



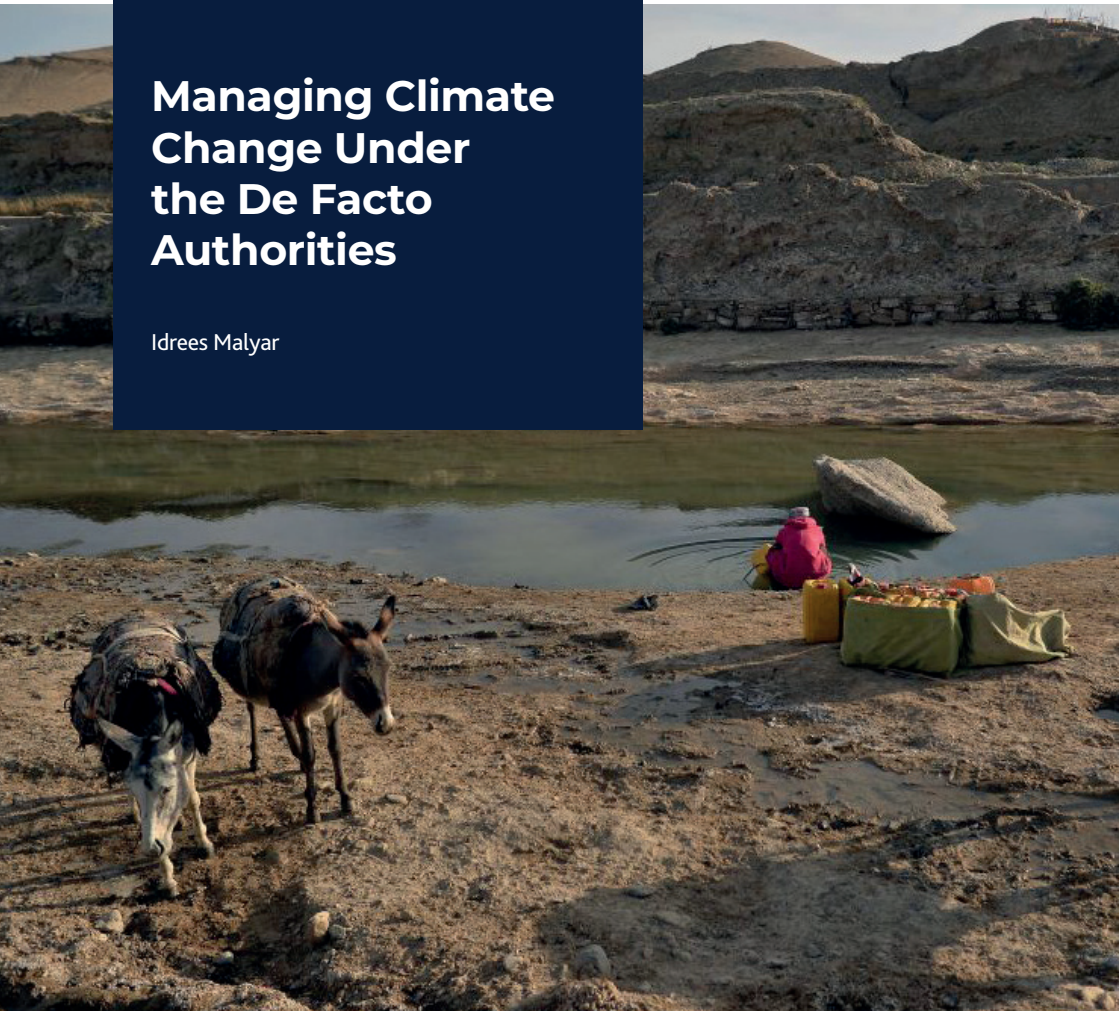
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AFGHANISTAN RESEARCH NETWORK

Managing Climate Change Under the De Facto Authorities

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Afghanistan Research Network

This series highlights the work and analysis of the Afghanistan Research Network (ARN), a project convened by LSE / PeaceRep, and the Civic Engagement Project (CEP). The network brings together over 20 Afghan researchers (and several non-Afghans) with diverse expertise and backgrounds investigating a range of issues. This project aims to support Afghan researchers who were recently forced to leave Afghanistan; to ensure expert and analytical provision; inform contextually-appropriate international policies and practices on Afghanistan; and to deepen understanding of evolving political, security, and economic dynamics.

