

Afghanistan: Nation-building in the Minds of People

"Ending military conflict and rebuilding economic and political infrastructures, along with basic services, to include the armed forces, police, government, banks, transportation networks, communications, health and medical care, schools, and other basic infrastructures. This definition does not explicitly include rebuilding social systems, a point often lost in the contentious discussion about nation-building" (Watson 2004, p. 9).

Nation-building in Afghanistan means integration of and capacity-building for different groups of society left behind and vulnerable after many years of war. The available human resources are insufficient, the heterogeneous level of education, differences in ideology, salary, citizenship among government and administrative staff can challenge the process of nation-building. This process of integration and capacity-building in government institutions is understood here as "mental nation-building".

Afghanistan as a battleground until 1996

As a political entity Afghanistan emerged in the middle of the 18th century (Gregorian 1969, p. 1; see also article by Schetter in this edition). Its strategic location has attracted many invasions during the course of its history. The "Great Game" delimited the current borders of the country in the 19th century. And the Cold War of the 20th century brought the USSR and USA into competition over giant construction projects in Afghanistan which later became the battle field of a less than "Cold" War as a result of the Soviet invasion in 1979.

After World War II both the USA and its allies and the USSR had invested a lot of capital in

development projects in the country. From 1946 to 1970 they funded projects like the Kajaki hydroelectricity dam (by the USA) and Naghlo and Darunta – two other hydroelectricity dams (by the USSR). The southwestern highway construction project again was funded by the USA, the northern highway construction as well as the crucial Salang Tunnel by the USSR. The mapping of the northern part of the country was executed by Techno-Export of the USSR and that of the southern part by Fairchild Company USA, Bagram airport built by the USSR and Kandahar airport by the USA (Dupree 1973, p. 482–645).

Apart from these giant projects both East and West started investing in human resources of the country. The newly established Kabul University came under the influence of the USA and its allies while the USSR established its own sizable institutes in the country (e.g., the Institute of Polytechnics, the Institute of Pedagogy). For the first time many Afghans were sent on a large scale to the West and to the USSR for further training (Peabody Newell and

Newell 1981). These trained staff not only brought new knowledge but also new ideologies back to their home country.

The education system, especially higher education, became a tool for spreading the ideology of communism. The gap between the West and the USSR became more obvious when the USSR started to spread the ideology of communism among Afghans. This ideology automatically created its opponent in the form of Islamic movements.

Kabul University was the battleground of these different ideological groups. Three presidents of Afghanistan and many ministers and leaders of political parties were either teaching staff or students, and they spent time of enmity and struggle against each other during that period. The USSR invaded Afghanistan and installed its own preferred government in Kabul from 1979 until 1989. The communist regime from time to time 'purified' the country of enemies. The brutal killing, torture and imprisonment of anti-communists caused a large number of Afghans to leave the coun-



Photo 1: Children and their education are the foundation of nation-building: a girl in Mazar-i-Sharif

Photo: medica mondial e.V., www.medicamondiale.org

try. The victims of this battlefield of the Cold War were not Westerners but Afghans who turned against the communist regime in their homeland. They either remained as resistance forces in the country or they emigrated to Pakistan and Iran to continue their struggle. Most of those who studied in the West received political asylum in western countries.

Although general data about the staff of all governmental institutions are not available, one can imagine the general picture of education in the country when in a single university more than 300 teaching staff had emigrated between 1978 and 1986 or had been killed or jailed (*Rubin 2002*, p. 140). As a result Afghanistan faced the consequences of a "brain drain" and a general lack of human resources. In order to fill this gap the communist on the one hand sent people for training to the USSR, and on the other hand recruited Russian and Eastern Bloc personnel for those institutions. In 1983, 60 % of teaching staff in faculties were foreign (*Rubin 2002*, p. 142).

After the collapse of the communist regime and the establishment of the interim government by Mujahidin groups (1992–1996), Afghanistan turned into a battlefield between local players. Around half of Kabul city was destroyed in the civil war, and many ministries, including the Ministry of Higher Education were burnt; Kabul University, the Institute of Medicine, and the Polytechnic Institute were bombarded, burnt, badly damaged or looted. As a result many people emigrated, many of those who had remained during the Soviet invasion now left the country as well. For more than three years (1992–1994) higher education in the capital came to a complete stop.

