



Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

COUNTRY POSITION PAPER FOR RIO +20

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INTRODUCTION

The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GoA) shares the common vision that has been articulated in the draft proposition for Rio+20 in relation to sustainable development and the requirement of enabling policy and institutional framework for sustainable development. The GoA welcomes the objective of the Conference "to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development, reviewing progress and remaining implementation gaps and assessing new and emerging challenges".

For Afghanistan, Rio+20's timing as well as its thematic focus on green economy and the institutional framework for sustainable development is ideal. Afghanistan is in the process of transitioning to leading its internal security operations as international security forces plan for withdrawal by the end of 2014. On the development side, the GoA is presenting its achieve self-reliance plan in an upcoming July 2012 conference in Tokyo.

This document is based on discussions and deliberations with representatives from government and non-governmental organizations, communities, and national decision makers from a broad section of society. A Consultation Group was created to ensure different views, voices and thinking was included. A strategic task force was set up to ensure practical implementation can take place. In the following sections, we present a summary of progress that has been made in promoting human development since 2001, followed by a discussion about challenges and opportunities for the green economy in Afghanistan. In the last section, an agenda for action to promote sustainable development is proposed.

Status of Human Development

Afghanistan has emerged as a new democracy after almost three decades of conflict. A system of governance based on the foundation of democratic principles has been established and the institutions required to safeguard those principles created. At the national level, a new National Assembly and Supreme Court have been established. Similarly, local community *shuras* (council) responsible for directing the development interventions have been created, provincial council members elected and a new constitution in accordance with United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was adopted by the elected delegates of *Loya Jirga* (constituent assembly representing the Afghan people), in 2004. Two terms of presidential elections were successfully held in which many Afghans participated¹. A vibrant local civil society has emerged, the foundation of free and open media has been created and Independent Human Rights Commission monitoring and reporting on human rights violations established. Similarly at the local level, through local flagship National Solidarity Program rural communities across Afghanistan, for the first time, are empowered to actively participate in selecting development priorities for their communities – an allocation of \$1.2 billion in support of development priorities for rural communities has been made.²

¹ The turnout for the 2004 election was a reported 80 percent.

² Ministry of Finance, Supporting Self-Reliance in Afghanistan: Roadmap to the Transformation Decade, May 3, 2012 Draft.

The economy of Afghanistan has improved significantly since 2002 despite difficult security situation. The GDP per capita grew from \$123 in 2001/02 to nearly \$600 in 2011/12.³ The growth is largely made possible by development aid and interventions. It is, however, worth mentioning that the expected departure of the foreign troops and the projected decline of donor support by 2014 will likely to adversely affect the economic growth. It is estimated that GDP growth is forecasted to fall to 5 percent in 2011/2012.⁴

Health care, an important pillar of human development, has received considerable attention in Afghanistan. Many Afghans in rural areas (more than 80 percent) are now enjoying access to basic health services through the Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) programme. Households can now receive basic care through maternal and newborn health care, immunization and disability services in or around their communities. Life expectancy rates at birth have improved from 43.9 years for men and 43.8⁵ years for women in 2006 to 64 for both women and men in 2010.⁶

Today, 65 percent of Afghans live within a two-hour walk of a health facility. The under-5 mortality rate, as a result of these interventions, decreased from 257 per 1,000 live births in 2000 to 161 in 2007–2008.⁷ New estimates, using a different source, now indicate even better progress with a reduction to 83 per 1,000 live births.⁸

An analysis of educational opportunities in Afghanistan indicates that, since 2001, **primary and secondary enrolment rates have expanded considerably, and more children than ever are attending schools.** In 2007, 61 percent of school-aged children (4.7 million) were enrolled across the country.⁹ The number increased to a total of 6.8 million students at all levels of the educational system in 2008. Moreover, a remarkable surge in literacy has occurred among children aged 12–16. That is, 37 percent of girls and 62 percent of boys can now read and write.¹⁰

An increasing number of youth Afghans have benefitted from new job opportunities in the service and industrial sectors which have grown significantly due to international spending. The World Bank estimates that approximately 48 percent of the population is underemployed.¹¹

³ Ministry of Finance, Supporting Self-Reliance in Afghanistan: Roadmap to the Transformation Decade, May 3, 2012 Draft.

⁴ WB Economic Outlook for Afghanistan, March 2012.

