

Geneva Conference on Afghanistan Civil Society Position Paper

November 2018

Over the last 17 years Afghanistan has gone through remarkable changes after decades of war and violence. In that time, the Afghan people have seen developments in access to education, healthcare and other basic services that were either cut off or reduced in the previous decades of conflict. However, there is still a long way to go, especially as the conflict extends out into yet another year. Despite these challenges, the number of civil society groups and activists has continued to grow, with many of these organisations trying to fill in the gaps where the government is unable to engage with citizens and provide much-needed services. However, as the war expands out into new territories — including the nation’s urban centres — and with civilian casualties mounting, many of these groups are facing major challenges in reaching people in need. This is why it is so important that both the Afghan government and the international community hear the voices of the country’s civil society. The ability of these organisations to reach people on the ground, including many communities the government has been unable to access, allows them to be yet another voice for the millions of people trying to build their lives despite the effects of the mounting violence — poverty, inability of children to access education, lack of service delivery and difficulties traveling.

In consultation with representatives from all 34 provinces, including 68 representatives who gathered in Kabul on the week of November 11, 2018, several key areas have been identified for the Kabul government and its international partners to focus on.

There are three issues in particular that respondents from every region of the country listed as major difficulties that affect all other areas of their lives: the conflict itself, endemic corruption and the increasing poverty in the country. For all of the respondents these areas were simultaneously interconnected and also have a massive spill-over effect on all the other challenges they face. The respondents all said there must be a serious, concerted effort to finally bring this current conflict to an end. Additionally, even residents in more ‘secure’ areas of the country are feeling the impacts of an economic downturn that began in 2013, carried on through the months-long presidential election process of 2014 and continues to this day. According to the Central Statistics Office, between 2015 and 2016, the unemployment rate in the country [grew](#)¹ from 25 percent to 40 percent. Adding to the impact of the poverty is the endemic corruption Afghans face in every aspect of their lives. In 2016, Integrity Watch [estimated](#)² that Afghans paid nearly \$2.9 billion in bribes. With at least [54 percent](#)³ of Afghans living below the poverty line, each bribe comes at a tremendous cost that often keeps many people from being able to see even the most basic bureaucratic and logistical processes through to the end. Additionally, recent years have seen the [precipitous](#)⁴ decline in the value of the Afghani against foreign currencies. According to media reports, since 2011, the Afghani has fallen more than [40 percent](#)⁵ in comparison to the dollar. Though the decline

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1. “Unemployment rate spikes in Afghanistan”. Tolo news, 2016.
<https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/unemployment-rate-spikes-afghanistan>
 2. Integrity Watch Afghanistan, National Corruption Survey 2016 - Afghan perceptions and experiences of corruption.
https://iwaweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/NCS_English_for-web.pdf
 3. “Over 54% of Afghans live below the poverty line: CSO” ATN news, 2018
<https://ariananews.af/over-54-percent-of-afghans-live-under-poverty-line-cso/>
 4. “Currency markets - Afghan Afghani” Trading Economics, 2018
<https://tradingeconomics.com/afghanistan/currency>
 5. “Afghani Devaluation: Unintended or Deliberate?” Pajhwok Afghan News Reflecting the Truth, 2018
<https://www.pajhwok.com/en/opinions/afghani-devaluation-unintended-or-deliberate-0>

has been attributed to a number of factors, including the smuggling of foreign currencies from Afghanistan to neighbouring countries, the impact for the citizens of Afghanistan has been greater strains on families trying to procure staple goods.

Beyond these three issues, the delegates gathered at various meetings held across the nation's 34 provinces also cited seven important areas that must be addressed by the Afghan government and their international counterparts: peace, security and the protection of civilian victims of war, service delivery and aid effectiveness, corruption, strengthening and developing the role of civil society, social protection — particularly of the millions of disabled people and those who have been displaced by war and environmental disasters — women's inclusion and education.

