

Accelerating progress towards SDG2

AFGHANISTAN



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List of Acronyms

AFSeN	Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition-Agenda
A-MPI	Afghanistan Multidimensional Poverty Index
ANDMA	Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority
ANPDF	Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework
CAD-NPP	Comprehensive Agriculture Development – National Priority Program
CBR	Afghanistan’s Capacity Building for Results
CC	Citizen Charter
CDC	Community Development Council
CCDC	Cluster Community Development Council
CIMMYT	International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre
DALY	Disability-Adjusted Life Year
FIRST	Food and Nutrition Security Impact, Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation
FLRC	Farmers’ Learning and Resource Centres
FSN	Food Security and Nutrition
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GMAF	Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework
GOIRA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
HDI	Human Development Index
ICARDA	Centre for Agriculture Research in the Dry Areas
IDLG	Independent Directorate of Local Government
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IPC	Integrated Food Security Classification
KII	Key Informant Interviews
MAIL	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock
MEW	Ministry of Energy and Water
MIS	Management Information Systems
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoEc	Ministry of Economy
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoIC	Ministry of Industry and Commerce
MoLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
MoPH	Ministry of Public Health

MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NAPA	National Adaptation Program of Action
NSAG	Non-State Armed Groups
NSS	National Nutrition Survey 2013
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PND	Public Nutrition Directorate
RIPA	Project for Rice Based Agriculture Development in Afghanistan
SHA	System of Health Accounts
SUN	Scaling Up Nutrition
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
WFP	World Food Program

Introduction

The FAO-EU partnership under FIRST was launched in 2017, to provide strategic support to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GOIRA) on policy processes addressing Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) and Agriculture at the national level. FIRST supported the launch of the “Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition-Agenda (AFSeN)” a platform to reach multi-stakeholder consensus on national food security and nutrition priorities. AFSeN also seeks to strengthen FSN governance, and put food security high in the development agenda of Afghanistan, while introducing a strong focus on nutrition in 2018, leading to recommendations, which fed into the strategic planning of the AFSeN and extended its support to mainstreaming Food and Nutrition Security into the SDG Debate.

The findings of this exercise aim to guide the GOIRA and its partners on sector-specific policy support to improve implementation capacities, investment, and evidence-based decision making for Food and Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture in Afghanistan. The policy effectiveness analysis was undertaken in partnership with the AFSeN technical secretariat, which in this case was the main government counterpart for FIRST.

Objectives:

1. To review the design and overall coherence of policies relevant to food and nutrition security (FNS) in Afghanistan;
2. To review the role and capacity of relevant stakeholders in implementing FNS policies at all levels, to identify bottlenecks, avoid duplication and ensure synergies;
3. To review Afghanistan’s competences, institutional capacities, and skills and recommend necessary steps/actions required for upgrading and capacity building;
4. To prioritize the actions/interventions required, identify implementation channels, and recommend the areas/interventions for resource allocation.

Methodology

FIRST-Afghanistan used a combination of tools to conduct the diagnosis, including a desk review, consultations, and Key Informant Interviews (KII), focusing on the development, implementation, and investment plans of four key policies and strategies for food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture. Opportunities, challenges and gaps in the implementation of policies were identified, affecting the way these policies were institutionalized, institutional capacities were built, governance was strengthened and investment plans for resource utilization and mobilization were formulated.

A **desk review** covered socio-economic and political economy contextual issues, as well as GOIRA policy documents, including the Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda (AFSeN), the Comprehensive Agriculture Development Priority Program, MAIL's Food Security and Nutrition Strategy, and the Ministry of Public Health's Nutrition Strategy.

Consultations: Around six consultative workshops were carried out with the executive committee members of AFSeN, SDGs, and technical working groups of AFSeN and development partners working groups. All the activities were carried out under the platform of AFSeN for ownership, involvement, and buy-in of government, donors, and the UN.

Key Informant Interviews: 17 individual or group interviews were conducted with relevant stakeholders.

1. TRENDS, GEOGRAPHICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC PATTERNS AND PROSPECTS FOR ERADICATING FOOD INSECURITY, MALNUTRITION AND POVERTY IN THE COUNTRY

What are the trends, geographical and socio-economic patterns, and prospects for eradicating food insecurity, malnutrition, and poverty in the country? Key drivers of food insecurity, malnutrition, and poverty.

Afghanistan is a landlocked country with a dry climate and a mountainous terrain¹. Its geographic characteristics and its multi-ethnic population result in a certain degree of fragmentation, which in turn affects transport, trade, and basic social services, and makes attracting investments a challenge. The country's location along the trade routes connecting Southern and Eastern Asia to Europe and the Middle East has long determined its strategic role within the South Asian region, while the diverse and polarised nature of its society has often led to internal struggles among conflicting factions. Regional and global powers have lent their support to different armed groups throughout the years through shifting alliances, exploiting the conflict as a battleground for proxy wars where their own strategic interests prevailed². Lack of access to education, training and scarce employment opportunities, coupled with a widespread illicit economy, are critical factors fuelling hunger, malnutrition and poverty.

1.1 Demographic and Socio-Economic Trends

According to the latest figures, the total population for 2016/17 was estimated at round 29.1 million, of which 14.8 million men and 14.3 million women³. Though from 2015 to 2017 the fertility rate fell from 4.8 to 4.5, the average household still consists of 7.7 persons⁴, and half the population lives in households with nine or more members. The Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016-17⁵ indicates that almost three quarters of the population in 2017 are below the age of 30, and 48% was comprised of children under the age of 15, ranking Afghanistan fourth worldwide in terms of under 15 population. Such an increasingly young population demands high expenditure in terms of services, and makes households highly dependent on food purchases and vulnerable to food price fluctuations. On the other hand, the high percentage of youth leads to a high dependency ratio⁶, with a significant impact on the potential for economic development seeing the cost of dependants on working age adults. 70% of the population resides in rural areas, 25% lives in urban areas and 5% are members of the nomadic and semi-nomadic Kuchi. Services

¹ FAO (2018) 15 years in Afghanistan a special report: 2003-2018, Rome

² OCHA (2017), The Protracted Conflict in Afghanistan: a Protection Crisis above all. Background paper. Downloaded August 2019 from <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/afghanistan/document/afghanistanbackground-paper-protracted-conflict-afghanistan>.

³ Central Statistics Organisation (2018), Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2016-17, Kabul, CSO. The report was released one year after the collection of data.

⁴ Central Statistics Organisation (2018)

⁵ Central Statistics Organisation (2018)

⁶ The dependency ratio is defined as the ratio of people in dependent ages (younger than 15 or older than 64) to the population of working age 15-64.

were the main economic sector in 2016, amounting to almost 60% of the GDP, followed by agriculture (23%) and industry (21%). Agriculture is the main employer in the country, providing work to 43% of workers. The livestock sector represents 15% of the country's GDP and employs 1.1 million workers.

The Afghanistan Multidimensional Poverty Index (A-MPI) revealed different patterns of poverty according to socio-economic characteristics: for example while 33.2% of households with four family members are poor, the figure rises to 60.2% for those with more than nine members⁷. Child marriage is very common, and 28% of women aged 20-24 were married before the age of 18 in 2017, and more than 4% even before they were 15 years old⁸. These statistics are a simple but clear indication of the high prevalence of gender inequality in Afghan society, limiting girls' access to education, vocational skills training and career, socially isolating them, and compromising their development.

In 2017 the adult literacy rate in Afghanistan was 35%, one of the lowest in the world, and 82% of the adult population aged 25 and above had not completed any level of education. Comparatively speaking, 54% of literate youth indicate a positive historic trend in the education sector in Afghanistan. However, the national youth participation rate in education and training remains a low 28%, and while progress has been made in gender equity in literacy, the literacy rate for young women is still only 57% of young men's. Factors keeping girls from school include security concerns, family approval and distance, or lack of schools, with worsening conflict and increasing insecurity most affecting attendance, as demonstrated by the lower numbers of girls attending schools in high conflict areas compared to low conflict ones⁹.

1.2. Security Outlook in Afghanistan

The long-standing conflict in Afghanistan has disrupted State institutions and eroded the population's livelihoods and its capacity to withstand shocks. Afghans face multiple interconnected threats and shocks on a daily basis, including armed violence, displacement and drought, all of which demand a continued humanitarian response, resulting in chronic underdevelopment and weak investment in basic services. Out of 401 districts in Afghanistan, around 106 score 4 out of 5 on the conflict-severity index due to high levels of displacement, armed clashes, airstrikes and civilian casualties. More than 17 million people, amounting to over two-thirds of the country, live in the provinces most severely affected by the drought of 2018¹⁰, which, compounded with years of civil conflict and instability, as well as the severely degraded conditions of much of the land, have limited food production and depleted the assets of farmers and livestock keepers¹¹.

In 2018 for the fifth consecutive year, more than 10,000 human casualties were reportedly caused by ongoing hostilities. The latest Humanitarian Response Plan 2018-2021¹² foresees a deteriorating humanitarian situation across the country over the next three years, with more than 6.3 million people requiring some form of humanitarian and protection assistance throughout 2019 only. The presidential elections scheduled for September 2019 have already caused attacks by Non-State Armed Groups (NSAG) seeking to disrupt the process by targeting civilians. The diplomatic efforts to reach a negotiated political settlement intensified the violence in some parts

⁷ National Statistics and Information Authority (2019), Afghanistan Multidimensional Poverty Index 2016-2017. NSIA, Kabul.

⁸ Central Statistics Organisation (2018)

⁹ World Bank (2018), Afghanistan Development Update

¹⁰OCHA (2018a) Humanitarian Response Plan Afghanistan 2018-2021

¹¹ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (2018), Afghanistan Acute Food Insecurity Analysis August 2018-projection until February 2019.

¹²OCHA (2018a) Humanitarian Response Plan Afghanistan 2018-2021

of the country, as both sides tried to improve their hand in advancing the peace talks. Escalating violence in 2018 leads to a deteriorating and increasingly volatile humanitarian space, as loss of control over some areas translated in restriction of access and diminished capacity to deliver assistance. The first nine months of 2018 also saw a 153% increase in aid workers killed and injured compared to the previous year, making Afghanistan the second most dangerous country in the world for aid workers, and blocking relief from reaching civilians.

1.3. Agriculture in Afghanistan

Agriculture is an important productive sector in Afghanistan, with an annual budget allocation of 4-5% for 2017-18. The sector grew on average by 8 per cent per year between 2007 and 2012, while its annual growth rate has fallen sharply since then to an average 0.1 of per cent. Though agriculture’s contribution steadily declined from 2007 until 2016, the trend was reversed lately, and in 2017 it represented 23.7 per cent of Afghanistan’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with sub-component data indicating potential further growth for 2018¹³. Agriculture provides an estimated 44% of jobs, and the majority of the population is directly or indirectly involved in agriculture, making it the main source of livelihoods in Afghanistan¹⁴. In rural areas, 27% of women participate in the labour force¹⁵, compared to 81.5% of men¹⁶. Land ownership is under high pressure, with a decrease in average landholding size from 6.7 jeribs (1.3 ha) in 2007-8 to 4.9 jeribs (1.0 ha) in 2016-17. The majority of landowning households are smallholders, as 64% of their farms are less than 4 jeribs (0.8 ha) in size, up from 54% in 2007-8. There is a clear correlation between small landholding size and poverty, with 50% of households with 4 jeribs or less being poor.

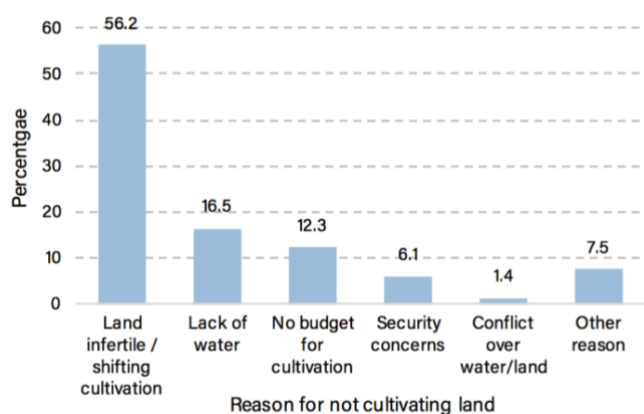


FIGURE 1: HOUSEHOLDS OWNING RAIN-FED LAND LEFT FALLOW, BY REASONS FOR NOT CULTIVATING THE LAND

SOURCE: ALCS

Afghan agriculture is prone to harsh weather conditions, and the country remains in cereal deficit even during good harvest years. The agriculture sector, characterized by low productivity and variable production, is unable to meet the demands of a growing population, hence the rapid expansion of food imports. There is a long tradition in horticulture production of exclusive indigenous varieties of fruits and vegetables, including grapes, apples, apricots, pomegranates, and melons. In 2017 overall export experienced 28% growth, from US\$614 million to US\$784 million, amounting to 6% of GDP. Agriculture represented a significant share of exports – around

¹³ Afghanistan International Bank (2018), Annual report; World Bank (2018)

¹⁴ Central Statistics Organisation (2018)

¹⁵ Reasons for the low participation of women include the social restrictions faced by women and insecurity. In general, men are engaged in agriculture-related activities, while for women only activities such as kitchen gardening are considered socially acceptable. In the livestock sub-sector, women are handling most activities, but when it comes to the market-related activities, this is done by the men.

¹⁶ Central Statistics Organisation (2018)

21 per cent in 2016, valued at nearly US\$ 168 million. Although overall Afghan exports remained limited to a few commodities, seven out of the top ten export goods, accounting for 72.2% of the export market were agricultural commodities¹⁷. In 2018, the biggest challenge for export was trading with Pakistan due to unpredictable border closures, while market access to India was improved through air corridors with the export of high value fruit products.

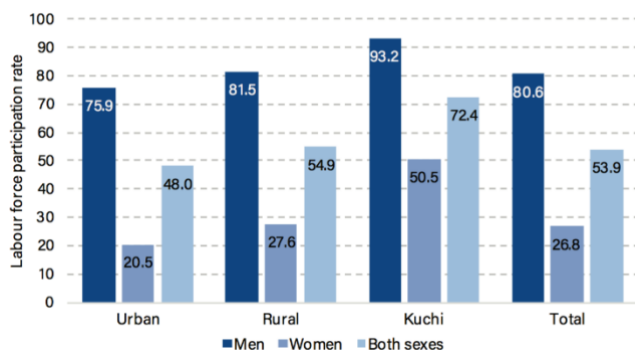


FIGURE 2: LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE, BY RESIDENCE AND BY SEX

SOURCE: ALCS

Wheat as a staple crop amounts to almost 70% of cereal consumption and is grown over 57% of the cultivated land. Other cereal crops include rice, maize, and barley. 45% of cultivable land is irrigated, while the rest is rain-fed. Total cultivated land has significantly reduced in 2017, resulting in a decreasing volume of production. Some provinces, including Badghis, Faryab, Jawzjan, Sar-e-Pul, Daikundi and Nimroz, saw a drastic decrease in the production of irrigated wheat, while in the provinces of Helmand, Kabul, Nangarhar, Laghman and Kunar wheat production increased considerably. In 2017 the production deficit of wheat was recorded around 1.5 million metric tons, and in 2018, due to drought, the deficit increased to around two million metric tons.

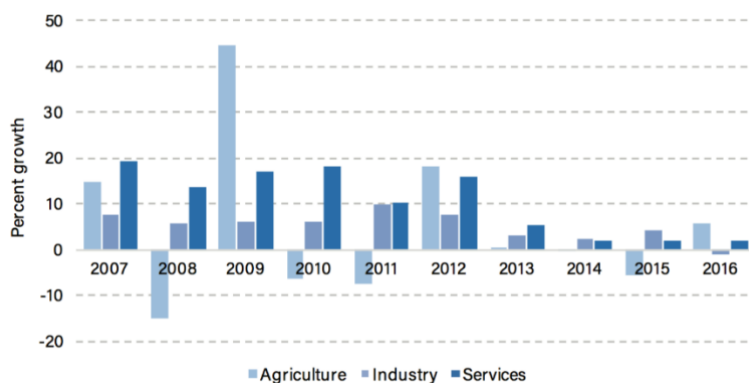


FIGURE 3: ANNUAL GROWTH RATE 2007-16 BY MAIN ECONOMIC SECTOR (IN PERCENTAGES)

SOURCE: CENTRAL STATISTICS OFFICE

The sector faces several challenges: the majority of farmers are small, unorganized landholders and have difficulties in accessing agriculture inputs, such as planting material, credit, good-quality animal feed, agricultural services and so on, and when available, inputs are often too expensive for them. Irrigation facilities are inefficient, with no or few technologies or good agricultural practices. The land tenure system is highly exploited and there are very few examples of formal contract farming, an arrangement under which companies could overcome credit and technology constraints by advancing farmers' inputs and providing extension. These factors are compounded by the limited capacity within government ministries to bring about needed reforms, enforce policies, and provide technical and advisory support in rural areas.

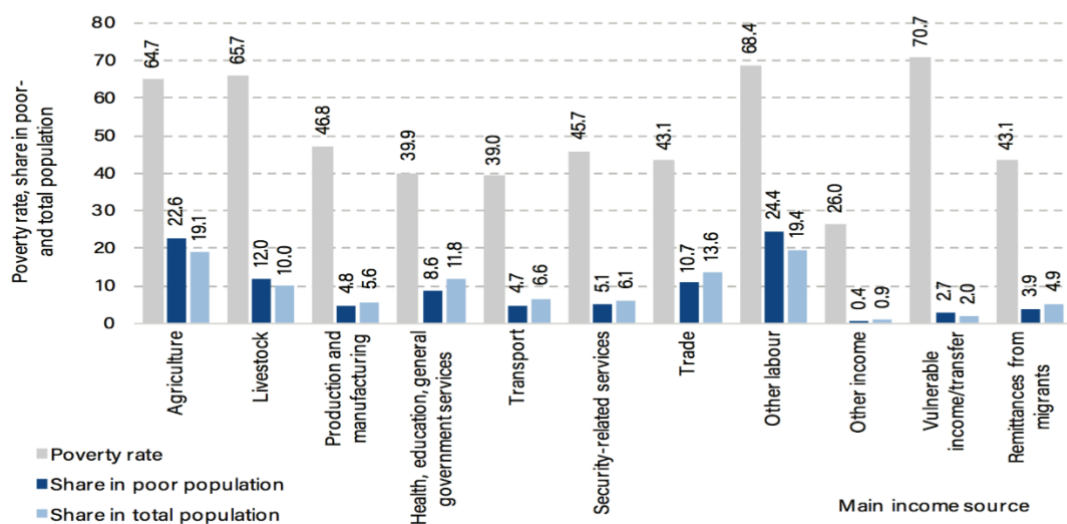
¹⁷ This figure refers to 2016. The World Bank (2018)

High levels of rural poverty result in almost half the rural population considered food insecure according to the latest National Nutrition Survey, with rates of under-five stunting above 40 per cent¹⁸. Strengthening the agricultural sector is essential to improve livelihoods, enhance food security, and generate employment, critical since the conflict has destroyed many job opportunities and finding work has grown increasingly difficult.

FIGURE 4: POVERTY BY MAIN SOURCE OF INCOME

SOURCE: CENTRAL STATISTICS ORGANISATION

Figure 6.22: Poverty rate, share in poor population and share in total population, by main household income source (in percentages)



1.4. Poverty trends

In parallel with sluggish economic growth and declining per capita income in the face of unrelenting population growth, poverty in Afghanistan has experienced a sharp increase since 2011-12, due to several interrelated factors, most prominent of which the escalating conflict and political instability, a reduced presence of international military forces and the sharp fall in associated international spending, and diminished aid. Large numbers of internally displaced and of returning refugees, 2.3 million since 2015¹⁹, also place a burden on service delivery and increase competition for scarce supplies. The percentage of the population classified as poor grew from 33.7% in 2007-08 to 38.3% in 2011-12, and then up to 54.5% according to the most recent 2016-17 figures. Worsened economic circumstances led to increasing vulnerability and deterioration of welfare experienced across all income brackets and throughout the country. Even though inequality has declined as an effect of the proportionally greater impact of losses on the wealthiest, important differences remain in the distribution of income, and there are strong correlations between poverty and socio-economic characteristics and geographic areas.

The recently published first Afghanistan Multidimensional Poverty Index 2016-17 (A-MPI) is a combined measure of two aspects of poverty: headcount ratio and intensity²⁰. The MPI report indicates that 51.7% of people in Afghanistan are poor while 54.5% are income poor and 36.3%

¹⁸ Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) (2013) Afghanistan National Nutrition Survey

¹⁹ Central Statistics Organisation 2018

²⁰ The headcount ratio is the proportion of the population who are multidimensionally poor, while the intensity of poverty reflects the proportion of the weighted indicators in which, on average, multidimensionally poor people are deprived.

are poor by both measures²¹. Different policy solutions are required to tackle the various dimensions and forms of poverty, and markedly to support the 18% who are income poor but not multi-dimensionally poor, and the 16% who, vice versa, are multi-dimensionally poor, but do not suffer from lack of income. Improving the conditions of the former, for example, might involve increased access to economic opportunities or cash transfers, while for the latter a priority would be addressing deficiencies in services and infrastructures.

Vulnerability to poverty is also very high, as demonstrated by simulations indicating that a 30% reduction of income would lead to a poverty rate exceeding 80 per cent.²² Overall numbers mask an uneven distribution of poverty between geographical areas and population groups. There are, for instance, stark differences between rural areas, where poverty rates reach 61.1%, and urban areas where poverty is estimated at a much lower 18.1%, even as the number of urban poor has doubled since 2007²³. A case in point is also the dire circumstances of the nomadic Kuchis, one of the most vulnerable groups in Afghanistan, more than 89% of whom live in multidimensional poverty²⁴ (see also box 1). The A-MPI reported 80.2% and 85.5% poverty rates in Nooristan and Badghis respectively, as compared to Kabul where 14.7% of the population is poor. Poverty is highly correlated with lack of education and with certain occupations, and households deriving their main source of income from agriculture, livestock, or non-formal employment present high poverty rates of 65, 66 and 68 per cent respectively²⁵. Poverty also has a seasonal character, as evidenced by the much higher percentage of people classified as poor during the autumn and winter 2016/7, an effect of the increase in prices, and in particular of higher food prices, combined with the decline of income-generating opportunities and local availability of food in local markets during the winter months.

The Living Conditions Survey collected data on the frequency and intensity of household coping strategies, a common measure of vulnerability. Coping strategies can be classified according to their impact on households' livelihoods, on a scale going from "distress and crisis strategies" which may imply selling land, livestock and other main productive assets to "sustainable strategies" which do not deplete household assets, productive capacity and human capital. While one-quarter of households never felt the need to resort to mitigation measures, another quarter adopted more than once in the 12 months preceding the survey, the most frequent of which were decreasing expenditure, taking loans, and reducing the quality of their diet, with the Kuchi population also often selling reproductive livestock, and in a small but significant number of cases (2.5%) selling a child bride. 9 per cent of respondents had adopted the most damaging form of coping strategies one or more times during the past year, with the Kuchis employing them most often (26%). The significant erosion of these households' future capacity to withstand shocks and stresses and to bounce back in their aftermath is related to their specific livelihoods, particularly in the case of the livestock-dependent Kuchis, but also to the impact of the decades-long conflict, which has progressively undermined tangible and intangible assets of households and communities.

²¹ Not all MPI poor are poor in monetary terms. National Statistics and Information Authority (2019).

²² The World Bank 2018

²³ Central Statistics Organisation 2018

²⁴ On average the Kuchis are deprived in more than 56% of the MPI's weighted indicators, and their MPI is higher than in rural areas. This may however to some extent reflect the selected living standards indicators. NSIA 2019

²⁵ Central Statistics Organisation 2018

BOX 1: TWO MINORITY GROUPS IN AFGHANISTAN: THE KUCHI AND THE HAZARA²⁶

Kuchi, which means 'nomad' in Dari, are Pashtuns from southern and eastern Afghanistan and may be considered a social rather than ethnic grouping. Only a few thousands are still nomadic herders, while the majority have become farmers, have settled in cities or have emigrated. For centuries, Kuchis were the main traders in Afghanistan, connecting South Asia with the Middle East, exchanging tea, sugar, matches and other goods for wheat and vegetables with settled communities. They also acted as moneylenders and offered services in transportation along with additional labour at harvest time. Their livestock amounted to about 30 per cent of all the sheep and goat and most of the camels in the country, making an important contribution to the national economy.

Kuchis have been greatly affected by conflict, drought and demographic shifts: the traditional camel caravan became obsolete once road transportation companies were established; a wave of severe and prolonged droughts caused the death of up to 75% of their livestock, which was further decimated by bombing campaigns and landmines, and fighting often blocked their migratory routes. So despite their history and their traditional resources, the chronic state of instability in Afghanistan has left them among the poorest groups in the country. While the relation between settled communities and Kuchis was historically peaceful, real tensions commenced when the Kuchi's nomadic lifestyle was disrupted. Notably, during the Taliban regime, Kuchi nomads were encouraged to settle in Northwestern Afghanistan, an area traditionally occupied by Uzbeks and Tajiks.

