

Editorial

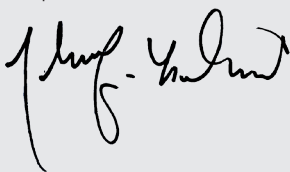
Improving the livelihoods of poorer segments of the population is one of the cornerstones of global development policy. In this respect, this issue of our newsletter showcases Northern Afghanistan. For a decade, GFA has been focusing on poverty alleviation in rural areas and the improvement of state services there.

Decades of civil war led to high unemployment rates, weak labor markets, and low incomes made Afghanistan one of the poorest countries worldwide. At the same time, the depletion of natural resources resulted in the country's high vulnerability to climate change impacts. As a result, forced and voluntary migration from Afghanistan has increased considerably.

GFA's work in Northern Afghanistan shows that sustainable economic development can be fostered even in fragile regions. The livelihoods of rural families can be improved while safeguarding natural resources. At the same time, investments in primary school education and vocational training as well as in infrastructure development in rural areas are crucial. So is strengthening good governance.

Safeguarding food supply, investing in education for men and women, and creating new jobs will reduce poverty and improve the social and economic situation in rural areas. Indeed – these are good reasons to keep people from leaving their homes.

We at GFA will continue contributing to a better Afghanistan and are proud of our dedicated and highly motivated staff working in and for this country that has been hit by so many human and natural catastrophes.



Christoph Schaefer-Kehnert
Managing Director
GFA Consulting Group

Boosting resilience – the role of rural empowerment in Northern Afghanistan

While the last GFA newsletter dealt with refugees, displacement and migration, today's edition is about the prospects of boosting resilience at home. People leave their homeland looking for a better future elsewhere. The decision to migrate is often involuntary and based on unemployment, warlike conflicts, poor education, food insecurity, political persecution, natural catastrophes, etc. Everyone agrees that the exodus has to be stopped. But how can this be achieved? What measures can be taken so that people are kept from leaving their homes?

Based on the experience from five projects carried out by GFA in Northern Afghanistan, this newsletter will point out that the livelihoods of rural families can be improved so that people have a realistic perspective to stay. This has been achieved by promoting economic development, and improving primary school education as well as technical and vocational education and training. Good governance in infrastructure development, and training in agriculture and natural resources management (NRM) have proven equally important.

Afghanistan's natural resources are heavily degraded. Illegal logging and cutting trees for fuel wood has led to massive deforestation and degradation of forest resources. Overgrazing is so serious that desertification progresses in some places. Deforestation, destroyed water infrastructure and bad water management lead to unpredictable floods in spring and long droughts in summer and autumn. Impacts of decade-long wars and conflicts add to the depletion of natural resources.

These factors make Afghanistan highly vulnerable to the effects of global warming and one of the poorest countries in the world. High unemployment and low income characterize the economic situation. Every year, 500,000 young Afghans are entering a labor market that offers little prospect. Far more than half of the population is employed in low-wage jobs in agriculture. In order to counter these trends, the Afghan government and the international community have established sustainable economic development, employment promotion and natural resources management programs. The programs aim at providing young men and women with better career prospects by creating new jobs, safeguarding living conditions and food supply, in other words – a reason to stay.



Northern Afghanistan – Project implementation at the foothills of the Hindukush

GFA Consulting Group has been active in Afghanistan since 2005. The company's expertise in the country covers 16 projects and 10 studies financed by GIZ, KfW, SDC, USAID, World Bank, EC, and FAO. Currently, GFA is implementing five projects in Afghanistan – two related to technical vocational education and training (TVET) and educational development, two on private sector and value chain development and one in the field of capacity development in NRM. All projects are located in the country's North-East (see map).

