

**Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees,
to support
Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration,
and Assistance to Host Countries**



**A collaborative approach towards
Sustainable Reintegration of
Afghan Returnees in
Afghanistan**

September 2013

Background

Between Jan 2013 and Jul 2013, 28,792 Afghan refugees returned to Afghanistan with the assistance of UNHCR. Current rates of return indicate an overall decrease of 40% compared to the same period during 2012. Return from Pakistan has decreased by 40%, and return from Iran has decreased by 37%. 2012 saw a total return of 94,556 persons. 2011 was lower, with 67,964 persons returning. In 2013, the majority of Afghans returned to Kabul (6,385 persons), Nangarhar (4,587 persons), and Kunduz (2802 persons).

Year	Returns from Pakistan	Returns from Iran	Returns from Other countries	Total
2002	1,565,066	259,792	9,679	1,834,537
2003	332,183	142,280	1,176	475,639
2004	383,321	377,151	650	761,122
2005	449,391	63,559	1,140	514,090
2006	133,338	5,264	1,202	139,804
2007	357,635	7,054	721	365,410
2008	274,200	3,656	628	278,484
2009	48,320	6,028	204	54,552
2010	104,331	8,487	150	112,968
2011	48,998	18,851	113	67,962
2012	79,435	15,035	86	94,556
2013	22,980	5,764	48	28,792
Total	3,799,198	912,921	15,797	4,727,916

In order to make return more sustainable, the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR), together with UNHCR, has advocated for the inclusion of refugee returnees into the Afghan National Development Programs, in particular the National Priority Programs (NPPs). In 2012, 12 MOUs were concluded with line ministries so that the Solutions Strategy priorities would be included in the NPPs. We jointly continue to identify areas where national development programs overlap with areas of high return, analyzing the gaps, and engaging development partners. Engaging development partners has contributed towards returnees having access to essential social services, improved and diversified livelihood opportunities, enhanced food security, and greater social protection. Integrating returnees into nationally-owned development programs is also expected to strengthen the capacity of national authorities to respond to the needs of returnees and their communities.

The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) administers 5 National Priority Programs, with coverage across all 34 provinces of Afghanistan:

- **NSP:** National Solidarity Programme (World Bank)
- **NABDP:** National Area-Base Development Programme (UNDP)
- **NRAP:** National Rural Access Programme
- **Ru-WatSIP:** Rural Water Supply, Sanitation & Irrigation Programme (UNDP)
- **AREDP:** Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Programme (World Bank)

Projects are developed in the sectors of agriculture, health, education, irrigation, power, transport, water supply and sanitation. As of September 2013:

- 19 of 20 districts have completed NPP projects - (total cost: approximately US\$7.4 million)
- All 20 districts have at least 1 ongoing project - (total budget: approx. US\$33.4 million)
- 17 districts have new projects planned - (total budget: US\$24.6 million)
- Nangarhar Province has the majority of development work (Khogyani district with 309 ongoing projects)
- Mehtarlam (Laghman) has the most completed (79) and the 3rd most ongoing (143)

The **NSP** is the primary vehicle used to promote rural development in Afghanistan. It was launched in 2003 by MRRD with the aim of developing and rehabilitating rural villages in Afghanistan. It also intends to empower rural communities and promote their participation in local development. Local community themselves choose which programs are to be implemented through the NSP. Each community voluntarily and democratically elects their own council, known as a Community Development Council, which is then able to engage in important local decisions and decide how to distribute resources. To date, the NSP has successfully established more than 31,000 Community Development Councils in 34 provinces of Afghanistan. As at 31 July, the NSP have completed approximately 54,000 programs across Afghanistan. Due to its wide coverage, the NSP is a national development program with significant potential to reach returnee communities across Afghanistan,

and contribute to **sustainable return**. One quarter of Afghanistan's current population is returnees/former refugees.

Within the NSP's strategic planning, one of the key criteria for selection of the initial three districts per province was the scale of expected return in each district. Although the NSP's central purpose is to provide development assistance to entire communities it nevertheless aims to strengthen the local economy of the communities where refugees are returning.

UNHCR is actively engaging Governors and Mayors, relevant Government Departments such as the Ministry of Urban Development, and the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled, as well as UN agencies such as UN Habitat in order to address issues of urbanization.

Inter-agency engagement

UN agencies are also trying to engage more holistically with refugee returnees.

In February 2013, a Letter of Intent was signed with the UN Resident Coordinator, the International Labor Organization, and UNDP, in order to take a **broader, development approach to refugee return**. UNDP and UNHCR have agreed to map out their programs throughout the country to look into areas of overlap, and gaps. UNHCR has been actively involved in the Common Country Assessment (CCA) and preparatory discussions leading to the 2015-2019 UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) process with a view to putting returnees on the map for the UN's development priorities. UNHCR is exploring opportunities with the World Bank to cooperate, in particular through the World Bank's Rural Development Program, with a view to linking return solutions to agricultural development. The organization has also entered into consultations with the Asian Development Bank so that the needs of refugee returnees could be reflected in the workplan of the Bank in Afghanistan.

Impact on returned refugees

Sarasyab Shekhani village, Samangan province

A farmer returned to his childhood home. There was no access to electricity. NABDP installed the Micro Hydro Power plant in the village:



After this project:

The family was able to stop using expensive kerosene oil. The children are now attending school regularly because they do not need to collect wood, and can spend their time at night studying. His wife is a skilled tailor and now uses the available electricity at night to continue her tailoring, which has increased her income.

Integrating development and returned refugees Qarashikhi Village, Khoja Sabz Posh District, Faryab



Electricity for the school is paid jointly by the Department of Electricity and the community. The NSP programme provided road graveling, construction of culverts, drilling of water points, purchasing of a transformer, electricity power line, carpet weaving, and training in tailoring. The girls' school building was funded by UNICEF and the boys' school by a Turkish company. UNHCR constructed the schools' boundary wall and the entrance doors.

NSP constructed a community center building, and drilled 7 semi-deep wells, completed in 2008. Then, in 2010, 170 refugee returnee families settled there. MoRR provided 104 land plots at 300 sqm each for the families. UNHCR supported projects including shelter, school, community center, road gravelling, livelihoods, and solar electricity. Now the second round of NSP program has started in different districts of Balkh province and this returnee community is being encouraged to enroll their Community Development Council in the second round of NSP funding.



Gaps and Challenges

- MoRR and UNHCR are looking at how to strengthen the positions of refugee returnees in the NSP Community Development Councils, so that returnee views can be incorporated more effectively.
- Development projects designed to benefit a set number of persons (eg. schools, clinics, water) can struggle to meet the needs of an influx of returnees.
- Challenges in urban areas include increasing population density, illegal land occupation, poor economy, extreme traffic rush, lack of water drainage, contamination of underground water and increasing urban migrations.
- Decline in the security situation is influencing patterns of return.
- In situations where national development programs cannot cover all the needs of returnees, UN agencies and other development actors can support the Government to fill the gap.
- UNHCR is actively sharing its data not only with MoRR, but also with other relevant ministries such as MRRD, and UN development agencies, to encourage more effective coverage of development programs.