Taliban regime

From 1996 to 2001 the Taliban gained control of Kabul and most parts of Afghanistan. Their basis for ruling the country was not founded on any named constitu-

tion but on their own interpretation of Islam. However in reality they were mostly Jirgas and tribal elites under the name "Ulama" following traditional medieval rules (*Schetter 2003*). Under this interpretation of Islam women were banned from work even though a quarter of Kabul's civil service was run by women. More than 70,000 female students were deprived of the right of education (*Rashid 2002*). The education system was completely destroyed by carrying out fundamental reforms and regulation of education in general and of higher education in particular. The Taliban changed the curricula of the entire education system by removing natural science subjects and replacing them with certain religious subjects.

Any argument against this ideology was regarded as being against Islam and anything against Islam was punished with death (*Schetter 2003*). Due to this extreme pressure enrollment in the education system during this time decreased to nil for females and also had a negative impact on males. Many professors and teachers, especially women, had no choice but to leave the country. But this was not the last period of brain drain in Afghanistan.

The event of 11 September 2001 brought an end to the Taliban regime. For the first time, under international pressure, different heterogeneous Afghan political groups met at the Petersberg Conference Centre in Königswinter near Bonn (Germany) in December 2001 to discuss the future of their country (see contribution of *Yamaguchi* in this edition).

Social groups participating in and vital to mental nation-building

Afghanistan lost a lot of its human resources due to war and political unrest in the past three decades. Those who stayed in the country were scarred by war and violence and changing ideologies. Under Soviet occupation the education system was not directly affected by the ideology of communism. But

free textbooks from publishers in the Soviet Union were provided, special rooms were kept for members of the Communist Party and fellowship programs to the USSR were available.

For Afghan refugees and Mujahidin outside the country, the USA printed books encouraging them to fight against communism and the occupying force. From primary to higher education a lot of classroom materials dealt with the ideology of fighting and the "Jihad". By 1988 tens of thousands of religious schools ("madrassas") were created. One of the Afghan Mujahidin leaders, Sayaf, was even allowed to open a university called Da-awat wa Jihad for training men from around the world (*Gannon 2005*, p. 141 f.).

Today, the politically much securer yet still unstable situation has at least provided an opportunity for all Afghans to come forward and participate. Different groups – Afghans from exile in the West, Mujahidin, even Taliban and former communists – have seized the opportunity, but have also created an uneasy turbulence within the government of Afghanistan. As time progresses splits between these groups are appearing in terms of ideology, identity, religion, ethnicity and professional career. To analyse in which way different social and political groups participate in nation-building, one has to look at them separately (*Table 1*).

Civilian population

The civilian population forms the biggest group and is not affiliated to a particular political movement; its education is not very high and job skills are not very well developed. However most of the people are high school graduates. Many have experience in administrative work and have on average a better education than the Mujahidin and Taliban and a wider range of work experiences than the ex-Communists.

Most of the students graduating from university who have B.A. degrees but no job experience also belong to this group. Sometimes their new occupation does not

Table 1: Playing groups in the process of nation-building

Criteria	Social Groups					
	Civilians	Communists	Mujahidin Warlords	Westernized Afghans	Taliban	Foreigners
Income ²	very low ¹	middle	middle	very high	middle	very high
Social hierarchy	very low	high	high	very high	high	very high
Modern education ³	very low	very low	very low	high	very low	high
Traditional education ³	middle	middle	very low	very low	very low	very low
Knowledge of English	very low	very Low	very low	very high	very low	very high
Social status	very low	very high	very high	very high	very high	very high
Reliability ⁴	very high	very low	very low	very low	very low	very low
Share of total popul.	very high	low	low	low	low	high

¹ The various degrees (very low, low, middle, high and very high) illustrate the importance of each social group in the various categories.

² "Very low income" is defined for an ordinary staff as US\$ 40 per month while "very high" means several 1,000 US\$ per month.

³ "Modern education" includes university level education, skills in English, computer knowledge, modern administration, and management abilities.

"Traditional education" covers those who graduated from 12th grade of school without further advancing their education, but are skilled in the "local system".

⁴ "Reliability" means the degree to which Afghanistan can rely on this group as human capital for nation building.

match their backgrounds because of the ineffective distribution of graduates by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. They hold the lower ranks in the government, with a salary as low as 40 US\$ per month, and they are occasionally dismissed from the government. And yet groups in the higher ranks benefit from them as the B.A.s fill gaps of knowledge and experience.

Communists

The group of ex-communists comprises members of the former PDPA (People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan), and most belong to the Khalqis and Parchamis fractions. Most were educated in the former USSR and Eastern bloc countries. Some members of these groups merged with Mujahidins, some fled to Russia and to the West. The majority of the low ranking members of this group remained in the country. They have

formed new parties and occupy some posts in the present government. Looking at the failure of Mujahidin in forming a government and at the Taliban barbarism, they feel a sense of justification.

