

Provincial profile for

Helmand Province

Executive Summary

1 Natural Resources (*ANDS Sector 3*)

Helmand Province is very rich with natural resources in particular with potential that exists in the province for Agriculture, Livestock, Fishery, Poultry, Forestry, and Horticulture because of:

- Fertile and deep soils
- The natural water resources and irrigation infrastructure present

Helmand could be divided into 2 parts in terms of *water* resources: (i) southern Helmand and (ii) Northern Helmand.

Southern Helmand:

- Has got one main river –Helmand- River that is flowing throughout the province in the southern part and irrigates almost 70% of the agricultural lands of the province.
- On top of that Helmand has got the Kajaki Dam, which helps the province with irrigation capacity and with hydraulic power generation capacity.
- The Helmand River has got 3 main canals separated from it in 3 parts of the province under a project in the past:
 1. Bughra Canal with the intake on Helmand River in Grishk district flowing through Grishk to Marja district with 70 M³ /Sec original flow capacity irrigating over 60,000/-jeribs of land.
 2. Darvishan Canal with Intake on Helmand River in Darvishan flowing all over Garmseer district in Lakarai, Binadir irrigating around 50,000/-jeribs of land in Garmseer district.
 3. Shamalan Canal with Intake on Helmand River in Bolan bridge area, flowing in Nawa district through Sourkhodoz irrigating around 40,000/-jeribs of land
- There are many sub canals from the abovementioned 3 canals as well as many traditional canals on Helmand River made by the villagers.

Northern Helmand

- is covering the parts of Nawzad, Baghni, Baghran and other districts located in the north of the province where Helmand River doesn't flow through and it doesn't play a role in the agriculture of the area. The main source of water used to be karezes and natural springs.
- The long-term drought of 5-7 years has strongly affected this part of the province; the karezes have mostly dried out and people use deep bore-wells which has further damaged the traditional karez irrigation system as the water table has dropped below the karez intake level.

Helmand has got a very big natural forest all the way along the river on both sides from Khanishin to Diwalak, Malakhan, Taghaz, Dishu, Khoja Ali Aulia, Khoja Ali Sufla, Landai, Falalka, Rodbar, and then to Charborjak of Nimroz. The main trees are Tamarix and the forest is mainly used as grazing area for the livestock of the farmers and Kuchi. Helmand has got capacity for more artificial **forestry** where drought resistance trees such as Tamarix, Saxaul and other trees such as Eucalyptus and pinetrees could be grown. This will require clear policy decisions on land titles for forestry production if it were to be a private-sector economic activity.

In the *agricultural field* Helmand has got potential and suitable climate for long season cultivation of cereal crops, industrial crops as well as orchards. Especially in southern-Helmand 3 crops a year are possible and

with support of simple green houses/tunnels out of season vegetable production for the regional market would be an interesting prospect for especially the farmers with small land plots.

Helmand capacity for *livestock* production is also very high: the possibility to produce year-round fodder under irrigation (lucerne, berseem, green maize/sorghum) would make dairy development, if accompanied with the build-up of processing capacity, a good prospect. Helmand has traditionally been the area where the Kuchi would spend the winter season, grazing orchards, buying forage from sedentary farmers and working as day labourers for these farmers. The integration of the Kuchi livestock production system with the sedentary agricultural production system is of mutual benefit (soil fertility-winter feeding, labour, risk spreading).

Helmand has the potential for *fish production*, especially on the soils destroyed by salination which are no longer suitable for irrigation, but still within reach of water and poultry production due to the presence of grain.

Helmand has got *marble mines* in Deshu district in the Registan sandy deserts bordering Pakistan. This is one of the highest quality marble in the country, but due to the lack of roads inaccessible from the Afghan side and currently apparently being smuggled to Pakistan.

2 Human Resources

Helmand province has got a high educated proportion of the population in the region and in that respect could be compared to Kandahar. There are many educated, professional and skilled people in the province, in particular in Lashkargah, Grishk, Marja, NadiAli, Bolan and areas close and surrounding the Lashkargah city.

