One year on since the official launch of DIAG, the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups, the process is continuing to move forward at a steady pace with a number of activities in the last weeks and more than 20,000 weapons collected in the first year.

In Daikundi province the process is continuing when on May 24 the Provincial DIAG Coordination representative in Daikundi held a workshop for the launch of the DIAG Main Phase in the province.

The workshop was attended by the Governor, local heads of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, the Afghanistan National Army, the National Department of Security, the Chief of Police, representatives of the Ministry of Haj and Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Water and Energy and a member of Regional Verification committee.

During the workshop, the Provincial DIAG Coordinator for Daikundi explained the Concept of Operation and the Provincial Implementation Plan for the Main Phase to be launched soon in Daikundi province.

The purpose of the workshop was to follow up on the conference held on May 14 for the eight provinces targeted under the DIAG Main Phase in the second group which include Badakhshan, Farah, Ghor, Nangarhar, Bamyan, Wardak, Ghazni and Daikundi.

Main Phase of DIAG is part of a governmental programme implemented by the Joint Secretariat of the Disarmament and Reintegration Commission with the support of the international community to disband illegal armed groups in the country.

DIAG IN TAKHAR

June 1 was marked as D-Day for the launch of the DIAG Main Phase in Takhar Province. Takhar is the fourth province in group one after Kapisa, Herat and Farah to begin with the implementation of DIAG Main Phase.

Thirty eight identified illegal armed groups and government officials linked with illegal armed groups were given notification letters signed by the Second Vice President, Karim Khalili. The letters give the groups and officials 30 days to surrender their weapons and disband or sever their links with illegal armed groups. If they do not comply, they will face dismissal and/or prosecution by state institutions.

General Daud the Deputy Minister for Interior Affairs said that DIAG is not a programme to take only take weapons from individuals but that it is a programme to disband the armed groups in order to ensure a sustainable safe and secure country.
Most reasonable estimates suggest that the population of Kabul has grown since the fall of the Taliban regime in November 2001 from 500,000 to perhaps as many as four million people. The resulting pressure and strain on public services is tremendous.

In an effort to alleviate some of the strain in the busy city the Urban Development Group (UDG), of UNDP with the municipality of Kabul and the Ministry of Urban Development, has just completed building eleven public toilets in eight different districts of the city.

Each building has five toilet rooms and separate sections for men and women including a fully accessible toilet for people with disabilities.

Speaking at a handover ceremony the Mayor of Kabul, Ghulam Sakhi Noorzad, said he appreciated the work of UNDP and requested that more public toilets should be built in the city.

The project, which took seven months to complete at a cost of US$ 654,000, was originally suggested by Kabul municipality as it looked at some of the most urgent infrastructure needs of the city.

In keeping with the guiding principles of UDG projects the construction of the toilets provided a total of 17,574 man days of work for internally displaced people ex-combatants, returnees and vulnerable people.
The objectives of the retreat were to promote voluntarism, to review and advocate for the Millennium Development Goal, to provide an opportunity for sharing of experiences among UN Volunteers and to discuss ways of bringing effective solutions to their problems.

A special message from Mr. Ad de Raad, Executive Coordinator of UN Volunteers from the headquarters in Bonn to was read out to UNVs in Afghanistan. In it he said: “It is my hope that — especially in an environment you live and work in as in Afghanistan — your time together during the retreat will be one of strengthening the large UNV family we have there. You are an exceptional group of professionals, and you make us very proud that you are associated with the UN Volunteers programme.”

Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations is quoted as saying: “At the heart of volunteerism are the ideals of service and solidarity and the belief that together we can make the world better. In that sense, we can say that volunteerism is the ultimate expressions of what the United Nations is all about.”

The United Nations Volunteers is the UN organization that supports sustainable human development globally through the promotion of voluntarism, including the mobilization of volunteers. The UNV programme has been present in Afghanistan since 1989 and since then more than 1000 International National and TOKTEN UN Volunteers have contributed to the reconstruction and development in Afghanistan by supporting relief, humanitarian and capacity building programs, and the Voter Registration and the Electoral Assistance projects, in preparation for Afghanistan’s first presidential and parliamentary elections.

