

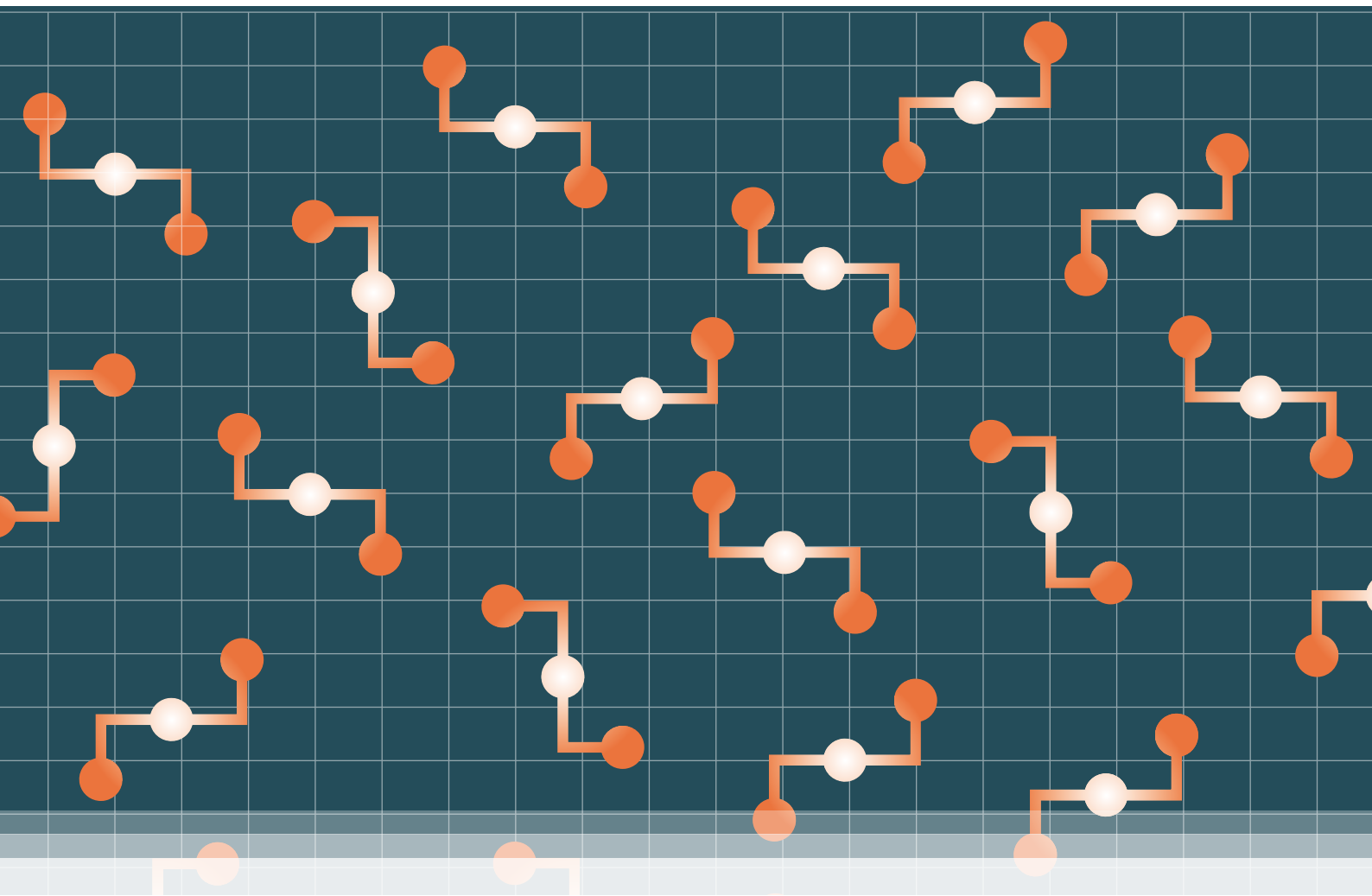
HPG case study

Climate change, conflict and internal displacement in Afghanistan

‘We are struggling to survive’

Kerrie Holloway^{1D}, Zaki Ullah, Dastgir Ahmadi, Elham Hakimi and Aaftab Ullah

November 2022



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Acronyms

HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IDP	internally displaced person
IEA	Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan
IOM DTM	International Organization for Migration Displacement Tracking Matrix
ISIL-K	Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TEF	Transitional Engagement Framework
UN	United Nations
WFP	World Food Programme

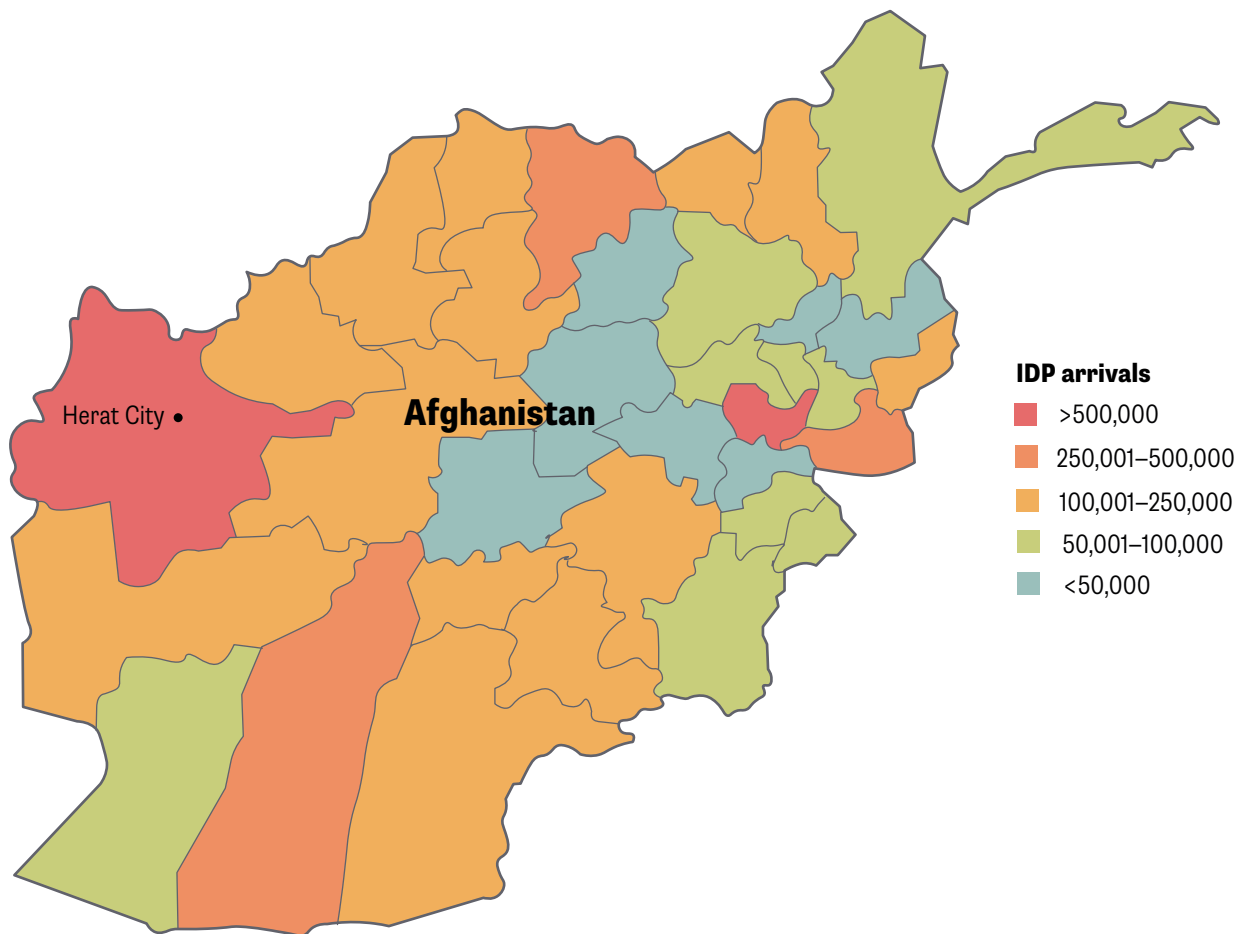
1 Introduction

Afghanistan faces one of the world's most complex crises. Recurring cycles of conflict, violence and natural hazard-related disasters – often exacerbated by climate change – interact to create overlapping vulnerabilities and multiple displacements (Weerasinghe, 2021). Forty years of conflict have destroyed transport, water and energy infrastructure, restricted development and increased deforestation across the country (Brown, 2019; NUPI, 2022).

