

CHILDREN AFFECTED BY ARMED CONFLICT IN AFGHANISTAN



**Discussion document prepared for
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&
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Executive Summary

This discussion document results from the UNICEF ROSA Children Affected by Armed Conflict (CAAC), Part One Project. It relates how millions of children in Afghanistan have been affected by conflict and today suffer from the accumulated legacy of the loss of life, upheaval, destruction of infrastructure and material possessions entailed by the war. The paper urges that research into CAAC in Afghanistan must remain a matter of priority in order to raise the profile of the situation in Afghanistan and to contribute to better-informed intervention for children.

The paper uses the framework of a 'complex political emergency' to conceptualise the political, economic and social circumstances prevailing in Afghanistan today. War is a key component of the dire situation. The particular nature of the war with high levels of material destruction, a huge loss of life and phenomenal displacement is responsible for the extent of the devastation. The impacts of the war have been compounded by other factors such as poverty, the lack of state based social welfare, abuses of civil and political human rights, environmental fragility and cultural practices.

Families and communities have been economically, socially and emotionally affected. Family structures and livelihoods have undergone profound changes as war and displacement has become a way of life. The quality of inter-personal relations has also been influenced; war has taken its toll on the ability of parents to provide supportive and protective environments for their children. These impacts have negative ramifications for the emotional well being of parents and children alike.

Children face particular risks in Afghanistan. They are in danger of death and injury during fighting or from landmines and UXOs. Children have a high exposure to violence and some have participated in the fighting. Increasing reliance is being placed on children's roles in the cash economy. This may involve expose them to hazards. Orphaned children and girls also have unique vulnerabilities.

The paper suggests that research on CAAC in Afghanistan can be strengthened through attention to the systems and structures in which the needs of contemporary children in Afghanistan are derived. Further work should also identify issues of coping and survival in which children are involved. There is a need to move analysis beyond small statistical samples on selected groups of children to build up a more representative picture across the country. Research would benefit from the participatory involvement of children, especially adolescents. The ethical and methodological issues of conducting research on children in Afghanistan need consideration. Finally, CAAC should not be seen as a minority concern but work on children should be mainstreamed into wider analysis of the situation in the country as a whole.

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Abbreviations

CAAC	Children Affected by Armed Conflict
CAR	central Asian Republic
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DfID	Department for International Development - UK
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
MSF	Medecin Sans Frontier
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
PAFO	Pakistan Afghanistan Field Office, Save the Children Fund (USA)
PDPA	People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF ROSA	Regional Office of UNICEF, South Asia
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
WFP	World Food Programme

Introduction

Background to the Project

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides a global charter for the protection of children's survival, development and well being. Armed conflict creates conditions under which many of the rights laid out in the CRC are undermined. As the 1996 Graca Machel/UNICEF report on Children Affected by Armed Conflict pointed out, war increases the threats to children and clearly contravenes the mandate for their protection laid out in the CRC.

The international community has therefore a special duty of care and protection with regard to children exposed to armed conflict, civil strife and displacement. This duty requires agencies involved in preventative and emergency efforts to understand how children are affected by such adversities and to develop measures that mitigate the impact on children. Acknowledging the urgent need to improve child-focused emergency responses in the context of conflict, the UK government's Department for International Development (DfID) has provided financial support to UNICEF globally, through the Children Affected by Armed Conflict (CAAC) Project to raise the capacity of child-focused interventions in armed conflict.

As part of this initiative the Regional UNICEF Office in South Asia (ROSA) has undertaken the Children Affected by Armed Conflict, Part One Project. The premises of the project are:

- Child protection during emergencies involves more than simple service delivery. The project seeks to develop a conceptual and practical framework to move forward policy, practice and advocacy on CAAC. This entails the development of new methods of information gathering and analysis, new approaches to programming and policy development and new ways of thinking about and working with children and their families during conflict.
- Working with and supporting children, their families, communities and other local stakeholders implies the need for in-depth understanding of the particular context, dynamics and impacts of armed conflict in South Asia.
- Building the capacity of UNICEF and partner organisations to respond more effectively to war-affected children requires the development of new training approaches that enhance not only individual learning, but also institutional memory. Current training practices that rely on 'training events' and the production of manuals are not the most effective way of meeting these objectives. The Project will therefore develop interactive and distance learning

methods and produce learning modules and materials that will be made available on the UNICEF website.

- Children's rights can be protected by promoting leadership and accountability for violations of children's rights and by ensuring that internationally agreed standards of child protection become accepted throughout the region and are sustained during conflict. This entails lobbying, advocacy and information dissemination on general human/children's rights instruments, with a focus on principles and issues that are of particular relevance to war-affected children.

Establishing the Knowledge Base

To initiate the project UNICEF ROSA commissioned consultants at the Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford, to map out: 1) the existing knowledge on children affected by armed conflict in the South Asia region 2) the existing institutional capacity for intervention on CAAC. Between January and April 2001 two consultants travelled throughout India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Afghanistan collecting existing secondary information on CAAC and meeting informed experts, particularly those involved in child-focused intervention in areas of conflict. The UNICEF country offices provided logistical support in Bhutan, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. In Pakistan and Afghanistan the UNICEF Pakistan Country Office and Afghanistan Country Office facilitated the project in partnership with Save the Children Fund (US) Pakistan and Afghanistan Field Office. A complementary study on children in the Chittagong Hill tracts and Cox's Bazaar of Bangladesh was funded by the British Council, Bangladesh.

The findings of the research constitute two regional discussion papers to be presented at a workshop in Kathmandu 9-14th July 2001. Country specific reports have also been compiled. These use existing material and insights from interviews with informed experts to promote conceptual and practical frameworks to move forward policy, practice and advocacy on children affected by armed conflict.

The Afghanistan Country Report

Afghanistan is an apt case for this project, for in 22 years of war (of which there is still no end in sight) children have been directly affected by the conflict and today suffer from the accumulated legacy of the loss of life, upheaval, destruction of infrastructure and material possessions entailed in the conflict. Too often, however, investigation into the impact of war on children in Afghanistan has started and stopped with the rapid survey of current pressing needs in order to plan the next round of service delivery. The needs in Afghanistan are indeed severe and demand humanitarian assistance. Yet it is being recognised that a more holistic perspective is required. There is increasing concern for understanding the social and historical aspects of the situation as it stands today in the hope for better informed and more effective intervention.¹

In line with both this shift and with the aim of the ROSA project to develop new conceptual frameworks for understanding children affected by armed conflict, this report covers two areas:

1. An integrated and holistic perspective on the impact of war on children's survival, development and well being in Afghanistan.

There is little doubt that the situation of children in Afghanistan is one of the worst in the world. This is proved in the dismal national indicators on health, education and survival. It is confirmed again and again in the ongoing needs assessments conducted by humanitarian agencies, assessments that reveal a plethora of nutritional, health, material and developmental inadequacies amongst targeted populations.²

The war in Afghanistan is one of the key components of this dire situation. Yet it is not war alone that has created the extremely poor standard of living in Afghanistan and where it is war the causes lie in the particular nature of the conflict. The many threats to children survival development and well being in Afghanistan are the result of a complex set of factors, histories, events and causal relationships. Afghanistan fits well the description of a 'complex political emergency', with many players, vested interests and events affecting its peoples.

The report uses the framework of a complex political emergency to assess the current situation in Afghanistan from a holistic perspective. This is in line with the aims of the UNICEF ROSA project to looking at the impacts of conflict on children in historical and social context. It is important that research into CAAC goes beyond the impacts on children and addresses the causes, characteristics and correlates of the war. This information is crucial both for advocacy and for devising appropriate intervention. Unless these wider structures, systems and tensions are addressed it is likely that violence and loss will continue to mark the lives of children.

2. A review of Current Knowledge on CAAC in Afghanistan

The second part of the report gives details on how children have been affected by the war and ongoing disaster in Afghanistan. Children have been affected through the economic, social and emotional impacts of the war on their families and communities. Some children have faced especial hardship. The report draws attention to the adversities of direct violence and of increasing roles and responsibilities in the cash economy. Orphaned children and girls are also particularly vulnerable to certain risks and the report dwells on these groups of children.

Methodology

The report was written on the basis of secondary source material. This was collected from resources in the UK, on the web and during a four week field trip to Afghanistan and Pakistan made in February 2001. The consultant met with Non-government Organisations working with children and families both inside Afghanistan and amongst Afghan refugees in Pakistan. She visited the cities of Kabul, Jalalabad and Mazar-I-Sharif in Afghanistan. It must be pointed out that the trip did not include visits to territory held by the Northern Alliance, therefore the report concentrates on issues in Taliban held areas alone.

Background to Afghanistan

Population

Population Profile ³		
Total Population	24 792 375	
Ethnic Composition	Pashtun	35%
	Tajik	25%
	Uzbek	6%
	Hazara	19%
Demographic Make Up	0 - 14	42.37%
	15 - 64	54.86%
	65+	2.77%
Languages Spoken	Pashtu	35%
	Dari	50%
	Turkic Related	11%

History of the War

The borders of present day Afghanistan were created in the late 1800's. They were drawn up more as the result of external influence – to create a buffer state between the rival empires of Russia and England - than as a statement of any national coherence. Indeed the peoples of Afghanistan have long been the subjects of external empires. Their loyalty had traditionally been placed more at the local clan, community and ethnic level rather than with these transient invasions and rulings.

In the 1900s subsequent attempts at national consolidation and state building within Afghanistan's borders proved problematic for precisely these reason. The extension of the central government in the search for unification met with resistance from the fragmentary nature of actual local political power.⁴ At the same time, the state apparatus remained weak, heavily dependant on foreign aid and legitimate only to a minority urban-based intellectual elite.⁵ Within the elite itself there was frustration over the slow pace of change and many internal factions. The numerous coups throughout the 1900s were evidence of the instability of the central government and its vulnerability to the factionalism and different reformist agendas of the elite. Tensions and factions amongst the elite were compounded during the 1970s with the growth of communist and secularist ideologies, hand in hand with the growing dependence on Soviet aid for the army and administration. In 1978 the principal communist organisation in Afghanistan, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), which had - with Soviet backing - penetrated the military, succeeded in mounting a coup and took power.

The PDPA immediately attempted to push forward a set of radical reforms.⁶ These were met with fervent resistance, especially in rural areas. By the end of 1978 large swathes of Afghanistan was committed to resistance against the rule of PDPA.

Importantly the resistance was conducted in the name of Islam, the one unifying force in Afghanistan's heterogeneous ethnic and political make-up and heralded a fight against the secularism of the PDPA's agenda. Meanwhile, a series of army defections undermined the ability of the PDPA to maintain control and the resistance gained ground.⁷

In 1979 the PDPA government appealed for direct help from the Soviets to fight the revolution. In December Soviet troops crossed into Afghanistan, replacing the government with new Afghan leadership in the process, in the hope of strengthening the state from within. It was certainly in Soviet strategic interests to promote stability within Afghanistan but they initially intended only to stay long enough to secure the power of the national government in areas of resistance. This, however, proved an impossible task. By 1980 the resistance, which had started as local level protests in the name of Islam, had become politicised and organised through Afghan Muslim political parties based in Pakistan. The resistance also became increasingly well armed with aid from America, China, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. The 'mujahideen' became a powerful fighting force. In response the Soviets took effective control of the Afghan state structure and scaled up their army to 100 000 men.

By the mid 1980s a stalemate had occurred with the mujahideen controlling the rural areas and the Soviets in charge of Kabul and other major towns. By 1989, with no sight of decisive victory, Gorbachev decided that the cost of the war for the USSR was too high and pulled his troops out. They left President Najibullah in power and continued to back his hold of state structures and the war of the Afghan army against the mujahideen.

With the withdrawal of the Soviets, who had provided a common enemy and unifying force amongst the resistance, the ethnic and regional divisions amongst the mujahideen were exposed. Their attack on Najibullah's army was weakened by fragmentation and factionalism which Najibullah himself exploited. At the same time the government forces were also breaking apart, with defections by the northern militia under General Dostrum who joined with the northern mujahideen.

In 1992 Kabul finally fell to the Tajik and Uzbek forces of Rabbani - with his commander Massoud - and Dostrum respectively. Yet the seizure of Kabul by forces from the north, rather than by the Pashtun mujahideen of the south, further exposed the divisions (divisions often, but not always, along regional and ethnic lines) amongst the former jihadis. The fighting continued between different factions. Kabul was almost obliterated as different groups fought for control. Elsewhere the country was divided into fiefdoms under the authority of different mujahideen warlords.

