

<b>Forum:</b>	General Assembly
<b>Issue:</b>	Improving access to clean water and medical infrastructure in Afghanistan
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## Introduction

After decades of war and armed conflict, the infrastructure in Afghanistan is in rubble; they have no electricity, which makes it hard for businesses to operate, and are lacking access to reliable water sources. Households do not have enough water for drinking, cooking or cleaning, and the absence of basic sanitation services causes them to be more prone to health problems, such as water-borne illnesses, including dysentery and cholera. On top of that, the medical infrastructure has been left devastated due to the war; there is a scarce number of medical clinics that can supply the citizens residing there. Most of them have restricted access to even basic healthcare, making it harder to control the spread of diseases in war-torn Afghanistan.

According to the United States Agency for International Development organization (USAID), in 2015, only 47% of rural households have access to safe drinking water and only 27% have access to better sanitation facilities. Water is a fundamental resource for survival. However, less than 25% of the Afghans can access it easily. In fact, approximately only 33% of the population can use clean or reliable sanitation facilities whilst the rest cannot. Climate change and drought contribute to this issue as well. Afghanistan has a harsh climate and recently there has been a reduction in precipitation—more than 30% down against previous years and is not enough to mitigate seasonal dryness. Furthermore, the country's water is mainly derived from the annual rainfall and snowfall but Afghanistan and nearby countries still have not managed to produce treaties on water sharing. This is making it even harder for Afghan citizens to gain access to the country's river supplies. Despite the progressive efforts to improve water quality, it is still an ongoing concern due to active fighting, roadblocks, and unnecessary delays; organizations are prevented from delivering aid, especially to the geographically remote areas.

The lack of medical infrastructures in Afghanistan is also a major issue. A lot of health services are in suspension, and natural hazards such as earthquakes and flooding exacerbate this critical situation. The nation has the highest infant mortality rate of 112.8 deaths per 1000 live births, mainly because they lack access to proper medical services and basic sanitation services, causing more infants to be susceptible to diseases. It is vital to strengthen the public health system and improve the basic infrastructures so that the nation can avoid any deaths that could have been easily prevented.

Change is needed to resolve this dire situation. Afghanistan, which used to be a flourishing country, is now suffering from limited access to clean water and food supply. Bearing in mind that war has decimated the country in general, the nation needs to improve their method of collecting water. Currently, the citizens are not collecting enough due to an inadequate number of reservoirs that have been built in order to collect this water as most of them were destroyed due to ongoing disputes. Also, underground water supplies are compromised and are unhygienic; Afghanistan needs to take more effort in improving their canalization system.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Medical infrastructure

Medical infrastructure consists of basic facilities such as hospital buildings, adequate supplies of pharmaceuticals and other related materials, trained professionals or staffs. It provides the nation with appropriate healthcare and prevents citizens from getting diseases or prepares for emergency cases. In regards to this issue at hand, Afghanistan still needs to build and invest more in terms of medical infrastructures in order to mitigate this issue.

### Waterborne illness

Waterborne illness is used to describe a disease that is caused by drinking contaminated water that contains pathogenic micro-organisms. The disease can be spread in various ways—bathing, washing, and drinking. Some of these illnesses include diarrhea, typhoid fever, cholera, and dysentery. Afghanistan needs to train and educate citizens about the importance of clean water in order to prevent them from getting waterborne illnesses.

### Canalization

Canalization of a watercourse is used to describe the process of building or constructing a canal in order to control the water level and make sure it is going to the right place (suited the needs of people). In regards to this issue at hand, Afghanistan needs to gain more knowledge about the planning of water supply and canalization in order to improve access to clean water.

## General Overview

### Previous Attempts to Solve This Issue

The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) was established in order to help citizens gain more access to sanitation, as well as clean water supplies for the purpose of improving the health of citizens. The Afghanistan government has started to implement programs in order to help

resolve this problem, especially in rural areas. They eventually developed “rural water supply and sanitation policy” which aims to provide more clean drinking water to those who rely on streams, lakes, and rivers. United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), as well as other partner organizations, are currently helping with the construction of water systems. This was somewhat successful because Afghanistan had considerable improvements in access to water supply. In 2015, 55% of the population had a more reliable source of water. However, 15 million still have not benefited from this program.

