

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

**EASTERN
REGION**



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Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations



United Nations Capital Development Fund



United Nations Mine Action Service



World Health Organization

The UN organisations are listed in the order of joining STFA



Programme Title & Project Number		Country, Locality(s), Priority Area(s)/ Strategic Results	
<p>Programme Title: <i>STFA Joint Programme for the eastern Region of Afghanistan: Addressing Basic Human Needs (JP-Eastern)</i></p> <p>MPTF Office Project Reference Number: 133760-3</p>		<p>Country: Afghanistan Region: Eastern Region</p> <p>Priority areas/Strategic Results:</p> <p>UNSFA Outcomes 1, 2, 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outcome 1: Sustained Essential Services Outcome 2: Economic opportunities and resilient livelihoods Outcome 3: Social Cohesion, Inclusion, Gender Equality, Human Rights, and Rule of Law 	
Participating Organization(s)		Implementing Partners	
<p>Organizations that have received direct funding from the MPTF Office under this programme: 11</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Food and Agriculture Organization International Organization for Migration United Nations Conference on Trade and Development United Nations Development Programme United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization United Nations Population Fund United Nations Human Settlements Programme United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women International Labour Organization 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Please refer to PUNO-specific reports 	
Programme/Project Cost (US\$)		Programme Duration	
Total approved budget as per project document:	150,685,491	Overall Duration	38 months
MPTF /JP Contribution ¹ :	28,156,484	Start Date	03.11.2022
Agency Contribution	N/A		
Government Contribution (<i>if applicable</i>)	N/A	Original End Date	30.04.2024
Other Contributions (donors):	N/A	Current End Date	31.12.2025
Total Contributions:	28,156,484		
Programme Assessment/Review/Mid-Term Eval.		Report Submitted By	
<p>Assessment/Review - if applicable <i>please attach</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>Mid-Term Evaluation Report - <i>if applicable please attach</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name: Hiroko Massey Title: Trust Fund Manager Participating Organization (Lead): UNDP Email address: hiroko.massey@undp.org 	

¹ The MPTF or JP Contribution, refers to the amount transferred to the Participating UN Organizations, which is available on the [MPTF Office GATEWAY](#)

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CDC	Community Development Council
CfW	Cash for Work
DaO	Delivering as One
DfA	De Facto Authorities
DIC	Drop in Centre
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
DTC	Drug Treatment Centre
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FHH	Family Health House
GBV	Gender Based Violence
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JP	Joint Programme
MPTF	Multi-Partner Trust Fund
MPTFO	Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PUNO	Participating United Nations Organization
RMNCAH	Reproductive, Maternal, Neonatal, Child and Adolescent Health
STFA	Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TEF	Transitional Engagement Framework for Afghanistan
TFMU	Trust Fund Management Unit
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UCT	Unconditional Cash Transfer
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNSF	United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan
VLC	Village Literacy Committee
WFHS	Women-friendly Health Spaces
WHO	World Health Organization



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA) was established on 20 October 2021 to help address basic human needs in Afghanistan at a time when communities across the country were confronting an accelerating socio-economic crisis. It constitutes an important instrument to enable well-coordinated international assistance for populations in need – including women and children – through joint United Nations (UN) interventions, while facilitating robust connections with humanitarian actions on the ground.

Established as a Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF), the implementing STFA Joint Programmes (JPs) offer a common framework for Participating UN Organizations (PUNOs) to provide coordinated assistance to address priority issues according to the specific needs of the most vulnerable people of Afghanistan. Implemented in Northern, Southern, Eastern and South-Eastern regions in 2023, the four JPs aim to promote more effective and integrated responses by strengthening the collaboration, coherence, and complementarity of interventions with those of the Humanitarian Response Plan. They are being strategically positioned to become part of the One UN Funding Framework.

The numerous interventions, tailored to the local context, were delivered through four main Outputs: 1) provision of essential services; 2) community livelihoods and local economic activities; 3) protection of farm-based livelihoods from natural disasters; and 4) community resilience and social cohesion. The four STFA JPs are part of unprecedented efforts of the UN and its partners to ‘Deliver as One’ (DaO) in the new political and socio-economic landscape of Afghanistan. This approach offers an integrated approach to programming for community-based development, enabling and catalysing the collaboration of multiple agencies, funds and programmes to capitalize on complementarities and synergies that would otherwise have remained untapped through a ‘business-as-usual’ approach to programming.

In 2023, a total of 71,255 people, including 39,952 (56.1%) females, benefited from STFA JP activities in the Eastern region, as follows:

- 46,697 people, including 22,222 (47.6%) females, benefited from access to essential services. Of these, 5,561 people received basic health services, such as child and maternal health services and health education, drug treatment and prevention, and psychosocial counselling. In addition, 39,081 people (43.9% female) benefited from enhanced basic community infrastructure, including access to potable water, irrigation, public sanitation, and renewable energy, among other services. Another 2,055 people (57.7% female) benefited from education related initiatives.
- 13,221 people (85.5% female) benefited from livelihood support activities related to rural livelihood support, support to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and training.
- 5,593 people (37.6% female) benefited from community resilience and disaster risk management interventions such as rehabilitated and newly constructed disaster-resilient community infrastructure, and training on climate resilience. Moreover, some infrastructure support activities also contributed to disaster risk management.
- 5,744 people (75.3 % female) benefited from activities to improve social cohesion such as awareness-raising, mainly on gender and human rights issues, and to support community planning and training.

Throughout 2023, STFA JP activities encountered challenges in all regions. One of the most common related to the operating environment: general restrictions imposed by the *de facto* authorities (DfA) (e.g., on women’s mobility or access to public spaces) created obstacles to meeting targets, sometimes resulting in delays and lower-than-expected participation of women in activities. The STFA Secretariat continued to closely engage with PUNOs, donor partners, and other key stakeholders to monitor the restrictions imposed on women’s work and education, continually assessing their implications on programming and options to manage the negative consequences in a principled manner. At the same time, PUNOs were, in many cases, also effective in introducing alternative, pro-active measures to continue to ensure - and, to the extent possible, expand - the meaningful engagement of women throughout the programming cycle. Such efforts are expected to continue.



PURPOSE



PURPOSE

The 15 August 2021 powershift exacerbated the prevalent vulnerabilities of the people of Afghanistan, who have subsequently required increasing life-saving and basic human needs assistance. In response, the UN committed itself to the principle of 'staying and delivering' for the people of Afghanistan under the overarching UN Transitional Engagement Framework (TEF), launched in January 2022, which established a common basis for the UN and its partners to deliver a coordinated and effective crisis response.

12 Contributing Partners - Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, UNDP, Luxembourg, Qatar, Turkey, Czechia, Iceland

The Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA) was established on 20 October 2021 as an inter-agency mechanism to enable donors to channel their resources and coordinate their support to UN joint programming. Complementing the efforts of humanitarian programmes, it aims to provide essential services to vulnerable Afghan communities so that they can meet their basic needs. At inception, the STFA implemented the Area-Based Approach to Development and Emergency Initiative (ABADEI) strategy, adopting the UN Transitional Engagement Framework (TEF) as the overarching strategic planning document in 2022, and contributing to two of TEF's main outcomes: the maintenance of essential services (Outcome 2) and the preservation of social investments and community-level systems essential for meeting basic human needs (Outcome 3). In 2023, the STFA aligned with the priorities of the UN Strategic Framework for Afghanistan (UNSFA) to support strategic and systemic programming and programme implementation while capitalizing on the complementarities and technical expertise of PUNOs. The Fund constitutes an important instrument to enable coordinated international assistance to vulnerable communities in Afghanistan.

The STFA Joint Programmes (JPs) build on the longstanding experience of PUNOs in Afghanistan and the early findings and lessons learned during implementation of activities in the Northern and Southern regions following the August 2021 powershift. Interventions are designed to capitalize on the different mandates and capacities of PUNOs, avoiding duplication of efforts and promoting meaningful collaboration and synergies to ensure tangible impact for target communities. As such, the JPs are part of the unprecedented efforts of the UN and its partners to 'Deliver as One' (DaO). This initiative aims to bolster inter-agency complementarities and synergies whereby the output of one PUNO can contribute to other PUNOs' activities. This strategic approach is designed to optimize cost-effectiveness and capitalize on the unique areas of expertise, capacities and programmatic footprints of each PUNO. Key intervention areas and districts are prioritized based on the situational analysis of the region and other available information, including the Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index (MPI), Priority Areas of Return and Reintegration (PARR), remote and underserved 'white' areas, food security data from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, and disaster-prone regions.

