Borghaso, Bamyan Province — Eleven-year-old Mohamed Nasim, who is in sixth grade, wakes up at 5:30 every morning to take computer lessons in a makeshift classroom here in Borghaso village, Bamyan Province, northwest of Kabul. He draws a house in Microsoft Paint, colors it, and types his name in the corner as his young teacher watches over his shoulders. The back of Mohamed’s hands are dried and cracked by the cold weather.

Eleven-year-old Mohamed Nasim, a student from this computer class. The freshly drawn house in Borghaso village, Bamyan Province. (Joel Van Houdt/UNDP)

By MujiB Mashal

Borghaso, Bamyan Province — Outside, just in the distance, farmers tend to their wheat, trying to bring in the harvest in preparation for the harsh winter ahead. The mountain peaks in the distance already gleam with snow.

Mohamed’s teacher watches over his shoulders. The freshly drawn house in Borghaso village, Bamyan Province. (Joel Van Houdt/UNDP)

Afghanistan has one of the lowest per capita rates of electricity consumption in the world. In 2007 only seven percent of the population had access to electricity, according to Government data. Since then, that figure has risen to about 30 percent, thanks to an increase in imported electricity and the construction of micro hydroelectric and solar panel stations. But imported electricity, which provides more than half of the country’s power, does not reach Bamyan province. As a result, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has funded the construction of 18 micro hydroelectric power plants in Bamyan province, with a budget of US$997,000 generously provided in part by the Governments of Norway and the European Union.

The plants are currently generating a cumulative 196 kilowatts of electricity and the construction of micro hydroelectric power plants in Bamyan province. (Joel Van Houdt/UNDP)

The power plant in Borghaso. The local shura—a traditional assembly of tribal elders and religious scholars—took eight months to build it, at a total cost of $62,064.

Take the power plant in Borghaso. The local shura—a traditional assembly of tribal elders and religious scholars—took eight months to build it, at a total cost of $62,064. CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Mr. Ajay Chhibber meets H.E. Vice-President Mr. Khalili. (UNDP Afghanistan/Sayed Farhad Zalmai)

Inside the micro hydroelectric power plant in Kata Qala village, Bamyan Province. (UNDP)

Micro hydroelectric power plants in Afghanistan have at their core the common aspirations of a people yearning to make their country a better place. Their dreams and hopes dovetail with UNDP’s core values and mandate in the areas of poverty reduction; democratic governance; crisis prevention and recovery; and environment and sustainable development. It has become clear that the Afghan people are eager to learn and explore, and take on new challenges. Support from across the world—from governments, aid organizations and corporations—has been vital in that effort. And it is making a difference, as we demonstrate in the pages of the Afghan Development Advocate.

It is with great pleasure that I introduce this edition of the Afghan Development Advocate. Our mission with the Advocate is to provide you with a look at Afghanistan through an unusual point of view: that of Afghan men and women who are spearheading positive change, confronting the odds and defying conventional wisdom. UNDP is privileged to be part of that transformational process.

All the stories of our projects there, some bigger in scope than others, have at their core the common aspirations of a people yearning to make their country a better place. Their dreams and hopes dovetail with UNDP’s core values and mandate in the areas of poverty reduction; democratic governance; crisis prevention and recovery; and environment and sustainable development. It has become clear that the Afghan people are eager to learn and explore, and take on new challenges. Support from across the world—from governments, aid organizations and corporations—has been vital in that effort. And it is making a difference, as we demonstrate in the pages of the Afghan Development Advocate.

So please do take the time to read their stories, and listen to what they say. We hope you enjoy reading this special edition, and please feel free to share any suggestions, feedback or ideas.

Sincerely,

Ajay Chhibber
Assistant Secretary-General, Assistant Administrator of UNDP and Director of UNDP’s Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific

By MujiB Mashal

Borghaso, Bamyan Province — Inside, in Mohamed’s room, which was donated by a local elder, but what makes such initiatives possible here in Bamyan province, where there is no power grid, is the use of micro hydroelectric power plants.

