

# AFGHANISTAN

LESSONS IDENTIFIED 2001-2014



**PART II**

**Development Cooperation  
in Afghanistan**



Nicole Ball, Sue Emmott, Maja Greenwood,  
Najib Murshed and Pablo Uribe

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LESSONS IDENTIFIED 2001-2014  
PART II

# Development Cooperation in Afghanistan

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# ABBREVIATIONS

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ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
ARTF	Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund
CA	Comprehensive approach
CSO	Civil society organisation
DACAAR	Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DKK	Danish krone
ELECT	Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow
EQUIP	Education Quality Improvement Project
ESPA	Education Support Programme to Afghanistan
EU	European Union
FCAS	Fragile and conflict affected states
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (Germany)
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
LOTFA	Law and Order Trust Fund
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MISFA	Micro-Finance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan
MOD	Ministry of Defence
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MOI	Ministry of Interior
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NABDP	National Area Based Development Programme
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPP	National Priority Programmes
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
PEPS	Primary Education Programme Support
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
PSF	Peace and Stabilisation Fund
QIP	Quick Impact Project



ROI	Region of Origin programme
TA	Technical assistance/technical adviser
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This is one of three studies commissioned by the political parties supporting Denmark's engagement in Afghanistan. Its objective is to contribute to the development of realistic and useful lessons for future comprehensive and integrated efforts in fragile and conflict affected states (FCAS).

From the outset of the international engagement in Afghanistan post-2001, Denmark understood that its development, security and political/diplomatic tools were all necessary to combat terrorism and support the transition from Taliban rule. As part of this effort, Denmark provided some DKK 4.3 billion development assistance to Afghanistan between 2002 and 2014 to support national, regional and global security and poverty reduction in Afghanistan.

The 2012 evaluation of Danish development co-operation found that Denmark had made a difference with its development assistance. Support was relevant, aligned to Afghan needs and delivered in accordance with Afghan priorities and plans. Denmark has actively promoted agreed international principles for development co-operation including ownership, state-building, gender equality and human rights protection and recognition of linkages between political, security and development objectives. Danish development co-operation has also reflected the belief in multilateral organisations as a means of promoting Danish development objectives by delivering a substantial amount of assistance through multilateral channels.

At the same time, delivering development assistance in Afghanistan was highly challenging. Denmark, in common with other members of the international community, had to navigate the difficult waters of intense strategic interest, limited capacity and reach of state institutions, increasingly entrenched corruption, multiple lines of conflict domestically and regionally, a profound lack of trust between state and citizen and a deteriorating security environment. This process has produced a number of lessons concerning the integration of politics, development, stability and security and delivering development assistance.

## LESSONS

### Integrating politics, development, stability and security.

- 1 An integrated approach requires clear shared strategic objectives.** Engaging in FCAS such as Afghanistan requires a multifaceted approach based on an understanding of the complexities of the environment, in particular its political aspects. In order to deliver the most effective integrated response, international partners such as Denmark need to bring all relevant actors – political, development and security – around the table to establish a shared contextual understanding and to determine how each set of actors can contribute to the integrated effort. Specifically with regard to development co-operation, it is essential to understand the complete integrated effort in order to deliver development effectively.
- 2 Integrated implementation requires that all tools are used to their best advantage.** While Denmark's capacity for joint strategy development and joint planning has improved over time, joint implementation remains challenging. There is some evidence of productive collaboration between Danish and other partners' development, political and security tools in Afghanistan. Questions remain about the most appropriate mix of tools and approaches to use in areas where the dominant activities are war-fighting and stabilisation and where international financing risks exacerbating or creating social and political divisions. Experience suggests that the use of development tools in this context must be carefully assessed for potential impact on security, corruption and political relationships.
- 3 A broad political consensus on engagement creates space for an adaptive and flexible development approach.** Proactively engaging Denmark's political leadership in discussions on strategic objectives proved to be an effective tool for generating broad political consensus and protecting development assistance from political brokering unrelated to the Afghanistan engagement. At the same time, the trade-offs needed to achieve such consensus had consequences for the scope of the development programme, notably in Helmand Province.

### DELIVERING DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

- 4 Developing ownership of state-building is fundamentally a political process, requiring donors to have a deep understanding of the particular context and to be prepared to provide support over the long term.** In FCAS, power is continually contested. Power struggles take place within and between all levels of government as well as between state and non-state actors. Ownership of change processes is affected by the political and economic interests of multiple stakeholders. For example, co-operation between authorities at the national and provincial levels was often

weak due to mutual mistrust. This complicates the application of the foundational principle of the Paris Declaration – ownership – which commits donors to respect partner country leadership and to help strengthen both the state’s capacity to deliver and the civil society’s capacity to demand development and human rights. Experience shows that donors need to understand the context in which they operate, to adapt continually to change and to be realistic about the length of time required for ownership to develop and take root.

- 5 Providing assistance in fragile and conflict affected states requires careful balancing between promoting principles of aid effectiveness and ensuring adequate oversight of the use of funds.** Developing the kind of ownership envisaged by the principles of donor engagement, in which a process originated by outsiders becomes owned by domestic actors with the political will to carry forward the same agenda, was inevitably a challenge. Fourteen years after the international intervention, Afghanistan continues to be a very fragile state which, by definition, means that it is not yet capable of assuring basic security, rule of law, services or economic opportunities for all citizens and has not yet established public confidence and trust. With corruption deeply affecting the legitimacy of the state, Denmark and other donors have been reminded that the promotion of country-led processes can result in both positive and negative development outcomes. Therefore, at the same time as promoting principles of aid effectiveness such as ownership and demonstrating the necessary strategic patience, it is important that the monitoring mechanisms of bilateral and multilateral channels are strong enough to prevent abuse of donor funds undermining state legitimacy.
- 6 When decisions are made to add substantial capacity through technical assistance (TA), it is important to actively address sustainability in order to avoid creating a parallel civil service.** Donors including Denmark have funded tens of thousands of technical advisers (TA) to address profound capacity weakness that characterised the line ministries from 2001 onward. Donors’ strong belief that improved service delivery would convince Afghans it was in their best interests to support the government rather than the armed opposition and that TA would enable this to occur rapidly led to support for high levels of TA. In many ministries, TA became a vehicle for patronage and graft. Although it was assumed that TA would be a temporary means of developing the capacity of the core civil service, for over a decade no plans were put in place to phase out TA and advisers became entrenched as a parallel civil service. While lessons about the limitations of the TA model were identified globally decades ago, donors in Afghanistan were slow to demand TA to focus on capacity transfer instead of doing-the-job.

- 7 While the type and size of projects needs to be tailored to context, including Danish strategic priorities, and can be expected to change over time, minimising the number of projects in the portfolio and focusing on large interventions that support delivery of results at scale can create space for deeper engagement with partners, including policy and political work to improve donor understanding of the context.** In a high stakes context the pressure to deliver results quickly tends to produce a large number of projects. In Afghanistan at the time when Denmark was increasing funding, a large portfolio compromised its ability to engage with multi-lateral partners and the government during the design of new programmes that were better able to deliver results at scale. There are compelling reasons in an initial phase to fund a variety of partners and issues and certain themes such as human rights and gender will always be a high political priority for Denmark, both of which can require funding of smaller interventions. At the same time, the decision in the 2014/15-2017 Country Programme to focus development co-operation resources on a small number of larger multilateral projects has meant that Denmark can deliver greater impact through its portfolio, including through policy dialogue.
- 8 Denmark's 'risk willing' approach is appropriate for a context where there are many serious risks. It can best be supported by strong monitoring and evaluation arrangements that are adjusted as the context changes.** Time and experience have demonstrated that strong monitoring arrangements are essential to manage risk effectively and that these arrangements need to be established in the early stages of an engagement. This is challenging when Danish policy gives responsibility to implementing partners to monitor the results they are responsible for creating. It is even more challenging when these partners are unable to visit insecure areas to verify what is being reported. Approaches to monitoring have adapted to changes in the context but they have done so slowly. In future engagements it is crucial to minimise the risks by allocating time and financial resources to ensuring that monitoring arrangements are the best possible in the context and are adjusted rapidly as the context changes so that programmes can be adjusted as necessary.
- 9 For Denmark to be an influential voice in aid coordination staff need sufficient seniority, strong country knowledge, relevant technical expertise and a consistent presence.** In a context as political as Afghanistan, where the multiple agendas of the largest donors dominate, and where there are a multitude of coordination forums and actors, participating in aid coordination is challenging. For a small donor to have influence is extremely challenging. In spite of the inherent disadvantage, there is some evidence that small donors can have a degree of influence if, depending on the forum, they have strong country knowledge, relevant technical experience and sufficient seniority. Alliances such as Nordic Plus can also be beneficial in strengthening influence.

## CONCLUSIONS

Five main conclusions emerge from the lessons that arise out of this study.

**Context matters.** Denmark's experience in Afghanistan underscores the validity of the first principle for good international engagement in fragile states: Take context as the starting point. It also demonstrates the complexities of applying this principle. To maximise the ability to understand context and mitigate aggravating conflict through development assistance, Danish experience suggests the importance of cross government co-operation at the strategic and planning levels, an integrated Embassy, staff with appropriate specialisations (area, development and political) both at headquarters and the Embassy, strong working relations with country/regional specialists, postings of adequate length and a system for developing and utilising institutional memory. Providing optimal amounts of these inputs is challenging, especially in the early phases of a transition process, but contextual understanding benefits from efforts to maximise them.

**Because the context is complex and evolves over time, it is essential to be flexible and to adapt programming as donors become more familiar with the environment.** Understanding of context deepens over time as international actors become more familiar with the environment, but programming cannot wait for this knowledge to mature. Even when donors and implementers are relatively familiar with the context, it is impossible to foresee all consequences – positive and negative – of development interventions or the way in which the context will evolve. Programming decisions inevitably have to be made based on imperfect information and progressively adapted as more information becomes available.

**It is important to try to do what is right.** Denmark's development co-operation with Afghanistan has strongly reflected its support for internationally agreed principles governing the delivery of development assistance. While delivering against these principles has confronted a number of obstacles, Danish officials generally agreed it is important to maintain a principled approach, as this may help lay the foundation for a more positive outcome in the future.

**Integrated strategies, planning and implementation are all important.** During the course of the engagement in Afghanistan, Denmark laid the groundwork for applying an integrated approach in FCAS (building in part on its engagement in Iraq). Progress was greatest at the strategic level at headquarters and that facilitated the development of the Helmand Plans. The record on integrated implementation of these strategies and plans has been mixed and has raised questions about the viability of joint working. In particular, evidence is unclear about the degree to which development activities (as distinct from stabilisation activities financed through development co-operation) are feasible in highly insecure environments.

**When working in fragile and conflict affected states where development occurs alongside a stabilising military presence, it is important to make every effort to learn from experience.** The process of undertaking this study has highlighted the importance of being willing and able to learn from experience. While this conclusion is by no means unique to Afghanistan or even other FCAS, learning from experience is more challenging in these environments because of the multiple players involved, the complexity of the operating context and the high political stakes. The Danish experience in Afghanistan, in common with that of other members of the international community, underscores the importance of systems that promote critical reflection to enable organisations, not just individuals, to learn even in environments where the political pressure for positive results is strong.



# INTRODUCTION

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## BACKGROUND

### **Purpose**

This report is one of three studies commissioned in November 2014 by the political parties supporting the Danish civil and military engagement in Afghanistan. Its objective is to draw lessons from the experience of implementing development co-operation in an unstable and insecure environment where a stabilising military presence operated simultaneously. The objective of this study is to contribute to the development of realistic and useful lessons for future comprehensive and integrated efforts in fragile and conflict affected states (FCAS).

Denmark has provided substantial development assistance to the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan since 2001 with the aim of contributing to national, regional and global security as well as poverty reduction. Danish development assistance has been concentrated in: 1) state-building, 2) livelihoods, 3) education, 4) the resettlement of refugees and the internally displaced and 5) financial assistance to the Afghan National Police (ANP).

Denmark has also supported activities implemented by Danish non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in Afghanistan, humanitarian assistance and a range of small projects funded through the Local Grant Authority. The portfolio review carried out for this study indicates that Denmark disbursed approximately DKK 4.3 billion in development assistance to Afghanistan between 2002 and 2014.

