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POST-CONFLICT CONVERGENCE OF DEVELOPMENT PLANNING: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT RELATED MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN AFGHANISTAN

by Belinda Bowling and Dr. Asif Ali Zaidi*

INTRODUCTION

Development was effectively lost in Afghanistan during the period 1979 to 2001: economic growth stagnated, the environmental resource base was severely degraded, millions of people were displaced, and institutional structures were eroded. The sentiment of the Afghan people after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001 is eloquently articulated by former *Washington Post* correspondent Pamela Constable:

Kabul was still an atavistic city of survivors and refugees, toughened by hardship and violence. People had spent years crouching in caves and waiting for the next bomb to shatter the windows. It was a place where each group of liberators had turned into oppressors, where children had learned to shove and kick and cheat and steal to eat, and where everyone had committed or endured shameful acts to survive. Removing the Taliban did not erase the habits or memories burned into a generation. This was a country with few heroes, only survivors, weighed down by boulders of vengeance and greed and traditions. Change would come slowly, if ever; trust would take a generation to rebuild.¹

Today, all Afghans have high expectations of the new government. Two rounds of elections and government programs, such as the National Solidarity Programme, have brought the government to most villages around the country. International support for Afghanistan remains strong. Yet, despite this progress, the most recent Human Development Index still ranked Afghanistan 173 out of 178 nations.²

Afghanistan is an agrarian-based, arid, least developed country; the population of which is highly dependent on environmental resources, in particular natural resources. The effective implementation of Millennium Development Goal (“MDG”) Seven on environmental sustainability is accordingly of particular importance in the context of development planning and poverty reduction.

Afghanistan’s post-conflict development planning – including the domestic implementation of the MDGs – has been fragmented and, to some extent, uncoordinated. However, four years

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after the end of the period of conflict, a move towards more unified development planning is now visible. This is likely to improve Afghanistan’s chance of meeting its goals in relation to environmental sustainability.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

In a country where over 80 percent of the population relies directly on the natural resource base to meet its daily needs, widespread environmental degradation poses an immense threat to livelihoods. More than two decades of conflict, military activities, refugee movements, collapse of national, provincial and local forms of governance, lack of management and institutional capacity, and over-exploitation have heavily damaged Afghanistan’s natural resource base. The recent drought has had an additional negative impact. As a result, the country’s vulnerability to natural disasters and food shortages has increased.

Of Afghanistan’s 655,000 square kilometres of total land area, only twelve percent (7.9 million hectares) is arable and four percent irrigated. An additional 46 percent is under permanent pastures and three percent under forest cover. The remaining 39 percent is mountainous. Geographically, nearly 75 percent of the



Loss of vegetation cover has caused serious erosion across Afghanistan, such as in this village.

arable area is concentrated in three of the eight agricultural planning regions of the country – north, northeast, and west. Of the total arable area, not more than half is actually cultivated annually, primarily because of water availability problems.³

Overall, the natural resource base continues to suffer due to:

- competing land use (agriculture, human settlements, forests and rangeland, wetlands and protected areas);
- ambiguous legal status of ownership and access to natural resources (land, water, forests and rangeland,

biodiversity, wetlands, and protected areas);

- lack of enabling policy, legislation, and regulatory framework for managing natural resources, along with weak governance and management of natural resources; and
- negative impact of war, increasing population, human settlements, drought, overexploitation, and landmines on natural resources.

In the urban environment, humans are being placed at risk by poor waste management practices and lack of proper sanitation, which are the main environmental factors affecting human health, and are a major contributory factor to mortality amongst the Afghan people.⁴

Nearly 75 percent of the urban population may be living in slums. Due to the influx of returning refugees from neighboring states, Afghanistan also has the highest rate of urbanization in Asia at six percent a year, which puts an additional burden on the already weak service delivery in urban areas.⁵

Other challenges for natural resource and environmental management include still insufficient institutional capacities and the current absence of legislation in many areas. Linked to this

will be a source of subsequent conflicts. Environmental degradation in Afghanistan, often the consequence of socio-economic inequities, thus is to be seen as a factor contributing to prevalent insecurity.