As of December 2023, 17 UN Agencies had signed the memorandum of understanding to participate in the STFA in the reporting period, with an invitation open for any other interested UN agencies to join. At that time, eight regional JPs covering the entire country had been developed and approved by the STFA Steering Committee, and four are being implemented in Northern, Southern, Eastern and Southeastern regions. Further Regional JPs, along with other possible joint sectoral programmes, will be rolled out in stages based on the STFA resource allocation strategy and the availability of funds.



Reflecting the UNSFA, the regional JPs have three priorities:

- Priority 1: Sustained Essential Services (STFA Output 1)
- Priority 2: Economic Opportunities and Resilient Livelihoods (STFA Outputs 2 and 3)
- Priority 3: Social Cohesion, Inclusion, Gender Equality, Human Rights, and Rule of Law. (STFA Output 4).

In 2023, the JP worked to deliver four outputs:

- Output 1 - Essential services and community infrastructure - including for health, agriculture, education, and energy supply - are functional, sustainable and expanded to meet the different needs of women and men.
- Output 2 - Livelihoods, businesses, and the local economy are able to recover, more sustainable and more resilient to instability.
- Output 3 - Communities have improved infrastructure, access to water and preparedness mechanisms to protect farm-based livelihoods and cope with climate and environment shocks and natural disasters.
- Output 4 - Social cohesion, respect for human rights - including, in particular, the rights of women and girls - and access to justice are progressively strengthened at the local level contributing to greater community resilience.

In addition, STFA interventions also directly contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including Goal 1: Poverty Reduction; Goal 2: Zero Hunger; Goal 3: Good health and well-being; Goal 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower all Women and Girls; Goal 8: Decent work and Economic Growth; Goal 10: Reduce inequalities; and Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities.

The STFA Regional Joint Programme for Eastern Afghanistan covers Kunar, Laghman, Nuristan and Nangarhar provinces and borders Pakistan. The Eastern regional JP was approved by the STFA Steering Committee in March 2022, but funding allocation was only approved in October 2022. It received total funding allocation of US\$41.5 million, until December 2023 calculated based on the STFA Regional Allocation Strategy, which, in turn, is guided by the population-adjusted Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI). In 2023, this supported a total of 10 DaO initiatives. [2022: a total funding allocation of US\$41.5 million]

The Eastern region's population is 2,912,579 (7.48% of the total national population). It is vulnerable to natural hazards which are dominated by seasonal floods, earthquakes, landslides and droughts. In the past, the region has been adversely impacted by conflicts, which have led to significant displacement, destruction of life and property, loss of livelihood and derailment of development initiatives. This has created a fragile humanitarian situation as access to the population remains a challenge due to the insecurity and remoteness of some rural areas.

A total of 11 PUNOs have received funding allocations to implement JP activities in the region, as presented in Table 1 in the following page.

No	PUNO	Output 1	Output 2	Output 3	Output 4
1	FAO	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
2	IOM	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	UN Habitat	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	UNCTAD	Yes	Yes	No	No
5	UNDP	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
6	UNESCO	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
7	UNFPA	Yes	Yes	No	No
8	UNODC	Yes	No	No	Yes
9	UNWOMEN	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
10	UNHCR	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
11	ILO	Yes	Yes	No	No
Number of PUNOs		11	9	6	7

Table 1: List of Participating UN Organizations (PUNOs) Eastern Region JP by Output Area

The end of 2023 marked the first full year of implementation of JP activities under STFA in the region. This report presents the consolidated progress and results collectively achieved and reported by the 11 implementing PUNOs for the period January to December 2023.





RESULTS



RESULTS

Since the start of the joint programme in the Eastern region of Afghanistan 74,344 people, including 40,674 (54.7%) females have benefited. While an outcome level independent evaluation is yet to be conducted, the analysis of available data indicates that the programme has contributed to generating significant and tangible impacts on the lives and livelihoods of targeted beneficiaries in multiple dimensions. Programme activities targeted priority needs, focusing on construction or rehabilitation of essential infrastructure, improving access to health services, including drug treatment and drug prevention services, provision of permanent and adequate shelter, rural livelihood support activities, and community engagement to promote social cohesion and gender equality. The overarching objective has been to improve and sustain access to essential services, facilitate avenues to employment and economic opportunities for resilient livelihoods, and promote social cohesion and human rights, with a focus on women and girls. The JP has also generated immediate employment and income opportunities for host communities, including the most vulnerable and disadvantaged households, internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees and returnees through rehabilitation of public assets and community infrastructure.



Southern Region STFA Report Card - 2023



11

Participating UN Organizations



71,255

people benefited



56.1%

43.9%



Beneficiaries reached through STFA in Eastern Region

Health

5,561



Basic community
infrastructure

43,281



Income generation
support

18,965



1,393

Trainings



28

MSMEs supported



Aiming to build resilience, the JP has delivered livelihoods support for economic inclusion, including through support for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and training programmes. Working to address identified needs, enhance community resilience and foster durable solutions, the programme has progressed significantly in enhancing community resilience, economic empowerment, disaster preparedness and social cohesion. Targeted interventions have directly impacted many individuals, particularly women, and have laid a foundation for sustainable development and inclusive growth. Collaborative efforts and targeted interventions have helped develop positive change in communities, setting a promising trajectory for future initiatives and continued impact. Aligned closely with the outcomes outlined in the UNSFA, the impact on gender inclusivity and empowerment, as indicated by the number of female beneficiaries across multiple initiatives, directly supports UNSFA's goal of promoting gender equality and social inclusion. The emphasis on supporting women in need through initiatives such as MSME support reflects the UNSFA's objective of enhancing economic empowerment and sustainable livelihoods for all Afghans, particularly vulnerable populations, in a principled manner.

Improved access to infrastructure and health services



Renewable energy support in Eastern Region Nangarhar

The JP has improved access to essential services through construction and rehabilitation of community infrastructure aiming to strengthen environments conducive to durable solutions and enhance access to basic services including healthcare and education. In 2023, community infrastructure projects reduced risks of natural hazards, particularly flooding, and improved sanitation, housing and street lighting, as well as supporting access to livelihoods. In total, over 39,081 people (43.9% female), are estimated to have benefited. These interventions have contributed to improved irrigation, mitigating disaster risks posed by flooding, and enhanced protection for livelihoods linked to agricultural activities.



All interventions were designed and targeted to deliver high impact, enhancing protection of local livelihoods, mitigating natural hazard risks, and promoting overall community resilience against shocks. Ultimately these activities have contributed to creating environments where community members have access to services in line with needs and have the capacity to absorb returning families within local service systems in a sustainable manner. In due course, increased accessibility to essential services resulting from infrastructure rehabilitation will catalyse socio-economic transformations in the served communities. Improved access to health, education and energy will empower individuals, particularly women and children, by equipping them with the tools to pursue education, skills development and economic activity. These outcomes therefore do not only address immediate needs but also establish a robust foundation for long-term community resilience and development, with the potential for enduring positive and sustainable impact.

In the reporting period, a total of 5,561 people (69.7% female) benefited from improved access to essential health services, including drug prevention and treatment services. A total of 10 temporary family health houses (FHHs) are now fully operational providing essential reproductive, maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent health (RMNCAH) services. In addition, plans are advanced to support construction of 10 permanent FHHs in the same communities, along with four community health centres (CHCs) with construction work scheduled for 2024. These interventions will address unmet needs for essential RMNCAH services and improve overall physical health and well-being of populations living in underserved and remote 'white' areas, promoting equitable access among communities to lifesaving healthcare, including the provision of psychosocial support services and awareness raising.

