



Re-Imagining the Drought Response

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About ATR Consulting

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ACRONYMS

ADSP	Asia Displacement Solutions Platform
ATR	Assess Transform Reach Consulting
ALCS	Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey
AMD	Afghanistan Meteorological Department
ANDMA	Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority
AHF	Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund
ARCS	Afghan Red Crescent Society
CERFT	Central Emergency Respond Fund
DiREC	Displacement and Return Executive Committee
DINA	Drought Impact and Needs Assessment
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
ERM	Environmental Resources Management
FEWS	Famine Early Warning Systems
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
ICCT	Inter Cluster Coordination Team
IDLG	Independent Directorate of Local Governance
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KII	Key Informant Interview
MoRR	Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation
MAIL	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
MEW	Ministry of Energy and Water
MoE	Ministry of Education
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NSIA	National Statistics and Information Authority
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
SFSA	Seasonal Food Security Assessment
WFP	World Food Programme
WV	World Vision
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. Background

Afghanistan has seen an unprecedented rise in Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the last two years, the phenomenon largely triggered by the ongoing conflict and recurring natural disasters. Based on IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), around 2,598,000 IDPs are displaced within Afghanistan. The figure was collected between December 2017 and December 2018 and includes people who were displaced between 2012 and 2018.¹

In 2018, over 170,000 people were displaced in Afghanistan's western region alone after drought conditions adversely affected livelihoods, forcing locals into chronic food insecurity. Assessments conducted by humanitarian NGOs and aid agencies indicated that insufficient access to water and fodder culminated in crop failure and livestock mortality, respectively.² The socio-economic demographic of western Afghanistan is typically comprised of subsistence farming, the prevailing majority of such households struggling to absorb shocks caused by natural disasters. As a prolonged dry spell developed into a drought, local farmers relied on distress mechanisms including limiting food consumption, marrying-off their daughters at a young age, and liquidating assets to buy food.

Hunger was a main factor triggering displacement. Qala-e-Now and Feroz Koh (the provincial capitals of Badghis and Ghor provinces, respectively) were the first urban centers where households were forced to leave their homes in search of food, drinking water and healthcare services.^{3 4} The scale of damage created by the drought called for an immediate coordinated intervention by the Afghan government and relevant humanitarian actors, to provide life-saving assistance to affected communities. However, these late efforts proved ineffective in preventing an emergency situation from transforming into a full-scale crisis, leading to acute, prolonged displacements and frustrating the possibility of return.

This study is aimed at answering the following question: What would the drought response have looked like if its key long-term objective had been to prevent a protracted displacement scenario? Through a desk review of relevant documents and a series of Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), this study returns to the chain (or indeed gaps) in the decision-making process that led to a crisis with such protracted displacements. It also presents a set of recommendations, primarily addressed to the humanitarian community and the Afghan government.

1 IDMC's Global Report on Internal Displacement, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/GRID%202019%20-%20Conflict%20Figure%20Analysis%20-%20AFGHANISTAN.pdf>

2 OCHA, Afghanistan: Forced to flee, April 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.unocha.org/story/afghanistan-forced-flee>

3 Norwegian Refugee Council, Afghans fleeing conflict face worsening hunger, June 2018. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghans-fleeing-conflict-face-worsening-hunger>

4 Norwegian Refugee Council, Afghans fleeing conflict face worsening hunger, June 2018. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghans-fleeing-conflict-face-worsening-hunger>

From dry-spell to large displacements: the unfolding of a crisis

Afghanistan's western region was affected by a prolonged dry spell in the 2016-17 wet season, but limited awareness of the risks of displacement caused by drought characterised this initial period. The prolonged dry-spell weakened the resilience and coping mechanisms of affected households, and no early action was taken by the Afghan government and humanitarian community to mitigate the impact of the drought conditions. Afghanistan's early warning system provided sufficient information in late 2017 of the impact of below-average rainfall during the 2017-18 wet season (typically January through March) in conjunction with conflict, food production, and pastures. Early warning messages were either poorly disseminated or poorly understood.

Initial displacements in early 2018 were not considered to be of serious concern as the situation had not been closely monitored, or indeed analysed in the context of a dry spell. However, concerns began to mount in April as it transpired that the emergency assistance initially provided to affected households was insufficient, and that a further increase in displaced families was likely. Planned emergency responses were further frustrated as it emerged that humanitarian assistance could not contain the scale of displacements.

In mid-April 2018, the Afghan government declared a drought. In mid-May 2018, the Humanitarian Country Team revised the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan to facilitate fundraising. The government set up a drought emergency task force to coordinate and align the response with the humanitarian community.

The 2018-19 Humanitarian Drought Response in the western region was effective in addressing basic and immediate needs of displaced households. However, the response was not structured in a way that could enable communities both displaced and in their location of origin to quickly recover, resume livelihoods and, most importantly, remove or diminish dependency on humanitarian aid. This convergence of challenges was caused by shortsightedness in planning from both government and humanitarian actors. **Emergency responses were directed at troubleshooting issues in IDP settlements , rather than offering more dynamic solutions by way of returning displaced families,** and resolving complex challenges such as decimated livelihoods and development gains within drought-affected communities. Whilst an early recovery intervention may have been more effective at resolving challenges as they arose, calls for a comprehensive drought response went unanswered during the acute stages of displacement.

Re-imagining the drought response: increasing awareness, improving decision-making processes and linking development and humanitarian action

While around 3.5 million people were provided with life-saving emergency assistance in 2018-2019, displaced households did not benefit from durable solutions. To avoid displacement, more efforts to inform stakeholders of the multiple risks associated with drought should have been undertaken. Further, certain key factors should have been considered to prevent such protracted displacement, including:

- Improved engagement with government, national and international actors committed to **addressing climate change issues in the region**. The drought was primarily caused by climate change, which should have been prioritised in the region years ago, especially considering the vulnerability of the area to drought conditions;
- An **earlier appeal for funds** in early 2018 may have prevented large-scale displacements, if fund allocation had been prioritised to address life-saving support in drought-affected communities;
- Sufficient humanitarian and recovery efforts in communities affected by the drought may have **facilitated a**

return for families forced to flee their home;

- As demonstrated by the millions displaced by the prolonged period of drought and ensuing floods, there is an **urgent need for a development strategy to tackle climate change effects and increase food security**.

For this course of action to take place, a number of recommendations should be considered, and are presented in more detail in the last chapter of this study:

- 1) Improve efforts to disseminate robust analysis of early warning signs;
- 2) Prevent displacement by addressing the structural causes of food insecurity;
- 3) Explore flexible longer-term funding options in order to scale-up early responses;
- 4) Recognising dry spells as a humanitarian and development challenge, potentially leading to displacement;
- 5) Identifying needs prior to developing a Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), and before a drought is declared;
- 6) Providing measures to care for livestock, including restocking support;
- 7) Synchronising and coordinating planning and responses between government and humanitarian actors to maximise resources, capacity and impact; given that there are many agencies active in Afghanistan (whether International NGOs, local NGOs, and UN agencies mandated to do both development and humanitarian set of actions), there is a need for building a connection and coherence between their two set of actions.
- 8) If assistance cannot be delivered due to insecurity, consider negotiating for access;
- 9) Collect information and develop a durable solutions strategy;
- 10) Provide livelihood assistance at the place of origin to avoid pull factors and facilitate early returns;
- 11) Coordinate and align return interventions within the national and international humanitarian community.
- 12) Provide assistance to the vulnerable members of the host community.
- 13) Facilitate return of small and larger-scale farmers to their places of origin, bearing in mind the agricultural calendar;
- 14) Provide local market-driven vocational training programmes to IDPs in place of displacement;
- 15) Provide additional assistance to vulnerable members of the host community;
- 16) Provide civil documentation to IDPs to gain access to employment, credit, and education.

INTRODUCTION

The long-term consequences of the drought in western Afghanistan, particularly in Badghis, Ghor, and Herat provinces, were largely borne by locals, and led to mass displacement in 2018. While some affected families initially sought refuge close to their community of origin, in urban centers such as Qala-e-Naw (provincial capital of Badghis) and Feroz Koh (provincial capital of Ghor), the vast majority (some reports citing up to 100,000 people) were forced to settle closer to Herat city, significantly further away from their community of origin. Throughout 2019, higher than average precipitations of rain and snow were recorded, finally ending the drought. However, long-term effects persisted in 2019, and to this day many families remain displaced due to a complex web of reasons including conflict and food-based insecurity, heavy debts, and floods.

Although displacement has been a significant challenge in Afghanistan over the last forty years, international and Afghan stakeholders have often prioritised short-term humanitarian goals. This approach was also employed during the 2018 emergency drought response, with interventions focusing on families that had already been displaced receiving life-saving support. However, little has been done to mitigate the risks of further displacements, or to provide solutions to facilitate return.

In light of the protracted nature of displacement in Afghanistan, policies on IDPs have evolved since 2014, increasingly focusing on a) durable solutions and b) solutions to prevent and mitigate natural disasters. However, effective policy implementation remains limited and insufficiently coordinated.

The Asia Displacement Solutions Platform (ADSP) seeks to identify ways to prevent prolonged displacements by reviewing state and humanitarian responses to natural disasters. The ADSP published a report on the drought in western Afghanistan in 2018-2019. This study aims to identify possible alternative responses to the drought that may have better utilised solution-oriented programming alongside the initial provision of life-saving relief. This ATR report features an extensive review of the available data and literature regarding the drought and responses to it, as well as a series of interviews with key stakeholders, shedding light on the decision-making and management process of the response. The report provides targeted recommendations for the ADSP members, as well as the broader humanitarian and development communities, to identify forthcoming opportunities for intervention and alternative approaches.

METHODOLOGY

A. Inception Phase

1. Preliminary Desk Review

ATR conducted preliminary research and compiled relevant documents spanning the duration of the drought (2016 through 2019). This preliminary review helped ATR develop the study's methodology and tools necessary for data collection.

The following documents were collected based on the aforementioned criteria:

- Relevant Humanitarian Cluster Meeting Minutes
- Humanitarian Response Plan (2016-2019)
- Drought Response Situation Reports (2017-2018)
- Updates from relevant humanitarian actors (e.g. NRC briefing notes)
- Drought Response situation weekly updates by OCHA (2016-2019)
- Comprehensive overview of needs and requirement by OCHA (2018)
- IPC Acute food insecurity analysis (2019-2020)
- Humanitarian needs overview by OCHA (2017, 2018, 2019)

Documents were identified and collected from the internet, including sources such as:

- <https://displacement.iom.int/afghanistan/>
- <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan>
- <http://www.ipcinfo.org>

A wide number of documents were identified through a Google search of keywords and phrases. Although the websites of humanitarian agencies contained documents relating to drought-induced displacement and solutions in Afghanistan, secondary sources regarding the situation in Ghor and Badghis were limited. Therefore, ATR leaned towards primary data sources to collect information on Badghis and Ghor. Additionally, ATR used primary sources to assess the availability of secondary data at the local level, which may not be published online.

2. Design of Interview Guidelines

ATR developed a list of guiding questions for conducting Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with representatives of NGOs/ humanitarian agencies and government officials. With the need to adapt questions for each respondent to obtain their individual experience, perception and analysis, this questionnaire was used primarily as a checklist to ensure that all aspects of the crisis were covered.

B. Data Collection Phase

1. Comprehensive Desk Review

Once identified, documents matching all parameters for the desk review were selected for inclusion in the catalogue. The desk review allowed the author to collect detailed information regarding the progress and phases of the drought and to triangulate data from various sources. This review also examined potential recommendations and opportunities for their eventual use. Case studies of drought responses conducted by FAO and WFP in Sahel and Somalia were also considered for collecting best practices.

2. Interviews

KIIs were conducted with NGOs, humanitarian organisations, and government institutions. Most of the interviewed individuals worked at the provincial level, both in areas of origin as well as in areas of displacement. Additionally, 15 KIIs were conducted in respective organisation headquarters in Kabul.

Relying on purposive sampling, the selection of key informants was based on their membership in heavily-involved humanitarian institutions and organisations. An ability to provide first-hand insights on management of the drought response was also a key factor in the selection. Informants were chosen from a variety of organisations in order to ensure consistent and reliable data.

