



**Canadian/ United States Engagement in Afghanistan:  
An analysis of the 'Whole of Government' Approach  
Conference**

**Key Note Speech**

**Address by the  
Minister for Rural Rehabilitation and Development  
H. E. Ehsan Zia**

**(Duration 45 minutes)**

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## **Canadian/ United States Engagement in Afghanistan and analysis of the 'Whole of Government' Approach**

Key Note Speech by His Excellency Mohammad Ehsan Zia, Minister of Rural  
Rehabilitation and Development

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is both an honor and pleasure for me to address this conference. I am deeply aware that as keynote speaker, you would wish me to share with you the views of my Government in regard to the Canadian and United States Engagement in Afghanistan and analysis of the 'Whole of Government' Approach. This is quite an impossible task; the government of Afghanistan owes so very much to both countries for their engagement with us in our security, reconstruction and development efforts that I could not do justice to that goal. What is particularly noble about the contribution is the realities of Afghanistan in terms of social and economic status

I am pleased to see this conference take place on the Whole of Government Approach for donor countries. Although it is a simple, and somewhat obvious concept that various parts of a government should work together to develop a common strategy to address security, governance and development approaches in fragile states, we know that history and the nature of government makes this a serious challenge. I would like to take the opportunity at this time to present you

with an additional challenge as you do your good work in the next two days. The obvious next step to Whole of Government Approach within donor countries is to work on harmonization of approaches between donors. Our experience in Afghanistan has shown that this is a crucial function to increasing aid effectiveness, and achieving our common goal of improved security, governance and development.

I wish to use this keynoting opportunity to discuss what we are doing in the re-establishment of a relationship of trust between the state institutions of government and the citizens of the country. AND, to ask you to consider how you might become involved in helping to further that trust so critical to the security and growth of Afghanistan. Furthermore, I would also like to describe some of our own attempts at Whole of Government Approach that we are undertaking in Afghanistan. In this regard, I will discuss:

- National Program Approach which underpins our efforts in several key areas;
- successful programs in the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, or MRRD, that have a direct impact on governance and development; and
- Kandahar model that brings together all three pillars of the Whole of Government Approach: governance, development and security.

**The National Program Approach** was first announced by HE President Hamid Karzai in his Tokyo speech of 2002. This approach was pioneered by my ministry with the National Solidarity Program, National Rural Access Program, and Rural Water and Sanitation program. Following the development and implementation of these national programs for governance and infrastructure, other national programs were developed, including Afghanistan Stabilization Program, National Education Program, National Health Program and National Communications Plan. This National Program Approach most closely resembles the Whole of Government Approach, where a single platform and set of rules is developed to facilitate collaboration of different donors. More specifically, the government of Afghanistan develops its own policies, rules and procedures and the donor community can then collaborate on how to finance the programs. Furthermore, a framework for collaboration is developed for the private sector, NGOs and government, that utilizes the strengths of each. The result is stronger and more capable Afghan institutions that will in time be able to take on the responsibility..

Supporting the National Program Approach are some coordinating bodies at the top of the government, which again approximates a Whole of Government Approach. Perhaps the most important is the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, or ANDS, whose goal is to prioritize investment needs and facilitate donor coordination. Through the development of comprehensive sector

strategies, the Government of Afghanistan will guide and focus efforts on development, governance and security.

**Ladies and Gentleman – Now I would like to move on to the second part of my presentation, which is to discuss some of the National Programs that are managed by MRRD.**

However, before I discuss the programs in some detail, I would first like to briefly introduce my ministry. The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development is a multi-level, multi-sector and multi-agency service ministry. Its mission is to ensure the social, economic and political well-being of rural communities, especially poor and vulnerable people, while working towards the integration of rural communities within the national economy. In achieving this, the focus of my ministry for the next five years will be to further strengthen Comprehensive Rural Development approach, focusing mainly on the consolidation of the governance structures at village and district levels, and to foster linkages between national strategies and local needs and priorities at provincial level. Specifically MRRD uses participatory and consultative mechanisms to ensure that government responds directly to the needs and aspirations of rural people through the delivery of services and development priorities by the communities themselves. Comprehensive Rural Development is best facilitated through a ‘whole of government approach’ and therefore sits well within the mandate of donor countries such as the United States of America and Canada.

