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Strengthening the humanity and dignity of people in crisis through knowledge and practice



AFGHANISTAN: Humanitarianism in Uncertain Times

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1. INTRODUCTION

“As the armed conflict in Afghanistan rages on, life for ordinary Afghans has taken a turn for the worse.”

—Reto Stocker,

ICRC Head of Delegation, October 8, 2012¹

The Afghan crisis, now well into its fourth decade, has many layers. The military and political dimensions of what appears to be a deepening and never-ending crisis grab the headlines. But the structural violence and poor governance that underpins it—grinding poverty, rampant abuse of power, criminalized economy, parlous condition of women and girls, poor access to health and other services—receives much less attention. This report is concerned with the more brutish aspects of the human condition in Afghanistan today. It focuses on the lives and vulnerabilities of those affected by disasters, whether man-made or not, and on the attempts by local and international agencies to mitigate these vulnerabilities within the fraught and volatile Afghan context.

Purpose of the report. This report presents an analysis of the humanitarian situation on the ground and of the challenges and constraints faced by the humanitarian community in a fast-moving environment. Its conclusions point to urgent changes required to improve the response to a severe and deepening humanitarian crisis and to protect humanitarian agencies, to the extent possible, from overt manipulation. It follows up on previous work by the Feinstein International Center (FIC) on Afghanistan that highlighted the perceptions of communities on the work of aid agencies, the attempts to manipulate humanitarian actors in support of political agendas, and the tensions between the various segments of the aid enterprise.²

Why now? In the context of the so-called “transition”—that is, the significant reduction of foreign troops and probable decrease in aid and international engagement in Afghanistan—it is important to take stock of the humanitarian situation. It is also important to review how humanitarian agencies are preparing for a future that is bound to be of great uncertainty and that might well result in an escalation of conflict, lawlessness, displacement, and humanitarian need. Moreover, as yet another phase of the Afghan crisis comes to a close, with the departure of most foreign troops leaving behind a landscape of rising violence and political instability, this is an opportune time to reflect on the wider

meaning of the Afghanistan crisis from a humanitarian perspective, what it tells us about the state of the humanitarian enterprise and the evolving debates on the relationship between humanitarian action and international political/military endeavors.

Structure of the report. Section 2 describes the current humanitarian situation. On the basis of the best available data, it highlights a number of indicators that illustrate the vulnerability of a growing proportion of Afghans. This is followed by a discussion of the protection dimension of humanitarian action and the way related challenges have been addressed (or not) by the aid community (section 3). A commentary on the current state of the humanitarian enterprise in Afghanistan is provided in section 4 and is followed by a discussion of possible scenarios and contingency planning for the future (section 5). Conclusions and further implications are presented in section 6.

Methods. The report is based on interviews held, by two members of the team in Kabul in June 2012, with a wide range of interlocutors, both Afghan and international, in government, UN, NGOs, donor agencies, independent think tanks, and with Afghan intellectuals and researchers. Over 80 interviews were conducted. The key informants interviewed are not identified by name; unless otherwise specified, all the personal communications quoted in the text were held in Kabul in June 2012. The report is complemented by a thorough analysis of recent published and grey literature on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. Some 190 reports were identified and examined and 30 datasets consulted.

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2. A SITUATION OF HUMANITARIAN CONCERN: INDICATORS OF VULNERABILITY

“We cannot get funding on the basis of assumptions. Donors say: ‘Is there a crisis? You need to prove it!’”
—Senior international NGO official, Kabul

By all accounts, significant but uneven progress has been made since 2002 in addressing vulnerability to shocks and to the accumulated legacy of the conflict. However, the spread of armed conflict and a host of other factors, including limited disaster preparedness and efforts to strengthen resilience, have increased vulnerability and added to the humanitarian caseload. Assessing and quantifying debilitating factors is hampered by a number of issues, including the paucity and unreliability of data and the lack of conceptual clarity on “what is humanitarian”—an eminently variable notion and one that has, over the years, been subjected to political manipulation. The notion that there was a “situation of humanitarian concern” in Afghanistan post-2002 ran counter to the dominant narrative of the US-led coalition and the Afghan government it supports. As a result, humanitarian need was often minimized or re-branded as chronic underdevelopment. Moreover, the tools to assess the situation on the ground were until recently neither developed nor deemed necessary.

This section represents an attempt to summarize and analyze the evolution of vulnerability since 2002 on the basis of the best available data. Of course, collecting humanitarian data in conflict-affected settings is always extremely challenging: first, a mix of logistical, linguistic, and security-related obstacles make it difficult to access the affected population; second, there often is a general lack of good baseline data (such as a reliable census); third, in disaster settings, the situation is often extremely volatile, and data that more or less reliably described the situation at one time may become inaccurate a few months later; finally, various groups may have an incentive to overstate or present a partial view of needs and conditions on the ground.³

Such difficulties seem to be particularly extreme in Afghanistan, where access has been increasingly

constrained and where the populations of concern have often been perceived by local authorities and by the humanitarian community as untrustworthy.⁴ For these reasons, data, even where available, may be unreliable, or conflicting, due to differences in data collection methods, location, timing, and so on. Just to give one example, population estimates for the country range from 27 to 35 million. As stated explicitly in the 2012 Consolidated Appeal (CAP): “Given the multitude of constraints, humanitarian and development needs assessments are completed to the best of the ability of aid actors, as and when possible.”⁵ Furthermore, while the data provide an aggregate view of the humanitarian situation, “there are often dramatic differences in indicators between urban and rural areas, by household socio-economic status, and by region.”⁶

Since 2002, as our previous reports have shown, humanitarian data collection and analysis have not been a priority. When the UN integrated mission was established in 2002, the existing United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) information management capacity was disbanded. In recent years, after the re-establishment of an OCHA office in 2008, mechanisms for data collection and aggregation have improved somewhat;⁷ however, the analysis deficit remains and is compounded by the fact that humanitarian access to the country has been progressively shrinking, and with it, the capacity to gather reliable data. For all these reasons, the data presented in the following pages have to be taken as the best possible approximation of the situation on the ground.

Despite the constraints outlined above, our view is that the existing data are sufficient to affirm that there is a continuing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. The underlying structural and chronic vulnerabilities are often exacerbated by man-made and other disasters associated with natural hazard events, thus leading to phases of acute vulnerability that require a specific humanitarian response.

Indeed, while the international aid commu-

nity has achieved important results over the past decade, in some sectors the situation has further deteriorated in the last five years, due to a series of factors, many of which fall outside the control of the aid community, including a worsening of the conflict and adverse weather conditions. According to OCHA,⁸

Humanitarian conditions in Afghanistan have steadily deteriorated in recent years due to the protracted conflict and recurrent natural disasters—particularly drought, flash floods, and other extreme weather. An intensified conflict in 2011 caused further civilian casualties and displacement, delayed humanitarian action and disrupted essential services.... Such endemic environmental hazards render the majority of Afghanistan’s population chronically or acutely vulnerable.... Key humanitarian indicators have steadily deteriorated in Afghanistan in recent years as a result of protracted conflict, recurrent environmental hazards and a combination of under-development and development failure.⁹

The following sections offer an overview of various indicators that break down vulnerability by sector.

Health

“It has become increasingly difficult for ordinary Afghans to obtain health care.”

—Reto Stocker, ICRC
Head of Delegation, October 8, 2012¹⁰

The nutritional status of a population, often measured through the Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rate and the Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) rate, and the health status, measured by the Crude Mortality Rate (CMR), is a good indicator to assess the severity of a humanitarian crisis. In Afghanistan, the CMR,¹¹ an estimate of the rate at which members of a population have died over a defined period of time,¹² has been declining slightly from the beginning of the war to 2010 (from 19 deaths per 1000 people in 2002 to 16 per 1000 people in 2010), and remains below the threshold generally considered to indicate an emergency.

The situation, however, is much more dire if one looks at the **GAM**. While many thresholds exist

that can be used to categorize emergency situations,¹³ a GAM value of more than 10% generally identifies an emergency, and a value over 15% is perceived as critical. In Afghanistan, according to the last two country-wide available surveys—a Rapid Nutrition Assessment by the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) covering 22 provinces in 2008 and a survey by the Census Bureau and UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in 2011—the GAM rate has worsened from 16.7%¹⁴ to 18%, reaching a staggering 31% in the most affected regions.¹⁵ While this high figure may be the result of inconsistencies in the data, it is safe to assume that up to one in three Afghan children are malnourished. Furthermore, as shown in Figure 1, there is a huge regional variability in GAM rates, with the more heavily conflict-affected south being far worse off than the northeast. In contrast, the lowest incidence of malnutrition—around 13%—was found in the center of the country, where the Taliban have little influence, thus confirming that the conflict has a significant impact on the level of malnutrition. The **SAM** is equally worrisome, having increased from affecting 4.7% of children in 2008 to 17.6% in 2010/11 compared with an international emergency threshold of 2%.¹⁶ Moreover, Afghanistan has the highest prevalence of stunting in the world among children under five years old.¹⁷

The **under-five mortality rate (U5MR)**, which describes the probability of dying between birth and five years of age per 1,000 live births, seems to have improved over the past four years, moving from 191 deaths per 1,000 births in 2008¹⁹ to 149 per 1,000 in 2011.²⁰ Despite this improvement, Afghanistan still remains the worst off country in terms of under-five mortality in the whole of Asia, with levels worse than those not only of developing countries as a group (63 deaths per 1,000 births) but also of the aggregate average for Sub-Saharan Africa countries (121 deaths), and with levels comparable to other prolonged crisis countries, such as Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.²¹

The situation is even more appalling when data on the condition of women is taken into account: Afghanistan has the second highest maternal mortality rate in the world²² (an estimate of between 327 and 460 for each 100,000 live births,²³ which represents nevertheless a significant improvement from 710 deaths every 100,000 births in 2005).

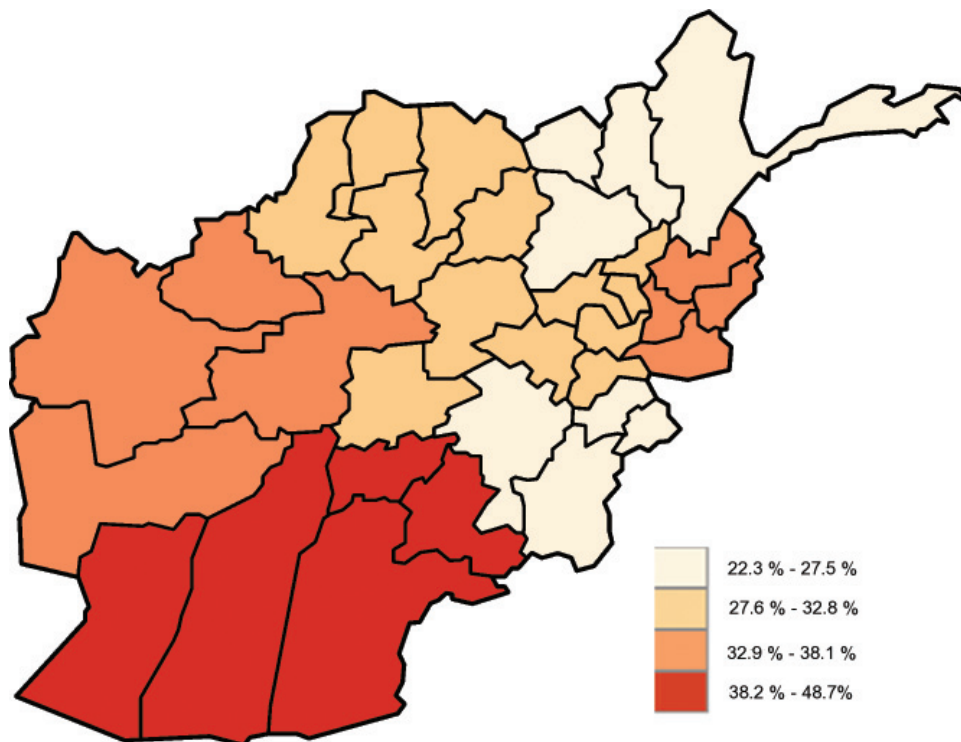


Figure 1: Prevalence of Underweight Children in 2010/11, by region¹⁸

These data unfortunately mask the severity of the situation: first, because the areas that may be most severely affected were excluded from the data collection: according to the Afghanistan Mortality Survey 2010, “about one-third of the rural population in the south zone was not covered in the survey due to the security situation, thus generating a substantial urban bias.”²⁴ Furthermore, these data are not disaggregated by province, but only by region, thus masking the severity of the situation in certain provinces. Even so, in both the north and the south, recorded maternal mortality was estimated around 356 deaths per 100,000 live births, in contrast with the center, with about 285 deaths per 100,000 live births.²⁵

In 2001/2002, UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) launched massive yearly immunization campaigns. Yet, according to a 2011 Multi-Indicator Survey, only 30% of children below two years of age are fully vaccinated, while one in four children (24%) was not vaccinated at all against any diseases. Furthermore, there is a big disparity between urban (37%) and rural (29%) areas, as well as by region: “In the North-Eastern region, 42% of children are immunized against communi-

cable diseases, while in the Southern region, fewer than 2% of children are fully vaccinated.”²⁶

The causes behind the high numbers of unvaccinated children are many: UNICEF stresses that to reach the targeted population, persuasion, participation, and peace are all-important: “Since 2008 ... the number of armed attacks in Afghanistan has increased, creating an environment of fear and limiting access for vaccination teams in conflict-affected areas. Against this backdrop, the number of polio cases has climbed back up.”²⁷ Similarly, according to the 2012 Mid-Year Review of the Consolidated Appeal, a sharp increase in the number of measles outbreaks has been observed in the first quarter, with some areas reaching a staggering fatality rate of 14%—three times the international emergency threshold.²⁸

Access to health is similarly worrying: despite some improvements and substantial investment, a comprehensive health care infrastructure has yet to be achieved, and many communities are still living without access to primary health care. According to the World Health Organization and the Ministry of Health, approximately 15% of the

population has no access to the most basic health services, while nearly 85% of the population has access (within a 2-hour walk) to basic health care;²⁹ however, a vast majority of these health posts are without medical personnel. Furthermore, according to the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR),

The Ministry of Public Health access figures ... only represent ... the percentage of the population that live in districts in which primary care services are provided by NGOs under contracts with the Ministry of Public Health or through grants to the NGOs. This is misleading and communicates a false sense of achievement in terms of access to healthcare available to Afghans across the country. Currently, 60% of the rural population lives more than an hour's travel time from any health facility and 85% live within one hour's distance by any means of transportation, including by car.³⁰

The quality of services is also limited: a 2011 study conducted by ACBAR reported increasing frustration among Afghans attempting to access facilities, “which are frequently closed, being served by staff that lack the required professional skills and knowledge or having to use facilities with sub-standard buildings and lack of equipment.”³¹ The problem is also compounded by a major shortage of a health care professionals in Afghanistan. One estimate—the Health Management Information System managed by WHO—claims that there are only 1,563 physicians for a population of approximately 27 million people,³² and an average of 55 health personnel (including medical doctors, nurses, and midwives) for every 10,000 inhabitants. These numbers may well be on the low side, but the huge regional differences shown in Figure 2 are probably an accurate indicator of the disparities in availability of health services.

