INCLUSIVE URBANIZATION THROUGH EVIDENCE BASED ADVOCACY & INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO TENURE SECURITY FOR THE DISPLACED IN AFGHANISTAN’S CITIES

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Abstract
Reintegration of displaced people is one of Afghanistan’s most pervasive issues. Recent returns from neighboring countries since the beginning of 2016 expected to exceed 1 million by mid 2017, whilst conditions internally continue to generate record level internal displacement, with current estimates placing the total caseload at approximately 1.3 million. Concurrently, Afghanistan is facing the prospect of reintegrating potentially in excess of 100,000 unsuccessful asylum seekers, as the first forced deportations from Europe commence. The displaced are predominantly drawn to the relative safety and economic opportunities of urban areas. The traditional response to an influx of the displaced has been one of exclusion to encourage return to place of origin, undermining the self-reliance and potential contributions of these groups to Afghanistan’s cities. The following article details how through an approach of evidence based advocacy, acknowledging the concerns of local decision makers and hosting areas, development actors were able to positively influence the discourse and secure a durable solution for a high profile settlement of more than 19,000 protracted internally displaced people and returnees.

Key Words: Afghanistan, Displacement, Evidence-based advocacy, Inclusive Urbanization, Local integration,
Inclusive Urbanization through Evidence Based Advocacy & Innovative Approaches to Tenure Security for the Displaced in Afghanistan’s Cities

Since the downfall of the Taliban in 2001 and subsequent reconstruction, Afghanistan’s cities have been undergoing unprecedented growth. Within the next 35 years the traditionally rural society’s urban population is expected to triple to 24 million with one of the highest rates of urbanization in the world. This expansion however has vastly exceeded the capacity of the nascent land administration system and formal housing market to accommodate the influx. Currently the vast majority (approximately 85 per cent) of Afghanistan’s urban dwellers live in conditions consistent with the UN-Habitat definition of a slum, facing issues of overcrowding, inadequate services and infrastructure, poor environmental health and a lack of tenure security. Such rapid growth of cities also presents significant opportunities however, allowing more Afghans access to the concentration of economic and social activities and relative security that cities represent. However, a prerequisite for leveraging the positive impacts of urbanization for more Afghans is inclusion; whereby all urban residents are given opportunities to fully participate in the economic, social and political aspects of urban life. Recently innovative approaches to evidence-based advocacy and improving tenure security have been paying dividends for some of the country’s most excluded and vulnerable urban residents. The following report details the experience in Maslakh; a protracted IDP hosting area in the country’s West, where evidence-based advocacy was successfully used to create a durable solution for the displaced through ‘local integration’ into the urban fabric.

Displacement, Migration & Afghan Cities

Throughout the protracted conflict spanning three decades, displacement has been and remains one of Afghanistan’s most pervasive issues. Since 2002, over 6 million Afghans have returned from neighboring countries with as many as 40% not being able to reintegrate in their place of origin. In 2016 sporadic conflict, shifting regional relations and other political factors have culminated in a rapid decrease in the protection space for Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran. The result was a surge in the return of both registered refugees and undocumented Afghans; with approximately 700,000 returning. Following a three-month pause during the winter months, returns are expected to resume, with the total expected to exceed one million by mid 2017. Simultaneously in Afghanistan, the deteriorating security, economic and environmental conditions continue to generate record levels of

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1 An Informal Settlement or ‘slum’ is defined as meeting one or more of the following five criteria; inadequate access to safe water, inadequate access to sanitation and infrastructure, poor structural quality of housing, overcrowding, lack of tenure security.  
2 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Afghanistan, Afghanistan: Conflict Induced Displacement - Snapshot (1 January – 31 May 2016)  
3 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Afghanistan 2017 ‘Afghanistan Returnee Crisis, Situation Report 5 as of 12th January 2017’
internal displacement, with the majority of new and protracted Internally Displaced People (IDPs) being drawn towards the relative safety and economic opportunities of urban areas; current estimates place the total number of IDPs in Afghanistan at approximately 1.3 million⁴.