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Key Takeaways

- ▶ Create an Afghanistan Climate Emergency Working Group, comprising key partners, such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), UN-Food and Agricultural Project (FOA), World Bank, and others currently in operation, including national and international NGOs and local communities, i.e., Community Development Councils (CDCs).
 - ▶ Establish the Afghanistan Climate Emergency Fund (ACEF) under the UN Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA), dedicated to centralizing and ring-fencing climate-focused financing.
 - ▶ Reconnect with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and climate finance institutions, e.g., Global Environmental Facility (GEF), Green Climate Fund (GCF), and Adaptation Fund (AF), to release Afghanistan's on-going/halted projects and funds, made possible via a joint UN and World Bank effort, especially once the Afghanistan Climate Emergency Fund (ACEF) is established.
 - ▶ The Afghanistan Climate Emergency Working Group should focus on an emergency approach, closely engaging with the communities via the Area-Based Approach for Development Emergency Initiatives (ABADEI).
 - ▶ Once a legitimate government is in place, ACEF and the Climate Emergency Working Group can handover to Afghanistan's National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) and the Ministry of Finance (MoF).
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Introduction

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges facing humanity. It has significantly affected people's lives and ecosystem services. Climate change has always been a continuous process; however, the rate of change has accelerated considerably in the past few decades. Primarily, global warming drives climate change due to fossil fuel burning, such as oil and gas that emit greenhouse gases (IPCC, 2022). The impacts of climate change and extreme weather events have negatively affected or caused the loss of ecosystems, lowered food security, damaged livelihoods, increased migration and displacement, affected people's health and security, and increased inequalities.

Climate impacts are felt disproportionately in developing countries. With significantly fewer financial resources, Afghanistan is one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world due to its geography, sensitivity to changing weather patterns, and limited capacity to cope with climate change (Hakimi & Brown, 2022). Based on Afghanistan's National Environmental Protection Agency report, temperatures in Afghanistan rose by 1.8°C between 1950 and 2010, twice the global average (NEPA, 2017). In the Global Climate Risk Index 2021, Afghanistan was in the top 10 (number 6) most affected countries in 2019, with total losses of US\$ 548.73 million, while Afghanistan was ranked 24th in 2018 (Eckstein et al., 2021).

Heavy rains have caused severe floods and landslides in Afghanistan. The floods in 2019, 2020, and 2021 were destructive. The floods in March 2019 alone affected 120,000 people, destroying or damaging 12,000 homes, and over 75 people died (Eckstein et al., 2021). Between January 2020 and August 2021, 8,967 families were affected by floods, killing 212 people, injuring 237, and displacing over 80 families (IOM, 2021). These events have critical implications on people's health, nutrition, shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), food, livestock, and agriculture.

Due to lack of rainfall or reduced river flow (snowmelt shortages), drought has also harshly impacted people's lives. An increase in drought severity and frequency in Afghanistan from 1901 to 2010 shows that more severe droughts are expected because of global warming (Qutbudin et al., 2019; Chandrasekara et al., 2021; and Alami et al., 2017). Other social factors intensify these vulnerabilities in the country, such as poverty, undernourishment, food insecurity, and inequality. If climate change is not addressed in Afghanistan, short-term impacts will worsen the current socioeconomic security situation.

