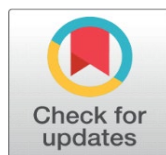


CONSTRAINTS, OUTCOME AND PROSPECTS OF INDIA'S AID POLICY IN AFGHANISTAN

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ABSTRACT

The present research article makes a comprehensive effort to investigate India's aid policy to Afghanistan from the year 2001 to 2021. It examines India's motives for aiding Afghanistan, focuses at the several areas where India has made contributions, and evaluates how its assistance has impacted the development of Afghanistan. The paper outlines the constraints and persistent challenges faced by India during its involvement in Afghanistan almost for two decades. It also examines India's successes and failures as outcome of its aid strategy, generally known as soft power approach in Afghanistan and presents future prospects with regard to changing regional dynamics.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Geopolitics, Aid, Projects, Taliban

1. INTRODUCTION

Aid policy has been an important part of India's diplomacy and strategic approach towards Afghanistan. India has recently been actively involved in Afghanistan's reconstruction and development process to strengthen regional stability and bilateral ties. Nevertheless, this engagement has not been without some difficulties as will be discussed below. The delivery of India's aid has been faced with several challenges such as security, bureaucratic and diplomatic challenges. An analysis of the results of these efforts shows that it has been a mixed bag of successes and failures. In the future, the future of India's aid policy in Afghanistan will depend on the changes in the region and geopolitics of the world. This chapter examines these constrain policy and the impacts of India's aid policy and considers the possibilities of its future engagement in Afghanistan.

1.1. CONSTRAINTS FACED BY INDIA

India has had a positive aid policy in Afghanistan due to its strategic importance, but this has faced several challenges that have limited the achievement of its goals. These constraints can be broadly classified into three main categories: security issues, administrative challenges, and political constraints. All these challenges have been quite complex in their way, which has defined the nature of India's aid policies and programs in Afghanistan.

1.2. SECURITY CONCERNS

Security risks have remained the largest and most enduring barriers to India's aid policy in Afghanistan. The security situation in Afghanistan has remained unpredictable with different insurgent groups and frequent incidences of attacks on Indian projects, personnel, and assets.

Afghanistan is one of the most insecure countries in the world with internal conflict that has been going on for decades. The emergence of the Taliban in the 1990s and their overthrow in 2001 after the invasion by the United States and its allies paved the way for the insurgency. Even after attempts to bring stability to the country, the Taliban and other terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K) have continued to act and create unrest.

These groups have directly targeted India, which has been one of the leading contributors to the reconstruction process of Afghanistan. The Indian Embassy in Kabul has been a special victim. The embassy came under a suicide car bomb attack on July 7, 2008, in which 58 people were killed, among them Indians and Afghans, and more than 140 were injured. This attack, which was carried out by the Haqqani network, a group with links to the Taliban and believed to be aided by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), brought into focus the insecurity of Indian diplomatic establishments in Afghanistan¹.

The second major attack was on October 8, 2009, in which the Indian Embassy in Kabul was attacked. A suicide bomber drove an explosive-laden car into the embassy and exploded it killing 17 people and wounding more than 80 others. The attack, which resembled the 2008 bombing, proved that the threat to Indian interests in Afghanistan remained high and that the insurgent groups would go to any length to sabotage India's engagement in the country².

In addition to these high-profile attacks on the embassy, Indians involved in different development projects have also been attacked. In April 2006, an Indian engineer was kidnapped by the Taliban and later killed when he was working on road construction in Zabul province. This was succeeded by the kidnapping and killing of two Indians in 2008 and 2010 respectively who were working on infrastructure-related projects in the south of Afghanistan. These incidents have not only claimed lives but have also raised questions about the safety of Indian employees in Afghanistan, which has made the Indian government think twice before sending its people to such risky zones³.

2. IMPACT ON AID PROJECTS

The necessity of protecting Indian projects in Afghanistan has put great pressure on the funds designated for development cooperation. A significant part of the aid budget has been spent on meeting the expenses incurred in protecting the Indian interests. This has involved employing private security companies, bringing in more diplomatic security personnel from India, and engaging the Afghan security apparatus to protect Indian assets.

The most significant project that experienced several security issues was the construction of the 218-kilometer Zaranj-Delaram highway in western Afghanistan. This strategic and significant project was accomplished in 2009 to link Afghanistan to Iran border and therefore, reduce the dependence on Pakistan for sea access. Nevertheless, the project faced security issues in which Indians were attacked often by insurgent groups. However, due to the threats, the project experienced several delays and higher costs of security despite the tight security measures. In the end, the highway was built but at a very high cost in terms of money and lives lost, which gives an insight into the security situation in Afghanistan⁴.

Likewise, the construction of the Afghan Parliament building in Kabul which was funded by India and completed in 2015 also came across several security challenges. The project which was aimed at developing a long-lasting relationship between India and Afghanistan was time and again delayed due to security concerns regarding Indian engineers and construction workers. The building also became a target, and the insurgents attacked the surrounding areas making construction even more difficult⁵.

¹Swami, Praveen. "The Hindu." *The Hindu*, 18 May 2016, <https://www.thehindu.com/books/praveen-swami/article5649107.ece>.

²Harpviken, Kristian Berg. "Rashid, A. *Descent into Chaos: How the War Against Islamic Extremism Is Being Lost in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia* (1st ed.). London: Allen Lane, 2008." *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2009, p. 290, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433090460020813>.

³"Bruce Riedel." *Brookings*, 20 Oct. 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/people/bruce-riedel/>.

⁴Katzman, Kenneth. "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy." *Congressional Research Service*, Aug. 2021.

⁵Pant, Harsh V. "India's Afghan Dilemma." *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2011, pp. 121–138.

At times, security threats have resulted in project halting or reduction in the scale of the project. For instance, the Salma Dam project in Herat province which was funded by India was a major target of the Taliban and other insurgent groups and this led to many attacks on workers and supply lines resulting in delays. The construction of the dam was completed in 2016, and it took several years more than was initially anticipated due to the increased costs in security measures needed to secure the construction site⁶.

