

Geneva Conference on Afghanistan 2018
Provincial Civil Society Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

Consultations with civil society in the provinces

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Introduction

In 2018 BAAG and the Civil Society Working Committee (CSWC) received funding from four international donors (DFID, SDC, SIDA and GIZ) to raise civil society's voices ahead of, during, and beyond the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan (GCA). As part of the preparations for the GCA, Provincial Facilitating Organisations (PFO's) led consultations in the form of focus group discussions (FGD) with members of civil society in Afghanistan's 34 provinces. The aim of the FGD's was to obtain provincial civil society's views on development issues and inform civil society's key advocacy messages delivered at the GCA. As a result between the 15th and 29th October 2018 seven PFOs planned and delivered FGDs in all 34 provinces, covering the views and voices of 917 (577 male, 340 female) civil society activists.

The data collected from each FGD was analysed and compiled by BAAG and the CSWC to inform discussions at the National Civil Society Conference in Kabul and civil society's key advocacy messages delivered at the GCA in November 2018.

As part of the planning, design, and preparation for this activity the CSWC reviewed how they had conducted their provincial consultations ahead of the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan (BCA) in 2016 and implemented improvements which that they felt were vital. As a result, the CSWC and stakeholders delivered consultations with a greater reach (34 provinces rather than 8 regions), consulted each other on the invitation lists for the provincial focus group discussions to ensure wider representation of participants, and discussed ways to ensure the process was seen to be credible and representative in drawing out evidence and examples of civil society's work and recommendations.

Methodology

In September 2018 BAAG and the CSWC began preparations for the provincial consultations. It was agreed, following reflections on the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan (BCA) in 2016, that the voices of provincial civil society actors were crucial to understanding the context of development in the country. It was therefore of paramount importance that provincial civil society was included in the processes leading up to the GCA. In order to address civil society's needs on a national level a three phase project methodology was employed by BAAG and the CSWC.

Phase 1, pre-delivery, consisting of the selection of PFOs, completion of due diligence on the PFOs, and invitations to provincial civil society groups and activists. BAAG and the CSWC selected PFOs based on their experience contributing to or leading civil society coordination bodies and networks in Afghanistan. All of the seven PFOs selected represented a wide array of provincial civil society organisations (CSOs) and met BAAG's due diligence criteria. Invitations to provincial participants were managed by the PFOs however the CSWC and BAAG agreed the following participant criteria: 1) Participants should be a Manager/Director of programmes/advocacy, or a Head/Director of an organisation or group, or, for smaller organisations, any appropriate representative. 2) One participant per CSO, 3) CSO's/ NGOs should be registered with a government ministry, those which were not should be nominated by the PFO or an attending CSO/NGO, 4) Efforts should be made to be inclusive and invite women, young people and people with disabilities. Civil servants, private sector personnel, members of provincial councils and leaders of political parties were not eligible to attend the FGDs.

Phase 2, delivery, consisted of PFO facilitators conducting FGDs in 34 provinces using the FGD guidelines and instructions (see annex). Each PFO was responsible for organising a safe, secure and

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appropriate venue to encourage high attendance and safeguard participants. In total 917 civil society actors participated, representing a diverse range of organisations (grass-roots groups, youth and women's leadership groups, CSOs and civil society networks) offering a range of thematic expertise. The one-day FGD followed a detailed agenda comprised of two opinion polls, three discussion points and one election to confirm two provincial civil society delegates for the national conference in Kabul (a copy of the agenda can be found in the Annex). Only one PFO facilitator, in Uruzgan, decided to hold two FGDs – one for male and one for female participants. Separating men and women may be seen as problematic however it enabled men and women to speak openly without fear of criticism or retribution for their views. In addition it resulted in a higher turnout of both men and women adding greater insight into the needs of civil society in their province.

The first poll asked participants to raise their hands if they'd found it easier/ harder to operate since the BCA in 2016. The second poll asked participants to raise their hands to denote which of the following they felt had the most impact on their work: 'lack of funding', 'security', 'staff leaving (to another job/ country)', 'low awareness about the value of civil society', or 'other'. The majority of the day was then spent on open discussion prompted by three questions: (1) What is the development and humanitarian situation in your province? (2) What three changes are necessary in development programmes to improve life in your province? And (3) Would participants like to share experiences demonstrating their impact and success in the face of adversity?

The final section of the FGD involved all participants nominating two delegates (one male and one female) to attend the National Civil Society Conference in Kabul on the 11th and 12th November, 2018. To ensure free and fair elections the facilitator followed guidelines set out by BAAG and the CSWC. All participants could either nominate themselves or someone else and the facilitator wrote their names on a flip chart. A secret ballot was organised. Votes would then be counted by the facilitator and results were presented to the group. In some FGDs candidates were given three minutes to speak to the group and 'pitch' their qualities. In others two or three rounds of voting would be done with each round eliminating the tier of candidates with the lowest votes. This resulted in the top two candidates being selected. As a result, 68 provincial delegates were confirmed to attend the national conference and present the views and voices of their colleagues and communities.

