We don't trust that!

HPN event London May 2011
Médecins Sans Frontières
Brice de le Vingne
MSF strategy

• Independent medical humanitarian association. To oppose to NGO identity.
• 100% proper funds
• Progressively High visibility
• International staff presence
• High value activities = life saving
• No weapon policy
• No armed escort
• Very active networking with all actors
Politics of relief

• Westerners countries should provide aid to flood affected families because it fits their security concerns.

• Humanitarian organisations are "force multipliers, "part of the combat team", "elements of soft power".

• Area must be classify as "affected" in order for IDPs to be legitimated for assistance.
The challenge of the multiple mandates

• INGOs have not been bystanders to the confusion

• Development activities to "stabilize" are carried out under the guise of humanitarian principles.

• Is it possible to engage in activities funded by one of the party to the conflict without undermining access to the victims?
No Weapon Allowed Beyond This Point
Afghanistan: the Humanitarian space

- This "space" does not exist by itself but it needs to be created through negotiation.
- The "humanitarian space" is actually increasing in Afghanistan.
- The "space" to sustain long-term development projects is decreasing.
Conclusion

There needs to be a clearer distinction between development activities that, however unwillingly, serve the objectives of the governments and the West and a principled humanitarian approach with an immediate, life-saving goal only. Both are legitimate forms of action but they need to be distinct in a conflict environment, a choice between them need to be made. In the absence of such a choice the value of humanitarian principles in gaining access and acceptance is rapidly being eroded. With the devaluation of the humanitarian “currency”, it is the communities themselves that pay the heaviest price.