



2002-2021

Afghanistan

*Building Environmental Resilience
and Sustainability in Afghanistan*

An aerial photograph of a mountain valley. In the foreground, a river flows through a lush green valley, flanked by terraced fields and small settlements. The middle ground shows a dense cluster of buildings, likely a village, situated on a slope. The background is dominated by high, rugged mountains with patches of snow or light-colored rock, under a clear blue sky. The entire image has a blue-green color overlay.

Acknowledgements

UNEP's work in Afghanistan was possible due to the strong partnerships with the National Environmental Protection Agency as well as the Ministry of Agriculture Irrigation and Livestock, Ministry of Water and Energy, Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority, Academia, particularly the Universities of Kabul and Bamyan; partners on the ground such as the Afghanistan Resilience Consortium, Aga Khan Foundation and the Wildlife Conservation Society; and funding support from the Global Environment Facility, the European Commission and the governments of UK, USA, Korea, Finland, Estonia among others; and also very importantly the communities we worked with.

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Bamyan Province, @ Alec Knuerr

Front Cover image: Bird's eye view across the Wakhan Corridor @ Matthieu Paley

Back Cover image: Local leaders, environment, and peace-building @ Najeeb Azad, UNEP, 2015

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An aerial photograph of a mountain valley. In the foreground, there are green terraced fields and a river. The middle ground shows a valley with a river and some buildings. The background features large, rugged mountains under a blue sky with white clouds. The entire image has a blue tint.

“Decades of conflict coupled with recurrent extreme weather events have had devastating impacts on the people of Afghanistan as well as the natural environment. Starting with a Post Conflict Environmental Assessment in 2001, UNEP provided technical and normative support to the government of Afghanistan in strengthening environmental governance and piloted projects with local communities to build their resilience to natural hazards and climate change.”

Mohammad Hasnain
Country Programme Manager, UNEP, 2019-2021

Shigal district of Kunar Province, @Esmat Tarhan, 2021.

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1. CONTEXT

Building Environmental Resilience and Sustainability in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a landlocked, and mountainous country in South and Central Asia with an area of 647,500 square kilometers and a projected population of about 40 million. Afghanistan has an arid and semi-arid continental climate with cold winters and hot summers. The climate varies substantially from one region to another due to dramatic changes in topography. The wet season generally runs from winter through early spring, but the overall country is dry, falling within the Desert or Desert Steppe climate classification. In terms of human development, Afghanistan is ranked 169 out of 189 countries, which reveals the profound difficulty the country faces in seeking to advance the well-being of its citizens. A large percentage of the population is living with extreme poverty and is the most vulnerable to the climatic hazards.

More than three decades of conflict, and the resulting lack of management and protection of natural resources, combined with the impact of a series of droughts, has led to a significant degradation of many ecosystems in Afghanistan. Natural forests, for example, have been extensively degraded due mainly to unchecked logging, unsustainable fuel wood collection and the expansion of agricultural and urban areas. These factors have contributed to the loss of around 50-80% of the national forested area since the 1970s.

Forests are now estimated to occupy less than 1% of county's total area and rangelands are being converted to rain-fed wheat production, exposing such areas to wind and soil erosion.

In addition to the degradation of ecosystems and the loss of natural resources, these factors have also weakened the country's institutional capacity to implement environmental policies, effectively plan for climate change, and take preventative steps to boost the country's adaptive capacity. Eighty percent of Afghanistan's population relies directly on the natural resources base to meet its daily needs; however, poverty and social and economic pressures such as migration, unemployment, and land tenure practices have made Afghans more vulnerable to climate change. More specifically, Afghanistan's dependence on rain-fed agriculture, livestock herding, and dry land farming makes it vulnerable to climate change impacts on water availability.

UNEP's engagement in Afghanistan began in 2002 with a major post-conflict environmental assessment, conducted in conjunction with the Government of Afghanistan and Afghan environmental experts. Published in 2003, the assessment highlighted serious and widespread ecosystem degradation, including lowered water



Band-e Amir National Park, @ Carl Montgomery, 2014.

tables, desiccation of wetlands, widespread loss of vegetative cover, erosion, and loss of wildlife.

This led to a request from the Afghan Government for technical assistance to set up a national environmental agency. UNEP's support has since expanded to focus on rebuilding structures of governance and on addressing urgent environmental and natural resource management issues.

