



WORKING GROUP PAPER ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
(AGRICULTURE)

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## **A) Introduction**

- i. Agriculture employs 80 per cent of Afghanistan's 30 million people, but three decades of war cut agricultural productivity by three percent every year, and droughts in the past ten years killed roughly half the nation's livestock.
- ii. Today, Afghan agriculture has begun to recover. The country came close to self-sufficiency in cereals in 2009 and 2010, and 25 million head of livestock approaches the pre-war level of 28 million. Farmers are experimenting with new, potentially lucrative crops such as saffron, while learning to quadruple the yield of traditional favorites such as pomegranates.
- iii. Afghan agricultural investment and active agribusiness have grown rapidly, spurred on by unexpected global demand for its products, ranging from fresh fruit and vegetable exports to India and the Middle East; raisins (with ISO-9000 certification) to America; concentrated juices to Canada, Britain, Austria and the region; and vigorous sales at trade fairs from Kabul to Dubai to Dushanbe and Moscow.
- iv. Eight years of failed agricultural development is being reversed. Poor prioritization of projects, duplication of effort and a lack of cooperation from donors have been replaced by a practical, Afghan-generated, agricultural plan that has the full backing of the international community.
- v. Today, Afghans provide the assessments, priorities and diagnostics which only they know best, while the donors follow with financing and technical expertise. Four key ministries (Agriculture, Energy & Water, Rural Rehabilitation and Development, and Counter-Narcotics) have been grouped into a team, the Agriculture and Rural Development Cluster (ARD), to more swiftly and efficiently improve rural economics.
- vi. Natural resources will be better managed through reforestation, rural electrification and expanding irrigation. Improving rural roads, another ARD priority, will increase farmer access to markets and local governance is being strengthened to better serve the agriculture sector. Agricultural research and extension reform will introduce new, more profitable products and increase harvests from traditional crops, plus introduce better techniques for dry-land farming while value chains are being built linking fields to farms, to markets, factories and airports.
- vii. Economic growth and food security depend upon natural resource management, increasing agricultural production and productivity, improved physical infrastructure and market development. This is the path to poverty reduction, licit crops and national security. This is the mission of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock.
- viii. But our vision cannot be achieved alone. It will require the concerted effort and support of our regional neighbours and international partners. This paper identifies four priority areas

for regional and international support with recommendations which complement the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, the Agriculture and Rural Development Cluster Strategy and the National Agricultural Development Framework are designed to take forward the regional aspects of outcomes which were supported by regional and international partners at the London and Kabul Conferences.

## **B) Regional Cooperation**

- i. Afghan agricultural development is aimed at providing sufficient food for the people of Afghanistan threatened by food insecurity. It also brings income and employment opportunities. Furthermore it will encourage those who are engaged in the narcotics trade and the insurgency to engage in legitimate activity, earn an income and at the same time, participate in the development of Afghanistan which will bring peace and stability to the country.
- ii. Moreover, Afghanistan's pivotal position in the region, historically and geographically, plus its high-quality produce which is in much demand within regional and international markets, are opportunities for greater regional economic cooperation.

## **C) Four Priorities for the Agriculture Sector in Afghanistan**

- i. **Transit and Trade:** Afghanistan and Pakistan has signed the Afghanistan Pakistan Trade and Transit Agreement (APTTA). The APTTA seeks to eliminate those laws and regulations which impede trade, giving the signatories wider access between both countries and the region to strengthen economic growth and agricultural development.
- ii. **Strengthening Export/Import Standards:** Governments not only wish to protect their own citizens from dangerous or unsafe products but they are also aware that if they cannot ensure safety then their own exports are jeopardized. In terms of risks to consumers from imports, this includes protection from diseased livestock and livestock products, impure plant or livestock medicines and unsafe foodstuffs. Similar sanitary, python-sanitary and related standards need to be maintained internally so as not to contaminate customers abroad and break the safety strictures that all governments seek to sustain and improve. Developing, regulating and enforcing import/export standards require science and technology as well as policy and administration. Higher standards can boost the safety of people throughout the entire region, as well as increase trade within the region and result in more exports from the region to global markets.
- iii. **Research & Policy:** Many countries in the region host unique national or international agricultural research institutions that have either found local solutions to shared regional problems, or are capable of performing new research on behalf of another country in the region. Better sharing of existing agricultural research and research capabilities will increase economic performance in the agricultural sector across the region.