### **Results to date**

The 2012 evaluation of Danish assistance to Afghanistan found that Denmark made a difference with its development co-operation (MFA, 2012). Overall, support was relevant and aligned to Afghan needs and delivered in accordance with Afghan priorities and plans. Results varied across the sectors receiving assistance. Support to education contributed to more Afghan children getting an education, including a growing number of girls. Denmark's funding for activities such as the National Solidary Programme (NSP) and micro-finance programmes helped to create new jobs. Access to health care for ordinary citizens increased and child mortality declined. Returning refugees received assistance to enable them to rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

The state-building portfolio delivered more mixed results. Danish development assistance helped establish the Afghanistan legislature, the Civil Society and Human Rights Network and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. It also helped build the capacity of the Ministry of Education (MOE) in some respects. But efforts supported by Denmark to disband illegal armed groups as well as to sustain and reform

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the Afghan National Police through the Law and Order Trust Fund (LOTFA) were only partially successful. While the payroll system was implemented (albeit with some challenges that were progressively addressed), LOTFA's record on promoting institutional capacity development in the Ministry of Interior (MOI) was very weak throughout the period under study (UNDP, 2012).

The way Danish development assistance was provided also mattered. The evaluation found that the alignment of Danish development assistance with Afghan policies and priorities and the delivery of that aid in line with aid effectiveness principles contributed strongly to the effectiveness of Danish assistance.

At the same time, one of the biggest question marks about post 2001 assistance to Afghanistan on the part of all donors is the sustainability of progress recorded. The 2012 evaluation found that long-term funding would be necessary for the sustainability of Danish interventions. A World Bank survey of international development co-operation in Afghanistan noted serious concerns about sustainability (World Bank, 2013, p. 4). The continuation of Danish assistance through the Country Programme 2014/15-2017 is intended to address this issue to the extent possible.

## METHODOLOGY

### The approach

This is a strategic level review, which has examined policies, strategies and activities with a focus on the development aspects of Danish policy toward Afghanistan. At the same time, it has sought to identify and understand linkages between the strategic and implementation levels.

At the strategic level, the study has examined Danish policies and strategic frameworks (including the definition of a comprehensive and integrated strategy), their alignment with Government of Afghanistan policies and strategies, coordination with other donors, the geographic and sectoral allocation of resources, and the choice of aid modalities.

At the implementation level, the study has examined how strategic choices are put into practice. For example it has asked questions such as:

- How did the comprehensive and integrated approach function in reality?
- How were synergies, contradictions and dilemmas between development, security and stability addressed at the strategic and implementation levels?

- What was the experience with different aid modalities in the Afghan context?
- What guided decisions on the choice of programme elements?
- What was necessary to achieve Afghan ownership?
- How did the decision to finance nationally (versus through the Provincial Reconstruction Team, or PRT) work out?
- How did aid coordination in Afghanistan work in practice?
- What risk management strategies did Denmark employ and how did they function?

### Data sources

The information that has fed into this analysis has been derived primarily from qualitative methods of research. Data were collected through two interrelated methods: analysis of documentation and interviews with key informants.

Documents consulted fell into three main categories:

- Strategic documentation from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Ministry of Defence (MOD), including country strategy level, sectoral strategies, the comprehensive and integrated approach and addressing topics relevant to the study such as stabilisation, reconstruction, aid modality choices, and partnership possibilities;
- Programming documents (from Denmark, or other relevant donors in the case of multi-donor initiatives), annual programme reviews and independent evaluations conducted by Denmark and other donors, where available, as well as Afghanistan's monitoring reports on the implementation of both the fragile states principles and the New Deal.<sup>1</sup>
- Policy related analytical papers and published studies on security, stabilisation, post-conflict reconstruction, mainly from academic and research institutions, often written by analysts with experience in Afghanistan.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with key informants. Members of the Team made several visits to Copenhagen and undertook a two week mission to Kabul. Interviews were also carried out in London and Washington, DC as well as by phone and Skype. Informants fell into the following categories:

<sup>1</sup> The New Deal calls for peacebuilding and state-building objectives to be at the forefront of international efforts in conflict-affected countries (OECD, 2011).

- Current and former officials from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defence at headquarters in Copenhagen and at post in Afghanistan and locally contracted programme officers at the Embassy in Kabul.
- Current and former Afghan government officials, including provincial officials.
- Officials from relevant donors at headquarters in London (UK) and Washington (US and World Bank) and at post in Afghanistan (USAID, DFID, GIZ, World Bank, European Union (EU), Sweden and Norway).
- Staff from implementing agencies in Kabul (local authorities, UN agencies, NGOs).
- Scholars/researchers in independent think tanks.
- Afghan individuals with insights into key issues. The complete list of individuals interviewed is found below.

Finally, earlier drafts of this study have been discussed intensively with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and have also been reviewed by the study reference group consisting of representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence, Royal Danish Defence College and DIIS.

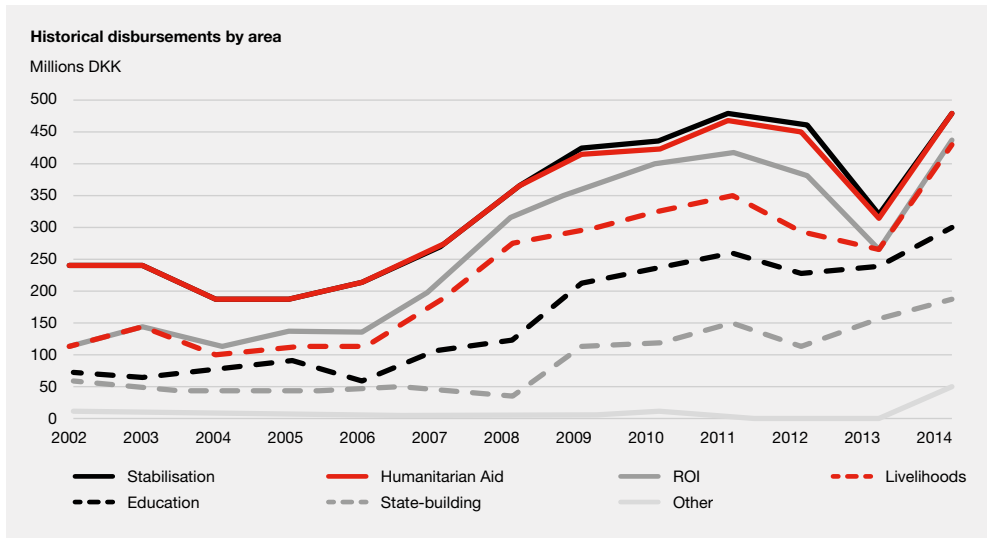
#### **Methodological challenges and limitations**

During the course of the study, the Team faced a number of methodological challenges. These included continuous and increasingly rapid staff turnover among Danish and other international staff, recent change of government in Kabul, lack of institutional memory, difficulty among interlocutors in identifying and/or articulating lessons learned, certain types of data not being readily accessible and a problematic security situation in Afghanistan.

The Team have sought to mitigate these constraints to the extent feasible, for example by interviewing as many individuals as possible who were responsible for developing and implementing donor policies in Afghanistan over the 2001-2014 period, thereby gathering a wide range of views and in-depth information. Nonetheless, these factors have all influenced the Team's ability to determine the lessons from Danish development assistance. For example, while it was possible to travel to Kabul, Afghan informants (officials and other individuals) are underrepresented in the interview sample. Similarly, the Team were given access to a wide variety of Danish document as well as documents from partners related to the programmes and projects supported. But hand-over notes and end of tour debriefings that would have provided evidence of changes in practices and approach have only been archived or produced to a limited extent.

This report has examined data on the disbursement of Danish financing for Afghanistan between 2002 and 2014. Figure 1 shows that the total amount of financing disbursed grew steadily over that period. Humanitarian assistance initially accounted for a large share of the funds disbursed. Although the graph indicates a decline in aid for humanitarian assistance, it should be noted that, since 2004, humanitarian needs have also been addressed under a more comprehensive initiative (Region of Origin Initiative)<sup>2</sup>.

Figure 1



Between 2005 and 2014 Denmark’s annual disbursement increased substantially, especially those for livelihoods (mainly after 2007) and state-building (after 2009). The large reduction (31%) in the total annual disbursements in 2013 reflects a technical change in the disbursement schedule rather than a reduction in Danish support to Afghanistan. Disbursements in 2014 were the highest of the 2002-2014 period.

The following discussion provides more detail on sectoral, on-/off-budget and bilateral/multilateral allocations.

2 The Terms of Reference specify that the scope of this study includes activities in the following areas: 1) State-building, 2) Livelihoods, 3) Education, 4) Region of Origin Initiative and 5) Financial assistance through the Local Grant Authority. For greater clarity, the Study Team has made minor modifications to this classification. We have created the categories Humanitarian Aid, Stabilisation and Other to include interventions that did not fit into the initial groups. Likewise, the projects funded by the Local Grant Authority are distributed among the other categories according to their sectoral nature. It is also important to clarify that interventions under “ROI” can in most cases be classified as Humanitarian Aid. However, given the importance of this component for Danish assistance to Afghanistan, we have kept ROI as a separate group.

## Sectoral allocations

The distribution of funding across the three main sectors receiving most Danish support was roughly equal: livelihoods (around 22%), state-building (24%) and education (21%). Support to the livelihoods component was relatively consistent during the period. The highest level was reached in 2008 and was concentrated in two programmes: NSP and Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan (MISFA). Contributions for state-building took on greater importance from 2009, particularly through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) and for the ANP (through LOTFA). The support for education was delivered through fewer programmes with an important emphasis on on-budget modalities.<sup>3</sup> During the first four years, the support was almost exclusively through the Primary Education Programme Support (PEPS), followed by a period of a relatively higher diversification in which major national level interventions were still very important.

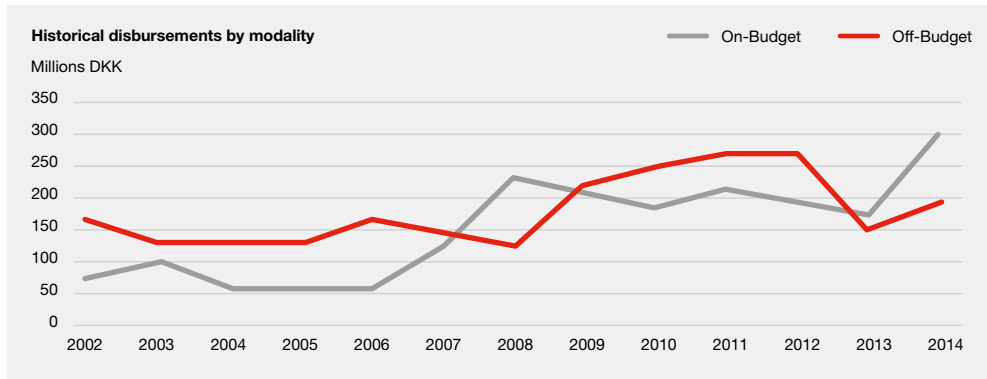
### On-budget/off-budget allocations.

Overall, the distribution of funds between on-budget and off-budget modalities was relatively even throughout the period under study: 46% of aid across sectors was implemented by the Afghan public sector and 54% was delivered under off-budget modalities. This means that Denmark was well positioned to achieve the 2012 Tokyo agreement target of delivering at least 50% of aid on-budget.

Figure 2 shows how Danish on-and off-budget financing varied over time. Between 2002 and 2006, the prevalence of off-budget assistance reflected the state's limited capacity for service delivery and law enforcement. From 2006, the steady increase of on-budget assistance reflected emerging aid effectiveness priorities. It also demonstrated a strong commitment to strengthening Afghan public institutions, whose capacity had increased since 2002 but required additional reinforcement. With its peak in 2008, an important share of funds was being channelled through various on-budget mechanisms across different sectors. This included multilateral contributions through the ARTF (mainly MISFA) and bilateral allocations to NSP and PEPS.

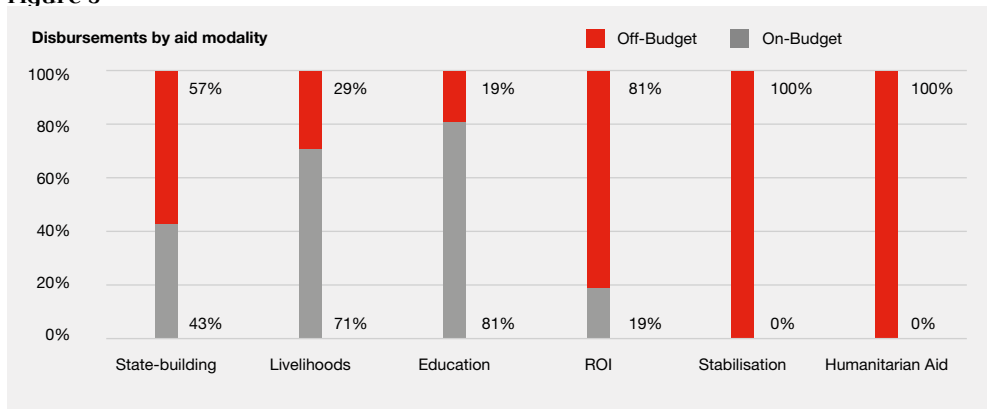
<sup>3</sup> On-budget expenditure refers to aid financing that appears in the Afghan budget, passes through the government's treasury account and is executed by the government. Off-budget expenditure is aid financing that is directly executed by the donor or an entity contracted by the donor. It may or may not appear in the country's budget. For example, in 2005 the World Bank noted that most security expenditure in Afghanistan was recorded in the budget but executed by donors or their agents rather than by the government (World Bank, 2005, p. 33).

