



World Food Day Celebration

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in close coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) celebrates the 40th Anniversary of the World Food Day (WFD) at MAIL in Afghanistan on 18 October 2020.

Every year on the World Food Day, FAO and its 130 member countries across the world commemorate the founding of FAO on 16 October 1945. World Food Day 2020 marks the 75th anniversary of the FAO in an exceptional moment as countries around the world deal with the widespread effects of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

The theme for this year - "Grow, Nourish, Sustain. Together." - calls for global solidarity to help all population, and especially the most vulnerable, to recover from the crisis, and to make food systems more resilient and robust so they can withstand increasing volatility and climate shocks, and deliver sustainable healthy diets for all, and decent livelihoods for food system workers.

Over the years, the world has made great progress in the fight against poverty, hunger, and malnutrition. Agricultural productivity and

food systems have come a long way. Still, too many people remain vulnerable. More than 2 billion people still do not have regular access to enough safe, and nutritious food. COVID-19 pandemic has added a further additional layer to this challenge, threatening to reverse important gains in food security, nutrition, and livelihoods. Now is the time to address the persistent inequalities and inefficiencies that have continued to plague our food systems, economies and social support structures. Now is the time to build back better.

Afghanistan is suffering from one of the most severe food crises worldwide. According to the 2020 Global Report on Food Crises, Afghanistan is ranked as the third worst crisis country globally, and food insecurity has significantly worsened since COVID-19 pandemic broke out in the country. The shock caused by COVID-19 comes on the back of 40 plus years of ongoing conflict, displacements, sudden onset shocks and weak social safety nets, which have severely debilitated the coping capacities of vulnerable households across the country. Even before the emergence of COVID-19, Afghanistan had nearly one third of its population in need of urgent food and livelihood assistance.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis from May 2020 reveals that the total number of people in current situation to be in acute food insecurity are nearly 11 million, which corresponds to 35 percent of the total population after the COVID-19 impacts in the country. "The agriculture sector has been adversely impacted by COVID-19. On this World Food Day, FAO pledges to all sectors, the government, private sectors, farmers and individuals to join hands together in making the food system more resilient and assist the most vulnerable people and smallholder farmers to withstand this shock and safeguard their families' food security", says Rajendra Aryal, FAO Representative in Afghanistan. "This is the time that we need to work hand-in-hand", adds Aryal.

"The socio-economic effects of COVID-19 in Afghanistan are heightening existing threats to food security linked to conflict and climate change. More than ever before, 'grow, nourish, sustain, Together' encourages us further to work hand-in-hand to protect our future. There is an urgent need for concerted action to strengthen food systems, enhancing global supply chains and ending food waste", says Parvathy Ramaswami, WFP Deputy Country Director in Afghanistan. "More than ever, there is a need for global solidarity to help the most vulnerable, food-insecure communities."

COVID-19 response sows seeds of resilience for Mrs. Marjana

Almost three quarters of Uruzgan province's economy is based on farming and livestock with remaining dependent upon trading and commerce. Uruzgan also happens to be one of the provinces reporting significantly low on gender equality particularly women's performance on development indicators and participation in decision making. This coupled with the various recent shocks including the COVID-19 crisis has adversely impacted women's access to secure food, health, and social services in Uruzgan province. Traditional agricultural practices, lack of access to certified seeds and traditional food sources, and lack of home gardening knowledge contributed to low food consumption and high food insecurity in Uruzgan province. COVID-19 crisis and related containment measures on top of the recent shocks including the severe drought of 2018 and floods of 2019 contributed to the worsening of food and nutrition security and adverse impacts on the agriculture livelihoods particularly of vulnerable smallholder households in the province. Further, health care costs due to COVID-19 infection and related loss of access to income sources have aggravated these impacts.

This impact was particularly severe for Mrs. Bibi Marjana - a 47-year old single woman, who heads her household comprising her two children, daughter-in-law and herself. Mrs. Marjana lives in Sarshakhili village of Terinkot district of Uruzgan province. Mrs. Marjana was one of those unlucky who got infected by COVID-19 in May 2020. Further adding to her troubles was the fact that her elder son, who was the sole earning member of her household, left the home with his wife to go to another province in search of employment while leaving the COVID-19-infected mother (Mrs. Marjana) and younger brother to fend for themselves while she was still COVID-19-positive. Not able to make ends meet or afford the health expenses for her treatment, Mrs. Marjana and her family became extremely vulnerable. This triple trauma of getting COVID-19-infected, sole bread-winning son leaving home and now figuring out ways to generate income to ensure the availability of daily food for her family left Mrs. Marjana in a particularly vulnerable and desperate situation. With neither any agriculture landholding nor any local employment/daily-wage labour

opportunities, Mrs. Marjana's situation became quite precarious tipping her into adopting negative coping actions.