Furthermore, Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW), a German development bank, gave assistance to the development of water infrastructures and worked on increasing the number of water and sanitation systems with some Afghan institutions. This eventually turned out to be successful, especially in Kabul, where KfW helped construct wells and water containers to make it easier to access clean water, promoting sustainable economic development.

In 2016, With the support of US Agency of International Development (USAID), the Afghanistan Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) and the Central Statistics Organization (CSO) released the Afghanistan Demographic and Health Survey in 2015, which was the first demographic and health survey ever conducted in the nation. It was a good use of time and resources as it provided new baseline data on key health indicators such as childhood and maternal mortality. It helped gather comprehensive health information of Afghan citizens.

## Limitations

### *Security*

Currently, the security situation in Afghanistan is unpredictable and insecure. There are ongoing threats such as suicide bombers, ransom kidnappings and other acts of violence. Afghanistan is known for being one of the most mined countries, with the areas war-torn nation made unusable due to explosive devices. It was



*Figure 1: suicide bombing in Kabul that killed 90 people*

estimated that 45% of the districts were inaccessible to the UN missions from 2007, which restricted them from helping out in addressing these issues. The problem is that the nation's unstable security caused lots of health care centers to be closed due to violence. Health and reconstruction workers have been innocently killed and murdered for no specific reasons. This is why Afghanistan is continuously losing access to primary care services and this is affecting those who seek medical care. Improved security is required for continued improvement in Afghanistan's emergency health care system.

While the issue of "security" may be broad and complex to tackle this issue directly, it is important to fully understand this barrier and realize the importance of addressing security issues as well.

### *Health care workforce*

As a result of the conflict, many Afghan health care workers have immigrated or have been killed unexpectedly, reducing the number of workers in hospitals. In fact, those who remain are lacking standardized training programs and often do not meet the minimum skills they need when diagnosing patients. According to the Afghanistan Ministry of Public Health, they claim that some workers trained by some NGOs do not meet the government's strict requirements, making it harder to employ more health care workers. Afghanistan is having a shortage of health professionals and is demanding for more; they are especially looking for skilled workers that are capable of working in rural areas.

### *Lack of infrastructure*

There are not enough infrastructures in Afghanistan and this can be evidently shown — poor road networks and absence of railways. However, this is making rural areas inaccessible to clean sources of water or health care centers. Health care facilities and resources in most places apart from Kabul are having a difficult time providing patients with the proper care. For instance, according to a survey from the International Council on Security and Development, a regional hospital called the Mirwais Hospital, situated in the Kandahar City was found to have 0.15 beds per 1000 people, whereas Kabul had 9.1 beds. Another major issue is that even with sufficient medical equipment, workers are not trained properly to operate or maintain them. Hence, in order to improve the status quo, the government needs to invest more in transportation, safe water, and most importantly the health care system.

### *Economic instability*

Although the evident cause of this issue is security and ongoing disputes, another one can be the economic instability. Almost 70% of the Afghans live in extreme poverty and the unemployment rate is high as well. Therefore, most of the funding for health care comes from external sources like the USAID, the European Commission, and the World Bank. The external funding itself is unpredictable and can end without any warning. Hence, this means that if the funding disappears, the nation will be unable to work on improving their medical infrastructures, emphasizing the need for stronger domestic support for Afghanistan's health care. Currently, per capita spending on health care is relatively low and in 2014, it was reported to be about 905 USD. This highlights the fact that it will be highly likely that more spending by the Afghanistan government will allow the nation to improve access and affordability to a reliable source of water and proper health care.

