



FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

Of DEC funded “Food Security, Livelihoods, and WASH response for vulnerable households in Kabul, Balkh and Bamiyan province” Project

December 31st 2023

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AAP	Accountability to Affected Population
ACBAR	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief & Development
BPHS	Basic Package of Health Services
CBOs	Community-Based Organizations
CDC	Community Development Council
CFF	Cash for Food
CFM	Complaints & Feedback Mechanism
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standards
CRM	Complaint Response Mechanism
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DEC	Disasters Emergency Committee (hereinafter
DoEC	Directorate of Economy
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCS	Food Consumption Score
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FI	Food Items
FSC	Food Security Cluster
HER	Health Emergency Response
HH	Household
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
IRAF	Islamic Relief Afghanistan
KII	Key Informant Interview
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEAL	Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning
MoLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
MoRR	Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPCA	(Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance) MPCA
NFI	Non-Food Items
NGO	Non-Government Organizations
NPP	National Priority Projects
ODK	Open Data Kit
PDM	Post-Distribution Monitoring
PSEA	Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse
PWD	Persons with Disability
rCSI	Reduced Coping Strategies Index
RH	Right Holders

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Training and Research (TAR) Business Consulting Profile

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

“Food Security, Livelihoods, and WASH response for vulnerable households in Kabul, Balkh, and Bamyan provinces of Afghanistan was implemented by Islamic Relief Afghanistan (IRAF) and it was funded Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC). The project was implemented in two phases (phase-1) was implemented from (December 2021 – May 2022) while phase-II of the project was implemented between (July 2022 – December 2023). The project was focused on the food security of rights holders and strengthening their health and hygiene through well-planned WASH interventions.

On October 30th, 2023 Training and Research (TAR) Business Consulting was commissioned by Islamic Relief Afghanistan to evaluate this project. The evaluation was completed in three project-targeted provinces (Kabul, Balkh, and Bamyan) and it used both primary and secondary data. The evaluation was completed using a mixed approach collecting both quantitative as well as qualitative data. It is important to highlight that the evaluation was completed based on 9 commitments of Core Humanitarian Standards for Quality and Accountability. It covered both male and female rights holders of all the key stakeholders.

We (the TAR Team) would not have been able to complete this evaluation without the tireless and continued support of the IRAF leadership, MEAL team, Project team, and Finance team members of IRAF in Afghanistan and IRW team in headquarters. Additionally, I would like to thank the right holders, and other community members for their time and the information given to us.

I also would like to take this opportunity to thank the Director of Economy, and the Director of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR) in Kabul, Balkh, and Bamyan provinces, for extending their support and giving their valuable time to provide us with information. My sincere thanks also go to our technical and logistical team members at Training and Research (TAR) Business Consulting who made it possible to complete this assignment effectively.

With best wishes,

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. Evaluation methods

The evaluation of this project was carried out in 12 districts of Kabul, Balkh, and Bamyan provinces using the 9 commitments of Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS) for accountability and quality. Each of the 9 CHS commitments has been measured using specific evaluation questions. This report presents a brief context analysis of the humanitarian crises in Afghanistan as well as a thorough review of each project component based on the (CHS) commitments. The project evaluation followed a mixed research design that included both quantitative as well as qualitative data. The data was collected using household surveys, (HHS) Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), in-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and success stories.

B. Profile of respondents:

In total 706 Household Surveys (HHS) were conducted with food security component rights holders including (379 respondents from project phase-1 and 327 from project phase-2), 97 Key Informant Interviews including (54 females) with livelihood grant right holders were conducted, and 49 Key Informant Interviews including (43 females) with WASH right holder, 6 Focus Group Discussions (3 female / 3 males) with community elders and 4 in-depth interviews with program management team were conducted. The evaluation team has also prepared 4 success stories that show the outcome-level results of this program.

Since the project had covered more right holders in Kabul, therefore 52% of household surveys were completed in Kabul, 24% in Balkh, and the remaining 24% in Bamyan proportionately. To get diverse views on the project interventions the household surveys were conducted with all age right-holders including 40% of respondents aged 14-35 (young age) 38% of respondents were 36-50-year-old and the remaining were above 50 years. The evaluation team also tried to ensure the active participation of the marginalized groups of the society such as women and the disabled (specially-abled) as well, there for the household survey respondents included 43% women rights holders and 9% disabled.

The literacy status of the household survey respondents was concerning, because only 32% of them could only read and write. This situation was even more concerning for women because only 8.4% of all literates were women. Most of these literates were primary school dropouts.

PROJECT INTRODUCTION:

The Disasters Emergency Committee (hereinafter DEC) brings together 15 leading aid charities to raise funds quickly and efficiently at times of crisis overseas. The DEC mission is to save, protect and rebuild lives through effective humanitarian response. With financial support from (DEC), Islamic Relief (*that is working in Afghanistan for more than 23 years, providing emergency relief and implementing life-changing development projects*) implemented a project called "Food security, livelihoods, and WASH response for vulnerable households, in Kabul, Bamyan and Balkh Provinces in Afghanistan.

The phase – 1 of this 24 months long DEC project started in January 2022 and it continued for six months until, while the second phase of the project started in July 2022 and will continue up to December 2023. The project spent 629,453 £ in phase one, however in phase two a sum of 837,530 £ were spent. Under phase-I, the project focused on immediate emergency response and life-saving and the project has provided food packages to around 5,000 households and culturally appropriate hygiene kits to around 2,000 families, while under phase-II, which moved towards more sustainable programming, the project has provided cash for food assistance for one month to almost 2,558 households, provided livelihood grants to around 1,000 households, and 850 households received multipurpose cash to support their basic needs. Besides that, under both phases some awareness raising campaigns have also been conducted. WASH NFIs distribution

C. Evaluation findings:

This project evaluation aimed to examine the project according to 9 commitments of core humanitarian standards for quality and accountability of humanitarian aid. Each of these 9 commitments (CHS) has been assessed based on specific evaluation questions. In the end, each (CHS) was ranked based on their achievement level in (Accept, Monitor or Improve) categories. Please see the ranking with its definitions in Table 8 of this report.

CHS 1: Humanitarian response is appropriate and relevant

To map the priorities and needs of the communities Islamic Relief Afghanistan conducted a multi-sectoral humanitarian need assessment in 18 districts of Kabul, Balkh, Nangarhar, Kandahar, Herat, and Bamyan provinces of Afghanistan in November 2021. The assessment covered different sectors including; Food and Nutrition, Livelihood and Livestock, WASH and Hygiene, Shelter, Education in Emergency, Health, and Protection. The findings of the assessment were used in shaping the activities under this DEC project. With that said based on the following key findings this evaluation ranks the relevance of the project interventions as “Accept”.

- 1. Selection of the most appropriate interventions:** The project interventions were selected based on the findings of multi-sectoral humanitarian need assessment as well as recommendations of the Food Security Cluster and WASH cluster member NGOs. To understand if the project interventions were appropriate the household survey respondents were asked these questions directly and the data shows that 96% of the right holders ranked the project interventions as appropriate and relevant to their needs. The evaluation tried to further rank the relevance level on a scale of (1-5) with five interventions being highly relevant and 1 being not relevant. The data shows that 84% of respondents ranked the project interventions highly relevant, followed by 3% of respondents who ranked the project interventions as relevant. The 4% of respondents that had ranked the project food security interventions as irrelevant were requesting a more durable employment generation intervention, and they requested a program specially designed for widows.
- 2. Contribution of the project interventions towards meeting household needs:** Overall the right holders seemed very satisfied, and happy with all components of the project interventions, however, livelihood grant receivers seemed more satisfied because most of them had either purchased a cow or established a small business with the livelihood grant. They not only used the dairy products from their cow but also sold the dairy products in the nearby market that had contributed to the sustainability of their livelihoods and this was exactly what the right holders are looking for (sustainable livelihood). In addition to that the household survey findings indicated that the interventions were >99% useful in the community as well as at the household level. In other words, there is the usefulness of the activities in the community at large and satisfaction at the individual level.
- 3. Alignment of the project objectives to the overall sector and cluster strategy:** The evaluation believes that the project's interventions were aligned with the overall sector and cluster strategy. Because food insecurity and lack of sustainable livelihood have been the two long-term problems, the Afghan population has been facing for decades. Based on the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) acute food insecurity analysis October 2023 – March 2024 published on December 14, 2023 “this year during the post-harvest season in October 2023, approximately 13.1 million people, accounting for 29 percent of the total population (based on 2024 Flow minder national population estimates) are facing a high level of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above). The IPC Acute Food Insecurity analysis has ranked 30% of the Kabul and Balkh populations under IPC phase 3 and 25% of the Bamyan population under IPC phase 3. This means the project objectives are aligned with the overall sector strategy and needs of the targeted population.

CHS 2: Humanitarian response is effective and timely

Under this commitment, the evaluation tried to understand (i) whether the project achieved its intended immediate and intermediate results and (ii) How timely the results were achieved. After a careful review of all the indicators in the project log frame, it was explored that the project was able to complete its targets on the due date and time. Therefore, this evaluation ranks the project's effectiveness as “**Accept**”

1. **Effectiveness of project:** Under this criterion, the evaluation team tried to understand if the project had achieved its targets. The data shows that the project achieved its desired immediate result by reaching a total of almost 65,640 individuals (men, women, and children), of which 24,767 individuals (in Kabul and Bamyan) were reached with either Cash for Food or (Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance) MPCA. Furthermore, the project reached at least 20,812 vulnerable individuals (men, women, and children) through the distribution of 2,851 hygiene kits, and 20,061 vulnerable individuals (one male or female participant from each family) were reached through hygiene awareness sessions. The project also provided livelihood grants to 1,000 households (45,000 Afs / HH), based on a practical and well-thought-out business plan, to achieve intermediate results.
2. **Timeliness of results achieved:** As per the information received, the first phase of this project was registered with the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) Afghanistan in December 2021 and was supposed to finish in May 2022 and the first phase of the project followed its deadlines. The second phase of the project was for 18 months that started from July 2022 to December 2023 and this phase of the project was also completed in December 2023. This means the overall project was completed within the timeline the project was supposed to finish. It is worth mentioning that the key, to the timely completion of a project, was a combination of good planning, efficient execution, and effective monitoring.

CHS 3: Humanitarian response strengthens local capacities and avoids negative effects:

Under this commitment, the project evaluation did not only study how active the community members engaged in the project implementation but also studied the sustainability of project interventions, and the intermediate and long-term results produced by the project. Although the project was an emergency response and community level interventions were for a short period still the program was able to develop local capacities and produce the planned outcomes, this evaluation ranks the achievement level of this CHS commitment as “**Accept**”.

1. **Extent to which the benefits will continue/ last or likely to continue:** Besides having evaluation team observations, and findings the project evaluation team tried to understand the perspectives of the community members about project sustainability. The data shows that 90% of respondents believed that project interventions contributed to sustaining their livelihood. Following were some of the key reasons, how the community perceived that the project cash programming contributed to sustaining their livelihood:
 - The cash provided helped right holders for two months and they were able to reserve their income during that time, which will help them in the coming time & this cycle will continue.
 - The cash provided to some right holders allowed them to search for jobs and find one.
 - Some of the right holders started micro-businesses with the cash provided to them.

The evaluation found that in the food security component, the likelihood of the benefits continuation is high, especially for those who received livelihood grants. For example, out of those that received this grant, 58% have started off-farm businesses (Income Generating Activities e.g. bakery), 39% have started on-farm businesses (e.g. cow, goat, and sheep) while 13% have started doing other things. This is a big platform for continuity, as long as they are safe from unpredictable climatic and political disturbances. In addition, for those who received MPCA and CFF, it was encouraging that 13% indicated that they made savings and started some small businesses. However, their businesses were at a very small scale to guarantee continuity.

The evaluation also gauged that the benefits in the WASH component will likely continue since they are largely focused on Knowledge, Attitude, Practice (KAP), and behaviour change. Since the knowledge has been imparted and they have started practicing amid 100% recognition that hygiene-related illnesses have reduced, the likelihood of continuation is high.

2. Strengthen local capacities: The evaluation found that project phase II was particularly designed to consider the need to strengthen local capacities and mitigate negative effects in several ways:

- **Building Local Capacities:** Phase II of the project was focused on supporting local communities' in strengthening their health, hygiene awareness, and other livelihood opportunities. Under this project, the staff entered communities, trained community elders, and CDC leadership to understand how to operate and work for the betterment of their societies, stayed engaged with them beyond the project's lifetime, and supported them in understanding their vulnerabilities in the face of climate change.
- **Providing Essential Services:** Islamic Relief Afghanistan (IRAF) has been committed to staying and delivering in Afghanistan to protect the most vulnerable and assist Afghans with life-saving shelter, core relief items, community infrastructure, and psychosocial support. Under this project IRAF provided emergency food and nutrition assistance, health care services, livelihood opportunities, multipurpose cash, protection, shelter, and water, sanitation, and hygiene support to at-risk populations.
- **Adapting to Changing Needs:** The project operations were adopted based on the ground realities, such as recurrent natural disasters, the withdrawal of international forces, and the shift in the governance structure. This adaptability helped IRAF to mitigate the negative effects of these crises on the local population.

The evaluation found out there was adequate effort to develop and/or strengthen local capacities and prevent negative effects in the future as well.

3. The project's long-term results in addressing basic needs: Under this criterion long-term results produced under different project components were assessed and the following are the results.

- **Improvement in food security status of the right holders before vs after the project:** Using the recalling method the project beneficiaries confirmed a huge improvement in the food security status of the project beneficiaries. The food security status of the right holders was ranked on a scale of (1-5), five being excellent and 1 being bad food security status. The data shows that the food security status of the right holders has significantly improved after the project. As such (0.24% of respondents were ranked with excellent food security status before the project, while after the project implementation, 28% of respondents had excellent food security status. Similarly, 0.56% of respondents were ranked with better food security status before the project, which increased to 38% after the project implementation.
- **Improvement in food consumption score of right holders before vs after the project:** When food consumption patterns of the seven days before the interview were explored, it appeared that 65.7% of the respondents had poor food consumption scores before the project, while this reduced to 21.8% in after the project implementation, which is a huge positive change. Similarly, 28.6% of respondents were ranked borderline and 5.7% of respondents as acceptable in before before-project implementation state, while in the project implementation state, 25% of respondents were borderline and 53.2% of respondents were ranked with acceptable Food Consumption Score (FCS). This shows a huge improvement in the FCS of the right holders.

- **Reduced coping strategies index:** As was the case with the FCS, over the lifespan of the project, the rCSI is also showing a similar trend where there is an average reduction from 74% to 20% in terms of respondents with high rCSI. Similarly, there is an average reduction 35% to 20.5% in terms of respondents with moderate rCSI. This reduction has shifted to moderate and low rCSI. However, worth noting is that there is a very high increase in the low rCSI from 5.5% to 45%. This shows that after receiving the cash for food, multi-purpose cash, and food packages most of the respondents did not need to cope with hunger, which is a good sign for project impacts.
 - **Improvement in hygiene practices of the right holders after benefiting from the project:** The data shows that there is tremendous improvement in implementing the selected hygiene practices. For example, 100% of the respondents use hand washing soap after using the toilet, an increase from 30% before the project. Similarly, drinking water from open sources has reduced to only 20% from 43% before the project, while almost everyone (98%) is purify water before drinking compared to only 4% before the project. The findings further denote that open defecation has reduced to 8% compared to 24% before the project while (86%) of WASH respondents seem to be cleaning the home, and managing the waste compared to only 45% before the project implementation.
4. **Avoiding negative effects considering do no harm concept:** This was an emergency response project and it could produce negative effects on the ground if careful measures were not taken by the project team:
- **Reducing project's unintended environmental effects:** Without proper safeguarding measures, it was possible that Phase II could have unintended environmental impacts. For example, improper disposal of hygiene kits could lead to pollution. Fortunately, all risks of negative impacts on the environment were pre-identified and mitigated, as stated above.
 - **Dependency:** One of the unintended effects of emergency response projects is that sometimes unwantedly it promotes dependency among the project beneficiaries. To avoid that situation, the project team made sure that this dependency didn't occur by continuing communication with RHs encouraging their self-sufficiency, and motivating them to work and be innovative to meet their needs themselves.
 - **Inequality and conflicts:** One of the issues in humanitarian assistance is that sometimes some ineligible people benefit and eligible people remain out of the process. Maybe because the community head recommends some people, and others do not. If the project had not conducted door to door survey and not distributed the humanitarian aid transparently, social inequalities could have been exacerbated on the community level. Those with better access to aid resources may benefit more than others. In addition to that, Phase II was too small to meet the need for food and good hygiene practices of all those vulnerable households in its targeted communities and that is why IRAF went for extreme measures and set very tight criteria for beneficiary selection and provided the assistance to only those households that were in dire needs of the assistance.

CHS 4: Humanitarian response is based on communication, participation, and feedback

Under this commitment the evaluation studies how were people informed about their entitlement under this project and how active community elders participated in the project and provided feedback. The data shows that after registering the project with the Ministry of Economy the project team conducted an information-sharing meeting with the communities and informed them of the project, selection criteria, and project survey teams, and requested their active engagement and support with the project team. Despite the demand for humanitarian aid within the communities being so high and it is so difficult to engage community leadership within the selection process of the right holders and engage them in the monitoring and decision-making

process, still the project tried multiple ways of community participation, which is commendable and this criterion is ranked as “Accept”

1. Community Participation in Implementation of Activities: Under this criterion beneficiary's engagement in different project interventions was assessed and documented as follows.

- **Community elder's engagement in MPCA right holder's selection:** Despite IRAF using specific selection criteria for selecting right holders for the Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA) component of the project, still the MPCA beneficiaries were selected with close coordination, of the related clusters, sectorial department, local authorities CDCs and community elders by conducting door to door survey in the target areas. In this whole exercise CDC leadership and community elders played their vital role.
- **Beneficiaries' engagement in Livelihood Choice Assessment:** The evaluation findings show that during the implementation of the project, especially the cash grant for livelihood, the project conducted a livelihood choice assessment with each house by house and directly involved them in decision-making to select the business that would work for each household individually. This provided a platform to make their own decisions or rational choices.
- **Right holder's engagement in project monitoring using the project hotline number:** As per the data received from the Islamic Relief Afghanistan's (IRAF) Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEAL) team, this DEC project has been regularly monitored by the MEAL team of IRAF. Still, to engage community members in project monitoring, they were provided the IRAF-specific hotline number on which community members could call in case of any issue, and their identity was protected by the IRAF. This was also one of the ways IRAF engaged community members in the project decision-making.

2. Timely and Effective Communication with Communities: The evaluation found that the project had put in place several communication and feedback channels for the beneficiaries to use as a way of participating in the project and also fostering transparency and accountability. These were in the form of face-to-face interaction, hotline, and complaints box amongst others. The evaluation explored that 39% of the beneficiaries had used the available communication and feedback mechanisms under the project. The emphasis was noted on the high usage of face-to-face interaction methods (78%) in feedback and communication under the project. Second to that was the use of the hotline, where 20% of the beneficiaries were able to give their feedback.

CHS 5: Complaints are welcomed and addressed

Under this commitment, the evaluation did not only study the complaints-handling and feedback mechanism infrastructure, and tools but also assessed how were these complaints dealt with within the IRAF. Despite the IRAF has a strong complaints response mechanism, a dedicated focal point and a specific committee that reviews and manages the whole process still the number of complaints received by the IRAF under this two-year project looks much less considering the Afghan context, IRAF needs to do a thorough bottleneck assessment of the whole process and identify gaps if any. Therefore, this evaluation ranks this commitment as “Monitor”

1. Effective, Inclusive, and Accessible Feedback Mechanisms: The evaluation found that IRAF established the complaint-handling and feedback mechanism which included hotline numbers, suggestion boxes, text messages, and community meetings, through which right holders could forward their complaints and suggestions anonymously. The data shows that IRAF had received a total of 13 complaints related to DEC projects. In DEC-I, IRAF received two complaints from female participants regarding the selection of RHs (Right Holders) and conflicts between two members. Adhering to IRAF's comprehensive feedback and response mechanism guidelines and policies, a dedicated committee was assigned to ensure the resolutions were reached in a manner consistent

with the feedback and response policy and guidelines of IRAF. Moving on to DEC-II, a total of 11 complaints were registered from Kabul and Balkh provinces. Among these, four males and three females from Kabul, and three males and one female were from Balkh province, expressed their concerns about various matters such as quality issues, (Right Holders) RHs selection processes, information requests, improvement suggestions, and delays in payment or input distribution by the suppliers.

2. **Safety and inclusiveness of the mechanism:** IRAF ensured communities and staff have and are aware of a variety of feedback channels, including phone hotline/SMS, email, and in-person meetings. By designing awareness materials in the formats and languages according to the local context and the preferences of the communities, feedback was provided, complaints were raised, and sensitive or high-risk issues were timely brought to the attention of IRAF. IRAF promoted an external whistleblowing hotline, managed by Safe Call, through which staff or other stakeholders globally can anonymously report any sensitive complaints.

To solicit, listen to, collate, and analyse feedback and complaints from the project stakeholders, IRAF has an inclusive Complaints Feedback Mechanism (CFM). Each feedback, question, and concern received were documented in the project learning log with storage and data-sharing protections in place. Relevant management reviewed and responded, following the IRAF Complaints Response Policy.

CHS 6: Humanitarian response is coordinated and complementary

Based on the evaluation observations and findings it is clear that IRAF has coordinated the project interventions in all major coordination forums, and there are several practical on-the-ground challenges listed below that make effective coordination and synergies building a little difficult, but the evaluation team believes that synergies building is possible if the project has clear plan and efforts in this regard. Since IRAF has not been able to create any synergy and resource sharing with any similar project in the targeted areas, therefore this evaluation ranks this commitment as “**Monitor**”

1. **Collaboration and synergies creation:** The evaluation found that IRAF coordinated its projects including this one through multi-sectoral partnerships with other organizations by being active in (FSC) and WASH clusters. It seems that IRAF attended monthly meetings of clusters, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief & Development (ACBAR) Access Working Group, the Cash and Voucher Working Group, and so on to share and receive information and learnings and reducing duplication. These partnerships boost the overall capacity for disaster risk management through effective coordination of data, expertise, capabilities, and resources.
2. **Strengths and Challenges of Coordination:** IRAF being a member of ACBAR, and a member of the Food Security Cluster and WASH cluster regularly updates other member NGOs on the progress of their interventions and IRAF is not new to other government and non-government agencies working in Afghanistan. With all the efforts made still no sign of synergy and complementation (resource sharing) was observed between this DEC project and other projects. The evaluation data also show some harsh realities and difficulties in coordinating the project interventions. Some context realities had negatively affected the project coordination with other similar projects. For example, DEC has funded another emergency response project to World Vision Afghanistan that is being implemented in western Afghanistan Herat, Ghor, Faryab, and Badghis provinces. The project targeted areas are so far from each other and they may not be able to create synergies and share resources, even if they want. Besides that, the following factors were identified as the key barriers towards creating synergies and resource sharing.
 - Different locations and targeted areas for different projects.
 - Different timelines of implementation, even though working in the same area

- The short duration of the field interventions of the project.
- Tough deadlines and the emergency nature of the projects
- Lack of government-level efforts for creating synergy between the different NGOs.

CHS 7: Humanitarian actors continuously learn and improve

Under this commitment the evaluation studies how were IRAF able to continually learn from its strengths and weaknesses and adapt project implementation accordingly. The evaluation team found that IRAF has a comprehensive results-based M&E system and a very strong monitoring team. The MEAL team of IRAF had performed 28 monitoring visits of this DEC project. The MEAL team members also performed Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) visits. The MEAL team also engages third parties for project evaluation. With that said this evaluation ranks this criterion as “**Accept**”

1. **Strengths and Challenges of the MEAL System:** As per the information received, IRAF has a functional Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning department with permanent staff members. The evaluation findings showed that IRAF promoted continuous learning and improvement by implementing regular monitoring and evaluation processes. Through project process monitoring reports and Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM) reports, IRAF identified strengths and weaknesses, extracting valuable lessons learned. Besides that, IRAF utilizes third-parties for program evaluation and IRAF uses best practices, and evaluation recommendations for future programming. The evaluation team did not have any doubt that IRAF has a comprehensive Monitoring Evaluation and Learning system and a strong MEAL team, but the resources allocated to the MEAL activities in IRAF are believed to be insufficient. During the two-year DEC project, the MEAL team was able to conduct only 28 surprise monitoring visits from three provinces, which makes it almost 9 visits per province in two years that makes it 5 visits in 12 months, and 1 visit in 2.5 months, which is considered very limited monitoring visits.
2. **Adaptation of the interventions based on the changing context:** The findings show that the project proactively adapted interventions to the changing context, based on prioritizing their relevance and effectiveness. This involved conducting regular assessments of the political, social, and economic situation and making necessary adjustments to the project strategies. By staying attuned to the evolving landscape, it ensured that interventions remained responsive to the needs and realities on the ground, maximizing their impact and achieving positive outcomes. This would be a good practice if all donors would be as flexible.

CHS 8: Staff are supported to do their job effectively and are treated fairly and equitably

Under this commitment, the evaluation team studied the staff management process within IRAF. The data shows that IRAF has a function HR department with a comprehensive HR policy, where the recruitment, pay, grade, performance appraisal, promotions, and gender mainstreaming are clarified and the HR team follows the policy accordingly. Most importantly the IRAF leadership not only motivates their team but also develops their capacities by regular coaching, mentoring, and on-the-job training. So this evaluation concludes that the project fulfilled this aspect and this commitment is ranked as “**Accept**”

1. **Support rendered to project staff to implement interventions:** The evaluation team observed that IRAF recruit's human resources based on the IRAF HR policy. IRAF retains the staff members by regular motivation as well as continues capacity development of their staff members. The evaluation also found that IRAF had responded to this critical point sensibly. On a positive note, it was found that top leadership provided regular guidance and motivated team members by recognizing their exceptional efforts and achievements in delivering project results. Additionally, the top leadership provided them with leadership guidance and support, ensuring the project was implemented to its fullest potential. Whenever necessary, the leadership offered timely technical guidance to enhance the project's execution and foster a culture of continuous learning and

improvement. By combining recognition, guidance, and support, the leadership helped create a motivated and high-performing team, resulting in successful project outcomes.