Discussion

Before the Taliban takeover, in 2019, as an initial step to improve environmental conditions and advance the climate agenda, NEPA in Afghanistan launched the development of the National Environment Policy (NEP). For an environmental policy in Afghanistan's challenging context, it is important to contextualize environmental concerns with consideration to social and economic issues, including deprivation, poverty, insecurity, displacement, urgent development, and other humanitarian needs, as well as some of the root causes of environmental degradation. NEP identified seven priority areas that needed to be addressed to achieve Afghanistan's environmental goals:

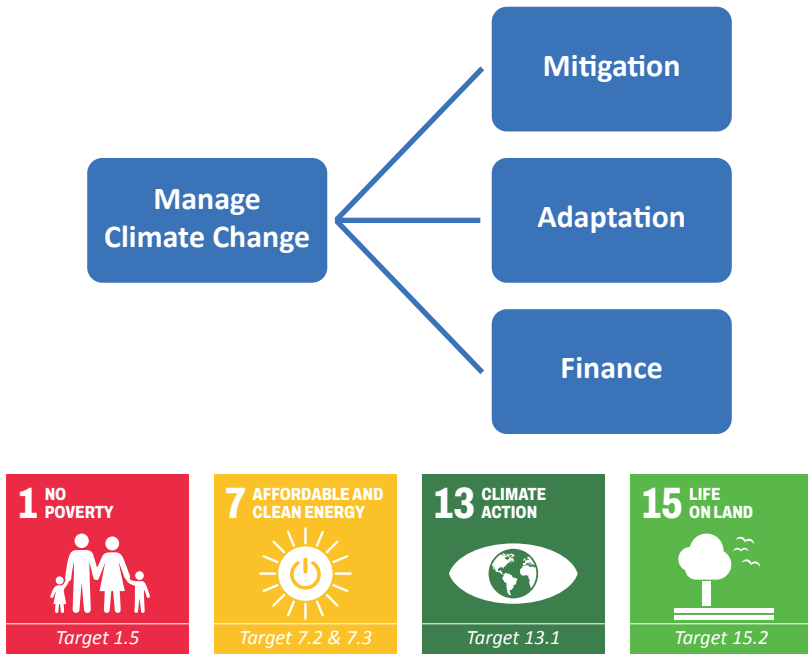
- ▶ Manage climate change
- ▶ Maintain a healthy and productive ecosystem
- ▶ Equitable management of natural resources
- ▶ Manage pollution and waste
- ▶ Build resilience to conflict and disaster risks
- ▶ Support a green economy
- ▶ Coordinate and manage cross-cutting issues: international commitments, public awareness, and gender equity

Addressing climate change has always been a priority because of its impact on food security and livelihood, the natural ecosystem, fresh water supplies, health, security conditions, and many other aspects of people's lives.

Climate change management in Afghanistan means a transition to low-emission economic development, enhancing adaptation (including nature-based solutions), incorporating climate finance, and build resilience. This entails a) mitigation, b) adaptation, and c) finance—Figure 1 shows areas and linkages most connected to the Afghanistan-Sustainable Development Goals (A-SDG). Mitigation actions reduce greenhouse gas emissions, adaptation actions reduce impacts on lives and livelihoods, and climate finance supports mitigation and adaptation agendas.

Afghanistan has considerable mitigation potential owing to its abundant renewable energy resources. However, unlocking this potential proceeded at a slow pace because of challenges related to funding access for the US\$ 6 billion required, as outlined in Afghanistan's Nationally Determined Contributions. For similar reasons, while Afghanistan's population is extremely vulnerable to climate change impacts, NDC adaptation funding was short of the required US\$ 10 billion (NDC, 2015).

Figure 1
Areas of Climate Change Management and Contribution to A-SDG Targes



Afghanistan's per capita greenhouse gas emissions are significantly below the global average because of low levels of industrialization. However, emissions are predicted to rise by roughly 9.5% per year between 2015 and 2035 under a business-as-usual scenario: global carbon dioxide emissions are expected to go up by 1.2% annually over the same period. In contrast, Afghanistan has the potential to reduce its emissions by 17.4% compared to the baseline scenario by 2035 (NDC, 2015).