Phase 3, analysis and results, involved PFOs translating FGD findings into English and submitting one FGD report per province to BAAG. BAAG then analysed and collated quantitative and qualitative data from the submitted FGD and reported the key points to the CSWC ahead of the National Civil Society Conference in Kabul. Each provincial FGD report was collated into eight regional reports and one national summary which was used to inform the GCA preparations. Findings were used to add detail and primary source data to the civil society position paper, the GCA statement and numerous press releases during the GCA.

Limitations

Limitations of the above polls and questions were noted during the analysis and reporting phase. Some provincial statistics showed irregular patterns which led analysts to the conclusion that participants misunderstood the question or facilitators had found some topics challenging to explain. For instance, in one region renowned for its insecurity one of the provincial FGDs said insecurity had no impact on its work despite noting it as an issue later in the discussion session. Readers may also find irregularities in the detail of regional reports and anecdotal evidence from the FGDs for similar reasons. Future provincial FGD campaigns could consider PFO training sessions on facilitation and data collection methods.

Overview of findings

Collectively, the 34 provincial consultations portray Afghanistan as a nation in pursuit of prosperity whilst facing the greatest adversity. Across the country insecurity was reported as having impacted civil society's work the most, with lack of funding often coming in a close second place, and, in some provinces, tying for first place. Frequent examples are given of civil society voluntarily safeguarding communities against indiscriminate conflict and advocating on behalf of human rights. At least 1-2 provinces in each region cited low awareness of the value of civil society as greatly impacting their work, with Baghlan and Takhar placing this on par with insecurity.

Corruption and insecurity at the local, provincial and national levels are seen as the primary overarching issues hindering Afghanistan's prosperity by reducing the effectiveness of development and humanitarian programmes. Education (including higher education) and health services are poor and where they do exist quality is low and many cannot access them. Access is limited for a variety of reasons – gender restrictions and inequality, underqualified staff, and poor infrastructure. In the majority of provinces there were strong calls for modernising infrastructure to enable communities to connect and to have better access to socio-economic opportunities. The current poor state of roads, water and irrigation systems and dams have exacerbated food insecurity and impacted essential sectors such as agriculture. Farming was discussed in over 50% of the FGDs as a primary means of livelihood but lacking, across Afghanistan, in adequate resources (machinery, modified seed), mechanisms (subsidies), and the infrastructure (water irrigation systems) to develop further.

In several regions there are high levels of internally displaced people (IDPs) who have little or no assistance or employment opportunities so poverty increases. As a result of these widespread problems many CSOs experience difficulties in coordinating and maintaining activities to support their communities. Participants in the Western region added that as a result they were not able to adequately implement the SDGs.

The participants thought the lives of citizens could be improved in three ways; – through investment, reform, and advocacy. Investment in infrastructure, agriculture and employment programmes would boost local livelihoods and the economy. Firstly they cited the construction of roads, dams, water irrigation systems, and increasing human connectivity through a functional electricity grid and internet as primary infrastructure needs. Secondly, investment in agriculture, in providing equipment, training and government subsidies, would enable the sector to alleviate drought conditions and compete regionally. And thirdly investing in national non-formal education programmes for adults with further access to professional qualifications and skill-sets would empower people to create employment opportunities at a local level.

Reforming the education sector through a revised curriculum, provision of teacher training leading to qualifications, and greater access to higher education would enable citizens to enrich future generations. Healthcare reform could improve current services by ensuring professional qualifications for all doctors and the provision of functioning equipment. Reform could be spurred on by civil society advocating to government and international donors however this would require greater coordination among civil society activists.

Forceful advocacy for local, provincial and national government to revise mechanisms to combat corruption came from all provinces. Participants also called for greater communication between

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communities, CSOs, and local government to engender trust and foster peace. Participants saw advocacy as a means to empower communities to have a say in programmes, to access information and to enable free speech so they may hold their government and civil society actors to account.

Despite the challenges, participants felt they had succeeded in some areas. In particular a notable number of participants worked towards ensuring access to education for girls and young women in their communities, through mediating conflicts with their families, community elders, and, in one case, the Taliban. Civil society has performed critical roles in resolving conflict between IDPs and host communities, in responding to humanitarian emergencies, and in familiarising communities with the role of the government and their local officials in order to build trust. Activists across Afghanistan led efforts to provide opportunities for vulnerable groups in their communities. Ranging from innovative sports and recreational activities for people with drug dependencies to encouraging youth-led libraries and theatres, CSOs continued to offer invaluable services to their communities.

Regional Findings

1. South

(Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Zabul)

Summary

105 people (74 male, 31 female) participated in four provincial FGDs in the Southern region. Collectively participants in this region found insecurity (90%) and a lack of funding (87%) to be the primary issues impacting CSO activities. Low awareness of civil society's value (74%) raised questions as to how CSOs may improve their reputation amongst the community whilst staff retention (30%) may indicate that CSOs capacity is durable.

Additional issues cited as impacting the work of CSOs in this region included 'lack of support for CSOs (Helmand), 'threats to traditions' (Uruzgan), and 'reduced capacity' (Zabul).

