

PRESS RELEASE

United Nations Development Programme

Afghanistan Country Office, Shah Mehmood Ghazi Watt, Kabul



Urban Infrastructure Handover in Mazar-e-Sharif - Working towards a better environment and economy

Mazar-e Sharif, 11 June 2007 - A vegetable market, drainages of Shadiyan road and a public toilet, constructed in the heart of Mazar City by the UNDP Urban Development Group (UNDP-UDG) are today handed over to the municipality which also provided significant support for the completion of the project

These infrastructures have been constructed along Shadian Road, one of the main roads leading to the main symbol of Mazar-e Sharif city, the Shrine of Hazrat Ali. The market was constructed to promote local trade of agricultural products. The public toilet is expected to be utilized by the local people, including shopkeepers and customers of the market, thus contributing to an improved business environment.

The construction work provide the much-needed short-term employment to locally mobilised labourers with priority given to the most vulnerable groups in the communities, including returnees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), the disabled and women. Ex-combatants are also targeted for supporting their reintegration to the society. Over the course of the past one year, the market construction project generated 5,700 employment days including 1,087 days for returnees / IDPs from a local returnee settlement and 2,660 days for ex-combatants.

This market construction project, as well as other urban infrastructure works undertaken by UNDP-UDG in close collaboration with the Balkh Department of Urban Development, is part of the **Regional Initiative for Sustainable Economy** (RISE) –funded by the Government of Japan.

Under this programme, three UN agencies – the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN (FAO) and the UN Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan (UNMACA) – work together to create a better and sustainable regional economy of thee provinces of Balkh, Nangarhar and Kandahar.

Representatives from the local government, the Ministry of Urban Development, the municipality, the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, the Embassy of Japan, UNDP, FAO, UNMACA and a representation of community members will attend the hand over ceremony in Mazar-e Sharif.

In addition, UNDP-UDG has been working on the construction of an Access Centre for the Disabled and a Women’s Resource Centre in Mazar-e Sharif. UNDP-UDG also worked on upgrading infrastructures that complement some FAO activities in rural areas of Balkh to empower vulnerable farmers and increase agricultural productivity and diversity – thus providing support for the local economy both in urban and rural areas. UNMACA, through its local offices, coordinates de-mining activities in the region to provide better security for livelihood and economic activities.

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Annex - What is RISE?

The Regional Initiative for Sustainable Economy (RISE) is a programme funded by the Government of Japan. This is a unique programme jointly implemented by three UN agencies –UNDP, FAO and UNMACA, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MoAIL). With the view to promote integrated regional development, by targeting the most vulnerable groups of society, the project aims at creating an enabling environment for long-term, sustainable regional economy through providing immediate and medium-term support for both urban and rural development.

The RISE programme consists of four components: (i) Capacity development of relevant local authorities (especially Provincial Development Committees (PDCs)) and communities in monitoring and evaluation (M&E), implemented by UNDP Urban Development Group (UNDP-UDG); (ii) Short-term employment generation & urban infrastructure support, implemented by UNDP-UDG and MUD, (iii) Empowerment of vulnerable farmers, implemented by FAO and Ministry of Agriculture; and (iv) Mine / Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) survey and clearance and mine risk education & victim assistance activities coordinated by UNMACA. Since its inception, the partners involved in the RISE programme have been working hand in hand towards the common goal of providing a better and safer environment for longer-term economic development at the regional level.

In Balkh Province, UNDP UDG conducted workshops for selected staff from local government departments to introduce basic concepts of M&E. In cooperation with the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) and National Area-Based Development Programme (NABDP), UNDP will organise more workshop and field exercises in near future. UNDP has completed the construction of a vegetable market, the drainages for the Shadiyan road and a public toilet and small infrastructures for four villages with strong guidance of local government including Governor, Mazar-e-Sharif Municipality and Department of Urban Development. The planning and construction of the Access Centre for the Disabled, Women's Resource Centre, 2 more Public Toilets and a Women's market adjacent to the main market in Mazar city are still under way. All of the infrastructure works have been selected to reinforce the market activities especially those related to agriculture. By the end of May 2007, UDG projects in Balkh created 41,260 labour days (One labour day = opportunity for one person to obtain a job for a day) including 7,378 days for IDPs and returnees, 5,699 days for ex-combatants and 250 for Afghans with Disabilities.

FAO, together with extension workers of MoAIL, has been supporting 630 vulnerable farmers in Balkh with input packages of 212 fruit tree nurseries, 223 intensive vegetable productions and 195 livestock production combined with technical training. Agriculture is the main of Afghanistan, and FAO intervention is expected to help increase local agricultural productivity and diversity to boost local economic activities.

UNMACA has a crucial role in this programme. UNMACA deploys technical survey teams to RISE project sites as requested to ensure safe project implementation. Mine risk education and victim assistance activities have also been in the region. In 2006, de-mining teams funded under the RISE programme cleared 113,502 square meters and removed 20 anti-personnel mines and 46 pieces of UXO. UNMACA conducted 261 mine risk education and victim assistance sessions that were attended by more than 6,950 people.

Of the USD 12.7 million contributed by the Government of Japan through the RISE programme, approximately USD 3.3 million has been allocated for activities in Balkh.