Primary and secondary education in Afghanistan

Since 2014, a team of GFA experts has piloted an innovative school-to-work transition approach in secondary schools in Afghanistan as part of the BMZ-funded BEPA program implemented by GIZ. The program aimed at enabling students to build informed decisions on their future educational and occupational career paths. Completed in 2016, the program revised a career orientation subject called HERFA+ and developed a concept for its national implementation. HERFA+ combines basic technical knowledge for selected occupations in various economic trades, and information on educational requirements for spe-

cific occupations with further career guidance. It includes content of the world of work and uses a student-centred and action-oriented didactic and methodology. The national pilot at twelve boys and girls schools in rural and urban areas of four provinces, curricula for lower secondary schools and lesson plans were developed with relevant departments of the Afghan Ministry of Education. Suitable teaching materials were created, respective teachers were trained and school management and governance bodies were familiarized with and involved in the practical implementation of HERFA+ activities.

A number of extra-curricular activities in and outside the classroom formed an integral part of the program. In so-called 'real encounters' with the world of work, professionals such as carpenters, electricians or beauticians visited classes and gave students hands-on insights into their line of work, the skills and attitudes needed to do their jobs and the importance of their occupations in society. Students of pilot schools also visited TVET colleges to gather information on educational pathways. Several thousand students attended job fairs where private sector companies presented their trades. The fairs were organized as largely community-

based initiatives with substantial support of local school governance bodies. The project was part of the German Development Cooperation to create perspectives for Afghan youth to build a sustainable life for themselves and their families. It was closely linked to both the GIZ TVET and SEDEP programs outlined below.

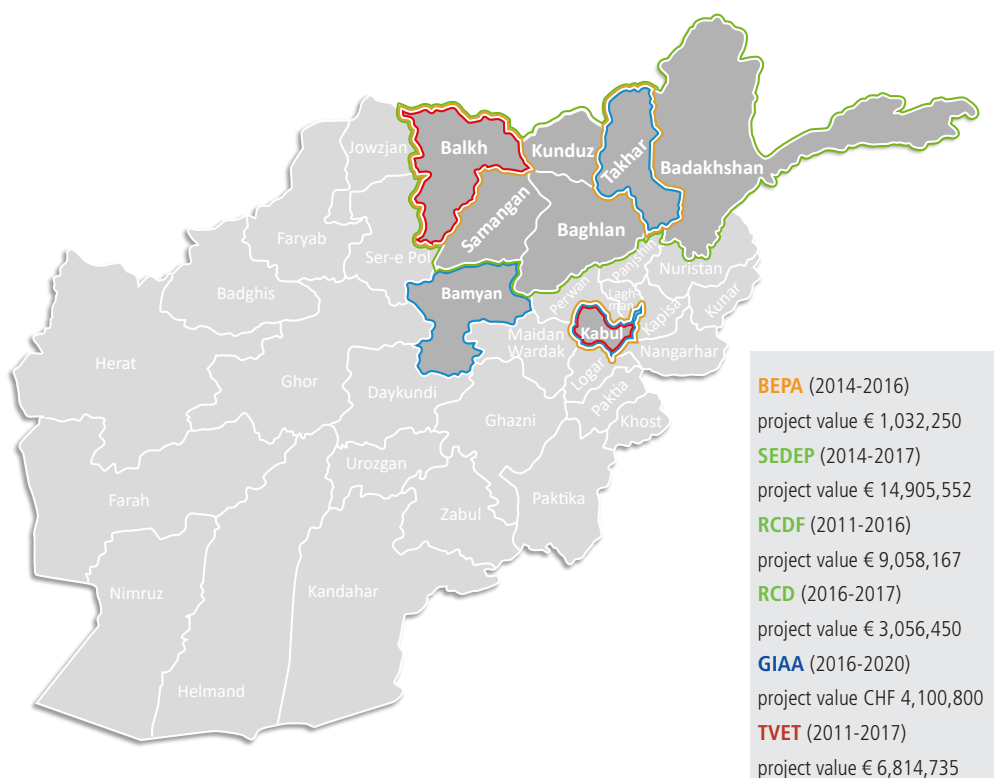
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Technical and Vocational Education and Training

GFA has been supporting GIZ and its local partners in developing an effective TVET system since 2011. By 2017, the project intends to provide young people with access to practice-oriented training based on consistent standards. GFA experts contribute to improving youth employability and promoting a higher productivity for enterprises in the formal and informal sector. The Afghan TVET system still faces major shortcomings due to insufficient vocational schools and the latter's poor equipment. Curricula and exams lack proper standardization and many vocational teachers miss practical experience. Hence, many students are not prepared for their jobs when they complete their training.