⁵ Ministry of Public Health, Afghanistan Health Survey 2006: Estimates of Priority Health Indicators, Kabul: Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University and Indian Institute of Health Management Research, 2008.

⁶ Afghan Public Health Institute, et al, Afghanistan Mortality Survey 2010, 2011.

⁷ Centre for Policy and Human Development, The Forgotten Front: Water Security and the Crisis in Sanitation, Afghanistan Human Development Report (AHDR), (2011).

⁸ Afghan Public Health Institute, et al, Afghanistan Mortality Survey 2010, 2011.

⁹ AHDR (2011).

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ministry of Finance, Supporting Self-Reliance in Afghanistan: Roadmap to the Transformation Decade, May 3, 2012 Draft.

Sixty-eight percent of the population is under the age of 25,¹². Many of this youth have only experienced instability over the past decades. As international military leaves, associated jobs will also be lost. Without job prospects this new generation will be more vulnerable to malign influences. Alternatively decent work will allow them a more secure and positive future.

Development of key infrastructure and public works has been the catalyst of economic growth. Many cities and villages are now connected through the construction or rehabilitation of roads. Access to electricity has increased by 250 percent since 2001, though still inadequate to meet the needs of rural areas. Most Afghans (80 percent) can now access telecom services.

Despite these remarkable achievements, **there are still many challenges ahead for stability and poverty eradication.** According to internationally comparable HDI data for 2010, Afghanistan ranks 155th among the 192 United Nations member states. This illustrates the challenges that lay ahead. 36 percent (9 million Afghans) of the population cannot meet their basic requirements such as access to food, clean water, clothing and shelter.¹³ Using the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), a method of measuring poverty that is based on calculating deprivation in 10 indicators¹⁴, a rather dismal picture of poverty is revealed. Afghanistan, with a value MPI value of 0.51, is ranked 96th among 105 developing countries. According to this measure, about 84 percent of Afghan households are multi-dimensionally poor.¹⁵

Environmental degradation is a key factor in sustaining poverty in Afghanistan. Poverty and environment are directly linked here due to high dependence of the population on the natural resource base. Approximately 80 percent of the population relies on natural resources for meeting domestic needs and or as a livelihood source.¹⁶ In this context, any environmental degradation deepens Afghan's poverty and likewise poverty is pivotal in further deteriorating the environment. For example, without electricity, 85 percent of rural households rely on kerosene oil, fuel wood and animal dung to fulfill their domestic energy needs. This has led to over utilization of forests, rangeland resources and decreased of agriculture productivity.

Due to drought and floods, many Afghan families adopt livelihood and risk management strategies that deplete their productive assets - such as land and livestock- and drive them deeper into poverty. Significant dependence on agriculture, lack of water storage infrastructure (one of the lowest in the world)¹⁷ and on-going land degradation render Afghanistan particularly vulnerable to floods and drought. One study shows 90 percent of local conflicts caused by land tenure issues and inequitable access to water. There is a fluctuation on cereal crop production of 40-55 percent for irrigated land and 80 percent for rainfed land relative to an average year.¹⁸

¹² Ibid

¹³ Afghanistan's Central Statistics Office, National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (2007/08).

¹⁴ The 10 indicators used for measuring multi-dimensional poverty are: nutrition, child Mortality, years of schooling, children enrolled, cooking fuel, sanitation, water, electricity, floor, assets.

¹⁵ AHDR (2011).

¹⁶ UNEP, Post-Conflict Assessment of Environment in Afghanistan, 2008

¹⁷ AHDR (2011).

¹⁸ Ibid

Afghanistan has a low HDI, with poor health indicators for many. At 1600 deaths per 100,000 births, Afghanistan has the second highest maternal mortality rate in the world¹⁹. Annual deaths from water borne diseases and air pollution are estimated to be higher even than from the military conflict. Estimates presented in the latest AHDR shows that every hour 6 children of under-five years of age die due to unsafe drinking water and sanitation. Afghanistan has the lowest access to safe drinking water (27 percent) and sanitation (5 percent) in the world.