Apart from standard primary and secondary educational facilities Helmand province has an Agriculture High School in Lashkargah and a technical school in Grishk district. These are both not very active due to lack of resources.

Due to recent insurgency, resulting in intimidation of teachers and the burning of especially girls' schools the level of school attendance has been affected and number of schools operational, particularly in Northern Helmand such as Mosa Qala, Sangin, Kajaki, Nawzad, Baghni and Baghran, has been severely affected. Other *issues* are:

1. insecurity
2. threats from sources who try to prevent people to attend schools
3. cultural barriers
4. lack of teachers and capable human resources
5. lack of teaching material
6. low level of salaries for teachers and staff

The *population* of Helmand province is of a mixed origin. The Helmand Valley development project of the fifties resulted in the government settling the new agricultural areas with e.g. Kuchi who lost all their livestock during droughts in the fifties and sixties, landless and others in search of agricultural land.

Helmand like Kandahar has *IDPs* of different nature, some from before and some from after the fall of Taliban. There is the Mukhtar IDP camp in Lashkargah for Kuchi, who lost their livestock due to the drought, IDPs from the north, war affected IDPs and a recent new group of IDPs, who left their places of origin due to the recent battle between coalition and Taliban. They had to leave their villages and come to Lashkargah and Grishk districts because of the fighting. Besides the IDPs living in this camp there is a large number of destitute Kuchi living along the Darweshan canal with the remnants of their former flocks, eking out a living by working as day labourers for the agricultural community.

The level of returnees in the province is not very high in 2006 which is obviously due to the security problems and instability in the region and lack of job opportunities and other prospects for returnees (land!).

However, according to UNHCR data 191 families have returned from Pakistan and Iran to the 13 districts of Helmand province since January 2006.

The Department of agriculture in Helmand province used to be very active with very technical and professional personnel. That capacity still exists but not in the government: the majority of these people have left the government and are now working either with NGOs or are old and stay at home.

3 Agriculture (ANDS Sector 6)

3.1 Overview

Helmand Economy prior to the war and still now is 75-80% based on Agriculture 15-20% on Livestock and 5% on services. There is no manufacturing industry of any significance. As mentioned above Helmand used to be the potential area for agriculture in the region therefore the governments prior to 1970s have paid much attention to use the available potential to the maximum extent possible.

Key agricultural activities are cultivation of cereal crops, vegetables, orchards as well as industrial crops:

- Wheat
- Mungbeans
- Bean
- Maize
- All kinds of vegetables
- Onions
- Melons & Watermelons
- Cotton
- Tobacco
- Sugar beet

Encouragement of Cotton cultivation was started in late 60s and early 70s in Helmand by the government of that time as main cash-crop for farmers, it was also planned that Sugar beet and Tobacco would also be introduced to the farmers. The Germans had conducted a survey for cultivation of Sugar-beet in Helmand and it was realized that Helmand climate as well as soil is suitable for sugar beet containing 18% sugar, the Germans planned for the construction of a sugar factory in Helmand and buying the sugar beets from farmers and making sugar beet as the 2nd cash-crop for farmers after cotton.

On the other hand the government of that time after construction of Kajaki Dam had implemented an agricultural project in Helmand with construction of 3 Canals. The project aimed to use Helmand as the centre for production and multiplication of improved seeds both cereal and vegetable particularly Onion seeds- to the world; all necessary studies of soil, climate water and trials had been done, according to agriculturists. This potential and the capacity to do it still exist in Helmand and require just proper investment and planning. The climatic conditions (hot and with a low relative humidity, long growing season with a wide variety of temperature ranges from start till finish) makes the area eminently suitable for seed production. Unfortunately this activity, based on foreign companies' investments, has developed in India and the perimeters of the Gobi desert in China, making Afghanistan with the relatively high daily labour cost and the insecurity a less interesting prospect; as long as poppy can be grown without legal action this crop will outcompete any new high-value crops such as seed production (ACI's experience with trial production in Kandahar).

