ACBAR

Humanitarian in Afghanistan: Towards the World Humanitarian Summit and Beyond

Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief & Development

ACBAR was created in August 1988 and has been providing the framework within which NGOs and civil society, the Afghan Government, the UN and bilateral donors can exchange information, share expertise and establish guidelines for a more coordinated, efficient and effective use of resources providing humanitarian and development assistance to the Afghan people. ACBAR’s activities have focused heavily on information sharing with its members and to the aid community in general; coordination of activities at the national and regional levels and advocacy on a variety of humanitarian and development issues.

The World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) will be held in Istanbul, Turkey on the 26th-27th May 2016. This is the first global summit of its size and scope to be held on humanitarian action. It is an initiative of the United Nations Secretary-General to bring the global community together in order to map out a new humanitarian approach that is more effective and inclusive, and more representative of the needs and challenges of millions of people today and in years to come. With the humanitarian system is being stretched to its maximum across the globe, with crisis’s in South Sudan, Syria, Iraq, and the Central African Republic and the Ebola crisis, Afghanistan must not be forgotten.

In 2015, after years of conflict and turmoil, Afghanistan has made many achievements in sectors ranging from agriculture, education, health, governance to infrastructure. The country now finds itself at the beginning of “The Transformation Decade; Spanning from 2015 to 2024, this is a period of political, economic, and military transition.

To maintain effectiveness during this time, humanitarian action must understood, and where necessary adapted to these transitions to ensure that those affected by conflict or disasters are not left behind. According to the United Nations, an estimated 7.4 million people are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan in 2015.

Deteriorating security conditions, a complex and challenging humanitarian situation, recurrent natural disasters and the possible reduction in international aid require the humanitarian community to devise more innovative, sustainable, and long-term solutions to see humanitarian action strengthened and ultimately create a more dignified life for affected Afghan communities.

1) Humanitarian effectiveness

In a context of continued conflict, propensity to natural disasters, protracted displacement, and insufficient access to basic needs, the humanitarian community must be prepared for a sustained humanitarian effort for the coming years. A process of effective inclusion of stakeholders on all levels is therefore required. As part of this effort, people affected by disasters must be empowered, rather than made dependent. The humanitarian community should increase substantive consultations and engagement with affected communities to ensure greater sustainability of humanitarian projects and services. An increase of physical donor presence at a regional level would allow for improved communication, empowerment and support of regional bodies.

There is an overlap between acute and chronic emergencies in Afghanistan and missing links between emergency responses and long-term development. A cyclical humanitarian response is neither dignified for people in need nor cost-effective for donors. Increased
development and state action must take place to address some of the underlying drivers of humanitarian needs to foster long-term recovery, starting with better aligning humanitarian relief to development goals and activities. Given the growing gap between humanitarian needs and resources, humanitarian and development actors should jointly explore the cost-effectiveness of current crisis responses (for example the recurrent natural disasters which occur year on year) and the overall humanitarian system; introduce innovative technologies and processes, and invest in resilience building, risk reduction, and preparedness for both response and recovery.

Independent and needs-based humanitarian aid flow to Afghanistan is paramount to ensuring, impartial and neutral access to affected communities. The Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) and the Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) are therefore framed outside the national Aid Management Policy (AMP) and the Tokyo Commitments which ask for 80% alignment with National Stability Program 50% of aid to be on-budget. Humanitarian action is globally accepted to be ring-fenced from these mechanisms to ensure the impartiality. It is an absolute imperative that this continues.

2) Reducing vulnerability and managing risk

Emergency response preparedness is a proven effective and more efficient way to reduce overall vulnerability and manage risk. This approach should not be restricted to natural disasters but be expanded also to address political or socio-economic crises. The WHS Afghanistan National Consultation held in May 2015 highlighted risks in Afghanistan as:

- Natural disasters including floods, drought, landslides, avalanches, affect over 200,000 people per year; these disasters occur year on year and are therefore easily predictable.
- Climate change creates less predictability which has an impact on the county’s natural resources.
- Inefficient land water management creates environmental derogation in addition to social inequalities
- Armed conflict
- Large scale return of Afghans returnees from Pakistan, Iran and others countries
- Poor access to poor and vulnerable communities due to security concerns. Additionally, Geographical constraints prevent access to locations prone to natural disasters.
- Gender inequity – Natural disasters have a disproportionate impact on women. Ways must be found to incorporate the broader participation of women and other vulnerable groups to ensure they have an input into strategies for disaster risk reduction and humanitarian response.
- Lack of sufficient information for reducing vulnerability and managing risks.

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 National Disaster Management Commission 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 more with Provincial Disaster Management Committee 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 curriculums or other educational or religious institutions.

