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## **BREAKING THE CYCLE**

### **TOWARDS A COLLECTIVE-NEEDS BASED APPROACH TO HUNGER IN AFGHANISTAN**

#### **POSITION PAPER FOR THE 2019 GENEVA MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON AFGHANISTAN**

Nearly forty years of conflict have deeply affected Afghanistan. Despite efforts to stabilise the country the security situation continues to deteriorate. Whilst peace talks between the Government of Afghanistan and the main non-state armed group continue, the conflict between the different actors across the country has continued to intensify. Attacks on civilians and aid workers, including many grave violations of International Humanitarian Law, have increased, and 2018 is on track to be the deadliest year on record for civilians in Afghanistan.

Successive waves of violence have resulted in a large number of people on the move. Last year, on average, approximately 1,400 people fled their villages to safe havens, often urban centres, every day. In addition, an estimated 2 million people have returned to Afghanistan since 2015 – largely from the neighbouring countries of Pakistan and Iran and including many who have attempted to seek asylum in Europe.

This deteriorating security crisis, combined with slow economic growth, has resulted in widespread poverty with around 55% of the population considered to be living below the national poverty line<sup>1</sup>. This is a considerable decline, compared to 38.3% in 2012-2013, an increase of 5 million people in poverty. In rural areas, the poverty rate is even higher – with almost 60% of the rural population living in poverty.

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<sup>1</sup> Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS) 2016-2017.

There is a general consensus now acknowledging the existence of a vicious cycle between hunger and conflict whereby both mutually reinforce each other. Conflicts like in Afghanistan, as described in more detail below, are one of the main causes of food insecurity. At the same time, food insecurity can create conditions conducive to increasing social tensions and the outbreak, spread and prolonging of conflicts.

The **United Nations Security Council Resolution 2417**, adopted on 24 May 2018<sup>2</sup>, recognises the link between conflict and hunger and established the issue of food insecurity – including famine, fostered by armed conflicts – as a threat to international peace and security. The Security Council asks to be promptly informed when a risk of famine and widespread food insecurity appears in a context of armed conflict. Ultimately, it demands compliance with International Humanitarian Law and underscores the need to guarantee unconditional humanitarian access – both of which create an ever-present challenge to actors on the ground in Afghanistan.

At the Brussels Conference, the international community committed to providing \$15.2 billion until 2020 to support Afghanistan's development needs. However, this much-needed investment continues to be undermined by a humanitarian crisis, continuing displacement and high-level of chronic and unmet needs. Such challenges are further compounded by insecurity (that restricts both humanitarians ability to reach populations in need and impedes populations' in need access to assistance), physical constraints (such as distance to facilities and geographical factors such as weather conditions), bureaucratic constraints and a lack of governance over the IDP situation. **In order to break this cycle, all actors must ensure that they address the hunger and conflict cycle as a whole – embracing an inclusive Nexus approach focused on the needs of the Afghan population whilst ensuring space for principled humanitarian action is preserved.**

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<sup>2</sup> Security Council (2018), Resolution 2417 on the link between armed conflict and food insecurity, adopted on 24 May 2018, S/RES/2417. Available at: [http://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2417\(2018\)](http://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2417(2018)) (accessed in October 2018).

## [CHAPTER I] HUNGER IN AFGHANISTAN – A COLLECTIVE CHALLENGE

Afghanistan is facing a significant crisis. Across the country, approximately 9.8 million people (43.6% of Afghanistan’s rural population) face severe acute food insecurity (IPC phase 3 and phase 4) with an estimated 2.6 million people who are classified as facing emergency levels of food insecurity (IPC Phase 4 - Emergency)<sup>3</sup>. This corresponds to a 17.4% increase compared to the previous analysis in 2017. According to the last nationwide nutritional survey, approximately 10% of children suffer from wasting (low weight for height) and approximately 41% suffer from stunting (low height for age) indicative of widespread chronic malnutrition<sup>4</sup>. However recent SMART surveys conducted by ACF at a provincial level indicate that the prevalence of Global Acute Malnutrition is much higher.

At the heart of this current food security crisis are two main drivers – **Conflict** and **Drought**.

