

COUNTING THE UNCOUNTED:

Afghanistan's Civil Society in Transition

PTRO Research Paper, August 2014



Promoting and strengthening civil society has been an important area of focus for both the Government of Afghanistan and the international donor community over the past ten years, and the country has seen great gains and achievements in many areas. However, the process of transition due to be completed at the end of 2014 presents an uncertain time for the country's civil society community. This report explores the impacts of transition on civil society organisations and actors in seven Afghan provinces, and presents their concerns, strategies, and suggestions for navigating the process.



Peace Training and
Research Organisation

About PTRO and Acknowledgements

The Peace Training and Research Organization (PTRO) is an Afghan NGO based in Kabul, which focusses on peace, conflict, and justice issues, and provides training in peacebuilding and good governance. PTRO also conducts research for national and international governmental organisations, NGOs, and national bodies, to inform policy and provide a deeper understanding of relevant issues.

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1. Executive Summary

The current period of security and political transition in Afghanistan represents a challenging time for the country's civil society organisations, structures, and actors. Worsening security in many of Afghanistan's provinces, as well as decreasing availability of funds, has curtailed the work of many civil society organisations in the country.

This research attempts to assess the impact of transition on CSOs and their concerns throughout the process. The report also makes a number of recommendations aimed at civil society, the Afghan government, and the international community to render improved support to the country's civil society.

Overall, the transition process presents a number of critical challenges for Afghanistan's civil society. The extent to which civil society groups are able to navigate trends such as declining international funding, potentially chaotic political changes after the 2014 election, and an increasingly fragile security environment will determine the capabilities and position of civil society for a number of years to come.

Despite these challenges, however, transition also presents Afghan civil society with a valuable opportunity for reflection on the past ten years of work, giving space for a more collaborative working model, new funding modalities, and new ways of working with local communities, international donors, and the Government of Afghanistan.

Key Recommendations

Afghan Civil Society

- Formalise and strengthen local networks
- Strengthen and enhance national-level networks to aid advocacy and knowledge sharing
- Support formation of national standards for CSO work
- Conduct more in-depth situational and stakeholder analysis
- Build stronger relations with communities and other types of organisation
- Encourage cost-saving and cost-sharing techniques such as voluntary work

Government of Afghanistan

- Build capacity of local officials to work with civil society
- Improve consultation with CSOs around local and national policies
- Ensure CSOs have adequate protection under rule of law

International Donors

- Build more sustainable, long-term relations with key partners
- Improve consultation with CSOs to ensure projects meet the needs of communities
- Set aside funding for new and innovative CSOs
- Expand locally-managed funding pools
- Provide training to potential local CSO managers



2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The Transition Process

Afghanistan's transition process was announced at the Lisbon Conference in June 2010. The goal of transition, a multilateral process involving the international community, ISAF (International Security Assistance Force), and the Government of Afghanistan, is to transfer full responsibility for maintaining security and providing governance to the Afghan Government by 2015.

The transition process moved through five tranches, which were implemented in different phases across Afghanistan's provinces. More secure provinces, such as Bamiyan, went through the transition process much earlier than less secure provinces, such as Nuristan. The security aspects of transition involved the withdrawal or drawing down of international troops' presences in the provinces concerned, alongside a scaling up of Afghan National Security Forces' presence and responsibilities.

As yet, the full impact of the transition process on the country remains unclear. A number of key trends are evident, however, including a significant draw down in international donor funding.

2.2 Afghan Civil Society

Civil society is of major importance to sustainable peace and security in Afghanistan. Peace- and state-building go very much hand-in-hand in the Afghan context, and civil society constitutes a key pillar of a functioning state apparatus, allowing citizens the opportunity to articulate their needs and concerns, furnishing them with access to essential services that the state may be unable to provide, and creating forums for meaningful debate of the challenges facing the country. As such, fostering an active and effective civil society that is able to engage with citizens, respond effectively to their needs and demands, and represent their concerns to policy-makers is integral to reinforcing the legitimacy and efficacy of Afghan state institutions in the eyes of the population and ensuring that armed groups opposed to state institutions (including the Taliban) do not grow in popularity and importance.

Responding appropriately to the needs and demands of civil society in Afghanistan – helping its members and activists to navigate the transition process and improving their ability to represent and serve the population – is therefore instrumental to the future success of the Government of Afghanistan and international community's efforts to foster peaceful and sustainable development in the country.

With this in mind, the present research was commissioned in order to understand in more detail the specific concerns and challenges facing civil society actors in Afghanistan, and to give a platform for their recommendations for the Afghan government, international donors, and Afghan civil society itself.

3. Methodology

The primary methodology for this project was focus group discussions conducted with civil society activists, members of CSOs, and other figures involved in local civil society activities such as journalists. These FGDs were conducted with as many local civil society actors as could be gathered.

Focus group discussions followed a semi-structured questionnaire, with guideline questions being provided and interviewers probing for further information where suitable.

In addition to the focus groups, a number of key informant interviews were conducted in some provinces. This was partly due to practical exigencies, as not all participants were able to attend focus group sessions, and also to target more specifically key civil society actors.

The primary areas of focus of the research were as follows;

- The political and security impact of transition on civil society
- The impact of transition on funding streams for civil society organisations
- The strategies employed by civil society organisations to mitigate the negative impacts of transition
- The impact of transition on vulnerable groups, and especially women's, interaction with civil society

Due to the principally qualitative nature of data collection – open-ended questions, with no quantitative or coded answers – the analysis was carried out using qualitative techniques and answers have not been coded or quantified.

3.1 Respondent demographics

The figures for focus group participant numbers are as follows, broken down by gender;

	Male	Female	Total
Bamyan	11	1	12
Balkh	8	4	12
Helmand	15	1	16
Herat	7	5	12
Kabul	5	11	16
Nangarhar	11	0	11
Takhar	5	3	8
Total			87

Respondent figures as broken down by thematic focus of CSOs;

	Civil	Media	Legal	Women	Rural	Youth	Network	Cultural	Total
Bamyan	3	2	2	1	3	0	1	0	12
Balkh	3	3	2	2	1	1	0	0	12
Helmand	3	2	1	4	4	1	0	1	16
Herat	4	1	1	4	1	1	0	0	12
Kabul	6	1	2	4	0	2	1	0	16
Nangarhar	1	1	0	0	2	3	1	3	11
Takhar	5	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	8
Total									87



In addition to the focus group discussions, PTRO conducted key informant interviews in the following areas;

	Number
Bamyan	0
Balkh	0
Helmand	0
Herat	2
Kabul	3
Nangarhar	2
Takhar	1
Total	8

A number of provinces saw no key informant interviews conducted. There were a number of reasons for this; a) key informant interviews were not necessary as the majority of the major civil society actors that PTRO wished to interview were able to attend focus group discussions, b) suitable key informants could not be identified, limiting the usefulness of individual interviews, and c) the on-going security situation limited the ability of PTRO's researchers to travel outside of urban areas to conduct key informant interviews for respondents unable to travel to urban centres.

