

# ANNUAL REPORT

SOUTHERN  
REGION

2023



# CONTRIBUTING DONORS



Government of Germany



United Nations Development Programme



Government of Sweden



Government of Qatar



Government of Norway



Government of Luxembourg



Government of Denmark



Government of Türkiye



Government of the Netherlands



Government of Czechia



Government of Finland



Government of Iceland

The order is by the size of contributions.

# PARTICIPATING UN ORGANIZATIONS



**Delivering as One UN**



Organizations that have received direct funding from the MPTF Office under this programme: 10 PUNOs





Programme Title & Project Number	Country, Locality(s), Priority Area(s)/ Strategic Results								
<p><b>Programme Title:</b> STFA Joint Programme for the Southern Region of Afghanistan: Addressing Basic Human Needs through UNSFA ('JP-Southern')</p> <p><b>MPTF Office Project Reference Number:</b> 129789-92</p>	<p><b>Country:</b> Afghanistan <b>Region:</b> Southern</p> <p><b>Priority areas/Strategic Results:</b> UNSFA Outcomes 1, 2, 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Outcome 1:</b> Sustained Essential Services</li> <li>• <b>Outcome 2:</b> Economic opportunities and resilient livelihoods</li> <li>• <b>Outcome 3:</b> Social Cohesion, Inclusion, Gender Equality, Human Rights, and Rule of Law</li> </ul>								
Implementing Partners	Programme Duration								
Please refer to PUNO-specific reports	<table> <tr> <td>Overall Duration</td><td>48 months</td></tr> <tr> <td>Start Date</td><td>01.01.2022</td></tr> <tr> <td>Original End Date</td><td>31.12.2023</td></tr> <tr> <td>Current End Date</td><td>31.12.2025</td></tr> </table>	Overall Duration	48 months	Start Date	01.01.2022	Original End Date	31.12.2023	Current End Date	31.12.2025
Overall Duration	48 months								
Start Date	01.01.2022								
Original End Date	31.12.2023								
Current End Date	31.12.2025								
Programme/Project Cost (US\$)	Report Submitted By								
<p>Total approved budget as per project document: 150,906,481</p> <p>Government Contribution: N/A</p> <p>MPTF /JP Contribution[1]: 49,509,218</p> <p>Agency Contribution: N/A</p> <p>Government Contribution (if applicable): N/A</p> <p>Other Contributions (donors): N/A</p> <p><b>Total Contributions: 49,509,218</b></p>	<p>o Name: Hiroko Massey</p> <p>o Title: Trust Fund Manager</p> <p>o Participating Organization (Lead)[2]: N/A</p> <p>o Email address: hiroko.massey@undp.org</p>								
Programme Assessment/Review/Mid-Term Eval.									
<p>Assessment/Review - if applicable please attach Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Mid-Term Evaluation Report – if applicable please attach Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>									

[1] The MPTF or JP Contribution refers to the amount transferred to the Participating UN Organizations.

[2] The Joint Programme has no lead agency.





# CONTENTS

Acronyms and abbreviations.....	6
Executive Summary.....	7
Purpose.....	9
Results.....	11
Outcomes.....	13
Outputs.....	14
UNSFA Outcome 1: Sustained Essential Services.....	16
UNSFA Outcome 2: Economic Opportunities and Resilient Livelihoods.....	18
UNSFA Outcome 3: Social Cohesion, Inclusion, Gender Equality, Human Rights, and Rule of Law.....	20
Delays in implementation, challenges, lessons learned and best practices.....	21
Challenges.....	22
Lessons Learned.....	23
Risk Analysis.....	24
Qualitative Assessment.....	26
Partnerships.....	29
Annexes.....	31
Annex I. Indicator Based Performance Assessment.....	32
Annex II. Stories from the Field.....	35
Annex III. Other Assessments or Evaluations.....	36
Annex IV. Programmatic Revisions.....	36
Annex V: A Brief Note on Resources.....	36