The 2021 change in government brought stability and security to many parts of the country, but it also resulted in economic collapse due to the suspension of development assistance and other external funding, the delinking of the Afghan central bank and commercial banks from the global financial system, the freeze on Afghanistan's foreign reserves and the devaluation of the country's currency (Lang, 2022; McKechnie et al., 2022). Half of the population required humanitarian support before the change in government, and the compounding shocks of a collapsing economy, changing climate and ongoing conflict have forced many Afghans to migrate to other parts of the country – as well as across borders – in search of safety, security and livelihoods (IDMC, 2022).

Since 2012, almost six million Afghans have been internally displaced, with the majority of internally displaced persons (IDPs) currently residing in Herat province (IOM DTM, 2022a; see Figure 1. For more on why Herat City was chosen for this study, see Box 1). Once in Herat, IDPs struggle to rebuild their lives, often lacking the resources to employ the same everyday coping strategies and longer-term adaptations as Afghans living in Herat who have not been displaced. As an IDP who has lived in Herat for four years put it: 'We left because of the drought and conflict between the Taliban and the people. We arrived in Herat after too much struggle and difficulty, and we are struggling to survive here.' Often, IDPs turn to extreme coping strategies to make ends meet. Yet, through all this, they are actively striving to help themselves, countering the narrative of displaced people as passive victims as routinely depicted in academic literature and humanitarian policy and advocacy (Malkki, 1996; Harrell-Bond, 2002; Hovil, 2007; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2009).

Figure 1 Number of Afghan internally displaced persons arriving between 2012 and April 2022, by province



Source: IOM DTM, 2022a

Box 1 Why Herat City was chosen for this study

Herat hosts 17% of all IDPs in Afghanistan – more than any other province (IOM DTM, 2022b). Herat City is the third largest city in Afghanistan and one of its most vibrant urban centres, with close links to neighbouring Iran. It has long been a preferred destination for Afghans seeking job opportunities and education as well as those fleeing conflict and hardship due to its relatively strong economy and stable security situation (Samuel Hall Consulting, 2014; Leslie, 2015; Ahmadi, 2019). It is also a well-established transit hub for Afghans wanting to emigrate to another country, particularly Iran (Stigter, 2005; Kamminga and Zaki, 2018).

During the 2018 drought, Herat attracted IDPs due to its status as the largest city in western Afghanistan and ‘the perception that access to life-saving aid supplies would be more likely in Herat’ than in other provincial capitals (Sahak, 2020: 20). Other studies, however, suggest that security and social networks are more important ‘pull factors’ than the availability of assistance or economic opportunities (Sydney, 2020).

This paper outlines the overlapping crises that face Afghanistan, how IDPs in Herat who have been displaced by either conflict or climate change (or both) are coping with and adapting to the ongoing effects of conflict and climate change in displacement and the barriers that prevent aid from reaching them. It is part of a two-year, multi-country research project that seeks to map the strategies urban IDPs use to survive in crises, and to create an entry point for actors at the local, national and international levels to support communities affected by displacement in ways that reflect their experiences, preferences and aspirations. While humanitarian assistance provides a critical lifeline for these groups, the strategies that affected people deploy themselves can be a crucial determinant of their survival and recovery.

1.1 Methodology

This case study uses a qualitative approach to understand how Afghan IDPs and their host communities are coping with and adapting to climate change and conflict.¹ Coping and adapting are distinct yet interlinked processes (Eriksen et al., 2005). Both refer to actions or activities taken in response to changes or pressures, and adaptive strategies often build on existing coping mechanisms. That said, they involve differences in timeframe, sustainability, motivations and outcomes: whereas adapting is perceived to be a ‘process of adjustment’ that seeks ‘to moderate harm or exploit beneficial opportunities’ (IPCC, 2019: 804), coping can imply short-term survival or consumption at the expense of longer-term and more sustainable change.

This study is centred on three main research questions:

- How do people cope and adapt to the challenges of climate change, conflict and internal displacement?
- How do people’s strategies of coping and adapting affect their lives?
- What are the implications for aid actors, governments and policymakers?

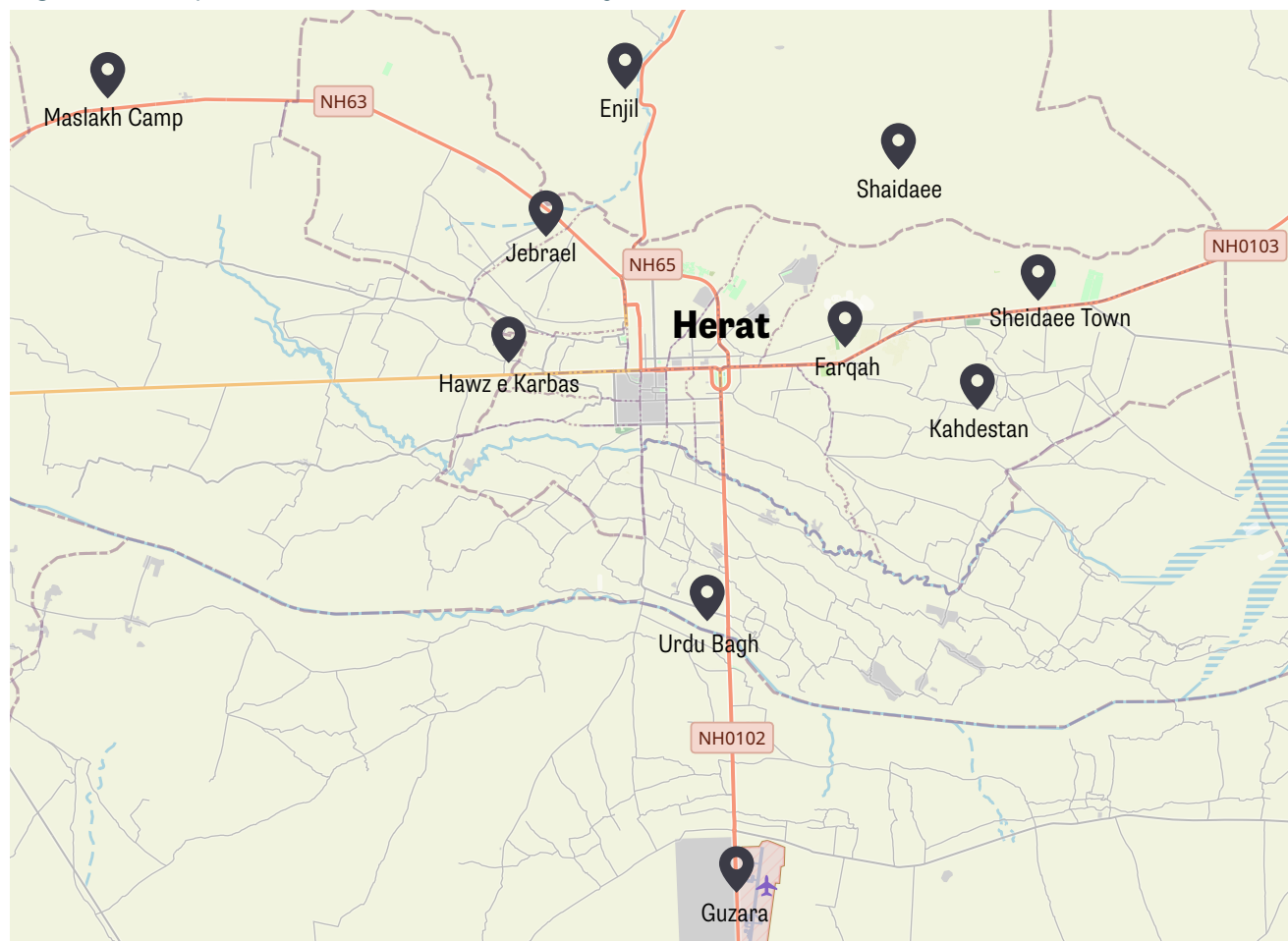
The research presented in this study is based on 41 in-depth interviews with IDPs and the host community in and around Herat City, conducted during July 2022 by two researchers from Herat (see Table 1 and Figure 2).

¹ The authors recognise that the phrase ‘host community’ is problematic for several reasons, including that it is not a homogenous community, but rather comprises different, diverse communities with varying degrees of privilege and vulnerability. Moreover, ‘host’ implies a show of hospitality that is often, but by no means always, apparent. Nevertheless, for clarity and ease this term is used throughout this paper as a shorthand for the various communities of people who were already living in Herat and who have not been displaced.