The above figures by themselves paint a grim picture of the state of health in Afghanistan. But the impact of the conflict makes things much worse. Attacks against health facilities, the lack of respect by belligerents of the neutrality of such facilities, and the reluctance of civilians in some areas to be seen in government or NGO clinics add to the problem. Not only are health services still sparse and insufficiently equipped and staffed, security concerns further inhibit access to available health facilities. The International Committee of the

Red Cross (ICRC) has repeatedly denounced the difficulties faced by civilians in accessing health services: “Obtaining health care remains a challenge for people in the areas hardest hit by conflict because of the fighting and the general lack of security, ... and some staff have fled or are simply too afraid to go to work.”³³ “The security situation is depriving a large part of the Afghan population of access to health-care facilities, some of which have been directly attacked.”³⁴

In 2011, a UN report similarly stated that “the deteriorating security situation and continued attacks on health workers and facilities have forced many health facilities to close or scale down services, resulting in no or limited access for hundreds of thousands of Afghans to basic health care.”³⁵ A single attack can have severe consequences: for instance, a Taliban attack on January 5, 2009, in Arghandab District, Kandahar Province, destroyed a basic health center, immediately depriving the 20,000 families in the district of any health care.³⁶ According to the same report, “attacks on both health facilities and personnel increased significantly from 2008 to 2009” and decreased in 2010. Of such incidents, most were attributed to armed opposition groups, including the Taliban.

In addition to the localized conflicts and the attacks by the armed opposition, ACBAR mentions “raids, intimidations and operations by the Afghan National Security Forces and the International Military Forces (IMF),”³⁷ which negatively impact on the ability of the population to access services and service providers to deliver services. There have also been reports of health facilities used as staging posts for military operations and of armed elements entering health facilities or searching them.³⁸ This not only violates International Humanitarian Law,³⁹ but also undermines the confidence of civilians in need of medical assistance and increases direct risks to these facilities.

Lastly, thinking about the future, it is also worth noting that health provision is closely linked to the presence of international aid actors and their funding streams, both of which will likely decrease as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) reduces its presence. The health system is highly dependent on external support, as the government expenditure on health is only 1.6% of total government expenditure.⁴⁰

In 2006, according to a study conducted by the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), 82% of the population of Afghanistan was living in districts where primary care services were provided by NGOs under contract with the Ministry of Public Health of Afghanistan or through donor grants.⁴¹ As with education (see below), a reduction of support for a system that relies so heavily on donor funds could have devastating consequences for the general population. Already, reports are emerging in the media of facilities having to close because funds have been withdrawn and/or the government lacks the resources to run them.⁴²

Food Security

“You have malnutrition rates which are among the highest in Asia and equivalent to rates deemed totally unacceptable in other parts of the world.”

—Michael Keating, UN Humanitarian Coordinator⁴³

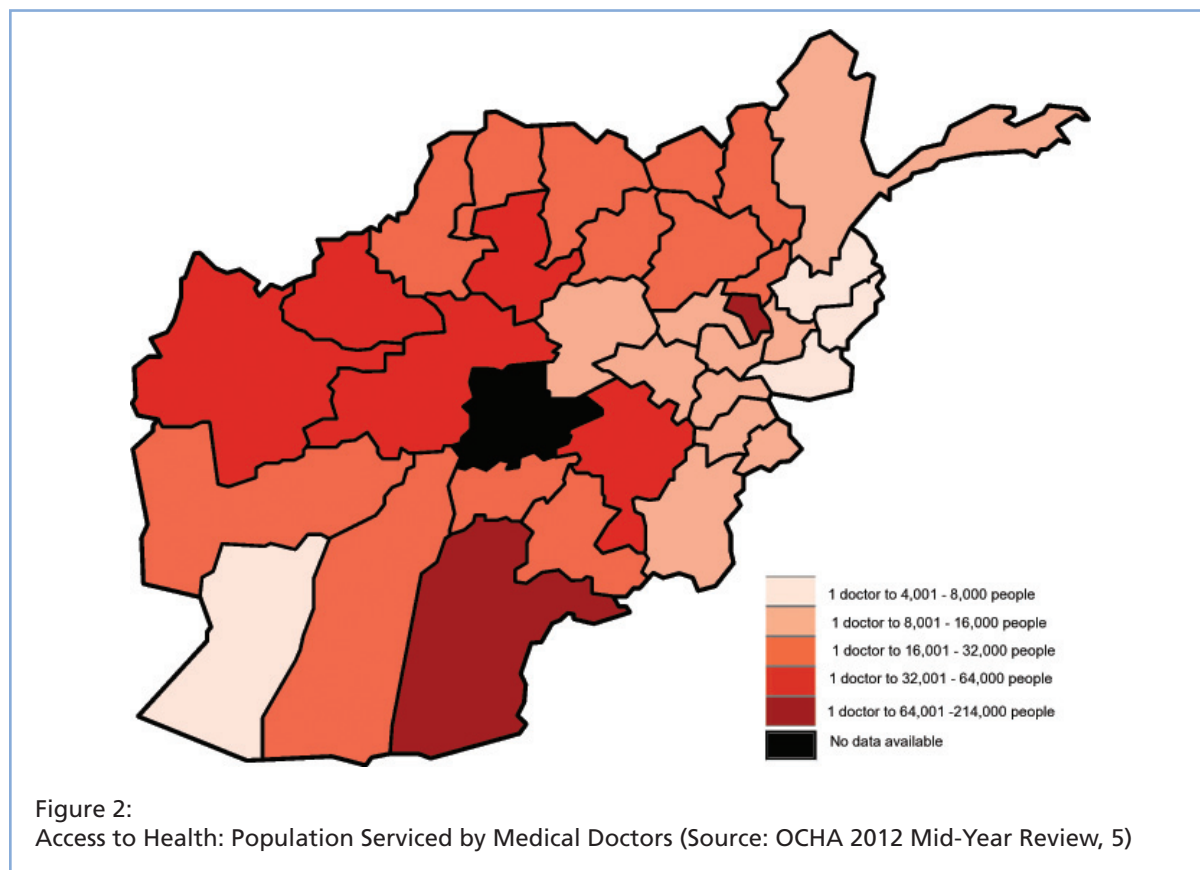
According to the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) completed in 2007/08, 68% of the Afghan population was affected by some form of food insecurity, with 31%

food-insecure and 37% borderline food-insecure.⁴⁴ The data on nutrition provided above gives a sense of how severe and widespread malnutrition and food insecurity are. This sub-section expands further on the causes of such food insecurity.

According to the World Bank, over 75% of the Afghan people live in rural areas where agriculture is the primary activity; yet, only 12% of the country’s 65 million hectares of land is arable; of this arable land, furthermore, only 40% is irrigated, and only 0.2% yields permanent crops.⁴⁵

The conflict and recurring droughts have hampered the main drivers of agricultural (and industrial) production growth—assets, institutions, technology, roads, irrigation, and education; as a result, agricultural production has been growing at a rate of only 0.2% per year during the last thirty years, compared to 2.2% per year in the pre-conflict period (1961–78), whereby a growth rate of at least 5% per year is deemed necessary to reduce poverty and, thus, malnutrition.⁴⁶

Moreover, the fact that Afghanistan is not self-reliant in terms of food production exposes the



country to international instability. In 2008, due to a combination of international (increasing global food prices) and regional factors (export bans in key trading partners such as Pakistan), and severe drought, domestic wheat grain and flour prices—good proxy indicators for food insecurity—approximately doubled.⁴⁷

Furthermore, as discussed in a recent study,⁴⁸ even short-term price shocks can have a measurable impact on household food security across Afghanistan; they can easily lead to short bouts of poor nutrition, which, in turn, may exacerbate already high levels of malnutrition. Such bouts of poor nutrition may have long-term repercussions, particularly for vulnerable populations. For instance, in 2011, after a severe drought, the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster conducted an Emergency Food Security Assessment (EFSA), identifying 2.86 million people as severely affected by the drought and food insecure. In mid-2011, OCHA estimated 4.1 million people to be food-insecure⁴⁹ and in need of relief support, with a further one million in need of emergency agricultural assistance.

Education

“My class is very close to the main road - in a tent. Sometimes even stray dogs get in” and passing cars “blow dust into our tent, which gets into our clothes, hair and even notebooks.”

—Mir Khan, 10,
primary school pupil, Argu, Badakhshan.⁵⁰

Strictly speaking, the absence of education in a crisis is not a life-threatening issue. Nevertheless, it has been included for three reasons. First, given the protracted nature of the conflict, it is certainly relevant to the population in the long term, as it is hard to imagine suspending education for decades given its significance for livelihoods, health and nutritional status, gender equity, and the overall stability of the social fabric. Second, education has been highly politicized: on the one hand, the international community has treated it as emblematic of the success of its post-9/11 recovery strategy; on the other, the Taliban have, at least initially, opposed it for symmetrical but opposite reasons, because it represented the “corrupt” government supported by the “invas-

ers.” Third, education serves as a proxy indicator of stability. Thus, it is an interesting lens to look at the evolution of the situation on the ground and the tensions and opportunities that accompany it.

Education has been improving steadily over the years. Nevertheless, in 2010/2011, according to the Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, only 55% of children of primary school age were attending school, with high disparities between urban and rural areas; and about 32% of secondary school aged children were attending school. There were significant differences in the attendance of girls and boys, both in primary school (attended by 7 girls for every 10 boys) and, even more so, in secondary school (5 girls for every 10 boys).⁵¹ Such inequalities appeared particularly pronounced for girls in the southern region, i.e., in the most conflict-affected areas. According to the same source, the education level of women consistently emerges as a reliable predictor of almost all indicators of the condition of women and children. While there has been massive improvement of enrolment levels since 2002, the quality of the education provided suffers wide variations. Moreover, the enrolment of girls has reached unprecedented levels, but primary school completion rate for boys is 32%, versus 13% for girls. Merely 30% of girls reach grade 5, compared to 56% for boys. In more conservative and conflict-affected areas (which often are the same) the completion rate for girls is even lower.⁵²

In addition to logistical constraints and shortage of human resources, education is also highly vulnerable to insecurity related to the conflict.

Attacks by anti-government elements: As education facilities represent the presence of the state, school burnings and forced closings have been a recurrent feature of the last decade (which echoes the attacks against schools and teachers by the *mujahideen* during the communist period).

Attacks include grenades/bombings, night letters or verbal threats to teachers, and killings of students and education personnel, although the most frequent type of attack is arson, followed by explosions in or near school buildings. Direct attacks against students or education personnel are also common. Government schools are by far the most targeted compared to NGO and private schools;

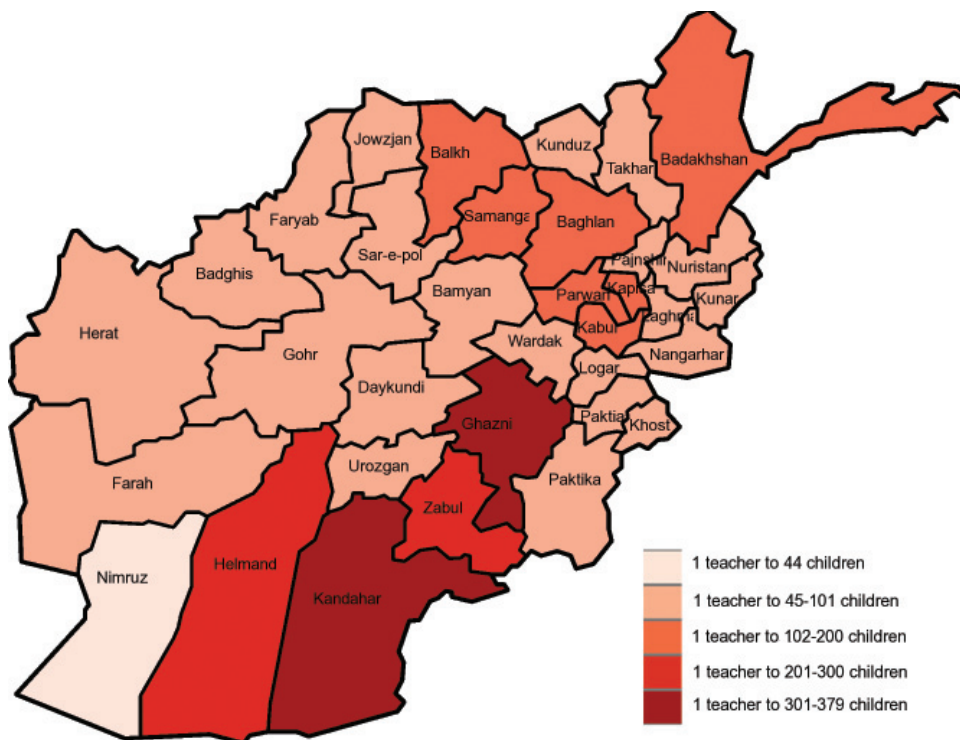


Figure 3: Ratio of Primary School Teacher to Student (Source: OCHA). The national average for female teachers is 1 per 344 school aged girls.

the reasons for this are unclear.⁵³ The conclusion that NGO-based schools are less of a target is, however, challenged in another report, which, on the basis of several interviews with Taliban commanders and other key informants, notes how “in some instances schools and teachers [supported] by international nongovernmental organizations ... may be attacked as symbols of ... the work of foreigners.”⁵⁴

A CARE report for the World Bank and the Ministry of Education (MoE) published in 2009 highlighted this “alarming” trend. The number of incidents against schools stayed stable at 241 and 242 respectively in 2006 and 2007, but then it began escalating rapidly: it almost tripled in 2008, reaching 670 attacks, and kept growing.⁵⁵

While the trend is mixed, there seems to be a slight de-escalation in the attacks against schools in the past couple of years. At the beginning of 2009, according to the CARE/World Bank report, 670 schools were closed across the country, amounting in the southern provinces to a staggering number,

estimated to be between 65 and 81% of all schools. This contrasts with Amnesty International data for 2012 indicating that 450 schools were closed, mainly in the southern and eastern provinces.⁵⁶

Another effect of attacks is that parents keep their children home from school. According to the 2009 CARE report, “girls’ attendance suffers slightly more than boys’ after a security incident at their school. 36% of the respondents indicated that fewer girls have frequented the school after the threat; while 27% said that it had led to a reduction boys’ attendance.” After an attack, female teachers are less likely to return to the school than male teachers.

Nonetheless, there have been many instances in which schools have remained open, thanks to negotiations with the armed opposition. These negotiations represent an interesting example of how aid organizations, communities, and sometimes the government have reached a compromise in order to ensure service provision. According to one study, over the years, the position of the

Taliban, on one side, and of the government and the aid actors, on the other side, have progressively converged. After 2001, the Taliban adopted violence against schools as one of the main manifestations of their campaign against the new regime, reaching a peak of attacks against schools in 2006; however, as of 2007, the Taliban began to backtrack and develop contacts with the MoE at the central level, demanding the adoption of a “Taliban-approved” curriculum,⁵⁷ the return to the old textbooks, and the hiring of teachers for religious subjects in exchange for their agreement for reopening of schools.

While there may not have been a formal agreement at the central level between the Taliban and the government, numerous local agreements or informal understandings were achieved, especially as of 2010. Such negotiations with the Taliban often involved NGOs as well; if not directly, at least through the mediation of local communities.

In a statement issued on March 7, 2012, the Taliban declared that the promotion of education inside the country was one of their main objectives, that they considered education to be “a need of the new generation,” and condemned attacks against education.⁵⁸ Possibly in relation to this, the MoE recently endorsed a new history curriculum that deletes nearly four decades of the country’s war-torn past, avoiding any mention of the coups of the 1970s, the 1979 Soviet invasion, factional *mujahideen* fighting in the 1990s, the US and NATO presence, and leaving little mention of the Taliban themselves.⁵⁹

Anti-government elements are not the only threat to education: other parties to the conflict are also involved. Pro-government elements have occupied schools, putting children and education personnel at risk, denying children the right to education, and often causing, directly or indirectly, damage to school buildings. Since January 2012 alone, according to the UN-led Country Task Force on Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC), “parties to the conflict have occupied schools in 10 separate incidents.”⁶⁰ The majority of these occupations were by pro-government forces, and combatants mostly used schools as bases of operations, sometimes temporarily. In some instances, children continued studying in the presence of combatants, while in other cases, children did not

go to school when the school was occupied.

