



AFGHANISTAN

EU COUNTRY ROADMAP FOR ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

2018 – 2020

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| | |
|---|-----------|
| ACKNOWLEDGMENT | 4 |
| LIST OF ACRONYMS | 5 |
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | 6 |
| 1.INTRODUCTION | 8 |
| 1.1 Background..... | 8 |
| 1.2 Objectives of the Roadmap..... | 8 |
| 1.3 Methodology..... | 8 |
| 1.4 Definition of Civil Society..... | 9 |
| 2.STATE OF CIVIL SOCIETY | 12 |
| 2.1 ENABLING ENVIRONMENT..... | 12 |
| 2.1.1Legal and Regulatory Environment | 12 |
| 2.1.2Administrative processes | 13 |
| 2.1.3Self-Regulatory initiatives and certification schemes | 14 |
| 2.1.4State-Civil Society Relations | 15 |
| 2.1.5Donor-Civil Society Relations..... | 18 |
| 2.1.6International NGOs-Civil Society Relations..... | 19 |
| 2.1.7Security and Basic Rights | 19 |
| 2.1.8Economic Environment | 20 |
| 2.1.9Aid Dependency | 20 |
| 2.1.10Alternatives/Volunteerism | 21 |
| 2.1.11Public Perceptions of Civil Society | 22 |
| 2.2 PARTICIPATION AND ROLES | 23 |
| 2.2.1Coordination and Collaboration among Civil Society | 23 |
| 2.2.2Participation in Public Policy Formulation and Reform | 24 |
| 2.2.3Participation in Strategic Consultation and Program Design | 26 |
| 2.2.4Service Delivery | 26 |
| 2.2.5Transparency and Accountability | 27 |
| 2.2.6Conflict Prevention and Peace Building | 28 |
| 2.3 CAPACITY | 29 |
| 2.3.1Technical Capacity and Expertise..... | 29 |
| 2.3.2Institutional Capacity..... | 30 |
| 2.3.3Project Management | 30 |
| 2.3.4Research and Advocacy..... | 30 |
| 2.3.5Gender-Responsive Programming | 31 |
| 3.CURRENT EU ENGAGEMENT..... | 33 |
| 3.1 STRUCTURED EU DIALOGUE WITH CIVIL SOCIETY | 33 |
| 3.2 POLICY DIALOGUE FOR AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT | 34 |
| ANNEX I | 40 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Priority Area 1: Enabling Environment | 40 |
| Priority Area 2: Structured Participation and roles | 43 |
| Priority Area 3: Capacity | 44 |
| ANNEX II..... | 47 |
| EU Priority Actions 2018-2020..... | 47 |

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|----------|--|
| ACBAR | Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development |
| AICS | Afghanistan Institute for Civil Society |
| APPRO | Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organisation |
| ANPDF | Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework 2017-2021 |
| BAAG | British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group |
| CSO | Civil Society Organisation |
| CS | Civil Society |
| CDC | Community Development Council |
| CoC | Code of Conduct for NGOs Engaged in Afghanistan |
| DCC | District Community Council |
| DDA | District Development Assembly |
| EU | European Union |
| GIRoA | Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan |
| INGO | International Non-Governmental Organisation |
| JCMB | Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board |
| MS | Member States |
| NAP 1325 | National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| NPP | National Priority Program |
| OISAT | Organisation Integrity System Assessment Tool |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNAMA | United Nation Assistance Mission for Afghanistan |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The European Union and its Member States, together with like-minded international partners, have undertaken to develop country roadmaps for engaging with CSOs all around the world. These roadmaps are meant to increase the impact, predictability and visibility of EU action in support of civil society, and to improve coordination between the EU Delegation to Afghanistan, MS and other international actors. As the period covered by the 2015-2017 Roadmap has come to an end, the process for a revised *EU Country Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in Afghanistan 2018-2020* is to take stock, assess progress and provide recommendations for the future engagement. This Roadmap identifies objectives for the coming years for the EU cooperation with CSOs and actions to be taken in three key areas: enabling environment, structured participation and roles, and capacity.

Positive developments have been noted in the legislative and policy provisions with civil society more actively engaged in some of the initiatives to improve the CSOs regulatory framework. This includes, *inter alia*, the revision of the NGO Law, the Associations Law, and the development of a draft Law on Foundations. CSOs acknowledged the efforts made by the government to reform the legal framework. At the same time, concerns persist over the translation of existing laws and policies into practice: among the CSOs consulted, 60% of respondents considered laws and policies of the Afghan Government did not sufficiently support the activities of civil society. While administrative processes in general are still considered cumbersome and lengthy, registration processes for NGOs have been simplified and are largely perceived as adequate. The government is considering centralising all processes for delivery of certificates for various CSOs, currently split between different ministries under the authority of a single government institution, an initiative advocated, in

particular, for tax processes that most civil society actors continue to perceive as complex and often corrupt.

A more active engagement by CSOs has also been observed in legislative and policy processes, where CSOs have been advocating for their expertise to be taken into account in policy development, making recommendations for policy reform, requesting amendments of existing documents, participating in consultations and on technical and advisory boards for policy reform and implementation. The emergence of sectoral networks and thematic groups, pooling together expertise has improved the ability of CSOs to structure their advocacy efforts and hold the government accountable. Benefitting from increased collaboration, coordination has also been improving, though at a much slower rate and with mechanisms rather *ad hoc* than systematic. Overcoming the lack of systematic interactions between the civil society and the government and tackling the capacity needs of CSOs in the area of monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation seem essential to improve CSOs engagement.

Improvements are needed also with respect to the civil society participation in development programming where limited interactions with the donors took place mainly because of security and mobility restrictions. A key condition for CSOs to be recognised as legitimate partners in the policy process and as watchdogs, with a mandate to ensure the accountability of the government, is to improve their own accountability and demonstrate the transparency of their internal processes. The role of CSOs in service delivery, conflict prevention and peace building is analysed more in detail in this Roadmap.

A mixed assessment concerns also CSOs' capacity, a topic that has gained heavy attention over the past decade. Due to

international recognition of the shortcomings and external pressure from the international community, the capacity of civil society has improved in terms of organisational management and technical specialisation. However, despite improvements and extensive efforts, major gaps in terms of CSOs' capacity persist, in particular of grassroots organisations. The identified challenges include, *inter alia*, limited organisational capacity, lack of technical expertise, gaps in understanding and practice of project management and strategic planning, limited research, communication and information technology skills, little knowledge and limited capacity in systematising gender-sensitive and conflict-sensitive situational assessments as part of programme design. Building on existing strengths and potential, much insistence was placed on the need for more capacity exchange among civil society actors, supported by structured cooperation at the local level, and between Kabul-based CSOs and others in the provinces.

Coordination and collaboration remain prevalent themes also with concern to the current EU and MS engagement with the civil society in Afghanistan. Most donors and CSOs recognise the need for more coordination, both among MS and with other international partners, to know who supports what and where. Coordination between the EU Delegation to Afghanistan and MS on civil society related issues is done usually at Head of Cooperation meetings, in action-oriented discussions as well as in political level meetings where relevant, on an *ad hoc* basis when specific issues arise. The consultation exercise for this Roadmap highlighted that coordination needs to include, to some extent, division of labour in programming and also that donors' support models are often quite diverse and project-based with the involvement of civil society being envisaged merely during the implementation phase. More specifically, on the EU role, closed contact has been

maintained with the civil society through different channels such as bilateral meetings, thematic working groups and policy dialogue fora involving the Government, the donor community and the CSOs. However, when it comes to the EU programming cycle, the participation of CSOs is still carried out mostly on an *ad hoc* basis.

Finally, challenges for donors still persist when trying to get the balance right between supporting the 'usual suspects' of Afghan civil society and the smaller grassroots organisations, and this equally affects all the areas analysed in the Roadmap. The nature of funding systems and the imperative to manage few bigger contracts makes it problematic for some CSOs to participate. This is further exacerbated by security restrictions which make direct engagement with CSOs outside of Kabul difficult and lead to a high degree of Kabul-centricity. As a result, those CSOs with a better access to the donor community and knowledge of the development jargon remain the primary civil society interlocutors and beneficiaries of international funding. Making the processes around policy reform and development programming more inclusive is one of the key challenges that emerged throughout the consultation and it will require renewed efforts in order to be addressed.

The Roadmap is complemented by two Annexes. Annex I includes a list of recommendations for the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA), the civil society, and the donors community. The recommendations were provided by those who participated in the consultation to facilitate positive developments in the three key areas analysed in the Roadmap. Annex II summarises a set of actions that the EU intends to take in the next three years in order to increase the impact, predictability and visibility of EU action in support of civil society, and to improve coordination between the EU Delegation to Afghanistan, EU MS and other international actors.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In 2012, the EU adopted a policy shift to push its long-standing support for civil society a step further by proposing an enhanced and more strategic approach in its engagement with local CSOs covering all regions.¹

The emphasis of this policy is on CSOs' engagement to build stronger democratic processes and accountability systems and to achieve better development outcomes. The EU gives value to a dynamic, pluralistic and competent civil society and recognizes the importance of constructive relations between states and CSOs.

To implement this policy, the EU encouraged the elaboration of EU roadmaps for engagement with CSOs at country level. Conceived as a joint initiative between the European Union and Member States, roadmaps were introduced to activate and to ensure structured dialogue and strategic cooperation, increasing consistency and impact of EU actions.

