



# NRC AFGHANISTAN SHELTER EVALUATION

JANUARY 2019 | EVALUATION REPORT



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### Credits

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Unless otherwise specified, all pictures were provided by the evaluators or taken from the NRC documents we consulted.

### Team biographies

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#### **Alexandre Koclejda, main evaluator**

Freelance architect and humanitarian specialist, and partner of mobilstudio.

He has 13 years of humanitarian experience in disaster and conflict situations, from emergency responses to reconstruction. He has worked in 14 countries with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and a number of NGOs including NRC.

#### **Guillaume Roux-Fouillet, main evaluator**

Freelance architect and humanitarian specialist, and co-founder of mobilstudio.

He has eight years of humanitarian experience in disaster situations, from emergency responses to reconstruction. He has worked, among others, for the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) in countries including Bolivia, Ecuador, Haiti and the Philippines.

#### **Nadia Carlevaro, support evaluator**

Freelance architect and humanitarian specialist, and co-founder of mobilstudio.

She has nine years of humanitarian experience in disaster and conflict situations, from emergency responses to reconstruction, and including shelter cluster coordination. She has worked, among others, for the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in countries including Cameroon, Ecuador, Haiti, India, Myanmar, the Philippines, Nepal and Syria.

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Contact: Destelia Ngwenya,  
Monitoring and Evaluation Manager  
destelia.ngwenya@nrc.no +93 (0) 729899563

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## 1

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## BACKGROUND

NRC is a prominent humanitarian agency that has been operating in Afghanistan since 2003. Its programmes include shelter and settlements, information counselling and legal protection (ICLA), education, and it is also active in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), livelihoods and food security (LFS), and camp management. It places significant importance on helping displaced people in hard-to-reach areas and empowering women. It actively participates in the Emergency Response Mechanism (ERM) consortium, in several clusters and technical working groups. This strengthens its position vis-a-vis other shelter partners and enhances both its and other actors' responses through positive sharing.

NRC Afghanistan's shelter programme has a long history and its budget has recently increased. It implements three types of shelter-related activity:

- i. Temporary shelter solutions:** Emergency cash, cash for rent (CfR), tents, non-food items (NFIs) and temporary shelters provided by the emergency and shelter teams
- ii. Transitional shelter solutions:** One-room shelters with a latrine provided by the shelter team
- iii. Permanent shelter solutions:** Durable two-room houses with a latrine and passive solar veranda (PSV) provided by the shelter team

NRC has provided 6,465 vulnerable households with shelter assistance in the last two years, including 3,675 temporary shelters. It has also distributed more than USD 926,000 for shelter construction and rental support.

This evaluation focuses primarily on temporary shelter solutions and examines how they link to transitional shelter assistance and long-term recovery measures. It covers the last three years of shelter programming, from January 2016 until November 2018. It concentrates on two of the five regions where NRC is present in Afghanistan, the west and north, with a lesser consideration of projects in Kabul in the central region. It combines a desk review of 29 project documents, seven site visits, five focus group discussions (FGDs) and a household survey which, because of sampling limitations, provided only qualitative insights.

This evaluation report and its findings and recommendations are structured around four lines of enquiry: **i.** impact of temporary shelter assistance; **ii.** adherence to safe programming principles;<sup>1</sup> **iii.** linkages between the emergency response and transitional solutions; and **iv.** performance of support functions.

## FINDINGS

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### IMPACT OF TEMPORARY SHELTER ASSISTANCE

The temporary shelter solutions NRC provides seem relevant and adequate. Ninety-three per cent of the beneficiaries interviewed for this evaluation said the assistance they had received was appropriate and that they were satisfied with its quality. The review of project reports indicates that, generally speaking, targets are usually met and shelter solutions are used as intended. Some temporary solutions, however, may not be entirely suitable. The fact, for instance, that a winter storm destroyed 104 tents in 2017 showed that they were not sturdy enough to withstand the harsh Afghan climate.

The evaluation found that the shelter team rarely measures the timeliness of its interventions from shock to response. The household survey showed that only 44 per cent of beneficiaries had received their tents and NFI within the first months after displacement. This highlights the fact that the timeliness of shelter responses needs to be improved, for which it will first have to be measured. This is confirmed by the example of the 2018 drought crisis, during which families spent up to eight months in inadequate makeshift shelters while they waited for assistance.

ERM ensures a faster response, although distributions still began on average 41 days after a shock and 29 days after notification. It is interesting to note that it takes an average of 12 days for NRC to be informed of a displacement or other shock. There are various obstacles to a rapid response, including beneficiary selection. The petition system, under which the authorities provide a list of people who have registered for assistance, requires a time-consuming process of verifying potential beneficiaries to avoid fraud and duplication.

ERM consists mainly of multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA), which is key to meeting the immediate needs of newly affected people and offers maximum flexibility and dignity. Post-distribution monitoring (PDM) in 2017, however,

revealed that 35 per cent of MPCA recipients were still living in substandard shelters which were at best overcrowded and at worst did not provide sufficient protection against the elements.

NRC has already flagged up that “cash alone is not enough” and has started to pilot shelter outcome-oriented solutions such as cash for rent (CfR). It is also developing “companion programming” in which cash recipients are supported with additional modalities to achieve adequate shelter condition as per the planned outcomes set out in the temporary shelter theory of change (ToC).

NRC’s choice of shelter-related temporary solutions and modalities is not consistently evidence-based, but it continues to improve its assessment methodology, including its rental market assessment. The shelter team has also developed numerous tools, such as guidelines and standard operating procedures, and has started training national staff. Given that these developments are quite recent, it is vital that NRC continue to coach staff and monitor projects very closely, not only so that it can measure their impact on the adequacy of shelters, but also to prevent shortfalls in assistance from doing harm by triggering indebtedness and other negative coping mechanisms.

### SAFE PROGRAMMING

NRC generally makes substantial efforts to learn and consider lessons learnt when designing new projects. The customary good practices are in place: complaints, response and feedback mechanisms (CRFMs), a referral system and community consultation in advance of programming. Further efforts should be made, however, to ensure the effective inclusion of groups such as women and people with disabilities (PWDs). They are usually priority targets, but their specific needs are not always reflected in shelter design and construction, although guidance material is available and awareness-raising activities have been carried out since 2018.

FGDs with women conducted during the evaluation indicate that they are under-represented in community consultations, mainly for cultural

reasons. CRFM database analysis shows that women submit only seven per cent of the complaints NRC receives. More proactive consultative methods should be used to understand women's needs and elicit their feedback and complaints. NRC should increase its follow-up of internal and external referrals to make sure cases receive appropriate assistance.

NRC uses its own leading expertise on housing, land and property (HLP) rights, but some protection and HLP issues were identified. These include the lack of follow-up of referred protection cases, and an increased risk of indebtedness among some transitional shelter beneficiaries, as revealed during site visits, in FGDs and confirmed by ERM PDM. This is mainly the result of misinterpreting due diligence standards, in that tenure security was wrongly assimilated to ownership.

It is essential that a due diligence approach be implemented across all response phases as per the 2018 Sphere Standard for tenure security, which implies strengthening tenure security incrementally throughout the different response phases. Certificates of occupancy are a potentially interesting way of securing tenure for IDPs living on public land. The HLP-related issues identified in the shelter programmes were also mainly the result of a lack of coordination between the ICLA and shelter teams.

In terms of principled access, NRC aims to be one of the leading humanitarian agencies in Afghanistan operating in hard-to-reach areas through emergency responses and protection advocacy. The review of its projects over the last three years shows that it does indeed intervene in hard-to-reach areas, but that most of its shelter projects are implemented in government-controlled areas. NRC should strive to increase its interventions in non-government-controlled areas, where needs have been documented as being more acute.<sup>2</sup> The evaluation of security risks should be paired with rapid need assessments and where possible, small-scale interventions to improve acceptance and gain further access.

NRC is very much involved in clusters and technical working groups. It co-leads a number of them, including the protection cluster and the cash and

voucher working group. It has also occasionally led the emergency shelter/non-food item (ES/NFI) cluster technical working group and previously co-led the gender in humanitarian action task force. NRC is also part of the ERM consortium, in which it cooperates closely with other organisations and shares resources to ensure an efficient, coherent and coordinated humanitarian response.

## **LINKAGES TO TRANSITIONAL AND LONGER-TERM SOLUTIONS**

Temporary assistance should allow NRC to “buy time” to better prepare for the transitional phase. There are currently only limited linkages between the different programming phases and core competencies (CCs). Better tools for initial assessments and a more agile beneficiary database should be developed to enable the flagging up of the most vulnerable and allow for better follow-up from emergency to transitional assistance.

Nor does NRC consistently provide the minimum shelter area per occupant as defined in the Sphere Handbook. The databases for two transitional shelter projects show that in one case a third and in the other 10 per cent of beneficiaries were provided with less than 3.5 m<sup>2</sup> per occupant. Good practice would be to adhere to minimum standards in all circumstances and promote local materials, capacity and support adapted to households' needs to ensure adequate shelters are consistently provided during the transitional phase.

That said, NRC continues to try new types of assistance to better link temporary and transitional shelter solutions. The upgraded shelters visited in Kabul provide decent temporary solutions with materials and layouts that are better adapted than tents in climate and cultural terms. Shelter upgrades and occupancy free of charge (OFC) also have potential as transitional shelter solutions, because they provide options within the existing housing stock and do not encourage the establishment of new informal settlements. OFC is not, however, a sustainable solution in the long term, so livelihood measures should be considered to ensure that beneficiaries are able to afford to pay rent when it ends.

A considerable part of NRC's response is based on households' own contribution to their shelters, mainly in the form of labour. This seems to work well with beneficiaries' efforts and readiness to recover, and was confirmed by observations in the field of the improvements they had made to their dwellings. The evidence collected for this evaluation and from previous reports, however, shows that 22 per cent of beneficiaries had not been able to recover despite having received cash and ES/NFI assistance. This raises the issue of very poor families falling into debt and the danger of shortfalls in assistance triggering negative coping mechanisms.

While conscious of constraints in terms of funding and the definition of a vulnerability baseline, this shows that temporary shelter beneficiaries should be systematically reassessed, and that in some cases NRC needs to provide additional assistance to mitigate indebtedness and exposure to further protection issues such as eviction and exploitation. In Balkh province for example, the shelter team reassessed the needs of IDPs who had received temporary solutions in order to support the most vulnerable with transitional solutions, first with CfR and then a one-room shelter.

Such an approach, which closely integrates assessments and the provision of a phased response, seems very relevant and should be more widely used, because it leaves open the possibility of adjusting assistance if needs be. It is also in line with the stipulation of the transitional shelter ToC to promote pathways toward durable solutions. To that end, the shelter team plans to twin CfR with livelihood support to ensure that beneficiaries are able to pay rent after a project is completed. The LFS team has previously supported shelter beneficiaries in an ad-hoc manner, but a better link between the temporary and transitional phases requires a more robust multi-sector beneficiary data collection and management system. This should include more concerted and consistent internal and external referrals and follow-up.

## **SUPPORT FUNCTIONS**

NRC's staff offer a comprehensive skillset. Given the complexity of the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, protection-related challenges and the wide range of shelter projects, however, an additional senior shelter expert would be an asset in strengthening project proposals, developing new indicators for issues such as timeliness and tenure security, and supporting the implementation of new activities. NRC undertakes significant training to build the capacity of its national staff members, but they could still benefit from further improving their HLP and access skills, and from being exposed to other projects and contexts as learning opportunities.

Based on the evaluated projects it seems in-kind assistance has been side-lined in favour of cash-based interventions, despite the fact that the former remains relevant and necessary. NRC has considerably reduced its ES/NFI preparedness stock in anticipation that UNHCR will have enough to respond to emergencies. The 2018 drought crisis, during which families spent up to eight months in inadequate makeshift shelters while they waited for assistance, underlines the need for NRC to improve its preparedness plan and its supply chain including procurement and storage, and to increase its budget allocation for emergencies. It should also consider stockpiling in relevant area offices, looking into donors' flexibility and predicting the likelihood of shocks to improve the timeliness of its emergency responses.



## MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS<sup>3</sup>

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### 1. Improve the timeliness of the temporary shelter response

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- Update and finalise the emergency preparedness plan (EPP) and make sure it continues to be updated. Repeat at least annually or whenever the context changes significantly
- Include timeliness indicators that capture the lead time from shock to response for all emergency shelter responses

### 2. Reinforce coordination and integration between shelter & settlement and other CCs

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- Improve synergies between CCs, and in particular coordinate a rapid analysis of tenure security through ICLA to help to determine the most appropriate temporary shelter solutions for IDPs
- Create a decision-making tree that lists possible assistance types and the CCs involved according to context
- Set up a single database to share needs across all CCs
- Companion programming: provide additional shelter-related assistance for vulnerable MPCA recipients living in substandard shelters

### 3. Strengthen NRC's existing operational tools related to protection, gender and inclusion

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- Use proactive tools to gather feedback, complaints and the concerns of people such as women and PWDs who are presently under-represented. Make sure that 50 per cent of PDM respondents are women and five per cent PWDs
- Replicate the female shelter team beyond Kabul

- Address land issues as early as possible to reduce IDPs' risk of eviction and indebtedness. Engage the ICLA team in due diligence and the definition of indicators for tenure security
- Strengthen the referral system, including by extending NRC's responsibility beyond the point of referral until the relevant service or assistance has been provided

### 4. Concentrate NRC's efforts in hard-to-reach areas

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- Allocate more resources to better understand shelter needs in hard-to-reach areas and extend shelter programmes and responses to those needs
- Extend training on principled access to the shelter team

### 5. Human resources and training

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- Reinforce the shelter team with a shelter project development manager
- Continue to invest in staff training and coaching, particularly in principled access, CfR, HLP, protection mainstreaming and shelter accessibility and inclusion
- Consider partnerships with other organisations in Afghanistan with relevant expertise for training opportunities

## 2

## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<b>AFN</b>	Afghan afghani	<b>IDP</b>	Internally displaced person
<b>AOG</b>	Armed opposition groups	<b>KAP</b>	Knowledge attitude practice
<b>CaLP</b>	Cash Learning Partnership	<b>KI</b>	Key informant
<b>CC</b>	Core competency	<b>LFS</b>	Livelihoods and food security
<b>CfR</b>	Cash for rent	<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and evaluation
<b>CGI</b>	Corrugated galvanised iron	<b>MPC/MPCA</b>	Multi-purpose cash/ Multi-purpose cash assistance
<b>CHF</b>	Swiss franc	<b>NFI</b>	Non-food item
<b>CRFM</b>	Complaints, response and feedback mechanisms	<b>NRC</b>	Norwegian Refugee Council
<b>DACAAR</b>	Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees	<b>OFC</b>	Occupancy free of charge
<b>DoRR</b>	Department of Refugee and Repatriation	<b>PDM</b>	Post-distribution monitoring
<b>ECHO</b>	European Commission Humanitarian Aid Organisation	<b>PFA</b>	Psychological first aid (training)
<b>ERM</b>	Emergency Response Mechanism	<b>PM</b>	Programme manager
<b>ES/NFI cluster</b>	Emergency shelter and non-food item cluster	<b>PSN</b>	Person with special needs
<b>FGD</b>	Focus group discussion	<b>PSV</b>	Passive solar veranda
<b>FHH</b>	Female-headed household	<b>PWD</b>	Person with disabilities
<b>FSP</b>	Financial service provider	<b>RRM</b>	Rapid response mechanism
<b>HCT</b>	Humanitarian Country Team	<b>SMEB/MEB</b>	Survival minimum expenditure basket/Minimum expenditure basket
<b>HEAT</b>	Household emergency assess- ment tool	<b>SoK</b>	Sealing-off kit
<b>HLP</b>	Housing, land and property	<b>ToC</b>	Theory of change
<b>HH</b>	Household	<b>USD</b>	US dollar
<b>HNO</b>	Humanitarian Needs Overview	<b>VASC</b>	Vulnerability assessment scorecard
<b>HRP</b>	Humanitarian Response Plan	<b>WASH</b>	Water, sanitation and hygiene
<b>ICLA</b>	Information, counselling and legal assistance	<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme

# 3 INTRODUCTION

## 3.1 CONTEXT

Afghanistan has been in a state of active conflict since its revolution in 1978. Following the US-led invasion in 2001, the country is now entering its 18th year of protracted crisis, and humanitarian needs show no sign of abating. Displacement associated with conflict is the main driver of these needs across the country, and insecurity is the main barrier to reaching the most vulnerable. A chaotic and unpredictable security situation, combined with disasters such as earthquakes, floods and drought, force many to flee their homes.

More than 550,000 civilians were newly displaced in 2018, while 673,000 Afghans returned from Iran and 43,000 from Pakistan. Around 3.3 million people were pushed into emergency levels of food insecurity. There are currently 731,000 people across all 34 of Afghanistan's provinces in need of shelter assistance, not including non-food items (NFIs), and 6.3 million require some form of humanitarian assistance and protection, the result of a convergence of factors arising from exposure to escalating violence, forced displacement, the loss of essential livelihoods and limited access to basic services.<sup>4</sup>

## 3.2 NRC SHELTER PROGRAMME

NRC has operated in Afghanistan since 2003. It has supported people primarily with shelter and settlements, information, counselling and legal assistance (ICLA), and education. It is also active in complementary water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), livelihoods and food security (LFS), and camp management programming. Its team reached more than 336,000 people in 2017.

NRC implemented its shelter programme in five regions between 2016 and 2018: Nangarhar and Kunar provinces in the east; Herat and Badghis provinces in the west; Kandahar province in the south; Balkh, Sar-e-Pul and Kunduz provinces in the North, and Kabul province in the central region. In response to the growing number of internally displaced people (IDPs) and returnees from Iran and Pakistan, the programme's budget more than doubled over the same time period from USD 2.5 million to 5.6 million.

The following table shows NRC's overall budget from 2016 to 2018, and its allocations for shelter and emergency assistance.<sup>5</sup>

Year	2016	2017	2018
Overall budget	USD 13,978,100	USD 21,288,100	USD 25,579,700
Shelter and settlement	USD 2,498,650	USD 2,568,730	USD 5,623,180
Emergency	USD 2,732,790	USD 5,363,060	USD 3,577,040

### 3.2.1 NRC'S SHELTER STRATEGY

The overall objectives of NRC's shelter programme in Afghanistan are to physically protect vulnerable households (HHs) and ensure their dignity and ability to live in safe and secure shelters with pathways to durable solutions. This includes access to property rights, livelihoods and education.<sup>6</sup> The organisation's 2018 strategy set out plans to target 64,500 vulnerable people with various shelter solutions: 28,000 with temporary solutions; 14,000 with transitional solutions; 3,500 with permanent solutions; 7,000 with cash for rent (CfR) and



12,000 with shelter-related training. By December 2018, the shelter team had reached 136,000 people.

NRC shelter macro log frame, Afghanistan strategy 2018.

Specific objective	Outcome indicators (objectively verifiable indicators)
1. Vulnerable affected displaced families have access to safe and secure temporary shelter and benefit from physical protection	<p>1.1. Percentage of temporary shelters occupied by intended beneficiaries within a month of handover</p> <p>1.2. Percentage of recipients who report/are observed using items purchased with cash as intended within a month of distribution (versus trade, selling etc.)</p>
2. Vulnerable affected families have access to safe and secure transitional and permanent shelter solutions and benefit from physical protection with pathways to durable solutions	<p>2.1. Transitional shelter (including cash for rent +): Percentage of recipients who report/are observed using items purchased with cash as intended within three months of distribution (versus trade, selling etc.)</p> <p>2.2. Percentage of transitional shelters occupied by intended beneficiaries within three months of handover</p> <p>2.3. Permanent shelter: Percentage of recipients who report/are observed using items purchased with cash as intended within three months of distribution (versus trade, selling etc.)</p> <p>2.4. Percentage of permanent shelters occupied by intended beneficiaries within 3 months of handover</p>

### 3.2.2 KEY SHELTER ACTIVITIES

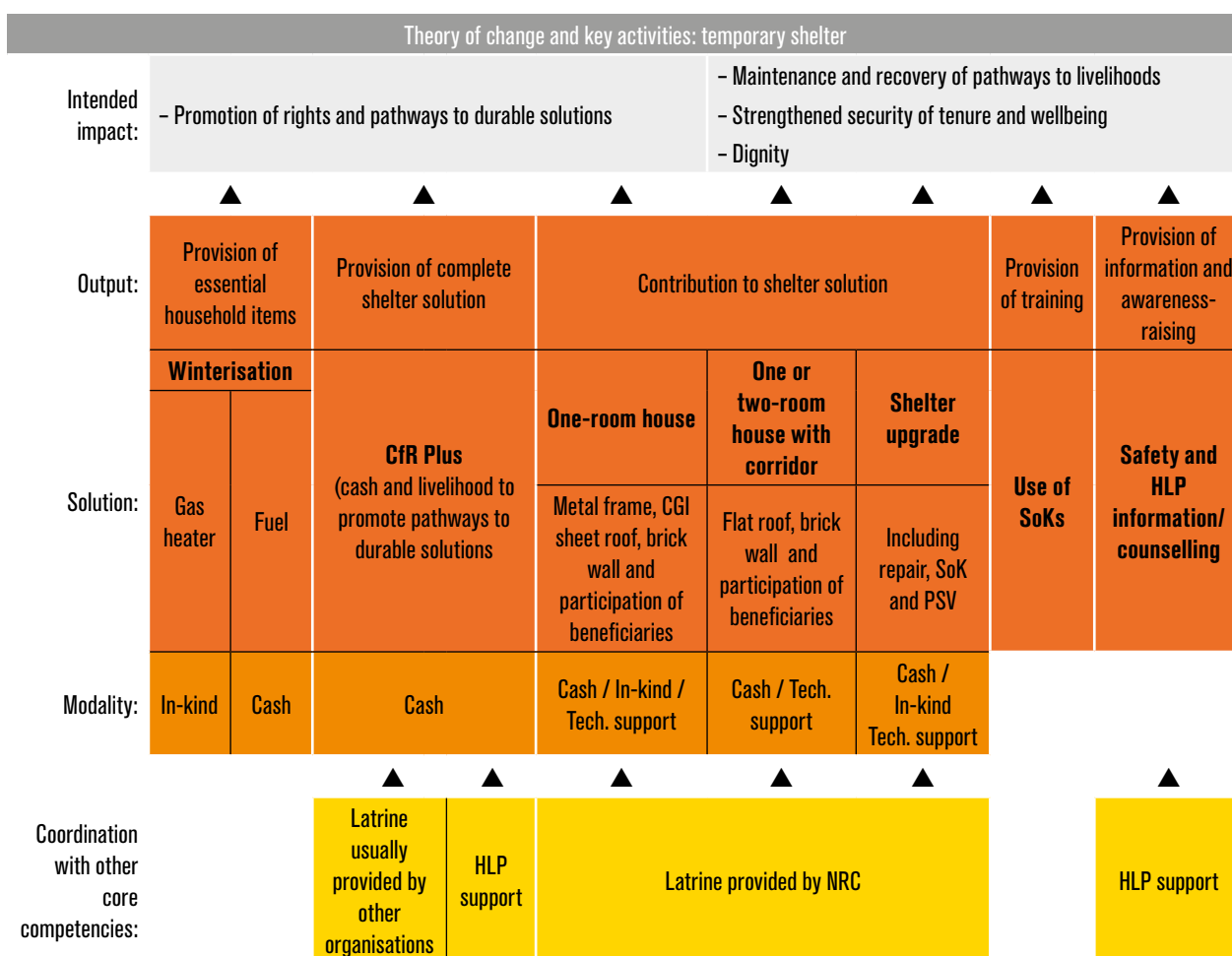
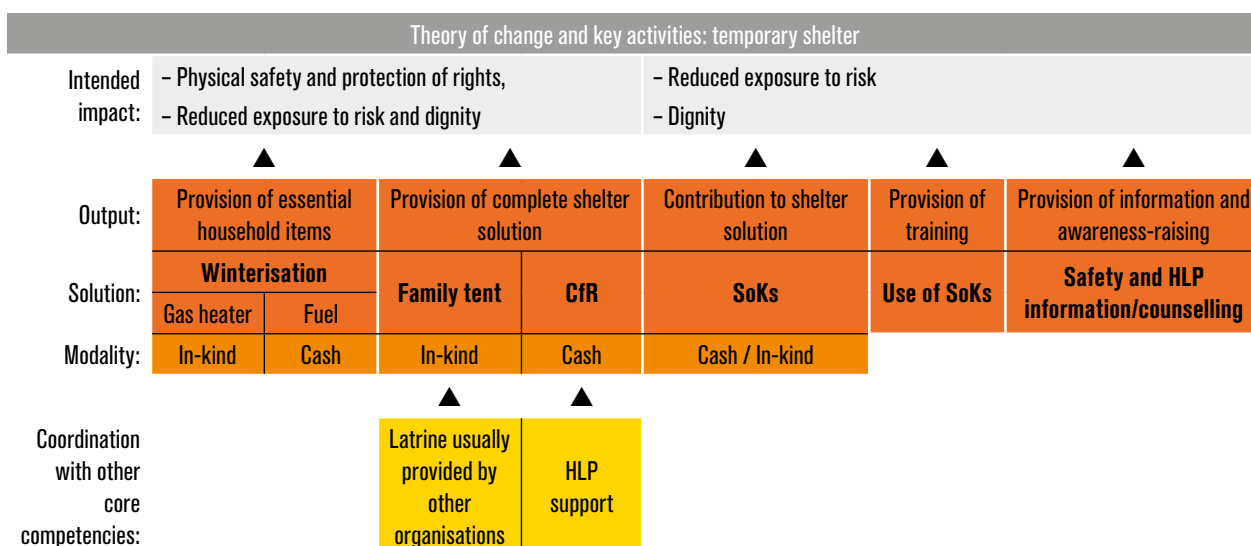
NRC provides a wide range of shelter assistance options to vulnerable internally displaced, refugee and returnee HHs.<sup>7</sup> This includes the specific targeting of female beneficiaries, and most often involves WASH solutions as well. It implements three types of shelter-related programmes:

- i. Temporary shelter solutions:** Tents, CfR, NFIs, sealing-off kits (SoKs), multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA), training and information provided by both the emergency and shelter teams. Latrines are usually provided by other organisations
- ii. Transitional shelter solutions:** One-room or two-room shelters with a latrine, and CfR provided by the shelter team
- iii. Permanent shelter solutions:** A durable one or two-room shelter with a corridor, passive solar veranda (PSV) and latrine

NRC has also started a new project that aims to provide shelters by upgrading heritage buildings in Kabul. This project was still being initiated in 2018 and was not part of the evaluation.

For temporary solutions, the emergency and shelter teams support each other with the assessment and distribution of NFIs, winterisation, SoKs, training and the supervision of tent erection. The shelter team is responsible for transitional and permanent solutions.

The emergency team distributes MPCA through the Emergency Response Mechanism (ERM), which is funded by the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Organisation (ECHO). The survival minimum expenditure basket (SMEB) is tailored based on the items other responders distribute to avoid the duplication of efforts. If the World Food Programme (WFP) provides food, for example, NRC deducts the value of the food basket from the cash assistance it provides to those beneficiaries.





## 4 METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 EVALUATION APPROACH

The evaluation is primarily intended to strengthen NRC's ability to improve its organisational approaches, strategy and policy by capturing lessons learnt while implementing temporary shelter solutions. A secondary purpose is to ensure accountability to internal and external stakeholders. The evaluation covers the last three years of shelter programming, including shelter outcomes that may have been achieved through emergency interventions such as MPCA, from January 2016 to November 2018. It was carried out between 21 October and 30 December 2018, and included a 15-day field visit to Afghanistan.

The report, findings and recommendations are structured around four lines of enquiry:

- ➔ Did the different types of temporary shelter assistance provided from 2016 to 2018 have the intended impact set out in the theory of change (ToC)?
- ➔ Did the different types of temporary shelter assistance provided uphold the safe programming principles common to all core competencies (CCs)?
- ➔ To what extent did the temporary shelter solutions link to transitional solutions for beneficiaries in need of further assistance?
- ➔ To what extent did support functions enable smooth implementation of quality projects?



