

GOVERNMENTAL OBLIGATIONS: TALIBAN GOVERNMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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Abstract

This study explores the environmental obligations of the Afghan government, examines the role played by the previous administration, and investigates the current environmental policies of the Taliban government. Given the ambiguity surrounding public perceptions of the Taliban's governance and the pressing issue of environmental degradation affecting Afghanistan, understanding the Taliban's stance on environmental matters is crucial. The research employs secondary data to analyze the government's formal obligations and the actions of the previous administration. For insights into the Taliban's policies, the study uses purposive sampling to conduct in-depth interviews with Taliban officials, providing firsthand perspectives.

The findings reveal that while Afghanistan had established an environmental governance framework during the previous government's tenure, full implementation and enforcement of these policies remained limited. Challenges such as weak institutional capacity, political instability, and resource constraints hindered effective environmental management. Despite these difficulties, the study finds that the Taliban government acknowledges the severity of environmental issues and is taking concrete steps to address them. This includes efforts to build upon existing frameworks and prioritize environmental concerns within their governance agenda.

Keywords: *Afghanistan, Environmental Protection, Environmental Obligations, Environmental Policy, Taliban Government*

Introduction

This study is an attempt to examine the government obligations under the International Law and investigate the position of democratic government and government of the Taliban. Afghanistan having an ironic cultural heritage and a rich history of foreign invasions, Afghanistan is the unique home of numerous agricultural products (including cereal, goat and sheep breeds, and forest products), as well as being rich in minerals (such as copper, gold, and semi-valuable stones), as well as additional natural resources. Since earliest times, Afghanistan's natural riches have provided resources to a variety of large and tiny empires throughout the world. Afghanistan had a significant amount of forest and plant cover until the middle of the twentieth century. High-alpine flora, coniferous and diverse woods, open woodlands with almond, juniper, and pistachio trees, semidesert vegetation, and marshlands were among the species found there. Aside from the country's most parched deserts and icy mountains, almost the whole country's land surface has been utilized for generations, whether for agricultural farming, animal grazing, fuel wood collecting, or hunting, among other activities. High-arid regions of Afghanistan have particular difficulties when it comes to providing for one's basic needs. Almost all natural resources of the country have been destroyed by the war that has lasted over three decades and years of drought and misuse of the most important resources. Consequently, numerous individuals have been affected and nearly all the national resources in the country have been exhausted (UNEP, 2022).

The government plays a vital and fundamental role in ensuring that the environment is safe by coming up, implementing and sustaining proper environmental policies. There are various major responsibilities and obligations of governments to protect the environment that are based on principles and conventions of international law. French (2000) observes that states have the rights and responsibilities in the international law regarding the environment. They have the sovereignty over their natural resources but they are not absolute; they are constrained by the need to avoid inflicting environmental damages on other states or to the other regions that are not within the national jurisdiction. The principle, which is referred to as the no-harm principle, is a guiding principle in international environmental law, which requires governments to regulate and control operations in their territories that cause negative environmental impacts on the global or regional environment. Moreover, governments must embrace and implement domestic legislation which congruent with international environmental commitment, therefore, guaranteeing the prevention, reduction and regulation of pollution in all its manifestations, such as air, water and soil. They should carry out Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) of the projects which would likely cause substantial harm and must provide publicity and participation in decision making on the environment as is emphasized in the instruments like Rio Declaration (1992) and Aarhus Convention (1998). Also, the principle of sustainable development is highlighted, which requires the balancing of the economic growth with the environmental protection and the precaution principle that requires the measures to be taken priori even in the presence of scientific uncertainties. It is also the responsibility of the governments to collaborate with one another on a global scale, by treaties, sharing of data,

notifications, and consultation in solving the transboundary or global issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss and marine pollution.

According to the research by Kulin and Johansson Sev (2019), the problem of environmental degradation issues like climate change, pollution, and global warming are collective action problems that demand action by the state to organize the state and impose rules and regulations as well as enforce them. Nevertheless, the Quality of Government (QoG) which can be discussed as the degree to which the state institutions work without any bias, inefficiently, or corruptly affects the effectiveness of governmental responsibility in this sphere. In countries with good governance, the governments can be in a better position to implement the environmental laws fairly, use resources effectively and make the citizens trust and support the environmental spending. Since Afghanistan is a developing country, the roles of developing nations in the same is an issue that needs to be examined.

The role of the government in safeguarding the environment in developing countries, as outlined in the article by Boyowa A. Chokor, in the article titled *Government Policy and Environmental Protection in the Developing World*, is about integrating environmental management in the bigger economic growth. These governments should establish the right policies and structures to balance between both expanding their economies and ensuring environmental sustainability. Their role is in formulating national environmental policies, setting standards of quality of air, water and soil, controlling what industries are emitting, preserving wildlife and biodiversity and sustainable land use. Besides, they should make sure that these policies are implemented successfully, offer adequate funding and promote the general awareness and obedience to environmental concerns. Although most people have accepted sustainable development goals, the developing countries continue to stumble in major obstacles such as shortage of funds, poor institutional structures, low public support and red-taping (Chokor, 1993).

Boyowa A. Chokor in his work “*Government Policy and Environmental Protection in the Developing World*” points out that the government in the developing countries must play a crucial role in environmental protection as they seek to achieve economic development. They have to incorporate environmental management in their economic development strategies. This is through formulating regulations and systems that will create a balance between growth and sustainability. They include policymaking of national environmental policies, quality assurance in air, water and soil, and control of what is emitted by industries, preservation of wildlife, biodiversity assurance, or sustainable use of land. Besides, they should also implement these policies efficiently, provide a sufficient budget, and teach the population about environmental concerns in order to raise awareness and adherence. Although sustainable development goals exist, these countries tend to fail owing to their inability to get funds, poor institutions, low public support, and bureaucracy (Andreen, 2000).

