NABDP: Whilst much of the country labours slowly towards educational achievement, there are some encouraging strides being made in Herat. Narwin-e Sufla High School in the Enjil district is reversing the predominant statistic in Afghanistan where boys’ enrolment in school exceeds girls’.

According to headmaster, Mohammed Ibrahim, girls have an insatiable thirst for education which surprisingly, runs deeper than boys. Additionally, Herat parents, as a general rule, have a common desire to have well educated daughters. “Girls have more interest in education than boys. They want to learn more,” says Ibrahim. “Generally, the people of Herat, including the parents, value education and want to send all their children to school.” As a result, girls’ enrolment is not just equal but higher than boys by almost 100 students at the 1000-pupil school. “Boys are often working in agriculture and earning money for the family and learning a skill, so they don’t have time to go to school. That is another reason why we have more girls.”

Narwin-e Sufla was constructed in January 2003 by UNDP’s National Area-Based Development Programme (NABDP) in partnership with UNOPS. The objective was to provide educational facilities and to increase the efficiency of education. In turn, it was hoped that this would decrease the number of jobless youth, and improving social conditions. The original target was to reach 500 students, yet two years after construction there are already 1000 students with enrolment only set to increase.

Zubaide, a 13-year female student speaks for her fellow female students when she expresses her desire to learn. Prior to the opening of Narwin-e Sufla, Zubaide and other girls were restricted to limited Islamic education at the local mosque. “We had enthusiasm for education but because of the Taliban we couldn’t go to school, so we would go to the mosque. Four years now after the Taliban I can come to school,” she says.

Zubaide is now determined to become a doctor. “I want to go all the way through to grade 12 then I want to go to university to be a doctor.” Becoming a ‘doctor or an engineer’ is a very common response amongst Afghan youth, yet few have the means or opportunity to see their dreams realised. Zubaide however, has the two key ingredients: family support and adequate finances. “I have the commitment and my finances are okay. My parents support me and no uncles disapprove so I will be a doctor.” Unlike other countries, money is not an incentive for Afghan doctors where pay rates are low. Zubaide’s motivation stems from wanting to help contribute to her country’s rehabilitation: “We have many difficulties in our families because of the lack of hygiene and especially in maternal health.”

Whilst the future looks bright for Zubaide, the same cannot be said for other girls across the country. In March this year, UNICEF launched a nationwide campaign promoting the value of girls’ education across Afghanistan. Research cited obstacles such as lack of female teachers and inadequate school facilities. But it also showed that girls’ education is still undervalued in many communities. UNICEF estimates that more than 1 million of Afghanistan’s primary school age girls are not enrolled in school. Furthermore, at least 90 per cent of the primary school age girls in five of Afghanistan’s 32 provinces are not attending school

Thankfully Herat is bucking the trend and leading the way forward in girls’ education.

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An insatiable appetite for education

Boys of Narwin-e Sufla School. (All girls declined to be photographed.)
Towards accessing information for the blind: case study of Iran

NPAD: Everybody has the right to access information that affects their daily lives and enables their decision-making and participation in governance. Access to information for disabled people in Afghanistan is limited due to the unavailability of tools that facilitate access to information. One neighboring country, Iran, has demonstrated good practices in enabling information access for the blind.

Iranian models of access include locally adapted accessibility tools and information services targeted for the blind. The Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled (MMD) and the Afghanistan National Association for the Blind (ANAB) showed a keen interest in learning about enabling access to information for the blind with an aim to implement such mechanisms in Afghanistan.

A study visit to Iran to learn about information accessibility was made possible with support from UNDP/ NPAD in collaboration with the National Library of Iran. The participants of this study visit included three representatives from MMD and one representative from ANAB, Fayaz, who has been totally blind since the age of 11. “I have MA from international University of Islamabad,” he says. “But I can not be hired by any international organization and the reason is very clear—lack of access to internet. Having access to internet, we can enter society, and play an important role.”

The group visited different institutions, and entities working for the blind or institution where the blind were working. “We also visited news and press agencies. They all had great influence. Sitting in front of the computer, I was really impressed,” says Fayaz.

The participants were introduced to information services and publishing services for the blind such as bibliographies for the blind, talking books, Braille newspapers, and accessible libraries. They also had practical demonstrations in the use of accessibility tools such as Braille computers, internet for the blind, electronic text magnifiers, and Braille printers.