Development and humanitarian situation in the region

Insecurity and 'endemic' corruption were outlined as the key issues effecting the region's infrastructure and public service provisions. All provinces highlighted a lack of education, employment and health services as a product of insecurity and wished to apply methods to hold both local and central government accountable. Helmand and Zabul highlighted ineffective health systems as a humanitarian risk as the limited number of medical centre's that do exist are ill equipped (with limited availability of medicine), under-staffed (unable to cover a district) and ineffective (either no female doctors or ill qualified doctors the norm).

Poor education systems and absent government monitoring and regulation is prevalent throughout the South. There is general consensus that this is due to corruption within the tiers of government. As a result, people are concerned that future generations will not understand their rights and be unable to vote. All provinces described sub-standard education due to inadequate curriculums, limited availability of teachers and poor project planning. Many schools are being erected primarily in civic centres and with a disregard for villages and rural communities. Traditions have played a key role in fostering negative perceptions of education. Some participants expressed a need to overcome superstition and tradition with non-formal education and sensitisation campaigns for adults. A high level of poverty and no government mechanisms to improve unemployment levels were seen to exacerbate these education issues. Agriculture is a primary means of livelihood in the South and the majority of provinces were content with the situation. Only Helmand noted weaknesses in agriculture and called on the government to prioritise projects which would increase employment and education in the sector.

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Key regional priorities

- Reform national security, support local and national peacebuilding efforts.
- Reform the education system – Hold national and local government accountable in establishing access to education at the district level. Offer non-formal education (literacy, numeracy) and cultural awareness to adults. Take a grass roots approach in establishing local education programmes.
- Ensure reform in governance structures to combat corruption. New mechanisms for administration, auditing and policy application are needed.
- Enable community cohesion programmes to promote gender equality and explore cultural and religious barriers to women's rights.
- Empower community ownership of localised development programmes.

Examples of successes in the face of adversity (3)

The Helmand FGD reported an increase in the number of young people participating in community development programmes and in CSOs having a greater confidence in approaching decision makers in local and national government in order to lobby for their campaigns.

In Uruzgan the introduction of the Citizens' Charter and youth programmes has increased community approval of the NUG. New literacy courses (non-formal education) and the increased participation of women in political, cultural and social spheres are promising for the creation of a social contract and trust in the government.

And in Zabul the FGD stated greater coordination between CSOs and local NGOs had enabled them to deliver stronger programmes, build capacity and achieve a positive impact in their communities. As a result CSOs were feeling more confident in communicating with donors and in holding the authorities responsible for their actions.

2. South East

(Khost, Paktiya, Paktika)

Summary

94 people (59 male, 35 female) participated in three provincial FGDs in the South East region. Collectively participants in this region found insecurity (88%) a lack of funding (71%) and staff leaving (61%) to be the primary issues impacting CSO activities. Low awareness of civil society's value (37%) raised questions about how CSOs might sustain a good reputation in the community.

All female participants in the Khost FGD lambasted the local government for 'political hiring'. They claimed positions which should be occupied by women were occupied by men due to political influence on the hiring processes. The same group described further corruption in local project tenders where CSOs are not included in social audits. In Paktia, participants felt better follow up activities could be done and called for a thorough follow up mechanism and a provincial report in 2019, including another provincial consultation.

Development and humanitarian situation in the region

Insecurity and corruption were rated as major problems by the FGDs in the South East as all provinces there held the government accountable for ineffective action against belligerent actors. Only Paktika noted an improvement in some areas due to increased government security presence however it was claimed that the majority of the province was under 'anti-government elements'.

Unemployment and poor education systems are prevalent as a result of government inaction leading to high levels of poverty throughout the region. All provinces in the South East noted an absence of government monitoring and regulation in education. There was a general consensus that this is due to corruption within the tiers of government and linked to the unemployment situation and gender inequality. However, in Paktia women's employment in midwifery has gone up 20% in rural hospitals and girls' education has increased by 5%. In Khost, 'private sector' or 'entrepreneurial' programmes were perceived to be more effective than public sector schemes with women being trained in livelihood skills such as tailoring. Agriculture as a primary livelihood is a challenge as access to dried fruit stock and modified seeds is reduced while deforestation increases. Participants believed poor access to processing machinery (e.g. grinding mills) has led to a high proportion of produce (apples, oats etc) being exported for low prices.

Furthermore, humanitarian and development initiatives are ineffective as corruption is endemic in government departments - both local and national. It exists in the form of jobs being awarded based on political affiliations and in the mismanagement of development funds. Provincial authorities are highlighted as culprits in the misappropriation of funds. As a result, participants reported government negligence towards vulnerable communities and IDPs. Khost in particular is worried for the condition of IDPs ahead of winter as there is no government (local or national) plan to act and INGOs prioritise 'international refugees from Pakistan'. Khost and Paktia highlighted ineffective health systems as exacerbating the humanitarian risk, especially in Paktia where IDP numbers are high. There is a lack of medical centres and, where they do exist, they are ill equipped (with limited availability of medicine),

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under-staffed (unable to cover a district) and ineffective (either no female doctors or ill qualified doctors the norm). Limited access to water and electricity was noted.

