

# CMI REPORT

R 2011: 10

## Review of Den Nationale Scenes (DNS) programme: “Continued Cooperation with Afghan National Theatre”

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Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) is an independent, non-profit research institution and a major international centre in policy-oriented and applied development research. Focus is on development and human rights issues and on international conditions that affect such issues. The geographical focus is Sub-Saharan Africa, Southern and Central Asia, the Middle East and Latin America.

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“Continued Cooperation with Afghan National  
Theatre”



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**Front page photo**

*Burnt Wishes* by Einar Bjarkø and Petter W Kristiansen

**Project number**

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Theatre development in Afghanistan

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# 1. Introduction

The collaboration between Den Nationale Scenes (DNS), Bergen, Norway and the Afghan National Theatre (ANT) has lasted since 2002, and in 2009 a three year project was funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), titled "Continued Cooperation with Afghan National Theatre".

The aim of this project is to contribute to quality improvement of the Afghan National Theatre (ANT) by building of competence within the theatre with a special focus on female actors. The main objectives of the programme are:

- Contribute to a separate education of female actors.
- Contribute in order to make the situation for women at ANT more attractive.
- Increase the number and quality regarding new afghan plays, especially with focus on women and children.
- Strengthen the dramaturg section at ANT.
- Continue capacity-building in different departments of the theatre with emphasis on the artistic part.

The DNS took the initiative for an internal midterm review in 2011, with two main objectives:

1. Document and review the activities undertaken until mid 2011 and assess as to what extent the activities have met the programme objectives.
2. Assess potential alternations/improvements to ongoing programme activities and provide suggestions for a possible extension/future direction of the programme.

The full Terms of Reference is included in Annex I.

The review team consisted of Arne Strand (Chr. Michelsen Institute, teamleader), and Rhine Skaanes and Einar Bjarkø (DNS), while Carle Lange from Nasjonalteateret undertook a desk study of the project objectives and outcomes based on their experience from Burkina Faso. The team visited Kabul and Herat from 25. June to 2. August 2011, where in addition to staff at ANT and Kabul University a range of key informants were interviewed (see Annex II). The fieldwork was concluded by a feedback workshop with all staff at ANT.



## 2. Background

The collaboration between Den Nationale Scenes (DNS), Bergen, Norway and the Afghan National Theatre (ANT) dates back to 2002 when the first contact was made following footages of a destroyed ANT was shown on Norwegian television. A solidarity group was established at DNS and initial funding collected from holding an extra performance, and later a DNS team visited ANT in Kabul.

The cooperation developed gradually and got more formalized through a one year staff exchange system organized with support from the Norwegian Fredskorpset from autumn 2007. The ANT Director visited Bergen in 2008, and an agreement was reached between ANT and DNS to develop and seek funding for a 5 year collaboration project. The main objectives were to build the professional capacity of ANT actors, establish a theatre for children and youth, strengthen Afghan dramaturgy and increase the number of female staff at the ANT. Major investments were made at ANT, including a total refurbishing of the Bahresh Restaurant, owned by the theatre, and building of a theatre stage with professional light and sound equipment and an upgrading of the different theater departments.

The project approved by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), represented by the Royal Norwegian Embassy, Kabul, cover a three year period from April 2009 to March 2012 and represents a value of NOK 4,500,000. In collaboration with the Theatre Department of the University of Bergen additional funding has been secured from the MFA for strengthening the professional level of the Theatre Department at the University of Kabul.

DNS has continued to generate funding through their voluntary work and performances enabling them to support additional initiatives at ANT, and has also managed to raise funding from other private sources.

## 3. Programme management

Den Nationale Scene, represented by the Director, stands responsible for the project and the DNS administration manage administrative and financial aspects of the collaboration. Project implementation is delegated to project manager Rhine Skaanes. A constituted group of DNS employees stand responsible to develop and run the activities in Norway and in Afghanistan, including organizing various fundraising initiatives for the project. An Afghan coordinator, Naimullah Qalander, is responsible for the daily running of the project in Kabul. The Afghan Ministry of Culture (MoC) (as owner of ANT) is regularly updated on plans and achievements and obtain copies of agreements signed between DNS and ANT, and lists of all equipment donated. There are regular consultations on the professional development of ANT and the financial resources made available to them.

