

## Report

### Workshop on Global Compact on Refugees and Global Refugee Forum 2019: Opportunity for strategic, collective engagement of Afghan civil society

A series of consultative workshops were organised by ADSP and ACBAR for the latter’s member base. To ensure as wide an engagement as possible, the events were held in sequence in **Kabul** (12 September), **Herat** (16 September) and **Mazar-e-Sharif** (23 September). The purpose of these workshops were:

- to bring ACBAR members together and to discuss levels of engagement and activities relating to returnees and reintegration in Afghanistan;
- to strengthen awareness on the Global Compact on Refugees, its objectives as the framework for international cooperation in finding sustainable solutions to refugee situations as well as in addressing their protection issues. It also aimed to build an understanding of the Global Refugee Forum and to initiate a dialogue on how civil society actors can ensure a role in Afghanistan’s participation – Whole-of-Society approach;
- to discuss and understand the role civil society actors can play in national, regional and global arrangements including support towards the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), with Afghanistan being one of 15 pilot countries;
- initiate discussions around identifying gaps and challenges, good practices and securing pledges/contributions ahead of the GRF as well as ways forward beyond the event.

All three workshops were delivered in the same format based on identical agendas in order to maintain consistency. However, the Mazar workshop was fully conducted in Dari/Farsi. The final text of the GCR was distributed ahead of the workshops, for advance reference. In Herat and Mazar, the invitation was also extended to a number of non-members, some of whom attended.

The workshops were kick-started with a light-touch discussion during the introduction process, seeking from each of the participants a snapshot of their views on the priorities in addressing returns and reintegration.

Figures 1, 2 and 3 highlight the main areas identified by individual participants in each city where the workshops were held.