1. Peace, security, and the protection of civilian victims of war

The current conflict in Afghanistan is only the latest in a decades-long cycle that has seen the Afghan people move from one war or period of political unrest to another. However, in recent years, the current war in Afghanistan has gone through remarkable transformations. Over the last four years, the people have seen the formation of a new armed opposition movement, as fighters claiming allegiance to the so-called Islamic State have taken root in the East and North of the country. According to the latest [figures](#)⁶ from the Special Investigator General for Afghan Reconstruction, the Taliban currently controls or influences more than 45 percent of the nation's 300-plus districts. At the same time, there are renewed efforts for a fast-tracked peace process which has caused concern that a quick negotiation will not allow time for sufficient inclusion of women and other marginalised groups and therefore, will not be sustainable.

The consultations with provincial civil society actors found that the 'great insecurity' in the nation involves several intertwining factors including political, economic, social, and religious aspects. Airstrikes targeting insurgents kill innocent civilians and this has made the situation much worse. An October [report](#)⁷ by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan found that the first nine months of 2018 saw a total 8,050 civilian casualties (2,798 deaths and 5,252 injuries). This figure represented a five percent increase in civilian deaths from the same period a year prior. Many citizens believe that people in their communities join insurgent groups not only due to religious ideologies but for taking revenge over past injustices.

Corruption has always has been one of the root causes hindering the success of security forces in many provinces. Citizens from the provinces highlighted this as a major issue, with army members known to illegally sell weapons to other groups.

The level of criminality in the country has risen and the government is challenged when it comes to control and oversight of the country, especially along the borders, where explosives can easily be brought into the country, drug trafficking is rampant, insurgents are able to

⁶ October 30 2018 Report - Special Investigator General for Afghan Reconstruction.
<https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2018-10-30qr.pdf>

⁷ Quarterly report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2018 - United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 2018
https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_3rd_quarter_report_2018_10_oct.pdf

cross into the country freely, and the recruitment of young university and school students by insurgent groups is prominent. Furthermore, informal power groups in Afghanistan do not obey the law, creating security incidents and increasing criminality. Even when perpetrators are arrested, they are easily freed without being prosecuted.

With so few opportunities for employment in the country, many people are joining insurgent groups not only as part of religious ideology, but because they receive financial benefits from opposition groups. Afghanistan is a country with enriched natural resources including forests, high production of famous fruits, cotton, and other minerals. These resources are purchased by neighbouring countries at very low prices and after being processed, neighbouring countries are able to sell it at very high prices with their own tags/label on it. Therefore, addressing the economic concerns of the Afghan people is extremely important, as it will also have an impact on overall peace and security.

Recommendations

- **The industrial sector should be developed so that the natural resources of the country can be utilized and profited from internally to boost the economy.** The international community should also invest in the industrial sector so the country stand on its own feet rather than being dependent on international funds. Government should encourage the investors by providing them coupons and other benefits.
- **Airstrikes on the houses of civilians should be stopped.** There should be a proper mechanism to identify insurgents and only target them.
- **The detective system and control of government on the borders and inside different institutions such as universities, schools and other similar areas in the local communities should be increased.** Proper detective equipment should be placed in different areas of the city to identify explosives and weapons carried by insurgents.
- **The Government should take proper measures and provide assistance to help the people who are displaced internally due to the overtake of their province by insurgents.**
- **A special control and oversight mechanism should be developed to reduce corruption in the military.** The senior management of the military and army should be selected based on merit and ability and those who are corrupt should not be able to move from one post to another. Opportunities should be provided to the new abilities.
- **In order to help reduce criminality, the informal power groups should be arrested and they should be prosecuted according to the law.** This would need a focus to improve the justice sector.
- **The High Peace Council, which has been in existence since 2010, must be reformed and restructured to become a smaller, nimbler organisation.** A smaller HPC would help the Afghan public recognise exactly who is part of the group and what role each member serves. This will also aid in accountability, as the public will know exactly who to refer to when questions or issues arise. Additionally, as Afghanistan is still a largely aid-dependent country, reducing the size of the body would also help reduce costs and possibly revert that funding to locally-focused peace efforts.
- International community must warn and hold some of the main neighbor countries who has been plotting different plots to worsen the security of Afghanistan.
- **The coordination mechanism between central MoI and provincial ANA should be improved and central MoI should provide on-time assistance to the provincial**

forces when they need it and when their province are under the attack of insurgents.