**The conflict between pro-government forces and non-state armed groups (NSAGs)** is the first and foremost driver of hunger across the country. According to reporting by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, the Afghan government control approximately 56.3% of Afghanistan’s districts (totalling 229 districts). The remainder – totalling 178 – are either under the control of or contested by NSAGs<sup>5</sup>. The conflict both creates the conditions for and compounds wide-spread poverty, lack of sustainable livelihood opportunities, poor infrastructure and a lack of access to basic services such as clean water, sanitation and healthcare – ultimately driving a lack of access and poor utilization of food and under-development.

Insecurity and violence, mass displacement and limited access to assistance and basic services, caused by or exacerbated by the conflict, interact with each other to create drivers for hunger across Afghanistan.

### Insecurity and Violence

The deterioration in security since the withdrawal of international troops began in 2012 combined with the associated decline in international aid, has driven down both consumer and investor confidence in Afghanistan, magnifying the economic shock that the drawdown ultimately produced as both outside investment and domestic demand decreased. As such - whilst economic growth has fallen dramatically (9.4% in 2003-2012 to 2.1% between 2013 and 2016 - the population has continued to grow, outstripping economic growth and resulting in inevitable under-employment (23.9%<sup>6</sup>) and an increase in poverty as shown above. With over half of the population considered to be living in poverty, economic access for these families to food and other essential items is increasingly reduced leading to food insecurity where two out of five people lack adequate amounts of nutritious items, proteins and micro-nutrients within their food consumption<sup>7</sup>.

So far 2018 has witnessed a continuation of violence against civilians in Afghanistan perpetrated by all parties to the conflict. Between January and September 2018, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan has documented 8,050 civilian casualties including 2,798 deaths – the most deadly nine-months since 2014<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> IPC 2018 (validation pending).

<sup>4</sup> National Nutrition Survey (NNS) 2013 – ACF trend analysis of 97 small and mid-scale nutritional surveys from all over Afghanistan between 1995-2017, conducted in June 2017, suggests that the prevalence of Wasting remains steadily poor at around 8% and that stunting has decreased from approximately 65% in 1996 to approximately 45% in 2017 thereby corroborating the NNS data. However at a provincial level variation between the NNS and ACF SMART survey data is significant. For instance for Daikundi – NNS (2013) suggested that the prevalence of wasting was 5.3% however ACF SMART survey conducted in August 2017 found that the prevalence of Global Acute Malnutrition (WHZ) was in fact 14.8% - almost exceeding the globally recognized emergency threshold.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2016/08/afghanistan-controls-160823083528213.html>

<sup>6</sup> [http://cso.gov.af/Content/files/Surveys/ALCS/Final%20English%20ALCS%20Highlight\(1\).pdf](http://cso.gov.af/Content/files/Surveys/ALCS/Final%20English%20ALCS%20Highlight(1).pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid p8

<sup>8</sup> [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama\\_protection\\_of\\_civilians\\_in\\_armed\\_conflict\\_3rd\\_quarter\\_report\\_2018\\_10\\_oct.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_3rd_quarter_report_2018_10_oct.pdf)

The combined use of suicide and non-suicide improvised explosive devices (IEDs) by Non-State Armed Groups remained the leading cause of civilian casualties – and also reflects the changing complexity of the conflict, due in part to the increase in attacks perpetrated by *Da'esh/Islamic State-Khorasan Province (ISKP)*. Increasingly such attacks are directly targeted at civilian populations and in some cases specifically against minority groups, and account for 45% of all civilian casualties so far in 2018. Overall civilian casualties caused by IEDs increased by 21% in the first 9 months of 2018, compared to the same reporting period in 2017, and civilian casualties resulting from suicide and complex attacks – half of which were attributed to Da'esh/ISKP and offset the decrease in civilian casualties resulting from other incident types.

Civilians living in the provinces of Nangarhar, Kabul, Helmand, Ghazni and Faryab were most impacted by the conflict this year<sup>9</sup>. In Helmand, the majority of the province is considered insecure and the continuous fighting in many districts has reduced the income of households by 44.7% this year<sup>10</sup> - reducing economic access to food and other necessary non-food items. Over 60% of households are engaging in emergency livelihood coping strategies.