1.2 Objectives of the Roadmap

The key objectives of the roadmap are:

1. To enhance efforts to promote a conducive environment for CSOs in partner countries;
2. To promote a meaningful and structured participation of CSOs in domestic policies, in the EU programming cycle and in international processes; and
3. To increase local CSOs' capacity to perform their roles as independent development actors more effectively.

¹ European Commission (2012) [Communication: The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe's engagement with Civil Society in external relations](#), COM(2012) 492

1.3 Methodology

This Roadmap was developed in a consultative and inclusive way by taking the following steps:

A **Desk Review** of existing documents and secondary data sources on the state of civil society in Afghanistan, background on EU engagement and strategies in Afghanistan, and lessons learnt on the support for an enabling environment for CS from similar contexts. The review was instrumental to develop the analytical framework for the consultation.

Consultations: Countrywide consultations with stakeholders in Kabul and five regions (North, South, East, West, Central Highlands). As much as possible, efforts were made to extend the consultation beyond established networks in regional and provincial centres.

Consultation Survey: The previous roadmap survey consultation questionnaire for civil society was revised as follows:

- A higher focus on gender equality and gender-responsive activities of CSOs;
- An assessment of awareness and perception among CSOs of the NGOs certification schemes; and
- A stronger focus on financial and organisational sustainability.

The questionnaire included a mix of qualitative and quantitative questions (a total of 57 questions); it was translated in Dari and Pashto and uploaded onto an online survey tool to facilitate data collection through online consultations.² The launch of the survey took place on Thursday July 27, 2017 and 214 Afghan CSOs participated.

² Questions were designed to be accessible to both grassroots organisations and established NGOs. However, it needs to be acknowledged that some of the themes addressed may be more easily accessible to established NGOs familiar with the development terms.

Additional consultation questionnaires were designed to collect the views of EU Member States and International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) engaged in Afghanistan. Five Member States and 24 INGOs participated in the consultation.³

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Focus group discussions were carried out with three types of actors: registered NGOs, trade unions/guilds and their provincial branches, youth groups, student associations and volunteer networks.

A FGD questionnaire was developed and FGDs engaged at least ten representatives from each group in each region, ensuring gender balance as much as possible. FGDs were conducted in Kabul and the five regional capital hubs (Mazar-e Sharif, Herat City, Bamyan Center, Jalalabad, and Kandahar City). Additional FGDs were conducted in Daikundi.

Key Informant Interviews with relevant stakeholders and the donor community (diplomatic representations and INGOs), government and representatives of CS networks were used to identify progress on priorities outlined in the previous roadmap.

A **Workshop** was conducted in Kabul in August 2017, bringing together 21 CSOs.

A number of limitations impacted the extent of the consultation. Most of those who were reached and replied are *de facto* registered NGOs and structures familiar with development terms, technical language, and channels of communication. It proved difficult to simplify some of the technical language without losing sight of the objectives of some questions. To nuance this bias, key terms were explained in an introduction of the questionnaire, and during FGDs.

³ Questionnaires were sent out by email to identified networks, with occasional follow-up by telephone. In case of limited access or unavailability of internet, face to face interviews were conducted.

Due to restricted access to internet, many in the provinces were unable to send back the survey forms. To the extent possible, hardcopies were distributed, completed with the help of researchers and digitalised.

Five MS provided feedback through the online consultation questionnaire. Response rates were affected by evacuation of staff of most diplomatic representations in the summer of 2017, and subsequent reduction of full-time operational staff in Kabul over the data-collection period.

Finally, and in light of the time frame and resources available, the scope of consultations focused on three types of organisations. These categories include NGOs, local voluntary groups (including youth, student and cultural groups), and labour associations/trade unions. The perspective was primarily organisational, and research did not include the numerous traditional governance institutions, including jirgas and shuras, or religious structures and semi-formal development structures⁴

1.4 Definition of Civil Society

There are several definitions of civil society. The European Union defines civil society as ‘all non-state, non-profit structures, non-partisan and non-violent, through which people organise to pursue shared objectives and ideals, whether political, cultural, social or economic’.⁵ Civil society encompasses a wide range of actors with different roles and mandates, e.g. community based organisations, NGOs, trade unions, cooperatives, professional or business

⁴Community Development Councils (CDCs), District Development Assemblies (DDAs) and District Community Councils (DCCs).

⁵ They include membership-based, cause-based and service-oriented CSOs. Among them, community-based organisations, non-governmental organisations, faith-based organisations, foundations, research institutions, gender-focused and LGBT organisations, cooperatives, professional and business associations, and the not-for-profit media. Trade unions and employers’ organisations (‘social partners’) form a specific category of CSOs.

associations, not-for-profit media, philanthropic organisations, etc. Civil society differs from political society because it does not aim to seize power. It differs from business because it does not seek profit for its members.

Challenges in agreeing on a common workable definition of civil society are not specific to the Afghan context: the concept of civil society itself, its relationship to democracy, and its translation in different environments, have long been debated.

In 2010, Winter's "Civil Society Development in Afghanistan" attempted to provide a contextual working definition:

"Civil society is formed by individual and collective voluntary action around shared values, interests, purposes and standards which is intended to improve the lives of Afghan men, women and children without compromising their dignity. Action can take a variety of non-profit forms; from charitable work, through cultural activities, to advocacy and campaigning. CSOs can include registered non-governmental organisations, community and self-help groups, art and cultural associations, women's organisations, professional associations, trade unions, business associations, faith based organisations, umbrella groups and coalitions."

Recognising challenges in the definition of civil society, the 2016 "State of Enabling Environment for CSOs in Afghanistan" uses the definition proffered during the 2007 Kabul Enabling Environment Conference, which considers civil society as "committed to the public good and powered by private voluntary energies. It includes institutions of education, health, science and research which conduct activities and/or provide services on a charitable or non-commercial (but fee-paying) basis. It embraces professional, commercial, labour, ethnic and arts organisations, and others devoted to religion, communication (including media), the environment, and the community (e.g. village organisations)."

Development actors often differentiate between "modern" and "traditional" civil

society, the former referring to initiatives and organisations which emerged after 2001 (NGOs, associations, youth and women's groups), and the latter to localised traditional community and religious structures including traditional councils (jirgas, shuras), religious groups and institutions, and cultural and literary groups. Intermediary "quasi-traditional" elected bodies created by development actors after 2001 on the model of traditional structures, such as CDCs, DDAs and DCCs, are also generally considered as part civil society. In development practice, however, the term "civil society" is often equated with NGOs, and to a lesser extent, associations – with which international development and the government actors interact the most.

The vast majority of the literature on civil society in Afghanistan therefore focuses primarily on NGOs, and to a lesser extent on traditional local governance structures and quasi-formal institutions – all of which have been included in development programming to different extents.⁶

Within Afghan society, the term "civil society" and what it covers is still highly debated, and sometimes contested by those who consider it a western import. Among those who do identify as civil society, the question of its definition continues to generate heated discussions. During consultations for the current roadmap, the question of the inclusion of the media, private entities, religious structures, academic and educational institutions,

⁶ The role of traditional guilds (senfs) and trade associations (anjoman) remains largely under-researched. Senfs, anjomans, the national ettehadia (apex of traditional guilds and trade associations) and its provincial branch offices continue to play a pivotal role in representing the interests of their constituent micro and small sized enterprises. These, however, have remained outside of the scope of interest of most development actors and experts, the government, and the international community. Similarly, the role and activities of youth associations, cultural circles and networks, and local interest groups (neighborhood associations, community assistance and solidarity networks) have not received much attention or support.

neighbourhood associations or individual volunteer initiatives, was discussed. The values that underpin the activities of civil society were debated, with some placing emphasis on values such as social justice, democracy, human and women's rights, and arguing those who did not abide by these standards should be "excluded" from civil society. Others dissociate NGOs and CSOs, considering the former as market-driven implementation bodies of international programmes. The extent to which civil society activities should be volunteer or fund-based is regularly discussed and many express the need for a clearer identification of the scope of action and services to be delivered by CSOs.

Finally, and while the term "civil society" is repeatedly mentioned in Afghan legal documents, there appears to be no common definition and understanding of civil society among Government actors. The lack of a common accepted definition has increasingly become a bone of contention between the government and civil society – particularly concerning who should or should not be included in various commissions responsible for overlooking the revision and implementation of laws and policies.

2. STATE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

2.1 ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

An enabling environment refers to the national policies, laws, dialogue structures, external support, contextual factors and other elements that need to be in place for CSOs to be able to perform their role in society.⁷ Recent reports have outlined a number of improvements necessary for a more conducive environment for civil society in Afghanistan.⁸ Positive developments have been noted in the legislative and policy provisions framing the activities of various civil society actors. Expressions of political will to engage with civil society have been repeated, including through formal commitments in policy frameworks, but challenges persist.

This section focuses on developments noted since consultations for the EU Roadmap for 2015-2017 under eight indicators:⁹

- Developments in the legal and regulatory environment and access to rights, that support or impede the work of civil society;
- Self-regulatory initiatives and certification schemes;
- State-civil society relations;
- Donor-civil society relations;
- INGOs-civil society relations;
- Impact of security on the work of civil society and on access to basic rights;
- Economic environment and space for volunteerism;
- Public perceptions of civil society.

