





*Crisis reports*

# **Afghanistan**

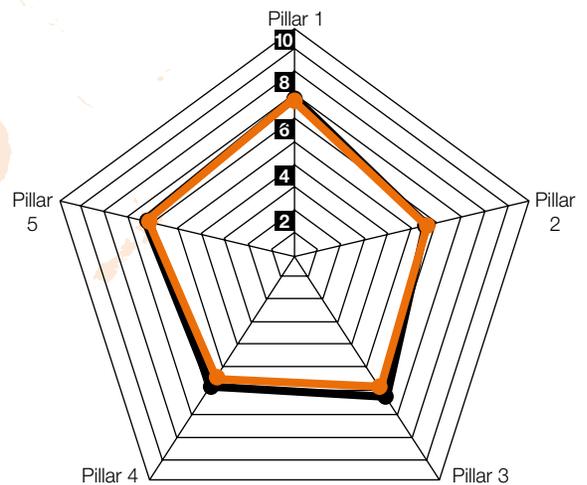
## Afghanistan at a glance

### The crisis and the response

- Several key actors are reluctant to acknowledge evidence of the extent of the humanitarian crisis: increased insecurity, high displacement (at least 297,000 IDPs and 2.89 million refugees), growing food insecurity and disrespect for human rights, especially of women and girls.
- 2009 was the worst year for civilian casualties since the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001.
- Accessing the needs of affected populations is difficult, as more areas become no-go zones.
- All major OECD/DAC donors (with the exception of Switzerland and Ireland) have shaped their aid support on the flawed assumption Afghanistan is a post-conflict country.
- Donors funded 76 percent of the 2009 HAP target of US\$665 million. Outside the appeal, donors provided an additional US\$145 million.
- OCHA reopened in Afghanistan in 2009 and set up an Emergency Response Fund.
- Many humanitarian organisations were frustrated by continued use of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), which compromise impartiality and neutrality.

### Donor performance

- Politicisation of the crisis has violated principles of impartiality and neutrality and made humanitarian intervention difficult and dangerous.
- The least funded cluster is health followed by nutrition, an inadequate response to protection in a country with some of the world's worst health and nutrition indicators.
- The same donors who call for greater transparency and accountability are consistently violating their own professed principles.



— Afghanistan  
— All Crisis Average

### HRI 2010 scores by pillar

- Pillar 1** Responding to needs
- Pillar 2** Prevention, risk reduction and recovery
- Pillar 3** Working with humanitarian partners
- Pillar 4** Protection and international law
- Pillar 5** Learning and accountability

### Key challenges and areas for improvement

- Humanitarian workers must act to distinguish themselves from military personnel.
- Donors must recognise the true scope of the humanitarian crisis and encourage separation of humanitarian response from military activities.
- All conflict protagonists must be encouraged to respect humanitarian principles of independence and neutrality.
- Donors must empower civil society and ensure aid is allocated only after thorough analysis of community needs and capacities.

## Afghanistan

### *Militarisation of aid hinders humanitarian efforts*

In 2009, expectations of peace, stability and development were further dashed in Afghanistan. Already appalling humanitarian indicators have worsened since the previous Humanitarian Response Index (HRI) missions in 2008 and 2009 (Marañón & Fernández 2008 and Polastro 2009), and the country slipped further down the Human Development Index to second-to-last place. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports that 42 percent of the population live on less than US\$1 per day and more than half suffer from chronic malnutrition (OCHA 2010a). Infant mortality is among the highest in the world and in September 2009, OCHA estimated that 31 percent of the population were food-insecure (UNICEF 2009 and OCHA 2009). There are growing criticisms that the estimated US\$36 billion spent on development, reconstruction and humanitarian projects in Afghanistan since the overthrow of the Taliban (Afghan Ministry of Finance, cited in IRIN 2009) has been mismanaged, poorly targeted, corruptly misappropriated and significantly used to support military-led humanitarian responses which continue to violate key *Principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship* (GHD).

