



Half of Afghanistan's population faces acute hunger as humanitarian needs grow to record levels

UN appeals for urgent assistance as country becomes one of the world's largest food crises

More than half the population of Afghanistan – a record 22.8 million people - will face acute food insecurity from November, according to the latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) report issued today by the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster of Afghanistan, co-led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN and the UN World Food Programme.

The combined impacts of drought, conflict, COVID-19 and the economic crisis, have severely affected lives, livelihoods, and people's access to food. The report's findings come as Afghanistan's harsh winter looms, threatening to cut off areas of the country where families desperately depend on humanitarian assistance to survive the freezing winter months.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) report has found that more than one in two Afghans will be facing crisis (IPC Phase 3) or emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels of acute food insecurity through the November 2021 to March 2022 lean season, requiring urgent humanitarian interventions to meet basic food needs, protect livelihoods and prevent a humanitarian catastrophe.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Half of Afghanistan's population faces acute hunger as humanitarian needs grow to record levels
- UN and humanitarian partners scale up life-saving response to crisis in Afghanistan and call on all donors to urgently turn pledges into reality
- A humanitarian worker in Afghanistan, through thick and thin
- We risk a catastrophe if agriculture collapses in Afghanistan
- Afghanistan - to avert a catastrophe, agricultural assistance is urgently needed

The report also notes that this is the highest number of acutely food insecure people ever recorded in the ten years the UN has been conducting IPC analyses in Afghanistan. Globally, Afghanistan is home to one of the largest number of people in acute food insecurity in both absolute and relative terms.

“It is urgent that we act efficiently and effectively to speed up and scale up our delivery in Afghanistan before winter cuts off a large part of the country, with millions of people – including farmers, women, young children and the elderly – going hungry in the freezing winter. It is a matter of life or death. We cannot wait and see humanitarian disasters unfolding in front of us – it is unacceptable!” said QU Dongyu, FAO Director-General.

“Afghanistan is now among the world’s worst humanitarian crises - if not the worst - and food security has all but collapsed. This winter, millions of Afghans will be forced to choose between migration and starvation unless we can step up our life-saving assistance, and unless the economy can be resuscitated. We are on a countdown to catastrophe and if we don’t act now, we will have a total disaster on our hands,” said David Beasley, WFP Executive Director.

“Hunger is rising and children are dying. We can’t feed people on promises – funding commitments must turn into hard cash, and the international community must come together to address this crisis, which is fast spinning out of control,” Beasley warned.

Hunger spreads from rural to urban areas

The IPC report reflects a 37 percent increase in the number of Afghans facing acute hunger since the last assessment issued in April 2021. Among those at risk are 3.2 million children under five who are expected to suffer from acute malnutrition by the end of the year. In October, WFP and UNICEF warned that one million children were at risk of dying from severe acute malnutrition without immediate life-saving treatment.

For the first time, urban residents are suffering from food insecurity at similar rates to rural communities, marking the shifting face of hunger in the country. Rampant unemployment and the liquidity crisis mean that all major urban centres are projected to face emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels of food insecurity, including formerly middle-class populations.

In rural areas, the severe impact of the second drought in four years continues to impact the livelihoods of 7.3 million people who rely on agriculture and livestock to survive.

Current funding - a drop in the ocean

FAO and WFP have been alerting the world to huge funding shortfalls and the need for urgent action by the international community before it is too late. Immediate financial support is now crucial to meet the most basic humanitarian needs as Afghans confront winter with no jobs, cash, or prospects, just as another La Niña event is on the horizon, meaning this year’s drought conditions are likely to extend into 2022.

To meet the scale of needs, the UN will need to mobilize resources at unprecedented levels. The UN’s Humanitarian Response Plan remains only a third funded. WFP is planning to ramp up its humanitarian assistance as we enter 2022 to meet the food and nutrition needs of almost 23 million people in Afghanistan. To meet the task at hand WFP may require as much as USD 220 million per month.

