

The Nexus between Nation Building and Capacity Building in Afghanistan

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Introduction

Over the course of the past ten years nation building has increasingly become an important subject of research as the world attention has been focused on Afghanistan. Although the overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001 has created opportunities for the international community to promote the national consolidation process in Afghanistan along with revival of the state's institutions, however the chaotic and delicate nature of the Afghan social structures have proven subtle task to make major headways. Without fully investigating all the complexities involved, rebuilding the fragmented state of Afghanistan remains an untested assumption. With the looming uncertainty of tomorrow, the fear are profound that the financial assistance from international community will dry up with the exit of multinational forces from Afghanistan which can undermine the whole project of post-conflict reconstruction process in the country. Given this backdrop, what is the specific function of indigenous capacity building initiatives in rebuilding post-conflict nations such as Afghanistan? How human capacity constraints affect the various dynamics of nation building processes in present Afghan society? Over the course of the past ten years nation building has increasingly become an important subject of research and attention as the world powers have been engaged in Afghanistan. Although the overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001 has created opportunities for the international community to have profound influence on the Afghans' internal affairs, the chaotic and delicate nature of the Afghan social structures has proven subtle task requiring sustained efforts and resources. Without fully understanding all the complexities involved, rebuilding the fragmented state of Afghanistan is an untested assumption. With the looming uncertainty of tomorrow, the international community can exit the country militarily and cut their financial ties which can prove disastrous for the whole project of post-conflict reconstruction of Afghanistan.

This research paper will examine the concept of nation building with regard to the utmost importance of building the capacities of Afghanistan's civil service sector. In order to be specific, this research will primarily focus on the various dynamics of capacity building of the Afghan civil servants and how it is affected by institutional capacity constraints—in terms of institutional decay and human resources depletion. This research paper argues that the current capacity building efforts should be focused on the development of human resources in the public service sector, particularly in areas such as management, administrative system, monitoring & evaluation, accountability, and transparency. These areas are critical to reviving a functioning administrative system that may strengthen the capacity of the Afghan government to deliver needed services to the Afghan people in a satisfactory and timely manner. Unless the nation's human assets are developed through proper and sustainable capacity building processes and approaches, the country transition toward a future of prosperity and growth is far-fetched goal. Afghanistan needs a comprehensive capacity building policy targeting the civil servants in order to increase their set of skills to bring about transparency, accountability, efficiency and economic growth. Nation building can only be possible through building Afghan indigenous capacities that can promote the national ownership in building self-sustainable Afghanistan.

Literature review

Studies show that despite billions of dollars investment in Afghanistan post conflict reconstruction project, the notion of nation building is yet to become a complete reality for the country. Few international researchers and scholars have been able to enter Afghanistan to conduct extensive field research about the nation building and capacity building processes. Insecurity, threats, lack of understanding cultural issues, traditional values and continued wars has forced many observers and writers to

stay away from the country. Even those who have tried to write on these subjects have not been able to fully grasp the facts as they cannot spend enough time in the country because of constant threats to their lives. So the burden of doing research and reporting largely fell on the shoulders of large organizations such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and United Nation Development Programs (UNDP). They are the front runners in producing relative quality work on these topics as these organizations have headquarters in the country and offices in many provinces.

For instance, the World Bank efforts to revitalize the Afghan public sector and improve governance are well known. World Bank has joined by many other national and international organizations to offer support and assistance to the Afghan government in implementing measures and programs to develop local capacity over the short to medium term. Since 2003, the efforts resulted in establishing the Afghan Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission to oversee civil service reforms in the country. One of the signature reforms was Priority Reform and Restructuring (PRR) to hire new recruits based on merit and offer rewards to be placed on elevated pay scale for a fixed term in exchange for restructuring and reforms. The idea was to reduce corruption by empowering the Afghan civil service to attract new and untapped talent and fulfill the existing gaps in various ministries.

The existing policy documents and reports point toward two major problems with the Afghan civil service sector at two levels; the systemic level and individual level. The outdated and rigid Afghan civil service structures with overlapping functions and old fashioned procedures and processes are presenting enormous challenge to the current reform efforts on systemic level. It is compounded by lack of merit based recruits and proper human resources planning. Poor human capacity further resulted into fewer quality reforms to deal with the problems on individual level. Poor human resources management is more a root problem to administrative inefficiency and lack of policy implementation at both national and sub-national level.

Most of the studies highlight the security problem as the major impediment to serious and honest reforms to tackle corruption in the Afghan civil service sector. For instance, Kai Eide, ex-UN diplomat to the United Nations Political Mission (UNAMA) in Afghanistan, argued in his recent book, entitled *Power Struggles over Afghanistan*. According to him, the worsening security situation and continuation of armed conflict created an environment where rapid progress seems impossible, constraining the ability of the UN organizations to deliver on its mandate to help Afghan government to reform itself. Further, he rightly draws attention to the chaotic international engagement strategy in Afghanistan and the negligible role of the Afghan government in shaping that strategy to unlock the locally deep rooted conflict to resolve the security problem. However, he rarely touched upon on the other side of the coin—the brain drain and poor human resources base as a future threat to Afghanistan.

