
Capacity Building – A Myth in Afghanistan?

by Nipa Banerjee

I am compelled to begin with an anecdote that typifies ‘capacity building’ in Afghanistan. In 2003 I met a woman in her mid-twenties in a Consultative Group Meeting. She introduced herself as an external advisor to the Minister of Justice – a pretty impressive title, I thought! I came across her after a year or so, when she gleefully announced that she was now advising the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. Despite having initial difficulty reconciling the suitability of a justice advisor also advising on rural development, I assumed the young lawyer advised on legal issues. I had the good fortune of meeting her again after six months, when she presented herself as a Private Sector Development advisor. To clearly understand the logic of the trail of her advisory

roles, I asked her about her academic specialization and expertise. She enlightened me: she had a bachelor’s degree in a social science field and she had had the thrill of practicing skills in building ‘capacity’ for the first time in Kabul. Capacity building in *what* was not clear because I was afraid to pursue the matter further. She was thankful to the UN Development Programme for this.

With this backdrop, we may proceed to examine the concept of capacity building and its effectiveness in Afghanistan.

The essential ingredients for a durable and sustainable turnaround of a fragile state such as Afghanistan are economic growth that can support investment in poverty reduction and human development, social and political progress, and a state with efficient and effective institutions to serve as the custodian of such developments. Advances in these areas are essentially

(continued p. 24)

Dr. Nipa Banerjee headed Canada’s development and aid program in Kabul (2003-06). She currently teaches international development at the University of Ottawa. She travels to Kabul frequently.

THE VIMY AWARD

LA DISTINCTION HONORIFIQUE VIMY

Nominations are invited for the 2008 Vimy Award.

The Vimy Award was initiated in 1991 by the Conference of Defence Associations Institute (CDAI) to recognize, annually, one Canadian who has made a significant and outstanding contribution to the defence and security of our nation and the preservation of our democratic values.

Previous recipients of this prestigious award include: General John de Chastelain, Major-General Lewis MacKenzie, Major-General Roméo Dallaire, Dr. Jack Granatstein, the Right Honourable Brian Dickson, Lieutenant-General Charles H. Belzile, the Honourable Barnett Danson, Air Commodore Leonard Birchall, Colonel the Honourable John Fraser, General Paul Manson, Dr. David Bercuson, Mr. G. Hamilton Southam, Brigadier-General David Fraser, and General Raymond R. Henault.

Any Canadian may nominate one individual citizen for the award.

Nominations must be in writing, be accompanied by a summary of the reasons for the nomination and include a brief biographical sketch of the nominee. Nominations must be received by 1 August 2008, and should be addressed to:

VIMY AWARD SELECTION COMMITTEE
 CONFERENCE OF DEFENCE ASSOCIATIONS INSTITUTE
 222 SOMERSET STREET WEST, SUITE 400B
 OTTAWA ON K2P 2G3

The Vimy Award will be presented on Friday, November 14 2008, at a gala dinner that will be held in the Canadian War Museum. Her Excellency, the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada, has been invited to attend as the guest of honour.

For more information, including ticket orders for the Award dinner, contact the Conference of Defence Associations Institute at the above address, or fax (613) 236 8191; e-mail pao@cda-cdai.ca; or telephone (613) 236 9903.



Nous invitons les nominations pour la Distinction honorifique Vimy 2008.

La Distinction honorifique Vimy a été instituée en 1991 par l'Institut de la Conférence des associations de la défense dans le but de reconnaître, chaque année, un Canadien ou Canadienne qui s'est distingué par sa contribution à la défense et à la sécurité de notre pays et à la préservation de nos valeurs démocratiques.

Les récipiendaires précédents de la Distinction honorifique Vimy sont, entre autres, le Général John de Chastelain, le Major-général Lewis MacKenzie, le Major-général Roméo Dallaire, M. Jack Granatstein, le Très honorable Brian Dickson, le Lieutenant-général Charles H. Belzile, l'Honorable Barnett Danson, le Commodore de l'Air Leonard Birchall, Colonel l'Honorable John Fraser, le Général Paul Manson, M. David Bercuson, M. G. Hamilton Southam, le Brigadier-général David Fraser, and le Général Raymond R. Henault.

