

## Promoting Community Resilience through the Humanitarian, Basic Needs, and Conflict Sensitivity Nexus



Figure 1 - Left. A DRC deminer detects and removes a Soviet-era mortar. Figure 2 - Right. DRC conducts a conflict mediation training with female community members from Khaki Jabbar district.

### Afghanistan: A Complex Crisis

Over the past four decades, Afghanistan has endured prolonged conflict and compounding crises, which have had a profound impact on communities' ability to move towards recovery and solutions. Today, the legacy of war remains, with Afghanistan suffering from one of the highest levels of explosive hazard contamination in the world which continues to claim innocent lives, cause psychological distress, and disrupt local livelihoods.<sup>1</sup> The presence of explosive ordnance (EO) severely hinders Afghan communities' ability to recover, and has also contributed to the weakening of local structures and fuelling of mistrust among and between communities. Adding to this, EO contamination has historically impeded much-needed development programming, as affected communities are often considered too dangerous for long-term investments, such as infrastructure rehabilitation, road construction, and the provision of basic services.

<sup>1</sup> Mine Action Review, 'Clearing the Mines 2021,' October 2021.

As found through DRC conflict analyses, the effects of the conflict cannot be isolated from the many social and economic factors that, together, can spur tension amongst community members and hinders their ability to come together for shared purposes. These complexities are highly evident in rural Afghanistan, where fighting was widespread and where social and economic vulnerabilities coincide with exposure to various shocks and stresses. Assessments conducted by DRC multi-sectoral teams have confirmed that EO contamination is a significant barrier to community safety, recovery, and long-term development, as populations living in proximity of EO hazards are not only faced with life-threatening risks but also lack access to productive assets, natural resources, and markets which are essential for their livelihoods and survival. Studies have found that when a child is injured or killed in an EO accident, parents often place the responsibility on each other's children or the landowner, thereby worsening the social climate.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, competition and pressure around limited access to land and natural resources due to EO contamination have also been reported as a key source of tension amongst communities.<sup>3</sup> Localised conflict over natural resources are not uncommon in remote, rural communities where other livelihood opportunities are scarce, and where lower water accessibility – including as a result of EO barriers – further compromise residents' ability to make a living through agriculture and livestock.<sup>4</sup>

## **DRC's Approach to Integrated Programming**

As a result of the relative cessation of conflict, DRC now has greater access to communities and EO contaminated sites than ever before, representing a unique window of opportunity to significantly expand risk education and clearance efforts – also into areas that have seen little to no Humanitarian Mine Action (HMA) response in the past. To maximize the impact of HMA interventions, DRC has recently scaled-up complementary community engagement activities, in line with our global peacebuilding programme.

In Afghanistan, community engagement activities have focused on developing capacities to deliver community-driven safety planning and conflict mediation activities in previously contaminated areas, in acknowledgement that the longstanding presence of EO has eroded the social fabric of affected communities. When linked with economic recovery interventions, identified by communities themselves based on their own priorities, this integrated approach has the potential to alleviate tension within communities that were experiencing economic hardships before EO clearance and can have wide-reaching socio-economic benefits. This includes increased availability of land for crop cultivation and livestock grazing, greater access to natural resources such as irrigation water, and renewed trust amongst communities attributed to improved safety and socio-economic conditions.

DRC is the only actor in Afghanistan capable of directly delivering integrated HMA, community engagement, and recovery programming, and will continue to build on its position to support community-driven interventions centred on the sustainable and productive use of cleared land according to communities' priorities and preferences, to enable Afghan populations trapped in post-conflict phases to recover. To ensure a holistic and integrated approach to the complex needs and vulnerabilities stemming from EO contamination, DRC's applies the following steps:

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<sup>2</sup> UNMAS, Samuel Hall, '30 Years of Impact, an Evaluation of the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan, November 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> DRC, Conflict Analysis Reports in Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, and Nangarhar provinces, February 2023.

## A Phased Approach to Integration

### Step 1: Integrated Assessments



Joint teams of MEAL, HMA, Economic Recovery, and Community Engagement members conduct a series of assessments to identify hazards and establish a baseline for the prioritization of clearance and subsequent recovery interventions in accordance with community perspectives and potential for development of productive land and assets.