Since the beginning of 2021, WFP has provided food, cash, and nutrition assistance to 10.3 million people, including malnutrition treatment and prevention programmes for nearly 400 000 pregnant and breastfeeding women, and 790 000 children under five.

FAO continues to deliver vital emergency livelihood interventions at scale in Afghanistan, providing life-saving support and cash

assistance to farmers and livestock owning households who comprise 70 percent of the total population, so they can remain productive. More than 3.5 million people will be supported this year, with FAO reaching over more than 330 000 in August and September alone.

Amid worsening drought, FAO is seeking USD 11.4 million in urgent funding for its humanitarian response and is seeking a further USD 200 million for the agricultural season into 2022. FAO is now distributing wheat cultivation packages, including high-quality and locally-supplied seeds, fertilizers and training. This campaign is expected to benefit 1.3 million people across 27 out of 34 provinces of the country.

FAO is a specialized agency of the United Nations. FAO supports the transformation to more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agri-food systems for better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life, leaving no-one behind. That includes addressing acute levels of food insecurity, providing agricultural and pastoralist communities with support so they can continue to produce food, earn income, and save their livelihoods.

WFP is the 2020 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate. It is the world’s largest humanitarian organization, saving lives in emergencies and using food assistance to build a pathway to peace, stability and prosperity for people recovering from conflict, disasters and the impact of climate change.

UN and humanitarian partners scale up life-saving response to crisis in Afghanistan and call on all donors to urgently turn pledges into reality



A woman farmer in Afghanistan.

UN agencies and humanitarian NGOs in Afghanistan are in a race against time to deliver life-saving aid to crisis-affected people and preposition supplies ahead of winter.

Millions of people in Afghanistan have been deeply affected by decades of conflict and displacement, chronic poverty, the COVID-19 pandemic, a severe drought, a failing health system, and an economy on the brink of collapse. The rights of women and

girls, and of minorities in Afghanistan, are seriously under threat.

The UN and humanitarian partners are sparing no effort to overcome financial shortfalls, logistical challenges, and an increasingly complex geo-political situation to support the millions of women, men and children in Afghanistan who depend on humanitarian assistance and protection.

In September, more than 3.8 million people received food assistance, 21 000 children aged 6-59 months and 10 000 women received treatment for acute malnutrition, 32 000 people received non-food items including blankets and warm clothes for winter, 10 000 children were reached with community-based education activities, 450 000 people were reached with primary and secondary healthcare, 160 000 farmers and herders were provided with livelihoods support, 12 000 people received emergency psycho-social and mental health support, 186 000 drought-affected people received water, and 150 000 people received hygiene promotion and hygiene kits.

At the beginning of 2021, the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan was already one of the worst in the world, with nearly half of the population – some 18.4 million people – in need of humanitarian assistance. Conflict and insecurity have displaced nearly 700 000 people within the country this year, with more than 3.5 million Afghans uprooted by conflict in total. Existing needs and vulnerabilities have deepened following recent events, and economic shocks are tipping more people in Afghanistan into crisis.

On 13 September 2021, the humanitarian community launched the Afghanistan Flash Appeal, calling for USD 606 million to provide priority life-saving aid to 10.8 million of the most vulnerable people in need by the end of the year. Despite the outpouring of support and global attention to the dire situation in Afghanistan, the flash appeal remains only 35 percent funded.

Pledges and commitments by donors must urgently be turned into reality to ensure humanitarian organizations can respond before it is too late. UN member states are requested to allow the swift and unfettered movement of humanitarian supplies and personnel into and out of Afghanistan, and to provide humanitarian financial exemptions to allow funds to reach aid organizations in the country.

