions were taken together.

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<sup>33</sup> Idem, p. 59-60.

<sup>34</sup> This 'development rush' should not only be attributed to an improvement in security, but also to the fact that with the presence of the Dutch, Australians and Americans in this province, large amounts of funding for reconstruction projects became available.

<sup>35</sup> Three Years Later, TLO 2009, p. 12.

This assured effective cooperation and coordination between military and civilian staff, in line with the strategy 'as civilian as possible, as military as necessary'.

Although over the last four years security has improved around the three main urban centres, a large part of Uruzgan is still insecure and off-limits to NGOs. Development is far behind the national average. Only 20% of children attend school, compared to 50% nationally. The provincial government is still suffering from a lack of institutional cadre, illiteracy and corruption, and is not capable of assuming development duties. TLO states that sustainability is the main challenge facing any intervention in this province: 'The Uruzgan government is not yet capable of taking over the domains of development and security(...). The overall success and sustainability of the Dutch advances over the past four years thus depends heavily on how well their successors build upon it'<sup>36</sup>.

At the time of writing, the Netherlands Ministries for Foreign Affairs and of Defence were preparing a joint evaluation on the operation of the PRT in Uruzgan. This evaluation will serve as valuable input for further discussions between governments on PRT models and how PRTs can effectively contribute to the development of an unstable region<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> The Dutch Engagement in Uruzgan 2006-2010, TLO, p.60.

<sup>37</sup> As such, these specific 'lessons learned' may be less relevant to NGOs or international organizations, which operate at a different level, with different objectives and challenges.

## 4. CHALLENGES AND GOOD PRACTICES

This section sets out the challenges that our resource persons encountered in education, media or cultural reconstruction projects in Afghanistan, and the working methods adapted to circumvent or minimize these obstacles. In many cases, a solution was simply not at hand. The 'lessons learned' identified (see box 5) were in many cases principles that were known but not always implemented, as they conflicted with other interests.

### 1. Insecurity

The precarious security situation in some regions of Afghanistan, most notoriously the south and south-east, forms one of the main challenges to reconstruction interventions. Many areas are still 'no-go' zones for development agencies. Staff of NGOs, as well as structures and persons associated with them, are deliberately targeted by the insurgents. Schools, teachers and even children risk attack when associated with the government or foreign military forces. In these areas the adequate monitoring of development projects is difficult and often impossible. In addition, insecurity has a negative impact on the cost of projects. In regions where transport by road is considered unsafe, goods and staff have to be flown in, adding considerably to the cost of projects.

Limited visibility of the implementing agency is an important factor for success in an insecure area. The 'under the radar' approach practiced by the Dutch in Uruzgan allowed reconstruction projects to be carried out in areas that were under Taliban control and out of reach of the PRT. The Dutch Consortium for Uruzgan (DCU)<sup>38</sup> has tackled the problem of monitoring in unsafe areas by establishing a 'monitoring matrix'. In this matrix, information on a specific desired output is gathered by combining and cross-checking information from several local sources, such as local monitors, the local community or other NGOs/partners.

### 2. Presence of foreign military forces

The presence of military forces in Afghanistan impacts reconstruction and development in several ways. First, it has a negative impact on the security of NGO workers and projects. As PRTs have moved to undertake development projects, the distinction between military and aid organizations has blurred. The Taliban have declared all foreign military operations a target, whether they are aimed at securing an area or at carrying out development projects. It is of great importance to NGOs that their staff and operations are not associated with the military. The Dutch NGOs interviewed for this paper go to great lengths to maintain their neutrality in the eyes of the Afghans.

Second, the strategic agendas of countries providing troops have a major influence on the development agenda. All will agree that development is a long-term matter. At the same time, there is a clear need for interventions with a quick return on investment. These are necessary to gain acceptance for the military mission, both by the local community and the home front. There seems to be a preference for projects with quick and highly visible results, such as

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<sup>38</sup> DCU is a consortium of five Dutch NGOs working in Uruzgan: Save the Children, Healthnet/TPO, Cordaid, Dutch Committee for Afghanistan Veterinary Programme and ZOA Vluchtelingen zorg

construction projects. Projects that are less visible or that exhibit their effects in the long run, such as capacity-building projects or cultural projects, seem less popular among donors.