3. PERSISTENT CHALLENGES

Due to insecurity in Afghanistan, which India has tried to address to some extent, insecurity has remained a major hindrance to the effective implementation of Indian aid projects. The uncertainty of the insurgent movements and the intricate structures of tribes in different areas have posed challenges in protecting Indian manpower and the successful implementation of the projects.

The recent pullout of NATO forces in July 2021 and the fast-moving Taliban takeover have brought new problems. Due to the Taliban's return to power, in large areas of the country, the security situation has worsened even more, and there are concerns about the continuation of the current and future Indian projects in Afghanistan. The overthrow of the Afghan government and the Taliban's resurgence has left India with no option but to adapt as it fears that the security situation will remain a major threat to its aid policy.

4. BUREAUCRATIC HURDLES

Several bureaucratic factors have significantly impacted the aid policy of India to Afghanistan; these are the delivery of aid in Afghanistan and bureaucratic processes in India. These challenges have emerged due to the following weaknesses in the Afghan administrative structures, lack of coordination between the central and provincial governments and the Indian administrative structures.

4.1. CHALLENGES WITHIN AFGHANISTAN

The Afghan administration which has not yet come out of the effects of war and political instability may have a very high level of bureaucracy and corruption. These issues have severely impacted India's aid projects, manifesting in various forms: These problems have affected India's aid projects in different ways:

Delays in Land Acquisition and Permits: The issue of acquiring land and permits for development projects has however remained a challenge. For instance, the Salma Dam in Herat province which was funded by the Indian government was a slow process because of problems relating to the acquisition of the land and bureaucratic processes. These problems were further compounded by the Afghan government's weak control over local governance institutions. Some of the challenges that were realized included delays in negotiations and approvals which led to time overruns and hence incurring more costs⁷. **Corruption and Mismanagement:** Another problem that has been encountered in the Afghan administration is corruption which has been a big issue. Among the negative effects are Instances of bribery and corruption of funds that have been established to affect the execution of projects. One of them is the Indian aid that has been provided for the construction of schools and health facilities. There have been cases of embezzlement and misuse of the funds, where construction work is either reported to be incomplete or substandard, this has been attributed to a lack of supervision and corruption at the grassroots level⁸.

Inconsistent Implementation Across Regions: This has led to poor coordination of aid projects and thus there is weak central control of aid projects. As can be seen, local administrations that are relatively stable have been the main beneficiaries of the Indian aid more than the areas that are in a state of instability and bad governance. This has at times led to tensions and feelings of bias and this has made it difficult for India to foster balanced development in Afghanistan such as in the distribution of dividends⁹.

⁶Roy-Chaudhury, Shantanu. "India-Afghanistan Relations: A Regional Perspective." *Observer Research Foundation*, December 2016.

⁷Roy-Chaudhury, Shantanu. "India-Afghanistan Relations: A Regional Perspective." *Observer Research Foundation*, December 2016.

⁸Katzman, Kenneth. "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy." *Congressional Research Service*, August 2021.

⁹*Afghanistan. Crisis Group.* <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan>

5. BUREAUCRATIC CHALLENGES WITHIN INDIA

India's bureaucratic structure has also contributed to delays and inefficiencies in the execution of aid projects. India's bureaucratic structure has also posed a problem with delays and inefficiencies in the implementation of aid projects:

Multi-Layered Coordination: Indian aid projects in Afghanistan include MEA, ICCR, and technical and financial organizations. This multiple-layer approach, which is intended to give adequate cover, has in most cases led to delays. For instance, the project approval cycle may entail several inter-ministerial consultations and clearances that may take several months to be accomplished. This has made it hard to address emergent needs and has at times resulted in failure to address needs as and when they occur¹⁰.

Lengthy Approval Processes: Numerous policies have been put in place to guide the disbursement of aid and hiring of contractors, which have also contributed to the issue. Every aid project must be authorized, and this entails a financial audit, an assessment of the impact of the project on the environment, and a compliance check. While these requirements are important in ensuring accountability and transparency, they lead to prolongation of the time taken to start the project. For instance, the Indian government has had to wait for long periods before approval of the Afghan Parliament building project because the project entails a lot of compliance with the rules and the oversight mechanisms in the country¹¹.

Rigid Adherence to Pre-Approved Plans: The bureaucracy that is characteristic of India has been inflexible on certain occasions, and this has caused a gap between the ground situation and the bureaucracy. Once a project plan is set up and approved it becomes very difficult to alter or introduce new elements to address new challenges or prospects. This has been done in such a way that the projects have been implemented according to the plan without regard to changes in circumstances or new needs. For instance, some of the infrastructure such as roads and irrigation systems have been faced with the problem that designs cannot be adapted to the local conditions or changes in the security situation¹².

6. SPECIFIC INCIDENTS HIGHLIGHTING BUREAUCRATIC CHALLENGES

Several incidents highlight the impact of these bureaucratic hurdles:

The Salma Dam Project (2006-2016): This project which was aimed at increasing irrigation and electricity output in Herat province was hampered by bureaucratic formalities. Among the issues that were noted were the problems with land and permits, corruption, and bureaucratic issues on the local level, all of which contributed to the delays in the projects. The project was expected to be over in 2011 but only reached 50% in 2016 and the costs were high due to these bureaucratic procedures¹³.

The Afghan Parliament Building (2007-2015): This symbolic building built in Nigeria was funded by India and the construction was a slow process because of the time taken in the approval process and the construction process also needed inter-ministerial approval. The project was aimed at demonstrating India's support for Afghanistan's democracy but due to several years of construction delay, the project could not achieve its intended goals and objectives that were to be achieved¹⁴.

Education and Healthcare Projects (2010s): Some of the schools and healthcare projects that were financed by India were subjected to issues emanating from poor governance and embezzlement in the recipient countries. Some of the issues that were raised included cases of substandard or incomplete work and cases of embezzlement or misuse of funds which were attributed to poor supervision and unsound management and control measures at the district level¹⁵.

