



WORKING TOGETHER
FOR PROTECTION

GLOBAL PROTECTION CLUSTER COORDINATOR | MISSION TO AFGHANISTAN 5-15 May 2017

REPORT

Background

1. My mission was postponed three times from early 2016 owing to security. My Terms of Reference were to assist the Afghanistan Protection Cluster (APC) with prioritisation, to examine efficiencies in the APC's way of working and provide general support to UNHCR as cluster lead agency.
2. The regional and national political environment remains extremely complex and driven by identity politics. The security situation has deteriorated to such an extent that the US has announced a troop surge in support of the Afghan government, which controls or influences only 57% of the territory. Notwithstanding some of the highest levels of aid given to a country over the past 15 years some 40% of the population of 29 million people live below the poverty line and some 9.5 million people are in need of humanitarian aid (see Humanitarian Response Plan 2017). In 2016, UNAMA recorded the highest number of civilian casualties, internal displacement hit a recent new high (over 500,000, of whom 56% are children) and involuntary returns of refugees from Pakistan and Iran threatened to overwhelm the absorption capacity of Afghanistan and create new causes of conflict (see <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/resettling-nearly-half-a-million-afghans-in-nangrahar-the-consequences-of-the-mass-return-of-refugees/>).
3. Looking ahead, there is a general consensus that the security situation in Afghanistan is deteriorating and is expected to worsen through 2018. The dynamics are expected to include further civilian casualties and internal displacement (450,000, per HRP17). The hardening of the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan in the context of relations between the countries, security concerns about the Afghan population in Pakistan and administrative changes within Pakistan are expected to lead to further large-scale returns (1m, per HRP17). In this context, the delivery of humanitarian protection and assistance will demand more focus and efficiency.
4. The APC is co-coordinated by UNHCR and the Norwegian Refugee Council. In the 2016 HRP, the APC requires \$99m (of which \$43m is for returnees) to fulfil three objectives: identifying and addressing acute protection concerns; monitoring, analysing and responding to evolving protection concerns; supporting the creation of a protective environment. Other than Mine Action, the target numbers for the APC are very low

relative to the stated need (i.e. fewer than 10% of those in need of a protection service are directly assisted and fewer than 5% are monitored in relation to objective 1).

5. In 2016, the APC received 52% funding against request. In 2017, the first round allocated envelope for protection in the Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) amounted to a mere \$500,000. At the time of writing, the APC has achieved 2% of its stated targets (taking out Mine Action).

Findings

6. The level of understanding of Afghanistan, its people, society and culture by humanitarians has markedly declined since I first served in Afghanistan from 2002 and my assumption is that this is because humanitarians appear in large part to be operating from a “compoundistan” within Kabul (the UNCT staffing list shows that the vast majority of agency staff, particularly internationals, are based in Kabul). Actual contact with affected Afghans and their needs is mediated through national staff and organisations, with some areas not having any international staff presence. The lack of contact does not appear to be mitigated by the reading or inclusion of anthropological studies and this may be contributing to a lack of direction.
7. Sub-national protection coordination has been outsourced to partners and the consensus appears to be that it is ineffective. Inefficient practices at the national level appear to be replicated at the sub-national level. At the same time, the use of networks to collect information and extend the reach of assistance appears weak, with some conflict-affected areas not covered by humanitarian agencies at all.
8. When I asked my interviewees what they thought the protection priorities are in Afghanistan I was struck again and again by the lack of reference to the conflict or to protection of civilians. I was also struck by the inability of interviewees to prioritise concerns, with some listing a dozen issues. Not surprisingly, those priorities tended to coincide with what the agency (said they) could deliver. I also saw a consistent confusion between what humanitarian aid could be expected to achieve and what should properly be left to development actors. There is a(n understandable) reluctance by UNAMA Human Rights to be more directive with an APC they see as process-driven and there is a lack of a granular understanding within the APC of what the conflict means for ordinary Afghans.
9. The level of attention to civil-military coordination is very low, with only 10% of the time of a CIMCOORD officer in OCHA devoted to it. This low level has an obvious impact on the ability of humanitarians to liaise with international and national forces on protection of civilians, despite the best efforts of the CIMCOORD officer.
10. While the objectives of the APC include identifying protection concerns, analysing them and environment-building there is a consensus that the APC is not using the abundant data it is collecting and is not producing analysis or information, without which it cannot support the creation of a protective environment (both the GPC and humanitarianresponse.info websites contain very little from Afghanistan after 2012).
11. One of the reasons behind the lack of information and analysis appears to be an overwhelming government/UNCT/humanitarian coordination structure, sucking between 100-150 hours of staff time each month in scheduled meetings alone. This does not leave space for the reflection required for analysis and the production of information, as a result of which the APC has no narrative on the protection situation in Afghanistan and cannot enforce a prioritisation of its efforts.

12. There is a consensus that the time devoted to meetings is not reflected in any discernible impact. One of the reasons is likely to be that the coordination structure is atomised, with duplicate working groups established on single issues, when what is required is a joined-up approach focussed on protection, access and advocacy.
13. The HRP 2017 is not a useful document for the prioritisation of protection response: the protection analysis is weak and the differentiated risks of women, men, girls and boys, elderly people, nomads or the disabled are not well integrated. The protection objectives set out the classic response, remedy and environment-building modes in a generic way, the indicators are not chosen to measure impact and the target numbers are incredibly unambitious, e.g. 55,000 people from 1,400,000 in need (of a consultation?) will be consulted through protection monitoring.
14. On the positive side, the new DSRSG/RC/HC welcomes a new vision from the APC and donors appear supportive of a clearer focus on responding to protection needs in conflict. The deployment of an experienced Senior Protection Officer by UNHCR to lead the APC, assisted by an experienced Information Management Officer and the support of an active Norwegian Refugee Council co-coordinator at the national level and coordination staff at the sub-national level also represents significant coordination resources that can make an impact with the right prioritisation.

