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**INTEGRATING HOUSING, LAND AND PROPERTY (HLP) AND FOOD SECURITY AND AGRICULTURE CLUSTER (FSAC) PROGRAMMING AT THE HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT-PEACE NEXUS: URBAN AGRICULTURE FOR SUSTAINABLE IDP AND RETURNEE SETTLEMENTS IN AFGHANISTAN**

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## KEY MESSAGES

- The Housing, Land and Property Task Force (HLP) and Food Security and Agriculture Cluster (FSAC) coordinate humanitarian action on land rights and food security, respectively, in Afghanistan. This brief makes the case for integrating HLP and FSAC programming to increase investment in urban agriculture in IDP and returnee settlements.
- Investments in urban agriculture strengthen HLP rights and can be integrated with legal recognition of ownership. In turn, strengthened HLP rights support investments in urban agriculture, enhancing livelihoods and increasing food security.
- The SHURA programme provides secure land to displaced populations in new urban townships; promoting urban agriculture in these sites supports the reintegration of millions of displaced people into formal socioeconomic systems, and ensures that settlements are sustainable.
- This brief provides strong evidence that HLP and FSAC programming should be integrated to achieve positive, sustainable outcomes for vulnerable Afghans at the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus.

# 1. Making land allocation schemes work for displaced populations<sup>1</sup>

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The large and growing number of Afghan IDPs and returnees presents a key policy and programmatic challenge for the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GoIRA), development partners and humanitarian agencies. According to the IOM, around 4 million people have returned to Afghanistan, mainly from Iran and Pakistan since 2012, while there are currently 4.2 million IDPs across the country (IOM, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the rate of returns, particularly from Iran, from where nearly 225,000 Afghans returned in the first quarter of 2020 (OCHA, 2020). In addition, a likely peace deal between the Government and the Taliban may further increase the volume of returns to Afghanistan. The reintegration of these communities provides an opportunity for long-term socioeconomic development, and for a lasting peace, as marginalised groups are integrated into formal social, economic and governance systems. Consequently, reintegration efforts are widely considered a key component of a lasting peace in Afghanistan, as represented in a range of GoIRA policy documents and national strategies.

Providing secure Housing, Land and Property (HLP) rights to IDPs and returnees underpins an inclusive future for Afghanistan. Consequently, HLP rights is the focus of GoIRA's flagship returnee reintegration mechanism, the Presidential Decree 305 (PD 305). The PD 305 was promulgated in August 2018 and is intended to provide the long-term framework for the reintegration of returnees and protracted IDPs into Afghanistan's society and economy. The PD 305 provides returnees the legal right to apply for land allocations and housing support from the state to provide a durable solution to tenure insecurity and poor living conditions suffered by millions of displaced Afghans. Land allocations are made in new settlements (or 'townships'), located on vacant urban land that meet the PD 305 criteria for sustainable settlements. Beneficiaries are selected following a vulnerability assessment, and receive land ownership titles and housing support to foment socioeconomic development. The SHURA programme, implemented by GoIRA with technical support from UN-Habitat, is operationalizing the PD 305

in two pilot sites in Kabul and Herat, with a view to up-scaling nationally.

Secure land rights are the foundation of social and economic equity, but as a standalone intervention may not result in sustainable development. Global best-practice suggest that HLP responses that integrate legal recognition of land and housing rights with investments in land, housing, services and infrastructure are most effective in securing the rights of vulnerable groups over the long term (Gilbert, 2012). A particularly important aspect of integrated HLP programming is livelihood support. In this regard, country-wide studies of Afghanistan show limited economic activity in peripheral urban settlement sites, and a prevalence of urban-based informal work (ILO, 2013). Such livelihood profiles are a cause of vulnerability, and have effects in relation to health, food security and intergenerational poverty. Vulnerable groups, including women, youth and the disabled, suffer particular hardship, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (UN-Habitat, 2020).