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>CDC</b>	Community Development Council
<b>CfW</b>	Cash for Work
<b>DaO</b>	'Delivering as One' (approach, modality, initiative)
<b>DfA</b>	De Facto Authorities
<b>DIC</b>	Drop-in Centres
<b>DTC</b>	Drug Treatment Centre
<b>GBV</b>	Gender Based Violence
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Person
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>JP</b>	Joint Programme
<b>MPTF</b>	Multi-Partner Trust Fund
<b>MPTFO</b>	Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office
<b>MSME</b>	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>PUNO</b>	Participating United Nations Organization
<b>STFA</b>	Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>TEF</b>	(UN) Transitional Engagement Framework (for Afghanistan)
<b>TFMU</b>	Trust Fund Management Unit
<b>UCT</b>	Unconditional Cash Transfer
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNCT</b>	United Nations Country Team
<b>UNCTAD</b>	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNHCR</b>	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNIDO</b>	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
<b>UNODC</b>	United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime
<b>UNSFA</b>	United Nations Strategic Framework for Afghanistan
<b>VLC</b>	Village Literacy Committee
<b>WHO</b>	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 Southeastern 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 'Delivering 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. The end of 2023 marked the second year of implementation of JP activities under STFA in the region. This annual report presents the consolidated progress and results collectively achieved and reported by the 10 PUNOs for the period January to December 2023.

In 2023, a total of 507,484 people, including 226,167 (44.6%) females, benefited from STFA JP activities in the Southern region, as follows:

- 428,144 people, including 199,201 (46.5%) females, benefited from access to essential services. Of these 7,815 people (36.7% female) received basic health services, such as child and maternal health services and health education, drug treatment and prevention, and psychosocial counselling. In addition, 417,054 people (46.7% female) benefited from enhanced basic community infrastructure, including access to clean water, irrigation, public sanitation and renewable energy, among other services. Another 3,275 people (54.5% women and girls) benefited from primary education, literacy and vocational education.



- 17,035 people (24.4% female) benefited from Cash for Work (CfW) and Unconditional Cash Transfers (UCT).
- 56,624 people (33.1% female) benefited from training, income generation support and rural agriculture-based livelihood support. This includes community resilience and disaster risk management interventions such as training, agricultural inputs, rehabilitated and newly constructed disaster-resilient community infrastructure, and training on climate resilience. Some infrastructure support (linked to bullet 1) also contributed to disaster risk management.
- 5,681 people (71.6% 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 possible 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. 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 Regional Joint Programme for Southern Afghanistan covers five provinces including Kandahar, Helmand, Zabul, Uruzgan and Nimroz. Since its launch in 2022, it has received a total funding allocation of US\$49.8 million. Such allocation was calculated based on the STFA Regional Allocation Strategy, which, in turn, is guided by the population-adjusted Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI). The Southern region's total population is 3,925,955 (10.08% of the total national population). The region borders Iran to the west and Pakistan to the south and in the past two decades, has been disproportionately affected by conflict, limiting access to certain areas. Labour opportunities remain significantly below average.

**10 Participating UN Organizations** – FAO, IOM, UNCTAD, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UN-Habitat, UNHCR, UNODC, UN Women have received funding allocations to implement JP activities in the region, as presented in Table 1 below.

PUNO	Provision of Services (Output 1)	Livelihood Support (Output 2)	Community Resilience & Disaster Risk Management (Output 3)	Social Cohesion (Output 4)
FAO	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
IOM	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
UN-Habitat	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
UNIDO	No	Yes	No	No
UNCTAD	Yes	Yes	No	No
UNDP	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
UNESCO	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
UNFPA	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
UNODC	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
UNHCR	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
# PUNOs	10	9	5	7





# RESULTS



## RESULTS

In 2023, 507,484 people (44.6% female) benefited from STFA JP activities in the region. 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, livelihood support, and community engagement to promote social cohesion and gender equality.