By 1994 the Taliban had become a significant fighting force. The Taliban were traditional Islamic scholars from the southern Pashtun tribes and students (both Afghan refugees and Pakistanis) studying in Sunni madrasas in Pakistan.⁸ The Taliban drew support both as a religious movement and as representing the interests of the Pashtun ethnic groups. Their agenda was to end the civil war that was wracking the country and to impose a strict interpretation of sharia law.⁹

The Taliban swept through the country. They gained Kandahar in 1994, Herat in 1995, Kabul in 1996 – defeating the Rabbani regime - and Mazar-I-Sharif in 1998.

Their success can be attributed to their access to arm power with support from Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. They were also successful in a strategy of buying out local mujahideen commanders using money from the drugs fields they controlled in the south. Indeed the Taliban were welcomed by much of the population, especially in the south, who perceived them as a liberating force from the violence and restrictions imposed by mujahideen in-fighting.

Today, the Taliban control 90% of Afghanistan. In the north-east they still face opposition from a loose alliance of former mujahideen – the so called Northern Alliance - including members of the *Jumbesh-I-Melli Islami*, National Islamic Movement, led by the Uzbek leader Abdul Rashid Dostrum *Jamiat-I-Islami*, Islamic Society, led by former president of Afghanistan Rabbani Bushannaddin who is still recognised by the majority of the world community as the official leader of Afghanistan and his Tajik military commander Ahmad Shah Masood, and the *Hizbi Wahdat-Kalili*, Islamic Unity Party, led by the Hazara Abdul Karim Khalili. Khalili leads resistance amongst the Shia Hazaras of the central highlands who hold out for a separate Hazara homeland.

All sides continue to be well armed with support from external countries. Heavy offensives, especially in the spring, continue to inflict civilian casualties. Important events in recent years include fierce fighting for control of the Panjsher Valley. In September 2000 the town of Taloqan fell to the Taliban, although the last couple of years have seen a stalemate with all sides gaining and losing ground in equal measure. In 2001 Fighting was renewed on the 29th April. The Northern Alliance has acquired more heavy armaments from Iran and is bolstered by the return of exiled Ismail Khan, leading opposition amongst the Tajiks.

Causes of Conflict

Given the length and changing nature of the Afghan conflict the task of identifying causes is a complex one. A framework that identifies the international, national and local level determinants of the war is useful.¹⁰

International

Events within Afghanistan have long been influenced by the policies of international powers, evidenced in the strategies both Russia and England employed to gain influence in the area during the 1800s, strategies known as the ‘Great Game’.

The course of the war was determined by the commitment of international powers to supporting different players. This influence was at its height during the 1980s as Afghanistan became the crucible of cold war rivalries between America and the USSR. Today, those who influence the course of the war are Afghanistan’s more immediate neighbours, Pakistan, Iran and the CAR. Some commentators suggest that the extent of Pakistan’s current involvement in Afghanistan amounts to a proxy war to promote strategic interests in the region. Others, however, point to the ambiguities in the relationship between Pakistan and the Taleban and the high price Pakistan has paid for the war, including destabilisation within her own borders.¹¹

Other international influences in the Afghan war today are non-state entities that profit from the continued instability and lack of regulation over Afghan borders. Smuggling, drugs and trade enterprises involving international networks and passing through Afghanistan are an incredibly lucrative source of income. Indeed these vested interests, who often back the Taliban, benefit from continued war and may serve to promote it.

National

The fragmentary but conservative nature of political power bases in Afghanistan and the inability of a weak state to counter these and implement a reformist agenda have been seen to be at the centre of the initial uprisings in the country. Later, ethnic divisions came to the fore and perpetuated the fighting.

Ethnic identity has long been a factor in access to central power. Between 1747 and 1992 the leaders of Afghanistan were Pashtun, the dominant ethnic group concentrated mainly in the south. The Rabbani government of 1992 to 1996 was a historical anomaly with the leadership of 'northerners'. The ascendance of the Taliban has seen a predominantly Pushtun movement take power again. This has served to exaggerate ethnic and sectarian divisions amongst the fighting parties of Afghanistan, divisions, which continue to be expressed in war.

Local Level

The influence of local leadership has been critical in the conflict. Community religious leaders and elders inciting resistance against modernity and secularism, backed the mujahideen resistance. Yet, during the war the authority of the elders was sidelined and replaced by military commanders, who became extremely influential in directing the course of the conflict at the local level.¹² Loyalty to a local military commander was often the force behind recruitment and commitment to particular mujahideen group. These power networks and relations promoted the war effort amongst villages and communities.

Conceptualising Conflict in Afghanistan: A Complex Emergency

The war in Afghanistan fits well the description of a ‘complex political emergency’. Analysis of complex emergencies acknowledge:

- In modern day wars it is civilians, as much as combatants, who are the casualties of the fighting.¹³
- War has long term and structural characteristics, which become a way of life for the people affected. Complex political emergencies are marked by a “spiral of violence and fragmentation which lay to waste transport and communication; destroyed commercial and health networks; huge areas of land and natural resources taken out of production; a devastated human resource and skill base; blighted educational aspirations for future generations and millions forced into poverty.”¹⁴
- War is an event which people experience differently according to time, place and social status.
- Displacement is an integral part of a war experience. Displacement has profound social and economic costs for the people involved and for the country as a whole.¹⁵
- The impacts of war may be compounded by other factors such as natural disaster, cultural values, political instability, and the growth of war-lord economies.
- The stakes of political and physical survival are raised in conditions depleted of opportunity and resources by war.
- Humanitarian aid has a major impact on the political and physical security of the beneficiaries.¹⁶

This section substantiates how all these processes are manifest in Afghanistan and contribute to the context in which children and their families live and negotiate.

Threats to Civilians

Civilians have not been spared the impact of war in Afghanistan. The war has entailed and continues to entail severe human rights abuses, to the detriment of children. “Every day front line communities are subjected to indiscriminate bombings and the use of landmines. There are also regular reports of the deliberate destruction of homes and assets, including water systems, food and animals essential for survival.”¹⁷ Throughout the war fighting has taken place in the midst of villages and homes. During times of violence civilians have fled for their lives leaving behind fields, crops

and food stores and assets essential to their survival. Their loss has been material, economic and personal.

“My cousin was walking on Bibi Mahro hill with her mother. A mine exploded, she was killed and her mother was injured.”

“Five years ago a rocket killed my father and his face was completely destroyed.”

“One of my cousins was killed by a mine. When his father went to collect his body, another mine killed him.”

Boys aged 7 – 11, centre for street and working children, Kabul¹⁸

The Destruction of Infrastructure

The fighting in Afghanistan has been characterised by high levels of destruction. This is due to the extent, longevity and intensity of the fighting and also to the use of modern and expensive equipment, which caused maximum loss of life and material devastation. The operations of the Soviet and Afghan government forces in the 1980s took their toll on the rural infrastructure:

- An estimated 22 000 villages were completely destroyed or heavily damaged during this period.
- 3000 irrigation systems were blown apart, as part of the deliberate strategy to disable the local economy in areas thought to be harbouring mujahideen.
- An estimated 10 million land mines were used in the conflict and their presence continues to restrict some villages from returning.

Rural schools and health centres particularly suffered as they were often used as barracks for combatants stationed in the area and were targeted by opposing forces. The physical infrastructure for educational and health needs has therefore largely been obliterated, compounded by the displacement of trained professionals.

- An estimated 2000 schools were damaged between 1978 and 1986.¹⁹
- The impact of the Soviet war on educational institutes is shown in the table below. Village based institutions were particularly affected²⁰:

Type of Institute	1978	1984	Decline %
High School	163	44	73
Middle School	350	78	78
Primary School	1154	210	82
Village Schools	1451	0	100
Teacher Training Schools	26	6	65
Technical Schools	17	8	69

- The enrolment rate of boys in primary school dropped from 30% in 1978 to 18% in 1986.

The Use of Landmines

The use of landmines was a key tactic in the Soviet's 'area denial' campaign against the mujahideen; areas that were not controlled by the Soviets were to be destroyed and denied to the mujahideen.²¹ Villages were mined both by ground forces and by air. Supply routes were also targeted; the borders with Pakistan and Iran were particularly mined, with the aim of cutting off support for the mujahideen. In addition the Soviets used defensive mining to fortify their barracks and outposts.

After the Soviet withdrawal the mujahideen continued to employ land mines. Large stockpiles left by the Soviets were used by local war-lords to defend their territory and to undermine the security of others. Today, mining still occurs. Regular parties from both the Taliban and Northern opposition forces cross over the front line at night to penetrate behind enemy lines and lay mines in areas of civilian habitation.

- By 1996 an estimated 730 square kilometres of land in Afghanistan was mined.
- Residential, commercial, agricultural and grazing land, irrigation systems and roads comprise 70% of the total mined land in Afghanistan.²²
- 508 square kilometres of once mined land is now cleared but the continued presence of mines remains one of the biggest obstacles to agricultural reconstruction and security in Afghanistan.²³

The Differential Experience of War

Geographical Differences

In 22 years the battle lines and conflict zones of the Afghan war have shifted and changed, they have crossed the country in many ways and forms. Each village, town and region has its own history in this war. Some places were caught up and destroyed early on with the residents and their children living in exile for the last twenty years, others have seen successive waves of fighting and patterns of repeated displacement and return, others have hardly been touched or have only been involved recently. For some loss and displacement is an old history, for others a recent phenomenon. Concerns in the present-day Afghan population resulting from the war may be as variable as they are local. Identifiable patterns in the fighting are:

1978 – 1989, Widespread Rural Destruction

From the very beginning the PDPA response to the anti-communist resistance was extremely heavy. In 1979 Herat, a centre of the rebellion, was bombed by the Afghan air force, several thousand were killed and the movement of refugees to Pakistan and Iran began. The scale of the violence increased with the Soviet invasion. Suspected rebel strongholds were bombed and free fire zones created; the civilian population was moved into settlements so as to clear strategic areas, isolate the resistance and

deny them support. Anything beyond these areas was considered a legitimate target for Soviet attack. Some Afghans attempted to remain in their villages but faced heavy bombing, although the fate of different villages varied depending on their strategic importance. Communities fled to the mountains – where they often joined the mujahideen resistance - or out of the country. The largest refugee exoduses occurred in this time. Muhajadin bases, refugee caravans, villages, were all razed and covered with land mines. Suspected opponents, such as village elders and religious leaders, were detained and killed. The border areas were particularly targeted, with the aim of cutting off muhajadin supply routes.

1989 – 1994, Civil War

With the Soviet withdrawal the mujahideen offensives focused on the regime of President Najibullah and turned towards Kabul. There was a rise in attacks against major cities and places of national importance, which had escaped relatively unscathed under Soviet control until then. Kabul bore the brunt of the fighting and after years of mujahideen in-fighting was almost totally destroyed. Throughout the country travel was almost impossible as the land became carved into different, often warring, regions. In the larger of these fiefdoms, however - for example in the north under Dostrum - there was more peace than there had been than under the Soviet assault on the resistance.

Violence under the Taliban

The Taliban forces spread through the country from 1992 onwards. They gained Kandahar in 1994, Herat in 1995, Kabul in 1996 and Mazar-I-Sharif in 1998. In the south many war-lords were bought out with bribes and incorporated into the Taliban ranks without too much resistance or fighting. The Taliban offensive grew in ferocity as they proceeded into the northern area under the control of non-Pashtun leaders. The battle for Kabul was especially destructive. When cities came under Taliban control there was widespread looting and targeting of leaders in the local population.

Today in the areas under Taliban control - roughly 90% of the country - there is comparative peace although there are growing reports of lack of discipline amongst the Taliban ranks and the looting of homes and villages.²⁴ Heavy fighting still continues along the front lines in the NE and the central mountains and the levels of destruction of civilian communities as severe as anything previously experienced in the war.

Ethnic Differences

The impact of the war in Afghanistan has been differentiated in time, in place and, more recently, according to the ethnic and religious status of people within the country. In the early 1990s the main cleavages of the muhajadin occurred along ethnic lines, with Rabbani and Massoud gaining support from the Tajiks, Dostrum from the Uzbeks and Khalili from the Shia Hazaras, whilst the Taleban were identified with the majority Sunni Pashtun population, who dominate the south of the country. The current fighting between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance, has therefore, an ethnic character. Certainly Taliban offensives have been markedly more severe against non Pashtun populations than against Pashtun war-lords. In addition the

Taliban have been accused of fostering ethnic and sectarian violence within regions under their control and committing a wide range of human rights abuses against minority groups.²⁵ The fact that fighting today continues in largely non-Pashtun areas, plus the record of human rights abuses by Taliban against ethnic and religious minorities suggest that the impact of the present violence is most severe for non-Pashtun minority ethnic groups.²⁶

Displacement

“My grandfather who had been to another village came back and he decided that we should go to Pakistan. We had to walk for two days and then we got a ride with a truck. I don’t remember what happened in the first two days because I was so afraid. We had to climb a mountain to avoid the roads. There was a lot of snow and I only had this dress on. We had nothing to eat. I was so tired and hungry. When I got a piece of bread I could not hold it in my hands. They were frozen stiff and I had no feelings. My grandfather had to rub my hands and feet and then he put the bread in my mouth.”

