**Humanitarian Catastrophe in Afghanistan: Are the Taliban Responsible?**

[Nudrat Fatima](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/nudrat-fatima/)

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Afghanistan has been in economic upheaval since August 2021, when international aid payments worth billions of dollars were halted, and the Afghan Central Bank’s assets were frozen. Subsequently, the country has entered an economic crisis. This, according to many, resulted in the prevailing food insecurity in the country. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) predicted that from November 2021 to March 2022, more than one in every two Afghans would face emergency levels of acute food insecurity. Thus, there is an urgent need to stabilize the food security and nutrition situation for this winter-spring season.

“Food insecurity affects 11 million Afghans, and the country’s population will be on the verge of universal poverty by June-2022.”

The Taliban government is held accountable for this, although the political unrest has exacerbated the situation, the underlying causes are not government-induced. This is evident from the 2020 Seasonal Food Security Assessment’s report, which estimated that approximately 40 per cent of families have inadequate food intake and 32 per cent have a lack of dietary variety (i.e., consuming four food groups or less).

The political unrest in Afghanistan has worsened the pre-existing food insecurity situation. The actual causes are climacteric, not polit-centric.

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Agriculture is the biggest livelihood provider in the country and has a vivid influence on its economy. Around 80 per cent of all livelihoods come from farming and herding and 70 per cent of the population reside in the backcountry. The prevailing food insecurity is attributed to below-average rainfall, which is driven by recurring episodes of La Niña (the phenomenon of strong trade winds which push more warm water toward Asia. This resulted in drought in the southern countries and heavy rains and flooding in the Pacific Northwest), and its consequent negative impact on livestock and agricultural production.

FAO has estimated that the past five droughts induced by La Niña reduced the production of wheat by 16-27 per cent.

Livestock production is also expected to fall, as 30 per cent of the ruminants will be affected. A wheat deficit of 2.5 million tonnes is estimated to result from one of the most severe droughts in 30 years. Further, the country faces an extensive risk of widespread famine soon if adequate aid is not provided soon. Afghanistan is already in a precarious position, ranked 103rd out of 116 countries on the Global Hunger Index 2021, and has a severe hunger level with a score of 28.3.

Every year, about 250,000 people suffer the devastating impacts of environmental disasters such as floods, droughts, avalanches, landslides, and earthquakes in Afghanistan.

Moreover, after the Covid-19 lockdown, around 15 million Afghans became job insecure. This was another contributor to food insecurity along with the internal displacement due to conflicts and violence. Over 404,000 new displacements associated with war and violence were recorded in 2020. So, these factors have not triggered the food insecurity in Afghanistan but exacerbated this pre-existing problem.

All these causes of food insecurity in Afghanistan are intertwined, and the consequences may be seen in a multitude of settings. The social, environmental, and economic ecosystems are all interwoven in complex ways. Food insecurity is increased by the interrelated nature of these linkages, posing future concerns.

To establish long-term sustainability against the repercussions, decisive steps must be implemented immediately and in a scalable manner.

The complex issues of combating food insecurity and malnutrition necessitate stronger cross-sectoral collaboration and policy alignment, as well as global funding to safeguard the climate-vulnerable.

*The writer is Research Associate (Sustainable Development Policy Institute) and can be contacted at nudratfatima@sdpi.org.*