Overarching outcomes include improving and sustaining access to essential services, facilitating routes to employment and economic opportunities for resilient livelihoods, and enhancing 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



**10**

Participating UN Organizations



**507,484**

people benefited



55.4%



44.6%

**226K**

female  
beneficiaries



## Beneficiaries reached through STFA in Southern Region

Health  
**7,815**



Basic community infrastructure  
**417,054**



Awareness-raising  
**5,681**



Unconditional cash transfers  
**8,391**



Cash for work  
**8,644**



Employment generation  
/work days/  
**143,916**



Agri-based livelihood  
**17,424**



Trainings  
**590**



MSME support  
**3,383**







# OUTPUTS







# UNSFPA 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 417,089 people, including 193,089 (46.4%) females in the Southern region, benefited from the provision of services under Output 1.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

In 2023, 405,054 people (46.5% female) are estimated to have benefited from improved infrastructure and the provision of essential services including improved access to safe drinking water and electricity, public toilets, renewable energy, irrigation canals and education infrastructure. Key highlights include the following:

- 403,054 (46.5%) people benefited from the rehabilitation of community-based basic infrastructure, education infrastructure as well as provision of safe and clean water and sanitation facilities, vendor cabins and solar streetlights. This also includes construction of three elevated water reservoirs, installation of submersible water pumps with solar energy supplies to extend water supply systems and sanitation facilities comprising toilets with stalls, septic tanks with absorption wells, and solar panels, batteries and lights.

Such infrastructure initiatives provide durable solutions with long-lasting effects on target communities. In implementing these initiatives, most PUNOs employed members of the local community, contributing to the creation of livelihood opportunities for both skilled and unskilled workers.

## ESSENTIAL HEALTH SERVICES

In the reporting period, a total of 7,815 individuals (36.7% female) benefited from improved basic health services[3], including drug prevention services. Highlights include the following:

- The construction of 21 out of the originally planned 29[4] FHHs varies between 10 and 90 per cent for each unit according to the new requirements of the authorities.
- The JP kept 31 drug treatment centres (DTCs) operational and provided technical and capacity building support to service delivery staff through contributions of medicines, foods and operation costs. One 100-bed male DTC was established in Kandahar and one 50-bed male DTC was established in Zabul.
- Through provision of drug treatment services, 271 persons who use drugs recovered and were socially re-integrated. By establishing two drop-in centres (DICs) in Kandahar and Zabul and conducting outreach services, access to evidence-based drug prevention was enhanced through drug use awareness and prevention sessions, improved parenting skills, and psychosocial support to children, youths and families in communities and other settings.

[3] Service provision was provided through 29 temporary FHHs, using non-STFA funding, to continue of lifesaving and essential reproductive health services, including individual and group counselling in the psychosocial facilities integrated in FHHs. The beneficiaries are not counted in this report. Also, as no STFA funds were advanced in 2023, the community midwifery programme, launched in 2022, was kept operational using other sources of funding.

[4] Due to significant increases of construction costs and additional requests by de facto authorities such as perimeter fences and waiting areas for men, the initial STFA allocation had to be amended between UNFPA and IOM. Eight FHH remain unfunded.



- The spread of HIV and adverse social and health consequences were mitigated by providing HIV testing and counselling services to 5,906 (2,933 male and 2,973 female) people who use drugs, and primary health care services were provided to 13,485 (7,119 male, 6,366 female) people who use drugs. In addition, communities were empowered and sensitized to make informed decisions about drug use prevention.
- The awareness of at-risk individuals, families and communities was enhanced, and community protective factors strengthened, through distribution of 11,924 brochures on drug prevention (6,312 to male, 5,612 to female).
- 2,575 people who use drugs and their families (2,279 male, 296 female) were provided with outreach services including primary health care services, HIV testing and counselling, and social services.
- In Kandahar (110) and Zabul (50) 160 male youth were encouraged to avoid and prevent drug use through two sensitization events. Capacity building training was also delivered to 50 health services providers (25 male, 25 female) in two batches in Kandahar, and three awareness raising sport events on drug use prevention were organized for 1,100 youth in Zabul. In addition, 40 community leaders were sensitized through four awareness raising events in Zabul.