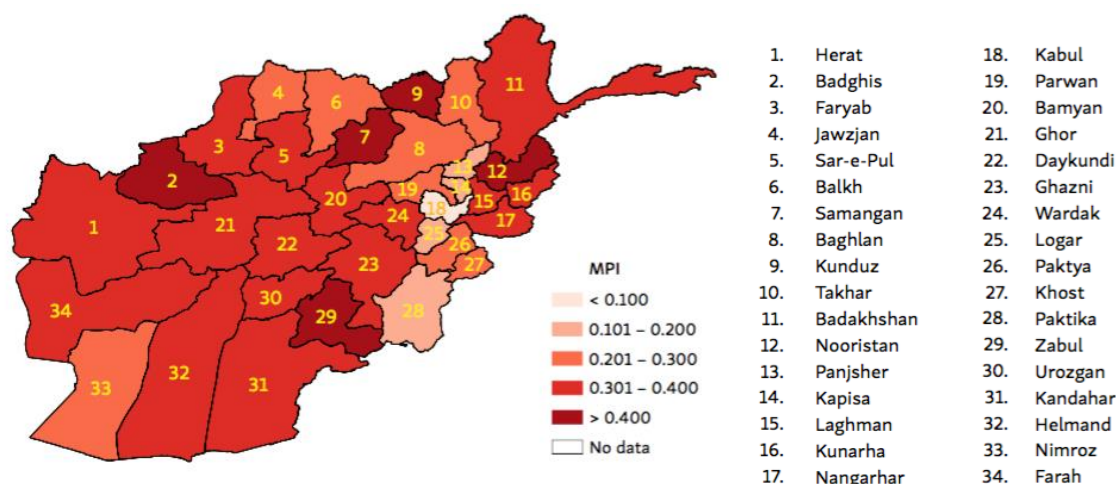
The lack of an overall policy regarding land tenure and pasture rights created prolonged and recurrent disputes over land and resources with settled populations, especially Hazaras, and the traditional system of pasture rights ended up being replaced by the power of the gun. Thus, although many Kuchis still hold century old documents indicating their rights to use pastures and parcels of land, their current value is undermined and their land rights not recognized by the government when handling disputes. Furthermore, since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Kuchis have been discriminated against on the basis of their perceived alignment with the former government.

Many have ended up in rudimentary IDP camps in the outskirts of big cities, or isolated in refugee camps in Pakistan. Sedentarization in precarious urban areas with no access to services or through the illegal occupation of pastures and intermittent and short-term humanitarian aid contribute to their further marginalization. Emerging social differentiation is creating a class of large and absent herd owners who are establishing new patronage mechanisms, and unregulated settlements may create further potential sources of conflict with settled farming communities²⁷. Thus, the real challenge is the creation of livelihood opportunities in Kuchi areas of origin, complemented by projects aiming at longer-term reintegration.

²⁶ World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous People: <https://minorityrights.org>

²⁷ Giustozzi, A. (2017), *Mapping nomad-farmer conflict in Afghanistan*, Kabul, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit.

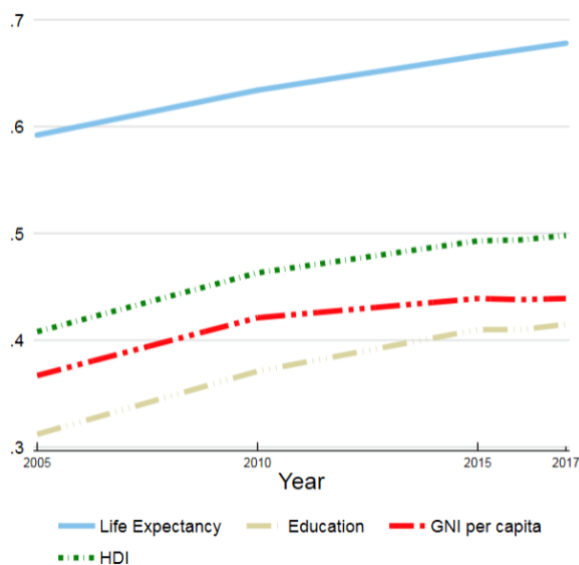
FIGURE 5: MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY INDEX



SOURCE: NSIA 2019

With a Human Development Index (HDI)²⁸ value of 0.498, Afghanistan ranked 168th out of 189 countries in 2017, placing it in the Low Human Development category. The ranking has increased by 22 per cent since 2005, though progress has been practically stagnant in the past three years.²⁹

FIGURE 6: HDI COMPONENT TRENDS 2005-2017



SOURCE: UNDP 2018

Afghan women score significantly lower than men on all three components of the HDI, with the overall female HDI measuring 0.364 compared to the male value of 0.583. The Gender Inequality Index (GII), developed to track gender-based inequality in three dimensions - reproductive health,

²⁸ The HDI is a summary measure for assessing long-term progress in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living.

²⁹ UNDP (2018), *Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 statistical update. Briefing note for countries on the 2018 Statistical Update: Afghanistan.*

empowerment, and economic activity³⁰ - ranks Afghanistan 153rd out of 160 countries in 2017. For example, only 11.4% of women reach secondary education as compared to 36.9% of men³¹, and female participation in the labour market is recorded at 19.5% against 86.7% of men according to the Afghanistan Living Condition Survey 2016-17.

FIGURE 7: COMPARISON BETWEEN FEMALE AND MALE HDI COMPONENTS FOR 2017

Life expectancy at birth		Expected years of schooling		Mean years of schooling		GNI per capita		HDI values	
Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
65.4	62.8	8.0	12.7	1.9	6.0	541	3,030	0.364	0.583

SOURCE: UNDP 2018

1.5. Food and nutrition security trends

Food and nutrition insecurity is a major concern in Afghanistan, as it is widely spread across population groups, though unevenly distributed in terms of its depth and quality. Overall 44.6%, or 13 million people, were found to be severe to moderately food insecure in 2016-17, 13.4% of whom were very severely food insecure. This represents a significant 11.6% increase, or 3.4 million more food insecure people, as compared to the 30% recorded in 2012-13, with the highest increase observed in rural areas (17.2%), while the variation was much smaller among the urban population (7.7%) and the Kuchis (6.7%).

The proportion of the rural population who is food insecure (46.2%) is greater than the urban one (42.1%), while the nomad and semi-nomad Kuchi, 32.9 per cent of whom are food insecure, are comparatively speaking better off, as their livestock-dependent livelihoods grant them access to nutritious food in stable conditions. The highest proportion of overall food insecure people, 60%, is reported in the Eastern region, followed by the North, North-East, and Central Highlands, all in the 50 to 55% range. The Eastern region also has the highest proportion of severely insecure among its population. According to the Integrated Food Security Classification (IPC), the most vulnerable and food-insecure districts in the autumn of 2018 were Badghis, Nooristan and Kandahar, classified as Phase 4 of the IPC scale, with Badakhshan projected to join them by the beginning of 2019³². The Food Security and Agriculture Cluster reported that approximately 87% of conflict-affected IDPs, 84% of returnees and 97% of refugees were severely food insecure, and so were 75% of those affected by natural disasters, including crop pest infestation and prolonged dry spell.

Particularly in irrigated areas, food insecurity is strongly correlated with agricultural seasonal calendars, which vary in the different regions according to the start and length of the pre-harvest lean season, and harvest and post-harvest periods, which in turn affect food availability and markets to different degrees across the country. Urban, rural, and nomadic and seminomadic Kuchi pastoral populations are affected differently by seasonality: the greatest variation in food insecurity is registered among the Kuchi, between the lean season (46.5%) and harvest (24.8%), which coincides with peak dairy production that is consumed by the household and sold in the

³⁰ Reproductive health is measured by maternal mortality and adolescent birth rates, empowerment is measured by the share of parliamentary seats held by women and attainment in secondary and higher education by each gender, and economic activity is measured by the labour market participation rate for women and men.

³¹UNDP (2018)

³² Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (2018)

market.

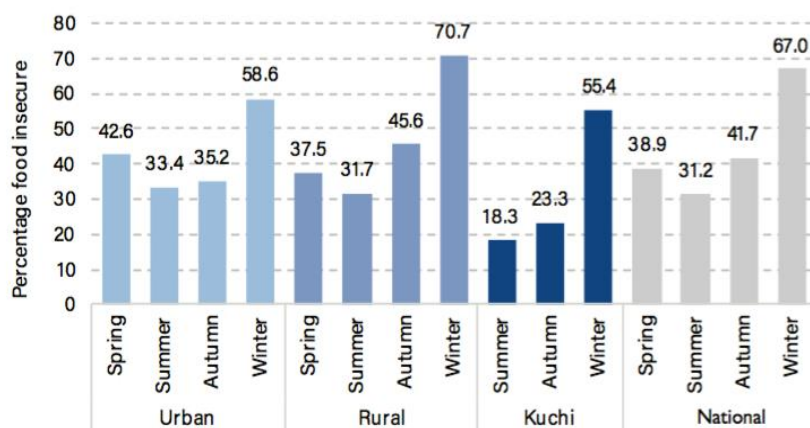


FIGURE 8:
PERCENTAGE OF
FOOD INSECURE
POPULATION BY
LIVELIHOODS AND
AGRICULTURAL
SEASON

SOURCE: ALCS 2016-17

Widespread malnutrition is a result of multiple immediate, basic and underlying causes, and has a relevant impact on human and economic development. Poor dietary diversity is an issue across the country, and the large majority of food-insecure people also face inadequate protein consumption across all population groups, though protein deficit is highest among the rural population, and lowest among the Kuchis. According to the 2013 National Nutrition Survey, malnutrition is more likely to occur in women who are illiterate, unmarried, and have not had access to at least primary education³³. Though declining food production is largely compensated by food imports, which ensure availability to cover market demand for food, Afghanistan still experiences a ‘nutrition gap’³⁴, estimated at 2 million tons in 2008, when food prices were high, and at 144, 000 tons in 2012.

The prevalence of stunting in children under-5 was 40.9% in 2013, and has been constantly declining from the high 60.5% recorded in 2004³⁵. However, large differences were registered in chronic malnutrition among children across the country, with the lowest proportion in Ghazni, 24.3%, and the highest in Farah and Nuristan, where it reached 70.8% and 63.3% respectively. This alarming percentage of stunted children aged 0-59 months can be attributed to low food security in these provinces³⁶. Wasting is estimated at around 9.5%, with the prevalence of moderate and severe wasting at 5.5% and 4% respectively. There is a strong correlation between stunting and wasting and wealth index quintiles, with children in the poorest households most likely to be affected by both.

The situation in more vulnerable geographical areas remains alarming. Wasting rates among children below one are extremely high particularly in some of the poorest and most drought-stressed provinces. Other causal factors of wasting can be traced to maternal health and care practices, early and frequent pregnancies, maternal anaemia and sub-optimal breastfeeding and care practices. Similarly, infant and young child feeding practices are vastly inadequate throughout the country, with only 41% of children exclusively breastfed, contributing to a high prevalence of child undernutrition³⁷.

³³ FAO 2018

³⁴ The ‘nutrition gap’ is an expression of insufficient access to food for parts of the population, and is calculated as the difference between total available food for consumption and the amount of food needed in the country to support a 2,100-per capita caloric intake

³⁵ Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) (2013)

³⁶ MoPH (2015), National Public Nutrition Policy and Strategy, Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

³⁷ Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Strategic Plan (2019-2023)

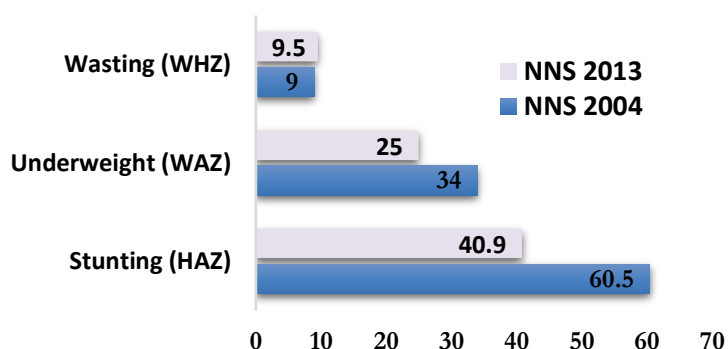


FIGURE 9: NUTRITION INDICATORS 2004-2013 FOR CHILDREN UNDER 5

SOURCE: NSS

Micronutrient deficiencies are also high among pre-school children and among women of reproductive age (15-49) and adolescent girls, in particular iron-deficiency, anaemia and Vitamin A deficiency. Figure 9 below shows mostly improving trends on these indicators over the years, though in 2013 9.2% of women were still undernourished, 41% were iodine deficient and 40% suffered from anaemia (substantially more than during the previous survey round). Lack of food, poor care and feeding practices and limited access to healthcare are the key contributing factors to under-nutrition of these groups.

FIGURE 10: NUTRITION INDICATORS 2004-2013

Indicator ³⁸	2004	2013
Undernourishment (women) BMI<18.5	20.9%	9.2%
Anaemia (women)	24.7%	40%
Iron Deficiency (women)	48.4%	24%
Iodine Deficiency (women)	75%	40%
Iodine Deficiency (children)	72%	30%
Number of health facilities providing care for SAM	17%	40%

SOURCE: NSS 2004 AND 2013

More than 70% of households nationally, and close to 90% of urban ones, purchase wheat flour, the vast majority of which is imported, but not fortified. Similarly, nearly all Afghan households purchase industrially produced vegetable oil and ghee, of which more than 90% is imported, and none is fortified yet, though efforts are underway to require fortification of these staple food ingredients with vitamins A and D.

1.6 Key drivers of food insecurity and malnutrition in Afghanistan

Lack of economic access and obstacles to utilization persist as the major factors limiting household-level food security, particularly for poor segments of the population and those living in remote rural areas, including the nomadic pastoral Kuchi population. While high levels of poverty, unemployment, lack of quality education and low-quality infrastructures are key issues limiting access to food, poor food utilization is determined by difficulty in accessing diverse food, in-existent food quality controls, weak health services, unsafe drinking water and inadequate sanitation. A range of factors negatively affecting levels of agricultural productivity constitute indirect causes of food insecurity, such as post-harvest losses, limited agricultural services, lack of access and ownership of productive resources, weak research and development, weak irrigation

³⁸ Data for women of reproductive age (15-49 years old) and children under five.

systems. Fluctuations in food prices, transport and access to markets also play an important role in determining access to food for Afghans. As mentioned above, Afghan women suffer from high levels of malnutrition. Beside individually affecting women's food insecurity and having an impact on their offspring's wellbeing, the cultural and social barriers restricting women's social status within Afghan society and their lack of access to productive resources and services also undermine their potential to contribute to household and community efforts to contain a further deterioration of the food security crisis³⁹.

Among the multiple underlying causes of food and nutrition insecurity, the first and most obvious is the on-going protracted and complex conflict and its many effects on the Afghan economic, political and social environment. Other factors such as the huge numbers of refugees, returnees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) in the country, the dysfunctional land ownership system and governance of tenure, the effects of climate change and natural disasters, and the degradation of natural resources interact with the conflict and with each other, creating negative feedback loops and vicious circles increasingly trapping sections of the Afghan population in a state of permanent vulnerability and food and nutrition insecurity. Such interconnectedness of factors affecting people's livelihoods, and the need to integrate short, medium and long term responses for risk reduction and inclusive and sustainable change are the rationale behind the new way of working known as the triple Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (see annexe 1), which is very relevant to the Afghan context.

1.6.1 PROTRACTED CONFLICT

In the last forty years, Afghanistan has been experiencing a complex conflict which has destabilized the socio-economic situation in the country, generated millions of internally displaced people and refugees, limited governance capacities, causing inward migration to urban areas, increased corruption and human rights violation, huge destruction of infrastructure and loss of livelihood opportunities, ultimately resulting in widespread hunger and hindering the provision of assistance and services⁴⁰. Wheat production has been steadily declining in the past five years as a result of climatic factors and violence, with an impact both on availability and access to food. The conflict has directly contributed to the deterioration of the national economy and the continued decrease in private investments. The worsening security situation has had a significant impact on Afghans' ability to maintain their livelihoods, creating barriers to accessing markets, fields and rangeland for farming and grazing land, or to engaging in temporary migratory labour⁴¹. UNAMA reports that women and children are disproportionately impacted by the conflict. Armed violence exacerbates inequalities and discriminatory practices against women. In the first half of 2019 children continue to comprise the vast majority of casualties from explosive remnants of war, are particularly exposed to attacks on hospitals and, increasingly, schools, and vulnerable to recruitment and use by parties to the conflict⁴².

A further effect of the deteriorating humanitarian space is the increasing attacks on aid workers, affecting their capacity to reach vulnerable people especially in remote areas and further exposing an already food insecure sector of the population. Attacks on medical facilities are yet another effect of widespread violence and an almost daily occurrence in Afghanistan, hindering food insecurity and famine prevention measures, such as the distribution of supplements and treatment of child malnutrition. Overall insecurity also undermines attempts to develop a long-

³⁹ FAO 2019

⁴⁰ OCHA (2017)

⁴¹ FAO (2019), *Afghanistan Emergency Livelihoods Response Plan 2019*, Rome.

⁴² UNAMA (2019), Update on the protection of civilians in armed conflict: 1 January to 30 June 2019.

term solution to recurrent droughts and erodes household and institutional capacities to cope with hazards and risks⁴³. As noted by the *Afghanistan Zero Hunger Review*, which identified challenges driving food insecurity and under-nutrition: “each of these drivers has a two-way relationship with hunger and interactions between themselves. For example, recent studies suggest that hunger is not only caused by conflict, but can significantly contribute to and exacerbate tensions.⁴⁴”

Lastly, the security situation limits the capacity of government institutions to operate throughout the country, collect data, and overall to decentralise its structures and activities. This has severely limited the design and implementation of food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture policies and strategies.

1.6.2 INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPS) AND RETURNEES;

Political instability, deepening poverty and growing food insecurity, increasing natural disasters compounded with the country’s fragile security situation have forced a huge number of Afghans to leave their hometown throughout the years, travelling both within the country and abroad. After the Syrians, Afghans are the largest refugee population in the world, and together with the Palestinians, the displacement of Afghans constitutes the most protracted refugee crisis⁴⁵. Large-scale attacks by NSAG have created substantial forced population movements over the years. The drive to ensure the physical safety of household members and access productive occupation through internal migration has resulted in an extra strain on the overall food security situation, both for displaced populations and host communities.

Internal displacement overwhelmingly results in increased vulnerability and food insecurity both on the short and long term, as livelihoods are continuously eroded and households are forced to adopt harmful coping strategies such as reducing food intake or relying on child labour, which often combines with a pre-existing condition of poverty, reduced access to informal safety nets, lack of documentation and loss of land and assets⁴⁶.

The improvement of IDPs’ food and nutrition security situation, particularly of those displaced by conflict and economic slowdown, and the possibility for them of establishing a more secure and sustainable livelihood basis in the future, mainly depends on whether after the elections the new government will focus on priority programs and policies addressing factors related to housing, education, governance, corruption and social protection.

1.6.3 LAND OWNERSHIP AND TENURE GOVERNANCE

Land rights in Afghanistan are characterized by overlapping and conflicting legal frameworks, including informal systems and civil, traditional and state laws, unclear definition of boundaries, and significant variations in regional land tenure patterns. Such unsettled state of affairs and the instrumental use made by different actors of contradictory legal frameworks, in parallel with the breakdown of traditional land management practices, have resulted in unsustainable use of

⁴³ A recent joint FAO/WFP report on food security in conflict situations summarises the multiple links between food insecurity and armed violence. FAO/WFP (2019), Monitoring food security in countries with conflict situations. A joint FAO/WFP update for the United Nations Security Council, Issue n.5, Rome.

⁴⁴ The six broad challenges identified in the WFP report are protracted conflict, climate change and natural disasters, demographic shifts, gender disparities, limited job opportunities, and transparency and accountability concerns. WFP (2017), *Afghanistan Zero Hunger Strategic Review*.

⁴⁵ World Bank 2018

⁴⁶ OCHA 2017.

pasture and poor land management. This has hindered private-sector investment, stunted economic growth⁴⁷, and made disputes over access to land and water involving State and non-State actors one of the key drivers of conflict, fostering criminal violence⁴⁸. Traditional systems of conflict resolution over resources have been destabilized by pressure on land created by displacement, resettlement, population growth and urbanization. On the other hand, widespread and chronic conflicts over land have been a sign of the weak administrative capacity of the central government, in whose absence other actors control land through intimidation, force, and customary legal regimes that reflect deeply entrenched power structures⁴⁹. Efficient use of land resources, particularly in the agriculture sector should be re-established to address food insecurity and poverty and to encourage private sector investments.

Disputes over land tenure and ownership often influence the livelihoods and food security of various sectors of the population, including IDPs and returnees, pastoralist and farming communities, rural inhabitants involved in poppy cultivation, and women:

- The property of millions of families who fled their homes have often been occupied or bought and sold in their absence. When these families tried to return, local disputes ensued between IDPs and returnee refugees and settled population, tied to conflicting claims over appropriation and allocation of land by the government. The lack of tenure rights compounds these groups' vulnerability, both when returning to their home place and when settling in a new area, where they usually do not have legal access to land. Insecure tenure limits returnees' and IDPs' potential to establish themselves, rebuilding their livelihoods, and investing in the future.
- Conflicts between farmers and pastoralist groups over pastures and grazing rights have historically been rampant in Afghanistan, particularly in the central highlands between nomadic Kuchi and settled Hazara, a relationship, which became more strained after the Kuchi retained their pasture rights during the Taliban regime, at the expense of the Hazara, who viewed them as allies of the Taliban. The expansion of urban settlements has inflated the value of grassland previously used by Kuchis and created an incentive for others to try to establish ownership over it. Ultimately, disputes over land tenure represent a conflict over shrinking resources to be divided among a growing population that would be difficult to avoid even if the communities were empowered to decide how to exploit the pastures⁵⁰. The instrumental use of the conflict by political parties mobilizing their constituencies to their political advantage does not solve the concrete problem of how to share scarce resources, of how to solve the 'opaque' status of the rangelands, or of the need to mediate the conflict, establish a commonly accepted system of property and usage rights, and enforce it⁵¹.
- Various studies have shown a strong link between opium production and the tenure system in Afghanistan, as opium is used in some areas as in-kind payment for leases by indebted leasehold and landowning farmers, who grow poppy to regain mortgaged lands and pay off debt.
- Afghanistan's constitution and its civil code, as well Sharia law, all recognize women's housing, land and property rights, but prevailing customary law and discriminatory

⁴⁷ Giampaoli, P. and Aggarwal, S. (2010), *Land tenure and property rights in Afghanistan: Do LTPR conflicts and grievances foster support for the Taliban?*, Property rights and resource governance briefing paper 5, USAID.

⁴⁸ Land Governance for Equitable and Sustainable Development (LANDac) (2016), *Food Security and Land Governance Factsheet*, Utrecht, International Development Studies.

⁴⁹ Giampaoli, P. and Aggarwal, S. (2010)

⁵⁰ (LANDac) (2016)

⁵¹ Giustozzi, A. (2017).

cultural norms and practices do not, making women more vulnerable to poverty, domestic violence, hunger and homelessness. For many women security of tenure is achieved through their relationship with a man, via inheritance or dowry, and as such susceptible to being lost if the relationship changes either through divorce or death. Women, particularly uneducated and illiterate women in remote areas, maybe pressured into waiving their formal rights or they are often unaware of them. Scarce arable land is a source of prestige and power in Afghanistan, and the difficulty that women have in accessing it limits their economic empowerment and the freedom to make decisions and provide for themselves and their families. The traditional justice system suffers from extremely discriminatory interpretations of laws, the prohibition of women's participation and high susceptibility to local power-holders, while the statutory justice system is scarcely present throughout the country, lacks trained judges and lawyers and suffers from corruption, delays, a failure to implement decisions, and discriminatory attitudes and practices amongst the judiciary.⁵²

The Government of Afghanistan is finalising a policy framework to improve access to land and adequate housing of vulnerable returnees and IDPs. The framework allows the allocation of land to the disabled, widowed, families with no male household head, the elderly and the chronically ill, returnees and IDPs (based on dependency ratio and other criteria). As per the Constitution of Afghanistan, it ensures women's right to own land, provided the woman is the head of the household. It is critical to continue completing and clarifying the legal framework for land in Afghanistan, as important services such as land survey, land registration and geodetic services require new laws and regulations, an effort that would be consistent with Afghanistan's goal of establishing a comprehensive Land Code, and would also go a long way towards greater gender equality, with a considerable indirect impact on their own and their families' food and nutrition security.