“ANAB cannot run our activities without full cooperation of NPAD and MMD,” says Fayaz. “With the cooperation of UNDP, we have some programs in mind to launch our ideas.” In the near future, it is planned that the participants of this study visit will analyze the accessibility needs for the blind people in Afghanistan and implement systems to enable their access to information and thereby enhance participation in society.

A four-year physical therapy curriculum for Afghanistan

NPAD: Most countries in this region run a four-year physical therapy curriculum, while Afghanistan is still teaching a two-year curriculum. For reasons of quality, and national and international recognition, Afghanistan’s physical therapists wished to introduce a four-year curriculum for their country.

A framework draft for a new physical therapy four-year curriculum for Afghanistan has now been established. Subjects and their relative importance of hours of teaching were defined. As a next step, the draft has been approved by a technical commission. Then, the outdated task force will be able to continue its work and define the exact content of each subject.

NPAD is trying to finalize the curriculum by the end of the year before submission for approval to Afghan authorities. In parallel, the draft will be shown to Kabul Medical College, with whom negotiations are underway to open a faculty for nurses and physical therapists. In order to be accepted in the faculty, approval and support of the Medical College is vital.

The objective is to get recognition to teach a bachelor degree curriculum for physical therapists. At the same time, NPAD working on the upgrading process of physical therapy teachers, since they need more knowledge and recognition in order to teach a four-year curriculum.

For this upgrading process, Afghanistan will need technical support from foreign countries. Much remains to be done and various difficulties still have to be resolved. But the first steps of restructuring completely an important part of Afghanistan’s health sector are done.

National Programme for Action on Disability is supported by: USAID, France, Sweden, Japan, Germany, Norway.
Welcome to Anita Nirody

The UNDP Country Office is pleased to welcome Anita Nirody as Senior Deputy Country Director. Ms Nirody will be taking over the reigns from Karen Jorgensen who has come to the end of her tenure in Kabul.

The new SDCD brings with her an exceptional work record with her most recent posting as Chief of UNDP’s Bangkok Sub-Regional Office where she has been for three years. During her time in Bangkok, Ms Nirody was a Capacity Development Advisor, managing UNDP’s Capacity 2015 programme for Asia and the Pacific. She was also a Policy Advisor for environment and natural resources management.

Prior to this, Ms Nirody was Group Leader of UNDP’s Operational Policies and Applied Research Group in New York; and Global Co-ordinator of an $85million Trust Fund for the Capacity 21 Initiative with programmes in over 75 countries.

Born in India, Ms Nirody is a naturalized American citizen with three masters’ degrees in international development (natural resource management); international relations and political science.

Ms Nirody arrives in Kabul on November 5 and will officially take over as SCD. Ms Karen Jorgensen will remain in Kabul in an advisory role until her departure on December 8.

SEAL seminar

SEAL: ‘Support to the Establishment of Afghan Legislature’ (SEAL) held a three-day seminar from October 23-25, where 270 participants contributed to the nascent process of parliamentary development.

The overall goal of SEAL is to contribute to the establishment of a fully operational and efficient parliament recognised by all the people of Afghanistan as their representative institution. The Seminar distilled the critical lessons learned from different attachments and study tours organized by the SEAL Project for the staffers. The Seminar facilitated the organisational development planning exercise for the National Assembly Secretariat. Each department of the Secretariat presented through a participatory process, their respective short-term, mid-term, and long-term priorities and draft work plans. Additionally, the seminar discussed a potential code of conduct which sets out a system of values that encapsulates a fundamental relationship between commitment to the work and commitment to democracy. The initiative brings out the critical issue of a possible Code of Conduct for the future Members of the Afghan National Assembly, which would assist Members in the discharge of their obligations to the House, their constituents and the public.

Support to Establishment of Afghan Legislature is supported by: France, Italy, Sweden, UNDP, Denmark.

Violence Against Women Campaign

MOWA: A one-day workshop on 25 October was organized to prepare for an Elimination of Violence Against Women (VAW) campaign. The workshop was held for the Ministry of Women’s Affairs head of departments from 10 provinces.

The workshop aimed to enhance the understanding of gender advocacy and develop the capacities of provincial offices to raise public awareness and advocate on issues and problems.

Technical Deputy Minister of MoWA, Ms. Safa emphasized DOWA’s role in generating understanding about VAW in provinces. She added: “Violence against women is not a new phenomenon, but in the last decades we have experienced many sad cases, which had negative consequences; affecting women’s employment, legal rights, education, and health.” She emphasized the importance of families in perpetuating the inequalities between boy and girl children. She also referred to unfair traditions and misunderstanding of Islamic laws as significant factors in limitation of women’s rights.

