

CIVIL SOCIETY INPUT INTO THE GENEVA CONFERENCE ON AFGHANISTAN

SUMMARY REPORT

JANUARY 2019



ABOUT BAAG (www.baag.org.uk)

The British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG) is a unique advocacy network organisation with 29 current members. BAAG's vision is to contribute to an environment where Afghans can take control of their own development and bring about a just and peaceful society. We seek to put our vision into practice by:

- Bringing member agencies and the wider relief and development community together to advocate for continued international commitment to the development of Afghanistan;
- Sharing information and knowledge to improve policy debate and decision-making processes with a particular emphasis on ensuring that those processes reflect the views, needs and aspirations of the Afghan people; and
- Enhancing the abilities of Afghan civil society in influencing national and international policies on Afghanistan.

Introduction	6
Preparatory Work	6
Consultations with Provincial Civil Society	7
Geneva Conference on Afghanistan Delegate Selection Process	7
Afghan Civil Society Delegation	8
INGO Delegation	9
National Civil Society Conference	10
Policy and Advocacy Engagements	10
Civil Society Position Paper	10
Synthesis Paper	11
Geneva Conference Week	12
Afghan & International Civil Society Workshop	12
Summary of Working Groups and Panel Discussions	12
Civil Society Statement	13
Civil Society Side Meeting	14
Policy Engagements and Meetings	15
Summary of GCA Outcomes	16
General Outcomes	16
Civil Society-related Commitments	16
Media Engagements	17
Follow-up and Next Steps	18
Afghan Civil Society Statement on the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan	18
Plans for Follow-up	18
Annexes	19
Annex 1, Members of CSWC	19
Annex 2: Report of the Provincial Civil Society Consultations	20
Annex 3: Civil Society Position Paper	34
Annex 4: Civil Society Synthesis Paper	43
Annex 5: Civil Society Statement for the GCA	53
Annex 6: Civil Society Side Meeting Minutes and Recommendations	55
Annex 7: Afghan Civil Society on the Geneva Conference, December 2018	58

Abbreviations

BAAG	British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group
BCA	Brussels Conference on Afghanistan
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CSWC	Civil Society Working Committee
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
GCA	Geneva Conference on Afghanistan
GMAF	Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework
GoA	Government of Afghanistan
IDP	Internally Displaced people
INGO	International Non-governmental Organisation
JCMB	Joint Coordination Monitoring Board
LCA	London Conference on Afghanistan
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
PFO	Provincial Facilitation Organisation
SDG	Sustainable Developmental Goals
SMAF	Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework
TOR	Terms of Reference
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
USAID	United States Agency for International Development.

Acknowledgements

Civil society input in the GCA process was the result of the collaboration of many partners and stakeholders. BAAG would like to acknowledge the leadership and commitment of the Civil Society Working Committee (CSWC), whose members led the various phases of consultations in Kabul and in the provinces. We would also like to thank the members of the Independent Interview Committee for their assistance in selecting the ten-member Afghan civil society delegation.

In turn, thanks go to the Afghan civil society and international civil society delegates who attended the various events during the GCA week and raised the voices of civil society. Moreover, our thanks go to the facilitators, moderators, speakers, presenters, participants and members of the Afghan & International Civil Society Workshop.

We'd like to acknowledge the generous financial support of our donors, namely the Department for International Development (DFID), German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD).

Lastly, we would like to thank the hundreds of participants of the provincial civil society focus group discussions and attendees of the National Civil Society Conference in Kabul. Without their voluntary input, the GCA process would not have benefited from these wide-ranging civil society views and voices.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to share the key documents, statements and messages, delivered on behalf of the wider civil society community primarily by the ten Afghan civil society delegates to the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan (GCA) on the 27th and 28th November 2018. The report presents the civil society activities that were led by The Civil Society Working Committee (CSWC) and facilitated by British & Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG) in the lead-up to, during and after

PREPARATORY WORK

The Civil Society Working Committee (CSWC), a group of major Afghan civil society networks that led the civil society input in Brussels Conference on Afghanistan (2016)¹, provided leadership for the input in the GCA too. To ensure that the civil society's messages were based on evidence from all over the country, they agreed to organise a provincial consultation process in all 34 provinces.

The consultations took the form of a day-long workshop consisting of two polls and three Focus Group Discussions (FGD) which elicited qualitative and quantitative data to be analysed and used to inform discussions at the National Civil Society Conference in Kabul and guide the civil society position paper ahead of the GCA. Therefore, between the 15th and 29th October 2018 seven Provincial Facilitation Organisations (PFO) planned and delivered FGDs in all 34 provinces, obtaining the views and voices of 917 (577 male, 340 female) civil society activists. The participants in these workshops also elected two provincial civil society delegates (1 male, 1 female) to attend the national conference in Kabul.

Collectively, the results of discussions portray Afghanistan as a nation in pursuit of the means to live whilst facing great adversity from insecurity, poverty and a lack of basic services. Across the

¹ Please see Annex 1, for names of CSWC members.

the GCA. It includes the position papers prepared for the GCA, the consultation processes that informed the Afghan civil society position paper, the statements delivered during the GCA and the discussions which took place within and alongside the official GCA agenda. It also presents civil society's initial reflections on the GCA and follow-up plans.

country insecurity was reported as having impacted civil society organisations' (CSO) work the most, with lack of funding often coming a close second, and, in some provinces, tying for first place. At least 1-2 provinces in each region cited the low awareness of the value of civil society as negatively impacting their work, with Baghlan and Takhar placing this on par with insecurity. On the other hand, frequent examples were given of civil society actors playing a part in safeguarding communities from conflict and in advocating for human rights.

Corruption and insecurity at the local, provincial and national levels were seen as the main issues hindering Afghanistan's prosperity by reducing the effectiveness of development and humanitarian programmes. Education (including higher education) and health services continue to be poor and where they do exist quality is low and many people cannot access them. Access is limited for a variety of reasons – gender restrictions and inequality, underqualified staff, and poor infrastructure. In several regions there are high levels of internally displaced people (IDPs) who have little or no assistance or opportunities for employment and are thus caught in a poverty trap.

The participants in the consultations thought that 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. Reform to education and healthcare could be spurred on by civil society advocating to government and international donors but to be effective this would require greater coordination among civil society activists.

Strong recommendations for local, provincial and national government to revise mechanisms to combat corruption came from all provinces. Participants saw advocacy as a means to empower communities to have a say in public 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. CSOs have 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 its local officials in order to build trust.

The final section of each workshop involved all participants in nominating two delegates (one male and one female) to attend the national conference, according to guidelines set out by the CSWC. All participants could either nominate themselves or someone else and submit their votes into a concealed box. 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 qualifications for selection. As a result, 68 provincial delegates were confirmed to attend the national conference and present the views and voices of their colleagues and communities.

For the full provincial consultation report please see the Annex 2.

Geneva Conference on Afghanistan Delegate Selection Process

Afghan Civil Society Delegation

The level of diversity and thematic knowledge within the civil society delegation was welcomed by the donors and other attendees at the GCA. The 10-member delegation comprised five men and five women civil society leaders, with four under 30 years of age. It was ethnically balanced, with two delegates coming from provinces and one representing the disability sector in the country. Five of the delegates had never been to an international donor's conference on Afghanistan.

Deciding on the civil society delegation took three months of planning and consultations culminating in the selection of the ten successful delegates. During the month of August, BAAG and the CSWC reviewed the advantages and disadvantages of election/selection processes used in previous conferences. It was agreed that a selection process would be the most fair and transparent method for determining the delegation. Past experience had shown that an election system is more susceptible to fraud as voting is often based on popularity rather than merit, and puts certain people at a disadvantage if they are not well-known by voters. As the delegation size was small, an election process would put the provincial civil society at particular disadvantage because it could only be held in the capital Kabul. It was further agreed that in order to avoid conflicts of interest, a Screening Committee and a separate Interview Committee, comprised of civil society actors whose organisations had not put forward any nomination for the delegation, should manage the selection process.

On the 3rd September 2018 the process for delegate nominations was opened; applicants were able to apply until 18 September 2018. 101 applications were received for the delegation, 67 male and 34 female; of which 28 were from provinces other than Kabul. Of the total, only 68 met the eligibility criteria outlined in the TOR (51 male, 17 female, and 19 of these were from provinces other than Kabul).

The selection process consisted of three phases – Screening (21st – 22nd September), Interviewing and Interview Committee deliberations (23rd – 25th September).

Initial screening was conducted in the first phase which removed the applications of those that



clearly didn't meet the requirements (e.g. they were staff/members of government, armed forces and international agencies, or parliamentary candidates), had submitted incomplete applications, or did not reach the minimum standards. Candidates were then given scores based on their competencies as outlined in their CVs and cover letters. Priority was given to strong candidates from provinces and to civil society leaders with national recognition. Each candidate was independently scored by two people. As a result, 32 applicants (13 female, 19 male) were shortlisted.

In the second phase, an Interview Committee was formed which assessed each of the 32 shortlisted candidates from 24th – 25th September 2018. An Observer Committee including representatives of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Counterpart International (CPI), and BAAG, monitored the two-day process. Of the 32 applicants 29 attended interviews in Kabul or over Skype. To ensure transparency in the process observers monitored and recorded (audio and visual) each interview. The Interview Committee consisted of:

1. *Rahim Ataei, The Liaison Office*
2. *Ali Latifi, an international journalist*
3. *Mirwais Wardak, Peace Training and Research Organisation*
4. *Naser Timory, Integrity Watch Afghanistan*
5. *Negina Yari, Afghans for Tomorrow*

And an Observer Committee consisted of:

1. *Jawaid Hanifi and Moqamuddin Siraj (UNAMA)*
2. *Rafi Popal (Counterpart International)*
3. *Jawed Nader and Mohammad Sulaiman (BAAG)*

All candidates brought significant thematic expertise, organisational knowledge and personal experience. The final phase required the Interview Committee review each candidate interview and rank their competency on a score sheet. Based on scoring against the criteria, ten candidates were selected for the delegation. Six reserve candidates were selected in case any of the primary candidates were unable to attend the GCA.

The ten Afghan civil society delegates were:

1. *Frozan Mashal – Public Awareness Organisation*
2. *Forozan Rasooli – Equality for Peace and Democracy*
3. *Tamana Asey – Forensic Science Organisation*
4. *Freshta Karimi – Da Qanoon Ghush-tonky*
5. *Suraya Pakzad – Voice of Women Organisation*
6. *Naeem Ayubzada – Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan*

7. *Zakir Stanekzai – Afghanistan Institute for Civil Society*
8. *Raz Mohammad Dalili - Sanayee Development Organisation*
9. *Mohammad Shafaq – Community Centre for the Disabled*
10. *Samiullah Hamidee - Helmand Province Bost Civil Society Organisation*
11. *Humaira Rasuli – Medica Afghanistan (reserve list)*
12. *Zahra Mirzaei – Qalam Cultural and Social Foundation (reserve list)*
13. *Roshan Mashal – Afghan Women's Network (reserve list)*
14. *Ayub Shahryar – Afghanistan Civil Society Forum organisation (reserve list)*
15. *Ahmad Tamim Sabri – Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief & Development (reserve list)*
16. *Abdullah Ahmadi – Afghanistan Democracy and Development Organisation (reserve list)*

INGO Delegation

To support the coordination of INGOs and their participation in the GCA, BAAG secured five additional delegate badges for INGO representatives. The INGO delegation selection

process was announced on the 12th October and received 13 applications. All INGO applicants had over 10 years' experience in Afghanistan and 40% of those nominated by the INGOs were Afghan employees. An Advisory Committee consisting of two INGO representatives screened and shortlisted five INGO delegates and five reserves based on 1) the INGOs experience and knowledge of civil society and core development themes in Afghanistan, and 2) the INGO nominee skills and experience in supporting civil society.