This also included supporting two drug treatment centres (DTCs) to improve the quality as well as the availability of drug treatment rehabilitation services. Improved quality and access also help mitigate the spread of HIV and the adverse social and health consequences of drug use through HIV testing and counselling services. In addition, outreach activities increased awareness of risky individuals, families and communities, along with youth and underserved targeted populations, about drugs, drug use and the harmful consequences of addiction, and improved counselling services supported the well-being of people facing psychosocial challenges and mental health issues.

Furthermore, to strengthen access to quality education, construction of six classroom blocks is 55 percent completed, and water supply networks have been improved at two schools. In addition, the JP trained facilitators, provided basic literacy classes, and completed a series of studies and assessments to provide up-to-date information on the state of education to inform future initiatives.

Overall, these interventions have addressed unmet needs for essential health services and improved the overall physical and mental health and well-being of populations living in underserved areas, promoting equitable access among communities to vital services. While the environment for implementation remains challenging, the JP continues to ensure that lives are saved, and no one is left behind.

Improved livelihoods: In 2023, 13,221 people (85.5% female) benefited from livelihood support activities. Key initiatives included provision of agricultural livelihood support packages, entrepreneurship training for farmers,

support to MSMEs, including asset replacement support, income generation and CfW schemes, and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and apprenticeship and basic skills training. These interventions provided a holistic and inclusive approach to increase community resilience to shocks, protect household and community assets and infrastructure, and generate employment opportunities, underscoring the JP's commitment to address both immediate and long-term needs with interventions underpinned by gender transformative actions and aligned with the priority requirements of the target communities. This assistance was provided at a time when people's needs were particularly acute as the rate of unemployment and the proportion of people under the poverty line continued to increase.



Male beneficiary in the paper recycling factory in Eastern Region Nangarhar

The assistance provided to MSMEs focused on creating more inclusive opportunities, particularly for women and vulnerable groups, and contributing to the recovery, sustainability, and resilience of the local economy. Improved livelihoods significantly mitigate protection risks faced by vulnerable individuals and groups by improving household capacities to meet needs, absorb shocks, and reduce reliance on coping strategies. At a time when businesses are having to cope with the impact of political changes and the economic recession, they create a more inclusive economy with greater equality of economic opportunities and jobs, leading to more resilient livelihoods. By bolstering MSMEs, the programme does not only foster entrepreneurship and innovation but also sets in motion a cascade of economic growth and job opportunities within the community. A dedicated focus on empowering women entrepreneurs promotes gender parity and unlocks the latent potential of women as key drivers of economic advancement, ultimately cultivating a more inclusive and resilient local economy.



To ensure better access to dignified livelihoods, and to strengthen the recovery of businesses, the JP's asset replacement assistance enables beneficiary businesses to upgrade their equipment and infrastructure, leading to increased productivity, competitiveness and sustainability in operations. Through the apprenticeship programme, apprentices gain valuable skills and practical experience, enhancing their employability and contributing to the economic development of the region. The JP is therefore advancing towards promoting an increasingly inclusive economy with greater equality of economic opportunities and resilient livelihoods by enabling business sustainability and productivity, as well as by enhancing the technical skills and employability of targeted beneficiaries. These efforts are constantly being advanced to engage women, in turn promoting the inclusivity of the job market and economy.

Cumulatively, these interventions will contribute to local economic resurgence by creating sustainable livelihood avenues and fostering an environment conducive to economic expansion and prosperity amidst the prevailing political and economic challenges. The potential impact extends beyond individual beneficiaries to encompass the broader community as enhancing access to basic services such as water, education, healthcare and transportation fortifies the foundations for long-term socio-economic development and resilience.

The JP's proactive initiative to raise awareness on disaster preparedness demonstrates a strategic approach to enhancing community resilience and minimizing the impact of natural disasters. By imparting knowledge and skills necessary for climate adaptation and disaster response, the programme empowers communities to safeguard their livelihoods and assets against environmental risks. Through targeted awareness activities, communities gain insights into sustainable farming practices, resilient livelihood strategies, and effective disaster management, increasing their ability to withstand and recover from natural disasters. These outcomes in disaster risk reduction, climate-resilient livelihoods and climate-smart agriculture underscore the JP's commitment to enhancing resilience and sustainability in the face of climate change and natural disasters, in line with the UNSFA's focus on building resilient communities. Likewise, an emphasis on gender inclusivity underscores the JP's commitment to promoting gender equality and empowering women.

Despite challenges in achieving targets related to human rights awareness and social cohesion, the overall progress made in creating employment opportunities, supporting livelihoods, and empowering women-led enterprises demonstrates the JP's contribution to UNSFA outputs and the broader goal of sustainable development and well-being in Afghanistan. These activities will generate lasting benefits for the community, shaping a future characterized by increased social harmony, respect for diversity, and collaborative problem-solving. By building a cadre of informed and engaged individuals committed to upholding human rights, promoting social cohesion, and preventing conflicts, the programme is creating a legacy of positive change that will endure beyond its immediate duration. As community members continue to apply their newfound knowledge and skills in their daily interactions and decision-making processes, the transformative impact of these activities is expected to continue across generations, fostering a culture of inclusivity, understanding and resilience that will fortify the community against future challenges and contribute to its long-term prosperity and well-being.



OUTPUTS



OUTPUTS

In 2023, approximately 71,255 people, people in the Eastern region (56.1% female) benefited from STFA activities across all four output areas. The majority benefited from the provision of essential services, most significantly access to improved infrastructure and healthcare and drug treatment services under Output 1 and livelihood support under Output 2, but it is worth noting that the four output areas have cross-cutting impacts: 'cross-fertilisation' is common and indeed an objective across programmatic interventions. For instance, irrigation works implemented under Output 1 also contribute to the protection of people from flood hazards under Output 3. Similarly, community-level planning initiatives under Output 4 contribute to programming for the remaining three output areas. The following section provides a more detailed breakdown of all four JP output areas for the Eastern region.



Female beneficiary in the paper recycling factory in Eastern Region Nangarhar

UNSWA PRIORITY AREA 1: SUSTAINED ESSENTIAL SERVICES



Output 1: Essential services and community infrastructure - including for health, agriculture, education, and energy supply - are functional, sustained and expanded to meet different needs of women and men.

In 2023, approximately 46,697 people, including 22,222 (47.6%) females in the Eastern region, benefited from the provision of services under Output 1. Highlights include the following:

Infrastructure: In 2023, over 39,081 people (43.91% female) are estimated to have benefited from improved infrastructure to reduce risks of natural hazards, particularly flooding, as well as waste removal, improved housing and street lighting. Highlights include the following:

- The JP rehabilitated eight critical community-based infrastructures in Nangarhar and Laghman provinces, benefiting a total of 4,903 households (34,321 individuals) with a significant representation of women.
- In response to environmental safety and climate change concerns, 7,000 cubic meters of waste was removed from Jalalabad city. The initiative directly and indirectly benefited 19,285 households through reduced health risks and created temporary job opportunities for 15 individuals.
- Access to safe and adequate housing was delivered to 680 households, equivalent to 4,065 individuals (2,463 female and 1,602 male) in Nangarhar, Kunar and Laghman provinces, improving living conditions and the well-being of vulnerable community members.
- One culvert was constructed and handed over to the communities benefiting over 3,000 individuals.
- Two projects are on-going to install street solar lights with 30 percent of work completed for both projects.



