



ANNUAL PROJECT REPORT 2007

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Afghanistan
Support to the Establishment of the Afghan Legislature (SEAL)
01-01-2007– 31-12-2007**



Youth Parliament members attend a Public Hearing on the election law with members of the lower house, October 2007

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Acronyms

ANDS	Afghan National Development Strategy
CB	Capacity Building
CCTV	Close Circuit Television
CPAP	Country Programme Action Plan
DCN	Digital Congress Network
DEX	Direct Execution
DIPR	Department of Information and Public Relations
FES	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
FM	Frequency Modulation
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (German Corporation for Technical Cooperation)
IACSC	Independent Afghan Civil Service Commission
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IPU	Inter Parliamentary Union
IT	Information Technologies
LAN	Local Area Network
LE	Legislative Environment
MP	Member of Parliament
MYFF	Multi-year funding framework
NA	National Assembly
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NPAD	National Programme for Action on Disability
PA	Preparatory Assistance
PO	Public Outreach
RFF	Results and Resources Framework
SEAL	Support to the Establishment of the Afghan Legislature
TOR	Terms of Reference
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VHF	Very High Frequency

Executive Summary

The SEAL project entered its third and final year in 2007. It delivered to parliament most of the material support and services planned in the Project Document and in the work plan for the year. The third year of the project was a result of a one year no-cost funding extension agreed by donors. It was also the second full year of the mandate of the re-established parliament of Afghanistan. While the year saw significant support to parliament, it also witnessed continuing challenges for parliament, and was marked by some challenges for the project as well.

The year 2007 was the bloodiest for Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. The capital city, parliament, and the project were not exempt from this escalating violence. Six parliamentarians were killed while carrying out their duties (many bystanders were also killed in this brutal attack). Suicide bombers in Kabul threatened the security and the functioning of parliament and the project. World attention to this escalating violence made recruiting international project staff more difficult than ever.

There were also substantive challenges within the Parliament itself. Parliament took over donor coordination through a Working Group, and despite the best of intentions, this Working Group experienced critical challenges and had difficulty functioning at the necessary level of effectiveness. Parliamentary practice, and particularly the development of parliamentary culture, improved but remained at an early development level. Parliament's financial administration services received considerable project attention in order to modernize, bring transparency, and assist Parliament on its necessary road to financial autonomy from government. But at the end of 2007, this work remains incomplete and essential financial autonomy remains a longer term goal.

The project supported a wide range of training for National Assembly staff and has funded substantial technical infrastructure and communications equipment for parliament. The project continued to fund and organize publications and public activities to raise awareness and understanding of parliament. These included a groundbreaking Youth Parliament to attract the involvement and attention of young Afghans.

SEAL-supported trips for MPs and senior parliamentary staff consumed much time and attention in 2007. By the end of the year, the Project had decided that it was necessary to develop a more rational, results and impacts based approach to parliamentary travel. The SEAL travel arrangements function placed a great burden on SEAL staff, compounded by staff shortages by mid-year.

After contributing to the inauguration of the National Assembly of Afghanistan in December 2005, 2007 was another year in which the project provided significant material support, training, advice, public awareness, international exposure and other support to the parliament of Afghanistan. A formal Assessment of the project in mid year gave the project positive reviews, and an audit found no serious irregularities. Outside consultants concluded SEAL has been a success through 2005, 2006 and early 2007, enough so to warrant renewed international support to parliament through a follow-on project, SEAL 2, to start in March 2008. The details of these successful activities are found on the following pages. The lessons learned and signposts for SEAL 2 are also described.

1. Context

The objective of SEAL has been to ensure the timely establishment of the Afghan Parliament and support to its functioning. SEAL, which began in January 2005, contributes to putting in place stable democratic foundations for Afghanistan by assisting the Afghan authorities in the following areas:

- (1) Ensuring the setting-up of an effective coordination and programming mechanism for all activities related to the support to the Parliament.
- (2) Building the capacities of administrative and technical staff as well as members of the Parliament to ensure smoother and more efficient functioning of the Parliament.
- (3) Ensuring the establishment of the necessary legal environment to enable the first session of the Parliament.
- (4) Ensuring proper linkage and complementarities between physical infrastructure, information services and communication technologies (ICT) tools to provide assistance to members, staff, media and public.
- (5) Allowing for parliamentary outreach and the design of an effective public information and awareness strategy.
- (6) Ensuring that parliament is established and that the basic running costs were met during first year of activity.
- (7) Establishing an effective project management team able to provide and manage the assistance offered through SEAL project activities.

The SEAL project aims to strengthen its partnership with other UNDP initiatives, in particular the "Joint National Youth Programme," (through collaboration on the establishment of a Youth Parliament), UNDP's Accountability and Transparency Project (ACT), and UNDP's Afghanistan Sub-national Governance Programme (ASGP). SEAL has also worked in collaboration with United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM) to provide assistance to a Women's Centre in the parliament. For the provision of specialised trainings, partnerships have also been established with Inter-Parliamentary Union and other bilateral institutions.

SEAL was intended to be implemented in two phases: I - 6 months up to the establishment of the Parliament; II -18 months, up to the end of 2006. Activities started in 2004 under a preparatory assistance (PA) grant. There has been substantial donor support for this project, which has implemented a total estimated budget of USD 15.5 million through cost-sharing arrangements.

During the reporting period, the expected results of the SEAL Project were in line with ANDS Objectives. The project supports the realization of the overall UNDAF outcome *[By 2008, transparent, effective and efficient legislative and policy frameworks and processes are established and implemented]*, the CPAP outcome *[State capacity enhanced to promote responsive governance and democratization]* and the CPAP output *[Democratic assemblies and electoral institutions strengthened at national and sub- national levels (Parliament operational, efficient and recognised by all the people; Provincial councils elected and functional; Village Chiefs elected and officially recognised; Independent Electoral Commission institutionalised and autonomous)]*. The project's role in supporting these indicators is discussed in detail below.