### Step 2: Humanitarian Mine Action



HMA staff initiate operations by conducting detailed re-survey of hazardous areas to clearly define the boundaries of safe and unsafe areas. Subsequently, clearance teams are deployed based on detailed task implementation plans to clear and release unsafe areas. To supplement these activities, a localised and targeted approach to Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) is implemented.

### Step 3: Community Engagement



Community safety planning and conflict mediation interventions are conducted to build the capacity of local governance structures to prevent and manage conflict and identify community-based initiatives that can be undertaken to address issues of concern and contribute to longer-term resilience and recovery.

### Step 4: Recovery Interventions



Economic Recovery/Shelter & Settlements teams conduct post-clearance rehabilitation focusing on early recovery and development interventions, such as rehabilitation of agro-based and water infrastructure, disaster risk reduction activities, distribution of agricultural start-up kits, and the provision of equipment needed to resume farming activities.

### Step 5: Integrated Impact Assessment



MEAL teams conduct a multi-sector evaluation to measure the joint impact of HMA, Community Engagement, and Recovery interventions to evaluate the effectiveness of the response and inform future programming.

## Case Study

### Khaki Jabar District, Kabul Province

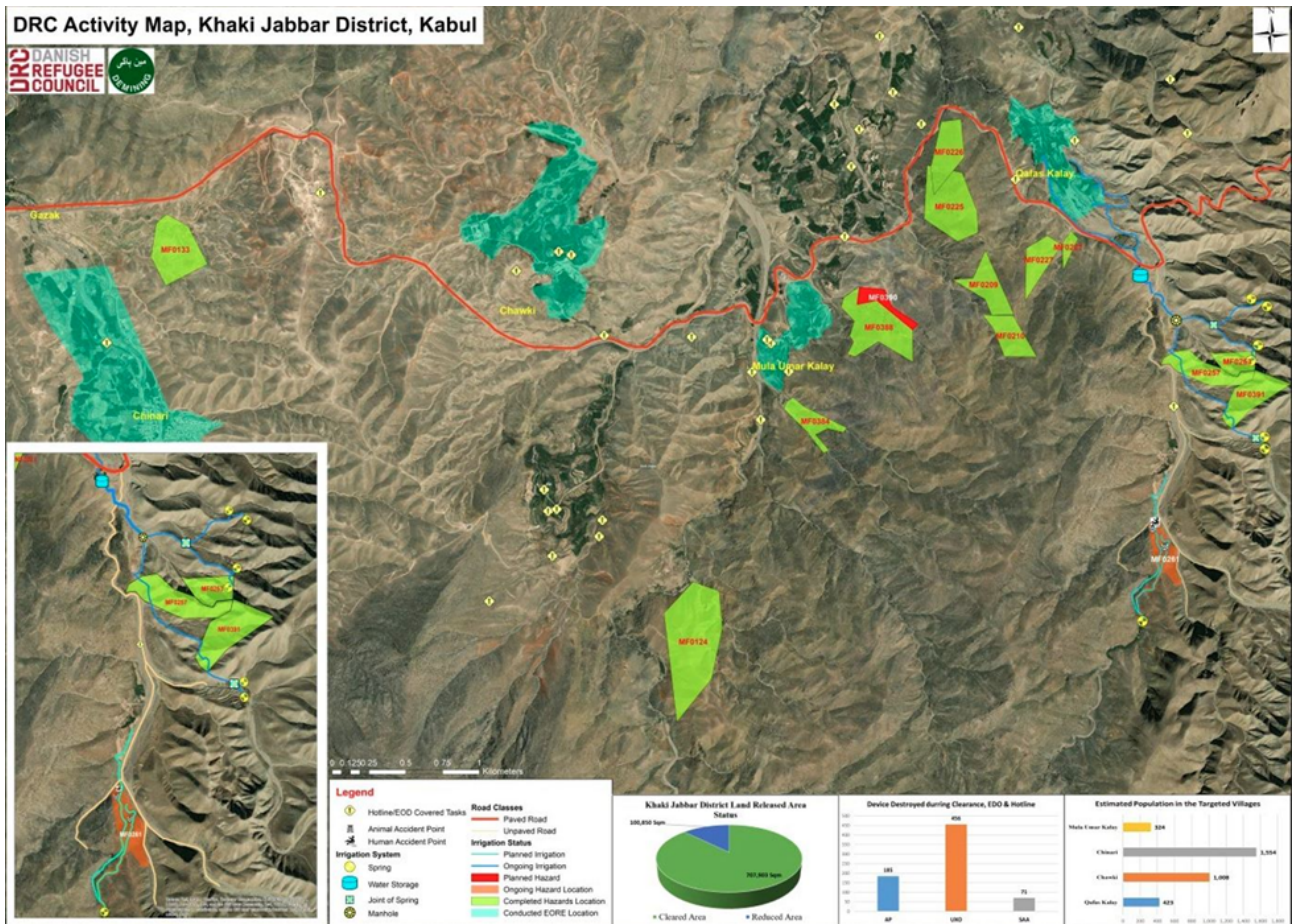


Figure 3. Map of DRC HMA and Recovery interventions in Khaki Jabar district, Kabul Province.

Khaki Jabar is a mountainous district situated in the south-eastern part of Kabul province. An overwhelming majority of the population are Pashtuns (80%), while the remaining 20 percent are ethnic Tajiks with a few IDP settlements established in host communities. In the 1980s, most of the villages in the district experienced heavy fighting and were contaminated by anti-personnel pressure mines (PMN2) as a military tactic to prevent the Mujahidin from accessing the area. In more recent years, Khaki Jabar has witnessed numerous explosions, with the UN Mine Action Services (UNMAS) reporting mines and EO contamination along roads connecting villages and grazing areas.

Due to landmines and other explosives embedded during the conflict over the past four decades, residents have been effectively blocked from using their land and accessing vital water sources, severely limiting their rural livelihoods and ability to meet their basic needs. Reportedly, most residents who have migrated outside of the district are deterred from returning home due to the lingering effects of war, a lack of electricity and water, the economic impacts of drought, and insufficient primary health care and education services. DRC assessments conducted in March 2022 confirmed that the main source of revenue in the targeted villages of Mullar Omer, Qafas, and Chakari villages is agriculture and animal husbandry, with local tensions over water scarcity and land rights reported amongst households who wholly rely on rural livelihoods for their subsistence and income.

