

# Migration and Urban Development in Kabul: Classification or Accommodation?

Newcomers and Host Communities  
in Districts 5, 7, and 13 in Kabul, Afghanistan

## About the Authors

The APPRO team responsible for this research consisted of *Saeed Parto* (Director of Research), *Ahmad Shaheer Anil* (Research and Evaluation manager), *Jos Winters* (Researcher), *Ehsan M. Sadaat* (Researcher), *Mohsin Usyan* (Researcher), *Asad Shadan* (Researcher), *Zarghona Saify* (Researcher), *Nafasgul Karimi* (Researcher), and *Wahab Hazivi* (Research consultant)

## About APPRO

Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization (APPRO) is an independent social research organization promoting social and policy learning to benefit development and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. APPRO is registered with the Ministry of Economy (Registration Number: 1212) as a non-profit, not-for-profit, non-government organization and headquartered in Kabul, Afghanistan.

APPRO's mission is to measure development progress against strategic reconstruction objectives and provide insights on how to improve performance against the milestones set by the Government of Afghanistan and the international donors. APPRO is staffed by personnel with many years of collective experience in various facets of development and scientific research.

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AFGHANISTAN  
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## 1. Introduction

Since 2001 around 6 million Afghans have returned from Iran and Pakistan to Afghanistan. *En masse* population movements are not new to Afghanistan, however. For many Afghans migration internally or to neighbouring countries, particularly Pakistan and Iran, due to socio-political and/or economic reasons is a fact of life.<sup>1</sup> The international Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reports that 76 percent of conflict affected Afghans have experienced forced displacement at least once in their lives internally and/or internationally.<sup>2</sup>

The causes for displacement are not always directly related to conflict. For ordinary households, conflict and other shocks, such as periodic droughts, reduce economic opportunity and predictable prospects, creating subsidiary or secondary reasons for migration and, often, displacement. Given the various causes of movement and displacement, it is difficult to categorize all internal and international Afghan migrants as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

The vast majority of the returnees from Pakistan and Iran have moved to the larger cities of Afghanistan, particularly Kabul. The official estimate for Kabul's population in 2010 was 4-4.5 million, with the vast majority living in sprawling informal and unplanned settlements.<sup>3</sup> These estimates and related projections point to serious challenges in terms of access to land, housing, employment, food security, sanitation, potable water, health, and a host of social problems.

The massive waves of returnees and the subsequent urbanization are compounded by a continuous inflow of displaced persons or economic migrants from rural areas to the cities. Kabul is estimated to have had approximately 1 million inhabitants in 2001.<sup>4</sup> The projected population for Kabul by 2020 has been put at 6 million.<sup>5</sup> At the same time the number of informal settlements in and around the capital has grown expansively, while estimates of the percentage of people living in informal settlements of Kabul have been put between 65 and 80 percent.<sup>6</sup>

The growth of informal settlements is not only a consequence of unprecedented influx of people, but also a manifestation of a lack of capacity to manage and administer it. The inability of the formal sector to provide the public with basic needs, such as adequate shelter, utilities, and health and education services, is believed to be one of the main factors driving the growth

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, The Liaison Office (2010), *Beyond the Blanket: Towards More Effective Protection for Internally Displaced Persons in Southern Afghanistan*, (Kabul: Brookings-Bern Institute), available from: [http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2010/05\\_idp\\_protection\\_afghanistan.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2010/05_idp_protection_afghanistan.aspx), accessed: December 20, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Cordero, C. (2010), *Kabul Urban Shelter Needs Assessment*. (Kabul: Norwegian Refugee Council).

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA-World Urbanization Prospects-2007) estimates 3,227,000 inhabitants, whereas Beall and Esser (2005) suggest a number between 5.6 – 6.4 million.

<sup>5</sup> AREU (2006) *Urban Poverty Reduction in Afghanistan*. Workshop report (Kabul:AREU). Available: [www.areu.org.af](http://www.areu.org.af). (Kabul: AREU), pages 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> Gebremedhin, Y (2005). 'Preliminary Assessment of Informal Settlements in Kabul City' (Kabul: USAID). Reed in MacDonald (2011); and ACF (2006) *Kabul vulnerability study*.

of informal settlements.<sup>7</sup> Also, the upward spiralling rents in the centre of Kabul, largely a product of unprecedented amounts of money pouring into the local economy by the many international organizations, has pushed the newcomers and even some of the middle income Afghan families into informal settlements.<sup>8</sup> The combined impact of these developments has taken a serious toll on the socio-economic wellbeing of large swathes of Kabul's residents.<sup>9</sup> Understanding the vulnerabilities facing urban residents in Kabul, which now includes a significant number of "newcomers", is central to designing appropriate assistance and urban development planning.

The two main government institutions in charge, the Kabul Municipality and the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing (MoUD), have been under-resourced, ill prepared, and incapable of developing adequate responses through policy and other forms of intervention to attend to the many needs of Kabul's sprawling population.<sup>10</sup> Current municipal service provision is still largely governed by the Master Plan from 1978, when the population of Kabul was barely one million. The settlements built in and around Kabul on government owned lands or disputed plots fall outside of the Kabul Master Plan and are thus considered informal. As such, the Municipality and MoUD maintain that they cannot legally provide services to the informally settled areas of the city for fear of legitimizing informal settlements and exacerbating the current unmanageable situation.

Rapid urbanization may be viewed as either a (return) migration/displacement problem, or a problem of urban planning and absorption capacity. Afghanistan does not have much experience in addressing large-scale urban planning issues since it has been a largely rural society with few cities whose sizes had remained, until 2001, the same for centuries.<sup>11</sup> Urban planning in Kabul, in a conventional sense, dates back to the rule of Zanbeel Shahan in the Third Century, when designated bodies were set up for water supply, tax collection, administration, and construction of public buildings and infrastructure.<sup>12</sup> These bodies eventually evolved into the *Shahrwali* (town council) of Kabul, enshrined in the 1964 Constitution.

The institutionalisation of urban management facilitated the creation of a Master Plan for Kabul's development by the Techno Export Institution of the Soviet Government in 1964. One landmark of this development was the first Kabul housing project known as Macrorayon (1965-1987), completed with funds from the Soviet Union.<sup>13</sup> A second agreement between the Soviet and Afghan governments was signed in the 1970s, of which the Third Master Plan for the development of Kabul in 1978 was an outcome. The Third Master Plan, which has remained in place since its inception, caters for a population of 2 million spread over 32,000 hectares in 25 years and classifies all settlements outside of the Plan's boundaries or codes as informal and thus in violation of the Plan.<sup>14</sup>

This study was undertaken to examine issues of displacement due to population movement and urban growth, land and settlement patterns, access to basic services, urban infrastructure,

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<sup>7</sup> Gebremedhin. 2005. p. 3

<sup>8</sup> UNHCR (2010) *Draft Report - Protection Profiling of the Informal Settlements in Kabul City and surrounding areas*, unpublished.

<sup>9</sup> UNCHR (2010).

<sup>10</sup> Ghazanfari (2002) Kabul City and UN-HABITAT. Policy Brief. Unpublished.

<sup>11</sup> Samizay (1974:8).

<sup>12</sup> Ghazanfari (2002).

<sup>13</sup> Ghazanfari (2002) p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Ghazanfari (2002).

and livelihood strategies by comparing different cohorts of in-migrants and host communities in Districts 5, 7 and 13 of Kabul.

The research sought to identify the current needs of the whole populations in these districts and to identify pathways forward for future planning and interventions through policy. The underlying assumption, subsequently confirmed during the research, was that “return” to the place of origin was not a viable option for the vast majority of the newcomers. Hence this research conceptualized the development of Kabul not as a temporary growth due to displacement but as a process of *slumization*, a prevalent phenomenon faced in major cities in less developed countries around the world. To this end, the focus of this study was the interactions and relations between the newcomers and the previously settled populations in the three selected districts.

## 2. Objectives and Methodology

The goal for this study was to gain a better and more accurate understanding of the issues surrounding urban in-migration in Kabul and to provide a sound basis for policy and other forms of intervention to improve the affected (host and incoming) populations. To achieve this goal this study set out to:

- Deepen understanding of the drivers and history of displacement with a focus on Kabul;
- Review policies and legal frameworks for displaced populations, including protection, housing, land and urban development policies relevant to displaced populations;
- Assess the specific vulnerabilities of displaced populations in Kabul particularly in relation to access to basic services, urban infrastructure, and livelihood opportunities and how they compare with other urban poor; and
- Identify how the Government of Afghanistan and the international aid community can best assist with the urban poor populations living in Kabul, and the implications for humanitarian and development programming.

This study was carried out in Districts 5, 7, and 13. The rationale for the selection of these districts, as opposed to others is as follows:

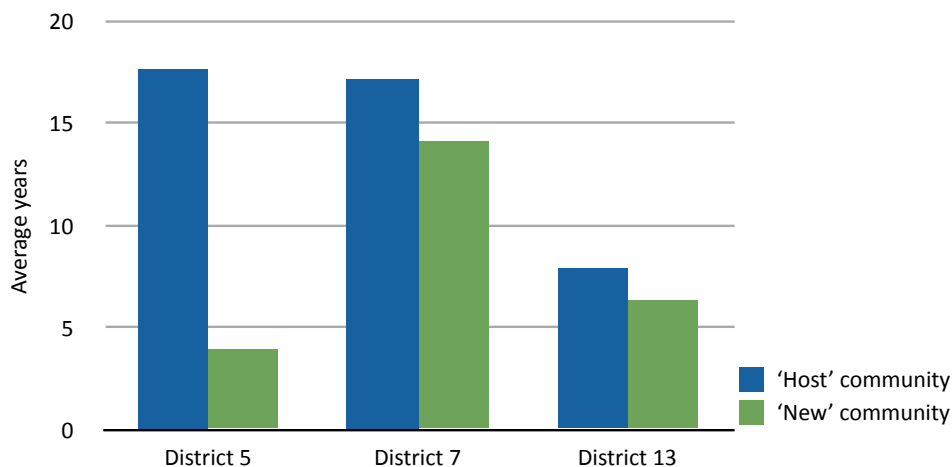
**District 5:** This area was chosen as it represents a specific land and settlement pattern, being the largest informal and illegal settlement in Kabul. It is located on the west side of the city on the road in from Kandahar, and is where the recent arrivals from the conflict in the southwest (Kandahar, Helmand) have settled, along with smaller groups of Kuchis (nomadic pastoralists) and returnees from Iran. The ethnic composition of the majority is Pashtun with some Baloch. The people are living mainly in tents, although a few have started to build simple living quarters. The first settlements began to sprout in 2007, and an exponential population growth has emerged ever since. The land belongs to the Ministry of Defence and there is no clarity as to what needs to be done to address the many needs of the community and the issue of land ownership. However, this area has been the subject of much attention and assistance from national and international humanitarian organizations, and continues to be cited as a case example of the problems confronting migrant/displaced communities.

