



# UNDP Afghanistan Newsletter

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## Historic local governance conference commits to back ANDS

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The first ever conference of some 500 elected local representatives of Afghan people ended in Kabul on Wednesday March 1 2006 after the adoption of a resolution, which committed the newly established Provincial Councils (PC) to support the government and asked, in return, for the creation of a conducive working environment for the PCs.

The 13 point resolution said the Provincial Councils were adamant in their support to the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) and that they were determined to promote gender equality, education at all levels, to support agriculture and animal husbandry and all efforts to raise the living standards of the population as well as endeavours against corruption and narcotics. In turn, the PC members demanded that necessary security be provided for them to be able to perform their duties and also called on the government to respect the principles of social justice and equal development.

Provincial Council members were elected in last September's general and local elections.

The three-day conference was called by the Government of President Hamid Karzai to lay down the guiding principles for the Provincial Councils, the first Constitution-based and elected local government structure ever to be established in Afghanistan and the importance attached



*Provincial Council members at the conference*

by the Government to the event was clearly visible through the presence of many cabinet ministers at the proceedings throughout the conference period.

Ahmad Masood Amer Programme Officer for governance issues with the UNDP Country Office in Afghanistan, said they were pleasantly surprised to see that the initiative for the convening of the conference had come from the Government and not from any donor or international organization. "From that point on, we tried to give all the substantive and organizational support we could" he said.

In the course of the proceedings, the PC members were organized into five working groups with each one tasked with delineating the powers and obligations of the PCs. The first working group worked on the general duties and responsibilities: The second on the role of PCs in strengthening security and stability and promoting reconciliation and counter-narcotics: The third on the

functions of PCs in rural and urban development; the fourth group was charged to deliberate on ensuring the observance of women's and children's rights in the society, while the fifth group worked on the modalities of relationships of the PCs with the central government and international organizations.

Karim Khalili, Vice President of Afghanistan, told the closing session of the conference that it was "a very good beginning" to the work of the Provincial Councils and promised that in line with the requests of many of the delegates, the law on Provincial Councils would be improved and clarified in the shortest possible time. He said the PC would be the main bridge between the people and the Government of Afghanistan and as such they had a vital role to play to bring about lasting stability and prosperity in the country. Mr. Khalili said the Government would expect the PCs to contribute to efforts, in five areas in particular: security, counter-narcotics, reconstruction and development, anti-corruption

## Historic local governance conference

and elimination of domestic violence and discrimination against the vulnerable in the society.

Also speaking at the closing session, Chris Alexander, the Deputy SRSG, UNAMA, described the Provincial Councils as “the modern embodiment of the long tradition of decision making” in Afghanistan and said they expected a lot from the Provincial Councils in supporting the central government to achieve the benchmarks set in the Afghanistan Compact, agreed in London in February. Mr. Alexander said the PCs would be the voice of the people to be heard by the Provincial Governors, and through them, by the Central Government.

Some delegates were restrained, though, in their optimism on the functioning of the PCs. Mohammad Muhlis of the Saidabad district of Wardak province said there was a lack of experience and understanding on the part of provincial governors as to how much power sharing would be required to allow PCs to function. He said this was mainly because the PCs represented a totally new concept of local administration. According to Mr Muhlis, the old traditional councils, or shura as they were called, were ad hoc, based on customs, and relied on age and wisdom as the basic tenets of decision making while the PCs are permanent, constitutional and they rely on laws to make decisions. Mahbooba Sa-

dat of Dehedadi district of Balkh province concurred: “We are now not only law based and permanent, but also we conduct a participatory process” she said. “Things are really discussed in detail” she added. The main benefit of this conference was, according to Ms. Sadat, the opportunity it provided to PC members from all over the country to come together and exchange ideas.

Mr. Muhlis said what lay ahead was a difficult task: “For the last 27 years, a very gap formed between the people and the government” he said. “Now the task of the Provincial Councils is to fill that gap and to build the trust among the people for their government.”

## SEAL project visits top leadership of legislature

Younus Qanoni, the Speaker of Wolesi Jirga, the powerful lower house of the Afghan Assembly, received the representatives of the UNDP's SEAL\* project recently both to discuss further assistance projects and to thank them for the valuable contribution the project has already made to Afghanistan's first legislature in three decades.

