

Afghanistan

Mid-Term Evaluation

Thematic window: Environment and Climate Change

**Programme Title: Strengthened Approach for the Integration
of Sustainable Environmental Management
in Afghanistan (SAISEM)**

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Prologue

The current mid-term evaluation report is part of the efforts being implemented by the Millennium Development Goal Secretariat (MDG-F), as part of its monitoring and evaluation strategy, to promote learning and to improve the quality of the 128 joint programs in 8 development thematic windows according to the basic evaluation criteria inherent to evaluation; relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.

The aforementioned mid-term evaluations have been carried out amidst the backdrop of an institutional context that is both rich and varied, and where several UN organizations, working hand in hand with governmental agencies and civil society, cooperate in an attempt to achieve priority development objectives at the local, regional, and national levels. Thus the mid-term evaluations have been conducted in line with the principles outlined in the Evaluation network of the Development Assistant Committee (DAC) - as well as those of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). In this respect, the evaluation process included a reference group comprising the main stakeholders involved in the joint programme, who were active participants in decisions making during all stages of the evaluation; design, implementation, dissemination and improvement phase.

The analysis contained in the mid-term evaluation focuses on the joint program at its mid-term point of implementation- approximately 18 months after it was launched. Bearing in mind the limited time period for implementation of the programs (3 years at most), the mid-term evaluations have been devised to serve as short-term evaluation exercises. This has limited the scope and depth of the evaluation in comparison to a more standard evaluation exercise that would take much longer time and resources to be conducted. Yet it is clearly focusing on the utility and use of the evaluation as a learning tool to improve the joint programs and widely disseminating lessons learnt.

This exercise is both a first opportunity to constitute an independent 'snapshot' of progress made and the challenges posed by initiatives of this nature as regards the 3 objectives being pursued by the MDG-F; the change in living conditions for the various populations vis-à-vis the Millennium Development Goals, the improved quality in terms of assistance provided in line with the terms and conditions outlined by the Declaration of Paris as well as progress made regarding the reform of the United Nations system following the "Delivering as One" initiative.

As a direct result of such mid-term evaluation processes, plans aimed at improving each joint program have been drafted and as such, the recommendations contained in the report have now become specific initiatives, seeking to improve upon implementation of all joint programs evaluated, which are closely monitored by the MDG-F Secretariat.

Conscious of the individual and collective efforts deployed to successfully perform this mid-term evaluation, we would like to thank all partners involved and to dedicate this current document to all those who have contributed to the drafting of the same and who have helped it become a reality (members of the reference group, the teams comprising the governmental agencies, the joint program team, consultants, beneficiaries, local authorities, the team from the Secretariat as well as a wide range of institutions and individuals from the public and private sectors). Once again, our heartfelt thanks.

The analysis and recommendations of this evaluation report do not necessarily reflect the views of the MDG-F Secretariat.



Strengthened Approach for the Integration of Sustainable Environmental Management in Afghanistan

(SAISEM)

MDG-F 1713-E-11a-AFG

(FAO-UNDP-UNEP JOINT PROGRAMME)

MID-TERM EVALUATION REPORT

Financial Breakdown

DONOR: MDG Achievement Fund	USD 5,000,000
IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES: FAO UNDP UNEP	USD 2,500,000 USD 2,500,000 USD ---

**Fund Management
Administrative Agent
Project Duration:
Evaluation Date:**

Pass-through
UNDP
November 2008 – March 2011
December 2010

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A. SUMMARY

The MDG-F supports the Strengthened Approach for the Integration of Sustainable Environment Management in Afghanistan (SAISEM), a JP of FAO, UNDP and UNEP; and three governmental counterparts - the National Environment Protection Agency (NEPA), the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MoAIL) and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD). The JP has two expected outcomes:

- ➡ Environmental issues mainstreamed in national and sub-national policy, planning and investment frameworks.
- ➡ Local management of environment and natural resources improved and service delivery enhanced.

The purpose of the Mid-term evaluation is to assess the JP's effectiveness and achievement of expected results, draw lessons and make recommendations to improve performance. The methodology was based on review of documents and field visit to interview with stakeholders in Afghanistan. The security situation in Afghanistan presented a major limitation on data collection.

The initial concept of the JP was based on two premises; (1) to contribute to the capacity development of "duty-bearers" to address sub-national and community level natural resources management issues, including in planning and budgeting processes; and (2) to empower the "rights-holders" to claim their rights, manage their natural surroundings and sustain their livelihoods. The JP would also aim to develop government ownership of the process and project results to ensure sustainability.

The project rationale was based on a simple model of change theory. At the first level, the project recognised that there was a need for an appropriate enabling political, legal and regulatory framework for environment and natural resources management. At the second level, this would be followed up with intensive education and awareness raising interventions to influence and change behaviour of society at all levels. This would lead firstly to government providing adequate resources for environment management, and also in communities developing and implementing appropriate action plans and activities in environment management.

The key findings of the evaluation were:

- (1) The JP is aligned to the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and is also relevant to achieving most of the MDGs in Afghanistan, in particular given the close dependence of the poor on the natural environment for their livelihood. However, the JP does not address issues of environment and natural resources management in urban areas.
- (2) Project governance and management structures were established as per the project design. However, differences in budgeting and planning cycles of participating UN agencies; and limited coordination both among UN agencies and between the UN and government counterparts presented challenges at the beginning of the project.
- (3) The fund management arrangements based on the "pass-through" modality tended to cause undue delays in transfers from the MDG-F Secretariat to UN agencies and adversely affected project implementation and timely delivery of results.

- (4) The project was adversely affected by delays in recruitment of both international and national staff, which also contributed to the slow progress in project completion and realization of expected results.
- (5) The strategy for environment mainstreaming adopted for Outcome 1 was not very effective, given that environment is already identified in government policy and strategy documents as a cross cutting issue. The strategy for capacity development was mainly based on workshops and seminars, and did not address the strategic institutional capacity gap in government and line ministries.
- (6) Overall, the project was on track to achieve its expected results, particularly at the output level. However, outcome indicators were not achieved partly due to lack of specific targets and baselines for tracking progress.

The major factors that affected achievement of results were (1) delays in recruitment of staff, (2) security issues, (3) seasonal effects of weather and climate conditions, and (4) coordination among UN agencies, and between the UN and government counterparts.

The key lessons to emerge from the evaluation were:

- (a) Planning and implementation modalities for projects in conflict countries have to take into account the risks and delays associated with security and mobility of staff.
- (b) Environment specific projects tend to be affected by such factors as seasonal effects and natural disasters. There is therefore a need to build some flexibility into the project design and implementation phase in order to allow for adjustment of activities in accordance with the climatic conditions beyond the control of project management.
- (c) Joint Programmes entail collaboration and coordination of work activities between entities that may have different mandates, work ethics and approaches. In order to avoid project dysfunction due to these differences, work planning and implementation should be preceded by comprehensive consultations and broad participation of all stakeholders, with a specific emphasis on clarifying roles, responsibilities and expectations of the contributing partners. This should be complemented with frequent joint monitoring, feedback and reporting in order to ensure that all partners move in tandem, and continue to realise value from the partnership.
- (d) Work planning and timelines for projects that depend on external factors such as weather and climate requires some degree of flexibility. This is further exacerbated by conditions of conflict and associated security concerns, in the case of Afghanistan. There is therefore need to provide an allowance for more time than would normally be provided for similar projects in more politically stable situations.

In view of the foregoing lessons learned, as well as the request for the no-cost extension, the evaluation makes four recommendations aimed to ensure successful finalisation of the project.

Recommendation One: Review Outcome 1 Outputs.

The outputs and indicators for Outcome 1 should be reviewed taking into account that Afghanistan already has a national environment policy and that environment is already identified in government policy and strategy documents as a cross cutting issue. The review should also

consider allocating some resources to target activities for addressing environment issues in urban areas, with specific focus on water resources, sanitation and pollution.

Recommendation Two: Review Project Strategies.

The project should review its strategies for achieving outcomes. More specifically, the review should focus on strategies that help to increase social awareness of sustainable environment, and building strategic capacity of government counterparts in a manner that strengthens national ownership and sustainability of results. This could include sponsorship for qualification-based training for line ministry staff, as well as train the trainer courses. In addition, the review should seek to align the project strategy with the UNCT's Integrated Strategic Framework that is being developed.