¹⁰Rubin, Barnett R. *Afghanistan: How We Got Here*. Oxford University Press, 2011.

¹¹C. Raja Mohan. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. 2024. <https://carnegieendowment.org/people/c-raja-mohan?lang=en>

¹²Pant, Harsh V. "India's Afghan Dilemma." *The Washington Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (2011): 121-138.

¹³Human Rights in India." *Amnesty International*, 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/asia-and-the-pacific/south-asia/india/>.

¹⁴"Sardar Sarovar Project: The War of Attrition." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 23 Sept. 2017, <https://www.epw.in/journal/2010/05/special-articles/sardar-sarovar-project-war-attrition.html>.

¹⁵Yousuf, Muhammad. "India-Afghanistan Relations in Changing Regional Geopolitics." *South Asia Research*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2023, pp. 343-361, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02627280231190790>.

In total, the bureaucratic issues that have been associated with India's aid policy in Afghanistan have impacted the effectiveness and achievement of aid initiatives. Issues such as corruption and inefficiency of the Afghan administrative systems and the bureaucratic Indian administration have led to delays, increased costs, and challenges in project implementation. Such challenges have led to questions on how to enhance synergy, flexibility, and supervision to enhance the impact of Indian aid to Afghanistan.

7. DIPLOMATIC OBSTACLES

The aid policy of India in Afghanistan has been influenced a lot by political issues due to the political structure in the South Asian region and beyond. All these challenges are due to poor relations with other countries, competition of the superpowers, and political instabilities in Afghanistan.

8. STRAINED INDIA-PAKISTAN RELATIONS

Another important diplomatic consideration of India's aid policy in Afghanistan has been the hostile attitude of Pakistan towards Afghanistan. Pakistan has always worried about India's involvement in Afghanistan as this is perceived as a threat to Pakistan's hegemony and stability in the region.

Suspicion and Hostility: The reasons that may be associated with the concern that Pakistan may have for India's involvement in Afghanistan may be historical and strategic. The Indian attempt to offer support to stability and growth in Afghanistan is regarded by Pakistan as an attempt to surround it because of the adversarial relations between the two nations. This suspicion has been well expressed in various diplomatic and spy activities that have been directed towards Indian interests. For example, it has been alleged that Pakistan's intelligence agencies are helping the Taliban and Haqqani network that has attacked Indian personnel and assets in Afghanistan. These insurgent groups are said to have links with Pakistan intelligence, and it is on record that Indian embassy attacks in 2008 and 2009 were allegedly facilitated by these groups¹⁶.

Impact on Projects: The aggressive posturing of Pakistan has made threats to the security of Indian aid projects even higher. Indian infrastructure and personnel have been attacked frequently and this can be attributed to the Pakistan proxy war to check India's progress in Afghanistan. The insecurity situation in the country has increased causing the cost of security and implementation issues to rise and impact the capacity and quality of aid implementation¹⁷.

9. REGIONAL GEOPOLITICAL DYNAMICS

The broader regional dynamics have also presented significant diplomatic challenges for India's aid policy:

Competing Interests of Major Powers: Afghanistan is a central country, and this makes it an important country to some of the world's most influential countries such as the United States, Russia, Iran, and China. These countries have their axes and interests in Afghanistan, and these may not always align with India's interests. For example:

United States: It was inevitable that India's humanitarian actions during the period of 2001 to 2021 were going to be in harmony with the US strategies which at times were paradoxical. The U. S. and its allies were more concerned with the war on terrorism and the achievement of the military goals while India was more concerned with rebuilding and rehabilitation. There used to be this difference, and it did cause tensions in diplomatic relations particularly when the United States was felt to have done something that was not in the best interest of India¹⁸.

China: China has also been a factor of concern in Afghanistan, especially through its BRI which has seen the country invest heavily in Afghanistan. China has invested and partnered in Afghanistan which has been sometimes against India's interest hence competition in diplomacy. For instance, it has been observed that China has been involved in the

¹⁶Riedel, Bruce. "Deadly Embrace." *Brookings*, 14 Apr. 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/books/deadly-embrace/>.

¹⁷Snider, Don. "Taliban 2.0 and U.S. National Security Policy in Afghanistan." *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2022, pp. 402–423, <https://doi.org/10.1177/23477970221129905>.

¹⁸Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2001, <https://www.wwnorton.com/books/9780393349276>.

construction of infrastructure projects in Afghanistan which are seen as a response to the growing Indian influence in the region¹⁹.

Iran and Russia: Both Iran and Russia have had their stakes in Afghanistan because of security and regional concerns. India, for instance, has had similar strategic interests with these countries in the stabilization of Afghanistan but the policy congruence has not been total. For instance, Iran's backing of certain groups in Afghanistan and its somewhat reserved attitude towards Indian activism has led to diplomatic tensions from time to time. Likewise, Russia's attempts to regain its lost ground in Afghanistan and its somewhat ambiguous attitude towards the Taliban have presented some tricky questions to Indian diplomacy²⁰.

10. INTERNAL AFGHAN POLITICAL DYNAMICS

The internal political dynamics within Afghanistan have further complicated India's diplomatic efforts: Afghanistan has introduced another dimension to the political dynamics that India has been dealing with:

Frequent Government Changes: Afghanistan is politically volatile, and the government changes from time to time and this has been a major challenge to India to conduct its business there. This has impacted the efficiency and coordination of the aid projects because of the instability and unsteadiness of the partner. For example:

The Fall of the Karzai Government (2014): There were also changes in priorities and policies towards the new and continuing Indian projects with the change of guard from President Hamid Karzai to President Ashraf Ghani. During the transition period, the coordination of projects and implementation of projects was affected and this affected delivery of aid²¹.

The Taliban Takeover (2021): It is possible to state that the events that occurred in August 2021, when the Taliban captured power in Afghanistan, can be considered as a turning point. The change of regime was something that the Indian diplomacy had to respond to as soon as possible. The position of India to bargain with the new authorities and protect its interests and its people became rather complex. The fact that different international players including the regional neighbors have recognized the Taliban-led government has added to the position and strategy of India toward Afghanistan²².