New Stone Boulder Wall constructed in Zakhil Kama Nangarhar, Eastern Region



Essential health services: In the reporting period, a total of 5,561 people (69.72% female) benefited from improved access to essential health services, including drug prevention and treatment services. Highlights include the following:

- A total of 10 temporary family health houses (FHHs) - five in Kunar and five in Laghman - were established and are now fully operational. In 2023 they provided essential RMNCAH services to 4,884 women and children (322 receiving antenatal care services, 26 deliveries with skilled birth attendants; 513 children under five years old; 40 users of modern family planning methods; and 3,375 female outpatients) with two complicated maternal health cases referred externally.
- To support construction of 10 permanent FHHs - five in Kunar and five in Laghman - the JP conducted and completed the necessary technical assessments, finalized the designs, and expects to award qualified contractors in the first quarter of 2024.
- The installation of four community health centres (CHCs) is ongoing, to be completed in 2024, which will contribute to improved overall well-being of over 10,050 households in Laghman, Nangarhar and Kunar provinces. At the end of 2023, the CHC in Bad Pakht, Laghman, is estimated at 34% completion, the CHC in Deh Bala at 11%, and the two CHCs in Dara-e-Pech and Sultan in Kunar at 7%. The CHCs will improve the overall physical health and well-being of populations living in catchment areas and create short-term employment opportunities for an average of 25 skilled and unskilled labourers per site who will be engaged over a six-month period and receive daily wages.
- Psychosocial support services were integrated into five FHHs in Catras, Kalaygal, Nangal, Nickmock and Parchagram in Nuristan province to increase access of women and girls. The facilities are staffed by trained psychosocial counsellors and midwives.
- Five female psychosocial counsellors received five days of psychological first aid (PFA) training to equip them as frontline service providers in Nuristan province supporting 624 beneficiaries, including 422 women and 202 girls. In addition, two women-friendly health spaces (WFHS) provided psychosocial support services to 2,143 beneficiaries (1,731 women and 412 adolescent girls) and group psychosocial services reached 1,982 beneficiaries (1,155 women and 827 adolescent girls) in Nangarhar. Furthermore, 240 individuals (152 women and 88 girls) benefited from vocational skills training provided in two WFHS in Nangarhar.
- In 2023, 5,231 individuals (2,985 women and 2,246 girls) were reached with awareness raising messages on reproductive health, personal hygiene, and menstrual hygiene topics in the two WFHSs in Nangarhar province. Information on services available was disseminated to promote health seeking behaviours with targets being overachieved due to the high level of community acceptance which led to an increase in women and girls attending.
- The JP increased access to evidence-based drug treatment services supporting one 30-bed male drug treatment centre (DTC) in Laghman and one 20-bed male DTC in Nuristan. Drug treatment, rehabilitation and social re-integration services were provided to 214 persons who use drugs (all male). In addition, through provision of psychosocial support and counselling services, knowledge was enhanced, and the behaviour changed of 2,364 at-risk individuals (all male).
- The spread of HIV and adverse social and health consequences was mitigated through provision of HIV testing and counselling services to 986 individuals (943 male, 43 female), and a total of 662 (642 male, 20 female) people using drugs received primary healthcare services. In total, 1,078 clients (1,040 male, 38 female) were reached and provided with services.
- The awareness of risky individuals, families and communities was increased through distribution of 7,296 information, education and communication materials to 7,028 male and 268 female individuals, strengthening protective factors and increasing knowledge on the adverse effects of drugs and drug addiction.
- Improved counselling services reached 7,296 individuals in Laghman and Nuristan provinces to support the well-being of people facing psychosocial challenges and minor mental health issues.
- A total of 662 individuals received primary healthcare services. These services addressed the immediate health needs of people using drugs and their families and ensured access to essential healthcare services for this marginalized group. In addition, 3,456 clients received basic social services (food, refreshment and hygiene services).
- Awareness was increased of around 1,300 youths directly and 6,600 indirectly about drugs, drug use and the harmful consequences of addiction through a sports event in Nangarhar province.
- Capacity building training was organized in Nangarhar and Laghman provinces for 99 health services providers on harm reduction. The events aimed to enhance the skills and knowledge of healthcare

professionals and enable them to assess, identify, provide brief interventions, and refer people who use drug to specialized drug use treatment centres. Participants included nurses, midwives, doctors and community health supervisors from national Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) health facilities.

Education

- Construction of six classroom blocks is ongoing with 55 percent of construction work completed. Likewise, construction of a water supply network at Samar Khill girls and boys high school is on-going with 60% of construction work completed.
- The construction of a solar powered tube water well and water reservoir for Kandi Bagh school in Chaparhar district in Nangarhar province started in mid-December and by 31 December had reached 55% progress.
- In Nangarhar and Nuristan provinces, 137 basic literacy classes were provided, where 2,055 learners (58% female) aged 15 years and above completed the nine-month programme. All facilitators received pre-service and in-service training on teaching methodologies and the curriculum.
- In addition, the JP conducted a series of national studies, which included the Eastern region, on primary teacher competencies, the TVET sub-sector, and the present situation of higher education. The primary school study demonstrated a pressing need for a more systematic approach to teacher training and continuous professional development. The TVET studies included: (1) a survey on formal TVET institutions (covering 379 institutions in total, i.e., all public and private TVET institutions across 34 provinces, including those in the Eastern region); (2) a non-formal TVET sub-sector analysis; (3) an assessment of TVET management information system; (4) a TVET stakeholder mapping; and (5) an overall TVET sub-sector review. The higher education study highlights the detrimental impacts of the suspension of higher education for women on the functionality of the higher education sub-sector and Afghanistan's economic growth prospects.

UNSFA PRIORITY AREA 2: ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES AND RESILIENT LIVELIHOODS



Output 2: Livelihoods, businesses, and the local economy can recover, more sustainable and be more resilient to instability.



Male beneficiaries in the paper recycling factory in Nangarhar, Eastern Region

In the reporting period, 13,221 people (85.5% female) benefited from livelihood support. Key outputs included agricultural support, MSME support, income generation, and apprenticeship programmes and TVET training. Highlights include the following:

- The JP supported 9,109 households (77,863 people of whom 40,599 female) representing 60.6% of the total 15,025 target households through provision of livestock protection, home gardening, backyard poultry keeping, soybean cultivation, micro-poly greenhouse beekeeping and mushroom packages along with related technical training. The distribution of different assistance packages to the remaining 5,916 households is ongoing.
- The JP identified 1,100 farmers in Nangarhar province (Sorkhrood, Rodat, Khogyani and Shirzad districts) and Laghman province (Alinegar and Alisheng districts) and trained 30 lead farmers in entrepreneurship and generating business ideas. Support was also provided in terms of poultry and livestock keeping, drip irrigation networks, and growing citrus fruit. Twenty-eight lead farmers also received equivalent training in Jalal-Abad city with each round of training lasting four days. The end of training evaluation indicates that the

sessions improved the farmers entrepreneurial abilities with the average total marks obtained by the 28 participants in the pre-test being 3.11 out of 20 while the post-test average was 15.9.

- Alternative livelihood opportunities were provided to 1,676 farming families (1,005 female-headed) in Nangarhar and Laghman provinces to steer vulnerable farming families away from poppy cultivation.
- The JP assessed the needs of 120 MSMEs from Nangarhar, Laghman, and Kunar provinces. Of these, 69 businesses (40 male-owned, 29 female-owned) were deemed eligible for asset replacement support. Among the eligible businesses, 22 MSMEs (7 male-owned, 15 female-owned) were selected for asset replacement support and procurement has started based on plans submitted by the businesses.
- To improve access to livelihoods and strengthen recovery of businesses, the JP worked to support MSMEs in Nangarhar, Kunar, Laghman and Nuristan provinces. Beneficiaries were supported to establish or upgrade MSMEs operating in sectors such as tailoring, metalwork, clothing and food sales, cosmetics, mobile phone repair, pharmacy, vehicle repair, poultry, and printing services.
- Support to local economic activities included CfW schemes that reached 1,903 vulnerable individuals, generating 27,376 paid working days. In addition, support was extended to 246 MSMEs led by women, providing them with technical and financial assistance to create sustainable livelihood avenues and foster economic growth within their communities.
- Provision of livelihoods support benefited 800 (376 females, 424 males) returnees and IDPs in Laghman, Kunar, Nangarhar, and Nuristan provinces. Activities improved household economic inclusion, access to basic services through strengthened purchasing power, and overall resilience to shocks.
- The JP delivered essential agricultural inputs and comprehensive training to empower 115 women in Nuristan province. The intervention involved training 60 women in food processing techniques, providing a small-ruminant package to 45 women, and constructing 10 greenhouses for female beneficiaries.
- In Nangarhar province, 500 apprentices were selected and enrolled in programmes which will conclude in February 2024. Comprising 26 percent returnees, 2 percent IDPs, and 72 percent vulnerable people, the apprentices are undergoing a six-month programme in various vocations such as textile and fabric crafts, food processing, shoe making and healthcare with 150 MSMEs.
- TVET was provided to 190 individuals (100 female). In addition, 240 women were identified to receive technical and financial support.
- TVET programmes were implemented reaching 221 women and improving access to crucial resources such as water, roads, energy and education.
- Planning for two vocational tailoring skills training sessions was completed with training materials distributed to over 60 women in women-only centres. Two vocational skills training for 60 women on carpet weaving is on-going and 10 percent of the curriculum has been delivered.



