

Afghanistan Protection Cluster (APC) STRATEGY 2012-2014¹

I. Context - The period of 2012-2014 is considered critical for the protection of Afghan civilians, notably with heightened civilian casualties and internal displacement trends in 2011². Chronic human rights violations remain at the core of the protection of civilians concerns in Afghanistan. Challenges in enabling human rights protection mechanisms are further aggravated due to the added dimensions of the armed conflict and widespread insecurity.

The likelihood of the trend of increasing civilian casualties continuing in 2012 is a realistic expectation amongst the humanitarian community in Afghanistan.³ The security transition from the International Military (IM) to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), planned until 2014 is also likely to contribute to the continuation of this trend.

II. Focus of the Protection Cluster⁴ - In light of the context, the Protection Cluster Strategy (APC Strategy) will focus on the following 6 areas:

- i. Humanitarian Protection Issues that have a direct link to concerns arising out of general insecurity, armed conflict and natural disasters⁵;
- ii. Core populations of concern for the APC will thus remain those affected and/ or internally displaced, due to natural disasters and conflict;⁶
- iii. The protection of civilian populations will remain the overarching perspective for the APC and will embrace comprehensive appreciation of the impact of the conflict and insecurity on civilians;
- iv. The APC will continue to execute responsibilities under the humanitarian reform process, especially in light of the current discussions under the *Transformative Agenda*. This will include timely protection advice to the Humanitarian coordinator and Humanitarian Country team;
- v. Through its sub-clusters and thematic groups the APC will focus in the areas of: Child Protection in Emergencies (CPiE); Gender Based Violence (GBV); Housing, Land and Property (HLP); and Mine Action⁷. The APC sub-groups will focus on their agreed priorities and report to the APC on emerging protection concerns;

¹ The definition of Protection used to guide the work of the APC will be the one used by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC): "... all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e. HR law, IHL, refugee law)."

² Refer: Afghanistan Annual Report 2011 – Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, <http://unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/human%20rights/March%20PoC%20Annual%20Report%20Final.pdf>, UNAMA/OHCHR, Feb 2012, Kabul and IDP Task Force reports, <http://afg.humanitarianresponse.info/clusters/IDP%20Task%20Force>

³ Refer, CAP 2012, <http://afg.humanitarianresponse.info/cap>

⁴ The focus of the Protection Cluster is also guided by its Terms of Reference, refer, <http://afg.humanitarianresponse.info/clusters/Protection/>

⁵ As per the strategic framework of the Global Protection Cluster (GPC) for 2012-2014 the aim of the protection cluster will be "A world in which boys, girls, women and men affected by humanitarian crises are fully protected in accordance with their rights". Therefore, the focus will be to respond to humanitarian crises which could include: 1 Armed conflict ; 2 Post-conflict situations; Natural disasters ;4 Famine – 5 Protracted social conflict, Slim and Bonwick, Protection – An ALNAP guide for humanitarian agencies, 2005.

⁶ UNHCR's is lead on protection response to natural disaster since 2011 within GPC. However, in country IOM is lead responder on natural disasters related displacement while UNHCR responds to conflict affected IDPs, refer, Draft -Population Movements- Policy and Response Mechanisms, November 2011. However, the overall protection coordination of both natural and conflict disasters IDPs falls within the responsibility of the APC.

⁷ CpiE, SGBV, HLP and Mine Action are AOR's at the GPC and APC members have prioritised these as a need in country. However, other thematic groups will be formed as and when needed, such as the Protection of Civilians Working Group.

- vi. Protection will transcend across all clusters as a cross-cutting issue and APC will provide guidance and support to other clusters to ensure that a rights based approach is fully integrated in all planning, preparedness, response and recovery efforts.⁸

III. Priority Protection Activities⁹

The APC Work-plan and its activities have been spaced over 2012-2014, in the context of the ongoing protection concerns in the context of the transition period that Afghanistan is currently undergoing and also because some activities initiated will require longer term commitment. Given that protection priorities in Afghanistan's volatile situation can alter at any time, the APC work-plan proposes two reviews of 12 months (open to the entire APC) and 6 months (where the various sub-cluster and thematic groups will undertake a joint review on progress being made).

APC will ensure that its priorities are reflected in the work of its task-forces and sub-groups. These priorities are supported by the Global Protection Cluster priorities as well. Protection activities have been prioritised based on a 'bottom up' approach that enabled a situational analysis at the APC Retreat in March 2012.

A. Field Support: Field protection clusters develop into strong action based co-ordination networks that are the primary early warning and protection information gathering systems. Speedy feedback from the field will enable the APC to undertake supportive interventions and provide advice as required. There will be a concerted effort to fill the gaps related to GBV, CPiE and HLP in the field.

B. Training and tools development: A key gap has been the lack of common understanding among the different agencies in the field on a range of protection issues. The APC will therefore, develop a harmonised sensitisation/ training plan for the varied areas of concern for the APC. The APC will support OCHA in the introduction of new tools but will minimise the number of assessment forms and other tools being sent to the already overburdened field.

C. Advocacy and Information Sharing:¹⁰ Protection advocacy is a key component of the work of the GPC and the APC and the focus is to have this issue field driven. This will ensure informed decision making at the HCT. Key protection issues during the transition that have an impact on protection of civilians will be further discussed in a dedicated Protection of Civilians working group. The APC will continue to undertake advocacy towards donors in relation to key protection and funding issues.

D. Policy Development: The APC will seek to address two areas of policy development from 2012 through 2013: the National IDP policy for Afghanistan; and Situation of Urban IDPs, vulnerable populations and engagement of cluster partners.

E. Development of key partnerships: with the current situation in Afghanistan with some parts being inaccessible and other parts transitioning rapidly, the need for greater and wider engagement by the APC with local, regional and national level actors (Governmental and non-governmental) is even more needed. Therefore, key activities will be engaged in sustaining and

⁸ Refer, p.5, GPC Strategic Framework 2012-2014.

⁹ Refer, APC retreat, March 2012 main paper, "A bottom Up" approach which was a comprehensive review by the Regional Field Clusters of their activities being undertaken and gaps to be addresses. Also, refer APC work-plan 2012-2014, which was an outcome of the APC annual retreat, March 2012.

¹⁰ Advocacy has been identified as one of the activities identified by IASC principals as critical to improving the humanitarian system as a whole – IASC guidance Note on Using the cluster Approach to Strengthening Humanitarian response, Nov 2006, Ibid, p. 7.

deepening the involvement of the AIHRC and bringing on board early recovery actors who have been a critical missing gap. The notion of *protection networks* to enable access to inaccessible areas or areas of limited access will be further expanded and refined.

IV. Expected Impact of the work of the APC

- Early warning on protection of civilian concerns will enable development and implementation of action oriented strategies for their prevention and mitigation.
- Strengthened field protection clusters will enable speedy and effective coordination of responses to fill critical humanitarian needs.
- Effective and efficient policy, advocacy and programme interventions will be enabled nationally especially through protection mainstreaming across clusters
- An engaged HCT and HC will facilitate strengthened advocacy and interventions for the protection of civilian populations.
- Key protection issues prevalent in Afghanistan are highlighted for the enhanced understanding of key stake-holders, including the GoA.

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