⁷ European Union (2015), "[EU Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in Afghanistan 2015-2017](#)"

⁸ See for instance AICS/USAID/CPI (2017), "Financial Sustainability of Civil Society Organizations in Afghanistan," Policy Brief; Altai Consulting (2016), "The State of Enabling Environment for CSOs in Afghanistan", Afghanistan Institute for Civil Society; USAID (2016), "The 2015 CSOS Sustainability Index for Afghanistan", USAID.

⁹ As such, it does not provide a full overview of legislation framing the activities of civil society. These are available in other reports, including the EU Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in Afghanistan 2015-2017, USAID (2016) *op. cit.*, and ALTAI Consulting (2016) *op.cit.*

2.1.1 Legal and Regulatory Environment

The EU Policy for Engagement with Civil Society in External Relations puts emphasis on the importance of "*a functioning democratic legal and judicial system – giving [civil society] the de jure and de facto right to associate and secure funding, coupled with freedom of expression, access to information and participation in public life.*"¹⁰ The State has a key role to play in ensuring these basic conditions are met through a consistent implementation of existing legislative provisions, addressing obstacles that adversely impact policy outcomes - including corruption, and the protection of public access to information.¹¹

Constitutional and legislative provisions, as well as national and international commitments by the GIROA since 2002 have paved the way for new rights-based discourse. The policy and legal dispositions framing the activities of civil society are largely in place. Three key legislative tools are the Law on NGOs, the Law on Associations, and the Access to Information Law. A Whistle-blowers' Protection Law is currently being developed. Civil society has been actively engaged in initiatives to improve the existing legal framework, including amendments to the Law on Associations, the Law on NGOs (currently under review), the development of a draft Law on Foundations, draft regulations on Volunteerism and provisions for tax incentives for individuals and the private sector.¹² Particularly in Kabul, CSOs acknowledged the efforts made by the government to reform the legal framework.

¹⁰ See footnote 1

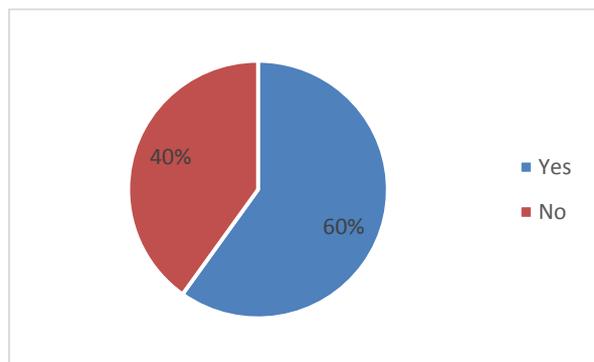
¹¹ PARTO S. and PUGH S. (2016) "[State-Civil Society Relations: Fundamental Rights in South Africa](#)", Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization.

¹² USAID (2016) *op. cit.*

At the same time, there are concerns over the translation of existing laws and policies into practice. The Access to Information Law, for instance, has yet to be enforced throughout the country, and is considered unsatisfactory by the consulted CSOs in both its design and its implementation.¹³

60% of the survey's respondents considered laws and policies of the GIRoA did not sufficiently support the activities of civil society (graph 1). Additional regulations were said to be instrumental to strengthen the legal framework including clear legal provisions for the inclusion of civil society in legislative processes through the Open Government Partnership (OGP)¹⁴. The establishment of an independent and transparent institution for citizens to lodge complaints against government malpractice was also noted as crucial. Though commitments have been made to decentralise bureaucratic processes and decision-making mechanisms, the high centralisation of administration hinders the effectiveness of advocacy initiatives at local level.¹⁵

Graph 1: Perceptions of adequacy of laws and policies in supporting civil society



n=172

¹³ USAID (2016), *op.cit.*

¹⁴ For an explanation about the genesis of the OGP initiative see p. 16.

¹⁵ USAID (2016), *op.cit.*

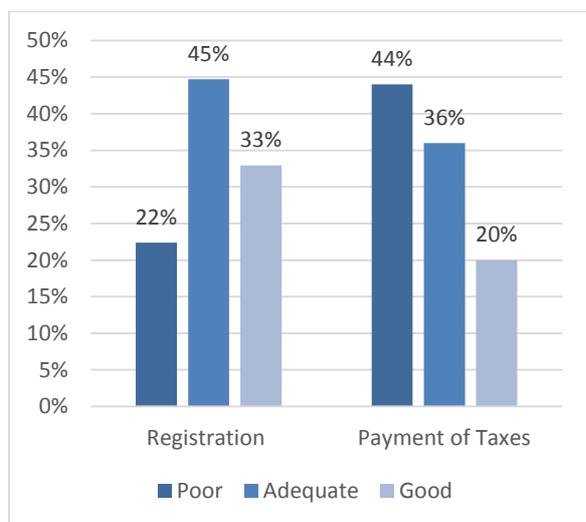
2.1.2 Administrative processes

Registration processes for NGOs have been simplified and are largely perceived as adequate (graph 2). That said, administrative processes in general are considered cumbersome and lengthy, with recurrent delays for obtaining letters of authorisation for implementation of projects and signing of MoUs unless one has access to privileged contacts. Tax processes, in particular, continue to be perceived as complex and often corrupt by most civil society actors, despite commitments by the GIRoA.¹⁶

There is also some confusion regarding GIRoA entities habilitated to register NGOs. Aside from the ministries of Economy and Justice, respectively responsible for registration of NGOs and associations, parallel registrations are requested by other Ministries. Trade and labour unions mentioned demands with no legal grounds from various GIRoA entities to register within their administration. The GIRoA has been developing mechanisms for centralisation of all processes for delivery of certificates to CSOs under the authority of a single government institution, an initiative advocated and welcomed by CSOs.

¹⁶ See also APPRO (2017), "[Reconceptualising Corruption in Afghanistan: An Institution of Bad Governance](#)"; USAID (2016), *op.cit.*; ALTAI Consulting (2016), *op.cit.*

Graph 2: Perceptions of registration and tax payment processes



n=166

2.1.3 Self-Regulatory initiatives and certification schemes

The first Afghan CSO coordinating bodies emerged in the 1980's and early 1990's Pakistan to coordinate assistance to Afghan refugees.¹⁷ Grouping CSOs around a body of values and principles, other networks and umbrella organisations emerged in Afghanistan in the 2000s.¹⁸ The first Code of Conduct for NGOs engaged in Afghanistan (CoC) was developed in 2005, under the initiative of the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development (ACBAR) and with the support of other local NGOs, INGOs, and the GIRoA. In 2013, umbrella organisations/networks based in Afghanistan jointly revised the CoC, which

¹⁷ These provided initial frameworks for coordination and operation to Afghan NGOs and include ACBAR, the Southern and Western Afghanistan and Baluchistan Association for Coordination, and the Afghan NGOs Coordination Bureau.

¹⁸ To date, some of the most prominent registered networks on the Afghan development scene include the three above-mentioned and, Afghan Civil Society Forum Organisation, Afghanistan Women's Network, Civil Society and Human Rights Network.

EHSAN A. (2013) "Non-governmental Organisations' Self-Regulatory Mechanisms: A Reference Guide for Non-Governmental Organisations in Afghanistan", Counterpart International, Global Civil Society Strengthening, USAID.

frames the activities of Afghan NGOs around a set of shared norms, principles and values, and includes operationalisation principles focused on accountability, responsibility and transparency. To date, the CoC remains the main self-regulatory mechanism developed for NGOs in Afghanistan.¹⁹

The development of a national certification scheme is recent. Currently, no single certification model is being widely used and recognised by NGOs and CSOs throughout Afghanistan. Primarily due to increasing donor requirements, international certification, transparency and accountability schemes have been used by Afghan NGOs to assess and upgrade their internal management systems. Usually, these are specifically required by individual donors upon contracting a partner, and based on international criteria.²⁰

With the aim of providing a single national certification model for CSOs in the country, a certification scheme was set up in 2014 with the support of international agencies, and has been implemented since 2015 by the Afghanistan Institute for Civil Society (AICS). In 2017, 40 organisations have been assessed and 20 certified by AICS, established with a mandate to "support a credible and competent civil society sector in Afghanistan by linking CSOs, donors, GIRoA and capacity-building services through culturally appropriate certification schemes."²¹ Two models are currently in use: a national-level model for well-established large to medium-sized NGOs, and a more recent provincial model for smaller grassroots organisations. The national-level AICS certification model includes 66 evaluation standards, based on international standards and Afghan legal

¹⁹ On self-regulatory initiatives, see EHSAN A. (2013) *op.cit.* ACBAR, 2005, [Code of Conduct for NGOs](#).

²⁰ One example is the Checklist on Organizational Capacity Assessment (COCA), required by some donors from their partners for commitments above 1.000.000 Euro.

²¹ For more information on AICS and its certification scheme, see <http://aicsafg.org>.

requirements.²² The AICS certification model received strong backing from the international community. A second Provincial scheme for grassroots²³ organisations, comprising 46 standards, has recently been developed and it is currently being piloted in three provinces.

The idea of a process for certification was welcomed by Afghan NGOs, which see benefits in the diagnosis of internal management and governance systems, and its potential for improving internal governance and credibility. However, some deplore the process is directed primarily at well-established NGOs in Kabul and not complemented by capacity-building and regular mentoring to support institutional reform, particularly in the provinces.

Some CSOs perceive the certification scheme as initiated by international donors to ease identification of partners, rather than developed within and by Afghan civil society itself for its own benefit. Most CSOs are unable, or unwilling, to pay the costs of certification, which are usually covered by donors. This resulted in confusion on the objectives of the scheme: among those in the provinces, the registration is considered project-driven rather than an established independent nation-wide mechanism for certification.

