

Chapter 7

Uruzgan Province

7.1 Although Australia channels the bulk of its aid to Afghanistan through national level programs, a smaller but significant proportion of Australia's ODA goes to Uruzgan province. In this part of the country, Australia maintains a considerable troop presence and Australian civilian and police officials work within the multinational Uruzgan Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT).¹ In this chapter, the committee considers Australia's contribution to integrated civil-military-police efforts to help stabilise and rebuild Afghanistan. The committee is particularly focused on the effectiveness of Australia's development assistance to Uruzgan province through the PRT.

Background

7.2 Uruzgan in southern Afghanistan is one of the poorest provinces in the country. It has a population of approximately 400,000–500,000 and is one of the most remote and undeveloped of the country's 34 provinces.² It has a female literacy rate at less than one per cent; illiteracy is common amongst provincial officials; and conflict and instability severely impede development progress and the capacity to deliver and access basic services. Corruption remains a major challenge and compounds other constraints on development.³ According to Ms Lydia Khalil, only 30 per cent of public servants positions are filled, the reach of the national government is scant, corruption is high, economic prospects are low, and the province remains a 'hotbed of insurgent activity'.⁴

Australia's engagement in Uruzgan

7.3 In 2009–10, AusAID estimated that it spent around 10 per cent of its country program in Uruzgan Province. After Australia assumed leadership of the PRT, the proportion of Australia's ODA to Uruzgan increased substantially and now stands at approximately 20 per cent of Australia's total ODA to that country.⁵ Figures show that AusAID development assistance to Uruzgan increased from \$1.6 million in 2009–10 to \$23 million in 2010–11.⁶ Also, some aid that is channelled through national

1 See for example, *Submission 20*, p. [2] and AusAID, *Annual Report 2010–2011*, p. 121.

2 AusAID, *Annual Report 2008–2009*, p. 113 and AusAID, *Annual Report 2009–2010*, p. 112.

3 *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2012, p. 2.

4 *Submission 20*, p. [1].

5 AusAID Afghanistan, <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/countries/southasia/afghanistan/Pages/home.aspx#aid> (accessed 10 September 2012) and AusAID, *Annual Report 2010–2011*, p. 121. See also AusAID, answer to written question on notice no 8.

6 AusAID, *Annual Report 2010–2011*, p. 121. See also AusAID, Afghanistan, <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/countries/southasia/afghanistan/Pages/home.aspx#aid> (accessed 10 September 2012).

programs also reaches Uruzgan. For example, AusAID noted that the NSP, which AusAID supports through the ARTF, has spent \$18.5 million in Uruzgan since 2005.⁷

Achievements

7.4 From Australia's perspective, the work of the PRT in Uruzgan is a whole-of-government endeavour whereby the ADF, DFAT and AusAID develop projects jointly.⁸ In chapter 3, the committee described the range of activities undertaken by Australian military and civilian personnel in Uruzgan as part of the PRT. In 2012, DFAT explained:

For much of the past two years, the PRT has had a presence in five of Uruzgan's six districts, where PRT officers have undertaken intensive political and tribal engagement activities, designed and implemented development and stabilisation programs, and promoted peace and reintegration objectives and ANSF accountability. PRT projects have ranged from small scale village projects in areas recently 'cleared' by Afghan and ISAF forces through to AusAID's four-year 'Children of Uruzgan' health and education program.⁹

7.5 DFAT informed the committee that the PRT's efforts had been 'critical in creating a broader political environment in which transition can be progressed'.¹⁰

Reconstruction

7.6 The ADF has engaged in development assistance involving a wide range of reconstruction projects through the PRT, the Australian led Reconstruction Task Force, the Mentoring Reconstruction Task Force and more recently the Mentoring Task Force. Since 2006, ADF personnel have worked on many reconstruction works in Uruzgan including civil, community, education, and administration buildings, health facilities and transport infrastructure. They include the construction of the Tarin Kowt Waste Management Facility; the Sorgh Morghab Mosque; the Malalai Girls' School; the Tarin Kot Boys' School; the Ministry of Energy & Water Compound; the Dorofshan Basic Health Care Centre; the Eastern Causeway; Sajawul Crossing and Zabul Bridges.¹¹ According to Defence, these development projects were 'instrumental in changing life in Uruzgan' with the Trade Training School a notable example. Defence cited one Afghan instructor at the school who told Australian soldiers:

Before, there wasn't any local work but now it is changing and there are local jobs. The school is good for us and the community benefits from it.¹²

7 AusAID, answer to written question on notice no. 8.

8 Defence answer to written question on notice no. 5(2).

9 *Submission 22*, pp. 3–4.

10 *Submission 22*, pp. 3–4.