Regarding adaptation, Afghanistan's most significant sectoral needs are in water, agriculture, forests and rangelands, biodiversity and ecosystems, health, and energy. Priority adaptation actions for these sectors were placed in the National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) and previous national communications. These are also encapsulated in the NDC, which asserts Afghanistan's commitment to pursuing Low Emission Development Strategies, and outlines financial, technological, and capacity support needs for adaptation valued at US\$ 10.79 billion over ten years.

Institutional Context

The National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) is leading on climate action. The NEPA established the climate change division/department in 2010 as one of six key divisions: climate change, natural heritages, sustainable development, monitoring and inspection, legal and policy, and international relations. Other key institutions also shared responsibility in addressing climate change and hazards risks, such as the Afghanistan Meteorological Department (AMD); Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA); Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL); Ministry of Energy and Water (MEW); and Ministry of Rural Development and Reconstruction (MRRD).

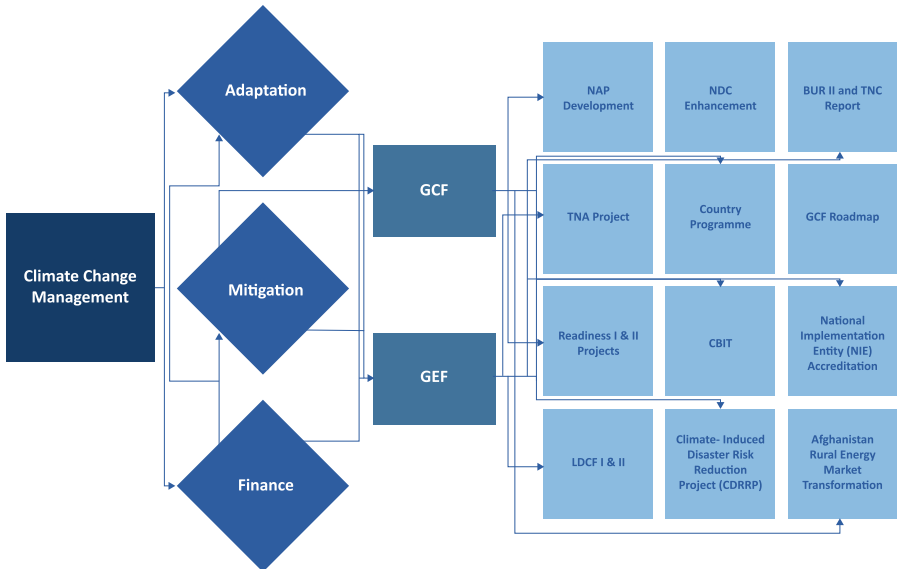
Moreover, an inter-ministerial coordination body, the National Climate Change Committee (NCCC), governed and lead the coordination mechanism for mainstreaming climate change in Afghanistan. NCCC was responsible for the provision of policy guidance and advice and for building the country's institutional, scientific, technical, informational, and human capacity for the sustainable implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This was NEPA-led and comprised representatives from relevant government and academic institutions.

Climate Action until August 2021

Prior to the Taliban takeover, the climate change agenda was moving forward in a positive direction, albeit slowly, focusing on the above three main areas: mitigation, adaptation, and climate finance. NEPA and partners were working on several climate change projects funded by the government itself with bilateral donors, such as the Department for International Development (DFID), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), and others; and multilateral funding agencies, e.g., Green Climate Fund (GCF), Global Environment Facility (GEF), Adaptation Fund (AF) through implementing partners, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (UN-FAO). Figure 2 shows a snapshot of the projects/tasks that were in place:

Figure 2

Climate Change Projects in Afghanistan before August 2021



Climate Finance

Regarding climate finance, Afghanistan was implementing around US\$ 40 million in projects from GEF, GCF, and AF. At the same time, other projects were in the pipeline. In addition, the government was investing a considerable amount into climate adaptation projects. Based on an assessment, between 2013-15, the Afghan government was spending around US\$ 100 million annually on projects related to climate change.

