

Questions on notice for Caritas

Community-based projects

Q1. In your submission, Caritas referred to community-based education and the Basic Package of Health Care Services (submission 10, p. 1).

- To what extent are these community-based projects likely to remain sustainable in the face of reduced development assistance and/or increased insecurity?

Caritas recognises that key services such as healthcare and education are currently almost entirely funded by international donors, and are thus acutely vulnerable to reductions in funding. It is essential that Afghan Government acknowledges the implications of this, and develops a robust strategy for ensuring an uninterrupted delivery of essential services to the Afghan people. An effective way that they can do this is through the partnership approach demonstrated by Community Based Education (CBE) and Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS).

Because the CBE model involves a partnership between CRS, the community and the Ministry of Education (MoE) this means that CBE classes are designed to be integrated into the government system and are therefore sustainable. The fact that the MoE has actively expanded its role in education and wants to increase enrolment means that there is a strong will to continue CBE even in the face of reduced development assistance. The recent formation of a CBE unit established within the MoE is further evidence of this commitment¹. It should also be noted that the actual cost for NGOs to deliver CBE is reasonable due to this partnership approach; as a result, in the event that development assistance will reduce this will not affect the sustainability of CBE though it may have an impact on the number of students reached.

Finally the issue of insecurity is one of concern however it should be noted that the current CBE program implemented by a consortium of NGOs is active in 93 districts in 18 provinces. This proves that the partnership approach and community engagement are successful in ensuring the sustainability of CBE, even in insecure areas. The CBE model ensures sustainability in two ways: firstly the CBE service providers have worked with the Ministry of Education over a period of years to design and implement comprehensive plans to handover CBE classes to the MoE. This means that NGOs like CRS have been deliberately working with MoE to build their capacity, coordinate handover plans in consultation with the communities themselves, and advocate that the MoE dedicate sufficient resources to meet their commitments to support CBE classes going forward. Secondly, agencies like CRS have also been promoting community-level management and support for CBE classes. This strategy is a reflection of the recognition that communities themselves need to be empowered to take real ownership and management of their schools. This has been done through the recruitment and training of local teachers and the formation of parent-teacher

¹ Note that currently the CBE policy and unit in the MoE only covers 18 of the 32/33 provinces.

groups, etc. Furthermore, the community-level capacity building can be seen as a contingency to deal with possible greater insecurity or lack of access for NGOs and government agencies in the coming years.

The BPHS demonstrates a similar partnership model i.e. community-based, utilising existing government structures, in partnership with NGOs, and focused on and with funding for the long-term. If such programs are expanded and replicated, the impact of a reduction in international development assistance could be mitigated.

- In your view is Australia doing enough to support community-based programs such as in education and health care services?

Australia has made a good start in supporting such initiatives. The objective of Australian aid to Afghanistan is to build the Afghan Government's capacity to deliver basic services and provide economic opportunities to its people. Australia's 2010-2012 Aid Strategy for Afghanistan defines four pillars of support, one of which includes enhancing basic service delivery in health and education and this commitment looks set to continue. Australia compares favourably to other donors as it is committed to channelling 50 per cent of development assistance to Afghanistan through Afghan programs² - provided the necessary management and reforms are in place. Australia's primary contribution to development in education and health is through the ARTF which is seen as a vehicle for delivering funds both on- budget and in support of key national programs. Australia contributes to the ARTF Strengthening Health Activities for the Rural Poor (SHARP) program, which delivers the BPHS and we anticipate that this important support will continue.

While Australia supports on-budget funding to the Ministries of Public Health and Ministry of Education it is clear that they, like many Afghan ministries face serious challenges. Australia has a role to play in building the capacity of these government institutions. Australia is committed to aligning 80 per cent of its assistance with National priorities³. In this regard, AusAID is assisting the Afghan Government to strengthen its capacity to deliver services and increase its accountability. Through DAFA, Australia provides targeted training and capacity building support, including scholarships, to build the capacity of key GIRoA ministries and this looks set to continue.