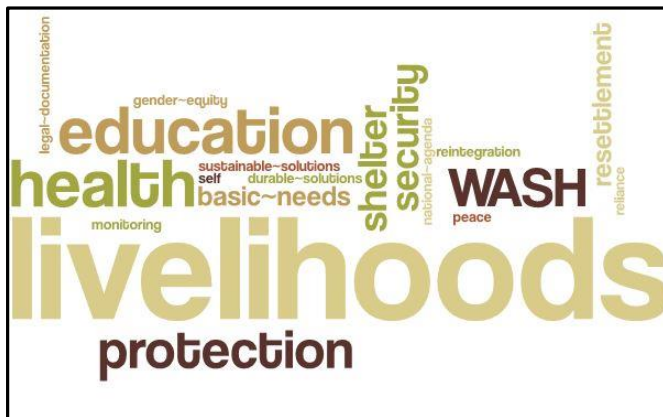


Figure 1: Kabul Workshop 12 Sept

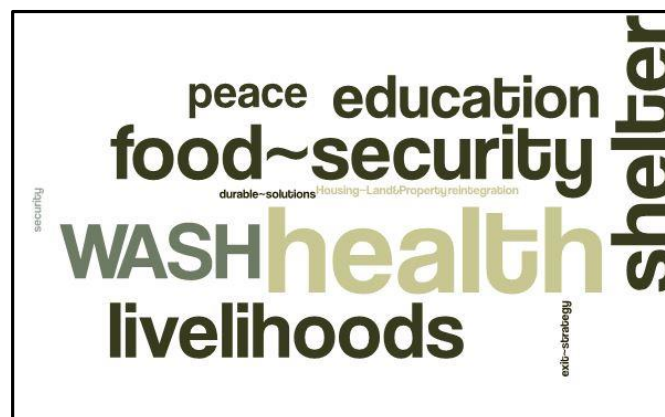


Figure 2: Herat Workshop 16 Sept

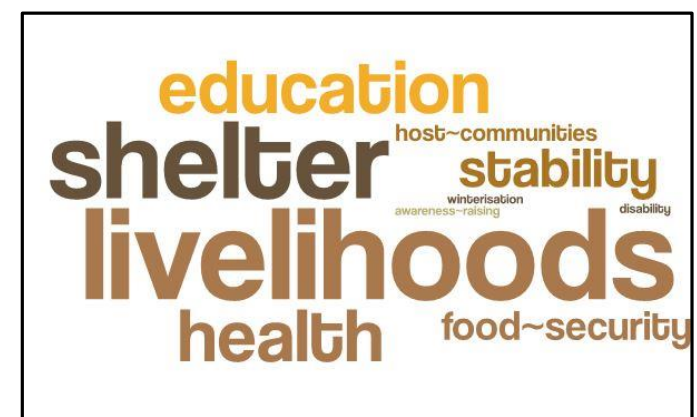


Figure 3: Mazar Workshop 23 Sept

A combination of modalities was applied throughout the workshop with a view to maintain a consultative and participatory approach. The workshop was therefore comprised of a one hour presentation (see Annex 2) which provided a detailed overview of the background to the Global Compact on Refugees, its composition, framework, objectives and global arrangements. In addition, the Global Refugee Forum, its intended outcomes, themes, roles and responsibilities and the side events were presented. The aim of the presentation was to prepare the ground for and initiate group discussions and consultations among the NGO participants towards identifying good practices to showcase as achievements and approaches for GCR implementation. Likewise, to set the stage for thinking around determining concrete pledges and contributions to be shared at the GRF that will advance GCR objectives. The GRF needs to be recognised as an opportunity where civil society actors also play a significant role in ensuring that the Afghan displacement issue remains high on the agenda among the international community. It is also important to ensure that Afghanistan's civil society is strongly represented in a coordinated manner in partnership with UNHCR and government stakeholders.

Group discussions centred around four themes listed below, with pledges and contributions being a cross-cutting area that participants were encouraged to consider identifying throughout their deliberations.

- i) What are the needs and priorities for returnees and their reintegration?
- ii) What are the gaps and challenges in addressing needs for returnees and their reintegration?
- iii) What good practices are out there?
- iv) What interventions can be introduced towards addressing needs and challenges for returnees and their integration?

What pledge or contribution would you make to address the issues identified or to take forward/scale-up existing good practices?

## Summary of Group Discussions

### i) Needs and priorities:

Discussions across all three workshops involved in-depth analysis centred around the immediate and longer term needs of refugees returning to Afghanistan and the challenges they face. Across all groups, immediate needs were identified in areas of health, shelter, education, food security and livelihoods with the critical underlying need being safety and security. However, it was widely believed that meeting these needs, while crucial at first instance of return, cannot be sustainable in the lead up to reintegration as a durable solution. As one participant in **Herat** noted, “humanitarian aid is without roots”. Participants stressed on the need for adequate funding opportunities to take forward durable interventions for reintegration of returnees – something they believed is currently not sufficiently available. This, they found may contribute towards the risk of secondary displacement and in many cases it has meant that returnees then become internally displaced people (IDPs).

In **Kabul**, group members reiterated the need for inclusive coordination across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and the need to consider the situation within the national and regional contexts. While there is strong coordination within the humanitarian sector, this is to a large extent lacking when it comes to development related interventions. In addition, they considered it essential to distinguish the needs of returnees who are documented and those who lack documentation.



In **Mazar**, security was pinpointed as the underlying cause that impacts accessibility and the ability to respond to needs. Livelihood opportunities are not always matched against returnees' existing skills that they may have gained when living as refugees elsewhere. Moreover, urban settings are not designed to accommodate the large influx and this can place pressure on infrastructure facilities and service provision. The right to property and land was highlighted as a challenge that can cause secondary displacement for returnees. This issue of access to data and a comprehensive database was identified by some national NGOs as a challenge.

Ideas for pledges and contributions centered around results-based fundraising targeted for returnees, the need for a common approach and solutions among NGOs/UN/government, promoting the rights of the displaced at national and regional levels, monitoring how resources are utilised and advocating for a needs-based and rights-based approach in this regard, implementation being aligned to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, stronger coordination with host countries and an advocacy campaign for the right to settle for returnees as well as more information being made available to those experiencing displacement (including immigration laws, what to expect upon return etc) with a view to protect them from hazards associated with movement including for example smugglers.