Output 3: Communities have improved infrastructure, access to water and preparedness mechanisms to protect farm-based livelihoods and cope with climate and environment shocks and natural disasters.

In the reporting period, climate change adaptation, disaster preparedness and early warning support activities progressed with 5,593 beneficiaries (37.6% female). Highlights include the following:

- The JP selected 4,000 vulnerable households to participate in CfW activities to repair 40 critical community-level infrastructures including local irrigation systems, livestock watering points, flood protection walls, soil-water conservation structures, *karezes* (traditional water management systems), and other productive agricultural assets. Interventions were prioritized based on community needs identified through participatory approaches.
- Six community-based drought early warning systems (CB-DEWS) were established across five provinces and 1,393 smallholder farmers and herders were trained on them. CB-DEWS aims to make meteorological, remote sensing, and agro-related information accessible and actionable to provide farmers with practical guidance.
- The construction of flood protection for an irrigation canal in Pashad village, Sarkani district of Kunar province was planned to start in August 2023 but had to be delayed due to unsafe water levels. The works resumed in



November and by 31 December 2023 had reached 72 percent progress. Expectations are that the work will be completed in the first half of February 2024.

- The JP rehabilitated traditional water management systems and provided documentation of intangible cultural heritage in the region. In total, six karezes were rehabilitated in Khogyani, Chaparhar and Rodat districts of Nangarhar province, directly benefiting 4,200 individuals (50% female). In addition, the project created 9,170 working days of short-term employment through a CfW scheme.
- The JP protected farm-based livelihoods from natural disasters by raising awareness among 800 individuals (50% women) on disaster preparedness.
- A groundbreaking intervention, the Afforestation as a Nature-Based Solution to Disaster Risk Reduction project was successfully concluded, marking a significant milestone in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction efforts. This innovative initiative focused on afforestation and delivered transformative impacts. By planting 20,000 jujuba trees across 12 hectares of arid land, the project directly benefited 3,200 individuals, enhancing resilience to climate change and reducing the risks of natural disasters. Furthermore, through a CfW scheme, 647 labourers participated in the project resulting in economic empowerment and community engagement.
- The first phase of a Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Watershed Management Study partially funded under the JP was conducted and a final report was completed in mid-December 2023. The study aims to develop an integrated approach to DRR watershed management in the Kabul basin and produce guidance for the introduction of small-scale measures that fit into an overarching plan.

UNSAFE PRIORITY AREA 3: SOCIAL COHESION, INCLUSION, GENDER EQUALITY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND RULE OF LAW



Output 4: Social cohesion, respect for human rights - including, in particular, the rights of women and girls and access to justice are progressively strengthened at the local level - contributing to greater community resilience.

In the reporting period, community outreach and engagement programmes benefited 5,744 people (75.3% female) with JP activities focusing on participatory engagement, capacity building on community resilience and social cohesion, and media training. Highlights include the following:

- Five Comprehensive Action Plans (CAPs) were completed in Kunar, Nangarhar and Laghman provinces and the findings shared with PUNOs with the aim of implementing interventions identified and preferred by communities. Communities were engaged in an inclusive and participatory manner, especially with the aim of promoting women's contributions, insights and rights.
- In Kunar, Nuristan, Laghman and Nangarhar provinces, 1,600 individuals were identified to receive capacity building support on social cohesion and peace building.
- The JP conducted training sessions on conflict mitigation, natural resource management, and women's rights for 150 participants, including 78 youths. In addition, 271 women in the region received psychosocial support.
- To improve the condition of women and girls by enhancing their legal knowledge and accessibility to legal aid services and provide psychosocial and case management services to gender-based violence victims to improve their economic resilience, 3,380 beneficiaries (including 2,630 women) were identified in Kunar and Laghman provinces.



- In partnership with the Afghan Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AWCCI), a regional support hub was established, bringing together female psychosocial counsellors and para-legal advisors to cater to the needs of female-led MSMEs and female farmers. The primary objective was to offer tailored services that address the specific demands of these groups along with psychosocial awareness sessions offering guidance on emotional and mental well-being, as well as providing psychological first aid.
- To foster gender diversity and job creation in the media, the JP trained 84 journalists (30% female). In addition, 110 news reports, special interviews and feature reports were created on social topics (e.g. education, health, environment and social issues) and roundtable discussions were hosted contributing to improved information accessibility and increased community engagement.
- Using the peoples' process approach, the JP conducted community meetings in Jalalabad with men and women to identify community challenges and needs and prioritize projects that enable vulnerable groups including women, children and people with disabilities to have access to quality essential services.



CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED & BEST PRACTICES



CHALLENGES

In 2023, implementation of activities under the JP in the Eastern region faced a number of challenges, including security concerns, lack of access, exchange rate fluctuations, and the limited availability of assistance. The following are the most significant challenges reported by STFA PUNOs in 2023.

Security concerns: Security concerns and the complex political situation caused disruptions, particularly in remote areas. Staff retention amid security risks presented additional challenges. The PUNOs have maintained rigorous security protocols to uphold situational awareness and safeguard the well-being, security, and safety of their personnel.

Increasingly challenging operating environment: The DfA decree of 24 December 2022 and its extension in April 2023, announcing restrictions on women work for NGOs and UN agencies, remained a challenge. Particularly during the period that immediately followed the announcements, with limited female staff available, office-related work and project administration ran at reduced capacity resulting in process delays. The restrictions also limited access among female staff supporting field activities, meaning that it was harder to engage women and girls in targeted communities. While the exemptions that have been secured through a limited level of coordination enabled most female staff to return to employment, the risk of intervention continues and requires close monitoring to enable timely and appropriate mitigation measures. Nevertheless, the JP remains committed to gender representation within the workforce, and a principled approach, including within implementing partner workforces.

Inflation and exchange rates: Inflation and shifting exchange rates contributed to market price increases for construction materials and works resulting in challenges related to implementation costs. As per the UN Operational Rates of Exchange², on 15 January 2023, 1 US\$ = 88.73 Afghani (AFN) while on 31 December 2023, 1 US\$ = 69.34 AFN meaning that the US\$ value against the Afghani dropped around 22 percent and, at the same time, global inflation contributed to an increase in the costs for materials and fuel. With the intention of ensuring stability of JP contracts, the cost of fulfilling agreements made in US\$ has had a huge impact on contractors considering that the costs of wages, materials, equipment and taxes are paid in local currency. This has caused significant losses among contractors and bankruptcy threatens some.

Delays of Afghan-destined containers at Karachi Ports: Import of some specialist construction material was affected following the impasse and pile-up of Afghanistan-destined containers at Pakistan ports which led to the re-direction of the material through Bandar-Abbas in Iraq.

² <https://treasury.un.org/operationalrates/OperationalRates.php>

Limited availability of assistance: The JP faced a significant challenge in some locations due to the large population, the limited assistance available and the fact that there are multiple competing priorities which cannot be fully addressed with existing resource envelopes. This created a substantial challenge for the programme team in determining the most vulnerable eligible beneficiaries, while, at the same time, ensuring fairness in the selection process.

Recruitment of midwives: Selection of midwives in collaboration with communities promotes stability of tenure and thus retention of the midwives in their localities. However, it has often proved to be difficult to identify suitable trained midwives to recruit who would accept to work in remote areas. Despite this challenge, over the course of 2023, relevant PUNOs have been able to adopt innovative approaches to identify suitable trainees that are eligible for such support and who, at the same time, can benefit local communities in need.