Nonetheless, it is essential to note that Afghanistan, prior to the Taliban, was also struggling to secure the required financial support for its climate agenda. Based on the NDC, Afghanistan needed US\$ 6.62 billion for mitigation (2020-30) and US\$ 10.78 billion for adaptation (NDC, 2015). However, a minuscule amount was secured by NEPA from the multilateral funding agencies leading the global climate finance agenda. The problem here was twofold: first, Afghanistan did not have the required technical capacity and expertise to secure more funding, due to poor technical expertise in the field, lack of human resources, lack of data availability, and poor coordination between government entities, such as NEPA and the executing ministries. Second, the global climate finance institutions were lagging way behind their promises. For example, the Green Climate Fund (GCF) was supposed to disburse US\$ 100 billion annually by 2020 (GCF, 2023a); however, it was only able to secure and disburse US\$ 10 billion since its establishment in 2011 (GCF, 2023a). Furthermore, the whole GEF-7 cycle was US\$ 4.1 billion for 2018-22; and the GEF-8 cycle has US\$ 5.33 billion for the 2022-26 period for the entire world's environmental issues on biodiversity loss, climate change, pollution, and strains on land and ocean health (GEF, 2023a).

From the GCF, Afghanistan, like many other developing nations, was barely able to secure one project, "Afghanistan Rural Energy Market Transformation Initiative – Strengthening Resilience of Livelihoods Through Sustainable Energy Access," with a budget of US\$ 17.2 million grant and US\$ 4.2 million in co-finance (GCF, 2023b). Apart from this, other projects from the GCF, which started in 2019, were from Readiness funds, budgeting around US\$ 3 million. While GCF is a competitive process, all countries apply for the same fund, and GEF has an allocated budget for each recipient country. Afghanistan's last GEF cycle funds were US\$ 8.92 million; in total, since 2006, the country has received to-date US\$ 31.5 million. For the GEF-8 cycle (2022-26), Afghanistan has US\$ 10.95 million, divided between US\$ 2 million for climate change, US\$ 4 million for biodiversity, and US\$ 4.9 million for land degradation (GEF, 2023b).

As shown by these numbers, climate finance is a huge stumbling block in the way of managing climate change globally, as well as for Afghanistan. The amount, in reality, needed on the ground for mitigation and adaptation processes are many times higher than the resources available by global climate finance institutions.

Having said this, the situation in Afghanistan is worse than ever for managing climate change. The relationship between the Taliban and Afghanistan's former international supporters is damaged. Firstly, all the projects (ongoing and in the pipeline) have been stopped/halted by the international community, including GEF, GCF, AF, and the bilateral donors. Secondly, UNFCCC has discontinued working with Afghanistan and did not allow the Afghan delegation into the main event at the Conference of Parties (COP). The Afghan delegation was not part of COP 26 in 2021 in Glasgow, United Kingdom, or COP 27 in 2022 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt — COP is known as the supreme decision-making body of the Convention. Managing climate change was highly challenging even before the Taliban takeover; however, the current restrictions from the international community make matters worse.

What Is Next?

Climate change is a profoundly vital issue for Afghanistan that should not be dealt with solely on political settlements. It immediately impacts the lives of Afghans who have been suffering for decades and should no longer be left in anguish. Climate change can act as a catalyst for increasing conflicts in the country if not dealt with.

At the outset, here are a few positive indications that could allow taking initial steps toward climate change management in Afghanistan. First, there are no religious, cultural, or political differences between the Taliban and the international community on climate actions—both sides accept the urgent need to combat climate change. Second, the institutional body responsible for leading the climate agenda in Afghanistan, i.e., the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA), is in its proper place, and so there is no institutional gap. While there is an understanding that working with the de facto authority institutions is not an option for now, this body's existence helps preserve institutional memory and data availability. Third, the United Nations offices (UNDP, UN-FAO, WFP, etc.) and international NGOs are in the country and active.

