



BRITISH & IRISH AGENCIES AFGHANISTAN GROUP

STRATEGIC PLAN

2018-2020

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. BAAG

The British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG) was originally set up by British NGOs in 1987, as an umbrella group to draw public attention to the humanitarian needs of the population of Afghanistan and of Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan.

BAAG's role and structure has changed over the years with the evolving situation in Afghanistan. It currently has a membership of 29 British and Irish NGOs that support development and relief programmes in Afghanistan.

BAAG has supported, and continues to support, the work of its membership, civil society and the wider development and relief community through:

- Facilitating and supporting policy and advocacy initiatives that will positively contribute to the development process in Afghanistan and the work of its member agencies;
- Bringing members together to share lessons and good practice, and creating linkages with organisations from outside the membership whose participation in these processes will add value; and
- Working to raise & maintain the profile of Afghanistan with policy makers, donors and public.
- Working with Afghan civil society to enhance its voice and input to decision making about policies and programmes affecting the population.

2. PROCESS

BAAG develops a strategic plan every three years, which it reviews annually. The 2014-2017 plan expired and the BAAG team sought the views of BAAG member agencies based in Afghanistan and the UK, the BAAG Board of Trustees, Afghan partner organisations including ACBAR, officials from UK government departments, and other stakeholders to inform the Strategic Plan. The views of Afghan civil society have also been sought about ways to collaborate and to enhance their role in development policy making and implementation.

3. CONTEXT

Afghanistan is going through a considerably difficult period in its history. At the beginning of 2018, the security, economy and humanitarian situation has been judged to be the worst it has been in the last fifteen years. The results of the annual, independent Survey of Afghan People, have shown that a growing number of Afghans in recent years have become dissatisfied with government institutions and that, since 2014, the majority of Afghans view their country as going in the wrong direction. The security, political and economic 'transitions' of 2014 are thought to have largely failed.

A major threat to Afghans, and to the aid agencies supporting them, is the growing insecurity since the drawdown of NATO combat troops in 2014. The activities of Taliban and other insurgent groups have expanded in scope and intensity in many parts of the country and attacks on the capital have increased too. A recent BBC study found that 70% of Afghan territories are being controlled or threatened by the Taliban. The escalation in the conflict has worsened the humanitarian situation and greatly increased internal displacement. The number of displaced people in Afghanistan increased three-fold between 2012 and 2016. The presence of fighters affiliated to the Islamic State group (Daesh) has exacerbated the situation as they target civilians (notably in the Shia population), public spaces and aid agencies in unprecedented ways. Security incidents particularly those affecting electoral offices, have grown in number and insurgents have vowed to disrupt the electoral processes. As the Parliamentary and Presidential Elections are due in 2018 and 2019, these threats are likely to affect large segments of the populations. Security and a successful election process are likely to be key priorities for the Afghan government and international partners, overshadowing other development and humanitarian issues.

Hopes for peace were re-kindled as the Afghan Government and the Taliban observed a three-day ceasefire for the first time during Eid in June 2018. Afghans, particularly in the restive Helmand province are increasingly calling for peace. Public sit-ins and marches have been held there and been supported by residents of other provinces. Though such gatherings are small in size and some suspect that they are not entirely independent, their impact on national public opinion is noticeable. Afghan NGOs involved in peacebuilding have been raising awareness of the need to build peace since mid-1990s and have been resolving local disputes varying from tensions between family members to conflicts between tribes. These interventions, as well as their wealth of knowledge about local conflicts will be instrumental in obtaining a long-lasting peace in the country and BAAG is actively supporting examination of further opportunities to foster peace.

Afghanistan's humanitarian needs continue to increase. According to the 2018 Humanitarian Needs Assessment for Afghanistan conducted by the UN, more than a third of the population (39%) live below the national poverty line; large numbers of Afghans are in situations of chronic poverty with rural areas being disproportionately affected. An estimated 12 million Afghans will be in need of humanitarian assistance in 2018 in a population which is already facing very high levels of acute malnutrition (annually about 1.6 million children under five and 443,000 pregnant and lactating women require treatment for acute malnutrition), as well as unprecedented levels of displacement (1.6 million people were displaced between 2014 – 17 alone).

There are alarming numbers of civilian casualties, thereby increasing the number of people with a disability in the country. A 2005 (latest) survey estimated 2.7-15% of Afghans have differing levels of disability and it is a growing problem. According to the UN, more than one million Afghans live within 500 meters of landmine-contaminated areas. Poor medical provision in many areas results in visual or hearing disabilities. Despite the adoption of good disability-related policies in Afghanistan; in reality, few are implemented, nor are the governments' obligations under these policies systematically met or monitored. A 2016 report by Community Centre for the Disabled, a BAAG partner, found that although Afghanistan ratified the UNCRPD in 2012, the government has yet to implement it.