11 A comprehensive list is provided in Department of Defence, *Supplementary Submission 17A*.

12 Department of Defence, *Defence Annual Report 2009–10*, p. 56.



Australian 1st Reconstruction Task Force soldiers receive an update from the local contractor on the progress of a new government building during a site inspection. (image courtesy of the Department of Defence)



Australian 1st Reconstruction Task Force soldiers consult with local Afghan contractors about the progress of the eastern causeway bridge. (image courtesy of the Department of Defence)

7.7 It should also be noted that some of the tradesmen who graduated from the school have returned as trainers to deliver training there.¹³ The Foreign Minister also cited the Trade Training School as an example of one of the reconstruction projects aimed at enhancing health, education and other vital infrastructure in Uruzgan.¹⁴

Education

7.8 Much of the reconstruction work in Uruzgan has been directed toward education facilities such as the Trade Training School. The opening of the Malalai Girls' School in Tarin Kowt in August 2011 gave a major boost to the education of girls in Uruzgan. The 21-classroom school took 15 months to build at a cost of US\$1.575 million, and has facilities for up to 700 primary and secondary students. The Uruzgan provincial government and the Uruzgan PRT formed a partnership to build the school with most of the construction work undertaken by Afghan contractors using local labour under direction from ADF engineers.¹⁵

7.9 The 2012 TLO report recorded that residents were 'very pleased' with this large-scale and highly visible school in the centre of Tarin Kowt.¹⁶

7.10 Other encouraging gains evident in the education sector during 2010–2011 included four AusAID funded schools built for 2,300 students and three community resource centres through a program to improve Uruzgan school infrastructure. In 2012, AusAID reported that Australia had funded the building of 205 schools, including 29 schools for girls in Uruzgan.¹⁷ Mr Bernard Philip, who has headed the PRT in Tarin Kowt, informed the committee that, according to estimates, the number of operating schools in the province had increased from 34 in 2006 to over 200 in 2011, a sixfold increase.¹⁸ At the moment, children in Uruzgan are more likely to complete primary education than previously.¹⁹

13 Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee, *Committee Hansard*, Estimates, 21 October 2009, p. 33.

14 Statement by Senator the Hon Bob Carr, Minister for Foreign Affairs, 'Australia's International Development Assistance Program 2012–2013: Helping the World's Poor: Implementing Effective Aid', 8 May 2012, Budget 2012–13, http://www.budget.gov.au/2012-13/content/ministerial_statement/ausaid/html1/ausaid.htm (accessed 11 September 2012).

15 Mr Brendan Sargeant, Department of Defence, *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2012, p. 49.

16 TLO, *Uruzgan: 18 months after the Dutch/Australian Leadership Handover*, A TLO Provincial Profile, April 2012, p. 14.

17 AusAID, *Annual Report 2011-12*, pp. 5 and 113.

18 *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2012, p. 14.

19 AusAID, *Annual Report 2011–2012*, p. 113.



An ADF plumbing instructor assists a Trade Training School student on the first plumbing course. (image courtesy of the Department of Defence)



Three young Afghans display their graduation certificates at the Trade Training School after completing their basic trade qualifications in carpentry. (image courtesy of the Department of Defence)

7.11 The findings of the 2012 TLO provincial profile also noted concrete improvements including the increase of schools and teachers throughout the province. It reported that aside from the 205 schools, there were 1,294 teachers for Uruzgan's 71,920 students. Further that the number of madrassas had more than doubled from eight to 18. Overall, it recorded that provincial school enrolment had jumped from 29 to 39 per cent, a step closer to the national average of about 50 per cent.²⁰

Health

7.12 The provision of health services was another area showing significant progress in Uruzgan due in large part to Australian ODA.²¹ According to AusAID, improved service delivery and capacity building had more than doubled the annual number of health service consultations from 2006 levels.²² Access to healthcare was expanded with the opening of one and reopening of two health care facilities, the construction or renovation of nine others, and the opening of 32 health posts. According to the 2012 TLO report, there were 20 healthcare facilities and 234 health posts in Uruzgan. The number of professional healthcare workers rose by 32 to a provincial total of 145 staff. More women were now using health services and the number of female health workers had increased.²³ In its latest report, AusAID stated that in Uruzgan 80 per cent of pregnant women now received at least one antenatal visit. Mothers had a higher chance of benefiting from skilled birth attendants, minimising risks to them and their newborns.²⁴

Capacity building—training public servants

7.13 The Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) recognised the important work of PRTs and encouraged the teams 'to assist in the implementation of priority projects through the Provincial Development Plans in line with national priorities'.²⁵ It was expected that, as part of the transition process, PRTs would prepare Afghan authorities to assume responsibility by the end of 2014.²⁶ In 2010 the then CDF told the Legislation Committee that:

It is vital that we go with that enhanced civilian capability because it will enable us to put a lot more effort into the governance line of operation. If

20 TLO, *Uruzgan: 18 months after the Dutch/Australian Leadership Handover*, April 2012, p. x, http://www.tloafghanistan.org/images/PDF_Provincial_District_and_Area_Assessments/2012%20APRIL%20TLO%20Uruzgan%20Report%20Mid%202010_%20End%202011.pdf

21 AusAID, *Annual Report 2010–2011*, pp. 3 and 122.

22 AusAID, *Annual Report 2010–2011*, p. 122.

23 TLO, *Uruzgan: 18 months after the Dutch/Australian Leadership Handover, A TLO Provincial Profile*, April 2012, p. xi.