## EDUCATION

In the reporting period, 3,275 individuals (54.5% female) benefited from improved access to equitable and quality education where no one is left behind. Highlights include the following:

- 219 basic literacy classes were established, where 3,275 learners of age 15 and above completed the nine-month programme. Despite recognized challenges for women's participation, 56% of the learners were women. 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 Southern 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 Southern 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 more resilient to instability.

In the reporting period, over 30,392 people (24.9% female) benefited from livelihood support. Key outputs included agricultural support packages, income generation, cash-for-work (CfW) schemes, unconditional cash transfers (UCT), and MSME support, including training. Highlights include the following:

- 16,302 farmers (29.6% women) received agri-based livelihood support and income generation support through provision of livestock protection, home gardening, backyard poultry keeping, soybean cultivation, solar dryer, micro-poly greenhouse, beekeeping and mushroom packages, along with related technical training and the repair of community irrigation systems. Technical training was provided to improve agricultural practices, inputs and post-harvest management, as well as marketing and vocational skills, of 9,757 vulnerable households (2,705 female-led). Field data confirms that targeted farmers increased unit yields by 15 percent on cereal crops and by 21 to 37.5 percent on vegetable crops and were able harvest vegetables 20 days earlier and get 50 percent more for their produce at market.
- 17,035 individuals (24.4% female) benefited from cash-based assistance programmes under CfW and UCT activities, enhancing economic opportunities and livelihoods. Of these individuals 8,391 (49.4% female) benefited through UCT and the other 8,644 (0.1% women) benefited through CfW.
- 3,383 MSMEs were supported through employment retention, asset replacement, training and infrastructural support. In total, 338 businesses were supported through the Employment Retention Scheme (128 businesses) and the Asset Replacement Scheme (123 businesses) with 87 businesses receiving both types of assistance. Around 25% of beneficiaries of the Employment Retention Scheme were female-led businesses in sectors such as agriculture, automotive, construction, electronics, food and hospitality, manufacturing and personal care. The scheme covered the salaries of 2,831 employees (2,680 men, 151 women) in 213 businesses to help staff retention and create new job opportunities.



*Support for MSMEs in Southern Region Kandahar*



- A total of 48 training sessions (33 for male and 15 for female) engaged with 350 MSMEs (220 male-led and 130 female-led) to improve the knowledge and capacity of 383 MSME employees (243 male, 140 female) on business and trade related topics. With the average total marks obtained by the participants recorded as 3.62 out of 20 in the pre-test and 17.16 in the post-test, significant improvement was demonstrated.
- Vocational skills training and the provision of 188 training kits (including essential items such as sewing machines, sewing tables, threads, needles, irons and scissors) in two women-friendly health spaces in Helmand served as an entry point for 4,147 beneficiaries (2,729 women, 1,418 girls) to access vocational information and services along with awareness sessions on psychosocial support and reproductive mental health.
- Three 3-month vocational training sessions were conducted with 108 women in Kandahar. The wages<sup>[5]</sup> paid to trainees and supervisors were part of a project contribution to provide capital for women to start their own businesses when they finished training.
- Construction of a car repair workshop has been completed at Kandahar Mechanical School to support youth training. When operational, it will benefit over 3,000 young people at the state-owned facility.
- Vendor cabins and solar streetlights have been constructed and installed to benefit 280 male traders and passers-by in Kandahar. The initiative enables vendors to operate their businesses in a safe and organized manner and increase visibility and accessibility. The current DfA decree, which is strictly adhered to by local communities, makes it difficult to engage women in such activities



**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.



*Financial support in Kandahar Southern Region*

<sup>[5]</sup> Stone crafting trainees were paid 5,737 AFN (\$78) monthly and trainers 18,387 AFN (\$250). Tailoring trainees were paid 3,825 AFN (\$52) monthly and trainers 15,077 AFN (\$205).