The Development Advocate

AFGHANISTAN EDITION

MICRO HYDROELECTRIC POWER

LIGHTING UP THE HOMES AND LIVES OF THOUSANDS

The Development Advocate

1 May 2013

Empowered lives. Resilient nations.
As the international forces prepare for their announced military drawdown date of 2014 in Afghanistan, the United Nations system and other global organizations working there can expect to play a stepped up role in working with the Afghan Government to help manage the transition and beyond. After more than 50 years of development work in Afghanistan, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has a special and critical task. Indeed, our country programme there remains our largest operation across all the countries we work in, and we are committed to staying in Afghanistan for the long haul, with defined plans to work even more closely with the country and its people to build a stronger nation.

Since 2001, an important area of our engagement in Afghanistan has been our support to the Law and Order Trust Fund (LOTFA), a programme within the Ministry of the Interior. LOTFA has ensured that Afghanistan, with all its security challenges and other operational risks, has had a police force that now numbers almost 140,000 police officers in the months and years ahead, UNDP will work closely with the Ministry of Interior to streamline LOTFA’s operational effectiveness and transparency so it continues to be seen as a bulwark against any possible challenge to the country’s stability and well-being.

Besides LOTFA, UNDP operates development projects—alongside the Government and civil society counterparts—across the country’s 34 provinces, with the aim of contributing to a secure transition as national and sub-national institutions take increasing responsibility for the country’s development agenda, management of its economy and governance of its citizens. For instance, since 2002, with the Afghan Government, UNDP has completed more than 2,300 rural infrastructure projects benefiting over 14 million Afghans. These projects have provided wages for approximately 3.8 million working days through a cash-for-work programme. Our work also ensures almost 1.6 million Afghans have access to safe drinking water, while nearly 1.2 million people in rural areas have power for lighting, education and agriculture thanks to a UNDP-supported network of micro-hydroelectric power plants.

Based on these experiences and responding to the country’s own stated needs, UNDP will increas-ingly focus on three key areas of development: shoring up democratic governance, including elections; elevating the status of women; and improving employment opportunities for young people.

In terms of governance, UNDP has contributed to rebelling and improving critical state institutions in Afghanistan, including the Independent Election Commission and the Parliament. As the Independent Election Commission readily takes over responsibility of the electoral process, UNDP is working to help the Commis-sion to improve voter identification methods and broaden democratic participation in preparation for the upcoming 2014 presidential election, building on lessons learned from past elections. We are also strengthening governing bodies at the provincial and municipal levels.

After more than 30 years of conflict, Afghanistan continues to face enormous development chal-lenges, many of them related to the challenges of peace negotiations, which are held by women, and an active civil society has developed in recent years. These young and energetic women are being trained to deal with political decisions, including those related to peace negotiations, which are being held by women, and an active civil society has developed in recent years.

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In Sia-Khail district, about a 20-minute drive from Barighwa, the local shire decided to build a flour mill attached to its micro hydroelectric power plant. The flour mill is able to grind 1100 kilos of wheat a day. The mill charges one kilo of wheat for every 1000 rials it grinds.

In Kata Qola village of Taklawlang district, about a 1.5 hour drive from Bamyan province’s capital city, the shire also decided to create a daytime computer center with basic computer literacy in two different shifts, and pay a monthly fee of 15. The Kata Qola power plant was built in 2010, and the shire has saved about $2,000 from tariffs after paying the electricity salaries. At one of Kata Qola’s regular meetings, Nabi Muzzafari, UNDP’s on-the-ground partner from the Afghan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, urged the launch of a number of projects he believes will bring tangible and positive change to the local economy.

“You should save a small amount of the money in case the power plant malfunctions, but with the rest why don’t you start an English language class or hire a teacher to provide basic literacy for adults?” he says. “Or even better, why don’t you install two carpet-weaving stations ... if you can teach 10 people how to weave carpets, you would have done wonders to their financial situation.”

Electricity is now providing a cheap substitute to oil lamps and smoky woodstoves in the evenings—reducing household lighting costs by almost 90 percent in addition to indoor pollution.

In the dynamic discussion, as members of the shire and Muzzafari weigh the benefits of different projects they can implement from the saved money, a clear picture emerges: the micro hydroelectric plant. About 30 students learn basic computer literacy in two different shifts, and pay a monthly fee of 15. The Kata Qola power plant was built in 2010, and the shire has saved about $2,000 from tariffs after paying the electricity salaries.

