



UNDP Supports Initiatives to Provide Legal Aid in Helmand



Female inmates at a prison in Lashkar Gah, Helmand.

People accused of crimes or imprisoned in Helmand province will now have access to legal representation and legal aid following the opening of the office of the Afghanistan Independent Bar Association (AIBA) in Lashkar Gar. The initiative, supported by UNDP's Justice and Human Rights (JHRA) project, will mobilise 10 defence lawyers who are expected to provide legal support to approximately 150 people in 2014. The project is funded by Denmark.

According to the Afghan Constitution, every individual has the right to appoint a defence lawyer, but many Afghans do not have access or cannot afford one. Without defence lawyers, those accused of crimes languish in prison.

There are an estimated 1,500 people, including children, in conflict with the law in Helmand province. Some of them are detained due to misinterpretation of the law. According to the Crisis Group, in Afghanistan "a substantial number of arbitrary detentions stem from the criminalisation of acts that do not constitute actual crimes". It adds that in numerous occasions "citizens are detained for alleged crimes involving land disputes, debts, or family conflicts although the law expressly prohibits detention in such cases".

The establishment of the AIBA office in Helmand will allow cases to be channelled to the province's Legal Aid Grant Facility. The grant, which is also supported by UNDP, provides funding for legal aid cases undertaken by registered defence lawyers, prioritising cases involving women, children and the poor.

At a ceremony to mark the opening of the office on August 20th, the Provincial Governor, Mohammed Naeem, emphasized the importance of defence lawyers in ensuring peace and justice in society.

Of the people held in Helmand General Prison, 16 are women, many of whom are accused of so-called "moral crimes," such as adultery. Others have been accused of running away from home which, according to the attorney general and the Supreme Court, is not a crime. There are 56 prisoners in the juvenile facility in Helmand, five of whom are girls.

"Many people were going unrepresented. The active legal aid providers cannot cover all the cases because demand is too great", according to the access to justice coordinator for JHRA in Lashkar Gar, Zabihullah Karimullah. "This is a step in the right direction to address some of these issues."

JHRA is also supporting the attorney general's office to hire two female lawyers in Helmand for the province's unit working on the elimination of violence against women. In addition, the project is facilitating the coordination between the state justice system and those involved in traditional justice mechanisms such as shuras or jirgas with a view to increasing the number of referrals to the formal justice system.

JHRA works with the Ministry of Justice and other partners to support and facilitate the implementation of the Afghan National Priority Plans on Justice and Human Rights across the whole country.

A New Bridge in Garam Sair District Brings People Closer to Schools and Markets



This new bridge helps farmers ship produce to market in less time.

In the past, families in the Kharoti area of Garam Sair district had to cross a worn-out suspension bridge over a drainage canal or face a long trip by road to reach school, health facilities and markets.

The situation has recently changed after the construction of a reinforced bridge, supported by the UNDP-MRRD National Area Based Development Programme and funded by Japan.

Allowing more than 11,000 residents as well as vehicles and animals from seven villages of the Kharoti area to safely cross the canal, the bridge project provided employment for 12 local labourers who received a daily wage of 400 Afghani per day (about US\$ 7) over a period of six months.

Thanks to the new bridge, travel time to schools, health clinics and local markets nearly halved, and residents from both sides of the

canal now get together more often. Most of the residents are farmers which grow fruit and vegetables, in particular melons and watermelons, which constitute their main source of income. With the new bridge, they are able to transport their fresh produce to district and provincial markets less time, saving 24 kilometres round trip.

NABDP, a joint programme between UNDP and MRRD, works to achieve a significant reduction in poverty in Afghanistan focusing on agriculture and rural employment generation, the promotion of sustainable livelihoods and the development of rural infrastructure.

Wells Provide Water to a Kuchi Community in Bost District



A Kuchi family fetch water from a well built with UNDP support.

More than 2400 Kuchi of Registan area in Bost district have now access to water provided by 20 wells built with support from the National Area-Based Development Programme (NABDP) and UNDP's Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP).

The project employed 14 local labourers to dig the wells, each earning 400 Afghani per day (about US\$ 7) for a period of 40 days. Five of the labourers were former insurgents who had recently been reintegrated into their community. In addition, members of the community provided free labour and transport of materials, equivalent to 10 percent of the total budget.

Until then, the Kuchi families had relied on rainwater accumulated in ponds or water brought by women and children on donkeys or camels from the Helmand river, 10 kilometres away, which often caused diarrhoea and other infections especially among young children. "One day, my children went to bring water from the river and after several hours they came back empty-handed as a strong flood had swept away the donkeys and water containers," said Abdul Karim, an elder from the Kuchi community.

Life for the Kuchi families has now changed for the better. Women and children only have to walk for a couple of minutes to get water from the wells which are equipped with hand pumps. According to Mr Karim, lack of water in the past has caused them loss of livestock, but now they have enough water also for their animals, which are their sole source of income.

NABDP, a joint programme between UNDP and MRRD, works to achieve a significant reduction in poverty in Afghanistan focusing on agriculture and rural employment generation, the promotion of sustainable livelihoods and the development of rural infrastructure. APRP is another UNDP programme that works with the High Peace Council to encourage current combatants to renounce violence, return to their communities and begin a new and respectful life with their families.

UNDP Opens a New Office in Lashkar Gah to Bring Its Programmes closer to the People of Helmand



Staff gather at the newly-open UNDP office facility in Lashkar Gah.

UNDP opened a new provincial office in Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand province, which brings its operations in the province under one roof and facilitates coordination among its projects. The office also offers space for other UN agencies with presence in the province.

The UNDP projects that occupy the new office include the Afghanistan Subnational Governance Programme (ASGP); Justice and Human Rights Afghanistan (JHRA); Gender Equity Project (GEP) and the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP).

Established with support from the United Kingdom, Denmark and Estonia, the office is part of UNDP's regionalisation strategy which aims to bring development programmes closer to the Afghan people.

