



Rapid Needs Assessment of Returnees in Host Communities

Kunar and Nangarhar Provinces



Organisational profile

Relief International is a humanitarian, non-profit agency providing emergency relief, rehabilitation and development assistance to victims of natural disasters and civil conflicts.

RI takes a holistic, integrated approach to empowering the world's most vulnerable communities. Working with communities, RI focuses on enabling them to develop custom solutions to their most pressing challenges in a participatory way. RI's experience responding to emergencies includes delivering cash, food, water, healthcare and education. RI's transition strategy empowers communities to address complex issues, such as chronic poverty, and make sure they're ready for when disaster strikes. RI puts its technical experts and resources at the service of community leaders, and its programs harness the power of working together for community goal sand building resilience.

RI started working in Afghanistan in 2002, responding to the most pressing humanitarian needs of conflict affected populations in the Easter Region. Since then, RI has demonstrated value in response to conflict and natural disasters and building stronger communities through various programs, including local governance.

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

- AOG** – Armed Opposition Group
- Daeash** – Local name for ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria)
- DORR** – Department of Refugee and Repatriation
- FGD** – Focus Group Discussion
- HH** – Household
- HC** – Host Community
- KII** – Key Informant Interview
- IOM** – International Organisation for Migration
- UNHCR** – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

METHODOLOGY

RI undertook a rapid, multi-sector needs assessment from 30 January 2017 to 4 February 2017 in four Districts in Nangarhar Province (Batikot, Kuzkunar, Muhmand Dara and Rodat) and four Districts in Kunar Province (Chawkay, Dara-e-Pech, Shigal Wa Sheltan and Watapur). Districts were selected due to the high level of needs and high number of Refugee Returnees. RI’s assessment took place in 80 villages of different sizes, with the smallest village consisting of 20 households (HHs) and the largest consisting of 2800 HHs. The assessment was conducted by RI East Regional staff, organised in different teams. Both male and female staff contributed to the assessment.

The **objective of the assessment** was to deepen the understanding of return dynamics, together with collecting information on levels and types of needs and resources available to the communities and the vulnerabilities of both returnees and host communities (HC).

The assessment was conducted by a team of RI Eastern region staff, who contributed to the assessment after participating in a one-day training workshop in data collection tools and techniques. This training included the provision and deployment of:

- Household surveys (HH)
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)
- Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

A total of **315 HHs surveys** were conducted (mostly Returnee HHs returned in 2016), together with **145 FGDs** (Returnees) and **47 KIIs** (mainly HC village elders and CDCs consultations). Regional and gender composition can be observed in Fig. 1 below.

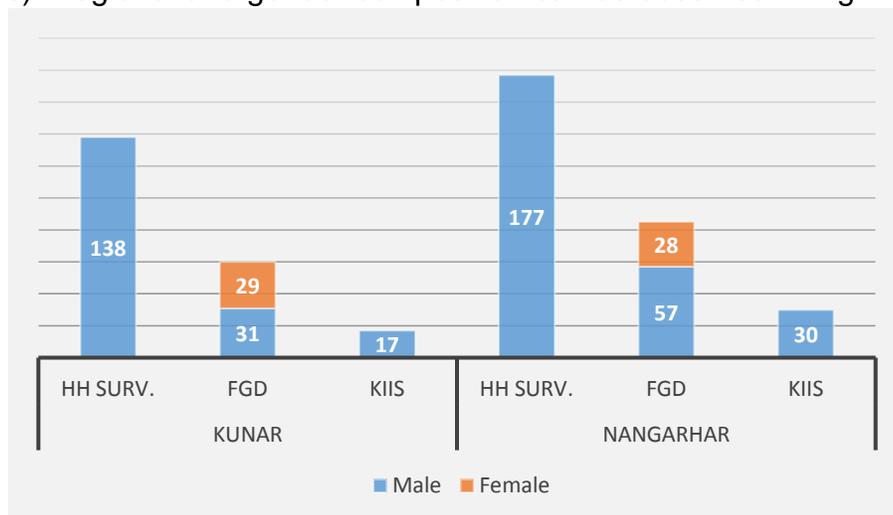


FIGURE 1 - NUMBER OF HHs AND INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWS, BY METHODOLOGY

The assessment covered a considerable geographic area in order to have comparable data from different communities and to understand similarities and differences. Although helpful to gather main trends, issues, inputs and feedback, as well as to provide

understanding of challenges Returnees and HC are facing, the sample considered for this research is not statistically significant; when percentages are mentioned, they are intended as percentages of the sample studies, not as percentages of the Districts targeted.