Some of these occupations have been going on for years: for instance, in Logar Province, a high school for 1,500 students has been occupied since 2005 by the Afghan National Police and subsequently by the international military, requiring students and teachers to be body searched on a daily basis when entering the school.⁶¹ This situation led approximately 450 students to leave this school.

Occupations by pro-government forces not only directly disrupt access to education; they also turn the schools into targets. For instance, during the August 2009 presidential elections, almost 50% of the polling stations were located in schools; in the same month, a fivefold increase in reported incidents against schools was registered compared to prior and subsequent months.⁶²

Population Movements

“We made a big mistake, the biggest mistake UNHCR ever made... We thought if we gave humanitarian assistance then macro development would kick in.”

—Peter Nicolaus,
UNHCR Representative Afghanistan⁶³

“The (repatriation) strategy is all about investing in village-level development activities in Afghanistan, so when they get back they can stay integrated and become part of the population that builds the future of Afghanistan.”

—Neil Wright,
UNHCR Representative, Pakistan⁶⁴

Population movements and displacement, both internal and international, represent another key indicator of the humanitarian situation. Statistical claims on displacement and refugees are, undeniably, highly politicized and, thus, questionable to some extent.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the overall trends since 2006—after the massive assisted return and repatriation between 2002 and 2005—show a diminishing level of voluntary repatriation over time, accompanied by growing internal displacement. The return trend has dwindled in the past four years, which aligns with the increasing trend in internal displacement observed since 2008 and

is described further below. Moreover, Pakistan and Iran, the larger host countries for Afghan refugees, are increasingly pushing for the repatriation of said refugees, as well as other Afghans who do not have refugee identification.

Refugees and Economic Migrants: According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “more than 5.7 million refugees—4.6 million of them with UNHCR assistance—have returned to Afghanistan since 2002, increasing the population of the country⁶⁶ by some 25%.”⁶⁷ Yet, 3.1 million registered Afghan refugees still reside legally in Pakistan and Iran.

At a meeting held in Dubai in January 2012, and then again at a meeting held in Geneva in May 2012, representatives of Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and UNHCR agreed to a “Solutions Strategy” aimed at creating conditions conducive to voluntary repatriation through community investments and promotion of employment opportunities. The Solutions Strategy has not extended, explicitly, the terms of the March 2009 Tripartite Agreement⁶⁸ that fixed the end of the legal stay of Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan at the end of 2012.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, it was agreed during a Tripartite meeting held in Istanbul in September 2012 that

a proposal to extend the refugee ID cards be considered by the government of Pakistan. Furthermore, according to the ACAPS report, “UNHCR stated that Afghans in Pakistan will maintain their refugee status regardless of the Government of Pakistan’s decision.”⁷⁰

At the end of July 2012, representatives of the government publicly declared that Pakistan will not renew the ID cards of the 1.8 million registered Afghan refugees.

On the 17th of July, Habibullah Khan, secretary in the Ministry of State and Frontier Regions, was quoted by the media as saying:

*The international community desires us to review this policy but we are clear on this point. The refugees have become a threat to law and order, security, demography, economy and local culture. Enough is enough. After 31 December 2012, there is no plan to extend the validity of the POR [proof of registration] cards of Afghan refugees. Those currently registered will lose the status of refugees. They will be treated under the law of the land. The provincial governments have already been asked to treat the existing unregistered refugees as illegal immigrants.*⁷¹



Photo: James Longley. Used with permission

A similar trend can be seen in Iran, where—following the recent European Union embargo on Iranian oil and the U.S. ban on business with Iran’s central bank that resulted in an overall decline in the economy—authorities have been forcing Afghan migrant workers to leave the country, regardless of their legal status.⁷²

The international community has invested heavily in distinguishing refugees from “economic migrants,” despite the fact that the motivation of both sets of Afghans to depart their country are highly correlated; insecurity severely affects livelihoods, and individuals and their households weigh multiple factors when taking the decision to leave home. There is evidence showing how Afghanistan, while experiencing massive refugee return, is also experiencing a significant exodus. The NRVA conducted in 2007/08 pointed to a relatively high rate of male out-migration in the year before the survey. While 13% of the households interviewed by the NRVA survey housed an in-migrant (one or more household members who were living elsewhere sometime during the five years preceding the survey), a remarkable 7% saw a household member leave during the previous year. As noted by Andrew Pinney,

*The estimated total immigration in the year preceding the NRVA 2007–08 survey was much lower than emigration, and almost evenly split between males and females. Emigration, on the other hand, was significantly higher and predominantly male, with an estimated 1.73 million males and 113,000 females leaving Afghanistan in the year before the households were enumerated for the 2007–08 NRVA [in over half of the cases to reach Iran]. This underscores that the Afghan population was, for the reference period of this analysis, still very mobile with significant numbers of Afghans moving in or out of Afghanistan influenced by various factors including drought, insecurity and repatriation efforts by Iran and Pakistan.*⁷³

Furthermore, in response to the “return” operations from Pakistan and Iran on one side, and to the increased instability in Afghanistan on the other, an increasing number of Afghans, desperate for work and security, are paying to get back into Iran and Pakistan, where they are often no longer recognized as refugees, but rather as (illegal)

economic migrants. According to Heather Barr, Human Rights Watch’s Afghanistan representative, “there are groups of up to 1,000 people being smuggled back into Iran: this is extraordinary money going to smugglers, which is not good for security on the already volatile border.”⁷⁴

In addition, the 2011 industrialized country asylum data notes a 30% increase in asylum applications from Afghans from 2010 to 2011, mostly towards Germany and Turkey.⁷⁵ This trend confirms Afghans’ willingness to leave the country (or avoid returning to it), and shows how significantly Pakistan and Iran have lost their appeal as a destination for Afghan migration, as a political momentum is building in both countries for the return of remaining refugee populations. This trend of increasing asylum claims towards industrialized countries is of particular concern because it is largely composed of unaccompanied Afghan minors.

Voluntary Repatriation, Landlessness, and Urban Displacement: UNHCR has, for decades, facilitated voluntary repatriation that, in 2002, was ramped up significantly as the prospect of peace enabled return. Within the first year, around two million refugees had returned from Pakistan and 222,000 from Iran and other neighboring countries; 80% of these returnees came from urban areas rather than camps.⁷⁶ In 2003, there were around 473,000 returnees, and then numbers stabilized at around 150,000 per year for the following four years.⁷⁷

In 2008, more than 277,000 Afghan refugees repatriated, largely from Pakistan—due to the closure of two of the largest camps by the Pakistani government—and, to a lesser extent, Iran. That same year UNHCR stated: “The era of mass voluntary return of Afghan refugees is over.”⁷⁸ The number of returnees, indeed, progressively decreased in the following years: in 2009, the returnees were 57,000 (of which 51,000 from Pakistan); in 2010, they were 118,060 (109,400 of whom from Pakistan);⁷⁹ in 2011, UNHCR counted 71,200 Afghan returning refugees.⁸⁰

Thus, while a certain variability exists from year to year, a decreasing trend seems to be in place, signaling, once again, that Afghanistan is not perceived as safe or appealing to the millions of Afghans refugees still living in camps and urban

areas in the neighboring countries. UNHCR itself recognizes that returnees generally “remain in urgent need of continuing humanitarian assistance,” and that “sustainable reintegration is becoming harder to achieve due to a combination of insecurity, limited livelihood opportunities, and erosion in asylum conditions in the neighboring countries.”⁸¹ UNHCR has also identified that returnees as well as other community members perceive themselves to be more vulnerable than other community members, according to the 2011 UNHCR Snapshot Survey. Returnees fare worse on a number of measures, in particular, related to access to basic services, livelihoods, and land tenure/shelter.

Apart from voluntary repatriation, there are also massive deportations of Afghans deemed to be illegal migrants who are mostly single males. In Iran, for instance, while some progress towards a managed labor/migration policy by the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been made (with 800,000 work visas received by Afghans in the last 12 months), Iran continues to extend no-go areas for refugees and to deport undocumented economic migrants back to Afghanistan: 200,000 such migrants were forcibly deported in 2009,⁸² and more than 211,000 were deported in 2011, on the grounds that they were economic migrants instead of refugees.⁸³ According to UNHCR deportation data,⁸⁴ deportations from Iran are slightly less in 2012 compared to the last five years. Nonetheless, with 174,000 recorded deportations as of September 2012, the number is still significant.

The five and a half million Afghan refugees who have returned since 2002 face severe challenges that receive limited attention from the international community. A first issue is that of landlessness: 90% of recent returnees and those left in Pakistan have no claim to land or property.⁸⁵ Even for those returnees who left a plot of land when they first fled the country, land occupation and controversies concerning land tenure represent a major issue. AREU estimates that at least 50% of Afghanistan’s land tenure is not formalized.⁸⁶

Partly linked to landlessness and land-ownership issues, rapid and unsustainable urbanization, including growing numbers of displaced in urban centers, is fast becoming one of the most critical

trends that illustrate demographic change while contributing to the larger problem of vulnerability in Afghanistan.

The urbanization rate in Afghanistan is projected to be around 4.7% between 2010 and 2015. Since the fall of the Taliban regime, Kabul’s population growth in particular has been staggering: while in 2001 the population was between 500,000 and 1 million, in 2010 it was already (according to conservative estimates) around 4.5 million.⁸⁷ Urbanization is significantly driven by secondary displacement of returning refugees: according to UNHCR, between 20 and 30% of returned refugees were forced into secondary internal displacement in the five years leading up to 2010.⁸⁸

Another reason for concern emerging from the high number of returnees is the fact that, if repatriations/deportations continue, Afghanistan will also lose an important source of revenue, with cascading effects on the country’s economy and on individual households. According to research by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the yearly amount of remittances sent to Afghanistan is approximately US\$3.3 billion,⁸⁹ equivalent to over 16% of Afghanistan’s GDP. The fall in the value of the Iranian rial is having a similar effect.

Internal Displacement: The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country has been rising significantly over the last four years: the 2008 CAP refers to some 232,000 IDPs, a number that remained roughly the same in 2009. However, IDP numbers had grown to 435,436 in 2011, and further, to 445,856 at the end of September 2012;⁹⁰ according to UNHCR figures cited in UNAMA’s 2012 Mid-Year Review, “conflict-induced displacement in 2012 is 14% higher than in the same period last year.”⁹¹

According to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN-OHCHR) annual report on the protection of civilians, “the most commonly cited reasons for conflict induced displacement was armed conflict, including cross border shelling, disputes over grazing lands and military operations.”⁹² In theory, current monitoring of internal displacement includes those living in the urban

and peri-urban areas that many analysts have pointed out to be a primary destination for IDPs and refugees returning to Afghanistan.⁹³

However, UNHCR clearly states in its reports on IDPs that in urban areas IDPs are indistinguishable from the masses of urban poor, and “the current data excludes those displaced in urban, semi-urban areas as well as those displaced in non-accessible insecure locations and does not track individual or household movements,”⁹⁴ and that “the absence of timely information on IDPs displaced within conflict zones has a critical impact on any possible humanitarian redress of material assistance and other protection needs.”

For these reasons, many believe that UNHCR official figures under-represent the magnitude of forced displacement: due to logistical and security constraints, IDP profiling and monitoring efforts in Afghanistan fall far short of where they should be—the reality is that IDP data are very limited and therefore the understanding of protection and humanitarian assistance needs is weak.

Many IDPs have ended up in secondary displacement: according to a 2011 report by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC); “50 per cent of IDPs who have fled within their province and an equal number who have fled

further afield have tended to seek protection and livelihoods in urban areas, where they have often ended up in a state of protracted displacement.”⁹⁵

The majority of these urban displaced live in miserable conditions—although it is well possible, according to the available evidence, that such conditions are still better than those of the rural displaced—including the absence of proper sanitation. According to a study conducted by Action Contre la Faim (ACF) in Kabul Informal Settlements (KIS) in 2010, the main humanitarian needs of the settlers were: (a) the lack of water and sanitation, and more generally the deplorable hygiene situation, with rubbish seen everywhere; (b) an elevated prevalence of disease amongst the population due to limited access to health facilities (thanks in part to limited or nonexistent health structures close to the KIS) and the incapacity to afford medicines or consultation fees; (c) the lack of food; and, overall, (d) the unemployment of the vast majority of the men living in the settlements.⁹⁶ Despite various studies on IDPs in urban areas in 2010 and 2011⁹⁷ and the establishment of a KIS Task Force in 2011, the situation in the KIS was not high on the priority list of aid agencies until early 2012, when reports of dozens of children freezing to death made headlines in the international media.

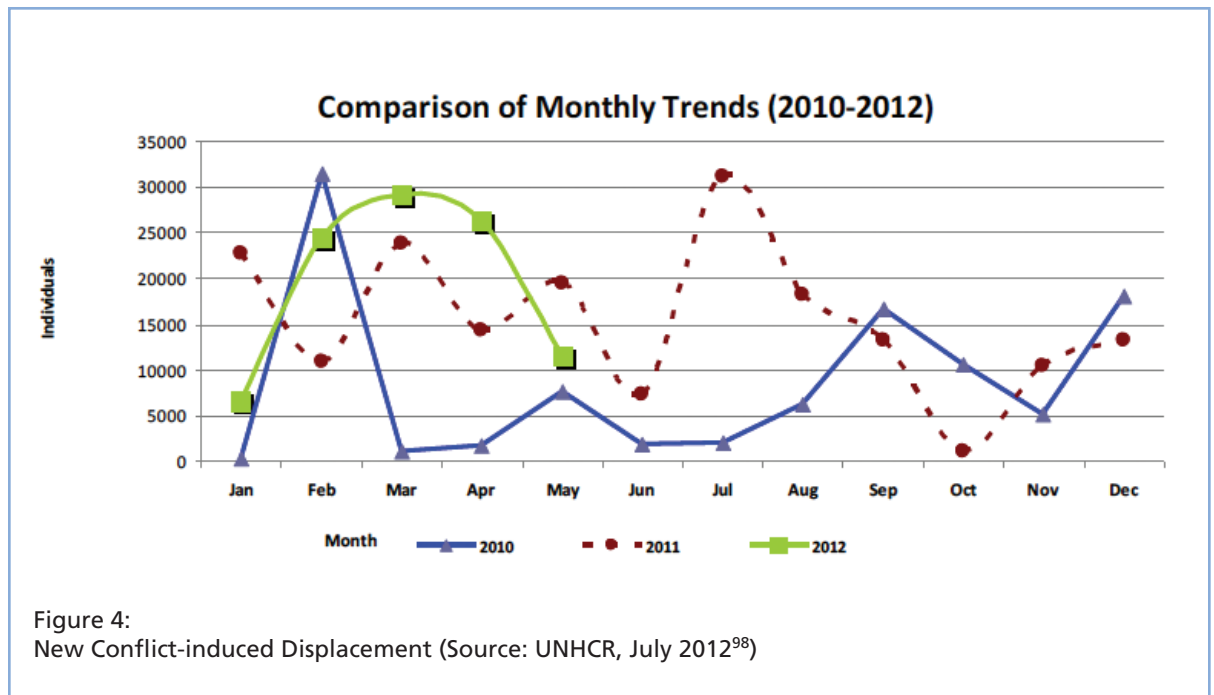


Figure 4: New Conflict-induced Displacement (Source: UNHCR, July 2012⁹⁸)

Impact of “Natural” Disasters on Vulnerability

The main causes of Afghanistan’s vulnerability discussed so far are related to the over 30 years of conflict, which have weakened institutions, hampered economic growth, and reduced the resilience of communities. The risks associated with routine natural hazard events are an additional and aggravating factor.