This environmental background should be viewed now in the context of Afghanistan's development planning frameworks, the home of MDG Seven on environmental sustainability.

POST-CONFLICT DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

After the fall of the Taliban regime in late 2001, representatives of various Afghan factions met in Bonn, Germany under the auspices of the United Nations to map out Afghanistan's future.⁶ After laborious negotiations, the Bonn Agreement⁷ was signed on December 5, 2001. The Agreement represents a schematic, post-conflict roadmap and timetable for establishing peace and security, reconstructing the country, re-establishing some key institutions, and protecting human rights.

By the beginning of 2002, the United Nations had hurried to align "resources, people and actions behind a common nation-building strategy at the field level."⁸ The National Development Framework, born of the Bonn Agreement, was agreed in April as the strategy to map the country's economic needs and direction. The Framework consists of three pillars: human capital and social protection;⁹ physical infrastructure;¹⁰ and enabling environment for development.¹¹ The document soon became the coordinating document for all international and national actors in the country.

Although none of the pillars of the National Development Framework are concerned with the environment *per se*, the environment is nonetheless recognized as an important cross-cutting issue. In this regard, a structure called the Advisory Group on Environment was established, which had as its primary purpose the mainstreaming of environmental issues into the development agenda by means of input provided and recommendations made to the pillar sub-groups. The success of this structure was, however, regrettably limited.¹²

In 2004, after the endorsement of the Millennium Declaration,¹³ the Government of Afghanistan, in cooperation with its international partners, prepared the *Securing Afghanistan's Future: Accomplishments and the Strategic Path Forward* report. The report sets economic growth targets for Afghanistan that are aligned with the MDGs, but are Afghanistan specific.

The report gave rise to the Afghanistan National Development Strategy ("ANDS"), a five-year strategy that complements the MDGs and which will, in due course, replace the 2002 National Development Framework. Through the ANDS, the government will draft plans for full rural development to benefit the poor, and for the building of infrastructure to manage the country's water, and for providing connections to markets. Although the strategy remains a work-in-progress, it is important to note that environment has been highlighted as one of the key components of Pillar One on infrastructure and natural resources, which would indicate that it has been mainstreamed as a priority issue within the development agenda, in line with the MDG approach.

Confusingly; there are therefore currently three applicable development frameworks for Afghanistan: the Bonn Agreement;



Children collect scrap materials at Qamar Qalla dumpsite in Afghanistan.

is the need to develop sound information programs and monitoring systems, which would allow the government to establish a link between the quality of health and environmental conditions. On the part of the communities, there is a lack of awareness on sound environmental practices, which needs to be addressed simultaneously with the improvement of their livelihoods and economic conditions.

A failure to address environmental degradation would negatively impact the population's health and increase poverty and hunger. Environmental degradation, besides hampering economic growth in the agricultural sector, impacts in a particularly negative way on the lives of the poor. More specifically, female-headed households with physically impaired members, and households of landless or those farming small rain-fed plots only are the most affected. Many of the human rights of these people are not fulfilled due to environmental degradation; not least, the right to life. Economic development that leaves out the poor and enhances distributive injustices is not sustainable and

the National Development Framework; and the nascent ANDS.¹⁴

Most signatories to the 2001 Millennium Declaration were able to integrate the MDGs within a short time into their five-year development plans. However, for reasons set out above, this standard approach has not been possible for most post-conflict countries, including Afghanistan.¹⁵

ACHIEVEMENT OF MDG GOAL SEVEN

MDG Goal Seven focuses on environmental priorities related to sustainable development and poverty reduction. The Global MDG Goal Seven framework includes three targets and eight indicators for monitoring the status of forest cover, biodiversity protection, energy use, emissions of carbon dioxide and consumption of ozone depleting substances, use of solid fuels, access to safe drinking water and sanitation systems, and access to secure tenure.