Recommendation Three: Review Fund Management Modality.

Collaborating UN agencies should review and consider the pros and cons of a “pass through” funding modality against a “pooled” funding modality with a view to adopting the modality that provides for more flexibility and effective budget management. This should be done in the context of moving towards actual joint work planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring of activities, as opposed to consolidation of individual work plans.

Recommendation Four: Review Community-based Intervention Strategies

The project should review its strategies for achieving Outcome 2 and approaches for mainstreaming environment at local levels. The project focus should be reoriented towards the following:

- 👉 Developing a structured advocacy and communication strategy for awareness-raising.
- 👉 Target local-level capacity building, including developing Community-based Natural Resources Management Plans.
- 👉 Developing technology transfer initiatives, such as introduction of drip irrigation techniques.

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C. ACRONYMS

AIRD	Afghanistan Institute of Rural Development
ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
AWP	Annual Work Plan
CBNRM	Community-Based Natural resources Management
CDC	Community Development Committee
CEC	(Inter Ministerial) Committee on Environmental Coordination
CTA	Chief Technical Advisor
DDA	District Development Assembly
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment(s)
EIMS	Environmental Information Management System
ESC	Environment Sub-Committee
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ISF	Integrated Strategic Framework
JP	Joint Programme
MDG-F	Millennium Development Achievement Fund
MoAIL	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NEAC	national Environment Advisory Council
NEDA	National Environment protection Agency
NSC	National Steering Committee
NTF	National Task Force (on environment)
PEAC	Provincial Environment Advisory Council
PIT	Project Implementation Team
PMC	Project Management Committee
RCO	Resident Coordinator's Office
SAISEM	Strengthened Approach for the Integration of Sustainable Environment Management (in Afghanistan)
SEA	Strategic Environment Assessment
TOR	Terms of Reference
TWG	Technical Working Group
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UN RC	United Nations Resident Coordinator

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND

The Millennium Development Achievement Fund (MDG-F) was established in 2006 when the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Government of Spain signed a partnership agreement to accelerate progress towards achievement of the MDGs. The Fund supports countries to achieve their MDGs under thematic windows; (1) Children, Food Security and Nutrition; (2) Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment; (3) Environment and Climate Change; (4) Youth, Employment and Migration; (5) Democratic Economic Governance; (6) Development of the Private Sector; (7) Conflict Prevention and Peace building; and (8) Culture and Development. The MDG-F uses a Joint Programme (JP) mode of intervention and operates through the UN teams in participating countries.

In 2007, Afghanistan was approved to receive funding under the Environment and Climate Change thematic window, which aims to reduce poverty and vulnerability by supporting interventions that improve environmental management and service provision at the national and local levels, as well as increasing access to new funding mechanisms for sustainable environment management. The Environment and Climate Change thematic window has 17 Joint programmes, with a total funding of \$89.5 million. In Afghanistan, the MDG-F supports a JP of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), UNDP and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The JP, called Strengthened Approach for the Integration of Sustainable Environment Management in Afghanistan (SAISEM) works with three governmental counterparts; the National Environment Protection Agency (NEPA), the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MoAIL) and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD). The JP aims at enhancing the capacities of the government counterparts, local governments as well as local community institutions to be able to incorporate environmental management concepts and practices into their national and sub-national sectoral strategies and plans; and support community-led and owned activities aimed at sustainable environment and natural resources management.

The JP strategic approach is to provide guidelines and tools for enhancing consideration and incorporation of environmental management concepts into policy and planning processes, and to facilitate government's and communities' capacities to effectively implement sustainable development projects. The JP also provides local communities with livelihood alternatives and incentives as a motivation and driver for them to invest in environment and natural resources management.

The JP is aligned with the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) 2010-2014, which includes environmental management as a crosscutting issue. The government strategic vision on environment as articulated in the ANDS has three goals; (1) to secure a clean and health

environment, (2) to attain sustainable economic and social development while protecting the natural resource base and the environment, and (3) to ensure effective management of the country's environment through participation of all stakeholders. The project also contributes to MDG 7 for sustainable environment, as well as to Outcome 5 of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2010-2013: "improved capacity to manage natural resources to support poverty reduction and dispute resolution, and reduce vulnerability to natural disasters".

The expected results of the JP are specified in the statements of Outcomes and Outputs as shown below.

<p>Outcome 1: Environmental issues mainstreamed in national and sub-national policy, planning and investment framework.</p> <p>Output 1.1: National environmental concerns reflected in the ANDS and select sectoral plans and institutional capacity strengthened to operationalise them.</p> <p>Output 1.2: Environmental concerns are fully reflected in provincial and district development plans.</p> <p>Outcome 2: Local management of environment and natural resources improved and service delivery enhanced.</p> <p>Output 2.1: Communities are able to develop and implement projects for sustainable use of natural resources and livelihoods, including rural energy systems.</p> <p>Output 2.2: Institutional knowledge management improved in relation with community-based field initiatives.</p>

1.2. EVALUATION PURPOSE

The purpose of the Mid-term evaluation (MTE) is to assess the JP's effectiveness and achievement of expected results, draw lessons and make recommendations to improve performance. The specific objectives of the MTE are:

- To assess the project's design quality and internal coherence, as well as its external coherence and alignment with national development priorities, MDGs and UNDAF;
- To assess the project's relevance and effectiveness of its strategy to achieve expected results;
- To assess the efficiency of its management arrangements in planning, coordination and execution of resources allocated for its implementation;
- To assess the potential of the project's sustainability as well as the degree of national ownership of processes and results; and,
- To identify the factors that affect the project's effectiveness and performance, and make specific recommendations on how to improve performance and achievement of results.

METHODOLOGY

1.3. The evaluation methodology was based on the following:

- Review of official government, UN and project documents, including monitoring and annual reports. The list of documents reviewed is shown at Annex 1.
- Interviews with key informants and stakeholders, including government officials, UN agency and project management and staff. The list of individuals consulted is shown at Annex 2.
- The draft report was shared with the partner UN agencies and government counterparts; and the present report incorporates their comments and feedback.

LIMITATIONS

1.4. Due to various security-related issues, the MTE was unable to undertake planned field visits to the provinces to consult with stakeholders at sub-national level, and to assess the community-based interventions that have been implemented. Consequently, the information pertaining to interventions implemented at field level is all based on secondary data. There were also other security-related issues that limited movement within Kabul, which also affected the number of interviews that were actually conducted. Some of the planned meetings did not take place because of constant changes to interview schedules as a result of security alerts, and thereafter, it was not always easy to reschedule the appointments.

Limited time and language difficulties were also limitations, though to a significantly less extent than the security issue, which alone made it impossible to travel to the provinces outside Kabul.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

INITIAL CONCEPT

2.1. The initial concept of the JP was based on two premises; (1) to contribute to the capacity development of “duty-bearers” to address sub-national and community level natural resources management issues, including in planning and budgeting processes; and (2) to empower the “rights-holders” to claim their rights, manage their natural surroundings and sustain their livelihoods. The JP would also aim to develop government ownership of the process and project results to ensure sustainability. The JP would also use participatory human rights-based approaches to ensure that both government and communities are made aware of, and are empowered to take on, and be accountable for the activities on their own.