Tout Canadien ou Canadienne peut nommer un citoyen ou citoyenne pour la Distinction honorifique Vimy. Les nominations doivent nous parvenir par écrit et doivent être accompagnées d'un sommaire citant les raisons motivant votre nomination et une biographie du candidat. Les nominations doivent nous parvenir au plus tard le 1 août 2008, et doivent être adressées au:

COMITÉ DE SÉLECTION DE LA DISTINCTION
 HONORIFIQUE VIMY
 L'INSTITUT DE LA CONFÉRENCE DES ASSOCIATIONS DE
 LA DÉFENSE
 222 RUE SOMERSET OUEST, SUITE 400B
 OTTAWA ON K2P 2G3

La Distinction honorifique Vimy sera présentée vendredi, le 14 novembre 2008, à un dîner qui aura lieu dans le Musée canadien de la guerre. Son Excellence la Très honorable Michaëlle Jean, Gouverneure général du Canada, a été invitée.

Pour de plus amples informations, incluant la demande de billets pour le dîner, veuillez contacter l'Institut de la Conférence des associations de la Défense à l'adresse ci-haut mentionnée ou télécopier: (613) 236 8191; courriel: pao@cda-cdai.ca; or téléphone (613) 236 9903.

dependent on the capacity of the post-conflict government to address them. Unfortunately, almost without exception, post-conflict states are fragile and straddled with weak capacity to perform their primary tasks. Acknowledging this fact, fourteen post-conflict peace building and development operations undertaken in Afghanistan in the period 1989 to 2001 included massive technical assistance for state building, including capacity building.

Building an effective state that provides stability through the provision of security and delivery of essential services is central to the security, development and reconstruction agenda in Afghanistan. A newly born post-conflict state with extremely limited human resources capacity of its own cannot wait for an extended public administration building process for service delivery purposes. Urgent and essential services must be delivered immediately. Thus, to cover the first few years of the post-conflict period, service delivery needs externally funded technical assistance and expertise, along with a simultaneous capacity-building program.

Initially, the belief was that filling the gap with external expertise until civil servants were trained would last not more than two to three years if short term external consultants simultaneously trained Afghans to replace themselves. However, the reality today is that after seven years many functions that an effective state government should perform are being performed rather haphazardly by international experts or high salaried Afghans financed by the international community, without any retention of capacity and with no exit strategy in view. The capacity of the Afghan civil service has not been built simultaneously. Afghanistan remains a weak state, with inadequate capacity in its civil service to deliver public services without enormous imported expertise. This, of course, continues to undermine local ownership and leadership principles which are critical for making aid and development effective.

Research findings show that in the past, massive influxes of expatriate technical assistance (TA) to fragile states with weak capacity failed to produce the desired result of in-country capacity building. Instead of learning from the past, classic mistakes in TA supply were repeated in Afghanistan. The international community's financing of TA in Afghanistan reflects random and fragmented approaches. As a result, with an expenditure of over \$1.6 billion in seven years, little capacity building in government institutions is visible.

For security reasons, recruitment of quality TA for most conflict-ridden fragile states is difficult. The Afghanistan case is no different. Inexperienced and less qualified external consultants resulted in little capacity building. A slew of overpaid, inexperienced and untrained recent graduates from the northern countries have used

resources to develop their own capacity working in the ever expanding 'aid industry' that has engulfed Afghanistan. Moreover, much of the TA programs have turned into individual, donor-driven, high cost service provisions through temporary installation of expatriate personnel in line Ministry staff positions. Technical assistance, as narrated above, performs no capacity building tasks, nor can it transfer skills to locals.

The Afghan government also critiques the high salaries and benefits that expatriate advisors earn and the culturally insensitive operational styles of many such advisors that hamper amicable cooperation with Afghan staff. The Canadian experience is that the placement of Afghan expatriate TAs (presumably with no cultural baggage) with high salaries without a phase-out scheme does not necessarily serve the intended result of capacity building. The failure of the Canadian-financed TA program can be attributed to the wrong practise of TAs undertaking national staff jobs, with little attention to the transfer of skills and capacity building for locals.

The practice of supporting line Ministries in their hiring of comparatively better-trained and competent Afghans, at a higher-than-local but lesser-than-expatriate salary, was considered more effective because it was less costly. However, there is little indication that this practice helped extend and expand capacity in any Ministry in a sustainable fashion.

Another mechanism is donor funding of 'salary top-ups' for qualified civil servants. This has produced few results in terms of sustained capacity building. The practice of salary top-up has created the 'second civil service' which is directly paid for by donors, with officials' first accountability being to the donor. It is also being increasingly realized that the better paid Afghan staff would not continue to work for the Afghan government once the top-ups ended. Utilization of these Afghan nationals might be possible if and when the salary scales are raised in the Afghan civil service structure. However, improved public finance management prioritizes fiscal sustainability, which makes large salary increases in the Afghan civil service structure unjustifiable. Other than the disease of the second civil service, higher salaries paid to externally-funded non-civil servant Afghan consultants and advisers tends to foster unfair competition that is counterproductive to the creation of a well-motivated and qualified Afghan civil service cadre. The new pay grade structure planned for the civil service is considerably higher than the existing one; however, this will never match the pay offered by the international community.

