



Afghanistan Drought and Economic Crisis

EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND RECOVERY STRATEGY | NOVEMBER 2021 - AUGUST 2023





Cover: In Afghanistan, harvests of wheat and potato—two important staples—have been negligible. CRS helps farmers adopt proven agricultural practices such as low-cost winter storage for potatoes. Photo by Stefanie Glinski for CRS



22.8 million

PEOPLE—MORE THAN HALF THE POPULATION—ARE AT “CRISIS” OR “EMERGENCY” LEVELS OF FOOD INSECURITY AS DEFINED BY THE INTEGRATED FOOD SECURITY PHASE CLASSIFICATION (IPC) ANALYSIS.

EMERGENCY CONTEXT

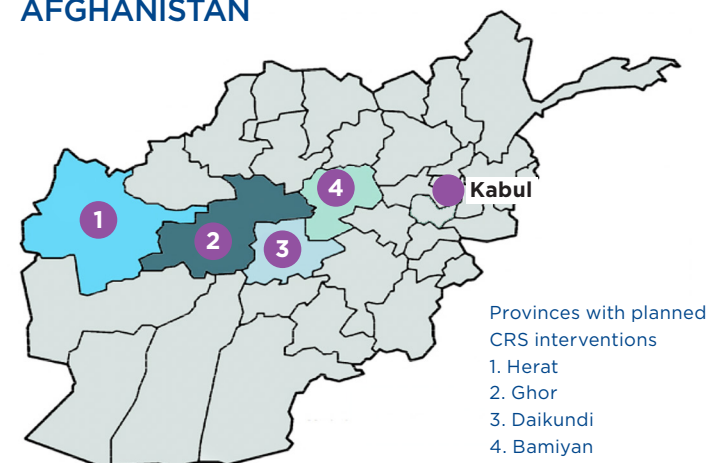
Millions of people across Afghanistan are suffering from the dire humanitarian consequences of a political and economic crisis following the August 2021 Taliban takeover, as well as the impacts of severe drought. These crises have exacerbated the deep wounds left by decades of violent conflict and widespread, chronic poverty and underdevelopment.

More than 2.6 million Afghans have fled their country as refugees, and another 5.5 million people are internally displaced.¹ With the end of longstanding conflict in the country, many displaced Afghan families are expected to return home. In 2021, an estimated 750,000 undocumented people returned from neighboring countries. This influx has strained local health care and education systems as well as other public services. Many areas previously inaccessible to humanitarian actors are extremely poor due to their remoteness and isolation during years of insecurity.

Following the political transition and resulting economic sanctions and currency devaluation, Afghanistan has suffered high unemployment, reduced income and rising food prices. Moreover, the resources of Afghan families have been depleted by two consecutive years of drought. Water tables had not recovered from the 2018 drought and have now fallen further.

1. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). January 2022. [Afghanistan: Humanitarian Needs Overview](#).

AFGHANISTAN



Harvests of wheat and potato—two important staples that feed rural families, especially during the harsh winters—have been negligible, and vegetables have not grown where irrigation canals have run dry. The health of livestock—a critical asset and source of income and nutrition for many families—is also deteriorating due to a lack of water and the resulting rise in disease. While the El Niño weather phenomenon is expected to bring better rainfall in winter 2022/2023, farmers are unlikely to see good crop yields until August 2023. This is devastating for a country that relies heavily on agricultural livelihoods, with 80% of the population engaged in crop cultivation and animal husbandry.²

2. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). November 19, 2021. [Afghanistan - to avert a catastrophe, agricultural assistance is urgently needed](#).

EMERGENCY CONTEXT

Two-thirds of the country is experiencing severe water scarcity, especially in rural areas, where at least 70% of the population lives. With contaminated drinking water and poor sanitation and hygiene, communities are experiencing a rise in waterborne diseases, including cholera and acute watery diarrhea, particularly among children.