Some of the key strategies and principles of the JP include:

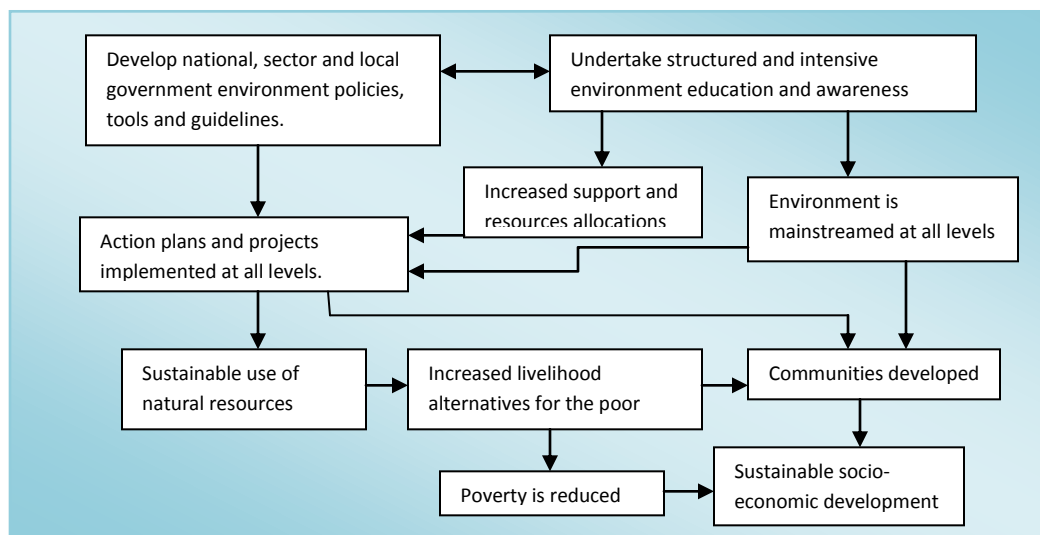
- △ Support decentralized planning, budgeting and programming with focus on environment and natural resources management projects;
- △ Promote participatory natural resources management as the main tool to reverse environmental degradation and ensure sustainability of eco-systems;
- △ Promote the application of lessons learnt from field-based natural resources management activities into the development of legal and policy frameworks;
- △ Promote awareness raising and knowledge sharing among all stakeholders; and
- △ Ensure sustainability through appropriate exit planning as well as accountability and transparency in project implementation.

THEORY OF CHANGE

2.2. The project rationale was based on a simple model of change theory. At the first level, the project recognised that there was a need for an appropriate enabling political, legal and regulatory framework for environment and natural resources management. At the second level, this would be followed up with intensive education and awareness raising interventions to influence and change behaviour of society at all levels. This would lead firstly to government providing adequate resources for environment management, and also in communities developing and implementing appropriate action plans and activities in environment management. Once the concept is mainstreamed effectively in this way, this would lead to the sustainable use of natural resources, and overall, result in community development, reduction of poverty and ultimately, in sustainable socio-economic development.

In its more simple form, the project theory of change model can be represented as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Project Theory of Change Model



III. LEVEL OF ANALYSIS

3.1. EVALUATION CRITERIA

The MTE was based on the following evaluation criteria. First, the evaluation sought to establish the efficacy of the project strategy and determine its effectiveness in accomplishing the expected results. Secondly the evaluation examined the degree to which the stated outcomes were being achieved, by assessing whether or not the outcome indicators had been achieved and the probability that they would be achieved. Thirdly the evaluation determined the extent to which outputs were, or were likely to contribute to the achievement of outcomes. Based on these evaluation criteria and appropriate quantitative and qualitative analysis, the MTE arrived at its conclusions and attendant recommendations.

3.2. KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Table 1 below shows the key evaluation questions that guided the interviews with key informants; and that guided the analysis leading to the conclusions made.

Table 1: Key evaluation questions

Area of focus	Key questions
Contextual scan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👍 To what extent is the project aligned to national priorities, MDGs and UNDAF? 👍 What is the degree of national ownership and engagement of all stakeholders/
Design and strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👍 Does the strategy address the root causes of the problem? 👍 Are the JP components complementary to each other; and do the results of each add value to the other?
Implementation and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👍 Is the implementation modality effective and efficient? 👍 Does the JP constitute a cost-effective utilization of resources, for government and for the UN? 👍 How effective was implementation in the context of the strategy?
Results achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👍 Did the JP address the expectations of all partners and stakeholders? 👍 To what extent were expected results achieved? 👍 What factors positively or negatively affected progress towards results? 👍 Are the results sustainable, and did the JP establish appropriate venues for sustainability?

IV. EVALUATION FINDINGS

4.1. PROJECT RELEVANCE

The JP clearly identifies the problems and their respective causes. The design is based on a detailed situation analysis that identified the major environmental challenges in Afghanistan, their root causes and potential impact on human livelihoods. The analysis identified the key natural resources and environment-poverty linkages. The analysis noted that 80 percent of the Afghan population lives in rural areas, practicing agriculture and related rural activities that rely on natural resources. Of the total land area (665,000 km²) only 12 percent is arable and 4 percent is irrigated, while agriculture generates about 40 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and employs about 70 percent of the labour-force. The degradation of the natural resource base therefore directly and severely impacts the livelihood of the majority of the population.

The JP is also aligned with the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS). At the time of project design, the Interim ANDS (2006 – 2007) featured environment as a crosscutting issue, and noted that the major challenges in Afghanistan included:

- ▶ Lack of government's ability to integrate sustainable development approaches into the national development framework;
- ▶ Underdeveloped and unenforceable environment legislation and regulatory framework;
- ▶ Limited public awareness of environmental and natural resource issues; and
- ▶ Unsustainable exploitation and inequitable access to natural resources facilitated by insecurity.

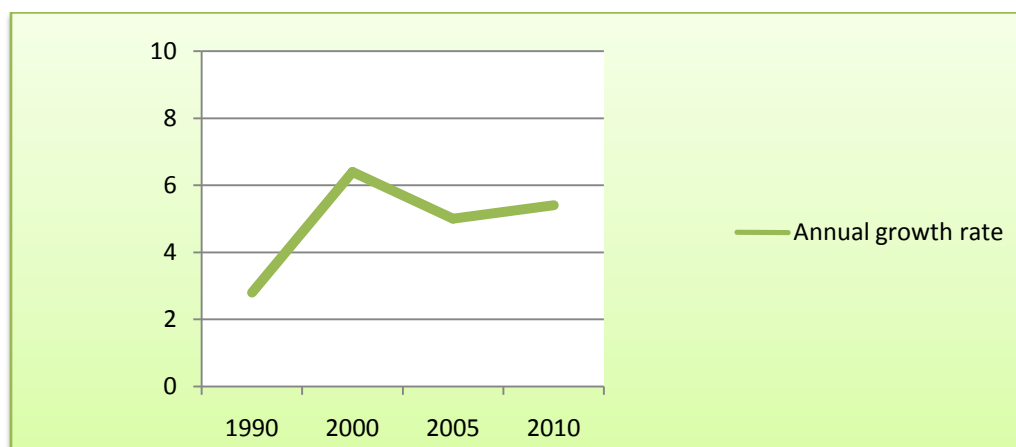
"The environment is a crosscutting issue that underpins the entire social and economic development for the country. The government's chief goal regarding the environment is to improve the quality of life for the people of Afghanistan through conservation, protection and improvement of the country's environment as well as to ensure the sustainability of development efforts for future generations. As a top priority, the government will strengthen the capacity of NEPA to perform its regulatory, coordination and oversight functions, and the capacity of line ministries to actively address environmental considerations in their programme design".

ANDS 2010 - 2014

The JP therefore appropriately developed two outcomes focusing on mainstreaming environment issues in national and sub-national policy, planning and investment frameworks; and improving management of environmental resources at local levels. The strategy for achieving these outcomes includes two components; the first targeting development of policies and building institutional capacities of the National Environment Protection Agency (NEPA) and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD); and the second targeting the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MoAIL) to undertake community-based interventions to enhance livelihoods and improve Rangeland Management.

The evaluation notes however, that the JP does not address issues of environment and natural resources management in urban areas, when urbanisation is one of the key trends in Afghanistan. According to UN Habitat, the Afghan population is expected to increase by 14 million to reach a total of 37 million between 2000 and 2015. More than half of this growth will be in urban areas, because of the limited capacity of rural areas to absorb further population growth. A United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report notes that the urban population was 24 percent of total in 2008, with a projected annual rate of change of 5.4 percent from 2005 - 2008.¹ In Kabul, urban population increased by 156 percent from 1,373,000 in 1980 to 3,528,000 in 2008. Figure 2 below shows the growth trend in urban population between 1970 and 2010.

Figure 2: Average annual growth of urban population



In a 2002 study, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) found that lack of waste management systems was creating dangerous conditions in several urban areas.² In Kabul's districts 5 and 6, household and medical waste was discarded on the streets. Human waste was contained in open sewers, which flowed into the Kabul River and contaminated the city's drinking water, while medical waste from hospitals was disposed in the dumpsters with the rest of the city's waste, contaminating water and air with bacteria and viruses. The project should therefore have included urban environment management, and could have been strengthened by including UN Habitat among the partner UN agencies.

The role of UNEP is clearly defined in the project design, and it has provided technical support to the project from the beginning. However, the coordination at the field level was not clearly defined, particularly the linkages between the FAO component and UNEP, who apparently are involved in similar work at the community levels.

