



DROUGHT ASSESSMENT REPORT

June 2021

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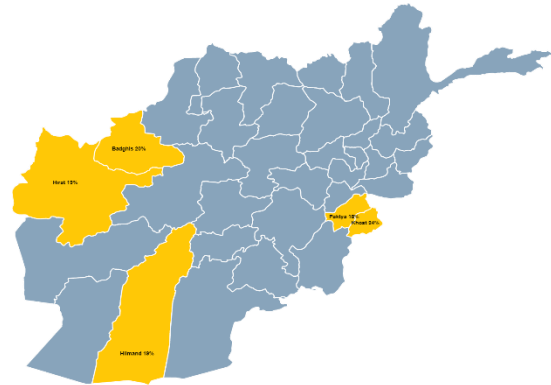
Summary.

Between May 4th-12th, 2021 the International Rescue Committee (IRC) conducted a drought needs assessment in the provinces of Herat, Badghis, Pakitya, Helmand and Khost to get a clear understanding of the impact of the situation caused by the extreme weather conditions that have affected different parts of the world including Afghanistan. A sample from 484 community members was selected for this survey. In each of the five provinces, the assessment was conducted in three districts hence covering 15 districts and 158 villages. All the respondents were community members above 18 years in the target areas. The results show that the water resources are increasingly being strained as result of slow onset drought conditions, with reported cases of increased conflict over water in various communities. Pastoralists have started experiencing loss of livestock and strain on pastoral livelihoods due to the early drought conditions and this will worsen in the coming days while market prices for basic food commodities have started rising and it has already been reported that some households have not been able meet their food needs. Population movements especially in Herat and Badghis have also reportedly been increasing. To prevent large-scale displacement, early response is required to support households faced with challenges of food security and livelihoods in form of cash-based assistance or food distributions. Livelihood support should also be prioritized to protect household assets including provision of livestock fodder and veterinary service. This drought assessment report did not include the other major humanitarian factors such as COVID-19, food security situation and conflict, which impact the lives of the Afghans as a whole.

Introduction

Various parts of the world have experienced moderate to strong La Niña phenomenon, and this has caused extreme weather conditions. According to the World Meteorological Organization, this phenomenon, which started in the second half of 2020 has effects on temperatures, precipitation, and storm patterns and is expected to continue at least until spring 2021. In Afghanistan, this commonly results in below-average rainfall and snowfall across the country. It is reported that the period from October 2020 to February 2021 have been the driest winter in 40 years in the central and western regions of Afghanistan. The timing of this La Niña event coincides with the main wheat season with harvests in May-July 2021, which are critical following the lean season (January-April). The conditions have affected the winter season snow

accumulation, which is critical for water access during the spring and summer agricultural seasons. It is anticipated that the situation will have an impact on both rain-fed and irrigated agriculture/livestock, as well as on the availability of water for drinking, washing, and sanitation. In May 2021, the IRC conducted a drought assessment to get a clear understanding on the impacts of the drought conditions on the livelihoods of the people in its target locations.

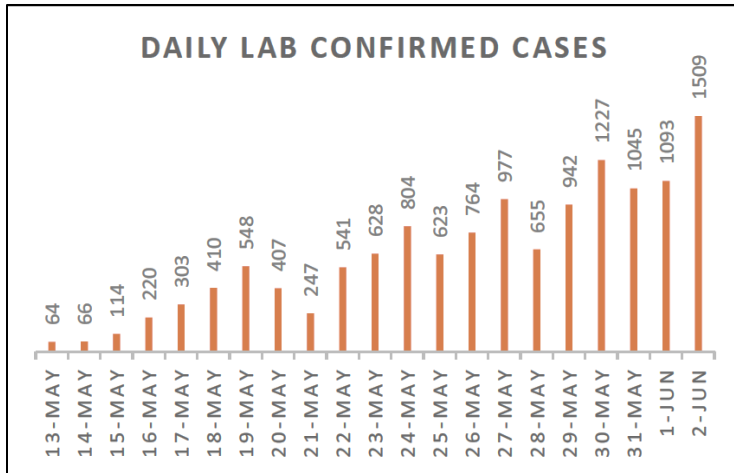


The Map shows provinces where the assessment was conducted.

Limitations of the assessment and the context dynamics

This drought assessment report did not include the other major humanitarian factors- -COVID-19, food security situation and conflict- which impact the lives of the Afghans as a whole. Below is the latest update as of the 1st week of June 2021:

COVID-19 Situation: As of 4 June, Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) data shows that 76,628 people across all 34 provinces in Afghanistan are confirmed to have had COVID-19. Some 58,070 people have recovered, and 3,068 people have died – at least 91 of fatalities have been healthcare workers. Since the start of the pandemic, only 484,939 tests have been conducted for a population of 40.4 million. Cases have steadily risen to alarming levels over the post-Eid period. The daily average number of people newly impacted has now surpassed figures seen during the



