Since 1990, some of the most trade-intensive countries, such as China and Singapore, have seen unemployment rates substantially increase. Moreover, the benefits of free trade have accrued more to highly-paid skilled workers rather than unskilled workers, further undermining human development.

The Asia Pacific Human Development Report (APHDR), launched on June 29 2006 in Kuala Lumpur, could not be unveiled at a more appropriate time for Afghanistan.

The report entitled “Trade on Human Terms: Transforming Trade for Human Development in Asia and the Pacific” examines recent developments on trade and economic growth and assesses the impact on human development – more specifically, the effects on the region’s poorest countries and on its poorest people.

The report further emphasizes that neither trade nor growth can ever be ends in themselves; but means towards the larger goals of expanded human development and combating poverty and deprivation. The report goes on and offers an eight-point agenda to help countries rise to the challenge of a demanding new environment for international trade as below:

► Invest for competitiveness
► Adopt strategic trade policies
► Restore a focus on agriculture
► Combat jobless growth
► Prepare a new tax regime
► Maintain stable and realistic exchange-rates
► Persist with multilateralism
► Cooperate with neighbours

In the context of Afghanistan, the APHDR is consistent with the Afghan government’s regional cooperation framework – designed to integrate Afghanistan into the growing regional economy through trade, transit, investment, labour exchange and increased reliance on regional resources for development. The Interim-Afghanistan National Development Strategy also identifies access to regional and international markets, as debated in the regional report, as a means to achieve Afghanistan’s economic growth and political stability.

Despite the importance and appropriateness of the regional report, Afghanistan’s relationship to the concept and practice of Human Development is not new. Back in 2003, UNDP and the Government of Afghanistan agreed to start a participatory process of producing the country’s first ever National Human Development Report (NHDR). The report entitled “Security with a Human Face: Challenges and Responsibilities” came out with a message that “Poverty, unemployment and inequality are bigger threats to the everyday lives of Afghans than traditional security threats.” (Afghanistan NHDR 2004)

Building on the success of Afghanistan’s first National Human Development Report for 2004, the United Nations Development Programme and Kabul University have embarked on establishing the Centre for Policy and Human Development at Kabul University. At a critical juncture of Afghanistan’s transition to development, the 2004 NHDR clearly identified challenges for sustained research and analysis among Afghan specialists and institutions, in order to carry out alternative policy research beyond the production of a national report. Capitalizing on lessons learned, and housed at Afghanistan’s premier institution of higher education, the centre supports long-term capacity for research, advocacy and teaching on human development and policy research in general.

The Centre for Policy and Human Development in partnership with Kabul University is currently engaged in preparations for producing Afghanistan’s second National Human Development Report for 2006.

In cooperation with the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Commerce, UNDP is co-hosting a national launch on Monday July 10 2006 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kabul.

Afghan sign language on the move thanks to NPAD

The further development of Afghanistan’s first ever comprehensive sign language is leaping forward with the support of UNDP’s National Programme for Action on Disability and with the British NGO SERVE.

In the last two weeks of June some 40 hearing impaired people from across Afghanistan came together in Kabul to start work on increasing the number of signs available for them to use.

The Afghanistan National Association of the Deaf has already developed 2000 signs and the aim of the recent Kabul workshop was to boost the number of signs to 4000, concentrating on the development of grammar in particular.

The Deputy Speaker of the Wolesi Jirga and the Deputy Minister of Youth have launched a joint initiative with the UNDP and other agencies to focus on what efforts are being taken to support the youth of Afghanistan.

In June Ms. Fawzia Koofi from the Parliament and Mr. Timor Shah Achekzai, the Deputy Minister of Youth, chaired two meetings to brainstorm on the subject “Youth and democratic governance; what initiatives are already underway and what are the additional areas in need of support?”

“Given the large proportion that youth represent in Afghanistan’s demography and considering the pivotal role youth play in Afghan society, UNDP is in the process of identifying areas of youth engagement in need for support, with a particular focus on the role of youth in democratic governance. We are aware that a series of donors and UN agencies are already involved in supporting youth initiatives of different natures and want to complement these efforts. UNDP had supported the participation of young Afghan leaders in a leadership training last year in Thailand and some ideas on follow up on this initiative have been brought to our attention already,” said Ms. Karen Hussmann, Programme Officer at UNDP.

A smaller working group will now be established by the Deputy Minister of Youth to look at a number of issues including developing a youth strategy and to identify possible resources to support the development of the strategy.

Assembly member from Paktika Ms. Garghasha, who’s 26 and the youngest member of the parliament will also participate in the working group along with representatives from other organisations.