**Box 2. Culture interventions: The Centre for International Heritage Activities**

The Centre for International Heritage Activities focuses on the conservation and rehabilitation of cultural heritage. One of its main objectives is capacity development: training Afghan craftsmen in restoration techniques and creating jobs. It is a relevant newcomer to Afghanistan, having started up its activities there in 2006. It has a small field office in Kholm (North Afghanistan).

The Centre's two main projects in Afghanistan are the rehabilitation of the National Museum in Kabul and the Baghe Jehan Nama palace and gardens in Kholm. In the National Museum, it works together with other parties such as UNESCO. Initially the Centre focused on the physical infrastructure of the National Museum through renovation of galleries and temporary exhibitions. Since 2009 it organises intensive training for museum staff and guards to improve security. In 2010 the Centre took the initiative to coordinate the activities of organizations contributing to the restoration of the museum, as parties were working in parallel to one another instead of together.

The main challenges to the Centre's work in Afghanistan are insecurity, the lack of coordination between organizations operating in the same field, and the lack of capacity within both the Afghan Ministry of Information and Culture and the National Museum. The Centre considers the following 'lessons learned' the main ingredients for success in operating a cultural project in Afghanistan:

- **Time.** It takes at least two years for an organization to become operational in Afghanistan. Too many projects are executed on a 'hit and run' basis because of donor demands.
- **Political commitment.** Involving the local community in the choice and execution of a project is an absolute must. Before an organization starts a project in Afghanistan, it should make an assessment as to whether it is capable of building successful working relations with local partners, the local government and the local community.

Another problem related to the presence of foreign military troops is the availability of financial resources. There seem to be more funds available to support state structures than can be absorbed and spent in a responsible way. Foreign and local organizations are under political pressure to rapidly spend these resources. This may result in an overly hasty selection and implementation of projects, lack of planning, inflation of the cost of local materials, duplicity and wastage of funds<sup>39</sup>. This in turn invites corruption, an issue that continues to plague reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan across the board. Another effect of this ready availability of financial resources is that NGOs are drawn to areas where they do not have prior experience or relevant expertise. Projects follow finances instead of the other way around.

3. A complex political and tribal situation

No development project is 100% neutral; by choosing priorities, implementing agencies affect and change social and political realities. In a complex tribal society such as Afghanistan, implementing agencies must walk a tightrope to avoid being caught up in personal agendas. Without adequate information on the local political context, they run the risk of becoming pawns in the power games of warlords, drug lords, landlords and power brokers.<sup>40</sup> To avoid being dragged into a local conflict or being manipulated by these groups, aid agencies must spend time to get to know the 'lay of the land'. This is especially important in relation to the selection of a local implementing partner. The wrong choice of a local partner can result in the

<sup>39</sup> See *Falling Short: Aid effectiveness in Afghanistan*. Matt Waldman (Oxfam International), 2008.

<sup>40</sup> TLO mentions one instance where a district governor demanded a share of the poppy harvest from villagers, threatening that if they did not comply he would inform 'the foreigners' that insurgents were hiding in their village and tell them to bomb the village. *Three Years Later*, TLO 2009, p 28.

ineffective implementation of a project or in the aid agency unwillingly taking sides in a local conflict.

Resource persons indicated that it takes time and presence on the ground to get to know the local situation well enough to decide on projects and implementation partners. It can take up

**Box 3. Educational interventions: agricultural education by Wageningen University**

Wageningen University is developing a programme to reconstruct the Afghan education system for agricultural training. The objective is to develop and implement a national programme for agriculture education. A national agricultural education centre, which is to develop training curricula, will be established in Kabul. A training centre for horticulture will be established near Kabul. Two schools for agricultural training will be set up, one of which will be located in Uruzgan. The project started in 2009 and is in its start-up phase. In 2010 - 2011, 30 Afghan students were trained at Wageningen University in curriculum development, training and management.

While Wageningen University has carried out many projects in developing countries, it did not have prior experience in working in Afghanistan. Our resource person indicated that insecurity is a main challenge to this project. Another concern is a lack of capacity and political will at the level of the Afghan government. Furthermore, cultural barriers impede the involvement of women in the training programme at Wageningen.