According to Ntambirweki (1990), there is a distinction in the role of the developing countries in the international environmental law, which is influenced by their economic development requirement and environmental challenges. Though they are supposed to participate in the global environmental

activities, they should principally concentrate on incorporating the environmental protection in their national development plans. This must respond to their immediate requirements such as combating poverty, food security and promoting the health of the population. Hence, they have to establish and implement legislation to deal with industrial pollution, safeguard natural resources, and manage hazardous waste, but with longer deadlines to do so or with other commitments, such as the one in the Montreal Protocol, due to their economic circumstances. Additionally, developing countries are also supposed to be active negotiators in international arena so as to bring up matters such as desertification, soil conservation and urbanization. They should also find international financial and technical assistance to develop their sustainable and environmentally friendly development capacity.

In his 2017 paper, Johnson plunges into the complex institutional and legal infrastructure of environmental protection in Afghanistan, the major part of which is created with the help of the Environment Law passed since 2001. This legislation presents the wide-ranging responsibilities of the Afghan government yet its development has been a contentious issue. The government must be able to plan, implement and enforce the law through its major agency the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA). The requirements are divided into brown issues, such as pollution control and environmental impact assessment, and green issues, such as biodiversity and the administration of the covered areas. The issue is that the accountability of these green issues has triggered much controversy between NEPA and the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL) and the outcome is the actual difficulties in operations. Additionally, the government has an official role of budgeting on these initiatives particularly the protected areas system, and through the law to fulfill its international environmental obligations. This move is considered to be the determinant of long-term funding.

The environmental protection of the Afghan government is outlined in the Environment Law of 2007 that was developed as the reconstruction phase after 2001. The laws guide the government, principally in NEPA, to establish and administer country-wide environmental policies, regulate Environmental Impact Assessment of development undertakings, regulate pollution, handle waste, and preserve biodiversity by an array of safeguarded areas and control of commerce in endangered species. In addition, the government must enhance awareness of the general population about the environmental problems and ascertain that the country is adhering to the international environmental agreements, something which is necessary in accessing the international funding.

However, in bringing these responsibilities into practice, the fact that Afghanistan is grappling with the challenges of a country affected by conflict has been very influential. All the problem actually became a matter of national discussion as early as 2002, when the new discourse on the issue of environmental security arose, and this fact opened up the gates to many of the international actors. Interestingly, this law was, to a great extent, assembled by international agencies, in particular, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which was determined to establish a contemporary best practice model. This created an actual conflict between that international and local governance. As the Afghan legislative body or the Taqin underwent the domestic ratification process they made drastic changes to the law. This was a clear indication of power battle. They

changed NEPA into what UNEP had anticipated it to be; an organization coordinating policy to that of an implementation organization. This change was a local demand towards a more recognizable system of command and control that reallocated authority in the Afghan government.

This institutional restructuring led to inert gridlock and power struggles especially between NEPA and the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL). The ratified law also accorded NEPA precedence in implementation and enforcement even in those areas where MAIL had acquired de facto responsibilities and expertise such as biodiversity. This duplication and ambiguity resulted in stagnation within key functions such as the creation of protected areas where the two institutions were in constant conflict. The misunderstanding was so much so that the international NGOs did not know which government institution to collaborate with and the government was forced to use poor procedural tweeking which weakened the power of the law. To make matters even harder, NEPA was also formed as an agency and not a ministry due to domestic politics patronage where the president could appoint a political competitor to an influential but limited position, and it reflects how the environmental institutions could be utilized to play politics without the conservation agenda. In conclusion, as much as the formal environmental obligations placed on the government are elaborate and contemporary on paper, the government has been crippled by the war, its limited capacity, and the inherent institutional clash and political scuffles during the formulation of the law and its enforcement.

The four decades of armed violence in Afghanistan have destroyed or badly harmed the formerly cultural sites, rural and urban areas, and natural environment that were once so abundant and diverse. Due to a combination of factors including war, internal armed conflict, and the absence of effective governance, as well as population growth, a sequence of natural disasters, and an increase in demand for natural resources, there has been an extensive depletion of resources, resulting in fragmentation of resources and a reduction in their productivity. The huge expanses of the country polluted by depleted forests and landmines, particularly in the east and north, are direct consequences of conflict and the environmental destruction caused by the conflict. The international obligations and legal sanctions can contribute to reduce the harm environmental degradation has been inflicting on Afghanistan. It is thus important to investigate the legal obligations the Afghan governments (both democratic and Islamic Emirate now) have under international law and multinational obligations.

Literature Review

A number of researchers have looked into different aspects of environmental governance and protection in Afghanistan, particularly focusing on laws, public awareness, institutional hurdles, and approaches centered on rights. Manzanay (2024) offers a detailed look at both Afghanistan's international obligations and its local environmental laws. The study points out that Afghanistan has signed multiple international treaties and set up the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA). It also notes the rollout of specific environmental laws along with six related regulations aimed at tackling various environmental issues. Besides that, environmental crimes are contained in the penal code of the country and this demonstrates a clear legal obligation in the preservation of the

environment. However, despite these developments, Manzanay points out that there are still some huge gaps in the way these laws are but actually enforced and implemented in reality.

In the meantime, Rahmani et al. (2021) cast a light over the issue of public awareness, which was, in many ways, an undervalued aspect of the environmental governance image in Afghanistan. They surveyed the students in Sharana, Paktika province and their results show that a substantial number of the respondents (59.2) recognizes the importance of the public awareness (59.2) and the implementation of the environmental laws (35.2) in promoting the environmental protection. This study highlights the importance of community participation and community education in proper environmental governance, but it also brings out a deficit in awareness and enforcement plans throughout the board.

Rafat and Ibrahim (2024) take some distance to provide a broader historical picture of how environmental governance in Afghanistan has developed since the Taliban formerly collapsed in 2001. They indicate that although there had been some initial efforts to develop the capacity to be institutionalized by the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) and other environmental policies, these ones had failed mainly in terms of reducing environmental destruction. They claim that the situation was further worsened when the Taliban came back to power in 2021 which caused a further collapse of the governance and increased environmental hazard.