Concurrently community ownership drives programs such as BPHS and CBE and also needs to be developed. This is where Australia could do more to support NGOs who have a valuable role to play as they already have the relationship with the communities and their trust. NGOs are able to coordinate planning and service delivery with GoA officials from relevant line ministries in order to deliver better services thereby building a positive perception of government within communities. Community engagement also contributes to low cost sustainable services since communities are empowered to take real ownership and make their own contributions.

² 2010 Kabul Conference Commitments

³ 2010 Kabul Conference Commitments

However programs like CBE and BPHS are delivered across many provinces and experience working with GoA officials varies widely across different provinces, districts and programming sectors. In some cases our partners have found it has been quite positive, while in others it has been extremely challenging due to low capacity, lack of resources, poor motivation, and/or outright corruption.

We understand that currently AusAID is the only donor funding Lower Secondary CBE directly to an ANGO; we would like to see further direct financial support to NGOs for CBE in recognition of their valuable role in bridging civil society and government ministries. Caritas is also aware that the education delivery strategy is currently being developed and we would welcome the opportunity to consult in the development of this strategy and give recognition to the value of CBE and a renewed commitment to the quality of and access to education.

Importance of active functioning civil society

Q2. In your submission, Caritas referred to the need for an active functioning civil society for the delivery of equitable development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (submission 10, p. 1).

- In what way could Australian development assistance help to achieve or nurture an active functioning civil society in Afghanistan? In your view, are DFAT and AusAID putting sufficient effort into this objective? If they could do more, what do you suggest they do?

Civil society and local governance relationships need to be developed. Priorities are often defined by the central government, often with little or no engagement, particularly from rural populations and particularly women. This is coupled with weak civil society institutions that cannot hold state institutions to account and little local and national governance recognition of their value in this role. Caritas recognise that AusAID is serious about nurturing civil society and this is demonstrated through the development of the Civil Society Engagement Framework (CSEF). Australia can further assist by providing civil society organisations with technical and other support to develop their capacity, for example through the Tawanmandi programme. This programme is effective as it is a joint funding mechanism enabling donors to coordinate and pool their funding. Such initiatives will need to happen in conjunction with support for building the capacity and sustainability of local government departments. Efforts to support civil society do not only involve funding; time and technical support is just as important and we recognise that Australia is supporting capacity building initiatives through the Development Assistance Facility (DAFA) and the Government of Afghanistan's Civilian Technical Assistance Program (CTAP).

Key players in building the capacity of civil society are the NGOs, local, national and international. NGOs play a valuable role in bridging the gap between civil society and the local state institutions that serve them. Australia can support NGOs directly to build these bridges and one way of doing this is through programs such as CBE and BPHS. Australia can also make sufficient off-budget funds available to civil society to allow for innovation, independent research and to support communities in holding their government to account. Caritas understands that Australia is doing this on a small scale through support to the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission

and the Independent Electoral Commission and would like to see more examples of this form of support. Caritas would urge AusAID to consider further generous support for civil society-led international and domestic observation missions for the 2014 and 2015 elections since the legitimacy of the Government will depend on the transparency of the elections.

Finally, Australia should also continue to press GIRoA, both privately and publicly for inclusive peace and reconciliation processes which ensure the effective participation of civil society, in particular women and youths. This engagement should be nurtured in three areas of the peace process - selection of agenda, execution of plans and decision making. This was an essential recommendation of the Afghan Civil Society on the occasion of Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan in 2012. We recognise that Australia was actively engaged in lobbying for women's rights to be part of the Afghanistan Declaration and Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework in the lead up to Tokyo. Australia can further ensure a central role for women in peace-building by insisting that all Afghan-delegations attending Australia supported meetings or events include a significant proportion of women and to press for strengthened representation of women on the High Peace Council.

How can Australian development assistance help to build the capacity of line ministries and Afghan institutions and to build stronger connections between district, provincial and federal bodies and civil society?⁴

Local officials often disagree with Kabul ministries on the priorities that have been identified at the national level⁵. Currently only a tiny fraction of the total operation and maintenance (O&M) budget goes outside of the line ministries in Kabul⁶ however as the transition process continues; significant responsibilities will fall to the government's provincial and district departments. It is crucial that they have the technical and project management capabilities, financial management and budget utilisation skills to ensure they can assume their new responsibilities. Australia can advocate for more responsibility for planning, budgeting and monitoring to be delegated to the provincial and even district, levels of line ministries and develop the capacity and sustainability of local government departments. It is important that this support is done in a transparent manner so that civil society can hold their government agencies and representatives accountable and so that the risks of corruption are lessened.