The Action

Mrs. Marjana says, "I am thankful that I was included in this project by FAO despite being COVID-19-infected and my elder son leaving my family. Because of this support I do not have to look around the village for some assistance or employment."



Mrs. Marjana is one of the households received home-gardening assistance as part of the COVID-19 emergency assistance.

FAO in collaboration with the PAIL officials of Uruzgan decided to include Mrs. Marjana as one of the households to support with home-gardening assistance package as part of the COVID-19 emergency assistance project initiated in Uruzgan and Badakhshan, Daikundi, Ghor, and Herat provinces with generous support from the Government of Denmark. In order to support Mrs. Marjana and other vulnerable households like her, FAO provided emergency assistance in the form of nutrition-sensitive vegetable cultivation package comprising quality seeds of locally relevant and nutritious 8 vegetables (tomato, eggplant, okra, squash, cabbage, onion, coriander, and red radish), gardening equipment and technical training. *Mrs. Marjana shares, "I am extremely happy that I can provide food and non-food support for my small family but even can contribute to the other families living around me without need to go out".*

Upon receiving this emergency assistance support from FAO, Mrs. Marjana with her younger son's support started cultivating the 8 vegetables in the backyard of her home. She also participated in the technical training on vegetable cultivation and nutrition-sensitive consumption and storage of vegetables. This training was organized by FAO along with implementing partner ANRCC while adhering to all COVID-19 safety measures like physical distancing, mask use, checking of temperatures, handwashing and sanitation at the training venue, organizing of the training in open ventilated space (backyard common space), and use of COVID-19-PPE at the time of training. Training focused on a mix of informative sessions on appropriate cultivation of vegetables and integrated pest management techniques and demonstrative practical sessions on the same as well as nutrition-sensitive consumption and storage of surplus vegetables. Mrs. Marjana applied all this new information and was able to successfully harvest enough vegetables to not only suffice her family's daily requirements but also have enough surplus to sell in the village as well as now also created a stock of stored vegetables for the upcoming winter season while also using some traditional methods for storage.

This has resulted in enhanced availability and consumption of nutritious food by all Mrs. Marjana's family members as well as regular income from the sale of surplus vegetables to neighbors and in the village. All this has come together for Mrs. Marjana to enhance her and her family's food and nutrition security and some cash income as well as ensured that she does not have to go out every-day to seek assistance for her and her family's daily survival. It has further contributed to cultivation of vegetables in

otherwise relatively unused backyard and change of behavior towards consuming healthy and nutritious food apart from decreased expenditure related to food consumption. With increased production of vegetables in the village, it has increased the availability of fresh vegetables and of nutritious food varieties for the targeted households and in the village.

Mrs. Marjana sums it up nicely, "I am happy by FAO's support because of which now my household's vegetable requirement is solved permanently while also creating some regular income for me to meet other expenses. I would like to ask FAO to extend these kinds of programs to the other villages in order to reach more people".

This emergency assistance project is funded by the Government of Denmark and implemented by FAO till February 2021 supporting 18 500 households across Badakhshan, Ghor, Daykundi, Herat and Uruzgan provinces.

Supporting families to become self-sufficient by growing and selling their own crops

Zarmina (25 years old) lives in Dara-e-Qazi village of the Feruzkoh district in Ghor province. Zarmina sadly lost her husband a year ago and ever since has been raising her 2-year-old son alone. Zarmina has faced many difficulties and has particularly struggled following her husband's passing to provide food and shelter for herself and her son, as she had no means of income. After moving back in with her father, Zarmina was feeling very alone and most often worried about her son's future.

She was selected as a beneficiary of Sweden-funded and FAO-implemented "Integrated emergency agriculture and livelihood assistance to food insecure farming families" project, and received necessary inputs to establish her own home garden and produce vegetables to improve her household food consumption and generate some income. With the support provided by FAO, Zarmina is now not only using her home garden vegetables for household consumption, but is also able to sell the surplus to her neighbors and generate some income (an average of 1 000 AFN per month), which is largely helping her take care of herself and her son and pay for her son's education in the future.

