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UNDP Afghanistan Newsletter

Disability: The commitment is there, but much remains to be done

Afghanistan may be very well placed to conduct successful programs for its disabled population provided that a focused approach is adopted to tackle the problems, according to world-renowned activist on disability.

Sebenzile Matzebula of South Africa, who advised President Nelson Mandela on issues of disability and still does for the administration of current South African President Thabo Mbeki, was in Kabul for the International Day of Disabled Persons, December 3.

Alongside the national authorities, Ms. Matzebula has worked as advisor not only to various UN agencies like ILO and WHO, but also to European Union and the World Bank and she brought all the expertise and experience she has accumulated over decades to share with her Afghan counterparts.

Invited by UNDP's NPAD (National Program of Action on Disability) to Kabul, Ms. Matzebula agreed to be interviewed for the UNDP newsletter and started by saying she had been truly heartened by the spirit in Afghanistan as regards to the solution of the problems of the disabled.

"Without the spirit, it means nothing, even if you have all the

money in the world" she said, referring to the enthusiasm she said she had witnessed in the eyes of the people she contacted during her stay in Afghanistan. "You could sense their determination, there is a sense of hope and wanting to make a change" she added.

Referring to the Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled, Ms. Matzebula said the fact that a whole ministerial structure had been established at the government level was a very loud and clear declaration of the political will that existed in the country to tackle and resolve the problems of the disabled.

"What you need now are targeted but holistic programs to deal with disability as a cross-cutting issue. Key indicators must be identified and analyzed and programs for disabled should be developed" she said.

Comparing the situation in her native South Africa with that in Afghanistan, Ms. Matzebula said since the time of former President Nelson Mandela, the office of the president had taken over the task of overall coordination of the implementation of programs for the disabled. She said President Mandela was considerate enough to receive the representatives of the disabled for a meeting at 05.00 in the



Ms. Matzebula speaks with appreciation of the legal framework established for action on disability

morning and thanks to the similar consideration by the current President Mr. Mbeki, they were able to implement the programs they had designed.

She said it was very important for everybody to understand that disability was not a matter to be seen through a window of charity and that all the disabled had the right to contribute to the development of their country, but that they needed support like vocational training to be able to make that contribution.

Ms. Matzebula, herself, was disabled by polio when she was 10 months old, but her disability did not prevent her from studying in Botswana, Swaziland, Canada and the USA and from giving birth to two children.

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Regional Conference Decides on Priorities for Economic Cooperation

The highest level regional conference on issues of economic cooperation organized by the Afghan Government, since the fall of the Taliban regime, ended with decisions on short-term cooperation and a solid expression of intent for improved business climate in both Afghanistan and the region.

The “Kabul Declaration on Regional Cooperation” adopted at the end of the December 4-5 conference stated that the short-term focus of regional cooperation “should be on practical win-win projects” with a particular emphasis on energy, transport and trade sectors. The document said the areas of immediate cooperation would include information sharing, mutually beneficial ways of using the region’s water resources and preparations for development of ideas on cooperation in agriculture and the agricultural industry.

The Declaration stressed the need for improvement in the business climate, and trade facilitation, through increased

information sharing, encouragement of enterprise culture and border zone trade, simplification of procedures for movements over borders and visa regimes for business purposes.

According to the document, the participants to the meeting will gather again in nine month’s time, at the ministerial level, to review the progress in promotion of the regional economic cooperation. The Afghan Government, as the host the conference, has been given the responsibility to follow up the implementation of the decisions and considerations of the meeting.

The conference, under the aegis of G8, the world’s most powerful economic grouping bringing together the leading industrialized nations, attracted participants from a wide geographical area spanning China and Turkey.

Speaking on behalf of the British Government, that currently holds the Chairmanship of the G8 group and the rotating presidency of the European Union,

Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister Kim Howells emphasized that improvement of business climate in the region was “absolutely central to (Afghanistan’s) prosperity.” He said the conference which assigned the Kabul government a leading role in following up on its decisions, marked “the moment when Afghanistan has become a real player in bringing peace and stability to this region.”

Supported by the UNDP’s “Regional Trade Cooperation Project”, which aims at boosting trade and economic development between Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries, the conference was attended by representatives from China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates and Uzbekistan, many of them at the ministerial level. High level representation from G8 member countries, International Organizations and Financial Institutions and Regional Economic Grouping Secretariats were also present at the conference.



Special operations and programme volunteers with Frederick Lyons, UNDP Country Director.

IVY Day Celebration 2005

International Volunteer Day was celebrated around the world on December 5th. In Afghanistan 60 volunteers, national and international, gathered at UNOCA to mark the day

The celebration was a moment to relax, meet the other volunteers and recognize their efforts. UNDP Administrator Kemal Dervis, delivered a message to volunteers worldwide emphasizing the role of volunteers in the

development process, “As is being demonstrated around the world today, volunteers have a unique and important role to play as active participants in development,” he said in a message to mark the day.

It was important to celebrate the dedication and hard work of all volunteers working in Afghanistan. Many of them were at the end of their assignments after working in very remote locations

under considerably difficult conditions.

The UNVs were also honored with the presence of UNDP Country’s Director, Mr. Frederick Lyons who inspired the crowd with a speech about his own experiences as a UNV and his appreciation for all the volunteers’ hard work.

Counter Narcotics Trust Fund gets boost from EC

The European Commission (EC) signed an agreement to contribute Euro 15 million to the Afghan Government's Counter Narcotics Trust Fund (CNTF) on 6 December in an effort to support initiatives aimed at expanding sustainable livelihood options for the people of Afghanistan and the counter-narcotic policies of the Afghan Government. "The government's multifaceted approach to counter narcotics production though both strengthened law enforcement capacity and alternative livelihoods needs continued international support," says

Karl Harbo, Head of the EC Delegation to Afghanistan.

