

Discussion Paper
**Reflections on the Paris Declaration and Aid Effectiveness in
Afghanistan**



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About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

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Acronyms

AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
ARTF	Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund
GoA	Government of Afghanistan
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Country
IDLG	Independent Directorate of Local Governance
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
PEFA	Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability
PFM	Public Financial Management
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
US	United States

Executive Summary

This paper discusses the limitations of the Paris Declaration and the challenges of applying the Declaration's principles for aid effectiveness in Afghanistan. It maintains that, although the principles of ownership, alignment, harmonisation, managing for results and mutual accountability should be upheld, the Declaration's principles alone are not enough to achieve aid effectiveness in Afghanistan. This is because the Declaration is technically orientated, does not take into account the political dimensions of aid, and is designed to guide development assistance and not relief and stabilisation efforts.

The Declaration has also led to a focus by the international community on the processes of managing aid rather than on the impact of aid. In addition, the Afghan context poses challenges to aid effectiveness. These include: continued insecurity; lack of national and international capacity; multiple and often incompatible agendas; unclear goals; blurred lines between military, humanitarian and development interventions; widespread corruption; and lack of coordination.

The paper concludes that, although the Paris Declaration principles are worthy, there are factors that limit the effectiveness of aid in Afghanistan that cannot be addressed within the framework of the Declaration. The Declaration's principles provide a foundation for aid effectiveness. However, there are key issues that need to be addressed at the policy level to enhance aid effectiveness in Afghanistan:

- **Prioritise Aid Effectiveness**

Aid effectiveness will only be maximised when it is a priority. Aid effectiveness is reduced when it comes second to military or political aims.

- **Address the Political Dimensions**

The technical nature of the Paris Declaration does not help development actors negotiate the complex political environment in Afghanistan. Political challenges and the limitations of the Paris Declaration must be acknowledged and discussed openly to advance the debate on aid effectiveness and improve the impact of aid in Afghanistan.

- **Recognise the Limitations**

The Paris Declaration focuses on development aid and is not necessarily applied to relief or stabilisation efforts. The lines between development, humanitarian and military actors and their interventions have become blurred. In Afghanistan, the Paris Declaration framework is inadequate to ensure aid effectiveness. Action is needed to address these issues to enhance aid effectiveness and advance the debate on aid effectiveness in complex situations.

- **Measure Impact**

Adherence to the Paris Declaration does not ensure the positive impact of aid. The Declaration measures only adherence to its principles and not the effectiveness of aid on the ground. To achieve greater aid effectiveness development actors must look beyond monitoring the principles of the Paris Declaration and focus on impact and not just process.

- **Improve Information and Knowledge**

The Paris Declaration can be used as a framework to guide aid effectiveness

but it does not compensate for the lack of basic data on Afghanistan. To ensure improved aid effectiveness, programmes must be developed using baseline data and needs assessments.

1. Introduction

The issue of aid effectiveness in Afghanistan is high on the agenda of the Government of Afghanistan (GoA), the international community and other development actors.¹ Despite this, aid is widely criticised for not being effective. Criticisms stem from perceptions that the impact of assistance has been limited, that the security situation is deteriorating, and that funding and resources are either being mismanaged or misappropriated. When development actors, particularly donors, talk about aid effectiveness, they are often referring to the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and assessing whether aid to Afghanistan complies with its principles. The Declaration refers to the effective management of aid at high levels through mechanisms agreed between the donors and the recipient government. The focus of the Declaration is on the effective management of aid rather than its implementation and impact. However, the management of aid and its impact tend to be conflated; although aid is criticised for not having an effective impact, the scale against which its effectiveness is often measured is the management-orientated principles of the Paris Declaration.

The ultimate aim of the Paris Declaration is to manage aid effectively to maximise the benefits to the population, but its definition of aid effectiveness differs from what might popularly be understood. For those unfamiliar with the Paris Declaration, aid effectiveness is more likely to be interpreted to mean that aid should effectively meet the needs of the people by having a positive impact during and following project implementation.²

There are many legitimate challenges to delivering aid on the ground and to the effective management of aid at the national level but these challenges are seldom discussed openly, or addressed systematically. The contextual challenges, which include continued insecurity, lack of national and international capacity, multiple and often incompatible agendas, widespread corruption and lack of coordination, are complex and interlinked. At the same time, there are international agreements such as the Paris Declaration, and accepted best practice stipulating how aid should be managed, which hold development actors to mechanisms or processes that may not be the optimum approach given these contextual challenges.