Two major factors have overshadowed all normal agricultural activities of Helmand during the last 10-15 years is **poppy cultivation** and the **recurrent droughts**. While southern Helmand, using surface water from Helmand River, was not that badly affected by the drought northern Helmand, where agriculture is based on irrigation and underground water, was strongly affected by drought. It could be said that poppy has now become a "normal" agricultural activity in Helmand, with the province being the major transit route for opium and heroine produced in Afghanistan.

The **irrigation** system is explained in detail in section 1. Please refer to that section.

It should be mentioned that after construction of the mentioned canals, Helmand agricultural lands faced the problem of **salinity** and many lands were rendered useless for agriculture; the need for construction and maintenance of a drainage system was realized and the Helmand project constructed many drainages. Now most of those drainages are filled and the problem of land salination has once again become a problem for

the area. ALP and RAMP have cleaned many canals and drains on the basis of Cash For Work, but the problem is still not resolved and farmers are complaining about it.

The major agricultural schemes in Afghanistan were planned in Helmand because of its potential in suitable climate, soil and availability of sufficient water sources. The Marja, Nawa and Bolan farms are the most important farms comprising large areas of state land. The agricultural policy and strategy has not given a clear function for these farms (e.g. quality seed and breeding stock supply, research and training/demonstration) and land grabbing by the powerful seems to be a recurrent phenomenon.

The irrigation schemes of Shamalan, Boghra and Darwishan with its irrigation intakes and canals that irrigate hundreds of thousands jeribs of lands in 5 districts were one of the major schemes.

Bolan *Dairy* Farm, where breeding and dairy production both were planned, was a very successful state project which still has got the capacity for re-investment if this farm would become part of a larger agricultural development plan in the area: it could be the support unit for the development of small-holder small-scale dairy production with central facilities for veterinary care, breeding services, extension and processing of milk.

The introduction of *industrial crops* such as cotton as pilot and then planned sugar beet and tobacco crops introduction with installation of processing factories did not go beyond cotton. The Spinzar cotton ginnery has an oil mill, but is now obsolete and without working capital. Tobacco has become an international Cinderella crop due to anti smoking campaigns and world sugar prices are so low that production based on sugar beets is hardly profitable without government support (see EU).

There is potential for alternative industrial crops such as oil crops (sunflower, safflower, peanut, soya). This would also support the development of intensive livestock production (poultry, dairy production) in the area due to the production of high-value by-products from the processing of oil.

There is also potential along the Helmand River for the construction of more *intakes and canals* to irrigate the un-cultivated state lands to be distributed to landless people as was done in the past by the state in Marja and NadiAli; the potential areas could be:

- In Sistany area of Marja
- Shorau area further from Grishk district
- The Deserts between Marja and Garamsir

Such developments however should coincide with a far more frugal irrigation practice as Afghanistan is bound to an international agreement with Iran to let 26 cubic meters of water per second pass into Iran; in drought years this minimum requirement can already not be met.

The *Helmand farming system* can be divided in the northern (orchards, irrigation from underground water) and the southern (principally field crops and surface water irrigation). The third farming system is the Kuchi livestock keeping system, whereby there are long-range Kuchi migrating into Farah, Uruzgan and the shorter range Kuchi, who basically live in and around Registan.

- A) Private lands: There are different categories of land owners big land lords above 100 jeribs, Medium land owners from 10 to 100 jeribs and Small land owners from 1 to 10 jeribs. On the other hand there are many landless farmers who are working for other land owners on the basis of:
1. **Labourers:** Working for the land owner, the land owner has provided them with shelter/house and pays them on labourer whatever agreed upon either on monthly or yearly basis when the harvest is done
 2. **Bazgari or partnership:** The land owner gives his land in partnership to a farmer to work on it on the basis of agreement to give one-third, one-fourth, or one-fifth of the harvest to the farmer who cultivates the land of the owner. The harvest ratio depends on the nature of agreement and share of expenditures, for instance the owner takes the responsibility for provision of fertilizers, seeds, tractor, fuel for water pump or whatsoever and the farmer is only working on land for cultivation, in this case the 4 or 5 shares would belong to the owner and 1 or 2 shares will be given to the farmer.