UNEP's Afghanistan programme focused on building environmental resilience and sustainability throughout the country through building the capacity of national institutions for strengthened environmental governance; providing technical assistance in fulfilling Afghanistan's obligations under ratified environmental agreements and conventions; putting in place robust knowledge management and environmental outreach activities; developing and piloting environment and community based natural resources management approaches; and preserving the country's diverse landscape.

The Taliban regained power in Afghanistan in August 2021. The international community has since restricted their involvement in the country to providing critical humanitarian assistance to the people. Engagements with the current government

in power on development issues could resume only if the United Nations decides to recognise the de facto Taliban Administration as the legitimate government of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is currently facing a crumbling economy due to market disruptions, freezing of the central bank reserves and the withdrawal of international development assistance that accounted for around 75% of the public spending. According to estimates, up to 97% of the people are at the risk of universal poverty in the coming months. Alongside the heavy toll of a humanitarian crisis, Afghanistan also continues to face an insidious but no less serious environment crisis, which is likely to exacerbate significantly given the current political and economic situation in the country. Despite some gains over the last two decades, Afghanistan continues to face severe challenges including deforestation and desertification, water insecurity, air pollution, and loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services. The already precarious environment sector is likely to experience further pressures given risks arising from the current situation.

2. OUR WORK

Building Environmental Resilience and Sustainability in Afghanistan

Since 2002, UNEP has supported Afghanistan's environment sector and institutions, including on governance, laws, policies, scientific research, and multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

UNEP has partnered with line ministries in the Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) cluster for developing environmental policies and plans, piloting community-based ecological approaches to building resilience, and upscaling impacts for landscape- and ecosystem-level planning to build resilience to natural hazards and climate change. As a small agency, UNEP has focused on technical science-based work, giving technical and environmental guidance to partners in government, academia, international organizations, and UN agencies.

Focus Areas

- Climate Change

UNEP implemented projects to increase the resilience of vulnerable rural communities and build the capacity of national and local institutions to address climate change risks. In addition, UNEP provided technical support

to the Government of Afghanistan to fulfil its reporting obligations to the UNFCCC through the development of greenhouse gas inventories, capacity building on climate science and diplomacy, and the submission of National Communications and Biennial Update Reports.

- Ecosystem Management

UNEP promoted sustainable management and conservation of ecosystems through policy support, training, advocacy, research, and practical implementation of community-based natural resource management projects.

- Chemicals and Waste

UNEP provided support to the Government of Afghanistan on policy- and decision-making as well as formulation of strategies, action plans and technical reports on chemicals and waste including ozone-depleting substances and persistent organic pollutants.

- Resilience and Disasters

UNEP promoted the implementation of ecosystem-based solutions for climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction through technical support and community-based flagship projects.

Afghan Farmer transplant rice seedling at paddy field in Laghman province, @ Hassan Rezayi, 2021.



- Multilateral Environmental Agreement

UNEP continues to build the capacity and guide the Government of Afghanistan to access, implement and report on multilateral environmental agreements.

Below are brief descriptions of projects UNEP implemented in the country in different areas, including but not limited to climate change, chemicals and waste, biodiversity, ecosystem management, community management of natural resources, resilience and disasters, environmental resources mobilization from funding partners such as GEF, The European Commission, bilateral donors, etc.

Post-conflict environmental assessment: between 2002 and 2003 UNEP's Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch (PCDMB), working closely with the Afghanistan Transitional Government, mobilized 20 Afghan and international experts organized into five teams. Their findings and recommendations were published in 2003 as The Afghanistan Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment Report.

The environmental assessment revealed the severity of Afghanistan's environmental degradation, and warned of a future without water, forests, wildlife, or clean air if these issues were not addressed in reconstruction efforts. The assessment report contained 163 recommendations covering environmental legislation and enforcement, capacity-building, job creation, planning, environmental impact assessment procedures, industry and trade, public participation and education, and participation in international environmental agreements. The report also offered recommendations in relation to water supply, waste, hazardous wastes and chemicals, woodlands and forests, energy, air quality, wildlife and protected areas, desertification, and food and agricultural resources. It also identified concrete actions to rehabilitate specific urban and rural sites.

The environmental data collected during the 2002 assessment was updated in the State of the Environment Report for Afghanistan that was produced in 2008 by the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA), with the assistance of UNEP.

