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United States Department of State
and the Broadcasting Board of Governors
Office of Inspector General

MIDDLE EAST REGIONAL OFFICE

The Bureau of Population, Refugees and
Migration's Reintegration Assistance
Program for Refugees Returning to
Afghanistan

Performance Evaluation

Report Number MERO-I-11-10, July 2011

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PREFACE

This report was prepared by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, and Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, as amended. It is one of a series of audit, inspection, investigative, and special reports prepared by OIG periodically as part of its responsibility to promote effective management, accountability and positive change in the Department of State and the Broadcasting Board of Governors.

This report is the result of an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the office, post, or function under review. It is based on interviews with employees and officials of relevant agencies and institutions, direct observation, and a review of applicable documents.

The recommendations therein have been developed on the basis of the best knowledge available to OIG and, as appropriate, have been discussed in draft with those responsible for implementation. It is my hope that these recommendations will result in more effective, efficient and/or economical operations.

I express my appreciation to all of those who contributed to the preparation of this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H. W. Geisel".

Harold W. Geisel
Deputy Inspector General

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

KEY FINDINGS.....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	5
Results	5
Recommendations.....	8
Management Comments and OIG Response.....	8
BACKGROUND	9
REINTEGRATION ASSISTANCE FOR RETURNING REFUGEES	11
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees’ Activities.....	11
Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration’s Grants Program	13
Afghan Government’s Land Allocation Scheme.....	15
PROGRAM MONITORING.....	17
ROLE OF PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAMS IN ASSISTING RETURNEES	19
ABBREVIATIONS	23
APPENDIX I – PURPOSE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY.....	25
APPENDIX II – COMMENTS FROM EMBASSY KABUL.....	27
APPENDIX III – COMMENTS FROM THE BUREAU OF POPULATION, REFUGEES AND MIGRATION	29

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KEY FINDINGS

- Through its implementing partners, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and nongovernmental organizations (NGO), the Department of State (Department) has generally been effective in providing reintegration assistance to returning Afghan refugees, but finding long-term solutions for returnees remains significantly challenging.
- Because of the Afghan Government's inability to provide adequate assistance to returnees, the international community mainly bears the burden.
- UNHCR's initial assistance to returnees, which includes a medical examination and a cash stipend, has been delivered through an orderly and efficient process.
- At their final destinations, UNHCR has been able to provide returnees with materials and money to build shelters. Since 2002, more than 1.1 million returnees, or nearly 25 percent of those who repatriated, have benefitted from this shelter program, but it has been hampered by the lack of land ownership as well as land disputes.
- To support both returnees and communities that are receiving them, UNHCR funds a limited number of income generation and water projects that can build capacity, offer incentives, and stabilize the communities.
- The Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) has effectively used its grants programs to fill gaps and unmet assistance needs to returnee populations, including skills training, basic education, shelter, water and sanitation, gender-based violence programs, income generation, health services, and agriculture programs.
- The Afghan Government's Land Allocation Scheme (LAS), aimed at providing plots of land to returnees, has been mismanaged and has not met its goal of providing land to support a basic livelihood for returnees. For these reasons, UNHCR has withdrawn its funding support to the LAS, and PRM and UNHCR now attempt to fill the assistance gap with shelter materials, water projects, and other income generating programs.
- PRM and UNHCR have mechanisms to monitor the delivery of assistance to returning Afghan refugees, but because security concerns limit access to approximately half of the country, they often have to rely on third-party proxies for information from the field.

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- There are gaps in assistance and a disparity in the living situations of some returnees and members of absorbing communities, which have not been evaluated.
- Provincial reconstruction teams (PRT) are inconsistently involved in tracking issues faced by returnees and in reporting to Embassy Kabul.

INTRODUCTION

Decades of conflict in Afghanistan led large numbers of Afghans to leave their country from the 1970s to 1990s, resulting in one of the biggest refugee displacements in history. Since 2002, more than 5 million Afghans have returned to Afghanistan. In some areas with the highest number of returns, as many as one in three persons is a returnee. The reintegration of so many returnees has put a strain on receiving communities, the Afghan Government, and the international donor community. A successful returnee reintegration program is critical to U.S. Government efforts to stabilize Afghanistan.

The Middle East Regional Office (MERO) of the Office of Inspector General (OIG) initiated this evaluation under the authority of the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, to determine whether PRM, through its implementing partners, UNHCR and NGOs, is effectively managing the reintegration program in Afghanistan. The objectives of this evaluation were to determine: (1) whether assistance is reaching intended target populations; (2) how PRM monitors its implementing partners to ensure program objectives are being achieved; and (3) the effectiveness of Embassy Kabul, including staff stationed throughout the country, in managing and coordinating the humanitarian response, and the role PRTs play in supporting these efforts.

In developing this evaluation, OIG met with officials from PRM, UNHCR and other UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and Embassy Kabul. OIG traveled to Kabul, Herat, Barikab, and Jalalabad and observed assistance projects and visited with returnees. The OIG team participated in meetings with Afghan Government officials from various ministries, including the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, and with provincial and local government officials. OIG also met with officials from U.S. and coalition military forces, PRTs, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), located in the Afghan provinces that are monitoring the condition of and providing assistance to local communities with returnees.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RESULTS

The Department, through its implementing partners, UNHCR and NGOs, has been generally effective in providing reintegration services to returning Afghans, but considerable challenges remain in finding durable solutions for many returnees. According to the Department, those refugees who returned between 2002 and 2005 have reintegrated into their local communities with few major difficulties. However, more recent returnees have found increasingly less land, shelter, livelihoods, and family to which to return. The international community continues to assist returnees because the Afghan Government does not always have the capacity to provide basic services and Afghan ministries have not always included refugee needs in planning and budgeting. Corruption, coupled with a demand for services that far exceeds resources, exacerbates these problems. Weak Afghan institutions cannot handle land disputes or prevent human rights abuses.