## DRC's Response

DRC responded to the multi-sectoral needs in Khaki Jabbar district through an area-based programme, integrating land clearance and Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) with community engagement and recovery interventions.

Following an integrated assessment to identify community priorities for land clearance, DRC HMA teams deployed to the area and successfully cleared 36,001 square meters of land and destroyed nine anti-personnel mines and 34 explosive remnants of war (ERW), contributing to the physical safety of 278 village residents whilst paving the way for further recovery efforts. Alongside the removal of EO threats, DRC instructors conducted Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) sessions, reaching 1,321 community members to create awareness, promote safe behaviour, and reduce the likelihood of life-altering injuries and casualties due to risks associated with EO.



**Figure 4 - Left.** DRC Deminers prepare for land clearance operations in Khakki Jabbar district, May 2022. **Figure 5 - Right.** A DRC Risk Education instructor conducts a community-level EORE session with young boys, who represent the most at-risk group in terms of EO casualties.

While clearance efforts were ongoing, through its multi-sectoral integrated approach, DRC community engagement team held consultative meetings with community leaders to discuss how the cleared land will be used, also considering the needs identified through DRC assessments conducted at the inception phase. This process included community entry and mobilization meetings with traditional and other opinion leaders to discuss the implementation of activities with the greatest potential to strengthen the capacity of local community structures in the prevention and management of conflict and to enhance social cohesion among different ethnic and religious groups. Following this exercise, DRC trained 41 community members (49% women), including local leaders, elders, religious leaders, women, and youth, on conflict mediation and dialogue facilitation aimed at strengthening grassroots conflict management mechanisms. The trainings were conducted using well-tested methodologies and training modules adapted for the Afghan context, focusing on building on existing skills and capacities, while bringing in additional skills and tools to manage conflicts peacefully. The training itself also offered a safe space for diverse participants to share experiences and perspectives on issues of concern and ways of managing these. After the trainings, participants became more proactive and started using the acquired skills to mediate conflicts in their families and broader communities thus contributing to peaceful coexistence and improved social cohesion.

