

## Written evidence submitted anonymously (AFG0056)

### Foreign Affairs Committee Inquiry on Afghanistan

#### April 2022 update

We welcome the UK Government's leadership in co-hosting the UN pledging summit for Afghanistan on 31<sup>st</sup> March and its commitment of £286 million in additional funding. However, overall, the summit raised only half of the \$4.4 billion that the UN needs to fund its Humanitarian Response Plan and save Afghan children's lives - leaving a \$2 billion gap in the humanitarian response.

The summit also failed to deliver a clear plan for how donor governments will maintain and increase their support for Afghanistan in the long-term, including through preventing ongoing economic collapse and protecting the country's education system.

The impact of the war in Ukraine on global commodity prices is now threatening to exacerbate the hunger crisis gripping Afghanistan and elsewhere. It's therefore vital the UK redoubles its efforts to address the humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in the country and ensure basic services are restored.

#### Priority calls to the UK Government

- 1) Take urgent steps to prevent the total collapse of the Afghan economy. Specifically, as one of the biggest donors of the World Bank and the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, the UK Government should lead fellow shareholders in efforts to expediently release humanitarian funds, but also to ensure the ARTF is replenished and able to support the provision of basic needs.**

#### Background

- While humanitarian funds will help keep children and their families alive, humanitarian agencies cannot replace a functioning economy. The collapse of the economy and the ongoing fallout from last year's drought have triggered an unprecedented food crisis in Afghanistan. Most families have lost some or all of their incomes and are unable to afford the rising cost of food, with the UN estimating 97 percent of the population will be below the poverty line by the middle of 2022. Families we work with tell us how they are too afraid to ask the price of food, with children joining in the Ramadan fast because there isn't enough for them to eat. This of course has serious protection implications, with children being forced to work, married or in extreme cases sold because of the financial strain families face. With the economy collapsing, unemployment rising and a lack of liquidity across Afghanistan, not only are needs rising, but it is increasingly difficult for humanitarian organizations to operate. If governments, international financial institutions and donors do not move urgently to unlock financial assets and address the liquidity crisis, more and more Afghan families will sink further into poverty and debt. Liquidity – in the context of sanctions and frozen assets – remains a major hurdle to humanitarian scale-up to meet this rising need. Due to the current liquidity crisis, and particularly the absence of a functioning central financial system, NGOs are forced to

rely on more expensive mechanisms, reducing the funds available for the direct response, and face challenges in getting money into and around the country at scale. We know from decades of humanitarian response that cash and voucher assistance is one of the most effective tools in combatting food insecurity and livelihoods needs. However, in Afghanistan getting cash into and around the country is complex and expensive. Further, the impact of a lack of liquidity on the payment of public sector salaries further undermines the provision of basic – lifesaving – services. The lack of liquidity, as well as the broader economic and banking crises, are increasing humanitarian need and making it more difficult for humanitarian actors to operate. We, and other humanitarian agencies, are doing everything we can, but at the rate the need is increasing, we cannot reach all the children and adults who desperately need support to survive.

- The international community's pause in development assistance has compounded the liquidity crisis, contributing to a massive contraction in the Afghan economy, driving poverty, and undermining past investments and efforts to maintain institutional capacity.  
Donors, including the UK must commit to a holistic approach to financial and technical assistance in Afghanistan which includes humanitarian and development assistance. Importantly, while the reversal by the de facto authorities to allow girls to return to schools above grade six should be universally condemned, donors should not walk away from the full spectrum of support children in Afghanistan require.
- Specifically, we call on the UK government to:
  - Work with fellow shareholders, G7 partners and ARTF donors to ensure existing ARTF funding is dispersed as soon as possible to support humanitarian response and basic service provision. Further, ARTF donors should agree a clear strategy for replenishment, and the steps they will take to improve liquidity and move towards economic recovery. This should include collaboration with the UN and IFI's to ensure the central bank is supported with technical assistance.
  - Continue financial assistance to the humanitarian response – working with partners to meet the full \$4.4bn required in 2022.
  - Work with the private sector to increase confidence and clarity related to sanctions and financial transactions. While humanitarian exemptions and licenses have been issued, we continue to see the chilling effect of sanctions on the banking sector.
  - Maintain a proportionate response to the deeply troubling developments regarding girls' education – avoiding blanket conditionalities which would only further undermine the attainment of girls' and boys' rights.

## **2) Prioritise girls' education and protect the education system from collapse, including by:**

- Funding, and galvanizing other donors to fund, the Afghanistan Education Sector Transitional Framework – a plan put together by the NGO sector to protect education. The UK should refrain from attaching conditionality to any funding, including conditions relating to girls' education, and encourage other donors to do the same. The collapse of

the education system would only further undermine girls' ability to access education, protection and other crucial forms of assistance.

- Engaging with senior Taliban leadership to condemn the de-facto ban on girls' secondary education and urge them to reverse this decision and allow all girls to return safely to school immediately. In the meantime, governments and donors should adjust their strategies to support and protect the access some girls still have to secondary education.

## Background

- An estimated 8 million school-aged children need support to access education right now - an increase from 2.6 million last year.
- Despite confirming that all boys and girls would be returning to school on March 23rd, the Taliban authorities announced on the day that all secondary school classes for girls would continue to be suspended. The de-facto ban on girls' secondary education has had a combined cost of over 200 million days of learning. As of the end of last year, 40% of the students aged 10-18 who were out of school were girls, compared to 25% of boys.
- While all stakeholders should be principled and clear in their opposition to any formal or de-facto barriers to girls accessing education, it is important to note that 2.2 million primary school-aged girls, as well as hundreds of thousands of secondary school-aged girls, are still accessing education. Primary schools are unaffected by the ban, and in many provinces, schools have remained open for girls above grade 6 – with attendance at district level in places still high. The response of donors should consider the access of these girls too – ensuring funding and policy decisions are measured.
- Prior to the Taliban takeover, Afghanistan's education system was highly dependent on aid, with development funding contributing to almost 50% of the national education budget – funding which has now been withdrawn. Some teachers – still working – haven't been paid since August.
- Without additional support from the international community – long-term development assistance as well as urgent humanitarian funding, Afghanistan's education system will collapse. Schools will remain shut; teachers will continue to be unpaid and millions of children – especially girls – will be denied their right to quality education.
- The NGO education sector has developed a new plan – set out in the Afghanistan Education Sector Transitional Framework - to prevent the collapse of the education system, keep schools open and ensure all teachers and children continue in the teaching and learning process. This plan must now be fully funded. The money can be channelled through existing mechanisms including the Education Cannot Wait Multi-Year Resilience Programme and the Global Partnership for Education, as well as NGO and civil society partners.
- However, unless concrete steps are taken to address the economic crisis in Afghanistan and reduce household poverty, no matter how effective the humanitarian response, households will struggle to send their children to school.

***April 2022***