Mujahidin

The Mujahidin warlords consist of political and military personnel rather than any managerial or administrative staff. In other words they are good for military purposes rather than social services. This includes Mujahidin commanders and leaders. Their education is mainly limited to religious training, and they have little knowledge of administration. Moreover this group includes different Islamic parties that are not on very good terms with each other. Their number is comparably low but they occupy higher ranks in the government. Those former Mujahidin believe that they de-

serve these posts as a reward for their struggle against the communists and the Taliban.

Returnees from exile in the West

The group of returnees from exile in the West includes all Afghans who came from exile and joined the new government from the first day of its establishment. They are known in the western media as technocrats while inside the country they are called “Westerners”. Educated in exile they are strongly supported by the USA to fill important posts in the government. They occupy very high ranks (ministers, vice ministers, advisors, etc.) and receive extraordinarily high salaries paid in US dollars. This group finds it difficult working in government institutions because of the high expectations of them from all staff, and also because of the lack of equipment and facilities. They are less reliable as nation-builders, firstly, because they are temporarily based in Kabul while their families are abroad, and, secondly, because with western passports they have a second identity. Their co-operation is conditional as they will co-operate with the government only as long as they receive high salaries and are incumbents of high ranking posts. Should these perks be terminated, they will leave the country. However it is stated in the new constitution that the president and his ministers should be Afghan and that no one can be a minister while having two passports. This item was required by the Mujahidin group to be mentioned in the constitution in an effort to exclude the returnees from the high ranking government posts.

Taliban

In its new policy the government has classified the Taliban movement into moderate and extremist groups. Moderate Taliban are invited through regular messages of welcome to join the government. In the beginning this included only some of the Taliban who surrendered to the US or Afghan forces, and also some who were arrested

during the US-led war. But recently this welcome policy has gone further and now covers all extremist members of the Taliban, even their leader Mullah Omar.

Foreigners

This group consists of foreigners who indirectly run the government of Afghanistan. It carries out the main functions of the government, such as maintaining security and reconstruction programs. The group consists of US, NATO forces and ISAF who are maintaining security, fighting terror and eliminating opium. In other words, they carry out the jobs of the Afghan army and Afghan police. At the same time there is a huge number of national and international NGOs which have raised a lot of criticism from the people and government.

People’s expectations of government institutions

As illustrated in *Table 1*, there are two main problems among the staff of different government institutions. The first one is that there are remarkable differences in employment, salary, identity and political ideologies among staff members. The second problem is insufficient qualifications and experience of a huge portion of the staff. In such a situation the government cannot effectively carry out its planning and activities. Lack of efficiency and transparency have caused foreign governments to channel their funds not through the government but through international NGOs.

According to Afghanistan’s finance minister, *Anwarulhaq Ahadi*, the aims of the Bonn Accord have been achieved while the basic problems still remain. He said, “The world does not accept our plans. Some of the very big donors have their internal problems that they are not allowed to spend their money through the government. At least three donors or very big donor countries have their internal problems. For example this year [in 2005] the United

