

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP  
12 March 1998**

**Item 3.1: Afghanistan  
Update on Details of Assistance Strategy**

(Based on input from the field)  
98/iasc-wg/XXXI/3.1.2

*The text below is part of a communication dated 13 February 1998 from Mr. Witschi-Cestari to Messrs Speth, Vieira de Mello and Prendergast. The common fund proposal has been deferred indefinitely, although moves towards collaborative funding are being explored by and with donors. A mission is currently at work to draft a monitoring and evaluation proposal for the common programme.*

1. In early December, the revised Assistance Strategy was presented to the Afghanistan Support Group (ASG) meeting in New York. Donor response was vigorous in support of the process that had resulted in the document and of the paper itself, particularly its honesty, and the inclusive and consultative approach. It considered the document to be conceptually sound and operationally relevant. The donors also encouraged the immediate establishment of an independent monitoring and evaluation mechanism for the common programme, setting explicit ground rules for all donors, agencies and NGOs. On the issue of common funding, donor reaction was mixed. Most agreed with the proposal that common funding remain a medium term goal. They also acknowledged that bilateral and multilateral contributions should be consistent with the strategy. There was support for the general precept that in future only programmes included in the Consolidated Appeal would be funded by ASG donors.
2. In conclusion, the ASG meeting agreed that ASG members would seek endorsement for the strategy from boards of UN agencies, and would seek consistent policies from these boards; that bilateral and multilateral programme funding would be made consistent with the strategy; and that the ASG would meet more frequently as common programme formulation continues; and that the first revisions of the strategy would be submitted to the May 1998 meeting of the ASG, and would include clearer language on gender, human rights, capacity building and a code of conduct for dealing with authorities in Afghanistan.
3. The translation of the agreed objectives, concepts and parameters of the Assistance Strategy into a common programme which provides all partners and stakeholders with a sufficient clear and operationally specific frame of reference for the coordinated planning and implementation of their respective programmes of assistance is now our major task, with the overall facilitating role by the UN Coordinator and with strategic guidance from the Afghanistan Task Force and the Afghanistan Support Group.
4. In order to move this process forward, the following has been decided/proposed:
  - (a) The four (soon to be five) UN Regional Coordinators based in Afghanistan will immediately start a process of consultation in the field with all stakeholders, so as to ensure all views are being obtained, and fed into the formulation process; this is already underway;

- (b) The UN Coordinator's office will undertake a process of consultation with Heads of Agencies in Islamabad and Peshawar, this will take place in the coming weeks;
- (c) The UN Coordinator will attend and, if requested, facilitate meetings among donors on the steps they might take to address the practical implications for them of the common programme;
- (d) By March 15th, a "group of five" (see text para) will work full-time on the drafting of the programme document;
- (e) A sounding board of approximately 25 (5 UN, including DPA; 4 donors; 4 international and 4 Afghan NGOs; the 5 Regional Coordinators; the World Bank and the ICRC) will be formed to meet with the "group of five" to provide feedback and comments as the formulation of the common programme evolves;
- (f) In late April (i.e. shortly before the London ASG meeting) a larger group will be convened to comment on - and hopefully endorse - the common programme document.

5. We see the "group of five" as composed of the following (it being understood that all five members have to be available for between 4 and 6 weeks as of early March, and that all should be well familiar with the main issues related to crisis countries programming):

- (a) a senior staff member or UNDP funded consultant identified by UN agencies working in Afghanistan, who would take overall responsibility for the drafting of the Common Programme document to be presented to the ASG meeting in London;
- (b) an individual whom DPA can consider as its member on the team (a DPA Staff Member or DPA-identified consultant, and irrespective as to whether UNDP or DPA funded);
- (c) an individual whom the World Bank can consider as its member on the team ( a WB Staff Member or WB-identified consultant, and irrespective as to whether UNDP or WB funded);
- (d) an individual whom the NGO community can consider as its member on the team (maybe through ICVA, and irrespective as to whether UNDP or NGO funded);
- (e) the Islamabad-based Senior Advisor for the Strategic Framework (representing UNDP/UNOCHA).

6. Members under (b) to (d) are extremely important so as to ensure the "political" and "economic" connect of the Common Programme, as well as the participation of - and buy-in by - the NGO community.

7. The document which we expect the "group of five" to produce is to build further on the Assistance Strategy document, the reactions to it by the ASG and other stakeholders, and to reflect the outcome of consultations and logical framework analyses that are currently being held with donors, UN agencies, NGOs and other stakeholders, both in regional centers within Afghanistan and in Islamabad/Peshawar. We anticipate a document which sets out practical steps that need to be taken to realize the Common Programme and which

serves as a clear frame of reference for all aid partners with respect to objectives; priorities; parameters; principles; coordination mechanisms; programming, monitoring and evaluation; timeframe; etc.

8. We believe that success in the formulation of the Common Programme will depend, among other things, on a number of factors, including:

- (a) the transparency of the formulation process
- (b) thorough consultation with all stakeholders, including individual UN agencies, including UN and NGO;
- (c) understanding and respect for mandates, experience and capacities of agencies, including UN and NGO;
- (d) responsive and professional facilitation of the process by the UN Coordinator's office, including UN and NGO;
- (e) support from donor capitals and UN headquarters and governing bodies for efforts in the field to realise a common programme.

9. We understand that while this process is advancing in the field, the draft Strategic Framework document prepared last October is being revised in New York in anticipation of the next meeting of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC). In this context we trust that a means will be found to ensure that the revision takes into account reactions to the draft Strategic Framework from stakeholders in the field and developments since the draft Strategic Framework was prepared, notably the reaction to the Assistance Strategy, not least so that lessons learned here can be of use to the broader UN system, particularly in other complex political emergencies.