

Rebuilding Communities in the Aftermath of a Disaster

A Case Study on Integrated Programming



Photo 1. In the background, families whose homes were destroyed by an earthquake reside in self-made tents while their new houses are constructed. Nurgal district, Kunar province.

Background

Afghanistan is facing a complex crisis in which natural disasters and climate-related shocks affect communities already reeling from decades of protracted conflict and compounding crises. Afghanistan is extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, ranked the 8th most vulnerable country in the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Index due to its high sensitivity and low adaptive capacity. Climate projections available for Afghanistan suggest a future of higher temperatures, reduced rainfall, higher evapotranspiration and increased frequency of extreme events such as droughts, storms, floods, landslides and avalanches. Located in one of the most seismically active regions in the world, Afghanistan has a long history of earthquakes – particularly in the mountainous Hindu Kush Region bordering Pakistan.¹ In 2022, the number of recorded sudden-onset disasters, such as floods and earthquakes, was higher than preceding years and it is anticipated that this pattern may become the norm moving ahead.² Resulting death tolls are worsened by the often remote locations of natural disasters and associated humanitarian access constraints, as well as the impacts of war,

¹ Prevention Web, 'Multiple factors make Afghan communities vulnerable to earthquakes,' August 10, 2022.

² UNOCHA, 'Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) 2023, March 2023.

historical lack of investment in infrastructure and natural resource management, and proceeding environmental shocks which have left homes and basic infrastructure in dangerous conditions, susceptible to collapse.

Integrated Response to Disasters

Since 2021, the collapse of the previous government resulted in a suspension of direct international development assistance, which previously accounted for 75 per cent of public expenditure.³ Consequences have been dire, with rapid economic decline, inflation, rise of poverty and hunger.

The country response also pivoted towards short-term humanitarian assistance. However, because the current crisis is not driven by the impact of a particular shock, humanitarian assistance can only effectively mitigate suffering for a limited period of time: once the assistance is consumed, affected populations will be unable to recover on their own – instead facing the same underlying challenges that continue to drive needs.

This calls for an expansion of resilience and recovery interventions, which are essential in meeting critical sectoral needs that tend to remain unaddressed once the initial emergency response to a disaster is completed. This is in acknowledgement that the priority is first to ensure the safety and survival needs of affected populations are met, while also facilitating a path to recovery that would prevent a dramatic deepening of vulnerabilities and promote the return to a state of normalcy after a disaster strikes. The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) adopts a nexus approach through integrated programming to mutually reinforce outcomes between sectors, for example emergency and post-disaster shelter and economic recovery support. Integrated programming between these two sectors contribute to reducing the risk and exposure of the affected population and support the capacity of individuals and households to meet their essential needs.

In Afghanistan, DRC is uniquely positioned to leverage on complementarities of its complex portfolio to strengthen the impact of programming, including but not limited to, Emergency Response, Shelter and Settlements, and Economic Recovery interventions. DRC has developed significant capacities to deploy multi-sectoral teams in the wake of a disaster to implement a comprehensive and carefully phased response with the aim of mitigating further collapse and reliance on humanitarian assistance or negative coping strategies. This is achieved through a multi-pronged process, outlined below.



Photo 2. The establishment of Quba village, where 80 families now reside and in newly constructed houses.

³ UNDP, Economic Instability and Uncertainty in Afghanistan after August 15, September 2021

DRC's Approach

Step 1: Household-level Emergency Assessments



In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, the Emergency team conducts a household-level emergency assessment. Depending on the response capacity in the location of the disaster, DRC may either proceed alone or as part of a Joint Assessment Team (JAT) comprising multiple actors delivering different types of emergency assistance (e.g. MPCA, food baskets, emergency NFIs, etc.). This initial assessment of affected households takes into account persons of concern (PoCs) priorities, capacities, intersecting vulnerabilities, and needs at different phases of assistance.

Step 2: First-line Response / Coordinate Emergency Assistance



In close coordination with other humanitarian actors (where available), Emergency teams provide first-line response to extremely vulnerable households to prevent morbidity and mortality through addressing critical basic needs. For DRC, this typically includes the distribution of multi-purpose cash assistance. This step ensures affected populations receive the immediate assistance required to meet their basic needs in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. DRC strives to deliver MPCA within the first 10 days from the disaster, immediately after the completion of the preliminary needs and market assessments and of the beneficiary identification process.