2. Performance Review

2.1 Progress Review

Overall progress towards the ANDS benchmark(s)

Through the Bonn Process, the Afghan Government was required to take timely measures towards the establishment and functioning of the National Assembly, approval of the Secretariat structure, providing an appropriate Assembly budget, provision of a compound, and the recruitment of the core staff through the IACSC. This was achieved in 2005 and 2006.

The objectives of SEAL and that of ANDS for the National Assembly are distinct. ANDS states that 'The National Assembly will be provided with technical and administrative support by mid-2006 to fulfill effectively its constitutionally mandated roles.' The more ambitious Project document seeks the 'establishment of [a] fully operational and efficient parliament, recognized by the people of Afghanistan as their representative institution, functioning on an accountable basis, and in a transparent manner.' SEAL predates ANDS by a year and was therefore well placed to prepare the ground for the more limited Government ANDS benchmark which was largely achieved before 2007.

The internal arrangements for the Assembly, for example, the training of the members and staff of the parliament and provision of the modern parliamentary equipment, were efficiently delivered by the international community, mainly under the auspices of the SEAL project. The inauguration of the National Assembly on 19 December 2005 by the President of the Republic, the fruit of these preparatory activities, was perceived as a major achievement. The Assembly has now functioned for two full years.

In spite of these major achievements, challenges remain. It would be overly optimistic to characterize today's Afghan National Assembly as a 'fully' operational, efficient and transparent legislature, able to 'fulfill effectively' its key functions. But considering that the starting point was a baseline of virtually no relevant modern Afghan parliamentary experience, and considering that all of the work that has taken place has been in the face of continuing and escalating security uncertainties, it is impressive that so much progress has been made to date and continues to be made.

The Assembly and its Members will require the support of the international community to continuing advancing toward these goals in the medium term (4 or more years).

Overall progress towards the UNDAF outcome

By 2008, transparent, effective and efficient legislative and policy frameworks and processes are established and implemented

The SEAL project was established in January 2005 for a period of two years to facilitate the emergence of a fully operational and efficient Assembly with a mandate to strengthen and reinforce its legislative environment and build capacities among its staff. These general achievements and, in particular, the legislative environment, have a direct link to the UNDAF, which identified the need to strengthen the rule of law and implement measures that enhance the confidence of Afghans in their Government.

Overall progress towards the CPAP outcome and output(s)

State capacity enhanced to promote responsive governance and democratization
Democratic assemblies and electoral institutions strengthened at national and sub- national levels (Parliament operational, efficient and recognised by all the people; Provincial councils elected and functional; Village Chiefs elected and officially recognised; Independent Electoral Commission institutionalised and autonomous).

The establishment of the SEAL Project helps demonstrate the commitment of the UN to the process of deepening democracy. By creating capacities in the areas of legislative environment and public outreach, the objectives articulated in the CPAP for creating an accountable and efficient legislature are being fulfilled. In-country missions facilitated by SEAL for parliamentary commissions under the initiative *'Taking Parliament to the People'* had a favorable impact on parliamentarians and civil society generally in several target provinces in 2007.

Capacity Development

The SEAL project's central objective is development of the capacity of parliamentarians to carry out their responsibilities, and professional development of their support staff (Secretariats) to assist them to do so. The Secretariats have consistently welcomed the opportunities offered by SEAL to receive training of staff. In 2007 SEAL continued to advise parliamentarians about their roles as legislators and about oversight of government. Specific advice included procedural rules; criteria for and the parliamentary role in reviewing ministerial and judicial appointments; and how the Assembly can best listen to the people of Afghanistan who come seeking redress for grievances. There was also continuing eagerness of some MPs to seek out international experience and build their own capacity.

Impact on direct and indirect beneficiaries

The level of satisfaction displayed by the direct beneficiaries of project support, the Members and Secretariat, was high, but there are also requests from these beneficiaries for more consultations, improved delivery of material support, more training, more support for strategic planning, and more international travel. Women parliamentarians also expect more support from SEAL. These conclusions emerged from a series of consultation meetings in late 2007 and from regular contact with Secretariat officials.

2.2 Implementation strategy review

Participatory/consultative processes

Direct consultation with beneficiaries has been carried out throughout the life of the project, both formally and informally. On a formal level, through the Project Board meetings, regular updates were provided to main stakeholders and feedbacks have been received for quarterly as well as annual planning. As in previous years the key interlocutors were Deputy Presidents/Speakers and the Secretaries-General of the Houses and their senior Deputies. The Presidents were consulted from time to time, as were Commission chairs and other members of the parliament on day-to-day business.

Quality of partnerships

In 2007 the project continued on-going partnerships with UNIFEM (Women's Resource Centre), UNOPS, NPAD from the UN family; foundations such as FES, Heinrich Boll, GTZ; and American implementers funded by USAID (SUNY and NDI). SEAL also worked closely in a mutually beneficial manner with Kabul University and various media and youth organizations, among others.

National Ownership

A key philosophy of the SEAL project is to work towards increasing the involvement of the National Assembly in defining priorities and project implementation in order to reach the point at which the Assembly is fully enabled to take charge of its own development. This is a constant theme within the relationship SEAL has with its Assembly partner. There are at present practical limits of expertise in involving our Afghan partner in the process of project resource allocation and reporting. This limitation is especially problematic in the travel activities and needs to be addressed in 2008.

Sustainability

The key to long term sustainability is the support to parliament by the government/Ministry of Finance coupled with the increasing real autonomy and financial independence of parliament. In 2008 an important project goal will be to help move parliament further on the path for such autonomy and modern, transparent financial self management. Training provided in 2007 and future training both aim to secure sustainability through the long term development of a professional parliamentary staff in all areas of the Secretariats. SEAL's material resource support is also aimed to provide sustainable technology and services to MPs and staff.

As noted in 2006, reliance by the Assembly on the international community should not become institutionalized.