3.2 Methodological Weaknesses

- **Statistical significance:** The relatively small sample size and lack of stratification limits the level of inference that can be drawn from the results. However, due to the qualitative nature of the research, it is not felt that this limits the validity of the results or the extent to which they can be seen as indicative of the concerns of civil society actors in the provinces involved.

- **Representativeness of sample:** The research was conducted in seven provinces. While efforts were made to make the sample as representative of Afghanistan's provinces as possible (regions in the north, west, south, and east as well as the capital were all covered), it should be noted that the country's regions are extremely diverse and, as such, the concerns represented here may not be applicable to all provinces. Overall, however, the similarity of main concerns raised in all areas supports the viability of the research findings.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

4. The Impact of Transition on Civil Society

Key Findings

- The transition process has had a significant and major impact on CSO funding, leading to staff losses of staff and office closures.
- The impact of reduced funding touches on a wide number of areas, including CSO programming and ability to engage in longer-term strategic planning.
- In many areas that enjoyed good security prior to transition, the process has not had a significant impact on security. In other areas, a reduction in international troops has improved security and opened new areas for operation.

The research found the impact of the transition process to have a highly variable and often contradictory impact on the work of civil society, with the effects of impact being closely tied to local contexts, existing CSO capacity, and thematic areas of focus.

Participants in the Kabul focus group expressed a number of reservations about the transition process, stating that transition could have been implemented more gradually and with a less jarring impact on civil society and Afghanistan more generally. Respondents to the focus group and individual interviews questioned the level of preparation that the country had for transition and noted that transition might have the effect of rolling back gains made in the previous ten years.

In Bamyan, respondents accepted the transition process and recognised the need for such a process to take place in order to render responsibility for security to the Afghan Government. Despite this, many respondents were not happy with the implementation of the process – expressing frustration especially that Bamyan had been selected as the first province to undergo transition simply because it is perceived to be more stable than other provinces – and some were unhappy with the underlying idea of transition, and particularly the withdrawal of international troops from the country.

Answers in Helmand contrast with this, as respondents were much more critical of the NATO presence in the country (due to the extensive foreign troop presence seen in Helmand), and highlighted a number of both positive and negative outcomes from the transition process – these will be explored further below.

Nangarhar saw relatively polarised opinions around transition with some respondents stating that it would lead to greater insecurity in the province – which borders mountainous areas in Pakistan which serve as a main base of operations for insurgent groups – and others stating that a withdrawal of international troops would resolve a key grievance of insurgent groups, leading to an improved security situation.

Focus group participants in Takhar noted that although the transition process had less impact on the province than elsewhere (due to relatively good security and a small NATO troop presence), security had improved in the province leading to new areas being accessible for civil society organisations. Despite this, the process had had a negative social and economic impact as international funding – upon which the local economy was perceived to be dependant – had decreased.

Respondents in Balkh stated that transition had a minimal impact on the province in terms of security, but also noted that social, economic, and political factors had not been properly considered when the



process was planned, leading to significant nervousness around the social and economic future of the country. Overall, respondents in Balkh emphasised that the 2014 elections would have a much greater impact on the province (and particularly on civil society) than the transition process.

Similarly, respondents in the Herat focus groups stated that urban areas of the province had seen minimal security impact from transition but extensive – and perhaps unintended and unplanned – social and economic impact.

4.1 Impact on Funding

Funding for civil society organisations is the area that has seen perhaps the biggest and most notable impact during the transition process; both quantitatively, through a drawdown of funding and reported closures of donor offices (those attached to NGOs and also to government donor agencies), and qualitatively through changing funding mechanisms.

Respondents in all areas noted that their work and the work of civil society more generally had been severely impacted by increasingly limited sources of funds. Participants in the Kabul focus group, as well as key informant interviews, noted that CSOs based in Kabul had previously enjoyed significant levels of funding, with some respondents comparing CSOs to “construction companies” (which have also enjoyed significant international funding) in terms of the amount of contracts received. Interestingly, respondents noted that depleted funding has a negative impact on the ability of many CSOs to continue operating, but also that many CSOs, formed during the boom of international money in the past five years and interested (in participants’ opinion) mainly in garnering as much funding as possible, have found it difficult to operate in the bust of transition, leaving only those CSOs with stronger capacity;

“In the last decade the CSO development process was quite rapid and there was no difference between a CSO and a construction company. The number of CSOs that were working only to attract funds is wiped out.”

Focus group participant, Kabul

Although declining funds throughout the transition process presents a huge challenge for many CSOs, it may also have a streamlining effect on the civil society sector, filtering out unsustainable CSOs that are interesting primarily in bringing in as much funding as possible.

In Bamyan, civil society actors reported that their organisations had become almost completely dependent on international donor funding, and that without this funding many activities would cease and many CSOs would have to close down completely. This concern was also voiced in Nangarhar, Balkh, and Herat. Respondents in Balkh stated that increased competition for funding discouraged coordination and cohesion amongst the civil society community, as different individuals and organisations came to see each other as potential competitors rather than colleagues. Despite this, respondents in Balkh (as in Kabul) made the interesting observation that limited funding may see an unintended positive side effect; with funds becoming increasingly scarce, CSOs will need to re-orientate their funding mechanisms towards local and community sources of funding (see “Mitigation Strategies” section). This may lead to the closure of weaker, more donor-dependent CSOs that are interested only in chasing short-term funding, as only CSOs with deeper roots in communities will be able to raise funds in this way.

Participants in a number of provinces (Bamyan, Herat, Takhar) gave great emphasise to the signing of the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the United States (which had not been given Presidential approval at the time of the research and publication of this paper), and commented that without the guarantee of continued US support for Afghan National Security Forces provided by the agreement,

international funding would continue to decline as donors become increasingly nervous about the longer term security situation in the country. This was reflected in reports of donor office closures in all provinces, as remote management becomes increasingly the norm.

Respondents in Bamyán stated that corruption on the part of the Afghan Government meant that they frequently preferred international donor funds to GIRA funding resources, which are more transparent in their processes.

Focus group participants in Bamyán, Takhar, and Balkh commented that with funding becoming increasingly scarce, donors are beginning to favour more established CSOs over new and innovative organisations, limiting the scope of civil society in these provinces and preventing potentially effective and useful civil society groups from becoming established. Respondents in Takhar observed that funding is often tied more to a CSO's particular networks and contacts, with nepotism limiting the ability of CSOs to secure funding and meaning that weaker CSOs often win funds at the expense of stronger, but less well-connected organisations.

