

Facing the climate crisis, building resilience



Afghans working to rehabilitate vital underground water reservoirs in the country's Logar province. ©UNOPS/Rafiullah Hemat

“The floods destroyed the canal I use to irrigate my lands so I could not cultivate anything and this put my family in a very difficult economic position [...] Now that the canal has been fixed I will be able to grow on my land again next year. I even helped to repair the canal.”

- Afghan farmer and beneficiary of the Afghanistan Community Resilience and Livelihoods Project

Against a backdrop of decades of war, chronic poverty and acute food insecurity, the ever-present impacts of climate change further threaten the well-being and survival of millions of Afghans.

Afghanistan is among the top 10 countries experiencing extreme weather patterns – droughts, flash floods, landslides, and avalanches. Rising temperatures bring with it increasingly frequent and severe disasters that expose already vulnerable people to critical losses in resources and livelihoods.

Approximately 85 percent of Afghans rely on rain-fed agriculture for their livelihoods. Yet across this landlocked country, with temperatures that range between -20°C and +45°C, early frost and unpredictable precipitation patterns can greatly impact production, and alter lands that so many depend upon to graze cattle and cultivate crops.

In an already fragile context, the scarcity of resources and growing desperation only compound structural vulnerabilities, such as political grievances, inequality, gender-based marginalization, food insecurity, economic weakness, and large-scale migration.

A protective approach



Laborer helps green a new Kabul park, intended to be a safe space for women and children. ©UNOPS/Mirwais Nasery

As a matter of priority, the **Afghanistan Community Resilience and Livelihoods (CRL) project** assesses any potential project against key environmental and social considerations before a final selection is made.

Will activities degrade the environment in any way? Is there a risk of water or soil contamination? Will work encroach on protected lands or endanger animal and plant species? Are there risks to vulnerable populations like women and children? Will the project cause conflict between groups ...

In this sense, each of CRL's sub-projects places the local environment and welfare of communities at the centre of its efforts.

Climate adaptation, informed by communities



A new protection wall in Afghanistan's Wardak province will help protect the local community from flooding. ©UNOPS/Rafiullah Hemat

No one understands the impacts of a changing climate better than the communities hardest hit.

“Most of the residents in this area are poor and rely on their lands for their daily needs. However, the floods have destroyed some agricultural and farmlands and left others unproductive due to the floods.”

- Farmer and resident of Baghlan

Recognizing the importance of this lived experience, the CRL project invites Afghan people to speak about the threats and impacts of severe weather on their lives. Communities identify projects and priorities that will help mitigate the risk from these events.

“The protective walls made our farmlands, homes, and public utility sites safe from the floods. Now I can cultivate my land again and what I get provides for my family’s daily needs.”

- Farmer and beneficiary of the CRL project

Since the start of the project, over 3,000 sub-projects in urban and rural areas across the country have helped put in place infrastructure that allows local communities to better adapt to a changing climate. Work ranges from the construction of protection walls to the building and rehabilitation of canal networks.

In Mamee Khill Village in Afghanistan's Wardak province, a community-led watershed sub-project constructed a network of trenches to tackle flash flooding caused by rain and snowmelt. Local laborers constructed gully plugs, trenches, terraces and flood protection walls. This network of assets helped the community store and absorb excess water that would have otherwise been lost. Flooding in the area was reduced, protecting over 320 households.

Meanwhile in Bamyan province, a downstream irrigation sub-project helped strengthen water efficiency for and in consultation with the local community. Twenty-two dry stone masonry check dams were constructed in various locations to store rainwater. The check dams serve as vital resources to deliver water along the complex and challenging terrain of the region – supporting agricultural activities and generally improving water management.

With Afghanistan – one of the world's least developed countries – facing some of the worst threats from climate change, resilience must be built into projects whenever possible, and at any scale. Every protection wall or check dam helps mitigate the risk of unpredictable weather for entire communities, protecting vital crops and livelihoods. When climate adaptation is included in development projects – as it does with CRL – they stand to serve generations to come.