Initially, upon the refugees' return to Afghanistan, UNHCR has been able to provide important assistance through an efficient and orderly process. This assistance includes a medical examination and a cash stipend which can be used to purchase basic items and cover the cost of transportation back home. In certain instances, UNHCR also provides food, cooking oil, and non-food items, such as cooking utensils and blankets. Once returnees arrive at their final destinations, UNHCR has also been able to provide reintegration support, most notably shelter, with a program begun in 2002. Since that time, UNHCR has provided materials and money for shelters to approximately 200,000 families and benefited more than 1.1 million people. The shelter program has assisted nearly 25 percent of returnees, but the lack of land ownership and land disputes have hampered provision of shelter for many returnees. To equitably support returnees and local communities, UNHCR also funds a limited number of income generation and water projects, which can build capacity and offer incentives to receiving communities to absorb the returning refugees. This assistance can also stabilize the communities and help prevent fighting over scarce resources. Examples of these projects include cleaning and rehabilitating irrigation canals; helping to establish vegetable gardens, home-based poultry projects, and sewing cooperatives; and providing water points for potable water.

PRM grants effectively provide gap-filling assistance to meet needs including skills training, basic education, shelter, water and sanitation, gender-based violence programs, income generation, health, and agriculture. From 2007 to 2010, PRM awarded 57 grants, totaling \$51 million, to NGOs in 15 Afghan provinces. Grants are often used to develop sustainable livelihood opportunities for women, and are

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credited with providing badly needed assistance to vulnerable returnee populations. PRM's efforts have improved water and sanitation infrastructure, health care access, and awareness of women's rights and access to justice systems. In interviews, returnees expressed appreciation and satisfaction with these services and acknowledged the programs help ensure their survival.

The Afghan Government developed the LAS initiative in 2005-2006 to address the needs of landless returnees. However, this Afghan-led initiative has suffered from mismanagement and corruption and has been largely ineffectual in providing returnees with land capable of sustaining a basic livelihood. As of January 2011, for more than 266,000 applicants only 38,000 plots of land had been distributed and only 9,200 families had moved onto their land. UNHCR initially provided funding to the Afghan LAS committee, which was supposed to identify and develop land sites. However, according to Embassy Kabul and UNHCR officials, selected sites many times were located far from towns or markets, in areas without access to water. Further, according to embassy officials, the initiative has been plagued by credible allegations of land speculation and distribution of desirable plots to unqualified applicants. The OIG team found that returnee communities generally received little assistance from the Afghan Government other than the initial land allotment. UNHCR and PRM-funded NGOs have attempted to fill gaps by providing shelter materials, water projects, and livelihood programs. The embassy's refugee coordinator acknowledged that the LAS sites are inadequate to support a durable solution for most returnees, and noted that PRM is using its grants program to mitigate the situation. UNHCR has withdrawn financial and technical support to the Afghan LAS, and is now providing direct assistance to returnees living at the nine sites.

Although PRM and UNHCR have mechanisms to monitor the delivery of assistance to returning Afghan refugees, the unstable security environment has restricted access to approximately 50 percent of the country. Threats to staff members of international organizations and NGOs have limited their presence in the field, which limits their ability to directly oversee program implementation. Thus, in addition to international organization and NGO staff, PRM and UNHCR often have to rely on Afghan representatives, such as local elders, village councils (shuras), district and provincial-level government officials, and occasional media reports for information on the condition and situation facing returnees.

At the beginning of each year, UNHCR conducts a needs assessment and devises a country operations plan. The PRM refugee coordinator at Embassy Kabul formally reviews this plan twice a year and provides feedback on areas such as achievement of performance targets, frequency of program monitoring, and areas of weakness or ongoing challenges. UNHCR provides updates, evaluations, and reports; and representatives from Embassy Kabul and Washington-based PRM officials also conduct periodic site visits. However, providing cash assistance alleviates the need for the type of monitoring required by infrastructure and livelihood projects.

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PRM has faced challenges in getting Department approval and necessary logistical support to conduct site visits to monitor and assess the outcomes of its grant program. Of the 57 grants awarded from FY 2007-2010, PRM staff visited 47 projects once each and never directly visited 10. Ninety-three percent of projects were also evaluated using progress reports, emails, and telephone calls. Security concerns, as well as thin staffing and other duties in the refugee coordinator's office at Embassy Kabul, have limited project monitoring. In addition, the short terms of many projects do not always allow enough time for assessment. OIG found gaps in assistance, with returnees living in makeshift shelters on barren land having little opportunity to earn a livelihood. Review of documents and interviews revealed a disparity of living situations between some returnees and community members. However, there has been no evaluation of the current situations of former refugees with their receiving communities several years after return. The ability of returnees to exercise their legal rights, including those related to property, is a systemic problem throughout Afghanistan, and is of particular concern.

