



UNDP Afghanistan Newsletter

1 September 2006

189,163 landmines and 10,071, tons of ammunition destroyed in Afghanistan

On August 12, the Steering Group on the Anti-Personnel Mine and Ammunition Stockpile Destruction Project, also known as the Ammunition Project, met at the Ministry of Defence in Kabul. The group discussed issues such as the completion of an additional central ammunition depot by June 2007 and the training of more students in the newly created Ammunition Technical Officers course which teaches Afghan National Army (ANA) personnel on ammunition disposal. The Steering Group, which meets quarterly, is jointly chaired by the Canadian Ambassador and Afghanistan's Minister of Defence.

The Steering Group was established following the signing between the Government of Afghanistan and UNDP of the Agreement on Anti-Personnel Mine and Ammunition Stockpile Destruction (July 31 2005). The two-year nationwide project provides that ammunition which is safe to be moved will be transported to secure storage facilities while the remainder will be destroyed; all mines will be destroyed.



Since the launch of the pilot project in January 2005, 1,130 caches of ammunition have been surveyed, 189,163 landmines and over 12,475 anti-tank mines have been destroyed under the supervision of ANBP's teams. With stockpiles amounting to hundreds of thousands of tons, there are genuine concerns over the current state of ammunition in Afghanistan which has not been maintained and is lying in unguarded locations or stored in populated areas.

The Ammunition Project will also assist the Government of Afghanistan in meeting its stockpile destruction obligations as a State Party to the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of

the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. By signing the Convention on March 1 2003, Afghanistan committed to establishing a complete ban on anti-personnel mines within four years, with all stockpiles to be destroyed by February 28 2007.

The implementation of the project is supported by ANBP but ultimately under the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence. The total cost of the two year project is US\$ 16 million; with US\$ 5.1 million the Canadian Government is the biggest donor supporting this project.

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ANBP Briefing: Anti-personnel mines and ammunition stockpile destruction

In July 2005, a nationwide project for the destruction of anti-personnel mines and ammunition was launched when the Government of Afghanistan and UNDP signed an Agreement on Anti-Personnel Mine and Ammunition Stockpile Destruction. In line with this two year project, ammunition deemed safe to be moved will be transported to secure storage facilities while the remainder will be destroyed; all mines will be destroyed.

This project is assisting the Government of Afghanistan in meeting its anti-personnel mines stockpile destruction obligations as a State Party to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, also known as the Ottawa Convention. By signing the convention on March 1 2003, Afghanistan committed to establishing a complete ban on anti-personnel mines within four years, with all stockpiles to be destroyed by February 28 2007. Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs will keep the Ministry of Defence abreast of Ottawa Convention obligations, including the need to report on the destruction of anti-personnel mines.

Donors

The total cost of the operational two year project is US\$ 16 million.

- The Canadian Government (US\$ 5.1 million)

- The United Kingdom (US\$ 3 million)
- The European Commission (US\$ 1.8 million)
- Afghanistan's Ministry of Finance (US\$ 0.5 million) and
- UNDP (US\$ 0.5 million)

These are the key donors along with commitments from the Netherlands and Norway. This project has also received in-kind support from the US State Department's Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) Programme.

When was this project initiated?

On December 23 2004, the Ministry of Defence and Afghanistan's New Beginnings Programme (ANBP) signed an agreement to carry out an ammunition survey throughout the country. As a pilot project the ammunition survey began in the first week of January in Mazar-e Sharif and Herat. The survey was to determine:

- Where current ammunition stockpiles exist and their quantity?
- Whether the ammunition is useable and stored in a secure site?
- Whether useable ammunition needs to be transported to a safe and secure area?

How does the current programme on anti-personnel mines and ammunition work?

There are a total of nine Ammunition Survey Teams operating in all the regions of the country. These are supported by an implementing partner, either the HALO Trust or UXB (a company which provides ordnance and explosive waste services) to provide technical support. In addition, two Ministry of Defence officers are embedded with each team to assist in surveying and reviewing new caches.

Who oversees the programme?

The Ministry of Defence, representing the Government of Afghanistan, is ultimately responsible for leading the anti-personnel landmine and ammunition stockpile destruction project towards a successful conclusion. In support UNDP, through ANBP will be accountable for project management and administrative activities related to the implementation of the initiative, including project reporting and sustaining the resources utilized.

What is the extent of the problem?