Severe hunger and malnutrition are the result of these compounded issues. An estimated 22.8 million people—55% per cent of the population—are at “crisis” or “emergency” levels of food insecurity as defined by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis. Crisis level, or IPC 3, is reflected in households not eating enough food, experiencing high levels of malnutrition, and/or adopting irreversible coping strategies—such as selling assets that support their livelihoods—to support a limited diet.

At the emergency level, or IPC 4, people face extreme food shortages, acute malnutrition, excessively high levels of disease, and an increased risk of hunger-related death. A reported 8.7 million people in the country are estimated to be at IPC 4, the highest number in the world.³

Local and national government offices are not yet fully operational and have limited ability to support communities and coordinate nongovernmental humanitarian assistance.

3. Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC). [Afghanistan: Acute Food Insecurity Situation September - October 2021 and Projection for November 2021 - March 2022](#).

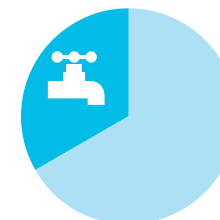


A village elder in Lal District, Ghor, where CRS has provided water filters for families and is setting up a pipe system with taps.

Photo by CRS staff

Families are resorting to extreme measures to survive.⁴ Rural families are selling their livestock, sometimes at 30% less than the normal price, a huge loss of income for those who own only a few productive animals.

4. CRS rapid assessments in Ghor and Bamiyan provinces, January-March 2022.



TWO-THIRDS OF THE COUNTRY IS EXPERIENCING SEVERE WATER SCARCITY, ESPECIALLY IN RURAL AREAS, WHERE AT LEAST 70% OF THE POPULATION LIVES.

EMERGENCY CONTEXT

Families are using credit with interest to buy food and other basic items, but some shopkeepers are hesitant to give loans since the income of farming families has decreased through poor harvests and livestock sales. Families are limiting the diversity of the food they eat, sometimes eating only bread, and decreasing their number of meals. Men and boys are leaving their families to seek daily wage labor in other Afghan provinces or in neighboring Iran. As a last resort, whole families have migrated to slums and camps at the edges of Afghanistan's cities in the hope of receiving help and living in better conditions.

Women and girls are suffering acutely from the complex crisis. Afghanistan is considered to have the most extreme gender inequality in the world, and disparities are widening due to the combined effects of the Taliban takeover, the economic crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵ Freedom of movement and the ability for women to work and for girls to attend school is being further restricted.

Conflict, displacement and COVID-19 have caused gaps in children's education especially in the last two years. According to the Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022,⁶ an estimated 4.2 million children in the country are not attending school, of whom 60% are girls.

5. Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security. [Women Peace and Security Index 2021/22](#).

6. OCHA. January 2022. [Humanitarian Needs Overview: Afghanistan](#).



Sixty percent of girls are not attending school. Conflict, displacement and COVID-19 have caused gaps in children's education. Photo by John Varrieur/CRS

Economic pressures are causing many families to send boys to work and to arrange marriages for young girls. Also, the chronic shortage of female teachers is perpetuating a cycle of school dropping out among girls. Children in CRS-supported classrooms have increasingly expressed feeling stressed, anxious, worried and sad.

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COUNTRY PROGRAM CONTEXT

CRS has been serving Afghan families since 2002, with offices in five provinces and about 360 experienced Afghan staff. We work with communities to deliver emergency relief, improved agricultural techniques, inclusive education, and other life-enriching services to tens of thousands of families. Afghanistan's long conflict has left many families displaced and impoverished, but the war's end has opened the possibility of reaching previously inaccessible communities with emergency assistance, recovery and longer-term development.

CRS operations have continued peacefully since the recent transition in government, and we remain committed to the people of Afghanistan. Our presence continues to be welcomed thanks to our trusting relationships with local communities, and our reputation for putting the humanitarian needs of the Afghan people first. With more than 75 years of experience in emergency response in a range of challenging contexts, CRS is uniquely positioned to lead humanitarian relief efforts in Afghanistan.



