

Climate Crisis in Taliban-Ruled Afghanistan: The Need for an Alternate Approach

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Abstract

Following the Taliban's seizure of power in August 2021, Afghanistan plunged into a severe humanitarian and economic crisis. Since then, a dire situation has been exacerbated by frequent natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, and droughts, many of which are linked to climate change. This chapter argues that the reduction in international aid and attention given to the country, and the Taliban's inability to respond to these disasters effectively, have together aggravated the humanitarian and economic hardship faced by ordinary Afghans. If left unaddressed, this could result in increased cross-border migration, displacement, and violent extremism as poverty and unemployment levels rise. Drawing on more than a decade of field research in Afghanistan, this chapter unpacks and analyses the role of the international community in Afghanistan in addressing the climate crisis, elaborating on alternate pathways that go beyond a sole reliance on international NGOs for disaster response. The long-term strategy includes engaging the people and the defacto authorities in the global climate change conversations as part of environmental peace-building process and incremental institution and capacity-building to respond to the unfolding crisis effectively.

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Locating Conflict Fragility and Climate Change Debate in Afghanistan

Environmental peacebuilding is an important yet relatively under explored subject of study in the expansive realm of climate change. It provides a useful lens for countries, like Afghanistan, that have both witnessed prolonged periods of violent conflict and are presently experiencing the worst consequences of climate change. Tobias Ide's research has highlighted six adverse effects of environmental peacebuilding (Ide, 2000). Each one of his "six Ds" – depoliticization, displacement, discrimination, deterioration into conflict, delegitimization of the state, and degradation of the environment – are relevant in the current context of Afghanistan. On the other hand, Adriana Abdenur and Siddharth Tripathi provide specific examples on the need to adopt local approaches to climate-sensitive peacebuilding in Afghanistan (Abdenur & Tripathi, 2022)

This chapter attempts to address the gaps that exist in current research and practice. It probes into the Afghan state's capacity to deal with the climate crisis in the context of an abrupt change of regime that significantly diminish the fragile capacity and gains that was built in the last two decades of the international community's intervention in Afghanistan. It makes the case for the international community to play a larger role to prevent the reversal of the fragile gains and the need for a reactivation of a local response mechanism that appears to have been disrupted by the capture of power by a theocratic regime and collapse of the republican government in August 2021.

Following the Taliban's capture of power in Afghanistan on August 15, 2021 and the subsequent establishment of the Islamic Emirate, the international community's measures to compel the new regime to adhere to the norms of human rights, among them a safeguarding of the rights of women, girls and minorities, resulted in the exclusion of the Taliban regime from the global climate change conversation. In 2022, the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the Bureau of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) decided not to recognize any Taliban institution as a focal point in Afghanistan (Dickie & Greenfield, 2023). This not only resulted in Afghanistan being disinvited from the annual COP meetings but blocked the Taliban regime's access to key UN climate funds, including the Green Climate Fund (GCF). The Taliban-run National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) of Afghanistan was divested of any legal status.

Before that, the Taliban had initiated regressive domestic measures as part of its move to overhaul the administrative apparatus of the deposed Republican government, much of which had been established over two decades of international assistance. One of the early decisions the Taliban took after taking power in August 2021 was to abolish the National Water Affairs Regulation Authority (NWARA), the government agency set up to look after water management throughout the country (Reliefweb, 2022). Immediately after the regime change in Kabul, many of the technical experts associated with the Republican government fled Afghanistan, fearing for their safety. This exodus also included the head of NEPA and his deputy. Threats to their lives came not only from the Taliban but also from those punished for environmental violations, who had been imprisoned by the previous Republican regime after being reported by NEPA. They were released by the Taliban. While NEPA as an institution was retained, the massive flight of human capital affected the organisation's ability and performance.