- **The Government must pay equal attention to all provinces, especially provinces with minorities who have been targeted by insurgent groups and suffered immense casualties.**

2. Aid Effectiveness and Service Delivery

As with every other facet of life, insecurity and corruption are also impacting the delivery of aid and services in the country. With the war now encompassing both the urban centres and districts, delegates at the provincial focus groups and in Kabul expressed their concern about the sheer amount of human and technical capital that is lost due to insecurity in the country. Though the Taliban and forces claiming allegiance to Daesh have claimed responsibility for attacks on aid groups and nongovernmental organisations in the past, the insecurity faced by these groups is not just limited to the armed opposition. There is also the alarming number of disappearances, attacks and even killings carried out by unknown elements.

Reductions in funding have also dealt a massive blow to groups looking to address government shortfalls by providing aid and services to people in need. When there are funds, often grassroots and small organisations are overlooked given the perceived difficulties they have in meeting compliance standards.

Recommendations

- **Civil society members called for a more equal distribution of funds between local and international groups.** Providing more direct financial assistance to local groups has two specific benefits: 1. Local groups are more directly and consistently in contact with specific communities, which gives them more insight into the specific needs of a community 2. Because they are already in the country, and the communities they serve, local groups can often operate at much lower costs.
- **For projects that involve multiple stakeholders from the government, the international community and local groups, there must be an emphasis on greater coordination between each stakeholder.** Such efforts would reduce or eliminate redundancies and would insure that the aid and services are delivered directly to those most in need. This would also greatly reduce the amount of time spent on bureaucratic matters, especially if a database or any similar system can be established to help facilitate efforts between the three entities. The establishment of such systems would also greatly reduce the amount of bribes aid groups would have to pay in order to do their work.
- **The government must make reforms to the national priority list, taking recommendations from civil society groups into account.** For instance, many representatives of education-focused groups said when they approached foreign donors for financial assistance they were told that because the government has not identified education as a national priority, the amount of money they can provide to such groups is limited.
- **The government and international donors must work with local NGOs to improve umbrella groups,** which can bring together different organisations working on similar issues so that they can make collective decisions and divide the work

according to each organisation's strength. Again, this would be extremely beneficial in eliminating redundancy of efforts.

- **There should be a greater focus on the capacity building of human resources in the public service delivery sectors.** However, Capacity building should not be limited to a single sector because health sector relies on other sectors.
- **Establish an ICT enabled monitoring and evaluation system of the public service delivery sectors to improve accountability and transparency, and deter graft at the micro and macro level.**
- **A National Public Services Information Management System designed to collect, process, and disseminate information in order to inform response, reform policy and research.**
- **Work to improve the long-term sustainability of civil society,** by donors supporting core budget rather than project based and increasing off-budget funds with a high percentage going to local organisations.
- **Support initiatives which would increase CSOs credibility.**

Aid effectiveness in the health sector

There were also major shortages reported in terms of health services, this includes: community-based hospitals in rural areas, properly-trained health professionals to staff those facilities (including female doctors to attend to female patients) and awareness campaigns by health authorities, to alert communities about any impending health risks. Given the fact that more than 60 percent of the Afghan population is illiterate, awareness raising has a huge impact in controlling preventive disease and de-stigmatisation of mental disabilities and harmful practices (i.e. stigma that persons with disabilities are harmful and virginity testing).