Although some PRTs facilitate Embassy Kabul in assessing humanitarian assistance to returning refugees, these efforts are not consistent among PRTs. The level of effort depends on PRT members' perception of whether monitoring refugee reintegration is part of the PRT mandate, as well as the number of returnees in a given area; the security situation; the local political climate; provincial development conditions; and the size, staffing, and location of the PRT. Among the PRTs that work with returnees, OIG observed PRT members working with Afghan Government officials, NGO representatives, and community leaders. Staff from these PRTs conducted visits to local villages and met with provincial and district development committees. These PRTs also interact frequently with UNHCR to discuss ongoing operations, and some PRTs fund programs that complement other returnee assistance programs. Embassy Kabul officials also noted that PRTs regularly facilitate travel of PRM representatives. A number of PRTs reported they do not manage or coordinate humanitarian assistance to returnees because it is not part of their mission, the military has taken the lead, or international organizations are providing assistance to returnees. Embassy officials indicated that participation and increased reporting by PRTs would better support U.S. Government policy. PRT members reported that they are not adequately trained in identifying issues related to returnee assistance, either before deployment or in-country.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION 1: OIG recommends that the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, in coordination with the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, conduct a protection, legal, and welfare parity survey of Afghan returnees and their receiving communities to determine whether a durable reintegration solution has been achieved. (Action: PRM, in coordination with S/SRAP)

RECOMMENDATION 2: OIG recommends that Embassy Kabul task civilian staff assigned to consulates and provincial reconstruction teams to routinely observe and assess the situation of returning Afghan refugees in their provinces, advise on coordination and humanitarian assistance issues, interact with local and provincial Afghan representatives to advocate for inclusion of refugees needs into community planning, and report regularly to the embassy on these efforts. (Action: Embassy Kabul)

MANAGEMENT COMMENTS AND OIG RESPONSE

Embassy Kabul and PRM provided formal written comments, which are included verbatim in Appendix II and III, respectively. The embassy stated that it plans to issue guidance in the summer of 2011 to PRT officials to familiarize them with and recommend reporting on refugee matters. The embassy further noted that, with the support of PRTs, PRM has been able to conduct monitoring in parts of Afghanistan where UNHCR does not have access. PRM concurred with both recommendations in this report, noting that efforts are underway to gather data to determine whether a durable solution for returning refugees has been achieved. PRM also stated it will coordinate with relevant parties to address recommendation 2.

BACKGROUND

The reintegration program for returning Afghan refugees, administered by UNHCR, is the largest assisted returnee reintegration project in history. With the end of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1989, UNHCR started an assisted repatriation and reintegration program in Pakistan and later extended the program to Iran and other countries farther away. The program has continued because of additional periods of flight from Afghanistan during the Taliban regime and the U.S. military campaign after the 9/11 attacks. Between 2002 and 2010, more than 5.6 million refugees have returned to Afghanistan, increasing the estimated population inside Afghanistan by more than 20 percent. (Since 2001, large numbers of Afghans have also been internally displaced by drought, natural disasters, and conflict.) UNHCR's role in voluntary returnee reintegration is to facilitate safe return and the provision of initial reintegration assistance to the approximately 4.5 million registered refugees who have returned. Table 1 summarizes the returning refugee population from 2002 to 2010.

Table 1: Voluntary Repatriation of Returning Afghan Refugees from 2002-2010 (in thousands)*

Year	From Pakistan	From Iran	From Other Countries	Total
2002	1,565.1	259.8	9.7	1,834.6
2003	332.2	142.3	1.2	475.7
2004	383.3	377.1	0.7	761.1
2005	449.4	63.5	1.1	514.0
2006	133.3	5.3	1.2	139.8
2007	357.6	7.0	0.7	365.3
2008	274.2	3.7	0.6	278.5
2009	48.6	6.0	0.2	54.5
2010	104.3	8.4	0.1	112.8
Total	3,647.7	873.1	15.5	4,536.3

*Because the numbers in this table do not include "spontaneous" (non-UNCHR-assisted) returns, the total is less than the 5 million returnees noted elsewhere in this report.
Source: UNHCR

From 2002 through 2010, PRM contributed approximately \$350 million to UNHCR for assistance to Afghan refugees and for advocacy and support for voluntary returnees. UNHCR is the lead international organization responsible for assisting repatriating Afghan refugees and supervising the reintegration process, based on

two tripartite agreements, one among Afghanistan, Pakistan, and UNHCR; and a second among Afghanistan, Iran, and UNHCR. UNHCR also provides strategy and institutional capacity support to the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation. Support to returnees has included cash grants, transportation, and non-food household items to assist in their journey back home. Once settled, returnees and their receiving communities are provided assistance for a limited period to support improvements in shelter, health, sanitation, education, livelihoods, and infrastructure. Table 2 shows the total amount of PRM funding from FY 2002-2010, to support Afghan returnees.

Table 2: Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration Assistance to Returning Afghan Refugees, Total from FY 2002-2010 (in thousands)

Country	MRA ^a	MRA Supplemental	ERMA ^b	Total
Afghanistan	\$0.78	\$29.50		\$30.28
Pakistan	2.30	1.00		3.30
Regional ^c	267.27	39.80	10.00	317.07
Total	\$270.35	\$70.30	\$10.00	\$350.65

Source:

^aMRA: Migration and Refugee Assistance

^bERMA: Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance

^cRegional includes funding for Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran

In addition to providing funding to UNHCR, PRM implements a grants program with NGOs to provide direct assistance to returnees that augments or fills gaps in assistance provided by UNHCR and the international community. Since 2007, PRM has expended more than \$50 million on approximately 60 projects, including the construction of healthcare facilities, staffing and provisioning of health clinics, improvement of water and sanitation infrastructure, legal assistance and referral services for vulnerable women and girls, and income-generating projects such as tailoring, kitchen gardening, and animal husbandry.