To date, the enormous gaps between local public service salaries and donor-financed second civil service

(continued p. 26)

THE ROSS MUNRO MEDIA AWARD

PRIX MÉDIA ROSS MUNRO

Nominations are invited for the 2008 Ross Munro Media Award.

Nous invitons les nominations pour le prix média Ross Munro, 2008.

The Ross Munro Media Award was initiated in 2002 by the Conference of Defence Associations (CDA) in collaboration with the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute (CDFAI). Its purpose is to recognize, annually, one Canadian journalist who has made a significant and outstanding contribution to the general public's understanding of issues that relate to Canada's defence and security.

Le prix Média Ross Munro a été décerné pour la première fois en 2002 par la Conférence des associations de la défense (CAD), en collaboration avec le Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute (CDFAI). Ce prix a pour but de reconnaître annuellement un journaliste canadien qui a contribué de manière importante et remarquable à la sensibilisation du grand public aux questions liées à la défense et à la sécurité canadiennes.

The recipient of the Award will receive a replica of the Ross Munro statue, along with a cash award of \$2,500.

Le lauréat ou la lauréate du Prix recevra une reproduction de la statuette Ross Munro et un prix en argent de 2500 \$.

The past recipients of this prestigious award are Stephen Thorne, Garth Pritchard, Sharon Hobson, Bruce Champion-Smith, Christie Blatchford, and Matthew Fisher.

Au nombre des lauréats des années précédentes, figurent Stephen Thorne, Garth Pritchard, Sharon Hobson, Bruce Champion-Smith, Christie Blatchford, et Matthew Fisher.

Anyone may nominate a journalist for the award. Nominations must be in writing, accompanied by two letters of support, and include a summary of reasons for the nomination, a brief biographical sketch of the nominee, and samples of the journalist's work. Further details are available at www.cda-cdai.ca, click: Ross Munro Award. Nominations must be received by 1 September 2008, and should be addressed to:

Toute personne peut nommer un journaliste pour le prix Ross Munro. Les nominations doivent nous parvenir par deux lettres de soutien, être accompagnées d'un sommaire citant les raisons qui motivent votre nomination, d'une biographie du candidat et des exemples des écrits du journaliste. Pour les détails voir www.cda-cdai.ca, click: Ross Munro Award. Les nominations doivent nous parvenir au plus tard le 1 septembre 2008, et doivent être adressées au:

ROSS MUNRO MEDIA AWARD SELECTION COMMITTEE
CONFERENCE OF DEFENCE ASSOCIATIONS
222 SOMERSET STREET WEST, SUITE 400B
OTTAWA, ON K2P 2G3

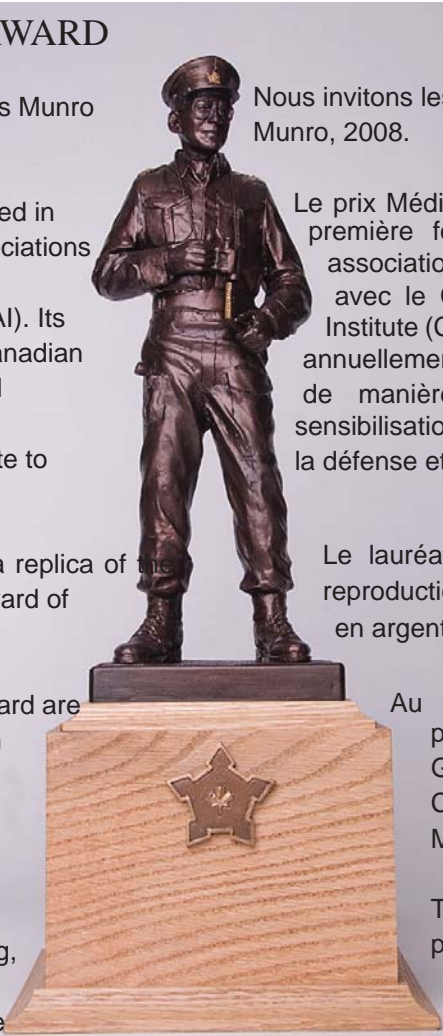
COMITÉ DE SÉLECTION DU PRIX MÉDIA ROSS MUNRO
LA CONFÉRENCE DES ASSOCIATIONS DE LA DÉFENSE
222 SOMERSET STREET, SUITE 400B
OTTAWA, ON K2P 2G3

The Ross Munro Media Award will be presented on Friday, 14 November 2008, at the Vimy Award dinner that will be held in the LeBreton Galley of the Canadian War Museum. Her Excellency, the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor-General of Canada, has been invited to attend as the guest of honour.