**District 7:** Settlers of this hillside area are a mix of Pashtun, Tajik, and Pashaei ethnic groups from Ghorband, Tagab, and Ghazni. The main driver for these groups to migrate is cited as insecurity. This population does not figure on UNHCR’s IDP list, despite having some IDP characteristics. Other groups in this area include rural-urban migrants who come to the city in search of jobs and better access to services and other amenities.

**District 13:** The majority of the population are Hazara. Many of the family members are returnees from Iran who have decided to settle in Kabul. Many of the residents have legal titles to their land or claims to their dwellings as belonging to their family, friends, or kin. This area can be considered as a slum outside of the Kabul Master Plan.

Given the inadequacies of widely used terms such as “internally displaced”, “returnees”, and “refugees” to fully capture the population characteristics in Districts 5, 7, and 13, this report adopts the terms *newcomers* and *host community* to distinguish between the two main segments of population in each district.<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 1. Host and Newcomer Communities of Districts 5, 7, and 13**



No. = 166

As Figure 1 shows, the three districts are all relatively recently settled in, with the oldest host community in District 5 having only been settled in for 18 years. To varying degrees, the land settlement patterns consist of camp-like existence in tents and makeshift living quarters built informally and illegally (e.g., District 5), hillside settlements (e.g., District 7), and peripheral settlements (all three districts). The main ethnic groups (Pashtun, Hazara, and Tajik) are present in all three districts. Also, some areas in these districts have been targeted for assistance programmes, while others have not.

The primary data were collected using qualitative and quantitative methods. Interviews were held with a number of key informants selected from the target districts, and government and international agencies with stakes in issues of displacement and migration. In each district, at least one interview was held with community representatives. The focus group participants were randomly selected from a pre-stratified list provided by the *wakil* (community leader) of each district (Appendix 1).

The list was stratified based on: the time of arrival in the district, to distinguish between the host community and newcomers; and age, to distinguish between young adults and adults, and gender. In Districts 7 and 13, the participants were also stratified along migration/displacement patterns. Each focus group had 7-9 participants, and each participant was surveyed using a socio-economic survey tool to get a sense of household livelihood conditions (Table 1). However, data collected using this survey tool must be viewed as indicative rather than representative.

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix 2 for a summary of various terms

**Table 1. Data Collection Methods**

Source	Number and Type	Total Number of Individuals
Key informants	15 local key informants 12 national key informants	27
Focus Group meetings (7 per district)	1 Elder/community representative (of host community and newcomers) 2 Men (of host community and newcomers) 2 Women (of host community and newcomers) 1 Young adult male (newcomer) 1 Young adult female (newcomer)	166
Socio-economic surveys	Focus Group Discussion participants	166
Social mapping	Approx. 10 males in each district	30
Mobility mapping	Approx. 10 females in each district	30

In addition, the field researchers were tasked to write down observations from their field visits focusing on general living conditions, level of responsiveness to questions, and difficulties experienced in carrying out the fieldwork. Finally, social maps were drawn up to identify key resources and services in the community, while mobility maps were used to identify movements by women within the community in accessing the available resources, particularly in cases (such as District 5) where movement of women is heavily restricted.

### 3. Conflict, Displacement, and Urbanization in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is situated on important historic trade routes and has always had a great deal of movement of people within and across its territory. Migration driven by economic needs and ethnic and linguistic ties to the neighbouring countries, such as Pakistan and Iran, has long been established as a key demographic feature and predates the direct Soviet involvement in the country in 1979. Over the last 30 years, however, cross border movements and internal displacement have intensified greatly due to socio-political instability, compounded by severe climate-related changes such as recurring droughts, particularly during the 1990s and 2000s. By 2001, there were around 5 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan, 2.4 million in Iran, and an unaccounted number spread out across many European countries, the United States, and Canada.

The Soviet invasion of 1979 triggered the fleeing of millions from rural areas to the relative safety of cities, such as Herat and Jalalabad, while some 1.5 million refugees fled to neighbouring countries.<sup>16</sup> A large number of those who fled to Pakistan eventually joined the Mujahideen to fight the Soviet and Soviet-backed Afghan armies. The anti-Soviet warriors increasingly enjoyed considerable military and financial assistance by the intelligence agencies of the United States, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia as part of the Cold War. Despite the withdrawal of the Soviet troops in 1989, fighting continued between the Mujahideen and the Soviet-backed administration of Dr. Najibullah. The Mujahideen eventually toppled the Najibullah administration in 1992. Najibullah and the Mujahideen entered into peace talks brokered by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UNOCHA). Part of

<sup>16</sup> It has also been reported that the western governments and international organizations opposed to the Soviet invasion actively encouraged this mass exodus as a means to embarrass the Soviet Union. See, for example, Hanifi, M. Jamil (2000) *Rethinking refuge and displacement*. Selected papers on Refugees and immigrants, Vol. VIII, 2000. Arlington, VA: American Anthropological Association. Marsden and Turton (2002) Taking refugees for a ride? The politics of refugee return to Afghanistan (Kabul: AREU).



these negotiations concerned the repatriation of refugees from the neighbouring countries, while other UN agencies and NGOs focused on rehabilitation efforts within the country.

Around 900,000 refugees returned to Afghanistan voluntarily in 1992, followed by another 500,000 in 1993.<sup>17</sup> UNHCR's "Operation Salam" programme encouraged voluntary repatriation through mine clearing in affected rural areas, provision of health programmes, rehabilitation of essential infrastructure such as the water supply, and provision of education services. However, the rate of return diminished considerably towards the end of 1993, mainly due to infighting among the heavily armed Mujahideen, whose different factions turned against each other to gain dominance in the political vacuum that ensued soon after the fall of the Najibullah administration.

The civil war from 1992 to 1996 took on a notably urban (and violent) dimension with a concentration in Kabul, resulting in much devastation and an exodus of 100,000 Kabul residents. Many government administration buildings, around 60 percent of private houses, and much of the infrastructure in the city were destroyed or damaged beyond repair.<sup>18</sup> An estimated 75,000 Kabul families lost their homes during this period. The most affected were districts 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 16.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the civil war set in motion new waves of refugees and internally displaced persons.

While the Mujahideen factions were pounding Kabul, the Taliban had been recruiting fighters from the many *madrassas* (Islamic religious schools) set up in Pakistan mainly under Zia Al-Haq's regime in the 1980s. This development received support from Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and the United States as a means to fight Soviet influence in the region. The Taliban took pride in their explicit anti-modernist stance and an austere interpretation of Islam mixed with the traditionalist value system of *pashtunwali*, the tribal codes of conduct adhered to in varying degrees by all Pashtuns in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Taliban wished for, and attempted to institute, a purist Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan. Initially the Taliban's aim was to wage *jihad* (holy war) against the Soviets, although later they became critical of the "immoral" behaviour of the Mujahideen parties and offered, instead, strict interpretations of the Quran and *pashtunwali* as the only alternative. The Taliban began to assert control over the south of Afghanistan, centred on Kandahar, from 1994 onwards. Support for the Taliban among the local populations began to grow as they promised, and established, order in war torn areas that continued to come under their rule. By 1996 the Taliban reached and took over Kabul, ousting the impotent and failing Mujahideen government.

The Taliban were initially well received by the general populace, who vied for stability and order, especially in the South where they had their ethnic support base. However, the Taliban were still at war with the Northern Alliance, headed by Ahmad Shah Masoud, and never managed to bring the provinces of Panjshir (Masoud's home province) and Badakhshan under their control.

The Taliban's increasing control and severity of their punishment for the seemingly non-compliant urban dwellers resulted in the out migration and displacement of the educated liberal urban elite and the persecution of ethnic (non-Pashtun) and religious (e.g., Shiite) minorities in Kabul. The harsh social environment and diminished economic opportunities under the Taliban, compounded by a severe drought between 1999 and 2000, resulted in the internal displacement of an estimated 900,000 Afghans, and the mass exile of millions more to

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<sup>17</sup> Poppelwell (2007). FMO Research Guide on [www.forcedmigration.org](http://www.forcedmigration.org)

<sup>18</sup> Ghazanfari (2002).

<sup>19</sup> Ghazanfari (2002).

neighbouring countries that by the summer of 2001, around 3.6 million Afghans had become refugees.<sup>20</sup>

Since the fall of the Taliban regime in late 2001, more than 6 million Afghans have returned to Afghanistan.<sup>21</sup> From 2002 onwards, there have been a number of large refugee return waves through repatriation programmes based on tripartite agreements between the administrations in Kabul, Tehran, and Islamabad and facilitated by UNHCR. Also since 2002, a large number of Afghans have been finding their way back to Afghanistan without any form of official assistance.<sup>22</sup> In addition to the returnees from Iran and Pakistan, urban centres, such as Kabul, have also been receiving a large number of people from the provinces, who leave their rural homesteads in search of better living conditions and income security, settling largely in informal dwellings in and around the city.

According to UN and ICRC records, 730,000 people have been internally displaced in Afghanistan due to conflict since 2006, an average of 400 a day.<sup>23</sup> Food insecurity due to the drought in 2006, followed by further food shortages and a severe winter in 2007 and 2008, and the global increase in the prices of basic foodstuffs in 2008, created waves of newly displaced and re-displaced peoples.<sup>24</sup> UNHCR has estimated the number of IDPs in Afghanistan at 447,547 in 2011, of which 43 percent was conflict induced.<sup>25</sup>

Estimates for IDPs are sometimes higher, due mainly to the difficulties of collecting accurate data. Security concerns constrain access to certain areas, while rapid changes in settlement patterns make it difficult to distinguish between forced internal displacement and economic migration.<sup>26</sup> Kuchis (nomadic pastoralists) are the largest of the country's IDP population and constitute a large percentage of those IDPs classified as "protracted".<sup>27</sup> The Kuchi economy consists of sheep and goat herding and is dependent on the availability of seasonal pasturelands in the central highlands. The continuous and patterned movement to the lowlands in winter and the highlands in summer make Kuchis particularly vulnerable to conflict and drought.