1.6.4 CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURAL DISASTERS

A rapid assessment by the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster highlighted that 20 Afghan provinces were expecting severely diminished harvests over the course of the summer following the 2018 drought⁵³. The drought also had an indirect but drastic impact on animal health due to decreased fodder, leading to distress sale of animals, which in turn drove down meat prices, decreasing profits for livestock owners. In spring 2018, almost 2.2 million people were estimated to be chronically food insecure, 1.4 million of which at risk of acute food insecurity.

This is just the most recent example of the consequences of Afghanistan's intrinsic environmental vulnerability: an arid climate, mountainous terrain, fragile ecosystems and its position over a fault line all make the country highly susceptible to a host of disasters, ranging from flash floods to droughts, landslides, heavy snowfall, avalanches and earthquakes. The country's exposure to environmental shocks exacerbates its vulnerability to climate change, something that will increasingly affect agriculture and hunger in rural communities in the coming decades. Though contributing to only 0.06 per cent of world greenhouse gas emissions, Afghanistan ranked among the top five countries with climate change vulnerabilities according to the Global Climate Index⁵⁴, and is projected to rank 8th out of 170 for its vulnerability to climate change in the coming 30

⁵² Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) (2014), Strengthening Displaced Women's Housing, Land and Property Rights in Afghanistan

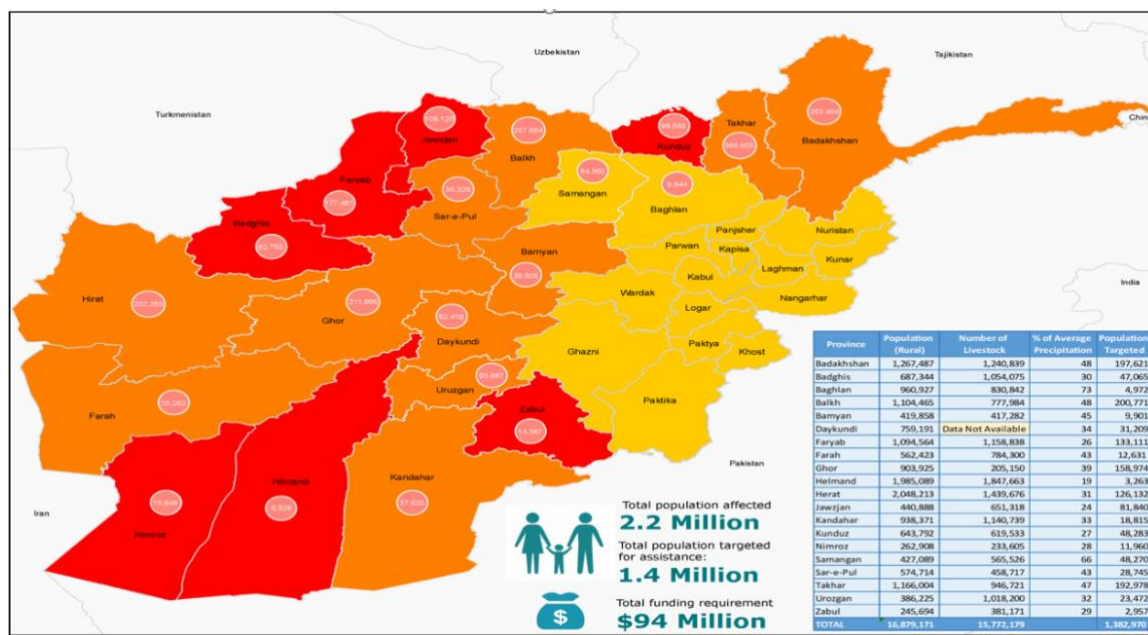
⁵³ Food Security and Agriculture Cluster (2018), Rapid Assessment of the 2018 Winter Dry Spell in Afghanistan

⁵⁴ Germanwatch (2019), Global Climate Risk Index.

years. This forecast, if realised, will make any social gains difficult to sustain and will have a considerable impact on food security and vulnerable livelihoods.

In particular, decreasing availability of water due to droughts, depletion of natural resources, rising temperatures and erratic weather patterns causes an overall decline in agricultural productivity per farmer. This affects both underlying factors of food security directly linked to climate conditions: local agricultural production, and household income. The two are correlated, considering that in rural areas income is mostly derived from the sale of agricultural products for landowners, or farm wages for agricultural labourers⁵⁵, and that in rural areas 80 per cent of the most food-insecure households are dependent on markets for food⁵⁶.

FIGURE 11: DROUGHT MAP BASED ON SEASONAL CUMULATIVE PRECIPITATION - 10 APRIL 2018



SOURCE: FOOD SECURITY AND AGRICULTURE CLUSTER

In many ways, climate change is also linked to the protracted Afghan conflict, and their combined effects increase the country’s vulnerability to shocks: for example, conflict has restricted the mobility of the nomadic population, limiting its ability to adapt migration routes; for many years hostilities have diverted resources and national and international focus from mitigation and adaptation efforts; drought impacts on future water needs could heighten regional tensions considering the country’s high dependency on trans-boundary watersheds; competition over scarce productive rangelands has increased; and extreme climatic events have led to increased opium poppy production, despite efforts at eradication⁵⁷. In general, by straining social and economic systems, climate change is a threat multiplier, exacerbating existing conflicts and potentially turning hazardous situations into full-blown disasters and, on the medium to long term, destabilising the political scene.

⁵⁵ National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA), World Food Programme (WFP) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (2016) *Climate Change in Afghanistan: what does it mean for rural livelihoods and food security?*

⁵⁶ However a longitudinal panel survey studying rural Afghan livelihoods trajectories over 2002-2016 found that most households from villages in different parts of the country and with distinctive economic and institutional structures were involved in a combination of farm and off-farm economic activities. Pain, A. and Huot, D. (2017) *Life in the times of ‘late development’: Livelihood trajectories in Afghanistan, 2016-2002*, London, ODI

⁵⁷ USAID (2016), *Climate change risk profile: Afghanistan*.

1.6.5 DEGRADATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Afghanistan is rich in natural resources⁵⁸ and, with more than 3,000 endemic plants, one of the most bio-diverse countries in the world. However, conflict, climate change, natural hazards, demographic pressure, poor natural resource management and weak public institutions all combine to erode the country's natural resource base, with considerable and multiple negative impacts on livelihoods and food security, particularly for the poorest sectors of the Afghan population who depend on them and are most vulnerable to their degradation.

Agricultural land, which tends to be overused, is further stressed through mismanagement caused by lack of state control and prolonged degradation of the countryside throughout the decades-long conflict, during which trees, shrubbery and natural soil embankments were torn away. Severely depleted land thus became unable to withhold water, which in turn provoked further erosion of the topsoil, increasing farmers' vulnerability to climate change and weakening their ability to produce food. Side effects of soil depletion are: 1) increased flooding, e.g. post drought El Niño induced flash floods and landslides; 2) expanding opium poppy cultivation; 3) increasing spread and severity of food insecurity, driving rural population towards alternative livelihood options, and particularly towards seasonal or more long-term migration from previously viable agricultural lands in search of labour in neighbouring areas, urban centres, or abroad.

Climate change-induced accelerated snowmelt can cause variations in wildlife habitats, vegetation cover and associated grazing patterns, while melting off the Pamir/Hindu Kush glaciers provokes agro-ecological changes mostly affecting subsistence farmers and pastoralists who depend on natural resources for their livelihoods. These are often the poorest, such as flood-affected smallholders or landless living on marginal lands in areas of irrigated agriculture in Southern Afghanistan⁵⁹. Climate change impacts are exacerbated by pre-existing water scarcity in much of the country: though Afghanistan is not a water-poor country, its water resources are unevenly distributed mainly in the upper reaches of the river basins in the highlands.

A different plight is that of the Afghan forests, which were cut down over decades of fighting. Wood is the main source of household energy, also considering that gas is not subsidised, and as households faced growing poverty and their options in terms of income-generating activities were reduced, local communities, with scarce awareness of the damages caused, resorted to the illegal timber trade. The protection of forests was not a priority for the government at the time, and by 2013, half the Afghan forests had disappeared. In the areas on the border with Pakistan, over which the Afghan government has little control, plentiful quality wood is illegally sold across the border, providing an easy albeit increasingly unsustainable source of income for the local population⁶⁰. In general, the growing depletion and impoverishment of the natural resource base heighten competition and tensions within and among communities, triggering hostilities and potentially violent confrontations, which in turn, as mentioned, have a destructive effect on the environment, fuelling a negative feedback loop, which is hard to break. Finally, a lack of knowledge within communities around natural resource protection amounts to alarmingly high rates of environmental degradation, in the face of absence of law enforcement or policies.

⁵⁸ Afghanistan has 1.7 million hectares of forest (covering 2.63% of the total surface) and 30.1 million hectares of rangelands (covering 46.84% of the total surface) MAIL (2012) Land Cover Atlas Of The Islamic Republic Of Afghanistan, p.16

⁵⁹ NEPA WFP UNEP 2016.

⁶⁰ Agnieszka Pikulicka-Wilczewska, "We're in Crisis: the high price of deforestation in Afghanistan", Al Jazeera, 4 July 2019.

1.7 Political economy

While the Government of Afghanistan has taken a further step to improve food and nutrition security in the country by launching the Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda (AFSeN) and the Scaling up Nutrition (SUN) Movement in 2017, further efforts are needed towards more inclusive governance of food security and nutrition at all levels e.g. in the allocation of resources, designing and implementing policy and regulatory frameworks, and mechanisms to ensure accountability. Given the condition of food and nutrition insecurity in the country, the problem has not been receiving the attention it deserves from the government and other stakeholders, partly because it has been overshadowed by huge humanitarian needs and what have been considered other priorities, such as the security situation. However, the establishment of AFSeN and SUN are also a testament to the will of some champions within government and a number of international actors, FAO, WFP, UNICEF, the EU and the World Bank foremost, to further the food and nutrition security agenda. Though there is widespread recognition on the part of many, including the World Bank, that addressing poverty, hunger, malnutrition, and vulnerability reduction should presently be a priority in Afghanistan, MAIL's overarching strategic direction in designing policies does not take these objectives sufficiently into account. Instead, the present shift in focus of donor and government-led agricultural initiatives towards value chain development, if exclusively aimed at income generation and production, risks deflecting from this all-important aim. Public participation and institutional coordination remain a challenge in shaping appropriate policies to address food insecurity and malnutrition in Afghanistan.

1.8 Progress in addressing SDG2

The Government of Afghanistan is fully involved in setting targets and in the operationalization of SDGs and is engaged in ensuring that Food and Nutrition Security and Agriculture are mainstreamed within the National SDG Debate⁶¹.

Over the last two years, the GOIRA, supported by UN agencies and development partners, has shown a commitment to addressing the issue of food and nutrition insecurity through: (i) the nationalization of SDG targets, which were streamlined and integrated into national policies. In particular, concerning SDG2, by developing a unified framework to undertake multi-sectoral actions to improve nutrition, ensure food security and sustainable agriculture; (ii) joining the SUN movement and launching the AFSeN platform, which contributes directly to SDG1, SDG2 and SDG 17; (iii) alignment of the SDGs to the overarching national policy framework, notably the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) and the 10 National Priority Programs (NPPs), and with the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework.

In terms of political will and decision-making, the High Council of Ministers oversees and supervises the localisation, alignment and implementation process of the SDGs in the country, while an Executive Committee on the SDGs has been established within the Office of the Chief Executive with the core task of ensuring government support is provided to the Ministry of Economy as well as policy advice on proposed SDGs implementation mechanisms, cross-sectorial coordination to accelerate SDGs implementation, oversight of the achievement and progress of localized SDGs targets and indicators, issuing of recommendations and practical solutions to the Economic Committee of the Council of Ministers.

⁶¹ Information retrieved from Afghanistan – Sustainable Development Goals website: <http://sdgs.gov.af>

Given Afghanistan's intention to nationalize the SDGs based on its national priorities and its budgeting process, composed of eight budgetary sectors, and with a view to streamlining the coordination process in the context sectors, four sectoral Technical Working Groups have been designed aggregating the eight sectors to mainstream the coordination process within the Executive Committee ⁶². The groups are comprised of representatives from leading sectoral agencies and different relevant stakeholders. They work on data collection, data verification, preparing progress reports and A-SDGs national documentation. The GOIRA authored a Voluntary National Review, focused on SDG 1 and 2, highlighting the importance of food and agriculture in SDGs discussions at the country level and globally, and submitted the document at the June 2017 High Level Political Forum held at UNHQ in New York, and the Expert Group Meeting on progress in achieving SDG 2 and setting targets and indicators for various SDGs.

⁶² The eight budgetary sectors are Security, Good Governance, Agriculture, Rural Development, Economic Growth, Infrastructure, Health, Education and Social Protection; the four technical working groups are Security and Good Governance; Agriculture and Rural Development; Health, Education, Environment and Social Protection; Economic Growth and Infrastructure.

2. POLICIES AND STRATEGIES ADDRESSING FOOD INSECURITY, MALNUTRITION AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Is the current set of policies and strategies sufficiently focused and well-designed to adequately address these immediate and underlying causes of food insecurity and malnutrition in the most impactful way both at a national scale and at the level of specific socio-economic groups, geographic areas, agro-ecological zones and/or administrative areas that are facing “stubborn” or more “pervasive” problems of food insecurity and malnutrition?

In Afghanistan, food and agriculture policies can dramatically influence livelihoods, and their outcomes are potentially very significant for economic growth and, more indirectly, politics. Since its establishment in 2014, the National Unity Government has had to contend with weakened institutions and severe social and ethnic rifts caused by the protracted conflict, which have resulted in political hiring, ethnic strife, and corruption in major sectors like banking, public services, procurement, defense and civil services. The divide these created within the government, both horizontally at central, provincial and district level, and vertically between ministries and departments, has had multiple and relevant effects on the ways policies have been designed and implemented.

The drive behind the Government of Afghanistan’s current strategic framework and related sectoral policies cannot be fully understood without taking into account the decades-long conflict, its multiple ramifications and particularly its effects on governance. The country’s ongoing transition process has been punctuated by international conferences where the mutual commitment was expressed between the Afghan government and the international community to work together towards peace, stability, democracy and economic independence. A roadmap was established to this effect, and 2015-2024 was declared the “Transformation Decade”. Various issues have prompted the engagement of all actors in the transition, including the need to ensure gradual ownership of the political process and of the development agenda on behalf of the Government, international actors’ fatigue and difficulty in justifying the continuing investment in the country to their constituencies, and national and international security concerns, also considering Afghanistan’s strategic geopolitical situation.

As part of the transition process, in 2012, 22 National Priority Programs (NPP) were presented under the government’s previous planning document, the Afghanistan National Development Strategy 2008-2013, to prioritize sector strategies and develop a more focused approach, overcoming the previous fragmentation due to lack of coordination within and between Ministries and with donors. The NPPs were grouped into 6 clusters, of which Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) reflected MAIL’s priorities in two programs covering 2012-14: ARD NPP1, dealing with water, irrigation and natural resources, and ARD NPP2, “Food For Life”, framing broader agricultural priorities in production, market

BOX 2: GOIRA POLICIES FOCUS OF THIS ANALYSIS:

- Comprehensive Agriculture Development – National Priority Programme (2016-2020)
- Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda (2014-2017) – MAIL
- Food and Nutrition Strategy (2105-2019) - MAIL
- National Public Nutrition Policy and Strategy (2015-2020) – MoPH

Other policies of interest:

- Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (2017-2021)
- The Citizen Charter – National Priority Programme
- National Strategy on Women in Agriculture (2015-2020) MAIL

development and food security. With the adoption of the current planning document, the NPPs were later reduced to 10.

Accountability mechanisms accompany the reform process, the most recent being the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework (GMAF), established in November 2018 to monitor concrete reform deliverables, encouraging continuing donor support and ensuring accountability to the respective national constituencies⁶³. The GMAF aligns to the Afghan policy framework, the ANPDF, and its 10 National Priority Programmes, guiding the government and the international community's reform activities, in pursuit of the country's increased self-reliance by the end of the Transformation Decade, in 2024.

It is within this framework that, working towards self-reliance and in order to attract investment, the Government of Afghanistan stresses the need for a reform agenda and pro-growth macroeconomic policies. The government is also at least nominally committed to the economic empowerment of women, which could significantly contribute to the country's socio-economic development through small businesses in the agriculture sector, increasing productivity and reducing household poverty. The *Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework - ANPDF (2017-2021)* is the GOIRA's current five-year strategic plan to achieve self-reliance, promote sustainable job creation, and support Afghanistan's progress towards achieving the SDGs. It focuses on creating jobs, increasing agricultural yields and opening markets for farmers through various investment programs. A few of those relevant to the agricultural sector are mentioned in Annex 3.

MAIL's main strategic document for agriculture, the Comprehensive Agriculture Development – National Priority Programme (CAD NPP) 2016-2020⁶⁴, was developed before the present strategic planning framework, but has been incorporated as one of its current NPPs, and is one of only five actually at the initial stages of implementation. Other Government strategic documents relevant to the present analysis include the Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda (AFSeN) 2018-2023, MAIL's Food Security and Nutrition (FSN) Strategy 2015-2019 and the MoPH's National Public Nutrition Strategy 2015-2020 the latter two also predating the ANDF. Other policies relevant to the subject of the present report are the Citizen Charter – NPP and MAIL's National Strategy on Women in Agriculture 2015-2020.

2.1 Comprehensive Agriculture Development – National Programme Priority 2016-2020

MAIL's *Comprehensive Agriculture Development - National Programme Priority 2016-2020* was developed through a wide consultative process involving all MAIL sectoral directorates, other ministries, including MoF and MoWA, and both development and humanitarian partners. The thorough situation analysis on which the programme is premised, based on data and statistics, stresses how MAIL has emphasised structure up to now, focusing excessively at the centre, while the provincial level suffered from insufficient technical and enforcement capacities, limiting extension services' potential to reach out. The analysis also draws attention to MAIL's dependency on donor assistance, which is found to be generally uncoordinated and ad hoc.

CAD NPP aims to create an enabling environment to produce a surplus, raising productivity and household incomes in rural areas, developing an agro-industry triggering import substitution, and

⁶³ A list of the principles guiding the relationship between the Afghan Government and the international community under the GMAF is provided in Annex 2.

⁶⁴ At the Brussels Conference in 2016, the Government of Afghanistan made a call to re-invigorate the country's economy, empower Afghan institutions and people, with the target of reaching 6 per cent GDP growth by 2020, with a major contribution from Agriculture. Eleven thematic National Priority Programs (NPPs), among which the CAD and the FSN Strategy, were approved to guide ministries to address problems through inter-ministerial coordination, shared resources and investments, ensuring geographical and ethnic balance.

generating revenue through increased exports, all the while shifting from the previous institutional focus towards a more farmer-centric one, both in programmatic and organisational terms. Farmers' Learning and Resource Centres (FLRC) are instruments to be employed at province and district levels to achieve this overall underlying aim and work in a more needs-based and demand-driven fashion. As part of this effort, a call centre has been recently established within MAIL in Kabul, to provide direct assistance based on farmers' enquiries and needs.

The framework follows the World Bank's 2014 Agricultural Sector Review recommendations to adopt a two-pillar strategy: 1) boosting intensive agriculture by prioritizing Value Chains and 2) addressing extensive agriculture by responding to the needs of the rural poor. To reach the first goal the CAD-NPP targets medium to large farm holders, organizing them to create economies of scale in view of increasing production. The Agribusiness Charter is the sub-sector strategy guiding programming and public and private sector investments in agribusiness to ensure concentrated support to the highest potential geographies and value chains to improve productivity and competitiveness of Afghan products domestically and abroad. It focuses on the commercial development of value chains, from production through to processing and marketing. The second goal, on the other hand, should be realised by supporting subsistence farmers, including landless households, and Kuchi animal herders, through complementary services and a safety net delivered through the Citizen's Charter under MRRD. Coordination between MRRD and MAIL to this aim, however, does not appear to have even been initiated yet. A cursory reference is made to the fact that "both strategies require addressing issues such as legal land ownership, pasture and rangeland management; rights of passage, access to water resources, provision of agricultural inputs; conflict resolution mechanisms", among others. Further details on how these issues should be addressed and linked to MAIL's activities would have been necessary, since, as mentioned in Chapter 1 of this report, most are a precondition to sustainable and equitable agriculture sector development and overall growth in Afghanistan.

The CAD NPP's seven strategic priorities⁶⁵ address key institutional and sectoral aspects, as well as improved service delivery, food security, and greater productivity to increase national revenue. In November 2018, while preparing for the Geneva International Conference on Afghanistan, the Government drafted implementation plans for the NPPs, ranking the CAD priority areas and assigning key deliverables, activities and responsibilities to each⁶⁶. However, since then a few steps were taken to realise the programme, and for now the plan remains a donor-driven exercise.

MAIL intends to provide technical assistance and support to marketing efforts in promoting medicinal and industrial crops such as saffron, liquorice, pistachios, turmeric, pine nuts, ferula and an array of valuable medicinal crops. Along with this value chain improvement, increased export potential, improved irrigation systems, investment in better storage, reliable farm to market infrastructure and other potential areas of focus are envisaged to bring significant investment in the coming years, contributing to achieving SDG 10 targets.

The CAD-NPP highlights that by adding 360,000 ha of horticultural land, it is estimated that more than 360,000 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs will be generated by 2024, when the horticulture sector alone is projected to contribute \$3.23 billion compared to the \$1.4 billion in 2012. Similarly, milk yield is expected to increase to 1,200 litres/cow from the existing 400 litres/cow. Whilst the overall expansion of livestock is primarily focused on poverty alleviation interventions, the sector is projected to produce 604,000 new FTE and double poultry production resulting in a further \$274 million contribution to National GDP. This includes increased opportunities for exporting national products to neighbouring countries.

The planned restructuring of MAIL is an essential component of the CAD-NPP, as also pointed out

⁶⁵ See annex 4 for the full list

⁶⁶ Ranking was the following: 1. Improving irrigation systems 2. Enhancing food security and livelihoods of the most vulnerable, 3. Accelerating agribusiness, and 4. Sustainable management of natural resources.

by different people interviewed for this analysis, who clearly expressed the view that decentralisation and institutional and organisational change were urgent to make the Ministry fit for purpose. The plan envisaged in the CAD framework entails a thorough restructuring, including reducing and re-profiling departments at the central level within two years, and reforming MAIL's organisation at provincial and district level, the latter to become the cornerstone of decentralised bottom-up planning. In view of the importance of information gathering and management for planning, MAIL envisages introducing a new system to gather information and data, starting with farmers through extension services at the district level and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and other means, employing it to inform planning. The document outlines the required implementation mechanism at central, provincial and district level, and envisages a restructuring of the M&E department to carry out periodic evaluations and impact assessments and ensure regular monitoring.

The CAD makes an explicit link to SDG1 through strategic priorities 5, 6, and 7, and SDG2 through priorities 3 and 4. Notwithstanding the fact that SDGs are mentioned in combination with various actions or approaches throughout the document⁶⁷, such links are not fully developed, so the commitment to the SDGs risks being somewhat tokenistic. In relation to SDG2's main objectives in particular, and to the focus of this report, the extent to which the programme is actually farmer-centric and specifically addresses the circumstances of small-scale landholders and addresses food insecurity and malnutrition is questionable. Several mentions throughout the document of community level actions targeting farmers demonstrate an awareness of the need to involve them at the grassroots level, in order to include subsistence farmers in the effort of raising agricultural production, productivity, and revenue. However, in practice, this preoccupation seems to run counter with the clearly stated emphasis on "organising medium to large farm holders to create economies of scale⁶⁸".

Aiming to generate employment and income through increased production and productivity is in line with the lens through which the government and the international community have mainly been viewing agriculture. It is a relevant aim for the country, and is likely to be supported by both, not least because it is consistent with the ANPDF, and the GOIRA's effort toward self-reliance. In fact, many development partners are already contributing to the agribusiness component of the CAD NPP. On the other hand, a value chain approach mostly targeting medium to large-scale farmers to increase agricultural revenue does not fully cover SDG2 objectives, as aggregate production and productivity growth per se do not translate into greater availability for all, and the way value chains are developed, income is generated, landholdings are consolidated and the kind of employment created all have a bearing on the lives and livelihoods of small-holders and landless, who are the majority of the Afghan population and on their food and nutrition security. Potential negative effects of agricultural intensification and commercialisation on the rural population and the most vulnerable especially should be considered, and mitigation measures put in place. For example, agricultural commercialisation and industrialisation often entail decreasing employment opportunities in the sector and crowds out small scale farmers, so the claim that jobs will be generated should be set against the potential job losses, and, considering the important numbers of unemployed in the country, measures taken to protect the livelihoods of smallholders and agricultural labourers, beyond the provision of safety nets.