24 AusAID, *Annual Report 2011–2012*, p. 113.

25 Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Afghanistan National Development Strategy, 1387–1391 (2008–2013)*, A strategy for Security, Governance, Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction, p. 161.

26 Department of Defence, *Defence Annual Report 2010–11*, p. 64.

you have a look at Afghanistan as a whole, the main issue that we need to confront is the issue of governance.²⁷

7.14 In June 2011, AusAID reported that Uruzgan's provincial administration was very weak and in dire need of trained and qualified public servants. At that time, the number of filled government positions had increased from around 30 per cent in 2009 to over 40 per cent in 2011, but, in AusAID's view, even at the increased levels it was 'very difficult for most departments to function'.²⁸

7.15 One of the key development achievements in Afghanistan during 2010–11 included boosting the capacity of the provincial government by providing literacy, numeracy and administrative training to its officials.²⁹ In April 2011, 38 interns graduated from an AusAID-funded training program in Uruzgan, which was designed to improve the capacity of the provincial government. Managed by the UNDP, the pilot program commenced in May 2010 and aimed to equip the local government with a cadre of young, qualified and professional public servants in response to the large number of government vacancies in the province. The interns were trained in basic-level public administration skills such as public financial management, computing, law, public service ethics and general administration. They also completed on-the-job training in provincial government departments.

7.16 AusAID noted that by June 2011, 16 interns were working in the provincial administration, 21 awaiting confirmation of government appointments, and one joined a non-government organisation in Uruzgan.³⁰ In March 2013, Mr Mark Tattersall, AusAID, informed the committee that 60 per cent of positions in the provincial administration were now filled representing a doubling of staff in around 2½ years.³¹

Infrastructure and land improvement

7.17 During 2010–11 Australia contributed to improving road infrastructure in Uruzgan, including building 5.5 kilometres of road which created over 50,000 labour days of short-term employment for local residents.³² Also, according to AusAID, since 2009 more than 244,000 square metres of contaminated land in Uruzgan and over 638,000 square metres in Khost Province had been cleared with Australian support. Through the provincial and district governors in Tarin Kowt, Chora and Deh Rawud, two thousand tree saplings had been distributed among farmers, schools, clinics, parks and public offices.³³

27 Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee, *Committee Hansard*, Estimates, 31 May 2010, p. 20.

28 AusAID, *Annual Report 2010–2011*, p. 123.

29 AusAID, *Annual Report 2010–2011*, p. 123.

30 One of the interns, Abdul Sami, was appointed Director of the Directorate of Electricity and Energy in Uruzgan. AusAID, *Annual Report 2010–2011*, p. 123.

31 *Committee Hansard*, 22 March 2013, p. 29.

32 AusAID, *Annual Report 2010–2011*, p. 123.

33 AusAID, *Annual Report 2010–2011*, p. 122.

Law and order

7.18 According to the AFP at the beginning of 2011, the primary objective of its mission in Afghanistan was to 'train, develop and mentor the ANP in Uruzgan Province'.³⁴ AFP officers were providing basic training and also courses to improve the skills of police supervisors.³⁵ The 28 officers working in Afghanistan were focused on developing the ANP so that its members could ultimately 'assume responsibility for national security'. Specifically, of the 28 officers, 21 were at Tarin Kowt involved in training and mentoring Afghan National Police.³⁶ In 2010, the former CDF, Air Chief Marshal Houston, informed the committee that the police training centre in Tarin Kowt had been set up inside the wire. He explained:

One of the biggest problems for the coalition in Afghanistan is finding sufficient people to do...the institutional training. Our people are doing a sterling job with the *ab initio* training and indeed some other training. They are also doing some higher level post-graduate training within the police training centre. Their whole task is giving these young Afghans the necessary skills and the ethos to do the job out in the province of Uruzgan.³⁷

7.19 As at September 2012, the AFP had trained 2,194 ANP members in the Afghan Uniform Patrolman's Course and 38 Provincial Response Company members in evidence collection at the Provincial Training Centre in Tarin Kowt. The AFP had also trained 212 ANP members in investigation courses and 65 in surveillance courses at the Afghan Major Crimes Taskforce in Kabul. Thirty-nine ANP senior officers had completed leadership programs with AFP instruction at the Police Staff College in Kabul.³⁸ Sixty-one ANP members had undertaken literacy courses. Importantly, six ANP members completed a train-the-trainer course and have returned to the Provincial Training Centre to assume training roles themselves.³⁹

34 AFP, Media Release, 'AFP clarifies its commitment to Afghanistan', 1 January 2011.

35 Chief of the Defence Force, Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee, *Committee Hansard*, Estimates, 31 May 2010, p. 23.