This paper discusses some of the factors surrounding aid effectiveness in Afghanistan. It does not claim to highlight new issues or provide solutions to the challenges it identifies; it simply aims to present some of the obstacles to aid effectiveness. As the Paris Declaration is the measure that many development actors use to assess their aid effectiveness, and the Paris Declaration has informed agreements between the GoA and donor governments, including the Afghanistan Compact and the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), the focus of this paper is effectiveness in the management of aid.

The paper begins by briefly discussing the Paris Declaration and the challenges to initiating

1 The paper is based on document review and data from senior international and national actors involved in the management of aid in Afghanistan. Interviews were conducted and meetings attended in Kabul in 2008 and 2009.

2 This view was expressed by Afghan MPs, civil servants and development professionals during interviews and meetings, Kabul, 2008.

effective development processes in Afghanistan. To illustrate the impact of the challenges on the different aspects of aid effectiveness, the paper is organised loosely around the five key principles of the Paris Declaration—ownership, alignment, harmonisation, managing for results and mutual accountability. The paper is not a comprehensive review of the challenges to aid effectiveness: it provides examples of obstacles to managing aid according to the principles of the Paris Declaration and presents some dilemmas that may have no solution within the Paris Declaration framework. The purpose of the paper is to advance the aid effectiveness debate by drawing attention to these challenges and dilemmas and highlighting the limitations of the Paris Declaration framework.

2. The Paris Declaration: limitations and challenges

“The Paris Declaration broke new ground for achieving greater aid effectiveness on the basis of shared principles and measurable time-bound indicators.”³ It specifies indicators against which donor and beneficiary countries should measure their progress in achieving the five key Declaration Principles. The 2008 Survey on Monitoring the Paris Declaration reports that Afghanistan and its donors scored low for ownership and managing for results, moderate for alignment and harmonisation, and high for mutual accountability.⁴ However, the indicators used are narrow and bureaucratic and do not take into account the political dimensions of aid⁵ or assess the quality of aid and its impact on the ground. Although intended to enhance aid effectiveness, the Declaration may have precipitated a shift in focus from the impact of aid on development to the technical aspects of managing aid. Development efforts seem to be distracted by the processes and mechanisms of aid delivery rather than being directed towards improving people’s lives. It is acknowledged that, in Afghanistan, there has been a focus on the process rather than the outcomes.⁶ It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss how the emphasis on process may have affected the impact of aid. However, there is growing international recognition that the Paris Declaration, in its present form, is technocratic and fails to address the political complexities of aid or to demand partnerships between donor and recipient governments that are more than bureaucratic relationships.⁷

Another limitation of the Paris Declaration in the Afghan context is that the principles are intended to be applied to development aid. The complex security situation and ongoing humanitarian concerns, such as drought and food security, mean that a significant proportion of assistance coming into Afghanistan is for stabilisation activities in insecure areas, or relief to vulnerable groups. Some actors argue that interventions for stabilisation and relief fall outside the development assistance umbrella and therefore outside the Paris Declaration.⁸ This is because the immediate aims of relief and stabilisation differ from those driving development activities although, in the long-term, all types of interventions are aimed at providing the foundations for sustainable development. Another factor to consider is that it takes time to deliver assistance in line with the principles of the Paris Declaration: both relief and stabilisation need to be

3 Stefan Meyer and Nils Sjard Schultz, *Paris to Accra: Building the Global Governance of Aid* (Madrid: Fride, August 2008), 16.

4 “2008 Survey on Monitoring the Paris Declaration Effective Aid By 2010? What It Will Take,” Vol. 2 Country Chapters, (2008 3rd High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, Accra, Ghana, 2-4 September 2008).

5 Meyer and Schultz, *Paris to Accra*, 16.

6 Author interview, Kabul, August, 2008.

7 Meyer and Schultz, *Paris to Accra*, 16.

8 AREU interview, Kabul, September 2008.

implemented more quickly than development efforts.

