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Reporting Period: 21 to 31 August 2021

Afghanistan

Humanitarian Situation Report 21–31 August 2021

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Highlights

- With 9.7 million Afghan children already in desperate need of humanitarian assistance, the ongoing displacement, current political volatility and expected disruption of basic social services, compounded by drought and continued COVID-19 pandemic, and the onset of winter will further exacerbate their humanitarian needs.
- To ensure access to humanitarian aid to the affected population in an operationally challenging context, UNICEF has already mobilized its resources and capacities to continue scaling-up protection, health, WASH, nutrition, education and cash interventions.
- During the reporting period, safe drinking water was provided to more than 170,000 drought-affected people in multiple provinces, UNICEF-supported mobile teams delivered health services in 14 provinces, 8,870 children affected by conflict and displacement were reached with child protection services, 4,000 severely malnourished children were provided with life-saving therapeutic treatment, and 479 community-based education classes (CBEs) were established reaching 22,470 out-of-school children.

Situation in Numbers



Situation Overview & Humanitarian Needs

Following a two-decade war, the Taliban took over Kabul on 15th August merely two weeks before the complete withdrawal of international military forces. This rapid change of power further deepened an already dire humanitarian situation and has brought the country to the brink of an economic collapse. The national and internal banking system has largely frozen all transactions – including international - and most of the private sector companies have suspended services. This situation is impacting the population across with challenges to receive salaries and access cash for procuring basic food staples and other key goods for households.

Since the end of May, the number of people internally displaced because of conflict more than doubled, reaching over 570,000 by end August.

The funding suspension of the Sehatmandi project which is the backbone of the health system in Afghanistan has critical negative implications for the delivery of the health services in Afghanistan. More than 2,300 health facilities are affected by this decision, with reports indicating growing gaps in the delivery of life-saving interventions including routine immunization services, limited medicine and supplies, and lack of salaries for health personnel. Over 80 per cent of life-saving nutrition services for children and women are provided through these health facilities. Nutrition counsellors, whose work will also be stalled, provide critical support and counselling for breastfeeding mothers and one-on-one advice on feeding young children. Provision of iron, folic acid and vitamin and mineral tablets and powders, critical in these times of rapidly diminishing access to food, will also be jeopardized. Likewise, critical nutrition information on treatments will no longer be available, limiting the ability to obtain updates on the nutrition situation in the country. With one million children under five projected to suffer from severe acute malnutrition this year, such suspensions in service provision will have a devastating impact on the nutritional situation of children.

Hunger is likely to increase in the coming months as wheat and other food prices are climbing daily notwithstanding the compounded impacts of the meagre harvest season ends and the harsh Afghan winter that will begin in two months from now.

An inter-agency flash appeal will be launched on 13 September during a High-level Ministerial Meeting convened by the UN Secretary General. The Flash Appeal reflects the overall funding requirements needed to address the immediate humanitarian gaps from September to December 2021 in light of the deteriorating situation.

Summary Analysis of Programme Response

Health

During the reporting period, more than 2,500 individuals (including 650 children) received primary healthcare services at IDP settlements in and around Kabul. After Taliban captured all over South region, provinces, the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Haji Camp and other areas of Kandahar city, returned to their places of origin and UNICEF ensured that they received the basic health services upon return to their places of origin by alerting the mobile health teams across the service delivery points. UNICEF also supported mobile health teams in 14 provinces to continue delivering basic health services to women and children in hard-to-reach areas. Despite a decline in the number of vaccinations against COVID-19, more than 250,000 eligible individuals received COVID-19 vaccinations in the past two weeks.

With the suspension of the funding for the Sehatmandi project, immediate actions need to be taken to restore the funding, as the health system is at the brink of collapse in a context where the system is already overburdened by the increased internal displacements and the COVID-19 epidemic. In addition to doubling the number of Mobile Health and Nutrition Teams (MHNTs), UNICEF is actively engaged with donors and partners to leverage support for the minimum integrated health and nutrition package continuity in more than 500 prioritized health facilities across the country.