The youth initiative falls within UNDP’s future Civil Society Empowerment project which envisages strengthening the capacity of Afghan youth to become a recognized “voice” and to help them participate in policy discussions and democratic governance. The UNDP programme will compliment current interventions and efforts by other partners such as the UN-Habitat youth development project.
People with disabilities get the chance to go into business for themselves

The UNDP’s National Programme for Action on Disability (NPAD) is pushing forward the chances for people with disabilities to get into business and make a living.

NPAD supports an initiative called Afghan Ability which promotes private sector participation by people with disabilities. The intent is to mainstream them and get civil society to focus on the ability aspects rather than on the disability. The Coca-Cola Company has now joined with NPAD and Afghan Ability by providing ten kiosks from which people with disabilities can sell everyday items such as phone cards, biscuits, sweets and drinks.

At a special ceremony at the Ministry of Martyrs, Disabled and Social Affairs a draw was made to choose who would be given a kiosk. The Deputy Minister of Martyrs, Disabled and Social Affairs had to make the draw for the lucky winners from twenty bags, one for each district in Kabul city, each with twenty names in it. The twenty winners drawn will then go on to team up into pairs to operate the ten kiosks which cost about US$ 700 each.

To ensure transparency in the selection process twenty disabled representatives were invited from the twenty districts of Kabul city to oversee the balloting process, which selected the lucky twenty disabled from a list of 400 people who were known to be the neediest.

“It is a happy occasion that we are starting this work of a very important project. Although it is very small, it is very important because the problem of the disabled is a huge problem. A number of them were disabled for the freedom of this country and their biggest problem is now unemployment,” said Mr. Najibullah Fahim, the Deputy Minister of Martyrs, Disabled and Social Affairs.

“The aim of this programme is to integrate people with disabilities into society as other people are,” said Rudy Rodriguez, UNDP’s Senior Technical Advisor to the Ministry of Martyrs, Disabled and Social Affairs.

Takhar province winning in DIAG Main Phase

The June 22 handover puts the Farkhar District of Takhar well ahead of the other targeted provinces of Group One (Kapisa, Herat, Farah, Takhar and Laghman) in the DIAG Main Phase.

At the end of the ceremony, eight leaders of the illegal armed groups were given letters of confirmation for their compliance with DIAG process.

The DIAG Main Phase is the process where commanders and those associated with illegal armed groups have 30 days to voluntarily surrender their weapons before government authority compels them to do so.

By voluntarily surrendering their weapons, the commanders are not only complying with the gun law regulating the possession of weapons in Afghanistan, but also actively supporting the DIAG programme, a process which intends to consolidate peace, the rule of law and prosperity in Afghanistan.

Since the launch of DIAG in June 2005, a total of 2,356 heavy and light weapons have been surrendered to DIAG weapon collection teams in Takhar province. More than 87% of these weapons are operational and can be issued to the Afghan National Army and police forces.

The collected weapons will eventually be transferred to the Pul-i-Charki central weapons collection depot where they will be under the control of the Afghan National Army. The serviceable weapons will be refurbished and issued to front line army and police units. Non-serviceable weapons will be destroyed.

The DIAG process was first launched on June 11 2005. As of June 24 2006, 23,675 weapons as well as 20,915 pieces of boxed and 194,886 pieces of unboxed ammunition have been handed over to and verified by ANBP (Afghanistan’s New Beginnings Programme) collection teams.
Some twenty five Afghan journalists from leading newspapers, news agencies and television and radio stations attended a background briefing from the three Assistant Country Directors who head up UNDP’s activities in Afghanistan.

Ms. Sitara from the Democratization and Civil Society Empowerment programme, Yonus Payab from Promotion of Sustainable Livelihoods and Abdul Bari from State Building and Government Support outlined UNDP’s key areas of work in Afghanistan and answered questions from the journalists in an informal, background briefing over lunch.

Representatives from most of the key Afghan media were present including news editors and directors and journalists who cover news from international organisations and follow development and reconstruction news.

After a good lunch, two suspiciously complimentary comments from journalists at the event came from Mohammad Ikram Shinwari from Voice of America’s Pashto service and Abdul Hafiz Rahsepar from the Kabul Times newspaper.

“I am familiar with the work of UNDP from the past, but in today’s meeting with the ACDs of UNDP, we learnt about many other things too. In the past we were thinking that the entire job is done directly by the international community, but today we learnt that it is the UNDP which has done most of the job,” said Mr. Shinwari.

Mr. Rahsepar added: “So far it was thought that the UN staff are only driving white cars around. But today we learnt that if the UN is not in Afghanistan, the government will collapse.”


Some of the questions the journalists asked:

**Danish Karokhel, Pajhwok News Agency:**

In your cooperation with the Ministry of Finance, how do you consider the three ministries that are receiving a higher amount of budget than other ministries?

**Jamila Mujahid, Radio Voice of Women:**

I think cooperation should be made with those civil society associations that are functioning. Why is cooperation not made with civil society associations? As far as I know, UNDP has not supported civil society, even if it has done it has done very little. What is your opinion?

