Dear Mr. Witschi-Cestari

GOVERNANCE INITIATIVES FOR AFGHANISTAN
AFG/96/009
Draft Report of the Preliminary Mission

Further to our completing the preliminary mission, we take pleasure in submitting the draft report for the consideration of UNDP. As you may be aware there was a lot of interest generated by this mission, and many UN agencies and other partners in development who met us in the course of the mission, expressed interest in seeing this report and contributing further as part of the consultation process. We look forward to receiving UNDP’s comments and those from all interested parties, prior to finalising the report and the draft project document in a few weeks time.

Thanking you for your personal interest and support.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

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Islamabad
23 March 1997
UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Governance Initiatives for Afghanistan
AFG/96/009

Report
of the
Preliminary Mission
7 - 23 March 1997

*** DRAFT REPORT ***

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Islamabad, Pakistan
23 March 1997
This is the first draft of the report of the Preliminary Mission concerning governance initiatives in Afghanistan. It has been prepared by the two UNDP consultants at the end of their field trips, and has been submitted to UNDP (Afghanistan) in Islamabad on 23 March 1997, for circulation within UNDP, and to all UN agencies, other international agencies, organizations and donors active in Afghanistan. The consultants welcome comments from all sources, particularly those who gave time to meet them during the course of the mission. The final report is expected to be available after mid-April, 1997, subject to receipt of comments.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to Mr. Alfredo Witschi-Cestari, Resident Representative of UNDP (Afghanistan), to his predecessor, Mr. Erling Dessau, and to all UNDP staff for their advice and support throughout the mission. A particular thank you is extended to Mr. Umer Daudzai (UNDP), Ms. Angela Kearney (UNOCHA), Mr. Terry Pitzner (UNHCR), Ms. Samantha Reynolds and Mr. Gregory Wilson (UNCHS) for the considerable efforts in organizing the many meetings and logistics which go into a mission such as this. Finally to all those who were kind enough to give time to see us and to offer their views, please accept our grateful appreciation.
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A.1 Terms of Reference
*** THE REPORT ***
1. INTRODUCTION: THE NATURE OF THE ENQUIRY

1.1 BACKGROUND: THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan has endured war for the last 18 years, and the outcome of the current phase of conflict is not clear. As preparations for future fighting continue, forces in the north and east of the country expect to encounter more battles with Taliban forces, centered in the south. All sides appear to be supported by a variety of external actors. No military powers have complete control over their military domains. Intermittent outbreaks of violence continue, and the loyalties and interests of local commanders are not predictable.

The long conflict has resulted in the fragmentation of Afghan society, the collapse of economic activity, the relative absence of civil representation in decision-making processes, and the reduction of public administration, if not virtual absence in some areas. Inflation is rampant and wages cannot match it. (For example, current civil service salaries, when they are paid, which is sadly infrequently, are of the order of USD 4.00 per month).

These conditions lead to many intractable challenges:

Aside from the provision of basic relief and rehabilitation assistance, is there anything that the UN system and the international donor community can do to foster any form of governance—let alone good governance? Is it possible to undertake governance initiatives without condoning the particular political views of those who have thus far prevailed in the war? Is this, indeed, the appropriate time to undertake any of the initiatives traditionally available to UNDP and the UN system?

1.2 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The initial Terms of Reference for this mission are attached as Annex (A.1). The two consultants revised these with UNDP when they arrived in Islamabad in early March 1997. It was agreed that as this was a preliminary mission, what was really needed was guidance on how to approach these challenges. It was mutually agreed that the output of the mission would have four components: (a) an outline of priority issues in governance, (b) an initial structure for understanding these and related issues, (c) guidelines for future projects incorporating some element of support for governance, and if possible (d) a plan of action for UNDP and other interested parties to consider.

The consultants (hereinafter called the Mission) were asked to assess the prospects for initiatives that can incorporate governance into UN programming, without necessarily recommending specific projects. The nature of the inquiry was not "if" governance could be programmed but how to do it. This, of necessity, implies some discussion of the conditional
term "if". The assessment below is therefore based on an analysis of the opportunities available through current programming, rather than an analysis of Afghanistan per se.

### 1.3 METHODOLOGY

The Mission reviewed a variety of documents and held a large number of interviews, informal discussions and formal meetings with Afghans and international personnel, both in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The document review was confined to key publications, strategy papers, project documents, conference proceedings and memos dealing with Afghanistan and/or rebuilding war-torn societies. This review was by no means exhaustive. The views of Afghan politicians, academics, intellectuals, professionals and community representatives, either in-country or in Pakistan were solicited, again without being comprehensive or necessarily representative of the society as a whole. The views and experiences of UN agencies active in Afghanistan were also solicited, as were those of a number of donors, non-governmental organizations, also international humanitarian and funding institutions.