Programme planning is taking place in collaboration with the ANT Director, where annual plans are drawn up for performances, professional training, workshops, planning of tours and festival participation, as well as courses for independent theatre groups. What is also agree upon are plans for renewal, improvements and maintenance of the theatre building and the equipment. As agreed with the MoC are all investments paid directly by DNS.

This arrangement is managed in collaboration with NCA, where their accounting department check the three quotations required for each purchase and approve the cheapest one. They do also validate all payment/purchase vouchers and prepare monthly financial reports to DNS. Staff and consultants hired by DNS are lodged at the NCA guesthouse and included in the NCA staff security system.



## 4. Programing challenges

Afghanistan has been at war for the last three decades, which naturally is causing a range of challenges for any project implementation. To mention a few: frequent changes of officials in the Ministry of Culture and at the ANT, where low salaries causes a large turnover of actors, not least female actors. This has been attempted rectified through strengthening the education of actors at the University of Kabul, and through collaboration with independent theatre groups that have a number of female actors.

Afghan tradition and culture is another factor that influence on the ability for women to perform in public, though there are major differences between Afghan provinces. Towns as Herat, Mazar-e Sharif and Kabul have a longer history of theatre and female performances than areas in southern parts of the country.

Security is another factor that needs to be taken into consideration, as this has deteriorated over the last years. There have been a number of suicide attacks in Kabul over the last year, as well as violent incidents and demonstrations taking place in a number of other cities. At ANT a curved wall has been built in front of the theatre screen to protect the audience against potential blasts on the street.

## 5. Main achievements

As of June 2011 DNS has helping ANT to establish a well functioning theatre house with whatever is required to run a modern theatre, including a child and puppet theatre with own technical workshop. The physical improvements of building and equipment has improved the working conditions of ANT staff and contributed to an increasingly professional level. It has been established a dramaturgy section, a library and the female employees have had a separate room to meet in.

The four young male actors with study visits to DNS in Bergen has contributed with professional resources at the ANT, and taken part in training of staff of independent theatre groups.

An artistic council has been established at ANT, common annual planning is taking place and there are regular production meetings and promotion work is under development.

Most performances are broadcasted on national TV channels, and transport has been organised from different institutions and orphanages for children to view ANT performances.

A collaboration with the Afghan Pen club has aimed to develop new Afghan drama for performance, and a new competition will be announced aimed at rewarding three plays that hopefully can be performed a stage. A collaboration is initiated with the "Ibsen reward" to promote new Afghan drama, and we have seen ANT staff develop a number of new plays for children.



*Photo: An old restaurant hall converted into a theatre stage*

A prioritised task has been improvement of the professional and artistic level at ANT, which has included workshops on different professional aspects of new performances, including laying of masks and use of sound and light equipment.



*Photo: Light and sound workshop*

Some workshops and trainings have been made available for independent theatre groups and there has been a collaboration with Kabul University, contributed to establishment of a library and supported ANT participation in theatre festivals in Afghanistan and Tajikistan.



*Photo: Absence Crew working with a group of Afghan children*

DNS has made major investments in ANT's theatre building and equipments. The review documents that the technical equipment is well cared for and constantly in use. The renewed and partially restructured theatre building hold a good standard and is well maintained.



*Photo: The stage for Firebird is being prepared*



The theatre stage is in need of improvements to make it more functional but the light rig is working well.



*Photo: A security wall is erected to protect the audience.*



*Photo: Storage of technical equipment is well organised*

**The main conclusion** is therefore that the project is in general very well functioning and in accordance with the objectives set. The collaboration initiated in 2002 has generated an Afghan

National Theatre holding a professional standard in their own well functioning theatre building that the staff take great pride in.