Despite progress in advancing women’s rights, enhanced access to education among girls and increased participation of women in government, gender discrimination is pervasive in Afghanistan. Women comprise half of Afghanistan’s population and continue to play a vital role in sustainable consumption and production, safeguarding the natural environment, traditional knowledge and in allocating adequate and sustainable resources within the household and community. According to the 2009 global HDR, the country ranks 154th in measurements of the gender-related development index, which is second-lowest in the world only after Niger.²⁰

Afghanistan is signatory to global norms, policies and standards on gender equality and women’s empowerment which provide a firm basis for action by Government agencies, its partners and other stakeholders at all levels. These include: the Constitution; ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); the endorsement of the MDGs, adopting six gender equality targets; the ANDS both of which positioned gender as a cross cutting theme. In line with these commitments, the Government of Afghanistan will harness women as key participants in advancing the three pillars of sustainable development and realization of their rights to equal access to resources, opportunities and decision-making.

Status of the Environment

Afghanistan is a diverse landscape of sweeping plains and high mountains covering roughly 650,000 km². Mountains make up over 65 percent of the landmass, with over 25 percent of the country above 2,500 m, including the Hindu Kush Central Highlands that grade eastward into the huge mountains of the Pamirs, with Mount Noshaq reaching over 7,400m in elevation. The climate is continental, with cold winters and hot summers. Most of the country is semi-arid or arid, with extensive deserts and semi-deserts in the southwest. The northern plains were once dry, open woodlands of pistachio and juniper stretching to the Amu Darya River and riparian Tugai woodland along much of the country’s northern border. In the southeast, remnants of once extensive forests of pine and cedar can still be found.

Afghanistan is very rich in biodiversity including medicinal plants. With up to 4,000 native higher plant species; it is a critical pathway for migratory birds and supports populations of several of the world’s most endangered animals including the iconic Snow leopard and Marco Polo sheep. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF)’s ecological classification system divides Afghanistan up into 17 ecoregions, five of which are considered globally ‘critically endangered’. The Western Himalayan Temperate Forest, is on WWF’s ‘Global 200’ list of the most unique and important terrestrial, freshwater or marine eco-regions on the planet.

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

Afghanistan’s environment has been negatively affected over the last 30 years of conflict by poor environmental management practices and lack of effective environmental governance. The current state of the environment is at a critical level with 99 percent of the land area being composed of ecosystems that are either endangered or vulnerable. Forest cover stands at only 50 percent of that in 1970, rangeland has been degraded. There is population growth, livestock increase and over-harvesting of grasses and bushes. Depleted ground water reserves, reduced surface water quantity and quality, erosion, salinity, lowered soil fertility, and the loss of biodiversity are just some of the other challenges being faced.

More recently, a combination of poor management practices, rapid socio-economic development and the impacts of climate change, has resulted in significant further environmental degradation.

Environmental Governance

Afghanistan long-term development vision (15 years) is outlined in the country's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which was endorsed by GoA in 2004.²¹ Similar to the other MDGs, Goal 7 is to ensure sustainable development, and “Integrate principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs, and reverse the loss of environmental resources (Target 12)”. As such, the GoA recognizes that failure to address environmental degradation will negatively affect the long-term growth of the country.

MDG Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources

- Proportion of land area covered by forest
- Proportion of area protected to maintain biological diversity
- Energy use per unit of GDP
- Carbon dioxide emissions per capita and consumption of CFCs

Halve by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water

- Proportion of population using solid fuels
- Proportion of population with sustainable access to an improved water source, rural and urban.

Have achieved by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers

- Proportion of population with access to improved sanitation.
- Proportion of households with access to secure tenure

Source: ANDS, Environment Sector Strategy, December 2008.

²¹ Afghanistan endorsed MDGs much later than other countries due to the on-going conflict in 2000. As a result Afghanistan has an extended deadline (2020 as opposed to 2015) and due to the particular post-conflict challenges of the country, it has one added goal of “Goal 9: Enhancing Security”.

The Country's medium term (5 year) development vision and strategy, which is based on Afghanistan's MDGs, was outlined in Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) in 2008 after extensive consultations with national and international counterparts. The ANDS includes an Environmental Sector Strategy, which aims to "improve the quality of life of the people of Afghanistan through conservation, protection and improvement of the country's environment".²² ANDS framework includes three pillars- security; governance and human rights; and social and economical development as well as three crosscutting issues, one of which is environment sustainability. As a cross cutting issue, it is expected that the environmental initiatives be mainstreamed across the three pillars of ANDS. The ANDS environment strategy should provide direction for integration of environmental issues and policies into Afghanistan's development priorities and contribute to increased economic growth and poverty reduction.