Equally, the rift in the document between strategic priorities 1 to 4, covering irrigation, agricultural production, and livestock, and priorities 5 and 6, related to climate change, natural resource management, resilience and food security, conceals how these two sets of priorities influence each other. This missing link in policy design results in a failure to highlight the threats and opportunities agriculture poses for climate change, resilience, NRM and food security, and

⁶⁷ Besides SDG1 and 2, CAD NPP links its activities to meet SDG5, Targets 5,7,8,9; SDG6, Targets 4, 5, 8; SDG8, Target 2; SDG9, Targets 3,5; SDG10, Targets 1, 9; SDG11, Target7; SDG12, Targets 2, 3.

⁶⁸ MAIL (2016), *National Comprehensive Agriculture Development Priority Program 2016-2020*, p.7

therefore how to translate these risks and opportunities into action in the sector. In particular, once again the strategic goal to develop value chains and intensify agriculture entails risks and potential gains for people's livelihoods and food security as well as for the natural environment, which should be taken into account and factored into the overall strategy.

Some further issues to be considered, in the light the contextual analysis laid out in chapter 1:

1. Notwithstanding its clear link to agricultural development, no mention is made of the seasonality of food insecurity and how to address it, planning based on agricultural calendars, making markets function better and ensuring year round availability of food;
2. Even though in line with Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda (AFSeN-A), the CAD-NPP refers to the need to improve feeding and food preparation practices, nutrition is barely touched upon throughout the document, and nutrition-sensitive agriculture only gets a cursory mention when referring to kitchen gardens and women's role. Again, by failing to make a connection between nutrition-sensitive agriculture and value chains, the potential of a value chain approach is not fully developed.
3. The programme is based on a correct analysis of women's role and potential in agriculture, but although it claims to realise SDG2 by "enabling women to increase food production, both at the household level and on a commercial scale, providing women and other vulnerable groups with food security", in practice the issue is not considered cross-cutting and gender is almost exclusively associated to home economics, and relegated to a separate section of the policy document. Importantly, gender does not seem to factor in the importance of men's role in bringing about change for women in the agricultural sector.
4. Not enough is made of the huge geographical differences throughout the country in terms of agricultural production, food and nutrition security, and insecurity.
5. No mention of civil strife and security concerns, though they clearly impact on the capacity to decentralise, provide services, collect data, and monitor and evaluate the implementation of the policy, and in general to adopt the farmer-centric and demand-driven approach at the core of the approach. Also not addressed is the role agriculture could play in delivering humanitarian, peace and development outcomes, or how it relates to the nexus between them.
6. Amongst the country's minorities, only the Kuchis are considered in the CAD NPP and targeted through specific interventions. Although they have an important role in agriculture and are marginalised, none of the many pastoralists or agriculturalists Afghan minorities are considered.

2.2 Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda (AFSeN)

In 2013, the GOIRA established AFSANA (Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda), a comprehensive framework aiming to address food insecurity and malnutrition in a coordinated manner. At the time, the framework did not go much beyond producing a policy statement and outlining a strategy, which mostly remained on paper⁶⁹. The process of Afghanistan joining the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement was catalytic to revive the need for a multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder coordination platform, and to this end, following up from AFSANA, AFSeN was launched in October 2017 under the leadership of HE Abdullah Abdullah, the Chief Executive of the Government of Afghanistan.

⁶⁹ Another precursor of AFSeN was the 2012 the Nutrition Action Framework which adopted a multi-sectoral approach to combat under nutrition during the first 1000 days from conception through the development and implementation of nutrition strategies and programs across five government Ministries, including public health, agriculture, commerce, education, and rural development. However this Framework had a very narrow technical rather than political mandate, and was later incorporated within AFSeN. Other important policy directives concerning nutrition include the National Public Nutrition Policy and Strategy (2015), the National Nutrition Communication Policy (2015), the National Reproductive, Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health Strategy (2017), National Health Policy (2016) and the National Health Strategy (2015).

AFSeN is presently the GOIRA's framework to achieve SDG2, advocate for food security and nutrition and ensure that they are approached in a coordinated, coherent and holistic manner. It also attempts to overcome the problem of nutrition's "homelessness" as a multidimensional phenomenon by placing it at the heart of an inter-ministerial and multi-stakeholder platform. As a multi-sectoral coordination mechanism, AFSeN outlines the roles and responsibilities of government and non-government stakeholders and identifies coordination structures at the central and subnational levels to address the multiple and inter-related determinants of hunger and malnutrition, and oversee the implementation of food and nutrition actions taken by different Ministries and other governmental and non-governmental bodies throughout the country to achieve a hunger-free Afghanistan. As such it should be noted that while informing Ministerial sectoral policies such as MOPH's National Public Nutrition Policy and Strategy, MAIL's Food Security and Nutrition Strategy and CAD NPP, and the Citizens' Charter NPP by providing technical support, and supervising and monitoring their implementation, AFSeN does not have the capacity or the mandate to implement directly.

The AFSeN High-Level Food Security and Nutrition Steering Committee provides policy and budgetary direction to all and any Food Security and Nutrition Programmes in Afghanistan, while an inter-ministerial and multi-sectoral coordination body, the Food Security and Nutrition Executive Committee discusses policies, strategies, technical and operational aspects of the AFSeN agenda. The latter is established under the Council of Minister's Secretariat, as are five technical working groups⁷⁰. A Technical Secretariat with a support function is also in place, composed of 6 technical staff, one of whom is a woman, and financed by FAO, WFP and UNICEF. Up to now at the subnational level 24 Provincial Food and Nutrition Committees have been established, while Councils are yet to be set up at district level.

AFSeN's high-level position under the CEO and the fact it is coordinated by the DG of the Council of Ministers Secretariat, constitute an incentive to comply with the agenda, contribute to avoiding horizontal turf wars, and ensure that AFSeN's mission and goals are effectively owned by different ministries, therefore making it an authentic cross-cutting multi-stakeholder platform. Nonetheless, some tensions exist between mandates of different government institutions, and in particular, MAIL could be more involved than it is at present – an issue that will be explored more extensively in chapter 4 of this report.

In terms of AFSeN's organisation, there are a few still outstanding and unresolved issues, one of the most urgent being the question of how to institutionalise the technical secretariat as a government body. In particular, in view of the upcoming election and potential changes in government structure and composition it is not yet clear where the secretariat could be institutionally housed in the future. This will be a crucial decision, since up to now the capacity to survey, monitor, and enforce AFSeN's cross-cutting objectives has relied exclusively on its strong governance structure and having access to decision-makers. How to handover financing of the secretariat, from UNICEF, FAO and WFP who have committed financial support until 2020⁷¹, also remains to be determined.

Costing of the AFSeN Strategic Plan is underway, in order to present a concrete proposal and work toward full government ownership. Since any budget change proposal needs to be presented by the last quarter of the fiscal year, the window of opportunity was missed again in 2019. The fact that no targeting of AFSeN actions has been determined also constitutes a concrete limit to the development of a realistic investment plan.

⁷⁰ The Executive committee consists of representatives of more than ten ministries, NSIA, donors, INGOs, Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The four working groups under the Executive Committee are Food Security; Nutrition; Advocacy and Communication; and Development Partners.

⁷¹ The agencies have recently committed to funding the secretariat for another year, in the spirit of making every effort of keeping it active, however the issue of sustainability remains an open question.

BOX 3 AFSEN ACHIEVEMENTS

- Development of the 5 year AFSeN National Multi-Stakeholder Strategic Plan in November 2018, through a widespread consultation process. The plan aligns with SDG2 and 17 and outlines evidence-based nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive actions to be taken to improve food security and nutrition in the country, with a special attention to vulnerable and food insecure population groups, an analysis of main stakeholders, and respective responsibilities. AFSeN is gender-sensitive in its design, including a number of specific and urgent actions to ensure gender mainstreaming. The triple nexus is not included in the agenda, and markedly no link is made between the agenda and peace. There is a focus on data collection and management, and an outcome under one of the objectives is “measuring progress improved”, coordinating and ensuring that methodologies and indicators are consistent to inform decision-making.
- A Public Awareness and Advocacy Framework and a 2-year plan have been finalised and are ready for implementation. In the meantime, many FNS awareness and advocacy initiatives for food and nutrition security have been undertaken, including orientation and awareness sessions, a booklet on food security and nutrition from the religious perspective, and World Breastfeeding Week, to name but a few.
- The establishment of a food safety authority, the Afghan National Food Authority, has almost reached its final stages.
- Development and approval of legislation on food fortification.
- Multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms established through different bodies and working groups and regularly convened meetings.
- Technical sessions, webinars, exposure visits, international and national training programmes and coaching, and events, through which the capacity of stakeholders on food and nutrition-related topics was improved.

Strengthening decentralisation through the participation of local authorities and non-government stakeholders is crucial to articulate the AFSeN agenda and give it legs, though insecurity is a big challenge. UNICEF and FAO are striving to establish AFSeN focal points at the provincial level, who will ensure the involvement of all actors on the ground, and identify needs and gaps in food and nutrition security interventions.

Whatever the limitations of AFSeN, overall the establishment and implementation (see also chapter 4) of a true multi-sectoral framework involving food security, social protection, health, education and nutrition, should be considered a solid success and an opportunity for the future, especially in view of the challenges due to the complex and fragmented Afghan environment.

2.3 MAIL’s Food Security and Nutrition Strategy (2015-19)

MAIL’s Food Security and Nutrition Strategy (2015-19) was developed before the formulation of CAD-NPP, to complement the ARD NPP-2, which was focused largely on production and productivity increases, hence on enhancing food availability, while the other aspects of food security were scarcely addressed. To cover this gap, NPP2 was complemented by this FSN strategy, based on a comprehensive concept of food and nutrition security. Under the overall umbrella of the 2013 AFANSA, and recognising that many agricultural interventions can have multiple effects on different aspects of FSN, the Strategy aims to establish a common MAIL framework for food and nutrition security, reinforcing the impacts of its actions aimed at improving FNS and expanding their scope as well as that of nutrition-sensitive measures in agriculture, filling gaps and creating synergies, strengthening the resilience of small farmers against shocks. The Strategy suggests measures based on the classic food security framework, to

increase availability, improve access, ensure stability and improve utilization of food. The adoption of the food security framework makes the strategy's proposed actions very comprehensive and all-encompassing, but at the same time somewhat generic, spanning such a broad range of food and nutrition security interventions without prioritising them, that some may not necessarily be relevant or adapted to the Afghan context.

To implement the strategy, MAIL created a FSN Technical Secretariat, also functioning as a focal point for AFANSA, and placed it under the Home Economics Directorate. To a certain extent, the rationale behind its development and its establishment under Home Economics reduced of the strategy's potential as MAIL's overarching and cross-cutting framework for food security policy planning in agriculture, and, as will be further explored in chapter 4, inadvertently contributed to the marginalisation of the food and nutrition security agenda within MAIL.

The FSN Strategy recognizes the importance of gender, nutrition sensitive interventions, data and information systems and the impact of cross cutting issues, such as environmental conditions, climate change and drought on food and nutrition security. No formal implementation or investment plans were prepared for the Strategy. A Logframe matrix is annexed to the Strategy, as a tool to monitor results and evaluate all MAIL's FSN interventions, in theory feeding into a national FSN M&E system to be established under AFSen.

As will be illustrated more in-depth in chapter 5, resource allocation for MAIL's priority areas shows that planned activities focus mainly on production and productivity aspects, ignoring the nutrition-sensitive lens, thus revealing a gap between actual budgeting decisions and policymakers' claims regarding the urgency of investing in food and nutrition security, which, contrary to what is presently the case, should be addressed comprehensively through the allocation of resources by the government and involvement of relevant stakeholders and the private sector.

The fact that MAIL's FNS strategy falls under the previous GOIRA planning framework and set of NPPs, while in the meantime CAD, the new NPP for agriculture, does not even mention the strategy, raises the question of duplication and overlap of government policies, and of the need to consolidate policy documents both among and within Ministries and to ensure the coherence of the government's overall strategic planning. A separate FSN strategy is probably still necessary for MAIL to clarify its role in food security and nutrition-sensitive agriculture however, efforts should be made to review and update the current FNS strategy, which ends in 2019, aligning it with AFSen, and CAD NPP.

Seeing the present situation, it is also necessary to take steps to broaden ownership of the FSN strategy within MAIL, beyond the Home Economics Directorate. This would also give the Strategy a better chance to be implemented, seeing the multiple links of food and nutrition security with agriculture and its crosscutting nature, which should require involving the more directorates than is presently the case.

2.4 Ministry of Public Health's National Public Nutrition Policy and Strategy (2015-2020)

Nutrition is a priority for Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), and the ministry is directly responsible for coordinating and implementing the 2015-2020 National Public Nutrition Policy and Strategy, which addresses nutrition in a coordinated and multi-sectoral fashion, and places it at the core of its strategic direction in the MoPH's five-year Vision for Health (2016-2020). The Nutrition Strategy aims to prioritize the allocation of resources for nutrition, providing a common framework for all partners and supporting inter-ministerial and inter-agency coordination. The strategy was implemented through Basic Packages of Health Facility (PPHS) and Essential Packages of Health Facility (EPHS).

The Public Nutrition Strategy focused on:

- Implementation of evidence-based nutrition-specific interventions of high quality and coverage, with greater emphasis on preventive nutrition programs and services that target women of childbearing age and young children, especially under 2 years of age.
- Informing the public about the role of nutrition in physical health and cognitive development and promoting dietary practices to prevent malnutrition and its related health consequences, especially among children under 2 years of age.
- Advocacy for public nutrition policies and adequate resources to support quality and high coverage interventions as essential components of the national development agenda.
- Improving multi-sectoral coordination to help increase coverage of quality nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive interventions.
- Developing human resource capacities in planning, implementation and evaluation of nutrition interventions and strengthening the role and capacity of the Public Nutrition Directorate (PND).
- Strengthening national capacity to track the quality, coverage and impact of public nutrition interventions and services to guide future policies and strategies.

2.5 Other policies of interest

2.5.1 THE CITIZEN CHARTER. NATIONAL PRIORITY PROGRAMME (OCT 2016 - OCT 2020)

One of the key pillars of the ANPDF is the Citizen Charter (CC) National Priority Programme, which aims to support poverty reduction, achieve sustainable development goals 1-9 and 16, and ensure effective and efficient use of resources, while working towards the Government's self-reliance through a partnership between the state and communities throughout the country. This 10-year program places communities at the heart of the development process by providing them with a basic package of services to which they are entitled, according to their own development goals. By putting Community Development Councils (CDC) at the heart of the process, the Charter strives to build a bottom-up approach and inclusiveness of vulnerable groups, returnees, IDPs and women, who should compose 50% of the CDCs.

BOX 4: KEY RESULTS EXPECTED FROM THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CITIZEN'S CHARTER:

- A minimum of 25 million people across Afghanistan benefiting from improved services
- All people in Afghanistan accessing clean drinking water
- Achieving a minimum of 50 per cent female beneficiaries
- 38,000 CDCs able to plan, implement, monitor and coordinate development activities

The Citizen's Charter provides an inter-ministerial coordination platform including MoF, MRRD, Independent Directorate of Local Government (IDLG), MAIL, Ministry of Education (MoE) and MoPH under presidential oversight, streamlining the service delivery mechanisms under the different Ministries by consolidating them under the Citizen Charter to make the best use of scarce resources.

A phased rollout is envisaged considering geographical specificities and availability of funds, with the final aim of covering all rural villages and urban centres in the 10 years from the beginning of the programme. A crucial novelty of the Charter is the effort to bring under one umbrella rural and urban development programmes, including informal settlements and refugees. This is critical to reach IDPs and returnees and to address emerging issues in Afghanistan such as internal migration and unemployment (see also chapter 3). The document acknowledges the fragility of the country and the corollary weak government institutions and social divisions, and recognises the challenges posed by insecurity affecting outreach and service delivery across all 34 provinces.

The following Citizens' Charter programme components are particularly relevant to the present diagnostics:

- **Rural development:** implementation of projects related to rural infrastructure through Service Standard Grants, chosen on the basis of pre-assessed community needs among the following: access to water; basic electricity; road access; small-scale irrigation.
- **Agriculture:** agricultural services delivered by MAIL will be coordinated by CDCs, particularly initiatives targeting poor and vulnerable populations. MAIL's National Horticulture and Livestock Programme (NHLP) and Community Livestock and Agriculture Project (CLAP) will use CDCs to facilitate needs assessments and targeting.
- **Food security:** CDCs will establish self-help groups for food deficit farmers with support from better off ones.
- **Irrigation:** CDCs will act as facilitators to modernise the traditional community level irrigation management system.
- **Disaster risk reduction:** CDCs will improve disaster risk prevention, mitigation, and management measures through a number of activities. DRR and DRM are a way to link humanitarian and development goals, thus to a certain extent working towards a nexus approach.

The AFSeN High Level Steering Committee on Nutrition carried out a preliminary analysis to identify the key drivers of poverty and food and nutrition insecurity⁷² and how they could be addressed through the Citizen Charter as a means to ensure compliance with the AFSeN Agenda.

An important function of the CDCs could be to manage and supervise the implementation of social protection interventions, which in Afghanistan mainly comprise public works and food for work programmes, ensuring outreach to rural households. The proportion of the eligible population, i.e. the poorest 20% of the population participating in social protection programmes was only 12.5% in 2011⁷³.

Many of these programme objectives dovetail quite neatly with CAD NPP's and AFSeN's, so it would be all the more important to establish at least a light coordination between the programmes and respective government bodies, as already envisaged by the CAD document.

2.5.2 NATIONAL STRATEGY ON WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE - MAIL (2015 – 2020)

The National Strategy on Women in agriculture was developed under the previous NPP framework and identifies entry points for the integration of women's empowerment components in that framework. It focuses on mainstreaming and institutionalizing gender issues within MAIL, with the objective of identifying and implementing priority activities that are vital for empowering women and highlighting the inextricable link between women's empowerment, increased food security and poverty alleviation, and the ultimate goal of promoting inclusive agricultural development for women's empowerment. To meet the SDG targets, and specifically SDG5, MAIL's Home Economic Department implements MAIL's Gender Strategy, and provides support and

⁷² The identified drivers are landlessness and marginal land holdings, insufficient to provide for the basic needs of a household; widespread unemployment amongst men who rely on daily wage labour; low daily wage rates and rising food prices; seasonal hunger leading to 'erosive' coping strategies (sale of assets, loans, advanced wages), poor health, and unequal access to services (health, drinking water, irrigation, transport, energy, education) between different generations; exploitative relations between classes, e.g. advance selling of labour and money lending; vulnerability to natural disasters; exorbitant costs of social events and bride price forcing families to sell valuable assets or take loans; poor sanitation; low or no access to diversified and balanced food leading to malnutrition; and inappropriate food preparation and feeding practices causing malnutrition.

⁷³ World Bank Social Protection Atlas.

assistance to women in times of disasters.

Directorates, programs and projects within MAIL have developed a number of other gender strategies and guidelines, however the lack of coordination and integration between these MAIL bodies means that issues of gender mainstreaming, equality and women's empowerment are inadequately addressed. Although this issue is mentioned under CAD NPP's *Strategic Objective 1: "Institutional strengthening and individual capacity development of MAIL and concerned stakeholders"* through a great number of different activities at the individual, organizational, and enabling environment levels, in practice it does not seem to have enhanced coordination or integration of policies, nor to have had an impact on the very stubborn problem of the deep-set lack of acknowledgement of gender inequality and its consequences among MAIL officials at different hierarchical levels.

Furthermore, the second Strategic Objective's⁷⁴ aim to support women to move beyond subsistence production and into higher value and market-oriented production is not assisted by its confinement to the Home Economics Directorate, or by the absence of a clear link to this component in the CAD NPP. Although the National Strategy on Women in Agriculture employs the value chain concept to strengthen business linkages between producer groups, service providers and other actors and reduce the exclusion of women farmers by identifying niche areas that are women's strength, in practice there is no reference to this in the CAD NPP. Nor is there in the Agribusiness Charter (ABC) the government's document addressing strategic priorities for agribusiness development, where gender and women are mentioned in passing.

An institutional weakness that is addressed is the lack of gender-disaggregated data, which, especially at intra-household level, is necessary to have a better understanding of dynamics of differentiated food access and utilization within households, and to translate it into targeting. At least in terms of gender-disaggregated data on food access, according to the information presently available as well as interviews conducted for this report, the situation does not seem to have changed, and NSIA does not collect this kind of data when conducting household surveys.

TARGETING

Target groups under each of the policies are mostly not clearly specified. The 2017 Afghanistan Zero Hunger Strategic Review (ZHSR) indicates that populations particularly vulnerable to food insecurity are women, children, displaced persons, returnees, women-headed households, persons with disabilities and those living in poverty. Small-scale independent efforts were made to involve these vulnerable groups in capacity development and target them in income generating initiatives, but in practice, this is a subject of intense debate and discussion within the institutions.

⁷⁴ "Programmatic support by MAIL to reduce the gap between women and men's access to productive resources with focus on women's increased resilience for improved food security and nutrition"

3. EMERGING PROBLEMS IMPACTING FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Are current policies and strategies sufficiently forward looking to also address the food security and nutrition impacts of emerging problems related to for example migration, youth unemployment, climate change, population growth, urbanization, etc.?

3.1 Climate Change

It is increasingly recognized that climate change, manifesting itself in more severe and frequent natural hazard, is having profound impacts on the food security of the Afghan population. Given the country's fragile ecosystems, negative impacts can only be expected to increase over time, undermining agriculture, contributing to displacement and continued instability.

Water sources are heavily dependent on annual rain and snowfall, and lately diminished snowfall due to climate change has intensified concerns over increasing droughts. Officials from the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (AMDMA) believe that the level of the country's underground water table has dropped considerably and that the scarce rain and snowfall in 2019 threatens the grasslands and the agriculture sector.

The temperature has already increased by 1.8 degrees C nationwide and 2.4 degrees C in the south since 1950. For now this has had beneficial impacts on agriculture, lengthening the growing season and resulting in a surge in food production. However, in the future, the temperature is expected to rise even further, with disastrous effects on food crops and livelihoods overall. The most severely impacted are expected to be pastoralists and smallholders who rely on rain-fed agriculture in the north and central highlands due to decreased spring rain, and around Kabul due to lower river levels from changes in snowmelt. Many pastoralists have already been forced to settle and more are expected to do so in the future. As a signatory to the Paris Agreements⁷⁵, Afghanistan is working to both mitigate and adapt to climate change through policies and programs such as the National Adaptation Program of Action (NAPA), however in the future more technical and financial assistance will be needed to this end.

In light of COP21 Framework, the CAD NPP includes a review of MAIL's capacities to sustainably address adverse effects of climate change through awareness raising. MAIL pledges to work in coordination with the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA), the Ministry of Energy and Water (MEW) and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) on the issue of climate change. Though CAD refers to Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Risk Reduction activities, and recognizes the crucial need to build upon its existing NRM base, and adopt structured programs on agricultural adaptation for farmers, herders, and particularly women (sic), it fails to address environmental sustainability in a holistic and cross-cutting manner.

Climate change is mentioned under the CAD Strategic Priorities 5 and 6, which focus on Natural Resource Management and Food Security respectively, and actions to address it under these

⁷⁵ An agreement signed by 195 State parties in 2016 to determine, plan and regularly report on the contribution that it undertakes to mitigate global warming.

priorities are centred mainly on awareness raising, early warning and mitigation. On the other hand, no links are made between climate change adaptation and mitigation and SP 1 on irrigation, or SP 2 to 5, i.e. the priorities directly concerned with raising production and value creation. This is problematic, and indicates an important policy gap, seeing the two-way links between climate change and agriculture, and considering that the latter both contributes and is affected by the former.

This failure to make an explicit link between agriculture and climate change in MAIL's main strategic document also questions the extent of attention paid to sustainable technological solutions (e.g. rainwater harvesting for irrigation, conservation agriculture, integrated pest management, integrated soil fertility management biodiversity, intercropping, diversification, mixed farming, etc.) in response to the emerging challenges of soil degradation and climate change. It is unclear that there is sufficient awareness about various technological, institutional and policy-oriented options that have the potential of increasing climate resilience, and increasing agricultural productivity and income on a sustainable basis, or that interventions will be designed to bring about sustainable practices in fertilizer applications, seeds/ breed choices, water use efficiency in irrigation, mechanization types.