80%

OF THE POPULATION IS ENGAGED
IN CROP CULTIVATION AND
ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

GEOGRAPHIC PRIORITIES



A family drives goats in Bamiyan's remote Dare-chasht valley. Rural families are being forced to sell their livestock to buy food.
Photo courtesy of Philipp Spalek/Caritas Germany

CRS will provide relief and recovery assistance to 273,000 people affected by crisis in Afghanistan. We will prioritize working in communities most affected by the drought and the economic crisis and, wherever possible, in remote, hard-to-reach areas that are receiving little or no support from other humanitarian actors. CRS works primarily with rural communities, while monitoring the needs in urban areas especially among displaced populations. The table shows the provinces and districts planned for CRS interventions, which may be updated based on ongoing assessments to identify communities most in need.

CRS intervention areas

Provinces	Districts
Herat	Adraskan
Ghor	Chaghcharan, Dulaina, Lal, Tulak, Saghar
Bamiyan	Dare-chasht, Yakawlang, Sayghan, Waras
Daikundi	Ashterlay, Sangi Takht, Pato


















EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND RECOVERY FRAMEWORK

CRS is taking a holistic approach to helping poor Afghan families meet their urgent needs while strengthening their ability to withstand further crises or setbacks. Since winter 2021/2022 and through autumn 2023, CRS is distributing emergency assistance at critical moments when families face the most difficulty covering their basic needs—notably, during the winter lean season and before harvests.

CRS will complement this lifesaving assistance with measures to build the resilience of families and communities to better prepare for future crises, and mitigate negative coping strategies. CRS will also look for opportunities to link emergency and recovery assistance to longer-term development programs in the communities we serve. We will assess the situation in all targeted communities and tailor a package of support based on the most pressing needs.

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GOAL: Vulnerable people in Afghanistan survive the current crises and become more resilient to shocks

Strategic Objectives	Immediate Results	Response
SO 1: Crisis-affected households meet their immediate food and other basic needs	IR 1.1: Targeted households access food and other essential items through cash and/or in-kind assistance	Urgent / emergency 
SO 2: Crisis-affected farmers enhance agricultural and livestock production	IR 2.1: Targeted farmers access productive inputs and assets through cash and/or in-kind assistance	Recovery 
	IR2.2: Targeted farmers apply improved crop and livestock management practices that optimize limited resources and increase productivity	Behavior change / Resilience  
	IR 2.3: Targeted communities rehabilitate or construct productive small-scale community infrastructure	Recovery / Resilience  
SO 3: Crisis-affected households effectively utilize sustainable and safe water supplies and sanitation facilities throughout the year	IR 3.1: Water systems in targeted communities are rehabilitated or constructed	Recovery / Resilience  
	IR 3.2: Individuals in targeted communities have access to safe and dignified sanitation services and infrastructure	Recovery / Resilience  
	IR 3.3: Individuals in targeted communities adopt hygiene behaviors that reduce the risk of disease transmission	Behavior change / Resilience  
SO 4: Crisis-affected girls and boys, including adolescents, learn in safe, supportive environments	IR 4.1: Girls and boys in targeted communities enroll in school or temporary learning centers	Recovery / Development  
	IR 4.2: Targeted teachers adopt improved teaching practices and integrate psychosocial support into the curriculum	Recovery / Resilience / Development   

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Food and essential supplies

CRS will provide the most vulnerable families with lifesaving cash and/or in-kind support to help them meet their immediate food and other basic needs, while protecting their productive assets and reducing migration out of their communities.

CRS will align the value and duration of assistance with Food Security and Agriculture Cluster and Cash Working Group recommendations, and aim to cover at least half of the essential food needs—2,100 Kcal per person per day and enough protein, micronutrients and fat—for an average seven-person household for up to one year.



CRS provides cash assistance where feasible so people can buy goods in local markets to inject cash into the economy.