It is estimated that up to 100,000 tons of legal or illegal munitions are either intentionally or unintentionally littering Afghanistan outside of the government's control. Much

of the abandoned munitions, which have generally not been maintained are lying in unguarded locations or stored in populated areas. This has led to terrible tragedies, such as one in Baghlan province in May 2004 when the explosion of an ammunition cache located within a house in the village of Bajgah resulted in 28 dead and 70 injured. This surplus ammunition presents the government with considerable logistical and safety problems whilst also generating security concerns within Afghan and international circles. In addition, practical ownership of the ammunition is dubious. Of the ammunition stockpiled, there are many types that are no longer required for the planned weapon systems of the Afghan National Army (ANA). Some of the ammunition found is safe, some is useable, yet much is unsafe and of no further use. With stockpiles amounting to hundreds of thousands of tons, there are justified concerns over the current state of ammunition. If this ammunition is not collected or destroyed it can be used with malicious intent such as in Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). Its mere presence continues to kill or maim innocent people.

January 1 2005 to August 13 2006

1,061 surveyed caches of ammunition equate to:

Total unexploded ammunition MT, tons	Boxed Ammunition	Loose Ammunition
28,675	1,142,990	7,705,632

Landmines & ammunition destroyed

Anti-Personnel (pcs)	Anti-tank (pcs)	Ammunition (MT)
189,163	12,475	10,071

Are there still victims?

Afghanistan remains one of the most heavily mined countries in the world. An average of 60 Afghans are killed or injured by mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) each month and about half of those victims are under the age of 18. A survey by Handicap International indicates, that based on an estimated population of 25 million people, there are almost 50,000 mine and UXO survivors in Afghanistan today, or almost 7 percent of the total number of people with disabilities.

What happens once ordnance is discovered/surveyed?

Ammunition deemed to be in a

good condition and safe to be moved is transported by ANBP to an Ammunition Consolidation Point (ACP) agreed with the Ministry of Defence. The consolidation of disparate ammunition caches in suitably guarded facilities is intended to facilitate the centralized control of stocks of legitimate ammunition types.

All anti-personnel mines found in caches, irrespective of the condition, are destroyed by the implementing partners and a record is maintained. Ammunition which is clarified as unserviceable by the team, based on the technical advice of the implementing partner, is

destroyed at central destruction sites by the implementing partner.

Who are ANBP's implementing partners?

ANBP has two implementing partners the HALO trust and UXB. They have a number of detachments supporting teams in conducting surveys, the movement and destruction of ammunition in all the various regions.

Is this destruction project linked with DIAG?

The overall project is intended as a compliment to other security sector programmes already in place between key

national stakeholders and UN agencies. In particular, the effort is strongly linked with a key Afghan initiative, the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG), which operates in parallel with the Anti-Personnel Mines and Ammunition Stockpile Destruction Programme. DIAG yields stockpiles of mines and ammunition that are handled within this project.

By July 22 2006, 24,182 heavy and light weapons, 20,935 pieces of boxed and 196,840 pieces of unboxed ammunition have been handed over to and verified by ANBP/DIAG collection teams in Afghanistan.

UNDP's Afghanistan Information Management Services receives honours for exceptional work using GIS technology

UNDP's Afghanistan Information Management Services (AIMS) has been recognized for excellence in the geographic information system (GIS) field with a 2006 Special Achievement in GIS (SAG) award at the Twenty-sixth Annual ESRI International User Conference in San Diego, California.

ESRI, the world leader in GIS software, presents the award to organizations and agencies that display dedication and commitment through their use of GIS technology. The winners of the award are chosen out of more than 150,000 organizations worldwide. "The SAG awards celebrate the

achievement and vision of innovators in the GIS field," said Jack Dangermond, ESRI president. "Each winner brings benefits to their communities and influences others to do the same."

A GIS is a collection of computer hardware, software, and geographic data for capturing, managing, analyzing, and displaying all forms of geographically referenced information. With a GIS, users can link information to location data such as people to addresses, buildings to parcels, or streets within a network. This innovative technology enables users to layer the information and present a visual representation for analysis that leads to more informed decisions and a better understanding of their communities, businesses, and the environment.

AIMS introduces GIS technology to UN agencies, governments, non-government organizations, international non-governmental organizations, and the public in Afghanistan. The organization works diligently to spread the benefits of GIS throughout Afghanistan by providing map products, on the job training, and mentoring and advisory services.