There have been **challenges** though. Recruitment of female actors has proven difficult due to salary levels and cultural challenges and a trial with increased salaries have had mixed results. Collaboration with Kabul University and the independent theatre groups might hopefully increase the number and qualifications of female actors as might the emphasis on generating new Afghan drama create plays that the ANT, the Kabul University and the independent groups might benefit from.

## 6. Recommendations

Given the positive review of the ongoing activities there is no reason to suggest major changes to the direction of the ongoing project. However, there are a few suggestions for modifications and further improvements:

- Improve the internal communication and project planning process between ANT and DNS, and ensure a common understanding of roles and responsibility of those involved in the project. At the same time DNS's ability to control investments made in and at ANT has to be secured.
- Discuss and agree with the ANT Director upon the prioritisation of workshop themes for the remaining project period. DNS preference is for one long and one short workshop annually, the long one undertaken as part of preparation for a screening of a new play. It should also be discussed if Kabul University and independent groups can be invited to these workshops and if ANT staffs do need more professional training to perform training sessions of independent groups based outside Kabul.
- Encourage the ANT Director to communicate and discuss experiences and the annual collaboration plans between ANT and DNS with the entire ANT staff, if possible in a common meeting with DNS staff.
- Consider recommendations from ANT staff for the following: extended English language course, training in the use of internet and establishment of an ANT web page, train more female staff in makeup, light/sound and film recordings and for attendance at longer workshops.
- Do not fulfil requests from ANT and KU for sending actors for longer term training in Norway. While acknowledging the positive benefits this has had for ANT this has to be balanced up against the potential negative effects should more actors decide not to return. This could jeopardise the support that has developed for the project both at DNS and with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Prepare an English version of the report to be presented to and discussed with ANT, the Ministry of Culture, Kabul University and the Norwegian Embassy in Kabul.
- Continue the reporting to and close dialogue with the Ministry of Culture, including discussion on how the professional development and administration of DNS can be further developed. AN important message is that the Ministry need to plan for how the ANT can be continued when DNS support have come to an end.
- Consider, within existing budget limits, further support for the independent theatre groups, including a potential advisory functions towards establishment of functional stages in Herat and Mazar-e Sharif, provided the Government of Afghanistan make available suitable localities.



- Continue the collaboration with NCA on financial management/control, lodging of DNS personnel and security advice for their stay in Kabul.
- Provide regular and detailed reports for the Norwegian Embassy in Kabul and encourage Embassy staff to attend ANT performances to visualize the support and provide feedback on the professionalism of the performances.
- Revise routines and responsibilities in relation to stay and travels by Norwegian /international project staff, and prepare a short "to do list" in case of emergencies and what should be done to reduce vulnerability during stay's in Afghanistan.
- Establish a DNS "sustainability fund" from voluntary collected financial resources to help maintain a long-term collaboration between DNS and ANT, The fund should be earmarked for maintaining DNS investments in technical equipment and a "seed fund" for new professional developments and development of specific skills enabling ANT to engage in new forms of acting and performances.



*Photo: The Dragon Mountain team*

ANT staff expresses a strong interest in extended the collaboration with DNS beyond the ongoing project period, which is supported by the DNS project team. However, their suggestion is to merge the ongoing collaboration with the ANT with the pilot project that is underway with the Kabul University in one common – and smaller – project aimed at a more targeted approach to develop Afghan theatre.

The following is suggested:

- A further development of the professional capacities at the ANT in the form of selected workshops and targeted training using Norwegian/international resource persons, including a project for "training of trainers". This should include:
  - Support for initiatives to increase the number and professionalism of female actors and other female personnel, though without providing subsidized salaries as that appears to generate a number of new conflicts. Emphasis and support further

development of targeting a child/youth audience, including puppet theatre and the use of dance/music in the performances.