More than 70 international and national UN Volunteers from different parts of Afghanistan joined the first Retreat of UN Volunteers on June 9-10 at the UNICEF Conference Room in the UNOCA compound on the Jalalabad Road in Kabul.

The event was inaugurated by Ameerah Haq, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative. Ms. Haq pointed out the valuable contributions UNVs have made in Afghanistan and how they are the backbone for every grassroots achievement especially in areas such as elections.

As part of the UN’s fifty years of involvement in Afghanistan, the United Nations Volunteers programme has been present in the country since 1989.

Over this period, more than 1,200 international, national and TOKTEN (Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate National) UN Volunteers have contributed to the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan by supporting relief, humanitarian and capacity building programs as part of different UN agencies.
Profiles of some of the UN Volunteers in Afghanistan
From Malawi, India, Nepal and Tajikistan

Being a UNV in Afghanistan is challenging to everyone and so is being a UNV all over the world. I am one of those long serving UNVs in the system. I have served as a UNV in different capacities and have acquired vast experience in my life as a UNV. For me it is a great opportunity for sharing my professional working experience with my fellow International and National colleagues and it contributes to my input on governance, human rights and development process a challenging and rewarding experience. Thank you to UNV and let us keep the “V” spirit growing TALL and WIDE.

Name: Rose Khan
Age: 50
Country: Malawi
Job title: Programme Officer (Health & Nutrition)
Duty station: Country Office
Agency: WFP
Time in Afghanistan: Since 2004

Name: Dr. Pandu Nagarajan
Age: 52
Country: India
Job title: UNDP Dispensary Doctor
Duty Station: Kabul
Agency: UNDP
Time in Afghanistan: From December 8 2005

Being a UNV and as a Doctor, my main goal is to serve the people of Afghanistan and the staff of UNDP and other agencies in Afghanistan, where medical facilities are inadequate.

Name: Malika Iskandari
Age: 28
Country: Tajikistan
Job title: Programme Officer
Duty station: Gardez
Agency: WFP
Time in Afghanistan: One month

Being a UNV I hope to help the poor and vulnerable and make their life better.

Name: Shrestha Bina
Age: 50
Country: Nepal
Job title: Programme Officer
Duty station: Jalalabad
Agency: WFP
Time in Afghanistan: From September 2004

UNV offers me a challenge and real job satisfaction.
More profiles of some of the UN Volunteers in Afghanistan
From Ghana, Tajikistan and Sierra Leone

Working with WFP in the remote Badakhshan province and feeding food to insecure people is a lifetime challenge and I am glad to see the difference I have made in peoples’ lives working as a volunteer.

Kobby M. Mensah
Name:
Age: 32
Country: Ghana
Job title: Programme Officer
Duty station: Badakhshan, Faizabad
Agency: WFP
Time in Afghanistan: For the past 27 months

Being a UNV in Afghanistan is a big challenge for me as it is my first experience to be an international specialist. It is a great opportunity for me to share my professional working experience with my international and national colleagues and it gives me a chance to make a contribution to the development process of Afghanistan. During the period from 2003 – 2006 I was directly involved with the WFP operation in Afghanistan and have been working in Faizabad, Kandahar, Mazar and Turkmenistan.

Zarif Rahmanov
Name:
Age: 38
Country: Tajikistan
Job title: Finance / Administration Officer
Duty station: Mazar-e-Sharif
Agency: WFP
Time in Afghanistan: Since January 2003

UNVs in Afghanistan have played an indispensable role in the agencies and especially during the past two elections.

Andrew Stanley Colway
Name:
Age: 33
Country: Sierra Leone
Job title: Finance Officer
Duty station: Kabul
Agency: UNAMA
Time in Afghanistan: Since December 2004

The reason why I became a UNV is because I was working for UNAMSIL in my country as peacekeeper and I wanted to continue with a peacekeeping operation with the United Nations. I joined the UNV because I wanted to do peace building in a country affected by war and I wanted to help the development of the nation. Also, there was so much senselessness in my country for ten years, but due to the effort of UNV and permanent staff members of the UN we (Sierra Leoneans) are enjoying peace and economic development now.