Establishment of a National Environment Protection Agency:

UNEP played a major role in guiding the creation of Afghanistan's institutional infrastructure for the environment – in particular the strengthening of the Department of Environment within the Ministry of Irrigation, Water Resources and Environment – and its eventual establishment, in 2005, as an independent National Environment Protection Agency (NEPA) through the civil service reform related Priority Reform and Restructuring (PRR) processes.

UNEP assisted NEPA in creating the National Environmental Advisory Council, a body of some 300 members that includes provincial and local authorities, religious leaders, and others. UNEP has also assisted in the establishment of the inter-ministerial Committee for Environmental Coordination (CEC), as well as in the development of the National Environmental Strategy of Afghanistan and ensured the integration of environmental considerations into the development process of Afghanistan's National Development Strategy (ANDS).

Whilst NEPA was the primary beneficiary institution during the early years, UNEP also worked closely with the Natural Resources Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, which has 15 the primary mandate for the management of forests, rangelands, protected areas, and wildlife, particularly regarding law and policy, MEAs and community-based natural resource management.

At NEPA's request and under its guidance, UNEP experts have trained and mentored counterpart staff, provided technical assistance and advice on a need basis, and supplied basic office and field equipment. Rather than providing top-down advice, UNEP has adopted a 'learn-by-doing' approach to counterpart staff within NEPA and empowered them to propose and implement Afghan solutions to the problems faced.

National Afghan Ozone Unit (within NEPA):

UNEP supported the creation of the Afghan National Ozone Unit within NEPA in 2004. The Unit has overall responsibility for implementing the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete

the Ozone Layer, through projects on institutional strengthening, a national phase-out plan, training in good refrigeration practices and training for customs officials.

In 2006 the Ozone Depleting Substances Trade Regulations came into force, the Ozone Programme submitted its annual consumption data of ozone depleting substances, and the Afghanistan Ozone Officer was awarded the "Best Implementer Award" by the Ozone Secretariat during the 20th anniversary celebrations and 19th Meeting of the Parties (MOP) of the Montreal Protocol in September 2007.

In cooperation with NEPA, UNEP has organized regional environmental law and policy workshops in all regions of the country in which the UN can safely operate. Their purpose has been to provide relevant stakeholders – government officials, local NGOs, community leaders, and others – with an introduction to environmental law: what it seeks to achieve, and what laws are in the pipeline.

Development of the Environment Law: With help from IUCN, UNEP staff oversaw the drafting of the central framework legislation, the Environment Law, ratified by the Parliament in early 2007. Building on this foundation, UNEP has been assisting with the drafting, consultation, and legislative processing of a community-based forest law; a ground-breaking law on rangeland management; laws on water, hunting and wildlife management, and medicinal plants; and environmental regulations governing ozone, environmental impact assessment, and protected areas.

Technical support to the Natural Resources Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL):

In regard to environmental policy and law, UNEP provided technical support to MAIL to: increase capacity to manage protected areas and enforce natural resource legislation; develop natural resource laws, regulations and policies; aid the establishment and effective functioning of the Protected Areas Central Management Authority under the Environment Law; and develop community-based natural resource legislation for the forestry and rangeland sectors.

Accessing key multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs): UNEP has supported the Government of Afghanistan in accessing MEAs. Focusing initially on selected biodiversity-related conventions, UNEP set up a Steering Committee and a Working Group for each and worked side by side with them to identify priorities, develop methodologies, design pilot projects, produce reports and generally prepare them to take full responsibility as soon as possible. UNEP has provided specific assistance related to: training and technical support to NEPA and the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock in project development, legal harmonization, and reporting related to the implementation of the conventions; fulfilling the administrative obligations of each convention in order to become eligible to receive technical and financial assistance; setting up the appropriate MEA institutional structure within NEPA; preparing a National Capacity Needs Self-Assessment for Global Environmental Management and a National Adaptation Programme of Action for Climate Change related to the MEAs; procedures for accession to additional multilateral environmental agreements, including Ramsar and the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS); developing GEF (Global Environment Facility) projects, including enabling activities under Rio Conventions; ensuring the participation of Afghan officials in various conferences and technical meetings of the conventions; and workshops and training sessions for counterpart staff on specific MEAs.

