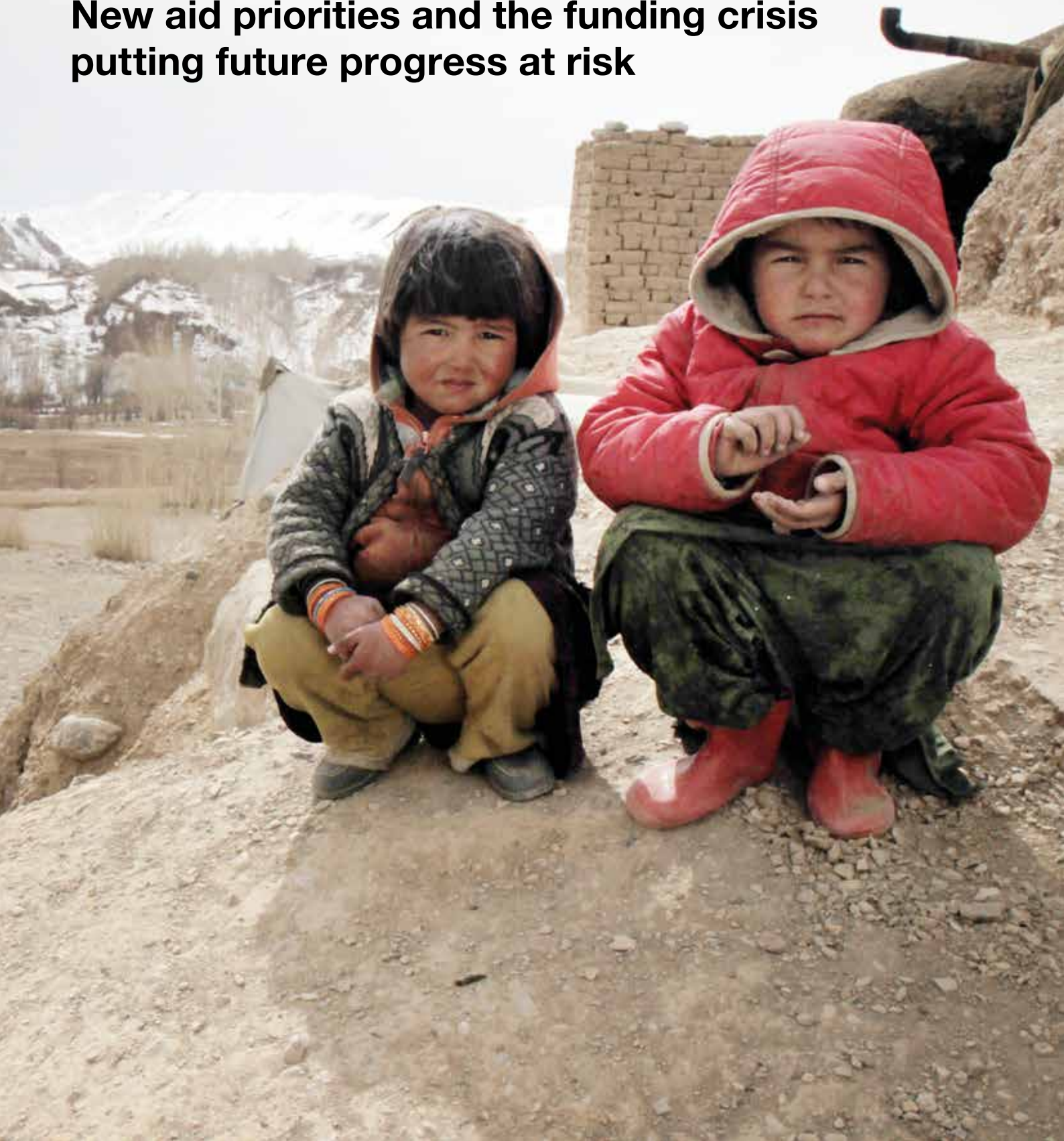


Afghanistan in limbo



**New aid priorities and the funding crisis
putting future progress at risk**



Foreword



Afghanistan is at a crossroads, facing an uncertain future as most of the remaining Western troops in the country prepare to withdraw by the end of 2014.

The international community largely abandoned Afghanistan in the 1990s after the end of the Soviet occupation – a

withdrawal that paved the way for the rise of Taliban and is now seen by many observers as a huge mistake. Yet as the end of 2014 approaches we are seeing signs that Afghanistan is being abandoned again.

As the troops get ready to leave, aid funding is dropping too. It fell from \$894 million in 2011 to just \$508 million in 2013, and in March 2014, less than one fifth of the UN's humanitarian plan for the year was funded. A certain caution about future funding is understandable, given the uncertainties that lie ahead. But the effects could be catastrophic for my people – the people of Afghanistan. Large cuts in aid funding will cripple health, education and other services and sentence another generation to a life of poverty.

What's at risk is a decade of progress in which many of us have seen real improvements in our lives. In 2001 there were barely a million children in school, and now there are over seven million. The proportion of people living within an hour's walk of a basic healthcare facility has increased from 8% to 57%.

The reality is that Afghanistan remains extremely poor, and there is much still to be done. Around half of children still don't go to school, the under-five mortality rate is one in ten and 2.3 million people don't have safe drinking water. If the flow of aid stops, then so does the chance to deal with these problems. The biggest losers will be Afghanistan's women, whose growing freedoms and improved education have been a real plus point of the past decade.

Instead of cutting aid to Afghanistan, Islamic Relief believes that the international community should stand by the Afghan people and improve the quality of aid. That means focusing on relieving poverty rather than just building security, investing in agriculture, supporting health and education, tackling drug addiction and protecting women's rights.

It would be easy to abandon hope in the face of the challenges we face. But I do have real hope for the next step in Afghanistan's journey. That hope comes from the endurance of my people in decades of conflict, from the resilience of our women in the face of such deprivation and disadvantage. "Woman is a ray of God," wrote Rumi, one of Afghanistan's most celebrated sons and one of Islam's most revered poets. "She is not just the earthly beloved. She is creative, not created."

The people of Afghanistan, the women of Afghanistan, are ready to build on the hard work of the past decade. We urge you to stand by us, and work with us, for a brighter future.

Farzana Balooch

Orphan Sponsorship and Child Welfare Coordinator
Islamic Relief Afghanistan

Executive summary¹

A new and uncertain chapter has begun in Afghanistan's bloody and poverty-stricken recent history, as most foreign troops prepare to withdraw by the end of 2014.

Although there have been some improvements since the fall of the Taliban, Afghanistan is still one of the poorest countries in the world. Its human development indicators are very low as a result of decades of conflict, high food and fuel prices and a succession of natural disasters, including drought, flash floods and earthquakes.

Islamic Relief believes it is critical at this time of transition not to abandon the people of Afghanistan to their fate but to prepare for future challenges and reinforce international support for efforts to lift Afghans out of the vicious cycle of poverty and conflict. We are concerned that the country is in danger of being left in limbo as support for aid ebbs away, putting recent gains and future progress at risk.

Introduction

Poverty is killing more people in Afghanistan than direct fatalities from the ongoing conflict. The experience of the past decade has shown that real progress can be achieved with international aid, but that progress has been modest and huge challenges remain.

There are worrying signs that the international commitment to poverty alleviation is on the wane. Over the past decade aid to Afghanistan has been relatively high, but this is changing in the face of the military withdrawal, a tough global funding climate and donor fatigue.

Between 2011 and 2013 there was a sharp drop in aid funding, from \$894 million to \$508 million, with the UN requesting just \$406 million this year. The World Bank anticipates that government budgets are likely to face a financing gap of 25% of GDP by 2021/22 because of reduced aid.

Although the security situation will remain difficult, Islamic Relief believes that Afghanistan needs and deserves more humanitarian support after 2014, not less.

Progress and problems

Afghanistan has made significant development progress in the past decade, but numerous deep-seated challenges remain. Some of the biggest gains have been made in education and health.

Enrolment in primary and secondary schools increased from 1.1 million in 2001 to 7.7 million in 2013. Net school enrolment rose from 43% to an estimated 63% for boys and from 3% to 46% for girls in the same period.

From 2002 to 2007 the number of functioning primary health care facilities more than doubled from 496 to 1,169, and the proportion with female staff rose from 25% to 83%. In 2001 only 8% of the population was estimated to have access to basic health care, but now 57% live within one hour's walk of a basic health care facility. Infant mortality fell by nearly 40% between 2002 and 2012, while childhood immunisation rates climbed from 12% in 2005 to 37% in 2008.

Despite this success, Afghanistan's needs are immense. More than a third of the population live below the poverty line. Around 8.7 million people do not produce enough food or earn enough income to feed themselves adequately. Life expectancy is just 50, and 4.8 million children are out of school. Over 3 million Afghans are living as refugees in neighbouring countries or in camps for internally displaced people.

The challenges ahead

Despite the challenges that Afghanistan faces, much can be done and much achieved. Islamic Relief believes that seven cross-cutting principles should inform the efforts of the international community in supporting Afghanistan.

These principles are: sustaining aid funding, improving the quality of aid, prioritising long-term development, focusing on basic services, ensuring community and NGO involvement, building resilience and strengthening governance – see 'Recommendations' overleaf for more details.

Agriculture and livelihoods

Supporting agriculture and livelihoods is one of the most important areas for international support to Afghans, perhaps even the most vital of all. But the country's farmers have been relatively neglected. Farming accounts for 60% of employment in Afghanistan but only 8% of government spending.

Food insecurity is deepening, and rural communities across Afghanistan are getting poorer. Decades of conflict have hit the agricultural sector hard, and productivity is currently below 50% of its pre-war level three decades ago. Islamic Relief has provided seeds and tools to thousands of farmers, and wants to see strategic investment in new crop varieties and advice services for smallholders.

Education and health

Afghanistan needs to continue to make big investments in health and education, with a focus on delivering high-quality healthcare and good schooling to more people.

School enrolment has increased sevenfold in a decade, yet still fewer than half of girls go to school and 4.8 million children receive no formal education. One million under-5s are acutely malnourished, 10% of children don't live to see their fifth birthday and half of adults have suffered from mental health problems.

A number of problems are common to both sectors, especially the quality of health and education personnel and physical infrastructure. Islamic Relief is directly involved in delivering schooling and basic health care, and believes there are still too few schools and clinics and not enough skilled professionals to staff them. There needs to be special provision to train more women teachers and health professionals, especially in rural areas.

Women's rights

The position of women in Afghanistan has improved in the

past decade. More girls are in school than ever before, and more than a quarter of Afghanistan's parliamentarians and government officials are female.

The constitution grants equal rights to women and men, and many more women are freer to participate in public life and work outside their homes as doctors, teachers, entrepreneurs and lawyers.

But new laws that are meant to protect women have barely been enforced. Afghanistan's women are so disadvantaged in health, education and employment that the country is ranked a lowly 175th out of 186 nations by the UN's Gender Inequality Index.

Islamic Relief runs a respected home-based literacy programme for women in Bamyan province, and wants to see more investment in community and home-based education.

Drug addiction

Addiction to narcotics has become a major public health issue for Afghanistan, while the booming opium trade continues to be a major obstacle on the path of stability and sustainable economic development. These twin challenges need urgent attention and a significant injection of funds from the Afghan government and the international community.

Afghanistan accounts for 90% of the world's opium production and has the highest rate of drug addiction in the world, yet health facilities have the capacity to treat only 1% of the country's 1 million or more addicts. Islamic Relief runs a successful village-based treatment and rehabilitation programme in Balkh province, and is calling for an expanded national programme to tackle drug abuse.

Refugees and displaced people

Afghanistan has a long history of mass displacement, and has been described as the 'epicentre' of the world's refugee challenges.



Around 400 Afghans are displaced every day, and Afghanistan is the number one source of refugees internationally. Islamic Relief is involved in supplying fuel and other aid to IDP camps. It believes that any serious approach to alleviating the poverty and suffering of the Afghan people should have a well resourced strategy for supporting refugees and displaced people, and building communities fit for the dispossessed to return to.

Recommendations

Islamic Relief urges aid donors to stand by the people of Afghanistan by pledging to adhere to a set of seven broad principles for continuing international engagement, and acting on our seven recommendations to improve the impact of aid.

Key principles

► Sustain international funding

The international community should invest significantly in poverty alleviation and make a forward commitment to fully fund the UN's Common Humanitarian Action Plan for Afghanistan over the next three years. It is vital to maintain progress in addressing the country's humanitarian needs.

► Improve aid quality

Donors need to improve the quality of aid by ensuring that programmes are better attuned to local needs (prioritising teacher shortages and community and home-based education, for example) and that services are developed in a more inclusive and transparent way in partnership with international NGOs and Afghan civil society groups.

► Prioritise development

Future aid should focus on alleviating poverty, promoting long-term development and addressing the basic needs of the most vulnerable people, with a more equal balance of funding between secure and insecure areas.

► Focus on basic services

Aid donors and the government of Afghanistan need to channel more resources into delivering good-quality basic services and improving essential infrastructure. This is especially true for investment in agriculture, health, schools and women's education.

Facts and figures

Afghanistan over the past decade has been a real success story for international aid:

- The number of children going to school increased sevenfold between 2001 and 2011, from 1.1 million to 7.7 million
- 46% of girls now go to school, compared to just 3% 13 years ago
- Over half of the population live within one hour's walk of a basic health care facility, compared to just 8% in 2001
- Child immunisation rates have tripled in under a decade; infant mortality has been cut by almost 40%.

