

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE COMPLETION REPORT

Division: AFRM

TA No., Country and Name			Amount Approved: USD 1,785,000	
TA 4541 (AFG): Natural Resources Management and Poverty Reduction			Revised Amount:	
Executing Agency Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry <sup>1</sup>	Source of Funding Global Environment Facility and Poverty Reduction Cooperation	Amount Undisbursed: USD 771,892	Amount Utilized: USD 1,013,107.32	
TA Approval Date: 23 Dec. 2004	TA Signing Date: 11 Jan. 2005	Fielding of First Consultant(s): 27 Apr. 2005	TA Completion Date Original: 30 Nov. 2006 Actual: 30 Nov. 2007 Account Closing Date Original: 31 Dec. 2006 Actual: 31 Dec. 2007	
<p><b>Description</b></p> <p>Over two decades of conflict and instability have had a severe impact on the biodiversity of Afghanistan. Endangered species of plants and animals found in all representative ecosystems, ranging from the arid deserts of the southwest to the alpine valleys of the Hindu Kush, are under severe threat. Afghanistan's first national park at Band-e Amir and five other wildlife reserves and sanctuaries established in the 1970s, after years of effort, were abandoned along with other protected areas due to a shift in government priorities. Since then, institutional development of natural resource and environmental management agencies has stagnated, trained and experienced staff members who might maintain a system of protected areas have disappeared; and resources for management of protected areas were not allocated. These changes have had an adverse impact on the country's ecology and its functioning ecosystem, including flooding and loss of rangelands, forests and wildlife. The Department of Forest and Range Management (DFRM) in the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry is charged with conservation and management of Afghanistan's protected areas. Unfortunately, DFRM has neither the personnel, facilities, nor funding to undertake the activities required for responsible conservation management in protected areas. Local communities in Afghanistan rely very heavily on natural resources for economic and social welfare. Due to years of war, however, these resources were severely degraded, impacting the livelihoods of the poor and resulting in urgent needs to revive the country's nature reserves and sanctuaries.</p> <p>The overall goal of the TA was to conserve resources and reduce the extensive poverty prevalent among some of the remotest communities in the country, residing in and adjacent to key protected areas, through a set of activities to promote socioeconomic stability among the rural poor while conserving natural ecosystems and wildlife resources. Successful poverty reduction and protected area management models that were expected to come out of the TA would be considered for broader application nationwide.</p>				
<p><b>Expected Impact, Outcome and Outputs</b></p> <p>The TA structure comprised two interlinked components; the first component was protected areas and biodiversity conservation with the goal of conserving globally significant biodiversity. The second component was related to poverty alleviation in the buffer zones of the protected areas, with the goal of linking community development interventions to conservation goals, in the form of a conservation stewardship agreement. The purpose of the TA was to address the basic needs of communities in the buffer zones of protected areas by providing incentives that would help reduce poverty as well as promote the conservation of globally significant biodiversity in selected protected areas.</p> <p>The TA envisaged the following outputs: (i) advance the conservation of natural ecosystems and wildlife resources in selected key protected areas by developing management plans and undertaking rapid biodiversity assessment to update available data at each site; (ii) promote capacity building and institutional strengthening for natural resources and protected areas management; (iii) use participatory methods to assess the needs of the communities, followed by provision of pilot activities to address those needs; (iv) develop and implement an integrated package of assistance, including skills training coupled with opportunities for income generation; (v) pilot-test assistance that improves food security and access to health and education; (vi) implement pilot activities envisaged, which include greenhouses for food security, aquaculture, community center that is solar heated and enables livelihood activities (carpet weaving and handicrafts), health and veterinary clinics, horticulture, beekeeping, propagation of medicinal plants; and (vii) enter into a contract with a nongovernmental organization (NGO) specializing in microfinance services.</p>				

<sup>1</sup> Later reorganized as Ministry of Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL).

### **Delivery of Inputs and Conduct of Activities**

Implementation began in April 2005 and ended in November 2007. The consultants provided satisfactory reports, in accordance with the schedules determined by the original contract and/or agreed contract modifications.

The TA was conducted by 15 international consultants and 5 local consultants. Originally 37 person-months of international and 29 person-months of domestic consulting services were expected. A total of 33 person months of international and 28.5 person months of domestic consulting services were utilized.

The quality of inputs into various activities and the on-going technical guidance and supervision provided by ADB through the consultants to the Government and stakeholders were found to be satisfactory. The Consultants were able to work in a challenging situation, and enhance the viability of the TA. They were also instrumental in providing advice to the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) leadership on strategic issues pertaining to natural resources management issues in Afghanistan.

Although the review missions were intermittent, they were output-oriented and technical guidance was provided continuously to the Consultants and MAIL. A consultative and skills transfer approach was adopted in each activity to ensure the ownership of key stakeholders of the outputs and outcomes.

Overall, the TA design, the quality and delivery of inputs were considered as adequate, relevant, and responsive to the requirements of the Government.

### **Evaluation of Outputs and Achievement of Outcome**

At the policy level, (i) a Strategy for Protected Area System/Regulations and National Ecotourism/Tourism Development Strategy/ Social and Gender Strategy for Protected Areas was prepared; (ii) a Social Development and Gender strategy was prepared to ensure women's participation in project activities; and, (iii) socioeconomic surveys were conducted in identified villages of the park regarding communities' perception of poverty-environment links and to ensure women's participation in project activities.