3.2 Migration

According to the *Whole of Afghanistan Report*, one of the world's most complex humanitarian emergencies results in 263,000 forced displacements due to drought, along with around 290,000 conflict-affected IDPs in 2018⁷⁶. In addition, more than 702,000 refugees returned from Pakistan and Iran between January and October 2018 only. Behind these overall figures, however, hide some substantial variations in the direction and numbers of population flows, which have fluctuated in parallel with the evolution of political, economic and environmental factors at the global, regional and national level. So even though hostilities still force families to flee, the actual numbers of conflict-induced IDPs have diminished considerably from 2016/17, as NSAG now tend to engage in a war of attrition with government forces, confining displacement to relatively small-scale and temporal movement in 2018, mainly to Ghazni, Faryab and Kunduz provinces⁷⁷. In the same period the more than a quarter million people who left their homes for urban centres after the loss or distress sale of their most productive assets due to drought moved towards Badghis and Hirat provinces, concentrating in the provincial capitals and causing the emergence of 19 vast and sprawling informal settlements at their outskirts. Living conditions in these settlements remain dire, while IDPs settled in areas close to highways or riverbeds or those occupying government or privately-owned land, and at high risk of eviction, fare no better. At the same time returnee flows, dominated by a surge of returns from Iran (while the number of returnees from Pakistan are at an all-time low), reached unprecedented levels in 2018, prompted by a changing international scene, the closure of borders in countries formerly the destination of Afghan refugees, and, in Iran, currency devaluation resulting in a drastic reduction in demand for informal work undertaken by Afghan migrants, and a decade long drought⁷⁸.

The further erosion of the livelihoods and food security of displaced households, a population group disproportionately composed of more vulnerable individuals, such as single women, unaccompanied children, and people with disabilities⁷⁹, has multiple causes: access to health is

⁷⁶OCHA/REACH (2018), *Whole of Afghanistan Report 2018: Multi-Sector Needs Assessment Report*.

⁷⁷In 2017, when a different kind of conflict was being waged on the ground, and NSAGs aimed at seizing and holding large population centres, the highest rates of conflict-affected displacement were in Nanghar, Faryab and Kunduz.

⁷⁸OCHA 2019.

⁷⁹This has been found to be true both of returnees (OCHA 2019), and of conflict-induced displacement (OCHA 2017)

gravely compromised by extremely poor conditions of crowded public health structures, and limited training of healthcare personnel, adding to the frequent breaches of International Humanitarian Law with respect to medical facilities by NSAG; access to education, particularly for girls, is hindered by their lack of documentation; violation of child rights is rampant: displaced children are often injured, recruited by armed forces, or employed in child labour; women and girls are particularly exposed to a heightened risk of gender-based violence, and there is anecdotal evidence that more stringent application of social and moral codes result in a restriction of freedom and a recrudescence of traditional harmful practices, such as forced marriages. In particular the more than 1.2 million IDPs living in informal settlements earn less, frequently do not own IDs and are more vulnerable to the adoption of negative coping mechanisms,⁸⁰. Due to the above mentioned changes in push and pull factors, households who used to engage in circular and seasonal migration patterns towards Iran now attempt to return to Afghanistan permanently. However, conflict and lost community networks often prevent most returnees from going back to their places of origin⁸¹, turning them de facto into IDPs, who end up contributing to pressure on cities.

Supporting returnees and IDPs is a very complex problem: since people move in unpredictable ways, and may partially return to their original birthplace without necessarily relocating there, for example to periodically or seasonally tend to their land. In other words, being an IDP constitutes a shifting identity, which makes addressing the problems it entails extremely complex. However thorny, though, as an emerging problem impacting on food and nutrition security and agriculture, it is surprising that CAD NPP makes no mention of how to support the livelihoods and ensure the food and nutrition security of refugees, returnees, and IDPs, nor does it refer to migration, or refer to the relationship between agricultural labour and seasonal agricultural migration, and how it affects livelihoods, food security, and agricultural production and productivity.

The call for the Government to commit to ensuring the right to food and nutrition equity to all vulnerable groups, including IDPs and returnees, is part of the first guiding principles of AFSeN, as explicitly stated in the AFSeN strategic plan. However, neither IDPs, refugees nor migration are directly referred to again in the document, which in any case is a very broad framework. An implementation plan for AFSeN, yet to be developed, would be a more suitable instrument to provide clearer indications on how to politically address the inter-related links between food and nutrition insecurity and migration.

3.3 Unemployment

Unemployment is a huge and rising concern in Afghanistan, particularly among the young. The poverty cycle along with decades of conflict has negatively impacted on access to education, skills training and employment opportunities. Youth unemployment is especially worrying about seeing the demographic growth and the high proportion of this age cohort among the population. Besides its direct impact on hunger and malnutrition, unemployment also fuels poverty, illicit industries such as poppy production, and recruitment under the Taliban.

An unstable economy is struggling to provide work for Afghan citizens, and almost a quarter of the labour force is unemployed. Furthermore, 20% of the working population is under-employed, and the quality of work is often poor: 80% of jobs are characterized by job insecurity and poor working conditions, also reflected in the rates of poverty of the fully employed, which are hardly

⁸⁰ OCHA 2019.

⁸¹ Three quarters of the returnees surveyed in late 2017 indicated they were unable to go back to their original home OCHA 2017.

lower than among the unemployed. And while 31% of youth do not have a job, a high 42% are considered 'not in employment, education or training' (NEET), and thus at high risk of labour market and social exclusion, a condition which more heavily affects girls. The low levels of engagement of girls in education and of women in the workforce significantly undermine their potential to contribute to improving food security and nutrition for families. Employment in agriculture dominates the labour market: 44% of jobs are in the agriculture sector, and agricultural workers represent 43% of the overall workforce.

Though the CAD NPP acknowledges the role of the agricultural labour market and places a strong accent on employment generation in general, it does not acknowledge the existence of those categories most vulnerable to unemployment and fails to offer solutions for those who are most in need. In the first instance, it does not address the problem of the burgeoning youth population, both skilled and unskilled, and markedly of how thousands of freshly graduated agriculture students could be engaged in the sector. In the second place, it fails to consider how policies could support women in the agricultural labour market. For example, it does not address the big issue of unpaid female agricultural labour; how women could access credit for agriculture, seeing they usually lack collateral; and, once again, no link is made with the focus on value chain development, and its potential to economically empower women by linking women producers to markets through a "gendered value chain"⁸².

AFSeN Outcome 1.1 specifically targets women and small-scale farmers in rural communities, aiming to increase employment and income opportunities. Promotion of nutrition-sensitive value chains through diversification and increase in food production, improved processing, storage, support of market linkages and local trade are key actions under this outcome.

3.4 Poppy cultivation

Opium production in Afghanistan fell in 2018, with a 20% drop of cultivated hectares compared to the previous year and an 11% drop in average opium yield, resulting in a 29% drop in potential production of opium, mainly due to the effects of the drought, and possibly to low and decreasing prices in provinces less affected by the drought. However 2018 remains the second-highest year for the area under poppy cultivation⁸³ following the peak year of 2017 when cultivation soared by 46% compared to 2016 and exceeded by three and a half times the peak level of the 90s, and opium production grew even more rapidly to 9,000 metric tons, nearly doubling the previous year's record crop⁸⁴.

Increased poppy cultivation has been a rational response to drought since the late 90s, and will continue to be so in the face of climate change if no concrete measures are taken. As a more drought resistant crop, the relatively high returns generated by opium per unit of irrigated land have made it ideally suited to the changing ecological conditions, particularly as technologies have become more easily accessible. Between 2003 and 2013 these characteristics of opium poppy encouraged significant encroachment and settlement in former desert areas of the South and Southwest to expand its cultivation⁸⁵, constituting a pull factor for qualified agricultural labour

⁸² See for example FAO 2016, *Developing gender-sensitive value chains. A gendered framework* <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6462e.pdf>

⁸³ Poppy cultivation has been monitored since 1994. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and GOIRA Ministry of Counter Narcotics (2018), *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018: Cultivation and Production*.

⁸⁴ Byrd, W. (2017), *Disease or symptom? Afghanistan's burgeoning opium economy in 2017*, Kabul, AREU.

⁸⁵ Mansfield, D. and Fishstein, P. (2016), *Moving with the times: How opium poppy cultivation has adapted to the changing environment in Afghanistan*, Kabul, AREU

force specialised in harvesting opium poppy left unemployed following the Helmand Food Zone⁸⁶ initiative to curb opium cultivation.

Besides being used as in-kind payment for leases by indebted farmers, opium is also a way for small farmers to access credit, while the landless depend on the employment provided by the opium economy, and unemployed returnees and IDPs provide cheap labour, as well as contributing to increasing pressure on land. Researchers believe these represent ideal conditions for drug production, and that farmers are likely to continue growing poppies in the absence of a comprehensive land tenure reform that provides secure land ownership and access rights.⁸⁷

If on the one hand the burgeoning opium economy compounds some of Afghanistan's problems, fueling corruption, supporting power-holders and insurgents, undermining good governance, infecting politics through drug financing, and distorting economic incentives against competing licit crops, on the other it provides benefits from a short-run perspective, generating large numbers of rural livelihoods and jobs in a weak economy that desperately needs them⁸⁸. It is a paradox that rural poverty, especially in Southern Afghanistan, would be much higher without this illicit income stream⁸⁹. Opium poppy cultivation is, therefore, a particularly thorny problem for Afghanistan and markedly for the agricultural sector, which up to now has not found a straightforward solution.

The CAD NPP does address the issue, with a chapter on counter-narcotics, which rightly recognises that sustainable alternative on and off-farm livelihood strategies need to be provided, particularly to subsistence farmers, and that a coordinated approach is needed, since the licit agriculture sector lacks the necessary dynamism to provide viable alternatives. Investing in irrigated wheat risks resuscitating opium poppy by facilitating irrigation, since it is a lower value crop than poppy. The strategy, therefore, indicates that wheat productivity should be raised, rather than expanding areas under irrigated wheat, and priority should anyway be given to investment which could compete better with poppy, such as perennial horticulture and intensive livestock production. The former, in particular, represent "sunk" investments that would be costly to shift back to opium poppy cultivation. The CAD NPP, therefore, confronts this emerging problem and offers some solutions. However, this "cross-cutting" component of the strategy could be better linked to the main body of the policy and its strategic priorities, and in particular with the development of value chains. In the second place, though this section does underscore the importance of focusing on "subsistence and marginal farmers and labourers" it does not address land tenure in any detail, or the employment side of the poppy economy, though both are an important part of the problem.

⁸⁶ The goal of the Helmand Food Zone was to bring about a rapid and significant reduction in opium poppy cultivation. It was funded directly by the UK and US governments to the tune of between US\$12 and \$18 million per year between the autumn of 2008 and 2012.

⁸⁷ Giampaoli, P. and Aggarwal, S. (2010)

⁸⁸ Based on 2017 data, poppy cultivation alone provided 590,000 full time equivalent farm jobs. Byrd 2017.

⁸⁹ Strand, A., Borchgrevink, K. and Berg Harpviken, K. (2017)

4. IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISMS AND CAPACITIES

Are the implementation mechanisms and capacities that are in place adequate to reach specifically those people and areas most affected by food insecurity and malnutrition?

While, as mentioned in chapter 2, in the past years highly relevant policies and strategies addressing SDG2 have been developed in Afghanistan, there has been a lack of consistent follow-up on commitments and targets contained within. Equally, systematic monitoring and evaluation of implementation and results usually set out as a component of the policies and strategies, rarely takes place. This constitutes a serious limitation to Afghanistan's current efforts at enhancing the food security and nutrition status of its population.

Constraints to implementation of food and nutrition and sustainable agricultural policies are many, ranging from weak technical and organisational capacities and inadequate financial and human resources, to the lack of strategic thinking, difficulties in reaching out to vulnerable groups and most affected populations, the negative impact of external factors such as the political and security environment, and slow processes of institutionalisation of coordination mechanisms and failure to make them operational at the sub-national level.

4.1 Inputs, outputs and resources

It is a widespread opinion, expressed by different actors interviewed for this report and confirmed by the literature,⁹⁰ that MAIL staff is under-qualified and that teams have insufficient capacity to perform. This is due, among other things, to poor technical skills of staff at all levels, and scarce ability in terms of public financial management and human resource management. Weak extension and credit services in MAIL also remain limiting factors for effective policy implementation, M&E and evidence-based programming under A-SDGs. Particularly constraining is what is perceived to be a limited understanding of food security and nutrition issues throughout MAIL's directorates, including Home Economics, the ministerial focal point for FNS and for AFSen. This is seen to negatively impact on MAIL's full participation in the cross-sectoral platform on one hand, and more generally to weaken MAIL's commitment to Food Security and Nutrition. Furthermore, a deeper theoretical understanding by MAIL staff of the drivers of agricultural productivity and of markets, and the way these interact with food and nutrition security would be needed to implement such an ambitious and comprehensive strategy as the CAD NPP.

Policymakers' *reliance on external advisors and contractual project-based staff* for planning and decision-making contributes to a lack of ownership and implementation capacity within Ministries and other national bodies. Donor designed programming is a consequence of weak capacities, but it also risks reinforcing this weakness and creating a vicious circle: the greater the reliance on external financial and human resources, the bigger the hurdle to the development of homegrown capacities, especially at the sub-national level, unless specific measures are taken to encourage it, including built-in mentoring and capacity development opportunities, as well as better systems

⁹⁰ For example, the GOIRA's strategy for Agribusiness, the *Agribusiness Charter: Unlocking agribusiness for economic growth and expanding job opportunities*, analyses the challenges to providing adequate services for agriculture/agribusiness development in Afghanistan, which are mostly applicable to implementation of food and nutrition security policies as well.

based on improved agricultural education, a performant adaptive agriculture research sector, a demand-driven extension system and private sector engagement. A further negative effect of the burdensome presence of resource partners is the much higher salary scale they offer, creating negative incentives for qualified staff to remain or move to public office positions.

A key challenge for the implementation of the policies under scrutiny is the lack of institutional capacities in MAIL, which in turn affects the development of investment plans. Some important efforts made in the past to strengthen the overall efficiency of ministries, such as the USAID funded Capacity Building and Change Management Program-II (CBCMP-II)⁹¹ and the Capacity Building for Results Program (CBR)⁹² have had mixed success. The latter has gone some way towards addressing these challenges, though in MAIL the benefits hoped for were undermined by low uptake in the ministry itself. As mentioned in chapter 2 of this report, MAIL's Comprehensive Agriculture Development Strategy acknowledges such institutional weakness, and the creation of an enabling environment is presently the focus of the reform process proposed to deliver CAD NPP's strategic priorities and move towards a farmer-centric approach. It is yet too early to tell how effective this reform will be, or even if it can count on the existence of resources and political will to implement it.

Another instance of this kind of bottleneck is the lack of technical capacity to implement nutrition programmes. While the MoPH's National Public Nutrition Policy aims to strengthen in-country capacity to assess the nutrition situation and design, implement, monitor and evaluate public nutrition interventions, the Public Nutrition Directorate (PND) which has this mandate within the Ministry's organizational chart is not able to address all these needs. The MoPH might think of upgrading the administrative level of the PND and allocate more resources, especially considering there is much interest in nutrition on behalf of development partners.

Equally, there is inadequate human resource capacity to deliver preventive and therapeutic nutrition services by Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) and Essential Package of Hospital Services (EPHS) providers. Furthermore, the PND has limited human resources, infrastructure, and budgetary and administrative capacity to carry out its responsibilities as the Nation's lead public nutrition agency, and limited national capacity for regulatory quality control to assure the fortification and sanitary quality and safety of food products (fortified and otherwise) at the production and retail levels. Technical and financial self-reliance is essential to the development and implementation of sustainable evidence-based public nutrition interventions. Technical capacity is of particular importance, since there are currently no academically trained Afghan public nutrition or dietetics professionals or certified allied health professionals to advise on, lead, implement, and track the quality, coverage and impact of preventive and therapeutic nutrition interventions.

⁹¹ The CBCMP-II was a USD 21 Million off-budget program running from 2014 to 2017, which strengthened the human and institutional capacity of MAIL and the linkages between MAIL and its Provincial Directorates (PAILs), and supported the PAILs to effectively deliver agricultural public services to farmers and herders <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/fact-sheets/capacity-building-and-change-management-program—ii-cbcmp-ii>.

⁹² CBR was funded through Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) under the Afghan National Budget, and ran from 2012 to 2017. It was an Afghan-led reform and capacity building program assisting line ministries to integrate and incentivize their restructuring, organizational, staffing, institutional and human capacity development efforts in a strategic manner to deliver clear budget execution and service delivery targets supported by a framework of approved rules. All line ministries were eligible to apply for CBR support, which was provided through four inter-related components: 1. Technical assistance facility for the preparation and implementation of capacity building programmes; 2. Building Human Capacity; 3. Civil Service Training; and 4. Project Management, Monitoring and Evaluation. <http://old.mof.gov.af/en/page/481/capacity-building-for-results>

4.2 Strategic Leadership, Governance and Planning

A further weakness of MAIL that heavily influences its capacity to implement is its tendency to be generally ad-hoc and project-based in its approach and lacking in strategic vision, leadership and internal coordination. MAIL's organigram is old and not fit for purpose, and its top-heavy structure with staff mostly concentrated in Kabul is not conducive to the decentralisation that it is called to undertake. Unclear and overlapping mandates, lengthy bureaucratic processes, poor inter-departmental coordination, lack of performance incentives constitute some of MAIL's current organisational bottlenecks, as are the challenges it faces in performance and recruitment procedures. A more strategic outlook would entail providing technical support and outsourcing implementation through partnerships, rather than implementing directly as it presently does.

The absence of a programmatic approach also stems from the fact that, notwithstanding pledges made under the Mutual Accountability Framework and progresses made by establishing the NPP process, up to now the majority of projects and programmes continue being mostly designed by donors, with MAIL only involved at later stages. This has influenced the distribution of financial resources and hindered a comprehensive strategic approach and integrated planning practices. Overall, in order to streamline MAIL's various programs in line with its strategic priorities, the ministry needs to start with the current planning framework encompassing both on and off-budget projects and programs. In practice, the many options available within the big portfolio of food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture interventions and actions included in the policies under examination, and markedly MAIL's FNS policy, are not ranked or prioritised. Doing so would demand to develop credible implementation and investment plans, based on relevant data and assessed needs. Equally, the MoPH lacks a strategic vision for nutrition and relies totally on donor funding, with partners contributing to the implementation of the Nutrition policy by plugging into an annual plan until all components and 34 provinces were covered. There is strong coordination and transparency on the use of donor funds in the Health Sector however, the sustainability of this model remains an open question.

A strategic plan of action and stakeholders mapping of AFSeN has been carried out and is yet to be made public, following which a costing exercise will be conducted to assess the budgetary requirements to achieve the AFSeN targets. However, to assess the respective weights of nutrition-sensitive interventions versus nutrition-specific ones, costing studies or investment frameworks for relevant policies and strategies like MAIL's FNS Strategy need to be developed. This would help to mobilize financial resources through GOIRA's regular and development budget allocations, as well as resource partners' on and off-budget support.

As an institutional response to the multi-dimensional nature of malnutrition and the concerted cross-sectoral approach it demands, AFSeN is highly strategic in its design and governance structure, and very well functioning in terms of overall coordination. Its position in the CEO's office up to now has also been strategic, placing it above the fray as is required for an inter-ministerial organism, and under a high-level office within the government structure, with direct access to decision-makers, ensuring that the agenda progresses smoothly. However, translating the approach into action requires a series of coordinated interventions on the ground led by the different line Ministries, and a need for a coordinated response, as well as legislation complementary to the policies and other means to ensure their enforcement, and these are yet far from being a reality.

The importance of champions to advocate and mainstream cross-sectoral agendas such as food and nutrition security, or gender equality, cannot be understated. In Afghanistan, a positive

example is the championing of AFSeN by the Director General of the Council of Ministries' Secretariat who is its coordinator, as well as the Chief Executive of the GOIRA, who is Chair of the AFSeN High Level Steering committee. An opposite example is the absence of a strong champion for gender throughout different sectors, and its relegation, within MAIL, to the Home Economics Directorate, resulting in a weak uptake of gender related issues, and little effective gender mainstreaming in programming and implementation of food and nutrition and sustainable agriculture initiatives.

4.3 Outreach

Perhaps the biggest hurdle to the new farmer-centric and bottom up approach endorsed by MAIL's CAD NPP is the Ministry's overly centralised structure, translating in limited delegation of authority and no decentralised control over resource allocation hindering progress to bring MAIL closer to farmers. The strongly politicised Afghan institutional environment means that at central level there is no appetite for decentralisation, made more difficult by the physical fragmentation of the country. Though it would be highly desirable and necessary, reaching out to the most vulnerable according to needs is therefore not an option, since programming and targeting are based on the possibility of accessing geographical areas, criterion that weigh in particularly in the case of initiatives led by donors, who usually don't venture outside the comfort zone of the areas where they have been implementing for years or even decades.

The low awareness and lack of knowledge about food and nutrition security and disaster risk management are the main challenges on the demand side, notwithstanding the existence on paper of institutional mechanisms, policies and provisions such as the Citizen's Charter and its CDCs. Community capacities for bottom up management to achieve better FNSSA outcomes needs to be reinforced. Smallholder farmers face many challenges to adopt new technologies within their production systems, as they lack access to and control over resources, and women in particular need technical, economic and organisational capacities to grow in the agricultural sector. Many projects in MAIL and MRRD target women, though mainly supporting kitchen gardening and green houses. To reach out to rural women and expand their presence in agriculture, more female extension workers would be needed, but it is very difficult to recruit any, as there are not enough women who have the required technical knowledge and skills.

The CAD's proposed employment of Farmers' Learning and Resource Centres as a platform for decentralisation makes much sense, however, they are presently not fit for purpose, and will need to be made fully functional before being in the condition to reach out to farmers throughout the country.

Human resources are concentrated in Kabul, and technical and focal points are lacking at provincial and the district levels. At the community level no government staff is allocated to promote FSN related interventions. MAIL/DAIL extension staff at district level only have limited access to farmers and, in a male-female segregated culture, there is a clear gender gap in the provision of assistance, focused overwhelmingly on male heads of households, while women's concerns and needs are not prioritised. There is a gender focal point from the MoWA in MoPH working on nutrition education, and other gender focal points have been assigned in different line ministries but only at the national level. There are also two focal points from MOWA in two of AFSeN's working groups, and the presence of MoWA in the process of developing AFSeN has influenced it, making sure that gender was a cross-cutting topic throughout.

There is a huge need to strengthen engagement at the sub-national level to accelerate reduction in malnutrition. However, as mentioned, AFSeN's current ability to carry out its coordination and

oversight functions at sub-national level is weak at best. There are presently nominally 23 provincial platforms, but they are not very active, and at district level, where security remains a huge challenge, there are no councils yet. A pilot mapping through the existing provincial platforms is envisaged to plot FNS initiatives and gaps at provincial level, to be later scaled up throughout the whole country. The mapping would also allow differentiated implementation plans for the different agro-ecological zones, something that is sorely needed for effective actions in a highly diverse country such as Afghanistan.

A Manual for planning and implementation of FSN projects and programmes (2015) has been prepared, providing guidelines for staff and partners to design, plan, implement, monitor and evaluate measures aimed at improving food and nutrition security. It could be a very useful tool to implement food and nutrition related initiatives at subnational level, as a companion to a detailed implementation plan setting out priorities and actions to realize MAIL's Food and Nutrition Strategy.

4.4 Operating Environment

The persistence of *corruption* at all levels in Afghanistan continues to severely limit the correct and effective implementation of government policies. Corruption in ministries and departments begins with managers and decision-makers discharging their responsibilities due to political influence, at times pressured by illicit monetary incentives. External pressures influence hiring and procurement processes, which often lack transparency, though an effort to curb this widespread phenomenon has been made by following the Capacity Building for Results programme's hiring protocols and the National Procurement Commission Guidelines. As mentioned, scarce financial resources and political fragmentation, often along ethnic cleavages, contribute to the retaining control centrally rather than delegating power to provincial level structures, the first step toward reaching out to more marginalised communities and vulnerable farmers. The decade long war has deepened some of those cleavages, contributing to an environment within State institutions where suspicion is rife. In MAIL, high staff turnover, and bureaucracy further limit the implementation and operationalization of its medium and long-term objectives. At the same time, the rivalry between ministries and authorities over resources, power and mandates negatively affects the overall implementation of comprehensive and well-established National Priority Programmes, leading to duplication of efforts and waste of resources.

Some in MAIL consider that food security should naturally fall under MAIL's mandate and that AFSeN's establishment within the CEO's office is, therefore, problematic as it detracts from MAIL's authority. This is a symptom of the consistent rivalry between these two Government institutions and translates into the perception within MAIL that AFSeN is a "pro CEO" agenda, and therefore prevents MAIL from full-heartedly engaging in AFSeN.

As mentioned throughout this report, the security situation is another key contextual element, affecting outreach, allocation of resources and provision of basic services to vulnerable communities by NGOs and donors, and directly and indirectly affecting their food and nutrition security status. Furthermore, widespread and long-term insecurity in Afghanistan has influenced the allocation of resources and confronting and reducing it has become the primary focus of development interventions to the detriment of other needs, such as those of vulnerable communities living in the remote areas.

4.5 Information management

Up to now, food security and nutrition information in Afghanistan, including socio-economic data, agricultural statistics, nutrition data, early warning information and emergency assessments, has been generated by various institutions ranging from government entities to international agencies, NGOs and donors. These information systems overall have provided relevant and valuable data and information. However, they also embody shortcomings that need to be tackled in order to obtain a consistent picture of the FNS situation, and to design and implement appropriate response strategies, and monitor progress and results.