Despite this, respondents in Bamyán, Nangarhar, and Balkh stated that a dependency on external funding limited the scope of civil society work as CSOs were tied to the requirements, goals, and objectives of donor organisations; this often leads to a top-down approach to civil society which precludes locally based groups from designing and implementing projects that respond actively to the needs of local communities. Respondents in Nangarhar also highlighted an interaction between funding mechanisms and long-term strategic planning on the part of CSOs, with a dependency on donor funds meaning that CSO managers are under great pressure to secure funding on a frequent basis, limiting their ability to engage in longer-term development of the goals, visions, and strategy of their organisations. This problem is becoming increasingly acute during the transition period;

"About strategy and planning, there are no organizations that have specific plans and strategies or advocacy programs here in this province because they just focus on bringing in money. The last few years were good years for earning money but now when the foreigners withdraw they won't continue their activities based on a specific plan and strategy due to a lack of money. So now, we don't have such organizations with advocacy programs, plans and strategies."

Key informant interview, Nangarhar

Participants in Balkh, Takhar, and Herat noted that, in addition to decreasing funds, processes for securing existing funding had also changed, with donors attaching greater requirements and more laborious processes to their funds. This constitutes a significant burden for smaller and more localised CSOs, which are less able to engage in complex funding processes. Respondents in Helmand, Balkh, and Herat also noted that the funding process is taking longer during transition, meaning that by the time projects are approved they are often less relevant and have less of an impact;

"In the past donors had more money, but now they have decreased the number of projects, NGOs and CSOs can't receive projects and money easily. In the past we could get a project in a week, but now it takes 2-3 months to get a project. From the other side the demands of donors have also increased and money is less than in the past."

Focus group participant, Balkh

Despite this, respondents in Balkh were also supportive of increased donor oversight, and cognizant of the fact that depleted funding will require greater oversight to ensure that it is used to the best possible effect.



Participants in the Kabul focus group noted the increasing prevalence of multi-country calls for proposals, meaning that Afghan civil society is more and more obligated to compete with more established and better resourced civil societies in other South Asian countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh, and even Middle Eastern countries such as Jordan – a number of respondents cast doubts on the ability of Afghan civil society to do this at the current time.

Funding appeared to be a less serious issue in Helmand, where civil society actors reported that the sector had received less international donor funding than development organisations working in the province, and were thus less directly impacted. Despite this, many respondents commented that civil society had been heavily impacted by the decrease in funding available from the province's PRT, which had previously provided effective funding for short-term, highly targeted projects. Additionally, Afghan line ministries were reported to be a more significant source of funds in Helmand as compared to other provinces (this is interesting when compared to reports of civil society interactions with government bodies in Takhar, Balkh, and Herat).

4.2 Impact on Operating Environment

Transition has also presented a number of indirect effects on CSOs, through impacts on their operating environments and contexts.

Focus group participants in Helmand noted that the primary impact of transition on their operating environment has been through security, and a number highlighted significant improvements in this area. As international forces withdraw from the province, insurgent attacks have decreased in frequency and intensity. This, in turn, has allowed greater scope for accessing new geographical areas for work, as well as increasing the rate of female participation in civil society activities as families are more willing to allow female relatives out of doors to participate in such activities.

Other respondents in Helmand noted that female participation has, more broadly, increased over the past two years, with applications for jobs from local women increasing in frequency and local CSOs finding that identifying local women with the skills necessary to engage in civil society has become much easier.

The impact of transition on local economies in Takhar has impacted negatively on the ability of CSOs to conduct effective work. Respondents indicated that unemployment had increased in the province, placing greater economic pressure on individuals and households. This severely limits the interest of the population in engaging with civil society activities. This may, however, reflect the areas of the focus of the CSOs engaged with in the course of this research.

Respondents in Herat indicated a number of significant improvements in their operating environment in recent years. Improvements in education in the project have seen large improvements in the potential pool of staff available to CSOs. Additionally, Herat and Helmand both reported significant increases in the numbers of applications for jobs received from qualified and capable female staff, reflective of improvements in female capacity in the past few years.

The Herat focus group participants also highlighted, however, that on-going doubts around security and the economy limited the willingness of the private sector to invest in the local economy. This has led to a decline in private sector engagement with civil society through advertising and sponsorship, constricting a potentially useful avenue for mitigating funding stream depletion throughout transition.

4.3 Impact on Women

Focus group participants in Balkh, Nangarhar, and Herat noted the disproportionate impact of concerns about insecurity on women, and CSOs working with local women in particular. The transition process has

seen a significant amount of concern around insecurity at the local level, and this has seen the movement of women become restricted as male relatives place limits on their movements.

Respondents in all areas noted significant improvements in women's rights, female capacity, and engagement of women in civil society work throughout the past ten years. Respondents in Helmand in particular noted a significant increase in the numbers of job applications received from qualified and capable women. Despite this influx of qualified female candidates for employment, however, CSO managers in Helmand and elsewhere noted that greater support was needed for women entering management roles, areas in which they often lack experience.

Despite this, a number of respondents in Helmand, Herat, and Bamyan conveyed concerns that the transition process would have a significant and negative impact on women's rights, potentially threatening gains that have been made over the previous decade;

"Our primary concern was women's issues, we are afraid that after the transition process all achievements linked with women's issues will be wiped out."

Focus group participant, Bamyan

Stated threats to gains made on women's issues come from a number of areas, including the potential for increased insecurity, with a number of respondents stating that even doubts around the long term security situation in their areas have led to a curtailment of women's engagement with civil society, and declining funds for projects related to women's issues.

4.4 Security and Threats

The impact of security transition on the provinces in which the research was conducted is tied closely to the existing level of security prior to transition. Respondents in Bamyan stated that the underlying security situation prior to transition was relatively good. Bamyan saw little presence of foreign troops, who conducted few operations in the province, and was the first province to be handed over to Afghan security forces. The province had seen little change in its security situation throughout transition, although insecurity in neighbouring Ghorband district (Parwan province) had restricted movement of civil society activists to Kabul and impacted on their operational logistics. Focus group participants in Bamyan expressed some doubts around continued security, emphasising that the Taliban and other insurgent groups may capitalise on fears over on-going security if the BSA is not approved, but stated that it was unlikely that the Taliban would be able to gain any strong foothold in the province due to the opposition of local people.

Respondents in Bamyan did, however, note the impact of potentially increased insecurity on donor agencies. With deteriorating security, donor agencies have become increasingly doubtful about their ability to directly monitor projects in provinces – and this has led to declining funds.