CHS 9: Resources are managed and used responsibly for their intended purpose

The evaluation studied not only Value for Money (VfM) but also focused on how efficiently the resources especially the financial resources were managed based on three different criteria (i) Allocability (ii) Allowability (iii) Reasonability of the expenditures. The data shows that IRAF has spent money based on the approved budget keeping in mind each specific budget line. Despite there being huge fluctuation in the exchange rate of the USD and GBP into Afs still, the project expenditures look reasonable. In addition, the evaluation team did not witness any adverse effect the project might have produced on the environment. Therefore, this evaluation concludes that the project resources were efficiently managed and did not have any adverse effect on the environment. The evaluation ranks this commitment as "Accept"

1. **Value for money (VfM):** According to the Department for International Development (DFID), Value for Money (VfM) is the optimal use of resources to achieve the intended outcomes, measured through the three "E"s (economy, efficiency, and effectiveness) of not-for-profit organizations, which are important for their performance and sustainability. In humanitarian programming, a complementary model is sometimes useful as a basis for VfM assessments, the humanitarian VfM triangle of speed, quality, and cost.

The data shows that the programme was completed on its due date and time that fulfils the first criterion (speed). The quality of the programme interventions was correlated with delivering programme interventions as planned, and the right holder's satisfaction level with the programme interventions. The data shows that programme targeted its planned provinces, and districts. Besides that, the program delivered its planned interventions in the programme Phase-I and programme phase-II. The findings also indicated the right holder's satisfaction level >99%, which shows the programme had maintained its quality. That fulfils the second criterion as well.

On the cost criterion the evaluation found that the project spent 629,453 £ in Phase I and 837,530 £ in Phase II, covering around 11,400 households. This translates to around 128£ / household in the crisis environment. The funds have not been used for any other purposes. Furthermore, the intervention was aligned with the Humanitarian Response Plan of the country and it contributed to meeting the needs identified in that plan. Lastly the evaluation findings also show that 79.6% of the approved budget was spent on the planned program interventions, while 20.4% of the approved budget was spent on operational issues and the programme had not requested for extra cost which makes it easy to conclude that the third criterion for (VfM) Value for Money analysis was also considered.

2. **Efficient Utilization of Resources:** When implementing a project, both the implementer and the funding agency ought to adhere to the principle of "prudent use of resources", which means "using the resources for its intended purposes and with care! Under this evaluation, it was important to find out whether the project funds have been used for its intended humanitarian work and in a manner that promotes prudence. IRAF has developed different tools to monitor expenditures and ensure proper burn rates. These tools included the budget itself, budget utilization plan, assets registration tool, budget narrative that explained each budget line in full detail, and others. Besides this, the evaluation findings show that 79.6% of the approved budget was spent on the planned program interventions, while 20.4% of the approved budget was spent on operational issues, such as office rent, staff salaries, communications costs, and others, which look so efficient in the current emergency context of Afghanistan.
3. **Environmental Impact:** In Afghanistan, and all over the world, developmental interventions and activities are supposed to safeguard the environment. For example, if the soil is not safeguarded,

agriculture production and productivity are lowered food insecurity increases, agri-business stalls, and the overall agro-reliant livelihood of the people is gone. The evaluation found that the project activities including cash for food, cash for multi-purpose, livelihood grants for income generation, hygiene kits distribution, and hygiene awareness sessions made a significant difference towards environmental safeguards;

- **Multi-purpose Cash:** This reduced the need for environmentally harmful activities such as deforestation of firewood or producing harmful smoke from burning plastics and Tyres. It is because people purchased wood for warming their rooms in winter and they had not cut trees, and burn plastics and tyres that produced huge black smoke.
- **Livelihood Grants for Income Generation:** These supported environmentally friendly businesses and practices, contributing to the local economy while also protecting the environment.
- **Hygiene Kits Distribution and Hygiene Awareness Sessions:** Proper waste management and sanitation practices significantly reduced environmental pollution. Hygiene awareness led to better waste disposal practices, reducing the spread of diseases and the contamination of natural resources.

The project implemented all the interventions with environmental safeguards in mind. Early identification of environmental risks through surveys, assessments, consultations, and designing responses that incorporate environmental avoidance or mitigation were crucial. This included measures for solid waste management, wastewater treatment, and management of natural resources. In addition, the implementation team has seriously followed the guidance of the World Bank on the importance of conducting environmental and social impact assessments, consulting with affected communities about potential project impacts, and restoring the livelihoods of displaced people. These measures ensured that project interventions do not inadvertently harm the environment and instead contribute to its preservation and sustainability.

D. Major challenges faced by the project:

The project evaluation team identified the following as the key challenges of the project during implementation:

- Ban on women's participation
- Delays caused by getting MoUs signed by the de-facto government authorities
- Difficulty in engaging with some of the officials of the de-facto government
- Conflicts in the distribution of assistance to the community people due to high demand
- The remote location of the project targeted population

E. Key recommendations for the future such projects:

The evaluation has concluded that the project has delivered on its goal and objectives. As such recommendations are usually hard to come by. However, a few considerations could still be taken on board;

1. **Adopting Nexus Approach:** this is a method for dealing with sustainable development challenges in an integrated manner, considering multiple variables and it uses a long-term approach to respond to the protracted humanitarian crisis.
2. **Ensuring flexibility in project design to accommodate changing circumstances:** In the current context Afghanistan is going through multiple shocks and waves, and nothing is guaranteed, therefore to avoid delays project design should have some flexibility to accommodate minor changes.
3. **Applying a blanket coverage mechanism of beneficiary selection can reduce conflicts:** Therefore, it is recommended that IRAF applies a blanket coverage mechanism in selecting the expected right holders. This will avoid conflicts in the project as well as enable the project team to complete their milestones on time. Because there is huge homogeneity in terms of the economic situation of community members living in the villages in southern Afghanistan.

4. **Advocacy:** It is recommended to advocate for the rights of the Afghan population that is affected by multiple crises for adequate funding and support for humanitarian interventions in this country.
5. **Scaling up rather than phasing out:** Building on the above, looking at how successful the project has been implemented, it would be important to come up with a scaling-up strategy rather than an exit strategy. The new beneficiaries would be encouraged by IRAF staff for peer-learning from those that have been in this Phase II
6. **Clustering the enterprises to produce economies of scale:** While livelihoods are usually the people's own choice, sometimes that makes things too wide open such that market linkage becomes a problem, and they will fail to produce in bulk and utilize economies of scale. It would be recommended that livelihoods are clustered and people form groups to enable the enterprises to grow to a bigger scale.
7. **Expansion and extension of the project:** The project needs an extension to have more time to pull more households out of the "poor consumption scale" and more into the "acceptable consumption scale". The duration is short, so it is not surprising that the change is average. Being communities affected by the crisis, the 45% that is still food and nutrition insecurity within the targeted communities [despite project support] may need continued support.
8. **IRAF to conduct a proper baseline survey at the beginning of the project:** While the IRAF relies on the assessments conducted by other entities to conceptualize its projects, specific baseline studies need to be done for each project and benchmark every indicator so that proper Indicator Performance Tracking tables are developed for standard Monitoring and Evaluation System.
9. **Strengthening capacities of local structures:** For sustainability purposes, the IRAF needs to strengthen the capacities of local structures to enable them to handle project initiatives once it is completely phased out. The current capacity strengthening was much on delivering activities while the recommended one is for handling initiatives in the absence of project staff
10. **Establishment of community-based accountability mechanisms:** At the moment the program interventions are only monitored by the IRAF team, however establishment of Community Participatory Monitoring (CPM) teams will help in sustainable community-led monitoring of the project.
11. **Engagement of third party in project monitoring:** Despite all the great work done by the project MEAL team in terms of monitoring the project interventions, still the limited number of monitoring visits conducted (28) in the whole project life cycle due to a limited number of IRAF / MEAL team members that are responsible for other projects too, cannot be expected to perform so many surprise monitoring visits to the different stages of the project implementation. Therefore, it is recommended that third-party monitoring companies be actively engaged in monitoring the project interventions. This will increase accountability, transparency, and quality of the interventions
12. **Utilizations of community-based volunteers for efficient utilization of funds:** Operating in a community affected by crisis, the project recruits' volunteers so that it minimizes costs. The volunteers would be community members and can only be paid at a minimum, but would largely contribute to project implementation, especially during the distribution of food items. The volunteers can be recalled at any time whenever they are needed.
13. **Project with wide scope to be implemented:** Given the magnitude of the crisis in Afghanistan, and the three big provinces that were targeted, the scope of the project was very narrow. For example, only 1000 households for Cash for Livelihoods is on the lower side.
14. **Sustainable development requires long-term employment generation projects:** The emergency response project has temporarily solved the food security issue of the community members, however, if IRAF and the project donor want the right holders to have a sustainable livelihood, it is recommended that IRAF designs a long-term employment generation project for these communities.
15. **The de-facto government requested shelter projects for refugees;** The de-facto government authorities recommended shelter projects for the new refugees that have come from Pakistan and Iran.

Picture 1: Cow purchased under livelihood grant in Balkh province of Afghanistan



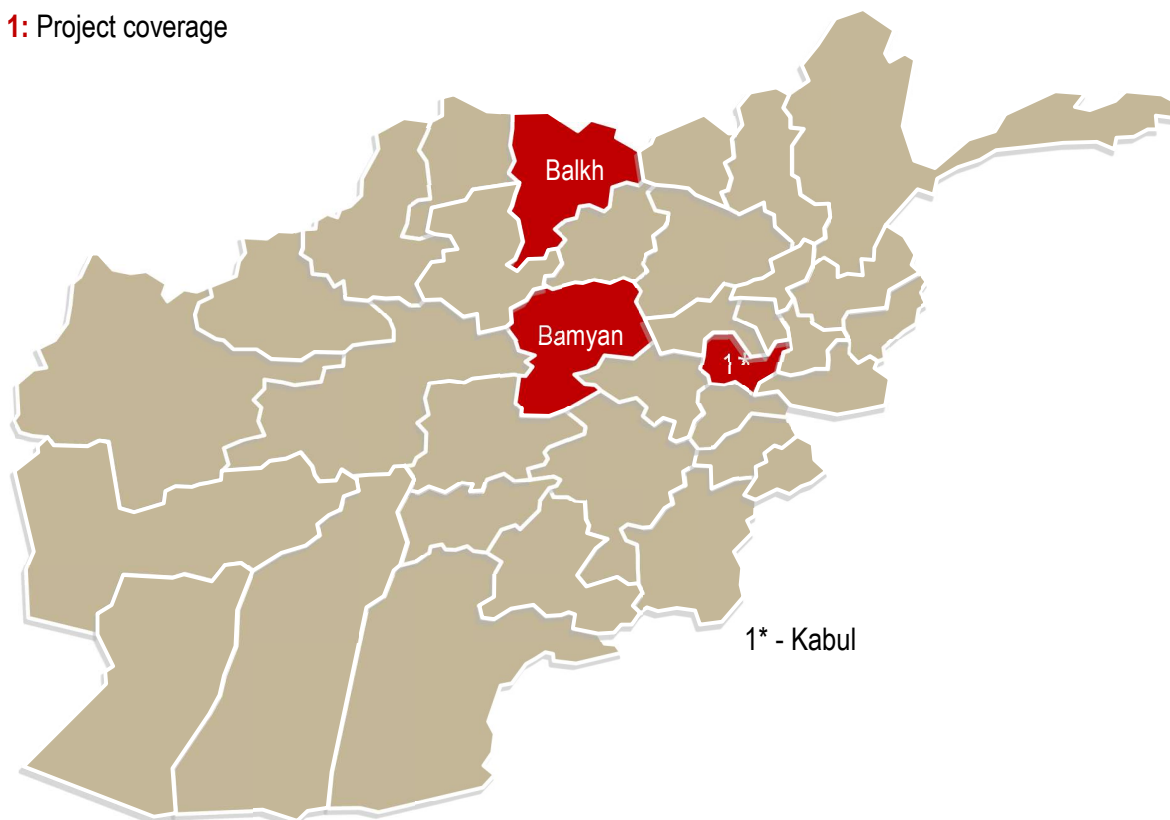
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

On 30th of October 2023, Training and Research (TAR) Business Consulting was commissioned by Islamic Relief Afghanistan (IRAF) to undertake the evaluation of their (DEC) Disaster Emergency Committee-funded project called “Food Security, Livelihoods, and WASH response for vulnerable households in Kabul, Balkh, and Bamyan province)” project. Please see the project-targeted provinces on the Afghanistan map presented in Figure 1.

As a means of clarification on the services to be provided under this assignment, TAR Business Consulting presented the inception report to IRAF before the evaluation commenced. The inception report clarified & specified the evaluation framework, methodology, data collection methods, types and numbers of respondents to be covered disaggregated to province, and much more.

Figure 1: Project coverage



2. Project Background

The Disasters Emergency Committee (hereinafter DEC) brings together 15 leading aid charities to raise funds quickly and efficiently at times of crisis overseas. The DEC's mission is to save, protect, and rebuild lives through effective humanitarian response. With financial support from (DEC), Islamic Relief Afghanistan implemented a project called “Food security, livelihoods, and WASH response for vulnerable households, in Kabul, Bamyan, and Balkh Provinces in Afghanistan.

Phase – 1 of this 24-month-long DEC project started in January 2022 and continued for six months, while the second phase of the project started in July 2022 and will continue up to December 2023. The project was implemented in two major phases. Under Phase I, the project focused on immediate emergency response and life-saving and the project has provided food packages to around 5,000 households and culturally appropriate hygiene kits to around 2,000 families spending (629,453 £), while under Phase II, which was focused on more sustainable programming and the project provided cash for food assistance for one month to almost 2,558 households, provided livelihood grants to around 1,000 households, and 850 households received multipurpose cash to support their basic needs with (837,530 £) expenditures. Besides that, under both phases, some awareness-raising campaigns were also conducted. For more details, please see the project outcomes and outputs as follows:

DEC Phase 1: Key Outcomes/Outputs # of beneficiaries

- **Outcome 1:** Reduced potential for immediate starvation for 5000 households (35,000 individuals)
 - **Output 1.1:** Most vulnerable households received standard food packages. 5000 HH
- **Outcome 2:** Reduced hygiene-related disease & morbidity for 2000 households (14,000 individuals)

- **Output 2.1.** Vulnerable households received culturally appropriate hygiene kits. 2000 HH
- **Output 2.2.** Vulnerable households received Afghanistan WASH cluster standard water kits. 2000 HH
- **Output 2.3.** # of households received information about hygiene awareness and COVID-19 mitigation measures - 5714 HH

DEC Phase 2: Key Outcomes/Outputs # of Beneficiaries

- **Outcome 1:** Food Security and Livelihoods: reduced suffering and vulnerabilities of 4408 most vulnerable households in Kabul, Bamyan and Balkh provinces
 - **Output 1.1.** Food insecure and most vulnerable households in the target areas are provided cash for food assistance for one month. 2558 HH
 - **Output 1.2:** Most vulnerable households will have received livelihoods grants* to support income-generating activities. 1000 HH
 - **Output 1.3:** Vulnerable households received multipurpose cash to support basic needs. 850 HH
- **Outcome 2:** WASH: Increased good hygiene practice for 52,400 individuals in targeted areas
 - **Output 2.1:** Vulnerable households will have received culturally appropriate hygiene kits 2000 HH/ 14000 individuals.
 - **Output 2.2:** 1,920 hygiene promotion sessions will be conducted so that 38,400 individuals will receive information about hygiene awareness and COVID-19 mitigation measures through hygiene promotion sessions. 38,400 Individual

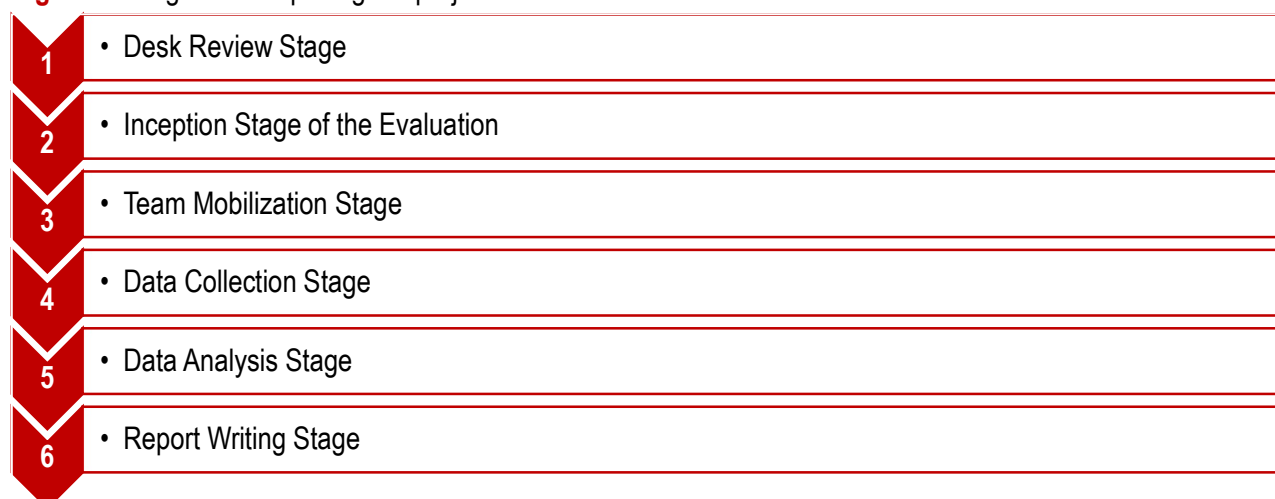
3. Evaluation Purpose and Scope

Islamic Relief Afghanistan (hereinafter IRAF) commissioned the project's final evaluation to assess the extent to which the project accomplished or made progress against its intended objectives to document the strengths and weaknesses of the project and provide practical recommendations for future programming. The evaluation was also expected to provide a thorough assessment of different project components based on the 9 commitments of Core Humanitarian Standards for quality and accountability. The evaluation was expected to cover the project's phases including (Phase-I and Phase-II).

4. Evaluation Process

Training and Research (TAR) Business Consulting completed the evaluation of this DEC-funded project in six different stages, where the first stage started with a desk review of the existing relevant project documents followed by designing the project evaluation tools, and methods, and conducting the data collection. The evaluation ended up by analysing the data and drafting the evaluation report as shown in the below figure.

Figure 2: Stages of completing the project evaluation



5. Evaluation Criteria and Questions

The evaluation was conducted based on the 9 commitments of core humanitarian standards (hereinafter CHS) for quality and accountability. Each one of the 9 (CHS) was assessed using some specific evaluation questions listed in the following Table.

Table 1: Core Humanitarian Standard Commitments (CHS) along with its evaluation questions

CHS Commitment 1: Communities and people affected by crisis receive assistance appropriate and relevant to their needs.	
Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response is appropriate and relevant.	
1	• Did the project select the most appropriate interventions (activities) for the targeted sectors? • Is the intervention in line with the needs and highest priorities of the most vulnerable groups (men and women, boys and girls)? • To what extent did cash interventions contribute towards meeting household needs? • What difference did the intervention make under Health, Nutrition, Water sanitation hygiene, and Protection? • Was the design of the intervention relevant to the wider context? • Was the design and implementation of interventions age, gender, and disability-sensitive? • Is the intervention design and objectives aligned with the overall sector and cluster strategy? • Did the design and implementation of the intervention consider and build on available local capacities?
CHS Commitment 2. Communities and people affected by crises have access to the humanitarian assistance they need at the right time.	
Quality Criterion: The humanitarian response is effective and timely.	
2	• To what extent the intended outcomes of food security and emergency livelihoods were achieved or not and why? • Were the intended objectives achieved timely? • How has the political environment influenced programming, what was its effect on effectiveness and timeliness and how did the project respond to shifts in the political environment? • To what extent were desired competencies/ skills required for effective project implementation of the staff and structures supporting project implementation strengthened? • Were relevant technical and quality standards for food security, livelihood, and WASH interventions in a humanitarian context followed and met?
CHS 3. Communities and people affected by crises are not negatively affected and are more prepared, resilient, and less at-risk as a result of humanitarian action.	
Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response strengthens local capacities and avoids negative effects	
3	• To what extent will the benefits continue/ last or are likely to continue? • How did the interventions strengthen local capacities while avoiding negative effects? • How did political restrictions limit the project? • What difference did the intervention make towards environmental safeguards? • What was the impact of the multi-purpose cash grants not only in addressing basic needs but also in protecting livelihoods? • What were the outcomes and impacts of the livelihoods grants on the households, and communities in terms of their income generation and resilience-building?
CHS 4: Communities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information, and participate in decisions that affect them.	
Quality Criterion: Humanitarian response is based on communication, participation, and feedback.	

4	• How did participants access information about the project and their entitlements? • How did the project engage beneficiaries in decision-making? • What measures were taken to engage all different groups in the community, and how was their input collected and reflected in the response and project? • Were there groups that were excluded? • How appropriate were the communication, participation, and feedback channels? • Did the interventions use appropriate communication, participation, and feedback mechanisms?
CHS 5. Communities and people affected by crisis have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints.	
Quality Criterion: Complaints are welcomed and addressed.	
5	• What was IRAF's feedback mechanism? • Did the feedback mechanism inclusively meet the needs of different targeted beneficiaries? • Was the feedback taken in line with IRAF's policy welcomed and re-informed the feedback provider? • How did the project monitor the flow of feedback and complaints mechanisms to ensure they are being used by a range of community members and to understand whether communities (particularly vulnerable children and marginalized groups) are satisfied with the system? • How safe and inclusive were feedback mechanisms designed for different groups or communities? • How did feedback collected, contribute to the overall country's humanitarian architecture and (AAP) Accountability to the Affected Population is working?
CHS 6. Communities and people affected by crises receive coordinated, complementary assistance.	
Quality Criterion: The humanitarian response is coordinated and complementary.	
6	• How well did the interventions fit with other stakeholder's interventions? • To what extent did the interventions complement each other? • To what extent did the interventions complement or reinforce country priorities? • How were IRAF's interventions compatible with other interventions in the country/institution?
CHS 7. Communities and people affected by crises can expect the delivery of improved assistance as organizations learn from experience and reflection.	
Quality Criterion: Humanitarian actors continuously learn and improve.	
7	• How did IRAF promote continuous learning and improvement? • How often did the project convene joint meetings with community members? • How did the project document the results of these consultation meetings, and use these results to influence the design and implementation of interventions? • To what extent were interventions adapted to the changing context?
CHS 8. Communities and people affected by crises receive the assistance they require from competent and well-managed staff and volunteers.	
Quality Criterion: Staff are supported to do their job effectively and are treated fairly and equitably.	
8	• How were project staff supported to implement interventions? • How were female staff supported to do their job/ implement interventions? • How effective were existing support structures/ resources (internal and external) to staff?
CHS 9. Communities and people affected by crises can expect that the organizations assisting them are managing resources effectively, efficiently, and ethically.	
Quality Criterion: Resources are managed and used responsibly for their intended purpose	
9	• How well were resources managed or used? • How did the project apply the Do-No-Harm concept and safeguard against PSEA?

- How did the project protect beneficiaries' information/data?
- What measures were taken by the project to make sure that all the interventions were completed on time?
- Was there value for money while delivering project interventions?

6. Evaluation Stakeholders

The project had multiple components and many stakeholders had direct or indirect engagement with the project. Therefore, the evaluation team performed a stakeholders' analysis and covered all the key stakeholders under this project evaluation. Following were some of the key stakeholders that were covered under this evaluation:

- Right holders
- Community elders
- Islamic Relief Afghanistan (IRAF) core team that was engaged in project implementation
- Similar to other NGOs that implemented DEC projects
- De-facto government authorities

Picture 2: A family has started carpet weaving with the livelihood grant received under the project



CHAPTER TWO: EVALUATION APPROACH

This section provides details on the evaluation design, sampling strategy applied, data collection methods, data analysis, data quality assurance protocols applied, and ethical considerations followed during the project evaluation.

1. Evaluation design;

This summative evaluation followed mixed research methods, where both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. As mentioned above, the evaluation was administered using commitments set by the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) on quality and accountability. There are nine commitments for humanitarian and development actors to measure and improve the quality and effectiveness of their assistance. The CHS places communities and people affected by crises at the centre of humanitarian action.¹ Besides that these commitments ensure that organizations support people and communities affected in a way that respects their rights and dignity and promotes their primary role in finding solutions to the crises they face. These nine commitments have been listed as follows:

- CHS 1: Humanitarian response is appropriate and relevant
- CHS 2: Humanitarian response is effective and timely
- CHS 3: Humanitarian response strengthens local capacities and avoids negative effects:
- CHS 4: Humanitarian response is based on communication, participation, and feedback
- CHS 5: Complaints are welcomed and addressed
- CHS 6: Humanitarian response is coordinated and complementary
- CHS 7: Humanitarian actors continuously learn and improve
- CHS 8: Staff are supported to do their job effectively and are treated fairly and equitably
- CHS 9: Resources are managed and used responsibly for their intended purpose

The lessons learned, and recommendations emerging from the evaluation clarified the appropriateness level of the response and its impact on enhancing the well-being of the target population, as well as improvements made both in terms of coordination and operations. The evaluation team tried their best to make the whole exercise inclusive and participative, where all the stakeholders could actively participate.