Information on food security is currently collected through yearly Seasonal Food Security Assessment conducted by the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster, which is mainly donor funded. Food security analysis has been provided through various sources such as the Afghanistan Living Condition Survey, IPC, Seasonal Food Security Assessment, the MAIL-Management Information Systems (MIS), and nutrition surveillance data. However, even though MAIL's M&E, MIS, and the statistic department are providing a basis for a mapping system, and the Food Security and Agriculture and the Nutrition Clusters have a system, Who is doing What and Where (3W), mapping short-term interventions, the country has no comprehensive system to track actions in food security and nutrition. Furthermore, the M&E department of the Ministry of Agriculture does not monitor the impact of food security and agriculture policies and has insufficient capacity to regularly monitor the food security situation in the country to guide policy and program processes.

So overall up to now there has been no central unit storing data on food security and nutrition, and while information to support food and nutrition security programming exists, its fragmentation and inconsistency present a challenge. Furthermore, particularly within MAIL and between Ministries information is not always shared, nor is there widespread awareness about the need to use the data that is available, and the Government in Afghanistan makes moderate use of food security data for informed decision-making purposes. On the other hand, data produced by the Clusters and the IPC are used largely by donors, government and UN agencies for the humanitarian response.

According to some sources, the quality of data on agriculture collected by MAIL has been found to be contradictory and therefore not always valid or credible, and there is currently a conflict over whether MAIL or the National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) should be in charge of agricultural data collection. MAIL has started district level profiling in collaboration with FAO and coherently with the CAD NPP framework, but the information is very granular and it is doubtful whether this kind of exercise can be scaled up, and what the data can be used for.

A recent legislation requires all data to be consolidated under the National Statistics and Information Authority, who in the future should be the agency produce official data exclusively. NSIA has the capacity to collect information on the ground, while it requires assistance from donors in the design of surveys, which are developed through a consultative process with national and international partners, who may request adding indicators relevant to their work. The recent Income Expenditure and Labour Force Survey, for example, was carried out in all 34 provinces by NSIA under their own budget and for the first time using tablets for data collections.

There are obvious advantages in this effort to consolidate data on food security, nutrition, and agriculture, enhancing both credibility of data and access to them. On the other hand, there are some obstacles to this trend, the first one being political, since, as mentioned, different institutions and bodies are often reluctant to loosen their hold on the information they possess,

which after all is a form of power. The capacity of NSIA to collect and analyse all the information needed is also questionable. For example, NSIA does not track crises, it does not collect data on IDPs, nor does it carry out seasonal surveys, so its capacity to produce relevant information for Disaster Risk Reduction and prevention, or to feed into policies regarding returnees and refugees, and more in general supporting nexus programming, is doubtful. Another important gap is NSIA's failure to collect gender disaggregated data on food and nutrition security at household level, though this kind of information is essential to understand the utilisation dimension of food security and inform policies tackling gender inequality within the household. Lastly, the absence of data protection legislation in Afghanistan prevents agencies from sharing data on their beneficiaries, whom they are called on to protect. No data were collected on nutrition in the last Domestic Household Survey (DHS) however, there will be four new nutrition indicators in the next DHS round which should include wasting and stunting. A new Nutrition and Health Survey should be carried out in 2020 with USAID support.

4.6 Partnerships and Coordination

On paper many ministries including Ministry of Energy and Water (MEW), MOPH, MAIL, MRRD, and National Statistical Information Authority (NSIA) are responsible for facilitating coordination and ensuring policy coherence under the leadership of the President's and the CEO's offices, to address food security and nutrition in an integrated fashion. MAIL on the other hand is responsible for ensuring both horizontal (from district to central level and back) and vertical (between departments and ministries) information flow, and strategically strengthening coordination in the food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture sectors.

AFSeN is an answer to nutrition's usual condition of "homelessness", since it does not fit into a single government agency, addressing the need for cross-sectoral coordination on nutrition. At the same time, by bridging the gap between humanitarian and development actors in nutrition, at least in theory it provides an opportunity towards a joint approach to realising the Nexus in Afghanistan. However up to now the sustainability of AFSeN has not been granted, and it is as yet unclear how and at what level the government's ability to create an enabling environment for effective and transparent implementation of the coherent cross-sectoral and sectoral policy and strategic framework of AFSeN will be ensured.

The *Food Security and Agriculture Cluster* is a coordination structure which ensures leadership and coordination of emergency food security and agriculture interventions to address critical humanitarian needs, promote effective and efficient responses and build national capacities in food security analysis, response planning and coordination. Its members include 167 representatives of government, national and international NGOs, UN and research organizations. The *Nutrition Cluster* is a further body to strengthen humanitarian coordination and ensure a predictable and accountable nutrition response as part of the humanitarian reform. It presently includes both humanitarian and development actors.

The UN, donor and NGO community also play a vital role in emergency preparedness and response through the Food Security and Agriculture and the Nutrition Clusters. The National Disaster Management Plan by the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) deals with disaster preparedness and response while long term recovery and rehabilitation are the remit of relevant line ministries. MAIL is responsible for dealing with short-term interventions by formulating sector-based disaster risk management interventions focusing on mitigation and prevention, preparedness and response under CAD NPP's sixth strategic priority area. The MoPH has also taken on this challenge through its sector specific policies.

Within ministries coordination is uneven, and among them it is weak. In the health sector, for instance, there is strong coordination, while there is almost none between MAIL directorates, and

before the establishment of the revamped AFSeN the same could be said of coordination within the FNS sector, which still remains a challenge in practice, due to instability, insecurity and politics, among other things. In terms of nutrition, the guidelines for supplementary feeding and the food based dietary guidelines for Afghanistan were the first successful attempt at working cross-sectorally between MAIL, MoPH and MoE. The MoPH contributed a little when MAIL's Food and Nutrition Strategy was developed, however their intermittent participation during the drafting sessions is another instance of weak collaboration between Ministries when it would have been appropriate. The lack of coordination between Ministries is a serious hurdle to implementation, especially for cross-sectoral policies, but not exclusively, as the case of the effects of the failure of MAIL and MRRD to link up to realise the farmer-centric and pro-poor approach at the heart of the CAD NPP.

In the agriculture sector *Public Private Partnerships* can be a way of empowering interest groups such as farmers, communities and civil society by involving them in decision-making processes through the platform of the CDCs under the Citizen Charter NPP, while also strengthening efforts to control corruption. On the other hand there are challenges in working with the private sector in Afghanistan, due to a variety of factors, among which disputes on land, climate change, and the difficulty on behalf of a very traditional private sector to invest in agriculture primarily because of insecurity and scarce and unpredictable irrigation in many parts of the country.

As mentioned in 1.6, integrating peace, development and humanitarian actions under a common framework, or what is commonly known as the Nexus approach, would be extremely relevant in the Afghan context⁹³. While significant resources have been dedicated to providing emergency relief to address natural disasters in the past, a more holistic, long-term approach is now required. Such an approach would ensure that humanitarian, development, and peace efforts are mutually reinforcing, helping the country to achieve not only zero hunger and climate resilience, but also its broader aspirations of reducing outmigration, and achieving sustainable development and lasting peace.

There is widespread consensus that there is presently a big disconnect between the three areas in terms of partners and mechanisms, and that not enough is being done to address it. There is a prevalent tendency to rely on humanitarian intervention, due to the long-term crisis modality that has been operational in the country. The weak link between the humanitarian and development sectors in Afghanistan, often also reflected within agencies and organisations, has manifested itself during the recent drought response, when inaction on the development side rendered the whole affected population a humanitarian caseload, with serious consequences once the humanitarian funding window closed, and IDPs who had not been absorbed by development projects fell into the gap between the two and, though still in need of it, stopped receiving any form of assistance.

Most people interviewed for this study agreed that the bigger gap is found on the development side, and that if more and better development interventions were in place, also in terms of prevention (what an interviewee called the "nexus backwards"), the need for humanitarian presence would be much circumscribed. The current somewhat artificial divide between humanitarian and development caseloads and needs, mainly created by the ways of working of the international community, could disappear with better integration between the communities and actions on the two sides.

The Famine Action Mechanism, recently established to address recurrent famines with a commonly agreed ex-ante plan, triggering financial and surge capacity, is a useful and welcome facility, but it does not in itself respond to the need to close the gap, as the problem is not lack of early warning, but rather the capacity of development actors and initiatives to be present in the

⁹³ See also Annex 1

early stages of a crisis, and to put their considerable resources into action.

Because this approach should bring together three different systems and sets of actors, it is in dire need of a common coordination platform. This does not exist at present, seeing that the UN Country Team does not include donors and NGOs, and the Humanitarian Country Team, which includes all three groups of actors, has an exclusively humanitarian focus. Who should be championing the nexus approach is also unclear, and it risks becoming another case of an issue belonging everywhere and to everyone, and therefore not finding a concrete home.

Some attempts have been made to move forward and kick off the debate on the nexus, including consultations carried out by UNAMA, a discussion in June 2019 within the Humanitarian Country Team, and, currently, the recruitment of a consultant by UNDP exploring how to operationalize the nexus in Afghanistan.

Some questions that remain open and need to be addressed to move forward with a more integrated way of working are the following: firstly, finding ways to finance transition between clear cut humanitarian and development interventions, necessary for example when targeting IDPs (see also chapter 5); secondly, attract the World Bank's interest in humanitarian initiatives, since it is a huge actor in Afghanistan, but has never even attended the HCT, notwithstanding a standing invitation; thirdly, gain a better understanding of the links with the peace component, how humanitarian and development work contributes to peace, and how these contributions could be measured. This kind of research would be desirable since these relationships have not been much explored, but also to clarify the scope of action of each kind of initiative, and minimise the risk of politicising humanitarian action.

Summary: A number of issues affect the effective implementation of SDG2 related policies, among which: no or weak institutionalization of AFSeN; lack of policy coherence and coordination (both vertical and horizontal) to deal with the complex and multi-dimensional nature of food and nutrition security; currently implementation of MAIL's development programs is concentrated at central level, as is adoption of SDGs. Capacity to reach out and operate at subnational level is crucial to implementation, however decentralisation is hindered by lack of/limited technical capacities, weak regulatory mechanisms, lack of political will, and insecurity in parts of the country.

5. RESOURCES VS. IMPLEMENTATION

To what extent are the existing policies and strategies adequately resourced (from national resources and other sources), implemented, monitored and, in case of inadequate or incomplete implementation, what are the implications for the achievement of the intended food security and nutrition impacts?

According to the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework, all financial resources should be allotted through the national budget, or alternatively international assistance should be aligned to the objectives of the NPPs. In practice however, the GOIRA does not control off-budget contributions. The evidence suggest that government ministries fit what funding is available from the national budget and donors' assistance to their strategic plans and policies – while in fact costing plans ought to direct resource mobilization, and not vice versa.

National budget allocation for food security and nutrition is classified separately for each involved government ministry based on their strategic plans and programme objectives. Funding is progress-oriented rather than a flat allocation. The MoF allocates resources via the national budget, and international donors also play a pivotal role by securing funding, either “on-budget”, through the government, or by directly funding programs and projects “off-budget”. Government ministries have to report on their progress against the programming objectives to secure additional funding, and if they lag behind the delivery timetable they miss the chance to obtain any.

Most Government strategies analysed in this report lack implementation plans and resource mobilization strategies, which means that policies and programmes are mostly delivered through projects, a form of implementation which places a constraint on them and makes them dependent on donor commitment. Considering that the national development budget, including MAIL, has been mainly financed by international donors until now, changing strategic focus will require a substantial increase in public budget allocation for policy work and development programmes for food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture. Furthermore, in the present changing financial environment where competition over shrinking resources is increasing, it is mandatory for MAIL to stop relying on a constant cash flow from donors, and start adopting a more strategic outlook and being more pro-active, including gaining a better understanding of what to prioritise and how.

The national budget for the fiscal year 2017 amounted to US\$ 6.5 billion, marking an 8.3% decrease compared to the previous year, with a budget gap three times the available funds. For 2017 the Government of Afghanistan allocated around 7% of the country's total budget, or US\$ 455 million, to the Agriculture sector. Budget allocation for the Health sector in comparison is very meagre, accounting for only US\$ 215 million, or 3% of the national budget. MAIL's estimated five yearly budget (2017-2021) for the food and nutrition security sector is around US\$ 81 million, of which US\$ 17 million are committed, with a present gap of US\$ 64 million. Allocation to the FSN sector is much lower than what is budgeted for the other MAIL strategic priority areas, and a sign of weak government commitment to this area of work. For example the irrigation sector has the largest estimated budget with US\$ 393 million, followed by wheat/cereal and horticulture with US\$ 350 million each, while the estimated budget allotted to natural resource management is US\$ 319 million, and for livestock it's around US\$ 285 million.

FIGURE 12: NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT BUDGET 2018-19 BY SECTORS

Sectors	000 USD	% share in the total discretionary (2018)	000 USD	% share in the total discretionary (2019)
Security	16,000	3%	2,109,661	34%
Governance	16,169	3%	312,304	5 %
Infrastructure	198,508	41%	1,285,992	21%
Education	62,661	13%	804,653.7	13%
Health	42,365	9%	205,808.2	3 %
Agriculture and Rural Dev	83,811	17%	435,629.0	7 %
Social Protection	9,640	2%	377,427.2	6 %
Economic Governance	31,487	6%	125,699.9	2 %
Contingency Codes	28,881	6%	477,305.1	8 %
Total	489,521	100%	6,134,481	100%

Since data on government spending on Food and Nutrition Security is difficult to collect, given its multi-dimensional character and its dependence on non-agriculture investments, it is measured through such proxies as public expenditure on agriculture, coverage of public social protection and progress made towards the SDGs on hunger reduction, universal primary education for all, gender equality and drinking water and sanitation.

According to the CAD NPP, the total budget for the agriculture sector is estimated at around US\$ 1,978 million for five years, whereas the commitment through on-going programmes only covers US\$ 561 million, leaving a deficit of US\$ 1,417 million, a gap three times higher than the currently available budget. Most of the government’s human and financial resources related to food security, nutrition, agriculture and resilience building are limited to the national level at present, with scarce resources allotted to the subnational level.

MAIL’s five-year budget (2017-2021) illustrates the expected budget for each priority, the commitment by government and development partners ⁹⁴, and the gap to cover.

An implementation plan for the CAD NPP has been developed and endorsed by MoF staff, and an accompanying investment plan has been costed up to 70%. A FAO consultant was providing technical inputs to the investment plan while this report was being drafted⁹⁵, after which the plan will be finalised. The plan envisages attracting future investment for the following: improved irrigation systems and increase agricultural production; improved food security through broad based, gendered interventions; development of a balanced agricultural development strategy that ensures the poor are not left behind; agribusiness development for job creation and increasing economic growth; sustainable Natural Resource Management. Accompanying

⁹⁴ Commitments are made under various projects, among which On Farm Water Management (OFWM), Strengthening Watershed and Irrigation Management (SWIM), Realigning Agriculture for Improved Nutrition (RAIN), Panj-Amu River Basin Programme (PARBP), Support to National Priority Programme 2 (sNaPP2), Community Livestock and Agriculture Programme (CLAP), National Horticulture and Livestock Project (NHLP), Afghanistan Agriculture Inputs Project (AAIP), Grain Research and Innovation (GRAIN), Strategic Grain Reserve (SGR).

⁹⁵ The consultant was scheduled to start working earlier, but could only be hired in September 2019 as a waiver from FAO’s two language rule for consultants had to be obtained in order for him to be recruited.

guidelines have been developed to ensure effective and efficient implementation of the planned activities. The guidelines will ensure that all investments will be adopted as per government's rules on incorporating accurate forward cost estimates for operation and maintenance, in order to safeguard transparency, accountability and predictability with appropriate monitoring and evaluation systems. Implementation will be carried out through strengthened coordination and partnership, to promote broad-based agriculture development and minimise the existence of fragmented and parallel delivery mechanisms. In any case MAIL's capacity to draft policies and investments is still weak, and assistance in their review remains a space for future FAO and EUD support.

FIGURE 13: MAIL BUDGET IN USD MILLIONS (2017-2021)

Item	Budget	Committed	GAP
Irrigation	391.50	193.0	198.50
Wheat (& other Cereals)	92.00	27.00	65.00
Horticulture	288.90	86.80	202.10
Livestock	262.95	124.90	138.05
Natural Resources MANAGEMENT	318.50	17.00	301.50
Food & Nutrition Security	318.50	17.00	301.50
Institutional Reform	105.79	12.13	93.66
TOTAL	1886.02	536.69	1349.33

The Agribusiness component of the CAD NPP is sufficiently financed, both on and off budget, to move forward, unsurprisingly, seeing that there is a serious appetite for a growth in this area, both on behalf of donors and of government. The MoF reviews concept notes of agribusiness projects and determines eligibility for funding on the basis of their capacity to generate income and employment.

As mentioned, the health sector is totally donor-funded, and the unsustainability of this model is of great concern. Data from the 2014 System of Health Accounts (SHA) show that Afghanistan spent about US\$ 97 million or two dollars per capita on nutritional disorders, only US\$ 820 of which, or US\$ 0.02 per capita, were from the public budget, while the remaining US\$ 96 million came from development partners and out-of-pocket expenditure⁹⁶. The Public Nutrition Directorate will develop annual work plans related to the MoPH's responsibilities for successful implementation of the six broad Strategic Components of the Nutrition Policy. The work plans will be prepared in close consultation with PND's partners within MoPH and other public and private sector entities. In order to track the implementation and anticipated improvements in the nutritional status of target populations, the PND has planned to improve its system for administrative monitoring of the implementation of nutrition services through BPHS and EPHS implementing facilities, and implement the Nutrition Monitoring and Surveillance System (NMSS) that is being developed with funding support of CIDA and technical support of WHO and UNICEF, and is expected to track the quality, coverage and impact of large-scale nutrition interventions in the country.

⁹⁶ Respectively US\$ 56 million or US\$ 1.62 per capita, and US\$ 39.9 million or about US\$ 1.15 per capita.

BOX 5: COST-EFFECTIVENESS OF EXPANDING INVESTMENT IN NUTRITION

The World Bank's discussion paper, "An Investment framework for nutrition in Afghanistan (April 2018), estimates the costs, impacts and cost effectiveness of expanding high-impact nutrition interventions to reduce stunting and invest in the early years, emphasizing that significant public investment is required to scale up to government-set up programme coverage level.

This paper examines the costs, impacts, and cost-effectiveness of scaling up the nutrition interventions included in Afghanistan's Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) as a first step in investing in the early years to build human capital. Total public investment required for the scale up to government-set program coverage levels is estimated at US\$ 44 million per year over five years, or US\$ 1.49 per capita per year.

Each dollar invested would yield at least thirteen in economic returns and even under conservative assumptions regarding future economic growth, so the economic benefits exceed cost by six times: US\$ 815 million over the productive lives of the beneficiaries. This scale up would prevent almost 25,000 child deaths and over 4,000 cases of stunting and avert a loss of 640,000 disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) and almost 90,000 cases years of anaemia.

Almost 100,000 more children would be exclusively breastfed. However, this scale-up would only have a marginal effect – a decrease of less than one-half percentage point – on stunting prevalence because the current government-set target program coverage rates are very low for the preventive interventions that affect stunting. A substantially greater impact could be achieved if preventive interventions could be scaled to full program coverage levels, which would require less than US\$ 5 million more a year. This would triple the number of DALYs averted, double the number of deaths averted and avert almost eight times as many cases of stunting, resulting in a 2.6 percentage point decline in stunting over the five year period (from 41% to 38%).

The prevalence of anaemia in pregnant women could be reduced by 12 percentage points, and the prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding could be increased by 18 percentage points. In addition, this investment is projected to generate economic benefits of US\$ 815 million over the productive lives of the beneficiaries. Each dollar invested would yield more than \$13 in economic returns. Sensitivity analysis was conducted for the total cost, cost effectiveness, and economic returns on investing in the BPHS nutrition interventions.

Although the Ministry of Public Health considers nutrition a fundamental priority, allocation of finances towards Nutrition Sensitive Interventions in the costing plans of relevant ministries remains negligible, as demonstrated by AFSeN's rapid assessment:

- **Agriculture, Irrigation, Livestock (MAIL):** For 2019, MAIL suggested a budget of 13,826,431,000 AFs for nutrition-sensitive interventions, which is 32% higher than the ceiling proposed by MoF, so due to budget limitation MoF may not approve the proposal. However, considering that the proportion of food insecure population is at a high 45% in the country, and since MAIL is the key ministry responsible for the AFSeN, agenda, its budget deserves special attention and support, particularly on budget lines dedicated to food production and women's economic empowerment.
- **Ministry of Energy and Water (MoEW):** In 2018 allocation to nutrition sensitive activities was 311,330,240 AFs, or 31.60 % of total budget. For 2019, a slight 0.12% increase compared to the previous year is forecast, mainly from the ARTF.

- **Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD):** In 2019 a budget of 5,132,022,000 AFs was proposed for nutrition sensitive actions mainly planned and executed under the Citizen Charter NPP, including food for the poorest population sector in winter, provision of potable water, construction of water reservoirs, improved irrigation facilities and hygiene, sanitation education.
- **State Ministry for Disaster Management:** This ministry does not have a budget for food security and nutrition, furthermore, in 2018 the development budget was not approved by MoF. For 2019, the ministry presented two concepts for MoF approval, one for disaster management awareness and establishment of school committees in schools of 10 provinces over two years, worth 80,645 AFs and a second one on prevention and mitigation of malnutrition risks through food distribution, food storage, water storage and humanitarian response.

A roadmap for AFSeN started to be developed last year: it will outline activities under each action area as well as an M&E indicator matrix to form the basis for the future costing plan, in order to inform programme managers of each of the 17 government agencies participating in AFSeN of the resource requirements to improve food security and nutrition over the next five years, and be used to advocate for resource mobilization. Resources are needed to operationalise the AFSeN plan and strategy, but it is also important that AFSeN is gradually weaned off support from international agencies, in order for the GOIRA to eventually take over full ownership of the Agenda. Though as mentioned the AFSeN secretariat will also need to secure funding starting from 2020, for now MoF is not planning to take on the expense.

For the moment the total off-budget costs and available funding to implement the AFSeN strategic plan is simply disaggregated by nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive activities, the estimate for the latter being greater than for the former, and the proportion of nutrition-sensitive activities that has received funding is slightly higher. Overall funding is still very low⁹⁷.

⁹⁷ As the costing is a work in progress, the figures are approximate and the data is not yet endorsed by the government.

FIGURE 14: TOTAL OFF-BUDGET COST, AVAILABLE FUNDING, AND UNFUNDED ACTIVITIES OF AFSEN

	Total Off- Budget Cost	Funded Activities	Unfunded Activities
Nutrition-Specific Activities	US\$ 329,754,725	US\$ 31,186,524 (9.5%)	US\$ 298,568,201 (90.5%)
Nutrition-sensitive Activities	US\$ 552,846,853	US\$ 69,314,731 (12.5%)	US\$ 483,532,122 (87.5%)
Total	US\$ 882,601,578	US\$ 100,501,255 (11.4%)	US\$ 782,100,323 (88.6%)

Development Partners' contributions

According to the 2014 OECD report the largest donors in Afghanistan included USA, Germany, the EU, the UK, Japan and World Bank, mainly in social infrastructure, including security, governance, education and health. In 2014 only around USD 4.8 billion was allocated in Afghanistan in production category in sectors like agriculture, fisheries and forestry, main donors being USA (116 million), the EU (37), the UK (31), Denmark (27) and Korea (16).

USAID is shifting its approach in the Agriculture sector from input delivery to private-led growth and value chain of high-value crops (mainly horticulture), along with technical assistance to small and medium enterprises in agri-business with the Agriculture development Fund, which is an initiative to expand access to credit. Despite an emphasis on agricultural led economic growth, the bulk of USAID support goes to security (over 50%) and governance (over 25%), while 8% of total ODA goes towards humanitarian goals. This leaves little for investments in the agricultural, sector, which have to be further divided between counternarcotic initiatives and civilian operations.

The EU's priorities in Afghanistan in the Agriculture and Rural Development sectors have mainly been reducing the dependence of farmer households on poppy income and building institutional capacity, besides the cross-cutting areas of interest of increasing resilience, disaster risk reduction and rehabilitation. The EU also focuses on agri-business through Sustainable Economic Development and Economic Promotion (SEDEP), and Facility for Agriculture and Rural Market (FARM) development projects on post-harvest and extension development. There are four transitioning projects, among which Seeds Certification and the IPC. Very recently the EU offered MAIL around 2.5 million euro in the Agriculture sector for a three years project with the overall objective to improve monitoring and analysis of agricultural production systems to support agricultural policies and food security in the country. Otherwise the EU is moving to on-budget support and since 2018 has been providing funding to the MoF through the State Resilience Building Contract a cooperation package worth €474 Million. However MAIL does not compete for this bigger pot, and is still operating in the old modality to which it is used, depending on large cash flows on the part of donors. The EU is ready to continue providing technical support, but not to continue to pay staff's salaries, and is presently trying to transfer capacities and facilities to MAIL. However it is still prepared to support specific projects financially, such as the IPC, which is considered to be a successful investment.