The lack of baseline data on environmental indicators, such as forest cover, protected areas, energy use, and carbon dioxide emissions, and the shorter period of time within which

ed to complement those baseline years for which data exists. In addition, some of the indicators have a 2020 achievement target, rather than a 2015 one.

A further obstacle is that aid assistance from donor countries has been spent primarily on security and democratization. Development is the poor third cousin. Within the development sector itself, most donors do not see the environment as a priority, notwithstanding that Afghanistan is an agrarian-dependent country, the natural resources of which most Afghans depend for their livelihoods. Regrettably, a mere fraction of the national development budget has been allocated directly to the environment.¹⁶

Instability in relation to environmental governance has also been an obstacle to the achievement of environmental sustainability. The environment mandate is a new one, introduced only in 2002, when the interim government was constituted. In May 2005, the mandate was transferred from the former Ministry of Irrigation, Water Resources, and Environment to the newly established National Environmental Protection Agency (“NEPA”), a standalone agency that reports directly to the

President. The sector mandates for water, energy, agriculture, minerals, forestry, biological diversity, public health, urban planning, water, waste and sanitation services, and the like are split amongst the line ministries, unfortunately sometimes with a degree of overlap. Like most fledgling institutions, NEPA now requires time to establish itself properly within the new government structure, and to determine the nature of its relationship with these relevant line ministries.

The absence of any environmental policy or regulatory framework has also contributed towards paralyzing government efforts to achieve environmental sustainability. The imminent promulgation of the Environment Act, framework environmental legislation for Afghanistan, will go some way towards alleviating this development encumbrance, however. In addition to vesting NEPA with institutional identity and regulating the relationships between different government actors in the environment

sector, the Act also sets out frameworks for biodiversity and natural resource conservation and management, water resource conservation and management, integrated environmental management (including environmental impact assessment), pollution prevention and control, and environmental information and education. Importantly, the Act also contains the compliance and enforcement provisions required to allow NEPA to effectively enforce the Act.

Donor-funded, environment focused programs, which will hopefully assist the government in the achievement of the MDG Goal Seven indicators, also exist. The United Nations Environment Programme (“UNEP”) is assisting the government to develop an integrated policy, regulatory, and institutional

Figure One: Afghanistan’s current targets and indicators for MDG Seven

Target	Indicator	Baseline year	Baseline value	2015 target	2020 target
9. Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies.	25. Proportion of land area covered by forest	1993	2.1%		
	26. Ratio of area protected to maintain biological diversity to surface area	2004	0.34%	0.5%	
	27. Energy use (kg oil equivalent) per US\$1,000 GDP	2005		TBD	
	28. Carbon dioxide emissions (per capita) and consumption of ozone depleting CFCs	2004	TBD	TBD	TBD
	29. Proportion of population using solid fuels	2003	100% (rural areas)	90% rural and 80% urban	
10. Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation.	30. Proportion of population with sustainable access to an improved water source, urban and rural	2003	23%	23%	61.5%
	31. Proportion of population with access to improved sanitation, urban and rural	2003	12%		66%
11. By 2020 to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.	32. Proportion of households with access to secure tenure	2005	TBD		

Afghanistan ought to attain the MDGs (owing to the late adoption of the Millennium Declaration) are two obstacles Afghanistan faces in achievement of Goal Seven. Without data one cannot set targets, many have argued. All data that did exist was in the hands of international organizations, not the government, and much of it pre-dated the 1979 Soviet invasion. Even if the data were robust, the Government would encounter significant hurdles in meeting those targets within the shorter period of twelve years.

