

Situational Report #04

January 2022

Herat Province
Afghanistan

Returning to the
Country to Address
the Acute Food
Insecurity Crisis

In Partnership with

ChildFund
Alliance

01. Situation Overview

Afghanistan is currently embroiled in one of the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

The summer of 2021 saw collapse of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, following the withdrawal of the U.S. led coalition forces and the capture of Kabul by the Taliban. The political transition has created an environment that presents many new difficulties, as well as exacerbating a number of crises that have been ongoing for many years. Almost 700,000 individuals became internally displaced as of the beginning of 2021 due to the conflict, adding to the 9.2 million already displaced since 2012.¹ The economy has drastically shrunk by 40%, partly as a result of the collapse of the financial system that has prevented much-needed cash from entering and sustaining the country. As such, the livelihoods of many families have been lost and households struggle to pay for food, water, rent, electricity and other basic necessities. Basic services have all but halted, much of which had previously been delivered with assistance from international organizations. Amidst the political and economic turmoil, Afghanistan is facing its worst drought in almost three decades, leaving the country with the highest number of people living with food insecurity in the world.² For this reason, WeWorld has restarted its operations in Afghanistan after 3 years away, with the aim to support women-led households and their children at risk of severe hunger, residing in the Western Herat province.

Currently, Afghanistan has roughly 24.4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, which accounts for over half the population and four times the number of people who were in need three years ago. Of this total, 23 million are facing acute hunger due in large part to the drought, which has impacted 80% of the population, 8.7 million of which are at risk of famine induced hunger in 2022.³ The drought has also led to major water insecurity among the Afghan population, with eight out of every ten drinking bacteriologically contaminated water.⁴ This puts many at risk of contracting preventable diseases. Other health risks threaten the lives of Afghan children, for instance outbreaks leading to 60,000 cases of measles in 2021 alone.⁵ With an overall INFORM risk of 8.2 (the highest of any country worldwide), Afghanistan is extremely vulnerable to further shocks, such as the 5.3 scale earthquake that struck the west of the country in January 2022 that caused 27 deaths.⁶ Afghan families are severely ill-equipped to cope with sustained, multiple pressures to their safety and wellbeing, especially as it is projected that 97% of individuals will be under the poverty line for 2022.⁷

¹ IOM, *IOM Afghanistan Highlights, Reporting Period 15th August -28th November 2021*. December 2021.

² OCHA, *Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan 2022*. January 2022.

³ WFP, *WFP Afghanistan Situational Report 19 January 2022*. January 2022.

⁴ UNHCR, *Flash External Update: Afghanistan Situation #12*. December 2022.

⁵ UNICEF, *Afghanistan Humanitarian Situational Report November 2021*. November 2021.

⁶ OCHA, *Flash Update No. 2 Earthquake in Badghis Province, Afghanistan*. January 2022.

⁷ ILO. *Employment prospects in Afghanistan: A rapid impact assessment- ILO Brief*. January 2022.

02. Women & Children

Women and children suffer the most from humanitarian disasters in Afghanistan.

With multiple, aforementioned emergencies ongoing across all 34 provinces, both women and children bear the greatest cost. Of the 24.4 million people who need assistance, 12.6 million are children, with more than one in two under five facing acute malnutrition, and if not treated, then possibly death.⁸ This issue is exacerbated by the winter months in which food stocks diminish with the difficulties of transporting supplies across country. As mentioned earlier, there have been tens of thousands of measles cases affecting children last year due to poor water sanitation and lack of health services; other outbreaks too are on the rise, including dengue fever, acute watery diarrhea and malaria.⁹ Children also continue to face protection risks due to displacement, insecurity and forced child labour, to name but a few examples. Of the approximately 700,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), 59% are children (80% of total are women and children).¹⁰ **7.9 million children are in need of education assistance and 4 million are currently out of school.**¹¹

Women and girls in particular face numerous threats to their wellbeing; whether it is increased rates of child marriage, forcing girls into arrangements which increase chances of abuse, sexual exploitation, poor mental health, and often at the expense of receiving an education. On the subject of education, girls and women have been systematically barred from secondary and higher education, while women across the country have been prevented from working, unless involved in primary education or the health sector.¹² This has left a huge strain particularly on women who are the primary caregivers in the family, often out of necessity, whose loss of income can lead to the malnourishment of their children. **Nearly 2 million women are widows from conflict and disaster, and a larger number are the head of households.**

⁸ OCHA, *Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan 2022*. January 2022.

⁹ WHO, *Afghanistan Emergency Situation Report No.10*. January 2022.

¹⁰ OCHA, *Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan 2022*. January 2022.

¹¹ UNICEF, *2022 Humanitarian Action for Children Afghanistan*. December 2021.

¹² Human Rights Watch, *Afghanistan: Taliban Deprive Women of Livelihoods, Identity*. January 2022.