In addition to returnees and IDPs, the year 2015 saw out-migration from Afghanistan at a level unprecedented in recent years. Between January 2015 and January 2016 more than 220,000 Afghans were reported to have arrived in Europe⁵. An exodus of this scale has not been observed since the Soviet occupation and civil war of the 1990’s. Afghans were the second largest group after Syrians to seek asylum in Europe in 2015⁶. However, the reception of Afghan asylum seekers was markedly different from other groups. Whilst Syrians are considered prima facie refugees, Afghans are not perceived as not fleeing individual persecution on the grounds described in the 1951 Refugee Convention, but rather as opportunistic migrants and thus excluded from integration programs available to other nationalities⁷.

Research indicates that the majority of Afghan asylum seekers originate from urban areas, with many becoming heavily indebted to finance their journey to Europe⁸. Indications from the most significant destination countries suggest that as many as 60% of applications for asylum made by Afghans in 2015-16 may be refused, with deportations recently commencing from several European countries⁹. The result is that in addition to the above caseloads of returnees and IDPs, the Government of Afghanistan is facing the prospect of reintegrating in excess of one hundred thousand returned asylum seekers-who have significantly reduced means and levels of resilience than when they left to seek asylum-back into cities.

Motivations to leave Afghanistan are nuanced and individual, however it is well documented that those who make the decision consistently cite insecurity and a lack of employment opportunities as the most significant ‘push’ factors¹⁰. Thus for the displaced, the relative security and economic opportunities offered by Afghanistan’s cities will continue to make them the most attractive location for re-integration. With strong indications that the security situation will deteriorate further, it is highly likely that the ‘pull’ factors of Afghan cities will become even more pronounced in the coming

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⁴ UNHCR 2015
⁵ International Organization for Migration January 2016 ‘Mixed Migration Flows in The Mediterranean and Beyond – Compilation of Available Data and Information’
⁶ Ibid
⁷ Beaty T Surana K 2015 ‘Afghan Refugees Receive a Cold Welcome in Europe’
⁸ DACAAR, Samuel Hall 2015 ‘Agency and Choice Among the Displaced; Returnees and IDPs Choice of Destination in Afghanistan’
⁹ German Ambassador to Afghanistan, Markus Potzel, quoted in Radio Free Europe 2016 ‘German Campaign Asks Afghans to Think Twice Before They Go’
¹⁰ Altai 2009 ‘Understanding the Return and Reintegration Process of Afghan Refugees from the UK’
months and years.

**Urban Development in Afghanistan**

Afghanistan’s cities have been at the center of the country’s growth and development since the turn of the millennia (see Figure 1). Urban areas have undergone unprecedented expansion, at a rate that has exceeded the capacity of the government to plan for and effectively guide development. Many urban areas now host populations that significantly exceed the area’s carrying capacity. Currently the vast majority (approximately 85%) of Afghanistan’s urban dwellers live in conditions consistent with the UN-Habitat definition of a slum, facing issues of overcrowding, inadequate services and infrastructure, poor environmental health and a lack of tenure security.

![Figure 1: Urbanization of the Afghan population (UNDESA 2014)](image)

Such rapid growth of cities also presents significant opportunities, however, allowing more Afghans access to the concentration of economic and social activities that cities represent. Over the last decade, largely urban-based activities rather than agriculture have increasingly become the drivers of the Afghan economy, and now comprise approximately 75% of total the GDP\(^{11}\). The expansion of these sectors has also supported a burgeoning informal economy, which heavily subsidizes the formal sector, with indications that the former may account for as much as 90% of all economic activity\(^ {12}\).

Inclusion is vital to urbanization to enable successful integration in social, economic and political aspects of urban life. To date however, a significant portion of urban residents have been systematically excluded, and continue to live on the margins. Among the most prevalent of these

\(^{11}\) Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan ‘State of Afghan Cities’ p55 Urban-based economic activities such as wholesale, retail trade, manufacturing, public administration, services, transport and construction

\(^{12}\) Ibid
marginalized groups are the displaced; Internally Displaced People (IDPs), whose movement to cities was forced, by either conflict or natural disaster, returned refugees (returnees) and undocumented returnees (including those that have returned spontaneously or who were deported).