Despite the limitations, many international actors in Afghanistan emphasise that the principles of the Paris Declaration—ownership, alignment, harmonisation, managing for results and mutual accountability—are worthy principles that should be upheld. They also believe that the Paris Declaration has led to improvements in the management and delivery of aid and increased donor awareness of best practices. At the same time, international actors acknowledge that delivering assistance in Afghanistan is a politicised process which cannot be managed solely through applying the Paris Declaration principles. In addition, some actors state that the Paris Declaration indicators to measure aid effectiveness are not useful and do not provide a real measure for aid effectiveness. Yet many international actors argue that the principles themselves should be applied as far as possible and, perhaps, should also be used to guide relief and stabilisation efforts, recognising that compromises have to be made.⁹ The discussion below outlines briefly some of the challenges to applying the five Paris Declaration principles.

2.1 Ownership

According to the Paris Declaration, recipient countries should “exercise effective leadership over their development policies, and strategies and coordinate development actions.”¹⁰ This statement supports current best practice, which advocates that development processes should be owned by the national government and population. The rationale for promoting national ownership is to ensure that development interventions are appropriate and meet the needs of the people. Inappropriate development activities that are not understood by or fail to meet the needs of the general public are unsustainable. Yet, what does ownership mean?

Ownership can mean different things to different people in different contexts—there is no single measure but there has to be an understanding of what level of ownership is necessary for it to be meaningful. The Paris Declaration focuses on government ownership, which does not necessarily lead to national ownership, particularly if the links between the people and the government are weak. Furthermore, to have ownership of development processes, so that they are planned, managed and implemented according to the country’s needs, there has to be national capacity: one of the main challenges facing Afghanistan is the lack of capacity. Without effective capacity the country is unable to assume ownership of aid or to exercise effective control over its management. Lack of capacity is a problem throughout Afghanistan at all levels, but it is the lack of capacity at the national level among government officials, ministries and civil servants¹¹ that has the greatest impact on the management of aid. This lack of capacity is compounded by the practice of keeping decision-making at the highest level. Consequently, senior staff are overwhelmed by their work load, a lot of which could be completed at a lower level, and decisions are delayed. This is exacerbated by an unwillingness to take initiative because people are unused to having the power to make decisions or fear being held accountable for mistakes they might make.¹²

The general lack of capacity has resulted in development activities being concentrated around the most able, which has led to a tendency to work with individuals rather than institutions. This bias distorts the current situation, further increasing the gap between

9 Author interviews, Kabul 2008 and 2009.

10 *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*, (2005 High Level Forum, Paris, February 28 - March 2 2005), 3.

11 AREU interview, Kabul, January 2008; author interview, Kabul, April 2008.

12 Author interview, Kabul, January 2009.

the more and less able. It also threatens the sustainability of development processes because the success of interventions relies on individuals rather than institutions. In addition, the approach reduces widespread feelings of ownership because it limits the numbers of those actively involved.

Another issue challenging national ownership is the prominence of external influences. What does it mean for national ownership when the development methods and approaches are determined externally and the international community imposes conditions on assistance? For example, to qualify as a Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) eligible for debt relief, a country must produce a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). The international assistance a country receives is based on the PRSP. The process of producing a PRSP uses considerable resources and the final document has to be approved by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). It is argued that there should be national ownership of a PRSP, and that the process of producing it should be consultative. However, as a PRSP is demanded and approved by the international community, it is uncertain whether a country would choose to produce one on its own, or whether it feels much ownership of the end product. The process of producing Afghanistan's PRSP, the ANDS, was expensive and time-consuming for national and international actors. It diverted resources from elsewhere and, although it was argued publicly that it was an Afghan document, there were a lot of negotiations behind the scenes as the international community tried to shape the ANDS into what it required.¹³ The timescale for the ANDS was brought forward by the World Bank to meet HIPC deadlines, so the final stages of the ANDS process were rushed.¹⁴ Furthermore, the various frameworks that link international assistance, such as the Paris Declaration, HIPC and PRSPs, mean that neither donors nor aid recipient countries had much room to tailor their approaches to the Afghan context. The Paris Declaration ties donors into supporting national development plans but at the same time donors require recipient countries to produce a PRSP. Consequently, donors themselves can have a significant influence on the creation of these national plans which can undermine or limit national ownership.