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<sup>20</sup> Poppelwell (2007).

<sup>21</sup> The total number of returnees is 6,234,922. Figures provided by UNHCR's Kabul branch office from 2002 and go through 23 October 2010 quoted in: Kronenfeld, D, 2011, *Can Afghanistan cope with returnees? Can returnees cope in Afghanistan? A look at some new data*. Refugee cooperation, Middle East Institute and Foundation pour la Recherche Strategique.

<sup>22</sup> From Pakistan 3,607,673 returnees have been assisted while 349,583 have returned without assistance. UNHCR statistics quoted in: Kronenfeld, D (2011).

<sup>23</sup> IDMC (2011) AFGHANISTAN: Armed conflict forces increasing numbers of Afghans to flee their homes. A profile of the internal displacement situation.

<sup>24</sup> IDMC (2010) Afghanistan: Armed conflict forces increasing numbers of Afghans to flee their homes. Country profile.

<sup>25</sup> See UNHCR (2012) Statistical summary conflict induced IDPs.

<sup>26</sup> IDMC (2010) Afghanistan: Armed conflict forces increasing numbers of Afghans to flee their homes. Country profile.

<sup>27</sup> The categorization of Kuchis as IDPs leaves unresolved the question of whether Kuchis are actually displaced or move around from pastureland to pastureland as a way of life, not uncommon for a large number of nomadic peoples the world over and particularly throughout south and central Asia.

## 4. Migration and Patterns of Urban Growth in Kabul

By most accounts, the population growth in Kabul since 2001 has been unprecedented. Estimates as to the size of the population vary, however. In 2001, Kabul's population was estimated at 1.5 million, in contrast to more recent estimates varying from 3 to 7 million.<sup>28</sup> The migrants to Kabul can be divided into three groups. First are the returnees from the neighbouring countries that seem to have a preference for urban, as opposed to rural, areas. About 40 percent of all refugees from Pakistan and Iran returned to urban centres, with 29 percent of the total settling in and around Kabul.<sup>29</sup> Second are the returnees who go back to their areas of origin but, largely due to inability to settle in and/or lack of access to land, are forced to move a second time to the cities. The third group is made up of people who move due to natural disasters, conflict, and chronic poverty/lack of livelihood opportunities.<sup>30</sup>

Internal and secondary displacement and the subsequent urbanization can be explained by the lack of livelihoods in rural areas, lack of services, insecurity in provinces of origin, or changed skill sets of returnees. In some cases, rising food and fuel prices have made people move to the cities.<sup>31</sup> The conflict-ridden provinces are particularly difficult to reach for the government and the international aid agencies to provide the necessary relief.<sup>32</sup> IDPs and returnees are forced to move to urban areas when their land is occupied or sold in their absence, often with no legal recourse to repossess the land or to access new land. Furthermore, many returnees do not have the agricultural skills and inclination to work in rural areas, as most would have spent their time working in the cities of the neighbouring countries.<sup>33</sup> In some cases, the families of the returnees have expanded in numbers while in exile, and often too large to resettle in the rural areas they initially came from.<sup>34</sup> While in exile, their links with the community and other remaining family members loosen which, reportedly, makes them more aware of their individuality and more critical of the tight social fabric of the village life.<sup>35</sup> Many displaced people prefer to move on to cities rather than return to their villages because cities offer better access to water, electricity, hospitals, and schools and are perceived as being safer for family life and having greater social and economic opportunities.

There are also distinct patterns of urban settlement in Kabul. First, people have tended to move to areas where they already have kin or moved into particular districts as part of a larger group with the same ethnicity. As a result, different neighbourhoods of Kabul have become associated with different ethnic groups. This is prevalent in all the three districts (5, 7, and 13) selected for this research (Figure 2).

Drought, alongside little or no access to land, was cited as the main reason for migrating by the newcomers in Districts 5, 7 and 13. Access to free or cheap(er) land was stated by many from

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<sup>28</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA-World Urbanization Prospects-2007) estimates 3,227,000 inhabitants, Beall and Esser (2005) suggest a number between 5.6 – 6.4 million, USAID (2005) estimates 3,6 million, Majidi (2011) quotes 4,5 million in 2007.

<sup>29</sup> UNHCR. 2007.

<sup>30</sup> Majidi, N (2011) *Urban Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in Afghanistan*. Middle East Institute / Foundation pour la recherche strategique. p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> See MacDonald, I (2011) *Landlessness and insecurity: obstacles to reintegration in Afghanistan*. Middle East Institute/ Foundation pour la recherche strategique and Majidi, N (2011).

<sup>32</sup> MacDonald (2011).

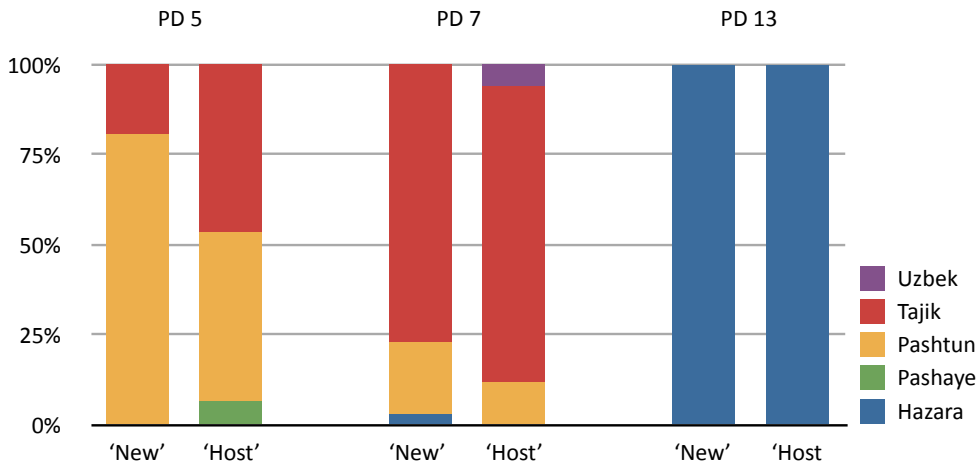
<sup>33</sup> Majidi (2011).

<sup>34</sup> Majidi (2011).

<sup>35</sup> d'Hellencourt et al. (2003) *Preliminary Study of Land Tenure Related Issues in Urban Afghanistan with Special Reference to Kabul City*. UN-Habitat: Kabul. p. 4.

District 7 as the reason for migration.<sup>36</sup> Causes for being displaced for the residents of District 13 were described as mainly ethnic strife in home provinces. Seeking employment and having relatives who already lived in the district were the specific reasons to come to Kabul. Public services, such as education and health, were also cited by all participants as main reasons to come to and remain in Kabul.

**Figure 2. Ethnic Makeup in Districts 5, 7, and 13**



**District 5** is populated by families, mainly from Helmand, Uruzgan, and Kandahar. There are also a large number of people from different provinces, who have spent time in Iran and Pakistan. The people from the provinces came to District 5 mainly because of armed conflict and drought. The main incentive for all migrants in this district is the hope of settlement on free land and its proximity to Kabul, which might also provide some means of livelihood. One of the other main reasons for many newcomers from Helmand to come to District 5 is said to be the word of mouth from Helmandese who have already settled there, telling others in their home provinces that there are more opportunities in Kabul than in Helmand, or anywhere else in the country, or adjacent countries. In addition, living in Kabul was said to be safer with more access to basic services, such as health and education.<sup>37</sup> Others said that they had come to Kabul because they could no longer grow poppies and had no other source of income.<sup>38</sup>

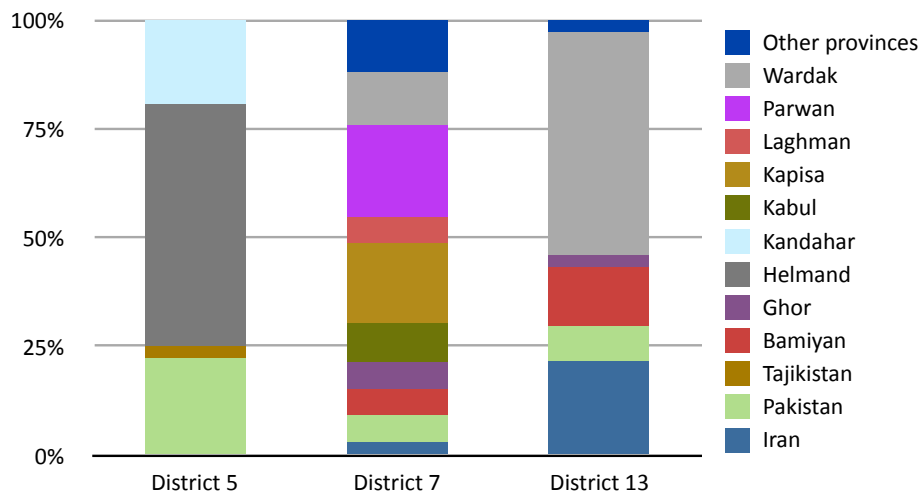
**District 7** is populated by Pashtuns (from different provinces), Hazaras (the majority, and mainly from Bamyan but also from other provinces), Pashais (Nurestan and other eastern provinces), and Kabulis from Kabul and the Shomali Plains (north of Kabul), as well as people from Takhar, Kunduz, and Kapisa. In 2002 the district experienced a steady inflow of newcomers mainly from Kapisa, Panjshir, Nurestan, and Khost provinces and the Shamali Plains. The main causes of this inflow were recurring droughts and unemployment. The newcomers also included people from Kabul, who saw an opportunity to own land or pay less in rent than they would in Kabul centre. Subsequent waves of migrants came to the district, either because they had friends and relatives in Kabul, or because living in Kabul would be more affordable. The newcomers reportedly settled on land designated as cemeteries or pastures.

<sup>36</sup> For example, FGD-H-F-7:2.

<sup>37</sup> FGD-NC-F-5, FGD-NC-YF-5, FGD-NC-YM-5.

<sup>38</sup> FGD-Wakils-5:1.