Figure 2



From 2009 off-budget aid prevailed, while on-budget flows remained more or less at a steady level until 2013. These off-budget contributions comprised a wide variety of interventions implemented by different types of organisations including the UN system, NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs). From 2014 the pattern of aid delivery changed with a clear majority of the funds channelled through a few on-budget initiatives, mainly ARTF, NSP (bilateral allocations) and LOTFA. This reflected a conscious attempt by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to reduce the size of the portfolio to make it more manageable in the face of reduced human resources. Figure 3 shows a wide variation in the utilisation of these two modalities across sectors for the full period 2002-2014. All of the interventions financed under stabilisation and humanitarian aid were off-budget along with the vast majority of Region of Origin (ROI) funding.

Figure 3



In contrast, education was predominantly on-budget. This was the major bilateral investment for Denmark with a number of different activities, mostly implemented by the MOE. For livelihoods, the on-budget interventions were more diversified both in terms of implementing partners – mainly Ministry of Reconstruction and Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) and Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock – and channels (bilateral/multilateral). Around half of the funds were channelled through ARTF, mainly for MISFA and the NSP. NSP was also funded bilaterally.

### Bilateral/multilateral allocations

The majority of Danish aid to Afghanistan was channelled bilaterally (62%), while 38% went through multilateral institutions. Figure 4 shows the distribution across sectors for the full period 2002-2104. Contributions for state-building, livelihoods and to a lesser extent ROI were channelled bilaterally and multilaterally in almost equal proportions. In contrast, humanitarian aid, education and stabilisation activities were predominantly bilateral.

Figure 4

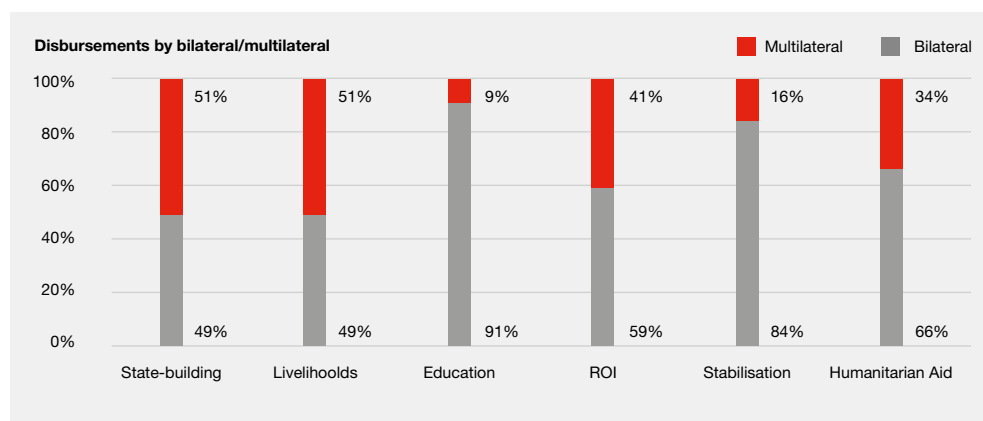


Figure 5 provides detail for the major multilateral contributions in all sectors during the period 2002-2014. By far the largest was the contribution to ARTF. This included contributions to the ARTF's recurrent window and its investment window. The recurrent window covered salaries for civil servants (both tashkeel and those on contract) and non-security operations and maintenance expenditures.<sup>4</sup> Denmark allocated approximately DKK 200 million to the recurrent window. The investment window has covered national development programmes. Denmark's contribution to the investment window focused on support for MISFA (nearly DKK 260 million) and NSP (DKK 45 million).

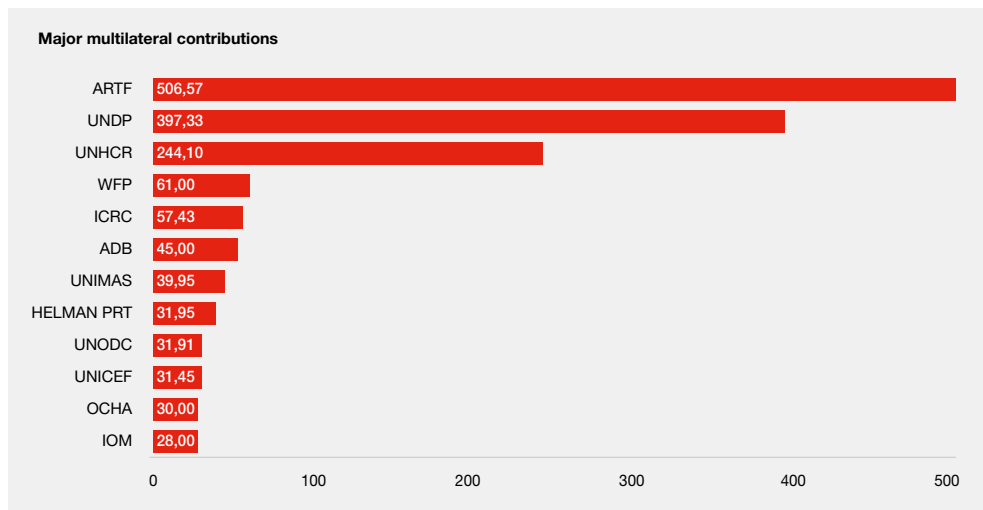
The second largest channel of multilateral funding was contributions to UNDP. These covered Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow (ELECT) at DKK 106 million, LOTFA at DKK 135 million and Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme at

<sup>4</sup> The term tashkeel refers to the approved list of government civil servants which forms the basis of budget and payroll calculations.



nearly DKK 45 million. Other UN agencies that received Danish support were the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Food Programme (WFP), Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS).

**Figure 5**



## REPORT STRUCTURE

### The remainder of this report is divided into three parts

Chapter 'The context of Danish development assistance in Afghanistan' outlines the context in which development assistance was delivered in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014. It examines the context of the international intervention, Danish efforts to develop a comprehensive and integrated approach to Denmark's engagement in Afghanistan, Denmark's approach to development assistance and the Afghan context.

Chapter 'Lessons' examines nine lessons relating to an integrated approach and the delivery of Danish development assistance that have emerged from Denmark's development engagement in Afghanistan during this period. Lessons on developing an integrated approach focus on the importance of strategic clarity, integrated implementation and political dialogue. Lessons on the delivery of development assistance include fostering ownership of state-building, developing capacity, managing the portfolio, managing risk and influencing aid coordination.

Chapter 'Conclusions' briefly considers five main conclusions that have emerged from this study. All programmes referenced in this document have either been funded or cofunded by Denmark. Unless otherwise specified, all examples given are Afghanistan-specific.



# THE CONTEXT OF DANISH DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE IN AFGHANISTAN

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This chapter examines four key elements of the context in which Danish development assistance to Afghanistan was delivered between 2001 and 2014: 1) the context of the international intervention, 2) the development of a comprehensive and integrated Danish approach to Denmark's engagement in Afghanistan, 3) the Danish approach to development assistance, and 4) the context in Afghanistan.

## THE CONTEXT OF THE INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION

Following the attacks of 11 September 2001 on the United States (US) by al-Qaeda, the US government assembled a broad-based military coalition (including the Afghan Northern Alliance) under Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Its aim was to remove Afghanistan's Taliban regime, which had harboured al-Qaeda, and destroy the ability of al-Qaeda to continue operations. The UN Security Council passed several resolutions backing the fight against terrorism and in November 2001 called on its Member States to support the transition in Afghanistan by helping to create state structures and providing humanitarian assistance and long-term social and economic reconstruction and rehabilitation aid to the people of Afghanistan.

The Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-establishment of Permanent Government Institutions (the Bonn Agreement), signed on 5 December 2001 was aimed at re-creating the State of Afghanistan. It focussed on the establishment of a transitional authority and a legal framework and judicial system to guide the country while a new constitution was prepared. The Bonn Agreement was silent on issues of reconstruction and rehabilitation. The framework for reconstruction, rehabilitation and longer term development has been set by UN resolutions and agreements reached at international donor conferences since 2002 and by the 2006 Afghanistan Compact which set out a five year development plan for Afghanistan.

The scale of military, development and humanitarian assistance has been unprecedented.<sup>5</sup> The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), led by NATO, was established by UN Resolution 1386 in December 2001 to support this process. The international donor community pledged \$4.5 billion at the Tokyo Conference in January 2002. Some of these were multi-year pledges (MFA Japan 2002, pp. 3-4). Regular pledging conferences were held throughout the period under study. In March 2002, the UN Security Council

<sup>5</sup> The volume and sectoral allocation of Danish development and humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan is discussed in the section 'Portfolio review'. The Danish approach to development assistance is discussed in the section 'Denmark's approach to development assistance'.

established the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, a political UN mission requested by the Government of Afghanistan to assist in laying the foundations for sustainable peace and development.

The US's dominant position in Afghanistan shaped the nature of the international engagement post-9/11. The response focused on countering terrorism, establishing security and promoting socioeconomic development. Little attention was given to achieving a political settlement either within Afghanistan (including a US refusal to negotiate with the Taliban) or between Afghanistan and its neighbours (notably Pakistan, Iran and India).

The US decision to go to war in Iraq in 2003 caused a significant shift in military-diplomatic attention away from Afghanistan until 2006. This helped to create the conditions for the resurgence of the Taliban and other anti-government elements in the intervening years. The subsequent deterioration of the security environment led the US to declare a military and financial 'surge' in 2009 to address problems of insurgency. In 2011, a process of transitioning responsibility for security from the International Security Assistance Force to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) began. The transition process was completed by the end of 2014.

## TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE AND INTEGRATED DANISH APPROACH

In 2001 Denmark joined OEF as a close and trusted ally of the US. On 11 December the Danish Parliament voted to contribute 'to the international effort against terrorism' through the provision of military forces and humanitarian and reconstruction assistance (Parliament, 2001). On 11 January 2002, the Parliament approved Danish support to ISAF in order to 'provide the proper and secure environment for the political transition process, the relief effort and the reconstruction of Afghanistan' (Parliament, 2002).

In 2001 Denmark committed DKK 5 million to a UN trust fund to cover urgent needs of the interim Afghan administration. At the January 2002 meeting in Tokyo, Denmark pledged DKK 500 million over five years to support the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan. This amount was soon to become much higher. Total disbursement of Danish development support to Afghanistan over the period 2001-2014 eventually amounted to some DKK 4.3 billion.

In 2004, Denmark established the Comprehensive Approach (CA) to promote the effective collaboration of civilian and military actors in conflict-affected areas. The CA was reflected in the two strands of Danish cross-government strategies for Afghanistan: 'to contribute to national, regional and global security by preventing that the country once again becomes a haven for terrorists' and 'to contribute to the establishment of a stable and more developed Afghanistan that can take care of its own security, continue the

democratic developments and promote respect for human rights' (MFA&MOD, 2008, p. 1; MFA, 2015). In order to apply the CA to Afghanistan, Denmark established the Afghanistan Task Force in 2007.

Denmark deployed small numbers of military troops to Kabul-based activities from 2002 to 2006 and to Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Mazar-e-Sharif (2002-2006), Feyzabad (2005-2008) and Chaghcharan (2005-2011). At that time the PRT was seen mainly as a stability promoting force to support the ANSF. Its role was to create the stability that was considered a necessary precondition for the success of the central and local authorities' development plans, as well as for the implementation of international assistance for reconstruction and development (MFA, 2005, pp. 11-12).

In 2006 Denmark joined the United Kingdom (UK) in the Helmand PRT, significantly increasing its military contribution, at a time when the security situation had begun to erode. In addition to military troops and in some cases police advisers, the PRT deployed civilian advisers to support capacity building and development coordination with the provincial authorities through advice and minor projects. The PRT was to be the locus of combined (UK, US and Danish) political, military, and civilian efforts in Helmand Province (MOD&MFA, 2008, p. 4).