2.3 Management effectiveness review

Quality of monitoring

In 2006 two independent external UNDP evaluation missions indicated that the project was making a key positive impact. The first of these was led by an international consultant and including a distinguished Afghan constitutional academic of national stature and the coordinator of UNDP's Regional Governance Programme in Asia. The team interviewed a broad collection of stakeholders from the National Assembly, the government, the broader Afghan community, and donors. The major insight was that international support will be required by the Assembly for some years to come. A successor project was proposed by the evaluators.

Responding to that recommendation, independent consultants undertook a further review of the SEAL project in mid 2007, came to the same recommendation, and prepared a draft Project Document for SEAL 2. The SEAL 2 Project Document (2008- 2012) was reviewed by UNDP, donors,

Assembly leadership, and other partners and officially approved at a Local Project Appraisal Committee meeting in December 2007.

Internal day-to-day control and monitoring is carried out through staff meetings and completing Annual and Quarterly Work Plans.

The UNDP Country Office Programme Unit also provides regular oversight over the project activities and carries out systematic monitoring of project implementation.

In accordance with UNDP corporate regulations, an audit of the project was conducted at the end of 2007, to ensure that UNDP resources are being managed in accordance with the financial regulations, rules and practices and procedures, the project document and project workplans. The audit was carried out by an external firm and the report is in the process of being finalized.

Timely delivery of outputs

The project delivered all of its key outputs on time. There were some delays in specific planned activities due to events in the parliament, challenges in internal planning within the Parliament, staff shortages within the project, and factors such as security challenges and lack of physical infrastructure (e.g. the lack of a space to house the SEAL-purchased printing press). In spite of these challenges, however, the project has managed through great effort to keep delivery of key outputs on track.

Resource Allocation

The total support costs including the salaries for international staff amounted to less than 30% of the total project cost. 70% of the project's resources were utilized for development activities.

Cost-effective use of inputs

As in 2006, a significant portion of financial resources was spent on technology and equipment. This was necessary in order to build an appropriate base on which capacities could be sustained in the long-run.

Travel expenses and study tours were a significant expenditure in the year, constituting almost half of the money spent on capacity building activities. In future, international travel will be funded only as a carefully targeted part of an overall plan, where it is directly related to capacity building and policy issues.

The expenditure support for the 'establishment and running costs of the parliament' has been kept low.

3. Project Results Summary

During 2007, the SEAL project attained the following achievements, as measured against the outputs set out in the Project Document:

Output 1: Establishing an effective coordination and programming mechanism to support the Assembly.

The SEAL project works to support the National Assembly, in collaboration with Members of Parliament, Secretariat staff, and other implementing organizations, to help ensure better coordination while limiting duplication. Towards this goal, in 2007 SEAL continued to contribute to the inter-donor and Assembly Working Group and the SEAL Taskforce.

The Taskforce was established in 2005 as a strategic coordination mechanism representing the National Assembly, donors, and UNDP Afghanistan. The Taskforce was convened by the President of the Lower House, overseeing all Assembly support activities under SEAL management. In 2007, the Taskforce was reconstituted as a UNDP 'Project Board'.

SEAL contributed to the work of the parliamentary Working Group throughout the year, which serves to share information and coordinate training activities and other support to parliament from different donors and implementers. Leadership of the Working Group was successfully handed over to the National Assembly in 2006, with the additional aim of the group becoming more oriented towards coordination and planning of Assembly support. After a SEAL review in 2007 which found the Working Group needed stronger focus, SEAL offered to assist the chair the Working Group, allocating a dedicated SEAL staff member to assist with agenda consultations, meeting preparation, document collection, minutes and reports.

SEAL's financial and administrative work with parliament was steered by a group consisting of representatives from Parliament's HR, ICT and Finance Departments, who met regularly for briefings, brainstorming and to plan training activities to help ensure parliamentary ownership of new systems. Towards the end of the 2007, a new working group was formed to steer the Electronic Attendance System.

SEAL has continued its commitment to coordinating with others through periodic working meetings for public information activities and planning, evaluation and monitoring of the I-ANDS (Interim Afghan National Development Strategy), and capacity building activities in budget and other areas.

SEAL has assisted Assembly Secretariat staff in drafting and updating the Development Strategy of the National Assembly, which assesses the Assembly's achievement of benchmarks. The Lower House Secretariat drafted a detailed strategic paper and a work plan, with a similar paper expected from the Upper House soon. These will guide SEAL activities and inform SEAL 2.

Output 2- Building the capacities of Secretariat staff and Assembly Members

SEAL is working to strengthen the capacity of Parliament through technical training and study tours for Members and staff in the Secretariat, Departments of Security, Information & Public Relations, Finance, Administration, Management, ICT, and Legal Services.

In 2007, SEAL worked to ensure exposure to the norms of parliamentary practice, to support the legislation and policy making work of Commissions (including in-country public hearings) and targeted support to some women parliamentarians and to citizen engagement.

SEAL provided support which enabled MPs and staff to communicate better through ICT training and provided the latest information technology and security support.

SECURITY

The year 2007 has been marked as the bloodiest year since the collapse of the Taliban Regime in late 2001, with deteriorating security across the country. Afghanistan has seen a rise in incidents of VBIED, BBIED, kidnappings and road side bombs.

Afghanistan's difficult security environment, and deteriorating security in Kabul, remain among the most immediate challenges to the implementation of SEAL project goals. Violence and the threat of violence to Afghan civilians, to foreigners and to symbols of state authority (e.g. police, army) challenge the project goal of helping to establish a well functioning parliament, well connected to and respected by citizens in every region.

Insecurity in the capital includes the threats to the premises and precinct of the National Assembly (including the nearby SEAL office), and makes it challenging to provide a secure environment for MPs, Assembly staff, visitors, and parliamentary work.

Training:

In order to mitigate security risks, SEAL has assisted the National Assembly security department in developing, organizing and conducting a range of security training courses (in-country and overseas).

In order to increase the knowledge and skills of parliamentary security staff, around one hundred officers of the National Assembly were trained by French police trainers. Those officers subsequently trained all soldiers of the National Assembly's security department, with training now taking place on daily basis. SEAL's Security staff work closely with the National Assembly's Security Department, and in 2007 SEAL and the Security Department conducted joint small arms shooting exercises to enhance troops' confidence while dealing with the weapons. SEAL also supported training in explosives detection, which took place in Bulgaria.

