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EARTH Magazine: A Dry and Ravaged Land: Investigating Water Resources in Afghanistan

Alexandria, Va. — Afghanistan is one of the world's poorest countries, with an economy largely based on subsistence agriculture. Working in an arid climate on thin margins of profitability and sustenance, Afghan farmers depend on reliable, year-round sources of surface water and groundwater to irrigate their crops and water their livestock. Seasonal flows of streams and rivers fed by melting snowpack high in Afghanistan's mountains also recharge alluvial aquifers located in populated valleys and provide city dwellers with drinking water. But the arid country is already highly susceptible to drought, and climate change threatens to alter precipitation patterns. With the population expected to increase by 80 percent by the year 2050, all factors point to water being one of the most critical national needs.

Since early 2002, American geoscientists have been working in Afghanistan to help the country develop reliable water supplies. Recent developments have included re-establishing the hydrologic expertise of Afghan scientists and creating local and national groundwater monitoring networks as well as a national climatic network. Although further improvements are needed, U.S. Geological Survey scientists working in Afghanistan hope that these advances will assist Afghanistan's planners and managers to assess and monitor current and future water resources.

Read more the work these scientists are doing to secure Afghanistan's future in the January issue of EARTH magazine: <http://bit.ly/1DoWZzz>.

For more stories about the science of our planet, check out EARTH magazine online or subscribe at www.earthmagazine.org. The January issue, now available on the digital newsstand, features stories on tornado season coming weeks earlier than it used to and marine mammals being blamed for the first tuberculosis cases in the New World, plus a commentary on preparing for the volcanic eruption in your backyard, and much, much more.

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Keep up to date with the latest happenings in Earth, energy and environment news with EARTH Magazine online at: <http://www.earthmagazine.org>. Published by the American Geosciences Institute, EARTH is your source for the science behind the headlines.

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