The focus of this chapter is on climate change and the challenge it poses to Afghanistan under the Taliban. It delves both into the intent and capacity of the Taliban regime to respond to the climate crisis and into the international community's approach to assisting the Afghan people. The chapter argues that, given the incapacity of the Taliban regime, keeping Afghanistan out from the global climate conversation would add to the country's conflict fragility, pushing it further into an abyss. In addition to aggravating human misery and economic contraction, it could lead to large-scale human migration and even compel desperate Afghans to join violent extremist and terrorist organisations that still operate in the country and the region. The chapter uses historical, analytical and comparative methods, building upon primary and secondary source material, as well as over a decade's worth of first-hand information accrued by working in government and non-government sectors in various provinces of Afghanistan, including those worst affected by climate change. Conversations and discussions with multiple stakeholders have provided primary inputs and insights into the local dynamics and on the ground realities of the linkages between conflict and climate crisis.

What follows in this chapter is divided into five sections. The first unpacks the challenge climate change poses to Afghanistan. The second probes into the Taliban's in/capacity to deal with the challenge within the broader context of the governance crisis the country has faced since Au-

gust 2021. The third and fourth sections analyse the international community's approach to Afghanistan and the role of the International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) in assisting the Afghans to deal with the impact of climate change. The concluding section provides pathways for policymakers to revisit their overall approach to Afghanistan which could prevent the worst-case scenario of climate crisis, economic collapse, rise in violent extremism and unending cycles of conflict.

Understanding Afghanistan's Climate Woes: The Local and Regional Context

On September 23, 2020, then-Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, speaking to the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly, identified “five sources of unrest” in Afghanistan (United Nations, 2020). Along with the COVID-19 pandemic, haphazard industrialization, rampant inequality, and the violence perpetrated by the Taliban, Ghani identified climate change as a source of violence and suffering in Afghanistan. Terming Afghanistan the 17th worst-affected country, recurrently ravaged by seasonal floods and drought, Ghani called for “regional solutions based on international models” to address the problem of climate change.

Ghani's call for placing Afghanistan's climate woes in the regional context arises from the significant overlaps between Afghanistan and its neighbours. Its fossil fuel-dependent South Asian neighbours like Pakistan and India have remained prone to disasters related to climate change. Iran and the Central Asian countries that share boundaries with Afghanistan are also considered extremely vulnerable. Heatwaves, water shortages, recurrent flooding and their impact on human lives, agriculture, and livestock have been significant. In effect, the fight of this entire landmass against climate change boils down to national commitments and resources they can gather for the purpose.

Over the years, independent assessments have underlined Afghanistan's immense vulnerability to climate change. According to the Global Climate Risk Index 2019, (the last year the index has data for), Afghanistan was ranked sixth among countries most affected by climate impacts (Kumar, 2023). According to similar surveys like the INFORM Risk Index 2023, Afghanistan ranks fourth on the list of countries most at risk of a crisis. The country is eighth on the 2021 Notre Dame Global Adaptation Index of countries most vulnerable and least prepared to adapt to climate

change (OCHA, 2023). Between 1950 and 2010, the average annual temperature rose by 1.8 degrees in Afghanistan (Batha, 2023), which is about twice the global average. According to the climate change projections for Afghanistan, developed by NEPA and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 2015, by 2100 the country will see a strong increase in mean annual temperature coupled with an overall decrease in water availability, impacting the country's diverse ecosystems. (UNEP, 2017)

One of the major manifestations of climate change is the increasing frequency of drought in the country. Over the past two decades, drought has been sporadic, with its intensity worsening over the years; the drought of 2018 directly affected 22 of the 34 provinces and produced at least 300,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs). Drought between 2021 and 2022 has affected 80 percent of the country. It coincided with the main wheat season harvests in May–July 2021, which are critical months for food security and livestock production. In 2023 and 2024, the country experienced its worst drought in 30 years, affecting 25 out of 34 provinces, with the highest increases reported in Parwan, Kunar, Baghdis, Baghlan, and Samangan provinces (Reliefweb, 2024).