But the country still has a long way to go, and a drop in aid funding threatens to stop progress in its tracks:

- Aid to Afghanistan was cut by 43% between 2011 and 2013, from \$894 million to \$508 million, with the UN requesting just \$406 million this year
- Health (26%) and education (29%) received well under a third of their UN funding requirements in 2012
- The UN has requested just \$13 per Afghan in foreign aid this year, compared to the \$2.1 million it will cost to deploy each US troop in the country
- Life expectancy is still only 50. A million under-5s are acutely malnourished, and 10% of children don't live to see their fifth birthday
- Fewer than half of girls go to school (46%) and 4.8 million children receive no formal education
- Agriculture employs 60% of the population but commands only 8% of the government budget
- 8.7 million people do not have enough food or income to feed themselves adequately
- Over a million Afghans are opium or heroin addicts, the highest rate of addiction in the world
- Over three million are living as refugees in neighbouring countries or in camps for displaced people.

► **Ensure greater community and NGO involvement**

Afghans need to be more involved in developing, delivering and evaluating the programmes of which they are the intended beneficiaries. More aid should be channelled through non-government organisations that have a good track record in accountable community development. In addition, local capacity to identify and tackle the root causes of conflict needs to be developed and supported as an integral part of aid and development activities.

► **Build resilience**

Despite the potential for progress, it would be naive to ignore the possibility of Afghanistan falling victim to further natural disasters and renewed conflict. International assistance should include support to prepare communities for drought in particular, and contingency funding for dealing with conflict and displacement.

► **Strengthen governance**

Increased support for NGOs must be accompanied by policies to strengthen the Afghan government to deliver services – including measures to professionalise management, devolve power to the provinces, reduce bureaucracy and protect against corruption. Improvement in government capacity should be accompanied by investment in efforts to address the causes and effects of conflict at national and regional levels.

Key recommendations

► **Strengthen agriculture**

Strategic investment is needed in areas such as irrigation systems, storage facilities, improved crop varieties, post-harvest processing technologies and extension and advisory services – especially for smallholders. Disaster risk reduction should be strongly supported.

► **Expand health provision**

Tackling malnutrition is the number one priority, and improving access to health care in remote areas is vital. Priorities include expanding the country's network of health clinics, employing more health professionals, improving treatment for victims of conflict and repairing clean water facilities.

► **Invest in education**

Funding for education is critical if more Afghans are to be lifted out of poverty. The quality and accessibility of education should be improved by building more schools, employing more teachers, investing more in teacher training and implementing a standardised national curriculum.

► **Protect women's rights**

Donors should ensure that promoting gender equality is an integral aspect of aid, and the government needs to ensure that new laws protecting women are properly enforced. It is vital to prioritise girls' education and implement more initiatives like Islamic Relief's home-based education project.

► **Tackle drug addiction**

Islamic Relief believes it is time for a major new national programme to tackle drug abuse, supported by international aid donors. The programme should incorporate education, a tenfold increase in the treatment budget, a treatment facility in every province, livelihood projects for recovering addicts and increased investment in crop substitution.

► **Support refugees and IDPs**

With government provision struggling to cope, return and repatriation programmes need to be realistic and carefully planned. More resources should be committed to protecting and integrating IDPs in the communities where they now live, as well as supporting Pakistan, Iran and other host nations to enable refugees to live in greater dignity and comfort in neighbouring countries.

► **Resolve conflicts**

With forecasts that conflict in Afghanistan is likely to increase in the coming months and years, there is a need to move beyond dealing with conflict purely in the narrow sense of how it affects aid delivery and creates humanitarian needs. Islamic Relief wants to see a greater focus on how poverty alleviation can be integrated with efforts to address the causes of conflict and build lasting peace.

Introduction

'While much of Afghanistan's future economic stability depends on an improvement, or at minimum a halt, to the continued deterioration of security, it also depends on continued financial support from the international community'

House of Commons International Development Committee, United Kingdom²

Afghanistan is at a crossroads, facing a period of uncertainty as most foreign troops prepare to withdraw from the country next year.

This report argues that it is critical at this time of transition³ not to abandon the people of Afghanistan to their fate but to prepare for future challenges and reinforce international support for efforts to lift Afghans out of the vicious cycle of poverty and conflict. Islamic Relief is concerned that the country is in danger of being left in limbo as aid levels drop sharply, putting recent gains and future progress at risk.

Poverty is killing more people in Afghanistan than direct fatalities from the ongoing conflict. The experience of the past decade has shown that real progress can be achieved with international aid, but that progress has been modest and huge challenges remain.

The **quality** and **focus** of international support are what makes all the difference, and this report puts forward a range of ways in which these can be improved. It is also important to invest in conflict resolution, without which any development gains will remain dangerously fragile.

There are worrying signs that the international commitment to aid for Afghanistan generally, and for poverty alleviation in particular, is already on the wane. Over the past decade aid to Afghanistan has been relatively high, but this is changing in the face of the military withdrawal, a tough global funding climate and donor fatigue.⁴

Elhadi Abdalla, Islamic Relief's Country Director in Afghanistan, is concerned that aid seems to be ebbing away from Afghanistan at a crucial moment of transition and uncertainty. "For too long the Afghan people have endured

terrible suffering and deprivation in the proxy wars of others," he says. "Now is the time for the international community to stand by Afghanistan and play its rightful part in building a brighter future."

Sharp drop in aid funding

Over the last three years there was a sharp drop in aid funding, falling to \$508 million in 2013 from nearly twice that – \$894 million – in 2011, with the UN requesting just \$406 million this year. Two critical funding areas – health and education – received just 26% and 29%, respectively, of the UN's funding requirement for 2012.⁵

Although there have been some improvements since the fall of the Taliban, Afghanistan is still one of the poorest countries in the world. Its human development indicators are very low as a result of decades of conflict, high food and fuel prices and a succession of natural disasters, including drought, flash floods and earthquakes.

Average income per person is just \$570, and more than a third of the population lives below the poverty line. Over half are at serious risk of falling into poverty, and three-quarters cannot read or write.⁶

Nearly two-thirds of the population are under 30 – a new generation full of potential for a new Afghanistan. As well as yearning for economic progress, the country's educated youth want efforts to be made to deal with cronyism and ethnic divisions and improve the justice system.⁷

Islamic Relief believes it is imperative to ensure that the limited development gains made over the past decade are built on by the international community, which needs to step up its commitment to prioritising development goals and eradicating poverty. Although moving forward will certainly present challenges, greater progress can be made with better policies, which means learning the lessons of the past decade.

The withdrawal of international troops is expected to have a profound impact not just on stability and security but also



Islamic Relief in Afghanistan

Islamic Relief has been working in Afghanistan since 1992, and currently operates in 13 of the country's 34 provinces.

In 2013 we delivered a £1.4m programme that encompassed projects in education and vocational training, health, agriculture, orphan sponsorship, water and sanitation, emergency response and community micro-finance. We employ 125 staff; all but two are Afghans and over a third are women, including four in senior positions.

Education accounted for more than half of Islamic Relief Afghanistan's 2013 budget (55.4%). Our own education projects include home-based education for women and schools for orphans. We are also one of the implementing organisations for a major UN food-for-education project that provides nutritious snacks and hot meals to over a million schoolchildren – as well as an additional monthly family ration of cooking oil for girl pupils – to encourage parents to send both boys and girls to school.

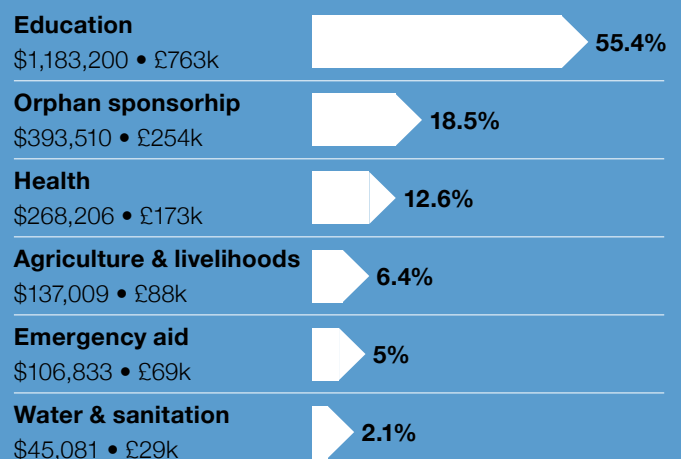
Where the money comes from

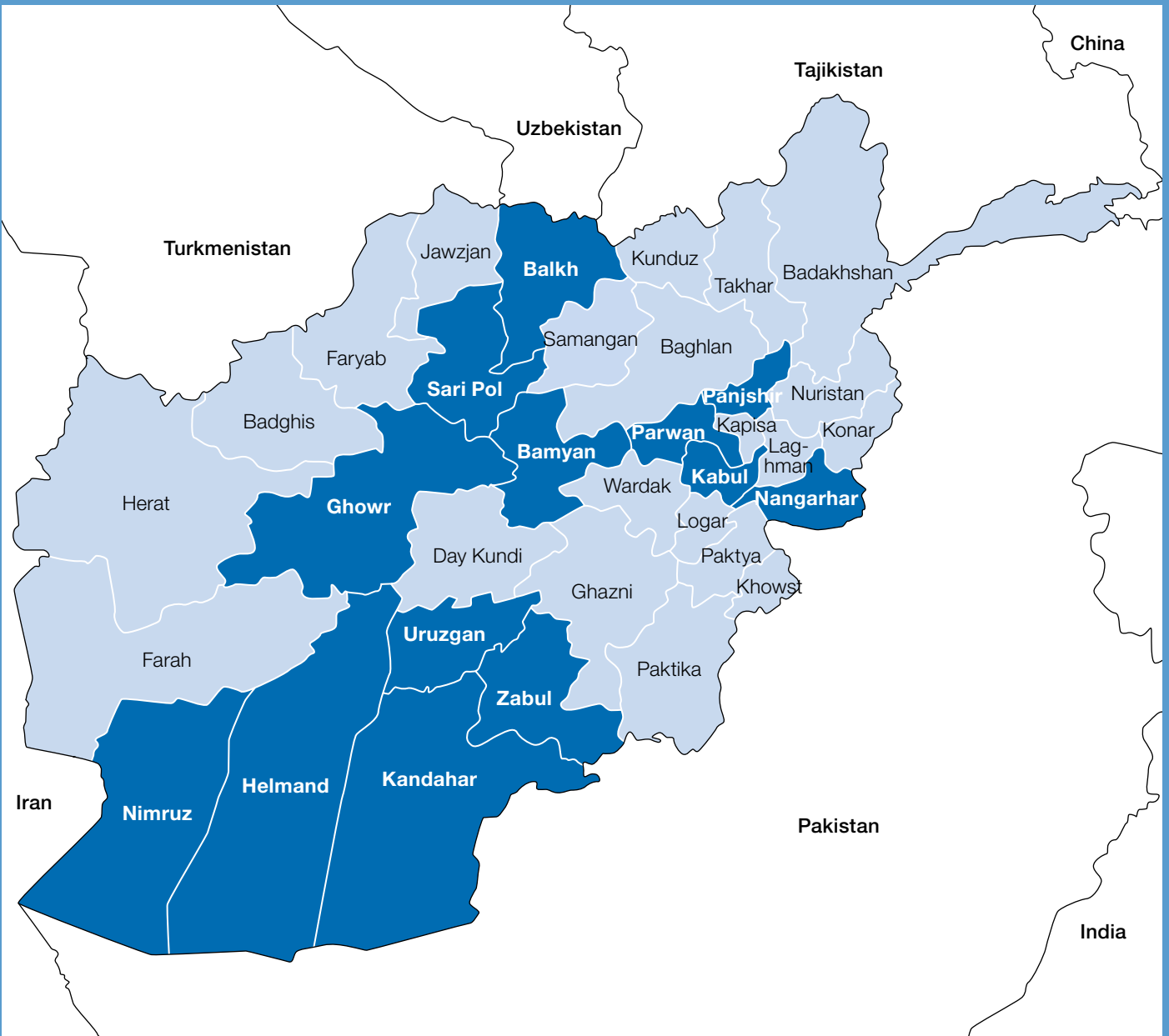
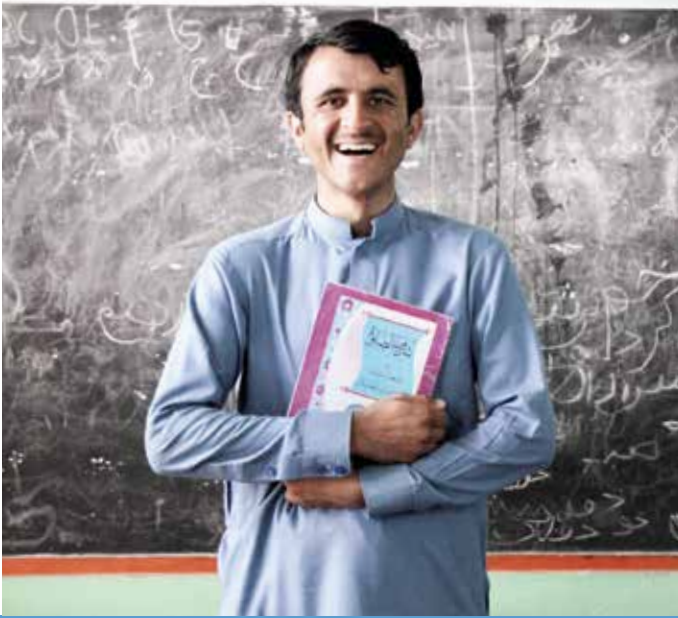
A little over half of Islamic Relief Afghanistan's budget in 2013 (53%) was funded by public donations from around the world.¹¹ The rest (47%) came from three UN agencies: the World Food Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the Office for Drug Control.