The decreasing priority given to Afghanistan by the international community and the concomitant reduction in funding has created additional challenges for Afghanistan, a country which will remain highly aid independent for many years. The emergence of prolonged crises in other parts of the world has meant that funding has been diverted to other countries affected by conflict, such as Syria and Yemen. This factor, alongside increased security and delivery challenges, has led some BAAG member agencies to reduce or discontinue their work in Afghanistan and their global advocacy efforts on behalf of the country.

The 2016 Brussels Conference on Afghanistan stressed the importance of aid being increasingly channelled through the Afghan government's budget and/or channelled through pooled funding arrangements managed by

the World Bank and the UN. There may be perceived benefits to these arrangements, such as improved coordination, and donors often cite the challenging security situation, staffing and monitoring and evaluation constraints for not designing and delivering bilateral programmes. However, in practice this presents challenges including a decrease in funding bilateral, smaller and more focused development interventions. While the donors may recognise the crucial role of NGOs in development work, their reducing physical presence in Afghanistan inevitably means there is less understanding of issues on the ground, and progress in securing funding for projects is often slower as well. Some BAAG members, especially the smaller ones, are already struggling to cover their core costs whilst the bigger ones have had to downsize their Afghanistan teams. It is feared that Brexit could further compound the situation should British charities become ineligible for EU funding. British charity coalitions continue to discuss this matter with British and European officials and BAAG will monitor the situation.

4. RATIONALE FOR BAAG

There is widespread support, within Afghanistan and international charities for BAAG to continue its facilitation, coordination, policy, advocacy and information sharing work. Members and other key stakeholders will therefore continue to benefit from the following services that BAAG provides:

- A detailed and long standing knowledge of the humanitarian and development issues in and the work of national and international civil society organisations operating in Afghanistan and of the current thinking and learning on key developments and issues;
- An on-going process of engagement with key donors and a sound awareness of evolving donor policies, engagement with the wider relief and development community and decision-makers;
- Strengthened capacity for Afghan CSOs and an increased role in influencing policies and decisions;
- Joint discussion of key issues relating to the development and humanitarian response process, peacebuilding and security;
- Opportunities to engage in debate, inform and influence Afghan government and international policies;
- In-depth knowledge and analysis of the local context;
- Research and partnerships with academic institutions aimed at enhancing understanding of key development, humanitarian and rights issues;
- Informed coverage by the British media of the situation in Afghanistan; and
- Briefings, induction and other information services provided by BAAG to member agencies, civil servants and policymakers.

4.1. BAAG MEMBERS

The following organisations that work or support relief and development activities in Afghanistan are BAAG members:

Current members: Afghanaid, Afghan Action, Afghan Connection, CAFOD, CARE International, Children in Crisis, Christian Aid, Concern Worldwide, Conciliation Resources, Farkhunda Trust, Friends of Aschina UK, Global Witness, Hand in Hand International, HealthProm, International Rescue Committee UK, Islamic Relief, Muslim Hands, Organization of Human Welfare, Oxfam, SAFE, Save the Children, Tearfund, The Linda Norgrove Foundation, War Child UK, and World Vision UK.

Observer members: Amnesty International UK, British Red Cross, Human Rights Watch

BAAG is committed to monitoring and reviewing membership satisfaction with BAAG services regularly, and to improve them accordingly. BAAG is also actively seeking to increase its membership base to include all British and Irish NGOs with operations in Afghanistan.

4.2. WORKING WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

BAAG will continue to cooperate with a wide variety of stakeholders, Afghan and non-Afghan, government and non-governmental, including Afghan civil society actors, other international agencies, academics and individuals, to enhance understanding of Afghanistan, the challenges its people face and the solutions that may assist them.

BAAG has always collaborated closely with the Kabul based Agency Co-ordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR), which is the key co-ordinating body for Afghan and international NGOs. It was set up at about the same time as BAAG.

BAAG will continue to collaborate with the Tehran based International Consortium for Refugees in Iran, which supports the work of NGOs in Iran and of which BAAG is a founder member.

BAAG will also continue to support the European Network for NGOs in Afghanistan (ENNA), which will be essential to raise the voices of civil society in European policy debate in relation to Afghanistan.

BAAG will collaborate with Afghan civil society coordination groups including the Civil Society Working Committee, which it helped set up before the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan in 2016. BAAG's collaboration with UK-based networks such as Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) and the Afghan Women's Support Forum UK will also continue. BAAG will support Afghan NGOs and CSOs to enhance their working practices to better meet Afghan needs.