Conversely, Saqib et al. (25) pay more attention to the legal and participatory dimensions of environmental governance. Their analysis examines both the rights and duties of the Afghan government and its citizens emphasizing on the need to work together by way of such things as public-private alliances and foreign cooperation. They emphasize the role of the government in enacting legislations and regulations, whereas the rights and conservation responsibilities of citizens are also noted as participative. Their point is that good governance does actually depend on collective decision making and shared management.

Problem Statement

These studies illuminate environmental legislation of Afghanistan, its people, institutional challenges, and rights systems, although they address them in most cases individually. It is apparent that there are no detailed studies that examine the actual performance of environmental governance as we know it today, more so in the light of extremely political, economic, and security challenges that the country is grappling with at present, more so with the Taliban 2.0 regime. Most of the available literature lacks the engagement of weakened governance bodies in interactive relationships with weaknesses within law enforcement, community participation and the international obligations in the prevailing socio-political context. The purpose of this paper is to seal that gap by giving a balanced perspective on the operation of the environmental governance of the Taliban 2.0. It combines an array of references, such as the expertise, government and international reports, and previous academic literature to assess the effectiveness of environmental policies and institutions on the challenging governance environment. Through legislative frameworks, social awareness, and ruling through cooperation, this research puts it into perspective in light of political instability and a

scarcity of resources, which helps provide a better perspective on the circumstances and the future of the environmental protection in Afghanistan today. It takes the conversation out of fragmented analyses and depicts a more interrelated perspective, which is crucial in aiding policy interventions and additional research.

Research Question

What are the environmental obligations of the government under the International Law and what is the position of democratic government and government of the Taliban?

Research Objectives

This paper is intended to

- Explore the environmental obligations of Afghan government
- Investigate how did Democratic government deal with the environment
- Examine the position of EIA regarding the environment.

Research Methodology

This qualitative research will provide a closer examination of what responsibilities the Afghan government has on the environment, what the former government did on its part, and how Taliban and the present Taliban fits in this scenario. The study is based on three major objectives; first, to excavate formal environmental obligations of the Afghan government; second, to examine what the past administration performed in the regard to environmental governance and third, to comprehend the current management of environmental governance and its duty by the Taliban administration. To address the former two objectives, the study goes into an extensive literature review, accessing academic literature, governmental reports, and international organizations. This secondary data establishes a good foundation of the formal duties the Afghan government ought to have, such as adherence to international treaties, enactment of environmental laws and institutions, such as the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA). It also illuminates on the efforts, challenges and failures of the previous government in implementing environmental policies since the original fall of the Taliban in 2001 to provide significant background on the way the governance and enforcement has evolved over the years.

The main difference in this research is the concentration on the present-day role of the Taliban that is examined through the primary data gathered through in-depth interviews. Ten Taliban officials were also interviewed in order to acquire first-hand information about their opinions, policies and practices when it comes to environmental governance. The study employed purposive sampling to select the participants carefully with the required knowledge and authorization to talk about the environmental matters in the administration structure of the Taliban. These interviews give a seldom and priceless insight as to how the Taliban looks at the issue of environmental responsibility, an aspect that is hardly visited or hardly visitable because of the political sensibility that surrounds the regime. The research provides an unprecedented insight into the official position of the Taliban

officials as well as the reality of the difficulties they cannot encounter in their effort to control the environmental problems among the broader political and economic arena through direct speaking with the officials of the Taliban.

Data Analysis

Laws and Policies of the Previous Afghan Government on Environment

The existing legal framework on the environmental front in Afghanistan was largely achieved through the reconstruction phase that followed after the year 2001, under which the international community was largely involved both in the technical and financial aspects. The Environment Law was the core of this framework and a basis of further regulations and policies. The government plan was simply to create institutions, which were in line with practices of international environmental governance, and ensure that the environmental aspect was included in the development planning.

The government of Afghanistan is allowed to develop and alter the environmental laws and regulations. The government has been compelled under the constitution of 2004 in Article 15 to take measures in protecting and enhancing the forests and the environment. This is a legal privilege and duty that emphasizes the role of the government to design and revise laws that could address environmental challenges and promote sustainable operations. The primary legal instrument was the Environment Law of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, which was initially ratified in 2006 and became widely known as the Gazette in 2007. All environmental governance in Afghanistan was founded on this law. It established the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) as the main governmental body in policy formulation, coordination of environmental activities by different ministries and law enforcement. The process of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of major development works was one of the major requirements of the law and it was considered against the law to proceed without an adequate assessment and approval by NEPA. More so, the law included particular chapters on dealing with pollution (brown issues) and the protection of biodiversity, ecosystems and protected areas (green issues), which described the role of the state in protecting the natural resources and endangered species.

In Afghanistan, the Environment Act of 2005 is a major developmental breakthrough, since it is the first official attempt to deal with a severe environmental crisis that has been escalated because of the years of conflict and drought. Such a law is essential as it deals with such a terrible situation of Afghanistan natural resources and introduces the fact that there is a connection between a healthy environment and the stability of the country.

This laws necessity was demonstrated by a shocking degradation level that was revealed by a 2003 UN Environment Programme (UNEP) evaluation. It indicated that almost all wetlands had disappeared, there was extensive deforestation and its population was exposed to health hazards because of poor waste management and unequal availability of water. This was not a mere green problem since more than 80 percent of Afghans depend on natural resources to earn a living, and it

was a crisis of survival and economic life and death. That is why this law was so significant, it was going to begin to reverse the damages and secure the resources that so many are relying on.

There are a number of important roles played by the Environmental Act. The first one is that it established the key legal and administrative structures through the establishment of the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) and the mission of the various ministries. This established a governmental framework on environmental governance which was nonexistent. Second, it implemented operational enforcement mechanisms, such as environmental impact assessment process, pollution management and natural resources conservation. These are the tools needed to control the development process and avoid the further harm.