Efforts to manage climate change can be divided into two phases: Phase one (emergency approach): targeting short-term goals like improving immediate coping capacities at the community level via interventions, such as water security via improved irrigation systems, disaster management (including flood management), and natural resources management. Phase one will primarily focus on Afghanistan's adaptation priorities, i.e., food and agriculture, water resources, forest and rangelands, and disaster risk reduction. Phase two will mostly work on long-term goals, such as institutional development, re-sorting the administrative frameworks, capacity building, and development/updating climate change policy and strategy for 2030 and beyond.

Establishing the Afghanistan Climate Emergency Working Group

Combating climate change under the de facto authorities should be a joined-up effort of all partners, including UNFCCC, climate finance institutions (GEF, GCF, and AF), bilateral donors that already perform humanitarian assistance (e.g., World Bank, ADB, DFID, etc.); partners physically present in Afghanistan, such as the United Nations offices, particularly UNDP who has abundant experience in climate change projects; national and international NGOs; and local communities, i.e., Community Development Councils (CDCs). To address climate emergency, all key partners are necessary and invited to contribute. At this stage, the paper suggests a few key institutions, particularly those operating in Afghanistan, forming/creating the Afghanistan Climate Emergency Working Group — with support from the World Bank, UNDP, or UN-FAO to lead the group.

Financial Setup: Establishing the Afghanistan Climate Emergency Fund

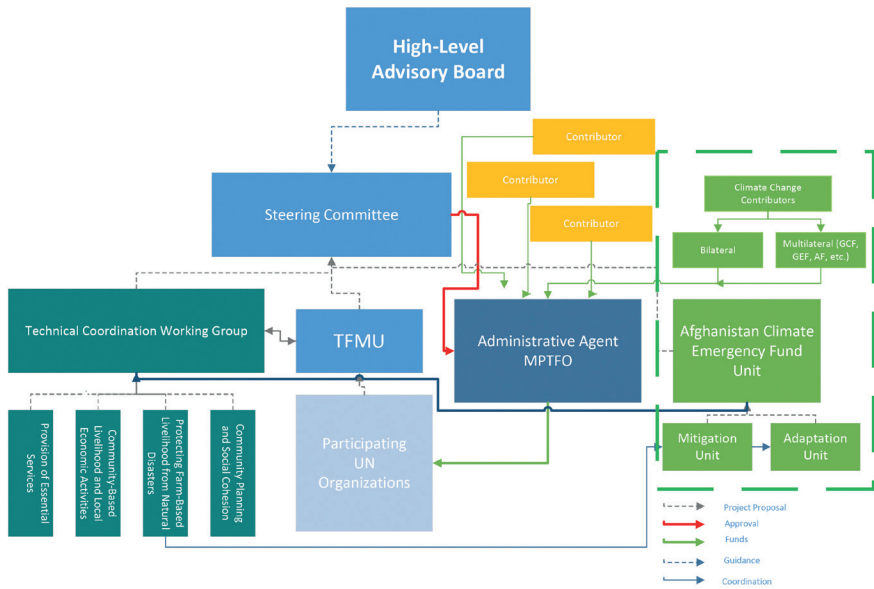
As discussed, one of the main hurdles of the previous government in managing climate change were financial constraints and limited spending ability on environmental issues. At the same time, over US\$ 100 million was spent annually on climate change through the government's development budget between 2013 and 2015 — though still inadequate compared to the total finance needs of US\$ 662 million per year from 2020 (NDC). The above spending needs to be more strategic and implemented via climate change-focused program(s) led by a dedicated fund for climate change.