In the health sector (12.6% of the budget) in 2013 we provided basic community health care, including support for pregnant women and infant nutrition, coupled with health education and HIV/AIDS prevention. We run a pioneering village-based drug treatment and rehabilitation programme in the northern province of Balkh, and provide some additional treatment and care for drug users elsewhere.

Islamic Relief built 500 shallow wells in 2013 to improve access to clean water, while in agriculture it has provided seeds, tools and training to thousands of farmers. Our emergency aid work has included food distribution in Bamyan province and the provision of winter food and fuel to displaced people hit hard by the harsh winter in Kabul.

Where the money goes (2013)





Islamic Relief has a presence in 13 provinces of Afghanistan



The price of poverty

Twelve-year-old Marzia (above) is one of the human faces behind some of the shocking statistics that define Afghanistan's plight: over half a million people displaced by conflict, 8.7 million without enough food, a million orphans, average life expectancy of just 50.

For five years of her life, home for Marzia and her mother Zahra was a small cave in the cliffs above the ancient city of Bamyan. Zahra's parents and husband all died a premature death there, all fighting a losing battle against hunger and cold. "Our story is very difficult," she says, gazing out at the bleak beauty of the snow-capped Hindu Kush mountains. "We have no one to earn a living for us."

In a society where it is difficult for women to find employment, Zahra has no chance of earning an income for herself. She has no land or property, no access to electricity or clean water. She is too weak for manual labour, and her daughter is too young to work. "I beg in the village for food," Zahra says. "We have no other way of eating."

So many Afghans find themselves living in desperate conditions like these – marginalised and dispossessed, friendless and forgotten. For Marzia, at least, there is some hope of a better future. In 2013 the UN's Habitat for Humanity agency provided a small house for her and Zahra – one of a dozen cave-dwelling families in Bamyan who now have a proper roof over their heads. Islamic Relief has enrolled her into its orphan sponsorship programme, through which vulnerable children receive support with the basics of life – food, water, fuel and education.

on the country's economic and development fabric. The World Bank anticipates that international aid, on which Afghanistan has heavily relied since 2001, is likely to fall.⁹ It is also anticipated that the government budget is likely to face a financing gap of 25% of GDP by 2021/22.¹⁰

In addition, the World Bank predicts that economic growth will halve, from an average of 10% per year over the past decade to 4-6% up to 2018. Given population growth of 2.8%, it will be very difficult to increase incomes and reduce poverty and underemployment without strong international support.¹¹

Formidable challenges

Afghanistan's security challenges remain formidable. The UN's Common Humanitarian Action Plan for 2013 notes that it is unlikely that the withdrawal of international military forces will result in a transition from conflict to stability. It warns that "the worsening conflict trends over the last five years indicate that civilians will continue to suffer because of armed violence and that the humanitarian situation will deteriorate".¹²

The number of civilian deaths in Afghanistan rose every year between 2007 and 2011, falling slightly in 2012 only to rise again in 2013. In those seven years, over 17,000 people were killed.¹³

Over the past three years, internal displacement due to conflict and insecurity has increased significantly. At the end of June 2013 there were an estimated 574,327 internally displaced people (IDPs), and in February this year, UNHCR estimated that this had risen to around 630,000.¹⁴

The number of civilian casualties and displaced people is increasing, and the conflict is spreading to most provinces of the country ... The security environment for civilians and humanitarians is likely to remain fragile, fragmented and unpredictable⁷

Afghanistan: Common Humanitarian Action Plan 2013, UN¹⁶

Securing access to IDPs and providing them with emergency aid is a key objective for UNHCR, the United Nations refugee

Progress and problems

agency. As well as meeting immediate needs, UNHCR is committed to trying to reduce displacement and support 'durable solutions'¹⁵ but it is a tall order.

Resilience and resourcefulness

Despite all these challenges, there is certainly hope – as some of the gains from the past decade testify. Afghans do not simply depend on outside support, having demonstrated enormous resilience, resourcefulness and self-reliance in surviving three decades of conflict.

Although the security situation will remain difficult, Islamic Relief believes this should not prevent an intensification of development and humanitarian activities if the international political will is there to stand by the Afghan people. Afghanistan needs and deserves more humanitarian support after 2014, not less. And without focused attention on reducing poverty, the country's volatile conflict dynamics are liable to worsen.

'Development progress since 2001 has been mixed. Some major achievements have been recorded, such as rapid economic growth (with large fluctuations), relatively low inflation (after hyperinflation in the 1990s), better public financial management, and gains in basic health and education. Key social indicators, including life expectancy and maternal mortality, have improved markedly (admittedly from an extremely low base), and women are participating more in the economy. Yet in other respects, particularly governance and institution building, the country has fared less well, and many indicators have worsened in recent years'

*World Bank*¹⁷

Afghanistan has made significant development progress in the past decade, but numerous deep-seated challenges remain.

Some of the biggest gains have been made in education and health. A recent World Bank analysis notes that enrolment in primary and secondary schools increased from 1.1 million in 2001 to 7.7 million in 2013. Net school enrolment rose from 43% to an estimated 63% for boys and from 3% to 46% for girls in the same period.¹⁸

Enrolment in tertiary institutions has also increased significantly, from 22,500 in 2002 to 68,000 in 2011. The number of schools in Afghanistan has risen from 3,400 in 2001 to over 13,000 in 2011.¹⁹

In education, various programmes have facilitated the increase in numbers of school buildings, students and teachers across the country. Large-scale textbook production and distribution programmes have been implemented to support the growing student population.²⁰

Public health coverage has also improved:

- ▶ From 2002 to 2007, the number of functioning primary health care facilities increased from 496 to 1,169, and the proportion of facilities with female staff rose from 25% to 83%.
- ▶ In 2001 only 8% of the population was estimated to have access to basic health care, but now 57% live within one hour's walk of a basic health care facility.



A woman's progress

Uzra, 30 (above), is living testimony to how far some women have progressed in today's Afghanistan – and how important it is not to let government and international support for women's education ebb away.

A mother of five children, Uzra was unable to read or write three years ago. She could not make the most basic of calculations, or make sense of sign boards in the mountainous central province of Bamyan where she lives. Then she enrolled in Islamic Relief's ground-breaking home-based literacy programme.

Uzra was among the programme's first intake of 450 women. For nine months they were schooled in basic literacy and numeracy in one of their own homes – the ideal place for women to learn when travel outside the home is limited by security concerns and cultural norms.

Like so many who participated, Uzra spoke enthusiastically about being able to read independently and with her children for the first time. But her progress did not end there. She has established a thriving business that employs 48 village women and produces a range of hand-embroidered products including bags, clothes, toys and prayer mats. She now chairs the health committee in her village and is determined that all of her children will go to school.

Islamic Relief's home-based education programme has been so successful that the Director of Education in Bamyan has asked us to extend it to some of the remotest parts of the province. But it remains on a small scale, and much more work of this kind needs to be done.

- ▶ Infant mortality fell from 11.5% of live births in 2002 to 7.1% in 2012, and childhood immunisation rates climbed from 12% of children aged 12–23 months in 2005 to 37% in 2008.²¹
- ▶ In 2002 only 9% of the population had access to healthcare services. Nine years later, government figures revealed that as much as 85% of the population had access in some districts where NGOs are delivering primary care services.²²

Moving the goalposts

The UN has already revised the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for Afghanistan.²³ The realities on the ground suggest that the revised targets are overly optimistic. Here is a summary of what the UN and Islamic Relief make of the new targets:

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Target 1: The proportion of people whose income is less than US \$1 a day decreases by 3% per annum until the year 2024.²⁴

Target 2: The proportion of people who suffer from hunger decreases by 5% per annum until the year 2020.²⁵

- ▶ *UN verdict: Difficult to achieve*
- ▶ *Islamic Relief: Difficult to achieve*

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

Target 3: Ensure that, by 2020, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.²⁶

- ▶ *UN verdict: Achievable*
- ▶ *Islamic Relief: Achievable only with a major increase in investment.*

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Target 4: Eliminate gender disparity in all levels of education no later than 2020.²⁷

Target 5: Reduce gender disparity in economic areas by 2020.²⁸

Target 6: Increase female participation in elected and appointed bodies at all levels of governance to 30% by 2020.²⁹

Target 7: Reduce gender disparity in access to justice by 50% by 2015 and completely (100%) by 2020.³⁰

- ▶ *UN verdict: Difficult to achieve*
- ▶ *Islamic Relief: Achievable in the long term, but dependent on a cultural shift that could take generations.*

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Target 8: Reduce by 50%, between 2003 and 2015, the under-5 mortality rate, and further reduce it to 1/3 of the 2003 level by 2020.

- ▶ *UN verdict: On track*
- ▶ *Islamic Relief: In spite of progress, this target is unlikely to be reached without significant additional resources.*

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

Target 9: Reduce by 50% between 2002 and 2015 the maternal mortality ratio, and further reduce the MMR to 25% of the 2002 level by 2020.³¹

- ▶ *UN verdict: Achievable*
- ▶ *Islamic Relief: Unlikely to reach target without significant additional investment in services.*

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

Target 10: Have halted by 2020 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Target 11: Have halted by 2020 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

- ▶ *UN verdict: On track*
- ▶ *Islamic Relief: This may be possible for HIV/AIDS but is more difficult for malaria.*

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

Target 12: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources.

Target 13: Halve, by 2020, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation.³²

Target 14: By 2020 to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of all slum dwellers.³³

▶ *UN verdict: Achievable*

- ▶ *Islamic Relief: With the Chinese playing a major role in the extractive industries, it is unlikely that environmental considerations will be prioritised. Providing access to safe drinking water will be a challenge. There is no viable funding or plan for dealing with urban poverty.*

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

Target 15: Deal comprehensively and influence the provision of foreign aid through appropriate measures to enable Afghanistan develop sustainably in the long term.

Target 16: Develop an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system includes a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction.

Target 17: Develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth.

Target 18: In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries.

Target 19: In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communication.

- ▶ *UN verdict: Achievable*
- ▶ *Islamic Relief: Achievable only with the continued engagement and investment of the international community.*

Goal 9: Enhance security³⁴

Target 20: Reform and professionalize the Afghan National Army by 2010.³⁵

Target 21: Reduce the misuse of weapons, and reduce the proportion of illegally held weapons by 2010.

Target 22: Reform, restructure and professionalize the Afghan National Police by 2010.

Target 23: All emplaced antipersonnel mines destroyed by 2013. All other explosive contaminants destroyed by 2015.³⁶

Target 24: All stockpiled antipersonnel mines destroyed by 2007. All other abandoned or unwanted explosive stocks destroyed by 2020.

Target 25: To reduce the contribution of opium to the total (legal and illicit) GDP to less than 5% by 2015, and to less than 1% by 2020.³⁷

- ▶ *UN verdict: On track*
- ▶ *Islamic Relief: Most of these targets seem unrealistic given how deep-rooted the country's conflicts are, unless more resources are made available.*

Vital signs

Key poverty indicators:

- ▶ **36%** of the population has income below cost of basic needs
- ▶ **4.8 million (45–50%)** of children are out of school
- ▶ **1 in 10** – the under-five child mortality rate
- ▶ **2.3 million** – the no. of people without safe drinking water
- ▶ **50 years** – life expectancy at birth
- ▶ **8.7 million (28%)** – the no. of people who are food insecure
- ▶ **1 million** – the no. of malnourished children under five
- ▶ **574,327** – the no. of people internally displaced due to war

Sources: UN, 'Afghanistan: Common Humanitarian Action Plan 2013', 2012; Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief, 'Health and Education in Afghanistan: 10 years after – Quantity not quality', November 2011; Richard Hogg et al, 'Afghanistan in Transition: Looking beyond 2014', World Bank, 2013; Report of the UN Secretary-General, 'The Situation in Afghanistan and its Implications for International Peace and Security', 13 September 2012. UNHCR Statistical Snapshot, June 2013; UNICEF Afghanistan Statistics, 18 December 2013; WFP Afghanistan Food Security Overview, February 2014.

Vaccination programmes and medical training

Vaccination programmes targeting polio and tuberculosis have achieved notable successes in both coverage and awareness raising. The number of medical schools and training institutes has increased: there are now six medical schools in Afghanistan with approximately 8,000 students, and nine institutes of health sciences that prepare nurses, midwives and other health professionals, with 3,500 students.³⁸ Health and education facilities are now present in many areas of the country that previously had little or no health or education infrastructure.

Behind this progress lies a series of strategic plans and international agreements. Afghanistan's Ministry of Public

Health, for example, was able to rapidly expand the provision of primary healthcare under the Basic Package of Health Services programme, using a contracting-out mechanism. This has incorporated NGOs, which have been the main health service providers for decades and have had access to insecure areas that the government could not reach. Continued funding is needed if this success is to be built upon.

Afghanistan's needs remain immense, however, including those in the areas of education and health where most progress has been made.

