

Introduction and Comparison

As part of its efforts to learn and adapt throughout the Afghanistan Emergency Appeal, DEC commissioned a two-part Community Perception Survey (CPS) to **better understand affected people's perceptions** of the humanitarian action led by DEC and its members and to inform the rapidly evolving humanitarian response. The CPS was a sub-set of a larger project that aims to strengthen accountability to crisis affected communities in Afghanistan where DEC members are implementing humanitarian actions.

This report provides a brief **overview of key perceptions** drawn from the results of a second CPS conducted between October – November 2023.

Survey findings indicate that the **current aid programming is perceived positively** by most participants, however, the need far outweighs the available resources. There is a consensus among community perceptions for a **re-evaluation of the effectiveness and reach of humanitarian aid** to ensure it meets the basic needs of the Afghan population.

The following is a summary comparing the first community perception survey conducted in mid-2022 with the most recent, follow-up survey conducted in late 2023.

Priority Needs and Appropriateness of Aid

There continues to be a significant perception among communities that the **amount, type, and frequency of assistance provided is insufficient** to meet the needs and rising costs in Afghanistan. While food security and other basic needs are still in high levels of need, community perceptions have shifted to strongly prefer more **sustainable solutions to address widespread unemployment** and support households with **income generating activities**. While direct provision of a variety of assistance such as food and clothing were highlighted in the last survey, a growing consensus among communities is that **cash is the best solution**. Current strategies are not sufficient to empower people. People's perceptions are that more investment in longer term strategies is critical.

Selection, Distribution, Accessibility

The first CPS highlighted perceived inconsistencies and potential corruption in distribution, while the second set suggests a **generally fair and needs-based distribution process**. This was attributed to more thorough surveying of the local population by aid agencies and continued involvement of community leaders to help identify households most in need of support.

Information sharing has improved. Local leaders and the Imam Masjid still play a vital role in identifying eligible people for receiving aid.

People with disabilities still have difficulty receiving aid due to **inaccessibility of distribution** of aid. For example, people with physical impairments report that they experience the same requirements as able-bodied community members without accommodations. Due to significantly increased **restrictions on the mobility of and opportunities for women and girls** since the previous survey, women and especially women-headed household are experiencing compounded struggles especially in terms of participation and accessing employment and information.

Community leaders **continue to influence the distribution of assistance** across different provinces, which is perceived as both ensuring fair distribution in some cases, while in some cases it is perceived as leading to bias. The contrasting views on fairness and distribution underscore a need for increased transparency and accountability in the aid distribution process. These contrasting perspectives highlight the complexity of the situation on the ground, emphasizing the need for enhanced transparency, accountability, and perhaps a re-evaluation of the distribution mechanisms to ensure that aid reaches its intended recipients fairly and effectively.

Feedback and Safety

Both CPS findings report a shared consensus on safety and respect with community recipients continuing to feel safe and respected in their interactions with humanitarian staff. Community members have positive perception on the consideration of their feedback but ask for more frequent and extensive aid.

As in the previous perception survey, responses indicate that community members continue to **lack awareness of the feedback mechanism and its purpose**. Feedback is still associated with ‘complaints’ and there is confusion about how to interact with the process.

The following statistics illustrate key perceptions, most of which have improved between surveys:

Question	Perception survey 1	Perception survey 2
<p>Do people have information they need to access humanitarian assistance?</p> <p style="color: red;">Improved</p>	<p>27% - NO</p> <p>73% - YES</p>	<p>14% - NO</p> <p>86% - YES</p>
<p>Community members feel informed about the assistance available to them.</p> <p style="color: red;">Same</p>	<p>87% - YES</p> <p>13% - NO</p>	<p>85% - YES</p> <p>5% - NO</p>

