

AFGHANISTAN

Floods in Kandahar, Helmand, Farah, Herat, Badghis

Briefing note – 13 March 2019

Heavy rains and flooding have affected several thousand people in nine provinces across the country. The most severely affected provinces are Kandahar, Helmand, Farah, Herat and Badghis. The death toll currently stands at 70 people but is likely to increase as more information is made available. More than 8,670 houses have been damaged or destroyed, as well as agricultural land and infrastructure including water systems, increasing the risk of water- and vector- borne diseases. Response gaps include emergency shelter, food, NFIs, winter clothes and emergency latrines.

IMPACT



NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE



Anticipated scope and scale

The floods have affected nine provinces with Kandahar, Helmand, Farah, Herat and Badghis as the most severely affected in the South West of Afghanistan. As flood waters move downriver towards the border town of Zaranj, the **province of Nimroz is on high alert** (ECHO 07/03/2019). The impact may increase in the coming weeks as Afghanistan is moving into the spring season and increasing temperatures are raising concerns for additional flooding and avalanches caused by melting snow. A long-lasting **impact on the already critical food insecurity** situation may be expected as floods have destroyed agricultural land and crops in some areas.

Key priorities



+8,670
houses destroyed or damaged



250,000
people affected



Food assistance
needed

Humanitarian constraints



Infrastructure damage, rugged terrain, and ongoing rainfall are hindering the humanitarian response. Insecurity in the region remains high and may restrict operations.

Limitations

Conflicting data from OCHA and IFRC as well as inconsistencies in the reporting format between provinces cause confusion about the numbers of impact.

Crisis impact

An El Niño phenomenon, declared in early February, has caused unusual heavy snow- and rainfall across Afghanistan. As a result, flooding has been affecting nine provinces in the south, west and, to a lesser extent, the east of Afghanistan since 1 March. As of 8 March, at least 70 people have died and hundreds are injured or missing as a result of the flooding. Some 36,000 households, including approximately 250,000 people, are reported to be affected by the floods (IFRC 08/03/2019). In Kandahar, Helmand, Farah and Herat the four most severely affected provinces, more than 9,249 families are in need of humanitarian assistance as of 11 March (OCHA 07/03/2019; OCHA 11/03/2019). On 9 March heavy rain and flooding hit Muqur district in Badghis province. Figures on the overall impact are not yet available.

Assessments conducted in the past few weeks show that Kandahar province is the most severely impacted with 33,000 people in need of humanitarian assistance and at least 5,000 displaced as of 11 March (OCHA 07/03/2019; ECHO 07/03/2019; OCHA 11/03/2019). In Helmand 5,400 people have been displaced from their homes, making up the vast majority of the people in need in the province as of 7 March (OCHA 07/03/2019). An initial OCHA assessment published on 7 March counts 9,200 families whose houses were either destroyed or damaged by the floods and 9,250 families who are in need of assistance in Farah province. However, a report published 11 March estimates the number of families in need in Farah to be only 3,250. In Herat the impact has been largely on agricultural land. A lower number of 254 households affected in the province has been reported (OCHA 07/03/2019).

Impact Overview as registered by OCHA 11/03/2019 and 7/03/2019.

	Kandahar	Helmand	Farah	Herat
Households affected and in need	4,698 (11/03)	1,092 (11/03)	3,205 (11/03)	254 (07/03)
			9,250 (07/03)	
People affected and in need	33,000 (11/03)	6,000 (07/03)		
Houses destroyed	1,855 (11/03)	+770 (07/03)	1,601 (11/03)	
Families with destroyed houses			3,600 (07/03)	
Houses damaged	2,841 (11/03)		1,604 (11/03)	
Families with damaged houses			5,600 (07/03)	

Additionally, the floods have caused widespread damages to schools, businesses, mosques, agricultural land, government buildings, and infrastructure across the country (Al Jazeera 05/03/2019; OCHA 03/03/2019).