36 AFP, Media Release, 'AFP clarifies its commitment to Afghanistan', 1 January 2011.

37 Chief of the Defence Force, Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee, *Committee Hansard*, Estimates, 31 May 2010, p. 22.

38 *Submission 19*, pp. 6–7.

39 AFP, *Annual Report 2012–2011*, p. 39.



AFP member delivering training to ANP members (image courtesy of the AFP)



Group of Afghan National Police on parade (image courtesy of the AFP)



ANP member receiving his certificate following completion of training at the Provincial Training Centre, Uruzgan. (image courtesy of the AFP)

Overall progress

7.20 The 2012 TLO report found that visible progress in socio-economic development and reconstruction had been made throughout the province since 1 August 2010, when the Netherlands formally handed over command of the PRT.⁴⁰ The accounts from the various agencies testify to the advances made in Uruzgan in education, health, building or restoring vital infrastructure and in helping to improve capacity in the local administration and in the ANP.

Ownership and alignment

7.21 It should be noted that the Australian agencies working in Uruzgan drew attention to the efforts they take in the province to engage the local community in projects. Together with DFAT and AusAID representatives, the ADF worked within the PRT to 'develop projects in close consultation with a wide range of stakeholders,

40 TLO, *Uruzgan: 18 months after the Dutch/Australian Leadership Handover, A TLO Provincial Profile*, April 2012, p. x.

including Afghan and ISAF partners, provincial and district administration leaders and local communities'. By building relationships with local officials and leaders, the PRT is able to 'facilitate the delivery of stability, governance and development activities at the provincial and district level'.⁴¹

7.22 For example, civilian and military advisers in the PRT meet regularly with the Afghan Government and communities in order to build strong relationships. According to Defence, this direct engagement enabled the construction of roads, schools and other basic infrastructure in the province. By working with local and provincial government officials, the PRT was also able to implement programs to improve governance capacity and facilitate the delivery of basic services such as health and education to the Afghan people.⁴² Air Chief Marshal Houston explained that the ADF needed to work closely with the provincial government to improve its ability to govern within the province, to connect with the officials down at the district level, and to deliver the services required by people in the province.⁴³ As an example, the former CDF referred to the type of small projects delivered by the ADF on a day-to-day basis in response to local needs:

...in one village there was a real problem with water. Our special forces took it upon themselves to deliver a suitable water pump to provide the necessary water to the community...it is all part of our approach at the moment, which is to protect the people, engage the people and basically improve their lives and protect them from the Taliban.⁴⁴

7.23 The relationship that the PRT developed with the local community provided its members with important insights into Uruzgan's political, economic and social landscape. Defence suggested that by 'developing their knowledge of the province's complex tribal and political structures, departmental officers within the PRT were able to make a substantial contribution to reconstruction and development in Uruzgan'.⁴⁵ Mr Philip, DFAT, likewise highlighted the importance of officers finding out what was happening in the local community by meeting and talking with Afghans. He explained:

Over the past couple of years DFAT and AusAID officers in the provincial reconstruction team have been able to travel the length and breadth of the province to get out into some pretty difficult locations, where they have

41 Statement by Senator the Hon Bob Carr, Minister for Foreign Affairs, 'Australia's International Development Assistance Program 2012–2013: Helping the World's Poor: Implementing Effective Aid', 8 May 2012, Budget 2012–13, http://www.budget.gov.au/2012-13/content/ministerial_statement/ausaid/html1/ausaid.htm (accessed 11 September 2012). See also Department of Defence, *Defence Annual Report 2010–11*, p. 4.

42 Department of Defence, *Submission 17*, p. [2].

43 Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee, *Committee Hansard*, Estimates, 31 May 2010, p. 20.

44 Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee, *Committee Hansard*, Estimates, 21 October 2009, p. 34.

45 Department of Defence, *Defence Annual Report 2010–11*, p. 64.

been co-located with military forces, and to really build up a network of contacts of hundreds of tribal leaders to get that sense of what is happening on the ground.⁴⁶

7.24 He gave the example of the Mirabad Valley, where diplomats in the PRT carefully and over a long period of time worked with the local community and, as a result of many meetings and visits to communities and villages, were able to build up a level of trust.⁴⁷ This relationship then created opportunities for AusAID to come in and look at supporting education activity in the Valley through the 'Children of Uruzgan' program. Mr Philip explained:

Through one of AusAID's programs, the small projects facility of Uruzgan, we have seen a number of projects at the community level up and running in the Mirabad Valley which we have never seen before. What this will then lead to is a major project involving the upgrade of a road through the entire length of the Mirabad Valley. That will be completed partly by AusAID and partly by the Australian Defence Force engineers in the PRT.⁴⁸

7.25 Australia played an important role in overseeing the final stages of this challenging project and also funded and constructed a bridge over the river halfway along the road.⁴⁹

Criticism of Australian development assistance to Uruzgan

7.26 While acknowledging the impressive gains made in Uruzgan, a number of independent reports and some witnesses to the inquiry held reservations about the overall effectiveness of Australia's aid program in the province.⁵⁰ They questioned matters such as the sustainability of the achievements, the focus on inputs rather than outcomes, and the possible undermining of aid effectiveness by the military delivering aid.