Afghanistan is prone to natural hazard-associated disasters: it sits on major fault lines that trigger frequent earthquakes. Afghanistan is also regularly affected by floods, droughts, and severe winter weather. These hazards are compounded by the fact that, due to the protracted conflict, the country has few means and mechanisms in place to mitigate risks or to prepare for and respond to emergencies.

The country’s vulnerability to desertification is one of the highest in the world. Flooding and mudslides are frequent, particularly when snow starts melting or glacial lakes suddenly burst, causing destructive flash floods. Prolonged drought, dust storms, and extreme winter conditions can also wreak extensive damage. According to a report by the European Commission, only 12% of the land area is suitable for cultivation in Afghanistan, and this is largely due to the damages inflicted by the conflict (including damages to irrigation systems and the presence of landmines and unexploded ordnance).⁹⁹

These problems, coupled with demographic pressures, have reduced the arable land per capita from 0.55 ha per capita in 1980 to 0.25 ha in 2007. Such pressures, in turn, combined with issues in land tenure, have pushed many Afghans to live in disaster-prone locations.

There is an average of some eight or more significant disasters per year. The displacement caused by “natural” disasters is also significant: according to the Emergency Events Database, an average of 590,000 people are affected by such disasters every year.¹⁰⁰

Investment in disaster mitigation and risk reduction has been hampered by the continuation of the conflict and poor governance and weak or

corrupt institutions. The international community has been paying increasing attention to the ways in which disasters associated with natural hazard events are precipitating acute vulnerability: this is clearly reflected in the Consolidated Appeals, which have been making increasing reference to such disasters in recent times. However, the renewed attention to “natural” disasters is seen by some relief personnel as a means to deflect attention from “man-made” disasters. From this perspective, donors and some parts of the UN consider that vulnerability to natural disasters is more palatable, as it fits with the narrative that conflict is not a major source of humanitarian need and that the remaining humanitarian issues can be dealt with through technical fixes and long-term development interventions. ■

3. THE PROTECTION CHALLENGE

“Yes, we all know that protection is important, but knowing what to do about it is something different.”

—Aid worker, Kabul, June 2012

“Compared with previous decades, the plight of civilians is being made known more forcefully by the media and civil society” and the ICRC “has been able to raise its concerns more directly and candidly with the various parties to the conflict” who “have shown a greater willingness to listen to us and to follow certain recommendations we have made concerning the conduct of hostilities.”

—Reto Stocker, ICRC Head of Delegation, Kabul, October 8, 2012¹⁰¹

In the previous section we looked at a number of indicators that provide a quantitative picture of the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. This included a review of the calamitous effects of weather and other disaster-related events in a country in conflict, where more than a third of the population struggles with chronic vulnerability and profound levels of poverty. We now turn to the protection dimension of humanitarian action. “Protection deficits” are not, always, easy to quantify but measures to enhance the safety and dignity of at-risk groups are critical to effective humanitarian action.

Assistance has always been at the forefront of the decades of humanitarian action in Afghanistan and has mainly focused on the material needs of Afghans in distress. With a few exceptions, such as the work of ICRC and UNHCR, the protection needs of Afghans were mostly ignored at the strategic, as well as the operational, level. This was the case until relatively recently, when “protection” became a routine element of overall analysis and program design. Nonetheless, there continues to be significant confusion as to what constitutes “protection” in the context of humanitarian action, notwithstanding an agreed definition and considerable investment in training in Afghanistan and elsewhere.¹⁰² The formal definition is widely seen as conceptually sound but lacks precision, thereby complicating its translation into initiatives and programs that are protective in the sense of

reducing or eliminating threats to the safety and dignity of at-risk groups.

Threats that undermine the safety of Afghans include the direct impact of the war on civilians, such as the indiscriminate use of improvised explosive devices, air strikes, night raids, and involuntary displacement. Threats can also be sourced to the indirect and accumulated impact of warfare, including generalized insecurity, lawlessness, and restricted or no access to humanitarian programs and other essential services. In addition, vulnerability can occur or be exacerbated as a result of disaster-related gender-based violence, *refoulement*, discrimination, and marginalization or non-inclusion in the humanitarian caseload.

Of course, relief actors tend to have a limited capacity to stop or inhibit violent or abusive behavior in armed conflict or chaotic settings. However, it is equally clear that, at a minimum, humanitarians need to avoid being complicit in undermining the safety and well-being of endangered groups and must strive to enhance protection when lives are at risk. Thus, protective humanitarian action involves an overall humanitarian strategy based on sound analysis that clearly identifies crisis-related patterns of harm, including abusive or violent behavior, discrimination, and undignified living conditions. A “protection lens” should inform, and be part of, the overall humanitarian response at the strategic and programmatic levels. From this perspective, *everyone* involved in a humanitarian endeavor has a protection responsibility.

In Afghanistan, there has been significant investment in developing a protection infrastructure—a dedicated cluster with sub-clusters, and other fora, including the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT),¹⁰³ where protection issues are discussed—to facilitate coordination among relief actors and interaction with others such as the government and the ISAF Humanitarian protection mechanisms and play an important role in bringing together concerned stakeholders to review relevant issues as well as the identification of preventive or remedial action. Such protection-focused mechanisms are active throughout much of the country with the exception of the southern and southeast-

ern regions, given the limited operational presence of relief agencies in these areas. There have also been important strides in the development of policy, such as Civil-Military Guidelines, and in the design and delivery of a multitude of training and sensitization programs. Coordination fora also facilitate information-sharing and data collection and analysis, as well as the profiling of specific protection issues.

However, the politics and dynamics of the operating environment, high staff turnover, and a relatively weak humanitarian community that is further constrained by limited access and security concerns affect the ability of agencies to actually address and mitigate the protection problems faced by those who constitute the humanitarian caseload. Frequently, structure and process take precedence over substance, analysis, and effective intervention. Many humanitarians interviewed for this report, including dedicated protection staff, are concerned that there is a reluctance to acknowledge problems that have significant protection implications, while a vast amount of time is spent on initiatives (such as the development of a Joint Access Strategy or advocacy initiatives) that do not deliver or are abandoned without the actual problem being addressed.

As elsewhere, protection concerns are associated with particular groups such as refugees, returnees, those subjected to coerced repatriation, IDPs, war-affected communities, child soldiers, unaccompanied minors, etc. However, while a focus on particular groups may be useful for coordinating, programming, and fund-raising purposes, it runs the risk of pursuing a piecemeal approach and the generation of dysfunctionalities that run counter to principled and effective humanitarian action. In particular, there is a danger that those who are most at risk are not always identified or prioritized. In Afghanistan, limited access and inadequate coverage of those in need are significant problems; these are compounded by an unresolved debate on needs-assessment tools and the nature and comparability of available data. An incomplete picture of needs and vulnerabilities invariably undermines prioritization. This, in turn, complicates resource mobilization and the ability of humanitarians to advocate assertively on unmet needs, including in relation to protection.

Notwithstanding the debilitating and time-consuming discourses on data and needs assessments, the relief community has a pretty good understanding of the origins, drivers, and ramifications of decades of conflict and the factors that shape chronic and acute vulnerability. Unquestionably, greater precision on fast-changing realities in frontline and other war-affected communities would facilitate profiling of protection and material needs, if security and access were not an issue. Similarly, there is a well-grounded understanding of the calamitous effects of weather and other disaster-related events in a country where more than a third of the population struggles with chronic vulnerability and profound levels of poverty. In general, aid actors also have a good appreciation of indigenous coping mechanisms. They know that when these are degraded or exhausted, the protection problems of those in need of humanitarian action tend to become more acute; such problems can range from underage marriage through child labor to death of family members, disease, and displacement related to armed conflict.

Whatever the outcome of the “data debate,” it is worth noting that Afghanistan is, effectively, a nonstop production factory of studies, surveys, briefing notes, think tank reports, and advocacy papers. Some of these examine and explain the limited resilience of particular groups to shocks and processes that undermine their survival options.¹⁰⁴ In addition, different monitoring mechanisms, such as those concerned with the direct impact of the war on civilians, IDPs, and returnees provide a rich reservoir of insights on the changing humanitarian caseload and the protection challenges it faces.¹⁰⁵ The complex, multi-tiered humanitarian protection coordination system also contributes to a voluminous information flow as Kabul-based structures support and interact with colleagues working at the regional and provincial level in the collection and analysis of data. Intense coordination and collaboration also occurs at the national and international level with a range of actors in and outside the humanitarian arena.¹⁰⁶

The need for well-informed coordination and collaboration among aid actors and others on protection matters is unquestionable; the formalization of processes—from agreed Terms of References, joint strategies, and Action Plans to annual consolidated appeals and mid-year reviews—has

greatly enhanced decision-making, policy formulation, and the sustainability of different initiatives such as data collection and advocacy. Nonetheless, when speaking to different agencies and individual staff in Kabul in June 2012, it was clear that there was a remarkably limited understanding of the essence of problems identified as protection concerns, what issues needed to be prioritized and why, the purpose and anticipated outcome of particular initiatives, and the responsibilities of different actors working on particular interventions.¹⁰⁷ Almost invariably, material assistance was the dominant preoccupation of senior aid personnel, even when it was apparent that insecurity, discrimination, or exclusion from the humanitarian caseload, such as those in the Kabul Informal Settlements (KIS), were the most pressing problems faced by at-risk groups. In addition, many interlocutors, especially those most engaged with protection issues, expressed concern that “protection work” was in danger of doing nothing more than “feeding the cluster machine” and related reporting requirements.

Importantly, even though relief workers, including dedicated protection staff, devote a lot of energy to collecting data and coordinating different mechanisms, there are few insights on the actual, real-time outcomes of efforts to enhance protection. Unless there is a relationship between analysis (including needs assessments), program design, and outcomes, the protection cluster is in danger of becoming an end in itself. Indeed, it is probably fair to say that some of the frustration that relates to time-consuming—if not oppressive in the eyes of some NGO and UN personnel—coordination structures can be traced to fears that all the effort does not result in improved protection or, worse, ignores or sidelines issues of major concern. With reference to the former, the multiplicity of mechanisms concerned with child protection was identified as an example of lots of coordination but little clarity as to what is actually achieved. Some interviewees also indicated, for example, that it was not clear whether the energy invested in community-based approaches to protection was useful, as it was unclear what were the actual outcomes. Others noted that there was little clarity on the scale or nature of *crisis-related* gender-based violence (GBV) issues, never mind whether declared objectives and approaches were appropriate.¹⁰⁸

The issue that was raised most routinely in terms of priority concerns and outcomes was that of access. Clearly, the issue of restricted, limited, or no access has huge implications for the safety and protection of vulnerable groups and individuals. Networks, formal and informal, associated with the Protection Cluster and the IDP Working Group, were seen by some interlocutors as providing an access of sorts to populations in “inaccessible” areas. The reluctance of some key agencies to acknowledge their limited direct presence in heavily war-affected areas, and the protection implications of this, was also identified by various interlocutors as a key concern.¹⁰⁹ Many NGO interlocutors were of the view that the issue of limited access had been sidelined in the HCT, given the difficulties that arose in relation to the attempt to agree on a Joint Access Strategy.¹¹⁰ While NGO and UN agency concerns about being associated with the political UN persisted, there was broad recognition among relief actors that in the absence of a “joint strategy” there needed to be some agreement on areas that are a priority to access and a shared understanding of “dos and don’ts” that benefits from the experience of those already operating in remote or difficult-to-access areas.

Discussions in Kabul concerning pressing protection issues and how these were identified and prioritized frequently resulted in a re-telling of the Kabul Informal Settlements (KIS) winter drama. The *New York Times* played a central role in mobilizing public and aid worker angst and belated action as headline articles drew attention to the deaths of numerous children from the cold and grossly inadequate “living” conditions.¹¹¹ The rush of donors, UN, and NGOs to offer blankets and other assistance provoked overdue questions on the policy positions of humanitarian actors in the face of a significant increase in urban IDPs in recent years.¹¹² It is noteworthy that IDPs who flock to urban centers other than Kabul receive less attention than those who are concentrated in the capital; research shows that only “6% of those surveyed in Kandahar” received assistance.¹¹³ According to UNHCR, there was a 45% increase in conflict-induced IDPs in 2011. However, some key stakeholders, including the government, donors, and the aid community, effectively related to these uprooted Afghans as economic migrants, including those who fled war-ravaged Helmand.¹¹⁴ Explanations for the dramatic policy shift varied;

UNHCR advised that it had been concentrating on 200,000 IDPs in rural and other urban areas where relief services were much weaker than those available in Kabul, USAID indicated that “being prepared for a disaster is one of the most difficult things to do.”¹¹⁵

From any perspective, it is extremely disquieting that a steady increase in urban displacement, driven by the intertwined problems of war, insecurity, and poverty, received limited and inadequate attention until headlines provoked a surge in action.¹¹⁶ It was the view of many interlocutors familiar with the workings of UNHCR, the IDP Working Group, Protection Cluster, and the HCT that the child IDP deaths had “changed the debate.” They underlined that even when “access” was not a problem, politics and faulty prioritization processes could trump principled and protective humanitarian decision-making. This experience was also a reminder that the positive transition narrative that has replaced the post-conflict, state-building narrative of earlier years needs to be challenged so that it does not become the framework shaping humanitarian decision-making, including resource mobilization efforts.¹¹⁷ The storm of media attention to the death of kids in the KIS also accelerated action by the government on the development of a national IDP policy. This is welcome and provides, in principle, an opportunity to develop policy that is non-partisan and contributes to durable solutions that take account of the massive urbanization, and related search for human security, that characterizes contemporary Afghanistan.

Recent experience in Afghanistan points to the importance of analysis that leads to clearly defined and prioritized protection objectives that feed into the development of an overall HCT-approved humanitarian strategy that is shaped by protection considerations and provides a protective framework for action. In addition, there is an urgent need for the development of monitoring (or survey) systems that facilitate results-oriented protection approaches. These would, in principle, facilitate collaboration and, importantly, measurement of impact and factors that determine outcomes. Such an approach would also strengthen transparency, accountability, and knowledge of the way in which populations of concern are coping and the role of humanitarian endeavor in this regard.

Part of the difficulty aid agencies are facing in Afghanistan is that, with the exception of ICRC, MSF, OCHA, and a few others, the majority of UN and NGO agencies are multi-mandated and deal both with humanitarian and reconstruction/development agendas as well as advocacy. Such agencies often find it difficult to distinguish acute from chronic need. In addition, the lack or inadequacy of capacity-building initiatives to deal with issues such as the chronic problem of gender-based violence (GBV) has seen relief actors assume responsibility for GBV referral systems. As a result, there is inadequate attention to the types of synergies and bridges that need to link and shape efforts that are designed to address life-threatening imminent dangers and processes geared to tackling under-development, systemic marginalization, and deep-rooted patterns of abuse. With specific attention to protection, the lack of distinction between chronic and acute concerns has clogged the protection architecture and contributed to the confusion concerning “protection” in the context of humanitarian action. Lack of clarity on the essence of a problem is a recipe for failure when attempting to address it.

Few will disagree that factors shaping vulnerability will vary as contexts change, particularly in relation to the issue of security. Safety concerns, for example, are often most *acute* in contested areas, where armed conflict results in frequently changing front lines or zones of influence; efforts by relief actors to enhance protection in such settings need to be context-specific. Issues such as gender-based violence or a broad range of problems that undermine the integrity of children are chronic, nation-wide, deeply-rooted societal and politically-charged issues that need to be tackled in a manner geared to systemic change. When GBV and other protection problems arise in the context of crisis situations, interventions need to be tailored to the circumstances provoking the problem and shaping the options available for preventive and remedial interventions. In sum, to be effective, humanitarians need to better acknowledge the way in which problems that undermine “protection” occur and change, in a crisis or emergency setting, and pursue remedial measures accordingly. Identifying when stop-gap or longer-term measures are required, and the linkages between these, is critical to effectiveness in settings where chronic problems are often exacerbated when



Photo: Claudio Deola. Used with permission

usual coping mechanisms are under stress or break down. Equally, there is a need for so-called “early recovery” initiatives that demonstrate productive relief-development linkages and effectiveness in environments where humanitarian programs can be phased out.