Meeting the goal of increasing the National Assembly's capacity in up-to-date security knowledge and technology, SEAL delivered presentations to Parliament's Security Sub-departments on Identification of Personnel, Package Material Control, Riot Control Training, Designation of Restricted Areas, and Emergency SOP.

Organizational support:

SEAL's Security staff assisted the National Assembly's Security Sub-departments in their early planning processes, advised the Security Department in organizational restructuring and procedures, and prepared ROE (Rules of Engagement) for the Parliament. SEAL continues to support the planning, coordination, monitoring and evaluation of all crisis and emergency preparedness measures.

Following the bombing attack in Baghlan province in November 2007 which killed six MPs and left up to 100 civilians dead, SEAL worked closely with the Security Department of the National

Assembly to strengthen the existing chain of command with government and other external parties, and to help coordinate proper security measures for official travel missions.

SEAL continues to help promote the flow of important and timely security information promote the passage of relevant security related information between the Security Department of the Parliament, UNDSS and other UN agencies, NATO-led ISAF, Afghan National Department of Security, Ministry of Interior, and the Ministry of Defense.

Infrastructure:

Parliament is now able to control and record the movement of visitors into the National Assembly, following SEAL's installation of an access control system monitoring visitors into Parliament. SEAL has also provided vehicles, security fencing, police equipment, explosive detectors, security monitoring equipment, software and satellite phones to the National Assembly's Security Department.

SUPPORT to MEMBERS

SEAL continued to support committee capacity by conducting in-country and international study visits, giving committee members and support staff the opportunity to learn practical lessons, gather input from key stakeholders in Afghanistan, experience first-hand the parliamentary procedures of other countries, and share Afghan Parliament success stories with local and international audiences.

As a consequence of SEAL's national committee outreach programme, committees are more familiar with their representative and oversight roles. The 'Bringing Parliament to the People' programme supported committee visits to ten remote Afghan provinces this year, providing vital input to and exposure for the commissions. During these visits, the commissions conducted public hearings at provincial levels, gathered information from local communities, conducted local consultations, and engaged communities and civil society organizations in the lawmaking process.

MPs are now better able to take direct action to support Afghan nationals and refugees living abroad, following diplomatic visits to Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India, and Sweden. Following the SEAL sponsored visits, the Committee of International Affairs of the Upper House committed to building two schools for Afghan refugee children in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

The Committee on Justice, Administrative Reform and Anti-Corruption gained practical knowledge on Ombudsman procedures as an efficient oversight tool, as well as anti-corruption measures, in a study tour to Sweden. As a result of this visit, a draft Ombudsman bill was produced with assistance from SEAL, which the Committee will take forward to plenary for adoption.

Supporting parliament's goal of better assisting the women of Afghanistan, SEAL facilitated a delegation of both Houses to participate in the 'Violence Against the Girl Child' conference in New York in cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSSW).

In a study tour to the Parliament of India, 26 Senators gained practical knowledge in the design and management of committees, and the role of committees in parliamentary affairs, plenary sessions, law drafting and approval process. The delegation also observed the working process of Committees on Legislation, Complaints & Petitions; Budget and Finance; Privileges & Immunities; and Foreign Affairs.

MPs are better informed of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and how they apply to Afghan development following a SEAL supported delegation to a United Nations conference on MDGs in Thailand. MPs learned the responsibilities of parliaments in overseeing the implementation of MDGs. A Joint Sub-Committee was proposed, to establish oversight the implementation of MDGs in Afghanistan which will be followed up in 2008.

Improving the capacity of the committees, SEAL sponsored a two week training course for 12 Committee Assistants to the French Parliament. Topics covered in the training included: drafting a member's bill; incorporating amendments in a draft bill; reporting to the president; the legislative role of the commission in the law-making process; familiarization with the rules of Procedure; conducting a commission meeting; and dealing with the public. Following this training, 64 Committee Assistants received similar in-country training by an expert consultant provided by SEAL. Committee Assistants now better understand their roles and responsibilities, and are more skilled in report writing. Committee assistants can provide notably improved administrative services, including substantive support to the day-to-day tasks of their respective commission members.

SEAL also supported delegations from Afghanistan to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Iceland and the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the CIS Member Nations in Moscow.

FINANCE and ADMINISTRATION

SEAL's work in 2007 with Parliament's Finance, Administration, ICT and HR Departments has greatly reduced duplication and errors, and has increased the speed and accountability with which transactions are processed. This work has contributed to the operational capacity and efficiency of the Parliament secretariat.

Because of the integrated nature of the work involved in the modernization of the secretariat function, active participation from various departments and groups at staff and management levels was of prime importance. Because the new systems affected the way people work, many of these initiatives were achieved successfully by the formation of working groups.

In early 2007, SEAL completed a thorough study and documentation of the current workflow processes in the Finance and Administration Departments of the Houses. The study produced thirteen major recommendations for progressive implementation. The recommendations were rolled into SEAL's capacity building work, focusing on the implementation of the computerized payroll system, banking system, information management system, cash management system, and training programmes.

Computerized payroll system:

After six months of data computerization, validation, training and customization of software, a computerized payroll system for more than 300 staff members was inaugurated for the Upper House. The initiative has subsequently been extended to cover the more than 600 staff members of the Lower House, and the system is expected to be fully operational in early February 2008. Efforts are underway to expand the system to cover an additional 350 staff members.

Several constraints delayed the implementation of the computerized payroll system. Errors in data entry and data loss at the Ministry of Finance required validation workshops and re-registration activities, delaying implementation. Additionally, limited availability of members of the interdisciplinary working group from the Parliament delayed completion of the programme. Implementation of the payroll for Lower House was delayed due to difficulty in identifying appropriate software to accommodate the payroll for the security staff.