Table 1 Afghans interviewed for this study

Interviewees	Men	Women	Total
IDPs	10	12	22
Members of the host community	9	10	19

Figure 2 Map of interview locations in Herat, Afghanistan



The majority of IDPs living near Herat City reside in temporary and poorly constructed shelters in large informal settlements built on either private or government land (Inter-agency Durable Solutions Initiative, 2016; Příkladová and Příkladová, 2019). Participants in this study were initially selected through canvassing 10 locations around the city where IDPs are concentrated. These locations were chosen to ensure a diversity of backgrounds for the sample. At each location, the first respondents were randomly identified. The research team then used a snowball approach to reach other IDPs in the settlement who were displaced from different provinces across Afghanistan. Of the 22 IDPs interviewed, 17 lived in IDP settlements and five were integrated into host communities. Seven had been displaced in Herat for more than 10 years, while three had arrived in the past year. The majority (12 of 22) had been displaced

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for between one and 10 years. Interviewees had travelled an average distance of around 200 kilometres to their new location in Herat, with almost half originally from Badghis province, just to the north-east of Herat province (see Table 2).

Table 2 IDPs interviewed, by place of origin

Province	Number
Badghis	9
Bamyan	1
Farah	1
Faryab	4
Ghazni	1
Ghor	2
Herat	4

Sixteen interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including staff of international and national non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and United Nations (UN) agencies. Ten interviews with key stakeholders in Herat were conducted by researchers in country, with a further six in English with people in Herat and at the global level by a researcher in the UK between July and September 2022 (see Table 3).

Table 3 Key stakeholders interviewed for this study

Type of organisation	Number
International NGO	7
National NGO	5
Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement	3
UN agency	1
Total	16

1.2 Challenges and limitations

The security environment in Afghanistan posed a challenge for this research. This challenge was mitigated by using researchers already based in Herat. The research was also able to maintain relatively even gender representation, as the research team consisted of one man and one woman.

The main limitation of this research is the small sample size of IDPs, host community members and key stakeholders. The populations sampled are not representative, but they do provide an insight into the

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lives and challenges facing Afghans in Herat – both those who have been displaced and those who have not. The sample of key stakeholders interviewed was also small and not representative. In particular, the researchers were unable to speak to any government representatives, nor were they able to interview as many people working with the UN as hoped. Thus, the paper offers limited insights into the working of the de facto government and the UN humanitarian system in Afghanistan.

Finally, the research team took the decision to limit interviews with key informants within Afghanistan to the effects of climate change on the country and de-emphasising – though not avoiding – discussion of conflict, in order to ensure the safety of the researchers and research participants. Regardless, 8 out of 10 of the key informants in Afghanistan mentioned conflict and war without being prompted when asked what has driven displacement.

2 Afghanistan's complex crises

Since the late 1970s, nearly all provinces in Afghanistan have been affected by disasters, and all of them have been affected by conflict and violence (Weerasinghe, 2021). Although Afghanistan has made negligible contributions to global warming, it is one of the countries experiencing the largest effects of climate change (Brown, 2019). Climate-related risks are often framed as natural and inevitable, but this overlooks underlying vulnerabilities created by social inequalities and politics. Seemingly small climate shocks can cause significant damage for people who have been historically marginalised, particularly in countries affected by ongoing conflict. Already displaced communities, for example, may end up even further disadvantaged, with knock-on effects on their ability to cope and adapt to future shocks and stressors (Sturridge and Holloway, 2022).

The majority of disaster-related internal displacements in Afghanistan occurred in 2018, with more than 400,000 people displaced due to drought following four years of below-average rainfall – many in western provinces, including Herat (IDMC, 2019; 2022). Many of those who were displaced remain unable – or unwilling – to return home due to ongoing drought. Four years on, in 2022, Afghanistan is experiencing an even worse drought than in 2018 which, combined with the change in government in August 2021 and ongoing health concerns, such as Covid-19 and a widespread measles outbreak, has resulted in compounding vulnerabilities and a growing humanitarian emergency (NUPI, 2022).

This chapter outlines the climate challenges facing Afghanistan, the ongoing conflict and 2021 change in government and how both climate and conflict have led to widespread internal displacement. It concludes with a brief overview of the state of the humanitarian response as of summer 2022.

2.1 Climate challenges facing Afghanistan

Afghanistan faces a wide variety of climate challenges, including extreme temperatures, droughts, floods, earthquakes, landslides and avalanches. Among low-income countries, Afghanistan is second behind Haiti for the highest number of fatalities due to natural hazard-related disasters between 1980 and 2015: weather-related and geophysical events account for half of all deaths in the country (World Bank and GFDRR, 2017). In Herat province, the two most serious hazards are droughts and floods, though the province – like the rest of Afghanistan – is also affected by extreme temperatures. As climate change increases the frequency of extreme temperature events, droughts and floods, agriculture will be significantly impacted – with critical knock-on effects on food security and livelihoods across the country (see Box 2).

Box 2 Agricultural impact of extreme temperatures, droughts and floods in Afghanistan

Extreme temperatures, droughts and floods all affect Afghanistan's agricultural production and water availability, with severe knock-on effects on food security and livelihoods. In 2016, 85% of the population relied on the agricultural sector for their livelihoods, though only 12% of Afghanistan's total land is arable (Nett and Rüttinger, 2016). What land can be cultivated is highly dependent on rainfall and snowfall, both of which have become increasingly erratic, as Afghanistan's irrigation network is inequitable and underdeveloped (ibid.). Just under 4% of the country's land is irrigated and regularly farmed, and only 10% of that land uses modern irrigation methods, with the rest relying on rainfall and snowfall (Brown, 2019).

Farming comprises half of Afghanistan's agricultural sector, and livestock production the other half. Herding livestock has also suffered due to the effects of climate change, with drought and feed shortages resulting in livestock dying or being sold as farmers are no longer able to support them (IRC, 2021).

With less farmland capable of coping with increasing droughts and farmers increasingly unable to feed their livestock, the number of people who can earn a livelihood from agriculture has declined. In the past few years, less than half the working population has been employed in this sector. This has had major livelihood impacts for people in Afghanistan, including an increase in rural–urban migration (Nett and Rüttinger, 2016; World Bank Group and Asian Development Bank, 2021).

2.1.1 Extreme temperatures

Between 1950 and 2010, temperatures in Afghanistan rose 1.8°C – twice the global average (Hakimi and Brown, 2022). Based on climate models, Afghanistan is expected to continue to see levels of warming above the global average, somewhere between 1.4°C and 5.5°C projected under the lowest and highest emission pathways, respectively (World Bank Group and Asian Development Bank, 2021). This variation in potential temperature rises is especially important for Herat, where the average July maximum temperature is already around 37°C (ibid.). As an Afghan living in Herat for the past 22 years observed, 'Every year, the weather gets hotter and hotter. And life is getting tougher for us, day by day.'

Afghanistan also experiences extreme cold weather events. Between 2000 and 2012, there have been five such events (two in 2001, and one each in 2005, 2008 and 2012), with the one in 2008 killing more than 1,000 people. Herat was affected by extreme cold events in 2001 and 2008 (EM-DAT, 2022). Recent cold waves and related disasters have also been reported in 2017 and 2020 (OCHA, 2017; 2020).

2.1.2 Droughts

There have been six major droughts in Afghanistan since 2000 (in 2000, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2018 and 2021), and the frequency of severe droughts is expected to increase as rainfall declines in most parts of the country due to climate change (World Bank and GFDRR, 2017; EM-DAT, 2022). The 2018 drought directly affected two in every three people through failed harvests and resulting food insecurity as well as empty groundwater reserves, with almost 400,000 Afghans forced to move to other parts of the country (Amoli and Jones, 2022). The drought that began in 2021 remains a concern, particularly as many farmers had yet to recover from the previous drought in 2018 (IRC, 2021). As of December 2021, it was labelled ‘one of the worst droughts and food shortage crises in decades’ (IFRC, 2021).

In Herat province, the impact of drought has resulted in a decline in employment for unskilled workers – with direct consequences for people’s living standards and finances – as well as increased migration and displacement, particularly from rural to urban areas (Nett and Rüttinger, 2016; World Bank Group and Asian Development Bank, 2021).

2.1.3 Floods

Despite rising temperatures and frequent droughts, floods are the most prevalent hazard in Afghanistan (World Bank and GFDRR, 2017). Floods are caused by a combination of melting glaciers, poor soil absorption and land degradation (Přívvara and Přívarová, 2019). Afghanistan’s topography has changed drastically since the 19th century. Then, more than half of the country was covered by woodlands and forests, whereas as of 2017 only 2% remains forested, due to decades of over-harvesting (Brown, 2019). As with extreme temperatures and droughts, flooding is set to increase in frequency and severity due to rising temperatures. The number of people affected by floods could double by 2050 (World Bank and GFDRR, 2017).