Experience in Afghanistan underlines the importance of protection mechanisms, and related activities, being non-partisan—and being perceived as such—so that they are not associated exclusively with one party to the conflict.¹¹⁸ As the ISAF drawdown unfolds, power equations change, and uncertainty about the future increases, the effectiveness of protection measures will be greatly impacted by the ability of the humanitarian community to operate impartially and to engage with all actors that shape the safety and well-being of at-risk groups. Aid agencies with a strong humanitarian focus tend to recognize the importance of systematic and strategic engagement with the armed opposition, however fragmented, and the difficulty of maintaining meaningful dialogue beyond community-level contacts. Agencies that

have kept their distance from PRTs (Provincial Reconstruction Teams) and counter-insurgency or stabilization programs and have a history of effective partnerships with communities in certain geographic areas, are better situated than others to engage with non-state actors. There is limited clarity on the extent to which the UN and other humanitarian players are involved in cross-line communication on issues that relate to protection. It is easy to understand why there is little or no public acknowledgement of relief agency interaction with the armed opposition, given security and political concerns, and an understandable desire to maintain trusted relationships. However, it should be possible for concerned protection and other actors to define the parameters within which interaction with non-state actors should and can occur and to share generic experiences and insights. As the crisis in Afghanistan evolves, a case can also be made for greater investment by the HCT in augmenting the support of *all* concerned stakeholders—including relief actors and the armed opposition—to core humanitarian values.

The experience of bringing attention to the issue of non-combatant deaths, for example through the regular reporting of UNAMA Human Rights on civilian casualties and other direct consequences of war, points to the importance of maintaining a spotlight on patterns of harm, and the factors that give rise to these. Evidence-based advocacy and related interventions, such as dialogue with armed groups and others in and outside government, are equally important.¹¹⁹ Experience also shows that effective protective programming includes mobilizing the buy-in of those who are most responsible, namely military and militant commanders and their political partners. Such actors are best situated to secure support for core humanitarian values, including the protected status of civilians and other endangered individuals. Data and debate on the issue of civilian casualties, for example, coupled with direct engagement, when possible, with diverse actors who have influence at the local, national, and international level have been instrumental in shaping attitudes that, to some degree, limit indiscriminate and direct harm to war-affected communities.¹²⁰ The reduction in the proportion of civilian casualties attributed to ISAF and its changed rules of engagement is largely a consequence of the direct advocacy on war tactics by UNAMA and others vis-à-vis senior military commanders and Afghan officials. As power brokers and the dynamics of the armed conflict continue to change, it will remain important to maintain local and national level networks and a clear focus on actionable objectives. In all likelihood, it would prove beneficial for the humanitarian collectivity to examine the effectiveness of different interventions to identify what actually delivers in terms of better protection in diverse settings.

The unclear, or contested, reality of uprooted Afghans—refugees, returnees, IDPs, and a host of other categories¹²¹ to describe people no longer in their place of origin—tends to be a major preoccupation, both in humanitarian circles and dedicated protection fora. Dominant issues include: (a) the scale and constantly-changing nature of the uprooted phenomenon; and (b) the non-inclusion of the HCT and the Protection Cluster in strategic decision-making on refugees and returnees. UNHCR considers these Afghans beyond the remit of dedicated inter-agency coordination fora,

although the situation of returnees is sometimes reviewed at HCT meetings. This latter point is an issue of significant concern, given the implications of migration and refugee flows (outward and return) for the larger caseload of Afghans in need of humanitarian action in Afghanistan. The lack of consensus on numbers and categorizations tends to deflect attention from the core issue of defining an *overall* protection strategy for all Afghans in need of humanitarian action, including refugees and returnees. UNHCR has traditionally been reluctant to engage with the wider humanitarian community on refugee issues, arguing that it must safeguard its exclusive refugee protection mandate. UNHCR considers refugees its core responsibility and first priority and is, thus, less invested in other forms of “being uprooted,” notwithstanding its institutional insistence on being in the lead on conflict-induced IDPs and protection matters in the context of the 2004 humanitarian reform. However, on occasion HCR welcomes the support of other relief actors when addressing some problems.¹²²

It is apparent that the rate of voluntary repatriation has declined significantly in recent years, given security and other concerns and that the exodus of Afghans seeking refuge abroad has increased. Thus, the “Solutions Strategy” (described in section 2), a multi-year US\$2 billion regional framework concerned with the protracted refugee situation, including the relatively poor reintegration of some two million returnees since 2002, is deemed very ambitious. This strategy is widely seen by aid agency personnel as unrealistic given the limited attention to the problems that shape refugee flows and hinder their reintegration upon return.¹²³ This strategy is widely seen by aid agency personnel as unrealistic given that secondary displacement by returnees and IDPs, to urban areas, is significant. The problem of landlessness and limited availability of livelihood possibilities in many areas is profound, notwithstanding some HCR pilot and other projects geared to facilitating durable return and re-integration strategies. UNHCR advises that it remains concerned about “deteriorating asylum space” and is committed to mobilizing support for host countries and greater “burden sharing” while simultaneously facilitating voluntary repatriation and working with Afghan authorities to improve conditions in high-return areas. Dealing with Afghan refugees as a vertical

problem disconnected from the reasons for population movements in general, request for asylum patterns, and a growing internal displacement caseload has undermined UNHCR's credibility and authority, including in relation to protection policy.¹²⁴

The many issues related to conflict, insecurity, poverty, urbanization, and migration that are relevant to a strategic policy on asylum, refugees, return, and reintegration are beyond the scope of this report. However, it is apparent that it is counter-productive to not approach the protracted refugee situation in a comprehensive manner that also takes account of others who constitute the Afghan humanitarian caseload, as well as long-standing regional population movements in the context of adverse security or economic conditions. Indeed, it could be argued that the prioritizing of one group over another is contrary to basic humanitarian principles. The "Solutions Strategy" also risks undermining efforts to enhance the protection of all who face threats that endanger their safety and survival chances, including those seeking asylum abroad. It is noteworthy that there are few voices challenging the politicization of the refugee situation and calling attention to its origins. Afghanistan's neighbors and their geopolitical allies played a significant role in the 1980s in promoting refugee flows in the context of Cold War politics and proxy-war strategies that greatly shaped the decisions of Afghans to seek protection beyond the country's borders.

The protection needs of Afghans are likely to increase and pose challenging demands on the relief community, which has limited time to re-think, strategize, and prepare for a probable deepening crisis. It is worth repeating that important strides have been made in recent years in mobilizing awareness of the significance of the protection dimension of humanitarian action and building the architecture, mechanisms, and skills to address protection issues. However, at the strategic and operational level, there is inadequate appreciation of the criticality of protective humanitarian action to the overall relief endeavor. To a significant extent, "protection" is addressed as a parallel activity to the provision of material assistance and the reinforcement of essential services as exemplified, for example, by the KIS drama and the refugee "Solutions Strategy."

There is need for a stronger and more coherent relationship on action to address intertwined issues such as impartiality, access, data collection and related needs assessment and analysis, prioritization, program design, and ability to measure the impact of protection interventions. Aid agencies need to unravel the confusion surrounding stop-gap and sustainable approaches to acute and chronic vulnerability to avoid compounding protection problems. This includes the identification of context-specific protection objectives and the ability to measure the impact of particular interventions. The identification of a comprehensive protection strategy and action agenda that takes account of *all* constituents of the humanitarian caseload, and both sets of warring parties and authorities on the ground, is crucial to building the preparedness needed for a surge of incidents and circumstances that are more than likely to undermine protection in the run-up to 2014 and beyond. ■

4. THE STATE OF THE HUMANITARIAN ENTERPRISE

Aid Agencies

“The fragmentation of the armed opposition is mirrored by the fragmentation of the aid community.”

—Aid worker, Kabul

“Unless we talk, and are seen as talking, there is no way we will be seen as impartial.”

—NGO country director, Kabul

“In Helmand there is a Taliban ‘reconstruction committee’. They have computers and read our contracts. They know who is funding us. They are not against NGOs. They do not like our arrogant stance and that Afghans are not in charge.”

—Afghan NGO Country Director

The previous sections have highlighted the depth and breadth of the Afghan humanitarian situation. Vulnerability indicators and life-threatening protection problems we have described should be sufficient to convince remaining optimists, wedded to the post-conflict recovery and Afghanization narratives, that these story lines no longer hold water. In this section, we shift our lens to the humanitarian enterprise and discuss if it is fit for purpose.

The pathologies affecting the work of aid agencies trying to assist and protect Afghans that we analyzed in our 2010 report¹²⁵ have not changed markedly in the past two years. If anything, the “transition” and NATO troop withdrawals are making them more acute.

The big picture issues affecting the work of relief agencies are basically the same. Afghanistan is:

- The only complex emergency where all major donors (with the exception of Switzerland) are belligerents involved in a fighting war;
- The most advanced laboratory for the militarization of aid—through the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and other attempts to instrumentalize relief and aid programs in support of political/military objectives;
- A glaring example of the alignment of the political UN with one of the warring parties—rather than operating as an honest broker that would “talk peace” with all sides;
- A complex emergency where the leadership of the humanitarian UN, despite more energetic advocacy of humanitarian principles, has been unable or unwilling to effectively negotiate access and promote the respect of humanitarian norms with all parties to the conflict, thus generating loss of credibility within the aid community and the Afghan population at large.

However, the situation of the bunkerized and beleaguered relief community has been made even more precarious by a number of additional factors:

- The optic of alignment of the UN agencies and mainstream NGOs with NATO and Afghan government agendas has increased due to reduced presence outside government-held cities: road missions have all but ceased for the UN; international NGOs are similarly reluctant to move outside the comfort zone of government-held cities where they have their offices and a few areas where community relations have remained strong; national NGOs face similar problems, but often still retain the ability of moving under the radar and on the basis of local understandings with whomever controls a particular area. Even the ICRC, the paragon of principled humanitarianism—which has long had the most advanced network of contacts and understandings with the Taliban and other insurgent groups—is finding it more difficult to maintain relationships of trust beyond the very local level.¹²⁶ Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) had also gained some traction in negotiating with the armed opposition to expand its presence on the ground; but recently has had to curb its ambitions after a direct attack against one of its clinics in Khost in April 2012.¹²⁷
- The prospects of a “humanitarian consensus” around which UN agencies and NGOs involved in humanitarian work might have rallied have suffered a number of setbacks,

which in turn have fuelled mistrust and some suspicion. One example was the failure of the Joint Access Strategy that was promoted by the Humanitarian Coordinator and OCHA in discussions with ACBAR and the wider NGO community. NGOs were split. While there was initial interest, key international NGOs eventually withdrew from the discussion. As one observer put it, “NGOs felt that the UN was putting them at risk.” Our conversations with aid workers in Kabul stressed two motives for this: on the one hand, NGOs that were interested in engaging with the “other side” did not trust the UN to do so on their behalf (or did not want to compromise their own “under the radar channels”); on the other, those who worked for government programs, or the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), were even more reluctant to contemplate such negotiations. Another setback was the inability of OCHA and the NGO coordination body ACBAR and its members to agree on the basic parameters, precise objectives, and use of needs assessment exercises.

- There was also heightened concern about the implications of the Patriot Act and other anti-terrorist legislation. US-based or funded international NGOs were particularly cautious in their local contacts, as their donors do not allow them to interact with the Taliban. “We can speak to the community elders, but how do we know they are not Taliban?” said one NGO staffer. Paranoia that they could be speaking to the “wrong people” or that such conversations might be reported back to donors had made some NGOs very secretive about their activities, further reducing the prospects of a joint access strategy: “Basically, it’s everyone for himself,” quipped an NGO country director.
- By and large, the dominant narratives in aid agencies and donor circles had shifted away from the denial of the existence of a humanitarian crisis that characterized the 2002–2008 years to a much more realistic assessment of the situation. Progress had been made in establishing a separate OCHA office outside and distinct from the UNAMA integrated mission premises (at least in Kabul, if not in all regional offices) as well as in beefing up its visibility. However, humanitarian coordination

still suffered from a basic flaw in the coordination architecture, and namely the tri-hatted nature of the UN Humanitarian Coordinator (HC), who also acts as Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRS) and Resident Coordinator (RC). Try as he may, our interviews show, the HC cannot be a neutral player: his allegiances are seen to be shaped by UNAMA political objectives and processes. This affects the credibility of OCHA and the degree to which other humanitarian players are prepared to engage with it, especially when it comes to negotiations on gaining a sustained presence in areas that are contested or where the government has no hold. Whether such negotiations are actually happening is a moot point, often summarized by “yes, but we can’t talk about it.” The fact that a cloak of secrecy clouds the issue and that there is no transparency and no visible advocacy strategy on the importance of reaching out to the other side, by the HC and OCHA, adds to the high levels of disconnect and mistrust. To make matters worse, there are differing views and much speculation—and scant evidence to support either—on the extent to which the various currents in the armed opposition are indeed interested in negotiating access with the aid community, or able to do so.

- Finally, the whole phenomenon of uprooted Afghans—internal displacement, refugee outward and return flows, migration, and rapid urbanization—is barely visible on the aid community radar screen. We have already mentioned the “Solutions Strategy” crafted and supported by UNHCR and its optimistic objectives for refugee return. The fact that so much energy has been devoted into framing a strategy that is unlikely to happen and runs counter to the reality on the ground—conflict, uncertainty about the future, increasing internal displacement and out migration—is symptomatic of a worrying disconnect between UNHCR and the senior UN leadership and the perceptions and the actual human condition of vulnerable Afghans. Moreover, acceptance by UNHCR of the hopeful fiction that millions will return voluntarily when, in all likelihood, if they arrive back in Afghanistan it will be because they are forced to do so, undermines the right to asylum and has



Photo: James Longley. Used with permission

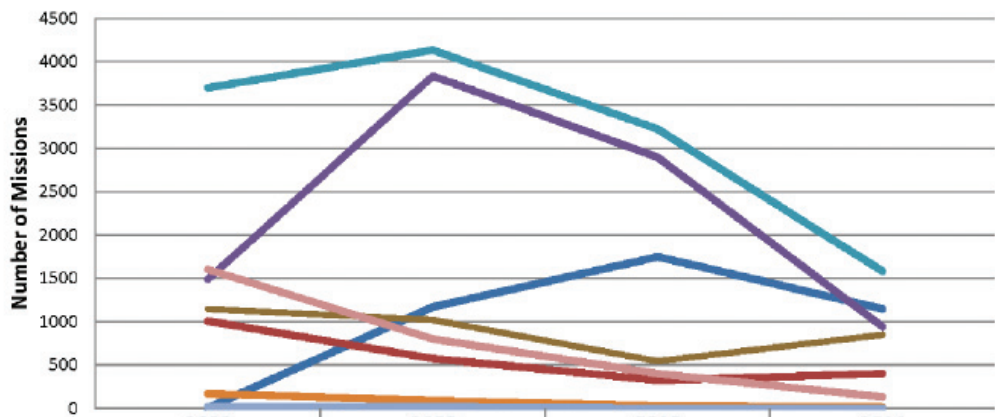
obvious protection implications for the wider humanitarian caseload. The whole area of population movements and the implications of Afghanistan's runaway demography is sorely in need of a comprehensive strategy to replace current piecemeal approaches.