3. **Ijara (Lease):** Ijara is the form of agreement between the land owner and the farmer for a longer term that the farmer rents or leases the land of the owner for 1-2-3...5 years for a fixed sum of money or amount of product being cultivated in the land; for instance 100 kg of wheat per each jerib to be given to the owner on annual basis, while all the expenditures fall the responsibility of the farmer. This should be mentioned that for orchards there is another form of Ijara or Lease exist in Helmand; once the orchard is close to harvesting time, someone is ready to buy the fruits of the tree on a lump sum basis from the owner, the picking, packaging and transportation becomes the responsibility of the buyer.

3.2 Crops

Helmand agriculture could be divided into 2 categories (i) Field Crops and ii) Horticulture.

A) The **crops** could be divided into number of categories such as:

- a. Cereal Crops such as (wheat, maize, mungbeans, beans, barley) which is cultivated and used for domestic use mainly and is not exported.
- b. Industrial Crops such as cotton, groundnuts that is being cultivated but not in a big quantity since there is no market to for sale apart from Helmand Cotton Gin and Oil Factory that is not very 100% operational. On the other hand as mentioned other industrial crops such as sugar beet, tobacco and sunflower might have some potential if introduced and a market would be available for the products so that farmers can use it as an alternative cash crop.
- c. Animal forage crops, such as alfalfa, berseem, clover, green maize and sorghum). Especially alfalfa, berseem and clover are used for poultry and are important in the crop rotation for soil structure improvement and improvement of soil fertility.

B) **Horticulture** in Helmand is also very common and can be divided in two sections:

- a. Orchards in principally Northern Helmand (almonds, apricots, pomegranates and some grapes).
- b. vegetable crops such as cucumber, tomatoes, onions, green-leaf vegetables, melon, watermelons etc. in the Central Helmand in the irrigation schemes

3.3 Livestock

Helmand has got potential for **Livestock** and the **livestock products** as well as **breeding**. Bolan state farm was one of the pilot farms with breeding, milk production and processing.

As Helmand has got water and pastures, Registan Kuchi were using Helmand for summer grazing and long-range Kuchi as a winter station, when there is snow in the mountains in Central-Afghanistan. In particular the north of Helmand was used by Kuchi. Helmand farmers themselves also used to keep a number of animals such as sheep, goats, cow, oxen, and donkeys to satisfy their own needs. Due to drought and war this number of animals has declined, but is now picking up again.

Poultry keeping is also very common among the general population being farmer or not, in Helmand. Almost every one in particular farmers keeps a number of chickens, ducks, turkeys and use it mainly for domestic consumption while a small part of chicken eggs produced are in certain cases being sold by the women of the households. Helmand has not been included in the FAO rural poultry promotion project, but there have been restocking projects, unfortunately with commercial line chickens from Pakistan.

3.4 Fisheries

Helmand has got very good capacity for fishery, but fish farms are not yet common; however, fishing is a good business for number of people in the province in particular in Grishk and other parts located along the Helmand River. The fishing itself is done in a very brutal way mainly by electrification via generators and explosives which is very dangerous for the future of fisheries in the province. It is currently not likely that the government will be able to play a monitoring task on how and where fish is being caught.

3.5 Land tenure

There are 3 types of land tenure in the province:

1. **State land:** State land is available and is almost always either mountainous or without water. Especially the last category could provide good potential for implementation of future developmental projects, although an unauthorized and illegal occupation is rampant and government is not paying attention to it at all. If this process of impunity continues there will soon be no state land left for any future planning and projections.
2. **Private land:** Private land belongs to people on the basis of heritage being distributed among the heirs. In certain cases it has either been given centuries ago by the governments of that time to the people or the people have just simply occupied the vacant lands and then it became their properties by laps of years and time (squatters' right).
3. **Helmand Project land, destined for privatisation.** The final category of land is part of state land that falls under a state agriculture extension project, which was planned before the 70s and had to be distributed to landless people, in particular from other provinces in the time in Marja, Nadi Ali, Bolan and Garmseer. This land allocation was based on a proper plan of the government and distributed on the basis of soil fertility, meaning that good and fertile land within the project area up to 30 jeribs per family and less fertile land up to 50 jeribs per family. The families were also provided with housing schemes within the farming land, provision of all assistance to help the families become good farmers for instance trainings, improved seeds, fertilizers, loans, and etc. It was the intention to continue with such programmes, but the political changes of 1973 put a hold to these programmes.