Region	Province	District	Methodology				
			Desk review	Field visits	HH survey	Focus group discussions	Interviews (KI, staff, donors)
West	Herat	Herat, Pashtun Zarghun, Enjil	X	X	X	X	X
North	Balkh	Mazar-e-Sharif, Nahri Shahi, Dehdadi	X	X	X	X	X
	Sar-e-Pul*	Herat, Pashtun Zarghun, Enjil	X	X			X
Central	Kabul**	Kabul city province	X	X	X		X

\* area not accessible to evaluation team but to NRC national staff

\*\* added during the evaluation

## 4.2 METHODOLOGY

The evidence from which our findings and recommendations are drawn was collected using a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods.

**Initial desk and background research:** We conducted secondary data collection and disaggregated analysis of project components provided by NRC, including assessment reports, context analyses, project proposals, grants agreements, budgets, post-distribution monitoring (PDM) and progress reports, complaints and feedback from target populations and other stakeholders. We also looked at important documents to understanding the context and NRC's coordination with other humanitarian organisations. These included Humanitarian Needs Overviews (HNOs) and Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs), the emergency shelter and non-food item (ES)/NFI cluster strategy, due diligence guidelines, the Sphere Handbook 2018 and Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP) reports.

**Interviews with key informants (KIs) and other stakeholders:** We interviewed global, national and area-level NRC staff, representatives from UN agencies and donors, cluster and working group coordinators, and members of other NGOs that implement similar programmes to NRC in Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup>

**Field visits:** We visited each of the areas shortlisted for the evaluation, where we met people who had benefited from NRC assistance including MPCA, tents, CfR and transitional shelters in urban settings, and camps.

**HH surveys:** NRC and partner organisations' enumerators conducted HH surveys on Kobo with internally displaced, refugee and returnee beneficiaries to identify their needs and understand their experiences, level of participation and the use and ownership of their temporary shelters. NRC's emergency and shelter staff were not involved in data collection, except in Mazar-e-Sharif.<sup>9</sup>

The surveys involved semi-structured interviews lasting between 15 and 25 minutes. The enumerators were trained in using Kobo on tablets and asking follow-up questions as necessary. Field data was collected between 10 and 13 November 2018, with female and male enumerators working together in pairs – except for one team in Herat which was made up of two males – to better reflect the beneficiaries targeted.

The teams in Mazar-e-Sharif and Herat worked as a close-knit unit for five days, meeting daily for briefing and debriefing to discuss shared experiences. Some surveys, however, were deemed to be of lesser quality for lack of photographs and GPS

position, and had to be excluded. In the end, 261 surveys were used. Given the limited sample size, findings should only be taken as indicative.

**Focus group discussions:** The evaluation team conducted five FGDs lasting between 50 and 70 minutes each with the aim of understanding the impact of shelter programmes on specific groups, such as women and people with disabilities (PWDs), who may have been under-represented in the HH survey sample, complaint, response and feedback mechanisms (CRFMs) and PDM. The FGDs were also useful in better understanding the impact of cash assistance on shelter, and providing information on beneficiary involvement and project implementation. Exceptionally, and in the absence of other options, NRC emergency staff were used as interpreters in two of the FGDs.

**Data analysis and triangulation:** We used an evaluation matrix to structure the findings around the four lines of enquiry, using related indicators, information sources and preliminary findings from the desk review and field work.<sup>10</sup> The evidence collected during the evaluation was compiled, analysed and triangulated in the matrix to consolidate findings for all four lines of enquiry.<sup>11</sup>

The geographical scope of the evaluation, which was initially to cover the whole country, changed several times and eventually the southern, eastern and central regions were excluded. As a result, the findings may not be representative of all NRC shelter programming in Afghanistan. Once in country, we were only able to visit Herat, Balkh and Kabul city provinces, and some project sites also had restricted access. The limited number of projects visited and beneficiaries consulted through FGDs and HH surveys means the data collected constitutes a qualitative rather than quantitative source of evidence. This was somewhat compensated for by various other sources of information such as bilateral meetings with KIs and staff from NRC and other organisations.

## 4.3 RISKS AND LIMITATIONS

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The broad scope of the evaluation and short timeframe, particularly for the field mission and analysis phase, constituted a challenge. It was meant to cover 29 shelter projects spanning three years, funded by nine donors with different strategies and approaches, and implemented in 13 provinces each with their specifics in terms of culture, climate, conflict or disaster driven displacement, and rural and urban areas.

Given that the focus was essentially on the emergency shelter response, a more targeted selection of projects and documents by the steering committee would have facilitated the work throughout the process. Nor did NRC provide some key documents early enough. Beneficiary datasheets, for example, were not available until we reached the field offices, which did not help preparing the HH surveys and FGDs.



## 5 FINDINGS

### 5.1 IMPACT

*Did the different types of temporary shelter assistance provided from 2016 to 2018 have the intended impact set out in the ToC?*

**The ToC indicators include:**

- ❶ Cash/material/shelter solution is used as intended
- ❷ Shelter solution is on time and timely
- ❸ Shelter solution is relevant to immediate/basic needs
- ❹ Protection from forced eviction and secure enough tenure arrangements

#### 5.1.1 MPCA

NRC is part of the ERM consortium funded by ECHO, and ERM is implemented by its emergency team with the support of other CCs. Before deciding how it will respond to a specific situation, NRC conducts rapid market assessments that include FGDs to ensure that the targeted beneficiaries are able to access markets, and a survey of vendors to ascertain availability. ERM assistance is delivered in urban and peri-urban areas where markets are functioning, so it is mainly made up of MPCA. According to the MPCA theory of change, when essential needs are not met, other CCs should complement the programme.

SMEB is intended to cover the critical needs of the most vulnerable HHs for two months. AFN 17,000 (± USD 227) is provided for the first month and AFN 11,000 (± USD 147) for the second. The amount transferred is reduced when other





responders provide support included in the basket such as food or NFIs. SMEB includes AFN 3,000 for rent – the average for a house with a separate latrine and access to water – that is not conditional on the HH actually renting. Less vulnerable HHs are only eligible for one month.

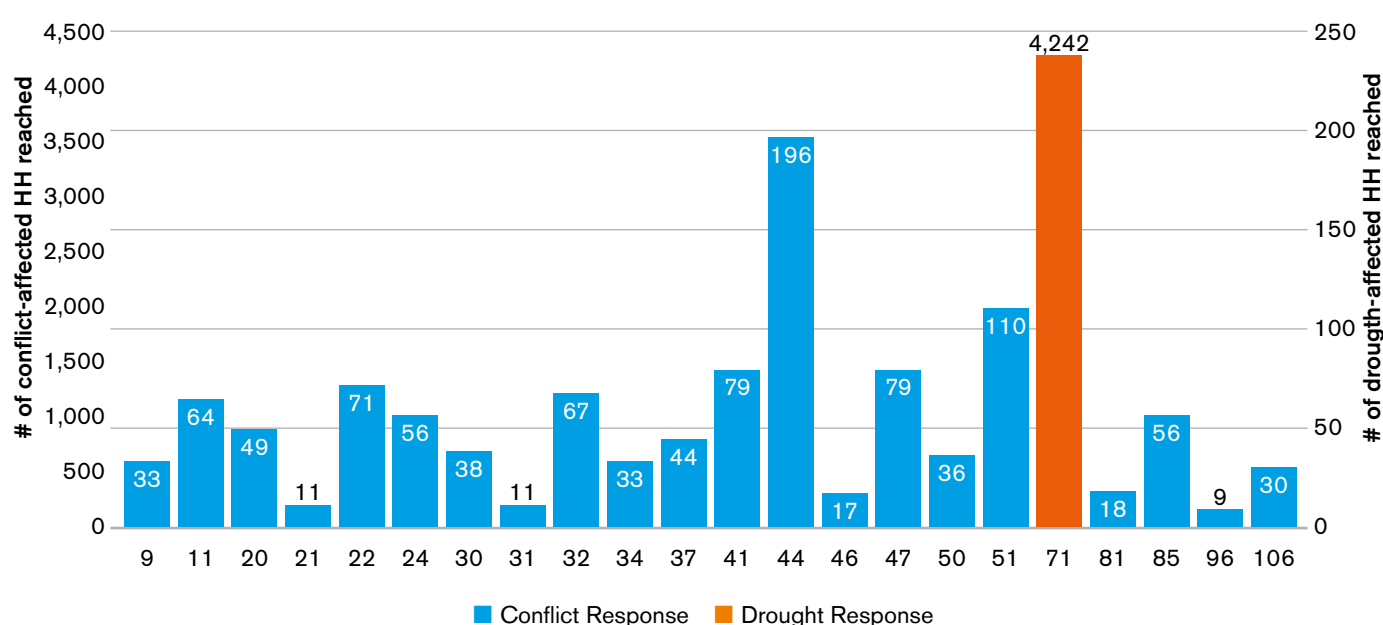
### i. Use of cash was partially as intended

ERM7 PDM shows that 52 per cent of recipients consulted did not use their MPCA to cover their rent.<sup>12</sup> Some HHs had more urgent needs such as food and health, while others were hosted free of charge at least initially. Only 19 per cent of NRC MPCA recipients in Khogiani were renting while 72 per cent were hosted for free and nine per cent were living in the open air, tents or public compounds. “All respondents who were hosted indicated that they chose this solution as they could not afford to rent a place or because there were no affordable places to rent.”<sup>13</sup>

Around 40 per cent of HHs spent part of their assistance to pay off debts and 13 per cent spent more than half, even though debt repayments are not part of SMEB. The reasons for their being in debt in the first place are not mentioned. FGDs with NRC beneficiaries in Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif confirmed that many displaced families have debts, but again not enough information was gleaned about the extent of their indebtedness or the reasons for it. Further study on this issue is recommended, because it is a significant element of HHs’ recovery process.

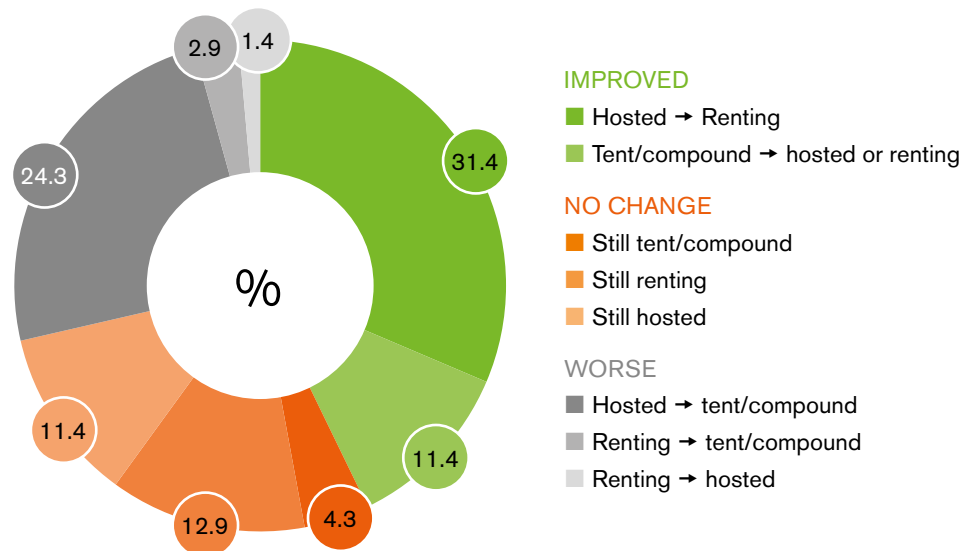
### ii. MPCA was partially on time and timely

ERM aims to provide a fast response, with assessments completed within eight calendar days of a shock being reported and response delivered to those most in need within a further eight days, mostly in the form of unconditional cash assistance.<sup>14</sup>



Timeliness of ERM8 response (May-September 2018)

Change in living conditions after end of MPCA in Khogiani



The ToC indicators do not consider the time lapse between shock and response delivery, but analysis of NRC's beneficiary database for May to September 2018 shows that on average it provided MPCA to conflict-affected IDPs 41 days after the shock and 29 days after being notified.<sup>15</sup> It is worth noting that it takes an average of 12 days for NRC to be informed about displacements.

### iii. MPCA is relevant to cover immediate/basic shelter needs but is not sufficient to cover shelter needs

ERM7 PDM indicates that 35 per cent of people who had received MPCA were still living in overcrowded shelters and eight per cent in shelters that were not weatherproof. Twenty-nine per cent of ERM beneficiaries in Khogiani reported that their shelter situation had got worse after a few months.

ERM seems to meet its objective of providing flexible assistance that people can use according to their own priorities. It fails, however in the majority of cases, to meet specific shelter objectives, even though AFN 3,000 of SMEB is meant to cover shelter needs. Access to adequate shelter should be given more attention, and this may have to go beyond MPCA.

### 5.1.2 CFR

An early winter storm in 2017 destroyed 104 tents NRC had distributed in Mazar-e-Sharif. The shelter team provided shelter solutions through CfR.<sup>16</sup> Beneficiaries received USD 75 a month for five months, followed by transitional core shelter assistance as described in section 5.3.3 below.

In 2018, NRC piloted a CfR programme to continue support for MPCA beneficiaries after their two months of emergency assistance.<sup>17</sup> This project was intended to take place in the east of the country but for various reasons it had to be diverted to Herat in the west, where we visited it. Given the short time remaining for implementation, adjustments to the initial intention were also made. IDPs living in protracted displacement and who were already renting their accommodation were the target group, rather than former MPCA beneficiaries. They received eight or nine months of CfR to cover their rental payments, capped at USD 75 a month and disbursed monthly.

NRC is preparing a lessons-learned review based on the pilot project and has started to research ways of improving its CfR option.



### i. Use of cash was as intended

NRC ensures that CfR is provided to beneficiaries who are renting. NRC staff said the CfR beneficiaries in Mazar-e-Sharif were living in tents until they were destroyed by a storm. In order to receive assistance, the beneficiaries had to find a place to rent themselves. NRC also checked the accommodation before beneficiaries moved in, and the ICLA team verified the rental agreements.

