

# Risk and Resilience: COMMUNITY CLIMATE ACTION



Akam Climate

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## BURKA'S STRUGGLE: CLIMATE CHANGE AND FLOOD DISASTERS

The global climate is already changing, and the Europe and Central Asia (ECA) Region is vulnerable to these changes. The ECA Region will not be immune to these changes. In fact, the degree of warming from climate change is generally expected to be higher at more northerly latitudes, and this warming is projected to result in many more frequent and more severe extreme weather events. (1)

Climate is the average state of the atmosphere and the underlying land or water, on time scales of seasons and longer. Climate is typically described by the statistics of a set of atmospheric and surface variables, such as temperature, precipitation, wind, humidity, cloudiness, soil moisture, sea surface temperature, and the concentration and thickness of sea ice. In 2018, the US National Climate Assessment concluded that the "earth's climate is now changing faster than at any point in the history of modern civilization, primarily as a result of human activities. (2)

Among all these countries, Afghanistan has been one of the most affected by climate change in recent years. "This Country is highly prone to natural disasters throughout its 34 provinces. As a result of climate change, it is anticipated that the incidence of extreme weather events, including heat waves, floods, and droughts will likely increase, as will climate change-linked disasters such as glacial lake outflows. The majority of Afghanistan's population relies directly or indirectly on the available natural resources for their livelihoods so with these climatic changes the foundation of the country's economy, stability, and food security is under threat. Afghanistan has extensive development and climate adaptation needs and, currently, low levels of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world today". (3)

Afghanistan's Central Statistics Organization (CSO) estimated the country's population at 29.7 million in 2017. This population has a fast growth rate as well as a youth bulge, with persons under 14 years of age accounting for nearly half of the total population. (4)

United Nations has listed Afghanistan as one of the most vulnerable countries to the climate crisis. Following the Taliban's return to power in 2021, the country also lost significant amounts of foreign aid. The World Food Program has reported that Afghanistan is highly exposed to natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, avalanches, landslides, and droughts. The country's geographical features, mountainous terrain, and climate, combined with low levels of socio-economic development, exacerbate its vulnerability to such disasters. (5)

Afghanistan, a nation grappling with multifaceted challenges, is now facing the escalating consequences of climate change. Decades of war and instability have left the country with severely damaged infrastructure, making it especially vulnerable to environmental crises. Among these, severe flooding has emerged as one of the most devastating impacts, causing widespread destruction to livelihoods and infrastructure. The last year floods in Burka District of Baghlan Province in Afghanistan, which occurred in May 2024, are a stark reminder of the urgent need to address the effects of climate change in Afghanistan.

In 10, May,2024, intense flooding struck northern Afghanistan, with Baghlan Province bearing the brunt of the disaster. These floods inflicted unprecedented levels of financial and human loss, further weakening an already fragile local economy. For the residents of Baghlan, the scale and intensity of the floods were unlike anything they had experienced before. Elders in the community, who have lived through decades of hardships, described the floods as unprecedented, sparking fears about the potential recurrence of such events in the future. This disaster not only disrupted lives but also served as a harsh wake-up call about the growing risks associated with climate change.



According to a Community Leader Habibullah, a resident of Fulol village,

**"We hurriedly informed about the danger through mobile phones and the sound of gunfire.**(an action that acts as an early warning system at the time). **Those who received calls left their homes and took refuge in the mountains and hills. However, many who could not receive calls or whose men were not at home remained unaware and became victims. We were so frightened that my wife and daughters couldn't even put on their shoes. In the final moments, we packed 11 family members into a small car and fled, leaving behind all our belongings including cash, gold and expensive things at home. We barely escaped a few minutes before the flood arrived. But our belongings who couldn't make contact and we are not able to help them, failed to establish communication perished in this disaster—a flood that, according to our elders, has been unprecedented for decades.**

Afghanistan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation has reported that 315 people that most of them are Women and children lost their lives due to floods in Baghlan province, located in northern Afghanistan. In a statement released on Sunday, May 2024, the ministry announced that the floods in the districts of Burka and Central Baghlan in Baghlan province caused the death of 315 individuals and left 1,630 others injured. (6)

Many of those who had died are from the Burka district where more than 200 people had been trapped inside their homes.(7) With 6 Schools, 50 bridges and 30 electricity dams damaged, essential transportation and power supply systems have been severely disrupted. Roads across most affected Districts was remain inaccessible after disaster, slowing down emergency response and joint assessment teams.

At least six public schools in Baghlan Province have been completely destroyed, along with 10,200 acres of orchards, wiping out years of agricultural investment. The loss of 2,260 livestock further exacerbates food insecurity in the region. These photos depict broken bridges, collapsed homes, and flooded farmlands, highlighting the long-term economic impact on affected communities.

Women in Burka district of Baghlan province, relying on social support and traditional knowledge, have bravely risked their lives by entering the floodwaters to save their children. Videos of their bravery have been shared on social media. Despite limited resources and a lack of infrastructure, mutual cooperation and resilience have enabled them to survive.

Women in Afghanistan can play a key role and be effective in managing and mitigating natural hazards and raising awareness about climate change and natural disasters. They can be a positive and effective step by identifying high-risk areas, educating the family, properly managing the family in times of danger, and leading families. Adding to the severity of their plight, many people lost valuable personal possessions, the loss of safety nets has deepened the financial strain on families and eroded their ability to recover. For Burka District, the floods were not just an environmental catastrophe but also a social and economic crisis that has left deep scars on the community.

In the aftermath of these devastating floods, the residents of Burka District are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance. Although some support has been provided by local communities, national organizations, and international agencies, it has been insufficient to address the scale of the disaster. Essential needs, such as access to clean drinking water, food security, temporary shelters, and tools for rebuilding livelihoods, remain unmet for many affected families at 2024.



**The flood's impact extends beyond human casualties. Significant damage has been sustained to civilian infrastructure, including schools, bridges, and power stations.**

Based on field findings and direct engagement with vulnerable communities, it is evident that reducing climate-related losses is only possible through practical, community-driven actions. Efforts should focus on strengthening climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction, mitigation, Nature based solutions (NBS), Community based Adaptation (CBA) and sustainability to enhance community preparedness for climate shocks. Implementing awareness programs, targeted trainings, seminars, workshops, and local gatherings plays a critical role in building knowledge and capacity. This approach equips communities with the skills and understanding needed to make informed decisions, reduce risks, and prepare for a safer and more resilient future in the face of climate change.



Beyond meeting these important needs, the community requires sustainable interventions to restore their lives and livelihoods. Job creation, economic opportunities, and programs that support self-sufficiency are critical for helping these communities recover and thrive. Only through sustained and comprehensive assistance can they rebuild their lives and prepare for future challenges.

Efforts to restore Afghanistan's forests, protect soil and land, and improve the management of natural resources are also critical. Such measures not only strengthen environmental resilience but also contribute to reducing the risk of future flooding and other climate-related disasters. Building climate-resilient communities requires investments in sustainable practices and active involvement from local and international stakeholders.

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