

MISSION REPORT

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE INTER- INSTITUTIONS EVALUATION PROCESS FOR AFGHANISTAN

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1. OBJECTIVES OF THE MISSION

To organise a process for an interdisciplinary, multi-actors, multi temporal and multi sites evaluation is a complex undertaking. One of the keys for the potential success remains with both the quality of the work done and in the dynamism of the networking activities. It is in the light of the experiences of previous exercises in the Balkans and Central America that it was decided to put in place an "institutional mission". This was due to take place before the full fledged evaluation process starts.

This mission had six objectives :

- Ensure that the level of knowledge and understanding of the process, its rational and its modalities is high, in order to attract interest and buy in all the actors that would like to be associated with it (international and national NGO, UN agencies, donors, and of course the Afghan authorities).
- Ensure the establishment of appropriate working relations and collaboration with the two structures that were identified a potential key partners to the operation, namely ACBAR and AREU (Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit), the new name of SMU ;
- Identify early enough what could become blocking points in the process and prepare ad-hoc remedies or elaborate a strategy to deal with them ;
- Identify similar or quasi-similar initiatives in order to ensure a proper coordination and avoid burdening the same field teams and populations;
- Continue fund raising in order to ensure the coverage of the remaining funding gap;
- Get a bit of a sense of the ambiance in Afghanistan in order to adjust the evaluation process to logistical, political and security issues.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE MISSION

It started with two meetings with NGO in Paris and two meetings with NGO and people from the French MFA and Ministry of Agriculture about the famous in coming "French seeds". The mission arrived in Kabul on time to participate to the APB meeting, the operation body of the ASG, currently chaired by Norway. The objectives and the methods of the one year long coming evaluative process was presented in a nutshell to this important coordination mechanism between the donor community, the UN agencies and the Afghan Authorities.

Then a three track process started :

- Photocopy and dispatch in the largest way possible an up-dated version of the Terms of Reference of the Evaluation Process;
- Meet many people and agencies at all level in order to reach as many structures as possible in order to ensure the high level of awareness on the process being launched;
- Participate to inter-agency in order to inform about the evaluation but also to feel the existing levels and constraints affecting the existing collectives mechanisms.

This ended up with a series of debriefing and conclusion meetings in Kabul, Peshawar and Islamabad :

- With the structures with whom we aim at developing working relations ;
- With the UN ;
- With the most concerned donors (EU, Swiss Cooperation, ...).
- With the Special Adviser to the Prime Minister, Mr Ashraf Ghani.

This mission went extremely well thanks to the numerous contacts taken prior to departure, and, among others, of the NGO involved in the Quality Project. Hospitality and logistical support from ACTED and ICRC have been greatly appreciated. The mission's itinerary are attached in the annex.

3. RESULTS

The results of this mission are largely positive :

Vis-à-vis the NGO already URD partners :

In general, the information was well transmitted from HQ to the field and the Mission was received very nicely by the field teams. Due to the short duration of the mission, the fact that in Kabul every runs from one meeting to another, if not gone to the field, is was not possible to see all partners. This report will keep them informed of the contacts taken and results achieved during the mission. all have not been seen. Observer to Groupe URD since 1993, ICRC was contacted after an initial contact at HQ level. Their participation and experience will be greatly appreciated in the debate.

Vis-à-vis ACBAR :

ACBAR, the main NGO coordination structure, was evidently seen as our most legitimate correspondent at the field level. Regular contacts took place since October with its Executive Secretary and continued during the mission. The mission could also spend some time with some of the Board members and. The final result is an agreement on partnership during the all evaluation process in order to underline its "NGO led nature". This is especially important because one of the ideas that came out during the mission is that the implementation of the evaluation process could also be a good chance to help preparing an Evaluation Module for NGO. This alliance with ACBAR is particularly important if we aim at avoiding further deepening of the "Francophone-Anglophone Divide". Our colleagues from OXFAM, DACAAR, etc. will thus be important partners in the process, as well as the Afghan NGO.

Vis-à-vis AREU :

The Terms of Reference of AREU have been modified during the last few months and the direction taken is that AREU will concentrate on a more « macro » level. This will be complementary, but relatively different from our initiative. On the basis of well defined complementary and synergies, it seems that the concept of establishing regular working relations can go ahead. Members of AREU's Steering Committee (3 NGO, 3 UN, 3 donors) as well as the new Director are very pleased with this process and their support could be logistical (premises in Islamabad), methodological as well as support in our fund raising efforts.