The CfR beneficiaries in Herat were vulnerable families who were already renting and had signed a tripartite agreement with NRC and their landlords. The assistance is intended to strictly cover rent, but in reality there is no way to control what people actually spend the money on. The indicators linked to the project do not capture the use of cash or recipients' level of rent-related debt. The indicators from the log frame are:

- ➔ Percentage of targeted HHs in NRC-supported rented accommodation meeting minimum quality standards
- ➔ Percentage of targeted HHs in NRC-supported rented accommodation reporting reduced risk of eviction
- ➔ Number of HHs receiving nine months' rental support

- ➔ Number of vulnerable, displacement-affected men, women, boys and girls benefiting from rental support
- ➔ Total value of cash distributed for CfR support
- ➔ Number of HHs whose accommodation did not meet minimum standards provided with SoKs

NRC could collect information on the use of cash through PDM, because the project is still ongoing.

### ii. It was not possible to verify if the shelter solution was on time and timely

Given that CfR was provided to IDPs living in protracted displacement in Herat, there was no shock as such against which to gauge whether the assistance was on time and timely.

### iii. Shelter solution is relevant for immediate/basic needs

We were not able to assess the results of CfR assistance in Balkh because all recipients had moved into transitional shelters.

In Herat too, the only CfR project included in the scope of this evaluation was amended. The

beneficiaries were IDPs in the poorest neighbourhood of the city, and not former MPCA recipients. The results of the HH survey indicate that some beneficiaries still live in substandard dwellings that are not weatherproof, which suggests that this component does not meet basic shelter needs as currently implemented. NRC intends to adopt a two-pronged approach with a cash for upgrade component to enable progression toward more suitable dwelling conditions, but this has not yet started (see section 5.3).

#### iv. Protection from forced eviction and secure enough tenure arrangements

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NRC is attentive to rental arrangements in order to reduce the risk of eviction, and in Herat it has entered in tripartite agreements with beneficiaries and their landlords. A written agreement is not, however, necessarily the best outcome for beneficiaries, because it gives landlords the opportunity to increase the rent when it comes up for renewal. Verbal agreements would appear to make such increases less likely and NRC may change its approach, but not across all area offices. In the absence of tripartite agreements, however, questions remain about how best to protect tenants and track their use of CfR. Monitoring the level of debt they incur in relation to housing or rental costs may be a good starting point.

### 5.1.3 FAMILY TENTS

When markets are not functioning adequately, or when the scale of displacement and the need for a prompt response is such that NRC does not have time or staff to conduct a rental market assessment, it implements an in-kind response by distributing standard family tents or metal-frame temporary shelters.

Standard family tents are 23 m<sup>2</sup> and are suitable for a HH of six people. They are water resistant and double-fold, and have a minimum lifespan of a year, which should give enough time to prepare transitional or permanent shelter assistance. Standard family tents have been distributed both by the emergency team as part of the ERM and the

shelter team. Each unit costs USD 439, including transport from Pakistan to Badghis or Herat.

#### i. Use of tents as intended

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All beneficiaries said the tent they had received was useful. This was confirmed by final NRC reports which stated that 100 per cent of the tents distributed were occupied after two weeks<sup>18</sup>.

Twenty-three per cent of tent recipients, however, said during the HH survey that no one had told them how to put up their tent. During our field visit to Herat, the day after tents had been distributed, three families had put theirs up without the inner lining, making them less waterproof. We also observed NRC camp management teams helping some IDPs to put up their tents. The shelter team said that it had trained tent beneficiaries, but it would be worth verifying that such training is systematic. It might also be useful to put up a tent at the distribution site to demonstrate how it should be done, or systemise quick training sessions with representative groups of beneficiaries.

#### ii. Tents are on time and timely

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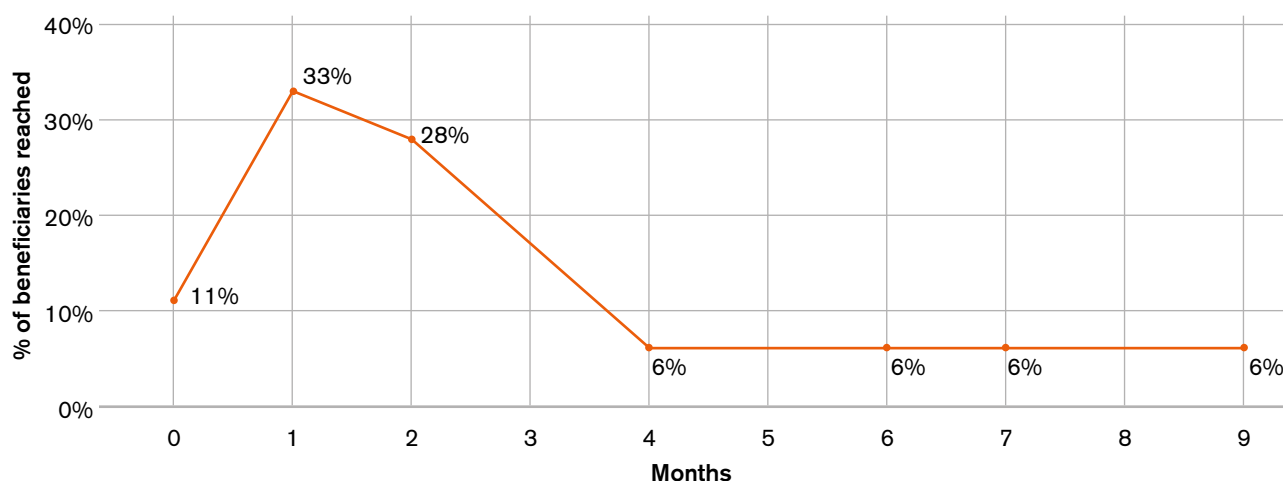
The HH survey shows that 44 per cent of tents and NFIs were provided within a month of displacement. The sample is too small to be representative, but it still suggests that the timeliness of the response needs to be improved.

Some beneficiaries had to wait much longer for a tent. We met people affected by drought in the west who had waited up to eight months. The delay was partly the result of donors, authorities and even the ES/NFI cluster having to be convinced first that they needed to be assisted. It seems that additional funding should be allocated for temporary shelter solutions to respond to the large number of emergencies every year.

It would also be useful for the ES/NFI cluster to coordinate joint contingency stock. This is currently not the case despite the fact that emergencies occur practically every year. Feedback from beneficiaries, interviews with staff and analysis of



## Timeliness of ES/NFI response



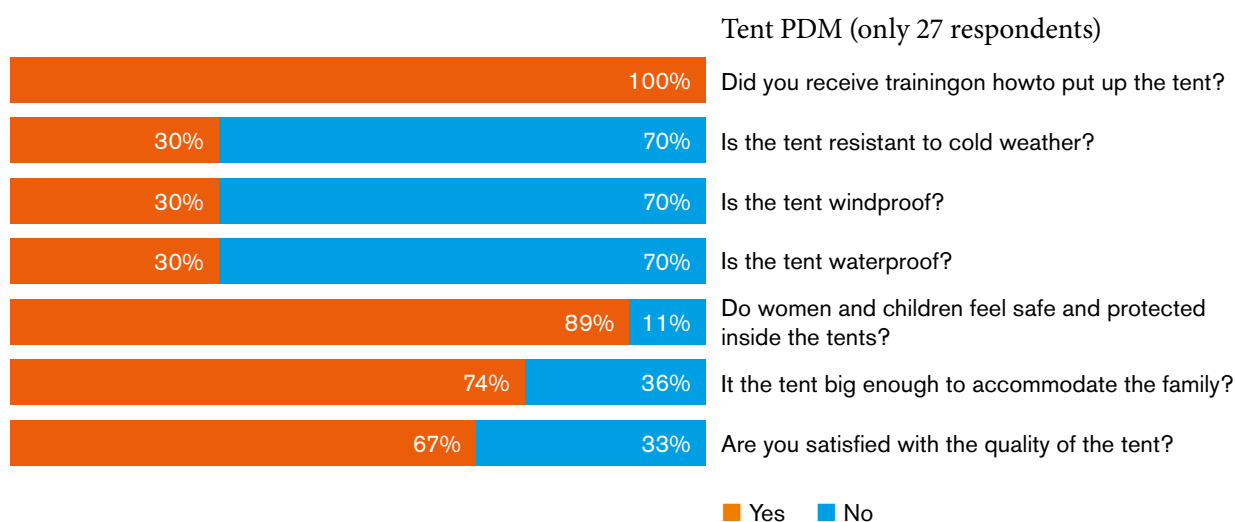
response options suggest such a move is necessary. NRC is conducting a review to learn from its drought response. It might be useful for the ES/NFI cluster as a whole to engage in such an exercise.

### iii. Tents are relevant for immediate/basic needs

Feedback during our field visits and FGDs was very positive, and IDPs felt their tents were a significant immediate improvement on their previous shelter. Negative feedback came from families who were worried about the cold because it is not possible to make a fire inside the tent.

NRC planned to distribute gas heaters that could be used instead with appropriate safety measures.

The fact that 104 tents in Mazar-e-Sharif were destroyed by a winter storm in 2017 raises the question of whether they were suitable for the local climate. FGDs also revealed that recipients were not always satisfied with the tents because they did not provide enough physical protection. It might be interesting to explore alternative cheaper solutions, combining the standard shelter kit – two tarpaulins and a tool kit – which costs CHF 60 in the ICRC/IFRC catalogue, with local available materials. A timber or metal frame and ground-sheet could be added.



#### iv. Protection from forced eviction and secure enough tenure arrangements

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Thousands of people moved to Herat and settled on private land as a result of the drought. NRC distributed MPCA and the Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR) built latrines. NRC later distributed tents. It seems that no authorisation was given before IDPs moved on to the land and latrines were constructed, which has the potential to aggravate tensions between IDPs and the landowners. IDPs occupying public land in Kowsar, Herat province, were threatened and told to leave in September 2018, and their tents and latrines were demolished.

This sparked intense conversations with the owners of the land on which the IDPs displaced by drought had settled, and a housing, land and property (HLP) assessment was carried out. The fact that there were numerous owners and that ownership of some of the land was contested made this task very difficult, and the government began relocating some of the IDPs in December. We conclude that the due diligence was not carried out early enough. NGOs must negotiate with landowners as soon as possible to establish what they are willing to accept on their land and for how long.

##### 5.1.4 STEEL-FRAME TEMPORARY SHELTER

The ToR for the evaluation mentions a steel-frame temporary shelter solution, but such shelters were not distributed in the area covered. The only metal structures used were transitional shelter solutions.<sup>19</sup>

##### 5.1.5 WINTERISATION AND SOKS

NRC supports the repair and upgrade of damaged shelters by providing cash or in-kind SoKs. It targeted 400 HHs living in shelters that were severely damaged by fighting in Faryab district with SoKs in 2017. The kits were designed to protect homes from damp and to repair doors and windows, improving insulation and enabling the installation of electrical fittings. Each SoK cost USD 230 and included tools, construction items, four blankets and 20 m<sup>2</sup> of cotton cloth. HHs were expected to contribute with labour at an estimated average cost of USD 178.<sup>20</sup>

#### i. Use of SoKs as intended

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NRC also assisted 500 IDPs from the Sar-e-Pul province following armed clashes in 2018. After assessing their needs using the household emergency assessment tool (HEAT), it distributed AFN 14,000 (USD 220) in MPCA and cash-for-winterisation and USD 50 for SoK for 100 of the most vulnerable families. In the HH survey, 98 per cent of the SoK recipients said they had used the kits to improve their shelters and no one reported having sold any items.

NRC provides mixed in-kind and cash support for some projects, which seems to be the right approach. “In-kind materials ensure minimal quality standards and cash can be provided to cover labour and transportation costs.”<sup>21</sup> It learned from another SoK project in 2017 in which no cash was distributed: “Ensuring quality of construction works is a challenge when beneficiaries are expected to undertake the works themselves particularly for elderly, women, and all those with limited physical abilities ... The lack of cash assistance provided in this SoKs pilot has prevented some HHs from starting or completing repairs or meeting quality standards.”<sup>22</sup>

To ensure more adapted assistance, NRC could consider tailoring the assistance it provides to the extent of damage and HHs’ capacity to carry out the repairs. It might also be worth exploring whether particularly vulnerable HHs could be assisted by other members of the targeted community.

#### ii. SoKs are on time and timely

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The crisis in Sar-e-Pul happened on 12 December 2017. NRC secured funding by 23 December and assisted the first families on 26 December. We conclude that the response was on time and timely given the low winter temperatures. NRC mentioned in the grants closure meeting, however, that the petition system delayed the response because it had to doublecheck all beneficiaries.



### iii. SoKs are relevant for immediate/basic needs

NRC conducted PDM after the SoK distribution in Sar-e-Pul, during which 100 per cent of the respondents said they were satisfied with the quality of the items, and 98 per cent with the quantity. It did not, however, collect any data to ascertain whether the SoKs had made the shelters warmer and more resistant to wind and rain.<sup>23</sup>

NRC is also considering upgrading shelters in exchange for occupancy free of charge (OFC). This approach has potential given that “Afghan cities are faced with widespread informal settlements, which are characterized by severely inadequate housing conditions and account for 70 per cent of the urban housing stock”<sup>24</sup>. NRC is currently developing guidance on this type of assistance,<sup>25</sup> and implementation should be carefully planned and monitored to draw conclusions about its relevance. Improving the quality of the shelters too much could lead to future increases in rent, making them unaffordable for vulnerable families.

NRC also provides PSVs, a low-cost solution to reduce fuel consumption while adding a room or greenhouse, and it distributes NFIs such as blankets, gas heaters and cash for fuel. The HH survey shows that beneficiaries found these items useful and were satisfied with their quality except for the gas heaters. Two out of 20 respondents said they were not satisfied with the quality. Further investigation is required to understand the issue.

### 5.1.6 SHELTER SOLUTIONS DEVELOPED BY IDPS

Field observation of several shelter solutions developed by IDPs illustrates their capacity to adapt and self-help. Such initiatives are important to support not only to improve immediate temporary living conditions, but also to encourage ownership and empowerment in the recovery process. Light and targeted assistance consisting of materials or cash creates opportunities for customising, local adaptation and innovative interventions by beneficiaries.