A number of other key achievements have been accomplished. The National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) was established in 2005 as Afghanistan's environmental policy-making institution, tasked with regulation, coordination, monitoring and enforcement of environmental issues. The Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) was created with a mandate to coordinate and manage all aspects related to emergency response to disaster, including post disaster recovery and development. Furthermore Afghanistan's first Environment Law was drafted through a consultative process and signed by President Karzai in late 2005. The law was reviewed and amended by the National Assembly, and the final version promulgated in early 2007²³. NEPA plays an important role. Under the Environment Law, it is responsible for fulfilling 18 key functions related to the environment and natural resources. In the years to come NEPA will be one of the central institutions dealing with management of Afghanistan's environment, guiding sectoral ministries such as the Ministry for Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), Energy and Water (MEW), the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA), Mines, Urban Development and many more.

In addition to the Environment law, ozone, pollution control, EIA regulations and various other policies and strategies have been approved and enforcement is underway. Progress on natural heritage conservation is also a national priority, with a system of 30 parks and conservation areas being developed. Several interventions targeting various aspects of capacity building and environmental assessment, clean-up and restoration have been implemented, and important international environmental conventions and cross-border cooperation agreements signed.

The National Capacity Self-Assessment for Global Environmental Management (NCSA) and National Adaptation Program of Action for Climate Change (NAPA) projects, completed in February 2008, provide an overview of Rio conventions in Afghanistan, and state international environmental agreements. The emerging National Priority programs on Water and Natural resource development with components on forestry, rangeland and parks will go some way to fulfilling the targets and aspirations in the ANDS strategy document.

²² ANDS Environment Sector Strategy, December 2008.

²³ Official Gazette No. 912, 25 January 2007.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan fully supports multilateral efforts at promoting a global sustainable development agenda. Rio+20, therefore presents an important opportunity to build on what was agreed at Rio in 1992, take stock of the status of global implementation of sustainable development in pursuance of Agenda 21 and chart a future course of action for sustainable and inclusive and equitable green economic growth for all. Afghanistan's main expectation from Rio+20 is a renewed commitment of Member States for preserving the Rio principles and fostering implementable agreements for fulfilling the implementation gaps in the Rio declaration and other associated commitments, and addressing new and emerging challenges in a fair and equitable manner based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

Afghanistan needs United Nations and international community assistance in its transition to sustainable development through a green economy. and expects a clear articulation of the objective of Rio+20 to ensure a balanced and integrated approach for addressing the three pillars of sustainable development. Afghanistan's country position on the themes of Rio+20 and other components are elaborated below.

Transitioning to a Green Economy

Green development in Afghanistan can contribute to poverty reduction and inclusive and equitable economic growth as well as environmental conservation. We acknowledge that a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication should protect and enhance the natural resource base, increase resource efficiency, promote sustainable consumption and production patterns, and move the world toward low-emission development.

We support the position that a sovereign state should have the right to exploit their own natural resources pursuant to their own environmental and developmental requirements and natural resource endowments. In addition, it should be in compliance of agreed and ratified international rules and regulations. Green economy approaches should be a decision-making framework to foster a balanced and integrated development of the three pillars of sustainable development in both public and private sectors' decision-making.

In the context of Afghanistan, proper management of its resources will lead to long term sustainable economic growth, create jobs and generate adequate revenue to cover financing needs, if properly support by the international community, mainly the developed countries.

Rural electrification is an important example. Rural energy, under the Ministry of Rural Development and Rehabilitation, has made modern energy services available to some one million people living in isolated rural and mountainous areas, largely by expanding small hydro, solar heating, and other renewable energy technologies. The programme has reduced average annual household spending, helped create 40 new businesses for every new micro hydropower station brought on line, and helped get girls to school.²⁴

²⁴ Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development.

In addition to clean energy solutions, sustainable forms of agriculture, a sector that accounts for 36 percent of Afghanistan's licit GDP²⁵, can increase yields and revenues and reduce climate change and environmental vulnerability. By increasing investment and introducing appropriate technology, and implementing appropriate policy reforms, significant gains can also be achieved.

Another valuable source of potential economic growth in Afghanistan is its "high-value" resources (such as hydrocarbons, minerals, metals, and stones). By 2021, mineral and hydrocarbons could contribute up to \$ 1 billion annually to the Government's fiscal revenues. The pressure to kick-start development of the extractive industries can lead to the rapid and uncontrolled exploitation of such resources, without due attention to sustainability imperatives. Through proper management of these resources and investment in appropriate technology the prospect of positive economic development, employment and budget revenues is attainable.

