

Focusing ANDS Implementation on Pro-Poor Outcomes

Proceedings of a Workshop Held on Monday, 23 February 2009 at the Ministry of Economy

Overview of the Workshop

Purpose

This workshop presented key findings from two recent AREU papers on the ANDS process and outcomes,¹ and used these to fuel discussion on ways forward in implementing the ANDS. It aimed to engage some of the people with a role in the implementation of the ANDS in thinking through how to build on what has been done to achieve pro-poor outcomes.

Structure

The workshop was structured into two sessions, keeping groups sizes small to give participants a greater opportunity to share and develop their ideas. The morning session consisted mainly of representatives from the Government, and the afternoon session consisted of internationals working with Government ministries, plus representatives from the UN, donors and international diplomats. This structure was intended to allow for more focused discussion on issues of shared interest.

Participants

The morning session consisted of participants from: the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) Implementation Directorate, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), Ministry of Counter Narcotics (MCN), Ministry of Energy and Water (MoEW), American Institute of Afghan Studies (AIAS), International Development Law Organization (IDLO), and Afghan Women's Skills Development Centre (AWSDC).

The afternoon session consisted of participants from: ANDS Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Department, Ministry of Finance (MoF), MCN, Central Statistics Office (CSO), Afghanistan Information Management Services (AIMS), RTI International, UNAMA, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Embassy of Norway, the Embassy of Finland, and the Embassy of the Netherlands.

In total, 24 people took part in these workshop discussions.

Presentations

AREU gave two presentations in the morning session and again in the afternoon session, to provide context and content to input into the following discussions. These presentations covered the key findings from research and analysis on the process and content of the ANDS.

¹ See Paula Kantor, Adam Pain et al, "Delivering on Poverty Reduction: Focusing ANDS Implementation on Pro-Poor Outcomes" (Kabul: AREU, 2009) and Sayed Mohammed Shah, "Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) Formulation Process" (Kabul: AREU, 2009).

The Process of Formulating the ANDS

Presented by Sayed Muhammad Shah, Senior Policy and Communications Officer, AREU

This presentation was based on a new study about the process of forming the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), its influencing factors and challenges. The study found that aid dependency, lack of capacity within government and some political pressures weakened government ownership over the formation of the national document. This suggests a need for stronger coordination at all levels of government, and amongst donors. Additionally, Shah recommended that indigenous ideas must be better integrated into the sector strategies and their ongoing interpretation if they are to be successfully realised.

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Presented by Dr. Paula Kantor, Director of AREU

The second presentation gave an analysis of ANDS content and moving it forward while holding it to its poverty reduction aims. It focused specifically on how to address implementation and monitoring and evaluation processes to ensure they are pro-poor, strategic, and realistic in terms of security challenges. The key points presented were: 1) ANDS' poverty profile fails to assess the causes of poverty, 2) ANDS contains many vision statements and little detail on how to achieve them, 3) ANDS is currently characterised by a lack of sequencing and prioritisation and 4) the ANDS largely ignores the politics of development.

Remarks on the Presentations

Mr. Shakir Majeedi, ANDS Implementation Directorate at the Ministry of Finance

(Morning Session):

A team was responsible for the formulation of ANDS and the process was owned by Afghans. The ANDS will be revised every second year to bring improvement while the poverty profile is already being revised. Three sectors have been prioritised and are being integrated into the 1388 budget. Still, about 70 percent of the budget is spent by the donors and there is need to bring more and more of the budget within the control of government. Line ministries have agreed to pick projects from the Provincial Development Plans (PDPs). Implementation of the ANDS totally relies on the capacity of the line ministries. Meanwhile, strong coordination among the ministries and donors is essential. Inter-Ministerial Committees have been established, and the Joint Coordinating and Monitoring Board (JCMB) is continuing. UNAMA also has a coordination mechanism in place. The budget is the key tool for implementing the ANDS.

Mr. Nematullah Bezhani, Director General, ANDS M&E Department (Afternoon Session):

ANDS is not only a poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP), otherwise the structure would be something different. Compared to the Afghanistan Development Framework (ADF) and Securing Afghanistan Future (SAF), the ANDS has much more national ownership. It is not comprehensive but is a living document and will be revised after two years based on M&E

experiences. While formulating the ANDS, the main inputs were from the ministries, while the technical advisors facilitated. The PDPs are mainly lists of demands by the communities, but it was the first such exercise in Afghanistan and proved to be a good start. The ANDS has helped to ensure mutual accountability. There are shortcomings in the poverty profile; however it is being updated now based on the new National Risk and Vulnerability and Assessment (NRVA). Alignment of donor programmes and resource allocation is a big challenge and it needs discussion. The problem of sequencing and prioritisation will be addressed in the revised ANDS. First the implementation of ANDS is essential, we will learn from the process.

