NEWS

1. Iranian delegation visits Mine Action project
A delegation from the Government of Iran is visiting Kabul for six days to draw lessons from Afghanistan's mine action programme. The Afghan programme is the largest and oldest in the world, and manages a complete range of mine action technical capabilities and management. While in Afghanistan, the delegation has visited field demonstrations of manual demining techniques and equipment used in demining, explosive ordnance disposal demonstrations, and the Afghan Mine Dog Centre, which trains and deploys 250 dogs in its mine clearance activities. The delegation is led by Mr. Hossein Vaziri, the Head of the National Demining Secretariat of the Iranian Ministry of Defense, and includes five delegates from the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior, along with a UNDP-Iran programme demining specialist. A UN mine action delegation from New York will visit Tehran in March to assist the Government in developing an action plan supporting an Iranian mine action programme.

2. UNDP projects forge new partnerships
Private-sector development project cooperates with Afghanistan Investment Support Agency to improve business development
On 25 January, the UNDP Partnerships for Private Sector Development project and the Afghanistan Investment Support Agency (AISA) signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement. UNDP and AISA have already cooperated on the development of a database of all registered companies in Afghanistan. The new phase in the partnership includes: the preparation of investor-friendly country information; the preparation of a guide to trade and investment in Afghanistan; enhancing AISA’s existing communication channels; raising awareness of private-sector development and foreign-direct investment issues at the central and local government levels, support for the regional expansion of AISA, promotion of sustainable business practices, and corporate social responsibility. This initiative will be undertaken in cooperation with other donors, including BMZ/GTZ.

European Commission commits EU6 million to district-level justice
The European Commission signed an agreement with the Ministry of Justice and UNDP to contribute EU6 million to the "Access to Justice at the District Level" project. The project aims to strengthen the Government's justice system in the districts by improving judicial facilities, training key judicial actors, and carrying out public awareness campaigns targeted at disadvantaged groups.

Aid coordination project signs on for two more years
On 25 February, representatives from the Ministry of Finance, the Government of Canada and UNDP signed a commitment for CA$3 million in support the "Making Budgets Work" project. The project emerged from its forerunner, "Aid Coordination for Afghanistan," which established an aid coordination system to manage the flow of
financial assistance to Afghanistan's reconstruction. The aid coordination system is now fully owned and led by the Government, and is used by all international, national and provincial partners in Afghanistan's reconstruction. For the next two years, through the end of December 2006, Making Budgets Work will aim to further unify the national budget, modeling it on principles of transparency and accountability; establish a monitoring unit for grants and loans; and assist in the coordination and maintenance of the National Development Framework.

3. Private-sector development project recruits two new consultants
The Partnership for Private-Sector Development Project has recruited two new consultants to work on agribusiness in Afghanistan. Bill Mays and Matt Beckwith are business development specialists working on small- and medium-sized enterprise development, consultancy and training. Bill’s previous experience is in the Balkans, and Matt has been working in Latin America. They are working as part of the Afghan Business Centre team under PPSD, and are concentrating on agriculture sector businesses.

4. Upcoming Publications

Afghanistan: Nation on the Move
A journalist has been immersing herself in the UNDP-Afghanistan programme for the last three weeks to write a brochure on UNDP’s activities. Azadeh Moaveni, a freelance writer based in Beirut, has interviewed staff from numerous projects, civil servants, donors, beneficiaries and partners. In collaboration with an Afghan photographer, Wakil Kohsar; the Country Office External Relations Unit; and UNDP headquarters in New York, Azadeh has written a series of articles chronicling UNDP development work and its impact on the lives of Afghans. The brochure is being designed and printed in New York, and will be used as a public relations and resource mobilization tool by New York Headquarters and UNDP Afghanistan. It should be available by the end of February.

UNDP in Afghanistan
In addition to the above brochure, the External Relations Unit has compiled and is publishing "UNDP in Afghanistan"--a booklet that catalogues current UNDP projects and summarizes much of the achievements of the UNDP Country Programme to date. This booklet is intended as a condensed version of the factsheets, with photographs, and will also be available for public relations and resource mobilization.

National Human Development Report
Eliana Escobedo-Gonzales is back in the country! Eliana is here to assist with the launch of the National Human Development Report (NHDR) on 21 February. This is the first NHDR published for Afghanistan, and is the result of more than one year of hard work by the UNDP team. Mr. Zepherine Diabre, the Associate Administrator for UNDP, will be coming to Afghanistan for the launch.

5. UN holds two retreats to assess strategy in Afghanistan
UN Country Team holds prioritization retreat
The United Nations Country Team hosted representatives from all UN agencies, donors, the Afghan government and NGOs at a retreat in Kabul at the end of January to discuss priorities and partnerships for the UN system in support to the country's pursuit of key Millennium Development Goals. Over the course of 2 1/2 days, the participants discussed issues such as national priorities, conflict analysis and rights-based programming, and came to an agreement on the priorities for the United
Nations Development Assistance Framework from 2006-2008. These priorities will serve as guidelines for UNDP's own programming in the coming years.

**UNDP plans strategic retreat**
In response to Afghanistan's rapidly changing environment and shift from a post-conflict to a more comprehensive development stage, UNDP is holding a strategic retreat on 15-17 February at UNOCHA on Jalalabad Road. The aim of the retreat is to explore possible areas and methods of intervention over the next 3 years.

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

15-17 February--UNDP strategic retreat, UNOCHA compound. Contact Kazuto Tsuruga (kazuto.tsuruga@undp.org)  
21 February--National Human Development Report launch, InterContinental Hotel. Contact Eliana Escobedo-Gonzales (eliana.escobedo@undp.org).

**NOTES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Congratulations to Hiroko Takagi on her engagement! Hiroko will marry Basil Massey, the head of operations for Afghanistan's New Beginnings Programme (DDR), in March in India.

To make a submission to the next newsletter, please e-mail gary.holub@undp.org