Some of the other organizations being honoured at the 2006

User Conference include: The Royal Court, Kingdom of Bahrain; USGS National Wetlands Research Centre; Geological Survey of Austria; City of Philadelphia Mayor Office; Library of Congress; Nova Scotia Community College Centre of Geographic Sciences; Missouri Botanical Gardens; and Charlotte County, Florida.



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AIMS

Project goals

The AIMS mandate is to deliver high-quality information management services and products to increase the government's effectiveness, performance, and capacity and to develop a skilled national information management systems workforce throughout Afghanistan. One of the major goals of AIMS is to develop GIS and MIS capacity in the Afghan Government.

AIMS has been conducting a series of workshops and seminars for awareness on GIS and its benefits to the government and the humanitarian community.

Business problems solved

Almost three decades of war have contributed to the collapse of state institutions, mass migration of manpower, poor economic growth, poor information management practices, lack of requisite technical skills, lack of the enabling environments in the form of skills, training, hardware and software. AIMS has positioned itself in building a sustained information management infrastructure in the Government of Afghanistan through the use of geospatial technology solutions, trainings, advisory and consultancy services. Most ministries now boast a GIS lab fully equipped with staff trained in GIS (ESRI Software) and envisioned in projects enabling GIS to be used in problem solving and decision making.



Technology implemented

Initially AIMS used ArcView 3.x in the training of Government of Afghanistan and other development actors. Most of the ministries in Afghanistan have been using ArcView3.x with plans to migrate to ArcGIS suite of software. Few of the ministries have already migrated to ArcGIS. Those ministries that have not migrated to ArcGIS are still provided with support using the ArcView platform.

AIMS has already migrated from ArcView 3.x to ArcGIS software over a year ago and has an ESRI certified ArcGIS trainer.

Development team biography

The GIS department of AIMS is made up of two major sections: GIS Projects and GIS Training.

The GIS Projects team is led by GIS Projects Manager Mr. Ahmad Khalid Amini who has been working in this field for the past 8 years. The team consists of two GIS Assistants and three GIS Technicians. The GIS Training Team is led by GIS Training Manager Mr. Ali Ahmad Wali, an ESRI certified ArcGIS instructor who is a well known face in the GIS community in the country with more than 15 years experience in the field of GIS.

UNDP Afghanistan supports civil society participation in regional strategic events

By Abdul Basir Stanikzai, National Programme Associate, UNDP

UNDP Afghanistan is committed to supporting Afghan Civil Society Organizations as one of the key areas under its Good Governance Programme. This includes supporting Civil Society participation in policy and programme dialogues at the country level, inviting their voice in the design and implementation of UNDP programmes and projects and supporting their participation in regional and international strategic events.

The UNDP Country Office

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supported the participation of delegates from two organizations to attend regional events in Mongolia and Indonesia held at the end of July 2006.

A delegation of three members representing the Independent Human Rights Commission, the Foundation of Civil Society and Culture and Civil Society for the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) participated in the three-day *Asian Civil Society Forum for Democracy* in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. The objectives of the workshop were to evaluate the state of the democratization and pro-democracy movements in the Asia-Pacific region, analyze

the challenges that they are facing, assess the strengths and weaknesses of the pro-democracy civil society movements in the Asia-Pacific region and define ways of promoting further their interaction, increasing their effectiveness and subsequently establishing regional and

international Civil Society Networks in the areas of common interest to share experiences and lessons learned.

A further delegation of four people, a Civil Society representative, an ANDS member (financed by ADB) and two UNDP



staff, attended a two-day workshop on *Promoting Transparency and Accountability of Local Governance and Deterring Corruption in Public Contracting and Procurement* in Bali, Indonesia. The objectives of this workshop were to present an overview on the status of corruption in public contracting and procurement with special focus on the local government levels in Asia and Europe, discuss initiatives to promote transparency and accountability of local governments and deterring corruption in public contracting, promote information exchanges and networking among participants and finalize a Training Manual on Promoting Transparency and Accountability in Public Contracting.

The members of both delegations contributed actively to the workshop and engaged in dialogues on related matters. "I successfully led one roundtable discussion in Mongolia workshop on the issues of how CSOs can monitor Government programmes and projects," said Dr. Niazi a member of the delegation to Mongolia and representative from FCCS. "I think the registration of the Afghan CSOs with the Asian Civil Society Forum for Democracy was a great achievement for Afghanistan."

