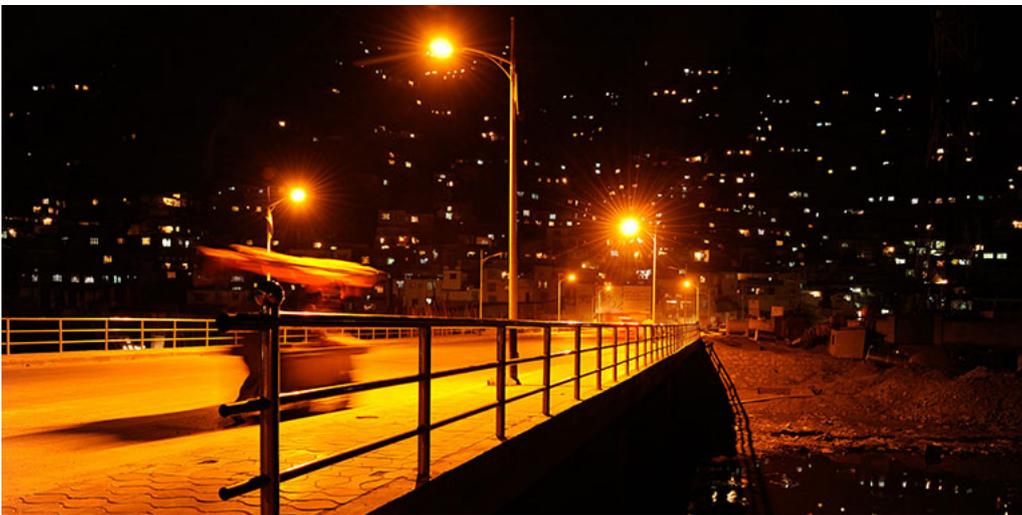


INSIGHT

# The Power of Persistence in Guiding a National Development Strategy



Rebuilding Afghanistan's energy infrastructure has been critical to its development progress. ADB photo. *The lessons learned by the Asian Development Bank, which was one of the last organizations to leave Afghanistan in 1980 and one of the first to return in 2002.*

## Introduction

After years of war, Afghanistan was devastated by the early 2000s. Much of the country's already limited infrastructure had been destroyed and its transport system was hit hard. An estimated 80% of the country's roads were in disrepair.

Responding to the need to repair the country's most important road was a top priority.

Since 2002, ADB has provided \$2.2 billion in assistance for 17 key road projects to construct or upgrade over 1,700 kilometers of regional and national roads across Afghanistan.

Fixing the roads was critical to rebuilding the country and the most important was Highway 1, also called the Afghanistan Ring Road, which linked the capital of Kabul to other major cities.

The ring road had to be repaired to bring together disparate communities, allow the country's poor to reach government services, and strengthen the credibility of the new administration as it undertook the challenging task of rebuilding the nation.

As part of the Emergency Infrastructure Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Project, ADB helped rebuild 392 kilometers of the ring road and part of a road to Uzbekistan that would allow reconstruction supplies to reach Afghanistan. A major power line and an extensive irrigation system were also built under the project, which improved the lives of about 9 million people.

"In the past, our children could not reach school on time, and it was very difficult to transfer patients who were in critical condition to hospitals in Kabul City. Now, our dreams to have easy access to school and health services have become real, and many of our major problems will be solved," says Haji Zeyaratgul, 38, a member of the Khaki Jabbar district council in Kabul and one of the thousands of beneficiaries of ADB-financed projects in Afghanistan.

## Analysis

Nestled in the mountainous Hindu Kush region, Afghanistan has a proud history of commerce and culture, with flashes of vibrant modernization in its major cities. The country has faced severe civil unrest and poverty in recent decades, but since 2001 life has been gradually improving for many people in Afghanistan. The government and the international community are working together to build a well-governed democratic state with modern infrastructure, sound basic services, and efficient institutions. ADB has been a partner in this effort since 1966, though operations in the country were suspended from 1980 to 2002. Once back in the country, ADB helped prepare a needs assessment, and assisted in agriculture, education, infrastructure, and environment sectors.

While many challenges persist, Afghanistan has made important strides in economic and social development. Life expectancy has risen, from 35 years in 1967 to 60 years in 2014. In 1967–2015, per capita income in the country went from \$161 to \$590, and under-5 mortality was cut by more than two-thirds, from 323 to 91 deaths per 1,000 births.

## Insights

Almost 85% of the Afghan population live in rural areas and are largely dependent on agriculture. The agriculture and natural resources sector is a key area in which ADB contributes markedly to economic growth, job creation, and poverty reduction.

As of March 2017, total investments had reached \$578 million for irrigation and agricultural infrastructure and to strengthen the institutional environment. These investments have resulted in improved rural livelihoods, economic growth, and better water resources management.

About 160,000 hectares of irrigated land have been rehabilitated and upgraded, with work continuing on an additional 260,000 hectares. Muhammad Amin, a 56-year-old farmer in Balkh province, was among those who benefited: "The canals and intake were damaged by heavy flash floods, and every year

hundreds of hectares of crops were washed away by floods in this village,” he says. “Now, the newly rehabilitated canals and intakes have helped the farmers to control the flow of water and have significantly increased the productivity of farmlands.”

Another system that lay devastated in the early 2000s was the country’s electricity supply. Kabul received power for only 4 hours a day while other cities were even worse off. Providing reliable and affordable energy was vital to drive economic growth and improve lives in Afghanistan.

ADB has been Afghanistan’s largest and longest-standing development partner in the energy sector providing grant assistance totalling nearly \$1.2 billion. This has supported the development of power imports for urgently needed electricity, provided distribution systems, developed domestic generation, and built capacity and promoted institutional reforms.

More than 5 million people have benefited from the construction of 1,460 kilometers of power transmission lines, 16 substations, and 143,000 new power distribution connections. The program supports the government’s targets of increasing the country’s electrification rate from 30% to 83% and lifting the share of domestic power generation from 20% to 67% by 2030.

The Power Transmission and Distribution Project, approved in 2005, provided grant and loan financing of \$47.2 million to improve the grid power supply and the electrification rate in the northern, eastern, and southern regions, where nearly 75% of Afghanistan’s population lives.

The project successfully extended affordable power to rural Afghanistan through the grid, where the poverty rate is close to 65%. The ready supply of electricity lowered the cost of doing business, reduced poverty, and opened up new opportunities.

## Resources

Asian Development Bank (ADB). 2017. Together We Deliver

Asian Development Bank (ADB). 2017. Afghanistan: Country Operations Business Plan (2018–2020)

Asian Development Bank (ADB). 2016. Afghanistan: Country Partnership Strategy (2017-2021)

## Related Links

Development Asia Case Study: How to Build a Railway in Afghanistan in 10 Months



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