At the natural resources management and ecotourism development level, (i) the Band-e-Amir National Park was identified for biodiversity and natural resources conservation with the participation of local communities, introducing a process for community involvement; (ii) land use plans were also established for Band-e-Amir National Park. Restoration of Qambar Lake (Band-e-Amir); (iii) community based fish farming and floristic and botanical studies in Band-e-Amir National park were conducted, and a new tourism package inside Band-e-Amir National Park discussed; community members were trained to build traditional Afghan village guesthouse for tourists; (iv) surveys of Dasht-e-Nawar wetlands were undertaken; two wetland sites: "Aye Khanum Wildlife and Archaeological Site" and "Weghnon Lake" in Takhar province in northern Afghanistan were identified for natural resources conservation; (v) five valleys: Farmanqully, Tagab-e-Khumbuk, Katho Bala, Kawri, and Tagabe Neem Dastak in northern Afghanistan were explored for consideration as potential Protected Areas; (vi) a survey was undertaken in Keshem, Badakshan and valleys above Farmanqully, which can be declared as Provisional Conservation Areas; in addition, a survey team visited the Pamirs and conducted meetings with Government and community leaders; consultations were held in Faizabad, Ishkeshem and villages in the Wakhan Corridor including Big and Little Pamir; and, (viii) public awareness was raised among local people on conservation education and park management.

At the infrastructure level, (i) ranger stations, gate facilities and toilets were built and furnished in Band-e-Amir and Wakhan Corridor (Kalai Panja), which was used as the National Park office; (ii) Band-e-Amir Ranger station was electrified by solar-power; and, (iii) two bird observation towers in Kola Hashmat Khan waterfowl Sanctuary were constructed.

At the institutional capacity for protected area management development level, (i) training sessions/study tours for government staff were conducted on participatory modes of planning and management of biodiversity conservation in Afghanistan and Nepal; and, (ii) the Department of Natural Resources and Afghan Tourism Organization were provided with office equipment.

The component related to poverty alleviation in the buffer zone of the protected areas failed to implement pilot alternative livelihood schemes, pilot social protection measures, and microcredit through NGOs. While guidelines were prepared for protection of the park and related livelihood opportunity for the community, and discussions with Microfinance Investment and Support Facility for Afghanistan (MISFA) and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) have taken place for formulation of microcredit and income generation scheme were held, no microcredit facility, pilot alternative livelihood schemes or food security measures were established.

The TA, with the exception of the poverty alleviation component, is considered as satisfactory in terms of efficiency and effectiveness in the timely production and quality of outputs. The Government was satisfied with the TA's results and found them useful in demonstrating the usefulness of solar power as a renewable energy alternative.

While achievement of the TA's objectives is considered as satisfactory, a TA audit conducted in mid-2007 and early 2008 found that overall TA management was deficient. In some cases, procedures for consultant selection and contract variations, approval for changes in budget allocation, procurement of goods and services, and submission of Back-to-Office Reports were not strictly followed. Also, deficient documentation and inadequate recordkeeping rendered monitoring and follow up of TA activities difficult.

The above administrative weaknesses were ameliorated by strengthening of monitoring and control systems at AFRM to ensure that administrative procedures were correctly followed.

### **Overall Assessment and Rating**

The TA is rated as partially successful. The TA objectives for the protected areas component were substantially met but not for the poverty alleviation component. The TA prepared an agreed Strategy for Protected Area System/Regulations and National Ecotourism/Tourism Development Strategy/Social and Gender Strategy for Protected Areas, identifying areas for establishment of national parks to protect natural resources and wildlife, conducting socioeconomic surveys, constructing infrastructure and procured the necessary equipment in addition to hiring staff, and raising awareness and capacity among local people and Government's officials for conservation and park management. However, the lack of alternative income generation initiatives supported by microcredit constrained the possibilities of the TA's beneficiary communities to properly implement adequate natural resources management measures. There is a risk that the communities in the Project sites could further harm the natural environment in their pursuit of income generation activities despite the existence of a natural resources conservation strategy.

### **Major Lessons**

Inclusion of alternative income generation activities as a component under this TA was a worthy objective but its viability must be weighed against the financial and human resources available and the timeframe for implementation. The experience gained through this TA shows that microcredit initiatives are not easy to implement in countries where communities are widely dispersed in remote areas, and microfinance institutions are relatively new and inexperienced, without appropriate outreach and coverage. Moreover, even when microfinance services are available, it takes a considerable period of time to convince potential beneficiaries to access these services if previously there is no clear purpose for using the funds. The TA was too ambitious in assuming that communities had understood the sorts of income generation activities that might be financed by microcredit; in retrospect, extensive skills training was required but was not contemplated under the TA. Income generation activities including the provision of microcredit should probably be considered as a standalone TA and not mixed with other activities if there are financial and technical resource constraints.

### **Recommendations and Follow-Up Actions**

It is advisable that the Government adopt the policy recommendations provided by the various strategies under the TA, and that some pilot Community Forestry programs be taken up in the buffer zones of the protected areas followed by more land use planning of the protected areas. For that purpose, it is recommended that the Department of Forest and Range Management and the Afghan Tourist Organization (ATO) explore possible donor support through the concerned Ministries.

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