Accordingly, the Government has “Afghanized” the MDGs and defined the globally agreed objectives into country specific targets, which balance ambition with realism and incorporate national development priorities. As can be seen from Figure One, the baseline years for each Goal Seven indicator has been amend-

framework (the cornerstone of which is the Environment Act), which will encourage sustainable use and management of natural resources and conservation and rehabilitation of the environment. This framework may be used as the roadmap for achievement of Target Nine, namely integration of the principles of sustainable development into country policies. UNEP is also assisting the government in implementing the multilateral environmental agreements to which Afghanistan is a Party, most notably – for the purposes of MDG Seven – the Climate Change Convention (relating to carbon emissions) and the Montreal Protocol on Ozone Depleting Substances, which will similarly assist in the achievement of this target. Significant investments

are also being made in reforestation initiatives and renewable energy. Other UN agencies, in particular UN Habitat, are assisting the government to achieve Targets Ten and Eleven.

CONCLUSION

In the four years since the demise of a quarter century of war and conflict, the achievement of a single development planning framework for Afghanistan that meets its own unique needs, environmental and otherwise, and also meets its international obligations (including those under the Millennium Declaration) is within reach. Although achievement by 2015 of the MDG on sustainable development is unlikely, significant progress towards its realization is now almost a certainty. 

ENDNOTES: Post-Conflict Convergence of Development Planning

¹ PAMELA CONSTABLE, *FRAGMENTS OF GRACE: MY SEARCH FOR MEANING IN THE STRIFE OF SOUTH ASIA* 219 (Brassey's Inc: Dulles, Virginia 2004).

² UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME, *AFGHANISTAN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT* (Feb. 2005).

³ UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME, *AFGHANISTAN POST-CONFLICT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT* (Jan. 2003).

⁴ UNITED NATIONS HABITAT, *Meeting Notes* (2005).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Unlike in Kosovo and East Timor, in which countries the organization had provided peacekeeping forces and served as *de facto* government, the United Nations adopted a “light footprint” strategy in Afghanistan.

⁷ Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Reestablishment of Permanent Government Institutions, dated 5 December 2001, endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 1383 (2001).

⁸ Mark Malloch-Brown, UNDP Administrator at the time, speaking to the UN Economic and Social Council in New York, 18 April 2002.

⁹ This includes sub-groups on refugees and internally displaced persons, education and vocational training, health and nutrition, livelihood and social protection, and culture, media, and sport.

¹⁰ This includes sub-groups on transport, natural resources management, urban management, and energy, mining, and telecommunications.

¹¹ This includes sub-groups on trade and investment, public administration and economic management, justice, national police, law enforcement and stabilization, Afghan National Army, mine action and disarmament, demobilization,

and reintegration.

¹² UNEP's experience was that the Advisory Group model, despite significant efforts, failed to successfully achieve environmental mainstreaming. Although inputs were prepared for submission to the sub-groups, no pressure was brought to bear by the government to incorporate or take account of the recommendations.

¹³ Afghanistan endorsed the Millennium Declaration in March 2004.

¹⁴ Added to this complex web of post-conflict development planning is the World Bank and IMF's requirement that Afghanistan develop a poverty reduction strategy paper. This document describes a country's macroeconomic, structural, and social policies and programs to promote growth and reduce poverty, as well as associated external financing needs. The Government of Afghanistan intends to use the ANDS as the basis for satisfying this requirement. Furthermore, the ANDS will be developed to complement the Post-Bonn Agreement—the sunset of the Bonn Agreement is nigh, and the international community, representing donor countries, has indicated that Afghanistan is not yet at the point where it can become a regular aid consortium country. Accordingly, the Government of Afghanistan intends to enter into a follow-up agreement, and has requested the United Nations Secretary-General to spearhead the post-Bonn process.

¹⁵ Palestine, in respect of which the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation signed the Oslo Accords in September 1993, has encountered similar difficulties.

¹⁶ Afghanistan National Development Budget, *available at* www.af/mof/budget (last visited Nov. 4, 2005).