The main difference here is that the citizens listen to their elders. The messages we convey to the elders are easily accepted by the whole community. This is amazing—I have not seen anything else,” he says.

In September 2009, the Government of Afghanistan, supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), started reaching out to communities in eight northern districts in Kabul province to strengthen ties between police officers and regular citizens. The districts of Kabul city, Mirbachakot, Kalakaan, Guldara, 4th Sabz, Qaraqagh, Shukkar Dara and Istalif were the first to benefit from the outreach. The Police-E-Mardumi, or community policing initiative, forms part of Afghanistan’s most recent national police strategy, and is supported by Switzerland and the United States.

Indeed, in the overall backdrop of general public distrust and limited engagement between the police and public, the Farza model of community-policing is showing the way in rebuilding the image of the police as protectors, with a human face. The scope to strengthen rule of law in Afghanistan is immense, with the project already at work in Kabul, Herat and Jalalabad and plans to expand throughout 60 districts and 15 provinces.

Both the police and public require extensive training to embrace the concept of community-oriented policing. The process of building public trust started by introducing the local police to community leaders, including elected members of the district development councils and district development assemblies, religious leaders, and the local share, a traditional assembly of tribal elders and religious scholars.

Haji Mohammad Hanif, the Malik—head—of Qala Salim Khan village in Farza, says that thanks to the Police-E-Mardumi (community outreach) initiative and regular meetings with Colonel Ibrahimshahi, security has improved significantly in Farza. This has helped speed up construction of basic infrastructure across the district, such as roads, schools and health centres across the district.

Our weekly meetings with the district governor and the police chief have provided a forum to report on threats, analyse insurgent activity and find common solutions,” he explains. “We will not allow insurgents to infiltrate into our villages as they are a threat to our lives as well as to our infrastructure.”

Raz Mohammad, a local shopkeeper, agrees with his village head, Haji Mohammad Hanif.

“Unlike other parts of the country, we have never had to shut down our businesses because of incidents of crime or violence.”

Not in the last year, at least. The credit must go to the role played by our community elders and the local police who work together to make peace an everyday reality in Farza.”

The main security challenge for Farza comes from its geographical location. The district is surrounded by mountains and with scattered troop deployment it is easy for the Taliban to occupy one of the hilltops nearby and mount attacks on the district. Indeed, the Taliban maintains a huge presence in a conflict-ridden district west of Farza.

Over the last five months, Taliban fighters have planted mines in inhabited areas, but thanks to the cooperation of young community members, the mines were identified and defused before exploding. The police chief credits the close ties between the police and communities with these small but significant gains in maintaining security in the district.

“The good thing about our community-police solidarity in Farza is that we all know each other,” says Dr. Bahloul, a respected community elder who goes by one name. He says women’s issues are regularly discussed in district level meetings.

We have such (traditional) councils at the village level that have women’s representation. The council representatives in the district committee direct the attention of district officials to issues raised by women,” he explains.

The community elders agree that the police have improved security for girls in schools, clinics and other government institutions. There are four high schools for girls, five middle-level and six junior-level schools serving Farza’s population of 61,000 people. At a local health centre, women even work the night shifts.

This district has a tradition of respect for women,” says the village head, Haji Mohammad Hanif. “We make sure that crimes against women are dealt with firmly.”

While the community elders and Ulema (religious leaders) have assisted the Government in dealing with petty crime and securing progress in development, there is a need to equip the police with proper weapons and training so that external threats to peace efforts in the district can be dealt with more effectively, explains Haji Mohammad Hanif.

Citizens claim that stealing and robbery occur less frequently.

“What keeps us busy is issues related to family disputes. Most of these have to do with economic distress and joblessness. If we had more opportunities for work for our youth, they would never be recruited by the insurgents. This could only enhance our security,” Haji Hanif says.

The Government of Afghanistan is favouring this new approach to policing. At a recent meeting with foreign embassy officials in Kabul, Minister of Interior Ghulam Mujtaba Patang called for a move towards a civilian police force that includes unarmed officers, a move that would help “decrease the distance between the population and the police.”