**Historical Attempts at Providing Tenure Security to the Displaced**

Historical approaches to reintegration of the displaced in Afghanistan have been characterized by resettlement to purpose built, detached ‘townships’ created under Afghanistan’s ‘Land Allocation Scheme’ (LAS); a mechanism to provide vacant state land to returnees free of charge, or a focus on return to place of origin as the most preferred durable solution. The majority of townships however were in unviable locations, typically isolated, long distances from existing markets, lacking access to livelihoods and basic services. Now, 11 years after the scheme’s inception, nationwide occupancy of LAS sites stands at approximately 14%, with the majority of land recipients simply abandoning their plots. In the case of protracted IDPs, some who have been living in their locations of displacement for more than two decades, evidence suggests the overwhelming majority intend to stay and integrate locally. It has become clear that the option of returning to their place of origin is not likely or feasible in the current context.

Currently recent returnees are receiving humanitarian assistance, in the form of food and NFI, temporary shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene, health and protection assistance whilst some protracted IDPs receive intermittent assistance such as ‘winterization’. However, assistance tends to be limited to one month packages and there remains a critical gap between this assistance and longer term efforts to create self-reliance. With the failure of the LAS to provide a durable solution, the displaced continue to be drawn to urban areas, where they typically come to reside in degraded urban enclaves and informal settlements.

**Exclusion of the Displaced in Afghan Cities**

Exclusion of the urban displaced is multifaceted; in many cases IDPs and returnees are prevented from obtaining essential civil documentation, accessing adequate and regular employment and, lacking the means to enter the formal housing market, frequently come to reside in informal, underserviced enclaves of poverty. Frequently the urban displaced do not reside in distinct ‘camps’ but rather come to live in areas also occupied by the urban poor. Although conditions of the two groups may be similar, studies show the displaced are frequently worse off in key indicators of well-

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13 According to UNHCR there are three ‘durable solutions’ to displacement; voluntary repatriation/return to place of origin, resettlement to another location and local integration in the location of displacement
14 UNHCR, forthcoming study into the Land Allocation Scheme
15 UN-Habitat 2016 ‘Coming in from the Margins; Ending Displacement and Increasing Inclusion in Afghan Cities’
being and earning potential\textsuperscript{16}. IDPs and returnees frequently find themselves in a situation of ‘limbo’, whereby they are unwilling or unable to return to their place of origin, whilst prohibited from fully integrating in their new urban locations. The protracted nature of many displacement situations in Afghanistan means that in some cases this ‘limbo’ has persisted for decades. In addition to systematic exclusion, assistance targeting the urban displaced to improve access to basic services and shelter has traditionally been restricted for fear of attracting more arrivals and/or encouraging permanent settlement in cities. In some cases, humanitarian and development actors are prevented from accessing populations in dire need\textsuperscript{17}.

![Figure 2: Typical living conditions of displaced Afghans in urban areas, PD 22, Kabul City](image)

The displaced can indeed represent a considerable burden to a hosting area, many of which already have development challenges. However the current approach of exclusion can be seen to be counterproductive for two reasons. Firstly, decades of continuous occupation of urban and peri-urban areas by the displaced demonstrate unequivocally that exclusion is not an effective disincentive to long-term settlement. Secondly, opportunities for those populations to become self-sufficient are undermined. A potentially highly productive contribution to the local area and the city as a whole is squandered; reinforcing degraded urban enclaves and a cycle of poverty. Reducing or removing the barriers to the participation of the displaced could thus be an extremely significant step towards increasing the capacity of Afghan cities to accommodate more urban citizens.