2. Sample size

After reviewing the literature, the evaluation team was able to determine the type of stakeholders to be consulted at different levels (national, provincial, district, and household) level. Based on the information shared by IRAF, the evaluation primarily utilized a multi-stage stratified random sampling technique for the household surveys. Samples were drawn through the following formula where n is the desired sample size, z is the z -value yielding the desired degree of confidence, p is the estimate of the population proportion, and e is the absolute allowable size of the error.

$$n = z^2 (1-p) p / e^2$$

To calculate a statistically reliable sample size, the evaluation team used a confidence level of 95%, and a margin of error of 5%. Given the diversity of the project, the evaluation first categorized all the right holders into two strata, including DEC Phase- I and DEC Phase – II. Taking into consideration both the phases following sample size was calculated accordingly.

- 379 household surveys with right holders that received standard food packages (Phase-I)
- 327 household surveys with right holders that received cash projecting all types (Phase II)
- 27 (KIIs) key informants interview hygiene kit receivers Phase-I
- 22 (KIIs) key informants interview hygiene kit receivers Phase-II
- 97 (KIIs) key informant's interviews with livelihood grants receivers Phase - II
- 3 FGDs with male community elders (One in each province)
- 3 FGDs with female right holders
- 4 in-depth interviews with the project management team of Islamic Relief Afghanistan
- 4 Success stories based on the availability (at least two for each phase of the project)

¹ <https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/>

3. Sampling strategy

Furthermore, the sample size was proportionately distributed across all respondents' categories using a stratified proportionate sampling method. Table 2 below presents the breakdown of the sample size for DEC Phase-I and DEC Phase-II right holders disaggregated by the targeted provinces. As outlined in the table below, out of the 706 households covered under this project evaluation, 363 were targeted in Kabul, followed by Balkh and Bamyan provinces, with 170 and 173, respectively. Despite all the issues in having female employees on board, the evaluation team (female data enumerators) was able to cover 43% of female respondents under the household surveys.

Table 2: Breakdown of the Sample Size for household surveys proportionately disaggregated to provinces

Province	# of Beneficiaries Phase -I	# of Beneficiaries Phase -II	Total Beneficiaries	Proposed Sample Size Phase I	Proposed Sample Size Phase II	Total
Kabul	7,356	3,646	11,002	214	149	363
Balkh	2,811	1,919	4,730	78	92	170
Bamyan	3,000	1,682	4,682	87	86	173
Total	13,167	7,247	20,414	379	327	706

To ensure meaningful participation of all key project stakeholders in the evaluation process, the evaluation team proposed conducting 153 key informant interviews (KIIs) using purposive sampling methods. The key informant interviews were conducted with the project's key stakeholders such as de-facto government officials, other international NGOs implementing DEC-funded projects in Afghanistan, and rights holders who received hygiene kits and livelihood grants. Please see Table 3 for more details.

Table 3: Number of KIIs conducted with project stakeholders

S.N	Key stakeholders	# of Key stakeholders Phase -I	# of Key stakeholders Phase -II
1	Directorate of Economy (DoEc)	0	3
2	Director of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR)	0	3
3	Other international NGOs implementing DEC-funded projects	0	1
4	Right holders that received hygiene kits	27	22
5	Right holders that received livelihood grants	0	97
Total		27	126

Besides household surveys and Key Informant Interviews, this project evaluation conducted in-depth interviews with the project management team including (project design, implementation, finance, monitoring, and evaluation) team members. Please see Table 4 for more details.

Table 4: Number of in-depth interviews conducted

S.N	Stakeholder	# of in-depth interviews conducted
1	Project design team	1
2	Project manager	1
3	Finance manager	1
4	Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEAL) team	1
5	Project international advisors if any	1
Total		5

In addition to the different types of interviews conducted, the evaluation team also conducted two Focus Group Discussions in each province one with male right holders and one with female right holders. That makes a total number of 6 FGDs.

Table 5: Number of FGDs conducted

S.N	Province	# of male FGDs	# of female FGDs	Total number of FGDs conducted
1	Kabul	1	1	2
2	Balkh	1	1	2
3	Bamyan	1	1	2
Total		3	3	6

4. Data collection

4.1. Secondary data:

To comprehend the project, its activities, and its operational mechanism(s), the evaluation team conducted an extensive review of related literature. The documents that were studied in the literature review stage included:

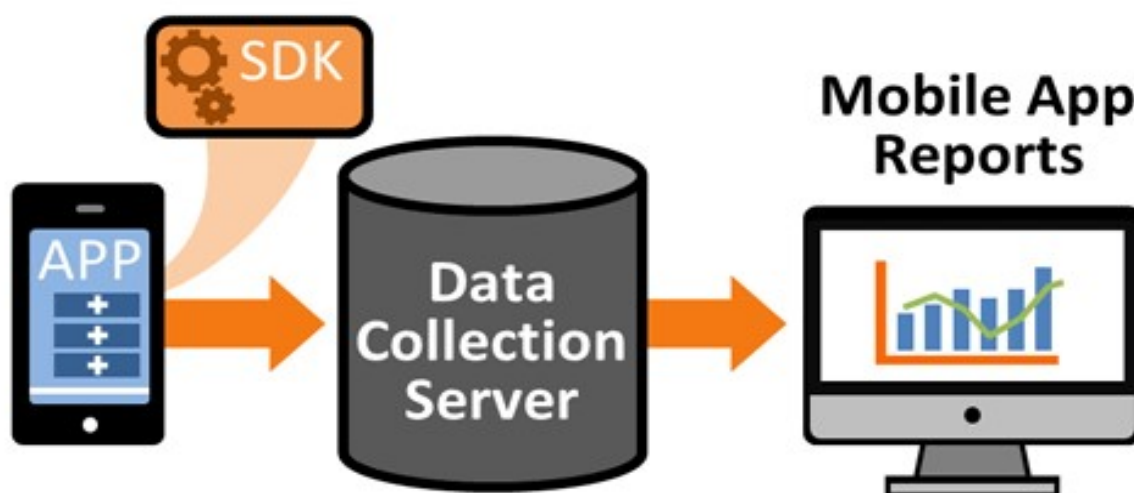
- Project proposal;
- Project logical framework;
- Post-distribution monitoring (PDM) reports of the project;
- Project monitoring and evaluation reports
- Project progress reports;
- Management meeting minutes and;
- Field visit reports;
- List of right holders for Phase I and Phase II
- Project MoUs with the de-facto government

The review process of the above documents helped the evaluation team deepen its understanding of the project, and complement the primary data with facts and figures extracted from the meta-analysis of the secondary data.

4.2. Primary data:

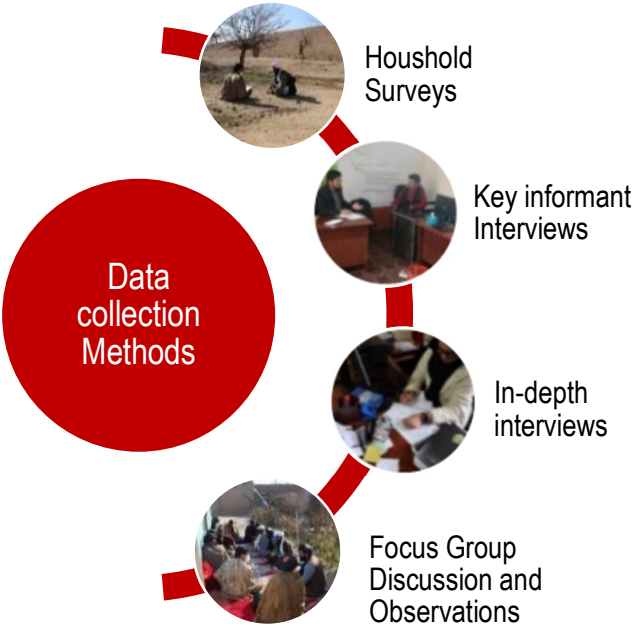
Once the evaluation team members were trained and the evaluation tools were tested for irregularities and standardization, TAR Business Consulting gathered the primary data in person from right holders in all targeted districts and provinces. The evaluation team followed all cultural and social norms in the villages as well as instructions and regulations of the de-facto government of Afghanistan. Therefore, the male interviewers interviewed male respondents, and female interviewers had interviews with female respondents. The female interviewers were accompanied by their Mahrams as per the requirements of the de-facto government of Afghanistan. The quantitative data under the evaluation was collected through the Open Data Kit (ODK) / Kobo application using smart mobile phones, allowing the core evaluation team to monitor the data collected from right holders in the field. Data quality was reviewed daily. In addition, by the end of every day throughout the evaluation, the data collection team was contacted and briefed on necessary improvements in the data, if deemed necessary.

Figure 3: Data collection process using ODK / Kobo digital platform:



Besides household surveys, the primary data was collected using Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), In-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and Observations. Please see the following figure for a clear picture of all the data collection methods used in this project evaluation.

Figure 4: Project evaluation data collection approaches:



5. Data quality assurance:

Tailored quality control standard operating protocols are of prime importance for accurate, reliable, and valid results. Data collection team members implemented systematic data quality assurance procedures to determine acceptable practices and minimize errors in data collection analysis and reporting. To ensure the accuracy, validity, and reliability of the data the field data collectors applied the quality assurance protocols before during, and after the fieldwork as follows.

Figure 5: Data quality assurance protocols followed during the data collection process

Step 1	Data quality assurance protocols before data collection
• Highly accurate and contextualized translation • Training and capacity development of the field data collectors	
Step 2	Data quality assurance protocols during data collection
• Tringulation of the data • Daily chek of all the questionnaires	
Step 3	Data quality assurance protocols after the data collection
• Coordination and verification of the fieldwork. • Direct observations, return visits and call-backs.	

6. Ethical considerations:

The following ethical considerations were strictly followed by the evaluation team members during the data collection process.

- **Informed Consent:** The enumerators got consent from the data providers for the use of the data and pictures taken from them during the interview and FGD process. The process of obtaining the consent was as such at first the enumerator explained the consent to the data providers and once they agreed and wanted to consent, then they signed the consent form.
- **Impartiality:** Data enumerators moved to the project area without any pre-mind setup. They impartially approached the data providers and triangulated the data to ensure the quality of the data.
- **Confidentiality:** The respondents were assured of confidentiality. Also, all collected information was kept strictly confidential and they were informed that the information would only be used for official purposes in IRAF. TAR Business Consulting submitted all the documents and data set to IRAF upon completion of this assignment.
- **Data protection:** To ensure data protection the first step taken in TAR Business Consulting was that highly trusted enumerators were assigned to this assignment. Secondly, as an integral part of their contracts, they signed data protection clauses, that made the enumerators responsible for data protection. Lastly, the enumerators collected the KII's data through the ODK using smartphones. Once the information was uploaded to the ODK server, it was permanently erased from the smartphones of the enumerators.
- **Do No Harm:** This principle implies that researchers and respondents should not be put at risk of harm intentionally or unintentionally. TAR Business Consulting fully utilized the resources to evaluate with minimal risk. This principle was upheld fully by adhering to ethical considerations and conducting a comprehensive risk assessment and mitigation plan. Besides that, the data collectors were also oriented on the do's and don'ts of interviewing to avoid the traumatization of the respondents and minimize the risks as possible.
- **Child protection and child safeguarding:** TAR Business Consulting has a child protection and child safeguarding policy and this was one of the topics, that was covered during the data collection process. All the enumerators considered child protection and child safeguarding in all phases of the data collection.
- **Respectfulness:** Data enumerators of TAR Business Consulting fully respected the respondents' time and conducted the interviews at the time they preferred. The enumerators were highly trained to behave in a culturally sensitive manner throughout the different phases of the evaluation.

7. Data analysis:

Once the fieldwork was completed, the next step was to perform data cleaning, which involved coding every survey question and its relevant responses. Data cleaning was carried out through a 4-step approach: (i) screening, (ii) diagnosis, (iii) treatment, and (iv) documenting. More specifically, TAR Business Consulting applied the following filters to the collected dataset to ensure it meets these basic quality standards: (i) accuracy, (ii) validity (iii) completeness, and (iv) consistency. To avoid biases in the evaluation results, incomplete entries where respondents had responded to a portion of the survey questions were deleted from the dataset. This enables us to make sure that only complete responses are analysed.

When the data was cleaned and it was ready to be analysed the quantitative data was analysed using an Excel statistical package that included all types of quantitative analysis such as drawing, mean, mode, median, percentage, correlations, and others. The qualitative data was analysed using the thematic approach of data analysis. Under this type of analysis, the data was sorted and analysed around key themes or groups of information. The causes and effects of each data theme were identified, and the results were presented in graphs or tables. The themes were decided based on the evaluation of ToR requirements before the analysis took place.

8. Key challenges faced during the project evaluation:

The evaluation team faced the following challenges while conducting the project evaluation in the targeted districts and Communities in the Kabul, Balkh, and Bamyan provinces of Afghanistan.

Table 6: Key challenges faced by the project evaluation team

S. N	Key Challenge	Details of the Challenge	Resolution of the Challenge
1	Delay in getting the official letter from the DoEc	Getting an official letter from the Directorate of Economy (DoEc) is considered a must by the de-facto government before moving to the field, for the data collection process.	Despite IRAF team being able to get the official letter from the DoEc in the provinces, it took some time, which pushed our data collection process as well. However, increasing the number of teams and covering all targeted districts simultaneously helped complete the data collection.
2	Reaching out to female right-holders	One of the challenges was how to cover female rights holders. Because IRAF had problems recruiting and deploying female staff to the field.	To respond to this issue, local personal networks were utilized verbal permissions were obtained from the officials and our provincial female data enumerators were able to cover project female rights holders as well.
3	Low literacy level	One of the challenges was the low literacy level of the right holders, where it was so difficult to make the right holders understand each of the questions and get rich data from them.	Even though evaluation data collectors were the residents of project-targeted provinces, still the team found it very difficult to get rich data from the right holders.
4	Measuring the impacts of the project while the project was continuing	The “Food Security, livelihood and WASH Response for Vulnerable Households in Kabul, Balkh and Bamyan Province” project continued while this project was undergoing project evaluation. As it is clear it takes a while for a project to produce impacts.	The best thing about this project was that it was an emergency response project that besides having long-term impacts on the community members produces immediate impacts too. The project evaluation team focused more on the immediate impacts the project has produced.
5	A crowd of people interrupted the data collection process and requested registration for coming humanitarian Aid.	Despite the evaluation team making this clear to the people from the beginning, that they were not in the community to register names for any upcoming projects, still the community people made crowded in the village in front of the evaluation team, requesting the evaluation team to register them for the upcoming humanitarian project.	The evaluation team lead informed the village leadership in advance that they were only there to evaluate the IRAF project and this was also clarified to the people once again.

9. Coordination with the IRAF team:

The evaluation team coordinated all the field-related activities with the IRAF team not only on the headquarters level but also on the provincial level. The respective IRAF team members supported the field team members in coordinating their data collection visits to the relevant districts and responsible community members.

Picture 3: Coordination meeting conducted with IRAF Project Manager Balkh



Picture 4: One of the remote villages in Bamiyan province covered under this DEC funded project



CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS

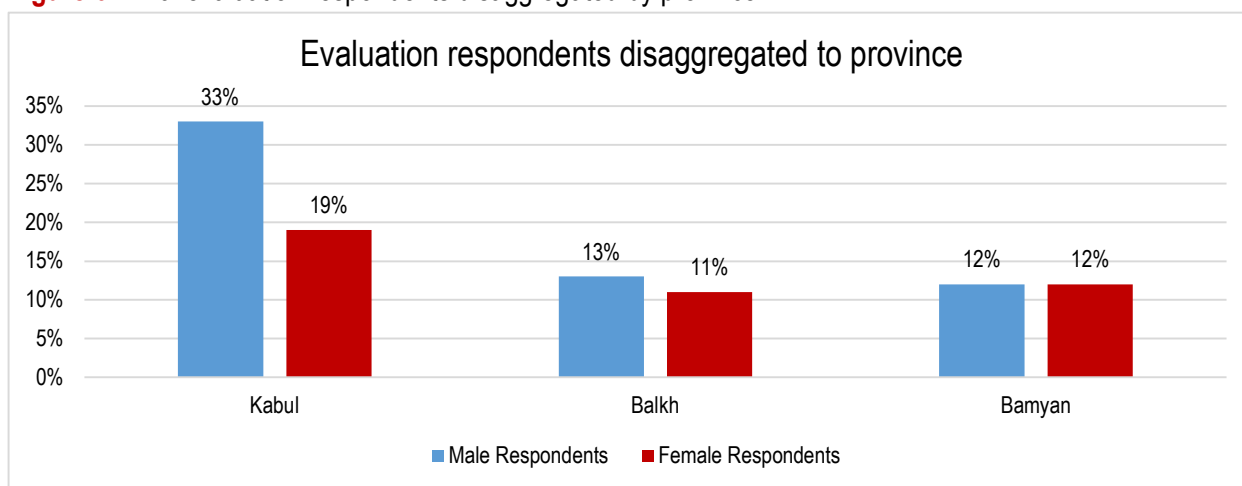
As stated earlier, this evaluation is relatively unique, as it focuses more on Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS). As such, the evaluation findings are categorized into two main sections, namely; (1) Social and Demographic Characteristics, and (2) Core Humanitarian Standards. The first section presents the profile of respondents in terms of sex, age, area, disability, and income. The second section elaborates on the changes the project has produced in all project components.

1. Profile of respondents

1.1. Evaluation respondents disaggregated to province:

As mentioned above this DEC-funded project was implemented in two phases (Phase 1 and Phase II). This evaluation covered 706 right holders (379 respondents from Phase 1 and 327 from Phase II) from the three provinces targeted by the project including (Kabul, Balkh, and Bamiyan province). The evaluation data shows that 43% of respondents were female and the remaining 57% of respondents were male. The respondents under the final evaluation were selected proportionate to the number of right holders in different provinces covered by the project. As such 52% of respondents were covered in Kabul province, followed by, 24% in Balkh province, and 24% in Bamiyan province. Please see the following figure for more details of the end-line evaluation respondents.

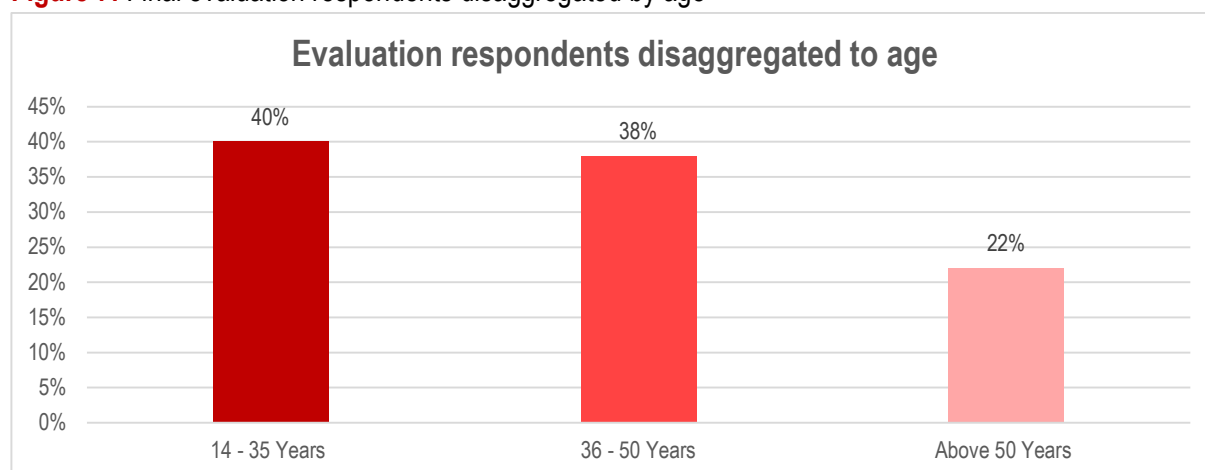
Figure 6: Final evaluation respondents disaggregated by province



1.2. Evaluation respondents disaggregated to age:

Regarding the age dimension, it is pleasing to note that it took the same trend, with both sexes of respondents recording a mean age of 43 years for males and 38 years for females, with minimum age (14 years for females and 15 years for males) and very little variation in maximum ages (89 years for males and 85 years for females). Indeed, this sample of respondents had less bias, which means the beneficiary selection was fair and balanced (0.005 Skewness and 0.003 Kurtosis). It also showed that the project reached all age respondents including adults, young age, and old age ones showing the characteristic of an inclusive developmental project in emergencies. As such, 40% of respondents were aged 14-35 (young age)³, 38% of respondents were aged 36-50, and the remaining were above the age of 50.

Figure 7: Final evaluation respondents disaggregated by age



1.3. Disability status of the evaluation respondents:

Studies have shown that "Disability is not Inability"! Persons with different forms of disabilities have shown different abilities once their areas of strength are supported and encouraged. However, in the wider context, Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in many countries including Afghanistan face a range of challenges, such as discrimination, high unemployment, and limited access to essential services, which render them some of the most vulnerable individuals in the country. This evaluation sought information on whether this project included People with Disabilities (PwD) among its beneficiaries given their obvious vulnerabilities. The data shows that

³

9% of respondents were disabled and the remaining 91% of respondents had no disability. The figure further shows that there were diverse forms of disabilities in the project area. For example, the most common type of visible disability was that of “walking or climbing” which showed that it covers about 41.56% of the 9.2% of the visible forms of disability. This was attributed to the fact that the country had been at war, which affected limbs, especially legs and arms.

Other forms of visible disability included; “seeing” (16.24%), hearing (11.69%), remembering (10.39%), and “safe care” (7.14%). The various disabilities call for different forms of attention and assistance. It was justifiable then for the project to pay attention to this demographic characteristic.

Figure 8: Disability status of the evaluation respondents



1.4. Literacy status of the evaluation respondents:

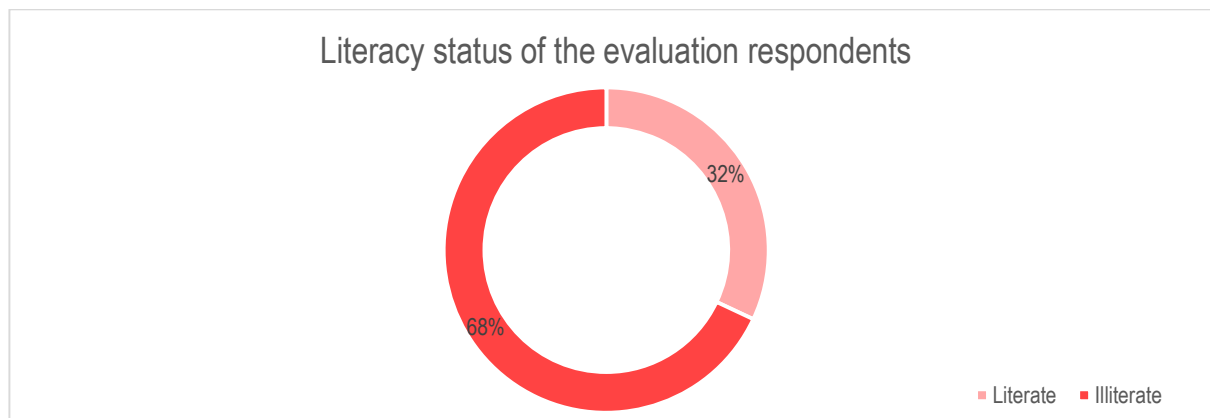
Literacy is one of the most important demographic characteristics of beneficiaries because a literate beneficiary base has more adoption and absorption rates of developmental initiatives due to a better understanding of basic things such as awareness messages compared to those who are illiterate. Valuing such information, the evaluation collected information regarding the literacy levels of respondents.

The data shows that in the project-targeted areas, only 32% of the respondents were literate. While the literacy level was low, it was noted that the difference between male and female literacy levels was too high. Of the 32% of respondents that were literate only 8.4% were females, yet the project made efforts to target equal male and female beneficiaries. With this anomaly, usually, the project ends up working with more illiterate beneficiaries than literate ones thereby requiring more effort, time, and energy for successful completion of the project.

In addition to literacy, the actual education attainment is also very low. For example, overall, the majority (50.4%) of those who are literate only attained Primary Education level. Usually, such education may not be adequate to make someone developmentally functional. Further data showed that the situation worsens up the education ladder, with Secondary Education (39.4%), and Tertiary Education (10.2%).

By location, the data shows that the 32% literacy is dominated by respondents/ beneficiaries from Kabul Province (17.7%), seconded by Bamyān Province (10%) while Balkh Province only has 4.3%. This Skewness sometimes becomes a major driver of successful locations, where the project may easily show an impact in Kabul than Balkh. This was one of the areas for comparison when analysing project outcomes.