Security was of much greater concern for respondents in Helmand. Many CSOs had engaged in activities and projects aimed at stabilising the province and countering insecurity – such as educational and employment enhancing programmes – and many within the province's civil society community were concerned that a draw-down of NATO military activity would lead to greater insecurity in the province. Despite this, the security situation has not deteriorated greatly as NATO troop numbers have diminished, and many respondents stated that their previous fears have proven to be unfounded. A number noted that contrary to their concerns prior to transition, the withdrawal of NATO troops from the province has actually seen a decrease in insurgent activity (as international forces constituted a key target for attacks) and that it has become easier to work in some rural districts and safer to move around on the province's main transport routes. The capacity of the Afghan Local Police to provide security in many locations of



interest to CSOs was also noted by some. However, since completion of data collection and the writing of this report, security reports in many areas have indeed shown an increase in the rate of attacks against both military and civilian targets as transition continues.¹

A number of CSOs in Helmand, and particularly media related organisations working on areas deemed political, such as raising awareness around elections, did report receiving direct threats against employees and offices, although overall the number was low and government and security targets remain much more important for Taliban and other insurgent groups. These threats do highlight, however, the challenges posed by CSOs being seen to be “political” in sensitive areas – particularly when this work engages with government programmes and official events such as elections. Although insecurity had not directly impacted on the work of civil society in Nangarhar, respondents noted some secondary impacts. Donors were reported to have put activities on hold in some areas as they review security in the long term;

“With the withdrawal of the foreign troops in some areas NGOs stopped activities because of the threat of armed opposition groups.”

Key informant interview, Nangarhar

Additionally, in some areas – and particularly rural areas – concerns about security mean that local residents are less willing to engage in civil society activities as they fear they may be threatened in the future if security deteriorates and they are associated with CSOs.

Takhar and Balkh reported little impact of insecurity on civil society activities. Both of these provinces enjoyed relatively good security prior to transition, and saw low levels of NATO troop presence. Respondents in Balkh, however, noted that the province's different political factions may cause internal conflicts and insecurity in the province as they engage in localised power-plays later in the transition process. This was, however, much more closely tied to political developments within the province than broader, national-level developments. Linked to this, a number of civil society participants stated that CSOs and their members often find that navigating the province's complex political dynamics poses a significant challenge, as CSOs are cautious about the potential of encroaching on or angering powerful groups (this will be explored further below).

In Herat, respondents noted that rule of law poses a significant challenge to their work. An inability on the part of local government and law enforcement to guarantee the safety of CSO workers in some more rural districts of the province limits the scope for work in these areas. Although the principle threat was seen to come from armed criminal and bandits, some organisations had received direct threats to staff engaging in what was perceived as politicised work in certain districts.

The importance of rule of law in mitigating the threat of violent crime in Herat was emphasised by a number of female focus group participants. One respondent, who was employed as a civil defence lawyer for a local CSO, had been threatened by family members for her working outside of the home – her male relatives threatened to attack her with acid if she continued to work at the CSO. Although anecdotal, accounts such as this emphasise that even in relatively secure areas like urban Herat civil society work can be dangerous.

Although security was reported to be less of a concern within Kabul city itself, insecurity – both because of insurgents and armed, criminal gangs – limited the ability of CSOs based in Kabul to reach provincial office locations, even those relatively close to the capital such as Parwan and Kapisa. Respondents reported having their road travel outside of Kabul limited by unofficial checkpoints.

1. UNAMA, "Civilian casualties rise by 24% in first half of 2014", July 2014

5. Interaction with Transition Process

Key Findings

- There is a general perception that the concerns, demands, and interests of civil society have not been adequately reflected or incorporated into political processes around transition.
- Civil society engages actively with many local governments, but largely on an ad hoc basis.
- This interaction and the effectiveness of advocacy activities is often limited by structural problems such as a lack of government capacity, and increasingly limited funding.
- A lack of collaboration amongst local CSOs renders presenting coherent advocacy agendas at the local level difficult.

5.1 Engagement of Communities

Civil society organisations reported engaging local community members in the transition process in a variety of ways, with local contexts largely dictating the extent to which this was possible. In Bamyan, civil society respondents reported attempt to engage with citizens in order to serve as a bridge between the populace and the local government, with the goal of steering local policies in a manner that is more responsive to the needs of local communities;

“CSOs function like a link between the government and the people. If CSOs remain silent, society moves towards an unknown direction.”

Focus group participant, Bamyan

Civil society groups engage with local residents on specific issues, such as the deployment and behaviour of ANA and ANP units, and reported having meetings with local government bodies to pass their concerns on. These activities were, however, limited in their effectiveness by structural problems that limit the scope of advocacy work in the province (see below). Additionally, focus group participants in Bamyan noted the need for greater education for the population on matters relating to democracy and political participation, in order to build a more active citizenry able to engage with local policy issues.

Helmand saw a greater interweaving of civil society with informal community leaders and representatives, such as elders and shuras, as well as formal government bodies. Civil society actors in Helmand reported being informally consulted by these individuals and bodies as they take decisions, and use this as an opportunity to express the concerns of community members to local decision makers;

“We have our Islamic and traditional society, we always contact our local elders and religious leaders, know about the public's problems and challenges, and make the government al aware of them. CSOs try to have an active role in our society, especially in the transition process”

Focus group participant, Helmand

This may not have an entirely beneficial impact, however, as a number of respondents noted that civil society groups in Helmand can often be perceived to be tribally-oriented, and this partisanship can serve to limit the extent to which they are able to represent and serve the population more generally.

Respondents also noted that civil society groups in Helmand have an active role in engaging local citizens with various strands of the peace process, such as the APRP, through educating them about these processes. The centrality of local media and its importance to these aspects of civil society work



was highlighted by many.

Participants in the Kabul focus group observed that civil society activities can often have a divisive impact on communities in the country. They noted differences between urban and rural populations, with urban populations engaging actively with civil society and its projects, while for rural populations institutions such as mosques remain the focus of community life. By failing to engage more actively with the country's local religious institutions, civil society has alienated rural communities by drawing an artificial distinction between “modern”, “urban” civil society and “traditional”, “rural” religious bodies;

“Civil society has also created a gap between people living in urban and rural areas by differentiating between the mosque and civil society, while we need to give them enough awareness that the mosque is also a traditional form of civil society so that these people don't consider us strangers.

Focus group participant, Kabul

The ability of civil society groups to engage actively with citizens was reported in Nangarhar and Takhar to be limited by economic pressures. Respondents in these provinces stated that challenges such as high levels of unemployment mean that community members are often more concerned with employment and short-term income than engaging with social and political issues, meaning that they have little time for civil society engagement and little interest in the projects of CSOs.