At the provincial level, respondents included:

Government
1. Provincial Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation
2. Provincial Directorate of Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority
3. Provincial Directorate of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock
4. Provincial Directorate of Public Health
5. Provincial Directorate of Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
6. Provincial Disaster Management Committees (PDMCs)
7. Provincial Directorate of Water and Energy
8. Herat Governor Office
9. Herat Municipality
10. Badghis Governor Office
11. Badghis Provincial Governor
12. Badghis Municipality
13. Herat Provincial Governor
NGOs/Humanitarian Organisations
1. NRC
2. DRC
3. IRC
4. UNHCR

At the central level, respondents included:

Government
1. Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL)
2. Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR)
3. Afghanistan National Disaster Management Agency (ANDMA)
NGOs/Humanitarian Organisations
1. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
2. FAO
3. NRC
4. Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development
5. Welthungerlife
6. OXFAM

C. Analysis

1. Analysis of Secondary Sources

ATR analysed secondary data by:

- Preparing and conducting a thorough review of collected documents based on specified parameters;
- Cataloguing documents based on publication date, commissioning agency, location, and solution type;
- Highlighting both the decisions taken during each phase, as well as the notable lack in decision-making, in response to the mass displacements, and the drought in Ghor and Badghis;
- Assessing to what extent the recommendations and lessons learnt from studies focusing on the 2017-18 drought-induced displacement contributed to adaptive planning responses;
- Using any available comparative literature to identify lessons for solutions-oriented programming from other drought-affected contexts.

2. Analysis of Primary Sources

ATR employed a thematic analysis method. Thematic analysis gives order to analysis by coding recurrent, salient themes, and identifying categories, exploring patterns and relationships in data. Thematic analysis includes coding data based on recurring patterns, combining codes, and concluding larger themes based on the data pattern.

D. Challenges

Most interviewees had little to no knowledge of all phases of the drought response in the western region, because they were either not based in Afghanistan before 2019 or not occupying a position that dealt with the growing crisis in western Afghanistan before 2018 or 2019. This lack of institutional memory was felt more strongly in UN agencies than in NGOs or among Afghan government officials.

METHODOLOGY FINDINGS

This chapter reviews the various phases of the humanitarian crisis as it unfolded from 2016 to late 2019, analysing the chronology of events and the response (or absence thereof) of the Afghan authorities and humanitarian actors. It also highlights moments when another course of action should have been considered, and identifies system failures that need to be fixed.

A. Background and Initial Onset (2016-2017)

In 2018, Afghanistan experienced its worst drought in decades due to a precipitation deficit of around 70 percent during the 2017-18 wet season.⁵ The crisis affected 22 of the country's 34 provinces, including Ghor, Badghis, and Herat⁶, which form the main focus of this study. They are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change mainly because of their wide reliance on climate-sensitive livelihoods, particularly pastoralism and rainfed agricultural production.⁷

The two sub-sections below present the climate and food security situation in the two years leading to the drought.

1. Pre-Drought situation

Agriculture-based sources of livelihood in these provinces were affected by a lower precipitation during the 2016-17 wet season (relative to the preceding year), culminating in a significant reduction of local watertables to irrigate major regional crops including wheat – a staple food for most households in the western region. In addition to the below-average harvest, whose yield was substantially diminished both in terms of quality and quantity, unavailability of pasture and fodder for livestock, particularly in Ghor, was another challenge that households were faced with from 2016.^{8 9} Widespread conflict in 2017 exacerbated existing challenges, hampering the delivery of aid to food insecure areas.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock of Afghanistan (MAIL), the 2017 wheat harvest yield was the worst recorded since 2005.¹⁰ In 2016-2017, Herat, Badghis, and Ghor were among the provinces with high food insecurity, with farmers already struggling with poor food production due to a prolonged dry spell.¹¹ In the worst-

5 FAO, Emergency Livelihoods Response Plan 2019. Retrieved from: <http://www.fao.org/3/ca4252en/ca4252en.pdf>, page 5

6 IFRC, Emergency Appeal 2019, March 2019. Retrieved from: https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=5&ved=2ahUKEwjQiL_7-cvoAhVRKewKHQUQAwwQFjAEegQIBBAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fadore.ifrc.org%2FDownload.aspx%3FFileId%3D233279&usg=AOwVaw2YTSQX5DAjyV53rqb4DKI, page 8

7 Poverty and Equity Global Practice, Hunger Before the Drought: Food Insecurity in Afghanistan. Retrieved from: <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/560691563979733541/pdf/Hunger-before-the-Drought-Food-Insecurity-in-Afghanistan.pdf>

8 Afghanistan Analyst, Less Rain and Snowfall in Afghanistan 2019, July 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/economy-development-environment/less-rain-and-snowfall-in-afghanistan-high-level-of-food-assistance-needed-until-early-2019/>

9 Afghanistan Food Security Cluster, Badghis Emergency Assessment Report, November 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/assessment/badghis-emergency-food-security-assessment-2017-report>

10 FEWS NET, Afghanistan Food Security Outlook Update 2018-2019, July 2018. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-food-security-outlook-update-june-2018-january-2019>

11 IPC Afghanistan, Acute Food Insecurity Situation Overview Aug-Nov 2017, August 2017. Retrieved from: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ipc_afghanistan_national_level_acture_analysssi_2017_final_report.pdf

affected province of Badghis, 75 percent of the population was classified as an Humanitarian Emergency (IPC Phase 4 in the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification) between August and November 2017.¹²

2. Initial Onset of Drought

Food insecurity in the mist of multiple other stresses

During the prolonged dry spell of 2016-17, members of the UN Food Security Cluster were providing assistance to some affected areas in the western region, aiming to alleviate chronic levels of food insecurity.^{13 14} During this period, most displacements were conflict-induced.^{15 16} Assistance to chronic food insecurity was hampered directly or indirectly as a result of the following challenges:

- The delivery of assistance was constrained by insecurity, and as such, it was unable to reach all areas affected by the dry spell;
- Humanitarian actors had concentrated their efforts on immediate conflict-induced displacement, including in Badghis and Ghor;
- The forced return of refugees from Pakistan required an urgent response, which diverted the attention of humanitarian actors until the first half of 2017.

Ultimately, the response to food-insecure households proved largely ineffective because of its focus on meeting the immediate needs of a) undocumented vulnerable returnee households and b) conflict-induced IDPs, whilst drought-induced food-insecure households remained the recipients of relatively less aid (see Figure 1 below).¹⁷

12 IPC Afghanistan, Acute Food Insecurity Situation for Aug-Nov 2017, November 2017. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-ipc-acute-food-insecurity-situation-overview-current-aug-nov-2017>

13 FSAC, Afghanistan Newslesster January-March 2017. Retrieved from: https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/fsac_afghanistan_newsletter_jan-mar_2017_final.pdf

14 Food Security Cluster, Meeting Minutes, May 2016. Retrieved from: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/afg_minutes20160504_fsac_wr.pdf

15 Weekly Humanitarian Update. Retrieved from: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afghanistan_returnee_crisis_situation_report_no_4_29dec2016.pdf

16 Weekly Humanitarian Update. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-returnee-crisis-situation-report-no-5-12-january-2017>

17 Afghanistan Nutrition Cluster, WR Nutrtrion Cluster Meeting: Feb 23, 2017. Retrieved from: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/wr-nc_meeting_minutes_feb_23_2017.pdf

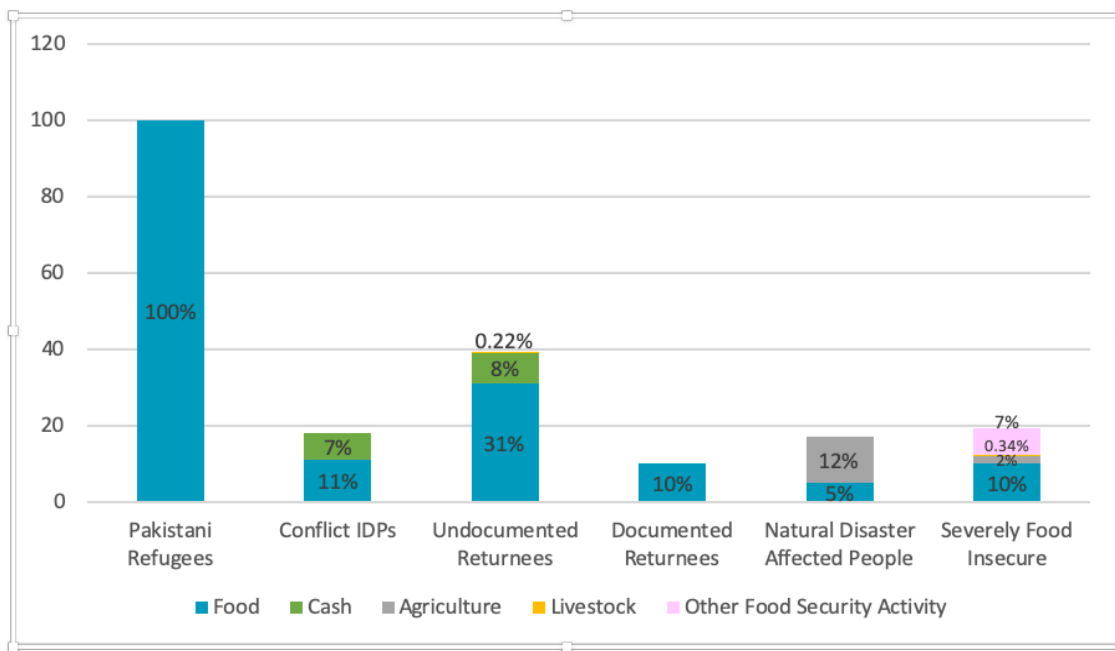


Figure 1: Response to different groups in 2017

Rethinking analysis and decision-making processes

Given the unpredictable nature of the complex challenges facing Afghanistan, the 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) recognised the need to maintain a constant state of preparedness to respond to emergency situations. Cross-sectoral preparedness was deemed a critical component of the humanitarian response strategy to ensure sufficient capacity and swift responses. Bi-annual Emergency Response Preparedness (ERP) reviews were planned for further development by the Humanitarian Regional Teams (HRT) to enable initiating interventions.¹⁸ The ERP reviews took place in mid-2017 but were not published. The main risk identified related to conflict-induced displacement, and all food prepositioning seems to have been planned based on this specific risk.¹⁹ **Reviews of the ERP methodology may have benefited from ensuring that all risks had been thoroughly assessed to allow for more informed prioritisation within the process** (in this case between conflict-induced displacement, returnees, and severely food insecure households). **The publication of ERPs may also have enabled greater transparency.**

The risks of high food insecurity were nevertheless identified in November 2017 through an emergency assessment conducted by FSAC and WFP, which reported that the dry spell had adversely affected food security in Badghis province. Crop yield was estimated to have dropped by over 35 percent. This significant reduction was sharply felt by affected subsistence and larger-scale farmers, comprising 59 percent of the local population.²⁰ The findings provided by the assessment were an accurate prediction of a looming crisis ahead, sending a clear message to the Afghan government and humanitarian community of the combined risks of a climate-change induced poor harvest, directly

18 Humanitarian Response Plan, Jan-June 2017. Retrieved from: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/afg_hrp_2017_mid_year.pdf

19 Ibid

20 WFP Emergency Assessment Report, November 2017. Retrieved from: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/assessments/badghis_emergency_food_security_assessment_2017_report.pdf

resulting from low precipitation in 2017.²¹ To mitigate the dry spell effects, the FSAC and WFP assessment called on the Afghan government and humanitarian community to a) deliver immediate food assistance to over 41,000 households in Badghis (during two to four months depending upon the district), and b) to focus in the medium-term on livelihood recovery activities, expanding services to support livelihoods, and enhancing community resilience to food insecurity.²²

Besides the WFP assessment, the effects of the dry spell on the livelihoods of affected locals were often discussed at regional cluster meetings.²³ **No decision followed these discussions and the FSAC assessments, which indicate that none of these tools were able to trigger any substantial decision-making. Improved mechanisms need to be devised to ensure that assessments result in informed, effective decision-making.**