#### Intensified armed conflict

In 2009, General Stanley A. McChrystal, the then commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the United States Forces in Afghanistan (USFOR-A), re-elaborated the US's traditional counter-insurgency strategy of "winning hearts and minds", using a new acronym –WHAM. In February 2010, on the eve of ISAF's Operation Moshtarak in Helmand Province, he talked confidently of military promotion of democratic governance, declaring that "we've got a government in a box, ready to roll in" to areas liberated from Taliban control (International Council on Security and Development 2010).

This rhetoric does not appear to impress Afghans. A survey after Operation Moshtarak found 71 percent of Afghans said they wanted foreign troops to leave Afghanistan (International Council on Security and Development 2010). A tribal leader from Kandahar noted that "ten percent of the people are with the Taliban, ten percent are with the government and 80 percent are angry at the Taliban, the government and the foreigners" (Mericille 2010). Afghanistan now hosts more US troops than Iraq, yet analysts doubt that the troop surge will lead to sustainable diminution of the Taliban presence or to achievement of WHAM objectives. Civilian fatalities resulting from US/ISAF military offensives caused increasing resentment in 2009, prompting the US to repeatedly declare a desire to minimise "collateral" damage, but has been unable to do so in several well-publicised incidents.

Insecurity, corruption, poor coordination, under-resourcing and external control of many development interventions all came together to prevent the Afghan government from providing basic services. Afghanistan has been ranked as the second most corrupt country in the world (Transparency International 2009). Almost all those employed by the government, whether in a civilian or security capacity, are judged to be corrupt by Afghans by and most humanitarian organisations the HRI team interviewed in the field. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) states that corruption ranks even higher than security as a concern among Afghans (UNODC 2010). Corruption has been described by a senior British official as the "elephant in the room", the key impediment to development, but rarely talked about during seminars on the country's future (DNDTalk 2010). US congressional investigators report that funds clandestinely paid by the US to ensure safe passage of military convoys further reinforce corruption and bolster the Taliban (Reuters 2010).

Intensification of the armed conflict and its expansion into areas previously considered stable made 2009 the worst year for civilian fatalities since 2001: 2,412 Afghan civilians were reported killed (UNAMA 2010). Amid signs of growing disagreement between US civilian and military managers, the Obama Administration has deployed additional forces to Afghanistan. Despite this, the insurgency continues unabated, with the Taliban now reportedly having shadow governors in 33 of the country's 34 provinces.

Many believe there is no alternative to ending the conflict other than by achieving some kind of negotiated settlement with insurgents. With objectives of building democratic institutions being scaled down, most external providers of military assistance to the government are contemplating withdrawal. Fuelled by civilian deaths in military operations and frequent press reports about misallocated aid and profits made by international contractors, there is increasing popular resentment. As Western optimism has faded, there is a considerable sense of unease as well as mistrust and resentment among donors, the UN, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), Afghan government officials, private contractors and Afghan civil society.

### What humanitarian crisis?

The HRI team found once again that key actors, including the government, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and many troop-providing governments, are clearly reluctant to acknowledge the extent of the crisis.<sup>1</sup> While some interviewees agreed with the designation of humanitarian crisis, others preferred to speak of “a humanitarian situation”, “vulnerability crisis” or “chronic crisis”. This reluctance to “call a spade a spade” is partly the result of the inability to gather robust data through field evaluations and the resultant dependence on often dubious proxy assessments.

Eight years have passed since the fall of the Taliban regime, and although the international community appears to recognise the importance of humanitarian needs more than was reported in the HRI 2008 and 2009, it is still unable to define clearly the nature and magnitude of these needs. Effective response to immediate vulnerabilities is hampered by continued insistence that the Western military and aid intervention is focused on post-conflict recovery and the building of Afghan military and

civilian capacity – not on humanitarian response. Donors continue to frame interventions within the framework of the Afghanistan Compact and the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), political agreements between the government and the international community which stress the need for reconstruction, development, institution building and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (UNDP 2010).

As a result of this emphasis and the dire security situation, the UN has reported increasing difficulties in recruiting appropriately experienced staff. Donors like the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) and the US Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) are eager to receive project proposals that fit with their humanitarian mandate yet are unable to allocate part of their funds. Most international agencies and their implementing partners are development specialists and there is a growing lack of humanitarian actors.