1. CONTEXT

The second half of 2016 saw a substantial surge in the numbers of returnees from Pakistan compared to the previous year. From January to December, **almost 400,000 Refugee Returnees and 250,000 Undocumented Returnees crossed the border and relocated to the Eastern Region of Afghanistan**. In 2017, these numbers are expected to continue growing, with an estimated 550,000 refugee returnees (UNHCR, projections) and 495,000 undocumented returnees (IOM, projections) expected to cross the Eastern border into Afghanistan.



The surge in numbers is largely due to diplomatic tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan, intensified in the last few months of 2016 as a result of the partnership between the Government of Afghanistan (GoA) and the Government of India (GoI); with the response of the Government of Pakistan (GoP) that they will not renew residency permits for Afghan nationals regularly registered in Pakistan and threatening deportations. A wave of resentment against Afghan nationals followed the announcement and resulted in violence and threats both from the community members and the police, along with widespread harassment of Afghan nationals (according to the survey conducted by RI, see Annex 4) . This hostile environment in Pakistan combined with the

announced change in the refugee regulations has had a considerable push effect, resulting in thousands of families moving back to Afghanistan.

Due to the aggression suffered in Pakistan, returnees were often hurried and the decision to leave was made with insufficient available information, mostly motivated by insecurity, or forced. Families had to sell their assets in Pakistan, often at a portion of their value, due to their diminished negotiation power. This factor, together with the cost of the travel to Afghanistan, has meant that refugee returnees and undocumented returnees have arrived to Afghanistan with reduced coping capacity compared to the pre-return period. Returnees were supported to some extent at the Zero point (at the border), often receiving different assistance packages depending on status. Returnee families moved from Zero point to Nangarhar, Kunar and Laghman, going through reception centres (IOM) and encashment centres (UNHCR), depending on their status, before continuing toward a destination for attempted resettlement.

Kunar and Nangarhar are the two of the provinces most impacted by conflict and the largest recipients of returnees, both Refugee Returnees and Undocumented Returnees. In the villages surveyed in Kuz Kunar (Nangarhar), Refugee Returnees households **represent 22%** of the total in the District¹.

¹ UNHCR data on Refugee Returnees.

2. LOCAL RESILIENCE

Through the different data gathering methodologies noted above, RI assessed the status of existent systems and services, in an attempt to identify the level of resilience in communities and the resources available, at the date of the assessment.

2.1 Markets

In the District surveyed in Nangarhar, local markets are consistently reported to function well. People can find all the basics needed and the markets are generally close (max 2 Km) and easily accessible. The exception is Muhmand Dara, where people say they cannot access markets and the basic items have to be brought from outside the village. In Kunar, 18% of HH representatives report that, in their community, the local market is absent, with only a few local shops providing basic items. Respondents say that the quantities of staple and daily items are not enough and that restocking is slow.

In general, the market seems to be able to respond dynamically to shocks; this is an important asset entailing that newcomers will be able to access everyday items without entering in competition with the local community. This is particularly important in view of further returns expected after the winter pause. However, as mentioned above, in a few areas the concern exists that, with heightened demand, the market will not be able to serve all the customers, leading to possible frictions due to competition for resources.



2.2 Services

Most of communities surveyed have access to basic education and health facilities. In Nangarhar, where communities are generally large, schools (at least primary schools) and a primary health clinic are available. In Kunar, basic school and clinic services are available either in the communities themselves or in nearby villages, and easily reachable.

Although available, services appear to be already overstretched or partially dysfunctional. **In Kunar, circa 68% of FGDs agreed that services were overstretched, 20% functioning and the remaining completely destroyed. In Nangarhar, 91% reported services to be overstretched, 8% functional and only 1% completely destroyed.** This data shows that limited services have been greatly impacted by the wave of returns in 2016 and have reached now a level where they will struggle to absorb a second large wave of displacement. 50% of communities surveyed report that they are not happy with

the high influx of Returnees because of the effect this has on the services available to the community.

2.3 Economic activities

The most common economic activities in the communities surveyed are in agriculture and animal husbandry, followed by daily labour, other services (e.g drivers) and government jobs (more common in Nangarhar, less common in Kunar).

Key Informants (KIs) report that Returnees are participating in the economic activities, although they are not completely satisfied with the level of integration. This is particularly true in Nangarhar, where **30% of respondents report that they would like to see Returnees more involved.**

This data leads to the conclusion that there is space for more actors in the local economies of the two provinces. A deeper analysis reveals that a key reason why Returnees are not fully participating in the local market is twofold: a saturated labour market and lack of start-up capital. The vast majority of respondents are daily workers and the KIs report that one of the most common activities is daily labour. In a context where there are not large scale economic activities, this translates into a market which has a disproportionate offer of labour compared to demand. At the same time, people are unable or find it difficult to start a small enterprise of their own (for example, a local shop) because this would demand an initial investment, inaccessible to many. 30% of returnees declare they would like to participate more in economic activities of the communities, but report challenges entering the market.