Precipitation has been scarcer in peak winter months as well. Between October 2023 to mid-January 2024, Afghanistan received only 45 to 60 percent of the average precipitation compared to previous years, well below the 40-year average. On January 23, 2024, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), warned that such unseasonably dry and warm winter could be devastating for Afghanistan's rain-dependent agriculture, especially the seasonal cash crops, affecting the prospect of pasture recovery (Siddique, 2024).

Changing weather patterns and erratic unseasonal rains led to at least three flash floods ravaging many provinces between July 2023 and April 2024. Severely parched land loses the capacity to absorb water, which typically leads to such floods when it rains after a long gap. The difficulty in growing crops and maintaining livestock has led to widespread food insecurity and malnourishment, affecting as many as 40 million people, including close to eight million children. Approximately 80 percent of Afghanistan's population relies directly on the natural resource base for their livelihoods. These climatic changes can therefore seriously disrupt the country's food security, economy, and stability and become a threat multiplier.

Further, rising temperatures directly lead to less-than-optimal water and sanitation conditions, already troubled by altered precipitation patterns across the country. For years, residents of Kabul have dug deeper to access groundwater (author's field-notes, June 2007– May 2017). In other areas of the country, such fast-depleting water columns directly affect agriculture, the raising of livestock, and the lives of people. El Niño conditions, which bring in some amount of rain, may offer some opportunities for drought recovery. But these also pose the risk of flooding and pests that affect crops.

The coming years are not expected to provide any respite from this catastrophic phenomenon. According to the Afghanistan Drought Risk Management Strategy (2019–2030) of the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), by 2030, annual droughts in many parts of the country will likely become the norm (FAO, 2019). This combined with other natural hazards such as flooding and earthquakes, can further limit the coping and earning capacity of the population (author's field-notes, August 2016). According to the UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs- Population Division, the population of Afghanistan is set to expand significantly towards 2030, which could put enormous strain on the resources of the country and its capacity to fight climate change (UN-DESA-PD: 2022).

Taliban's Governance Crisis: Capacity Deficit and Flight of Human Capital

Afghanistan's inability to respond to climate change under the Taliban can be viewed in the context of a complete collapse of governance structures and flight of human capital since August 2021. The Taliban regime has failed in two ways to respond to the unfolding crisis: first, in successfully developing and managing the official competencies required to meet both short-term exigencies and the necessities of long-term planning and institution-building; and second, in finding adequate resources. Both are linked to the regime's obscurantist policies and somewhat lackadaisical approach to human suffering.

In the days following the Taliban's capture of power, many critical and longstanding functionaries of Afghanistan's Republican government fled the country fearing persecution, leading to a brain drain and a crisis of governance; the Taliban then proved to be clueless and incompetent when it came to operating the state machinery set up by the international

community over the last two decades. Those who could not escape went into hiding, waiting to assess the new regime's approach towards the agents of the previous administration and contemplating methods of leaving the country. Many of them were personnel and officials belonging to the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA).

Set up in 1973, the ANDMA has nearly five decades of experience dealing with natural and climate disasters in the country. However, in the past two decades of the Republic, it has been relying on international aid to augment its capability. For example, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the Asia Development Bank collaborated with the Government of Afghanistan and other partners to develop a National Plan for Disaster Management and a Strategy for Institutional Strengthening in Risk Management in 2005 (UNDRR, 2005). These plans detailed a roadmap for strengthening Afghanistan's disaster response capacity and identified areas for international assistance. In 2017, the World Bank, with financial support from the Government of Japan and the Global Facility for Disaster Risk Reduction, produced a comprehensive multi-hazard risk assessment at the national level (World Bank, 2017).

