

AFGHANISTAN MOBILE TEAM APPROACH WITH COMMUNITY TENTS

KEYWORDS:

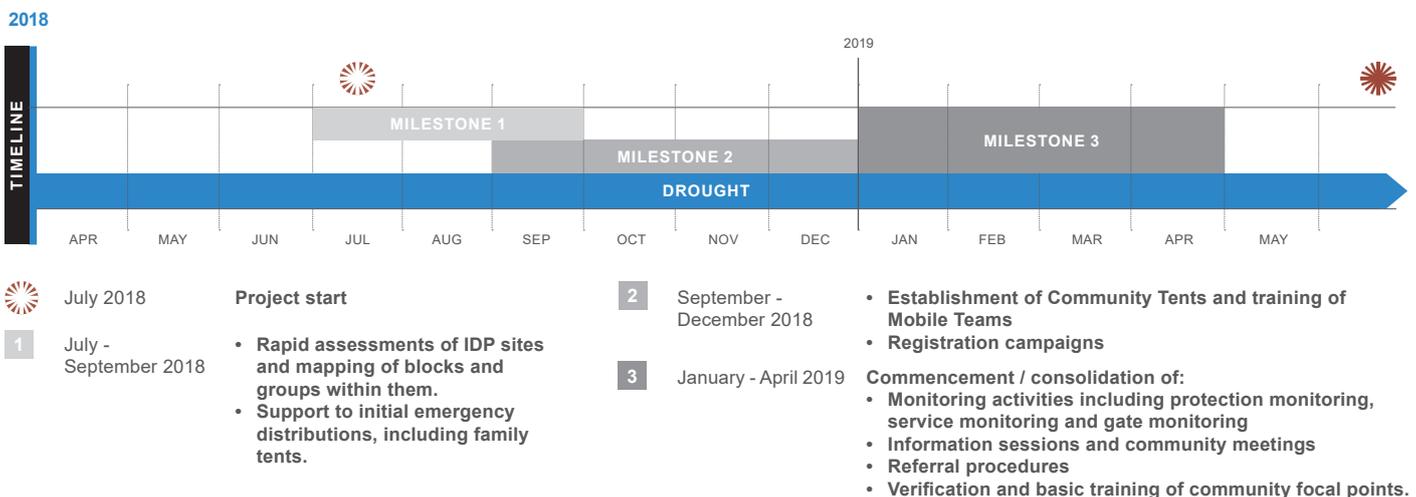
INTERNALLY DISPLACED, URBAN, DISPERSED, MOBILE TEAMS, COMMUNITY CENTRES, COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION, CAPACITY BUILDING, WOMEN PARTICIPATION

CAUSE OF DISPLACEMENT	Primarily drought with combined drivers including insecurity, chronic poverty and lack of basic services	
DATE OF EVENT CAUSING DISPLACEMENT	Ongoing drought crisis peaked during second half of 2018	
PEOPLE DISPLACED	Estimated 250,000 in Herat and Badghis provinces ¹	
PROJECT LOCATION	Herat (Injil District) and Badghis (Qala-i-Naw City and surrounding villages)	
PROJECT DURATION	July 2018 - Ongoing	
NUMBER OF PEOPLE TARGETED BY THE PROJECT	100,000 people	
CCCM COORDINATION MECHANISM	No cluster activated	

SUMMARY:

The project was established in response to a wave of internal displacement and subsequent proliferation of informal sites accommodating the IDPs. The project was based on Camp Management methodologies, concentrating on the following outcomes/outputs:

- **Support to Coordination:** through mapping informal sites and blocks/groups within them, undertaking IDP registration and intentions surveys, monitoring service provision (or lack thereof) and convening site-level coordination meetings.
- **Communication with Communities:** through mobile teams, Community Tents, Community Meetings, theatre performances and identification of IDP focal points.
- **'Light' Protection:** through protection monitoring and referrals.





Baghdhis drone footage.