5.2 Advocacy and Influence

Civil society respondents in Bamyan reported extensive advocacy activities conducted with local government representatives, including presenting the concerns of local citizens around transition with the hope that they would be communicated to policy makers, but stated that these advocacy activities had met with little response.

In many areas, respondents reported that the efficacy of advocacy activities is limited by poor capacity on the part of local government. Research participants in Bamyan stated that they faced structural problems in dealing with local government departments, including corruption, a high turnover of staff, and a poor understanding of civil society. Local government lacks mechanisms for incorporating the concerns and demands on civil society into their local policies and for this reason CSOs find themselves side-lined from local policymaking processes.

Despite this, CSOs in Bamyan, Takhar, and Helmand have made efforts to present the concerns of local people to government representatives. Respondents in Helmand reported that ad hoc meetings with relevant government departments occur on a relatively frequent basis, but that the effectiveness of these meetings was often limited by a poor understanding on the part of the government of civil society organisations – a number of respondents complained that local officials are sometimes unable to differentiate between CSOs, NGOs, and private companies.

“We approached the [local] government but no-one asks local NGOs [for their opinion], the governmental officials think that they are construction companies.”

Focus group participant, Helmand

The perception that local government views civil society as a competitor for influence and authority rather than a collaborator was reflected in Herat, where respondents highlighted that the concerns of civil society have not been incorporated into the transition process at the local level because of antipathy on the part of local government representatives;

“Our main concern is that the government considers organizations as a rival, while it is not so. In other countries CSOs act as an arm of the government. We have concerns that the next government may try to wipe us out. A lack of financial support can be solved, but our concern is that we lose both government and international community support.”

Focus group participant, Herat

Related to this, many participants in Herat drew a distinction between civil society organisations working for “political” agendas, which was viewed negatively by respondents, and those that are working directly for the benefit of local communities, which was viewed positively as work in the “public” sphere. The scope of this differentiation, and the nature of the “political” work carried out by CSOs, was not strictly defined, but the observation that some CSOs are perceived as being politically motivated is interesting;

“Some of the CSOs mean to serve people, while a number of them follow their political aims. Existence of such CSOs or organizations deprives financially those organizations who mean to serve people. ”

Focus group participant, Herat

Many CSOs respondents in Herat, Kunduz, and Balkh stated that they preferred to avoid this kind of politicised advocacy work, in favour of service delivery and implementation.

Respondents in Balkh noted that a lack of cohesion and cooperation amongst the civil society community in the province, exacerbated by increased competition for funding, impacts on the extent to which they can engage in effective advocacy activities on behalf of community members;

“Here, there is negative competition among the CSOs [for funds] and this issue doesn’t allow them to have good relations and coordination with each other to do advocacy.”

Key informant interview, Balkh

With funding becoming increasingly scarce and competition increasingly intense between civil society groups and actors, CSOs find it difficult to present a united front with coherent goals and advocacy strategies, meaning that civil society interaction with local government is fragmentary and lacks a clear overall direction. With greater cohesion and more well-defined long-term goals, it would be easier to engage in effective advocacy campaigns.

6. Responses to Transition

Key Findings

- The capacity of Afghan CSOs to develop strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of transition varies greatly throughout the country and is often limited by structural problems such as funding.
- Few CSOs reported having developed long-term strategies to mitigate transition's negative effects.
- Civil society bodies and activists make a number of recommendations including changes in local government attitudes towards civil society, changes in key funding mechanisms to encourage sustainable, long-term partnerships, and improved selection of organisations and projects to fund.

6.1 Mitigation Strategies

The extent to which CSOs have been able to develop strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of the transition process is highly variable and often limited by localised constraints. Respondents in the Kabul focus group and key informant interviews noted that civil society organisations in Kabul themselves carried an element of blame for decreased funding, as they had failed to unify and present a united front to donors to request further funding for specific areas of concern – although the extent to which this might have helped to gain more funding is questionable;

“To attract international community financial support, we were intending to design a [coherent] platform, but found that we were not able to do so. Concerning the funding decrease for CSOs we are guilty ourselves as we couldn't act in coordination with one another.”

Focus group respondent, Kabul

Participants from CSOs in the media sector in the Kabul focus group appeared to have met with more success in meeting the challenges of declining funds, and had formed a consortium to lobby potential donors and produce a coherent, long-term strategy for fundraising. Other CSO managers stated that they had reached agreements with media outlets to allow them to advertise for free, easing public outreach activities and campaigns around elections and other national-level events and activities.

One respondent in Kabul noted the need to engage in more voluntary work throughout the transition period. While previous projects allowed significant budgets for activities like conferences and events, this is now becoming increasingly rare. Civil society actors must become increasingly willing to engage in voluntary work, giving time and expertise for free in order to ensure civil society capacity continues to grow.

Another civil society group based in Kabul had reached an agreement with a local university in order to employ more staff. Students from the university are engaged as interns in the organisation, handling administrative and other duties in order to build their capacity while at the same time providing the organisation with a capable source of employees. The organisation had also entered into an agreement with a number of government ministries to hire graduates who had interned at the organisation. This model has proven to be an effective means of improving relations with government departments, providing capable staff for the organisation, and improving the capacity of young university students.

In Bamyan province, few respondents reported having developed concrete, longer-term strategies for navigating transition. Indeed, several respondents stated that they recognised a need for the development of coherent, localised strategies based on analysis of potential post-transition scenarios

carried out jointly by the province's civil society groups, but a number of factors limited their ability to conduct this due to financial constraints, and a lack of formalised cooperation. A number of participants reported engaging in ad hoc cooperation and collaboration around planning to attract further funding for the province's civil society activities, but this was not on-going in a formalised manner. Several respondents stated that they had tried to form links and connections to the civil society community outside of the province, and particularly in Kabul, in order to explore the possibility of tapping into new funding streams.

Civil society in Helmand reported a greater prominence of volunteer-based initiatives and volunteerism as a model of work more generally, and this has served as an effective mechanism for continuing work in the light of depleted funding streams;

"The withdrawal of foreign forces doesn't have any effect on our CSO, because we are all volunteers and don't have any specific salary."

Focus group participant, Helmand

Civil society groups reported opening more projects on a volunteer basis in order to be less dependent on outside funding. The effectiveness of this as a longer-term strategy was questioned by some, but nonetheless an increasing use of volunteers allows for greater flexibility in the shorter term as well as giving CSOs greater scope for carrying out longer term planning with a guaranteed core of staff not dependent on project funding.