Failure to address livelihoods often results in the failure of resettlement schemes as residents abandon settlement sites and relocate to central areas where livelihood opportunities are located (OHCHR, 2012). This sub-optimal outcome has manifest in past resettlement schemes in Afghanistan, including the cases of Barikab and Mamozai townships (including around 2,500 households) on Kabul's outskirts. Hence, there is a demonstrable need for livelihood support to secure sustainable settlement sites for Afghan IDPs and returnees.

## 2. Integrating HLP and FSAC through urban agriculture for sustainable settlements

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Investing in urban agriculture provides an opportunity to integrate HLP with FSAC priorities for mutually beneficial outcomes in SHURA Townships and other settings. Integrated HLP/FSAC programming provides legal recognition of land rights and makes land-based investments to improve agricultural output. These two programmatic facets mutually reinforce residents' HLP rights and drive increases in agricultural productivity to enhance residents' livelihoods. Investing in urban agriculture increases the legitimacy of HLP rights in the view of authorities and host communities, leading to increased security of tenure of vulnerable groups. In addition, legally secured HLP rights mean people invest more of their time and capital into farming because they do not fear appropriation of their assets. Resultantly, many studies across the globe have linked strengthened HLP rights with increased agricultural productivity and enhanced livelihoods (Lawry et al., 2017).

Urban agriculture is particularly important for sustainable townships as a livelihoods intervention that builds on the skills of Afghan IDPs and returnees. Agriculture is the dominant economic sector in Afghanistan, and also represents the skills and experience of the majority of the Afghan population (Bolton, 2019). Many Afghans living in protracted urban displacement are rural dwellers, forced from their agricultural land by insecurity. Often, they must adapt to fragile employment situations as unskilled laborers after their former agricultural livelihoods become out of reach. In this environment youth may get pulled into criminal activities, join armed groups or be forced to migrate in search of employment opportunities. In response, promoting agricultural livelihoods builds on the skills and traditions of displaced groups, links to wider agricultural markets both locally and nationally, and results in positive social outcomes. In this way, supporting urban agriculture is the foundation of sustainable livelihoods, sustainable settlements and sustainable reintegration programming.

Promoting urban agriculture also addresses the issue of food insecurity, which blights millions of Afghan lives. The latest IPC analysis identifies 32% of the Afghan population as facing acute food insecurity (Afghanistan IPC, Apr 2020).

Food consumption and dietary diversity scores are low amongst urban Afghan populations: over 75% of displaced people ranking food as their most important need and their highest household expenditure (Afghanistan SFSA 2019). Food insecurity is particularly prevalent within displaced urban/peri-urban populations who have seen their purchasing power decrease dramatically during COVID-19 as casual/day wage livelihood opportunities disappear. There are also strong gendered aspects to food insecurity. Food consumption and dietary diversity reduces during crisis and this burden falls heavily upon women who often adopt negative coping mechanisms such as skipping meals.

In response, solutions are needed that incorporate livelihood enhancements and that increase the access of the most vulnerable to dietary diversity and protein intake. Such interventions can take a range of context-dependent forms. In SHURA townships and other areas where irrigation solutions are readily available there is a potential for larger community-based initiatives, such as communal plots or greenhouses. In more tenure insecure areas, simple low-resource demand solutions, including backyard gardening of climate smart fast-growth crops and poultry packages, may be more appropriate. In all cases, investments should be accompanied by market linkages to ensure continued viability and ownership after the project lifecycle ends. It is also crucial that urban agriculture interventions provide rapid outputs and replicable practices, such as seed producing crops, which can be easily transported and replanted as required.

Urban agriculture solutions should be dynamic to represent the spectrum of HLP contexts where displaced groups live. In this regard, they should limit any potential conflict with host communities, particularly in the use of limited arable land or shared water resources. In areas with weaker HLP rights, urban agriculture should be carefully approached as disruptions to the planting cycle due to evictions or interrupted access to irrigation can cause irreversible losses. In such cases, interventions should be easily portable and low-resource intensive, such as simple kitchen garden plots and small-scale poultry packages.