CONTEXT

In 2018, a 'prolonged dry spell' in Afghanistan escalated into a 'drought', primarily in areas with high rates of chronic poverty and limited services, many of which were also affected by protracted armed conflict. Three provinces escalated into Integrated Food Insecurity Phase Classification (IPC) Phase IV ('Emergency') in 2018, and one of these provinces are expected to persist throughout 2019 at IPC Phase IV (Badghis Province). The prolonged dry spells went largely unaddressed by the humanitarian community in terms of adequate preventive action, partly because of a humanitarian system geared towards responding to rapid-onset and acute needs including displacement (predominantly in government-controlled areas), rather than slow-onset disasters (often in non-government-controlled areas). The implementing agencies were mostly unable to respond in the contested areas to address the emergency there due to a combination of the lack of presence, lack of access and a frequently cited lack of a mandate to address chronic conditions as compared to a sharp focus on conflict-related displacements and needs. However, the drought impact resulted in mass displacements in mid-2018, at which point the humanitarian community was faced with a rapid-onset dynamic in Herat and Badghis provinces, with over 250,000 Afghans poured into the outskirts of the provincial capitals.

The displaced settled in several scattered and informal sites primarily located on private land. These sites were situated alongside existing highly vulnerable host communities, as well as conflict-induced protracted IDPs settled in older informal settlements. Despite the dire conditions in which displaced families were living, the humanitarian response was initially not forthcoming. This was linked to several factors including the founded fear of creating a "pull factor", pressure from

authorities and host communities not to respond, and a lack of capacity by humanitarians on the ground to scale-up operations. When a response finally arrived, it concentrated on short-term assistance (distributions of tents and food, emergency latrines, water trucking and mobile health teams), on the widely assisted assumption that this assistance could end within a few months since people would then either return home or a development response would take over. By January 2019, it became clear that people would not be returning home and so most assistance was extended to June 2019, still without a clear strategy of what would happen after that point.

Despite the evident presence of camp-like displacement sites, there has been a lack of consensus on an approach to camp management – both in terms of how to respond to the informal sites and with regards to establishing formal camps. On the latter, the Government of Afghanistan endorsed plans to establish formal sites (to which all IDPs would be moved) and obliged the Afghan Land Authority to assign state land for this purpose. However, the plans quickly lost momentum due to a number of factors: stubborn unrealistic requirements for site preparation works, ineffective humanitarian-government engagement on the topic, lack of clarity on land ownership of the proposed sites (as well as the suitability of their siting) and poor UN-NGO relations regarding operational coordination. The humanitarian community's support for government land allocation (thereby essentially endorsing establishment of a formal camp) was also fundamentally incompatible with its strategy of short-term assistance to be curtailed by the middle of 2019, as the establishment of formal camps implies a longer-term commitment.

PROJECT

PROTECTION RISKS

There were frequent reports of families resorting to child labour and child recruitment (mainly affecting boys), forced child marriage (mainly affecting girls) and sell of children. Due to depleted assets and lack of livelihoods, many households were in debt and forced to resort to such coping strategies when their creditors demanded repayment. IDPs also reported a fear of harassment and violence by Armed Opposition Groups if they chose to return to areas of origin. Women reported an increase in family violence – an expected consequence of the psychosocial stress levied on families due to displacement, scarce resources and dire living conditions. Finally for the vast majority of IDPs situated on private land, they faced frequent eviction threats by the landowners and/or were forced to pay rent despite not having financial resources to do so, which added to the cycle of debt and negative coping strategies.

CCCM ACTIVITIES

The project targeted people displaced to informal sites in Herat and Badghis provinces. In Herat, the sites consisted of many scattered, small clusters of tents as well as one formal camp; in Badghis there were three larger sites. Together, the sites were supported by NRC to have accommodated around 100,000 families at their maximum although this number was declining as some people have returned home. Besides IDPs there were also host communities and protracted IDPs from surrounding villages/protracted IDP settlements who have settled in the sites in search of assistance.