In addition to displacement caused by insecurity and violence (which is explored in more detail below), the conflict has a direct impact on agricultural infrastructure, such as irrigation channels, which are destroyed during armed clashes, military operations and airstrikes. In Nad-Ali district of Helmand, following military operations by the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), many internally displaced people (IDPs) who had displaced to areas controlled by NSAGs or to desert areas that surround many villages in that particular area began to return. However upon return, they found that both their homes and their agricultural land had been destroyed in the military operations – impacting the upcoming planting season<sup>11</sup>. Whilst ad-hoc emergency assistance was provided by partners of the Emergency Response Mechanism to meet their emergency food and non-food needs, such assistance is difficult to mobilise as emergency response in Afghanistan is often dictated on the basis of status while the specific needs of returning IDPs are not identified within the Humanitarian Response Plan for Afghanistan.

Similarly, the longer-term assistance is required to support the rehabilitation of agriculture. Voluntary return in safety and dignity is a critical durable solution for IDPs. The need for assistance with reconstruction of homes, provision of water and basic services in areas of return is recognised as a crucial condition for return in the National IDP Policy<sup>12</sup> however resources to address the specific needs of returning IDPs at a provincial level are severely lacking and the Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (the provincial level of the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation – ultimately responsible for IDP response and the implementation of the National IDP Policy) continue to rely on humanitarian organisations to provide such assistance.

## **Displacement**

**Last year on average, approximately 1,400 people were displaced every day as a result of the on-going conflict<sup>13</sup>**, most commonly as a result of armed clashes between Pro-Government forces and Non-State Armed Groups – including both large-scale operations and sporadic low-level clashes. The vast majority are often forced to leave at short notice, leaving behind their livelihoods and crops, and disrupting crop cultivation and harvests. As indicated above, when and if families are able to return they often lack the necessary support to restart agricultural activity in time for planting seasons resulting in a negative impact on both livelihoods at a household level and food production more generally beyond the timespan of the initial displacement.

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<sup>9</sup> [https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama\\_protection\\_of\\_civilians\\_in\\_armed\\_conflict\\_3rd\\_quarter\\_report\\_2018\\_10\\_oct.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_3rd_quarter_report_2018_10_oct.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> IPC 2018 (validation pending).

<sup>11</sup> OCT minutes, Lashkargah (Hilmand) 05 Aug 2018

<sup>12</sup> [http://morr.gov.af/Content/files/National%20IDP%20Policy%20-%20FINAL%20-%20English\(1\).pdf](http://morr.gov.af/Content/files/National%20IDP%20Policy%20-%20FINAL%20-%20English(1).pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Humanitarian Response Plan 2018-2021

In addition to negatively impacting food production, displacement has a negative impact on families' economic access to food. Across all regions of Afghanistan, recent IDPs have a lower food consumption score that is lower than non-displaced families<sup>14</sup>. This has a significant impact on malnutrition – with children under 5 years old from displaced families being more likely to be acutely malnourished than families of host communities<sup>15</sup>.

**Afghanistan currently hosts an estimated 1.2 million IDPs** in both emergency and longstanding, protracted situations. Such displacement can also have an impact on the food security of host communities as competition for employment increases and availability of food sources decreases. In Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand province, which currently hosts thousands of displaced families, competition for the few jobs available is particularly fierce. Many of the IDPs living in and around the city have been displaced for between six and twelve months and 98% indicate they are unable to safely return to their area of origin. Having left their fields and livestock when they fled their homes, these families are reliant on humanitarian aid for survival. The vast majority the prolonged IDPs in Lashkargah are food insecure and lack the income to buy food or pay for medical treatment. As a result, 78% of IDPs are implementing reduced coping strategies such as limiting portion size, reducing the number of meals per day and restricting consumption by adults to provide food for their children. In an attempt to address their financial situation, many IDPs have resorted to begging and 98% of households have acquired increasing levels of debt. Whilst some humanitarian assistance is available to prolonged IDPs to provide emergency food assistance (often in the form of cash) and reduce reliance on potentially harmful coping strategies, longer-term solutions for these prolonged IDPs are lacking.

