GUARDIANS

New Zarghoon Road,
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AFGHANISTAN

BACKGROUND

In the year 1979 history once again repeated itself over Afghanistan. After 60 years of peace and primary development of rural and urban areas, Afghanistan in the intersection of two super powers became nothing but a battle field.

At the end of the year 1979 Russian’s army invaded Afghanistan. The Russian invasion of Afghanistan continued till late 1989. After 10 years of severe fighting Russian troops were defeated in Afghanistan. In late 1989 after a big defeat and forced by International Community, Russian’s army withdrew from Afghanistan.

The withdrawal of Russian’s army from Afghanistan was not a solution to bringing peace into the war torn country. The infrastructure and social and economical conditions of the country, both in urban and rural Afghanistan, had collapsed. The central government lead by Dr. Najeeb could not hold firm against an intensified internal fighting for power within Afghanistan. After almost three years of vicious war and internal fighting, in April of 1992, the central government collapsed.

Since 1992 the war and internal fighting and ethnic conflicts have even more intensified. The United Nations efforts for peace in Afghanistan have failed and it seems that it will be years passed, before there is a strong central and broad based government in Afghanistan.

The people of Afghanistan crave for peace, but they can only have war.

The people of Afghanistan have a need for food, but they can only starve and die of hunger.

The people of Afghanistan have a necessity for homes, but they have lost and are loosing their homes by severe bombing and rocket attacks.

The people of Afghanistan have an urge for good health and health facilities, but they can only face male- nutrition and many other disabilities.

The people of Afghanistan hope for humanity, but they can only have prejudices and a machine gun culture.

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While the other nations will enter the 21st century with an emphasis on peace, human rights and developmental ideas, Afghanistan remains a country torn by war and internal conflicts.

Afghanistan crumbs a country in crisis, with its infrastructure and social capital mostly destroyed and its regulation system ripped. Nineteen years of war have complicated the countries social and economic status. The national economy has been crippled through loss of export earnings, loss of jobs, lack of national economic management and revenue generation capacities. In 1996, UNDP’s Human Development Report placed Afghanistan 169th out of 175 countries in the Human Development Index.

At least three quarters of the population live in the rural areas, and about 85 percent of all Afghans depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Those who live by existence farming have been particularly affected by the years of conflict. Many people have lost their land and livelihoods through dislocation, erosion, mines and destruction of irrigation structure.

Like the rural areas, the urban areas have seen widespread destruction of their physical, economical, and social infrastructures. This has severely disturbed the delivery of basic services, and as well as eroded the capacity of urban residents to cope with the war. It has also had devastating effects on municipal administration. Urban areas have become the final destination for many internally displaced persons and returnees. With a population growth estimated at 2% per annum, the limited agriculture land has come under intense pressure. Together with a lack of alternative employment in rural areas, this has contributed to rural-urban migration, further increasing pressure on already strained urban infrastructures and services.

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The following summarizes some of the most critical aspects in the social, economic, institutional and environmental context of Afghanistan:

**GOVERNANCE AND SOCIAL STABILITY:**

* Disruption and isolation of civil society and its traditional structures which used to form the basis of community resilience, self-reliance, and self-help.

**FOOD SECURITY/NUTRITION:**

* Food production per capita still substantially lower than in 1979.
* Livestock production severest affected by conflict and disease.
* Chronic malnutrition and dietary imbalances in most parts of Afghanistan.

**EDUCATION:**

* Only 13 percent of adult females and 44 percent of adult males are literate.
* From 3,500 primary schools in 1978, to 600 in 1990.
* Hardly any girls and only 27 percent of boys attend primary school today.

**REFUGEE RETURN:**

* Since 1978, up to 6 million Afghans have fled from armed conflict, finding refuge in neighboring countries; only half of them have since returned.
* Another 2 million people are internally displaced.

**DEMINING:**

* Ten million unexploded mines.
* An estimated 10 people per day killed or maimed by land mines.

**HEALTH:**

* One of the highest rates of infant mortality (165 per 1,000 live births), child mortality (257 per 1000) and maternal mortality (640 per 100,000 live births) in the world.
* 3 to 4 percent of all Afghans are disabled.

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SHELTER:

* Over 1 million houses need rebuilding.
* Only about 20 percent of the population live in urban areas but the rate of urbanization in Afghanistan is estimated to be among the highest in Asia, putting enormous pressure on the weak urban environments.

INCOME GENERATION:

* Production mostly subsistence, with many living below the poverty level.
* Employment opportunities extremely limited.

WATER AND SANITATION:

* Safe water available to only 5 percent of the rural and 40 percent of the urban populations,
* Poor sanitation, the major underlying cause of morbidity and mortality in children.

ENERGY:

* Significant natural energy resources exist but energy production, distribution and consumption are grossly deficient, and with severe adverse effects on the environment.