The law is not only on environment protection, but it addresses the issue of national security and poverty. UNEP experts indicate that insecurity may be caused by environmental destruction which is usually associated with social inequalities. Consider, as an example, farmers whose land has been taken over by desertification, whereby they may find themselves growing poppies as a way of venturing into the drug trade, which is capable of creating instability. This legislation establishes a legal system of sustainable resource management, which provides the means of the interrelation between the environmental recovery and economic stability and social cohesiveness.

In order to implement the Environment Law, the government developed a series of additional regulations as well as procedures. The Environmental Impact Assessment Regulation (2013) that provides a description of how to conduct Environmental Impact Assessment and Protected Areas Regulation (2013) that establishes the legal principles of creating and managing national parks, wildlife reserves, and other protected areas are some of the most significant ones. Another important regulation was the regulation that should protect water resources against pollution (2013) given to the importance of making sure that the most important sources of water are safe in Afghanistan. Formulation of these regulations was usually a debatable issue, as seen in the article "Institutional change in a conflict setting: Afghanistan environment Law." It points out how the ratification process resulted in institutional gridlock particularly between NEPA and the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) on the roles to play on biodiversity and the role of the protected areas.

The government has developed the policy-level, namely, the National Environmental Protection Strategy and Action Plan (NEPSAP) that was approved in 2016. NEPSAP was the master plan of the five years on the environment of the country, with the following priorities outlined, including the enhancement of air quality in the large cities, land degradation, enhancement of the natural resources management, and the construction of climate change resilience. This approach was well synchronized with the overall development vision of the government and it was supposed to direct both domestic effort and international donor assistance. Afghanistan has also joined a number of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). The Environment Law was specifically

intended to give the domestic legal framework that the government needed to fulfill its international commitments on these treaties which was essential in terms of gaining international climate and conservation funds including that of the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

The Taliban Stand on the Environmental Protection

The manner in which the Taliban does its activities is strongly determined by their interpretation of the Sharia law. They are quite cautious of the 2007 Environmental Law of the former government. In a report released by NEPA in 2022, it was indicated that that law and six others do not conform to the Sharia perspective of the Taliban, which led to a debate on how to amend them. This endangers existing environmental science and legal systems which are being coerced to adapt to an ideological system that does not take into account organized environmental protection.

NEPA which once was the principal agency of controlling environmental matters has had its power slowly eroded away. It has lost much of its influence, particularly by being thrown out of the cabinet, and that actually marginalizes the issues of the environment in major national policies. On ground, NEPA is gutted; they have eliminated professional people and they have been substituted by Taliban loyalists and mullahs who are not necessarily fitted in the right backgrounds. This has cost the elimination of approximately 150 of jobs and virtually, female employees, which has immensely reflected on their technical abilities. Besides, consultative measures such as advisory committees are placed on hold and transparency is at a deplorable position, vital information concerning budgets and resource extraction is being held at heart.

The manner in which the Taliban is conducting itself has essentially isolated Afghanistan to the rest of the globe. They have been deprived of all the financial, technical assistance of big international partners such as the UNEP, UNDP, the World Bank and USAID. This is a huge setback, since 32 environmental projects costing approximately 895 million dollars stalled and Afghanistan would no longer be able to access international climate funds such as the Green Climate Fund. The budget of NEPA was reduced by almost a half between 2019-2022, and it was exceptionally difficult to maintain the operations. Consequently, current conservation activities have been brought to a standstill and any other development is frozen.

The ecological policies of the Taliban are a major retrogression on the ecological well-being of Afghanistan. They have dismantled the past system of governance in a way that is systematic and they appear to value ideology more than science. The National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) has been marginalized as the agency has lost its qualified experts who have been substituted by the loyalists who lack the appropriate skills. This has exposed the agency to a hard time to operate. To compound this, the complete international isolation has seen almost a billion dollars' worth of environmental projects stalled and important climate funds have been defunded. The effects are terrible: air and water pollution levels are increasing without any noise, deforestation and illegal logging are taking place and being continued by members of the Taliban, and exploitation of natural resources is taking place without any sustainable actions. Biodiversity is not spared either as some of the endangered species are poached to generate profits. In general, the Taliban rule is not merely

creating a policy vacuum; it is becoming an environmental disaster, which threatens the Afghan population and the fragile ecosystems of the country even more (Rafat and IBRAHIM, 2024).

Green In deep contradiction with a discourse of highly green diplomacy, the environmental policies and laws of Taliban government are marked by reality of unsustainable resources exploitation, which is necessitated by economic need and lack of ability. Formally, Taliban has expressed a position on environmental conservation. They have publicly raised alarm over the issue of climate change, citing billions of dollars in destruction as a result of climate-related disasters and making Afghanistan a victim of an international crisis. Their argument is frequently put into Islamic beliefs of stewardship (khalifah). They have declared great plans, including a new Green Unit to save forests and a goal to plant 35 million trees and have used a religious fatwa to encourage planting more trees. On the part of diplomacy, they have sought international support and have made expressions that they conform to world agreements such as the Paris Accord (Tayah et al., 2025).

There is quite a wide disconnect between what is being purported by the Taliban and what is actually taking place on the ground. On a legal front, they have reverted to the 1964 constitution which does not even mention issues of the environment, abandoning the 2004 constitution and the 2007 Environment Law that once informed the previous government in its endeavors to protect the environment. This has provided a legal gap indeed. The Taliban attitude toward governing the environment demonstrates a remarkable incompatibility between their strategic rhetoric of being green and the fact of continuing resource extraction, institutional collapse, and the absence of sound legal frameworks. Superficially, they have strived to portray the image of taking the climate seriously by ensuring that senior officials recognize the issue of climate change as a very serious threat. They even declared their ambitious plans such as to plant 35 million trees and establish a Green Unit to protect forests. Their communication usually references Islamic teachings of stewardship, and they have repeatedly called on other countries to assist them and to begin climate initiatives that had been frozen, indicating that collaboration on environmental matters could open up the possibility of broader diplomatic ties.