Without security and rule of law, Afghan progress in improving human development conditions will be stalled. As the country is transitioning to lead the provision of security, we look forward to support from the international community in supporting our efforts.

Afghan growth will be difficult to realize unless we put in place effective measures to address environmental management. A coherent approach to development and mainstreaming environmental issues in national planning process, in the National Priority Programs and in allocation of financing, will allow sustainable practices in development.

For Afghanistan, there are considerable risks involved in a green economy commitment. Efforts to help Afghanistan build a green economy must not: (a) create new trade barriers; that is environmental concerns should not be used for trade protectionism (b) impose new conditionality on aid and finance; (c) widen technology gaps or exacerbate technological dependence on developed countries; (d) restrict the policy space for countries to pursue their own paths to sustainable development.

Afghanistan's commits to the formulation and implementation of policies and mechanisms that are conducive to engaging the government, private sector and the civil society to work together to support green enterprises. Training and targeted interventions including financing and credit facilities can help increase civil participation. The promotion of gender and social equity in education, skills and entrepreneurship development, health care, child welfare and social security will greatly assist the poor, women and socially excluded groups.

The GoA welcomes initiatives for facilitating knowledge and technology transfer to the least developed countries, such as the agreement made at the climate negotiations in Cancun in 2010, (UNFCCC) and others. These promising initiatives, while not sufficient for the ambitious goal of supporting the development of innovation systems for least developed countries, are still important for Afghanistan, a recipient of technology on all fronts. While a comprehensive assessment of technologies needs are required, however, some of the technological needs are in

²⁵Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, 2012.

the areas of: agriculture, disaster management, land use, livestock and forestry sector, energy, water management, waste management, transport and industry. We call for initiatives to ensure that the technologies developed remain in the public domain and are accessible to Afghans at affordable prices. In parallel, efforts to support Afghanistan's scientists and engineers institutions to develop local technologies and use traditional knowledge should be supported.

Favorable trade and transit facilities are crucial for achievement of sustainable development. The composition of Afghan exports is highly dependent on natural capital, particularly on agriculture products and mineral resources. At the domestic level, trade policies should be adopted that will sustain extraction and use of natural resources, maintain their conservation, and facilitate the transmission of clean technology. Furthermore, reduction of tariffs and removal of non-tariff barriers on environmentally friendly good and services is an important step that can facilitate access to technology and can trigger the use of green goods by the consumers. At the international level, however, through established mechanisms, rules should be developed to prevent countries from using environmental concerns as pretext for adopting trade protectionism and imposing product quality standards that countries like Afghanistan will not be able to meet.

Foreign aid has made a significant contribution to socio-economic development and poverty reduction in Afghanistan. Despite an average growth rate of 17 percent per annum since 2005,²⁶ the country remains fragile and is highly dependent on foreign aid. The future Afghanistan wants will clearly need new sources of financing from the international community to meet the financing needs for such a transition to take place. There is also the need to launch a process to identify other innovative instruments of finance for transitioning to a green economy.

The Busan partnership on aid effectiveness recognizes the catalytic role that aid effectiveness plays in achieving sustainable development. Continuous dependence of Afghanistan on aid requires that sustainable development issues be mainstreamed in the national development plan. Likewise, there is a need for common guidelines and a framework to ensure that both the GoA and donors in aid mobilization and utilization address issues of sustainable development.

On an Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development

Afghanistan recognizes that strong governance at local, national, regional and global levels is critical for advancing sustainable development. Afghanistan would prefer an enabling institutional framework for sustainable development with the following ingredients:

- A green development transition is particularly difficult for fragile countries such as Afghanistan. The challenging task is to how to balance immediate security provisions, facilitating economic stability and growth, and provision of technical and financial support for new development approaches and technologies in a weak institutional setup. Success in this regard will require improved national and international cooperation and coordination to support Afghanistan's efforts in designing, adapting green development strategies while building the human resources and institutional capacities to implement those strategies.