5. BAAG VISION AND MISSION

5.1. BAAG VISION

An Afghanistan where Afghans take control of their own development and create and maintain a just and peaceful society.

5.2. BAAG MISSION

BAAG advocates for the needs, aspirations, views and the best interest of Afghans to be reflected in the work of our members, partners and in national and international policies. BAAG collaborates with Afghans and international actors to ensure sustainable development and improved aid policies and practices in Afghanistan.

5.3. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

We are guided by our continuing commitment to:

- Supporting, facilitating and contributing to an environment whereby policies and decisions reflect the needs of Afghans in a meaningful and sustainable way;

- Neutrality and impartiality;
- Good practice in obtaining, analysing and disseminating information;
- Ensuring that our policies, decisions and positions are informed through reliable and fact-based research and data and reflect the views of Afghans.
- To be a learning organisation;
- Creating and maintaining a safe working environment for staff, consultants, volunteers and other colleagues and preventing sexual exploitation and abuse and bullying of these and beneficiaries.
- Keeping the best interests of Afghans and members at the heart of the work and dealing with all issues sensitively; and
- Accountability and transparency in all our work.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2018-20

1 Strategic Objective One:

BAAG will initiate, support and facilitate policy and advocacy initiatives that will positively contribute to a greater understanding of Afghanistan’s key development challenges, the work of its member agencies and civil society by donors, government decision makers and the Afghan, British and Irish public.

Aims	Activities
<p>1.1 To work with the members to initiate policy and advocacy activities on priority issues, with particular focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting a conducive environment for the delivery of development and humanitarian aid; • Promoting development and economic policies that are rational, pro-poor and needs-based; • Encouraging effective international response to the protection of fundamental rights of Afghan men, women and children; and • Facilitating the inclusion of Afghan voices and recommendations in the development process and key international events and at meetings between them and international policymakers. • Co-ordinating and participating in research on agreed topics with members and others as necessary 	<p>1.1.1 Develop and promote evidence-based policy positions on social and economic development of Afghanistan and other priority areas to this end:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult member agencies about issues that affect their programmes and beneficiaries, particularly ensuring interaction with staff and partners based in Afghanistan; • Identify and use credible sources of information on trends, policies, decisions and priorities to support BAAG’s advocacy role; • Consult Afghan civil society actors; • Make maximum use of capacity within member agencies to promote BAAG’s advocacy work; • Identify and make use of effective methods, including where appropriate the media, to disseminate advocacy messages; • Seek Afghan views and expertise on specific policy and advocacy issues; <p>1.1.2 Support advocacy initiatives undertaken by members’ in-country offices, and partners;</p> <p>1.1.3 Keeping abreast with the developments in Afghan civil society by communicating with them and, security permitting, visiting the country on a regular basis;</p> <p>1.1.4 Undertake, support and encourage activities that are aimed at strengthening Afghan civil society’s abilities to advocate more effectively in national and international arenas;</p> <p>1.1.5 Leading on and participation in research on poverty, peace building and migration in Afghanistan to inform our work on policy and advocacy.</p>

<p>1.2 To maintain the profile of Afghanistan with policy makers, donors and public; to sustain and raise international/UK support to Afghanistan; and to facilitate the effective participation of Afghan civil society in key international conferences with donors and the Afghan government.</p>	<p>1.2.1 Develop and maintain positive relationship with policy makers;</p> <p>1.2.2 Continue to provide secretariat support to UK based All-Party Parliamentary Group for Afghanistan (APPG-Afghanistan);</p> <p>1.2.3 Present accurate and balanced picture of Afghanistan, in particular with regards to the progresses and challenges in development, humanitarian and security areas, to the policy makers and the public, including the Diaspora, to promote continued international engagement in the country.</p> <p>1.2.4 Support Afghan civil society in preparation for participation in key national and international events, through providing coordination services, technical advice and messaging.</p>
<p>1.3 To work with academic institutions, think-tanks, and other organisations and structures with similar objectives to achieve greater impact in research, policy and advocacy efforts.</p>	<p>1.3.1 Maintain effective communications with the Afghan Civil Society Working Committee (CSWC) the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR), the International Consortium for Refugees in Iran (ICRI), European Network of NGOs on Afghanistan (ENNA) and relevant Afghan and international NGO networks in Afghanistan or elsewhere in order to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share and coordinate policy and advocacy plans; • Support advocacy initiatives taken in Afghanistan and other countries; and • Seek feedback/evidence/ information in support of BAAG’s policy and advocacy work; <p>1.3.2 Work with them to achieve a broader impact of policy change objectives.</p> <p>1.3.3 Strengthen the work of working groups and task forces established from time to time, through consultation, policy input, media support and engagement with decision makers.</p> <p>1.3.4 Organise joint events and coordinate policy positions. Participation in conferences, round tables etc.</p>

2 Strategic Objective Two

BAAG will bring its members together to share lessons and good practice on humanitarian and development issues.