The official narrative, however, is, in fact, not what is going on in the real world. The Taliban have been dismantling the environmental governance system by discarding the 2004 Constitution with environmental specification and returning to the 1964 royal constitution, which pays no heed to the environment, climate change and conservation. This has left a huge legal gap. The National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) that once played a significant role in the management of environmental problems has been struck. They have also eliminated the talented professionals and substituted them with untrained loyalists. Besides, NEPA was excluded in the government cabinet, which literally reduced its political influence. To top it all, it has seen a drastic reduction in foreign funding and technological assistance, which has halted almost a billion dollar in projects as well as reduced their domestic budget.

This is seriously deteriorating the environment as the regime is not looking at the long-term sustainability but at the immediate survival of the economy hence institutions are collapsing. The

government has undergone a massive drive to advance coal mining and export which is totally not in line with global climate vows. They are also resorting to the imports of Russian and Iranian fossil fuels. And even with the claims by officials, deforestation continues to occur in areas such as Bar Kunar as a result of timber smuggling, land clearing to plant crops, as well as firewood. The situation is a mess with unregulated mining and illegitimate trade of medicinal plants endangering some of the species to extinction. Admittedly, the economic motivation behind the disappearance of forests has been reduced by the opium ban of the Taliban, but it has also created a feeling of economic despair that may compel individuals to look in other means, particularly given that there are no means to support alternative employment.

Obligations and Government's Responses

The Taliban government is also emphasizing environmental conservation as a major component of its national governance agenda despite the enormous political, economic and security challenges that Afghanistan is experiencing. According to Amjad Shahab who is a senior leader in Kabul, environmental issues are not merely a post hoc to the government; they view it as a core obligation, which is interconnected with long term stability and prosperity of the country. In conclusion of what Shahab has to say, he states that the administration priority covers such things as conservation of natural resources, addressing the effects of the climate change and reduction in pollution, implementation of the environmental laws, and creation of awareness to the people. He points out that such priorities indicate the interest of the government in ensuring that environmental protection is an important aspect of governance.

First, the government is of the opinion that safeguarding the natural resources, such as forests, water resources, wild animals, and farmlands are crucial national duties. They are focusing on such issues as halting the illegal logging, reforestation, and development of equitable water management strategies. All this is an effort of preserving the natural resources in Afghanistan, which according to Shahab, is a crucial element of the general wealth in Afghanistan. Second, the government is well aware that Afghanistan is especially susceptible to climate change, which puts the region in danger of such issues as drought, floods, erratic rainfall, and soil erosion. They, in turn, argue that in their National Climate Change Strategy they have put climate mitigation measures, which include constructing reservoirs and preparing to withstand droughts. This implies that they understand the fact that the climate-related problems are real threat to the environment and the security of people.

The pollution in large urban centers is an issue that the government is raising and through the new clean energy projects is showing that it is serious about the quality of the air and the water. Shahab also underlines that the implementation of the current environmental regulations such as the Environmental Protection Law, the Forestry Law and the Water Management Law is important. He says that by vigorously implementing these laws, the government is demonstrating that it is seriously committed to saving the environment and not paying lip service to it. Furthermore, he emphasizes on awareness of the people. The government is looking to create a sense of collective responsibility

to the environment by involving communities in the conservation process and reduction of pollution and safeguarding of the public health.

With regards to the fact that Afghanistan does have international environmental obligations, that is the obligation not to do anything that will impair the environment on its territory beyond its borders, the government seems to deem that to be in its domestic agenda. In spite of the fact the international activity of Afghanistan is not an extensive one, the words of Shahab demonstrate that the country understands that national activities, including the fight against deforestation, water resources and pollution problems, can influence other countries. The government is at least making a show that it plans on aligning its domestic policies with that of the world in their environmental duties declared by the international law by ensuring that the protection of resources, pollution management and naturally climate protective strategies are on the agenda.

Ahmed Sarhadi provides another version of the management of the environmental issues in Afghanistan by comparing practices of the Islamic Republic prior to 2021 with the current Taliban government. He identifies a tendency of making environmental protection seem significant yet, it ends up lost to more important national emergencies. With the influence of the organizations such as the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) and the National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP) the environmental issues started to have an official place on the national plans during the period of the Islamic Republic. These plans recognized that the loss of the environment would pose a significant threat to the health of the people, agricultural activities, water supply, and expose people to the risk of natural disasters. However, even with these policies, there was still a weak implementation strategy because of the constant conflict and inability of the government to implement its policies and priorities were conflicting. In that way, environmental initiatives did not in most cases result in actual change which was substantive on the ground.

Sarhadi notes that it is even more difficult now since the Taliban assumed power in 2021. He says that there is not a lot of devotion to an environmental policy that is solid and prioritized at the moment. The government is being too busy with short-term problems such as political stability, humanitarian disasters and economic problems. Local efforts do exist--usually associated with religious doctrines that encourage the need to practice environmental protection and shun unfriendly activities--yet these efforts are accidental and not a national approach. The absence of systematic policies or significant environmental policies demonstrates that environment governance is not a priority issue of the state.

On the other hand, Najib Sahi emphasizes that the environmental protection is an important component of the agenda of the Afghan government due to dire environmental conditions, such as global warming, droughts, floods, deforestation, and air and water pollution. He points out that the government is preoccupied with the protection of natural resources through policies governing the management of water and forests, illegal logging and protection of wildlife habitats. A significant part of this attempt is also addressing climate risks, where strategies are meant to enhance drought

resilience, increase water management as well as modernizing farming techniques to minimize vulnerability.

Sahi observes that pollution control is a major concern especially in the big cities where the air has been rendered unclean. The government is trying to monitor emissions, making the activities in the industrial sectors controlled, and also pushing the government to use cleaner sources of energy. He also stresses the necessity of legal implementation and indicates such laws as the Environmental Protection Act, Forest Act, and Water Act as an essential instrument to preserve nature and make everyone adhere to the regulations.