Eight year old girl living in Pakistan²⁷

Displacement is fundamental to the nature of the conflict in Afghanistan, producing at one time the heaviest case load of refugees in the history of modern warfare. People began to move way from fighting right from the start of the PDPA counter-attack on the resistance – by 1978 there were already 350 camps in Pakistan harbouring 120 000 people -²⁸ and this trend continued apace. By 1990 6.2 million refugees were living in Pakistan and Iran. The refugees began to return after the fall of the Najibullah government. Today the numbers have fallen to 1.2 million Afghans living in Pakistan and 1.5 million in Iran. Yet every new offensive, every new battle sees people leave the country seeking refuge outside. In 2000 30 000 refugees crossed to Pakistan as a direct result of fighting.²⁹ Others flee in the face of persecution by Taliban.³⁰

The situation of Afghan refugees outside the country is complex and worthy of study in its own right.³¹ A minority have become successful, making lucrative businesses in the transport, export and construction industries, many others have taken up jobs with aid organisations. Indeed access to money, education and health services may dissuade Afghans from returning home. Yet the majority are vulnerable both economically and politically.³² In Pakistan, for example, although assistance still continues in the form of shelter, health and education provision direct aid to refugee families has been cut back.³³ At the same time the government of Pakistan is becoming increasingly persistent in demands for the refugees to return in the light of Pakistan’s internal instability and worsening economic conditions. In February 2001 Pakistan placed a ban on new arrivals from Afghanistan. They suspended the verification process that was started on 25 January 2001 by UNHCR to determine those who are most vulnerable and in need of urgent assistance. There followed a Government decision that all undocumented Afghans would be subject to deportation.³⁴

The exodus of such large numbers of people out of Afghanistan has had an impact on the conditions of those families and children who remain. On the one hand it has

undermined community networks and structures, causing fragmentation and dispersal. It has also been to the detriment of health and educational services, since large numbers of professionals have left, seeking employment elsewhere and fleeing from persecution against the urban elite. On the other hand, displacement has opened up new economic survival strategies for those who remain: WFP estimates that at least one of every three Afghan households relies on remittances from members outside Afghanistan.³⁵

“Mujahideen came to our village and told us to leave immediately. We were not allowed to take anything with us. They said that my uncle and some other men in the village had helped the government. They would spare our lives if we left for Pakistan. We managed to take two quilts with us but I had to leave behind my blue eyed doll. It took 20 days before we arrived in Pakistan. To start with we were a big group of people but we had to divide into smaller groups. We were attacked many times and could only move at night.”

Eight year old girl living in Pakistan³⁶

“When the fighting started our house in Dashti Barchi in Kabul was looted. We went to the north, came back to Kabul, but again fighting started. This time we left for Jalalabad. My mother is sick and we do not have enough money to return to Kabul.”

Boy aged 15 Surkh Rud District Nangarhar Province³⁷

“Since we returned form Iran we have been staying with neighbours and feel ashamed. Everyone asks why we have not rebuilt our home but our father has no work and therefore no money to rebuild the house.”

Girl aged 16 Enjeel Distroct, Heart³⁸

Displacement is a significant phenomenon within Afghanistan itself. In 1999 there were an estimated one million internally displaced people (IDPs), mostly settled in towns. Over half of the population of Kabul are thought to be IDPs from all over the country. Internal displacement continues as a result of the ongoing war. In 2000, 73 000 people moved as a result of fighting. But the issue has reached staggering proportions with the recent drought (see below). By April 2001, an estimated 700 000 people had left their homes and moved to camps and towns in the search for food, another 170 000 had crossed to Pakistan and 100 000 to Iran and numbers continue to rise.³⁹ Today, Afghanistan faces a humanitarian crisis on an appalling scale.⁴⁰ The IDP population is physically vulnerable - during the winter months there were deaths from cold and there have been outbreaks of disease. Drought-related deaths amongst children in the north have reportedly reached emergency proportions.⁴¹ The presence of IDPs also affects local host populations where they settle, swamping health facilities, spreading disease and overburdening the labour market. Even more drought affected families, who lack the resources to move, remain on their lands and face starvation.⁴²



Drought Affected IDPs arrive in Heart, September 2000
Photo: Cosmos

Other Factors

The impact of war in Afghanistan has been compounded by the following factors:

Poverty and a pre-existing lack of Infrastructure

Even before the war Afghanistan was an extremely poor country. In 1978, 85% of the population were rural peasants or nomads and agriculture – mostly on small-holdings - accounted for 60% of production. Poverty related diseases and threat to children were already widely prevalent before the war.

At the same time state provision for social services was weak. Health care coverage was estimated at a mere 25%. More serious still, massive inequity in distribution meant that health facilities seldom reached the rural poor at all. Services were clinically based and mostly concentrated in Kabul.⁴³ Yet even there it was estimated that 30% of those suffering ill health received no medical care.⁴⁴ The illiteracy rate was 88%. Whilst girls represented 14.7% of all primary school pupils, again the picture from Kabul dominated these statistics; girls in rural areas had few opportunities for education of any kind.

The Nature of Social Provision

Traditionally, social responsibility in Afghanistan has occurred at the level of the local community. Here, conservative social and cultural forces may affect the survival and development of children (see below). The attempts to locate social welfare at the level of the nation state in the 1950s to 1970s with the process of modernisation and rapid development was itself a source of tension in Afghanistan and the spark to the war. The project of nation building - including investment to improve the welfare

infrastructure of schools and health services - was deeply resisted. Since then leadership in Afghanistan has been defined more through military success and control rather than through accountability to the welfare of peoples. The Taliban who now represent the most significant nation-wide authority perhaps in the history of Afghanistan, derive their legitimacy from military control. What credibility they have stems from the physical security they have provided across the country, from their relations with local leaders and their laissez-faire attitude to the economy, rather than from social provision. The chronic lack of investment in social services therefore continues, to the detriment of the majority of the population.

Cultural Practices and Traditional Conservatism

Given Afghanistan's ethnic diversity there must be caution in generalising the role of culture and tradition in children's survival and development. In the main, however, children are highly valued as members of families and local communities in Afghanistan. Parents feel a strong responsibility to socialise their children to be effective members of society. Nevertheless, there may be aspects of cultural understandings and priorities that are detrimental to the survival and protection of children. For example:

- Traditional understandings of health and disease in Afghan culture sometimes involve practices that put children at considerable risk.⁴⁵
- The importance of marriage in Afghan culture deeply affects attitudes towards the disabled, especially on girls. The meaning of a woman's life is almost entirely attached to marriage and raising a family. Since a congenitally disabled girl is unlikely to marry, she will suffer social stigma and shame on top of her disability. The presence of a congenitally disabled person in the family may affect the marriage chances of other members and cause resentment amongst family members. Given this, it is common for the disabled, especially women, to be hidden from public view with negative impacts on their well being.⁴⁶

Likewise the conservative and traditional basis of rural life in Afghanistan has influenced the provisions made for children. Given that the Taliban have scaled up a set of traditional values into a national charter for social behaviour, these conservative forces continue to affect the development of children.

- The area of education has long seen a tension between traditional and modernising processes. Traditional education centred on the madrassa, where Islamic scholarship was promoted for boys. State run educational establishments, including provisions for girls, which were founded during the 1900s were seen as pushing forward a secular and modernising agenda. These perceived implications were deeply resisted in rural areas.⁴⁷ Today education, especially for girls, suffers from a lack of endorsement from national leaders.
- The institutionalisation of Islamic law in a reactionary and conservative manner by the Taliban has implications for the rights of women and children. It makes recourse to justice for women and girls very difficult. Rape, for example, can only be proved by the testimony of four male witnesses. A rape

case is more likely to be interpreted as adultery or fornication by a woman, for which she will be punished.

Environmental Fragility

Afghanistan is located in an environmentally sensitive part of the world, belonging to an arid zone prone to recurrent drought and earthquakes. Rural livelihoods tend to depend on a delicate environmental balance that can easily be upset by clearing, overgrazing, erosion and desertification, all of which have gathered pace over the last decades.⁴⁸

The war has only served to deepen the environmental fragility of the country. Environmental impacts of the conflict include: the widespread use of burning to destroy rural villages, heavy deforestation by refugee and mujahadin groups, the uncontrolled felling of timber forests for trade, overuse of pasture land and pollution of water supplies by concentrations of refugees, the poaching of rare species.

The population remains critically vulnerable to further environmental disaster. This has been clearly shown in the current drought, producing an emergency that has grown in intensity over the last few years and has peaked in 2001. Certainly the impact of the drought has been so devastating since years of war on top of an already perilous agricultural basis have undermined the resources and coping abilities of rural populations to a critical point. The seriousness of the situation is foretold in predictions that put the agricultural production for 2001 down by 80 to 90%.

Abuses in Civil and Political Rights

Summary executions and arbitrary detention of civilians have long been a feature of the Afghan conflict. The pursuit of justice for victims has been complicated by the existence of different sets of law: local tribal codes, Islamic interpretations of sharia law and the move to centralised systems of accountability during the 1960s.⁴⁹ In the course of the war each system has effectively contributed more to the violation than to the honouring of human rights:

- Centralised state structures, such as the police and prison system, were used by the communist regime to detain political opponents, often without trial. Many were never seen again and many were subject to torture.⁵⁰
- Under the mujahideen, different groups operated local systems of law, arresting, torturing and killing those suspected of being opponents.

The collapse of accountability in systems of law and lack of public monitoring of human rights abuses means that one of the most serious human rights concerns in Afghanistan today is the impunity of perpetrators.⁵¹

The situation continues today under the enforcement of the Taliban's interpretation of Islamic sharia law, has resulted in major curbs on rights and freedoms. Recreational activities, such as watching television, flying kites, playing music in public, have been restricted, freedom of dress and appearance has been curtailed. The most dramatic consequences of the Taliban regime have been for women. They are unable to work

apart from in the health sector, cannot move without the accompaniment of a male relative and must, at all times, conceal themselves under a burqa. Whilst for rural women in conservative Pashtun communities these measures might be nothing new and are consistent with ideals of protecting women, for the urban elite they represent an entirely different way of life and an assault on what they consider to be personal dignity.

These changes have implications for children; restrictions of women's travel make it more difficult for them to seek health care for their children. The lack of female employment means increased economic vulnerability, especially for female headed households. The dismissal of female teachers has resulted in the near collapse of the formal educational system as 70% of teachers were women (although this has entailed a resurgence of home based schooling as female teachers have set up their own tuition). Girl children have been directly affected through the ban on girl's schooling.⁵²

Failure to comply with these standards is met with harsh and violent punishments, including execution, stoning and the amputation of limbs enforced by members of the Taliban's so called Department of Vice and Virtue. Having grown up in a climate of war, children in Afghanistan are now seeing their parents exposed to a violent form of law enforcement.⁵³ Children themselves may also be directly affected. Today a pressing issue is the high proportion of under-18 year olds detained in prisons, where conditions and systems of legal redress are poor.⁵⁴ In one survey in 28 prisons about 30% of the prisoners were children under the age of 18 arrested for narcotic involvement.⁵⁵ Indeed drug addiction is in itself a serious child protection concern emerging in contemporary Afghan society, especially in the light of harsh punishments accorded to drug addicts by the Taliban.⁵⁶

The Role of Humanitarian Aid and NGOs

Despite many constraints and limitations, the international and national aid community has played a crucial role in sustaining and rehabilitating services and infrastructure and providing life-sustaining information throughout the war in Afghanistan.⁵⁷ Different agencies can point to their own successes but notable achievements include:

- External assistance reaches an estimated 300 to 350 000 primary school children within Afghanistan (approximately one eighth of the population of primary school aged children), serving to improve their standards of education, support for teachers and provision of materials.⁵⁸
- Despite the ban on girls education, support to home based schools has managed to maintain the proportion of girls receiving education.⁵⁹
- Intervention for the disabled has proved particularly strong and includes: physiotherapy, the manufacture and distribution of prosthetics, education for disabled children, health education, community sensitisation, sporting activities, provision of mobility aids, vocational training, referrals for medical treatment, orthopaedic provision, teaching of Braille for the blind, sign language for the deaf and development of deaf and blind curriculum.