Flooding in Herat has caused loss of life and livestock; damage to agricultural land, houses, roads and bridges; increased debt; and internal displacement (ACAPS, 2019; Shaw and Ghafoori, 2019; Spink, 2020). In 2019 – following the 2018 drought – heavy flooding due to above-average rainfall prompted a second wave of displacement to Herat City (Sahak, 2020).

2.2 Conflict and the 2021 change in government

Conflict occurs on several different levels and among various actors (Mena et al., 2019). While the most well-known conflict over the past decades involved the Taliban² and the previous government, violent incidents also occur between other armed groups and between different ethnic groups (Weerasinghe, 2021). The Taliban ruled Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001, when an invasion led by the United States

² This report follows Allouche et al. (2022: 6), which uses the term ‘Taliban’ to loosely describe ‘the de facto coalition led by members of the Taliban movement in Afghanistan. It includes members of the Haqqani network affiliated to, but not controlled by, the Taliban, as well as appointments from other factions’.

forced them out of power. From 2004 to 2021, the Taliban carried out insurgent operations throughout the country. These increased from small- to large-scale attacks to secure territory as the Taliban transitioned from ‘a shadowy insurgency’ to ‘the de facto governing authority for many Afghans’ (Jackson and Weigand, 2019: 143). In 2019, roughly two in three Afghans lived in areas directly affected by conflict (Sydney, 2020). From May to August 2021, as international forces withdrew, the Taliban took control, reaching Kabul by mid-August. By early September 2021, the Taliban had claimed control of the country and formed a government, known as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA).

The IEA has continued operations against other armed groups, such as the National Resistance Front, comprised of forces loyal to the previous government, and Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) (UNAMA HRS, 2022). ISIL-K is an affiliate of Islamic State with the aim of establishing a caliphate in Afghanistan, Pakistan and surrounding countries. It has had a presence in Afghanistan since 2015, fighting against the previous Afghan government, the Taliban and international forces prior to their withdrawal (Doxsee and Thompson, 2021). According to the UN Security Council, attacks claimed by or attributed to ISIL-K have decreased since the formation of the IEA, though there has been ‘a continuing presence and activities of foreign groups in Afghanistan and its border areas’ (UNSC, 2022: 4).

Smaller conflicts between ethnicities, communities and religious traditions persist at the local level. Increasingly, these are tied to control of land, water and other natural resources. According to a 2014 UN report, ‘while 12% of the population had experienced attacks by militants, 41% had suffered from land disputes’, which can also turn violent (Brown, 2019: 9). These types of resource-based clashes are only likely to intensify in parallel with the effects of climate change.

Herat, like other major cities in Afghanistan, has been more isolated from conflict than many rural parts of the country (Kamminga and Zaki, 2018). In a study conducted in 2019 with IDPs in Herat, Kabul and Nangarhar provinces, 80% of those interviewed said that they moved to these provinces for better security (Sydney, 2020). A city under the control of the former government until late July 2021, by mid-August 2021, after three weeks of fighting, Herat had surrendered to the Taliban.

2.3 Internal displacement due to climate change and conflict

The overlapping crises of climate-related disasters and conflict have undermined resilience and led to widespread internal displacement. At the end of 2021 there were 4.3 million IDPs in Afghanistan, with more than 700,000 displaced in 2021 alone – the largest number of displacements in a single year ever recorded in the country (IDMC, 2022). Almost one million IDPs have arrived in Herat province in the last 10 years, accounting for 30% of the province’s population and comprising the largest arriving IDP population of any province in the country (IOM DTM, 2022a). Most IDPs in Herat live in camp-like settlements on the outskirts of the city, though some reside among host communities, with friends and family and in rented accommodation (Weerasinghe, 2021; Amoli and Jones, 2022).

IDPs in Afghanistan often undergo multiple displacements, as the areas to which they move can be affected by similar situations of climate change and/or conflict that caused them to move in the

first place (Weerasinghe, 2021). For the IDPs interviewed for this study, 12 of 22 said they had been displaced multiple times. Some had gone to other parts of Afghanistan before ending up in Herat, while others had tried several IDP camps in Herat before settling down. As a man displaced to Herat 20 years ago explained:

I have lived in two places. One was [an IDP settlement in Herat], where we had no shelter. Then we came here to [their current IDP settlement] ... We also went to [another IDP settlement in Herat] for 20 days to receive help, but unfortunately, we didn't receive any help, so we came back here.

IDPs also tend to be affected by both climate change and conflict prior to their displacement, and it can be difficult to ascribe their decision to move to either one cause or the other (Weerasinghe, 2021). Almost all interviewees in this study (19 of 22) said the reason for their displacement was both climate change and conflict. Of the remaining three interviewees, two said they had been displaced only by conflict and one only by climate change. A previous case study of one IDP camp outside of Herat produced similar findings, noting that some IDPs who had moved to the camp because of drought had refused to return due to conflict back home (Spink, 2020).

For interviewees who stated that both climate change and conflict had forced them to migrate, many expressed sentiments similar to those of a man displaced to Herat five years ago:

We moved because of war and several years of drought. Our sheep and goats were dying because of the drought and sickness. All of the farming land in our village was dry land. There was extortion in the village by the warlord and by armed groups. They were taking our livestock by force. We were forced to pay money for them to buy guns and motorbikes.

As seen here and noted by Nett and Rüttinger (2016), farmers were often forced to give up their livestock and land by threats of violence and extortion, while others chose to align themselves with armed groups for support and protection. This choice was reflected in other interviews with IDPs in Herat. For example, as another man who has lived in Herat for five years recounted:

We left because my brother took away my land ... My brother was an armed person and in a gang. He stayed in the village. He liked the deteriorating situation, as he was using the situation for his own benefit.

For those affected by climate change and/or conflict who opted to migrate to nearby towns, many shifted to informal employment to provide for their families. The change in government in 2021 and resulting economic crisis, however, have had a negative impact on urban areas, leaving many Afghans displaced, unemployed and in greater need of humanitarian assistance than ever before (Allouche et al., 2022).

2.4 The humanitarian response in Afghanistan

The change in government in 2021 has also meant changes for development and humanitarian assistance. Development aid has been largely paused, including projects focused on water resources and climate change mitigation (Sayed and Sadat, 2022). These cuts initially led to drastic consequences across a country that had previously depended on foreign assistance to pay salaries of public sector workers such as teachers, healthcare providers and other essential workers, as well as to support cash-for-work, cash transfer and livelihood support programmes (HRW, 2022).

This situation has been somewhat mitigated by the UN Transitional Engagement Framework, which incorporates the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) and two other pillars covering basic human needs by sustaining essential services and preserving community systems (UN Afghanistan, 2022). These two pillars, ‘dubbed “humanitarian plus”’, have a combined financial requirement that ‘is roughly equivalent to the total amount of civilian and security assistance cut off by foreign donors after the Taliban seized power’, though its effectiveness and efficiency is yet to be determined (Lang, 2022: 14).

Afghanistan’s largest-ever relief operation was launched last year in response to famine following the collapse of the economy (ibid.). According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2022a), between the beginning of January and the end of July 2022 half of the funding required (\$2.2 billion of \$4.4 billion requested) for the HRP had been received, and almost all of the people in need – 23.8 million of 24.4 million, in a total population of 40 million – had been reached with at least one form of humanitarian assistance. In Herat specifically, 1.5 million of the 2.2 million people in need had been reached (ibid.). While these numbers look impressive, in practical terms people in Afghanistan are still suffering greatly, even if the worst of the looming humanitarian crisis has been averted for now (Lang, 2022).

Supporting IDPs is generally considered the responsibility of their government. The previous government had a National Policy on IDPs, enacted in 2013, and a Policy Framework for Returnees and IDPs, enacted in 2017 (Weerasinghe, 2021). It remains unclear whether the IEA will adopt these as their own, establish new policies or leave the issue unaddressed. Following the change in government in 2021, the economic crisis and resulting needs throughout the country have hit the most vulnerable hardest, both IDPs and other struggling Afghans who have not been displaced. Yet, as will be seen in Chapter 5, there are still barriers that prevent humanitarian assistance from getting to IDPs, including not enough aid to go around; the interference of an intermediary, often a village leader; and a new strategy for delivery that relies on shifting aid towards rural areas and away from urban centres as security improves.