Peace Negotiations and Uncertainty: The present ongoing peace talks between the Taliban and different factions in Afghanistan have however made the situation relatively ambiguous. This has been so because India has not had a distinct and stable political framework to enable it to implement long-term development projects. This has created a very volatile condition in as much as project delivery is concerned due to power and association shift within Afghanistan hence diluting the effectiveness of Indian aid²³.

Diplomatic issues have been an issue to the efficiency of India's aid policy on Afghanistan. The issues of Pakistan, the clash of interests, and the political instability of Afghanistan have turned into obstacles to the delivery and effectiveness of Indian aid. This has meant that Indian diplomacy has had to seek the best of both worlds, and this has often meant that it has had to make some compromises that have implications on the size and scale of its aid programs.

11. CONSEQUENCES OF INDIA'S AID POLICY

An analysis of India's aid policy in Afghanistan shows that despite the many challenges, it has produced a web of outcomes. This section also looks at the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of the initiatives taken in India so that a clear picture of the whole process can be developed.

1) Successes

India has been providing aid to Afghanistan and has made several successes in its aid policy in Afghanistan has helped Afghanistan to develop and has also improved the bilateral relationship between India and Afghanistan. These

¹⁹McBride, James. "China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative." *Council on Foreign Relations*, 3 Feb. 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>.

²⁰Rashid, Ahmed. *Descent into Chaos: The U.S. and the Disaster in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia*. Viking Penguin, 2008.

²¹Rubin, Barnett R. *Afghanistan: How We Got Here*. Oxford University Press, 2011.

²²Ali, Shah. "The Taliban's Return: Implications for Regional Diplomacy." *South Asian Studies Journal*, September 2021.

²³Pakistan: Shoring up Afghanistan's peace process | Crisis Group. (2021, June 30). <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/pakistan/b169-pakistan-shoring-afghanistans-peace-process>

successes include large-scale infrastructural development, educational and capacity-building projects, humanitarian assistance, and the development of bilateral relations.

2) Major Infrastructure Projects

The major accomplishment of India's aid policy is the construction of major infrastructure projects in Afghanistan including the Salma Dam and the Afghan Parliament building. The Salma Dam which was constructed in 2016 has been one of the most prominent projects that India has undertaken in terms of development aid. It has been very instrumental in increasing the availability of water for irrigation and hydroelectric power production which has greatly improved agricultural production in the surrounding regions. It is not only a source of revenue generation but also has brought stability to the region by supplying necessary resources to the local people and also showing India's capability of large-scale infrastructure development in Afghanistan²⁴.

Likewise, the Afghan Parliament building which was constructed in 2015 can also be considered as one of the achievements. This project is not only beneficial for Afghan democratic institutions but also a sign of India's support for the democratic system in Afghanistan. It is an embodiment of the spirit of bilateral relations and India's commitment to the nurturing of Afghan democracy. The construction of these facilities has played the role of supporting the image of India as a development partner who is willing and ready to help Afghanistan become stable and developed²⁵.

3) Education and Capacity Building

India has also invested in education and capacity-building for Afghanistan, which has also brought a positive change in the country. Many Afghan students have been able to study in Indian institutions of higher learning through the scholarships that India has offered to them. This has helped in developing a new generation of professional human resources that can support the development of Afghanistan. For instance, the scholarships offered are in engineering, medicine, and agriculture, areas of skills deficit in Afghanistan²⁶.

Apart from scholarships, India has set up several training facilities in the core areas of the country's economy including agriculture, health, and information technology. These centers have played a significant role in capacity development at the local level by imparting necessary skills and information to Afghan employees. The training programs not only help in knowledge sharing but also the development of a favorable attitude towards India among the Afghans. These are initiatives that target areas that are relevant to development and hence they act as a bridge between the short-term needs and the long-term needs for development²⁷.

4) Humanitarian and People-Centric Projects

India's aid policy has also been characterized by its focus on humanitarian and people-oriented projects. Projects like building schools, hospitals, and roads have positively impacted the Afghan people and have enhanced their quality of life. For instance, India has provided grants for the construction of many schools and hospitals in Afghanistan that have enhanced access to education and health care services for the people of Afghanistan. The focus on projects that solve current problems and improve the quality of people's lives has set India apart from other international donors and contributed to the construction of India as a friendly and helpful partner²⁸.

These projects have not only offered basic services but also helped in creating a positive attitude among the people of Afghanistan. Focusing on the projects that have clear and tangible benefits for the communities, India has created a favorable image and underlined its willingness to participate in the support of Afghan people²⁹.

²⁴"Salma Dam – Message & Significance." *Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee Research Foundation*, 30 June 2016, <https://spmrf.org/salma-dam-message-significance/>.

²⁵Alexander, A., and N. Singh. "India and Refugee Law: Gauging India's Position on Afghan Refugees." *Laws*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2022, p. 31, <https://doi.org/10.3390/laws11020031>.

²⁶Naqawi, G. H., and D. V. Rajath. "Educational Opportunities and Challenges in Afghanistan." *Asian Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities*, vol. 12, no. 8, 2022, pp. 31–44, <https://doi.org/10.5958/2249-7315.2022.00372.0>.

²⁷Bhat, R. A., and S. A. Dar. "Capacity Building Initiatives by India in Afghanistan: A Developmental Strategy." *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Recent Developments in Science, Engineering, Management & Humanities (SEMH-19)*, Institute of Engineers, Mumbai, India, Jan. 2019.

²⁸Prabhu, S. "The Future of India's Development Cooperation in Afghanistan." *Observer Research Foundation*, 8 Nov. 2021, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-future-of-indias-development-cooperation-in-afghanistan/>.

²⁹HHanif, M. "Indian Involvement in Afghanistan in the Context of the South Asian Security System." *Journal of Strategic Security*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2010, <https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.3.2.2>.