Looking to the positives, Khost was noted the least vulnerable province in the South East and, whilst agreeing with the other provinces on difficulties in education, health and livelihoods, it had seen improvements in provincial infrastructure (roads, public buildings) and health (increase in doctors). Participants in Paktika believed their health services had improved by almost 70% and agriculture by 50% in the past five years, however their rural health services remained poor.

Key regional priorities

- **Infrastructure:** Establish a national electricity grid or community generators for vulnerable households. Only wealthy households have electricity through generators and vulnerable households live in the dark. Implement district road planning around social services (i.e. Health clinics, Schools, Markets). Renovate dams and reservoirs (in Khost Dawmanda, Mazghora and Toori Obaa). Establish a national scheme for new 'residential cities'.
- **Agriculture:** Reform skills-specific training programmes so they address a lack of technical training, low quality seeds and fertilisers. Apply government subsidies to support employment and agricultural schemes.
- **Unemployment:** Introduce competency-based recruitment in public and NGO sectors.
- **Health:** Reform the health industry – ensure health systems meet national standards and health workers are fully trained and accredited.
- **Access to justice:** Establish access to information campaigns for civil rights, law and a social contract. Promote the right to free speech.
- **Education:** Introduce scholarships and bursaries for young people and promote training programmes and non-formal education on numeracy and literacy for employment.

Examples of successes in the face of adversity

The most common examples of success in the face of adversity were in education. In all three FGDs participants gave examples of supporting girls and young women who were denied access to education and livelihoods because of prejudice against women and conservative views. Civil Society and religious leaders played a pivotal role in influencing decision makers and establishing a compromise in order to safeguard women's rights to education and livelihoods.

In Paktia, insecurity adds to the difficulties presented by conservative views. As one participant explained *"In our district (Zurmat) an international NGO build a school where our sons and daughters were studying. After some years the Taliban militants became aware and disagreed with attending girls to school and said that it is against our culture that the young girls go to school. To be allowed to go to school, the girls wore boys dress. After few months, in coordination and agreement of our community, we made separate classes for the girls at our home in order to protect them from threats of Taliban"*.

The Khost FGD gave a number accounts covering education, gender rights and land distribution. One participant discussed the role of CSOs in influencing negative perceptions on women's education stating *"A tribal elder from Gurbaz district of Khost gave land to the community people to build a school by his own money. After building this school for the people of the Gurbaz district, he was not allowing his own daughter to go to the school. His daughter was highly interested in studying, so she asked for*

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the help from the Mili Arman CSO. [Their Director] met the father and after conducting several meetings to convince him for allowing his daughter to school, she was successful. The tribal elder permitted his daughter to study and attend the school.”

In Paktika civil society is playing a pivotal role in alleviating the suffering of internally displaced persons and refugees through leading local corporate fundraising initiatives, coordinating blood banks and managing accommodation. Refugees from North Waziristan are supported by a consortium of CSOs from Barmal, Gomal, Urgan and Geyan who act as mediators with local communities supplying accommodation.

3. The North

(Faryab, Jowzjan, Samangan, Sar-E-Pol, Balkh)

Summary

150 people (99 male, 51 female) participated in five provincial FGDs in the Northern region. Not all FGDs supplied qualitative data however, from the partial data provided, insecurity ranked the highest of participants' concerns. A lack of funding, low awareness of civil society's value and staff retention all ranked on a par with each other, raising questions as to how CSOs may sustain their operations and build support from the community and government.

Other issues impacting the work of CSOs in the North included a lack of activity and funding in cultural and environmental initiatives, and poor capacity and coordination between provincial CSOs.

Development and humanitarian situation in the region

The majority of provinces in the North found insecurity and corruption an overarching cause of poor social services (health and education). Reasons for this varied from inactive or ineffective Peace Committees, increasing levels of poverty caused by a rise in unemployment and climate change (drought), and poor governance.

The FGDs agreed that poor health and education systems exacerbated the above issues. A core concern, particularly in remote districts and rural areas was a lack of infrastructure such as schools and clinics. Contributing to this was a lack of resources; of curriculum text books, medical equipment and, most importantly, the human resources required to deliver services (medical staff and teachers). In Mazar for instance there is only one Eye Hospital and it is hindered by insufficient resources.

On the wider development front, the implementation of livelihood programmes accountable to the SDGs is slow. In Samangan, growth plans are non-existent, and in Faryab 90% of agricultural progress has been reversed by the drought and poor water management systems. A lack of coordination between government, CSOs and INGOs means issues are not addressed and the capacity of local communities to establish relief efforts is extremely low.

Key regional priorities

- NUG and local government should focus on attracting domestic and foreign investors to provincial projects. (Less reliance on International grants, more focus on investment).
- NUG and donors should focus on reforming the education system.
- Target investment into infrastructure development including the construction of dams and water irrigation systems and delivery of engineering/ maintenance training for local staff.
- Streamlining coordination and collaboration between CSOs and local government.
- Strong focus on agricultural reform for provincial livelihoods. This includes training local communities in water management and maintenance, and supplying tools and plant equipment (i.e. tractors, mechanical ploughs) to support crop growth.