What was initially seen from 2016 as short-term dry spells, was in fact a manifestation of grave, longer-term climate change effects. If government and humanitarian actors had considered these dry spells through such a lens, this may have led to a more comprehensive analysis of the risk, especially in areas with high vulnerabilities (rain-fed, high ratio of subsistence farmers, previous history of drought). In other words, humanitarian actors believed that the dry spell was a perennial occurrence, and therefore a stress locals had adapted to with coping mechanisms. Such actors dismissed warnings it could turn into a full-scale disaster, whether a famine or large-scale displacement.²⁴ Additionally, there is cause to believe that relevant humanitarian actors were reluctant to approach donors for emergency funds in the absence of an official announcement stating a national emergency. **No mechanism was activated to monitor whether the limited food assistance provided was sufficient to respond to this stress, and to which beneficiaries the aid was delivered. Similarly, without any system in place to monitor the risks, it became challenging to monitor the effects that a slow onset of drought may have had on displacements.**

In December 2017, the Famine Early Warning System (FEWS Net) provided further information about the impact of below-average rainfall during the 2017-2018 wet season on food production and pastures²⁵ However, these warnings did not lead to early actions to strengthen households' coping mechanisms in affected areas, which could have prevented or mitigated the scale of displacement (see Box 1 below). Again, **if a mechanism had existed, compelling humanitarian decision-making bodies to consider warnings and document their decisions, this would not only have increased transparency but also likely led to a partial - if not full - timely response to the developing crisis.**

In February 2018, below average rainfall was reported, and above-average temperatures recorded in many parts of Afghanistan, both of these weather conditions adversely impacting pastoralist communities and general crop cultivation throughout the year. The Afghan government eventually acknowledged the drought in April 2018.²⁶

21 Ibid

22 Ibid

23 Food Security Cluster, Meeting Minutes, Jan 2018. Retrieved from: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/fsac_meeting_minutes_24jan2018.pdf

24 Key Informant Interview, Herat, 2020

25 FEWS NET, Poor early season precipitation delayed the planting of winter wheat in most areas, December 2017. Retrieved from: <https://fews.net/pt/central-asia/afghanistan/food-security-outlook-update/december-2017>

26 IFRC, Emergency Appeal, March 2019. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MDREF005ea.pdf>

Box 1: Early warning systems in Afghanistan

EARLY WARNINGS IN AFGHANISTAN

ANDMA is mandated to manage all disasters in Afghanistan. With no strategy on how to mitigate slow onset drought conditions through the analysis of early warning signs, ANDMA did not initiate any timely action. In 2018, this led to approximately 200,000 people in drought-induced displacement in the western region.

Early warning information related to drought conditions are provided through the Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWS Net) and the non-governmental organisation iMMAP. The reports are in English, rather than in the national Dari and Pashto languages, and they focus on agricultural productions, market prices and weather forecasts. The information provided through the website is detailed, and offers a good level of analysis of past and current situations, highlighting particular difficulties at the provincial level. However it provides only limited analysis of risks and does not provide recommendations. The reports are published online in English and are distributed to relevant institutions by MAIL. It is then left to the relevant Afghan institutions to interpret the data offered by FEWS Net and to analyse risks both at the national and provincial levels.

As reports are not widely disseminated or understood due to language barriers and a lack of capacity to forecast risks (based on early warning reports), this led to the failure of decision makers to identify the risk of displacements and to plan accordingly.

In addition, even if the early warnings had been understood as potentially leading to displacement, the national disaster management plan fails to clearly elaborate the conditions for declaring a national emergency situation, the formal mechanism through which funds can be released. A declaration must be issued by the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan when an emergency cannot be dealt with at the provincial level. Due to the protracted nature of the drought, and the staggered escalation in displacement it caused, early warning signs were not perceived as sufficient evidence to justify such a declaration.

Learning from this failure, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has worked on two initiatives with its partners:

1. With the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations to develop a long-term strategy for drought risk management in Afghanistan;
2. With the World Bank, along with FAO and WFP, on institutional aspects of drought governance and management, through a new initiative called Early Warning, Early Action and Early Financing. The initiative also provides a road-map for the upcoming National Early Warning Committee to analyse early warning signs, which can enable automated release of funds to pre-agreed actions;

In addition, other actions could be considered by the government in order to make a better use of the early warning system:

1. Translate FEWS Net projections that enable early informed decisions by local disaster management authorities;
2. Facilitate participation of disaster management authorities at FSAC cluster meetings in order to enhance collaboration between clusters, local and central government agencies.

The missed opportunity to mobilise development actors for mitigating risks

Early actions to mitigate the effects of dry spells on local livelihoods required investment in resilience-building initiatives as a first-line defence system, before the full drought onset. Since resilience is mostly rooted in structural factors, resilience-building requires delivery via a development approach, in itself requiring cross-sectoral partnerships and long-term interventions. The structural causes of hunger in the western region were well-known and included chronic poverty, reduced access to sustainable livelihoods, water and health services. These causes were exacerbated by the change in climate and conflict.

Prior to the dry spell depleting household assets and capital reserves (a scenario that unfolded in early 2018), causing families to adopt more distressed coping mechanisms including displacement, the structural causes of food insecurity should have been addressed. A resilience-targeted programme could have successfully improved households' resilience as it did in the Sahel region of Africa, to prevent displacement. There, actors developed a comprehensive series of interlinking solutions, including sustainable use of water resources; construction of irrigation systems; distribution of drought-resilient crop varieties; supporting farmers through wheat and fodder banks; direct cash transfers; drinking water facilities; livestock breeding; market gardening for women; medical services improvement, and sustainable livelihood opportunities. This kind of holistic intervention could have been tailored to the specific context in Western Afghanistan, likely resulting in improved effectiveness.

The 2017 HRP in Afghanistan clearly stipulated that building resilience within a broader framework required the Afghan government's commitment and a nexus between development and humanitarian actors:

"A significant proportion of the needs portrayed result from inadequacies in national service provision, and failure to deliver sustainable actions and durable solutions that address the root causes of vulnerability while greater efforts are required to bridge the humanitarian -development divide, critical policy decisions and actions are required of the Afghan government to end the cycle of receptivity humanitarian interventions".

2017 HRP

Such rhetoric, though praiseworthy in that it sought to identify the root of the issue in effective emergency response, nevertheless failed to deliver a mechanism by which to engage the development sector, particularly in addressing the needs of food-insecure households as a result of climate change in the western region. Many interviewees believed that earlier scaling up of resilience activities could have enabled affected-households to withstand climate change shocks, thus preventing displacement.

Integrating measures for disaster risk-reduction in general, and slow-onset drought reduction more specifically, in long-term development plans is not unheard of. Indeed, the Citizens' Charter Afghanistan Project (CCAP) has already been used as a platform to build resilience among the most vulnerable populations, notably through the Social Inclusion Grant, and grain banks. Certainly, cross-programme discussions between humanitarian agencies and the Afghan government should be encouraged and would certainly start up initiatives such as the ones currently run through CCAP. Other more formal systems should also be considered, including flexibility in the development budget to prioritise areas at risks.

B. Early Stages of Displacement (January-May 2018)

1. Unfolding of early displacement

The first wave of drought-induced displacement was recorded in Badghis and Ghor in late February, 2018. Already affected by a lower than average harvest in 2017, severe winter conditions in 2018 resulted in a poor winter crop yield, rendering locals reliant on food and livelihood assistance.^{27 28}

Around 600 people were displaced from Shahrak, Tolak, Taywarah, Pasaband, Dolayna and Charsada districts of Ghor province, and sought refuge in Feroz Koh, the provincial capital of Ghor. Over 650 people arrived in Qala-e-Now (provincial capital of Badghis) from Ab Kamari, Jawand, Bala Murghab, Muqur and Qadis districts of Badghis in February 2018.^{29 30 31}

In early-March the number of people displaced from the same districts to Feroz Koh increased to 1,000 due to the dry spell.³² During the same period, around 450 people moved to Herat City from within the province of Herat and Badghis. In the same month, nearly 300 people were also displaced to Qala-e-Now from within Badghis, with a further 2,200 people displaced to Qadis district center from district communities.^{33 34} By late April, around 6,000 more people were displaced to Herat from Badghis and Ghor, while 700 more sought refuge in Qala-e-Now.^{35 36} By May 2018, the number of IDPs in Herat reached over 20,000, and almost 8,000 in Qala-e-Now as more people fled their villages as it became evident their spring crop had failed.^{37 38}

The information regarding drought-induced displacement was first provided by (I)NGOs to the UN clusters in the western region. No information on these initial displacements was shared by local authorities neither with humanitarian agencies, nor with other relevant government institutions.³⁹

27 World Vision, Drought Rapid Assessment Report, October 2017. Retrieved from: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/assessments/drought_affected_in_badghis_qala-i-nawab_kamaryqadis_and_muqur_districts_by_world_vision_october_2018.pdf

28 Weekly Humanitarian Update, April 2018. Retrieved from: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20180430_afghanistan_weekly_field_report_23_-_29_april_2018_final.pdf

29 Weekly Humanitarian Update, February 2018. Retrieved from: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20180226_afghanistan_weekly_field_report_19-25_february_2018_en_0.pdf

30 Key Informant Interview, Badghis, 2020

31 Key Informant Interview, Ghor, 2020

32 Weekly Humanitarian Update, February 2018. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-weekly-field-report-26-february-4-march-2018>

33 Weekly Humanitarian Update, March 2018. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-weekly-field-report-4-11-march-2018-enps>

34 Weekly Humanitarian Update, March 2018. Retrieved from: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20180319_afghanistan_weekly_field_report_12_-_18_march_2018_en.pdf

35 Weekly Humanitarian Update, April 2018. Retrieved from: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20180423_afghanistan_weekly_field_report_16_-_22_april_2018_en_final.pdf

36 Weekly Humanitarian Update, April 2018. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-weekly-field-report-16-22-april-2018-enps>

37 Weekly Humanitarian Update, May 2018. Retrieved from: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20180528_afghanistan_weekly_field_report_21_-_27_may_2018.pdf

38 Key Informant Interview, DoRR-Badghis, 2020

39 Key Informant Interview, Humanitarian NGO, Herat, 2020

“Local authorities woke up when they saw large number of people moving to Qala- e-Now and Herat in mid 2018”

KII- Humanitarian NGO, Herat

When initial displacements occurred, humanitarian agencies struggled to quantify the scale of displacement in Qala-e-Now and the origin of the displaced, due to security-related access issues. However, as the scale of movement from Badghis districts to Herat and Qala-e-Now escalated, the emerging displacement crisis became impossible to overlook by UN agencies and NGOs.⁴⁰

2. Coordination system in place

This sub-section aims to provide a general background to how the coordination system functions, in order to better understand how the response to the early stages of displacement (following sub-section) and subsequent humanitarian interventions were coordinated.