- External aid sustains 97% of all health services in the country.
- By 2000 5.3 million children under the age of 5 had been immunised.⁶⁰
- 47% of all Afghans surveyed were found to listen to the BBC educational radio drama 'New Home New Life' set up in 1994. This has proved an essential means of spreading information across the country. Some families report going hungry so that they can save the money they need for new batteries.⁶¹
- International celebrations such as The International Day of the Disabled, International Women's Day and the 10th anniversary of the CRC have been marked.
- The co-ordinated Poverty Eradication and Community Empowerment (PEACE) programme operates in 26 focus districts. So far the scheme has entailed the development of 2 100 community organisation, 14 000 safe drinking water schemes, 85 community revolving funds, assistance given to 34 000 disabled people and 25 million animals treated and vaccinated.

At the same time there may be many unseen benefits from the presence of NGOs:

- Save the Children – UK, found that their child to child health education programme not only raised children's knowledge about health and sanitation but also had positive affects on the confidence and self esteem of those involved.⁶²
- NGOs and UN agencies provide employment to many thousands of Afghans and this employment may be the only reason why members of the education elite choose to stay on.
- International NGO personnel may provide a 'witness' function. In a country largely abandoned by the outside world the presence of foreigners and their institutions has been crucial as a means of getting information out of Afghanistan and to provide moral support and accountability within.

Impacts on Children

Having identified the characteristics of the war and complex nature of the situation on Afghanistan, the report now moves to identifying evidence in the existing literature on how children have been affected.

At first glance it is clear that conditions in the country take their toll on the survival, development and well being of both children and adults:

The Situation of Children in Afghanistan³	
Infant Mortality	165/1,000
Child Mortality	257/1,000
Maternal Mortality	1,700/100 000
Child Diarrhoea deaths p.a.	85 000
Access to Health Services	35%
EPI Coverage	45%
Maternity Care	12%
Life Expectancy at Birth	43.7 years
Number of districts with no Basic Health Centre	50/330
Proportion of Doctor: Number of Population	1: 50 000
Access to Safe Drinking Water	12%
Access to Adequate Sanitation	12%
Literacy	32% (11% women)
Gross Enrolment Rate	39% (boys) 3% (girls)

Yet, the impacts of current conditions on children and their families are far broader than these indices alone portray. The wider ramifications are discussed below:

Impacts on Communities and Families

The crisis in Afghanistan has entailed and continues to entail the transformation of family life, either through dislocation, through impoverishment and the loss of property or through the loss of family members. These changes have detrimental consequences for the relationships and emotions of family members. This is the context in which children affected by armed conflict in Afghanistan live and negotiate, which has implications for their own survival, development and well being.

Economic Impacts

A survey conducted with more than 4 000 families who had returned to Afghanistan after years of exile illustrates the cost of the war to their economic and material status and the ongoing upheaval and poverty within the country.⁶³ 39% of the families found their homes completely destroyed and 14% were unable to reclaim land. 12% were subject to further displacement being unable to return to places of origin due to a lack of water, security, recoverable property or because they felt that economic opportunities were better elsewhere. 44% returned to what they perceived as inadequate health facilities and 11% still faced the threat of landmines in their homes

and fields. Indeed many returnee families have reported being overwhelmed by the drop in their living standards on return to Afghanistan.⁶⁴

The economic impacts of the crisis at the level of individual families and communities take place in the context of a changed economy in the country as a whole. Domestic food production fell by 50% during the Soviet invasion.⁶⁵ This and the large numbers of refugees, moving away from their land and becoming dependant on foreign aid and the purchasing of food stuffs has increased reliance on a monied economy.⁶⁶ Wage labour is therefore an essential part of economic survival in Afghanistan.

Sources for waged labour and monetary income for men include: conscription, casual manual labour in construction, portering, sale of farm produce, livestock trade, labour migration to Iran or Pakistan, technical services, the transportation industry, scrap metal collection and sale, handicraft production, retail, the service industry (tea houses and hostels) poppy cultivation, labour in local industry, employment in NGOs, administrative posts, teaching, health professions. Avenues for women include: begging, tailoring, soap making, candle making, poultry keeping, honey production, baking, domestic services such as washing clothes, embroidery, carpet weaving and prostitution.⁶⁷ But increasingly families are also reliant on children's paid work. This may involve children in dangerous and exploitative activities.

At the same time, with the collapse of the state, opportunities for large scale economic profit have been taken up by unregulated non-state actors. Lucrative enterprises in Afghanistan include the trans-national smuggling of electrical goods and drugs, the trade in timber, fuel and precious stones, the transportation business and money changing. This informal 'war economy' vastly overshadows the formal economy of oil and handicraft export. Many local Afghans work in such informal enterprises for economy survival. Yet they take part in deeply exploitative conditions. The bulk of profits is retained by a few and not redistributed. This further weakens the ability of local people to gain access to the money they need for survival. For example, farmers who grow poppies receive a tiny fraction of the profits that are made by opium and heroin traders. Their vulnerability is evidenced in the fact that since the UN ban on poppy production, former poppy farmers have been amongst those moving to Pakistan as economic migrants.⁶⁸

Thus the war has entailed structural changes to the basis of the economy. The majority of the population are engaged in the process of survival and increasingly reliant on money. This trend is only set to continue with the effects of the current drought, as more and more families move away from their lands and come to settle in towns and camps. Children become caught up in this process with consequences for their own roles and responsibilities.

Social Impacts

The search for economic survival is taking its toll on family composition. Men and boys involved in fighting and labour migration may be away from home for significant periods of time. This is a phenomenon that affects the educated as well as the poor. Employment with NGOs, for example, may take people into or out of Afghanistan and away from their families: "Talk about family separation? What about me? My family live in Pakistan and there they will stay because I want education for

my children. But I am based here [Jalalabad] for work. My children are growing up without a father to guide and discipline them.”⁶⁹

It is not only impoverishment that has brought changes to family composition; the experience of displacement may also result in the fragmentation of families. Firstly, families can become separated during flight.⁷⁰ Secondly, different family members pursue different survival strategies following displacement. During the Soviet War, for example, women and children often left for the hills, while men and older boys often remained to fight with mujahideen forces. In other cases, men fled with the livestock, an important family asset, leaving their wives and children behind to keep the home. Those in the process of return after displacement may leave a member behind to continue benefiting from new work opportunities.⁷¹ Nevertheless practitioners working amongst refugee and displaced populations have commented on the resilience of family and kinship structures; villages, clans and even whole communities have tended to move and to re-settle together.⁷²

The huge loss of life has certainly taken its toll on family structures. There are an estimated 700 000 widows in Afghanistan.⁷³ Although they may be cared for either by paternal or maternal kin, their children live without their natal father. Widow headed households are common. Currently between 1% and 5% of households appear to have no adult male above the age of 15 years.⁷⁴ The nutritional and economic status of such households has long been a cause of concern⁷⁵, but the adversities for female-headed households have been deepened by Taliban edicts forbidding women from working outside the home, other than in the health sector. This has curtailed women’s access to waged labour. At the same time the loss of female staff from NGOs has also undermined the number of projects supporting women.⁷⁶

Wider family structures have also been affected. Loss in extended kinship networks is also extremely prevalent. Of 310 children interviewed in Kabul in 1997, 72% had lost a member of their wider family. Of 500 children interviewed throughout Afghanistan in 1998, 60% had lost a family member. Equally the economic pressures on families may force them to cut off ties with wider family members. As in other Islamic societies, the ethos of providing and caring for destitute family members is strong. However, the extreme circumstances in which Afghans find themselves today, may force many to cut down on these responsibilities, to the detriment of vulnerable clan members.⁷⁷ The resources of the extended family, so integral to social and economic survival for Afghans, have been seriously undermined by the conflict.

As well as the impact of the crisis on family structures and composition, there is a sense that family relationships have also been affected. Indeed, many Afghans worry that because of the economic and social pressures they confront at present, adults do not have the time or energy to be as loving or protective parents as they would like to be.⁷⁸ There is concern that the family environment is becoming depleted of care and companionship in the midst of the day to day struggle to survive.

A key part of this concern is over the curtailed opportunities for recreation. Many families have tried to preserve a degree of normality for their children. Of 500 children interviewed in 1998 most were still told stories by their parents and many enjoyed jokes and games with their peers.⁷⁹ Nevertheless families and children’s

opportunities for play and recreation have been seriously affected by past and present circumstances:

- Restrictions on the movement of women, the destruction of former beauty spots, poverty and the threat of landmines have hampered opportunities for picnics, which have long been an important recreational activity for Afghan families.
- Impoverishment has also curtailed wedding and festival celebrations.
- Working children complain that they do not have the time or energy to play.
- Parents may forbid play activities such as football due to the risk of landmines.
- Taliban edicts forbidding the playing of music and chess, watching of television, playing of chess and flying of kites have also affected recreation.

“When I look at the state of Afghanistan today, I wish that I had never had children and bought them into this world.”

“Every day my daughter asks me whether they have opened the gate of her school yet and every day I have to say ‘No’”

“What comfort is there left to give to children? There is nothing we can do for them and nothing we can give them.”

Mothers at a meeting on the CRC, Kabul, February 2001

Emotional Impacts

The emotional and psychological costs of the war have been heavy: people mention widespread apathy, weariness, depression and exhaustion amongst the Afghan population. Research in this area suggests that Afghans themselves understand that the prime contributor to emotional suffering is poverty. Impoverishment presents them with day-to-day problems, such as how to provide for their children or how to afford medical care, that take their toll on their emotional well-being. Those who perceive themselves to be economically vulnerable and helpless – such as widows and ethnic minorities under persecution – may be more prone to emotional suffering.⁸⁰ Other causal factors in emotional suffering are:

- **Social Pressure.** Women report that the customs associated with purdah may cause them depression. This is especially the case for urban women for whom wearing a veil and being restricted from work is a new phenomenon.⁸¹ Children too may feel emotional stress from social pressure. Officers with UNHCR in Delhi noted the high incidences of suicide amongst teenaged Afghan refugees. They related this to the acute sense of responsibility these boys felt to provide for their destitute families and the lack of employment opportunities for them to do so.⁸²

- **The consequences of conflict.** People have reported being psychologically disturbed when fighting, bombing and gunfire engulfs their community. While these effects generally die down quickly, longer term emotional suffering is caused by the loss of family, friends and inter-personal support mechanisms.⁸³
- **High Rates of Mortality.** Both child and adult mortality are devastating to family members. Women, in particular, list deaths in their kinship circle - whether war related or not – as the prime cause of emotional suffering.⁸⁴
- **Displacement.** The upheaval of dislocation also takes its toll on emotional well being. We spoke to both adults and children IDPs who said that they missed their homes, fruit trees and animals. In addition, cramped conditions in the camps and in homes where IDPs seek support, put strain on family relationships. IDPs we met in Baglan said that the worst thing about the experience was the constant noise from children playing inside the camp (they were housed in a old hanger, six families to a cubicle), with nowhere for them to play or nothing for them to do. Other families complained of boredom.

“I am a widow with ten children. The only male member of the family who can provide us with an income is my sixteen-year old son. He tries to help but it is simply not enough. I think every day about how to feed my children. I cannot sleep because of the thinking. I have terrible headaches and I sometimes faint. When I think too much I get dizzy and I have terrible pressure on my chest as well.”

Widowed Woman, Herat⁸⁵

“I lost my mother when I was only 5 years old and I lived with my father and brothers who loved me very much. When I was 6 years old my father went to Kabul and got lost there and never returned. I do not know whether he is living or not. During this time my best sister also died due to a complicated delivery leaving behind my niece who I love very much and who I take care of. When I remember all these sad incidences I cry a lot and faint and later feel pain in my whole body. I have never seen happiness or at least I do not remember any happy moments. Maybe Allah has created me to suffer for the rest of my life.”

14 year-old girl, Yakawlang⁸⁶

There is a clear understanding in Afghan culture that manifestations of emotional suffering can go beyond depression and anxiety and be expressed in physical illness.⁸⁷ MSF workers in Baglan, for example, noticed that women understood goitres arising from ‘too much grief’.⁸⁸ Families have been known to suggest that a case of congenital mental disability started after a bomb attack.⁸⁹ Symptoms such as headaches, diarrhoea, muscle and bone aches are commonly put down to unhappiness and stress. There is concern that psycho-somatic symptoms such as these, are placing more burden on an already woefully inadequate health service and that the inability to afford medical care for such symptoms may increase stress for those affected.⁹⁰

In addition, emotional suffering is understood to increase vulnerability to attack, by malicious spiritual entities known locally as ‘jinns’. Spirit possession leads to further mental disturbance and may entail expensive healing ceremonies by religious specialists.⁹¹

Afghans do have coping and healing mechanisms for the emotional consequences of suffering. They draw strength, for example, from the fact that adversity is never an isolated incident but is typical in the lives of their family and friends, people know that they hold experiences of hardship in common. Religious faith is also a source of comfort and explanation, a point of reference, offering structure and meaning. Economic gain can be a source of comfort and happiness.⁹² Nevertheless the legacy of the crisis on people's emotional well being is of serious concern. It affects interpersonal relationships and constitutes a difficult environment for children to respond to and develop. Having a parent struggling with extreme emotional suffering may entail financial consequences for the whole family, put extra pressure on children's role and responsibilities in the home and involve them in taking on extra burdens of care giving for their parents and siblings.