Before the Taliban takeover, NEPA had prepared a national climate action plan and emissions inventory. During my field research in Afghanistan, NEPA was construed as one of the successes of the two-decade-long international intervention (author's field-notes, September 2012; August 2016). The Taliban has not established any agency to replace the dismantled NWARA (Reliefweb, 2022), nor has it provided any indication about measures it will take to mitigate the impacts of climate change and to enact water governance. None of these, including the promotion of clean energy, appears to be a priority for the Islamic Emirate, which hopes to rule the country under shariah (Islamic canonical) law. Worse still, media reports have indicated that cash-strapped and cut off from international aid, the Taliban-led government is tapping into the country's coal mines to boost revenue (REFRL, 2022).

Similarly, the former Republican government led by President Ashraf Ghani had officially declared a drought on June 22 and predicted that wheat crops in the country would be reduced by nearly 2 million tonnes and more than 3 million livestock were at risk of death (IFRC, 2021). After taking over the reigns of power, the Taliban regime failed to document the actual impact of the drought.

Overall, the Taliban regime has displayed little understanding of cli-

mate vulnerability, while often claiming to have rolled out policies related to climate change, such as enforcing limits on emissions from coal-fired heating systems. Otherwise, its policies to deal with climate issues have been mostly extemporaneous, including the occasional provision of small monetary handouts to victims of drought, earthquake, and floods. Taliban spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid has underlined the limited capacity of the Taliban regime to deal with the crisis by saying: “Afghanistan is a poor country and cannot handle disasters on its own; therefore, we need the help and support of other countries” (Saifullah, 2023). Clearly, the development of local competencies to meet exigencies and to plan for dealing with climate change seen under the Republican regime seem to have been replaced by rudimentary and ad hoc measures, grossly inadequate given the scale of the crisis.

The International Community's Ad-hoc Approach: Isolation vs Recognition

The international community's current strategy of isolating the Taliban has neither brought about any change in the group's world-view on women and human rights nor has it helped in addressing the governance deficit and climate crisis inside Afghanistan. Since August 2021, there has been a dwindling of funds from the international community impacting the implementation of those critical projects already approved. This includes funds for water resources development and climate change mitigation projects. The projects that have come to a halt include a \$21.4 million rural solar energy project backed by the GCF, the project to create a national carbon inventory, a \$36 million project funded by the Global Environment Facility and others to boost renewable energy, make agriculture and forestry more climate-resilient and safeguard ecosystems, and several green projects worth \$90 million in the pipeline (Banerji, 2021).

Similarly, before the Taliban's takeover, Afghanistan's climate plan estimated that the country needed \$20.6 billion to fund climate adaptation and emission-cutting initiatives between 2021 and 2030. (Talaash & Batha, 2023) The GCF had approved nearly \$18 million for a sustainable energy project in Afghanistan. That project was put on hold, pending a “full review of current and emerging risks”, according to the GCF (Dickie & Greenfield, 2023). In addition, the erstwhile Republican regime had sought \$750 million for various projects, such as improvements in irriga-

tion and the deployment of rooftop solar panels in Kabul. They, too, have been deferred.

This precarious situation has made millions, including farmers, more vulnerable to disaster, without any assistance whatsoever from the Taliban regime. A critical lack of infrastructure and leadership to deal with disasters has directly impacted food production, both for domestic consumption and exports. Staple crops of the northern and southern plains and the fruit orchards in the central highlands have suffered massively, unveiling a sweeping spectre of mass hunger that is threatening to consume 10 million Afghans, who are no longer covered by the aid provided by the resource-starved World Food Program (author's e-interviews with Afghan stakeholders, September 2022).