## Climate

Due to the rise in global temperature, Afghanistan is facing a prolonged drought, affecting large parts of the nation. It is a landlocked country that is relatively arid. Afghanistan is known for having forbidding mountains that cover up some of the landscape of the nation, creating local rains. However, for the past few years, citizens have been struggling through the devastating droughts. Rising global temperatures results in unexpected

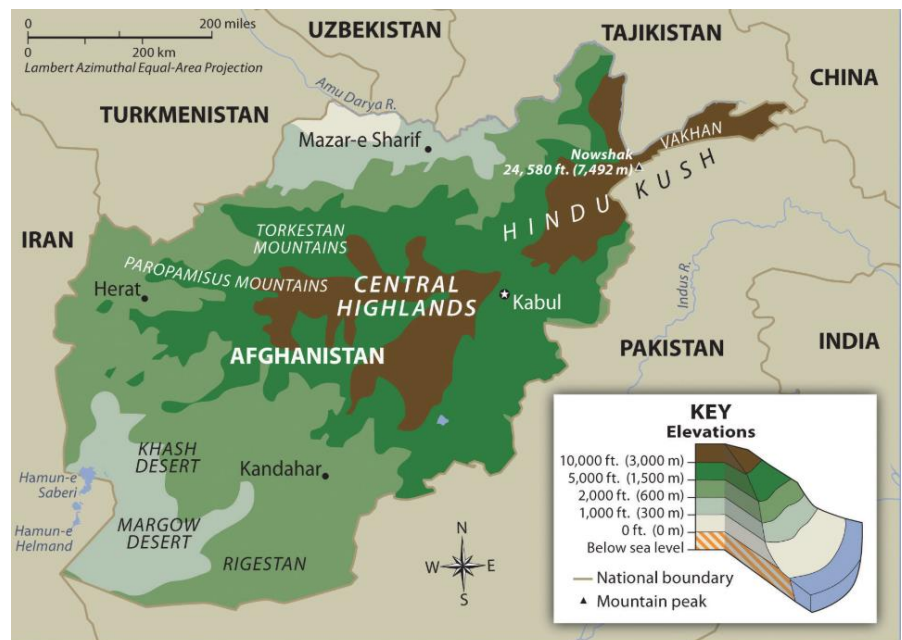


Figure 2: Map of Afghanistan

weather changes and currently, precipitation is below the average level. The country relies on its major reservoirs to collect water from rainfall, but the drought left these reservoirs alarmingly low. Many citizens residing in Kabul obtain their water from the 100,000 private wells that are contaminated and are especially vulnerable to drought. According to a study conducted by United States Geological Survey, more than 25% of the shallow wells have gone dry in the past few years and suggested that 40% of the remaining ones could go permanently dry as well. Due to climate change, there will be reduced water availability which will exacerbate the situation.

## UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The issue of improving access to clean water supply as well as medical infrastructures has been addressed several of times by the United Nations and especially since 2001, Afghanistan progressed tremendously, increasing access to safe water, improved water facilities, and sanitation systems. In 2001, about 4.8% had access whereas by 2011, it increased rapidly to 60.6%. Even though it may be hard to resolve the issue directly, with the full commitment of all nations, the issue can be relieved. In order to mitigate the issue and ensure improved access to clean water and medical infrastructure, some of the major UN organizations have been involved.

One notable example of this will be the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), an organization that mainly aims to improve overall health and education for children. Over the past few years, they have continuously contributed to improving sanitation and hygiene programs, aiming to solve these challenges in various regions. UNICEF's Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) team has focused on the ability of children to have access to safe water and ensure the use of basic toilets with good hygiene practices.

Another one is the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), helping to alleviate poverty and reduce inequalities or exclusion in various countries around the world. They are currently operating in 34 provinces and have implemented more than 3862 projects so far. It helped 2.5 million people in the nation to have better access after the water supply and sanitation projects that were undertaken by the UNDP. These projects have yielded significant achievements, but there are still some remote areas that do not have full access to clean water supplies.

International Rescue Committee (IRC) also provides vital support to those living in Afghanistan. They began working from 1988 to help those citizens that had their lives shattered by ongoing conflicts and natural disasters. They currently work in nine provinces and are trying their best to achieve measurable improvements in various areas including health and education. They help build safe and water and sanitation facilities that can be easier to access by the citizens and promotes hygiene programs to prevent the spread of diseases and illnesses.

## Timeline of Events

The timeline highlights major droughts, natural disasters, as well as any large programs that aimed to solve this issue at hand.