More flexible, multiyear funding and investment in contingency planning for prepositioned capacities before the crises take place is needed. Early warning systems should become a priority, placing emphasis on the improvement of participation of at-risk population and strengthening information to them. More attention should be paid to people livelihoods, how they are affected by natural disasters and conflicts and promote actions that protect and diversify people’s livelihoods to enhance their resilience and reduce humanitarian assistance needs. More research and analysis is needed to help the humanitarian community respond to disasters and manage risks. To enable the progress, the humanitarian community needs to systematically share experiences to ensure that they are learning from the natural disasters and humanitarian crises which occur year on year. Donors need to put more money into this type of research.

3) Transformation through Innovation

Innovative information management: Powerful tools of communication, including radio and phone coverage, should be utilized to disseminate messages related to emergencies. This also includes more communication through Community Development Councils (CDCs), schools, mosques, and clinics etc. Mapping these different communication modes will enable faster, up to date information relating to emergencies to be shared with the humanitarian community. Better early warning systems, inclusive of media messages, SMS, radio etc. should be used to communicate threats and hazards.

Innovating partnerships: There are many sectors with technical, managerial, information, operational capacities that should be more involved in humanitarian action. 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.

Innovation in human capital: Humanitarian Action requires innovative, professional and dedicated minds, evolving from pure technical experts and implementers to process facilitators, analyzers, mediators, and practitioners. Additionally, Madrasahs graduates are very much unrepresented in humanitarian organizations. This creates an unbalanced perception of impartiality. One INGO is teaching a module on humanitarian principles and practices to graduates of Islamic Madrasahs for the purpose of enabling more Madrasah students to become humanitarian aid workers. More projects like this should be encouraged.

4) Serving the needs of those in conflict

Afghanistan’s protracted internal armed conflict, insurgency, and political instability have internally displaced over 700,000 Afghans. As of 30 April 2015, 1,989 Afghans were injured and 978 Afghan civilians killed in conflict situations, throughout the country. Aid workers are also increasingly becoming victims. One aid worker killed in their line of duty is one too many. In 2014, 36 aid workers were killed and 95 wounded throughout Afghanistan. By June 2015, as many as 26 NGO workers have been killed, 17 wounded and 41 abducted.

The humanitarian space in Afghanistan is increasingly shrinking. Delivery of humanitarian relief to affected populations has been frustrated by those who are wary of aid agencies' due to a lack of understanding and trust of their work, agenda and principles which guide their
work. NGOs therefore often find themselves stuck ‘between a rock and a hard place’ in the
delivery of their duties and face obstacles from both State and non-state groups. There are
concerns that humanitarian space may decrease further in 2015 as criminal groups,
currently loosely controlled by the GiROA and other militant groups, become less
‘controllable’ and potentially more violent.

Responding to crises is complex and costly. Renewed focus must be given to humanitarian
conflict response. Many NGOs remain under pressure from donor governments to direct
humanitarian aid in certain ways, with political objectives often defining humanitarian
interventions, placing humanitarian workers and beneficiaries at risk. In many conflict-
affected areas, information on needs is non-existent and gathering assessment data has
become an impossible task. Without this information, it is almost impossible to capture
baseline data and apply appropriate analysis to understand protection and humanitarian
assistance gaps. This, in turn, affects the ability of humanitarian actors to advocate for
effective response and contributes to a poor donor understanding and a reluctance to make
humanitarian funding available. A clear commitment to a needs-led humanitarian response
and the halting of ‘hearts and minds’ funding must be enforced by donors during the next
critical transition phase. This will help ensure that humanitarian actors achieve long-term
acceptance and that aid to meet basic service needs is allocated evenly across the most
vulnerable areas.

A key focus of the WHS will be to see how to make accountability more robust, of all
stakeholders, but particularly duty bearers and Member States. It is of utmost importance
that the international community uses this opportunity to reaffirm the shared value of
humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. The
humanitarian principles emerged from International Humanitarian Law and are based on a
common understanding that humanitarian action is driven by a sense of humanity, a
willingness to relieve human suffering, regardless of culture, origins or religion. They are
encompassed within the core of key humanitarian references, such as the Code of Conduct
for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental
Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief or the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.

**Key recommendations:**

In moving towards the World Humanitarian Summit and beyond the Afghanistan
humanitarian community should:

- Re-affirm their commitment to respect and promote the humanitarian principles of
  humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence and re-affirm the value of the
  humanitarian imperative;
- Re-affirm the good practice of Humanitarian Donor-ship and commit to ensuring a
  full-scale separation of humanitarian response from military objectives by delinking
  humanitarian aid from political, security and military agendas during and beyond
  transition;
- Re-affirm and protect the fundamental right for all affected people, regardless of
  gender, disabilities and backgrounds to access humanitarian aid;
- Prioritize and fund needs-based humanitarian programs that target vulnerable
  groups, particularly women and children, and persons with disabilities, and 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 to help build
  disaster management and response capacity through increased funding to local
  humanitarian preparedness and disaster risk reduction programs.
**Humanitarian Principles**

*Humanity:* Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found. The purpose of Humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings.

*Neutrality:* Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

*Impartiality:* Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of need alone, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress and making no distinctions on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions.

*Independence:* Humanitarian action must be autonomous from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.

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