Banking System:

In 2007, staff of the Upper House began receiving their salaries through the bank for the first time. The computerized payroll system is linked with a banking system and on-site banking facility. SEAL has negotiated and facilitated an agreement between the partner bank and the Parliament to build a dedicated and fully operational bank on the premises in 2008.

Information Management System:

To meet the information needs of senior management of the Finance Departments of both Houses, an interim semi-automated budget and expenditure tool was developed by SEAL for both Secretariats. This tool is designed to track the aggregate budget and expenditures of both Houses pending implementation of a modern financial system in the future. The information management system was further customized to Parliament's needs as requirements were redefined and staff members were trained in its use.

Improved cash management and transparency:

To move beyond Parliament's existing inefficient and risky manual cash system, SEAL helped to develop a formal cash scheduling system for disbursing salaries in the Upper House, endorsed by the Secretary-General and to be followed by all Departments. This system is complemented by the establishment of cash offices with safes for storage and distribution; the creation of cash register books for the cashiers to improve controls over money; and the development of an audit plan for the Audit Offices to ensure that the cash-offices are properly controlled and to enable regular reconciliation of physical cash against the balances indicated in the cash-register. SEAL has supported the Secretaries-General in drafting official advisory circulars about the initiatives outlined above.

Modernization and transparency of Members' payments has been introduced by SEAL, and will be operational in 2008. Supporting transparency of the Finance Departments, SEAL has developed a tool to produce pay slips for Members of both Houses. The 102 senators and 348 members of the Lower House now receive pay slips on a monthly basis with full details of entitlements and deductions.

The current system of recording attendance of staff and members is manual. In order to reform this inefficient, slow and unreliable system, SEAL has completed a detailed study on the feasibility of modernizing the attendance recording system and providing greater transparency through use of fingerprint technology. This plan is ready for implementation in early 2008.

Training Programs:

Over the past year, SEAL has supported training for staff both in-country and abroad. These initiatives included:

All staff of the Finance Departments of both House improved their IT skills in the workplace through a month-long, intermediate-level courses on MS EXCEL.

Auditors from the Meshrano Jirga and Lower House are better skilled in modern procedures in planning and conducting audits and risk management, following training with the Controller & Auditor General of India.

Key Assembly managers are performing at a higher level following a SEAL-supported one-week training course for the Assembly senior staff on improvement of the financial & administrative systems.

SEAL supported a delegation of secretariat staff from both houses in budget and finance training in the German Bundestag, focusing on budget procedures, mechanisms for independence of parliament from the Ministry of Finance, budget and expenditure management systems, and financial management software.

In conjunction with the payroll initiative, SEAL conducted intensive training on the computerized payroll software for key staff from HR, ICT and Finance Departments of the Upper and Lower Houses. Changes in government laws regarding calculation of salaries and grades necessitated customization of software, adding to the complexity of the learning process for staff.

Output 3 – Necessary legal and institutional environment in place

In 2007, the SEAL project continued to strengthen the skills of staff, and offer legal, procedural and other advice and services to the Members of Parliament. Through a variety of SEAL activities, MPs now better understand their constitutional rights, their responsibilities, and the legislative process. Promoting better understanding by these MPs of the role of MPs in governance, the budget process, and oversight is an important ongoing goal for the SEAL project.

In 2007, this advice and assistance included assisting with preparation of Member's bills, personalized training for MPs in committee work, and seminars for Commissions on rule making, legislation, oversight, the constitution and the budgetary process.

The budget Commissions of both Houses are better prepared for the process of budget approval following specific budget training programmes during the reporting period. SEAL's assistance in this area also included a dedicated parliamentary and budgetary expert assigned by SEAL to Commission work, and creation of a Budget Research Unit. Through SEAL's advisory and technical support, the research capability of the National Assembly's Legal and Professional Studies Department was improved.

Output 4 – Information services and ICT set up to provide timely assistance to those who use the Assembly

Strengthening the National Assembly's ICT services, SEAL is working to build technical capacity and infrastructure support in 2007. These goals were addressed through training, technical support and assistance to the ICT Department of the Assembly, and infrastructure provision and installation of IT equipment and services.

Training and technical support:

Throughout the year, SEAL's ICT Unit has provided essential services and technical support to the Assembly, facilitating the day-to-day work of the staff and parliamentarians. Further, the ICT Department of the National Assembly has in 2007 undertaken various training courses, study tours, and in-house training. SEAL has supported ICT technical training; specialized Hansard training in Belgium and Germany; and Project Management and technical Cisco training in Malaysia.

In 2007, SEAL's ICT Unit developed a strategy for the use of ICT facilities by Members of Parliament and staff. The strategy includes comprehensive policies on the use of email, Intranet, internal servers, and promotion of effective use of the Internet for research. The strategy was approved by the National Assembly and is now being implemented.

The Project completed the installation of a state-of-the-art audio/video congress system and all the other necessary computer and multimedia components of parliament. Since installation of this system, SEAL's priority has been to put in place and maintain a well conceived and effectively managed policy for the use of all ICT and multimedia equipment.

SEAL's ICT staff, together with SEAL Public Outreach, upgraded the pilot website of the National Assembly. This pilot website was developed by combining Afghan input with the best practices of parliaments of other countries. This website enables parliament to communicate news and parliamentary business effectively with national and international audiences.

Provision of IT equipment and services:

SEAL has assessed the ICT needs of the Assembly throughout the year, and built Parliament's infrastructure and services accordingly. SEAL in 2007 connected the Afghan Parliament with the 34 provinces of Afghanistan using video conferencing technology, enabling Members of parliament to conduct meetings with provincial elders, and governors of different provinces.

The project has, over the year, developed Parliament's ICT infrastructure, providing 300 Desktopcomputers and 300 UPS. Printers and photocopy machines were also provided for different departments of Upper and Lower houses. SEAL is also equipping Parliament's annex with IT equipment, including installation of communication technology and computers.

Looking ahead to 2008, SEAL is working to: further equip the Assembly Annex to accommodate Members; develop a database (e-systems) system for all departments of Parliament; continue assistance to Members for basic computer and internet training; and continue to build the technical and managerial capacity of ICT Department staff.