Date	Description of event
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2001	Inadequate snow and rainfall in Afghanistan caused six provinces: Herat, Jawzjan, Balkh, Badghis, Faryab, and Sar-e-Pul to have no crops grown, resulting in poverty. It also reduced the health and nutrition status of many Afghan citizens.
2011	There was a severe drought that hit Afghanistan in 2011, affecting more than 12 million people and 14 of the country's 34 provinces. This drought was known to be one of the worst droughts in a decade and many areas had wells that were dry. Also, people were also forced to move off their land and the Taliban or other insurgents made it harder to deliver food and other supplies to those that were in need.
June 6 <sup>th</sup> , 2014	There was a flash flood that hit the Baghlan province on April 25 <sup>th</sup> and June 6 <sup>th</sup> (2014). More than thousands of people were forced to flee and more than 100 people were killed. Overall, it destroyed four villages and washed away 2000 houses, fields, and roads.
May 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 2014	On the 2 <sup>nd</sup> of May, there was a landslide in Badakhshan province. Due to a series of heavy rain, landslides struck in the province, causing a huge damage to homes as well as agriculture. It also caused several people to die. According to the Coordination of Afghan Relief, it reports that around 200-350 Afghans have been killed and many people were gone missing.
2016~	In 2016, USAID launched a project in order to increase access to safe water and sanitation which was known as the flagship p nutrition project. This five-year global project aims to reduce malnutrition by increasing access to basic sanitation and safe water.

### Possible Solutions

Especially in rural areas of Afghanistan, people have a very limited access to clean drinking water and most people can only dream of this recognized human right. They are forced to get water from the tankers which are expensive and are contaminated or polluted. Therefore, the government needs to intervene more in the project of various organizations like KFW that aims to solve this problem. They should finance for the construction of deep wells, water containers as well as better pipes installed to

houses so that it will be easier for the citizens to derive water. Citizens will be able to benefit from improved conditions since these infrastructures will provide them with less contaminated water. This is will also be beneficial for those that have to travel long distances to fetch water.

Furthermore, member states need to pull collective effort in researching for better conversion generators that will address the water quality and come up with an updated version of water purification systems. Installing these systems will help convert large amounts of wastewater and safely collect cleaner water. However, they must be aware of the fact that it will take a prolonged time and heavy amount of expense to construct these infrastructures. A solution is to form an international research group mainly for this purpose so that the issue can be solved innovatively and efficiently. They need to make sure that they have a proper plan so that it will be as efficient and cause less damage to the surrounding areas.

Effective operation and staffing of hospitals are vital so that the living standards of Afghans can be improved. There needs to be proper and professional equipment which will be a prerequisite for reducing poverty throughout the nation. Hospitals need to make sure that they adequately stock equipment so that patients can be treated in an efficient and timely manner. On top of that, extensive prehospital training of workers is also required to improve the health care system. Without training these workers, they will not be able to use the equipment properly and will make it harder to offer basic treatments to patients suffering from illnesses.

Also, there needs to further progress in building better health care facilities and infrastructures because currently, there is not enough due to the damage caused by war and ongoing disputes. The nation needs to fully support this and give funds or aid to those organizations involved in this construction project. Some hospitals need to be reconstructed and renovated so that they do not lack accommodation which is what Afghanistan is facing right now. They should have enough space to treat a patient with an emergency as soon as possible and include new facilities like a pediatric wellness center, rehabilitation facility and many more. By doing so, the health care situation in Afghanistan will get better.

Finally, in order to improve basic healthcare and provide proper basic sanitation services in Afghanistan, the government needs to also take a proactive approach and educate citizens on some of the sanitary or hygiene methods to prevent them from getting easily infected by ill-borne illnesses. This nation is a country suffering from drought, so though it may be challenging to take simple actions such as washing hands with soap or showering, the government still needs to promote and advertise it. This will definitely help reduce the number of people suffering, resulting in less government expenditure on healthcare.



Moreover, the government needs to ensure that the citizens are fully aware of this issue so that they can try to find an alternative method of getting water that is more reliable to use.

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