2.2 Alignment

The principle of Alignment in the Paris Declaration asks donors to “base their overall support on partner countries’ national development strategies, institutions and procedures.”¹⁵ Such an approach reinforces the other principles of the Paris Declaration and is consistent with promoting national ownership and sustainable development. However, donors cannot achieve alignment without coming into contact with political and controversial issues. Countries in receipt of development aid typically face political problems, particularly fragile states, so alignment is likely to be politicised. Even if a government has been democratically elected, it can be or can become unpopular. How can donors be aligned with national strategies, institutions and procedures without being seen to engage in political issues?

In Afghanistan, international actors have to perform a delicate balancing act by trying to offer practical support at the same time as maintaining their distance and providing constructive criticism. This balance is particularly difficult to achieve in areas of governance reform. Donors have stated that subnational governance structures and procedures should be strengthened and clarified. In response the GoA has created the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG). However, IDLG is increasingly

13 Author interviews, Kabul, 2008.

14 Author interview, Kabul, August 2008.

15 *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*, 4.

perceived as a political tool of President Karzai rather than an institution to improve technical aspects of subnational governance.¹⁶ By funding IDLG, international actors could be supporting the incumbent regime rather than development processes. By not supporting IDLG, donors are ignoring efforts by the national government to improve subnational governance and are failing to align their policies with Afghanistan's national policies.

Another area that may at first seem technical but very soon becomes political is the management of the funding. How can donors provide funding to countries that have poor public financial management and where the government is perceived as corrupt? There is widespread scepticism about the GoA's ability to manage funding independently.¹⁷ The 2008 Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) assessment showed an improvement on the previous assessment of June 2005. In fact, Afghanistan ranked higher than other middle income countries that had been PEFA assessed.¹⁸ However, the focus of the PEFA assessment concentrates on the activities of the central government and is less concerned with how subnational government and public institutions operate.¹⁹ This limited focus has led some in the international community to question whether the PEFA really demonstrates GoA ability to manage assistance funding.²⁰ In addition, to date, progress in public administration reform and efforts to tackle corruption have been largely unsuccessful.²¹

Currently, World Bank figures suggest that around two-thirds of development assistance is spent outside the GoA budget.²² This limits Government ownership and control over development funding and processes. However, because GoA capacity to manage large amounts of funding is perceived as weak and allegations of corruption are widespread, donors are not prepared to provide direct budget support. Donors also have to answer and justify their actions to the taxpayer at home and disburse their funds responsibly. The failure to address corruption which is endemic in the government and public sector has damaged the credibility of both the GoA and donors among the Afghan population.

The creation of the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), managed by the World Bank, offers a compromise for donors who are reluctant to provide direct funding to the GoA.²³ Donors contributing to the ARTF argue that by doing so they are aligning their funding with GoA budget requirements and therefore adhering to the principles of the Paris Declaration. However, this technical fix is not without its problems. Donors are not allowed to set conditions on funds managed through the ARTF but they are

16 Personal Communication with informed international observers, Kabul, 2008.

17 Author interview, Kabul, July 2008.

18 DFID, "PEFA assessment—Afghanistan ranked higher than middle income countries," <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/news/files/afghanistan-pefa.asp>, 11 April 2008 (accessed 12 April 2008) and author interviews, Kabul, 2008.

19 PEFA Secretariat, World Bank, "Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability," *Public Financial Management Performance Measurement Framework, Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability*, (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, June 2005).

20 Author interview, Kabul, September 2008.

21 The World Bank Group, "World Bank Urges Improvement in the Effectiveness of Development Spending in Afghanistan," <http://www.worldbank.org.af/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/AFGHANISTANEXTN/0,,contentMDK:21788937-menuPK:306004-pagePK:2865066-piPK:2865079-theSitePK:305985,00.html>, 3 June 2008, (accessed 12 February 2009).

22 World Bank Group, "World Bank Urges Improvement in the Effectiveness of Development Spending in Afghanistan."

23 The Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) is a multi-donor trust fund managed by the World Bank. Donor funding is pooled to finance recurrent expenditure in the Afghan Government and investment projects.

able express preferences for how funding should be disbursed. Although there are caps on this, preferencing impedes cash flow, results in some areas being underfunded and undermines the Ministry of Finance's ability to manage its own budget. Consequently, levels of alignment and national ownership are reduced.²⁴