Photo by John Varrieur/CRS



8.7 million

PEOPLE ARE ESTIMATED TO BE AT THE EMERGENCY FOOD SECURITY LEVEL, THE HIGHEST NUMBER IN THE WORLD. THEY FACE EXTREME FOOD SHORTAGES, ACUTE MALNUTRITION, EXCESSIVELY HIGH LEVELS OF DISEASE AND AN INCREASED RISK OF HUNGER-RELATED DEATH.



Market-based approach

A key priority in CRS emergency responses is to ensure local markets are central to recovery. In Afghanistan, CRS provides cash assistance where feasible so people can buy goods locally and inject cash into the local economy. This type of assistance also promotes the dignity of choice so individuals and families can prioritize their own needs. We will also ask community members about their preferences and access to markets to determine the most

appropriate assistance. In local markets in each geographic target area, CRS will monitor and assess the availability, quality, diversity and price of food, agricultural inputs, and other essential items. When cash or other market-based modalities are not feasible or appropriate, CRS will provide in-kind assistance. We will monitor the satisfaction of households, and adjust the approach accordingly.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Agricultural livelihoods

CRS will provide farmers with cash and/or in-kind essential agricultural resources, such as seed, fertilizer, tractor rentals and livestock fodder. Complementing this support, CRS will deliver trainings to farmers on low-cost, high-impact techniques to improve wheat and potato cultivation as well as small ruminant husbandry—the primary agricultural sources of food and income for smallholder farmers in the targeted areas.

All practices will help optimize farmers' limited resources and increase their productivity, ideally directly improving their production, sales and food security.

CRS invites all households in the communities to training events, and encourages both male and female members to attend. The trainings incorporate images and stories to facilitate learning among a low literacy audience. Also, practical demonstrations allow farmers to observe the improvements in crop and livestock outcomes at each critical stage of the season. Farmers are encouraged to conduct their own small trials, helping to generate discussion within the community and demonstrate the effectiveness of various techniques.



CRS will provide farmers with cash and/or in-kind essential agricultural resources, such as livestock fodder, seed and fertilizer.
Photo by Stefanie Glinski for CRS

Key improved farming practices

- Improved wheat and potato seed preparation, as well as sowing methods, have proven to foster greater plant emergence and development in the critical early stages of the growth cycle. They are also more water efficient and drought resilient.
- Improved, ventilated potato storage methods using local materials have proven to significantly reduce loss and extend the storage period into the lean season.
- Improved livestock stable conditions and increased nutritious feed during mating and late pregnancy, while reducing feed at other times, helps reduce disease, improves the health of ewes, increases lambing percentages and bolsters milk production.
- If 2022 proves to be a mild to moderate drought year, CRS will talk to communities about making plans to protect and feed their nuclear breeding flocks, while culling weak, old and less productive animals that are a liability in a drought.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Productive community infrastructure

CRS will engage households in cash-for-work activities to rehabilitate or construct small-scale infrastructure to strengthen livelihoods. These activities will be determined with the community based on their needs and preferences, and participant numbers, and may include digging trenches and embankments to reduce water runoff and increase percolation, and clearing and maintaining roads after winter snows and spring flooding. A cash-for-work approach will allow urgently needed cash to be injected into local communities.

Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH)

CRS will rehabilitate water supply systems to ensure community access to safe water throughout the year, thereby reducing the risk of waterborne diseases. Activities may include repairing boreholes, excavating wells, replacing handpumps, and doing maintenance on solar-powered water supply systems and gravity-led pipe schemes. CRS will drill, develop and install new water systems in areas with no other immediate solutions. We will conduct water quality tests to ensure World Health Organization standards for safe drinking water. Until access to safe water is restored, CRS will provide families with water purification tablets.

CRS will complement the provision of safe water with a participative approach to sanitation. We will promote the construction and use of safe, dignified sanitation facilities and services through locally accepted participative methodologies, paying particular attention to the preferences of women and girls as well as people with specific needs.