The cluster system was established in Afghanistan in 2008.⁴¹ Humanitarian coordination is facilitated and managed by UN-OCHA. Soon after the Afghan government declared the drought a national emergency, the majority of drought response meetings were held fortnightly at the Inter Cluster Coordination Team (ICCT) level. All cluster coordinators and co-coordinators (WASH, Education, Health, Food, Livelihood, Nutrition and Protection) attended the ICCT with UN-OCHA taking the lead as chair.⁴²

At the regional level, monthly UN Cluster meetings continued with partners under ICCT and in coordination with UN-OCHA discussing provision of immediate support to displaced communities. The Government set up a drought emergency task force, comprised of the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Rural Development (MRRD), MAIL, the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), ANDMA, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG), Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS), UN-OCHA, FSAC, WASH, and nutrition clusters to coordinate and align the response across all humanitarian agencies.⁴³

40 Key Informant Interview, NRC, London, 2020

41 Humanitarian Coordination Overview. Retrieved from: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/inter-cluster-coordination>

42 Key Informant Interview, Kabul, 2020

43 Humanitarian Coordination Report 2018. Retrieved from: https://cerf.un.org/sites/default/files/resources/18-RR-AFG-31254-NR01_Afghanistan_RCHC.Report.pdf

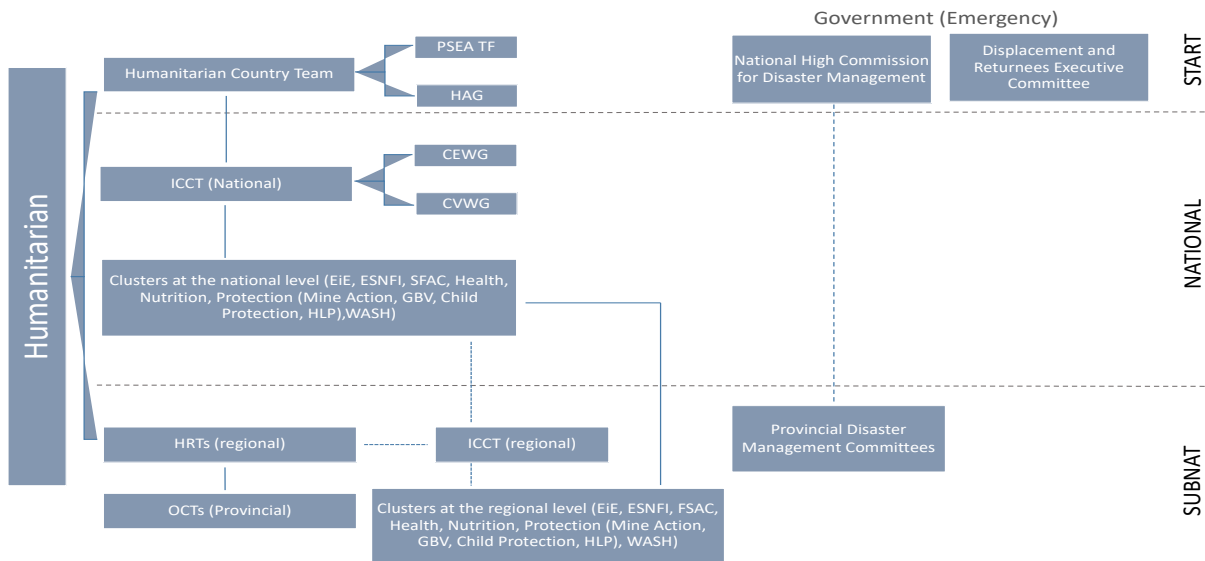


Figure 1: Humanitarian Coordination Architecture in Afghanistan

As displayed in the diagram, information typically circulates upwards between the sub-national and national levels, whether in the government led coordination mechanism, or in mechanisms led by humanitarian actors. Importantly, little information flows back to the sub-national level. With no feedback on meeting minutes or their requests, HRTs, regional ICCTs and OCTs do not seem to trust the system to support their requests, and tend to go through individual member agencies to raise issues and concerns. The system thus relies more on individual two-way communication than on a formal, institutionalised channel. In addition, while coordination of emergencies has been decentralised⁴⁴, decisions for fundraising, allocating resources or declaring a disaster can only be made at the national level, leaving little room for sub-national level actors to address issues at the local level. Perhaps even more importantly, **there is no feedback mechanisms by which the HCT or the ICCT are obliged to respond to concerns raised by regional coordination bodies. This may account for the conspicuous silence from national-level stakeholders even after information of displacement had been provided from the regional level to country offices in Kabul.**

3. Response to the early stages of displacement

Although in early 2018 humanitarian agencies were aware of the displacement in Qala-e-Now and Feroz Koh, none had forecast that the situation would deteriorate so significantly.⁴⁵ While more families became displaced and migrated to Herat city, response to drought-induced IDPs was raised for the first time in March by the Humanitarian Regional Team (HRT) members to be advocated and responded by Emergency Response Mechanism (ERM). Regional representatives of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) in Herat alerted the DRC Headquarters in Kabul and sought guidance.⁴⁶

44 Afghanistan Coordination Architecture Review, December 2015. Retrieved from: <http://www.acbar.org/upload/1471266253335.pdf>

45 Key Informant Interview, Kabul, 2020

46 Humanitarian Response, Meeting Minutes, April 2018. Retrieved from: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/hrt_minutes_26april2018.pdf

Interestingly, the analysis that seems to have led to the development of an inter-cluster drought contingency plan in late April 2018,⁴⁷ and to the revision of the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) in May was not based on these displacements, but the alarming decrease in precipitation in early 2018, which subsequently led to dry soil conditions and limited availability of water for agricultural cultivation. The impact of the drought was amplified with the 2018 harvest which yielded a failed harvest. Displacement was envisaged as a possible but unlikely event, as expressed in the inter-cluster drought contingency plan:

“While the ES-NFI cluster does not foresee immediate shelter or NFI needs associated with the drought, based on experience in 2011 and 2012, if food and WASH needs are not addressed, the situation might trigger (...) displacement”

As the numbers of families seeking refuge in Herat rose steeply, the humanitarian community and government began to quantify the number of IDPs in April 2018.⁴⁸ The assessment was conducted by IOM, WFP, IRC, ANDMA and DRC. Based on the results of the assessment, relief assistance (Hygiene Kits, Non-Food Items and tents) was provided to over 12,700 IDPs in Herat.⁴⁹ The Afghan government initiated an animal-feed response scheme in drought-affected places with the support of the World Bank.⁵⁰

However, the assistance failed to reach the worst affected areas. This challenge in delivering assistance to all affected areas directly led to an increase in displacement in the western region. Most of the stakeholders interviewed raised access as the main reason for why aid could not be distributed in a timely manner to drought-affected villages. General information on the level of insecurity at the time confirms this difficulty, but none of the interviewees were able to share ‘lessons learned’ analysis of locations where access had or had not been possible. More importantly, no evidence of tangible efforts to negotiate humanitarian access could be found. There was no call to Non-State Armed Group (NSAG) to guarantee access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance, as is usually the case in emergency situations. It is thus difficult to conclude that insecurity was indeed the reason why all areas were not covered by assistance. ***This gap in information also unveils another issue: the lack of reporting on the implementation of assistance plans. Indeed, while overall assistance at the national level is usually well documented, gaps in geographic coverage are not reported. Additional reporting requirements could have revealed gaps in a timely manner.***

KII interviewees alluded to the fact that there was a missed opportunity to contain the scale of displacement in early 2018 (when initial displacement occurred) with providing affected-households food assistance, had the government announced the drought earlier. Particularly in KIIs with representatives of UN agencies, interviewees noted that donors would not have provided funds without official evidence at hand.⁵¹ ⁵² This acknowledgement was presented as critical to allow the HCT to fundraise for assistance that would go beyond the routine humanitarian relief interventions being delivered.

47 Humanitarian Response Plan 2018-2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/document/afghanistan-2018-2021-humanitarian-response-plan-drought->

48 Key Informant Interview, Humanitarian NGO, Herat, 2020

49 Ibid

2018 Drought Response Report:

50 United Nations CERF, Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator Report 2018, Retrieved from: https://cerf.un.org/sites/default/files/resources/18-RR-AFG-31254-NR01_Afghanistan_RCHC.Report.pdf

51 Key Informant Interview, Kabul, 2020

52 Key Informant Interview, Herat, 2020

The Afghan government did not acknowledge the drought earlier, alleging that the early warnings came as technical information in terms of deviation of precipitations. For example, FEWS Net projections indicated that vegetation condition and/or animal body fat conditions had decreased. This technical information was useful for technical people, but not for broader agency-level decision-making. Therefore, the government was wary of taking impacting decisions within an uncertain context. ***However, this issue could have been resolved if the ICCT level had analysed the data and defined immediate priorities for early action in consultation with a) disaster management authorities, and b) Afghanistan Meteorological Department (AMD), and contextualised technical information for the government.***

This study also finds that the government interpreted declaring an emergency drought as a sign of weakness, as this would confirm food insufficiency. Therefore, the state stalled declaring the national emergency, fearing it would affect popularity ratings.⁵³

This leads to the question of whether donors would have pre-emptively released funds for disaster risk reduction actions without an official drought acknowledgement. Most humanitarian actors including non-UN agencies in Afghanistan are dependent on donor funds. The funding landscape is also divided into two buckets: one for short-term humanitarian assistance, and one for longer-term development. Within most donor agencies, these two buckets are not seemingly connected. Development budgets are often earmarked for multi-year development strategies and plans, this explanation often being cited to explain why budgets cannot be repurposed for emergency or unforeseen funding.⁵⁴

However, because no request was made to donors in 2017, or in the first quarter of 2018, this argument could not be considered a justification to the lack of preparedness before the drought declaration. Alternative funding options could have been explored with donors, following the model used for returnees and IDPs assistance, or for mitigating the effects of poverty during the COVID-19 crisis, using flexible funding from the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), through National Priority Programmes (NPPs). Based on the multiple assessments attesting the existence of a crisis before April 2018 (see above), the humanitarian communities had the necessary information available to make a solid case for funding to donors.

Such models could also be found in other countries. For instance, although the President of Nigeria announced drought late in the country in 2011, aid agencies acted early in terms of addressing cereal deficits. Quick multi-sector needs assessments in affected areas enabled them to gauge the impact and needs of households, employing the Household Economy Analysis (HEA) method. Assessment findings could have been used as evidence for persuading donors to provide emergency funding to alleviate pressures on households in their places of origin, in anticipation of precarious coping mechanisms. Since resilience-building required long-term programming and flexible funding for effective preparation to the initial drought onset, organisations such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department for International Development (DfID) revisited their mandates to disburse flexible funding and support an early response.⁵⁵

53 Key Informant Interview, Kabul, 2020

54 Key Informant Interview, Kabul, 2020

55 FeedtheFuture, Early Response to Drought in Pastoralist Areas, November 2015. Retrieved from: http://karamojaresilience.org/images/what-we-do/crisis-modifier-review/usaaid-crisis-modifier-review_final_draft_jan_2016.pdf

Crisis Modifier was another highly innovative funding mechanism developed by USAID for pastoralist areas of Ethiopia.⁵⁶ The mechanism was used by various aid donors, supporting long-term safety net programmes of the Ethiopia government. The European Commission's humanitarian aid department (ECHO)'s **Drought Preparedness** and DfID's **Social Protection** programmes in the Horn of Africa are other cases of innovative, flexible funding that enabled rapid response to drought conditions.⁵⁷

This opportunity was missed in Afghanistan. It could have been seized if humanitarian actors had used assessment findings and developed these as a tool to attract donors' attention. A number of humanitarian NGOs, including some that are based in western Afghanistan have a clear mandate to advocate for responding to identified humanitarian needs. As such, and considering that no evidence of such advocacy could be found, warnings of an upcoming disaster were not heeded by the government which declared the drought too late, but by the humanitarian community which did not seek implementable solutions to address the mitigate the unfolding crisis before it resulted in mass displacement.⁵⁸

Interviews reveal that development actors focused their criticisms on humanitarian agencies when reviewing the history of the drought. This further demonstrates the gap between development and humanitarian efforts. Early funding could certainly have been successful if it had focused on rebuilding irrigation systems, supporting livestock, and distributing drought resistant seeds. This bridge between humanitarian and development actors could be resolved by linking the ITCC or the HCT to the coordination mechanisms led by the Ministry of Finance (Office of the Minister and Deputy Minister Policy) to design the development agenda.

C. Acute Displacement (June 2018- June 2019)

1. The displacement crisis

From June 2018, displacement in the western region sped up significantly as a result of the drought. Later in 2019, while some families were returning to their place of origin, floods and conflicts triggered another wave of displacement to the same western provincial capitals.

Drought induced displacement

An estimated 4,000 people were displaced in June 2018 to Qala-e-Now IDP settlements (Noor Abad, Jar Khusk, Jar Haji Sakhi, and Sanji Gak) mainly from Ab Kamari and Muqur districts.⁵⁹ ⁶⁰ Movements from nearby villages to the district centre of Ab Kamari also increased in June. During this period, Feroz Koh also had an influx of around 4,000 people affected by drought in Dawlat Yar, Sharak and Qasaband.⁶¹ In July, this figure increased to approximately 15,000 in

56 GSDRC, Helpdesk Research Report, July 2017. Retrieved from: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/59b7ec37ed915d19636fef39/1412-Flexibility-in-funding-mechanisms-to-respond-to-shocks.pdf>

57 Ibid

58 Ibid

59 Key Informant Interview, DoRR, Badghis, 2020

60 Weekly Humanitarian Update, July 2018. Retrieved from: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20180702Afghanistan%20Weekly%20Field%20Report%2025%20June%20-%201%20July%202018_EN.pdf

61 Key Informant Interview, DoRR-Ghor, 2020

Qala-e-Now, while humanitarian organisations reported a total of 65,296 drought-displaced people in Herat.^{62 63} By early August, 4,000 additional people were displaced to Qala-e-Now.