Step 3: Second-line Response / 'Build Back Better' Shelter Programming



The initial household-level assessment also allows to identify PoCs in need of shelter assistance. Depending on the scale of shelter damage, and the household's capacity to independently conduct the repairs, DRC may provide shelter self-repair kits, cash-based shelter repairs, and cash-based shelter reconstruction (t-shelter), as well as winterization support (seasonal). In order to inform the shelter intervention, DRC Shelter & Settlements staff carry out detailed technical assessments to assess the condition of shelters as well the vulnerability of households and their preferred living arrangements. Shelter interventions apply disaster-resilient designs, in line with the Build Back Better approach.

Step 4: Second-line Response / Economic Recovery Assistance



It is not uncommon that PoC lose productive assets as a result of a disaster. These may include seeds supplies, tools and materials necessary for their vocation, livestock, etc. To enable the recovery of affected households, DRC Economic Recovery team conduct technical assessments to identify lost assets, the capacity of PoCs to independently acquire them after the shock, and overall household vulnerability (already determined under step 1). A grant of up to 500 USD is then disbursed to eligible households for the purchase of the assets lost because of the disaster. Close follow-up by DRC technical team ensures spending of the grants as per agreed assets purchase plan.

Step 5: Cash for Work & Reconstruction of community infrastructure



Cash for work schemes are also considered an appropriate response modality both in the aftermath of a disaster for debris removal, carcass management, etc. and for promoting post-disaster recovery through the rehabilitation of community infrastructure, for example roads, irrigation channels, and karez. The rehabilitation of community infrastructure damaged by a shock may also be implemented through contractors, where required, for example for the reconstruction or extension of water supply systems.

Step 5: Multi-sector Impact Evaluation



MEAL teams conduct a multi-sector evaluation to measure the joint impact and effectiveness of Emergency, Shelter, and Economic Recovery interventions to inform future DRC programming and the broader humanitarian response. Activity-specific post-distribution monitoring is complemented by qualitative data collection to gather insights on the broader impact of the intervention.

Case Study

Nurgal District, Kunar Province

On September 5th 2022 at 2:57 am, a 5.1 magnitude earthquake struck Eastern Kunar province in close proximity to Jalalabad, the provincial capital city. The earthquake was felt across various parts of the country, including in Nangarhar, Laghman, Kabul, and other nearby provinces, waking residents who were still asleep.

Jubagai village of Nurgal district, one of the most impacted areas, saw casualties and significant destruction to public infrastructure and private shelters – rendering residents effectively homeless and unprepared for the imminent winter season and below freezing temperatures.