- In the reporting period, 29,069 people (38.2% female) benefited from climate change adaptation, disaster preparedness and early warning support. Highlights include the following:
- Training and capacity-building was provided to over 590 individuals (36.6% female) on climate smart agriculture.
- 14,000 people (50% female) benefited from infrastructural support including agriculture tools and inputs. Of these people 9,278 (49.2% female) benefited from canals that were constructed to prevent flooding.
- 14,479 people (26.8% female) benefited from agri-based livelihood support including early warning. A total 21 community-based drought early warning systems[6] (CB-DEWS) were established across five provinces, a total 1,595 small holder farmers and herders were trained on early warning system.

## UNSFA 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 over 30,934 people (44.9% female) with JP activities focusing on participatory engagement, women's empowerment, capacity building on community resilience and social cohesion, and media training and engagement. Highlights include the following:

- The JP engaged with nine Community Development Councils (CDCs) in Kandahar to support the identification of local challenges and develop and prioritize community initiatives. This resulted in the development of 24 community projects. A peoples' participatory process approach was used to conduct community meetings in Kandahar with both males and females to identify community needs and prioritize projects to enable vulnerable populations including women, children and people with disabilities to access quality essential services.
- 5,681 people (71.6% female) received training and psychosocial support.
- 19 journalists (30% female) were trained on various aspects on journalism. In addition, 349 news reports, special interviews and feature reports were created on social topics (education, health, environment, and social issues) and roundtable discussions were hosted contributing to improved information accessibility and increased community engagement.
- 25,253 individuals (38.9% female) were engaged in various social cohesion activities that contributed to their participation in income generation activities.

[6]The CB-DEWS serves the purpose of providing forecasts and early warning information to farmers and livestock holders. It also offers advisories on anticipatory actions to be taken in the face of potential shocks or hazards. The CB-DEWS strives to make meteorological, remote sensing, and agro-related information accessible and actionable for farmers and practitioners, providing them with practical guidance and agronomical recommendations.

# CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED & BEST PRACTICES



## CHALLENGES

In 2023, implementation of activities under the JP in the Southern region faced a number of challenges, including security concerns, lack of access, exchange rate fluctuations, and harsh weather conditions. 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. Localized measures continue to be adopted by PUNOs to ensure a principled delivery modality across the portfolio.

**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 Exchange<sup>[7]</sup>, 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\$ have 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 greatly 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 Iran.

**Limited local labour and skills:** During consultations on plans to engage communities in construction work, concerns were raised regarding the limited number of skilled workers available locally. It was therefore concluded that the communities could not contribute, and the approach needed to be adjusted to engage contractors, which increased costs.

---

[7] <https://treasury.un.org/operationalrates/OperationalRates.php>





## 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 (CDCs):** Involvement of CDCs was often crucial in ensuring project activities were delivered on time. It also helped ensure that any changes in the delivery mode of women's activities were socially accepted. Such engagements have not only helped to ensure community ownership and inclusion of both women and men but have also often contributed to reducing restrictions put in place by local DfA. 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. Through stronger collaboration, duplications and overlaps in activities have been reduced 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 context of a very fluid environment. 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.



# RISK ANALYSIS



## RISK ANALYSIS

During the planning and development of the JP for the Southern 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, the major risk that materialized pertained to the deterioration in the human rights situation, particularly of women, across the country.

However, despite the more challenging enabling environment, PUNOs have been able to adopt measures to ensure the principled delivery of interventions across the portfolio – including by ensuring that the delivery of ‘by women to women’ activities are in place.



# QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT

## QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT

In 2023, the STFA-supported JP in the Southern 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 (since 2022) of US\$49.8 million, a total of approximately 507,484 individuals (44.6% female) benefited from JP activities in the region in 2023. This includes more than 417,089 (46.4% female) in vulnerable locations with improved access to basic services such as safe drinking water, shelter, electricity and education, and 7,815 people (36.7% female) 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, all essential to help restore at-risk individuals to normal and more resilient lives.

Work to improve infrastructure, culverts and flood protection walls have not only improved drainage systems and protected agricultural land from flood damage but have also acted to safeguard local livelihoods and economies. The JP has therefore 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 17,035 people (24.4% female) benefited from livelihood support through CfW and UCT initiatives.