5) *Strengthening Bilateral Relations*

India's aid policy has been effective in enhancing the bilateral relations with Afghanistan. The positive attitude towards India as a friendly country and a reliable partner has contributed to the formation of a favorable context for further cooperation. The positive image created by India's developmental activities has helped sustain good relations and cooperation in the diplomatic front and other spheres of cooperation such as trade, security, and cultural relations³⁰.

The successful implementation of aid projects has not only improved India's position in Afghanistan but also helped in stabilizing the region. India has successfully established good bilateral relations with Afghanistan and has made itself one of the important partners in the development of Afghanistan and the relations will continue to be beneficial in the future³¹.

In conclusion, it can be stated that India's aid policy towards Afghanistan has been successful in infrastructure development, education, humanitarian projects, and in enhancing bilateral relations. These achievements demonstrate India's continued engagement in Afghanistan's development and the strengthening of the bilateral relations between the two nations.

6) *Failures*

India's aid policy in Afghanistan has not been without several challenges and failures that have affected its effectiveness and success in the country. These failures are mainly in the areas of delayed and suspended projects, problems of sustainability, concerns associated with corruption and administrative problems, and problems of transition in the political and security environment.

7) *Delays and Stalled Projects*

Among the challenges, there has been a halt and slowdown of different aid projects because of security issues and red tape. For instance, the Afghan Parliament building project was a project that experienced a lot of challenges. Construction was not easy at the initial stages due to security issues and other challenges in the construction process. The project which was intended to showcase India's support for democracy in Afghanistan was not without its problems, it was delayed and the deadline for its completion was shifted from 2011 to 2015³². These delays not only delayed the delivery of the infrastructure but also escalated the costs and complications, making the impact of the project less.

Another example of such an issue is the building of roads and other infrastructure in conflict regions. Several activities have been affected by the insecurity in the country and this has been a major setback in terms of mobilization of funds and human resources. This has led to the situation where projects are left uncompleted and development objectives unachieved, leading to dissatisfaction among the targeted communities and a general decline in the efficacy of India's aid.³³

12. CHALLENGES IN SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability has been a major issue of concern in some of the large-scale aid projects in India. The Salma Dam that was completed in 2016 can be considered a success story, but it has some problems with maintenance and operational sustainability. It was constructed to increase the yields in agriculture and for the generation of hydroelectric power; however, the local authorities have not been able to manage the technical and financial aspects of running such a massive structure. Some of the studies have indicated that the local capacity to manage the dam has been constrained which has affected the usefulness and sustainability of the dam³⁴.

Other infrastructure projects have faced challenges with the sustainability of the projects. For example, some schools and healthcare facilities that have been funded by India have had problems with organizational sustainability because of

³⁰"QUESTION NO. 183 India's Relationship with Afghanistan." Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, <https://www.mea.gov.in/lok-sabha.htm?dtl/37428/QUESTION+NO+183+Indias+Relationship+with+Afghanistan>.

³¹"Embassy of India, Hanoi, Vietnam: Bilateral Relations." Embassy of India, Hanoi, Vietnam, 2024, <https://www.indembassyhanoi.gov.in/page/bilateral-relations/>.

³²Islam, M. S., and B. Trigunarsyah. "Construction Delays in Developing Countries: A Review." *Journal of Construction Engineering and Project Management*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2017, pp. 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.6106/jcepm.2017.3.30.001>.

³³Upadhyay, S. "Taliban's Focus on Infrastructure Development." *ManoharParrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses*, <https://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/Talibans-Focus-on-Infrastructure-Development-SUpadhyay-190224>.

³⁴Shah, S. H., and R. B. Gibson. "Large Dam Development in India: Sustainability Criteria for the Assessment of Critical River Basin Infrastructure." *International Journal of River Basin Management*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2013, pp. 33–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15715124.2012.754445>.

inadequate local resources and organizational management capacities. The failure to support such projects has thus eroded the benefits that were expected from the aid and has also sparked debates on the effectiveness of India's aid policies.³⁵

13. CORRUPTION AND MISMANAGEMENT

Corruption and mismanagement in Afghanistan sometimes redirect aid funds from their intended recipients impacting the success of several aid initiatives. Some of the cases that have been highlighted include embezzlement of funds and misuse of funds for development projects. For instance, corruption concerning road construction projects has been a major concern. Some of the past reports have pointed to instances where funds provided for infrastructure development have been embezzled resulting in half-baked or shoddy works³⁶.

Corruption of this sort affects not only the direct results of aid but also the overall perception of India's aid. The poor handling of the funds and the resources has raised issues of accountability and transparency of aid delivery thus reducing the overall success and efficiency of India's aid policy in Afghanistan.³⁷

14. ADAPTABILITY TO CHANGING CONTEXTS

India's aid policy has also been reactive to the changing political and security landscape in Afghanistan as well. The recent withdrawal of the international forces and the rise of the Taliban have brought new problems to Indian projects. It is now clear that many of the planned and executed programs were appropriate for a more stable political environment, but in the new world of constant change, they are either irrelevant or simply do not work.

For instance, the construction of infrastructure in regions that have experienced the escalation of violence and insecurity has been problematic. New political conditions have changed the set objectives and security conditions that make some projects irrelevant or impossible to implement. These failures have been attributed to the failure to address these changing circumstances hence impacting the success of India's aid policy while calling for more flexibility and context sensitivity in aid policy.³⁸

In conclusion, it is possible to state that the successes of India's aid policy in Afghanistan are evident, however, several issues have been encountered in the process of its implementation, such as delays, sustainability issues, corruption, and flexibility. These failures thus point to the fact that there is a need to have a more refined perception of the impact of India's aid policies and the areas that require enhancement in the future.

1) Prospects of Future

When India plans for the future of its aid policy in Afghanistan, the following factors will determine its success and course. These are the shifting of the balance of power in the region, global politics, and the internal situation in Afghanistan.

