

## **Strategy for Support to Internally Displaced Persons in the Southern Region in 2005 and 2006**

### **Background**

In late 2001 and early 2002, there were an estimated number of about 1 million persons internally displaced within Afghanistan, as a result of several years of severe drought, of conflict as well as the demise of the Taliban regime. The large majority of the IDPs were able to return to their places of origin and residence during 2002 and 2003, leaving some 145,000 IDPs in five camps in the south, including in Spin Boldak, which was closed by the end of 2004. Reasons for not returning included continuous security concerns in places of origin in the North and the continuation of the drought. (A description of the IDP caseload in the four camps, Zhar-e-Dasht, Mukhtar, Maiwand and Panjwai, of Southern Afghanistan, can be found in the Annex).

At present some 125,000 IDPs remain in the Southern region for whom UNHCR, DORR and its partners continue to provide basic care and maintenance assistance, including food assistance, water and sanitation, health care, education, vocational training and income generating activities. The IDPs live in four camps mainly in mud shelters, some in tents, and UNHCR continues to provide support with camp-management services. Protection activities and monitoring of their situation are regularly conducted to address their specific problems, including obstacles to their potential return and reintegration.

The IDP camps were originally established as a temporary emergency response to displacement.

### **Current situation**

The climatic and political situation in Afghanistan has improved in the last three years and thereby created increased opportunities for IDPs to return to places of origin and to step out of the framework of dependency on relief assistance whether upon return or in a location of their choice.

With regard to the drought, favorable climatic changes with high levels of snow fall and rains have mitigated the effects of the drought in the areas of origin of many IDPs. It is expected that the recent rains will have a positive impact on agricultural yields and on grazing areas in the country, particularly the southern provinces of Helmand, Zabul and Kandahar, the areas most affected by drought in the past five years.

With regard to security and stability, the presidential elections, changes in the administration in provinces of the North, progress in the DDR process in major

Northern and North Western provinces as well as the expansion and deployment of ANA and ANP to various parts of the country have had a positive impact on the human rights situation. These developments also created opportunities for return in safety and with dignity to Afghans displaced from the North and North-West.

More than three years after their displacement, the situation of the remaining IDPs in the camps in the Southern region has largely stabilized. Surveys among IDPs show basic health indicators comparable to Afghans in surrounding areas as well as a high level of attendance of formal and informal education among children and literacy courses among adults. The majority of the IDP households has also found access to income-generating opportunities in surrounding areas and is no longer dependent on food assistance. (A recent survey in Mukhtar indicates that 87% of the IDP households generate some form of cash income to sustain their lives). UNHCR and its partners continue to invest in marketable skills to increase the ability of IDPs to generate own income.

### **Focus of the future strategy**

Against this background, and following a series of consultative meetings and an agreed understanding between the Government and UNHCR, it is now considered timely to shift emphasis from care and maintenance assistance and maximize durable solutions opportunities for the remaining IDP caseload. During the next months efforts will be made to build on emerging opportunities for the safe and sustainable return of IDPs to their places of origin by investing a greater portion of programme resources in assisted voluntary repatriation and reintegration in place of origin, as well as to self-reliance opportunities for IDPs.

The key elements of this strategy therefore are:

- Promotion of voluntary return through regular dialogue with the IDPs and mass information (informed choice), provision of transportation assistance and of an improved return package as well as group and community reintegration assistance upon return in places of origin.
- Re-direction of resources from care and maintenance assistance in camps towards government and community capacity building including through devolution of camp management functions and mainstreaming of social services in current camp locations.
- Limiting assistance activities, except for extremely vulnerable individuals, to those that enhance self-reliance, in particular skills development and income generating activities.

## **Information and consultation activities**

A mass information campaign will be planned, designed and delivered jointly with the Government of Afghanistan. For the success of the shift in emphasis in the strategy, it is important that the IDP caseload is consulted and informed in a timely and objective manner of situation in places of origin as well as the changes in displacement locations in order to enable informed decision-making. IDPs will be informed of the opportunities available for assistance if they choose to return as well as their increased responsibility in ensuring the well-being of their communities. The timing of the changes in assistance in present locations is critical in order to enable return, where opted for, before the winter sets in.

The government authorities, UNHCR, WFP, UNAMA, IOM and other partners are in the process of arranging meetings with all IDP groups, particularly those from districts within Kandahar province, to outline the planned revision of support. Particular attention will be paid to ensuring the participation of all families, including women, in decision-making.

## **Promoting and assisting voluntary and safe return and reintegration**

Generally, to maximize opportunities for return, UNHCR will work towards strengthening linkages with other actors to promote development investment in areas of return. This is particularly important to ensure that investment in education and skills development, which is much valued by IDPs in displacement, can be transferred and built upon after return. UNHCR will encourage actors to follow returnees to places of origin and invest resources in development and reintegration there.