Assessments of the affected areas are ongoing and figures on impact are likely to change as more information becomes available (Reuters 06/03/2019).

Shelter: The published information does not allow for an updated total count of damaged houses in the affected region. However, an estimation based on information published in OCHA reports on 7 March and 11 March suggests that at least 8,671 homes have been damaged or destroyed (OCHA 05/03/2019). Particularly, nomadic herder families staying near riverbeds have been severely impacted (The Guardian 06/03/2019). Emergency shelter needs are high and response gaps are being reported (OCHA 07/03/2019; ECHO 07/03/2019). ECHO fears that the gap could widen if flooding spreads to the north, in line with usual seasonal patterns (ECHO 07/03/2019).

Food & NFIs: An estimated 10.6 million people are severely food insecure in Afghanistan (OCHA 20/01/2019; IPC, October 2018; FEWS Net, January 2019). While the anticipated above-normal rainfall was thought to provide relief to the farmlands that have been affected by a severe drought since April 2018, the limited capacity of dried out soil to absorb water has led to the loss of crops during the heavy rains (FEWS Net 26/02/2019; The Guardian 06/03/2019). The damaged agricultural land and destroyed livestock as a result of flooding increase the risk of further deteriorating food insecurity in the affected areas (The Guardian 06/03/2019).

Flood affected families are in need of food assistance as well as warm winter clothing due to the cold weather conditions (OCHA 07/03/2019; ECHO 07/03/2019).

WASH: Needs for emergency latrines and the distribution of hygiene kits are widely reported (OCHA 07/03/2019; ECHO 07/03/2019). Reports mention that water supply systems including wells, water catchments and water reservoirs in the affected areas have been damaged (OCHA 05/03/2019; OCHA 07/03/2019; OCHA 11/03/2019). Some communities are drinking unsafe water, raising concerns over outbreaks of diarrhoea and waterborne diseases (OCHA 07/03/2019; IFRC 08/03/2019).

Health: Hundreds are injured by the floods. With some health facilities reported to be damaged or destroyed in Kandahar province, there is a need for emergency health and psychosocial services. Floods increase the risk of potential disease outbreaks (OCHA 07/03/2019; ECHO 07/03/2019).

Impact on critical infrastructure

The floods have damaged, blocked, and inundated critical infrastructure including roads, irrigation canals, schools, health facilities, telecommunications, and water systems (OCHA 04/03/2019; OCHA 11/03/2019). No exact information on numbers or extent of damages has been reported.

Vulnerable groups affected

Nomadic families have been particularly vulnerable to the floods. Floodwaters have swept away the tents and livestock of nomadic herders in the affected area (Al Jazeera 05/03/2019). Some 500 individuals from the Nomadic Kochi population are stranded on the river bank in Kandahar province. OCHA stated on 2 March that urgent air support was needed to rescue those who have been trapped and to provide relief (OCHA 02/03/2019).

Herat and Badghis provinces count over 60,000 IDP's who have been displaced because of the drought. Even though, it is expected this group is especially vulnerable to the floods, no specific information on their conditions has been reported (NRC 7/11/2019).

Humanitarian and operational constraints

Ongoing heavy snowfall, restricted access due to damaged or closed bridges and roads, as well as a telecommunication shut down are hampering the humanitarian response in the region. The flooding has hit a widespread geographical area, including rugged mountainous terrain and remote rural districts, further impeding humanitarian operations (Reuters, 02/03/2019; OCHA 07/03/2019; CHA 03/03/2019).

Active conflict, the threat of landmines, and widespread insecurity represent the major obstacles for humanitarian access in Afghanistan. The road network has suffered from decades of conflict, leaving many in poor condition and impacting road safety (i.e., poorly maintained vehicles and loose enforcement of traffic laws (Logistics Cluster, 04/07/2018). Attacks against aid workers have decreased since a peak in 2013, partly attributed to reducing the presence of aid workers in the most insecure areas and direct access negotiations with conflict parties (GPPI October 2016; OCHA 16/08/2018; OCHA 21/06/2017). However, between January 2018 and January 2019 at least 35 humanitarian aid workers were killed, wounded or kidnapped in Afghanistan, all of them Afghan nationals (AWSD assessed 28/02/2019; OCHA 16/08/2018).

