

AFGHANISTAN

Challenging Local Context for Implementing the 2030 Agenda

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Afghanistan endorsed the Millennium Declaration and accompanying eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) only in March 2004 and added an additional goal to enhance security in order to recognize the critical role of peace and security in achieving the other MDGs. However, having lost over two decades to war, the country has had to modify the global timetable and benchmarks to fit local realities; therefore, 2020 was set for achieving its MDGs instead of 2015.¹ The discrepancy between global and local timetables has created confusion and creates the risk of diverting the focus away from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Afghan Government published the final report on its progress in achieving the MDGs in 2015.² Because its findings - if challenged by independent watchdogs and shadow reports of the civil society - can be used as the baseline for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this report will look at the status of each of the MDGs in Afghanistan, and consider the implications for implementing the 2030 Agenda.

Progress on Implementing the MDGs: A Reliable Baseline for the New Agenda?

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The Afghan Government published the final report on its progress in achieving the MDGs in 2015.⁴ Because its findings - if challenged by independent watchdogs and shadow reports of the civil society - can be used as the baseline for the SDGs, it is useful to look at progress made on each of the MDGs, and consider the implications for implementing the 2030 Agenda.

MDG 1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

Currently, more than one third of the Afghan population (36%) lives on income that is below the poverty line, meaning that more than 9 million Afghans are not able to meet their basic needs. Many more people are highly vulnerable to becoming poor. In addition to other issues, the ongoing conflict and heavy reliance on agriculture and international aid as well as the lack of clear pro-poor policies are considered as key factors contributing to the high level of poverty in the country.

¹ UNDP Afghanistan, Afghanistan MDGs overview; available at: <http://www.undp.org.af/undp/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=62&Itemid=68>

² Government of Afghanistan, A Decade of Opportunities, Afghanistan MDGs 10 Years Report (2005 – 2015).

³ UNDP Afghanistan, Afghanistan MDGs overview; available at: <http://www.undp.org.af/undp/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=62&Itemid=68>

⁴ Government of Afghanistan, A Decade of Opportunities, Afghanistan MDGs 10 Years Report (2005 – 2015).

The 2011–2012 National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA)⁵ findings (latest data) indicated no significant change in the prevalence of poverty across the country between 2007 and 2012 — despite the high level of economic growth (at 10 percent) in that same period. The food insecurity prevalence rates derived from the NRVA findings for 2005–2006 (the baseline) and 2011–2012 showed no significant change, at 30 percent.

The UNICEF 2013 National Nutrition Survey found the prevalence of underweight among children younger than 5 years had decreased to 25 percent, compared with 34 percent in 2004.

MDG 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education

There has been considerable progress over the past ten years in terms of access to education in Afghanistan and in particular, in the net enrolment ratio in primary education, which increased from 70 percent in 2011 to 76 percent in 2014, although it is not yet sufficient for Afghanistan to achieve the goal of universal primary education by 2020.

MDG 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

Although many challenges to women fully enjoying their rights in Afghanistan remain, the situation in general has improved, and women's participation in socio-economic activities is bolder today than it was a decade ago. Women's participation in the national Parliament (27%), for example, is well above the global average of 21.8 percent.

The increase in girls' enrolment in education has resulted in increasing female literacy. The most dominant reason for girls not attending school is related to gender norms in the culture (affecting 34% of girls of primary school age and 53% at the tertiary level), followed by problems of access –particularly in rural areas—and long walking distances to school.

Female participation in the civil service force has increased, although with vast variation from province to

province.

Amid all the achievements, however, violence against women remains a daunting challenge in Afghanistan. The Elimination of Violence against Women law was adopted in 2009 in Afghanistan. Cultural barriers, ignorance, lasting war and its impacts, political instability and lack of rule of law are said to be sustaining this unwanted phenomenon.

MDG 4: Reduce Child Mortality

Since late 2003, Afghanistan has impressively reduced the mortality rates for children younger than 5 years of age and infants by nearly 60 percent. The under-5 mortality rate fell from a staggering 319 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1970 to 97 in 2010, according to the latest available Ministry of Public Health data. However, at 40 per 1,000 live births, neonatal mortality accounts for more than 50 percent of the infant mortality rate. The decline in neonatal mortality has been extremely slow, with an annual rate of reduction at 0.1 percent.

However, much remains to be done to address the most prevalent causes of death through the widespread coverage of proven health interventions.