Some argued that a province based civil society council bringing together skilled civil society representatives and governance experts to assess the accountability of CSOs,

from their governance structures to the effective management of their projects on the ground, would be an effective way to certify CSOs and identify those with a clear mandate and the ability to carry it out.

Other recent initiatives to develop national tools for increased accountability and organisational management of Afghan CSOs include Integrity Watch Afghanistan (IWA)'s "*Organisation Integrity System Assessment Tool*" (OISAT) in 2017. Acknowledging the ongoing reflection among Afghan CSOs on means to improve the effectiveness of their systems, the integrity assessment tool is based on peer to peer capacity exchange of Afghan CSOs. The tool is designed to engage Afghan CSOs/NGOs to diagnose strengths and challenges through mutual examination, and work together to meet integrity requirements set out in the OISAT. The OISAT is currently under review and it is expected to be operational in 2018.^{24 25}

2.1.4 State-Civil Society Relations

Strong and structured state-civil society relation is mentioned as crucial to enhance accountability both within GIRoA and civil society. This requires enhanced coordination of CSOs with strengthened capacity to constructively engage with the GIRoA on an evidence basis on the one hand, and the development of a clear strategy for engagement of civil society by the GIRoA on the other. The political support of donors to civil society is noted as instrumental by

²² The model focuses on 5 key areas: Project Management and Program Delivery, Financial Management, Internal Governance and Strategic Planning, External Relations, Communication and Outreach, and Human Resources.

²³ For the purpose of this document grassroots organisations are defined as "Informal groupings or ad hoc organisations working in the immediate local context both in rural and urban areas. They generally convene right-holders, have limited geographical or thematic focus, are membership based and are mostly self-financed through members' fees and contributions (e.g. co-ops, women's associations)". European Commission (2012), "[Mappings and civil society assessments. A study of past, present and future trends](#)". This does not constitute an official EU definition.

²⁴ Capacity elements to be assessed are clustered into eight dimensions: leadership, financial management, management, human resources and operations, monitoring and evaluation, awareness creation and advocacy, policies, and corruption control mechanism. Correspondence with Integrity Watch Afghanistan, September 2017.

²⁵ Outside of the NGOs community, traditional guilds (senfs), trade associations (anjomans) and ettehadies (apex of trade organisations and guilds at the provincial and national levels) have their own self-regulatory mechanisms governing their day to day activities (e.g., quality control, entry requirements for apprenticeship, training regulations etc.). Certification through the Federation of Afghan Craftsmen and Traders is considered relatively simple and trustworthy.

CSOs and MS consulted in fostering better mutual engagement between civil society and the GIRoA, and increased recognition of the role of civil society in policy processes.

The GIRoA has renewed and strengthened commitments to increase civil society engagement in key policy processes, with the support of the international community. In 2015, the GIRoA signed a Mutual Cooperation Agreement with the Civil Society Joint Working Group.²⁶ This is reflected in both the NPPs of 2015 and the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) for 2017-2021, which identify civil society as a key partner. The ANPDF places emphasis on continued efforts to address protection of civil society's operating space, as well as sustained dialogue and partnership between civil society and the state.²⁷ There is also more recognition of the need for the presence of CSOs in legal reform processes and strategic planning, with NGOs and coordinating bodies present in secretariats and boards overlooking the implementation of policies such as the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB) Secretariat for the Afghan Compact²⁸ or the National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 (NAP 1325).

The GIRoA, however, has yet to act upon these commitments and to translate them into practice. Studies highlight poor interactions, and occasional distrust, between civil society and the GIRoA, particularly in the provinces.

²⁶ The Civil Society Joint Working Group is composed of 30 coordinating bodies representing around 1,400 organisations. Its members include NGOs, CSOs, social organisations, unions, associations and other registered entities. Its mandate is to mobilise Afghan civil society around key international events with the Afghan government (e.g., the Bonn II and Tokyo inter-ministerial development conferences, the SOM in July 2014 and the JCMB sessions in 2013 and 2014). See: <https://www.baag.org.uk/member/ayenda/csjwg>.

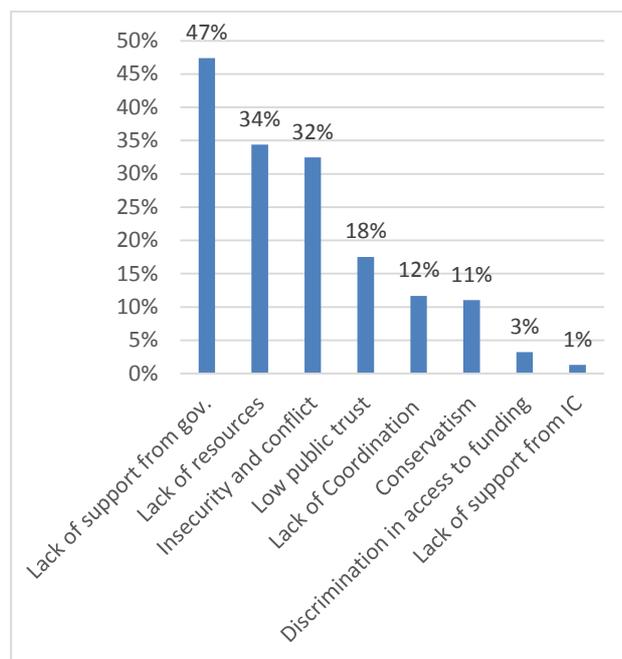
²⁷ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2016), "Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework 2017-2021".

²⁸ GIRoA and UNAMA, (2006), [Terms of Reference of the Joint Coordination Monitoring Board](#).

Administrative corruption, poor rule of law, conflicts of interest, continued threats against civil society, human rights and media activists, including by pro-government elements, are recurrent concerns being reported.²⁹

Though some improvements were noted in the way they engage with each other, lack of support from the government to civil society was the most commonly reported concern. Graph 3 provides an overview of survey respondents' perceptions of main challenges affecting the enabling environment for civil society in Afghanistan.³⁰

Graph 3: Main challenges for an Enabling Environment for Civil Society



n=164

As expressed by respondents, "lack of support from the government" covers a variety of issues, ranging from the expression of moral support, poor implementation or

²⁹ USAID (2016) *op. cit.*; ALTAI Consulting (2016), *op. cit.*, DURAND M. (2015), *op. cit.*

³⁰ This graph was developed based on a textual analysis of qualitative responses to Question 14 of the Consultation Survey for Afghan Civil Society. For the full questionnaire, see Appendix 6.

understanding by civil servants of legal provisions covering the activities of civil society, lack of coordination or disconnect between different levels of government administration, poor monitoring of civil society performance by GIRoA, to inefficient and slow bureaucratic processes, concerns about the lack of transparency of administrative processes, and political interference in civil society's activities. At the provincial and district level, variations in terms of willingness of government administration to collaborate with civil society were noted, based on the connections that organisations or individuals may have within a given administration.

This allegedly generates a climate of distrust and one recurrent remark was that civil society is perceived more as a rival or substitution body to the government than a constructive partner. Respondents highlighted that the lack of clarity on the concept of "*civil society*" in the law itself contributed to mutual distrust. Some mentioned difficulties to conduct advocacy due to lack of responsiveness of relevant government entities which consider civil society as service providers rather than representatives of people's needs.

In Kabul, interviewees noted an increased commitment by the government to support civil society, especially at higher levels of decision making and within the Ministry of Economy, responsible for the registration of NGOs. In practice, however, more needs to be done to institutionalise collaboration and dialogue. Support initiated at the highest level of the government, including the presidential palace, does not trickle down to lower levels of the administration, where NGOs, labour unions and associations mentioned constant challenges in terms of cooperation.

At the same time, GIRoA is considered as having a fundamental role in sustaining civil society, and respondents expressed both

willingness, and a crucial need, for close collaboration and better coordination. At sub-national level, respondents insisted on the need to build strong links between local administrations and CSOs, to increase collaboration and capacity exchange in service delivery, and proper monitoring and evaluation of civil society projects by the GIRoA. The appointment of CSO representatives in Provincial Councils, for instance, is a welcomed practice. Many consider civil society has a responsibility in rebuilding trust, and that little knowledge of mechanisms of engagement had led to a lack of, or inadequate, interactions.

Some also noted a cultural change within civil society itself, with more interest in building long lasting relations with sectoral administrations in order to work together rather than alongside. Though mechanisms for both coordination and collaboration are *ad hoc* rather than institutionalised, there are encouraging initiatives such as the inclusion of CSOs in joint government - CSO councils.

At the national level, the OGP process opened up new perspectives for enhanced collaboration. Established in 2011 on the side-line of the United Nations General Assembly to provide a shared platform to make governments more responsive, transparent and fiscally sustainable, the OGP platform brings together civil society and governments to develop and implement National Action Plans to support reforms in line with government commitments. Following intense advocacy by civil society, the GIRoA officially expressed its intention to join the OGP in December 2016.³¹ At the time of writing, mechanisms for the implementation of eleven commitments made under National Action Plan for Afghanistan are under joint review by the

³¹ This was followed by joint meetings between the government and civil society to consolidate the process and strengthen collaboration for the development of a National Action Plan for Afghanistan (NAPA), approved by the President on December 26, 2017.