Health infrastructure should be built in a way to be more responsive and objective to the immediate needs of each community.

Recommendations for health sector

- **A greater focus on capacity building of human resources for the health sector, especially in the provinces.**
- **Establishment of a database system for health services,** to help identify shortcomings, additional needs, and ease the monitoring mechanisms for holding health institutions accountable for their effectiveness. The data gathered by such a system would also aid policy development by basing it upon evidence directly collected by health facilities and the ministry of public health.

3. Fight against corruption

Corruption has unfortunately remained a part of daily life for millions of Afghans and has become an issue that affects every Afghan across the country. At least [54 percent](#)⁸ of Afghans currently live below the poverty line, which means corruption and bribery are not

⁸ “Over 54% of Afghans live below the poverty line: CSO” ATN news, 2018
<https://ariananews.af/over-54-percent-of-afghans-live-under-poverty-line-cso/>

only taking a heavy financial toll on millions of Afghans but are also leaving large swathes of the country out of formal systems, including basic matters like obtaining a *tazkira*, national ID, obtaining a passport or driver's license, seeking medical care and procuring a passport.

Recommendations

- **When making appointments to high-level posts, the government must emphasise identifying capable, experienced individuals, rather than on their political or ethnic allegiances.** The current tendency of politicians to appoint high-level officials based on ethnic patronage or political affiliation has greatly impacted not only the capacity of those appointed to key positions but also limited the amount of accountability they face.
- **The government should avoid cleaning ministries and other institutions of corrupt or ineffective figures by conducting large, sweeping firings.** Civil society organisations say that this is actually counterproductive, as many of these people will go on to find employment in other offices that they are likely equally as unqualified for.
- **The government should create a mechanism that requires senior officials to file in-depth bi-annual reports on their achievements and challenges in detail.** This will allow for more close monitoring of these officials and the organs they head. Such reports can be replicated throughout the levels of each ministry or government office as a sign of stronger political will to fight corruption at all levels. These kinds of reports can also serve as the basis for the institutionalisation of the monitoring and evaluation of all officials at every level of government.
- **The government must undertake efforts to create electronic and Internet-based systems for citizens who have access to computers and the Internet.** The current reliance on handwritten documents not only causes delays in bureaucratic matters, but also creates a space for possible corruption or mishandling of documentation. Therefore, any efforts by the government to create electronic mechanisms for bureaucratic matters would not only speed up processes, but also eliminate the chances for corruption and errors inherent in handwritten documentation.
- **There must be concerted efforts towards informing the public of their rights.** This is crucial to the fight against corruption. Though nearly every Afghan has experienced administrative corruption, not many can identify it, which is a key factor in reporting those who engage in graft and bribery. If the government begins to apply legal mechanisms to hold corrupt officials to account, the Afghan public will not only get a better sense of what administrative corruption looks like, but will also gain faith in the Afghan bureaucracy, making them more likely to engage in formalised processes.
- **The government should be willing to consult civil society organisations when it comes to drafting and passing legislation, in order to assist with the rule of law.** Again, because civil society organisations often have more direct, on-the-ground experience with local communities, they can at times provide better insights into how laws (or the lack thereof), will impact the lives of Afghans across the country.
- **Ensure the salary scale for low and middle level staff of the government are realistic and allows them to be able to adequately cover their daily life expenses, which would help reduce corruption.**

4. Women's inclusion

Though members of the international coalition often cited the re-emergence of women in society as a basis for the 2001 intervention, millions of women are still not able to participate in many aspects of society even more than 17 years since the fall of the Taliban and the two decades since the civil war of the 1990s.

Again, one of the major factors that keep women from enjoying many of their rights, including the ability to partake in social and political life, is the endemic corruption that has plagued the country over the last decade-and-a-half. Without access to education and employment, many women simply cannot afford the bribes required for even the most basic of bureaucratic matters. With proper education and finances, many women are also at a great disadvantage in terms of appointments to official positions as they are not able to establish the social networks needed in such a patronage-based system of appointments.