## CONCLUSION

NRC's temporary shelter response consists of a wide range of solutions. Its choice of options and modalities is not consistently evidence-based, but it continues to improve its assessment methodology, including its rental market assessment. Its solutions seem relevant and adequate, and 93 per cent of beneficiaries interviewed found the assistance provided useful and were satisfied with the quality. Some evidence, however, shows that solutions taken separately are not sufficient given the extreme vulnerability of many IDPs. Despite the fact that MPCA includes some cash for shelter, for example, at least 35 per cent of beneficiaries continue to live in substandard and/or overcrowded shelters. Better synergy between NRC's shelter, emergency and ICLA teams could improve its response considerably.

The review of project reports show that targets are usually met. The shelter team, however, lacks indicators, data and evaluations to measure impact. Data on timeliness, for example, is not collected except for ERM, and NRC faces some difficulty in providing assistance on time. Between May and September 2018, it provided MPCA to people affected by conflict on average 41 days after the shock and 29 days after being notified. Nor is information collected to understand how NRC interventions contribute to reducing the risk of eviction. Data collected during this evaluation, however, shows that the temporary shelter assistance it provided partially met the intended impact laid out in the ToC.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**R1.1 Measure and improve timeliness:** The shelter team should systematically include timeliness indicators in emergency responses to evaluate and improve their efficiency. These might state, for example, that temporary shelters are to be provided within two weeks of a shock. Such indicators are also essential for transitional solutions to ensure that there is no gap between the response phases. NRC should also consolidate its preparedness plan considering the capacities and difficulties of other ES/NFI cluster members. This might include the pre-positioning of tents and NFI kits in strategic warehouses, possibly in coordination with other ES/NFI cluster members and ERM partners.

**R1.2 Improve synergies between core competencies:** The integration of CCs starts with project design and continues through to implementation, including during the emergency response phase. In this sense, the ICLA team should ensure the shelter team has legal/HLP resources at its disposal, support context and risk analyses, participate in project design and take ownership of projects. During implementation, land issues should be addressed as soon as displacement occurs to reduce the risk of IDPs' eviction.

**R1.3 Companion programming:** Cash-only interventions fail to meet specific shelter objectives because beneficiaries spend the money they receive to meet their most acute needs, and these may differ from those foreseen in SMEB. MPCA is unlikely to address the need for adequate shelter on its own. NRC should develop a robust multi-sectoral response for the emergency phase. It should explore how to flag up the most vulnerable cases so they can be assisted in their pursuit of durable solutions with adequate support from the relevant CC.

**R1.4 Support local shelter solutions and explore other designs as alternatives to tents:** Several examples of self-built shelters demonstrate IDPs' capacity to build temporary shelters with locally available and/or recycled materials. It would be worth supporting these examples of IDPs' self-help initiatives with tools, tarpaulins, metal frames and/or cash, depending on the resources available, local markets and IDPs' capacity, which in turn would help to empower them and support their ownership of the recovery process. A feasibility study and a pilot project would help to find the best approach, determine the package to be provided, calculate the cost of this solution and get beneficiaries' feedback.

**R1.5 Ensure that beneficiaries are trained in how to put up tents,** whether by the shelter or emergency team. It would also be useful to put up a tent at the distribution site to demonstrate how it should be done and/or systemise quick training sessions with representative groups of beneficiaries.





## 5.2 SAFE PROGRAMMING

*Did the different types of temporary shelter assistance provided uphold the safe programming principles common to all CCs?*

NRC has a set of common principles that underpin all of its programming and strategies worldwide.<sup>26</sup> This part of the evaluation examines the extent to which its temporary shelter interventions in Afghanistan are designed and implemented in accordance with these principles, which in turn are aligned with the Sphere standard on protection and the global protection cluster's guidance on mainstreaming protection.

### 5.2.1 PRINCIPLED

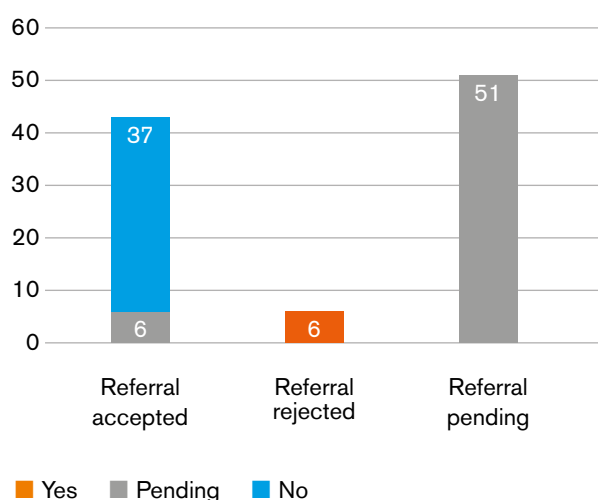
**ACCESS TO HARD-TO-REACH AREAS.** NRC aims to be one of the leading humanitarian agencies operating in hard-to-reach areas of Afghanistan through emergency response and protection advocacy. The review of projects for this evaluation shows its capacity to intervene in such areas, though a significant proportion of its activities are concentrated in government-controlled areas. Targeting people mainly in the latter has two main negative implications. Given that reports reveal displaced people in non-government-controlled areas to be

more vulnerable, it is not fully needs-based and may also restrict response options. People who moved in 2018 because of drought were not assisted in their area of origin when it may have been better to do so.

**THE PETITION SYSTEM.** For people displaced by conflict, NRC and most other humanitarian organisations operating in Afghanistan receive beneficiary lists from the Department of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR). This has the potential to compromise the neutrality of assistance and adds a layer of potential corruption and discrimination. The number of people excluded from the petition system, under which IDPs register and lodge assistance requests with DoRR, is unknown. In all cases, the DoRR lists have to be verified to ensure appropriate beneficiaries are selected, and this slows down responses.

Most of the humanitarians interviewed for this evaluation complained about the petition system and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is trying to address the issue with the government, but without success so far. NRC and ERM partners have committed “to working through a community-based system as an alternative to the petition system” while an alternative is formalised by the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT).<sup>27</sup>

Referral follow-up (total 140 referrals)



### 5.2.2 HUMAN RIGHTS AND PROTECTION

**Rights-based approach.** NRC “encourages actors with responsibility to respect and protect the rights of displaced and vulnerable people as set out in domestic and international law” and uses legal bases to ensure beneficiaries are protected.<sup>28</sup> The HLP Task Force, which NRC co-leads, supported IDPs during alleged forced evictions in Kowsar in 2018.<sup>29</sup> Legal analysis of the case was conducted as the basis for negotiating with the authorities and advocating for IDPs’ rights.

**INTERNAL REFERRALS.** The shelter team refers cases to the ICLA team, and these internal referrals form part of the indicators for most shelter projects – the number of beneficiaries referred to ICLA for HLP training. Targets are usually met, but we did not see the tool used and so were unable to assess its effectiveness.

**EXTERNAL REFERRALS.** The documents made available for this evaluation did not provide exhaustive evidence, but an example of an ERM referral database in Herat shared by NRC’s monitoring and evaluation (M&E) team shows that its ERM and camp management teams have a system mainly for people in need of protection or medical attention. NRC did not provide referral databases from other CCs, nor does it have a unique referral system yet.

NRC considers that its responsibility ends when referrals are accepted, but the quality of assistance provided by partner agencies is not always known and options in terms of alternative partners are very limited, particularly in the health sector. Feedback from beneficiaries and partners is needed to understand the impact of the referral system. Referral database analysis also showed that nearly half of the cases were pending for six months.

Other organisations also refer cases to NRC for ICLA and HLP support. The feedback from one partner agency in Mazar-e-Sharif was very positive.

**PROTECTION-CENTRED.** To ensure protection is integrated in all projects and mainstreamed across all activities, NRC has a protection specialist who also co-leads the protection cluster. It also trains its national staff. Shelter and WASH teams working with NRC receive a half-day session on protection mainstreaming as part of its bi-annual shelter training workshop. Given the extent of protection challenges in Afghanistan, however, it would be advisable to expand the sessions on mainstreaming and hold them every year. They could last two days and could include role play, case studies and improvement of ongoing projects. NRC also trains all ICLA and camp management staff and a few protection focal points from other CCs including shelter in mainstreaming protection in psychological first aid (PFA).

### 5.2.3 PARTICIPATORY, ACCOUNTABLE AND IN PROXIMITY

**Community consultation.** The HH survey shows that 93 per cent of the HHs interviewed were consulted before assistance was provided. Of the few who were not consulted, 41 per cent were CfR beneficiaries in Herat. During our site visits in Herat, one head of HH confirmed that he had not been consulted and said he would have preferred to invest the cash he received in setting up a second-hand clothes shop rather than upgrading his house. The shelter team selected beneficiaries among extremely vulnerable HHs living in protracted displacement in a poor neighbourhood. There was no recent shock per se, and it seems

shelter was not their priority even though they lived in substandard housing.

**CRFM.** NRC improved its CRFM in 2018 and has set up a dedicated phone line for beneficiaries to report grievances. It recorded 176 complaints in 2017 and 2018. Thirty-eight per cent of HH survey respondents said they were unaware of CRFM, but three-quarters of those who contacted NRC said they were satisfied. From site visits and ad-hoc discussions with beneficiaries, any dissatisfaction seemed to be with lack of follow-up. Analysis of CRFM databases shows that only seven per cent of complainants were women.<sup>30</sup> Many women do not own a phone or do not know how to use one, and elderly people face the same problems.

**COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION.** NRC strives to collaborate closely with beneficiaries at the community and settlement level, and relies strongly on community committees and representatives. The impression to emerge from most FGDs was that beneficiary selection reached the most vulnerable and that the selection process and communication ensured community acceptance. Some FGDs, however, revealed that certain beneficiaries, particularly women and PWDs, felt less represented, informed and assisted. This illustrates the fact that community representation must be carefully established and verified.

**STAFF AND ANTI-CORRUPTION MEASURES.** Afghanistan faces major corruption challenges. Transparency International (TI) ranked it 177 out of 180 countries in its 2017 corruption index with a score of 15 out of 100.<sup>31</sup> This creates a very challenging environment for humanitarian organisations. NRC participated in the Afghanistan report of TI's Collective Commitment to Enhance Accountability and Transparency in Emergencies initiative. The report shows that corruption risks exist in a number of areas, including the negotiation of access, the procurement and awarding of contracts, and the targeting and selection of beneficiaries.

NRC is aware of the high risk of corruption and has taken a number of measures to mitigate it, including anti-corruption training and a whistle-blower system. The review of PDMs shows that it also systematically inquires if beneficiaries have

been asked for money or services in exchange of humanitarian assistance. The HH survey, however, revealed that a beneficiary had been requested to give up part of his cash assistance as tax. NRC was informed and an investigation is ongoing, confirming its commitment to mitigating such risks.

The extent to which NRC verifies how contractors such as financial service providers and transporters get access to hard-to-reach areas is unclear, but this would be a relevant information given the situation in Afghanistan. It is not clear why, for example, the cost of money transfers varies between 0.8 per cent and 1.8 per cent of the transaction amount depending on the area concerned.

## 5.2.4 INCLUSIVE

**GENDER.** FGDs revealed that most female participants felt marginalised because their communities tended to communicate with humanitarian organisations through male leaders. Nor are women always recognised as heads of HH despite being the main provider if there is an elderly, disabled or teenager male family member. NRC already organises FGDs with women and has a female shelter team in Kabul specifically to provide assistance to female heads of HH. Such good practices should be replicated widely.

**PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS.** NRC has made progress in mainstreaming disability concerns and disaggregating beneficiary selection with the production of guidance material.<sup>32</sup> It also prioritises PWDs for shelter assistance, particularly through the use of the vulnerability assessment scorecard (VASC). FGDs, site visits and the analysis of beneficiary lists confirmed this point, but the FGD with PWDs revealed that once they are selected, they do not always get assistance tailored to their disability.

Even if NRC staff know about basic access solutions such as ramps for wheelchair users, they would need additional training to be able to identify specific needs associated with different types of disability, propose adapted solutions and ensure proper follow-up of their implementation. Beneficiaries with disabilities said it had been down to them and their family members to adapt



their shelter solutions to their needs, including spatial divisions and access to shelters or latrines. The shelter team identifies people with special needs (PSNs) during assessments and refers them to specialised organisations and service providers, if available.<sup>33</sup>

## 5.2.5 PRIORITISE SAFETY AND SECURITY

**PHYSICAL PROTECTION, SECURITY AND PRIVACY.** Shelter solutions are partially secure. SoKs including door locks and MPCA to purchase related items increase occupants' physical security. Tents offer low physical protection, but NRC takes mitigation measures by erecting them in safe places with facilitated access to WASH facilities, health services and other amenities.

To address an identified increase in negative coping mechanisms including child marriage and the sale of children to pay off debts among communities affected by drought, NRC plans to reintroduce the individual protection assistance (IPA) component used by ERM, a cash grant that aims to facilitate access to ad hoc support for particularly vulnerable cases identified during ERM assessments.

During tent distributions in Herat, NRC strove to “do no harm” by conducting fire safety training with visual and oral explanations in the local language for better understanding. Female beneficiaries in the same camp said there were no lights in the toilet area and that doors could not be locked, creating a security risk. The WASH facilities were provided by a partner NGO, but NRC's camp management team, which is present in the camp, could have been proactive in improving security by taking direct action or referring the issue to the NGO responsible.

In a settlement visited in Kabul with a high number of female-headed beneficiary HHs, some shelters were grouped together behind a surrounding wall and the temporary latrines were individual or shared between two to four families, which ensured security for female users around the clock.<sup>34</sup>

**PHYSICAL SAFETY TO/AT DISTRIBUTION.** ERM7 PDM of June 2018 shows that the situation in Kunar would benefit from more attention given that 99 per cent of people reported feeling unsafe. NRC should investigate further and take mitigation measures.

## 5.2.6 DO NO HARM AND GRATUITY OF SERVICES

Risk analysis and due diligence. For the projects we reviewed, risks assessments and related mitigation measures were included in NRC's shelter proposals. An annual assessment is also conducted at the national level to identify and mitigate the main strategic risks, based on an analysis both of the internal strategic capability required for successful strategy implementation and external factors that might affect implementation.

