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Sweden's funding supports the most vulnerable food insecure farmers in Afghanistan

FAO to deliver emergency and resilience assistance to 168 000 vulnerable livestock owners and farmers

Vulnerable farmers and livestock keepers and owners of the most food-insecure provinces of Afghanistan will benefit from the funding (USD 3.6 million) provided by Sweden for FAO to assist 168 000 people in Badakhshan, Daikundi, Nuristan, and Samangan provinces.

This humanitarian response will protect agriculture-based livelihoods, build farmers and herders' resilience to withstand future shocks like the expected drought-like impacts from La Niña, and improve their food and nutrition security.

"In these difficult times, Sweden continues to stand by the people of Afghanistan. FAO's expertise and capacity to deliver emergency assistance in the most hard-to-reach remote and rural areas ensures that no one is left behind. Protecting agriculture-based livelihoods is key to achieve food security, an essential element to cement peace and stability in the country," said Torkel Stiernloef, Ambassador of Sweden to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, during the joint

visit today (FAO-Swedish Embassy in Afghanistan) to attend the distribution of agricultural inputs to herders and farmers in Nili, Daikundi province.

"The people of Daikundi highly appreciate the timely response to drought thanks to the financial support of Sweden and the technical expertise of FAO. Daikundi has a great potential for developing agriculture-based livelihoods, specifically almond. It is an honour that such a high-profile mission has visited the province and vulnerable communities," said Rashida Shahidi, Governor of Daikundi province.

"Sweden's funding comes at a critical time for the country, with high numbers of food insecure people in rural areas due to conflict, unemployment, and increasing food prices. Also, in anticipation to the expected impacts of La Niña in agricultural and livestock production, this anticipatory action is necessary not only to safeguard agriculture-based livelihoods, build resilience and improve food security, but also to avoid vulnerable farmers from resorting to rural migration," said Rajendra Aryal, FAO Representative in Afghanistan.

This intervention is part of FAO's Humanitarian Response Plan to assist 3.5 million people in Afghanistan in 2021, for which the UN agency requests USD 50 million. "Thanks to the generous commitment of resource partners like Sweden, FAO has already mobilized USD 15 million so far in 2021. Nevertheless, as the humanitarian needs to attend are far greater than this, we look forward to their continued support in order to be able to deliver the full plan," said the FAO Representative in Afghanistan.

Emergency agriculture and livestock support

Through this humanitarian assistance, 56 000 people (8 000 families) will receive a wheat assistance package, including certified high-quality seeds and fertilizers, which otherwise would not have been able to afford. This support is coupled with a specific training to improve wheat productivity, and geared towards sustainable, nutrition-sensitive and climate smart crop cultivation.

Another 56 000 people will be provided with a livestock protection package, featuring 100 kg of concentrated animal feed, provided alongside animal health assistance in the form of deworming medicines. Both emergency assistance packages will be key to anticipate the drought-like impacts of La Niña expected in 2021.

Building communities' resilience

8 000 vulnerable households will also rehabilitate 100 local water harvesting infrastructures and flood protection walls through the Cash-for-Work modality. 56 000 people will also benefit from unconditional cash transfers, nutrition-sensitive kitchen gardening packages and related trainings.

COVID-19 prevention

Throughout this intervention, FAO will also sensitize people regarding COVID-19. All precautionary measures to prevent and minimize the spread of the virus will be strictly followed throughout the implementation of the activities.

Farmers in Khushk-e-Rabat Sangi find a permanent solution to a sustainable livelihood



Reliable access to water is key for smallholder farmers to make their living out of agriculture.

Migration has been reduced thanks to the training provided to farmers, which has increased their agricultural production by adopting advanced water supply techniques in their farms.

Khush-e-Rabat Sangi is one of the most remote places in Herat province. The majority of the population are vulnerable smallholder farmers who often face food shortages. According to the Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) figures in March 2021, 20 percent of the

population in Herat province is severely food insecure.