Children at Risk

The crisis in Afghanistan has deeply affected the economic, social and emotional context in which children live. The impact of the war is such that children also face the following particular risks:

Direct Casualties

"I was conscious when I saw my house burning but after the next bomb was thrown I remember nothing."

Boy aged 10 from Nuristan, Kumar, 1986

"My brother was taken under a tree and shot. Then they went inside. They killed my father and mother and wounded my sister. That was four years ago and I saw it with my own eyes."

Boy, 13 years old, Shamali, 1986⁹³

During the lull in bombing in Kabul in 1994 a woman went out to bring some food for her three children. She was grabbed by two mujahideen guards and taken to a house where she was gang raped. When she was allowed to go home she found that two of her children had died of hypothermia.

In mid 1993 militia took away a former army official and six of his children. The children were never traced.

The family of a former government official Dr Saleh Mohammad Zeray, his wife and eight year old daughter and 12 year old son were found dead in their Kabul flat with their throats slit. The political nature of the killing was evidenced in that no property had been taken.

During the siege of Kabul in 1994, children were often shot as they stepped out of the house to bring food and water. Two young girls had gone to a corner shop in the Bibi Mahroo district of Kabul. They never returned home and their dead bodies were discovered in the debris of a building. A 12-year old child had gone out with a bucket to fetch some water. He was shot by a sniper and when his mother ran to him she too was killed.²⁵

"When we left Morghab we fastened my brother, who was one year old, on the back of a donkey. On the way he got cold and by the time we arrived in Heart he was dead."

Boy aged 10, Rwaza Camp, Guzara District, Heart Province 1998

"When we left our house we had to cross the river Morghab and my brother was drowned, he was ten"

Girl aged 8, Kamaz camp Balkh Province 1998⁹⁴

Children have been killed and maimed throughout the conflict. They have been killed as their villages and communities were destroyed, they have been caught up in the crossfire, they have been directly targeted in retaliatory violence, subject to arbitrary killings and torture they have died as a result of hardship and neglect on refugee exoduses.⁹⁶ Yet despite the prevalence of child casualties in the war, the record remains fragmentary and anecdotal, with no systematic monitoring.

Today children are still being killed in the violence. As the current front lines pass through people's villages and lands, children are as likely as ever to be caught in the crossfire. Children may also be directly targeted: one of the bodies of those massacred by Taliban in Hazarajat in January 2001 was that of a seventeen-year-old boy, Mir Ali, much of whose skin had been removed either prior to or after his death.⁹⁷ Even away from the fighting the continued presence of landmines and UXOs puts children at risk. Boys are particularly vulnerable given their participation in livelihood activities that frequently take them out of the home, although children are also at risk through play and recreation.

- ICRC records for 1997 showed that 30% of patients admitted into IRC hospitals with mine injuries were children under the age of 12.⁹⁸
- Save the Children – US's monitoring in Kabul in 1997 found that 71.5% of all UXO victims and 52.6% of all mine victims were male and under 18 years of age.⁹⁹
- In 1998 an average of seven children a day were being killed by landmines.¹⁰⁰
- Children are killed and injured both through mines laid during the conflict of previous years and from newly laid mines:

“A least 25 people including women and children have been killed in two landmine blasts in the northern Takhar Province. Two landmines hit a passenger jeep and truck...250km from Kabul. Taliban radio blames the northern alliance for the blast saying the opposition forces have planted landmines in civilian areas which have caused the deadly blasts.”

The Nation, December 2000

- While children might know about the presence and risk of landmines, the imperative of economic survival often overrules safety considerations for their safety forcing them into areas of danger. A Danish de-mining expert was dismayed to find truck loads of boys being bought into the mine field he was seeking to clear, to quarry stones from the area. Even though three workers had been killed on the site this did not deter the boys or their paymasters from continuing their activities.¹⁰¹
- Experts working on clearing mines in Afghanistan state that it will take 20 to 30 years to clear the county completely. Landmines will therefore continue to be a threat to future generations of children.¹⁰²
- Although practitioners working with the disabled are impressed with the level of care and patience accorded to them in Afghan culture,¹⁰³ catering for a

disabled child might place added strain on the economic and emotional well being of the entire family. Siblings are often care takers for disabled brothers and sisters and sometimes for their parents; this increases their responsibilities within the home.¹⁰⁴

Exposure to Violence

Children in Afghanistan are familiar with scenes of cruelty and violence. Of 310 children interviewed in Kabul in 1997, for example, 82% had seen violence in the last two years, 66% had seen someone killed by a rocket, seen dead bodies or parts of bodies and 34% had been involved in tending to a wounded or dead friend or relative.¹⁰⁵ Today children form a large percentage of spectators at public executions and violent punishments by the Taliban.¹⁰⁶ Although little detailed investigation has been done into this, those working in child-focused agencies in the country express concern about children's exposure to violence for the impact it has on their mental health and well being. They also worry about how children might learn violence as an acceptable and widespread method of conflict resolution.

There is particular concern for those children who have actively participated in violence. Boys under the age of 18 have served in armed forces throughout the war.¹⁰⁷ Under Soviet occupation boys were used to take the places of those who defected from the government army.¹⁰⁸ They were trained to be spies, to identify and lead soviet troops to the homes of mujahideen leaders.¹⁰⁹ During the civil war thousands of orphaned boys reportedly also joined the mujahideen for employment, food, shelter, protection and economic opportunity such as looting.¹¹⁰

The Taliban have long depended upon ranks of youth. When they first formed they recruited heavily in the madrasas amongst refugees in Pakistan.¹¹¹ In 1997 another heavy recruitment drive in madrasas saw many teenaged Afghan and Pakistani boys join the Taliban forces. In 1999 there were reports of a rise in Taliban conscription in the southern provinces. Witnesses reported that each land-owning family had to provide one young man and \$500 in expenses. In August of that year 5000 students aged between 15 and 35 left madrasas in Pakistan to join the Taliban.¹¹²

There are reports of some boys leaving the country or being sent away by their families in order to avoid recruitment, suggesting that the risk is widespread.¹¹³ However, there is still uncertainty about the proportion of under 18-year olds currently serving with the Taliban.¹¹⁴ Emphasis on military aptitude and training may mitigate against the recruitment of minors for active combat. In addition, in 1998 Mullah Omar decreed that boys who were too young to grow a beard should not fight. Nevertheless, boys without beards have been sighted amongst the Taliban forces.¹¹⁵ Moreover even if a young man has a beard this does not preclude the possibility that he is under 18.¹¹⁶ Children may also be employed as cooks, porters, security guards and on patrols.¹¹⁷

One survey suggested the following proportions of child soldiers in the various stages of the war, although the methods by which these figures were acquired are not clear¹¹⁸:

Child Soldiers in Afghanistan		
	% of total under 16	% of total 16 - 18
Pro-Soviet Government Armed Forces 1979 – 1992	10	16
Mujahideen 1979 – 1992	10	18
Mujahideen 1992 - 1996	19	26

Investigation in why and how boys have joined armed forces in Afghanistan reveal the following factors:

- **Forced recruitment.** There are reports of forced recruitments organised by local military commanders through press-ganging, house to house searches and seizing children from secondary schools. This is considered to have been more widespread during the civil war, although no systematic investigation has been done.¹¹⁹
- **Ideological motivation.** Both the various mujahideen groups and the Taliban have sought to “arm the children spiritually and emotionally for the battles that lie ahead.” Their teaching, often effected through the madrasa system, has stressed the righteousness of fighting a holy war, or ‘jihad’, in the name of Islam.¹²⁰ This ideology was particularly strong among refugee children during the Soviet invasion and may have motivated young men to join mujahideen groups.¹²¹ More recently, young people have fought to protect an ethnic or regional identity.¹²²
- **Economic Necessity.** A number of economic factors contribute to young people joining armed forces: in conditions of impoverishment parents may encourage them to leave so as to have one less mouth to feed. Also militant groups may offer financial and material provision. The following interview with a young man is informative:

“The interviewee was a beardless teenager who was billeted with the Taliban checkpoint in Qalaat. He had been in a mine accident two years earlier, and since then had not been able to work for his family as a shepherd. He wanted to go to Kandahar to seek help for his foot from the hospital but in the meantime he had joined the military unit. He was being provided with food in return for preparing tea and cooking for the Taliban. The commander had given him a waistcoat, and the boy hoped that he would also be able to give him a lift in a vehicle to Kandahar. The previous year he had worked at the Qul Urdu military base in Qalaat as one of the armed guards. He carried a kalashnikov despite his disability.”

Quoted in Sellick, Patricia 1998

There are fears that the current drought will produce a new round of recruits for the Taliban.¹²⁴

- **The Desire for Vengeance.** Those who have met with young Afghan soldiers note that they are often inspired to fight in order to avenge the death of a father or other relative.¹²⁵ Given that fighting continues in Afghanistan and people continue to be killed, there could be an enduring legacy of retaliatory violence by today’s young for many years to come.

- **Social Pressure.** Some boys may have motivated by the desires of their family, local religious or military leaders. Under the mujahideen, local commanders sometimes accepted the recruitment of a son into the militia in lieu of local taxation.

“In the education of the Koran in the mosques the mullahs all the time tell the boys that they have to participate in the holy war and help to liberate their country in order to come to Paradise. Many boys want to participate as soon as possible. Also the mothers want their sons to fight for their country. My mother has always encouraged me.”¹²⁶

Little study has been done on the reintegration of young men who have served with forces. Partly this is due to the fact that those who have joined as young boys generally stay until killed or discharged with injuries. Their reintegration therefore becomes coloured by disability and ill health. There is suggestion that there are high levels of drug addiction amongst former fighters.¹²⁷

Children’s Work

The economic roles of children have long been valued in Afghan society.¹²⁸ The conflict has, however, entailed changes in these roles and responsibilities of children. Firstly, domestic chores such as fetching water and firewood have become more dangerous and arduous with both the loss of infrastructure and presence of landmines. Displacement may compound risks for children as they seek to contribute to the livelihoods of their families. We met IDPs staying in a desolate army barracks outside Mazar-I-Sharif, for example, who reported that wolves had killed two young boys as they went to look for firewood in an area that was unfamiliar to them. IDP children can face resentment from the local population as they look for labour opportunities and they may be unaware of mine fields in new areas.

Secondly, in recent years, families are increasingly reliant upon their children’s roles in the monetised economy. As opportunities for adults in formal waged employment continue to be scarce and as trade and informal opportunities have opened up with conditions of increased security, children, may in fact, be in a better position than adults to earn cash. Indeed adults rely upon the special qualities of children that make them successful in this field:

“Why do parents send children out onto the streets to beg?”
 “It is less shameful for a child to beg than an adult. Children do not care so much. We adults feel too much shame.”

Interviews with IDPs in Baglan, February 2001

Children work’s in the cash economy is conducted both on the streets and in the home. Having a child working outside the home may be especially beneficial since it means one less mouth to feed during the day, as children tend to use some of the money they earn to feed themselves.

Surveys on children working on the street have been conducted in Jalalabad, Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif and amongst refugee children in Pakistan.¹²⁹ The findings show that:

- Remunerated child work is especially prevalent in urban centres. WFP figures for Mazar suggest that children's wages account for 42% of the prevailing market wage in the town.¹³⁰ There are an estimated 50 000 children working on the street in Kabul. Urban based children can earn money or payment in kind by selling water, trinkets, food or by collecting fuel, polishing shoes or cleaning cars. Children may work in mechanical shops, carpentries or factories, make carpets, shoes, sweets, bread and be paid for doing house repairs. Children constitute a significant proportion of beggars. Of 289 beggars interviewed in Kabul in 2000, 29.3% were found to be children.¹³¹
- It is generally boys who work on the streets. In Mazar a survey found only 6% of the working children were girls. In Jalalabad no working girls were reported. In Kabul only 18% of the children surveyed were girls. Where girls do work they are generally under the age of 10, parents will take them out of work on the streets at puberty.¹³²
- The phenomenon of working children is closely related to displacement. In Jalalabad 95% of boys had been displaced at least once, in Mazar 49% of the children interviewed had been displaced (12% were returned refugees), in Kabul 73% of all the families had been displaced (9% were returned refugees). The majority of the boys' families were not living in their original homes. Paid child work is extremely prevalent amongst Afghan refugees in Pakistan. An estimated 82% of refugee children are involved in some form of monied labour.¹³³

Carpet weaving provides a mainstay of child labour within the home. One survey found 36 000 children to be in carpet weaving in Kabul alone. 55% of these were girls. The phenomenon has increased since the banning of women's work by the Taliban as more and more families are reliant on the earning capacity of their children.¹³⁴

In general interviews with Afghan children show that they are proud of the economic contribution they make to their families. They enjoy their work most when they feel it teaches them a skill that is useful for the future.¹³⁵ However, remunerated work can place children at risk. Children working on the street, for instance, face the following threats:

- Children interviewed in the three town of Mazar, Jalalabad and Kabul complained of exhaustion – the majority of the children worked seven days a week and walked long distances to get to and whilst at, work. Their work often involved carrying heavy loads in the hot sunshine.
- They regretted the lack of free time to invest in friendships and family relations.
- Children in Kabul reported that officials threatened them if they entered into a militarised zone. A few had been forced to pay money at checkpoints.