Gaps in education

Despite the increases in school enrolment cited by the World Bank, UN figures show that 45-50% of primary school-age children remain out of school. This amounts to over 4 million children, of whom 2.4 million are girls, while hundreds of thousands living in camps for internally displaced people also have no access to schools.³⁹ In addition, although 7.7 million students are now enrolled in schools, around 15% – or nearly one million – are said to be 'permanently absent'.⁴⁰

The Afghan government has developed excellent programmes for adult literacy and numeracy, home-based education with an accelerated curriculum, and community-based education. The international community needs to provide increased support for initiatives like these, as access to education remains low in rural areas, particularly for girls.

There is wide variation between provinces. In some, enrolment rates are only around 30%. The variation in girls' primary enrolment is especially wide, ranging from less than 10% in Helmand and Uruzgan provinces to almost 90% in Nimroz.⁴¹

'Only one out of four Afghans aged 16 or above is able to read and write or has completed some formal level of schooling'
*World Bank*⁴²

There are also major problems with the quality of education. This is due to the poor qualifications of some teachers, the

lack of standardised evaluation criteria, and an inadequate delivery system for school supplies.

Statistics collected in 2009/10 by a national teacher registration system indicated that only 27% of registered teachers were educated to the minimum grade required for teaching.⁴³ In addition, school facilities are often poor. Almost 45% of school buildings are without usable structures, boundary walls, and safe drinking water or sanitation facilities.⁴⁴

Teacher shortages

There are also still too few teachers, despite major efforts by the Ministry of Education and donors to increase the number to accommodate the growth in schools. Between 2001 and 2010 there was an eight-fold increase in the number of teachers. Yet according to the Ministry of Education, based on current demographic trends, by 2020 Afghanistan will require an additional 99,000 primary-school teachers and an additional 112,000 secondary-level teachers at a cost of around \$495 million.⁴⁵

Female teachers account for only 31% of the current total in primary and secondary education.⁴⁶ Initiatives such as Islamic Relief's training of teachers from remote villages in partnership with the literacy department of the Ministry of Education have the potential to help solve such problems.

Conflict and insecurity continue to adversely affect children's attendance at school. Incidents have included armed assaults and suicide attacks, intimidation and threats, search operations and forced closures. In 2011 500 schools in ten provinces (15%) remained closed due to insecurity. The UN notes that "the anticipated continued deterioration of the security situation and the impact of conflict will continue to adversely affect education services".⁴⁷

Endemic health problems

Health statistics are stark, even when the casualties of conflict are removed from the reckoning. Although there have

been improvements in infant mortality, the rate of under-five child mortality is 99 deaths per thousand live births, meaning that 10% of children do not live to begin primary school.⁴⁸ Around one million children under five are acutely malnourished.⁴⁹

Maternal mortality is also serious – one Afghan woman dies every two hours due to pregnancy-related causes.⁵⁰ In addition, 2.3 million people have no access to safe drinking water, over 18 million people lack access to improved sanitation facilities and nearly 12.5 million people are in need of improved hygiene practices.⁵¹ Despite improvements in vaccination coverage, Afghanistan is one of only four countries in the world with endemic polio.⁵²

As with education, millions of people do not have good-quality health services. In southern provinces 50-60% of the population have difficult or no access to basic health care due to conflict and insecurity, distance and transport costs.

The UN notes that there was a 40% increase in the number of 'non-functional' health facilities in 2012, compared with 2011, as 540 planned health facilities were forced to suspend their activities (or unable to begin activities) because of insecurity or lack of funding. The lack of adequate health services has given rise to outbreaks of disease; in the first ten months of 2012, 283 disease outbreaks were investigated and responded to in Afghanistan.⁵³

The lack of skilled health workers remains a major issue for those NGOs working with the government to deliver services to the population. In many areas, there are almost no women workers, and many of the workers who are present have few medical skills. The problem is most acute in rural and remote areas where literacy rates are lower; the majority of skilled medical professionals are in urban areas.⁵⁴

Drug addiction affects over a million Afghans and is another major health issue that needs to be tackled, covered by its own separate section of this report.

The challenges ahead

Hunger and food security

Most of Afghanistan's provinces suffer from chronic food insecurity. Contributory factors include cyclical and persistent drought, minimal agricultural infrastructure, poor market access and a lack of access to extension (advisory) services. Conflict exacerbates these challenges by disrupting agriculture cycles through displacement or damage, and scarcity of resources remains a primary trigger for local-level conflicts.⁵⁵

Unsurprisingly against this background, hunger is on the increase: nearly a third (28%) of Afghans were experiencing Crisis or Emergency levels of food insecurity at the end of 2013. This amounts to 8.7 million people, with 2.4 million in the Emergency bracket.⁵⁶ The UN's Strategic Action Plan for 2014 includes food aid for 1.76 million people.⁵⁷

These challenges are clearly very large. Three decades of conflict and recurrent natural hazards have left the population in a state of deep vulnerability, and many people's coping mechanisms are exhausted. In addition, the humanitarian presence in conflict areas remains limited. Nevertheless, despite these obstacles, there are specific policies (described in the sections following) that the international community can pursue to address humanitarian needs in this extremely complex environment.

'Large gaps remain in the provision of basic public services, demanding a humanitarian response across a range of sectors. Poor governance, non-functional public facilities and chronic shortage of qualified staff leave many Afghans without primary health services, basic education, water and sanitation and adequate housing'

*United Nations*⁵⁸

Despite the challenges that Afghanistan faces, much can be done and much has been and can be achieved. Islamic Relief believes that the following seven 'cross-cutting' policies should be among the key priorities that guide the efforts of the international community in supporting Afghanistan. They are based on lessons learned from what has gone right and wrong with support for Afghanistan over the past decade, and on Islamic Relief's own experience in delivering key services to some of the country's poorest and most vulnerable people.

1. Sustained funding

The international community must ensure that funding levels are adequate for maintaining progress in addressing the immense humanitarian need in Afghanistan. At the July 2012 Tokyo conference, donors pledged only \$16 billion in civilian aid to Afghanistan up to 2015 – a 35% decrease from previous funding levels.⁵⁹

When these donor pledges are combined with earlier security-related commitments, aid looks set to add up to around \$8 billion a year – an amount divided fairly equally between development and security aid.⁶⁰ But in 2013, the UN's Strategic Response Plan only received 82% of its required funding - \$389 million of \$474 million - and as of March this year, only 17.3% of the requested \$406 million for 2014 has been received.⁶¹

This shortfall in aid is perhaps understandable given the international military withdrawal and long-standing problems with the quality of aid (see next point). But as aid agencies working in Afghanistan have long argued, rapid and substantial drops in funding could cripple health, education and other services across the country, fuel rising inequalities and



increase the negative perceptions of the local population regarding the legitimacy of local and national government.⁶²

Human Rights Watch has noted that Afghans are keenly aware that military intervention is only one of three types of foreign involvement in Afghanistan—the other two being political engagement and aid programmes. Opinion varies on whether or not military forces should leave but most Afghans do not want an end to the other two forms of international involvement. Many Afghan citizens, including women, appreciate the gains in education, health and freedom of expression that have been made in recent years.⁶³

2. Improving the quality of aid

It is increasingly recognised that the quality of aid is even more important in Afghanistan than the quantity. Large amounts of aid have been wasted on expensive foreign consultancies, and aid focused on stabilisation in conflict-affected provinces has often become a source of patronage and political power, sometimes exacerbating conflicts and grievances among different groups.⁶⁴

A recent World Bank analysis even argued that “a decline in aid and international military spending — thus leaving fewer resources to contest—may benefit the longer-term political economy”. Islamic Relief wants to see humanitarian and development aid levels maintained at this uncertain time – but with measures to improve the effectiveness of aid spending and ensure that real progress is made in reducing poverty.⁶⁵

Aid agencies working in Afghanistan have long noted a disproportionate focus on increasing the quantity of services and their coverage, with too little attention given to quality and sustainability.⁶⁶ Donors need to improve the quality of aid by ensuring that programmes are better attuned to local realities and that services are developed in a more inclusive and transparent way with Afghan civil society groups.

The international community also needs to strengthen monitoring and disbursement mechanisms to ensure that

The human cost of conflict

In the hills of the Bamyán valley, around 130 families live in freezing caves that were first inhabited by Buddhist monks 15 centuries ago. Among them until 2013 were four-year-old Sakeena, her six-year-old sister Shukria and their grandmother Rahima (pictured above). Now the family have a small, shared house in Bamyán provided by the UN but their living conditions remain basic.

“We feel safe because we have a house and we can lock the door,” says Rahima. “But we don’t have electricity and we don’t have a wash room or a toilet. We do not have water so we have to pay.”

Sakeena and Shukria are being enrolled into Islamic Relief’s orphan sponsorship programme, which will provide Rahima with a little money each month. It’s a lifeline the family desperately needs. “I don’t have food or fuel,” Rahima says. “My priorities are to keep my grandchildren warm and fed.”

After starting to read the Qur’an with the help of a woman who lived in a nearby cave, Shukria is now looking forward to starting school this year.

“The caves didn’t have windows or doors,” says Shukria. “It was dark there. There were scorpions. This is a good place. There are no scorpions. My grandmother provides water and food for us. Now I want to go to school.”

good-quality programmes are being delivered and that aid is being properly utilised.⁶⁷

In addition, a more explicit focus is needed from donors on ensuring that aid programmes positively address conflict issues and develop the capacity of local organisations and communities to overcome conflict. Afghanistan's Common Humanitarian Action Plan addresses the impact of conflict on aid delivery and as a cause of humanitarian needs but it does not point to any role for humanitarian agencies in conflict resolution beyond providing protection to civilians.

Islamic Relief believes a key element in improving the quality of aid is recognising that sustainable development requires a context of peace and stability. Humanitarian organisations and donors should recognise the importance of peace building efforts as an integral part of humanitarian and development projects.

3. Prioritising development

Aid should overwhelmingly focus on alleviating poverty, promoting long-term development and addressing the basic needs of the most vulnerable people. Although this might appear obvious, much international aid up to now has been linked to achieving security goals, building visible infrastructure in areas of conflict, and 'winning hearts and minds' – without necessarily recognising that where poverty levels are high and people remain marginalised, violent conflict will continue to be the path chosen by some.⁶⁸

This has meant that much aid has excluded those who could and should be receiving assistance, such as people in relatively peaceful but poor provinces. A 2011 US Senate report noted, for example, that 80% of USAID spending had gone to southern and eastern areas of Afghanistan, where conflict is deepest, leaving only 20% for the rest of the country.⁶⁹ Islamic Relief would like to see a much closer balance of support between secure and insecure areas, with a stronger focus on poverty alleviation.

'The direct poverty impact of declining international spending might be limited if aid is more equally distributed across provinces and if assistance shifts toward development programs rather than short-run stabilization activities. Aid disproportionately devoted to conflict-affected provinces has only modestly affected poverty. Moreover, households in the conflict-affected provinces were less poor, on average, to begin with, so this concentration of aid inadvertently increased inequality among provinces and between groups'

*World Bank*⁷⁰

The UN's Common Humanitarian Action Plan 2013 stated: "Donors are encouraged to delink humanitarian funding from military and political objectives."⁷¹ But despite years of humanitarian groups criticising donors for blurring the distinction between humanitarian aid and security priorities, much development aid still appears to be conditioned by military objectives:

- ▶ In recent years, over half of all international aid to Afghanistan has gone to the security sector (ie to the Afghan National Security Forces).⁷²
- ▶ In 2011, 68% of aid (\$8.8 billion) was disbursed to finance security-related expenditures. Development efforts, by contrast, received \$4.1 billion.⁷³

Development aid to Afghanistan has long been dwarfed by the cost of military operations. Between 2002 and 2009 the international community spent nine times as much on military operations as it did on development aid – \$242.9 billion compared to \$26.7 billion.⁷⁴

The opportunity cost of this expenditure are vast. It will cost \$2.1 million to deploy just one US soldier in 2014 – more than 160,000 times the \$13 per Afghan requested by the UN for development aid this year.⁷⁵

A report by Tufts University found that, in recent years, the international community has directed its aid even more to the most insecure areas "despite the lack of evidence that the aid funds being spent are promoting stability or improving attitudes towards the Afghan government and international

community". The study found that aid is spent more effectively in secure regions where good development practice and stronger oversight are more feasible and less money has to be spent on security.⁷⁶ Islamic Relief believes that communities in both secure and insecure areas need and deserve to be supported.

4. Focusing on basic services

Public resources, from both government and donors, need to focus on ensuring the regular delivery of good-quality basic services and essential infrastructure.⁷⁷ This is especially true for investment in food security (including agricultural extension services), health, schools and women's education, as we detail in later sections of this report. This kind of investment will also help create new infrastructure and livelihoods for returning refugees and displaced people.

Islamic Relief wants to see a renewed focus on overcoming the main challenges that are hampering the provision of basic services. A 2011 joint NGO report, based on wide-ranging consultations with Afghans, concluded that these main challenges are a lack of awareness; insecurity; a lack of access to facilities; a lack of human resources capacity; and the poor quality of current services.⁷⁸

In other words, Afghanistan desperately needs not only better security but also more and better trained teachers and health professionals and an expanded network of schools, clinics and support for farmers close to people's homes. The report argued that donors should continue to prioritise healthcare and education for women and that the training of women professionals, health awareness raising and ensuring accessible emergency health services are all vitally important.⁷⁹

Also important is systematic investment in maternal and child health services, and increased support for culturally sensitive community and home-based education programmes. One of Islamic Relief's most successful projects in Afghanistan is a home-based literacy and numeracy education programme that delivers one-to-one education in women's homes.⁸⁰

In addition to health and education, which has received the most attention from donors, greater support for agriculture – the mainstay of the economy – is also vital.