Developing Environmental Integrated Assessments (EIAs): Environmental impact assessment (EIA) procedures are being used to integrate environmental considerations into Afghanistan's infrastructure projects, from transportation and energy to sanitation and water. EIA can also be applied to protected area management and ecotourism development and can help identify environmentally sensitive areas threatened by expanding settlements and population growth. UNEP has been helping NEPA to integrate EIA within its pollution control and management efforts. A first step was to develop guidelines for screening of projects and an approvals system

for dealing with polluting industries. UNEP has provided training and technical support to NEPA counterpart staff, in both theoretical concepts and knowledge and practical 'hands on' approaches to project implementation. NEPA is now helping other ministries and departments to carry out EIAs for themselves – a prime example of 'learning by doing'.

Development of the Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) for Paris Agreement:

UNEP supported Afghanistan prepare and communicate its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution to the Paris Agreement. Under this specific technical assistance, UNEP has also prepared and supported a delegation of around 16 officials to participate in COP21, to negotiate on climate priorities of the country in Paris Climate Conference. Under the INDC, Afghanistan has communicated a 13.6% of relative reduction in its business-as-usual emissions by 2030, if technical, technological, and financial supports of equivalent to USD 17.5 billion are made available to the country.

Development of the first National Green House Gas (GHG) Inventory Report:

UNEP supported Afghanistan prepare its first National Green House Gas Inventory Report (NIR) in 2019 under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) for the fulfilment of its commitment under Article 4, paragraph 1(a) and Article 12 of the Convention and Decision 1/CP.16. The report provides a detailed and comprehensive description of the trend and the methodologies applied in the greenhouse gas inventory for CO₂, CH₄, N₂O, HFC, PFC, SF₆ and NFH₃. It contains emission data of greenhouse gases by sector for the years 1990 – 2017, as well as detailed information on methodology, emission factors, activity data and other primary data for emission calculations.

The NIR was developed after an extensive consultation process and is a result of UNEP's years of hard work in enabling the country to meet its obligation under various MEAs, particularly

the UNFCCC. To prepare the NIR, UNEP helped NEPA establish a national technical working group, composed of 21 stakeholder institutions across ministries, agencies, academia, research institutes, and the private sector. The NIR will shape the country's future decision-making in terms of both climate change adaptation and mitigation. It will also enable the government to design and implement low emission development strategies and help them keep track of the key emission categories.

Development of the first National Environment Policy:

Even though Afghanistan has adopted regulatory frameworks, including an Environment Law, significant gaps remain, and a need was felt to have an overarching policy for the environment sector that outlines the vision of the government. UNEP, along with UNDP and the EU, thus supported NEPA prepare a draft National Environmental Policy (NEP), an evidence-based policy resulting from a participatory and inclusive process. The NEP was developed through a 'phased approach' between 2019 and 2021, to ensure all challenges and needs were collaboratively considered and prioritized; that all available evidence informed policy options; and that broad and inclusive consultations were undertaken with stakeholders across sectors and regions of the country. After a reparatory phase in 2019 that collected evidence on the gaps, needs, challenges, barriers and opportunities in the Environment Sector, a development phase between 2020 and 2021, engaged a broad range of stakeholders, drawing on national and international expertise, led by a high-level a Steering Committee (SC), with representatives of key ministries and agencies, supported by a Technical Working Group (TWG). Comprehensive consultations were organized both in Kabul and in key provinces of the country and online consultations were also undertaken through the digital channels of NEPA.

The final draft of the policy document was pending approval of the Steering Committee as of 15 August 2021 when the Taliban overthrew the elected government and captured power in Kabul. Once enacted, the National Environmental Policy aims to, mainstream environmental considerations into peace and development planning and decision making in all sectors and at all levels of government; enhance intersectoral and interinstitutional coordination and collaboration on environmental planning and practice; promote innovative approaches for environmental governance and interventions, to ensure a sustainable development path for the country.

Recent projects

OMAID project: Mountain Resilience: Community-based Ecosystem Restoration in a Torrent Catchment of the Pamir Mountains of Afghanistan

UNEP has supported the government of Afghanistan to pilot ecosystem-based approaches to reduce the vulnerability and increase the resilience of mountain societies to natural hazards. The overall objective of this project was to create a replicable demonstration model for community-based ecosystem restoration of relatively small mountain torrent catchments and to improve livelihoods through rebuilding natural capital and optimizing ecosystem services to minimize the impacts of natural hazards.