Inadequate irrigation infrastructure and mismanagement of water distribution were the major challenges that Afghan farmers faced in this area. The temporary and traditional water intake built by the farmers have frequently been washed away, and because of the poor conveyance system, farmers did not have a reliable water supply to their fields. This issue had severely constrained agricultural production and made farmers highly vulnerable to extreme weather shocks such as drought.

The agricultural production obtained from lands used to be sufficient for only four months. As for the rest of the year, farmers had to migrate for wage labour to make a livelihood for their family, specifically to the neighbouring countries.

Thanks to the generous funding of Japan, FAO has been able to assist the most vulnerable farmers in the western region of Afghanistan to get access to irrigation canals, improve agricultural production of their farms and find a sustainable income within their own communities.

The story of Jalali, a smallholder farmer

"To get an Iranian visa was difficult and costly; therefore, I had to risk my life and travel through illegal routes. That was probably the toughest period of my life," remembers Jalali.

Jalali, 35, is a smallholder farmer and the only breadwinner in a family of 12. He owns one jerib of land on which he grows wheat seed and vegetables but the produce he was getting from his land was not enough to cover all the household expenses. Life was not easy for him. He did not have a sustainable job to support his family; therefore, he was forced to migrate to Iran to get a seasonal job.

FAO's assistance provided a job opportunity for him as a daily wage labourer in the construction of an irrigation canal in Shah Mashhad. From the day he started working with this project, his life turned upside down. "I earn AFN 350 per day (equal to USD 5) which means that I have already earned AFN 84 000 (equal to USD 1 100) so far. Thanks to this income, I bought four goats, which are a sustainable source of income," said Jalali.

With the improvement in water delivery on the agricultural lands, Jalali has been able to improve his agricultural production. He is now able to support the livelihood of his family, and he can afford to send his children to school. Through this FAO project, he has acquired the construction skills that will help him continue his work in this field as an alternate source of livelihood.

Creating job opportunities to prevent illegal migration

The implementation of this project has brought new hopes to the lives of these vulnerable smallholder farmers and on the one hand, it has rehabilitated the irrigation schemes that will improve the supply of water to the farmlands. On the other hand, it has created employment opportunities for the local communities by training them with the required construction skills, as well as engaging locals in Cash-for-Work activities related to the construction and rehabilitation of irrigation canals.

These activities will in turn enhance the livelihoods of the local communities and reduce illegal migration to the neighbouring countries. The project is expected to create jobs for over 7 000 workers and train them with the required construction skills.

The project intervention also includes rehabilitation of intake structure, canal reshaping, and lining works, as well as retaining wall and cross drainage structures.

Hazifa, founder and chairperson of the first women-led milk producers' cooperative in Afghanistan

Milk producers' cooperatives provide a platform for Afghan rural women to improve their livelihoods and develop their leadership abilities, thanks to FAO training.

Child marriage forced Hazifa to drop out of high school when she was 16 years old. At that time, she had no choice but to give up her dream of pursuing higher education studies.

After marriage, Hazifa was involved in various subsistence farming activities until 2014, when she took part in a training from FAO through the IFAD-funded Dairy Industry Development project, which aims to develop the dairy industry in Afghanistan. She couldn't imagine that this training would be a massive turning point in her life.

When she enrolled in this training, Hazifa was 38 years old and had two local breed cows, which were mainly for household's milk consumption. Getting a regular income from the sales of milk was unimaginable.

Through the Dairy Industry Development project, funded by IFAD, FAO has assisted since 2014 around 4 000 rural women with different trainings on livestock management, hygienic milking, and marketing of milk production.

Hazifa quickly learned that crossbreed cows produce higher milk than the local breed. The average milk produced by local breed is 4.08 litres per day, while the milk produced by crossbreed cow is 10.9 litres per day. Moreover, the crossbreed cows are also adaptive to the local environment.

"Motivated by the trainings provided by the project, I purchased a pregnant cross-breed cow," tells Hazifa. "I applied the training skills to feed the cow with concentrated feed, silage and by-products of the different crops. The cow produced 6 litres of milk per day, and it allowed me to start selling the surplus milk to the market, as well as to a nearby milk collection centre, which was also established by the project funded by IFAD. Within a year, I bought a second cow and started selling around 13 litres of milk daily earning more than 380 AFN daily (USD 4)," recalls Hazifa about how she started earning from milk sales.