The increase in displacements came because the drought had significantly reduced the river flows and water tables by June 2018, and consequently the spring harvest completely failed in the western region. Following the drying up of wells and traditional water supply systems such as Kareez, households could not afford to dig the wells deeper due to economic constraints.^{64 65} The lack of water also led to significant livestock deaths while farmers also had to sell their livestock at a loss. As a result, displacements began to significantly increase from June 2018 onwards.^{66 67}

By August 2018, over 160,000 people were displaced due to the drought, of which an estimated 66,500 (mostly from Sharak, Pasa Band, Dawlat Yar, Lal Sar Jangal and Charsada districts of Ghor, Muqur and Ab Kamari districts of Badghis) were displaced in Qala-e-Now. With the arrival of 3,000 IDPs in July, over 100,000 people were scattered across several settlements in Herat city, which attracted the highest number of displacements relative to Ghor and Badghis. These figures included families who were registered as having been displaced due to the drought in the first quarter of 2018.⁶⁸

Movements continued to Herat from Qala-e-Now and Feroz Koh settlements. It appears that this movement was motivated by the perception that access to life-saving aid supplies would be more likely in Herat, while aid was insufficient in the two other provincial capitals.⁶⁹ Government authorities in Ghor and Herat believe that displaced families in Qala-e-Now, Feroz Koh and Ab Kamari wanted to remain close to their areas of origin and intended to return when conditions permitted, whilst those who moved to Herat had longer-term displacement intentions. According to government officials, such intentions were motivated by a lack of or liquidated assets, particularly land, and by high levels of debt.^{70 71} Significant instances of forced child marriage in exchange for dowries were also reported by communities forced to raise capital, or simply have fewer mouths to feed. In addition, some of the families from Badghis province, particularly from Ganda Ab, Kok Dari, Pushtai Godar, Chalanak and Shaghazak areas of Ab Kamari district, went directly to Herat and were displaced for longer periods, either because of insecurity at their place of origin or lack of livelihood.⁷²

62 Weekly Humanitarian Update, July 2018. Retrieved from: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20180723_afghanistan_weekly_field_report_16_-_22_july_2018_en.pdf

63 Weekly Humanitarian Update, July 2018. Retrieved from: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20180730_afghanistan_weekly_field_report_23_-_29_july_2018_en.pdf

64 Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, September 2018. Retrieved from: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/ipc_acute_food_insecurity_analysis_report_2018.pdf

65 Key Informant Interview, Herat, 2020

66 Food Security Cluster, Seasonal Food Security Assessment 2017. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/post20harvest20sfsa20201720report20by20fsac.pdf>

67 K4D, Agriculture in Afghanistan, May 2019. Retrieved from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d10b7f5e5274a0694afe5f5/574__576_Agriculture_in_Afghanistan.pdf

68 Weekly Humanitarian Update, August 2018. Retrieved from: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20180903%20Afghanistan%20Drought%20Sitrep%20No%201_FINAL.PDF

69 Ibid

70 Key Informant Interview, MoRR, Kabul, 2020

71 Displaced Afghans resort to desperate measures as support dwindles, August 2019. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/displaced-afghans-resort-desperate-measures-support-dwindles>

72 Key Informant Interview, DoRR-Ghor, 2020

Flood and conflict induced displacement

Households continued to arrive in Herat and Qala-e-Now through the remainder of 2018 but were mainly displaced by conflict and no further severe drought-induced displacements were reported.⁷³

During the wet season (October 2018-March 2019) precipitation was above-average and a high elevation of snow was reported across the western region.⁷⁴ While the increased rainfall was favourable for the harvesting season, it also caused heavy flooding. The situation was alarming in the western region as an estimated 80 percent of the soil was already in poor condition due to the 2018 drought and thus prone to further erosion.⁷⁵

From March 2019, heavy rains had caused flooding across the western region-including Badghis. Houses were damaged, water infrastructures were destroyed, and livelihoods were once again affected.⁷⁶ While people were struggling to recover from the impact of the 2018 drought, the 2019 heavy floods, combined with raging conflict, resulted in further internal displacements in the western region.⁷⁷ Badghis (districts: Abkamari, Qadis, Jawand), Ghor (districts: Charsadda, Pasaband and Tolak) and Herat (districts: Shindand, Khushk-e-Khuna, Khusk and Farsi) were the major places in 2019 that were affected by both conflict and flooding.^{78 79 80} Most of the affected households in these areas either fled to the provincial capitals or travelled to Herat City.

Roads connecting Ghor to its districts became unsafe for delivering assistance in early 2019. Also, the road connecting Herat to Badghis was closed due to heavy snowfall, further constraining the work of aid workers. But in August, a series of peace negotiations brokered between the government and Non-State Armed Group (NSAG) resulted in the safe passage of commercial trucks and humanitarian aid supplies on the Jawand Road in Badghis, as well as roads in Charsada district, between Feroz Koh, and Pasaband in Ghor province.⁸¹

Fighting continued in other districts including Bala Murghab and Qadis, causing displacements to Qala-e-Now.⁸² Overall, from 1st January to 30th June 2019, the following number of people fled their village due to conflict and flooding:⁸³

73 Key Informant Interview, Kabul, 2020

74 FEWS NET, Seasonal Monitor, March 2019. Retrieved from: <https://fews.net/central-asia/afghanistan/seasonal-monitor/march-19-2019>.

75 IFRC, Afghanistan Drought and Flash Floods EPoA update, August 2019. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-drought-and-flash-floods-epoa-update-n-2-emergency-appeal-n-mdraf005>

76 World Vision, World Vision Afghanistan Annual Report 2019, Jan 2020. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/world-vision-afghanistan-annual-report-2019>

77 Ibid

78 Weekly Humanitarian Update, April 2019. Retrieved from: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/20190402_ocha_update_flash_floods_8.pdf

79 Meeting Minute, July 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/document/hirat-operational-coordination-team-oct-meeting-minutes-9-july-2019>

80 Key Informant Interview, MoRR, Kabul

81 Weekly Humanitarian Update, August 2019. Retrieved from: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/afg_weekly_humanitarian_update_19_august-2019.pdf

82 Meeting Minutes, July 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/document/badghis-operational-coordination-team-oct-meeting-minutes-9-july>

83 UN OCHA-Conflict Induced Displacement, Jan-Nov 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/idps>

- 4,565 people were displaced to Herat City (from Shindand and Farsi districts, and from Farah, Badghis, and Ghor provinces);
- 6,778 people were displaced to Qala-e-Now (from Jawand, Ghormach, Bala Murghab, and Muqur districts);
- 3,637 people were displaced to Feroz Koh (from Dolayna, Sharak, Tolak and Pasaband districts).

2. The response to acute displacement

In early June 2018, the main discussions at the Inter Cluster Coordination Team (ICCT) level were aimed at preventing displacement before it becoming protracted. This included discussions on positioning of stocks, continuing rapid needs assessments to identify vulnerable families in need of shelter and NFI assistance, scaling up emergency nutrition services through fixed and integrated mobile nutrition teams and providing food, water and other livelihood support to affected families in their places of origin.⁸⁴

Between June and July 2018, the HCT and the ICCT began discussions with the government-led Emergency Task Force including ANDMA, and decided to continue the provision of relief assistance by UN Clusters and NGOs both in the place of origin and displacement sites until additional funding would be secured to provide full scale humanitarian support.⁸⁵ ⁸⁶ The funding request was made to Sweden, Norway, Canada, Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, Denmark and the European Commission.⁸⁷

In order to provide full-scale humanitarian assistance, the HCT increased the funding appeal from USD 430 million to USD 547 million for emergency assistance, with the objective to reach around 4.2 million people across the country.⁸⁸ However, only USD 34.6 million for emergency aid to target 2.2 million people was raised. Since the number of people in need significantly increased, the HRP was revised for the second time in mid-2018 based on UN Cluster needs assessments, including Food Security and Agriculture Cluster (FSAC) and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH).

By September 2018, the response was in full-scale implementation at displacement sites, but it came late because of long administrative and procurement procedures. When most emergency-response activities were being implemented, the number of drought-affected displacements had reached around 223,100 people - out of which 147,000 were already in camps in Herat, 70,600 in Badghis province, and 5,500 in Ghor.⁸⁹ An overwhelming majority of IDPs waited for over two months before receiving assistance. Precise figures have yet to emerge, though a number of interviewees corroborated this.

84 Key Informant Interview, Herat, 2020

85 Key Informant Interview, DRC, Herat, 2020

86 Key Informant Interview, ACBAR, Kabul, 2020

87 Key Informant Interview, IRC, Herat, 2020

88 USAID, Afghanistan- Complex Emergency, July 2018. Retrieved from:
https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/afghanistan_ce_fs03_07-09-2018.pdf

89 Key Informant Interview, MoRR, Kabul, 2020

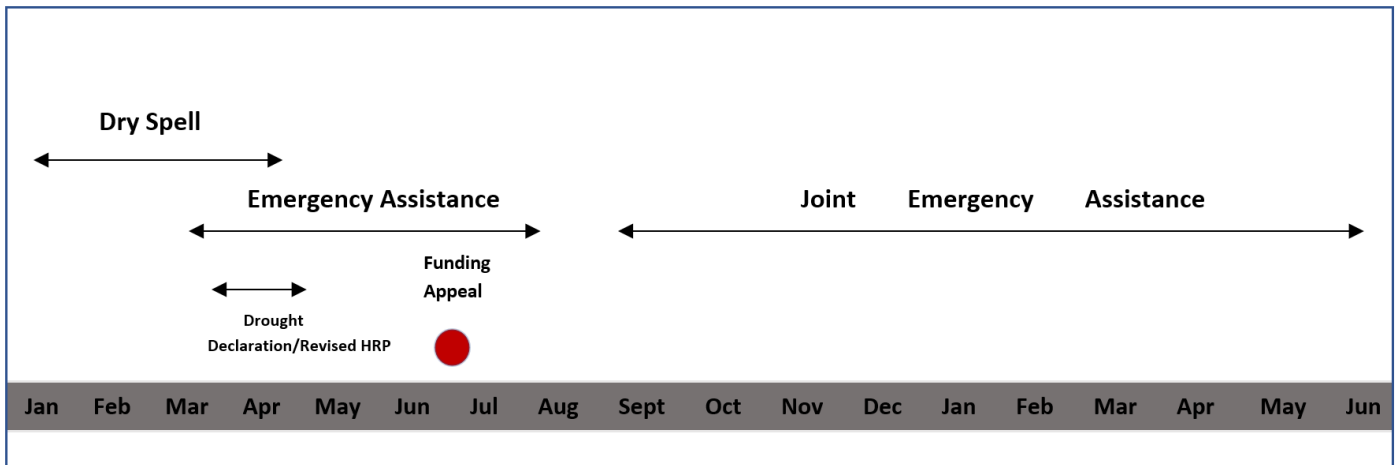


Figure 2: Timeline of the 2018 drought response

The response was coordinated with the relevant sector ministries, as well as with ANDMA.⁹⁰ Assistance included emergency shelter kits, food, water, sanitation and hygiene, mobile health services, temporary education spaces for children and multi-purpose cash support. WFP also started providing food and wheat grain to people in Ab Kamari, Muqur, Bala Murghab and Qadis districts of Badghis, and also in Ghor.⁹¹

As inflows of displaced persons put a strain on the ability of host communities to access basic services, it was also recommended by international NGOs to provide a portion of the assistance to the most vulnerable members of the host community.⁹² However, these recommendations went unheeded due to the scale of support that was immediately required in displacement sites.