Author Marvin G. Weinbaum, in his article titled *Rebuilding Afghanistan: Impediments, Lessons, and Prospects* highlighted the key factors affecting the nation building processes in Afghanistan beyond security issues. He expanded the scope of the factors and largely focused on the local dynamics such as poor governance and human resources basis along with limited economic recovery and interference of regional countries as the obstacle for national building processes in Afghanistan.² His whole idea can be sufficiently summarized that the “[c]oncern over limited administrative capacity and corruption leads international agencies and donor countries ordinarily state-focused, to channel aid programs largely through NGOs and U.N. agencies. Poor coordination among these groups—and among them, the Afghan government, and the private sector—remains a serious impediment to the recovery”.³ Nonetheless his conclusion that the apparent shortage of trained and motivated personal in the Afghan public sector is to attract qualified people from the Afghan Diaspora to fill the gap in the government is somewhat problematic without developing indigenous capacities in Afghanistan.

To move a bit further to the region, the Pakistani writer, Ahmed Rashid, has tried to write more in depth such as *Taliban* and *Descent into Chaos* about Afghanistan, trying to capture the realities on the ground. It is important to mention that a number of the world publishers such as *New York Times* have also taken solid steps in reporting ongoing- events and writing analytical reports about the conflicts in the country. However, none has completely touched upon or has precisely spoken on the issue of nation building and capacity building of human resources management in the country as the subject might not have gotten much of the attention. This research article will try to focus on answering the concept of nation building from the point of views of human resources development.

Research methodology

This case study research is based on the findings of years of field research, work and observation in Afghanistan’s civil service sector. This research is primarily qualitative in nature supported by quantitative data and techniques. For this research paper, the apparently competing approaches of qualitative and quantitative techniques are seen as mutually complementary, providing different perspectives and answering different aspects of the main research question. The question that this research

paper is attempting to examine is however qualitative in nature and therefore is not easily answered by the quantitative research designs alone. But our professional opinion is that it is rather best answered by qualitative research methods complimented by other methods as well.

Moreover, in order to acquire the needed facts and figures in a country such as Afghanistan, where more than 70 percent of the population is deprived from receiving formal education, the qualitative method is a more advantageous approach in getting relatively accurate data, gender-and-geographic balanced information, and rich and diverse details. Another main factor is that many Afghans prefer generally interviews rather than speaking numbers. In order to achieve a clearer picture of how capacity constraints affect the various dynamics of nation building processes in present Afghan society, where a lingering conflict, violence and insecurity has created mistrust and a divide amongst its members, the most promising approach are the classic three methods of qualitative data-gathering: *In-depth Interviews, direct Observation, policy document analysis*.

The author of this paper has conducted two hundreds interviews in six months in Afghanistan. Interviewees were randomly chosen both from public and private sectors that included central and, provincial governments, local authorities, international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, foreign dignitaries residing in the country and wider academia etc. The diversity of subjects helped in making a comprehensive understanding of the topic under discussion. The author used both open-ended and structured questions during various interview sessions. The privacy of the participants is properly handled. Quality data analysis tools were used to derive common themes and coherent patterns and proper categories from the primary data. The gathered data were critically examined, and carefully interpreted and synthesized for meanings and comprehension.

The concept of nation building

Over the course of at least two decades, the world has witnessed a number of failed states that have emerged from continuously devastating conflicts. One of these war-torn countries is Afghanistan; a state that is still struggling between gunfire and insecurity, and the complex transition of peace and stability. In order to bring back a relatively minimum amount of stability and normality to the lives of ordinary Afghans, the notion of nation building must be applied accurately and in a timely manner.

Nation building is defined by the OECD as such “Actions undertaken, usually by national actors, to forge a sense of common nationhood, usually in order to overcome ethnic, sectarian or communal differences; usually to counter alternate sources of identity and loyalty; and usually to mobilize a population behind a parallel state-building project. [Nation building] may or may not contribute to peace building. [The term is] confusingly equated with post-conflict stabilization and peace building in some recent scholarship and US political discourse”.⁴ Given this definition, the concept of nation building is not new to scholars and practitioners familiar with the historical processes of state and nation building processes. This paper takes this definition in the context of post-conflict situation and within the framework of international assistance to reconstruct capable, legitimate and effective states in the aftermath of armed conflict and violence.

In the last century humanity has greatly suffered from World War I and World War II; two costly and extensive wars.⁵ These wars disrupted the financial system of the world, destructed the global economy, destroyed millions of lives, and generated worldwide suffering. However, it is made certain that the risk of having such a catastrophic war again seems very low; as many economically well-off nations have developed a range of sophisticated arms. These arsenals of advanced weapons are capable of completely wiping out countries in a matter of minutes. Also the possibility of massive devastation logically prevents advanced nations from initiating any military attacks with each other, as none will gain the status of victor. On the contrary, it is the undeveloped countries (the so called failed states) that are currently more threatening the stability of the world.⁶

On the surface these failed states are a direct threat to the peace and stability merely of their respected regions. Nevertheless in the broader prospect, they remain, in fact, a powerful force in destabilizing the world as a whole. Consequently the failing states have become a point of focus throughout the world. Powerful global stakeholders are trying to resuscitate these failed states through a variety of forward-looking strategies, such as nation building; in order to protect international interests as well as their own. Case in point, Afghanistan has emerged as one of those failed states that have been perceived to be a source of destruction for itself, a source of terrorism to its region, and a center of enormous risk to the world. As a result, over the course of the last decade, the world has invested human and financial resources into Afghanistan; costing many participants dearly. These efforts were put forward in order to engage in nation building efforts, hoping to reverse the failing policies of the past and thus save Afghanistan.