In addition to force protection implemented by military CIMIC teams, small stabilisation projects were initiated by Danish soldiers and/or civilian advisers, consisting of supplies of school materials, health care and water supply. In addition to this, the civilian advisors initiated capacity building of local authorities including the provincial Department for Education and the Governor's Office. By 2007 Denmark had come to understand that it was possible to achieve 'immediate, visible results of the efforts in Helmand. However, the scattered implementation areas and the insufficient local anchorage have reduced the impact of the efforts.... Efforts will focus on fewer strategic implementation areas and work will be targeted at greater correlation between national and local activities' (MOD&MFA, 2008, p. 5)

Prior to Denmark joining the Helmand PRT in 2006, development and military assistance had largely operated in parallel. After 2007, the Afghanistan strategies and annual Helmand Plans expressed the intention at the strategic level to integrate Denmark's political, security and development approaches and tools. As a backdrop to the increase in the military presence from 2007, the Afghanistan Strategy 2008-2012 underscored the objective 'of gradually shifting the balance towards increased civilian efforts and a more withdrawn military role' in recognition of the fact that the long term solution in Afghanistan had to be political and developmental rather than military. The guiding motto for the Danish engagement has been that the efforts should be as military as necessary and as civilian as possible so that, by 2014, the Danish civilian efforts would predominate. For that reason, Denmark also made the strategic choice to continue state-building efforts at the national level by, among other things, focussing most of its

development assistance at the national level and on national programmes (rather than through the PRT). Another factor that enabled this choice was the large amounts of funding for activities in Helmand Province made available by the US and the UK, the senior partners in the PRT.

## DENMARK'S APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

Denmark has been active in promoting a series of internationally agreed principles for development assistance, starting with the five fundamental principles for aid effectiveness agreed with the Paris Declaration in 2005 and progressing through their modification as Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States in 2007 to the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States in 2011. Danish development assistance to Afghanistan has been framed by these principles, in particular a focus on state-building as the central objective in FCAS and recognition of the links between political, security and development objectives.

Denmark has provided development and humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people since the 1980s. In accordance with good donor practice, Denmark made an early strategic decision after 2001 to focus most of its development resources on a nationwide approach. This continued after joining the Helmand PRT. Eighty-two percent of Danish development financing was allocated for the nationwide approach. This stood in contrast to many donor countries that focused all or a larger proportion of their assistance in the province of their PRT, creating considerable imbalance between provinces.

The choices made by Denmark about how to allocate funding in Afghanistan have been guided by: 1) Afghan ownership with the close involvement of Afghan civil society, 2) state-building, 3) capacity building of state institutions, 4) human rights, 5) women's rights, 6) support for multilateral aid modalities and 7) aid coordination (MFA, 2002).

Danish allocation of assistance has also reflected Denmark's strong belief that multilateral organisations are important instruments for promoting Danish development policy objectives. There has therefore been a trend to channel more development funds through the multilateral system. Under the 2012 policy "The Right to a Better Life," Denmark is committed to strengthening the ability of the multilateral system to address complex global challenges and to promoting Danish development policy on fighting poverty and promoting human rights, which are seen as fundamental enablers of development and progress.

State-building was at the heart of the Bonn process initiated in 2001 and Denmark has endeavoured to deliver development assistance consistent with this objective. This approach was based on the assumption that for the central government to have 'the strong backing of the majority of the Afghan population, who are tired of decades of

fighting and unrest' (MFA, 2005), the Afghan authorities must be able to deliver services. The Danish approach envisioned the eventual creation of a central state that operated by the rule of law and had control of the security situation, where ordinary Afghans were empowered to engage in the process of governance and the local and national levels of government functioned in an integrated manner.

Danish development co-operation with Afghanistan was guided by the series of international conferences held almost every year. Until 2005 the international community considered Afghanistan to be a post-conflict country, albeit one with a precarious security situation. From 2006 onwards, as security deteriorated steadily, there was increasing focus on rule of law and governance of the security sector. In 2008 then President Karzai approved the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS). This constituted the first national framework with which donors could align their support. In 2010 the Afghan-led Kabul Process, which had been agreed at the London Conference, sought to confirm that responsibility for the development of Afghanistan lay with the Government. Donors were asked to commit to align at least 80% of their assistance with the 23 National Priority Programmes (NPPs) and to spend half of their funds on-budget. Denmark broadly met these targets.

International delivery against the principles for development assistance has been very challenging. In 2010, the Afghanistan Country Report of the global Monitoring Principles Report observed that application of the principles was poor (OECD, 2010). It noted that Afghanistan was one of the most complex environments to understand and operate in as a result of intense conflict and strategic interest. Operationally there were a wide range of sensitive issues that could not easily be discussed. These included the impact of the military effort which was both positive and negative. The role of the military influenced every aspect of how donors perceived and responded to all the principles, especially Do No Harm, which was repeatedly violated. Another sensitive issue was the limited capacity and reach of state institutions. At the practical level, other challenging aspects were the diversity of national and international actors, the multiplication of coordination mechanisms, and the turnover of international staff.

Therefore, although Denmark tried to do the right thing in accordance with international best practice principles, there were many contradictory factors at play that influenced the impact of Danish development co-operation.

## THE CONTEXT IN AFGHANISTAN

At the time of the international intervention in 2001, Afghanistan had been at war for more than two decades. Human development indicators were among the worst in the world and approximately one quarter of the population (over six million people) had fled to neighbouring Pakistan and Iran. The challenge for recovery was enormous but, in the

euphoria that followed the overthrow of the Taliban regime, the assumption of the international community and war weary Afghans was that reconstruction could take place quickly. Millions of Afghans returned in a short space of time, full of hope for a better future.

For many in the international community the history of Afghanistan started with the highly repressive Taliban regime and its downfall after 9/11. It has been common to use this era as the benchmark for progress and some of the most popular indicators of success, such as the number of girls in school, or the participation of women have used the lowest possible benchmark. However, dating back to the time of the monarchy (1926-1973) there were considerably more options for those living in urban areas (notably Herat, Kabul, Kandahar and Mazar-e-Sharif), especially for women. At the height of the Communist era, nearly half of Afghanistan's doctors, civil servants and teachers were women and they were employed in every field of administration, from police forces to judgeships of family law courts to factories. In the countryside the situation was entirely different and there was historic resistance to any aspect of modernisation enforced by the central government. Following the downfall of the communist government in 1992, the Mujahideen, who were unable to form a workable government, were responsible for several years of infighting that devastated the capital city Kabul and parts of the country.

In the period from 2002 to 2015 there is no doubt that a great deal has been achieved in some of the most difficult conditions. There have been two cycles of elections and political power has transferred, albeit amidst allegations of fraud, from one government to another. Human development indicators, such as life expectancy, maternal and child mortality, and school enrolment rates have improved significantly. At the same time there have been serious failures such as in agriculture and urban infrastructure. Following the near collapse of Kabul Bank as a result of massive fraud and the pervasiveness of large scale corruption in general, the credibility and legitimacy of the government has been undermined. The opium economy also continues to thrive, with the attendant effects on governance, corruption, the economy and security (Byrd, 2014).

Managing the expectations of the people, including those warlords who had entrenched their power during the years of war economy, was never going to be easy. The government that came to power in 2001 was comprised of a range of players who often had conflicting interests and agendas and the relationship between President Karzai with the US was fractious. Although the western narrative has focused on the threat from a renewed Taliban insurgency, the issues to be dealt with were far greater. They included historical tensions with neighbouring Pakistan and Iran, infighting between clans and fractions over control of resources and the lucrative drug trade, the negotiation of agreements with the US, highly contentious civilian deaths, insider attacks by Afghan forces against their international counterparts and endemic corruption throughout the government. (USIP, 2014).



Although the Afghan government took ownership of aid coordination at an early stage, coordinating the interests of so many donors with so many agendas and so much money has been an overwhelming challenge. Coupled with diverse interests on the Afghan side and buying off various fractions to stay in the process led to an unmanageable situation from the perspective of aid coordination. From a starting point of relatively low corruption, a wide variety of corrupt behaviours grew exponentially. These were exacerbated by the international community forming allegiances with warlords and mixing implementation of development programmes with counterinsurgency and counternarcotic objectives in the public and private sector (Afghanistan, Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, 2015).

The 2015 Annual Public Opinion Survey shows that around 70% of ordinary Afghans are happy with their lives and two thirds report that they have access to education and health services. However, optimism about the overall direction of the country fell to the lowest point in a decade. The proportion of Afghans who fear for their personal safety is at the highest point, as is the proportion who says that corruption is a problem in their daily lives. The number of Afghans who are satisfied with how democracy works in their country hit an all-time low and there was a sharp decline in the level of satisfaction with and confidence in different levels of government and public institutions. (Asia Foundation, 2014). This illuminates the enormous challenges ahead.

Denmark has generally understood these challenges and has aimed to use the development programme to build trust between the government and the people. For example Danish assistance was to a high degree intended to support the Afghan government's service delivery and Denmark refrained from 'putting flags' on infrastructure paid for with Danish funds. Early in Denmark's engagement in Helmand, it was recognised that the local population was loyal to traditional tribal structures and did not support either the central government or its modernising tendencies. This was particularly the case where development interfered with profitable activities relating to the opium economy and smuggling. The 2008 Helmand Plan noted that the approach adopted to date had not strengthened the population's trust in and active support for the authorities, especially in the parts of the province dominated by insurgents and characterised by instability and insecurity. There was also recognition that the population could observe the lack of success in attempting to change the corrupt power structures, put a stop to the opium economy and strengthen the ability of the Government and the provincial authorities to provide security and basic social services. (MOD&MFA, 2007). Denmark's 2014/15-2017 Country Programme recognises that many of these challenges and risks remain.



Two main categories of lessons have emerged from this review:

- Lessons that derive from the overall Danish objective of integrating its political, development, stabilisation and security objectives and tools.
- Lessons that derive from the way in which Danish development assistance has been delivered in Afghanistan.

## INTEGRATING POLITICS, DEVELOPMENT, STABILITY AND SECURITY

This section examines lessons that influence the ability of the Danish government to integrate its political, development, stability and security approaches and tools to maximise its development inputs. These lessons pertain to the importance of clarity on strategic objectives, the integrated implementation of strategic objectives, and the role of political dialogue in the process of developing an integrated response.

### Clarity of strategy

An integrated approach requires clear shared strategic objectives.

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*Engaging in fragile and conflict affected states such as Afghanistan requires a multifaceted approach based on an understanding of the complexities of the environment, in particular its political aspects. In order to deliver the most effective integrated response, international partners such as Denmark need to bring all relevant actors – political, development and security – around the table to establish a shared contextual understanding and to determine how each set of actors can contribute to the integrated effort. Specifically with regard to development co-operation, it is essential to understand the complete integrated effort in order to deliver development effectively.*

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At the outset of the Danish engagement in Afghanistan following 9/11, activities were developed on the basis of a division of labour between development and security actors and goals. There was early recognition of the linkages between security and development and the guiding framework for the Danish activities were UN resolutions on combatting terrorism, supporting the restoration of government in Afghanistan and providing humanitarian and reconstruction assistance to the Afghan people. Thus, while Danish engagements were integrated into the international framework for Afghanistan, they were initially elaborated independently of each other.

This separation reflected in part the fact that the space available for national strategic thinking and planning was limited by the joint international effort where a dominant partner drove the agenda in Afghanistan and Denmark was a junior partner. Nonetheless, over time, Denmark was able to develop a more comprehensive and integrated approach in Afghanistan. The strategy for Danish development co-operation in Afghanistan published in late 2005 contained a short section on the security environment, which acknowledged that the security environment posed important limitations on the ability to reconstruct the Afghan state, society and economy. This strategy did not, however, provide guidance on whether or how Danish political, development and security actors could work together in order to achieve Denmark's overall objective in Afghanistan of contributing to a secure environment in which political transition and reconstruction could take place.

Once the security situation began to deteriorate in 2005, discussions began within ISAF of the need for an integrated approach. When Danish troops were deployed to Helmand in 2006, it became evident that synergies needed to be identified between security and development engagements and that ways of working together in-country needed to be developed. In part this was linked to the Danish experience of working together with British troops in Basra, Iraq. Denmark began to develop multi-year strategies to guide Danish engagement in Afghanistan overall and annual plans for engagement in Helmand Province. The crucial point was that all Danish actors should contribute in a comprehensive and integrated way to the achievement of Denmark's overall goals in Afghanistan. Starting with the 2008-2012 Afghanistan strategy, Denmark identified political, security and stabilisation and development objectives that constituted an integrated three-strand engagement to achieve those goals (MFA&MOD, 2008, pp. 13-19). The tools employed to achieve these objectives changed over time, particularly to take into account the drawdown of ISAF and the transition to greater Afghan government responsibility for the maintenance of security in the country that started in 2013.