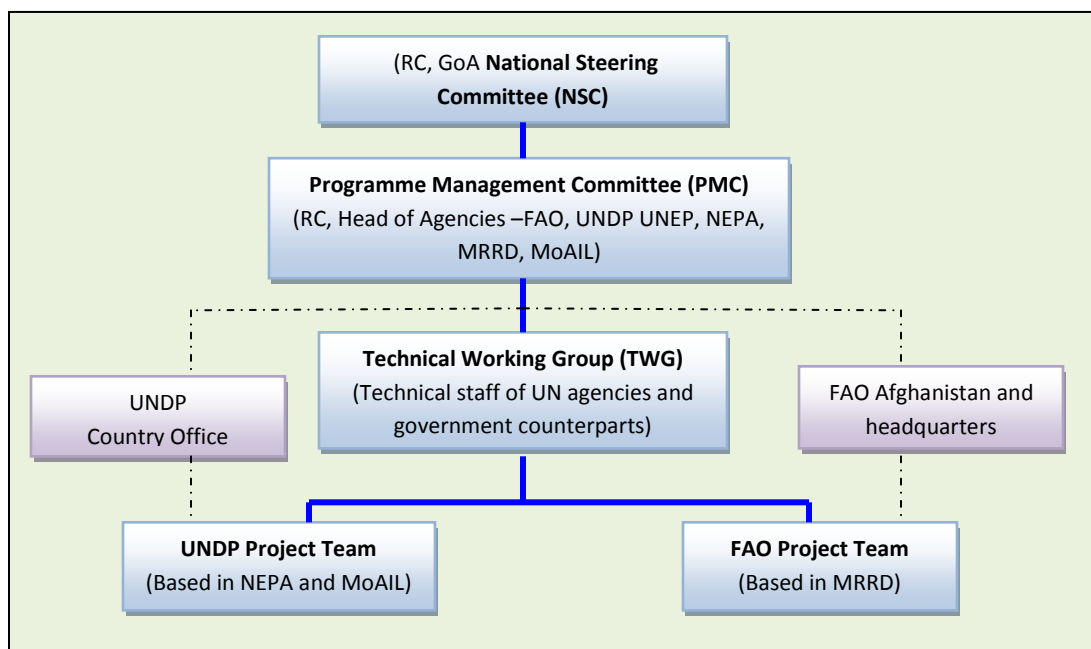
¹ www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan

² UNEP (2003); Post Conflict Environmental Assessment: Afghanistan

4.2. MANAGEMENT AND COORDINATION

The evaluation found that the project governance and management structures were established as per project design shown in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Project governance and management structure



A National Steering Committee (NSC) comprising the UN Resident Coordinator (UN RC), Spanish Embassy and Director General of NEPA (DG-NEPA) was constituted at the inception of the project. Based on documents made available, the NSC did not meet annually as provided in the project design, but actually met once in 2009. This is in itself not an issue, because until recently, there was only this one JP funded by the MDG-F. In addition, the members of the NSC also sit in the Project Management Committee (PMC), thereby obviating the need for frequent meetings.

The PMC was also established as per the project design and is co-chaired by the UN RC and the DG-NEPA. The Terms of Reference (TOR) for the PMC envisaged that it would meet quarterly to guide operational coordination, project resources and review work plans, budgets and progress reports. However, the PMC met only three times since start of project implementation. The last of these meetings was in December 2010 when the PMC met to consider a request by the project team for a no-cost extension (discussed below). UN agencies and government counterparts were all represented at appropriate levels during this meeting. With regards to the Technical Working Group (TWG), this too was established as per project design but did not meet monthly as was planned in the design, in part due to practical and logistical considerations. It was not practical for the FAO members of the TWG based in the provinces to travel to Kabul every month.

At the level of JP management however, the evaluation noted that the project had experienced considerable challenges throughout its life, particularly with respect to project management within the framework of the UN agency programmes. For example, due to the volatile security situation in Afghanistan, UN agencies undertook a criticality assessment of their programme portfolios in order to reduce international staff levels. As a result of this assessment, UNDP restructured its programme portfolio. Initially, the JP was managed under the Natural Resources and Environment Unit, which enabled the project to get appropriate technical backstopping and related synergies from similar ongoing UNDP environment projects. After the criticality assessment, this Programme Unit was abolished and the JP was relocated to the Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Livelihoods Unit. While at face value this may not appear to be a problem, the move created anxiety among the JP staff who interpreted it to mean that UNDP was no longer engaged in environment at the programme level.

The JP has been operating without its full complement of both international and national staff for more than a year, albeit not continuously. The JP Coordinator and Chief Technical Advisor, who ostensibly were supposed to be the leading experts for UNDP and FAO respectively, were both recruited late after the project had started. Both had some personal issues that eventually led to the termination of their contracts at about the same time, leaving behind a huge gap in project management and coordination. Due to the security environment, recruitment of international staff is a challenge in Afghanistan; and this is further worsened by lengthy UN staff recruitment procedures. UN agencies should find ways to address these challenges. National staff have also had high turnover in some posts, with some of them remaining vacant until now, while the pool of qualified candidates is not that big. The information box below discusses some of the key findings with regards to a few of the critical posts that have not been consistently staffed in the JP.

Box 1: JP Staffing Situation

JP Coordinator. The international expert recruited by UNDP to coordinate joint planning, monitoring and reporting was recruited in early 2009 but only reported in June, ten months after the project had started. His contract was terminated in June 2010 and has not been replaced since. The JP Coordinator was supposed to provide technical support and be based in NEPA. However, during his tenure, he was based in UNDP, in part due to logistical and security considerations.

FAO Chief Technical Advisor (CTA). Recruitment was delayed for various reasons. The CTA was eventually recruited in January but only reported in May 2009, nine months into the project implementation. His contract was terminated in July 2010 and a replacement arrived in November 2010. The CTA is supposed to provide technical support and be based in MoAIL, but is currently based in the field (Herat province).

International Environment Specialist. Recruited by UNDP to provide technical support and based in MRRD, he arrived in April 2009. However, due to various reasons, he is based in UNDP. After the departure of the JP Coordinator and the National Project Manager, he took over their two functions, which take up 80 percent of his time, thus is unable to focus on his core functions in MRRD. His contract ends on 31 December, and at the time of writing, no indication had been made by UNDP about extending the contract or his replacement.

National Project Manager. Recruited by UNDP for day to day management of the project, he left in November 2009 and has not been replaced. His functions have since been transferred to the International Environment Specialist (who is also leaving at the end of December).

National Environment Specialists. Three national specialists recruited by UNDP. One of the posts is vacant, and one of them will be taking over as Project Manager from January 2011.

Natural Resources Officer, M&E Officer and Community Mobilisation Officer – FAO. These posts were filled at various intervals after the project started and are all currently manned.

4.3. UN AGENCY COORDINATION

The evaluation found that coordination between UN agencies has been rather nominal throughout the project implementation. Each of the project components – FAO and UNDP – develop their Annual Work Plans (AWP) independently of each other, and only merge them into a JP AWP for submission to the MDG-F. This is an issue which has been consistently observed and acknowledged by the Project Implementation Team (PIT) and the PMC. At a meeting of the PIT held on 13 May 2009, the minutes indicate that the PIT noted that coordination was lacking at various levels, including among UN agencies and between the UN and government agencies. In July 2009, the PMC held its first meeting and also observed that there was no coordination between the two project components and between the project team and government counterparts. In the JP Monitoring report of 25 July 2010 covering the period January – June 2010, the JP Coordinator noted that there were persistent difficulties in UN agency coordination (page 19). The report stated *“limited coordination between the project implementation team...resulted in limited synergies in terms of time and resources”*.

The Monitoring Report further observed that there was lack of common understanding and interpretation of the JP outcomes and outputs by the project teams, which resulted in slow delivery of results. There was no coordination in the development of the JP AWP, which affected the coordination of field level activities. These coordination challenges appear to be structural in nature, and were not adequately addressed in the project design. Many of these challenges are a manifestation of wider systemic problems with UN coordination at the country level. Lessons from the pilot Delivering as One countries testify to the fact that ‘effective coordination cannot be achieved until and unless there is one project, one budget and one leader’. In its present design, the JP encourages each component to use their respective agency procedures in developing work plans and implementation modalities.