5. Greater community and NGO consultation and involvement

Afghans need to be more involved in the programmes of which they are the intended beneficiaries. More aid should be channelled through non-government organisations that are close to local communities.

Islamic Relief's experience is that the most successful and enduring initiatives to tackle poverty involve the poorest communities designing and delivering their own projects. A good example is the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development's National Solidarity Programme (NSP), under which communities elect their own representatives to form community development councils that have a strong say in decisions that affect their lives.⁸¹

Yet there is generally an absence of bottom-up consultative mechanisms in Afghanistan. Priorities are largely defined by central government, often without engaging rural populations, and particularly women, about their concerns and needs.

This problem is compounded by a general absence of grassroots civil society institutions to hold state institutions to account. More mechanisms need to be established to enable communities to monitor and evaluate development projects, to ensure that resources are effectively used. One simple way to help achieve this is displaying project expenditures and details of the authorities responsible in the communities affected.⁸²

In some aid programmes in Afghanistan, Islamic Relief estimates that as much as 40% of funds may not have reached the people who needed them because of reliance on expensive consultants and the administrative burden of contracting and sub-contracting services.⁸³ It is imperative that international aid is spent in a more cost-effective way than this. We believe that a much greater proportion of international aid should be invested in programmes implemented

by community-based organisations and international and local NGOs with a good track record in accountable community development.⁸⁴

A survey of Afghans commissioned by the British and Irish Afghanistan Group of NGOs (BAAG) concluded that funds given directly to NGOs have a better chance of generating projects that are accountable, participatory and make good use of Afghan human and material resources.⁸⁵ Yet only around 0.5% of all development aid to Afghanistan has been channelled through Afghan NGOs.⁸⁶

Pledges by donors to increase the proportion of funds allocated to the government budget look set to exacerbate this deficiency by further reducing funding for NGOs before the government is ready to take their place. With insufficient capacity to manage services in government, this may significantly harm service delivery.

Donors need to find creative ways to deal with this issue, working with the government to channel service funding to international and Afghan NGOs in a manner similar to what already happens with the Basic Package of Health Services (BHS) and the National Solidarity Programme (NSP).

Conflict resolution is another important area that demands strong community engagement. While the international community focuses on the ongoing insurgency and the conflict between the Afghan national security forces and opposition armed groups, conflicts driven by local disputes are being left unaddressed.⁸⁷ Islamic Relief believes that local communities need more support from aid donors and NGOs to identify and overcome the root causes of conflict, making the best of indigenous dispute resolution mechanisms to do so.

6. Building resilience

Despite the potential for progress in Afghanistan, it would be naive to ignore the possibility of the country falling victim to renewed conflict – and neglectful not to help communities prepare for future natural disasters.

In the transition back to full Afghan sovereignty the UN has forecast “a continued escalation of violent conflict fuelled by the departure of foreign security forces in country and subsequent increased humanitarian need, coupled with nominal humanitarian access or assistance”.⁸⁸

Islamic Relief has noted that the global incidence of natural disasters linked to climate change is growing by more than 4% a year and the cost of tackling them is doubling every 12 years – yet in 2010 the world spent 23 times as much on emergency relief for the ten developing countries hit hardest by natural disasters as it spent on disaster prevention and preparedness.⁸⁹

Even if an anticipated escalation of conflict in the short term is overcome, international assistance in the medium to long term needs to include contingency funding to ensure that communities are well prepared for future conflict and displacement. Investment is needed in disaster risk reduction, to make communities more resilient in the face of drought in particular.

7. Strengthening governance

Increased support for NGOs must be accompanied by policies to help tackle government corruption and strengthen the capacity within the Afghan government to provide key services. While Islamic Relief believes that cutting support for NGOs could be very destructive in the short and medium term, service delivery will be unsustainable in the longer term without strengthening the capacity of government to play a leading role.

A 2011 US Senate report concluded that a ‘simple rule’ should be followed: “Donors should not implement projects if Afghans cannot sustain them. Development in Afghanistan will only succeed if Afghans are legitimate partners and there is a path toward sustainability.”⁹⁰

In Afghanistan, government capacity building is a major challenge. Nearly all international aid, and most delivery capacity, remains outside the government budget, although donors have pledged to increase the government share.⁹¹

Government health capacity, for example, is very limited. NGOs employ 90% of rural health workers and half of provincial hospital staff. This is a consequence of the design of the Basic Health Services Package programme, built during the 1990s, which was intended to be carried out by NGOs.⁹²

NGOs play much less of a role in education but the Ministry of Education also continues to face serious capacity challenges. As the BAAG group of NGOs told a UK parliamentary enquiry, the Ministry is thought to be spending barely half its annual budget and lacks trained professional staff at all levels.⁹³

Off-budget funding by donors to education is decreasing but the Ministry of Education lacks the capacity to handle greater on-budget support. Afghanistan currently has a highly centralised system, and the links between and among national, provincial and district levels are weak. Procurement procedures are complicated and bureaucratic, resulting in delays in implementation, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are poor.⁹⁴

To improve the delivery capacity of the Afghan government, donors may need to develop conditions around capacity building when allocating funds, and conduct assessments of key ministries before awarding those funds. Donors could award funds to ministries in tranches and set benchmarks that the Afghan government must reach before further funds are released.

While government delivery capacity is being developed in this way, Islamic Relief would like to see donors working in partnership with the government – as already described above – to implement more systems like the NSP and BHS, in which funds are part of the main government budget but delivery is assigned to NGOs to ensure that services are delivered in a timely and cost-effective manner.⁹⁵

Alongside this, analyses of the cost effectiveness of contracting in services, and the continued building of capacity to promote domestic revenue collection, are important in moving away from aid dependency.⁹⁶

It is also important to strengthen governance in a number of ways, including a devolution of power from Kabul to the provinces. The UK's House of Commons International Development Committee has argued that there need to be more middle-ranking provincial and local government officials who have the support of their local communities, without the interference of central government in deciding appointments, and that it is particularly important to have more women in such positions.⁹⁷

'Enhancing the core civil service, with an emphasis on strengthening budget execution and service delivery, will be crucial for government functioning and providing essential services. The heavy reliance on a 'second civil service' of externally funded Afghan staff needs to be transformed into a reliance on core government capacity...An important priority moving forward will be enhancing the capacity of provincial offices to participate in budget formulation and key spending ministries to execute their budgets subnationally'

*World Bank*⁹⁸

Corruption remains a fundamental problem affecting most aspects of government spending and services in Afghanistan, including aid and development projects. International support for developing government capacity in service delivery needs to go hand in hand with continuing investment in integrity and anti-corruption programmes.

The UN's 2012 report on corruption in Afghanistan notes that perceptions of corruption by Afghans "have not improved significantly" in the past three years. It states that "while corruption is seen by Afghans as one of the most urgent challenges facing their country, it seems to be increasingly embedded in social practices, with patronage and bribery being an acceptable part of day-to-day life". In 2012 50% of citizens paid a bribe while requesting a public service. Some progress has been made, however – the figure was 59% in 2009.⁹⁹

Improving agriculture and livelihoods

'Agricultural development remains Afghanistan's biggest hope to achieve sustainable, inclusive growth'
*World Bank*¹⁰⁰

Supporting agriculture and livelihoods is one of the most important areas for international support to Afghans, perhaps even the most vital of all. But the country's farmers have been relatively neglected.

The Afghan economy is largely dependent on agriculture. Workers employed in the agriculture sector represent 60% of all employment. The sector is dominated by smallholder family farms, often producing for subsistence and seldom providing enough resources to sustain their families throughout the year.¹⁰¹

The potential is certainly there: the World Bank notes that Afghanistan has a long tradition in horticulture and livestock production, and used to be an important exporter of fresh and dried fruits, vegetables and nuts. But Afghan farmers currently get little 'added value' from their agricultural exports because most are primary commodities and very little processing is done within the country.

Meanwhile food insecurity is deepening, and rural communities across Afghanistan are getting poorer.¹⁰² Decades of conflict and the huge human and financial cost it has caused have brought destruction and disinvestment to Afghanistan's agricultural sector. Agricultural productivity in Afghanistan is currently below 50% of its pre-war level three decades ago¹⁰³, and competition over resources remains a crucial source of instability.¹⁰⁴

Rising food and fuel prices

Problems include rising food and fuel prices; inequitable land holdings and declining family farm sizes (which can be a source of conflict¹⁰⁵); poor access to services and farm inputs; and climate change. Recent growth in agriculture has been volatile, partly due to Afghanistan's vulnerability to disasters, especially drought.

Although 2012 saw a bumper wheat crop, Afghanistan is a semi-arid country where bountiful harvests tend to be the exception rather than the norm. Droughts occurred in eight of the 11 years up to 2011, and this has devastated rural families: agriculture and livestock are largely dependent on rain-fed crops and pasture.¹⁰⁶ From January to September 2012 alone, the UN reported that 25,076 people had become displaced due to natural disasters (including floods, earthquakes, a harsh winter and landslides).¹⁰⁷

It's not only farmers and their families who are feeling the effects of food insecurity. Afghans internally displaced by conflict are also particularly vulnerable because of the loss of traditional livelihoods, weak support networks and compromised access to land and labour markets.¹⁰⁸

'Afghanistan is highly prone to earthquakes, landslides, avalanches, drought, floods, flash floods and harsh winters...In a largely agrarian economy, poor crop diversity and high dependence on rain-fed crops (as opposed to irrigation-fed crops) amplify the food insecurity caused by drought'

*Afghanistan: Common Humanitarian Action Plan 2013, UN*¹⁰⁹

Four priorities for agriculture

To recapture the country's lost competitiveness, several key policies and investments need to be promoted.

First, the government needs to invest heavily in the agriculture sector. The national budget for 2013/14 allocates 8% of expenditure to agriculture, amounting to around \$300 million.¹¹⁰ This is a reasonable allocation by developing country standards but spread across at least 20 million Afghans reliant on agriculture for their livelihoods, it amounts to only \$15 per person. Much will depend on reducing the security budget, where spending is presently over five times larger than what is spent on agriculture.

Second, Afghanistan needs to make strategic investments in areas such as irrigation systems, storage facilities, transport, post-harvest processing technologies, market development



Building self-reliance

In a country where 8.7 million people cannot rely on having enough food or income to feed themselves, Abdul Sattar (above) is looking forward to a less uncertain future.

The family of this genial father of eight is just one of 6,200 who are benefiting from seeds, tools and agricultural training provided by Islamic Relief in the northern provinces of Balkh and Sar-e-Pol.

Abdul Sattar received specialist training plus a new watering can, spade, shovel, trowel and rake through a project funded by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation. He is now growing five types of vegetables – onions, tomatoes, aubergines, carrots and green beans – alongside a new high-yielding variety of wheat.

A harvest of fresh vegetables should help combat malnutrition by enabling Abdul's family to enjoy a nutritious, balanced diet. The wheat he is growing promises 15% higher yields, providing a bigger income from his land in the future.

and – especially – in extension and advisory services. Extension services are currently sparse, reaching few farmers. The smallholder farmers who dominate the sector, including women farmers, need to be closely consulted to ensure that programmes meet their needs.

Third, particular support needs to be provided to smallholder farmers to get the best out of often degraded land and grapple with the challenges of climate change. Strategies that promote disaster risk reduction and community resilience, especially agro-ecological farming practices that avoid the use of expensive chemical inputs that can degrade the environment, should be supported, especially through the extension service.

This should be coupled with new income-generating and livelihood projects, help with marketing, skills training opportunities and opportunities for adding value to products in order to increase livelihood options.¹¹¹ At the same time, the UN and other aid donors should be encouraged to continue their support for disaster early warning systems and prepositioning of stocks of food, agriculture inputs, and veterinary equipment, to improve emergency response.¹¹²

Fourth, it is critical that policies support the ability of people to support their livelihoods when disaster strikes. Contingency funding is needed to support the rapid recovery of agricultural production through food-for-work schemes and the provision of new animals and animal feed, livestock vaccination and deworming, seeds and tools. As noted by the UN, farming communities should also be assisted with improved yield plant varieties that are suited to Afghanistan's different regions, elevations and soil types.¹¹³

In all these policies, strategies need to ensure that those most in need benefit and that political elites and patronage systems at regional and village levels do not restrict access to resources or capture most of the benefits. Enhancing the strength of collective organisations, such as farmers' groups, is one way to improve the livelihoods of the rural poor and strengthen their means to challenge local inequality.¹¹⁴

Advancing education and health

'The human capital stock in Afghanistan is extremely low in spite of significant improvements in school enrolment rates and education achievement over the past decade. Low human capital reduces the rate of return on physical capital, diminishes the profitability of investments, the adoption of new technologies as well as the structural transformation of the economy. It is therefore paramount that investments in education at all levels remain a priority in Afghanistan's development strategy'

*World Bank*¹¹⁵

It is clear that Afghanistan needs to continue to make big investments in health and education, with a focus on delivering high-quality healthcare and good schooling to more people.