Lack of Adopting Long-Term Development Programmes: Collective Failure

Many of the INGOs and UN agencies that were involved in the 2018 drought response performed different roles. For example, FAO worked in the humanitarian, longer-term development and normative space. Similarly, a number of international NGOs had both functions as part of their core mandate as well.⁹³

However, the humanitarian community focused more on immediate assistance to the drought-affected population, rather than looking for longer-term recovery actions. This was because no discussions had been organised within the internal units of the UN agencies and INGOs, or at the ICCT and HCT level to link their independent development and humanitarian functions. There was sufficient literature on what sort of actions should be taken even in the early stages of the drought response, but a decision on how to make the system supportive and conducive to introduce them at

90 Key Informant Interview, UN-OCHA, Kabul, 2020
 91 UNICEF, Afghanistan Western Region Drought Response, Humanitarian Situation Report #2, September 2018. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNICEF%20Afghanistan%20Humanitarian%20Situation%20Report%20%232%2C%20Western%20Region%20Drought%20Response%20-%2030%20September%202018.pdf>
 92 Reach Out, July 2018. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/reaching-out-implementing-comprehensive-response-drought-afghanistan>
 93 Oxfam International, What We do. Retrieved from: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/what-we-do/countries/afghanistan>

the earliest was lacking by all stakeholders.⁹⁴

Some International NGOs realised that long-term interventions were missing. In July 2018, international NGOs including DRC, NRC, Relief International and OXFAM issued a detailed letter recommending the provision of sustainable livelihood-support as part of early recovery and resilience-building interventions at places of origin. The provision of emergency assistance to IDPs was not excluded from this proposed approach, but it was suggested as a last resort in order to avoid pull factors and encourage further displacements. However, these recommendations came late. They may have made a difference at the initial stages of displacement in the first quarter of 2018, or before displacement happened in the second half of 2017. In addition, such letters are generally most effective when complemented with briefings to donors on the drought situation, and more specifically presenting the joint assessments that had been conducted in Badghis and Ghor.

In December 2018, discussions between the government and UN agencies shifted from providing assistance in IDP camps, because it was not encouraging people to go back to their places of origin.^{95 96} In June 2019, emergency programmes ended in Qala-e-Now and partially continued in Herat City, but they were not replaced with self-reliance oriented initiatives at the place of displacement, or long-term livelihood-based initiatives at the place of origin.⁹⁷ Instead, only short-term humanitarian assistance was provided to would-be returnees. In addition, the conditions for safe return were not met for a number of households who then faced additional shocks such as floods and insecurity, leading for some families to endure a second displacement (as described below).

D. Returns (2018-2019)

Returns continued amidst reports of cessation of humanitarian assistance. In early 2019, the Humanitarian Coordination Team (HCT) announced that assistance to households would be provided upon their return to their place of origin. To enable cluster partners to design and deliver voluntary return assistance packages, IOM conducted 4,400 Intention Surveys among IDPs in Herat and Qala-e-Now in February 2019.⁹⁸ The intention surveys thus happened very late in the crisis, when humanitarian actors were planning suspending aid in IDP camps. Also, no assessments had been conducted of the conditions in return areas at any time during the displacement period. The needs of both displaced families at displacement sites and places of origin were reflected only in initial needs assessments. The results of the IOM survey conducted in IDP sites of Herat and Badghis indicated that seven percent of the IDPs wanted to return to their places of origin whereas, when looking only at Herat, only two per cent of the IDPs wanted to return.^{99 100} Since willingness to return was higher in Qala-e-Now, the FSAC decided to design return assistance packages based on the

94 Reach Out, July 2018. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/reaching-out-implementing-comprehensive-response-drought-afghanistan>

95 Key Informant Interview, UN-OCHA, Kabul, 2020

96 Humanitarian Bulletin. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-humanitarian-bulletin-issue-79-1-october-31-december-2018>

97 Meeting Minutes, July 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/document/badghis-operational-coordination-team-oct-meeting-minutes-9-july>

98 DTM Afghanistan, Drought Response Situation Report, February 2019. Retrieved from: <https://displacement.iom.int/system/tdf/reports/IOM-AFG-DTM%20Drought%20Response%20Situation%20Report%2022-FEB-2019%20EN.PDF?file=1&type=node&id=5337>

99 WASH Cluster Meeting Minutes, July 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/document/afghanistan-wash-cluster-meeting-minutes-31-july-2019>

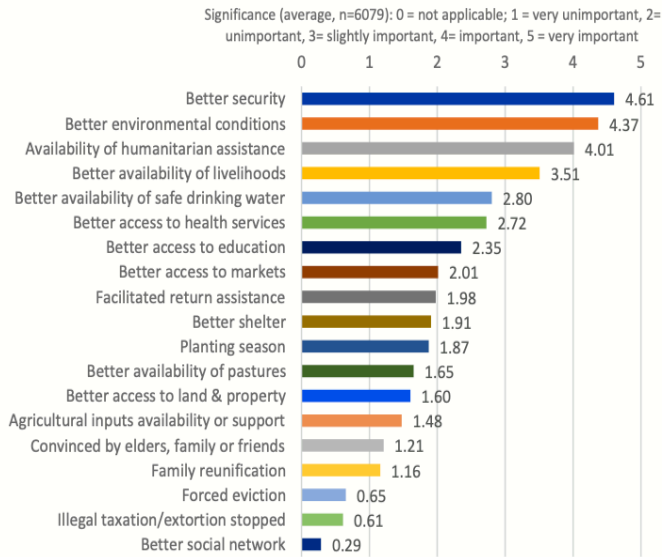
100 Key Informant Interview, Herat, 2020

needs of IDPs in Qala-e-Now, while the needs of IDPs in Herat were later on.¹⁰¹ The needs of households who intended to return varied ranging from food, employment opportunities, to water for agriculture and livestock.¹⁰²

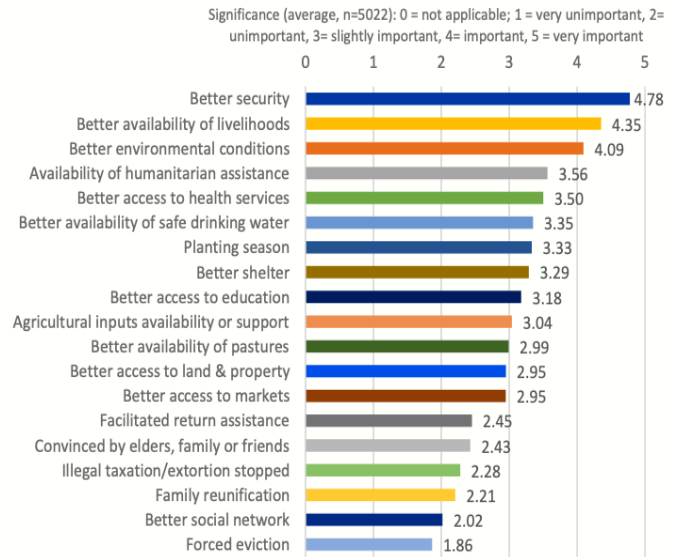
If Undecided, what would help you make a decision to return, resettle or remain?

rank all options: ① ② ③ ④ ⑤ 0 = not applicable; 1 = very unimportant, 2= unimportant, 3= slightly important, 4= important, 5 = very important

Main decision-making factors for UNDECIDED | Herat



Main decision-making factors for UNDECIDED | Badghis



Source: IOM-led Return Intention Survey

To facilitate returns, the FAO started providing drought resistant seeds and food for returnees in their place of origin.¹⁰³ They were also provided cash and food for work, involving them in the rehabilitation of local irrigation systems. In April 2019, NRC and World Vision also started several projects in Badghis, focusing on provision of sustainable livelihood interventions such as constructing water reservoirs, beekeeping, economic activities, and vocational trainings for women to encourage people to return to their place of origin.¹⁰⁴

These late findings on IDPs’ intentions lead to questions of whether returns could have been facilitated as early as 2018, if assistance had been provided to farmers (with a similar package than the one proposed in 2019), based on the crop cycle. Most people in Badghis and Ghor were displaced because their spring harvest had failed in 2018, and they had missed the next planting season (October-November). Households could have been supported in the area of displacement until the next planting season, but to support the return, families should have been supported with drought-tolerant seeds and food to return to their places of origin and prepare for the next planting season.

The food cluster confirmed that members’ operations are always aligned with crop cycles and existing local cultivation practices. It first introduces certified seeds and quality fertilizers coupled with better cultivation practices training

101 Key-Informant Interview, FAO, Kabul, 2020

102 Food Security Cluster, Meeting Minutes, April 2019. Retrieved from: https://fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/mom_national_fsac_10_april_2019.pdf

103 Key Informant Interview, FAO, Kabul, 2020

104 Key-Informant Interview, NRC, Herat, 2020

sessions. All activities delivered by the food cluster are tailored based on an annual mapping analysis of needs in each geographical location. The FSAC could have refined its annual plan in discussion with displaced households. If the FSAC had planned its operations' details in August 2018, return packages with seeds would have been ready one month before the planting season and would have facilitated a return.^{105 106} Such surveys do not need to be as expansive as the IOM survey, as a reasonable margin of error would have been reached with around 400 surveys in each of the three areas of displacement.

The provincial Directorates of the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) in Ghor and Badghis described the assistance to returnees as inefficient and inappropriate to facilitate their reintegration. They voiced their dissatisfaction with the assistance that had been excluding long-term support at the place of origin.¹⁰⁷

“People went back because there was nothing left for them there. Emergency assistance had ended, and it forced return decisions upon them. There was no security and long-term support at their villages either”.

KII, Ghor, DoRR

While the conditions for return were not conducive in terms of security and sustainable sources of income, returns started in March 2019 when around 500 families left Qala-e-Now and returned to their places of origin including Qadis, Jawand and Ab Kamari.¹⁰⁸ By summer 2019, more displaced households opted to return, and this trend continued.¹⁰⁹ Between July and August 2019, around 19,000 households had returned to their place of origin from Qala-e-Now, while 100 families went back to Dawlat Yar, Shahrak and Dolina districts from Feroz Koh.^{110 111}

The proportion of returns in Herat remained low compared to Qala-e-Now. At the height of the response in Herat in 2018, there were over 100,000 drought-induced displaced individuals in Herat City. The number of IDPs did not significantly decrease. In April 2020, around 80,000 people still remained displaced.¹¹² From Herat, there were no significant returns because most IDPs had considerable debts and no assets, particularly land, back at their place of origin.^{113 114} The current number of households still displaced in Qala-e-Now is 9,000 (approximately 100,000 people), while 1,000 people remain displaced in Feroz Koh of Ghor.^{115 116}

“The reason that people chose to return was that they believed that they could get back on their land and resume their livelihood.”

KII, UN-OCHA, Kabul

105 Key Informant Interview, Kabul, 2020
 106 Key Informant Interview, DoRR, Ghor, 2020
 107 Key-Informant Interview, DoRR, Ghor, 2020
 108 Key-Informant Interview, Badghis-DoRR, 2020
 109 Humanitarian Response Plan, Year-End Report, January-December 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/document/afghanistan-wash-cluster-meeting-minutes-29-may-2019>
 110 Ibid
 111 Key-Informant Interview, Ghor-DoRR, 2020
 112 Key-Informant Interview, DoRR-Herat, 2020
 113 Key-Informant Interview-UN-OCHA, Kabul, 2020
 114 Weekly Humanitarian Update, September 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/afg-monthly-humanitarian-update-sep-2019.pdf>
 115 Key-Informant Interview, Badghis-DoRR, 2020
 116 Key-Informant Interview, Ghor-DoRR, 2020

From the interviews, a debate emerged on the voluntary nature of returns. Some respondents argued that a number of households took the decision to go back to their village because of the generous cash support they received from the government (20,000 AFN per family)^{117 118}, without fully understanding the difficulties they would face in their village of origin. Indeed, investments on provision of basic services and, most importantly, livelihood diversification at the place origin had not been delivered, which risked making the return unsustainable.