4.4. FUND MANAGEMENT AND EXPENDITURES

The fund management arrangement is a “pass-through” modality, with UNDP as the Administrative Agent. The funding process starts with preparation and submission of the JP Work Plan to MDG-F, who then approve transfer of the requested funding by the Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) separately to FAO and UNDP. The MDG-F approves the transfers if the implementing agencies (FAO and UNDP) have achieved a combined 70 percent expenditure of the last transfers. The evaluation found that this approach has tended to delay implementation by respective components because the combined delivery may sometimes be below 70 percent even when one of the components has exceeded that threshold. This was particularly the case in the first two transfers following the initial transfer.

Moreover, since transfers are made directly to the UN agencies, the rationale for a combined expenditure threshold is unclear. If consideration is made for the planned activities of UN agencies separately, then there is no reason why the delivery rate of the other component should be a factor in determining the transfers. Besides, separate management of the funds by the individual UN agencies does not particularly encourage joint planning and implementation. In the consultations with participating UN agencies, the evaluation found that they did not mind a “pooled funding” arrangement with UNDP managing the funds under the guidance of the PMC. This would go a long way in ensuring that planning and implementation of activities are undertaken in a more coordinated manner, and justify a joint delivery threshold before subsequent transfers are approved. Table 2 below shows annual expenditures for each component by year.

Table 2: Annual Expenditure by Component

UN Agency	Total Budget	2008	2009	2010	2011 ^e	Balance
FAO	\$2,500,000	\$186,881	\$303,422	\$535,692	\$240,000	\$1,234,005
UNDP	\$2,500,000	\$16,084	\$661,299	\$1,132,818	\$150,000	\$539,799
Total	\$5,000,000	\$202,965	\$964,721	\$1,668,510	\$390,000	\$1,773,804

e = estimate

The figures above show that the project got off to a slow start. This was in part due to the delays in the recruitment of project staff. By the end of 2009, a total of \$1,595,214 or 32 percent of the total project budget had been transferred, and of that amount, \$1,167,686 or 23 percent of total budget had been disbursed. At that time (end of 2009), the project was 14 months into its planned implementation period and proportionately by then, should have disbursed at least 45 percent of the budget. In effect, this means that delivery was lagging 22 percent behind schedule by the end of 2009.

Given that project implementation normally undergoes a ‘learning curve effect’, delivery should have been expected to improve in 2010. However, delivery actually declined by more than 10 percent in 2010 compared to 2009. By end of December 2010, a total of \$2,836,196 or 57% of total budget had been disbursed. By then (end of 2010), the project was 26 months into its planned duration and should have delivered at least 85 percent of the total budget in order for the total budget to be spent by end of the planned period. This means that by end of 2010, delivery was lagging 28 percent behind schedule. The evaluation noted that as of December 2010, UNDP had delivered 72 percent of its total component budget and was lagging 13 percent behind schedule; while FAO had delivered just 41 percent of its component budget, and was 44 percent behind schedule.

The PIT estimates that the project will be able to deliver an additional \$390,000 (FAO - \$240,000 and UNDP - \$150,000) in the remaining three months to March 2011 when the planned project period ends. There will therefore be a balance of \$1,773,804 or 35.4 percent of total project budget unspent at the end of the project, of which \$1,234,005 (24.6% of total budget) is from the FAO

component, and \$539,799 (10.7% of total budget) is from the UNDP component. Consequently, the project team has requested a no-cost extension of 12 months to March 2012, which was presented to the PMC at its meeting on 12 December 2010. Further analysis and justification or otherwise for the no-cost extension is provided below, after discussion of the project's achievements and contribution to expected outcomes.

4.5. STRATEGY EFFECTIVENESS

The JP was developed in 2006 in a context where the National Environment Law was not yet in place, but was subsequently passed in 2007. The evaluation noted that this had in some ways created differences in expectations between the government counterparts and the project team. On one hand, the government justifiably argue that the project strategies, particularly those related to Outcome 1 (Environment issues mainstreamed in national and sub-national policy, planning and investment framework) have to be interpreted in a broader perspective. From their perspective, environment is already mainstreamed since it is reflected as a crosscutting issue in national and sub-national policy and strategy documents. NEPA, as the government agency with the mandate for sustainable environment management is well established and has ongoing programmes to establish a presence at provincial and district levels.

The governments' view is that mainstreaming should be broad-based and go beyond looking at development of policies because these are already in place and contained both in the Environment Law and the ANDS. In particular, they do not see much value in the JP undertaking primary-level activities such as Rangeland Restoration and livelihood interventions such as kitchen gardens and nurseries because MoAIL already has a national programme that addresses these issues. Instead, mainstreaming should focus on broad strategic areas that will lead to behaviour change, such as (1) raising social awareness on environment management, and (2) institutional capacity development. For example, the MoAIL noted that FAO was undertaking interventions at community level without the involvement of the Ministry. As a result, FAO did not get the required level of cooperation from the MoAIL sub-national structures.³

With regards to institutional capacity development, government counterparts noted that the project approach of conducting workshop-based training does not address the strategic capacity gap in government. Institutional development requires a more long-term oriented approach, such as for example, providing training to a targeted team, leading to recognised

³ FAO stated however that it was satisfied with the support from the local government in Herat and other provinces.

qualifications in such areas as (a) environment mainstreaming, (b) sustainable environment management and (c) monitoring and evaluation. This team can then become the basis for a strong Environment Management Unit in NEPA, and also conduct training for other line ministries.

One government official noted: “Joint programme objectives should be achievable jointly. Activities that do not particularly fall within common partner mandates do not add value. For example, kitchen gardens have no particular value to NEPA”.

The project team on the other hand, has been implementing the JP strategy strictly according to the established Outcome and Output indicators. Most of the activities associated with these indicators involve the conduct of training workshops for government staff at various levels in line ministries and local government. The evaluation is of an opinion that this approach, although important in a situation where national and institutional capacity is lacking, does not necessarily lead to behaviour change at the community level, which is what the concept of mainstreaming actually entails.

Some partner UN agencies also questioned whether the project had done any meaningful institutional capacity building and environment mainstreaming. Many doubted the efficacy of the project strategy. For example, some of them argued that the policy and structure for environment mainstreaming already exists in the Environment Law and Community Development Councils. What is lacking is specific and targeted interventions to strengthen their capacity for implementing the policies. The essence of this argument basically being that the focus of any mainstreaming strategy should be targeted at community level, rather than at central policy level.

One UN staff member observed: “mainstreaming should aim to change the mind-set of the community. If you provide seeds for nurseries, the villagers will come back and say, ‘we need fertilizer and irrigation water’. If you don’t provide these, then the nursery will die. This is not mainstreaming. To be effective, you need to raise their awareness and knowledge about the value of the environment through intensive and targeted communication and education strategies using all available media, including radio, mosques and schools.”

In the opinion of the evaluator, there is a need to re-assess and review the JP strategy in order to align it more closely with national priorities in the context of the current situation. The JP should also take into account, and avoid duplicating programmes that are already being implemented either by the government or other UN agencies. For example, UNEP has been engaged in Institutional Development for Environmental Management in Afghanistan since 2003, particularly targeting NEPA. The UNEP programme consists of five main pillars:

- 👉 Environmental institutions and coordination;

- 👉 Environmental law and policy;
- 👉 Environmental impact assessments;
- 👉 Environmental information and education;
- 👉 Community-based natural resource management.

The JP should consider how it can complement these programmes, or at a minimum, consider how to piggy-bank on these programmes in order to upscale them. The JP should also be cognizant of the fact that the impact of field-level environment interventions cannot be realised in a short period of time. In fact, according to UNEP, the global standard for field level interventions such as rangeland restoration, re-forestation, etc., is about seven years.

The evaluation also noted that the UN is in the process of developing the Integrated Strategic Framework (ISF) for Afghanistan, which provides a window of opportunity for the JP to review its own strategy within the overall framework of the ISF in support of the ANDS. For example, on environment mainstreaming, the ANDS states; *“environment must be mainstreamed across all sectors and in each programme area through the development of policy benchmarks to ensure that government (and other partners) follow established norms with respect to the incorporation of environmental considerations into the design and implementation of projects, and provide adequate oversight and monitoring of the environmental impacts of economic and social development projects.”* This should form the basis for development of the JP strategy and UN support to sustainable environment management in Afghanistan going forward.