MoWA’s collaboration with UNDP includes various activities such as women’s film festival, a workshop on child/forced marriage, spot movies, and special publications.

Ministry of Women’s Affairs is supported by: France, Luxembourg, UNDP, Belgium.
Cisco Academy opens in Herat

ICT: Herat is an anomaly where education is concerned. Throughout the city, girls are streaming into education at a faster rate than boys. What is surprising, in addition to this encouraging trend, is that women have a remarkably higher enrolment rate in Cisco Systems’ information technology course, which in most other countries is traditionally a male-dominated field.

Through a partnership among Cisco Systems, UNDP, the Ministry of Communications and the International Telecommunication Union, the Cisco Academy Program was introduced and initiated in Kabul in 2002 as part of the Least Developed Countries (LDC) Initiative—a joint initiative by Cisco Systems, UNDP, USAID, UNV, and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) to bridge the digital divide in the world’s Least Developed Countries. After four successful years in Kabul, the Academy has now branched out to three other cities.

“According to the UNDP agreement with Cisco, at least 25% of the course must be for women,” says Dean of Economics, Farya Hadary. “But here in Herat we have 65%. There are 100 places on the course; 50 for Herat University students, and 50 for NGO staff currently in the workforce. Over 200 applications were received for the student places with a major majority from women. Project officer, Farhad Ali Salehi, says they had to cap women’s placement at 65% even though there were many more women who applied. “Herat women are very keen on education in general. We even have 40-50 year old women wanting education and attending university here.”

The future looks promising for these women who are facing more opportunities than ever before. “After they graduate from the course, we can introduce them to employment opportunities through a placement programme we have with banks, ministries, NGOs. This is how the new generation of IT graduates can get work,” says Farya. Indeed, as she explains the work placement programme, Farya receives a phone call from an international bank about to establish itself in Herat, looking for IT graduates – particularly women, who are available for work in the near future. She confirms that shortly, there will be a cadre of IT women who will be just perfect for the role. “We make many workshops for students on getting jobs, teaching them how to interview and approach the workforce. There are many opportunities for women to get jobs who actually are getting placed at a higher rate than men. All jobs now ask for women to apply.”

ICT skills are developed through significant hands-on learning and skill-set development which leads in a direct route to industry-standard certification. The Cisco Networking Academy Program qualifies students to pursue a number of industry-standard certifications, including the Cisco Certified Network Associate (CCNA) and Computing Technology Industry Association (CompTIA) Network+ certifications. The CCNA is a four-semester program that prepares students for networking and IT-related careers in the public and private sectors and for higher education in engineering, computer science, and related fields. Cisco aims to help bridge the digital divide by establishing these programs worldwide. Cisco is attempting to create a core of specialists who contribute to a modern workforce, moving the country into the information age.

For women, and some men, education often means no more than placing a certificate on the wall, rather than applying skills to the workforce – something Herat University is trying to address. “Mostly women learn just for the sake of learning, but many do get jobs with NGOs. It is possible to transition from education to vocation but we have to partner with NGOs. We have introduced many women to NGOs for jobs and shown them vacancies. Now they are starting to be interested in applying skills and gaining work. For example, UNHABITAT wants to network their offices and I offered my students. We now have a contract with them and the students have the opportunity for work experience.”

The Faculty of Economics hosts the Cisco Networking Academy Program and started classes during October 2005. The lab equipment for Herat University Cisco Networking Academy was purchased by UNDP Cisco Project, and delivered to the University in August 2005. One of the trainers is Homera Solehi, a graduate from the Kabul Cisco Academy who is now lecturing in IT. She confirms that shortly, there will be a cadre of IT women who will be just perfect for the role. “We make many workshops for students on getting jobs, teaching them how to interview and approach the workforce. There are many opportunities for women to get jobs who actually are getting placed at a higher rate than men. All jobs now ask for women to apply.”

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Information and Communication Technology is supported by: USAID, France, EC, Cisco, Microsoft.
**An intern’s insight** by Franz Danner

ANBP: Cross-legged, I sat in a small, white room surrounded by colourful, homemade carpets and cushions. Mustafa Qui, the elder of the tiny Uzbek village in the south of Samangan province handed me an extra pillow for my back while rice, yoghurt and green tea were served. I was overwhelmed by the Afghan cordiality despite the serious and sad occasion brought me to the village in the first place.