- Boys who collected scrap metal in Kabul pointed out the risks they faced from landmines and UXOs.
- Sometimes customers refuse to pay children for services rendered:

“I started cleaning cars about 14 months ago. The first day I came to the street for cleaning cars it was very difficult and my elder brother worked with me. But I had to get used to it because there is no other way for us, only this. Cleaning big cars is very difficult even impossible. I became very disappointed when some drivers told me that I had not cleaned well and pushed me to go away.”¹³⁶

- The relationship between child work and education is unclear. In Kabul 44% of the children were still attending some form of school, while in Mazar none were. Working might then, be to the detriment of children’s education.

Children work on carpet weaving may also be at risk:

- Families can offer the labour of their children on carpets in payment of their own debts, which brings no financial advantage or protection to the children.
- Children as young as five may work up to 16 hours a day on carpet weaving.¹³⁷

Orphans

The experience of being an orphaned child in Afghanistan may differ according to whether the child now lives in a female-headed household or with members of his or her wider family.¹³⁸ Although there is concern for the children of female headed households, it is difficult to gauge whether such children are actually more vulnerable in terms of their survival and development. For example, nutritional and mortality surveys amongst children do not tend to be disaggregated to take into account family status.¹³⁹ Nor is it clear that children of female headed households are at more risk to recruitment, psycho-social suffering, hazardous work or other such adversities. There does not appear to be a direct link, for example, between children working and the loss of a male household head. 73% of children in Kabul and 76% of working children in Mazar lived with both parents.

An even greater impact than the experience of living in a female-headed household might occur for children on the re-marriage of their mother. Orphanages in Afghanistan appear to have a high proportion of children who are rejected by new step-fathers. There are more such boys than girls in these institutions, since girls are more easily accepted by new step-fathers as their domestic work is of use in the home.¹⁴⁰

Child-focused organisations have expressed concern over conditions in orphanages. They note the lack of sanitation, hygiene, the inadequate diet, the loss of opportunities for children to partake in a ‘home like’ environment and the restrictions placed on girls, since most of the care-takers are un-related men.¹⁴¹ There are, however, signs

that children derive great support from peers and this may compensate for some of the suffering they experience in institutions.¹⁴²

Yet just because a child remains within a family setting does not exempt them from vulnerability to abuse and neglect. The toll that conditions in Afghanistan are taking on family relations may be exaggerated for orphaned children who are taken up by their wider family. Indeed one of the hidden consequences of war for children is the abuse they may suffer at the hands of new care-givers, including relatives.¹⁴³ Children who are catered for by distant relatives may be denied equal opportunities as the natal children of the home and may be deprived of their inheritance rights.¹⁴⁴

“What does having no father mean for boys in Afghanistan?”

“For me having no father means that when I go home to my uncles house, I sit and eat by myself in the back room, whilst my cousins eat with my uncle. Whenever there is any work to be done, I am the one to do it. My uncles buys his children new clothes but he does not buy me any.”

Interview with boys at the Islamic Relief Services Vocational Centre, Jalalabad, February 2001

Girls

The value placed on girl children in Afghan society is almost uniformly lower than that place on boys. Indeed some women have said that it was amongst the worst time in their life when they produced a girl rather than a boy as their first child, as their own status is tied to family honour and the need for boys to perpetuate this.¹⁴⁵ Gender discrimination is certainly evident in children’s education where the proportion of girls studying has always been extremely low. This tendency has been compounded by the institutionalisation of gender discrimination in education by the Taliban.¹⁴⁶

Yet ‘gender discrimination’ in Afghanistan goes hand in hand with ideas about the protection of girls and women and ironically these values may protect girls from some of the hazards outlined above. Unlike boys, for example, teenaged girls are confined to the home and less at risk of injury from land mines and UXOs.

Nevertheless there are certain other vulnerabilities that girls face. The early marriage of girls, for instance, has long been customary in Afghan society. There are suggestions that this phenomenon has been aggravated by the war. First, there are reports that parents attempt to marry their daughters as young as possible in order to protect them from being abducted by mujahideen commanders.¹⁴⁷ Second, the economic value of daughters in marriage may have been mobilised as an economic coping strategy. A father receives bridewealth from his daughter’s groom. Practitioners working with those severely affected by drought have noted fathers’ despair at being forced to ‘sell’ their daughters as a way of mobilising funds for the rest of the family. Economic hardship may therefore be directly related to the lowering of the marriage age of girls, as well as lowering the amount of bridewealth a father can expect from her husband.¹⁴⁸

Conditions of war often go hand in hand with increased incidence of sexual violence, especially against women and adolescent girls.¹⁴⁹ There has been little systematic monitoring of this issue in Afghanistan and the sensitivities of the topic make it a

difficult area for research. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that women and children have been subject to rape and abduction throughout the conflict:¹⁵⁰

- Whilst the Taliban has imposed serious punishments for those involved in cases of sodomy¹⁵¹, members of the Taliban themselves are accused of sexual violence against women and girls. Notably when they took over territory in the north and centre many Hazara and Tajik women and girls were reportedly abducted and taken by force, being rounded into trucks. These women have not returned and were apparently trafficked to Jalalabad, Kandahar and Pakistan. The numbers of women and girls involved are not known.
- There are reports of Taliban forcing girls into marriage in Mazar and Kabul, entering homes with marriage contracts or demanding money in order to prevent this abduction of daughters. Some parents have apparently chosen to send their daughters away with IDP groups in order to protect them from such practices.
- There is anecdotal evidence that the trafficking of girls is increasing, especially from the camps of Afghan refugees in Pakistan.¹⁵²
- Interviews with women suggest that domestic violence is a common part of many marriages in Afghanistan.¹⁵³

Conclusion

The lives of children in Afghanistan can appear very bleak. The complex emergency, which has marked Afghanistan for the last twenty two years, has taken its toll on the health and educational infrastructure, undermining facilities for children's survival and development. The war has affected the economic, social and emotional life of families and communities. Not only have children's roles and responsibilities been changed by these processes, children also face considerable risks. They are in danger of injury and death from fighting and from the large numbers of landmines and UXOs that litter the country. Their exposure to violence is high and some have actively taken part in the conflict. Reliance on children's remunerated work may expose them to hazards and burden their social relationships and recreational opportunities. Kinship resources have been diminished to the detriment of children's survival and development. Girls face sexual abuse or early marriage. The current drought and resulting impoverishment and displacement is only compounding these hazards.

There can be no complacency in monitoring the effects on conflict for children in Afghanistan. Ongoing research is essential. It is needed to alert the outside world – a world, which is in danger of turning its back on Afghanistan – to the many adversities faced by children in the country. Research is a tool for advocacy and for fund-raising and there should be commitment to the sustained gathering and dissemination on the needs of children. Research is also a tool to improve the design of intervention, by analysing the context and reality of children's lives, intervention can be made more appropriate and effective.

The existing material is useful and highlights some important trends but the following areas are in need of strengthening:

- First, this report has stressed that investigation must go beyond the impacts of conflict on children and look at the context in which those impacts are set. Identifying needs is important but such work remains only partial without analysing the structures and systems that contribute to those needs. The framework of a complex political emergency, which has been used in this report to look at children affected by armed conflict in a historical and holistic perspective, is useful. What this analysis lacks, however, is a sense of the positive processes at work in Afghanistan. An emphasis on needs and acute suffering, while important, belies the fact that there are other phenomenon at work, processes of survival, coping, return, reconstruction and even rehabilitation. For much of the population life under the Taliban, although entailing its own threats, has been a period of relative security as compared to the dangers of the all-out war of the past.

How do families and children survive? What resources do they mobilise? What is the basis of both social and economic survival? How have families responded to conditions of increased security in areas outside the front line? What are children's roles in these processes? What negative and positive

implications do these have for children? These questions often go unanswered in the emphasis on needs and crisis.

- Second, the existing literature is strongest on special categories of children – child soldiers, children working on the streets, orphans, the disabled. Yet the social, economic and emotional impacts of the war extend to every child in the country. What about the children who fall outside these categories? How have their roles and responsibilities been affected? What is the legacy of the suffering on their emotional health and well being? How are they responding? These are questions for the many, not just the few. The challenge is to move beyond small statistical samples on selected groups of children and to build up a representative picture across the country. This will allow variations in the circumstances of children to be identified. This challenge is twofold. It involves maintaining depth at the same time as breadth, seeking disaggregated and detailed information at the same time as general patterns. It also involves integrating a focus on children into community-based and holistic research.¹⁵⁴
- Third, it is noticeable that to date little work has been based upon the long-term participatory involvement of young people in monitoring and investigating situations of conflict. It is rare to hear children's voices at all on this subject, part from as an illustrative comment. A commitment to children's participation in research processes is important in order to capture their opinions and grievances.
- Fourth, there should be commitment to looking at the different experiences of children living in the same area. It has already been shown that boys and girls might undergo unique events; boys are more prone to getting involved in waged labour, girls may face early marriage or sexual abuse. Age, ethnicity, class and gender will all influence the way children are affected by conflict and their relative vulnerabilities. There is a noticeable lack of information on adolescents in Afghanistan. In some areas young people will have spent their whole life under conditions of violence. As yet, however, no serious work has tackled the role and relation of young people to conflict.
- Fifth, there are ethical and political dilemmas in investigation into CAAC in Afghanistan. The way in which research is conducted, the people and means employed to conduct the work, the safety of researchers and their subjects can have ramifications for the results, success and applicability of the findings. There needs to be consideration of who the relevant stakeholders are in the research projects, how their interests and point of view might be represented, what are the most appropriate means and tools for research and who the most effective actors are in conducting this work.
- Finally, research into the lives of children in Afghanistan should not be relegated as a minority concern or as the domain of child-focused agencies alone. Information on children is critical to understanding the impacts of the war, the structures and systems in which these impacts are set and how people are coping with the complexity of the adversities that face them. Insight into the lives of children also provides powerful advocacy material for all areas of concern in Afghanistan, from the violation of human rights to the nutritional

impacts of the drought. Children are important stakeholders in all humanitarian interventions and in the future of the country. Taking their voice, needs and circumstances into account will only serve to improve understanding of the lives of Afghan people as a whole.

