

Standard Project Report 2015

Reporting Period: 1 January - 31 December 2015

AFGHANISTAN

Provision of Humanitarian Air Services in Afghanistan

Project Number	200639
Project Category	Single Country Special Operation

Project Approval Date	24 Dec 2013
Planned Start Date	01 Jan 2014
Actual Start Date	01 Jan 2014
Project End Date	31 Dec 2015
Financial Closure Date	n.a.

Approved budget as 31 December 2015 in USD	
Capacity Dev.t and Augmentation	30,732,817
Direct Support Costs	3,862,707
Indirect Support Costs	2,421,686
Total Approved Budget	37,017,210

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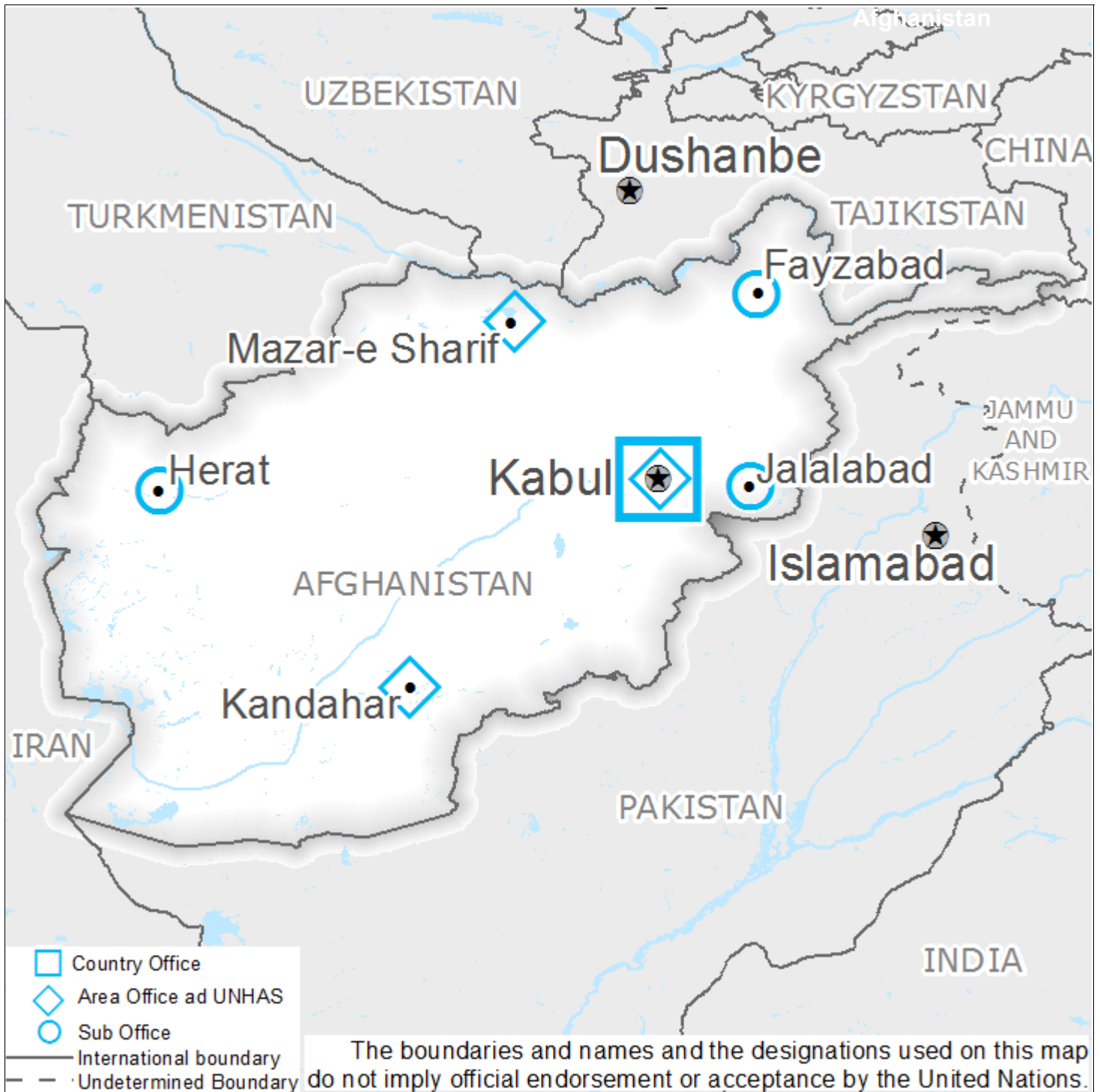
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COUNTRY BACKGROUND

Afghanistan is a landlocked country, with an estimated population of 30 million, and with a rank of 171 on the 2014 Human Development Index. After more than three decades of war and civil unrest, Afghanistan continues to face enormous challenges. Despite recent economic growth largely driven by foreign assistance, the socio-economic indicators of the country remain poor and still in need of recovery and development support.