Managing for results—sustainability

7.27 Despite the military and civilian members of the PRT consulting with local communities about development projects, a number of witnesses were concerned about the extent to which the benefits to the local people would last. Some witnesses were critical that the projects were in effect 'quick fixes'. For example, Mr Antony Loewenstein, an independent journalist who has spent time in Afghanistan, suggested that while there had been some minor benefits for Uruzgan province, they were likely

46 *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2012, p. 17.

47 *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2012, p. 17.

48 *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2012, p. 17.

49 *Committee Hansard*, 3 December 2012, p. 17.

50 *Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace, Laying the Foundations for an Inclusive Peace Process*, December 2011, p.9. Although tangible improvements have been made in Uruzgan, Afghans from the province participating in the People's Dialogue in 2011 'despaired of the conditions in which they live'. They referred to the lack of markets for buying and selling products due to poor roads connecting the districts; unavailability of adequate health care, and the weak education system, including the poor capacity of teachers.

to be 'profoundly fleeting and unlikely to survive once Australia pulls out'.⁵¹ One major concern was the capacity of the community or the government to cover operational costs and to maintain facilities.

7.28 Importantly, the authors of the 2011 *Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness* reported that in their travels to Uruzgan, they were told that the focus of Australian aid had shifted from 'vertical infrastructure' (schools) to 'horizontal infrastructure' (roads) because 'a large number of schools had been built with aid funds, but not used'.⁵² Furthermore, the 2012 TLO report noted that:

The demographic and numerical breakdowns of student enrolment, gender, and facility, reveals little about the overall quality of education provided. A local NGO representative noted, 'The new school buildings alone do not make it better if everything else like teachers, training, materials, and payments are lacking'.⁵³

7.29 Despite positive indicators, it recorded that local residents expressed concern with the lack of properly qualified teachers and the resulting poor quality of education.⁵⁴ One representative from an international NGO described the quality of education and teachers as 'bad', noting further that there was a lack of materials—in his words most of the new schools were 'white elephants'.⁵⁵ The report was also deeply concerned about the number of girls attending school. It found:

Overall only 7% of school-aged girls are enrolled in school and most are forced to leave school when they reach puberty, often as early as 10 years of age. Only a small number complete high school and none of 2011's female graduates wrote the Kankor University Entrance Exam that was held for the first time in Uruzgan in 2011.

7.30 The TLO concluded that female literacy was at 'a seemingly impossibly low 0.6 per cent of the population' and that more targeted efforts were required to ensure that women could complete their education.⁵⁶

7.31 It should be noted that AusAID provided the committee with a table from the Afghanistan Ministry of Education that recorded the following figures for Year 12 graduates in Uruzgan:⁵⁷

51 *Committee Hansard*, 4 December 2012, p. 30.

52 *Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness*, April 2011, p. 284.

53 TLO, *Uruzgan: 18 months after the Dutch/Australian Leadership Handover*, A TLO Provincial Profile, April 2012, p. 20.

54 TLO, *Uruzgan: 18 months after the Dutch/Australian Leadership Handover*, A TLO Provincial Profile, April 2012, p. 20.

55 TLO, *Uruzgan: 18 months after the Dutch/Australian Leadership Handover*, A TLO Provincial Profile, April 2012, p. 20.

56 TLO, *Uruzgan: 18 months after the Dutch/Australian Leadership Handover*, A TLO Provincial Profile, April 2012, p. xi.

57 Answer to question on notice no. 1 from 22 March 2013 hearing.

Figure 7:1: Year 12 graduates from 2010 to 2012⁵⁸

1389/2010			1390/2011			1391/2012		
Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
410	12	422	289	12	301	430	16	446

7.32 Along similar lines about the effectiveness of aid in Uruzgan, Professor Howes referred to the ADF's heavy focus on infrastructure and concerns that roads may not be maintained and schools may lack teachers.⁵⁹ He stated:

...if it is done directly by the Australian government there is no guarantee that there is going to be the ongoing funding to provide the teacher or to maintain the road, whereas if you go through a national program there is a budget process and there are better odds that there will be maintenance and that there will be teachers provided.⁶⁰