2.4 Access to credit

Access to formal credit is limited in the districts for both Returnees and HC. Some forms of informal credit are possible but normally benefit people who have a network or trusted person to guarantee it for them. This fact reduces the likelihood that Returnee families will have access to informal credit, because they are reported to have a smaller or non-existent network.

In Kunar, **92% of Returnee HHs reported to have debts of over AFG 8,000**, whilst only one family stated to be completely debt-free. In Nangarhar, the same indicator is down to 46% of respondents and 11% do not have any debts.

Long term consistent and/or increased level of debt is one component considered in the vulnerability period, because it deteriorates the capacity of the family to satisfy their primary needs and leads to a vicious cycle: vulnerability and poverty lead to contracting more debts to meet basic needs which, in turn, results in increasing vulnerability and poverty.

3. SAFETY AND SECURITY

3.1 Pakistan and the journey back to Afghanistan

The majority of Returnee HHs interviewed in Nangarhar and Kunar declared to have left Pakistan because they were forced to do so. The experience they report is one of violence and harassment which ultimately culminated in their decision to flee the country.

During their journeys from Pakistan, Returnees report having faced violence, with the most common perpetrator being the Pakistani police.

The most common incidents reported to the RI assessment team were:

- Violence from armed people and/or AOG;
- Forcefully expelled from Pakistan;
- Caught in the fighting against Daesh;
- Arrested by police;
- Hit by the police;
- Property confiscation;
- Humiliated by police;
- Forced to hand off money to police;
- Harassed by police;
- Ill treatment by communities in Pakistan.

One case also reports the police entered and destroyed their house in Pakistan. Although this is an isolated case in our interviews, it is helpful to understand the level of trauma and stress the Returnees have to face in their journey back to their country.

3.2 Safety and security in the community of destination

Returnee HHs interviewed declared they are not foreseeing or planning to further move in the next 6 months.

Because of the trauma experienced during the journey and because areas they are relocating to are affected by high levels of fighting, Returnees do not feel safe in their new communities.

One particular reason for anxiety is the situation of children, both those too young to be enrolled in the education system and those who, lacking documentation, cannot attend school. Mothers, specifically, raised concerns about kidnapping for ransom and the insecure environment with the fighting so close to the village. Forced recruitment into armed group is another reason of concern.

Women FGDs also shared the issue of unsafe accommodation. As mentioned during both FGDs and KIIs, some returnees still live in tents and others live in highly damaged buildings. Precarious shelter increases the feeling of insecurity because walls or doors are not strong and reliable to protect them. In addition, latrines are often missing in those habitations and this is acknowledged to have an impact on the incidence of rape.

The inability to find secure shelter is due to two reasons: levels of poverty, translating into inability to pay rent; and limited shelter available. In fact, the space in existing buildings is close to saturated whilst building new structures is a problem in most villages, where property rights and landed property are sensitive issues. KIIs consistently report that it is difficult to obtain land in the communities to build new structures.

43% of communities feel less safe as a result of the influx of Returnees. Communities generally are empathetic and welcome the newcomers. However, in both Kunar and Nangarhar, they highlight that they are already in a critical situation and don't have many resources to help. This approach is enforced by the fact that host communities are hardly targeted with assistance. 100% of respondents report that the HC has not received any sort of assistance. Low levels of resources and this exclusion from humanitarian assistance, which is consistently the case, is likely to generate resentment when only Returnees are targeted in these communities.



4. VULNERABILITIES

The RI assessment team has screened families in both Kunar and Nangarhar for vulnerabilities. The aim was to understand how many of the sample population of Returnees were highly and extremely vulnerable. Although the vulnerabilities and resources score has not been elaborated for this assessment, the analysis of vulnerabilities alone showed that **25% of Returnees surveyed can be considered highly vulnerable** (3 vulnerabilities or more) and **9% can be considered extremely vulnerable** (4 vulnerabilities or more), according to the linear definition of vulnerability, which is simply based on the number of vulnerabilities in a HH (Elderly head of HH; Widow head of HH; 3+ children under 5, etc.).

This situation becomes more critical when combined with the debt rate described above and the low level of community resilience and highlights the need for a whole-of-community approach to the problem.