To reduce the risk of eviction, NRC requires beneficiaries to have a property title to be eligible for cash for shelter assistance. During field visits to transitional shelter beneficiaries in Herat, one family said they had bought their land on credit.<sup>35</sup> They paid a first instalment of AFN 30,000 but were struggling to pay the remaining 40,000 because only one of the eight family members was in work. It seems the risk analysis was not carried out carefully enough. The family members had to reduce their food consumption to be able to pay for the land and participate in the construction of their dwelling.

Whether this is a recurrent problem in NRC construction projects is not possible to ascertain, in part because the question of indebtedness was not included in the HH survey, but also because NRC did not research the matter. Given that indebtedness may have severe consequences such as the sale of children, it is vital to analyse the risks before launching such projects.

Using land ownership as a selection criterion fails to meet due diligence standards. “Due diligence is a process of research and analysis in any given situation to avoid causing harm to other persons or property”.<sup>36</sup> The family selected for the project had a mud house on public land, so their risk of eviction was considered quite low. It has arguably increased given that they have not yet been able to





pay for their land, and this eventuality should have been assessed.

The shelter team needs to understand and assess tenure arrangements in a way that facilitates and strengthens the delivery of shelter interventions. ICLA and shelter staff should jointly define what is “secure enough” as a baseline for transitional shelter assistance. This approach is recommended by the 2018 Sphere standards.<sup>37</sup> NRC guidelines on tenure security also summarise what might be considered secure enough in places of displacement.<sup>38</sup> In Afghanistan, occupancy certificates for IDPs living on public land, community consultation/consensus and payment of rent should be considered.

### 5.2.7 CONTEXTUAL PROGRAMMING, EFFECTIVE AND QUALITY-FOCUSED

NRC is committed to adhering to the Sphere principles. It also makes commendable efforts to learn throughout the project cycle and adjust its responses accordingly.

**SPHERE STANDARDS.** The level of privacy is determined by tent size versus family size, which databases show to be an average of seven but up to 10 members, and the separation of male and female occupants. In Mazar-e-Sharif, FGD revealed that families were provided with 16.5 m<sup>2</sup> standard tents shortly after displacement, and that warm summer temperatures allowed men to sleep outside while leaving women and children inside. Spatial separations were later improvised with blankets to accommodate male and female under the same roof, but with limited space for all. The Mazar-e-Sharif FGD leads us to conclude that the temporary shelters provided did not systematically respect minimum Sphere standards.

**HEAT.** During emergencies NRC’s ERM teams use HEAT, which was initiated and rolled out by OCHA and is used by all ECHO ERM members, for quick response projects funded by ECHO, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA) and Start Fund to target and select beneficiaries for tents, NFI and MPCA. The ERM teams assess every HH reported to be affected. HEAT focuses on collecting quick data for an immediate emergency response, and deeper assessments are necessary to provide vulnerability profiles and more specific information for further assistance.

## CONCLUSION

NRC shows strong dedication in targeting the most vulnerable families and mitigating risks in its shelter projects. The customary good practices are in place: CFRMs, a referral system and community consultation to inform programming. It does not do protection case management, but it does have a specialist to mainstream protection in programmes and co-lead the protection cluster. It also trains its staff on humanitarian principles and corruption awareness.

This evaluation, however, highlights the challenges NRC faces in ensuring women and PSNs participate in project design, feedback and complaints and in terms of referral. The complexity of land issues in Afghanistan and the potentially tragic consequences of indebtedness also demand additional attention and support. Despite NRC's willingness and ability to assist people in need in hard-to-reach areas, it implements most of its shelter projects in government-controlled areas. This, combined with the use of the petition system, raises questions of neutrality.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**R2.1 Context analysis:** NRC's emergency, shelter and ICLA teams should be involved from the emergency phase in jointly assessing situations and defining potential risks. This includes understanding the local context, the profile of those displaced, their intentions in terms of return or relocation and challenges in both areas of origin and displacement. Shared knowledge and expertise would improve coordination from the early response stage and provide the basis for integrated programme design and particularly shelter modality.

**R2.2 HLP due diligence standards:** These should be applied in line with the 2018 Sphere Handbook and the shelter cluster's due diligence guidelines adapted for Afghanistan. NRC should understand the risk of eviction, indebtedness and what is "secure enough" before designing shelter responses and modalities. It should also support incremental tenure security in all shelter projects.

**R2.3 Accountability and inclusion:** NRC should be more proactive in gathering feedback, complaints and people's concerns about under-representation. The female shelter team should be replicated outside Kabul, and needs assessments should systematically include FGDs with women and PWDs. Fifty per cent of interviews for PDM and CRFM should be with women and five per cent with PWDs, given that 4.7 per cent of Afghan population have disabilities.<sup>39</sup> The inclusion of PSNs throughout all project phases is essential to adapting shelter designs to their needs. Staff should receive advance training in accessible housing and environments and technical solutions.

**R2.4 Principled access:** NRC should allocate more resources to identifying and understanding shelter needs in non-government-controlled areas. It should use KIs or local partners to carry out rapid assessments to better understand shelter needs and then flash distributions as entry points for improving acceptance and more detailed need assessments.

**R2.5 Training on principled access and protection mainstreaming** should be extended to the shelter team.

**R2.6 Referral:** NRC's responsibility for referrals should extend until the required service is actually delivered. If services are not delivered, it should look for other partners and inform the relevant cluster. When mapping potential referral partnerships in each area, NRC should note expectations, check the capacity of referral organisations and agree on monitoring procedures until achievement.

**R2.7 The petition system:** The current system should evolve toward fair, rapid and corruption-free beneficiary selection. The UN, NGOs and donors should join forces to advocate for DoRR to reform it. In the shorter term, immediate steps should be taken to understand which vulnerable population groups, such as certain tribes, may be excluded from the system so that adequate measures can be adopted to ensure they are reached.

## 5.3 LINKAGE TO TRANSITIONAL SOLUTIONS

*To what extent did temporary shelter solutions link to transitional solutions for beneficiaries in need of further assistance?*

NRC aims to support vulnerable families' recovery process by linking its temporary support to transitional and eventually durable shelter solutions. This evaluation concentrates primarily on the early stages of shelter assistance, but this section analyses the extent to which temporary solutions establish a sound basis for transitional recovery.

### 5.3.1 HOUSEHOLD SURVEY AND MPCA PDM REPORTS SHOW THAT IDPS' RESILIENCE LEVELS VARY

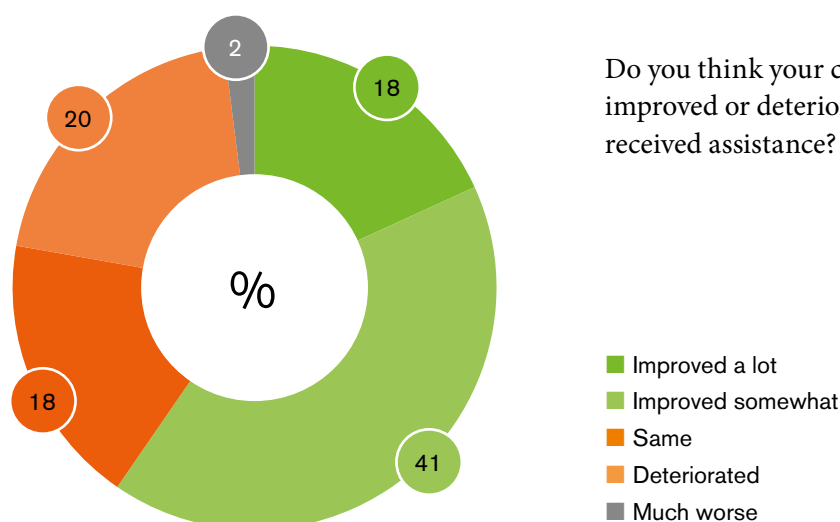
According to the HH survey, 59 per cent of beneficiaries consider their shelter conditions to have improved in the year since they received NRC assistance, whether it be cash and NFIs or cash and tent.

Many families have also invested in their dwelling, with 46 per cent of HHs improving their shelter conditions in a variety of ways, as shown in the figure below.

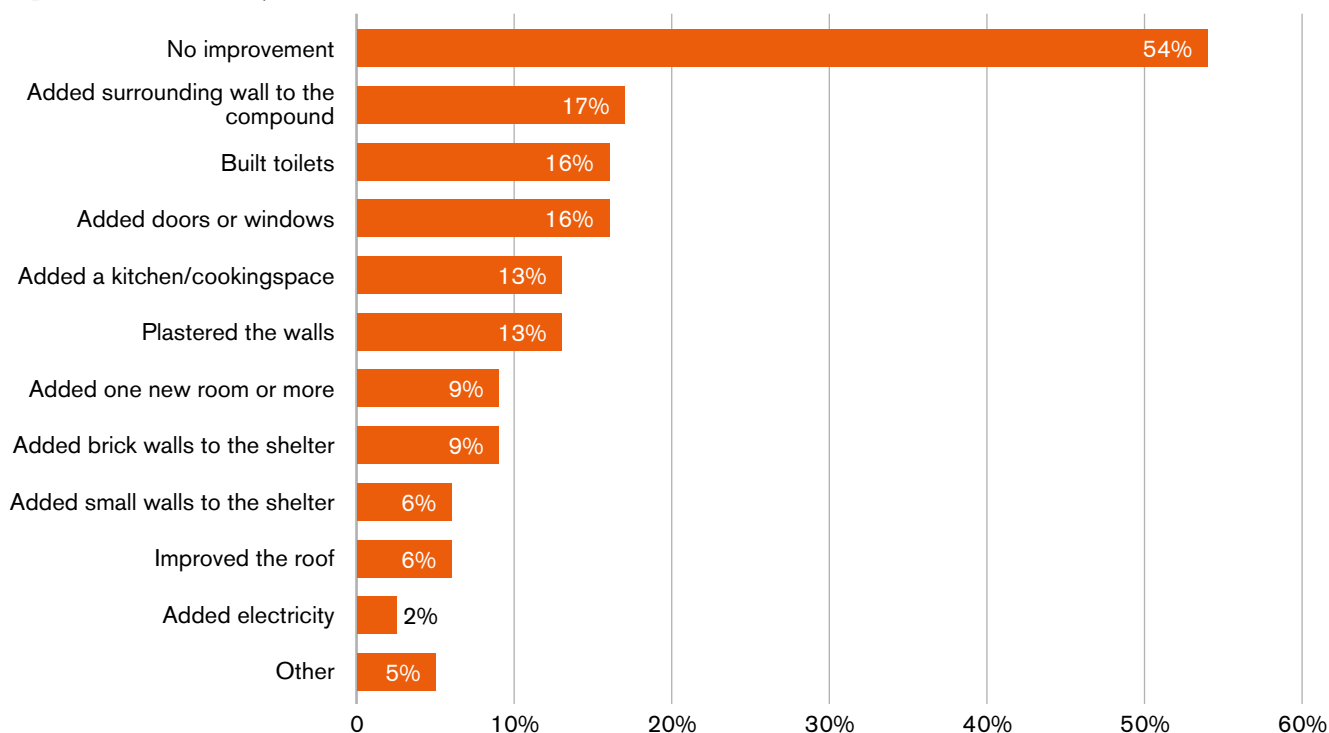
NRC reassessed MPCA recipients in Khogiani and found that 31 per cent of those previously hosted for free were renting accommodation. That does

not necessarily mean their living conditions have improved, but it demonstrates a degree of resilience. That said, it also found that 24 per cent of cash recipients had moved in to a tent having previously been hosted for free, which means their situation deteriorated. The HH survey also confirmed that further assistance is required to avoid vulnerable people slipping back into their initial situation. Shelter conditions declined for 16 per cent of HHs that received some form of temporary assistance.

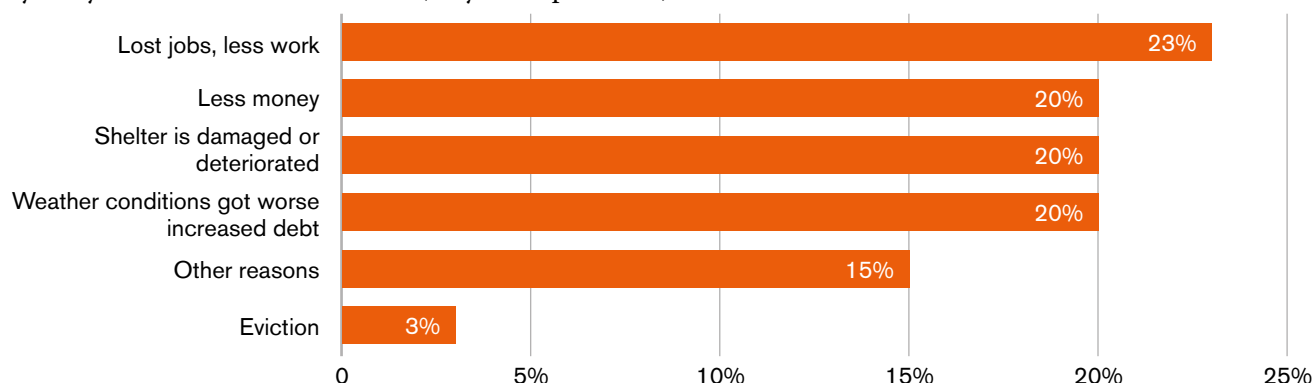
Of the respondents who said their shelter conditions had deteriorated, 40 per cent said it was the result of weather or other damage. Others said their economic situation had worsened, whether because of increased debt, lack of work or less income. Although some beneficiaries show a degree of resilience, the emergency response should lead to a thorough assessment to identify vulnerable people in need of further assistance. Temporary solutions should allow time for the transitional phase to be designed.



### Improvements made by beneficiaries



### Why has your situation deteriorated? (only 18 respondents)



### 5.3.2 TEMPORARY VS TRANSITIONAL SOLUTIONS

After several changes in the definition of temporary, transitional and permanent shelter solutions since 2016, NRC developed global guidance to clarify its ToC.<sup>40</sup> It considers temporary solutions as saving lives and providing physical protection, transitional solutions as pathways to durable solutions and permanent/recovery solutions as means of return, integration and shelter for non-displaced people.