Perhaps the most serious indicators of the disquiet in the enterprise were the diverse and competing viewpoints on the "evidence issue." As one senior UN humanitarian official noted, "the debate on data makes me seasick given the availability of evidence for whatever scenario or narrative is presented!" A senior NGO official noted dryly that "communities can now do needs assessment themselves!" given the many and duplicative assessments that are undertaken. The relationship between donors and the humanitarian community is "very skewed," indicated another senior aid official concerned about the central role of donors in decision-making and their participation in the HCT.¹²⁸ Many relief personnel, particularly in the NGO world, query whether donors, whose core focus is the "transition," are able to take an objective stance on the nature and changing levels of vulnerability. From a donor perspective, they are reluctant to fund programs in the absence of real-time comparable data that identifies where vulnerability is highest. It was also noted by a donor representative that most aid agencies have limited relief capacities, which greatly hampers the ability of such agencies to assess and address acute need.

Whatever the objective adequacy, or lack thereof, of the information that is available, the perception

of a data deficit is an issue that restricts programming and resource mobilization. Needs assessment exercises are in disarray; they suffer from lack of consensus on methods and content. The inability of OCHA to steer through the conflicting perspectives and promote a "good enough" data collection and analysis system able to secure a modicum of consensus on who is most vulnerable and why does not bode well for the future. Foreign troop drawdown and political jockeying by Afghan actors may well result in a fast-moving situation where humanitarian need suddenly surges or changes in different parts of the country where access is limited, assessment tools contested, and the ability to mobilize and lead are weak.

As expected, most aid agency staff shared a feeling of pessimism about the evolution of the humanitarian situation and the aid community's ability to address it. There were variations, of course, from the "cautious optimism" of senior UN staff to a much more realistic if not bleak analysis of NGOs and particularly of senior NGO national staff. Some, in line with the perspectives of much of the Afghan Kabuli elite, were talking of leaving the country. Others were concerned that their association with programs supported by foreign/belligerent donors would put themselves and their families at risk once the NATO troops were no longer around. Afghan staff of multi-mandate agencies were, frequently, the most vocal in expressing concern about future potential security problems as a result of the perceived biases of particular agencies and programs. Agencies with solid humanitarian credentials were somewhat



	2008	2009	2010	2011
Capital*	0	1166	1745	1143
Central Highland	1004	572	322	397
Eastern	1142	1016	541	846
North Eastern	1487	3833	2896	936
Northern	3696	4133	3222	1578
South Eastern	167	88	25	12
Southern	20	16	0	0
Western	1599	797	399	127

* Road mission data is derived from incomplete records

Figure 5:
Number of UN Road Missions, from 2008 to 2011 (Source: OCHA 2012¹³³)

confident they would be able to operate whatever the new dispensations of political and military power might be. All in all, the dominant feeling seemed to be one of stasis if not paralysis, with the agencies in reactive mode, reluctant to move out of their comfort zone, rather than proactively engaged in searching for opportunities to address needs and redress the credibility deficit of the aid enterprise. Because of shrinking access and poor data and analysis, the universe of responsibility of aid agencies seemed to be becoming increasingly skewed in favor of urban areas. Much of this was linked to the fraught security situation, to which we now turn.

Access and Staff Security

“NGOs are walking dollars.”

—INGO security advisor

“I haven’t been back to my village since 2007. It’s OK for me to go there. The problem is coming back. I could be easily kidnapped.”

—Afghan NGO Director

“Now communities have doubts when we visit them. ‘Are they spies? What is their agenda?’ Now they look at us differently.”

—Senior Afghan officer, INGO

Security for aid actors in Afghanistan has deteriorated over the past decade, with an acceleration of the trend starting in 2006. The first six months of 2011 showed a significant increase in the number of serious incidents against NGO staff, with increases in the number of abductions, Improvised Explosive Device (IED) strikes, and shootings.¹²⁹ There has been a small improvement in the first half of 2012.¹³⁰

As a result of increased insecurity, the presence and reach of NGOs and UN agencies has declined significantly over time. According to the 2012 CAP, “access in areas in the central, east, south-east, south, and south-west of the country—some 50% of the territory—remains severely limited.”¹³¹ However, it is extremely difficult to find any detailed data on which areas are not reached or covered by humanitarian agencies. Access is much

more restricted for UN staff and donors, who travel mostly by air or armed convoy, than it is for NGOs, some of which continue to work with unmarked vehicles or by using public transport. Access would appear to be less of an issue for some Afghan NGOs with good local roots, or, for example, for the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) that undertakes a narrow range of primary humanitarian aid activities, sometimes well beyond territory controlled by the government.

Furthermore, “access” and “presence” mean different things to different actors, and are implemented in different ways, including negotiating access, using armed protection, and making use of remote programming and its extreme version, “bunkerized” compounds that have little or no interaction with the outside world. The implications of this situation were aptly summarized by the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO): “There is a tendency for NGOs not to move from areas where they are well established and accepted. It is therefore not always easy to scale up humanitarian interventions in areas of great need, not to mention the most insecure areas of the country. ... The use of local implementing partners may also sometimes dilute respect for humanitarian principles.”¹³²

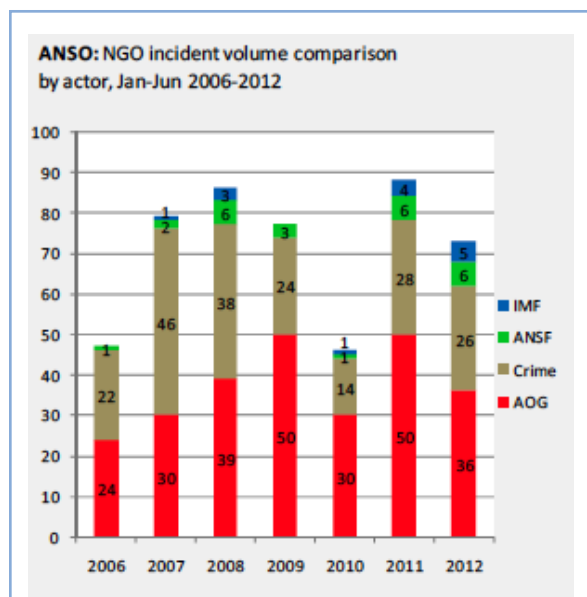


Figure 6: NGO Incident Comparison by Actor (Source: ANSO 2012, Q2 report)

ECHO’s claim that aid organizations tend not to move from areas where they are accepted is well supported by the declining numbers of UN road missions shown in Figure 5.

Even the ICRC is heavily constrained in its access by persistent insecurity and the high number of armed confrontations. “Much of southern and eastern Afghanistan, with the exception of the major cities, is off limits to ICRC staff, although they have a greater degree of accessibility elsewhere. The ICRC thus relies on an extensive network of Afghan Red Crescent Society volunteers to help the people worst affected by the conflict.”¹³⁴

The reduction of attacks against aid workers in early 2012 is open to different interpretations. It could be the result of an overall (likely temporary) decrease in armed opposition activity, or it could be the result of a policy shift of the Taliban and other insurgent groups. ANSO remarks that this positive trend is encouraging and in their view indicates that the armed opposition does not seem to have a policy of violence against NGOs.¹³⁵ Whether this policy extends to the UN is less clear.

At the same time, however, a similar reduction has not been observed in the number of attacks perpetrated by criminal actors, as shown in Figure 6. This seems to point to the fact that “NGO security incidents are most commonly related to circumstantial exposure” and that “criminal targeting remains a key component of NGO security profile.”¹³⁶

Unfortunately, most observers agree that criminal activity will likely increase with the reduction of NATO’s presence and associated financial largesse.

The extent to which the reduction in attacks against aid workers is the result of deliberate armed opposition policy or a reflection of the risk-averse posture of the aid community is impossible to quantify. Clearly, aid agencies are less present on the ground, and remote management tends to obey a law of diminishing returns. Monitoring and therefore accountability become more tenuous, and some donors such as ECHO have a policy of not supporting projects that cannot be monitored by NGO international staff. This has obvious implications in terms of the weakening

of links between agencies and the communities they work with and, importantly, for the possibility of scaling-up when natural or conflict-related needs escalate. Again, it is premature to draw any conclusion on a security situation that is likely to change rapidly in the coming months and for which there are no easy solutions.

Donors/funding situation

Since 2002, Afghanistan has benefited from massive amounts of international assistance, both civilian and military. However, because of the rhetoric of “post-conflict,” which did not sit well with a situation of humanitarian concern resulting from widespread fighting, relief has represented only a fraction of the total official development assistance. Out of an expenditure of US\$203 billion for development assistance from 2005 to 2010, only US\$3 billion, or 1.4%, was directed to humanitarian aid.¹³⁷

Even so, Afghanistan is one of the countries to receive the highest funding percentage in the Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP). Until 2011 it received around 60% of what was requested.¹³⁸ Moreover, much funding goes outside the CAP. OCHA estimates that a minimum of US\$398

million reaches the humanitarian community for actions not planned in the CAP. This amount is roughly equivalent to over 60% of the average request for funding in a CAP, and about the amount actually funded.¹³⁹ Additional and very substantial funds that are labeled “relief” are channeled through NATO military commanders’ special funds, Provincial Reconstruction Teams, and bilateral funds by ISAF coalition members. Such funding is difficult to define and estimate. In the same timeframe (2005–10), in which US\$3 billion were directed to humanitarian aid, approximately US\$2.64 billion in commander’s discretionary funds were spent by PRTs, but hardly any information is available on how or for what they were spent.¹⁴⁰

Somewhat paradoxically, if it is true that the humanitarian situation in the country is deteriorating, the amount requested through the CAP has been decreasing: from an average of over US\$710 million in 2009 and 2010 to around US\$440 million in 2011 and in 2012. In 2011, the CAP was funded at 59% of the requested amount, but in 2012, the situation seems to have worsened. At the end of September 2012, the appeal had been funded at 39%, which is particularly low, even in comparison with other emergencies, and makes



Photo: James Longley. Used with permission

Afghanistan one of the top five underfunded emergencies in 2012.¹⁴¹

What are the future funding prospects for humanitarian aid? They are likely to be impacted both by global trends and by the Afghan “transition.” According to the 2012 Global Humanitarian Assistance report, (GHA),¹⁴² the collective international government response to humanitarian crises reached an historic peak in 2010, growing by 10% to reach US\$13 billion, but later fell by US\$495 million, or 4%, in 2011, mostly due to the financial crisis. While humanitarian aid fell at a slightly lower rate (2%), this is likely due, at least in part, to the influence of the Haiti “mega-disaster.” GHA predicts that the impact of the global economic crisis will lead to a further reduction of funds for humanitarian action.

According to the most recent OCHA data on humanitarian funding to Afghanistan,¹⁴³ the top 10 donors are the United States (counting alone for over 37% of the total humanitarian aid to the country), Japan (23%), the European Commission (9.6%), and the United Kingdom (6.1%), followed by Norway, Australia, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, and Finland.

The US, which is by far the main humanitarian donor, has clearly expressed its intention to drastically reduce funding. Requests for development and reconstruction for Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 submitted to Congress were down to US\$12 billion, 44% less than the US\$17.4 billion requested for FY 2012, and 34% less than the FY 2012 appropriation for reconstruction funding for Afghanistan. According to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, the “decline reflects a major shift in U.S. reconstruction priorities in Afghanistan as the U.S. government refocuses its resources on transitioning from a military to civilian-led mission by 2014.”¹⁴⁴

Everyone expects a massive reduction of funding for Afghanistan as NATO troops progressively withdraw and Afghanistan slips away from the international headlines. One observer predicts a radical and irreversible decrease in resources: “Western spending will dip from more than US\$100 billion/year to less than US\$5 billion.”¹⁴⁵ Most of this huge amount is for the NATO military intervention, but the ripples of such a

massive reduction is likely to have huge repercussions on the Afghan economy, the viability of the government, and the provision of services. It is still unclear to what extent funds for humanitarian aid will be affected. Even if humanitarian funding is less affected than reconstruction and support to the Afghan government, the signals are not good. As of 2013, Canada, a traditionally generous donor for humanitarian relief, is understood to be cutting its funding for Afghanistan significantly. While it is unclear to what extent development assistance can be seen as a proxy of the commitment to humanitarian action, planning by most donors seems to indicate a downward trend. The European Commission’s development funding has been cut by some 30%.¹⁴⁶ Other donors are likely to follow suit as their troops, and interest in parliament and the media back home, decrease. ■

5. THE ROCKY ROAD AHEAD

“Governance is the key to peace but international assistance has transformed warlords into billionaires. Now there is no trust.”

—Former Afghan senior government official

“Corruption is legal in Afghanistan. It is an honor to be corrupt.”

—Afghan parliamentarian

“It will be déjà vu all over again, but with deadlier weapons.”

—NGO security advisor

“The notion that the centre will hold does not take account of Kabul where re-positioning within and among groups is already under way.”

—Senior Afghan Think Tank official

There are many ways of conceptualizing the current period of uncertainty and transition that characterizes Afghanistan as it moves into the next phase of a seemingly unending crisis. Our findings prompt us to view the transition as a Gramscian “interregnum”—full of “morbid symptoms”¹⁴⁷—between a known and troubled past and an uncertain future, in which the nature of livelihoods, power relations, governance structures, and the very fabric of society may undergo a complex and potentially violent transformation. The key moment of this interregnum is likely to be 2014, when most of the foreign troops will have left, presidential elections are scheduled to take place, the economy will be hurting because of a rapid decrease in foreign aid and increased capital flight. This, in turn, is likely to result in an increase in lawlessness and violence, while urbanization intensifies as conflict-affected groups seek safety, and neighboring countries persist in trying to influence evolving political dynamics. What the new dispensation, political and otherwise, will look like is impossible to predict, but there is no shortage of perspectives, positive and pessimistic, as to how the “interregnum” will unfold. In the following paragraphs, we reflect on the possible implications for at-risk groups and for humanitarian agencies.

At the time of our visit to Kabul, a number of

potential scenarios were being discussed by UN agencies and NGOs. Each agency was making its own assumptions, but most felt that, one way or another, the political and security situation would deteriorate, possibly leading to major dislocations in the body politic, with the emergence of conflicting centers of power coupled with a substantial worsening of law and order, and that this would have negative consequences for vulnerability and the work of aid agencies. In addition, most NGOs were predicting a decline in the availability of resources for reconstruction and even humanitarian activities and, possibly, a disappearance of Afghanistan from the international donor community’s radar screen, similar to what happened in the 1990s when factional fighting destroyed the country and the Taliban took in control in Kabul.

Many organizations were, nevertheless, making efforts to plan for the future in terms of security and access. In 2011, several initiatives were undertaken by various organizations, including: a UN Access workshop, with inputs provided by NGOs on their humanitarian access strategies; an ongoing ECHO-funded Access study (on a global level); a similar access initiative funded by Switzerland, and an ACBAR Access workshop. In early 2011, OCHA tabled a Discussion Paper on a joint access strategy for the humanitarian community at the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT). As already discussed, this latter initiative did not succeed. Moreover, most NGOs had their own organizational strategies to negotiate access and promote acceptance at the local level, including in areas beyond government control. These strategies were very often localized and relied on community support for agency activities based on trust developed, sometimes over decades of cooperation. Understandably, agencies were reluctant to go into details of local arrangements and to what extent they involved direct or indirect contact with the armed opposition or its political agents.

Aid agencies were also reflecting on how to maintain their programs in more violent and contested environments. An OCHA 2012 discussion paper on humanitarian access¹⁴⁸ presented four approaches to access already employed in Afghanistan that could be used to a greater extent

in case of a further deterioration of security. These approaches are: (a) negotiated permission and acceptance based on investment in time and effort to develop a relationship of trust with parties to the conflict by presenting “who they are, what they do, why, and how;” (b) remote control or distance management approaches through the use of either national staff within an organization or of a national organization as implementing partner to conduct humanitarian activities in insecure areas; (c) a sub-contracting approach with a private company; and (d) a direct negotiations with communities approach. In the absence of a framework agreement with different armed opposition groups that would guarantee a modicum of predictable access, all the above approaches have limitations. Quality of implementation in remote management arrangements tends to diminish over time. In addition, some donors require monitoring of projects by international staff as a prerequisite of funding.