To respond to some of the immediate health priorities of women and children, UNICEF has developed a 4-week acceleration plan which will start in start in September. Joint health and nutrition contingency partnerships are under development to expand the number of MHNTs and initiate delivery of minimum services in those health facilities which are going to be closed because of suspension of funds from the Sehatmandi project. The 3-month plan will last until the end of the year and aims to sustain the routine immunization services, respond to measles outbreak, provide Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health (MNCH) services through 57 existing, and 43 new, mobile health teams as well as provide necessary support and health services to the IDPs and other vulnerable populations in the upcoming winter season. Extensive resource mobilization efforts are in place, including engaging with major donors such as GAVI, Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank.

Nutrition

Nutrition programmes have also been experiencing a substantial disruption in all provinces as result of the discontinuation of funding for the Sehatmandi project. While the delivery of nutrition services through integrated mobile MHNTs teams are ongoing, there are some disruptions in service provision at provincial level. During the last week of August, an estimated 4,000 under-five children suffering from severe acute malnutrition (SAM) were provided with lifesaving therapeutic treatment through the Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) at health facilities and mobile teams across the country. The figure is significantly lower than normal. Reporting systems will largely be disrupted after August and it will be difficult to measure activities.

Despite various challenges, UNICEF continues its work with partners for the distribution of therapeutic supplies for the fourth quarter of 2021 and repositioning of required supplies for the winter to be used in the first quarter of 2022. Supplies for SAM will be delivered by road from Pakistan to avoid logistical challenges at the Hamid Karzai International Airport. UNICEF also integrated the nutrition preventive and treatment services into mobile health teams working in IDP settlements in Kabul.

UNICEF ensured that integrated mobile teams can be scaled up rapidly, with planning in place to deploy nearly 100 more teams over the next quarter. UNICEF is in the process of doubling the number of nutrition programme extenders in the field to further support, coordinate and monitor the nutrition programmes at the field level.

Programmes implementation by some of the Nutrition Cluster partners were constrained by the inability to provide cash for the transport and accommodation of caregivers traveling with SAM children with medical complications who are in need of inpatient treatment. Implementing partners were guided to provide food-based in-kind assistance instead.

The Nutrition cluster partners plan to reach close to 1.2 million children and women suffering from acute malnutrition by December 2021, including 163,000 IDPs and 126,500 people outside of the scope of the original Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), for a total funds' requirement of US\$ 56.3 million.

Child Protection, Gender-Based Violence and PSEA

During the last two weeks of August, UNICEF continued to respond to urgent child protection needs in the wake of the Taliban takeover of the country. Through its implementing partners, UNICEF provided 8,870 (4,885 boys and 3,985 girls) children affected by conflict and displacement with immediate and life-saving services. Of the 8,870 children reached, a total of 8,447 (4,625 boys and 3,822 girls) children were reached with Psychosocial Support Services (PSS) and 423 (260 boys and 163 girls) children reached with integrated case management mainly in North, Northeast, South, Eastern and West Region provinces, including 38 boys who were provided with immediate cash assistance, transportation, referral to medical and other services.

Additionally, UNICEF supported identification, registration, for evacuation of unaccompanied and separated children from Kabul airport. Of the 163 (134 boys and 29 girls) children identified and registered, 17 (9 boys and 8 girls) children were reunified in Kabul (10 inside the airport and 7 in Kabul city) and 146 (125 boys and 21 girls) children were evacuated to Qatar for onward Best Interest Assessment (BIA) process and subsequent support. Since 25 August, UNICEF and partners supported 224 unaccompanied children in the Doha airbase in Qatar. UNICEF-Qatar worked with Government of Qatar institutions and the Qatar Charity Fund to arrange care, including social workers and paediatricians, for 158 of these children. In addition, at the Ramstein airbase in Germany, UNICEF had been supporting an initial caseload of 46 unaccompanied children, with more expected to arrive. A registration point for unaccompanied children and a safe space for children – a “kinder pod”- has been put in place. UNICEF assessed incoming arrivals and conducted rapid Best Interest Assessments (BIA), after which a recommendation for onward movement (or not) is issued within 24 hours.