The ToC stipulates that shelter impacts should be understood from the beneficiary's perspective rather than from the durability of the materials provided. "This is because the same output can have a different impact depending on the context, and the materials used do not (necessarily) equate to impact. For example, a family may live in a masonry house, but may have no access to essential services and experience limited freedom of movement. While one might think to report this masonry house as permanent, if we look at the contribution mapping in the ToC, it may be that the impact is actually temporary."



The “labelling” of shelter solutions is also a sensitive and somewhat political matter related to the overall response strategy and consequently funding. Some donors have been reluctant to support durable solutions in Afghanistan, and labelling solutions as transitional has allowed greater coverage even if they were directly linked to durable solutions. In this sense, NRC views one-room and the two-room shelters as transitional, to be extended according to families’ needs to become permanent shelters.

### **5.3.3 DIFFERENT TRANSITIONAL SHELTER SOLUTIONS FOLLOWING TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE**

NRC supports IDPs unable to recover from their displacement with two types of transitional shelters: a one-room brick and metal structure with foundations, brick infill walls and a corrugated galvanised iron (CGI) roof; or a masonry one-room house with corridor.

NRC Afghanistan’s 2018 shelter strategy clarifies the available shelter-related options, but it provides little guidance as to which solutions should be implemented for whom and when, and which solution(s) might follow. A decision-making tree would be a useful complement to the strategy, to view potential scenarios, contexts and assistance, and support a smoother transition between emergency and recovery.

### **5.3.4 BENEFICIARIES OF TEMPORARY SHELTER SOLUTIONS ARE NOT ALWAYS REASSESSED TO CHECK ON THEIR NEEDS**

#### **TENTS AND MPCA LINKED TO TRANSITIONAL SOLUTIONS.**

NRC reassessed the shelter needs of families who received tents and MPCA from a previous project in the north of the country.<sup>41</sup> The most vulnerable were selected using VASC to receive five instalments of cash-for-shelter assistance and build a more durable transitional shelter consisting of a one-room metal structure with brick walls and a latrine. This is as a well-articulated follow-up of assistance between the emergency and transitional phases.

It took two to three months for the shelter and HLP/ICLA teams to finalise the selection of beneficiaries, formalise land titles and prepare for the construction, which in turn took six to seven months with the beneficiaries’ participation. This meant that families had lived in tents for between eight and 12 months from the date of their arrival before moving into their transitional shelters.

In another project that provided transitional metal-structure shelters in the north, beneficiaries had previously received five months of CfR as a temporary solution during the winter.<sup>42</sup> This gave the shelter team time to organise the construction of transitional shelters. These two examples show that the initial temporary solution ought to provide sufficient shelter assistance to tide beneficiaries over until the transitional phase can be implemented. They also indicate that two months’ MPCA is not enough for those who are not hosted for free. AFN 3,000 does not cover the cost of renting a basic house for six months, nor the price of a tent or even a shelter kit.

**BENEFICIARY DATA SHEET MANAGEMENT.** The LFS team targets some of the same beneficiaries of shelter projects. It receives shelter beneficiary lists and selects those who are vulnerable and fit according to its specific criteria. NRC’s intention is to twin CfR with a livelihood component to meaningfully and comprehensively support HHs on their path to self-sufficiency. This approach, called CfR Plus, has not yet materialised.

The shelter teams, however, do not seem to use emergency databases systematically to further evaluate possible needs of the most vulnerable. Assessment data, beneficiary selection and exclusion criteria and PDM should be managed in such a way that they improve understanding of needs and possibly trigger further assistance in the transitional or early recovery phase. NRC does not consistently follow up on very vulnerable people once they have been given assistance even if that assistance is time-bound or very light. It has no tool, such as a single multi-sector database, to share data and flag up vulnerable profiles between CCs. NRC is working on this issue at the global level, but it is not clear when such a tool will be available.

## CONCLUSION

The HH survey revealed that 59 per cent of beneficiaries considered their shelter conditions to have improved since receiving NRC's temporary or emergency assistance. Forty-six per cent had invested in their shelters. This demonstrates both the positive impact of NRC's assistance and the resilience of Afghan families affected by displacement or disasters. We also identified projects in which extremely vulnerable HHs first received temporary solutions such as tents and/or cash, and then transitional shelters. The LFS team also supported temporary shelter beneficiaries with livelihood activities, which builds a pathway to more durable solutions. This stepped approach should be replicated to ensure a smooth continuum of assistance between response phases.

That said, 22 per cent of HH survey respondents said their situation had deteriorated since receiving assistance. One reason for this is that NRC does not always reassess the needs of people who have received temporary or emergency assistance. Nor does it have a database to follow up on needs across different projects or sectors, which makes it challenging for the shelter team – and the evaluators – to identify and shortlist the most vulnerable for possible further support.

NRC's shelter strategy defines the different shelter solutions it offers, but it does not clearly explain in which situation and for which caseload each solution should be implemented. The strategy should clarify who gets both temporary and transitional assistance.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **R3.1 Set up databases of beneficiaries that would allow follow-up across phases**

and information sharing between CCs.

Such databases should be accessible by the country office to facilitate programme integration and monitoring by the M&E, head of programme, head of programme support, CC advisors and specialists.

### **R3.2 Systematically reassess the needs**, coping mechanisms, intentions, living conditions and vulnerability of MPCA and temporary shelter solution recipients to identify those who need further transitional assistance. Extend the duration of MPCA for extremely vulnerable HHs.

### **R3.3 Prepare the transitional response as soon as possible** to ensure continuity of assistance for the most vulnerable. This should involve detailed needs assessments, risk and context analysis, market assessments, due diligence in coordination with the ICLA team, community consultation and coordination with other stakeholders. Make sure temporary shelter solutions allow the most vulnerable families to live in adequate conditions while the transitional response is prepared.

### **R3.4 Consider additional assistance** such as livelihood support and MPCA, based on risk analyses, for extremely vulnerable HHs during the construction of transitional shelters to avoid doing harm.

### **R3.5 Create a decision-making tree** to help to determine which types of assistance are necessary according to people's needs, local scenarios and funding availability. This may include shelter, FSL, ICLA or WASH assistance; temporary, transitional or permanent solutions; external referral or a combination of such interventions.



## 5.4 SUPPORT FUNCTIONS

*To what extent did support functions enable smooth implementation of quality projects?*

The question of support functions was not included in the terms of reference for this evaluation, but was added to its lines of enquiry because the quality, timeliness and efficiency of assistance depends very much on support functions, particularly during the emergency phase.

### 5.4.1 LOGISTICS

**CASH ASSISTANCE.** NRC has framework agreements in place with money transfer companies including mobile network operators (MNOs) and the traditional hawala system. This approach has been successful, because it is able to provide cash in two days in all of the districts where it implements ERM, and in one day for mobile phone-supported transfers. During ERM7, 94 of the 168 caseloads assessed, or 44 per cent, were reached within five days of completing HH emergency assessments.<sup>43</sup>

**IN-KIND ASSISTANCE, STOCKPILING AND PRE-POSITIONING.** NRC has framework agreements with several suppliers, including for tents and NFIs. Most suppliers are located outside Afghanistan, because

in-country suppliers do not always have the required items or quality in stock.<sup>44</sup> Pakistan-based suppliers offer more consistent provision of quality products such as tents and tarpaulins, but customs clearance and import tax make this option unreliable timewise and more expensive. During the drought response, tents were delivered 46 days after the validation of the purchase request. Exchanges with NRC staff revealed that it has also considerably reduced its ES/NFI preparedness stock in anticipation that UNHCR will have enough to respond to emergencies.

This shows that NRC will not be able to respond to a crisis on time with in-kind shelter solutions unless it has pre-positioned stock in the country. Nor is cash alone a solution, given that not all items may be available during the emergency phase or not all people may have access to markets. The pre-positioning of NFI kits should be part of an improved supply chain.

In 2018, ERM8 consortium partners were allowed to provide in-kind assistance but they were not encouraged to hold stock, which pushed responders to opt for cash. ECHO is aware of this issue and seems open for discussion. In theory “DG ECHO will support the most effective and efficient modality of providing assistance, whether it be cash, vouchers or in-kind assistance” and consider pre-constituted stocks eligible.<sup>45 46</sup>

**Supply chain and costs.** For the drought crisis, the cost per unit for tents transported from Pakistan to Badghis was USD 439.<sup>47</sup> This included seven per cent import tax and USD 109.50 for transport, the latter representing 33 per cent of the tent value. This is a considerable amount which might worth breaking down into the cost of the truck, fuel, driver’s salary, insurance and possibly the cost of “security” to reach hard-to-reach areas.

### 5.4.2 STAFF

**TEAM SETUPS ACROSS AREA OFFICES.** In NRC’s area office for the west of the country, emergency and shelter/WASH activities fall under two different project managers, whereas in the area office for the north one is responsible for both. Given the increasing budget and activities in the north, it

seems the role will be split at the possible expense of synergies and fluidity of communication. If this happens, any restructuring should consider ways of maintaining tight interaction between the teams on projects, data collection and sharing, not only as a mitigation measure but also to ensure that the shelter/WASH team provides the emergency team with technical support.

The ERM team has the capacity to deploy staff in cases of emergency. For the drought response, NRC deployed the emergency response team (ERT) in Badghis, meaning it was able to assess the situation and scale up the response without affecting ongoing programmes. According to ERT, however, additional support from national staff in areas such as finance and HR would have been of significant help in improving the emergency response.

One shelter specialist covers the whole Afghanistan shelter operation for the development, design, planning, implementation of projects including coordination with other CCs. This can at times be challenging, especially in the event of one or more acute crises, and could benefit from support from an additional senior shelter expert.

**STAFFING SETUP.** NRC uses international staff for expertise in its own programmes, and its substantial involvement in clusters and technical working groups benefits the overall response. A significant majority of NRC's expatriate and senior staff are positioned in the country office in Kabul, and far fewer in the area offices. It would be good to establish a balance by having more senior staff based in the field and more regular field visits.

The nationalisation of project manager positions is positive in many obvious aspects, including staff turnover, and understanding of the context. Even if national shelter staff are experienced and provided with quality training, however, they have rarely been exposed to other contexts, and such exposure would be an asset in improving programmes. NRC should consider national staff exchange in other countries. It has good experience of cash-for-shelter programmes in Lebanon and Jordan, for example. If obtaining visas were to prove an obstacle, video conferences and presentations could still be useful.

### 5.4.3. DONORS AND FUNDS

Feedback from donors such as ECHO, NMFA, the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the UK's Department for International Development (DfID) is very positive. They recognise that NRC has a good understanding of the context, consistently meets project targets and demonstrates operational and strategic capacity. They also acknowledge that its support for the coordination mechanism through co-leadership of and participation in clusters and working groups contributes to improving the humanitarian response in Afghanistan.

NRC funds for shelter and emergency activities increased between 2016 and 2018, as did the share of the budget for shelter projects. ECHO provides a relatively constant portion of NRC's total annual funding, which is allocated to emergency actions. It contributed 39 per cent in 2016, 37 per cent in 2017 and 34 per cent in 2018. A growing proportion of shelter funds from DANIDA and DfID were allocated to durable solutions support in 2017 and 2018.

NRC donors differ in terms of strategy, approach, funding duration and allocation speed. This allows a variety of activities to be funded, ranging from emergency and transitional responses to longer-term and more integrated programmes. The flexibility that donors such as NMFA, SIDA and DANIDA give NRC to allocate funds to cover shelter needs is an important asset, because it allows the organisation to fund emergency responses promptly and reduces potential dependencies on a particular donor for specific actions.

Multi-year programming with these donors also means reporting procedures are lighter, allowing NRC to save time on administrative issues and focus on assistance. The downside is that it is less meticulous in terms of monitoring. It has no timeliness indicator, for example, and fewer PDM reports are available for projects funded by these donors.



## CONCLUSION

Logistical support, staff capacity and funding management are identified as key support functions upstream and at the onset of the shelter response to enable timely implementation of quality assistance.

Based on the projects evaluated it seems in-kind assistance has been side-lined in favour of cash-based interventions. The shelter response in Badghis, however, shows that in-kind remains a valid and necessary modality during emergency responses. NRC's emergency preparedness plan (EPP) should be updated and finalised, among other things to include improved in-kind solutions.

NRC's staff is very comprehensive in terms of skills and competences. Given the complexity of the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, however, the challenges of HLP and protection issues, the very large number of projects, the range of shelter solutions and the implementation of new programmes such as CfR and CfR Plus, the shelter specialist needs additional support to cover the whole Afghanistan shelter operation. An additional senior shelter expert would be an asset in strengthening project proposals, developing new indicators for issues such as timeliness and tenure security, and supporting the implementation of new activities.

NRC conducts significant training on various topics to build the capacity of its national staff but the impact is rarely measured, which is necessary to evaluate and improve the input. Discussions in the field also revealed that national staff need to further strengthen their HLP and access skills, and increase their exposure to other projects and contexts as learning opportunities.

NRC has a solid reputation as a humanitarian actor in Afghanistan, which guarantees the support of regular donors with various strategies and approaches. This allows it to fund a wide range of projects and assistance, ranging from emergency to recovery, and gives it a degree of flexibility in allocating funds. NRC should take advantage of this flexibility to stockpile ES/NFIs and strengthen the whole supply chain.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**R4.1 Update and finalise EPP**, which was approved by the senior management group (SMG) in April 2017. According to NRC procedure, this should happen at least annually or whenever the context changes significantly. Join efforts by ES/NFI cluster partners to advocate for pre-positioning in country. Several ideas are worth exploring, including joint procurement and stockpiling, and joint agreement with local suppliers to support them in producing or importing quality standard items for humanitarian organisations.

**R4.2 Reinforce the shelter team** with a shelter project development manager, particularly for CfR. Additional support should also come from NRC's regional and head offices, particularly for work on HLP issues which requires specific expertise. Such support should not only consist of field visits, which would create extra workload for the Afghan team, but should be output oriented, including the revision and updating of the shelter strategy and indicators and the ToC.