\textsuperscript{16} World Bank 2011 ‘Research Studies on IDPs in Urban Settings’ p\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{17} Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2014 ‘Still at Risk; Security of Tenure and the Force Eviction of IDPs and Refugee Returnees in Urban Afghanistan’ p\textsuperscript{61}
The Official Discourse

From the experience to date, two key issues have become apparent as among the most significant and mutually reinforcing barriers to durable solutions for the displaced; a) a lack of political support for local integration and a fixation on return and; b) challenges in obtaining up-to-date, accurate data on the displaced (both registered and unregistered) that is accepted by government and development partners, or; a widely endorsed ‘evidence base’ for the discourse. Both issues contribute to a situation where ideology and stereotypes rather than evidence permeate official discussions on the issue and where an approach of marginalizing the displaced is applied dogmatically, despite compelling evidence that it is not only ineffective in discouraging long-term settlement, but also counterproductive and actively undermining the development of urban areas.

The Case for Local Integration

‘Local integration’ refers to a situation whereby the displaced are able to establish themselves in an area to the point where they no longer suffer from disadvantage derived from their displacement.18 The process is complex and politically sensitive, with social, economic, legal and cultural dimensions. At the best of times, increased displacement can cause tensions within a host community, particularly when there are comparable levels of poverty among both groups. The displaced may represent competition for scarce resources and/or place downward pressure on local wage-labor markets. In Afghanistan, cultural, ethnic and religious differences are further potentially divisive factors, with the displaced also frequently being viewed as a security threat. However, facilitating an increased level of

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18 Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2010 ‘IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons’
self-reliance can contribute to mitigating potential sources of tension.

When barriers to participation are decreased, populations who would arguably be located in urban areas regardless are more likely to feel a sense of ownership over the area they reside in. This inclusion in turn leads to urban residents being more likely to pay tax, feel secure enough to invest in their dwellings, be empowered to invest in or advocate for improved basic services and more likely to establish small enterprises. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the displaced generally aspire to work rather than be dependent on humanitarian assistance. It is also important to note that inclusion through local integration does not preclude the displaced from returning to their place of origin. On the contrary, self-reliant IDPs are much more likely to return home and integrate if they have been able to retain rather than exhaust their financial resources and maintain or increase their skills rather than have them atrophy during their time in displacement.

The continuous presence of the displaced in cities despite being marginalized is evidence of significant levels of endogenous resilience. In light of the current crisis and facing the prospect reintegrating tens of thousands of returned asylum seekers, this resilience is a resource that Afghan cities cannot afford to waste. If the capacity of cities to accommodate more urban citizens is to be augmented, it is vital that the barriers that some groups face to fully participate in urban life are reduced. Local integration of the displaced has the potential to ‘unlock’ and harness that resilience for the benefit of all urban residents.

**Maslakh**

Maslakh (meaning slaughterhouse) was developed as an IDP hosting area in 1998. Maslakh was once the largest IDP camp in Afghanistan and among the largest in the world; at one point home to more than 350,000 IDPs. In 2002 the population was estimated at 120,000, at which time large scale aid distribution was scaled back ahead of the camp’s official closure in 2005. Since that time however a residual population of around 20,000 conflict induced IDPs have remained in Maslakh. Unable or unwilling to return to their place of origin and with some households having lived on the site for more than 15 years, residents of Maslakh see now themselves as citizens of Herat. Efforts to regularize Maslakh and provide some degree of tenure security to the occupants and/or provide assistance of a non-temporary nature, were largely prohibited as part of the Government’s policy to encourage return. Confined to the margins, the remaining population remained extremely vulnerable as a result of their protracted displacement.

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19 Zetter R 2014 ‘Reframing Displacement Crises as Development Opportunities’
In an attempt to improve the self-reliance of the residents of Maslakh through local integration, an approach of evidence based advocacy (EBA) was applied. The objective was to target key decision makers at multiple levels of government to advocate for lifting the prohibition on development interventions and providing residents with tenure security. This presented a number of formidable challenges however, as the prevailing discourse was significantly anti-integration, with the displaced being seen as security threats and ‘outsiders’. Prior to the intervention, the concept of local integration had been broached a number of times by development actors and was flatly rejected, with the
government being fixated on returning them to their place of origin as the only feasible durable solution.