Large numbers of Afghans remain displaced. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2010) reports there are 297,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and a further 2.89 million Afghans are registered refugees in neighbouring countries. Actual numbers are thought to be considerably higher with analysts suggesting both donors and the government have chosen to overlook the extent of displacement. In 2009, insecurity, land disputes, unexploded ordnance and lack of livelihoods resulted in a further decrease in the number of repatriating refugees assisted by UNHCR. The UN refugee agency’s 2009 target of assisting 220,000 returns was only 25 percent achieved. Significant numbers of returnees have become IDPs, many becoming undocumented residents of informal settlements in major cities.

Most repatriating refugees have lived for decades, or have been born, in Pakistani or Iranian cities and have little capacity or interest in agriculture. Significant numbers are thought to have returned clandestinely to Iran or Pakistan where there is growing popular and official resentment of their presence and regular threats to forcibly repatriate Afghan refugees and illegal migrants. UNHCR (2010) has warned that Afghanistan has no capacity to absorb more returnees unless donors provide targeted support. Some experts speculate that 70 percent of the population of Kabul – several million people – fall into the overlapping categories of repatriated refugee/IDP. Swollen by IDP and refugee numbers, Afghan cities are experiencing rising poverty, unemployment, criminality and despair. Displaced and unemployed urban men may be particularly vulnerable to recruitment by the insurgency (ICG 2009).

In 2009, two pronouncements by President Karzai provoked storms of protest: apparent support for a draft law which would have legalised rape within marriage and the granting of a presidential pardon to convicted rapists. Warning that the already dire vulnerability of women and girls could further worsen, Human Rights Watch (2009) has argued the need to “make sure that women’s and girls’ rights don’t just get lip service while being pushed to the bottom of the list by the government and donors”. The massive presence of the international community and theoretical national adherence to international human rights laws<sup>2</sup> have done little to address the lack of protection and impunity for perpetrators of human rights violations. Many humanitarian and human rights agencies accuse donors of remaining silent about human rights. US and ISAF military personnel, the Afghan government and donors all need to do more to protect civilians and encourage wider respect for international humanitarian law.

<sup>2</sup> Under the terms of the Afghanistan Compact, the Afghan government of its determination “to work toward a stable and prosperous Afghanistan, with good governance and human rights protection for all under the rule of law”.

<sup>1</sup> See 2009 Afghanistan crisis report

## The response

The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) launched, for the first time since 2001, a Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP) – a framework to identify, prioritise and address the needs of the most vulnerable in Afghanistan. The 2009 HAP initially requested US\$604 million for 112 projects. The appeal was later revised upwards to US\$665 million. Some NGOs and donors argued that the HAP actually has the character of a Development Action Plan, neither addressing chronic vulnerability nor establishing means to save lives imminently at risk. To date, the HAP has received US\$507 million (76.4 percent of overall needs), with 93.6 percent allocated to UN agencies, mainly to the World Food Programme (WFP), 5.5 percent to NGOs and a mere 0.02 percent to local NGOs (OCHA 2010b).

The least funded cluster is health, with five percent of the required amount, followed by nutrition with 19 percent. This low response is highly regrettable, given that Afghanistan has among the world's worst health and nutrition indicators. Donors interviewed by the HRI team explained that health is normally covered by development projects. There is an equally poor response for protection (27 percent funded) – although this is one of the most important needs in Afghanistan. While these clusters have suffered from underfunding, others such as common services, education, and emergency telecommunications met or surpassed the funding requirements. Donors funded 97 percent of food security and agriculture requirements, with most pledges allocated to WFP – which is by far the largest humanitarian recipient of aid in Afghanistan. Other humanitarian actors and donors like ECHO question the quality of WFP food security data and argue the appeal is based on guesstimates. WFP is criticised for distributing assistance through local governments with insufficient monitoring, potentially leading to politicisation of aid, especially as parliamentary elections approach.

It is next to impossible to quantify the extent of international aid provided to Afghanistan. This is because the response continues to be led by multiple overarching layers of players: humanitarian actors, militaries, diplomats and private contractors with various, and sometimes incompatible, agendas. Donors are criticised, both by the Afghan government and the UN, for their lack of transparency. The same donors who call for greater transparency and accountability on the international stage are, when it comes to revealing figures on total aid provided to Afghanistan, consistently violating their own professed principles.