²⁶ WB/Aid Policy (check source)

- Afghanistan reaffirms that the Economic and Social Council as a central mechanism for the coordination of the United Nations system and its specialized agencies and supervision of its subsidiary bodies, in particular its functional commissions.
- More coherence, coordination and improved service delivery systems into multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), intergovernmental bodies, the UN system and other international organizations. Afghanistan recognizes that coordination and cooperation among the MEAs are needed in order to, inter alia, address policy fragmentation and avoid overlap and duplication. We welcome the work already undertaken to enhance synergies among the three conventions. We call for further measures to enhance coordination and cooperation among MEAs.
- The GoA is committed to strengthening the environmental pillar of sustainable development in Afghanistan. The governance of the whole initiative has to be consistent with Rio Principles of universality, democracy, transparency, cost-effectiveness and accountability.
- In order to support the environment pillar of sustainable development in Afghanistan, institutional mechanisms are to be activated specifically focusing on issues of pollution abatement, waste management, biodiversity conservation, sustainable management of land and water resources, and protected area management. Dedicated support from the international community will be required for this.
- The women of Afghanistan play a critical role and are primary stakeholders in the future of the country. The Government is committed to ensuring adequate women's representation and leadership in any emerging governance/institutional framework. The structure; financing; capacity-building, technology transfer and development mechanisms that would be established at Rio should include provision for targeted support and resource allocation that benefits Afghan women and promotes the implementation of sustainable development agenda that takes account of gender dimensions and the empowerment of women.
- Enhance institutional capacity at all levels and promote adequate flow of resources and technologies to Afghanistan during (and beyond) the transition towards green economy.
- Strengthen the network of local scientific institutions with institutions at global, regional and national levels to address global challenges including climate change and pollution.
- Afghanistan would require dedicated support from the international community in establishing an enabling institutional framework to strengthen national innovation capacity to generate appropriate technologies, enhance extension services and improve market infrastructure. Examples should include productivity of agriculture and natural resources; improved waste management, and rural electrification.
- Building on the success of local communities in deciding development interventions through NSP and water users associations, forestry, protected areas, appropriate community based co-management approaches are vital for sustainable management of natural resources.
- Afghanistan reaffirms its support to the central role of the General Assembly as the highest policy-making body, and calls for its intervention for further integration of sustainable development as a key element of the overarching framework for United Nations activities.

PRIORITY ACTIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan's commitments to the Rio Conference will focus on the following priority issues. Afghanistan will set up working groups in these areas and try to integrate these areas into national development plans, in detail- the National Priority Programmes under the Afghan National Development Strategy and the Vision 2020.

A green economy is not just about the color green and natural environment. It should balance the need for security, governance and socio-economic development. This includes services in health and education, industrial and agricultural growth, jobs, women's empowerment, social inclusion and equity, as much as ecosystems. Afghanistan will move away from short term decisions that erode democratic space and breed social inequality, intolerance, and violence and into long term responsible use of resources to sustain development into the future.

Sustainable development is not a new concept in Afghanistan. The Government has designed and implemented policy and programming frameworks that are making sustainable development happen. For example, during the past decade there has been strong economic growth and major reductions in poverty and inequality, while also dramatically extending the share of land under conservation and sustainable natural resource management.

Afghanistan must deliver on the MDGs, while moving towards the SDGs: We must sustain progress already made towards the MDGs and accelerate action to bridge remaining MDG gaps. At the same time we must effect a post-2015 transition to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), by building on what worked and learning from what didn't, from the MDG process.

Beyond GDP and the bottom line—new metrics to measure progress are necessary, in both the public and private sectors. Rio+20 should be the beginning of the end of GDP as the “gold standard” of development progress. We need an economic valuation of environment and ecosystem services for Afghanistan. This can be carried out by the Rio Task force looking at values in natural water, soil, air, hydrological cycles, as well as subsurface and atmospheric systems. As a policy tool economic values of ecosystems will provide strong support to the government for more sustainable forms of development.

In mobilizing ODA, government of Afghanistan in consultation with its development partners should develop a framework and common guidelines to ensure that financing is geared towards programs that promote sustainable levels of economic growth and offers effective protection and enhancement of the environment reductions in environmentally damaging subsidies, and the adoption of sustainable public procurement policies, can also make significant contributions to financing sustainable development.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women will be centrally incorporated into Afghan national strategies for moving towards a green economy. The transition toward a green economy must put gender equality and women's empowerment at its core – with women as key contributors, shapers and beneficiaries of sustainable production and consumption patterns. A green economy should not increase inequality and should not lead to further marginalization of

women. In order for the move to a green economy to be socially fair and to promote equity and inclusiveness, a “just transition” strategy should be implemented. Green jobs, green technology and green finance must have strong focus on the economic empowerment of women and contribute to enhancing food, energy and job security, as well as in achieving the goals of sustainable development and poverty eradication. The Government of Afghanistan therefore calls for the Rio+20 Conference to reiterate and reaffirm the importance of gender equality and the empowerment of women in the implementation of the Rio Conventions.