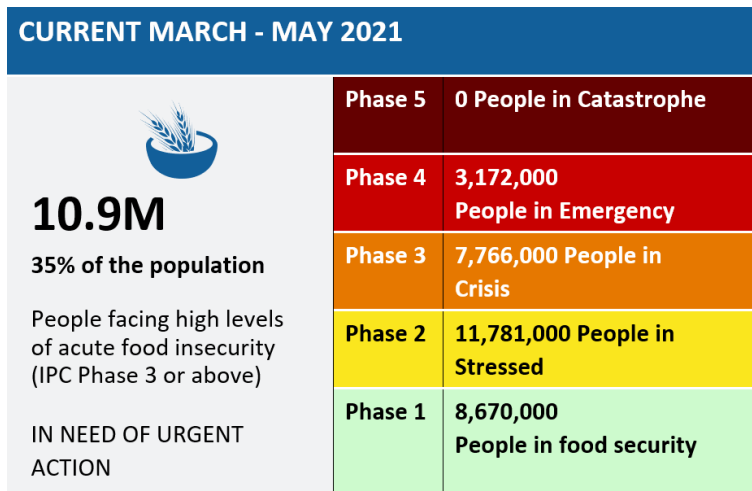
peak of the first and second waves. On June 1, 2021 alone, 1,509 new cases were reported – the highest number of new cases recorded in a single day since the onset of the pandemic. Overseas testing has confirmed the presence of the variants in Afghanistan. While Afghanistan lacks in-country facilities to test for the variant that originated

in India, concern over the variant’s spread is high as many of the patients hospitalized over the last two weeks have a history of recently returning from India or having contact with people who have. It is believed that cases are underreported because of low testing capacity and reporting issues. Most confirmed cases were men between the ages of 15 and 30, whereas the majority of recorded deaths were men between the ages of 50 and 79. Men account for more than 66 per cent of the total COVID-19 confirmed cases in the MoPH data, although this may be the result of over-representation of men in testing. Afghanistan now has a test-positivity-rate – positive tests as a percentage of total tests – of 44 per cent, suggesting overall under-testing of potential cases. Due to limited public health resources, lack of people coming forward for testing, as well as the absence of a national death register, confirmed cases of and deaths from COVID-19 are likely to be underreported overall in Afghanistan. World Health Organization warns that widespread complacency and failure to follow public health advice in Afghanistan is creating grave risks in the community with people generally not observing physical distancing or mask wearing protocols. In response to the rapid rise in new cases, the MoPH announced a two-week closure of schools, universities, and training courses from 29 May in 16 provinces, including Kabul. The first batch of 468,000 COVID-19 vaccination doses through the COVID19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) facility arrived in Afghanistan on 8 March. In total, Afghanistan has received 968,000 doses of the vaccine – 468,000 from the COVAX facility and 500,000 directly from the government of India.

Socio-economic impacts of COVID19: The COVID-19 pandemic has set back Afghanistan’s economic growth by several years. It exposed structural and resource gaps in responding to unforeseen events such as pandemics. The country had to reallocate resources from long-term development priorities to fighting this health and food insecurity crisis. The socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 in addition to other factors have translated into a dramatic deterioration in

food insecurity. The recently released updated IPC analysis estimates that 14.1 million people – more than one third of the population - are in crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity. Cumulative precipitation has been below average over the wet season with reduced precipitation and higher temperatures likely to affect farmers and pastoralists, as well as water availability over the next few months. Food prices are already higher than normal due to COVID-19 and are likely to increase further given the dry spell’s likely impact on first and second crops in 2021. These factors, combined with COVID-19 related interruptions to informal employment and decreased remittances, are driving people into crippling debt. Data from the 2020 Whole of Afghanistan Assessment showed that the primary reason for taking on this debt last year was to pay for food (53 per cent).

Food Security¹: Nearly 11 million people in Afghanistan are experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above) due to conflict, COVID-19, high food prices and rampant unemployment, between March and May 2021 (the lean season in most parts of the country.) This includes around 7.8 million people in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and 3.2 million people in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) and require urgent action to save lives, reduce food gaps and save and protect livelihoods.



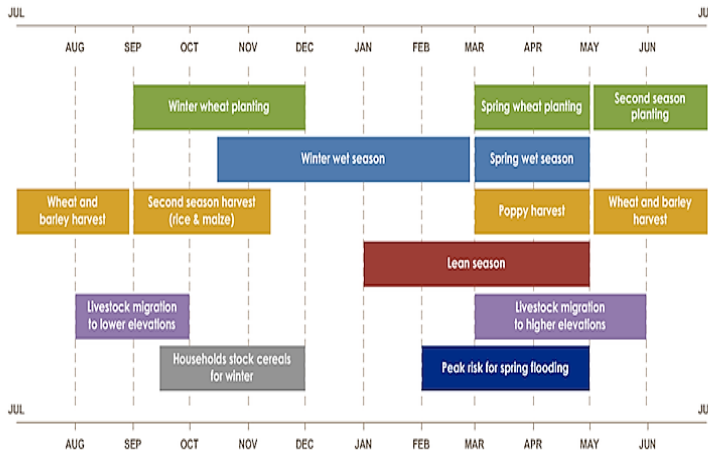
Between June and November 2021 (harvest and post-harvest seasons), a slight improvement in food security is expected, with the number of people in IPC Phase 3 or above decreasing to 9.5 million, with 6.7 million in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and 2.7 million in IPC Phase 4 (Emergency). The areas that were in Phase 4 in the current analysis period are expected to remain in Phase 4 in the projection period, despite slight seasonal improvements. It is likely that household’s food access will improve slightly with the onset of the harvest, better job opportunities, as well as seasonal decreases in prices; however, rainfall forecasts suggest that the harvest will be below average, which will likely affect food availability during the following lean season.