**Methodology**

In order to obtain a comprehensive profile of the demographics, living conditions and aspirations of the residents of Maslakh, a quantitative data collection tool the ‘Resilience Index’ (RI) was applied. The RI included multiple choice and close-ended questions, assessing basic living standards, earning potential, support networks and ability to cope with external shocks. A number of questions to gauge levels of household integration into their local area were also asked; including participation in local organizations, perceptions of neighbors, perceived tenure security and perceived involvement in local decision making. The RI was implemented in all households in Maslakh giving a total sample of 1,746 households/19,350 individuals.

The manner in which data was collected was critical, as a primary objective of the exercise was to create an evidence base that was widely accepted, to counter the pervasive ambiguity, ideology and stereotypes that permeated the official discourse surrounding the displaced. Data collection was thus conducted in conjunction with representatives from the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, municipal and district officials. Local officials were given initial training in data collection and then participated directly in the profiling exercise. Data validation workshops were then conducted, where preliminary findings were presented to local officials, representatives from the office of the governor and representatives of Maslakh who endorsed findings as a group.

**Resilience Index**

In the context of this report, resilience is defined as ‘the ability of households to keep with a certain level of well-being by withstanding shocks and stresses’. The objective of the RI is to examine the core components that contribute to standard of living, and to predict the ability to cope with future shocks and stresses. It is intended to give a detailed picture of the impact of living conditions, whilst assisting with the targeting of future interventions and measuring the impacts of such.

To this end the RI examined five key components that contribute to household resilience:

- **Food Security**: including food consumption, dietary diversity, and household hunger; gauged by measuring the frequency with which households had access to key staples and how often coping mechanisms such as food substitution or skipping meals were required
- **Access to Basic Services**: including the proximity of health and education services, access to and quality of water, access to electricity, latrine type and accessibility

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20 The Afghan Ministry mandated to address the needs of the displaced
- **Social Safety Nets**: including the prior receipt of assistance from government, NGOs and private individuals and assistance in locating employment
- **Assets**: including housing, livestock, mobility and other durable household assets
- **Adaptive Capacity**: Including source of income, expenditure patterns, savings, debt and significant impediments to household resilience such as a drug addicted or disabled member

Respondents were also asked a series of questions to determine under what circumstances they came to be living in Maslakh. This information was used to classify respondents into one of four migratory groups;

- **Internally Displaced People** (IDPs): defined as ‘Persons or groups of persons who have been forced to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised state border.’\(^{21}\)
- **Economic Migrants**: for the purpose of this study are defined as ‘Those who choose to move in order to improve their lives and living conditions, internationally or within a country but were not directly forced to relocate, by disaster or conflict.’
- **Returnees**: defined as ‘Those who have gone through the process of return who were refugees in a foreign country and have returned to Afghanistan’\(^{22}\)
- **Host Community**: ‘A community that has IDP, returnee or migrant households living amongst non-migrant households.’\(^{23}\)

It is important to note that there is significant cross over between IDPs and economic migrants in Afghanistan; the latter of which may be moving to escape the long term or indirect manifestations of protracted conflict. In fact, it is often difficult or impossible to identify one sole motivation for a household moving locations. The term economic migrant has unfortunately come to function as a derogatory label in Afghanistan, that implies at best an opportunist and at worst malevolent intentions to ‘steal’ jobs in a hosting area\(^ {24}\). Whilst displaced households may have distinct needs, particularly in the first years of displacement, the term ‘economic migrant’ as it used in this report does not indicate a household that is less deserving of assistance or has less of a right to be present in a hosting area. Distinctions were not made between different groups in advocacy activities, rather an ‘area based approach’ was favored, whereby interventions benefit IDPs/returnees, economic migrants and the host community in target areas.