Although the following report discusses the potential of current programmes and prospects, the Mission did not assess the quality, breadth or depth of current projects. Mission members met with individuals associated with these projects, and with organizations affiliated with them, but did not undertake even a preliminary analysis of their activities. Similarly, the Mission did not undertake a comprehensive analysis of alternative concepts of governance, or measure them against conditions in Afghanistan today. As this is a preliminary exercise, the Mission saw its role as soliciting a variety of views, and attempting to put a programming framework around them.

Both members of the mission visited Mazar-i-Sharif, and one member visited Kabul. Bad weather prevented the UN flight from landing at Jalalabad on the scheduled day. A visit to Peshawar was also undertaken. All other matters were dealt with in Islamabad.
2. MISSION INVESTIGATIONS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The starting point for the investigation was to discern which forms of governance already work in Afghanistan today, and under what conditions. Appointments were scheduled with several Afghan politicians, academics, intellectuals, professionals and community representatives. Although their opinions are not representative of the wider Afghan body politic and society, nonetheless demonstrated the wide range of opinion that characterises Afghan political society today. The Mission did not meet Afghan NGOs. Hopefully, this omission will be corrected by others, at a later stage.

The views of UN agencies active in Afghanistan were solicited, as were those of donors, non-governmental organizations, and also international humanitarian and funding institutions. They gave a clear picture, based on their in-country experiences, of what governance might mean in terms of Afghanistan, what in their opinion were the most likely points of entry, if any, for the UN system and the broader international assistance community to foster governance, and possible keys to success for future governance initiatives under present or anticipated conditions. The Mission explained that this current exercise was but the first in the process of exploration, and further opportunities should be presenting themselves for continuing the discussions. All were invited to let UNDP have further contributions as and when available.

Approximately 45 meetings and discussions were held over the course of the exercise. It is not possible or practical to set out all individual contributions made at every meeting. However, so as to convey the essence of the opinions being expressed at these meetings, the Mission has extracted key points under five general categories. The views of Afghan political figures, intellectuals and groups based in Pakistan were found to be similar to those expressed under other headings, and have not been repeated.

There were a number of points on which there appeared to be general agreement across all of the Mission's interviews. Without doubt the most important point, and one which permeated all discussions, was the need to engage the authorities on their policies regarding human rights and gender equality. The other general points of agreement were as follows:

- Everyone is concerned with the need for peace, although its precise nature remains undefined. The goals of the UN political mission and of the UN agencies appear to most interlocutors, however, to be contradictory.

- Notwithstanding the intentions of the UN and international aid community, local perceptions regarding assistance were often very critical.

- Respecting and enhancing the role of Afghan women was of paramount concern to all, but determining the most effective way of dealing with the current obstacles was by no means clear to most interviewees.
Poverty is considered by almost everyone to be the root cause of all of Afghanistan's problems, pre- and post-war.

2.2 AFGHAN AUTHORITIES

The Mission interviewed Taliban authorities in Kabul and Northern Region officials in Mazar-i-Sharif. Statements of a general political nature which are already in the public domain are not repeated here.

(A) In the view of Taliban representatives who met the Mission, the international community needs to understand two basic points:

- The move to impose sharia law throughout the country is irreversible and not open for discussion. This includes the separation of men and women. There are nonetheless varying views within the movement on other issues and, whereas the pre-occupation right now is with the military campaign, there is debate in policy formulation and implementation.

- International agencies, if they want to assist the government (sic), should stop criticising it and rather (a) get to know their counterpart ministries, and spend time at this, (b) earn the respect of their counterparts by displaying respect towards Taliban practices, and (c) over time, work towards securing the trust vital for meaningful dialogue and debate between any two parties.

(B) The views of the official representatives in the Northern Region who met the Mission, covered a wide range of issues:

- National unity is the aim of all Afghan movements; for this reason, they have deliberately withheld from establishing separate ministries based in the North. Nevertheless, public administration and public finances are in disarray, and are in need of international assistance now. For example, there is insufficient staff to undertake data collection and research into social and economic conditions, and in general there is a need for more expertise in both public and private sectors.

- People need income generation opportunities desperately at all levels, and without peace there will be a further "brain drain" of trained personnel.