3 Coping and adapting to climate change and conflict

How people – both those who have lived in Herat their whole lives as well as those who have moved to the city and its surrounds due to climate change and conflict – are coping and adapting to climate change and conflict is largely dependent on varying degrees of vulnerability, as not everyone has the same capacity to cope and adapt. As Allouche et al. (2022: 16) explain:

Globally, Afghanistan is the country most severely affected by disasters in terms of their impact on the population. The country's protracted conflict has eroded people's coping mechanisms, making them more prone to hazards ... The co-occurrence of natural disasters and conflict has further impoverished people.

In Herat, the picture is mixed due to its relatively strong economy and stable security situation (Samuel Hall Consulting, 2014; Leslie, 2015). A needs assessment conducted with IDPs and host communities in March and April 2022 identified that 33% of households in Herat were unable to meet basic food needs and 17% had no income – compared to Afghanistan as a whole, at 69% and 55% respectively (IOM DTM, 2022b). Even so, the World Bank Group and Asian Development Bank (2021) found adaptation strategies in Herat to be ineffective in cases of severe drought.

This chapter highlights how migration and displacement have been, and are continually being, used as adaptive strategies throughout Afghanistan, and describes how women and girls have coped with the restrictions brought in by the IEA. The remainder of the chapter details the everyday, intermediate, long-term and extreme coping and adaptive strategies used by the host community and IDPs in Herat.

3.1 Migration and displacement as adaptive strategies

Migration and displacement – both within Afghanistan and across borders – are common adaptive strategies for Afghans living in areas affected by climate change and/or conflict (IDMC, 2022). As there is rarely one single moment that triggers the decision to move, it can be difficult to distinguish between migrants and IDPs. For this study, all of the IDP respondents self-identified as IDPs, and 18 used phrases such as 'we were forced to leave', 'we had to leave' or 'we were unable to continue living there'. Similarly, Giffin (2022: n.p.) notes the difference in a survey between 56% of respondents who framed their movement as due to a lack of job opportunities, and 29% who said they moved looking for better work opportunities, using this variation to highlight the 'potentially forced nature of economic migration' in Afghanistan.

One adaptive strategy commonly employed in Afghanistan is split households, where men – either the head of the household or older sons – are sent to different provinces or even different countries to find work. This has been seen in cases of severe drought (Iqbal et al., 2018) as well as due to conflict

(Stigter, 2005). Iran and, to a lesser extent, Kabul and Pakistan were cited by interviewees as common destinations – although such journeys did not always result in the expected remittances. According to a man who has been living in Herat for five years:

Two of my sons have gone to Iran to work and support our family. They were taken hostage by the smugglers and human traffickers until they could pay [unofficial] border crossing fees to Iran. They still have not paid their debts. I am not happy with this arrangement. I wish my teenage boys had the opportunity to go to school and get higher degrees instead of doing hard work in Iran.

As with these young men, most immigrants to Iran enter the country via irregular routes or with the help of smugglers, as passports and official visas are difficult to obtain (Stigter, 2005; Shaw and Ghafoori, 2019). This lack of legal migration pathways obstructs one of the main adaptive strategies employed by people in Afghanistan.

When asked specifically how they had adapted to conflict, most interviewees – IDPs and hosts alike – suggested that migration was the only available option. As one man who had lived in Herat his entire life stated, when asked how he was adapting to conflict, ‘When there is long-term conflict in a country, how can a person adapt? Unless you are killed in the middle of the conflict or escape from the country.’ Another man displaced to Herat six years ago stated that, while conflict was a reason for leaving his place of origin, and specifically the death of his brother during the conflict, the trauma of it made him want to stay in Herat, as he ‘didn’t like living there any more.’

3.2 How women and girls are coping and adapting under the IEA

Beyond migration, the bulk of the coping and adaptive strategies to conflict discussed by respondents referred to changes women and girls had to make in order to comply with the current government’s restrictions, such as not going outside during the day, for work or without a chaperone and wearing a veil when they did go outside. According to a woman who has lived in Herat her whole life:

Since the Taliban took over Afghanistan, many restrictions have been imposed on girls, and girls are now allowed to go out only for a little time. When they do go out, a veil is considered a must for them. We have adjusted ourselves according to the changing situation.

The restrictions on women and girls have forced many women to change their livelihoods, which curtails households’ ability to adapt to their new environment and reduces women’s ability to contribute to their household finances. In 2013–2014, women made up almost 30% of the labour force, with two in three employed in agriculture (Ganesh, 2017). After August 2021, however, many women said that, while they had previously worked in the fields, they now did indoor jobs such as embroidery or spinning wool into yarn. One woman who had worked in fields prior to displacement, and had shifted her work to greenhouses around Herat post-displacement, spoke of having to stop doing this work due

to recent restrictions forcing her to stay at home. Likewise, a woman who has lived in Herat for 10 years stated: 'I used to have fields and land. I used to harvest wheat with the support of my family, and we were farmers. But for now, I don't do anything other than spinning wool and being a housewife.'

Other IDP women mentioned similar ways of earning money while staying home, such as repairing clothes, hairdressing or keeping some livestock, such as sheep or chickens. IDP women were not the only ones to speak of these restrictions and shifts in livelihoods. A woman from the host community explained how one of her sisters 'has a bachelor's degree in science, but due to war, she now sells handmade products'. Interviewees also mentioned girls' inability to attend school, with several IDPs calling for educational opportunities to be provided by the government, civil society or humanitarian actors.

3.3 Strategies used in displacement

Interviews for this study clearly show that the coping strategies and adaptations employed by IDPs are not enough to meet the overlapping and intersecting challenges of climate change, conflict and displacement. Adaptations to conflict, namely migration/displacement, and the changes required to adhere to the IEA's restrictions on women and girls, have been covered in the previous section. This section focuses on coping strategies and adaptations used by IDPs and the host community in Herat related to climate change.

3.3.1 Everyday coping strategies

Residents of Herat who have not been internally displaced showed a stronger ability to adjust their day-to-day lives to climate change than did IDPs. For example, several interviewees noted they had switched to using clay or earthenware jars covered with pieces of linen to keep drinking water cold, or that they slept outside or on the roofs of their houses when the weather was hot.

IDPs were unable to do these things, due in large part to a lack of resources. One noted that their only relief from hot weather came by moving to the shade of nearby trees. Others mentioned that they burned thorns and animal excrement for cooking and heating their homes as they did not have access to electricity or firewood.

The everyday coping strategies employed by IDPs focused more on reducing consumption, particularly as the economy declines and the price of commodities increases. One IDP stated that their family coped with the lack of resources in displacement by no longer eating meat. Another said that his family ate two meals a day rather than three. Others relied heavily on borrowing money to survive – often from friends and family abroad (see also Shaw and Ghafoori, 2019).

3.3.2 Intermediate and long-term adaptations

Similar to everyday coping strategies, host community members were better able than IDPs to incorporate intermediate and long-term adaptations to climate changes into their lives. For example, Afghans local to Herat who have not been displaced were more likely to adapt to changes in extreme temperatures by buying air conditioners and electric heaters. Some also purchased generators in order to ensure this equipment remained usable when there was no electricity, while a few referred to using solar power for electricity. Others mentioned putting plastic around their windows and insulating their houses to keep out cold air in the winter, and painting rooms white to keep the house cool in the summer. Several mentioned community-based adaptations, such as planting trees for shade and digging deep wells to access water. As a woman who has lived in Herat her entire life explained:

To overcome the shortage of water and to overcome the issue of unavailability of urban tube-well pipes, we are now paying each month a small amount of money to the keeper of the deep well. For this deep well, we have purchased a water storage tanker where water can be stored.

Some IDPs were able to apply similar adaptations in their lives, though rarely to the same degree. One mentioned having dug a deep well to reach water and storing that water in barrels, while another described how an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) had built a drinking well for their IDP settlement, which they described as ‘vital for the people living in the camp’. Others mentioned painting their house to keep cool, and a few said they had solar-powered air conditioners, though one revealed that his had been stolen during the past year and he did not have the resources to replace it.

For many, however, the types of shelters in which they live do not lend themselves to any intermediate or long-term adaptations, as they are meant to be temporary. Those in rented accommodation are often unable to paint or make any other alterations. Others did not have resources to do these types of adaptations – to purchase paint, air conditioners or electric heaters; even if they did, many did not have electricity to run them. As a woman living in Herat for the past 10 years explained, ‘We would live like the locals, but we don’t have money to feed our children, so how is it possible to live like the local community? To plaster or paint our houses or make adjustments for climate change?’

3.3.3 Extreme coping strategies

Residents of Herat who have not been displaced did not mention any extreme coping strategies that they have been forced to take due to the changing climate or conflict. IDPs, by contrast, mentioned several. The most commonly mentioned extreme strategy described during interviews was sending their young sons out of the house to work and support the family financially, whether by collecting and selling garbage, polishing shoes or begging on the streets. Child labour is known to occur more frequently as economic conditions worsen and during periods of drought, resulting in children being kept from school and at greater risk of human trafficking, forced labour and modern slavery (Iqbal et al., 2018; UNICEF, 2018; IDMC, 2021; Allouche et al., 2022).