DEC Afghanistan Response: Accountability to Affected Populations

<p>Community members feel that community leaders share key information on humanitarian activities with them.</p> <p>Slight improvement</p>	<p>92% - YES</p> <p>8% - NO</p>	<p>93% - YES</p> <p>7% - NO</p>
<p>Perceptions of community members on how respectfully staff from humanitarian organisations treat them.</p> <p>Improved</p>	<p>Very Bad 0.8% Bad 2%</p> <p>Fair 2.2% Good 21%</p> <p>Very Good 73%</p>	<p>Very Bad 0% Bad 0%</p> <p>Fair 2.5% Good 29.5%</p> <p>Very Good 68%</p>
<p>Provided feedback to a humanitarian organization.</p> <p>Worsened</p>	<p>64% - YES</p> <p>36% - NO</p>	<p>54% - YES</p> <p>46% - NO</p>
<p>Perception of community members on how well their feedback was considered.</p> <p>Improved</p>	<p>Very Bad 7% Bad 6%</p> <p>Fair 23% Good 23%</p> <p>Very Good 41%</p>	<p>Very Bad 0% Bad 1%</p> <p>Fair 11% Good 51%</p> <p>Very Good 37%</p>
<p>The level of confidentiality of the feedback mechanism by the community members.</p> <p>Slight improvement</p>	<p>Very Bad 1.3% Bad 5.8%</p> <p>Fair 3.9%. Good 42%</p> <p>Very Good 47%</p>	<p>Very Bad 0% Bad 0%</p> <p>Fair 14% Good 46%</p> <p>Very Good 39%</p>

Introduction

Between September 2023 – November 2023, Rooted Impact worked with Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) member agencies and its Afghanistan-based research firm, BEID Consulting Services, to develop and conduct a customised community perception survey (CPS) focused on accountability to affected populations (AAP) in **three provinces**: Ghor; Helmand; and Nangahar. An initial CPS that was conducted in September 2022 involved four provinces¹. However, due to a series of earthquakes during October 2023 which resulted in a large-scale emergency in Herat province², a decision was made not to pursue data collection in Herat to mitigate further burden on already overwhelmed communities and DEC members responding to this disaster.

The CPS process was designed in support of DEC and its members' objectives to focus on and **strengthen inclusion and accountability** to affected communities during the implementation of the Afghanistan Crisis Appeal. The overall goal of the survey was to **better understand affected people's perceptions** of the humanitarian action led by DEC members and to inform the rapidly evolving humanitarian response. Rooted Impact, with the support of BEID and DEC members **engaged local actors and communities** throughout the process to centre their voices and priorities in the DEC Afghanistan response.

Survey findings indicate that the **current aid programming is perceived positively** by most participants, however, the need far outweighs the available resources. This report provides a brief **overview of key perceptions** drawn from the survey results to support DEC learning.

Approach and Methodology

In this study, participant cooperation was positive, as enumerators reported ease in information gathering across genders, with few challenges. A primary difficulty emerged in regions with lower education levels, where participants struggled with understanding and articulating responses, highlighting the need for communication strategies tailored to different educational backgrounds. In some instances of data collection, it was observed that there was a tendency for participants to mirror initial responses, indicating a challenge in eliciting diverse viewpoints. Despite these issues, participants were eager and confident in contributing, underscoring the importance of an environment that fosters open and honest dialogue.

The survey methodology was based on the sampling of DEC member beneficiaries, similarly to the first perception survey. At the same time the official permissions were obtained from the ministry or local government on data collection from beneficiaries. In some provinces, because of the enhanced restrictions towards the participation of women in any activities, focus groups

¹ Herat; Ghor; Helmand; and Nangahar

² <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/15/afghanistans-herat-province-hit-by-third-earthquake-in-nearly-a-week>

DEC Afghanistan Response: Accountability to Affected Populations

discussions (FGD) were not possible and researchers found solution through conducting individual phone interviews and managed to talk to the respective community members. Throughout the data collection process RI and BEID have ensured that equal access and respective environment was created for people with disabilities as well as women.

In the second phase of the CPS, researchers employed FGDs, Household (HH) interviews, and Key Informant Interviews (KII) with community leaders. The survey was delivered across 12 FGDs, 11 HHs, and 12 KIIs. Community leaders were prioritized for KIIs due to their important roles in Afghanistan's context as influential elders and Mulas. These individuals are traditionally involved in the selection process of community recipients for humanitarian assistance. The survey was conducted using open-ended questionnaires.

The table and map below provide an overview of the geographic areas included in this survey.

AAP Community Perception Survey Target Provinces and Districts

Province	District	Sample
Ghor	Firuzkoh (Known as Chaghcharan), Lal, Shahrak, Tiwara 1, Pasaband, Saghar, Dawlatyar, Marghab	8 FGD 10 HH interviews 8 KIIs
Helmand	Sangin, Musa Qala, Kajaki, Nawzad	15 FGD 5 HH interviews
Nangahar	Chaparhar, Lalpoor, Goshtain, Surkh Rud	4 FGD 4 HH interviews 4 KII

Of the 110 participants across FGDs and 19 HH interviews, participants for this survey were **selected from communities that received support from the DEC crisis appeal**. Most participants that were selected (98%) confirmed that they had received aid, including cash, cash for work and food items. Most participants have been **receiving aid for 4-7 months**. There was a small number of interviewees in Ghor province who began receiving aid as long as two years ago, while the remainder have only received aid 1-2 times.