- Working at the grass roots level is most important, as it is ordinary people who have suffered the most. Under current conditions in the North there is no reason why assistance for governance could not be up to and including, provincial level administration. As part of this, law-and-order issues should also be a matter for international support.
2.3 AFGHAN ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS AND PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Among the shared views from several interviews the Mission found:

- Internal problems can only be solved by Afghans, although the general feeling is that the UN could do more to stop external support for the protagonists in the conflict.

- There is a need to develop a policy/strategy for rehabilitation. For its part UN should coordinate all agencies, working throughout complete districts. Community-based projects are needed to look at a wide range of issues, and as such could become a means of introducing or enhancing governance at the local level.

- Universities have the will and the potential to participate in governance initiatives but need substantial assistance in many related areas. Universities could lead the debate on the new Afghanistan as "small candles of enlightenment". There are graduates being produced every year but the challenge is in finding them real jobs afterwards; similarly finding suitable employment and remuneration for returning Afghan professionals remains a continuing problem.

- People are concerned about the absence of a civilian police force and transparency in the law enforcement process. The authorities are taking notice of these concerns and inviting law associations to advise, but nothing concrete has emerged from these activities.

- Educated Afghans can see the dilemma facing the UN and the international assistance community regarding how to react to policies that contravene internationally-accepted human rights charters. Nevertheless, an opinion heard more than once was that the education of males should continue, and should not necessarily be used as a reason for withdrawing international assistance. It is quite possible that those holding a dissenting view at an all-male meeting felt that in front of a visiting mission, was not the place to voice opposition on such a sensitive subject. Female professors questioned separately expressed far more mixed opinions.

2.4 COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS IN AFGHANISTAN

It was encouraging to learn of dynamic organizations undertaking a wide variety of activities in their communities, some on a separate gender basis and often in mixed settings, and to observe them raising governance issues for the organizations:

- There is widespread concern over the lack of employment, for men and for women alike, and the prospect of further economic situation decline, including in the Northern Region.
There is a widely held perception that urban programmes have received more, and more valued, international assistance than those targeting rural communities. Rural areas do have special circumstances: approximately 80% of Afghanistan is rural, and their needs must be taken into account when studying problems and seeking solutions in any sector, including governance. As a general consideration, it was noted that the UN system can only move to respond when the target communities decide to move on issues themselves.

Women's organizations recommended that education and awareness programmes are needed for men in gender issues, if the potential for all members of the community is to be harnessed for rebuilding the country. It was also noted that there are already educated women in the professions but with no access to work at present.

2.5 UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES, OTHER INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES, DONORS AND FUNDING INSTITUTIONS

Over the course of the exercise, the Mission was able to meet a number of heads of UN agencies for Afghanistan. A selection of individual agencies' views include:

- Commanders have destroyed Afghan society. People are fed up with abuses by local commanders and their men. Commanders are judged by the amount of aid / money and support they bring to their communities, building additional pressures on international agencies and NGOs. Other areas of concern have to do with Afghanistan as a source of narcotics and terrorism, and any governance initiative which can lessen these concerns will receive very careful consideration from donors.

- Districts are too "distant" for communities to feel a sense of association or identity with them, as providers of public services. Some think that international aid has damaged traditions of self reliance and initiative in Afghan communities. Community building takes more time than allowed for in UN projects: a "hit-and-run" approach does not work. Governance initiatives, if they are to succeed, require time to assess and plan before taking action, and to start modestly with individual communities. Current community consultation and participation is often not the same as real engagement. Another concern is that a culture of dependency has set in and will prove difficult to discard. For their part, donors are likely to be skeptical of governance initiatives that adopt a top-down approach. The feeling is that success is more likely to come if initiatives concentrate on enhancing social processes, and on small scale community-related projects.

- Governance needs must be identified by communities, and cross-sectoral data collection and analysis are imperative in the first instance. Of necessity this will involve studying the problems of the people in the communities directly, seeking out the real/potential "nucleus of governance". The UN system must become a facilitator rather than a donor, with an integrated agency approach to communities.
and districts. In considering what issues to look at under governance at the community level, income generation, food security, revenue systems needed for maintaining public assets and suchlike will be of prime importance. Initiatives for capacity building for governance at the community level and above, will most likely need to include salary and material support.

All agencies are encountering difficulties with local authorities. The UN and the international assistance community could consider assistance with preparation and implementation of economic and social recovery plans, while demanding reciprocity on behalf of all Afghan people who are not able to speak out, in the form of fundamental concessions on human rights and gender equality. Any engagement in dialogue with authorities must be carefully handled, with an awareness that local counterpart negotiators will probably have multiple agendas.

Seeking out governance initiatives with a realistic chance of success in the fields of poverty alleviation and gender equality, is very important.