Finally, PRTs¹ also play a role in the reintegration of returning refugees. Located throughout Afghanistan, PRTs serve as the eyes and ears of Embassy Kabul in the provinces. There are 27 PRTs in Afghanistan, 11 operated by U.S. military forces and 16 by other coalition countries. The embassy's refugee coordinator uses the PRT field reporting capability to monitor some returnee populations.

¹ PRTs in Afghanistan are led by military officers supported by teams of specialists, which typically include civilians from the Department, USAID, and other U.S. Government agencies. These small joint civilian-military teams work in provinces across the country to improve security, expand the reach of the Afghan Government, and assist with reconstruction.

REINTEGRATION ASSISTANCE FOR RETURNING REFUGEES

The Department, through its implementing partners, has been generally effective in providing reintegration services to returning Afghans but significant challenges remain to finding durable solutions for many returnees.² According to Department reporting, the majority of those who returned between 2002 and 2005 have been able to reintegrate into their local communities with few major difficulties. However, because of the worsening security situation since 2006 and other important factors, those who have returned more recently have had progressively less to return to in terms of land, shelter, livelihoods, and family. According to UNHCR reporting, the early return period was largely driven by positive developments in Afghanistan and mostly involved those most capable and willing to return home. Since 2006, the reasons for returning were increasingly influenced by negative conditions in host countries such as the deteriorating security condition in the border regions of Pakistan, higher food and rent prices, and pressure by the Government of Iran on Afghan refugees and economic migrants to depart.

The burden of providing assistance to returnees continues to fall largely on the international community and little progress has been made in getting the Afghan Government to assume responsibility for the provision of basic social services. According to embassy reporting, the extremely low capacity of the Afghan Government at all levels, exacerbated by corruption and demand for services that overwhelmingly exceeds the supply of resources, makes the Afghan Government a difficult partner. Further, Afghan institutions are too weak to properly deal with land disputes; prevent human rights abuses; and provide for social services, livelihoods, and security; which are cited among the main reasons for lack of integration.

UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES' ACTIVITIES

UNHCR effectively supports returnees with initial assistance to meet important needs in the first months of return. The OIG team visited UNHCR's Kabul encashment center (where newly arrived repatriating returnees are received), and reviewed

² A durable solution is achieved when returnees no longer have any specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement, and they are afforded their human rights without discrimination because of their displacement.

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program documents and management control procedures, and concluded that UNHCR has put in place an orderly and efficient process to assist in reintegrating returnees. When a returnee first arrives back in Afghanistan, UNHCR provides the individual with a medical examination and a cash stipend. (Beginning in 2011, the per capita stipend was increased from \$100 to \$150.) This assistance allows returnees to procure basic items of immediate need when reaching their final destination and covers the cost of transport to their province in Afghanistan. In certain instances, particularly vulnerable returnees are also given food stuffs, cooking oil, and non-food items, such a cooking utensils and blankets. The OIG team observed UNHCR officials collecting and destroying returnees' refugee identification cards to prevent returnees from coming back to obtain a second stipend. In Pakistan, UNHCR also gathers biometric information on Afghan returnees to help prevent repeat applications for return stipends. As indicated in Table 3, these initial cash grants to returnees represent UNHCR's largest area of reintegration assistance.

Table 3: United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees Assistance Expenditures, FY 2002-2009*

FY	Cash Grants	Shelter	Livelihoods	Water
2002	\$35,800,000	\$31,625,799	\$3,971,034	\$3,511,712
2003	6,400,000	25,410,248	8,794,391	5,204,729
2004	17,400,000	19,753,419	2,982,836	4,130,626
2005	13,000,000	12,984,607	1,906,156	1,170,335
2006	3,800,000	13,250,314	2,328,519	1,067,675
2007	35,500,000	7,997,223	582,974	268,299
2008	27,700,000	13,995,362	643,407	1,179,709
2009	5,800,000	12,307,871	1,174,898	19,019
Total	\$145,400,000	\$137,324,843	\$22,384,215	\$16,552,104

Source: UNHCR

*FY 2010 expenditures not available.

UNHCR also provides initial reintegration support once individuals have arrived at their final destination. According to UNHCR surveys with returnees, shelter is the most important need for reintegration, and is the second main area of support to returnees. Since UNHCR started a large scale shelter program in 2002, UNHCR has provided shelters to approximately 200,000 families (mainly in rural areas), benefiting more than 1.1 million people. UNHCR does not build homes for returnees but supports them by providing shelter packages which include essential construction materials, such as tools, roofing beams, doors, and windows. The shelter program also includes cash assistance to cover additional material and labor expenses. Although the shelter program has been credited with providing nearly 25 percent of the assisted returnee population with shelter, the lack of land ownership and land disputes involving returnees have hindered provision of shelter for many returnees.

In addition to the substantial cash grant and shelter programs, UNHCR also funds a limited number of income generation and water projects as part of its strategy of equitable support to returnees and local communities. Embassy officials told OIG that these activities support the capacity of receiving communities to absorb returnees, and in some cases offer incentives to welcome returnees. PRT officials told the OIG team that this community-based model can serve as a stabilization tool and helps prevent fighting over scarce resources. The OIG team observed projects that cleaned and rehabilitated irrigation canal systems, thereby improving agricultural production in surrounding communities as well as providing badly needed daily wage labor to returnees. OIG observed other examples of income generation projects including small scale vegetable gardens, home-based poultry projects, and sewing cooperatives. Finally, UNHCR helped construct approximately 10,000 water points in high return areas. Potable water is an overwhelming need throughout Afghanistan, but it is an acute problem in returnee areas hit by drought and at sites designated for returnees by the Afghan Government.