Due to the (potentially) more sensitive security situation in Helmand, CSOs have developed a number of mitigation strategies for a potential deterioration in security after the complete withdrawal of NATO troops (although, as noted previously, security has not impacted the work of CSOs as much as some believed that it would). These strategies involve emphasising the politically neutral nature of CSOs, drawing attention to the fact that they try to work for the benefit of community members at the local level and have little interest or connection with national-level political developments. As organisations, CSOs try to occupy neutral stances with regards to political issues and have distanced themselves from foreign groups in order to avoid potential threats and targeting by insurgent groups. Other strategies for navigating the potential for insecurity include cultivating links to community leaders at the local level, in an attempt to embed civil society groups within communities in order to garner goodwill from community members;

"Once armed groups came to our office and threatened our guard. We informed the NDS about the situation. If we face the same problems in districts, we share the issue with other local elders and ask them to find a solution, but we will not stop our activities."

Focus group participant, Helmand

CSO managers reported using tribal elders and jirgas as conduits between themselves and insurgent groups to ensure that they did not become targets. Additionally, a number of respondents who had been able to work in the province during the time of the Taliban noted that they had been able to develop measures to continue their work then, and were confident that they would be able to do so once again should security deteriorate to the point that the Taliban become dominant in the province.

The close network of civil society activists that exists in Helmand was clear from the interviews, with common references to informal and ad hoc collaboration going back as far as the years of Taliban control of Afghanistan – many respondents stated that they had initially formed informal networks in Peshawar when they were unable to work in Helmand itself. These networks create considerable opportunities for developing informal support structures that can help during times of decreased funding or insecurity,



but a number of participants noted that they are not being fully capitalised upon and that provincial CSOs currently have no coherent strategic plan for the longer term.

Civil society groups were more fragmented in Nangarhar and Takhar, with few reports of cohesive strategy or coordination mechanisms for mitigating negative impacts of transition. In Takhar, a number of respondents stated that their organisations had increasingly mobilised internal funding mechanisms from members in order to sustain their projects as external funds decreased. These included subscriptions to organisations and charitable fundraising events. There were no reports, however, of CSOs forming networks or partnerships to concentrate on making the most of depleted funding streams; indeed, it appears that transition in these areas has increased competition and decreased collaboration between CSOs.

Similarly, respondents in Balkh reported expanding the scope of their fundraising to include a number of sources including local businesses and large companies, although it was not clear whether this involved simply donations or sponsorship of events;

“We have some contracts with traders and big companies. We receive fund from this source and some donors give us advertising too. No, CSOs can't reach funds easily, but those CSOs can that have private contacts or relations with [private] donors.”

Focus group participant, Balkh

Participants drew a contrast between newer CSOs that are more dependent on external funding sources and older CSOs that have deeper roots in the community; older and more established CSOs are better positioned to mobilise community fundraising mechanisms and are thus more able to mitigate the impact of depleted funding streams. Some respondents also mentioned that their civil society groups had joined together in informal networks, to share resources, pool funding, and divide work between them – this has helped some groups to overcome the increasing competition for funds and capitalise more greatly on existing resources.

Levels of planning to mitigate potential impacts of transition were reported to be higher in Herat, where a number of CSOs reported creating five or six-year strategic plans to help them gain funds, plan activities for the longer term in line with an organisational mandate and mission, and approach existing donor organisations more effectively. A number of Herat-based CSOs reported extending their activities into areas that generate revenue for the organisation in response to decreasing funding streams, such as vocational training centres funded by contributions by students, and other educational activities. Additionally, a number of respondents employed by women-focussed CSOs reported having strategic plans to deal with the impact of potential insecurity on the province's women; these included increased community-based work and domestic work for women with restricted movement, and lower-profile activities so as not to risk being targeted by insurgent groups.

In Takhar, some CSOs reported exploring other sources of funding in order to mitigate negative impacts of transition on funding streams. These included collecting contributions from members and local businesses.

6.2 Demands and Concerns

Focus group participants presented a number of demands and concerns about the transition process, directed towards its managers at the national level, the civil society community in Afghanistan more widely, and international donors.

Respondents in Bamyán commonly complained about the number of national policies that are piloted in

the province. They perceived that the province is used to test out national policies (including the transition process) because it is felt to be more stable and secure than other areas. A number of civil society actors had requested, for example, that the transition process not begin in Bamyan, along with the concomitant draw-down of NATO forces and decrease in international funds;

“Our organization hasn’t done advocacy concerning the transition process, only along with other CSOs we raised our concern that Bamyan province must not be an experimental site for the central government, as Bamyan is always selected as first province.”

Focus group participant, Bamyan

So far, these demands have not been met, and many respondents felt that Bamyan was unfairly treated due to its relative stability.

Respondents in Balkh highlighted that greater support from the local and national government is needed if civil society is to continue to engage in effective work on women’s rights, women’s capacity building, and other gender-related areas. Women in Balkh – and other areas – are often heavily criticised for involvement in civil society activities – and as mentioned above in the case of Herat, this criticism has the potential to become extremely serious. Focus group participants in Balkh stated that support from the GIRoA for women’s projects can give them greater legitimacy and avoid certain criticisms; backed up by enforcement of rule of law for CSOs, the support of the authority of the GIRoA is required to facilitate these activities.

Despite these calls for closer coordination with the GIRoA, however, a number of respondents in Bamyan emphasised that these links must not become too close in order to guarantee the independence of civil society. While civil society actors and groups are keen to maintain closer links with the government, in order to have a greater hand in policy formulation and service delivery, they are wary of too close a level of government involvement in civil society activity, which may lead to CSOs being seen as overly politicised and present a security risk in some areas.

Noting the dependency of many civil society groups on external funding, as well as the inevitability of the depletion of funds in Afghanistan, many focus group participants called for international donors to build long-term, sustainable relationships with civil society groups. Respondents stated that this can help ensure the capacity of established CSOs continues to grow, and emphasised the importance of continued support for certain CSOs, particularly those working with women, to ensure that gains made in the previous years are not lost. Participants in the Kabul focus group, as well as key informants, stated that donors should shift from funding streams based on projects to longer-term funding models; this would not only ensure increased sustainability for CSOs and improved capacity through long-term investment, but also allow CSOs to broaden the scope of their activities as they are no longer limited by the exigencies of securing short-term funding;

“In the second step donor agencies need to stop their budgeting project-by-project, they need to budget organizations through a long-term program. The main reason for the chaos amongst organisations is that they haven’t become able to design a coherent platform yet.”

Focus group participant, Kabul

Other participants in the Kabul focus group noted the need to increase the capacity of civil society to compete for international funding. With funds specifically for Afghanistan diminishing, and donors increasingly issuing multi-country calls for proposals (as was noted by a number of respondents), Afghan civil society must become able to compete with civil society in other countries in order to draw sustained funding to the country;



“Our main source of income is international funding, while the only solution to attract this funding is to improve the standards of our organizations so that they can compete with other organizations and bring funding to Afghanistan.”