Recommendations and actions

15. The APC should:

- a. Assist the Humanitarian Country Team to develop a short and action-oriented Protection Strategy, based on the GPC Provisional Guidance Note and the IASC Protection Policy; the HCT strategy should be completed by end August;
- b. The HCT Protection Strategy, and the focus of the APC, should be built around the linked issues of protection of civilians, displacement and access to basic services, with advocacy and mainstreaming forming common threads;
- c. The HCT Protection Strategy should be accompanied by a short and clear action plan, including the establishment of Call Centres (with WFP etc. following the model in Iraq) to provide a means of communication with affected people and accountability to them;
- d. The HCT should include a discussion of protection priorities at every meeting and the UNHCR Representative should, as cluster lead, present a Note on critical issues to every meeting (see http://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/assets/files/news_and_publication_s/gpc-cop_review_2016.pdf); this should begin ASAP;
- e. The APC should re-draft the protection analysis and objectives in the HRP during the mid-year revision; this should be completed by end July;
- f. OCHA should increase the attention/time allocated to civil-military coordination;
- g. The GPC should hold a briefing in Geneva on Afghanistan, inviting Permanent Missions and others; this should be held during June;
- h. The APC should produce public information products based on the analysis of its data on a monthly basis and post regular updates to the Afghanistan page of the GPC website or humanitarianresponse.info and the GPC Facebook page, YouTube account and Twitter feed; this should begin ASAP;

- i. The APC should take a critical look at the coordination structure across DiREC, UNCT and HCT and rationalise its attendance at meetings; it should also divide attendance at meetings between the co-coordinators, this should begin ASAP;
- j. The APC should focus its protection mainstreaming efforts on food security/livelihoods, health and shelter/NFIs rather than diffuse its efforts across all sectors; this should begin ASAP;
- k. In relation to the Housing, Land and Property Task Force, the APC should focus on mediation in areas of return where returnees find their property or land occupied; providing information on access to civil documentation (tazkera), and; the issue of security of tenure and the risk of eviction (see <https://areu.org.af/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/918E-Land-Conflict-in-Afghanistan-ES.pdf>);
- l. The involvement of the APC in the selection of beneficiaries for the government land allocation scheme, which has been beset by difficulties, should be discussed openly and with intellectual frankness but the engagement of agencies in the APC in the scheme can only be determined by the agency itself, following a thorough assessment of the security, operational and reputational risks of engagement in the land allocation scheme and a conflict analysis (see <https://areu.org.af/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/1203E-Drivers-of-Conflict-IP-2012.pdf>); the involvement of agency security staff in the discussions is recommended;
- m. The APC co-coordinators should force efficiencies in the working methods of the APC, including but not limited to:
 - i. Publishing a schedule of meetings through to year end (the GPC website can be used) and scheduling them in the same week to provide maximum space to travel to the field; stating clearly that meetings are not held in order to exchange information but to achieve agreement;
 - ii. Convening the meetings around thematic issues related to the priorities of protection of civilians, displacement and access to basic services, and including experts on those issues, e.g. tazkeras, land;
 - iii. Drafting agendas for meetings that clearly limit them to maximum one hour and chairing meetings actively to conclude on time and with actionable points;
 - iv. Desisting immediately from writing minutes of meetings and confining records to action points, to be followed up;
- n. UNHCR and the NRC should agree the Memorandum of Understanding setting out their particular responsibilities to the APC no later than end May; UNHCR and NRC should hold a meeting with the sub-cluster coordinators and the APC to ensure a common understanding of the TA Cluster Reference Module and the IASC Generic Terms of Reference for Cluster Leads at the Country Level;
- o. The GPC will explore with ProCap the possibility of deploying a Senior Protection Advisor to draft a reintegration strategy for the HCT;
- p. The GPC will convene a meeting with its AORs in Geneva to discuss performance issues within the APC and its sub-clusters and agree on further performance monitoring; to take place before end June.

Interviewees

Gerry Simpson, Human Rights Watch + staff
Phyllida Strachan, DFID, British Embassy
UNHCR protection staff: Mazar-i-Sharif, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat, Bamyan, Kabul
Sarah CRAGGS, Deputy Head of Mission, IOM
Toby Lanzer, DSRS UNAMA/RC/HC/RR UNDP
Danielle Bell, Representative, OHCHR/Chief Human Rights Officer, UNAMA + staff
Dr Mateen Shaheen, Deputy Country Director, UNFPA + staff
Nicolas Coutin, Andrii Mazurenko, Nimarta Khuman, Afghanistan Protection Cluster
Will Carter, Norwegian Refugee Council
Nader jan Farhad, Aurvasi Patel, UNHCR
Martha Kow-Donkor, Marko Macskovich, Afghanistan Shelter Cluster
Mick Lorentzen, Representative, WFP + staff
APC Strategic Advisory Group: NRC, UNAMA, UNICEF, UNHCR, UN-Habitat
Norah Niland, DARA + staff
Adele Khodr, Country Director, UNICEF
Mathilde Vu, Advocacy Manager, ACBAR
Dominic Parker, Head of OCHA + staff
Esmee DE-JONG, Head of Mission, ECHO
Shubhan Chaudhuri, Country Director, World Bank