LESSONS LEARNED

The following are key lessons learned during 2023:

Engagements with local stakeholders: Although the process is lengthy and causes delays, affecting implementation, timely expenditure and agreed timelines, consultation with local stakeholders to ensure safe and unhindered access to beneficiaries proved essential. Coordination with relevant de-facto counterparts and obtaining assurances for programme implementation, especially regarding women's involvement or when dealing with sensitive issues, has proven helpful. Close coordination and building strong relationships with community elders, youth associations, religious leaders, and influential bodies such as provincial chambers of commerce and investment can also increase support and understanding of the benefits of programming, especially if addressing stigma and discrimination against targeted individuals, for example. Segregating office space for male and female staff, hiring female staff to engage with female beneficiaries, and recommending the use of hijab for female staff can help address gender-specific challenges and ensure inclusivity within projects.

Training work with women: Likewise, following Islamic rules and regulations, female trainers should train female trainees, separate spaces and entrances should be provided for female participants, and training may need to be conducted in female-dedicated spaces such as women's markets. Female trainers and women activists may also agree to use their own houses for training. To a large degree, the decision to switch to apprenticeships for female beneficiaries has resolved the issues of the DfA ban on centre-based trainings. Engaging and involving the relatives of female beneficiaries through training sessions has also proved effective in enhancing women's skills and knowledge, fostering knowledge transfer within their support networks, and ensuring project sustainability.

Involvement of Community Development Councils: Involvement of Community Development Councils (CDCs) was often crucial in ensuring project activities were delivered on time. It also helped to ensure that any changes in the delivery mode of women's activity were socially accepted. Such engagements have not only built community ownership and inclusion of both women and men but have also often contributed to reducing restrictions put in place by local DfAs. In contrast, the implementation of activities without engaging local



community leadership can reduce impact and sustainability, and place greater risks on programme personnel during implementation.

Strengthening the 'Delivering as One' modality of operations: PUNO working groups have successfully collaborated to identify and address common problems, share experiences and knowledge, and organize joint visits and activities, for example. Duplications and overlaps in activities have been avoided and beneficiaries reached more effectively and equitably. Shared knowledge has enabled mapping of different interventions, resources available and good practices. Similarly, the overlapping of community engagement and social cohesion activities to raise awareness and community capabilities and ensure continuity of activities with women, for example, has been more effectively implemented.

Continuous innovation: The need to be flexible and innovative in developing pragmatic solutions is apparent, especially within the current fragility context. The restrictions imposed by the DfA, many which impede the application of decent work principles, has led to the continued need to consult, seek and identify local techniques and solutions and adapt them to address the socio-economic challenges. Sometimes this resulted in additional costs and delays related to the need for additional incentives, partnerships building, and stakeholder engagement.

Transparency, clear communications and managing expectations: With needs on the ground far outweighing availability of resources, consistent and transparent communications with communities were required on a frequent basis to manage expectations and promote social cohesion. By clearly communicating eligibility criteria and the objectives of the project from the outset, as well as involving relevant stakeholders in decision-making processes, potential problems, misunderstandings and conflicts among community members were reduced, ensuring smoother implementation. In particular, beneficiary profile surveys benefit, and a more efficient and transparent selection process result, from the establishment of selection and appeal committees responsible for the selection of villages and their active involvement in decision-making processes.

Female engagement: One of the main lessons learned from STFA projects in other regions is that the direct implementing agency must ensure security assurances for female staff engagement and deliver services tailored to females. Active participation in discussions with relevant local stakeholders is required to ensure the safe and unimpeded access to target locations .

Recruitment of midwives: To encourage unemployed midwives to move with their families to new locations, they were provided with suitable reimbursement packages, acceptable family accommodation, and a clear understanding of the project and work. In some cases, recruiting the husband or brother of the midwife as a guard of the health facility acted as further encouragement.





RISK ANALYSIS



RISK ANALYSIS

During the planning and development of the JP for the Eastern Region, a risk management framework was developed to categorize risks into contextual (political, security), programmatic, operations/financial, and organisational types. In 2023, while no new risks were reported, a number of pre-identified risks did materialize as summarized in Table 2 below.

Risk Description (as per JP document)	Type	Rating	Owner	Response Implemented
Risk#7: Abuses of human rights or unlawful behaviour is committed by de facto authorities and/or local authorities.	Programmatic	Likelihood: Likely Consequence: Major Risk Rating: High	Programme Management, PUNOs	[Risk status: Materialized and Open] In 2023, PUNOs have continued to engage with CDCs, shuras, village literacy committees, religious leaders, and community elders, to assess and monitor the human rights situation, at local level, and continue advocacy for a principled approach to delivery – including by ensuring the meaningful participation of women and girls in planned activities.
Risk#18: Further restrictions on women and girls’ participation in social and economic life. (De-facto Authorities (DfA) issued a decree banning women from working in NGOs (national and international) across the whole country)	Contextual	Likelihood: Very Likely Consequence: Major Rating: Very High	PUNOs/TFMU	[Risk status: Materialized and Open] PUNOs to remain apprised of higher-level dialogues and engagements on the human rights situation in Afghanistan (UN SG; UN Human Rights Council; UN Security Council, UNAMA; international community/ACG), and of measures or recommendations issued through such platforms. Regular coordination meetings between UN/ international community leadership and DFA aiming to advocate to reverse announced restrictions on Afghan female workers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PUNOs assessing the situation at local levels – and adopting locally-suitable measures. Where appropriate, alternative work modalities/approaches for female staff to work and to reach out to female beneficiaries have been rolled out. Continued advocacy has been a key measure PUNOs have taken to lessen the impact of this

			<p>materialized risk. Space for localized arrangements (ensuring non-discrimination alongside the safety and security of personnel) continue to be explored on a regular basis.</p> <p>In some cases, alternative modalities of implementation have been effectively implemented- e.g. changes in venues for training targeting women entrepreneurs. Commitment requested by IPs not to replace female personnel with male personnel.</p>
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Table 2: Risks that materialized and responses implemented





QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT



QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT

In 2023, the STFA-supported JP in the Eastern region of Afghanistan continued to make progress to improve lives and livelihoods, especially those of the most vulnerable. In a challenging socio-economic environment resulting from the August 2021 powershift in Afghanistan, the conflict in Ukraine and a global economic slowdown, the JP has enhanced access to essential services, including healthcare services, and created sustainable jobs, including for women. Agricultural support packages, along with income generation, CfW and UCT initiatives, and cash (small grants), in-kind and training support to MSMEs - many female-led - have sustained and enhanced lives during a severe and continuing socio-economic crisis. With activities prioritized according to needs determined by local communities, the JP also helped improve social cohesion by promoting women's rights and human rights and building local community governance structures to guide grassroots planning processes. Despite some limitations resulting from the working environment, in 2023 the JP has achieved its intended objectives.

The JP has also provided a unique opportunity for the international aid community, UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes, along with a wide range of implementing partners - with years of practical experience in Afghanistan - to work together through a 'Delivering as One' (DaO) approach. This approach has been instrumental in addressing the basic human needs of the Afghan people in a more efficient and effective manner. It has enabled JP PUNOs to capitalize on each other's strengths and technical expertise and avoid unnecessary duplication or overlaps.

With a total funding allocation of \$41.5 million, a total of approximately 74,344 people, including 40,674 (54.7%) females benefited from JP activities in the region since inception of programming. In 2023, 71,255 people (56.1% females) benefited as follows: 39,081 people (43.91% female) in vulnerable locations with improved access to basic services such as safe drinking water, sanitation, housing, street lighting, and 7,616 people who received healthcare services, including child and maternal health services, drug treatment and drug prevention services, mental health and psychosocial counselling support, and health education and education, all essential to help restore at-risk individuals to normal and more resilient lives.

Work to improve infrastructure, culverts and flood protection walls has not only improved drainage systems and protected agricultural land from flood damage but has also acted to safeguard local livelihoods and economies. The JP has improved the quality of life for many community members while enhancing resilience against natural disasters and contributing to overall community socio-economic well-being with initiatives providing employment opportunities and incomes that help drive economic growth and local development. Specifically, a total of 13,221 people (85.50% female) benefited from livelihood support under income generation.