GIRoA, civil society and media representatives.³²

2.1.5 Donor-Civil Society Relations

Since 2011, the international community played a significant role in providing moral, material and technical support to Afghan civil society. However, those NGOs based in Kabul, with a better access to the donor community and knowledge of the development jargon, remain the primary interlocutors of the international community and beneficiaries of funding. Informal community governance structures (*jirgas*, *shuras*) and semi-formal institutions such as CDCs, DDAs and DCCs have also progressively started benefitting from capacity development programs and higher involvement in program implementation.³³

The role of international donors is recognised and considered crucial to help civil society sustain itself, achieve its mandate and institutionalise relations with the GIRoA. This includes continuing and intensifying political support for the inclusion of civil society in policy and decision-making processes, strong commitment to fundamental rights by denouncing rights violations and moral support to civil society initiatives in defence of rights, sustained development aid and financial support to civil society.

While recognising the role of donors in the development of civil society, some are critical of the forms and means of engagement by the international community with civil society, and the limited contextual knowledge within the donor community.³⁴ Security concerns and restrictions in movement, but also high turnover of staff,

have limited the space for interactions with civil society outside of Kabul.

Many observe that the international community at large has distanced itself from civil society as trust has been undermined by allegations of corruption on both sides and the phenomenon of "briefcase NGOs" – i.e. with the technical capacity to develop well-written proposals, but limited ability to deliver. Donors' assumptions regarding the lack of capacity of local NGOs to carry out tasks they were assigned, stringent reporting requirements by donors and limited flexibility in program implementation also impede the ability of local implementing partners to deliver beyond outputs and affect mutual trust.³⁵

The means of engagement and forms of donors support are not uniform, and may vary significantly from donor to donor. Among the MS consulted, mechanisms of support to civil society depend on representations' strategic development and cooperation objectives. These include indirect support through multilateral development agencies, direct bilateral support through project-based grants, capacity-building through joint partnerships, and core funding. Forms of engagement with civil society, the amount of direct financial support allocated to CSOs as part of development or humanitarian aid, and the perspective on the stability of current mechanisms of engagement in the coming years also vary. Due to security concerns and staff reduction limiting the ability to effectively manage support and follow-up, some MS expect a reduction in the amount of direct support to CSOs in Afghanistan in the next period, while others, by contrast, are considering expanding their support.

One NGO mentioned that, due to pressure for tangible results from their constituencies and concerns over the accountability of local

³² For more information on the OGP Process see <http://www.nac-pp.net/2017/04/13/1st-civil-society-consultation-workshop-on-open-government-partnership-ogp-in-afghanistan/>.

³³ DURAND M. (2015), *op.cit.*

³⁴ See also DURAND M. (2015), *op.cit.*

³⁵ See also EHSAN A. (2013) *op. cit.*

NGOs, international donors have increasingly been turning to multilateral agencies, INGOs and foreign contractors, with which they are more familiar and *a priori* consider as more reliable for reporting and grants management, as intermediaries for disbursement of funds.

As civil society witnesses a decrease in both international presence outside of Kabul and development funds, this raises concern that the amount of support, which effectively trickles down to civil society and communities is a small fraction of the original funds, with much of the expenses spent on security and administrative costs of international NGOs and contractors. The use of foreign intermediaries, which often contract local NGOs based on terms of reference with little or no flexibility in implementation, also strengthens the perception that Afghan CSOs are considered by donors more as service providers and implementers than partners for dialogue and consultation.

Some CSOs perceive their task is often limited to reporting on outputs, with requirements on addressing long-term outcomes at the proposal stage fading throughout implementation because of donor's focus on reporting and accountability rather than on outcomes. While monitoring and evaluations is conducted by donors to assess the impact of their projects, their results are seldom shared with the implementers themselves. Open and transparent monitoring and evaluation of projects is considered crucial both to strengthen trust between donors and those who ultimately implement their programs on the ground, but also for local CSOs to be able to identify areas of improvement. Similar concerns were expressed by MS consulted, which emphasised the need to focus on sustainability by moving away from short-term, output-based approaches, including through long-term and/ or core-support.

2.1.6 International NGOs-Civil Society Relations

The type of interactions between Afghan civil society and INGOs may vary from organisation to organisation. INGOs play a crucial role in development in Afghanistan and supporting local civil society, including through long-term partnerships, technical advice, capacity-building, and political engagement with the international community. Many have been long established in the provinces, where they have built trusted relations with local CSO, consulting them on a regular basis to define their priorities, and engaging them through capacity-building.

That said, some also primarily engage with local civil society on a project basis for short-term partnerships or capacity support, or simply as intermediary recipient and disbursers of donor funds. One direct consequence is the institution of a hierarchy in the division of tasks between INGOs and local actors, with INGOs assuming the monitoring of activities and reporting to donors, and Afghan NGOs the implementation of activities, on which they are accountable to intermediaries.

CSOs underlined that the institution of a hierarchy implies a lack of recognition that Afghan CSOs themselves have increased their human, technical and organisational capacity over the past decade and that both INGOs and donors can often benefit from consulting with them on contextual needs and project design, and from partnering as equals. The need for more horizontal collaboration is identified by some INGOs, which insist for creating conditions for more civil society agency.

2.1.7 Security and Basic Rights

Insecurity is considered as the third highest challenge by survey respondents (graph 3 above). One direct consequence is limited

access to areas reclaimed by opposition groups, and closing down of activities due to threats and interference by power holders. Deteriorating security, lack of rule of law, armed opposition groups' (AOG) activities and threats against civil society workers, perceived as associates of the government or international actors have seriously endangered the work of local civil society actors, with increasing reports of abductions and killings.

Lack of rule of law and its consequences on security and upholding of basic rights have deeply affected the work of rights defenders and promoters. AOGs, local power holders, conservative elements within society, but also government elements, are considered to be responsible for increasing pressure and threats on basic rights of civil society actors and organisations. In 2016, 50 cases of abuse and threats against human rights defenders were filed within the Human Rights Defenders' Committee and 37 in 2017 as of July. According to some respondents, the practice of blackmailing and defamation campaigns against organisations and individuals working for fundamental rights and women's rights is increasing.

This reportedly contributes to the degradation of trust between civil society and the government, which seems unable to protect it; furthermore some elements with links to the government are considered responsible for threats against civil society actors. The lack of effective mechanisms of protection for human rights defenders further compounds these concerns.

2.1.8 Economic Environment

CSOs are affected in different ways by the economic evolutions, depending on the financial mechanisms of support they have in place. National NGOs which primarily rely on external funding for support, essentially project or program-based, are highly sensitive to evolutions of international

donors' priorities. Trade unions and labour networks, which have developed mechanisms of support through the contributions of members, for instance, demonstrate higher resilience. Volunteer organisations and networks use a variety of support mechanisms, including contribution from members, in-kind donations, or mobilisation of communities.

The one common trait noted by all types of CSOs engaged in this research as affecting their work and perceptions of their work is the institutionalisation of corruption, whether administrative, within the private sector, civil society itself, or donor funding mechanisms. For instance, it is quite common for NGOs to be asked to employ local government employees or their relatives and friends in return for facilitation by government authorities for the NGO to carry out its work. Another example is the occasional lack of transparency in mechanisms for awarding contracts, casting doubts about the accountability of funding.

2.1.9 Aid Dependency

Access to funding and heavy dependency on external support are mentioned as primary sources of concerns of CSOs in Afghanistan (see graph 3 above). Sustained financial and technical support by international donors was unanimously mentioned as a persisting necessity for civil society, as well as by some MS. Sharp decline in international support and the shift to on-budget support in the so-called Transformation Decade has raised concerns among CSOs, which have seen their financial resources shrinking over the past four years and lack proper sustainability plans. Smaller grassroots CSOs and NGOs with difficulties to meet increasingly stringent bureaucratic standards are particularly at risk, with many reportedly having shut down over the past 3 years.³⁶

³⁶ See also ACBAR (2016) "Collaborating for Transformation. The Civil Society of Afghanistan Position

The funding environment is dominated by short-term projects, rigid in their design, with reporting mechanisms focused on efficiency more than effectiveness. One direct consequence is a high turnover of staff and limited capacity of NGOs to retain employees and hire specialists. The urgency to reply to a variety of calls to sustain themselves has also allegedly turned some NGOs into contractors offering a variety of services in different areas of work, focusing exclusively on outputs and demonstrating low levels of expertise and specialisation. The use by some donors of predetermined terms of references with limited flexibility in implementation has also restrained the agency of CSOs and it has hampered initiative in proposing innovative projects that may be rejected.

The use of international NGOs as intermediaries further compounds these challenges, with most administrative and management costs absorbed by INGOs, with sometimes multiple levels of sub-contracting, leaving little or nothing to national NGOs/associations to cover their own administrative and management costs that would assist them in building their institutional capacity. This is further compounded by trends to cut down overheads for implementers. As donors ask for proofs of institutional and organisational capacity to award projects to Afghan CSOs on the one hand, while cutting down budget lines beyond activity expenses on the other, implementing CSOs find themselves in a "catch 22" situation where they have to demonstrate high administrative, management and reporting performance without being able to cover their costs.