3.6 Agricultural support services and input supplies

The Department of Agriculture of Helmand Province used to be a very strong institution with technical and professional personnel. This structure still exists and is better in terms of its activities in comparison to other provincial agricultural department, but also needs to be assisted.

Helmand and Arghandab Valley Authority (HAVA) was one of the strongest and best organized institutions with quite extensive presence and both technical and human resources parallel to the Department of Agriculture in the province. HAVA was responsible for planning of all irrigation and settlement projects and schemes. The HAVA structure still exists but with a very low capacity and in case it would have to function again as in the past it would need extensive assistance.

There are some NGOs and institutions present with good resources in the province such as ALP/Chemonics, CADG, MCI, VARA, and PRT with DFID section.

ALP is providing some assistance to the farmers in particular distribution of seeds and fertilizers as well as working for the capacity building of the Agriculture department.

NSP through BRAC has been working since 2005 in the province but no major outputs influencing the economic activities in the districts are being reported.

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

There are a few farmers cooperatives in existence in Helmand province that are sometimes being assisted with improved seeds, fertilizers etc by the department of agriculture as well as ALP.

A number of state research farms exist in Helmand (Marja, Bolan and Nawa) with lots of capacity and potential such as land, suitable climate, fertile soils, ample water etc; there are also one livestock and one poultry state farms which are not operational.

These farms could be developed into research/training/demonstration farms for the production of improved seeds and saplings, introduction of new crops, giving demonstrations and training to assist farmers to achieve better yields.

The cooperatives require proper training and capacity building how to run a cooperative and to understand what their role is/should be to increase the income of their member farmers.

3.8 Agriculturally related businesses

As mentioned above, Helmand economy used to be based on the above mentioned agricultural products, cotton and wheat were considered as main cash crops for farmers. During the mujaheddin period production of cotton, seen as a crop for the government, was discouraged by the mujaheddin. 17 years ago with the departure of the Soviet occupation the system of government control, on which everything in the country was dependent, collapsed and nobody was there to help farmers adapt to the new situation: where to get agricultural inputs, training, loans and machineries, fertilizers, consultations. The state marketing system collapsed and their products didn't have any market; the drought had also a negative effect on farmers and contributed to further indebtedness and reduced returns from farming which made more and more people turn to poppy cultivation. Many consider it now as the main cash crop for their survival.

4 Other business activities (ANDS Sector 8)

Helmand business capacity is very huge for agricultural products, it was called in the past as the Asia grain store, but currently based on the facts mentioned in point 3.8, there is very little capacity available for business in Helmand.

Helmand has two relatively large state factories: the Helmand cotton gin (Spinzar) and a marble factory. There are a few private small factories such as Ice factories and small beverages factories. Helmand cotton is of a good quality and being sold to Pakistan and other countries.

There are also number of other businesses going on in the province; a good bazaar full of all kinds of materials needed for peoples' use starting from Food items to Medicines. Majority of goods are coming from Iran and Pakistan via Nimroz, Herat and Kandahar.

There are quite a lot of private English and Computer literacy courses in Lashkargah and Grishk cities.
No business unions

5 Security (ANDS Sector 1)

The security situation in Helmand province is very fragile, particularly a number of districts are completely out of the question to work in; the access road from Kandahar to Helmand is not safe, access roads from Lashkargah districts are also quite risky. Poppy and Drug smugglers are the major element for insecurity in the province.

6 Physical infrastructure (ANDS Sector 8)

Helmand is also is not very poor in terms of physical infrastructures. It has got electricity, irrigation system constructed, Hospitals and Health facilities mainly everywhere in the province, Schools, 2 main bridges connecting Helmand to Kandahar and Herat as well as Northern and Southern Helmand. Its access roads to other districts are not in good conditions at all. The main road connecting Lashkargah city to Kandahar-Herat highway has recently been constructed.