Examples of successes in the face of adversity

Jowzjan highlighted the key achievements of civil society as being improved coordination and socio-economic empowerment within communities. In 2018 the Network of Civil Society Institution's was formed to ensure CSOs operated in a coordinated and sustainable manner. In response to high youth unemployment a Youth Empowerment Centre was formed to train school graduates in practical work skills and support them in obtaining employment. A similar scheme was formed to diminish child labour through promoting non-formal education for adults and empowering women through income generating activities. This enabled new income streams into families and ensured their children could access education.

In Balkh the number of schools has increased and despite gender-based stigma, the number of girls and women attending has also increased.

In Samangan the electricity grid has been extended to several villages enabling a positive relationship and partnership to form between the communities, CSOs and the implementing power supplier.

In Sar-e-Pol the role of civil society activists has thrived as they engaged with media groups to create attention around physical violence against women and establish community support for displaced people throughout the province.

4. North East

(Badakhshan, Baghlan, Kunduz, Takhar)

Summary

113 people (59 male, 54 female) participated in four provincial FGDs in the North East region. The greatest challenges for participants was a lack of funding (73%) resulting in CSOs paying staff below the national average, signing short-term contracts or suffering from high staff turnover. 65% of participants said insecurity continued to cause a wide range of issues such as decreasing domestic and foreign investment into the region, reducing INGO activities, and increasing recruitment of young people into radical armed groups. A lack of primary education facilities and sub-standard training and resources has led to ill-equipped teachers and poor curriculum distribution however secondary education, primarily in Baghlan, achieved a positive impact. 55% of the group said a low awareness about the value of civil society presented a challenge as it meant CSOs were unable to bridge the gap between the government and the people. The government is perceived to have little commitment to anti-corruption efforts and provincial peace committees are seen as ineffective in leading negotiations.

Development and humanitarian situation in the region

Agriculture was agreed as being the North East's primary industry for livelihoods and the participants believed innovation in the agricultural development was lacking. Poor water management and distribution systems, inefficient irrigation systems and provincial infrastructure affected a community's ability to create goods for market distribution.

Participants raised concerns over the state of provincial health, education and infrastructure, outlining a lack of transparency in local governance and unsatisfactory service delivery as contributing factors. INGOs ceased activities due to insecurity, resulting in a lack of health facilities, in both district and remote areas, and a lack of supervision from the respective government departments. Furthermore, there are many IDPs in the region requiring various forms of assistance (food and non-food). The government and INGOs do provide assistance however its distribution is unequal due to ineffective mechanisms for IDP assessments and the absence of a long-term strategy.

Key regional priorities

- Stronger focus on agricultural reform for provincial livelihoods. This includes training local communities in water management and maintenance, and supplying tools and plant equipment (i.e. tractors, mechanical ploughs) to support crop growth.
- NUG and donors should investing human resources, in infrastructure and in education as it is also a means to eradicating harmful assumptions about gender and promoting national unity.
- NUG and local communities must establish ways to improve provincial security and reconciliation.
- Enable local CSOs to have a greater involvement in development programmes and processes.

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- Regulate infrastructure programming to balance social and economic programming and combat corrupt and illegal activities such as unlicensed mining. (In Kunduz there is an increasing trend for residential programmes to use agricultural land resulting in more unemployment).

Examples of successes in the face of adversity

In Takhar the FGD reported that youth employment had risen thanks to the implementation of the government-run Citizen Covenant Programme. Literacy programmes were playing an important role in raising awareness of common issues in the community and CSOs were taking positive steps in advocating for the role of women in employment, politics, culture and social life.

In Kunduz the RET Small Business Programme has provided many women with new skillsets (such as sewing) and tools to create financial stability and independence for their families.

In Baghlan participants said the Citizen Covenant Programme is increasing youth employment and local peacebuilding efforts are producing results and insurgency and insecurity had diminished.

The Badakshan FGD praised the Open Trend and Sadat Charity Organisation programmes for enabling young people and women to have the skills required to be financially independent and support their families. The creation of the 'Peace Caravan' is active in the pursuit for peace and mediating between local power holders.

5. West

(Baghis, Ghor, Nimroz, Farah, Herat)

Summary

164 people (94 male, 70 female) participated in five provincial FGDs in the Western region.

The greatest challenges for participants was a combination of reduced funding and increased insecurity, especially in Farah city where insurgents contested control of the city on multiple occasions in 2018. Low awareness about the value of civil society presented a challenge as it meant CSOs were unable to bridge the gap between the government and the people and play a supportive role in peacebuilding initiatives. In Farah a civil society activist exhibited extraordinary bravery and civic duty in supporting the community by providing safe spaces and transportation for people caught in conflict flashpoints in Farah province.

Development and humanitarian situation in the region

There was overwhelming concern throughout the FGDs about the strength of the Taliban and the inadequacy of the High Peace Council in reaching even temporary local and national peace. Feeding into these feelings were negative perceptions of regional actors supporting the insurgency both politically and militarily. As a result of insecurity and climate change (drought), the number of IDPs continues to exacerbate an unsustainable development outlook. Participants in Herat said a lack of livelihood programmes for the IDP population and their lack of access to basic humanitarian needs has resulted in abject conditions. Furthermore, social tensions have surfaced between IDPs and host communities as poverty rates increase, access to health facilities decreases and more children and vulnerable people resort to begging.