2.6 INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

The selection of individual views below are from a sample of eleven international non-governmental organizations, working in Afghanistan itself or with Afghan refugees in Pakistan:

- Taliban policies are not necessarily so rigidly imposed in rural areas under its control. There is pressure from communities on the Taliban to allow them their rights. International actors need to and indeed, can, negotiate locally. There are differences of opinion within the Taliban movement. One major difficulty is the constant changing of Taliban leaders in charge of communities and districts. Time and patience are needed to engage and educate the Taliban on issues of policy.

- A point for further study must be to determine what the real community structures are. At the same time there is a concern that NGOs are taking on the role of local government and being drawn, unwittingly or otherwise, into the political arena. One isolated view expressed by an NGO was the possibility of Taliban moving towards controlling international access to Afghan communities.

- The role of the UN system and the NGO community needs to be examined and coordinated. The involvement of women is vital for the success of community-focusing projects. There are windows of opportunity for undertaking governance initiatives, but it may be too early for support to go straight to the existing public administration.
2.(7) SUMMARY

To summarise: The Mission perceived a sharp contrast in informal assessments of the environment in which UN programmes operate. On the one hand, there is a widely held view that all presumptive authorities in Afghanistan hold strong and relatively uncompromising views, and have neither the interest nor the need to revise or refine their policies. On the other hand, many individuals in the international assistance community believe that these authorities themselves are speaking from a heterogeneous base, and therefore believe that opportunities for discourse will continue to change. It is in this presumed diversity that many believe lies the opportunity for dialogue and debate and the possibility for change, but only if constructive engagement, respect and trust are maintained.

Were the Mission to adopt the first viewpoint it would sharply restrict the ways it might be able to recommend entry points for supporting governance. Only time will tell whether this somewhat pessimistic diagnosis is accurate. The guarded optimism of the second viewpoint provides more practical possibilities for new programming, and prudence demands that it be tested against reality on the ground. The Mission has therefore, tried to consolidate both kinds of views in its deliberations, taking the first as a backdrop, but drawing its cues from the second.
3. GOVERNANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF AFGHANISTAN

3.1 BACKGROUND

Much of UNDP's governance work in other countries has supported the reform of government institutions, ranging from civil service training to work with government ministries. These traditional activities, however, presume the existence of a central government, the delimitation of central and state/provincial responsibilities, and nascent, if not fully developed, career paths for public servants. Charting governance programmes has been possible because it is possible to chart (or at least imagine) the future.

None of these conditions exist in Afghanistan today. At this time, the country is divided militarily, ideologically and administratively. Although several million refugees have returned, at least two million remain outside the country; hundreds of thousands of individuals are still displaced within the country; land mines still carpet large portions of the landscape. Most support systems are still not functioning: disease and malnutrition, unsafe and inadequate drinking water, and poor health care all contribute to high infant and maternal mortality. Despite high rates of urbanization, cities have not recovered from years of shelling and bombing. Local economies -- let alone the remnants of a national economy -- are still dictated by the exigencies of war, even where there is little active fighting.

The policies and practices of those who hold de facto power are determined in the first instance by a continuing -- if intermittent -- state of war, secondly by their respective ideologies, and only by a distant third, by local, district, provincial or national civilian needs. The major tasks of reconstituting the state -- from rebuilding transport and communications systems to rebuilding an educational system -- remain distant and, in many ways, inaccessible to most Afghan citizens.

The governance environment is therefore complex and often opaque. In northern Afghanistan, where General Abdul Rashid Dostum's Jumbash party holds sway, municipal and provincial authorities function, albeit with resources that pale in comparison to local needs. Even though government offices function, power remains in the hands of the ruling party and its network of commanders -- all of whom see their primary task as waging war against Taliban forces who now control two-thirds of the country. UN and NGO assistance programmes have been able to function consistently, although their forays into governance areas has been extremely limited. Ahmad Shah Masoud's forces still occupy the small but strategically vital area between the Dostum-led and Taliban-led forces, thus maintaining a three-pronged conflict.

