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## Bolstering the local economy in Afghanistan

### By Jonathan Spassov and Morgane Robert-Ouellet

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Peace Dividend Trust (PDT) is a non-profit organization whose primary goal is to bolster economic development in post-conflict countries through re-developing their private sector and encouraging international investment in the local economy.

Since January 2006 the PDT has run the Peace Dividend Marketplace project in Afghanistan. Funded in part by the Government of Canada, the Kabul-based project team works directly with the international community in Afghanistan to encourage local procurement and business development.

Shirine Pont, PDT Country Director in Afghanistan, has been in Kabul since 2006, heading up a small team of five national and two international staff. "What we do is look at clients' needs and find matches for what they require within the Afghan economy," she explains.

Their flagship product is the [Afghanistan Product Directory](#). Launched in September 2006, the site features profiles of over 3,000 Afghan companies that potential international clients can browse to find a suitable match for goods and service providers large and small. Says Ms. Pont: "There is a surprising amount of possibilities within the Afghan marketplace and we facilitate the linkages between Afghan entrepreneurs and international buyers."

In 2005 PDT studied UN peacekeeping missions and found that after overhead costs and salaries, less than 10% of monies are kept in the host nation's economy. The Afghanistan project was designed specifically to focus on that 10% by optimizing and increasing local procurement. The achievement to date is tremendous: over the last year, PDT has turned every dollar received from the Government of Canada into close to USD\$100, invested in the local Afghan economy.

International donorship and the presence of international NGOs such as PDT are critical in helping fledgling governments establish themselves. "The Government of Afghanistan is very much in a situation where it's still building its own capacities," says Ms. Pont, "and that's why it's very important for the national community to be here, not only to provide assistance in the building of this capacity, but also to step in where there might be a need for support."

However she is conscious that these changes will not be happen overnight. "We are talking about a country that has a lot of rebuilding to do, and that covers everything: from the economic legal framework, to the reconstruction of roads. There are a lot of opportunities for

#### VIDEO IN DEPTH

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**SHIRINE PONT**, AFGHANISTAN  
COUNTRY DIRECTOR, PEACE  
DIVIDEND TRUST, SPEAKS ON:

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Afghan entrepreneurs but it's also important to support them in understanding where these opportunities are and how they can access them. This is exactly what we're trying to do here, in Afghanistan."

While acknowledging the significant challenges of reconstruction in a post-conflict nation, Ms. Pont remains hopeful for the future of Afghanistan's economy: "It's the Afghans who, in the end, will carry this country forward, and the international community can only provide the support and assistance where it's requested and where it's needed. From my point of view, the Afghans maintain the momentum and the positive spirit."

More information on Peace Dividend Marketplace and the Afghanistan Procurement Directory can be found at <http://www.procurementdirectory.af/index.php> and at <http://www.peacedividendmarketplace.org>.

**Date Modified: 2008-06-10**