Such nation building approaches have not been proved to be an effective tool, due to the fact that domestic and international policy-makers have paid little attention to capacity building. One needs to first assess what major characteristics a

failed state has before providing a nation building prescription. In other words, understanding the nature of a failed state paves the way for a better and effective nation building strategy through one of the main means, known as capacity building.⁷

This paper understands the concept of nation building in terms of capacity building. Through the comprehensive and systematic process of capacity building, the rebuilding of a failed state such as Afghanistan becomes clear and achievable. However, the Afghan nation builders have so far not paid sufficient attention to this notion of nation building processes and approaches. A comprehensive capacity building agenda is prerequisite for the nation building goals in Afghanistan after the departure of the multinational forces and need to be incorporated into the current national strategy.

Characteristics of a failed state

To clearly pinpoint the uniqueness of a failed state, Afghanistan would suffice as a case-study; it has been marred by being in post-conflict transition and still burned by war, gunfire, and external interferences over a decade. Overall, a failed state such as Afghanistan has the following major issues to deal with:

First: The lack of human capital or brain-drain has been a major topic.⁸ War brings misery and destruction, forcing external powers to either leave the country or suffer extreme loss through the conflict. In the case of Afghanistan, the educated force, the intellectual sources, and the professional beings have always been the target of elimination or constantly deprived of their wealth. Either way, these human capitals have been killed, jailed, or have fled the country over three decades of war. Some of the more fortunate ones, who escaped the chamber of death and humiliation, have either passed away, lived abroad in isolation, or have retired. Consequently, Afghanistan has been further drawn deeper into turmoil and disarray as its educated force, having the experience to occupy the leading vacant positions around the state, does not exist in the country.⁹

When a state cannot offer the least amount of expected public service to its citizens, as a result of not having the human resources, that country more or less falls into the category of a failed state. A genuinely common expectation of a state is to protect its citizens in order for them to be able to receive public service. A state without the human assets to run the country's daily operations is simply predestined for disaster, even if international donors continue to dump hundreds of their own advisors to offer support in that country. Without the capital a firm goes out of business and without the human capital a country goes into chaos.¹⁰

Second: Corruption is another major stumbling block of a failed state because it devastates national financial resources. It lowers the confidence of investors, resulting in uncertainty in the market. Corruption¹¹ drives the liquid assets out of the failed state to a safer destination beyond its borders. Therefore, the state's national financial institutions would not have much reserve or even cash in hand to support the daily operation of the government adequately, let alone the idea of building infrastructures and creating jobs and domestic growth.

The worst case scenario is that corruption becomes simply a way of daily life. Without kickbacks, as a means of financial rewards, achieving completion of daily services from the government would be nearly an impossible task. Today, Afghanistan is ranked amongst the most corrupted nations on the Earth.¹² Almost four decades ago when Afghanistan enjoyed a relatively peaceful era and was not considered among the failed states, the country suffered very sparse corruption. During those days, there was relatively a strong sense of prosecution as well as law and order; as the Afghan government was strong enough to prosecute, according to the law, those who committed the criminal activities such as corruption. In essence, corruption and failed state, in many cases, are synonymous.

Third: The mismanagement of resources is another inclination that can be seen in a failed state. After the September 11th tragedy, the world's attention suddenly turned towards Afghanistan, where Bin Laden and his followers made the country their safe-haven at the cost of the native Afghans. As part of counterinsurgency initiatives, the will of the political world followed with billions of dollars of aid for the reconstruction of Afghanistan; to rebuild the destroyed infrastructures, to create jobs, and to bring prosperity.¹³

The injection of financial packages from different developed nations greatly exceeded the expectation. However their effects, in terms of making the lives of the ordinary locals better, have turned out to be surprisingly minimal. In most cases the financial aid did not even reach the intended targets; the municipalities and districts where the majority of the local Afghans live. From a statistical standpoint, the last decade indeed has been the golden age for Afghans in terms of the volume of aid money being sent to the country. Modern Afghanistan had never witnessed such cash inflows in the past and had never had such remarkable financial resources at its disposal.¹⁴

Nevertheless, these flows of international financial resources have not been managed properly and have not been channeled to meet a range of strategic and constructive planning. In most cases, high costs and huge expenditures have consumed the resources.¹⁵ Occasionally financial engineering replaced the real agenda and the majority of financing left the

country and settled in consulting accounts under the names of fees and commissions. Such wasteful events have occurred at the expense of the world's taxpayers and under the name of local Afghans as there was not much of oversight, accountability, transparency, and responsibility. Therefore, mismanagement is another component of a failed state.

Fourth: Poverty is another grim reality of a failed state. The majority of its citizens suffer from a lack of employment, high inflation, expensive real estate, and low income to make ends meet. As highlighted by Kai Eide, that the Afghan middle class is nonexistent;¹⁶ the individuals who supposedly have the purchasing power to run the diverse cycles of the national economy. The immense power of poverty and lack of domestic growth force the middle class to gradually become downgraded and join the masses of the impoverished. Only a slim percentage of society, possibly ten percent of the population, makes up what is considered to be rich. In other words, the wealth of the nation becomes accumulated in the hands of a tiny minority and the rest of the population does not have the working capital to work with. As a result, the engine of the economy is not functioning; causing in most cases the disintegration of family structures, the creation of prostitution, heightened level of criminal activities, and the formation of social disorder.¹⁷

Poverty, in principle, is one of the most strikingly inseparable elements of a failed state. Poverty has rocked the social values of Afghans and has completely wiped out the middle class in Afghanistan. The accretion of the financial resources in the hands of few have increased poverty to a level that the masses of ordinary citizens have lost hope in having a brighter and better future for themselves as well as for their children; all this despite the fact that international donors are still pumping millions of dollars monthly towards the economy of the country.¹⁸

Fifth: Interference of the neighbors is another vivid sign of a fragmented state. Usually, neighbors have long-term strategic stakes in the failed state and try their best to subdue the failed state's leadership to obey their wishes. If such obedience is not granted, the neighboring powers commit a variety of bullying tactics, from terrors to economic sabotages to bring the failed state further into disarray and anarchy.