Some IDPs interviewed for this study also mentioned marrying off their daughters at an early age. Daughters are often married at younger ages during periods of drought and severe food insecurity, as the money that comes from marrying off a daughter can offset increased debt and agricultural losses (NUPI, 2022). While rural communities in Afghanistan have always practised child marriage, ‘now aid agencies report that girls as young as five or six are being sold off as brides’ (Lang, 2022: 9). Indeed, in the relatively small sample of IDPs in this study, a woman who had been displaced to Herat four years ago stated that ‘due to poverty and debt, we sold and handed over my eight-year-old daughter to her husband’. While discussing this practice, a national NGO worker explained that, from his perspective, IDPs resorted to this practice not because it was a cultural norm, but because ‘there is no other alternative for them’.

Finally, while not mentioned by the IDPs interviewed for this study, several of the humanitarian actors interviewed mentioned that people have resorted to selling their children³ and their organs for money to survive – coping strategies also mentioned by the Secretary-General in March 2022 (UNSG, 2022). According to the International Organization for Migration Displacement Tracking Matrix (IOM DTM) (2022b: 3), ‘Although extreme coping mechanisms, such as selling a child or body organs, remain unlikely in Herat province, the reported likelihood is higher in the province compared to the nationwide average’.

3 Although this phrase typically refers to early marriage of girls, in this context it also refers to the selling of children, both girls and boys, to earn money for food or to repay debts (Charles, 2021; Save the Children, 2022).

4 Living with climate change, conflict and internal displacement

IDPs' inability to engage in the same everyday coping strategies and intermediate and long-term adaptations as the host community, as well as their reliance on extreme coping strategies, has shaped how they feel about their lives and how well they cope with their displacement. Many IDPs interviewed for this study expressed despair at the lack of livelihood opportunities available to them, which would help them adapt better to their circumstances and prevent many of the extreme coping strategies they are currently forced to employ. Yet, at the same time – though they are largely unable to support themselves and struggle daily to survive – almost all of the IDPs interviewed (17 of 22) planned to stay in Herat.

For the host community, however, the arrival of large numbers of IDPs, particularly over the past five years, has been a cause for concern. While all of the interviewees from the host community willingly stated that people should have the right to migrate to other places to escape conflict and the effects of climate change, when asked if these people should be able to move to Herat, fewer than half of them agreed. All of these factors – a lack of livelihood opportunities, their unwillingness or inability to return to their places of origin and the host community's lack of acceptance – combine to create dire conditions for those who have been internally displaced, with little relief in sight.

4.1 Lack of livelihood opportunities

The largest barrier to IDPs' ability to adapt to their displacement is their inability to access sustainable livelihoods (Amoli and Jones, 2022). Without opportunities to make money and support their families, many critical issues – like climate change – remain unaddressed. As a man who has lived in Herat his entire life stated: 'I have not noticed any changes other people made. People have bigger problems, and they don't pay attention to the challenges of climate change. People have no jobs, and they can't provide for their basic needs.' Similarly, a woman who has been displaced in Herat for 30 years explained, 'To make changes in our homes and our lives, we need money. Right now, we are in a bad economic situation. We lack the funds to support ourselves and to continue living. Poverty does not fill our stomachs.'

Even before the change in government in August 2021 and subsequent economic collapse, IDPs struggled to find jobs and earn money. Most were unable to replicate the same type of work they had done in their rural places of origin prior to displacement now that they were living in the more urban environment of Herat. Indeed, out of the 22 IDPs interviewed for this study, only five were able to continue doing the same type of work that they had done previously. Of these, four of the five were women who had previously worked inside the home already, and thus were unaffected by the restrictions imposed by the IEA (see Section 3.2). Two had been housewives both before and after displacement, while two had done embroidery, though they all either had additional jobs previously – typically working in fields or raising animals – or had taken on additional jobs in displacement, such as

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embroidery or spinning wool into yarn. The only man who had been able to continue with the same work in displacement was a shopkeeper. In Herat, however, he struggled without a permanent shop and instead carried his goods from village to village to sell them.

For IDPs who were unable to replicate their previous livelihoods, the majority had been farmers and herders, and were now unable to access land to cultivate or raise livestock. According to one man who has lived in Herat for the past three years:

I am driving a rickshaw now, but previously I was doing farming. There is nothing to do here, and there is no land to cultivate on. I know about farming and have experience of that, but that job is not available here.

A man who has been in Herat for five years noted:

Back in our village, I used to have livestock and look after them. Now, I collect trash and garbage, and it is the worst job I have ever done. If I had any other choice to do any other livelihood activity to provide my family, I would have never done this work.

Other men leave their IDP settlements to go into the city to find day work as unskilled labourers in construction and other industries, but often return home empty-handed after not being hired.

4.2 Unwillingness and/or inability to return

Despite the inability of many IDPs to earn a living in Herat, almost all (17 of 22) stated that they planned to stay and did not want to return to their places of origin. As one woman who has been living in Herat for 10 years stated, ‘Where should we go? We have no place to go.’

For the majority of IDPs, previous and ongoing conflict was a key motivation for not returning. As a man who has lived in Herat for the past 20 years stated,

I plan to stay my whole life in Herat. Here, no one is punishing me and forcing me to do heavy work or fight. Here, though we earn less money, we eat in peace at home. Having all these problems in the cities like having no shelter, electricity, drinking water and home appliances makes it easier to live in a village. However, due to the fighting between Uzbeks and Taliban, it is not safe to go back.

Several interviewees spoke of how they lost their land to armed groups, and thus had nowhere to return to even if they wanted to go home. A man who moved to Herat 21 years ago explained:

I plan to stay my whole life in Herat. I have no other choice to return to my village. I have nothing over there. My house is destroyed, and I have no farming land or any livestock ... We left all our cattle behind [when we moved] because of the war. The warlords took them all.

These sentiments correspond with Weerasinghe (2021: 27), who found that ‘while some IDPs return to their areas of origin after relatively short periods, many – particularly people who have fled in the context of conflict – remain internally displaced for years’. Indeed, as Ferris (2020: 7) notes, ‘the longer that displacement lasts, the less likely IDPs are to return’.

By contrast, for a few interviewees, the main issue preventing their return was climate change. One IDP who used to collect spices in the mountains to sell at the market noted that the spices no longer grew there because of the lack of rain. Moreover, their house, which had been made of mud, had also been destroyed, and they no longer had a place to live. According to Sayed and Sadat (2022), the halt of development projects focused on water and other climate change mitigations following the change in government will also discourage some from returning, as well as compelling others to migrate from rural areas.

Some interviewees identified new opportunities in Herat as a motivation for staying. As a man who has lived in Herat for the past five years noted, ‘I plan to stay here until I have a better choice. Here, our children go to school, and there are fewer war threats. If living conditions improve in our village, which is very unlikely, we might return.’

Others, however, acknowledged that they had to stay in Herat not because they necessarily wanted to, but because they did not have the funds or the resources to return home. As an IDP woman who has lived in Herat for five years explained, ‘We cannot go back to our place because our financial situation is weak, and we cannot settle ourselves again there.’ While every IDP interviewed for this study was struggling to earn enough money to support themselves, many recognised that livelihoods opportunities in their places of origin would be even worse. As one IDP man said,

If the situation gets better and the poverty issue resolves, we will go back to our village. Otherwise, there are no jobs to do to support the family. Here at least I can work for 200 AFN [approximately \$2.25] per day and bring some bread to my family, but that is not possible there.

For those who did wish to return to their places of origin (5 of 22), almost all (4 of the 5) cited the harsh conditions in Herat and the lack of livelihood opportunities as their motivation. As a man who has been displaced for three years explained, ‘I will return to my original place as soon as the drought finishes. Living in Herat is very hard. There is no job and no assistance.’ Similarly, a man who has been displaced for eight years remarked, ‘I plan to move back to our village if the drought finishes, and we have the opportunity for farming and livelihood activities. We are in a bad situation in Herat. There are no job opportunities.’ Unfortunately for both of these men, however, the drought that drove them to Herat in the first place shows little sign of easing. Indeed, as Amoli and Jones (2022: 18–19) note:

Four years later, and in the midst of a second drought, many of these internally displaced persons (IDPs) have still not been able to access ‘durable solutions’, unable to return to their places of origin or to integrate within local communities.