### 3. Case study of Eltefat Township in Kabul

Eltefat Township is on the outskirts of Kabul and is one of the pilot sites where the SHURA programme is currently implementing the PD 305. Eltefat provides a case study of how urban agriculture could be integrated into site planning for sustainable settlements. The site is located in the Northwest periphery of Kabul municipality, in an area dominated by agriculture, and specializing in fruit production. The township also has good access to the Kabul market, being located near the main Kabul-Parwan road and other transport arteries (Fig 1). The journey to central Kabul is approximately 15 km, although urban markets in the Northern areas of the city

are more easily accessible. As of October 2021, land use planning has been completed for the Eltefat site and basic infrastructure works (such as drainage, water services, road construction) is ongoing. In 2021, an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 IDPs and returnees that meet the eligibility requirements of the PD 305 will be settled at the site. This case study will recommend that development partners support a multi-scale approach to urban agriculture in Etefat through integrating HLP and FSAC programming modalities at the neighbourhood and household scales, and through incorporating public space in agricultural activities.

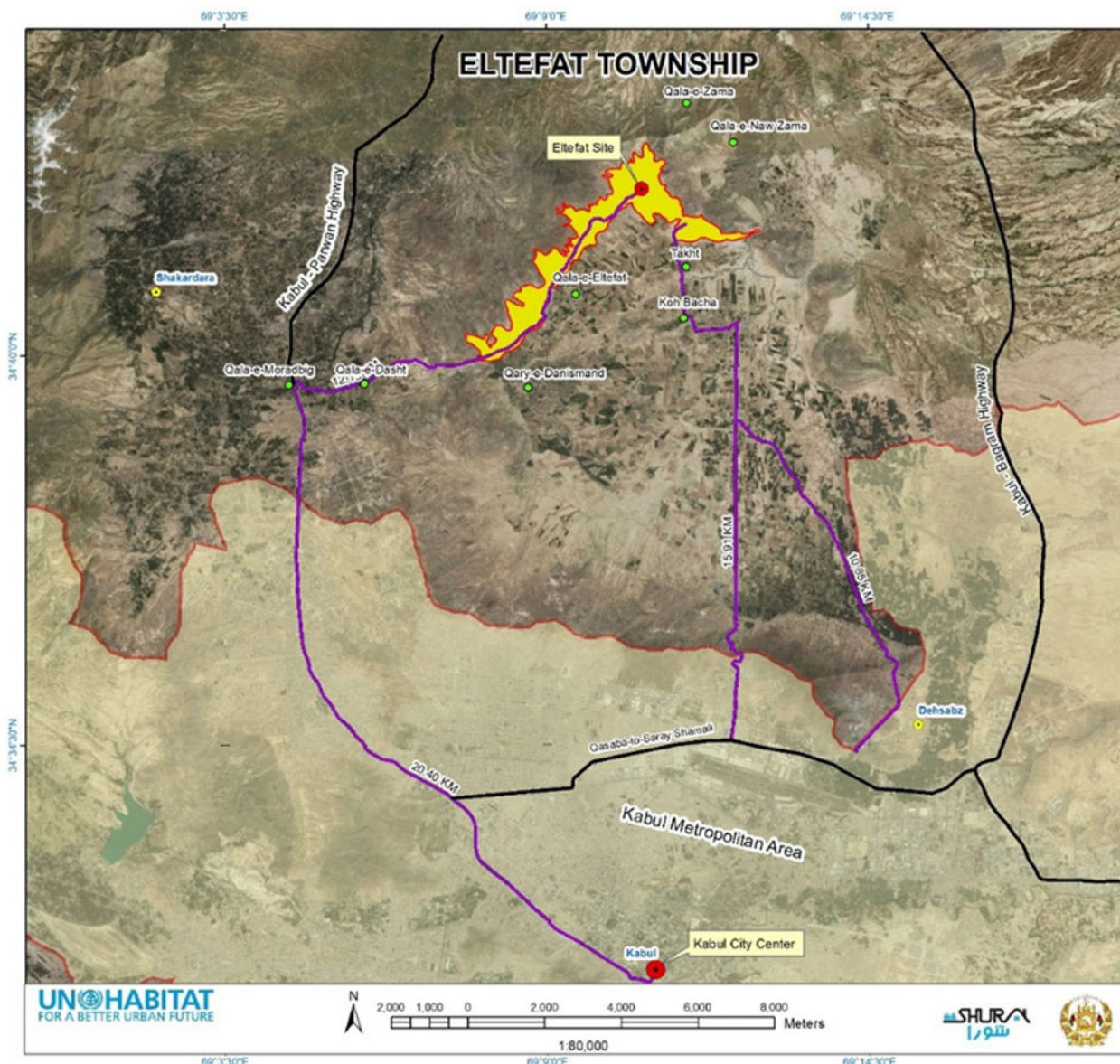


Fig 1: Location of Eltefat Township in relation to Kabul Municipality

## Neighbourhood scale:

Community gardens provide a neighborhood scale modality to implement urban agriculture. A community garden can be located in a central space within a neighborhood, protected from busier main streets, and woven into the settlement fabric (Fig 2). These spaces are ideal for small scale communal production and have

the potential for yielding sizeable output that provides food security for residents and can be integrated into local and national value chains to support productive livelihoods. In addition, communal gardens foster community participation, build social cohesion and support healthy lifestyles through promoting physical activity.

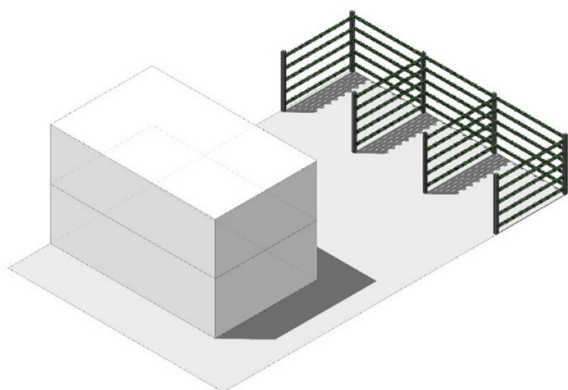


Fig 2: Urban farming in community gardens

HLP underpins equitable agricultural investments in communal gardens and provides incentives for community workers to farm the land. As such, HLP and urban agriculture considerations should be included at the early stages of urban planning and design processes. The property rights associated with communal garden plots are defined by laws relating to Community Land in the 2017 Land Management Law. The Land Management Law provides key legal