Discussions from the Morning Session (Government Representatives):

This discussion session consisted of a number of substantive commentaries given by a range of participants from different ministries and sections of the government. These are summarised in bullet format below.

- The positive story is that there is ANDS. For the first time, government was consulted at all levels for the preparation of a national strategy. It also built the capacity of government institutions, now they know how to make strategies. However, the creation of this PRSP in Afghanistan was very challenging. It was primarily driven by donors and the Government of Afghanistan was undermined. The Ministry of Finance cut the time of the ANDS formulation by one year to meet the HIPC deadlines. This decision was a big mistake because it accelerated the pace of work too much. This turned out to be unnecessary, because the deadline for meeting HIPC conditionality has now been extended for one year. The PDPs were incorporated as a part of the ANDS process and this further increased the workload and reduced the quality of work. The ANDS Secretariat was under huge pressure and that is why it sometimes had a slightly authoritarian attitude towards the ministries. The UNDP failed to provide sufficient technical support to the ANDS Secretariat. The NRVA was the only tool for poverty analysis.
- The Ministry of Education prepared a five-year strategic plan through consultations. This strategic plan provided the main input for the ANDS ministerial and sector strategies. We should look forward and pay more attention to the implementation of the ANDS. Once implementation has started, we will start learning the gaps and challenges, and then we can work on fixing them. We know we face information gaps: for example, census data is not available. In the PDPs, many communities wanted schools to be constructed and provided lists. About 900 million dollars are needed to build about 7,600 schools. The question is, who will give this amount, since the Ministry of Finance does not have enough funds for this. To meet the Afghanistan Compact benchmarks, we need to build school buildings.
- Adapting our plans to the required formats took lots of our time while we were developing sector strategies. Many advisors came and then left quickly. The last adviser was asking very strange questions, because he was not familiar with the context of Afghanistan. Our recommendation was make rural development a separate sector because it is multi-dimensional. National ownership of the ANDS was very weak, and this is obvious because it was first written in English, and only translated into Afghanistan's national languages at the very end of the process. There is no result framework for the ANDS, although this is very important. The role of the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economy in implementation are not very clear. Stabilisation programmes must be integrated into ANDS. Roles need to be clarified in policies addressing implementation. There is a budget

but we are not allowed to utilise it according to our priorities. These are specific to specific regions. Provincial governors do not know who to work with in MRRD. We are still working with Ministry of Agriculture to resolve some of the problems.

- Despite limited capacity, the ownership was good in Ministry of Energy and Water. In the MEW, 13 donors were involved. ANDS is a good document; in the beginning, we should have something and then correct it constructively. The monitoring and evaluation system of ANDS needs improvement. A standard system is needed and result frameworks as well as M&E sections for ANDS in the ministries are needed. A proper reporting format should be given to the ministries. The Ministry of Finance and donors should agree on one standard format. The role of Ministry of Economy needs clarification. The inter-ministerial committees are a good step for coordination.
- Formats have been prepared and distributed to ministries for monitoring of the Afghanistan Compact benchmarks. The ANDS technical team is working on reporting format as well. An M&E advisory group has been formed, in which ministry experts are involved. Now work is underway on establishing the M&E Task Force and comments are being received in this regard.
- Establishment of Inter-ministerial Committees is a good step. It is necessary to look to the past and learn from past experiences to bring useful changes in the strategies. The strategies should be based on needs. The M&E outcomes should be integrated into the sector strategies. The results framework is imperative while a mechanism should be devised to use the results of M&E in future planning. The ministries should have impact evaluation systems designed and put in place.

Discussion from the Afternoon Session (International representatives):

The comments and statements from the afternoon session are summarised below in bullet format:

- The central government has done little for the development of the Southeast. There were, however, many rounds of planning and these raised expectations amongst those involved. Now is the time to take action, not to waste time with further revisions and plans. We have to remember that security is the biggest issue. Different approaches are required in certain parts of the country. In the south and east, stability programmes are needed while in peaceful areas, infrastructure should be built.
- A process of reflection is needed that is divorced from the process of politics in funding; otherwise ANDS is just a reflection of donors' interest. A clear roadmap is needed for Afghanistan, fully sequenced and prioritised. This could be developed through forums such as this one or through consultation with think tanks, to make a non-useful document a useful document.
- The ANDS needs to be a clear champion of poverty alleviation. It has provided poverty analysis but does not give solutions to the problem. ANDS assumes growth will solve poverty but the experience in India contradicts this assumption. There is need for an actual identification of the poor.