Ghor is one of the most food-insecure provinces in Afghanistan due to continued conflict, natural disasters and prolonged drought. According to IPC acute food insecurity analysis for Apr – May 2020, over 40 percent of the total population in the province has been estimated to be in IPC phase-3 (crisis) or above. Additionally, Afghanistan, FAO's implementing partner in Ghor continued to observe high rates of negative coping strategies amongst the smallholder households following the 2019 drought. Families like Zarmina are amongst the most vulnerable people who are struggling to make ends meet, as they are left with no sources of income.

This challenging situation has been exacerbated by the economic impacts of COVID-19 as movement restrictions, transportation blockages, market shortages, and price rises have been reducing already very limited employment opportunities.

Afghanistan is implementing the emergency agriculture and livelihood assistance project supported by FAO, supporting 12 400 food-insecure farming families across Feruzkoh, Shahrak, Lal-wa-Sarjantal, and Dulaina districts of Ghor province.

HIGHLIGHTS

- World Food Day Celebration
- COVID-19 response sows seeds of resilience for Mrs. Marjana
- Supporting families to become self-sufficient by growing and selling their own crops
- Development of Afghanistan's First Agro-ecological zoning Mobile Application
- Backyard poultry production is a great source of home-based income for Afghan women
- A Canal to Peace and Improved Livelihoods: Restoration of Occupied Irrigation infrastructure
- Global Environment Facility approves over \$78 million to support FAO-led projects 16 countries will benefit from projects designed to conserve biodiversity, enhance ecosystem services, combat land degradation, and preserve natural resources on land and water management

The project is delivered over a nine-month period (March – December 2020).

Thanks to the generous support from the Government of Sweden 3 200 vulnerable female-headed households are supported to bolster their livelihoods and improve their food and nutrition security through home gardening activities. After being selected as a project beneficiary, Zarmina received eight types of vegetable seeds (tomato, eggplant, okra, squash, cabbage, onion, and red radish), along with home gardening tools and related technical training in order to establish a home garden and start producing.

"Every day I was worried about how to find a job for myself and what would happen to my son and his future education. However, when I was selected as a beneficiary for this project and received vegetable seeds and tools, I became hopeful, and believed in myself that I can become self-sufficient", said Zarmina.



Zarmina, a food insecure farmer who received assistance through home-gardening activity in Ghor province.

“Now, my son, my father and I have a much better diet thanks to my vegetables, and I am also able sell the surplus to my neighbors”, expressed Zarmina.

With the income she is generating, she is confident that she will be able to save for her son’s education in the future.

A total of 12 000 vulnerable smallholder farming households, including many other female-headed households such as Zarmina facing the impacts of COVID-19 on top of the existing food, nutrition and livelihoods insecurity are being supported by FAO with the generous support from the Government of Sweden in the provinces of Ghor, Daikundi and Uruzgan. This project, which commenced in March 2020 just after the start of COVID-19 pandemic in Afghanistan, will be completed by December 2020 wherein agricultural livelihoods will be safeguarded and resilience will be rebuilt through enhanced coping capacities and food and nutrition security of vulnerable smallholder farming households impacted by recent shocks including COVID-19 pandemic.