Figure 9: Literacy status of the evaluation respondents

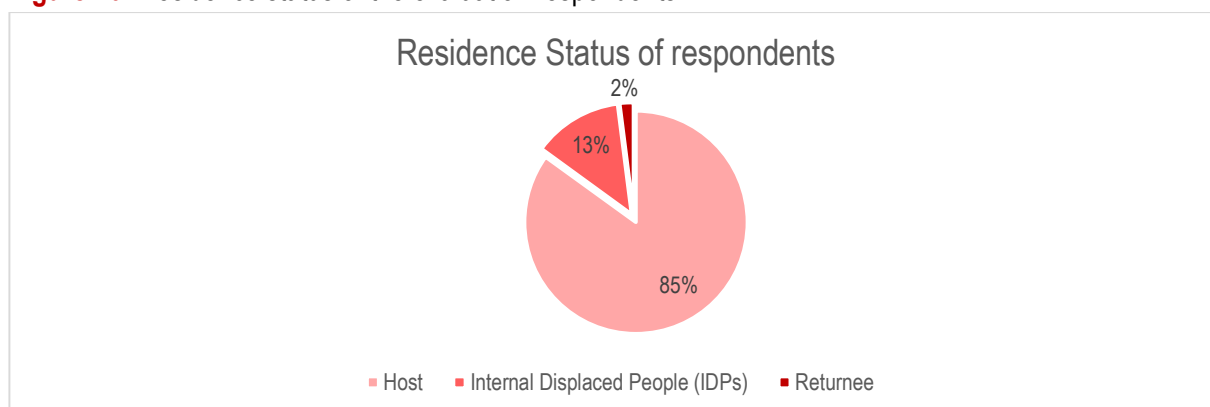


1.5. Residence status of the evaluation respondents:

The nature of residence or residential status is one of the indicators of vulnerability in Afghanistan as well as in many parts of the world that are associated with human suffering and poverty. As such the evaluation sought information on the residence status of the respondents/beneficiaries in the target areas. This is another dimension that vulnerable communities suffer from because many of them could be IDPs or Returnees, such that development activities may only be temporary. The evaluation data shows that all three categories of residents (Returnees, IDPs, and Host communities) had benefited from the project. As such the host community comprised 85.1% of the respondents while the rest are IDPs (13.6%) and Returnees (1.3%). Again, this is a good quest for inclusive development activities because the last two categories are even more vulnerable.

The evaluation also examined the factors driving internal displacement among the households targeted by the project. A significant majority, constituting 59%, reported that they were internally displaced persons (IDPs) due to conflict. Many of these IDPs had left their communities of origin but had not returned since the political transition. The second primary driver of internal displacement was the pursuit of better employment and livelihood opportunities, while the remaining 5% attributed their displacement to natural disasters. Examining the profile of returnees, the data indicates that 40% of them possess documentation, while the remaining 60% are undocumented

Figure 10: Residence status of the evaluation respondents



1.6. Marital status of the evaluation respondents:

Marital status is also one of the drivers of the sustainability of project initiatives or even for beneficiaries to value the initiatives. For families (married or widowed), project activities such as these are very crucial in contributing towards maintaining their families in terms of food and income. As such, the evaluation sought information on marital status, which can later be compared with how they valued the initiatives of the project. The Table below summarises the information;

Table 7: Respondents' Marital Status

No	Marital Status	%
1	Married	76.1%
2	Single	7.6%
3	Widow	16.1%
4	Separated	0%
5	Divorced	0%

The marital status of the respondents reveals a diverse profile, with the majority (76.1%) reporting themselves as married. In contrast, 16.1% of the respondents identified as widows, a group that warrants special attention as they often serve as the heads of their households. It's noteworthy that female-headed households were a priority target group for the project, and this 16% inclusion of widows in the evaluation demonstrates a successful adherence to the project's beneficiary selection criteria in this specific aspect. Approximately 8% of respondents reported being single. The project's ability to encompass such diverse marital statuses underscores its inclusive approach to addressing the unique needs of different household compositions.

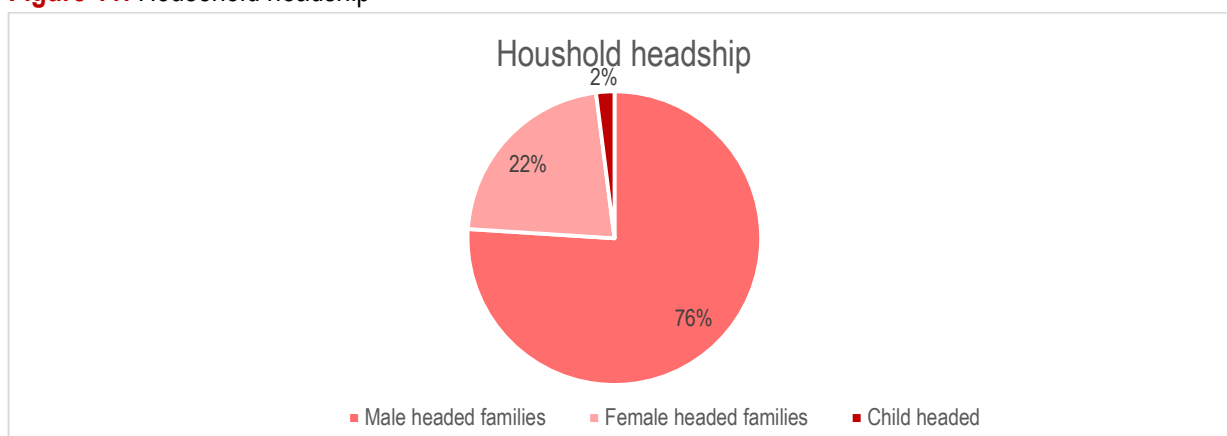
1.7. Household headship of the evaluation respondents:

Given the nature of the interventions under this project, it was important to look at the characteristics of the household heads i.e. whether they deserved food assistance or cash assistance for livelihoods. For example, if the rights holder is strong enough and healthy, the best option is the “cash for livelihoods” because that household head has the energy to embark on such livelihoods. On the other hand, if the household head is old and frail, the best is the “food assistance” to support the consumption side of life.

While not graphically illustrated here, field data showed that the average household size in the study ranges between 8 and 12 members. This is a higher number to have adequate basic needs daily, given that they are vulnerable groups while noting this factor even increases their vulnerability to food insecurity. From the figure below it is clear that 76% of the households are headed by males and 22% are headed by females. Again, this are a lot of female-headed households in the project area. Moving into the details, the households headed by youthful parents are 45.6% (i.e. 34% males and 11.6% females).

Generally, this is on the lower side and confirms the vulnerability of the beneficiaries. This is further exacerbated by the fact that; 27.3% are headed by elderly (very old) parents (19.2% males and 7.8% females); 3.3% are headed by disabled parents (2% male and 1.3% females); and 2% households are headed by children (1.1% males and 0.9% females). The situation is a confirmation of high vulnerability and the targeting of the project was proper. However, it shows the limited number of household heads that can handle the “cash for livelihoods” assistance from the project, with the majority requiring consumption assistance.

Figure 11: Household headship



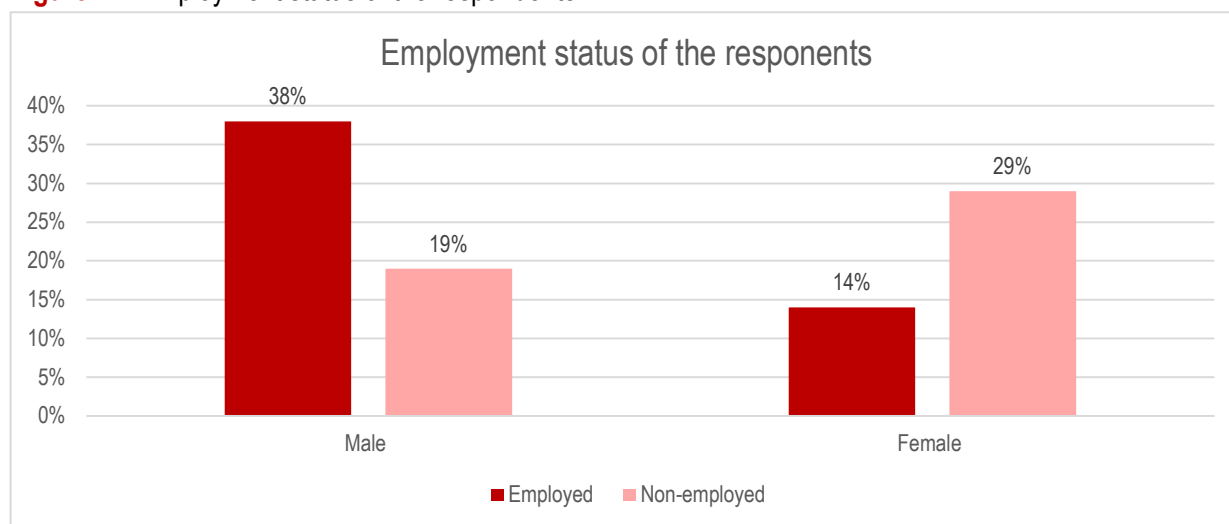
1.8. Employment status of evaluation respondents:

According to official information, “Afghanistan population in the year 2018-2019 was around 31 million (NLP 2019) with a growth rate of >3%, economic growth rate of 2.5 - 3.5% and unemployment rate of around 16%. Furthermore, 76% of the settled population lives in rural areas, 46 percent of the population is below the age of 15 years, 63 percent under the age of 25, and only 3.7 percent above the age of 65 years – hence “The Youth Burge⁴”. While this statistic may seem old, Afghanistan has lived with these trends over time such that unemployment has been one of the challenges.

Taking cognizance of the same, the evaluation sought information about employment among the respondents under the project. Looking at the statistics levels of employment [especially in the provinces] are skewed towards Kabul. For example, while Kabul registered 28% employment levels, Bamyan registered only 11% employment and Balkh only 13% employment, bringing the average employment levels to 17% only. This means an alarming 83% of adults within the targeted households are grappling with unemployment, reflecting a stark economic challenge as alluded to earlier. In contrast, very few had full-time employment, defined as a commitment of 40 hours per week per Afghan labour law,⁵ with most of them engaged in part-time work, involving fewer than 40 hours of labour per week.

These statistics revealed a profound degree of joblessness among the targeted population. Even among those who are employed, there is a sense of underutilization as their full potential remains untapped. After the employment, as depicted in the figure above, the evaluation sought information about their average monthly wages and it was interesting to note these facts. To begin with, over these months a total of 322 individuals disclosed to have been employed (255 males and 96 females) with an average monthly earnings of Afs 3, 507 (average Afs 4,073 earned by males and average Afs 2, 197 earned by females). It is also important to note that these figures are sometimes negatively affected by the notion of getting the attention of NGO staff and expecting them to provide more aid.

Figure 12: Employment status of the respondents



Respondents also provided insights into the root causes of unemployment within their communities. A significant 55% expressed frustration with the lack of adequate job opportunities, highlighting the pressing need for more employment prospects. Following closely, 44% cited insufficient skills as a barrier to securing employment, while 34% reported a lack of necessary certification documents as an impediment. Furthermore, 32% of the respondents found themselves without jobs due to a dearth of capital required to start their businesses, revealing a significant financial barrier to entrepreneurship. A smaller yet noteworthy proportion,

⁴ GOIROA, Central Statistics Office 2019, Kabul, Afghanistan.

⁵ <http://www.asianlii.org/af/legis/laws/lloaogn790p1999110114200722a443/>

nine percent, pointed to limited market connections as a factor contributing to unemployment, while an additional eight percent cited a lack of community networks as an obstacle to finding employment opportunities."

To provide more context, it's important to consider national employment figures. According to the Afghan Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA),⁶ an estimated 15 million people were eligible for work nationwide in 2020. Worryingly, eight million of them, equivalent to 53%, were grappling with unemployment. Furthermore, UN estimates suggest that the number of jobless individuals has likely increased significantly since the political transition in 2021, possibly reaching between 500,000 and 900,000. Consequently, the actual unemployment rate is likely considerably higher than the figures reported in 2020, though an exact nationwide unemployment rate from a reliable source remains elusive.

2. Project performance against commitments of core humanitarian standards:

This project evaluation aimed to examine the project according to 9 commitments of core humanitarian standards for quality and accountability of humanitarian aid. Each of these 9 commitments (CHS) has been assessed based on specific evaluation questions. In the end, each (CHS) was ranked based on the following assessment ranking matrix.

Table 8: Assessment matrix for commitments of Core humanitarian standards

No	Ratings	Description
1	Improve	The area where the quantum of findings is substantial enough to put the project's activities and gains at considerable risk.
2	Monitor	The area where the quantum of findings is substantial enough to partially put the project's activities and gains at risk.
3	Accept	The area where the quantum of findings is of low substantiality and may not endanger the activities and gains of the project at risk.

CHS 1: Humanitarian response is appropriate and relevant

To map the priorities and needs of the communities Islamic Relief Afghanistan conducted a multi-sectoral humanitarian need assessment in 18 districts of Kabul, Balkh, Nangarhar, Kandahar, Herat, and Bamyan provinces of Afghanistan in November 2021. The assessment covered different sectors including; Food and Nutrition, Livelihood and Livestock, WASH and Hygiene, Shelter, Education in Emergency, Health, and Protection. The findings of the assessment were used in shaping the activities under this DEC project. With that said based on the following key findings this evaluation ranks the relevance of the project interventions as **"Accept"** based on the following key findings.

CHS1.1 Selection of the most appropriate interventions

The household survey data shows that 96% of the rights holders ranked the project interventions as appropriate and relevant in the area to their needs. Several supporting examples were given by different individuals to support the claim. On nutrition, for example, there claims that at first there was a high dependency on 'tea' without appropriate food every day, but with the project, they were able to access bread, oil, and rice, in the winter season, they purchased some essential food items such as flour, rice, and oil, which solved many of their family's needs. Generally, this is also an indication of the acceptability of the activities and forms a good foundation for scale-up and continuity. The 4% of respondents (mostly men) that ranked the project activities inappropriate, gave the following reasons:

- They suggested designing a special project for only widows.
- They suggested shelter projects for IDPs
- They requested for long-term employment generation project.

⁶ <https://ariananews.af/afghanistans-surging-unemployment-triggered-by-coronavirus-outbreak/>

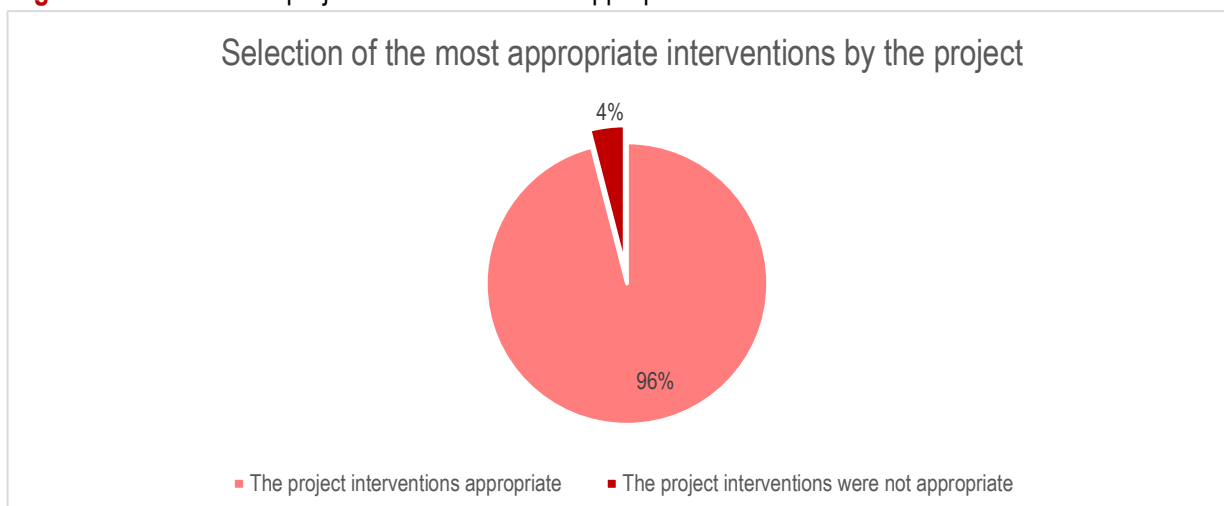
- They suggested using a cash-for-work mechanism for young and healthy right holders rather than unconditional cash programming.
- They suggested interventions for pure drinking water
- The female requested mobile health clinics

The evaluation team has also provided their technical observations on the appropriateness of the project interventions. They also ranked the project interventions appropriate and relevant, however, the relevance and appropriateness of the project interventions would have been more high if the following activities were taken care of:

- Conducting a full-fledged Baseline Study
- Conducting an internal, program mid-year review after Phase-1 of the project

Performing these two activities would have ensured systematic and objective analysis of the context and stakeholders, risks, and vulnerabilities, including benchmarking. However, using phase phase-wise approach for project implementation was found to be a good approach, which provided room for adaptation and adjustments. Please see the following figure for more details.

Figure 13: Whether the project selected the most appropriate interventions

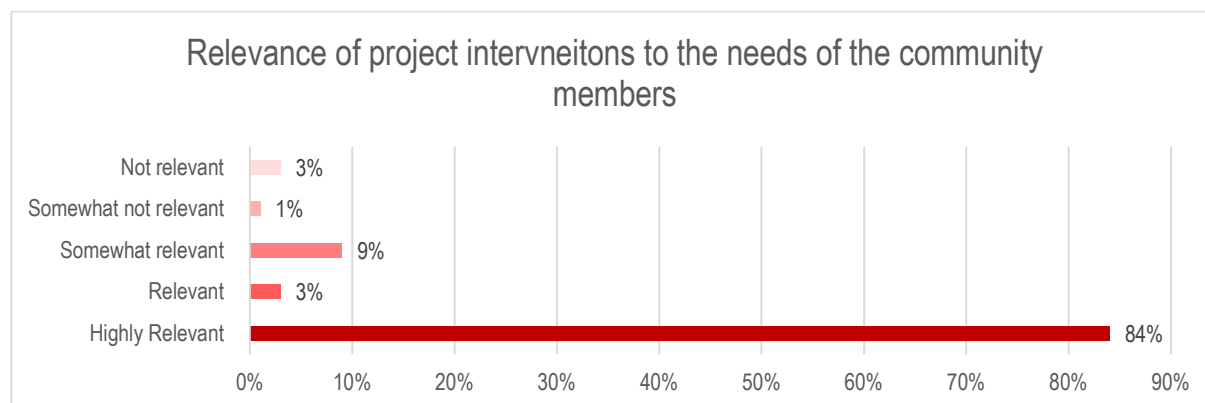


CHS 1.2. Interventions are in line with the needs and highest priorities of the most vulnerable

The first variable and the second variable under the first commitment of CHS are very similar to each other's. and this was intentionally brought this way to be able to triangulate the data. This means the evaluation team already knew the perception of the right holders on the relevance of the project interventions from the answers provided to the above question, however, in this section the evaluation tried to further rank the relevance level on the scale of (1-5) five interventions being highly relevant and 1 being not relevant.

The data shows that 84% of respondents ranked the project interventions as highly relevant, followed by 3% of respondents who ranked the project interventions as relevant. 1% of rights holders ranked the rejected interventions as somewhat not relevant and 3% ranked it as irrelevant. The basis for ranking the project irrelevant has been clarified in the CHS 1.1. Again, this high relevance level of right holders is an indication of the acceptability of the activities and it forms a good foundation for scale-up and continuity of the project.

Figure 14: Whether interventions were in line with the needs and highest priorities of the most vulnerable



CHS1.3 Contribution of the project interventions towards meeting household need

As a follow-up question on relevance, the right holders were asked how much the interventions contributed towards meeting the household needs. This question was asked by the cash programming right holders, hygiene kits receivers, and livelihood grant receivers. The community elders were also asked about this in the FGDs. Overall the right holders seemed very satisfied, and happy with all components of the project interventions, however, livelihood grant receivers seemed more satisfied because most of them had either purchased a cow or established a small business with the livelihood grant. They not only used the dairy products from their cow but also sold the dairy products in the nearby market that had contributed to the sustainability of their livelihoods and this was exactly what the right holders are looking for (sustainable livelihood).

The food package rights holders seemed happy and thankful because the food packages were provided to them at a time when they needed the most. These food packages helped them for 2-3 months during which they searched for a job and most of them were able to find some seasonal jobs, which was a great step towards sustainability of their livelihood but their livelihood is still not sustainable and their family is still facing food shortage issues. The hygiene package receivers (mostly females) were happy about it they told us the stories of how the infectious diseases had negatively affected their lives and income but with the hygiene kits the infectious diseases have been reduced.

With all the thankfulness community members expressed they requested for:

- Expansion and extension of the project.
- Long-term employment generation projects.
- Projects that could contribute to sustaining their livelihoods.
- Women rights holders mostly requested projects that could help them establish their small businesses.

CHS 1.4 Alignment of the project objectives and interventions to overall sector and cluster strategy

In the development sector, it is always important to ensure that any project maps out stakeholders before implementation starts. One of the benefits of the exercise is to identify other players doing the same initiatives so that synergies are formed and duplications are avoided. Another benefit is to ascertain policyholders in the sector given that all projects implemented in any country ought to contribute towards National Priority Projects (NPP) or sector policy goals. This policy issue is crucial in a project like this one because it is multi-faced i.e. "Food security, livelihoods, and WASH response for vulnerable households". Here, the challenge is that: "food security" is answerable to "agriculture and nutrition policies", WASH is answerable to Water and Health policies" while "livelihoods" can be anything.

Food insecurity and lack of sustainable livelihood have been the two long-term problems, the Afghan population has been facing for decades. Before August 2021 this issue was responded to jointly by the ex-Afghan government as well as the international community. With the government transition to the current de-facto

government in August 2021 the food security situation of the Afghan population was negatively affected because most of the international organizations stopped their support and Afghanistan was no more in the focus of international aid providers.

Based on the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) acute food insecurity analysis October 2023 – March 2024 published on December 14, 2023 “this year during the post-harvest season in October 2023, approximately 13.1 million people, accounting for 29 percent of the total population (based on 2024 Flow minder national population estimates) are facing a high level of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above). The analysis further describes the main drivers of this acute food insecurity as challenging economic conditions, high unemployment rates compounded by the limited access to income that reduced purchasing power, in a context of continued high prices of food and agricultural inputs, reduced livelihood opportunities, and decreased remittances. The analysis explains the adverse impact of extreme and variable climatic conditions, particularly the multi-year drought experienced between 2021 and 2023. Additionally, other natural hazards such as flooding and earthquakes further compromise the limited coping capacity of the population, resulting in the persistence of a severe food insecurity situation. Now the forceful expulsion of the Afghan refugees from Pakistan and Iran and sending them to Afghanistan has further added to the dire food security condition of Afghan people.

The IPC Acute Food Insecurity analysis has ranked 30% of the Kabul and Balkh populations under IPC Phase 3 and 25% of the Bamyan population under IPC Phase 3. This means the project has targeted the right population, based on this analysis. The IPC Acute Food Insecurity analysis was conducted for two time periods. The current period was October 2023 and the projection period was November 2023 – March 2024. Data used in the analysis included the FSAC’s Seasonal Food Security Assessment (SFSA 2023) conducted from 21– 29 October 2023 and the Whole of Afghanistan Assessment.

However, the findings from in-depth interviews with Key Informants depicted that the overall project was on IRAF Policy. The project ought to get feedback in line with IRAF’s policy and should re-inform the feedback provider. So far, the practice has been that the feedback taken in line with IRAF’s policy has been welcomed and reinforced by acknowledging the feedback providers, acknowledging their input, and providing updates on actions taken in response to feedback. In line with the planned practice, the project fulfilled its plans.

CHS1.5 Interventions relevant to the wider context

To understand whether the project interventions were relevant to the wider context first of all this evaluation defines what a wider context means. The “wider context” shall mean the situation in the area, while “household needs” shall mean the situation at the individual level. Nevertheless, they are both perceived from the opinions of individuals in terms of the “usefulness and satisfaction” of the interventions. Both these proxy indicators were used to obtain quality information in this regard.

Figure 15: Perception of respondents on the usefulness of the project interventions

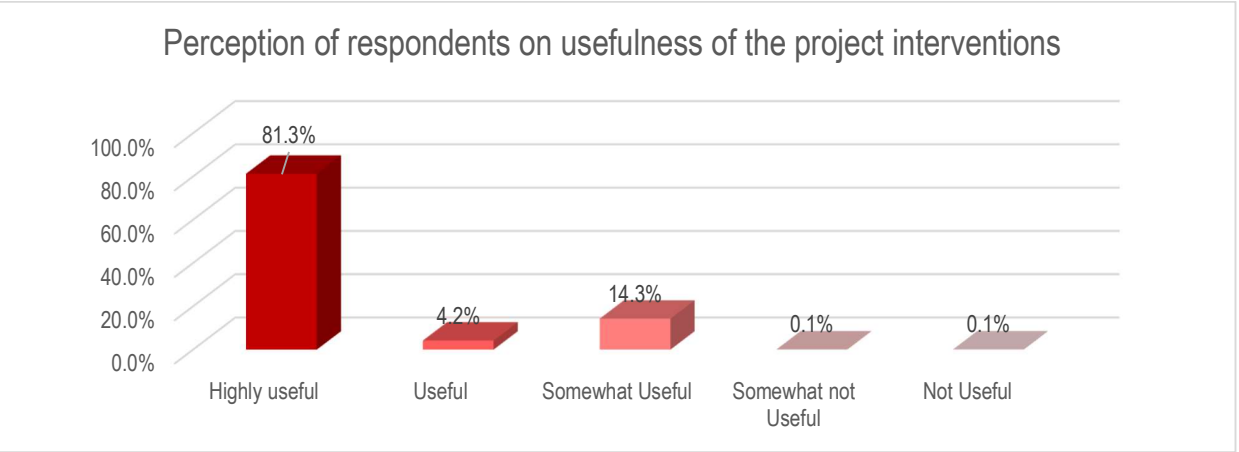
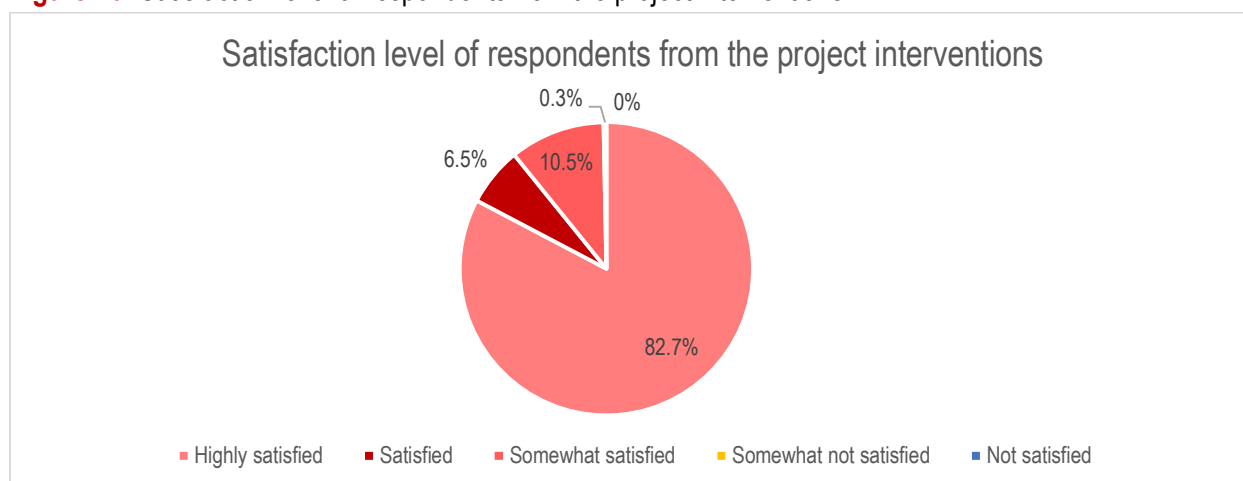


Figure 16: Satisfaction level of respondents from the project interventions



The findings indicated that the interventions were >99% useful in the community as well as at the household level. This was also corroborated by findings from Focus Group Discussions where they indicated that the overall community situation was dire, and even after this project, some continued systematic support would be required accompanied by continuous assessment of the changing environment. Similarly, the findings show that there was high satisfaction at the individual level, with the implication that the household had adequate benefit from the project interventions. In other words, there is the usefulness of the activities in the community at large and satisfaction at the individual level. This is encouraging as it makes the community feel self-esteem and individuals feel equal to those who are not in vulnerable situations.