Indeed the needs of prolonged IDPs are often unaddressed by both development and humanitarian interventions. For instance, despite significant health and nutrition needs in the 70+ informal settlement across Kabul (Kabul Informal Settlements – KIS), there is limited humanitarian funding for the needs of its citizens and there has yet been no attempt to integrate these settlements into the Kabul City Master Plan or extend much needed basic services or infrastructure to these areas. Between October 2016 to September 2017, Action Against Hunger provided integrated health, nutrition and WASH support to bridge critical gaps in the Basic Package of Health Services treatment of acute malnutrition and to prevent the further deterioration of nutritional status in the KIS. Since September 2017, as humanitarian funding for prolonged IDPs in KIS ended, Action Against Hunger shifted its intervention to deliver Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition. Unfortunately, there are many barriers preventing those in KIS accessing government health facilities exists, excluding many of those most in need from urgent nutrition services. This programme itself will end in December 2018 and the availability of financial resources needed to enable either the provincial health directorate or a non-governmental organisation to continue to provide integrated management of acute malnutrition remain uncertain.

### **Limited Access to Assistance and Basic Services**

The conflict in Afghanistan is characterized by its complexity, mutability, and large-scale impact on civilians across the country, where humanitarian access is severely constrained - particularly to areas under the control of by Non-State Armed Groups. Insecurity remains a primary barrier to the delivery of assistance and services to those in need in Afghanistan.

**An estimated 20% of those displaced by conflict have displaced into areas that the humanitarian community has designated as hard-to-reach (HTR)** due to security risks resulting from the active fighting and constraints imposed on humanitarian actors by NSAGs. Whilst comprehensive data of the needs of populations in HTR is lacking recent assessments based on Key Informant Interviews indicated that the access to markets and basic services was limited. Approximately 21% of communities living in HTR districts indicated that they had no access to markets<sup>16</sup> - citing distance to markets and security concerns as the primary barriers they faced. Unlike in other areas of Afghanistan where the price of food and other essential items remains more or less stable, prices for essential items appears to be a recurring problem for populations in

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<sup>14</sup> REACH (2018) Whole of Afghanistan Assessment - Preliminary findings

<sup>15</sup> ACF trend analysis of 97 small and mid-scale nutritional surveys from all over Afghanistan between 1995 and 2017, conducted in June 2017.

<sup>16</sup> REACH (2018) Whole of Afghanistan Assessment - Preliminary findings

HTR districts. 54% of communities in HTR areas reported an increase in the cost of both diesel and rice in the last 3 months. In addition, **the majority of people living in HTR communities had less than 3 weeks of food stock**, 45% 1-3 weeks, 18% less than 1 week and 19% no stocks.

Those living in HTR areas also lack access to basic services, such as healthcare and sanitation facilities, which can increase the prevalence of malnutrition among children under 5. **Approximately 29% of communities in HTR areas have no access to any health facilities** and less than 10% had access to general hospitals. In addition, over 60% indicated that these health facilities had inadequate basic first aid tools, and over 75% indicated these health facilities required basic surgery tools – indicating that the quality of healthcare provided may be extremely poor.

**Outside of designated hard-to-reach areas, humanitarian access to populations in need remains an issue.** Last year 377 access constraints were reported across the country including 156 attacks on aid workers. Humanitarian personnel and assets continue to be directly affected by violence in Afghanistan – between September 2017 and September 2018, 17 aid workers have been killed, 32 injured and 47 kidnapped. Such access constraints have a direct impact on food security as can be seen in the case study below.

#### ACCESS CONSTRAINT – CASE STUDY

Ghor province, situated in the Western Region of Afghanistan, is home to approximately 713,000 people – the vast majority of whom live in rural areas and rely on crops, livestock and/or agricultural wage labour as their primary source of income. Between 2017 and 2018, Action Against Hunger implemented a project funded by the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) in response to the Locust infestation. Around 70% of cultivated land in Dawlat Yar District was affected by locust in 2017 and 40% of households assessed in the district reported between 75-100% loss of crops<sup>17</sup>. As part of the project, which provided agricultural training to 6000 households and livestock inputs, including vaccinations and animal feed to 3000 households, the improved wheat seed was intended to be delivered to the remaining 3000 households. However the delivery of the improved wheat seed to 1800 households was prevented as the truck transporting the 90 metric tonnes of wheat seed was looted on route from Herat to Chaghcharan, the provincial capital. Whilst the intervention was adapted to 'Cash for Seeds' to respond to this issue, this change in modality took many months to be approved by headquarters based in New York and farmers were reluctant and in some cases unable to purchase the seeds in advance of cash distributions and therefore the critical window for wheat cultivation was missed. This again impacted both household's individual economic access to food (resulting from the loss of expected income that the cultivation of wheat would have produced) and the overall availability of food in the area.