Development of Afghanistan’s First Agro-ecological zoning Mobile Application

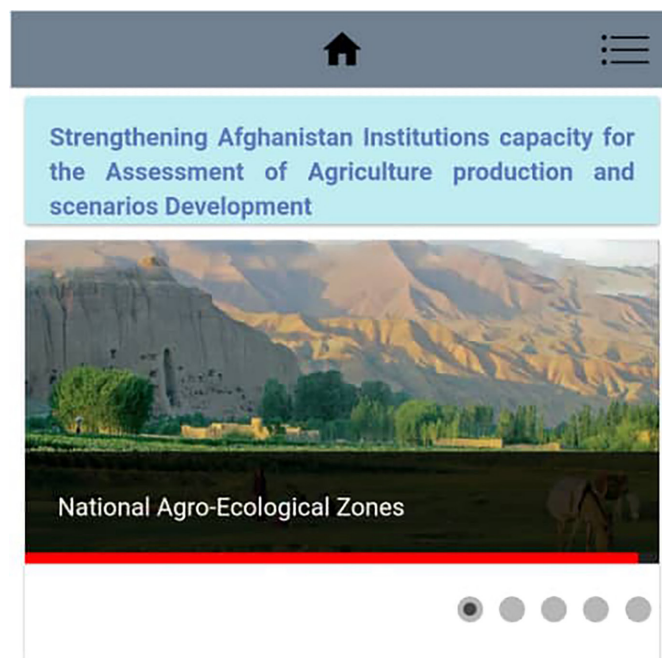
The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in close collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL) has supported the development of Afghanistan’s first Agro-ecological zoning mobile application. Development of this mobile application was done under the FAO project titled “Strengthening Afghanistan Institutions’ Capacity for the Assessment of Agriculture Production and Scenario Development (NAEZ)”.

Establishment of this mobile application is the first of its kind in the country that allows the users to get the easiest, fastest and more accurate information on analysis of agriculture production system and agriculture and food security policies in Afghanistan. In addition, it serves as a platform that enhances visibility of the project, long term project sustainability, and strengthen stakeholder’s engagement. This is a user friendly application that provides information in English and local languages which will be understandable for national stakeholders.

Users can easily download the application from google store through <http://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=org.faonaez.sediqi.naez> in any compatible mobile with no price and install in any android and IOS mobiles phones.

“The goal of the project is to improve monitoring and analysis of agricultural production systems to support agricultural policies and food security in Afghanistan. The project results and lessons will be expanded to the whole of Afghanistan during the lifetime of the project and the establishment of this mobile app is a step forward towards the achievement of the project”, said Mohammad Safi, NAEZ project manager in Afghanistan.

The development of this mobile application was done under the NAEZ project funded by the European Union (EU) with a generous contribution of USD 2.5 million.



Screenshot of Agro-ecological zoning Mobile Application

As a primary caretakers of livestock, Afghan women play an important role in improving Food Security and Nutrition of the Households

“The most significant change that happened in my life is that I received only two lactating sheep with 2 baby lambs in 2018 and now after two years, I own eight sheep and eight lambs”, said Khadija Hashemi, a farmer in Bamyān province. Khadija Hashemi, 45, is a mother of eight children who lives in Parjoyak village of Yakawlang district together with her husband. Before she got any support through FAO, she mainly relied on her husband’s income – who is a smallholder farmer – to make a living. However, the income the family was making was not enough to cover



Khadija Hashimi is a livestock farmer in Bamyan who received assistance through distribution of lactating sheep and lambs to improve her food security.

even the basic needs of the family of 10 members. She always wanted to support her husband to improve the livelihoods of the family, however she didn't get a chance to do so until she received a support through FAO's Households Food and Livelihoods Security (HFLS) project. "Now that I have these sheep, I get 5-6 liters of milk every day; I use the milk for household consumption and sell the surplus milk to the neighbors", says Khadija with a smile in her face. "This is a great source of income, and the money I earn through the sale of milk, I usually spend on my children's education and daily household expenses", adds Khadija happily. Khadija is also a member of the sheep rearing group in her village that is formed by HFLS project. "I eagerly participate in the meetings organized by the group as it helps me increase my social inclusion in the community and helps me build a strong relationship with other women in the community", says Khadija confidently. "Being a member of this group also gives me the opportunity to exchange my experience with other women and learn new techniques on better livestock management", adds Khadija with a pride in her face.

The HFLS project has targeted 1 200 most vulnerable women households in Bamyan through distribution of lactating sheep and lambs to improve their food security and nutrition. Thanks to the generous support provided by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), each vulnerable household received two lactating sheep and two lambs and 100 kg pure alfalfa, 20 kg wheat bran, and 20 kg de-oiled cake. The project also provided four rounds of vaccination for the livestock provided. Further, the women also received training on better livestock management, such as training on identification and treatment of livestock common diseases, preparation of nutritious feed, and bran management. The project also facilitated the linkages of these women farmers with the government-run Veterinary Field Units (VFUs) for better livestock management practices and future support. Bamyan has abundant pastureland and the province provides suitable space for rearing livestock. Majority of the people in this province therefore are involved in animal husbandry, mostly raising sheep and goat. While women in rural areas are the primary caretaker of livestock, they play an important role in managing the food security and nutrition of the households by keeping and rearing livestock.