In addition, DRC Community Engagement teams facilitated community safety planning (CSP) workshops for 48 community members – half of whom were women. During these workshops, the community identified their own priorities to facilitate the rehabilitation and development of community infrastructure to mitigate local conflict drivers and promote longer-term recovery and community resilience. This involved mobilizing female and male youth to build their capacity to participate in civic engagement and decision-making processes in their communities and the identification of community-based initiatives to improve access to sustainable livelihood opportunities, as well as more effective management of natural resources. This resulted in the development of action plans with a vision of a safe and secure community, to be implemented with the support from local civil society and humanitarian and development actors, including DRC.

CSP participants reported the destruction of the main water channel, which significantly reduced the availability of irrigation water and agricultural productivity, prompted families to relocate to Kabul city in seek of daily labour opportunities. In this light, constructing a water channel was identified as a high priority for residents in addition to the creation of temporary employment to provide immediate economic relief to extremely poor households so that they can start to recover. To revive traditional livelihoods in Qafas and Mula Omar villages, DRC temporarily employed 50 individuals under a cash-for-work scheme, where they were engaged in the installation of a 2,100 metre-long High-Density Poly Ethaline (HDPE) pipe which effectively transfers water from four springs to the local water reservoir built by WFP following advocacy and engagement by community representatives trained by DRC community engagement team. Prior to this intervention, the water flow was only able to reach 20 hectares of land but now covers over 60 hectares, much of which had previously not been harvested due to insufficient water availability and presence of EO. The installation of the new pipe is expected to increase irrigation coverage by more than four-fold.

In addition, through Focus Group Discussions with a broad range of community members from Chakari village, the construction of a check dam was captured as a high priority to mitigate flooding and soil erosion while also improving availability of water for irrigation purposes. In response, DRC mobilised 92 socio-economically vulnerable residents through a cash-for-work scheme to construct a 5.1 square kilometre check dam with a catchment area of 25,000m<sup>3</sup>. The participants were engaged in construction works for a four-month period, during which their families benefitted from temporary income while also enabling the protection and irrigation of over 800 square meters of productive land – which will contribute to sustainable recovery in the longer term.



**Figure 6 - Left.** Cash for Work participants install a HDPE 2100 meters pipe scheme benefitting residents of Qafas and Mula Omar villages. **Figure 7 - Right.** The 5.1 square kilometre check dam constructed in Chakari village.

## Impact Assessment

DRC conducted an impact evaluation in Qafas village in August 2022 to understand the effectiveness of DRC's integrated HMA and Recovery interventions on community members, as well as the economic situation and living conditions of residents before and after the multi-sectoral response. Specifically, the study gathered information on DRC's HMA and cash-for-work activities, which were implemented in the same area, and collected feedback regarding the major challenges and needs residents were facing. A majority of participants reported that they were relying mostly on debt from friends and relatives and on selling their limited seasonal harvest to meet their basic survival needs. Before clearance activities, community members explained that they were unable to farm all available land and effectively manage their limited water sources due to the presence of EO contamination. Following clearance operations, residents viewed the newly decontaminated land as safe and secure, but they were initially unable to productively use the land due to a lack of access to water. Thanks to the installation of the HDPE pipe through a cash-for-work approach, respondents reported having sufficient irrigation water and the ability to harvest their crops. Beyond the restoration of vital rural livelihoods, men and women participants explained their children can now move freely without any risks or fears.

**“Before DRC activities, one of my family members had a mine accident and lost his hand. Now, the community feels safe,” tells a Qafas resident.**

Similarly, during a Focus Group Discussions with community members of Chakari village, the construction of the check dam was said to already have far-reaching benefits, reportedly increasing water reserves and enriching the underground water source. Participants emphasized the positive impact of this intervention on their quality of life, as they are now able to access sufficient water to irrigate their land which is essential for both their subsistence and livelihoods, but also for longer-term community resilience and recovery. Several participants also communicated their commitment to maintaining the infrastructure, demonstrating a willingness to work together for the betterment of their community.