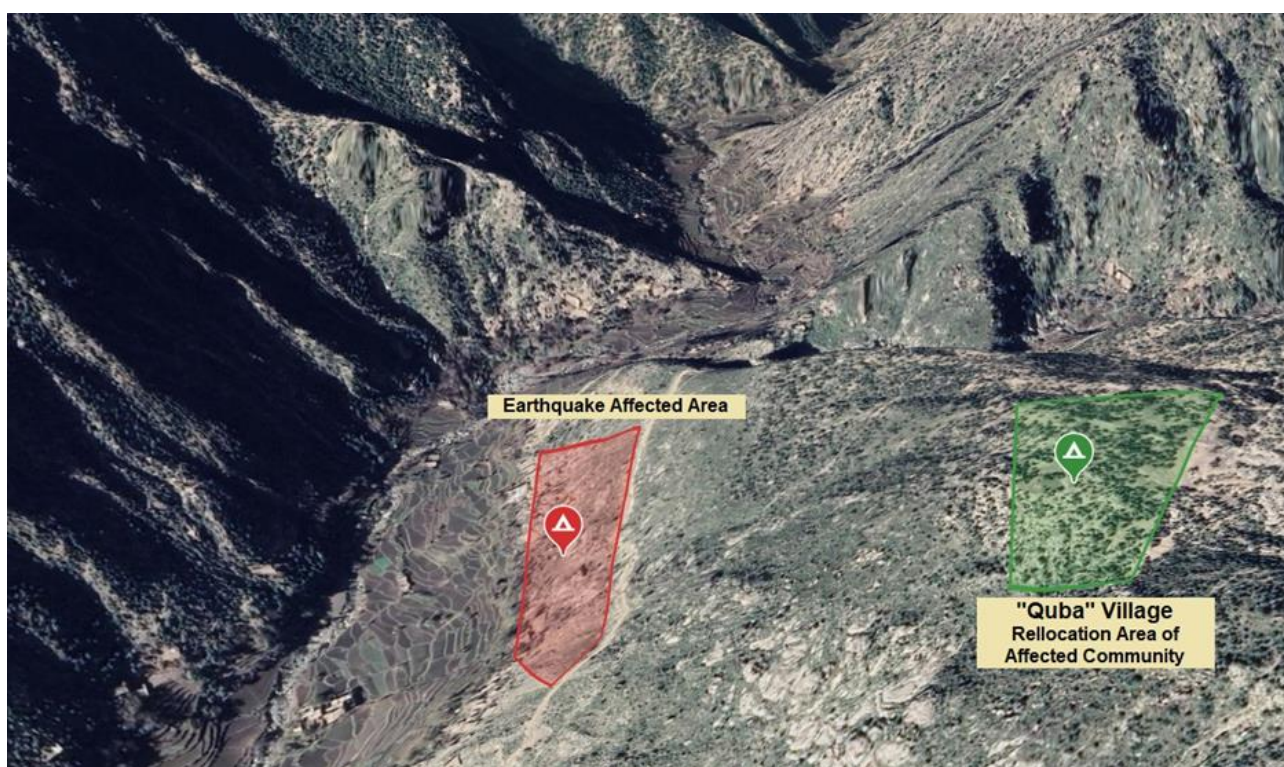


Figure 3. Map of earthquake-affected area (Jubagai village) and relocation area (Quba village).

Jubagai is a remote, mountainous village situated in the western part of Kunar province, with approximately 1,000 inhabitants who are nearly entirely reliant on agriculture and livestock rearing for their subsistence and income. Like most villages in the Nurgal mountains, Jubagai was built at the foothills of a mountain next to a stream, where residents were living in vernacular stone houses – valued for its thermal performance and ability to blend in with the surrounding environment. While vernacular stone and earthen architecture have a long history and rich cultural heritage in Afghanistan due to the availability and affordability of locally sourced materials, it is known to be fragile and susceptible to damage from natural disasters. As a result, the moderate earthquake in September 2022 saw substantial destruction, leaving homes in ruins and families without protection from the elements or basic household items.

Adding to this, the mountain surface above Jubagai village was disrupted due to the earthquake typology (reverse faulting), presenting significant risks of landslides and further destruction to the area. In particular, there were threats of large rocks along the surrounding mountain walls collapsing into the village, ultimately forcing residents to relocate to higher grounds in seek of safety.

DRC's Response

First-Line Emergency Assistance

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, DRC rapidly deployed its Emergency team to Nurgal district to provide first-line humanitarian response. With the financial support of **European Union Humanitarian Aid (ECHO)**, 812 families were identified and supported through Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA) to address urgent basic needs according to their own priorities. This first-line response was designed to provide immediate relief to families with reduced coping capacities as a result of the earthquake, while also setting the necessary foundation for their transition towards recovery through complimentary support.



Photo 4. During the initial assessment, a DRC Emergency staff member helps an injured boy safely get down from the rubble.

'Build Back Better' Shelter Programming

Acknowledging that vulnerabilities generally extend beyond immediate basic needs and often remain unaddressed once the initial emergency response to disasters is completed, DRC's Shelter and Settlements team proceeded with technical assessments of affected families who were identified at the initial assessment stage as having high shelter vulnerabilities. During this process, DRC selected 80 families whose houses had been destroyed by the earthquake, rendered inhabitable, to be supported through Transitional Shelter Reconstruction made possible thanks to rapid emergency funding from the Ole Kirk's Fond (OKF).

Through this second-line support, "Quba" village – which translates to 'up' – was newly established in a safe location to allow residents of Jubagai to be relocated to a safe and landslide-free area. Informed by rapid market assessments and in line with the Shelter-NFI Cluster recommendations, families were provided cash support to facilitate the re-construction of their houses, reinforced by the signing of Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with each household to ensure the assistance was used for timely and quality shelter works. To compliment the financial support, DRC conducted a training for all head of households responsible for implementing the works, focused on an introduction to the shelter design and an overview of different disaster risks and recommended techniques in line with the principle of 'Build Back Better.' Throughout the

response, DRC Shelter teams provided continuous technical support and site monitoring to ensure that the newly constructed housing units were strengthened to withstand future shocks.

In light of the quickly approaching winter season, enhanced cash-based winterization support was also provided to all 80 assisted households to enable the purchase of winterization and other household items lost during the disaster. Notably, to ensure that the housing land property (HLP) rights of residents of Quba village were protected and would not be contested by any party at a later stage, DRC received approvals from local de-facto authorities and nearby tribal leaders previously residing in and around the selected area.



Photo 5. Community members work to re-construct their homes through the cash and technical support provided by DRC.