Output 5 – Promoting Assembly outreach and designing an effective public information and awareness strategy

The Public Outreach staff of the SEAL project work to strengthen parliamentary outreach to citizens and the provinces, while helping to build sustainable capacity of the Departments of Information and Public Relations of both the Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament. SEAL continued to assist the National Assembly's Information and Public Relations Departments to disseminate information to the people of Afghanistan. These activities included the production of publications, broadcasting, the parliament-media forum, and parliament-civil society meetings. Together these activities have helped to significantly raise public awareness and understanding of parliament.

Public information and awareness:

In order to minimize gaps and duplication in the National Assembly's communication and public information strategy, and to increase awareness of Parliament and other partner's roles and responsibilities, SEAL together with Parliament's Department of Information and Public Relations (DIPR), in coordination with other partners, began the development of the National Assembly's long-term communication and public information strategy.

To ensure DIPR staff can effectively and efficiently implement the Parliament's communication and public information strategy and projects, SEAL provides resources and regular training to the DIPR staff members.

This training has included: a two-week on-the-job photo-journalism training course for cameramen and photographers of the National Assembly; a two-week course in Effective Oral Communication and Pashto Conversation for DIPR staff; media relations courses for DIPR and parliamentary journalists; and planning for a training (to be held on the future) for the Parliament's librarians. All training activities were successfully completed within the specified budget and in close coordination of the National Assembly.

In addition to training, SEAL is working to ensure Parliament is equipped in a sustainable way to report back to citizens, through the provision of a radio studio and printing press to be operational in 2008.

In 2007, SEAL supported the production of numerous publications and periodicals to raise awareness of and understanding of parliament, Committees, the legislative process, and Legislative-Executive relations. A school parliamentary guide was disseminated for children, as well as a publication on the history of assemblies in Afghanistan.

In order to provide the public and development partners with information about Afghanistan's Parliamentarians, SEAL has produced the 'Who is Who' book covering the backgrounds, education, achievements and professional lives of the members of the National Assembly. This book has been disseminated in Pashto, Dari and English languages. The 'Who is Who' book will increase public awareness of the National Assembly and the background of Parliamentarians. It will also contribute to National Assembly transparency and accountability to constituents, and address public uncertainty about the role of the Legislature and the Parliamentarians. The 'Who is Who' book will also serve as a public information tool ahead of upcoming parliamentary elections. Publication of the 'Who is Who' book for the Lower House is underway. SEAL/UNDP has also produced a booklet outlining SEAL's responsibilities, activities and achievements in Pashto, Dari and English languages.

Utilizing the most accessible and commonly used media in Afghanistan, SEAL has targeted radio for various public outreach activities. For many people living in the provinces and mountainous valleys, radio is the only medium to access news and information on events, security, and national development. SEAL has led the production of eight Pashto and Dari radio programmes which were broadcast through satellite radio stations to all provinces of Afghanistan. Following these radio broadcasts, focus group discussions garnered public feedback in various provinces; this feedback was discussed with Members of the Lower House in a one-day communications seminar.

SEAL also produced a 30-minute television documentary for the public, to raise awareness and understanding of the roles of the National Assembly, Members of Parliament, and the Parliament's secretariat. The documentary was given to the National Assembly for further broadcast targeting under-informed constituencies, particularly those living in the rural areas, with a goal of enhancing the understanding of the National Assembly among rural people.

Engaging citizens:

SEAL is working to ensure the public of Afghanistan is not only better informed about the legislative process of the National Assembly, but is also able to better engage with parliament and its members.

To encourage public participation in the legislative process, SEAL supported two public hearings on the proposed Election Law. The hearings were conducted in coordination with members of the Youth Parliament and the Legislative Affairs Committee of the Lower House of Parliament.

Preparatory work has been done towards a pilot programme establishing a Provincial Resource Center in one Afghan province. The Resource Centre will provide access to information and resources to Members of Parliament, civil society, and media, through a library, communication tools such as computers, internet, and telephones, and a meeting space. The Parliamentary Resource Center is aimed at incorporating an electronic link with the Assembly for the use of visitors. The centre will support the Parliament's provincial outreach aims, enhancing effective parliament-constituency relationships.

Civil society relations:

SEAL Public Outreach Unit in 2007, organized and hosted six meetings of the Civil Society-Parliament Relations Forum, engaging civil society organizations with the Gender & Civil Society Committee of the National Assembly.

Youth outreach:

SEAL is working to support the engagement of high school children with Afghanistan's parliamentary life. Working towards this goal, in June 2007 SEAL inaugurated Afghanistan's Youth Parliament in partnership with the National Assembly, UNDP's Joint National Youth Programme (JNYP), and the Deputy Ministry of Youth Affairs.

The National Assembly has hosted three sessions of the Youth Parliament this year, bringing together representatives of Parliament, the Parliament's Youth Caucus, civil society organizations and Ministries to help young people understand what goes on in Parliament, and provide a forum to express their concerns and views to parliament and the public. The young representatives report back to their school peers on the work of the National Assembly and parliamentary processes. Further, Members of Parliament have an opportunity to gather input and feedback from the young representatives

The Youth Parliament is made up of 101 young participants selected through a carefully-managed secret ballot process conducted by the Independent Election Commission (IEC). The Youth Parliamentarians selected, 52 girls and 49 boys from more than 80 high schools, represent a total of more than 50,000 young adults.

During Youth Parliament plenary sessions, members have been coached and subsequently participated in parliamentary debate and committee discussions. Marking the United Nations International Volunteer Day, SEAL, together with UNV, supported Youth Parliament members' volunteer engagement with a children's hospital in Kabul, where Youth Parliamentarians met with children and parents to distribute donated food and hygiene items.

Output 6: Parliament set-up and operational costs met

While parliament's initial set-up costs have been successfully met, the SEAL project continues to provide support to basic running costs, including building rental, security operation costs, transport, and logistics. In 2007, SEAL made significant technical and communications support contributions to the new Annex Building and to new offices for the Senate.