Taliban forces now control the majority of the country; they took Kandahar two and a half years ago, Herat one and a half years ago, and the rest of their area some six months ago. In these regions, they have established paramountcy, taken over government functions (to varying degrees), and maintain control over roads and communications. Although they have become known primarily for their edicts concerning religious practices and the role of women in Afghan society, their influence is far broader and in some instances, certainly more practical, than general dictates would suggest. Government office function at all levels, often with staff
that has remained from prior governments, although the level of expertise, training and resource allocation and management varies considerably. Where central control lies -- whether in Kandahar, where their spiritual leader, Mullah Omar, retains a residence, or in Kabul, where some central ministries have been re-established, or in a more decentralized hierarchy of changing commanders and leaders -- is still difficult to assess. To date, international assistance has been maintained in Taliban areas by cautiously respecting some edicts and -- where there appears to be a conflict between Taliban ideas and the ideals enshrined in the UN Charter -- revising programmes. In some areas where Taliban is in presumptive control, local authorities have nonetheless followed their own counsel -- as in quietly continuing schooling for girls -- while in other areas, assistance programmes have been stopped because of Taliban strictures.

3.2 GUIDELINES

For all these reasons, as well as continually changing landscape of politics and protest, governance work in Afghanistan faces immense challenges. The Mission therefore, derived the following guidelines for thinking about governance initiatives:

1) **The governance context of Afghanistan today probably precludes traditional governance initiatives.**

In Afghanistan today, military victory is now presumed by many people to bring with it political control; however, when the Taliban first entered the country, the movement declared that its role would be temporary, leading to a later determination by Afghan citizens of their country's future. The protraction of military engagements, changing methods of securing loyalties, and evolving means for retaining control, however, have meant that Taliban power is often *de facto*, if not *de jure*. Afghan citizens have not been formally polled about their preferences for Afghanistan, although anecdotal evidence suggests widely varying opinions about both short-term and long-term prospects. Regardless of preferences, Taliban are being treated in much of the country as not just wielding power, but exercising authority.

In a sense, therefore, the people of Afghanistan are encountering authority without legitimacy, and authority without proper government. Governance initiatives, therefore, will require working with a concept of governance that can ignore or preclude formal government where, or when, formal government is lacking.

At the same time, assistance to Afghanistan has moved beyond traditional emergency relief. Across the country, rehabilitation has endeavoured to create foundations for the sustainability of communities. The conventional wisdom of development work dictates that a necessary condition for sustainability is community participation and community ownership in all aspects of rehabilitation and development. If good governance is a prerequisite for sustainability, then governance initiatives are a critical element in rebuilding Afghanistan.

2) **Flexibility is essential, in concept and in practice.**
In the past (and in other places), governance assistance has not only been limited to assisting the work of governments, but often has also been reserved almost exclusively for supporting public administration. Under prevailing conditions in Afghanistan, such programming is not only impossible in practice, but probably inappropriate in concept.

At the same time, flexibility continues to be the byword for programming, and for field operations. Where government departments -- most likely, at local levels -- are, or can be, integrated into project planning, this should not be discouraged. The point of entry, however, cannot be government per se, but governance: citizen to citizen, community to community, region to region relationships that build on mutual needs and carefully honed strengths.

Flexibility must permeate whole programmes in order for them to work. To the extent that community participation -- not simply addressing the needs of communities, but addressing needs that communities identify for themselves -- is a requirement for sustainable programming, flexibility is a logical outgrowth of planning. This pertains to project initiation -- who is involved in design and how -- to project implementation -- where, when and how projects are executed -- to project management. It means that personnel decisions -- ensuring that female professional staff are included in all hiring so that communities have access to all assistance workers -- ensure that such flexibility is maintained. In this way, flexibility is a prerequisite and a partial guarantor of sustainability.

As a result, the working concepts of governance embedded in future Afghanistan initiatives are derived from the particular conditions of the country. Working in areas controlled by one or another military groups is not precluded on the basis of ideology -- theirs, or assistance organizations -- but is determined instead by what citizens and localities believe is necessary and possible.

(3) Governance initiatives most logically flow from ongoing community-based programming.

Most assistance projects in Afghanistan today are described by their sponsors as being "community-based". In many instances, this depiction is accurate; in many others, however, the ideal is not necessarily matched by reality. Almost without exception, where true community-based projects function well, they tend almost automatically to include governance as part of their initiation, progress and results -- whether explicitly or implicitly. The reasons are simple: with participation comes discussion, debate and ownership, and these attributes together comprise the fundamentals of sustainability.

Good community-based programming also incorporates strong elements of flexibility in governance. Governance may include simple community discussions before choosing the placement of tube wells and hand pumps; it may also mean the initiation of inter-community discussions in order to arrange larger-scale network connections. But governance can also mean bringing responsible municipal authorities into these discussions, and hence, providing training for communities and authorities alike in order to facilitate wider community participation in more broadly-based projects. In each instance, an essential element of good governance -- participation -- is achieved in a variety of ways, and with different combinations
of individuals and organizations. The result can be a multi-faceted programme in which both individuals and communities, citizens and officials, select the modes of their interaction. Participation, flexibility and sustainability join hands to build a substantial foundation for future cooperation.