¹ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Acute Food Insecurity Analysis, April 21.

The food security situation has relatively improved compared to the last three years, aside from the impacts of drought in 2018 and the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020. However, the food security situation is still concerning and expected to deteriorate further during the 2021-2022 lean season.

Seasonal Calendar – Typical Year (FEWSNET)

Security Situation:



Key figures	
	People displaced 140,691
	Families displaced 21,175
	Adult male 20%
	Adult female 20%
	Children under 18 59%

2021, 140,691 individuals fled their homes due to conflict. A total of 29 out of 34 provinces had recorded some level of forced displacement. Just in the second quarter of 2021 (April to present), several provinces have experienced large-scale conflict: Baghlan, Helmand, Kandahar, Ghazni, and Laghman. Constrained humanitarian access hinders assessments, thus preventing verification of the full extent of displacement and undermining the provision of assistance and services. Displacement affects all individuals differently with needs, vulnerabilities and protection risks evolving over time due to exhaustion of coping mechanisms and only basic emergency assistance provided following initial displacement. Inadequate shelter, food insecurity, insufficient access to sanitation and health facilities, as well as a lack of protection, often result in precarious living conditions that jeopardizes the well-being and dignity of affected families.

Although at this stage, the effort is to manage the symptoms and triggers rather than the underlying and root causal factors of drought, a humanitarian-development-peace nexus programming across the sectors should be prioritized.

Methodology

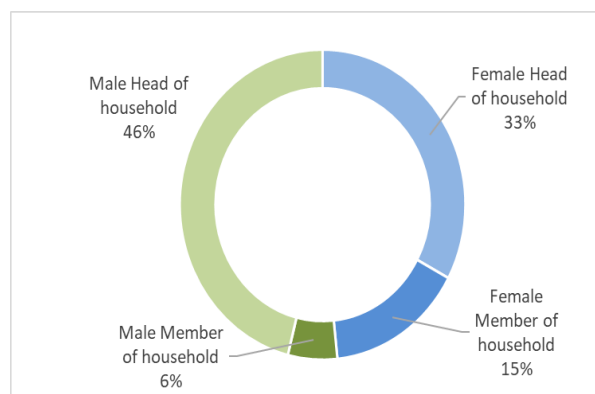
IRC Afghanistan conducted the Drought Need Assessment in Herat, Helmand, Badghis, Khost, and Paktia Provinces, between 4th – 12th May 2021. The primary objective of this assessment was to assess the impact of drought on target population livelihoods, agriculture, and livestock.

A sample of 484 community members were randomly selected for this survey, and respondents came from households which do farming, pastoralism and do small business. In each of the five provinces, the assessment was conducted in three districts hence covering 15 districts and 158 villages. All the respondents were community members above 18 years in the target areas.

Each province had three assessment teams each team comprising of two people (male and female) and delivered the interviews through a face-to-face meeting to a total of 484 respondents across all the five provinces. 45% of the respondent were female, while 55% were male.

Number of respondents interviewed per location

Province	District	Number of male respondents	Number of female respondents	Total
Badghis	Ab Kamari	12	20	32
	Muqur	8	23	31
	Qadis	28	6	34
Helmand	Nad-e-Ali	15	16	31
	Nahr-e-Saraj	15	13	28
	Nawa-e-Barak Zaiy	12	20	32
Herat	Karukh	15	15	30
	Kushk	13	17	30
	Zinda Jan	16	16	32
Khost	Gurbuz	20	19	39
	Tani	19	20	39
	Tere Zayi	20	20	40
Paktia	Gardez	15	15	30
	Shawak	26	14	40
	Zadran		16	16



