



BUILDING RESILIENCE IN AFGHANISTAN

A PAPER FOR THE 2018 GENEVA
CONFERENCE ON AFGHANISTAN

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

Positioned between Central and South Asia, with a breadth of natural resources and rich in mineral reserves, an economy growing for the first time in years, and a diverse and young population with which to drive progress forward; Afghanistan has the potential to make substantial progress in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals. However, despite the many development gains that have been made over the last thirty years, after nearly four decades of persistent conflict and instability, Afghanistan remains an extremely volatile and fragile environment.

By the end of 2017, the United Nations had reclassified Afghanistan from a 'post-conflict' country to a country in 'active conflict' that is now affecting nearly two million people annually. Sustained internal displacement, combined with the ongoing return of refugees and asylum seekers, is putting a great strain on services and facilities in parts of the country already suffering from grave insecurity and violence.

Faced with these challenges, communities, government and development and humanitarian actors are unable to adequately prepare for and respond to the natural disasters that Afghanistan is prone to: earthquakes, avalanches, floods, droughts and landslides. This has resulted in the deterioration of natural resource management systems and a corresponding widespread degradation of the country's natural resource base. As one of the world's least developed countries, Afghanistan lacks the institutional capacity to implement environmental policies, prepare for natural disasters and provide the necessary humanitarian response when disasters do occur.

With the frequency and severity of natural disasters and extreme weather events increasing due to climate change, Afghanistan is now facing one of the most acute complex humanitarian and environmental crises in the world. Millions of people across the country are in need of immediate humanitarian assistance; it is estimated that

The Afghanistan Resilience Consortium (ARC) integrates environment, disaster risk reduction, and humanitarian support to create lasting resilience for Afghanistan's communities and ecosystems. The ARC was established in 2014 as a partnership between Afghanaid, ActionAid, Concern Worldwide, Save the Children, and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and The Department for International Development (DFID), the ARC works closely with the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) and The National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA). The ARC's holistic approach recognises that conflict and environmental degradation can exacerbate the impacts of natural hazards, and strives to support communities and improve ecosystem management in order to reduce the risk of disasters and build adaptive capacity to climate change.

Endorsed by:





50% of the population are now living below the poverty line; some 1.9 million people are severely food insecure and 40% of all children under 5 are stunted. 3.3 million people across the country have needed immediate humanitarian assistance this year alone and a further 8.7 million people are in need of longer-term support. Afghanistan does not have the capacity to face these challenges alone.

Unless urgent action is taken to build the resilience of Afghanistan's households, communities and environment, much of the country's development gains over the last 30 years are in danger of being eroded. Effectively addressing this complicated and evolving situation requires support from the international community and a holistic strategy which is innovative, action-oriented, collaborative and adaptable. These challenges cannot be remedied simply

CLIMATE CHANGE

Globally, Afghanistan is one of the smallest contributors to greenhouse gasses and yet it is one of the countries worst-affected by the consequences of climate change. As the Earth warms up, incidences of extreme weather and natural hazards are becoming increasingly frequent and severe, and the poorest and most vulnerable communities are being hit the hardest. Eighty percent of the Afghan population are reliant on natural resources as their primary source of daily food and income, but environmental issues such as drought, desertification, and deforestation are having devastating effects on their rural livelihoods.

As a result of climate change, Afghanistan is increasingly vulnerable to natural hazards such as floods, droughts, landslides and avalanches, which affect over 235,000 people annually. These disasters destroy lives, livelihoods and infrastructure, and jeopardise development gains. Such disasters further exacerbate the humanitarian crisis resulting from the ongoing violence that has already forced 1.3 million people to

by humanitarian aid. Instead, an efficient and agile response relies on building community resilience, prioritising disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA) strategies, alongside pre-positioned resources and training.

To support the achievement of meaningful resilience and sustainable peace in Afghanistan, it is crucial that the Government and international community: 1) integrate humanitarian aid and development efforts, 2) strengthen and coordinate national and sub-national institutions and policy planning, 3) invest in long-term solutions to drought and flooding and the consequences of climate change, 4) prevent and reduce vulnerability to disasters and increase preparedness for response and recovery by building community-based resilience through local-level DRR and CCA planning and programming.

flee their homes. The lack of investment in climate change adaptation has now put more than half of the Afghan population under serious threat, unable to adapt quickly enough to their changing environment.

The Global Adaptation Index ranks Afghanistan among both the world's most vulnerable countries to the effects of climate change and the least prepared. The United Nations identified Afghanistan as the most risk-prone country in Asia in 2018. Support from the international community is therefore crucial if Afghanistan is going to build resilience and ensure that development gains that have already been made are not eroded. Addressing Afghanistan's complicated crises demands an approach which prioritises disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in order to provide households and communities with the ability to prepare for, withstand, and recover from the shocks of natural hazards and climate change. Local and national institutions must work together to steer change through innovation and learning.