Under this project around 90 hectares of degraded lands are rehabilitated, around 150 000 trees are planted, 125 households are provided with the solar water heaters to reduce pressure on natural resources, an alluvial fan is corrected with establishment of a flood protection dike, an irrigation canal to allow reforestation over 100 hectares of land, is reconstructed and a Community-based Natural Resources Management Committee is established.



OMAID Torrent Catchment Project: 3D Mapping, Afghanistan, @Haris Sherzad, UNEP, 2020

FREESIA project: Forest Restoration for Enhanced Ecosystem Services Functioning in Afghanistan:

Funded by the Republic of Korea, UNEP implemented this project in collaboration with its implementing partners, the Aga Khan Foundation and Seoul National University. The overall objective of the project was “to improve environmental decision-making based on a better understanding of the impact of human actions on ecosystems and the social context that drives those actions”. The project’s expected impact was to increase the resilience of socio-ecological systems to natural and anthropogenic shocks in Bamyan, Daikundi and Takhar provinces in 35 communities and capacity building of key institutions in science, research, and policy.

Key achievements of the project include:

- Strengthened governance mechanisms for environmental conservation and management through development of a National Natural Resources Management Policy and an upscaled Natural Resources Management Strategy
- Restored, multi-benefit forests established through a forestry approach in degraded watersheds covering approximately 1,102 ha (Land treatment activities were conducted to protect the soil and conserve the water, reduce erosions, prevent flash floods, reduce vulnerability to land slide)

- Alternative livelihoods developed within selected sites in degraded watersheds to support sustainable use of forest resources by establishing 1,127 passive solar greenhouses, 35 nurseries to create local supply sources of native species such as almond, walnut, mulberry and established 35 woodlots cover 169 ha of land as an alternative to allow regeneration of natural ecosystems.
- Supported stakeholder in making better environmental decisions by developing over 30 policy briefs and technical guidelines including an manual on Land Health Monitoring Framework, high economic species.
- Conducted forest inventories in two provinces and developed a State of Forestry Report
- Promoted scientific research through building the research capacity of academic institutions in Afghanistan and producing joint research products
- Promoted science and knowledge exchange between Afghanistan and international institutions by facilitating signature of MOU between three academic institutions in South Korea and three academic institution and the Natural Resources Management Directorate. Also, exchange programmes and study tours were organised for stakeholders.
- Promoted education and awareness by organisation national and provincial level awareness campaigns on ecosystem restoration and delivering comprehensive targeted trainings for professionals and local communities.

Watershed after implementation Katot CDC, @UNEP, 2022.



Enhancing the sustainable institutional capacity to regulate toxic chemicals (2019-2021):

UNEP implemented this, Special Programme Secretariate supported, project jointly with the National Environment Protection Agency (NEPA) to support country-driven institutional strengthening to address environmental challenges caused by the mismanagement of chemicals and wastes in Afghanistan, considering the development strategies, plans and priorities of the country. This project aimed to address Afghanistan's capacity in fulfilling its obligations with respect to the management of hazardous chemicals and waste under the Basel, Rotterdam, Stockholm, and Minamata (BRSM) Conventions, to which it is a Party. A major obstacle to achieving this lie in Afghanistan's inability to treat and dispose of municipal solid waste and sewage, both of which are generally contaminated with industrial wastes and effluents.

Key achievements of the project include:

- Setting up a National Chemicals Unit at NEPA with a mandate to lead the implementation of chemicals related conventions that Afghanistan is a signatory to. The Unit would also support the government in the management of hazardous chemicals and wastes through legal and technical instruments, capacity building, research,
- and implementation of the international conventions.
- A Data Needs Assessment was conducted to identify the sources, data needs and flow of hazardous chemicals and wastes among public and private stakeholders. Based on this, a structured Data Acquisition Management Plan (DAMP) was developed to help the government in managing data on hazardous chemicals and wastes.
- Conducted research on toxic chemicals to address environmental data gaps towards better planning and decision-making efforts of all stakeholders to manage chemicals and wastes and provided recommendations for filling the identified gaps.
- Drafted a sub-ordinate legislation for chemicals and hazardous waste after conducting a legal gap analysis that involved review of relevant national legislations and comparing it with the requirements of the BRSM conventions.
- The project also established a private sector Waste Trade Association; developed National Customs Codes; built capacity of Afghan Customs Department and other stakeholders for improved coordination and control of illegal trade of hazardous chemicals and waste; promoted best practices in waste management by public and private sectors.