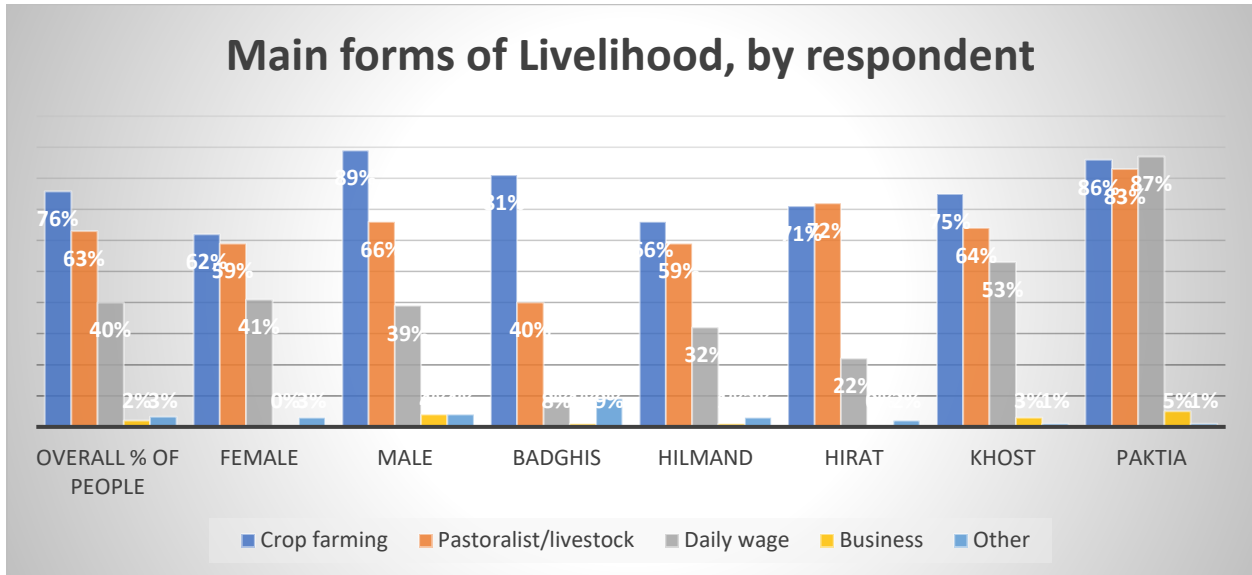
Graph 1: Gender of the respondents

Demographics

Ninety three percent (93%) of the respondents were host community members, 7% were internally displaced and 1% were recent returnees (less than three months) from either Iran or Pakistan. 79% of the respondents were the heads of their households and the average monthly income for respondents was 4,072 AFN (Median 2,000 AFN reported by female respondents and 3,500 AFN by male respondents). The average household size was 14 people with each household having

an average of 3 children that are under five years. 94% of the respondents reported that there are under five children staying in their households and 60% of respondents reported having children below six months in their households.

Across all the five provinces, when respondents were asked what their major source of livelihoods is, crop farming and livestock were the predominant sources. Daily wage work was also a major source for 40% of households, though this varied more widely by region – see graph 2.

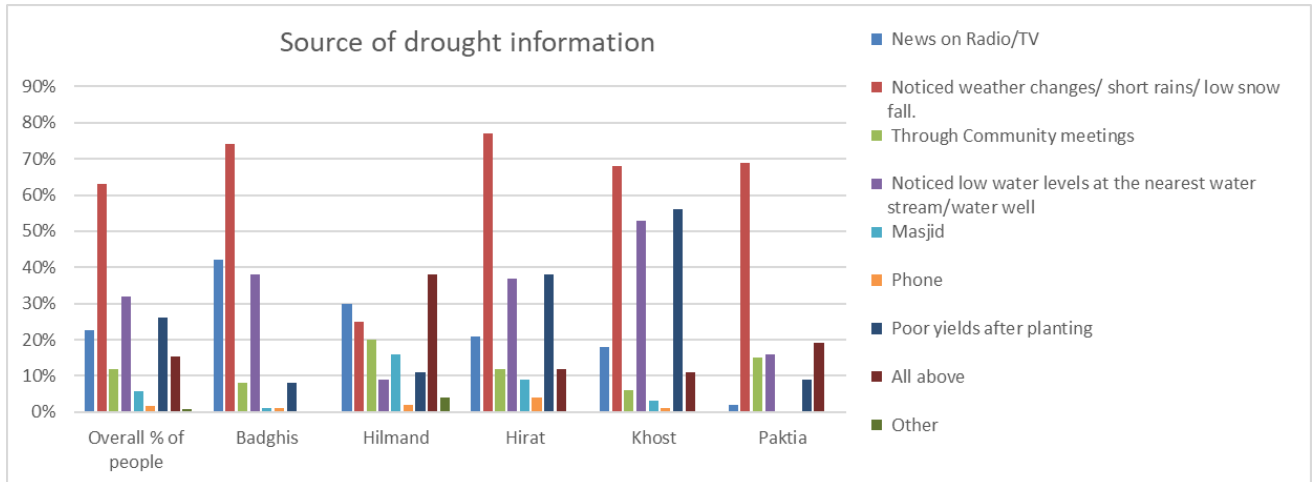


Graph 2: Main source of Livelihoods

Results

Knowledge of impending drought and immediate needs

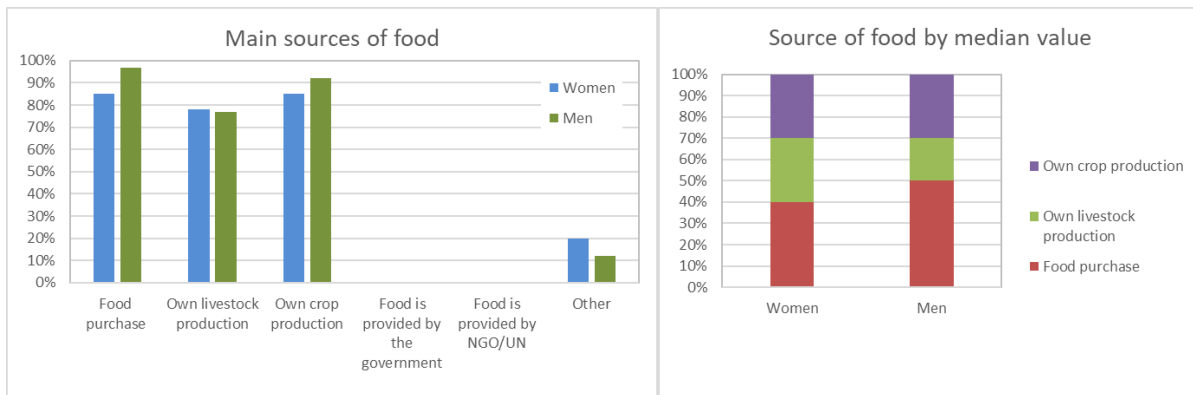
When asked about the likelihood of a drought this year, 92% of the respondents were fully aware of the impending drought because nearly all of them had experienced past droughts – this percentage was similar between female and male respondents. For most of the respondents that were aware of the impending drought, their main source of information was through observation, rather than outside sources such as news reports. 40% of the respondents have already started experiencing the impacts of the drought. When asked if they have received any from support from the government or non-governmental organization, 98% of the respondents said they had not received any form of support and 70% of the respondents felt not informed of any form of assistance available to them, while only 13% confirmed that they felt informed.