In terms of education, there are simply not enough proper educational institutions for women and girls in the country. Last January, the Ministry of Education said that at least [1,000⁹](#) schools across the country have been closed due to insecurity. Often, it is girls' schools that are the first to be closed. According to a January 2018 UNICEF report, at least [60 percent¹⁰](#) of girls are unable to attend school across the country.

Even when girls can attend school, the facilities (like boys' schools) are often lacking everything from proper buildings to qualified teachers. Civil society representatives in Parwan and Nimroz provinces, both relatively secure, said hundreds of schools across their provinces lack female teachers to teach girl students. In Nimroz, there is also a lack of proper higher education facilities for young women wishing to continue their education.

Recommendations

- **Education must be listed as a national priority by the government, and there must be an emphasis placed on training female teachers in order to insure no more girls are kept out of school due to a lack of quality education facilities.**
- **There must be more of an effort made to engage women and vulnerable groups particularly families/victims of past atrocities in the peace process.** Civil society actors welcome the idea of a political settlement provided that it does not comprise the achievements of the past 17 years in democratic and human rights spheres, but all elements of Afghan society must feel included in the process. This will insure that the rights women have regained over the last 17 years are not once again lost as part of a peace deal that lacks the representation of women, and the political settlement does not overlook the right of victims. The recent [call](#) for the inclusion of women in the peace process by President Ashraf Ghani has been welcomed as a positive step, but civil society organisations remind the government of national unity that the president's statement must be followed up with practical actions that insure the voices of millions of Afghan women are heard.

⁹ "Treading Carefully, Negotiating with the Taliban on girls education". Qantara.de, 2017.

<https://en.qantara.de/content/negotiating-with-the-taliban-for-girls-education-treading-carefully>

¹⁰ "Up to 60% of Afghan girls out of school: reports" Al-jazeera news, 2018.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/06/60-percent-afghan-girls-school-report-180603150117803.html>

- **Civil society organisations are also calling on the government to insure laws pertaining to women, including the Elimination of Violence Against Women law, be properly implemented.** Though the drafting of such laws are an important step, they are of little value without implementation.
- **During the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan, the Government during the promised to establish an EVAW special court in all provinces by the end of 2018, however to date this has only been done in 18 provinces.** This needs to be rectified to ensure the structures needed to implement the EVAW law is available to women and citizens in every province of the country.

5. Elections

On October 20, more than [four million](#)¹¹ Afghans, including a record [33 percent](#)¹² of women, withstood concerted Taliban attacks targeting the polls, to cast their ballots in the [17th](#)¹³ parliamentary election. However, that enthusiasm, despite two previous elections plagued with accusations of widespread, fraud perceived to be government-assisted or taking place due to low government oversight, was met with massive logistical failings that saw people waiting in hours-long lines due to reports of missing ballot papers, ballot boxes, malfunctioning [biometric devices](#)¹⁴ (which were being employed for the [first](#)¹⁵ time) and even centers that never opened their doors because election staff simply did not show up. Election monitoring organisations found that at least 521 polling places across 21 provinces, including Kabul, never opened on election day. Of the polling places that did open on October 20, at least 68 percent of them were opened late, beyond their 7am stated opening.

As a result of the technical issues and absence of election workers, the vote was [extended](#)¹⁶ into a second day in centers that were not properly functioning or did not open. Election monitoring organisations noted that this 24-hour extension was in fact in violation of Article 104 of the election law. The fear was that this extension into a second day would create the opportunity for overnight fraud between the 20th and 21st of October.

This left the people feeling that they had done their duty as citizens, despite considerable risks to their own safety, but that the government failed to meet their enthusiasm with proper oversight of an election had already been delayed by more than three years due to security concerns and political infighting within the national unity government over electoral reform

¹¹ “Four million vote in Afghanistan despite violence and technical glitches” CNN news, 2018.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2018/10/20/asia/afghanistan-elections-intl/index.html>

¹² “Voting for landmark Afghan parliament polls conclude” Anadolu Agency, 2018.