4.6. RESULTS ACHIEVEMENT

The evaluation found that the project had made some progress towards achieving its stated expected results, although it was not possible to objectively measure and assign a specific rating of progress, particularly at outcome level, because some of the indicators lacked specific baselines and targets.

4.6.1. Outcome 1. Some progress was made towards achievement of Outcome 1. The project supported MRRD to develop its Strategic Intent 2010 – 2014, which constitutes mainstreaming of environment at sector level. However, the indicator does not specify how many national and sub-national policies were targeted. With regards to the indicator on budget allocations made to the environment sector, the evaluation was unable to obtain relevant data. The evaluation notes that the project did not develop a specific advocacy and communication strategy, as part of its mainstreaming activities. However, some activities were undertaken including, support to government to commemorate World Environment Day; publication of monthly NEPA newsletters; radio and TV spots on Climate Change Adaptation. While these activities contributed to awareness, the project would be more effective following a structured advocacy and communication strategy to strengthen its mainstreaming agenda. Table 3 below provides a summary of progress achieved on the indicators for Outcome 1. In the opinion of the evaluator, progress achieved ranks in the low to medium range.

Table 3: Progress on Outcome 1 Indicators

Outcome 1. Environmental issues mainstreamed in national and sub-national policy, planning and investment framework.	
<p>Indicator:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of national and sub-national policies, plans and budgets integrating environmental concerns. <p>Baseline: Various policies and plans in pipeline but none fully established.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Number of government funding allocated to the environmental sector especially through NEPA and MoAIL <p>Baseline: Unknown / to be established.</p>	<p>Progress achieved by Mid-term evaluation.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Project supported MRRD to develop its Strategic Intent 2010 -2014. The strategic Intent includes Environmental protection as cross-cutting issue. The strategy states – “MRRD will undertake Strategic Environment Assessments (SEA) to guide its institutional strategic level policy and decision-making processes in relation to environment mainstreaming into rural development initiatives”. 2. Based on information provided during the evaluation, no specific assessments were undertaken to establish the baseline or to determine national budget allocations to the environment sector.

4.6.2. Contribution of Outputs to Outcome 1. Most of the project outputs were achieved or had a very high likelihood of being achieved as illustrated in the key highlights presented below. A database of baseline case studies on environmental mainstreaming was established in 2009. Following on this, a national task force chaired by NEPA was established to lead development of the National Environment Mainstreaming Guideline (NEMG), which includes specific sector-level guidelines and benchmarks. At the time of writing the report, the draft NEMG had been completed and submitted for approval by partners and PMC. In addition, a draft guideline for incorporating environment management within the curriculum of the Afghanistan Institute of Rural development (AIRD) was also developed in collaboration with NEPA.

A guideline for Strategic Environment Assessments (SEA) has been developed (and is now pending approval) as a basis for the screening of projects prior to implementation. The guideline includes tools for conducting Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA), which are ordinarily done after project implementation. The project also supported NEPA to develop an Environmental Information Management System (EIMS) to enhance capacity to manage information on environment management. As part of the process, technical support was also provided for NEPA to develop its official website, which will serve as a one-stop centre for environment information on Afghanistan. At the time of drafting, the website had not been launched.

At sub-national level, the project supported the establishment of Provincial Environment Advisory Councils in 19 provinces, from a total 34 provinces. Two PEACs were initially established on a pilot basis, following which NEPA then established the PEACs in the other 17 provinces using the tools and guidelines developed by the project. The TORs for the PEACs describe their role as coordination with Provincial development Councils (PDC) to ensure environmental mainstreaming in local development programmes. The project also established Environmental Sub-Committees (ESC) in

District Development Assemblies (DDAs) and Community development Councils (CDCs). The role of ESCs is to advocate and raise awareness about environmental issues in their communities.

Table 4 below provides a summary of some of the key achievements and progress made towards the output indicators. In the opinion of the evaluator, progress on outcome 1 outputs is ranked between high and very high.

Table 4: Highlights of key progress made towards Output Indicators for Outcome 1.

Output 1.1. National environmental concerns reflected in the ANDS and select sectoral plans and institutional capacity strengthened to operationalise them.	
OUTPUT INDICATORS: a) Number of national and sub-national plans integrating environmental concerns. b) Environmental considerations incorporated in target ministry project cycles. c) NEPA institutional development strategy in place and operational at central and provincial level. d) Relevant government departments able to formulate and implement projects incorporating considerations for environment and natural resource management, (MRRD – EIA; and MoAIL – Rangeland management) including M&E. e) Natural Resource management frameworks developed, including Rangeland policy.	PROGRESS TOWARDS INDICATORS: a) 4 provincial strategic plans (Herat, Balkh, Bamayan and Laghman) with environmental concern for sustainable development will be finalised in March 2011. b) National Environmental Mainstreaming Guidelines Drafted. c) The project undertook a Capacity Needs Assessment for NEPA, but NEPA said that it was already working with other development partners on this. d) Auditing, monitoring and evaluation guideline developed for NEPA and MRRD. Training workshops (2) MRRD based on the recommendation of the guideline. One was at program level and the other on Environmental and natural resources management. e) No evidence obtained about this indicator.
Output 1.2. Environmental concerns are fully reflected in provincial and district development plans.	
OUTPUT INDICATORS: Number of sub-national plans incorporating environment concerns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guideline for Provincial Environmental Advisory Councils (PEAC) Developed. - Concept note for PEAC developed. - PEAC Capacity Development Plan developed. - 20 Provincial Environmental Advisory Councils established at sub-national level for environmental mainstreaming in the process of Provincial Strategic Planning (which will localize the ANDS and MDGs). By January 2011 4 Provincial Strategic Plans are expected to be completed for Herat, Balkh, Laghman and Bamyan provinces (already in draft form but waiting presidential approval). - Concept Note for Environmental Sub-committees establishment developed. - Environmental sub-committees piloted in 20 DDAs for environmental mainstreaming into district development plans. (In three districts of Bamyan Environmental consideration has been integrated in the updating process of district development plans).

4.6.3. Outcome 2. At the beginning of project implementation in 2009, a feasibility study and assessment of the Community Conservation Fund was undertaken by FAO in 4 districts and 8 communities in Bagdhis and Herat provinces. The study culminated in the development of a concept note for implementation of the priorities that were identified by the communities, which included rangeland restoration and management, as well as reforestation, particularly for Pistachio forests. FAO also established seed multiplication production centres in three farms owned by MoAIL in Bagdhis, Ghor and Herat provinces. A kitchen garden and home economics programme was established in all participating communities, with a total of 800 female farmers now trained and cultivating their own kitchen gardens. A family nutrition programme was started in Herat provinces plans are underway to replicate it in Bagdhis and Ghor provinces.

The evaluation noted however, that much more still needs to be done, particularly with respect to developing local-level capacities. In addition, no evidence was obtained to indicate that the project had any specific activities tailored and targeted at local entrepreneurs as provided for by some of the indicators. Table 5 below provides a summary of the key results and achievements made under Outcome 2. Progress made towards Outcome 2 is ranked low to medium.

Table 5: Progress on Outcome 2 Indicators

Outcome 2. Local management of environment and natural resources improved and service delivery enhanced.	
<p>Indicator:</p> <p>1. Number of sustainable community-based environment and natural resource initiatives.</p> <p>Baseline: No data.</p> <p>2. Improved capacity of the government, communities and local entrepreneurs to plan, manage and execute environment and natural resources projects.</p> <p>Baseline: Low level of awareness and use of sustainable natural resource practices, including rangeland management and rural energy).</p>	<p>Progress achieved by Mid-term evaluation.</p> <p>1. Seed multiplication and re-seeding of rangeland interventions undertaken in Herat and Ghor Provinces. Community capacity development in rangeland management undertaken in 32 villages in 7 districts – 4,775 people trained. (56 kg of seed propagated in Ghor and Herat provinces. Also provided water resources infrastructure: 3 x 4 metre deep wells and 24 KW water pump for irrigation in Zendajan district. 4 deep wells rehabilitated at Herat University.</p> <p>2. Training workshops conducted in Herat and Bamyan provinces. In Herat provinces, training was provided to PEAC, DDA and CDC when they were in the process of developing their Provincial Strategic Plans. In Bamyan province, training was provided to DDAs and CDCs when MRRD was in the process of updating the District Development Plans.</p>

4.6.4. Contribution of Outputs to Outcome 2. The project undertook several and various community-based interventions, all of which contributed to the outcome. However, the evaluation noted that many of these interventions are too limited in scope and do not address the strategic issues from a long-term perspective. For example, the project could have done more to assist communities to develop local Community-based Natural Resources Management Plans and to develop their capacities for implementing and managing those plans in a sustainable way. This is a much more strategic intervention, which would also directly feed into the results of both components of the project.