Wageningen University considers the following 'lessons learned' the main ingredients for success in operating a large top-down capacity building programme in Afghanistan:

- **Experience.** Start with small pilot projects. This will allow the organization to assemble 'lessons learned' and adjust the programme before a larger project is established. Insecurity is an important complicating factor when setting up a new project in Afghanistan. To gain experience in such an environment, a pilot project should be started up in a safe province. Only later, and with the experience from the pilot project, should a project be rolled out to less secure provinces.
- **Time.** Time is of the essence. It takes at least a year and a half before a local network is established. The top-down approach that is required in capacity building projects takes time to produce results.
- **Political will.** Establish that there is enough political will at the government level before a project is started.

to two years before structures are in place to start a project in a responsible way. However, this can conflict with a donor's requirement to provide quick results. One resource person reported difficulties that stemmed from an insufficient knowledge of the local situation. As the funds were available and there was pressure to start the project, no investment was made to get to know the local situation.

4. Limited capacity of Afghan government partners

During thirty years of conflict, many educated Afghans left the country in different waves. The qualified Afghans that remain are much sought after by international organizations, embassies and NGOs. The Afghan government cannot compete with the salaries offered by these aid agencies. Many government positions remain unfilled while qualified Afghans change government jobs for jobs with the international aid community.

This impedes capacity and institutional memory building at the government level. Ministries that cover areas that are high on the international development agenda, such as the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education, seem to operate adequately. However, ministries covering areas that are not high on the list of priorities, such as the Ministry of Culture and Information, cope with funding and staffing problems. Many posts are filled by temporary foreign consultants. While this may offer a temporary solution, it does not help in developing the necessary institutional memory.

At the provincial and local level other factors impede capacity building. In 2010 70% of government posts in Uruzgan remained unfilled<sup>41</sup>. In this province illiteracy is a big problem: more than 95% of the population is illiterate, including key government officials. Another problem is the insecure environment. Qualified Afghans from outside the province refuse to work in Uruzgan because of insecurity.

Building up a functional civil structure in Afghanistan may take another decade. In such a situation, efforts directed at supporting government structures at the national and provincial levels must be matched with a bottom-up approach: support for local organizations, and development interventions at the level of villages and districts.

## 5. Corruption

Where tribal and personal agendas prevail, reconstruction efforts may not only be impeded by lack of capacity, but also by lack of political will and corruption. Corruption is a fundamental problem that continues to plague development efforts in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, it is also stimulated by the presence of large sums of money that are readily available for development projects.

Donors have requested that President Karzai address the problem of corruption at the government level. However, donors themselves can also do their part to close off avenues for corruption, by choosing the right procedures for contracting and adequately monitoring reconstruction projects. Corruption seems to occur frequently in large-scale construction projects with multiple subcontractors. The Dutch and Australians operating in Uruzgan work using direct and local contracting, involving local companies. According to the Afghan NGO TLO, this approach appears to have reduced the embezzlement of funds<sup>42</sup>.

## 6. Lack of coordination within the international community

The fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, together with the ensuing steep increase in foreign development funds, sparked an influx of international organizations and international NGOs. The lack of coordination between these many development agencies has become a persistent problem. A 2008 paper on aid effectiveness in Afghanistan commissioned by the NGO coordinating body ACBAR states that donors insufficiently coordinate with the Afghan government or with each other, resulting in parallel structures and organizational chaos<sup>43</sup>. The paper estimates that two-thirds of foreign aid bypasses the Afghan government. Although several coordinating bodies try to improve information sharing between NGOs, there seems to be a lack of capacity or willingness among donors and NGOs to solve this issue of donor coordination.

The level of coordination differs per sector. The education sector seems relatively well-organized, with donors coordinating with each other and with the Afghan government. UNICEF and Save the Children play a leading role in the coordination of reconstruction efforts in this sector. The culture sector, however, seems to be insufficiently coordinated. The first coordinating meeting on culture, initiated by UNESCO and bringing NGOs, international organizations and the Afghan government to the table, only took place in April 2010. There is a

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<sup>41</sup> The Dutch Engagement in Uruzgan: 2006 to 2010. A TLO socio-political assessment, 2010 , p viii.

<sup>42</sup> The Dutch Engagement in Uruzgan: 2006 to 2010. A TLO socio-political assessment, 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Falling Short: Aid effectiveness in Afghanistan. Matt Waldman (Oxfam International), 2008. ACBAR is an alliance of 94 national and international NGOs working in Afghanistan.

clear benefit from coordination by UNESCO in sectors that are not addressed by any other UN organization, as is the case with culture.

