

*ACCESS TO ADEQUATE QUANTITY AND
QUALITY OF WATER IS A BASIC HUMAN RIGHT*

**A STRATEGIC POLICY FRAMEWORK
FOR THE WATER SECTOR**

**TRANSITIONAL ISLAMIC STATE OF AFGHANISTAN
MINISTRY OF IRRIGATION, WATER
RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT (MIWRE)**

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INTRODUCTION

The Need for Policy Development: This policy document is an overall framework and intends to guide the Ministry of Irrigation, Water Resources and Environment (MIWRE) in setting general direction for the ministry over the next 20 years. Specifically, it aims to set guidelines for its institutional reform processes, as well as for the implementation of MIWRE's **12 year strategic plan** for 1383-1394 (2004-2015).

Almost 80% of Afghanistan's population derive their livelihood from the agriculture sector. Consequently, the government has made development of water sector one of its major **national priorities**. In order to achieve overall objectives in the water sector, specific **laws, rules and regulations** must be developed. Existing water law and regulations might require to be revised, while additional ones will be developed to effectively respond to the growing needs of the communities in the water sector. The role of the **communities and the private sector** in the management, use and development of the water sector also need to be defined. Similarly, this document will be used as the basis for the development of a number of **sub-sector** policies and strategies, such as Water Resources Management, Irrigation and Environment. In addition, specific policies, strategies and acts will be developed, as may be required in the near future, including:

- **Water Resources Regulations, including a Water Resource Act, for both the surface and ground water resources;**
- **Irrigation Regulations (small and medium community-based, and medium and large-scale public irrigation facilities);**
- **National Water Supply and Sanitation Policy; and**
- **Hydropower Development Policy.**

Afghanistan is landlocked and mountains cover most of the country, with limited amount of water available in the country. **Total arable area** in Afghanistan is around **7 million hectare** of which around 3 million was under irrigation. About **90%** of the irrigated area in the country is irrigated through **traditional irrigation** schemes, while the remainder is under formal irrigation. Average **annual rainfall** is estimated at around 240 millimetres and varies in different parts of the country. Annual rainfall ranges from 1200 millimetres in the higher altitudes of the northeast, to 110 in the southwest. Snow falls principally in the mountainous regions and higher altitudes of the Northeast and the Central Highlands regularly, while the rest of the country has varying snow fall. The last cycle of drought has reduced the size of glaciers in the country, posing additional problems in longer-term.

Regional variation in water availability scenario poses another challenge. The country is divided into five major river basins: The Amu Darya Basin; Northern River Basin; Harirud-Murghab Basin; Helmand River Basin; and the Kabul-Eastern Basin. They have varying water availability and consumption situation. Recent studies show that Amu Darya Basin covers about 14% of area but holds about 60% of water flow; whereas Helmand with 40% area coverage holds only 11% of water flow. Kabul-Eastern River Basin, with an area coverage of about 12% holds around 26% of the water flow, while population density in this basin ((93) is the highest, compared with 22-33 in the other four basins.

Since the fall of *Taliban* in late 2001 and the establishment of the Afghan Interim Authority (AIA), a significant number of international organisations, UN agencies and NGOs have arrived in Afghanistan to participate in the implementation of a large-scale reconstruction and humanitarian programmes, whilst the Afghan Government is trying to carry out a process of reform and transformation to be able to effectively respond to the growing needs of the Afghan communities. Over two decades of war and conflict, the absence of a stable government and the destruction of most public institutions, NGOs and the UN agencies have played a significant role in response to growing humanitarian needs of the communities in Afghanistan. However, **most projects** and programmes have had an **emergency and humanitarian character** and have therefore failed to effectively respond to the mid-term and longer-term needs of the communities. Lack of specific national policies and strategies has deteriorated the situation and will have lasting consequences on the country.

Afghanistan's rich **community-based structures** and Water Users' groups (such as *Mirabs*) have been **badly damaged** and/or have been replaced with local groups dominated by the power structure in many parts of the country.

In the face of these huge challenges, MIWRE's major strategies will emphasise a number of inter-related actions and interventions to effectively respond to the growing water needs of the Afghan society. **Short-term emergency** rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes, within the framework of this policy, will be required to respond to the **immediate needs** of the communities and assist the country to retain what was there prior to the war, while mid-term and longer-term **large-scale strategies** will be required to ensure **sustainable** use and management of Afghanistan's **water resources** and its natural resource base.