**Figure 3. Places of Residence of Newcomers Prior to Kabul**



**District 13** is the newest of the three districts and is overwhelmingly made up of Hazaras originating from Ghanzni, Bamiyan, Ghor, Uruzgan, Wardak, and Daikundi. There is a small population of Pashtuns. Some of the settlers have spent time in Pakistan and Iran in recent years. (Figure 3).

As these brief district profiles indicate, displacement is not due only to conflict, or drought but often the product of a combination of factors, which include economic and social issues. The complex patterns of displacement have led to much debate, both within the Government of Afghanistan and among international assistance agencies, as to who is actually internally displaced due to conflict, who is an economic migrant and, perhaps more importantly, what can be done to address the many issues that have arisen due to the mass movement of people to urban areas, such as Kabul. Few would deny that those displaced by the conflict in recent history are internally displaced, although there is dispute about numbers, especially in the south-west, where most international agencies have little access, and about whether displacement is protracted or new.

There are several difficulties in analyzing the specific vulnerabilities of people attributable to displacement in urban areas. First, due to successive displacements, some people may be recent returnees, economic migrants, and IDPs, or all at the same time. Second, in Kabul the displaced are not spatially distinct, as IDPs have settled across the city's broad swathes of informal settlements. Also, due to a lack of adequate monitoring, IDPs are difficult to identify.<sup>39</sup> For instance, there are not many differences between what one sees in District 13 and the rest of Kabul, as there are well-to-do homes and poorer homes intermixed throughout the district. Third, displaced persons may not be considerably more vulnerable than others amongst the urban poor in Kabul. The high level of vulnerability of many dwellers in Kabul also makes it hard to apply the criteria based on the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998) to determine when displacement ends and habitation begins.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Majidi (2011). See also Davies and Jakobsen (2010) and Brookings-Bern Project and NRC (2010) *Realizing National Responsibility for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons in Afghanistan: A Review of Relevant Laws, Policies, and Practices*.

<sup>40</sup> See Brookings-Bern (2007), *When displacement ends? A framework for durable solution* (Publisher: Brookings-Bern project on internal displacement).

The newcomers may be those who have fled rural areas due to drought, poverty, conflict, in search of improved social and economic existence, or a combination of these reasons. They may also be returnees from Iran and Pakistan, who do not wish to return to their areas of origin due to a change in their expectations or perceptions of where they should live. The Government's preferred solution is to send the newcomers "back" or away from Kabul for fear of having to deal with uncontrolled urban growth and to prevent the development of slums. However, many agencies involved in addressing refugee and displacement issues are of the opinion that the newcomers cannot be sent back and that solutions will need to be found *in situ*. Also, given the multifaceted characteristics of the newcomers, arbitrary distinction between IDPs, returnees, and so forth, is not at all helpful in attempts to address the many needs of these largely vulnerable populations and can, indeed, distort programmatic response.

There is broad agreement, nevertheless, that the incoming populations are very vulnerable and their presence in urban areas creates complex and difficult challenges, such as increased demand for jobs and urban services and pressure on the environment.<sup>41</sup> The increasing presence of the newcomers and their drain on various resources and services also serve as fertile ground for tension between the host and newcomer households and, more broadly, social unrest.

#### 4.1 Legal and Policy Framework

There is a long list of international and national laws, constitutional provisions and presidential decrees pertaining to the displacement/return migration – urbanisation nexus, including those that regulate property rights. More generally, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has committed itself "to create a prosperous and progressive society based on social justice, the preservation of human dignity, realization of democracy, attainment of unity, as well as equality of all peoples and tribes" (Article 6, Constitution, 2004). The Constitution therefore considers the *Universal Declaration on Human Rights* as binding. It also provisions for the freedom of movement and residency.<sup>42</sup>

Internationally, the United Nations' *Guiding Principles* are the starting point for laws, policies, and practices pertaining to internal displacement. The foundation for the guiding principles is the notion of "sovereignty as responsibility", which makes it the responsibility of the sovereign state to respect human rights laws. The Brookings-Bern project on IDPs has formulated three durable solutions for IDPs: voluntary return to the place of origin, integration in host community, and relocation elsewhere. The Refugee Returnees and IDP Sector Strategy (RRI) encourage voluntary return as a right emphasizing, however, that the outcome in any case should consist of durable solutions to displacement.<sup>43</sup>

Afghan authorities have yet to adopt a comprehensive law on internal displacement, however. The efforts by government bodies to effectively address the situation of IDPs in Afghanistan are

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<sup>41</sup> Reportedly, there has been a significant drop in the water table of the Kabul basin, from 2 to 3 meters to 8 or 10 meters. There are also extremely high levels of pollution, particularly in winter months when all types of combustible materials, including plastics and rubber, are burnt by the very poor households for cooking and warmth. See, for example, Parto, Mihran, and Kohi (2007).

<sup>42</sup> There are, in addition, a number of legal provisions pertaining to IDPs including the Presidential Decree No. 14 on the need for shelter and distribution of government land to IDPs and returnees, the Presidential Decree No. 297 on the human rights of the returnees, and the Presidential Decree No. 104 *on Land Distribution for Settlement to Eligible Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons* to address the land and shelter needs of IDPs.

<sup>43</sup> Brookings-Bern and NRC (2010).

limited by a lack of capacity and resources.<sup>44</sup> The Ministry of Returnees and Refugees (MoRR) has a relatively small IDP unit headed by an adviser to the Minister. In 2009-2010 MoRR had a budget of 3 million USD to address IDP issues, contrasted to 872 million USD pledged by the international community to be allocated through the Afghanistan Humanitarian Action Plan (2010). The situation is complicated by the fact that MoRR favours the return of IDPs and returnees from adjacent countries to their places of origin as the most “durable” solution and, for this reason, it has prevented organizations from providing basic services to IDPs in Kabul.<sup>45</sup> UNHCR has warned that return could easily lead to secondary displacement mainly due to landlessness of the IDPs and returnees in places of origin.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, the classification of the newcomers as IDPs is now being changed for District 7 by MoRR since, the ministry argues, many of the newcomers are now longstanding residents of District 7.<sup>47</sup> A large number of the newcomers have settled into regular daily life, holding jobs and sending their children to school in Districts 7 and 13, but to a much lesser extent in District 5.

In the National Urban Program (2004) five broad responses have been formulated to manage the rapid urbanization in Afghanistan. These are:

1. Accountable, effective, responsive, realistic and participatory planning and management, institutions and systems.
2. Integrated settlements for urban citizens with equitable access to basic urban services [and] tenure security [to creating] an enabling environment for affordable, durable housing and improved livelihoods.
3. Well functioning land and housing markets with an expanded range of actors involved in land development (private sector, the public, and government), which ensure the range of choices, and respond to people’s needs.
4. Revival of cultural identity and stimulation of economic activities through the preservation and revitalization of historical fabric and sites.
5. Appropriate standards of higher order infrastructure in place, essential to urban productivity, environmental protection, and mobility, which are well planned and managed.

There have been six types of interventions to meet these objectives since 2004. First, a number of programmes have sought to engage communities in participatory development by the World Bank and CARE and with some success. Second, efforts are being made to formalize some of the informal settlements. Third, improvements have been made to the core infrastructure in Kabul through interventions by the World Bank and UN-HABITAT, for example. Fourth, there have been developments of new residential areas in some Kabul districts. Fifth, completely new districts have been developed through such programmes as the land allocation scheme by UNHCR, or the more ambitious, but yet unrealised, Kabul Satellite City in Deh-e Sabz. Finally, there have been interventions through capacity building within relevant ministries and the Kabul Municipality to better provide for the city’s inhabitants. The findings from this research clearly show, however, that there is little evidence of the above interventions having had a significant or sustainable positive impact on the most vulnerable.

## 4.2 Land Tenure

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Majidi (2011).

<sup>46</sup> UNHCR (2008).

<sup>47</sup> Key informant interview (KI-NGO-21).

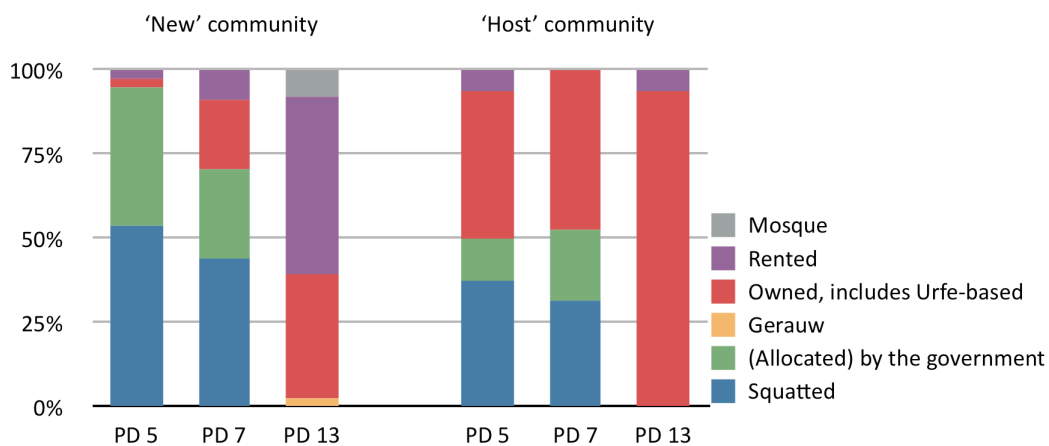
There is widespread allegation of corruption in land deals throughout Afghanistan with Kabul having the prime lands. Large swathes of land are apparently grabbed every so often by the powerful while at lower levels, a number of local people with means to bribe their way into obtaining forged land titles sell them to the desperate landless migrants in informally settled areas. Land grabs also happen at lower scale and for personal use:

A lot of these people come to Kabul pretending to be refugees of war or victims of conflict to get a land title.<sup>48</sup> Mixed among them are people from Kabul and elsewhere who have made a business of getting land titles from the Government on the grounds of being landless and then selling it at market price to the highest bidder.<sup>49</sup>

Numerous newcomers have purchased land from land speculators and illicit real estate entrepreneurs based on Urfe contracts, which are legally worthless.<sup>50</sup> There are recurring incidences of conflict over land ownership, both legitimately and illegitimately. All settlers, old and new, express strong attachment to their homes and would refuse to give up their entitlement to the land, regardless of titling legalities:

They tell us that this land belongs to the Ministry of Defense. Some of the richer merchants claim that the land is theirs and show us documents to prove it. We will not leave this land. If the merchants or the government tell us to move, we will not leave under any circumstances. Even if they kill us we will not move.<sup>51</sup>

**Figure 4. Land Tenure in Districts 5, 7, and 13**



Many newcomers to the three districts have no documentation as, reportedly, all documentation, such as birth certificates and land titles, is destroyed or lost during ethnic conflicts. Without a *taskara* (birth certificate) and the formal title to the land, it is almost impossible to get the land back in the home provinces, especially if the title has been lost in an ethnic conflict and if the land was expropriated by the more powerful side. It is not surprising that for many, the land they occupy now belongs to them:

<sup>48</sup> KI-G-3:2.