Australia can continue support to initiatives such as the National Solidarity Program (NSP) which was created to develop the ability of Afghan communities to identify, plan, manage and monitor their own rural development projects. Like CBE and BPHS, the NSP is based on partnerships between communities, civil society, government, donors and NGOs. Communities elect their leaders and representatives to form voluntary Community Development Councils (CDCs) which are now established

4 Submission 10, p. 1.

5 British & Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group (AAAG) submission, March 2012

6 World Bank, Transition in Afghanistan: Looking Beyond 2014

across 361 districts of Afghanistan, covering all provinces. These CDCs deliver rural development projects. NSP like BPHS has delivered services to areas that the line ministries of the government alone could not reach. This has built the legitimacy of government and in conjunction the community-focused component has resulted in ownership and sustainability resulting in a strengthened civil society. The Australian government can support the NSP and initiatives that replicate this successful model to achieve other national objectives such as building the capacity of local government, local CSOs and improving their substantive working relationship.

Whilst we recognise that Australia has improved linkages between national, provincial and district levels in Uruzgan through programmes such as public financial management and public sector internship initiatives it would be good to see a similar commitment to other Provinces. Whether through CDCs, District Development Assemblies (DDAs) or other local authorities, many Afghans have learned to rely on their government to deliver services for the first time. The DDAs have successfully fed into provincial-level development planning by linking with provincial council members. Australian support to CDCs and DDAs will strengthen connections amount district, provincial and federal levels of government. Ensuring that civil society – often supported by NGOs – has a voice in advocating for these linkages will further improve governance.

Humanitarian and development aid and vulnerable people missing out

Q3. In your submission, Caritas drew attention to the vulnerability of a great many Afghans to the effects of natural disasters. You suggested that while humanitarian work should be resourced adequately, it should be accompanied by an expansion of disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction activities in order to build the resilience of communities (submission 10, pp. 2 and 4).

- To your knowledge, is Australian providing assistance in this area of disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction? In your view, is such assistance best provided through NGOs?

Australia's aid program used to be focused on the provision of sporadic funding for humanitarian crisis as opposed to long term funding to support resilience amongst rural communities. The development of the proposed Australia Afghanistan Community Resilience Scheme (AACRS) is encouraging as this indicates recognition of the need to support long term agricultural livelihoods and DRR in rural areas which are traditionally vulnerable to recurrent drought and environmental hazards. It is the Caritas network experience, that community based DRR activities are affordable and relatively simple. This is demonstrated in the work that Caritas Germany are undertaking in Daikundi Province which explores root causes of vulnerability and entry points for risk reduction interventions for floods and droughts through water supply (WASH at the household level, irrigation management) and food security (nutrition education). Whilst the Caritas network and local and international NGOs have a key role to play in DRR within the communities in which they work this intervention is very much focused at the local level. As many as three million individuals in Afghanistan are affected by natural disasters, including 2.8 million by recurrent drought. In this context a national response is required and disaster

preparedness and early recovery programs must be expanded. Australia can support this process at the national level by supporting the capacity of the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) and other key government ministries to improve disaster management planning.

Q4. In your submission, Caritas stated that disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction must be expanded to build the resilience of communities so they are better able to respond to shocks. It noted that the 'current lack of clarity within the UN appeal process between 'chronic vulnerability' and 'pure humanitarian needs' means that there is a grey area where those that are chronically vulnerable are not eligible for humanitarian or development funding (submission 10, p. 4).

- Could you elaborate on this observation? Does this lack of clarity apply to Australian humanitarian and development aid?