The mobile CM approach (known as "Site Management" for this context) was complemented by static "community tents", and comprised of the following key outputs:

- **Support to Coordination:** mapping informal sites and blocks/groups within them, undertaking IDP registration and intentions surveys, monitoring service provision (or lack thereof) and convening site-level coordination meetings
- **Communication with Communities:** through mobile teams, Community Tents, Community Meetings, theatre performances and identification of IDP focal points
- **'Light' Protection:** through protection monitoring and referrals.

IMPLEMENTATION

Mobile teams played a critical role in the early stages of the displacement by mapping out blocks and groups of IDPs in informal sites. This allowed for more organised and dignified registration activities and distributions of assistance. Mobile teams were assigned to different geographical areas or sites to follow-up on, and thereby visited all the sites on a regular (if not daily) basis to conduct tent-to-tent and site level meetings with residents as well as identified community focal points (male and female) who can both disseminate information to communities and provide information to NGOs about the situation. Mobile teams also conducted protection monitoring through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and household level interviews and undertook protection-related referrals where necessary and possible. Community tents were strategically placed between and within sites to allow IDPs to proactively access information and mechanisms for feedback and complaints.

Tents were staffed by Community Mobilisers which included people from both the host and IDP communities – five days per week, at least five hours per day. On a bi-weekly basis, NRC convened coordination meetings with IDP focal points inside the community tents.

IMPACTS OF THE PROJECT

For the implementing agency, the project provided a way to structure and scale up its response across multiple sectors². For example, the Site Management teams facilitated mapping of sites and mass registration campaigns in the sites, which in turn allowed for distributions of essential assistance including shelter, food and NFIs – both by the implementing agency and others. In turn, the Site Management teams were able to understand important dynamics of the target populations and use these insights to inform the broader response and communications with the communities' strategies. Without the Site Management projects, there was no site level coordination and therefore significant gaps and duplications in assistance which were now being mitigated through coordination meetings and evidence-based advocacy.

COORDINATION IMPACT

To date, there is no CCCM cluster active in Afghanistan, however, UN and NGO stakeholders agreed to establish a Site Management Task Force to support the work of Site Management agencies. This has helped mobilise other agencies for Site Management; agree on minimum activities/responsibilities of Site Management agencies; develop shared tools (e.g. site monitoring and key messages); and discuss strategy for ongoing response.



CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

CHALLENGES

- It has been difficult for the implementing agency (and other site management agencies) to consolidate and obtain agreement on key messages to disperse to IDPs, due to ever changing strategies and response plans by the humanitarian community.
- Mobile teams have often been the majority of or even the only community-facing staff who were regularly present in the informal sites and therefore had to bear the brunt of community frustrations about lack of assistance and information.
- Even with a large mobile team, it was challenging to understand and manage community power dynamics:
 - hundreds of men claimed to be IDP leaders, but there were also frequent changes in which leaders were representing which groups and many people complained about their so-called leaders. The role played by some influential leaders in the community (some of whom were also bolstered by support from local authorities) enabled them to foment violence against humanitarian agencies and to extort money and goods from vulnerable families.
 - Strained relations between the government and local authorities have led to delays in humanitarian assistance and the relocation of distribution points to periphery locations to appease certain community leaders.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Community expectations must be addressed immediately: mobile teams were unable to manage expectations in the early stages of the project as they did not have basic information about forthcoming humanitarian assistance and there appeared not to be a response strategy by the humanitarian community. CM agencies that attempted to respond to informal, scattered sites must push for an agreement on key messages to disseminate to communities regarding the broader response strategy.
- Host community members opportunistically and violently forced themselves onto beneficiary selection lists, in part due to a lack of specific attempts to identify or engage with them. The response by CM agencies as well as others could have included a more systematic coverage of host communities, which would have likely reduced the risk that host community would take up pretences of being displaced.

¹ OCHA, September 2018

² As stated in NRC's internal 'Emergency Response Review', completed at the end of 2018.

