Rustaq earthquake
The initial response phase is now almost over and agencies are now making plans for emergency rehabilitation. The airdrop operation will be completed this week, but food and other essential supply will continue to be delivered to the region by road.

Southern floods
Shelter material and clothing are being distributed in the affected region, along with food supplies. Following a preliminary assessment of the situation by staff on the ground, additional personnel will be sent to assist with planning a longer-term response.

In two districts of Kandahar Province (Arghandab and Panjwai, aid organizations have asked the District Development Committees set up by UNOPS under the UNDP P.E.A.C.E. Initiative to assess relief and development needs. The committees will handle distribution and monitoring of assistance, with guidance from UNOPS and assistance from WFP.

Bamiyan food
Small quantities of food are now making their way down to Bamiyan from Pul-I-Khumri, but shortages are being reported from the remoter parts of the Hazarajat region. WFP teams are currently investigating these reports, but the process is being impeded by thick snow.

From the frontline
Fighting continues north and northeast of Kabul, and it has been reported that activity in the Mir Bacha Kot area has increased.

Mazar-I-Sharif is still jointly controlled by six groups. Daily reports of armed lootings are being received. On 21 and 25 February, armed clashes took place west of Mazar. Fighting continues in Kunduz.

Fighting is also still taking place in Kunar and Laghman

Law and order
Public punishment of criminals is becoming increasingly common in Kabul, where large crowds are gathering to witness amputations and other punishments.

Criminal activity is still increasing in Herat. On 23 February, three markets in the south of the city were reportedly looted. On 25 February, armed robbers held up staff and guests at the UNICA guesthouse, stealing cash and personal property.

Paigham magazine
The first issue of the new, monthly, magazine-format Paigham comes out this week. Copies of the Dari/Pashtu magazine are being sent to a number of UN offices and NGOs, and the editors are grateful to all those who have volunteered to help with distribution. The new-look Paigham is designed to be a family magazine – not just another publication for the aid community
– and the editors hope that staff members will distribute copies to as many Afghans outside that community as they can.

**Assistance strategy**

A series of meetings and workshops, hosted by Regional Coordination Officers were held during February with UN, NGO and ICRC staff inside Afghanistan (Herat, Jalalabad, Kabul, Kandahar) as well in Peshawar on current plans for preparation of the 1999 Appeal and the move towards common programming. Meetings will be held on the same with UN agencies in Islamabad and Peshawar during March.

These meetings are also intended to clarify the relationship between the Strategic Framework (currently being revised in New York) and the Assistance Strategy (a field-driven initiative). In particular, they are intended to provide an opportunity to share views on how all stakeholders can work together to make common programming a reality.

**Humanitarian update**

**Central Region**

Halo Trust is to clear battle areas in much of Wardak and Kabul's District 6. Mine action operations continue, although snow is disrupting some activities.

In addition to its winter relief provisions, UNHCR has supplied quilts and clothing to the Ministry of Repatriation, for distribution to IDPs who have recently fled from Ghorband.

The second phase of the Health Sector Planning Workshop was inaugurated on 22 February. The workshop is being attended by around 45 NGOs working in Taliban-controlled areas of Afghanistan, 35 senior MoPH staff, and representatives from WHO and UNICEF.

Eight female staff from the MoPH are conducting house-to-house visits to disseminate messages about hygiene, with a particular focus on the importance of sanitary latrines. UNICEF has supported renovation of 60 latrines in District 15. The work has been carried out by German Agro Action.

UNICEF has also helped to reunite 41 orphans who were living in institutions with their families.

WFP released a total of 1,228 tonnes of food through vulnerable group feeding projects (i.e. bakeries), institutional feeding activities (orphans), and food-for-work schemes.

**Southern Region**

UNOPS ran a two-day workshop with the District Development Committee of Khake-Safed, Farah Province, on “Community organization, structural functions and needs identification”. The workshop is part of a UNOPS campaign to engage committees in capacity building with a view to enhancing management capabilities and ensuring sustainability.

In Bala Buluk, also in Farah, UNOPS has started constructing 16 tube wells, following a decision by the Cluster Village Development Committee that lack of drinking water was a priority concern. Some 3,500 people will benefit from the wells.

FAO Crops has acquired 75,000 grape, pomegranate, and fig cuttings for distribution in five P.E.A.C.E. Initiative districts in Farah. The organization has also provided weed control assistance to wheat farmers in all five P.E.A.C.E. Initiative districts in Kandahar. Three district trainers have been found for the Integrated Production and Protection programme in Kandahar and Zabul. Five community liaison officers have been trained in field inspection. One
of these officers will work in each of the five P.E.A.C.E. Initiative districts in Farah.

**Western Region**
Preparations are under way for the upcoming National Immunization Days in districts bordering Iran. Immunization will be carried out on 5 and 6 March.

UNHCR staff from Afghanistan and Iran have met in Herat to discuss ways to encourage refugees to return from Iran.

UNCHS (Habitat) is working on graveling the Jada-e-Abreshim road in District 7 of Herat.

UNICEF distributed a variety of supplies, including food for nutrition patients, hygiene materials, generator fuel for the EPI cold room, and tailoring materials for women’s home-based income-generation projects.

Meetings on common programming resulted in a joint decision to strengthen local coordination mechanisms.