2.3 Harmonisation

The Paris Declaration advocates the harmonising of donors' actions to be "collectively effective."²⁵ This is because "[a]id effectiveness is significantly enhanced when there is a good mechanism for aid coordination that builds on shared objectives."²⁶ To be collectively effective there needs to be a coordinating body, and donors and other development actors need to cooperate and coordinate. Currently, the GoA lacks the capacity to take responsibility for managing assistance²⁷ in which case, according to the Paris Declaration guidelines for delivering effective aid in fragile states, "[h]armonisation is all the more crucial in the absence of strong government leadership" and donors should commit to harmonising their activities.²⁸

Although some experienced development actors argue that the Paris Declaration has contributed to improved donor coordination²⁹ many also argue that there is still a lack of coordination, which is reducing aid effectiveness.³⁰ In the absence of government leadership the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) might be expected to lead on harmonisation. However, the mission is often criticised for being weak and lacking staff and resources.³¹ Donors believe that UNAMA should be leading and coordinating the development effort in the country but instead, some donors claim that they have had to manage coordination between themselves.³² Donors state that they are ready to support UNAMA as soon as it provides leadership. In return, UNAMA argues that it already has a central leadership and coordination role, and the strongest mandate for Afghanistan possible without having the executive authority it has in Kosovo and East Timor.³³

The lack of coordination is exacerbated by the number of actors involved in development including the GoA, donors, the United Nations, international and national NGOs, private companies and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) through the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs).³⁴ All these organisations have different mandates and motivations which has complicated the situation by blurring the lines between humanitarian, development, political and military activities.

Some informed observers feel that the international presence in Afghanistan has become so large and complicated that it is almost impossible for anyone to have an

24 Author interview, Kabul, February 2008.

25 *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*.

26 "2008 Survey on Monitoring the Paris Declaration Effective Aid By 2010?" 13.

27 Author interview, Kabul, August 2008.

28 *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*, 7

29 Author interviews, Kabul, February 2009.

30 Author interview, Kabul, September 2008.

31 Author interviews, Kabul, 2008-2009.

32 Author interview, Kabul, July 2008.

33 Author interview, Kabul, August 2008.

34 According to ISAF, PRTs are civil-military institutions which facilitate reconstruction and development activities in less secure areas of Afghanistan, HQ ISAF, "PRT Review," (July 2008).

effective overview of what is going on.³⁵ In addition, there are “real political differences among the international actors in Afghanistan” about prioritisation and sequencing of activities.³⁶ The “[r]ivalry and friction between international actors may be unavoidable. But...continuous infighting...and the...search for operational and organisational concepts to facilitate cooperation...consume time and resources better spent elsewhere.”³⁷ This raises the question whether the costs in time and resources to improve harmonisation are simply too high. Furthermore, given the number of actors and agendas, is it possible, even with a strong coordinating body, to achieve harmonisation?

Harmonisation poses a dilemma for donors because they know that they should work with the elected Government but that the lack of capacity makes this difficult.³⁸ There is concern that without coordination, assistance will fragment because the government cannot coordinate it.³⁹ A trend that could lead to the fragmentation of aid is beginning to emerge as major donors decide to concentrate funds in their areas of military and PRT operations rather than channelling funding to Afghanistan centrally. The first major move towards focusing at a provincial rather than a national level has been made by Canada, which is reducing funding to the UN and the ARTF to concentrate on Kandahar.⁴⁰ If there were a strong mechanism to coordinate funding effectively, the fragmentation of aid could be managed. As it is, no organisation is in a position to allocate funding equitably and ensure that remaining resources are allocated to areas or activities that were overlooked during initial resource allocation.

It is unsurprising that donors prefer to concentrate on areas where their forces operate. There is detailed media coverage of military activities and it is easier to prove effectiveness and demonstrate a coherent well-resourced policy to the taxpayer if military and development activities are focused on a particular geographical location. The need to be accountable to the public at home and to demonstrate that assistance is being delivered in an effort to win “hearts and minds” to support military operations is particularly important when troops are being killed. Given the tension between the political and humanitarian interests of the individual donors, and the need for donors to pursue development and stabilisation goals in Afghanistan simultaneously, is harmonisation possible? Or is it inevitable that the need to concentrate on stability and insecure areas diverts funding and resources from the centre, undermining harmonisation efforts?⁴¹