Since 2001, the Afghan population's access to basic services has greatly improved in nearly all sectors. School enrolment has increased sharply, with over eight million children currently enrolled in school, of whom 40 percent are girls. Adult literacy stands at 31.4 percent. Life expectancy at birth is 62 years.

Despite significant improvements in the coverage and quality of health services, as well as a drop in maternal, infant and under-five mortality, Afghan health indicators remain below average for low income countries, indicating the need to further lower barriers for women accessing services. Afghanistan has one of the highest levels of child malnutrition in the world, with over 40 percent of children under five years of age suffering from chronic malnutrition while both women and children suffer from high levels of vitamin and mineral deficiencies.

Afghanistan is a food-deficit country and relies on imports to meet consumption needs. In 2015, the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock estimated that the country produced 5.8 million mt of cereals indicating a reduction of 0.940 million mt compared to the previous year (2014). The cereal deficit in 2015 was estimated at 1 million mt against 0.242 million mt in 2014. While food availability has improved since 2011 at the national level, challenges regarding the lack of physical and economic access to a nutritious diet persist. Poor infrastructure and limited livelihood opportunities, poor food utilisation, insecurity and market instability continue to have a negative impact on household food security.

The latest Afghanistan Living Condition Survey (ALCS-2014, formerly the National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment or NRVA) showed that 33 percent (9.3 million people) of the total population are food-insecure. Among them, an estimated 3.4 million (or 12 percent) are severely, and 5.9 million (or 21 percent) moderately food-insecure.

Widespread insecurity is a major and growing concern. Military operations launched in most parts of the country against insurgents have not only affected the food security of populations, but also undermined the government's reconstruction efforts and led to serious restrictions on humanitarian interventions. Despite the growing insecurity, WFP remained fully operational in most parts of the country through three area offices and three sub offices addressing health, educational and environmental deficiencies and providing livelihood opportunities in remote, food-insecure areas.

SUMMARY OF WFP ASSISTANCE

WFP's programme portfolio is comprised of a Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO), Purchase for Progress (P4P), the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) and a Special Operation for a Strategic Grain Reserve (SGR).

WFP supported the acute food and nutrition security needs of the most vulnerable populations in Afghanistan with food and unconditional cash or voucher transfers and food-based nutrition interventions, and continued to respond to emergencies through the provision of basic food rations. Contributing to Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 1 (eradicate extreme poverty and hunger), WFP ensured that the most vulnerable could meet their basic food needs during times of crisis, by supporting internally displaced people (IDPs) and returnees, people affected by natural disasters, and economically stressed populations. WFP also assisted moderately malnourished children under five years of age, and pregnant and lactating women, thus contributing to MDG 4 (reduce child mortality), MDG 5 (improve maternal health).

WFP contributed to learning achievements among primary and lower secondary school children by providing take-home rations and among adults, particularly women, through vocational skills training activities. There was also broad participation in the country's recovery efforts by developing local capacities and rehabilitating household and community assets. WFP also helped communities recover from shocks by supporting communities in their efforts to restore the degraded environment by constructing flood protection walls, check dams, irrigation canals, establishment of tree nurseries and planting trees, etc., throughout the country. These activities contributed to: MDG 2 (achieve universal primary education) and MDG 3 (promote gender equality) and MDG 7 (ensure environmental sustainability).

Through the P4P initiative, WFP supported increased production, productivity and market development in Afghanistan. WFP purchased local wheat from farmers and locally produced high-energy biscuits to strengthen Afghan markets and improved market access for small-scale producers. WFP continued to support national flour fortification programmes, and enhancing the capacity of private millers to fortify flour for commercial purposes, by providing millers with micronutrients and training. In addition, WFP supports and promotes soya and soya fortification, a good source of daily protein.

The UNHAS operation provided safe and efficient air transport services for the humanitarian community throughout Afghanistan. UNHAS operated a fleet of two aircraft and one helicopter, serving 25 destinations, and supported up to 160 humanitarian organizations to deliver assistance in locations where no commercial air transportation option exists.