Backyard poultry production is a great source of home-based income for Afghan women

"Although we knew the benefit of eating an egg, we could not afford

to buy however. We can now even consume it," says Ms. Shagol, a resident of Omar Khan village in the Paghman district of Kabul province. "We also sell the surplus eggs at the local market, and we use the money earned to cover our other daily expenses" she further added.

In rural conservative families in Afghanistan, where women usually do not get permission to work outside their houses, backyard poultry and livestock rearing have proven to be great sources of home-based income. In rural households, women normally take care of backyard poultry, producing more than 90 percent of eggs and poultry meat at local level. Backyard poultry production therefore plays a vital role in the improvement of the rural economy. Against this backdrop, FAO, under the Household Food and Livelihoods Security (HFLS) project funded by the Government of Luxemburg, recently assisted most vulnerable households in Paghman district in Kabul with backyard poultry. This intervention aimed to address the need of the most food-insecure households, especially women, to improve their household food security and livelihoods by improving backyard poultry production. Ms. Shagol, 70, is one of the poorest women in her community living with her daughters and grandchildren. She got assisted through backyard poultry intervention, and received 30 pullets with 300 Kg of poultry feed and drinkers, wire, and vaccination. She also received technical training on better poultry management practices.

She strongly believes that since women are the primary caretaker of the households including managing livestock and poultry management, the project intervention was an excellent opportunity to support the livelihoods of the family for a person like herself. "Now that we have 30 pullets, we get 30 eggs every day; we consume ten eggs at home, and sell the remaining 20 in the market", says Ms. Shagol. "This is a great source of income that I can earn without leaving my house, and this has largely helped me support my family" she further adds. Paghman is one of 13 districts in the Kabul with an estimated population of 350 000 where over 85 percent of the people are engaged in agriculture and livestock to earn a livelihood.

The HFLS project is designed to improve the food security and livelihoods of the poorest communities in Kabul, Herat and Bamyan provinces. The project organizes the targeted households into Common Interest Groups (CIG), and provides them with sufficient skills to produce and get connected with the local markets for the sale of their surplus produce. The project, through three successive phases, has organized over 13 000 men and women farmers in more than 600 CIGs. The project has conducted several technical training to address the specific needs of the farmers' groups, supported to link the farmers with the local markets, provide them the opportunity to market their products together, and link them with other farmers' groups for peer-to-peer learning.



Ms. Shagol is explaining about the problems she was faced with before the intervention of the project.

A Canal to Peace and Improved Livelihoods: Restoration of Occupied Irrigation Infrastructure

Since 2016, Kotwal village in Chinarto district of Uruzgan province is facing severe security challenges constraining any kind of humanitarian assistance including strict movement restrictions for all civilians' activities. The situation in this area got further aggravated when the Kotwal irrigation canal was used as a trench by cutting and enveloping with surrounding trees as pillars and covering it with tonnes of soil from top to make it safe against any form of external attacks. This also restricted the local farming communities from having access to irrigation water and agricultural lands. The closure of this irrigation canal that spans more than 25 km, resulted in more than 1 600 hectares of agriculture lands being cut-off from assured irrigation with high adverse impacts on the livelihoods of more than 1 200 households.

The population in Uruzgan, particularly in this area is highly dependent on agriculture and livestock to make a living. This coupled with the various recent shocks including the COVID-19 crisis, the continued conflict, unemployment, blockage of roads and complete besieging of some districts with no exemption for access to the basic commodities coupled with the traditional agriculture practices, damaged irrigation systems, the inability of access to irrigation water and agricultural lands, lack of access to certified seeds, and traditional food sources have adversely impacted food and livelihoods security in Uruzgan province. According to the recent Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis report of November 2020, Uruzgan province has been classified as IPC Phase 4 with 45 percent of its total population facing acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 and above).