A number of problems are common to both sectors, especially the quality of health and education personnel and physical infrastructure. There remain too few skilled professionals in both the health and education sectors. There needs to be special provision to train women teachers and health professionals, especially in rural areas where many people require that only females attend to the girls and women in their families.¹¹⁶

Investing in health

The most urgent need on the health front is to continue to address under-nutrition and high death rates from preventable diseases through programmes targeted at those most in need, especially children.

Yet while the UN's Common Humanitarian Action Plan for 2013 had various policies in place to do this, it noted that some under-nutrition interventions "are yet to reach some of the neediest provinces in the south and south east" and that "although planning exists to begin working in some districts there, a lack of appropriate funding, assessments and beneficiary access have hampered progress". There is also a lack of capacity for conducting nutrition assessments and developing effective programming, "affecting capacity to monitor, analyse and respond in a timely and effective manner to the nutritional situation in the country".¹¹⁷

Thus both adequate funding and enhanced capacity building are needed if nutrition programmes are to succeed. The UN notes that recent gaps in funding have meant fewer purchases of emergency medical supplies and restricted the development of emergency health services for affected communities, especially in conflict areas. It also notes that "in spite of growing need, the support for trauma treatment of victims of conflict was insufficient and on an ad-hoc basis".¹¹⁸

Other basic investments needed to protect health include the rehabilitation, repair and maintenance of water facilities, alongside water quality monitoring and testing.¹¹⁹

Improving access in remote areas

Improving access to health care in remote areas is vital. The last Afghan Mortality Survey of 2010 confirmed that the biggest barriers to accessing health care included distance to the facilities, harsh weather, lack of/unaffordable transportation, insecurity, the need for out-of-pocket expenditures, and the lack of female medical staff. All of these challenges disproportionately affect women and girls.¹²⁰

In many areas there is a need for more health care facilities closer to local communities, and for the provision of training for local people to provide care. Increasing the presence of female staff within emergency and other health teams is also important.¹²¹

A range of improvements in the quality of health services needs to be made. Professionals often receive poor quality training, while performance monitoring, supervision and professional development are weak. Key ways to overcome these deficiencies include building the technical capacity of service providers, increasing the skills of healthcare workers, improving monitoring and evaluation and standardising quality assurance procedures for medicine. As NGOs have recently argued, outcomes and impact should inform future policy direction rather than inputs and outputs.¹²²

Increasingly, mental health needs attention in a country that has endured over 30 years of conflict alongside natural



Reducing infant mortality

Malalai (above) is proud to be a midwife at the Bibi Fatima Zahra Hospital in Jalalabad, delivering healthy babies like this little girl born in February 2013.

Before Islamic Relief took the hospital over in 2011 its facilities were run down and it was blighted by a mortality rate of one child or maternal death for every 11 births – a perilous place for expectant mothers and their babies.

Islamic Relief refurbished the existing facilities and provided new equipment and supplies, including an x-ray machine and ambulance. Standards of care have improved to the extent that over 1,800 babies have been born under Islamic Relief's management without a single death.

Maternal mortality is a serious problem in Afghanistan – one woman dies every two hours due to pregnancy-related causes.¹²⁷ Levels of maternal, infant and child mortality have fallen in the areas where Islamic Relief is providing basic health care. We want to see better training and performance monitoring for nurses, midwives and other health professionals, and investment in new health facilities to bring more services within closer reach of remote communities.

disasters, acute poverty and lack of access to health services. Surveys of Afghans have found very high rates of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorders.

Some studies suggest that half the population over 15 suffers from mental health difficulties; the UN's World Health Organisation says that the number is around 2 million. This is one of the factors contributing to violence in the home and within local communities.¹²³

Investing in education

Improving literacy and general education in Afghanistan, especially in rural areas, is another key priority for fostering inclusive growth.¹²⁴ Overall, more focus needs to be put on learning outcomes and standardisation, teacher retention, building teaching capacity and expanding community-based education.¹²⁵

Improvements in educational attainment are known to have pacifying effects in the context of civil conflict but this can be derailed by mismanagement and by severe inequalities in access.¹²⁶ This means that the *accessibility* and *quality* of education are key factors in enabling education programmes to have a positive impact on the conflict dynamics in a country like Afghanistan.

Islamic Relief believes that community and home-based education – two distinct but complementary approaches – should be at the heart of Afghanistan's education policy. These forms of education play a significant part in our own education programmes, helping to ensure that learning is locally accessible and culturally appropriate, and should be significantly expanded.

Afghanistan's National Interim Education Plan is sympathetic to this view. "Community and home-based education provided by NGOs and UNICEF, and increasingly by the government, is modest in scale but, nevertheless, important," it says. "They are long-term efforts – some agencies have been involved since the 1990s – and are locally anchored and owned. They can discreetly circumvent some access



and gender constraints to education. Their completion rates are high and the small classes are an advantage for educational quality.”¹²⁸

Another plus point for community and home-based education is that it can often shrug off the security constraints and disruption associated with pupils and teachers having to travel longer distances. This may do nothing to resolve underlying conflict, but it at least minimises its impact educationally. In many cases the community and home-based approach has proved to be so effective that the Ministry of Education has entered into enduring partnerships with NGOs like Islamic Relief, local community-based organisations, village elders and district leaders. Community and home-based education initiatives have been researched in detail, and delivery systems are well developed.¹²⁹

Funding is critical

Funding for education is critical. Significant efforts need to be made to enhance the quality, as well as the accessibility, of primary, secondary and higher education, and to focus on learning outcomes.¹³⁰

Evaluations suggest that the lack of qualified professional teachers is a major obstacle to providing high-quality education in Afghanistan.¹³¹ Thus the number and quality of teachers needs to be addressed. The Ministry of Education needs to be supported in enhancing skills training for teachers and in prioritising the development and accreditation of teachers who are currently teaching but do not meet the minimum educational requirements.¹³² There should be a greater focus on training female teachers and on implementing a strategy to address girls’ education (see next section).

Islamic Relief has contributed to the development of a new teacher training curriculum, and is among a number of NGOs that have warned of the dangers of curriculum inconsistencies and the lack of accepted evaluation standards.¹³³

The quality of education can and should be enhanced by developing and implementing a standardised national

Excellence in education

Little Ainullah Abdul Haleem (above) had high hopes for the future as he came to the end of his first year at school. He is one of 480 orphans being educated at the Sweet Home Orphans School in Jalalabad, which has progressed under Islamic Relief’s management from a failing school to the second most highly rated school in the city.

The school teaches the full Afghan curriculum for school years 1 to 9, providing education for children aged 6 to 16. Fifty of the pupils board at the school, while the rest travel from home each day. We are extending classes up to year 12, and increasing the number of resident orphans from remote conflict-affected areas from 50 to 100 by building a new dormitory. We have provided a fully equipped computer suite and we are in the process of adding a science laboratory to further enhance the quality of education at the school.

Islamic Relief is committed to high academic standards, and has contributed to the development of a new national teacher training curriculum. After decades of conflict Afghanistan has over a million orphans, and providing schooling for them is a targeted way of improving the prospects of some of the country’s most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Islamic Relief is also involved in implementing a major UN World Food Programme project that provides nutritious snacks and hot meals to over a million schoolchildren – as well as an additional monthly family ration of cooking oil for girl pupils – to encourage parents to send both boys and girls to school. We believe there should be a greater focus on training female teachers and on implementing a strategy to address girls’ education.

Protecting women's rights

curriculum throughout the country, including national standards for examinations. The curriculum and teaching materials need to be available in all the relevant languages. There is also a need to monitor teachers' understanding of the curriculum, the extent of its use across the country and the resultant learning outcomes for students.¹³⁴

Significant investments also need to be made in improving physical infrastructure. As noted earlier in this report, the poor quality of buildings and the lack of equipment is often a major impediment to education (and health) programmes.¹³⁵

'Women in Afghanistan have made gains since the Taliban-led government was ousted in 2001 ... However, such gains are limited, and women and girls in Afghanistan continue to face enormous disadvantages ... There are worrying signs that the advancements for women and girls made in the early years after the fall of the Taliban are receding'

House of Commons International Development Committee, UK¹³⁶

The position of women in Afghanistan has improved in the past decade. More girls are in school than ever before, and more than a quarter of Afghanistan's parliamentarians and government officials are female.

The constitution grants equal rights to women and men, and legal and policy frameworks protecting and empowering women have been established in recent years. Afghanistan is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and has developed a National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) and the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) law, which criminalises rape and forced marriage. Many more women are much freer than in 2001 to participate in public life and to work outside their homes as doctors, teachers, entrepreneurs and lawyers—a situation impossible under the Taliban.¹³⁷

These gains are somewhat limited, however. The NAPWA and EVAW laws have barely been enforced.¹³⁸ Some 87% of women face some form of domestic violence, while 70–80% of marriages are forced.¹³⁹ A new law passed in 2014 prevents the family members of an accused person testifying against them, making it almost impossible to prosecute marital rapists or parents forcing children in to marriages. A 2012 survey by ActionAid of a thousand women in Afghanistan found that they were more fearful of sexual assault than of abduction, kidnapping or being caught in an explosion combined.¹⁴⁰

Women in rural areas, particularly in the more conservative southern provinces, often face considerable restrictions when working outside the home. They also lack basic rights such as access to justice and economic independence from men. Development statistics are invariably harsher for women than



men – nearly nine out of ten women over the age of 15 cannot read or write, and more girls than boys are out of school.¹⁴¹

Worrying signs

Afghanistan's score on the UNDP Gender Inequality Index – which measures the extent of women's disadvantage in reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market – has worsened since 2005. The country is now ranked 175 out of 186 nations.¹⁴²

There are worrying signs that advancements for women and girls made in the early years after the fall of the Taliban may be receding.¹⁴³ Human Rights Watch, for example, has repeatedly expressed concerns over the Afghan government's increasingly conservative stance on the role of women, including President Karzai's public statement in support of the Ulema Council that instructed women not to travel unchaperoned or mix with men in education or work.¹⁴⁴

Alongside changes in attitudes in Afghanistan, various policies need to be promoted to help reduce the incidence of violence and discrimination against women:

- ▶ The government must ensure that the protection of women's rights is an integral part of peace and reconciliation throughout Afghanistan and is implemented in practice as well as being enshrined in legislation.
- ▶ Adequate legal and advisory capacity needs to be in place at national and community levels to ensure that cases can be followed up.
- ▶ There needs to be adequate police capacity to investigate offences.
- ▶ Donors should ensure that promoting gender equality is an integral aspect of aid.¹⁴⁵

The importance of women's education

Women's education is vital not only for women themselves but also for future economic prosperity in Afghanistan.

'It was as if I was blind'

Aged 38 and with ten children, Sarah Jafar (above) thought her chance to read and write was long gone. She married young, and never had the opportunity to go to school.

"I couldn't buy anything because I couldn't count, and I didn't know how much change I was getting," she remembers. "It was as if I was blind."

Sarah's life changed completely when she joined Islamic Relief's home-based education course in the central province of Bamyan. In nine months of studies she covered 20 topics, and now reads fluently. She no longer feels helpless when faced with sign boards or her children's vaccination sheets.

"Those who are not educated are like people who don't have eyes," she says. "Now I know my role in society and I am able to give my children direction."

Only three out of ten people in Bamyan can read and write, and just 12% of women. But thanks to Islamic Relief, working in partnership with the provincial education department, 1,840 women have now completed the same course of study as Sarah. Each course is delivered by women for women in their own homes, making learning easily accessible and in harmony with cultural norms.

Sarah now values education so much that she is sending all her children to school, even paying \$4 a month (£2.50) for her six-year-old daughter to go to a kindergarten where she is learning English. In the words of the African proverb: 'If you educate a man you educate an individual but if you educate a woman you educate a nation.'

Tackling drug addiction

A World Bank study of 100 countries found that increasing the share of women who have completed secondary education by 1% increases per capita income growth by an average of 0.3%.¹⁴⁶

Women's rights need to be promoted and championed in so many areas but none of these is more important than the education system. Less than one in ten Afghan women over 25 have received any formal education and just 12% of women over 15 can read and write.¹⁴⁷

The lack of girls' schools and female teachers, coupled with the lower educational qualifications of women teachers, means that the quality of education that girls have access to is low, especially in rural and remote areas.¹⁴⁸ Ninety per cent of female teachers work in the nine urban areas of the country. Out of the 412 urban and rural districts in Afghanistan, some 245 do not have a single qualified female teacher, while 200 have no female students enrolled in certain grades.¹⁴⁹

To address this situation, a key starting point is that there needs to be an increased emphasis on community and home-based education; an increase in the number of girl-friendly, well equipped schools; and a greater focus on training female teachers to address the shortfall and meet the cultural preference of families wanting girls to be taught by women. Teacher training should be conducted locally, especially in rural areas, since many potential women teachers are unable to go for training in the cities.¹⁵⁰

Afghanistan's government should be more strongly supported to develop a strategy to tackle the challenges faced by girls in education. This could include developing measurable indicators of success and ensuring that the Ministry of Education mainstreams the promotion of gender-sensitive policies.¹⁵¹ Part of this involves mobilisation and advocacy through influential figures in the community (such as mullahs and traditional leaders) on the importance of education for girls as well as boys.¹⁵²

'Three decades of war-related trauma, unlimited availability of cheap narcotics and limited access to treatment have created a major and growing addiction problem in Afghanistan'

Antonio Maria Costa, former Executive Director, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)¹⁵³

Afghanistan accounts for 90% of the world's opium production. It is also the world's largest per capita consumer of illegal narcotics, thanks to the ready availability of heroin¹⁵⁴ and hashish¹⁵⁵ in the country as a result of widespread opium and cannabis cultivation.