- iv. **Training:** The region needs greater sharing of agricultural strategies, policies and procedures among each nation's agricultural experts – often a problem that is mystifying in one country has long since been solved by the nation next door. This demands extended professional exchanges between agricultural experts, whether small numbers of regional specialists and policy-makers visit a seminal institution to work alongside acknowledged experts, or the institutions send small teams to coach agriculturalists at work in surrounding countries. This will hasten the flow of information available regionally as well as convey best-practices learnt better by sustained contact than by brief seminars or published papers.

#### **D) Recommendations for Regional and International Partners**

- i. **Transit and Trade:** Positive steps forward may include formation of a framework to: Assess, expose and oppose existing barriers to regional trade in agricultural and livestock products; Monitor compliance with existing trade agreements between participating nations in the region.

#### **Proposed Action**

- i. Discuss the possibility of forming a Transit & Trade Committee (TTC) to advise, propose recommendations to the relevant authorities to improve trade and transit between Afghanistan and the region, taking account of existing arrangements and international and regional instruments.
- ii. **Within Six months:** TTC reports on existing general barriers to trade among member states with the aim in the medium-term to agree tariffs, prices and subsidies; sends first mission to monitor compliance of an existing bilateral trade treaty and proposes recommendations for further facilitation of trade and transit.
- iii. **Within Twelve months:** Report on the findings on trade and transit of goods, including the challenges facing trade and transit activities with recommendations on further facilitating trade and transit.
- iv. **Strengthening import and export standards:** Steps forward include: Assembling information on current and proposed standards, plus technical and administrative support, among countries in the region; identifying best practices among countries in the region; facilitating exchanges of policy and technology, scientific and administrative expertise so that regional countries may upgrade their own standards and contribute to regional improvement.

## **Proposed Action**

- i. Agreement to form an Export/Import Standards & Safety Committee for Agricultural products (EISS).
- ii. Within Six Months: Produce a Status Report on existing practices, gaps/inconsistencies; agreement on the standardization of quality standards, certification and control protocols; member states report on their individual skills and capacity building requirements.
- iii. Within Twelve months: First technical (Scientific and Administrative) conference held to discuss the topics identified above relating to standards and safety.
- iv. Research and Policy: Development of this field can be achieved through the following: Strengthening institutional links between research facilities and agriculture ministries across the region; strengthening informational links by creating an online database of institutions, capabilities, existing and ongoing research; facilitating regional conferences on key issues of regional interest to the agricultural sector, including dry-land cropping and farming, community-based natural resource management strategies, sanitary and python-sanitary standards and regulation, intensive forage production, etc.; facilitating agricultural institutions to assist in providing regional neighbours with research to solve a potentially unique problem.

## **Proposed Action**

- i. Identify an existing mechanism or forum which is capable of developing a research and policy framework to deliver on the above;
- ii. Within Six Months: issues and institutions/expertise identified by subject for example, animal and plant disease control agreements; increasing pest surveillance; regional best practice on irrigation methods; on-line database established.
- iii. Within Twelve: Meeting of experts including regional and international partners to share information on best practice and discuss issues of importance to the agriculture sector including topics raised above; ensure regional institutions are responding to national research needs, in general or specific to a member countries.
- iv. Training: Steps forward may include: Identifying at RECCA IV, three agricultural topics and three lead research institutions (governmental or regional) each tasked with hosting an incoming exchange with regional country participants in 2011; Linking the needs of governments with the willingness and capacity of governmental or regional institutions to send training teams or individual experts abroad in the region;

## **Proposed Action**

- i. The Ministry of Agriculture in cooperation with international and regional partners identifies lead regional and government institutions or organizations to provide exchanges i.e. sending officials for extended training/work in institutions and institutions sending shorter-term expert training teams to interested member states; ensuring that national and sub-national agricultural training is reflected in vocational training programs and centres.