Project inception, Enhancing the sustainable institutional capacity to regulate toxic chemicals, Afghanistan, @Maxime Paquin, UNEP, 2019.

3. KEY OUTCOMES

Building Environmental Resilience and Sustainability in Afghanistan

1. UNEP's Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment (2003) was the first comprehensive environmental study in Afghanistan ever and the first international environmental assessment since 1980.
2. UNEP worked with the key Member States during the transition period to promote the establishment of an independent National Environment Protection Agency (NEPA).
3. Given that Afghanistan almost entirely lacked a modern environmental regulatory framework, UNEP assisted the government to develop the basic legal instruments for environmental management. As a result, the Environment Law, developed by UNEP with input from IUCN was promulgated in 2007.
4. UNEP also assisted NEPA to formulate new regulations on environmental impact assessments, pollution control, protected area management, biodiversity, rangeland, water, and chemicals management.
5. UNEP assisted NEPA build capacity of its staff in technical fields through an array of training and mentoring programmes as well as helped develop its operational capacity.
6. UNEP assisted Afghanistan to relink with regional and international conventions, supported them in implementing International Environment Agreements and Conventions and assisted their participation in Conferences of Parties and other consultative meetings.
7. UNEP also implemented many field-based pilot projects, focused on ecosystem and community-based approaches to natural resources management, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaption, across the country when the security



Inauguration of the Afghanistan Environmental Data Center lab at Environmental Sciences Faculty of Kabul University, Afghanistan, @Maxime Paquin, UNEP, 2017.

- situation allowed. Through these projects, UNEP helped local communities plant over a million fruit and non-fruit trees, restored thousands of hectares of degraded land and community rangelands, planted woodlots, established nurseries and greenhouses.
8. UNEP supported Afghanistan develop and communicate its Intended National Determined Contribution for the Paris Agreement under the UNFCCC;
 9. UNEP supported Afghanistan identifying climate technology needs for Agriculture, Energy and water sectors;
 10. UNEP helped Afghanistan prepare its first National Green House Gas (GHG) Inventory Report for 1990-2017 time series and prepared reports on available options for Climate Change Mitigation and GHG mitigation scenarios.
 11. UNEP developed Curriculum Frameworks on Environmental Science; Disaster Management; and, Natural Resource Management, for the Faculty of Environmental Science at Kabul University, besides establishing the Afghanistan Environmental Data Centre (AEDC) with a fully equipped IT lab and Library.
 12. UNEP supported NEPA to develop Afghanistan's first National Environment Policy and supported MAIL to develop its first Natural Resources Management Policy (final drafts of both these policies were pending adoption by the competent committees when the Taliban overthrew the elected government in August 2021).

4. LESSONS LEARNED

Building Environmental Resilience and Sustainability in Afghanistan

1. UNEP's engagement in Afghanistan has been focused on creating a truly lasting foundation for environmental management and sustainable development. Strengthening environmental governance, building technical capacity of key environmental agencies, and building resilience of local communities has thus been at the core of its programming.
2. Nurturing the development of environmental and natural resource management capacity was the overarching goal of UNEP's activities in Afghanistan, and this includes capacity not only of the Government counterparts and local communities with which UNEP closely works, but also of UNEP's own staff, particularly its national staff, many of whom are now amongst the leading national experts in their fields.
3. Finding Afghan solutions to Afghan problems has always been the guiding principle behind UNEP's approach to its operations in Afghanistan over the last 20 years.
4. Whilst much of UNEP's focus is at the national level in terms of building environmental institutions, improving technical expertise, and developing environmental laws and policies, UNEP ensures that this work is symbiotically linked to its field-level projects, so that lessons learnt from piloting new, innovative approaches at the community level feed into national-level policy development, and vice-versa.
5. UNEP must reconcile to the fact that it is one of the smaller UN agencies and will remain so in post conflict countries. However, its niche is important and unique as it could not be filled easily by other UN agencies, at least at the normative and policy level. Any issue related to the environment sector is by default directed towards UNEP. This is an advantage on which UNEP should build its credibility, while adjusting its delivery model. At the same time, and given its size, UNEP needs to be selective in terms of what it agrees to do with the government and within the UN Country Team.