COMMUNITY SERVICES:

* Loss of cultural and recreational facilities and damaged cultural heritage, major factors which inhibit social integration and recovery of the social fabrics.

NATURAL RESOURCES:

* High rates of deforestation, desertification, and loss of biological diversity.

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Even before the war, Afghanistan was one of the world’s least developed countries. More than 18 years of conflict have shattered the country. An estimated 19 million people are struggling to survive in a traditional, rural areas, and 85 percent are estimated to depend on agriculture for their livelihood.

While the level of destruction differs between provinces, districts and even neighboring localities the effects of the war are visible everywhere. The destruction or deterioration of the most critical social and productive assets of rural communities has exacerbated poverty, deprivation and suffering across the board.

Afghanistan still faces numerous challenges along the road to peace. The most widespread problems currently facing Afghanistan are:

DESTRUCTION OF LOCAL INSTITUTIONS OF GOVERNANCE

Afghanistan faces massive development challenges as well as needs for rehabilitation after many years of war. What makes the reality of the Afghan situation particularly, complex and difficult, however, is that the key parameter of the situation is the fragmentation of the country and the collapse of particularly all national - and local - institutions of the governance. And when local entities of governance exist they are, even in the best case, hardly “Institutions”, since their legitimacy is often derived from force rather than from any kind of social contract with civil society.

Even when traditional local governance structures exist, e.g. civilian based councils or “Shuras”, their capacity of function and be effective has been severely eroded by the long conflict and fragmentation that characterizes the overall social, political and economic environment of the country. This situation, compounded with frequent displacement of large numbers of people fleeing areas of conflict, has broken the traditional trust between communities and their local entities of governance.

Good governance and peace in Afghanistan can only be achieved if people have security in their daily lives. In a country that has been devastated by conflict and war, the effort of reconstructing peace and good governance must address security issues at the very household and community level, both in the rural and urban areas.

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The agriculture sector has been seriously affected by the conflict, particularly subsistence farming. Traditional irrigation systems, on which agriculture depends in most of the country, have generally fallen into disuse or despair due to war destruction and neglect associated with population dislocation. As a consequence, large tracts of arable land remain either uncultivated or their production capacity is greatly reduced.

The severe damage of rural access roads due to both the war and general neglect has resulted in difficult, and often only seasonal, access to markets and increased costs in getting agriculture products to markets.

COLLAPSE OF SOCIAL SERVICE INFRASTRUCTURE

Even before the war social services were poor and unevenly distributed, with facilities concentrated in or near urban areas. Formal educational facilities had the capacity to serve only a minority of the population, and were also mainly concentrated in the urban areas.

Whatever social service infrastructure existed in rural Afghanistan has virtually collapsed. Most schools have been damaged, destroyed or abandoned. Existing figures show that primary school enrollment dropped by 84 percent and the number of primary school teachers declined by 75 percent nationwide between 1978 and 1993; the figures for rural areas are estimated to be much higher.

More than 60 percent of rural health centers have been destroyed, and the ones remaining are barely functional. The figures for infant and maternal mortality, life expectancy, literacy, and access to safe water (as low as 5% in rural areas), are among the worst in the world. Many shallow wells and piped water systems have been neglected and fallen in despair, and are no longer functioning. Consequently rural people resort to using open canal water and suffer associated health hazards. Very little in the way of sanitation facilities or basic health education exists in rural areas.

The health and education administration has been decimated and what is left is in a state of paralysis, unable to maintain whatever facilities remain, or to provide adequate salaries to their employees. Assistance from the international community has been primarily of a relief nature and tends to be concentrated, with a few exceptions, in urban centers and surrounding areas.

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COLLAPSE OF SUPPORT SERVICES

traditional government support services (extension, banking and credit, marketing and communication) have completely collapsed, and communities have thus been deprived of the essential inputs and services with which they can develop their self help activities.

POVERTY

Poverty impact negatively on everyone in Afghanistan, but some socio-economic groups feel the impact more strongly, in particular the poorest of the rural and urban populations and the most marginalized: women, the landless, the displaced and the disabled.

FOOD INSECURITY

The widespread problem of food insecurity in Afghanistan is effecting farmers at different levels, particularly the poor, small-holder and subsistence farmer.

MIGRATION, URBAN GROWTH, AND LACK OF BASIC INFRASTRUCTURES

Migration of refugees and internally displaced persons will continue to upset the social and economic infrastructures, in both urban and rural areas.

ENVIRONMENT DEVASTATION

The years of conflict has devastated the forests, forms and livestock and natural resources within Afghanistan. Environmental devastation and exploitation of natural resources, cultural heritage have reached its peak level.

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WOMEN

In many areas of Afghanistan, both before war and now, women have played an integral role in the productive aspects of rural and urban life, in addition to their roles as wives and mothers. In rural areas, women’s work has included responsibility for livestock’s, for horticulture, and for working on agriculture land. They have also been involved in the production of traditional crafts that generate income for their families. The ongoing conflict has increased the number of widows throughout the country, and recent development have further increased the level of female seclusion in many areas.

