

Planning for Peace

AFGHANISTAN is not just a war zone. Despite the media's focus on the military conflict, which is actually limited to less than 20 per cent of the country, there is a large, multinational relief and redevelopment operation now making great strides. While in Kabul, I worked with over 1000 advisors from approximately 50 countries on a long-term development plan to rebuild government agencies as well as environmental conservation and protection programs.



In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and destroyed the government. A civil war (1990-1996), followed by the Taliban regime (1996-2001), exacerbated an already unstable situation and prompted creation of a 2002 United Nations Environment Programme report entitled, "Afghanistan: Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment." Its authors state, "The most serious issue in Afghanistan is the long term environmental degradation caused, in part, by a complete collapse of local and national forms of governance."

Afghanistan has become a classic "failed state," ripe for abuse by outside interests. Drought, resource depletion and earthquakes forced many Afghans, most of whom had relied on subsistence agriculture, to find new means to make a living. As a result, smuggling, poppy cultivation, heroin production and military activity are ripe.

Once the Taliban regime had been overthrown, many international aid agencies and non-governmental organizations arrived to establish services. After much confusion, typical of post-conflict situations, an important step forward came in January 2006 at the London Conference on Afghanistan. At this meeting, delegates signed the Afghanistan Compact to create a new, interim government system. Furthermore, the international community has donated almost \$12-billion to implement the Afghanistan National Development Strategy.

My own portion of this work, supported by the European Union, focused on rebuilding the agency responsible for the environment, natural resources and parks. Afghanistan now has a comprehensive *Environment Act* (2006) that supports its new National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA). With the Act in place, NEPA has the building blocks necessary to create and enforce environmental laws. Regulations on park management, planning and community involvement will follow.

Prior to 1979, Afghanistan had a basic parks system and tourism industry. Several groups are now rebuilding them. For example, the Asian Development Bank plans to develop new protected areas in the western Hindu Kush mountain range. The US Agency for International Development just granted \$7.8-million to the Wildlife Conservation Society to develop management plans for new mountain parks. This project includes a transboundary "peace park" that will link conservation and community development in Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and Tajikistan. Other countries are implementing integrated watershed development projects such as rebuilding irrigation systems. And this is only the beginning.

There is no question that progress depends on a stable security situation. For the time being, this requires international support, now led by NATO. Improving natural resource management is part of a much larger effort to alleviate poverty across the country. If these environmental projects are successful they will complement efforts to re-establish and reform education, healthcare, employment and social security. In combination, these initiatives address the fundamental causes of violence in contemporary Afghanistan.. ♻️

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RESEARCH

Green Apple™

Apple products are known for being sleek, sexy and ubiquitously available in a rainbow of colours. But Greenpeace is campaigning for Apple to take on a new hue, and it's green all green. Given their short lifespan, Apple electronics are piling up in developing nation waste dumps. Toxic chemicals, Greenpeace contends, leaching from this detritus of 21st century technology, threaten the local environment and the health of the people who live nearby. The environmental group's campaign involves spreading the word among Apple customers so they will demand that the company remove toxic chemicals from its products, introduce a "take-back" program and generally green up its act. www.greenmyapple.org

SolarChill

World Health Organization approval is all that stands between off grid communities and access to solar-powered refrigeration. SolarChill, the name given to this new technology, would replace kerosene or propane-operated refrigerators that emit large volumes of the greenhouse gases that cause climate change. A who's who list of international aid organizations, environmental groups and corporations came together to develop this refrigerator. Proponents say that it will allow safer food storage and make vaccines more readily available in remote areas where electricity is unavailable.

Fish-Free by 2048

Mark these down: Orange Roughy, Chilean Sea Bass, Swordfish and caviar. If you do nothing else to combat depleted stocks, according to the Endangered Fish Alliance, don't consume these fish or fish products. But this is not enough, according to a new report entitled, "Impact of Biodiversity Loss on Ocean Ecosystem Services." The report, to be published in *Science*, indicates that oceans will be emptied of fish by 2048 if our consumption patterns don't change. Yet, despite the collapse of some 29 per cent of species to date, Boris Worm, a Dalhousie professor and study author, believes the trend can be reversed. All we need do is implement restoration and conservation efforts. Sound familiar?