Focus group participants, Kabul

Implementing and encouraging broad, across the board standards for Afghan CSOs will be important in this, to ensure that Afghan CSOs are able to compete with more established civil society communities in other countries. Calls for longer-term partnerships between donors and CSOs were also reflected in Bamyan, Herat, and Takhar, where respondents also called for donors to work more closely and over the longer term with partners to identify needs and build capacity;

“Donor agencies try to identify CSOs’ basic needs through [intermediary] NGOs who are their partners and I think it is a good method, but if case donor agencies try to establish direct link with CSOs it is even better.”

Focus group participant, Bamyan

Alongside calls to longer-term, sustainable funding relationships, however, respondents in Bamyan, Takhar, and Kabul also highlighted the effectiveness of responsive and closely targeted funding. Noting the increasingly demanding and time-consuming nature of many funding streams, respondents called for more easily accessible, short-term funding that can respond quickly to localised needs as and when they arise.

These calls for changes in funding modalities in response to transition were accompanied by calls for more locally-managed funding pools. A number of civil society organisations reported positive experiences of working with internationally-funded, but locally managed funding pools such as the British Council-funded Tawanmandi fund, stating that this model allows for greater flexibility, better targeting of funds, and eases direct donor over-sight of projects. Respondents in Balkh and Herat called for this model to be expanded into other areas.

In Helmand, focus group participants noted the need to cultivate more sustainable, local funding sources. Civil society groups working in the areas of media, in particular, have begun exploring – alongside publications and other media outlets – the possibility of garnering financial support in the form of sponsorship for their work. A number of respondents noted the challenges inherent in this – a loss of independence of the part of CSOs, and an unwillingness on the part of companies to be associated with CSOs that are seen to be “political”, for example – but stated that this was the only mechanism through which they could raise funding streams to continue their work. Cultivating stronger ties with local business communities, and an increased openness on the part of businesses to engagement with civil society, was a key demand for many respondents.

A number of respondents in Helmand and Balkh also emphasised that stronger relationships with established civil society groups must not come at the cost of “crowding out” new and innovative CSOs, and that donors should continue to identify emerging civil society organisations, particularly those with a focus on the youth, to ensure that organisations with novel approaches do not get overlooked in the competition for funding. This can be seen as contradictory to other calls for donors to establish closer, longer-term partnerships with established CSOs, but must be seen in the context of balancing increasingly depleted funds in such a way as to maintain a vibrant and innovative civil society in the country.

Respondents in Takhar called for changes in relationships with donor agencies to reflect the changing

reality of funding and context in response to the transition process. Specifically, donors should work more closely at the local level to identify the particular needs and requirements of CSOs, building more participatory project planning processes to ensure that declining funds are spent effectively. This can help build a more “bottom-up” approach to civil society that moves CSOs away from simply responding to projects designed by donors.

One respondent in Takhar also noted the opportunities present by transition, as a chance to reflect on over ten years of work with considerable international support, and to take the opportunity to find new ways of working more suited to the emerging context in Afghanistan;

“I think it's a golden chance for CSOs to reappear with new policies and take lessons from past experiences, after the election and signing the BSA they have to start a new life and new activities.”

Focus group participant, Takhar

Respondents in all areas called for closer cooperation between civil society groups in order to assist in carrying out situational analysis and analysis of possible post-transition scenarios, as well as sharing of assets, pooling of access to funds, and sharing of areas of expertise. The formation of stronger networks at the provincial and national levels was called for in Herat, Takhar, and Badakhshan, with the purpose of endowing civil society in these provinces with a more united face and allowing CSOs to approach both local and national government with coherent agendas and recommendations.



7. Conclusions

Key Conclusions

- The transition period presents a number of challenges for civil society, but also a key opportunity for changing long-standing working paradigms to improve sustainability and effectiveness.
- Funding remains a key challenge for civil society, and minimising the impact of decreased funding will require a number of changes on the part of both CSOs and international donors.
- Civil society advocacy remains limited in its scope, but CSOs and the GIRoA are in a strong position to implement changes that can improve the efficacy of both national and local advocacy activities.
- CSOs must work together sensitively to ensure that increased competition for funding does not negatively affect their work.

The transition period will undoubtedly be a testing time for civil society in Afghanistan, but along with its challenges come a number of opportunities for building a more effective, participatory, and sustainable civil society. Achieving this will, however, require nuanced and considered engagement by civil society groups and individuals, the GIRoA, and international donors.

Reductions in international donor funding clearly present the most important challenge to civil society throughout the transition period. Although funding for civil society has been high in previous years, depleted funding will require CSOs to explore new funding mechanisms, ways of maximising remaining funds, and identify long-term goals that they wish to achieve. Donor organisations will have to alter funding modalities to capitalise to the fullest on reduced funding, but these changes must not place burdensome requirements on CSOs' already stretched capacity.

Coordination between CSOs is variable across the different provinces looked at, with civil society actors in some areas coordinating informally to discuss long term strategies to mitigate potential negative impacts of transition, while in others transition has a fragmenting effect as CSOs increasingly compete for funds. Calls for greater coordination represent a good starting point for creating local and national networks of civil society bodies and actors.

Transition has seen improvements in security in areas such as Helmand, where the withdrawal of international forces has seen less frequent insurgent attacks, and this has allowed CSOs to expand their activities into newly secure areas. In other provinces, such as Takhar and Bamyan, transition has had little impact on security as the previous security situation was relatively good. Despite this, however, there are deeply held concerns about the continuing security situation in many areas, and this has a negative impact on certain areas of civil society's activities, particularly on women's issues.

Many respondents reported engaging actively with communities in the provinces looked at on issues relating to transition, conducting consultative meetings with community members and leaders. These activities have been met with little engagement on the part of the GIRoA, as structural challenges and attitudes on the part of GIRoA representatives limit the extent to which they are willing or able to engage with civil society advocacy.

Special attention must be paid to minimising the impact of transition on women's ability to engage with CSOs and their work. This will entail enforcing rule of law, providing additional capacity building for



female employees, and encouraging participation by providing specialised support for female staff such as transport.

Overall, there is a sense of trepidation around the negative impacts of the transition process and concomitant decline in international support, which is, however, offset by a recognition of the need to adapt to a new context, and the opportunities for greater coordination and longer term planning that this adaptation will present for civil society in Afghanistan.