Vis-à-vis the Donor community :

Most of the important donors were met and/or received the Terms of Reference of the evaluation : The European Union (ECHO but also the other instruments in place and the New EC Head of Mission), Swiss Development cooperation, DIFID, French cooperation, Norway, USAID. There is basically a great interest for the process which as been described by one donor as badly needed useful, original and timely. This is especially important if we keep in mind that previous evaluation exercises (Kosovo/Albania, Central America) showed how important it is to have the attention of the Donors. Some recommendations will target them ! We can also capitalise on this interest to fill the remaining funding gaps.

Vis-à-vis the United Nations :

Nearly most of the agencies received, one way or another, the document presenting our project. Specific meetings with UNOCHA, with UNSMA (UN Special Mission for Afghanistan), UNHCR, FAO and the office of the UNHRC (UN Human Rights Commissioner) took place. In general there is a lot of interest in our NGO driven evaluation initiative.

Vis-à-vis des Autorités afghanes :

At a time when the tone of the Afghan Authorities was not very « pro-ONG », the announcement of an NGO led evaluation and learning process was very welcomed by them. What remains to be seen is how will they be associated with the process and how can we ensure that they can also benefit from all the training activities that will come during and after the exercise is completed. Their involvement in the final Kabul Concluding Conference will also be important, although the form of this involvement is still to be worked out.

Vis-à-vis other processus in the pipeline :

The Humanitarian Accountability Project (HAP) is launching a case study in Herat. There are rumors of a initiative coming from the Henry Dunant Centre in Geneva. We will have to keep monitoring the developments of these initiatives and of others in order to avoid burdening the field teams by the mutliplication of visits and surveys. The evaluation office of UNHCR is currently carrying our their third "real team" evaluation. Contacts taken with them in Geneva have already ensured that the two processes will collaborate and exchange views and results.

4. NEXT STEPS

Once this report finalised in both English and French, it will be sent to all persons and institutions met during the mission or who received copy of the evaluation's TOR for comments. The negotiation will continue with the Donors interested in filling the gap.

The preparation for the first interdisciplinary mission will also start :

- elaboration of an itinerary on the basis of questions, concerns and issues coming from the field;
- finalisation of the method for the field work and the feed-back processes ;
- organisation of the logistic of the mission.

5. CONCLUSION

Innovative and collective, this NGO driven evaluative process both attracts interest and raises questions. We will have to meet with high expectations. But at the time when NGO and the aid community at large face harsh criticisms, we hope we can contribute to demonstrate that we community wants "to be good at doing good"!

Annex 1

ITINERARY OF THE MISSION

06/03 : Meeting of coordination of the French NGO for Afghanistan

Meeting with NGO at the French MFA on agricultural matters

07/03 : Bibliography for the preparation of the mission

08/03 : Meeting with MFA and NGO

Depart

09/03 : Arrival in Islamabad

Briefing ACTED

Meeting with ECHO

Meeting with FAO

10/03 : Departure Kabul

Meeting with Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU, ex SMU)

Participation to the Afghan Planning Board (APB)

Meeting with the Norwegian State Secretary for Development

Meeting with NGO forum

Meeting with ICRC

Meeting with FAO

11/03: Meeting with ACBAR

Meeting with UNOCHA

Meeting with UNCHS (UN Habitat)

Meeting with le Swiss Development Cooperation

Meeting with the EC Coordinator of the Budget Line « Uprooted people »»

Participation to the Agricultural coordination meeting

Meeting with the Deputy Ministry on Agriculture

Meeting with ACTED

Meeting with Solidarités

12/03 : Meeting with FAO

Meeting with the UN Special Mission for Afghanistan

Meeting with le Chargé de Coopération of the French Embassy

Participation to the Coordination meeting on IDP and Repatriation

13/03 : Meeting with CICR

Meeting with AMI

Meeting with MSF

Meeting with HCR

Meeting with ACTED

Debriefing Meeting with ACBAR

Meeting with the Ministry for Rural Development

Meeting with the Special adviser to the Prime Minister

Debriefing with ECHO et SCD

14/03 : Debriefing with the new EC Head of Mission in Kabul

Meeting with ACF

Meeting with the ICRC Agro-team

Departure from Kabul to Peshawar

Debriefing with the EC Coordination Office in Peshawar

Return to Islamabad

15/03 : Debriefing with FAO

Debriefing with AREU

Debriefing with the UN Human Right office in Islamabad

Departure for Paris