The free and safe movement of humanitarian goods and personnel in the country must be guaranteed, and necessary steps must be taken to ensure an inclusive response where all aid workers, including women, are free to perform their life-saving work. The humanitarian community in Afghanistan reiterates its commitment to deliver unconditional aid to millions of people on the basis of needs, in line with the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

Without urgent action, the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate into 2022. The de facto authorities, UN member states, donors, humanitarian organizations, and other stakeholders must mobilize immediately to prevent a further humanitarian catastrophe in Afghanistan.

Dr Ramiz Alakbarov, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Afghanistan, said: “The people of Afghanistan must not pay the price of collective failures. They deserve a normal life in peace and dignity. We will spare no effort to respond to the needs of all women, men, and children in Afghanistan. We will continue to advocate for the rights of women and girls, and of minority groups, as well as the rights of all to employment, food, healthcare, education, and safety.”

Mary-Ellen McGroarty, Representative and Country Director of WFP Afghanistan, said: “Afghanistan is on borrowed time. In my long career with WFP I’ve never before seen a crisis unfold at this pace and scale. We are witnessing a new depth of destitution as the drought and the economic crisis drives up food and fuel prices.

Getting food to families across Afghanistan before the cold and harsh winter is what we must do now!”

Lisa K. Piper, Director of the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief & Development, said: “The NGO community is committed to staying and delivering an equitable and safe humanitarian response. We know that at least half of the people in need of humanitarian assistance are women and girls; and so to have a response that is based on actual identified needs, female aid workers must be able to work, move freely, and access communities.”

Marin Din Kajdomcaj, UNHCR Deputy Representative in Afghanistan, said: “If the commitments made by the international community are not delivered on now, millions of displaced Afghans will struggle to survive over the coming winter. A lack of immediate action will inevitably lead to a deeper humanitarian crisis and further displacement that will have not only regional, but global implications.”

Astrid Sletten, Country Director of the Norwegian Refugee Council in Afghanistan, said: “As the economy spirals and the banking system is at risk of collapse, the impact on Afghans across the country who are already struggling to survive will be catastrophic. NRC stands ready to scale-up our response to meet growing needs but we need unhindered humanitarian access, including our female staff, to be able to do so. Member states must also urgently find ways to stabilize the economy and address the liquidity crisis so that we can continue supporting the Afghan people.”

Stuart Simpson, IOM Afghanistan Chief of Mission, said: “Now more than ever, we need commitments from the international community to materialize so we can support those displaced, the local communities, while also giving Afghans a chance at living with dignity through decent work.”

Dr Luo Dapeng, WHO Country Representative in Afghanistan, said: “Access to health for Afghans is falling further out of reach just as winter approaches. Outbreaks of measles and acute watery diarrhoea are expanding. COVID-19 transmission continues across the country. The immune systems of children are increasingly compromised by malnutrition. This deeply troubling combination of factors will lead to an increase in preventable illness and death unless urgent action is taken.”

Abdul Khaliq Zazai, Executive Director of the Accessibility Organization for Afghan Disabled (AOAD), said: “The inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian and development assistance is a critically important cross-cutting agenda recognized by the United Nations. Afghanistan has one of the largest populations per capita of persons with disabilities in the world, most of them conflictaffected people who need physical rehabilitations, prostheses, orthoses, assistive devices, or food support.”

Hervé Ludovic De Lys, UNICEF Representative in Afghanistan, said: “As more families struggle to put food on the table, the nutritional health of mothers and their children is getting worse by the day. Children are getting sicker and their families are less and less able to get them the treatment they need. Rapidly spreading outbreaks of measles and acute watery diarrhoea will only exacerbate the situation.”

Abdallah Al Dardari, UNDP Resident Representative for Afghanistan, said: “In addition to immediate assistance to save lives, the international community must act to save livelihoods and local economy, enhance resilience of communities, and prevent a total economic and social breakdown in the country.”

Richard Trenchard, FAO Representative in Afghanistan, said: “FAO is deeply concerned about the rural crisis affecting 70 per cent of the Afghan population. 80 per cent of Afghans depend directly or indirectly on rural livelihoods. The importance of agriculture in keeping the people of Afghanistan fed, alive, and self-reliant cannot be overstated.”