The participation of the masses is an important aspect of this strategy. They are creating awareness programs, promoting tree planting activities and community efforts to conserve water and ensure the environment is clean to enhance social responsibility. Sahi points out that despite the economic and security challenges that Afghanistan is going through, environmental protection is a definite and proactive agenda in the national agenda.

Akmal further notes that the same powers in Afghanistan claim that they cherish the environment, but still the role of this is secondary to other pressing national priorities such as the security threat, financial crises, and humanitarian disasters. He indicates that there is little government funding, lacks strength of institutional frameworks and constant instability that makes it difficult to plan systematically on environmental issues. Due to this fact, such serious problems as air pollution, water shortage, deforestation, and climate change adaptation are addressed only when they are critical instead of having to be addressed through a well-funded program. Akmal is of the opinion that the environmental governance approach will remain reactive and disjointed unless it is stable, well-integrated, and properly funded.

Jamal Khan gave a more detailed insight into the implementation problems. He indicates that although the government discusses several environmental programs, all of them have not been translated into actual action. He, as an example, points at the fact that in Kabul, people still heat their homes with the help of coal, a practice that is relatively unfriendly to the environment, and it demonstrates how remote our real policy changes are. Jamal admits that the protection of the environment is also covered in the laws and policies of Afghanistan, and in practice, this process is rather weak due to the economic factor, security concerns, and general weaknesses in the institutions. His comments do indeed emphasize the point that a huge disconnect exists between officially-prioritized things and the absence of actual initiatives on the ground, usually due to the fact that more pressing political and economic concerns are being given the first-line consideration.

Responsibilities of the Government

Taliban understands that environmental conservation is a significant foreign responsibility as informed by the international environmental legislations. Although Afghanistan is a developing country that is afflicted by serious issues related to climate change, it is staying loyal to the concept of not harming the environment outside of the country. Individuals will do this by avoiding behaviors

that may affect air, water, or ecosystems in other countries negatively. The administration has shown respect to international environmental standards that are binding though it has withdrawn some of their agreements. It highly values the protection of collective water by controlling its rivers to prevent the cross-border pollution, and the transboundary air pollution by fuel reforms and environmental standards. In the case of Afghanistan, environmental protection is not just a domestic issue, but it is considered a regional and global obligation which emphasizes on collaboration and long-term development. The country acknowledges its environmental responsibility as both legal and moral based on neighborliness, equality and sustainability values.

Ajmal notes that Afghanistan is handling its environmental issues in the context of international environmental laws despite the bottlenecks of being a developing country that is greatly influenced by climatic changes. The Afghan government has been following the universally recognized rule of not inflicted environmental damages outside the country hence ensuring that its activities do not have any negative effects to the ecosystems, air, and water of other nations.

Afghanistan also realizes that it has a role to play in preserving the common water resources and water cross-border rivers are handled to prevent contamination or any other damage that may cause harm to the neighboring nations. The government also intends to reduce international air pollution, and has put in place policies such as the reform of fuel consumption, enforcement of environmental controls of industries, and the introduction of urban air quality programs. It is apparent that environmental protection is not only a local issue in Afghanistan, but it is an issue that is shared regionally and internationally. This vision is anchored on a larger philosophy of sustainable environmental management that is premised on such values as neighborliness, equality, and collaboration. According to Ajmal, the undertakings of Afghanistan concerning the environment are not only legal obligations but also moral obligations where Ajmal is aiming to find a balance in the growth and the environment, as well as the current and future generations in the region.

Jamal Khan is of the view that the Taliban government has a responsibility to respect the provisions of the international environmental law to avoid environmental damage within its borders and prudent utilisation of its natural resources to maintain stability within the region. Their perspective highlights the importance of having cooperation with the other nations especially in the decision making concerning the common water and environmental sources. However, despite the acceptance of these duties, there are practical challenges such as institutional capacities and political difficulties that render the implementation of these environmental obligations in full and consistent by the government very difficult.

Khan Sarwari feels that the government must know that Afghanistan has its fair share of hardship being a developing country, with the effects of climate changes. Nevertheless, they believe in maintaining the global standards and principles of environment. The fact of the global level of environmental protection is admitted in principle, and the nation struggles to transform the principle into practice. This predicament is largely due to poor administration, resource scarcity, as well as

other problems of attaining international acknowledgment all of which hinder Afghanistan to fulfill such commitments to the full extent.

Jamal Khan mentions that Afghanistan has assembled a diverse pool of national legislation, policies, and regulatory frameworks aimed to avoid environmental destruction, preserve natural resources, and encourage sustainable development. Although implementation may not be as uniform, these frameworks are the guiding hand in the management of the environment in the country.

The center of this system is the Environmental Law that was enacted in 2007 and is the principal legal document on environmental protection. It establishes broad principles of environmental protection, imposes the rules of avoiding air, water, and soil pollution, and provides major development projects with Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs). There are also regulations concerning the protection of forests, rangelands and wildlife in the law and also the handling of hazardous material. Its primary mission is to be able to guarantee the possibility of development and at the same time maintain ecological balance.

In line with this there are several pieces of legislation which are meant to control natural resources. The Forestry Law is concerned with protecting, registering and restoring the forests. The Pasture Law is aimed at making sure that the rangelands are used in a sustainable way. The Water Law is everything concerning equitable water distribution, curbing pollution and the water systems management. Equally, the Land Law provides regulations on the use and protection of the public lands to ensure that they are not abused and degraded. Through the National Environmental Policy, the country has also established several priorities such as reducing pollution, promoting sustainable management of its resources, planning in the face of climate change, creating environmentally friendly urban zones, and creating awareness among the citizens in conserving the environment. All these objectives emphasize the need to have regulations in place as well as engaging the society.