A lack of coordination between line ministries and provincial directorates resulted in poor budget management and has had a negative impact on infrastructure projects. It was acknowledged that infrastructure has seen a degree of progress since 2016 through the construction on the Salma Dam in Herat, the Bakhshabad dam in Farah and the Kamal Khan dam in Nimroz. Additionally, a new airport is under construction in Farah and as the government is building roads, local labourers got jobs, albeit temporarily. The TAPI Project also promises much economic growth and job creation opportunities for the western region. However continued corruption and political, as opposed to merit based, appointments within local government result in sub-standard project delivery. This in turn produces abysmal road conditions in Ghor and Baghis and expensive (30Agh/p/kwh) public electricity programmes in Farah (most communities rely on privately owned generators). As a result, participants cast doubt on the political will of the government to fight corruption in these projects. Communities have tried to take ownership via local monitoring and evaluation projects only to be denied access.

Corruption in governance crosses over into education when it is reported powerful political figures intervene in government decisions for their personal benefit. One example was given where scholarships to study abroad went to the people with contacts and money to bribe 'gate-keepers'. Access to education is marred by numerous challenges – international donor support for education has declined, schools are closing due to insecurity (e.g. almost 50% of girls schools are closed in Ghor), and young people, especially girls, do not have access to lessons. The majority of students find it difficult to obtain further education in universities due to poor teaching standards, high fees and a worsening financial situation nationally. In Ghor for instance, there are no private universities and in

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Farah women cannot access higher education because of insecurity and fear of harassment should they not be accompanied by a *mahram*.

The level of acceptance of women's rights varies throughout the western provinces. In Herat participants acknowledged that positive structural progresses, including the passing of the new regulation that criminalises the street harassment of women, had brought positive change. Initiatives are underway to provide women survivors of violence free counselling, and NGOs lead projects on strengthening the political and social participation of women in society. Unfortunately, these initiatives continue to suffer from lack of funding and there was very little support given to female candidates during the parliamentary elections. Also, the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women is still not fully considered by the courts in their decisions because it is a legislative decree. Violence against women has increased in Badghis and negative social norms continue to impede women's progress in society.

Key regional priorities

The NUG must eliminate corruption. In order to do so, appointments should be made based on merit and ability, the Right to Information law should be enforced, project contracts in infrastructure and minerals extraction should be monitored and publicised, and provincial institutions should be empowered to take ownership of provincial and district level development planning (no central oversight or dictates).

International donors must apply more pressure on the NUG and regional countries to respect Afghanistan's territorial integrity. Greater emphasis should be applied to social, cultural and educational programmes to counteract violence and extremist ideologies. Civil society can play a role through coordinating activities with national CSO networks and implementing awareness raising programmes on citizen rights and responsibilities. This would enable CSOs to establish closer ties with their communities, to pool funding and apply pressure on the NUG to enact laws safeguarding human rights and justice.

Livelihoods should be supported through targeted investment in infrastructure and agriculture. The on-going dam projects must be viewed as priorities and contracting regulations should be enforced – award contracts based on merit and penalise contractors who do not complete contracts. This would ensure access to employment opportunities and sustainable water systems could thrive. Farmers should receive subsidies to prevent migration and support innovative production methods using improved seeds developed to withstand low water levels.

Examples of successes in the face of adversity

In Farah, civil society actors exhibited extraordinary bravery in providing safe places and transporting people caught in the war, when the Taliban attacked on several occasions in the summer 2018.

In Ghor, participants claimed provincial authorities acknowledge the monitoring role of civil society actors. For example, the provincial Governor called on one provincial CSO to monitor local government activities and evaluate staff conduct on an ad hoc basis.

6. East

(Kunar, Nuristan, Laghman, Nangahar)

Summary

97 people (79 male, 18 female) participated in four provincial FGDs in the Eastern region.

The greatest challenges for participants was a combination of reduced funding and increased insecurity, resulting in reduced access for CSOs to support communities. In Kunar, participants outlined insecurity as a primary driver of internal displacement and poverty. Participants in all four provinces agreed cooperation and reconciliation were drivers of peace and only complete inclusivity (women's participation) could champion awareness raising activities and construct peace, (ironically given the relatively low participation of women in the FGDs in this region). Furthermore, limitations in infrastructure and education were exacerbated by insecurity and corruption. Participants called for reform in the education system through teacher training and regulation of infrastructure projects to gain access to rural areas and deliver vocational and agricultural training.

Low awareness about the value of civil society presented a challenge as it meant CSOs were unable to action their objective to support communities in self-regulating projects, address corruption and strengthen the education system. Data from the FGDs in this region was limited however several regional success stories shine a light on the potential for CSOs alleviating the hardships of communities.

CSOs across the region felt they'd been effective in supporting the most vulnerable in their communities. Programmes supporting people with addictions enabled CSOs to build trust between themselves, their beneficiary, the community and government to form a sense of unity. In Kunar this has led to a reduction in drug dependency and the government being more aware of its role as a service provider to vulnerable people and the community. The role of women in government has also been challenged and more women feel encouraged to apply for civil service posts.