YOUTH

The non-existence of government in Afghanistan and internal conflicts have deprived the youth of their education rights, health facilities and job opportunities. Their conditions of living is becoming increasingly difficult and challenging. Child labor is becoming a dominating factor and part of youth’s daily routines and daily lives.

The Afghan youth have been seriously neglected of their rights. If this negligence further continues, then it will be the loss one generation in almost two decades of conflicts.

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Afghans fought the Russians for almost one decade. Presently, as well as intensified internal conflicts, the Afghan land is fighting Afghans and it is estimated that this (Afghan land fighting Afghans) will continue for another five decades.

WHY?

* Ten million unexploded mines in Afghanistan.
* An estimated 10 people per day killed or maimed by land mines

Disability affects a high percentage of the population in Afghanistan. Exact figures cannot be given due to a lack of reliable and up-to-date statistics, but the direct effects of war, including the heavy mining of agriculture lands, as well as the indirect consequences such as insufficient basic health care and lack of immunization, are taking their toll. Services and programs to answer to the medical, educational, and social needs of children, women and men with disability are woefully insufficient, and the human resources to staff such programs are totally inadequate.

Although reliable statistics for the whole country are lacking it is likely, based on the evidence of local surveys, that between 3% - 4% of the population of Afghanistan is disabled to the point of needing specialized services. The presence of a disabled person in a family tends to have a disabling effect on the whole family, so the number of people affected by disability is probably as high as 10% of the population.

War has disabled thousands, creating amputees, blindness, and paralysis. The lack of preventive services, including vaccination programs, has resulted in a high incidence of disabling diseases such as polio and tuberculosis in many areas. A high rate of birth complications (especially in undernourished women) with inadequate medical care gives rise to disability such as cerebral palsy.

While people disabled by the war form highly visible proportion of the disabled population, an equally significant but much less visible group are those with sensory and multiple impairments. Many disabled people are hidden from view, especially disabled women and children, trapped by their cultured and lack of services within very narrow confines at home. Probably about 60% of disabilities are mobility-related (polio and amputations), while sensory, mental and multiple impairments account for the rest.

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The distribution of impairments is related to a variety of factors, including where there is or has recently been fighting, the presence of mine fields, polio immunization coverage and (in the case of leprosy) poor local environment conditions and poverty. There are also large numbers of psychologically traumatized people in Afghanistan having some type of disability (for example, loss of speech, strange behavior, etc.)

**DISABILITY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION**

In addition to the physical constraints imposed on their situation by their specific impairments, disabled people are also affected by the consequences of their disability-induced poverty and the lack of equal opportunities that affects them, thus doubling the impact of their constraints. Exclusion from a range of sustainable livelihood opportunities; from social sector services (education in particular); and often from community life itself, are just some of the characteristics of the generalized exclusion.

At the same time, the specific difficulties imposed by disabilities impact not only the disabled themselves but also their families, many - not most - of whom belong to the poorest and most disadvantaged people in the first place. Thus, the specific constraints faced by the disabled and the larger constraints faced by them, their families and other members of disadvantaged and marginalized groups are in many ways linked intrinsically.

**OTHER FORMS OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION**

The disruption of social life and community cohesion caused by the war was resulted in new forms of social exclusion which will need to be addressed as a matter of urgency, in order to enable the rebuilding of community cohesion and local governance required as a basis for sustainable development and peace.

Categories of vulnerability and marginalization in particular include widows and orphans. Recent policies introduced in parts of the country marginalize women and girls. The loss of husbands and fathers in the war has seriously inhibited the ability of many women and children to survive.

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CREATION OF GUARDIANS

Considering the needs of the people of Afghanistan and the war torn country, and considering the devastation that arose from 19 years of conflicts and internal fighting in Afghanistan and most importantly to assist the impaired and disable people of Afghanistan by providing them with comprehensive rehabilitation and socio economic services was the main reason behind creating and establishment of Guardians.

The overall goal is to provide equalization of opportunities, integration and promotion and protection of rights of the men, women and children with disability leading to their full participation in education, economic, social and cultural activities in their communities.

Guardians aim is also to reach the disable people of Afghanistan without any religious, national, and political prejudice. To minimize further negligence of this vulnerable group of the society (disabled) Guardians has and will apply a community based approach to reach the disabled.

The long years of conflict have deeply affected every aspect of life in the country. The problem facing rural and urban Afghanistan are many, complex and fundamentally linked , and thus need to be addressed in an integrated, holistic manner.

A community based approach where, even in the absence of enabling policies from the local authorities, communities pursue the integration of these groups and betterment of their living and earning conditions, appear in the current context the most practical and though difficult, the most promising approach to follow.

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