The five successful INGO's and delegates were:

1. *Charles Richard Davy – Afghan Aid*
2. *Jawed Nader – British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group*
3. *Michela Paschetto – Emergency (replaced by Raffaella Baiocchi)*
4. *Mariam Atahi – Save the Children Afghanistan*
5. *Ramin Nouroozi – Counterpart International (replaced by Ian Carver).*

National Civil Society Conference

On the 11th and 14th of November the National Civil Society Conference took place at the Serena Hotel in Kabul, Afghanistan. The national conference was an opportunity to bring together findings from the provincial consultations, discuss and propose national-level recommendations for the civil society position paper. The participants were also able to engage directly with each other and with other stakeholders including the Afghan Government.

The first day of the conference began with presentations from civil society (an overview of the GCA selection process and objectives) and from Mr Sajed Taqwa, Director General of Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting, Ministry of Finance. The afternoon session included an overview of the provincial consultation findings and working group sessions covering the following themes: (1) Peace, security and the protection of civilians and victims of war, (2) Service delivery and aid effectiveness, (3) Anti-corruption, (4) Elections, (5) Strengthening and developing civil society, (6) Social Protection, and (7) Women's inclusion.

Unfortunately, the second day of the conference was postponed to the 14th November due to demonstrations blocking road access to the Serena hotel. A majority of the provincial delegates had to leave before that but their views had already been collected on the first day. A total of 110 civil society actors attended the National Civil Society Conference. This included the 68 provincial civil society actors, the ten GCA delegates and the six reserve delegates.

The outcome of the event was a Conference Resolution, agreed by the CSWC, which covers peace and security, protection of civilians and support to victims of violence; elections; social protection (for People with Disability and internally displaced people); women's inclusion; enhancing the role of civil society; fighting corruption and; service provision and aid effectiveness.

In the resolution, peace and stability were linked to a number of necessary reforms in security, the economy, and social sectors. It was stated that to ensure long term peace in the country, addressing the root causes of violence within Afghanistan and creating consensus among regional and international actors are key. A key point in the resolution was the call on all parties to the conflict to avoid harming civilians. It was also stated that

Afghan civil society actors believed that public trust in elections would improve if the government were to roll out the electronic ID programme; bring key reforms in electoral laws, change the non-transferable voting system to a mixed electoral system; reduce the size of constituencies, and stop the political interference by certain power-holders in the electoral process.

Policy and Advocacy Engagements

Civil society engaged on policy issues with the Afghan Government and the international community through dedicated meetings and other forums such as the Civil Society Support Group meeting and the National Civil Society Conference. Dedicated meetings took place on 17th November with the Ministry of Finance and on 12th November with international donors. In the meeting with Ministry of Finance the latest iteration of the GMAF was shared with members of the CSWC who gave their initial input verbally in the meeting, and in writing afterwards, after soliciting views from other civil society actors.

Since donor organisations were unable to attend the National Conference due to security restrictions in Kabul, the meeting with them on the 12th of November provided an opportunity for the civil society delegates to share an update on their plans, preparations, and key messages for the GCA so far, including those raised at the National Conference, and to discuss these with donors.

Civil Society Position Paper

The civil society position paper was developed based on the findings of the provincial consultations and the discussions which took place at the National Conference. Initially, the findings of the 34 provincial FGDs were summarised and consolidated into eight regional reports. The summary was shared with the Position Paper Consultant, who also attended the National Conference in order to understand the key themes and recommendations as made by the civil society participants. The first draft of the paper was presented to the CSWC for feedback and comments. The comments were incorporated into a second draft, which was then reviewed and agreed by the Afghan civil society delegation. The position paper was used in developing the Civil Society Statement for the GCA.

The position paper outlined the key progress and challenges, with recommendations, under each of the following themes:

1. *Peace, security, and the protection of civilian victims of war*
2. *Aid Effectiveness and Service Delivery*
3. *Fight against corruption*
4. *Women's inclusion*
5. *Elections*
6. *Social protection of the disabled and internally displaced*
7. *Strengthening and developing the role of civil society*

For the full civil society position paper please see the Annex 3.

Synthesis Paper

The Synthesis Paper synthesized the 22 civil society position papers prepared for the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan (GCA). Civil society views were outlined in seven areas: (i) peace and security; (ii) citizen's rights and protection; (iii) governance and corruption; (iv) the economy; (v) displacement and integration; (vi) development in health, education, agriculture and livelihoods; and (vii) a new way of working: the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

Given the mutual challenges faced by the Government of Afghanistan, the international community and civil society in achieving their common goal of developing Afghanistan and improving the wellbeing of its citizens, the following overarching recommendations are offered by Afghan and international civil society:

- The Afghan Government should acknowledge the importance of civil society — national and international — in furthering Afghanistan's development, and engage CSOs in a spirit of mutual respect, co-operation and support;
- The Afghan Government should abide by international conventions and treaties entered into, and strive to fully implement ratified legislation and official policies;

- Donors should deliver long-term support to Afghanistan, dependent upon the Afghan Government's implementation of reforms and attainment of short-term deliverables; and
- All actors should realise the humanitarian-development-peace nexus; enabling and supporting the adoption of collective, needs-based and people-centred programming.

For the full synthesis paper please see the Annex 4.



GENEVA CONFERENCE WEEK

Afghan & International Civil Society Workshop

On the 26th November BAAG hosted the Afghan and International Civil Society (AICS) event at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Geneva. The event welcomed over 100 participants from international NGOs, think-tanks, international donors and the government of Afghanistan. The agenda for the day consisted of workshops on six themes (governance, peacebuilding, civic space, gender equality and rights, service provision, and humanitarian response) and were followed by related panel discussions. The final session was a ministerial panel discussion on the theme 'Partnering for a secure and prosperous Afghanistan'.

The objectives of the event were three: Firstly, bringing together Afghan and international civil society actors to exchange knowledge and expertise and discuss key priorities for Afghanistan's development. Secondly, preparing effectively for key advocacy events and media engagement opportunities in Geneva. And thirdly, forming and developing ongoing relations between Afghan and international civil society and the Afghan government and international donors, and presenting to the latter a short civil society statement on the 28th November.

The first section of the day allowed delegations to come together in a working group and discuss two core themes for one hour. Moderating each working group was one civil society delegate and one facilitator. Facilitators in working groups were: Hameed Hakimi - Chatham House, Mirwais Wardak - Peace Training and Research Organisation, Ruby Ajanee - Oxfam, Lucille Grosjean - Action Against

Hunger, Andreas Stefansson – Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, and Fiona Gall – ACBAR.

The closing panel, moderated by former United Nations Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General for Afghanistan Mr Mark Bowden, explored the role of partnerships in building a secure and prosperous Afghanistan post 2018. The Ministerial panel included the Minister of Economy Dr Mustafa Mastoor representing the government of Afghanistan, Mr Shubham Chaudhuri, Country Director for Afghanistan at the World Bank, Ms Suraya Pakzad representing Afghan civil society, and Mr Ian Carver representing Counterpart International.

Summary of Working Groups and Panel Discussions

Discussions and debates throughout the day acknowledged the unique role Afghan civil society had played in filling the gaps left by government (in service provision) and holding the government to account (advocacy). The Minister of Economy agreed and stated civil society played a crucial role in promoting human rights, delivering basic services, monitoring government activities and promoting inclusive citizen participation. Concerns were raised about the current and future financial sustainability of civil society activities and one panellist advised CSOs to ask themselves 'how long will funding continue?'

Opinions on Afghanistan's electoral process were varied with many in the audience asking whether Afghanistan needed to reform its electoral processes due to the low level of turnout and high levels of violence and corruption. Those in favour of maintaining the current system called

on CSOs to support citizens in challenging the politicisation of electoral institutions. There were calls for donors to be more vocal in speaking out against and cease funding to elites who have been identified as corrupt. It was also recommended that the presence of international observers and the reform of electoral mechanism and systems would increase public trust.

There was general consensus that civil society could play a prominent role in promoting peace through 1) Advocacy – promoting an inclusive peace through speaking out against 'elite deals' and advocating for an agreement of transparency to set out 'red lines' in track-one talks. 2) Advocacy – promoting transitional justice and a victims-centred approach to peace, putting the needs of vulnerable groups and victims at the heart of the peace process as opposed to solely punishing perpetrators. And, 3) Utilising specialist peacebuilding and rights-based CSOs mediation skills to initiate local peacebuilding efforts and providing reconciliation programmes (e.g. for reintegration).

As a result of these discussions three core areas for cooperation was agreed and it was suggested to continue these discussions with the government departments in Afghanistan.

1. *Between civil society and government departments from local to central level: Civil society requires the financial and legal support of the State whereas the State requires the service delivery and community support CSOs can provide. Legally-binding frameworks should be formed for CSOs/NGOs to enable them to collaborate with Ministries and to monitor their provision of services.*
2. *Among CSOs: Following the NGO conference 2018 that was organised by Ministry of Economy, the Minister called for participants to form a*

working group to enhance trust among CSOs, state and donors, which he thought could strengthen CSOs influence on Government processes such as consultations on the NGO Law, Child Act, Access to Information, Law of Demonstration etc.

3. *Tri-partite cooperation: Sustainable partnerships between CSO, State and international community are needed. The development of these could be assisted by a review of the current mechanisms of engagement and coordination and by addressing any gaps that are identified.*

Civil Society Statement

The civil society statement, agreed by the delegates, was delivered by Naeem Ayubzada and Frozan Mashal, the two civil society spokespeople, during the GCA main event on the 28th November. The statement, which was allotted ten minutes, was based on the analysis and recommendations in the civil society position paper and it included messages on peace, civilian protection, justice, improving governance, elections, provision of services, women's inclusion, and civil society's role in the country's development.

"A peace that is narrowly defined as the cessation of violence or a 'quick fix' cannot be sustainable. A peace process that understands, involves and takes into account the views of people at the micro and macro levels of conflict and generates trust, can achieve a lasting peace. We therefore call on international donors to fund peacebuilding at all levels of social and political life." Civil society statement.

For the full civil society statement please see the Annex 5.



Civil Society Side Meeting

The Civil Society Side Meeting took place on the first day of the conference on the 27th November. The aim of the meeting was to provide an opportunity to improve civil society, state and international community understanding and to have a frank exchange of views. The participants comprised of representatives of the Afghan and international civil society groups, Dr Mustafa Mastoor, Afghan Minister of Economy, and representatives of all major international donors. The meeting was chaired by Elizabeth Winter, BAAG Senior Adviser, with opening remarks by Freshta Karimi (DQG) and Mariam Atahi (Save the Children).