The key principles behind the Trust Fund include: providing additional resources for the government's counter narcotics efforts through the national development budget; ensuring transparency and accountability in the allocation of those resources; enabling the government to have greater ownership over implementation of its counter narcotics strategy; and promoting greater coherence in the funding of counter narcotics-related activities.

Whilst managed by UNDP, the Fund's activities will be executed by the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan who retains overall responsibility for the nationally managed programme through its designated institutions – the Ministries of Finance and Counter Narcotics. The line ministries, as the implementing partners of the Trust Fund, will work closely with the Ministry of Counter Narcotics to identify, develop and propose counter narcotics-related projects within their mandated area.

The Trust Fund works upon

eight pillars for intervention, namely: Alternative Livelihoods; Building Institutions; Information Campaign; Drug Law Enforcement; Criminal Justice; Eradication; Drug Demand Reduction and Treatment of Drug Addicts; and Regional Cooperation. The EC contribution is not allocated to any specific pillar at this stage and the exact nature of how the money will be spent will be determined at a later date.

Since 2002, EC has contributed a total of \$200m. to UNDP-managed projects.

Improved access to justice expands to provinces

Thanks to a three-year, Euro 6m (approx US \$7m), European Commission-funded project, enhanced access to justice, in particular for vulnerable groups, will be expanded into provinces and districts in line with the Afghan Government's recently adopted "Justice for All Strategy Paper."

In the course of the project, for which the implementation process is to get underway shortly, an intense interaction and co-operation with civil society and NGOs is foreseen.

Tina Gewis, Officer in charge of UNDP's Strengthening of Justice System, says the primary goal of the new project is to empower the rural populace, in particular the vulnerable groups such as the disabled and women, to claim their rights granted to every citizen under the existing Constitution and legislative framework. But in order to be able to claim their rights, there is the initial task of

raising awareness on their rights, of educating these groups on what they are entitled to and what procedures are in place for them to seek what is legitimately theirs. And in accomplishing this task, cooperation and coordination of efforts with the local civil society organizations are to play a key role in the success of the whole concept.

This "grassroots" approach is complementary to the already implemented "Strengthening of Justice System" programme, which has so far achieved a fairly efficient collaboration and harmony among the basic pillars of the judicial system like Ministry of Justice, Supreme Court and the Office of the Chief Prosecutor. This programme is also to continue throughout the next programming cycle until the end of 2008. Although there is said to be donor interest in the continuation of this scheme, full

funding for the \$21m programme has yet to be secured.

The two-pronged mission to render Afghanistan's judicial system effective and efficient is part of the Government's National Development Strategy which is to be submitted to the London Conference at the end of January, when the Afghan Compact, the strategy document on international assistance to Afghanistan in the post-Bonn phase, will be discussed.

After decades of war, having reaffirmed its determination to become a rule-of-law state by adopting the Justice for All Ten-Year Strategy Paper in October 2005, the Government of Afghanistan is likely to be well placed to ask for continued donor support to its reconstruction programme.

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**A knowledge
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An image of Afghanistan



Mazar-e Sharif, by Ayna Khordova

Do you have an image of Afghanistan you'd like to submit? All UNDP staff members are invited to send in high resolution images that show how they see Afghanistan. Please email to emma.sutcliffe@undp.org. Files not to exceed 3MB.

World AIDS Day

On the 18th World AIDS day, the world faced a choice in the global response to AIDS. It could either continue to accept that no effort to curb the spread of HIV will ever suffice, or it could recognize the exceptional global threat posed by AIDS and embark on an equally exceptional response.

Afghanistan, as an active member of the international community, faces this same choice, yet adds its own challenge: to continue to believe that culture and religion make the country immune to HIV or to accept that without ardent public awareness and government commitment, the disease will continue to increase.

On 3 December, the Ministry of Health hosted an event de-

signed to promote public awareness and emphasise government commitment to preventing the spread of HIV. Over 100 people attended the event at the Serena Hotel, which featured strong and impassioned speeches from the Minister of Health and a religious leader from the Ministry of Haj and Awqaf. Both speakers emphasized that public awareness was paramount to preventing HIV reaching endemic proportions and that people infected with HIV are still part of society and should not be excluded in any way.

Afghanistan has only 49 known cases of HIV, however its neighbours Pakistan and Iran have 74,000 and 14,000 cases respectively. At the recent HIV/

AIDS Regional Programme in the Arab States meeting, the rapid pace of infection was emphasized. Based on limited (and perhaps imprecise) statistics, whilst the Arab world has one of the lowest prevalence rates worldwide, it has the second-fastest growing infection rate. Afghanistan's current low levels of HIV prevalence, even among people at high risk of exposure to HIV, present a golden opportunity to pre-empt serious outbreaks.

Dr Zalmay Ahmadzai, Manager of NACP, believes that Afghanistan's statistics could be misleading. "Diagnostic capacity varies and the real number of cases may be far higher as screening has been limited to blood donors," says Ahmadzai.

In his presentation at the Serena Hotel, he stated that much remains to be done, such as training of religious leaders and health workers, advocacy with religious leaders, media outreach campaigns, and educational tool kit production.

UNDP is committed to the prevention of HIV through its support to the Ministry of Health's National HIV/AIDS Control Programme (NACP). Launched in October 2005, UNDP is currently establishing an information library, research and training centre at the Ministry of Health, as well as a Voluntary Confidential and Counseling Testing centre in Jalalabad. (VCCT is currently only available in Kabul).