E. Ongoing Displacement (June 2019-Dec 2019)

1. The new wave of displacement

In mid 2019, Herat started facing an increasing food insecurity and loss of livelihood mainly because of heavy floods. The level of food insecurity differed in the region. For example, Ghor was at “emergency” level (according to Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, IPC)¹¹⁹. However, Herat and Badghis remained at “crisis” level.^{120 121}

Badghis (Bala Murghab and Qadis districts) and Herat (Shindand, Farsi and Pashtun Zarghoon districts) were the most affected places in 2019 by both conflict and flooding.^{122 123} Most of the affected households in these areas either fled to the district or provincial capitals.¹²⁴ In December 2019, roads to Pasaband and Charsada districts of Ghor and Jawand district of Badghis were closed by Non-State Armed Group (NSAG), blocking the movement of civilians and aid workers.

¹²⁵

From 1 July to 30 December 2019, conflicts and flooding led to the displacement¹²⁶ of:

- 3,695 individuals from Shindand, Farsi, Obe, Khushk-e-Kohna, Khushk, Gulran districts and from Ghor and Badghis provinces to Herat City;
- 4,312 people from Dawlatyar, Dolayna, Pasaband, Tolak and Sharak districts to Feroz Koh;
- 2,053 individuals from Bala Murghab and Qadis districts to Qala-e-Now.

These IDPs had already exhausted their available assets and savings due to the 2018 drought. They were provided with assistance at their place of origin, but short-term humanitarian assistance was not enough to recover depleted and eroded coping capacities of households. A severe drought needs three to five agriculture seasons for agriculture-based

117 Cash support was provided by MoRR in Qala-e-Now and Chaghcharan as part of the programme called “Return with honor”.

118 Salam Times, Internally Displaced Afghans From Western Provinces Return Home as Security Improved, 2019:

119 IPC scale is a tool for improving food security analysis. It provides information about the severity of nutrition and livelihood situations to allow for informed decisions.

120 WHO, Situation Report, February 2019. Retrieved from: http://applications.emro.who.int/docs/AFG/COPub_AFG_Situation_rep_Feb_2019_EN.pdf?ua=1

121 FAO Response Plan. Retrieved from: <http://www.fao.org/3/ca7736en/CA7736EN.pdf>

122 Meeting Minutes. Retrieved from: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/document/badghis-operational-coordination-team-oct-meeting-minutes-9-july>

123 Key Informant Interview, MoRR, Kabul

124 Weekly Humanitarian Update, September 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/document/afghanistan-weekly-humanitarian-update-16—22-september-2019>

125 Weekly Humanitarian Update, November-December 2019. Retrieved from: https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/afghanistan-humanitarian_weekly_1_december.pdf

126 Conflict Induced Displacements. Retrieved from: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/idps>

households to recover from losses sustained by drought. In western Afghanistan, the 2018 drought affected the winter cultivation season, and it also impacted on summer cultivation. To recover, affected households need five seasons of better cultivation (three winter and two summer cultivation seasons). However, assistance provided to households in Badghis and Ghor in 2018 was not of that scale. Therefore, coping capacities had barely recovered before the 2019 flood took place, sweeping away with it what initial rehabilitation had taken place. Flood-induced displaced persons were provided with humanitarian assistance-including food, tents, healthcare and livelihood support.¹²⁷

2. Protracted displacement

In mid-2019, the HCT decided to cease the provision of humanitarian assistance to IDPs, an exception designed to support IDPs in Sharak-e-Sabz, an area allocated specifically for IDPs in Herat City.¹²⁸ The decision to allocate this land for IDPs was taken by the MoRR, but has yet to be formalised through the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Herat Municipality and the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs, to whom the land belongs.¹²⁹ The WASH cluster also made three bore holes in the settlement, and the number of capacities at local hospitals of Herat City was also increased.¹³⁰

However, to many interviewees, these examples were not principle-based solutions to displacement. When asked what should have been done instead, they called for long term solutions in order to help IDPs undecided to return to their place of origin, and willing to integrate in their place of displacement, both in terms of a) economic livelihood and b) access to public services. Most households displaced in Herat, Qala-e-Now and Ghor are agriculturists. Respondents insisted on the need to explore economic opportunities in these three geographical locations in order to assist them in becoming self-reliant.¹³¹

Additionally, children in displacement sites remain vulnerable to child labour. Children of IDPs who do not have a Tazkira (national identification cards) are often turned away from schools. A lack of Tazkira has been identified as a challenge faced by displaced households to enrol their children in public schools.¹³²

Finally, there was consensus on the need to provide support to host communities as the influx of IDP caseloads put further pressure on already overstretched resources and basic services with the most vulnerable members of the host communities witnessing harsher living conditions, particularly in Herat city.¹³³

127 IFRC, Emergency Plan of Action Operation Update, November 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=2ahUKewj2xs2spaPpAhVriYsKHSB-CHUQFjAAegQIBhAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fadore.ifrc.org%2FDownload.aspx%3FfileId%3D269593&usq=AOvVaw2FGtiv3FXbj2fDtyMmr7b5>

128 Key-Informant Interview, Ghor, UN-OCHA, 2020

129 NRC, Forced Eviction Monitoring Report, September 2019. Retrieved from: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019.12.04_nrc-afg_evictionmonitoringreport_oct19_final.pdf

130 Key Informant interview, Kabul, 2020

131 Key Informant Interview, Herat, 2020

132 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, November 2018. Retrieved from: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afg_2019_humanitarian_needs_overview.pdf

133 Ibid

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents a general overview of the lessons that can be learnt from the 2018 drought, and how these lessons could be used to improve institutional and policy frameworks. It also presents more detailed recommendations to address weaknesses identified at each step of the crisis.

A. General conclusion and recommendations

Looking back at the response to the dry spell and the drought demonstrates that systems exist for monitoring risks, but that these systems are too weak or inexistent when it comes to ensuring these risks are addressed. The blank spots identified during the study speak for themselves. Indeed, interviewees highlighted several reasons to justify their limited or absence of action and their delay to act:

- Respondents to the study claimed that **security concerns impeded assistance delivery**. Yet, no report documented the specific places that had been missed because of insecurity and negotiated access by the humanitarian community;
- It was argued that **donors would not relocate their development funds to support resilience-building interventions** in affected communities, but no discussion was reported to have taken place with the Afghan government or development actors on this matter;
- Some officials from the humanitarian community argued that **they did not know that the dry spell was transforming into a disaster**. While it is true that similar situations across the country did not automatically lead to a disaster, the assessments conducted in Badghis and Ghor, in addition to the FEWSnet warnings, constituted real evidence of the crisis and had been made public;
- The humanitarian community was eager to blame **the government for not declaring the drought early enough**, but more complex factors were at stake, in which the government crucially delayed declaring a national emergency for fear of the effects that food insecurity issues would have on popularity so close to an election year;
- Humanitarian actors argued that **they could not fundraise to address critical needs** (such as emergency access to water or large-scale food distribution) **as long as a drought had not been declared by the government**. However no attempt was made to request for donor funding before the drought was declared.

Most of these failures could be prevented if stronger systems were put into place. These could include:

- the obligation for the HCT or the ICCT to take decisions and justify them following assessment reports
- the obligation for regional and provincial level coordination bodies to clearly document their recommendations to the ICCT and HCT for the national level to formally respond to these recommendations
- establishing a forum for discussion between development actors and humanitarian actors.

The review of the drought response unveils another institutional weakness: the policy framework for disaster management is not adapted to slow-onset disasters or disasters that are not listed in the National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP). The Afghan government's analysis relies on a static risk analysis, based on a limited number of disasters and not on evolving vulnerabilities. Dry spells are not considered as part of the risks Afghanistan is facing, as per the policy framework. Drafted in the late 2000s, because the NDMP only offers a rigid analysis framework, it is not a proper tool to guide the government and eventually hold it accountable in dealing with slow-onset disasters. Based on lessons drawn from the 2018 drought and the more recent COVID-19 pandemic, **it appears critical to review the**

NDMP and ensure it offers a more dynamic analytical framework, so government's response can adapt in an environment constantly evolving, and facing new risks. In fact, the NDMP does not consider a pandemic as part of the risks faced in Afghanistan.

Additionally, the findings presented above underline the critical need for long-term solutions and highlight how, in every phase of the crisis, long-term objectives were at best considered auxiliary, through ad hoc interventions and, at worst, completely disregarded.

What would the drought response have looked like if its key long-term objective had been to prevent a protracted displacement scenario?

To be able to envisage the long-term objective of preventing protracted displacement, there should have been awareness of three major aspects:

- 1) That the dry spell could eventually lead to a drought;
- 2) That communities had low resilience because of poverty and conflicts, and that communities had no capacity to absorb additional shocks;
- 3) That a drought could eventually lead to displacement.

Unfortunately, such risks were not seriously considered in a timely manner by relevant institutions, including the Afghan government or the humanitarian community. Individuals who may have considered these risks would not have been able to trigger a decision-making process, which is highly centralised.

The HRP warned that a lack of donor funding could lead to displacement, showing that the humanitarian community was not seeing displacement as an immediate risk. In addition, only one activity in the revised plan was presented as preventing displacement: the drilling of bore wells, as part of the WASH cluster. None of the indicators or outcomes in the HRP monitor the risk of displacement and how responses to the crisis at the place of origin might prevent or mitigate displacement.

Besides the necessity, in order to identify the risk of displacement, a number of decisions should have been taken to prevent such protracted displacement, including:

- **Improved engagement with development actors before and throughout dry spells.** The stress came primarily from climate change which should be tackled by development efforts and which should have been prioritised in the region years ago considering the vulnerability of the area to drought (especially in light of the heavy reliance of farmers on rain-fed agriculture). Even if development programmes aimed at building resilience to drought had been prioritised in 2017, the effect of the dry spell and the drought would have been lessened;
- **large-scale displacements may have been prevented, if fund allocation had been prioritised to address life-saving support in villages affected by the drought.** The pre-requisites for such a decision to have been made in early 2018 are presented in the recommendations below;
- **Proper humanitarian and recovery efforts in villages affected by the drought would have facilitated a successful return** for the families who would have fled their home. This would have required food security and agriculture cluster members to follow the agriculture calendar when providing assistance, so that small

and larger-scale farmers could have resumed work on their land in a timely manner;

- As evidenced by the **recent displacements induced by floods**, there is an urgent need for a **development strategy** to tackle climate change effects and increase food security. This strategy should be accompanied by a **preparedness plan** which integrates the lessons from the 2018 drought crisis (see further details on the recommendation below).

The following sections review how the crisis unfolded and recommend a set of institutional reforms, tools and systems that could foster effective decision-making, and increase the likelihood of the successful support to drought affected communities. It should be noted that the new prototype launched by the World Bank 'Early Warning, Early Action, Early Finance' which was presented to the High Poverty Council in December 2019 integrates many of the below recommendations. The challenge for the humanitarian community thus rests on how best to support and build this system.

B. Initial Onset

There was limited awareness of the slow onset nature of the drought in 2017. Resulting from weak coping mechanisms, this slow onset weakened the resilience capacity of households, interrupting livelihoods and consequently pushing them into severe food insecurity. No early action was taken to mitigate the impact of drought conditions because early warnings were neither communicated as widely as needed, nor analysed and understood, so HCT missed the opportunity to prepare for and mitigate the looming crisis.

In the initial onset period, a humanitarian response was not required - in fact, recovery or development interventions were more appropriate and could have focused on building resilience by increasing access to water, drought-resistant seeds, fodder, and alternative livelihoods. The establishment of grain banks at the community level (as currently organised under CCAP) would have mitigated the impending shock and could have postponed displacement by a couple of months, providing more time for humanitarian agencies to then provide lifesaving assistance to affected people at their place of origin.

For this course of action to be possible, the following changes are required:

- 1) Improving the use of early warning signs;
- 2) Prioritising recovery and development activities in response to early warning signs;
- 3) Investing in strengthening coping mechanisms at the local level.

Recommendation 1: Improve the dissemination and analysis of early warning signs

The newly established National Early Warning Committee and ANDMA should **translate FEWSNet reports in Dari and Pashtu and disseminate them to related government institutions**, including Provincial Governors' office, OCTs and planning and policy directorates in all relevant ministries. Also, these reports should be regularly shared at fortnightly Inter-Cluster Coordination Meetings with the Afghan Coordination Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) and UN agencies.