In the case of Afghanistan, the direct meddling and intervention of neighbors, such as particularly Pakistan and Iran, are undeniably crystal clear. Naturally, the neighbors see their geopolitical and economic advantages in a failed country by getting involved to make the failed state a further depended and suffered country. As a result, the failed state will face "national identity"¹⁹ crises and its political leaders will be encouraged by, in addition to many monetary and military means, the neighbors to fight for tribal and religious lines rather than for national unity or national reconciliation.

Capacity building as the bridge between the conflict and post-conflict reconstruction of a nation

The stakeholders, international as well as national policy-makers, have paid very little attention to the five major challenges of Afghanistan listed above. They have addressed their vision of undertaking the agenda of National Building through a shortsighted scope by providing cash, international advisors, soldiers, and other short-term relief aid. So far what has been missing in great detail has been one fundamental factor (and possibly the most proper solution), i.e., capacity building. Capacity building is the process of upgrading the government employees' skills so that the government functions to the best of its ability in terms of offering proper public service, security, and safety-net to the people of Afghanistan.

One might rightly wonder why so much focus is needed on the government's accountability and the sharpening of the skills of its employees. Through a social economic and political structure prospective, the reason why so many failed states are emerging from developing countries becomes clearer. One of the main characteristics of the developing countries is that the government, not the private sector, is the main player in providing mostly all services to the public. The same premise holds sturdy regarding Afghanistan. Afghanistan being an under-developed country does not have much of private sectors, although recently shaky and mostly unregulated segments of private sectors have been emerging. Generally, the government of Afghanistan has been the sources of employment as well as providing public service to Afghans. Consequently, the agenda of capacity building should focus particularly on the government and its employees.

To tackle the major issues of "lack of Human Capital", "Corruption", and "Mismanagement", one needs to assess the important role of capacity building. Basically, in many ways, capacity building could help the government solve issues or at least put the government on a long-term stable transition from post-conflict to reconstruction.

First of all, many of the international stakeholders have come to Afghanistan with a skewed perception of nation building in mind. Surprisingly, major policy-makers have not picked up on a critical issue, which is that donors cannot and will not be able to build a nation. It is simply impossible. No nation in the history of mankind has been built solely dependent on donors. On the contrary, the natives of a country build their nation. It is the responsibility of the citizens of the republic to supervise the republic. If this is the case, then, capacity building focused on the civil servants of Afghanistan is a crucial factor in enabling the government's employees to become self-efficient and self-empowered in order to be able to take control of the daily affairs

of the failed state.

The five common functions

Allowing Afghanistan to have a faster and better recovery requires the implementation of five common functions, which are basically five approaches in different fields of trainings. Based on the major question of why Afghanistan is perceived as a failed state, the following five key areas, in correlation with capacity approaches, to train government employees are:

- ◆ *Human Resources Development*
- ◆ *Fighting Corruption*
- ◆ *Financial Management*
- ◆ *Project Management*
- ◆ *Policy and Strategy Development*

Over the course of decades of war in Afghanistan, the so called “intellectuals” of the country, if been given the opportunity, have fled. A failed state without the proper human capital required to run the major operations of the government is an impossible endeavor. Therefore, human resource training is an essential part of the government capacity building strategy.

Furthermore, the human resource classes teach the employees how to take care of and be receptive to ordinary people, who come to the government’s offices seeking support. These classes remind the government employees that personal data must be treated with the utmost sincerity and should not to be compromised for self-interest and promotions. The human resource classes, moreover, teach the employees to be mindful of women’s rights and to be respectful of female colleagues’ rights as well as those of the female clients. These major issues, if not addressed properly through human resources training classes, will certainly prevent the country from moving on forward with the proper working force to serve the country.

Anti-corruption training will aim to curb and control the rising issues of corruption in Afghanistan. Teaching of ethics is an essential part of the training; as well as the idea of how corruption’s destructive tendencies can lead to the debasement of the foundation of an economy. For example the working capitals leave the corrupted country to a safe-heaven, to a more stable state, causing a major fiscal hole in the country.²⁰

On the technical side of the matter, processes of simplification will be taught to the civil servants in order to fight corruption on all levels of the government. These simplification processes have helped countries such as Singapore and will certainly condense the often long and torturous bureaucratic processes of administration in Afghanistan.

Another essential part of capacity building is training of financial management. To cut costs, lower expenditures and ensure sustainability, government employees (especially those who deal with budgets and accountings in Kabul as well as in provinces) need to be trained in both budgets and accountings. Billions of dollars have been invested in Afghanistan; however, there is not sufficient financial reporting or balance sheets to reflect those international expenditures. On the same token, developing budgets, allocated annually by donors, have not been spent mostly to their maximum capacity as few government employees really understand the budget cycles and how budgeting works. Financial management training will cover both accounting and budgeting and it is certainly necessary for young government employees to be familiar with those financial basics in order to execute them properly.