<sup>49</sup> KI-G-4:2.

<sup>50</sup> Urfe is a paper document attesting to a transaction having taken place between consenting parties. This document is not notarized or a substitute for a formal (and notarized) land title document.

<sup>51</sup> FGD-NC-YM-5:2.



This land belongs to us right now. We don't know who the owner is but right now this land is ours.<sup>52</sup>

In District 7, the land is thought to be owned by the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), Breshna (the Kabul electricity authority), and the Kabul Municipality. Allegedly, those who settled first and grabbed large parcels of land, later sold portions of it to newcomers based on Urfe contracts at prices ranging from 10 to 30,000 Afghanis.<sup>53</sup>

#### 4.3 Rule of Law

All disputes, including those involving land titles, are referred in the first instance to local *wakils*. The next step is referral to the community elders. If still unresolved, government sources, such as the police or personnel of the Afghan National Army, which has posts set up around Kabul, are informed. The latter are the last resort and avoided as much as possible because of their proneness to and expectation of bribes from all parties with the net result being that the person who can afford to pay the most is the person in whose favour the dispute is resolved.<sup>54</sup>

When the number of settlers in Districts 5 was lower, there were occasional patrols by the police, who often used these rounds to harass those building living quarters without official permit, by either extorting bribes to allow them to proceed or, if no bribe was offered, to demolish the construction. Similar incidents involving the police were reported in District 7, where the police would sometimes even beat up the individuals constructing homes or place them in jail for breaking the law, unless a bribe was paid.<sup>55</sup> However, as the numbers of settlers increased and community structures such as *wakils* and elders' *shuras* began to emerge, the visits and harassment by the police became less and less frequent. Currently, there are no routine visits by the police to District 7 and they often do not show up if called in cases of complaints or community disputes.

#### 4.4 Views on Informal Settlements

There is a general feeling by the residents of the three districts that the Government has no interest in their welfare and wellbeing. When asked what the Government was doing for the migrants and newcomers, a government official responded:

We have nothing to do with [the migrants] – we are not a charity organization. We have other problems to deal with. The problem we have with these migrants is that they come and occupy land that is not theirs and because of that we cannot provide them with municipal services. They bring their livestock and leave it to roam common areas and eat all the vegetation. We plant grass to keep the city green but the grass is eaten by their animals. They live in extremely cramped conditions year after year. Some have been living in these conditions for more than eight years. There is not very much we can do for them.<sup>56</sup>

While some officials look upon the migrant settlers with disdain, others offer a mix of views ranging from compassionate and pragmatic, to hostile. For example:

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<sup>52</sup> FGD-NC-F-7:3.

<sup>53</sup> FGD-NC-YM-7:1, FGD-NC-F-7:1.

<sup>54</sup> FGD-NC-F-5, FGD-NC-YM-5.

<sup>55</sup> FGD-NC-YF-7:3, FGD-H-F-7:3, FGD-NC-M-7:1.

<sup>56</sup> KI-G-2:1.

We have plans for all the government-owned land in Kabul. But we cannot just bulldoze the homes of these migrants to implement our plans. These people are also Afghans and have rights to live in the city. Now that they are here, we have to plan very carefully and work [to integrate] them. The Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Refugees must work with them to prepare them to move to provinces adjacent to Kabul so the population of Kabul does not grow anymore.<sup>57</sup>

This is contrasted to:

There are two groups of displaced people in [District 5]. The first group is from Helmand, Kandahar, and Uruzgan. These are the most dangerous people and make it very difficult to find Taliban when they try to lose themselves. They claim they lost their homes and families to the foreign forces and the Taliban. The second group is from Kunduz and Takhar provinces. These people are the laziest people. The men rest in the house while their women go out to beg and get involved in prostitution. There is also some drug dealing going on in the district.<sup>58</sup>

District 5's newcomers are a popular target of dislike and disapproval by officials and non-officials alike. For example:

These [migrants] are peasants with peasant cultures. They do not have urban culture. We [are supposed to] work with these people and train them to live like other urban folk.<sup>59</sup> ...they are disrespectful of the basic standards of urban living and hygiene. ... If you go to Helmand, you will see the same conditions there as you see in some of the settlements in Kabul: their kids play in the dirt and their women are not allowed out of the house.<sup>60</sup> ... The newcomers to [District 5] are seen by some as unclean, disease ridden, illiterate, and unwilling to abide by civic rules.<sup>61</sup> ... They cannot find work and so they get a cart and pull it through the city, adding to the already serious congestion problems. ... other government departments issue requests to us that we should look after the migrants, what can we do?<sup>62</sup>

Despite these negative views, there is also recognition by some government officials that in some cases newcomer families behave more responsibly than others by proper use of amenities, such as schooling for children, making the newcomers' children much better behaved [than their parents].<sup>63</sup> In contrast to District 5, the other two districts (which also have large populations of informal settlers) are not seen as problem areas by government officials.

The initial conflicts between the newcomers and the host community in District 7 appear to have been the result of newcomers being encouraged to move to vacant plots by senior government officials. Gradually the host community was outnumbered by the newcomers while, to the dismay of the host community, some of members of the host community also joined in the land grab foray and moved from the formal areas of the district to the informal areas in order to occupy larger plots of land.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> KI-G-2:5.

<sup>58</sup> KI-5-3:1.

<sup>59</sup> KI-G-2:4.

<sup>60</sup> KI-G-3:1.

<sup>61</sup> KI-5-1:1, KI-5-2:1.

<sup>62</sup> KI-G-2:3.

<sup>63</sup> KI-5-2:2.

<sup>64</sup> KI-7-21:1.

There have not been any concerted or officially sanctioned attempts to evict settlers from the informal settlements in Kabul. However, intimidation of the settlers by the police on legal grounds, i.e., no land titles or building permits, does occur, at least initially when a settlement is in its infancy. Land without title is bought and sold commonly based on Urfe and buildings are erected continually, usually facilitated through payment of bribes to the local police. Once a settlement is established and the community organizes itself, there is less evidence of intimidation by the police as, reportedly, the police are afraid of what might happen to them if surrounded by tens of angry and desperate households with nowhere to go and faced with losing the little they have scratched together in informal settlements.

There are no relations among the different newcomer communities and different ethnic groups in District 5 and in some cases, there is open hostility between the two main groups of gypsies and Helmandese. According to the refugees from Helmand, “these people [gypsies] don’t even speak Farsi, they have a strange language, don’t pray, and it is haram to socialize with them”.<sup>65</sup> There are widespread allegations against the gypsies of dealing in drugs and prostitution.

Some of the longer term residents in District 5 express great dismay at the negative impact the newcomers have had on the quality of life in the district:

These gypsies and Helmandese have created a lot of problems for us. They have strewn garbage everywhere and have a negative influence on our children. They have addicted our children to drugs and some of their kids, who play with our kids, have taught our kids bad manners. ... the Government must remove them from this area immediately.<sup>66</sup>

The influx of newcomers into District 5 has also created tensions among the newcomers themselves:

Before the Helmandese came here, all the help was being given to the gypsies. Now that the Helmandese are here, the gypsies receive much less and Helmandese get most of the free aid that is being distributed in District 5.<sup>67</sup>

An explanation for the discrimination alluded to in the above quote is the possible stratification of the population by the aid providing agencies based on what they perceive as IDP, economic (willing) migrants, or gypsies. Also, a lack of access to services due to scarcity causes friction among the various service users in District 5. For example, a group of young women complained that:

The water pump belongs to the Helmandese and Iranians [refugee returnees from Iran]. When we go to take water they fight with us.<sup>68</sup>

Or,

We don’t have any clinics near us and where there are clinics, they are where the Helmandese are. If we get sick, we go to private doctors who charge us.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> FGD-Wakils-5:5.

<sup>66</sup> FGD-H-F-5:1.

<sup>67</sup> FGD-H-F-5:2.

<sup>68</sup> FGD-NC-YF-5:1.

<sup>69</sup> FGD-NC-YF-5:2.

In the wider context both the gypsies and Helmandese suffer from discrimination. The young Helmandese, who work as casual labourers complain that they are discriminated against because of their appearance resembling the public image of the Taliban.<sup>70</sup> As a result, many of them are not selected from the crowd of casual labourers that gather at various pick-up points around Kabul. And, in cases where they are selected, they are the first ones to be replaced.<sup>71</sup>

The residents of District 5 are also seen as a security threat with suggestions by some officials that some of the residents are involved in gun running, drug trafficking, and anti-government activity:

The existence of these camps [in District 5] is very dangerous for the city of Kabul. Whoever helps the people in these camps is a partner in crime because Kabul cannot support this many people. Kabul is our capital and our capital [should be] a representation of our identity, character, and respect for the whole country. If you work for any organization, as an Afghan you have a responsibility to tell your employers that the presence of these migrants in Kabul is very detrimental and desecrates the city and corrupts its people.<sup>72</sup>

Relations among the different newcomer groups in District 7 are said to be good by some residents<sup>73</sup>, although inter-marriages between members of host and newcomer communities are very rare.<sup>74</sup> Host community members have a negative view of the newcomers and do not, for example, allow their children to mix with those of the newcomers' and refuse to share their mosques, water resources, and clinics with the newcomers.

In District 13, relations between newcomers and host communities is described as "very good".<sup>75</sup> However, the good relations did not stand the test of political meddling by a politician who decided he wanted to move in more members of his ethnic group onto land adjacent to the district, as a way to increase the numbers in his constituency. The land had been settled by Kuchis who, on hearing the news, became angry and started fighting with the local Hazaras. This led to riots in the district resulting in a number of deaths in the summer of 2010.<sup>76</sup> The key informant continued that this was not a conflict between newcomer and host communities, but rather an ethnic conflict between Kuchis and Hazaras, initiated by opportunistic politicians.