MRRD is one of the major actors in the developmental arena of Afghanistan and has in recent years been expanding its services into the remotest corners of the country. It has been able to do this through its national programmes, which address either a direct sectoral need or multi-sectoral needs as in the case of the National Solidarity and the National Area Based Development Programmes.

First I would like to discuss is the **National Solidarity Program**, which I will refer to as NSP. The genesis for NSP began in 2002, when it was recognized that after 23 years of war and separation there was a distinct lack of social cohesion at village level. Communities were disempowered and could see no possibility for change in their situation. Trust in the government was non-existent. There was a dire need for development as poverty had long been a central feature of rural Afghanistan. The Government of Afghanistan recognized an urgent need for the provision of sound governance structures, based on democratic principles. The premise of which, being to form the much needed links between the Government of Afghanistan and the Afghan people, while creating a situation in which people could have an impact on their own futures.

As the largest national programme in Afghanistan, NSP is widely recognized as the flagship programme for rural development and democratic governance. The National Solidarity Programme has for the first time in the history of the country established legitimate governance structures through a genuine process of

empowerment, promoting the active participation of the people in the process of development. To date, some 21,000 Community Development Councils, involving 32,000 villages that represent 70% of the population, have been established in all provinces across Afghanistan. What makes NSP unique is the direct block grants transfer to communities for implementation of prioritised projects, which, to date, amounts nationally to \$432 million. The programme has so far, raised \$60 million in the form of community contributions towards the funding of 33,000 community projects. This is an achievement that should not be ignored and it proves the potential of rural communities.

The scope of activities delivered through the Community Development Councils has exceeded all expectations. Issues such as women empowerment, conflict resolution, land management are regularly addressed. Community Development Councils are now being utilised as the entry point for most community development projects as well as food distribution and other disaster management services.

As mentioned, women's empowerment through CDCs is essential, and without their involvement, development is always incomplete. Through the establishment of CDCs we have managed to provide an equal and equitable approach to building social capital across Afghanistan by enabling all groups, be they minority, vulnerable or marginalized to participate in deciding upon what is best for their community. This process has allowed women to become active in

defining the priority needs of the community. Not only have women been elected to CDCs but in some areas they have also formed committees that have brought about major changes within their communities. Over the last five years, through increased awareness of their role in the current environment women have influenced the profile of NSP sub-projects. The results are now tangible and visible; this increased process of empowerment has resulted in a number of visible projects such as schools, clinics and the most significant project is construction of a maternity hospital in Shomali Plains area that would not have been possible without women's voice and their relentless campaigns.

NSP block grants have also had a major impact on fostering green energy technologies through the expansion of micro-hydro power generation, and the use of solar energy on some projects. In fact, since 2002, NSP has managed to implement 5005 power projects comprising of Micro Hydro Power plants and Solar Panels, benefiting more than 800,000 families. Today flying over Afghanistan, one can see even the remotest villages lit up and more than 4.5 million people in the rural areas are now benefiting from improved access to energy. What is most significant about these energy projects is the role that CDCs have taken on to manage and maintain them for the benefit of their respective community. Notwithstanding this, there remains extensive amount of work to be done in this sector.

In addition to development activities, the positive impact of governance on security and peace is evident to see in the areas that rural communities are empowered through the NSP process and those that are not. Today, these rural communities are protecting their public infrastructures and taking far greater responsibility for development of their community and region. The process of democratically electing CDCs has provided a great opportunity for the people in rural Afghanistan to learn about the reality of democracy and how they could influence their own destiny. Through this bottom up approach to democratisation, we are creating the social cohesion that is necessary for consolidation of peace and future prosperity of Afghanistan.

With respect to the evolution the National Solidarity Programme, the initial focus was on expansion in order to provide support to the entire country. However, once national coverage is achieved we are planning to consolidate these infant governance structures, to ensure their sustainability and to further enhance the relationship of trust between the government and the people.

**Ladies and Gentleman** - The second national program under MRRD that I would like to present to you is the **Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Program, or AREDP**, which is currently under development. This program has a strict development focus on employment and income generation opportunities, and intends to utilize the NSP local governance structure to expand rural enterprise development activities to all CDCs in the country.

The idea of AREDP came about after the realization that the majority of the development focus by MRRD programmes has been in the area of governance and infrastructure with a notable gap in relation to rural economic growth, and that the only alternative to eliminating poppy cultivation is creating licit livelihood opportunities, including the value addition to all rural products.

