

After Herat Earthquakes: Urgent Aid Required
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Omid Haqjoo/AP Photo

Since October 8, 2023, the western province of Herat has been struck by a series of [five powerful 6.3-magnitude earthquakes](#). In addition, during the last two weeks, numerous aftershocks have forced Herat's residents to sleep in the open during the cold autumn nights. These earthquakes have indirectly affected 114,000 people, and, to date, nearly 43,400 people across six districts are reported to be directly impacted, with Injil and Zinjadin districts bearing the brunt. So far, these earthquakes have left more than 4,000 dead and around 10,000 injured.

The initial earthquake, which struck on October 7th, was so powerful that flattened all the houses in 11 villages. A heart-wrenching video that went viral on social media captured the devastation in one of these villages, where a man tearfully recounted how 14 members of his family were buried beneath the rubble, losing their lives. According to statistics provided by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid (OCHA), a total of 289 villages have been

affected by these earthquakes. Among them, 11 villages were completely destroyed, 110 villages suffered severe damage, and 168 villages experienced partial damage.

In response, the de facto Taliban government has allocated a relief package of 100 million Afghanis, which is equivalent to [\\$1.3 million](#), to assist the affected individuals. Meanwhile, the United States has provided the most substantial aid package to those affected, offering \$12 million. A significant portion of relief efforts have been directed to international organizations to reach those who are in need. However, the scale of the disaster in Herat is immense, and the assistance so far provided through various organizations, as well as the Taliban falls short of what is urgently required.

OCHA has put forth a [support plan, estimating the need for \\$93.6 million](#) to aid the 114,000 earthquake-affected people in Herat. They emphasize that the urgency of the situation is compounded by the harsh winter months fast approaching, in addition to the pre-existing poverty, making the aid package imperative.

Data reveals that the majority of victims are women and children. This underscores the dire situation that the women of Herat were already enduring, due to the harsh restrictions imposed by the Taliban even before the earthquake struck. As such, in addition to essential supplies like food, clothing, and sanitation items, the people of Herat, particularly women, require additional psychological support. Following the initial earthquake, a striking image circulated on social media, depicting predominantly men in the streets while women remained at home, enduring the devastating aftermath of the shock.

Afghanistan is currently struggling with a severe economic and political crisis. The Taliban's forcible return to power has isolated the country once again, resembling the years between 1996 and 2001. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan is reporting [that 29.2 million people are in urgent need of humanitarian aid](#), and there is a significant shortfall in available funding to meet their needs.

While grappling with poverty, unemployment, and a severe drought, Herat has now faced a series of devastating earthquakes. According to a survey¹ which was conducted in the first half of 2022, a severe drought affected 60% of households, likely contributing to agricultural productivity losses. An abrupt economic shock, driven by a lack of opportunities, impacted 63% of households. As a consequence of this economic shock, a staggering 77% of households incurred additional debt, while 87% faced limited access to food, raising serious concerns about food security. These economic challenges also led to 27% of households losing or experiencing reduced access to healthcare.

The seirs of earthquakes in Herat, unprecedented in its history, have resulted in a catastrophe of monumental proportions. Addressing this crisis and tending to the victims requires a comprehensive strategy by the donor community, and it must be executed according to the plan presented by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid.

¹ All statistics are based on the Whole of Afghanistan Assessment (2022) national survey. All errors are my own.