### iii) Good practices

Contrary to challenges identified by other groups on the wider coordination levels, groups discussing good practices seemed to recognise the presence of good coordination at provincial levels particularly coordinating mechanisms such as ACBAR (as mentioned in **Mazar**). Conducting joint assessments to identify vulnerable beneficiaries, and surveys being sensitive to gender, disability and age was also discussed. While perhaps not systematic, there is recognition and integration of gender, age and disability related factors at policy and programming levels (discussed in **Kabul**). Good practices also involve provision of basic services including in communities in hard to reach areas by working with local partners – this in turn helps to empower these partners.

Practices that involve cultural and religious sensitivities were also recognised to be crucial in enhancing meaningful participation of men and women (mentioned in **Kabul**). Access to reliable data was considered easily available, with mention that requests to the government for data were responded to and information was made accessible. However, it was also highlighted that data should be sensitive to longer term interventions as well and not just humanitarian and immediate term related data.

In **Mazar**, several good practices were shared which includes the existing humanitarian coordination mechanism in place presently involving six partners (among UN, NGOs and government led by UN OCHA and the Ministry of Economy). Coordinated activities involve various stages including conducting joint needs assessments, coordinated responses and referral systems and documenting evidence<sup>1</sup>. Other good practices include joint efforts such as the Awaaz Afghanistan humanitarian hotline (# 410) for returnees and IDPs that is supported by multiple actors including UNHCR and funded by ECHO. The Citizens' Charter was also seen as a potential tool to take forward a wider approach to good governance and helping to strengthen synergy and cohesion among returnees and host communities.

Proposed pledges and contributions included the possibility of expanding existing partner mapping to be shared with all NGOs as well as on sharing information on areas of expertise and activities among all actors - particularly national NGOs who may presently not have access or are not aware. This

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<sup>1</sup> More details on this will be sought from the group in Mazar

mapping should outline clearly who does what so as to further increase opportunities for coordination as well as to prevent duplication. In this regard it was also recognised that DoRR/MoRR now has a stronger understanding of roles and areas where each organisation/actor operates (raised in **Herat**). Forums and opportunities where experience sharing is made possible was also considered as being constructive. Implementation with an innovative ‘lens’ and identifying good practices that can also be applied to the development and durable solutions context (as opposed to just humanitarian) were proposed.

#### iv) **Proposed interventions**

In **Kabul**, group discussions centred around interventions in various areas such as **education** (Better Learning Programmes, Accelerated Learning Programmes, Education in Emergencies etc), **livelihoods** (Technical and Vocational Education and Training, SME development distribution of inputs), food security (distribution alongside cash/voucher assistance), **WASH** (potable water, latrines etc, and development related interventions such as boreholes/piping), **gender-based violence** (awareness of rights, community dialogue, psychosocial support, context-driven in each region in Afghanistan), shelter (cash for rent, emergency, transitional and permanent shelters). Participants also deliberated on how organisations can work together in an integrated and complementary manner particularly in situations where one organisation has access to an area and others do not. An integrated and inter-agency approach was identified as a key solution for Afghanistan and this can include the consortium approach. This can mitigate issues that include lack of coordination as well as working with the same donor but with different modalities, approaches and expectations. It is important therefore to seek how to encourage donors to fund more integrated approaches. For existing coordination mechanisms and groups, it is also important to ensure sustainability in engagement and active participation in meetings that does not see dwindling in numbers across time.

Discussions in **Herat** led to the group recognising the need for a comprehensive leading coordination body for long term processes and solutions that will include a system whereby screenings and case management are done and intervention needs are determined through an integrated referral system. Screenings, it was recommended, need to be done at individual levels rather than household levels as needs differ among different types of family members (age, gender, disability, youth etc). The coordination mechanism needs to mobilise relevant actors in the regions they operate in, and it needs to ensure interventions also factor in other sectors. For example, if there are livelihood programmes being introduced for returnees in their place of origin, the coordination mechanism also needs to comprehensively look into aspects related to their needs in WASH, health, education that can be provided by other service providers. This mechanism also needs to be closely linked to relevant governmental bodies and other actors so as to ensure sustainability of results and impact. Tracking M&E indicators and assessment activities should also take on an integrated approach and factor in how interventions have contributed towards the beneficiaries’ needs across all areas.