The Afghanistan Task Force was created in mid-2007 to drive the process of coordinating and integrating Danish engagements in Afghanistan. Its members included representatives of the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministries of Defence, Foreign Affairs, Integration and Justice, and the Defence Command. Further impetus to a comprehensive and integrated approach came with the creation of the Stabilisation Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2008 and the Peace and Stabilisation Fund (PSF) in 2010. Focusing on financial assistance to build and sustain security forces as well as dialogue and reconciliation with opposing military groups, the PSF was complementary to the existing military engagement, civilian development assistance and humanitarian assistance. The partners in the Inter-ministerial Steering Committee for the PSF (primarily from MOD and MFA) progressively developed mutual trust and good working relations. This in turn promoted agreement on the direction of the programme and an increasingly smooth decision making process. (MFA&MOD, 2013; Coffey, 2014).

While acknowledging that the strategy development process could be further refined, Danish stakeholders interviewed for this report generally agreed that the policy and strategy development process in Copenhagen has been significantly strengthened over the last ten years to the benefit of Denmark's engagement in Afghanistan and in other FCAS. In particular, comparisons were made with Danish engagement in the Balkans in the 1990s where there had been limited military-civilian integration. There was widespread agreement that the articulation of clear goals and objectives is essential for the implementation of a comprehensive and integrated approach on the ground.

### **Integrated implementation**

Integrated implementation requires that all tools are used to their best advantage.

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*While Denmark's capacity for joint strategy development and joint planning has improved over time, joint implementation remains challenging. There is some evidence of productive collaboration between Danish and other partners' development, political and security tools in Afghanistan. Questions remain about the most appropriate mix of tools and approaches to use in areas where the dominant activities are war-fighting and stabilisation and where international financing risks exacerbating or creating social and political divisions. Experience suggests that the use of development tools in this context must be carefully assessed for potential impact on security, corruption and political relationships.*

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An integrated approach is most easily observed where military and civilian efforts are co-located as they were for Denmark in Helmand Province. However, joint implementation does not necessarily require joint working. It is also not necessary for all efforts to take place in the same geographical area or to be addressing the same problems simultaneously in order to deliver on an integrated strategy. What is important is to agree how Denmark's different approaches and tools can best be deployed to achieve common goals.

The decision to allocate Danish development assistance nationally was seen as a means of delivering on the central objective of contributing to the establishment of a stable and more developed Afghanistan. Activities such as supporting the education sector, providing assistance to communities through the NSP and empowering women were all viewed as contributing to this overarching goal. Denmark continued this national allocation of development resources after it began to deploy significant number of troops to Helmand Province. The continuation of this national approach was facilitated by the amount of UK and US assistance available for Helmand.

Denmark also recognised that Afghan security bodies ultimately had to assume responsibility for security in order to create and sustain an environment in which Denmark's support to state-building, education, livelihoods and human rights could

take root. Denmark accordingly supported efforts to strengthen the ANSF. This included support to LOTFA (through the development frame), military training, contributions to bilateral and EU police missions and diplomatic and financial support to the Afghan National Army Trust Fund.

In terms of joint working, however, the successes and challenges of integrated implementation were most evident in Helmand Province. When Danish military troops became engaged beyond Kabul and co-located at the German PRT in Fayzabad in 2005, there was no experience of joint working across government departments on the ground. Added to this, the Fayzabad PRT was quite small with a minimal civilian presence. The much larger engagement in Helmand and the development of Afghanistan strategies and Helmand Plans increased opportunities for developing operational civilian-military interactions. It was believed that the role of the military was to pave the way for security in areas where development activities were prioritised - and the other way around - that development could sustain stabilisation.

The available evidence presented by different interlocutors on how this interaction developed paints a mixed picture. Some sources saw modest gains in integrating civilian and military tools on the ground, particularly by the end of the engagement in Helmand. They believed that the experience of working together promoted a move from working in parallel in the same geographic area to a more integrated approach. Working together enabled Danish military officers and civilian officials and advisers to better understand each other's objectives and modes of operation. Other interlocutors identified significant challenges of both an administrative nature (parallel reporting processes, lack of communication among actors on the ground, inadequate numbers of civilians in the Helmand PRT) and a conceptual nature (integrated engagements in FCAS oriented toward military objectives or developmental objectives rather than jointly promoting political settlements).

That said, there was widespread agreement on the importance of integrated planning to implement strategic plans. Integrated planning was deemed essential in order to identify the most effective means of responding to the evolving situation on the ground in a manner consistent with overall strategic objectives. Some interlocutors noted that it is necessary to consider the impact of security on the opportunities for development in planning military campaigns and to balance those against other security-related goals such as counterinsurgency or counterterrorism. They also stressed the importance of assessing the impact that development efforts might have on security, in particular which individuals and groups would benefit from development activities and how that might enhance or reduce security.

In order to enhance understanding between military and development personnel, pre-deployment courses were established to enable civil-military co-operation and development advisers to learn from each other. This reportedly helped to improve understanding among these individuals. Nonetheless, when required at the tactical level during missions it remained difficult to integrate development approaches. Here too it was suggested that involving civilians in operational planning could promote tactical integration. While strategic plans can provide guidance on the nature of the context, the development challenge and the appropriate (political versus military) response, tactical decisions will be made at the level of the battle group and it is there that civilian influence has been particularly limited.

The different approaches were particularly evident with regard to the quick impact projects implemented by Danish troops ‘for the purpose of gaining the confidence of the population and creating development for the benefit of the population’ (MOD&MFA, 2007, p. 10). While not disputing the importance of force protection, Danish development advisors responsible for the management of Danish development portfolios in Afghanistan had difficulty reconciling development procedures, timeframes and objectives with the short-term nature of these military-led quick impact projects (QIPs). Military priorities were generally not determined on the basis of where civilian-led development activities required security. In this regard, the challenges Denmark faced in operating in a non-integrated environment were compounded by the senior partner nations focussing on ‘clearing’ with relatively little interest in ‘holding’ or ‘building.’

Looking to the future, some Danish interlocutors, including those from the military, suggested that a lesson that could be drawn from Danish experience was that civilian stabilisation input should be even better integrated into the planning process for military campaigns in order to maximise the developmental impact of these campaigns. Illustrative of the views expressed by some interlocutors on this point, one Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs official explained: ‘An integrated approach is joined up planning, so that when you are thinking about clearing an area militarily, you have Afghan ownership and civilian rebuilding perspectives integrated into the planning. You also have resources in the Afghan government or on the PRT civilian side. This is integration.’

It was also suggested by some interlocutors that Parliament could specify the deployment of an adequate number of civilian stabilisation advisors when authorising the deployment of Danish military personnel including the deployment of a senior civilian at the level of a battle group commander to facilitate equal working relations between civilians and the military. It has also been proposed that longer military deployments (12 versus six months) would also help, as the pressure on military commanders to produce results in a very short period of time would be somewhat ameliorated and their ability to develop contextual understanding would increase.

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At the same time the discussion of integrated working raises a broader question about the use of development assistance in FCAS. International research on the linkages between insecurity and instability, on the one hand, and various forms of financial assistance (including QIPs) to Afghanistan, on the other hand, strongly suggests that:

...the way in which aid has been delivered has contributed to instability through reinforcing uneven and oppressive power relationships, favoring or being perceived to favor one community or individual over others, and providing a valuable resource for actors to fight over. The most destabilizing aspect of the war-aid economy in Afghanistan, however, has been its role in fueling corruption, which delegitimizes both the government and the international community (Fishstein and Wilder, 2012, p. 5).

According to this research, these outcomes have been observed both in Helmand Province and in other parts of Afghanistan (Fishstein and Wilder, 2012, pp. 5-6, 61-66; Gordon, 2011; Wilton Park, 2014, pp. 18-25). What is more, international research also indicates that in the use of development assistance to promote security objectives, insecure areas have been prioritised over more secure areas, which has created a perverse incentive in favour of insecurity (Fishstein and Wilder, 2012, pp. 5-6). The continued national focus of Danish development co-operation even after the strengthened military engagement in Helmand was intended precisely to avoid this outcome. At the same time, some Danish development assistance was channelled to Helmand and Danish military officers and PRT advisers also implemented activities in Helmand using British financing as there was no shortages of funding as such in the PRT.

In future engagements in FCAS, particularly in areas where war-fighting and stabilisation predominate, it will be essential for Denmark to consider the context in which its development assistance is being employed and how best to use that assistance in ways that minimise its potential destabilising effects.



## Political dialogue

A broad political consensus on engagement creates space for an adaptive and flexible development approach.

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*Proactively engaging Denmark's political leadership in discussions on strategic objectives proved to be an effective tool for generating broad political consensus and protecting development assistance from political brokering unrelated to the Afghanistan engagement. At the same time, the trade-offs needed to achieve such consensus had consequences for the scope of the development programme, notably in Helmand Province.*

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Starting in 2004, the Danish government convened the security and development representatives of all political parties supporting the Danish engagement in Afghanistan to discuss priorities and risks inherent in the engagement. These closed door meetings occurred at least once a year, approved critical policy papers such as the multiyear Afghanistan strategies and annual Helmand Plans and helped to minimise the exploitation of Afghanistan for domestic political purposes unrelated to the Afghanistan engagement. Additionally the broad political consensus gave development actors greater space for innovation and enabled a more flexible response. Achieving a high level of political consensus was also important since Danish governments throughout the period under study were minority governments (composed of varying political parties) and because it was important to have broad support when engaging the Danish military in a war situation.

While this dialogue helped to create a common understanding of Denmark's goals and risks of engaging in Afghanistan, it also involved political trade-offs that affected development programming. The political consensus reconciled the government's position, which accepted the American approach of a military solution, with the approach of key members of various political parties, which called for a political and developmental response. This then facilitated the decision to join the UK in the Helmand PRT, building on the good relationship that had been established in Iraq. This in turn led to the decision to allocate development resources to a province where the security situation precluded a good return on investment in development terms for the reasons discussed in lesson number 2 above.

This section examines lessons that have emerged from Denmark's experience in delivering development assistance in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014. These lessons pertain to fostering ownership of state-building, developing capacity of Afghan counterparts and organisations, managing the portfolio, managing risk and influencing aid coordination.

### **Fostering ownership of state-building**

Developing ownership of state-building is fundamentally a political process, requiring donors to have a deep understanding of the particular context and to be prepared to provide support over the long term.

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*In FCAS, power is continually contested. Power struggles take place within and between all levels of government as well as between state and non-state actors. Ownership of change processes is affected by the political and economic interests of multiple stakeholders. For example, co-operation between authorities at the national and provincial levels was often weak due to mutual mistrust. This complicates the application of the foundational principle of the Paris Declaration – ownership – which commits donors to respect partner country leadership and to help strengthen both the state's capacity to deliver and the civil society's capacity to demand development and human rights. Experience shows that donors need to understand the context in which they operate, to adapt continually to change and to be realistic about the length of time required for ownership to develop and take root.*

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Denmark has supported a variety of efforts to strengthen ownership of state-building processes at the national, provincial and local levels. At the national level this includes contributing to the ARTF, providing bilateral support to the MOE, and contributing to pooled funds administered by UNDP. At provincial level it comprised support to the Department of Education in Helmand Province.

The NSP is perhaps the best example of a programme that has had a very high degree of Afghan ownership at the central level as well as an overarching objective to build ownership at the community level. It is unique in many ways, not least that it has received exceptionally high levels of funding and support from donors compared with other NPPs. For example, over a similar 5-6 year time period the NSP received \$1.05 billion compared with \$408 million for the Education Quality Improvement Project (EQUIP) and \$50 million for the National Horticulture and Livestock Project. Part of the

success of the NSP is due to a design that is much stronger than other NPPs, a mechanism enabling channelling of funds to community level (bypassing provincial and district levels), and a variety of checks and balances that increase transparency and accountability. The evaluation of Denmark's livelihoods portfolio found that in supporting the NSP, Denmark contributed to empowering local communities, including women, thereby helping to lay the foundation for economic growth and poverty reduction. At the same time, the evaluation noted reliance on donor funding and concerns about sustainability (MFA, 2012, State-building/Livelihoods p. 58).

Other initiatives supported by Denmark have had a more mixed record. Denmark has provided significant support to the education sector, bilaterally and multilaterally, on-budget and off-budget, and at the national, provincial and local levels. At the national level, this has included technical assistance (TA) for strategic planning which has contributed to increasing ownership of the National Education Strategic Plan. Danish support also assisted the MOE to obtain funding from the Global Partnership for Education, which now provides budget support to assist the implementation of the sector plan. In these cases there has been relatively strong ownership of the process of developing strategy and policy. At the implementation level this has been much weaker due to a range of competing priorities within the MOE as well as limited capacity to implement multiple initiatives at the same time.