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\(^{21}\) UN OCHA 2004 ‘Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement’

\(^{22}\) Ibid

\(^{23}\) UNHCR 2012 ‘IDPs in Host Families and Host Communities: Assistance for Hosting Arrangements’

\(^{24}\) Althaus 2016 ‘The False Dichotomy between the Displaced and Economic Migrants’
Normative Responses:
Inherent in the study was the risk of normative responses. A number of questions were sensitive, with the RI seeking detailed information regarding the possession of assets, food consumption patterns, coping strategies etc. There was the risk that participants would perceive that their responses would influence the amount of assistance they would receive and would thus have an interest in exaggerating the severity of their living conditions or otherwise misrepresenting the reality. To address this the data collection tool was designed so as to involve enumerators asking questions in a number of ways, reiterating key points and crosschecking responses. In addition, in preliminary meetings with community members, the objectives of the survey were outlined and it was stressed that household responses would in no way influence the level of assistance that would be received by any particular household.

An electronic survey platform (Kobo Toolbox) was used whereby data was uploaded directly into a tablet. This assisted with crosschecking of responses and minimized the potential for human error. At the end of each section of the RI, a summary of results was displayed, allowing enumerators to revisit a respondent’s answers. This was found to be useful in identifying cases where for example household size was over-reported or food consumption was under reported.

Figure 6: A social organizer delivers the Resilience Index Questionnaire to a female household head in Maslakh

Findings:
The key findings of the RI that would form the basis of EBA are as follows:
In keeping with the national trend the population of Maslakh is relatively gender balanced with a significant youth bulge; approximately 55% of residents are under the age of 18.

![Figure 7: Household Composition: Maslakh, Herat](image)

### i. Migration Profile

The majority of the households are conflict induced IDPs (68.5%), whilst approximately one third of respondents reported locating in Maslakh for economic reasons. Only 1% of the population were identified as returnees whilst approximately 3% reported always living in Maslakh and thus were considered members of the host community.

For IDP households, displacement is predominantly a long term phenomenon; 60.5% of report being displaced between 10-15 years, whilst a further 20.4% have been displaced for 15-20 years. A small minority (2.6%) are newly displaced; less than six years.

![Figure 8: Migration Profile: Maslakh, Herat](image)

![Figure 9: Length of Displacement, IDPs & Returnees: Maslakh, Herat](image)

Given the majority of the population are conflict induced IDPs, safety is unsurprisingly the most significant pull factor for locating in Maslakh (65.2% of households). Proximity to livelihood opportunities is the second most significant factor (55.3% of households), followed by the presence of relatives (43%).

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25 Given Maslakh’s development as an IDP settlement in 1998 it is likely that this figure is influenced by normative responses.
Lack of livelihoods is the most significant barrier to integration for both migrant and IDP households (89% and 87.2% of households respectively), followed by a lack of services (75.4% and 82.9% of households respectively). IDP households are far more likely to cite an inability to enroll children as a barrier to integration (70.5% compared to 35.5% of economic migrant households), suggesting the former group has significantly more difficulty in obtaining essential civil documentation.

### Figure 11: Barriers to Integration, IDP & Migrant Households, Maslakh, Herat

Virtually all residents of Maslakh report that local integration is their preferred durable solution. This is highly significant in the Afghan context, as unlike some examples from the region, the government frequently does not have the capacity to conduct force evictions. A lack of government control in some areas coupled with a population that is highly militarized culminates in a situation where the populous is much more equipped resist such attempts. Thus government actors have no choice but to take into consideration the future intentions of the displaced. Virtually all IDP households indicated

### Future Intentions
intending to remain, whilst 8.8% of migrant households reported intending to leave. Of those, the most common reason cited was lack of land and a lack of services (21 households respectively), whilst 10 households reported a lack of livelihoods had motivated their decision to leave.