In Uruzgan five NGOs<sup>44</sup> have integrated their operations and formed a consortium called 'Dutch Consortium Uruzgan' (DCU). DCU shares an office in Uruzgan, where a local staff of 25

**Box 4. Media interventions: Press Now and journalism in rural areas**

The independent media NGO Press Now focuses on media development in rural areas. Rural areas are where most of Afghanistan's population lives and where most of the ethnic tensions exist. The aim is to foster understanding between different tribal and ethnic groups by inviting people to discuss local issues on the radio.

Press Now has projects in Bamyan (central Afghanistan) and Mazar-i-Shariff (north Afghanistan). In Bamyan, local journalists were trained in independent journalism and provided with a mobile radio station to report from rural areas. In 2010, 36 journalists were trained, half of whom were women. In 2011 Press Now will assist the School for Journalism at Balkh University in Mazar-i-Sharif in developing curricula and training. The objective is not only to train future journalists, but also to train provincial and local government officials in press relations.

Press Now started its operations in Afghanistan in 2009. It considers the following 'lessons learned' as main ingredients for success in operating a media project in Afghanistan:

- **Neutral perception.** A media project should be seen as absolutely neutral and independent of the parties involved in the conflict. Press Now kept contacts with local PRTs to a minimum. There is no financial link to the international forces operating from the PRT: the project is financed by Cordaid. But neutrality also extends to the choice of teachers. Teachers from Kabul may be perceived as affiliated with the government. In the end, a Dutch teacher was accepted by the students as a 'neutral' element.
- **Time.** It takes a long time to become operational in Afghanistan. It may take up to three years to understand the local political situation, choose the right local partner, set up a pilot programme and generate results.
- **Flexibility.** Adaptability to changing local realities is a must.

carries out the operations. This approach has clear benefits: shared use of facilities and transport, avoidance of activity overlap and information sharing. The primary reason for this cooperation, however, is security.

#### 7. Lack of institutional memory of the international community

Lack of institutional memory is not only a problem of the Afghan government, but also of the international aid community. Embassy workers are relieved after one year of service. The military rotate at even shorter intervals. This results in a lack of institutional memory, lack of continuity and a short-term perspective. In addition, many organizations are relatively new to Afghanistan. Of the NGOs that participated in this research, only one had been active in Afghanistan before 2004.

In such a rapidly changing environment, the institutionalizing of 'lessons learned' would greatly contribute to the building of institutional memory. Paradoxically, the recording and exchanging of 'lessons learned' does not feature as a priority on the development agenda.

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<sup>44</sup> Save the Children, Healthnet/TPO, Cordaid, Dutch Committee for Afghanistan Veterinary Programme and ZOA Vluchtelingen zorg.

**Box 5. Summary of 'Lessons Learned' and 'Good Practices'**

Resource persons identified the following general 'lessons learned' and 'good practices' as essential elements for an effective strategy in interventions in Afghanistan in the sectors of education, media and culture.

1. A thorough analysis of the local political background before a project is started. The military and civilian actors operating from the PRT in Uruzgan made a comprehensive analysis of the local situation, assisted by an Afghan NGO. This was identified as one of the factors for successful interventions in this volatile region. Independent NGOs confirmed the importance of a thorough situational assessment.
2. Thorough selection of a local partner. One media project stranded because the local partner, Radio Television Afghanistan, did not cooperate adequately and even frustrated the project. A good local partner is essential.
3. Political will and ownership. Political will is a must, whether working with the Afghan government or with a local community. The government or local community should be involved in both the selection of a project and its implementation. A study on attacks by insurgents on schools in Afghanistan showed that schools that were built at the request of the local community suffer less from attacks than other schools.
4. Time and flexibility. Starting up a project in Afghanistan takes time. Resource persons indicated that the processes of making a situational analysis, choosing a local partner, and fostering the political will of the local community may take up to two years. A long-term vision, realistic expectations, flexibility and a preparedness to deal with setbacks are indispensable. This is specifically the case in areas where the arrival or pull-out of military actors can drastically change the local situation. Projects should be adaptable to changing realities on the ground.
5. Perception of strict neutrality. For NGOs keeping a neutral position is essential to the security and success of a project. All NGOs interviewed for this report indicated they did not wish to be associated with the military, and they take measures to avoid being perceived as partial.
6. Low visibility of the donor. Projects that are embedded in a community or carried out by Afghans run less risk of being attacked. In Uruzgan, even in areas controlled by the insurgents, projects could be carried out through an 'under the radar' approach. This requires a different mentality from donors whose 'home front' demands that tax money generates visible and clearly attributable results.