Mr. Qanoni expressed his deep satisfaction for the quality and the extent of wide-ranging assistance provided by the SEAL Project prior to the inauguration of the Afghan National Assembly. He thanked UNDP Afghanistan for its continued support to the Afghan democratization process and requested the continuation of this active engagement on parliamentary development

In his first ever meeting with SEAL staff at his office, Mr. Qanoni particularly sought assistance in the areas of parliamentary management and leadership, communication, legislative development,



Mr. Qanoni (R) being briefed by Mr. Kabir of SEAL

ICT & E-governance, parliamentary security, parliamentary oversight, and, above all, continued capacity building of the Members of the Afghan National Assembly.

Speaking on behalf of the SEAL project, Monjurul Kabir, acting Project Manager and Advisor on Legislative Affairs, laid out plans for the 2006 activities and informed the Speaker of the further initiatives in capacity development at the Af-

ghan National Assembly.

Earlier, the SEAL project team was also received by Sibghatullah Mujaddidi, the Speaker of the Meshrano Jirga, the upper house, who described the SEAL project as “an invaluable assistance” to the Afghan National Assembly and to all of its members. Mr. Mujaddidi also called for the continuation of SEAL assistance to the Mashrano Jirga to enable it to continue performing its constitutional obligations.

The SEAL delegation also met Farooq Wardak, the State Minister at the newly created State Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs at his office. Mr. Wardak termed the SEAL Project “an excellent example of strategic partnership for, the Afghan democratization process”. Mr. Wardak also sought SEAL assistance in building partnerships between the legislative and the executive branches of Afghanistan.

## Afghanistan finds an enthusiastic partner in Malaysia



*Afghan delegation being briefed on the greenhouse and irrigation technology*



*At the lab of a fruit processing industry*

Prominent government and business figures from Afghanistan and Malaysia spent more than a week at the end of February discussing ways of realizing the existing potential for business development in Afghanistan with Malaysian know-how, and perhaps, capital, with the outcome encouraging everyone involved.

Thanks to a UNDP initiative taken by the Country Office in Malaysia with the involvement of MARDITECH (Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute), and linked to the UNDP Office in Afghanistan, a delegation of more than 20 Afghan government and business representatives visited Malaysia between February 22 and March 2 under the leadership of Dr. Hassan Abdullahi, Deputy Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development.

In particular focus was on the agricultural industry that could help Afghanistan, where most of the fruit produce is spoilt before it can be consumed or properly dried.

Mr. Abdullahi was straightforward in his speech to the joint

meeting of Afghan and Malaysian delegates on February 28: "We believe that in order to develop institutions for agricultural development in Afghanistan, Malaysian technology is relevant and essential..." he said. He went even further to propose three steps of tangible cooperation to be taken without delay. "I look forward to the initiation of at least three pilot projects spanning quality assurance and standards, fruit processing and value added production of dry fruits to commence this year", he said. His Malaysian counterpart, Dato Joseph Salang, Deputy Foreign Minister of Malaysia, was equally forthcoming. "We are ready to provide training in existing and new areas, including rural development, privatization and disaster preparedness" he said. Both Ministers thanked the UNDP and called for its continued engagement in the process.

The visit followed an earlier assessment mission by a MARDITECH team to Afghanistan in October 2005, which concluded that there was encouraging potential in

reviving and expanding the fruit processing sector in Afghanistan. Immediately after the visit the Marditech team prepared an "Action Plan" which is now being implemented in stages.

The visit may have produced more than the Afghan delegation had bargained for. Preparations are already underway for a seminar in Kuala Lumpur on business opportunities between Malaysia and Afghanistan for investors interested in investing in Afghanistan.

Further, there are signs that Malaysian businessmen have already been nurturing the idea of establishing a "Malaysian-Afghan Joint Business Council" to regulate what is hoped to be increasingly frequent interaction between the business communities of the two countries.

Once the business ties have been firmly established with Malaysia, Afghanistan can justifiably look forward to receiving more investors interested in other sectors of its economy as well.