A humanitarian worker in Afghanistan, through thick and thin

Ahmady remains committed to delivering assistance where it is needed the most

"I particularly enjoy seeing farmers or herders smile when they receive agricultural inputs like feed or seeds; I feel calm and fulfilled," says Ahmady, a humanitarian worker who works for one of FAO's NGO implementing partners on the ground in Afghanistan.

Ahmady is passionate about his job. He has been doing this in his country for the last 15 years. Currently, he is coordinating the implementation of two FAO projects that are assisting farmers and herders affected by drought, reaching out to over 10 000 families with life-saving support to protect their agricultural livelihoods.

FAO is in the midst of scaling up its emergency assistance, providing agricultural inputs like animal feed, seeds and fertilizers for the winter wheat planting season. FAO is also providing specific agronomic training on wheat cultivation and sustainable livestock management to make the most out of the inputs and build resilience for the future.

This assistance aims to protect agricultural livelihoods and support 3.3 million people until the end of the 2021. 80 percent of the Afghan population depends directly or indirectly on agriculture for their livelihoods.

"Emergency projects are extremely difficult to implement because they are carried out in the most insecure, remote and deprived areas; however, I enjoy working in the field and with communities, particularly vulnerable and poor families," states the Afghan humanitarian worker, who has a master's degree in agriculture.

The expertise of implementing partners and local humanitarian workers is invaluable in calibrating emergency assistance to the on-the-ground needs of affected communities. Together with FAO teams in the region, implementing partners help the Organization keep its finger on the pulse of the situation for Afghan communities living in remote rural areas.

As some workers were evacuated in August 2021, and management and administrative systems have been disrupted, it is people like Ahmady who are ensuring the local delivery of much-needed humanitarian assistance to farmers and herders.

A challenging job

Humanitarian work is challenging by nature, and Ahmady's job is not getting any easier. Workers undertake their activities in areas particularly affected by poverty and widespread food insecurity. Needs are typically far greater than the humanitarian resources



An Afghan herder, Afghanistan.

available to assist people in these areas.

As many FAO projects in Afghanistan are implemented in remote areas, humanitarians must sleep overnight in the only accommodation available, government-offered district guesthouses, "which can be extremely dangerous because there is always the possibility of suffering an attack," explains Ahmady, a husband and father of five children.

Before the collapse of the government in August 2021, "our commuting had become very difficult due to armed clashes. The security officers along the road changed every day; the new officers didn't know us, and they were frequently performing body checks and even searching our phones," says Ahmady.

On one occasion, an armed clash broke out at the District Centre where food, tools and other relief items are distributed. The Centre fell multiple times to both sides with control of the Centre changing from day to day, but fortunately, Ahmady says, the animal feed stored there was respected by both sides and left untouched.

Changing rules

Uncertain rules regarding programme delivery by female aid workers are greatly complicating efforts to reach female beneficiaries, Ahmady says.

Things have become even more complicated as only women can survey other women in the beneficiary selection process. Yet, though "the majority of our beneficiaries are women," says Ahmady, "our female colleagues have not been permitted since the new de facto authorities took over."

In other areas of the country, women have however been able to continue with their humanitarian work. In Ahmady's area, some agencies have gotten verbal permission for women to come back to work, but there is no official permit issued by the de facto authorities yet.

The change in the administration has also led to bureaucratic issues. "Since the former governors abandoned the district and fled abruptly, [beneficiary] distribution lists previously elaborated started being rejected," says Ahmady. The humanitarian worker has so far managed to overcome all these issues to distribute FAO's assistance.

An uncertain future

As uncertainty reigns in Afghanistan, Ahmady worries about the future. "It is unclear what will happen. Making decisions about the future is quite tough." Workers, like beneficiaries, are taking things day by day to see what is in store. Ahmady wishes he could at least return to football, a hobby that kept him happy and active. But work is too intense at the moment: "I have not worn any sporting clothes in more than two months." He hopes that this, and much more, changes in the upcoming days.