## 5. UNESCO's FRAMEWORK FOR INTERVENTIONS IN PCPD SITUATIONS

### 5.1 Institutional framework and objectives

The framework for UNESCO's activities in Post-Conflict and Post-Disaster (PCPD) situations is set out in its Medium-Term Strategy for 2008-2013<sup>45</sup>. This document presents the following broad objectives for the fields related to the study:

- The 'building back better' of whole education systems, with the ultimate goal of realizing education for all;
- The promotion of cultural diversity, including the protection of cultural and natural heritage at risk;
- Reconstruction and promotion of independent and pluralistic media.

An important notion is that the interventions of UNESCO are to be targeted at 'upstream policy advice', providing assistance and capacity-building at government level. 'A key lever to prompt recovery and reconstruction is national ownership and leadership of post conflict/disaster efforts'<sup>46</sup>.

In 2008 UNESCO established the Inter-sectoral Platform for PCPD. This Platform is formed by a team of representatives of UNESCO's sectors, pooling knowledge and experience of programmes carried out in PCPD countries in these sectors. The secretariat of the Platform is tasked with the support to all field offices, facilitating administrative mechanisms and providing central services such as training. A PCPD intranet site has been established to facilitate communication between the field offices. The secretariat is manned by two staff.

The proposed targets of UNESCO's PCPD Platform for the 2012-2013 biennium are presented in Box 6.

### 5.2 The case for categorization

UNESCO's 'PCPD umbrella' applies to the countries of Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Cambodia, the Central African Republic, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, DRC, Eritrea, Guinea Bissau, Haiti, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Liberia, Nepal, Pakistan, Palestinian Territories, Peru, the Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Sudan.

These countries each present very different cases for intervention. A major difference between conflict and post-conflict situations is that in a post-conflict situation development can be a linear process. This allows for planning of operations, in an ideal situation from recovery to reconstruction to development to exit. In a conflict situation this is not the case. In the unstable environment of a conflict situation it is difficult, if not impossible, to chart out a strategy that extends over several years. Therefore, interventions in conflict situations must be flexible, following the reality on the ground rather than a fixed objective or plan from the implementing agency<sup>47</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> UNESCO document 35/C/4, p.31-32: 'Strategic Programme Objective 14: the support through UNESCO's domains to countries in post-conflict situations and post-disaster situations'.

<sup>46</sup> UNESCO document 35 C/4, paragraph 128.

<sup>47</sup> Evaluation of Strategic Programme Objective 14, Support through UNESCO's domains to countries in post-conflict and post-disaster situations, by MDF Training and Consultancy. Summary Report prepared by IOS, December 2008.

Another symptom of a conflict state is that frequent changes in leadership may occur, as is the case in Afghanistan. This hampers the development process and requires a different strategy. In these situations, instead of focusing efforts on 'upstream policy advise' and supporting the central government, UNESCO could increase its impact by also working with local communities, and providing a coordinating platform for NGOs working in the same sector. Of the Dutch NGOs interviewed for this paper, only one had worked with UNESCO and was aware of its policies in Afghanistan.

Aid interventions in conflict situations such as Afghanistan should be flexible and pragmatic. UNESCO should adopt separate, tailor-made strategies for each of the three categories of conflict, post-conflict and post-disaster, based on evidence and 'lessons learned'. The institutionalization of 'lessons learned' is an indispensable instrument for future successful interventions.

### **5.3 UNESCO and 'lessons learned'**

An external evaluation of UNESCO's Strategic Programme Objective 14 (Support through UNESCO's domains to countries in post-conflict and post-disaster situations), was carried out in 2008<sup>48</sup>. This evaluation reflects the situation of UNESCO programmes carried out in PCPD countries in 2006 and 2007, and is the most recent source of information on UNESCO's 'lessons learned' in PCPD situations. One of the objectives of this evaluation was to provide insights into how 'lessons learned' can be institutionalized within the organization. The report studies in more detail the functioning of UNESCO in four PCPD countries, among which Afghanistan.