7.33 To his mind, sustainability should be an overriding objective with matters around operational requirements and maintenance receiving major consideration.⁶¹

7.34 Professor Howes also doubted the effectiveness of building capacity in the local administration. He understood the connection between having Australian troops operating in Uruzgan and the presence of AusAID staff and civilian core staff in the province to provide development assistance and mentoring. He was sceptical, however, about the mentoring and whether it would have any effect at all because of the huge cultural and knowledge gaps. He noted the massive turnover of staff and political problems, and formed the view that Australian support to the Uruzgan government was 'of very limited value'.⁶²

Dynamics of local politics—patronage networks

7.35 A number of witnesses were concerned that in highly insecure areas, assistance could be more of a destabilizing than stabilizing influence because of the reality and/or perception of aid fuelling corruption and generating conflict over its distribution.⁶³ According to Dr Bizhan, ethnicity has been highly politicised in Afghanistan over the past three decades and therefore most of the political movements

58 AusAID, answer to written question on notice no. 1 following 22 March 2013 hearing. AusAID's answer provides statistics for all provinces in Afghanistan, see appendix 4.

59 *Submission 14*, pp. 13–14.

60 *Committee Hansard*, 4 December 2012, p. 18.

61 *Committee Hansard*, 4 December 2012, p. 16.

62 *Committee Hansard*, 4 December 2012, pp. 17–18.

63 See for example, *Submission 20*, p. 4.

that came into being during the years of conflict have been dominated by a certain ethnic group.⁶⁴

7.36 Uruzgan is no exception. The local power dynamics in the province are very complex and can be traced back to population policies originating in the 18th century and which continue today.⁶⁵ For example, Uruzgan was inhabited predominately by the Hazara ethnic group who were expelled in two separate waves—one in the late 18th century and the other in the late 19th century—and now constitute an estimated 8 per cent of the provincial population.⁶⁶ In 2010, the TLO report observed that:

Provincial government in Uruzgan needs to be seen as monopolized by pro-government (Popalzai) strongmen, who increase their own power and that of their tribe by practising a policy of marginalizing members of the former Taliban regime (or those associated with them) and weakening other power holders by excluding them from access to political positions and economic opportunities.⁶⁷

7.37 According to author and researcher, Mr Phil Sparrow, ethnic conflict has also contaminated working relationships between Hazara and Pashtun police officers in some districts, leading to widespread desertions. As an example, he referred to the 60 trained ANP in Khas Uruzgan, where only 10 were left. He also reported that parts of Uruzgan were still under militia control and the loyalty of the militia to the government was poor or non-existent.⁶⁸

7.38 In this context of leadership struggles between powerbrokers and changing alliances, a number of witnesses raised concerns about the potential for Australian aid to favour particular individuals.⁶⁹ Professor Howes and Mr Pryke stated that it would appear that aid most often, including in Uruzgan where Australian efforts were concentrated, 'fails to achieve its strategic objectives because the aid is itself tainted and ineffective'. They reasoned that if aid 'is seen as going to people who are "cruel and unjust"', it would not succeed in changing attitudes'.⁷⁰

64 Answer to written question on notice, no. 3.

65 There are no reliable statistics on the various ethnic groups in Afghanistan. See Dr Bizhan, answer to written question on notice, no. 3. Afghanistan's constitution identifies the following ethnic groups in Afghanistan: Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Turkman, Baluch, Pashai, Nuristani, Aymaq, Arab, Qirghiz, Qizilbash, Gujur, Brahwui and others.

66 TLO, *Three Years later; A socio-political assessment of Uruzgan Province from 2006 to 2009*, 18 September 2009, pp. 3–4.

67 TLO, *The Dutch Engagement in Uruzgan: 2006 to 2010*, August 2010, p. 28.

68 Phil Sparrow, *In it for the long haul? Delivering Australian aid to Afghanistan*, ACFID Research in Development Series Report no. 1, March 2011, pp. 16–17.

69 Mr Jim McMurchy also noted that some projects have seen 'the military support (tacit or otherwise) of some fearsome warlords and their militia, as an extra layer of security or promise of safe passage on the roads', *Submission 18*, p. [2].

70 *Submission 14*, p. 17.

Matiullah Khan

7.39 Professor Maley, who has travelled to and written extensively on Afghanistan, also noted that providing aid may have the unintended consequence of 'empowering particular local actors at the expense of others'. He reasoned that this situation could develop where those delivering aid become too closely associated with one political figure among others engaged in fierce competition in the same area. In his view, this had to some extent developed in Uruzgan, where the relationship between Australia and the provincial police chief Matiullah Khan was 'arguably an unhealthy one'.⁷¹ At one stage, Mr Khan was reported to be 'head of a private army' that earned 'millions of dollars guarding NATO supply convoys and fought Taliban insurgents alongside American Special Forces'.⁷² In August 2011, the Afghan Ministry of Interior announced his appointment as Uruzgan Provincial Chief of Police.