Under the Strategic Grain Reserve programme, led by the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock, WFP worked to support the construction of storage facilities to increase national emergency response capacity. In addition to enhancing emergency response, the SGR programme seeks to facilitate the stabilisation of wheat prices, provide storage options to farmers, and reduce post-harvest losses.

Through a budget revision of the PRRO, WFP sharpened its focus on food security and nutrition interventions in the country, and expanded the programme to include food assistance to some 200,000 Pakistani refugees in Khost and Paktika provinces as well as a pilot project providing high-energy biscuits to primary students in one district of Badakhshan province. WFP continued to contribute to the capacity development of central and district level government counterparts in food security analysis and emergency preparedness and response.

Beneficiaries	Male	Female	Total
Number of children below 5 years of age	390,924	375,594	766,518
Number of children 5 to 18 years of age	688,771	661,760	1,350,531
Number of adults	781,848	751,187	1,533,035
Total number of beneficiaries in 2015	1,861,543	1,788,541	3,650,084
Total number of beneficiaries in 2014	1,605,770	1,657,575	3,263,345
Total number of beneficiaries in 2013	1,910,222	1,562,917	3,473,139

Distribution (mt)						
Project Type	Cereals	Oil	Pulses	Mix	Other	Total
Single Country PRRO	62,363	9,778	6,481	1,359	409	80,391
Total food distributed in 2015	62,363	9,778	6,481	1,359	409	80,391
Total food distributed in 2014	60,937	11,237	6,517	2,065	440	81,195
Total food distributed in 2013	74,967	10,009	11,026	9,295	822	106,120

Operational SPR

OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES AND RELEVANCE

The primary objective of the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) Special Operation was to provide safe and reliable air transport services to the humanitarian community in Afghanistan. This was in support of critical life-saving activities implemented by the United Nations, local and international NGOs, and other humanitarian agencies in Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, access to project sites remained a challenge for humanitarian agencies due to inhospitable terrain, limited infrastructure and systemic insecurity. Additionally, weak administrative and regulatory provisions continued to hamper commercial aviation growth in the country. During most of 2015, limited commercial air carriers operating in Afghanistan were in compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) regulations. At the end of the year, only two ICAO-compliant local commercial carriers were serving a restricted number of destinations within the country.

The Special Operation was in line with WFP's Strategic Objective 1 'Save lives and protect livelihoods in emergencies' and aimed to:

- Provide safe, efficient and cost-effective inter-agency air transport services for 160 United Nations agencies, NGOs and donor organizations involved in humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan;
- Respond in a fast, safe and flexible manner to the needs of the humanitarian community;
- Carry out timely medical and security evacuations when requested/as required;
- Transport light cargo, such as medical supplies, information and communications technology equipment, and
- Assist the national authorities, in conjunction with international authorities, in search and rescue operations, when called upon.

RESULTS

'Story Worth Telling'

UNHAS provides medical and security evacuations to the humanitarian community in Afghanistan, and a timely response is of essence in such critical situations. Furthermore, when the roads are insecure and those in need of help are in the most inaccessible parts of the country, UNHAS is often the only option for delivering much-needed humanitarian assistance, moving aid workers and relocating people in times of crisis.

In Kunduz city in late September this year, more than 200 aid workers were trapped due to fighting when armed forces in opposition to the government stormed the city. As the city was being overrun, UNHAS planes were busy relocating humanitarian workers and their families to safety. UNHAS continued to fly until Kunduz airport was closed to civilian flights two days later. The event highlights the significance of UNHAS in supporting humanitarian operations in Afghanistan.

In the conflict-affected country, UNHAS has to be a vital service. "We can't take the road; it is too dangerous and most of the areas are insecure," says Jalaluddin Dashti, Regional Director for the Agha Khan Foundation in northern Afghanistan and a frequent UNHAS flyer. "For the moment, UNHAS is the one we can count on."

Outputs

In 2015, UNHAS provided safe air transport services to all eligible humanitarian organizations. Of the 25,400 passengers transported between January and December 2015, approximately 54 percent were from the NGO community, and 34 percent from United Nations agencies. Diplomatic missions and others accounted for the remaining 12 percent of passengers.

UNHAS transported nearly 2000 more passengers compared to 2014, including a successful response to a high number of requests from its partner agencies for staff relocations and medical evacuations. In addition, UNHAS transported an increased number of passengers against the initial planned number in 2015 and served 25 locations in remote areas of the country.