FAO's assistance in Afghanistan includes training as an integral part of the support provided.

We risk a catastrophe if agriculture collapses in Afghanistan



FAO animal feed distribution in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

Richard Trenchard, FAO Representative in Afghanistan, warns that worsening drought and recent economic upheaval are having a severe impact on the country with nearly 19 million people now facing acute food insecurity. He is calling for urgent international action to prevent a catastrophe.

How serious is the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan?

As every Afghan man, woman and child knows, Afghanistan is experiencing a humanitarian crisis on an unprecedented scale, with unprecedented speed. In Afghanistan today 18.8 million people are facing acute food insecurity. That means they are experiencing hunger on a daily basis, as the projections show. This is a dramatic increase on just six months ago.

Worryingly, we have not seen the worst of it yet. By the end of the year, that number is expected to rise to 22.8 million people. We must always remember that behind every single number lies a person, whether it's a man, woman or a child, facing acute food insecurity, that is to say, hunger on a daily basis.

Why has the crisis worsened in recent months?

What started off earlier this year, or even late last year, as a drought-driven crisis, has been transformed in the last few months into something far bigger and far more complex, a national crisis fuelled by the economic implosion and the suspension of the international development assistance that has underpinned the provision of basic services, such as primary healthcare, for so many years. Absent safety nets have become even more important as the crisis deepens.

Afghanistan's remarkable farmers, livestock owners and herders have always had a key role in bringing Afghanistan back from the brink of catastrophe. It will be the same this time. Let us remember 70 percent of Afghanistan's people lives in rural areas. Agriculture makes an enormous contribution and accounts for at least 25 percent of the country's GDP and an estimated 80 percent of all livelihoods depend directly or indirectly on agriculture. This is why the impact of the drought is so destructive and agriculture is so critically important.

What can be done to protect critical agriculture and why is this so important?

Agriculture is the backbone of Afghan livelihoods and the country's economy. Agriculture, including livestock, will play a vital role in bringing Afghanistan back from the brink of catastrophe. When

farmers cannot grow crops and livestock owners see their herds die or are forced to sell, their livelihoods will just disappear. They will leave rural areas and have no other choice than to migrate to urban centres and beyond, making the crisis worsen with further decreased domestic production of food and increased needs. This will make it so much harder for them and will make it so much harder for Afghanistan to avert catastrophe.

This is why urgent humanitarian assistance is so important now to support Afghanistan's farmers and livestock owners and herders. In addition to the incredibly important work that FAO is doing to save lives today, together with the UN World Food Programme and other UN humanitarian partners, we must make sure that humanitarian assistance continues to protect critical agricultural livelihoods across rural areas. Afghanistan's farmers and livestock owners know this. We know this.

We risk catastrophe if agriculture collapses. Alarmingly, the drought we have seen in Afghanistan since late 2020 is forecast to continue well into next year and it has already had a severe impact in 25 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces.

It's absolutely vital that Afghanistan's rural households, farmers and livestock owners, who account for such a large part of the population, are able to carry on farming and carry on growing food, keeping livestock alive.

FAO is currently distributing wheat seeds in 30 provinces but it is a race against the clock to get these seeds to 1.3 million people this winter. And humanitarian assistance needs will continue to grow. The massive humanitarian response needed in the coming months is focused on saving lives and protecting critical livelihoods. If rural livelihoods collapse, the risk is that the country will too.

If agriculture collapses we will see ever diminishing food supplies domestically, we will see ever-diminishing incomes, and we will inevitably see fast accelerating displacement. Let's remember too that winter is a critical factor both for the snow and the water that it provides, and also for the conditions that people will be facing.

How critical is the weather now for farmers, pastoralists and their families?