Drug addiction has become a major social problem that will require significant international support to subdue it. "The scale of production may be the biggest problem as far as the international community is concerned, but the scale of addiction and its implications for future generations are the biggest concerns for the Afghan people," says Elhadi Abdalla, Islamic Relief's Afghanistan Country Director.

'Afghanistan accounted for 12% of the world's opium production in 2001. By 2008 it accounted for 93%'

Wall Street Journal¹⁵⁶

According to the UNODC, over a million Afghans suffer from drug addiction in a population of 30 million – the highest rate of addiction in the world.¹⁵⁷ Over 40% of addicts are women and children,¹⁵⁸ and 70% have no access to drug treatment.¹⁵⁹ Many mothers pass their addiction on to their children through breast feeding, or by giving them drugs, or through second-hand inhalation. The risk of condemning the next generation of Afghans to a life of addiction is real and increasing.¹⁶⁰

An opium-dependent economy

Afghanistan's production of opium goes back to the 18th century. In the 1990s the country was the main source of the world's illicit heroin supply, accounting for an estimated 70% of production by 2000.¹⁶¹

Under Taliban control poppy production dipped dramatically as a result of a combination of threats, forced eradication and public punishment of transgressors.¹⁶² But production bounced back after the Taliban were overthrown, and today the opium trade accounts for around a third of the country's gross domestic product (GDP).¹⁶³

In 2011 farm-gate income alone from opium amounted to \$1.4 billion, 9% of GDP.¹⁶⁴ Cannabis cultivation is also booming, leading to widespread availability of hashish.¹⁶⁵

While billions of dollars have been spent trying to curb Afghanistan's narcotics trade through poppy eradication, with minimal success, the annual budget for treating addicts is just \$2.2 million (£1.4 million) – barely \$2 per addict each year.¹⁶⁶

The roots of production – and addiction

Islamic Relief has identified four key factors driving high drug production and consumption in Afghanistan:

► Income generation

According to the Afghan Ministry of Economy, around half a million young Afghans enter the labour force each year without finding work.¹⁶⁷ Opium is a lucrative crop, and growing it can be an attractive alternative for those facing unemployment and grinding poverty. In 2011 the gross income from opium cultivation in Afghanistan was 11 times higher than that from wheat.¹⁶⁸

► Pain relief

This is becoming the most prominent cause of addiction among Afghanistan's women and children. Conventional health care is inaccessible or unaffordable for many, and opium is often a readily available alternative. One woman told Islamic Relief that she started giving opium tablets to her daughter to stop her from crying, while another told us her addiction started when she had back pains from carpet weaving and took the drug in order to continue working.

► Conflict

In a country where violence is commonplace and where conflict has torn communities apart, many are turning to

drugs as a means of escape. Addiction is not confined to the uneducated and poverty stricken: young, educated Afghans are being drawn in too.¹⁶⁹ Some have become addicted amidst the boredom and frustration of living in refugee camps, and these problems cross borders. It is estimated that on average there is at least one addict in every refugee family returning to Afghanistan from Iran or Pakistan.¹⁷⁰

► Power politics

Opium cultivation is promoted and supported by war lords and the Taliban because it provides them with an economic power base, generating significant income to finance their activities.¹⁷¹

The seriousness of Afghanistan's battle with drug addiction has received relatively little international attention until recently, but concern is growing. The latest US State Department survey on drug use predicts that the number of adult drug users in Afghanistan could soon exceed 1.3 million, with nearly 300,000 children affected.¹⁷² Some experts say these figures hugely underestimate the problem, putting the number of addicts at over 3 million already.¹⁷³

This growing health emergency is compounded by the fact that Afghanistan is in the early stages of an HIV/AIDS epidemic. A 2008 study carried out by the World Bank showed that 3% of injecting drug users in Kabul were HIV positive. A large proportion of drug users engage in high risk behaviour, with 69% indicating that they have paid for sex.¹⁷⁴

The importance of education and rehabilitation

Based on Islamic Relief's research and analysis and our work on the ground, we believe there are a number of areas that require strong support to tackle Afghanistan's drug crisis.

► Education

One is education about the harmful effects of opiates. Many Afghans start using drugs without understanding the health consequences and the high risk of addiction. Some children are becoming addicted through secondhand inhalation,



a danger that parents may not be aware of. Islamic Relief wants to see a national education campaign to highlight the destructive effects of drug abuse and the importance of seeking treatment. Only 28% of Afghans can read and write,¹⁷⁵ so innovative methods will have to be used to ensure the message reaches those most in need. The *khutba* (sermon) that accompanies Friday prayers may provide a useful platform.

► **Treatment and rehabilitation**

Another key area is treatment and rehabilitation. It is estimated that 700,000 addicts in Afghanistan have no access to treatment. There are currently rehabilitation centres in just 21 of the country's 34 provinces, and these have the capacity to treat only around 10,000 people each year.¹⁷⁶ Many seeking treatment are turned away, and more funds are desperately needed. The professional treatment received by a small minority needs to be much more widely available.

► **Relapse**

Preventing relapse is another neglected area. Drug treatment can only be fully effective when it is accompanied by follow-up programmes that enable addicts to stay off drugs and move forward with their lives. Investment is needed to create employment opportunities for recovering addicts and their families.

Alternatives to poppy cultivation

It is not only recovering addicts that need employment opportunities. Poppy cultivation is a lifeline for many poor farmers in Afghanistan, and the ready availability of drugs will not be overcome without viable alternatives to opium production.

The average poppy grower in southern Afghanistan earned \$6,194 in 2008. Farmers in the south who grew other crops earned just \$3,382. It is little wonder, then, that the UN and US estimate that \$500 million of opium is grown each year in Helmand province alone.¹⁷⁷ It has no lasting effect simply to destroy these crops: renewed efforts must be made to develop and invest in alternative crops that give Afghans a profitable and sustainable return.

Freed from addiction

Addiction rates in the northern province of Balkh are among the highest in Afghanistan, with over 30% of adults addicted to opium and/or heroin in some districts.

“Traditionally the people here are carpet weavers,” says Mohammed Ehsan Hamrah, doctor in charge of Islamic Relief’s health centre and drug treatment facility in Shortepa, which serves a dozen villages near the Uzbek border. “Carpet weaving is very hard work, and a lot of weavers use drugs as pain killers.”

Male addicts are treated as inpatients at the Shortepa centre, while women receive treatment in their own homes. The treatment consists of progressively reducing the intake of opiates and prescribing sedatives and other medicines to treat the psychological and physical effects of withdrawal, which can include severe diarrhoea and vomiting.

Abdul Rahim (pictured above with his daughter Madina) says he has benefited enormously from the treatment provided by the centre. Until a year ago, the 35-year-old and his three brothers were all addicts, as were his wife and mother. Even little Madina had been given opium to pacify her in the absence of any conventional medicines to treat minor ailments. Now the whole family are drug free.

“When I was a drug user, I had no control over myself,” he explains. “At that time I did not feel like a human being, but this clinic has made me feel human again.”

Afghanistan’s drug treatment centres currently have capacity to treat only 10,000 addicts per year – less than 1% of the total. Islamic Relief is calling for a tenfold increase in funding for drugs treatment and the opening of new facilities in all provinces that do not have a treatment centre.



A case for treatment

Addiction to narcotics has clearly become a major public health issue for Afghanistan, while the booming opium trade continues to be a major obstacle in the path of stability and sustainable economic development. These twin challenges need urgent attention and a significant injection of funds from the Afghan government and the international community.

The enforcement approach to narcotics in Afghanistan – hard-core policing, imprisonment and poppy eradication – has failed even to put the brakes on the country's flourishing drugs trade. Islamic Relief believes it is time for a major new national programme to tackle drug abuse in a partnership involving the Ministries of Health and Education and aid agencies. This should incorporate education and awareness raising, a tenfold increase in the treatment budget, a treatment facility in every province, livelihood projects for recovering addicts and increased investment in crop substitution – an approach with which Islamic Relief has had some success by substituting saffron for opium in parts of the south.

Rehab, Afghan style

At the Mia Ali Baba shrine in Jalalabad, addicts endure what some misguidedly see as the answer to drug addiction and mental illness: imprisonment.

Addicts are placed in a small windowless cell, chained up and given only water, bread and black pepper for two months. They are unable to leave their cells unless there are significant signs of improvement.¹⁷⁸

Healthcare professionals consider this 'shock treatment' approach to be ineffective but addicts are desperate enough to turn to places like the Mia Ali Baba shrine and pray for a miracle when they cannot get professional treatment.¹⁷⁹

"The Afghan government fails to acknowledge the growing scale of the problem and downplays the reality of the situation to avoid criticism," says Tahir Qadir, a BBC correspondent specialising in Afghan affairs. "For too long we have focused on tackling the issue through hard-core policing and treatments such as imprisonment and poppy eradication, which have been ineffective or even worsened the problem. This is not helping the Afghan people whatsoever."¹⁸⁰

Refugees and displaced people

'More of the world's refugees come from Afghanistan than from any other country, and Pakistan is hosting over half of them. It is imperative not to hasten their repatriation in large numbers until the security situation improves and the Afghan government can cope, which means serious attention needs to be paid to preparing the ground for resettlement. There is also a need for Pakistan to do much more to provide for its Afghan guests, and the international community should support the Pakistani authorities to do so'

Fayaz Ahmad, Former Country Director, Islamic Relief Pakistan

Afghanistan has a long history of mass displacement, and has been described as the 'epicentre' of the world's refugee challenges.¹⁸¹

The 1970s Soviet invasion forced five million Afghans to escape abroad, and the Taliban takeover in the 1990s prompted hundreds of thousands more to flee.¹⁸² In the past decade internal and external displacement have continued unabated against a backdrop of armed conflict, natural disasters, human rights violations and generalised violence and insecurity.¹⁸³

Amnesty International reports that 400 Afghans are displaced every day.¹⁸⁴ Afghanistan is the number one source of refugees internationally, its 2.6 million refugees accounting for a quarter of the global total.¹⁸⁵ Any serious approach to alleviating the poverty and suffering of the Afghan people should have a well resourced strategy for supporting refugees and displaced people, ensuring acceptable conditions for resettlement and building communities fit for the dispossessed to return to with dignity and hope in the future.

Sharp increase in displacement

Even before the plight of Afghan refugees is considered, internal displacement is a major challenge for the Afghan authorities. The UN's refugee agency reports a sharp increase in internally displaced people (IDPs) over the past three years.¹⁸⁶ In 2013 alone some 124,000 Afghans were newly displaced,¹⁸⁷ comprising almost a quarter of the 574,327 IDPs

registered by UNHCR last year.¹⁸⁸ The situation may worsen after 2014, when there may be a further increase in IDPs for which aid agencies and the international community need to be prepared.

Though some leave home in the wake of natural disasters, a majority cite insecurity as the reason for their displacement.¹⁸⁹ The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre reports that over 100,000 of 2012's new IDPs fled because of conflict.¹⁹⁰

Difficult conditions

The conditions faced by both IDPs and refugees are sadly little better than the harsh environment they have left behind them. Over half of Afghan refugees live in neighbouring Pakistan, which is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and is therefore under no obligation to integrate its 1.6 million Afghan refugees into society or grant them legal status. Even Afghan families who have lived in Pakistan for over three decades enjoy none of the rights afforded to Pakistani citizens, and many have no option but to work as day labourers to make ends meet.¹⁹¹

The situation for Afghans in Iran is also difficult. The average refugee lives on just \$1.66 a day, well below Iran's poverty line of \$2.¹⁹²

Within Afghanistan conditions for IDPs are "extremely worrying", according to the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).¹⁹³ A 2012 report by Amnesty International illustrates the extreme hardship they face: deprivation in terms of basic needs such as shelter, water, food and fuel; a lack of access to healthcare and education; and gender-based violence and harassment. IDPs seeking a better, safer life are often sorely disappointed.

The challenge of urbanisation

One big challenge the Afghan authorities face is the country's growing urbanisation, which is drawing large numbers of people to the cities. Historically a country of agriculture and



Casualties of conflict

Shazia and Nazia (above) are eight-year-old twin sisters who live in a camp for internally displaced people (IDPs) in the Afghan capital, Kabul. Their mother died in childbirth, so they are cared for by their grandmother.

The sisters have never been to school. They spend their days begging in the muddy squalor of the camp and their nights huddling together for warmth. Food is scarce and there is no clean water, no electricity and very little support.

These are the miserable conditions awaiting those who flee to Afghanistan's biggest cities from the conflict that has been tearing the country apart for decades. Around 50,000 IDPs live in 53 camps in and around Kabul alone. Fuel is expensive, so children rummage in the rubbish to find plastic material and old shoes that they can burn instead, creating thick, black smoke and an overwhelming stench.