The participants in **Mazar** called for interventions that include addressing the underlying reasons for displacement with a view to minimising the need to become displaced. These include ensuring jobs and livelihoods security (including in the agricultural sector), social peace, prevention of conflict among host and returnee communities and would require more funding including of longer-term nature. They also reiterated the need to ensure close coordination among key stakeholders particularly among NGOs and therefore, for example, ensuring expansion of membership in the existing humanitarian coordination system currently in place in Mazar, to ensure all-encompassing responses. They proposed the expansion and further awareness raising of the [Awaaz Afghanistan](#) humanitarian helpline alongside interventions that raise awareness of the challenges and risks of displacement. In addition, they stressed on the need for more inclusive response in communities that ensure assistance is needs based, inclusive of host and returnee populations.



## Points to be noted for future occasions

- Throughout the discussions in all three cities, the terms **IDP** and **returnee** were referred to interchangeably and can often be considered a grey area. This issue is quite common in Afghanistan mainly due to the fact that, as a country of origin, it is grappling with the issue of displacement across both statuses. Moreover, many returnees undergo secondary displacement for a variety of reasons and in effect become IDP-returnees. Therefore, where reference is made to IDPs, this should not necessarily eliminate focus in the context of GCR or GRF. However, it should also be noted that many IDPs, such as those displaced due to the drought in recent years, will have experienced displacement only within the borders of Afghanistan and will not have crossed international borders.
- The workshops in Kabul were primarily held in English. However, a number of participants would have been more comfortable and benefited more if it was held in Dari/Farsi. This challenge was, however, balanced with the fact in Kabul, the workshop saw a strong presence of international NGOs and several participants were expatriates bringing in their perspective and experience. This further enriched discussions and Dari speakers not comfortable with English benefited from a purely Dari-speaking working group. In Herat, while the presentation was provided in English, the remaining plenary and group discussions were held in Dari/Farsi and was instrumental in strong engagement by the participants. The workshop in Mazar was fully delivered in Dari/Farsi despite the presence of one English speaker who was very familiar with the local language. The presentation has been translated into Dari/Farsi and will be shared with participants as reference. Farsi translations of the final text of the Global Compact on Refugees and the guideline for the Global Refugee Forum will also be shared.
- It was interesting to note that in all three workshops, participants expressed interest for invitation to such workshops being extended to the government and UNHCR. During various discussions, it was evident that participants would have benefited from hearing, right there and then, the perspectives of other actors they work closely with and who have a significant role to play.
- Throughout discussions in all three workshops, the imperative significance of data and access to data emerged. While some believed that the existing repertoire of data was quite sophisticated, accessible and reliable (from government, IOM, UNHCR), others believed that data, while available, was insufficient and not all-encompassing and applicable to all. Several participants across all three workshops, referred to the need for a 'data centre' that caters to a wide range of NGOs working across sectors in order to enable them to provide the right support and assistance to their target groups and geographic areas. An understanding of the need for data protection was evident among all.

## Ways forward

The three workshops were a start of dialogue among civil society organisations in Afghanistan on the GCR, CRRF and GRF which needs to be maintained, expanded and invested in. While concrete pledges and contributions as well as details of good practices to showcase still need to be unravelled and fine-tuned, the engagement of ADSP and ACBAR with the organisations has confirmed that good practices do exist and could also have potential for valuable learning, replication and scaling up. Civil society actors in Afghanistan are eager to continue to play a complementary role alongside the government and UNHCR in addressing the needs of returnees and their integration and to engage further. They have strong potential to enrich the representation of Afghanistan and sharing its displacement challenges with the international community at the GRF as well as going forward, by bringing their experiences on the ground into policy related discussions.



## Annexes

Annex 1: Agenda

Annex 2: Presentation on GCR and GRF (English and Dari)

Annex 2: List of participants (Kabul, Herat, Mazar)