For these reports to be useful, they should be discussed and analysed during the various coordination meetings, including ICCT meetings, OCT meetings and at the NDMC. Members of these institutions could then communicate

their analysis to the National Early Warning Committee (NEWC), responsible for issuing early notifications of drought and triggering the release of early financing for interventions building resilience and providing safety nets (under the 'Early warning, early action, early finance' WB prototype).

Recommendation 2: Prevent displacement by addressing the structural causes of food insecurity

While the World Bank prototype focuses on prioritising the financing of resilience-building interventions, funding is likely to be insufficient. Humanitarian actors have to take on an advocacy role, engaging in dialogue with development partners to ensure that building resilience is prioritised in areas experiencing stresses with the potential to transform into disasters. The monitoring on food security led by the FSAC could be used more widely to inform decision-making among development actors, including line ministries and the Ministry of Finance. Advocacy for prioritising zones at risks could be done through various channels, including the NEWC.

Recommendation 3: Explore alternative, longer-term funding options

The examples of ECHO (for Drought Preparedness), DfID (for Social Protection) and USAID (Crisis Modifier), suggest that alternative, longer-term funding mechanisms could be explored for drought response that allow for preparedness, mitigation, and recovery interventions that build the resilience of local communities.

C. Early Stages of Displacement

When initial drought-induced displacements happened in early 2018, no one predicted the crisis ahead because the risks of displacement had yet to be associated with dry spells in Afghanistan. Additionally, the drought's adverse impact on food security conditions were underestimated. All humanitarian organisations meeting at the regional level analysed and shared relevant information about initial displacements with same sector actors, but these meetings failed to ring the proverbial alarm bells. Closer monitoring of drought conditions accompanied by analysis of initial displacements will help to provide early preventive actions.

Humanitarian relief activities were being implemented at the place of displacement and also in some places affected by drought to mitigate the risks of displacement. Nevertheless, the scale of the response was far from sufficient. Scaling up initial efforts with data-led strategies would have ultimately proven more cost-effective.

At this point of the crisis, the following actions would have greatly increased the likelihood of a successful management of the crisis:

Recommendation 4: Recognising dry spell can be the cause of displacement and monitoring this risk.

The impact of a dry spell at the community level should be rigorously monitored through early warning signs. This should include a tracking of displacement movements in vulnerable areas via IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix.¹³⁴ IOM collects data about displacement movements through KIIs, focus group discussions (FGDs) and direct observation

134 IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix. Retrieved from: <https://afghanistan.iom.int/reports/displacement-tracking-matrix>

at settlements. Displacements can be also tracked via UN-OCHA¹³⁵ and Provincial Directorates of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR). It is also recommended that information about displacements are timely analysed and distributed to all relevant institutions, particularly ANDMA and MoRR.

Recommendation 5: Identifying needs prior to developing the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) and before the drought is declared.

UN-OCHA, under the leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator and the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), should start assessing needs of affected-families at the place of origin before the HRP is designed and developed. While security was put forward as a constraint to conduct such assessments, the access that some of the NGOs operating in these areas had been able to secure could have been better utilised. When first displacements took place it would have been useful to immediately assess needs that required to be addressed to avoid further displacements. In addition, the response plan should cover families that are already displaced. Provincial IDP Task Forces should conduct assessments of IDP settlements, generating information about numbers of families displaced, their current and former locations, their access to water and food, return intention, and needs. Responses should be designed and implemented based on the results of the survey.

Recommendation 6: Providing livestock restocking support.

It is important to assist families in order to contain distress sale of livestock, as this provides much-needed nutrition support through provision of milk and an income supplement. Livestock restocking should be considered as a priority livelihood-based intervention in drought-affected areas. It should also be accompanied by interventions aimed at increasing water availability for livestock. The humanitarian community should integrate lessons learned in Ethiopia, where livestock restocking proved an effective initiative in drought-affected communities. FAO procured local goats and sheep and distributed ten to each household (most vulnerable people who were landless or had lost all their assets). The beneficiaries were able to quickly reap the benefits, helping to restore lost livelihoods.

Recommendation 7: Given that there are many agencies active in Afghanistan whether International NGOs, local NGOs, and UN agencies mandated to do both development and humanitarian set of actions, there is a need for building a connection and coherence between their two sets of services .

Humanitarian agencies that have both humanitarian and development functions should first arrange internal discussions to determine what actions can be introduced in the first three months of the response as immediate life-saving measures, while considering longer-term risk reduction or recovery interventions. Internal discussions should be coordinated at the ICCT and HCT level, and decisions could be then passed on to development coordination bodies (such as the High Council on Poverty) to prioritise the required resources.

135 Humanitarian Response, Overview of Natural Disasters November 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/natural-disasters-0>

Recommendation 8: Consider the possibility to conduct early access negotiation, before a disaster takes place and advocate for common approach to access negotiations.

Communicate neutrally and with impartiality to non-government elements through community leaders, religious figures and influential tribal elders in hard-to-reach areas. For the drought, all major actors independently negotiated their own access, impeding assistance delivery for some of the actors. Access negotiation should thus be done as a team of humanitarian actors responding together to a crisis. Also, access issues had emerged in 2017, and as such negotiations should have been considered at this time. Mandatory reporting of access issues to the ICCT, at the national level, would certainly help in ensuring that the problem is tackled.

D. Acute Displacement

Considering that it takes up to 3 years for farmers and herders to recover from the adverse impacts of drought, this study finds that the humanitarian response had not accounted for a comprehensive response and early recovery at the place of origin. Instead, a standalone emergency response was administered during the acute phase of displacement in 2018. Many interviewees cited that an effective humanitarian response should have also included a longer-term programming pitch, that is drought recovery support at the places of origins for drought-affected people in order to minimise displacement. It is recommended that future humanitarian responses prioritise planning for early recovery and resilience building at the place of displacement.

Recommendation 9: Collect information and develop durable solution strategy.

With the arrival of new displaced-households, a survey shall be conducted at informal displacement sites through Flow Monitoring Points (FMPs)¹³⁶ installed in 2018 on major routes close to IDP settlements. Timely information about IDPs' intentions is critical to better understand barriers to return and requisite conditions for safe and voluntary return. Such data should be discussed at the ICCT at both the regional and national levels, and should lead to decisions on longer term solutions (return or long term solutions, or a mix) early on in the crisis. The absence of timely decisions led to farmers missing an additional planting season and further delayed the integration of families planning to stay at their place of displacement. In IDP sites in Herat, no activities were conducted to support IDPs (many of whom had intended on staying) to build self reliance by market-led skills programmes so they can adapt to the local labour market. Starting such activities early in the displacement period would have reduced IDPs' dependency on aid.

Recommendation 10: Provide livelihood assistance at the place of origin to avoid pull factors and facilitate early returns.

In drought-affected areas, livelihood-based interventions are an important way to prevent or mitigate further displacement. To be effective, however, interventions should be designed in coordination with provincial authorities,

136 In 2018, IOM set up Flow Monitoring Points on major routes connecting to Herat City. It proved to be very successful in terms of assessing return intentions, causes of displacement and assistance needed for return.

displaced households at the place of displacement, and if possible, with influential community leaders (such as Mullahs, community elders and farmers). In the western region, development-oriented activities could have included the rehabilitation of secondary and tertiary canals, Kareez, boreholes, rain water reservoirs, groundwater recharge, and management of sub-basins and other projects that can build the resilience of affected-families. Such projects could also allow useful cash injections in the community with the provision of local labour in the construction phase. The project should be designed in a way that can also encourage earlier returns.

E>Returns

The majority of displaced families in Qala-e-Now returned to their place of origin starting from March 2019 when emergency programmes announced they would be ending by Mid-2019 in displacement sites. The HCT decided to cease humanitarian assistance at the place of displacement as the focus of the assistance shifted to the place of origin in order to facilitate returns. At the place of origin, returnees were provided with humanitarian support to restore their livelihood. At the place of displacement, the government provided those who wanted to return with cash support so that they could arrange their journey back to their villages. However, these decisions came at a time while the situation was not conducive in places of origin in terms of security, weather and sustainable livelihoods. Government officials admitted that return support was not sufficient and timely. Expressing frustration over the lack of coordination between them and the government, humanitarian NGOs also stated that most returns were shaped by an interplay between the lack of assistance in place of displacement and pro-return government policy.

Recommendation 11: Build resilience in places of origin through supporting livelihoods and DRR initiatives, in order to create pull factors which facilitate sustainable, safe and voluntary return.

Encouraging a return which is not safe (because of security, weather condition or access to basic services) creates risks for a secondary displacement. Therefore, they need to be updated about the conditions in their place of origin while they are at displacement sites. Establish IDP Shuras and select a group of Shura members (male and female) and initiate "Go and See Visits" if necessary. The visits can be arranged by DoRRs and Provincial Governors, who should facilitate discussions between populations who are already residing in the areas and IDP representatives in order to identify issues related to conflict, protection and whether or not the root causes of displacement have been solved. IDP representatives can arrange group sessions inside IDP settlements for information sharing about the place of origin. In addition, immediate needs that condition the safe return should be addressed. For instance, food distribution and livelihood support, particularly provision of drought-resistant seeds should be systematically linked with the crop cycle of the affected areas. Most households in Badghis and Ghor were displaced when their half crop cycle failed. Those who were in Qala-e-Now and Feroz Koh missed the October-November crop planting season as well. FSAC should develop a timeline based on the crop cycle unless there were high resources to help people to not depend on their crops for a long period of time. Development of a timeframe that is aligned with the crop cycle can encourage earlier return of crop dependent families, but FSAC needs to make sure there is good operational and strategic leadership along its timeframe, for which it needs sufficient time to work with families and do regular scoping of crop chances for every following year.

Recommendation 12: Coordinate and align return interventions within the national and international humanitarian community.

Development of return plans with humanitarian NGOs could present a well-timed opportunity for building on existing coordination mechanisms and attracting the attention of NGOs technical support to ensure safe and voluntary returns. Greater coordination between humanitarian NGOs and government could also assist MoRR with the development of better return plans.

F. Ongoing Displacement

There is no doubt that the 2018-19 drought response helped to save lives and alleviate immediate suffering of displaced families in the western region. However, most of the interviewees described the role of the government as inefficient in terms of seeking to provide sustainable solutions to the problem of displacement in the three geographic locations (Herat, Qala-e-Now and Feroz Koh), in particular after emergency programmes ended in June 2019. There is a general perception that the government is strongly opposed to integration, and it considered return as the only option. It requires a focus on assisting IDPs to become self-reliant and also simultaneously working for long-term programmes at the place of origin to ensure sustainable and safe returns.

Recommendation 13: Provide local market driven vocational training programmes to IDPs.

The programmes shall be linked to existing economic opportunities in Herat, Qala-e-Now and Ghor and they should offer apprenticeships to IDPs, who by the end of the training, can use their skills and join the local market.

Recommendation 14: Provide assistance to the vulnerable members of the host community.

Migrants and their hosts face many similar challenges in terms of access to basic services. Therefore, provide assistance and / or design response plans with a focus on the needs of vulnerable host communities too. Likewise, equal participation of displaced households and their hosts in planning, implementation and monitoring of initiatives through their representatives (male and female) can ensure that needs of both communities are adequately taken into account.

Recommendation 15: Facilitate IDPs' access to civil documentation so they gain access to employment, credit and education.

Central Statistics and Ministry of Communication, Information and Technology (MoCIT) can extend their current biometric operations to Herat, Qala-e-Now and Feroz Koh to provide electronic Tazkira to IDPs and record keeping when it is established. Humanitarian organisations shall advocate with the government at national level to issue Tazkeras locally through the current biometric system.



ADSP

Asia Displacement Solutions Platform



NORWEGIAN
REFUGEE COUNCIL



The Asia Displacement Solutions Platform is a joint initiative of the Danish Refugee Council, International Rescue Committee, Norwegian Refugee Council and Relief International, which aims to contribute to the development of comprehensive solutions for Afghans affected by displacement. Drawing upon its members' operational presence in the region, the ADSP engages in constructive dialogue and evidence-based advocacy initiatives to support improved outcomes for displaced Afghans.