In an attempt to support the most vulnerable people in the area, FAO's implementing partner ANRCC along with the local community elders recently facilitated access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance in this affected area. However, this was not an easy job. After several discussions and meetings, the anti-government groups agreed to remove the mines and clear the trenches as well as support the clearing and rehabilitation of the damaged irrigation canal. This was necessary since whatever little amount of water was being released in the irrigation canal was not sufficient to irrigate the agriculture lands resulting in drying up of orchards and adverse impacts of crops. After several rounds of discussions, all stakeholders were convinced of the need for restoration and cleaning of the irrigation canal. FAO, along with implementing partner ANRCC, initiated Cash For Work (CFW) in Kotwal village to restore and clean around seven km of the irrigation canal by employing more than 760 most food insecure persons for 10 working days each. This also resulted in each of these 760 persons receiving USD 50 in the form of wages as per the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster (FSAC) food basket thereby helping cover 50 percent of the households' need. This intervention was done through the generous support of the Government of Denmark. It aimed to strengthen agriculture production of marginal families, provide cash income to landless people and consequently improve food consumption of the vulnerable households.

Now after four years of hardship, once again the water has flowed in this irrigation canal that resulted in 600 hectares land getting additionally irrigated, reduced water evaporation and water loss, and the village has witnessed 20 percent increase in the agriculture production with some farmers experiencing also increased groundwater levels. In addition, a water user committee is formed which is responsible for the maintenance of the canal and the members also received trainings on disaster risk reduction and infrastructure maintenance. All of this together has resulted in protecting the productive agriculture assets of marginal farming

families, enhancing agricultural livelihoods as well as providing cash income to landless / most vulnerable households and consequently food security has improved because of this intervention.



Workers cleaning the canal.

Global Environment Facility approves over \$78 million to support FAO-led projects

16 countries will benefit from projects designed to conserve biodiversity, enhance ecosystem services, combat land degradation, and preserve natural resources on land and water management

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has welcomed the recent decision by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Council to approve 13 FAO-led projects in 16 countries, totaling some \$78.5 million dollars. The decision came during the 59th GEF Council Meeting and will build upon its June 2020 decision to approve \$176 million for FAO-led projects.

The projects address global environmental crises that impact the productivity and sustainability of agricultural systems on land and water across five continents. They will be implemented in partnership with and co-financed by the governments of the countries involved: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Benin, Brazil, Chile, Fiji, Indonesia, Madagascar, Mexico, Nicaragua, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Solomon Islands, Tajikistan, Vanuatu, and Venezuela.

The approved projects provide pathways for countries to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic while building the long-term resilience against future shocks caused by increasing climate risk and environmental degradation. The projects will assist countries and communities to adopt more sustainable and climate-resilient practices, enact stronger policies to conserve biodiversity and natural resources on land and water, and foster policy coherence and transboundary cooperation.

"There is an urgent need to create pathways for building back better and greener, and the partnership between FAO and the GEF is creating opportunities for countries and communities to build more inclusive, resilient and sustainable agri-food systems for better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life," said FAO Director-General QU Dongyu.

The approved projects will directly benefit 480 000 people, restore over 340 000 hectares of degraded land, improve the management of nearly 7.4 million hectares of landscapes and 5.2 million hectares of terrestrial and marine protected areas, and mitigate 12.4 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions.

This builds on the results of the FAO-GEF partnership to date, which has benefitted nearly 5 million people, created 350 000 jobs in rural communities, safeguarded biodiversity in close to 200 vulnerable marine ecosystems, and saved some 1 000 crop varieties, animal species and breeds from extinction.

An example of the latest FAO-led projects to be approved by the GEF Council is the GreenMex project which will mainstream biodiversity conservation, integrated landscape management and ecosystem connectivity into Sembrando Vida, a rural social protection program in Mexico. It will use biodiversity conservation as an enabler for more sustainable livelihoods, economic development and healthier diets.

The approved project in Venezuela will create new green job

opportunities through an agro-ecological approach in the coffee and cocoa sectors, while the project in the Philippines will reduce pressures on ecosystems caused by loss in tourism revenues by training vulnerable communities to market and sell sustainably produced goods instead of resorting to illegal fishing and unsustainable land use.

The work program also includes regional projects that will assist countries manage shared natural resources more sustainably. The approved project for the Panj River Basin will develop effective transboundary water management between Tajikistan and Afghanistan to restore degraded lands and improve the management of protected areas and surrounding areas to better conserve biodiversity in both countries. The project in Fiji, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu will increase climate resilience and enhance water and food security across all three Pacific island states by relieving pressure on over-exploited coastal aquifers through sound groundwater governance frameworks.



Panj river basin in northern Afghanistan.

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