Specifically, in Kabul province, the evaluation team observed dissatisfaction in (Wakil Guzars) who are individuals assigned by the government as community elders who keep records of all the individuals living in the community as well as have official stamps and verify the individuals living in their community. The reason for this dissatisfaction was found to be the lack of collaboration of these people in selecting the right holders. The project team explained that these people interfere in the beneficiary's selection and sometimes they introduce their family members without considering the selection criteria. With all the issues these people have, their engagement is considered beneficial in the project design and implementation.

CHS1.6 Design and implementation of interventions that are age, gender, and disability-sensitive

It is the "popular message of encouragement" to be sensitive to "specific" groups during project planning and implementation. For example, in gender, there is now "transformative gender programming" as well as "Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)" and so on. The aim is to be as inclusive as possible, especially in vulnerable communities. So, it also rests on a thorough assessment of priority needs and stakeholder analysis. The evaluation then sought information on whether the design and implementation of the interventions were sensitive to age, gender, and disability. The figure below provides a summary.

Going by the socio-demographic findings of the study presented in the previous sections of this report, the project has done well in ensuring an inclusive beneficiary base. The figure above shows that at least 43% of the beneficiaries are women. Further information shows that the programming was made in such a way that the activities that are socially acceptable to be done by women are promoted, especially in sensitive cultures like Afghanistan. Apart from gender, the project activities had beneficiaries with a wide age range i.e. 15 – 89 for males and 14 – 85 for females. Similarly, on characteristics of household heads, it was found that some of the households are headed by children (1.1% male children and 0.9% female children as household heads). And, other householders are headed by very old people (19.2% old males and 7.8% old females). This means that the project was sensitive to all age ranges for its beneficiaries. Finally, the evaluation established that the project included 9% of respondents with visible disabilities, ranging from walking, climbing, seeing, remembering,

hearing, and many more. Overall, the project was sensitive to age, gender, and disability, even without a thorough baseline at the beginning. The following table shows the general summary of all variables on the profile of the evaluation respondents discussed above.

Table 9: Profile of end-line evaluation respondents

S.N	Category	Specification of respondents	Percentage of respondents
1	Age of respondents	14 - 35 Years	40%
		36 - 50 Years	38%
		Above 50 Years	22%
2	Literacy status of respondents	Literate	32%
		Illiterate	68%
3	Disability status of the respondents	Person with disability	9%
		Person with no-disability	91%
4	Residence status of respondents	Host	85%
		Internal Displaced People (IDPs)	13%
		Returnee	2%
5	Marital status of respondents	Married	76%
		Single	8%
		Others	16%

Table 10: Right holders disaggregated sex, disability and other factors (Phase-I)

Table 16: Right holders disaggregated by sex, disability and other factors (Phase 1)

Direct affected Households							
Planned				Reached			
5,000				5,698			
Direct affected Right holders without disability							
# of Male		# of Females		# of boys		# of girls	
Planned	Reached	Planned	Reached	Planned	Reached	Planned	Reached
6943	6943	9378	9378	11972	11972	12167	12167
Total of planned RHs		40,460					
Total of reached RHs		40,460					
Direct affected Right holders with disability							
# of Male		# of Females		# of boys		# of girls	
Planned	Reached	Planned	Reached	Planned	Reached	Planned	Reached
1,051	1,051	845	845	1641	1641	904	904
Total of planned RHs		4,441					
Total of reached RHs		4,441					

CHS 2: Humanitarian response is effective and timely

Under this commitment, the evaluation tried to understand (i) whether the project achieved its intended immediate and intermediate results and (ii) How timely the results were achieved. After a careful review of all the indicators in the project log frame, it was explored that the project was able to complete its targets on the due date and time. Therefore, this evaluation ranks the project's effectiveness as “**Accept**”

CHS 2.1. Whether intended results were achieved on time

The achievement of intended results is the primary objective of any developmental project in communities affected by the crisis. It should be borne in mind that results are at three levels i.e. output, outcome, and impact (immediate, intermediate, and long-term/ultimate). Usually, to account for such results, there is a need for a robust

monitoring and evaluation system that collects data objectively to track progress at all times. The evaluation found out that in the very first place, the project had articulated plans regarding what it needed to achieve. At this point, the evaluation takes an account of the same in the table below;

Table 11: Status of project indicators

SI	Deliverable	Target	Actual	Variance
1	One round of \$80/month cash-for-food is distributed to households	2558	2558	0
2	No. of HH receiving food assistance [containing 100 wheat flour, 8Kg pulses, 8liter oil, and 1kg salt] for one month (1 round)			
3	Livelihoods grants to most vulnerable households to support income-generating activities	1000	1000	0
4	MPCA to vulnerable households to support basic needs	850	850	0
5	Culturally appropriate hygiene kits given to vulnerable households	2000	2851	+851 ⁷
6	Hygiene promotion sessions conducted on hygiene and COVID-19 mitigation measures	1920	1920	0

From an activity and deliverable perspective, the project accomplished its work by covering vulnerable families that were facing acute food insecurity such as female-headed, disabled-headed, and below 5000 monthly income households, in the face of 2022's harsh winter. Evaluation details show that the project achieved its desired immediate result by reaching a total of almost 65,640 individuals (men, women, and children), of which 24,767 individuals (in Kabul and Bamyān) were reached with either Cash for Food or (Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance) MPCA. Furthermore, the project reached at least 20,812 vulnerable individuals (men, women, and children) through the distribution of 2,851 hygiene kits, and 20,061 vulnerable individuals (one male or female participant from each family) were reached through hygiene awareness sessions.

The project also provided livelihood grants to 1,000 households (45,000 Afs / HH), based on a practical and well-thought-out business plan, to achieve intermediate results. This is because there is a longer-term impact on the communities (than the Cash for Food and MPCA) in terms of food security and livelihood by creating means of income for 1,000 acute food insecure households moving forward. Ultimately, the project has left it open to support the business of the households continuously for further market linkage assistance and meeting their other needs in an integrated approach. From an implementation point of view, the evaluation concludes that the project achieved its immediate and intermediate results in the targeted communities.

CHS 2.2 Whether intended results were achieved on time

Timely implementation of activities is always crucial to the realization of the intended outcomes/results for the project, especially in communities affected by crisis because they are already stressed, and the situation can deteriorate at any time. The first phase of this project was registered with the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) Afghanistan in December 2021 and was supposed to finish in May 2022 the first phase of the project followed its deadlines. The second phase of the project was for 18 months that started from July 2022 to December 2023 and this phase of the project was also completed in December 2023. This means the overall project was completed within the timeline the project was supposed to finish.

It is worth mentioning that the key, to the timely completion of a project, was a combination of good planning, efficient execution, and effective monitoring. It's always important to Islamic Relief Afghanistan (IRAF) to have a dedicated and capable project team that can adapt to changing circumstances on time.

CHS 2.3. The Influence of political environment on programming

In Afghanistan, the political environment has been fragile for a very long time and it has destabilized several development initiatives in every sector. The most recent change of government has also come with its dimension of destabilization and has had several effects on programming.

⁷ 851 hygiene kits more added due to lowest cost of the kits and distributed as follows, Kabul 451kit, Balkh 200 kit and BMN 200 kit

The evaluation team found out that the implementation of the project faced significant challenges due to political changes that imposed new restrictions, including a ban on women's employment and engagement. It was a big struggle to negotiate and ensure the active participation of female staff and beneficiaries in project activities by employing innovative approaches. The project engaged community elders and Mahrams (male family members) to facilitate the involvement of women, respecting cultural norms and ensuring their safety and inclusion. Despite the imposed restrictions, the project remained committed to promoting gender equality and empowering women within the project's scope. However, the evaluation recognizes that the political environment had its influence and barriers to reaching the project goal but it seems the Islamic Relief Afghanistan team managed to productively engage with the political issues and efficiently achieve the results.

CHS 2.4. The relevant technical and quality standards for food security, livelihood, and WASH interventions in a humanitarian context are being followed;

In a humanitarian context, it is always important to follow relevant technical and quality standards as prescribed so that the interventions meet the expectations of the beneficiaries and the general public. Being a fragile environment, certain technical specifications tend to be unique from those of the usual context. The evaluation team found that the project followed the technical and quality standards shared by the food security cluster (FSC) and working groups for delivering food security, livelihood, WASH, and other interventions.

The Food Security Cluster (FSC), co-led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Project (WFP), has been coordinating food security responses during and after humanitarian crises since 2011. The FSC coordinates a network of partners – including UN agencies, INGOs, and NGOs – across 34 operations in 30 countries, to promptly address emergency food needs and improve livelihoods. The FSC operates at global and local levels to elevate country clusters' key requests and increase awareness of the state of the food crisis. Food Security Cluster (FSC) has developed quality standards for designing and implementing food security projects. These standards cover all the different types of projects and these standards and guidelines are available online. The shared standards were found to be in line with the International Standards of Spheres 2018. In this project, the activities were also designed and implemented considering the recommendations of the food security cluster, e.g. Cash for Food, MPCA as well as livelihood grants were designed as per the FSL cluster's recommendations.

CHS 2.5. The extent to which competencies/skills to implement the project were strengthened

In Afghanistan, and indeed in communities affected by the crisis, capacity development and capacity strengthening are very crucial aspects of development interventions. Communities affected by crisis usually have very big capacity gaps and the capacity of the project implementers becomes crucial to make sure that such skills are transferred to the locals.

The evaluation established that capacities were strengthened at the individual and organizational levels through training projects, mentorship, and knowledge sharing. The contributing factors to the successful capacity strengthening included dedicated resources, partnerships with external experts, and a supportive work environment. Despite constraints such as limited resources and time, proactive measures were taken to optimize available resources. These efforts resulted in enhanced skills and expertise among project staff, enabling them to deliver high-quality outcomes and contribute to the project's success.

The evaluation further established that the project's capacity development interventions for project staff members included a range of strategies to enhance their skills and knowledge. These interventions encompassed comprehensive training projects that focused on technical skills, project management, and gender-sensitive approaches. The project also provided on-the-job mentorship and coaching, specifically addressing humanitarian principles, community mobilization, safeguarding, child protection, and other relevant areas. Additionally, the project ensured access to relevant resources and tools, equipping staff members with the necessary materials and guidelines to excel in their roles. The evaluation concludes that there was enough effort towards capacity development in the project team.

CHS 3: Humanitarian response strengthens local capacities and avoids negative effects:

Under this commitment, the project evaluation did not only study how active the community members engaged in the project implementation, but also studied the intermediate and long-term results produced by the project. Although the project was an emergency response and community level interventions were for a short still the program was able to develop local capacities and produce the planned outcomes, this evaluation ranks the achievement level of this CHS commitment as **“Accept”**.

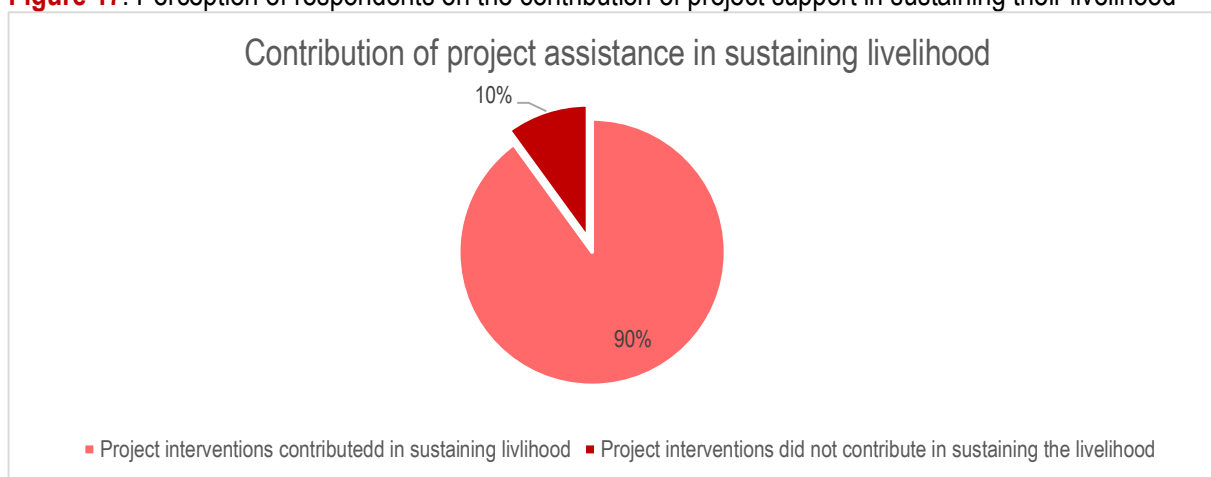
CHS 3.1 Extent to which the benefits continue/ last or likely to continue

It is in the interest of every project to ensure that the efforts yield lasting benefits to the target group so that they come out of poverty. It is even more important to have that impact on the communities and people affected by crises or are still in crisis. With scarce resources for development in the global world, there is no luxury to repeat the same activities in the same community, but rather implement interventions that have long-term effects or even multiplier effects.

Besides having evaluation team observations, and findings the project evaluation team tried to understand the perspectives of the community members about project sustainability. The data shows that 90% of respondents believed that project interventions contributed to sustaining their livelihood. Following were some of the key reasons, how the community perceived that the project cash programming contributed to sustaining their livelihood:

- The cash provided helped community members for two months and they were able to reserve their income for two months, which will help them in the coming two months and this cycle will continue.
- The cash provided to some of the community members allowed them to search for jobs and find one.
- Some of the community members started micro-businesses with the cash provided to them.

Figure 17: Perception of respondents on the contribution of project support in sustaining their livelihood



The evaluation found that in the food security component, the likelihood of the benefits continuing is high, especially for those who received livelihood grants. For example, out of those that received this grant, 58% have started off-farm businesses (Income Generating Activities e.g. bakery), 39% have started on-farm businesses (e.g. cow, goat, and sheep) while 13% have started doing other things.

This is a big platform for continuity, as long as they are safe from unpredictable climatic and political disturbances. In addition, for those who received MPCA and CFF, it was encouraging that 13% indicated that they made savings and started some small businesses. However, their businesses might be at a very small scale to guarantee continuity. One respondent from Balkh province was quoted as; *“We used the assistance for two months, and our modest daily wage became savings”*.

The evaluation also gauges that the benefits in the WASH component will likely continue since they are largely focused on Knowledge, Attitude, Practice (KAP), and behaviour change. Since the knowledge has been imparted and they have started practicing amid 100% recognition that hygiene-related illnesses have reduced, the likelihood of continuation is high.

CHS 3.2 Extent to which interventions strengthen local capacities

As outlined earlier, local capacity is one of the pillars for smooth implementation, minimum costs, and sustainability. As such building the local capacities will enable the locals to be first responders in future crises. It is, therefore, imperative that development interventions carry with them a component of local people and local organizations' capacity development/strengthening. The evaluation found that Phase II was particularly designed to consider the need to strengthen local capacities and mitigate negative effects in several ways:

- **Building Local Capacities:** Phase II of the project facilitated the staff operations and access on the ground, supporting local communities' access to basic services in health and hygiene awareness, and other livelihood opportunities. Through these projects, staff entered communities, trained community elders, and CDC leadership to understand how to operate and work for the betterment of their societies, stayed engaged with them beyond the project's lifetime, and supported them in understanding their vulnerabilities in the face of climate change.
- **Providing Essential Services:** Islamic Relief Afghanistan (IRAF) has been committed to staying and delivering in Afghanistan to protect the most vulnerable and assist Afghans with life-saving shelter, core relief items, community infrastructure, and psychosocial support. IRAF provided emergency food and nutrition assistance, health care services, livelihoods, multipurpose cash, protection, shelter, livelihoods, and water, sanitation, and hygiene support to at-risk populations.
- **Adapting to Changing Needs:** The project can scale up to meet new needs, including in response to recurrent natural disasters, escalating conflict, the withdrawal of international forces, and the shift in the governance structure. This adaptability would help IRAF to mitigate the negative effects of these crises on the local population.

The evaluation found out there was adequate effort to develop and/or strengthen local capacities and prevent negative effects in the future as well.

CHS 3.3. Avoiding negative effects considering do no-harm concept:

This was an emergency response project and it could produce negative effects on the ground if careful measures were not taken by the project team:

- **Reducing project's unintended environmental effects:** Without proper safeguarding measures, it was possible that Phase II could have unintended environmental impacts. For example, improper disposal of hygiene kits could lead to pollution. Fortunately, all risks of negative impacts on the environment were pre-identified and mitigated, as stated above.
- **Dependency:** One of the unintended effects of emergency response projects is that sometimes unwantedly it promotes dependency among the project beneficiaries. To avoid that situation, the project team made sure that this dependency didn't occur by continuing communication with RHs encouraging their self-sufficiency, and motivating them to work and be innovative to meet their needs themselves.
- **Inequality and conflicts:** One of the issues in humanitarian assistance is that sometimes some ineligible people benefit and eligible people remain out of the process. Maybe because the community head recommends some people, and others do not. If the project had not conducted door to door survey and not distributed the humanitarian aid transparently, social inequalities could have been exacerbated on the community level. Those with better access to aid resources may benefit more than others. In addition to that, Phase II was too small to meet the need for food and good hygiene practices of all those vulnerable households in its targeted communities and that is why IRAF went for extreme measures and

set very tight criteria for beneficiary selection and provided the assistance to only those households that were in dire needs of the assistance.

CHS 3.4. The extent to which political restrictions limited the project

The Afghan government went through a huge transition in August 2021, where the power was taken by the current de-facto government. The current government imposed drastic changes in laws, regulations, as well as governance models. These drastic changes negatively affected all fields of life, especially for Afghan women. Huge restrictions were imposed on their education, participation, movement, and employment.

The international NGOs also took their stance, and some of them even withdrew from this war-torn country and stopped their operations in Afghanistan. Under the new regulations, all the INGOs working in Afghanistan have to strictly follow the principles announced by the de-facto government such as signing an MoU at the beginning of the project, getting official permission letters for deploying staff to the field, and so on. With all the points mentioned above the evaluation found out that with the political regime change some positive improvements for NGO work have also been noticed such as a lack of active fighting between government and groups, and improved accessibility of all the districts, and villages in the country.

CHS 3.5 The difference made by the intervention toward environmental safeguards

In Afghanistan, and all over the world, developmental interventions and activities are supposed to safeguard the environment. It is perceived that natural resources, which constitute a huge part of the environment, are the major source of livelihood. For example, if soils are not safeguarded, agriculture productivity is lowered food insecurity increases, agri-business stalls, and the overall agro-reliant livelihood of the people is gone.

The evaluation found that the activities of Phase II including cash for food, cash for multi-purpose, livelihood grants for income generation, hygiene kits distribution, and hygiene awareness sessions made a significant difference towards environmental safeguards;

- **Cash for Food and Multi-purpose:** This reduced the need for environmentally harmful activities such as deforestation of firewood or over-farming of land. It also allowed families to invest in more sustainable practices.
- **Livelihood Grants for Income Generation:** These supported environmentally friendly businesses and practices, contributing to the local economy while also protecting the environment.
- **Hygiene Kits Distribution and Hygiene Awareness Sessions:** Proper waste management and sanitation practices reduced environmental pollution. Hygiene awareness led to better waste disposal practices, reducing the spread of diseases and the contamination of natural resources.

The project implemented all the project interventions with environmental safeguards in mind. Early identification of environmental risks through surveys, assessments, consultations, and designing responses that incorporate environmental avoidance or mitigation were crucial. This included measures for solid waste management, wastewater treatment, and management of natural resources. In addition, the implementation team has seriously followed the guidance of the World Bank on the importance of conducting environmental and social impact assessments, consulting with affected communities about potential project impacts, and restoring the livelihoods of displaced people. These measures ensured that project interventions do not inadvertently harm the environment and instead contribute to its preservation and sustainability. The evaluation concludes that the project made an adequate contribution towards environmental safeguards.

CHS 3.6 The project's long-term results in addressing basic needs and protecting livelihoods

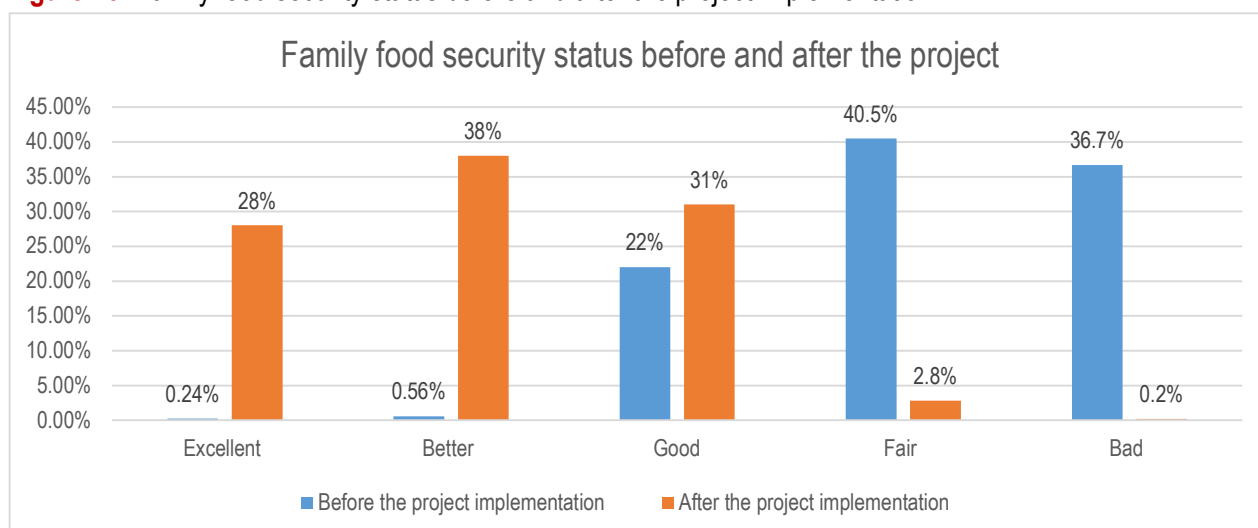
To understand the achievement level of the project's long-term results, different outcome level indicators were used, including (i) Family food security status (ii) Food Consumption Score (iii) Reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI), and (iv) improvement in the health and hygiene practices of the community members.

A. Improvement in family food security status of the right holders:

One of the major components of the project was food security under this component in Phase I of the project food packages were distributed, and later on in Phase II of the project cash programming including Cash for Food (CFF) and Multi-Purpose Cash (MPC) was distributed. These different project interventions were not only expected to improve the food security status of the relevant families but also improve the Food Consumption Score (FCS) and reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI).

The food security status of the right holders was ranked on a scale of (1-5), five being excellent and 1 being bad food security status. The data shows that the food security status of the right holders has significantly improved after the project. As such (0.24% of respondents were ranked with excellent food security status before the project, while after the project implementation, 28% of respondents had excellent food security status. Similarly, 0.56% of respondents were ranked with better food security status before the project, which increased to 38% after the project implementation. Please see the following figure for more details.

Figure 18: Family food security status before and after the project implementation



B. Improvement in food consumption score of the right holders:

The Food Consumption Score (FCS) is considered a proxy indicator⁸ of the current food security status of target communities. The FCS is a composite score based on dietary frequency, food frequency, and relative nutrition intake of different food groups. The FCS is calculated based on the 7-day before-interview food consumption recall for the household. The nine food groups applied in the calculation of food consumption score and the frequency of household consumption in the last 7 days were asked in the questionnaires. To calculate the FCS, the consumption frequencies were summed up and multiplied by the standardized food group weight. The following thresholds⁹ of FCS have been used to categorize households into three food consumption groups – **Poor** (FCS = 1-28), **Borderline** (FCS = 28.1- 42), and **Acceptable** (FCS = > 42)¹⁰: Please see the following table for each of the food group weights.