Following reflections by Minister Mastoor, participants were asked to provide their input. The key issues discussed were the shrinking space for civil society, mechanisms of engagements between State and civil society; effective ways to combat corruption; access of civil society groups to reliable information; and reporting mechanisms of NGOs to government agencies. Some of the requests made by civil society delegates to the Afghan Government were:

1. *That the Afghan Government should publicly support civil society, its value and its oversight role, which would be facilitated by a clear definition of civil society.*

2. *That incorrect information about civil society be refuted and corrected.*
3. *That necessary information should be provided to civil society and dissemination improved, in line with the relevant laws.*
4. *That agreed mechanisms of coordination with the government should be put into practice, ensuring that civil society voices are taken into account.*
5. *That a practical strategy be put into place to fight corruption which would include providing public servant salaries that are enough to live on, resistance to pressure to exclude civil society representatives from the Anti-Corruption Commission and action against any person/organization, (including NGOs) where there is evidence of corruption.*



Policy Engagements and Meetings

The Afghan civil society delegates engaged with international policymakers on a number of occasions during the GCA. In addition to many brief interactions throughout the conference week, the delegates took part in four separate meetings with the American, British and German delegations:

- 26th November, American delegation: Alice G. Wells, US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs; and Karen Freeman; United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Assistant to Administrator; Office of Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs
- 27th November: German delegation: Martin Jaeger, Head of German delegation; State Secretary of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
- 27th and 28th November: British delegation: Baroness Hodgson of Abinger; Co-Chair of All-Party Parliamentary Group on Women, Peace and Security; and Lindy Cameron Director General for Country Programmes at Department for International Development

These meetings allowed for a frank exchange of perspectives over key issues including the

peace talks, the elections and humanitarian and development issues. Civil society delegates expressed their appreciation of the international community's support since 2002, which has been a key factor in the Afghan people's progress. They said Afghanistan's dependence on international aid could be reduced by designing and implementing programmes that are based on real needs and take into account the participation and ownership of communities.

On the peace efforts, the civil society delegates emphasised that a peace which compromises the achievements in social and political rights of citizens, particularly those of women, will not be acceptable for Afghans. They emphasised the need for the participation of all sectors of society in the peace process and called for strong voices of women to be an integral part of it. Doubting the Taliban's rhetoric, that they respect women's rights, the delegates said that the reality of life for women in Taliban controlled areas contradicts these claims; and that if the Taliban are truly committed to women's rights, they should also include women in their own negotiation team.

The delegates also said that for long term peace to prevail in the country, all development partners should address the root causes of conflict and injustice. They include tackling the high levels of poverty and unemployment especially among the youth; ensuring citizen's access to justice; and providing effective social protection to vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities. Civil society groups can play an important role in inculcating a culture of non-violence and peace in the communities.

The civil society delegates also emphasised the important role of free and fair elections in the legitimacy of the future government, which would give the government a stronger mandate for peace and reform. They advocated for reform in the electoral bodies which would ensure that the mistakes of the parliamentary elections are not repeated in the next year's presidential elections.



The international policymakers also acknowledged the important role of civil society for the long-term peace and prosperity of Afghanistan and emphasised their commitment to the Afghan people through the transformation decade and beyond. They promised to advocate for reform in governance and inclusion in the peace talks.

Summary of GCA Outcomes

General Outcomes

The main outcome of the conference was the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework (GMAF). The GMAF document is a revised version of the Self Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework (SMAF) which was agreed and adopted at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan in 2016. The GMAF outlines short-term deliverables through to 2020 under six key areas:

1. *Improving security and political stability;*
2. *Anti-corruption, governance, rule of law, and human rights;*
3. *Restoring fiscal sustainability & integrity of public finance and commercial banking*
4. *Reforming development planning and management & ensuring citizen's development rights;*
5. *Private sector development and inclusive growth and development; and*
6. *Development partnerships and aid effectiveness.*

The conference Communique set out the overall agreements from participants on peace, reform, and development.

Civil Society-related Commitments

Civil society had fruitful discussions throughout the conference week with Afghan and international policymakers, particularly with the Minister of Economy Dr. Mustafa Mastoor who participated in the Afghan & International Civil Society event final panel discussion as well as the Civil Society Side Meeting, and agreed to meet with civil society to follow-up on the topics and commitments discussed.

Commitments included:

Space for civil society

- Recognition of the important role of civil society and independent media in Afghanistan's development, and the reiteration to strengthen the role of civil society in political processes, including in providing oversight and monitoring Government performance.
- That the Afghan Government should publicly support civil society, its value and its oversight role, which would be facilitated by a clear definition of civil society.
- That incorrect information about civil society be refuted and corrected.
- That a definition of civil society be explored so to clarify representation.

Mechanisms for engagement

- That agreed mechanisms of coordination with the government should be put into practice, ensuring that civil society voices are taken into account.
- That a formal consultation process be put in place for engaging civil society before the NGO law is amended and approved by the Cabinet by end of 2019.

Anti-corruption

- The recognition of the centrality of combating

corruption to Afghanistan's future.

- That a practical strategy be put into place to fight corruption which would include providing public servant salaries that are enough to live on, resistance to pressure to exclude civil society representatives from the Anti-Corruption Commission and action against any person/organization, (including NGOs) where there is evidence of corruption.

Access to information

- That necessary information should be provided to civil society and dissemination improved, in line with the relevant laws.

Reporting

- The establishment of a 'one stop shop' to receive reports from civil society organizations (removing the need for a variety of reports in different formats) and examine any complaints they may have.

Peace

- The emphasis that peace talks with the Taliban must be based on a broad political consensus involving all of society including women and persons belonging to minorities.
- That peace must be underpinned by serious efforts and reform as well as inclusive economic and social programs.

Women's inclusion

- More must be done to address women's socio-economic needs and levels of violence against girls and women which are among the world's highest.
- More tangible measures are needed to eliminate violence and bring perpetrators to justice in accordance with the Penal Code and provisions of the Elimination of Violence against Women Law.

International aid levels

- Commitment from the international community to provide \$15.2 billion for Afghanistan's development priorities up to 2020 and to direct continuing but gradually declining financial support to Afghanistan.

Service provision and fighting poverty

- Improving and accelerating the provision of basic services throughout the country and taking into account the diverse needs of the population including women and people with disability.
- Immediate provision of livelihood projects

and the adoption of long-term solutions to strengthen resilience against economic, social and climate shocks, particularly in the agricultural sector.

Elections

- Effective preparations for presidential and other foreseen elections in 2019 to ensure maximum transparency, credibility, participation and security.

Media Engagements

With the assistance of a Geneva-based Media Consultant, the civil society delegates engaged with Geneva-based and international media outlets. A total of 24 interviews were carried out with broadcast and print media, including on the BBC World Service and Al Jazeera. A minimum of 40 articles mentioned a civil society delegate in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Norwegian and other European print media. This wide media coverage exceeded the set objectives.

In these interviews, the delegates raised the voices of Afghans on a wide variety of themes including stopping violence and harm to civilians; electoral reform; help for vulnerable Afghans including women and people with disabilities who face inequality and lack of access to services; and supporting Afghan rural communities to offset the harms of drought.

To ensure effective preparation for media engagements, the profiles and short biographies of the civil society delegates were distributed to media outlets. These were also used on the BAAG website and for social media content. In addition, a press release was distributed to the UN press corps and other media ahead of the conference. This resulted in the UN allowing a civil society press conference to take place with twelve journalists from the UN Correspondents' Association in Geneva with two delegates and the Director of BAAG. In addition, the media consultant provided a training session for the delegates which involved practicing interview techniques with international media.



Afghan Civil Society Statement on the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan

Following the GCA, the civil society statement was developed based on the policy papers agreed and commitments made during the conference. They consisted of the Conference Communique, the Geneva Mutual Agreement Framework (GMAF) and the statements from the delegations during the main event and side meetings. The civil society statement states that the GCA was a step in the right direction in improving global understanding and support for the long term peace and prosperity of Afghanistan. In addition, the main conclusions of the conference under various themes were analysed and other immediate responses and recommendations were presented by the Civil Society Working Committee and the civil society delegation to the GCA.

For the full Afghan civil society statement on the GCA please see the Annex 7.

Plans for Follow-up

As was the case following the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan in 2016, the Civil Society Working Committee (CSWC) and delegates have planned to follow-up on the commitments made during the GCA and discuss how they could be monitored, particularly in preparation for upcoming international events such as the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB) and the international pledging conference in 2020. Current follow-up plans include delegates and PFOs returning to the provinces to report on the outcomes of the GCA. This will ensure the views of provincial civil society are heard and their involvement in follow-up activities and future consultations, on a provincial and national level, is assured. Current ideas include monitoring each of the six GMAF areas (shadow report) and creating a hub for reports and other information published in relation to the six GMAF areas.

- 1. Afghan NGOs Coordination Bureau (ANCB)**
- 2. Afghan Women's Network (AWN)**
- 3. Afghan Women's Educational Center (AWEC)**
- 4. Afghanistan Civil Society Forum organisation (ACSFo)**
- 5. Afghanistan National Education Coalition (ANEC)**
- 6. Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development (ACBAR)**
- 7. Civil Society and Human Rights Network (CSHRN)**
- 8. Civil Society Joint Working Group (CS-JWG)**
- 9. Community Center for the Disabled (CCD)**
- 10. Da Qanoon Ghush-tonky (DQG)**
- 11. EPD (Equality for Peace and Democracy)**
- 12. Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA)**
- 13. Salah Consortium**
- 14. Sanayee Development Organization (SDO)**
- 15. South-western Afghanistan & Baluchistan Association for Coordination (SWABAC)**
- 16. The Liaison Office (TLO)**
- 17. Transparent Election Foundation of Afghanistan (TEFA)**
- 18. Women and Children Legal Research Foundation (WCLRF)**

ANNEX 2: REPORT OF THE PROVINCIAL CIVIL SOCIETY CONSULTATIONS

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 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 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 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 centres 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.

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), 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 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.
- 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 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

(Bamyan, 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 Bamyan 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
- 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.

Agenda

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 only one of the below 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; 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. 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>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> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> d. Explain that to save time, you will need to cut down the numbers. 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. 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. 	60 mins

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.
- 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.

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:

- d. Explain that to save time, you will need to cut down the numbers.
- 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.
- 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.

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 grew² 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 estimated³ that Afghans paid nearly \$2.9 billion in bribes. With at least 54 percent⁴ 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 precipitous⁵ decline in the value of the Afghani against foreign currencies. According to media reports, since 2011, the Afghani has fallen more than 40 percent⁶ in comparison to the dollar. Though the decline 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.

² "Unemployment rate spikes in Afghanistan". Tolo news, 2016.

<https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/unemployment-rate-spikes-afghanistan>

³ 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

⁴ "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/>

⁵ "Currency markets - Afghan Afghani" Trading Economics, 2018

<https://tradingeconomics.com/afghanistan/currency>

⁶ "Afghani Devaluation: Unintended or Deliberate?" Pajhwok Afghan News Reflecting the Truth, 2018

<https://www.pajhwok.com/en/opinions/afghani-devaluation-unintended-or-deliberate-0>

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 figures⁷ 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 report⁸ 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 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

⁷ October 30 2018 Report - Special Investigator General for Afghan Reconstruction.