Next area of capacity building is the teaching of project management.²¹ Afghanistan is still at war. When many villages or districts are emancipated, through heavy combat and millions of dollars of cost, the local villagers need at least basic public services and support. In most cases and because of continuous conflicts, many government employees have not been trained properly and can’t write adequate reports to reflect the needs of those villagers. As a result, confusion, frustration and disappointment replace hope.

Project management training is so intricately and thoughtfully deep that it prioritizes the betterment of the writing skills of government employees systematically. These kinds of trainings teach data-mining to analyze the facts, understand the reality on the grounds and the ability to report properly to the central government the needs of the locals. Such objective reporting assists the central government to not only understands the needs of the ordinary people but also it allows for a further development of the relationship between the government and the local people.

It is obvious that capacity building efforts in the absence a relevant and an effective national strategy to fight poverty will yield little impact. To fight it, there should be a focus on how to develop a proper national strategy that can be implemented in medium to long-run. Of course, the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) serves as the Afghanistan’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)²² which is the key mechanism to fight poverty in the country. However, there is little

discussion on how it is linked to the improvement in reducing the corruption in the Afghan public sector. Fight poverty should be part of a broader mechanism of capacity building. Vocational training and teaching classes should be taught on how to make the effective use of the national policy of poverty reduction and create space for implementing the national strategy on all departmental and managerial levels. The evaluation of these training and teaching classes and modules may perhaps assist planners and policy makers on how to better understand the underlying dynamics of poverty reduction and design and develop demand-driven strategies to fight poverty across the nation.

The Afghan national strategy operates within the framework of the national policy to tackle the poverty both on macro and micro levels. As the public sector in a given failed state such as Afghanistan is often the major source of employment, investing in private sectors to create job opportunities is inevitable. In Afghanistan the private sectors largely do not exist or severely underdeveloped and informal. Given such a difficult environment, training government managers on how to combat poverty plays an important role as the increased public servants' skills serve the purpose to find them better jobs within the public sector and increase competition. It is evidently clear that the government leaders and managers need to be further creative in encouraging private sectors to design and develop new mechanisms to grow to absorb youth. Doing so would ease the burden of poverty on citizen and set the stage for creating a dynamic private sector.

In brief, the notion of internationally assisted nation-building is a relatively ineffective theory in the absence of an effective and modestly capable public sector and a dynamic private sector. The Afghan case demonstrates that it has not been a truly successful story, despite billions of dollars investment. The existing data²³ shows that insufficiently educated and under-trained public servants, their limited public administrative capacity at the national and sub-national levels require an urgent attention. One of the promising approaches to bring about sustainable results, to strengthen the institutional capacity of the failed state and to allowing for a gradual transition towards a peaceful country is the mechanism of indigenous capacity building. A low cost and continued training of civil servants brings back human capitals, fights back corruption, restores financial accountability, improves the government and the locals' relations by objective reporting, and decreases poverty in the long run.

Afghanistan could be saved from further divisions and conflicts. Afghanistan has the full capability of joining the rest of the peaceful nations of the world. Stability and economic growth can be back in Afghanistan and as a result to the regions. All this is possible if stakeholders unfasten their short sighted approach towards nation building and focus on the capacity building of the Afghans further. Capacity building is one of the best options to save the country and its citizens and to bring it back on the right track as it once used to be, at least before three decades of war.

To get to the bottom of the issue, capacity building in fragmented states, this research paper will solely focus on the elemental role of human capital and how to build such an asset through capacity building step by step. Before moving into details, there is one more issue that needs to be studied, it is called by major donors the "Quick Impact." This study shows that "Quick Impact" has been one of the main policies of donors in Afghanistan for at least the past decade since the Taliban were forced to relinquish power.

The politics of "Quick Impact"

Generally speaking and at least in the case of Afghanistan, major donors have followed so far their Embassies' policies. Afghanistan needed the international donors to jump start its broken economy and allows a fresh start. A clean slate would allow the country the ability to come up with a coherent civil service faction to run the country after years of wars and social unrest.

Major donors arrived in 2002 in Kabul and slowly have become the powerful element in shaping the Afghan Government through controlling cash flows. Without a doubt, the international donors have had to listen indirectly and in some cases directly from their embassies for directions and operations. In reality, donor politics, in some cases, have had a huge damageable cost in shaping capacity building in the country towards the wrong direction. The fact is that the donors' money has come from their native countries' citizens' taxes. These tax revenues are being collected by the states in return the states donate the tax money to their agencies to invest in war hit states.

Without a doubt, one of the major and possibly the most single important international donor in Afghanistan has been USAID. USAID spends the American people's tax money in order to aid developing states. Since the overthrow of Taliban, USAID has been funding numerous projects in a broader magnitudes of the country. USAID's involvement has brought, in many cases, success stories and the agency's engagement is admirable. However, its "Quick Impact" policy especially at the areas of capacity building has not been so positive.

