



PRESS RELEASE

Japan Joins Forces with UN-Habitat to Improve Essential Services and Livelihoods for Vulnerable Urban Populations in Afghanistan

Kabul, Afghanistan – 8 October 2024: The Government of Japan has contributed JPY 1.166 billion (approximately USD 7.36 million) to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) over the next three years to improve basic services and livelihoods for more than 100,000 vulnerable urban populations in Afghanistan. The project will also contribute to the recovery from the earthquakes that struck Herat province in western Afghanistan on 7 October last year. Today, an Exchange of Notes was signed between the Embassy of Japan in Afghanistan and UN-Habitat, with a Grant Agreement to follow between the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and UN-Habitat.

Afghanistan is currently facing an unprecedented humanitarian and economic crisis. Over three decades of conflict, coupled with environmental degradation and underinvestment in infrastructure, have exacerbated the vulnerability of the Afghan urban poor to sudden shocks, including natural disasters. Since the government takeover in August 2021, international aid has reached vulnerable populations across the country considering life-saving services, but poor residents in urban areas have been often left behind, further increasing urban vulnerability.

“A critical yet often overlooked factor impacting urban life is the poor state of the country’s key infrastructure essential for providing basic services. We need for a strategic shift from solely humanitarian aid to a focus on basic human needs (BHN) for inclusive recovery,” emphasized Ms. Kazuko Ishigaki, Regional Representative of the UN-Habitat Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP). “Our partnership with Japan will accelerate efforts to strengthen resilience in community infrastructure and support Afghan communities,” she added and appreciated Japan’s generous support.

“Fostering resilience, sustaining livelihoods, safeguarding human rights, and upholding developmental gains are crucial for Afghanistan today. Through our partnership with UN-Habitat, Japan remains committed to standing and delivering for the people of Afghanistan,” stated H.E. Dr. Takayoshi Kuromiya, Ambassador of Japan to Afghanistan.

The new “Project for the Improvement of Living Environment for Vulnerable People in Urban Areas,” which will be implemented in Kabul and Herat provinces, aims to improve access to basic services and livelihoods for the urban poor by rehabilitating, retrofitting or constructing

key community infrastructure. In Afghanistan, natural disasters – droughts, floods, landslides, and earthquakes – exacerbate communities’ vulnerabilities, which are heightened by complex topography, climate variations, and socio-economic challenges. The project will adopt a “Build Back Better” approach to address these challenges with sustainable solutions.

Through the project, healthcare facilities, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) systems, and access roads with drainages, will be improved in 38 target locations in Kabul and Herat, benefiting more than 100,000 people. These upgrades will not only improve living conditions but also generate waged income opportunities for vulnerable people in the target areas. Additionally, vocational skills training programmes will be conducted to support better livelihood opportunities.

With an estimated 23.7 million people (more than half of the country’s population) in need of humanitarian assistance in 2024¹, Afghanistan remains as one of the world’s largest and most complex humanitarian crises. The rapid growth of urban populations and the large number of Afghan returnees from neighboring countries have also placed pressure on the country’s already strained basic services, making the partnership between Japan and UN-Habitat vital for addressing these urgent challenges.

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¹ United Nations OCHA: Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan Afghanistan 2024