4.3 Little acceptance for IDPs

While IDPs remain committed to staying in Herat, by and large, the host community members interviewed for this study wished that they would either return to their places of origin or move somewhere else. All of the interviewees from the host community agreed that people whose lives had been affected by either climate change or conflict should be able to move to a new location. A common sentiment was expressed by an Afghan in Herat who said, ‘They should be able to have freedom of movement. Every human being is born free, and everyone should have the right to move on the earth wherever they wish.’

Yet, when asked whether these people should be able to move to Herat, just over half of the interviewees from the host community (11 of 19) said no. ‘People who can’t move out of this country should be moved to somewhere safe, but not here,’ explained one woman, while another pointed to Herat’s extremely hot summers and extremely cold winters, which she expected only to worsen with climate change, as the reason people should not be allowed to move to the city. When asked what the government, NGOs and civil society could do to help IDPs, most (14 of 19) said they should help them move back to their places of origin or to a new location, where they could be provided with land, shelter, water, healthcare, schools, mosques and job opportunities.

The most commonly cited consequence of the presence of IDPs in Herat was a perceived increase in crime. One man, who has lived in Herat since he was seven years old, claimed:

The presence of IDPs has changed the situation of Herat a lot. It has caused social disorder. The crime rate has increased in the city. As most of the IDPs do not have basic resources for life, they are committing crimes to feed themselves and their families.

Some mentioned that food prices had risen due to more demand, while employment opportunities and wages had decreased due to more supply, though the economic crisis has likely played a strong role. Others cited perceived issues of poor hygiene, increased pollution and environmental degradation, often due to rapid and haphazard urbanisation and IDPs’ lack of resources – such as water and clean fuel for cooking and heating – and consequent coping strategies and adaptations.

Finally, several members of the host community (and a few IDPs) noted tensions when assistance was given to IDPs and not to other Afghans who were seen as equally hungry and vulnerable. According to a woman from Herat City:

Whatever assistance is coming to Herat province, these IDPs receive it ... They have identity and registration cards for three to four separate settlements, and they collect aid from various donors and government authorities. In fact, no aid remains for the original people of Herat province.

Similarly, a man who has lived in Herat since birth noted:

There are lots of people displaced or using the label of ‘displaced person’ ... They claim that they moved to Herat due to the conflicts and climate changes, but it has been more than 15 years that they have been living here, and still they are receiving aid from national and international organisations. I think they are not displaced any more.

While most IDPs interviewed (15 of 22) stated that they had not received aid within the past year, the perception remained that IDPs were receiving aid that they did not deserve, and that this was the reason that others in Herat were also not receiving assistance at a time when the number of Afghans living below the poverty line has risen from 47% in 2020 to an estimated 97% in 2022 (UNDP, 2021). This perception has important implications for social cohesion and local integration, particularly while IDPs are struggling to survive and are unwilling or unable to return home.

5 Barriers preventing aid from reaching IDPs

The main constraints to getting aid to IDPs are not necessarily the most obvious ones. As Lang (2022: 12) notes, while some people have raised concerns about diversion of aid or interference with delivery due to corruption, neither ‘appear to be a central challenge to delivering aid to communities in need’.

One thing that is preventing aid from reaching IDPs is insufficient quantities in the face of overwhelming need throughout the country, due to the co-occurrence of long-term and severe threats to people’s livelihoods. For example, those who had previously moved from rural areas to cities due to drought and other climate-related threats have limited job opportunities following the country’s economic collapse, while also finding themselves unable to return to rural areas that have yet to recover. According to the World Food Programme (WFP, 2022), in July 2022 almost 9 in 10 Afghans faced insufficient food consumption, down only slightly from almost 100% in November 2021 following a large influx of humanitarian aid. Moreover, 91% of people’s income was spent on food, a figure that has continually risen since January, and almost half of Afghans (48%) reported using crisis coping strategies to feed their families (ibid.). Since – as was seen in Chapter 3 – IDPs are less able to use everyday coping strategies and intermediate and long-term adaptations and more likely to rely on extreme strategies to survive, it can be assumed that IDPs are among those who are suffering most.

IDP settlements are not conducive to aid delivery. First, according to Lang (2022), humanitarian organisations are reportedly struggling to locate IDPs living in informal settlements, and when they do deliver aid within the settlements there is not enough to go around. Second, they often give aid through the *Wakil Guzar* – the village leader or neighbourhood elder – who does not always distribute the assistance equally or according to need. Finally, recent shifts in strategy prompted by the new government – namely sending aid to remote provinces rather than concentrating it in cities – have prevented assistance from reaching IDPs who are already settled in Herat.

5.1 Not enough assistance to go around

While aid actors working in Herat interviewed for this study spoke of providing food, water, cash, clothes, shelter kits, winter equipment, hygiene kits and medicine, only 7 of 22 IDPs said that they had received any kind of assistance since August 2021. A man displaced to Herat five years ago explained, ‘We haven’t received any food assistance this year except a 50g bag of wheat flour, which was distributed to 10 families. Every family received only 5kg, which is really painful.’ Another IDP mentioned how bags of flour were divided among five families in her settlement. Another noted how they had received food assistance only once in the last two years. According to him, ‘There is no other aid available to the IDPs.’

The discrepancy between overwhelming need and inadequate supply was acknowledged by several humanitarian actors interviewed for this study. According to one INGO worker, ‘The level of the vulnerable population is too high, and the source of assistance is not sufficient or enough, particularly in all sectors and departments.’ Between the 2020 Revision to the HRP and the 2022 HRP, the number of people in need more than doubled, jumping from 9.4 million to 24.4 million (OCHA, 2019; 2022b). Further unexpected crises also affected aid levels in 2022, with another interviewee giving the example of how half of the funding earmarked for cash assistance was shifted to eastern Afghanistan after the earthquakes there in June.

The majority of aid that has been distributed during the past year has been food assistance. While this has been vital during this period of economic collapse and rising prices, when more than half the population is in dire need of food, it is also only temporary. As one INGO worker noted:

Resources are very limited, and the needs are very high ... It is difficult for humanitarian organisations to fill the gaps. To fill the gaps, we need long-term programmes. In these days, all the programmes and projects are for the short term, which are not going to solve the problem.

Only a few of the humanitarian actors interviewed mentioned providing livelihood support, which would help provide sustainable alternatives to aid, particularly for people resorting to extreme coping strategies.

Finally, though several organisations also give aid to vulnerable Afghans who have not been displaced, one respondent suggested it was not enough: ‘The level of host community vulnerability is also very high’. Others claimed that, while this was true, their organisations remained focused on IDPs because of a lack of resources. Yet, targeting Afghans who have not been displaced as well as IDPs – particularly when everyone is badly in need of assistance – would likely go a long way towards increasing acceptance for IDPs among host communities, as discussed in Section 4.3.

5.2 The role of the ‘village leader’

The second barrier preventing aid from reaching IDPs most in need involves the selection of beneficiaries, which in many informal settlements is done through the *Wakil Guzar*, or village leader. In some settlements, IDPs interviewed for this study suggested the village leader was doing a good job. According to one IDP:

We received flour, oil, salt, and 7kg of beans and chickpeas five times from [an INGO]. We have cards to receive aid/assistance, and the *Wakil Guzar* notifies our neighbours by phone call, and through our neighbours we get information about assistance.

For many other IDPs, however, their experience with village leaders has been much less positive. One IDP living in Herat for the past year noted that her family had had only one discussion with the village leader, and that ‘he provides assistance to his relatives and acquaintances, even though they don’t need help and they are not poor; their lives are going well.’

Others claimed that, rather than distributing aid to their friends and relatives, the village leaders in their settlements kept the aid for themselves. According to a woman who has been living in Herat for the past 10 years, ‘Whenever aid is allocated to our area, the *Wakil Guzar* and other elders of this area divide it among themselves, and they do not even tell us.’ Another woman displaced for 11 years claimed:

Until now we haven’t received any kind of aid. We were given aid cards, and several times we were told that we were registered, and that help would be given to us. But until now, we have received nothing, and none of these organisations has helped us. The *Wakil Guzar* takes everything and distributes nothing to the people.

Finally, one IDP who has been in Herat only one year described how, in her settlement,

Whenever aid is coming to our village, the *Wakil Guzar* gets it and then tells us to pay him a [transportation] fee in order to distribute the aid among us. Indeed, I don’t have money to pay for our daily living expenses, so how can I pay him?