In 2023, the OCHA claimed that the number of people facing high food insecurity during the lean season has decreased compared to previous years, mostly due to “extensive, timely and efficient delivery of humanitarian food and agriculture assistance” (Reliefweb, 2023). However, given the declining contribution from the international community, sustaining that momentum may be a challenge. Consequently, the vast majority of Afghans would remain outside any assistance programme. According to an assessment, the amount of aid Afghanistan currently receives from EU and UN projects is less than 10 percent of the previous aid, leaving the average Afghans weaker, vulnerable, and more exposed to the hazards of climate events (Kumar, 2024). Under the Taliban regime, sustained high food prices, soaring unemployment, and macroeconomic instability in the country are the order of the day. According to a recent survey, unemployment among men has surged to 31 percent (Mehran, 2024). Most women have been barred from work. An average Afghan works for a daily salary of 200 afghani, which is highly insufficient for buying “a bag of flour which is 2,150 afghani, a tin containing sixteen litres oil at 1,800 afghani, a bag of 24 kilograms of rice at 3,100 afghani, 7 kilograms of bean which costs 700 afghani and a bag of 7 kilograms of sugar that is 430 afghani” (Tolo News, 2022). This situation could worsen, triggering the outward movement of the population as climate refugees sooner rather than later.

Ironically, Afghanistan went unrepresented in the COP28 climate change conference held in Dubai in November to December 2023 – the third year in a row since 2021 that policy seeking to isolate the Taliban has not distinguished between the regime and its victims.

Despite being one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change

and one of the lowest emitters of greenhouse gases, Afghanistan did not find a place on the global climate table. The Taliban-controlled NEPA issued a statement regretting the “political factors” that resulted in the Afghan delegates not being extended an invitation to attend the conference (D'Souza, 2023). The NEPA has made several appeals for Afghanistan's inclusion in the COP process and to restart 32 climate change-related projects worth \$824 million postponed by donor institutions.

In a recent meeting of April 2024, NEPA also outlined smaller projects that it plans to undertake within its limited capacity (Tolo News, 2024). For the international community, however, any proposed inclusion of the Taliban in the COP process may inadvertently be interpreted as recognition of the regime. This is a challenge given the Taliban's regressive policies on girls and women (D'Souza, 2024). Since the capture of power, the Taliban have banished women to within the four walls of their homes. Through a series of edicts, the Islamic Emirate has put a curb on women's education beyond secondary levels, made the presence of women in public places illegal without a male guardian, has stopped local agencies and international NGOs from recruiting women as staff, and has slashed the salary of women employees working in fields such as health, security and art and craft. It has even made women conversing in the open illegal, to be punished by beatings, prison terms and even public stoning. No amount of international criticism has deterred the Taliban regime from unveiling new and harsher edicts each passing month. It describes women's issues as an internal matter and compliant with Islamic laws.

Engaging with such a regime unveils serious ethical issues, especially for democratic societies that treat women as equal to men and recognise their contribution to society. However, Afghanistan, being affected by climate change to the degree that it is, poses a unique challenge. The impact of climate change on the country, the potential region-wide spillover and the consequent increase in the flow of refugees into European countries that will follow should remain a source of concern for the international community. These hard truths need to be factored into the policies of the international community.

The INGO-led Response: The Parallel Service Delivery

Many of Afghanistan's security-related problems depicted a declining trend following the Taliban insurgents' assumption of power. Certain se-

curity challenges continue to be posed by Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) and the remnants of the deposed civilian regime. However, these are neither significant enough to disrupt the climate-related projects in the country, nor believed to be directed towards ameliorating the crises faced by the common Afghans. The host of problems faced by Afghanistan relates to all three aspects of the climate crisis – mitigation, adaptation, and resilience and the responses from the international non-governmental agencies (INGOs) must cover all three if they are to be effective. The following analyses seem to indicate that most of the projects currently in the works respond to the mitigation and adaptation needs in only a limited fashion.

In the absence of adequate resources and a lack of official competencies, small projects on a limited scale are being executed by the United Nations and the European Union to confront climate change, boost agriculture, and improve food security in Afghanistan. These are small project-based initiatives and are being implemented in a few provinces of the country; while they are not in the realm of developmental aid, their implementation has positively impacted the lives of the identified population. Such impact is limited to the area of implementation. Climate-proofing the country, or at least a significant area, is beyond the scope of such projects (author's e-interviews with Afghan stakeholders, July 2023). For instance, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is implementing a solarization initiative aiming to tackle Afghanistan's energy challenges (UNDP, 2024). The country imports 75 percent of its electricity from neighbouring Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, which is barely enough to cover 40 percent of its needs, forcing even the critical health facilities among others to be without power for more than six hours every day. The situation is worse in more remote provinces where such shutdowns can last 12 hours a day. The UNDP project has benefited hospitals, health centres, schools, and small farmers in Kabul and Kapisa provinces. Afghanistan needs an expansion of such projects to almost all of its provinces. This may be beyond the capacity of the INGOs and needs to involve both the government and the local organisations in its implementation.