## CNTF Steering Committee meets for the first time

The Steering Committee of the Counter Narcotics Trust Fund (CNTF) met for the first time on March 7 to discuss its Terms of Reference and issues surrounding the forthcoming process of project approval to be managed by the Board of the CNTF.

The Steering Committee, whose overall task is to monitor and oversee the implementation of the CNTF programme, comprises a bigger number of members and has a more flexible structure as compared to the Board of the CNTF, which consists of

representatives of the Government of Afghanistan, the United Kingdom, the Asian Development Bank, UNAMA and the UNDP. The World Bank is an observer at the board meetings.

Representatives of 18 current and potential donors were also present at the Steering Committee meeting to be familiarized with the broad structure and planned implementation processes of the CNTF. Discussion focused in particular on the kind of projects that the CNTF is to support.

Under the existing guidelines, the board of CNTF is empowered with making the final decision on whether to approve the projects that must be submitted through the already adopted procedures, and once approved the funding for the pro-

jects is to be provided by the Ministry of Finance.

The projects funded by the CNTF will be mainly aimed at empowering Afghan families and communities to get rid of their dependence on poppy cultivation or trade for their livelihoods and to start businesses or other economic activities on legitimate grounds.

So far, the CNTF has received donations to the tune of US\$16.4 m. and it is expected that by the end of March 2006, this figure is to reach some US\$28 m.

The first meeting of the CNTF Steering Committee was set to take place in February, but had to be delayed due to absence of several of its key members.

## International Women's Day launch-pad for long-term action plan

Dr. Massouda Jalal, the Minister of Women's Affairs launched a ten-year action plan on March 8, with a view to breaking the barriers that constrain the development of women in Afghanistan.



ents to accelerate nation building and bring about a better life for everybody.”

Also present at the ceremony in the Loya Jirga tent at the Kabul Polytechnic University, where Afghanistan's new constitution was born, were President Hamid Karzai and senior government officials and representatives of international organizations.

President Karzai, in his speech, said much had been achieved for women's rights but more needed to be done.

Meryem Aslan, UNIFEM's Programme Director said: "Women who have been able to break through gender, class and ethnic barriers and became active political and economic agents and who are now active in the civil society, media, private sector and civil service have a great potential for building strategic alliances and leading/facilitating behavioural changes in the society."

The celebration of International Women's Day in Afghanistan first took place in 2002 just four months after the collapse of the Taliban regime. Since then women have voted for the first time in presidential and parliamentary elections. One woman is a regional governor in Afghanistan and women now hold seats in Parliament and senior positions in ministries and other organisations.

Afghanistan with a special event for the first time. The two-hour event featured issue focused games, allowing the staff members to express their views on gender issues. Interestingly enough, most of the winners of the games were male staff members, with Ghulam Mohyuddin Sherani, Programme Officer for Disaster Risk Reduction, winning two awards. But the most hilarious remark of the event came from Siphosami Patrick Malunga, Manager of the Justice Project, with the whole staff bursting into laughter when he said: "My mother always used to tell me what to do and now my wife always tells me what do."



UNDP Afghanistan celebrates Women's Day

The choir of young Afghan girls contributed to the celebrations with their songs

In a ceremony to mark International Women's Day, Dr. Jalal addressed hundreds of delegates coming from every corner of the country by announcing the launch of the scheme, known as the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA).

Dr. Jalal said it "will translate the policies and commitments of our government into concrete programmes, projects and services that will eliminate women's difficulties, build their capacities, and harness their energies and tal-

### Women's Day Marked in UNDP

Meanwhile, International Women's Day was marked at the UNDP Country Office in Af-

## Workshop Disability Advocacy and Mainstreaming for Balkh province

Disability is a multi-dimensional and sectoral issue that needs everyone's attention. With this basic premise in mind, the National Programme for Action on Disability (NPAD) is determined to ensure that the international community in Afghanistan, and certainly the UN agencies, development partners and major non-governmental organizations (NGOs) put disability and the major concerns of over two million disabled Afghans on their radar. This is the only way that the ongoing processes and efforts at national reconstruction, reintegration and development will be meaningful as these efforts must mobilize and harness the talents and potential of all Afghans, including those with disabilities.