Support provided to MSMEs and farmers, including cash (small grants), in-kind and training opportunities, has also resulted in the creation of thousands of sustainable jobs, including for women, in targeted regions. Preliminary monitoring data indicates high success rates of activity outputs, including considerable increases in average incomes of MSME beneficiaries, contributing to improved access to basic services, self-reliance and resilience. Empowering MSMEs through financial support and training not only helps build economic growth but also strengthens local economies and improves access to essential services. Furthermore, promoting gender equality within the entrepreneurial landscape fosters a more inclusive and diverse workforce. As the current protection landscape of Afghanistan places strict limitations on the inclusion of women and girls in social,



economic and political aspects of life, facilitating their access to livelihoods is vital to provide pathways to inclusion.

Efforts in disaster preparedness and climate-resilient livelihoods - including an innovative afforestation project - highlight the JP's commitment to environmental health and climate resilience. These initiatives aim to enhance community members' knowledge and skills in mitigating risks related to disasters and adapting to changing climatic conditions, ultimately promoting sustainable practices and mitigating environmental impacts.

In 2023, the JP continued to demonstrate a strong commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment, along with youth empowerment and social inclusion, by prioritizing the needs of women and other vulnerable groups and enabling their participation. Gender diversity, job creation and resilience in the media has also been supported. Beneficiary groups have demonstrated strong engagement in decision-making processes, notably through engagement with CDC leaders and the community in promoting human rights and gender equity. Community consultations and needs assessments in intervention design phases have further ensured accountable programming, with interventions targeting priority gaps and needs. In 2023, 5,744 people (75.31 % female) benefited from social cohesion support under the JP.

Activities have been significantly enabled by key partnerships with local NGOs, and local expertise and knowledge have been instrumental in delivery for sustainable outcomes, including in infrastructure components, livelihoods activities, drug treatment, and soft social cohesion interventions. In tandem, DaO partnerships have enabled interlinked activities, leveraging PUNOs' individual technical expertise to deliver responses that effectively target gaps and needs including among IDPs, IDP returnees, refugees and refugee returnees, with specific consideration for vulnerable groups, including women and girls.

Throughout 2023, JP implementation faced programming and operational challenges. In some instances, PUNOs faced restrictions in gaining safe and unhindered access to target areas or beneficiaries which resulted in some delays in implementation and underachievement of targets, especially related to female beneficiaries. Nevertheless, PUNOs remained proactive in their pursuit of alternative means to engage female beneficiaries and such efforts will continue. Moving forward, alternative and innovative modalities for principled delivery will remain critical to sustain the pace and scale of progress and protect the gains made under the JP in 2023 and beyond.

In conclusion, the JP's comprehensive approach to addressing cross-cutting issues such as socio-economic development, environmental health, gender equality and community well-being underscores its commitment to fostering holistic growth and resilience. A comprehensive approach to implementation ensures that both immediate needs are addressed, and long-term sustainability and inclusivity is fostered. Strong inclusive practices in planning and implementation have contributed to local ownership of intervention activities, underpinning sustainable outcomes. JP initiatives are not only paving the way for sustainable development and inclusive socio-economic progress in the region but are also driving positive change within the community.

Gender mainstreaming and addressing gender-based violence



Notwithstanding the challenging operating context, and the Eastern region's conservative culture, the JP continued to address gender-specific issues, identifying and implementing appropriate measures to support women in the region. In 2023 56.1 percent of STFA beneficiaries in the Eastern region were female. Communities have been engaged in an inclusive and participatory manner, especially to encourage women's contributions and insights, promote gender equality, address gender-based issues, and ensure equal access to opportunities and resources for women and girls. People with disabilities have also been included during assessments, consultations and decision-making processes which will inform vital and inclusive interventions. Work has been advanced in close collaboration with local Community Development Council (CDC) leaders, focusing on sensitizing key stakeholders on protection risks and capacity building. Outcomes include empowered local leaders, better equipped to serve their communities and foster a sense of collective ownership. As a result of JP initiatives, women report feeling economically and socially more empowered with improved reading and writing skills, enhanced access to economic opportunities through vocational training, and increased knowledge and awareness about hygiene and health. Psychosocial counselling also supported women that were experiencing challenges in addressing emotional distress.

Promotion of human rights

The JP contributed to the promotion of basic human rights, including in particular socio-economic rights. As well as saving lives through support to critical health services and helping advance the right to work and to decent employment through livelihood support initiatives, JP initiatives have promoted the right to life with safety and dignity through improved access to education and measures aimed at the prevention and elimination of gender-based violence. Also advancing the right to live without discrimination through public awareness campaigns and gender equity and women's empowerment initiatives across the four joint outputs, the social and legal impacts are profound and far-reaching. By providing training on conflict mitigation, natural resource management and women's rights, the programme equips participants with the knowledge and skills needed to address and resolve conflicts peacefully, manage resources sustainably, and advocate for gender equality and women's empowerment. This integrated approach, which includes supporting Afghan media in challenging circumstances, both enhances the social fabric by fostering cooperation and understanding and strengthens the legal framework by promoting women's rights and providing essential services for female-led businesses, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and empowered society.



PARTNERSHIPS



PARTNERSHIPS

STFA Leadership: At the end of 2022, the Chair of the Steering Committee changed from UNDP Resident Representative to UN Resident Coordinator, contributing to moving STFA closer to a 'One UN' funding framework vision. In 2023, Under the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator, the STFA tapped into UN-wide coordination mechanisms (e.g. UN Country Team (UNCT)/ Programme Management Team (PMT)/ Operations Management Team (OMT)) as a key pooled financing instrument alongside the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF). As chair of the STFA Steering Committee, the Resident Coordinator is well-positioned to further advance "Delivering as One UN" in alignment with the broader UN reform agenda.

Co-leadership of the Steering Committee: In 2023, Sweden continued to serve as the co-chair of the STFA Steering Committee and other official platforms e.g., TCWG and Donor Technical Sessions until June. During this period, Sweden played an essential role in the management and coordination of the fund's activities aimed at supporting vulnerable communities in Afghanistan. At the STFA SC meeting held on 26 June 2023, Sweden transitioned its co-chair responsibilities to Norway. Norway continued collaborating with existing partners to further the fund's mission of addressing the basic human needs of people in Afghanistan.

Pro-active outreach: The Trust Fund also engaged in targeted outreach efforts to promote relationships with diverse stakeholders, including potential new donors such as Arab states, European countries, and North America, as well as non-governmental organizations like Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) and other implementing partners, local communities. In June 2023, a "Strategic Discussion on STFA Transition into 'One UN Funding Framework'" took place in Dubai, led by the Chair of STFA and attended by STFA stakeholders. Key topics addressed encompassed the necessity for predictable funding, alignment with other funding streams, and the prioritization of activities. Participants largely supported the transition into One UN framework, underscoring the importance of ongoing evolution and flexibility within the Fund. This dialogue laid the groundwork for the formulation of the STFA Strategic Note, which received approval during the STFA SC meeting in March 2024, held in Istanbul.

Strategic coordination with other funding streams: The Trust Fund further strengthened its engagements with other funding streams - particularly Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (OCHA), Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund (ARTF/World Bank), Asian Development Bank, and Afghanistan Humanitarian Trust Fund/Islamic Development Bank (AHTF/IsDB); cultivating a network of support and advocacy for delivering as one and HDP nexus approach to promote a sustainable solution for the current humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. Consequently, the STFA became an observer of AHF's Advisory Board Meeting, as well as ARTF's Management Committee, while representatives of OCHA and ARTF/World Bank are regular attendees, as observers, in STFA's Steering Committee meetings. Joint events hosted by STFA-ARTF/WB were also held on the side of the Afghanistan Coordination Group in-person meetings. Such levels of engagement allowed for strategic information-sharing which, in turn, helps to minimize the risk of unnecessary duplications or overlaps in downstream programmatic activities. The engagements between STFA and ADB also stepped up in 2023, at fund-management and senior leadership level, helping to ensure adequate strategic coordination.