03. Herat Province

Food and water insecurity are the largest drivers of displacement in Herat.



Food security has deteriorated across Afghanistan since the summer of 2021, with Herat province seeing a 12% increase in the proportion of people with insufficient food consumption.¹³ A large factor that contributes to this is the drought, which has hit the west of Afghanistan hard and has impacted 76% of households in Herat.¹⁴ This brings the total number of people facing food insecurity to 1,772,510, projected between November 2021 to March 2022.¹⁵ The winter period has proven particularly difficult for families, as temperatures can fall as far as -12 degrees. In the past few weeks snowfall has affected roads in neighbouring Ghor province, limited access and transport of goods from other parts of the country.¹⁶



Source: Siblings in Kakar Abad Sofla Village, Robat Sangi District.

Families that are particularly vulnerable are those who have been displaced to Herat which, between August and November of last year, numbered 142,097 individuals, with many more projected to have arrived during the winter months leading up to January 2022 (the same

¹³ WFP, *Afghanistan Food Security Update*. January 2022.

¹⁴ OCHA, *Afghanistan Needs Overview 2022*. January 2022.

¹⁵ OCHA, *Afghanistan Herat Province Humanitarian Profile*. January 2022. <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/provincial-profile>

¹⁶ OCHA, *Afghanistan Weekly Humanitarian Update*. January 2022.

period saw 94,300 IDPs flee Herat, 115,604 identified returned IDPs to Herat and 107,806 individuals migrated abroad).¹⁷ Displacement continues to be a real risk for families in Herat, with the main cause reported being food and water insecurity. Currently, 15% of households in Herat are run by women, against a national average of 5%, with the average size of a household comprising of 10 people (4 adults and 6 children ranging from 0-17).¹⁸

04. WeWorld & Afghanistan

WeWorld seeks to support vulnerable families in preventing any child from going hungry.

WeWorld strives to reduce poverty and strife for women and children around the world affected by man-made and natural disasters. The organization's mandate is to ensure their rights to a safe and dignified life, with equal opportunities and access to basic services, health, education and work.

WeWorld has returned to Afghanistan for the first time since 2017, sensing the urgency of the compounding crises facing the country. Upon request of their longstanding national partner located in Herat province, the Rural Rehabilitation Association for Afghanistan (RRAA), WeWorld has begun with the implementation of a cash for food project in the Koshk e Rabat Sangi district in Northern Herat, supporting specifically widowed households in feeding their families through the harsh winter.

Share of Women-led Households Compared to Total Households



% of Women-led
Households in Herat
Province



% of Women-led
Households in Afghanistan

Source: Afghanistan Food Security & Agriculture Cluster, Seasonal Food Security Assessment (SFSA) 2021 Presentation of Key Findings.

¹⁷ IOM Displacement Tracking Index, *DTM Afghanistan Emergency Event Tracking Herat Province, EET Round 2*. December 2021.

¹⁸ Afghanistan Food Security & Agriculture Cluster, *Seasonal Food Security Assessment (SFSA) 2021 Presentation of Key Findings*. October 2021.

05. Cash for Food Project

230 widow-led households are currently being supported via the cash for food project in Northern Herat Province.

Following a joint needs analysis and the development of an action plan, WeWorld has begun with a project to distribute cash for food, at first targeting 110 households headed by widowed women and later expanding to 230 households, **reaching over 1300 children**. Since access in Afghanistan remains incredibly difficult for international organizations, WeWorld has been supporting its national partner RRAA, whose presence and deep-rooted connections to the region allows for the sustained support of vulnerable families. Such widow-led households are often without income with the women unable to work, and without any assistance to cover basic necessities for themselves and their children. In line with the cash-based food basket recommended and agreed upon by the Food Security Cluster, the cash for food distributions amount to \$90 on a monthly basis per household. As of January 2022, WeWorld has secured 58% of the overall appeal. Thanks to the generous contributions of **ChildFund New Zealand, ChildFund Germany, ChildFund Australia, Barnfonden and EDUCO**, sustaining the duration of the project for six months from December 2021 lasting until the end of May 2022. The overall goal is to scale up to cover 400 households and approximately 2000 children as a minimum, as the initial needs assessment revealed there to be many more widow-led households in need.

One of the main challenges faced prior to the start of the project was ensuring that the international transfer of cash could be distributed, in the midst of a collapsed financial system with limited to no banking services available and severe cash liquidity shortage. This caused a slight delay to the initiation of the project, though afterwards no interruptions ensued. There is the possibility to run an assessment of the nutritional status of children and women involved in the distribution process, based on the availability of new funding. Furthermore, Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM) activities will follow after the distribution draws to an end, with data collected to evaluate the impact of the cash for food project and to inform next steps.

It is the imperative of WeWorld to support all vulnerable households identified in the original needs assessment through the cash for food project and therefore is seeking funds to cover the remaining 42% of the overall appeal.