"For me it was a new experience learning about new and modern tools to prevent corruption and enhance accountability and transparency in procurement, such as E-Procurement and Integrity Pacts," said Mr. Aziz Rafiee a member of the delegation to Indonesia and representative from ACSF.

The main achievements from these regional events:

Mongolia:

The delegation to Mongolia highlighted that for Afghanistan it was a great success to have been registered with ACSFD (Asian Civil Society Forum for Democracy)

In the course of the Civil Society workshop in Mongolia, Afghanistan was selected as a pilot for the monitoring project (the idea is that Asian Countries should develop a monitoring network or mechanism to help the CSOs of each country to monitor government projects and programmes). It was agreed among the participants of the workshop that a pilot project will be initiated in Afghanistan. Afghan Civil Society Organizations will be helped to monitor government activities in the country. For this initiative, the former South Korean President has pledged financial support and based on these experiences and lessons learnt, other countries could initiate their own projects.

The members of the Mongolia delegation were registered for the upcoming International Civil society Forum for Democracy (ICSFD) event that will take place in Doha, Qatar, in early November, with financial support from the Qatar government. Afghan CSOs will also be registered as a member in that event.

Indonesia:

The delegation to Indonesia established the foundations for a strategic partnership with an Asian Development Bank and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development initiative.

The delegation to Indonesia established networks with civil society partners and anti-corruption initiatives in the region.

Some initial agreements were reached with Transparency International and some of its regional chapters to explore their support to Afghan CSOs with a particular focus to provide capacity building and exchange of experiences.

An initial agreement with UNDP HQ was made that Afghanistan should be considered as one of the potential "guinea pigs" for a new procurement capacity self assessment methodology that is being developed in joint venture between UNDP and World Bank

Foundations for a partnership with the TI Malaysian chapter were laid for them to provide support and training opportunities through their Integrity Institute

UNDP together with both delegation members prepared a reporting back session on August 14 2006 hosted by ACSF for the rest of the CSOs and their network members to share the acquired knowledge and experience to the greater extent so that they can utilize the information and further disseminate it even to the provincial level.

UNDP's support to the Civil Society actors continues to be very important and will be reflected in upcoming new good governance projects, such as the Civil Society Empowerment Project, the Anti-corruption Project, and the UN Joint Youth Programme, among others.



HIV/AIDS epidemic among Afghan Injecting Drug Users – A precursor to a larger epidemic?

In a second feature story, as the 16th International AIDS Conference ended in Toronto, Canada, Rezaul Karim, Consultant to UNDP Afghanistan and the National HIV/AIDS Control Programme, looks at the growing threat in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is not free from HIV/AIDS. The blood bank screening system first detected it in 1989. Since then and due to war and to the lack of surveillance and reporting systems, very little is known about the spread of HIV/AIDS. The blood banks and the four Voluntary Confidential Counselling and Testing Centres (VCCT) established in 2005 are the only sources of information on HIV/AIDS incidences and prevalence in the country. Information so far available is not representative enough of all of Afghanistan, as it covers only those people and groups who visited the testing centres. However, the information now available does provide sufficient clues to an emerging HIV/AIDS epidemic in Afghanistan.

Blood Banks: Between 1989 and 2005, a total of 72 HIV/AIDS positive (rapid test only and without confirmatory tests) cases were detected out of 126,297 samples of potential blood donors in the country (there are 54 confirmed HIV/AIDS cases in Afghanistan). Highly significant here are the following characteristics of those who tested positive: 42% were returnees from Pakistan, Iran and abroad; 58% were from

within Afghanistan; more than 19% were female and nearly 46% of them were from Kabul (Source: *Draft Strategic Plan 2006-2010 National HIV/AIDS Control Programme Office*). January-July 2006 information is not publicly available.

Kabul Voluntary Confidential Counselling Testing Centres (VCCT): Established in 2005 the confidential separate registries are maintained for Injecting Drug Users (IDUs), sex workers and other clients. During 2005 the centres confirmed HIV/AIDS in 3.5% of the IDUs (total = 338) and 0.94% in all other clients tested (total = 317) (Source: *Draft Strategic Plan 2006-2010 National HIV/AIDS Control Programme Office*). January-July 2006 information is not publicly available.

In spite of the data limitations, the emergent trend from the above is clear and alarming: a concentrated epidemic is now well established in the drug users community in Kabul. International experiences show that the infection spreads very fast within this community.