The US Government has contributed the biggest share of the military among international donors in hoping to bring

stability in Afghanistan. On the same token the Bush Administration was under pressure to show result at home for its engagements in Afghanistan in order to take on the second war, Iraq. Furthermore, reelection of the President, congress and even the party's victory need favorable public opinions and the public opinion could be influenced by the good news from aboard particularly Afghanistan. These internal politics and public pressure gave birth in a more common way – to the concept of the “Quick Impact”.²⁴

USAID has been enormously and vastly engaged in reconstructions in Afghanistan. On capacity building, USAID favored, in the past, projects mostly that showed cosmetic results as long as it showed the “Quick Impact.” The organization favored proposal that backed not long term educational activities but rather three day or week training for recipients. These kinds of projects may have been very useful but not cost effective. Some of the government internal assessments²⁵ show that such projects have eaten away resources and valuable time, have not been helpful in laying down bases for a strong foundation for capacity building at least in the area most needed—the civil service. Among the cloud of politics and public opinion, maybe the “Quick Impact” showing quick results has been a smart political strategy at home but it has not healed the wounds in Afghanistan. The main reason is the Afghanistan requires sustainable and long term solutions. The restoration of modest infrastructures needs long term planning and investment, where the real time impact of “Quick Impacts Projects” are short lived. The whole premise of these projects is based on quick fix which does not exist in reality.²⁶

In short, there is no way in any account to engage in capacity building by implementing a week of educational activities to shore up the skill set of civil servants. The “Quick Impact” was designed for a short period project to show immediate results even if the results were on the surface. The policy of “Quick Impact” has given birth to another approach to spend money and report back that the allocated financial supports have been invested properly. That policy is called the “Study Tour.”

Discussion of research findings:

The Study Tour

Spending money in a proper way takes time and donors are under pressure to finish it despite the fact that it is during uncertain times. In the area of capacity building and human developments, some deep pocket donors have encouraged Study Tours by taking selective civil servants for a week of training out of Afghanistan to their native countries or in the region. While the study tour is one of the good approaches to get the participants familiar with cultural values and achievements of those countries, a week of study tour has never been a proper tool in creating added value education on the specific skills of participants.

A study tour following a month of training back at home will bring a much needed educational edge in supporting participants to master the academic materials. However, such a method is not often reinforced and in most cases the study tour has been a waste of energy and financial resources. However, the expenditures of these tours are high which look good at the accounting books of the donors. Unfortunately, this one week study tours are highly encouraged under the “Quick Impact” policies. For instance, some line-ministries annually use the donors' contributions for sending their high ranking officials abroad for a week in order to show the expenses and the week trip sounds more for sightseeing than learning new skills or knowledge.

Under the “Quick Impact” on nation building and capacity building, another alternative has been highly encouraged by many donors: the NGO–None Governmental Organizations. The NGOs' involvements need a particular attention as their engagements in capacity buildings have been questionable in most cases.

NGOs: The history of NGOs has been relatively a new chapter in Afghan history. Late 80s and early 90s, when the Russian backed Communist regime of Afghanistan was fighting the Western backed opponents, the concept of NGOs were being introduced by major donors at the Afghan Refugee Camps and Offices in Pakistan. The Western donors encouraged Afghan led NGOs to be created, in getting involved in different lines of businesses among the Afghan Refugees lives in Pakistan and Afghan-Pakistan borders. These NGOs were financed by the international donors and their requirements were to meet certain benchmarks in order to be in business. There was no direct supervision or restrict accountability. For example, a number of NGOs are involved in trainings locals in remote areas of the country. The NGOs get paid based on the benchmarks of donors to train fifty people in subjects such as finance and procurements in each five eastern districts of Konar Province. To keep paying the NGOs, major donors simply rely on the NGOs' monthly and quarterly reports on meeting those benchmarks. In most cases, the donors do not have enough of their own representatives or simply those representatives cannot travel to these districts because of high security concerns. The donors count on those NGOs' reports as the final results without practically and directly supervising and checking the impacts of those benchmarks or the real values of the NGOs' activities. Therefore, money is being wasted more often by many NGOs as there are no direct supervisions on quality of the outputs in the fields by either the

donors or the third party.

Once international donors arrived in Kabul around 2002, the same concept of creating NGOs was encouraged by donors either because of lack of the Afghan central government's mechanism or simply because donors wanted to move on and create parallel structures. Either way the NGOs have not been controlled or supervised by a centralized prestigious entity. Since capacity building has been a hot topic, many of these NGOs began to submit proposals for getting a slice of international funds in claiming to carry out training specifically in the remote areas of Afghanistan. The fact of the matter is that donors have given a big chunk of donations and financial supports to these NGOs.

Operating independently and in most cases without the governmental supervisions, these NGOs have moved forward in implementing mostly unorganized and unsystematic academic curriculums among masses of Afghan civilians. Without proper methods or being trained in area of educations, many of these NGOs, armed with the huge sums of money, began trainings. While money has been reported spent, the results, in most cases, in supporting the human capital of the civil servants remain questionable till now. For example, a considerable group of NGOs have been involved in Women Empowerment in the framework of the government. Without having a right training materials based on realities on the Afghan traditional ways of life, the NGOs began using the self-approved materials for trainings. Worse, in many cases the NGOs' trainers did not go through "Training of Trainer" processes to learn how to professionally transfer their knowledge to trainees. Therefore, the end results of their work remind yet to bring convincing impacts on empowering women after so many years of work and investments. However, under the policy of "Quick Impact", the concept of NGOs is still alive notably in capacity building and construction businesses.

Speaking of NGOs, the "Quick Impact" strategy has brought up another concept, the international contractors and their organizations in Afghanistan. It is important to cover this matter as will in hoping to give a clear picture of capacity impact.

International Contractors: Based on a numbers of interviews and exchanges of views taken place with the senior USAID officials in 2012, they believed that "after the end of Vietnam War in 1975, US Government slowly had cut down in rank and files of its main aid agency, the USAID. While the mission of USAID has remained the same and even got expanded based on the country's foreign policies' involvements overseas, USAID employees' budget got shrinking at least by 30%. The organization has far less employees now in managing operation in fields as opposed to much larger staff it had in 70s. Such a shrinking of its own staff has forced the agency to rely on independent contractors or big international firms to carry out projects.

