

World Vision Australia

Senate Inquiry into Australia's Engagement in Afghanistan Questions on Notice

In Hearing

1. Can we supplied any negotiated documents that govern our operations with the Taliban

For WV's specific operations in Herat, Badghis, Faryab and Ghor, we have oral confirmation of permission to operate from the de facto authorities. We have requested instructions from the de facto authorities to be in writing so we can refer to them and to hold account to the instructions set out, for those instances where interpretations may differ between ministries and individuals representing the de facto authorities.

The Governor of Badghis Province has provided written assurance of staff safety in Badghis.

There is a guidelines document from the Ministry of Economy that has been signed by the Acting president for General Presidency of the Red Crescent of Afghanistan. As titled, the document is a monitoring and control plan of NGOS activities for distribution of urgent humanitarian assistance food stuffs and non-food stuffs' (January 2022).

World Vision recommends that Governments establish an ongoing dialogue with the Taliban leadership in Afghanistan to protect the most vulnerable and for all humanitarian responders to have freedom to deliver assistance without threats or violence. Crucially, such dialogue must ensure the safety of female staff, especially now since there is no longer a Ministry that is purposed to represent the needs of women and girls. The employ of women is not just a right, but their roles within society is imperative for any response plan to meet the needs of all Afghans, including girls, mothers and pregnant women who may be invisible otherwise.

2. Have we examples of people being fleeced of their savings for fake visas?

We do not have any such cases from our team or reported from our team.

3. What are WVAFG's contingency plans for staff who are threatened

WV's course of action includes the immediate suspension of activities and the hibernation of staff within the province in which the threat was received or directed. The hibernation of staff refers to stop orders of work and mobility of staff, prompting them to remain home and/or within the WV compound. The WV compound in any province is equipped with basic supplies, some dorm facilitates appropriate for men and women, emergency radio systems and a generator.

Following the suspension of activities, WV immediately initiates discussions with the concerned authorities at the provincial level in order to arrive at a solution in order to restart work. WV will not resume operations unless a solution is achieved and assurances for staff safety are received.

Out of Hearing

1. On 11 January 2022, UN agencies launched the Humanitarian Response Plan for Afghanistan (HRP) and Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP). What do you expect the impact of these plans will be?

Martin Griffith in his opening statement of the Humanitarian Response Plan said, that humanitarian assistance is not enough, but an essential first step. Now, the international community should now pay attention to the economy, attention to capacity, attention to the stabilization of basic services.

At this stage, we cannot prevent the crisis from happening, but we can lessen the impact on children, women and men. These plans seek to alleviate suffering, but by themselves will not be able to solve underlying factors that have kept critical service sectors such as Health and Education from being locally sustained. The reliance on Humanitarian agencies to keep these vital sectors functioning will remain, with our sights needing to be set on longer term strategies that can lessen this reliance. That said, the HRP and RRP serve a basis to leverage longer term strategies, but only it is initially success at laying the foundations.

The impact of the HRP and RRP will be determined by whether the liquidity crisis is resolved. Without doing so, the delivery of the HRP, as well as the ability for local economies to be leveraged by the HRP will be limited. According to the ILO, 500,000 Afghans have lost their jobs since the takeover by the Taliban in August 2021. The Response Plans must contribute to favourable conditions for local economies, especially where prolonged high levels of youth unemployment further risks worsening the security outlook for other country, in which Armed Opposition Groups such as The Haqqani Network and Isis-K have emerged as belligerents against the de facto authorities.

The liquidity crisis will also affect how meaningful pledges are in relation to equipping the HRP and the RRP with the necessary funds to function. Pledged funds, even those by the Australian government, risk being 'left at the door' of the humanitarian crisis. The hawala system that is currently being utilised humanitarian agencies and the UN is both expensive and not suitable for scaling up – a key requirement for the HRP and RRP to have real impact.

If the liquidity crisis is not addressed, there is a risk that an imbalance of funding between the HRP and RRP will result, with the latter (not subject to Afghanistan's internal banking limitations) will be a default for pledged funds. In this scenario, funds may be channelled to neighbouring countries where it is easier to programme, at the expense of concentrating vital resources within Afghanistan where it is most needed.

World Vision urges the Government of Australia to work with like-minded donors and Humanitarian agencies to lead a comprehensive analysis into the economic and liquidity crisis. The analysis must seek to identify solutions to ensure the cash flows into the country can adequately meet the growing needs of the Afghan people and their fledgling economy.

2. With a ‘pledging conference’ expected in March 2022 to implement these plans, what should Australia’s funding contribution be?

As mentioned above, pledges from the international community will only be effective where the internal liquidity crisis is addressed, so that pledged amounts can be most effectively applied to life-saving initiatives carried out by Humanitarian agencies.

To avert perpetuating the crisis in Afghanistan, Donors, like Australia need to respond and commit funding to the plans. According to the OCHA Financial Tracking Service¹ reports, only USD 420m (AUD 587m) has been received in funding. With the United States and the United Kingdom being the largest donors. Australia is yet to contribute to the response plan.