The fast-advancing winter - and the continuing drought - is a challenge for farmers, pastoralists and many others across Afghanistan, including the displaced. But it also presents challenges for humanitarian organizations like FAO. Many areas of the country will become inaccessible in the coming weeks and months as winter advances and the situation will become far harder for those already caught up in the vortex of crisis.

We are now coming to the end of the winter wheat planting season. This is the foundation for rural livelihoods across vast swathes of Afghanistan. We are distributing wheat cultivation packages, including high-quality and locally-supplied seeds, fertilizers and training. This campaign will benefit 1.3 million people and keep their livelihoods going in 30 of the 34 provinces of the country in the coming weeks. It will decrease the need for food assistance, including in hard to reach areas.

What needs to be done to turn the situation around?

We need to see a massive increase in humanitarian assistance across the whole country, at scale and now. There is a very real risk of catastrophe if we do not see a massive uplift in humanitarian assistance in the coming weeks and months, and into next year. And for millions of Afghan men, women and children there is no Plan B.

Thanks to the generosity of a number of donors, FAO immediately needs USD 11.4 million until the end of the year, but it is clear our humanitarian needs for next year will be substantially higher than in recent years. With the worsening drought, FAO is seeking a further USD 200 million for 2022.

We also need to see the economic implosion addressed. There is a massive liquidity crisis, near paralysis of the banking system and major impact on business and domestic trade as well. It is not only driving the crisis, it also affects the humanitarian response.

Finally, we need to find ways of unlocking the large amounts of international development which has been so important in the last few years for providing basic services in agriculture, health and education and across all sectors. We need to see that unlocked in the coming months and into next year.

Is the Taliban stopping assistance from getting to those in need?

There is not a single person in Afghanistan that does not recognize the need for massive humanitarian assistance in the coming weeks and months, particularly as winter approaches.

Many humanitarian organizations, including FAO, have been working in Taliban areas for years. The need for operational independence, needs-based assistance and the core humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, independence and humanity are well established, understood and respected, here as they are in every other country where humanitarian work is ongoing.

For many years, including earlier this year, physical access, due to insecurity, was a major constraint in many areas. Conflict and other access challenges stopped us reaching many people in need of humanitarian assistance. However, access has improved enormously in recent months. We can access all Afghan provinces and most districts in these provinces. That wasn't the case a few months ago. But the challenges of access have now been replaced by the challenges driven by the economic implosion.

Along with the continuing drought, it is the economic implosion that has driven the dramatic worsening of the crisis in the last few months and fuelled its increasingly urban character. The economic situation has also made our humanitarian response much harder but not impossible.

Like all humanitarian partners, FAO has continued to work flat-out to find solutions to these new challenges and has continued to deliver vital humanitarian assistance as the crisis has evolved. FAO reached almost 350 000 people between August and October, and in November alone we are looking to reach over a million farmers, with urgent humanitarian assistance to protect critical livelihoods. We are now distributing enormous quantities of wheat seeds, livestock feed concentrate and other vital inputs. But so much more is needed.

Afghanistan - to avert a catastrophe, agricultural assistance is urgently needed

As the Afghan people confront widespread drought, the collapse of rural livelihoods and widespread economic upheaval, FAO is providing critical life-saving assistance to farmers and herders, while urging far greater and immediate support for agricultural production.

In Afghanistan, today at least 18.8 million people are facing acute food insecurity - meaning they are unable to feed themselves on a daily basis - and that number is projected to rise to 22.8 million people by the end of 2021. FAO is supporting farmers and herders with seeds, fertilizer, cash and livelihood support to keep agricultural production going and to avoid widespread livelihood collapse in several parts of the country.



Farmer sows seeds he received from FAO wheat seed distribution in Daman district, Kandahar in Afghanistan.

“We need to help Afghanistan avoid a hunger trap. Millions of Afghans are living on the edge of catastrophe - which will occur if their animals die or fields go unplanted,” said FAO Director-General, QU Dongyu.

