Afghanistan
Socio-Economic Problems
and
Rehabilitation

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General

Afghanistan is located in Central Asia and comprises an area of 652,225 square kilometers. In 1978, following a the bloody coup instigated by Russia, Afghanistan's presidential regime was overpowered and a communist regime of power ensued. From the outset, the Russian occupation of Afghanistan was faced with widespread resistance. The fighting took a critical turn with the invasion of the Red Army in Afghanistan in 1979. An all-out war spread throughout Afghanistan.

During the 12 years of its war with Russia, Afghanistan suffered a lot. During this war all economic, social and cultural sectors of the country crumbled and it was reduced to a state of ruins. Millions of its people took refuge to the neighboring Iran and Pakistan. Thousands of hectares of land became desolate. Millions of anti-personnel mines were planted all over Afghanistan. Millions of individuals became disabled and burdens on the Afghan society.

After the victory of the Islamic Revolution the fighting in the capital of the country, Kabul, continued, further compounding the peoples' problems. Prior to 1989, Afghanistan had a population of over 17 million. Two million of its people were killed in the war with the Russians.

Economically, the dollar rate increased 30 times. In 1977 1 US dollar sold for AFS 55 to 60; in 1991 for AFS 1200; and in 1994 for AFS 2000. All the economic systems of the country have been paralysed or totally eliminated. Not a single building or road
or plant in Afghanistan may be found in usable condition. Every thing there needs to be rehabilitated. A number of European, American and Islamic countries have assisted the Afghans since 1984. Approximately 3.5 milliards US$ have been spent on the rehabilitation of Afghanistan. A study of the graph of the work done in Afghanistan, during this period indicates that not even a tenth of this amount have been spent on practical works. This is due to the lack of coordination of in the work of donor agencies. They were unable to coordinate their work. Even UN Agencies have not been able to bring about a coordination of their activities. The unique situation concerning Afghanistan has been that the donor agencies coordinated their work neither with the ex-communist government of Afghanistan, nor with their adversaries. They paid little attention to local NGOs and coordination bodies and were not interested in the development of these bodies.

The State of Afghan Refugees in Pakistan

At the time of the Soviet occupation about 6.5 million refugees were scattered in different parts of Pakistan, Iran and other countries.
UNHCR statistics indicate that 1,377,000 refugees left Pakistan and 1,850,000 left Iran for Afghanistan in 1992. Those who entered Pakistan unofficially are not covered by these statistics. In 1992 roughly 1.7 Million Afghan refugees settled in Pakistan. About 1.6 million of them received assistance from UNHCR and international donors. Almost 0.4 million of them are staying in the camps without receiving assistance from any sources. A total number of 159,480 families live in cities of Pakistan. They also do not receive any assistance from UNHCR and other donors. A number of these families are engaged in their private business.

a. Food distribution

Food distribution for the refugees have not taken place equitably. In a majority of cases it has been very unsatisfactory, untimely and in small quantities.

b. Tent distribution

Tent distribution has never taken place properly. Large numbers of refugees lived in open spaces without tents and proper cover. Hence, the Afghan refugees found themselves compelled to build small huts with wooden roofs. Presently, 90% of Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan are in the form of clay cottages which are unable to withstand rain. There have been many occasions that these cottages have collapsed causing suffering, property losses and even death.
c. Health sector

On the average for a camp of 100,000 families there are only 3 health clinics. Water supply is not satisfactory. Most camp residents use water from uncovered wells or river water which is impure and unhealthy. Sometimes they cover a distance of one kilometer or so to get potable water. In some camps UNHCR have dug a number of 30-meter deep wells and installed hand pumps which are insufficient. Little work has been done in this sector. No survey of the disease of refugees has ever been made. No equipped hospitals have been built in Afghanistan or Pakistan. Health training needs of the refugees have also received little attention. Whatever has been done in this connection is faulty or limited.