Registration of a growing number of IDPs wishing to return has commenced. Other planned activities are:

- Come&Talk and Go&See visits, including, where feasible, with the participation of women and children (Refer to Annex II for the proposed schedule);
- A return package has been designed (Refer to Annex III for the components of the return package). It includes contributions from UNHCR, from IOM and WFP (4 months food rations to returnees).
- Transportation arrangements for safe and dignified return, where feasible, accompanied by IOM, have been made and will be available, as necessary and scheduled by district of return.
- Consult IDPs on their reintegration needs and priorities and provide them with information on project initiatives in place of origin in co-ordination with UNHCR and other actors in areas of return.

- Provide other actors with a list of potential returnees by village and encourage other actors to consider/transfer programme and reintegration activities to places of origin. This includes WFP for food-for-work programmes in food insecure areas of return, NSP facilitating partners for the inclusion of its programmes in the high returnee areas, and to consider the needs of returning IDPs through CDC mechanisms; as well as the health, education and other governmental departments.
- For the returnees in Kandahar region, the emphasis of assistance, in addition to the returnee package, will be the strengthening of basic socio-economic infrastructure (such as schools, health points and access roads) in cooperation with the Government and other development actors such as JICA through its Reintegration Programme in the three districts of Kandahar.
- Information and legal advice in places of return will be available and UNHCR and its partners will monitor the situation to identify, document and address possible obstacles to safe reintegration of returning IDPs.

### **Self-reliance initiatives for the remaining population in present locations**

UNHCR expects a number of IDPs to opt to stay and not to return to their places of origin or previous residence. IDP profiling (completed May 2004) indicated that 65% of IDPs were considering opting for return while 35% indicated that they had no wish to return. It is expected that the IDP population not opting for return will comprise two groups: Those remaining due to continuing concerns for their safety or for economic reasons and those (EVIs) who are not equipped to be self-supporting neither in places of origin nor, at present, in displacement.

UNHCR will continue to address protection problems of IDPs, including obstacles to return, and will monitor the well-being of the population. In order to sustain the return and to ensure that the remaining IDP population attains a higher level of self reliance as quickly as possible the following concrete measures are envisaged during 2005 and 2006:

- Management of settlement:

The devolution of camp management responsibilities to the Afghan government began in 2005 as did the re-direction of UNHCR funds and development resources away from camps towards government and community capacity building, social service networks and self-management of the settlements by those living in them. In 2006 the management and existing infrastructure (wells, sanitary facilities, security, and settlement management) will be managed communally by a shura with technical support from relevant government departments such as MoRR/MRRD and the district administration. Where IDPs are able to obtain right of use or ownership of land for more permanent

settlement, UNHCR will be ready to assist, as needed, in improving or addressing new shelter needs for those meeting vulnerability criteria.

- Education:

Primary education is mandatory for all Afghan children. Schools have already been established within the boundaries of the IDP settlements. In 2006, the Ministry of Education, in consultation with the shura and district administration, will continue to provide teachers for primary education and school materials in the settlements. In addition, UNHCR will consider, as required, in co-ordination with UNICEF, to support the Ministry of Education (MoE) in areas of return, to ensure continuation of education for returning IDPs. This assistance will focus on institutional strengthening, infrastructure development and capacity building as necessary.

- Health:

UNHCR established a basic health unit in Zhare Dasht camp in 2004 and in 2005 provides funding for mobile clinics to service Panjwai and Maiwand camps. The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) covers health services in Mukthar camp with the assistance of UNICEF. While providing facilities and incentives for MoPH staff throughout 2005, UNHCR will, in 2006, completely hand-over the health facilities established in the camps to MoPH and continue to strengthen linkages between the MoPH and specialized UN agencies for continuous support (such as with UNICEF and WHO).

- Water and sanitation:

UNHCR has completed water and sanitation facilities in all camps. Vocational training on water pump maintenance has been provided to IDPs. IDPs are already involved in the care and maintenance of the water systems in camps. Together with DoRR and selected shura members, facilities will be maintained communally in 2006. Technical support should be available from MRRD. UNHCR will also maintain an in-house capacity to support MRRD, if needed.

- Food-assistance:

In co-ordination with WFP and the Afghan authorities, direct food-assistance for all IDPs will be phased out by the end of August 2005, as the majority of the IDPs have other sources to sustain their lives. Arrangements have been made with WFP and the authorities, to ensure that food assistance, as needed, will be available to particular vulnerable families (EVIs), who would otherwise be unable to meet their needs through own means. UNHCR and WFP will jointly undertake nutrition surveys in all four camps prior in August 2005. The surveys will identify those who may require ongoing food assistance due to malnourishment. In addition, information available from the IDP profiling will allow the identification of households who will be unable to ensure own income, due to the absence of able-bodied family-members or family-members with special needs.

- Self-reliance projects:

EVI's are already given priority in income generation projects in Zhare Dasht by both InterSOS and UNHCR. This will continue in 2006. EVI's may be included in WFP food for work and food for training opportunities – in consultation with the government and shura. In addition, for a wider group of IDPs, with a particular focus on women, UNHCR will, in the future, allocate funds for skill training and provision of start up grants (tools and raw materials) in order to further promote self-reliance. For IDPs who are planning to start a small business UNHCR has planned to provide training for business management and basic accounting training. Furthermore, a register of IDPs will be established who have received vocational training to encourage government and private sector employers to draw on this labor pool.

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