The other climate adaptation projects in play include the EU's initiatives in the field of resilient agriculture. In July 2023, the EU announced a humanitarian donation of €7.6 million to address climate change and food insecurity in the country through an agricultural project to be implement-

ed by the British non-profit Afghanaid in Badakhshan, Daikundi, Ghor, Jowzjan, Samangan, and Takhar provinces (Delegation of the European Union to Afghanistan, 2023). Here too much emphasis has been placed on involving women in climate adaptation. Afghanaid lays special emphasis on implementing a women-centric climate action plan by training women in preparing bio-briquettes and gabion baskets, and involving them in kickstarting reforestation and nurturing drought-resistant home gardens.

Since September 2023, another EU-funded €3.3 million climate adaptation project in Afghanistan has been implemented by the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC). The project, which will last for three years, will enhance the capacities of local communities in seven provinces – Badakhshan, Daikundi, Faryab, Ghazni, Kapisa, Paktia, and Takhar – to take up climate-smart agriculture, livelihood diversification, and efficient and sustainable natural resource management.

Climate resilience projects have recently been initiated in a limited scale. In May 2024, the NAC, in collaboration with the Chr. Mikkelsen Institute (CMI) and NEPA, concluded a three-day climate dialogue and symposium on the consequences of climate change in Afghanistan, where community members from rural Afghanistan were invited to discuss the impacts of climate change and share their recommendations to build community-led resilience. Similarly, the Aga Khan Development Network's women-led climate resilience projects include growing micro-forests to support communities in combating climate change while supporting them in earning livelihoods in Badakhshan, Baghlan, Bamiyan and Takhar provinces (AKDN, 2024).

The scale of these projects is limited; significant expansion (impossible to achieve without capacity building and the involvement of local NGOs) is required. Unless backed by a visible increase in the availability of resources, the areas of implementation would remain limited and the outcomes would not evolve beyond tokenism.

The Long Road Ahead: Future Pathways

The exclusion of Afghanistan by the international community from global conversations on climate change has been a self-limiting strategy. While being ethical, it mixes ideals and politics with the priorities and needs of the Afghan populace. These concerns over the Taliban's regressive policies on girls and women need to be balanced against on-the-ground reali-

ties and necessities of the people in Afghanistan and developing adequate leverages to bring about a behavioural change. This balancing act could start with both issue- and project-based engagement with the Taliban regime with a view both to enhancing its capacity to respond to the climate crisis and to bring about an incremental change in their behaviour and world view. This could culminate in the Taliban becoming socialised as a participant in international negotiations, governance and cooperative frameworks on climate change. As the dilemma on recognition and assistance remains unresolved, Afghanistan could be subjected yet again to a vicious cycle of conflict with climate change acting as a threat multiplier.

Existing EU and UNDP projects certainly do make some difference to the lives of Afghans, but they are limited to only a third of the country's provinces. The country needs a much larger and immediate range of international interventions in terms of enhancing the capacities of Afghans to act in the face of growing challenges caused by climate change rather than merely relying on parallel delivery mechanisms. As with any other country, in Afghanistan it is the people who must assume the role of primary respondents to climate challenges as catalysts of environmental peace building efforts. Both the international community as well as the countries of the region have a responsibility to provide them with the necessary assistance and tools to deal with the impending climate crisis as it exacerbates food insecurity, impacts public health and results in climate refugees.