MDG 5: Improve Maternal Health

One of Afghanistan's success stories over the past decade is the dramatic reduction of the maternal mortality rate — though it remains one of the highest in the world. In 2003, 1,600 maternal deaths were recorded for every 100,000 live births. That rate plummeted to 327 in 2010 (latest available data). The proportion of births attended by skilled personnel also has improved, from 14 percent in 2003 to 47 percent of mothers who now have access to a skilled birth attendant when they give birth. The fertility rate (the number of live births per women) has decreased, from 6.2 births in the 2003 baseline (based on the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey--MICS⁶- findings) to 5.1 births in 2010, according to the results of the Afghanistan

5 Central Statistics Organization, National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2011–12, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey, Kabul, 2014.

6 Central Statistics Organization and UNICEF, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2010/2011, Kabul, 2013.

Mortality Survey.⁷

Although considerable achievements have been made, equal access to basic health services for all citizens of the country remains a challenge.

MDG 6: Combat HIV, AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases

Afghanistan has among the world's lowest HIV prevalence rates, at less than 0.1 percent, based on recent estimates. Behavioural data, however, suggest the potential for the spread of HIV, especially among injecting drug users.⁸

Afghanistan has the seventh-largest malaria burden worldwide outside of Africa and the third-largest burden in the World Health Organization's Eastern Mediterranean Region, based on reported total malaria cases. Hospital-related death cases associated with malaria have fluctuated over the past ten years, from as high as 46 cases in 2008 to 32 cases in 2014. At least one malaria case is reported each day.

The National TB Control Programme has also made significant progress and many achievements since 2002.

MDG 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability

Currently, 2.6 percent of the country is covered by forests, surpassing the 2015 target of 2.1 percent, with favourable signs that the 3 percent target for forest cover can be achieved by 2020. Carbon dioxide emissions, although on the rise, remain one of the lowest in the world, with 0.29 metric tons of emissions per capita in 2012, based on United Nations estimates. Consumption of ozone-depleting substances (ODS) has decreased dramatically, from a baseline value of 99.4 in 2005 to 17.34 total annual consumption of ozone-depleting

potential metric tons in 2012, achieving its 2015 target.⁹

Afghanistan largely lags behind its neighbours in terms of the proportion of the population with access to safe water and sanitation. According to United Nations estimates, the country has the worst provision of safe water in the world. But there are discrepancies in the available data due to the use of a different classification of improved and unimproved sanitation facilities. The WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation estimated that 55 percent of the Afghan population currently uses an improved drinking water source and 32 percent uses an improved sanitation facility.¹⁰

The negative trend among the proportion of the population living in a slum is expected to continue over the coming few years and may accelerate due to urban development and growth. The NRVA 2011–2012 findings indicate that up to 93 percent of urban households live in conditions of physical and environmental deprivation. The 2015 target of reducing the slum population to 1.54 million people has not been met.

Nonetheless, serious challenges lie ahead. Non-climate change-driven threats including the unsustainable use of natural resources, the high poverty levels, the dependence on rain-fed agriculture, a poorly developed policy environment and continued insecurity are exacerbating the country's vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. In turn, the climate change impacts will also exacerbate these issues.

MDG 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development

Afghanistan has received an unprecedented amount of international development aid over the past 14 years. While the huge aid inflow has benefited the country, it has also brought problems. The aid has underpinned much of the progress since 2001 — including in key

⁷ Afghan Public Health Institute, Ministry of Public Health, Central Statistics Organization, ICF Macro, Indian Institute of Health Management Research and World Health Organization Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, Afghanistan Mortality Survey 2010, Calverton, Maryland, 2011.

⁸ Government of Afghanistan, A Decade of Opportunities, Afghanistan MDGs 10 Years Report (2005 – 2015).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

services, infrastructure and government administration — but it has also been linked to corruption, fragmented and parallel delivery systems, poor aid effectiveness and weakened governance. Most of the aid is directly delivered by donors outside the government budget. In 2010–2011, USD13.8 billion (88%) in aid was executed by donors and their implementing partners through the “external budget”; only USD 1.9 billion (12%) was spent through the Government’s core budget. The proportion of the total bilateral sector allocation in 2013, as reported by the Ministry of Finance, was around 58 percent of the total commitment for 2013 — at USD 4.9 billion, while USD 2.86 billion was allocated to current account sectors.

The external budget spent on social services absorbed a huge part of the off-budget resources until 2009, although it decreased to 21 percent in 2007. In 2009, 91 percent of the external budget was directed to the social sectors, such as education, health, rural development and social protection; however, the figures for 2007–2008 are extremely high, indicating a possibility that Ministry of Finance data reporting and information sharing mechanisms were quite likely weak, if in place at all. In 2014, the percentage of the external budget spent on the social sector was 47 percent, reflecting a 2 percentage point increase over the previous year. This is common in post-conflict countries where social sectors are highly affected and a huge proportion of money is invested in social services.

The percentage of official development assistance (ODA) from donors in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) increased by more than twofold between 2005 and 2014. In 2005, bilateral ODA was 13 percent and improved to 32 percent by 2007, but then declined to 20 and 30 percent in 2009 and 2010, respectively.