<https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2018-10-30qr.pdf>

⁸ 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

along the borders, where explosives can easily be brought into the country, drug trafficking is rampant, insurgents are able to 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 Mol and provincial ANA should be improved and central Mol 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 percent⁹ of Afghans currently live below the poverty line, which means corruption and bribery are not 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**

⁹ "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/>

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 1,000¹⁰ 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 percent¹¹ 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

10 "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>

11 "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>

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.
- **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 million¹² Afghans, including a record 33 percent¹³ of women, withstood concerted Taliban attacks targeting the polls, to cast their ballots in the 17th¹⁴ 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 devices¹⁵ (which were being employed for the first¹⁶ 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 extended¹⁷ 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 procedures. The latest election was yet another example of the urgent need for proper election reform in the country.

12 "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>

13 "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>

14 "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/>

15 "Election Commission Unveils New Biometrics Devices" Tolo news, 2018. <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/election-commission%C2%A0unveils-new-biometric-devices>

16 "Afghanistan elections conundrum (21): Biometric verification likely to spawn host of new problems" Afghan Analyst Network, 2018. <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/afghanistan-elections-conundrum-21-biometric-testing-likely-to-spawn-host-of-new-problems/>

17 "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>

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 700,000¹⁸ to 800,000¹⁹, with at least 400,000²⁰ 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 injured²¹ 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 20²²

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

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

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

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

21 "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

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

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 Nations²³, 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 60,000²⁴ 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 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

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

23 "Drought grips large parts of Afghanistan" United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2018. https://docs.google.com/document/d/191Ucz2SY-OCXt8lwqtGu6iNu7_S7CY9uuzd3d8ZaM/edit

24 "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/>

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 accused²⁵ 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.**

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

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.

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 recent²⁶ 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.

²⁶ "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>

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.**
- **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.**

ANNEX 4: CIVIL SOCIETY SYNTHESIS PAPER

SYNTHESIS OF AFGHAN AND INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY PAPERS FOR THE GENEVA CONFERENCE ON AFGHANISTAN 27TH – 28TH NOVEMBER 2018

SUMMARY

This document synthesizes a series of civil society position papers prepared for the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan (GCA). Civil society views are outlined in seven areas: (i) peace and security; (ii) citizen's rights and protection; (iii) displacement and integration; (iv) governance and corruption; (v) the economy; (vi) development in health, education, agriculture and livelihoods; and (vii) a new way of working: the humanitarian–development–peace nexus.

Given the mutual challenges faced by the Government of Afghanistan (GoA), the international community and civil society in achieving their common goal of developing Afghanistan and improving the wellbeing of its citizens, the following overarching recommendations are offered by Afghan and international civil society:

- GoA should acknowledge the importance of civil society – Afghan and international – in furthering Afghanistan's development, and engage civil society organisations in a spirit of mutual respect, co-operation and support;
- GoA should abide by international conventions and treaties entered into, and strive to fully implement ratified legislation and official policies;
- Donors should deliver long-term support to Afghanistan, dependent upon the GoA's implementation of reforms and attainment of short-term deliverables; and
- All actors should realise the humanitarian–development–peace nexus; enabling and supporting the adoption of collective, needs-based and people-centred programming.

ACRONYMS

ANPDF	Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (2016)
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
BAAG	British & Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group
BCA	Brussels Conference on Afghanistan
CSWC	Civil Society Working Committee
DiRec	Displacement and Return Executive Committee
DoRR	Department of Refugees and Repatriation
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EVAW	Elimination of Violence Against Women
GCA	Geneva Conference on Afghanistan
GMAF	Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework (2018)
GoA	Government of Afghanistan
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IWM	Integrated Watershed Management
NAP 1325	National Action Plan for UN Security Council Resolution 1325
NPP	National Priority Program
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
SMAF	Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework (2015), updated with deliverables to become SMART SMAF (2016)
SSAR	Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

1. PURPOSE

This paper summarises the key views and recommendations made by Afghan and international civil society organisations in position papers prepared for the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan (GCA), held on 27th and 28th November 2018. See the Annex for the list of papers reviewed. This synthesis paper has been prepared by the British & Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG).

2. CONTEXT

The GCA was an international ministerial-level conference co-hosted by GoA and the United Nations in Geneva. It was attended by delegations from 65 countries and 35 international organisations, and representatives of the private sector and civil society, including the media. At the GCA, the National Unity Government outlined progress made in implementing reforms since the previous Brussels Conference in Afghanistan (BCA) held in 2016. Pending challenges were also discussed, primarily through a series of side events and meetings. In addition, a joint statement was presented by Afghan civil society to all conference delegates.

At the mid-point of Afghanistan's Transformation Decade (2015 to 2024), the GCA built upon earlier conferences held in London (2012) and Brussels (2016), with the adoption of the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework (GMAF). The GMAF builds upon previous policy frameworks, including the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework (SMART SMAF) agreed in 2016, to provide a set of short-term deliverables for the period 2019 to 2020. The GMAF remains in-line with the overarching national policy framework, the 2016 Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) and the 10 National Priority Programs (NPPs).

3. CONSULTATIONS

As part of the GCA, 10 Afghan civil society delegates (5 female, 5 male) were invited to participate in the conference proceedings and side events and meetings on the 27th and 28th of November. Their selection and participation in the GCA was managed by the Civil Society Working Committee (CSWC). In addition, international and national civil society organisations operating in Afghanistan came together for a day of preparation on the 26th of November. The position papers summarised

in this document were prepared to inform civil society participation at GCA. The Afghan Civil Society Joint Statement was delivered on day two of the conference (28th November 2018), and built upon the previous day of civil society dialogue.

Furthermore, the position papers synthesized in this document were themselves based upon consultations, and ongoing field-based research, undertaken across Afghanistan. Consultations were organised at national and subnational levels on a variety of themes by a number of civil society organisations.

4. THE PAPERS

Developments since the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan in 2016

Civil society welcomes the progress attained by the GoA, the international community and civil society since the BCA. While a number of challenges remain and some have deepened, a number of significant achievements have been made. Examples of achievements mentioned in the position papers include:

- President Ghani's February 2018 offer to the Taliban, for peace talks with no preconditions;
- GoA commitment to the National Action Plan for UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (NAP 1325), including appointment of ministerial Focal Points, delivery of regional Focal Point workshops, and preparation of two annual reports (2016 and 2017);
- GoA's steps to improve implementation of Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) Law;
- GoA's preparation of the Afghanistan National Strategy for Combatting Corruption (2017), related anticorruption commitments made in the SMART SMAF (2016), and joining of the Open Government Partnership in 2017;
- GoA's efforts to exceed international best practices for the extractives sector, including ongoing revision of the Minerals Law (2014) and committing to governance reforms relating to anticorruption in the industry;
- GoA's partial, yet increasing, enforcement of the Safe Schools Declaration; and

- GoA's adoption and support of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF).

Peace and Security

Across all the GCA position papers there is agreement that security in Afghanistan is deteriorating. The Taliban presently control, or influence, more than 45 percent of the country.²⁷ The so-called Islamic State have firmly established themselves in the north and east of the country. Criminality continues to rise. And, in the first nine months of 2018 alone, UNAMA reported 8,050 civilian casualties (5,252 injuries, 2,798 deaths).²⁸ This is a 5 percent increase from the same period a year prior. In addition to these harrowing figures are high levels of casualties amongst the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). Arresting this decline, and indeed securing a peace agreement to end the conflict, are of paramount importance.

The re-emergence of peace negotiations in 2018 has been met with mixed response. Seeking a negotiated peace in Afghanistan is a goal embraced by civil society. And, in this regard, President Ghani's February 2018 offer of talks to the Taliban is acknowledged as a vital first step. Yet, for Afghan civil society, a number of major concerns exist. First, peace negotiations must not take place behind closed doors. They should be transparent, accountable and inclusive. Of crucial significance, according to a number of civil society position papers, is the participation of women and ethnic and religious minorities in negotiations.

Second, it is also vitally important that no concessions are made with regard to hard-won achievements secured since 2002. Peace negotiations must preserve the Constitution of Afghanistan and protect women's rights and the rights of minorities. One civil society position paper summarises these points succinctly: "We do not accept any preconditions preventing the participation of women in the peace process or solutions that harm and curtail their rights".²⁹

Lastly, Afghan civil society "calls on the US not to replace Afghans in negotiations with the Taliban";³⁰ it is imperative that peace negotiations are Afghan-led. While the United States and the wider international community have a vested interest in achieving peace in Afghanistan, it is key that they

²⁷ BAAG, 2018a.

²⁸ UNAMA, Protection of Civilians Report, 2018.

²⁹ AWN, 2018: 2.

³⁰ CSJWG, 2018: 6.

do not agree terms with the Taliban on behalf of the GoA and the Afghan citizenry. Such an agreement might include concessions unacceptable to Afghans and, lacking Afghan ownership, would be unsustainable.

Citizens' Rights and Protection

In line with UNAMA's tracking of civilian casualties in 2018, international civil society organisations working in the health sector note not only equally high levels of war-wounded patients, but also an increase in insecurity (measured in mass casualty attacks).³¹ Given these trends, civil society calls upon all parties of the conflict to protect the civilian population, civilian hospitals and the transportation of the wounded or medical equipment, as stipulated in international humanitarian law.

Women's rights still stand as a major issue for civil society in Afghanistan. In addition to calls for women's participation in peace talks, highlighted above, chief concerns are women's political participation and their legal and social protection. Women's representation in leadership positions and government employment remains below 30 percent.³² Causes include the lack of political support for women's participation, lack of educational and training opportunities afforded to women, and harmful practices constraining women. Further action must be taken to overcome these limitations. Positive steps taken since the BCA should be noted, including the GoA attempts to improve delivery of the NAP 1325 (including appointment of ministerial Focal Points, delivery of regional Focal Point workshops, and preparation of annual reports in 2016 and 2017). Yet, further implementation, localization and monitoring of the plan is required.

Three central issues arise with regard to women's protections. First, violence against women is a serious concern for civil society. Recent steps taken by the GoA to improve implementation of the EVAW Law are appreciated. Yet, these efforts must be extended. It is imperative that steps are taken to improve delivery of the EVAW Law and monitor its execution. Likewise, building awareness of the law amongst the men and women of Afghanistan will be crucial to its success.

Second, women's shelters were also a pressing issue. While shelters remain deeply controversial in many quarters of Afghan society, one civil society organisation called for a shift, "from secrecy

³¹ EMERGENCY, 2018.

³² AWN, 2018.

to mainstreaming”.³³ Acknowledging that such shelters do have shortcomings, the position paper reminded us that “women’s shelters in Afghanistan are providing hundreds of women and children across the country with safety and immediate protection”.³⁴ Civil society recommends, amongst other points, establishing women’s shelters in underserved areas (including Kandahar, where no shelters exist); simultaneously securing sustainable funding for shelters from the GoA, whilst also maintaining their independence from government influence; raising public awareness of the value of shelters and that their functioning is consistent with Islamic principles; and supporting shelters to develop their capacity to offer much-needed training for residents.

