



The World Humanitarian Summit: A Call for Strengthened, Inclusive and Coordinated Action

May 2016



The World Humanitarian Summit, (WHS), will focus on mapping out a new humanitarian approach that is more inclusive and more representative of the needs and challenges of the rapidly changing world. On the 23-24 May 2016, world leaders will meet in Istanbul, Turkey in order to take action which prevents and reduces human suffering.

For those in Afghanistan, this presents an important opportunity for humanitarian stakeholders to review the frameworks in which they work and devise more innovative and sustainable solutions to the country's most pressing humanitarian needs. Therefore, capturing the perspectives of varying humanitarian actors is a critical part of the WHS. As a lead NGO coordinating body in Afghanistan, ACBAR, the Agency Coordinating Body of Afghan Relief and Development, have held various WHS consultation workshops in Kabul and four regional centers; Mazar, Herat, Kandahar and Jalalabad. It is now the time to see the recommendations from these consultations turned to action.

The Afghanistan Context: Humanitarian Situation and Humanitarian Needs

During the last fifteen years, it must be noted that Afghanistan has improved in many sectors ranging from agriculture, education, health, governance to infrastructure. However, the benefit of progress has been unevenly distributed, leaving many behind. As a result, in 2016 the country continues to suffer chronic conflict and faces serious humanitarian challenges. Access to basic human rights such as the right to health, safe drinking water, basic sanitation and shelter are urgently in many areas.

Million Afghans are food insecure, and a strong need for livelihood support remains throughout the country. More than 70 per cent of the population lives on less than two dollars a day and access to basic health care services is uneven in delivery and quality throughout the country. Armed conflict continues to take an unrelenting toll on Afghan civilians. In 2015, UNAMA documented 11,002 civilian casualties (3,545 deaths and 7,457 injured), exceeding the previous record levels of civilian casualties that occurred in 2014; There was a 37 per cent increase in women casualties and a 14 per cent increase in child casualties. In addition, natural disasters including drought, floods and earthquakes erode the resilience of thousands of Afghans.

The United Nations estimates that at least 948,000 people have been displaced as a result of conflict and violence. 250,000 people may further become internally displaced in 2016 while 2.45 million Afghans are still living as refugees in neighboring Iran and Pakistan. Some 5.8 million Afghan refugees have returned to Afghanistan since 2002 placing immense pressure on communities and national resources to support reintegration. Poverty, instability are driving Afghans abroad. More than 200,000 Afghans have left their country in pursuit of a better life¹

Over USD 431 million of humanitarian assistance was provided in 2015, but challenges remained in accurate and timely assessment of needs for humanitarian assistance. Solutions can be found to these problems, it requires better communication and coordination with communities on local levels, greater commitment from the government on national levels and more effective partnership of all levels among government, civil society, private sector and humanitarian actors in Afghanistan.

Shared Responsibilities of the WHS

Core Responsibility 1: Prevent and end conflict

Leaders must assume their responsibility to prevent and end conflict, working to find political solutions to end bloodshed and suffering

The United Nations reported in 2015 in Afghanistan that 3,545 civilians were killed due to increased conflict between Pro-Government Forces and Anti-Government Elements. The best solution to reduction in armed conflict is to continue to negotiate for an end to hostilities. Afghanistan should invest in its young women and men with education and employment opportunities in order to develop a more stable and secure environment. The government and donors must also increase investment in insecure areas.

Core Responsibility 2: Respect the Rules of War

States need to respect the rules they have endorsed in international humanitarian and human rights law

Afghanistan is signatory to the Geneva Conventions, a set of treaties regarding humanitarian issues of civilians and combatants in wartime. Afghanistan is also signatory to all the key international human rights conventions (with some reservations).

In 2015, according to information compiled by ACBAR, 50 aid workers were killed, 44 wounded and 108 abducted. This makes Afghanistan one of the most dangerous places in the world for an aid worker. Delivery of humanitarian relief to affected populations is hampered by a lack of understanding of the mandate of humanitarian agencies. Government, opposition forces and local communities do not know the mandate and the principles which guide

their work. Recent examples are the bombing of an MSF hospital in Kunduz by international forces on behalf of the Afghan Government, the execution of two patients and a carer taken from a clinic in Wardak by Afghan special forces in February 2016 and local health clinics and schools used by both government and opposition forces as military posts. The training of military personnel in humanitarian principles would help to alleviate these issues.