In 2016, GFA experts reviewed and newly developed curricula in ten occupational areas to address Afghan labor market needs. Their approach involved the development of competencies and curricula underpinned by a feasible quality management system. GFA qualified more than 30 task developers in examining, assessing and closely cooperating with companies and guilds to develop and validate over 400 tasks for tests and final examinations in both theory and practice. All measures are complemented by capacity building and training activities for teachers in pilot schools, ministry staff and members of the institutionalized economy. Aside from helping the industry to have access to a pool of skilled labor, the program will also increase the mobility of Afghans within and outside the country and the transferability of their qualifications. It is anticipated that the skills acquired will be compatible within the region and other parts of the world. This should result in increased access to further education and training, and employment.

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Sustainable Economic Development and Employment

The SEDEP program (2014-2017) has been aiming at creating jobs and increasing income and business opportunities for the rural population through design, facilitation and implementation of commercially viable agricultural value chains and infrastructure programs. It is currently implemented in six Northern provinces of Afghanistan. The project is pursuing a value chain approach for five agriculture-based products – poultry products, horticulture, dairy products, wheat and nuts – and focusing on three fields of action. The first field of action is entirely implemented by GFA. The technical, organizational and business management skills of actors in the value chains and their links with each other are strengthened.

The other two fields (infrastructure measure and policy dialogue) are implemented by GIZ in close collaboration with GFA. Based on market analysis, the program develops tailor-made interventions to address weaknesses and gaps of each value chain. SEDEP is working with all operators along the five value chains, from input suppliers to producers, processors and traders. Selected examples include:

Nut Value Chain – SEDEP supported more than 1,400 rural women working in the nut cracking sector with improved equipment and technical and business and life skill training courses. The program helped women form producer business groups and linked them to the Nuts Associations which tripled women's earnings.

Dairy Value Chain – SEDEP trained more than 2,780 dairy farmers on cattle and fodder management which resulted in higher milk yields and quality. Cooperation with associations supported the latter's members in reducing milk losses. PAKIZA dairy introduced a new business model based on a mobile milk cart that sells fresh milk and yogurt and cheese to by-passing customers.

Agriculture Fair – In April 2016, SEDEP supported the Balkh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) in organizing the Balkh Agriculture Fair. More than 180 exhibitors and 90 booths attracted over 8,000 visitors. Business to business meetings resulted in contracts worth over three million US dollars. Due to this success, BCCI organized another Fair in October 2016 without the program's financial support.

A monitoring unit has regularly collected data and provided qualitative and quantitative analyses. In 2015, SEDEP reached more than 11,000 small businesses in Northern Afghanistan through



Milk collection center

its capacity building programs. Survey findings show that 56% of beneficiaries confirm SEDEP to contribute to income increases. The program directly contributed to the creation of over 1,500 permanent and over 3,000 seasonal jobs in its first implementation year.

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Regional Capacity Development

The German federal government supports the implementation of good governance principles in the country with a focus on the rule of law, political participation and public administration. The overall objective is to increase the trust in the legitimacy and the functional capacity of state institutions and to improve the provision of government services.

Since early 2016, GFA Consulting Group has been assisting GIZ with three service packages of the Regional Capacity Development (RCD) project in Afghanistan. The project aims at capacity development of the Afghan administration's service delivery at sub-national levels, particularly in the Badakhshan, Baghlan, Balkh, Kunduz, Samangan and Takhar provinces.

By the end of 2017, the project intends to have reached improvements at three levels of intervention: **A:** vertical cooperation in a multi-level administrative system, **B:** administrative capacities and **C:** the relationship between state and society at sub-national levels. GFA provides technical assistance through three service packages.