Data collectors were **largely successful in meeting goals for inclusion** of priority populations. Women represented 51% of all participants. Goals were met for IDPs, older people, and women-headed households. Despite utilising information provided by DEC members and additional outreach efforts, there were challenges meeting the inclusion goals for participation of people with disabilities, mothers/caregivers of malnourished children, and pregnant/lactating women. 15 individuals were not aid recipients. This is primarily due to the **desire to gain perspectives on inclusion / exclusion from those** who have historically been excluded from receiving aid, such as those with sensory impairments.

Limitations

Access to / by Women and Girls

In Afghanistan, women and girls are continuously being kept out of public spaces at a growing pace. Women's access to humanitarian aid is becoming significantly more difficult to obtain as a result of the [Taliban's extensive](#) list of restrictions on their freedom of movement, rights, and activities since they assumed de facto authority in August 2021. Many women are barred from receiving humanitarian assistance because of the recent prohibitions on female aid workers in December 2021 and April 2023. However, organizations had trouble efficiently reaching women even before.

In the new context of Afghanistan, the de facto authority has limited the access of the humanitarian organization to the provinces. In comparison to the time when the first CPS was conducted it became much stricter. However, it differs from province to province. In some cases, the governor does grant access to certain sectors to have intervention. In other cases, the governor does give access to any kind of data collection or humanitarian intervention. Due to such limitations, we were not able to collect data in Helmand province. The governor did not grant any kind of access for face-to-face data collection. To compensate, the data was collected through a phone survey. To ensure inclusion in case of Helmand, there were conducted 15 phone interviews with people with disabilities, older people, IDPs, and lactating women.

Natural Disaster

Due to the earthquake in Herat Province, Western Afghanistan on 7 October 2023 and the resulting emergency context, researchers were not able to collect data in Herat province. This decision was made in consultation with DEC Secretariat. Humanitarian organisations, including DEC members, were actively engaged in a response. Potential community respondents were psychologically impacted by this disaster and not in any mental or physical condition to give their time or respond to survey questions. To compensate for this limitation, researchers conducted 12 KI interviews with the community leaders across the other three provinces. In the context of Afghanistan, community leaders can be older people or Imam Masjid.

Access

Securing permission for humanitarian interventions or data collection requires a multi-tiered process, starting with project registration at the ministry level, followed by obtaining the provincial governor's written consent. Central government approval does not guarantee provincial-level permission, as decisions vary based on the incumbent governor and the nature of communication. Effective communication, including providing a comprehensive project explanation and timing the approach, is crucial. The governor's understanding of the project's objectives and significance, especially when communicated in his native language with all necessary documents available in both local and translated forms, significantly enhances approval chances. Instances exist where governors, like in Helmand province, deny permission for data collection, underscoring the importance of strategic communication and awareness of individual governors' stances. The process emphasizes the need for meticulous planning and adaptability at both central and provincial levels, with a focus on effective communication strategies to facilitate humanitarian and data collection initiatives.

Key Findings

Priority Needs and Appropriateness

The [Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview](#) presents a deeply concerning picture of the country's humanitarian situation. It indicates that a staggering 28.3 million households are in dire need of assistance, reflecting the extensive and multifaceted nature of these needs across various sectors. This situation has been exacerbated since the change in authorities in August 2021, with the emergence of complex drivers such as environmental hazards, economic shocks, and protection issues, which further strain the limited coping mechanisms of households and communities nationwide.

Respondents still **believe that they cannot survive without humanitarian aid**. The responses across the CPS reinforce that most of Afghanistan's population is heavily reliant on external assistance for survival. This dependence has grown as traditional livelihood opportunities have significantly diminished following the recent political shifts. Community leaders and female and male respondents noted a **worsening situation compared to previous years**, with an increasing reliance on aid for basic survival needs. There is a shared sentiment across surveyed communities of an urgent need for more comprehensive and sustained humanitarian assistance.

Both men and women respondents perceive the types of assistance received as appropriate to their household and community situations, including various forms, such as cash, cash for work, food, and WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) initiatives. Despite the support provided by humanitarian actors, the consensus among **respondents is that it is insufficient to cover their basic needs**, a situation worsened by rising prices and scarce employment opportunities.