Another area of concern is the recent priority given to on-budget support by international donors. While moving away from international aid towards government support

is recognised as a positive ideal, it is considered unrealistic in the short and medium-term as it relies on trusted relations between the state and civil society, and the establishment of transparent administrative processes and funding mechanisms, all of which are far from being in place. Ensuring the government would allocate specific budget lines in its national programs to civil society for service delivery and monitoring and evaluation, under the control of donors, was considered as one possible step towards government funding of CSOs. That said, competition with NGOs backed, and sometimes founded, by individuals within the government, further complicates relations between civil society and the government, creating concerns over possible favouritism in allocation of projects and funds.

Recognising these challenges, some donors have sustained efforts to engage civil societies on their areas of competence, and are increasingly looking at ways to develop volunteerism as a complement to civil society activities and a means for increased sustainability of development efforts.

2.1.10 Alternatives/Volunteerism

With decrease in donor funding over the past three years, the need to look for alternative ways to sustain civil society activities has progressively gained recognition among CSOs. These include membership fees³⁷, more reliance on volunteer work, higher reliance on community contributions, donations from the Afghan diaspora, running fee-paying activities such as education centers, or securing loans without interest reimbursed progressively through membership fees.³⁸ Traditional mechanisms of donation, such as *zakat* or mobilising

³⁷ Guilds and federations of craftsmen and traders also use part of funds collected through membership fees to provide skills training for destitute male and female youth as a service to the community.

³⁸ See also ALTAI Consulting (2016), *op cit.* and USAID (2016), *op.cit.*

community resources to address the needs of the most vulnerable, are occasionally mobilised. Few CSOs have also started to initiate public-private partnerships, developing their capacities in networking. Though these initiatives are still at a nascent stage and often insufficient to cover running costs, they are increasingly seen as a necessary complement to donor funded activities. The use of volunteers as part of CSOs' approach with communities, for instance, is considered essential to sustain their activities and ensure long-term development. Less attention is paid to income generating activities, which remain considered by some as incompatible with the mandate of civil society.

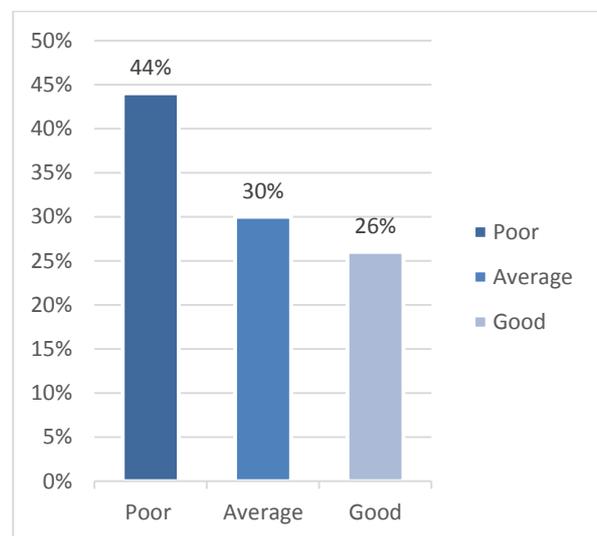
It is also largely accepted that part of civil society's work is to be done without expectations of financial return. Much of NGOs' engagement of communities, involvement in policy and legal reform processes, advocacy, and raising the attention on key social issues through unfunded publications are considered part of their mandate. In the long run, however, small CSOs in particular find it difficult to sustain activities and running costs while mobilising human resources on non-income generating activities. More generally, core funding or basic income to cover administrative and management costs of CSOs is reported as a prior condition to sustain and develop volunteerism.

Though youth volunteer initiatives are increasing in urban centers and some rural communities have their own mechanisms of volunteer community contribution, the culture of volunteerism in general is reported as weak. Concerns about security and high levels of unemployment require households to spend much of their time looking for sources of income, leaving little space for activities largely considered unnecessary if they do not directly benefit the community or family.

2.1.11 Public Perceptions of Civil Society

Public perceptions are shaped by a variety of factors, including the type of interactions communities have with CSOs, the visibility and effectiveness of their actions, the degree of conservatism in a given community, and of understanding of what civil society represents. The Afghan public has limited knowledge or understanding of the role of civil society. This is compounded by the variety and sometimes conflicting definitions of civil society in use in Afghanistan. By most accounts, the public is also largely disinterested in, and often defiant of NGOs in particular. In some cases, when organisations have been long established in a community and have provided sustained support, and in major urban centers, where the urbanised youth support and engage in actions to foster social change, then civil society is considered as a driver for change.

Graph 4: Assessment of Public Perception of Civil Society



n=167

Short-term and ineffective programming, lack of clear exit strategies, occasional disconnect between projects and perceived needs have damaged the reputation of some CSOs, particularly NGOs. One recurrent statement

by CSOs was that they were often perceived as working on a "project basis" and for their own benefit or that of their donors rather than for the communities. Distrust is aggravated by the fact that non-neutral organisations driven by political and/or personal interests are able to register and operate as NGOs.

The term "*civil society*" has also occasionally been equated with international assistance and with an urbanised class very distant from traditional rural communities. Some CSOs reported having been accused of being "*importers of Western values*" or "*secular*" organisations – both used as pejorative descriptions.

With improvements in CSOs' use of broadcasting and social media, however, improvements in public perceptions have been recorded in urban areas. Volunteer groups and CSOs advocating for social change generate increasing interest, and initiatives using internet and mobile media devices as means for mobilisation are flourishing among CSOs. Overall however, the vast majority of CSOs is not sufficiently knowledgeable about the potential and use of communication tools.

In order to move beyond misperceptions and distrust of civil society, more also needs to be done to institutionalise "*do no harm*" principles or conflict-sensitive programming and prevent them from remaining on-paper-only statements. This includes engaging civil society on developing reflections on the implications of interventions, and systematising gender and conflict-sensitive assessments as part of project design prior to implementation. Within civil society, it has become urgent to discuss, agree on, and clarify the role and mandate of civil society and explain it to the greater public with which CSOs engage. While small community-based CSOs manage to a great extent to secure the trust of their communities, CSOs with occasional and project-based presence are viewed with

suspicion. More recognition of their work requires longer-term projects based on extended needs-consultations with communities and prior assessments of contextual risks and more transparency concerning the aim of the project, the ways in which resources are used and transferred to communities, the duration of the intervention, and what is expected to take place after the intervention is over.

2.2 PARTICIPATION AND ROLES

Structured participation and roles refer to the meaningful participation of CSOs in domestic policies, in development programming cycle and in international processes. This section covers six areas that affect the extent of civil society's ability to engage in national policy processes and development programming:

- Coordination and collaboration within CS
- Participation in public policy formulation and reform,
- Participation in strategic consultation and program design;
- Service delivery;
- Transparency and accountability;
- Conflict prevention and peace building.

2.2.1 Coordination and Collaboration among Civil Society

Collaboration amongst CSOs has improved over the past two years. Sectoral networks and thematic groups have emerged, pooling together expertise and contextual knowledge, often with the explicit support of donors. These networks and platforms have facilitated the sharing of resources and CSOs' ability to structure their advocacy efforts, both at national and sub-national levels. Benefitting from increased

collaboration, coordination is also improving, though at a much slower rate.³⁹

Mechanisms for coordination are often loose, and more *ad hoc* than systematic. Grassroots CSOs in particular describe how limited coordination affects their performance and ability to approach decision-makers effectively. Efforts to overcome the disconnect between CSOs based in Kabul and those in the provinces need to be strengthened. Many small CSOs feel their voices have not been heard in national and international fora due to poorly organised representation, and call for more structured coordination and information sharing.⁴⁰

Additional challenges include insufficient resources and modest capacity, difficulties in standardising access to information for a multiplicity of actors all over Afghanistan, as well as occasional lack of commitment.⁴¹ Some interviewees also explained CSOs primarily group themselves according to the type of support they receive: organisations supported by Western donors, CSOs which receive support from neighbouring countries, volunteer organisations, or those who rely primarily on community support, rarely interact with each other.

Better collaboration is perceived by civil society itself as one of the most important means to strengthen its involvement in decision-making processes, boost creativity and innovation, and gain more credibility. Increased acknowledgement among civil society actors of the need to move away from a climate of competition and to structure collaboration mechanisms, provide opportunities to build on recent

achievements, and better structure the activities of existing networks and platforms.

2.2.2 Participation in Public Policy Formulation and Reform

Policy formulation and reform in Afghanistan has been largely an isolated process involving the GIRoA with inputs from international donors. In recent years, Afghan CSOs have become increasingly active in legislative and policy processes, advocating for their expertise to be taken into account, making recommendations for policy reform, participating in consultations on policy reform, and in technical and advisory boards for policy implementation.⁴² Some international donors have been pressing the government for more inclusion and better recognition of civil society's role. The GIRoA also demonstrates willingness to include civil society representatives in reform processes and to consult with them on a more regular basis.

There are two major entry points for Afghan civil society in the policy process. First, civil society can build on its insights into socio-economic needs and experience of local realities to influence policy making processes. Second, civil society has a key role to play in monitoring policy implementation.⁴³ To date, however, Afghan civil society's involvement at both levels remains sporadic.

A first major challenge lies in the lack of systemic interactions between civil society

³⁹ Over 82% of respondents to the survey mentioned being part of a civil society/associational network or platform (82 % of the 214 respondents to the survey, 88% of the 201 who answered this specific question). See also ALTAI Consulting (2016), *op cit.*, USAID (2016), *op.cit.*

⁴⁰ Consultation processes in preparation for the Brussels conference for instance, have been denounced as insufficiently inclusive, engaging primarily the "usual suspects" without reaching out to CSOs with less visibility.