Economic growth in rural area is a major contributor to improved security, development and Counter Narcotic. The Afghan economy as a whole has registered robust growth rates in recent years; however, these figures largely reflect booming construction and trade-related activities in urban areas and the steep rise in narcotics. There has been little growth of enterprise-related activities in rural areas of Afghanistan, and most people still live on subsistence farming. Even where Afghanistan could be self-sufficient in agriculture-related products, the country imports vast quantities of food and other easily-manufactured daily use items, while the exports sector remains small and undiversified. The dependency on poppy production and related activities is seen largely to be caused by massive unemployment, low income from licit agricultural produce due to lack of investment in value-chain facilities and processing infrastructure in rural Afghanistan.

Two major obstacles to private sector enterprise growth (micro-, small- and medium enterprises) in rural Afghanistan are shortage of business planning,

management and marketing know-how and shortage of access to formal credit. There is a strong need for a government-led initiative that targets rural areas for the specific purpose of providing business support and hand-holding and easy access to credit.

The Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Programme (AREDP) is intended to harness the potential of the private sector for inclusive economic growth and sustainable rural employment and income generation over a 10-year time frame. Through the AREDP, the Government will take a proactive approach in assisting actual and potential entrepreneurs/ micro-, small- and medium enterprises to overcome the various constraints to their development. By focusing on selected 'Champion Products' in strategic sub-sectors of the economy and the country's comparative advantages, the programme aims to reduce reliance on imports of mass consumption goods at the same time as supporting value addition to export items. This, in turn, will help contribute to reducing unemployment and under-employment in rural Afghanistan, which have been major causes of poverty and opium cultivation. The Government's interventions will be designed to strengthen the private sector through top-down (induced) and bottom-up (demand-driven) approaches. The main programme components are: enterprise-facilitation in rural communities and providing support for business incubation hand-holding' services and policy-based lending.

An additional key feature of the AREDP program will be to address the enabling environment in Afghanistan and the development of private sector businesses. A policy unit will be established within AREDP to analyze and make recommendations, develop business friendly legislation and regulations that will be enacted by other parts of government. This will be facilitated through the newly created Afghanistan Economic Development Council, which will be headed by HE President Karzai, and will have the mandate of improving the business climate to foster development of micro enterprises and SME throughout Afghanistan.

MRRD has several other key National programs that focus primarily on infrastructure and sub-national governance, and add greatly to the effectiveness of the NSP and AREDP programs discussed previously. The **National Rural Access Programme (NRAP)**, and the **Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Programme (RuWatSan)** have adopted sector specific approaches to address these needs. These programmes are designed to provide maximum coverage nation-wide on larger scale infrastructure development sub-projects, focused on roads, bridges, culverts and safe drinking water and sanitation, while simultaneously ensuring the sustainability of these projects through the introduction and application of minimum technical standards in their respective sectors. The **National Area Based Development Programme (NABDP)** targets sub-national development and governance structures. Through its community empowerment activities NABDP facilitates the establishment of

participatory and consultative mechanisms at the Provincial and District level to ensure grassroots engagement in integrated rural development planning and implementation processes.

**Ladies and Gentleman - The third topic I would like to discuss is the Kandahar Model.** To substantiate the need for Security, Governance and Development, as a holistic approach I would like to present our recent experience in the south of the country, which we refer to as the 'Kandahar Model'.

The Kandahar model was developed to address the specific needs of the Kandahar province where insurgency had escalated out of line with the majority of the country. The neighbouring provinces in the south show the same trend and this model is being rolled-out to these provinces.

Rural Kandahar is deeply impoverished because of many years of war and drought. Agricultural production is a fraction of what it once was. Irrigation systems have deteriorated or have been destroyed. Nomads have lost their herds which were in many cases their only means of livelihood. Only poppy cultivation has increased. Because of extreme insecurity, very little support to the villages could be delivered by the government, international agencies or NGOs. Between 2001 and 2006 larger infrastructure was put in place near and between cities by private contracting firms, however, village roads, bridges and schools

remained undeveloped. By the end of 2006 there were signs of increasing dissatisfaction amongst communities about the pace and progress of development. This, combined with the re-emergence of the insurgency, created a volatile situation that demanded immediate action on the part of the government.