There had been a number of only one-year health training programs for Afghan refugees. No doctor can be trained in one year. Out of necessity no person can become a doctor in one year only. Thus, thousands of Afghan patients have lost their lives by such amateur doctors. It is therefore recommended that these amateur doctors continue their studies in the country of asylum or a foreign country with the assistance of UN or other donors agencies. Under well organized training programs in the past fifteen years we could have a considerable numbers of doctors. A large number of Afghan youths have been compelled to discontinue their education and are roaming the streets of Pakistan or Iran in search of employment.

It must however be admitted that a number of international NGOs like ICRC, UNICEF, MSF(Medicine Sans Frontier), MSH(Management Sciences for Health), and some Islamic countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, have done worthwhile works in this connection for which we are grateful.

d. Sanitation

The sanitation of the camps are intolerable. For latrines, holes of one meter deep are dug. No progress has been made in this respect for many years.

Education

Formerly, there were a number of primary schools offering 6-years education in the camps. There were only a few schools with nine years education. The number of 12 grade secondary schools for Afghan refugees in all Pakistan were only 12. UNHCR and other donors supervised the management of these schools through the government of Pakistan. At the moment, most of these schools have come to a standstill. Most educational programs and important school issues were looked after by the government of Pakistan.
It must be recalled that the US financed schemes were active inside Afghanistan until 1993. Under these schemes worthwhile work was done on the curriculum. Unfortunately, all Afghan children of school age have been deprived of higher education since then. The level of education and mother and child care, is the lowest in the world. Education in general especially with regard to industrial and vocational sectors is to be rehabilitated.

**Displaced Afghans**

The civil war in Afghanistan has slowed down the pace of repatriation. Despite the return of a number of refugees to safe havens inside the country, 117,700 citizens of Kabul took refuge in Jalalabad in eastern Afghanistan and 21,000 in northern Afghanistan since the fighting in Kabul broke out in January 1993. The refugees in eastern Afghanistan have been lodged in four camps in the uninviting deserts of Jalalabad and four camps in the north of the country. Although some humanitarian assistance has been provided for the Kabul refugees, they are facing problems such as:

- Shortage of water
- Shortage of health services, especially concerning child and mother care.
- Shortage of basic amenities e.g. tents, clothes and blankets.
- Unfavorable environmental living conditions.
- Lack of electric power, roads, sanitation and education.

As a result of the last 2 years of intensive fighting in Kabul, one million of its population have been displaced. Almost all the citizens of Kabul are living in perpetual fear and anxiety. The government employees in Kabul have not been paid their salaries for the last several months. This has caused tremendous problems, especially in view of the increase of prices of basic necessities in Kabul.

**Afghanistan Rehabilitation**

Practically the rehabilitation work had a good start in 1988. It is continues to date. Some work has ben done in physical infrastructure, health, education, veterinary, agriculture and training. From 1989 to 1992 most of the work was concentrated in the provinces along the Afghan border with Pakistan. Presently, efforts are being made to spread the works to the central, western, south-western and northern Afghanistan. Funds are being provided mostly by the UN, USAID, European and Islamic countries. In June 1993 the United States cut the Afghanistan
rehabilitation assistance entirely. The negative impact of this cut in the social and economic life of Afghans is tremendous, causing immense problems to Afghans experiencing the agonies of a long war with the supper power which brought upon them untold sufferings. The assistance of Islamic countries were mostly channeled through Arab relief agencies. Of late, this assistance has been drastically reduced on allegation that these agencies have a role in organizing terrorest ic bands in Egypt, Algeria and other Arab countries.

Recently, a considerable number of Arab relief agencies have been forced to close. Presently, the only financing sources for the rehabilitation of Afghanistan are the United Nations and the European Community (EC). It must not go without saying, however, that financial assistance of the United Nations, too, has largely been reduced. EC's funding continues as before, but it is channeled through the international agencies based in European countries to Afghanistan. Under this arrangement local NGOs receive none of their funds. No specific direction of these funds are known. Although we are indebted for this assistance, we do not hesitate to point out the shortfalls in their work. These shortfalls are described below:

Physical Infrastructure

- In this connection long term 2-year and 3-year projects have been considered. For the implementation of their projects, donors have used their own specific methods. There has n't been a uniform method to be followed by all donor agencies. his lack of coordination creates problems which keep donor agencies from designing long term projects, which are associated with development process.