Output 7: Management team fully operational

In 2007, the SEAL Project faced a serious staff shortage. A number of key international staff including the Project Manager departed. National staff were promoted or played acting roles to fill these gaps, but there were resulting challenges in the area of project capacity. Meanwhile, the expectations and demands of parliamentary partners continued, and even increased during the course of the year.

For some months mid year, the management team was not fully operational. In the absence of a Project Manager, some decisions were not made and some activities were either not planned or appropriately supported.

In Finance, two unsuccessful attempts were made to recruit a qualified and skilled Procurement Associate. Inability to recruit a Procurement Associate and the departure of the Administrative Associate delayed the implementation of some improved workflow processes and internal controls in the project.

As part of UNDP's planned activities, an external audit firm conducted an audit of the SEAL project. Project staff, with UNDP Country Office colleagues, gathered the requested information to meet audit requirements and responded to the draft Audit Report. The final response report was also prepared. The SEAL project received an unqualified audit opinion on statements of expenditure and cash position, and a qualified opinion on the statement of inventory of non-expendable equipment. The final audit report is in the process of being finalized.

4. Implementation Issues

Project Risks

Deteriorating security environment:

Insecurity in the capital includes the threats to the premises and precincts of the National Assembly (including the nearby SEAL office) and the challenge of providing a secure environment for MPs, Assembly staff, SEAL staff, visitors, and parliamentary work. To help address security risks, SEAL assisted the National Assembly Security Department in developing, organizing, and conducting a range of security trainings, and has provided and installed security equipment.

Resistance to coordination:

Relations with other implementers of projects that support parliament have improved over the course of late 2007. Earlier in the year, there was a poor level of information sharing from implementing partners at the regular bi-weekly Working Group meetings. The Working Group meetings themselves are poorly prepared, poorly run, unproductive and do little to generate the discussions necessary for implementer coordination. In order to address the issue, SEAL has offered a dedicated secretary to assist the Secretaries-General in overall management and coordination of the Working Group meetings. SEAL has also taken the initiative in reaching out to partner organizations also working with Parliament, reducing duplication of activities and enhancing coordination. By late 2007 the SEAL public outreach team had established a close working relationship with other implementers.

Participation of women:

Advancing toward UN and other norms of women's participation and gender equality are challenges for both parliament and for the SEAL Project itself. Parliamentary delegations for trips abroad formed earlier in the year included no women participants. One aspect of women's participation was addressed at the end of 2007 with requests to parliamentary leadership to ensure the participation of women in delegations abroad. In late 2007, specific requests were made for the inclusion of women to the Inter-Parliamentary Union meeting in Geneva, the delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Association, and for a study visit to India.

Project Issues:

SEAL personnel challenges:

Retention of staff has been a challenge throughout the project, due in part to competition and poaching within the international community. Difficulties in recruiting key administrative staff have resulted in gaps in implementation. We have made some progress in 2007 through proactive efforts to find international and national staff for vacant positions, while other positions remain vacant and our recruiting efforts are on-going.

Challenges within Parliament:

Low attendance of parliamentarians at training events generally is a challenge for parliamentary development. SEAL has, in spite of this, managed to ensure consistently high attendance at SEAL/Members meetings.

Relatively low parliamentary staff salaries, compared to the open market, continue to limit the hiring and retention of parliamentary staff.

Parliament has low research and policy analysis capacities, and limited local-based materials and experts necessary for comprehensive understanding of the legislative environment and policy issues in Afghanistan.

5. Lessons Learned and Next Steps

5.1. Lessons learned

The SEAL Project was designed to help ensure the establishment of parliament after a 30 year absence of a functioning legislature in this country. This was accomplished at the end of 2005. During 2006 and 2007, the SEAL project's donors contributed to enlarging technical capacities (e.g. phone and internet systems, audio visual and electronic records systems, security screening systems), to start-up training for staff (among them: finance and administration, legal, human resources, security officers, public relations, Hansard and committee clerks) and to a wide range of study trips and international conferences attended by parliamentarians and staff to familiarize the National Assembly with other parliaments and to raise the international visibility of this parliament. Some attention was paid to the particular needs of women MPs, the National Assembly joined the International Parliamentary Union as a full fee-paying member, and a Youth Parliament was established to help widen interest in and knowledge of parliamentary government. In late 2007 we can reflect on a number of lessons learned from the SEAL 1 experience. Among them:

There is an urgent need to do more to deepen the capacities of MPs and staff and provide first class research and analysis services.

Activities involving international travel should be designed and conducted with better results in mind and broaden consultation with MPs (and staff at the working level).

There should be greater attention to facilitating MP peer-to-peer learning, and opportunities for South-South knowledge sharing.

Strengthening parliament's budget oversight skills needs to be a top priority.

SEAL 2 needs to better address the needs of women MPs.

SEAL 2 should incorporate regular monitoring and evaluation of results and problems and strengthen both the international and national capacities of the project.

These observations and lessons are reflected in the SEAL 2 Project Document and the work plan.

5.2. Recommendations

Many of the recommendations made in 2006 are still pending and thus deserve to be repeated and refined. Several other recommendations can be made as a result of lessons learned in 2007:

The ultimate goal of Project exit should be kept firmly in mind, and the government must become better aware that international support for parliament will end at some point in the not distant future. Parliament, especially the Secretariats, should be better aware that they must move boldly to take responsibility, including financial responsibility, for a wide range of services and activities.

The transfer of travel arrangements to the Assembly should be a priority. It is an essential skill for a modern parliament, is highly time consuming for the project, and often generates undesired travel agency service complaints. SEAL 2 needs to work closely with MPs and working level staff to hand over this function, helping them to understand and manage the logistical challenges involved in setting up visits, or arranging training.

SEAL 2 must continue to promote a culture of discipline about procurement, budgeting and administration.

It is vital to the success of the Assembly that the two Houses work co-operatively together. SEAL should encourage this strongly.