“Our weekly meetings with the district governor and the police chief have provided a forum to report on threats, analyse insurgent activity and find common solutions. We will not allow insurgents to infiltrate into our villages as they are a threat to our lives as well as to our infrastructure.” – Haji Mohammad Hanif, Malik of Qala Salim Khan village

“...with local village heads and religious leaders in Farza, Kabul Province. (Photo: UNDP/Sayed Farhad Zalmai)”

“...with local village heads and religious leaders in Farza, Kabul Province. (Photo: UNDP/Sayed Farhad Zalmai)”
GOVERNMENT TURNS TO MERIT-BASED RECRUITMENT

BY DUNCAN KEITH WILSON

Kabul—Sayra Shakib Sadat was a young female school student from an illiterate family, living in an isolated village in northern Afghanistan, when fighting broke out among political leaders and the mujahedin in the early 1980s. The fighters ran a brutal racket of extortion and violence, and government health and education services rarely reached her village of Zarzakhana, or other contested parts in the country’s northern provinces.

Twenty years later, as a teacher in the same province of Jawzjan, Shakib encountered similar repression, this time under Taliban rule. “I went through a very difficult time,” remembers Shakib, who is now 50. “Since I was a student I had a huge interest in government. I was always wishing that people working in their interest in government. I was always aware of local governance among family members and the community. Not listening to the people is a big problem of government. We need to enhance awareness of local governance among family members and the community. Not listening to the people is a big problem of local governance.” – Sayra Shakib Sadat, Afghanistan’s only female District Governor

The new recruitment process is run by Afghanistan’s Civil Service Commission. It publicly advertises vacancies nationwide, with job qualifications that specify minimal educational and professional requirements, and offering salaries in alignment with Afghanistan’s civil service salary scale. The Commission works with the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, and their joint committee administers a written exam on management and administration, and interviews successful candidates.

For Shakib—personal criticism and lack of resources, insecurity and—such a situation, government officials at the subnational level need to be “It’s important for me to know the matters of the people, and their expectations from government. We need to enhance awareness of local governance among family members and the community. Not listening to the people is a big problem of local governance.” – Sayra Shakib Sadat, Afghanistan’s only female District Governor

The UNDP merit-based recruitment project supports local governance initiatives and performance management systems. Once in office, District Governor’s challenges can include a lack of resources, insecurity and— for Shakib—personal criticism and harassment.

“One of the challenges is competition from men in the district, due to community ignorance that says women cannot be representatives in the districts,” she says. “But the day I decided to serve the realm of people and government I realized there would be challenges from many sides and I decided to stake out my goals. I have many challenges, and I attempt to overcome these challenges.”

For Shakib, the newly appointed District Governor of Khwaja Do Koh, this understanding and focus on solutions is fundamental to good governance.

The work is challenging, but she perseveres. Her name, Shakib says, means patience. And her favorite poem, in Dari, reminds her that with patience, “a stone will become a precious ruby.”

Sayra Shakib Sadat, District Governor of Khwaja Do Koh, is Afghanistan’s only female district governor. She was appointed through merit-based recruitment process supported by UNDP, UNDP Afghanistan.
Kabul — The Government of Afghanistan is tapping mullahs and ulama (Islamic scholars and clerics) as well as other religious and community leaders to make people aware of the rights of women in accordance with Islamic Law, through a programme supported by UNDP.

The national programme, which is being implemented by the Ministry of Haj and Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Women's Affairs, requires mullahs and other Islamic and community leaders to raise awareness about the consequences of early marriage, forced marriage and gender-based violence.

Mullahs, ulama and community leaders participating in the programme—supported by Italy and the United Kingdom—have begun to speak out about violence against women during Friday sermons in mosques.

Their listeners, all men, are told about the negative implications of such actions as laid out by Islamic texts. The hope is that by involving men from the outset as agents of change, society's views toward the status of women will begin to shift.

"In Afghanistan, when people are given instructions based on their religious values, they will easily listen and accept them," said Mawlawi Abdul Hanan, a participant. "We believe that by involving religious leaders such programmes will reduce domestic violence."

Participants also discuss inheritance issues, including a comparison between what Islamic law says about a woman's right to inheritance and what happens in practice. Afghanistan's population consists mainly of traditional communities who strictly adhere to their local cultures and customs. As a result, people often have a deep-seated trust for their religious scholars and mullahs, who are respected as the custodians of their society's values.