Table 12: Food Items, Food Group, and Weight applied for Afghanistan:

No	Food groups	Weight
1	Cereals (bread, rice, maize, barley) and tubers (potatoes, sweet potatoes)	2
2	Pulses and nuts (beans, lentils, peas, peanuts, etc.)	3
3	Vegetables	1

⁸ Proxy Indicator: Means indirect Indicators

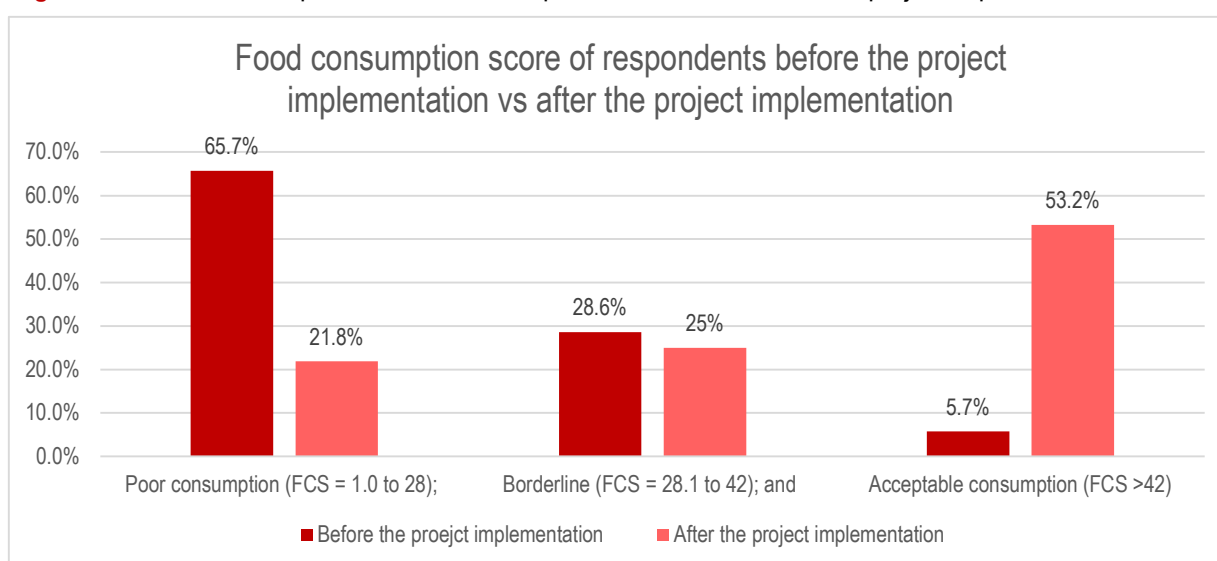
⁹ Source: Calculation of household food security outcome indicators/WFP Vulnerability Analysis & Mapping Unit, Afghanistan

¹⁰ Based on FSAC guidance for Afghanistan that applies the standard adjusted threshold for contexts with high reliance on fat and sugar

4	Fruits	1
5	Meat and fish (all types)	4
6	Dairy products (milk, yogurt, cheese, other milk products)	4
7	Sugar, honey	0.5
8	Oil, fat, butter	0.5

When food consumption patterns of the seven days before the interview were explored, it appeared that 65.7% of the respondents had poor food consumption scores before the project, while this reduced to 21.8% after the project implementation, which is a huge positive change. Similarly, 28.6 respondents were ranked borderline, and 5.7% of respondents as acceptable in before before-project implementation state, while in the project implementation state, 25% of respondents were borderline and 53.2% of respondents were ranked with acceptable Food Consumption Score (FCS). Please see the following figure for more details.

Figure 19: Food Consumption Score of the respondents before vs after the project implementation



C. Reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI):

When livelihood is negatively affected by shocks/crises, households adopt various mechanisms (strategies) that are not adopted in normal day-to-day life, to cope with reduced or decreased access to food. The Coping Strategy Index (CSI) is often used as an indicator to measure the household food security level. The CSI is based on a list of behaviours called coping strategies. It combines (i) the *frequency* of each strategy (how many times each strategy was adopted?) and (ii) their *severity* (how serious is each strategy?) for households reporting food consumption problems. A high CSI indicates a bad food security situation and vice versa.

The CSI has demonstrated itself as a particularly powerful tool to monitor the changes happening in the same population over time. There are two types of index: the “Full CSI” and the “Reduced CSI”. The rCSI is based on the shortlist of 5 food-related coping strategies applied during the 7 days and their severity weights, while full “CSI” is a long list of coping strategies. The maximal rCSI is 56 during the 7 days (i.e. all 5 strategies are applied every day). There are no universal thresholds for rCSI. But, the higher the rCSI, the more severe the coping behaviour is applied by a household.

Table 13: An example of rCSI of this analysis

Severity Category	Adoptive Coping Behaviour	Severity Weightage
Mild	Reduce the number of meals	1
Moderate	Borrow food, or rely on help from a friend or relative	2
	Reducing the Amount of Eating in The Meals by all Family Members	3
Sever	Rely on less preferred and less expensive foods	4
Very Severe	Restrict consumption by adults for small children to eat	5

Based on the country's context, the total rCSI score is the basis from which to determine and classify the level of coping behaviours into three categories: No or low coping (rCSI= 0-3), medium (rCSI = 4-9) and high coping (rCSI ≥ 10).¹¹ However, in this final evaluation based on the context of Afghanistan, the following scoring has been used for each category.

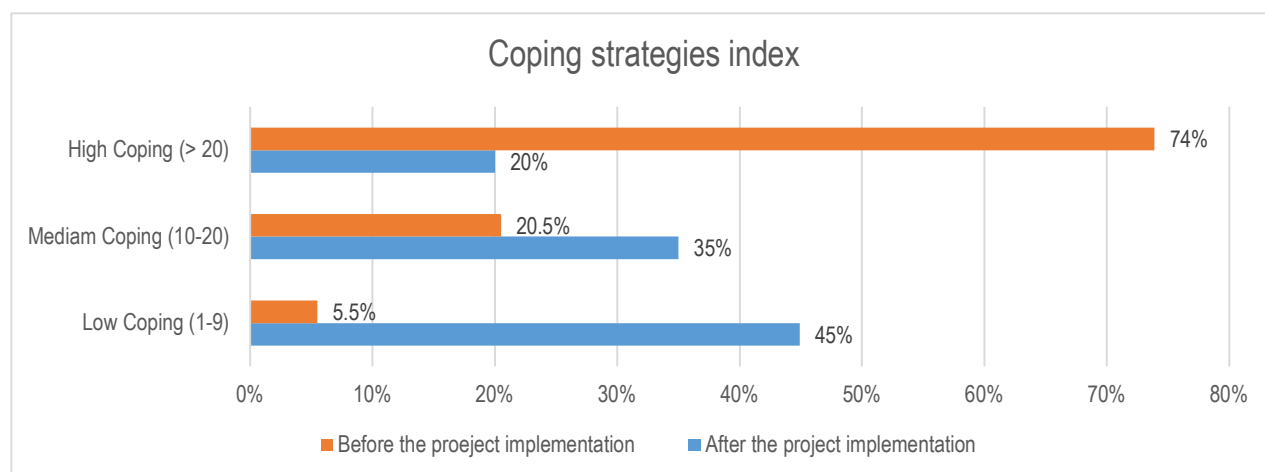
- Low Coping (rCSI = 1-9)
- Medium Coping (rCSI = 10 -20)
- High Coping (rCSI = >20)

As was the case with the FCS, over the lifespan of the project, the rCSI is also showing a similar trend where there is an average reduction from 74% to 20% in terms of respondents with high rCSI. Similarly, there is an average reduction of 35% to 20.5% in terms of respondents with moderate rCSI. This reduction has shifted to moderate and low rCSI. However, worth noting is that there is a very high increase in the low rCSI from 5.5% to 45%. This shows that after receiving the cash for food, multi-purpose cash, and food packages most of the respondents did not need to cope with hunger, which is a good sign for project impacts.

Mr. Tahir a resident of district-6 Kabul, name was surveyed but on the cash distribution day he was not present, therefore he was not able to get his payment, he said he was so un lucky and said

"Sang da pai lang" is a Persian proverb, which means stone hit by the injured feet is even more painful

Figure 20: (rCSI) Reduced Coping Strategies Index of respondents before vs after the project implementation



D. Improvement in hygiene practices of the right holders after benefiting from the project

The data shows that there is tremendous improvement in implementing the selected hygiene practices. For example, 100% of the respondents use hand washing soap after using the toilet, an increase from 30% before the

¹¹GUIDANCE NOTE - Calculation of household food security outcome indicators (WFP Vulnerability Analysis & Mapping Unit, Afghanistan - December 2012) – Accessed July 24th, 2019

project. Similarly, drinking water from open sources has reduced to only 20% from 43% before the project, while almost everyone (98%) is purified water before drinking compared to only 4% before the project.

The findings further denote that open defecation has reduced to 8% compared to 24% before the project while (86%) of WASH respondents seem to be cleaning the home, and managing the waste compared to only 45% before the project implementation. This was then substantiated by the researchers' observations, where 84% of the observations of good practices were about the use of soap and hand washing facilities while 76% observed waste management and home cleanliness as best hygiene practices. This is not surprising, because the other practices would not be easy to observe. Summing up, all the respondents also "opined that hygiene-related illnesses are rare in the area", a development that is encouraging.

Table 14: Improvement in hygiene practices of the right holders after benefiting from the project

Indicator	Before proeject implementation		After project mplementation	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Washing hands with Soap	30%	70%	100%	0%
Drinking open source water (river)	43%	57%	20%	80%
Purifying drinking water (boiling or using chlorine in it)	4%	96%	2%	98%
Open defecation	24%	76%	8%	92%
Waste management (Toilet waste management)	45%	55%	86%	14%

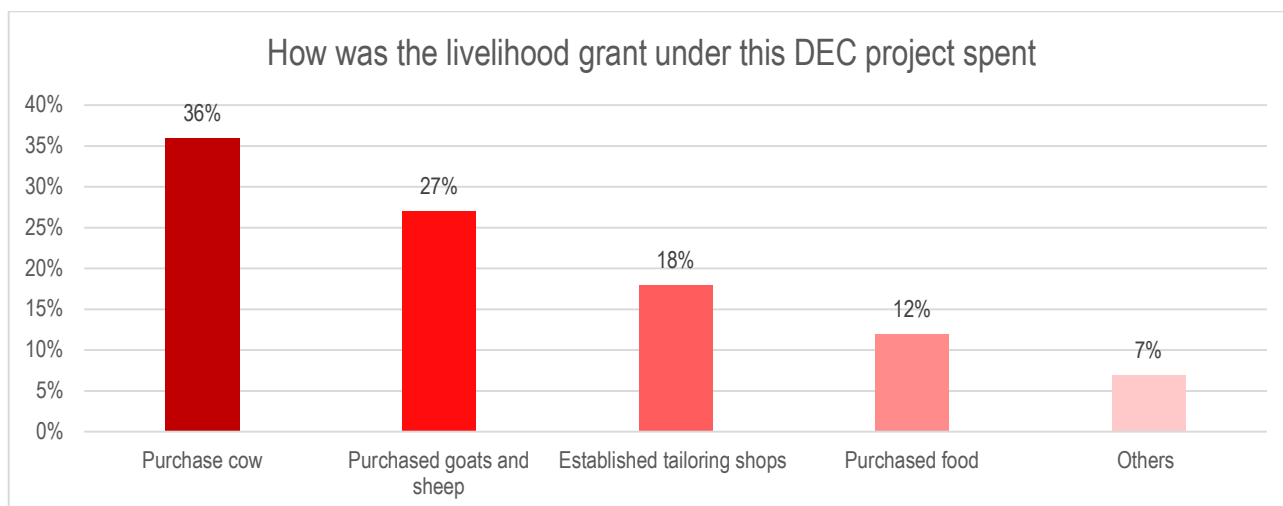
The evaluation therefore concludes that both food security and WASH outcomes have improved in the communities affected by the crisis as a result of the project. Beneficiaries/respondents recognized the combination of food items, cash for food, multipurpose cash assistance, cash for livelihoods, and promotion of hygiene practices from the project as key reasons for their improved lives.

CHS 3.7 The impacts of the livelihoods grants on the households in terms of their income generation and resilience-building

The design of the project points to the fact that the livelihoods grants stamps on the authority to move the benefits or results of the project beyond its lifespan. The intrinsic theory of change is that, once someone receives the food items, then cash for food and/or MPCA, ultimately, the one who stands out is the one who has obtained a grant for livelihoods (be it off- or on-farm). The catchword is that livelihood is much more long-lasting than Food Items (FI), Cash for Food (CFF), and Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA).

The evaluation found that there are specific expected outcomes and impacts of the livelihoods grants under the project. Speculatively, the following are some of the expected outcomes and impacts, namely; Employability, Productivity, Profitability, and Family IGA amongst others. The figure below summarizes the overall picture;

Figure 21: How was the livelihood grant under this DEC project spent



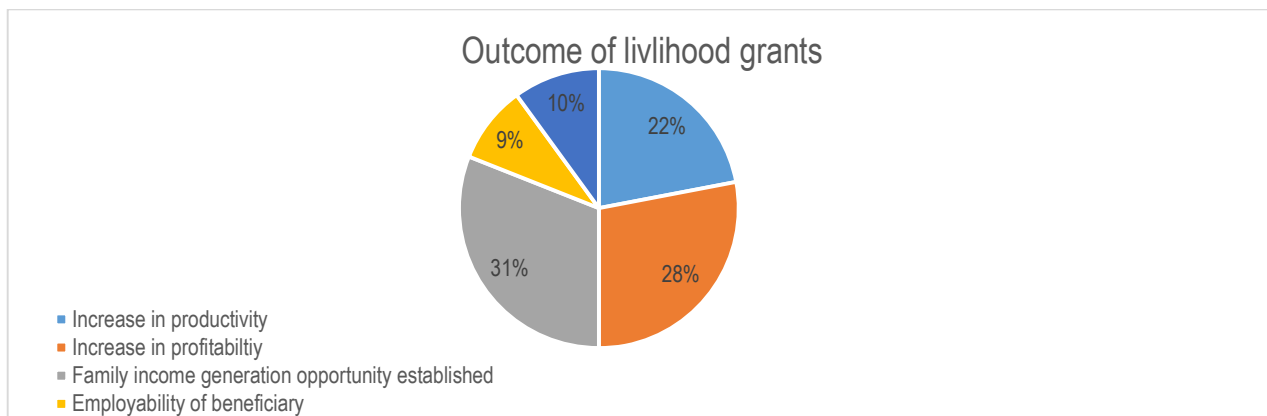
The livelihood grants under this DEC project were provided to the right holders as cash in some provinces, while others received toolkits for example tailoring toolkits. One of the issues was that in some provinces the livelihood grants were issued so late (in December 2023) (during the project evaluation) and it will require some time to produce outcomes or impacts. However, some provinces had received these livelihood grants earlier. Under this evaluation, 97 beneficiaries including (54) women who had received livelihood grants were interviewed. The first question was to understand how the right holders spent the livelihood grant money (a) Invested in business or (b) spent for household expenditures. The data shows that out of the total number of respondents, 90% of them had invested the money they had received under the livelihood grant in business. They had either established new business or had expanded their existing business. These were really small businesses such as:

- Buying a cow and selling its milk
- Livestock rearing
- Establishing tailoring business
- Establishing Bakery business and so on

Despite the livelihood grants that were recently received by the right holders, still some of the right holders had greatly benefited from it. For example, the ones that had bought cows were not only selling cow milk but also were using the dried cow dung for burning and warming their rooms. Besides that, they also used dairy products such as milk, yogurt, and cream in their home, which greatly improved their family livelihood as well. Some of the cows had given birth to heifer calf and the owners were really happy with it and they mentioned they could earn a lot if they sell them.

As mentioned above the money under the livelihood grants was diversely used by the right holders that making it a little difficult as well as technical to measure the outcomes of these newly established businesses under a single category of outcome indicators, therefore the project evaluation used multiple outcome indicators to measure the outcomes of this section. The evaluation data shows that 30% respondents benefited under the livelihood grants confirmed increase in profitability, 31% respondents confirmed that livelihood grant established income generation opportunity for their family, 22% respondents mentioned that the grant helped increase productivity (e.g before they receive 6 Litters milk from one cow now they have two cows and they receive 12 Litters milk) which is double. 10% respondents confirmed that the grant created employability opportunities. Please see the following figure for more details.

Figure 22: Outcomes and Impacts of the Livelihood Grants



From the figure above, much more of the Livelihoods Grants are valued from a perspective of “Family Income Generating Activity”. As has been the situation in other countries and the world over, this is the most straightforward way of looking at a “business establishment”. It is surprising though, that even if the grant looks more long-term, very few view it as a source of employment or its pedigree of employability is low.

CHS 4: Humanitarian response is based on communication, participation, and feedback

Popular participation with the right information is one of the cornerstones of empowerment in the development context and forms the basis of the feedback re-enforcing loop (Schanz 2008). Under this commitment, the evaluation studied how were people informed about their entitlement in this project and how active community elders participated in the project and provided feedback. The data shows that after registering the project in the Ministry of Economy the project team conducted an information-sharing meeting with the communities and

“On the back of the survey card given to us the complaints phone number was written, I thought it was only a formality, I had a feedback and dialed the number in my mobile phone, it was real and someone from the Islamic Relief picked the phone and carefully registered my complaint, I could not believe my eyes”

Salim one of the MPCA rights holders

informed them of the project itself, the selection criteria of right holders, and project survey teams, and requested their active engagement with the project team. Despite the demand for humanitarian aid within the communities is so high and it is so difficult to engage community leadership in the selection process of the right holders and engage them in the monitoring and decision-making process, still, the project tried multiple ways of community participation, which is commendable and this criterion is ranked as **“Accept”**

CHS 4.1 Participants access to information about the project, and their entitlements

The evaluation data shows that IRAF team members had provided the project-related information not only to the community elders but also to the community common members. The data further elaborate that after registering the project in the Ministry of Economy the project team had conducted an information-sharing meeting with the communities and

informed them on the project itself, rights holders selection criteria, and project survey teams, and had requested their active engagement with the project team. In some of the provinces CDC leadership also accompanied the survey team of Islamic Relief in the identification and selection of the most vulnerable community members. The data unveils that the following key methods were used to inform rights holders and ensure access to information in areas affected by the crisis;

- **Conducting a meeting with CDC leadership:** After selecting the relevant communities, conducting a meeting with the CDC leadership / Masjeed council was the first step toward project implementation. In this meeting, the project team provided the most important information about the project such as the project activities, the community members' entitlement, criteria for selecting the

MPCA project beneficiaries, and the next stages for example project survey team visiting houses door to door and so on.

- **Conducting regular meetings with common community members:** Besides meeting the community elders the project team also visited the community members regularly to inform them about the project's different components and to encourage their volunteer and active participation in the project implementation.
- **Providing information during the rights holders selection process:** As mentioned above the project right holders were selected based on the pre-set criteria. As such the project survey team visited all the project right holders using door by door method. During the door-by-door survey of the right holders, the community members accompanied the survey team and provided information on the project.
- **Providing information on the distribution day:** The first step on the cash distribution day was to inform the community members on how the project team would check the individual NIDs and so on. This process was facilitated and monitored by the community elders and de-facto government local authorities.

CHS 4.2 The project engages beneficiaries in decision-making

When communities and people are involved in decision-making or indeed make their own decisions, they feel empowered and own the outcome of the decision. The same works in development interventions, in which case, when the beneficiaries are involved in making decisions about which interventions or what else ought to be done, they feel empowered and own the development.

- **Community elders' engagement in MPCA beneficiary's selection:** Despite IRAF using specific selection criteria for selecting the rights holders for the MPCA component of the project, still the MPCA beneficiaries were selected with close coordination, of the related clusters, sectorial departments, local authorities CDCs and community elders by conducting door to door survey in the target areas. In this whole exercise CDC leadership and community elders played their vital role.

"I saw it with my own eyes, the door by door survey conducted by the Islamic Relief team went very well, let me be honest to you no body eat no-ones right" which means only the eligible people were selected under the door to door survey

Sayed Jamal one of the right holders in Bamyan province

- **Beneficiaries' engagement in Livelihood Choice Assessment:** The evaluation findings show that during the implementation of the project, especially the cash grant for livelihood, the project conducted a livelihood choice assessment with each house by house and directly involved them in decision-making to select the business that would work for each household individually. This provided a platform to make their own decisions or rational choices.
- **Rights holders' engagement in project monitoring using the project hotline number:** As per the data received from the Islamic Relief Afghanistan's (IRAF) Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEAL) team, this DEC project has been regularly monitored by the MEAL team IRAF. Still, to engage community members in project monitoring, they were provided the IRAF-specific hotline number on which community members could call in case of any issue, and their identity was protected by the IRAF. This was also one of the ways IRAF engaged community members in the project decision-making.

With that said, the evaluation concludes that the project engaged beneficiaries in decision-making at different stages of the project.

CHS 4.3 The project took measures to engage all different groups in the community

The project targeted the communities and people in or affected by the crisis. As such, in the community, there are different groups (youth associations, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), and so on) that are part of the community, but the different groups also serve different purposes in the same community. It is imperative, therefore, that they be recognized in their rights as “groups with a purpose” but would still have relevance to this project.

The evaluation found that, during the project implementation process, the project conducted regular joint meetings (every two months) with existing groups in the community, starting from mobilization, then the Right Holders (RH) selection, and continued up to the distribution and post distribution follow-ups. The groups were also given their roles in the process, such as mobilizing their members for the joint meetings and interventions of the project. The evaluation concludes that in this way, all the relevant groups in the community were engaged and their input is reflected in the response and project.

CHS 4.4 The project took measures to exclude other groups in the community

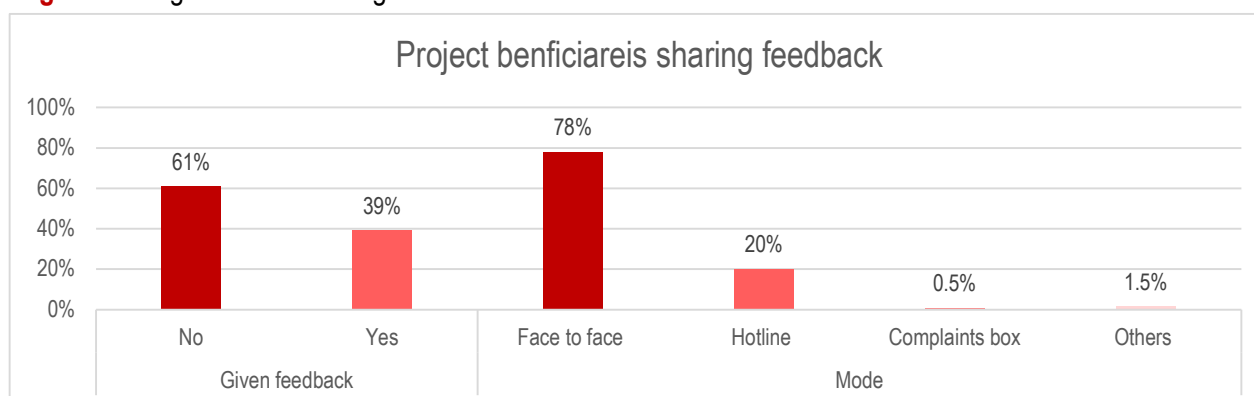
The project has had a theory of inclusivity where different classes of people affected by the crisis were included i.e. male, female, people with disabilities, aged, youth, and children. The evaluation found that, during the project implementation process, the project did not exclude any existing groups in the community. It made efforts to conduct regular joint meetings (every two months) with existing groups in the community, starting from mobilization, followed by Right Holders (RH) or rights holders’ selection, and continued up to the distribution and post-distribution follow-ups. The groups were also given their roles in the process, such as mobilizing their members for the joint meetings and interventions of the project. The evaluation concludes that in this way, all the relevant groups in the community were engaged and their input is reflected in the response and project

CHS 4.5 The project-appropriate communication, participation, and feedback channels

The project dealing with people affected by the crisis is associated with a multitude of issues and requires feedback from the beneficiaries so that the project leadership is kept abreast with the actual situation on the ground. It was imperative therefore for the project to put in place mechanisms/channels that would be used for communication and feedback.

The evaluation found that the project had put in place several communication and feedback channels for the beneficiaries to use as a way of participating in the project and also fostering transparency and accountability. These were in the form of face-to-face interaction, hotline, and complaints box amongst others. The figure below shows the channels and how they were utilized by the beneficiaries;

Figure 23: Right holders sharing feedback



The evaluation explored that 39% of the beneficiaries had used the available communication and feedback mechanisms under the project. The emphasis should be noted that there was high usage of face-to-face interaction method (78%) in feedback and communication under the project, which is an indication that probably the project staff was largely interacting with the beneficiaries in the course of the project implementation. Second to that was

the use of the hotline, where 20% of the beneficiaries were able to give their feedback. As few as 0.5% and 1.5% used complaint boxes and other channels to provide feedback on the project. Other channels included feedback meetings conducted on the community level every two months and sharing feedback with the CDC head, who then shared it with the IRAF team.

CHS 5: Complaints are welcomed and addressed

Under this commitment, the evaluation did not only study the complaints-handling and feedback mechanism infrastructure, and tools but also assessed how were these complaints dealt with within the IRAF. Despite the IRAF has a strong complaints response mechanism, a dedicated focal point and a specific committee that reviews and manages the whole process still the number of complaints received by the IRAF under this two-year project looks much less considering the Afghan context, IRAF needs to do a thorough bottleneck assessment of the whole process and identify gaps if any. Therefore, this evaluation ranks this commitment as **“Monitor”**

CHS 5.1 The RAF's feedback mechanism

In a situation where complaints are expected, there should be a way of handling such complaints so that the credibility of the project interventions and indeed that of the IRAF as a whole is maintained. As indicated above, one of the critical action points under this CHS is to “design and implement a complaint-handling process in consultation with the community and people affected by the crisis”.