This observation was also reflected in the British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG) submission for a similar Afghanistan inquiry within the United Kingdom. It was also an issue that was addressed at the ACFID organised humanitarian forum in 2012⁷. The observation was included as this is a recurring issue for many donor agencies, not just Australia and goes back to the question of funding availability for resilience activities, particularly in countries vulnerable to food insecurity. Support for resilience activities requires a commitment from actors such as AusAID in order to mitigate the impact of shocks in the longer term. The fact that AusAID is proposing the AACRS is timely and in line with this recommendation since this program recognises the need to build resilience amongst rural communities in Afghanistan over the long term. However AACRS does not have a large budget and it would be good to see more funding support for long-term interventions from Australia to help communities cope with the regular shocks they are exposed to in Afghanistan. Whilst there is currently a large chronically vulnerable population in the country this does not detract from the need to provide emergency assistance to these populations when they face an acute situation. In addition it is recognised that the ongoing chronic needs surrounding food security and access to water are an indictment of development efforts however this is often as a result of failure to provide this essential long-term funding.

AusAID–NGO Cooperation Program

Q5 AusAID informed the committee that it supports NGO projects in Afghanistan through the AusAID–NGO Cooperation Program (submission 16, p. 45)

- From your experience does this mechanism work well, is it effective?

Caritas Australia is an ANCP Partnership Agency and has recently signed a new partnership agreement with AusAID for approximately \$45 million over the next 4 years. Whilst we have not utilised ANCP funds for projects in Afghanistan to date, we welcome the opportunity to do so, and are aware that a number of other partnership agencies have. Caritas Australia values the flexibility and multi-year commitment of

⁷ A Stitch in Time – Early Action to Save Lives

the ANCP Partnership mechanism. In particular, the ability to allocate funds to development projects that reflect the strategic priorities of our agency. However we also recognise that the newly introduced Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Framework and associated requirements and templates may mean limitations to using ANCP funds in fragile states, such as Afghanistan, where the constantly changing context may challenge implementing partner agencies to adhere to these requirements. We therefore wish to point out that the ANCP is one of many ways that AusAID can support the work of NGOs to achieve development objectives in Afghanistan. Further to this and as mentioned above, an innovative funding mechanism relevant for protracted crisis in fragile countries such as Afghanistan, where the context does not necessarily fit a traditional humanitarian/development response would be welcomed.

Question taken on notice at hearing

Hansard, 4 December 2012, p. 53.

Q6. Mr de Groot: As I said before, during Taliban times, Caritas Germany ran education programs...As I said earlier, Caritas partner agencies have been in country 28 years. So there is an experience of how to negotiate and be present across all of those very real challenges.

...

Senator FAWCETT: Can I clarify that during the Taliban regime it was the support of the communities that allowed that to run? So in areas where the community did not support it, for example, there was no girls education. Where the community was strong enough, was that in a civil society sense or was that where communities had a strong local warlord or someone who, from a security military perspective, could actually keep the Taliban at bay? There is a slight difference there in terms of—

Mr de Groot: I do not know whether we have got that analysis.

Senator FAWCETT: I am happy for you to take it to notice. But if you could come back to us with your experience in country, it would be appreciated. It actually goes quite strongly to how we invest in programs now to get community on board with a non-military focus, if it is a civil society; or how we invest in terms of the strength of their local governance, if it is a local security question.

Mr de Groot: We will come back. I think it is a 'both ends' approach. Let us find that analysis for you.

Using the example of CBE it is important to remember that the context is different across different communities and CBE is currently being implemented across many different provinces and districts. In the communities where our partners work in Ghor and Herat provinces, there are armed local actors, some aligned with the Taliban and others not, that have at times presented an obstacle to the implementation of CBE. In other communities there are unarmed but more conservative elements that have initially opposed efforts, but community-level negotiations have been highly successful in allowing CBE activities to move forward. In this sense it is the power of civil society that has driven CBE in certain areas as opposed to strong local warlords

who keep the Taliban at bay. There are countless stories to share, among them the case of a local commander in Herat who caused considerable trouble for our partners at the outset of the CBE program and who, years later, approached them about the possibility of helping his daughter become a teacher. Our partners work in a number of areas where armed actors and even Taliban-affiliated groups operate, and as appropriate they support communities' efforts to negotiate access with those actors, but have not engaged in direct negotiations with the Taliban. Going forward, and given all of the strides that have been made over the past years in changing mindsets towards education for girls, it is hoped that communities will continue to be able to successfully advocate for CBE programming regardless of which local actors are nominally in power, be they the Afghan government, Taliban or other groups.