In 2016, it was estimated that 2.2 million children between the age of 8 and 14 work in Afghanistan.³⁵ And, child labor is on the rise. The growth in working children is driven by both poverty and conflict. Poverty results in households sacrificing long-term investments in children’s education in favour of short-term needs, such as having them work to provide immediate income for the family. Conflict equates to high dropout rates caused by uncertainty, low quality and inaccessible schooling, and schools being targeted in armed conflict. To protect children’s rights and diminish the negative social, physical and mental health impacts of child labour, civil society calls for the GoA to develop better policies to protect children for hard labour and ensure employers of children are punished. Children’s rights should also be preserved in apprenticeships, where the GoA should work closely with employers and parents to ensure suitable protections are in place for those working children over the legal age of employment. To support legislation, further research and monitoring of child labour will be required. It is also expected that the GoA better support orphanages to provide education for the children in their care and ensure schools remain safe places for students.

In 2005, 10.8 percent of Afghans suffered from a severe or very severe disability.³⁶ Since 2005 many more Afghans suffer from disabilities caused by the ongoing conflict, including from increasing levels of civilian casualty. To ensure protections for persons with disabilities, Afghan civil society believes it is necessary to both build upon and extend existing commitments. This includes the GoA reporting

33 APPRO, 2018i: 1.

34 Ibid: 1.

35 APPRO, 2018a.

36 GoA, National Disability Survey of Afghanistan, 2005.

regularly on the UN Convention on Rights for Persons with Disabilities, as a means to measure progress in securing said rights. Furthermore, the GoA should endorse the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, committing to render humanitarian assistance inclusive of persons with disabilities.

Displacement is worsening in Afghanistan. One international civil society organisation indicated the scale of the problem: “Afghanistan has experienced unprecedented levels of return in recent years and, compounded by exponential rises in internal displacement, the situation now constitutes a major humanitarian crisis”.³⁷ From 2012 to 2017, over 1.2 million Afghans were internally displaced.³⁸ In 2018 alone, conflict in 32 of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces drove 250,000 people from their homes.³⁹ Furthermore, drought in 2018 displaced 275,000 Afghans.⁴⁰ Added to these high levels of internal displacement are significant numbers of Afghans returning from Pakistan, Iran and other countries. From 2012 to mid-2018, more than 1.3 million Afghans returned from Pakistan and over 445,000 from Iran.⁴¹ Returns from Pakistan were just over 25,000 in 2018.⁴² Yet, 2018 saw Afghans returning in record numbers from Iran. Almost 700,000 people returned from Iran in this one calendar year.⁴³ This was driven by Iran’s economic downturn, related currency devaluation and intimidation by Iranian authorities.⁴⁴

The coercive methods employed by governments to promote return of the Afghan refugees they host, is of serious concern to international civil society. In Iran, this constitutes ongoing pressure and harassment. In Pakistan, systematic extortion, arbitrary arrest and detention, police raids on refugee homes, house demolitions and the closing of refugee schools are commonplace. These tactics are used to coerce Afghans into “voluntary” repatriation.

The EU, on the other hand, has made it easier for its Member States to return refugees or migrants; leveraging its aid to pressure the GoA into accepting increasing numbers of returnees without sufficient capacity to absorb and support these new arrivals. This, alongside the increasing tendency for Member States to repatriate Afghans back to precarious

37 BAAG, 2018b: 1.

38 NRC, 2018.

39 ADSP, 2018.

40 ARC, 2018.

41 NRC, 2018.

42 BAAG, 2018b.

43 Ibid.

44 ADSP, 2018.

situations, is deeply questionable and arguably in contravention of the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. There is also evidence the UK, Norway and other EU Member States are using bureaucratic loopholes to knowingly deport minors. International civil society are opposed to the use of such questionable methods, particularly given the levels of violence and vulnerability returnees are likely to experience upon arrival in Afghanistan.

Displacement and Integration

After being displaced, people’s needs grow. One of the position papers elaborates: “IDPs in Afghanistan are poorer, have reduced access to education and livelihoods, and face significantly increased protection risks as they struggle to make ends meet”.⁴⁵ Regarding return: Civil society assessments indicate that 20 percent of those returning need humanitarian support and 72 percent of returnees are displaced on return.⁴⁶ These vulnerable returnees effectively become internally displaced. Most of these returnees-cum-IDPs do not have a sustainable source of income, without which “food insecurity looms and negative coping mechanisms range from unsustainable debt to child labor”.⁴⁷

While the effects of displacement are significant, Afghan and international civil society see opportunities to more effectively respond to the growing humanitarian crisis. This requires galvanising national policy processes, while also capitalising on regional and international initiatives. A key step in reinvigorating the national policy environment would be guaranteeing that the Displacement and Return Executive Committee (DiRec) operates in a transparent, accountable and participatory manner. Furthermore, sustained efforts are needed to implement the National IDP Policy that, existing in draft form since 2014, has yet to be enacted. In a similar vein, while civil society acknowledges the GoA’s efforts to revise the petitions system (which directs aid distribution), further work is required to demonstrate the impact of these changes at local-levels. Lastly, a review of the process for IDPs to lodge claims with the Department of Refugees and Repatriation (DoRR) is advised. Currently, the registration process is so bureaucratic and expensive that many IDPs cannot access assistance.

45 ADSP, 2018: 2.

46 BAAG, 2018b.

47 NRC, 2018: 3.

In 2018, the GoA also agreed to participate in and pilot the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). This news was warmly received by members of international civil society. CRRF, a structure through which to plan a more predictable and complete response to displacement issues, will likely have positive impacts upon humanitarian response in Afghanistan. Yet, concerns remain for international civil society organisations. First, the framework’s emphasis on voluntary repatriation is problematic. One of the position papers states: “In a context where asylum opportunities for Afghans are under sustained erosion, both in the region and in Europe, and despite the widely acknowledged deterioration of security conditions, such an emphasis is unjustifiable and should be publicly acknowledged as such”.⁴⁸ As discussed above, in many cases “voluntary” repatriation is not truly voluntary or free of coercion. This needs to be made explicit, counteracted and factored into implementation of the framework.

Second, caution is necessary in determining how to adapt the CRRF to the conflict-affected setting of Afghanistan (as opposed to a more typical refugee-hosting setting). No guidance is available and adaptation could have unknown impacts on the planning and delivery of humanitarian assistance. Third, intentions to use the regional Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) as a vehicle for the CRRF is concerning. While the establishment of the SSAR in 2011 was a positive step, its general lack of transparency and narrow consultative scope indicate the mechanism does not engender the principles enshrined in the CRRF.

Governance and Corruption

Civil society sees high levels of corruption as one of the main factors undermining progress for the country and people of Afghanistan. While major steps must be taken to tackle the issue, civil society recognises the recent efforts of the GoA. Namely, the anticorruption commitments incorporated into the SMART SMAF (2016), the ratification of the Afghanistan National Strategy for Combatting Corruption (and establishment of Special Anticorruption Secretariat) and the country’s participation in the Open Government Partnership from 2017.

Despite this progress, much is to be done if corruption is to be overcome. Key to this is coordinated action from the GoA, the international community, civil society and multinational

48 ADSP, 2018: 2.

businesses. The GoA must press forward with agreed commitments and policies, whilst also undergoing administrative reform to minimise transaction costs in tax collection and basic service delivery. Moreover, the government should take bolder steps in regulating the private sector in Afghanistan and enforcing tax compliance. At the same time, a coordinated effort must be undertaken by the donor community, civil society and multinational businesses against corruption in both their internal processes and in their dealings with government officials. Donors must also pay closer attention to monitoring how their funds are appropriated and, indeed, misappropriated. They cannot continue to disburse funds as before, and yet expect different outcomes. Finally, civil society actors themselves have a two-fold role to play. This includes independent oversight of government and donor spending, along with taking greater responsibility for raising awareness of corruption amongst the general public and promoting methods to combat it.

A novel solution promoting schooling as a method to overcome corruption was outlined in one position paper. This argued: "cross referencing anticorruption education to legal and religious norms can instil anticorruption values in students".⁴⁹ Engaging schooling for anticorruption purposes is undertaken in two main ways. On the one hand, curricula should be updated to include anticorruption principles, educators should be retrained to use these revised curricula and parents engaged to raise student awareness. On the other hand, extracurricular activities should be initiated, to build on classroom learning and engage the wider community.

A secondary, yet important governance concern articulated in GCA position papers is the manner that the government engages civil society. Echoing discussions above, the chronic nature of corruption in Afghanistan means that civil society is heavily constrained and spends significant amounts of time dealing with excessive bureaucracy and managing bribery. At the same time there is a general feeling amongst civil society that government officials are meddling in their work. This constraint is underscored by civil society actors finding it difficult to obtain reliable information from government sources. This translates not only into challenges when monitoring government actions (arguably the reason government officials make it hard to obtain accurate information in the first instance), but also

an inability to implement national legislation and follow government policies and procedures.

A number of recommendations were raised by civil society in addressing these problematic state-society relations. They include the need for greater collaboration between the GoA, the international community and civil society (including a commitment to long-term international funding for national civil society organisations). Moreover, an improved relationship with government was especially desirable. Such a relationship would include the development of a formal mechanism by which civil society could be consulted in the drafting of laws, and could be realised through the establishment of a NPP focused on developing a vibrant and sustainable civil society.

The Economy

The Afghan economy continues to struggle since the onset of the economic downturn in 2013. According to the Central Statistics Office, deteriorating security coupled with poor economic growth has led to rising poverty and unemployment. The most recent data shows that between 2012/13 and 2015/16 national unemployment had risen from 25 to 40 percent.⁵⁰ Over the same period the percentage of people living below the national poverty line reached 54 percent, up from 38.3 percent;⁵¹ an increase of over 5 million people experiencing poverty.

One major source of possible government revenue and economic growth is from extractive resources. Yet, as President Ghani has himself stated, this may deliver a "resource curse". Afghan and international civil society see a number of cautionary issues in relation to extractives in Afghanistan. While the sector may drive growth, it also drives conflict and corruption. Indeed, one position paper highlighted that "mining is the Taliban's second largest source of funding".⁵² The same paper went on to detail that while the GoA makes estimated annual revenues of \$36 to \$40 million from extractive industries, almost \$300 million per year is lost to illegal mining.⁵³

Acknowledging that the GoA has taken significant steps to improve the sector since 2016, including surpassing international best practices, initiating an ongoing review of the Minerals Law (2014) and making commitments to incorporate further

⁵⁰ GoA, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey, 2017.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² GW/IWA, 2018: 1.

⁵³ Ibid.

anticorruption measures in the sector, a number of concerns were raised by civil society. These included the need for a series of safeguards to be introduced into existing legislation including, for example: the publication of payment and production data; the creation of a public register of beneficial ownership; and increased transparency in bidding and contracting processes. The goal of such safeguards is to further integrity, accountability and transparency in the extractives sector.

Development in Health, Education, Agriculture and Livelihoods

Good quality and accessible health and education services, food security and sustainable livelihoods are the bedrock upon which the welfare of the Afghan people rests. Across Afghanistan deficits are observed in all of these sectors. While civil society advocates for improvements in the welfare of all Afghans, special attention is reserved for those who suffer the greatest marginalisation and experience the greatest need. This includes, but is not restricted to, the needs of women, children, civilians injured by conflict, persons with disabilities and the displaced.