The evaluation found that IRAF established the complaint-handling and feedback mechanism which included hotlines, suggestion boxes, text messages, and community meetings, through which rights holders could forward their complaints and suggestions anonymously. The mechanism also had a complaints handling committee, which was tasked to follow up on the complaints/suggestions to a logical conclusion. Once the facts are substantiated, a resolution was made and submitted to the IRAF leadership for further action. The decision by the IRAF leadership would then be relayed back to the committee, tasking them to take appropriate action. Once the action is taken, feedback would then be provided to the anonymous person through the same channel. This maintained the credibility of the process and the safety of the individual who provided the complaint/suggestion. The evaluation concludes that this was a good mechanism in nature.

CHS 5.2 Whether IRAF's feedback mechanism met the needs of different targeted beneficiaries

Given that by nature the IRAF had to “design and implement a complaint-handling process in consultation with the community and people affected by the crisis”, it creates expectations from the different people involved and those that are aware of it. This means that the mechanism will have to meet the needs of different people and live up to the expectations.

The data shows that IRAF had received a total of 13 complaints related to DEC projects. These channels have provided an effective means for individuals to voice their concerns and provide feedback. In DEC-I, IRAF received two complaints from female participants regarding the selection of RHs (Right Holders) and conflicts between two members. Adhering to IRAF's comprehensive feedback and response mechanism guidelines and policies, a dedicated committee was assigned to ensure the resolutions were reached in a manner consistent with the feedback and response policy and guidelines of IRAF.

Moving on to DEC-II, a total of 11 complaints were registered from Kabul and Balkh provinces. Among these, four males and three females from Kabul, and three males and one female were from Balkh province, expressed their concerns about various matters such as quality issues, (Right Holders) RHs selection processes, information requests, improvement suggestions, and delays in payment or input distribution by the suppliers. Under IRAF feedback and response mechanism guidelines and policies, IRAF promptly took appropriate actions to ensure effective resolution. Throughout the project life cycle, IRAF's dedicated feedback and response focal point provided satisfactory responses to the rights holders and stakeholders. Furthermore, IRAF conducted four awareness sessions to educate beneficiaries and other project stakeholders about the feedback and response mechanisms in place. This proactive approach allowed IRAF to provide comprehensive feedback and effectively

address the concerns raised by the RHs. Based on the data provided to the evaluation team, all the logged complaints were responded to by the IRAF in a satisfactory and dignified manner. The evaluation found that IRAF's commitment to maintaining a robust feedback and response mechanism has enabled them to foster a culture of accountability and continuous improvement within their DEC projects.

CHS 5.3 Whether IRAF's feedback was welcomed and re-informed the feedback provider

A strong feedback mechanism ought to provide feedback to the one who provided the complaint or suggestion. However, moving forward, the mechanism should allow that once the complainant has received his feedback, s/he should be able to express satisfaction or dissatisfaction so that the feedback provider can learn/improve or not.

The evaluation found out that, in the first place, all thirteen (13) complaints that were received were looked into following the IRAF policy and were resolved to their logical conclusion. After the resolution, feedback was provided to all the complainants who, in turn, acknowledged their satisfaction with the resolutions. As IRAF and as a project, lessons were learned and it is the spirit of the complaints handling committee to "always improve in their performance" even though the beneficiaries/complainants expressed satisfaction. The evaluation concludes that this is an indication that the mechanism was useful to feedback providers too.

CHS 5.4 Monitoring the flow of feedback and complaints mechanisms

There should always be a way for the project to monitor the flow of feedback and complaints in the mechanisms to ensure that they are being used by a range of community members and to understand whether communities (particularly vulnerable children and marginalized groups) are satisfied with the system, otherwise, the feedback from complainants alone may not be enough because the system "aims to serve the community in crisis". This is also a way of interacting with the people who were reached by awareness messages regarding the system.

The evaluation found that the project monitored the flow of feedback and complaints mechanisms to ensure usage by conducting interviews with the community leaders, project participants, and rights holders regularly. This monitoring helped assess whether communities, including vulnerable children and marginalized groups, were satisfied with the system and identify any gaps in utilization or satisfaction. Moving forward, the data collection tools for regular project monitoring would have a section that should collect information regarding beneficiary satisfaction with the system so that it forms part of regular monitoring.

CHS 5.5 Safety and Inclusiveness of the Mechanism

IRAF ensures communities and staff have and are aware of a variety of feedback channels, including phone hotline/SMS, email, and in-person. By designing awareness materials in the formats and languages according to the local context and the preferences of the communities, feedback was provided, complaints were raised, and sensitive or high-risk issues were timely brought to the attention of IRAF. IRAF promoted an external whistleblowing hotline, managed by Safe Call, through which staff or other stakeholders globally can anonymously report any sensitive complaints.

To solicit, listen to, collate, and analyse feedback and complaints from the project stakeholders, IRAF has an inclusive Complaints Feedback Mechanism (CFM). Each feedback, question, and concern received is documented in the project learning log with storage and data-sharing protections in place. Relevant management was reviewed and responded to, following the IRAF Complaints Response Policy. This has ensured that Phase II is relevant and appropriate to beneficiaries' needs and is implemented in a way that respects communities and protects their well-being and safety, building and maintaining trust with communities.

IRAF has coordinated with AWAAZ, the UNOPS-sponsored safe and secure humanitarian helpline connecting Afghans and refugees with information on assistance by sharing the hotline number with communities through tokens, and banners, and maintaining regular interaction with AWAAZ to promote up-to-date referral pathways and collective accountability throughout the response. Necessary data, information, and support were provided to AWAAZ based on need. Any complaint or feedback received through AWAAZ was responded to immediately.

Information was protected as per information sharing guidelines of Islamic Relief. IRAF also coordinated with the AAP WG to contribute to the nationwide community feedback mechanism and attended the meetings. With all the infrastructure (policies, guidelines, and procedures) IRAF has this evaluation that ranks the safety of the feedback mechanism under the project as acceptable.

CHS 6: Humanitarian response is coordinated and complementary

Based on the evaluation observations and findings it is clear that IRAF has coordinated the project interventions in all major coordination forums, and there are several practical on-the-ground challenges listed below that make effective coordination and synergies building a little difficult, but the evaluation team believes that synergies building is possible if the project has clear plan and efforts in this regard. Since IRAF has not been able to create any synergy and resource sharing with any similar project in the targeted areas, therefore this evaluation ranks this commitment as **“Monitor”**

CHS 6.1 Project interventions fit with other stakeholder's interventions

As mentioned earlier, it looks simple to talk about collaboration or coordination because normally, there is competition for resources. It starts at the point of sourcing funds and it goes onto the ground about demonstrating results (who has done this good work?). As such the evaluation sought this information about how the interventions fit with other stakeholders.

The findings show that other stakeholders were doing similar work, and the activities fit in well i.e. OCHA as the main coordination body, WFP, UNHCR, IRC, and DRC, were important stakeholders of this project. They did provide valuable insights, support, and collaboration opportunities by collaborating with the project through sectorial FSL and WASH clusters. This was because the activities and outputs of this project were designed to complement and align with the interventions of other stakeholders in Afghanistan. The Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) is the country's response plan, which is the main document the project aligned its interventions with and strived to design future response projects in a way to complement others in meeting HRP's identified needs.

CHS 6.2 Extent to which the interventions complement each other

Complementarity goes with synergism, in that when projects complement, there are usually multiplier effects i.e. benefits that were not planned by any other parties. It avoids duplication and conflict among project implementers and avoids confusing the beneficiaries. The evaluation found that IRAF coordinated its projects including this one through multi-sectoral partnerships with other organizations by being active in (FSC) and WASH clusters. It seems that IRAF attended monthly meetings of clusters, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief & Development (ACBAR) Access Working Group, the Cash and Voucher Working Group, and so on to share and receive information and learnings and reducing duplication. These partnerships boost the overall capacity for disaster risk management through effective coordination of data, expertise, capabilities, and resources.

With all the efforts made still no sign of synergy and complementation (resource sharing) was observed between this DEC project and other projects. The evaluation data also show some harsh realities and difficulties in coordinating the project interventions. Some context realities had negatively affected the project coordination with other similar projects. For example, DEC has funded another emergency response project to World Vision Afghanistan that is being implemented in western Afghanistan Herat, Ghor, Faryab, and Badghis provinces. The project targeted areas are so far from each other and they may not be able to create synergies and share resources, even if they want. Besides that, following factors were identified as the key barriers to creating synergies and resource sharing.

- Different locations and targeted areas for different projects.
- Different timelines of implementation, even though working in the same area
- The short duration of the field interventions of the project.
- Tough deadlines and the emergency nature of the projects
- Lack of government-level efforts for creating synergy between the different NGOs.

CHS 6.3 Extent to which the interventions complement or reinforce country priorities

It is indeed the case that non-governmental organizations and development partners work to influence or complement national priority projects and policies. This is also the very reason why non-governmental organizations and development partners demand a conducive policy environment for their smooth operation. As stated in the CHS6.2, government entities such as the Ministry of Economy and well as Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation have played crucial roles to enable the smooth operations of the project. Now, the question is, to what extent have the interventions complimented and/or reinforced country priorities?

To respond to this, question the evaluation team conducted Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with the Director of Economy (DoEc) Director of Refugees and Repatriation. Both these senior government officials ranked the project interventions relevant to the government priorities. They accepted that they were not so familiar with the governance modalities and they also accepted that the de-facto government income was not at the level to reach each family in the country, therefore support like this was considered a relief for the poor community members.

The project evaluation team also had some observations in this regard. It is clear that the de-facto government has not produced any written document (policy paper) that can outline countries' profound priorities, that could be referenced by this evaluation team, however, the evaluation team has identified the following key reasons that rank this DEC-funded project highly relevant:

- Lack of support for the 270,000 widows who received monthly payments from the ex-government.
- The monthly payments to the disabled have also been stopped by the de facto government.
- The monthly payments of old and retired ex-government officials have also been stopped by the de-facto government authorities.
- The women working in the government, NGOs, and personal businesses have been stopped from working there and they do not work for their families anymore.
- There is no practical project from the government side for the IDPs and returnees.
- There is no practical payment plan for the families of drug-addicted people

So all the above categories of people that are in millions in Afghanistan do not have any source of support except for projects such as DEC. Therefore, it is easy to conclude that vulnerability in Afghanistan is so high and projects such as this are highly relevant to the national priorities.

CHS 6.4 Extent to which IRAF's interventions compatible with other interventions in the country

The understanding is that compatibility means that they are not in conflict, which is also another very important element even if they are not necessarily working to build synergies. The evaluation found that few other projects are directly compatible with the project activities, as follows;

1. **Sustainable Job creation and enterprise development projects;** can complement this project. This will take the livelihood grant receivers to another level of income generation, market linkages, and profit generation. Such a project was being implemented by Cordaid a few months ago.
2. **Humanitarian Relief:** UNHCR is providing vital humanitarian relief to millions of people in Afghanistan, including life-saving shelter, core relief items, community infrastructure, and psychosocial support.
3. **Emergency Aid:** Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF) supports humanitarian partners in providing emergency food and nutrition assistance, health care services, livelihoods, multipurpose cash, protection, shelter, livelihoods, and water, sanitation, and hygiene support to at-risk populations.
4. **Health Services:** The Afghanistan Health Emergency Response (HER) project, implemented by UNICEF, aims to increase the utilization and quality of essential health services, including the Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS), Essential Package of Hospital Services (EPHS), community- and facility-based nutrition services, and COVID-19 prevention and response interventions.

Looking at the above, IRAF's interventions are aligned with these areas and these projects can complement this DEC initiative, and they are compatible with the ongoing efforts in Afghanistan. IRAF has ensured that project interventions do not duplicate existing efforts and that they address the specific needs of the communities being served. The evaluation concludes that the project is compatible with several development initiatives being implemented by the UN and other NGOs.

CHS 7: Humanitarian actors continuously learn and improve

Under this commitment, the evaluation studied how were IRAF able to continually learn from its strengths and weaknesses and adopt project implementation accordingly. The evaluation team found that IRAF has a comprehensive results-based M&E system and a very strong monitoring team. The MEAL team of IRAF had performed 28 monitoring visits of this DEC project. The MEAL team members also performed Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) visits. The MEAL team also engages third parties for project evaluation. With that said this evaluation ranks this criterion as “**Accept**”

CHS 7.1 IRAF promotes continuous learning and improve

This process of ensuring that activities are implemented, results are registered (success/failure), experiences are documented, lessons are drawn and improvements are designed, is usually what is called “Knowledge Management”. As stated earlier, this is tricky, because not many would like to draw lessons from failure (no one wants to show off failure)! As such, the evaluation sought information on how IRAF promoted continuous learning and improvement in communities and people in crisis (where it is very easy to register failure).

The evaluation findings showed that IRAF promoted continuous learning and improvement by implementing regular monitoring and evaluation processes. Through project process monitoring reports and Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM) reports, IRAF identified strengths and weaknesses, extracting valuable lessons learned. The data also show that project team had conducted a lessons learned workshop, where the key lessons learned in all processes were documented. These findings lessons learned and recommendations were then incorporated into future project designs and implementation plans, fostering ongoing improvement and increasing effectiveness in achieving its objectives. Besides that, IRAF utilizes third parties for program evaluation and IRAF uses best practices, and evaluation recommendations for future programming. This was done well

CHS 7.2 Frequency of Project Joint Meetings with the Community Members

Joint meetings with communities remain a very important aspect of fostering local acceptance of project activities and trust building. These usually help in the implementation of future similar project initiatives because the community already has the trust. Once the trust is there, it also reduces unnecessary expectations because the communities already know the nature of the activities that the organization implements. This is a good standard practice, even though it is not just easy to organize such meetings in a crisis environment.

The findings show that the project convened joint meetings with community members and government stakeholders regularly to ensure their active participation and feedback. These meetings helped in understanding community needs and incorporating their perspectives into project interventions. Sometimes these meetings were ad hoc if there was any issue that required urgent attention. The best practices from other projects show that conducting meetings with specific frequency with specific managerial layers can be beneficial. The example is shown as follows:

- Every quarter M&E Manager + Project Staff + Community;
- Every 6 months Project Manager + M&E Manager + Project Staff + Community;
- The end of the year should be Country Director + Project Manager + M&E Manager + Project Staff + Community.

CHS 7.3 Documentation of Results of Consultation Meetings to use them for (re) programming

Consultation meetings are usually considered as time-consuming and difficult activity, especially in locations such as Kabul, because most of the right holders go to work on the official time and it is so difficult to get most of the

community members in an official time. Before analysing the results, it is important to analyse the context realities and on-the-ground situation. Currently, the efforts at sustainable job creation are limited and as mentioned above different categories of people that received regular payments (salary) from the ex-government are no longer receiving that payment, which has added to the vulnerability of the people. On the other hand, some opportunists in the community know about the cash programming of the international NGOs and they also enter the crowd of the very vulnerable people in the community and it becomes very difficult to separate the vulnerable from the non-vulnerable.

In such a situation the experience shows that when community consultation meetings are held, normally everyone tries to register their name for humanitarian aid, without providing any valid, logical, and practical inputs on the project design, implementation process, monitoring, and evaluation process of the humanitarian aid. In most cases, especially in major cities (Kabul) people hardly find those who had received humanitarian aid after the distribution process. In one of the communities in Kabul, community members had misunderstood the project evaluation team with the IRAF team and a crowd of people came together to register their names for humanitarian aid. In contrast, the situation in the districts and villages is different. There the CDC leadership could be found, and they volunteer to help and monitor the project provide valid inputs for project improvement, and offer support.

Despite all these challenges IRAF conducted regular meetings with the community is a huge positive effort. The findings show that the project team regularly conducted consultation meetings with the community members and analysed the results of their consultation meetings. The findings from these consultations played a crucial role in influencing the implementation of their interventions. By carefully considering and incorporating the community's needs and priorities, they ensured that our interventions were aligned with their specific requirements. This approach allowed the project to create targeted and impactful solutions, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness and relevance of projects. In principle, there has been some form of issue-based programming and adaptive management. This creates a good model

CHS 7.4 Interventions adapted to the changing context

The concept of adaptive management has been there for a few decades. However, as stated under CHS 7.3, to what extent would the project direction in the changing context maintain the same theory of change from the donor? The evaluation sought information on how adaptive management was implemented in this initiative.

The findings show that the project proactively adapted interventions to the changing context, based on prioritizing their relevance and effectiveness. This involved conducting regular assessments of the political, social, and economic situation and making necessary adjustments to the project strategies. By staying attuned to the evolving landscape, it ensured that interventions remained responsive to the needs and realities on the ground, maximizing their impact and achieving positive outcomes. This would be a good practice if all donors would be as flexible.

CHS 8: Staff are supported to do their job effectively and are treated fairly and equitably

Under this commitment, the evaluation team studied the staff management process within IRAF. The data shows that IRAF has a function HR department with a comprehensive HR policy, where the recruitment, pay, grade, performance appraisal, promotions, and gender mainstreaming are clarified and the HR team follows the policy accordingly. Most importantly the IRAF leadership not only motivates their team but also develops their capacities by regular coaching, mentoring, and on-the-job training. So this evaluation concludes that the project fulfilled this aspect and this commitment is ranked as “Accept”

CHS 8.1 Support rendered to project staff to implement interventions

It is important to highlight that IRAF has a function HR department with a comprehensive HR policy, where the recruitment, pay, grade, performance appraisal, promotions, and gender mainstreaming is clarified and the HR team follows the policy accordingly. This is critical, especially in crisis environments where staff operate with minimum alternatives. The evaluation found out that IRAF had responded to this critical point sensibly. On a positive note, it was found that top leadership provided regular guidance and motivated team members by

recognizing their exceptional efforts and achievements in delivering project results. Additionally, the top leadership provided them with leadership guidance and support, ensuring the project was implemented to its fullest potential. Whenever necessary, the leadership offered timely technical guidance to enhance the project's execution and foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement. By combining recognition, guidance, and support, the leadership helped create a motivated and high-performing team, resulting in successful project outcomes.

CHS 8.2 Support rendered to Female Project Staff to implement interventions

After the change of government in 2021, the working environment for females has been challenging in Afghanistan. In the first place, it is tough to deploy female employees, and then expect female staff to deliver. If the project manages to deploy staff, it must provide support.

To begin with, the evaluation found that the project managed to deploy female staff who would help the project interact with female rights holders, through discreet recruitment processes and prioritization of the safety and well-being of staff members. The evaluation established that, once female staff were on board, the project placed significant emphasis on providing them with comprehensive training projects and mentorship opportunities. Additionally, the project prioritized creating a safe working environment exclusively for women, ensuring their well-being and enabling them to thrive in their roles. To enhance their effectiveness in implementing interventions, the project equipped them with the necessary resources and tools, including gender-sensitive guidelines, and also extended support from senior staff members. By empowering female team members, the project fostered an inclusive and gender-responsive approach, ultimately leading to more impactful interventions and improved outcomes for the right holders. The evaluation concludes that this was done successfully.

CHS 8.3 Effectiveness of existing support structures/ resources (internal and external) to staff

For the staff members, both, male and female to effectively deliver the project results (implement project interventions), resources and support structures ought to be available. These provide a conducive environment for the smooth delivery of the project's intended results.

The evaluation established that the existing and allocated project support structures and resources were fully made available to the staff in the project for access and utilization towards implementation of project activities (not personal use). Internal resources included office materials and equipment, training projects, regular staff meetings, and clear communication channels. External resources included partnerships with local organizations and access to technical expertise. The project did not experience complaints from staff, while the implementation of interventions was going on smoothly. It is fair to say that the resources and structures were effective in supporting staff. The evaluation concludes that the project fulfilled its mandate and/or obligation in this regard.

CHS 9: Resources are managed and used responsibly for their intended purpose

The evaluation studied how efficiently the resources especially the financial resources were managed based on three different criteria (i) Allocability (ii) Allowability (iii) Reasonability of the expenditures. The data shows that IRAF has spent money based on the approved budget keeping in mind each specific budget line. Despite there being huge fluctuation in the exchange rate of the USD and GBP into Afs still, the project expenditures look reasonable. In addition, the evaluation team did not witness any adverse effect the project might have produced on the environment. Therefore, this evaluation concludes that the project resources were efficiently managed and did not have any adverse effect on the environment. The evaluation ranks this commitment as "Accept"

CHS 9.1 How well the resources were used or managed

When implementing a project, both the implementer and the funding agency ought to adhere to the principle of "prudent use of resources", which means "using the resources for its intended purposes and with care! Under this evaluation, it was important to find out whether the project funds have been used for its intended humanitarian work and in a manner that promotes prudence.

Table 15: Project expenditures disaggregated to sectors the money was spent in (As of December 10th, 2023)

A. Expenditures on project component		
USD amount spent on MPCA cash assistance	487,766	47.6%

USD amount spent on WASH NFIs	53,472	5.2%
USD spent on other WASH interventions	214,906	20.99%
USD amount spent on awareness-raising sessions	40,621	3.96%
For any other project expenditures in USD please add them here and below	18,432	1.8%
Total project expenditures	815,197	79.6%
B. Expenditures on operations component of the project		
USD amount spent on salaries of the staff	139,084	13.59%
USD amount spent on office rent	9,715	0.949%
USD amount spent for communication (Phone – internet, Website)	4,686	0.457%
USD amount spent for transportation (Fuel, vehicle repair, tickets)	34,036	3.32%
Transport, Tickets, Fuel, Travel (internal travel and external travel)	8,073	0.788%
USD spent on equipment (phones, tablets, computers, laptops, printers, furniture)	2,790	0.28%
For other costs please specify in the following rows	10,025	0.979%
Total operations	208,409	20.4%
Grand Total	1,023,606	100%

Data source; Finance department of IRAF

The evaluation findings show that 79.6% of the approved budget was spent on the actual planned project interventions, while 20.4% of the approved budget was spent on the operational issues, this looks very efficient in the current emergency context of Afghanistan. Under the program expenditures, a large amount of the project money went to the right holders directly in the shape of Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA), providing livelihood grants of 45,000 Afs in cash, and providing cash for food.

The money spent by the IRAF was the amount IRAF purchased tailoring toolkits that were distributed under the livelihood grant to some of the families that had previous tailoring backgrounds. Looking at the prices and quality it seemed reasonable. The money was used for providing emergency food and nutrition assistance, health care services, livelihoods, multipurpose cash, protection, shelter, water, sanitation, and hygiene support to at-risk populations. The funds have not been used for any other purposes.

CHS 9.2 Application of Do-No-Harm concept and safeguard against PSEA

Do-No-Harm requires humanitarian and development actors to strive to minimize the harm they may do inadvertently by their presence and by providing assistance and services.¹² Indeed, it goes along with the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA). Both of these are very critical when dealing with communities and people in crisis. Therefore, resources should promote Do-No-Harm and PSEA.

The evaluation team found that IRAF is a CHS HQAI-certified agency. As such it is strongly committed to accountability to disaster-affected communities and has a strong suite of policies, code of conduct, and operational processes at the global and country level to ensure and safeguard beneficiaries, staff, and wider stakeholders. Through interactions during the evaluation, it was clear that IRAF staff abide by a staff Code of Conduct and are aware of the 'Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment Policy', 'Dignity at Work Policy', 'People at Risk Policy', 'Whistle Blowing Policy', 'Field Office Complaints Policy'. It was also found out through in-depth interactions that staff, volunteers, and contractors are inducted and regularly sensitized on these policies as are communities, through a variety of IEC resources, to ensure all are aware of IRAF 'zero tolerance' policy to any form of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), sexual harassment, fraud or bribery.

CHS 9.3 Protection of beneficiaries' information/data

Beneficiary information needs to be used where needed only for official purposes, especially in conflict and fragile environments like Afghanistan. IRAF must ensure that the beneficiary data for the rights holders is well protected from abuse. However, this is a tricky activity to achieve. The evaluation team found that collecting rights holders'

¹² https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/2016_ApplyingBPI-DoNoHarm.pdf

data started with informed consent that was signed by the right holders where they agreed to the official use of their information. The information was stored in the databases of IRAF safely. The project evaluation data shows that the beneficiaries' data was only used for official purposes within the IRAF and IRAF.

CHS 9.4 Measures for interventions to be completed on time

Timely implementation of activities is very crucial at all times especially when dealing with communities and people in crises. They are in dire need of assistance at all times, such that delays in the implementation of already planned activities add to their misery. The evaluation found that the project instituted step-by-step protocols for timely implementation of activities, which are summarised as follows;

- **Planning:** Developed a detailed project implementation plan that outlined each activity, its timeline, and the resources required to serve as a roadmap for the project team.
- **Prioritization:** prioritize the interventions based on their urgency and impact so that the most critical interventions are addressed first
- **Resource Allocation:** Ensured that sufficient resources (human, financial, material) are allocated to each activity at the very beginning
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Regularly monitored the progress of each intervention against the project plan to identify any delays or issues early and took corrective actions.
- **Communication:** Maintained open and regular communication within the project team and with stakeholders so that everyone is aware of the project status and any changes to the plan
- **Risk Management:** Identified potential risks that could delay the project and developed contingency plans to address them.
- **Flexibility:** Always flexible and ready to adapt the project plan as needed in an emergency response where circumstances can change rapidly
- **Dedicated team:** A serious and committed team was key

The evaluation commends these as some of the best practices to ensure timely implementation of the project activities but also cautions that they may not be as straightforward. The flexible and adaptive management style is very much required

CHS 9.5 Value for money while delivering project interventions

According to the Department for International Development (DFID), *Value for Money (VfM)* is **the optimal use of resources to achieve the intended outcomes**, measured through the three “E” s (economy, efficiency, and effectiveness) of not-for-profit organizations, which are important for their performance and sustainability. In humanitarian programming, a complementary model is sometimes useful as a basis for VfM assessments, the humanitarian VfM triangle of speed, quality, and cost.