According to figures reported to OCHA's Financial Tracking System (FTS), the largest donors of humanitarian assistance in 2009 were Japan (US\$89.8 million); the US (US\$58.9 million); the European Commission (US\$52.8 million); Germany (US\$39.6 million); Norway (US\$26.4 million); Canada (US\$25.9 million) and the Netherlands (US\$14.8 million). Six new donors funded humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan in 2009, principally the Russian Federation (US\$10 million) and India (US\$6.4 million).

Donors' prioritisation of development is evident in their budgets. Donor agencies with a clear humanitarian mandate like OFDA and ECHO, with budgets of US\$33 million and US\$35 million respectively,<sup>3</sup> have limited budgets compared to development-oriented agencies like USAID, which had a 2009 budget of US\$2.15 billion (USAID 2010, ECHO 2009 and USAID Afghanistan 2010).

In 2009, OCHA also set up an Emergency Response Fund (with a target of US\$5 million) whose objective is to provide rapid funds to NGOs to initiate life-saving humanitarian activities. Outside the appeal, it is estimated that donors have provided an additional US\$145 million, mainly to INGOs and to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

<sup>3</sup> ECHO's 2009 funding decision includes the response to conflict and natural disasters in Afghanistan as well as Iran and Pakistan – where many Afghan refugees reside.

## Provincial Reconstruction Teams and the militarisation of aid

The primary mechanism for those who seek to ensure that development interventions chime with political and military objectives continues to be the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). PRTs are composed of military personnel, diplomats and contracted civilians. Despite considerable criticism from international NGOs, the PRT concept was further strengthened in 2009. There are currently 27 PRTs in Afghanistan, mostly controlled by the US military, but also by Canadians, Czechs, Estonians, Germans, Lithuanians, Poles, Turks and the United Kingdom (UK). Intended to promote stability, support security sector reforms and provide a local environment conducive to development interventions, the PRTs are located on military bases. Since the first PRT was established in 2004, the emphasis has been on post-conflict recovery, not humanitarian interventions. PRTs' engagement in relief operations was intended to be small-scale and time-limited, to plug gaps in services offered by national and international humanitarian providers.

Many Afghans lump together consultants, private contractors and INGOs as outsiders who have come to Afghanistan to make money. A survey found that 54 percent of Afghans believe that international organisations, including NGOs, "are corrupt and are in the country just to get rich," (UNODC 2010). Projects financed via PRTs are often implemented by for-profit private companies or by international NGOs who acquiesce in the PRT concept to secure funding and profile. Tendering and procurement processes are not often transparent. An NGO programme director expressed the frustration of many humanitarians: "We must constantly differentiate ourselves from militaries but also from private contractors". NGO efforts to assert their unique status are failing to convince Afghans.

There is considerable unease about PRTs among the humanitarian community and disappointment that previously expressed reservations have not influenced policy. In January 2010, the UN's Special Advisor on Development in Afghanistan argued that PRTs were set up at a time when there was little state capacity, but that PRT managers should now let Afghans manage more reconstruction projects and funds on their own in order to achieve the declared goal of building government capacity to deliver basic services. Because PRTs often have more funds than local Afghan authorities, they are competing with local Afghans to deliver services. Funding for PRTs diverts greatly needed funds away from Afghan civilian institutions whose weaknesses further prolong the military presence. PRTs thus end up hampering the development of the local government and further confusing Afghan communities and civil servants. Allocation of substantial foreign funding through PRTs, rather than through Afghan ministries, has led to discrepancies in development investments, with far more North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) PRT funding available in southern and eastern Afghanistan where insurgents are most active.

It is not possible to obtain aggregated information on total allocations for PRTs, but it is clear that they are an expensive and inefficient aid conduit. A considerable source of US funding for PRTs is provided by a mechanism also used in Iraq – the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP). US\$1 billion was allocated to the Afghanistan CERP fund in 2010 (US House of Representatives 2009). The 2009 US PRT budget of US\$200 million exceeded the Afghan national budgets for health and education combined (Oxfam 2009). The predominance of PRTs in the humanitarian landscape is a trend that has continued – if not accelerated – under the Obama Administration (Refugees International 2009).