Undertaking governance programming in this way avoids several hazards that are amply present in Afghanistan today. It precludes supply-driven projects that team unwilling citizens with authorities with whom they may be uncomfortable. It avoids associations with intermediaries who do not belong in governance programmes -- field commanders whose interest is military and ideological rather than rehabilitation and sustainability, for example. It also avoids taking hard and fast decisions about ideology, and vests the responsibility for difficult decisions -- how to deal with prohibitions against female employment or education, for example -- jointly with communities and aid providers. In general, it means that assistance is an active rather than a passive activity: providers and beneficiaries, participants and international assistance workers together achieve the same goals. The starting point for all governance programming is thus the same as the starting point for rehabilitation more generally -- the community. The end points, however, can include a universe of possibilities and benefits.

(4) Governance initiatives should follow a limited set of standards and principles to guide the evolution of community-based programming.

It is the Mission's opinion that four principles should guide well-designed community development, and thus, effective governance initiatives.

(a) **Preparation is critical.**

To embark on programmes that involve long-term relationships among citizens, and that can ultimately involve recrafting relationships between citizens and their state, communities must prepare themselves, as do assistance organizations. Some of this preparation requires the collection of knowledge: baseline studies, understanding local political economy, deciphering authority patterns and exploring new alternatives. The rest, however, is of a piece with community organization as a whole, for it is from within each community -- and among them, when appropriate -- that new initiatives will emerge.

(b) **Assistance programmes should aim toward sustainability, and governance initiatives should conform to this requirement.**

Periodic or erratic assistance results in hit-or-miss development. Simple relief programmes can measure sustainability in relatively transparent ways: immunized children can withstand disease, shelters can house previously homeless families. Governance, however, is measured literally by its sustainability. Short-term fixes -- a temporary shura, for example, on a project -- may serve a specific purpose, but it is not governance. In governance terms, sustainability means community participation, over the long term, with maximum attention given to the means by which communities take decisions and assess their results.
(c) Assistance programmes must find ways to include entire communities, although the way may differ from place to place and time to time.

In traditional societies, and in societies undergoing profound transformations -- whether self-induced or imposed -- it is particularly important to ensure that entire communities are included in design, planning, execution and management. In Afghanistan today, this means taking careful account of the views and/or participation of groups whose earlier exclusion has rendered them especially vulnerable -- children, the elderly, the disabled, and women, particularly widows and female heads of households.

The participation of women has been of critical concern to the international assistance community in those areas of Afghanistan ruled by Taliban. The broad strokes of Taliban edicts have placed the vulnerability of women in sharp relief, and have been in contrast to the situation of women elsewhere in the country. The international assistance community has not taken a unified stand on these issues: some UN agencies and some NGOs have chosen to suspend certain operations where and when women and girls are prevented from having access to those programmes; others have endeavoured to find ways to include women and girls among their beneficiaries, even where and when they are formally excluded.

Several fears lead to and inform these contrary positions: on the one hand, that the world will consign Afghanistan to international oblivion if assistance is ended, and that the needs of the country are greater than those of any one group; on the other hand, that the UN in particular cannot sanction behaviour that is explicitly contrary to rights protections included in the Universal Declaration and the UN Charter, and that supporting apartheid of any sort -- whether based on race, ethnicity or gender -- is repugnant to these ideals.

It is beyond the scope of this mission to arbitrate this dispute, which is likely to continue for some time, particularly as the military and diplomatic situations change and localities adapt to new conditions. However, the Mission nonetheless notes that virtually no programming is sustainable without the participation of women, that development as a whole can rarely progress without the education of girls, and that communities define themselves by the entire population, not just by traditional decision-makers. Indeed, governance initiatives contradict themselves if they exclude half the population of any community. For these reasons, the Mission encourages any and all governance initiatives, within these guidelines -- regardless of the projects to which they are attached, and across the entire range of areas in which they exist -- to find ways to include women as actors -- not just as passive beneficiaries -- in the formulation of community priorities and the execution of programmes. These modalities may differ from place to place -- the principle of flexibility also applies here -- but the principle of participation to ensure sustainability must be paramount.

(d) Patience is crucial.