But just how fast? Consider a few examples: In Manipur India, infection rates jumped rapidly among the IDUs from 1% in 1988 to 56% in 1995 (Source: *SAARC Tuberculosis Centre, HIV/AIDS in the SAARC Region, 2004 Update, Nepal*). In Vietnam, the national HIV/AIDS prevalence among the IDUs rose from 10.1% in 1996 to 32% in 2002 (Source: *Nguyen, Tran Hien et al: "HIV/AIDS Epidemics in Vietnam: Evolution and Response", AIDS Education and Prevention, Vol: 16, Issue: Supplement A, June 2004*). The infection inevitably crosses over

from the infected IDUs to the general population through their sex partners. It is only a matter of time.

How worrisome is the HIV/AIDS epidemic outbreak in the Kabul IDU community? For an idea we can look at the situation in Iran. According to A Brief Overview of the Status of Drug Abuse in Iran: "The Iranian Domestic Committee on AIDS estimated that more than 60,000 HIV-positive individuals are present in the nation. Current estimates claim that 60–70% of HIV transmission has been due to needle sharing in IDUs. Thus, the problem of HIV in Iran is primarily a problem of drug abuse."

Hence, the situation in Kabul and in the IDU communities in Afghanistan is both significant and is alarming. Consider some of the facts: A minimum of 7,500 IDUs (Afghanistan Drug Use Survey 2005) and up to 19,000 (unpublished internal aid agency report) are present in Afghanistan; Low literacy, low awareness of HIV/AIDS and low safe injecting and sexual practices among the IDUs; Difficulties in reaching out to the IDUs with services (if and when available) due to stigma, marginalization and the underground nature associated with drug use and with injecting.

Resources are poor too. The various services such as VCCT, drop in centres and needle syringe exchange has limited scope and coverage. Programmes and outreach for information, education, counselling and condom distribution are rare. Indeed only a few hundred IDUs are currently being reached by all the available programmes and services combined in the

country.

At another level there's a lack of a clear government policy, of programmes and services and a lack of sufficient financial, programmatic and technical capacities on the part of the implementing NGOs to scale up the services to the high risk groups, to reduce the harm, to contain the infection and to make an impact.

The next steps are clear. There needs to be a better understanding of what is going on through both nation wide behavioural and serological surveillances and policy and decision-support studies covering the IDUs and other known high risk groups. Coordinated policies are needed, decisive action and without delay, resource allocation and targeted and comprehensive programmes and services. Capacity building of the implementing partners, civil society organisations and of the affected communities should be stepped up. And resilience building and empowerment of the affected high risk groups and communities must be started. Finally the building of an environment where the HIV/AIDS threat is acknowledged, where broad based and high level support to combating HIV/AIDS is generated, where the social prejudice and stigma associated with HIV/AIDS and with the high risk groups is gradually removed.



UNV Highlighted: Nicky Rieger, Urban Development Group Regional Manager, Jalalabad

Sitting cross-legged on the floor, surrounded by my national engineers and a high number of village elders, sharing a joke here and there and enjoying a special lunch prepared for us by the community in recognition of our visit, what is pleasing me most is not the heart-warming hospitality with which we are being received, nor the words of acknowledgement and thanks which the elders have so graciously bestowed upon me just now.Rather, what is making my day is the fact that the channels and wells which the labourers have been excavating, cleaning and securing for the past month are already yielding 50% more water than before-and all that even though the project is only 30% complete. This will mean that the farmers can irrigate more land, that women and children will not have to walk as far anymore to get water for washing, cooking and cleaning, that refugees returning from abroad will want to rediscover their villages because they will be able to farm there, and that livestock can be given the water they need to survive. Moments like this, the happiness about an achievement made through the cooperation with other staff, government officials and, of course, the community, little successes along the way which I know can make a difference in people's lives for decades to come, always make my day, even month, and give me energy even when the going gets tough here in Afghanistan.

