



# REPORTING ON THE STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

## Workshop Report

4 - 6 March 2019  
Cedar Hotel, Kabul, Afghanistan





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## Background and Summary

Afghanistan's Environment Law (Article 9.12) mandates the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to prepare a State of the Environment (SoE) report every two years for urban areas and every five years for rural areas. Under the EU-funded Opportunities for Mountain Area Integrated Development Project, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) is providing technical assistance to help kick-start the development of the SoE process drawing on Afghanistan's previous experience and best international practices in environmental reporting and assessment. With a view to sharing knowledge and enhancing the technical capacity of the national SoE team, NEPA together with UNEP organised from 4–6 March 2019 a three-day inception and training workshop that was facilitated by international experts and involved specialists from neighbouring Tajikistan, who recently completed their SOE report.

The workshop objectives were to:

- familiarize Afghanistan's environmental professionals with principles of and approaches for developing SoE reports, including the analytical framework of Integrated Environmental Assessment;
- share SoE reporting lessons learned through the experience of neighbouring Tajikistan, other countries, regions and UNEP's flagship Global Environment Outlook process;
- help develop and agree on organizational arrangements and the roadmap for the preparation of a new state-of-the-environment report for Afghanistan.

By the end of the workshop, participants indicated an improvement in their understanding of the principles and techniques of Integrated Environmental Assessment (IEA) and SoE reporting, including the purpose and the scope of an SoE report, analytical approaches and tools for its production, as well as its users and the communication and dissemination of its messages. The participants were also exposed to examples and best practices from various other countries, regions and the world. Given its close relevance for Afghanistan, the recent experience of Tajikistan was introduced by representatives of the Government of Tajikistan and discussed by participants. In order to build ownership, participants actively contributed in breakout group and plenary sessions to the development of the framework, the contents, and the production plan / road map for the next edition of Afghanistan state-of-the-environment report.

During its three days, the workshop brought together 70 participants from the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA), various ministries and other governmental agencies, academic institutions, NGOs, the press, private companies, foundations, UN and other international organizations (Annex 1). A delegation from the Government of Tajikistan was also part of the meeting, sharing their country's recent experience in SoE reporting. The three-day programme (Annex 2) was split into several modules, focussing on the introduction to the approach, vision and focus of SoE reporting (day 1); the structure and tools of environmental assessment and reporting (day 2); and discussing the road ahead for the next edition of the SoE report for Afghanistan (day 3). At the end of the meeting the participants completed evaluation forms, commenting on various workshop elements and giving it the overall score 3.6 on a 1 to 4 scale (Annex 3). Simultaneous English-Dari interpretation was provided.

The meeting's structure built on: i) the Integrated Environmental Assessment (IEA) Training Manual and training modules developed by UNEP and the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), which has been successfully used for many years to build IEA capacity at the regional, national and subnational level and ii) Zoï Environment Network's multi-decade experience with capacity building for SoE reporting, with particular strengths in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

In conclusion, NEPA leadership committed to establishing a team/committee with responsibilities to lead the production of Afghanistan's SoE report. Furthermore, as a recurrent process, workshop discussions highlighted the importance of creating and embedding an SoE reporting system in NEPA to ensure its longer-term institutionalization. Substantial data management support and capacity building in IEA for NEPA staff is therefore needed for this to happen. Meanwhile, UNEP and partners will work with NEPA to formulate a road map to help guide the preparation of the next edition of Afghanistan's SoE report. This can also assist NEPA in directly approaching the Government as well as the international donor community with a well-developed proposal for support.

All participants of the training were awarded official certificates and given memory sticks with workshop materials and other relevant resources. UNEP's press release was published on the One UN for Afghanistan web site (Annex 6), while NEPA widely publicised the meeting through its Facebook page.

## Workshop Content and Discussions

### Day 1: Approach, Vision and Focus

The workshop was **opened** by NEPA and UNEP, followed by a **tour de table** among all workshop participants. In his opening speech Mr. Ezatullah Sediqi, Deputy Director of NEPA, emphasised the need to strengthen cooperation and close coordination gaps with respect to environmental management among various governmental organizations. Mr. Sediqi also underscored NEPA's interest in extending environmental awareness raising activities to all relevant staff of government organizations in the capital and in the provinces. For their part, participants emphasised the importance of environmental awareness, recognizing and building on existing capacities for collecting and managing environmental information in Afghanistan, and the need for their gradual modernisation.



Following an introduction to the **principles of Integrated Environmental Assessment**, the participants reviewed and discussed **NEPA's experience** in environmental reporting both for the national audience and through international processes and multilateral environmental agreements. The representatives of **Tajikistan** presented their experience with the recently prepared national SoE report together with a set of environmental indicators based on the guidelines of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

The afternoon session was devoted to discussing the **purpose of SoE reporting** and ways to strengthen it by understanding and taking into account the intended impact and the target audiences of environmental assessment. To illustrate these points in the specific context of Afghanistan, two external speakers were invited to present common users views of previous Afghanistan SoE reports in the **'Meet the user'** session.