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/voting-for-landmark-afghan-parliament-polls-concludes/1288710>

¹³ “Afghanistan Election Conundrum (16) Basic facts about the parliamentary elections” Afghan Analyst Network, 2018.

<https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/afghanistan-election-conundrum-16-basic-facts-about-the-parliamentary-elections/>

¹⁴ “Election Commission Unveils New Biometrics Devices” Tolo news, 2018.

<https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/election-commission%C2%A0unveils-new-biometric-devices>

¹⁵ “Afghanistan elections conundrum (21): Biometric verification likely to spawn host of new problems Afghanistan Analyst Network, 2018.

<https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/afghanistan-elections-conundrum-21-biometric-testing-likely-to-spawn-host-of-new-problems/>

¹⁶ “Afghanistan extends election to Sunday due to chaos at polling stations” Reuters, 2018.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-election-extend/afghanistan-extends-election-to-sunday-due-to-chaos-at-polling-stations-idUSKCN1MU09A>

procedures. The latest election was yet another example of the urgent need for proper election reform in the country.

In order to rebuild the people's trust in the election process, the government and its international partners must undertake several changes in the handling of the election process from the initial announcement to the final declaration of the victorious parties.

Recommendations

- **The government must finally embark on a wide scale rollout of the *e-Tazkira* (electronic national ID cards), which would help reduce the potential for fraud.** This would also be a less dangerous method of registering voters than the current system, which involves the affixing of a voter ID sticker to the back of a person's paper tazkira, a method which could potentially put someone at great risk if they were to have their tazkira in their possession while passing through opposition-controlled territories. An e-Tazkira system would also aid in establishing proper voter lists. With a proper voter list backed up by an e-Tazkira, election workers could verify that people are voting in the correct districts, that they are voting only once and that their identities have been biometrically verified ahead of their arrival at the polling place.
- **There must be an increase in representation of the Independent Election Commission in the provinces.** This would help encourage voters in rural areas, who may otherwise feel left out or uninformed about the election process. A greater IEC presence at the provincial level would also insure that all election procedures are carried out properly and that local militias, strongmen and warlords are not able to interfere in the process.
- **Increase female participation in the election process.** Currently, voting is the one form of political participation in which women have the most agency and are equal to men — each person, regardless of gender, technically is only granted a single vote. Therefore, it is highly imperative that women's participation in elections be simultaneously safeguarded and enhanced. This is another area in which greater representation of IEC officials in the provinces is important, as it would offer women a chance to learn about their rights as voters.
- **The government must make every effort to bring an end to politics based on ethnicity, and those that advance such causes.** They must insure that no government official interferes in what should be a free and fair election process. After two back-to-back presidential elections ridden with accusations of government meddling and fraud, it is absolutely imperative that the government work to re-earn the public's trust by insuring that no official, at any level, is able to interfere in the democratic process.
- **The government must commit to finally hold elections in the Eastern province of Ghazni,** which was not able to take part in the October 20 polls (or the rescheduled elections in Kandahar a week later), due to security and logistical issues. A resolution to these challenges must be found, so that the residents of Ghazni can be assured that their voices will be heard when it comes to their representation in the 'House of the Nation.'
- **District and provincial council elections must also be conducted,** so that people in all levels of society can choose their representation, and so that they will have more access to more forms of representation at every level.

6. Social protection of the disabled and internally displaced

Currently, figures of the number of people with disabilities in Afghanistan ranges from [700,000¹⁷](#) to [800,000¹⁸](#), with at least [400,000¹⁹](#) of those dealing with some form of blindness. Activists and researchers say the actual number could be much higher. As most disabilities in the country are the result of the ongoing conflict, recent figures by the United Nations — at least 5,252 were [injured²⁰](#) in the first nine months of 2018 — lead many activists to believe that the current estimates do not paint an accurate picture of the situation for disabled people in Afghanistan.