7.40 Dr Bizhan made a similar observation about particular individuals profiting personally from aid. He noted that in some provinces, 'instead of building functioning local institutions, resources have been channelled to individual players who were protecting NATO convoys and their logistic roots' and cited Matiullah Khan in Uruzgan.⁷³ According to Dr Bizhan, while Mr Khan kept his own militia, he became 'a source of distrust among the local tribes' and 'undermined the credibility of the government':

Though he helped to consolidate stability in the short-term, in the long run this approach compromised institution-building.⁷⁴

7.41 Defence described the context and nature of its relationship with Mr Khan. It noted that during its time working in Uruzgan, Mr Khan headed the Kandak Amniant Uruzgan (KAU), a private security organisation which provided contracted security in some parts of Uruzgan for the Ministry of Interior. It explained that as part of ISAF efforts to help stabilise Afghanistan, Australian forces regularly engaged with a wide range of tribal and community leaders in Uruzgan in an inclusive and impartial way. Defence stated:

In this setting, Matiullah Khan is one of many influential figures that Australians have engaged. Australia works with such individuals in a way

71 *Submission 4*, p. [4].

72 Attachment to *Submission 4*, William Maley, 'Reconstruction: A Critical Assessment' in Amin Saikal (ed.), *The Afghanistan Conflict and Australia's Role*, Melbourne University Press, 2011, p. 90.

73 *Submission 13*, p. 5.

74 *Submission 13*, pp. 5–6. The TLO Profile noted the appointment of 'strongman Matiullah Khan as Provincial Chief of Police and the security gains under his leadership', TLO, *Uruzgan: 18 months after the Dutch/Australian Leadership Handover*, A TLO Provincial Profile, April 2012, p. xiv.

to ensure that their influence is used positively, in support of governance and security in Uruzgan.⁷⁵

7.42 Since becoming the Chief of Police, Matiullah Khan, in his official capacity, has engaged with Australian officials including the Special Operations Task Group which mentors Uruzgan's Afghan National Police Provincial Response Company—Uruzgan (the PRC-U).⁷⁶

7.43 It should be noted that influential individuals such as Mr Khan are highly important figures in the communities with which aid agencies must engage. Mr Loewenstein noted, however, that many Western powers, including Australia, have chosen not only to deal with such people but to empower, fund and arm them.⁷⁷

Fuelling future rivalries

7.44 Professor Maley spoke of the danger of inadvertently laying foundations for a new kind of conflict within Uruzgan after 2014 that is distinct from the wider security challenge that the province faces because of the Taliban insurgents coming in from sanctuaries in Pakistan. He explained that the Dutch kept an arms-length relationship with Matiullah; were more focused on balancing their dealings with people from different and tribal backgrounds; and probably had a shrewder appreciation of the political complexities as compared to the Australians. He explained that from the Australians' point of view, Matiullah's great strength was his ability to keep open the road from Kandahar to Tarin Kowt, which allowed the easy resupply of Australian forces.⁷⁸ According to Professor Maley, if foreign forces get too close to a controversial local individual, the message conveyed to Afghanistan is 'not a happy one' with the consequence of a possible major future conflict in the province.⁷⁹ He concluded:

There may be short-term benefits for international actors who cooperate with figures such as Matiullah, but there can be long-term costs as well—and it is likely to be ordinary Afghans who pay them, especially if the main legacy of the international presence turns out to be a predatory, extractive warlord.⁸⁰

75 Department of Defence, Defence statement to ABC Four Corners program 'In Their Sights', 5 September 2011, dated 6 September 2011, <http://news.defence.gov.au/2011/09/06/defence-statement-to-abc-four-corners-program-in-their-sights-5-september-2011/> (accessed 7 January 2013).

76 Department of Defence, Defence statement to ABC Four Corners program 'In Their Sights', 5 September 2011, dated 6 September, 2011, <http://news.defence.gov.au/2011/09/06/defence-statement-to-abc-four-corners-program-in-their-sights-5-september-2011/> (accessed 7 January 2013).

77 *Committee Hansard*, 4 December 2012, p. 31.

78 *Committee Hansard*, 4 December 2012, p. 9.

79 *Committee Hansard*, 4 December 2012, p. 9.

80 Attachment to *Submission 4*, William Maley, 'Reconstruction: A Critical Assessment' in Amin Saikal (ed.), *The Afghanistan Conflict and Australia's Role*, Melbourne University Press, 2011, p. 90.

