



ACBAR



The
Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief & Development

ACBAR, the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief & Development, is an Afghan body bringing together 135 national and international NGOs working in Afghanistan and abiding by the humanitarian principles of independence, neutrality, impartiality and humanity. ACBAR was created in August 1988 and provides a platform for its member NGOs to share information and expertise with other state and non-state actors in development and humanitarian assistance.

According to the United Nations, an estimated 7.4 million people are currently in need of urgent humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan. Security has deteriorated with the departure of the international military forces at the end of 2014 and the country faces a complex and challenging humanitarian situation.

On the 21st May 2015, ACBAR, and Islamic Relief co-hosted the 'WHS Afghanistan National Consultation' to represent the widest range of perspectives and experiences of humanitarian organizations in the country to set an agenda to more effectively meet the needs of millions of people. ACBAR subsequently participated in the South and Central Asia Regional Consultation in Dushanbe in June 2015. The WHS Global Consultation now represents an opportunity for humanitarian actors in Afghanistan to put forward their ideas based on recommendations from the previous consultations to promote change and transformation in the humanitarian system.

DIGNITY: How can we ensure humanitarian action empowers and reaches all people?

DIGNITY: Empower people to cope and recover with dignity through humanitarian action that puts people at its heart, delivers equally for women and girls, reaches everyone, invests in youth and children, and protects and enables people as the primary agents of their own response

- The principle of participation is key in all phases of design, implementation, and evaluation; both promotion of local ownership and equitable distribution of benefits to ensure the success of any initiative.. A process of effective inclusion of stakeholders on all levels is therefore required. As part of this effort, people affected by disasters must be empowered, rather than made dependent. The humanitarian community should increase substantive consultations and engagement with affected communities to ensure greater sustainability of humanitarian projects and services.
- All members of the community, including the most marginalized, should participate in decision-making processes, including identifying priorities. In Afghanistan informal, traditional, and loosely structured CSOs have strong connections with their constituencies, although a lack of funding limits their organizational capacities. The international community should ensure that national NGOs and CSOs have greater access to funds so that they can deliver practical projects which are relevant to the needs of the people they are serving.
- In Afghanistan, many members of the community have been educated through religious schools and madrassas instead of secular schools. This section of the population is poorly represented in humanitarian organizations. More inclusion of religious leaders and traditional structures in humanitarian and disaster risk reduction projects should be encouraged.
- Data collection in Afghanistan needs to be improved. Humanitarian actors should work together to collect the necessary disaggregated data in order to form a more nuanced picture of vulnerability, taking into account the specific needs of women, men children, people with illnesses and disabilities and the elderly.

RESILIENCE: How can we increase preparedness and better manage risks, including health crisis risks?

RESILIENCE: Build hope and solutions for people in new or prolonged crises, through collective action by humanitarian, development and other partners, build people's resilience to crises, by investing in preparedness, managing risk, reducing vulnerability, finding durable solutions for protracted displacement, and adapting to new threats.

- A systematic resilience approach to disaster response should increasingly be channeled through local and national actors, to build capacities and increase sustainability. At community and district levels, we need to incorporate indigenous knowledge and local experience into community action plans. More can be done to empower vulnerable communities to help themselves, among others through the Community-based Disaster Risk Management Teams. Powerful tools of communication, including radio and phone coverage, should be utilized to disseminate messages related to emergencies. This also includes more communication through Community Development Councils (CDCs), schools, mosques, and clinics. Mapping these different communication modes will enable faster, up-to-date information relating to emergencies to be shared with the humanitarian community. Better early warning systems, inclusive of media messages, SMS, radio etc. should be used to communicate threats and hazards.
- Education is the key to empowerment. In the health sector, instead of bringing in long-term medical staff from cities and/or outside the country, members of the community can be identified and trained to respond to the most urgent needs of their communities: for example traditional midwives, first aid workers and traditional medicine healers or hakims. The same principles can be applied to improve local technical capacities in relation to housing, and infrastructure.
- There is an overlap between acute and chronic emergencies in Afghanistan and missing links between emergency responses and long-term development. A cyclical humanitarian response is neither dignified for people in need nor cost-effective for donors. Increased development and state action must take place to address some of the underlying drivers of humanitarian needs to foster long-term recovery, starting with better alignment of humanitarian relief with development goals and activities. Given the growing gap between humanitarian needs and resources, humanitarian and development actors should jointly explore the cost-effectiveness of current crisis responses (for example the recurrent annual natural disasters) and the overall humanitarian system. We need to introduce innovative technologies and processes to improve our preparedness for both response and recovery.