Male respondents from household interviews acknowledged that while the aid their families receive offers some relief, it fails to meet their most important daily needs and the size of their families as many families are large or there are multiple families living in one household. FGD respondents highlighted they need humanitarian organisations to increase support for food items, medicine, safe drinking water, water for irrigation, livelihoods and income generation, and cash. **Cash assistance remains a preferred strategy** among the surveyed communities. Respondents state that they can buy what they need with cash. It is also emphasised that households particularly need help from humanitarian organisations in **accessing water and healthcare services**, since they are most often inaccessible due to high cost.

Community respondents express that **they do not feel empowered by the support** provided because it doesn't provide sustainable solutions such as jobs and income generation. Findings reveal the need for a **more substantial focus on sustainable livelihood options** for communities and **tailored support**, particularly for women and girls and people with disabilities. Particularly **at-risk are women-headed households**, who face greater challenges due to limited income-generating opportunities. Women highlight the need for cash to help them cover nutrition and healthcare for their families since they do not have equitable access to earning opportunities or other sources of income. The current state of restrictions on the participation and mobility of women and girls in Afghanistan has led to barriers to work. Many of these women are widows or their husband are disabled and unable to work to earn income. While some humanitarian

"No, it does not. Unfortunately, I should say that the aid that has been provided so far is not enough to cover the basic needs of the affected people. There are some humanitarian organisations that assist people especially women to do some jobs in their own houses. For example, they train people to do some handicrafts or to keep some hens and do poultry in order to earn some income to afford their livelihoods. But again, it is not enough unfortunately."

Male FGD Participant,
Nangarhar_Lalpoor_KII

organisations have attempted to mitigate these challenges by offering in-home training in different livelihood areas, communities believe these efforts fall short of holistically addressing the extent of needs in women-headed households. Community leaders highlighted that many women-headed households in their communities rely on charitable donations from different organizations. Respondents also reveal there is an information vacuum for women who do not have access to mosques to get information about assistance.

Widows continue to be among the most in need. In Afghanistan, the male member of the family is responsible for providing for the family, and once they lose their male members of their family, they do not have any other option for earning or ensuring food security. The respondents still frequently pointed to households that do not have male members.

Selection, Distribution, and Accessibility

Findings from various districts indicate that most respondents and community leaders attest to a **fair selection process**, believing that aid primarily reaches those in greatest need, such as women-headed households, widows, orphans, people with disabilities, and internally displaced persons (IDP). There is **confidence in selection methods** with respondents frequently alluding to their acceptance of humanitarian organisations using household surveys to select community recipients for assistance. Respondents believe that surveying the household level allows for better identification of community members who are the most in need and distribution strategies based on need, including food items like rice and sugar. Most respondents voiced that they felt informed about the types of assistance being provided by humanitarian actors. However, there are still perceptions that people are being left behind. Community perceptions are that humanitarian actions are improving in their consideration of the needs and rights of people with disabilities.

Some respondents highlighted variability in the duration and timing of the assistance received. For example, a female interviewee in Helmand reported receiving cash aid the previous year but no subsequent support. FGD respondents highlighted and attributed **some gaps in assistance** to when there were problems between the government and humanitarian organisations.

Perceptions of **accessibility of assistance** are mixed. Among FGD respondents, there is a general perception that at-risk groups are specifically included in cash transfer selection, however, several respondents, who identify as people from at-risk groups, state that they are not included in cash assistance but want to be.

There are mixed perceptions of **accessibility of physical aid**, such as food items, with some respondents with disabilities sharing that they needed to physically show up to receive aid and hire transport of food items back to their home, despite their physical impairment. Many people with disabilities among the respondents perceive **distribution of cash assistance to be accessible** stating that they receive it without difficulty with or without support from a family member or they send a family member to receive it on their behalf. This indicates a need for greater versatility and effort to address the level of accessibility needed as disability is diverse.

“Yes, sometimes people from the organization come here. They often do their activities in close villages to the center, we have several villages like (Mama khill, Dur khill, Khoga Khill...) which are far from the district office, they don't visit those remote villages.”

Male FGD Participant,
Nangarhar_Goshtain_KII

Information sharing has improved since the last perception survey. Respondents report consistency in the flow of information about humanitarian aid from elders, Malik or Mola Imam, and via word of mouth between households. However, people still perceive information as not 'systematised' as people highlighted that there is not a designated and consistent mechanism. **Information about distribution** is reportedly more accessible through digital communications via smart phones. FGD respondents voice the desire for more face-to-face efforts from humanitarian organisations to understand the needs of the community and suggest agencies meet every Masjid, speak with elders, go door to door to listen to household challenges, continue to inform through community via smart phone communications, and employ community members as enumerators.