#### **4.5 Basic Services and Urban Infrastructure**

The vast majority of the households in informal settlements in Districts 5, 7, and 13 do not have access to municipality-provisioned electricity and, if they do, it is through an illegal line attached to the network through a residence in the formally settled parts of the same district. Kabul as a whole does not have a sewage network and has a minimal water network. In informal settlements there are private vendors that provide water on a regular basis to households, which are either too far from communal water pumps, or are intimidated by other users. Some better-to-do households in informal settlements purchase generators and sell some of the electricity to other informal settlers through locally set up power lines. Household garbage is usually discarded where it is most convenient and rarely collected.

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<sup>70</sup> FGD-NC-YM-5:2.

<sup>71</sup> FGD-NC-M-5:1.

<sup>72</sup> KI-G-6:1.

<sup>73</sup> FGD-NC-YF-7, FGD-Wakils-7, FGD-H-F-7:1, FGD-H-M-7:1.

<sup>74</sup> FGD-NC-M-7:3.

<sup>75</sup> FGD-H-F-13.

<sup>76</sup> KI-G-13:1.

There are a number of schools and clinics in all three districts but in most cases these are too far from the informal settlements and there are issues of discrimination or complaints by other users and concerns by parents about the safety of the children *en route* to school – there are a number of anecdotal cases of missing children in many areas of Kabul although there are no official statistics. Municipality buses and minibuses do not serve the informal areas, but there are a number of private minibus operators who service these communities.

The quality of health and education varies from location to location but, broadly, schools and clinics are ill equipped, underfunded, and understaffed. Education and health services are provided free of charge but there are also private or subsidized health and education providers. A large number of public schools (without fees) set up in makeshift structures, such as tents, are overcrowded, teach multiple grades at the same time and in the same classroom, and have no running water or toilets. Non-existent or inadequate toilet facilities is particularly inconvenient for girls, who cannot relieve themselves as conveniently as the boys. In addition, there is still a significant shortage of teachers, measured in tens of thousands nationally.<sup>77</sup> The situation worsens considerably in (relatively) newly settled urban areas such as the informal settlements in the three districts. These said, the chances of having access to education and health are significantly higher in Kabul than in the more remote or rural areas.

Contrary to the common perception of the Pashtun from the southern provinces being opposed to girls' schooling, all focus group participants, who had migrated from Helmand (District 5), stated explicitly that they came to Kabul in part because they wanted their children (boys and girls) not to be deprived of education.<sup>78</sup> This was also stated as a main reason to migrate by the young and older men from Helmand.

#### **4.6 Sanitation, Waste Management, Water and Electricity**

There is no waste collection system in any of the three districts. Toilets are mostly holes in the ground and garbage is usually collected in plastic bags and discarded in various areas around the settlements. Sanitary conditions worsen significantly when people burn sewage and garbage as a means of disposal and during the cold winter months. The situation is quite dire in winter with rain downpours and melting snow run-offs, which flood mostly the badly constructed informal settlements. The conditions in District 5 are described by Afghans and non-Afghans as horrific and even inhuman. The most widespread forms of accommodation are tents and makeshift living quarters. There is very little evidence of sanitation systems or waste disposal – a serious health risk, especially when population density is unusually high.

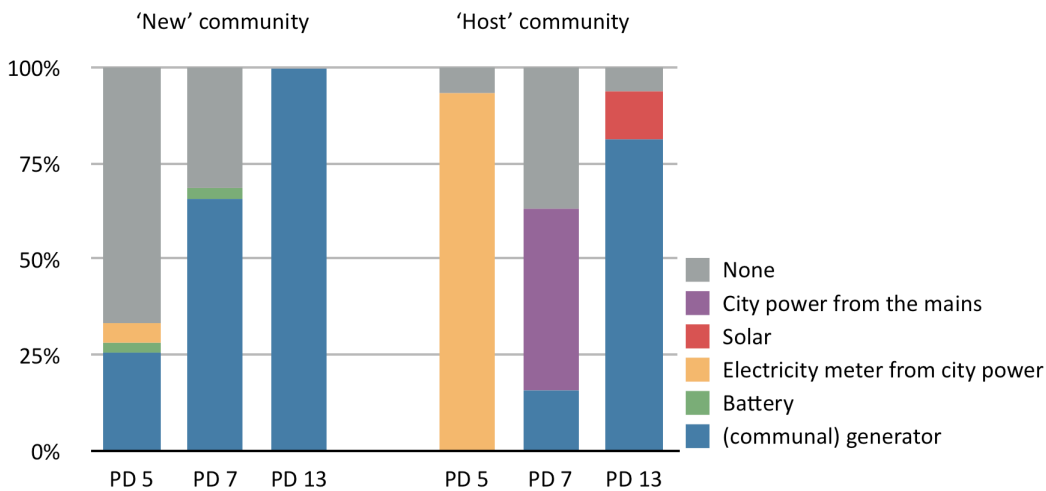
There appears to have been no direct assistance in providing electricity to informally settled districts by the Government, despite the fact that there has been a steady increase in the number of informal dwellings in Kabul. At the same time, assistance organizations are being prevented by the police from providing basic needs.

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<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Parto, Mehran, and Kohi (2007). Sector Reform in Public Health, Education, and Urban Services: Evidence from Kabul and Herat. Available from: [www.appro.org.af](http://www.appro.org.af).

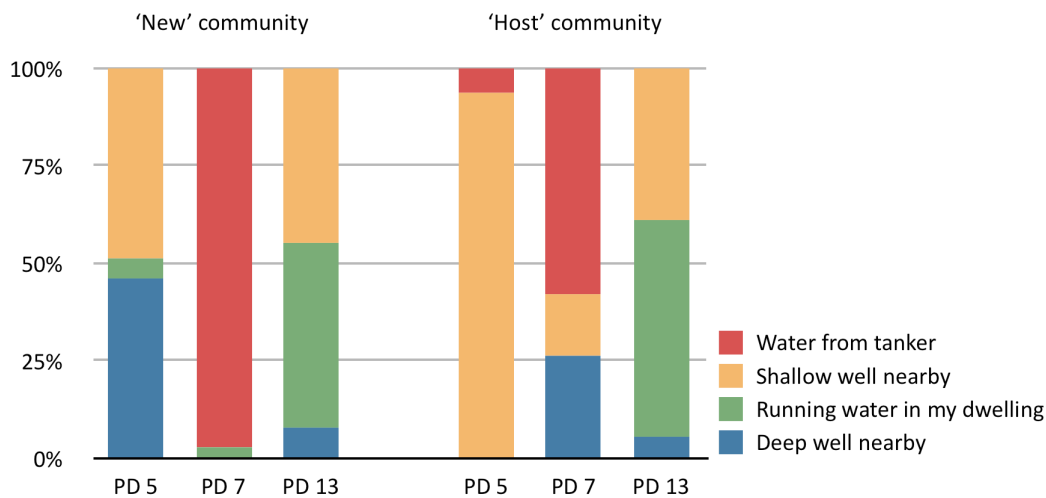
<sup>78</sup> FGD-NC-F-5.

**Figure 5. Sources of Electricity**



Interestingly, and in contrast to other major shortcomings in service availability, District 5 has an exceptionally high number of host community household receiving electricity from Kabul’s grid (Figure 5). District 5 also has a significant number of newcomer households with no electricity at all.

**Figure 6. Availability of Water in Districts 5, 7, and 13**



Access to potable or other water is scarce in District 5. In Districts 7 and 13, there are private companies that provide potable water plumbing for prices ranging between 12 to 16,000 Afghanis per household.<sup>79</sup> There were complaints in District 7, however, about shoddy work carried out by contractors appointed by international NGOs to provide plumbing:

We have asked for potable water through a communal water tank or plumbing a number of times. The community here and international NGOs [Solidarité] have lost so much money to private companies who said they would do it but did not, or the plumbing broke down very soon after it was completed. We complained to Solidarité,

<sup>79</sup> FGD-NC-YF-7:2.

who said that the contractors would have to fix it. In the meantime we have no water.<sup>80</sup>

In District 13, reportedly, most people have 24-hour access to potable water.

#### **4.7 Health Services**

District 13 has adequate, by Kabul standards, health service provision with “immediate access to ambulance service for emergencies”<sup>81</sup> while the number of clinics is insufficient in District 5 in particular and, to a lesser extent, in District 7. A major issue for the residents of Districts 5 and 7 is the long distance to clinics (around 60 minutes of walking) and the waiting time (sometimes all day). There is, inevitably, friction among the various users of services due to scarcity.

The public health conditions are so extremely poor in District 5 that some of the employees of humanitarian organizations servicing the community are said to be afraid that they might become inflicted with disease if they went there.<sup>82</sup> In District 7, the clinic is very far and located in the formal part of the district. When individuals from the informal parts go to the clinic, the residents from the formal part of the district protest that “these people are from the mountains and we should be given priority over them”.<sup>83</sup> Participants from District 13 said that the clinic was only 10 minutes walk away but complained that the local clinic is overwhelmed with the number of patients, who sometimes wait a whole day before they are seen by the doctor.<sup>84</sup>

#### **4.8 Employment**

Many of the men in District 5 do not have jobs or cannot keep jobs because of discrimination against them as being from the countryside, unclean and untidy, and sometimes as suspected Taliban. Some of the older women work as domestics or tailors. The younger women are almost always kept at home as it is deemed improper for a young woman to leave the house. There is strong sentiment among some informal settlers from Helmand that at least in Helmand they could grow their own food and meet their basic livelihood necessities. They also benefited from the mutual aid system prevalent among rural communities. In Kabul they have to earn wages but finding work is sporadic, cost of living is high, and there is no sense of mutual aid or community solidarity.<sup>85</sup>

In contrast to District 5, there are many cases of charitable practices in Districts 7 and 13, such as the host communities providing food to the less well-to-do newcomers, particularly in District 13. Some of the newcomers in Districts 7 and 13 work as domestic help in the homes of the wealthier host community members. In all three districts, the newcomers are mostly daily casual workers who, on average, work 2-3 days per week and earn between 100 – 300 Afghanis per day often supporting a family of at least 5. Other income sources include tailoring, quilt making, shoe cobbling, cart running for chores or selling fruits and vegetables, and carpet weaving and needle working, particularly in Districts 7 and 13 (Figure 6). Some men have office

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<sup>80</sup> FGD-IN-M-7:2.

