

Provincial Profile

- SAMANGAN -

Executive Summary

Samangan Province located in the north of the country and bordered by Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The Province is well positioned on the main trade road between Mazar-e-Sharif and Pul-e-Khumri, Salang and Kabul. However, a large part of the Province is geographically isolated and has not yet received the development funding required to allow a more positive prospect.

Rural Samangan is characterised by diverse agro-ecological conditions that feature large areas of fertile land (Zone D) under permanent irrigation through canal systems that needs to be improved. Due to its location between two important trade centres, Baghlan and Balkh, Samangan Province offers manpower and support services to the economy.

The main potentials in Samangan are Agriculture and Livestock and to some extent the services and SMEs sectors. The capital of Samangan is the site of ancient ruins, including the Takth-e-Rushtam, making it a key destination for Archaeologists and potentially tourists.

1. Natural Resources

Water: The availability of water can be described as moderate. People living in remoter areas have developed water harvesting schemes that provide drinking water and irrigation for a single crop, mainly grains. Low quality fodder is being harvested on the hillsides during the summer. There is sufficient ground water and a low to medium amount of perennial river water available for irrigation. The people living in the plains along the main road linking Mazar-e-Sharif and Pul-e-Khumri have developed perennial horticulture with drought resistant species like almonds, apricots and pomegranate. The sub-sector had deteriorated during the war but, once revived, has the potential to become a significant backbone of the rural economy.

Soil: River plains have fertile land. Water logging and high levels of salinity affect agricultural productivity only in small areas. The mainly loess-covered hills are depleted of soil nutrients and have a low pasture quality and carrying capacities of below 0.1 UBL. The high-altitude landscape is characterised by rolling slopes with high skeleton porosity, water permeability and scarce vegetation. While the area covered with fertile soil is small, Samangan has extensive areas of pastureland.

Biomass: Almost 90% of the region's perennial vegetation, including fruit and nut trees were destroyed during the war. The hill and mountain vegetation, and pistachio forests suffered from overgrazing during the years of drought. The rehabilitation of the vegetation in the Province is ongoing with support from different actors, but progress is slow. Investments through EC and World Bank projects will revive the perennial horticulture in the plain more quickly than the rangeland vegetation. The pastureland can be rehabilitated through reseeding combined with rotational grazing or other means to protect the land from overgrazing. However, the recovery process will be slow, given the low annual precipitation in the region of not more than 150 to 300 mm.

Minerals: The remote areas in Samangan share minor coal reserves with Balkh Province and coal mining is ongoing at low intensity. Though other mineral resources are mentioned in the literature, local people do not consider them as relevant.

2. Human Resources

Samangan Province is part of the northern cluster of higher education facilities in Afghanistan, comprising:

- Baghlan University with the Faculty of Higher Education in Pul-e-Khumri (Departments of Physics, Social Science and Literature)

- Faculty of Agriculture in Industrial Baghlan
- Taloqan University in Takhar Province with 4 Faculties, including the Faculty of Higher Education
- Mazar-e-Sharif University: Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Medicine (trains doctors), Medical Institute (trains assistant doctors)
- Medical Institute, Faculty of Higher Education, Faculty of Agriculture in Kunduz City
- Pul-e-Khumri Teacher Training Centre
- Private College in Mazar-e-Sharif
- Private Turkish High School in Mazar-e-Sharif

Samangan itself has no noteworthy education facility. Especially in the remoter areas, the illiteracy rate is high. Seasonal migration of the labour force to the neighbouring urban centres is common.

3. Agriculture (ANDS Sector 6)

3.1 Overview

The traditional agriculture sector in Samangan used to be *dominated by cattle* (i.e. for meat and traction) and *doubled mixed cropping* of mainly rice, wheat and cotton in rotation with fodder, legumes, potato and vegetable crops. *Perennial horticulture* was well established in the plains along the main road. Pistachios from Samangan used to be a brand recognised across the world. While wheat and rice have remained the dominating crops, crop diversification is increasingly emerging, influenced by development initiatives and reactivated research to find modern varieties/crops best suited to local conditions.

3.2 Crops

Wheat and *rice* are the main field crops but an increasing area of land is cultivated with *potato* and *fodder crops* (alfalfa, maize, barley, triticale) and *vegetables* (water melon, carrots, onion, tomatoes, okra). Farm Forestry and cottage fruit production is widely found. During the years of crisis markets were lost, forcing many households to restrict themselves to subsistence farming, growing grains and small quantities of vegetables and fruits, and to keeping cattle/small ruminants.

