**Increased aid to Afghanistan**

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The sixty-seventy years era of development aid has been on the decline for a couple of decades already, and more bilateral aid that is still forthcoming, is channelled through the multilateral system. Afghanistan has for a good while been a major recipient of aid, and for many donors, such as Norway and Sweden, it is the largest recipient of aid, ahead of some very poor countries. In Afghanistan, figures indicate that one trillion dollars of aid was provided over the last twenty years. Of course, we must take into consideration that a large percentage went back to the donor country in the form of purchasing goods, services, consultancies and more, and sadly, military equipment and training. However, there was also quite a bit of useful aid provided to Afghanistan, indeed to health and education for girls and women and advocacy for gender their rights. I have no figures that show the real quantity and quality, but we all know there were a lot of good intentions.

[Pakistan reports 4,016 Covid cases in single day](https://nation.com.pk/27-Aug-2021/pakistan-reports-4-016-covid-cases-in-single-day)

At this particular time, when the foreign occupation is over, it is important that aid continues to reach one of the poorest countries in the world. It is now in a post-conflict and reconstruction phase because Afghanistan was, after all, occupied by the US and NATO until last week.

Let us hope the final hand-over will be orderly, and until that time, that those who want to leave can actually do so, regardless of whether they are locals or foreigners, including locals who have worked for the occupying forces, or have residence permits abroad. At the end of a war and occupation, it is natural that a good number of people want to or have to leave for security or other reasons. That should be facilitated, and amnesty and free passage is also needed after the mentioned deadline.

Furthermore, we must hope that the West does not introduce any sanctions, although the sabre-rattlers talk about that. Much more aid is needed, not less, and certainly not sanctions in a very poor country where the daily needs for many people depend on aid. If aid is reduced and sanctions in certain fields and areas are introduced, that will have devastating consequences and lead to further humanitarian crises. It is the responsibility of the West to guarantee continued assistance in agreement with the new Taliban rulers. Of course, the donors and recipients may have conditions. That would concern human rights, including gender issues, a humane justice system, a fair distribution of social services and economic support, among other things. Since the Taliban led a repressive regime the last time they were in power, it is essential for all, also the new Taliban, that this time rule is exercised with ‘love and mercy’, as God’s commandments teach us. And it is a demand on the West, the donors, that they, too, operate without (or with fewer) hidden agendas.

[Google, Microsoft commit over $30 billion toward US cybersecurity efforts after White House meeting](https://nation.com.pk/27-Aug-2021/google-microsoft-commit-over-dollar-30-billion-toward-us-cybersecurity-efforts-after-white-house-meeting)

Donors have begun talking about restructuring of their aid programmes and the way aid is distributed. That would probably mean that less will go through the government. However, we must also realise that one cannot assist a country with major aid without working with the government. Even aid that is channelled outside the government, through NGOs, possibly with one or a few umbrella organisations, must still be declared and given in understanding with the government. UN organisations are often allowed to work independently, yet, in understanding with the government and in cooperation with certain NGOs. That would include help to refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), people who need food assistance (through the World Food Programme), and others needing help for health and education (through WHO and UNICEF), and in other fields.

Pakistan has received major assistance from the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, although the funds have mainly been in compensation for the country’s costs of helping a high numbers of Afghan refugees, more than seven million people since it all began in 1979. Pakistan should indeed be proud of its work for refugees, but I believe both bilateral and multilateral aid should have been more generous. Let me mention, too, that Pakistan has expertise that other refugee producing and hosting regions in the world draw upon.

[France to withdraw Afghanistan ambassador following explosions](https://nation.com.pk/27-Aug-2021/france-to-withdraw-afghanistan-ambassador-following-explosions)

In the future, the private sector in today’s ‘liberal super-capitalist’ world ought to play a much more prominent role in development aid, including in Pakistan and Afghanistan. However, this is not likely to happen until there will be an effort by the existing and possibly new multilateral organisations—the rich countries, and indeed the unbelievably rich multinational companies themselves, who should see it as a duty and form of global tax to provide aid to poor countries. I am sure this is coming, but how soon?

With regards to Afghanistan, the focus of my article today, I hope that the volume of aid will be kept high, as I have already mentioned. The US and the West will have a lot of ‘spare money’ now since the costly war has ended—and aid is a right for poor countries, indeed after occupation. I hope that existing aid funds can be spent more wisely than during the occupation decades. I hope that assistance to education and skills training will grow, for girls and boys, women and men. I also hope that the health sector can be improved, and that the results are concrete and real.

[South City Hospital welcomes International Spine Specialist on board, Dr Younus Hanif Lodhi](https://nation.com.pk/27-Aug-2021/south-city-hospital-welcomes-international-spine-specialist-on-board-dr-younus-hanif-lodhi)

Afghanistan is a large country with about forty million inhabitants. It is essential that research capacity is developed in social, cultural, economic and other fields, indeed to include agriculture, mining and so on. Some of this will have to do with finding new ways away from poppy cultivation, which went down when the Taliban was in power in the second half of the 1990s. In the concrete and pragmatic economic fields, it is expected that China and Russia will play key roles. In all higher education and research fields, in particular in such fields that have to do with livelihoods and economic development, there are unlimited needs—and potentials.

This could indeed be given focus by the new Taliban government—to the surprise of many, but to the benefit of all. I hope that all donors contribute generously to research and innovation and that cooperation with countries in the region and beyond is developed. If Afghanistan can move fast in these fields and create optimism and enthusiasm, negative and extremist attraction will diminish. Also, this would mean a shift from the West’s arrogant behaviour of telling the Afghans what to do; this would be working out new ways ahead for prosperity, which nobody has a blueprint for, but many dream of, including Afghan university teachers and ordinary people. Sometimes, we need guidance, but most of the time we just need opportunities and help to implement our great dreams, yes, in pragmatic and hard day-to-day work.