The first-ever milk producers cooperative led by women in Afghanistan

Encouraged by the benefits derived from the trainings, Hazifa started to influence and train other women in the community for keeping crossbreed cows rather than less productive local breed cows. She



Hazifa is the the founding chairperson of Manara Milk Producers's Cooperative, the first of its kind led by women in Afghanistan.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Sweden's funding supports the most vulnerable food insecure farmers in Afghanistan
- Farmers in Khushk-e-Rabat Sangi find a permanent solution to a sustainable livelihood
- Hazifa, founder and chairperson of the first women-led milk producers' cooperative in Afghanistan
- Afghanistan: La Niña looms large over one-third of Afghan population acutely food insecure today
- EU humanitarian aid and FAO partner to assist highly food insecure people in Afghanistan
- UN humanitarian emergency funding to support FAO in preventing livestock losses in Afghanistan
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eventually managed to organize 80 women of her village, Manara, and took the lead to establish the Manara Milk Producers' Cooperative.

Women make up almost half of the agriculture workforce in Afghanistan. The traditional division of agricultural works in rural Afghan households generally assigns and restricts the women's responsibilities to feeding and milking cows, raising calves, and preparing and selling traditional dairy products. However, opportunities are widening for rural women thanks to this dairy project.

"I always wanted other women in my village to learn new things and do not limit their capacity to merely the traditional livestock management. Therefore, I was excited to be able to share my knowledge and experience with other women, who are now members of our cooperative. I encouraged them to buy crossbreed cows because they can provide a sustainable source of income," said Hazifa proudly.

She was the founding chairperson of Manara Milk Producers's Cooperative, which has been established with the support of the IFAD-funded project to develop the dairy industry.

"Hazifa is a perfect example of a successful woman in the agribusiness; she has become a role model for many women and girls of neighbouring villages," says Dr Lutfullah Rlung, National Professional Officer at FAO. "The establishment of the first women-led milk producer cooperative itself is a breakthrough in Afghanistan, and this is attributed to Hazifa's determination and courage," he added.

This cooperative is the first of its kind in Afghanistan led and run by women. 75 percent of its 135 members are women. From the 34 litres of milk sold that first day, the cooperative sells nowadays around 400 liters of milk daily, and it has created a regular market to the farmers, even though only 30 members contribute to selling for now. Milk from other members is currently used for traditional products such as quroot, yogurt, chakka, and sold in nearby bazars.

Nevertheless, Manara Milk Producers's Cooperative collectively earns around 263 000 AFN (USD 3 500) per month from the sale of milk. And the figures are expected to grow as the new dairy plant in the district, currently in construction, will be up and running. This new plant will allow full phased milk collection. Manara's Cooperative estimates that they will collect 1 500-2 000 litres daily.

Self-help groups for home gardening and more

With Hazifa's support, women of Manara cooperative have also

created a Self-Help Group (SHG) for members who are still not selling milk. This SHG processes homegrown fruits and vegetables into marketable products such as pickles, jam, and jellies, which provide an additional opportunity for women to generate an income.

“SHG is as important as the cooperative because this group has provided us with the opportunity to increase our income through the sale of our own fruits and vegetable production,” says Nasima, a member of Manara SHG.

The Dairy Industry Development project also supported these women with distribution of solar dryers to preserve their agricultural products in order to consume or sell them, in particular during the lean season.

When COVID-19 emerged in Afghanistan, Hazifa also encouraged women in her community to sew facemasks to sell in the local markets. On the one hand, this effort would contribute to preventing the spread of COVID-19, and on the other hand, it would constitute an alternate source of income for women.

Afghanistan: La Niña looms large over one-third of Afghan population acutely food insecure today

Joint Press Release by the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Food Programme

One in three Afghans are acutely food insecure, according to the latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) report released by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

“With doubling of our focus on mitigating adverse effects of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable, we have managed to bring the numbers down from a projected 42 to 35 percent, which is an achievement, however this is still far from our vision of a hunger free Afghanistan.