Prior to the war a large part of the works, such as, karez, and canal cleaning done with the financial assistance of donors were carried out by the people themselves on voluntary basis.

- Lack of implementation criteria for local NGOs as well as lack of local coordination bodies and this regard to improving them.

Lastly the work of some projects have been proved faulty. Local people regard them as waste of money. The sad thing is that the people of Afghanistan new do not take interest in rehabilitation work as compared with the 1989 and 1990. The main reason behind the current fighting in Kabul and elsewhere in Afghanistan is unemployment and lack of essential facilities for the refugees inside Afghanistan.
- Negligence of the need for designing long term economic plans. Under such plans the UN and other donor agencies will help the people to attain the stage of self sufficiency. This will help the fighting to subside.

- Absence of experts constituting a major problem of Afghanistan. This state of affairs has created serious problems to UN and International agencies which have been able to get only a little number of Afghan experts in their employ. Foreign technical experts working for these agencies do not exceed 15.

Agriculture

- Agriculture is the heart of the Afghan economy and social structure. Prior to the war 85% of the population lived in rural areas. Pre-war Afghanistan was almost self sufficient in food stuffs. About 60% of its foreign income came from the export of agricultural products. For years refugees, relief workers and other observers reported wide spread social devastation to crops and farmland in Afghanistan. The problems created are attributed mainly to the aerial bombardment causing abandonment of farms by farmers. Approximately, 60% of the country's irrigation systems has been destroyed. Lack of good quality food grains is a major problem. The food grains which are now in use are susceptible to diseases and the varieties are now mixed up. Livestock have been killed in large numbers. The number of oxen has been reduced by 50%. UN estimates that 300,000 oxen will be needed to replace those lost. Chemical fertilizers are scarce and overpriced. Insects, rodents and weeds have overrun many places. The war destroyed 95% agricultural research stations and state farms. Animal husbandry, bee keeping, and other productive rural activities came to a halt. Poultry farms and seed and fertilizer distribution centers were destroyed. Eighty-five percent of the country's forests and 90% of its orchards were eliminated. Eighteen percent of factories and small plants and most of the agricultural equipment provided to the farmers no longer exists.

The continued destruction caused by the war caused the artisans, youths and students from urban and rural areas to abandon productive work and take up arms instead. As a consequence of this mass destruction, inflation rose dramatically and exports were paralysed. During the recent closure of Pakistan/Afghanistan border, NGOs engaged in rehabilitation projects in Afghanistan were unable to continue the constructive work they had begun. This setback severely suspended the country's economic recovery.

With political stability and international assistance, we can be optimistic that agriculture may be restored to its previous level. It will take about 10 years to rebuild the irrigation systems and bring agriculture back to its pre-war level.
The United Nations, specifically FAO, is the only organization which provides assistance to rehabilitation and development of agriculture in Afghanistan. There are some deficiencies in the work of FAO. We would like to print out the following:

- Afghan farmers are a hard working people, and they are highly receptive to new ideas, even though they may be without formal education.

- Distribution of fertilizer is inadequate. Farmers are given 35 kgs food grains which is not enough to meet their needs. FAO should establish plans for food grain production inside Afghanistan rather than in foreign countries.

- Surplus food grains should be stored and distributed to the farmers.

- Fruit trees are often not cultivated in Afghanistan. Transportation of fruits seedlings from Pakistan to Afghanistan which take some days to reach Afghanistan causes the roots to dry out. Fruit tree nurseries should be established inside Afghanistan.

- Irrigation systems are in need of repair. This will attract the interest of repatriates.