BUREAU OF POPULATION, REFUGEES AND MIGRATION'S GRANTS PROGRAM

PRM has been effective in using its grants program to fill gaps and unmet assistance needs to returnee populations, including the provision of skills training, basic education, shelter, water and sanitation, gender-based violence programs, income generation, health services, and agriculture programs. From 2007 to 2010, PRM awarded 57 grants, totaling \$51 million, to NGOs active in 15 returnee-dense provinces throughout Afghanistan.³ These grants have often been aimed at women to develop sustainable livelihood opportunities through technical and vocational training, apprenticeship opportunities, and to create cash for work opportunities. Although often only in the \$500,000-\$1,000,000 range and lasting 12-18 months, according to representatives of the embassy and donor organizations, and PRT civilian and military officials in the provinces, these small, targeted grants are credited with providing badly needed assistance to vulnerable returnee populations. Table 4 on the following page summarizes PRM's grants program by sector.

³ PRM partners primarily with international NGOs such as the Catholic Relief Services, International Medical Corps, Church World Service, Tearfund, United Methodist Committee on Relief, the International Rescue Committee, and the Norwegian Refugee Council, as well as a growing number of smaller Afghan NGOs.

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Table 4: Projects in Afghanistan Funded by the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, FY 2007-2010

FY	Total (millions)	Projects Awards	Shelter	Sectors ^a				
				Water	Health	Basic Education	Income Generation	Other Sectors ^b
2007	\$7.5	12	3	1	2	3	5	2
2008	10.6	15	2	3	3	4	14	9
2009	17.8	17	3	4	6	3	17	9
2010	15.1	13	0	3	5	3	19	5
Total	\$51	57	8	11	16	13	55	25

^aSome projects provide assistance in multiple sectors.

^bOther sectors include gender-based violence, agriculture, economic development, transportation, irrigation, literacy, support to local governments, and enhancement of infrastructure for the Afghan Government's Land Allocation Scheme (LAS).

Source: OIG analysis of PRM data

The OIG team reviewed program documents and end of project evaluations and travelled to eight field locations in four provinces to monitor PRM-funded projects in support of returnees. PRM's efforts have improved water and sanitation infrastructure, increased access to health delivery systems, and enhanced awareness of women's rights and access to justice systems. Returnees told the OIG team of their appreciation and satisfaction with the services funded by PRM and credited these programs with helping to ensure their survival. For example, in Jalalabad, OIG spoke with women who had participated in hands-on agriculture and animal husbandry training. The returnees stated that they had acquired useful vocational skills that enabled them to earn critically needed income. However, some returnees expressed concerns about the lack of continuing income opportunities in their communities and whether sufficient assistance would continue in the future. Figure 1 shows two PRM-funded assistance projects in Jalalabad.

Figure 1: The photo on the left shows a medical clinic in Jalalabad funded by the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, and the photo on the right shows a poultry management training class.



Source: OIG

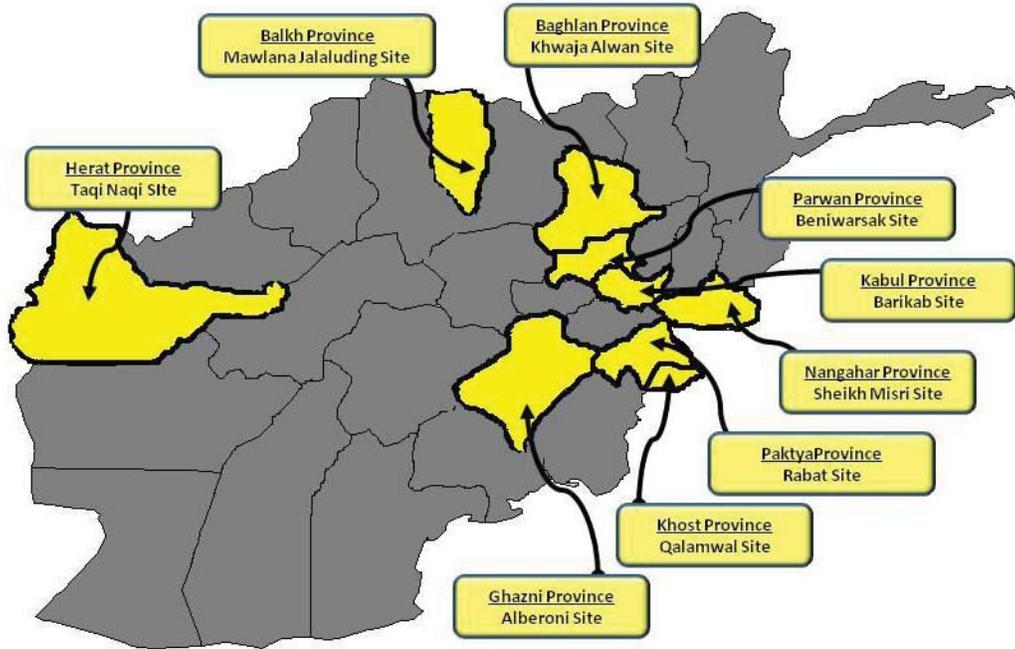
AFGHAN GOVERNMENT'S LAND ALLOCATION SCHEME

Beginning in 2005-2006, the Afghan Government developed the Land Allocation Scheme (LAS) initiative as a means to address the particular needs of vulnerable landless returnees. However, from its inception, this Afghan-led initiative has suffered from mismanagement and corruption and has been largely ineffectual in meeting its goal to provide plots of land capable of sustaining a basic livelihood for returnees. As of January 2011, for more than 266,000 applicants only 38,000 plots of land have been distributed and only 9,200 families have moved onto their newly acquired pieces of land.