World Vision reiterates our ask for 100 million AUD per annum, in additional and new funding with at least 30 million being set aside to target food insecurity that threatens the lives of approximately 24million Afghans.

World Vision urges the Australian Government to use its voice within the pledging conference to encourage the World Bank to reallocate and transfer Trust Funds budgeted to Afghanistan to prevent critical sectors from collapsing.

3. What are your views on how Australia’s \$65 million funding in immediate humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan, announced in September 2021, is being delivered? What is this package delivering on the ground?

It is our understanding that only A\$22.5m has been committed out of the A\$65m promised for this fiscal year. All funds have been channelled via UN agencies. DFAT has also confirmed that they will disperse around A\$20m to support refugees in regional and neighbouring countries.

World Vision’s visibility of what is being financially delivered via the UN is limited by the way in which the funds are being channelled by the UN. Funding committed to the UN is usually trickled down to individual implementing agencies, like World Vision, to deliver and run programs. The main visibility of UN funds between humanitarian agencies is achieved via the in-country coordination clusters where budgetary information is discussed and where some progress reporting takes place by agencies represented within the clusters. However, a detailed financial view of how funds are applied once they are disbursed is only shared with the UN, and not across agencies.

World Vision is currently co-lead on the education and child protection sub clusters of the Western region in Afghanistan and participate in all other clusters at the national level (WASH, Health, protection, food security, coordination for food distributions and nutrition).

¹ <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/1100/summary>

World Vision is one WFP's largest partners and we are carrying out food distributions in 2 provinces: Ghor and Badghis. In addition, World Vision implements Health, Nutrition, WASH and Education projects funded by UN.

4. ACFID and World Vision Australia both called in their initial submissions for Australia to increase the overall quantum of its humanitarian assistance funding to Afghanistan, beyond the \$100 million over four years announced in September 2021. In your view, what should Australia be contributing to the international humanitarian effort for Afghanistan?

With a 30% increase in humanitarian needs, current funding levels are not commensurate with the scale of the challenge. Australia can and should do more. Australia did not make an additional funding commitment for Afghanistan at the launch of the updated Humanitarian Response Plan 2022 on January 11. We ask the Australian Government to step up its funding to reflect the staggering increase of humanitarian needs in the country.

World Vision reiterates our ask for 100 million AUD per annum, with at least 30 million being set aside to target food insecurity that threatens the lives of approximately 24million Afghans.

Beyond funding, the Australian Government plays a critical role in engaging the de facto authorities as part of an international coalition of like-minded governments. It is imperative that Governments share the burden, currently consigned to the UN and the IFRC, to influence how Humanitarian agencies are able to operate within Afghanistan, and to advocate for women, girls and female staff working to assist those in need.

5. The Afghan Australian Development Association's supplementary submission reiterates its call for the Australian Government to develop a new funding stream focused on longer-term development assistance in Afghanistan (in addition to existing funding which focuses on immediate humanitarian assistance). What are your views on this issue?

World Vision emphasises the need for funding of long-term initiatives to be made available and secured, but without losing focus on the immediate needs of the Afghan people.

World Vision does not recommend separating out long-term funds from Humanitarian funds at this stage. Doing so neglects the unique needs of fragile contexts like Afghanistan, and the need for flexible funding that can pivot between life-saving and longer-term initiatives in concert with the changing needs of the operating environment. World Vision's global strategy seeks to reach the most vulnerable children in the world and requires us to operate in the world's most fragile contexts. World Vision's Fragile Context Programming Approach - FCPA

has been refined for the past 15 years, incorporating lessons from our extensive work in places like Somalia, DRC and Afghanistan. As the FCPA shows, the most appropriate way to move forward in this context, and to ensure donor funds are as effective as possible, is for those funds to be applied in a way that can dial up life-saving efforts when needed, and to then dial these down when conditions are favourable, in order to focus on sustainable and disaster prepared livelihoods for the future.

In addition, applying parameters that cut off life-saving activities from longer term programs, create unnecessary silos between short and long-term strategies and overlooks the importance of funding the continuum of the development process – beyond relief to sustainable recovery. At present, limitations of the OLFAC license, which allows funding only for life-saving activities, excludes formal education institutions and thereby prevents Humanitarian agencies from re-establishing schools or classrooms within a sector that has historically relied on Humanitarian agencies to do so.

Afghanistan is a highly disaster-prone country, where long-term engagement is needed to mitigate disasters due to extreme weather conditions and a legacy of erosion and poor soil health. Efforts by humanitarian agencies must promote climate smart agriculture and concentrate efforts on natural resource management. World Vision's extensive experience in Afghanistan, firmly suggests that some of the most effective initiatives are those that focus on livelihoods, and how these can make the transition from disaster relief to sustainable, disaster prepared states of recovery. The operating space requires funding that is not tied to limiting definitions of what is 'life-saving' and what would constitute 'long term development initiatives' – doing so prevents the connections between the two phases of development from being elevated and funded adequately.

6. What are your views on the settlement and support services being offered to Afghan evacuees who have recently arrived in Australia?

As an internationally focused organisation, World Vision Australia does not have a view on the settlement and support services being offered to Afghan evacuees.