Many initiatives will take a long time to bear fruit -- often longer than normal funding cycles. A corollary of the principle of sustainability is providing resources in ways that allow projects to grow. This means not only taking the time to prepare adequately, heeding the
advice of the community and ensuring participation, but also recognizing that providing assistance means just that - providing material assistance. If governance initiatives are not linked to the provision of resources, and if those resources are not rationalized in a way that allows their use to be followed by increasing participation, then those initiatives will most probably fail. Current programmes that employ local bodies simply to take single decisions are not flawed _per se_, but they are not governance programmes. Governance initiatives therefore, employ twin precepts: process is as important as substance, and substance is as important as process. To be effective in governance terms, the delivery of resources must be timed according to both material and process schedules. And because governance agendas change with time, assistance organizations must be prepared not only to be flexible in concept, but also to be willing to adjust the provision of assistance to meet the goals (if not all the demands) of the communities that oversee their programmes.
4. THE WAY FORWARD

4.1 CONCLUSIONS

The Mission has concluded that, despite many factors that might seem to inhibit governance initiatives, there are nonetheless a few points of entry for such programming. They are all modest, demand careful preparation, and should be limited in number, kind and place.

One proviso: at every juncture, the question of women's participation in rehabilitation and development programmes was broached by almost every individual and group with whom the Mission met. The Mission has taken this concern very seriously, and believes that -- perhaps contrary to some earlier discussions on this issue -- the problem is not a gender or women's problem, but a problem for Afghanistan as a whole. The following recommendations assume, as a matter of course, that governance initiatives in particular require a clear and sensitive acknowledgment that the people of Afghanistan represent the country's best hope for the future -- and that women and men are equal partners in that future. The Mission also believes that UN programmes by definition must conform to the ideals enshrined in the founding documents of the United Nations itself. If these questions are not addressed firmly and early on, it is very hard to see how any progress in the governance arena can be accomplished. The Mission, however, believes that well-formulated governance programmes should be able to achieve those goals in Afghanistan.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

First, governance initiatives should be derived from communities, and in particular, from community-based programmes that are in place or are planned. It is recommended that a select number of pilot projects be developed in communities where UN agencies and affiliated NGOs already work, and a equally small number in communities where new programmes are planned.

The Mission was not in a position to assess the modalities that are currently in practice, and thus cannot recommend one way over another, on how to proceed in these communities. From anecdotes and many common sentiments articulated by interviewees, however, it would appear that community members and assistance workers believe that it is useful and necessary to think more broadly about participation and governance structures, even at the most local level. The Mission endorses this recommendation because it makes good development sense as well as good governance sense.

At the same time, the Mission even more strongly recommends that any initiatives of this sort be preceded by detailed and careful analysis of community structure, authority patterns, political economy and basic needs, and that modalities -- such as shuras and community fora -- be carefully assessed before new programmes are developed. This point cannot be stressed enough. The Mission has found that conventional wisdom too often acts as a substitute for cautious evaluation, and that rigorous standards have not been developed to
understand fully the effects that current practices have on the communities in which they are used. These are all necessary if Afghanistan is not to become a laboratory for unguided experimentation, inadvertently or otherwise.

Second, careful analysis of community governance needs -- including inter-communal projects -- is vital; equally important, the conditions under which these needs can be addressed requires rigorous analysis, both before and after projects are initiated.

Some needs assessments are undertaken as a matter of course; others develop naturally in the process of including communities in planning. In addition to these activities, however, the Mission believes that national data is desperately needed so as to begin anchoring local projects in a broader context -- even if a unified Afghanistan remains a somewhat distant goal. Almost everyone who met the Mission articulated this need in one way or another.

Outside experts from development agencies, the World Bank, and donor countries, can help move this process along and, as an important corollary activity, can train local residents (including Afghan social scientists resident outside the country) in order to begin the slow but critical process of redrawing a picture of Afghanistan. The Mission would also like to stress that such training and studies must include women, not only for the sake of equality but in order to complete the most accurate assessment of the country and its people.

Third, training can and should begin wherever and whenever women can be incorporated as equal professional partners. The Mission believes, for example, that preparation for training future public servants might well begin at Balkh University, which is the only university in Afghanistan currently educating women and having female faculty members who lecture to classes irrespective of gender. Although the university is located in the Northern Region, training there would anticipate the national needs of Afghanistan in such areas as public administration and management, statistics, computer science and information management, accounting and other sophisticated skills needed to address the needs of the country. Again, the Mission stresses that preparation for such programmes should be carefully undertaken, should build on needs articulated and formulated by the community-based programmes already in place, and must under all circumstances include women at every level.