<sup>81</sup> FGD-H-F-13:4.

<sup>82</sup> FGD-NC-YM-5:1.

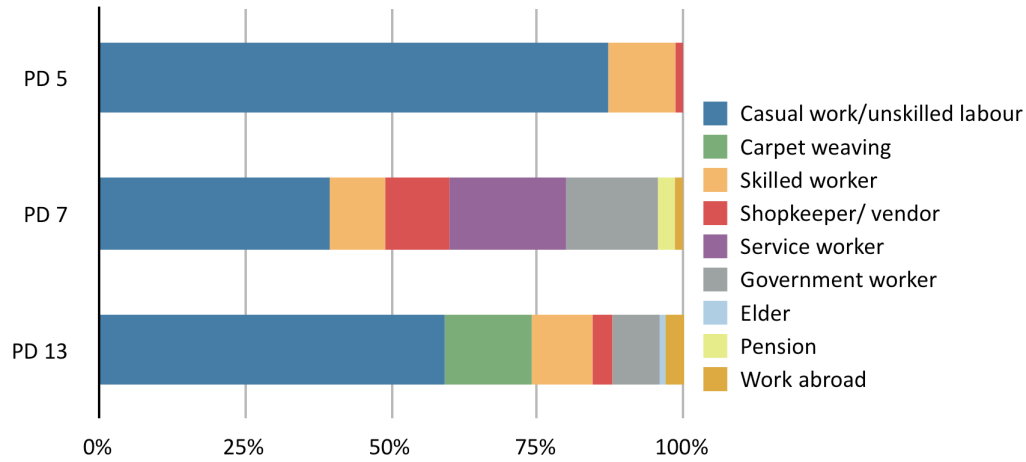
<sup>83</sup> FGD-Wakils-7:1.

<sup>84</sup> FGD-NC-F-13:1

<sup>85</sup> Yet, the families that manage to live in these conditions and earn a living send their younger children to school.

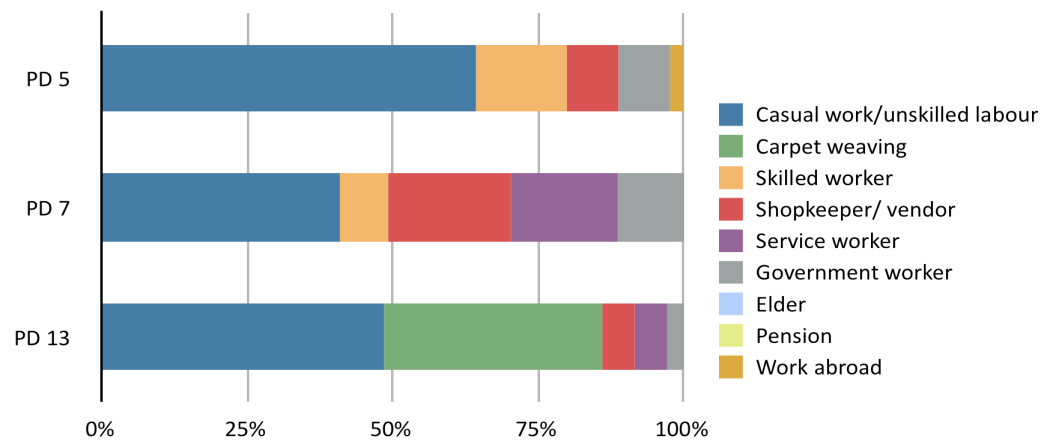
jobs with national or international NGOs, work for government offices<sup>86</sup>, or are in the police or the army.<sup>87</sup> A significant (but unknown) number of homes are headed by female widows.

**Figure 7. Sources of Income for Host Community Members**



A number of men, who originate from Helmand go there during summers to work in illegal poppy fields<sup>88</sup> – this was also stated by some of the men from the host community.<sup>89</sup>

**Figure 8. Sources of Income for Newcomers**



District 7 and 13 appear to have a significant number of people who are gainfully employed in mainstream, professional jobs, such as teaching and white collar positions with the government or non-government organizations, or trades such as carpentry and welding. The reason stated by these more professional dwellers for moving into District 7 was high rents and other living expenses in Kabul centre. A number of participants in focus group discussions described how they had tried to live in Kabul but were basically driven out because of high living costs.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>86</sup> FGD-NC-F-5.

<sup>87</sup> FGD-H-F-13:3.

<sup>88</sup> FDG-Wakils-5:6.

<sup>89</sup> FGD-H-M-5:1.

<sup>90</sup> FGD-NC-F-7:4, FGD-NC-YM-7:1.

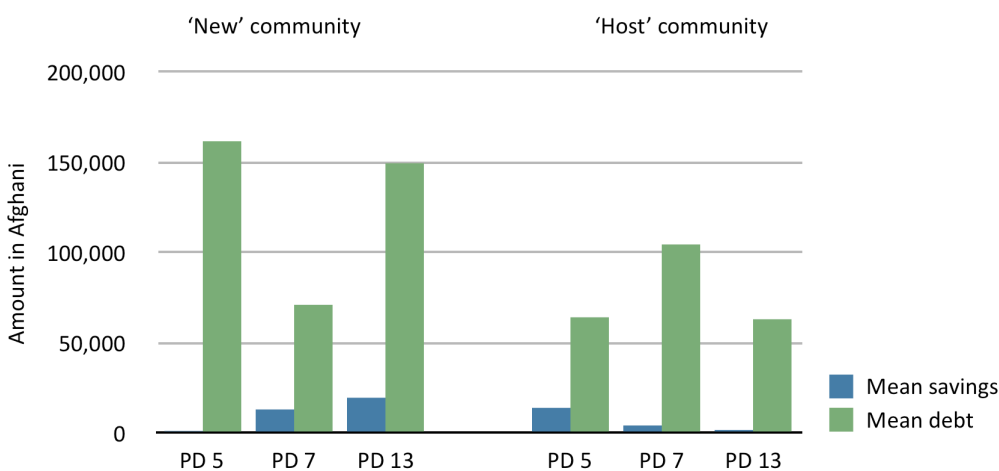


By most accounts, the newcomers, who come from Pakistan and Iran are better placed to find employment in Kabul’s relatively vibrant labour market than those who are displaced because of conflict, drought, lack of access to land, or the wish to make a better life in the city by any means necessary. This is because the returnees from Iran and Pakistan bring with them a host of skills in such areas as construction, making them more employable in Kabul, which has been experiencing a boom in construction since 2001.

#### 4.9 Household Financial Situation

Household debt levels are high, particularly among the newcomers and the jobless and particularly in District 5. The average income for the main breadwinner in the household ranges from around 2,000 to 7,000 Afghanis per month for all three Districts.

**Figure 9. Household Debt and Saving**



#### 4.10 Views on Going “Back”

The overwhelming majority of all those interviewed in the three districts stated categorically that they had no desire to go back to their places of origin, even if there was a home away from their relatively new but squalid homes around Kabul. According to many, what they had in Kabul was better than anything they could hope for elsewhere. Access to land to live on as owner, occupier, or tenant was said to be much more likely in the three districts than other places. There were some, however, who indicated that they would move under certain conditions. For example,

We go wherever they give us a roof over our heads, from Ghazni (southeast) to Mazar (north) to Jalalabad (east), or wherever. Unless they give us a place to live, we will not move.<sup>91</sup>

Similarly,

If there are schools, water, food, and clinics, we will go.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>91</sup> FGD-NC-F-5:1.

<sup>92</sup> FGD-NC-YF-5:3.

One of the *wakils* said that he had returned to Helmand with his family and stayed there for a year, trying to make a fresh start. However, he decided to return back to District 5 because of insecurity and worry about the wellbeing of his children.<sup>93</sup> Others said that it would be easier to consider returning if there was land for farming and money to buy livestock. This, however, is not the case for the overwhelming majority of the people who decide to settle in and around Kabul instead of their home provinces.

Some of the women who participated in focus group discussions in District 5 were adamant that they did not wish to return to their home provinces. The men said they had nothing to go back to and that Kabul was “the shared home of all Afghans”<sup>94</sup> while the sentiment expressed by the women was that they were happier to remain around Kabul.<sup>95</sup>

Some of the men said they feared for their lives if they went back to Helmand, as they would be hunted down and killed by anti-government forces, who view migrants benefiting from government help as traitors.<sup>96</sup> Another *wakil* stated that he would rather die than return to Helmand, while a young man from Helmand said he would be like a blind person if he returned and the only way he could scratch a living would be to carry a gun or grow poppies.<sup>97</sup>

The group of young females interviewed in District 7 categorically stated that they had no desire to return to their provinces of origin, and that “this is our country, we have a right to live [anywhere] in Afghanistan and the Government cannot move us away from here by force”.<sup>98</sup> A large number of the participants from District 13 were adamant that they would not go back:

No, we will not go back because our homes were burned down and our fields were destroyed [by Kuchis] who will come back every spring to do the same thing. We are afraid to go back. If the government protects us and the Kuchis leave us alone we will go, otherwise we will not.<sup>99</sup>

Apart from ethnic strife in home provinces, another reason cited by the participants in District 13 for not going back was having become used to urban living:

Some of the people in this district lived for over 10 years in places like Pakistan and Iran and have become urban dwellers. They can no longer live in the mountains.<sup>100</sup>

Or,

In Kabul both men and women can work. In the mountains all we can do is collect fodder for the animals in the summer months and then do nothing all through the winter.<sup>101</sup>

And,

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<sup>93</sup> FGD-Wakils-5:4.

<sup>94</sup> FGD-Wakils-5:3.

<sup>95</sup> FGD-NC-YF-5.

<sup>96</sup> FGD-Wakils-5:2.

<sup>97</sup> FGD-NC-YM-5:3.

<sup>98</sup> FGD-NC-YF-7:2.

<sup>99</sup> FGD-NC-F-13:2.

<sup>100</sup> FGD-H-F-13:1.

<sup>101</sup> FGD-H-F-13:2.