At the request of the Afghan Government, UNHCR initially provided funding to cover office expenses and salaries and other technical assistance to the Afghan LAS committee. The committee was responsible for identifying and developing sites for settling newly arriving returnees. According to Embassy Kabul and UNHCR officials, the committee's poor effort in conducting land feasibility studies resulted in the selection of sites (see Figure 2 on the following page) that lacked basic infrastructure, such as water and roads, or the opportunity to make a living. Many sites were located far from towns or markets, often in desolate, infertile areas. Further, according to embassy officials, the initiative has been plagued by credible allegations of land speculation by Afghan Government officials and distribution of desirable plots of land to unqualified applicants.

The OIG team visited two LAS sites and spoke with returnees and found that returnee communities generally received no assistance from the Afghan Government other than the initial land allotment. UNHCR and PRM-funded NGOs have attempted to fill the assistance gap by providing shelter materials, water projects, and livelihood programs. The returnees told the OIG team that many people assigned plots will not occupy their land because of the lack of basic public services including transportation, water, and health clinics. The embassy's refugee coordinator acknowledged that the LAS sites are inadequate to support a durable solution for most returnees, and that PRM is using its grants program to mitigate the difficult situation at some LAS sites. UNHCR officials stated that they have withdrawn their financial and technical support to the Afghan LAS committee and are using a small portion of UNHCR funding to provide direct assistance to returnees living at the nine sites.

Figure 2: Land Allocation Scheme Sites in Afghanistan



Source: PRM

PROGRAM MONITORING

PRM and its main implementing partner, UNHCR have put in place mechanisms to monitor the delivery of assistance to returning Afghan refugees. However, the difficult security environment which includes an active insurgency and widespread criminality, has restricted field access to approximately 50 percent of the country. Threats against foreign nationals working with international organizations and NGOs have limited the presence and field input critical to effective monitoring.⁴ As a result, PRM and UNHCR often rely on remote proxies, such as local elders, village councils (shuras), district and provincial-level government and NGO officials, and occasional media reports, to provide information on the condition and situation facing returnees.

At the beginning of each year, UNHCR's main Kabul office and its sub-offices conduct a needs assessment and devise a country operations plan with input from implementing partners and key stakeholders, including Afghan Government officials and donor countries. The PRM refugee coordinator based at Embassy Kabul, formally reviews the country operations plan twice a year and provides feedback on 40-50 substantive areas, such as achievement of critical performance targets, frequency of program monitoring, and areas of weakness or ongoing challenges. In addition, UNHCR provides operational updates, policy papers, evaluations, fact sheets, and situation reports throughout the year. Staff members from the refugee coordinator's office at Embassy Kabul and Washington-based PRM officials also conduct periodic site visits to stable returnee areas of Afghanistan to monitor UNHCR assistance activities and meet with returnees to discuss their living conditions. OIG notes that the need to implement a more robust monitoring mechanism has been eased by a policy decision to provide cash grants to returning refugees, rather than assist returnees with basic infrastructure projects and job opportunities designed to reintegrate them into their home communities. Offering cash assistance mitigates the need to conduct and monitor large scale logistical operations associated with infrastructure projects and provision of jobs.

PRM's ability to monitor and measure the impact of its grants program has been variable. Of the 57 grants that were awarded from FY 2007-2010, PRM staff visited 47 projects once each. Ten projects were never directly visited by PRM staff. Ninety-three percent of projects received interim and end-of-project evaluations through

⁴ In July 2010, six militants armed with suicide bombs stormed a compound in Kunduz, 175 miles north of Kabul, of an American aid contractor working for USAID, killing four security personnel in an assault that left all the attackers dead.

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reviews of progress reports, emails, and telephone calls. In addition to security concerns that have restricted travel to returnee areas, the refugee coordinator's office at Embassy Kabul is thinly staffed and has many other coordinating, reporting, and representational duties that limit the amount of time available to monitor grantees. Further, according to PRM officials the short length of many projects (often 1 year) has not allowed enough time for implementation, monitoring, and impact assessment.

In spite of significant reintegration efforts to make the return of Afghan refugees sustainable, there are still gaps in assistance at many settlement sites with returnees living on barren land, in makeshift shelters, and with little opportunity to earn a livelihood. In addition to large-scale returns, since the 1979 Soviet invasion, Afghanistan's population has grown from around 15 million to more than 25 million, making traditional livelihoods much less viable for much of the population. The OIG team's review of reporting documents and interviews with returnees and members of receiving communities indicates a disparity of living situations between some returnees and community members. According to PRM officials, no evaluations have ever been conducted to determine how former refugees' current situations compare with their receiving communities several years after return. A key concern is whether returnees are able to exercise their legal rights, including property rights. For example, according to the Brookings Institution, a key indicator for measuring progress in Afghanistan is determining the percentage of returnees with secure title to their house and land.⁵

⁵ *Afghanistan Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post 9/11 Afghanistan*, Ian S. Livingston, Heather L. Messera, and Michael O'Hanlon, February 28, 2011.

