

The Most Extensive Overview of International Efforts in Afghanistan Presented

According to Prof Zuercher, the Meta-Review is probably the most extensive systematic overview of the status of international efforts in Afghanistan currently available. Certain successes have been achieved. For example, better access to basic health care and education, drinking water and electricity, roads and bridges, basic government services and basic infrastructure. Nevertheless, more ambitious goals, such as institution building or fostering economic growth, have only partially been achieved.

Prof Zuercher highlighted three recommendations for the international donor community based on his findings. He said, 'Firstly, I recommend a call for modesty in interventions. This requires looking at what really works and avoid being too ambitious. Secondly, I urge persistency. This includes staying [in Afghanistan] and continuing to implement interventions. Finally, I would recommend reducing engagement in insecure regions. Evidence shows that interventions in insecure regions are not effective.'

Based on strict inclusion criteria, 148 studies on development assistance in Afghanistan were selected, analysed and summarised in the Meta-Review. The evaluations were divided into five groups: 1. Systematic Review of Impact Evaluations; 2. Summary Report of Bilateral Country-Level Evaluations; 3. Summary of SIGAR^[1] Reports; 4. Summary Report of Evaluation Reports by the ADB; and 5. Summary Report of Evaluations by Multilateral Organizations and NGOs. The results of the five reports were then condensed and contextualised in the Chapeau-paper, Meta-Review of Evaluations of Development Assistance to Afghanistan, 2008–2018.^[2]

Prof Zuercher's presentation was followed by short inputs from four experts: Professor Dr Joerg Faust, Director of the German Institute for Development and Evaluation (DEval), Mr Thomas Feidieker, BMZ Senior Advisor in the Division Afghanistan, Pakistan, Mr Matt Dove, SIGAR Assistant Inspector General for Audits and Inspections, and Ms Katie Blanchett, Senior Operations Officer at World Bank and Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF).

The conclusions drawn in the Meta-Review give pause for thought and are critical. At the same time, the Meta-Review provides very valuable insights and lessons learned that should not be ignored by the international community and the government of Afghanistan in view of improving the cooperation approach and the upcoming peace process.

The Meta-Review of Evaluations of Development Assistance to Afghanistan 2008-2018 was commissioned on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). All reports from the Meta-Review can be found on the Afghan-German Cooperation website at <https://www.ez-afghanistan.de/en/page/results-german-cooperation>.

^[1] Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

^[2] All reports can be downloaded here: <https://www.ez-afghanistan.de/en/page/results-german-cooperation>

Teaser text:

On Tuesday, Professor Christoph Zuercher of the University of Ottawa, Canada presented his findings from a Meta-Review of Evaluations of Development Assistance to Afghanistan on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Over 80 participants from bilateral and multilateral donors took part in the online conference. In preparation for an upcoming evaluation of the BMZ country portfolio in 2022, the Afghanistan division of the BMZ commissioned the review, which covered the period from 2008 to 2018. The main objective of the review was to provide background information and comparative evidence about various sectors of German development cooperation with Afghanistan, thereby aiming at improving the impact of BMZ development cooperation.

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