The government counterparts consulted indicated that the project outputs were below expectations. They noted for example, that seed multiplication was only done in Herat province, when it would have been more practical to do it in all four pilot provinces in order to generate more objective lessons and eliminate the bias from geographic and climatic conditions in Herat. Mostly government counterparts observed that FAO should not go to conduct field-interventions alone, but should always be accompanied by either MoAIL or MRRD staff as a way of developing sector Ministry capacities. They also noted that the major challenges with regards to rangeland restoration and reforestation was inadequate water supplies. The project could be more sustainable if it included a component for technology transfer through introduction of “irrigation technologies”, for example. In addition, the evaluation noted that some aspects of the output indicators were outright not addressed. For example, no evidence was obtained with regards to specific interventions directly addressing issues of rural energy. The summary of progress made on Output indicators is shown at Table 6 below.

Table 6: Highlights of key progress made towards Output Indicators for Outcome 1.

Output 2.1. Communities are able to develop and implement projects for sustainable use of natural resources and livelihoods, including rural energy systems.	
OUTPUT INDICATORS:	PROGRESS TOWARDS INDICATORS:
a) Number of CBNRM initiatives	a) Nurseries for reforestation established in Herat province, and seed multiplication initiatives established in 3 provinces for rangeland restoration.
b) Number of livelihood projects with focus on sustainable use of natural resources, including rural energy.	b) Concept note for small grants implementation developed. - Environmental sub-committee in Somara valley of Bamyan formed. (Working with UNEP to assist community develop eco-tourism project) - CBNRM priority has been identified (Eco-Tourism Development) - Small grants proposal received from environmental sub-committees in Bamyan province. - The implementation of the small grants will start in March 2011 because this activity is seasonal based. - 272 kitchen gardens established and operational
c) Number of CBNRM plans including Rangeland management.	c) Rangeland restoration plan in the three provinces developed, including plan to restore pistachio forests.
Output 2.2. Institutional knowledge management improved in relation with community-based field initiatives.	
OUTPUT INDICATORS:	PROGRESS TOWARDS INDICATORS:
CBNRM facilitation tools available and relevant government staff and local stakeholders trained.	566 individuals from community development councils (CDC), MoAIL, MRRD and NEPA personnel, and B.Sc. and Masters University students, received training in management of natural resources, community mobilization and community-based interventions.

V. FACTORS AFFECTING PROGRESS AND LESSONS LEARNT

As pointed out in Section 4.4 above, with only three months of the planned project implementation period remaining, the project has a balance of \$1,773,000 in unspent funds, representing slightly over 35 percent of the total project budget. The foregoing analysis on results achievement also indicates that progress has been mainly slow, ranking on average in the low to medium range. The evaluation found that several factors had combined and negatively affected the pace of progress. The most significant of these factors are discussed below.

5.1. DELAYS IN FUNDS TRANSFER AND STAFF RECRUITMENT

The JP was originally planned to start in August 2008, but officially started in November 2008 when the first tranche of funds was transferred. In addition, both FAO and UNDP experienced delays in the recruitment of international and national staff. As noted earlier, most of the international staff arrived in mission in the first quarter of 2009, some more than 6 months after the official project start date. The funding modality also requires that a combined threshold of 70 percent expenditure be achieved before transfer of subsequent tranches of funds. Over time, this has tended to delay project implementation, particularly the UNDP component, partly because FAO interventions are very seasonal and therefore tended to stall in the winter months.

5.2. SECURITY ISSUES

The second half of 2009 coincided with an increase in insurgency activities in Kabul that had profound implications for the JP. For example, in October, the International Environment Specialist survived a gun attack at his residence, and had to go on compassionate leave for 10 weeks.⁴ Following on this, most international staff were relocated outside the country and only allowed to return in December 2009. Furthermore, activity planning is very much constrained by security issues. Roads can become inaccessible at a moment's notice, thus delaying any planned meetings or activities. Flights to and from Kabul to the provinces where the project is being implemented are also subject to short notice cancellations because of security considerations. As a

⁴ Five international staff not connected with the project died in the attack.

result, a lot of time for project implementation is lost or not effectively used during these security alerts.

5.3. SEASONAL EFFECTS

Some of the community-based interventions at the field level can only be implemented in the spring between the months of March to May when the weather is favourable. During the rest of the year, the weather conditions do not allow any of the activities to be undertaken; for example, the kitchen garden projects, seed multiplication and reforestation. However, this is only a constraint in the current set up of the project, which does include provision of infrastructure such as green houses and deep-water irrigation, which could alleviate on the weather and climatic conditions.

5.4. COORDINATION

In the early months of its implementation, the project faced coordination challenges between UN agencies, and between the UN and government counterparts. Oftentimes, the project partners had different interpretation of its priorities. For example, there was no clear consensus, as noted earlier, on the linkages between sub-national (provincial and village level) and national (sector level) activities. In the first year particularly, no joint field activities were either planned or implemented. FAO had its entire project staff based in the provinces, while UNDP did not have any field-level activities. One official observed during interviews “...if there had been effective coordination, the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock would have hired, or at least nominated one of its staff members as the project focal point. On the other hand, the integration of the project activities in MoAIL, MRRD and NEPA, also has its own problems, as no one ministry takes full responsibility for the project”. However, the evaluation noted that coordination had improved considerably since the departure of the UNDP JP Coordinator and the FAO CTA.

These four factors combined contributed to the slow progress in project implementation and results achievement. Even this mid-term review was only undertaken in December 2010, with only 3 months remaining until the end of the JP. At the time of the MTR, the project still had a balance of \$1.7 million in

BOX 2: PIT JUSTIFICATION FOR NO-COST EXTENSION

- The project officially started in November 2008 when the first transfer of funds was received.
- As the first MDG-F project on Environment, the project can provide a useful case study of both negative and positive lessons.
- Most interventions are seasonal; with the major season only lasts from March to May, there is limited time for implementation.
- The guidelines, tools and mechanisms for Environmental Mainstreaming developed require time to be implemented and to monitor their impact on policies and investments.
- In September 2010, the MDG-F acknowledged that JPs had faced challenges across the board and recommended no-cost extensions for those that had potential to deliver on expected results.

unspent funds, but only 3 months remaining. Consequently, the Project Management presented the case for a no cost extension for an additional 12 months up to March 2012 to the PMC at its meeting on 12 December 2010. The Project Implementation Team presented a compelling case in support for the request for the no-cost extension as shown in Box 2.

Based on the remaining balance of unspent funds, and the average monthly burn-rate in 2010, the evaluation calculates that the project should be able to deliver the remaining funds by December 2011. In the opinion of the evaluator, there is sound justification for a no-cost extension for an additional 9 months from April 2011 to December 2011.⁵ The proposed work plan agreed between the UN and government counterparts for the period of extension is shown at Annex 3.

LESSONS LEARNT

5.5. Based on critical analysis of the key findings noted in this evaluation, as well as the factors affecting progress and achievement of results, a number of key lessons can be drawn.

5.5.1. Lesson One. Planning and implementation modalities for projects in conflict countries have to take into account the risks and delays associated with security and mobility of staff.

5.5.1. Lesson Two. Environment specific projects tend to be affected by such factors as seasonal effects and natural disasters. There is therefore a need to build some flexibility into the project design and implementation phase in order to allow for adjustment of activities in accordance with the climatic conditions beyond the control of project management.

5.5.3. Lesson Three. By definition, Joint Programmes entail collaboration and coordination of work activities between entities that may have different mandates, work ethics and approaches. In order to avoid project dysfunction due to these differences, work planning and implementation should be preceded by comprehensive consultations and broad participation of all stakeholders, with a specific emphasis on clarifying roles, responsibilities and expectations of the contributing partners. This should be complemented with frequent joint monitoring, feedback and reporting in order to ensure that all partners move in tandem, and continue to realise value from the partnership.