Whilst insecurity and conflict remains the primary barrier to accessing and delivering humanitarian assistance, humanitarian actors also face a series of bureaucratic restraints and frequent interference from authorities in the delivery of their programmes. Despite clear caveats within the NGO law to allow actors to deliver humanitarian assistance without pre-signing an MOU, many organisations continue to face issues in agreeing MOUs with relevant government line-ministries, which can cause challenges on a field level with provincial authorities. Similarly, geographical impediments (such as mountainous terrain) and adverse weather conditions – particularly over the winter period - can make many areas inaccessible. For instance, whilst the province of Daikundi remains comparatively less affected by the conflict, its mountainous geography combined with the fact that snowfall over the winter period often closes access roads and leaves communities without access to markets or basic services for many months of the year, has had a significantly adverse impact on nutrition across the province. Action Against Hungers SMART survey, conducted in August 2018, highlighted that 14.8% of children under 5 years old were acutely malnourished. This number is likely to increase to emergency levels as the drought (discussed in more detail below) has impacted 88% of the population, with the province likely to move into IPC Phase 4 (Emergency) from November 2018-February 2019<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/wfp292357.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> IPC 2018 (validation pending).



## [CHAPTER II] DROUGHT – A COLLECTIVE CONCERN

The second driver of hunger and the primary cause of the significant increase in the number of people who are classified as severely food insecure is the drought that has impacted much of the country. Below average precipitation from October 2017 to May 2018<sup>19</sup> has limited food production and depleting farmers and livestock keepers of assets and livelihoods. In most parts of the country, there was a precipitation deficit over 70% during the traditionally wet winter months (December – February). The drought has further exacerbated already poor food production. Last year (2017) there was already a nationwide wheat production deficit of 1.5 million metric tonnes and crops in provinces such as Ghor and Badghis had already been significantly negatively impacted by locust infestation. This year (2018), as a result of the drought, has experienced a further deficit of 2.3 million metric tonnes, particularly in rain-fed wheat. Wheat is the staple food of the country so this deficit impacts not only the food security and income of wheat growers, but means that the country has to import wheat, which can have broader implications for the national economy.

The drought has significantly increased both the number of people in need and the number of people on the move in Afghanistan. As a result, an estimated 2.2 million people already chronically food insecure have been impacted by the drought, including 1.4 million people who, as a result, have become acutely food insecure and in need of emergency assistance<sup>20</sup>. In Kandiwai, a village of 300 families in Ghor, only 15 families cultivated their crop this year. At least 40 families had already moved to Herat. The same is the case in the North and North Eastern regions, where only 68% of rain-fed land cultivated last year (2016-2017) was cultivated this year (2017-2018)<sup>21</sup>. At present, the number of people displaced by conflict in Afghanistan has surpassed 200,000 while the drought itself has displaced a total of 275,000 people, i.e. 75,000 people more than conflict in 2018. The majority of the drought-affected IPDs lives in camps on the outskirts of urban centres such as Qala-e-Naw, Badghis and Herat. Many of these families continue to remain in urgent need of adequate shelter, food and protection – needs that are likely to increase as winter approaches.

Drought in Afghanistan is nothing new. Ultimately the humanitarian consequences witnessed at present could have potentially been mitigated with earlier action and better coordination between humanitarian and development actors. As in previous droughts to affect Afghanistan early warning signs were present already in February 2018. However, the humanitarian architecture in Afghanistan was not flexible enough to respond to such crises. The humanitarian response system is largely driven by status (i.e. whether a person in need is a conflict IDPs, a returnee etc.) as opposed to the severity of needs. Whilst humanitarian assistance cannot and should not be expected to provide assistance to all acute and chronic needs witnessed in Afghanistan, the focus on status hinders humanitarian action– as witnessed during the drought.