It is obviously difficult to predict what will happen to humanitarian activities as international forces progressively leave the country. Most agencies seemed to have developed three-tier scenarios—best case, intermediate, and worse case—of what will happen once the bulk of coalition forces leave in 2014. Among the people we interviewed, the feeling was that the intermediate scenario was most likely and that the pessimistic scenario (chaos and breakdown of governance) was more likely than the optimistic scenario (political compromise and relative stability). The most elaborate scenarios were those developed by the Assessments Capacity Project (ACAPS);¹⁴⁹ those developed by Swedepeace;¹⁵⁰ and those developed by OCHA.¹⁵¹ The first breaks down the possible developments thematically, while the second and the third develop a best-case, a neutral, and a worst-case scenario, both concluding that the intermediate scenario is the most likely. Because they are the most detailed and convincing, they are summarized in Annex I. In addition, a cottage industry of both doomsday and rosy scenarios is appearing in international media and think tanks. And of course, institutional players such as the UN, NATO, and individual Coalition members have to toe the “cautiously optimistic” line. These are not reviewed here, as they do not focus on implications for humanitarian action and are often disconnected from ground realities.¹⁵²

A mention should be made, however, of a different take on the evolving situation that is taking hold among young Afghan-educated urban intellectuals and professionals who make a point of distancing themselves from both the current government and the earlier phases of warlord or Taliban rule. Their analysis is that thirty years of war and its corollaries of external assistance and migration have brought deep currents of transformation to Afghan society that it will be impossible to roll back. Outlooks and expectations have changed, even in the remotest rural areas. Urban social life is more vibrant than it appears at first glance. Access to education, a relatively free and often critical media, mobile phones, and social media are here to stay—or so they say. This rising generation—educated people in their twenties and thirties—appear disenchanted with the corrupt politics of the state and the international coalition that supports it, but also with the work of NGOs, and more generally, the contribution of humanitarian and development aid to the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Stuck between the historic figures of the jihad, who control the means of coercion, and the technocrats coming back from the West, who occupy many influential positions within the government, they are trying to find a third way built around Afghan sovereignty and responsibility. These young men *and women* seem convinced that they will play a future political role and wait for a more favorable time.¹⁵³ But the road ahead is not a smooth one. As a former parliamentarian remarked: “The youth and the new political groups want an end to tribalized politics, but there is little political space for alternative viewpoints; the “B52 Democrats” [who got power with US support] are afraid of the Facebookers.”

Beside OCHA’s and Swedepeace’s scenario analysis, many organizations are working on contingency plans, and, while these are at times only circulated internally, they are nonetheless mentioned in policy documents. UNHCR, for instance, discussing its strategy for 2012–13, notes that currently the UN has direct access to less than half of the country and that although the office “has put in place innovative measures to expand its reach, including through partners, access to people of concern remains precarious,” and that it “will continue to review its operational environment to ensure staff safety and security. Appropriate

mitigation measures may have significant resource implications.”¹⁵⁴

Based on interviews mid-2012 in Kabul, and a deluge of commentary in international press that often suffers from a Western bias, our own “crystal gazing,” colored by our relief-tinted spectacles, foresees increased humanitarian need in a much-changed and more complex operating environment. Our prognosis, informed by conversations with colleagues in the UN, NGOs, ANSO, and with Afghan intellectuals, can be summarized as follows:

- **Compromise and political reconciliation** are unlikely. The center may hold, given the presence of residual foreign troops, but its remit will shrink as the armed opposition increases its pressure on Kabul and other cities. Increased *de facto* governance by the Taliban and other insurgent groups in parts of the country is to be expected as foreign and Afghan forces retrench to protect main roads and regional capitals.
- **Conflict and Chaos:** there will be more of both, given the unlikely possibility of a negotiated compromise on a new system of power-sharing that is legitimate in the eyes of Afghan citizens. From this perspective, armed conflict, with stronger civil war undertones, will spread, as will fear, criminality, and related chaos that will likely exacerbate the existing rural-urban divide in terms of territory under the control or influence of state and non-state actors.
- **Conflicting Geo-Politics:** Afghanistan’s neighbors, far and near, will continue to engage in the country’s affairs in pursuit of their interests and at cross-purposes with each other. This, as in the past, will be to the detriment of Afghanistan’s stability. There is no clarity as to whether significant changes will occur in Iran and Pakistan in terms of their domestic and foreign policies, including in relation to the US-led Global War on Terror (GWOT). However, it is clear that the continuation of the GWOT, complicated Central Asian politics, and the problems faced by Islamabad and Teheran will continue to have implications for the stability of Afghanistan.
- **Contraction of the Economy:** Both the withdrawal of the bulk of foreign forces and the flight of capital and elites that have benefited from the international community’s largesse are likely to have severe consequences for the economy. The semi-parasitic cliques that had monopolized contracts and power will be the first affected, but the squeeze will likely trickle down, with negative impact particularly on urban middle class and traders. Rural livelihoods in stable areas will be less affected. Contraband and criminalized economic activities, including related to narcotics production and trade, will receive a boost.
- **Continuing Vulnerability:** The inroads made over the past decade in tackling long-standing chronic underdevelopment and structural socio-economic fault-lines that perpetuate marginalization will come to a halt or be greatly reduced. Conflict and lawlessness will likely fuel waves of displacement, both internal and external. Unlike previous periods of internal conflict, there will be no welcome mat in neighboring countries, which will also continue to forcibly repatriate documented and undocumented Afghans. Humanitarian need will be compounded by possible external shocks (closure of borders, sharp drop in remittances, increase in international food prices) and the consequences of poor investment in disaster risk reduction and mitigation and preparedness measures.

Given this sobering prognosis, in the following paragraphs we reflect on the probable implications for at-risk groups and for humanitarian agencies. We separate out areas where the humanitarians have no control or limited influence—the international, regional, and national political and military environments, the shape and posture of the UN integrated mission—and the internal functioning of the relief system where, though margins of manoeuvre are limited, some scope for shaping events and improving humanitarian response may still be possible.

Our previous reports have discussed in detail the architecture of the UN in Afghanistan, how it is perceived as being positioned on one side of the conflict, and how the “coherence” and integration agendas of the international community

have impacted on the humanitarian endeavor. In particular, we stressed that the early naming of the situation as “post-conflict” undermined the ability of aid agencies to identify and address growing humanitarian need. There has been no substantial change since our 2010 report to warrant another review of these issues, and we do not foresee any major change in the coming years.

The re-establishment of an OCHA office in 2008 was a partial correction to the integration agenda, and it did enlarge the scope for impartial humanitarian action. However, on the basis of our interviews, we do not see any real change in the overall positioning of the UN on political issues, nor in its public messaging, including on humanitarian concerns. The UN Security Council resolutions that periodically extend the mandate of UNAMA continue to stress the importance of cooperation and coherence between the SRSG, the UN integrated mission, the foreign military forces, and the Karzai government.¹⁵⁵ The lack of equidistance of the political UN from the different conflicting parties and the institutional proximity, if not integration, of the humanitarian UN with the political mission continue to be areas of concern for those striving to undertake humanitarian action in line with time-tested humanitarian principles. If anything, judging from our interviews, the limited possibility of joint and collaborative action, and the growing anxiety about agreed analysis and preparedness for the future, were deepening the trust deficit between the UN and humanitarian NGOs. And this at a time when there was an urgent need for concerted and robust intervention on a host of pressing problems.

Mainstream international NGOs have their own problems of proximity, however. With the exception of MSF, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), and a couple of smaller humanitarian-focused NGOs, most INGOs are multi-mandate agencies that are preoccupied with a range of humanitarian, reconstruction, or advocacy activities. Some of these activities are done in direct partnership with communities, but many NGOs are also contracted to implement government projects, especially through the National Solidarity Program, and/or work for the PRTs. With the withdrawal of foreign troops and the possible emergence of alternative centers of power at the local or regional level, multi-mandate NGOs face

their own problems of credibility and perceived one-sidedness. Repositioning was on the agenda, but many NGOs seemed to be caught between the rocks of impartiality and principle and the hard places of shrinking funds and donor conditionality. Moreover, unlike earlier periods where the NGO community was more or less united behind agreed policy positions—for example on how to interact with the Taliban regime prior to 9/11—there was no such unity of purpose. Joint advocacy initiatives had fallen by the wayside, and NGO coordination was in disarray.

A sense of anxiety, if not foreboding, was palpable in Kabul. While UN senior staff and some donors were still “cautiously optimistic,” NGOs were more upfront in articulating their pessimism and their fears for the future of their programs and their own security. Among the more pessimistic were the senior Afghan staff of NGOs who perhaps were more in tune with the general perceptions of the Kabuli middle class and elites than their expatriate colleagues. ■

6. CONCLUSIONS

While we consider that the conclusions and recommendations of our 2010 report are still valid, we are conscious that at the current juncture, major reform of the UN architecture in Afghanistan is most unlikely. The integrated mission is here to stay. We therefore focus on areas where change is urgent and possible. Our prognosis is that the humanitarian community will need to scale up for the next phase of the crisis and that it is critical that it prepares to do so. Based on our findings, we offer the following recommendations as a contribution to the debate on how best to address a complex and potentially fast-moving humanitarian situation:

- When operating in the humanitarian arena, the **UN needs to be equidistant** from all actors and belligerents. Ideally, the functions of HC, RC, and Deputy SRSR should be split, with a dedicated HC focused on providing leadership to the humanitarian community. This would go a long way in re-establishing the humanitarian credentials of the UN and its standing vis-à-vis the NGOs, Afghan civil society, the government, and the armed opposition.
- Given the uncertainty of security, funding, and commitment of the international community, it is more urgent than ever to **build up Afghan disaster management** capabilities at the national and local levels. Such support should be predicated on a clearly stated commitment to humanitarian values.
- With populist narratives of nationalism and “sovereignty” on the rise, including criticism of the aid community’s role and the promotion of “Western values,” it is imperative that **advocacy** and continuous dialogue with Afghan civil society and indigenous media convey the message that humanitarian programming is focused on the impartial alleviation of suffering and will resist instrumentalization, whatever its source.
- NGOs have an obligation to get their act together. The confusion surrounding the identity and approach to addressing acute vulnerability of multi-mandate NGOs needs to be resolved so that, ideally, all involved in relief can buy into common platforms. Perhaps the idea of a **NGO humanitarian consortium**, as recommended in our 2010 report, could be revived as a way of affirming the independence and impartiality of humanitarian actors. The consortium would be open to all agencies committed to humanitarian principles, but only to them.
- Issues of **data collection, needs assessment**, and identification and prioritization of the most vulnerable need to be sorted out as a matter of priority. The best is the enemy of the good; the goal should be a “good enough” system that improves over time and is not beholden to the narratives of belligerent donors.
- Funding for humanitarian action is likely to become tighter. OCHA and NGOs need to make a concerted effort to identify and court **new donors**, particularly in Asia and the Middle East, as well as Turkey, to help de-link western labeling from the humanitarian business.
- Reliance on bunkerization and remote management will only deliver to a very limited extent; quality degrades over time. Thus, a joint strategy of **negotiated access** built upon humanitarian principles needs to be at the center of the humanitarian endeavor. The humanitarian consortium should take the lead in developing the access strategy, working with OCHA. This requires a multi-faceted approach, ranging from emphasis on protective humanitarian action to developing relations with all actors on the ground, using social media, radio, and SMS in local languages to get the message out.
- The humanitarian community needs to build on the important work of recent years to mobilize attention, in and outside the relief community, to acute, **crisis-related protection** issues. Protective action should be integrated into the community-wide humanitarian strategy and the overall approach geared to

enhancing the safety, dignity, and well-being of at-risk individuals and groups. It is also important that protection initiatives have clear and measurable objectives so that anticipated impact can be evaluated and contribute to future program design.

- There needs to be recognition that the effectiveness of protective measures will depend, significantly, on the extent to which there is dedicated dialogue and **interaction with the armed opposition**, who are not insensitive to their reputation in the court of public opinion.
- In terms of advocacy, Afghanistan’s “**youth bulge**” is a critical cohort that will play an increasing role in influencing decision-making and perspectives as the country struggles to achieve a greater level of stability and security than has been the case in recent years. The role of “Facebookers” and “accidental activists” needs to be built into protection advocacy initiatives.
- Descending from the previous two points, **donors** should abstain from criminalizing NGO engagement with “terrorist”-labeled groups, thus allowing relief organizations to openly engage with the armed opposition, as such interactions are a prerequisite for effective humanitarian action.
- UN messaging on **civilian casualties** should factor in the increased need for interaction and dialogue with the diverse factions of the armed opposition and in areas where they are influential. ■

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACAPS	Assessments Capacity Project	KIS	Kabul Informal Settlements
ACBAR	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief	MoE	Ministry of Education
ACF	Action Contre la Faim	MoPH	Ministry of Public Health
AIHRC	Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission	MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy	MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
ANSO	Afghan NGO Safety Office	NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
ARCS	Afghan Red Crescent Society	NGO	Non-governmental Organization
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit	NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
CAAC	(Country Task Force on) Children and Armed Conflict	NRVA	National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment
CAP	Consolidated Appeal Process	ODI	Overseas Development Institute
CMR	Crude Mortality Rate	OHCHR	(UN) Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
CPAU	Cooperation for Peace and Unity	PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
ECB	Emergency Capacity Building Project	PTRO	Peace Training and Research Organization
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Office	RC	Resident Coordinator
EFSA	Emergency Food Security Assessment	SAM	Severe Acute Malnutrition
FIC	Feinstein International Center	SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
GAM	Global Acute Malnutrition	SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary General
GBV	Gender-Based Violence	U5MR	Under Five Mortality Rate
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator	UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team	UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
HPG	Humanitarian Policy Group	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross	UN-OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Center	UNSG	United Nations Secretary General
IDP	Internally Displaced Person	UNMAS	United Nations Mine Action Service
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development	WFP	World Food Programme
IMF	International Military Forces	WHO	World Health Organization
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Network		
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force		

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Annex I: Scenarios for 2014 and beyond

Swedepace/CPAU	OCHA	ACAPS/NRC/ECB
<p>Positive Scenario:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core elements: Political consolidation; Afghan National Police and Army are downsized; a disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and reconciliation process is started • Potential triggers (selection): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A Peace and Power sharing agreement that includes main AOGs is reached ○ Improved understanding and acceptance of the humanitarian imperative by all, resulting in increased humanitarian access ○ Economic growth and equitable distribution of wealth • Humanitarian implications: NOT LISTED 	<p>Best-Case Scenario:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core elements: Political consolidation, characterized by stable security environment, effective transition process with minimal and predictable population influx from neighboring countries • Potential triggers (selection): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Effective and inclusive transition process with increased, inclusive government leadership ○ Improved understanding and acceptance of the humanitarian imperative by all, resulting in increased humanitarian access ○ Economic growth and equitable distribution of wealth • Humanitarian implications (selection): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improved security for civilians and international community ○ Increased capacity of the government to provide basic services across the country ○ Reduced caseloads of displaced populations, due to reduced hazard activity and conflicts 	<p>N.B.: ACAPS SCENARIOS ARE NOT ORGANIZED IN ORDER FROM BEST TO WORST-CASE, BUT RATHER BY SECTOR.</p> <p>Deterioration of Economy Scenario:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assumptions (selection): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reduction of development assistance funds, down-scaling of humanitarian programs ○ Diminished government resources, especially the budget available for service delivery and hence access to basic services for the population ○ Construction and services sector affected by decrease of foreign investment and aid flows ○ Increasing opium poppy production and trade • Impact (selection): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Slow or negative economic growth ○ Aggravation of issues such as corruption, inefficiencies and lack of capacity ○ Widespread loss of jobs, especially in urban centers ○ High levels of food insecurity among poverty-affected populations who have lost their livelihoods ○ Quality and coverage of health care decreases ○ Increase in the moderate and acute malnutrition rates ○ Increased economic migration, both cross-border and to urban centers within Afghanistan