At the local level, Danish advisers in Helmand Province made considerable effort to engage with the authorities at central level on behalf of the Provincial Director for Education as well as to promote linkages and exchanges between the two levels. However, this had limited success. In part it was because subnational governance has not yet become functional and there was a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities at the various levels. Provincial line departments did not have budget or planning responsibility for local service delivery and there was little political will at central level to either deconcentrate or devolve functions. The lack of success has also been a function of power struggles. Power has traditionally been held at the local level and there has been strong historic resistance to the centralising tendencies of the state. Danish advisers in the PRT came to understand that although there was local demand for education in Helmand, the profound mistrust and lack of respect between provincial and national levels meant that there was resistance to co-operation.

Although attempts to strengthen provincial government were made during the existence of the PRT, these were inevitably limited because insecurity prevented education advisers reaching out beyond the major provincial towns. When the PRT closed, no further local level engagement was possible and nascent linkages could not be sustained. Denmark had understood that there would be a need for continuing support in order to promote the sustainability of earlier efforts and sought to create a UNDP office in Helmand for this purpose. Unfortunately, the deterioration of the security environment meant that this office was ultimately unable to function.

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This raises questions about whether it is appropriate to set in motion interventions aimed at developing ownership when the environment is so insecure that support is unlikely to be possible in the long term. Starting activities and then failing to see them through has led to significant disillusionment among Afghans across the country, as well as being dangerous for those associated with the government when power changes hands.

At central level, one of the most challenging programmes has been LOTFA. UNDP has aimed to foster ownership by bringing together the MOI, other relevant ministries, donors and various coordination and public stakeholders in a forum for discussion and formulation of joint strategies. This has been a difficult and highly political process. Throughout its history MOI has been reluctant to take ownership of routine functions within its ordinary area of responsibility such as verification of transactions, preparing financial data and correspondence among MOI, the Ministry of Finance (MOF) and commercial banks (UNDP, 2012). Despite 13 years and several billions of dollars in salary assistance to the Afghan government for the ANP, there is still no assurance that personnel and payroll data are accurate (SIGAR 15-26 Audit Report, 2015). While there is no doubt that the scale and complexity of the challenge is enormous, there has also been systemic and endemic corruption as a result of vested political interests. Recently a plan has been put in place to transfer management from UNDP to the MOI (UNDP 2015). It remains unclear however how committed MOI is to carrying out the necessary reforms and it can be anticipated that strong donor oversight of this programme would be needed.

Providing assistance in fragile and conflict affected states requires careful balancing between promoting principles of aid effectiveness and ensuring adequate oversight of the use of funds.

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*Developing the kind of ownership envisaged by the principles of donor engagement, in which a process originated by outsiders becomes owned by domestic actors with the political will to carry forward the same agenda, was inevitably a challenge. Fourteen years after the international intervention, Afghanistan continues to be a very fragile state which, by definition, means that it is not yet capable of assuring basic security, rule of law, services or economic opportunities for all citizens and has not yet established public confidence and trust. With corruption deeply affecting the legitimacy of the state, Denmark and other donors have been reminded that the promotion of country-led processes can result in both positive and negative development outcomes. Therefore, at the same time as promoting principles of aid effectiveness such as ownership and demonstrating the necessary strategic patience, it is important that the monitoring mechanisms of bilateral and multilateral channels are strong enough to prevent abuse of donor funds undermining state legitimacy.*

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Denmark's funding through the ARTF, as well as its bilateral support to the MOE, has aimed to support country ownership of the state-building and policy process. However, in a large and complex country, with multiple lines of conflict and a profound lack of trust between state and citizens that is dominated by foreign military intervention, the notion of a single vision and plan guiding all government actions has proven unrealistic. Nominally, ANDS provides a common framework and it has certainly helped donors focus their assistance. But a government riven by factionalism, unable to enforce rule of law, and with entrenched corruption at the highest levels will necessarily face severe challenges in managing development policy in the best interests of all citizens.

A critical observation of most development stakeholders in Afghanistan has been that donors have channelled too much money through systems where the capacity for transparency and accountability is very low. This is not to suggest that Denmark has provided too much money but that, as a member of the donor community, it shares the overall risk. To some extent the low absorptive capacity of the Afghan government simply resulted in high levels of underspend for all on-budget modalities (MFA, 2014, pp. 8-10). Where this has occurred Denmark has extended programme cycles. However, the availability of large amounts of donor funding in the context of inadequate levels of control has undoubtedly facilitated a range of different forms of corruption.

The 2012 evaluation of Danish assistance confirmed this experience. At the technical level, Denmark and like-minded donors have had a good appreciation of the need for safeguards to ensure accountability of funds. However, in the face of directives from the political level to disburse larger amounts of funds than there has been capacity to absorb effectively and efficiently, the level of risk has increased. Trying to manage the risk in the Danish bilateral programme, especially in the MOE in recent years, has been stressful for an Embassy which experienced a reduction in staffing levels. While the staffing problem has been addressed indirectly by switching to multilateral channels, in fact the risk to accountability is similar under multilateral channels such as the ARTF and UN agencies. The difference is that in accordance with the single audit principle, Denmark is not directly responsible for fiduciary oversight and therefore less burdened by and involved with management of risk.

At the time of this study there was increasing awareness among Danish and other donor staff that the oversight mechanisms of multilateral channels were not as strong as they need to be. This is a challenging realisation because the principles of fostering ownership and alignment require that responsibility for monitoring lies with the ministries utilising their own rather than external systems. Pulling back from established ways of working is a difficult, contentious and political process and one in which it can be impossible to disentangle resistance related to the principles from resistance due to entrenched perverse interests. Denmark has experienced this recently in the process of transferring its assistance to MOE from a bilateral to a multilateral channel.

Delivering on the New Deal requires Denmark to continue to utilise Afghan government systems in order to support their development. This creates tensions with the requirement to be accountable to domestic taxpayers. There is no way of knowing whether smaller amounts of funds, compatible with absorption capacity, would have reduced the potential for corruption and promoted improved oversight but it was the perception of informed contributors to this study that it could have. For the Government of National Unity that took office in September 2014, addressing corruption may now be harder due to the vested interests that have established themselves over the last several years. This challenge could be seen following release of a US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction report detailing the MOE's inflation of data in order to divert funds intended for schools and teachers (SIGAR, 2014). When the new Education Minister utilised aspects of the report to support his intention to combat corruption there was a strong backlash.

Balancing ownership and oversight is a dilemma for all donors for which there are no easy answers. There is provision through the principle of mutual accountability for results but few fragile states have managed to develop the necessary mechanisms. Where monitoring and performance assessment exists it tends to be mainly focused on the recipient side rather than the provider side. In addition to ensuring that Afghanistan has mechanisms for accountable use of funds, it is equally important that a mutual accountability framework takes account of donor use of funds. In this case it may help to demonstrate the impact on results when donor funds are provided beyond the capacity to absorb.

### **Developing capacity**

When decisions are made to add substantial capacity through technical assistance, it is important to actively address sustainability in order to avoid creating a parallel civil service.

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*Donors including Denmark have funded tens of thousands of technical advisers (TA) to address profound capacity weakness that characterised the line ministries from 2001 onward. Donors' strong belief that improved service delivery would convince Afghans it was in their best interests to support the government rather than the armed opposition and that TA would enable this to occur rapidly led to support for high levels of TA. In many ministries, TA became a vehicle for patronage and graft. Although it was assumed that TA would be a temporary means of developing the capacity of the core civil service, for over a decade no plans were put in place to phase out TA and advisers became entrenched as a parallel civil service. While lessons about the limitations of the TA model were identified globally decades ago, donors in Afghanistan were slow to demand TA to focus on capacity transfer instead of doing-the-job.*

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All Danish support to Afghanistan has aimed to support capacity development in recognition of the enormous challenge for a country that has experienced conflict and brain drain for more than three decades. With such a low starting point in 2001 and in the context of enormous political pressure to deliver results quickly, the main approach adopted by Denmark and the broader international community has been to provide TA. Some of the TA provided by Denmark has been Danish/international personnel working in the MOE in Kabul and in the PRT in Helmand Province. The majority has been Afghan, funded bilaterally in MOE and the MRRD (eg. NSP) as well as multilaterally through contributions to ARTF and UN agencies. These personnel have comprised expatriate Afghans, returnees from Pakistan and local hires. They have been on contract and paid varying amounts. Some have received exceedingly high salaries and all have been paid many multiples of the salary received by those employed as civil servants on the tashkeel.

The assumption behind this capacity-adding strategy was that it would be a temporary measure while the capacity of the tashkeel was being developed. In practice, however, TA have performed the jobs themselves. In part this was because TA, unlike civil servants remaining after the Taliban era, had the English language and computer literacy skills that were often defined as a prerequisite for donor supported modernisation. It was also because of the profound mistrust, based on perceived political affiliation throughout the long years of war, between returnees and the tashkeel staff. By around 2006 it was generally recognised by the wider donor community that TA on contract had become a parallel or second civil service. As they had assumed decision making and signing responsibilities the tashkeel staff had become marginalised (AREU, 2010).

Denmark's main practical experience of the TA dilemma was gained in the MOE. Denmark had funded TA since the start of the Education Support Programme to Afghanistan (ESPA) and, by 2009, was funding 155 of an estimated 1,157 TA. The majority were funded by ARTF (425) and USAID (450).<sup>6</sup> These TA were recruited by MoE, in theory according to agreed procurement guidelines but, in practice, mainly through patronage networks. Denmark pressed for an end to use of non-accounted TA and by October 2015, when the transfer of the Danish engagement to a multilateral funding mechanism was imminent, the number of TAs funded by Denmark had been reduced from over 400 to 21.

Lessons about the limitations of TA as a model are not new and have been learned from decades of global experience which indicates the need to take a gradual approach appropriate to the absorption capacity in the particular context (Michailof, 2007). However, as the political stakes for capacity development have been very high in Afghanistan, these lessons are destined to be re-learned. Frustration at the high cost of TA and its limited impact in terms of capacity building is shared by the international community as well as those Afghan parliamentarians and bureaucrats with a genuine

<sup>6</sup> These figures are cited in the Education portion of the 2012 evaluation (MFA, 2012). However, the exact number of TA has never been known due to weak data collection, fragmentation of sources, lack of coordination among donors, and the placement of advisors across various directorates.

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interest in the development of the country. The MOF estimated that total donor support for capacity building (not including funding for civil service salaries) between 2002 and 2010 was \$6.45 billion (ADB, 2012). This has been shown to distort the labour market and undermine long-term fiscal and capacity sustainability (European Commission, 2009).

Although there have been some attempts to address the TA dilemma, including by Denmark, there are many reasons why it has not been possible. For both the Afghan government and donors, attempts to ‘rightsize’ their ambitions for service delivery to fit the absorptive capacity of the country has been politically difficult. Denmark and other donors have held the strong belief that improved service delivery would convince Afghans that it was in their best interests to support the government rather than the armed opposition. Funding TA at high levels was considered necessary to improve service delivery fast. Addressing the problem became especially difficult during the ‘surge’ when donors, including Denmark, increased their civilian assistance at the same time as the military effort was intensified.

Donors have recognised at least since 2006 that TA salaries were not sustainable in the medium and long term. Danish advisers to the MOE began sounding the warning in 2005/2006 and Denmark began to reduce Danish-funded TA in 2012. It was only in the context of reducing levels of funding for many donors, however, that addressing the TA problem became a high priority.

During the no-cost extension period (January-September 2015), ESPA II continued providing support to Ministry of Education’s TAs as part of revised work plan but with a slimmer and focused approach towards limited number of key positions. Support to TAs has been kept within the already allocated budget. Contribution of each TA has been linked to specific outputs of the ESPA programme, keeping in mind a gradual exit strategy.

Decisions to discontinue funding unsustainable levels of TA are recent and learning is new. In ELECT, USAID withdrew funding at short notice, putting great pressure on UNDP to help the Independent Election Commission identify which positions were critical to its continued functioning. The learning from this is that disengaging from supplying TA requires a careful process to assess the type of capacity that can reasonably be sustained. This takes longer than might be predicted. As Denmark disengages from bilateral support to MOE in favour of support through the multilaterally-funded EQUIP programme Embassy staff have invested considerable amounts of scarce time in the process. Denmark is also co-funding (with the US, UNESCO and in-kind support from the World Bank/EQUIP) a TA study that is intended to assess TA needs as well as policies for recruitment and management. This will go some way towards mitigating the effect of the withdrawal of Danish funding for TA but it will not eliminate it.