**R4.3 Increase opportunities for national staff exchange** inside and outside Afghanistan through workshops or short-term deployments to other area offices and countries. Reinforce the capacity of national staff with active learning workshops on HLP, accessibility and humanitarian access. Such training should include theory, a review of project challenges, revision of one or two projects based on the review and new knowledge. The trainers should evaluate participants' knowledge and practices before and after training to determine whether additional support and coaching is needed. NRC could also explore the possibility of partnerships with organisations with specific expertise in Afghanistan. Handicap International (HI) might be a good option for accessibility and inclusion of PWDs. Such partnerships would be relatively inexpensive, and training could be done in local languages, which is always better.

**R4.4 Include all relevant CCs**, particularly HLP/ICLA, during emergency assessments and distribution to use the full potential of NRC's multi-sectoral expertise and prepare further assistance if necessary for those unable to recover after two months of cash assistance.

## 6

## CONCLUSION

NRC is a long-standing and important humanitarian actor in Afghanistan. Between 2016 and 2018, the period covered by this evaluation, its emergency and shelter teams implemented 29 shelter projects in nine provinces across five regions of the country. The shelter team used various assistance modalities, including cash, in-kind, training and the upgrade of heritage buildings to provide vulnerable people in need with temporary, transitional and permanent shelter solutions. In the last two years, NRC provided 6,465 vulnerable HHs with shelter assistance, including 3,675 temporary shelters.

The findings of this evaluation indicate that most of NRC's temporary shelter solutions provide an adequate level of physical safety. Its responses were not always as timely as they might have been, however, particularly when providing in-kind assistance. This underlines the need to improve its preparedness plan and supply chain and increase the share of its budget allocated to responding to emergency needs. The 2018 drought crisis, during which families spent up to 12 months waiting for support in inadequate makeshift shelters, confirms the need for these adjustments.

The ERM mechanism ensures a faster response, but again timeliness could be improved by quicker information sharing at the onset of displacement or a disaster. ERM consists mainly of MPCA, which is key to meeting the needs of newly affected people. By its nature, this modality offers a maximum degree of choice, flexibility and dignity. The 2017 ERM PDM, however, shows that nearly a third of MPCA recipients were still living in substandard shelters that were at best overcrowded and at worst did not provide enough protection against the elements.

NRC has already flagged up that “cash alone is not enough” and has started to pilot shelter

outcome-oriented solutions such as CfR.<sup>48</sup> The shelter team has developed guidelines and standard operating procedures, and has started training national staff. Given that these developments are quite recent, it is vital that NRC continue to coach staff and monitor projects very closely, not only so that it can measure their impact on the adequacy of shelters and tenure security, but also to prevent shortfalls in assistance from doing harm by triggering indebtedness, evictions or negative coping mechanisms.

NRC generally manages to meet its targets, but does not always succeed in ensuring safe programming in terms of personal safety and tenure security, mostly as a result of limited integrated assistance. This is linked to insufficient monitoring and follow-up of beneficiaries' situations and needs. More qualitative indicators, coaching and HLP support would enable more consolidated assistance. A number of protection and HLP-related issues have been identified, such as the lack of follow-up of referred protection cases and an increased risk of indebtedness among some transitional shelter beneficiaries.

NRC relies strongly in its programmes on very experienced and competent staff, divided into six CCs. This evaluation, however, highlights the fact that teams work too much within their own field and that better coordination between CCs would help to address this issue. HLP is a good example, because it requires a range of expertise including ICLA, shelter, camp management and livelihoods. The significant involvement of the ICLA team in the design and implementation of other CC projects is key to securing incremental tenure for newly displaced people, protracted IDPs and relocated people.

The evidence collected for this evaluation and previous reports show that, despite having



received cash and ES/NFI assistance, many vulnerable families are not able to recover. The shelter team reassessed the needs of IDPs in Mazar-e-Sharif who had initially received temporary shelter solutions in order to support the most vulnerable with transitional solutions, first with CfR and then a one-room shelter. Such an approach, which closely integrates assessments and the provision of a phased response, seems very relevant because it leaves open the possibility of adjusting assistance if needs be. Unfortunately, the NRC shelter team does not apply it consistently.

Needs assessments should also be more reflective of other CCs from the early stages, the first two months after the emergency response, to better identify those who may need further support to recover in terms of livelihoods, shelter, WASH and/or protection. This evaluation emphasises that a better link between the temporary and transitional phases requires a more robust multi-sector beneficiary data collection and management system. This includes more concerted and consistent internal and external referrals and follow-up, for which a shelter-related intervention decision-making tree could be a useful guiding tool.

The considerable extent of shelter-related needs in Afghanistan and the limited number of shelter actors raises questions about NRC's prioritisation strategy. Its large number of shelter projects across the humanitarian continuum from temporary and transitional to permanent solutions, which is now expanding to include the refurbishment of heritage buildings, is an ambitious undertaking but may overstretch the organisation. A reasonable objective for 2019 might be to concentrate its efforts on temporary and transitional assistance during the emergency and recovery phases, including in hard-to-reach areas. A focused, integrated and protection-sensitive approach would ensure a more efficient response, and enable NRC to reach its objectives in terms of quality and safe programming.



## 7

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are this evaluation's main recommendations, compiled and prioritised by theme. More detailed recommendations can be found at the end of each chapter covering the findings related to the four lines of enquiry.

## 1. Improve the timeliness of temporary shelter responses

→ **Update and finalise EPP**, which was approved by SMG in April 2017. According to NRC procedure, this should happen at least annually or whenever the context changes significantly. Pre-position tents and NFI kits, possibly in coordination with other ES/NFI cluster members and ERM partners. Several ideas are worth exploring, including joint procurement and stockpiling, and joint agreement with local suppliers to support them in producing or importing quality standard items for humanitarian organisations.

→ **Measure the timeliness** of emergency responses by systematically collecting data such as the date of shock, date of notification and date of distribution in order to evaluate and improve the efficiency of interventions. Include timeliness indicators such as “temporary shelters to be provided within two weeks of shock” in all temporary shelter projects.

## 2. Reinforce coordination and integration between shelter & settlement and other CCs

→ **Improve synergies between CCs** from project design to implementation, including in the emergency response phase. The ICLA team should ensure the shelter team has legal and HLP expertise at its disposal and that it co-owns shelter projects.

→ **Create a decision-making tree** to help to determine which types of assistance are necessary according to people's needs, local scenarios and funding availability. This may include shelter, FSL, ICLA or WASH assistance; temporary, transitional or permanent solutions; external referral or a combination of such interventions.

→ **Set up a single database** to share needs across all CCs to facilitate programme integration and project monitoring. Such a database would also help to follow up beneficiaries across different response phases. This implies that the needs of people who have received temporary shelter assistance should systematically be reassessed.

→ **Companion programming:** Cash-only fails to meet specific shelter objectives for the most vulnerable, because many spend the money they receive to cover their most acute needs, which may differ from those foreseen in SMEB. NRC should provide additional shelter-related assistance for vulnerable HHs living in substandard shelters during the emergency phase. It should also explore how to flag the most vulnerable cases, so they can be followed and assisted in their pursuit of durable solutions with adequate support from the relevant CC.



### 3. Strengthen NRC's existing operational tools related to protection, gender and inclusion

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- ➔ **Systematically include women and PWDs** in FGDs, needs assessments and project design to ensure their specific needs are addressed with adapted and practical solutions.
- ➔ **Use proactive tools** to gather feedback, complaints and the concerns of people such as women and PWDs who are presently under-represented. Make sure that 50 per cent of PDM respondents are women and five per cent are PWDs.
- ➔ **Replicate the female shelter team** beyond Kabul to gather more information about women's needs, HLP, protection and gender issues as the basis for providing specific assistance.
- ➔ **Address land issues as early as possible** to reduce IDPs' risk of eviction and indebtedness. Engage the ICLA team in due diligence and the definition of indicators for tenure security. The complexity of HLP and protection issues requires multi-sectoral expertise to choose shelter modalities that do not put people at risk. This recommendation also applies to other CCs such as camp management.
- ➔ **Strengthen the referral system** by systematically referring cases that NRC does not have the capacity or expertise to respond to. Make sure that such people's needs are covered by other organisations or advocate for additional internal support when there is no agency to refer to.

### 4. Concentrate NRC's efforts in hard-to-reach areas

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- ➔ **Allocate more resources** to extend shelter programmes in hard-to-reach areas, including the appointment of access officers.
- ➔ **Expand training** on principled access to the shelter team.
- ➔ **Carry out rapid needs assessments** in non-government-controlled areas to establish a better understanding of shelter needs. This could be done initially with KIs or local partners before, and/or by conducting flash distributions as an entry point to improve acceptance and further access.

### 5. Human resources and training

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- ➔ **Reinforce the shelter team** with a project development manager to strengthen project proposals, develop new indicators, including on timeliness and tenure security, and support the implementation of new activities such as CfR.
- ➔ **Continue to invest in staff training and coaching.** Together with NRC staff, we have identified principled access, CfR, HLP, protection mainstreaming and shelter accessibility and inclusion as training priorities. Training sessions and workshops should be based on the concrete issues the shelter team faces rather than just theory, and should employ active learning methods. Trainers and facilitators could help participants identify weaknesses in project design and implementation and assist them in developing revisions. They should also follow up to verify that the training given results in concrete improvements.
- ➔ **Consider training partnerships** with other organisations in Afghanistan, such as HI, that have relevant expertise and local knowledge of context and language.

# ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> According to NRC Programme Policy, Safe Programming is about designing and implementing programmes that responds to the specific needs and risks of displaced and vulnerable people and that minimizes negative, unintended consequences of interventions.
- <sup>2</sup> Shelter Needs in Hard-to-Reach Areas, Sex and Age Disaggregated Data Report, Common Humanitarian Funds, NRC, 2017.
- <sup>3</sup> These concise recommendations are more detailed at the end of sections 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4 in the full evaluation report.
- <sup>4</sup> 2019 Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview; and NRC 2018 Afghanistan Shelter Strategy
- <sup>5</sup> NRC-AFG\_ShelterGrants\_2016-2018 (Calculation in USD from NOK).
- <sup>6</sup> NRC 2018 Afghanistan Shelter Strategy
- <sup>7</sup> See Annex 07: "Photo selection of visited projects and areas"
- <sup>8</sup> See list of persons met (inside and outside of Afghanistan) in Annex 02: "Programme and list of persons met"
- <sup>9</sup> A shelter staff replaced one ill M&E enumerator during one day of the survey.
- <sup>10</sup> See Annex 08 "Evaluation matrix"
- <sup>11</sup> See Annex 03 "Field information: HH survey and FGD", Annex 04: "Field information: HH survey questionnaire" and Annex 05: "Field information: FGD results" for detailed methodology, objectives, resources, targeting, sampling strategy and results.
- <sup>12</sup> ERM PDM analysis, REACH, April 2018. ERM7 is the ERM that was carried out in 2017.
- <sup>13</sup> Khogiany emergency – mVAM shelter rapid assessment, A joint WFP and NRC assessment, December 2017.
- <sup>14</sup> In 2017 the objective was to carry out an assessment within five days of the notification, but this has proven too ambitious.
- <sup>15</sup> This analysis did not take into account the drought response which is not representative of NRC ERM.
- <sup>16</sup> Project AFFM1731 SIDA RRM
- <sup>17</sup> The evaluators assumptions are based only on the Cfr project implemented in Herat, as they were not able to visit any other such projects.
- <sup>18</sup> AFFM1629\_SIDA RRM\_Final Report.docx
- <sup>19</sup> See Annex 07: "Photo selection of visited projects and areas".
- <sup>20</sup> Lessons learned, Shelter Sealing Off Kits, NRC Afghanistan, August 2017.
- <sup>21</sup> Lessons learned, Shelter Sealing Off Kits, NRC Afghanistan, August 2017. Quote from an NRC staff.
- <sup>22</sup> Lessons learned, Shelter Sealing Off Kits, NRC Afghanistan, August 2017.
- <sup>23</sup> Cash Transfer Post Distribution Monitoring Report, Emergency Response for Sar-e-Pul Crisis, START Fund, 2018
- <sup>24</sup> Afghanistan Housing Profile, UN-Habitat, 2017.
- <sup>25</sup> OFC Basic guidelines and procedures, NRC, 2018
- <sup>26</sup> NRC Programme Policy, 2018
- <sup>27</sup> Emergency Response Mechanism - Common Rationale 8, Afghanistan 2018
- <sup>28</sup> NRC Programme Policy, 2018
- <sup>29</sup> Kowsar Eviction, Legal Analysis, NRC, 22 September 2018
- <sup>30</sup> Source: NRC CRFM database for West and North region (2017 and 2018).
- <sup>31</sup> <https://www.transparency.org/country/AFG>
- <sup>32</sup> Guide to age, disability in NRC shelter, NRC Afghanistan, August 2017
- <sup>33</sup> Referrals are done through the UNHCR-managed PSN network
- <sup>34</sup> PD22, Camp Sheena, project AFFM1814
- <sup>35</sup> Project AFFM1814 DANIDA
- <sup>36</sup> LAND RIGHTS AND SHELTER, THE DUE DILIGENCE STANDARD, Shelter Cluster, 2013
- <sup>37</sup> The Sphere Handbook, Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, 2018
- <sup>38</sup> SECURITY OF TENURE in Humanitarian Shelter Operations, NRC and IFRC, 2013
- <sup>39</sup> Disability Rights in Afghanistan, SIDA, 2014 <https://bit.ly/2tklAV3>
- <sup>40</sup> NRC Shelter & Settlements Guidance Note: Global Theories of Change and Indicators
- <sup>41</sup> Beneficiaries of project AFFM1706 further assisted under project AFFM1701
- <sup>42</sup> Project AFFM1731
- <sup>43</sup> Source ERM7
- <sup>44</sup> Tender evaluation reports, NRC logistics team
- <sup>45</sup> Humanitarian Implementation Plans 2018, TECHNICAL ANNEX, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Central Asia, financial, administrative and operational information, DG ECHO
- <sup>46</sup> [http://dgecho-partners-helpdesk.eu/eligibility/eligible\\_costs/stoks/start](http://dgecho-partners-helpdesk.eu/eligibility/eligible_costs/stoks/start)
- <sup>47</sup> NRC quote for family tents from Pakistan, September 2018
- <sup>48</sup> <https://bit.ly/2TQdKye>



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