

Afghanistan

In 2000, when the Member States adopted the Millennium Declaration and committed themselves to endorse the MDGs in a time-bound manner, Afghanistan was embroiled in war. It committed itself to achieve the MDGs in March 2004. As a late entrant to global development efforts, the Afghan Government has extended its MDGs timeline from 2015 to 2020 due to quarter of a century of conflict and the lack of available data. Most of the global targets have been 'Afghanized', which means that they have been revised to make them more relevant to Afghanistan. Moreover a ninth goal of 'enhancing security' has been added recognizing the interdependency of development and security.

The development policy framework of Afghanistan, which was established at the London Conference in January 2006, is aimed at enabling the achievement of the MDGs. At the London Conference, we launched our National MDGs Report, presented our interim National Development Strategy (i-ANDS) which is Afghanistan's poverty reduction strategy paper and we have adopted the Afghanistan Compact.

The IANDS and the Afghanistan Compact have been endorsed by the Security Council through resolutions: 1659.

In June 2008 during the International Conference on Afghanistan, our country has launched The Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS). The Paris Conference represented an opportunity for our international partners to renew their political and financial commitment for the implementation of ANDS and the achievement of our MDGs. About 20 billion US dollars were pledged by the International Community during the Paris Conference for the implementation of our development agenda and ultimately the achievement of our MDGs.

Despite significant progress made towards the achievements of the MDGs since Afghanistan's commitment to MDGs, many challenges still remain in the implementation of our goals. Allow me to highlight some of them;

Poverty and Hunger (MDG1). Since 2001, economic growth has not only been significant but also generated better livelihoods; GDP per capita has increased 53% in the last five years. However, Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world, with an estimated 22 million Afghans that represent about 70% of the population, living in poverty especially high in rural areas. In this regard, I would like to stress that poverty and unemployment in Afghanistan which have contributed to the increase of the terrorist activities in the country, can reverse the gains made in the last 6 years and increase the probability of resumption of large-scale conflict in Afghanistan.

Education (MDG2). Since 2001, nearly 7 million children have returned to schools - 35% of whom are girls. More than 3,500 schools have been built and new curriculum and textbooks have been developed for primary education. In addition, the number of teachers has increased seven-fold. However, a great number of children, particularly those living in rural areas, continue to face difficulties in accessing educational institutions. It is also important to mention that the Taliban and Al-Qaida, during their campaign of terror, have attacked and intimidated teachers, students and burned out a large number of schools.

Gender (MDG3). Significant progress has been achieved to empower women in Afghanistan in the political, economic and social areas. Women play an important role in the development and peace process in Afghanistan. However, women still face many obstacles. Among them low rate of literacy, low life expectancy, pregnancy related complication, unemployment and insufficient access to education and health services.

Reduce child mortality, Improve Maternal Health and Combat Diseases (MDGs 4, 5, 6). Today 81% of the Afghan population has access to basic health services. The rate of infant and maternal mortality has been reduced by 85,000 and 40,000 annually. Afghanistan has created its National AIDS Control Program (NACP) in 2004 to collect systematic data on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS. However, close to 900 children under the age of five die daily and more than 60 women die every day from pregnancy-related complications. Malaria is prevalent in more than 60% of the country and Afghanistan is the 12th highest tuberculosis burdened country in the world and the highest in South Asia.

Environment (MDG7). In 2007, 343 community water points were constructed in the drought hit and conflict-affected southern parts of the country. The Government of Afghanistan has taken numerous initiatives to prevent environmental degradation. However, only 23 % of the entire population has access to safe drinking water and most of the diseases are caused by lack of drinkable water.

Security (MDG9). The lack of security caused by the Taliban and Al-Qaida in the southern parts of Afghanistan is a major obstacle to economic and social development. Achieving our MDGs solely depends on providing security to our people. Afghanistan has added this new goal which includes targets related to disarmament, de-mining and counter narcotics. We would like to place emphasize on the provision of technical and financial assistance to our security institutions to contribute to the rule of law, and advance the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration process (DDR) and the counter narcotics efforts.

Develop a Global Partnership for Development (MDG8). The main part of Afghanistan's national development resources are currently provided by the international community. Therefore the partnership with the donor community is key to ensuring the implementation of our National Development Strategy, including the MDGs. In this regard, it is important to mention that the delivery and effectiveness of aid to Afghanistan is faced with the following constraints:

1. The overall volume of aid delivered to Afghanistan as a post-conflict country is less in comparison to other post conflict settings.
2. There is a very concerning growing gap of billions of dollars between amounts pledged and amounts disbursed which undermines the ability of our government to undertake long-term fiscal planning.
3. Nearly three quarters of the aid is disbursed outside our national budget which creates a parallel system that undermines our Government's ownership, involves multiple levels of contractors that inflate cost and fail to build Afghan national capacity.
4. The proportion of 'tied' aid is three times more than 'untied' aid which affects our capability to plan and effectively implement our national development strategy.

These were information that we could share with your office regarding the actions undertaken in Afghanistan and the challenges we are facing for the achievement of the MDGs.

Please note the following weblink to get more information concerning this matter: <http://www.and.s.gov.af/>