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- ¹ Girardet, Edward. 1998. *Afghanistan. Essential Field Guide to Humanitarian and Conflict Zones*. Geneva: International Centre for Humanitarian Reporting. Child-focused agencies in Afghanistan are already tackling programmatic areas that fall outside the remit of service provision. These are covered in the regional report on institutional capacity for CAAC.
- ² See for example *Indicators of Child Mortality and Morbidity in Three Afghan Provinces 1996 A Survey* conducted by The Research and Advisory Council of Afghanistan (RACA) in collaboration with UNCIEF-Afghanistan Program Office.
- ³ *1997 Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Baseline Report* to UNCIEF CIET Afghanistan
- ³ Afghanistan Country Report in the *CIA World Fact Book 2000*
www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/goes/af.html
- ⁴ Poullada, Leon 1974 in Dupree, Louis and Linetee, Albert *Afghanistan in the 1970s*. New York: Praeger.
- ⁵ Rubin, Barnett. 1995: 19. *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- ⁶ These included the large-scale redistribution of land and the emancipation of women.
- ⁷ See Urban, Mark 1990 *War in Afghanistan* London: Macmillan for a detailed history of the military's place in the conflict in Afghanistan.
- ⁸ Johnson, Chris. 1998: 58. *Afghanistan. A Land In Shadow*. Oxfam Country Profile.
- Taliban means religious student. See Ahmed, Rashid 2000 *The Taliban Islam oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia* London: I.B. Tauris for a detailed history of the Taliban.
- ⁹ Commentators suggest that the Taliban's version of Islam has more to do with their Pashtun identity, being based on the Pashtunwali, the Pashtun tribal code, and their history as long term refugees whose education was provided in all male madrasa establishments than with grounding in Koranic Islam.
- ¹⁰ As in Goodhand, J & Haneef Atmar 2001 Conflict Prevention Survey. Afghanistan: an orphaned conflict? European Platform for Conflict Prevention and Transformation.
- ¹¹ Rashid, Ahmed. 2000. *The Taliban. Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- ¹² Hunte, Pamela 1992 *Social Communications and Afghans, Continuity and Change*, report prepared for UNICEF
- ¹³ Kaldor, M. 1997. Introduction, in M. Kaldor & B. Vashnee (eds) *New Wars: Restructuring the Global Military Sector*. London: Pinter Press.
- ¹⁴ Duffield, Mark 1994: 1 *Complex Political Emergencies. An Exploratory Report for UNICEF*.
- ¹⁵ Allen, T. 1996. *In search of Cool Ground: war, flight and homecoming in North East Africa*. London: James Currey.
- ¹⁶ Duffield, M. 1993 NGOs, Disaster Relief and Asset Transfer in the Horn: Political Survival in A Permanent Emergency *Development and Change* 24 (1): 131
- ¹⁷ Report of the Security General, 2000. *The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace and Security*, United Nations General Assembly Security Council
- ¹⁸ Quoted in Sellick, Patricia. 1998. *The Impact of Conflict on Children in Afghanistan*. Radda Barnen, Save the Children Federation Inc, Save the Children – UK, UNICEF.
- ¹⁹ United Nations, *Consolidated Inter Agency Appeal for Afghanistan 2001*
- ²⁰ Ekanayake, S.B. 2000. *Afghan Tragedy. Education in the Doldrums*. Islamabad: Al-Noor Publishers.
- ²¹ McGrath, Rae. 2000. *Landmines and Unexploded Ordnance*. London: Pluto Press.
- ²² UNOCHA 1996 *Mine Clearance Workplan Annual Report*.
- ²³ United Nations, 2001. *Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal 2001 for Afghanistan*.
- ²⁴ Interview with UN security Officer, Jalalabad, February 2001
- ²⁵ Amnesty International 1999. *Afghanistan: The Human Rights of Minorities*.
- ²⁶ There must, of course, be caution in assigning an ethnic and sectarian nature to the present fighting in Afghanistan. First of all there is widespread ethnic heterogeneity throughout Afghanistan; geographical areas do not automatically correspond with an ethnically homogenous population. This heterogeneity has increased with widespread displacement. There may be non-Pashtun living in the south of the country and Pashtun living in the north who do not encounter ethnically based resistance from their neighbours. Second, it cannot be assumed that all Pashtun automatically support the Taliban and that all non-Pashtun support the opposition. Third, the precedent of other conflict is that leaders who mobilise in the name of ethnic identity may in fact only have their interests at heart, not the wider well being of 'their' peoples.
- ²⁷ Quoted in Ronstrom, Anitha 1994 *Afghan Children, Invisible, Forgotten, Traumatized: Mobilising Communities to Meet the Needs of Children in War and Refugee Crises*, Case Study Presented at the Workshop at Duke University Durham NC USA

- ²⁸ Weinbaum, Mervin 1994 *Pakistan and Afghanistan Resistance and Reconstruction* Oxford: Westview
- ²⁹ United Nations, *Consolidated Inter Agency Appeal for Afghanistan 2001*
- ³⁰ Amnesty International 1999 *Refugees from Afghanistan: The World's Largest Single Refugee Group* www.amnesty.org/ailib/aipub/1999/ASA/31101699.htm
- ³¹ For reasons of space and time the Afghan refugees are not considered as a separate entity here but are included under the cross cutting issues presented in this paper, although as refugees in a foreign country their status has many particular characteristics.
- ³² Marsden, Peter 1998 *Exile for a Cause: The Plight of Refugees in Afghanistan. Essential Field Guide to Humanitarian and Conflict Zones*. Geneva: International Centre for Humanitarian Reporting.
- ³³ UNHCR 2000 *UNHCR in Pakistan, Information Bulletin*
- ³⁴ Dr Kamal Hossain Special Rapporteur for Afghanistan *Situation of Human rights in Afghanistan*, Presented to the 57th Session of the Commission on Human Rights at Geneva
- In reality the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan remains porous and refugees continue to cross.
- ³⁵ World Food Program, *Vulnerability and Analysis Mapping, Mazar-I-Sharif City Baseline Report*, Islamabad, 1999.
- ³⁶ Quoted in Ronstrom, Anitha 1994 *Afghan Children, Invisible, Forgotten, Traumatized: Mobilising Communities to Meet the Needs of Children in War and Refugee Crises*, Case Study Presented at the Workshop at Duke University Durham NC USA
- ³⁷ Quoted in Sellick, Patricia. 1998. *The Impact of Conflict on Children in Afghanistan*. Radda Barnen, Save the Children Federation Inc, Save the Children – UK, UNICEF.
- ³⁸ Ibid
- ³⁹ Senior Inter-Agency Network on Internal Displacement Mission to Afghanistan 18 – 25th April 2001, *Findings and Recommendations*
- ⁴⁰ By February 2001 the initial crisis appeared to be containable, IDP groups had moved from their villages more as an advanced coping strategy rather than in last minute desperation, basic needs in the newly created IDP camps were being met through inter-agency cooperation and provision by the Taliban, indeed there was some argument that the nutritional status of IDPs was actually higher than that of the surrounding populations (Interview with MSF-Holland, Mazar-I-Sharif, February 2001). Since then, however, the situation has continued to decline.
- ⁴¹ Save the Children (USA) 2001 *Report on the Impact of the Drought*
- ⁴² Senior Inter-Agency Network on Internal Displacement Mission to Afghanistan 18 – 25th April 2001, *Findings and Recommendations*
- ⁴³ Niland, Norah 2000 *Assistance and Human Rights in War-Torn Afghanistan. Challenge and Opportunity* UN Coordinator Office for Afghanistan
- ⁴⁴ Johnson, Chris. 1998: 58. *Afghanistan. A Land In Shadow*. Oxfam Country Profile.
- ⁴⁵ MSF-Holland, UNHCR, UNICEF. 1992. *Beliefs and Practices Relating to Childhood Diarrhoea Amongst Afghan Refugees and the Local practitioners They Consult*.
- ⁴⁶ Coleridge, Peter. 1999. *Disability in Afghanistan*. Comprehensive Disabled Afghans Programmes.
- ⁴⁷ Ekanayake, S.B. 2000. *Afghan Tragedy. Education in the Doldrums*. Islamabad: Al-Noor Publishers.
- ⁴⁸ Skogland, Terje 1988 *Ecology and The War, in Afghanistan in Huld, Bo & Jansson, Erland The Tragedy of Afghanistan London: Croom Helm*.
- ⁴⁹ Johnson, Chris 1998 *Afghanistan A Land In Shadow An Oxfam Country Profile*.
- ⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch 1980 *Afghanistan The Forgotten War*
- ⁵¹ United Nations General Assembly Security Council, 1999 *The Situation in Afghanistan and its Implications for International Peace and Security Report* by the Special Rapporteur
- ⁵² Physicians for Human Rights 2000 *Women's Health and Human Rights in Afghanistan. A Population Based Assessment*.
- ⁵³ Interview with community based counselling group, Kabul February 2001, the 15 children in the group had lost their parents through Taliban law enforcement.
- ⁵⁴ Interview with ICRC Child Protection Officer, Kabul, February 2001
- ⁵⁵ CCA 2000 *A Summary Report on Children Situation in Afghanistan 2000*
- ⁵⁶ UN Afghanistan Magazine Summer 2000 *The War on Drugs Users in Afghanistan*
- ⁵⁷ Institutional successes, constraints and weaknesses for child-focused programming in Afghanistan are covered in detail in the UNICEF ROSA regional report to be disseminated in Kathmandu 9 – 14th July. For a detailed review of the achievements of NGOs for children over the last ten years see Cambell, Shon 2001.
- ⁵⁸ The World Bank, Save the Children (USA) Swedish Committee for Afghanistan UNICEF *Education for Afghans World Bank Workshops* November 10 1999Islamabad, December 13 1999 Washington DC

- ⁵⁹ Swedish Committee for Afghanistan 2000 *Lessons Learned for Gender Equitable Programming Under the Taliban*
- ⁶⁰ United Nations, 2001. *Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal 2001 for Afghanistan*
- ⁶¹ BBC/Afghan Education Projects 2000 *Introducing the BBC Afghan Education Projects*
- ⁶² Save the Children – UK 2000 *Impact of Save the Children UK Child-focused Health Education. Effects on Children's Self Esteem and Status on the Family*. Peshawar
- ⁶³ UNHCR 2001. *Monitoring of the Situation of Returnees in Afghanistan. Summary of Findings January to December 2000*. OCM Afghanistan in Islamabad.
- ⁶⁴ Sippi Azerbaijani-Moghadam 2001 *Report on Interviews with Returnee Women and Girls in Herat Province, Afghanistan*. Peshawar: Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.
- ⁶⁵ Swedish Committee for Afghanistan. 1988. *The Agricultural Survey of Afghanistan, first report*. Peshawar: SCA.
- ⁶⁶ Rubin, B. 2000. The Political Economy of War and Peace in Afghanistan. *World Development* 28 (10).
- ⁶⁷ UNOCHA 2001. *Mission Report of the UN gender Advisor on IDPs in Mazar-I-Sharif Afghanistan*. 19-22 February 2001. Reports of prostitution amongst women in Afghanistan remain anecdotal and must be treated with extreme caution due to the sensitivity of the issue.
- ⁶⁸ Niland, Norah 2000 *Assistance and Human Rights in War-Torn Afghanistan. Challenge and Opportunity* UN Coordinator Office for Afghanistan
- ⁶⁹ UNICEF employee, Jalalabad, February 2001
- ⁷⁰ Interview with newly displaced women in Shamshatoo camp, Pakistan, February 2001.
- ⁷¹ UNHCR 2001. *Monitoring of the Situation of Returnees in Afghanistan. Summary of Findings January to December 2000*. OCM Afghanistan in Islamabad.
- ⁷² Interview with UNHCR protection officers, Peshawar, February 2001
- ⁷³ UNICEF, 1997, *Situation of Children in Afghanistan*
- ⁷⁴ UNICEF, 1997, *Situation of Children in Afghanistan*
- ⁷⁵ World Food Programme *Vulnerability and Analysis Mapping, Mazar-I-Sharif City Baseline Report*, Islamabad, 1999.
- ⁷⁶ Aziz Christine, 1998 *Defiance and Oppression: the Situation of Women In Giradet*, Edward and Walter, Jonathon 1998 *Afghanistan Essential Field Guides to Humanitarian and Conflict Zones*. Crosslines Global Reporting.
- ⁷⁷ Interview with members of Orphans, Refuges and Aid, Peshawar, February 2001.
- ⁷⁸ Interview with CRC trainers, Kabul and Mazar-I-Sharif February 2001.
- ⁷⁹ Sellick, Patricia. 1998: 39. *The Impact of Conflict on Children in Afghanistan*. Radda Barnen, Save the Children Federation Inc, Save the Children – UK, UNICEF.
- ⁸⁰ Medecins Sans Frontiers 1999 *Mental Health Assessment Ghurian and Zendah Jan Districts Heart Province Afghanistan July – October 1999*
- ⁸¹ Rasekh, Zohra, Bauer, Heide, Manos, Michele, Iacopino, Vincent 1998 *Women's Health and Human Rights in Afghanistan The Journal of the American Medical Association* 280
- ⁸² Interview with UNCHR officers, New Delhi January 2001
- ⁸³ During meetings with caregivers – parents and teachers – amongst newly displaced people in Pakistan who had fled from the fighting I asked whether they noticed any difference in the children's behaviour before and after the flight. Care givers suggested that the children were much calmer now that they had arrived in a place of safety, compared to the panic they had shown whilst still living near the battle zones. This calmness was despite the poverty of their situation in Pakistan. Visit to Shamshatoo Refugee Camp, Peshawar, February 2001.
- ⁸⁴ Interview with Patricia Omidian, Medical Anthropologist, Peshawar, February 2001.
- ⁸⁵ Quoted in Medecins Sans Frontiers 1999 *Mental Health Assessment Ghurian and Zendah Jan Districts Heart Province Afghanistan July – October 1999*
- ⁸⁶ Quoted in UNOPS, UNDP, Save the Children 1998 *Women's Health in the Central Highlands. Report of the PRA in Yakawlang and Punjao Districts of Bamyan, Afghanistan*, June 1998.
- ⁸⁷ Quoted from Save the Children – UK 1988 *The Impact of the Male Primary Health Care Programme on the Health Knowledge and Practices of the Population in Afghan Refugee Villages*
- ⁸⁸ Interview with MSF doctors in Baglan province, February 2001
- ⁸⁹ Coleridge, Peter 1999. *Disability in Afghanistan*. Comprehensive Disabled Afghans Programmes.
- ⁹⁰ International Assistance Mission 1999 *Evaluation of Primary Mental Health Project 1996 - 1998*
- ⁹¹ Interview with Patricia Omidian, Medical Anthropologist, Peshawar, February 2001.
- ⁹² UNOPS, UNDP, Save the Children 1998 *Women's Health in the Central Highlands. Report of the PRA in Yakawlang and Punjao Districts of Bamyan, Afghanistan*, June 1998.