Health: In 2018, 1.5 million Afghans residing in underserved areas of the country required trauma and emergency primary health care.⁵⁴ Civil society advocates for the development of a comprehensive and accessible trauma care system in Afghanistan. For this to be possible, it has to feature comprehensive provision and be free of charge. To fulfil this right to healthcare, civil society seeks an increased allocation of funding from the GoA and international donors. Moreover, the delivery of such a system of care can only be realised if investments are made in training a future cadre of healthcare professionals. In particular it is important that women are increasingly trained as healthcare personnel, in a bid to produce more inclusive healthcare provision.

People with disabilities require mental and physical rehabilitation and other health-related services that surpass those required by their able counterparts. Yet, rehabilitation services are not only undervalued in the Afghan context, but people with disabilities are often least able to access them where they do exist. This results from the low availability of healthcare personnel in the field of rehabilitation, insecurity meaning many health facilities are non-functional, and insufficient funding for healthcare leading to limited rehabilitation service provision.

⁵⁴ UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan, 2018.

Providing funding for the provision of rehabilitation services and the training of healthcare professionals with a specialisation in rehabilitation is essential if these challenges are to be overcome.

Mental health services are severely lacking in Afghanistan. Similar to people with disabilities, mental health difficulties are also significant for IDPs and returnees. And, this is particularly the case for children. Depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicidal thoughts are common amongst displacement-affected Afghans. In addition to the limited number of mental health facilities and trained professionals, stigmatisation and abandonment by family members are major challenges to be overcome.

Education: Children have borne the brunt of conflict in Afghanistan. And, while increasing numbers of children have been attending school since 2001, this continues to be the case. Presently, 3.7 million children (2.2 million girls, 1.5 million boys) do not go to school and, for the first time since 2002, the number of children out of school is increasing.⁵⁵ A number of factors are driving this reduction in schooling, and attacks on schools, students and teachers, which have dramatically increased in 2018, are having a significant effect. With the control of non-state armed groups growing across the country, attacks on education are rising; with perpetrators being both non-state armed groups and ANSF. Existing data indicates that schools that have been used for election-related or military purposes are especially susceptible to attack. On a positive note, however, ANSF have been reducing the use of schools for military purposes year-on-year since the adoption of the Safer Schools Declaration in 2015. To minimize attacks on education, civil society calls on the GoA and non-state armed groups to avoid using schools for purposes other than education, to maintain safe access to education during armed conflict, and to strengthen monitoring of attacks and prosecute perpetrators.

In addition to the security-related challenges discussed above, children who have recently returned to Afghanistan also face specific constraints when accessing schooling. A key challenge identified by international civil society relates to the difficulty of returnee children enrolling for school due to a lack of documentation. Steps must be taken to support the registration of these children for educational purposes.

⁵⁵ GCPEA, 2018.

Children with disabilities suffer especially badly in Afghanistan. Many have no access to education as a result of conflict, and social and physical barriers. According to one international civil society organisation, “Afghanistan needs specialised teachers, awareness of the need for all children to attend school, including children and girls with disabilities, and sufficient funding in order to focus on inclusive education”.⁵⁶

Agriculture: Eighty percent of Afghans rely on agriculture as their primary source of food and income.⁵⁷ However, conflict and climate change are devastating agricultural systems in Afghanistan. In 2018, approximately 9.8 million people (43.6 percent of Afghanistan’s rural population) experienced severe food insecurity, with an estimated 2.6 million Afghans facing emergency levels of food insecurity.⁵⁸ This has contributed to widespread malnutrition, negative health impacts and massive internal displacement in the country.

A tentative method for combatting food insecurity was raised in one of the GCA position papers. It is argued that, “mosques could play an instrumental role in addressing food insecurity through organized and systematic awareness-raising and advocacy for donations from the wealthy to those in need, identifying the families in the community most in need of food assistance, and ensuring transparency and accountability in food distribution”.⁵⁹ This suggestion builds on systems already employed by mosques, including: the distribution of zakat, or obligatory Islamic alms, which is collected and dispersed through mosques to the poor; and the distribution of food that takes place alongside religious celebrations, such as eid ul fitr at the end of Ramadan.

Drought, currently experienced in 20 of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces, is one of the major natural hazards driving food insecurity. A 70 percent deficit in precipitation has impacted food production and depleted farmers’ assets.⁶⁰ The drought has stunted already low levels of crop production. Nationwide wheat production deficits have risen from 1.5 to 2.3 million metric tonnes from 2017 to 2018, respectively. Drought has pushed 1.4 million people into acute food insecurity in 2018.⁶¹

Two main solutions to mitigating drought, and other

56 HI, 2018: 3.
57 ARC, 2018.
58 ACF, 2018.
59 APPRO, 2018d: 2.
60 ARC, 2018.
61 ACF, 2018.

natural hazards, have been suggested by members of civil society. These are Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Integrated Watershed Management (IWM). In DRR, a community-based approach is utilised to identify and action strategies that mitigate the impact of natural hazards. This includes, “supporting communities to identify disaster-prone areas and protect themselves, introducing improved farming techniques and diversifying household income, thereby enabling them to better withstand economic and environmental shocks and invest in their families’ futures”.⁶² IWM, on the other hand, involves introducing techniques such as terracing, trenching, damming, and using vegetation to catch rain water and slow its run-off. This has the effect of creating improvements in the soil and water, and “bringing substantial improvement in sustainable agriculture, livestock and food security at the community level, and dramatically reducing the risk of flooding and vulnerability to drought”.⁶³ Investing in either, if not both, solutions would build community resilience to climate change.

Livelihoods: For most Afghans, a sustainable livelihood is a necessity. Yet, with the country in the grip of an economic downturn, widespread drought and ongoing conflict the livelihoods of many are under pressure. Of particular concern to civil society are the additional economic barriers facing displaced persons. IDPs and returnees possess limited connections to secure jobs. Markets are highly competitive and closed to outsiders. This is especially the case for displaced women who are all but excluded from the job market. This barrier to employment is furthered with displaced people typically lacking the skills required for most jobs available. The demand for unskilled labour is low given market saturation.

Faced with exclusion from markets, displacement-affected Afghans also endure insufficient financial support. Limited credit options are available, of which the vast majority are informal. Where loans are taken they are typically used for consumption and not for the establishment of new livelihoods. Furthermore, in forced repatriation circumstances, returnees often do not have sufficient time to ecover investments before return occurs, which further depletes their economic assets.

Civil society also noted that the impact of UNHCR cash grants requires further exploration. Evidence

62 ARC, 2018: 3.
63 Ibid: 4.

presented by one international civil society organisation, from 2016, indicated that grants were, “prompting Afghan refugees to return prematurely and that this had adverse longer-term impact on the ability of returnees to (re)integrate”.⁶⁴ It was suggested that early return, prompted by cash grants, undermined preparedness in relation to building social networks and skills-readiness.

Finally, IDPs and returnees are driven to utilise negative coping strategies in response to their financial vulnerability. Displaced households often find themselves caught in a cycle of poverty that ultimately leads to growing debt. In addition to indebtedness and, often as a response to it, displaced families rely on child labour. In one study conducted in 2017, 20 to 24 percent of displaced families included children who worked.⁶⁵ In some cases, also as a result of debt, displaced families resort to child marriage as a coping strategy.

Turning to the livelihoods of people with disabilities, it is important to remember that the charity model of disability is still common in Afghanistan. As a result, many people with disabilities are discouraged from participating in the workforce. In addition, people with disabilities lack the necessary skills to compete in the market. Women with disabilities face greater discrimination when job hunting. The Labour Law of Afghanistan (2007) states 3 percent of government employees should be people with disabilities. This provision has not been implemented. In the eyes of Afghan civil society, a first step in addressing the marginalisation of people with disabilities would be the enforcement of this legislation.

A New Way of Working: The Humanitarian–Development–Peace Nexus

There is growing recognition amongst Afghan and international civil society that humanitarian response alone is insufficient to address the displacement challenges Afghanistan faces. As highlighted above, Afghanistan has growing numbers of IDPs and returnees. Many are highly vulnerable and have long-term needs, which have been created or are compounded by ongoing conflict. Presently, humanitarian efforts to improve the welfare of displaced people focus solely on providing immediate assistance. Development efforts rarely target these populations and peacebuilding interventions largely exclude them. As such, a gap exists in the aid architecture in Afghanistan: Afghans facing

64 NRC, 2018: 7.
65 Ibid.

long-term displacement-related needs, and who are impacted by the effects of conflict, are being failed by the aid system. IDPs and returnees living in protracted displacement in Afghanistan receive less support over time. Their ability to break cycles of poverty and vulnerability is undermined and, in many cases, unlikely.

A further issue, noted by civil society, exacerbates this problem. This is the manner in which humanitarian assistance is targeted. Humanitarian response is largely determined on a categorical basis. Typically, beneficiaries of life-saving aid are identified as a result of their status (e.g. whether a person is a conflict IDP, a returnee, or was internally displaced as a result of drought), not as a result of the severity of their needs. This produces constraints in the delivery of humanitarian aid. Resulting, for example, in restrictions placed on the type or scale of support delivered, even when an individual’s needs may be significant.

In response to these challenges Afghan and international civil society call for a collective approach that spans the humanitarian–development–peace nexus. This approach “involves a wide variety of actors, working based on their comparative advantages and over multiple years, to reduce need, vulnerability and risk and increase peace and resilience for sustainable development”.⁶⁶ It is not about sequencing activities better, but actively collaborating, having common outcomes (and joint monitoring frameworks) that bridge conventional humanitarian–developmental–peacebuilding divides, and securing predictable and flexible funding streams that allow for this to occur. The role of donors is, therefore, crucial in developing flexible and quick response funding models. The provision of suitable incentives from donors to adopt the proposed approach will also be vital. The United Nations — with its mandate of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding assistance — will have a core leadership role to play in formalising and overseeing the delivery of a nexus approach. And, the GoA will hold responsibility for delivering the key functions of articulating collective outcomes, creating an enabling policy environment, and monitoring results.

A nexus approach would also be needs-based and people-centred. Moving beyond a categorical targeting of beneficiaries, nexus interventions would be based on, and respond to, local realities. Instead of using status as a determinant of

66 ACBAR, 2018: 1.

assistance, people-centred interventions would embrace the complexity of real-life circumstances experienced by those in need, allowing for the delivery of more appropriate and effective assistance. This requires local-level data collection and bottom-up planning (in line with GoA policies), which effectively places people at the centre of the approach.

5. ANNEX: POSITION PAPERS FOR GENEVA CONFERENCE ON AFGHANISTAN

ACBAR (2018). Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus in Afghanistan. Kabul: Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief.

ACF (2018). Breaking the Cycle: Toward a Collective-Needs Based Approach to Hunger in Afghanistan. Kabul: Action Against Hunger.

ADSP (2018). Ending the Displacement Trap: New Opportunities for Afghans to Achieve Durable Solutions. Kabul: Afghan Displacement Solutions Platform.

APPRO (2018a). Chronic Conflict and Child Labor: Drivers and Possible Remedies. Kabul: Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organisation.

APPRO (2018b). Corruption: Causes and Ways to Fight it. Kabul: Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organisation.

APPRO (2018c). Fighting Corruption through Education. Kabul: Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organisation.

APPRO (2018d). Food Security and Religion: Role of Mosques. Kabul: Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organisation.

APPRO (2018e). Good Governance in Peacebuilding Negotiations. Kabul: Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organisation.

APPRO (2018f). NAP 1325 and Institutionalizing Women's Rights in Afghanistan. Kabul: Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organisation.