These independent firms usually bid and get multi millions dollars projects. In the process, these firms hire extremely expensive international consultants to carry out the jobs. Their jobs in areas of building in human resources in Afghanistan have not been much of successes as they spent millions of dollars. For instance, an average international consultant gets paid \$14000 salary monthly. In a month, in most cases, they cannot show up to work at least ten days for security concerns. On the top of that they use another ten days as off for the weekends. They cannot travel to provinces easily. If they show up to work for the remaining of the month, they need translators. As a result, the job of building solid human assets for the country by the contractors and international consultants has not been a promising one. Here are some profound factors that explained the failures in most cases: *Language barrier:* International consultants usually do not speak the native languages and their ability of communications gets severely limited to get their messages across in fields. *Security Issues:* Afghanistan is still at war and security is the main cause prohibiting consultants and foreign workers from moving freely. The insecurity has limited the transportation or even the transit of them from one location to another on time. The international donors cannot leave their secure walls and actually go into the field and observe the contracts being carried out.

Cultural issues: Afghanistan is a socially conservative society, where the people are very hospitable to their guests. However, international consultants cannot reach out for the bigger segment of society, women. In many cases, in villages the international staff cannot reach out for men either. There are a number of cultural barriers creating the gap between a native and an international in a province.

The above main factors chop off opportunities for and cut off the link of communications for international firms to do a fine job in Afghanistan when it comes to the grass root level. Often more, these international firms are for profits and they look to maximize their share of profits rather than paying direct attention to get the job done at the best possible way. These donors and USAID do not have enough staff to follow the output closely as I have noticed in the past five years working for capacity building director. Therefore they rely on getting feedback from contractors through monthly reports. Contractors spend, not surprisingly, a good amount of time to write glassy reports full of achievements in order to meet their benchmarks. Example, even construction firms rely on hiring many international consultants that have nothing to do with civil engineering or

constructions. Many of these hired ones are report writers. They write non objective stories in many cases to maximize their firms' impacts in a country like Afghanistan that many donors fear to leave their headquarters especially in districts levels to check the bases of the claims. It is worth mentioning that there are some contractors that have done fine jobs but they are extremely outnumbered.

Based on above mentioned data and examples, "Quick Impact" strategies are not promising way dealing in countries such as Afghanistan. Maybe the "Quick Impact" strategy works well in states that have strong foundations in maintaining their human resource after a disaster hits or the country goes under a quick war. But in Afghanistan where wars simply demolished the structural basis of human assets not only in Kabul but largely and more profoundly in provinces the policy cannot be practical in bringing results.

How to build a reality based and result-oriented foundation in building human asset

The mentioned examples throughout this research paper have shown that these approaches have been paid off and have brought low cost and sustainable results in building human resources of the country as they have been implanted in the past five years with positive impacts through Afghanistan Civil Service Institute across the country:

First: Internship for college Graduate

A great many young Afghans graduate from four year of colleges but they cannot be hired in the public sector—the biggest source of employment in the country. The main reason is that these graduates do not have the necessary skills that these positions require. Furthermore, the government civil law requires a minimum of experience of one year in making the graduates eligible in applying and competing for new positions. The Internship program that is designed by the government provides the opportunity for the graduates to enroll for six months in those internships. These internships offer two advantages: one the prospective intern learns more about challenges in the real world during the program and on the same token the graduates of the internship program will receive the certificate that legally is equivalent to a full year worth of the job experience, directly allowing the young graduate to compete for the opening. Furthermore, in many cases, through the "Quick Impact" approaches, international donors cannot leave their bases to monitor the NGOs' or foreign contractors' outputs in the fields. However, the government has a free hand and its representatives can easily go around and monitor and even measure the results as its representatives have more accesses to regions and more flexibility in terms of security and transportation. Additionally, these government sponsored internships build a strong foundation for the young generations to become the new base of human assets for the country as the government has more opportunities to place the interns in many locations and positions across the country.

Second: Offering a Second Chance

Many female high school graduates, who fail the University Entrance Exam, more often than do not receive a second chance to continue their studies in the long-run. Offering two year diplomas for these female candidates allows them to continue their education through grades 13 and 14 and will provide a great chance for them to fill the necessary positions such as health as there is a huge demand for female nurses and health care specialists.

Third: Encouraging diploma oriented academic program

A week training is a kind of fast food style education that is not good for the capacity of the country as these one week programs do not add latest added values. Degrees or diploma oriented programs that require duration of two to four years combined with the necessary practical concepts and in the field training through internships will strengthen the base of human asset in war-torn country of Afghanistan. For instance, government sponsored diploma program requires continuous efforts at least for the two year education if one wants to graduate. Such duration will force the participants to acquire enough knowledge and skills in order to pass the exam to get the insensitive—the diploma through an academic entity such as the Ministry of Higher Education backed institute. However, the contractors' or the NGOs' do not offer such long and constant programs for building the human resource of the country.