⁴¹ See also DURAND (2015), *op.cit.*

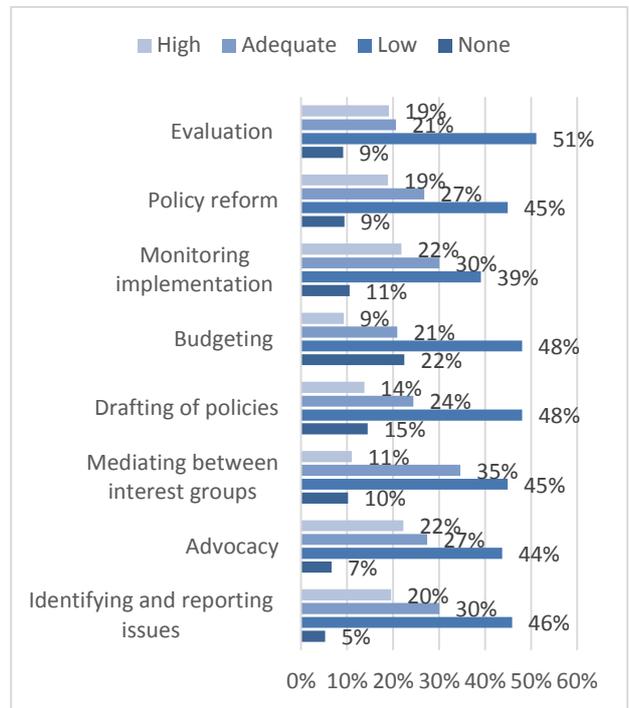
⁴² This has notably included amendments to the Social Organisations Law to allow CSOs to be involved in legal activities, the drafting of the Access to Information Act under the lead of Integrity Watch Afghanistan, the integration of civil society members' comments in the Elections Law, or the constitution of a Civil Society Natural Resources Monitoring Network in January 2013 to oversee and provide advice for the drafting of the mining legislation.

⁴³ KOYUNCU LORAZDAGI B. and OZMAN A. (2015), "[State-Civil Society Interactions in Turkey: Retrospect and Prospects](#)", Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization.

and the government on policy development. Despite increasing acknowledgement by the government of the role of CSOs in the development and amendment of laws and policies on the one hand, and increased interest of CSOs to engage in policy processes on the other, there are no regular consultative mechanisms to actively engage civil society in policy making and reform. This is attributed both to vagueness in the legal framework surrounding the definition of civil society and its legitimacy in effectively participating in policy formulation, and persistent mistrust between civil society and the government. There are notably concerns that consultations of CSO representatives on policies and legal reform are largely cosmetic, with recommendations rarely taken into account in the final product.

Initiatives by civil society itself to engage in policy processes remain mostly inconsistent, *ad hoc* and lack coordination. CSOs not only need to structure and institutionalise coordination efforts among themselves, but also to develop clear engagement strategies with the government based on evidence and recognised competence in a given sector. Many CSOs do not have the required expertise to provide informed input, and civil society members with knowledge and interest are rarely engaged in policy development. Graph 5 below shows most survey respondents assess civil society's capacity to engage in the policy process as low across all stages.

Graph 5: Assessment of Civil Society Capacity to Engage in Stages of the Policy Process



n= 143

Recognising these shortcomings, cooperative sectoral networks are emerging, bringing together CSOs to reflect on sectoral needs and develop concerted approaches to constructively engage the government. These initiatives build on the acknowledgement of the need for specialised advice based on experience, knowledge and evidence, and for moving away from competition among civil society itself and between civil society and the government to develop and sustain trusted relations. Such networks, however, are still at a nascent stage. Sustaining these efforts requires better economic stability of CSOs so they can invest time and human resources, improve capacity to conduct and use research, a better understanding of the different stages and stakeholders in the policy process, and of how to carry out evidence-based advocacy.

The second key area of engagement of civil society in policy processes is in monitoring

and evaluation of policy implementation. A recurrent observation by CSOs concerns the disconnect between existing policies and their translation into practice, and the limited control over policies implementation. Over the past 15 years, some CSOs have developed specific competence areas, and can effectively follow-up on government commitments and the implementation of policies related to their area of expertise. Others, particularly at the grassroots level, have the contextual knowledge and access to communities, but lack expertise and understanding of how to conduct monitoring and evaluation. These were identified as areas where donors and INGOs, but also established CSOs themselves, can assist in building capacities at the local level for effective community based monitoring of policies implementation through targeted training and consistent mentoring.

2.2.3 Participation in Strategic Consultation and Program Design

Limited interactions between donors and civil society due to security and mobility restrictions have affected both donors' ability to consult civil society in the development of aid strategies, and civil society's access to donors. Bilateral and trilateral working groups based in Kabul, participation of civil society in international fora, and targeted research, have been used as alternative means to gather civil society inputs in development programming.

The extent of these consultations remains very limited, and development initiatives are still overwhelmingly donor-driven. Concerns surrounding the representativeness of the few Kabul-based NGOs, which effectively interact with donors or are appointed to represent civil society in international events, are persistently raised by the CSOs consulted for this roadmap. Those who have access to donors, and have participated in consultations, reported that there is little

follow-up to their advice or examples of development strategies and program design having been modified as a result of their evidence. Grassroots CSOs further underline that they are dependent on pre-defined strategies and programs rather than consulted on their understanding of what needs to be done, and overall have a rather small role in program and project design.

Some CSOs state that they have reached a degree of maturity that would allow them to use their experience and understanding of key issues to propose projects and programs to donors and orient development rather than respond to calls designed to implement donor strategies. This requires efforts from donors, to effectively assess the competence of their CSOs, and from civil society, to demonstrate its capacity to develop programs and strategic input based on evidence.

2.2.4 Service Delivery

It is widely acknowledged that civil society plays a vital role in local and national development, notably through service delivery.⁴⁴ Supported by international donors to provide the basic services that the government was unable to operate, NGOs in particular have taken on the bulk of the delivery of what in other countries would be public services. The Ministry of Public Health, for instance, relies heavily on local NGOs and CSOs to provide health care and manage infrastructures. Emergency assistance, food distribution, rural development, education services, awareness raising on governance, among other services, are also largely provided by CSOs.

Heavy reliance on external funding and the recent decrease in international aid have resulted in the interruption of service delivery, particularly in rural areas. Insecurity has had a further serious impact on

⁴⁴ WINTER (2010), *op.cit.*, DURAND (2015), *op.cit.*, ACBAR (2016), *op.cit.*, ALTAI Consulting (2016), *op.cit.*, USAID (2016), *op.cit.*

the ability of civil society workers to access populations and provide basic services. At the same time, donors have favoured short-term projects for service delivery rather than planning for and fulfilling a strategic vision.⁴⁵ Inconsistencies between donor priorities and services delivered on the one hand, and community needs on the other, have also occasionally negatively affected the perception of CSOs in target communities.⁴⁶

As the State is expected to progressively take on more responsibility in delivering services, civil society can play an important role in ensuring transparency and accountability in the delivery of public services. Similarly, development projects and programs funded by international donors can benefit from a higher involvement of civil society in monitoring and evaluation of services delivered, and assessments of the impact. This includes mobilisation of CSOs with recognised expertise in M&E to conduct evaluations and build the capacity of others, and civil society engagement of communities to monitor and assess service delivery through community based mechanisms.

There is concern that the most recent contracts have insufficiently taken into account independent monitoring of their implementation by civil society. One recommendation from the civil society workshop was to ensure that each international contract allocates a minimum of 5% of its funds as a social accountability fee for project oversight by civil society.

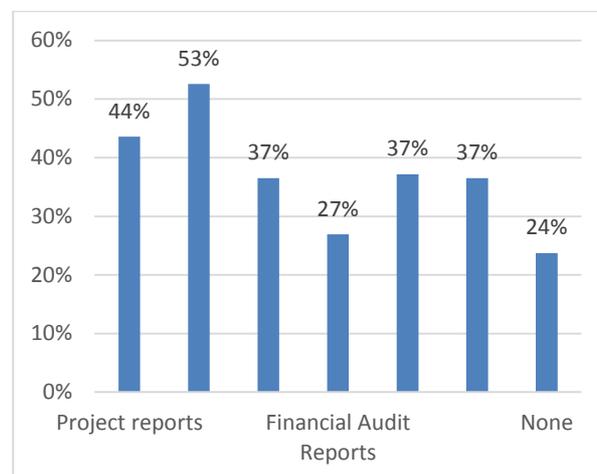
2.2.5 Transparency and Accountability

A key condition for CSOs to be recognised as legitimate partners in the policy process and as watchdogs with a mandate to ensure the accountability of the government is for CSOs to demonstrate they are themselves

accountable, their processes are transparent, and their mandate is clear. This would also be essential to avoid confusion between CSOs and organisations who work for private or political interests. Suspicion of corruption and misuse of resources have stained the reputation of civil society, and the need for CSOs to be fully transparent about their activities and how they manage their resources has emerged.

Certification mechanisms, ensuring proper procedures are in place and implemented, are welcomed, but considered insufficient to support necessary reforms in civil society institutional functioning.⁴⁷ Most CSOs do not make reports on their activities available to the public (Graph 6 below). For NGOs, transparency is often limited to legal requirements to report to government entities on their activities and finances, or to donors based on requirements set as part of terms of reference.

