



Rebuilding Afghanistan's Agricultural Sector – Common Recommendations across NGOs and Governments

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Introduction

For almost three decades, Afghanistan's agricultural sector has been faced with the devastating affects of civil war, Taliban rule, as well as drought, which in turn results in a number of factors continually shaping the sector. Such issues are represented by a lack of food security, an absence of financial support for farm and non-farm sectors, dependency on poppy cultivation for opium exports, lack of proper irrigation, severe damage to infrastructure and institutions, and an abundance of other related issues.

The problems facing the Afghan agricultural sector are deep-rooted and are by no means easily solved. Intervention of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as foreign assistance from governments of developed nations has been increased in an attempt to rebuild Afghanistan's agricultural sector. Along with these significant efforts, various organizations have submitted documents with key recommendations outlining how issues affecting the sector can be improved.

This report is an overview of some of the key recommendations outlined by a group of influential NGOs and various parties involved in conferences on redeveloping the Afghanistan agricultural sector. Ten common recommendations from all parties involved in this analysis are outlined below, with two differing strategies also included. Documents included in this analysis are as follows:

- Asia Development Bank's "Rebuilding Afghanistan's Agriculture Sector", 2003
- The UN's Agricultural Information Management Standards (AIMS) "A Policy and Strategy Framework for the Rehabilitation and Development of Agriculture and Natural Resources Sector of Afghanistan" 2004
- "The Informal Brainstorming Workshop on Food Security in Afghanistan", a workshop jointly organized by FAO, WFP, UNDP, the ASG, NGO representatives, and the World Bank, 2000
- The UK, UN and Afghanistan's "The London Conference on Afghanistan", 2006
- Afghanistan's Ministry of Agriculture and Food's "Master Plan", date unknown

This report does not include recommendations from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) and other Canadian governmental departments, and is not reflective of Canada's support. It is simply an overview of the suggestions of key players in the international community. However, Canada's contribution to rebuilding the Afghan agricultural sector is significant. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) oversees Canada's funding efforts to Afghanistan, which spans a variety of programs, including agriculture. Since 2002, Afghanistan has been the largest recipient of Canadian foreign aid, with investment totalling \$600 million for reconstruction and development activity. For more information on the Afghan agricultural sector, and opportunities for Canadian companies wishing to export to the country, please visit the ATS Web Site:

http://www.ats.agr.gc.ca/asia/4316_e.pdf

The following sections outline the common recommendations of the organizations listed above:

- **Improved Irrigation and Water Resource Management:**

It is estimated that about 80% of Afghanistan's agricultural sector is dependant on some form of irrigation system as it has traditionally low rainfall levels. Improved water resource management is vital to sustainability of the agricultural sector, particularly with regards to food security. It is suggested that government action is needed to achieve investment, technological advancement and strategic programs aimed at off-farm income generation. Training rural communities on the distribution of water and on-farm irrigation management is also necessary.

- **Achieving Food Security Through Cereal Production:**

To become self sufficient in food production, cereal production must improve, especially for wheat, which requires high-cost irrigation systems and technological support. While an investment of this type may not be cost-effective, another solution is to import cereals and rely on cash crops to support its trade activity. A plan must be put into place within the short-term, as it was estimated that between 45 to 55% of children before the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition.

- **Attracting Private Sector Investment:**

Private sector investment attraction is a priority of government (i.e. through financial resources, training and institutional capacity), and to draw support it is suggested that certification and quarantine systems be put in place. The private sector would be instrumental in the supply/marketing of farm inputs and investment in the country's rehabilitation/development activities.

- **Credit Building for Farmers:**

While currently farmers are over dependant on insufficient government funding and informal loans (i.e. typically from neighbours, friends and family), a credit system (i.e. suggested to be farmer owned and managed) to finance the development of the agricultural sector is needed. In addition to receiving credit, farmers should also be trained on money management practices.

- **Local Governance and Community Empowerment:**

Localized decision-making in rural communities should be established to involve and empower those working in the agricultural sector. A greater emphasis on rural development activities would also aid in building the skills of farmers and non-farmers and benefit the cohesion of communities.

- **Recognizing the Women's Role in Agricultural Sector:**

Approximately 70% of Afghanistan's agricultural sector is made up of women, particularly in the livestock and horticultural sectors. Women are a large contributor to the country's poverty, and to improve this situation it is suggested that gender-specific programs be implemented. Programs would be aimed training women on marketing livestock and horticultural products, which in turn will allow them to better control their incomes.

- **Building Export Capacity of the Perennial Horticulture Industry:**

The Afghanistan government suggests that both private and public investment should be allocated to the perennial horticulture industry (i.e. fruits, nuts and vines), to grow its export potential over the next ten years. The perennial horticulture industry represents much opportunity for Afghanistan, both as an alternative to poppy production and as a demanded export commodity of neighbouring countries, such as India. Currently, production is poorly managed as most orchards are small backyard orchards.

- **Marketing Activity for the Off-Farm Sector:**

An estimated 65% of the Afghan population relies on off-farm activity for income. Off-farm income sources include working as labourers on farms, relying on small-scale enterprises (i.e. carpet weaving, beekeeping, cheese making, skin processing, etc.), and working in the forestry industry. To build a more successful off-farm sector, the establishment of a co-operative to increase marketing activity would build support for these services in the country's urban communities. Training and the provision of raw materials are also necessary to build support for this low-income group.

- **Agriculture Research Capacity Building and Technology Transfer:**

Afghanistan does not have proper technological resources in place to maintain databases on the agricultural sector due to the destruction of government buildings which lost record of all previous data. Research is needed for various aspects of the agricultural industry, including on-farm, water management and natural resource systems. Also, in order to develop its research capacity, human capacity is also required to operate and analyze such systems.

- **Implementation of a Reforestation Plan:**

Afghanistan's forests have been greatly depleted due to illegal logging practices and local fuel demands. Currently, forest cover accounts for only 2% of its land, although when considering conservation and environmental factors, it should account for at least 5%. Intervention on various levels is required, such as government taking action to reduce illegal activity, as well as implementing a national reforestation campaign which would involve such initiatives as rehabilitating degraded forest areas and promoting viable alternatives for fuel wood and timber. Watershed activity, through river basins and various programs are also suggested to take place at the community level.

Differing Strategies

Apart from the general objectives compiled from the various organizations and governments, there were two strategies outlined by the Asia Development Bank that took a different approach. The two strategies have the following objectives:

- Developing a feasibility assessment of operating an apex marketing outlet in Kabul selling products of women with labelling stressing their origin.
- Promoting Afghanistan agricultural products by developing fair trade partnerships in various world markets.

While the first objective is focused at an inner-country initiative that will market products from rural, disadvantaged women, and the other aims to link developed countries with Afghan fair trade items, the objectives have similarities because they

are meant to build awareness of the unstable standard of living of those in the Afghan agricultural sector.

Conclusion

The recommendations for rebuilding Afghanistan's agricultural sector represent some of the key objectives, as determined by NGO and government strategies, needed to make change to its industry that has been stricken with years of damage and inadequate practices. However, the action currently being taken in Afghanistan is built on more than ten objectives of major organizations, and its issues are very complex and are therefore not all presented in this report.

Redeveloping Afghanistan's agricultural sector is foreseeable, but its success is highly dependant on the country's economic and political situation. While foreign aid is being used to help its situation, Afghanistan requires action from its own government and people, which involves much political reform, investment, and education, as well as other factors to change its agricultural system.

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