5.5.4. Lesson Four. Work planning and timelines for projects that depend on external factors such as weather and climate requires some degree of flexibility. This is further exacerbated by conditions of conflict and associated security concerns, in the case of Afghanistan. There is therefore need to provide an allowance for more time than would normally be provided for similar projects in more politically stable situations.

⁵ Balance of unspent funds/ Average monthly burn rate for 2010 = $\frac{\$1,773,804}{\$1,668,510/12}$ = 12 (less Jan to Mar) = 9 months.

VI. CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation noted some positive findings, while at the same time there are also a number of challenges that require further attention in the remaining period of project implementation. It is important to stress from the onset that, based on the lessons learnt as identified above, and also taking into account the conflict context in Afghanistan, the evaluation strongly recommends that the project be given a no-cost extension in order to allow for the completion of activities and realise some value from the investment of funds already committed through the project.

The key findings of the evaluation are summarised below.

6.1.1. The JP is well aligned to the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and is also very relevant to achieving most of the MDGs in Afghanistan, in particular given the close dependence of the poor on the natural environment for their livelihood. However, while rapid urbanisation is becoming a growing phenomenon in Afghanistan, the JP does not address issues of environment and natural resources management in urban areas.

6.1.2. Project governance and management structures were established as per the project design. However, the evaluation noted that the project experienced considerable challenges, particularly in relation to differences in budgeting and planning cycles of participating UN agencies; and limited coordination both among UN agencies on their own, and between the UN and government counterparts, especially at local levels.

6.1.3. The fund management arrangements based on the “pass-through” modality tended to cause undue delays in transfers from the MDG-F Secretariat to UN agencies. This adversely affected project implementation and timely delivery of results, particularly during the first months of the project.

6.1.4. The project was adversely affected by delays in recruitment of both international and national staff, which also contributed to the slow progress in project completion and realisation of expected results.

6.1.5. The evaluation concluded that the strategy for environment mainstreaming adopted for Outcome 1 was not necessarily the most effective, given that the national and sub-national policy and strategy documents include environment mainstreaming as a crosscutting issue. A more effective strategy for the project would most probably have focused on providing targeted

assistance to build implementation capacity of government counterparts, and strengthening advocacy, communication and raising awareness at all levels. The evaluation also found that the strategy for capacity development was mainly based on workshops and seminars, which does not address the strategic institutional capacity gap in government and line ministries.

6.1.6. Overall, the evaluation found that the project was on track to achieve its expected results, particularly at the output level. Some concerns were raised however, with regards to realisation of the outcome indicators, but while this was mainly due to the ineffectiveness of the strategies, it was also partly due to lack of specific targets and baselines for tracking progress.

6.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the request for no-cost extension, the following recommendations are made with a view to ensuring successful finalisation of the project.

6.2.1. Recommendation One: Review Outcome 1 Outputs.

The outputs and indicators for Outcome 1 should be reviewed taking into account that Afghanistan already has a national environment policy and that by and large, mainstreaming of environment is already identified in key government policy and strategy documents as a crosscutting issue. The review should also consider allocating some resources to target activities for addressing environment issues in urban areas, with specific focus on water resources, sanitation and pollution.

6.2.2. Recommendation Two: Review Project Strategies.

The project should review its strategies for achieving outcomes. More specifically, the review should focus on strategies that help to increase social awareness of sustainable environment, and building strategic capacity of government counterparts in a manner that strengthens national ownership and sustainability of results. This could include sponsorship for qualification-based training for line ministry staff, as well as train the trainer courses. In addition, the review should seek to align the project strategy with the UNCT's Integrated Strategic Framework that is being developed.


6.2.3. Recommendation Three: Review Fund Management Modality.

Collaborating UN agencies should review and consider the pros and cons of a "pass through" funding modality against a "pooled" funding modality with a view to adopting the modality that provides for more flexibility and effective budget management. This should be done in the context of moving towards actual joint work planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring of activities, as opposed to consolidation of individual work plans.

6.2.4. Recommendation Four: Review Community-based Intervention Strategies

The project should review its strategies for achieving Outcome 2 and approaches for mainstreaming environment at local levels. The project focus should be reoriented towards the following:

- 👉 Developing a structured advocacy and communication strategy for awareness-raising.
- 👉 Target local-level capacity building, including developing Community-based Natural Resources Management Plans.

 Developing technology transfer initiatives, such as introduction of irrigation techniques.

ANNEXES

DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

ANNEX ONE

1. Government of Afghanistan (2008); Afghanistan National Development Strategy 201-2013.
2. MDG-F (2009); Annual Programme Narrative Progress Report, 1 Jan -31 Dec 2009.
3. MDG-F (2006); SAISEM Project Document.
4. MRRD (2010); Strategic Intent, 2010-2014.
5. UN (2010); United Nations Development Assistance Framework, 2010-2013.
6. UNDP (2010); First Quarter SAISEM project Monitoring Report, 2010.
7. UNDP (2010); Second Quarter SAISEM project Monitoring Report, 2010.
8. UNDP (2009); Country programme Document, 2010-2013.
9. UNDP (2009) Country programme Action Plan, 2010-2013.
10. UNEP (2009); UNEP in Afghanistan: Laying the Foundations for Sustainable Development.
11. UNEP; A Post-Conflict Plan for People and their Natural Resources.
12. SAISEM (2010); Draft National Guidelines for Environmental Mainstreaming.
13. SAISEM (2010); Joint Project Monitoring Report: 1 Jan -30 Jun 2010.
14. SAISEM (2010); Joint Project Monitoring Report: 1 Jul -31 Dec 2010.
15. SAISEM (2009); Minutes of First PIT Meeting: 13 May 2009.
16. SAISEM (2009); Minutes of First PMC Meeting: 2 Jul 2009.

INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED

ANNEX TWO

1. Abdul Wali Modaqiq	Assistant Programme Manager	UNEP
2. Ambrose Mugisha	Environment Specialist	UNDP
3. David Joy	Head of Office	UN RCO
4. Emilio Perez de Agreda	Deputy Head of Mission	Spanish Embassy
5. Ernie Wijangco	CBNRM Expert	UNEP
6. Fazal Rahman Tasal	Environment Specialist	UNDP
7. Ghulan Ali Yaqoobi	Programme Coordinator	NEPA
8. Hashim Barikzai	Director-General, NRM	MoAIL
9. Jan Jilles Vander Hoeven	Senior Deputy Country Director	UNDP
10. Marziya Baydulloeva	Humanitarian Affairs Officer	UN RCO
11. Mohammad Rafi	Senior Programme Associate	UNDP
12. Mohammad Yaqub Naqshbandzaha	Coordination Officer	UN RCO
13. Najia Kharoti	Advisor to Minister	MRRD
14. Najibullah Yamin	Technical Deputy Director	NEPA
15. Salah Hakim	Chief Technical Advisor	FAO
16. Shaaib Timory	Programme Officer	UNDP
17. Shamim Ur Rehman	Environment Specialist	UNDP
18. Stephan Fuller	Consultant	UNDP
19. Tekeste Ghebray Tekie	Resident Representative	FAO



MINUTES OF TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP MEETING

15 DECEMBER 2010 (Extracts)

ANNEX THREE

Following endorsement of the request for no-cost extension by the PMC at its meeting on 12 December 2010, the TWG met on 15 December to develop a joint work plan for the proposed activities that will be undertaken in the extension period, if and when it is approved by the MDG-F.

The proposed work plan consists of two focus areas as shown below:

Focus Area	Planned activities
Environment mainstreaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish PEACs in the remaining 15 provinces Capacity building for all PEACs (including providing equipment) Establish and operationalise the NEAC (including at support for at least one meeting of the NEAC in each province) Continue environmental mainstreaming in sector Ministries through the CEC and NTF mechanisms Establish District Environmental Advisory Councils in the 18 districts of Kabul.
Social awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sponsor media messages on the major Radio and TV networks to promote environmental awareness and protection. Training of school teachers on environmental mainstreaming to engage young children and youth in environmental protection. Specialised technical skills training, such as water quality training for NEPA and other government staff. Provide support to NEPA in public awareness and environmental mainstreaming at community level. Provide support to NEPA and MRRD to organise environment-related events such as environment conferences and workshops Support national, regional and international celebrations such as World Environment Day, World Bio-diversity day, etc.