A student and an NGO representative (who at the same time is a university lecturer) shared their perspectives on the two existing Afghanistan SoE editions published in 2009 and 2012, respectively. The speakers acknowledged that despite being rather general than issue-specific, and not always presenting hard facts, the reports could be and actually were used for various purposes, including as a background reference for international aid projects. Written by small drafting teams or individuals, it was pointed out that reports missed opportunities to include inputs from a broader range of actors, especially academic institutions experienced and engaged with new methods as a matter of routine, research reports and academic publications. Academic experts could also bring into the process their students, who could join the data-collecting and report-writing team to the benefit of both sides. Some of the past reports, and especially the data used in them, are unfortunately not available online, which complicates and thus reduces the use of the report and their impact. Lack of access to data by the mass media was also emphasised. The speakers noted the lack of new information in the reports; many issues presented in 2012 can also be found in the 2008 edition.

The session resulted in a highly energetic, engaging and constructive **discussion**. Participants commented on the practical difficulties related to engaging people in the day to day efforts of environmental authorities who have a long list of responsibilities and usually insufficient resources. The lack of up to date and regularly collected data in various agencies is a serious bottleneck, forcing NEPA to initiate its own data collection often under precarious conditions. Without data it is hard to expect decision-making at any level to be based on facts and evidence. Data problems, which came up several times again later in the workshop is seen as a priority concern. In order to address data issues cooperation is needed among the different stakeholders, including environmental professionals with long-term hands-on experience on the one hand and organisations and individuals with considerable technical knowledge of the issues on the other. The value of cross-border environmental cooperation and experience sharing between Afghanistan and Tajikistan was also highlighted.

NEPA's **concluding perspective** in this session was that there are many gaps in the published SoE reports because of various limitations at the time of writing. It is therefore important to listen to comments on the reports in order to improve SoE reporting in the future. User comments should not be taken as a criticism, but even if they were, NEPA should accept these in an open and constructive spirit as a provider of public services. New recruitment, engaging students in NEPA's work, improving data availability are all important issues. Resolving these issues has been hindered by forty years of conflict, but there are opportunities now to learn from their own and others' experiences and move forward. Among other things this workshop should help NEPA move beyond business as usual in SoE reporting, and better institutionalize SoE reporting including by revising its overall framework and methodology. The strong and genuine leadership demonstrated by NEPA at the workshop should enable engaging a much wider range of contributors to prepare a report in 2019 that makes use of the best available data, reflects real concerns, and that also offers real solutions to society and decision-makers. Furthermore, the positive and participatory momentum created by the workshop should strengthen coordination, consultations, and cooperation with and between organisations.

The last part of the day was devoted to introducing the **thematic scope and issues of the SoE report** to prepare for a brainstorming session in break-out groups the following day.



## Day 2: Structure and Tools

Workshop participants split into small break-out groups were asked to identify, characterize and prioritise **SoE issues for Afghanistan**. The exercise resulted in several sets of issues being presented and discussed as possible elements of the 'Table of Contents' of the future edition of Afghanistan's SoE report.



The next session focussed on ways to assess **environmental conditions, trends and impacts** and their interlinkages, using the Driving forces – Pressures – State – Impact – Response (DPSIR) analytical framework. The session also covered how to integrate data, indicators and narrative elements into presenting environmental issues in the SoE context. The use of the DPSIR framework was illustrated through a case study focused on deforestation in Afghanistan.



Breakout groups were tasked to select a priority environmental ‘state’ issue identified at the end of Day 1 as the basis to characterize its associated drivers, pressures and impacts, following the logic of the DPSIR framework introduced earlier during the session. They were also asked to identify indicators that can characterize the selected environmental state, drivers and pressures (Annex 4).

Following the plenary presentation of group results, a question was raised about how global indicators could help environmental management in Afghanistan. A reference was made to UN efforts (including those to monitor progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals) to develop and suggest common indicators which can help countries identify their place in the global community and compare

their performance with that of the others. At the same time, it was recognized that there are also country-specific indicators, some of which are more relevant nationally than globally. There are also common environmental indicators in Europe which have, for instance, been used by Tajikistan in its environmental reporting. Indicators in SoE reports can help policy makers, other social actors like companies, NGOs and citizens not only to envision and implement, but also to monitor the successes or failures associated with environment-related policies and programs. In this relation, the indicators identified under the Afghanistan SDG report (2015–2030) published by the Ministry of Economy, aligned with Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) and National Priority Programmes (NPP), could be a good starting point to help reinforce the SoE report's policy relevance.



The afternoon session introduced **policy analysis** in the SoE context, focussing on the 'Response' part of the DPSIR framework. It reviewed policy types, policy actors, and the contextual factors that may affect the implementation of a given policy and its impacts. The session also drew attention to the difference between policy effects and policy effectiveness, and the challenges associated with attributing impacts to a specific policy. Building on the earlier developed assessment of drivers, pressures, environmental states and impacts, small groups were asked to identify and discuss clusters

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