SAFETY: How can we ensure respect for International Humanitarian Law in conflicts?

SAFETY: Keep people safe from harm by putting protection at the centre of humanitarian action, increasing political action to prevent and end conflict, preventing and putting an end to violations of international humanitarian law and ensuring humanitarian action is not instrumentalized.

- The humanitarian space in Afghanistan is increasingly shrinking. Delivery of humanitarian relief to affected populations is often hampered by those who are wary of aid agencies. This is due to a lack of understanding and trust of their work, agenda and principles which guide their work. NGOs therefore often find themselves stuck 'between a rock and a hard place' in the delivery of their duties and face obstacles from both State and non-state groups. We have to continue to raise awareness of the importance of IHL to all stakeholders. It is not enough for aid agencies to simply claim to act impartially, neutrally and independently: they must be seen to behave accordingly and deliver high-quality, needs-driven programming.
- In the early hours of the 3rd October 2015, an MSF hospital in Kunduz Afghanistan was repeatedly hit by a series of aerial bombing raids which resulted in the deaths of twelve staff members and at least seven patients, including three children. Thirty seven people were also injured including nineteen staff members. The hospital was severely damaged. The outcry, both in Afghanistan and internationally, has been tremendous and covered extensively by the media and through social media outlets. This sends a sign that violations of the Geneva Convention will not be accepted and puts pressure on policy makers to ensure adherence and accountability.

PARTNERSHIPS: How can we shift leadership of humanitarian action towards local actors?

PARTNERSHIPS: Build diverse and inclusive partnerships that reaffirm the core humanitarian principles, support effective and people-driven humanitarian action, enable first responders to take a leadership role, and leverage the power of innovation.

- Donors must require partnership of international actors with national partners in programme planning and evidence of inclusive participatory processes in project planning, implementation and monitoring.
- Find new ways to engage with the private sector who are sometimes the best innovators in terms of having their business stay ahead of socio-economic challenges. Public-private partnerships that work well in humanitarian and development settings should be mapped and enhanced to meet humanitarian challenges, with a strong focus on humanitarian principles compliance.
- Communication and coordination among the regional humanitarian agencies and the local government should be strengthened and improved. Humanitarian actors should support local governments in terms of capacity building, and providing tools which will enable them to collect data on community needs. Ensuring adequate resources for regional bodies is a must. Funding should be allocated by the government as it currently is for the National Priority Programs or by donors themselves in collaboration with the Government.
- Build viable, effective and accountable local institutions and capacities and take advantage of the knowledge and experience of local communities and NGOs. As part of this, INGOs should support local NGOs to ensure the effectiveness of their programs. Cultural sensitivity creates something fresh and works towards the development of something diverse. This takes collaborative sharing and patience; quick fixes are nothing but facades and are not sustainable. ACBAR has initiated a four year 'Twinning Program', funded by DFID. The aim of this program is to support the NGOs in responding to the humanitarian crisis. Through a Twinning Program, Afghan NGOs (twinnees) will be trained by INGOs (twinners) to carry out assessments on protection, WASH, food security, health and nutrition; and to properly submit grants (quality and needs correspondence). The aim is to increase the capacity of Afghan NGOs to participate in the planning, co-ordination and delivery of collective humanitarian programs in Afghanistan.

Key recommendations:

In moving towards the World Humanitarian Summit and beyond, the Afghanistan humanitarian community should:

- Re-affirm their commitment to respect and promote the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence and re-affirm the value of the humanitarian imperative;
- Re-affirm the good practice of humanitarian donor-ship and commit to ensuring a full-scale separation of humanitarian response from military objectives by delinking humanitarian aid from political, security and military agendas during and beyond transition;
- Re-affirm and protect the fundamental right for all affected people, regardless of gender, disabilities and backgrounds to access humanitarian aid;
- Prioritize and fund needs-based humanitarian programs that target vulnerable groups, particularly women and children, and persons with disabilities, and invest further in strengthening humanitarian coordination, financing and leadership mechanisms in order to improve the quality, relevance and timeliness of humanitarian responses.
- Provide support to Afghan institutions, NGOs and local communities to help build disaster management and response capacity through increased funding to local humanitarian preparedness and disaster risk reduction programs.