John Hamilton
Name:
Age: 42
Country: Sierra Leone
Job title: Administration / Finance
Duty station: Kunduz
Agency: UNDP / ANBP
Time in Afghanistan: The past eight months
**Disability projects get top billing at UNAMA press conference**

UNDP’s National Programme for Action on Disability presented its work at the weekly UNAMA press conference on June 12.

NPAD’s Programme Manager Shaya Asindua Ibrahim briefed the media on issues such as the development of Afghanistan’s sign language, the completion of a Disability Resource Centre in Khair Khana in Kabul (see UNDP Newsletter May 15 2005) and a disability awareness trip attended by eight Afghans in America.

Next week deaf experts from America start work in Afghanistan on further developing the country’s sign language from 2000 words to 4000 words. There are an estimated 10,000 people in Afghanistan who are hearing impaired.

**FACTS AND FIGURES**

There are more than 800,000 disabled people in Afghanistan according to a Handicap International survey (the real figure could be as high as two million)

People with physical disabilities make up 44%, mental 38% and sensory 18%

25% are war related

75% of children with disabilities are out of school

80% of people with disabilities are unemployed

**Vital computer training for the police**

Forty eight police officers from 15 provinces in Afghanistan have started 20 days of basic computer training to allow them to implement the Electronic Payroll System and Human Resource Database which is part of the Law and order Trust Fund’s (LOTFA) support to the police service.

The computerization of the payroll project for the police of the Ministry of Interior started in March 2004.

The training, which will be complete at the end of June, covers a number of subject areas, which are intended to bring each candidate up to an acceptable skill level, so that further personal advancement may be achieved independently through continued practice, and by using other software programmes.

The training is a joint effort of LOTFA and the Ministry of the Interior.
Disability and development: Time to walk the talk

By Phitalis Were Maskhwe, National Programme for Action on Disability

For a couple of decades now the topic of disability and development has featured prominently in development discourse. Many studies linking disability and development have been undertaken by major development movers and shakers. Global and regional initiatives have been convened to discuss, reflect and analyze the cost of exclusion.

As a result, major development partners have pledged to ensure that their policies, resources and programmes are accessible and inclusive of the more than 600 million disabled worldwide. Yet my concern is that we have lingered far too long at the level of talking, researching, conferencing and theorizing! Isn’t this a scandal in our age? Can disabled people eat intellectual disquisitions on disability and development? These theoretical flourishes benefit only those who engage in them. It’s time for an end to development polemics.

This article is written based on my over twelve years’ practical experience and observation working in the field of disability and development, first in Kenya and now in Afghanistan. I also write it as one who has lived with a disability for the last 35 years, having contracted polio at the tender age of three. So I have seen it all!

Here in Afghanistan, resources are extremely wanting. Among the formidable challenges are low human capacity, a fragile and fragmented disability movement, disproportionately high poverty and illiteracy among the disabled, and a lack of policy and legal infrastructure to support the mainstreaming of the over 2 million Afghans with disabilities. Getting the international community present in Afghanistan to appreciate the enormity of disability as a human rights and development issue is an uphill climb. My work includes alerting development partners to the larger repercussions of exclusion: that disgruntled and hopeless people with disabilities could resort to illegal and socially damaging survival tactics. If the plight of the disabled continues to go unaddressed, it could pose a serious threat to peace and stability not only in Afghanistan, but globally.

The number of people with disabilities continues to rise every day through disease, malnutrition, accidents, terrorism, man-made and natural disasters and war. According to UN figures, only 5% of disabled children are accessing education and fully 80% of people with disabilities worldwide are unemployed. While talk of disability mainstreaming goes on, the World Bank and the United Nations continue to churn out mind-boggling statistics on the state of the world’s disabled. Eighty-two percent of people with disabilities live below the poverty line in developing countries like Afghanistan. The World Bank says that one in every six absolutely poor people has some form of disability. With this wealth of statistics at our disposal, how is it that the disabled remain practically invisible in our development programming and initiatives?

All development partners and NGOs have one thing in common: they are all committed to observance of human rights for all and to poverty eradication, as expressed in the Millennium Development Goals and similar pro-poor schemes. Yet an objective critique of these landmark development blueprints reveals a conspicuous absence of the disabled. The current international development framework largely excludes them, particularly at ground level.