- Strengthen the collaboration between Kabul University and ANT to ensure a more "practical" orientation of the pilot project, where DNS resource persons to a larger extent can be used at the theatre. It will be important to ensure a high number of female resource persons to visualize the potential for women within this field, and encourage recruitment of more women for the studies. Further develop web based solutions for lectures and practical training, and if possible include ANT staff and independent groups. The overarching aim is to develop a professional web based Afghan/Norwegian theatre forum, while reducing the need for travels to Afghanistan until security is improved.
- Develop the professional capacity of the independent theatre groups outside Kabul, primarily in Herat and Mazar-e Sharif where there is an established collaboration. This should be developed through workshops/professional training organised by ANT staff, preferably in collaboration with Kabul University, and preferably in Kabul if non-Afghan expertise is required. One should consider seeking regional expertise to ease cultural and language barriers.
- Prepare a clear and step by step development and phase out plan for the project, where clear objectives are identified for all parties involved that will have to be met before the next step is initiated. It has to be a clear requirement that all initiated initiatives can be sustained without Norwegian financial support before the project come to a close.



# Annex I: Terms of Reference

## Terms of Reference

Review of the Den Nationale Scenes (DNS) programme

"Continued Cooperation with Afghan National Theatre"

AFG2797-09/005

## Background

The agreement between the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), represented by the Royal Norwegian Embassy, Kabul, and Den Nationale Scenes (DNS) cover a three year project period from April 2009 to March 2012 at a value of NOK 4,500,000.

The programme "Continued Cooperation with Afghan National Theatre" aim to contribute to quality improvement of the Afghan National Theatre (ANT) by building of competence within the theatre with a special focus on female actors. The main objectives of the programme as described in the Programme Document are:

- Contribute to a separate education of female actors.
- Contribute in order to make the situation for women at ANT more attractive.
- Increase the number and quality regarding new afghan plays, especially with focus on women and children.
- Strengthen the dramaturg section at ANT.
- Continue capacity-building in different departments of the theatre with emphasis on the artistic part.

## Main objectives and key questions

The DNS has initiated a review process that has two main objectives:

3. Document and review the activities undertaken until mid 2011 and assess as to what extent the activities have met the programme objectives, and potentially, developed the ANT beyond the initial plan.
4. Assess potential alternations/improvements to ongoing programme activities and provide suggestions for a possible extension/future direction of the programme.

The review team shall address the following questions:

1. What have been main programme achievements until mid 2011?

2. How can it be documented that the programme has helped build the professional capacity of the ANT?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the programme as identified by DNS and ANT, and are there project components that have yielded better results than other?
4. To what extent has the programme succeeded in securing a special focus on female actors?
5. Has narrative and financial reporting met donor requirements?
6. How is the programme perceived by the Government of Afghanistan?
7. How has the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan affected the programme?
8. How is the programme assessed by independent theatre professionals in Afghanistan and in Norway?
9. Are there adjustments to be suggested for the remaining period of the ongoing programme?
10. To what extent has securing the sustainability of the programme been part of the implementation strategy and is more needed during the remaining phase?
11. What can be further programme developments if DNS wish to consider an extension of their engagement in Afghanistan, keeping in mind the security situation?

### **The review theme**

The review is initialized by DNS to identify potential improvements to the programme and contribute to their and ANTs learning competence building, and includes therefore project director Rhine Skaanes and project advisor Arne Strand. DNS will in addition hire in an independent Norwegian theatre expert with extensive experience of theatre development in developing countries for a desk review of methodology and initial review findings.

### **Review methodology**

The review team shall base their assessment on progress and mission reports from DNT staff, interviews with key stakeholders to the programme and discussion and feedback sessions with the staff of the ANT in Kabul. The following institutions/persons should be interviewed:

- DNS staff that have participated in the programme, including the Kabul based coordinator
- ANT staff in Kabul
- The Norwegian Embassy in Kabul
- Ministry of Culture
- Staff of Kabul University, Academy of Fine Art
- International theatre experts available in Kabul
- Independent theatre groups in Mazar and Herat

The team shall in addition seek professional advice and input from Norwegian expertise on theatre development in developing countries.