In **Service Package 1**, GFA experts have been conceptualizing and implementing an impact-

oriented monitoring system. Initial work included all clarifications prior to the establishment and a technical solution for the system. The system safeguards reliable information and data sources, and establishes links, responsibilities and cooperation structures for the regular provision of relevant information. The overall project management uses information generated by the monitoring system for analysis and steering purposes.

Knowledge management and strategic communication are part of **Service Package 2**. This concerns relevant knowledge resulting from project implementation experience. The set up of an internal knowledge management system facilitates systematic extraction of relevant lessons learned within the program. In addition, GFA has developed and implemented a communication and visibility strategy for the RCD project, part of which is a comprehensive 30-page brochure "Promotion of Good Governance in Afghanistan – RCD". This service package has also been supporting the conceptualization of thematic field C, and providing assistance to capacity development activities regarding public outreach and participatory processes between sub-national administrative structures and the local population.

Service Package 3 entails management and implementation of RCD interventions in the provinces of Samangan and Baghlan, where intervention fields A, B and C are being tackled in-depth. RCD is a follow-up of the Regional Capacity Development Fund (RCDF) implemented 2011-2016 in six Northern Afghan provinces. GFA was responsible for the implementation of the program in the Baghlan and Takhar provinces where

a total of over 240 trainings with over 4,800 participants were carried out. The objective of RCDF was to improve the capacity of the state for service delivery at sub-national level. The project operated at three levels of intervention by improving vertical cooperation in a multi-level system, administrative capacities, and the relationship between state and society at the sub-national level.

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Green innovation for Afghanistan's agriculture

The Green Initiative for Afghanistan's Agriculture (GIAA) project addresses the problems of depletion of natural resources by building the capacities of respective organizations at national and provincial levels. It is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and has started in July 2016 with a duration of four years. In addition to the main project office in Kabul, there are offices in the Bamyan and Takhar provinces. Especially in Takhar, GIAA will cooperate with the above mentioned SEDEP project implemented by GFA so that synergies can be developed.

GIAA has two components. Organizations at national and provincial levels will carry out qualified training and capacity building related to NRM that is based on the newly developed NRM strategy of the Afghan Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL). GIAA will support these institutions technically and methodologically so that they can implement the capacity building activities in a professional way. This will include curricula development, internships, short- and long-term training packages, the development of an advanced studies program in Afghanistan, scholarships for Master programs at universities abroad, and the facilitation of networking and

cooperation among organizations. GIAA will also provide special training courses for women about their roles in NRM. The initiative will not directly work with farmers and will not provide extension services. But through its cascading training and coaching process, NRM advisors and rural community members will be able to manage their natural resources more sustainably.

In its second component, GIAA and its partner organizations will conduct local situation analyses, mainly in the two provinces of Bamyan and Takhar. The GFA team will assess capacity development needs in the field, and will evaluate the impact of completed trainings. Research findings will be fed back to decision makers at the national level so that they can develop better policies serving both people and nature.

Up to now, the project has carried out a number of baseline studies and stakeholder analyses with ministries, departments, NGOs, research institutions and universities, provincial governments, international donors and project managers who were interviewed to assess their knowledge on

NRM and needs for improvement. The results show that there is a high need not only for training, but also for more cooperation, networking and knowledge sharing. Therefore, activities that started in early 2017 will include the establishment of communities of practice, the building of networks, thematic groups, business networks and policy recommendations at all levels. Carrying out awareness raising campaigns at the province level and in village communities about the most pressing NRM problems and possible solutions are of crucial relevance. The GFA C³ unit will contribute multiplication and adult education enhancement.

Innovative Information and communication technologies for development (ICT4D) will be employed for knowledge management and the development of a project website, the development of an IT platform for the NRM sector, and as part of M&E data collection. The latter includes web-based M&E methodologies as well as e-extension approaches, e.g. mobile phone-based market information systems or cropping calendar information.

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Overgrazed area in Bamyan

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GFA vision – to be the partner of choice for clients in our core service areas.

GFA mission – to improve the livelihood of beneficiaries through our professional services.

GFA core values – to offer high performance in service delivery, technical excellence in our main sectors, innovative approaches and products, and credibility with our clients when putting projects into practice.