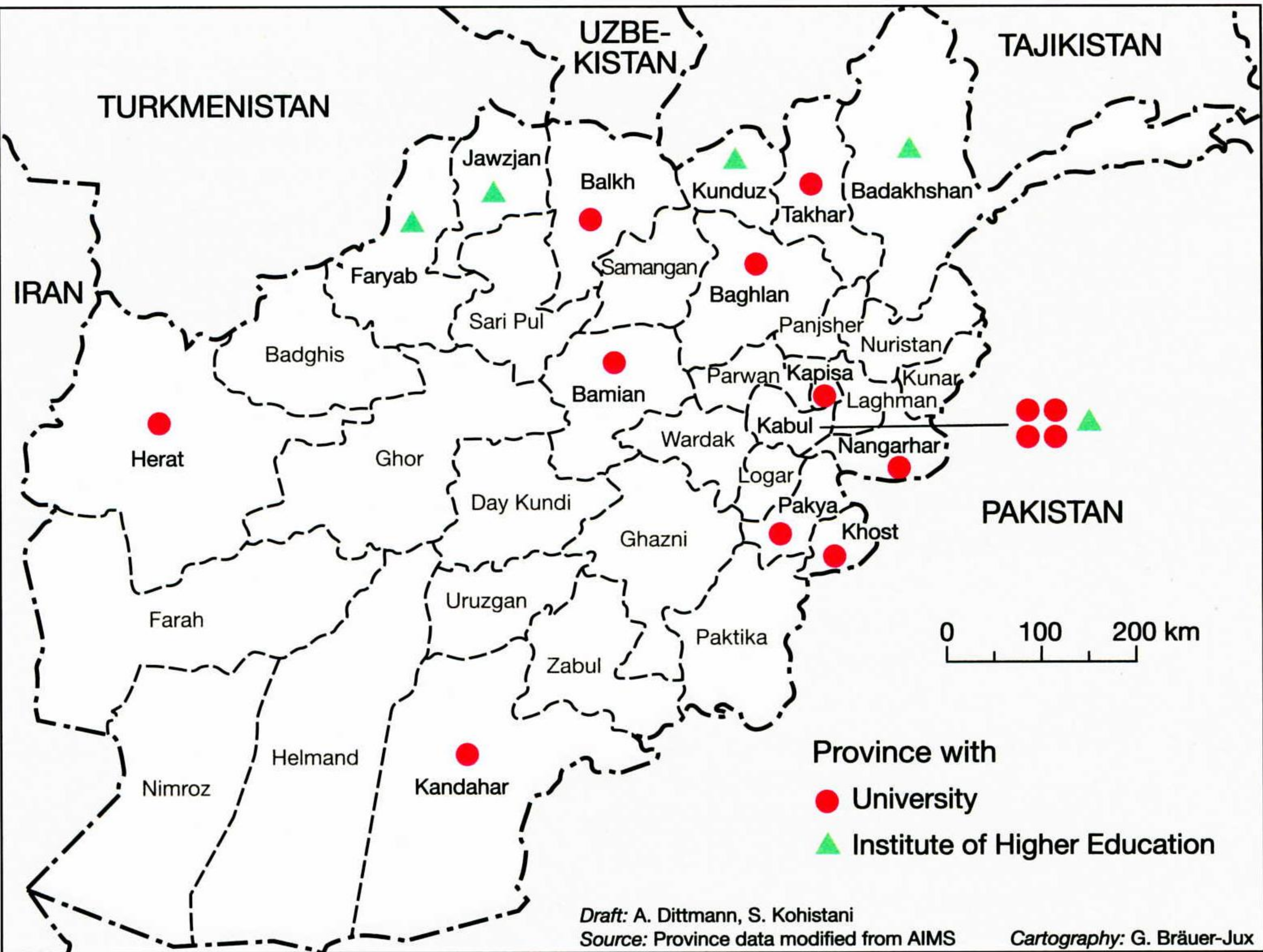


Figure 1: Distribution of universities and institutes of higher education in Afghanistan 2006

States donation to Afghanistan was more than 4 billion dollars. From this amount only 80 million dollars was given to the World Bank which the government of Afghanistan could use” (BBC-Interview with *Ahadi*, 25.01.2006).

The international donors are aware of the problem of insufficiently qualified human resources in the country. They have approached this problem in two ways. First, they employ foreign advisors with extraordinary high salaries in different ministries and institutions. Second, they have provided short-term capacity-building programs which did not fulfil the needs of the institutions.

As the Minister of Finance said, “I wish this capacity-building program was in the hands of the government. Capacity-building means provision of one week courses by international organizations and donors. When a person does not know the basis of a profession, how can he learn in one week. We have many advisors with very high salaries. Some of them cost around 500,000 dollars each year. This is not our will; they are advisors who have been sent to us” (BBC-Interview with *Ahadi* 25.01.2006).

As mentioned these capacity-building programs have been run for government staff in different ministries. Let us now examine the situation of the training institutions in the country and the possibility of training qualified staff according to the demand of government institutions in Afghanistan.

Provision of training institutions

Despite a huge number of international donors and players in the process of nation-building in Afghanistan (see contribution by *Dittmann* in this edition), the training institutions, very attractive for donors during the East-West rivalry in the Cold War, now seem to attract very little attention. The Bonn Accord included milestones of building an Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP); however the police job is currently carried out by ISAF and the army’s task by the US military forces. There were two institutions in Kabul for training policemen and the army, but they have been destroyed completely and their training staff have been scattered. Germany was able to rebuild the police academy and

reactivate it, but the challenges do not end there. Training 80,000 policemen as one milestone of the Bonn Accord needs well qualified teaching staff, and to train these teaching staff will take years as well as educated, efficient and reliable trainees. According to German sources two major problems are present – a lack of infrastructure and a lack of professionalism. They say that the majority of the police officers lack adequate training and often even basic education.

A similar situation exists in the army. According to the US and other donors, the new Afghan government has faced significant challenges in establishing a viable Afghan armed forces. Although the US Department of Defense and Department of State have not released official estimates, the army and the police could cost up to US\$ 7.2 billion to complete and about US\$ 600 million to sustain. But even with this cost estimate, there are certain challenges, like low payment (30 US\$ per month), the short period of training (14 weeks) and finally the lack of professional trainers and the high number of trainees with little basic education.

