

VI. INFRASTRUCTURE

A. Current Situation

122. More than two decades of war have not only devastated Afghanistan's infrastructure, but have also deprived the country of new investment that would have raised services above prewar levels. As a result, most Afghans have little or no access to decent basic services—and must either go without—or rely on costly alternatives. Among the most serious costs, particularly for women and children, are the costs in terms of health (from unsafe water and sanitation, and indoor air pollution from burning traditional biomass fuels) and time (for example, for fetching water and fuel). It is difficult to overemphasize the low base from which reconstruction will begin.

123. The national road network is in poor condition. Significant numbers of bridges and causeways are damaged or totally destroyed. For example, 128 km of the 227 km Torkham–Jalalabad–Kabul road (crucial both for trade and for relief shipments) is so seriously damaged that it takes 4 days for a truck to make a return trip between Peshawar and Kabul, a journey that used to take less than a day. The extent to which roads are seeded with land mines is unclear, but this is likely to be a significant problem in the short term. Few rural villages have all-weather road access.

124. Piped water and sewerage networks are limited and in poor shape due to lack of maintenance and extensive war damage. There is heavy reliance on on-site water and sanitation solutions. These local solutions, together with severely diminished water resources caused by 3 years of drought, have led to high levels of groundwater pollution. Less than a quarter of the population has access to safe water and less than 20% of urban households have access to piped water.

125. Access to safe sanitation is very limited, particularly in rural areas where less than 10% have access to sanitary facilities. Even in urban areas facilities are minimal. Consequently diarrheal disease is a major cause of infant and child mortality—accounting for 27% of deaths of children between birth and 1 year, and 12% of deaths of children aged 1-5.

126. War has resulted in a shift back to traditional biomass fuels (firewood, crop residues, animal waste) for cooking and heating. Based on experience in the region, this is likely to contribute to increasing respiratory diseases, especially among women and children. Electricity was formerly available only in cities—about 6% of the population has access to electricity supply—and this supply is limited to a few hours a day due to damage to electricity facilities and lack of maintenance. Petroleum storage facilities around major urban centers have been destroyed and transport costs of imported fuels are inflated by the high costs of road transport. Natural gas used to be a major export, but gas fields have ceased to operate and wells have been capped.

127. Around a quarter of urban housing is seriously damaged or destroyed and about 40% of housing units are in unplanned areas. Urban infrastructure is also severely damaged or destroyed: about 40% of roads are damaged and 50% of drains are broken or do not function. About 50% of houses have no solid waste collection and sanitary disposal sites do not exist.

128. Communications facilities are seriously underdeveloped. Access to telecommunications is one of the lowest in the world with only 2 telephones per 1,000 people.