To another point, Afghanistan is also participating in global climate activities by doing its National Adaptation Program of Action (NAPA) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under UNFCCC. These frameworks provide the priorities of climate adaptation in the country, particularly its agricultural sector, water resources, and minimization of the risk of disasters. In addition, the air pollution rules have been established to introduce voluntary standards of emission to the vehicles and industries, generators and practices such as burning which demonstrate the emerging apprehension of the deteriorating air quality in the cities.

The new Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) rules have been implemented by the country. They also include large-scale projects, such as highways, dams, factories, and mining projects, where the EIAs, environmental management plans, and go-ahead approval by NEPA (National Environmental Protection Agency) are to be conducted. Wildlife protection regulations also exist which contribute to the control of hunting, endangered species programs and establishment of protected areas such as national parks. In the case of mining, the companies must abide by the environment standards that include ensuring that their impacts are checked and that the sites where they are located are reclaimed. Finally, waste management regulations provide the guidelines on

how waste can be collected, discarded and recycled, particularly in the cities where concerns on waste are very high.

Environmental Protection and Development

According to Najib Sahi, Afghanistan is ensuring that the environmental considerations are incorporated in its main developmental sectors to encourage sustainable development in the country and reduce environmental degradation. As an example, in mining, all the large operations must undergo an Environmental Impact Assessment to identify all the potential risks. The mining companies have the role of preventing the pollution of both land and water, rehabilitating any damaged area and ensuring that no ecosystem is affected or damaged in the long-term due to the mining.

Environmental guidelines in the agricultural world dictate the way land is utilized and the manner in which farming is produced. This one is concerned with water conservation by conserving it effectively, adopting new and sustainable farming methods, and not over reliance on chemicals. Besides, they are integrating the climate adaptation programs, such as drought planning and flood management projects, to protect the agricultural lands at risk due to climatic factors.

To add to this, even the major infrastructure projects, such as transport systems, dams, and cities, undergo environmental reviews. Such projects must undertake measures of safeguarding natural endowments like forest, rivers, and wild animals. Urban planning is also adopting environmentally friendly measures through the creation of more green areas and improvement of wastewater networks and all this is through ensuring that development is sustainable to the environment.

The energy sector is going towards more clean energy use that the government is advocating, which should be renewable energy such as solar, wind, and biofuels. They are also striving to enhance the quality of fuel so as to reduce air pollution within the cities. On top of this, they are ensuring that any power generation plant whether hydrogeneration or fossil fuel is assessed in terms of its environmental impact.

Akmal notes that due to a well-organized system of regulations, the development planning in Afghanistan is concerned with the environmental issues. A large portion of this is that, any major project of large scale, be it in the mining sector, farming industry, infrastructure or energy provision, requires first to undergo environmental impact assessment, to ensure that they pass the green light. Such way will allow identifying any possible issues before they occur and make sure the development corresponds to the environmental standards. He also points out that the government supports this through laws and regulations that are aimed at promoting sustainable use of natural resources. This legal arrangement contributes greatly to the manner in which land, water as well as ecological resources are managed in development initiatives, that we do not destroy them in the long term.

Akmal indicates that the government is already taking steps on climate resistant agriculture where farming methods can deal with the changing climate. Along the same curve, there is an urge to use renewable energy which translates to using cleaner energy sources, which reduce pollution levels and reduce an environmental strain. In the area of infrastructure, he lays stress on the need to employ environmentally friendly designs that ensure construction projects adhere to the principles of sustainability to ensure the least ecological impact. Environmental factors are also considered in the development planning by the government which requires the assessment of the environment and sustainability checks in the vital sectors such as mining, agriculture, infrastructure, and energy. A regulatory framework exists to make sure that projects are in line with the national laws and strategies on environmental protection and climate adaptation. In general, the Afghan government is earnest in incorporating the environmental factors in its development strategies in order to protect the natural resources, mitigate the effects of climate change, and facilitate the sustainable development.

Addressing Environmental Challenges

Sarwari tells about several measures implemented to address some of the largest environmental problems of Afghanistan, such as deforestation, water scarcity, pollution, and land erosion. To combat the problem of deforestation, the government has established legal effects of illegal logging and is also supporting large scale reforestation particularly in state and national forests. With this is the awareness programs on how communities can be made to realize the value of forests and the long-term effects of deforestation. In the case of water scarcity, the two infrastructure developments and enhanced management practices are important. The construction and maintenance of reservoirs, dams, wells and irrigation canals will enhance storage and distribution of water. They are also insisting on the adoption of new methods such as drip irrigation, and rainwater harvesting as a way of reducing wastage and also ensuring sustainable farming. National water management plans present specifications of how to use and allocate water effectively.

In its effort to address pollution, the government imposes environmental policies on different industrial activities, transport, and energy generation. This entails being able to control the emissions, improving the level of waste collection as well as installing wastewater treatment facilities. Also, there are social awareness campaigns that will be conducted to help people embrace green lifestyles and minimize pollution in their lives. Regarding land degradation, the government is promoting sustainable farming practices including crop rotation and soil conservation practices, which would ensure that the soil is always fertile and erosion is eliminated. They are also striving to control land use in order to prevent encroachment of delicate regions. Risks associated with floods and landslides are being handled through infrastructures such as dams and soil stabilizing systems particularly in regions prone to soil erosion.

The initiative is supported by larger legal and institutional framework such as environmental protection and forestry, water, and land management laws. The National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) assumes a leading role in its role in reviewing development project based on

Environmental Impact Assessments and monitoring of environmental regulations. The international assistance and climate-oriented programs also enhance the national efforts in its efforts of resilience and environmental management by offering financial and technical resources.

We are addressing the problem of pollution through environmental regulations of industries, vehicles and power generators. To improve on the environment, cities are putting in place improved wastewater treatment systems, solid waste collection and recycling systems. Furthermore, he said that awareness programs have been motivating people to embrace environmentally friendly practices.