2.4 Managing for Results

According to the Paris Declaration, “[m]anaging for results means managing and implementing aid in a way that focuses on the desired results and uses information to improve decision-making.”⁴² However, is it possible to manage for results when the desired results are unclear or contested? The international assistance effort in Afghanistan is not motivated by humanitarian concerns alone but by a variety of international and domestic political and security concerns. Consequently, the effective delivery of aid is often

35 Author interviews, Kabul, November 2008 and February 2009.

36 Helge Lurås, Niels Nagelhus Schia, Stina Torjesen and Stale Ulriksen, “From Coherent Policy to Coordinated Practice: Are We Delivering Coherently in Afghanistan,” (2008 Conference, Oslo, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 17-18 November 2008), 3

37 Lurås et al, “From Coherent Policy to Coordinated Practice,” 3.

38 Author interview, Kabul, July 2008.

39 Author interview, Kabul, August 2008.

40 Author interview, Kabul, August 2008.

41 Author interview, Kabul, August 2008.

42 *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*, 7

secondary to other aims. The motivations for invading Afghanistan have not provided a good foundation for international development assistance. The main international actors are still distracted by ongoing fighting in various parts of the country and the influence of regional powers in Afghanistan. Aid is going to be at its most effective when the first priority is ensuring that it has the maximum impact. Obviously to maximise the impact of aid there has to be security, but security needs to be addressed to support the aid effort, if the aid effort is the priority. Currently the situation is reversed: aid is being used to support military and political objectives, and planned accordingly around these other objectives. This reduces the coherence and appropriateness of the aid. Aid is always politicised to a certain extent, but the effect of that politicisation on the impact of aid will reduce its effectiveness. Can aid be effective if assistance is not the primary aim?

The use of assistance in insecure areas to promote stabilisation has resulted in military and development aims becoming confused with each other. The multiple agendas for Afghanistan have blurred the lines between the different interventions and the continuing insecurity means that military and development activities can be taking place in the same area. NGOs claim that their principles and safety are being compromised because Afghan civilians and armed groups associate them with the military.⁴³

The motivations and loyalties of development actors are also being compromised because aid effectiveness best practice encourages donors to support government-led initiatives. However, in a country where war is ongoing, it can appear that donors have aligned themselves in the conflict with the government. NGOs can also be affected in this way. For example NGOs working as facilitating partners on government initiatives, such as the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), are seen as supporters of the GoA.⁴⁴

Another challenge to “managing for results” is the lack of accurate information. Even basic statistics about Afghanistan are lacking, for example, the size of the population, because a full census has never been completed.⁴⁵ 2008 World Bank data shows that the Afghan population is 33 million⁴⁶: for the solar year 1385 (2006-07), the Afghanistan Central Statistics Office estimated the country’s population at 24.1 million.⁴⁷ Without basic knowledge of the country is it possible to manage for results? There is always uncertainty of real needs after conflict because there is a lack of baseline data, poor access to remote areas and limited communications and mobility. Ongoing conflict reduces confidence in the potential peace, limits access to volatile areas, and creates fear and mistrust among the people. Expectations are usually unrealistic and therefore remain unfulfilled. Should development actors be making greater efforts to assess the needs of the people and to manage expectations? Would a more realistic approach that takes into account the practical challenges posed by lack of information improve development impact?

43 Views expressed in an open forum at the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) Conference, 2008 ISAF, (Kabul: September 2008).

44 Author interview, Kabul, March 2008.

45 Thomas H Eighmy, “Afghanistan’s Population - Settled, Nomadic, Displaced and Refugee: their numbers, location and ethnic composition,” (Boston: American Association for the Advancement of Science, Session on Afghanistan and Terrorism: World Transformation?, February 16 2002).

46 “2008 Survey on Monitoring the Paris Declaration Effective Aid By 2010? 3

47 Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Central Statistics Office, *Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2007-08*, Issue no. 28, (1386 (2007-08)).

2.5 Mutual Accountability

The final principle, “mutual accountability,” means that donors and recipient governments are responsible for development results.⁴⁸ Despite the many challenges to aid effectiveness, mutual accountability is considered to be high in Afghanistan because there are mutual assessment mechanisms in place that fulfil the Paris Declaration requirements.⁴⁹ However, it is unclear how the GoA can be accountable when the same Paris Declaration monitoring survey scored Afghanistan low for ownership⁵⁰: If there is little national ownership how can a recipient government be accountable?