The UNHAS fleet in 2015 was composed of two fixed-wing aircraft, two 19-seater Beechcraft 1900D, as well as one 19-seater Mi8-MTV helicopter, all based in Kabul. In order to extend the operational capacity of the fleet and enhance its cost-effectiveness, the 37-seat Dash 8/200 aircraft was changed to a 19-seater in early 2015. The fleet reconfiguration undertaken at the beginning of the year enabled UNHAS to obtain economies of scale by further ensuring optimal utilization rates, enhanced evacuation capabilities and timely flight re-organization when one aircraft was grounded due to technical or other operational problems. Furthermore, it enabled the operation to be more cost-effective and reliable by maintaining its responsiveness and efficiency.

From January to December 2015, UNHAS utilized the contracted aircraft for over 2,360 hours, 95 percent of the contracted hours.

Output	Unit	Planned	Actual	% Actual vs. Planned
SO 1: Special Operations (Airops)				
Average no. of mt (food or NFI) transported monthly	mt	6	6	100.0%
Average no. of passengers transported monthly by air	no.	1,200	1,631	135.9%
Number of aircrafts made available	no.	3	3	100.0%
Percentage of requests for medical and security evacuations fulfilled	%	100	100	100.0%
Percentage utilization of the contracted hours of aircraft	%	100	95	95.0%

Outcomes

The Special Operation was designed to serve the needs of the humanitarian community, which in turn directly contributed to improving food security, health and nutrition, water and sanitation, social services, education and capacity development of local populations. During the year, UNHAS enabled 154 organizations to reach their project sites across the country through scheduled flight services to 25 regular destinations, and ad-hoc destinations served on a request basis.

In May 2015, UNHAS operated a flight for the humanitarian community, in response to the landslide-affected families in the village of Jerow Bala in Khwahan district of Badakshan Province. Based on the rapid needs assessment conducted, the overall figures indicated that the entire village had been affected with 52 people dead and all 237 families affected; all houses had been completely destroyed and the population was living in the open air. As there was no road access to this community, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) requested UNHAS to transport the much needed humanitarian supplies to Jerow Bala. UNHAS undertook a successful assessment flight, followed by two humanitarian flights operated to transport relief items to Jerow Bala. The helicopter continued to provide essential flight services, crucial to the humanitarian organizations and agencies working in areas where air transport remained the only means of secure travel and ensured:

- A rapid deployment of humanitarian aid workers to their areas of operation;
- An access for rapid assessment teams to move into locations throughout the country;
- Safety of staff deployed in the area of operation through the facilitation and provision of medical or security based evacuations; and
- The movement of life-saving relief items such as medical supplies and high-energy foods.

Again, after receiving a call from OCHA on Friday evening, 11 September, UNHAS promptly initiated action to facilitate the evacuation of NGO personnel from Yawan district in Badakshan province to Faizabad due to the deteriorating security situation, and in particular, the inaccessibility by road. UNHAS evacuated 72 staff and their families from Norwegian Afghanistan Committee and CONCERN. This included 12 women, 7 children, and 53 men from the two organizations. Without road access, UNHAS was the only option available to the NGOs. UNHAS worked in close coordination with OCHA, the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) and the two respective NGOs to ensure timely evacuation of staff. Using the 19-seat MI8 MTV helicopter, UNHAS was able to effectively complete four trips from Yawan to Faizabad, and ensure all staff were evacuated successfully.

In late September and early October, UNHAS supported the relocation of over 200 humanitarian aid workers due to insecurity from Kunduz and Maimana to safe locations.

Overall, UNHAS contributed to the efficiency, effectiveness and security of staff in the implementation and monitoring of humanitarian programmes. In addition, UNHAS helped strengthen air safety through a standardized, single contracting process and its safety surveillance system.

Sustainability, Capacity Development and Handover

In 2015, UNHAS was one of the few carriers operating in Afghanistan compliant with ICAO standards. Should ICAO-compliant local commercial carriers start serving regional capitals on a regular basis, UNHAS would focus exclusively on remote locations not covered by commercial airlines. Furthermore, WFP plans to build on assessment reviews and regular feedback from the UNHAS Board of Directors to devise an exit strategy.

UNHAS facilitated the Aviation Security (AVSEC) capacity building by inviting an international AVSEC expert to the mission to undertake an assessment of all destinations served by UNHAS, and ascertain the gaps in the process. Further to his recommendations, the mitigation measures were duly implemented, thereby reinforcing the security measures.

In order to strengthen the weather reporting infrastructure and tools, thus minimising the cancellation of flights due to incorrect weather reporting, UNHAS, in coordination with the Afghanistan Civil Aviation Authorities installed two Automated Weather Observation Systems (AWOS III), at Faizabad and Kunduz respectively.