Recently six children were killed in accident close by when they played with a mortar bomb; one of the millions of remnants of the near past of war scarred Afghanistan. Called to take care of the safety hazard—a little depot full of rockets, mines and projectiles—my ammunition of the safety hazard—a little Afghan province handed me an extra pillow for my back while rice, yoghurt and green tea were served. I was overpowered by the Afghan cordiality despite the serious and sad occasion brought me to the village in the first place.

Adventurous? Certainly! But more than that, an unforgettable internship. When I first arrived in Kabul three months ago, I already had a good idea of Afghanistan—at least as much as one can know after one year working on the country from behind a desk.

Hands-on experience, getting to know people and country, learning UN work in the field; that was what I was looking for and what I found with UNDP/ANBP. I was astonished by the challenging task the teams of nationals and internationals are undertaking every day and often in fairly risky environments. The whole DDR programme which now includes heavy weapons, ammunition and illegal armed groups, has become a great endeavour for the Afghan government and the international community, and my internship gave me the chance to be part of all that.

Having been Team Leader in the Northeast region, I had to deal with all the minor and major hitches deriving from the task of surveying stockpiles of ammunition in a country where war and fighting are still present in people’s heads. I will never forget the time I have spent with UNDP/ANBP and at the end, I can certainly say that I gained a lot of professional as well as personal experience.

And for me personally it is also good to know that one week after I went to the little Uzbek village the improvisational ammunition storage was fully cleared.

**UNDPI launches HIV project**

Afghanistan is classified as a country with low HIV/AIDS prevalence but high vulnerability factors. In the absence of functional sentinel surveillance and a broad-based system for generating reliable data the extent of the spread is as yet unknown. However the vulnerability factors are many including massive poverty, gender disparities, drug use (including injecting drug use), open borders and movement between neighbouring countries which have a growing epidemic, low levels of awareness, very low use of condoms and extremely limited availability of services for prevention, testing or care.

“HIV and AIDS awareness is a core activity of UNDP throughout the world. It was only a matter of time before we invested our resources into preventing this disease spreading into Afghanistan,” says Karen Jorgensen, Deputy Country Director of UNDP. “There is a great risk of this country falling into the same predicament as its neighbouring countries where ignorance and denial has paved the way for HIV to take hold. We cannot let that happen here, which is why we are determined to assist the Government prevent the spread of the disease.”

A National HIV/AIDS Control Programme (NACP) was set up in mid 2003 within the Ministry of Public Health to lead the response to the epidemic. In spite of concerted efforts by NACP and other stakeholders as well as Funding support from the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM) a major gap lies in the area of technical, human and financial capacity to strengthen the response at the national and provincial level.

UNDP’s goal is to build the capacity of the Ministry of Public Health on HIV/AIDS and to develop a fully fledged project which addresses gaps identified by the MoPH, and facilitate an enabling environment for a multi-sectoral response to prevent the spread of HIV.

This project is supported by UNDP Core Funds.
Schedule of Events

- November: the entire month of November is Human Development Month at Kabul University
- November 7-8: UN Forum, International Forum for Microcredit in New York
- November 19: Global Microentrepreneurship Awards, Serena Hotel
- December 3: International Day of Disabled Peoples

Human Development Month: November

NHDR: UNDP Afghanistan is pleased to support the organization of Kabul University’s first-ever “Human Development Month”. Through a series of events, Human Development Month at Kabul University will seek to generate awareness among students, faculty and media about the key messages from the Global and first National Human Development Reports.

“These activities will also mark the beginning of a renewed relationship between UNDP and Kabul University,” says Richard Ponzio, Strategic Planning Advisor for UNDP. “Concrete steps will be undertaken to ensure that the promotion of human development (both in theory and in practice) for all Afghans is placed at the heart of the university’s mission.”

UNDP published Afghanistan’s first National Human Development Report (NHDR) in February 2005. The theme, “Security with a Human Face”, marks the first time in modern history that objective observers were allowed to gather and tabulate hard data on living conditions among everyday Afghans. It draws a portrait of a nation still at odds—if no longer at war— with itself. Beyond survival, Afghans expect an existence with dignity, a life free of fear and free from wants. Security with a Human Face will be included as a major theme for debate throughout the development month.

UNDP will manage an essay contest on the subject of human development, encouraging academic excellence in issues raised throughout the month. A $500 prize will be offered to the winning student which will be announced in January 2006.