For me as a UNV here in Jalalabad, the capital city of the Eastern Region of Afghanistan, there is no such a thing as a typical week, given how versatile and broad our work remit really is: UNDP's Urban Development Group (UDG) implements a series of infrastructure projects in Jalalabad city and in 4 rural districts, in support of FAO's projects to support income generation through farming activities. All of these will help improve urban and

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rural infrastructure, accessibility to markets and economic opportunity and health and hygiene in both the city and in the villages. My role as a regional manager of this exciting programme is therefore varied and extremely interesting. This week alone, I have been involved in activities as diverse as a training workshop on planning monitoring and evaluation issues for government officials; meetings with community development committees in the rural districts to conduct joint monitoring of our projects; meetings with the mayor and governor of Jalalabad to define sites and designs for a new market area and a slaughter-house while monitoring infrastructure projects which we are currently implementing; participation in inter-agency and security management team meetings; interviews with our site labourers, all of whom are returnees or ex-combatants, to define what impact our cash-for-works programme is having on their lives; a recruitment process to hire two new support staff for our office, and meetings with my staff team to address challenges that have

occurred in our work during the week and to encourage them in their work. One of the additional challenges ahead will be to keep them motivated and hopeful as we approach the end of our project funding, and I do hope that we will receive another grant which will allow us to implement more programmes for the benefit of the Afghan people and to continue working and growing together as a team.

I have been here for over 10 months now, but still, through each and every one of my daily activities, I learn something new every day: about Afghanistan and its people; about the country's past and its future needs on the path to reconstruction and development; about the way the Afghans think, the way they act; about the struggle to re-build social and political structures; about urban development and technical issues; and about myself and how I interact with people, react to situations and challenges. In so many ways, I feel



Private sector supports people with disabilities

UNDP's National Programme for Action on Disability (NPAD) is helping people with disabilities get into business with the help of the private sector in Afghanistan.

On August 14 2006 NPAD hosted a half day workshop which included the distribution of ten kiosks, donated by the Coca Cola Company, to people with disabilities in Kabul. The workshop also advised on the proper management and running of those kiosks.

NPAD is encouraging the private sector in

Afghanistan to take up a moral and social responsibility to enhance the lives of disadvantaged Afghans, including those with various forms of impairments. Working with Afghan Ability, which encourages people with disabilities to get into business, NPAD is lobbying to get the private sector more involved in widening the livelihood opportunities and choices for disabled people in Afghanistan.

This collaborative venture will be carried out with ABRAR (Afghan Amputee Bicyclists for Rehabilitation and Recreation), a national NGO, which will provide US\$ 4000 as non-interest loans to the ten kiosk beneficiaries to buy the

goods that they will be selling in the. Each kiosk will be staffed by two people with disabilities who will each receive US\$ 400 to help start up the running of their businesses.

Mr. Mirwais Syal from the Coca Cola Company expressed his optimism that the initiative will be a success and serve as an impetus to encourage other private companies to positively include disabled people in their operations. He called on Kabul Municipality and other relevant authorities to ensure that the kiosks are well served with water and electricity.

Mr. Waisuddin Seraj, Advisor to the Ministry of Martyrs, Disabled and Social

Affairs said: "This is an excellent initiative by Coca Cola and ABRAR and as a government we want to encourage other enterprises to emulate their example. Disability is a huge challenge in Afghanistan and neither the government nor UN agencies can comprehensively address it alone. We need every body on board."



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that I am receiving so much more here than I could ever give back.....

.....I must have been day-dreaming as I am torn from my thoughts by a muffled giggle behind me. A group of village children has just gathered from nowhere—little boys in shorts with cheeky grins, shy little girls who cover their faces with their scarves as soon as I look at them directly.... One little lad is more brave and steps out to give me a cup of that lovely *chai* which Afghans serve you everywhere you go and which breaks barriers, creates bonds between strangers. And I am reminded of one other important lesson I learn here every day....when I drive along and look out of the car window, when I visit the women in their houses and no male translator is allowed to go with me or, on more rare occasions, when I walk around the city busy monitoring our project sites....a lesson about the value of a smile, a distant wave or a wink when all other communication fails.

UNDP Afghanistan: working with the government to develop the parliament, the civil service and Afghan sign language

By Dominic Medley, Media Relations Officer, UNDP

The end of 2005 saw the opening of Afghanistan's parliament, the first in decades. By the early months of 2006 the nation watched with amazement as the new parliamentarians flexed their political muscles. Millions of Afghans were gripped by the live TV questioning of President Karzai's nominated ministers. Here was democracy in action as the new members of parliament found their political way and developed their checks and balances on the executive institutions of Afghanistan.

Behind the scenes one of the most important projects of the United Nations Development Programme in Afghanistan has been slowly but surely working away at the parliament. The SEAL project (Support to the Establishment of the Afghan Legislature), with a budget of more than US\$ 15 million and a duration of two years, aims to support the activities of the parliament, its members and staff, with training and equipment so that an effective legislature can take shape in Afghanistan.