In 2016, WFP will initiate a new special operation for a period of one year, wherein UNHAS will undertake a further fleet reconfiguration, with the addition of a third fixed-wing aircraft, to respond effectively to the increasing user demands. The operation will remain flexible in order to meet the changing requirements of the humanitarian response. The fleet composition will continue to provide a much needed capacity for prompt evacuation of aid workers for medical or security reasons.

MANAGEMENT

Partnerships

Donor contributions as well as partial cost-recovery through nominal booking fees allowed UNHAS to remain operational in 2015. The Government of Afghanistan also assisted the operation by providing parking space and air navigation support. UNHAS worked closely with the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation and airport authorities, and collaborated in operational meetings and projects in order to alleviate congestion at Kabul Airport. UNHAS supported the Government with the installation of two AWOS in Faizabad and Kunduz, for the use of the general aviation. UNHAS further supported the Civil Aviation Authority with some cargo movement and technicians when a major work was needed.

UNHAS collaborated on a daily basis with UNDSS to assess the security situation and get clearance of flights, to support the activities of the NGO forums as per the UNHAS mandate. A Board of Directors, which is a more restrictive body of the User Group Committee, is in place to provide feedback on the quality of service as well as endorse proposed strategies and support fundraising for the operation. This Board is comprised of United Nations agencies, donor representatives and NGOs, and is chaired by the Humanitarian Coordinator's Office through UNOCHA. The Board meets on a regular basis.

Inter-agency collaboration ensured the effective utilization of all air assets. UNHAS worked closely with the UNHAS User Group, the Humanitarian Air Services Scheduling Team, the UN Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), among other partners, to ensure that the air service remained focused and demand-driven in serving destinations to which no other means of transport were possible. Furthermore, UNHAS worked with the Resolute Support Force (RS), UNAMA, ICRC and PACTEC towards the common goal of promoting air safety. Safety meetings were held on a monthly basis; safety reports and other relevant information were shared on a regular basis.

Additionally, the Board of Directors and UNOCHA played a fundamental role in soliciting funds, while at the same time serving as a coordinating forum with other agencies in order to ensure smooth and effective operations and expedite procedures. During 2015, UNHAS organized five Board of Directors' meetings.

UNHAS worked closely with the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation and airport authorities, and collaborated in operational meetings and projects in order to alleviate congestion at Kabul Airport, which was under rehabilitation. UNHAS also performed a full scale live A-ERP (Aviation-Emergency Response Plan) exercise in coordination with RS and the various stakeholders at Kabul International Airport, like the Fire Fighting unit, Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) unit, K9 (Canine) units, military forces securing the area, etc.

Lessons Learned

UNHAS provided services to the humanitarian community despite a complex operational environment. Operational challenges included an unfriendly aviation environment, extreme weather conditions, high aircraft lease prices, and high war-risk insurance costs while adhering to international and United Nations standards for quality and safety.

The Special Operation remained flexible and regularly reviewed and tailored its fleet configuration to meet the humanitarian requirements. While the import of air assets to Afghanistan is a straightforward process, security issues, limited airport infrastructure and minimal parking space availability demanded a well-planned and clear fleet composition to avoid bottlenecks, which could have impeded optimal aircraft utilization.

Due to the unpredictable security situation, UNHAS required mandatory Security Risk Assessments for all Afghanistan destinations on a periodic basis. These were essential to maintain the safety and security of passengers, crew and assets at acceptable levels. Given the deteriorating security situation, an AVSEC assessment of all the UNHAS destination was deemed necessary; a follow-up AVSEC mission is being planned for 2016.

Moreover, with the increased user demand since April 2015, it is recommended to reinforce the current capacity to respond effectively to both scheduled and ad-hoc demands (in the event of unforeseen eventualities). Hence, augmenting the current fleet with another fixed-wing aircraft is factored for the next year.

The complete withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force will likely have a negative impact on the humanitarian situation. At least initially, it is feared that this process will further complicate the humanitarian response in terms of access by aid workers and for populations to access services. This may be exacerbated by the low capacity of the Afghan Government and militaries to take on additional security obligations. In line with the above, UNHAS continues to build capacity and implement adequate risk mitigation measures by focusing on safety and security, and providing aviation security trainings. It is envisaged that with the precarious and volatile situation, UNHAS will need to further strengthen its inherent flexibility to cater to the changing demands of the user community.

The continued success of the UNHAS air operation is conditional on adequate resources being available to WFP throughout the implementation period underlining the need for donors to commit resources early to allow forward planning.