The international community needs to take cognizance of the fact that frequent natural disasters, coupled with the prolonged economic crisis, could serve to exacerbate migration and a rise in violent extremism, with the unemployed and displaced youth compelled to join militant groups like al-Qaeda and ISKP due to the lack of economic opportunities. While both neighbouring and more distant countries alike would be affected by the spread of radicalization, European countries are likely to be the target of the mass-migration of refugees. Moreover, countries like Pakistan and Iran could continue to forcibly deport large numbers of Afghan refugees, thereby reducing their attractiveness as refugee destinations.

According to the UNHCR, a record 28.3 million Afghans need humanitarian and protection assistance in 2023, which represents a huge spike of 3.9 million from the 2022 figures of 24.4 million, and 9.9 million more from the early 2021 figures of 18.4 million. In 2023, 20 million people face acute hunger, with 6 million people in "emergency" levels (one step away from famine) – one of the world's highest figures (UNHCR,

2023). There should be greater engagement between the donor agencies and the UN with the Taliban regime, especially on a pressing issue like climate change, which plays a crucial role in such endemic poverty and food insecurity.

Afghanistan needs urgent help to deal with the growing climate vulnerabilities and crisis. It needs immediate assistance for comprehensive climate action strategies. The international community's support is crucial in building resilience and ensuring sustainable development in the country. The UN approach of leaving no one behind (LNOB) is set out in the Shared Framework on Leaving No One Behind: Equality and Non-Discrimination at the Heart of Sustainable Development; this includes a shared framework for action to ensure that the institution of the UN System actively seeks to combat inequalities and discrimination in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Operationalizing the commitment to LNOB in Afghanistan and addressing climate crisis and conflict fragility, the international community must provide financial assistance and engage with the de facto authorities on crucial humanitarian, governance and economic issues. Doing so will enhance a shared capacity and build stake holder ship to tackle the challenges of climate change impacting the country marked by sustained conflict. Such a policy should potentially translate to strengthening assistance and institution-building, both increasing interaction with the Taliban on climate stress and disaster management and building platforms of cooperation to include Afghans in global climate conversations and climate action. The international community and the INGOs can also help develop programs for training the ANDMA personnel and provide them with modern equipment and periodic assessments.

There are ample opportunities for developing a cooperative mechanism between the West and the regional countries. The West should perhaps take the responsibility of providing financial and technical assistance while the countries of the region, being conversant with the intricacies of working with the Taliban, should be tasked with implementing and monitoring the projects, in sync with the local culture and customs.

In addition to providing immediate humanitarian assistance for humanitarian relief, there is a need to build climate resilience strategies for the implementation of sustainable water management practices (rainwater harvesting and efficient irrigation systems, for example) to help mitigate the impact of drought. For this purpose, local self-help groups and com-

munities need to be included for climate mapping, prioritization and action. This could help build community-led resilience.

In particular, assistance and resources should be provided to women's groups, working to provide aid to female victims of disasters, to aid them in their efforts to help a vulnerable section of the population grappling with poverty and hunger due to climate-induced shocks. Afghan NGOs women and local grassroots representatives, meanwhile, need to be included in global conferences on climate and disaster management to help build networks of collaboration.

While such extensive engagement with the Taliban regime does run the risk of the latter using it as a source of legitimization, an assessment of the international community's approach of isolating the Taliban in the past two years indicate that efforts have not been particularly successful. To begin with, a change of approach with regard to climate action, in which stalled projects are restarted and greater civic engagement is sought, may save millions of lives and potentially bring about a modicum of moderation within the ranks of the Taliban through increased socialization.

Indeed, Afghanistan should be invited to participate in the COP29 summit to be held in Azerbaijan in November 2024. Excluding Afghanistan will further compound the problems of food insecurity, economic deprivation, violent extremism and climate-induced disasters with regional and international implications.

In the long term, Afghanistan's capacities and resilience must be developed by bottom up approach and long term institution-building; this would go a long way in addressing the threats of climate change the country and the region is experiencing.

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