Graph 3: Respondents' Sources of drought information

Source of food for household consumption.

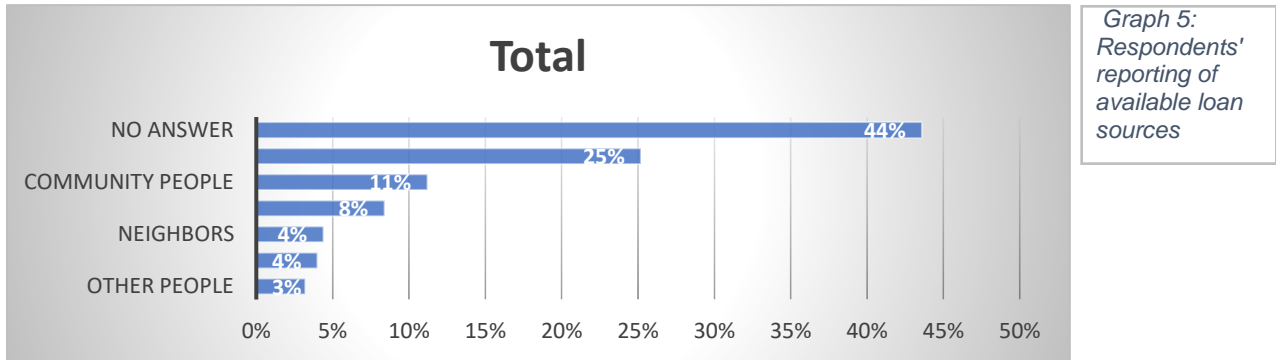
Most of the respondents purchase food from the local markets, grow their own food or own livestock with none of the respondents receiving any form of support from government or non-government organization.



Graph 4: Respondents' reporting of main food sources, disaggregated by gender of respondent

On the local markets, 72% of the respondents (60% of men but 85% of women) said that the markets are not accessible all year long and 86% of the respondents have started noticing changes in their food sources while 98% of the respondents have confirmed that the food prices have increased with a majority of the respondents linking food shortages to drought. 71% of the respondents anticipate that the food security situation will get worse, 28% do not know if the situation will get worse while only 1% think it will improve.

When asked if they could access a loan if they needed one, 52% of the respondents (60% of men but only 43% of women) said that had access to loans and 48% confirmed that they had existing loans. When asked the sources of loans that are available to them, almost all respondents that had access to loans mentioned informal sources, such as friends and relatives.

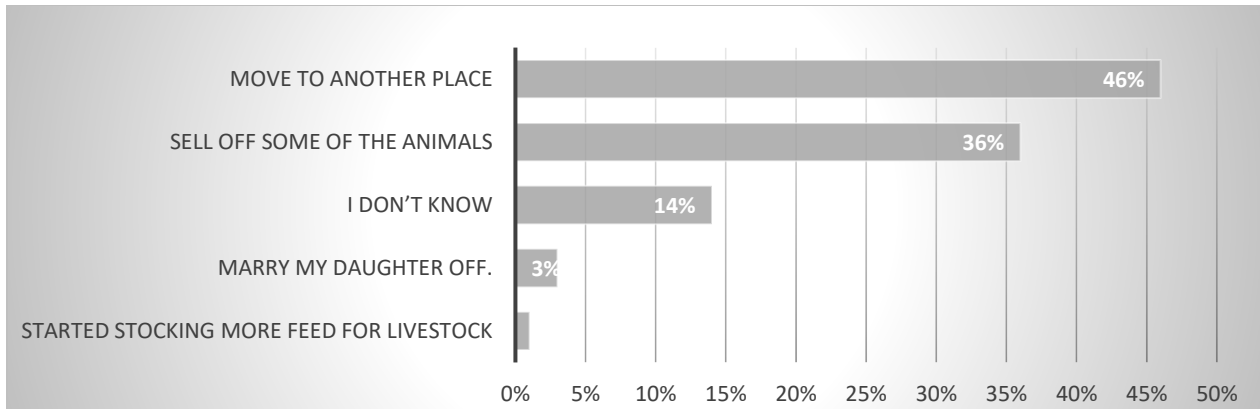


48% of respondents reported that they have existing loans to pay off. Many of the respondents that had loans used them for health care costs (37%) and agriculture (32%), followed by education (10%)

Livelihood: Pastoralism

86% of the respondents have noticed an unusual level of livestock diseases in the past one to two months before this assessment, and 97% respondents have noticed a depletion of the pastureland for grazing with 77% of those that own livestock confirming that they have started losing some their livestock.

