

ARTF AT WORK

RESULTS STORIES SERIES



Increasing Health Achievements and Strengthening the Health Sector in Afghanistan

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The System Enhancement for Health Action in Transition (SEHAT) program is the second and scaled-up phase of the ARTF and IDA-financed Strengthening Health Activities for Rural Poor (SHARP), and aims at expanding the scope, quality and coverage of health services provided to the Afghan population, particularly to the poor, in the project areas, and to enhance the stewardship functions of the Afghanistan's Ministry of Public Health.

The project supports the implementation of the Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) and the Essential Package of Hospital Services (EPHS), through contracting arrangements both in rural and urban areas covering a total of 22 provinces, expanding from 11 provinces under SHARP to 22 provinces under SEHAT.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Over the past decade:

- Health facilities has increased from 496 in 2002 to more than 2,000 in 2012.
- Prenatal care coverage is now 39%, up from 6% in 2003, and institutional deliveries are now at 43%, up from 7% in 2004.
- The maternal mortality rate dropped from 1,600 per 100,000 births in 2000 to 327 in 2010.
- Under-5 mortality has dropped from 257 per 1,000 live births in 2002 to 97 per 1,000 in 2012.
- Full immunization coverage in rural areas tripled from 11% in 2003 to 30% in 2010/11.

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CHALLENGES

Over the last ten years and coordinated by the Afghanistan's Ministry of Public Health (MOPH), the European Union (EU), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank have been supporting health service delivery in Afghanistan, each targeting a specific set of provinces.

Data from household surveys (between 2003 and 2011) show a significant improvement health indicators such as the coverage of reproductive and child health services as well as a drop in maternal, infant and under-5 mortality. However, these rates in Afghanistan are still well above the average for low income countries, indicating a need to further decrease to barriers for women and children in accessing services.

During the ongoing transition in Afghanistan when foreign security support will drastically diminish, the MOPH not only needs to maintain and increase the progress already achieved, but also needs to strengthen its regular structures and systems at central and provincial levels, so it can effectively perform its stewardship functions and ensure the long term sustainable growth of the sector.



APPROACH

The design of SEHAT builds on the experience of the SHARP project and other health projects financed by the World Bank and the EU in the Health Sector in Afghanistan. The lessons learned from the past ten years in terms of service delivery, contracting and monitoring have been incorporated in SEHAT to ensure continued and enhanced service delivery through three main components:

- 1. Sustaining and improving BPHS and EPHS services,**
- 2. Building the stewardship capacity of MOPH and system development, and**
- 3. Strengthening program management.**

Overall, SEHAT will expand the scope, quality and coverage of basic package of health services and the essential package of hospital services with proven cost effectiveness in the context of Afghanistan, which contribute to a healthier population and increased human capital. SEHAT will also lead to a stronger management structure for the health sector at various levels of the MOPH.

RESULTS

Afghanistan has made impressive progress in the health sector during the past decade:

- The number of functioning health facilities has increased from 496 in 2002 to more than 2,000 in 2012, and 85 percent of the population now live in districts where basic health services are provided.
- Prenatal care coverage is now 39%, up from 6% in 2003, and institutional deliveries are now at 43%, up from 7% in 2004.
- The maternal mortality rate dropped from 1,600 per 100,000 births in 2000 to 327 in 2010, and qualified delivery care in rural project areas increased six-fold—from 6% in 2003 to 31% in 2011. Nationwide, the improvement is from 14% in 2003 to 39% in 2010/11.
- Under-5 mortality has dropped from 257 per 1,000 live births in 2002 to 97 per 1,000 in 2012. Full immunization coverage in rural areas tripled from 11% in 2003 to 30% in 2010/11.

At the administrative level a clear separation of functions between service provision and its financing is one of the factors contributing to these results. This separation was made possible through contracting, of health services primary care services to NGOs by MOPH¹ such that the latter assumed full responsibility for service delivery and the government “purchases” health services from the NGOs and exercises its stewardship functions over the sector.

STORY FROM THE FIELD

KHOLM, Balkh Province – Pampered and propped on a blue silk embroidered pillow, baby Beheshta (meaning ‘Paradise’) looks ready to live up to her name. Her mother Laila, 32, looks on satisfied, knowing Beheshta has arrived safely in the world, thanks to the doctors, nurses and midwives at Kholm District Hospital in Afghanistan’s Balkh province.

“She is our great gift,” says Laila. “My blood pressure was very high, and I was afraid of giving birth at home,” she explains. “I had lost one baby before and a neighbor suggested this place. She said it’s free, with very good people.” Ultimately, doctors had to deliver Beheshta by Caesarean section. “Now we are very happy. This is a very good place,” Laila says.

The 54-bed hospital, located about 60 kilometers east of Mazar-i-Sharif, serves a district of approximately 120,000 people. Originally a basic clinic, the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) gradually upgraded the facility to a hospital since 2004 with support from the SHARP project and the SEHAT program.

Before the hospital was upgraded at Kholm to offer emergency care, obstetrics, pediatrics, gynecology and basic surgeries *“sometimes people were dying because they had to go 60 kilometers for help in Mazar,”* points out Himat Jalal, project supervisor for Balkh province. Now, people also have access to a range of other medical services such as: X-ray imaging and ultrasound scanning, as well as vaccines and medicines.



Child and maternal death rates have fallen dramatically in Kholm district where a rural hospital now provides basic and emergency health care to some 120,000 people.

¹ The NGOs are selected on competitive basis and the provision of services by NGOs is monitored through the regular MOPH on quarterly basis and through facility assessment carried out by an independent third party on annual basis.

WORLD BANK AND ARTF CONTRIBUTION

This nation-wide program, which is estimated for a total value of US\$407 million, is supported by the Government of Afghanistan with US\$30 million, World's Bank IDA Grant of US\$100, Norwegian Health Results Innovation Trust Fund (HRITF) of US\$7 million, and ARTF of US\$270 million.

PARTNERS

SEHAT cover financing for 22 provinces, which include Urban Kabul and the 11 provinces previously covered through the ARTF SHARP project, as well as the 10 provinces covered by the EU Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) and Essential Package of Hospital Services EPHS. The USAID will continue providing financing for the same service packages in the remaining 13 provinces.

The support has been well coordinated by the MOPH and the package of services provided is very similar in each of the provinces. Central functions are also supported by these three development partners in a complementary fashion.

MOVING FORWARD

Given the current transition in Afghanistan, a major realignment of foreign assistance to the country is expected over the coming years, to move towards a more coordinated programmatic support or a Sector-wide Approach (SWAP), so that financing for the sectoral priorities can be better planned through a well-coordinated effort by development partners.

In the coming years, SEHAT will continue focusing on implementing a systems-based approach to safeguard the enormous progress made in the health sector over the last decade; expanding the scope and quality of health services; and support the sustainable development of the health sector.

About this series:

ARTF at Work highlights development results and achievements emerging from the ARTF Program, as well as their impact on people's life. The series is produced by the ARTF administrator.

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