“Urgent investment in agriculture and livestock production is needed now, and it helps donors to save money down the road by putting the country back on track to food security.”

A wheat cultivation assistance package costing USD 157 enables a farm family to meet its cereal needs for a year, compared with USD 1 080 required to cover the minimum food needs of an average family, something that few can afford to do right now.

Agriculture is the backbone of Afghan livelihoods and critical for Afghanistan's economy. Around 70 percent of Afghans live in rural areas and agriculture accounts for at least 25 percent of GDP while an estimated 80 percent of all livelihoods depend directly or indirectly on agriculture.

FAO urgently needs USD 115 million to reach five million men, women and children this winter and next spring. Of this amount, one out of every five dollars will directly support Afghan women. An additional USD 85 million is required in 2022 to fund FAO's humanitarian response to prevent livelihood collapse and widespread displacement.

Seed distribution, a lifeline for farmers

FAO is currently distributing wheat cultivation packages for Afghanistan's winter wheat season across 31 out of 34 provinces of the country. They include high-quality and locally-supplied certified wheat seeds and technical training to ensure the best possible results for farmers.

This campaign is reaching out to 1.3 million people to keep their livelihoods going in the coming weeks and months, as FAO steps up its humanitarian support to farmers in the large rural areas of the country where the majority of Afghans live.

“If we didn't get this bag of certified wheat seeds, we wouldn't be able to cultivate wheat this year. These improved wheat seeds will grow a much better yield,” said Esmatullah Mirzada, a farmer from Safar Khan village, in Zendajan district of Herat province, who recently received seeds and training from FAO.

But the lean season before the harvest will be harsh, and much more needs to be done to feed rural families and ensure their survival, that means protecting their livestock to keep their valuable animals alive, healthy and productive.

“Afghan farmers need to be growing food again for their families and for Afghanistan and they need cash in their pockets. Agriculture can't wait and the people of Afghanistan can't wait,” said Richard Trenchard, FAO Representative in Afghanistan.

Consequences of inaction: rural displacement

Trenchard has just returned from a field visit to drought-ravaged areas in Zendajan district, in Herat province. He also met Internally Displaced People (IDP) living on the outskirts of the city of Herat. They were farmers from Ghor, a nearby province, and had left their rural land in despair.

“The situation is disastrous. Every farmer we’ve spoken to has lost almost all of their crops this year, many were forced to sell their livestock, they have accumulated enormous debts and simply have no money,” Trenchard said.

“No farmer wants to leave their land. But when you have no food, you have no grain from the previous harvest, there are no seeds in the fields and your livestock are gone, you have no choice.”

Helaladin Najmadin, a farmer from Qalae Rig village, Zendajan district, said: “Drought, COVID-19 and armed conflict have brought us to this terrible situation. In our village people don’t even have bread to eat.”

“Our properties and livestock have been destroyed, and due to the lack of improved seeds, fertilizers and water we couldn’t harvest any wheat,” he added.

The widespread drought looks set to worsen in Afghanistan. Farmers and herders are likely to face a second consecutive year of drought in 2022, with La Niña expected to bring drier than normal conditions to Afghanistan in the coming months. This situation will create a very real famine risk in 2022 unless immediate large-scale support to protect these people and their livelihoods arrives very soon.

While humanitarian access has never been better, prices are soaring and needs continue to outpace the resources provided.

With FAO assistance, the provision of animal feed, deworming and other services can keep up to 8.4 million livestock fed and productive, maintain household dairy production and support related income by USD 35 per week.

Cash for work, targeting the most vulnerable including the landless, provides life-saving cash in rural areas during the lean period, while improving access to water during drought through the rehabilitation of water catchments, irrigation, livestock watering points and karez (underground canal systems).



Farmer sows seeds he received from FAO wheat seed distribution in Daman district, Kandahar in Afghanistan.

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