**Mines**

The worst reminder of the Russian occupation of Afghanistan is the planting of 15 million mines in the country. They are mostly centered around the residential areas of the provinces neighboring Pakistan and Iran. A remarkable number of them have been planted in rural cattle raising grounds and farms. There are 2302 mine areas covering 558,675 sq.km in Afghanistan. With the largest number of mines areas, Afghanistan's mine situation remains unparalleled.

On the basis of the reports by certain Afghan NGOs, Kandahar with 131 mine areas constitutes the largest figure in mine planting. A number of Afghan NGOs have been involved in clearing the mines in this province. The most important of them is Afghan Technical Consultant (ATC) with an annual budget of $3.8m. which is not sufficient. Founded in 1989, ATC has cleared a total of 39,654,233 square meters of mines in Afghanistan. They have further detected and foiled 75,593 mines in other provinces of the country. Mine clearing in these lands at its present pace in Afghanistan would take five to ten years.
**Disabled and Crippled**

According to a UN report one in every six Afghans is disabled or crippled. They may be divided into three categories.

1. The war disabled.
2. Those disabled as a result of TB, polio and other infectious diseases.
3. Those disabled as a result of birth defects caused by drug abuse directly or through their parents.

There are more than 2 million Afghan who have been disabled as a result of the 14 years of war. Twenty-thousand women lost their lives and an estimated 500,000 were widowed. Most of the widows are suffering from mental diseases resulting from the post war strains. The 1993 budget for the disabled and crippled was merely $ 3.7 million.

The Afghan disabled are in need of regular income. Financial assistance is needed in areas, such as tailoring, carpentry, tanning, shoe making, metallurgy, welding, carpet weaving etc. A number of NGOs conduct training courses for the disabled.

**Narcotics**

Poppy is grown mostly in the eastern and southeastern provinces of Afghanistan. Cannabis is prevalent all over Afghanistan. Before the nineteenth century opium was used as a medicine in the country. The cultivation of poppy was enhanced during the recent war. The number of edicts also increased with the growth in production.

Afghanistan is known to be one of the principle exporters of this substance. In 1979 six thousand hectares of land was under poppy and cannabis cultivation. In 1987 this area was enlarged to 57,000 hectares. Currently 3,000 m/tones of opium are produced annually.

The opium produced is taken to refineries through hilly tracts. The refineries are located in the hilly areas on the Afghan borders with Pakistan. The opium is used in the production of heroin there.

According to recent statistics, only in the border areas in the south of the country there are one hundred heroin producing plants. Most of the heroin is smuggled to Europe via Iran, Pakistan, Turkey and Balkan countries. To arrest the heroin production, UNDCP have launched some projects with a budget of US$4,170,000.

Afghanistan is a party of 1961 UN convention on Narcotic drugs and also a party to the 1971 UN convention on psychotropic substances. In 1992 Afghanistan became a party to the 1988 UN
Political instability in Afghanistan prevented any major success in counter narcotics activity.

At present the increase in opium cultivation in Afghanistan is a major problem. Poppy can be grown on a variety of terrains with or without irrigation. Opium can be stored indefinitely and can be easily transported over long distances.

To reduce the level of opium production in Afghanistan an overall strategy has been developed by the UN agencies and NGOs.

To production of poppy and the cultivation of narcotic producing plants is on the increase in Afghanistan. The reasons behind this are:

- Lack of state power in the poppy cultivating areas of the country.
- Poverty of refugees returning to their land and high cost of living exacerbated by the war.
- Closure of communication routes between Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- Absence of markets for commercial and agricultural products.
- Destruction of irrigated agricultural land.
- Lack of routine income resources.
- Unemployment and absence of marketing system.
- Attractiveness of poppy as a highly rewarding substance.

An overall strategy has led the authorities to take effective measures. They are:

a. Rehabilitation of rural infrastructure and cultivation of pre-war crops.

b. Publicizing the harmful effect of the drug should be publicized through mass media and other means.

c. Identification and treatment of drug edicts.