A woman washes dishes in a stream in Garmaab Olya village, Ghor. CRS will rehabilitate water supply systems to ensure community access to safe water throughout the year. Photo by Stefanie Glinski for CRS

Our approach will include the promotion of a safe water chain (collection, storage, water treatment, etc.), handwashing with soap, the use and maintenance of sanitation facilities, and menstrual hygiene management. CRS will also establish and train water management committees, with both male and female members, so that communities have the capacity for the continued operation and maintenance of their local rehabilitated water systems. CRS will also support schools and public health facilities with comprehensive, sustainable and adapted WASH services.

CRS' approach will include the promotion of a safe water chain, handwashing with soap, the use and maintenance of sanitation facilities, and menstrual hygiene management.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Education in emergencies

CRS uses a community-based education, or CBE, model to provide quality education to girls and boys in Afghanistan, especially those who have had no access to education while living in remote or conflict-affected areas or during displacement. Within the CBE model, community-based schools offer children aged 7 to 17 the opportunity to attend grades one through six within their own communities, followed by a planned handover of classes to nearby hub schools for higher grades. Accelerated learning programs give children aged 10 to 17, especially adolescent girls, an opportunity to make up for the years of missed schooling through a catch-up program that offers two grades per year to complete their primary education over three years. In areas with large-scale displaced populations, temporary learning spaces allow out-of-school children to attend classes before being absorbed into the local hub school the following year. CRS will work with the community to establish the appropriate CBE program based on children's needs.

CRS will also train teachers on a range of topics, including student-centered learning, social and emotional learning and psychosocial support, ensuring increased teacher capacity to deliver quality, inclusive and gender-sensitive primary education responsive to the psychosocial needs of girls and boys in Afghanistan. CRS actively engages with school committees, or *shura*, to monitor classes as well as to overcome cultural barriers, particularly to girls' education. CRS proactively recruits female teachers and female *shura* members so that education is more accessible to girls.

CROSS-CUTTING RESULTS

See [market-based approach](#) on Page 7.

Gender mainstreaming



CRS mainstreams approaches specific to gender throughout program activities and operations in Afghanistan. CRS will ensure that programs are responsive to the local context by incorporating gender analysis into needs assessments, and using the results to design programs to be responsive to the gender disparities identified—such as women's lack of voice, limited mobility, lack of access to and control over resources, and vulnerability to gender-based violence. Where appropriate and possible, CRS will strive to integrate gender-transformative approaches.

CRS' experience has shown that men and women remember different messages, so trainings on agriculture and hygiene practices focus on both men and women in each household to generate equitable intra-household knowledge, discussion, decision-making and responsibility. CRS strives to maintain a gender balance among field staff to ensure all voices in the community are heard.

Protection mainstreaming



CRS will integrate protection mainstreaming throughout the emergency response by following Do No Harm and other principles of CRS' [Protection Mainstreaming Framework](#). CRS will conduct a protection risk analysis to understand risks, threats and vulnerabilities, and to develop mitigation measures. Protection considerations are mainstreamed into assessments, implementation and monitoring.

CRS has a thorough safeguarding and child protection policy and requires all staff, teachers and *shura* members to be trained and to sign a code of conduct to prevent the abuse or exploitation of children and vulnerable adults. CRS' feedback, complaints and response mechanism includes an internal hotline operated independently of program teams, with an established protocol for handling sensitive and non-sensitive feedback.

273,000

CRS WILL PROVIDE RELIEF AND RECOVERY ASSISTANCE TO 273,000 PEOPLE. WE WILL PRIORITIZE COMMUNITIES MOST AFFECTED BY THE DROUGHT AND THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, IN REMOTE AREAS THAT ARE RECEIVING LITTLE OR NO SUPPORT FROM OTHER HUMANITARIAN ACTORS.