The humanitarian architecture at the time of the drought, a lack of joint effort to assess the likely impact of the drought and delays in the allocation of funding, despite much time being spent devising contingency plans that ultimately failed to be operationalized, led to significant delays in the mobilisation of a collective response.



<sup>19</sup> AFGHANISTAN Seasonal Monitor. FEWS NET. June 6, 2018

<sup>20</sup> Afghanistan: Humanitarian Response Plan (2018-2021) – Revised Financial Requirements due to Drought (May 2018)

<sup>21</sup> ACTED Drought Assessment Fact Sheets

For many years the ECHO funded 'Emergency Response Mechanism' (ERM), has provided immediate emergency assistance to the majority of those displaced by conflict and sudden onset crises. Whilst rapid response mechanisms in contexts such as Afghanistan (characterised by changing localised conflict dynamics and frequent displacement of varying scales) are necessary, the size and reach of the ERM in Afghanistan has unintentionally created an environment whereby the humanitarian system has become increasingly reliant on ERM partners and a small number of other agencies to provide immediate response to crises. However, the ERM is not intended to respond to other causes of displacement or needs such as drought. In a system that has become reliant on this specific mechanism, when faced with a crisis falling outside of these pre-conceived mandates, the humanitarian system was not agile enough to mobilise a timely response. As a result in July 2018, due to a lack of response by the wider humanitarian community to drought displacement ECHO approved ERM partners to provide Cash for Food and some WASH response to drought-displaced families.

Whilst it may be preferable for IDP families to return to their areas of origin before the upcoming planting season to avoid prolonging the impact of the drought, many are unable or unwilling to do so. Limited resilience to multiple shocks further aggravates the food insecurity situation across Afghanistan. Whilst for many Afghans the drought provided the trigger for their displacement, the impact of the drought has been exacerbated by long-standing water shortages, insecurity and a general under-performing economy, which now having sold their assets and displaced, discourage their immediate return. Therefore it is imperative that humanitarian assistance to displaced families continues for as long as needs exist or other durable solutions can be achieved.

Similarly, the drought is not merely a failing of the humanitarian community but also representative of longstanding failures in development. ACF's assessment of the impact of drought in four districts in Ghor province highlighted that whilst the environmental trigger for the current crisis was a lack of rainfall and snow over the winter season – for most Afghans, the severe impact of the drought is the last straw. The negative impact of the drought on harvests will deprive many families of income and sustenance until the next harvest season and potentially beyond as many families, who have not cultivated this season, will lack seeds to plant for the next harvest – effectively creating a vicious cycle of deprivation for the years to come. The drought in Afghanistan has the potential to become a protracted crisis. Therefore development actors need to be engaged to ensure ongoing development projects continue and receive extra-attention to mitigate the impact of drought. At the same time resources are required for early recovery and resilience to provide sustainable livelihoods for communities in their areas of origin. Without this investment, the situation for drought-affected communities is likely to become more protracted, negatively impacting future harvests, discouraging those already displaced from returning and may cause a further drift into urban centres and provincial capitals increasing the strain on resources on local communities as well as displaced households. This type of investment cannot be provided entirely through humanitarian assistance – which is fundamentally intended to provide short-term relief, however despite global conversations centred around the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus and New Ways of Working, the provision of early recovery and resilience programmes, as well as response to longer-term needs, still falls through the gap between humanitarian and development actors in Afghanistan.



### [CHAPTER III] CONCLUSION: EMBRACING A COLLECTIVE NEEDS-BASED RESPONSE

The drivers of hunger in Afghanistan cannot be adequately addressed through emergency response alone. A collective response is required that prioritises the needs and addresses the vulnerabilities across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. Billions of dollars are being invested in Afghanistan (\$15.2 billion from 2016-2020 following Brussels conference). Whilst such long-term investments continue to be needed, Afghanistan's progress continues to be undermined by instability, displacement and chronic unmet humanitarian needs.

Humanitarian and development actors must work in complementarity to strengthen links and ensure that adequate resources are available to support both long-term support in response to the drought and invest in both agricultural and livelihoods, particularly in remote areas. In order to effectively address hunger in Afghanistan, development actors must engage in parallel with emergency response to ensure that their agricultural and community-based development projects continue and receive extra-attention required to adapt to drought and other shocks. However, the current linkages between mobilised resources for emergency response and longer-term development interventions continue to be severely lacking.