Civil institutions in the country, like universities and research institutes, also suffer from an insufficient number of professional teaching staff. There are two ministries in the country dealing with education - the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education. The Ministry of Education requires thousands (50,000) of teachers for schools in different provinces of Afghanistan. More than 90 % of school teachers in Afghanistan have only 12th grade or even lower qualifications.

In 2002 the big demand led to the idea of changing a small pedagogic institute into a university which is now called the University of Education and trains teachers with a B.A. degree. Additionally there are faculties in Kabul University and in other universities in Afghanistan that are also training school teachers. In 2004 twelve universities and five institutes of

higher education existed in the country - four of the universities were in Kabul, the rest spread over 15 provinces. At the end of 2004 a new university was established in Bamian. In early 2005 another one was established in Baghlan. Both, universities and institutions of higher education cover 16 out of the country's 34 provinces. The remaining 18 provinces lack these facilities (*Figure 1*).

One can see that there has been an increase in the number of institutions in the country. But the number of students also increases annually, and the capacity of the institutions hardly meets the growing demand. The most challenging problem is the qualification of teaching staff in these institutions. According to some figures, out of 1,846 teaching staff in 2004 only 112 of them had PhDs, and 719 had an M.A. degree. The remaining 1,015 had only B.A. degrees which is unique worldwide (Ministry of Higher Education 2004).

The subjects covered by the universities and institutes of higher education do not correspond very closely to demand in the country. For example the economy of the country before the war and even now relies primarily on agriculture. However around 20 % of students are studying medicine, and only 10 % are studying agriculture.

Conclusion

Nation-building in Afghanistan is today facing its critical phase. Three decades of war and chaos in the country have confronted Afghanistan with the problem of brain drain. How to train new "brains" or improve facilities and their capacities will be a challenge for the international community to respond to in the short term. But Afghanistan needs a long-term strategy together with a long-term commitment from the international community. To achieve the millennium goals – an opium free and terrorist free Afghanistan – the international community should invest in the training institutions of the country. Afghanistan needs teachers in schools and universi-

ties together with teaching materials to train the new generation in the culture of peace, freedom and democracy. This will be a difficult step to take but its positive impact will be long lasting and contribute to the prosperity both of the world and of Afghanistan. ■

References:

- Bendix, R. 1996: Nation-Building and Citizenship, A study of our Changing Social Order. Piscataway, NJ
 Dittmann, A. and S.M. Kohistani 2004: Wiederaufbau an afghanischen Hochschulen. *Südasiatische Zeitschrift* 24 (2-3), pp.41–45
 Dupree, L. 1973: Afghanistan. Princeton
 Gannon, K. 2005: I for Infidel: From Holy War to Holy Terror: 18 years in Afghanistan. Santa Barbara
 Gregorian, V. 1969: The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan. Stanford
 Kohistani, S.M. and K. Yamaguchi: Out of crisis: the reconstruction of Kabul as a challenge for the municipality. In: G.J. Arez and A. Dittmann (eds.): Kabul – Aspects of Urban Geography. Peshawar, pp. 147–157
 Ministry of Higher Education and International Institute for Educational Planning UNESCO (eds.) 2004: Strategic Action Plan for the Development of Higher Education in Afghanistan. Paris
 Peabody-Newell, N. and R.S. Newell 1981: The Struggle for Afghanistan. London
 Rashid, A. 2002: Taliban, Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia. London
 Rubin, B.R. 2002: The Fragmentation of Afghanistan, New Haven
 Schetter, C. 2003: Ethnizität und ethnische Konflikte in Afghanistan. Berlin
 Watson, C.A. 2004: Nation-Building. A Reference Handbook. Santa Barbara

Internet Sources

- Anwarulhaq, A. (Minister of Finance): Importance of London Conference
www.bbc.co.uk/persian/afghanistan/story/2006/01/060125_ram-londonconf-interview.shtml; accessed on 25.01.2006.
 Hasanyar, A. (Minister of Higher Education): Higher Education of Afghanistan
www.bbc.co.uk/persian/afghanistan/story/2005/11/051123_s-afg-educations.shtml; accessed on 28.01.2006
 United States Government Accountability Office
www.gao.gov/new.items/d05575.pdf; accessed 31.01.2006

Author

Ass. Professor Sardar M. Kohistani
 Geographisches Institut, Universität Bonn,
 Meckenheimer Allee 166, 53115 Bonn /
 GERMANY
 E-Mail: sardar_kohistani@yahoo.com