**Abdul Hamid Noorzad, Afghan TV:**

Those projects that are considered in the national strategy, how will these projects be put in action as most of criticisms are on the use of US$ 12 billion assistance to Afghanistan?

How will you reduce poverty in the country?

How problematic will be the reorganization of militias by the government?

**Abdul Hai Warshan, Voice of America:**

The World Bank and the government of Afghanistan are saying that the development budget should be used through the Afghan government, but last year US$ 800 million out of US$ 1200 million remained unused and donors are not ready to put that money on the budget of next year. What is your opinion on this?
Focus on learning: a silent revolution

There’s a silent revolution taking place in UNDP Afghanistan which can only have a positive effect on all the programmes and projects implemented by UNDP: everyone seems to be learning.

Globally UNDP has stressed the importance of learning for all staff members. As a result there are now more than 2700 online courses available to staff members as part of the UNDP’s Learning Resource Centre which is running in collaboration with Knowledge Planet.

It offers courses on areas such as general management, project management, IT, self development, human resource management and financial management.

At UNDP Afghanistan learning has suddenly taken on a new meaning in the last four months with an increased enthusiasm. Office cleaner Jamila, who’s 45 years old, has recently taken up English classes. She said: “Although at the beginning I was not willing to start the course, now I feel it is very important for me to learn English. In the past I had problems with understanding things, but I thing 5% of my problem is solved after nearly one month from the start of learning.”

Finance clerk Shakila Aziz is 50 years old and is working on her eighth online course in two months.

“I am very busy with my work, but as we have the opportunity of learning more I was very interested to do so, so I started taking some online courses. I have completed a number of courses including Sexual Harassment, Budgeting, Gender Journey, Analysis, Cash Flow and some others.”

Tina Gewisa Programme Officer is teaching French lessons after office hours.

“Learning will transform the organisation’s culture towards collaboration and knowledge sharing. That will obviously enhance the effectiveness of our delivery process for UNDP’s work in Afghanistan,” UNDP’s Learning Manager in Afghanistan Jai Prakash Upadhyay said.

My strategy in UNDP Afghanistan has been a strong advocacy for learning and connecting the staff members to the collection of learning resources.”

So far 74 UNDP Afghanistan staff members have completed one or more online courses with some members completing up to ten courses.

UNDP is a learning organization.

The organization needs to constantly adapt to new country development needs and staff development is crucial to the accomplishment of UNDP’s goals.

UNDP encourages staff members to allocate 5% of their time for learning, as described in the Learning Framework.

The Learning Plan seeks to provide all staff members opportunities to learn and grow.

The purpose of the Learning Plan is to assist all staff to pursue activities that lead to the acquisition of competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) required for present or future responsibilities.

The importance of Learning

By Jai Prakash Upadhyay

The purpose of learning in UNDP is to develop a knowledge base in supr- lative development advisory services and advocacy so that UNDP will be recognized as first-class in these substantive areas.

The Learning Resources Centre of the Office of Human Resources advocates T-Shaped Learning Profiles for each individual to be an effective member of the UNDP community. Each person will be required to have broad-based knowledge and skills in common practices and development principles (the horizontal part of the “T” profile) as well as in depth knowledge and mastery in one or two substantive skills and knowledge fields (the vertical part of the “T”).

Staff are encouraged to be proactive in their learning and to seek out learning opportunities (both informal and formal) that will allow them to enhance their competencies and develop professionally and ultimately build UNDP into a learning organisation.

The Learning Management System of UNDP makes available more than 2,700 web-based learning programmes that staff members can pursue at their own pace and convenience.

Staff can also avail themselves of the Educational Assistance Programme (EAP).

Staff members are entitled to use 5% of their working hours in learning activities such as reading a book or journal, attending a conference or seminar, etc.
Imagine how many special assistants and front offices there must be in Afghanistan.

Vinod Gupta, the Special Assistant to the UNDP Country Director in Afghanistan, perhaps thought his work would entail too much paperwork in the Country Office to get away from his desk.

Little did he know that he’d be meeting a counterpart in a key Afghan Ministry and helping him set up the office and establishing protocol procedures.

The request came from the Ministry of Martyrs, Disabled and Social Affairs for support to the Minister’s Special Assistant Mr. Sakhi Rezaie.

Over a two day period Mr. Gupta outlined advice for handling a front office. “The issues ranged from handling of incoming and outgoing mail, to ensuring submission of timely and quality information through appropriate coordination at various levels, to follow up on important issues, to organising internal and external meetings and visits, to maintaining confidentiality of information and discreet handling of inquiries, phone calls and visitors, to protocol aspects related to the front office, and to effectively supervising (including mentoring and coaching) the work of junior staff in the front office,” Mr. Gupta said. “A key function of our work in Afghanistan is building capacity, both within the government and our own office.”