However, findings also indicate some **dissenting views regarding the selection and distribution** of support. Some respondents allege biases in the distribution process, suggesting that aid access is often limited by familial relationships or personal connections to humanitarian organisations or community leaders. There are anecdotal reports where “richer” families receive aid while “poorer” ones do not, and community leaders are accused of favouring their relatives in distribution lists. There are also responses where geographic preferences are questioned with community members believing that DEC members prioritize selection of more central areas and neglect remote

“The aid does not go to those who need it most. Usually, we see those people receive the assistance which have no need to it. The needy people always left behind during distribution of assistance. A lot of assistance is coming to our area and some people received the assistance.”

Male Participant,
Helmand_Sangin_HH

areas for distribution of assistance. This is due in part to operational challenges of reaching certain areas and changing restrictions of local government officials across the context.³

Feedback and Safety

Community members **generally feel respected by humanitarian staff**, but there are mixed views among women and girls about their feedback being valued by these organizations, highlighting a need for enhanced gender-responsive practices. While 64% of communities in DEC-supported provinces have provided feedback, notable gaps exist, such as in Nangarhar, where feedback on aid distribution was not facilitated, pointing to regional inconsistencies in feedback mechanisms.

Feedback that was provided, especially concerning extending aid and reaching people with disabilities, was largely considered, reflecting some responsiveness. However, many individuals are either unaware of how to give feedback or have not been approached for it, indicating a need for better communication and outreach, with a preference for more in-person surveys.

In terms of feedback confidentiality, 89% rate it positively, with most women and girls finding the process accessible and safe. Nonetheless, some instances of fear and uncollected feedback suggest the necessity for improved feedback processes.

Feedback commonly relates to the inadequacy of aid, emphasizing the need for improved resource allocation. Although most community members feel safe giving feedback and acknowledged positive changes, some negative experiences stress the need for more proactive feedback collection by staff.

Conclusion

The report concludes that while the support from DEC member organizations is valued by communities, there is an ongoing call for more comprehensive and sustainable assistance. Community perceptions underscore the need for greater inclusivity and improved resource allocation, particularly in addressing the needs of groups affected by inequality and discrimination such as women, girls, and people with disabilities. The feedback mechanisms, though effective to an extent, require enhancements for better accessibility and responsiveness. The report suggests a re-evaluation of distribution strategies to ensure equitable aid distribution and recommends increasing transparency and accountability in the humanitarian response. This approach would better align with the community's aspirations for more empowering and sustainable support systems, addressing the complex and evolving needs in Afghanistan.

³ CPS Researchers and DEC staff contribution

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to DEC and its members in response to the above findings as well as contributions from a post-survey workshop with DEC members.

<p>What should DEC members keep doing in their responses?</p>	<p>Selection Process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage and employ community members who are familiar with the community. • Conduct 1:1 meetings with each Masjid. • Consult directly with and involve older people / elders in the community and local council members. • Conduct door-to-door surveys. <p>Implementation (ongoing):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with traditional and local leaders. • Advocate with local government authorities for female staff to continue working. • Focus on healthcare interventions. • Continue with cash assistance, especially for women-headed households. • Coordinate among DEC members. • Facilitate better access for women to receive support. • Coordinate with clusters at national/provincial level. • Conduct post-distribution monitoring in addition to perception surveys. • Collect shared metrics on inclusion and accountability to facilitate peer-to-peer learning and adapt strategies to the needs and preferences of different groups.
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<p>What should DEC members change in their responses?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve collaboration and coordination between DEC focal point, MEAL focal point, and country teams.• Address ongoing lack of awareness related to the feedback mechanisms in collaboration with other members.• Develop a Theory of Change for DEC appeal with shared objectives and indicators among DEC members.• Each DEC member should include and align the DEC appeal with its other humanitarian funding to optimize resources and reach.• Conduct an appeal closure meeting for all DEC members to discuss learning harvested across different evaluations and initiatives and increase in peer-to-peer exchange.• Improve food distribution amounts to align with nutritional needs of households.• Focus on sustainable livelihood solutions, specifically job creation and income generation, especially for women and people with disabilities.• Conduct accessibility audits and barrier analyses across implementation approaches to identify and address barriers faced by different groups.
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