Figure 12 & 13: Preferred Durable Solution, Movement Intentions: IDP & Migrant Households, Maslakh, Herat

iii. Resilience Index

There is virtually no variance in levels of resilience among different households in Maslakh. Findings indicate extremely poor living conditions and access to basic services across all groups. Examination of the components of the RI also shows only negligible variance between different groups. Economic migrant households have marginally better access to social safety nets by virtue of being more likely to have received some form of assistance in the past.

Figure 14: Resilience Index Dimensions: Maslakh, Herat
iv. Food Security

Findings showed pervasive food insecurity in Maslakh. 853 households were found to be severely food insecure, whilst a further 411 households are moderately insecure; with diets lacking in adequate diversity and/or households regularly having to employ coping mechanisms such as skipping meals or food substitution.

![Figure 15: Food Security by Migration Status: Maslakh, Herat](image)

v. Access to Services

Access to services in Maslakh is very poor, virtually all households rely on an unimproved pit latrine, of those approximately 30% share a latrine with one or more households. 102 households have no access to a latrine and must resort to open defecation. Access to water is a significant issue; virtually all households rely on communal water points outside of their compounds. 407 households report waiting times to collect water of more than 30 minutes; anecdotal evidence suggests that during peak demand times this can extend to up to several hours.

No households have access to the city electricity grid. Approximately 50% of households access electricity through their own diesel generator or that of a neighboring household. Electricity is primarily used for lighting and to power electric fans.

All roads in Maslakh are unpaved/unsealed, representing a significant impediment to mobility, particularly in the winter months. 532 households report the nearest health center being more than 30
minutes’ travel away, whilst 1007 households report that there is no health facility in the vicinity that they have the means to access.

vi. Employment & Household Expenditure

Virtually all of the household heads in Maslakh are engaged in daily wage labor. Heating transport and food are among the chief expenses. Approximately 5% of the population report spending all of household income on food, whilst 72% report spending more than half of household income. Transport represents a significant expense; approximately 10% of households report spending more than half of their income on transport, suggesting travel to Herat city for work is common.

![Figure 17 & 18: Source of Income, Most Significant Expenditure by Proportion of Income: Maslakh, Herat](image)

Further data including information on; land tenure, housing, possession of essential civil documentation, perceptions of integration, participation in local decision making was also obtained and trust in the municipal government to provide services was also obtained.

The Advocacy Process

The completed profile in itself represented a significant step forward in the case for local integration for Maslakh residents, as prior to the exercise there was pervasive ambiguity and disagreement among local actors regarding settlement patterns. The manner in which the profile was conducted with government partners was critical, to ensure widespread buy in and ownership of the results, as well as building the capacity of local actors to conduct comprehensive profiling. The results of the profile then formed the basis of an intensive process of engagement with government partners. A critical focus of the advocacy was the finding that the overwhelming majority (>95%) of the protracted
displaced have no intention of returning to their place of origin and will seek to remain in Herat regardless of whether or not they are marginalized. With the acceptance of this reality as a foundation, it was possible to advance other key arguments.

**Arguments that Resonate with Decision Makers:**

Past initiatives to advocate for the inclusion of the displaced in Afghanistan have tended to have a human rights focus; highlighting poor living conditions and/or legal and constitutional rights of Afghan citizens to things such as adequate shelter and livelihoods. Whilst these arguments are legitimate, they were observed to not resonate in those places where opposition to local integration was most present; local decision makers and residents of host communities. Thus an approach was taken to acknowledge the concerns of hosting areas, and to focus on ways in which potential negative impacts of an influx on a hosting area may be mitigated. A focus on the potential positive impacts and contributions the displaced could bring to a hosting area and the metropolis as a whole if they were given the opportunity to become self-reliant were also pursued. This approach came to be known as appealing to the ‘self-interest’ of decision makers.