8. Recommendations

8.1 Afghan Civil Society

- Strengthen local networks: Civil society groups and individuals should work at the local level to build and strengthen coherent, collaborative networks. Increased coordination and collaboration can help in capitalising on remaining resources and gaining bigger grants by sharing costs. Existing informal networks and collaboration should be strengthened and formalised to maximise sharing of information and capacities. Where a squeeze on funding is leading to increased competition between CSOs, the formation of networks can help CSOs to collaborate on projects that require diverse skill-sets and maximise the benefit of available funding.
- Encourage expansion and outreach of national-level networks: CSO respondents in local areas highlighted that a disconnect between provincial CSOs and those based in Kabul often leads to local CSOs having poor information around donor processes and available funds. Building connections between established CSO networks in Kabul and provincial-level CSOs can help share valuable information, feed local CSO concerns into the advocacy activities of national-level CSOs, and improve coordination around securing funding.
- Carry out contextual analysis and strategic planning: Networks of civil society organisations at the local and national level should carry out joint analysis of potential post-transition scenarios and outcomes. Based on this, coherent strategic plans for the longer term should be made. This will assist CSOs not only in negotiating increasingly depleted funding streams, but also in presenting more unified and specific advocacy activities around local and national issues to the various branches of the Afghan government.
- Carry out stakeholder analysis: In-depth stakeholder analysis, carried out jointly by CSOs at various levels, can assist CSOs in mitigating potential security risks by identifying local powerbrokers that might have interests that conflict with their work (this was found during the course of the research to be particularly pertinent in Balkh and Kunduz, for example), and presenting well-targeted advocacy strategies to parties of concern at the local and national level.
- Build stronger ties to local communities: Closer connections to communities can serve as a potential funding source, and assist in mitigating security threats and representing more accurately the opinions and concerns of Afghan citizens, closer. Closer association with local religious bodies could help access new population groups and gain greater acceptance from communities for civil society by emphasising overlap between the work of CSOs and traditional religious bodies.
- Build partnerships with other types of organisation: Building links to organisations with different specialities such as local media outlets and companies can help in gaining sponsorship and sharing costs of activities by capitalising on different organisations' areas of expertise. Agreements with higher education bodies such as universities can help provide young, capable interns for CSOs and build the capacity of the next generation of civil society actors.
- Encourage voluntary work: CSOs should explore more formalised voluntary working models in their activities. Building networks of local volunteers and organising volunteer-led events can help minimise the impact of decreased funding on CSO activities. Encouragement of volunteerism could also help to improve the perception of CSOs as working charitably within communities, perhaps mitigating the perception of CSOs and NGOs as businesses or profit-making enterprises that has grown up in many areas.

- Encourage national standards for civil society: The increasing number of multi-country bids directed towards Afghanistan means that Afghan CSOs are required to compete with more established civil society groups in other countries such as India and Nepal. Encouraging and embracing national standards for civil society, in terms of transparency and accountability, can help ensure that Afghan civil society is competitive in this new context. Additionally, embracing these standards can improve perceptions of Afghan CSOs at the local level.

8.2 Government of Afghanistan

- Increased training for local government representatives: Better training for local government figures and bodies on understanding and dealing with civil society, and incorporating civil society recommendations into local policy, will assist in building collaborative relationships with CSOs at the provincial and district levels. Local government representatives should be encouraged to see civil society not as a competitor that could potentially undermine their authority, but as a collaborator in formulating and implementing policies and services that meet the needs of constituents

- Policy consultation: Building mechanisms into local and national policy formation, such as consultations with civil society groups, can help to encourage bottom-up engagement in the policymaking process. These mechanisms should be integrated into the policy formulation process by necessitating CSO consultations.

- Ensure proper rule of law protection for CSOs: Ensuring that CSOs are respected under the rule of law will be important in supporting their ability to go about their work and in allaying fears of deteriorations in security. Afghan National Police units, as well as other local rule of law departments, should be encouraged to build links to local CSOs to ensure that they can respond appropriately to their requirements. Ensuring that local residents feel secure and confident enough to engage in civil society work will be especially important to the participation of women.

8.3 International Donors

- Build sustainable relationships at the local level: With many CSOs dependent on short-term, project based funding, and funding streams becoming increasingly constrained throughout Afghanistan, building sustainable, long-term partnerships with local CSOs will become increasingly important in ensuring the continued sustainability of civil society at the local level. This can help with capacity building, avoiding frequently burdensome changes in reporting requirements, and building coherent portfolios of activities for CSOs tailored to their contexts. Long-term partnerships should include, where possible, multi-year and core funding for CSOs in order to guarantee continuity of staff and ensure that gains made in projects are not lost when the project cycle ends.

- Build more responsive funding mechanisms: Closer donor-CSO partnerships can ensure that bidding processes do not place an onerous burden on increasingly stretched national CSO resources, while more rapid funding mechanisms and closer consultation with CSO partners can help ensure that projects fit as closely as possible with the needs of local populations and do not lose relevance due to delays in funding processes – which are becoming increasingly frequent in the uncertain climate of the transition process. Many CSOs expressed concerns around the implementation of projects that are seen as overly “political” at the local level, such as advocacy projects, as this can expose them to security risks. Increased consultation can help ensure that projects are feasible and that local partners are comfortable implementing these projects, avoiding wasting much-needed funds on projects with little benefit and which national CSOs are reticent to implement.

- Invest in new and innovative CSOs: Although cementing long-term donor relationships with partner CSOs is important in building further the capacity of effective and established civil society groups, this must not come at the cost of constricting access to funding for new and innovative CSOs. Funding



should be set aside for civil society groups taking novel approaches to existing and new challenges, particularly with regards to Afghanistan's large youth population. A re-orientation of funding models towards providing initial injections of cash into burgeoning CSOs, rather than funding specific project over a longer period of time, could help in the establishment of social enterprises that are able to respond quickly to changes at the local level.

- Expand locally managed funding pools: Funding pools provided by international donors and managed at the local level have proven to be a promising model for improving the effectiveness of donor funds, mitigating the increasing need for remote monitoring of projects (and its concomitant and burdensome reporting processes), and ensuring that decisions about which projects and organisations to fund are made effectively and wisely – capitalising to the fullest on remaining funding sources.

- Management training for national staff: As funding becomes increasingly constrained, national CSOs are less and less able to provide the higher salaries demanded by international staff. Capacity building workshops on subjects such as proposal writing, budget composition, and reporting systems should be provided by donors to ensure that talented and capable local staff –the one thing that many Afghan CSOs do not lack – are able to step confidently into management roles in the future. Although a number of capacity building projects have been implemented so far to enhance the capacity of civil society management, these should be expanded and built-upon, particularly at the provincial level, with adequate following-up of training to ensure the sustainability of these programmes.