"This kind of training is very essential for people like us who work in govern- ment positions and deal with people's cases," said Abdul Wasi Antzar, deputy district head of Rodad district in Nangarhar province. "We have learned a lot of things about women's rights and violence against women in this training, which we will use in our daily work now.

Antzar, his 25 colleagues and a group of village elders participated in a 10-day training course on women's rights.

The programme started in the northern Balkh province in late 2009. Two hundred fifty mullahs from five districts took part in a series of trainings, knowledge-building and participatory discussions on women's rights according to Islam. Today, the programme has reached over 3,900 community and religious leaders in six provinces.

Faridullah, 35, has noticed the new messages about women's rights at his mosque in Jalalabad since his mullah participated in the workshops.

"For me, personally, I did not know that much about women rights, but since our mullah started to talk about them I have learned a lot and now I always try to attend his speeches on a regular basis," Faridullah says. "If such speeches by mullahs continue in the future I am sure violence against women will significantly decrease in Afghan communities."

UNDP is working with the Government of Afghanistan to address women's needs, a crucial element for the country's development. Recently, the Government committed to fast-tracking the increase of women's participation in civil service at all levels to 30 percent by 2013. ■

BY TIVUS MOUTABR
Kabul—Seven years ago that Captain Zohra Daulatzia joined the Afghan National Police. But the mother of two girls aged 10 and 8 years still gets excited about their remarkable journey in her day in life when she achieved one of her greatest life ambitions:

"I was full of joy," she says.

Captain Daulatzia's experience as a woman and police officer is still a very rare one in Afghanistan. Half the population in Afghanistan consists of women, but only one percent of the Afghan National Police are female officers. In order for the national police force to deliver quality services to the entire population, the Ministry of Interior aims to increase this number.

"There are always big challenges in male-dominated societies," explains Lieutenant Colonel Lalifa Bayat, Deputy Director in the Ministry of Interior's Gender Unit, a woman who joined the force 15 years ago. "Our customs do not allow women to work in the police force. Women, however, have no access to education—hence they end up having low capacity, even in receiving training in the new police force."

UNDP, through its Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan—supported from its development partners—is working closely with the Ministry of Interior, where the Fund is based to make this happen.

Beginning in 2010, the Fund and the Ministry established a system for the national police force to begin recruiting women police officers. UNDP and the Ministry also initiated a series of multimedia campaigns on radio and television encouraging women to apply for police jobs, and it set up a telephone information hotline and sent out their representatives to recruit girls right out of secondary school.

In addition, the UNDP project is providing specialized three month-long training courses in leadership, management, accounting and information technology for police officers at the rank of lieutenant colonel and above. All police officers were trained to code of conduct by the UN Office for Drugs and Crime and, in collabora- tion with the European Union's Police Mission in Afghanistan, female officers who handle domestic violence cases are taking a course in crime scene analysis.

UNDP's Law and Order Trust Fund and the Ministry of Interior established 13 'family response units' across the country. As part of this expansion, additional women police officers will staff these units which are being trained in infor- mation technology, basic crime scene investiga- tion, forensic awareness, ethics, handling, interviewing witnesses, taking statements and compiling crime dockets.

Female police officers who have participated in these specialized training courses say that, as a result, they have been able to improve their day-to-day decision-making abilities, their knowledge of poli- ce procedures and practices and their overall confidence on the job.

Serious challenges remain, however, making the recruit- ment of women police officers a formidable task, one that requires more effective hiring campaigns as well as changes in attitudes both within the police force and within the communities they serve.

"The Afghan National Police around the country faces a big problem with their security in general," says Marina Hamidzada, a gender specialist who works for the Law and Order Trust Fund. "For women police officers, the situation is worse. They cannot even patrol the streets wearing police uniforms," as it is worse. They cannot even patrol the streets wearing police uniforms, " as it would be dangerous for them."

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**LOCAL DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT GO HAND-IN-HAND**

**BY KUMAR MTIKU**

Mahmud-i-Raqi, Kapisa Province—Mushtari, a 42-year-old high school graduate and secretary of the District Development Assembly of Mahmud-i-Raqi district, some 80 kilometres north of Kabul, is presenting to fellow Assembly members a project to build a primary school for girls. Having just completed a six-day workshop on project design, monitoring and financial management, Mushtari speaks assuredly on the project goals, a security assessment of the village where the proposed school would be built and an overall work plan for the project.