It is also unclear how mutual accountability works when relationships are unequal. The idea of accountability flowing both ways was promoted to overcome these asymmetries, but how this is to work has not been specified or understood.⁵¹ To ensure that accountability is mutual, particularly when relationships are unequal, there has to be a sense of moral responsibility between the donors and the recipient country. The emphasis for achieving mutual accountability in aid effectiveness is on producing reports—a technical approach to an issue that demands political will and a sense of mutual obligations. In addition, the monitoring processes for mutual accountability and the other principles of the Paris Declaration are led by the donor demands for information.⁵² This is not a mutual approach.

The Paris Declaration focuses on mutual accountability between the donors and the recipient government, yet many more actors are involved in development assistance, including the United Nations, international and national NGOs, the PRTs, civil society, the general public and the taxpayer in the home country. Mutual accountability is a multi-way process between numerous actors; it is more complicated than establishing vertical and horizontal reporting structures. For all actors to participate in the accountability process, including civil society and the general public, information has to be available. However, simply providing access to information does not achieve mutual accountability because that information has to be understood and analysed in context to determine whether development processes are appropriate and effective and that actors’ attempts to be accountable are genuine.⁵³ Therefore, mutual accountability cannot be achieved unless there are effective watchdog organisations with specialised skills, and there is a level of capacity among the population to assess the quality of the information being circulated. Assuming it is possible to overcome practical issues, improving mutual accountability also incurs financial costs: reports must be produced, reviewed and understood, and then challenged if they are unsatisfactory.

This principle of mutual accountability poses a particular challenge to aid effectiveness because concerns about the perceptions of the general public in a donor’s home country will always come above the interests of the recipient country. Donor governments have to keep their constituents happy to remain in power. Is it possible, therefore, to have true mutual accountability between multiple actors when the most important accountability relationship is between the donor governments and their own taxpayer?

The different types of development interventions also challenge mutual accountability.

48 *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.*

49 “2008 Survey on Monitoring the Paris Declaration Effective Aid By 2010? 17

50 “2008 Survey on Monitoring the Paris Declaration Effective Aid By 2010? 17

51 Meyer and Schultz, *Paris to Accra*, 5

52 Meyer and Schultz, *Paris to Accra*, 5.

53 Author interview, Kabul, July 2008.

International actors argue that mutual accountability is not possible for humanitarian activities because they have to be undertaken rapidly and there is not time to assess situations or the information to examine the impact accurately.⁵⁴ Conflict limits the type of assistance that can be provided but also prevents effective monitoring and evaluation of activities.⁵⁵ Is there mutual accountability in the assistance delivered through the military and the PRTs or is that classed as assistance for stabilisation or reconstruction, and therefore not covered by the Paris Declaration?

Mutual accountability is laudable but the complexity of achieving mutual accountability in Afghanistan seems to have been overlooked. For example, is mutual accountability in Afghanistan meaningless when corruption is perceived to be widespread? Has the international community lost credibility among the Afghan population for appearing to fail to take action against corruption in the GoA? In addition to corruption, ongoing insecurity also poses a challenge to mutual accountability. Is mutual accountability possible while fighting in Afghanistan continues and the major donors have military and political interests that overshadow development agendas?

3. Conclusion

There is no doubt that the Paris Declaration advocates worthy principles, which, if mainstreamed into aid delivery, would enhance aid effectiveness. However, aid effectiveness in Afghanistan cannot be achieved through the Paris Declaration alone because it is technically orientated, does not take into account the political elements of aid or contextual challenges, and is designed to guide development assistance and not relief and stabilisation efforts. Despite being technically-orientated and apparently apolitical, the Paris Declaration principles involve political engagement, such as alignment with national programmes, which may have political motivations. Furthermore, the focus on process rather than impact tempts donors and recipient governments to concentrate on how they do things rather than on what they achieve. It can also mean that donors use the Paris Declaration to measure their aid effectiveness in terms of the Declaration's indicators rather than examining the impact of interventions.

There are many factors which limit the effectiveness of aid in Afghanistan that cannot be addressed within the framework of the Paris Declaration. This paper has highlighted a few of them. The principles of the Paris Declaration provide a foundation for aid effectiveness, however, there are key issues which need to be addressed at the policy level to enhance aid effectiveness in Afghanistan.

54 Author interview, Kabul, September 2008

55 Author interview, Kabul, April 2008

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