6. Given that Afghanistan is one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world, UNEP should prioritize poverty reduction, livelihood generation and protection of human health in the implementation of its activities along with supporting the government on normative issues and technical capacity building. UNEP needs to strike a balance between Afghanistan's ecological needs with its human needs to be locally accepted and successful.
7. Getting too close to or staying too far from the environmental administration is not in favor of UNEP's programme, and a fine balance needs to be maintained between the two extremes. Care also needs to be taken in restricting relationships with key leaders of partner ministries only to professional matters.
8. Fragile states are quite often characterized by divided societies and have multiple fault lines: ethnic, linguistic, geographic, tribal, religious, sectoral etc. Development work in such a context is very difficult and one needs to be very careful in designing and implementing projects to make sure such biases are not perpetuated by any parties connected with our work.
9. Rampant corruption and nepotism are a given in post conflict countries, against which UNEP needs to constantly guard itself. Recruitment of national staff, short-term consultancies and procurements need to be handled very carefully through transparent and competitive processes.
10. Financial and human resource backstopping are key ingredients to the success of the programme. UNEP and partner executing agencies' processes need to be streamlined and responsive to ensure programme delivery does not suffer.

5. PARTNERS AND DONORS

Building Environmental Resilience and Sustainability in Afghanistan

UNEP Afghanistan office projects in the country were implemented in close collaboration with international and national partners, providing technical assistance and advisory services for the implementation of environmental law and policy, and strengthening the environmental management capacity of developing countries and countries with economies in transition. The National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) was the main government partner of UNEP Afghanistan projects in the country. Other key government partners include but are not limited to the following:

Key Government Partners:

- Ministry of Agriculture Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL)
- Ministry of Water and Energy (MEW)
- Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD)
- Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA)
- Afghanistan Meteorological Authority (AMA)
- Kabul, Bamyan, and Faizabad Universities

Key Donors:

- Global Environment Facility (GEF)
- The European Commission
- UK AID and DFID
- The Republic of Korea
- Special Programme Trust Fund
- The Government of Finland
- The Government of Estonia
- USAID

Key Non-Government Partners:

- Afghanistan Resilience Consortium
- Aga Khan Foundation
- Wildlife Conservation Society
- ICIMOD
- Seoul National University
- Zoi Network

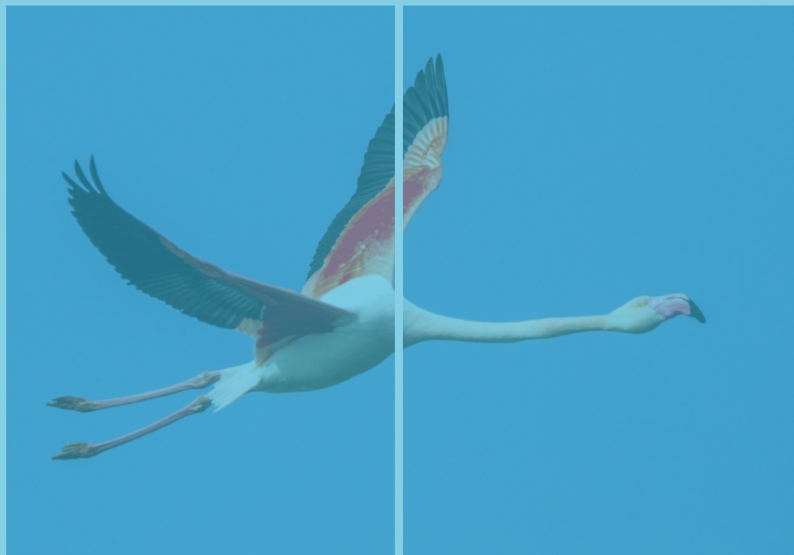
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Building Environmental Resilience and Sustainability in Afghanistan

- UNEP's Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment (2003)
- **Afghanistan New Environment Law (2005)**
- National Green House Gas (GHG) Inventory Report (2019)
- **Forest Restoration for Enhanced Ecosystem Services Functioning in Afghanistan**
- Mountain Resilience: Torrent Catchment Restoration in the Pamir Mountains of Afghanistan (2022)



A spice seller in Kabul, @OMF





UNEP's engagement in Afghanistan began in 2002 with a major post-conflict environmental assessment, conducted in conjunction with the Government of Afghanistan and Afghan environmental experts. Published in 2003, the assessment highlighted serious and widespread ecosystem degradation, including lowered water tables, desiccation of wetlands, widespread loss of vegetative cover, erosion, and loss of wildlife.