As part of its programme to reach vulnerable families facing multiple risks, including the families of children killed during the Kabul school bombing, UNICEF registered 300 out of the 900 targeted families to receive cash assistance. However, because of the ongoing changes in the country, cash transfer has been delayed due to the current suspension of banking services.

As the country opens up and more people are poised to return to their areas of origin or previously inaccessible areas, UNICEF is investing in Explosive Ordnance Risks Education (EORE) and through work with other sectors and NGO partners, a total of 577 individuals (483 Male and 94 Female) were reached with messages on Explosive Risks Ordnance as a way of preventing injury and death, particularly amongst children.

The UNICEF Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) taskforce has revised and translated the PSEA materials into Pashto and Dari for staff, partners and beneficiaries and these materials are currently being reprinted. The materials will increase awareness on SEA and new reporting guidelines.

Education

'Cold Climate' schools in 22 provinces have completed or are in the process of completing their mid-year exams. On 24 August, the *de-facto* authorities instructed schools to reopen for grades one to six for both girls and boys (cold climate). Grade seven and above remain closed - with the exception of some provinces in the North, where all schools opened - awaiting for further instructions that seem to be delayed due to operational challenges, including financial constraints and organization of classrooms in terms of separation of female and male students and ongoing reflection on the inclusion of religious subjects into curriculum. It is not clear how many teachers are reporting back to schools, especially female teachers, but the *de-facto* authorities announce that all teachers for primary education should report back to work. At the moment, no official data is available on the number of teachers or children reporting to school for grade 1-6 as no national survey has been conducted yet. UNICEF will have follow-up with the newly appointed provincial education directors and through its extenders to monitor the situation on the ground in terms of participation of both students and teachers, and in particularly girls and f female primary grade teachers.

Currently 1,234 CBE classes are operational supported by UNICEF and implementing partners. In the current reporting period, 479 grade-1 community-based education classes (CBEs) were established in Faryab and Zabul provinces reaching 22,470 out-of-school children (13,830 girls and 8,640 boys). All 1,2434 CBE classes received full teaching and learning materials (TLM) in March 2021. Teachers' salaries were paid until end of June 2021. At the moment, UNICEF is verifying CBE's teachers' salary list to process payments for July and August. In addition, textbooks for 2021-2022

academic year, additional set of TLM and hand-washing stations are in country and available for distribution, pending re-start of logistical operations (delivery and distribution by UNICEF LTA holders and other suppliers).

WASH

UNICEF provided safe drinking water to 166,536 drought-affected people through water trucking at their places of origin in six districts (Chimtal, Kishendeh, Zari, Sholgar, Charkent and Dawlatabad) in Balkh province. People in the affected districts mostly rely on rainwater harvest due to lack of potable groundwater availability. This response is helping affected people to remain in their places of origin. Additionally, 2,275 people affected and people who have been displaced from their villages due to flash flood in Kamdich district of Nuristan provinces received essential WASH supplies such as family hygiene kits, jerrycans, buckets, soap bars, products for household level water treatment. In informal settlements of Kabul province, 3,185 people accessed safe drinking water through construction and/or rehabilitation of handpump wells. Moreover, 14,460 people in informal settlements in Kabul province received hygiene supplies and benefited from hygiene promotion sessions. Water trucking also continues to 12,500 people affected by drought in Chakhansor district of Nimroz province.

The WASH Cluster has prioritised the provision of drinking water and WASH emergency supplies to 2.5 million people in the framework of the Flash Appeal supporting the HRP Addendum, 1.5 million of whom are outside the scope of the HRP. The majority of people to be reached outside of the original HRP target are people who reside in areas affected by water scarcity driven by the hydrological impact of the drought or are newly displaced IDPs. The Cluster requires \$66.5 million to deliver on priority needs, noting that this additional HRP Addendum Flash Appeal does not include the cost of potential water shortage from the private sector in the main cities.