protections to Community Land to promote equitable access to common resources and ensure that the land is not grabbed for individual gain. In this regard, there are restrictions on the buying, selling and leasing of communal land – and punishments for appropriation of communal land. Hence, a system of communal land use rights could be extended to community gardens, with governance by use rights decided by community-based organizations such as Community Development Councils (CDCs). Development partners could support communities to implement appropriate agricultural activities, linked to local value chains. Space saving approaches, such as multi-story gardens, should be incorporated into communal garden designs to maximize output.

### Household scale:

Each SHURA beneficiary family is allocated a residential plot in Eltefat Township of 250 m<sup>2</sup>. Once the beneficiary is allocated the plot, they are provided with a construction permit to provide them HLP rights to legally construct their home. Once the home is constructed, residents are eligible for a land title deed. A land title deed is the strongest proof of private land ownership under current Afghan law and provides strong investment incentives because land cannot be legally appropriated. Such strong HLP rights



**Fig 3:** Residential plot incorporating backyard gardens and hydroponic farming in boundary fence &

provide favorable conditions for sustainable investments in backyard farming.

Residential plots in Eltefat are endowed with enough outdoor space to support backyard farming. It is envisaged that following construction around 50 – 80 m<sup>2</sup> of green space will remain; some or all this space can be used for gardening (Fig 3). To integrate farming into private plots, it is important that core housing units are situated towards front of the plot. This way, as the house grows incrementally, there will still be backyard space (incorporated as setbacks in guidelines) that can be used for agricultural purposes, such as “kitchen gardens” incorporating home drip irrigation systems to avoid waste of potable water. These gardens could make use of low cost and low impact options, such as sack agriculture to provide subsistence level solutions for families requiring dietary diversity (Fig 4). Other simple solutions such as basic backyard potato pits or insulated rooms for fruit conservation could also provide additional improvements in household dietary diversity and nutritional intake. These activities should be supported with improved zero-energy storage solutions that reduce subsistence level crop production and provide options for resale/ bartering of excess products.