Disabled people do not want charity and welfare, for certainly that is not development nor is it sustainable. They want facilitation and investment in their education, skills development, livelihoods, employment opportunities and capacity development of their groups and structures for enhanced advocacy and participation. Realization of these demands will give them the confidence and inspiration to en-

gage and participate as equal partners in the development and governance of their country. This renewed approach to disability as a rights-based development issue requires new commitment, resources, disability affirming policies and a radical paradigm shift in the design and programming of development initiatives.

It is against this background that NPAD organized a day-long awareness, advocacy and disability mainstreaming workshop for UN agencies, NGOs, Government staff and leaders of disabled people's organizations (DPOs) in Mazar-e-Sharif.

The objectives of the workshop were to appraise the participants of the national, regional and international situation and status of disabled people; induct them on disability advocacy and mainstreaming tools including accessibility issues; and to get them to develop a joint provincial roadmap on the issues of the disabled.

Most participants felt the workshop was timely and extremely important "We have the will to include people with disabilities in our overall work, but we lack the know-how and the necessary tools" said the local FAO representative at the event, echoing the widely felt sentiment among the participants. All agreed that

the UN family should lead by example on the rights-based and inclusive development approach.

The workshop held at the UNAMA compound in Mazar attracted twenty two participants drawn from UNICEF, UNDP, FAO, WFP, UNHCR, UNAMA and WHO. NGOs that were represented at the workshop included ACTIONAID, the Swedish Committee, ICRC and three DPO leaders and an official each from the ministries of Education and Public Health.

Some key issues were raised that would form part of the provincial roadmap on disability mainstreaming and the empowerment of the disabled. These include but are not limited to: provincial disability needs assessment, intensified advocacy and awareness campaigns both at the grassroots and policymakers level, review and profiling of the skills and training needs of the disabled, mobilization of more resources for the disability sector, the need for more coordination and partnerships and the inclusion of DPOs in these meetings, mobilization for formation of more DPOs and the capacity building of existing ones and provision of technical support. NPAD plans to conduct similar workshops in Kabul, Nangarhar, Kandahar and Herat provinces.

## Afghan UNV takes glimpse of life in Liberia

When the plane carrying Rahima Walizada touched down at Monrovia's international airport at 9.00 pm, it was completely dark and there were no signs of a steady power supply to light the air terminal.

Rahima's expectations to see a lively city with round-the-clock open shops (as in Malaysia or Thailand, the countries she had visited before) and a lot of traffic in the brightly lit streets were shattered.

But her visit to the UN compound next morning to take up her new three-month assignment with UNMIL (UN Mission in Liberia) as the Human Resources Assistant would raise her spirits again.

Her mood was to be further illuminated when she met the other Afghan UNV serving with UNMIL in the next few days.

Rahima joined the UNDP in Afghanistan back in 1991 as a Human Resources Assistant after the completion of her studies in French literature at Kabul University, a position that allowed her to build up enough experience to put forward her can-

didacy for the UNMIL vacancy in the Human Resources section.

Rahima remembers her work three months after her return to Kabul in December 2005 as a challenging task at first, gradually getting easier thanks to the supportive attitude of the international staff she was working with. Although she says she had some difficulties working with Liberian national staff, she prefers not to speak about these experiences.

But her problems with adjusting to local food were never to go away and she developed a taste for Lebanese cuisine, the varieties of which were easily available in the local shops.

Rahima is pleased to have worked as an International Staff member under the UNV Umbrella, because she has not only gained new experience, but also contributed to the capacity development in Liberia by training a Liberian national to fill her own position after her departure.



*Rahima Walizada (centre)*

She has one bit of advice to everyone who would like to become an international UNV:

Everyone should try to have a glimpse of such an experience, but whoever wishes to do so must prepare well in advance by collecting the required information on the country, its people, climate and customs before embarking on the adventure.

## UNDP-GAIN environmental awareness raising & capacity building: Distribution of calendars launched in Mazar-e-Sharif!

UNDP GAIN (Greening Afghanistan Initiative) calendars were distributed at a launching event in Mazar-e-Sharif attended by the regional governor, heads of line governmental departments and UN agencies and NGOs.