Though covered and invisible behind the burqa, the traditional veil that many Muslim women wear, Mushtari’s voice is loud and clear. She is actually participating in a UNDP-supported mock training exercise, meant to conclude the training programme, but the Assembly members are real and they listen to her with attention and respect.

Since 2006, almost every district of Afghanistan—388 out of a total of 462—has appointed and elected female representatives to the local district development assemblies. UNDP support to a nationwide programme focused on creating legitimate and accountable local governing bodies. Additionally, in over 120 of these districts, the governance programme has established District Information Centres to collect and provide reliable and much needed data on development and the social and economic aspects of their respective districts.

In contrast to the traditional jirgas and other forms of village-level governing groups, Assembly members are elected by the people they serve and are mainly tasked with improving the quality, transparency and ongoing sustainability of rural development projects. As part of the initiative, most of the new Assemblies and their members have received training in local governance, conflict resolution, the importance of gender equality and the nuts and bolts of making development projects happen, from fundraising and procurement to monitoring and implementation.

**RECONCILING FAMILIES**

“In the absence of a functional court system, locals prefer us over the courts when it comes to arbitrating reconciliation among families and neighbours,” says Mohammad Malang Miskinyaar, 50, chairperson of the Mahmud-i-Raqi Assembly for which Mushtari acts as secretary. He also says that while the jirgas sometimes made decisions that went against modern Afghan law, the District Development Assembly system goes in accordance with the law. Equally important, the Assemblies include elected female representatives, resulting in the real concerns and voices of women being openly expressed and addressed by the Assemblies.

A resident of Deh Baba Ali village in Mahmud-i-Raqi district, Mushtari has risen from being a member of her district’s Development Assembly to the role of secretary since the Assembly was first established three years earlier. A mother of six, she volunteers for three hours a day to do the Assembly’s work. She is especially keen on meeting women from the district’s villages individually and in groups, listening to their issues and bringing them to the Assembly meetings.

Mushtari says that poverty among women in the district is widespread, and she believes the Assembly has been key in bringing forward projects that benefit women in particular.

“Our District Development Assembly has already done a good job of implementing income-generation projects for women such as bee-keeping, tomato processing and baking,” Mushtari says.

In Sufian village, part of Mir Bacha Kot district on the outskirts of Kabul province, vineyard owner Ghulam Mohuddin praises his District Development Assembly’s success in the building of a 150-metre irrigation canal that has not only put a stop to recurring fights over water distribution among villagers but has resulted in an increase in their crop yields. For example, Mohuddin’s vineyards are now producing 80 percent of their full potential yield, compared to 50 percent the previous year.

“The canal has been a boon,” he says.

Back in Mahmud-i-Raqi district, District Development Assembly members are proud of the capacity they have built for themselves over the last three years in proposal writing, project design, monitoring, procurement and financial management.

**SOARING EXPECTATIONS**

Looking forward, however, Miskinyaar, the Assembly’s chair, worries that members do not yet draw a salary, and that they still lack regular funding to run Assembly affairs.

“With expectations soaring, we often find ourselves spending long hours addressing issues that the locals bring to us,” says one member. “Even though a small grant of US$170 a month is provided, it is hardly enough to meet our daily needs.”

Meanwhile, the district itself is crying out for resources to match many of the plans that its Assembly has rolled out in its district development plan. Before the creation of the District Development Assemblies, there were very few rural development projects underway in Afghanistan and those that existed were poorly implemented. Miskinyaar cites the example of a failed energy project based on diesel generators that were too expensive to maintain.

“Now if the District Development Assembly was to put its mind to an energy project, we would propose a micro-hydroelectric project that stands a better test of sustainability,” says Waris, the Assembly’s deputy chair.