SPOTLIGHT ON 2018 DROUGHT

La Niña has had a devastating effect on this year's harvest in Afghanistan, with a rain, snow and sleet deficit of 70% prevailing across most of the country. The resulting ongoing severe drought, affecting 20 out of the country's 34 provinces, has inflicted acute food insecurity on close to 50% of the rural population and displaced an estimated 275,000 people - that's 52,000 more than the number displaced by conflict in 2018 and the highest levels of internal displacement ever recorded. Millions of people across the country are now in need of immediate humanitarian assistance and long-term support to get their lives back on track.

50%

**OF RURAL
AFGHANS ARE
NOW FOOD
INSECURE**

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Creating and protecting more resilient rural livelihoods is key to advancing Afghanistan's development. Investments in DRR in order to build resilience not only reduces unnecessary loss of life, property and the disruption of services, but also offers far better value-for-money as compared to the costs of emergency humanitarian aid and reconstruction in the aftermath of a disaster.

In 2015, Afghanistan, along with 186 other countries, signed the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR). The Framework calls for greater investment in DRR to prevent and reduce vulnerability to disasters and unnecessary loss of life, and increase preparedness for response and recovery. Given that environmental shocks are increasingly frequent, asset replenishment is near-impossible, meaning that communities are unable to break out of the cycle of poverty which exacerbates their vulnerability and threatens development gains. Protecting and safeguarding these gains, and ensuring that communities can contribute to the development of the country, is a prudent approach to advancing Afghanistan's priorities.

Whilst many natural hazards cannot be fully avoided, there are strategies that will mitigate the severity of their

impacts. Creating more resilient livelihoods is key to providing families with the means to lift themselves out of poverty, provide sufficient food and nutrition for their children, send them to school, meet the cost of medical care and, ultimately, create a thriving society. This includes supporting communities to identify disaster-prone areas and protect themselves, introducing improved farming techniques and diversifying household income, thereby enabling them to better withstand economic and environmental shocks and invest in their families' futures.

A community-based approach, which supports villages to take ownership of their own development and fosters sustainable stewardship of the environment, results in resilient rural communities. This approach includes community-based training in risk assessment and planning; the establishment of early warning systems planning and emergency response kits; the construction of mitigation structures to protect houses, shops and land; and the implementation of watershed protection measures. Successful interventions require close coordination with government ministries at all levels; from the community to the district, provincial and national levels.



INTEGRATED WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

Integrated Watershed Management (IWM) especially at the micro-watershed level, has been practiced by Afghan communities for centuries but largely ignored by donors and development practitioners until very recently. Watershed management works on the principle of catching the rainwater where it falls and letting water “walk-off” instead of run-off. IWM at a micro-watershed (approximately 100-250 ha catchment) level, with active engagement and participation of the community, fosters ownership of the project, boosting its sustainability. This approach includes community mobilisation and training in surveying and planning followed by terracing,

trenching, gully plugging, check-dam, plantation, vegetation cover, and the establishment of both a water management and a forest management committee.

The benefits of IWM have been seen worldwide, including increased water retention and soil moisture, increased water availability, reduced soil erosion, increased plantation cover and increased vegetation. These improvements in the soil and water, bring substantial improvement in sustainable agriculture, livestock and food security at the community level, and dramatically reduce the risk of flooding and vulnerability to drought.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Government of Afghanistan:

- Develop and implement a National Priority Programme (NPP) to holistically address resilience to hazards and climate change that integrates international commitments, national planning, and local actions, with the involvement of Government, the international community, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).
- Establish a national resilience framework that effectively convenes cross-sectoral and inter-ministerial actors to address the country’s major climate and hazard vulnerabilities, needs, and priorities in the short-, medium-, and long-term.
- Strengthen capacity in the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) and the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) to monitor and assess environmental data on hazards and climate change, develop action plans for building resilience and responding to specific hazards, and convene cross-sectoral and inter-ministerial actors to address the country’s vulnerabilities to natural hazards and climate change.
- Further integrate resilience-building principles and approaches from the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Paris Climate Agreement, and Sendai Framework for DRR (SFDRR) into national development plans, such as the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF), and as a crosscutting theme across NPPs.
- Implement the SDGs, Paris Climate Agreement, and SFDRR through a combination of policy, capacity, and practical actions that build cross-sectoral collaboration to build resilience, enhance preparedness, and improve response to natural hazards.

- Ensure that development initiatives, such as the Citizen’s Charter, promote community-based approaches that foster local stewardship for the environment and tap into the vital services provided by ecosystems to rural communities, including: community-based hazard mapping and risk assessment, planning, restoration ecology, early warning systems, and disaster response.

To the International Community:

- Invest in programmes to promote linkages between development assistance and humanitarian response, with an emphasis on DRR and CCA, especially those applying concepts such as eco-DRR and IWM
- Support the meaningful application of the Environment Marker in humanitarian and development programming to ensure that environmental resilience and sustainability cannot be overlooked.
- Integrate context-specific guidance on the environment and natural resource needs of affected communities in order to better inform humanitarian response operations.
- Support Afghanistan’s implementation of its Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) through the provision of financial, technological, and capacity assistance.
- Assist Afghanistan to access and manage global sources of bilateral and multilateral climate financing, such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF), Global Environment Facility (GEF), International Climate Fund (ICF), etc.