The data shows that the programme was completed on its due date and time that fulfils the first criterion (speed). The quality of the programme interventions was correlated with delivering programme interventions as planned, and the right holder's satisfaction level with the programme interventions. The data shows that programme targeted its planned provinces, and districts. Besides that, the program delivered its planned interventions in the programme Phase-I and programme phase-II. The findings also indicated the right holder's satisfaction level >99%, which shows the programme had maintained its quality. That fulfils the second criterion as well.

On the cost criterion the evaluation found that the project spent 629,453 £ in Phase I and 837,530 £ in Phase II, covering around 11,400 households. This translates to around 128£ / household in the crisis environment. The funds have not been used for any other purposes. Furthermore, the intervention was aligned with the Humanitarian Response Plan of the country and it contributed to meeting the needs identified in that plan. Lastly the evaluation findings also show that 79.6% of the approved budget was spent on the planned program interventions, while 20.4% of the approved budget was spent on operational issues and the programme had not requested for extra cost which makes it easy to conclude that the third criterion for (VfM) Value for Money analysis was also considered.



Picture 5: One of the female FGDs facilitated in Bamyan province of Afghanistan

CHAPTER FOUR: PROJECT CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, the project's main challenges, key lessons learned, conclusions, and recommendations are discussed in full detail.

1. Main challenges of the project:

As per the data collected from the Islamic Relief Afghanistan team (IRAF), the project faced the following main challenges during its implementation.

Table 16: Main challenges faced by the project

Key project challenges	Impact on the project
Ban on women's participation	During the project implementation, a ban on women employees of the project was enforced by the de-facto government of Afghanistan. That was a challenging situation. However, with the great linkage the IRAF team has established with the de-facto government, IRAF was still able to deploy their female employees to the field.
Delays caused by getting MoUs signed by the de-facto government authorities	It was noted the implementing partners invested a substantial amount of time to secure MoUs to allow them to implement activities in the targeted communities. Driven by a lack of adequate trust and insufficient understanding of NGOs' work, the de-facto government generally creates hurdles on minor issues. In addition, the de facto government generally tends to interfere in project budgets and operations. However, these efforts were minimized by IRAF to a great deal.
Difficulty in engaging with some of the officials of the de-facto government	A huge variety can be noted while engaging with the de-facto government authorities on a sub-national level. Some of them are extremely cooperative and supportive, while others are not supportive at all. In this case, the Directorate of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR) officials were found to be very supportive.
Conflicts in the distribution of assistance to the community people due to high demand	The project had a specific scope and limited budget, that could not respond to the vast community needs and demands that exist on the village level. Which caused conflicts in some cases. The conflicts were resolved with the help of community elders engaged in the project implementation.

The remote location of the project targeted population

The best thing about this project is that it covered a few of the most remote areas of the country such as the Saighan and Waras districts of Bamyan, province.

2. Key Lessons learned:

The project evaluation identified the following key lessons learned which could help inform similar projects planned by IRAF in the future:

- **Beneficiary Selection Committees:** In case the project resources are limited and blanket coverage method for selecting project beneficiaries is not possible, then involving beneficiary selection committees can enhance transparency, accountability, and community ownership of the selection process. Conducting vulnerability assessments in collaboration with community leaders helps identify the most vulnerable individuals or households accurately.
- **Fluctuation in USD / GBP to AFN exchange rate:** and the high inflation rate have effects on the spending of the project money and that needs to be considered in the planning phase of the project.
- **Getting an official permission letter for deploying a team to the field:** Without an official introduction letter, government organizations do not cooperate in data provision in Afghanistan.
- **Utilization of multi-tier monitoring system:** To transparently implement emergency response projects such as this a multi-tier monitoring and evaluation is required that can use multiple approaches to verify the data and ensure the quality of the interventions on the field level.

3. Conclusions:

Following are some key conclusions provided under different program components:

A. Program Relevance: The evaluation concludes that the project need was effectively and timely assessed under the multi-sector needs assessment conducted by the IRAF in November 2021. It also concludes that the project was relevant by targeting the communities and people in crisis who were in dire need of support. The target communities needed to be supported both immediately and intermediately so that they could look to the long term future.

B. Programme Effectiveness: The evaluation conclude that the program was effective in achieving its intended objectives, based on the data collected the project has achieved all its immediate and intermediate objectives that is why it is easy to conclude that the project was effective.

C. Programme Efficiency: In this humanitarian programme, a Value for Money (VfM) assessment was conducted that focused on a VfM-triangle of speed, quality and cost. The data shows that the programme was completed on its due date and time that fulfils the first criterion (speed). The quality of the programme interventions was correlated with delivering programme interventions as planned, and the right holder's satisfaction level of the programme interventions. The data shows that programme targeted its planned provinces, and districts. Besides that, the program delivered its planned interventions in the programme Phase-I and programme phase-II. Also the findings indicated the right holder's satisfaction level >99%. That fulfils the second criterion as well. The evaluation findings show that 79.6% of the approved budget was spent on the planned program interventions, while 20.4% of the approved budget was spent on operational issues and the programme had not requested for extra cost which makes it easy to conclude that the programme was efficient.

D. Programme scalability: After seeing the need and demand in the right holders of the targeted areas and seeing the programme has successfully achieved its immediate and intermediate objectives, this evaluation

conclude that the program can be scaled up to reach a larger population, based on the program's success in achieving its intended objectives.

E. Programme Sustainability: Despite the programme was an emergency response and it was designed to respond the immediate needs of the right holders, still the programme had some components that had chance for sustainability. Such as livelihood grants provided to right holders. Out of those that received this grant, 58% have started off-farm businesses (Income Generating Activities e.g. bakery), 39% have started on-farm businesses (e.g. cow, goat, and sheep) while 13% have started doing other things. The evaluation team also believed that the positive impacts of awareness sessions on health and hygiene issues will also last for long. So this evaluation concludes that except for the cash programming component of the project other project components had huge chance of sustainability.

F. IRAF Capabilities: Implementing emergency response project within such a dynamic conditions of Afghanistan requires confidence, flexibility, adoptability, and proper planning. By timely completing this DEC project the Islamic Relief team showed their capability of coping with dynamic environment, and ability to work under pressure, therefor this evaluation concludes that Islamic Relief team has the capability of implementing even larger projects in Afghanistan in the current context.

4. Recommendations:

The evaluation has concluded that the project has delivered on its goal and objectives. As such recommendations are usually hard to come by. However, a few considerations could still be taken on board;

Table 17: Key recommendations

S.N	Observation	Recommendation	Responsible
CHS 1: Humanitarian response is appropriate and relevant			
1	Specially in the second phase of the project some community members were not selected due to funds limitation and these people had complaints of they not being covered under the programme, despite they fulfilled all the vulnerability criteria.	Applying a blanket coverage mechanism of beneficiary selection can reduce conflicts: Therefore, it is recommended that IRAF applies a blanket coverage mechanism in selecting the expected right holders. This will avoid conflicts in the project as well as enable the project team to complete their milestones on time. Because there is huge homogeneity in terms of the economic situation of community members living in the villages in southern Afghanistan.	IRW / IRAF
2	The evaluation team observed that some healthy young men also benefited from the MPCA, and food packages,	Instead of unconditional cash transfer, cash for work will help reduce dependency: however, the evaluation team believes that it will cause dependency of these young people on humanitarian aid. To avoid such condition, it is recommended to apply cash for work rather than unconditional cash transfer to the young, and health community members.	IRW / IRAF
3	In the current context everything is changing in Afghanistan, which can negatively affect the project deadlines and achievements if the project design does not allow some level of flexibility.	Ensuring flexibility in project design to accommodate changing circumstances: Despite the programme had some flexibility in reprogramming of funds, such as allocating 95,000 GBP to earth quick victims in Hirat province, still in the current context Afghanistan is going through multiple shocks and waves, and nothing is guaranteed, therefore to avoid delays programme design should have some flexibility to accommodate minor changes during the programme implementation.	IRW
CHS 2: Humanitarian response is effective and timely			
4	Despite the programme had some level of integrity, still a next level of programming is required for these right holders.	Adopting Nexus Approach, which is a method for dealing with sustainable development challenges in an integrated manner considering multiple variables and it uses a long-term approach to respond to the protracted humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.	

5	The project had a specific budget and timeline and both of them have been completed, however looking at the ground needs, and ability of IRAF to successfully implement a next phase of the project, exiting does not seem to be a good option by the right holders.	Scaling up rather than phasing out: Building on the above, looking at how successful the project has been implemented, it would be important to come up with a scaling-up strategy rather than an exit strategy. The new beneficiaries would be encouraged by IRAF staff for peer learning from those that have been in this Phase II	IRW / IRAF
6	While livelihoods are usually the people's own choice, sometimes that makes things too wide open such that market linkage becomes a problem, and they will fail to produce in bulk and utilize economies of scale.	Clustering the enterprises to produce economies of scale: It is recommended that livelihoods are clustered and people form groups to enable the enterprises to grow to a bigger scale.	IRAF
7	Given the magnitude of the crisis in Afghanistan, and the three big provinces that were targeted, the scope of the project was very narrow. For example, only 1000 households for Cash for Livelihoods is on the lower side.	Project with wide scope to be implemented: Therefore, it is recommended that IRAF design a specific programme only focused on livelihood strengthening with wide scope and huge coverage, so that IRAF gets tangible results.	IRAF
8	Based on the UN reports around 28 million ¹³ people (2/3) of the Afghan population is struggling with basic food at the moment.	Advocacy: It is recommended that IRAF advocate for the rights of the Afghan population that is affected by multiple crises for adequate funding and support for humanitarian interventions in this country.	IRW
9	This project created so many small businesses under the livelihood component of this project, that will require support in terms of coaching, mentoring, and on-the-job training for marketing their products and getting high benefits from their small business.	Market linkages of the SMES: In case the programme has a next phase, it is recommended that these created small business are supported in terms of coaching, mentoring and on the job training sessions, that will help them in increment of their profitability, productivity and employability.	IRAF
CHS 3: Humanitarian response strengthens local capacities and avoids negative effects:			
10	The programme could engage volunteer right holders in the, monitoring of the programme interventions on the community level, that could help the programme without spending any addition cost.	Establishment of community-based accountability mechanisms: At the moment the program interventions are only monitored by the IRAF team, however establishment of Community Participatory Monitoring (CPM) teams will help in sustainable community-led monitoring of the project.	IRAF
11	The de-facto government officials are not familiar on how to deal with the humanitarian projects and productively engage with humanitarian emergencies.	Initiate some capacity development initiatives for the de-facto government officials: The future projects should initiate some capacity development interventions in the shape of coaching, mentoring, on job training sessions for the de-facto government	IRAF

¹³ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/afghanistan>

		authorities so that they understand the urgency of humanitarian response projects.	
12	IRAF has tried its best to create and strengthen local knowledge through regular information sharing and engaging some of the community elders in some critical phases of the programme management.	Strengthening capacities of local structures: For sustainability purposes, the IRAF needs to strengthen the capacities of local structures to enable them to handle project initiatives once it is completely phased out. The current capacity strengthening was much on delivering activities while the recommended one is for handling initiatives in the absence of project staff	IRAF
CHS 4: Humanitarian response is based on communication, participation, and feedback			
13	Islamic Relief Afghanistan has its method for collecting community feedback, they use multiple methods, including a hotline number, face-to-face meetings and so on. The evaluation explored that 39% of the beneficiaries had used the available communication and feedback mechanisms under the project. The emphasis was noted on the high usage of face-to-face interaction methods (78%) in feedback and communication under the project. Second to that was the use of the hotline, where 20% of the beneficiaries were able to give their feedback.	Community Engagement: Therefore it is recommended that IRAF senior management such as provincial managers, program managers, and country directors increase their interaction with the right holders and collect their feedback in face-to-face meetings.	IRAF
14	Sometimes de-facto government authorities also have some constructive feedback for humanitarian project design, knowing the sensitivity of donors in this regard it is not bed to get their input that is practical on the humanitarian project design.	Engagement of de-facto government authorities in the project design can help: To ensure smooth engagement with the de-facto government it is recommended that IRAF involve de-facto government authorities in the design phase of similar projects to manage their expectations and secure their support during project implementation. It is essential to navigate donor sensitivities related to engaging the de facto government.	IRAF
CHS 5: Complaints are welcomed and addressed			
15	Despite the IRAF has a strong complaints response mechanism, a dedicated focal point and a specific committee that reviews and manages the whole process still the number of complaints received by the IRAF under this two-year project looks much less considering the Afghan context.	Complaints Handling: It is recommended that IRAF conducts a thorough bottleneck assessment of the whole IRAF complaints response mechanism process, identify gaps if any, and takes corrective action.	IRAF

CHS 6: Humanitarian response is coordinated and complementary			
16	Based on the evaluation observations and findings it is clear that IRAF has coordinated the project interventions in all major coordination forums, and there are several practical on-the-ground challenges, that make effective coordination and synergies building a little difficult, but IRAF has not been able to build synergies and share resources with any of the similar projects working in the same province.	Therefore, the evaluation team believes that synergy building is possible if the project has a clear plan and makes efforts in this regard. It is recommended that the IRAF programme management team map similar projects in the targeted areas and identify opportunities of synergies creation and sharing resources, this will increase efficiency and value for money.	IRAF senior management
CHS 7: Humanitarian actors continuously learn and improve			
17	Despite IRAF had conducted lessons learned workshop at the end of this DEC project, and IRAF may utilize the key lessons learned in the next programme, but IRAF did not have a learning log and did not document their lessons learned on regular basis.	Lessons learned documentation, & utilization for future programming: It is recommended that IRAF keep a learning log, document lessons learned on a regular basis. IRAF needs to utilize the lessons learned in the same programme and the new programmes in the future.	IRAF
18	IRAF had not conducted any baseline survey for this DEC project and it was so difficult to measure the impacts of the programme by the consulting company.	IRAF to conduct a proper baseline survey at the beginning of the project: To be able to effectively measure programme impacts, IRAF needs to conduct a specific baseline study in the beginning of each project and benchmark every indicator.	IRAF
19	Despite all the great work done by the project MEAL team in terms of monitoring the project interventions, still during the two-year DEC project, the MEAL team was able to conduct only 28 surprise monitoring visits from three provinces, which makes it almost 9 visits per province in two years that makes it 5 visits in 12 months, and 1 visit in 2.5 months, which is considered very limited monitoring visits. This is due to a limited number of IRAF / MEAL team members that are responsible for other projects too, cannot be expected to perform so many surprise monitoring visits to the different stages of the project implementation.	Engagement of third party in project monitoring: Therefore, it is recommended that third-party monitoring companies be actively engaged in monitoring the project interventions. This will increase accountability, transparency, and quality of the interventions.	IRW / IRAF
CHS 8: Staff are supported to do their job effectively and are treated fairly and equitably			
20	Despite some ad-hoc capacity development initiatives in the form of coaching, mentoring, and on-the-job training were initiated by the IRAF team, still, no formal organization	IRAF team Capacity Development: It is recommended that the Human Resources (HR) team of IRAF conduct yearly capacity needs assessment of the IRAF team members, plan and budget capacity	HR team of IRAF

	capacity needs assessment was conducted for the DEC team of IRAF to outline their capacity needs, and no capacity development plan was developed and no any official internal or external training workshop was conducted to the IRAF / DEC team.	development interventions for IRAF team and this way help the IRAF team in their career development.	
CHS 9: Resources are managed and used responsibly for their intended purpose			
21	Operating in a community affected by the crisis, the project could recruit volunteers and minimize costs. The volunteers would be community members and can only be paid at a minimum, but would largely contribute to project implementation, especially during the distribution of food items. The volunteers can be recalled at any time whenever they are needed.	Utilizations of community-based volunteers for efficient utilization of funds: It is recommended that the HR team of IRAF creates an annex to their HR policy on recruiting, training, and utilization of community-based volunteers for efficient project implementation.	IRAF

Picture 6: Balkh data collection team lead observing the dairy products produced by the project beneficiary.



CHAPTER FIVE: SUCCESS STORIES

Chapter five is focused on the case studies of some of the right holders supported under the project:

Success Story 1:

Continues hard work pays off

In the beautiful valley of Bamyan, Afghanistan, there lived a determined and resilient man named Ali Hassan. Despite facing numerous challenges, Ali Hassan's spirit remained unbroken, and his unwavering determination to provide livelihood to his family led him on a path of success with the support of Islamic Relief Afghanistan.

Ali Hassan was chosen as one of the beneficiaries of the food packages he received under Phase 1 of this project. He received a generous package comprising 100 kilograms of flour, 5 liters of oil, 8 kilograms of split peas, and 1kg salt, which would serve as crucial food assistance for his family. This support arrived at a time when Ali Hassan's family faced great adversity due to unexpected circumstances.

Armed with hope and a desire to change his family's circumstances, Ali Hassan seized this opportunity to transform their lives. He recognized the potential impact of this assistance and committed himself to making the most of it. Instead of viewing it simply as a short-term relief, he saw it as a stepping stone towards a brighter future.

Ali Hassan's first step was to devise a plan. With the flour, oil, and split peas, he sought to create a sustainable and profitable venture that could support his family's needs beyond the immediate crisis. His entrepreneurial spirit kicked into high gear as he researched and explored various options.

Considering the local market demands, Ali Hassan decided to use the flour to start a small bakery business. He skilfully transformed the flour into delicious bread that quickly gained popularity in his community. Ali Hassan's dedication was evident as he woke up early each day, kneading dough, baking fresh bread, and delivering his scrumptious creations to local shops, restaurants, and households.

The news about Ali Hassan's bakery spread, and Ali Hassan's bakery became a hub of activity, attracting customers from near and far. The aroma of his freshly baked goods filled the air, symbolizing not only nourishment but also the sweet scent of success. With his profits, Ali Hassan expanded his business, purchasing more equipment and employing individuals from the community, creating a positive ripple effect by generating employment opportunities for others in need.

As time went on, Ali Hassan's business flourished and, with his hope for a better future. He invested a portion of his earnings into making his bakery bigger than it was, thereby ensuring a stable supply of delicious bread for his family and further diversifying his income. Additionally, Ali Hassan extended his gratitude to Islamic



Picture 7: Ali Hassan in his new Bakery



Relief by actively volunteering to help distribute aid to others in need, comprehending the value of community support and solidarity.

Ali Hassan's success story became an inspiration within the outskirts of Bamyān. His perseverance, coupled with the support he received from Islamic Relief, showcased the potential that lies within individuals when given a lifeline during challenging times. This transformative journey empowered not only Ali Hassan but also his entire community, proving that even the smallest acts of assistance can sow seeds of change and pave the way for success.

As Ali Hassan looks back on his journey, he takes great pride in how far he has come. From receiving food assistance to becoming a successful entrepreneur and a beacon of hope for others, his story serves as a testament to the resilience and indomitable spirit of the people of Bamyān, Afghanistan.

Success Story 2:

Where there is movement, there is a blessing

The weather was cold and the soft rain started caressing our heads and faces. We hurriedly and enthusiastically walked towards a person who was the father of five children and the breadwinner of his house. Yes, he was 44 years old and his name is Abdul Khaliq he is married and has (3 daughters and 2 sons) he is one of the beneficiaries of livelihood grants under the DEC-funded Food Security, Livelihoods, and WASH response for vulnerable households in Kabul, Balkh and Bamyan provinces” Project of Islamic Relief Afghanistan (IRAF).

Said Abdul Khaliq is professionally trained under his parents in dairy farming before the project support he had a cow and he sold the milk and yogurt for 4000 Afs per month this amount was not enough for a 7-person family since he had no other income source but when he received 45,000 Afs under the project, he bought another cow and with the second cow his income has become doubled by selling the milk and yogurt. In addition to that he dries up the cow manure and uses it for cooking and heating in his family. He was lucky that recently one of his cows gave birth to a heifer calf (female baby cow) and he was so happy with this.

He said that with an increase in their income, he can fulfil his family expenses and able to buy stationery for his children who are studying in a nearby public school. He further explained that besides selling milk and yogurt we use them in our family as well, when we do not have anything to cook we simply eat yogurt with bread.

With a smile, he said, *“I always advise at home and for my neighbours to use milk and yogurt that are rich in vitamin D, so that they don’t end up in Pakistan due to bone pain, it is also a good marketing for me and I just want to say that Allah loves movers and blesses them”*.

Picture 8: Sayed Abdul Khaliq with his cow that he bought with the project support



Success Story 3:

Project livelihood grant has caused food security and sustainable employment for Nazi

Afghan women are examples of zeal, courage, tolerance, and flexibility. This is the story of a woman whose name is Nazi, she is 45 years old mother of two sons (one 20 years old and the second 14 years old). She lost her husband six years ago, and she joined her brother's family and started living there with them. Nazi mentioned: when I sat on the table and took a bite of bread, it was very hard to finish. I was saying to myself when these hard days will end. Everyone advised me to send my eldest son to Iran to work there, I borrowed money and sent him illegally to Iran, but he is still working to get rid of the smuggler's money and debt.

"Since I lived in poverty, and miseries and this fact was known to everyone in our village, my neighbours introduced me to the survey team of Islamic Relief that came to my home." The survey team asked some questions and completed their assessment and observations and at the end she was ranked as eligible to the livelihood grant under the project. She received 45,000 AFs from the project after a while. Since she had prior experience of cattle rearing and carpet weaving. She bought a cow for 35,000 AFs and purchased carpet weaving materials for 10000 AFs. She sells the cow milk to the local dairy shops and earn money on daily basis, while the second source of her family income is the carpet that she weaves in every 10 days and her brother helps her sell it in the carpet Bazar in Balkh province. With both sources of income, she earns up to 10,000 AFs in a month. She does not only fulfil her family needs but also pay the course fee of her son and buy him stationary.

She said, it is such a sweet feeling when a woman is financially self-reliant and she mentioned that most *Afghan women have skills, it is enough for someone to hold their hand (financially supporting them) and encourage them to stand on their own feet.*

Picture 9: Nazi with her cow that was purchased with the livelihood grant of the project



Picture 10: Nazi with her carpet weaving instrument and carpet weaving materials purchased by the project help



Success Story 4:

Self-reliance comes with investment, effort, and commitment

Fatima is a prosperous and strong woman who lives in Bamyan, Afghanistan, once she had numerous challenges in her life. Her family had so many economic problems and she was struggling with her family income and necessities.

Fatima was fortunate enough to be a recipient of generous food assistance from Islamic Relief, which included 100 kg of flour, 5 liters of oil, 8 kg of split peas, and 1 kg of salt. Additionally, she was also provided with a hygiene kit consisting of essential items such as 7 handwashing soaps, 7 clothes washing soaps, 1 bucket, 4 towels, and 2 meters of cloth.

Recognizing the need for sustainable livelihood and availability of complete food package for two months. Fatima came up with a brilliant plan she spent her family income (money) that was supposed to be spent on food items Fatima made a strategic investment to sustain her income.

Inspired by her eagerness to change her circumstances, Fatima used the funds to purchase carpet weaving materials. With the help of these materials, she embarked on a new journey of creating beautifully hand-woven carpets. Fatima's dedication and craftsmanship soon turned her humble home into a small-scale carpet-weaving business. As days turned into months, her carpets gained recognition within and beyond her community. News of Fatima's exquisite textile products spread far and wide, attracting customers from neighbouring Bazar. With her newfound success, Fatima was able to empower herself financially and provide income for her family. The income generated from her thriving carpet business not only improved her standard of living but also allowed her to support her children's education and invest in their future.

Fatima's success story represents the transformative power of humanitarian aid and a strong determination to overcome adversity. She thanks Islamic Relief Afghanistan for the support provided to her. Her story is an inspiration to her community, reminding them that resilience and resourcefulness can lead to a brighter future.

In the end, Fatima's dedication, coupled with the assistance she received, not only uplifted her own life but also inspired others to believe in their potential. and reflects the positive impact that humanitarian organizations and their compassionate efforts can have on individuals and communities.



Picture 11: Fatima with her carpet weaving instrument



Success Story 5:

Islamic Relief helped Ms. Sitara in expansion of her home business

"Mrs. Setarah, is 19 years old, she is a resident of Sayed Baba village in Sayghan, district of Bamyan province. Since 2016, she has been running a shop with the collaboration of her family, providing essential necessities to the local people, especially women. Those who come to Setareh's shop for purchases are delighted to see a woman shopkeeper.

After the government transition in 2016, Mrs. Setareh closed her shop for a long period, fearing that the Islamic Emirate might hinder her work, putting her and her family's lives at risk. During these two years, her family spent all her capital with no other resources to bring income. She was compile to do something and generate income, therefore she decided to reopen her shop, but due to the lack of sufficient funds and capital, she struggled with purchasing materials until the Islamic Relief Organization comes forward and pays her.

The Islamic Relief Afghanistan granted her an amount of 42,000 Afghanis to create employment opportunity for her and generate income for her family. She purchased many items for her shop and now, Mrs. Setareh is very happy. With the money received from the Islamic Relief Organization, she managed to activate her shop, expand her business and continue her tailoring business on the side as well.

She is very satisfied with her work as a shopkeeper and tailor, expressing a sense of happiness. 'Thank God for this money; it saved my family from destitution and hunger.' She expresses gratitude to the organization for the assistance and is eager for their collaboration in acquiring new skills."

Picture 12: Sitara with one of her customers







Picture 13: One of the meetings arranged by IRAF with the community while introducing the evaluation team

CHAPTER SIX: ANNEXES

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