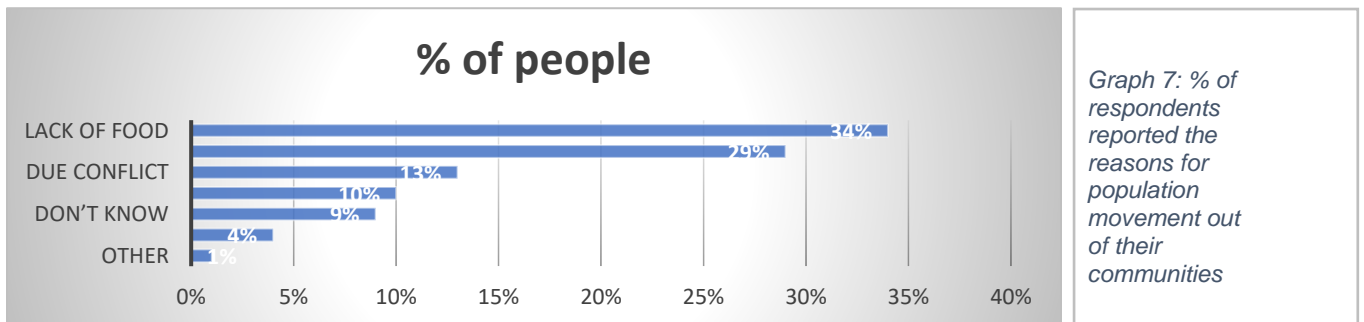
When asked what they intend to do if the drought hits hard and there is not any form support from the government of other organization, 46% said they will move to another place, 36% said they will sell off their animals, 1% have started stocking more livestock feed, 3% will marry off their daughters to get money to feed their livestock and support the family while 14% do not know what to do.



Graph 6: % of the respondents that reported the possible options to be taken if the drought hits hard

Population Movements

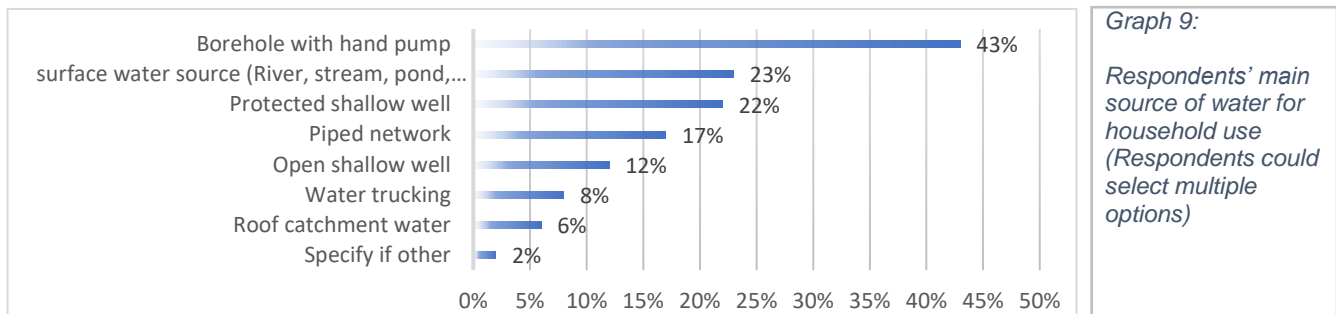
All provinces have experienced population movements within the last three months before this assessment with 83% of the respondents (86% of women and 80% of men) reporting notice of population movements in and out of their communities. The majority (76%) reported population movement out of their communities, and 22% reported population movement into their communities. The respondents reporting highest levels of movement were in Hilmand (99%) and Badghis (93%), with lower awareness of movement in Khost (70%) and Paktia (71%). In Badghis, population movement out of the communities was mainly reported in Ab Kamari and Qadis districts while in Herat it was mainly reported in Karukh district. Lack of food (34%), loss of livelihoods (29%), conflict (13%), water sources drying out (10%) were the major reasons given by the respondents for population movement to other communities. Population movement due to loss of livelihood and lack of food was mainly reported in Herat and Badghis (54%) while Helmand reported the highest level of population movement due to conflict. When asked if the population movements will increase when drought hits hard, 82% of the respondents confirmed that people will move to other places when this happens.