Fourth: Make ways for the experienced workforce

Many experienced civil servants or professionals, if they have survived the chamber of torture and wars, are isolated and the emerging culture of nepotism would allow them no chance to get back to work. These aged and experienced workers can be a boost to the capacity building of the country. They could be used to fill the gap and fix the broken human resource systems by their involvements. Further, these experienced workers could become a great source of mentorship in bringing up a competent, multi-tasking human resource force that will take Afghanistan to the next level of stability and prosperity. For example, the Afghanistan Civil Service Institute is a government owned academic entity. The Institute has access to all government files to

find out “who is who?” in order to recruit the experienced and retired workers to come and work as instructors, mentors or even as civil servants to share their knowledge with their young counterparts. The Institute, as a government organization, has access to the pool of such experienced and skilled workers that often work in line ministries or as instructors. NGOs and international contractors cannot have such pools of data to find these experienced workers. In some cases, these workers dislike to work for private entities as they prefer government backed organizations such as the Afghan Civil Service Institute for their contributions to public at their retirement ages.

Conclusion

The implementation of nation building policy in Afghanistan was not accompanied by parallel efforts to create an appropriate environment for developing sustainable civil service capacity to stand on its own feet. The gap in specialized training and professional knowledge hindering the Afghan civil service ability to perform duties, earn legitimacy and deliver services to the Afghan people in a transparent and accountable manner. In fragmented and traditional states, such as Afghanistan, the international donors’ imported strategies are less relevant to the local and national context. I have a high opinion of the conclusion of this article that a nation can be built by its own people with the assistance of international community only when the local knowledge and wisdom are embodied into building a comprehensive package of assistance. Implementing projects with immediate results—the so called “Quick Impact Projects” did not and will not work in Afghanistan, where the foundations of human recourses have been systemically eliminated and destroyed. The need for long-term educational projects, such as college diploma or degree oriented programs cannot be ignored in building the capacity of the civil servants. Specialized learning and training programs are required to supply civil servants with the set of skills to perform better along with reward for acquiring new competencies. Moreover, reforms should be implemented to recruit the right people for the right positions as it is essential in developing a dynamic civil service.

Similarly, the widespread culture of hiring international consultants to inject skills into various Afghan ministries was turned out to be less effective. This expensive international practice was less desirable because the notion of imparting basic and professional skills did not work as expected as these consultants did not know the native languages or were not familiar with the customs and cultures. As a result, the international community capacity building efforts were largely unplanned, supply driven, and were not coordinated properly to fill the needs for establishing a sustainable foundation for building an indigenous capacity.

In brief, the current international efforts to develop Afghan capacity have to build on the existing capacities in the country. There is a greater need to utilize and exploit the local asset in order to create a dynamic new layer of support. Experienced and senior Afghan educators should be hired instead, to provide mentorship to the inexperienced civil servants. They will be revitalized with a sense of responsibility towards providing adequate resources for the younger generation of Afghans. Thus this direct focus will allow future generations to become professionals and to be able to fill a variety of fields across the country. Allocating funds without having realistic benchmarks and costly international experts have not been the proper solution in rebuilding Afghanistan. The only plausible option towards a proper reconstruction is the long-term systematic education and training of the young native Afghans.

Endnotes

- ¹ In this paper the term human resources are interchangeably used as human assets or human capitals.
- ² Marvin G. Weinbaum, who contributed a wonderful article in the book titled Nation building: Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq published in 2005.
- ³ Marvin G. Weinbaum (2005). Rebuilding Afghanistan: Impediments, Lessons, and Prospects. In edited Francis Fukuyama. Nation building: Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq, the Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.
- ⁴ OECD/DAC discussion paper (2008). Concepts and Dilemmas of State building in fragile situations: From fragility to resilience, p. 12.
- ⁵ Palmer Colton (2006). A History of the World.
- ⁶ Personal Interview in Kabul, 8/9/2012.
- ⁷ Personal Interview in Kabul, 7/10/2012.
- ⁸ Personal Interview in Kabul, 04/10/2013.
- ⁹ Personal Interview in Kabul, 05/10/2013.
- ¹⁰ Personal Interview in Balkh Province, 02/07/2013.
- ¹¹ Transparency International, index for 2000.
- ¹² Transparency International index for 2011 ranked Afghanistan in the second next to North Korea on corruption.
- ¹³ Roxandra Burdescu, Stolen Asset Recovery; Personal Interview in Qandahar Province, 01/02/2013.
- ¹⁴ SIGA, the Inspection office for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, the special General, 2013.
- ¹⁵ SIGA, the Inspection office for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, the special General, 2013.
- ¹⁶ As former UN envoy, Kai Eide discussed in his book, Power struggle over Afghanistan. Please see his article online:

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/01/2012116114410804972.html>

¹⁷ Personal Interview in Kabul City, 01/08/2011.

¹⁸ By some rough estimate, around \$ 40 Billion has been spent in Afghanistan as assistance. Please refer to Nader Mohseni, 2010, p. 142, *Corruption in Afghanistan*.

¹⁹ Zaman Stanizai (2009). *From identity crisis to identity in crisis in Afghanistan*. The Middle East Institute Policy brief.

²⁰ Susan Rose-Ackerman (2011). *Corruption and Government*, the World Bank, Kabul Afghanistan; Personal Interview in Kabul City, 07/08/2011.

²¹ Reg Hamilton (1996). *Mentoring. A practical guide to the skills of mentoring*. Managers Pocket Guide, The Industrial Society.

²² The government of Afghanistan (2008). *The Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS)*, Kabul Afghanistan.

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²⁴ Jon Baker (2007). *Quick impact projects: Towards a 'whole of government' approach*. Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University.

²⁵ The Afghan government (2008). Internal classified assessment, Kabul Afghanistan.

²⁶ As former UN envoy, Kai Eide discussed in his book, *Power struggle over Afghanistan*. Please see his article online: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/01/2012116114410804972.html>

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