The Afghan Ministry of Public Health has noted that it has, at times, not been informed about the establishment of health facilities, and that PRTs have not ensured funding to continue their sustainable operation. PRTs have also donated medicines which are not on the government's approved list. Furthermore, the presence of uniformed military personnel in health facilities exposes medical staff and patients to threats from insurgents.

Education provides an additional example of the consequences of the unclear separation between political-military activities and aid. Threats against schools, students, parents and teachers led to the end of schooling in many areas in 2009 and to a decline in female enrolment. The use of educational premises as polling stations during the 2009 presidential elections, and the fact that some schools are constructed by PRTs, provided further incentive for insurgents' attacks on the education system. In the southern provinces it is reported that over two thirds of schools have closed due to insecurity (CARE 2009).

### **Humanitarian space disappearing**

Most INGOs are under intense pressure from the donor governments they depend on. A donor told the HRI team that "in Afghanistan humanitarian aid is an integrated element that must accompany military action and cannot be neutral... NGOs have a duty to support our boys. It is regrettable that NGOs are so reluctant to coordinate with our troops. They should be more pragmatic, they have so much to offer". Little has changed from the HRI missions of 2008 and 2009 when it was noted that military objectives often define humanitarian interventions, putting humanitarian workers and beneficiaries at risk. Staff of humanitarian agencies, particularly those working in areas of southern and eastern Afghanistan, are still endangered by perceptions that their activities are linked to Western military objectives.

Intensification of the conflict has further reduced humanitarian space. In early 2009, the UN Department of Safety and Security considered only 37 percent of the country to be "low-risk" and 20.6 percent "medium-risk". According to the Afghanistan NGO Safety Office (ANSO), insurgent groups have a presence in over 97 percent of the country. Today, only the ICRC is even attempting to negotiate access to areas held by insurgents. Conflict-affected areas of the country have become virtual no-go zones in which information on humanitarian needs is apocryphal or non-existent. In June 2010, a report from the UN Secretary-General contradicted US assertions of steady counter-insurgency progress by noting that the overall security situation had continued to decline (VOA 2009). As the Taliban have sought "soft" targets, the security of humanitarian aid workers and their ability to work has steadily eroded. Taliban commanders have stepped up their campaign to intimidate or kill Afghan civilians working for the Afghan government and aid agencies. In 2009, 19 NGO workers, all Afghans, were killed. In October 2009, an attack on a UN guesthouse in Kabul forced aid organisations to review security and further reduce visibility and travel.

### **Coordination lacking**

Afghanistan roll-out of the cluster approach took place in June 2008 and OCHA reopened an office in Afghanistan in early 2009 after an eight year absence, thanks largely to advocacy by NGOs. While humanitarian actors welcomed the return of OCHA as overdue recognition that Afghanistan remains in the grips of a humanitarian crisis, most report that coordination remains weak and disproportionately Kabul-focused.

The HCT meets on an ad hoc basis, and still has no concrete strategy for key issues such as refugee repatriation and IDPs. Military personnel and NGOs do not necessarily share information and donors often coordinate only with their own national NGOs whose work they support. Basic information on who is doing what and where is lacking. Humanitarian donors, such as OFDA and ECHO, only meet bilaterally on an ad hoc basis. There is no coordination structure as such to discuss access, humanitarian priorities, standards, core principles or financial decisions.

“OCHA’s presence is important if we want have a better picture of the humanitarian situation,” explained a donor. “Nevertheless, it is part of a UN mission with a strong political mandate that can impede its work.” There is near consensus within the humanitarian community that OCHA’s coordination role is handicapped by a lack of political support and financial resources. Some UN actors, notably UNAMA – which is mandated to “coordinate international efforts in Afghanistan and in support the Government of Afghanistan (...) and to play a central coordinating role in facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance” (UNAMA 2010) – question OCHA’s role. UNAMA is not regarded as impartial for working exclusively with the government, yet financial, logistical and personnel constraints make OCHA dependent on UNAMA. Respondents told the HRI team that UNAMA had not provided OCHA with requested information or support, hampering OCHA’s ability to carry out its mandate.

