India’s experience in development cooperation with Afghanistan
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With a broad understanding that peaceful and stable Afghanistan is crucial for regional stability, India has been playing an active role in the reconstruction since 2002. So far it has pledged assistance worth about US$2 billion, with projects covering the whole of the country mainly in the areas of road construction, power transmission lines, hydro-electricity, agriculture, telecommunication, education, health and capacity building. As India has committed significant resources, its experiences in Afghanistan could have a serious impact on evolving Indian development strategy. It seems that through its development partnership, India hoped to achieve certain objectives in Afghanistan. These include political objectives (influence in Kabul); economic objectives (preparing a strategy for South-Central Asia economic linkages); diplomatic objectives (to be considered an as important regional and global player), strategic objectives (a new outlet to Afghanistan and Central Asia), long term capacity building (through fellowships and training); and humanitarian objectives (providing relief to vulnerable Afghan citizens). Various public opinion polls and close India- Afghanistan relationship culminating into strategic partnership indicate that many of these objectives have been achieved significantly. Indian development efforts have been relatively more effective. Indian policy makers have clearly indicated at every forum that in Afghanistan, India does not have any exit policy. On the contrary, there are indications that India may be involved much more than hitherto. In all three crucial areas (political, security and economic) enhanced Indian engagement in Afghanistan could help the country meet these difficult challenges during its decade of transformation. If proposed investments in the mining sector as well as TAPI gas pipeline projects through Afghanistan become operational, it will have serious implications for Indian development strategy. For future projects India needs to do thorough homework in project selection and it might have to go for projects where it has comparative advantage. There is a need to involve more Indian NGOs in development projects. India should also try to cooperate with other donors for working jointly on similar projects. Overall, Indian development partnership in Afghanistan has the potential to become larger economic and strategic engagement in the region and also a model for other similar initiatives elsewhere.