Several humanitarian actors, particularly those from national NGOs, were also aware that the village leader often acted as a barrier preventing aid from getting to those most in need. One national NGO worker pointed to ‘intermediaries in the selection of beneficiaries to receive aid’ and ‘the identification of beneficiaries by the village leader, which causes deserving people to not receive aid’ when asked what he believed were the main gaps in assistance. Another answered the question by saying, ‘Most of the aid is given to the areas that are in favour of *Wakil Guzar* ... A small number of crooked and self-interested individuals control the weak and disadvantaged segments of society.’

5.3 Shifting strategy for delivering aid

Increased access in rural areas and the explicit priorities of the IEA have resulted in a shift towards rural districts, rather than concentrating aid in urban areas, to reduce the pull factor of cities for those seeking support (Lang, 2022). This risks undermining the utility of mobility as an adaptive strategy for Afghans affected by climate change and conflict. At the same time, it has resulted in short-term movements of IDPs, who travel to their places of origin to collect assistance before returning to Herat where there are better job opportunities and expanded access to services, according to one humanitarian actor.

This new strategy of sending aid to rural areas rather than concentrating it in urban ones goes some way towards rebalancing inequalities that have persisted in Afghanistan for decades. Rural areas have

always been underserved by aid organisations, largely due to lack of access and insecurity (DRC, 2022). Now, however, the new government has brought a semblance of peace to many parts of Afghanistan and, according to one respondent, humanitarian organisations can open offices in neighbouring provinces where previously they had been unable to do so.

It is also explicitly promoted by the IEA, which ‘want[s] IDPs to go home’ (Lang, 2022: 9). The government’s desire to return IDPs to their places of origin has resulted in the closure of settlements throughout Afghanistan, with a plan to close them all in the near future (NRC, 2022). In western Afghanistan, the threat of eviction and the return of IDP communities to their places of origin come at a time when those places remain uninhabitable due to prolonged drought (DRC, 2022). To help achieve this priority, according to one INGO worker, the new government has restricted the support humanitarian organisations can give to IDPs in urban areas.

For IDPs already living in cities, the decline in support was apparent. Commonly heard statements by IDPs include the following: ‘Since the Taliban took over Afghanistan, we have not received any help’ and ‘In the past year, since the economy has weakened and we have become dependent on aid, no aid has been provided’. Several alluded to the new aid strategy, saying, ‘It has been two years since we’ve received any noticeable assistance or aid ... The humanitarian organisations have stopped assisting the residents of [an IDP settlement] for the last two years.’ Another IDP living in a settlement for the past eight years remarked:

We used to get some assistance in the first years, but now all assistance is stopped to the residents of the camps. We got wheat flour, split peas, salt and vegetable oil in 2021 ... It has been almost a year that we have not received any aid.

Several pinned this shift on the change in government, remarking that ‘since the new ruling party came, aid has been stopped’.

The implications of this strategy were particularly evident for INGOs and UN agencies. For example, when asked what type of aid his organisation gave to IDPs, one INGO worker stated that it offered ‘financial support and cash assistance to IDPs to help them make ends meet and to motivate them to go back where they came from’. Yet, this strategy shows that the sector has still not moved past the ‘flawed assumption’ that ‘creating a future for returning refugees and IDPs is satisfied by restoring them ... to their places of origin and former livelihoods – even when conditions are not conducive for returning to these places’ (Fagen, 2011: 2).

By contrast, interviewees working with national NGOs were more likely to acknowledge that the effect of climate change on the agricultural sector in rural areas was the main cause of urbanisation, with one acknowledging that IDPs typically do not return because ‘in the majority of villages and towns, there is no water for drinking, and there is no news of agriculture at all’. While the government has already

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facilitated the return of many IDPs displaced by conflict throughout Afghanistan, less attention has been paid to those who have been displaced by long-term climate change impacts, such as drought (Sayed and Sadat, 2022).

While this new strategy may go some way to mitigating long-standing discrepancies between aid given in rural areas and that given in cities, it also dilutes the aid that is available for those who have already been displaced to urban areas. When combined with the inadequate amount of assistance available compared to the seriousness of the humanitarian crisis, spreading assistance even thinner will not be sufficient. It also undermines mobility as an adaptive strategy. As seen in previous chapters, many of those who have been displaced do not wish to return to rural areas due to trauma from the conflict and poor agricultural conditions from the drought. Unless these issues are tackled alongside the food shortage and economic crisis, encouraging people to return to their villages of origin by restricting the amount of aid provided in cities will likely do more harm than good.

6 Conclusion and recommendations

Whether displaced by conflict, climate change or a combination, IDPs in Herat are struggling to survive. They have been exposed to multiple, compounding shocks, including the country's economic collapse following the change in government in August 2021. They are overwhelmingly less able to employ everyday coping strategies and intermediate and long-term adaptations than Afghans who have not been displaced, and engage more frequently in extreme coping strategies. In most cases, they cannot return to their places of origin because the conflict has destroyed their homes and climate change has rendered their livelihoods unsustainable. The humanitarian assistance they receive is inadequate due to overwhelming needs and the government's desire to force them to return.

A more strategic approach to addressing the needs of IDPs in Herat is required. Afghans have long used migration and displacement as coping strategies in response to natural hazard-related disasters and conflict. Rather than undermine this strategy by attempting to prevent migration in the first place or sending people who are already displaced back to their places of origin, more should be done to support those who have already chosen to move and who now wish to stay where they are. Sufficient food, adequate shelter and gender-sensitive livelihood support will help prevent people from being forced to employ increasingly extreme coping strategies to survive.

Humanitarian assistance, however, is not sustainable and will never be able to meet long-term needs, particularly as these needs increase in line with climate change impacts. Since the 2021 change in government, conflict-induced displacement has decreased sharply while climate-induced displacement continues to grow (Giffin, 2022). As Amoli and Jones (2022: 19) note, 'Herat's informal settlements are a stark reminder of the need for development and humanitarian stakeholders to work hand-in-hand through all stages of climate-induced displacement if long-term solutions to displacement are to be achieved.' Closing these settlements and forcing people into ever-more precarious conditions elsewhere is unlikely to be a viable durable solution.

Development assistance, by contrast, remains controversial in the wider international community, and funding from traditional donor states – except under the guise of 'humanitarian plus' – is currently difficult, if not impossible, due to sanctions and a lack of formal engagement with the IEA (McKechnie et al., 2022). But there is still a role for other countries to play in helping Afghanistan adapt to climate change in a way that supports those who are suffering most, and yet who have done little to contribute to it. According to Hakimi and Brown (2022: n.p.), 'climate change could provide an entry point for engagement with the de facto Taliban government in a desecuritized and depoliticized setting' since 'it is one of the few issues the international community and the Taliban government actually agree on'. By focusing only on development projects that target the impacts of climate change, international organisations could meet their global commitments – such as Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 13 to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts – as well as make a substantial difference in the lives of all Afghans in need of assistance.

6.1 Recommendations

To tackle both the dire needs of IDPs and impacts of climate change on the country, this study suggests the following recommendations for national NGOs, international NGOs and UN agencies operating in Afghanistan, as well as donors:

- Improve knowledge of where IDPs are located, how many there are and what their greatest needs are. Rather than provide aid in bulk to the village leaders of informal settlements, work with the community to ensure that aid is reaching the people most in need.
- Implement interventions that are realistic, feasible and do no harm. Food and shelter support is likely to continue to be needed across all IDP settlements, but other longer-term improvements, such as solar power and drinking wells, should also be prioritised where possible. Look to the host community for suggestions of what types of adaptations are having the most impact, and then help IDPs implement them.
- Provide support for IDPs to find better jobs or to do their current jobs more efficiently, such as providing them with loans and capital to start businesses, rickshaws to help with transportation of goods or spinning machines for women. Women's livelihood support must be pragmatic and reduce risks for those in need, by focusing on in-home opportunities through training courses and equipment for tailoring, spinning wool, embroidery, pickling and baking. This can (and should) be provided at the same time as organisations continue to advocate for women to be allowed to work outside the home.
- Include residents of Herat who are in need in aid distributions and livelihood opportunities. Be more transparent in how and why recipients of aid are selected, or that aid is only available because of the presence of IDPs in their city, to mitigate feelings of ill-will between the host community and IDPs.
- Continue to provide aid in informal settlements with the understanding that rural livelihoods may not be feasible in today's changing climate, at least not without significant development to mitigate the effects of extreme temperatures, droughts and floods. Encourage the government to reverse its policy on returning IDPs to their areas of origin, particularly areas which are still affected by drought and conflict.
- Restart development projects that will mitigate the impacts of climate change when and where possible to address long-term needs and shift away from short-term humanitarian assistance. To do so, donors must continue to press for pragmatic and principled engagement with the IEA to find entry points for productive dialogue on issues on which the government and the international community agree, including climate change mitigation.

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