A third of our people are struggling to feed their families. We must not let our guard down in light of the challenges ahead, specifically the drought-like effects La Niña is already triggering across the country, and the Government is preparing to respond to the impending drought”, said the Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Anwarul Haq Ahady.

While the Government prepares its response to an impending drought, the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP) warn that current resourcing is inadequate to protect lives and livelihoods at risk.



La Niña drought-like effects are already evident in Afghanistan.

Drivers of Acute Food Insecurity

According to the IPC report, food insecurity in Afghanistan is attributed to the lingering impact of COVID-19, armed conflict, a jump in food prices, high unemployment rates and income loss, and arrival of the complex and recurrent weather event La Niña.

“This is the second drought in three years. Afghan families already struggle to survive. A bag of wheat is 30 percent more expensive than the four-year average. Jobs are few and far between,” Mary-Ellen McGroarty, WFP Representative in Afghanistan said. “The lean season is expected to arrive earlier and bite harder. We need to act now, bring food closer to people’s homes, and prevent irreversible malnutrition in mothers and children who will be impacted most. We cannot wait and see.”

Reinforced support from the Government of Afghanistan and the international community since the previous IPC analysis (November 2020) partially explains overall improvement compared to previous projections, factoring in “minimum assistance based on the plans available at that time”.

However, there exist significant funding gaps to meet even the most basic humanitarian needs in the coming months. While the onset of the summer harvest may bring employment and access to food, the report warns the harvest is expected to be “below average” and the “food security situation expected to *deteriorate further* during the 2021-2022 lean season”.

A further deterioration of the food security context will push more people to join one third of the population already food insecure. Monitoring prevailing food insecurity conditions will be critical, as will conducting a mid-year review of the IPC to adjust the responses and prevent the situation from further worsening.

La Niña impact: slow onset, delayed effects in food security

“In order to understand the IPC report figures, we need to take into account two things. First, this analysis was conducted before any of the drought-like effects could be felt. Second, the projection period coincides with the harvest season, but the most serious effects of the lower rain and snowfall are affecting agriculture and livestock production with cascading food security impacts during the subsequent lean season. These figures actually call for immediate action that mitigates the impacts on agriculture and livestock production and prevents rural people from abandoning their agriculture-based livelihoods and displacing to urban areas,” said Rajendra Aryal, FAO Representative in Afghanistan.

La Niña drought-like effects are already evident in Afghanistan, according to FAO. Early evidence of agricultural drought has been found in 25 hotspots across the country. This weather event is expected to severely affect both agricultural and livestock production in 2021. According to FAO estimates, wheat production decreased by 16 to 27 percent in the last five drought events induced by La Niña; the potential impact on livestock production of this year’s event is expected to affect 30 percent of ruminants in 18 provinces.

EU humanitarian aid and FAO partner to assist highly food insecure people in Afghanistan

New EUR 2 million intervention to assist 88 200 people in four provinces through anticipatory actions to prevent massive loss of livestock due to La Niña induced drought

The European Union humanitarian aid agency and FAO will be

partnering to anticipate the expected impacts of La Niña induced drought conditions on livestock production and food security in Afghanistan, and thus to mitigate the risks for some of the most vulnerable and food insecure people to slide into acute hunger and displacement.

“Based on the weather forecast for the upcoming months and the already evident signs of drought conditions in many areas across the country, we need to protect the most vulnerable rural people to meet their most basic needs and safeguard their livelihoods,” said Luigi Pandolfi, who oversees EU humanitarian programmes in Afghanistan. “Otherwise, there is a risk of people sliding into severe hunger and malnutrition, and resorting to desperate measures, such as distress sale of their livestock and migration from rural areas, as was the case during the drought in 2017-2018,” added Pandolfi.

Thanks to the EUR 2 million provided by the European Union humanitarian aid, FAO will assist 88 200 food insecure people in the provinces of Badghis, Badakhshan, Faryab, and Nuristan. This new FAO emergency intervention reinforces similar ongoing efforts of the UN agency across the country to protect rural livelihoods and food and nutrition security.