2) Changing Regional Dynamics

The changing nature of the regional environment in South Asian and Central Asian regions is significant in influencing the Indian aid policy in Afghanistan. China through its BRI and other investments has brought competition as well as cooperation opportunities for the international oil companies.

3) China's Belt and Road Initiative

China's BRI is a major increase in its economic and political footprint in Afghanistan. By funding the construction of roads, railways, and energy sectors, China seeks to connect Afghanistan to its regional markets to further consolidate its strategic position in Central Asia and beyond. This rising Chinese investment could potentially put pressure on China to compete with India for the right to be a development partner in Afghanistan. For instance, China's investments in the Afghanistan-China Trade Corridor and the development of the Chabahar Port as part of the broader connectivity plan

³⁵Bose, S. "Bridging the Healthcare Gap in Afghanistan: A Primer on India's Role." *Observer Research Foundation*, 24 May 2023, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/bridging-the-healthcare-gap-in-afghanistan/>.

³⁶Bak, M. "Corruption in Afghanistan and the Role of Development Assistance." *U4 Helpdesk Answer*, 2019, no. 7, <https://www.u4.no/publications/corruption-in-afghanistan-and-the-role-of-development-assistance>.

³⁷Karimi, A. M. "Moving Away from Foreign Aid: A Case Study of Afghanistan." *MPRA*, 2020, <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/>.

³⁸Singh, B., and M. Sharma. *India's Neighbourhood, Extended Neighbourhood and Near Abroad* (Study Material, M.A. Political Science, Semester IV, Course No. POL - 402). Directorate of Distance Education, University of Jammu, 2021.

are major steps that may well overshadow India's projects if they are not met with corresponding strategic countermeasures by India³⁹.

But at the same time, this competition offers India the chance to look for cooperation with China. One of them could be joint infrastructure projects. It is important to note here that if India and China can coordinate their interests, then cooperative measures in constructing infrastructure or in other sectors of development can reduce the competitive pressures and are beneficial for both. For instance, cooperation in energy sectors or in constructing trade links could effectively utilize the opportunities of both countries to meet the developmental needs of Afghanistan⁴⁰.

4) India-Pakistan Relations

The bilateral relations between India and Pakistan continue to be a factor of concern in determining India's aid policy in Afghanistan. The existing and past conflicts between the two countries have greatly influenced the Indian capability to function in Afghanistan. Pakistan's security concern regarding the Indian influence in Afghanistan has made the environment for Indian humanitarian assistance quite challenging and even hostile. Pakistan considers Indian activities in Afghanistan as a threat to its dominance in the region and this has caused diplomatic and operational problems for India⁴¹.

Some of these issues may be eased by a possible change in the relations between India and Pakistan. Improvement of relations could mean less hostility and could pave the way for better prospects for Indian projects in Afghanistan. Better relations might help to avoid problems in the practical realization of the aid projects and to strengthen cooperation in the region. For instance, lowered tensions may translate to improved cooperation on matters relating to security in the region and improved cooperation on development projects⁴².

On the other hand, if the relations between India and Pakistan become worse than it could also worsen the existing challenges. Tensions may result in increased risks to the projects in India and complicate the diplomatic relations between the two countries. Pakistan may increase its activities to curb Indian influence in Afghanistan and this may include sponsoring groups within Afghanistan that are against Indian developmental assistance. This would not only be a threat to the current projects but also to the planning and implementation of future projects⁴³.

In conclusion, the evolving geopolitical landscape of the region, especially China's rising power through BRI and the enigmatic nature of India-Pakistan relations will shape the future course of India's aid policy in Afghanistan. India's capacity to manage these dynamics – through competitive actions, cooperation with China, or better relations with Pakistan will be crucial to sustaining and expanding its role as a development partner in Afghanistan.

5) Geopolitical Factors

The external environment is therefore important in shaping the future aid policy of India in Afghanistan. Some of them are the change of strategies of the major global players such as the USA, Russia, and Iran. All these actors have a profound influence on the regional processes and India's role.

6) United States Evolving Strategy

The change in the US policy and its withdrawal from Afghanistan along with its new strategic relations with other countries of the region has a major impact on India's aid policy. The withdrawal of the U. S. has created a power vacuum that other international and South Asian actors are attempting to fill and thus change the environment in which the Indian state finds itself. The change in the U. S. strategy that focuses on the Indo-Pacific region and other issues of concern affects the bilateral relations between India and the U. S. in Afghan affairs.

The support that India gives to the U. S. strategic interests, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region may impact its role in Afghanistan. The counter-terrorism cooperation between India and the U. S. in the context of regional stability may also enhance India's position in Afghanistan as both are concerned with China's growing influence and the return of the

³⁹Iqbal, B. A., M. N. Rahman, and S. Sami. "Impact of Belt and Road Initiative on Asian Economies." *Global Journal of Emerging Market Economies*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2019, pp. 260–277, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0974910119887059>.

⁴⁰Zazai, A. K., and N. Rahmani. "India and Afghanistan: Dynamic Relations Since Decades." *Sprin Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 3, no. 5, 2024, pp. 58–63, <https://doi.org/10.55559/sjahss.v3i5.315>.

⁴¹Leksytina, Y. V. "Chinese Policy in Central Asia in the Estimation of Chinese Experts." *Russia in Global Affairs*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2024, pp. 141–154, <https://doi.org/10.31278/1810-6374-2024-22-2-141-154>.

⁴²Siddique, Q. "Pakistan's Future Policy Towards Afghanistan: A Look at Strategic Depth, Militant Movements and the Role of India and the US." *DIIS Report*, 2011.

⁴³Khaki, G. N., and T. A. Rather, editors. *The Journal of Central Asian Studies*. Vol. XXIV, Centre of Central Asian Studies, University of Kashmir, 2017.

Taliban. For instance, cooperation in counterterrorism and intelligence could improve the capacity of India to handle threats in Afghanistan which would be in the strategic interest of the U. S.⁴⁴.