Support provided to 3,383 MSMEs, 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 important and provides pathways to inclusion.



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.

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 population 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.







# 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, the Chair of STFA led a strategic discussion on STFA transition into 'One UN Funding Framework'. 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<sup>[8]</sup>.

**Strategic coordination with other funding streams:** The Trust Fund further strengthened its engagements with other funding streams – particularly Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (OCHA), ARTF (World Bank), Asian Development Bank (ADB), 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.

[8] The Strategic Note received approval during the STFA SC meeting of March 2024.



# ANNEXES





# ANNEX I: INDICATOR BASED PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT \*

JP Output Indicators	Achieved Indicator Targets	Reasons for Variance with Planned Target	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: 249,577 Female target: 141,944	Progress: 386,347 Female progress: 181,750		PUNO REPORTS
1c. Number of people that have benefited from drug treatment, and drug rehabilitation services (health). (Unit: People) Baseline: Target: 4,000 Female target: 1,200	Progress: 7,815 Female progress: 2,867		PUNO REPORTS
1d. Number of functional, UN-supported, facilities providing basic health assistance (including basic health assistance services for women and girls). (Unit: Facilities) Baseline: Target: 6 Female target: 0	Progress: 107 Female progress: 5		PUNO REPORTS
1e. Number of COVID-kits distributed to health centres/clinics. (Unit: Kits) Baseline: Target: 650 Female target: 0	Progress: 90 Female progress: 30		PUNO REPORTS
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: 0 Female target: 0	Progress: 3,275 Female progress: 1,785		PUNO REPORTS

JP Output Indicators	Achieved Indicator Targets	Reasons for Variance with Planned Target	Source of Verification
1g. Hectares of rehabilitated and/or newly irrigated land for agricultural activities. (Unit: Hectares) Baseline: Target: 100 Female target: 0	Progress: 59 Female progress: 0		PUNO REPORTS
<b>Output 2: Livelihoods, businesses and the local economy can recover, more sustainable and more resilient to instability.</b>			
2a. Number of people who benefited from UCT (at least 80% women). (Unit: People) Baseline: Target: 12,570 Female target: 6,786	Progress: 8,391 Female progress: 4,144		PUNO REPORTS
2b. Number of people who have benefited from newly created income-generation opportunities, disaggregated by sex, age and province. (Unit: Other) Baseline: 0 Target: 21,605 Female target: 9,212	Progress: 26,304 Female progress: 6,782		PUNO REPORTS
2b.1. Number of people who have benefited from productive employment through CfW schemes (at least 30% women; 50% youth). (Unit: People) Baseline: Target: 3,284 Female target: 0	Progress: 8,644 Female progress: 6		PUNO REPORTS
2c. No. of worker days generated with UN-support. (Unit: Workdays) Baseline: Target: 0 Female target: 0	Progress: 143,916 Female progress: 0		PUNO REPORTS
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: 462 Female target: 57	Progress: 3353 Female progress: 625		PUNO REPORTS

JP Output Indicators	Achieved Indicator Targets	Reasons for Variance with Planned Target	Source of Verification
<b>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.</b>			
3a. Number of districts with functional early warning systems and other preparedness mechanisms for climate shocks and natural disasters. Baseline: Target: 6 Female target: 0	Progress: 20 Female progress: 0		PUNO REPORTS
3b. Number of people who acquired knowledge and skills on disaster preparedness and climate-resilient livelihoods (at least 30% women). (Unit: People) Baseline: Target: 2 Female target: 0	Progress: 590 Female progress: 216		PUNO REPORTS
3c. Number of farmers who benefited from training and assets for improved, climate-smart, agriculture (at least 30% women). (Unit: People) Baseline: Target: 46,400 Female target: 7,520	Progress: 14,479 Female progress: 3,873		PUNO REPORTS
3d. Number of people that benefit from rehabilitated and/or newly constructed disaster-resilient community infrastructure and nature-based solutions. (Unit: People) Baseline: Target: 100 Female target: 0	Progress: 14,000 Female progress: 7,000		PUNO REPORTS
<b>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.</b>			
4b. Number of people with better awareness about human rights, social cohesion and conflict prevention (at least 50% women). (Unit: People) Baseline: Target: 9,620 Female target: 8,598	Progress: 48,660 Female progress: 14,006		PUNO REPORTS



