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Information Communications Technology Support to Reconstruction and Development:
Some Observations from Afghanistan
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Abstract

Information communications technology (ICT) activities in post conflict reconstruction and development are problematic. They suffer from a lack of adequate understanding of the affected nation information culture and related ICT business culture; there is no clear mapping of responding stakeholder organizations roles and responsibilities; program development, project coordination, information sharing and implementation are largely uncoordinated and non-standard; there is no agreed architecture and plan for affected nation ICT reconstruction and development; a coherent strategy and plan is not developed for responding nations, international organizations and non-governmental organizations support to affected nation ICT reconstruction and development needs; and, donors and interveners do not view ICT a high priority need to be addressed early and an enabler of cross-sector development, i.e., governance, security, economic, and social well-being.

This paper argues that information and ICT can significantly increase the likelihood of success in cross-sector reconstruction and development operations—if they are engaged as part of an overall strategy that coordinates the actions of outside interveners and focuses on generating effective results for the affected nation. Furthermore, if properly utilized, information and ICT can also help create a knowledgeable intervention, organize complex activities, and facilitate coordination and implementation activities among interveners and with the affected nation, making the latter more effective.

Key to achieving these results are a strategy that requires, 1) the U.S. Government to prioritize such a strategy and ensure that the effort is a joint civilian-military activity, 2) the military to make information and ICT part of the planning and execution of the intervention activities, 3) preplanning and the establishment of ICT partnerships to be undertaken with key regular participants in reconstruction and development operations, such as the United Nations and the World Bank, 4) the focus of the intervention, including the use of ICT, to be on the affected nation, supporting affected-nation governmental, societal and economic development, and 5) the harnessing of key information technology capabilities to support the strategy. Implementing the strategy includes development of an information business plan for the affected nation so that ICT is effectively used to support their reconstruction and development needs and plans and agreements are achieved among interveners on data sharing and collaboration.

This paper discusses the use of Afghanistan ICT reconstruction and development as a case study to explore the role of information and ICT in cross-sector reconstruction and development and related coordination and information sharing challenges. Findings from a visit to Afghanistan in April and May 2006 to document ICT activities are included.