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## Farewell to the Guns

— DIAG Efforts in Afghanistan —



“Dead or alive?” After going through daily fights with guns amid unending fear, people are now taking on a new challenge. That is the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) program, which is currently underway in Afghanistan, aimed at nation-building through which people can enjoy peaceful and contented life with their family toward the future.

DIAG is a program of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), aimed at disbanding illegal armed groups which are strongly rooted in local areas, following DDR (disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration) which was completed in June 2006 covering some 60,000 former soldiers of the Afghan national army. Japan is a leading country of DIAG, as it was for DDR, playing an important role in efforts toward the peace and stability of Afghanistan.

Once armed groups are disbanded in accordance with the program of DIAG, the areas where such groups are located may receive assistance of development program. Although the political situation of Afghanistan is still unstable, this program is delivering outcomes in various places around the country.

For example, Bagram, a city located in the north of capital Kabul, was notorious until a few years ago for having numerous illegal armed groups in it, but this area has been taking a new step with the assistance of DIAG.

By the DIAG development program, the construction of 74 wells in the area was planned, 39 of which have already been completed improving the life of the local people significantly. Nargis Marzi, a resident, said with a big smile, “Earlier, we the women had to go to the river to acquire

water for drinking and other household needs, which was a heavy labor. Now, thanks to the construction of wells, the quality and supply of water for my family have greatly improved. I am truly grateful to DIAG.”

Since the security situation in the region has been stabilized, associations of women have been established. An association established by 55-year-old Gulshirin is collecting a small amount of money from its members every week and providing support for life of poor women.

With twinkling eyes, Gulshirin said, “With the funds from the association, many micro finance projects have been launched such as for bakeries and tailoring. Previously all of the men brandished guns at us, and they tried to use guns to settle everything, including small issues. Women could not do anything at that time. But now, we can take our actions without any fear of guns.” Such projects were realized because of the peace and security. Dreams and hopes of people could not be realized amid the war, but they are now steadily growing.

Mohmand Dara is another area which has been dramatically changing by the DIAG program. The Emal Baba Higher Secondary School located in the center of town will soon complete the construction of a new building. This school used to have only 10 classrooms, and most of its 2,000 students were taking classes under the scorching sun without desks and chairs. Such terrible conditions are changing. Now, female students are also able to study at school, and they say that they can go to school without any fear of encountering armed groups.

Japan will continue to support the DIAG program which will run until 2010.



A well constructed in a DIAG development project. (Photo: UNDP)



Emal Baba Higher Secondary School under construction. (Photo: UNDP)