The Afghan authorities are barely able to help the country's population of over 600,000 IDPs, let alone to resettle the 2.6 million Afghans who have taken refuge in neighbouring countries.

pastoralism, Afghanistan now has one of the highest urbanisation rates in Asia.¹⁹⁴

Rural families affected by conflict often view cities as potentially safer places that offer better employment opportunities.¹⁹⁵ But Afghanistan is poorly equipped to cope with rapid urban expansion, and IDPs represent an added burden to cities' already weak service provision.¹⁹⁶ Families find themselves in unofficial settlements, building crude shelters on unoccupied pieces of land. The slums around Kabul alone house 35,000 people.¹⁹⁷

With IDPs usually offering fewer vocational skills than native city-dwellers,¹⁹⁸ the expected job opportunities rarely materialise. Displaced families often end up struggling to afford even their most basic needs. In IDP camps shelter is rudimentary and food is in short supply. There is often no clean water, and fuel is prohibitively expensive. The heat of summer brings the threat of water-borne disease, and the winter cold can be a killer.

In 2012 over 100 children perished in one IDP camp in Kabul alone, weakened by hunger and chilled to the bone by sub-zero temperatures. Islamic Relief is helping to support people in some of these camps but it is not always possible to do so, with local authorities in urban areas restricting humanitarian access to discourage permanent settlement.¹⁹⁹

The international response

The government of Pakistan continues to insist that voluntary repatriation is the solution, even for those Afghans born and raised in Pakistan – though a new scheme will offer birth certificates to 330,000 Afghan children, a welcome move to prevent statelessness. In 2013 it proclaimed a deadline of the end of June for all Afghans to leave the country, until a UN-backed meeting at the eleventh hour resulted in a change of heart.²⁰⁰

Although they typically enjoy good relations with foreigners living in local communities, Pakistanis' attitudes to Afghan refugees are changing because of the huge strain being

placed on their country's struggling economy and infrastructure.²⁰¹ That burden is something the refugees themselves are powerless to address, as none have been allowed to naturalise as Pakistani citizens, through which they might have contributed to the economy through work and taxation. Many Pakistanis feel that the burden of responsibility for refugees ought not to be placed on host countries alone but on the international community. They cite the lack of international aid for Afghanistan as a key factor in so many refugees fleeing their homes, and subsequently being unable to return.²⁰²

Meagre international support is also affecting Afghan refugees in Iran, where the Norwegian Refugee Council blames a deterioration in living conditions not on Iranian policy but on an antipathy of international aid donors towards Iran and international sanctions preventing transfers of funds.²⁰³

As Islamic Relief has seen in a number of humanitarian crisis zones, such as Gaza and Somalia, counter-terrorism legislation and fears about misuse or misappropriation of funds can adversely affect the flow of aid to some of the people who need it most. There is a clear need, articulated by the UNHCR, for the international community to provide more funds to Iran and Pakistan to support Afghan refugees, as well as to invest more in building Afghanistan's capacity to reabsorb its returning citizens.²⁰⁴

The road to repatriation

Following the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001, more than 5.7 million refugees voluntarily returned to Afghanistan,²⁰⁵ anticipating a better life than before. But repatriation is never that simple, especially when such large numbers of people are involved.

The UNHCR has found that returnees "struggle to achieve sustainable reintegration, which is defined as reaching parity with local community members...initial indications are that returnees have specific vulnerabilities."²⁰⁶ Nearly 60% of returnees to Afghanistan have ended up living in worse conditions than the local communities receiving them.²⁰⁷

One obstacle faced by returnees is severe economic hardship. Unable to make ends meet, many become secondary migrants,²⁰⁸ joining hundreds of thousands of IDPs flocking to the cities in search of employment.

A nation poorly equipped

The UNHCR states that "conditions in Afghanistan are too severe to support continued large-scale repatriation",²⁰⁹ outlining four key areas to be strengthened before refugees can safely return. These are access to basic services; livelihoods and economic reintegration; social reintegration and protection; and capacity development.²¹⁰ It is clear that today's Afghanistan is poorly equipped to deal even with internal migration, let alone mass repatriation.

Until recently, the government of Afghanistan's approach to IDPs continued to be encouraging them to return to their rural homes, leveraged by limitations placed on humanitarian aid in IDP camps and illegal checkpoints to restrict movement.²¹¹ However, the majority of internal migrants do not wish to return to their home areas, so a recent policy recognising the Afghan government's responsibility to protect IDPs and help them integrate into their new home towns is welcomed.²¹²

Urbanisation is a trend that is unlikely to slow down any time soon. Once this is accepted, and if the necessary resources and strategies are put in place to strengthen and build urban capacity in the areas outlined by UNHCR, Afghanistan may be in a better position to support those who wish to return.

In the mean time, international support for Pakistan, Iran and other host nations is vital to alleviate 'asylum fatigue' among host communities and governments and allow refugees to live with dignity and a measure of comfort in neighbouring countries. Indeed, for those families who have lived abroad for more than a quarter of a century, Pakistan should consider revisiting its legislation and begin a process of naturalisation. This will allow these refugees to contribute to the country's economy, rather than 'disappearing' within Pakistan's urban centres as illegal labourers.²¹³

Recommendations

It is a matter for grave concern that international aid for Afghanistan is drying up at a time of such uncertainty, as foreign troops prepare to withdraw. Development and a reduction in poverty may not deliver peace on their own, but reduced investment in poverty alleviation could severely reduce the country's chances of breaking the cycle of violence and instability.

Islamic Relief urges aid donors to stand by the people of Afghanistan by pledging to adhere to a set of seven broad principles for continuing international engagement, and acting on our seven recommendations to improve the impact of international assistance.

Key principles

► Sustain international funding

The international community should invest significantly in poverty alleviation and make a forward commitment to fully fund the UN's Common Humanitarian Action Plan for Afghanistan over the next three years. This is vital to provide a measure of certainty to the Afghan people and maintain progress in addressing the country's huge humanitarian needs.

► Improve aid quality

Donors need to improve the quality of aid by ensuring that programmes are better attuned to local needs (prioritising teacher shortages and community and home-based education, for example) and that services are developed in a more inclusive and transparent way in partnership with international NGOs and Afghan civil society groups. Monitoring and disbursement mechanisms must be improved to ensure that aid is being properly utilised.

► Prioritise development

Much international aid up to now has been linked to achieving security goals, building visible infrastructure in areas of conflict, and 'winning hearts and minds'. Future aid should overwhelmingly focus on alleviating poverty, promoting long-term development and addressing the basic needs of the most vulnerable people, with a more equal balance of funding between secure and insecure areas.

► Focus on basic services

Aid donors and the government of Afghanistan need to channel more resources into delivering good-quality basic services and improving essential infrastructure.²¹⁸ This is especially true for investment in food security (including agricultural extension services), health, schools and women's education.

► Ensure greater community and NGO involvement

Afghans need to be more involved in developing, delivering and evaluating the programmes of which they are the intended beneficiaries. More aid should be channelled through local and international non-government organisations that have a good track record in accountable community development. In addition, local capacity to identify and tackle the root causes of conflict needs to be developed and supported as an integral part of aid and development activities.

► Build resilience

Despite the potential for progress in Afghanistan, it would be naive to ignore the possibility of the country falling victim to further natural disasters and renewed conflict. International assistance should include support to prepare communities for drought in particular, and contingency funding for dealing with conflict and displacement.

► Strengthen governance

Increased support for NGOs in the short term must be accompanied by policies to strengthen the capacity of the Afghan government to provide key services – including measures to professionalise management, devolve power from Kabul to the provinces, reduce bureaucracy and protect against corruption. Service delivery will be unsustainable in the longer term if government is not capable of playing a leading role.

Key recommendations

► Strengthen agriculture

Farming accounts for 60% of employment in Afghanistan but only 8% of government spending. Strategic investment is needed in areas such as irrigation systems, storage facilities,

improved crop varieties, post-harvest processing technologies and extension and advisory services – especially for small-holders. Approaches that promote disaster risk reduction, community resilience and reduced dependence on chemical inputs should be strongly supported.

► **Expand health provision**

Life expectancy in Afghanistan is just 50. One million under-5s are acutely malnourished, one in ten children don't live to see their fifth birthday and half of adults have suffered from mental health problems. Tackling malnutrition is the number one priority, and improving access to health care in remote areas is vital. Priorities for investment include expanding the country's network of health clinics, employing more health professionals (especially women), improving treatment for victims of conflict and repairing clean water facilities.

► **Invest in education**

Funding for education is critical if more Afghans are to be lifted out of poverty. School enrolment has increased seven-fold in a decade, but fewer than half of girls go to school and 4.8 million children receive no formal education. The quality and accessibility of education should be improved by building more schools, employing more teachers (especially women), investing more in teacher training and implementing a standardised national curriculum.

► **Protect women's rights**

Afghanistan's women are so disadvantaged in health, education and employment that the country is ranked a lowly 175th out of 186 nations by the UN's Gender Inequality Index. Donors should ensure that promoting gender equality is an integral aspect of aid, and the government of Afghanistan needs to ensure that new laws protecting women against violence and discrimination are properly enforced. Education holds the key to women's emancipation, so it is vital to prioritise girls' education, extend the employment of female teachers and implement more innovative initiatives like Islamic Relief's home-based women's education project.

► **Tackle drug addiction**

Afghanistan has the highest rate of drug addiction in the world, yet health facilities have the capacity to treat only

1% of the country's 1 million or more addicts. Islamic Relief believes it is time for a major new national programme to tackle drug abuse in a partnership involving the Ministries of Health and Education and aid agencies, supported by international aid donors. The programme should incorporate education and awareness raising, a tenfold increase in the treatment budget, a treatment facility in every province, livelihood projects for recovering addicts and increased investment in crop substitution.

► **Support refugees and IDPs**

Any serious approach to alleviating the poverty and suffering of the Afghan people should have a well resourced strategy for supporting refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs), whose combined numbers exceed 3 million. With government provision struggling to cope and many reluctant to return to their home areas, return and repatriation programmes need to be realistic and carefully planned. More resources should be committed to protecting and integrating IDPs in the communities where they now live, as well as supporting Pakistan, Iran and other host nations to enable refugees to live in greater dignity and comfort in neighbouring countries.

► **Resolve conflicts**

With forecasts that conflict in Afghanistan is likely to increase in the coming months and years, there is a need to move beyond dealing with conflict purely in the narrow sense of how it affects aid delivery and creates humanitarian needs. Islamic Relief wants to see a greater focus on how poverty alleviation can be integrated with efforts to address the causes of conflict and build lasting peace.

Appendix

Aid commitments and pledges to Afghanistan

Bilateral donors	<i>Average annual aid commitments 2009–2011 (to the nearest \$1m)²¹⁴</i>	<i>Pledges made at or since Tokyo Conference July 2012²¹⁵</i>	Multilateral donors	<i>Average annual aid commitments 2009–2011 (to the nearest \$1m)²¹⁴</i>	<i>Pledges made at or since Tokyo Conference July 2012²¹⁵</i>
Australia	\$160m	\$1bn over four years starting 2015/16	Asian Development Bank	\$209m	\$1.2bn to 2016
Austria	\$1m		EU	\$409m	\$1.5bn a year
Belgium	\$15m		World Bank	\$237m	
Canada	\$178m	\$300m during 2011–14 \$224m during 2014–17 ²¹⁶	Others	\$319m	
Czech Republic	\$4m		Total donors	\$6.98bn	\$16bn in four years to 2016
Denmark	\$71m				
Finland	\$44m				
France	\$83m				
Germany	\$529m	c.\$536m a year to 2016			
Greece	\$6m				
Ireland	\$8m				
Italy	\$72m				
Japan	\$593m	Up to \$3bn to 2016			
Korea	\$35m				
Luxembourg	\$4m				
Netherlands	\$168m				
New Zealand	\$12m				
Norway	\$180m	\$137m a year ²¹⁷			
Portugal	\$9m				
Spain	\$54m				
Sweden	\$140m				
Switzerland	\$23m				
UK	\$296m	\$296m a year to 2017 ²¹⁸			
US	\$3.1bn	\$1bn–2.3bn a year			

End notes

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25. Target and target date were changed due to lack of availability of baseline data for 1990 and to account for Afghanistan's late start for achievement and tracking of MDGs.
26. Target year was changed to 2020 due to Afghanistan's late start for achievement and tracking of MDGs.
27. Target year was changed to 2020 due to Afghanistan's late start for achievement and tracking of MDGs. Tertiary education was included in the target.
28. Target was added to ensure appropriate policy focus on this area in Afghanistan. The indicator used to monitor this target was changed in order to reflect the fact that government is the largest employer and the revised indicator reflects the government's commitment to removing gender disparities in civil sector employment.
29. Increase in female participation in decision making positions is a precondition for ensuring sustainable improvements in the conditions of women. The indicator used to monitor this target was changed so as to better capture women's political participation at sub-national levels.
30. Target and target date were changed due to lack of availability of baseline data for 1990 and to account for Afghanistan's late start for achievement and tracking of MDGs.
31. This target and its target date were changed due to a lack of baseline data for 1990 and to account for Afghanistan's late start for the achievement and tracking of this MDGs.
32. Target year was changed to 2020 due to Afghanistan's late start for achievement and tracking of MDGs.
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34. Due to Afghanistan's special situation it was deemed necessary to include a separate goal on security, which is the necessary precondition for the sustainable achievement of all other MDGs.
35. Targets 20–22 reflect the need to achieve stability by re-instating the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force. This is done by disbanding and disarming illegal armed groups and strengthening the government institutions (army and police) tasked with maintaining peace and enforcing the rule of law.
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