The Cluster plans to expand water provision through deepening and rehabilitation of hand-dug wells and boreholes, repair and set-up of handpumps, rehabilitation of solar, gravity and mixed water systems, set-up of emergency water treatment units, and enhancing household water treatment capacity. Water trucking will be carried out as a last resort. These activities will be delivered in 14 priority provinces identified with acute WASH needs. The Cluster will further provide hygiene kits, water kits and bath and latrine set to new IDPs in areas of displacement.

Social Protection and Cash Transfers

New registration of households in Kabul is continuing, with nearly 800 households registered through UNICEF's new dedicated Management Information System (MIS) for Humanitarian Cash Transfers (HCT) in the period between 21-31 August. These households have been selected to receive cash assistance in combination with case management services to reduce and prevent negative coping mechanisms for children. UNICEF has been working closely with Financial Service Providers (FSPs) and other UN agencies on monitoring the financial situation in the country and assessing capacities of FSPs in preparing for a scale up of cash assistance.

Communications for Development (C4D), Community Engagement, and Accountability to Affected Population (AAP)

During the reporting period, UNICEF conducted a U-Report poll (on behalf of the interagency AAP Working Group) to assess the information and other priority needs of at risk and affected populations receiving over 121,000 responses from all over Afghanistan. The results have been shared widely including the AAP Working Group and Inter Cluster Country Team (ICCT) to inform response decisions.

In response to this poll, U-Report launched chatbot to share lifesaving information to the community. The content of the chatbot is about how and where to get food, water, and other humanitarian services. The chatbot has been sent offline, via SMS to 10 million people including 500,000 U-Reporters.

In Northern Region, 900 Community Health Workers were oriented on key messages relating to COVID-19 vaccine efficacy and where to get vaccinated. They are expected to engage with over 90,000 individuals over the coming weeks to explain vaccine efficacy and link them to available service points. In Kabul, social mobilizers were able to engage with 250 families and about 1,500 individuals in Dasht-e-Padola IDP camps with critical information on how to access available humanitarian services. In Eastern Region 500 mothers and adolescent girls were educated on COVID-19 prevention measures, how to access vaccines and other services. 13 radio programmes and 5 TV roundtables were broadcast on COVID-19 reaching over 200,000 people.

Gender and Adolescent Development and Participation

Platforms for engagement of communities to mitigate the protection risks for women and girls remain active in some of the provinces, mainly Herat in Herat province and Bagrami in Kabul. Through these structures, UNICEF supported the training of (45 (23M/20F) key community mobilisers from community on their role on promotion of empowerment of women, protection and GBV risk mitigation and including their role on facilitating women access to services delivery structures.

GBV risk mitigation training materials have been translated into local languages (Pashto and Dari). The training materials will be used by the Nutrition partners and women-led CSOs in cascading local capacity on addressing GBV risks and other protection concerns as women and children try to access nutrition services in 5 provinces.

Human Interest Stories and External Media

Since the onset of the current crisis, ACO communication and advocacy section has been highlighting the impact of the triple crisis of instability, drought and COVID-19 on children in Afghanistan and positioning UNICEF as a credible voice speaking on behalf of children from inside the country.

Afghanistan coverage over the reporting period includes UNICEF Afghanistan Representative's interview with [ABC News Radio](#) , [ABC Australia Online](#) , [The Guardian](#) and more. In addition to interviews by Sam Mort with [Canadian TV](#), and Swiss Television (SRF). Other coverage including of the [WHO/ UNICEF statement](#) calling for a humanitarian air bridge comprises of the [Associated Press](#), [US News and World Report](#), [Fox News](#), [Washington Post](#) , [Newsweek](#), [New York Times](#), [Press Trust of India](#), [interview with Channel 5](#) and with [ITN at 10pm](#), a [Sky Arabic interview](#) with UNICEF's Chief of Field Office in Jalalabad, [CNN](#), [Bloomberg](#), [Al Jazeera English](#), several pieces by [CGTN](#), including James Elder's [interview with CGTN](#).

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