ALP is also constructing 2 roads connecting the city to close villages.

Helmand has one small airport where PRT, PACTEC and CADG flights are landing. South of Garmseer is an airport, constructed by Arab sheikhs who would come to hunt in Registan.

7 Institutional constraints (ANDS Sector 8)

- Government bureaucratic procedures
- Lack of quality control and standardization procedures
- Lack supporting mechanism in the government
- Lack financing mechanisms and institutions
- Afghan transport is not allowed into Pakistan and Iran which creates problem in particular for transport of fresh food, has to change goods from one truck to the other in border, while Pakistani trucks are allowed to cross the border and come inside Afghanistan
- Lack of technical and professional agriculture extension workers

8 Credit

No significant activities in this regard exist in the area, however ALP is there to support the farmers, Da Afghanistan Bank and Mili Bank have branches, it is said that Kabul bank also has got a very small branch in Helmand.

9 Stakeholders

List of Potential stakeholders (broad categories)

No	Description (Name)	Importance Rate			Comment
		1	2	3	
1	Government Authorities	X			To take the lead role & build its capacity
2	Provincial Council	X			As advisory & regulatory body
3	Village & District Councils (CDC)	X			As advisory, participatory and owner
4	National Security Forces (ANP & ANA)		X		As security & stability enforcement bodies
5	International Security Forces (NATO & Coalition)		X		As security & stability enforcement & support to National security bodies
6	Local Commanders	X			As the main influential group
7	District level authorities (District Head and District Police Commander)	X			As facilitators but also in most instances as problem creators
8	Taliban Groups	X			Could be a threat to implementation
9	Religious scholars and Mullahs	X			Very important to be brought in the implementing process to avoid their passive views
10	Local NGOs & Coordination body and women Associations	X			As implementing & participatory body
11	International NGOs	X			As implementing, participatory & support
12	Ulema (Clerics) Shura & Madrasas		X		Can facilitate implementation as participant
13	Banks, AICC and Chamber of Commerce	X			As financing & business promotion bodies
14	IDPs, Returnees, Disables and Kuchi and women and children		X		As vulnerable and marginalized groups to be targeted
15	Media		X		As information & communication bodies
16	PRT & CIMIC	X			As influential bodies in terms funding agencies, but also as constraints due to military involvement
17	United Nation Agencies	X			As funding and capacity building as well as supporting & participatory bodies

18	USAID & DFID	X			As influential bodies in terms of funds & resource owners
19	Cooperatives and Unions	X			As managing, organizing, leading & participatory bodies

10 Summary of key potential development opportunities

The immediate improvement of people's living conditions depends on improved security and a major effort to make agriculture more profitable through the introduction of new higher yielding varieties, new higher value crops, rationalize the water use and improve the drainage system. Farmers will need to be organized to improve their bargaining position in the market and demand better prices for essential inputs. There will be no changes in the economy of the people as well as people will not leave poppy cultivation and thus poppy will always overshadow all other crops and activities and will remain as one of the major elements contributing to the insecurity in the area.

Some activities that can be undertaken:

- Intake constructions with irrigation canals and drainage construction and/or rehabilitation
- Activation of Research/Training/Demonstration farms with trained extension workers who can assist the farmers with new agriculture methods and crops
- Introduction of mechanized agriculture in particular water saving mechanisms such as drip irrigation for higher value crops (e.g. horticulture)
- Establishment of dairy farms with milk processing facilities, which would be a support structure for the development of small-holder dairy farms
- Support for farmers' association establishment and their capacity building and supporting them with loans, tractors, improved seeds etc.
- Establishment of financial services in the province for agricultural credits
- Assisting livestock owners & Kuchi with business centres / Associations and assisting in associations capacity building to run the business centres as well as provision of restocking credits
- Introduction of new cash crops with market potential to encourage farmers to grow these cash crops for the improvement of the local economy and as an alternative to poppy cultivation.