ANNEXES



ANNEX I. INDICATOR BASED PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

JP Output Indicators	Achieved Indicator Targets	Reasons for Variance with Planned Target (if any)	Source of Verification
Output 1: Essential services and community infrastructure – including for health, agriculture, education, and energy supply - are functional, sustained and expanded to meet different needs of women and men.			
1a. Number of people that have benefited from UN-supported essential services and/or new/rehabilitated infrastructure, disaggregated by type of service and sex. (Unit: People) Baseline: 0 Target: 302,331 Female target: 155,509	Progress: 49,065 Female progress: 21,181		
1c. Number of people that have benefited from drug treatment, and drug rehabilitation services (health). (Unit: People) Baseline: Target: 9,160 Female target: 630	Progress: 677 Female progress: 19		
1d. Number of functional, UN-supported, facilities providing basic health assistance (including basic health assistance services for women and girls). (Unit: Facilities) Baseline: Target: 145 Female target: 0	Progress: 25 Female progress: 25		
1e. Number of COVID-kits distributed to health centres/clinics. (Unit: Kits) Baseline: Target: 1,510 Female target: 0	Progress: 0 Female progress: 0		
1f. Number of children, adolescents, and adults (including adolescent girls and women) who benefit from primary and secondary education, basic general literacy and vocational education programmes (at least 50% female). (Unit: People) Baseline: Target: 194 Female target: 102	Progress: 2,247 Female progress: 1,285		
1g. Hectares of rehabilitated and/or newly irrigated land for agricultural activities. (Unit: Hectares) Baseline:	Progress: 3,948 Female progress: 1,519		

JP Output Indicators	Achieved Indicator Targets	Reasons for Variance with Planned Target (if any)	Source of Verification
Target: 1,150 Female target: 345			
Output 2: Livelihoods, businesses and the local economy can recover, more sustainable and more resilient to instability.			
2b. Number of people who have benefited from newly created income-generation opportunities, disaggregated by sex, age and province. (Unit: Other) Baseline: 0 Target: 5,453 Female target: 3,498	Progress: 13,221 Female progress: 11,304		
2b.1. Number of people who have benefited from productive employment through CfW schemes (at least 30% women; 50% youth). (Unit: People) Baseline: Target: 6,303 Female target: 23	Progress: 1,903 Female progress: 23		
2c. No. of worker days generated with UN-support. (Unit: Workdays) Baseline: Target: 27,376 Female target: 0	Progress: 27,376 Female progress: 0		
2f. Number of MSMEs that benefit through financial capital support, training and/or other forms of asset support, disaggregated by women-led and men-led MSMEs. (Unit: MSMEs) Baseline: Target: 3,396 Female target: 350	Progress: 28 Female progress: 0		
Output 3: Communities have improved infrastructure, access to water and preparedness mechanisms to protect farm-based livelihoods and cope with climate and environment shocks and natural disasters.			
3a. Number of districts with functional early warning systems and other preparedness mechanisms for climate shocks and natural disasters. Baseline: Target: 1 Female target: 0	Progress: 6 Female progress: 0		
3b. Number of people who acquired knowledge and skills on disaster preparedness and climate-resilient livelihoods (at least 30% women). (Unit: People) Baseline:	Progress: 1,803 Female progress: 390		



JP Output Indicators	Achieved Indicator Targets	Reasons for Variance with Planned Target (if any)	Source of Verification
Target: 6,410 Female target: 390			
3c. Number of farmers who benefited from training and assets for improved, climate-smart, agriculture (at least 30% women). (Unit: People) Baseline: Target: 1,391 Female target: 121	Progress: 116 Female progress: 116		
3d. Number of people that benefit from rehabilitated and/or newly constructed disaster-resilient community infrastructure and nature-based solutions. (Unit: People) Baseline: Target: 183,680 Female target: 74,340	Progress: 4,200 Female progress: 2,100		
Output 4: Social cohesion, respect for human rights - including, in particular, the rights of women and girls and access to justice are progressively strengthened at local level - contributing to greater community resilience.			
4b. Number of people with better awareness about human rights, social cohesion and conflict prevention (at least 50% women). (Unit: People) Baseline: Target: 74 Female target: 30	Progress: 110 Female progress: 33		



ANNEX II. STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Powering internally displaced Afghans through renewable energy and jobs

In the heart of Nangarhar, Afghanistan, a groundbreaking solar-powered initiative is bringing opportunities into internally displaced communities, including returnees, offering hope through employment to those forced from their homes.

Mariam, a 23-year-old participant in the UNDP's renewable energy programme implemented as part of Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA)'s Joint Regional Programme, lives with her family of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan. Having displaced from Pakistan a few years ago, she now works at a local paper recycling factory that was rejuvenated through sustainable initiatives.

Previously shut down due to financial difficulties, the factory was revitalized after the UNDP's ABADEI project, funded by STFA, implemented solar power solutions. This innovation not only restarted operations but also provided crucial employment opportunities for the community, including Mariam and approximately 60 others, many of whom are returnees or displaced persons from Pakistan. A significant number of these employees are women, who now have stable incomes to support their families.

In addition, the factory indirectly supports another 200 individuals who collect recyclable materials from urban and other areas. These roles are essential in a region where economic opportunities are limited.



Mariam in the paper recycling factory Nangarhar/Farhad Zalmai

When asked about the programme and its impact, Mariam responded with saying:

"I am extremely grateful for my job, which provides stable employment for many of us, including young people. This job is a lifeline, steering us away from potential involvement in drugs and crime. The income I earn supports not only myself but also my family's daily needs."

She also values the environmental benefits of the solar-powered factory, stating, "The use of clean energy significantly reduces our carbon footprint and helps combat climate change. It feels empowering to contribute positively to the environment."

The factory is a testament to how sustainable energy solutions can catalyze social and economic development. Through job creation and environmental protection, STFA's funding is driving progress and empowering displaced communities in Afghanistan's.



Workers in Eastern Region Nangarhar

A New Beginning: The Story of Sarah's Empowerment through Enterprise





Sarah in her cosmetic shop in Nangarhar, Eastern Region

In a crowded returnee settlement of Tangi, located in the Behsud district, Nangarhar Province, a hope springs from a small, brightly colored cosmetic shop.

The shop, operated by Sarah, an inspiring and hardworking 23-year-old, is not only a source of cosmetic products for the community but also a strong foundation that supports the stability and livelihood of her large family of twelve.

Sarah's journey to entrepreneurship began when UNHCR, in collaboration with its partner WADAN, identified her as a beneficiary for their livelihood support programme as part of the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA)'s Joint Regional Programme. Recognizing her potential and determination, they provided her with the necessary items and materials to establish her own business.

When asked about the programme and its impact, Sarah responded with saying, *"I am grateful to UNHCR for its support. I feel empowered and happy to be supporting my younger brothers and sisters,"* with her voice filled with a palpable sense of pride. Through her shop, she earns approximately AFN 9,000, which she supports her family's needs and invests in the future of her younger siblings.

"I am also supporting my small siblings who are able now to go to school and get educated," she added. The impact of the shop goes beyond mere financial stability for her and the family; it is about nurturing the stability and resilience of her community.

The returnee crisis in Afghanistan is a pressing issue as it compounds the already severe challenges of instability, limited socio-economic opportunities, exacerbated by climate change induced disasters, leaving hundreds of thousands in dire need of support to meet their basic human needs.

Sarah's story is one of courage, empowerment, and transformation. It underscores the profound impact of targeted support programmes in empowering individuals to change their circumstances and, by extension, those of their communities.

Her cosmetic shop does more than selling accessories and jewelry - it sells hope, sustains dreams, and builds resilience against all odds.



ANNEX III: PROGRAMMATIC REVISIONS

The joint programme document was revised to align with the UN Strategic Framework for Afghanistan (UNSFA), which will serve as the strategic planning framework for Afghanistan until the December 2025. This included adjustments involving the introduction of new PUNOs for the JP for East region (ILO), with relatively minor budgetary changes.



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