Being engaged in capacity development bilaterally, compared with providing funding through multilateral mechanisms, has been important for Denmark as a visible and politically popular means of supporting state-building and demonstrating a focus on gender. It has also drawn attention to the way in which capacity development can be co-opted for purposes other than those intended. In the relationship with MOE there have been many thorny issues which have required frank dialogue such as corruption in the printing of text books. In that case, which was politically very high profile, Denmark clearly pressed for putting an end to corruption, at the same time acknowledging the need for children to receive school books for the start of the year. In disengaging from funding TA Denmark has learned that the process is complicated and highly political due to its centrality as a mechanism for patronage and power. This is not unusual as international lessons learned show that successful capacity change requires constant strategizing, brokering, coalition building and conflict management (High Level Group on Capacity Development, 2011).

### Managing the portfolio

While the type and size of projects needs to be tailored to context, including Danish strategic priorities, and can be expected to change over time, minimising the number of projects in the portfolio and focusing on large interventions that support delivery of results at scale can create space for deeper engagement with partners, including policy and political work to improve donor understanding of the context.

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*In a high stakes context the pressure to deliver results quickly tends to produce a large number of projects. In Afghanistan at the time when Denmark was increasing funding, a large portfolio compromised its ability to engage with multilateral partners and the government during the design of new programmes that were better able to deliver results at scale. There are compelling reasons in an initial phase to fund a variety of partners and issues and certain themes such as human rights and gender will always be a high political priority for Denmark, both of which can require funding of smaller interventions. At the same time, the decision in the 2014/15-2017 Country Programme to focus development co-operation resources on a small number of larger multilateral projects has meant that Denmark can deliver greater impact through its portfolio, including through policy dialogue.*

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In the early years Denmark's portfolio contained a growing number of projects, many of which were very small. At the time, engaging multiple actors was seen as a way of dealing with the large scale of urgent need although smaller partners (often small and

new NGOs) could only manage smaller projects. Additionally, developing the capacity of civil society on issues such as human rights and gender was seen as an important strategic element of putting pressure on the Afghan government, leading, for example, to bilateral funding for the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission and various NGOs promoting the in particular the rights of women. The environment in which these decisions were made was fast moving and often chaotic, without a Danish or Afghan strategy to guide choices and with insufficient human resources on both sides.

By 2006 it was found that many projects, especially the small ones, had little supporting documentation and contracts lacked some essential requirements such as an end date and interlocutors have reported that bringing them in line with accountability requirements was enormously challenging. This was an issue for Denmark in all country programmes but was exacerbated in Afghanistan because of the pressure to deliver results quickly across a very wide range of objectives. Although various measures were taken to develop a more strategic, lean and multilateralised approach, by 2014 some of earlier projects were still creating administrative problems.

The lesson Programme Officers drew from this experience is that although there may be reasons to support a wide range of projects – such as promoting important political objectives and the availability of implementing partners – a large amount of small projects creates a disproportionate amount of work over a prolonged timeframe and these projects do not always deliver proportional results. The requirements for accountability mean that all projects, however large or small, are subject to more or less the same administrative processes and reporting products. Many of the small partners had little capacity and needed inputs that were out of proportion to the value of the project. Even some multilateral partners, such as UN Women, did not have the capacity to design and report on projects adequately. This meant that engaging with small and less effective partners had a high opportunity cost in terms of reducing the time available to engage with the more significant programmes and partners.

There is similar learning to be drawn from the ROI. The 2012 evaluation of Denmark's development co-operation in Afghanistan found that the choice of partners, who were leaders in their field with established reputations in Afghanistan, was critical to the effectiveness of individual components. However, the limited resources in the Embassy meant that the multiple strands were not pulled together to support advocacy with government stakeholders on the issues of refugee return and internal displacement.

Denmark has sometimes funded the same organisation, for a similar purpose, using different channels, which has added to the workload. For example, the Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR) and NSP received funding from ROI through the humanitarian budget as well as from the development budget. While this reflects the geographic and issues-oriented structure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is not an

efficient arrangement from the perspective of partners who have to produce a report for each funding stream. In addition, Danish staff have to process these separately, even though the programme or the partner is the same.

In contrast to small projects, PEPS and ESPA were large projects requiring in depth inputs from Danish staff in the Embassy as well as TA in the MOE. In the early years Denmark added considerable value to the overall effort but was unable to sustain the depth of engagement necessary to ensure that funding was effective and accountable. The 2012 evaluation noted that it was difficult to track Denmark's contribution to outputs between 2007 and 2010 because of weak systemic management and reporting in the MOE. From 2010 onwards the modality of on-budget support was making 'enormous' demands on Embassy capacity especially when staff responsible for management did not have education sector specific expertise and were no longer supported by the locally posted Danish-funded TA that had been crucial to managing the support within the MOE.

When Embassy capacity is limited, it is particularly important to be able to rely on trusted partners. In the early days the decision was made to support the education sector but not water and sanitation. This had the unintended consequence of reducing Danish influence in MRRD where DACAAR's influence at the strategic advisory level was growing. During the period when DACAAR received funding from the Embassy, there were opportunities for a mutually beneficial dialogue with the Embassy officials. However, by funding humanitarian activities from headquarters, the day to day formal dialogue, contextual learning and policy dialogue in Afghanistan was lost.

### Managing risk

Denmark's 'risk willing' approach is appropriate for a context where there are many serious risks. It can best be supported by strong monitoring and evaluation arrangements that are adjusted as the context changes.

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*Time and experience have demonstrated that strong monitoring arrangements are essential to manage risk effectively and that these arrangements need to be established in the early stages of an engagement. This is challenging when Danish policy gives responsibility to implementing partners to monitor the results they are responsible for creating. It is even more challenging when these partners are unable to visit insecure areas to verify what is being reported. Approaches to monitoring have adapted to changes in the context but they have done so slowly. In future engagements it is crucial to minimise the risks by allocating time and financial resources to ensuring that monitoring arrangements are the best possible in the context and are adjusted rapidly as the context changes so that programmes can be adjusted as necessary.*

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In the early years, Danish officials were able to visit project sites to verify how activities were being implemented and to increase their understanding of the context in which aid was being delivered. This was an important supplement to reports received from implementing partners, which were generally of low quality across most modalities. Only where substantial dedicated resources have been allocated, notably with NSP, has reporting been of the right quality at the right time to inform funding decisions.

Danish policy has been that partners create the results and are therefore responsible for monitoring and reporting the results. In a more settled development context this is rational and appropriate. However, in a context where capacity to use funds effectively and accountably is low, and where corruption is endemic, the arrangements for monitoring need to be strong enough to minimise potential damage. This applies especially to new and inexperienced partners, such as local NGOs, as well as to established multilaterals where a history of weak reporting has been chronic. Most donors, for example, were frustrated with the quality of reporting from UNDP.

From 2005 deteriorating security meant that donors were less able to visit projects. Especially in the most insecure provinces, awareness grew that activities may not have been monitored in the way they were being reported. A Management Review of the National Area Based Development Programme (NABDP), funded by Denmark, noted that ‘implementing agents and programme officers were quick to point out that effective M&E was not possible in the insecure provinces,’ stating that ‘the Taliban will kill us if they find us with a camera or a GPS’ (United Nations Development Programme/ Afghanistan, 2010). The review went on to question why any serious investments should be made in priority infrastructure in any area where there is a claim that normal monitoring and reporting tools cannot be used. While the risk was not contested, there was also a strong sense among many stakeholders – donors, government and some implementing partners – that the inability to monitor was also a disingenuous excuse for utilising project funds without the controls of being monitored.

Eventually third-party monitoring was adopted by some implementers as well as ARTF but this was preceded by a long period during which accountability for expenditure and results was low. Even when external monitors were contracted they faced the same challenges of insecurity and some of the same risks that reports may not be credible. Donors have subsequently learned that even third-party monitors also need to be closely monitored. Some programmes have demonstrated that innovative and reliable methods of distance monitoring are feasible. NSP’s community monitoring in high risk areas is a prime example of this. However, the mechanisms employed by NSP are very costly and labour intensive and so are not likely to be widely replicated.

At the bilateral level, Denmark and other donors also progressively turned to third-party monitoring in order to obtain information on the projects and programmes they financed. Denmark had the MOE contract with Danish Assistance to Afghan Rehabilitation and Technical Training for remote monitoring. It has also used local individuals to carry

out on-site inspections for activities such as school construction in Helmand Province, where insecurity has severely affected all aspects of the delivery of Danish assistance. In highly insecure areas even this level of monitoring eventually became unworkable. At the same time it should be recognised that monitoring has at times not been used to adapt programmes but simply to tick the ‘monitoring’ box.

Along with monitoring, evaluation is an essential component of aid management. In a highly politicised context such as Afghanistan, pressure to demonstrate success adds another complicating factor to the limited monitoring and can complicate efforts to deliver rigorous evaluation processes and products. That said, aside from results, in a context where there is such high turnover of staff and where institutional memory is weak, evaluation can be an important opportunity to record activities and progress. For Denmark, the 2012 development co-operation evaluation served this purpose well. In particular, the additional resources invested in the education portion of the evaluation to overcome the absence of documentation resulted in a historical narrative that became an important part of the record when a Freedom of Information request was made following allegations of corruption in textbook production.

As with the NABDP example of monitoring, it is often claimed that evaluation cannot be done in Afghanistan. The evaluation commissioned of NSP has proved that where there is high level ownership of a programme and a desire to provide an evidence base for claimed success, it is possible. While there were various methodological limitations and the cost was very high, the evaluation broadly met gold standard criteria.

### **Influencing aid coordination**

For Denmark to be an influential voice in aid coordination staff need sufficient seniority, strong country knowledge, relevant technical expertise and a consistent presence.

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*In a context as political as Afghanistan, where the multiple agendas of the largest donors dominate, and where there are a multitude of coordination forums and actors, participating in aid coordination is challenging. For a small donor to have influence is extremely challenging. In spite of the inherent disadvantage, there is some evidence that small donors can have a degree of influence if, depending on the forum, they have strong country knowledge, relevant technical experience and sufficient seniority. Alliances such as Nordic Plus can also be beneficial in strengthening influence.*

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It is estimated that some 50 countries and organisations contributed to the \$57 billion development assistance that was disbursed in Afghanistan in the ten years to 2011. Ten donors contributed 85%. The US was the largest donor and accounted for about 42% of

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the total (World Bank, 2013). The scale of development assistance has been unprecedented. Many of the challenges of coordination in Afghanistan are the same as other high profile, conflict affected states but the politics of donor coordination in the face of the military engagement is more complex. Although there are some positive incentives there are also powerful disincentives to effective coordination.

For staff at the Danish Embassy to fully coordinate assistance they have had to attend a multitude of meetings: between government and donors, among donors, within the ministries, for individual projects, and for the various trust funds. These meetings have covered a very wide range of issues, programmes and funding mechanisms. Some of these meetings have dealt with political-security issues and have been attended by political officers from relevant embassies; others have dealt with humanitarian and development issues and have been attended by representatives of donor aid agencies. For a small donor such as Denmark it has been a significant challenge to participate actively and fully. That said, being a small donor is not a disadvantage as long as Denmark has the capacity and knowledge to contribute to funding and programming discussions in a sustained way. Although the larger donors may appear to have an advantage due to the size of their contributions, experience indicates that it is the quality of engagement that matters. Even a smaller donor that is able to make solid contributions to discussions will be listened to and can have an impact on their outcomes.

Denmark's integrated mission, with the ambassador being responsible for politics and development co-operation and supported by an in-house military adviser, has provided benefits in terms of donor coordination. Additionally, some officials indicated that Nordic Plus coordination can elevate the influence of each member, since it expands the number of coordination forums that the Nordic Plus countries can participate in. It also offers the opportunity for more meaningful participation as the number of meetings any individual donor representative needs to attend is reduced.

To be influential in the largest and most political programmes, such as the UNDP-managed LOTFA and ELECT, requires deep understanding of the political, technical and financial complexities. Danish interlocutors have suggested that combining the political and development oversight role for engagements in the same Embassy secretary/councillor has sometimes helped develop an integrated response to issues because staff are familiar with both the political and developmental aspects of a particular issue. This was an advantage in helping to find a resolution to the question of how to fund the ANSF after the transition in 2014. Denmark's role was valued because the major donor, the US, was keenly interested in finding a solution to that particular problem. In both LOTFA and ELECT, one of the reasons why poor management was able to continue as long as it did was that many of the major donor representatives who attended meetings were political or security specialists and did not give adequate attention to critical issues of programme and fund management.