In particular arguments that were found to resonate the most with local decision makers are as follows:

- **Increased Stewardship over Settlement of Returnees & IDPs:**
  - Regularizing selected displaced hosting sites that have potential to absorb more of the protracted caseload allows the government to effectively plan for and direct the settlement patterns of the displaced, rather than the current situation of ad hoc settlement and the further growth of informal settlements in urban areas

- **Increased Attraction of Development Aid:**
  - Returnees and IDPs are often among the most vulnerable urban residents. However, to date development interventions targeting these populations have been largely restricted or prohibited as part of a policy of encouraging return/resettlement to LAS sites. By providing tenure security in appropriate locations and removing restrictions on permanent development interventions, development actors will have new access to previously unreachable target populations, opening up a host of new programmatic opportunities and facilitating an influx of development aid

- **An Area Based Approach to Service Delivery:**
  - An approach to development interventions whereby target populations, host communities and the wider metropolis benefit is critical to building support and mitigating tensions between different groups. Host communities will thus benefit
from programmatic opportunities afforded by the new access to target populations.

- **Increased Economic Activity:**
  - Excluding the displaced in urban areas undermines opportunities for self-reliance and a potentially highly productive contribution to the city is squandered. Local integration has the potential to ‘unlock’ the resilience and productivity of the displaced, for the benefit of hosting areas and for cities as a whole. A situation that is vastly preferable to undermining the self-reliance of groups that will be in cities regardless.

- **Increased Local Tax Revenue:**
  - Providing security of tenure gives the returnees and IDPs the confidence to invest in their dwellings and their local area. It also provides the foundation for functional relations with the municipality, and opportunities for revenue collection in the form of local services taxes.

‘Permission to Stay’: An Interim Approach to Tenure Security for the Afghan Context

Whilst the above arguments were found to resonate, the fact that none of the Maslakh residents owned the land they occupy remained a formidable challenge. A number of large scale programs in recent years to improve the land administration system and enhance tenure security for vulnerable Afghans have focused on the distribution of freehold land titles. Experience has shown however that the requisite capacity of the land administration system does not yet exist. The results have thus been typically confined to uncontested land and have had minimal positive impacts on the most vulnerable urban residents. Mindful of this context, a collective ‘permission to stay’ approach was piloted; whereby land titles would not be sought in the short term, rather a documented assurance that residents of Maslakh would not be evicted for a pre-defined period (in this case 15 years) was envisioned. Key to the ‘permission to stay’ concept was that it would be applied at the community rather than individual household level. Tenure security would be provided, however in the short term at least ownership of land would remain with the state and households would not have the ability to trade in plots.

The EBA was successful in influencing the discourse to the extent where both the Mayor and Governor (the former a previously outspoken critic of local integration) agreed to endorse a protocol whereby Maslakh residents were granted ‘permission to stay’ for 15 years. Whilst the protocol has no legal backing, the centralized nature of decision making in Afghanistan renders the document extremely significant in moving residents forward along the ‘continuum of tenure security’. There exists a precedent whereby a document from a high government official has been sufficient to guarantee land use rights in Afghanistan. The protocol was sufficient to give resident the confidence
to invest in themselves and their community and for the prohibition of development assistance to be lifted. This was a catalyst for a number of interventions to improve basic services; including a water supply network, improvements to shelter and educational facilities. In addition, the results of the profile were catalytic for a number of humanitarian actors to implement food and water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) assistance. The Government have also announced plans to distribute temporary occupancy certificates, that can eventually be converted to land titles in the coming years as the land administration system develops.

Conclusions
Whilst formidable challenges remain, the case of Maslakh demonstrates the potential for EBA to positively influence the discourse and have significant positive outcomes for some of the most vulnerable urban Afghans. Perhaps most significant among the data obtained through the RI was the confirmation that the displaced have and intend to continue residing in urban areas in the long term despite being marginalized. The acceptance of this reality is the first step towards altering an approach of exclusion applied dogmatically, despite evidence of it being ineffective in encouraging return.

Other key data has the potential to then build on this foundation to create a discourse predominantly based on evidence rather than ideology and stereotypes. A key output of the exercise was a methodology that is replicable and scalable. The intention is to conduct the same exercise in other provinces of Afghanistan that are centers of return/protracted displacement, employing the arguments that were found to resonate most with local decision makers.
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