Aims	Activities
<p>2.1 Facilitating the development of common views around major Afghanistan issues among the members and enhancing resource-sharing between them.</p>	<p>2.1.1 Collating and maintaining information about members' projects and geographical focus in Afghanistan and developing and maintaining awareness of member agencies priorities, interests and concerns;</p> <p>2.1.2 Make more effective use of members meetings for lesson learning;</p> <p>2.1.3 Coordinate between members working on similar areas and respond to their information needs;</p> <p>2.1.4 Identify and share information regarding key dates/events and plan for initiatives together with pertinent members;</p> <p>2.1.5 Provide members periodic email updates on major Afghanistan issues and the national and international responses to them; and</p> <p>2.1.6 Create linkages with organisations from outside the membership whose participation in these processes will add value.</p>
<p>2.2 In consultation with members to identify and implement effective ways for sharing experience and lessons, where appropriate organise expert/specialist input for discussions at BAAG meetings</p>	<p>2.2.1 Facilitate sharing information and lessons emerging from research, advocacy and other projects;</p> <p>2.2.2 Develop and maintain linkages with specialist/experts individuals and organisations.</p>
<p>2.3 To facilitate networking for members with relevant organisations from outside the membership</p>	<p>2.3.1 Identify, and build linkages, with target organisations that are relevant to the work of member agencies.</p>

3 Strategic Objective Three	
In line with UN Sustainable Development Goal 16 (on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development), BAAG will partner with Afghan civil society and non-governmental organisations to promote public participation in peace processes, and to achieve greater public influence over Afghan government policies especially with regards to vulnerable population including women and people with disability.	
Aims	Activities
3.1 Work with disability focused NGOs to share our expertise as an Afghanistan-focused network, particularly in the areas of coordination, policy and advocacy, and best practices.	3.1.1 Support Community Centre for the Disabled to improve their working practices to better meet the needs of people with disabilities and promote inclusivity; 3.1.2 Provide technical expertise to re-establish the Disability Rights Watch Afghanistan and improve members' coordination through delivering a new strategic plan; and 3.1.3 Advise on measures to improve family and community perceptions about people with disability.
3.2 Support the improvement of Afghan NGO capacities to collect evidence and use it effectively in advocacy work in key areas (e.g. improving gender justice, reducing domestic violence and promoting the rights of Afghan girls, women, boys and men).	3.2.1 Collaborate with Afghan NGOs including Afghanistan Capacity Development and Educational Organisation (ACDEO), Afghan Women's Network and other organisations to improve their services to the target population; 3.2.2 Identify and share best practices related to gender justice in Afghanistan with national and international actors.
3.3 Support the work of Afghan peacebuilders at the local level; and promote peacebuilding efforts in Afghanistan by raising the voices of Afghans in key regional and international events and multitrack processes.	3.3.1 Undertake relevant research to learn about best practices to inform relevant initiatives by international actors; 3.3.2 Advocate for increased and improved support to peacebuilding efforts at the local level; and encourage closer working relationships between Afghan peacebuilders and other countries whose experience will be beneficial for Afghans; and 3.3.3 Understand Afghan views on peace issues and facilitate dialogue between Afghan civil society and other actors in various levels on key issues relating to sustainable peace including on truth-seeking, addressing to the grievances of past injustices and national reconciliation.

6. REVIEWING THE STRATEGY

BAAG will review its strategy once a year and 4-6 months after the election of the new Afghan Government in 2019. In doing so, BAAG will take into account, its progress towards achieving the strategic objectives, and the environment in Afghanistan and the British and international policies affecting the country. The document



should also be reviewed when there are major changes in key environmental and risk factors, including security and safety, political, and legal; and organisational factors including financial and operational. BAAG will maintain a risk register for its overall operations; a security risk assessment for trips and activities within Afghanistan and a project-specific risk monitoring document.

7. OPERATIONAL PLAN

To achieve these strategic objectives, BAAG will develop separately a detailed delivery and resourcing plan. Based on those documents, BAAG will develop yearly work plan and budget to be approved by the Trustees. BAAG will seek the financial support of institutional donors, member agencies, trusts and foundations and private donors.