Therefore, the present policy document will shed light on major strategies and interventions, especially in the implementation of MIWRE's 12-year strategic plans for 1383-1394 (2004-2015), as well as for its annual National Development Budget for 1383 (March 2004-March 2005).

Background to the Development of the Water Policy Framework: During the years 2002 and 2003, several events took place and policy development process was in motion within the MIWRE. Assisted by international consultants, the ministry drafted an initial outline of its major policies and strategies already in October 2003 (Water Resource Management Policy and Water Resource Management Strategy).

This document followed the "Kabul International Conference on Water Resources Management and Development", organised by the MIWRE and UNICEF from 29 April to 1 May 2002, which was concluded in the drafting of a common understanding under "**Kabul Understanding on Water Resources Management and Development in Afghanistan**", hereafter called the "Kabul Understanding."

Recognising the priority, urgency and high level commitment of the government to water resource management and development in Afghanistan, the Kabul understanding outlines a number of major issues to be addressed in an integrated manner in the short- and mid-term, including:

- **Doubling the present level of coverage by 2005**, as part of our Millennium Development Goal, through use of appropriate technologies and recharge of

the ground water, meeting **universal access** for all to adequate safe drinking water through improved water sources **by 2015** in line with the Third World Water Forum Resolution of Kyoto from March 2003;

- The importance and urgency of irrigation for meeting the food **security needs** of the country and the promotion of agriculture exports, through rehabilitation and reconstruction of existing and development of new small-, medium and large-scale national irrigation facilities, while keeping a **balance between sustainable environmental management and farming**;
- Recognition of the considerable potential for the exploitation of **hydropower** for electricity generation in the country;
- Full endorsement of the principles of **conservation and preservation** of the **environment** in all aspects of water resource management and development;
- Agreement on the principle that efficient and effective management of water resources is only possible through a **coordinated approach** and in **partnership** between national and international actors;
- Finally the resolution called upon the government to take note of the observations and agreements and to incorporate them in the future policies, legislation and in their implementation processes.

Similarly, a workshop on “**Management and Development of Water Resources and Environment in Afghanistan**”, jointly organised by the MIWRE and FAO 19-22 January 2004, where representatives of water users from different zones of the country also participated, was concluded with a “Declaration”. The following are some of the major points agreed in the final declaration:

- Water policies and strategies should correspond to the **demands of the water users** and to water availability;
- Existing **water law** should be revised and **new legislation** should be drafted as soon as possible, based on the present and future needs of the country;
- A **working committee** (Inter-Ministerial) should be established at the national level, involving relevant stakeholder representatives;
- **Food security**, ensuring access to safe **drinking water** and addressing the needs for **industrial water** were identified as **priorities** and the meeting agreed that these and other national and local needs will be best addressed through the creation of **River Basin Authorities** in the country;
- **Environmental and social issues** must be considered during planning, design and implementation of irrigation and water resources projects;
- **Capacity building** must be addressed in a holistic manner to enable ministry staff to effectively respond to the growing needs in the water sector, technical as well as managerial;
- The role of the **private sector, water user associations** and community participation- particularly in small and medium scale rehabilitation- are highlighted as essential components of a sustainable water resources management and use;
- **Ground water use** must be regulated for domestic, agriculture, and industrial use;
- The government must strive to achieve a **balance** in access to water between **rural and urban areas**;

- A **draft environmental law** must be produced as the basis for the protection of natural resources, water resources and the environment, avoiding negative environmental impacts especially when irrigation schemes and similar projects are undertaken.

Finally, in March and April 2004, a series of **internal and external meetings** were undertaken to prepare a first draft of this strategic policy framework. The first draft was prepared by a **working group**, made up of senior ministry officials and external advisors, by the end of March 2004 and endorsed by His Excellency, the Minister of Irrigation, water resources and Environment. The draft framework was circulated among all stakeholders, relevant line ministries and MIWRE's international development partners for comments, suggestions and possible changes. In two separate meetings on 18 April 2004, one with national stakeholders and another with our international partners, comments and suggestions for changes were collected and have now been incorporated in this final draft, as far these were feasible, acceptable and possible.