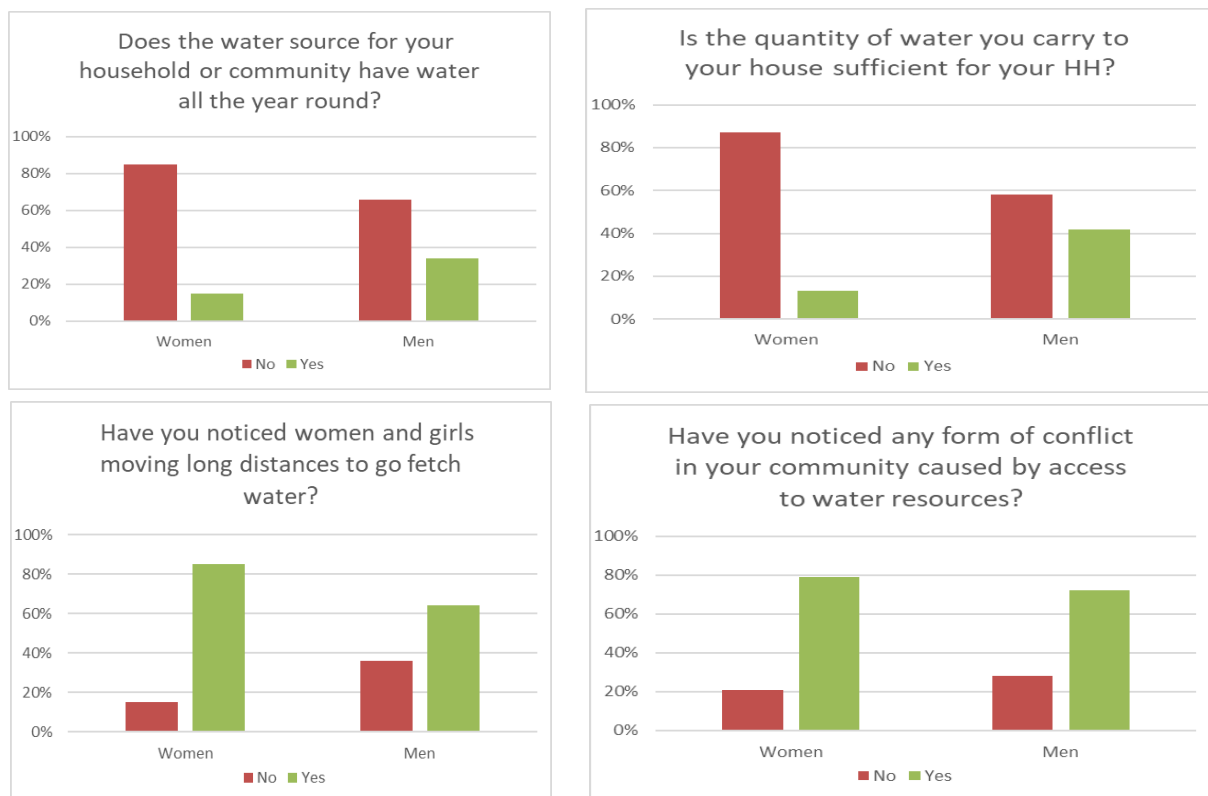
Graph 7: % of respondents reported the reasons for population movement out of their communities

Water and Sanitation

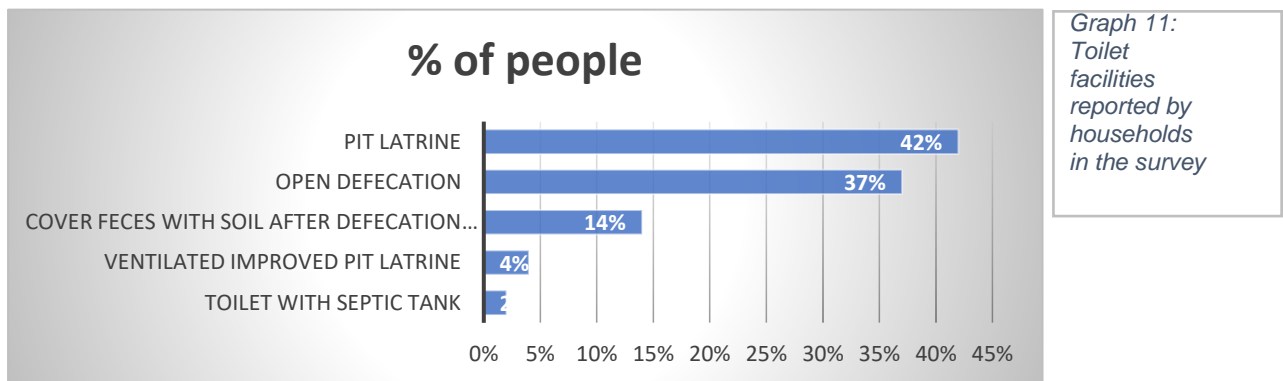
Respondents reported that the major sources of water for household use were borehole with hand pump (43%), surface water sources (23%) or protected shallow wells (22%). Most respondents (75%) reported that water points don't have water all year round and this was mainly reported in Khost and Badghis. 72% of the respondents reported that the water they carry to their households is not sufficient for households use and 50% reported that water availability in their communities will worsen in the next six months. 75% reported conflict cases arising from access to water resources in their communities with 74% of the respondents reporting that women and girls have to walk long distances to fetch water. In all of these metrics, there was some difference in perception between men and women, as illustrated in Graph 8 below.



Graph 9:
Respondents' main source of water for household use (Respondents could select multiple options)



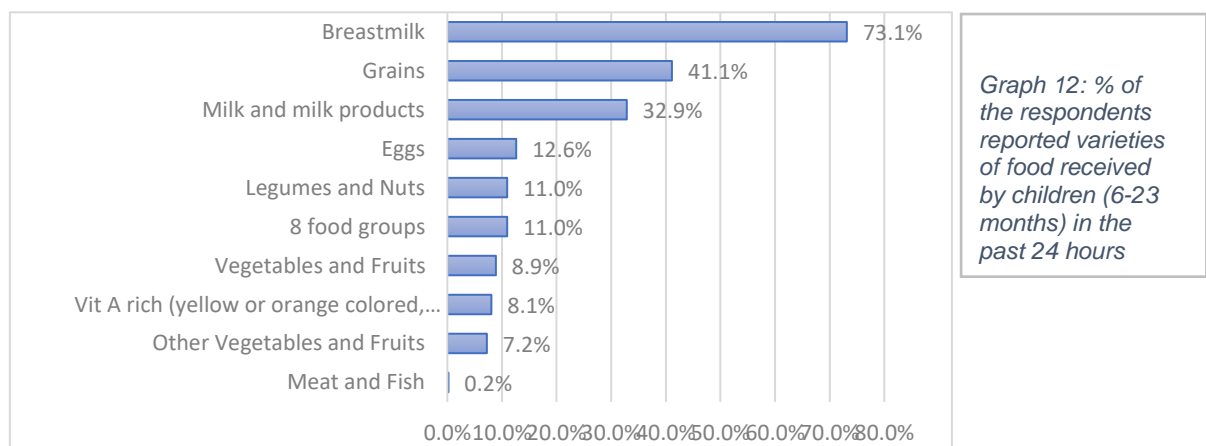
Graph 10: Perceptions around water disaggregated between women and men.