## ANNEX II: VOICES FROM THE FIELD: REAL-LIFE STORIES

### TRANSFORMATION IN KANDAHAR: A FAMILY'S JOURNEY FROM ADDICTION TO REINTEGRATION



*HIV counseling and Testing services in Kandahar, Southern Region*

In the heart of Kandahar City, a family's struggle with addiction and poverty paints a vivid picture of the challenges faced by many in Afghanistan today. Sherbano, a 25-year-old mother of two, found herself grappling with the harsh realities of life as her husband, Sardar, succumbed to the grip of drug addiction. For years, Sardar, a user of opium, heroin, and shisha, remained unemployed, which pushed the family deeper into hardship. Sherbano's brother tried to assist, but his help barely covered their basic human needs.

The situation remained unbearable until the day the outreach team from the Youth Health and Development Organization (YHDO) visited the family's home. It was a critical moment, not just for the immediate medical care of her six-month-old daughter, suffering from severe diarrhea and vomiting, desperately needed, but also for the psychosocial support that would begin to mend this fractured family.

YHDO, with support from UNODC as part of the Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA)'s Joint Regional Programme, focuses on establishing community-based support centers for individuals grappling with drug addiction. These centers offer a lifeline through various services, including medical care, HIV testing and counseling, and crucially, drug addiction treatment and rehabilitation services. The center in Kandahar is one of many aimed at tackling Afghanistan's acute drug problem, which affects four million or close to 10 percent of population in Afghanistan.

In April 2023, Sherbano and Sardar visited the drop-in center where he started his transformative journey. Over the next three months, through consistent psychosocial counseling and participation in group sessions, Sardar made remarkable strides in overcoming his addiction. The support did not just end with treatment; it included comprehensive follow-up care and social reintegration services. He took a significant step forward by securing employment with a local vegetable shopkeeper, thus beginning to contribute again to the household expenses.

The change in Sardar not only benefited him but also his family. Sherbano, once burdened by despair, saw new hope as her husband restored his health and social standing. The support received through the programme not only pulled Sardar back from the brink of destruction but also empowered Sherbano and their children to envision a future free from the shadows of addiction.

This story of recovery and resilience is more than a personal victory for Sherbano's family; it is a testament to the power of community-based interventions in restoring lives and strengthening the social fabric of communities ravaged by drug abuse and economic challenges. It highlights the essential role of targeted, compassionate, and comprehensive approaches in addressing the pervasive challenges of addiction—a critical step toward healing and rebuilding addiction ridden lives in Afghanistan.



## ANNEX III. OTHER ASSESSMENTS OR EVALUATIONS

The beneficiary survey assessed the progress of STFA activities against specific JP performance indicators in the Northern and Southern regions and for the health sector project – Support to Ataturk Hospital in Kabul. In addition, this assessment examined the impact of announcements by the DfA on women’s access to education and employment on STFA activities in the field.

- 98 percent of respondents expressed high satisfaction levels with the essential services support provided, particularly in basic community infrastructure and health services.
- 90 percent of respondents who received livelihood support affirmed its effectiveness, noting improvements in their situations through enhanced access to employment opportunities, initiation or expansion of businesses, income generation, and better provision for their families.

## ANNEX IV. 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.

## ANNEX V. A BRIEF NOTE ON RESOURCES

The STFA Regional Joint Programme for Southern Afghanistan received a funding allocation of US\$49.8 million in 2022. No further allocation was made in 2023.



# STFA



Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan



[www.stfa.af](http://www.stfa.af)



[@UN\\_STFA](https://twitter.com/UN_STFA)



[@UNSTFA](https://www.facebook.com/UNSTFA)



[@STFA](https://www.linkedin.com/company/stfa)