However at the same time, within this Nexus of needs, there is a critical need to safeguard humanitarian action. As can be seen this year, the humanitarian workers are increasingly under threat and restrictions on humanitarian access continue to impede attempts to address acute food insecurity across the country. It is essential to ensure that life-saving humanitarian assistance to all those in need remains removed from political objectives such as stabilization, counter-terrorism or attempts to prevent migration.

The 2018-2021 HRP is the first multi-year humanitarian response plan for Afghanistan, yet despite taking a long view, it retains a strong focus on responding to immediate humanitarian needs. During the HRP development process, the humanitarian community undertook a coordinated rationalization effort to target people with acute needs in the country, on the assumption that chronic needs and vulnerabilities of displaced populations should fall under development actors' agendas. However despite this, humanitarian funding and modalities continue to be operationalized across Afghanistan to address development deficits and chronic issues.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to ensure that the large investment in Afghanistan is effective, this disconnect between humanitarian assistance and development investments needs to be addressed.

- Improved harmonisation between humanitarian mechanisms and early recovery/development architecture is required at an operational level. **The Government of Afghanistan and international donors** should engage humanitarian actors and communities themselves in the formulation of strategies to ensure that the needs on the ground and operational realities are adequately reflected.
- Funding for activities that bridge humanitarian and development activities, such as early recovery and resilience is desperately needed in order to address hunger in Afghanistan. **International donors** should build on lessons learnt in other contexts such as the Middle East and Central African Republic, where EU funded trust funds have been used to address this gap, to explore whether similar mechanisms could be applied in Afghanistan, in consultation with both development and humanitarian partners on the ground.
- **The Government of Afghanistan** should review policies in aid allocation and strengthen the local consultation with communities to ensure that the needs of population are adequately reflected and addressed. The integration of specific populations in need such as IDPs into National Priority Programmes and the Citizens Charter is a positive move in this regard but in many areas marginalised communities such as protracted IDPs in informal settlements do not benefit from development dividends.

- **Humanitarian leadership in the country** should engage development actors and donors should be engaged throughout humanitarian response planning to ensure that adaptations to their programming can be made to mitigate against likely shocks and reduce humanitarian needs where possible.
- **International donors** must ensure that adequate and flexible humanitarian funding is available to allow actors on the ground to respond quickly and effectively to the frequent emergencies across the country. Donors should consider contingency and pre-positioning mechanisms, such as the ECHO-funded Emergency Response Mechanism and explore the possibility of funding early warning systems attached to pooled funding released through parametric triggers to enable earlier response to slow-onset crises such as drought.

In the immediate term, humanitarian space in Afghanistan to deliver life-saving assistance to those in need must be preserved:

- **All parties of the conflict** must facilitate humanitarian access and the delivery of basic services to those in need.
- **Humanitarian Actors** must resist the urge to ‘bunkerise’ and limit movement, and continue to attempt to reach those in need in both government and non-government held areas of the country. This will involve a re-evaluation of current programmatic priorities and access strategies.
- **Humanitarian Actors** must refocus on the delivery of principled humanitarian assistance and advocate in stronger terms when external actors attempt to compromise such principles. A re-assessment of current coordination and operational practices is required to ensure that current programming adheres fully to the principles of impartiality, neutrality, humanity and independence and enshrines the principle of ‘Do No Harm’
- International assistance should first and foremost focus on addressing needs and alleviating the suffering of the Afghan population.
- **The Government of Afghanistan**, especially at a local level, should refrain from interference in the operationalisation of civil society programmes and the delivery of humanitarian assistance (including the selection of beneficiaries) and should ensure the proper implementation of article 23 of the NGO law to ensure that humanitarian assistance is provided to people in need in a timely manner.

**Finally, hunger in Afghanistan will not be addressed completely until peace is achieved.** In the meantime, all parties of the conflict must uphold international humanitarian and human rights law and ensure the protection of civilians in the conduct of hostilities. All violations of IHL should be condemned and barriers preventing populations in need from accessing assistance, basic services and their livelihoods should be urgently addressed.