42% of the respondents reported having latrines and 37% still practice open defecation. 81% of respondents with children under five in their households reported that they had hard reported cases of diarrhea amongst the children the past two weeks before this assessment.

Nutrition

60% of respondents reported having children below six months in their households and of these, 56% confirmed that the babies had received something else other than breast milk while 43.6% had received nothing other than breast milk. Using the middle upper arm circumference (MUAC) tape, the assessment team conducted measurements to 400 children that are under five, and 37% was less than 110mm, 26% were between 115mm and 125mm and the rest were above 125mm.



Key findings

- Most communities assessed are fully aware of the impending drought with majority of community members directly experiencing the changes in weather. By the time of the assessment, there had not been any form assistance provided to communities and

many communities were not aware of any form humanitarian assistance available to them.

- Water resources are increasingly being strained as result of slow onset drought conditions, with reported cases of conflict over water in various communities. The conflict is amongst water users at water points. Women and girls have been observed to walk long distance to fetch for water. Diarrheal cases amongst the under-five have been reported in most of the households assessed. MUAC measurements show that up to 63% of the children assessed are malnourished.
- Pastoralist have started experiencing loss of livestock due to disease and reduced pastures and strain on pastoral livelihoods the early drought conditions and this will worsen in the coming days. This will negatively impact the household level resilience, income, and food security.
- Market prices for basic food commodities have started rising and it has already been reported that some households have not been able meet their food needs. Prices for food and basic staple commodities will continue to rise in the coming days.
- In Badghis and Herat increased movement of people out of their communities moving to other communities in search for food, livelihood opportunities and pasture for feeding their animals have been reported. The movements are attributed mainly to search for livelihood, food and freeing from conflict. These displacements will lead to creation of IDP camps with limited access to basic services.
- The reported increased conflict in communities can be partly attributed for struggle for fewer water resources between farmers and pastoralists. Conflicts can be intensified (as it did this year in Wardak) in pastoral/nomadic communities (depending solely on animal food) looking for feeder for their animals with host communities already stretched to find pasture for their animals because of a prolonged dry-spell and drought. Seasonality and seasonal income insecurity or the lean season - that dangerous period between planting and harvesting when job opportunities are scarce and incomes plummet in agriculture region

Recommendations

Overall, the drought response should focus on drought management triggered by water scarcity, through a set of sectoral humanitarian response and recovery actions focusing on ensuring drought affected people and livestock get adequate water, food, fodder/feed, and sanitation-health services as well as income support through cash transfers and cash for work programs. **Action needed now: Humanitarian response (urgent assistance from donors)** is needed to support the communities, that are already affected by the escalated conflict and impacts of COVID19, to prevent or mitigate further displacement and be able to cope and

adopt to the situation. Each target locations require a different set of drought management response stressing that **one response does not fit all** in locations; this demands rapid assessments prior to conducting interventions.

- To prevent large-scale displacement and intra-provincial movements among the vulnerable families who are food and income insecure:
 - Early response is required to support vulnerable households faced with challenges of food security and livelihoods in form of **Cash and voucher assistance (CVA)** for food in arid areas and drought hotspots. **Community-based livelihood support** should be prioritized to protect household assets, including provision of livestock fodder and veterinary services, cash for agriculture inputs (e.g., drought-resilient seeds, efficient irrigation facilities), and cash for work interventions, etc.
 - **Rehabilitation of existing water points** (e.g., small water dams, canal cleaning, etc.) and or construction of new ones should be prioritized before the drought hits hard to increase water availability and access challenges for the communities. Water point rehabilitation is needed to reduce the number of households that are using unsafe and unprotected water point sources.
 - To ensure children under the age of five are protected from **acute malnutrition**, there is urgent need to conduct awareness, screening, provision of appropriate referrals for treatment, offering community-based management of acute malnutrition for both SAM and MAM cases in these hard-to-reach areas.
 - **Distribution of water treatment kits as well as hygiene kits** supplemented by community level hygiene promotion emphasizing the importance of water, food hygiene and environmental hygiene to stop diarrheal related diseases amongst the children. Households should also be sensitized to on the proper disposal of human excreta to prevent an outbreak of diarrheal diseases amidst COVID-19 third wave in Afghanistan.
 - **Protection monitoring services** are urgently needed to mitigate the impacts drought. Interventions supporting social protection of the individual and gender-based risks at the communities where people start to prioritize/make decision on their children over other needs or a protection right (e.g., early marriage, education, etc.) should be stressed.
 - **Lifesaving services in existing camps** which are expected to receive lots of drought affected IDPs should be prioritized so that they can accommodate incoming displaced people.