

## **Conference on Preparing for Afghanistan's Reconstruction 27-29 November, 2001**

### **Co-Chairs' Concluding Remarks**

Ladies and Gentlemen

We are coming to the end of this three day Conference on *Preparing for Afghanistan's Reconstruction* held in Islamabad, and convened jointly by the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. We have been impressed and gratified by the large number of participants who came here over the last three days to exchange ideas about Afghanistan's reconstruction. Over 350 people came and actively participated, including a large number of Afghans of diverse backgrounds and NGOs working in Afghanistan. The agenda for the conference has been rich and very full and the discussion has been intense and spirited. In our concluding remarks we will not be able to do justice to the richness and detail of these discussions but instead will reflect on some of the key messages we heard that will help guide us in the months ahead as we continue preparing for Afghanistan's reconstruction. However, the full detail of all the group discussions and plenary presentations as well as the additional papers prepared for this conference, will be collated over the next few days and made available to the wider community.

In the context of Afghanistan's rapidly unfolding political situation the importance of this meeting for the future of Afghanistan is clear. The work we have undertaken over the last three days is a critical part of a broader process of re-building Afghanistan's shattered country and institutions. That process of reconstruction requires first and foremost knowledge and information. It also requires political leadership and cooperation and it requires funding. We came here over the last three days to discuss the first of these three items – that of knowledge and information. The conference provided an opportunity to harvest ideas and knowledge among Afghan participants and the aid community with operational experience in Afghanistan, supplemented by knowledge from the wider development community with its global experience of post-conflict work.

A number of guiding principles emerged early in our discussions that will remain with us as we move forward together. First and foremost, we must continue to listen deeply to Afghans. We must ensure that the people of Afghanistan are in the driver's seat for reconstruction and development of their country, and we must all try to look at the future of Afghanistan through the eyes of Afghans.

The political, humanitarian and social situation and challenges we face as we anticipate moving into reconstruction will need to provide an early context for our efforts. The political discussions taking place in Germany are a cause for optimism. The humanitarian situation remains serious for millions of Afghans and the costs of not supporting the humanitarian program are high. There is a need to ensure that there are sufficient resources for the humanitarian response so that it lays the foundation upon which a strong nation can be built. In the fragile political and social environment of Afghanistan, there will be a need for a process of reconciliation and for the international community to listen to Afghans.

Like most post conflict situations, Afghanistan presents its own unique environment and set of challenges. Nevertheless, previous experiences do provide some lessons, particularly for the early design and overall management of reconstruction efforts.

We need to avoid quick fixes and the tendency to set up inappropriate and costly precedents that would be difficult to fix later on – however expedient they may seem. Putting in place good economic policies and building sound economic institutions at the outset is important, including a central monetary authority, a fiscal system and a functional financial and payment system. In early reconstruction efforts, we should also avoid laying the basis for a bloated federal bureaucracy and focus first on the core responsibilities of an Afghan government. In turn, the international response must ensure that aid does not become part of the problem rather than part of the solution. In this context, we should work to avoid overly complex and competing aid management and funding arrangements which will be difficult for Afghans and their government to manage. Lessons for us in this context are: to give early attention to building a reasonably comprehensive and realistic Afghan government budget, even if rudimentary at first, to anchor the reconstruction effort; the need for an agency of the Afghan government responsible for managing international assistance; and the need for a unified aid coordination mechanism, that would enhance coordination and accountability of international assistance and reduce complexity for Afghans.

The core work of the conference to identify the priority needs and likely challenges and opportunities for Afghanistan's reconstruction was undertaken in small working groups, focusing on the first day on *Immediate Post Crisis Recovery and Reconstruction issues* and on the second day on *Social Development and Rebuilding Infrastructure*. Groups were asked to draw on the collective experience of members in building a better, and more concrete, understanding of Afghanistan's requirements and priorities for reconstruction and development, and options for how to move ahead.

The group discussions were challenging and dynamic, with much rich and useful information and recommendations that will provide an excellent foundation for further work. Key strategic messages emerged from the group discussions, as follows:

- Capacity, optimism and energy exist among the people of Afghanistan despite the years of war and deprivation. There is a unified and enormous will among the people to build a nation that encompasses all people, women and men, both inside and outside Afghanistan, and from all ethnic backgrounds.
- In everything we do, we must build on this capacity – utilize it and strengthen it, and optimise productive employment opportunities for Afghan citizens. Specific interventions should build initially on existing experience and capacities in Afghanistan. Reconstruction and development across all sectors must be accompanied by an equal emphasis on capacity building and local ownership.
- Local communities in Afghanistan have built up many survival skills, coping strategies, strengths and practices over the years that are available, and must be utilized in the short term and scaled up over time – including a vibrant private sector spirit, community driven efforts,

NGO experience in service delivery and traditional institutions for guiding resource allocation decisions.

- This private sector spirit and capacity must be at the centre of Afghanistan's development strategy, and evident in reconstruction efforts from the beginning, including in the delivery of both infrastructure and social services;
- With these strengths in Afghanistan's society, and the limited experiences with extensive government structures, Afghans have an opportunity now to build a nation that is based on strong civil society and communities, good governance, transparency and open and positive relations between local communities and government.
- Fragmented sector and sub-sector programming should be avoided. A coordinated and holistic approach must be taken, from the point of view of the people and their community, in all sectors ranging from roading, agriculture and rural development, as well as health, education and water and sanitation.
- Women, as well as men, must be fully engaged in reconstruction planning and development, with the family at the centre of our attentions.

In this concluding statement we will not go through all of the findings of our group discussions but want to reflect only on a few that are likely to require our immediate attention as we move forward with further planning in the next few months. These messages were as follows:

First, security is essential for the reconstruction effort – encompassing political stability, law and order, legal and financial. In particular, de-mining will be an important immediate priority. Afghanistan already has the world's largest de-mining program, run largely by Afghans, but for reconstruction and resettlement to take place there will be a need for further scaling up of this effort focusing on the most efficient de-mining techniques and further education efforts.

Second, agriculture is clearly going to be at the core of any survival and livelihood strategy for most of the population. It has demonstrated resilience and entrepreneurship and can be improved radically. It is imperative for restoring livelihoods and we need to work to find viable alternatives to poppy production;

Third, in most sectors, including education, health, water and sanitation, but also in infrastructure, attention must be focused in the first instance on building on the existing community based programs which have been running effectively for many years, despite limited resources, while retaining and strengthening the central role of Government as regulator and adviser;

Fourth, harnessing assistance to foster the "conditions" for demobilization or IDP/refugee return – including creating the opportunities for viable livelihoods and productivity - will be essential rather than forced efforts or consumption packages alone.

In addition, the small groups almost universally voiced the need to continue and broaden consultations with and among the people of Afghanistan, on many of the issues discussed throughout the conference as a means of building consensus, as well as a need for further work and information gathering, including a systematic assessment of Afghanistan's post-conflict reconstruction requirements. This advice mirrors the request made by the donor community at the meeting co-hosted by Japan and the USA on November 20th. Building on the excellent

discussions and knowledge-building that has occurred at the conference, UNDP, the World Bank and ADB will work together and in consultation with Afghans and the assistance community to prepare a preliminary assessment of reconstruction requirements by mid January.

Mieko Nishimizu  
[The World Bank](#)

Yoshihiro Iwasaki  
[Asian Development Bank](#)

David Lockwood  
[UNDP](#)