

Food security situation in Afghanistan improving but the crisis far from over

15 March 2024 | News

The food security situation remains alarming with over 15 million people or 36 per cent of the population being food insecure



The food security situation remains alarming with over 15 million people or 36 per cent of the population being food insecure

Afghanistan is the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) single largest country programme, where it continues to carry out its operations despite the ongoing political instability. The Organization has over 400 employees on the ground and is present in every one of the 34 provinces in the country.

The food security situation remains alarming with over 15 million people or 36 per cent of the population being food insecure. However, the work that FAO has been doing there with other partnersâ?? having reached over 10 million farmers last year and intending to reach more this coming year with wheat seed, animal vaccines, and other agricultural production inputsâ?? is contributing to the gradual reduction in the food insecurity numbers. These interventions play a vital role since 80 per cent of the countryâ??s population derives their income from agriculture.

Alexander Jones, FAOâ??s director of resource mobilisation and FAO Afghanistan representative spoke on his return from a field visit to Afghanistan, where he met with rural farming communities and pastoralists. In this interview, he sheds light on the current challenges members of these communities are facing, how the climate crisis is affecting them, their priority needs and ways to stabilise the situation. He also speaks about concrete projects on the ground and what difference they are making in rural peopleâ??s lives, while sharing his thoughts and observations on how the country has changed over the years.

What is the current food security situation there in Kapisa, Kandahar and Helmand and what are the biggest challenges faced by Afghani farmers and pastoralists at the moment?

Alexander Jones: The food situation has improved compared to a year or two years ago, but it is still quite dire. There is a loss of income, there are problems with migration, a recent influx of returnees from Pakistan, and, of course, drought and climate change are affecting them very seriously. But things have improved substantially, also thanks to the huge job that the United

Nations in general, and FAO specifically, has been doing over the last two years to support farmers. In short, improving, but a huge amount of work is still to be done.

Drought, water scarcity and rapidly descending ground water levels hit farmers and pastoralists the most, and rural people consequently suffer from these issues. How do climate change impacts affect the humanitarian situation in the country?

Climate change is particularly severe in terms of impacts in Afghanistan because it is a very arid country.

In addition, we have also had four consecutive years of drought. The expectation was that this year was going to be a really good one from a climatic perspective, because normally in El Niño years Afghanistan benefits. Instead, we have seen an inversion of the El Niño, followed by a horrendous drought situation. And this is affecting the whole country. There is not a lot we can do about this in the short term. But, for example, FAO over the last two years has supported communities through cash-for-work programmes in building more than 6,000 check dams to support better water infiltration and a recharge of the groundwater.