

# Safe Water in Afghanistan

A project to provide water points to communities in Afghanistan

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Afghan family collecting water. UNHCR

## A proposal to the UN Association – NY

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## Return to Afghanistan

Afghanistan has suffered from decades of turmoil and conflict, beginning with the Soviet invasion in 1979 and continuing with droughts, civil war, and the rise and fall of the Taliban. As a result, millions of Afghans fled their country to seek safety; in fact, in the early 1990s more than **6 million** Afghans were living as refugees in neighboring countries. However, the fall of the Taliban in late 2001 and the establishment of a new government in 2002 signaled hopes for a new beginning. Since then Afghan refugees have started to return to their homeland in massive numbers, to date more than 5 million Afghans have done so—the majority with the UN Refugee Agency's assistance.

Despite their high hopes for the future, most Afghan returnees face a myriad of challenges. A lack of jobs, safe drinking water, accessible health care, education, and housing are just some of the barriers to progress. Improvement in each of these sectors is absolutely vital to the successful reintegration of refugees—and the future of the country. The UN Refugee Agency provides assistance to returning refugees in each of these areas, but it is particularly concerned for the lack of safe drinking water in communities of return.

### The urgency of safe water

One of the most urgent needs that returnees face upon their arrival in Afghanistan is access to safe drinking water. It is estimated that out of a rural population of 18 million people, approximately 14 million do not have access to safe drinking water. Water-borne diseases remain the leading cause of death and the lack of safe drinking water contributes to high mortality rates in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is an arid country and water supply varies in the different regions. In the north and central regions, the snow-capped mountains feed rivers all year round, whereas in the south, people depend on the two rainy seasons to fill dams and basins. This being said, from the late 1990s until 2003, Afghanistan experienced one of the worst droughts in recent history: dams and rivers dried up and the underground water table was depleted. The prolonged drought uprooted people and made raising crops impossible in some areas. While the last few seasons have seen normal levels of rain and snow fall, the effects of the drought and the overall climate changes in the region have resulted in long-term effects on the availability of water in Afghanistan.



Local boys collecting safe water. UNHCR

This shortage is aggravated by the lack of major water infrastructure for collection and distribution. The decades of conflict, low maintenance capacity, and limited availability of spare parts have left many of the wells damaged and unusable.

With water in short supply, the control over this resource becomes a constant source of tension between the communities, and directly hampers the smooth reintegration of returning Afghan families to their villages of origin.

In 2008, UNHCR will implement the construction of 375 water points through the Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation and Development. Each water point is complemented with two model latrines. Of the 375 water points, 10 will be funded by the UN Association – NY via two projects, one in the central region and the other in the east.

## Project 1: Central Afghanistan

Project 1 will take place in two returnee communities, Intefat and Danishmand. The goal of the project is to facilitate the sustainable reintegration of Afghan families and to deter future displacement in the communities due to the lack of safe drinking water. The project will also contribute to the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees who are mainly in Pakistan and Iran, and encourage internally displaced persons (IDPs) to go to their places of origin by increasing access to water and adding to the incentives for Afghans to return to their homes.

### *Why Intefat and Danishmand?*

During the period of intense fighting between the Northern Alliance and the Taliban in the mid-1990's, Shakardara District was on the frontlines. Bordering Kabul, Shakerdara was strategically important, and the District changed hands many times over the course of the conflict. Due to the heavy fighting, most of the local vineyards, irrigation ditches, and wells were destroyed. Much of the local population also relocated either to Kabul City or to Panjshir Province, living as IDPs while the Taliban controlled most of the country.

When the Taliban fell, many of these IDPs returned to their homes, only to find their property and infrastructure destroyed. The lack of potable water throughout the country was intensified by the onset of a serious drought from 1999-2004, making an already difficult situation worse.