Members of both houses (the Meshrano and Wolsei Jirgas, upper and lower houses) have attended substantial training courses, seminars and workshops both in Kabul and abroad. A survey of assembly members in late 2005 indicated a strong desire for English language and computer classes

and the chance to travel abroad. The secretariat of the parliament has also received training as have accredited assembly journalists. A parliamentary library and other essential equipment such as computers, cameras and microphones have all been bought and put into place.

During the recent recess of the parliament the UNDP's SEAL project organised a number of events for members to meet their electorate back home in the constituencies. In Wardak, Bamiyan and Konduz parliamentarians met representatives from civil society organisations, the media and their electorate. The recess period of outreach was launched across ten provinces so that the electorate outside Kabul could begin to understand the parliamentary process that is taking shape in Afghanistan.

In the centre of government UNDP has traditionally played a lead role in building up Afghanistan's institutions so that they will continue to function as a normal governmental bureaucracy in the future. A recently announced US\$ 10.6 million agreement with the Asia Foundation will see further support to the development of the central executive institutions involving the Office of the President of Afghanistan. The project will strengthen the Office of Administrative Affairs, the Council of Ministers Secretariat, and the Presidential Chief of Staff Office's capacity by upgrading their organizational structures, procedures, office

equipment and facilities, information technology, and policy coordination processes.

In the wider government institutions UNDP is laying the groundwork for the future leaders of Afghanistan. Some 550 top civil servants are going through a two and a half year process of Civil Service Leadership Training. The aim is to consolidate the implementation of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy but also to identify younger staff who show potential. 150 interns, 50 of them female are also attending training and getting experience from working in various ministries.

UNDP has always been at the forefront of advocating for change and to help people build

change and to help people build a better life. Of all the countries in the world, and after three decades of turmoil, Afghanistan presents one of the major challenges to development. With all the major projects the smaller ones must not be overlooked.

War in Afghanistan has created a population dramatically affected by trauma and disability. Estimates suggested two million people may have a physical disability of some sort. This figure excludes those who have some sort of mental trauma, perhaps from something they witnessed or the high level of domestic violence.

It is a major role of the United Nations worldwide to encourage and ensure that everyone has the chance to play an active role



in their society. In Afghanistan this is even more important than ever following the restrictions the Taliban regime imposed. Perhaps some 75% of children with disabilities don't attend school; 80% of people with disabilities are unemployed.

UNDP's National Programme for Action on Disability (NPAD) is targeting a powerful voice in the country. To be a war victim in Afghanistan can earn respect; many parliamentarians, minister and leading members of society have some form of disability. But all too often they and others can

be forgotten. Working with the Ministry of Martyrs, Disabled and Social Affairs NPAD is ensuring that people with disabilities and their problems are not pushed aside; that they have a chance for education and employment.

NPAD is also leading the way in the development of Afghanistan's first ever sign language. There are an estimated 10,000 people who are hearing impaired in Afghanistan. That might not be a large number but it is all too easy to forget about them in the

wider development picture. Now the creation of an Afghan sign language is moving forward with new signs and grammar. A Disability Resource Centre has also been opened in Kabul which is fully accessible. This model centre, the first of its kind in Afghanistan, offers a haven for the disabled that will also be built in Jalalabad, Kandahar and Mazar.

Strengthening the parliament, the central institutions of government, the chance for people with disabilities to get involved in a full life in

Afghanistan are just some of the areas UNDP Afghanistan is working on. The UN has been in Afghanistan for 50 years. UNDP has been at the forefront in providing development assistance and helping to build up the institutions of the country. Poverty reduction, democratic governance and crisis prevention and recovery will continue to be the main areas of concern for UNDP Afghanistan.

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United Nations Development Programme, Shah Mahmood Ghazi Watt, Kabul, Afghanistan
tel: +93 (0) 20 212 4000 or +93 (0) 20 212 4076

For more information on any of these stories, or to make contributions, please contact:
Dominic Medley, Media Relations Officer; tel: +93 (0) 70 691 985; email: dominic.medley@undp.org
Samim Yaquby, Webmaster; tel: +93 (0)799 774 044; email: samim.yaquby@undp.org

www.undp.org.af

An Image of Afghanistan

Photo: Nasirudin