ROLE OF PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAMS IN ASSISTING RETURNEES

OIG determined that although approximately half of PRTs in Afghanistan assist Embassy Kabul in coordinating and managing humanitarian assistance for returnees and reporting on their situation, these efforts are not consistent among PRTs. This variance can be attributed to the PRT's perception of its responsibility for assisting with returnee reintegration, as well as the level of security, local political climate, development conditions in the province, and the size and location of the PRT. With the exception of a humanitarian assistance session during the 1-week training course for outgoing PRT members at the Foreign Service Institute, the members stated they received no training on their responsibilities with regard to returnees. Finally, PRTs reported they only informally measure the effectiveness of reintegration efforts.

OIG administered a survey of all 27 PRTs in Afghanistan to determine their role in returnee reintegration assistance. OIG received 19 responses—a 70 percent response rate. Of the 19 PRTs that responded, 10 reported involvement with assistance for returning Afghan refugees. The OIG team visited three PRTs, with robust and varied roles. OIG observed PRT members interacting with Afghan Government officials, NGO representatives, and community leaders. To support Embassy Kabul, PRT members visited, observed and assessed the returnees' and receiving communities' and met with provincial and district development committees to identify gaps in coverage and recommend projects. The OIG team met with PRT representatives who facilitate and accompany Embassy Kabul's refugee coordinator on periodic monitoring visits to PRM-sponsored returnee support projects.

OIG's observation and review of records confirmed that active PRTs interact frequently with UNHCR, especially in provinces with a large number of returnees and a large UNHCR presence (for example, Balkh, Herat, and Nangarhar), to discuss ongoing operations, such as the sudden influx of returnees from Pakistan after the significant flooding in that country in late 2010. PRT members also meet regularly with the provincial directors of the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, both of which are key ministries in the development of LAS sites and returnee receiving communities. In discussions with UNHCR and returnees, OIG learned some PRTs fund programs that complement current returnee programs, such as a community midwife program in three provinces which helps fulfill health service needs of returnees and communities. In Herat, the PRT reported that Afghan Government entities undertake

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outreach activities to oversee development and reconstruction activities in communities. However, PRT members are also active in numerous committees and work with the Afghan Government, the United Nations, international organizations, and NGOs to coordinate and facilitate development and humanitarian assistance.

In survey feedback, nine PRTs reported that for various reasons they have not been involved in this effort. For example, PRT Laghman stated it does not manage or coordinate the humanitarian response to returnees because this response is not part of its mission. PRT Kapisa reported that military units in its region have taken the lead on reintegration. The PRT in Kunduz stated that international organizations such as the UN provide assistance to returnee reintegration and grant and reconstruction projects.

Through interviews with the refugee coordinator's staff, OIG found that in the past, PRTs were involved very little and only informally in helping the embassy promote and monitor reintegration and provide reintegration assistance. Although the level of assistance from some PRTs has grown, the refugee coordinator at Embassy Kabul characterized the current level of involvement as a missed opportunity to serve as PRM's additional eyes to assess local situations and assistance projects. For example, PRTs could evaluate how government programs affecting returnees are integrated into provincial governance and budget planning documents. The OIG team noted a few instances of good communication, exchange of ideas, and rapport between the refugee coordinator at the embassy and PRT members, as well as evidence that the local officials, NGO representatives, and returnees in the provinces and communities were well acquainted and receptive to PRT staff and their contributions. However, PRM officials expressed a need for "whole of government" interest in returnees, to include assistance efforts by PRTs. PRM noted that it normally works through the interagency provincial affairs section⁶ at the embassy to reach out to PRTs. Embassy officials also reported, however, that the PRT model is falling out of favor with Afghan Government officials who consider PRTs to be "parallel structures" to coalition governments. Initial U.S. Government plans for post-transition Afghanistan envisage more traditional embassy platforms such as consulates rather than PRTs.

OIG reviewed guidance given to PRT members before deployment and found no official tasking to address returnee issues. OIG also reviewed the PRT course curriculum to determine what information is included on returnee issues and PRM programs, and determined that the only formal instruction on the returnee reintegration process is a PRM presentation at the Foreign Service Institute given at PRT field orientation classes. PRTs also reported that they have no formal means to measure reintegration effectiveness. PRT members noted that they tend to measure the success

⁶The interagency provincial affairs section coordinates the work of PRTs. The section is staffed by employees from the Department, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, USAID, and the Department of Defense. This section reports directly to an ambassador at the embassy, the coordinating director for development and economic affairs.

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of programs informally thorough public, government, and media feedback; patrols in areas; direct observations; meetings with elders; and consultations with local ministries, community leaders, and Afghan Government officials.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Department	Department of State
LAS	Land Allocation Scheme
MERO	Middle East Regional Office
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OIG	Office of Inspector General
PRM	Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration
PRT	provincial reconstruction team
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

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APPENDIX I – PURPOSE, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

MERO initiated this work under the authority of the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, to determine whether PRM, through its implementing partners, UNHCR and NGOs, are effectively managing the reintegration and resettlement program in Afghanistan. The objectives of this review were to determine: (1) whether assistance is reaching intended target populations; (2) how PRM monitors its implementing partners to ensure program objectives are being achieved; and (3) the effectiveness of Embassy Kabul, including staff stationed throughout the country, in managing and coordinating the humanitarian response, and the role PRTs play in supporting these efforts.

In developing this assessment, the OIG team interviewed officials in Washington, DC; Kabul, Afghanistan; and other locations in Afghanistan. OIG met with Department officials from PRM in Washington, DC; embassy personnel in Kabul, and Afghan officials and NGO representatives in various provinces in Afghanistan. OIG conducted extensive discussions with the refugee coordinator at Embassy Kabul, the refugee specialist, USAID officials, representatives from PRTs, and other officials involved in providing assistance to returnees.