The UNDP pooled funding arrangement ELECT makes no distinction between donors according to the size of their commitment. There is therefore no barrier, in principle, to Denmark making its voice heard. However, such was the importance of the elections to the United States that several US officials were allocated solely to ELECT coordination. By virtue of their numbers, as well as the deep understanding of the technical and political issues of some who had been in post for prolonged periods, the US dominated coordination. In contrast Danish personnel changed frequently and covered a number of programmes so could not hope to develop the kind of expertise that was necessary to make their voices heard.

In smaller programmes and with dedicated posted or national Programme Officers in the Embassy who understand the context and the players, Denmark has had a greater potential to contribute to coordination in a way that is consistent over time. The long term engagement of national programme officers provides a degree of continuity for smaller, less political projects and can mitigate to some extent for the rapid turnover of posted Danish staff. However, national programme officers have no authority in the bigger and more political forums.

One example of where Denmark was able to devote the resources necessary to contribute to coordination was with the Tawanmandi civil society capacity development programme, managed by the British Council for a consortium of five donors led by DFID. Consistency of input was important for two reasons. One was that it proved very difficult to get common agreement about the purpose of supporting civil society organisations and there was continuous tension between developing CSOs as advocacy organisations and using them as a delivery mechanism for donor-determined priorities. The second reason concerned management of risk. After two allegations of corruption, which were investigated but never proved, Denmark was influential in navigating a pathway acceptable to donors who varied substantially in their risk tolerance and risk aversion. Denmark was lead in formulating a joint anti-corruption policy accepted by all donors.

For Denmark, seeking to influence other donors in education was part of the rationale for use of the on-budget modality. However, the proliferation of other donor programmes, each requiring a separate coordination mechanism (including for Denmark's PEPs and ESPA) as well as the scale of the ARTF-funded EQUIP and USAID-funded off-budget programmes, meant that Denmark could not exert the anticipated influence. In the cross-programme Education Coordination Committee and the Human Resource Development Board Denmark's capacity to be influential varied. As long as there was Danish TA in the MOE there was a reasonable understanding of the parts of the system it was engaged with. However, as TA was withdrawn and the number of posted Embassy staff reduced, it became increasingly difficult to understand what was going on in the highly politicised environment within MOE. The difficulties faced in understanding the players and the various agendas were exacerbated by frequent turnover of staff.





# CONCLUSIONS

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Five main conclusions emerge from the lessons that arise out of this study.

## **FIRST**

### **Context matters.**

The Danish experience with delivering development assistance in Afghanistan underscores the validity of the first principle for good international engagement in fragile states: Take context as the starting point. It also demonstrates the complexities of applying this principle.

In fragile and conflict affected states such as Afghanistan, it is essential to avoid aggravating conflict through the delivery of development co-operation. To mitigate against instability-promoting outcomes, donors need to understand as best they can the political, security and developmental context in which aid is being applied. This has been particularly challenging in Afghanistan where one of the key drivers of conflict has been uneven and repressive power relationships which have excluded many Afghans from the benefits of development and fuelled the growth of corrupt behaviour within government, leading to a corresponding decrease in trust in and support for the government at all levels. The precise nature of these power relationships has reflected both national and local power dynamics and has shifted over time. This has placed a premium on having detailed knowledge of key actors and their changing relationships. Similarly the security environment has varied across the country and changed over time, affecting the ability to carry out development activities.

The Danish experience in Afghanistan suggests that engaging in FCAS such as Afghanistan benefits from:

- Cross government co-operation at the strategic and planning levels, for example through the establishment of a Task Force,
- An integrated Embassy where the ambassador has responsibility for both political and development activities and is supported by military advisers,
- A combination of area and sector specialists and broader political/development specialists at headquarters and in-country,
- The ability to draw on individuals and groups with deep knowledge of the country and region in question, including implementing partners and national staff,

- Postings of adequate length to enable staff to develop and apply contextual understanding, and
- A system for developing institutional memory and ensuring that it informs policy and programme development and implementation.

In practice, providing the optimal amount of these inputs may be a challenge, particularly in the early phases of a transition process. However, experience indicates that contextual understanding will deepen from efforts to maximise these inputs.

## SECOND

**Because the context is complex and evolves over time, it is essential to be flexible and to adapt programming as donors become more familiar with the environment.**

While the understanding of context deepens over time as international actors become more familiar with the environment, programming cannot wait for this understanding to mature. What is more, even when donors and implementers are relatively familiar with the environment, it is impossible to foresee all of the consequences – both positive and negative – of development interventions or the way in which the environment will evolve. Programming decisions inevitably have to be made based on imperfect information and adapted as more information becomes available.

This highlights the importance of mechanisms to provide flexibility and promote adaptation of programmes. The Danish experience points to two factors that are particularly relevant in this regard:

- In FCAS such as Afghanistan, there is often a dilemma between following aid effectiveness principles and promoting impact. Both the general context and the implementation of specific programmes and projects need to be carefully monitored and the findings of monitoring exercises incorporated into programming on an ongoing basis. While this reflects good programming practice wherever development resources are employed, it is particularly important in FCAS such as Afghanistan given the variability and politicisation of the context. Despite its acknowledged importance, the use of monitoring to adapt programming is often weak due to the combined challenges of insecurity and pressure for positive and/or quick results.

At the same time, the Danish policy that stipulates that partners create the results and are therefore responsible for monitoring and reporting the results generates a serious challenge in FCAS. Denmark and other donors control the degree to which they monitor the general context and the ways in which this influences their programming choices. However, implementing partners often have weak monitoring capacity and may not have the systems in place to incorporate

information generated by monitoring into programming routinely. They may also have powerful political and economic incentives for not monitoring activities too closely. Denmark and other donors have limited options for influencing the capacity of implementing partners to engage in monitoring (particularly if they are international organisations or established NGOs) and even fewer options to compel the integration of monitoring results into programming.

The deterioration of the security environment in Afghanistan has further complicated this situation. Declining security has prevented Danish officials and many implementing partners from observing first-hand how projects and programmes are being executed. Third-party monitoring can be useful in some circumstances but in highly insecure areas it is no more feasible than partner monitoring. All this has raised questions about the purpose of programming in areas of high insecurity.

- Donors and their implementing partners need to promote an institutional culture that accepts course corrections as the situation evolves. They also need to have modest expectations of what can be achieved. Here too Denmark and other donors have control over their own institutional culture and levels of expectation. However, delegating responsibility for monitoring to implementing partners limits the extent to which Denmark and other donors can influence the culture of implementers. It is possible to help government implementers strengthen their monitoring capacity but, in an environment where donor coordination is extremely challenging, the extent to which such assistance would have an impact is an open question.

### THIRD

**It is important to try to do what is right.**

Denmark's development co-operation with Afghanistan has strongly reflected its support for internationally agreed principles governing the delivery of development assistance. Danish programming has sought to implement principles such as enabling country ownership, taking context as the starting point, promoting state-building and supporting non-discrimination as a basis for inclusive and stable societies by, for example, promoting human rights protection and gender equality.

At the same time, actually delivering against these principles has confronted Denmark with a number of challenges. Some of these challenges have related to the fact that the environment in which development programming has occurred has been dominated by a military response to the conflict and that the policy of dominant international partners has often been at odds with these principles. Other challenges have been created by the complexity and fluidity of the Afghan, regional and international environments. Yet others have related to Denmark's influence as a small donor. Even if Denmark managed

to uphold a principle – for example promoting state-building and ownership by delivering education assistance bilaterally on-budget – the overall impact of Denmark’s policy approach was somewhat blunted when the preponderance of development assistance supported different objectives.

In some cases these obstacles were at least partly overcome by coordination with likeminded donors, particularly through the Nordic Plus group and with the UK. But even when Danish adherence to international good practice did not have an immediate impact, Danish officials generally agreed that it is nonetheless important to continue to adopt a principled approach. For one thing, they have seen it as simply ‘the right thing to do.’ For another, achieving the objectives enshrined in these principles – an effective state, local ownership, gender equality – require long-term processes. Danish officials therefore have believed that it is entirely possible that even small efforts will have a larger impact down the road.

#### **FOURTH**

##### **Integrated strategies, planning and implementation are all important.**

During the course of the engagement in Afghanistan, Denmark laid the foundations for applying an integrated approach in FCAS (implementation on-the-ground building in part on its engagement in Iraq). Progress has been greatest at the strategic level at headquarters and that facilitated the development of strategic level Helmand Plans. The record on integrated implementation of these strategies and plans has been mixed and has raised questions about viability of joint working.

There are at least two different types of integrated implementation. One involves reaching agreement on how Denmark’s different approaches and tools can be applied to achieve Danish overall policy objectives. This does not necessarily require joint working, although it could. It does, however, require discussion about Denmark’s top priorities and how best to use Denmark’s various approaches and tools to achieve those priorities. This type of integrated implementation appears to be relatively uncontested among Danish development actors.

Activities that require joint working constitute a second type of integrated implementation. It is here that the greatest number of questions has arisen. Some of those questions have related to the most appropriate mix of tools in environments characterised by war-fighting and stabilisation. Evidence is unclear about the degree to which development activities (as distinct from stabilisation activities financed through development co-operation) are feasible in highly insecure environments. Some of the questions have related to which Danish actor carries out the activity. In particular, there has been widespread concern about the appropriateness and effectiveness of QIPs carried out by military units or stabilisation officers with little development experience and without clear linkages to Afghan development strategies.

Some of the concerns may have little to do with joint working, however. There is considerable evidence from international research, for example, that international assistance of any type risks creating or exacerbating social and political divisions in highly fragmented societies such as Afghanistan. Therefore, this is a danger that all interventions, whether implemented jointly or solely by development actors, must face. As detailed an understanding as possible of the context in which activities are designed and implemented will help mitigate this risk but not eliminate it entirely. Hard questions need to be asked about the potential consequences of any international development engagement and difficult decisions need to be made about when to engage and when to abstain from engagement.

## **FIFTH**

**When working in fragile and conflict affected states where development occurs alongside a stabilising military presence, it is important to make every effort to learn from experience.**

The process of undertaking this study has highlighted the importance of being willing and able to learn from experience. While this conclusion is by no means unique to Afghanistan or even other FCAS, learning from experience is more challenging in these environments because of the multiple players involved, the complexity of the operating context, and the high political stakes.

The Danish experience in Afghanistan, in common with the experience of other members of the international community, underscores the importance of systems that promote critical reflection to enable organisations, not just individuals, to learn even in environments where the political pressure for positive results is strong. Input to such a system will come from rigorous monitoring at all levels (as discussed in conclusion 2 above) and an effective reporting system that enables information from a wide range of perspectives to be incorporated into policy assessments.



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# INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED

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## **Danish officials**

Lieutenant Colonel Steen Bornholt Andersen, FAK

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Pernille Dueholm, MFA

Lene Espersen, former Member of Parliament, former Minister of Foreign Affairs

Captain (N) Jens Claus Hansen, MOD

Commander S.g. Felix Ebbestad, MOD

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Due Haleem, Mission East

Kim Harzner, Mission East

Lene Ingvarsen, Danish Afghanistan Committee

Mads Jorgensen, Danish People's Aid

Lars Pedersen, Danish Assistance to Afghan Rehabilitation and Technical Training/Kabul

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Representatives of Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees, Danish Demining Group and Danish Afghanistan Committee (roundtable discussion)

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Lessons Learned Team

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Jim Wasserstrom, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction Lessons Learned Team

Scott Worden, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction Lessons Learned Team

**Other international interlocutors**

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Pawan Kucita, UNICEF

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Nadia Nivin, Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow

Rasool Rasooli, National Solidarity Programme

Samantha de Silva, World Bank

Andrew Wilder, United States Institute of Peace, formerly Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit

Björn Müller-Wille, formerly Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team

## **LESSONS FROM THE DANISH INTEGRATED APPROACH IN AFGHANISTAN 2001 – 2014**

At the end of 2014, the NATO-led ISAF-mission was brought to a close and the Danish combat troops withdrawn. Against this backdrop, the political parties behind the Danish engagement in Afghanistan agreed to compile experiences from the past thirteen years of Danish civil and military efforts in Afghanistan. The compilation should focus on lessons regarding the Danish integration of political, military and developmental instruments, which has taken place under very challenging security conditions.

**The study consists of three parts, of which this report is part II. The three parts are:**

- Part I** International Lessons from Integrated Approaches in Afghanistan, prepared by DIIS, Danish Institute for International Studies.
- Part II** Development Cooperation in Afghanistan, prepared by development consultants Landell Mills.
- Part III** Danish Lessons from Stabilisation & CIMIC Projects, prepared by The Royal Danish Defence College.