Nevertheless, if the U. S. changes its priorities and starts focusing on its interests in the region, it might not necessarily back India's efforts in Afghanistan. This may force India to change its strategy to align itself with the U. S. agenda while at the same time dealing with a dynamic security environment. This means a more complex way of how the US support can be leveraged to India's advantage without losing sight of the objectives that India has in Afghanistan⁴⁵.

7) Russia's Re-engagement

Russia also has a history with Afghanistan and has recently resumed its involvement in the region which makes it even more complicated. At the beginning of the year, 2000s Russia started to actively participate in Afghan affairs through diplomatic, economic, and security cooperation to stabilize the region and to counter Western influence. The new focus on Afghanistan because of terrorism and security is a boon and bane for India in the sense that it has led to the development of infrastructure but at the same time it has strained relations with Pakistan⁴⁶.

The fact that Russia has a strategic partnership with Central Asian countries and Russian influence in the region makes India very sensitive in its actions. India has to balance between its aid initiatives and the requirement of maintaining a good rapport with Russia as the latter has stakes in India. Dialogue and cooperation in such spheres as counterterrorism and regional security can contribute to the development of relations and not interfere with Russia's interests in Afghanistan⁴⁷.

India can seek a partnership with Russia in the field of counter-terrorism training and security in the region of mutual interest for both countries. This approach would help India to consolidate the strategic partnership with Russia as well as stabilize Afghanistan⁴⁸.

8) Iran's Complex Relationship

Iran is a neighbor of Afghanistan and has a checkered history with both Afghanistan and India therefore should be handled carefully. Iran has had a strategic interest in Afghanistan and has been involved in the country mainly because of security. The Afghan government has stakes in many factions in Afghanistan and has a say in the region making it hard for India to handle the situation in Afghanistan⁴⁹. India's policy cannot ignore the multifaceted nature of the bilateral relations between New Delhi and Tehran while the former is trying to advance its development agenda in Afghanistan. It is good to deal with Iran in some respects such as in humanitarian crisis and stability of the region but at the same time, it is good to sort out the issues of conflict of interest. For instance, India could talk with Iran on issues of mutual interest such as infrastructural and humanitarian projects without negating the fact that Indian assistance could reach the wrong hands⁵⁰.

India will have to make sure that it does not over-commit itself to the extent of being seen as partial to achieving its development goals in Afghanistan. This involves the engagement of the Indian government in the international system particularly with the superpowers like the U. S, Russia, and Iran, and ensures that the aid policies of India are in tune with the strategic interests of the country and are beneficial to the stability of the region.

The geopolitical factors that influence the Indian aid policy in Afghanistan are multifaceted and require a better comprehension. Therefore, it can deepen its presence in Afghanistan and contribute to the stabilization of the state if it coincides with the American goals, learns how to work with the Russian factor, and determines the correct strategy for relations with Iran.

⁴⁴Kotokey, A. "India's Strategic Diplomacy: Navigating India's Engagement with the Taliban Regime in Afghanistan." *Vivekananda International Foundation*, 19 Apr. 2024, <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2024/april/19/indias-strategic-diplomacy-navigating-indias-engagement-with-the-taliban-regime-in-afghanistan>.

⁴⁵Rahman, M. M. "The US State-Building in Afghanistan: An Offshore Balance?" *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2018, pp. 81–104, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0973598418804292>.

⁴⁶Oliphant, C. "Russia's Role and Interests in Central Asia." *Saferworld*, Oct. 2013, <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/xxx>.

⁴⁷Zakharov, A. "India-Russia Relations in Troubled Times: Steady but Stagnating." *Center for Asian Studies, Russia/Eurasia Center*, 2024.

⁴⁸Ramanand, D. "Sino-Russian Cooperation and Competition in Central Asia." *Journal of Defence Studies*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2022, pp. 3–30. ManoharParrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses.

⁴⁹Ali, J. A. "Modernity, Its Crisis and Islamic Revivalism." *Religions*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2022, p. 15, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14010015>.

⁵⁰Berlin, D. L. *India-Iran Relations: A Deepening Entente*. Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2004.

15. THE NEW SCENARIO IN AFGHANISTAN

The internal changes in Afghanistan particularly the Taliban factor will greatly influence the future aid policy of India. Therefore, as the Taliban consolidates its control over the country, the Indian approach to assistance may need a significant shift. Some of the infrastructural facilities that could have been deemed essential for development may not be feasible anymore because of heightened risk and shifting politics. In this regard, India can look at other small and less complicated projects that meet existing standards with a relatively low level of risk. Therefore, being less dependent on political fluctuations and more sustainable, community-based interventions, including health programs, education, and training, may provide higher long-term yields.

1) *Security and Feasibility of Large-Scale Projects*

While big infrastructure projects can spur change, they are also fraught with risk in politically unstable countries. The recent takeover of the Taliban has resulted in insecurity that may slow down or even stop large construction projects. For instance, the issues that the Salma Dam project faced in security and operational sustainability are the issues that are associated with large-scale projects in conflict-prone regions⁵¹. Given these constraints, India may have to re-strategise, maybe, opt for smaller projects that can be undertaken with less risk and less financial outlay. Some of the things that can be done at this level like improving the quality of local hospitals, and development small schools and vocational training institutions could go a long way in helping while being less sensitive to political instabilities⁵².

2) *Focus on Soft Power Initiatives*

Instead of reducing the aid, India could think of increasing the investment in soft power programs while moving the aid to smaller projects. Education scholarships to India's educational institutions, health-related projects, and exchange of cultural activities can go a long way in creating goodwill for India in Afghanistan irrespective of the political system in the country. Scholarships for Afghan students to study in India can bring long-term cooperation and can portray India's good intentions towards Afghanistan's growth. Similarly, the healthcare-oriented programs that fulfill the present-day health needs of the Afghan nations can improve the living standard and assert the friendly policy of India⁵³. Other areas such as art fairs, cultural shows, festivals, language teaching, etc., will also help in furthering bilateral relations and enhance India's soft power. Such measures can be useful in forming a positive attitude towards India and keeping the upper hand in any event even if the political situation changes. Therefore, it can be stated that by focusing on these areas, India can build permanent relations with the Afghan people and gain their trust and sympathy which will not be affected by the current political situation⁵⁴.