Food Security (National Priorities 16 and 22)

Comprehensive agriculture and market development is needed for Afghanistan’s productive safety net. A “Food for Life” programme will reach over eight million beneficiaries in 140 food-insecure districts, providing cash and food supplies in return for participation in public works in such areas as environmental conservation, water management, and terracing.

Water (NPP 16)

A National Water and Natural Resource Management Programme is needed in Afghanistan for both development and management of the water resources to improve the human development conditions. Considering that Afghanistan’s water retention capacity is one of the lowest in the world, GoA is committed to construction of water storage and improving watershed management to substantially improve the food security and overall poverty situation.

The Water Resources Management and Conservation programme will increase irrigated areas; employ over 20,000 people annually to restore tree and plant species in watersheds and local habitats. The programme will release some 50 million cubic meters of additional water each year, boosting agriculture and food security. It seeks to ensure that 60 per cent of participants are women, 20 per cent youth, and 5 per cent are people with disabilities.

Energy (NPP 20)

Energy offers clear opportunities for integrating the three strands of sustainable development (i.e economic, social and environment). The National Energy Supply Programme, Afghanistan’s rural energy programme should be expanded to make modern energy services available to people living in isolated rural and mountainous areas, expanding small hydro, solar heating, and other renewable energy technologies. It can reduce average annual household spending, helped create new businesses for every new micro hydropower station brought on line, and help get girls to school. The UN Secretary General’s “Sustainable Energy for All” initiative offers an excellent platform to replicate this kind of success.

Cities (NPP 21)

Urban planning technical assistance with the Directorate of local government, and Ministry of Urban Development can take the lead in developing green cities as centers for growth.

Green Jobs

Develop a national green jobs strategy. A framework should regulate labor migration, provide sustainable employment and reinforce efforts to build Afghan capacity. GoA will develop national priority programmes, Facilitation of Decent Work (NPP 1) and Women Employment and Empowerment (NPP 5). Focus on clean development such as creating a recycling mechanism for jobs and waste management to protect the natural resources base of the country.

Natural Disasters

National Disaster Management Authority to implement national disaster management priority programmes, and the National Disaster Management and Risk Reduction policy.

Climate Change: Afghanistan National Adaptation Plan of Action for Climate Change and studies on the socio-economic impacts a programme of work has been developed with NEPA.

Forest and Biodiversity

Develop a National Strategy and Action Plan for Forests, Water, Biodiversity, and Rangeland ensuring recognition of role of women in resource protection, management and food production.

Land Degradation and Desertification

Develop a National Action Plan for Land and Desertification

Mountains

Mountains provide Afghanistan with ecological, economic and social resources and services. These include biological and cultural diversity, the provision and regulation of freshwater and clean energy generation. At the same time mountains are fragile ecosystems suffering from widespread degradation and poverty. Mountain regions play a fundamental role in the transition towards a green economy, and in addressing common and transboundary water, food and energy challenges. There is an enormous potential offered in mountains to contribute to green growth.

Chemicals, Waste and Environment Standards

GoA should develop regulations on formulation and use of chemicals banned by international conventions such as the Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions. To enforce the ban on trade in chemicals that harm the environment and contribute to climate change, there is a need to build the capacity of the government. In addition, additional legislation is needed to adequately protect air and water quality standards for major urban centers and in areas where extractive industries are located. Standards to protect the most vulnerable, especially women, children, the disabled and the very poor from chemicals and waste in the environment will be enacted and implemented.

Environment Cooperation, Natural Resources and Peace-building

Environment cooperation based on management of natural resources- land, renewables, and extractives provides both great opportunity and threat to Afghanistan. A programme of work on environmental cooperation for peacebuilding with major focus on extractive industries, renewable natural resources and land and its tenure should start immediately. Community based management of natural resources should be given priority. Environment cooperation in regions and outside Afghanistan is also possible under this action.