To be sure, many development partners, NGOs and civil societies have produced flowery disability-affirming policies and good statements of intent on disability mainstreaming. But take those statements and measure them against practice in those organizations, and the picture is maddening. Walk into their offices and count the number of disabled employees, the adjustments to the physical workspace, and you are bound to come away dismayed. And where some disabled people are employed, what positions do they hold? Do they add value or are they merely window-dressing?

Disabled people deserve bolder strides toward mainstreaming. They need to be integrated into planning mechanisms, with more resources dedicated to the cause as we have seen with HIV/AIDS, environmental sustainability and other causes. Disability-disaggregated data should be standard output in our development monitoring and reporting. Barriers to mobility and access need to be removed at once, and donor and government commitment to these efforts needs to be reflected in the design of schools, hospitals and the entire infrastructures these partners support.

Above all, disabled people need more resources channelled toward strengthening their capacity for self-advocacy. Many development partners are reluctant to fund the organizational development of groups comprising the disability movement, citing “lack of capacity.” But isn’t capacity-building one of our core mandates as development partners? It’s time to walk the talk on disability and development.

The writer is a regular commentator on disability and development. He is currently the International Advisor, Disability Rights & Advocacy for UNDP Afghanistan.
Bronze for UN Afghanistan Volleyball team

The UN Afghanistan Volleyball team has won a Bronze medal at the UN games held in Pesaro, Italy on May 17-23. More than 1,350 UN staff members participated in the games. Twenty four sportsmen from Afghanistan's UN agencies took part in the games, including football, basketball, swimming, table tennis and volleyball.

Younis Imal from the UNDP Financial Management Unit said: “For the first time Afghanistan participated in the UN games. I was asked by the main organiser of the games to carry the flag in the opening ceremony wearing my traditional Afghan clothes. We also performed an Afghan national dance during the games.”

National Assembly members to Estonia for E-Parliament training

Thirteen members and secretariat staff of Afghanistan’s National Assembly (five members of the Wolesi Jirga, three members of the Meshrano Jirga and five secretariat staff) are attending information, communications and technology training to help them see the importance of having in place the right national policies and strategies on the information society.

This will help them achieve meaningful impacts in real life, help the process of democracy and see the potential ICT can have in a country’s overall development. UNDP’s SEAL project (Support to the Establishment of the Afghan Legislature) has organised the training as part of its commitment to and work with the national assembly members and staff.

The specialised week long course is taking place in Tallinn in Estonia at the e-Governance Academy which was initiated in 2002 by the United Nations Development Programme, the Open Society Institute (OSI) and the Estonian Government.

Estonia has been one of the success stories in the development of the information society and the use of ICT in the public sector. The country has reached a high level in the overall spread and use of ICT (eg: 78% of Income Tax declarations were submitted online in 2005).

The training program specifically addresses various forms of public-private partnerships among key stakeholders, shows how the general public should be involved and emphasizes a critical importance of the political will to ensure a much needed continuity and consistency during the implementation of adopted policies and passed laws.

SEAL forum on civil society

The UNDP’s SEAL project (Support to the Establishment of the Afghan Legislature) held a half day forum at the National Assembly on enhancing the relations between civil society organizations and the Gender and Civil Society committees of the parliament.

The main purpose of the forum was to link up civil society organizations with the parliamentary committees to help the future coordination of civil society support activities.

A further aim is to ensure assembly committee members are aware of the importance of Afghan civil society and advocate human rights, especially women’s rights in the civil service and civil society fields.

Speaking at the opening of the forum Anita Nirody, Acting Country Director of UNDP said: “Through our SEAL project, UNDP has provided and will continue to provide substantial support to the establishment and functioning of the National Assembly. A very key element of that support is to extend the public outreach of the National Assembly and its interactions with civil society. I very much hope that we can use this meeting to find ways and solutions to interact and communicate more effectively amongst each other through the forum of discussion that we are going to have.”

Sediga Balkhi, the chairperson of Gender and Civil Society Committee of the Meshrano Jirga praised the fact that civil society and the assembly committees were coming together. He explained the work of the committee: “The main duty of our committee is studying and evaluating civil societies and gender, implementation of laws, also making laws and studying laws that are made by the government and by civil society and the laws that we are jointly making and implementing; those are the duties of our committee.”
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.

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An Image of Afghanistan