Agriculture could also be incorporated into the plot boundary walls. Currently, plots are to be secured by building a solid wall, which can contribute to an unsafe urban environment due to the lack of “eyes on the street” principle of urban planning. Instead, plot boundaries could be demarcated with hydroponic farming systems; these systems would provide partial visibility, increasing residents’ safety, and provide additional vertical surface area.



**Fig 4:** Example of Vertical Sack Farming

## Street scale:

As well as utilizing communal and private space, urban agriculture could also be integrated into public spaces, such as sidewalks. Currently most sidewalks in Afghan cities incorporate tall coniferous trees that primarily act as wind breakers. These trees can be partially replaced by urban orchards of fruits and nuts (Fig 5). Shrubs

planted between streets and footpaths can purify air by removing auto exhaust and other harmful elements. They also improve the image of a neighbourhood through increasing green space and providing shade to promote non-motorised mobility. Care of these community resources would need to be managed through CDCs or recognized community level groups.

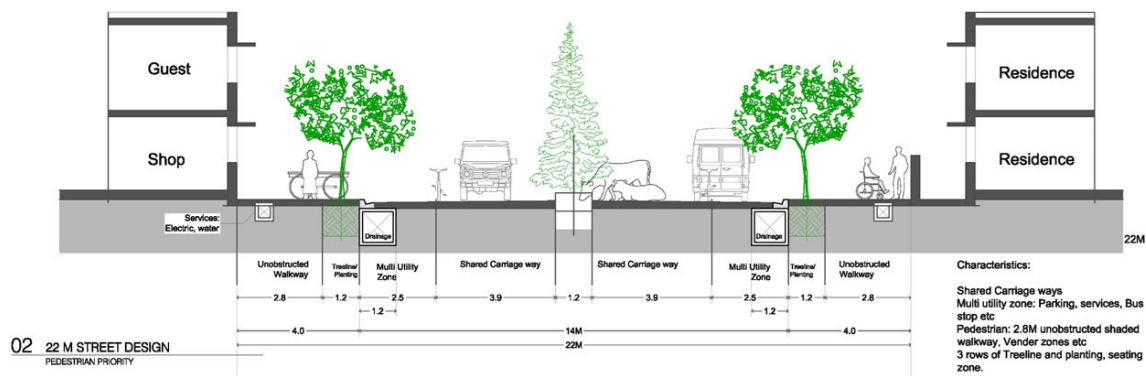


Fig 5: Urban agriculture incorporated in sidewalk design

## Policy recommendations

1. Implement pilot urban agriculture projects in PD 305 SHURA townships in Kabul and Herat. Multi-scale urban agriculture activities can incorporate innovative HLP regimes to provide secure property rights, access to livelihoods and incentives for investment, working at the household (backyard gardens) and community (communal gardens and street shrubbery) levels.
2. Design and implementation of national plan to action dynamic urban agriculture investments in IDP sites and informal settlements through integrated HLP/ FSAC programming. Programmes should provide tailored agricultural solutions that respond to the spectrum of HLP conditions in Afghanistan – from high tenure security/ low eviction threat to low tenure security/ high eviction threat – and be implemented in partnership with government entities to legitimize the property rights of marginalized groups. The aim of these programmes is: to strengthen HLP rights through the provision of legal documentation and investment in land-based agriculture; improve agricultural productivity to strengthen livelihoods and food security; promote sustainable settlements for development and peace.
3. Ensure gender equity by ensuring any HLP/ FSAC investments are made on land where women and men enjoy equal property rights; crucially, ensure that women's name on HLP documents are a prerequisite to land-based investments in urban agriculture
4. Provide dedicated market space and value chain linkages for women headed and people with disabilities households to facilitate their ability for limited production and sale of seasonal products, and to improve their future ability to access microcredit and diversify their income streams.



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