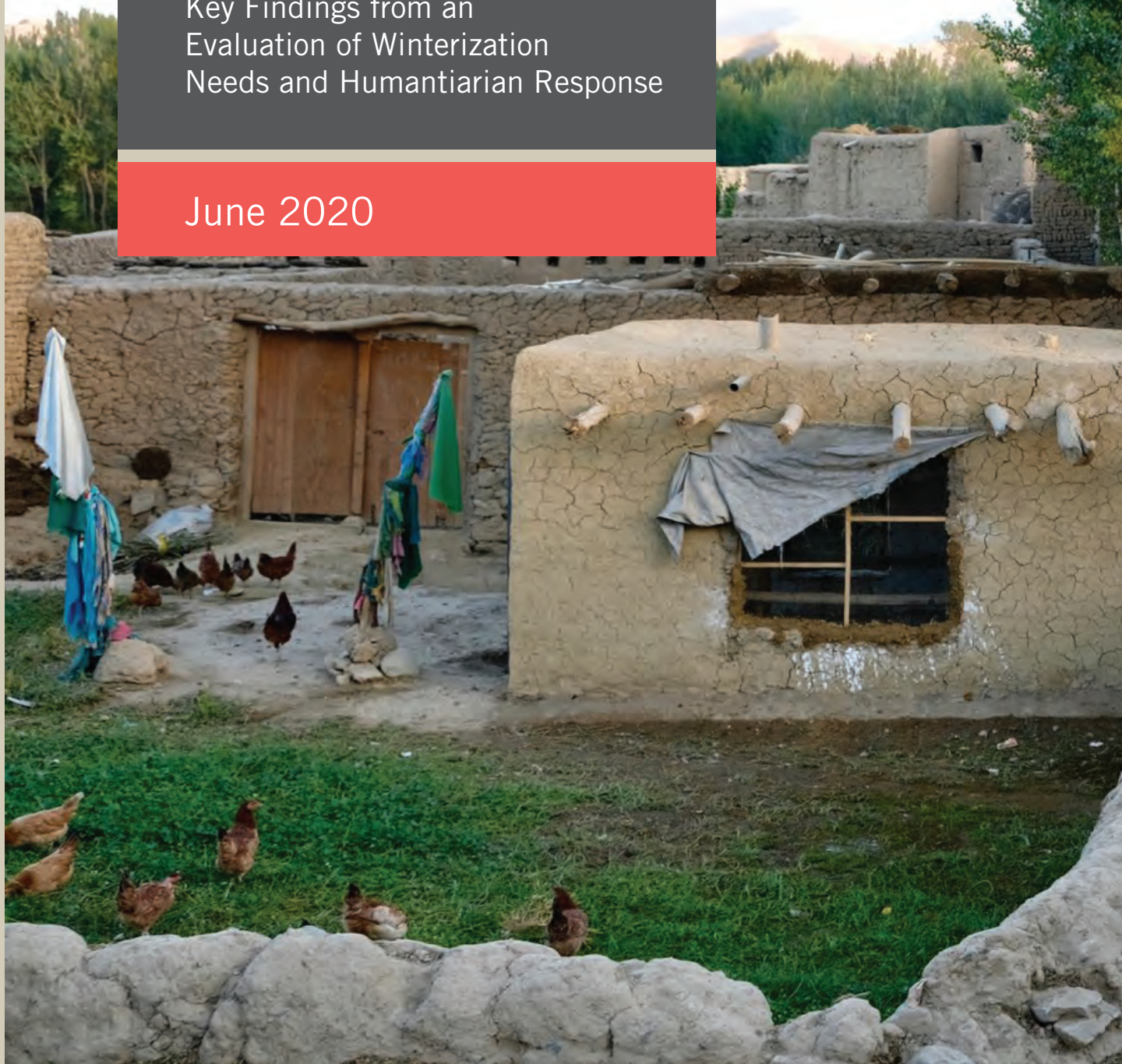


AFGHANISTAN

Winterization Evaluation

Key Findings from an
Evaluation of Winterization
Needs and Humanitarian Response

June 2020



Shelter Cluster Afghanistan
ShelterCluster.org
Coordinating Humanitarian Shelter



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

REACH

Informing
more effective
humanitarian action

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About REACH

REACH is a joint initiative of two international non-governmental organizations - ACTED and IMPACT Initiatives - and the UN Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT). REACH's mission is to strengthen evidence-based decision making by aid actors through efficient data collection, management and analysis before, during and after an emergency. By doing so, REACH contributes to ensuring that communities affected by emergencies receive the support they need. All REACH activities are conducted in support to and within the framework of inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. For more information please visit our website: www.reach-initiative.org. You can contact us directly at: geneva@reach-initiative.org and follow us on Twitter @REACH_info.

SUMMARY

Context

After 40 years of continued crisis, Afghanistan remains one of the world's most complex humanitarian emergencies, driven by escalating conflict and devastating natural disasters. Shocks and disruptions have depleted the resiliency of displaced, host, and natural disaster affected populations. Even under normal circumstances, it is difficult for households to meet their basic needs, but the harsh winter conditions in Afghanistan, where monthly temperatures can reach as low as -12.1 degrees centigrade,¹ have left many households in severe need.