“While we are already seeing the early effects of drought on herding communities, we will only be able to see the full and cascading impacts of the current drought conditions on agriculture livelihoods and food security during the lean season, from October onward. As usual, there is a seasonal time lag in the manifestation of the drought effects, but that’s precisely why we must act now towards building the critical near-term resilience of vulnerable rural people for them to be in a better position to withstand the negative impacts,” said Rajendra Aryal, FAO Representative in Afghanistan.

Cash+ assistance: Protecting instead of rebuilding

This humanitarian intervention will protect the livestock livelihoods of 6 300 vulnerable families (44 100 people) with Cash+ assistance. Each household will receive a livestock protection package, consisting of 200 kg of concentrate animal feed, deworming medicine and veterinary assistance. The distribution of inputs is scheduled to be provided during May and June, as the initial effects of drought are already evident on animals.

This assistance will be coupled with a one-off unconditional cash transfer (USD 50 per family) and technical training on livestock management related issues. The combination of livestock related inputs and cash assistance is aimed to enable people to safeguard livestock health, protect their productive livelihood assets, help them buy inputs, tools or paying debts, and covering their most immediate food needs as well as avoiding distress sale of animals.

Under this EU humanitarian funding, FAO will also provide cash assistance to another 6 300 vulnerable landless households (44 100 people). Families headed by women, elderly and people with disabilities will be prioritized. All these 6 300 families will receive a total of three unconditional cash transfers (USD 50) in three consecutive months over the summer of 2021 to “ensure predictability and consistency, and so that households can plan their budgets accordingly and use the money to accessing nutritious food, cover their daily needs and avoid resorting to negative coping actions,” said Rajendra Aryal.

Unconditional cash transfers are equivalent to more than half (55%) of the standard monthly food basket for a family of seven members, according to the estimates of the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster in Afghanistan.

The European Union and its Member States are the world’s leading donor of humanitarian aid. Relief assistance is an expression of European solidarity with people in need all around the world. It aims to save lives, prevent and alleviate human suffering, and safeguard the integrity and human dignity of populations affected by natural disasters and man-made crises.

Through its Civil Protection and Humanitarian aid Operations



One in three Afghans are acutely food insecure.

department (ECHO), the European Union helps millions of victims of conflict and disasters every year. With headquarters in Brussels and a global network of field offices, the EU provides assistance to the most vulnerable people on the basis of humanitarian needs.

UN humanitarian emergency funding to support FAO in preventing livestock losses in Afghanistan

FAO to assist 245 000 marginal and food insecure people across Afghanistan thanks to UN CERF time-critical funding

The UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), managed by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is supporting FAO in its efforts to anticipate the negative effects on livestock production induced by the current La Niña weather event.

“FAO has the technical expertise and ability to timely deliver this critical assistance to the most vulnerable in rural and remote areas of Afghanistan. As we have learned from past experiences, and based on the clear evidence available, the time to act is now, before disaster strikes,” said Ramiz Alakbarov, Humanitarian and UN Resident Coordinator in Afghanistan.

“CERF funding has been key to cover large under-funded gaps in the beginning and throughout the whole pandemic, and it played a catalytic role to attract and enable further funding. Once again, CERF’s funding is generous and fast, and it comes when it is most needed,” said Rajendra Aryal, FAO Representative in Afghanistan.

Thanks to the additional USD 4.8 million provided by UN CERF, 245 000 marginal and food insecure people will be reached in 33 districts across 11 provinces of Afghanistan. Herders and livestock owners will be provided with emergency livestock protection and cash assistance in order to safeguard their livelihoods and food and nutrition security. FAO estimates that 1 225 000 people may indirectly benefit from this intervention.

This new intervention complements other FAO ongoing operations across the country to mitigate the impact of La Niña. These efforts aim to build the necessary near-term resilience to withstand the upcoming impacts, which are expected to hit hard during the lean season, as of September–October.