7.45 Dr Bizhan also noted the importance of Australia being aware of, and sensitive to, the recent and complex history of armed conflict and rivalry among different local strong men and actors.⁸¹ He spoke of the influence of such men, empowered through transactions or contracts, who have the final say. Referring specifically to Matiullah Khan, he stated:

In terms of securing the transportation of convoys, what has happened is that they granted huge contracts to this man. Using that amount of money, he supported his own militia to protect the route or provide security. The cost of this process was to undermine local institution building in Uruzgan because, for most people, he was not the governor or chief of police—though now he is chief of police—but it was him who was playing a major role. These grievances or complicated politics widened the gap between local institutions and the local communities, which the insurgents—the Taliban—skilfully use for their own benefit.⁸²

7.46 In Dr Bizhan's words, Mr Khan 'has the money patronage and is redistributing it'—he is 'shaping and reshaping the whole dynamics in the province'.⁸³ He explained that Mr Khan belongs to one tribe and by becoming powerful 'has isolated the other rival groups in the same province especially in the south where rivalry among tribes is a common factor'.⁸⁴ According to Dr Bizhan, very prominent scholars were saying that some such war lords were empowered through foreign aid. He informed the committee that the government, international donors, and as indicated by some reports, Australia as well, have favoured Mr Khan. Dr Bizhan acknowledged that Mr Khan had helped to improve security in the short term, but shared the concerns of other witnesses about the long term consequences in Uruzgan beyond 2014.⁸⁵

Managing complex power relations

7.47 Dr Bizhan referred to weak institutions in Afghanistan, explaining that for this reason, donors must be cautious when working with an individual who can manipulate the whole system. He noted that in Uruzgan, the priority to deliver projects with quick outcomes on the ground led agencies to ignore local power dynamics and bypass the national institutions, which ultimately encouraged an unhealthy relationship to develop in the long term.⁸⁶ He suggested that the rules should be very clear when engaging with such people, arguing that there should be:

- equal political participation, which is mentioned in Afghanistan's constitution; and
- continuous monitoring.

81 See Dr Bizhan, answer to written question on notice, no. 3.

82 *Committee Hansard*, 4 December 2012, p. 24.

83 *Committee Hansard*, 4 December 2012, p. 24.

84 *Committee Hansard*, 4 December 2012, p. 24.

85 *Committee Hansard*, 4 December 2012, pp. 23–24.

86 Answer to written question on notice, no. 3.

7.48 Finally, he suggested that resources should not be used to isolate one player or another player. Overall, he was of the view that there should be 'a complex mechanism of correct, accurate information, expertise, monitoring mechanisms and accountability'.⁸⁷

7.49 Professor Maley noted the difficulty obtaining the required level of understanding of local power politics 'unless one exploits the skills and expertise of Afghans and international personnel who have spent considerable amount of time in the country'. He referred to the frequent turnover of Australian military and civilian personnel that did not allow such expertise to develop. In his view, it was unfortunate that Australia had lost the opportunity of gaining expert insight from the TLO.⁸⁸

7.50 In this regard, AusAID had engaged the TLO, an Afghan NGO registered with the Afghan Ministry of Economy, to undertake research and report on various aspects of Australia's aid program in Uruzgan. AusAID maintained that poor performance on the part of the TLO prompted it to terminate its contract with the NGO. The TLO disputes AusAID's assertions that it had consistently missed deadlines including ones that had been extended.⁸⁹ It should be noted that the TLO has produced a number of substantial reports, including ones that have provided the committee during its inquiry with valuable insight into many aspects of development assistance in Uruzgan (see bibliography at end of report).

7.51 Professor Howes and Mr Pryke also noted the limited time that agency officials spend in the field. In their view, the difficulty understanding the complex social, cultural and demographic relationships was especially severe in Uruzgan because of the heightened security conditions and the limited time and access that officials have in the province.⁹⁰

Conclusion

7.52 Australian development assistance to Uruzgan has produced tangible benefits from reconstruction work or restoration of important infrastructure (schools, health clinics, roads, bridges) to helping the provincial government develop a cadre of trained and professional public servants. Some witnesses expressed reservations about the effectiveness of this aid suggesting that some projects were 'quick fixes' and not sustainable. In some cases, the aid may have undermined local ownership and alignment with community priorities by supporting particular individuals. The committee supports Dr Bizhan's suggestion that Australian agencies should take the greatest of care to ensure that there is equal participation from among the community in the planning, designing and implementation of aid projects. Evidence also

87 *Committee Hansard*, 4 December 2012, p. 25.

88 Answer to written question on notice, no. 2.

89 See TLO, *Submission 7*. The TLO informed the committee that the contract termination 'may have been somewhat unfortunate given that it cost around 130 Afghan employees (a majority based in Uruzgan province) their jobs and life subsistence'.

90 Answer to written question on notice, no. 6.

underlines the importance of understanding the dynamics of the local patronage network.

7.53 One particular concern with Australia's work in Uruzgan, however, was the civil/military component of aid, which the committee deals with in the following chapter.



The construction site of the eastern causeway bridge in Tarin Kowt, one of many projects designed and project managed by the Australian 1st Reconstruction Task Force. (image courtesy of the Department of Defence)