A sound financial setup is of utmost importance in managing climate change. It is difficult to motivate expenditure on environmental sustainability and climate change within a context where humanitarian and security priorities take precedence over environmental ones. Thus, establishing the Afghanistan Climate Emergency Fund (ACEF) is one way to give proper attention to climate change projects. Establishing the Fund will centralize and ring-fence the finance within a dedicated setup, allowing for coherent investment and improving the confidence of bilateral and multilateral donors. Furthermore, it will avoid fragmentation and promote collective planning, coordination, and prioritization in managing climate change.

Because of the political limitations with the de facto authorities, the faster path could be establishing the ACEF as a separate wing under the UN's Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA). Established in 2021, STFA is an inter-agency structure and UN-Multi-Partner trust fund that assists UN joint programming in providing basic human needs in Afghanistan. In its mandate, STFA has already been investing in climate change under the Area-Based Approach for Development Emergency Initiatives (ABADEI) project pillar, protecting farm-based livelihood from natural disaster (UN-HABITAT, 2021); however, as stated earlier, in order to give the proper focus and attention to the climate crisis in Afghanistan, a separate financial setup, exclusively working on climate change, is necessary. It is worth noting that the previous government also approved the creation of a national environmental and climate change fund — NEPA was the leading agency working on establishing the fund. Back then, the idea also gave the right platform for financing the climate change agenda through grants (i.e., bi- and multilateral donors, such as the GCF, GEF, AF, WB, ADB, EU, and others) and private investments. The ACEF will work under the same setup, i.e., advisory board, steering committee, and administrative agent; adding the World Bank to the advisory board and the steering committee will make the fund more inclusive. Having a separate wing will, first, give the proper focus and attention, resulting in attracting climate funds from bilateral as well as multilateral donors (currently suspended); secondly, climate change projects will have one place for planning, coordination, and implementation (avoiding any fragmentation).

Figure 3 shows the current governance structure of the STFA; this paper suggests adding a climate change wing to the main body, as shown in the green box.

Figure 3
Establishing Afghanistan Climate Emergency Fund (ACEF) under the STFA



Recommendations

In summary, based on the above discussion and looking at the current situation, here are a few recommendations for managing climate change under the de facto authorities:

- ▶ Create the Afghanistan Climate Emergency Working Group, comprising key partners, such as the UNDP, UN-FAO, World Bank, and others currently operating in Afghanistan.
 - ▶ Establish the Afghanistan Climate Emergency Fund (ACEF) under the UN Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA). This will centralize and ring-fence the finance within a dedicated setup, give proper focus and attention to the climate change emergency in the country, and hopefully result in attracting climate funds from bilateral and multilateral donors.
 - ▶ Reconnect with the UNFCCC and climate finance institutions, e.g., GEF, GCF, and AF, to release Afghanistan's halted projects/funds and process the projects in the pipeline. This is possible via a joint UN and World Bank effort, especially once the ACEF is established.
 - ▶ While working with the UNFCCC and climate finance institutions, the Afghanistan Climate Emergency Working Group can focus on an emergency approach, closely engaging with the communities via ABADEI's third pillar (protecting farm-based livelihood from natural disaster), targeting short-term goals, such as improving immediate community-level coping capacities through interventions like improved irrigation systems for water security, disaster risk-reduction, and natural resources management.
 - ▶ After a year or so, as part of the second phase, once a legitimate government is in place, ACEF and the Climate Emergency Working Group can handover to NEPA and the Ministry of Finance (MoF).
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PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform is a research consortium based at Edinburgh Law School. Our research is rethinking peace and transition processes in the light of changing conflict dynamics, changing demands of inclusion, and changes in patterns of global intervention in conflict and peace/mediation/transition management processes.

Consortium members include: Conciliation Resources, Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations (CTPSR) at Coventry University, Dialectiq, Edinburgh Law School, International IDEA, LSE Conflict and Civiness Research Group, LSE Middle East Centre, Queens University Belfast, University of St Andrews, University of Stirling, and the World Peace Foundation at Tufts University.

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