3) *Flexibility and Responsiveness*

The aid policy of India should remain flexible to the needs of the Afghan people to remain effective. This requires a good knowledge of the environment, the political climate, and the needs of the people within the area. India should concentrate on establishing good rapport with local NGOs and other organizations who are well conversant with the situation on the field. These partnerships can assist in implementing aid projects that are most relevant to the local context and conditions and therefore increase the relevancy and effectiveness of the assistance offered⁵⁵.

The following capacity-building measures should therefore be undertaken to ensure the projects funded have a sustainable impact. India can help Afghanistan in building the capacity of its organizations for coordination and

⁵¹Mahato, B. K., and S. O. Ogunlana. "Conflict Dynamics in a Dam Construction Project: A Case Study." *Built Environment Project and Asset Management*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2011, pp. 176–194, <https://doi.org/10.1108/20441241111180424>.

⁵²Boyce, W., M. Koros, and J. Hodgson. "Community Based Rehabilitation: A Strategy for Peace-Building." *BMC International Health and Human Rights*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2002, p. 6, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-698x-2-6>.

⁵³Singh, S. P., and S. K. Singh. "India's Soft Power in Afghanistan: A Case Study of Health Initiatives." *International Journal of Human Rights and Constitutional Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1504/ijhrccs.2023.10056993>.

⁵⁴Nye, J. S. "Soft Power and Public Diplomacy Revisited." *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, vol. 14, no. 1–2, 2019, pp. 7–20, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1871191x-14101013>.

⁵⁵Nakanjako, D., D. Kendall, N. K. Sewankambo, M. H. Razak, B. Oduor, T. Otero, P. Garcia, and C. Farquhar. "Building and Sustaining Effective Partnerships for Training the Next Generation of Global Health Leaders." *Annals of Global Health*, vol. 87, no. 1, 2021, p. 66, <https://doi.org/10.5334/aogh.3214>.

sustaining aid programs by investing in training and local institutions. This approach enhances the effectiveness of aid and also fosters sustainable development in Afghanistan through ownership⁵⁶.

It can be concluded that India's aid policy is not without problems given the situation in Afghanistan now, but there are opportunities to enhance the policy. Thus, India can enhance the effectiveness of the aid by responding to the shifts in the regional context, which is associated with geopolitical processes, and focusing on small-scale projects. The approach that is based on the utilization of soft power and the formation of tight-knit local partnerships will be vital for maintaining the influence and gaining positive outcomes in Afghanistan, which is a rather volatile and changing country.

16. CONCLUSION

India's aid policy in Afghanistan has navigated a complex landscape of challenges and constraints, yet it has achieved noteworthy successes and continues to recognize new opportunities alongside emerging challenges. The difficulties India has encountered in delivering aid—ranging from security concerns, bureaucratic hurdles, and intricate diplomatic considerations—have at times hampered the overall effectiveness of its aid programs. However, these obstacles have not entirely diminished India's commitment to engaging in Afghanistan. On the contrary, India has demonstrated resilience, particularly in its focus on infrastructure development, education initiatives, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief efforts.

These initiatives have not only contributed to significant developmental outcomes but have also played a crucial role in strengthening bilateral relations and fostering goodwill between the two nations. India's investment in infrastructure, such as the construction of roads, dams, and public buildings, has been instrumental in laying the foundation for Afghanistan's long-term development. Educational programs and scholarships offered to Afghan students have also created enduring ties between the populations, fostering cultural and intellectual exchanges that go beyond immediate economic benefits. Moreover, India's involvement in disaster relief efforts has further enhanced its image as a reliable partner in times of crisis.

Nonetheless, the evolving conditions both within and outside Afghanistan necessitate a reassessment of India's aid strategies. Internally, Afghanistan faces a changing political landscape, shifting security dynamics, and significant economic uncertainties, all of which pose new risks and demands for India's aid initiatives. Additionally, the regional and global geopolitical environment is undergoing transformations, with other global powers and regional actors vying for influence in Afghanistan. This multifaceted context calls for a more nuanced and flexible approach from India, particularly regarding the sustainability and long-term impact of its development projects.

One key area that requires greater attention is the sustainability of the projects initiated under India's aid programs. While infrastructure and educational initiatives have produced tangible benefits, ensuring their long-term viability is crucial for Afghanistan's self-sufficiency. India must prioritize capacity building, enabling local Afghan institutions and communities to manage and maintain the infrastructure and services developed through aid. Without this focus, the projects risk becoming unsustainable in the face of future economic and political uncertainties.

Moreover, India should explore new avenues of cooperation, including engaging with other international donors and regional partners to create more comprehensive and coordinated development strategies. By working in tandem with other stakeholders, India can ensure that its aid efforts align with broader global objectives for peace and development in Afghanistan, thereby maximizing the impact of its contributions. A cooperative approach could also help mitigate some of the security challenges that have historically impeded aid delivery, offering a more stable environment for future initiatives.

In conclusion, India's aid policy in Afghanistan has navigated a challenging path, marked by both successes and obstacles. Despite these challenges, India's efforts have fostered positive relations and goodwill, particularly in critical sectors such as infrastructure, education, and disaster relief. However, the changing realities in Afghanistan, coupled with shifting global and regional dynamics, call for a strategic recalibration of India's aid approach. By focusing on sustainability, enhancing cooperation, and adapting to the new geopolitical landscape, India can continue to play a pivotal role in Afghanistan's development. As one of Afghanistan's most significant development partners, India's future

⁵⁶Victor, D. "Foreign Aid for Capacity-Building to Address Climate Change: Insights and Applications." *WIDER Working Paper No. 2013/084*. United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER), 2013.

aid policy will need to reflect the complex, multifaceted conditions that shape both the present and future of its involvement in the region.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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