The reconstruction of private shelters, alongside complimentary winterization support, proved to be essential in ensuring appropriate standards of living and the dignity and protection of residents left homeless as a result of the earthquake. In turn, assisted households reported substantial improvements to their overall living conditions and perceptions of safety, as well as their ability to cope with the harsh winter season. Adding to this, the provision of cash support had a knock-on effect, by providing much-needed income opportunities and cash injections to the local market for construction materials and household items. Within a context of heightened economic vulnerabilities, this proved to be a valuable secondary benefit of the intervention and supported DRC's choice to proceed with a cash-based intervention.

Economic Recovery Intervention: Cash for Work

Even prior to the earthquake, poor road conditions connecting Jubagai village with the district center and surrounding areas presented substantial barriers for residents to access markets and basic services. As a predominantly farming community, this severely limited households' ability to sell their produce on the market, instead relying on local sales at a significantly lower price or in exchange for other produce. Compounding the situation, the earthquake caused further destruction to the main road, which created additional challenges in the transportation of people and materials to the safe relocation site (Quba village).

With the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under the framework of the Area-Based Approach for Development Emergency Initiative (ABADEI), DRC temporarily employed 51 socio-economically vulnerable individuals over a period of one month to reconstruct the required road network based on a prioritization exercise involving community consultations. Participants were engaged through a

Cash-for-Work (CfW) scheme, earning a labour wage for their contributions in removing debris from the earthquake and levelling the road, which now spans five kilometres in length.



Photo 6. Ease of travel among local residents has significantly improved following the completion of the road network.

Similar to DRC's shelter programming, this intervention was not only an important step towards addressing immediate needs as a result of the earthquake, but also improved underlying conditions that were preventing families from realising their full economic potential. Since the reconstruction of the road, community members have voiced that they are now able to easily transport their produce to the district and provincial markets and have access to quality inputs which are expected to increase agricultural productivity, and ultimately, sales. Beyond the far-reaching benefits of improved income in the longer-term, temporary employment provided economic relief to CfW participants and their family members, who were not only experiencing physical and mental trauma from the earthquake but also lost productive assets that were detrimental to their livelihoods. The cash support thus enabled residents to replace their lost assets or other household items that were destroyed, in efforts to promote the return to a state of normalcy.



Photo 7. DRC Engineers monitor the construction works of Quba village.

Impact Evaluation

DRC conducted an impact evaluation in newly established Quba village in April 2023 to assess the overall effectiveness of DRC's integrated response. Specifically, the assessment focused on the challenges the community faced prior to DRC interventions, and the impact of multi-sectoral assistance on addressing these needs. To do so, DRC's Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEAL) team conducted a combination of post distribution monitoring (PDM), focus group discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews (KIIs) with community members. Based on PDM findings, the initial MPCA response proved to reduce household reliance on negative coping strategies, including preventing productive assets from being sold off or fully depleted, by enabling them to meet their most urgent needs.

With regards to shelter support, respondents explained that the earthquake severely damaged or destroyed the majority of houses in their community, and that the construction of new shelters in Quba village now provides a safe environment and protects residents from the elements and other risks (such as landslides). Further, DRC verified that the new houses were constructed following the guidelines of the ES/NFI Cluster and that implementation was closely monitored by DRC engineers, ensuring designs aligned with the 'Build Back Better' approach – including earthquake, wind, and rain resistance. Data collected from the interviews showed that all assisted households were satisfied with the quality of works and the timeliness of the response, which provided secure and insulated shelters during the harshest months of the winter season. Notably, respondents also highlighted the importance of combining shelter and winterization support to offset the risks of freezing temperatures, emphasizing particular concerns for children, women, and elderly members.

In terms of Economic Recovery activities, respondents noted high levels of poverty and unemployment even prior to the earthquake, explaining that the CfW project provided a positive impact by enabling easy access to the market and other parts of the district through the reconstructed road. Further, this initiative reportedly allowed CfW participants who benefitted from temporary employment to pay off debts.



Founded in 1956, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) is Denmark's largest international NGO, with a specific expertise in forced displacement. DRC is present in close to 40 countries and employs 9,000 staff globally.

DRC advocates for the rights of and solutions for displacement-affected communities, and provides assistance during all stages of displacement: In acute crisis, in exile, when settling and integrating in a new place, or upon return. DRC supports displaced persons in becoming self-reliant and included into hosting societies. DRC works with civil society and responsible authorities to promote protection of rights and inclusion.

Our 7,500 volunteers in Denmark make an invaluable difference in integration activities throughout the country.

DRC's code of conduct sits at the core of our organizational mission, and DRC aims at the highest ethical and professional standards. DRC has been certified as meeting the highest quality standards according to the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability.

HRH Crown Princess Mary is DRC's patron.

To read more about what we do, see: www.drc.ngo

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