Mr. Sakhi Rezaie said: “I learnt how to arrange conferences, how to arrange meetings and I learnt a lot about protocols and coordination. It will indeed open a new chapter in my carrier.”

An Afghan journalist has attended a UNDP organised workshop on media and accountability focusing on reporting anti-corruption.

Jawed Naimi, who’s a news presenter and producer from Tolo TV, one of Afghanistan’s private television channels, joined 15 other journalists at the workshop in Malaysia which preceded the Asia Media Summit at the end of May.

“Only very recently have the Afghan media had access to these types of courses. I think more chances should be given to journalists in order to let them see what is happening abroad and to learn from those experiences,” said Mr. Naimi. “The course was very important for me because it was the first time that I had the opportunity to go abroad for a course based on my job.”

“We were trained how to investigate a defamation or bribery claim against a minister. We should find the source of the claim and then from the smallest points we should start our investigation and finally at the end we should go to the minister and ask him about the claim,” Mr. Naimi added.

In a speech delivered at the training Patrick Keuleers, Regional Advisor at the UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok highlighted the extent of corruption around the world: “The World Bank also estimates that the total amount of bribes paid around the world amounts to 1 trillion US$ per year, nearly twice the annual GDP of Africa and more than 10 times the annual amount of ODA. Money laundering remains the world third largest business, estimated by the IMF to be somewhere between 500 billion and 1.5 trillion US$ per year. By means of comparison, the latest HDR estimates that about US$ 300 billion is needed to lift 1 billion people out of extreme poverty.”

The media development workshop was sponsored by the UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok and conducted by the BBC World Service Trust in cooperation with the UNDP Communications Office and the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcast Development.

Elizabeth Fong, the Regional Manager for the UNDP Regional Centre in Bangkok, wrote: "The 15 participating journalists who stayed for both events gave positive evaluations of the UNDP training. Together they form an invaluable network of journalists who are interested in governance issues and who valued the skills-building exercises they received on covering anti-corruption stories."
UNV highlighted: Manuela da Cruz from East Timor

It was a midnight phone call from UNV HQ in Bonn that opened a new chapter in the life of a young East Timorese economist. Her qualifications met the requirements and she was offered a UNV position: “Programme Officer in the UNHCR Sub-office in Gardez, Afghanistan.”

Manuela da Cruz had registered with the International UNV roster only a few months ago, after serving in East Timor with UNMizET (UN Mission in East Timor) and UNHCR for an extended period as a national staff member.

In her current capacity, Manuela has quite an extended list of tasks to carry out: from engaging in negotiations with local authorities on the planning and implementation of UNHCR-assisted programmes for education, vocational training, income generation to designing and drafting project proposals and negotiating them with various implementing partners. Her assessment and evaluation tasks also include reviewing project proposals submitted by potential or actual partners.

She used to work as an online volunteer assisting in the UNV HQ website and other projects. Thanks to the opportunities of learning, she was able to develop her capacity and made many friends over the net, a factor that helped her develop a passionate interest in working as an International UNV.

Now that she is a UNV she’s thrilled by the challenges she has to face and overcome on a daily basis and she’s glad that she has such an interesting assignment.

But life in Afghanistan, particularly in the provincial areas, has its compelling difficulties as well. Limited movement, lack of culinary choices, very limited chances of socializing with other people are only a few them, and she does miss her family.

Manuela says she enjoys working in Afghanistan. She likes Afghans and finds them very friendly. Although security measures make life a little hard, Manuela knows that there is little she can do other than wishing for a quick end to them.

She is proud of her voluntary service and appreciates UNHCR operations in support of refugees and IDPs. She believes helping huge groups of returnees in their repatriation, re-integration and settlement help a lot in enriching her professional and life experiences.

Manuela da Cruz, during a meeting with local authorities
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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Calendar of events:

- **July 2** Forty three police officers graduate from 20 days training on Electronic Payroll System of LOTFA (Law and Order Trust Fund)
- **July 4** UDG (Urban Development Group) Local Program Appraisal Committee meeting on the Barikab project
- **July 5** Fourth Steering Committee Meeting of Peace Building Grant Aid
- **July 10** Afghanistan Launch of the Asia-Pacific Human Development Report 2006
- **July 12** NPAD’s (National Programme for Action on Disability) first media orientation and awareness day on disability issues
- **July 18** Disability mainstreaming workshop in Kandahar for disabled people’s organisations and other stakeholders
- **July 23-25** Launch of UNDP GAIN rural and environmental awareness trainings in the Northern provinces of Balkh, Samangan, Jawzjan and Saripul

An Image of Afghanistan

Photo: Ayna Khaidova