

Think-and-do-tank Govern4Afg on Good Governance in Afghanistan

# The Impacts of Water Sector Reforms on Agriculture in Afghanistan

## What is Govern4Afg?

The two-year initiative 'Governance Forum Afghanistan (Govern4Afg)' has been launched by German and Afghan partners to establish a platform for policy dialogue on governance topics in Afghanistan. Govern4Afg brings together representatives of research, science, Governance practitioners and decision makers to discuss and further develop on governance related topics. Thereby Govern4Afg supports the Governance portfolio in Afghanistan in the implementation of the BMZ Country Strategy and contributes to overarching policy development and implementation aligned with Afghan context and needs.

## Context

Studying the impacts of the recent water sector reforms on agriculture will initiate a policy dialogue among relevant stakeholders at national level about the required and potential changes and improvements in the water and irrigation sectors. Following the global trend, the government of Afghanistan placed the Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) at the center of national water sector reforms. These structural and functional changes initiated by the government through its water sector national strategies and laws are aimed at providing river and sub-river basin based governance, allocation, and monitoring of water resources. These changes in the contexts of social, economic, and environmental objectives are intended to facilitate an inclusive sustainable socio-economic development at national level.

As an agrarian society with an almost 80 percent of agriculture dependency and with as high as 37 percent of agriculture contribution in the annual national income, Afghanistan's economic and social development is heavily dependent on agriculture. In the national development discourses, agriculture is considered the potential backbone of the national economy. However, the effectiveness and dynamics of agriculture in relation to the national economy is heavily dependent on the functionality and dynamism of irrigation. The dysfunctionality of irrigation infrastructure in the country is the main root cause of under-productivity. Even though irrigation accounts for 95 percent of the total water consumption in the country, the lack of a functional irrigation system left the agriculture sector with huge untapped potentials. As indicated by national water sector strategies and the water law, IWRM principles are adopted to provide tangible solutions to water governance, allocation, and monitoring at river and sub-river basin levels. The effectiveness of the initiated water sector reforms should be understood by analysing the impacts of these reforms on agriculture at grassroots level. The guiding question for this research line of Govern4Afg is how the IWRM-guided water sharing practices of the country are affecting agriculture at the grassroots level within different river basins?



*Basic vegetable agriculture  
in Badakhshan*



Drinking water and storing facilities in Baghlan

## Approach

German and Afghan partners initiated and designed this research and dialogue process to study the impact of water sector reforms on agriculture. This process is aimed at examining how the existing institutional frameworks and mechanisms, which are informed and driven by IWRM principles for the allocation of water at river and sub-river basins, are affecting the agriculture at grassroots level. The research and dialogue initiative is seeking to provide relevant policy makers with feedback from five river basin actors regarding the successes and challenges of the implemented water sector reforms. It is a qualitative study coupled with sensitization of stakeholders via dialogue activities with the overarching goal to foster development cooperation in the water sector through generating knowledge about the impact of water sector reforms on agriculture. In addition to line ministries including the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL) and the Ministry of Power and Water; and national institutions, the following agencies are the main stakeholders at grassroots level: River basin agencies, River basin councils, Water Users Associations, Irrigation Associations, and some NGOs. In-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) will be conducted with the representatives of the above-mentioned stakeholders. The study will be conducted in the following five river basins: Harirod Murghab, Helmand, Kabul, Northern, and Panj-Amu River Basins.

## Expected Outcomes

The findings of the study will facilitate evidence based interventions and reforms regarding water sector. The policy recommendations of the paper will be based on stakeholders' feedback including River Basin Agencies, River Basin Councils, Water User Associations, Irrigation Associations and NGOs regarding the implementation of the water sector reform (embodied in the 2009 Water Law).

In particular, expected recommendations will focus on:

- The challenges in the allocation mechanisms for water for agriculture within water law; and
- The implementation and operational status of the formal institutions necessary for implementing of the Water Law and reforms (e.g. water basin councils).

The research will build on the above two inquiries and it will specifically study:

- Within the scope of the current water law, the potentials for establishing more institutions necessary to implement the reforms;
- Testing through empirical research if amendments to the water law may be conducive for better agricultural production.

From the policy perspective, the study and its subsequent outcomes including conference proceedings and policy dialogue will provide national policy makers with policy recommendations drawn from the feedback of relevant actors and findings from the targeted five river basins across the country.

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