In Laghman drug dependency has reduced due to an innovative programme introducing cricket tournaments and sports as a physical and mental well-being activity. Through working with the directorate of borders and tribal elders CSOs have reduced violence against women and sensitised communities to education for all. A similar achievement can be seen in both Nuristan and Nangarhar where communities have agreed mechanisms on holding their local government accountable through the establishment of a Civil Foundation. This has led to improvements in CSO – government relationships, access to face-to-face meetings, and the creation of 25 new educational courses for young people.

7. Central Highlands

(Bamiyan, Daikundi)

Summary

58 people (29 male, 29 female) participated in the two provincial FGD's in the Central Highlands region. In Bamiyan two thirds of participant's were male whereas in Daikundi two thirds were female. The primary concern impacting CSO operations in this region were funding difficulties. Interestingly 64% of Bamiyan participants believed staff retention impacted civil society activities more than insecurity and community perceptions. In contrast over half of participants in Daikundi believed insecurity and community perceptions had an impact on their ability to deliver activities and staff retention was of minimal concern.

Development and humanitarian situation in the region

Regional governance stood out as the overarching concern affecting public services, insecurity and increasing levels of poverty in the Central Highlands. It was reported that poor oversight by the central government resulted in a lack of confidence in local government services. In Daikundi, it was felt that local government had not been able to make any improvements to transparency, responsiveness, and access to justice or information. Despite poor central government oversight and limited ANA presence there was a general consensus that a state of peace existed in the region apart from areas of strategic importance such as provincial borders and main highways.

Health and education provisions are below standard as the number of qualified health professionals is low, child malnutrition and maternal mortality is high and an estimated 29,000 children cannot access education. It was recognised that the number of educational centres has increased however the quality of curriculum and resources remains poor. In Daikundi one success involved working with community groups who were opposed to girls education to influence changes in these types of attitudes. As a result, the number of girls attending education has gone up, however problems continue and the next step will be to consult the government.

Drought is a major concern across the region and is believed to have worsened over the past three years. Sparse water reserves in canals, springs and rivers have caused damage to crops and livestock increasing insecurity in livelihoods. As a result, internal displacement is common and displaced people face physical insecurity, lack basic necessities and need emergency assistance to survive. Furthermore, it was felt the central government could do much more on IDP rights and access to land. For example, in Daikundi it was claimed over 18,000 people were displaced and central government assistance consisted of access to only 700 residential plots of land and temporary service provision. In addition, drought has exacerbated the already difficult agricultural conditions. Inadequate training and subsidies have resulted in poor farming methods and limited access to veterinary services and suitable equipment.

Key regional priorities

- Education (including non-formal education for adults)
- Environmental infrastructure (irrigation systems, wells, cisterns) and climate change

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- Infrastructure (improvements to roads and bridges)
- Tourism (investments in tourism)

Examples of successes in the face of adversity

Participants reported the recent successes of civil society, which included: The creation of the Bamiyan Youth Federation. A theatre, supported by young people, which visits communities and raises awareness on a variety of issues through a play entitled “Illegal Immigration – Submarine Children”.

A Home Cultural Centre was established by Bamiyan writers and poets to enable access to storytelling and reading activities. A public library complements the centre and consists of donated books.

The Equality for Peace and Democracy (EPD) is providing a litigation programme to increase the presence of girls in schools and supports the increase of female teachers within the Bamiyan Provincial Education Department. EPD have overcome conservative critics through working with the Education Directorate and relevant authorities and adopting a collaborative response to change.

In Daikundi CSOs have built capacity and sustained income through obtaining loans, hiring volunteers and delivering training sessions for other organisations.

8. Central

(Ghazni, Kapisa, Logar, Maidan Wardak, Panjsher, Kabul, Parwan)

Summary

136 people (84 male, 52 female) participated in seven provincial FGDs in the Central region.

52% to 100% of participants in the central region, and average of 74% across the seven provinces, noted a lack of funding as a primary concern to their operational ability. Security was a major problem with 58% to 100% of respondents citing it as a major challenge, particularly Ghazni and Logar, where all respondents in those two provinces said it was an issue.

There were complaints from all seven provinces about corruption, the misuse of aid money, a lack of basic services and poverty. Three provinces, Ghazni, Kapisa and Logar, reported feeling neglected and called for greater solidarity from the NUG. Half of the respondents could think of no successes at all, and common concerns included male dominance of political positions, poor education and health services and poor social safeguards resulting in child labour, underage marriage and an overwhelming insurgent presence. In Logar, a report expanded on these issues by highlighting restrictive effects of a conservative culture. These included women being excluded from clinics if they were not escorted by a 'legal' male companion, no matter how severe the illness. Furthermore, in Ghazni communities are on the brink as the insurgency escalates and representatives of the ANA and NUG vacate the area. This has resulted in a vote of no confidence by its inhabitants and further exacerbated internal displacement in the region.

Changes thought to be necessary ranged from improving strategic planning, governance and infrastructure, committing to improving security of its citizens by the government and providing a foundation for basic services and jobs. In Maidan Wardak, Kapisa and Ghazni participants clearly outlined an urgent need to 'neutralise' the insurgency and consult with communities on local needs to safeguard security. Feelings of neglect by the NUG were prevalent as many participants felt there was no support for social facilities and infrastructure or encouragement for community cohesion. The low awareness of the value of civil society was said to be a significant challenge in all except Kabul, with a range of 20% to 88%.

