



Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR THE STOCKHOLM CONVENTION ON PERSISTENT ORGANIC POLLUTANTS







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The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan acceded to the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants on 20 February 2013. In accordance its commitments under this Convention, Afghanistan has prepared its First National Implementation Plan on Persistent Organic Pollutants.

The National Implementation Plan is a step forward in protecting human health and the environment from persistent organic pollutants. The development of this Plan is a key milestone for Afghanistan and shows the country's commitment to implementing the Stockholm Convention. A largely qualitative inventory of releases of persistent organic pollutants in Afghanistan has been prepared as part of the Plan, which also identifies clear national priorities for addressing the pollutants. Based on the national priorities, chemical action plans have been prepared in cooperation with relevant ministries and agencies. These action plans also include ongoing strategies to reduce air pollution and to improve management of solid waste.

It is important to note that the preparation of this National Implementation Plan followed a consultative and participatory process that benefitted from valuable inputs from several stakeholders in government institutions and the private sector. The main content of the Plan was discussed in a series of national workshops engaging with and attended by a wide range of stakeholders, as well as international experts. All suggestions and comments received were thoroughly analysed and, as far as possible, addressed whilst finalising the document.

I wish to congratulate all those involved in the process of preparing this National Implementation Plan on Persistent Organic Pollutants, particularly the members of the National Chemicals Working Groups from all key government authorities. The Plan was prepared involving all key stakeholders within these multi-disciplinary study teams and through a broad consultative process coordinated by the National Environmental Protection Agency.

The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan would like to acknowledge the financial and technical support of the Global Environment Facility and the United Nations Environment Programme that assisted in the fulfilment of this national obligation. Moreover, the Government would like to use this National Implementation Plan to reiterate the commitment of Afghanistan and its people to the principles of the Stockholm Convention and the fulfilment of our national obligations under it.

Schah-Zaman Maiwandi Director General National Environmental Protection Agency Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Environmental Protection Agency of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has prepared this National Implementation Plan (NIP) in partial fulfilment of its obligations under the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs).

The Stockholm Convention came into effect in 2001 with the aim of eliminating or reducing the release into the environment of POPs, a class of highly toxic and stable chemicals produced by human activity, which accumulate in the environment and are transported and concentrated in certain regions by atmospheric circulation. Afghanistan acceded to the Stockholm Convention in 2013.

Afghanistan is currently recovering from nearly four decades of conflict, which has damaged much of the country's infrastructure and weakened its institutions. Following the Bonn Conference in 2001, Afghanistan adopted a new constitution as an Islamic Republic with Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches.

Afghanistan's Constitution gives a high priority to environmental protection through the powers that it vests in the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA). Environmental protection legislation takes precedence over any other and NEPA has overarching authority in environmental matters over other ministries and government agencies. The Environment Law gives NEPA powers to prevent activities liable to damage the environment. In line with its commitment to environmental protection, Afghanistan has acceded to a number of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs).

The Central Statistics Organization estimates the country's population at 29.7 million. Afghanistan also has a fast growth rate as well as a youth bulge, with persons under 14 years of age accounting for nearly half of the total population. Poverty is widespread, affecting more than a third of the country's total population, and reflected in the country's low per capita GNI of US\$580.¹ Nevertheless, over the past 15 years, considerable gains have been made in the areas of education and health. More children than ever are going to school, and literacy rates are increasing with more than half of the youth (15-24 years old) able to read and write.

Agriculture is the primary mode of subsistence in Afghanistan and engages 78% of the population, but produces only 22.6% of the GDP. Afghanistan ranked 169 out of 188 countries in the 2016 UNDP Human Development Index (HDI), and ranked the lowest in its region of South Asia. Life expectancy was 63.3 years and under-five mortality was 55 per 1,000 live births. Much of the population continues to suffer from shortages of housing, clean water, electricity, medical care, and jobs.

Despite investment by the international community, the country's infrastructure, which was heavily damaged during the war years, remains inadequate to the needs of a growing population. Proven mineral resources, valued at US\$3 trillion, promise future economic growth but will also require considerable investment in extraction and processing. Meanwhile the economy remains heavily dependent on foreign aid.

Afghanistan has a diverse natural environment, ranging from high alpine with permanent snow and glaciers to hot lowland desert. It thus supports a wide diversity of wildlife with a high level of floral endemicism. It also lies on main bird migration routes and its limited wetland habitats are of considerable international importance.

r. WB (n.d.). *World Data Bank, World Development Indicators, Afghanistan, a*vailable (November 2017) at: http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=2&country=AFG

It is not possible to measure the direct impact of POPs on the health of the Afghan people or on the natural environment due to a lack of monitoring capacity; however, both remain highly vulnerable. In cities, there is a high level of atmospheric pollution from the use of organic fuels which are known to produce dioxin-like substances. End-of-life products liable to contain POPs, are disposed of in solid waste from which they may leach into water courses and groundwater on which most people depend for their domestic supply. Only one of Afghanistan's drainage basins, the Kabul River, discharges into the open sea via the Indus River. The rest drain into inland basins and wetlands, where the accumulation of toxic chemicals will be most damaging.

A largely qualitative inventory of POPs releases in Afghanistan has been prepared as part of this NIP, which identifies clear national priorities for addressing POPs. The most significant is the unintended production of dioxin-like substances from the use of wood and coal for domestic heating and cooking and also from the incineration of clinical waste. Also of major importance is the disposal of end-of-life materials manufactured while POPs, such as the brominated fire-retardants HBB, PBDE and HBCD, were in widespread use. It is impossible to estimate precisely the quantities that may exist in the country as no statistics for imports exist over the relevant period, but these chemicals were commonly used in many consumer products in the period before the war. These POPs will be released into the environment unless the materials that contain them are disposed of in an environmentally sound manner.

The same considerations apply in relation to PFOS in imported textiles, plastics, synthetic carpet and paper products among many others. This is complicated by its continued Acceptable Uses under the Stockholm Convention for aviation hydraulic fluid, fire-fighting foams and certain medical devices. Another significant problem is the residue from the large quantities of HCH (Lindane) powder imported into Afghanistan from the Soviet Union for locust control over many decades until 1990. The warehouses used for storage in Herat, Mazar and Kunduz remain contaminated.

The final significant source of POPs was identified is the remains of the pre-war electrical distribution system in which cooling oils containing PCBs were used in transformers. Over 3,000 transformers from this period remain in Afghanistan, some still in use.

Based on these priorities, chemical action plans have been prepared, involving a number of responsible ministries and agencies. These include ongoing strategies to reduce air pollution and to improve management of solid waste. The electrical supply company, DABS, will undertake a survey of the remaining old transformers to determine their condition and make plans for their replacement and disposal. The Ministry of Public Health has an ongoing project to equip government hospitals with modern incinerators. These POPs action plans also include setting standards for products and materials that exclude POPs, and the Customs Service will develop Tariff Codes to identify commodities liable to contain POPs. In addition to these activities, projects, specific to the reduction or elimination of POPs and requiring a total funding of US\$70.450 million are identified.

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