- ⁹³ Cooperation Centre for Afghanistan. *Report of the Seminar on the rights of the Child in Afghanistan*. 17 –19th November 1996, Peshawar Pakistan
- ⁹⁴ Sellick, Patricia. 1998. *The Impact of Conflict on Children in Afghanistan*. Radda Barnen, Save the Children Federation Inc, Save the Children – UK, UNICEF.
- ⁹⁵ Helsinki Watch/Asia Watch. 1986. *To Win the Children: Afghanistan's Other War*.
- ⁹⁶ Amnesty International 1999. *Children Devastated by War: Afghanistan's Lost Generations*.
- ⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch. *Massacres of Hazaras in Afghanistan*, February 2001 Vol 13 (1).
- ⁹⁸ UNICEF. 1997. *The Situation of Children in Afghanistan*.
- ⁹⁹ Sellick, Patricia. 1998: 17. *The Impact of Conflict on Children in Afghanistan*. Radda Barnen, Save the Children Federation Inc, Save the Children – UK, UNICEF.
- ¹⁰⁰ Amnesty International 1999. *Children Devastated by War: Afghanistan's Lost Generations*.
- ¹⁰¹ Interview with Danish Deming Agency, Jalalabad February 2001
- ¹⁰² Mine Clearance Action Programme Report
- ¹⁰³ Visit to ICRC Orthopaedic Clinic Mazar-I-Sharif February 2001
- ¹⁰⁴ Sellick, Patricia 1998: 32. *The Impact of Conflict on Children in Afghanistan*. Radda Barnen, Save the Children Federation Inc, Save the Children – UK, UNICEF. Children disabled by landmines and Uxos should be seen in the context of disability generally in the country. There are an estimated 700 000 disabled men women and children in Afghanistan, about 3% of the population. Of these 200 000 have been disabled as a direct result of the war, through landmines and bombing. Many others are disabled through poverty related illness such as polio or complications at birth. Only 10 –15 % of disabled people have been reached by some form of treatment.
- ¹⁰⁵ UNICEF, 1997 *Psychosocial Assessment of Children Exposed to War related Violence in Kabul* For a similar kind of study conducted amongst women in Kabul and refugee women in Pakistan see Rasekh, Zohra, Bauer, Heide, Manos, Michele, Iacopino, Vincent 1998 Women's Health and Human Rights in Afghanistan *The Journal of the American Medical Association* 280
- ¹⁰⁶ CCA 2000 *A Summary Report on Children Situation in Afghanistan 2000*
- ¹⁰⁷ There are no reports of girls bearing arms in the Afghan war.
- ¹⁰⁸ Brett, Rachel & McCallin, Margaret 1998 *Children The Invisible Soldiers*. Radda Barnen.
- ¹⁰⁹ Helsinki Watch/Asia Watch. 1986. *To Win the Children: Afghanistan's Other War*.
- ¹¹⁰ Anselmo, Josue 1994 "After The War? I would Like to Work in a Sweet Factory". *International Children's Rights Monitor* 11(4)
- ¹¹¹ Rashid, Ahmed 2000. *The Taliban. Islam Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- ¹¹² International Coalition Against the Use of Child Soldiers. 2000. *The Use of Child Soldiers in the Asia Pacific Region*.
- ¹¹³ UNICEF. 1997. *The Situation of Children in Afghanistan*.
- ¹¹⁴ Of 500 children interviewed in the 1998 survey on the impact of conflict on children in Afghanistan, only 74 mentioned boys between the age of 15 and 18 who had been recruited.
- ¹¹⁵ On a visit to the IDP camp in the Soviet embassy in Kabul with members of the SCF-US Children at Risk team, we noted that two of the Taliban soldiers guarding the gates appeared very young and did not have beards.
- ¹¹⁶ UNICEF Afghanistan Country Office, Save the Children – Sweden and CCA are currently in the process of conducting a survey on the phenomenon of child soldiers, which will clarify this issue.
- ¹¹⁷ Amnesty International 2000 *Afghanistan Country Report 1999* www.amnesty.org
- ¹¹⁸ Mine Clearance Planning Agency 1996 *Report on the Child Soldier Problem in Afghanistan*.
- ¹¹⁹ International Coalition Against the Use of Child Soldiers. 2000. *The Use of Child Soldiers in the Asia Pacific Region*.
- ¹²⁰ Cohn, Irene & Goodwin-Gill, S. 1994: 37. *Child Soldiers. The Role of Children in Armed Conflict*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- ¹²¹ Chambers, Bea 1987 Drawings by Afghan Refugee Children. Paper presented at the Seminar *Afghan Refugee: A Global Concern*. Geneva: Webster University.
- ¹²² Interview with the CCA team conducting the assessment of child soldiers, Peshawar, February 2001
- ¹²³ Sellick, Patricia. 1998: 17. *The Impact of Conflict on Children in Afghanistan*. Radda Barnen, Save the Children Federation Inc, Save the Children – UK, UNICEF.
- ¹²⁴ Oxford Analytic Brief *Afghanistan Spring Offensive* May 2nd 2001
- ¹²⁵ Sellick, Patricia. 1998: 44. *The Impact of Conflict on Children in Afghanistan*. Radda Barnen, Save the Children Federation Inc, Save the Children – UK, UNICEF.

- ¹²⁶ Quoted in Ronstrom, Anitha 1994 *Afghan Children, Invisible, Forgotten, Traumatized. Mobilising Communities to Meet the Needs of Children in War and Refugee Crises*, Case Study Presented at the Workshop at Duke University Durham NC USA
- ¹²⁷ Mine Clearance Planning Agency 1996 *Report on the Child Soldier Problem in Afghanistan*.
- ¹²⁸ Knabe, Erika 1974 *Afghan Women. Does Their Role Change?* In Dupree, Louis *Afghanistan in the 1970s*. New York: Praeger Publishers.
- ¹²⁹ Van Oudenhoove, Harm 1993 *Learning the rough Way. An Anthropological Study into work and education of Afghan Refugee Children*. Faculty of Anthropology, University of Leiden.
- Terre Des Homme, 1996, *Needs Assessment of Children Working in the Streets of Kabul*. Terre Des Homme, UNCHR
- Islamic Relief Agency, 1996, *Survey of Working Children Jalalabad Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan*. UNICEF, Islamic Relief Agency, Jalalabad Department of Non-Formal Education.
- Save the Children, 1997 *Needs Assessment of Working Children in Mazar-I-Sharif*.
- National Bureau for Sustainable Development/Afghan Women's Educational Centre 1998 *Centre for Street Children and Women, First Progress Report*
- Church World Service, Pakistan 2000 *Street Children, Afghan Refugee Children in Peshawar*
- ¹³⁰ UNICEF ACO, 2001, *Overview of Programmes for Women and Children in Mazar*
- ¹³¹ CCA 2000 *A Summary Report on Children Situation in Afghanistan 2000*. It is not clear from this summary what age limit was used for children nor whether they were both boys and girls.
- ¹³² Van Oudenhoove, Harm 1993 *Learning the rough Way. An Anthropological Study into work and education of Afghan Refugee Children*. Faculty of Anthropology, University of Leiden.
- Terre Des Homme, 1996, *Needs Assessment of Children Working in the Streets of Kabul*. Terre Des Homme, UNCHR
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- Church World Service, Pakistan 2000 *Street Children, Afghan Refugee Children in Peshawar*
- ¹³³ Cooperation Centre for Afghanistan, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 1996 *State of Afghan Refugee Children in NWFP/Pakistan*. Outline of the Survey Report.
- ¹³⁴ CCA 2000 *A Summary Report on Children Situation in Afghanistan 2000*.
- ¹³⁵ Sellick, Patricia. 1998: 21. *The Impact of Conflict on Children in Afghanistan*. Radda Barnen, Save the Children Federation Inc, Save the Children – UK, UNICEF.
- ¹³⁶ Quoted in Save the Children, 1997 *Needs Assessment of Working Children in Mazar-I-Sharif*.
- ¹³⁷ CCA 2000 *A Summary Report on Children Situation in Afghanistan 2000*.
- ¹³⁸ NB the term 'orphan' generally refers to a child who has lost their father.
- ¹³⁹ For example Serve, 2001, Relief Project Family Casework Program, *Project Progress Report*, Jalalabad
- Action Contra La Faim, 2000, *Nutritional and Mortality Survey. Southern Panjsheer Valley – Shamli Plains, Central Region, Afghanistan*.
- Both identify nutritionally vulnerable children but do not discuss their family status.
- ¹⁴⁰ UNICEF, 1997 *Situation of Children in Afghanistan*
- ¹⁴¹ Save the Children – Sweden 1999 *A Baseline Study on the Future of Save the Children Sweden in Afghanistan*
- ¹⁴² Sellick, Patricia. 1998: 30. *The Impact of Conflict on Children in Afghanistan*. Radda Barnen, Save the Children Federation Inc, Save the Children – UK, UNICEF.
- ¹⁴³ For a comparative example see UNICEF, 1998 *Victims of Militancy in the Punjab*
- ¹⁴⁴ Sellick, Patricia. 1998: 29. *The Impact of Conflict on Children in Afghanistan*. Radda Barnen, Save the Children Federation Inc, Save the Children – UK, UNICEF.
- ¹⁴⁵ UNOPS, UNDP, Save the Children 1998 *Women's Health in the Central Highlands. Report of the PRA in Yakawlang and Punjao Districts of Bamyan, Afghanistan*, June 1998.
- ¹⁴⁶ However, whilst gender discrimination does extend into education it does not necessarily extend to health. Reports show that children brought for health care are equally boys and girls, Interview with Crol Le Duc, Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, February 2001
- ¹⁴⁷ Interview with Shon Cambell, consultant, Peshawar, February 2001
- ¹⁴⁸ UNICEF ACO, 2001, *Overview of Programmes for Women and Children in Mazar*
- CRIN
- Save the Children (USA) 2001 *Report on the Impact of Drought in Northern Afghanistan*

¹⁴⁹ Graca Machel Report 1995

¹⁵⁰ United Nations Economic and Social Research Council 2000 *Report of the Secretary General on the Situation of Women and Girls in Afghanistan*, submitted in accordance with the Sub-Commission Resolution 1999/14

¹⁵¹ Human Rights Watch 1999 *Afghanistan Overview* www.hrw.org/wr2k/Asia.htm

¹⁵² Interview with Niloufar Pourzand, UNICEF Child Protection Officer, Islamabad February 2001.

The Women's Commission on Refugee Women and Girls is currently investigating this phenomenon.

¹⁵³ UNOPS, UNDP, Save the Children 1998 *Women's Health in the Central Highlands. Report of the PRA in Yakawlang and Punjao Districts of Bamyan, Afghanistan*, June 1998.

¹⁵⁴ The case of research into the psycho-social effects of the war for children, is illustrative here. This area has been dominated by the 1997 survey of 310 children in Kabul. This study correlated a high degree of exposure to violence in the children with a high incidence of so-called post-traumatic stress disorder. The study has been used to suggest a high prevalence of psychological disorder and psychiatric conditions amongst the entire Afghan population. Since then, however, understanding about the meaning and expression of the psycho-social consequences of adversity has moved away from using psychological diagnostic tools (see Petty, C & Bracken, P 1998 *Rethinking the Trauma of War*. London: Save the Children). In line with these shifts any study that uses the framework of post-traumatic stress disorder to quantify the psycho-social impacts of war and violence can be criticised for: a) Assuming that witnessing a violent events necessarily leads to a traumatic reaction, thereby discounting resilience, coping and healing b) relating psycho-social reactions purely to the incidence of violence rather than to other factors such as economic instability c) focusing on the reactions that fall under the rubric of post-traumatic stress disorder (for example intrusive memories, flash back and avoidance) without looking at how those reactions diminish in time or how they are locally understood and managed by the population in question d) pathologising people who are experiencing a normal physiological reaction to massive shock e) using methods that might be intrusive and distressing to the subject (on this for Afghanistan see Sellick, Patricia 2000 *The Ethics of Conducting Research with Children in Afghanistan and Tajikistan*, paper presented at the conference *Researching on Humanitarian Assistance in Conflict Areas* 8 – 10 May 2000 Post War Reconstruction and Development Unit, University of York). Small statistical surveys on this issue need to be balanced with community-based participatory research in order to meet these objections. As yet, community based research in this field in Afghanistan has not taken the views of children into account.