### **GHD Principles missing in action**

Afghanistan is the only complex emergency in which all major OECD/DAC donors (with the exception of Switzerland and Ireland) are also belligerents who have shaped their aid support on the assumption that Afghanistan is a post-conflict country. Donors are, for the most part, unwilling or politically unable to recognise the humanitarian scope of the crisis. According to HRI respondents, with the exception of ECHO, Norway and Switzerland, donors do not defend the principled humanitarian approaches defined by the GHD.

*“When military actors are doing things we normally do, they create confusion about our neutrality. – Director of an INGO*



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Multiple donors and INGOs continue to be highly concerned about violations of principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality. ECHO is critical of the current “integrated approach” and according to some interviewees is considering not funding NGOs operating in PRTs. Some NGOs, determined to preserve or recover their impartial status, told the HRI team that they have chosen not to accept US or UN funds. A staffer from a US NGO that had lost its ability to access major parts of Afghanistan explained that rejecting US funding “was the only way to demonstrate the clarity and transparency of our intentions and to have again access to beneficiaries”. Some agencies have also declined military requests to provide confidential information about their local staff.

Some donors have imposed “security requirements” on implementing partners, obliging them to use armoured vehicles and employ guards, further causing them to be associated with military actors. It is hardly surprising that Afghans are confused as to who is a combatant and who is an aid worker. A director of a major INGO told us that “when military actors are doing things we normally do, they create confusion about our neutrality. The consequence is immediate: insurgency that normally target military is now targeting us. This situation also puts in danger those we are intending to help. It obliges us to revise our operation plans and our presence on the field”.

There seems little likelihood of change in donors' policies to direct aid resources to support their military and political strategies. Many NGOs explained that it is relatively easy to obtain funds in conflict areas where donor nations have troops, but extremely difficult in non-conflict areas. A UN staffer noted that there is "an imbalance between donors spending in insecure and secure provinces that needs to be addressed". Failure to meet needs in non-conflict regions provides an incentive to return to poppy cultivation.

### Lessons learnt and recommendations for the future

The international community appears to lack analytical capacity or a clear strategy, and continues to downplay the humanitarian emergency, to pursue post-conflict strategies and to heavily invest in the provision of development assistance through military leadership. Humanitarian action is significantly shaped by military and geo-political agendas. Despite considerable statements of concern from wide sections of the humanitarian community, donors still prioritise security, counter-terrorism, counternarcotics and nation-building. This increasingly diverts attention from the humanitarian crisis by conveying a misleading impression of development and post-conflict recovery. With Afghanistan's future so uncertain, there is an urgent need for dialogue between donors, international humanitarians, and Afghan state and civil society actors in order to ensure that unmet humanitarian needs are effectively and impartially addressed.

Amid a climate of tension between NGOs, donors, contractors and military personnel there is increasing awareness that the militarised approach to aid is not working. More of the same will not win "hearts and minds". Some governments such as Canada and the Netherlands are already discussing scenarios for a genuinely humanitarian-led response to the Afghan crisis if and when the current military mission ends. This provides a window of opportunity to reassert *GHD Principles*, and put a stop to the militarisation of aid, fragmentation of aid delivery, the disastrous post-2001 donor trend to view Afghanistan through a security lessons lens and, above all else, to begin repairing fractured trust between Afghan and international humanitarian actors and local beneficiaries.

It is important that donors:

- 1 acknowledge the failure of the militarised response to humanitarian needs;
- 2 promote the separation of military activities from humanitarian aid;
- 3 heed and promote *GHD Principles*: all protagonists to the conflicts in Afghanistan must be encouraged to respect humanitarian principles of independence and impartiality;
- 4 ensure aid is allocated only after thorough analysis of community needs and capacities;
- 5 provide support to empower national NGOs and civil society;
- 6 advocate for, and fund, protection activities, particularly targeted at vulnerable women and children;
- 7 advocate for OCHA to be permitted to play an independent, neutral and impartial role;
- 8 assuage the anger and fears of the Afghan population by ensuring greater national and international accountability and provision of transparent publicly available information on aid flows.

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**Information based on field interviews with key humanitarian agencies in Afghanistan from 04 to 14 April 2010, and 198 questionnaires on donor performance (including 159 OECD/DAC donors).**

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