The ongoing insecurity in the region have interrupted some of the assessments. In Farah province areas outside the city have not been assessed due to the security situation (OCHA 11/03/2019).

Aggravating factors

Drought and El Nino

Humanitarian conditions are exacerbated by the severe drought that has impacted the country since April 2018. In line with the El Niño event forecasted for February until May, most provinces have received rainfall 115% to 150% above the long-term average as of late February (OCHA 20/01/2019; WMO 27/11/2018; Fews Net 26/02/2019). Above-average precipitation offers relief to depleted water supplies and drought-affected land and is expected to be beneficial for irrigated spring wheat and second season planting (Fews Net 26/02/2019). However, considering the current state of soils and higher temperatures in March and April that may accelerate the melting of snow, there is an increased risk of additional flooding and landslides (Fews Net 26/02/2019, Fews Net 20/02/2019). Effects of these hazards on agriculture as well as a heightened risk for crop pests due to higher humidity will likely impact food security in a country where 10.6 million people are estimated to be severely food insecure (ECHO 07/03/2019; OCHA 05/03/2019; OCHA 07/03/2019).

Spring wheat planting season

Spring wheat planting season has begun and will last until May (FEWS Net 26/02/2019). However, the heavy rains and flash floods may make agricultural activity in the affected areas difficult, either due to leaching of soil, washing away of seeds, or inability to engage in any planting due to excess water and mud.

Location and type of housing/infrastructure

Due to the arid-like terrain in the southern provinces, people tend to settle closer to major rivers. This makes them more vulnerable to the effects of flooding when river banks burst. Arable land, livestock, and agricultural assets get washed away or damaged by flooding, leaving affected populations with little or no livelihoods when the waters recede (Logistics Capacity Assessment 04/07/2018).

Homes in many of the villages are not built to resist heavy rains and flash floods. Many, particularly in rural areas, are built of mud or stone and easily washed away by flooding (UN Habitat May 2017).

Fighting season

Spring is the beginning of the fighting season in Afghanistan due to improved weather conditions. It generally brings a spike in violence in the country when insurgent groups re-arm and launch renewed violent offenses in various provinces (REUTERS 25/02/2019).

Political stability and security

Afghanistan has seen a new escalation of violence and non-government armed groups (NGAGs) such as the Taliban and Islamic State Khorasan (ISK) control more territory now than they have since 2001. Active conflict is disrupting civilian life, limiting access to basic services and raising protection concerns for 17m Afghans in 106 districts. The volatile, unpredictable security situation has led to the displacement of 585,000 people in 2018 with urgent shelter, food, protection and WASH needs.

On 18 October 2018 General Abdul Raziq, a powerful police chief of Kandahar province, was assassinated. The killing is seen as a significant military victory for the Taliban and has left a security vacuum, raising concern about increasing instability in the province (The New York Times 18/10/2018).

Helmand has known high insurgent activity with the Taliban controlling large areas of the province (SIGAR 30/01/2019). Attacks with civilian casualties are frequently reported. On 10 March two airstrikes carried out by security forces killed 21 civilians in Helmand province (Al Jazeera 10/03/2019).

In Farah the security situation has been deteriorating in the western part of the province where attacks between Afghan security forces and the Taliban are carried out frequently (The New York Times 15/02/2019).