Parliaments cannot function effectively in legislation and policy responsibilities in the absence of caucuses or party groups. As a result of this absence, debate and decision-making are unpredictable. The absence of groups that can prepare for debate and negotiate coherent positions and responses to legislation will hamper the overall development of parliament. The project should examine this need carefully in SEAL 2 and consult others.

The SEAL team needs strong focus. We need to prepare the team for the changes necessary in SEAL 2 and urgently address the critical staff shortage with UNDP assistance, and by using contract staff as necessary.

SEAL 2 must work more closely with the UNDP country office, other UNDP projects, and with the larger UN family for the benefit of the SEAL project, for the benefit of parliament and Afghanistan.

6. Financial Status and Utilization

Financial Status

Financial utilization

Table 1: Contribution Overview (1st Feb 2005 To 31st December 2007)

Donor	Contributions			USD
	Committed		Received	Contribution Balance
France	2,884,923		2,884,923	0
Italy	1,204,819		1,204,819	0
EC	3,618,818		2,895,054	723,764
SIDA (Sweden)	1,277,139		1,277,139	0
UNDP - 01	643,757		643,757	0
Germany	2,671,819		2,466,237	205,582
Denmark	2,000,000		2,000,000	0
CIDA	1,052,632		1,052,632	0
TOTAL	15,353,907		14,424,561	929,346

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Table 2: Funding Status (as at the end of the 31st December 2007)

Donor	Received	EXPENDITURES			PROJECT BALANCE	EAR MARKED	AVAILABLE FUNDING (as of 1st Jan 2008)	REMARKS
		Period Prior to the reporting year	Reporting period only	Total				
France	2,884,923	2,334,854	349,506	2,684,360	200,562	0	200,562	
Italy	1,204,819	1,203,603		1,203,603	1,217	0	1,217	
EU	2,895,054	2,936,162	-13,778	2,922,384	-27,330	0	-27,330	Over spent - to be adjusted from the balance of funds to be received
SIDA	1,277,139	628,917	84,554	713,471	563,669	0	563,669	
UNDP	643,757	643,757		643,757	0	0	0	
Germany	2,466,237	267,365	1,740,374	2,007,739	458,498	0	458,498	
Denmark	2,000,000	825,901	863,880	1,689,781	310,219	0	310,219	
CIDA	1,052,632	56,700	910,060	966,760	85,872	0	85,872	
TOTAL	14,424,561	8,897,259	3,934,596	12,831,855	1,592,706	0	1,592,706	

Table 3: Annual expenditure by activity [1 January 2007– 31 December 2007]

Activity	Budget 2007	Accumulative Expenditures 2007	Balance	Delivery Rate
ACTIVITY1: Capacity building & Institutional Support	983,703	973,588	10,115	98.97%
ACTIVITY2: Legal Environment for the first session of the parliament ready	105,073	90,288	14,784	85.93%
ACTIVITY3: ICT, Equipments and Services	854,743	760,562	94,181	88.98%
ACTIVITY4: Parliament Outreach	621,104	620,919	185	99.97%
ACTIVITY5: Establishment and Running Cost of Parliament	316,744	143,748	172,996	45.38%
ACTIVITY6: Programme Support	1,501,155	1,148,742	352,413	76.52%
GMS 5%	230,659	196,748	33,911	85.30%
Total	4,613,180	3,934,595	678,585	85.29%

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Table 4: Annual expenditure by donor [1 January 2007 – 31 December 2007]

Donor	Activity	Budget 2007	Accumulative Expenditures 2007	Balance	Delivery Rate
Canada	ACTIVITY1: Capacity building & Institutional Support		- 367	367	
	ACTIVITY3: ICT, Equipments and Services	691,102	609,873	81,229	88%
	ACTIVITY6: Programme Support	255,033	255,033	0	100%
	GMS 5%	49,797	45,521	4,275	91%
Total Canada		995,932	910,060	85,872	91%
Denmark	ACTIVITY3: ICT, Equipments and Services	16,923	16,923	0	100%
	ACTIVITY4: Parliament Outreach	439,073	438,357	715	100%
	ACTIVITY5: Establishment and Running Cost of Parliament	88,797	31,063	57,734	35%
	ACTIVITY6: Programme Support	343,834	334,343	9,491	97%
	GMS 5%	46,770	43,194	3,576	92%
Total Denmark		935,397	863,880	71,517	92%
France	ACTIVITY1: Capacity building & Institutional Support	309,150	303,820	5,330	98%
	ACTIVITY2: Legal Environment for the first session of the parliament ready	28,117	28,187	- 70	100%
	ACTIVITY6: Programme Support		23	- 23	
	GMS 5%	17,751	17,475	276	98%
Total France		355,018	349,506	5,512	98%
Germany	ACTIVITY1: Capacity building & Institutional Support	674,553	670,135	4,418	99%
	ACTIVITY2: Legal Environment for the first session of the parliament ready	76,956	62,101	14,855	81%
	ACTIVITY3: ICT, Equipments and Services	146,718	146,718	0	100%
	ACTIVITY4: Parliament Outreach	182,031	182,562	- 531	100%
	ACTIVITY5: Establishment and Running Cost of Parliament	227,946	93,037	134,909	41%
	ACTIVITY6: Programme Support	498,802	498,803	0	100%
	GMS 5%	95,106	87,019	8,087	91%
Total Germany		1,902,112	1,740,374	161,739	91%
EU	ACTIVITY3: ICT, Equipments and Services	1	- 13,089	13,090	
	GMS 5%		- 689	689	
Total EU		1	- 13,778	13,779	
SIDA	ACTIVITY3: ICT, Equipments and Services		138	- 138	
	ACTIVITY5: Establishment and Running Cost of Parliament		19,648	- 19,648	
	ACTIVITY6: Programme Support	403,486	60,540	342,946	15%
	GMS 5%	21,236	4,228	17,008	20%
Total SIDA		424,722	84,554	340,168	20%
Grand Total		4,613,181	3,934,595	678,586	85%