The evaluation team found that there is no system of sharing of results and 'lessons learned' with other field offices or other organizations. Programmes are, however, evaluated during and after their execution, and 'lessons learned' and 'good practices' are shared orally at meetings and conferences. Due to limited staff resources, the focus is on doing, not on learning. The report recommends the establishment of an internal system aimed at the institutionalization of 'lessons learned'<sup>49</sup>. This is especially important in areas where staff turnover is high and institutional memory short, as is the case in the Afghanistan field office.

The Draft 36 C/5 (2012-2013) does not plan or provide for the establishment of such a system. This is a missed opportunity. With adequate staffing, UNESCO's PCPD Platform has the potential to become a strong learning instrument, analysing 'lessons learned' and feeding 'good practices' back into the organization with the aim of optimizing its operations in difficult environments. Not only UNESCO's field offices, but also other international organizations and NGOs operating in PCPD environments would benefit from such a central learning instrument.

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<sup>48</sup> Idem

<sup>49</sup> Idem

**Box 6. Expected results at the end of the biennium 2012-2013 for UNESCO's Inter-sectoral Platform PCPD, as formulated in the Draft 36/C5.**

- Effective post-conflict and post-disaster operations put in place, with proper infrastructures and administrative mechanisms;
- Advisory services provided on natural resource management and the revitalization of institutions in post-conflict and post-disaster affected countries;
- Support provided for cultural pluralism, intercultural dialogue and the safeguarding and protection of damaged cultural heritage, including intangible heritage, with a view to sustaining peace and social cohesion processes;
- Networks for media professionals promoted, and professional standards and self-regulatory mechanisms in post-conflict environments enhanced;
- Capacity for media to report on peace-building, conflict resolution and disaster awareness enhanced and access to humanitarian information in disaster environments improved, and safety of media professionals enhanced;
- National/local planning, management and reform capacity for country-led recovery and reconstruction improved in UNESCO's fields of competence;
- Policy guidelines on conflict prevention and disaster risk reduction developed and disseminated widely in affected Member States;
- Participation in United Nations integrated post-conflict and post-disaster responses ensured, in particular with respect to common needs assessments, OCHA consolidated appeals, strategic and programmatic frameworks as well as funding mechanisms and improved national/local activity planning.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **1. Institutionalising 'Lessons Learned'**

This study was based on the assumption that 'lessons learned' in reconstruction projects in Afghanistan can be assembled and studied. However, the key problem with 'lessons learned' is that they are often not shared with external parties<sup>50</sup>. Documentation of experiences on which aid organizations can base their policy for operations in Afghanistan is scarce. Nor is any general platform available for the exchange of such 'lessons learned'. The NGOs that contributed to this study stated that their focus is on doing. Sharing lessons learned with others and learning from others seems to have a lower priority.

This is a missed opportunity: exchanging 'lessons learned' could improve the impact of aid organizations and the quality of development interventions as a whole. Organizations should be stimulated to systematically record and share their experiences. Here donors can play an important role, stimulating the organizations they fund to look beyond the direct impact of their own specific interventions and contribute towards the bigger picture of systematic learning.

UNESCO, as a knowledge organization and authority in the field of learning, could play a leading role in this regard. With its structure of field offices UNESCO is well situated to centrally gather and analyse 'lessons learned' in conflict, post-conflict and post-disaster situations. Internally, UNESCO would greatly benefit from the analysis of these experiences, using these data to learn and design effective policies for its operations. Externally, the organization could play a positive role by stimulating discussions on 'lessons learned' between Member States and providing a platform for such discussions. Both UNESCO and its Member States would benefit from such a concerted effort and sharing of experiences. The Draft 36 C/5 (2012-2013) should provide for the establishment of such a lessons learned system.

### **2. PCPD: Different categories require specific strategies**

Our study showed that 'post-conflict' and 'conflict' situations clearly offer different challenges and require different approaches. Interventions in conflict situations require flexibility and a long horizon. Where reconstruction interventions are influenced by the presence of foreign military forces, as is the case in Afghanistan, policies for intervention should be even more flexible.