Today there is a clear trend towards recovering the diversity of economic activities and livelihoods in the region. Market development and rehabilitation of local processing support this trend while opening opportunities for new potentials. There is good potential for a variety of crops, i.e. oil seed (canola, sunflower, safflower, soybeans), but also *niche products* like sesame and strawberries to add to the list of agricultural produce. However, the comparatively high costs of crop production need to be examined. Local production will not be successful as long as cheap imports or the distribution of products like vegetal oil for humanitarian reasons continue. Mechanisation is at a very low level

3.3 Livestock

Samangan Province is part of the cluster of livestock producers and has a tradition in high-level meat production and in the production of milk for local consumption. Herd improvement through cross breeding is being promoted, while animal health services are being rehabilitated. In the remote areas of Samangan Province farmers continue the traditional way of keeping small ruminants for wool, meat and milk. Namads and gilms are produced at household level and traded in local and regional markets. The depleted pasturelands generate only limited amounts of fodder forcing livestock farmers to buy fodder or reduce the number of their animals.

3.4 Fisheries

The sub-sector is not known in the Samangan area.

3.5 Land tenure

There are diverse forms of land ownership in Samangan. In the remote areas smallholder agriculture dominates, and the communities have developed an informal system for sharing the vast rangelands and high-altitude pastureland.

3.6 Agricultural support services and input supplies

Samangan is almost devoid of agriculture support services, with the exception of services introduced by NGOs like Afghanaid and AKF. Farmers in the plains organise inputs from Mazar-e-Sharif or Pul-e-Khumri on a private basis as there are only few local input markets and temporary trade activities.

3.7 Agricultural structures (farmer groups/organisations/larger farmers etc)

New informal groups have emerged as a result of NGO activities and include Farmer Field Schools and groups based on PTD/PID approaches. These mainly informal groups are important arrangements for self-help. Groups like seed bank associations that were formed during the humanitarian relief period are being transferred to the CDCs through the NSP process.

3.8 Agriculturally related businesses

Small businesses are about to emerge and consolidate in certain sub-sectors like honey production, carpet making, handicrafts and embroidery, poultry and fruit tree sapling/ornamentals production by certified nurseries. Plans exist for other medium scale processing units that show potential. The textile industry was relatively prominent in the past, and there is a local interest to recover the employment opportunities, mainly for women.

4. Other business activities (ANDS Sector 8)

Samangan offers good potential for warehousing and business in the light engineering sector. Other SMEs focussing on local and regional markets also have good potential in towns near the main road. Energy is not available and the key factor slowing down development. Some famous historical sites attract tourists making Samangan a well-known stop for tourists visiting Mazar-e-Sharif from Kabul. However, the tourism infrastructure needs to be developed.

5. Security (ANDS Sector 1)

Samangan is relatively stable though factional fighting is occasionally reported.

6. Physical infrastructure (ANDS Sector 8).

The physical infrastructure in Samangan is in a weak state.

7. (Institutional) constraints (ANDS Sector 8)

The ongoing total deregulation can be seen as a chance as well as a threat to development. The following crucial facts were mentioned in interviews across Samangan and other provinces:

1. Lack of knowledge and access to information

- The education system is weak – but there is access to services in other Provinces.
- Many emigrants just have returned to secure their assets but emigrate after a short stay;
- Trained local staff tends to shift away into donor influenced positions promising higher salaries or to urban centers of other provinces for higher salaries;

2. Lack of services

- Financial and non-financial services are emerging but still do not reach out to the majority of the population;
- Cheap imports and humanitarian distribution, as well as the lack of energy prevents from a substantial development of local enterprises;

3. Competitiveness

- High salary expectations enhance production costs or negatively influence sub-sector development;
- A lack of comfort in the country and the psychological (or justified) feeling of insecurity prevent serious investment.

The institutional constraints are complex and general and therefore difficult to localise and address. This reflects in an environment supportive of pioneers but un conducive to rapid economic growth.

8. Credit

Formal finance services are mainly available in Samangan. Financial institutions (BRAC, ARMP) offer individual loans, group loans, specific loans for trade etc., micro leasing and other products. The main clients are traders or individuals who take loan for trade though SMEs are more relevant clients than farmers. Statistics are available with MISFA.

While financial services in various forms are available, the terms and conditions to operate in a volatile environment are problematic and often result in abusive service charges and complicated procedures. Informal loans are widely available though are largely provided at unfair conditions and mainly used as consumption loans by households, which often find themselves trapped in high levels of indebtedness.

9. Stakeholders

The main Stakeholders are Government Institutions, even if they still lack the capacity to fulfil their functions. There are only a few local CSOs and Common Interest Groups form the new potential of CSOs. These groups are being formed and trained in Human and Institutional Development (HID) and will, with time, take on considerable roles and responsibilities.

10. Summary of key potential development opportunities

Agriculture (i.e. perennial horticulture!) and Livestock, SMEs (Agriculture and non-agriculture small scale value addition) summarise Samangan's potentials for economic growth. Tourism can be developed in favour of few local beneficiaries.

A clustering of Balkh, Kunduz, Taloqan, Samangan and Baghlan would be helpful to evaluate the effectiveness of priority inputs.