In matters of land, we are emphasizing on sustainable farming activities such as rotation of crops, soil preservation, and inter-cropping to ensure our soils are healthy. The government is also making an attempt to combat the illegal land use and establish practical land-use planning. Even pragmatic solutions are not left in the blend, such as soil stabilization programs and flood-control dams, to minimize such issues as erosion and landslides. This is supported by a legal framework which incorporates important laws on the environment and natural resource laws. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) provides the management of the Environmental Impact Assessment of major projects and climate and environmental management plans are supported with international collaboration and financing.

Ahmed Nabi noted that Afghanistan is managing the acute environmental crisis by using a combination of restoration efforts, regulation measures, and community participation. We are increasing the rate of reforestation to fight the destruction of forests and rehabilitate the ravaged landscapes. The government is also striving to ensure that water resources are managed more efficiently by enhancing storage, distribution and water conservation techniques to address water shortages. The environmental laws are promoting sustainable agriculture to combat soil erosion and maintain land as productive, and environmental laws govern the sustainable use of land and resources. These interventions are being supported through public awareness through encouraging communities to adopt forest protection practices, water and soil protection practices. To deal with pollution in particular, the government is improving waste management facilities, restricting the number of emissions, and improving cleaner energy options such as solar and other renewables. All these measures are taken to reduce the environmental and health effects of industrial operations and the consumption of traditional fuels.

As Ahmed noted, Afghanistan is fortifying its relationships with the foreign allies and increasing the involvement of communities. Such partnerships do not only provide technical and financial support but also make sure that the local needs are met using the input of the community. Combined, such efforts are important parts of the bigger plan of environmental sustainability in Afghanistan. The nation is experimenting with different solutions to address environmental issues, including restoring degraded habitats, managing resources better and engaging communities in this process. One of the priorities is reforestation and efforts have been made to restore the lost forest as well as involvement of locals in managing forests and rangelands. Meanwhile, the government is also trying to conserve

more water by protecting watersheds, improving irrigation infrastructure and elaborate management strategies to alleviate the problems associated with water deficiency.

The pollution is also a significant issue to be addressed. City areas are working harder towards managing their waste, controlling emissions and seeking cleaner energy solutions to reduce the environmental cost of cars, industries and domestic fuel. New methods of wastewater treatment and the enhanced disposal systems are being implemented to minimize the pollution of air, soil, and water. In a bid to combat land degradation, measures such as soil rehabilitation and soil erosion are being put in place. These measures are used in stabilizing fragile landscapes, safeguarding agricultural output as well as reducing the impacts of floods and landslides. Furthermore, the encouragement of sustainable agriculture would help in the long-term wellbeing of the soil.

Community driven management of natural resources and public awareness activities can actually contribute to strengthening government activities. In this manner, the locals will be able to participate and take more care of the environment. Additionally, global collaborations are associated with not only the experience but also the finances, which may be used to expand the project with the aim of climate resilience and environmental protection. Nevertheless, some important obstacles must be overcome. The lack of funds, poor institutional capacity and constant security deterioration makes it difficult to enforce these plans in a constant way, which reduce the overall effect of environmental programmes. Formally in any major development project, especially in high-risk locations such as mining, hydropower, big industrial operation, and large constructions, in Afghanistan, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has to be conducted. These evaluations are essential in the study of the possible impact of projects on air, water, soil, forests, and wildlife and the local communities. This is aimed at ensuring that development does not negatively impact on the health of the people or the health of the environment in the long run.

The EIA process follows the Environmental Law from 2007 and is overseen by the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA). There are some key standards to meet, like doing a thorough analysis of environmental and social impacts, creating an Environmental Management Plan that outlines ways to mitigate those impacts, and sticking to international guidelines, often guided by organizations like the World Bank and UN environmental agencies. Also, they have to engage with the public so that affected communities can express their concerns and take part in decision-making. There's supposed to be monitoring in place to ensure compliance during project implementation. Even though these frameworks align with globally accepted EIA processes, like screening, scoping, assessing impacts, mitigating risks, and following up, the real-world effectiveness can vary. Limited technical expertise, weak enforcement, and political or economic pressures often compromise the quality and consistency of EIAs. Because of this, while the legal standards are in place and EIAs are required, the actual implementation can be uneven and sometimes not fully protective of environmental and community interests.

Conclusion

The analysis in this study has revealed that, there exists a huge disparity between what the officials proclaim concerning environmental governance and what is on the ground in Afghanistan. Although the governments frequently discuss the necessity of environmental protection, the fact is that such statements are merely a deception. According to Akmal, the environmental concerns are overshadowed by more urgent national concerns, such as security concerns, economic problems, and constant humanitarian crisis. Due to this, the environmental issues lack the attention they deserve and, therefore, care is not provided to fund it, implement stricter rules and regulations, and lack technical capacity. These programs can hardly accomplish any tangible or quantifiable outcomes without effective supervision and long-term designing. More urgent problems such as the aggravation of air pollution in urban centers, the rapid loss of trees in countryside, the growth of water scarcity and the unity to the catastrophe of climate are addressed in a more reactive, crisis-oriented fashion rather than proactive, well-warranted national policies.

All this information points to a more general structural fact, namely that Afghanistan has not only weak environmental governance, but also that it is embedded in a political and economic environment that severely constrains institutional capacity. The existence of the extended conflict in the country, economic isolation, and the inability to obtain international technical assistance have also weakened the establishment of the coordinated environmental management system. Consequently, the environmental protection industry has been a low hierarchy sector, which has far reached impacts on the health of the people, sustainability livelihood and stability of the nation.

This makes a significant addition to the rest of the literature on governance in fragile and conflict-affected states. It shows that despite the authorities having a statement of environmental commitments, structural barriers, to the translation of policy statements into action, in the form of resource shortages or institutional vulnerability. The solutions to the environmental issues of Afghanistan, however, should not be seen as just policy statements but long-term investments in the building of institutions, creating effective funding sources, and making the environmental concerns a part of the national development and recovery policies. In the absence of these basic reforms, it is probable that Afghanistan will continue to be susceptible to environmental challenges, which will only increase pressure upon the country socially and economically.

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