However, UNESCO applies one policy to the three different situations of post-disaster, post-conflict and conflict. For an effective PCPD strategy, UNESCO should design separate, flexible and tailor-made strategies for each of these situations. Furthermore, in conflict situations such as Afghanistan UNESCO could increase its impact by focusing on the needs of local communities, and working with local NGOs, parallel to 'upstream policy advise' and supporting the central government.

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<sup>50</sup> There are exceptions. The education sector distinguishes itself from the culture and media section in this regard: organisations such as Save the Children, UNESCO-IIEP and INEE publish useful studies on questions relating to problems that are specific to the education sector. Another exception form governmental and military actors, who are used to analyzing experiences and using this information to improve their operations.

### ***3. The impact of military interventions***

The 'lessons' for success in Afghanistan summarized in Box 5 are largely a matter of common sense. At the same time, 'good practices' do not always seem to be put into practice, or at least not initially. Factors other than common sense seem to influence decision-making and strategic planning.

One factor that has a major impact on development interventions in Afghanistan is the presence of international military forces. The military aim to stabilize areas that are not under the control of the government. At the same time, however, it is itself a destabilizing factor. Insecurity related to the military presence has become a major concern for NGOs operating in Afghanistan. Furthermore, political objectives have become an important driver for development operations linked to donor countries with a military presence in Afghanistan. Another impact that military missions have on reconstruction efforts in a conflict situation involves the vast sums of donor funds that accompany these missions. While the availability of funds for development aid is a good thing, the requirement of donors to spend these funds quickly can have a negative impact on the quality of aid interventions.

### ***4. The importance of interventions in the field of culture, education and media***

The ready availability of funds does not apply to all sectors. Projects in the sectors of culture, education and media contribute to peace-building and the normalization of the lives of people that have been traumatized by war. At the same time, these sectors do not receive the attention they deserve. Only 2% of the total Dutch budget for development intervention in Afghanistan was spent on these three sectors combined. The years ahead, as the Netherlands continues to focus development aid on other sectors, this is likely to be even less. Governments, NGOs and international organizations do not yet perceive culture, education and media projects as instruments for peace-building.

This is specifically the case for culture, which is still seen as 'fringe' and, consequently, does not have priority. This may be caused by the narrow perception that aid organisations have of culture. Culture is often perceived as synonymous with 'cultural heritage': monuments, museums, archaeology. These are not considered basic needs because they focus on things rather than on people. But 'culture' is much more than that: it also embraces creative expressions and intangible culture such as values, customs and beliefs. The difficulty with this broad perception is that it is hard to conceptualize and target. In this sense, almost everything is 'culture'. Yet in this broad sense, culture harbours both the roots of conflict and those of peace-building. Culture could have an important peace-building effect if, in this broad sense, it was made a cross-cutting element in reconstruction efforts. The reconstruction of the gardens of the Kabul National Museum and the palace in Kholm (see 2.4) offer a good example of such an approach.

Governments, NGOs and international organizations must be convinced of the value that culture, education and media projects can have as peace-building instruments in conflict and post-conflict situations. Here, too, UNESCO can play an important role by reporting on concrete results attained by its field offices and providing insight into the impact that these sectors can have on peace-building processes. The international conference on culture and development, as planned for 2013 and announced in the Draft 36 C/5, as well as the planned development of a global knowledge management data base on culture and development, offer an excellent step towards this goal.

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## 7.2 Acknowledgements

We thank the following persons for sharing with us their experiences and views on reconstruction in Afghanistan:

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### *Dutch Consortium Uruzgan / Save the Children*

Bert van Ruitenbeek, Sarwar Sidari. [www.savethechildren.nl](http://www.savethechildren.nl)

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### *Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

Marten de Boer, Nelly Blokker, Nathalie Kroner, Paula Sastrowijoto.

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### *Other*

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Ehsan Turabaz, Willem Vogelsang, Cathérine Verhoeven.