### **Timeframe**

The review will be conducted between 15 and 30 June 2011, with fieldwork in Kabul, Mazar and Herat scheduled from 23 to 30 June. The report shall be submitted DNS by 25 August 2011.

The extent and timing of the fieldwork will depend on the security situation in Afghanistan



## Annex II: Interview List

<b><u>Position</u></b>	<b><u>Name</u></b>
<b><u>Kabul</u></b>	
Deputy Minister, Ministry of Information and Culture	Omar S. Sultan
ANT Director	Shapoor Sadaqat
Former Director	Abdul Qader Farooq
Former Director	Gul Makai Shah
ANT staff from different departments	10 women/men
Actors with stay at DNS Bergen	Masoud Noori
	Najib Rahimi
	Hares Parwana
	Milad Farokh
Dean, Fine Arts Faculty, Kabul University	Pro. M. Alem Farhad
Director, Theatre Department, Kabul University	Mohammad Azim Hussainzada
Second Secretary, Embassy of Norway	Bjørn Klaumann Bekken
<b><u>Herat</u></b>	
Governor	Dr. Daud Saba
General Director of Information and Culture Dep.	Wali Shah Bahrah
General Director Education Department	Basir Ahmad Arwin Tahiri
Head, Herat Theatre Department	Faraydoon Fakiri
Actor, Herat Theatre Department	Beshad Ashkarzada
Artist and musician	Nematullah Hussainzada
Director, Herat Theatre	Shihan Mohammad Yaghoub Amini
Administrative Director SIMORGH Film	Abdul Hakim Hashemi
Artistic Director SIMORGH Film	Monira Hashemi
Political – Economic Councillor, US Consulate	Monique Quesada

## Annex III: MOU between DNS and Kabul University

### Memorandum of Understanding



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Bergen/Kabul, January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2010

This Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is signed between the Kabul University, Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Theatre and Den Nationale Scene (DNS) Bergen, Norway with an aim to strengthening the professional teaching and administrative capacity of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Theatre at the University of Kabul to professionalise the education of female and male actors in Afghanistan.

The contribution from the University of Kabul is through the utilisation of their existing facilities, professional resources and administrative capacity within the Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Theatre. The contribution from DNS will be to advice on the development of a curriculum, contribution of Norwegian professionals on theatre research and other lecture topics and practical training and, possibly, other forms of support that might be needed.

The project is foreseen to be developed through an initial stage in 2010 and 2011 where the parties to this MoU jointly explores possibilities for development of a long term proposal for external funding of the project and inclusion of other professional partners, as the University of Bergen. A more detailed work plan specifying the contributions and responsibilities of the two parties for the first phase will be developed jointly before July 2010, this will also include a process plan for developing a long-term joint funding proposal.

Signed in 2 copies

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bjarte Hjelmeland', written over a horizontal line.

Bjarte Hjelmeland

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hamidullah Amin', written over a horizontal line.

Professor Hamidullah Amin

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Since 2002, Den Nationale Scene (DNS), Bergen, Norway, has collaborated with the Afghan National Theatre. In 2009, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), funded the three year project "Continued Cooperation with Afghan National Theatre". The objective was to improve the quality of the Afghan National Theatre (ANT) by building competence within the theatre, with a special focus on female actors. The project aimed to contribute to a separate education of female actors, to make the Afghan National Theatre more attractive to women, to increase the number and quality of new Afghan plays, to strengthen the dramaturgy section, and to continue capacity building in different parts of the theatre.

This report documents and reviews activities until mid 2011 and assesses to what extent the activities have met the programme objectives. It assesses potential changes/improvements and suggests a possible extension/future direction of the programme.

The main conclusion is that "Continued Cooperation with Afghan National Theatre" in general is a success, and that the activities correspond well with the objectives of the project. The collaboration has generated an Afghan National Theatre holding a professional standard in a well functioning theatre building that the staff take great pride in. Yet, there have been challenges. Recruitment of female actors has proven difficult due to salary levels and cultural challenges.