- Regarding prioritisation and the issue of getting donors to commit to funding programmes in the provinces: The planning process and consultations raised expectations in the communities but there is not delivery. It took a lot to convince the elders of communities to participate in the process, now district shuras tell us: "You did the consultations but we have not seen any action." The issues of security and development are interlinked and interdependent. If security is failing, we can't succeed in development even with the best pro-poor development plan. An integrated monitoring and evaluation system is needed to give feedback to all stakeholders.
- ANDS was like a grand Jirga and for the first time happened on such a mega-level in the history of Afghanistan. The ANDS process is different from the paper. Circumstances are messy, but the ANDS is good.
- We cannot divorce politics from discussion. Development is essentially about resource allocation.
- The Ministry of Finance says it does not have access to information about 70 percent of funds spent by the donors. Lack of communication is a big problem, line ministries do not talk with each other. The central government has poor communication with provinces. It is a big problem for us at UNAMA. AIMS has created over 29 systems but all are scattered and they don't communicate with each other although the system is compatible. A simple knowledge management system is required for all ministries, although it would need to include a way of distinguishing classified and unclassified data, which can be shared broadly, and which must have limited circulation.
- Why are not we able to prioritise? First we need to find out the cause of poverty. Coordination should be improved. We say a lot but don't do it. The government could commission analytical organisations to come up with strategies based on understanding the Afghan culture and context and then make the choices boldly as to what best suits Afghanistan rather than trying to please the donors. The key is to make decisions - a bold decision taken is better than none.
- There are no lack of options but someone has to look at them all and take a decision. It requires boldness and this should be done by the government. The government should have ownership and this is the way to own it. Too many forums and stages can be counterproductive too. A lot has been done in Afghanistan but there are still lots of shortcomings. What are the criteria for sequencing? The criteria should be pro-poor policy. But these are all political decisions and need people's backing.
- One of the criteria in deciding where to channel development resources is to build on what has worked already. The NSP has been among the most successful programmes. There are shortcomings but those are debatable. It is true that the government should make strong decisions because there are many powerful players. The Americans, for example, like big infrastructure projects in the South despite the fact that the National Solidarity Program (NSP) has been one of the most successful development investments. And yet, this programme is inexplicably running short of funds. Another criterion in determining where to invest funds should be whether it helps to bring security, especially in the instable areas.

Summary of key points from the workshop

1. There was a general agreement, across both groups that a substantial amount of work went into the ANDS and that it has provided some foundation for collective action moving forward. Also, despite its challenges, the ANDS fostered at least some good will and sense of ownership within the government.
2. There was also a general agreement that after so much planning and consultation, the key issue now is to move forward, recognising that the ANDS is not a perfect document, and to learn from experiences as the process unfolds.
3. There is also a recognition, across both groups, that there is also a wealth of experience in the recent and more distant past within Afghanistan (and to a lesser degree, comparative experience elsewhere) that implementers should look to and also learn from.
4. There was also a shared agreement that the design of the monitoring and evaluation framework for the ANDS is a point of key concern and collaboration moving forward.
5. The monitoring and evaluation framework is key because it fulfils multiple functions, including addressing some of the existing imperfections in the ANDS. Specifically it:
 - a. Allows for learning - for this reason, M&E has to be tied into communication and planning systems
 - b. Allows for impact monitoring, which can also help in determining prioritisation and resource allocation based on what works
 - c. Allows for mutual accountability amongst different stakeholders in the ANDS
6. In addition to the monitoring and evaluation framework, improved coordination and communication is essential to the successful implementation of the ANDS. This may be achieved, at least in part, by a simple knowledge management system across ministries, and by policies that clarify the roles of different ministries and bodies in implementation.
7. Besides internal processes, consultation of external bodies such as think tanks, and discussion in less politically charged forums may provide useful input into decisions about how to move forward. Such processes can never be politically neutral, but may help in making the "bold decisions" necessary to move out of a potential quagmire of indecision. Such consultations and the final decisions should be led and made by the Government of Afghanistan.