## Projects in Afghanistan referred to in this report

| Initiator  | Objectives  | Donor   | Short description of projects   |
|--|---|---|---|
| Centre for International Heritage Activities (CIE)       | Capacitybuilding and conservation of cultural heritage  | Netherlands (€ 1 mln); USA, Germany                     | Rehabilitation Kabul National Museum; restauration Bagh-e-Jehan Nama palace and garden in Kholm.  |
| Dutch Consortium Uruzgan (DCU)                           | Coordination  | Netherlands   | Cooperation of five Dutch NGO's in Uruzgan.   |
| DCU<br>- Save the Children                               | Activities in education   | (€ 4,8 mln)   | Teaching materials; education for children with arrears; adult education; education for teachers; the founding of a centre with professional education for streetschildren. |
|  | Social welfare  |   | Radiostation Nawa (for children).   |
| Press Now  | Development of independent media in rural areas   | Cordaid   | Journalism training in Bamyan; School for Journalism in Mazar-al-Sharif at Balkh University; mobile radiostation.   |
| Prins Claus Fund – Cultural Emergency Response Programme | Cultural emergency aid  | Netherlands Government; Netherlands Postal Code Lottery | Stabilisation of a synagoge and mosque in Herat; restauration of a mosque in Kabul; restauration of a hamam in Kholm.   |
| Free Voice   | Supporting democratisation processes through free media   | Netherlands Government; Netherlands Postal Code Lottery | Childrens' news Ayenda Sazan ('Future makers'); photo press agency for female reporters in Bamyan.  |
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| UNESCO   | Assistance to the Afghan Government and development projects in the field of culture, education and media |   | See Box on p. 12  |

## AFGHAN CULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN THE NETHERLANDS SINCE 2002

The Afghan-Dutch activities in the sectors of culture, education and media discussed in this report, focus on Afghan society. Meanwhile, these three sectors found an echo in Dutch society as well. Books by Afghan authors were translated, exhibitions of art and culture from Afghanistan organized. Newspapers and other media covered the news and informed the public about numerous other issues related to Afghan history, economy, politics and culture. This Appendix presents a first inventory of such Afghan cultural projects in the Netherlands. One may wonder whether this is relevant in a report that focuses on lessons learned in a (post-) conflict situation. In our view it is: collaboration in culture, education and media projects implies a cultural exchange that enables people to develop mutual long term commitments.

### Afghan writers that have published in Dutch

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- \* Ghafour, Hamida (f, Can/Afg): *De slapende boeddha* (2008). Family history.
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- \* Joya, Malalai (f, Afg): *Een vrouw tussen krijgsheren* (2010). Afghan politician and human rights activist who informs about the influence of warlords and drug barons, the fake democratic system, terrorism and the war.
- \* Latifa (f, Afg) (with Chékéba Hachemi): *Gestolen gezicht* (2005). True story about a young woman growing up under the Taliban regime.
- \* Pazira, Nelofer (f, Can/Afg): *Nacht over Kabul* (2006). About the Soviet period in Afghanistan.
- \* Rahimi, Atiq (m, Fr/Afg): *Het labyrint van droom en angst* (2003); *Steen van geduld* (2009); *Aarde en as* (2010). Novels.
- \* Saraj-Arefi, Parwin (f, NL/Afg): *Mijn land* (2007). Poems about Afghanistan.
- \* Zoya (pseudoniem) (f, Afg): *Zoya* (2002). Woman who joined the illegal women's organisation RAWA under the Russians and the Taliban.
- \* The majority of the Dutch books about Afghanistan are written by Westerners who have spent some time there. Writers that are neither western nor Afghan, and have published books about Afghanistan in Dutch:
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### Expositions on Afghanistan in the Netherlands

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- \* "Kabul Portraits" in 2002 for Noorderlicht: photos by Martin Roemers about soldiers.

- \* "Afghanistan in beeld" in 2007 in the Atrium of Den Haag city hall: photo-exposition of SAN (Stichting Samenwerking Afghanistan – Nederland).
- \* "Verborgten Afghanistan" in 2007/2008 in De Nieuwe Kerk Amsterdam: archeological findings from 2000BC onwards.
- \* "Facing Afghan Women" in 2008 in Purmerend: photo-exposition.
- \* "Tussen Grebbeberg en Uruzgan" in 2008 in Legermuseum Delft: critical drawings from artist Fritz Behrendt about the war in Afghanistan.
- \* "Afghaanse Kalligrafische prenten" in 2009 by Abdul Qudus Wasiq.
- \* "In Afghanistan" in 2009 in multiple libraries in the Netherlands, London and Berlin: photo-exposition of Hans Stakelbeek on demand of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the redevelopment in Afghanistan.
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