In response to the persistent need for winterization, the ES/NFI Cluster, in coordination with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GoIRA) through the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR), released a Joint Winterization Strategy in July 2019 aimed to assist 95,350 vulnerable families with support for the winter season period from November 2019 to February 2020.² The strategy prioritized a set of solutions, including adequate shelter, heating, NFIs, winter clothing, food assistance, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and medicine and health supplies. The strategy was supported by both bilateral donors and the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF) with a total of \$19.2 million USD, and by GoIRA with \$2.4 million USD, ultimately reaching 71,405 households during the 2019/2020 winter period.³

With the winter being a recurrent annual challenge, this assessment was aimed to assess the effectiveness, impact, and challenges of the 2019/2020 ES/NFI winterization response and identify areas for improvement for the 2020/2021 strategy. In particular, this assessment evaluated cash, voucher, and in-kind assistance distributed by multiple ES-NFI partner organizations.

Assessment

The assessment comprised three tools, including both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, at different levels of analysis: 1) a statistically representative household survey conducted with 4,899 beneficiary and non-beneficiary households, representative by region, modality of assistance (restricted cash, unrestricted cash, voucher and in-kind), displacement status, and whether the households received aid or not, with a 95% confidence level and 7% margin of error; 2) 44 structured key informant interviews (KIIs) with key representatives from implementing organizations, providing indicative data on beneficiary selection and aid distribution, and 3) 31 semi-structured KIIs with coordinators at national and regional level from the ES/NFI Cluster, UNOCHA, Inter-Cluster Coordination Team (ICCT), and GoIRA's MoRR and Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA officers). Data collection and analysis took place between 19 May – 28 June 2020.

Key Findings

Overall Needs and Vulnerabilities

- A similar proportion of non-beneficiary and beneficiary households qualified as vulnerable (18% and 27% respectively), according to the concise vulnerability criteria in the Joint Winterization Response Strategy. **The high proportion of vulnerable non-beneficiaries suggests that the criteria for assistance may not have captured the most vulnerable individuals.**⁴
- **Both beneficiary and non-beneficiary households reported similar priorities and winterization needs;** Emergency shelter such as tents / makeshift shelters (57%) and fuel (31%) were reported to be the main priorities during the winter. **Shelter concerns reflected shelter integrity for winterization,** including a lack of insulation (55%) and damaged shelters (48%). WASH and housing, land, and property were also highlighted, including a lack of adequate sanitation (38%) and inability to afford rent (37%).

¹ Afghanistan ES/NFI Cluster, Winterization 2019/2020 – Targets, Partners Commitment and Gaps per Province, 30 January 2020.

² The Government of Afghanistan and Emergency Shelter/NFI Cluster, Joint Summary Winterization Response Strategy: September 2019 – February 2020, July 2019.

³ UNHCR, ToR for Evaluation of the ES/NFI Cluster Winterization Response 2019/2020 (*unpublished*).

⁴ A household was considered vulnerable if it had at least one of the following characteristics: having an elderly or disabled head of household, a female or child headed household with no adult males, no members of the household having a tazkera, or a dependency ratio of 8 or more.

Impact and Effectiveness of Winterization Assistance

- **Beneficiary households were able to better meet their shelter and NFI winterization gaps than the non-beneficiary households, indicating that the assistance did help households to cope with the winter. Beneficiary households were also more likely to report being able to heat their homes sufficiently in the last 5 months (45%)** when compared to non-beneficiary households (18%). Non-beneficiary households were less able to meet their most critical shelter needs over the winter. There was a 16% difference between non-beneficiary (43%) and beneficiary (27%) households being unable to meet shelter needs. Furthermore, there was a 15% difference between non-beneficiary (21%) and beneficiary households (6%) being unable to meet their most critical NFI winterization needs.
- In-kind and voucher assistance were reported by beneficiaries to be more effective at addressing specific NFI winterization gaps when compared to restricted or unrestricted cash (84% and 75% reported that the in-kind and voucher assistance mostly, almost, or completely met household NFI needs, respectively). However, cash was reported to be better at addressing shelter needs and non-ES/NFI winterization gaps.
- In-kind assistance was reported to be associated with lower levels of improvement in household well-being than other modalities (18%, compared to 43% of cash, and 41% of voucher recipients), suggesting that the in-kind aid helped meeting gaps, but only for NFI items that were received as part of the assistance.
- **Only 33% of female headed households (HHH) reported that the aid had improved their overall well-being significantly, compared to 41% of male HHHs.**

Resilience and Recovery

- Most households' reported coping mechanisms indicated an increased risk of a, "debt trap" due to winter. Approximately 68% of beneficiary households and 57% of non-beneficiary households reported borrowing money or going into debt during the winter. A majority of the debt was reportedly for covering shelter (41%) and NFI (51%) winterization gaps. **Only 34% of beneficiaries and 25% of non-beneficiaries believed that they would be able to repay their debt.** Female headed households were far less likely to report that they would be able to repay their debts (12%) compared to male headed households (34%).
- **A majority of households reported extreme coping mechanisms in order to survive the winter.** 61% of beneficiaries and 75% of non-beneficiaries reported reducing money spent for food in order to survive the winter; 55% and 66% of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, respectively, reported reducing expenditures for other services, particularly healthcare. **More than half of these expenditures were reported to have been made in order to address shelter and NFI winterization gaps.**
- **Refugees from Pakistan in the south east, IDP returnees to Badghis Province, and beneficiaries in the west consistently reported poorer outcomes than other groups.** Implementing partners and coordinators noted that these groups were also some of the most comprehensively covered by assistance, suggesting that these populations have low resilience and were dependent upon aid for survival.