OIG met with senior officials from UNHCR and participated in meetings with numerous representatives from the Afghan Government, including officials from the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation; Ministry of Women's Affairs; Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock; Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development; and provincial and district government entities. The team also met with officials from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, United Nations-HABITAT, and the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as with a wide range of NGO representatives whose organizations are providing assistance to Afghanistan returnees.

OIG reviewed PRM's and UNHCR's expenditure data, and program planning and performance measurement documents. The team reviewed contribution letters to UNHCR, the PRM-UNHCR Framework Agreement, UNHCR's country operation plans, PRM monitoring and evaluation procedures, and UNHCR policy papers, fact sheets, and situation reports. OIG analyzed UNHCR's appeals and progress reports to assess actual assistance provided. OIG also reviewed strategic planning and cluster performance indicators. OIG was given a demonstration of UNHCR's results-based management system, reviewed UNHCR's global performance targets and indicators, and gathered testimonial evidence from UNHCR staff on performance measures.

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Additionally, the OIG team reviewed PRM-funded cooperative agreements with NGOs for projects in Afghanistan and relevant program monitoring and evaluation reports. The team conducted several site visits and participated in interviews with returnees/beneficiaries and community male and female shuras. The team also participated in meetings with provincial government officials and an Afghanistan Provincial Development Committee. OIG also reviewed how PRM coordinates its returnee assistance program with USAID's assistance to internally displaced persons. Finally, the OIG team attended an embassy-sponsored meeting with Afghan Government representatives and assistance donors, and a military-civilian roundtable discussion on how U.S. Government and NGO assistance providers can work together to deliver necessary assistance, build capacity, and sustain assistance to returning refugees.

OIG conducted this performance evaluation from July 2010 to March 2011. OIG did not use computer-processed data to perform this evaluation. OIG conducted this performance evaluation in accordance with the *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation* issued in January 2011 by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency.

This report was prepared under the direction of Richard "Nick" Arntson, Assistant Inspector General for MERO. The following staff members conducted the review and/or contributed to the report: Patrick Dickriede, Kelly Herberger, Kristen Jenkinson, and Mable Stanford.

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APPENDIX II – COMMENTS FROM EMBASSY KABUL

May 26, 2011

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INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

TO: Richard Arntson, Assistant Inspector General for Middle East Region

FROM: Ambassador Karl W. Eikenberry

SUBJECT: Performance Evaluation of the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration's (PRM) Reintegration Assistance Program for Refugees Returning to Afghanistan.

Embassy Kabul appreciates the opportunity to provide the following formal response to the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) Middle East Regional Office's Performance Evaluation of PRM's Reintegration Assistance Program for Refugees Returning to Afghanistan.

In order to enhance Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) coordination with the Refugee Coordinator, Embassy Kabul will have the Refugee Coordinator send out email guidance through the office of Interagency Provincial Affairs in July, August and September to PRT officers to familiarize them with refugee matters, and to add a section to the PRT Intelink site that would provide updates on refugee returns. Coordination with PRTs should be focused in areas of high return in Regional Command-East and the central region, and areas where PRM is funding projects. We recommend that reporting on refugee matters be sent from these PRTs as regular reporting cables.

In addition, the draft states that "PRM and UNHCR ... [have] restricted access to approximately 50 percent of the country." In fact, while UNHCR has limited field access, PRM has been able to conduct monitoring in areas (such as the border crossing point at Spin Boldak, Kandahar) with PRT support where UNHCR does not have access.

We would like to thank OIG for a strong report, welcome the proposed evaluation of returnee need. We will work to ensure the PRT elements of the report can be adapted to existing practices.

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APPENDIX III – COMMENTS FROM
THE BUREAU OF POPULATION,
REFUGEES AND MIGRATION



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

July 12, 2011

MEMORANDUM

TO: OIG-MERO – Nick Arntson, Assistant Inspector General, Middle East Region

THROUGH: PRM – Kelly Clements, Deputy Assistant Secretary

FROM: PRM/ECA – Tom Hushek, Director

SUBJECT: **Draft Performance Evaluation – Reintegration Assistance Program for Refugees Returning to Afghanistan**

The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) would like to thank the Office of the Inspector General – Middle East Regional Office (OIG-MERO) for the opportunity to provide comments on the draft Performance Evaluation (Report Number MERO-I-11-10, _____ 2010) regarding “The Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration’s Reintegration Assistance Program for Refugees Returning to Afghanistan.”

PRM appreciates the attention OIG has paid to humanitarian assistance issues in Afghanistan and believes the report makes a positive contribution to our ongoing efforts. PRM also appreciates the attention OIG-MERO placed on the question of effectiveness of PRM’s reintegration assistance to returning refugees, as well as the thorough understanding as outlined in the report of the obstacles to achieving viable long-term solutions for returnees. Through its contributions to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and cooperative agreements with

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nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), PRM will continue to work to ensure that our funds are being used effectively for reintegration of returning refugees.

PRM agrees that working with civilian staff assigned around the country to observe and assess the situation of returning Afghan refugees, advise on coordination and humanitarian assistance issues, interact with local and provincial Afghan representatives, and report regularly on these efforts would usefully complement the work of the Refugee Coordinator. PRM will coordinate with Embassy Kabul, SRAP, and others to address this recommendation.

As the report recognized, the need exists to conduct a survey of Afghan returnees and their receiving communities to determine whether a durable reintegration solution has been achieved. Several efforts are underway to gather preliminary data and a comprehensive evaluation of this data will be conducted in coordination with UNHCR, SRAP, and Embassy Kabul.

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