DFID focuses on private sector development, economic growth and trade, and in the agriculture sector it also targets poverty reduction by creating job opportunities such as legal rural employment and income through more efficient agricultural value chains and markets. DFID's 5 years program (2014-2019) allocated approximately £30 m or 40% of its funds to agriculture and 30% to rural development.

The German cooperation's priority areas have included the promotion of sustainable economic development and employment – particularly in the agriculture sector, with the creation of 15,000 jobs, a 30% increase income for producers and employees, the promotion of agriculture programs including the expansion of irrigation systems, better seeds, livestock breeding, use of fertilizers and pesticides and improved crop rotation and storage, refinement, marketing and the promotion of the value chain.

JICA's emphasis is on improving economic growth, including job creation, sustainability and self-reliance with a special focus on the Agriculture sector. The Project for Rice Based Agriculture Development in Afghanistan (RIPA) is one of the major projects with MAIL, beside which JICA is also supporting MAIL in sector-wide coordination and capacity building.

Australia's aid program in Afghanistan focused on promoting prosperity, reducing poverty and enhancing stability. One of the objectives was to build resilience and support at-risk populations, strengthening resilience and food security efforts at the local level and connecting farmers and rural producers, including women, to markets and supporting increased crop yields. Support to the Agriculture sector is mostly focusing on dry land farming and research and extension, and some of its off-budget support targets the International Centre for Agriculture Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (CIMMYT), and others.

The *World Bank's* focus in Afghanistan is investment in agriculture, considering it is the sector deemed by the Agriculture Sector Review 2014 most likely to result in poverty reduction and job creation. Emphasis is on value chain development, increasing productivity, expanding irrigated areas, reducing post-harvest losses of main staples, promotion of high value crops, intensive livestock production in peri urban areas. Recommended interventions include improving animal breeds, privatizing veterinary services, developing medicines and vaccines, improving the availability of livestock feeds by supporting production by SMEs, better extension services and livestock disease control; programs for farmers in rain fed land/areas. Other non-agricultural programs are also recommended, including community development programs, education and training, social protection, settlement of nomadic people.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the bottlenecks to making the nexus way of working operational is the absence of appropriate tools, among which a funding mechanisms for “transition”, i.e. any issue that lays across what the aid world rather too neatly classifies under the “development”, “humanitarian” or “peace” pillars. The importance of finding a way to “fund transition” was raised in various meetings held for this diagnostic. Many were of the opinion that development actors need to find ways to release funds more quickly than they are currently able to do. This would be appropriate, to counter the fact that a humanitarian response is almost always universally considered the first choice of action, irrespective of the circumstances, and also considering that, paradoxically, the development budget is considerably bigger than the humanitarian one, with an approximate ratio of 8/1. Suggested solutions range from the possibility to putting aside a share of development funding for “transition”, either at source, with the donor providing flexible funds, or at delivery point, through a recipient “transition pool”, to the establishment of a flexible pot in the ARTF, say 10% dedicated to “adaptive programming”, which presently does not exist.

6. POLITICAL ECONOMY FACTORS IMPACTING IMPLEMENTATION

What are the political economy factors that may prevent the adoption and/or implementation of the right set of measures, actions, and implementation mechanisms to eradicate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition by 2030?

Hunger and malnutrition are closely correlated to poverty and inequality, which in turn are affected by decades of conflict and political instability. Although the change of leadership, election processes at different levels, the new constitution and the creation of a legislature are all steps towards improving the socio-political environment, the ongoing conflict and the Taliban insurgency maintain Afghans in a state of uncertainty, and limit the government's outreach and its capacity to establish itself as the sole legitimate ruling force throughout the country, keeping Afghanistan exposed to the trends of global geopolitics, and internally to acts of violence and terrorism.

After the defeat of the Taliban in 2001, discussions about the shape the new Afghan state should take were influenced by history, political affiliation, ethnic and religious representations and international affiliation, and to this day the National Unity Government maintains a delicate ethnic and political/religious balance. In the previous Hamid Karzai administration ministerial positions, which ensured access to domestic and international resources, came to be dominated by personality-driven commercial and military networks and ex-military commanders, transformed into skillful politicians and entrepreneurs. By the end of Hamid Karzai's tenure, in 2014, it was evident that the radical state-building and democratization project of the early post-Taliban years had been captured by elites and patronage networks, and that the attempt to get rid of warlords and their networks had failed utterly, primarily due to international security concerns⁹⁸.

In the Afghan context, formal and informal institutions and licit and illicit sources of income are hard to separate. While the formal state apparatus remains totally dependent on foreign support, a semi-formal state exists, partially embedded in the formal one, but reliant on opium and the smuggling economy to further its interests and secure its position. A parallel informal illegal state, represented by the Taliban and other militant groups draws income from drugs and imposed taxes, and receives some support from a disgruntled population. These three levels of the state interact with each other in complex ways and shape the Afghan political and economic space. A further key characteristic of Afghanistan is the underlying structure of ethnic groups and tribes, all of which have networks extending in neighboring countries. All groups maintain a degree of tribal structure, regulation, and justice, and all maintain networks that are part of the state apparatus, run parallel to it, or oppose it, sometimes simultaneously⁹⁹.

The Afghan economy is highly dependent on *the informal sector*, which represents 80-90% of total economic activity, *illicit poppy cultivation*¹⁰⁰, whose revenue is more than 1.4 billion USD in 2017¹⁰¹, and *remittances* from Afghan expatriates, which in 2017 amounted about 2.02% of the GDP. These

⁹⁸ Strand, A., Borchgrevink, K. and Berg Harpviken, K. 2017, Afghanistan: A Political Economy Analysis, Oslo, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs.

⁹⁹ Strand, A., Borchgrevink, K. and Berg Harpviken, K. (2017)

¹⁰⁰ https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afghanistan_opium_survey_2018.pdf

¹⁰¹ The total opium poppy cultivation area in Afghanistan was estimated at 263,000 (242,000 – 283,000) hectares in 2018, 20% or 65,000 hectares decrease compared to the previous year. It is the second highest measurement since the beginning of systematic opium poppy monitoring and recording in 1994. The level of 2018 exceeds the third highest level of 2014 by 17% or 39,000 hectares

three sources of revenue result in plentiful liquidity but limited sustainability of cash flows, as well as inequitable and unsustainable distribution of income and resources. Since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001 the economy also continues to rely on massive inflows of aid, creating a rentier State and a political and administrative class dependent on development and humanitarian assistance¹⁰². This state of affairs has contributed to the high levels of corruption widely confirmed by international rankings, where Afghanistan consistently scores at the bottom in terms of government effectiveness and control of corruption.¹⁰³

The fragmentation of the country split between Government and non-Government forces,¹⁰⁴ complicates the drive to decentralise, and the difficulty to control the periphery, a feature in Afghan history that goes back to the Taliban regime and earlier¹⁰⁵, constitutes a serious obstacle to decentralisation. Distribution of state revenue to secure loyalty and maintain control throughout the country also hampers decentralisation, as do the lack of investment, resources, and capacity of decentralised administration structures. Provincial stakeholders interviewed for a 2017 study on stakeholder perceptions of agricultural and nutrition policies confirmed the weakness of decentralisation, expressing “a lack of confidence in the knowledge of central policy-makers”¹⁰⁶.

Further constraining the country’s political and economic development and with relevant effects on its overall security is its relationship and partial interdependence with regional and global conflicts, including the tensions in the Persian Gulf between Iran and Saudi Arabia, those between Pakistan and India, and at a wider scale, the power struggle between the USA, China, and Russia. Conflicts within Afghanistan are exacerbated by the involvement of its neighbours, on whom as a land-locked country it also depends for imports and exports, and an Afghan peace will necessarily depend on the involvement of regional and global actors. At the same time, the country also faces a large number of local conflicts often over natural resources, family matters and the misuse of authority, which will not be solved through a formal nation-wide peace agreement¹⁰⁷.

The above-mentioned study found policies to be often donor-driven, ill designed through top-down processes, with insufficient knowledge of local realities or the heterogeneity of the Afghan context¹⁰⁸. Dependence on external funding streams and resources tends to shape policies according to international expectations, and this does not necessarily translate into efficient or effective outcomes at the local level. Furthermore, this dependency is not acknowledged in the

¹⁰² Strand, A., Borchgrevink, K. and Berg Harpviken, K. (2017).

¹⁰³ Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index, ranks Afghanistan as the 172th most corrupt out of 180 nations in 2018, a dire situation that effectively prevents the public sector from providing basic services. A World Bank governance indicator, the Government Effectiveness Index (GEI) captures perceptions of the quality of public services, quality of the civil service and the degree of independence from political pressures, quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of government’s commitment to such policies. In 2018 Afghanistan had a GEI of -1.5 on a scale of -2.5 to +2.5, and ranked in the 7.7 percentile of over 200 countries for which the GEI was computed. A further World Bank indicator, Control of Corruption, captures perceptions of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as “capture” of the state by elites and private interests. In terms of control of corruption Afghanistan scored -1.5 and ranked in the 4.3 percentile. Fighting corruption in the public sector would require reviewing current staff and reforming the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Services Commission.

¹⁰⁴ The lack of government influence over specific areas does not always translate into greater Taliban control, as the range of local power-holders and gradations in extent of control go beyond a simple Taliban versus government binary dynamic.

¹⁰⁵ David Mansfield (2016), *A State built on sand: how opium undermined Afghanistan*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

¹⁰⁶ Poole, N. et al (2017), *Stakeholder perception of agriculture and nutrition policies and practices: A policy brief for Afghanistan*, Kabul, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

¹⁰⁷ Strand, A., Borchgrevink, K. and Berg Harpviken, K. 2017

¹⁰⁸ Poole, N. et al (2017)

government's ANPDF, and if on the one hand it is perhaps understandable for political expediency reasons, on the other it risks translating into unrealistic and overambitious aims. As mentioned in chapter 4, Food and Nutrition Security is not well reflected in MAIL strategies, partly due to its reliance on project-led development efforts, running counter to what would be a more effective programmatic outlook.

Of the over US\$ 57 billion in Official Development Assistance (ODA) that Afghanistan received between 2001 and 2015, a large portion has gone to the security sector to the detriment of long term and productive investments, and Food and Nutrition Security and Agriculture initiatives have suffered accordingly. In order to maximise cost effectiveness, and to use aid to “win hearts and minds” of the Afghans, quick impact projects have generally been preferred by donors over ones addressing the drivers of the conflict or the underlying causes of inequality, poverty and food insecurity. As a result, there is not enough to show in terms of sustainable development, markedly in the agriculture sector, relatively to the huge overall amounts spent. The unsustainability of this mode of assistance was revealed as economic growth fell sharply following the reduction in international assistance in 2014, and poverty rates and gaps in access to services between poor and non-poor increased¹⁰⁹.

Although both donors and the Afghan Government sign up to the aid effectiveness principles, neither one actually fulfils their role of holding the other to account. Furthermore, as mentioned, though ostensibly designing their development strategies in consultation with the Afghan government, in practice donors' key decisions are taken in their respective capitals, following their own rationale. When it comes to implementing projects, donors often work with the local partners they are used to, staying in the same geographical areas, rather than assessing needs and implementing accordingly. Major donors in the agricultural sector include USAID, EU, JICA, ADB and the World Bank, among others. The benefits that would derive from them working in coordination with humanitarian actors, or even the humanitarian side of their own organisations has already been remarked upon in this report. If the peace process should move forwards, it would constitute an opportunity for putting the Nexus approach in place operationally, since it should extend the geographical scope for development actors, allowing for greater harmonisation of development and humanitarian initiatives.

As already mentioned extensively, data is fragmented, as different actors operate with different datasets. For a variety of reasons, including competition within and between government agencies, information is not easily shared, and therefore obtaining robust and reliable data is a challenge. Furthermore, no population census exists, partly because it would challenge the delicate balance of the agreed numeric representation among ethnic groups, which is reflected in the National Unity Government.

Afghanistan has been described as a “classic patriarchy”, and women's rights have been a central part of the political agenda since the end of the Taliban regime. In fact the reversal of Talibans' regulations restricting women's liberties was espoused as a key motivation for the international community to intervene and then continue supporting the Afghan government. In practice formal changes, expressed through legal frameworks and a quota system guaranteeing female representation in institutions, have mostly improved conditions and access to education in Kabul and other urban areas particularly for elites, while they have mostly failed to change the lives of the urban middle and working classes, not to mention the majority of women living in rural areas. Crucially, while some efforts have been made to enhance women's access to health and education

¹⁰⁹ Strand, A., Borchgrevink, K. and Berg Harpviken, K. 2017

and to increase their participation in politics, much less attention has been paid to their presence in the productive sectors, including agriculture, or putting in place mechanisms for their economic empowerment¹¹⁰. The idea that men are the ultimate breadwinners while women's place is in the home is deeply entrenched in traditional codes, norms and barriers, and any attempt to redefine gender roles should involve both men and women, and include transforming a rigid notion of masculinity widespread in Afghan society, as well as involving men as champions of greater gender equity¹¹¹. Practical hurdles to women's participation in productive activities include women's low educational level, their restricted mobility, and lack to access to capital and collateral. On the long term, there is some worry that women's rights could be the price paid for making peace with the Taliban, resulting in a step backwards from the small gains that have been made until now in Afghanistan.

The future of food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture policy environment in Afghanistan is subject to available resources following the changing political situation after 2019 Presidential elections. A quote from a 2018 research study captures well the present situation and offers a glimpse of the future: "A great deal of money has been poorly spent in the country, and from a donor's perspective, who answer to capital cities and to their tax payers, they want to see strong results soon, before donor fatigue fully sets in. This is part of the problem, which donors recognise: Afghanistan needs time, it needs longer-term strategies, it needs investment in public institutions and in its people, but for donors, who have been spending billions of dollars of aid money over the years, they need results¹¹²."

¹¹⁰ Strand, A., Borchgrevink, K. and Berg Harpviken, K. 2017

¹¹¹ Echavez, C., Mosawi, S.M., Pilongo, L.W, (2016) *The other side of gender inequality: Men and Masculinities in Afghanistan*, Kabul, AREU.

¹¹² ATR Consulting (2018), *Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan*, Kabul, ATR Consulting.

7. CREDIBILITY OF POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

Considering the above analysis, what is the realism/credibility of the current set of policies and strategies?

The documents examined here were found to be overall well designed, comprehensive and clear, however in practice fragmentation, competition, lack of ownership, donor dependency and lack of reliable data influence food and nutrition and sustainable agriculture policy design and implementation, as has been illustrated throughout this report. In particular, these characteristics of the environment are reflected in a number of practical bottlenecks including MAIL's weakness and absence of leadership, and its lack of capacity on and advocacy for Food and Nutrition Security. The tendency to work through piecemeal projects is a modality that makes it difficult for MoF to work with MAIL. There are an excessive numbers of Ministerial employees in Kabul, well beyond the needs, a result of recruitment through patronage networks, and to a certain extent of the use of public employment as a safety net. On the other hand civil servants' low salaries vis-à-vis donor project staff constitutes a disincentive for qualified staff to remain in government employment, further impacting on the MAIL's capacity.

Partly for historical reasons, corruption persists at all levels and continues to severely limit correct and effective implementation of government policies, and transparent hiring and procurement processes. High staff turnover, and bureaucracy further limit the implementation and operationalization of MAIL's medium and long-term objectives. At the same time, rivalry between ministries and authorities over resources, power and mandates negatively affects the overall implementation of comprehensive and well-established National Priority Programmes, leading to duplication of efforts and waste of resources.

Although the policies are well designed, they often fail to realistically assess the situation throughout the country, MAIL's institutional and organisational capacity, or the resources that are in fact available. An example is the CAD NPP's farmer-centric, bottom-up and demand driven approach, which while in theory relevant and appropriate, is scarcely realistic country wide, considering the present difficulties to reach out to the whole population. It would therefore be important to differentiate interventions, gradually scaling them up, and acknowledging what is realistically achievable, rather than setting out with ambitious plans that have reduced probability to become a successful reality on the ground. Furthermore, in practice, the many options available within the big portfolio of food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture interventions and actions included in the policies under examination, and markedly MAIL's FNS policy, are not ranked or prioritised. Doing so would demand the development of credible implementation and investment plans, based on relevant data and assessed needs.

MAIL'S FNS Strategy's adoption of the food security framework makes it very comprehensive and all encompassing, but at the same time somewhat generic, and not always relevant or adapted to the Afghan context. The strategy is perceived within and beyond MAIL to be confined within the Home Economics Directorate, giving it an extremely limited scope of action, vis-à-vis the multiple links between food and nutrition security and agriculture, and its crosscutting nature, which should require the involvement of more directorates than is presently the case.

Sectoral policies and strategies on food and nutrition and sustainable agriculture, such as MAIL's

CAD NPP and FNS policy, AFSeN, and MoPH's Nutrition Policy cover much of the same ground and partially overlap, however the relationships between them are not clear, nor how they complement each other. For example, the relationship between CAD NPP and the Citizen's Charter is not clearly articulated in practice, although the latter is vital to implementing the former, since the CAD NPP presents the Citizen's Charter as the means to reach out to poorest and most vulnerable rural households and most marginal communities, including IDPs and returnees. Some apparent overlap and unclear relationships also exist between the old and new NPPs, and of these with other non-prioritised policies and with GOIRA's ANPDF.

Furthermore, there is no clarity on how issues such as pasture and rangeland management, rights of passage, access to water resources, provision of agricultural inputs and conflict resolution mechanisms, all extremely relevant in order to address food and nutrition security of the most marginal groups and of women in rural communities, should be linked to MAIL's activities. Another vital but under-explored link is between the Comprehensive Agricultural Policy and legal frameworks on land, also crucial to address food insecurity and poverty, and to encourage private sector investments.

So the lack of coordination within and between Ministries is a serious hurdle to implementation, especially for cross-sectoral policies. One of the overarching consequences of this overall lack of harmonisation is that there are varied and often conflicting ideas of what should be prioritised in the sector, as well as diverging assessments of what works, what doesn't and what should be changed, and no clear and shared vision of the way forward. The value of a multi-stakeholder platform like AFSeN, which stands in contrast to this fragmented policy environment, cannot be overstated.

Limited capacity within Ministries is a serious hurdle to implementation. The capacity of MAIL staff is not always adequate to perform, due to the limited availability of both technical, and public financial and human resource management skills. Extension and credit services in MAIL are also weak. The drivers of agricultural productivity, of markets, and of food security and nutrition issues are not always well understood and articulated throughout MAIL's directorates. Likewise, the technical capacity on Nutrition is also limited in the MoPH. Reliance on external advisors and contractual project-based staff for planning and decision-making contributes to a lack of ownership and limited investment in implementation capacity.

MAIL also suffers from overall institutional weakness, tends to be ad-hoc and project-based in its approach and lacking in strategic vision, leadership and internal coordination. MAIL's organigram is old and not fit for purpose, and its top-heavy structure with staff mostly concentrated in Kabul is not conducive to the decentralisation that it is called to undertake. There are no technical and focal points at provincial and district levels, and community capacities for bottom up management also need to be reinforced. In fact the biggest hurdle to the farmer-centric and bottom up approach endorsed by MAIL is the Ministry's overly centralised structure, translating in limited delegation of authority and no decentralised control over resource allocation. However MAIL's Comprehensive Agriculture Development Strategy acknowledges such institutional weakness, and the creation of an enabling environment is presently the focus of the reform process proposed to deliver CAD NPP's strategic priorities and move towards a farmer-centric approach.

Likewise, there is a huge need to strengthen engagement at the sub-national level to accelerate reduction in malnutrition. However, AFSeN's current ability to carry out its coordination and oversight functions at sub-national level is weak at best.

In order to mainstream cross-sectoral agendas, the existence of champions who advocate and promote them is of essence. A clear positive example of the importance of champions is the high-

level endorsement of AFSeN, which has been critical in pushing the agenda. On the contrary, a negative example is the insufficient championing of gender issues among senior government officials, even though it needs to be acknowledged that the Prime Minister and First Lady, who have been very vocal about the topic, are an exception to the rule.

While in principle everyone is in agreement that working across the divide between humanitarian, development and peace interventions is necessary, in practice very little has been done beyond scoping exercises. There does not seem to be much thinking among main stakeholders in the sector regarding the role agriculture could play in delivering humanitarian, peace and development outcomes, or how agriculture relates to the nexus between them. At the moment, the “triple nexus approach” in Afghanistan lacks a champion, a common platform or coordination mechanism, a realistic roadmap and any other tools. Importantly, no pooled fund or any kind of mechanism exists to earmark a budget for “transition” situations.

CAD NPP refers to Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Risk Reduction activities, however it fails to address environmental sustainability in a holistic and crosscutting manner. No explicit links are made between climate change adaptation and mitigation and the priorities directly concerned with raising production and value creation, indicating an important policy gap, seeing the two-way links between climate change and agriculture. Not enough attention is paid to sustainable technological solutions in response to the emerging challenges of soil degradation and climate change, and there seems to be insufficient awareness about technological, institutional and policy-oriented options that have the potential of increasing climate resilience.

Data on food and nutrition security and agriculture has been scattered, up to now, and while there has been an unwillingness to share information on behalf of some for political reasons, on the part of others there has been a reluctance to do so for lack of legislation on data protection – a paradox since a law has recently been passed imposing centralisation of data collection and management. No central unit storing data on food security and nutrition exists, and the fragmentation and inconsistency of data presents a challenge both for designing evidence-based policies, and to implement them correctly. Furthermore, particularly within MAIL, there is little awareness about the need to use the data that is available. The Government in Afghanistan makes moderate use of food security data for informed decision-making purposes. NSIA, presently tasked by the new law to produce and manage all data, does not collect gender-disaggregated information on intra-household food consumption, or other data that is relevant for long- and short-term food, nutrition and sustainable agriculture programming. Together with the absence of a data protection law these are the limits of what is otherwise a desirable innovation, such as the centralisation of data within NSIA.

Though Afghanistan has a comprehensive legal framework granting women’s rights, and gender is considered in all the policies examined here - MAIL even has a specific Strategy on Women in Agriculture -, in practice there are many hurdles to putting gender-related policies in practice. Conservative forces remain strong, and in a context where men dominate public forums and women’s rights and participation are still seen as controversial, gender issues are easily compromised. There are few women in public positions, and the fact that they are not encouraged to work, especially in the provinces, creates an environment that is not conducive to securing women’s rights. Women are often an invisible and unpaid part of the agricultural labour force, and they lack the economic independence to engage in meaningful productive agricultural activities. They very rarely have the education and technical skills to be employed as extension workers or cover other technical positions, though this would be necessary to reinforce the active presence of women in the rural economy as entrepreneurs. Dedicating a separate chapter to gender within the CAD NPP document is not sufficient to tackle these issues, and gender needs to

be integrated throughout the strategy in order to produce change in the conditions of rural women.

Migration in Afghanistan, which, as already explained in detail, is a burning emerging issue influencing food and nutrition security and agriculture, is not mentioned in MAIL's Comprehensive Agricultural Framework. And though it is included in AFSen's guiding principles, an implementation plan for the agenda, yet to be developed, would be a more suitable instrument to provide indications on how to politically and practically address the inter-related links between food and nutrition insecurity and migration.

Though the CAD NPP acknowledges the role of the agricultural labour market, and places a strong accent on employment generation in general, it does not acknowledge the existence of categories most vulnerable to unemployment, and fails to offer solutions for those who are most in need. In the first instance, it does not address the problem of the burgeoning youth population, and how thousands of freshly graduated agriculture students could be engaged in the sector. In the second place, it fails to consider how policies could support women in the agricultural labour market. For example it does not address the big issue of unpaid female agricultural labour; how women could access credit for agriculture, seeing they usually lack collateral; and no link is made with value chain development. AFSen Outcome 1.1, on the other hand, specifically targets women and small-scale farmers in rural communities, aiming to increase employment and income opportunities.

There is a section on "counter-narcotics" in the CAD NPP, which, among other things, rightly recognises that to counter poppy cultivation priority should be given to investments that can compete with opium poppy, such as perennial horticulture and intensive livestock production. However, this cross-cutting component of the strategy could be better linked to the main body of the policy and its strategic priorities, and in particular with the development of value chains. Furthermore, this section of the strategy does not address the links between opium cultivation and land tenure in any detail, or the employment side of the poppy economy, though both land tenure and employment are an important part of the problem.