Key characteristics

- Total population in country: 34,124,811 (CIA 2018)
- Gender distribution: 1.03 male(s)/female (CIA 2018)
- Age distribution (CIA 2018):
 - 0-14: 40.92% (male 7,093,980/female 6,869,737)
 - 15-24 years: 22.22% (male 3,859,696/female 3,723,679)
 - 25-54 years: 30.35% (male 5,273,969/female 5,082,972)
 - 55-64 years: 3.92% (male 659,635/female 678,942)
 - 65 years and over: 2.59% (male 407,437/female 474,764)
- National food security figures: 10.6 million severely food insecure (OCHA 20/01/2019; IPC, October 2018; FEWS Net, January 2019)
- Infant mortality rate: 52 per 1,000 live births (UNICEF 2018)

- Under-five mortality rate: 67.9 per 1,000 live births (UNICEF 2018)
- Maternal mortality rate: 396 deaths/100,000 live births (CIA 2018)
- Access to improved sources of drinking water: 31.9% of population (CIA 2018)
- Access to basic sanitation facilities: 32% (UNICEF 2018)
- Literacy levels: 38.2% (CIA 2018)

Response capacity

Local and national response capacity

The Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) is leading the coordination of information gathering and operational response, with support from humanitarian agencies (ECHO 07/03/2019). Join Coordination Assessments and response are ongoing in Kandahar, Helmand, Farah and Herat provinces. Emergency Operation Centres have been opened. Food, hygiene kits, emergency health kits, NFIs such as blankets and winter clothing as well as emergency shelter have been distributed to the affected population in the four provinces (OCHA 07/03/2019).

Insufficient shelter response capacity has been reported (OCHA 07/03/2019; ECHO 07/03/2019).

Local authorities and private construction companies have been working to clear the rubble and mud that the floods have left behind and re-open the roads as well as divert flood waters away from villages and infrastructure (OCHA 07/03/2019; ECHO 07/03/2019).

International response capacity

INGOs and UN agencies are supporting the assessments and humanitarian response in the region. OCHA is taking on a leading role. Organisations such as IFRC, DRC, IRC and ACF are involved in the support (ECHO 07/03/2019).

Information gaps and needs

- Information on the impact of the floods is changing quickly due to the highly dynamic nature of the crisis. As a result, conflicting information on affected regions, people affected, houses destroyed or damaged and deaths have been reported by different sources. Particularly, a report by OCHA (7 March) and by IFRC (8 March) show different figures possibly due to a different approach in data collection. Moreover, a report published by OCHA on 11 March shows a significantly lower impact for Farah province than a report published on 7 March. It is not clear if the decrease is due to a change in the situation or in methodology of data collection.
- Impact Information published by OCHA does not show a coherence in "household data" and data collected on the individual level between provinces, making it difficult to derive a total impact count on the individual level over the affected provinces.
- Data on the affected population disaggregated by sex and age is not available.
- There is a lack of information on the specific needs of the affected population.
- Not all affected areas have been assessed due to restricted humanitarian access. Particularly, in Farah province the security situation has prevented assessments of areas outside the city (OCHA 11/03/2019).

Lessons learned

Flooding is the most frequently occurring natural hazard in Afghanistan. Steep slopes in headwaters cause rivers to overflow when there is heavy rainfall whether or not in combination with rapid snow melt during spring. Denudation of mountain areas and the general lack of vegetation contribute to the flooding risk. Despite the high risk of flooding, the country has poorly built flood protection infrastructure and a lack of early warning systems (GFDRR 2017). The World Bank and the GFDRR are mentioning the need to develop a comprehensive and inclusive national strategy for disaster risk management, hydromet monitoring and analysis, and early warning. However, the ongoing violence and high insecurity in the country are taking away attention and resources from long term development plans (World Bank & GFDRR December 2018).

To reduce the impact on livestock, there is a need for investments in a more effective water management systems during drought limiting the negative implications for soil conditions and allowing for more water to be absorbed during rainfall, as well as improved irrigation systems and diversifying of livelihoods. Moreover, strengthening dikes and improving shelter situations could improve flood protection (GFDRR 2017).