No, I don't want to go back because in my home province there is only hard work with livestock, I am comfortable here.<sup>102</sup>

For the residents of District 13, mainly Hazara, discrimination based on ethnicity looms large in discussions on returning to home provinces:

If there is social equality and development in every part of Afghanistan, we are ready to go to our provinces. But, if the situation remains the same we prefer to live in Kabul because right now [in our home provinces] there is no work and people live in very bad conditions.<sup>103</sup>

The *wakils* from District 13 stated that even if the adults decided to go back to their home provinces, their older children would remain, as rural life would have no appeal for them after living in Kabul.<sup>104</sup> Of the returnees, who came to Districts 7 and 13 from Iran and Pakistan, many do not wish to return to those countries because of discrimination, despite the fact that their daily life would be economically and hygienically preferable there than in the squalid conditions of their homes in Kabul.

## 5. Key Findings

Movement, displacement, and migration in Afghanistan are not new phenomena and have been ever present facts of existence for a vast number of Afghans. Since 2001, however, the rate of migration into Kabul has increased drastically, placing much stress on the already weak or non-existent infrastructure, fragile environment particularly in terms of air quality, and scarce resources such as potable water. There are, in addition, increased tensions centered on availability, access to, and use of the available resources and services.

Legal provisions relevant to settlement patterns, including land tenure, in Afghanistan are largely consistent with internationally recognized provisions and requirements. The key challenge is not, therefore, the adequacy or sufficiency of these provisions but how and why, to date, they have not been adhered to.

Numerous studies have underlined the need for a new, more realistic and practical Master Plan for Kabul based on Kabul population's current and projected needs. This research confirms the need for a new Master Plan that legitimizes the many dwellings currently categorized as informal.

The health and education sectors do not extend sufficiently to informal settlements. In part, the deficiency is attributable to scarcity in the number of clinics and schools, but also of the number of trained professionals required to staff and run the new clinics and schools and budgetary priorities to remunerate qualified staff.

Employment and employment prospects, particularly for the youth, is a major reason why many families move to Kabul. While the newcomers are happier to be in Kabul than elsewhere, there is significant discontent among them about the lack of employment opportunities and discrimination based on appearance and/or ethnicity in the Kabul labour market.

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<sup>102</sup> FGD-NC-YF-13:1.

<sup>103</sup> FGD-NC-YM-13:1.

<sup>104</sup> FGD-Wakils-13:1.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

It appears that what is happening in the three districts studied, and very likely in other Kabul districts with informal settlements, is the emergence of slums around the largest population centre in Afghanistan, consistent with patterns of rural-urban migration prevalent in a large number of less/least developed countries. Despite the illegitimacy of dealings around buying and selling land (based on Urfe contracts), many newcomers are more than willing to take the risk and are not easily dissuaded from moving in and staying. The reasoning behind this behaviour is that a life in Kabul, however difficult, is better than living in rural areas with rough terrain, extreme environmental elements, limited access to land, lack of employment opportunities other than farming and tending livestock, lack of access to services in health and education, and armed conflict.

The slum emergence patterns are indicated by sporadic but certain responses to the settlers' needs by a variety of sources, such as Microfinance Institutions (MFIs), providing loans to build homes on disputed land, CHF paving roads (District 13), NRC providing construction material (District 13), private companies providing electricity from generators (all districts), potable water wholesale or through constructing the necessary plumbing (Districts 7 and 13 but mostly inadequately), the Indian Government providing financial assistance to operationalize the electricity grid (District 13), garbage collection (Districts 7 and 13), and the many private operators, who offer transport services to and from these settlements on a regular basis (all districts).

Given these developments, sending back the migrants in these three and other districts around Kabul is not the most viable or realistic option as many of the migrants have no home to go back to, or refuse to go back now that they know there are ways other than working the land to make a living.

The problems of these districts will not go away easily, however, even if the Government took bold steps to grant land titles to the informal settlers. As with many solutions, granting land titles is likely to create another problem of land grabbing by the powerful or the opportunist, who will deprive those most in need. By the same token, the problem will also not go away by government indecision or inaction.

Much can and should be done to improve living conditions in these districts, nevertheless. Humanitarian organizations, such as Ashiana (in education) and UN Habitat (in municipal services), as well as the Government, will need to continue and intensify their support. The strong caveat has to be not to provide services without initiation from the would-be beneficiaries as such efforts would only strengthen the widespread aid dependency that plagues numerous Afghan communities in urban and rural settings.

### **Recommendations:**

- Arbitrary distinctions between the various segments of the informally settled is not practical for policy and intervention purposes, or in characterizing these most vulnerable urban dwellers. In the context of Kabul, more useful categories may be the vulnerable host communities and the equally vulnerable newcomer communities.
- The health and education sectors need to expand their reach into informal settlements in Kabul. This, however, is a function of budgeting priorities and a longer term policy objective, as clinics and schools will need to be staffed by adequately trained, and paid, professionals.

- Seeking solutions to the many social and economic challenges of the informally settled in Kabul would benefit from drawing on experiences of governments and humanitarian aid organizations faced with slumization processes in other parts of the world, in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.
- Given the absence of attempts to compare the slumization process in Kabul to others around the world, more research is needed to evaluate comparative cases as the basis for further policy making on informal settlements in Kabul, and perhaps other major urban centers, such as Jalalabad, Herat, and Mazar-e Sharif.
- Findings from further research on slumization processes should be used to engage the national and international agency officials with mandates for urban development and humanitarian aid provision in Afghanistan.
- Grassroots community organization and representation, as encouraged by some national and international agencies, should be supported and legitimized as a means to define problems and find solutions based on consensus.
- The Government will need to devise a new Master Plan for Kabul, based on Kabul's current population and needs.
- Aid coordination and the rule of law, often subjects of much bickering and complaint, but are key elements in most reports on reconstruction in Afghanistan, need to feature centrally in attempts to address the plight of the most vulnerable among the informally settled.
- More support should be provided to the Deputy Ministry of Youth, under the Ministry of Information and Culture, to serve the young population of informal settlements in Kabul through remunerated community service jobs, for example. Such efforts are likely to lessen discontent and idleness among the young, whose desperation and lack of prospects create fertile ground for turning against the rule of law and legitimate government.

## Appendix 1: Focus Group Discussions and Key Informants

### Focus Group Discussions

No.	District	Type	No. of participants	Code
1	5	FGD of host community female	8	FGD-H-F-5
2	5	FGD newcomer young female	8	FGD-NC-YF-5
3	5	FGD newcomer female	8	FGD-NC-F-5
4	5	FGD elders ( <i>wakils</i> ) male	8	FGD-WAKILS-5
5	5	FGD host community male	8	FGD-H-M-5
6	5	FGD newcomer male	8	FGD-NC-M-5
7	5	FGD newcomer young male	8	FGD-NC-YM-5
1	7	FGD of host community female	7	FGD-H-F-7
2	7	FGD newcomer young female	7	FGD-NC-YF-7
3	7	FGD newcomer female	8	FGD-NC-F-7
4	7	FGD elders ( <i>wakils</i> ) male	8	FGD-WAKILS-7
5	7	FGD host community male	7	FGD-H-M-7
6	7	FGD newcomer male	8	FGD-NC-M-7
7	7	FGD newcomer young male	8	FGD-NC-YM-7
1	13	FGD of host community female	9	FGD-H-F-13
2	13	FGD newcomer young female	7	FGD-NC-YF-13
3	13	FGD newcomer female	9	FGD-NC-F-13
4	13	FGD elders ( <i>wakils</i> ) male	9	FGD-WAKILS-M-13
5	13	FGD host community male	8	FGD-H-M-13
6	13	FGD newcomer male	8	FGD-NC-M-13
7	13	FGD newcomer young male	8	FGD-NC-YM-13

### Key Informants

No.	Organization	Code
1	NGO	KI-NGO-1
2	NGO	KI-NGO-2
3	Government	KI-G-3
4	NGO	KI-NGO-4
5	Government	KI-G-5
6	NGO	KI-NGO-6
7	Government	KI-G-7
8	Government	KI-G-8
9	Shopkeeper	KI-NGO-9
10	Shopkeeper	KI-NGO-10
11	Government	KI-G-11
12	Government	KI-G-12
13	Government	KI-G-13
14	Shopkeeper	KI-NGO-14
15	Shopkeeper	KI-NGO-15
16	Government	KI-G-16
17	Shopkeeper	KI-NGO-17
18	Government	KI-G-18
19	Government	KI-G-19
20	Shopkeeper	KI-NGO-20
21	NGO	KI-NGO-21

## Appendix 2: On Migration/Displacement Terminology

On the issue of displacement and urban growth, of particular interest are the varied and complex patterns of displacement that have led to much debate both in and between government and assistance actors on the right terminology to be used to refer to displaced populations. This report uses the definition of “internally displaced persons” articulated in the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998), according to which IDPs are:

*...persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.*

The *National IDP Profile* (2008) offers four categories for Internally Displaced Persons:

- Protracted,
- (New) conflict-induced,
- Displacement due to food insecurity and natural disaster-induced, and
- Secondary displaced returnees and deportees.

In the *National IDP Task Force Strategy* (2009) the categories are presented as:

- Conflict-induced
- Disaster-induced, and
- Protracted.

The populations displaced immediately after the fall of the Taliban fit the Protracted IDP category while those displaced from 2002 onwards are considered a new load. These categories seem to be more specific to the complex patterns of displacement in Afghanistan, in particular to the protracted displacement of returnees and deportees from Iran and Pakistan. Five broad groups of displaced people can be identified in Afghanistan:

1. Those fleeing war (in the south-west, and now increasingly from Baghlan and Kunduz to the north, to Kabul and from Badghis and Ghor to Herat),
2. Returnees, who have come to Kabul either because they cannot or are not willing to return to their area of origin, or because they went back, found it unsustainable, and returned to Kabul again,
3. In-migrants from rural areas because of drought, harsher winters, land disputes, or a shortage of work and/or food,
4. Those displaced within the city, either as a result of land disputes or other (economic) reasons, and
5. Kuchis staying in the urban areas, sometimes because conflict has disrupted their migration patterns, sometimes because of increasing impoverishment and the hope of a better livelihood near the capital city.

The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as a person who,

*... owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his[/her] nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself[/herself] of the protection of that country.*