One achievement in the face of adversity can be found through the activities of the Kapisa New Youth Integration Foundation. As an Ophthalmology Centre they deliver free eye tests and corrections, provide medication and supply glasses through a walk-in-centre. Other encouraging points can be found in participants' desire to attract domestic and foreign investment to 'modernise and bring enjoyment' to their communities. The picture which emerges however is of a population in need across the region.

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ANNEX

Provincial FGD Agenda

Item		
1	Welcome & Introductions	5 mins
2	Quick poll 1 – operations	Raise your hand if it your organisation has found it easier to operate since the BCA. Raise your hand if it has been harder. 5 mins
3	Quick poll 2 – operations	Raise your hand for <u>only one of the below</u> in response to the question. Which of the following has had the most impact on your organisations' work? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of funding • Security • Staff leaving (to another job/country) • Low awareness about the value of civil society • Any other reason? 5 mins
4	Overview of GCA	Overview of GCA objectives, agenda, civil society preparations and how the FGDs fit in. Opportunity for Q&A. 60 mins
5	Tea break	15 mins
6	Discussion 1	<i>What is the development and humanitarian situation in your province?</i> (May include: health, education, agriculture, anti-corruption, support to IDPs, poverty reduction, drought, SDGs, governance, etc.) 90 mins
7	Lunch break	60 mins
8	Discussion 2	<i>What three changes are necessary in development programmes to improve life in your province? Please specify why.</i> 90 mins
9	Tea break	15 mins
10	Discussion 3	<i>Successes in the face of adversity</i> Participants share success stories and experiences of their work and impact, in any area. 60 mins
11	Election of the civil society representatives for the National Civil Society Conference	Facilitator – please see guidance notes for further details. From every province, there is only budget for two participants (one man and one woman) to attend the CS National Conference. The election should be free and fair. Everyone should be allowed to nominate themselves or another person. After the nominations are known, please write the names of all the nominees on the flip chart. If the number of nominees is three male and three female, or below this number, please follow the following steps: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Allow the nominees two minutes to present themselves and say why they are a good nominee for the national conference; 60 mins

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		<p>b) After the presentations are over, the voting will start. The FGD participants including the nominees should be able to vote for one man and one woman. They should write the name of the people they wish to represent them in a piece of paper and cast it in a ballot box.</p> <p>c) At the end, count the votes and write the result in the flip chart. Please also note the names of the runners-up so they can be considered if funding allowed more participants to take part in the conference.</p> <p>If the number of nominees is more than three male and three female, please decrease the number to three male and three female through the following steps:</p> <p>d) Explain that to save time, you will need to cut down the numbers.</p> <p>e) Write the names of all participants on the flip chart and ask people to vote for one male and one female by raising their hands.</p> <p>f) The top three men and women will then be the finale nominees. If there was a tie between the nominees, please conduct another voting through raising the hands, between only those nominees. Please then follow the steps a, b and c.</p>	
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Instructions for FGD Facilitators

- The objective of these FGDs is to spark discussion among participants about their views on development issues and generate specific recommendations.
- A secondary objective is to evidence the valuable work of civil society in the provinces. This will be done by collecting success stories and experiences.
- The content of the FGD discussions will be used to feed into civil society's key messages for the GCA, including the Civil Society Position Paper.
- The outcome of the FGD will be a report, captured by the Report Writer, which details the discussions.
- The FGD reports of all provinces will be compiled into one report which consolidates the findings.
- The FGD discussion should not be about security issues! There are other forums for discussing this topic.
- The FGD discussion should be focused on answering the questions and kept on track by the Facilitator.
- The introductions should include asking everyone to state their organisations area of expertise (education, health, governance, etc.).
- Election of 2 delegates for the National Conference in Kabul.

This will be done towards the end of the day in order to allow participants enough time to discuss the key agenda items first and allow them enough time to know each other and be able to make a good decision.

From every province, **there is only budget for two participants (one man and one woman)** to attend the CS National Conference.

Please clarify to all that they are not being nominated for the Geneva conference, but would go to Kabul only.

The cost of "mahram" is also budgeted for provincial participants coming by road to Kabul (as part of National Conference budget) so if the delegates are coming by plane, they will not be allowed to have mahrams. If you have any questions about this and the budget, please consult BAAG colleagues.

The election should be free and fair. Everyone should be allowed to nominate themselves or another person. After the nominations are known, please write the names of all the nominees on the flip chart. If the number of nominees is three male and three female, or below this number, please follow the following steps:

- a) Allow the nominees two minutes to present themselves and say why they are a good nominee for the national conference;
- b) After the presentations are over, the voting will start. The FGD participants including the nominees should be able to vote for one man and one woman. They should write the name of the people they wish to represent them in a piece of paper and cast it in a ballot box.

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- c) At the end, count the votes and write the result in the flip chart. Please also note the names of the runners-up so they can be considered if funding allowed more participants to take part in the conference.

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