The combination of increasing insecurity and a devastating drought that has impacted at least [20²¹](#) of the nation's provinces over the last year, has led to an increased number of internally displaced people in the nation. According to the [United Nations²²](#), a precipitation deficit of 70 percent has been registered across most of Afghanistan due to La Niña conditions. As a result, the UN said that this year's main harvest is expected to be below average for the fifth consecutive year. At least [60,000²³](#) people in the Western provinces of Herat and Badghis have been displaced by the recent drought.

Currently, upwards of 3.5 million people in Afghanistan are either internally displaced or returnees from a foreign nation, many of whom become IDPs because they are unable to return to their native provinces due to either insecurity or economic hardship.

The displacement caused by these two factors means millions of people are forced to try and make a life in an area where long-time local residents may see the newly-arrived IDPs as interlopers who are syphoning off precious resources, jobs and money. This sense of resentment between the residents and IDPs in a given area exacerbates over time, which leads to major social challenges and friction for IDPs who often left everything behind in order to seek refuge from war or environmental disaster. This hostility and friction can be manifested in several ways ranging from: denial of services, verbal prejudice and even violence targeted towards IDPs. This can in turn lead to increasing rates of poverty, as the economy cannot sustain both the area's residents and the arriving displaced people without proper assistance from the government and its partner organisations.

This mix of poverty, hostility and violence has been known to lead to devastating consequences. For IDPs who have returned from a foreign nation arriving in a host community often means leaving a foreign nation where you are treated with disrespect and

¹⁷ Disability in Afghanistan: Taking a capabilities approach to look at research challenges and policy recommendations. JF Trani et al. University of Central London, 2005

¹⁸ "Most of 800,000 people with disabilities in Afghanistan are uneducated and unemployed" Khaama Press, 2013.

¹⁹ "Afghanistan - Eye care" World Health Organisation, 2018.

<http://www.emro.who.int/afg/programmes/eye-care.html>

²⁰ "Quarterly report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict: 1 January to 30 September 2018" United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, 2018.

https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_protection_of_civilians_in_armed_conflict_3rd_quarter_report_2018_10_oct.pdf

²¹ "Afghanistan Drought - Apr 2018" Reliefweb, 2018.

<https://reliefweb.int/disaster/dr-2018-000052-afg>

²² "Drought grips large parts of Afghanistan" United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2018.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/19IUcz2SY-OCXt8lwtquGu6iNu7_S7CY9uuzdj3d8ZaM/edit

²³ "Millions of Afghans face risks of drought related displacement" Norwegian Refugee Council, 2018.

<https://www.nrc.no/news/2018/september/millions-of-afghans-face-risks-of-drought-related-displacement/>

derision to arrive in an area of their own country where they, and their children, must face similar prejudice. Essentially replacing one prejudice for another.

Representatives of several provinces said they had documented cases of IDPs (and disabled persons) committing suicide out of frustration with the hardships they must endure. There is also the risk that those who are excluded from social life and economic opportunities may be lured by armed opposition groups, like the Taliban, who will use someone's feeling of inadequacy and frustration at the lack of attention from their adopted communities and the government to encourage them to join in their movement. In the past, the Taliban have been [accused](#)²⁴ of using people with disabilities to conduct suicide operations in Afghanistan.