Preventing a massive loss of livestock livelihoods

The complex and recurrent weather event La Niña has caused eight



UN CERF funding will allow FAO to provide animal health treatment in order to safeguard livestock livelihoods.

out of the eleven previous droughts in Afghanistan. The current drought-like conditions triggered by this weather event across the country are jeopardizing the livestock livelihoods of the most vulnerable herders and livestock owners. The lack of precipitation means lack of pasture and increased animal feed prices, according to the specialized UN agency. Without humanitarian assistance, many livestock owners will not be able to afford the increasing prices and may be forced to go into distress sale or abandoning their rural livelihoods, resulting in a massive loss of livestock.

In order to prevent these pernicious effects, FAO's assistance package to the most vulnerable families consists of concentrated animal feed, animal health treatment (deworming medicine) and technical training on sustainable livestock management in emergency contexts, as well as connecting herders and livestock owners to local veterinary services.

Protecting the most vulnerable and marginal rural people

Families headed by women, people with disabilities and landless farmers will also benefit from this intervention through unconditional cash transfers to cover their most immediate food needs. This cash-based assistance will be coupled with Cash-for-Work activities to rehabilitate or create 100 water infrastructures, which are key to retain and maximize the use of water in the current drought conditions induced by La Niña.

All 245 000 people directly affected by this CERF-funded intervention will also receive key protection messages related to the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and gender-based violence, as well as sensitization on COVID-19 safety measures and livestock diseases such as food-and-mouth in order to minimize transmission.

Life-changing hens and eggs for rural Afghan women

FAO assists women-headed households with poultry keeping packages to generate a sustainable income, build near-term resilience and improve food security and nutrition

"I am Shir Ahmad, I am a 60-year-old man, and I am blind. I lost my sight at war and can no longer work and get an income, unfortunately".

"My name is Naseema, and my father's name is Wali Mohammad. I am from Sange zor village, Farah province".

Shir and Naseema have been married since they were teenagers. Traditionally, Shir has been the breadwinner of the family, while Naseema has worked at home and looked after their six children and household chores. Due to Shir's disability and thanks to Naseema enthusiastic spirit, their roles have switched now.

"FAO provided us with a poultry package consisting of 30 pullets, three months of feed, construction materials for building the coop, as well as poultry coop equipment [feeders, drinkers]," tells Naseema, poultry farmer.

Thanks to the funding provided by USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, FAO has assisted 1 500 households in Daikundi, Farah and Kunar provinces with this poultry package.

Assistance for women and vulnerable households to escape poverty and hunger

Thanks to the regular and sustainable income that it can generate, backyard poultry farming is a useful livelihood intervention to raise women-headed families out of poverty and hunger.

From being reliant on charity and assistance from other relatives and neighbours before receiving this package, Naseema's household currently generates 100 AFN per day (USD 1.3). "I sell surplus eggs in the local market. What I earn covers more than half of the family's basic food needs, such as rice, oil, wheat flour, and I can even buy school supplies for my two children who are still going to school," explains Naseema, who received assistance at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

In rural Afghanistan, women are often not allowed to work outside their home. Together with other activities like livestock rearing, backyard poultry keeping has proven to be a great source of home-based income for women. "The assistance provided by FAO is very useful. It has significantly improved our livelihoods," says Naseema.

Building resilience, improving nutrition and more

Poultry keeping constitutes an important safety net in the event of drought. Chicken can be easily sold to cover immediate needs and the activity does not require much water. It is therefore an effective way to build near-term resilience; for instance, in light of the anticipated impacts in livestock and agricultural production induced by the complex and recurrent weather event La Niña.

Poultry also contributes to improving household and community food and nutrition security significantly. While white meat is a leaner source of protein, eggs are loaded with vitamins, minerals, high-quality protein, good fats, and various other nutrients. "These eggs have definitely improved the family's nutrition while also helping us save money on purchasing eggs and chicken for our family's consumption," says Shir.

The recent improvements in her life have encouraged Naseema to scale up her business. "I would like to get a small size hatchery unit, which will make our life much better," says this poultry farmer. The cost of this unit, which helps produce 80-day-old chicks in 21 days, is around USD 320. Naseema keeps saving for it but she dreams of getting some support to be able to buy it sooner rather than later, and continue growing her business.

The USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance provided generous funding for FAO to assist women-headed households with backyard poultry chicken packages in Daikundi, Farah and Kunar provinces of Afghanistan.



Backyard poultry keeping support has made a difference in Naseema family's life.

Afforestation, key to reducing greenhouse gas emissions in southeast Afghanistan

FAO is promoting high conservation value forest species to help contain deforestation and reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Paktia province

Situated in eastern Afghanistan, Paktia province used to be renowned by its pine nut forests. But since the outbreak of the war with the Soviet Union in 1979, illegal logging has almost devastated them.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and livestock (MAIL) together with the technical support of FAO, have been working to reverse this worrying deforestation. Since 2019, MAIL and FAO have initiated the reforestation of 687.5 hectares of deforested pine nut and walnut forests in Said Karam and Ahmad Aba districts, with the financial support from Global Environment Facility (GEF).

“Sustainable forest management plays a vital role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions while it contributes to mitigate climate change because of their great capacity to sequester carbon dioxide. Afforestation brings back to life lost livelihoods, and it therefore improves food security. I would like to sincerely thank the GEF for supporting such an important project in Afghanistan,” says Rajendra Aryal, FAO Representative in Afghanistan.

Pollution and deforestation

According to the data published by the NGO The Liaison Office (TLO), Paktia’s annual deforestation rate ranges between 2 to 3 percent of the forest area. In the same survey report, Root Causes of Deforestation in the Southeast Region of Afghanistan, Summary, Conclusions and Action Outline, TLO signals overgrazing, unsustainable collection of fodder and lack of proper afforestation, as the main causes behind forest degradation and deforestation. The NGO also points out that timber loggers surveyed are forced into this activity by poverty (49 percent), encouraged by the lack of law enforcement (22 percent), or simply unaware of the environmental consequences (6 percent).

“Pollution linked to greenhouse gas emissions in Paktia, and all over the country, has been increasing over the last few years. In order to sequester these emissions, we need to focus on afforestation and plantation, and implement projects like this, which have a positive impact in the environment and people’s livelihoods. In addition, the plantation areas are regularly monitored by province-level staff of the National Environment and Protection Agency (NEPA) of Afghanistan, in order to ensure saplings’ expected fertility rate, as well as proper irrigation for them to grow safely,” says Bahir Gul Sabiry, NEPA Director.

Managing the forest together

This GEF-funded project has also supported the establishment of Forest Management Associations (FMA) in collaboration with the provincial offices of MAIL. Haji Nabi Jan, 57, is the Head of the Mansor Khail FMA in Ahmad Aba district. He works to motivate locals to sustainably manage forests. He also encourages local people to sign commitment letters to avoid cutting trees in the forest area.

“It has been first time that we are establishing FMAs in order to sustainably manage our own forests with the support of FAO. We appreciate FAO’s commitment towards sustainable management of forest,” says Haji Nabi Jan.

“Despite the fact that we had developed several plans to establish communication with forest and mountain dwellers in order to reduce and stop deforestation, we had not been successful due to insecurity and the lack of an adequate mechanism as the FMAs,” says Mohammad Den Momand, Paktia PAIL director.



687.5 hectares have been afforested in Paktia province thanks to the GEF-funded FAO project.

“Establishing FMAs has enabled direct communication with forest and mountain dwellers in order to build their capacity to manage the forests. As a result, deforestation has been slowed down, and forest dwellers have shifted their approach towards sustainable forest management,” adds Mohammad Den Momand.

687.5 hectares of almond, pine nut and walnut trees

As a result of these efforts, 65 home-based walnut and pine nut nurseries have been established across the province of Paktia. 107 000 walnut trees, 6 100 pine nut trees and 5 000 almond saplings have been planted as an alternative livelihood option by FMAs across the 687.5 hectares of deforested area.

