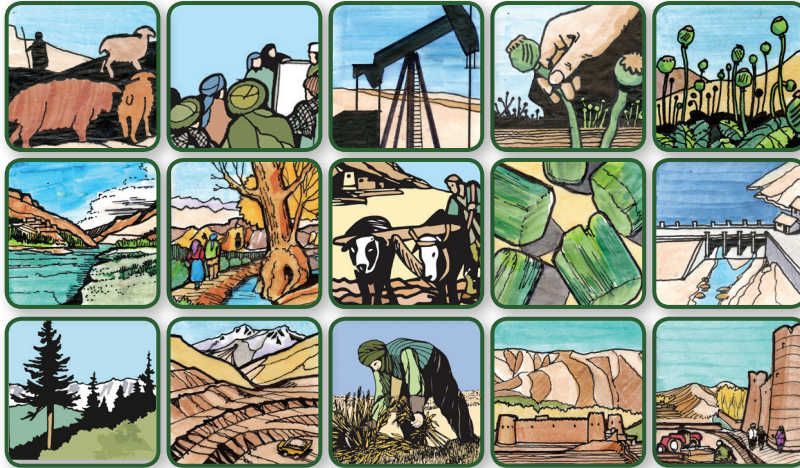


NATURAL RESOURCES, PEACE, AND CONFLICT IN AFGHANISTAN



Natural resource management in Afghanistan is a complex, sensitive, and political issue. Afghanistan's natural resources – its land, water, forests, and mineral deposits – are critical to the country's prospects for a peaceful and prosperous future. While international attention focuses on the country's ongoing conflict with anti-government armed groups, numerous other conflicts around the country occur at different scales and intensities. Natural resources often underlie these conflicts, and disputes over land and water are the most frequently reported reasons for violent conflict in the country. At its heart, effective natural resource management is a form of conflict prevention, and through this lens UNEP is researching the peace-building challenges and opportunities across Afghanistan's land, water, forest, drug, and extractive sectors.

AFGHANISTAN'S NATURAL RESOURCES

Land: Recent surveys identify land as the primary cause of violent conflict in Afghanistan, which is exacerbated by ine-qualities in land ownership, ethnic tensions over land access, insufficient land reform initiatives, disparities in land valuation, and population growth.

Water: Water gives land its value, and predictable and sufficient rains are essential for the agricultural and pastoral livelihoods on which most of the population relies; however, irrigation net-works and water storage capacity have been severely degraded by decades of underinvestment, conflict, and inadequate management.

Extractives: Recent geological surveys estimate the value of Afghanistan's mineral resources at USD 1-3 trillion, and the government and international community see this sector as the best engine for the country's economic growth and the achievement of fiscal self-sufficiency. However, the country's economic prospects rest on whether these resources can be extracted in a responsible and transparent managed for the benefit of all Afghans.

Forests: Afghanistan's forests produce the country's most important renewable resources (firewood, timber, tree crops, and fodder), contribute to the livelihoods of millions of people, and provide essential ecosystem services. However, decades of conflict and illegal logging have reduced Afghanistan's forests to just 2 percent of the country's total land cover.

Drugs: Afghanistan is the world's largest producer of opium (generating roughly 90 percent of global supply), the leading producer of cannabis resin (hashish), and the global center of heroin production. Insecurity and drug trade are mutually reinforcing, which has led to distorted politics, increased corruption, and criminalized a segment of the population and economy, as well as facilitated the exploitation of other natural resources.

NRM Recommendations to the International Community:

- Build environmental impact assessments (EIAs) and conflict-sensitive approaches into development and humanitarian interventions.
- Build national capacity to implement best practices for natural resource management and public participation in decision-making, planning, and implementation.
- Encourage better data collection and provide warning when risks are detected in development and humanitarian interventions.
- Support third-party mediation in natural resource dispute resolution, both regionally and nationally.
- Build international awareness of natural resource management issues in Afghanistan and catalyze funding to forestall emerging resource conflicts.