As a result of presidential direction, MRRD, in January 2007, started substantial development initiatives, which are based on active participation of community at all levels. Through, careful assessment of the problem in the south combined with an understanding of the culture, MRRD developed the 'Kandahar Model'. The overall objective of the model is to stabilize the security situation through substantial and rapid implementation of community based development activities to improve access to public services and increase the visibility of the government in a short period of time. The underlying key principles of the Model that emerged during the process are: out of the box thinking; decentralisation; quick delivery; hands on and continual involvement of MRRD leadership in the management of the development process; mass participation of the people; and the flexibility of stakeholders.

These principles are derived from the lessons learned and can be further elaborated as:

- Out of the box thinking and new conceptual framework for understanding and coping with the situation was the most important factor. We didn't follow the main stream view and traditional approach of intervention and development,

which dictates that without security the work with the affected population, cannot begin. We believe we should rely on the local people and initiate security from communication, interaction and collaboration between the local population and the government.

- Strong leadership commitment towards the project and regular continuous visits to the project sites, despite lack of security, was a booster to the whole process of change and engaged the local community people and MRRD personnel in the target area.
- The main factor to our success in the implementation phase has been the decision making process. Flexibility and rapid implementation permits us to meet the needs and manage the expectation of the villagers.
- To facilitate rapid implementation financial and procurement processes needed to be decentralized.
- The potential of local people and their positive inclination towards change and development was until recently unknown. The active participation in decision making and implementation processes within the programme reflects this mindset.
- The flexibility of donors in changes to implementation methodology is a large component of the success of this model.

As I mentioned before, a unique principle of the model is the strong commitment of MRRD's leadership team. We visit the region every month and take the time to meet with the village elders and Community Development Councils to

demonstrate our personal commitment. In return the people reciprocate by guaranteeing the safety of MRRD staff that are surveying, planning, designing and implementing the projects. This example demonstrates the interconnection of security, governance and development, with each other and the strong commitment of local people to their own future. Both military and civilian authorities have stated that the development work has contributed to the stability of the province. It is important to mention and acknowledge that our success in Kandahar has, to a large-extent, been due to the flexibility shown by CIDA and the strong partnership with the Canadian PRT.

**Ladies and Gentleman** - Among all the developmental actors in Afghanistan, the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) are far more geographically focused and their activities are no different from those taken on by my ministry. The PRTs have many strengths, namely they are self-contained with engineering, development and security expertise and some have independent funding for developmental activities. Therefore, there is an opportunity for the 25 PRTs located around Afghanistan to play an even more effective role in the reconstruction and development, given that they plan, coordinate and deliver their activities in partnership with the government institutions and their relevant national programmes and or regional plan. This can be achieved, as we shown in Kandahar, providing that there is the will to do so.

**In conclusion** – It is my expectation that this conference will assist in developing a strategy which results in greater Afghan ownership of security and development, an acknowledgement of the need for much greater coordination of development players and an agreement to continue working to support Afghan security forces in their development towards self sufficiency.

I would also like to leave you with a few final thoughts for your consideration in the next two days on additional areas to foster the Whole of Government Approach, and to strengthen our efforts to improve security, governance and development in Afghanistan.

**Coordination** of efforts between all actors – foreign governments, Government of Afghanistan, ISAF, donors, PRTs and international organizations – must be given particular attention in the near term. Resources are limited, patience among the citizens of the donor countries and Afghans is finite, and we can no longer afford to postpone good governance amongst ourselves any longer.

Following on coordination, is the need to continue to expand the **national program approach** to all corners of Afghanistan in an egalitarian manner. To date, various donor countries have concentrated efforts in one area with little regard to a complete absence of assistance in neighboring areas. Therefore, I request you to consider ways and mechanisms to address in the inequality in donor efforts on the ground in all three pillars of security, governance, and

development. As I have discussed previously, our national programs, in particular NSP for governance and AREDP for rural enterprise development are currently the only efforts to address governance and economic development in all 34 provinces, and are an excellent venue for donors to have a national impact while strengthening the institutions in Afghanistan.

Finally, I would like you to explore ways to foster **People to people** connection between Afghanistan and donor countries to bring the experience of your communities in terms of business development, civil society structures, and governance to the Afghan people. The benefit will be to increase understanding between your citizens and ours so that our efforts in Afghanistan have a human face, and not just a face of conflict.

At the end, I would like to extend my special thanks to the Governments of the United States and Canada for their generous and continual support in reconstruction and peace building efforts in Afghanistan, and to the George Mason University for the opportunity to bring us all together for such an important discussion.