Fourth and last, but in a sense also first, the Mission believes that the UN development agencies are well-suited and situated to encourage broadly-based public discussions of rehabilitation and development needs and priorities across the country. To the extent that UNDP, for example, can facilitate cross-community or regional discussions about the future of rehabilitation in the country as a whole, it will not only be able to plan its own activities more specifically and with greater public backing, but will also be helping to underwrite a crucial governance project in itself.
 Governance Initiatives for Afghanistan
 Preliminary Mission: 7-23 March 1997

*** ANNEX ***
BACKGROUND:

Although Afghanistan remains in crisis, with intermittent battles disrupting islands of peace, much of the country has remained relatively stable during the past few one to two years. Few government agencies operate at the national, regional or local levels. While it may be some time before an effective central government is in place, relative stability means that planning for future governance can begin now.

At the moment, Afghanistan is not only fragmented, but government is essentially non-functioning. Basic administrative needs cannot be fulfilled through the public sector, and in many instances, the environment is not conducive to private sector initiative either. In every sector - education, agriculture, commerce, health, sanitation and infrastructural maintenance and development - not only are the basic services underprovided, but fundamental governance is absent.

However, the country still has - in spite of disruption and isolation of civil society - traditional systems for community consultation and the resolution of conflict: and elements of this still function to varying degrees. Building on these local strengths is the core strategy of future UNDP activities in regard to governance in Afghanistan.

Initiatives to explore issues of governance in relation to conflict-resolution, peace-building, rehabilitation and development can provide significant value to UNDP's human development programme in Afghanistan, as well as to Afghan communities, and ultimately to the nation as a whole.

It is in this context that UNDP Afghanistan as part of its 1997-1998 Program has proposed its Governance Initiative Project, which aims at improving the conditions under which future governance programmes will be undertaken, including an assessment of current physical, political, social, legal and economic structures.

Activities that are covered under this programme include a wide array of exploratory initiatives in the areas of political economy and governance. They are all designed around two basic premises:

a) that governance work is possible in Afghanistan, even in the absence of a central government, provided the adequate analysis is undertaken prior to establishing programmes, and

b) that any future government in Afghanistan, regardless of ideology or political leaning, will require a common set of baseline studies on which to draw for the purposes of making policy.
REASONS FOR THE MISSION:

To date, there have been few, if any, assessment activities specifically oriented towards analyses of the issues of governance and their implications as well as possibilities in development programmes. Consequently, an initial assessment of the fundamental issues that are likely to affect or be affected by the programme's activities, and which will result in a systematic framework within which further activities can be conducted, is an essential requirement.

TIME AND DURATION OF THE MISSION:

The mission will be fielded during the second and third week of March, 1997.

PURPOSE OF THE MISSION:

The mission, at the end of their field visits, will prepare a detailed and realistic work plan for high-leverage governance initiatives.

It will also produce recommendations and outline priority issues to be looked at in detail by the UNDP/WB Study of Governance and Political Economy in Afghanistan planned to take place March-May 1997.

The mission will prepare the ground for further assessment and consultation leading to a number of governance projects to be implemented under the umbrella of the governance initiative Programme.

The mission will also appraise future assistance programmes, with particular attention paid in every case to the governance aspect in the proposals, and the potential to broaden the base of community participation.

ISSUES TO BE COVERED:

The proposed length of the mission, two weeks, is not long enough to carry out a comprehensive or detailed analysis of governance-related issues. However, through meetings and observations the mission will be able to make an initial assessment of the issues described below and make recommendations for more detailed assessments and provide suggestions for future projects:

Conditions for governance programmes:
Assess conditions for possible future governance programmes including identifying conflict resolution and post-conflict peace-building activities that can form a core of future programmes.

Past performance of assistance:
Assess the impact of past assistance on governance; and in particular, assess the local governance building dimension in the rural rehabilitation programmes, and the community participation programmes that accompany urban rehabilitation projects.
Governance aspects of future assistance:
Assess the role of future humanitarian, rehabilitation and reconstruction assistance in regards to its effects on governance; and as a corollary, design consultative and participatory processes for the formulation and implementation of future assistance.

Political economy and governance structures:
Assess the country's current political economy and its correlation with governance structure, regionally and to the extent possibly, nationally; in particular, analyse current socio-cultural conditions that determine social change and as a corollary, help to more clearly target future beneficiaries of assistance;

Prospects for specific short-term projects
Assess prospects for specific short term projects that can ease the transition from relief to rehabilitation assistance by identifying sustainable governance elements in each project;

Opportunities for women and marginalized groups:
Assess the opportunities for women and disabled to be included as completely as possible in future governance activities;

Conflict prevention activities:
Assess the needs and nature of future activities in this direction in part by identifying the specific links between peace-keeping and peace-building; and as a corollary, assess community assistance priorities for consolidating future peace accords.