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<p>Neutral Scenario (most likely)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core elements: Political consolidation, characterized by stable security environment, effective transition process, with minimal and predictable population influx from neighboring countries. • Potential triggers (selection): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Effective and inclusive transition process with increased, inclusive government leadership ○ Improved understanding and acceptance of the humanitarian imperative by all, resulting in increased humanitarian access ○ Economic growth and equitable distribution of wealth • Humanitarian implications: NOT LISTED 	<p>Intermediate Scenario (most likely)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core elements: Continued conflict, expansion of insecurity to stable areas, disruption of supply chains, increasing numbers of conflict-induced displacements, increased localized conflicts, civilian casualties, and continued decrease in humanitarian access. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Occurrence of natural disasters, increased demands for humanitarian aid, and disruption of development programs. • Potential triggers (selection): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Natural hazards affect multiple locations across the country ○ Inadequate capacity of the government to respond to needs ○ Increasing insecurity, localized conflicts, continued attacks on civilians ○ Increase of conflict-induced displacements; secondary tertiary displacements ○ Limited or no access to basic services due to resource constraints and insecurity ○ Continued rise in food prices and decreased community purchasing power ○ Decreased donor funding ○ Decreased humanitarian space • Humanitarian implications (selection): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increased numbers of already vulnerable households affected by natural hazards and severe weather resulting in increased demand for humanitarian aid that outmatches the response capacity of the government, as well as further increase in negative coping mechanisms, and deterioration of resilience capacities of the affected communities to economic shocks ○ Increased pockets of conflict-induced internal population displacements, including secondary displacements of refugees and IDPs, increased difficulty for refugee reintegration ○ Increased civilian casualties and violations against the civilian population, including women and children 	<p>Escalation of Violence Scenario</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assumptions (selection): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Inability to create an effective mix of Afghan forces post- 2014 ○ Desertion of security forces, including large-scale defections from Afghan security bodies and “insider” attacks ○ Presidential and parliamentary elections in 2014 and 2015 increase power struggles along ideological and ethnic lines and violence ○ Increased control by the Taliban and other insurgents and creation of parallel governance structures • Impact (selection): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Decreasing influence and service delivery of Afghan government in areas outside of Kabul ○ Increased (civilian) casualties ○ Increased internal displacement ○ Spill-over effects of insecurity in border areas of Pakistan, resulting in movement of populations ○ Increased human rights abuses, particularly in Taliban-controlled areas ○ Loss of livelihoods due to insecurity and market disruptions; increased number of people without access to basic essentials, electricity, heating, or fuel ○ Increased vulnerabilities and higher risk of malnutrition, infectious diseases and other public health issues ○ Decrease in vaccination coverage and increase in measles and polio cases

Swedepace/CPAU	OCHA	ACAPS/NRC/ECB
<p>Negative scenario</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core elements: Political collapse, characterized by loss of political control in the provinces, widespread demonstrations against the government, parallel power lines, increased local militias and localized conflicts, nationwide economic collapse, constricted humanitarian access, and suspension of humanitarian programs by some humanitarian partners, overwhelming caseload • Potential triggers (selection): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Substantial reduction of international forces ○ Collapse and failure of government capacity and the economy ○ Extremely decreased or no donor funding for humanitarian as well as development programs • Humanitarian implications: Very limited development cooperation opportunities, aid will have to focus on humanitarian assistance and initiatives to protect vulnerable groups. More long-term development cooperation is still possible in areas where security allows.” 	<p>Worst-case scenario</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core elements: Political collapse, loss of confidence in the government and international community, demonstrations, parallel power lines, increased local militias and conflicts, nationwide economic collapse, constricted humanitarian access and suspension of humanitarian programs by some agencies, overwhelming caseload • Potential triggers (selection): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increased, anti-government, ethnic, and localized conflicts, assassination of prominent political figures, attacks on civilians and the international community, including aid workers ○ Collapse of government capacity and the economy ○ Extremely decreased donor funding for humanitarian as well as development programs • Humanitarian implications (selection): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Humanitarian crisis beyond intervention capacity ○ Increased numbers of vulnerable households affected by natural hazards ○ Widespread population displacement; ○ Increased attacks on civilians ○ Militia activities resulting in extremely limited to no humanitarian access ○ Food assistance pipeline breaks ○ Hyperinflation, resulting in widespread famine. 	<p>Large scale influx of Afghan refugees from Pakistan Scenario</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assumptions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Pakistan refrains from renewing refugee registration cards held by Afghan refugees, triggering large number of returns, especially to border areas and urban centers ○ Refugee absorptive capacity in Afghanistan remains severely strained • Impact (selection): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Conflict over land access and ownership ○ Large number of landless returnees requiring shelter and land allocation support ○ Competition for access to water, food, livelihood opportunities, and humanitarian assistance leading to exacerbation of social tensions ○ Urban growth leading to greater demands on urban services, enlarged informal settlements, and an increase in the number of urban poor ○ Radicalization of unemployed men, vulnerable to recruitment by militias ○ Secondary and tertiary displacement for economic or security reasons ○ Adoption by returnees of negative coping mechanisms such as joining anti-government forces or selling of assets

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- 11 In most developing countries, the baseline annual CMR in non-refugee populations is between 12–20 per 1000, corresponding to a daily rate of approximately 0.3–0.6 per 10,000. A threshold of 1 per 10,000 per day has been used commonly to define an elevated CMR and to characterize a situation as an emergency. Center for Disease Control, “Famine Affected, Refugee, and Displaced Populations: Recommendations for Public Health Issues” (CDC, Washington DC, 1992) and UNICEF, “The State of the World’s Children” (UNICEF, New York, 2010).
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- 38 ACBAR, “Health and Education in Afghanistan: 10 Years After—Quantity Not Quality,” 6. For further details on allegations of IMF raids on clinics, see ICRC, “Health Care in Danger: Making the Case” (ICRC, Geneva, 2011); IRIN, “Afghanistan: NGO Alleges US ‘Occupation’ of Helmand Clinics,” September 8, 2009; and Susanne Schmeidl, “A Year-End: The Dummies’ Guide to the Geneva Conventions,” Afghanistan Analysts Network weblog, December 31, 2011.
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- 104 A selection of such recent studies is listed in the bibliography.
- 105 UNAMA Human Rights issues periodic reports on war-related protection issues based on systematic monitoring and analysis. UNHCR maintains various mechanisms and networks to record population movements and issues of concern in areas of origin; their IDP database was in the process of being upgraded mid-2012 and, it is understood, this exercise has now been completed. Landmines and related issues have a long documentation record, while child protection issues have benefited from dedicated attention in recent times. Various Sitreps, Incident Reports, and Regional Profiles provide updated data on conflict-related displacement and other significant events; these are available on the OCHA-Afghanistan website.
- 106 These coordination elements also contribute to in-country reporting, such as a monthly report from the Protection Cluster to the HC/HCT and others, and to international level mechanisms, such as the UN Security Council Expert Group on Protection of Civilians, as well as to advocacy initiatives.
- 107 In addition to agreed Terms of Reference and strategies that are routinely updated, the Protection Cluster has provided periodic updates, including for Security Council Expert Committee briefings.
- 108 Interviews for this report were not conducted outside Kabul; it may be that insights on actual outcomes are stronger in locations where aid personnel are closer to actual program interventions.
- 109 Efforts to offset limited access include a variety of remote-management arrangements, including sub-contracting with local NGOs. This type of virtual presence does not always allow for a high level of confidence in the quality of the data that emanates from the field.
- 110 See discussion on access issues in the next section.
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- 114 Susanne Schmeidl and Dan Tyler, “No Frontpage News? Afghanistan’s Ongoing IDP Crisis” (Afghanistan Analysts Network, Kabul, February 13, 2012).
- 115 Ron Nordland, “Long Neglected Camps in Kabul Get a Deluge of Aid,” *New York Times*, February 12, 2012.
- 116 A handful of NGOs, operating in some settlements, welcomed the increased support while expressing alarm at chaotic distribution efforts. Agencies and emissaries that rushed to the KIS in the wake of media coverage included a diverse range of government officials, President Karzai’s office, the US military, USAID, an army of NGOs, and OCHA, which noted the outpouring of aid was positive, but longer-term solutions were needed to avoid a repeat of the problem. Nordland, “Long Neglected Camps in Kabul Get a Deluge of Aid.”
- 117 Triangulated monitoring, under the auspices of the IDP Working Group, should, in principle, help ensure that all uprooted Afghans in need of support are identified and counted as part of the humanitarian caseload.
- 118 When the MRM/CAAC (Children in Armed Conflict, Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism) UN Security Council mechanism was established (resolution 1612), for example, it made no provision for the participation of, or engagement with, the armed opposition, even though a decreasing proportion of civilian casualties are attributed to pro-government forces.
- 119 Clarity of purpose and coordinated action are critical to effective advocacy, as are other factors, including not being reduced to the lowest common denominator when an agreed policy platform or joint message is being developed/articulated. Lack of clarity on who took the decision not to use an agreed HCT text on protection concerns at the NATO summit in Chicago (May 2012), allegedly because it did not fit the narrative being promoted by key participants at the Summit, exacerbated tensions and suspicions between the UN and humanitarian NGOs and was also an issue for some UN actors. This statement was a rare attempt by concerned relief actors to articulate a joint policy position that was initiated by the Protection Cluster and endorsed fully by the HCT.
- 120 Those with influence will vary, at the local level, for example, from community and tribal elders, civil society groups and mullahs to senior officials of the armed opposition; at the national level, President Karzai and other government officials, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), ISAF military and civilian officers, working level and senior UN and NGO officials; at the international level, the Security and Human Rights Councils, as well as the UN Secretary General and NATO. All have often been influential in bringing about positive change. The media, at the local and international level, have significant influence and played a critical role in shaping public opinion.
- 121 These range from “conflict-induced IDPs” and IDP returnees, to internal displacement as a result of disasters associated with natural-hazard events, to “cross-border displacement” (as a result of border-related hostilities that prompt Pakistanis to seek refuge in Afghanistan) and Afghan returnees or deportees from Iran who are unable to return to their place of origin and are described as IDPs.
- 122 Afghans subject to *refoulement* (or deportation depending on official status) from Iran became a population of concern to the Protection Cluster, while UNHCR worked with diverse authorities to regularize their status with appropriate documentation as noted in interviews in Kabul, June 2012.
- 123 Secondary displacement to urban centers is significant among both IDPs and refugee returnees given a range of issues, including landlessness and absence of livelihood possibilities in many rural communities.
- 124 The political undertones of the Solutions Strategy, given its relationship to the “transition” narrative associated with the drawdown of ISAF troops, and the amount of resources being sought for the relatively small numbers involved in 48 pilot “reintegration sites,” coupled with the phenomenon of growing internal displacement, have underlined concerns about the potential protection implications of this initiative.
- 125 Antonio Donini, “Afghanistan: Humanitarianism Unraveled?”
- 126 “Afghanistan: Insufficient Access to Health Care Exacerbates Humanitarian Crisis,” ICRC Operational Update, July 25, 2012, available online.
- 127 “Afghanistan: Medical Care Suspended in Khost After Attack on MSF Hospital,” Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Press Release, April 17, 2012, available online.
- 128 Major donors, being active belligerents, were preoccupied with the NATO drawdown and related narratives that were heavy on positive spin, particularly in relation to the “transition” or “handing over to Afghans” agendas.
- 129 The Afghanistan NGO Safety Office (ANSO), “Quarterly Data Report, Q2, 2011,” (ANSO, Kabul, 2011), 5, cited in Andy Featherstone, “Strengthening Principled Humanitarian Response: Afghanistan Case Study,” HPG Commissioned Reports (Humanitarian Policy Group, London, January 2012), 5.
- 130 ANSO, “Quarterly Data Report, Q2, 2012,” (ANSO, Kabul, 2012).
- 131 OCHA, “Consolidated Appeal for Afghanistan Mid-Year Review” (OCHA, Kabul, 2012), 4.
- 132 ECHO, “Humanitarian Implementation Plan (HIP) The Afghan Crisis (Including Affected Populations Of Afghans In Afghanistan, Pakistan And Iran)” (ECHO, Bruxelles, 2012).
- 133 United Nations—Office Locations and Road Missions, Thematic map, January 12, 2012. <http://afg.humanitarianresponse.info/mapcentre> (accessed August 3, 2012).
- 134 Ipsos/ICRC, “Our World.Views from the Field: Afghanistan Opinion Survey and In-depth Research” (ICRC, Geneva, 2009).
- 135 *Ibid.*, 1.
- 136 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 137 Data from Global Humanitarian Assistance database, <http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/countryprofile/Afghanistan> (accessed October 7, 2012).
- 138 alerie Amos, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, “CAP Mid-Year Review Launch” (UN, Geneva, July 20, 2011).
- 139 OCHA, CAP 2012, 4.
- 140 Paul Fishstein and Andrew Wilder, “Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan.”
- 141 Data from OCHA Financial Tracking Services, updated September 20, 2012.
- 142 Development Initiatives (2012), “Global Humanitarian Assistance (GHA) Report 2012.”
- 143 Data from OCHA Financial Tracking Services, downloaded on June 30,

- 2012.
- 144 Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), "Quarterly Report to the U.S. Congress 2012," (SIGAR, Washington DC, 2012), 3.
 - 145 Gilles Dorronsoro, "Waiting for the Taliban in Afghanistan" (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington DC, September 2012), 8.
 - 146 European Commission (EC), "Conclusions of the Mid-Term Review of the Country Strategy Paper for Afghanistan (2007–13) and Multiannual Indicative Programme 2011–13" (EC, Bruxelles, 2010).
 - 147 "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear," Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere, Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), 276.
 - 148 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) and Humanitarian Country Team, "Humanitarian Access Strategy" (Kabul: OCHA, Kabul, 2012), 2.
 - 149 Assessments Capacity Project (ACAPS), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), and the Emergency Capacity Building Project (ECB), "Afghanistan: Conflict and Displacement Disasters Need Analysis," October 10, 2012.
 - 150 Dr. Björn Holmberg, Khibar Rassul, Anisa Nuzhat, Jamila Wafa, Akbar Ludin, Thiyumi Senarathna, "Strategic Conflict Analysis of Afghanistan," Reference Number 2011-000560 (Swedepiece and CPAU, Kabul, January 2012).
 - 151 OCHA, 2012 Consolidated Appeal.
 - 152 As an example of the former, see Gilles Dorronsoro, "Waiting for the Taliban in Afghanistan" (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington DC, September 2012). Examples of the latter abound; see various recent statements by the Secretary General of NATO on progress in Afghanistan, e.g., North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Press Release (2012) 073, issued on May 13, 2012, available online. A third line is that "we are looking for success too quickly and abandoning hope too soon;" see Frederick W Kagan and Kimberly Kagan, "The 'Andar Uprising' and Progress in Afghanistan," *Wall Street Journal*, October 4, 2012.
 - 153 See Antonio Donini and Alessandro Monsutti, "Aid Agencies in Afghanistan: the End of an Affair?" in *Education About Asia* 17, no. 2 (Fall 2012).
 - 154 "2012 UNHCR Country Operations Profile—Afghanistan Working Environment," UNHCR, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e486eb6> (accessed October 9, 2012).
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