Although aid organizations began addressing the shortage of water in 2002, a UNHCR joint assessment with the Department of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, the Department of Refugees and Repatriation, and the local National Solidarity Programme in late 2007 concluded that some areas, including several villages in Shakerdara, still have insufficient access to potable water. The villages of Intefat and Danishmand are important centers in an area of high return, and, as such, are sites for the implementation of 5 water points (1 in Intefat and 4 in Danishmand) in 2008.

### *Beneficiaries*

The beneficiaries are located in the central part of Afghanistan and the water project will positively affect Afghans in the main villages Intefat and Danishmand in the Shakardara District of Kabul Province. The total direct beneficiaries of this project will be some 25 families (250 individuals) in two main villages of Shakardara District, the majority of whom will be Pashton returning refugees and IDPs.

### *Project 1 Description*

A construction company will be hired through the central bidding process.

The construction company will conduct a feasibility assessment of the site prior to bidding. During the course of the project the company will work together with representatives of targeted beneficiaries, the Site Selection Committee, the Department of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, and UNHCR to ensure coherence, and provide monthly progress reports.

The position of the water points will be decided through a site selection committee composed of UNHCR, the Department of Rural Rehabilitation (DRRD), and respective community representatives. In addition, the implementation procedures on the ground will take into account the involvement of community representatives in all phases of the project with due focus to site selection and monitoring.



Construction of a water point in Shakadara, February 2007.



Children in Shakadara getting fresh water from a newly constructed water point. UNHCR

Awareness activities on the importance of hygiene will be conducted among the beneficiaries, while caretakers and area mechanics will be trained on proper water stewardship. The community will be responsible for future operation and maintenance of the water points.

Each water point will be monitored by DRRD and UNHCR at different stages of the project. The monitoring is based on when the water point reaches the water table to ensure the agreed water column; when the drilling is completed; when casing is done; when the apron is constructed; and ensuring that the pump is in working order following installation

The handover of the completed and functional water points to the respective communities will be done in presence of the Site Selection Committee. The construction company will install signs showing the number of each water point, and when and by whom the water points were implemented and funded.

## Project 2: East Afghanistan

Project 2 will take place in Lagham province among three villages: Gerdi Kas, Ahmandzai and Charbagh Qalaqzai. The goal of the project is to enhance the reintegration of returnees by reducing the possibility of relocation due to shortage of water and encourage voluntary return.

### *Why Laghman province?*

Quargai district has the highest number of returnees in the whole province of Laghman. Some 38,000 individuals (6,621 families) have returned to Quargai district to date, representing 43% of the total returnees in the province since 2002. In 2007 alone, a total of 11,159 individuals (1,917) families returned to Quargai.

In 2007 UNHCR carried out a needs assessment in order to obtain firsthand information on various reintegration issues—the lack of water points was high on the list. The needs assessment was carried out in 8 villages of which three (3) villages (Gerdi Kas, Ahmandzai and Charbagh Qalaqzai) were found to have severe water supply problems due to the absence of potable water.

When community members use river water for drinking it can lead to a number of long term health problems. Due to the large population in Ahmandzai and Charbagh Qalaqzai, 2 water points are being proposed for each village. 1 water point will also be developed in Gerdi Kas.

### *Beneficiaries*

The estimated total population among these three villages is over 5,000 families—of which 881 families returned in 2007 alone. It is estimated that 25 families per water point will benefit from the project, totalling 125 families (750 individuals).

### *Project Description*

Both the projects in central and East Afghanistan will follow the same procedures.

In addition, the partners of UNHCR and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development are the same i.e. the Department of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, a Site Selection Committee, the local National Solidarity Programme, the community representatives and a construction company as the implementing partner.

## Safe Water in Afghanistan: Overall Expected Beneficiaries

The total beneficiaries for the combined projects will be some 150 families (1,000 individuals).

### Budget for UN Association - NY

	Number of Water Points	Unit Cost	Total Cost
<b>Project 1: Central Region</b>	5	2,600	13,000
<b>Project 2: Eastern Region</b>	5	2,600	13,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>		<b>\$26,000</b>