Accountability and Satisfaction

- Female HHHs (78%) were significantly more likely to report problems using cash assistance than male HHHs (57%), for example, by reporting that they did not receive enough assistance (65%). In addition, 37% of female headed beneficiary households reported that they would not report any questions or problems that they had with their assistance.
- **The restrictions of the cash assistance had no significant impact on the way the money was spent.** On average, households receiving restricted and unrestricted cash spent approximately 44% of their cash assistance on ES/NFI and winterization needs. Food (20% - 21%) was the largest non-winterization expense, highlighting the inter-sectoral nature of winterization needs.
- However, beneficiaries were less likely to report that they were satisfied by in-kind and voucher assistance (52% of voucher and 53% of in-kind cash recipients reported being very satisfied with their assistance, compared to 65% of unrestricted and 76% of restricted cash recipients).
- Additionally, in-kind (49%) and voucher assistance (46%) beneficiaries were more likely to face delayed assistance and voucher beneficiaries (53%) reported travelling for over one-hour to collect assistance.

- **Households in the north east, the only region where in-kind aid was reportedly distributed on a wide scale, were more likely to report a fall in prices of the goods they received**, including bukaris (57%), charcoal (55%) and gas (72%) than the national average (36%, 37%, and 72%, respectively).

Implementing partners

- **Assessed organizations recommended that the most useful improvement to the beneficiary selection process would be for them to have more flexibility in setting their own criteria (90%)** and using a digital assessment tool (90%); 37% of assessed organizations reported completely following the ES/NFI cluster guidelines on beneficiary selection and 53% mostly followed them.
- **Over half of implementing organizations modified their beneficiary selection criteria for different locations**, which suggests the need for greater flexibility. Additionally, despite having a cluster vulnerability criteria to prioritize/select beneficiaries, **almost all organizations (95%) reported that they had selected at least some beneficiaries solely on their displacement status**.
- All of the assessed organizations reported having a functional complaints mechanism and recorded 1,237 complaints. **29% of assessed organizations reported receiving at least one complaint about misdirection of aid or corruption**.
- **Difficulties due to snow coverage was reported by 65% of assessed organizations**. Challenges in the distributions included logistical issues (32%) and coordination issues working with government and humanitarian coordinators (24%).

Coordination

- **Coordination KIs reported that the beneficiary selection criteria had excluded many vulnerable households**. While the vulnerability scorecard helped in prioritizing households, KIs noted that many vulnerable households were left out because they did not meet the criteria, while in other regions partners had to make the criteria increasingly strict as too many households qualified.
- Provincial focal points, the members of implementing organizations that agreed to manage coordination of the ES/NFI cluster, were reportedly not always effective. Although some regional KIs reported a well-managed and organized provincial coordination bodies, many did not, and noted that not all of the provincial focal points have been properly trained, or were fully aware of their roles and responsibilities, making provincial coordination inconsistent.
- **In some regions, coordination KIs reported that some local organizations worked outside of the cluster system**. This raised concerns about duplication and potential problems rising from different types of aid or modalities being provided to the same population.

Conclusions

The assessment carried a number of implications for winterization assistance in Afghanistan. First, the results show that there is a **lack of overall resilience for both beneficiary and non-beneficiary households throughout the winter**. This was suggested by the **few long-term impacts** of assistance, which implies that the current winterization response is largely an emergency one. Furthermore, as households struggle to meet needs, adopting negative coping strategies such as reducing food and service expenditure, they turn to borrowing money and can become trapped in a cycle of debt. **Addressing the threat of debt and lack of recovery calls for a more resilience-focused response**. Second, results suggest that **assistance does work, but did not address inter-sectoral needs**. Although beneficiaries reported a greater ability to meet their shelter and NFI needs than non-beneficiaries, they did not do better in more inter-sectoral needs indicators, including food security and healthcare. Restricted and unrestricted cash recipients reported spending money on things other than the money was intended for. As their total amount of assistance was similar, it can be concluded **that perceived restrictions of cash did not have a strong effect on how it was spent**. It was not possible to ascertain what effect assistance has had on local economies. However, it was also reported that market prices, in the regions where the most popular winterization items were distributed as in-kind goods, had reduced significantly for these items. Yet, these are non-significant findings that indicate the **need for market assessments to understand the effect winterization assistance has on the economy**. Finally, the vulnerability criteria and allocation of assistance is reported to not capture those that face income and poverty related vulnerabilities, focusing more on displacement status and shelter type. This may not adequately address the needs of the populations most vulnerable in Afghanistan.