



REACHING OUT - Implementing a Comprehensive Response to Drought in Afghanistan

4th July 2018, Kabul, Afghanistan

Afghanistan remains one of the worst funded of the large crises around the world. Millions of people are in need of humanitarian assistance, mostly due to conflict, rapid-onset natural disasters and situations of protracted displacement. So far this year only 29% of the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) is funded; but on top of the initial response plan, a drought is further escalating needs.

Below average precipitation since October 2017, has destroyed and degraded agriculture and livelihoods, significantly increasing the number of people in need. For example, in Kandiwal, a village of 300 families in Ghor province, only 15 families had cultivated their crop this year. At least 40 families from there had already moved to Herat, joining at least 2,000 drought-displaced families. In the North and North-Eastern regions, only 68% of rain-fed land cultivated last year was cultivated this year and the price of goats is almost two times less compared to the previous year. Approximately 30% of the population of Chakhansoor district, Nimroz, have abandoned their villages because they were unable to meet their basic needs, moving towards the already overpopulated provincial capital of Zaranj, across the border into Iran, or towards Europe, where they face increased protection risks.

The situation for those who have already been displaced by drought and conflict is dire. Many lack access to safe drinking water, shelter or adequate sanitation facilities and diseases such as diarrhoea, as well as malnutrition, are widespread among drought-induced IDPs. Greater leadership from the clusters, particularly at a field level, is required to address this situation.

Whilst resource mobilisation to address these immediate needs has started, the current levels of funding are likely to be insufficient to meet growing needs – especially if more people displace. As such, in addition to providing necessary emergency assistance to IDPs, the aid community must structure the response in a way that ensures **both the immediate and longer-term needs of drought-affected communities in their areas of origin are equally addressed**. Thereby providing drought-affected communities in their areas of origin with equal access to assistance and helping prevent further forced displacement.

In addition to emergency assistance, **resources are required for early recovery and resilience to provide sustainable livelihoods for communities in their areas of origin**. The current drought is likely to cause a protracted crisis. The negative impact of the drought on harvests will deprive many families of income and sustenance until the next harvest season and potentially beyond as many families, who have not cultivated this season, will lack seeds to plant for the next harvest – effectively creating a vicious cycle of deprivation for the years to come. Without this investment, the situation for drought affected communities is likely to become more protracted, negatively impacting future harvests, discouraging those already displaced from returning and may cause a further drift into urban centres and provincial capitals increasing the strain on resources on local communities as well as displaced households.

Currently linkages between the mobilised resources for emergency response and longer-term resilience, early recovery and development interventions are severely lacking. **Humanitarian and Development donors must work together to strengthen these links and ensure adequate resources for long-term support in response to the drought**. In particular, development actors must be engaged from the very beginning of the response to ensure that their investments in agricultural and community-based development projects continue and receive extra-attention to ensure they are sensitive to the impact of the drought. In addition, given the protracted nature of this crisis, the need to promote early-recovery and resilience should be reflected in Humanitarian programme cycle planning and annual updates to the 2018-2021 HRP.

The response must be guided by the principle of 'Do No Harm'. Emergency assistance to drought-induced IDPs should be a last resort. Without the additional assistance to drought-affected communities in their areas of origin – humanitarian assistance to IDPs risks becoming a pull factor and encouraging further displacement. This displacement has already caused additional protection concerns linked with the inability to access safe shelter, the lack of safe water, the absence of adequate sanitation facilities. In addition, several incidents of violence and increased tensions between host communities and IDPs have occurred in cities such as Qal-e-Naw, Badghis and Injil, Herat. **It is therefore important to involve both host communities and IDPs, from the beginning of any response and where necessary allocate a proportion of resources to target particularly vulnerable host families.**

Drought-induced displacement has also increased the protection issues faced by those who have remained in their villages. In Nimroz, up to 30% of males have left their villages to find work in Zaranj or Iran. Without a male family member to act as their Mahram (Guardian), many women and children have decreased mobility in their day to day lives due to existing cultural norms that do not allow for women and children to travel without a male companion, which means that in some cases, they are unable to access medical treatment should they need it. **A targeted response in areas affected by drought is required in order to minimise the risk of creating a 'pull factor' for displacement, decrease further strain on local communities in urban centres as well as the IDPs themselves, and support those potentially unable to leave drought stricken areas.**

Finally, an enabling operating environment is required in order to respond effectively to the immediate and long-term needs of drought-affected communities. Humanitarian access continues to be an issue in many provinces of Afghanistan. All actors, including Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs), must facilitate safe and unhindered access to communities affected by the drought. In addition, NGOs currently face a number of bureaucratic constraints in the implementation of their response to ongoing needs in Afghanistan resulting from conflict, displacement and natural disasters. In particular, the complexity of the current MOU process leads to significant delays in the implementation of current programmes. **Given the critical situation, humanitarian actors should be exempt from this process in adherence to article 23 of the NGO law, to operate in lieu of a MOU when a humanitarian crisis such as drought requires immediate, independent, and effective response.**

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Humanitarian and Development actors must work together to produce a comprehensive, protection-sensitive response strategy to the drought, in both areas of displacement and origin, to respond to the emergency and to support early return and recovery, as well as resilience-building, to be integrated into the multi-year HRP update this year. Donor resources must be made available accordingly
2. Protection risks must be adequately analysed and responded to, through both host and displaced community participation, to prevent recourse into harmful coping strategies, including resorting to irregular immigration into Iran and beyond
3. Cluster Lead Agencies must demonstrate greater leadership, particularly at a field level, to take prompt action by better coordinating responses and more clearly understanding needs, and effectively dealing with potential obstruction from local and national stakeholders.

