

Afghanistan Information Management Service Briefing Paper

District Vulnerability Mapping

Introduction

Over the past few months the Interim Administration and the UN system have expressed increasing concern about the targeting of assistance to Afghanistan. Working with the UN Area Coordinators, UNAMA decided to undertake an exercise to identify the most vulnerable districts in Afghanistan. AIMS was tasked to support this exercise by collating data and providing map products as a basis for further analysis and planning.

Basic Methodology

At the initial meeting to launch this exercise, the following methodology was agreed:

1. The Area Coordinators identified a series of sectoral indicators for which they believed comprehensive data was available. A form was developed by the ACs to capture this data.
2. The ACs collected as much of this data as possible in their respective Areas, and forwarded it to AIMS in Kabul/Islamabad. At the same time AIMS collated centrally available data from existing sources.
3. AIMS cleaned the data¹ and entered it into a geographic information system (GIS).
4. District Vulnerability Maps were created as the initial products of this process for review by UNAMA.
5. The data and the maps will be circulated to the Area Coordinators to be checked for consistency. Combining the available data and maps with their local expertise, the Area Coordinators will identify the 10 most vulnerable districts in their Area.
6. This analysis can then be used as a tool to mobilize resources to meet immediate and longer-term needs, both at local and national levels, as well as a basis for more informed discussions on the targeting of assistance with the Afghan authorities.

Constraints

Collecting and collating the basic data proved difficult. The Area Coordinators worked extremely hard to collect data at the local level but faced significant obstacles. In some sectors it was not possible to get national coverage (notably with water) and so using these sectoral indicators would not have presented the complete picture. This should not be seen as a huge setback – instead it should provide an incentive to improve the collection and management of data for these sectors.

AIMS was able to get centrally available data for a number of sectors; in other cases data that had been identified was not easily obtainable – for instance neither of the agricultural indicators originally requested were available. The maps and analysis can be updated as new data is collected – for instance, the VAM data is valid until the next harvest, at which point WFP will provide a new set of vulnerability data.

¹ 'Cleaning' refers to the process of checking and formatting data in order to make it compatible with existing systems.

Afghanistan Information Management Service Briefing Paper

Area Coordinators agreed to use the 32 Province, 329 District model of administration and the CSO population statistics in order to standardize their reporting and to link with the model used by AIMS. However in some cases problems with the allocation of districts at local level made it difficult for data to be collected on this basis. AIMS Field Offices will support the Area Coordinators in addressing this issue.

The initial results of this exercise were scheduled to be issued at the end of April but were slightly delayed by gaps in the data returned. AIMS produced the first four maps by 3 May; as of the time of writing five maps had been developed and a sixth map (refugee returns) was under development. Given the constraints faced by everyone in the data collection process, this is an excellent result.

Mapping with Proxy Indicators – How to read the maps

The most important thing to remember is that the sectoral indicators are proxy indicators that do not take into account the full range of factors involved in determining vulnerability within that sector. A proxy indicator is used for primary analysis; proxy indicators are used because they provide a useful way to begin analyzing a complicated sector.

As an example, the proxy indicator for Health is a numerical count of the basic health facilities divided by the district population. This gives an indication of whether there are enough medical facilities to support the population in a district – but does not capture whether those health facilities are actually working, or the quality of service that they are providing. As new data becomes available, it can replace the proxy indicator and be used to provide improved analysis. Currently the organization MSH (Management Sciences for Health) is carrying out a comprehensive survey of health facilities in Afghanistan, and the results of their survey work can be incorporated into this process.

The individual sector maps by themselves only provide a rough indication of vulnerability. Although they are interesting in their own right it is the maps showing the Combined Indicators that begin to show interesting results.

As an example, when only Food, Health and Landmines/UXOs are combined, the North-Eastern Area does not appear as especially vulnerable. Given the general knowledge that this Area is one of the poorest in the country, this might lead one to question the accuracy of the map. However, the inclusion of the Accessibility indicator causes districts in the North-Eastern Area to show an increase in vulnerability – thus demonstrating that Accessibility is a major factor in the structural poverty of the North-East.

AIMS has received countrywide data for only four of the originally identified sectors. The maps currently being released are those for Landmines/UXOs, Health, Food, and Accessibility. As other data becomes available, new sectoral maps and Combined Indicator analysis maps will be released.

Afghanistan Information Management Service Briefing Paper

Conclusion

These maps are the first stage in an exercise that will increase in value as more data is added. As data becomes available it will be added to the database. The more data that is added, the clearer and more accurate the maps will become.

It is also important to include the experience of the Area Coordinators in analyzing and updating these maps. Discussions should continue on how to incorporate this experience into the process, particularly in identifying how it might be possible to fill the gaps that currently exist in the data.

AIMS hopes that this will become an ongoing process that can be used by the entire assistance community and the Afghan authorities as a guide for strategic decision-making about the allocation of resources for the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

If you have any questions about this exercise, please contact Paul Currion (Project Manager) on paul.currion@hic.org.pk or Kathleen Miner (Technical Manager) on kathleen.miner@hic.org.pk.

Annex 1: Sectors and Indicators selected by the Area Co-ordinators

	Sector	Indicator	Primary Source	Comment
1	Food Security	Percentage of population targeted as food insecurity	WFP VAM	Complete
2	Agriculture	a. <i>Estimated cereal deficit 2001</i> b. <i>Jeribs of spring wheat planted 2002</i>	FAO?	Data not available – AIMS recommends that these indicators be postponed
3	Water	<i>Individuals without access to safe drinking water</i>	?	Coverage not complete – AIMS recommends that this indicator be postponed
4	Health	Percentage of population with access to primary health care	WHO	Complete
5	Landmines/ UXOs	Percentage of settlements within 5km of contaminated area	MACA	Complete
6	Refugee returns	<i>No of returnees</i>	UNHCR	Ongoing
7	IDP returns	<i>No of IDP returns</i>	UNHCR/IOM	Ongoing
8	Accessibility	Travel time from district capital to provincial capital	Area Co-ordinators	Complete