The proportion of total exports to countries with which Afghanistan has a preferential trade agreement has considerably improved, from 11.8 percent in 2005 to 44 percent in 2010, reflecting a 33 percentage point increase within the five years. However, the free trade agreement-based export trend between 2010 and 2014

has only slightly improved. Although Afghanistan signed several region-based free trade agreements, such as the Economic Cooperation Organization Trade Agreement, the Framework Agreement on Trade Preferential System of the Organization of Islamic Countries, the India-Afghanistan Preferential Trading Agreement and the Agreement on the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA), only one (the SAFTA) has taken effect. With other free trade agreements coming into effect in the future, the total share of Afghanistan’s exports is expected to expand.

Improvements are evident on the proportion of telephone and internet users in Afghanistan. The number of telephone and internet users has increased extensively since 2002, when telecommunication service was opened to private sector investment. As of 2014, 882 subscribers per 1,000 people used cellular telephones while internet users increased to 141 per 1,000.

MDG 9: Enhance Security

The main issue of concern is the cost of military operations to combat the insurgency, given the country’s economy and the need to enhance the capability of the Afghan National Army (ANA). As of 2015, the country still relied on international assistance to cover its military expenses. The military expenditure as a percent of GDP increased to 5 percent in 2014 as the security responsibilities transferred from international forces to Afghan forces. Military expenditure as a percent of public expenditure also increased, to 21 percent in 2014.

Other issues of concern are the availability of illegal guns and gun-related crimes and the lack of capacity of the Afghan National Police to curb these crimes. Although (or because) the country has emerged from a long civil war, the availability of guns remains widespread.

Since the days of occupation and subsequent civil war, the prevalence of landmines and explosive remnants has remained an important concern. Upon leaving the country, the International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) and NATO troops abandoned scores of firing

ranges infested with the explosives. Consequently, dozens of children have been killed or wounded crossing those sites.

Afghanistan has made significant progress in addressing the challenge of landmines and explosive remnants by clearing more than 20,965 hazardous areas. Civilian casualties due to landmines and explosive remnants of war have reduced by 46.7 percent, while the number of civilian casualties caused by pressure-plate improvised explosive device (IEDs) has increased and reached an average of 64 persons per month.

Afghanistan has achieved its obligations under article 4 of the The Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines (Ottawa Treaty) by destroying all known stockpiled anti-personnel landmines. Afghanistan's request for extending the 2013 deadline for clearing all known landmine and explosive remnant-contaminated areas was approved by the State Parties to the Ottawa Treaty in December 2012, resulting in a revised deadline of March 2023.

The last but not least concern in this area is the vulnerability of arable land to the risk of turning to poppy cultivation. Unfortunately, poppy cultivation is on the rise. According to the Ministry of Counter Narcotics and United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) annual opium survey, the amount of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan has been increasing year after year, reaching a record high of 224,000 hectares in 2014. Insecurity, weak governance and lack of rule of law in the provinces where poppies are cultivated are said to be the common reasons for the increase. The UNODC Afghanistan Drug Report 2013 states that there is an undisputed link between insecurity and opium cultivation, which has been noted annually in the Afghanistan Opinion Poll and Survey since 2007. Increasing domestic drug consumption, challenges with developing alternative livelihoods and the low level of regional cooperation have also contributed to the rising trend in cultivation.¹¹

¹¹ Ibid.

Prospects for implementing Agenda 2030

As the period for implementing the SDGs gets underway, Afghanistan has received the commitment of its key partners, including United Nations: "It is a roadmap to ending global poverty, building a life of dignity for all and leaving no one behind," said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. "We have a big, bold agenda before us – now we must work to make it real in people's lives everywhere."¹²

Speaking at the 2015 Sustainable Development Summit in New York, Afghanistan's Chief Executive observed that a big part of Afghanistan's Transformation Decade (2015-2025) coincides with the 2030 sustainable development agenda, saying: "Afghanistan will remain committed to developing strategies and policies to integrate our national development agenda with the 2030 development agenda."¹³

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Country Director, Douglas Keh, said earlier that Afghanistan continues to face major challenges in its pursuit of a better life for its people. "Yet despite everything, over the past fifteen years, with the Millennium Development Goals as the backdrop, Afghanistan has witnessed some encouraging and noteworthy successes." also said that he was hopeful that Afghanistan will see more progress over the next 15 years: "Afghanistan today has a large number of trained and committed development practitioners who are passionate about serving their country [and] experienced leaders who seek to guide this country on a path toward peace."¹⁴

¹² <https://unama.unmissions.org/new-development-goals-promise-better-life-most-vulnerable>

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.