Recommendations

- **A proper, in-depth survey of the disabled population of Afghanistan must be conducted.** These figures should be further sub-divided into capturing sensory and physical disabilities. Doing so would allow the government and civil society organisations to better tailor their programmes to the specific needs of people suffering with each form of disability throughout the country. Such a survey would be the first step in implementing stronger programmes to address the challenges faced by people with disabilities. However, this should not delay the provision of services to address the immediate needs of persons with disabilities.
- **The government, in coordination with civil society organisations, must define and develop long-term and operational programmes for their social protection as well as proper programmes for livelihood development, which has eluded far too many people in the nation.**
- **The human rights environment is shrinking, not only for vulnerable groups, and all stakeholders should support civil society by allowing them space to raise these issues.**
- **Human rights issues are still a major concern and as security remains fragile, human rights defenders must be protected.**
- **The international community should ensure their focus, which is primarily on security at the moment, does mean human rights gets pushed to the bottom of their agenda.**

7. Strengthening and developing the role of civil society

As a bridge between local communities and the government, a healthy and robust civil society is an important part of any growing democracy. Over the last 17 years, civil society has grown at exponential rates in Afghanistan. There are currently more than 10,000 unions, foundations, organisations, local shuras and youth movements that comprise the civil society of Afghanistan.

However, there are still several hurdles to overcome before civil society organisations can be given the space to close the gaps between the people and the government and to account for any shortfalls of the state.

²⁴ "Welcome to suicide bomber rehab" Vocativ, 2014
<https://www.vocativ.com/world/afghanistan-world/suicide-bomber/index.html>

First and foremost is the issue of corruption, which representatives from the provinces and Kabul all feel has increased over the last five years. When coupled with a decrease in a sense of moral responsibility, this has made simple operational matters extremely difficult for civil society organisation. As stated earlier, civil society organisations feel too much of their time is spent on bureaucratic matters and dealing with issues of bribery and corruption within the government. This time and resources could be better spent addressing the needs of the communities they serve.

Security is of course a major issue for civil society organisation. It is in many ways the biggest impediment to their work. The security challenges facing civil society in Afghanistan go beyond armed opposition groups like the Taliban and Daesh — though both have claimed responsibility for attacks targeting civil society organisations or conducted in proximity to civil society offices, workers and projects — to include the threat of abductions, threats and intimidation by other groups.

There is also a sense that government officials are interfering in civil society work, which is in direct contradiction to the role that civil society is supposed to play as an entirely separate sphere. Though civil society organisations were appreciative of President Ghani's [recent](#)²⁵ meeting civil society representatives to discuss the peace process, such consultations tend to be the exception, not the norm, when it comes to government decisions that would impact the lives of all Afghans.

Additionally, civil society organisations say that despite the government's commitment to free expression and access to information, they often find it difficult to gain reliable access to information from government officials. This is key because information is the first step for civil society intervention in regard to monitoring the government and its ability to deliver on promises and commitments made including implementation of laws.

With a lack of support and funding, many civil society organisations feel as if they are existing in an unsustainable hand-to-mouth situation that leaves little room for development or advancement. As a result, the representatives said the general public's knowledge about the role of civil society has also greatly decreased.

Despite great strides towards improving the institutional capacity of civil society organisations, there is still a long way to go in terms of bringing such organisations to full capacity. As such, civil society organisations strongly recommended the government and international community make more serious efforts and intensive financial investments into the capacity building of civil society organisations in Afghanistan.

Recommendations:

- **Greater collaboration between the Afghan government, the international community and local civil society groups is essential.**
- **Development and support of mechanisms to improve trust and accountability within in civil society organisations is needed.**

²⁵ "Peace a national consensus, President Ghani to civil society members" BNA Bakhtar news, 2018
<http://bakhtarnews.com.af/eng/politics/item/35726-peace-a-national-consensus-president-ghani-to-civil-society-members.html>

- **Development of a specific national priority programme for building a vibrant and sustainable civil society.**
- **Develop and support systems, mechanisms and policies to ensure proactive promotion of public, private and civil society partnership in Afghanistan** (given the gradual reduction in international aid from past decade) and coordination among civil society organisations and the government.
- **Ensure there is a formal mechanism for civil society to be fully consulted in the development of laws and that the government push for a systematic implementation of laws affecting civic space.**