In addition, the vulnerabilities are increased by the adoption of negative coping mechanisms. Although, according to other research and studies, the phenomenon of child marriage is widespread and an aspect to factor in during an accurate beneficiaries selection phase, due to the limited timeframe, the sensitivity of the issue, conservatism of the rural areas surveyed and the absence of psychosocial workers in the survey team, child marriage incidence has been excluded from the negative coping mechanisms. RI's team focused, instead, on negative coping mechanisms based on food security, which are the first to be adopted and are therefore a good index of more dangerous behaviours potentially adopted by families.

According to RI's study, 5% of interviewed HHs in Kunar and 25% of interviewed HHs in Nangarhar adopt 4 or more negative coping mechanisms, such as limiting the amount of calories consumed per day, limiting the frequency of meals, limiting the amount of food

consumed by the adults to feed the children, relying on less nutritious food items and borrowing food.

Figure 2 below shows an example breakdown of data collected from 138 Returnee HHs in Kunar.

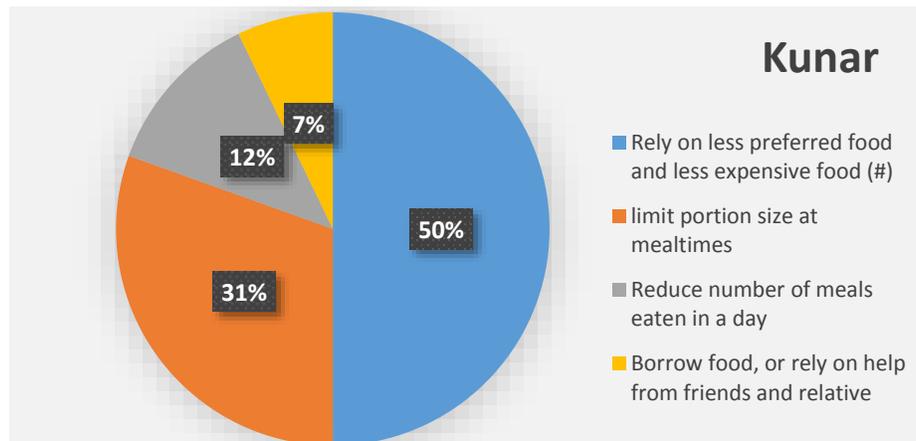


FIGURE 2 - FOOD-SECURITY, NEGATIVE COPING MECHANISMS IN KUNAR

Among the community population, the most vulnerable are reportedly children and women, because of limited resources and earning opportunities, followed by the elderly.

5. LEGAL PROTECTION

Returnee participants to FGDs, both male and female, estimated that between 25% and 90% of the Returnee population in their communities does not have registration. The worst performing District is reportedly Rodat.

Both HC and Returnees report that the main problems attributed to not having documents are the following:

- Exclusion of children from the education system;
- Problems purchasing land;
- Police harassment;
- Exclusion from humanitarian assistance.

Focusing primarily on the last point, among people without any form of documentation (national; humanitarian, etc.) there might be some of the most vulnerable people; these are not served by the humanitarian community, which without documentation cannot identify them as single beneficiaries so as to demonstrate accountability.

Although the problems connected to lack of documentation have been identified, **19% women FGDs and 36% men FGDs state that documentation is less important for children**. Male FGDs also say that documentation is less important for women.

The most frequently mentioned reasons for lacking documentation are: uncertainty regarding the process (the majority of Returnee respondents ascribe this to the fact that they are not familiar with the country); lack of any previous records in country; need for other people in the community to recognise and testify for them; impossibility to go back to the place of origin (although this specific requirement is currently under MORR review) and inefficiencies at the DORR office.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From data and information collected through this assessment, it is possible to conclude that:

- Humanitarian assistance targeting beneficiaries uniquely on the basis of status and not on the basis of vulnerability has the potential to have a negative impact, contrary to the principle of Do No Harm.
- Involve both host communities and beneficiaries in the early stages of program design to ensure the dynamics and specific needs are taken into account. This also increases participation and, as a consequence, the level of beneficiaries' ownership over the project.
- Both HC and Returnees are already vulnerable. HC are seeing their resources and services overstretched as a result of the influx of Returnees while, on the other hand, Returnees are often back to a country largely unknown to them and without a strong support network to rely on.
- In addition, Returnees have faced violence in Pakistan and during the journey to Afghanistan; HC receiving a high number of Returnees are also the worst affected by conflict. This strongly indicates the need of psychosocial support in the communities surveyed.
- Civil documentation is an important gap and hinders the capacity of vulnerable members of the community, both Returnees and HC, to access services (including humanitarian assistance in certain circumstances) and feel safe. Although considered important by all respondents, documentation is sometimes still considered less relevant for children and women, making these two categories even more vulnerable.