National Human Development Report is supported by Canada, World Bank, UNOPS and UNDP.
Global Microentrepreneurship Awards: 19 November

The GMA Programme is designed to celebrate the entrepreneurial spirit that exists in impoverished communities throughout the world. The Programme recognizes the contributions that microentrepreneurs make to the economic sustainability of families and communities. The initiative also works to increase investment in and recognition for microfinance from donors, national governments, and private sector businesses, ultimately leading to more inclusive financial sectors where low-income local entrepreneurs are increasingly perceived as valuable clients.

The GMA Afghanistan team has been receiving entries from all over the country throughout October. A review panel will soon select 12 semi-finalists who will travel to Kabul for the final event on November 19. All semi-finalists will present their stories to a judging panel; explaining their challenges and successes in using microcredit to improve the quality of their lives.

2004 Winner

Shakila is a sole provider with three children but she lives with her in laws and supports them as well. Her husband cannot work because he lost his right arm during the war.

Shakila has had many difficulties in her life staring with a forced marriage by her parents to a man she didn’t want. After some time, the abuse she suffered became unbearable as a result of her marriage problems and she attempted self-immolation by pouring gasoline over herself and burning herself. Thankfully she was saved, but not before half her body suffered sever burns, including her face, and she has lost some mobility on her right arm.

Though badly scarred and suffering the pain of her injuries, she continued to overcome her obstacles and borrowed 5,000Afs from PARWAZ and started her tailoring business in Kabul. She became a group leader and formed a cooperative to start a tailoring business making Afghani dresses out of her home. Shakila is very happy that she is earning a living on her own and does not need to rely on her husband anymore for money. She earns enough to pay for her children’s and household expenses.

International Forum to Build Inclusive Financial Sectors

Shakila will travel to New York on November 6 for the 2005 International Forum to Build Inclusive Financial Sectors. Afghanistan was the most requested participant for the forum and will be represented by 2004 winner, Shakila, and accompanied by Parwaz loan officer, Jamila Abdul Muqadas, and Besmiliab Ekhlas, UNDP DDR project officer who is responsible for reintegration and economic development.

Assembling experts from governments, the private sector, the United Nations, academia, civil society, other donors and the goal of the Forum is to adopt a programme of action to build inclusive financial sectors, bringing the world one step closer to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

International Day of Disabled People: 3 December

NPAD: The annual observance of the International Day of Disabled Persons (IDDP), 3 December, aims to promote an understanding of disability issues and mobilize support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. It also seeks to increase awareness of gains to be derived from the integration of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life.


A local theme “Equality & Full Participation is our Right” will augment the global idea. The national celebration will be along this subject and will be celebrated in Kabul and all provinces.

In Kabul, parallel meetings and exhibition to be held in Loya Jirga tent will be organized by the Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled with support from UNDP’s National Programme for Action on Disability, UNICEF, and other NGOs and Disabled People’s Organizations (DPOs).
ANBP: Last December, ANBP in partnership with the Ministry of Defense launched a nationwide ammunition survey with now eight regional ammunition survey teams dispatched throughout the country. Since last July and the signature of a memorandum of understanding with the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the destruction of anti-personnel landmines has been included in ANBP’s ongoing survey efforts. The destruction of anti-personnel mines will not just alleviate the threat of the ordinance itself, but will also assist the Government of Afghanistan in meeting its stockpile destruction obligations as a State Party to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, also known as the Ottawa Convention.

On 19 October, a delegation from the Joint Secretariat’s of the Disarmament and Reintegration Commission made a visit to the district of Mussa Kheil in Khost province. The visit was to respond to a request of local communities and their concerns regarding a stockpile of ammunition stored in the primary school of Ghalange. This visit resulted in the removal of 20 tons of ammunition in a combined action of ANBP, Afghanistan National Police (ANP), Afghanistan National Army (ANA) and the Provincial Reconstruction Team. The ordnance was transported to Khost and Gardez, or, when unstable, immediately destroyed.

Mohammad Nabi, 9 years old, is a second class pupil in Ghalange school. “I have been in school here for two years and I did not know all these ammunition. But now that I know that it was there and has been removed, I feel much better”.

Weapons and ammunition of all types and sizes exist in Afghanistan, both within military but also civil communities. This surplus of ammunition and mines not only presents the Government of Afghanistan with a considerable logistics problem but also generates serious security concerns. Weapons and ammunitions belonging to Illegal Armed Groups (IAGs) are often stored in populated areas. They are often very unstable and dangerous. This can lead to terrible tragedies as already witnessed in Afghanistan. When knowing of locations or caches of weapons, it is a duty to contact the nearest Afghan or international security forces so weapons can be checked and safely disposed of.