APPRO (2018g). On Mutually Hurting Stalemates, Peacebuilding, Actors, Factors, and Mechanisms. Kabul: Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organisation.

APPRO (2018h). State – Civil Society Relations in Afghanistan: Forward or Backward? Kabul:

Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organisation.

APPRO (2018i). Women's Shelters: From Secrecy to Mainstreaming. Kabul: Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organisation.

ARC (2018). Building Resilience in Afghanistan. Kabul: Afghanistan Research Consortium.

AWN (2018). Position Paper: Reiterating Voices from Afghan Women – from BCA to GCA. Kabul: Afghan Women's Network.

BAAG (2018a). Geneva Conference on Afghanistan: Civil Society Position Paper. London: British & Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group.

BAAG (2018b). Returns and Displacement: Policy Position Paper. London: British & Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group.

CSJWG (2018). Position Paper: Geneva Conference on Afghanistan. Kabul: Civil Society Joint Working Group.

EMERGENCY (2018). Emergency's Position Paper on Afghanistan. Kabul: Emergency.

GCPEA (2018). Attacks on Education in Afghanistan: Briefing Paper. Kabul: Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack.

GW/IWA (2018). Avoiding the Resource Curse: Extractives, Corruption and Conflict in Afghanistan. Kabul: Global Witness and Integrity Watch Afghanistan.

HI (2018). Position Paper on Inclusion of People with Disabilities. Kabul: Handicap International.

NRC (2018). Returning to What? The Challenges Displaced Afghans Face in Securing Durable Solutions. Kabul: Norwegian Refugee Council.

UN (2018). One UN for Afghanistan. Kabul: United Nations.

ANNEX 5: CIVIL SOCIETY STATEMENT FOR THE GCA

Civil Society Statement for the GCA, dated 28 November 2018

Presented by Naeem Ayubzada

(Mr President) (Chief Executive) Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour to speak to you today on behalf of the nearly one thousand people who took part in the countrywide consultations organized by civil society in preparation for the Geneva conference. We commend the remarkable achievements of the people of Afghanistan in coping with such difficult circumstances, which would have been far worse without the generous international assistance, government leadership and the sacrifices of men and women in uniform, aid workers, teachers, journalists and other civilians.

We also acknowledge the difficulties associated with achieving sustainable development in a context of conflict, when the focus of the government and international community has to be on security and meeting humanitarian need. The people of Afghanistan have shown trust and hope for the future by turning out to vote in the recent parliamentary elections. An impressive number of Afghan men and women voted, despite the security threats, and overcame the pessimism created by previous fraud.

Afghan men and women voted for hope. In overcoming the pessimism created by previous fraud their votes were investments, which should be honoured by the Afghan government. Many of the problems that voters faced during the last Afghan government could have been avoided.

Logistical failings that saw people waiting for hours in long queues due to false reports that their votes had already been cast, missing ballot papers, malfunctioning biometric devices, voting centres which remained closed as the staff had not turned up, and, even more significantly, the election management bodies were thought to have been politicised.

These issues, if not resolved, will continue to tarnish the reputation and legitimacy of the next presidential election and the government of

Afghanistan, reducing even further the trust of Afghan citizens in state institutions. We would also like to recommend that the 2019 Presidential election should not be delayed in favour of the reconciliation process with the Taliban.

Similarly, corruption continues to erode government efficiency and legitimacy but the government's commitment to curb corruption in the higher executive and military sectors is yet to produce a tangible outcome.

Most people who want their papers to be processed in government offices are expected to pay bribes and this has sadly become the norm. People outside the system, especially women, who do not have the means to pay for employed positions are hit the hardest. The state of affairs at grass roots level is compounded by political patronage systems at the higher level.

But how can the culture of corruption in Afghanistan be eradicated if those accused of mass fraud are given top leadership positions in the country? Presented by Frozan Mashal

As we gather in this splendid room, in this beautiful and peaceful corner of the world, we cannot help but remember the anxieties of an Afghan mother who sees her son stepping through the door, not knowing if he would return home alive; the pressures that young men and women are feeling if they cannot find a job, particularly if they have debts from university to pay or the rest of the family to feed or are examples of the increasing number of people with a disability struggling to make ends meet in an inhospitable climate. Providing jobs is essential, including in the industrial and agricultural sectors, so that people can bring themselves out of poverty.

With the relentless killing and maiming of record numbers of civilians and military personnel, the ever-mounting numbers of people escaping conflict and drought, and the number who go to bed hungry not knowing when their next meal will be, Afghan citizens are facing great uncertainty in all aspects of life. The people plough on through the difficulties in the hope that better days are coming but while we are known for our resilience

we, like other human beings have a breaking point. We therefore welcome the prospect of a political settlement that will put an end to most violence in Afghanistan. To reach such a settlement it is necessary for the government to think strategically, to honour inclusion in the process when it has been promised and to involve women in all peace negotiations, not to negotiate away the gains made at the price of women's rights.

A peace that is narrowly defined as the cessation of violence or a 'quick fix' cannot be sustainable. A peace process that understands, involves and takes into account the views of people at the micro and macro levels of conflict and generates trust, can achieve a lasting peace. We therefore call on international donors to fund peace building at all levels of social and political life.

Peace is also contingent upon justice and the rule of law and therefore the implementation of laws that are just, such as that for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. . The ERAW law is not enforced by all courts in the same way and the result is victims of violence are not protected by the state. Reports from so many organizations, CEDAW, Amnesty, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission continue to give details of the thousands of cases of violence against women, killings, beatings, acid attacks, domestic and sexual violence.

Other laws, such as the law related to freedom of information, have not been implemented either and we call upon the government and international partners to invest in implementing the existing laws before designing new ones. We would also call upon the government for a more consultative approach when drafting laws.

Civil society actors continue to be key players in the development of the country and act as bridges between the government and local communities. We appreciate that the government undertakes some consultation with civil society actors on important laws, however these consultations need to become more systematic and part of routine governance in the provinces as well as in Kabul. As the government is preparing to review the NGO law we call for an official consultation process with civil society actors before the Bill is presented to the Cabinet.

On behalf of Afghan civil society organizations we would like to thank all of you most sincerely for the

support you have given Afghanistan for the past 17 years and some of you for longer. We realise that neither government nor donor support is inevitable, nor is it inexhaustible. We are therefore committed to monitor our own performance and integrity. Long term and sustainable development objectives can be more easily achieved by enhancing the current partnerships between the government, the donors and international civil society.

ANNEX 6: CIVIL SOCIETY SIDE MEETING MINUTES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

NOTES ON RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION DISCUSSED WITH MINISTER MASTOOR 27.11.18, AT THE GCA

The Minister of Economy, Dr Mustafa Mastoor, was warmly thanked for agreeing to attend a side meeting to the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan (GCA), with Afghan and international civil society, in the presence of donors and others. He was thanked for his co-operation with civil society since his appointment. His commitment to working more closely with civil society, given at the end of the meeting, was noted and warmly welcomed, (as was the work that he had done in relation to the tax issue with NGOs).

The aim of the meeting was to provide an opportunity to improve civil society, state and international community understanding and to have a frank exchange of views. The Minister had read the draft position paper produced for the GCA by the Civil Society Working Committee.

The following requests were made to Minister Mastoor by representatives of civil society, including the official delegates to the GCA and other CSOs, NGOs and activists and the Minister's responses are noted.

Space for civil society

Space for civil society had been shrinking and this has led to a reduction in advocacy, and difficulties which in turn has been compounded by funding and security problems. Civil society has also been denigrated, despite the good work that CSOs and NGOs have been doing, and therefore was not seen to have a 'clean face' as a result of negative propaganda.

Civil society representatives called on Minister Mastoor and the Afghan government to support the activities of civil society and accept publicly its value and its oversight role. In order to be effective in monitoring the results of the government's policies and programmes they also needed information and this was not always forthcoming. They further asked that incorrect information about civil society work be refuted, such as the figure given by the Ministry of Economy NGO unit that 64% of NGOS money was spent in Kabul,

which was based on incorrect assumptions. NGOs and ACBAR had offered to assist the NGO unit in revising the figures.

Safeguarding of the space and of civil society actors themselves was felt to be essential. Dangers for civil society actors seen to be collaborating with the government were also mentioned and the risk of their becoming targets.

The Minister said he was appreciative of and accepted the oversight role of civil society in the past, present and future. However, he thought whether or not civil society actors collaborated with the government was a matter for civil society. He agreed that information dissemination was not always as good as it should be.

The representatives also called upon the international community to support a capable and sustainable civil society and felt that a clear definition of 'civil society' would be helpful. This was echoed by a donor who also advised that a clear vision and a clear voice from civil society was what donors wished for.

Those present agreed that credibility comes from good work, and that professional networks were an asset. There was also a call from an international civil society representative for coherent programming by civil society and a need to get on the 'front foot'.

Mechanisms of Engagement

Civil society participants felt that co-ordination with the government had been symbolic. Recommendations had been made but had not become policy or put into practice.

Minister Mastoor said that the Ministry of Economy had planned to have monthly technical meetings with civil society as well as a quarterly Steering Committee meeting but none had taken place since March 2018 and Minister Mastoor said there was therefore a backlog of material to discuss. The Minister said the Ministry of Economy was

working on a plan for a single fund for NGOs, similar to that operated by the Ministries of Health and Rural Rehabilitation and Development. While the Minister did not expect the fund to change everything, he said the aim would be to have a pooled fund and a country wide call for proposals which would result in an equitable distribution of funding. Safeguards would be provided by the technical meetings, for example for returnees. Some disquiet was expressed about the implications of this proposal, both by donors and by civil society actors present at the meeting. The Minister committed himself to working more closely with civil society. He also said he would like the national NGO conference to become an annual event.

Anti-Corruption

Participants expressed concern at the level of corruption experienced in Afghanistan and said there should be a practical strategy to fight it. They felt the disparity in the salary differentials of public servants encouraged corruption as the lower paid staff (getting \$130 a month) did not earn enough to live on. The Minister agreed that corruption is endemic but said civil society was not exempt from it, citing NGOs that were 'family businesses'. This labelling of NGOs as corrupt was challenged, there was support for a fair regulatory system and the Minister was urged to instigate action against any NGO when there was evidence it was corrupt. (So far the Ministry of Economy had only disqualified NGOs for a lack of reports, perhaps because they had ceased to operate).

Further-more there were said to be members of government who had established their own NGOs, or they were set up in the name of a family member. These and other 'favourite NGOs' had an unfair advantage when it came to awarding contracts, and Integrity Watch Afghanistan had evidence of this. There were also those who were pressing for civil society representatives to be excluded from the new Anti-Corruption Commission and the Minister was asked to press the government to resist this.

The Minister said no audits had yet been done on any NGO, (which used to happen when he worked for an INGO and he felt was a good idea) and therefore no action had been taken against any of them.

Access to Information

The law has been amended and all the appropriate mechanisms are mentioned, making it the 'best law in the world' according to IWA, and just before the GCA the President had assigned a five-member Commission on the issue. However - implementation had been another matter and no budget had been provided for this. The result was that people were having to go from office to office seeking information without success and this was making monitoring extremely difficult.

The Minister concurred that access to information could be better.