8. AREAS OF POLICY FRAMEWORK AND IMPLEMENTATION CAPACITY GAPS PRIORITIZED FOR RESOURCE ALLOCATION

Considering the above analysis and given a scenario of continued resource and capacity constraints, what areas of the policy framework and what implementation gaps should be prioritized for resource allocation?

Some suggestions for future action and resource allocation on the basis of the above analysis and bottlenecks identified:

Capacity development: MAIL's capacity is a serious obstacle to delivery of effective FNS and SA actions. Capacity gaps should be analysed systematically and mapped, and MAIL and MoPH should be supported through training and capacity development at the individual, organisational, and enabling environment level. This would probably entail both broad training across the board for all ministerial staff on cross-cutting issues such as FNS, productivity enhancement, markets, and public financial and human resource management, and more specific training on technical topics which demand narrower expertise such as knowledge of the technological and institutional options to address land degradation and the effects of climate change.

Reorganisation of MAIL and decentralisation: A deep restructuring of MAIL is necessary, as per the CAD NPP, including a review of the organigramme, decentralisation of staff and creation of technical focal points in districts and provinces, and strengthening of research and extension functions. Community capacities for bottom up management also need to be reinforced. Investments need to be made in learning and resource centres, which constitute a capillary network across the country and, if functional, could be employed to reach out to district and community level and gain a more nuanced understanding of needs of rural populations. Considering the huge diversity of the country, all policy implementation plans should strive to find a range of actions adapted to the various regions and agro-ecological zones.

Targeted allocation of resources: The process of resource mobilization and budget allocation for food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture needs to be based on assessed needs and evidence. This would include collecting information to develop evidence and needs based policies, assessing farmers' needs on the ground and balancing them with government's and international actors' requirements, correcting geographical imbalances in allocation of resources and insufficient investments as per needs. This could be done by building on IFPRI's recent policy gap analysis. Though the issue of sustainability should continue to be prominent, successful on-going projects such as AFSeN should continue to be funded for the moment, in order to ensure continuity and to build on positive outcomes achieved.

CAD NPP implementation and investment plans: The limits of the split in the CAD NPP between the productivity enhancement component and its other strategic priorities have been outlined throughout this report. In drafting the CAD NPP implementation and investment plans, the value chain component should be reviewed and further developed, integrating the production and productivity enhancement aims with food and nutrition security preoccupations and actions, and considering the links between value chains and a host of other issues and actors which are affected by the way value chains are developed, including their impact on landless and agricultural labourers, climate change and natural resource management, women's participation in agricultural production, inclusion of unemployed youth, opium poppy cultivation etc. Potential

negative effects of agricultural intensification and commercialisation on the rural population and on the most vulnerable especially should be considered, and mitigation measures put in place. AFSeN's Outcome 6.1, on strengthening nutrition sensitive value chains, can be a good starting point to develop a more articulated and comprehensive approach to value chain development for Afghanistan. The CAD NPP implementation plan should also explore how MAIL's activities could be linked pasture and rangeland management, rights of passage, access to water resources, provision of agricultural inputs and conflict resolution mechanisms, legal frameworks on land, to address food and nutrition security of the most marginal groups and of women in rural communities.

Links between the CAD NPP and the Citizens' Charter. Seeing the importance of this inter-ministerial collaboration to carry out that part of the Agricultural Strategy involving farmers and marginal and vulnerable groups, including IDPs and returnees, it would be important to better clarify how the cooperation should work and what it would entail in practice. Relevant to this aim and not touched upon in this report are the links between Agriculture, FNS and Social Protection, the latter being the remit of the MoLSA and also involving the Citizens' Charter. It would therefore be important to analyse the links between the CAD NPP productivity enhancement focus, its aim to reach out to the most vulnerable populations living in rural areas, and social protection. The current FAO/WFP/WB partnership on shock responsive social protection, working with MAIL and MRRD and including sustainable watershed management and irrigation, agricultural production and social protection components is a good platform to move forwards on this, and should be continued and expanded, in view of handing it over to the government who should eventually take full ownership of it.

AFSeN: Continue supporting AFSeN and technical secretariat as long as necessary, while advocating for a long-term sustainable solution. Assist in the finalisation of the roadmap, making sure that it addresses the inter-related links between food and nutrition insecurity and migration, and identify target groups. Oversee the process of finding a new home for AFSeN, ensuring its continuous access to the highest government level, while avoiding being captured by inter-ministerial disputes. At the same time, in partnership with WFP and UNICEF, FAO should continue the process of developing AFSeN councils at provincial level, drawing on lessons learned from this pilot, and using it to push for greater engagement at the sub-national level to accelerate reduction in malnutrition.

Review and update MAIL's FSN strategy, considering the current food security situation, and in line with the CAD NPP, the AFSeN Framework, and MoPH's recent Nutrition Strategy. Develop a comprehensive implementation plan for the FSN strategy, with prioritization of activities based on urgency and importance. Identify target groups and develop a targeting strategy. Prepare a clear costing plan supporting the implementation of the strategy, based on the existing funding of projects and programmes both off and on budget to identify funding gaps. Strengthen capacity to address nutrition through the formulation and implementation of Food Security Investment Plans. Ensure that FSN is more widely owned within the MAIL.

M&E: In response to scattered programming and the huge resources spent, and taking into account the actual difficulties of assessing outcomes and impacts on the ground, a considerable effort should be put in monitoring and evaluating past interventions, in order to learn lessons and consolidate successes. In line with its inter-sectoral and inter-ministerial nature and its coordination and oversight function, in the future AFSeN could become a focal point for M&E on food and nutrition security in Afghanistan. Ultimately enhancing common and mutually recognised M&E exercises should help in achieving a more evidence-based and shared notion of what works and what doesn't, beyond the political agendas of the single actors.

Coordination with present or future FNS and SA projects and activities, on the basis of present JICA funded MOF mapping of the Agricultural sector, building synergies and complementarity

among different donor activities and avoiding duplication.

Accountability and transparency in Government/Donor relations, The government should take a harder stance with the donors, to gain more control and ownership of development strategies, possibly by pushing the ANPDF and the reform agenda harder with the international community. On the other hand, MAIL and other ministries should increase their availability to discuss planning, implementation, and reporting, particularly financial reporting. Government should make provincial development plans, including budgets and financial reports, widely available for the public, so that public monitoring of government performance can be carried out. This could be advocated for by civil society through the introduction of a freedom of information act. Donors on their part should reduce fragmentation by exploring the option of improving the Multi Donor Trust Fund Approaches, to increase on-budget aid, and undertake a full review of the existing ones (including ARTF) to determine lessons learned and best practices. Donors should furthermore adopt a collective voice, especially in increasing pressure on the government to carry out its reform and development agenda, with tangible indicators of progress. If not met, the donors should hold the government to account for its performance. Donors should prioritise longer term planning and aid commitments with government counterparts, in order to encourage financial stability. Where possible donor planning and reporting processes should align with government systems, specifically the budget cycle. Options for multi-sectoral planning should be explored, to reduce competition and encourage coordination between different ministries. Accountability measures need to be more transparent between donors and government and within government leadership and its ministries, and they should be open to civil society review, to increase public accountability. Civil society should also advocate for more bottom up approaches to development strategy planning for the international community¹¹³.

NEXUS As mentioned, working through a nexus approach in Afghanistan has not gone beyond scoping exercises up to now, though these will hopefully provide a basis for future more concrete and operational collaboration between humanitarian, development and peace actors. In particular, development actors need to find a way to respond quickly, in practical terms and by releasing funds. A first step would be the creation of a coordination platform, possibly merging or complementing those that already exist. In the agricultural sector, the collaboration between FAO and MAIL is essential to bring forwards the nexus agenda and particularly to shift from humanitarian actions to more developmental ones. The recently established Early Recovery Mechanism might be used as a tool to extend humanitarian interventions towards developmental ones. Another way to bridge the gap between programming in the agricultural sector is to “do nexus backwards”, by introducing more prevention measures into design of development interventions. A way to fund transition, i.e. interventions falling in the gap between humanitarian and development funding, urgently needs to be established. This can entail either establishing a “pooled transition fund” from the recipient side, or by donors being more flexible, and providing funding in a flexible way and according to needs either to humanitarian or development activities. A flexible pot could be established in the ARTF dedicated to “adaptive programming”. To seriously address the implications of a nexus approach, a study to understand the contribution of development and humanitarian interventions to peace in Afghanistan, and vice versa, and of all three to food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture should be carried out, on the model of the one undertaken by WFP.

GENDER Explore the opportunities to fund and organise specialised technical training abroad for girls and women as part of a broader effort to support women’s productive activities and their participation in value chain development and agricultural commercialisation. Be more consistent in pursuing gender equality by advocating for it with MAIL, MoPH and any other government body and institution, and mainstream it throughout policy implementation and investment plans. Ensure that gender-disaggregated data is collected at every level, including at the household level,

¹¹³ Partly drawn from ATR Consulting (2018)

engaging with NSIA and, if necessary, providing technical support.

CLIMATE CHANGE Explore and propose sustainable technical solutions to address climate change impacts. Provide better technical understanding of the links between climate change and food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture (see also the point on the value chain approach) Better integration of climate change in MAIL policies and in AFSen.

Data: To be fully effective, the present centralisation of data under NSIA needs to be supported by filling some technical gaps, as well as advocating for a data protection-law that would enable data sharing between international agencies and NSIA.

9. Annexes

Annex 1: The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus

The triple Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, focuses on the need for the aid system to address people's vulnerabilities in a coherent and harmonised manner. The nexus is premised on the recognition that throughout the years a fragmented approach has failed to deliver, resulting in the drive to coordinate interventions with varied aims such as provision of immediate relief, rehabilitation of livelihoods, and broader efforts to overcome armed conflicts and stabilise political environments. The concept per se is not new, and has antecedents in past efforts made by the aid community to bridge this gap, such as "linking relief, rehabilitation and development", or the more recent mainstreaming of "resilience". The novelty is that the "nexus approach" goes beyond a conceptual or programmatic approach, and is premised on organisational and operational changes, which are mainly to be achieved by encouraging different actors and sectors that traditionally worked separately to coordinate towards the achievement of common goals. All UN agencies and many donors and multi-mandated NGOs are supportive of the approach, and the broader changes to the system which are taking place indicate that the nexus framework is more rooted in a realistic assessment of the obstacles to working together, and therefore more likely than previous initiatives to impact how aid is coordinated, funded and delivered.

The Nexus is an opportunity to link up different actors towards a common goal, and has the potential to make aid more efficient and effective by addressing people's vulnerabilities in a more holistic and needs-based fashion. The longer-term frameworks it envisages leave more space to work with national and local actors, potentially boosting inclusive governance and mutual accountability between the State and citizens. It may reduce duplication and enhance coherence, and ensure better implementation of early response and early action in the face of conflicts and natural hazards. A longer-term approach that engages a wider range of actors also allows more scope to address gender inequalities, at times exacerbated in humanitarian settings, and insufficiently addressed in response. And finally, the conflict prevention measures that would be inform all interventions have the potential to save lives and resources.

On the other hand, this new way of working does not come without its risks: first and foremost, the involvement of state actors may politicise humanitarianism, with all that would entail. In a global context of shrinking space for principled humanitarian action, and growing breaches to International Humanitarian Law and International Refugee Law, increased adoption of State perspectives could further diminish this space, considering the difficulties State actors may face to uphold the core humanitarian principle of impartiality and to guarantee the right to protection, especially for certain groups, such minorities, IDPs and refugees, stateless and undocumented citizens.

An integrated UN mission may face many competing political consideration that reduce its capacity or even willingness to consistently prioritise humanitarian needs, and there are no guidelines or good practices indicating how a common understanding of whether humanitarianism, development or peace building is to be prioritised, or how to balance the speed and scale of a humanitarian response, if development and peace building considerations are to be factored in¹¹⁴. Lastly, funding mechanisms are still do not have an instrument for humanitarian-development initiatives, and while some donors may in principle back multi-year

¹¹⁴ Oxfam (2019), *The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus: what does it mean for multi-mandated organisations?*

goals, in practice they mostly plan their budgets on an annual basis.

Truly delivering a nexus approach will involve rethinking finance mechanisms, ways of working, the expertise needed and reflection on how standards are set and success defined. But most of all it will require all actors involved to be aware of the abovementioned tensions, and to be ready to uphold the principles of humanitarian action and the need for a humanitarian space, while remaining honest about what is possible and ready to learn from mistakes.

Annex 2: Principles of Mutual Accountability of the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework

1. The international community will support the developmental priorities identified by the government;
2. The government's delivery of the mutually agreed commitments will be key for sustained international support;
3. Predictable aid is critical to effective government delivery;
4. Lessons from aid effectiveness should be acted upon by the international community and the government;
5. The government's commitment to transparency, efficiency and effective is critical to good governance and combatting corruption;
6. International assistance that is aligned with the 10 outcome-focused NPPs is essential for the sustainability of development assistance and citizen buy-in and trust;
7. International assistance provided through the national budget can ensure alignment with the goals of Afghanistan;
8. Transparent, citizen-oriented monitoring of development and governance benchmarks provides accountability to the people of Afghanistan, and reinforces the reciprocal commitments of donors and the government to improved development performance;
9. Building market institutions is critical to attracting, both domestic and foreign investment and thereby creating sustainable economic growth and jobs; and
10. Regional economic cooperation and connectivity are the key to ensuring growth, eliminating poverty and utilizing the immense trade and transit potential of Afghanistan and its neighbors.

Annex 3: ANPDF investment plans relevant to the agricultural sector

- a. Increasing horticulture capacity from 180,000 to 230,000 hectares, supporting investments in value-chains, establishing export certification procedures, increasing support to women owned agri-businesses;
- b. Increasing investment in water management, with rehabilitation of more than 1,000 irrigation schemes, developing new irrigation networks and building small water reservoirs;
- c. Implementing the national wheat program to increase yields to 26%, adding 110,000 hectares of land under cultivation, halving post-harvest losses, and developing a standardized wheat seed market; The five-year program of MAIL is expecting an increase in wheat production up to approximately 5.9 million MT.
- d. Improving livestock management, applying Phyto-sanitary entry criteria and WTO-allowed tariffs to prevent subsidized imports from competing with Afghanistan's small-holders;
- e. Rehabilitating the strategic grain reserve and establishing a Grain Reserve Board to support farmers;
- f. Expanding agroforestry and reforestation with over 60,000 hectares that support environmental conservation and income generation for farmers; and
- g. Restructuring the Ministry of Agriculture to become a decentralized and farmer-centric institution that regulates and encourages private investments.

Annex 4: Summary of MAIL's seven strategic Priorities under CAD-NPP

1. Improving irrigation systems: Irrigated land will increase from 2.45 ha to 2.7⁴ million ha in the next five years, impacting on 650,000 households. Adopting a farmer-centric approach in making water available and distributing it, irrigation needs to go beyond physical works and will require concurrent social management interventions through Irrigation Associations and Cluster Community Development Councils (CCDC). Achieving the target will require creating inter-ministerial coordination between the Ministries of Agriculture, Energy and Water (MEW) and Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) at the national planning stage in Kabul, and at the implementation level at sub-district level. *Components: Irrigation physical works; Enhance irrigated agriculture; Institutional strengthening (public and private sectors)*

2. Increased wheat and cereal production: The next five years will see MAIL address a number of systemic and technical challenges in a more coherent manner to meet its production target of 5.9 million metric tons. Given the economic and dietary importance of wheat, MAIL is committed to addressing chronic food insecurity, storage of grain surplus and the availability of high quality certified seed. In the next five years, MAIL anticipates an additional 110 thousand hectares of irrigated and rain-fed land under wheat cultivation, increasing current yield for irrigated land. Strategies for dry-land farming will also be expanded in order to effectively utilize the land where irrigation shortages continue to occur.

3. Horticulture Value Chain: By reorganizing the mandate of selected MAIL Directorates, appropriate policies and institutional arrangements will be developed to encompass relevant policy development, research, technical assistance, the regulation of required inputs, credit/financing packages and other forms of support to farmers and stakeholders. The emphasis on the demand side will involve active engagement of the private sector, focusing on market development and value addition activities. MAIL will adopt a cross-cutting strategy of rationalizing public and private sector roles, further establishing regulatory frameworks and providing training and capacity building for a variety of local institutions and private sector agents. *Components: High value horticulture crops and vegetables; Industrial crops and medicinal plants*

4. Livestock development: For the domestic livestock industry to flourish to a point at which it can offset imports, MAIL will lead an update in regulations covering the import and export standards for livestock products, a more coherent and domestically-driven health component and greater outreach of extension support. MAIL is committed to improving animal health, productivity and enhancing the key role played by women in this sector. In addition, Aquaculture will be explored in a systematic way to understand how uptake can be undertaken. Practical income diversification activities such as this, apiculture and sericulture amongst others, will add to farmer coping strategies and provide localized income generating opportunities.

5. Climate-sensitive Natural Resource Management: The overall objective of the NRM strategy is to ensure the program supports sustainable economic development of communities which depend on natural resources (forests, rangelands, natural vegetation and ecological areas), create green environment, conserve soil, water, and protect biodiversity. MAIL will review its abilities to adapt sustainable ways to address adverse effects of climate change through awareness-raising of climate change and its effects on agriculture and livelihoods. Through structured programs on agricultural adaptation, farmers, herders, and particularly women will be better positioned to plan and implement low-cost interventions. Links have already been developed between rural and peri-urban communities to build social awareness of the value of urban eco-systems and the provision of greenery for major cities to reduce air pollution levels. *Components: Forestry;*

Rangeland and medicinal plant management; Protected area management; Institutional and human capacity development.

6: Food and nutrition security and resilience building: MAIL acknowledges greater efforts will be needed to improve the utilization of nutritious food through dietary diversity (e.g. kitchen or commercial gardening) and food safety. Building upon evidence-based strategies, MAIL will collaborate closely with other Afghanistan Food Security and Nutrition Agenda (AFSeN) members to coordinate efforts through its Extension Workers and Home Economists to improve feeding and food preparation practices in a systematic and sustainable manner beyond a project-based approach and bridging the existing gender gaps in addressing the needs of women engaged in the agricultural sector. MAIL will establish a unit to contribute to the planning and implementation the national EPRR (emergency preparedness, response and resilience) strategy in line with pre-agreed responsibilities. In addition, the Ministry will strengthen Weather Early Warning Systems at its Research stations. It will also explore more innovative options around crop insurance and focus on development of disaster management techniques that address women's specific needs, enhancing their resilience through appropriate coping strategies.

7: Institutional reform: MAIL continues to retain many of its vestigial structures from the past. In responding to the demands of farmers in the current setting, it needs to shed some of these structures. For example it needs to move away from budget execution approach to a more results based approach. Reform at the Ministry will require an evolving critical focus on mid-level and senior leadership positions, in addition to a functional review and re-profiling of the various positions in MAIL, leading to a smaller, agile and responsive institution. Reformed management practices must reflect renewed emphasis on leadership and professional qualities that motivate and support junior staff. MAIL over the next two years will restructure its Kabul headquarters by reducing and re-profiling some of its departments. The Kabul centric approach is no longer responsive or compatible with its mission of placing farmers at the core of its mission. A farmer-focused Ministry will also reconsider its current provincial structure.

Annex 5: AFSeN framework

Goal: To ensure that no Afghan suffers from hunger and every Afghan is well nourished at all times.

- *Strategic Objectives:*
 - (i) Assure the availability of sufficient food for all Afghans;
 - (ii) Improve economic and physical access to food, especially by vulnerable and food insecure population groups;
 - (iii) Ensure stable food supply over time and in disaster situations;
 - (iv) Promote better diets and adequate food utilization particularly by women and children.

Priority interventions:

- (i) Promotion of domestic food production and stable food imports;
- (ii) Creation of employment and income opportunities, provision of productive and social safety nets and targeted food subsidies;
- (iii) Integration of the strategic grain reserve programs into national response to food emergencies, enhanced household and community resilience against emergencies and development of an integrated framework for disaster preparedness and response;
- (iv) Improvement in the quality of diets, care and feeding practices for infants and young children and self-care for pregnant women and adolescent girls, assurance of the healthy absorption of nutrients through infections prevention, and improved food safety and quality controls.

Annex 6: synthesis of actions which can be addressed through the Citizens' Charter to ensure compliance with Afghanistan's Food Security and Nutrition Agenda.

- Universal access to clean drinking water: one water point per 25 households, providing 25 litres of water per person per day;
- Rural infrastructure: communities will have at least one of the following services (depending on gap analysis, community prioritization and accessibility);
- Basic electricity: 100W per household through solar, micro hydro, biogas or wind (only in areas that cannot be reached by the grid);
- Basic road access: within two kilometres walking distance from nearest accessible rural road (accessible areas only); and
- Small-scale irrigation infrastructure: this includes intakes (for secondary/tertiary canals), water divider, water control gates, siphon, water reservoir up to 10,000 M3 capacity, rehabilitation or construction of small irrigation canal, protection wall, gabion wall, aqueducts, and super passage;
- Providing land for cultivation of vegetables and fruits specifically for SAM children and/or Pregnant and Lactating Women (PLWs) with Acute Malnutrition (AM).
- Quality education in government schools as part of MoE's existing education standards¹¹⁵. Citizens can monitor that: School feeding program for under 5-year children in kindergartens and Implementation of standard diversified and balanced food recipes/menu in all governmental dormitories;
- Delivery of basic package of health services, as part of the MoPH's existing health package¹¹⁶. Citizens can monitor the services; including Health facilities comply with required opening hours (8am to 4pm), required staffing requirements, and provide mandated services; implementation of Community Based Nutrition Program (CBNP) awareness on malaria, diarrhea, and acute respiratory infections, and referral to health facilities and health education; Health sub-center: carrying out nutrition interventions.
- Social Inclusion Grants: These are small grants provided by the Government to the community, via the CDCs, to help the most vulnerable households mitigate seasonal hunger during the lean season. It will target the very poor households in each community as identified by the CCNPP's WBA process, especially (but not limited to) those headed by women, very old persons, physically disabled persons, and/or drug addicts in which there are no other able-bodied adult men as well as those families in which children with Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) and/or pregnant and lactating women (PLWs) with Acute Malnutrition (AM) are available. It will equal the monetary value of the community's contribution towards the food/goods bank outlined below. Under the SIG Sub-Program, the community should mobilize (through CDCs and its sub-committees) to collect food grains/specified goods for food/grain banks to be set up under the SIG. All donations, whether in cash, kind or labour, must always be voluntary. The SIG will specifically target the most vulnerable households (usually female/ physically disabled/ drug addicted -

headed households, where there are no other adult able-bodied men as well as families with children of SAM and/or PLWs of AM). In the CC WBA these are the very last grouping, often referred to as “very poor” (“fakir”). 100% of the households that fall into the ‘very poor’ category must be considered and the funds must be divided to all. Special care should be taken for the inclusion of IDP/ returnee families that fall in the very poor category in the WBA analysis.

- Maintenance and Construction Cash Grants: Maintenance Cash and Construction Grants (MCCG) implements in high Returnee/ IDP areas. Building on lessons learned from the MCG Initiative, MCCG will provide 40 day’s work for roughly 35 percent of the targeted communities’ households. The beneficiaries of MCCG will be identified through the poverty analysis (well-being analysis) that has been mainstreamed in the Citizens’ Charter.

Annex 7: Key informant interview list

Name	Designation	Institution	meeting date
Mr. Hamdullah Hamdard	Former Deputy Ministry, Current Director of Extension	MAIL	20/8
Mr Homayoun Ludin	Sr. Adviser for Sehatmandi (System Enhancing for Health Actions in Transition) Coordination	MoPH	26/8
Ms Mariam Wafa	Senior Advisor to the Minister	MAIL	22/10
Dr Khara	Food security and nutrition working group	MoWA	26/8
Esmatullah Hakimi Atal Khan Gardiwal Amarkhil	Director Economic Statistics (acting dep DG) Field Operation Director Poverty and Food Security Analyst	National Statistics and Information Authority	24/8
Miroslav Bozic	Agriculture Expert	EU Delegation	5/8
Mr Mahdi Frough	Presently WB Health Economist	former MoF (ag sector)	22/8
Mr Zaman Rafiei Mr Duncan Bell Mr Wahid Shinwari	Senior Programme Manager (Agribusiness) Nut and Resilience, Humanitarian team	DFID	27/8
Ms Maureen Gallagher	Chief of Nutrition Section	UNICEF	25/8
Ms Rachel Fuli	Head of Nutrition	WFP	
Mr Nabi Sroosh	DG of Planning and Policy	MoEC	
Mr Saamit	Director	Citizen's Charter	
Mr Nasrullah Arsalai	DG of Council of Ministers	AFSeN Secreteriat	28/8
Ms Danielle Parry		OCHA	22/8
Fabienne Moust Mohammad Akhbar Francesco Tisei	Policy Advisor SO5 manager (policy coherence and SP) Programme Officer	WFP	25/8
Sayed Khalid	DG for Program analysis and implementation	MoF	24/8

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