The Assemblies’ success in Afghanistan has spurred progress in developing a unified policy for coherent, decentralized district-level development. Going forward, a recent Presidential Decree has tasked UNDP’s partner ministry, Afghanistan’s Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, with identifying a number of the District Development Assemblies with other existing shieves into District Coordination Councils. UNDP and the Ministry are playing a leading role in preparing regulations for the establishment of these new Councils, which will be ultimately responsible for coordinating development and governance at the district level.
NEW ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCILS CHANGING THE FACE OF DEVELOPMENT IN PROVINCIAL COMMUNITIES

BY KUMAR H TIKU
Char-i-Kar, Parwan Province—Standing at the edge of Joe-e-Projey canal in the northern town of Charlie-Kar, Mohammad Tahir, a car mechanic, rues the fate of children who drink water from the local canal. “This canal has snuffed out many young lives. It is a bed of dirt and disease,” he says sadly, with moist eyes.

The 70-year-old patriarch of a large family of eight children and a gaggle of grandchildren is echoing what local residents have known for years. The canal water is dangerous, sometimes deadly, to human life and health.

For an estimated 10,000 families in Charlie-Kar the Joe-e-Projey canal on the Parpsh River in Parwan province is the only source of drinking water. Unsustainable economic growth and the lack of sewage systems have caused the once pristine canal to drain and become clogged by garbage. Change is on the way, however, with a new environmental agency planning to clean up the canal and to combat a host of other environmental problems in Parwan.

Habib Rahman, 36, is a money changer and a father of five children. “We are caught in a quagmire of disease, death and poverty,” he says. “When we take our children to the doctor, the water from the canal is the culprit. Not many can afford medical treatment so often we let the culprit. Not many can afford medical treatment so often we let

The 70-year-old patriarch of a large family of eight children and a gaggle of grandchildren is echoing what local residents have known for years. The canal water is dangerous, sometimes deadly, to human life and health.

The active involvement of the new provincial councils in the development process in Parwan has led to growing awareness among state and community officials of the environmental threats facing the province. Abdul Wahid Azizi, the provincial head of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development claims environmental issues are strongly reflected in each of the 26 Community Development Council Plans at the village level. His ministry has directed all the Councils and District Development Assemblies to enforce strict environmental standards.

The Kabul-to-Parwan road in my childhood was full of shade, with tall imposing poplar trees lining the road on both sides,” says Hazratullah, a 35-year-old resident. “The Russians came and launched a massive tree-cutting drive in order to open clear access for their soldiers. It was as if overnight our villages were stripped and exposed.”

But three years ago, Haji Mohammad Wahid, head of neighboring Galqondy district’s Association of Skilled Laborers and a member of Parwan’s Environment Advisory Council, led a drive that helped plant more than 8,000 pine trees.

“The saplings were planted three years ago and are still being looked after by the volunteers, and as a result nearly all the saplings have survived,” he says.

Muhammad Abdul Wash Safi, who heads the Ministry of Islamic and Religious Affairs in Parwan, describes the environment as a major responsibility of the Ulema. In fact, he says, verses of the Holy Koran deal with the significance of protecting the environment and promoting public hygiene.

“I take it as my main religious duty to invite my Muslim brethren to volunteer their services in every way possible for the protection of our fragile environment,” he says.

Meanwhile, Parwan’s Provincial Environment Advisory Council has convinced local business to stop burning rubber tires and plastic, a major cause of respiratory illnesses. Bakeries and hammams—public bathing places—were particularly notorious for such practices.

Based on the Council’s advice, the provincial government took tough action against some establishments, including the closing of the largest hammam in Charlie-Kar. As a result, most businesses have started to use liquefied natural gas as fuel.

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Today, 22 of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces have Provincial Environment Advisory Councils, thanks to a nationwide environmental management initiative supported by UNDP in partnership with the Food and Agricultural Organization and the UN Environment Programme, and with financial backing from the Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund.
AFGHANISTAN BY THE NUMBERS

1,557
female police
officers recruited with
UNDP support

1,405 km
of roads constructed
with UNDP assistance, connecting 4,228
villages to district centres and markets

106
micro hydropower
plants completed

43,000
students enrolled in a
human rights-based
curriculum

1,682
Ministry of Interior offi-
cials trained in financial
management, account-
ing, human resources,
adминистation,
up-to-date
payroll and funds
transfer technologies.

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4 million
voters cast their ballots in 2010 Parliamentary
Elections

117,023
families now with
access to electricity

4.9 million
paid workdays through
UNDP’s cash-for-work
programme

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