Reporting

The civil society participants found the reporting requirements too onerous; reporting to the Ministry of the Economy was acceptable and understandable but each Ministry seemed to require its own reports in different formats. Memorandums of Understanding were made conditional upon these reports which organizations had to spend a great deal of unpaid time to complete and without them organizations were unable to work in the provinces.

A 'One Stop Shop' was proposed, which would not only receive the reports but could also file and discuss complaints, offer a mechanism for protection and ensure that civil society voices are taken into account in the decisions which are made.

The Minister responded that getting Annual Reports from civil society organizations had also been difficult but reporting was necessary. He conceded that the lack of streamlining of the reporting mechanisms was definitely a problem. Specialization of NGOs would be a recommendation made in the Road Map being prepared for civil society and he would know who the 'top ones' are. In his view this would lead to economies of scale and less reporting channels.

In Conclusion

The Minister agrees that there are good NGOs and that the general public and people in the government are aware of that. It was agreed that a list of the recommendations would be sent to the Minister and that the Civil Society Working Committee would follow these up with the Minister. He committed himself to working more closely with civil society.

SUMMARY OF REQUESTS TO MINISTER MASTOOR

1. That the Afghan Government should publicly support civil society, its value and its oversight role, which would be facilitated by a clear definition of civil society.
2. That incorrect information about civil society be refuted and corrected.
3. That necessary information should be provided to civil society and dissemination improved, in line with the relevant laws.
4. That agreed mechanisms of co-ordination with the government should be put into practice, ensuring that civil society voices are taken into account.
5. That a practical strategy be put into place to fight corruption which would include providing public servant salaries that are enough to live on, resistance to pressure to exclude civil society representatives from the Anti-Corruption Commission and action against any person/organization, (including NGOs) where there is evidence of corruption.
6. The establishment of a 'one stop shop' to receive reports from civil society organizations (removing the need for a variety of reports in different formats) and examine any complaints they may have.
7. That the Minister agrees to a follow-up meeting with the Civil Society Working Committee and delegates to the GCA to discuss these and other associated matters.

ANNEX 7: AFGHAN CIVIL SOCIETY ON THE GENEVA CONFERENCE, DECEMBER 2018

AFGHAN CIVIL SOCIETY STATEMENT ON THE GENEVA CONFERENCE ON AFGHANISTAN DECEMBER 2018

We, the members of the Civil Society Working Committee (CSWC) and the civil society delegates at the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan, were pleased to be invited to attend the conference which took place on November the 27th and 28th at the Palais des Nations in Geneva.

We welcome the conclusions of the Geneva Conference on Afghanistan (GCA) as reflected in the Conference Communique and the Geneva Mutual Accountability Framework (GMAF). We believe that the GCA was a step in the right direction in improving global understanding and support for the long term peace and prosperity of Afghanistan.

We appreciated the interactions that civil society actors were able to have with Afghan and international policymakers during the week of the conference. The people of Afghanistan have been beneficiaries of improvements in governance, public services and development initiatives, as well as being active contributors to these processes. The role of civil society as a bridge between the people and the Government will be instrumental in the further success of these processes. We therefore look forward to continued engagement with the Afghan Government and international partners in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

This statement sets out our immediate responses to the conference conclusions and our recommendations for policy priorities:

Civilian casualties: We note that the conference Communique draws attention to the “record level of civilian casualties, including the heavy toll on humanitarian workers”, and calls on all concerned to protect civilians, including children, from violence; and to respect the role and impartiality of aid workers. We therefore call on all armed opposition groups to cease their attacks on non-military targets and to stop using tactics that result in civilian casualties. We also call upon the Afghan Government and foreign forces to use robust mechanisms, especially concerning airstrikes, to avoid harming civilians.

Peace: There is a need for an immediate ceasefire by all parties to the conflict. We believe that a political settlement is the only way to end the war. However, we fear that a ‘quick fix’ may be attempted and that peace without addressing the injustices caused by all parties to the conflict will not be sustainable. We therefore call for the views of victims and their families to be taken into account in any peace process. Experience in other conflicts has shown that peace will only be sustainable if it is supported by the population and we would therefore urge that community peace-building is supported, locally and nationally.

Further-more we believe that ensuring adequate incomes and the accessibility of adequate public services will reduce the potential for conflict. We therefore welcome the statement in the Communique that “peace must be underpinned by serious efforts and reform as well as inclusive economic and social programs”.

We are pleased with the conference’s emphasis that peace talks with the Taliban must be based on a “broad political consensus involving all of society including women” and “persons belonging to minorities”. Despite the Taliban’s rhetoric about respecting women’s rights, women in the Taliban controlled areas are deprived of public life and are constant victims of severe punishments. We are therefore concerned that the peace talks may compromise the achievements in the sphere of human rights and gender equality. We call on the Government to include women in all Government bodies responsible for peace negotiations including the newly established Peace Advisory Committee.

International aid: We are grateful for the international community in its commitment “to provide \$15.2 billion for Afghanistan’s development priorities up to 2020 and to direct continuing but gradually declining financial support to Afghanistan”. We are dismayed at the possibility of further cuts to international aid when the population is in such dire need of assistance. We urge that any decline in financial support be based on the ground realities to ensure that the

people of Afghanistan are not harmed further and can lead lives in dignity. We appreciate the Government ownership and leadership of the development agenda, and the international community’s commitment to further progress in aid effectiveness. The emphasis in Government policies, including those set out in the Afghanistan National Development and Peace Development Framework (ANPDF) and the Afghanistan Sustainable Development Goals (ASDGs), on inclusive development is commendable. We call for a more equitable distribution of development projects including to remote areas and hitherto under-served populations.

We would ask that any change to on-and off-budget aid be based on a realistic assessment of the Government’s ability to spend the budget effectively and efficiently. Where shortfalls remain, we request that Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) are supported to address both the immediate needs of the population and to play a role in the achievement of the sustainable development goals.

Fighting poverty: we endorse the concern expressed in the Communique about the rise of poverty and unemployment in Afghanistan, especially as the drought also threatens people’s livelihoods in more than half of the country. We call for the immediate provision of livelihood projects and the adoption of long-term solutions “to strengthen resilience against economic, social and climate shocks, particularly in the agricultural sector” as stated in the Communique. More investment is required in expanding irrigation, improving dry-land agriculture extension, and in developing agri-business parks and supportive infrastructure.

As a lack of access to economic opportunities is a major driver of conflict, we also call on the international community to prioritise investment in the industrial sector and in job creation, particularly in rural areas.

Service provision: We concur with the view in the GCA Communique that, despite some modest progress under the deliverables in the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework (SMAF) 2017-18, “much” still needs to be done including in the provision of health and education services. We welcome the call for “improving and accelerating” the provision of basic services throughout the country and taking into account the “diverse needs

of the population including women and people with disability”. We urge the Afghan Government to list education as a national priority and prioritise training female teachers to improve girl’s access to education. The high levels of poverty, including among educated youth, underscores the need for substantial reform in education curricula to ensure that “education leads to decent work” as mentioned in the Communique.

People on the move: We concur with conference participants’ recognition of the urgent situation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. We ask the international donors to fully fund the UN call to address the humanitarian needs in Afghanistan so that life-saving support is provided to IDPs this coming winter season and that IDPs forced to move by drought are provided support in the coming seasons. As all parts of the country suffer from insecurity, nowhere is safe for return. Governments hosting Afghan nationals should immediately stop all forced deportations and should suspend all returns to Afghanistan until conditions there are stable, and people can return to the country in safety and dignity. Sending Afghan women, men and children back to volatile areas will likely only result in more displacement and fragility for them and for the communities they return to rather than sustainable reintegration.

Civicspace: We appreciate the GCA Communique’s recognition of the “important role” of civil society and independent media in Afghanistan’s development, and the Communique’s reiteration to strengthen “the role of civil society in political processes, including in providing oversight and monitoring Government performance”. This cannot be achieved without protecting civil society and human rights activists from violence perpetrated by all parties and the full enforcement of the Access to Information Law. Neither can it be done without financial support. We urge the international community and the Afghan Government to ensure that this continues without further cuts, at an appropriate level and with the flexibility necessary for effective operations.

We call on the Government and international partners to promote dialogue between civil society and Government institutions, both in the capital and the provinces to ensure understanding, trust and accountability on both sides. This could be assisted by a review of the current mechanisms of engagement and coordination and by addressing any gaps that are identified.

We welcome the Government's plan to amend the NGO law by end of 2019, as mentioned in the GMAF. We appreciate the Ministry of Economy's intention to engage in an official consultation process with the NGOs before the law is presented to the cabinet.

Fighting corruption: we welcome the conference's recognition of the "centrality of combating corruption to Afghanistan's future" as we are concerned that the current high levels of corruption further erode Government legitimacy and efficiency. The anti-corruption efforts in the security, justice and civil services have yet to produce tangible results. In dealing with corruption cases at higher levels, we urge the Government to implement a zero-tolerance policy across the board and to hold to account those accused of corruption irrespective of their political alliances. To improve governance, we call on the Government to simplify and streamline working procedures in the civil service sector, which is still an over-bureaucratic and complex paper-based system, allowing for loopholes and unnecessary discretions on part of the civil servants. As part of Asan Khedmat deliverable of the GMAF which aims to simplify 10 additional common public services by 2020, we ask that the Government prioritises the need of women and people with disability and ensure that the simplified procedures are not prone to corruption. We also call on the Afghan Government and development partners to make public monitoring of development initiatives mandatory and improvement in the capacity of communities to effectively detect and report corruption cases an objective.

Women's inclusion: Whilst acknowledging the progress Afghan women have made, we note the statement in the Communique that "more needs to be done to address women's socio-economic needs and levels of violence against girls and women which are among world's highest". We believe that the war and corruption have hit women the hardest and therefore they should have a vital role to play in national efforts to curb them. We call for the full implementation of Afghanistan's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security and request international partners to provide the necessary financial and technical support. We share the Communique's emphasis that "more tangible measures" are needed "to eliminate violence and bring perpetrators to justice in accordance with the Penal Code and provisions of the Elimination of Violence against Women Law". We think the

GMAF indicator 4.2, to train 40 additional female prosecutors and hiring and training eight judges for districts, is a low target given the enormous challenges women face in accessing justice and the availability of qualified female graduates in the job market. We think that an effective way to promote women's role in society is to tackle "gender" issues holistically and work with men and boys as well.

Elections: We commend the voting turnout during the last parliamentary elections which was achieved despite the intimidation and fraud seen in the 2014 presidential election. We believe that the Government should honour this public trust and we concur with the Communique's call for "effective preparations for presidential and other foreseen elections in 2019 to ensure maximum transparency, credibility, participation and security". We therefore call on the Afghan government to embark on a wide scale rollout of the e-Tazkira (electronic national ID cards), which would help to reduce the potential for fraud. We also call on the Government to reform electoral bodies and all related laws to help reduce ethnic based politics and those that promote them. The Government must ensure that no Government official interferes in what should be a free and fair election process.

In Conclusion: The Afghan people deserve a future in which they can live in peace and free from fear, poverty and injustice. The Afghan Government, the international community and civil society must strive to work together to ensure that they can attain this.



BAAG (British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group)

Romero House, 55 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7JB

www.baag.org.uk

Registered in England & Wales 06880188 / charity 1135700