Le prix média Ross Munro sera présenté vendredi, le 14 novembre 2008, à un dîner qui aura lieu dans la galerie LeBreton au Musée canadien de la guerre. Son Excellence la Très honorable Michaëlle Jean, Gouverneure générale du Canada, a été invitée.

For more information, including ticket orders for the Award dinner, contact the Conference of Defence Associations at: fax (613) 236-8191, e-mail pao@cda-cdai.ca, or telephone (613) 236-9903.

Pour de plus informations, incluant la demande de billets pour le dîner, veuillez contacter la Conférence des associations de la Défense: télécopieur (613) 236 8191; courriel pao@cda-cdai.ca, ou téléphone (613) 236 9903.



salaries and expatriate advisors' salaries have generated disaffection in local public servants. Such salary differences undermine the Afghan civil service and the process of public service reform.

Linked to this is the issue of donor financing of staff (both external and local) of extra-governmental units (outside of line Ministries and the public service). It is a counterproductive practice as it separates the advisors from the Ministries whose capacity should be built as the first order of business. Such extra-governmental units, not functioning under government budgets and not nationally executed, severely undermine state ownership principles. A good instance is the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS). Ideally, the ANDS Secretariat should have been placed under a line Ministry such as the Ministry of Finance, Economy or the President's Office; the wisdom of operating a project responsible for drafting the development strategy for the Afghan nation as an UN Directly Executed Project is questionable.

...recently announced 'signature projects' are signalling a shift away from the commendable practice of supporting Afghan state-led national programs.

Reflecting on Canada's role in capacity building, the results are mixed. While some technical assistance efforts by CIDA yielded little capacity enhancement results, CIDA can take pride in supporting programs that helped the government in successfully addressing capacity building through the National Area Based Development Program that strengthened the provincial directorates of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. CIDA supported an innovative capacity building program that financed the Ministry's staff placement in the provincial governors' offices across the nation and provided the opportunity for on-the-job training. In general, the national programs designed and led by the government of Afghanistan are the best instruments to engender government officials' capacity. Donor practices of designing and implementing projects and programs through private sector firms and organizations (profit and non-profit) undermine the capacity of state actors. CIDA's record of financing national programs and thus providing the space for government staff capacity building is one of the best amongst donors.

Unfortunately, however, the recently announced 'signature projects' are signalling a shift away from the commendable practice of supporting Afghan state-led national programs. While successful capacity building in

the Afghanistan National Army by the Canadian Forces (CF) appears to be a partial reality, as a results freak I need to be convinced that similar success is evident in enhancing the capacity of the Afghan National Police or in raising Afghan awareness of the spirit and principles of Corrections Services.

This section would be incomplete without mention of the contribution made by Canada through the work in Kabul of the Strategic Advisory Team (SAT) from the Department of National Defence (DND). Members of this team were placed within operational program units of the Government of Afghanistan to provide very basic organizational, management, and planning advice on day-to-day activities at the working level. This enabled Afghan government officials at operational levels to learn by doing. Through the provision of demand-driven services and the adoption of a low-key approach, SAT had earned a fair amount of success.

Before SAT could prove if it would leave a permanent imprint on the building of sustainable capacity, its life was cut short as the Canadian government took the decision to replace the DND SAT with a civilian crew. While there is the potential of the inclusion of a few of our CF colleagues in the new team, the strength of a well-disciplined commander-led team will be missed. The value added of a DND team lay in the deployment of disciplined teams, well-trained and supervised to deliver at the operational levels. Based on my personal experience, such high standards are not expected from civil servants or contracted civilian personnel, and even less encouraged. In addition, the reality is that CF personnel, for obvious reasons, are less reticent to being deployed in posts with difficult security. It has not been easy for CIDA to recruit seasoned and experienced staff for Afghanistan. On the other hand, SAT has not had a dearth of experienced officers for placement.

While acknowledging the differences in cultures of the three departments – diplomacy, defence and development – and the difficulties of coordinating a single Canadian national mission that this might cause, in the interest of best impact, more time and effort could have been devoted to the provision of assistance at the working levels of the Afghan government through the SAT. When we work in the context of enormous and unprecedented constraints, only unprecedented efforts can help us to build on our successes, however limited they are.

To conclude, I leave the reader to consider some pointed questions: does the international community have concrete indicators to measure the capacity that it expects to build in the Afghan civil service through an estimated 2,500 civilian external advisors and TAs currently moving about in Afghanistan? Has an end state been planned? ©