“I couldn’t even dream of planting one single pine nut sapling in this deforested area. Since 1980 neither governmental nor non-governmental organizations had worked on it in our area due to the slow growing rate of the species. Therefore, we appreciate FAO and GEF’s support to do so,” said Gul Sheerin, Head of Taro Khail FMA.

Community-based natural resources management plan

FMAs also received support to apply a ‘Community-based natural resources management plan (CBNRM)’. Capacity development workshops are being organized by the project for FMA members and other people from the communities with the aim to develop the CBNRM.

“The skills we learned at the training will definitely help us develop a comprehensive plan for managing natural resources. We identified and prioritized the needs of targeted communities through separate consultation meetings or gatherings with men and women,” said Muqbil “Haqbeen” member of the FMA, who participated in a three-day workshop back in Ahmad Aba district in 2019.

Sweden and FAO strengthen their partnership in Afghanistan to link humanitarian response to long-term development and resilience building

Sweden’s International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and FAO are reinforcing their partnership through an innovative long-term development programme to build resilience at community and ecosystems level, boost local rural economies in conjunction with the ongoing humanitarian response, and contribute to building peace in Afghanistan.

“The new Climate Resilient Ecological and Agriculture risks’ Management (CREAM) programme aims to reinforce the humanitarian response while enhancing long-term risk reduction and resilience building based on the conflict-sensitive programming and Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus approach. It is another step forward in our longstanding and fruitful collaboration with Sweden,” said Rajendra Aryal, FAO Representative in Afghanistan.

“Sweden is committed to stand by Afghanistan in these difficult times of complex humanitarian emergency. But as much as we need to provide urgent humanitarian assistance – as we are currently doing so, we also need to work with a long-term holistic perspective like the Nexus approach towards the development of the country. Building resilience is an imperative to achieve economic development and contribute to building peace. FAO has the technical expertise and reach to make it happen,” said Maria Lundberg, Head of Unit for Afghanistan.

Inception phase

Sweden and FAO will initiate this joint programme with a 10-month inception phase. This initial step will analyse vulnerabilities and risks of those smallholder farmers and livestock owners and herders in need, as well as the resilience levels of households and local ecosystems. This phase will lay the foundation for formulating a long-term implementation phase that is expected to follow.

The results of the various multidisciplinary context analyses will also help understand conflict dynamics and the drivers of local disputes, as well as smallholders’ ability to access agricultural inputs and sustainably link to local markets.

“The idea is to provide entry points for Nexus issues with a holistic approach to climate risks’ sensitive development, linking the humanitarian response to resilient development and localized peace building,” said Rajendra Aryal.

This inception phase will also implement a small pilot voucher programme to sustainably link 300 herding / livestock keeping families to local markets for livestock inputs. Based on the market assessment and feasibility studies to be conducted to address geographical needs, this pilot will be implemented in one province out of the six that will be analysed during the inception phase.

Promoting gender equality will be a cross-cutting priority in the design of CREAM implementation phase. Together with youth and people with disabilities, women will be prioritized in the various assessments, “Programme Clinics”, and in the selection criteria to access support from this Sida-funded programme.

Solid partnership

CREAM builds on the long-standing collaboration between FAO and Sweden, whose funding (USD 3.5 million) is currently enabling FAO to deliver emergency and resilience building assistance, during the ongoing drought, to 168 000 of the most vulnerable livestock owners and farmers in Badakhshan, Daikundi, Nuristan, and Samangan provinces in 2021.

Previously, between 2018 and 2020, the partnership between FAO and Sweden also focused on providing humanitarian support to protect the agriculture-based livelihoods of the most vulnerable population. In that period, 28 200 vulnerable livestock herding households (242 845 people) were supported with an emergency livestock protection package; also, the livelihoods of 29 120 vulnerable smallholder farming households (268 977 people) were protected with the provision of a wheat cultivation package. This support led to a total wheat production of 37 856 metric tonnes of wheat production, and ensured subsistence level food security for the families supported in some of the acutely food insecure provinces across Afghanistan.



A farmer receives an emergency home gardening kit from FAO thanks to Sweden’s Sida funding in Nili, Daikundi province, Afghanistan.

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