During the WHS, Afghanistan's representatives should commit to engage with stakeholders from different sides of the conflict with an end to ensuring better respect and understanding of International Humanitarian Law, with particular regard to the neutral and impartial role of the humanitarian aid community. More training is needed to educate both sides of the conflict about humanitarian principles.

Core responsibility 3: Leave No Body behind

Stakeholders must empower and protect the most vulnerable, including women and girls, young people, the displaced and people with disabilities, among others

Afghanistan has signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women. The government needs to ensure better implementation of these conventions in its national policies.

Physical accessibility of services should be improved for vulnerable groups, for instance at camp and community level with a specific attention to food distribution points, water, Sanitation and Hygiene infrastructures, health structures, shelter and education sites. Funding should be prioritized for vulnerable groups. Capacity building to ensure vulnerable groups are considered throughout humanitarian programming should be highly considered.

As part of this, assessments must be inclusive and the most vulnerable people must be identified in any given emergency. Data must be collected disaggregated by sex, age and disability taking into account contextual factors such as family or social support, discrimination, and household socio-economic situation. Vulnerable people must be meaningfully consulted and have participation in the crisis response's decision-making and planning processes. This may mean that adapting tools of communication to include spoken word communication such as radio, different languages, braille and culturally sensitive pictures.

Core responsibility 4: Working differently to end need

Change people's lives by moving from delivering aid to ending the need for it

Community-based (Disaster Risk Reduction) DRR, climate change adaptation and community resilience should put "people at the centre", while disaster preparedness and management experiences should build on partnerships with civil society and committing actors to be "as local as possible and as international as necessary."

Increased use of local markets, supplies and resources by the humanitarian community will speed the process of getting Non-Food Item (NFI) and other resources to affected communities. The humanitarian community should find new ways to engage with the private sector who are sometimes the best innovators in terms of having their business stay ahead of socio-economic challenges. Public-private partnerships that work well in humanitarian and development settings should be mapped and enhanced to meet humanitarian challenges, with a strong focus on humanitarian principles compliance. For example, local materials should be used to build shelters for affected communities. Methods of providing emergency relief should be designed around the particular needs of an affected community and a systematic resilience approach to disaster response should increasingly be channeled through local and national actors, to build capacities and increase sustainability.

- At a national level the humanitarian community should engage more with the Afghan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) in terms of capacity building, analysis and planning; further, a national disaster management policy which considers disaster risk reduction should be implemented in all regions of the country.

- At a provincial level, the humanitarian community should engage with Provincial Disaster Management Committees to map hazards which can then be anticipated and planned for in humanitarian and development programs.
- At a local level, the humanitarian community should have more engagement with District Disaster Management Committee to raise awareness of the risk reduction concepts and methodologies.
- At community and district levels, it is necessary to better incorporate indigenous knowledge and local experience into community action plans. More should be done to empower vulnerable communities to help themselves, among others through the Community-based Disaster Risk Management Teams. This could be achieved by educating communities in how to respond to emergencies through radio, drama, brochures, or incorporating messages related to disaster response and disaster risk reduction into school curricula or other educational or religious institutions.

Core responsibility 5: Invest in Humanity

Invest in enhancing local capacities, reducing risk and building effective and inclusive institutions, especially in fragile contexts

Increased development and state action must take place to address some of the underlying drivers of humanitarian needs. Due to the growing gap between humanitarian needs and resources, humanitarian and development actors should jointly explore investment in local solutions; introduce innovative technologies and processes, and invest in resilience building, risk reduction, and preparedness for both response and recovery. Local civil society organisations and NGOs should be increasingly supported through long term projects that link emergency response to development because they have better access to people in rural communities.

Key recommendations

During the WHS and after, the Afghanistan humanitarian community should:

- Continue to support the relief programs responding to the needs of civilians affected by armed conflict, including IDPs, refugees and returnees.
- Reaffirm their commitment to respect and promote the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence
- Prioritize and fund needs-based humanitarian programs that target vulnerable groups, particularly women and children, and persons with disabilities.
- Invest further in strengthening humanitarian coordination, financing and leadership mechanisms in order to improve the quality, relevance and timeliness of humanitarian responses.
- Provide support to Afghan institutions, NGOs and local communities for response capacity through increased funding to local humanitarian preparedness.

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