*Balkh Governor Atta Mohammad Noor looking at the new calendar*

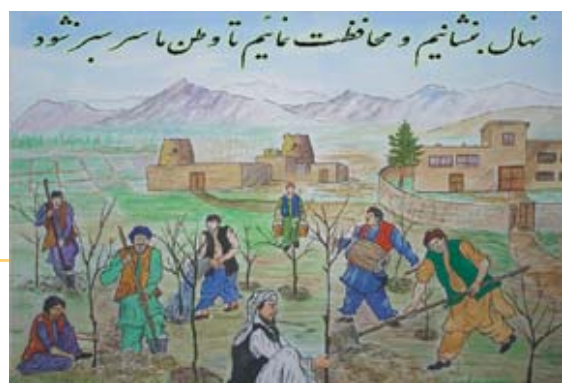
The UNDP GAIN project's two main components are community mobilization to increase the tree survival rate in GAIN projects during plantation and developing the capacity in the National Environment Protection Agency NEPA for Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting.

The project supports the programme "Greening Afghanistan Initiative" (GAIN) in which several UN agencies have agreed to tackle the environmental degradation in Afghanistan.

The first component focuses on the northern provinces of the country. Since the beginning of March the Regional Office in Mazar has been operational. The team is taking up four distinctive strategies for community mobilization: environmental awareness raising by publishing posters, pamphlets, newsletters, and story books; community-based awareness raising by organizing training sessions in villages; site awareness training in public parks, private nurseries and local farms; conducting seminars, workshops and training sessions for the government workers and environmental agents.

At one of the first activities, during the celebration of women's day in Mazar-e-Sharif on March 8 2006 in the Tolo Hall, representatives from the UNDP Gain Project introduced GAIN objectives to the participants by distributing GAIN calendars. The Balkh Governor Atta Mohammad Noor attended, along with heads of line governmental departments, focal points of United Nations Agencies and NGOs.

The Balkh governor whilst taking a look at the calendar said that "trees enhance the quality of life in our communities, this spring, the traditional tree planting season; we hope people will consider the environmental benefits of trees and bushes. We will be excited to support UNDP GAIN in Balkh province in all aspects of implementation if need be."



## Kabul Engineering Faculty celebrates revived library



*The opening ceremony*



*The new library*

Prof. Ata M. Nazar of Kabul University's Engineering Faculty and Kumi Furuyashiki of the UNDP's Urban Development Group (UDG) jointly inaugurated the revived and rehabilitated library of the faculty on March 8, allowing the Faculty to resume catering to the intellectual needs of the students.

The renovation work was made possible thanks to contributions from the family of Ms. Eriko Ohara and UNDP core funds. Eriko Ohara was tragically overcome by a fatal disease when she was working for a project with Japan's SSC company for the Kabul University.

Prof. Nazar said at the inauguration that it was a happy moment for the whole faculty staff to have their library revived and renewed. He expressed the hope that future book donations

would make the library a richer resource base for research and study.

Scott Hackney, the Project Manager of the Urban development Group (UDG) of the UNDP said he believed the engineers who were to graduate from the faculty would make an enormous contribution to Afghanistan's reconstruction efforts and that the library would hopefully be a source of knowledge to be used by all of them.

The Ohara family contributed US\$8,000 to the renovation work of the library and the fund was administered by the UNDP.

Ms. Eriko Ohara's contribution to the efforts to revive the Kabul University's Engineering Faculty and her memory will be immortalized by a plaque to be placed at the library.



*Eriko Ohara*



UNDP is the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life. We are on the ground in 166 countries, working with them on their own solutions to global and national development challenges. As they develop local capacity, they draw on the people of UNDP and our wide range of partners.

World leaders have pledged to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, including the overarching goal of cutting poverty in half by 2015. UNDP's network links and coordinates global and national efforts to reach these Goals. Our focus is helping countries build and share solutions to the challenges of: Democratic Governance, Poverty Reduction, Crisis Prevention and Recovery, Energy and Environment, Information and Communications Technology, HIV/AIDS.

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## An image of Afghanistan

*Photo by: Nicola Rieger*