Graph 6: Public Availability of CSO Statements and Reports



n=156

Necessary conditions to ensure more sustainability and transparency of civil society include a better understanding of what constitutes accountable mechanisms,

⁴⁵ See also DURAND (2015), *op.cit.*

⁴⁶ See also USAID (2016), *op.cit.*

⁴⁷ See section on self-regulatory mechanisms and certification schemes above.

institutionalised knowledge of processes to put them in place, and the importance of transparency throughout all activities. This requires capacity-building of civil society at all levels in institutional management, but also proper monitoring and evaluation of civil society's work, and availability of resources (human, time, and financial) to effectively focus on institutional capacity-building.

2.2.6 Conflict Prevention and Peace Building

Peace building may be defined as activities focused on the prevention of outbreaks of violence, conflict management during armed conflict, and sustaining peace after violence and conflict have ended.⁴⁸ Civil society in Afghanistan continues to play a role in conflict prevention and disputes resolution, at the local level through mobilisation and community engagement, and at the political level through advocacy. However, the effective role of civil society in the peace processes has remained minimal. More generally, at the local level, many civil society initiatives are still more donor driven than spontaneous – though voluntary endogenous initiatives from youth networks and traditional structures exist and are developing. Increasing insecurity and outbreaks of violence, but also the lack of trust in the capacity of the GIRoA to manage conflict and the peace process, generate uncertainty among civil society about the possibility of achieving and sustaining peace. Poor rule of law, corruption and nepotism, interference of powerholders, the persistence of a culture of impunity, but also the politicisation of some local NGOs constitute persistent threats to peace building initiatives.

⁴⁸ Based on the World Bank definition in 2006 "[Civil Society and Peace Building. Potential, Limitations and Critical Factors](#)," Social Development Department. Sustainable Development Network.

That said, opportunities for building peace in Afghanistan exist: there is a general consensus about the need for peace in Afghan society, a vocal pro-peace young generation, but also increasing engagement of volunteer civil society networks in soft initiatives promoting generational change and challenging violent behaviours inherited from the traumatic experience of war.⁴⁹

At the local level, more attention needs to be paid to long-term stabilisation projects focused on poverty reduction and community cohesion, and incorporating conflict-sensitive methodologies, rather than short-term and quick impact projects. Little or no attention and support have been paid to "soft" initiatives, including artistic and cultural activities, and civic education.

At the national level, the need for inclusion of civil society in discussions on the peace negotiations was recognised during the Bonn Process, and repeatedly since in international conferences on Afghanistan.⁵⁰ In practice, however, the most concerted effort towards peace has been mostly top down, firstly by the High Peace Council being established with little or no active input from civil society and, secondly, by peace negotiations conducted behind closed doors, with minimal engagement, if at all, of civil society.⁵¹ More generally, women's engagement in the peace process and peace negotiations, though

⁴⁹ See also BAAG, GLENCREE, (2012) "Peacebuilding in Afghanistan perspective on Civil Society's Role in the Peace Process in Northern Ireland and the Balkans" A Report of Workshop Proceedings," BAAG.

⁵⁰ The most recent include the Hague Conference in 2009, the Bonn Conference in 2011, the London Conference in 2014, and the Brussels Conference in 2016.

⁵¹ According to the CSOs consulted, symptomatic of this lack of inclusiveness and transparency is the peace deal concluded with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar in September 2016. Made in private with little information filtering as to its content, it has generated worry that fundamental rights, particularly as they relate to women, are at danger of being overlooked to achieve peace at any cost and regardless of commitments made by the government to include women's perspective in peace negotiations. Such processes, conducted in isolation from civil society, contribute to strengthening the divide between the State and civil society.

officially recognised in the NAP 1325, has hardly been translated into practice.

CSOs can play a role both in advocating to the government about needs, and supporting the government in identifying peace building projects. This requires efforts from civil society to build trust relations with stakeholders at all levels, including communities, religious groups, combatants, victims, the media and the government. The positioning of civil society as a neutral and independent body that can effectively mediate between parties to legitimately represent the interests of all segments of society is essential if civil society wants to be acknowledged as a credible actor in peacebuilding. An inclusive effort towards peace is more likely to be successful if the narrative on fighting the armed opposition groups is replaced with a peace narrative. The two narratives cannot continue in parallel.

2.3 CAPACITY

Capacity development of the Afghan civil society is one of the areas that received the most attention over the past decade. To date, studies unanimously state that there are still major gaps both in terms of technical and institutional capacity. This is confirmed by the consultations conducted for this roadmap. A host of challenges were identified, including limited organisational capacity, lack of technical expertise, gaps in understanding and practice of project management and strategic planning, limited communication and research skills, little knowledge on fundraising, among others.⁵²

With that in mind, there are nuances to bring to these assertions. Over the years, both due to internal recognition of shortcomings and external pressure from the international community, the capacity of civil society, and particularly NGOs, has improved in terms of

organisational management and technical specialisation. Highly skilled youth graduated from Afghan or foreign universities are also entering the labour market, with a high potential for increased capacity of CSOs across all indicators.

This section provides a brief overview of key challenges identified in five areas which emerged through consultations carried out for this roadmap:

- Technical capacity and expertise
- Institutional capacity
- Project management
- Research and advocacy
- Gender-responsive programming

2.3.1 Technical Capacity and Expertise

While technical capacity of CSOs has improved due to high focus on capacity-building by international donors and partners, needs are still significant. One of the most commonly reported is the lack of specialisation and institutionalised technical expertise within CSOs. This is partly seen as a side effect of heavy dependency on donor funding and frenetic applications to calls in a variety of sectors to secure revenue and sustain human resources. In order to adapt to donor strategies, some CSOs have developed superficial skills across several areas instead of developing expertise in a specific sector.

Though capacity needs are still enormous, there is a high potential within civil society, supported by contextual knowledge, and the existence of a strong social capital with the arrival of educated and motivated youth on the labour market. Investing in human capital was considered one of the key elements of CSOs sustainability, even more as international staff is increasingly withdrawing, offering opportunities for national staff to further develop their potential.

⁵² See also USAID (2016), *op.cit.*, ALTAI Consulting (2016) *op. cit.*; DURAND (2015) *op. cit.*

One important measure is the institutionalisation of knowledge exchange between and within organisations to increase and retain knowledge and build expertise, sectoral cooperation networks and knowledge transfer between those CSOs with recognised expertise and others.

2.3.2 Institutional Capacity

In 2016, while noting improvements, the USAID "CSO Sustainability index" noted that most CSOs still struggled with limited organisational capacity.⁵³ Institutional support was also noted as the most important capacity need of CSOs by most respondents. Sound governance, financial and management mechanisms are usually lacking. Procedures, when they exist, are often not understood by employees, and are sometimes simply taken from other models without much reflection on their implications in practice.

A deeper understanding is needed of the use and benefits of policies and procedures by CSOs, including for increased sustainability and crisis management. In provinces, in particular, CSOs have little awareness on procedures and their use. Procedures are seldom developed based on sound analysis of strengths and weaknesses, in consultation with the staff and owned by the organisations. This requires not only awareness and capacity-building, but also extensive follow-up and monitoring to ensure institutional reforms are accepted and practiced.

These gaps are compounded by limited institutional support from donors, further aggravated by cuts in administrative and management costs that would allow effective follow-up and administrative reform. One statement was that if organisations were to fully budget their administrative, finance and human resources management costs, they

would be deemed as too expensive by donors. In response, the vast majority of NGOs attempt to minimise costs by first lowering administrative, finance and human resources costs which inevitably leads to less effective management systems and lower capability to account to donors. The focus on efficiency and quick delivery of project outputs has limited the ability of civil society to give consideration to their institutional capacity as a means to increase effectiveness and sustainability.

2.3.3 Project Management

For NGOs in particular, a high focus on efficiency, short-term programming and quick impact projects has affected the project management cycle. Needs assessments, situational and stakeholder analyses are rarely systematic. Project monitoring and evaluations are affected by the lack of proper baseline and monitoring systems in place throughout projects. Evaluations are often weak and impact assessments are exceptional, with repercussions on NGOs' ability to improve their programming and reflect on their interventions.

The need for more robust and systematic external monitoring and evaluation was underlined by CSOs themselves. They also call for capacity-building in M&E, risk assessments, "do no harm" and conflict-sensitive programming. While "do no harm" is envisaged on paper, it is rarely followed up on during project implementation. Conflict-sensitive programming is seldom applied, and there are limited considerations for programmatic, contextual, and institutional risks in program implementation.

2.3.4 Research and Advocacy

There are limited studies available on the capacity of CSOs to carry out research, or to strategically use it for evidence-based advocacy.⁵⁴ Consultations emphasise the

⁵³ USAID (2015) "[The 2015 CSO Sustainability Index for Afghanistan](#)".

⁵⁴ DURAND (2015), *op.cit.*

need for more contextual research to frame development activities in Afghanistan, as well as increased capacity-building and resources for data collection and sharing. Realising that research could assist them in gaining credibility and recognition, notably in their advocacy towards the government, some CSOs have started to gather evidence and conduct assessments.

While research capacities have developed, additional support is needed to raise understanding of why research is necessary, and build capacity throughout the research cycle, including research methodology, tools development, data collection, research planning, data analysis, presentation of findings, dissemination, and referencing. Dissemination of findings, including in local languages, both through online platforms and physical resource centers is needed.

In addition, an important aspect of the development of a strong civil society is regular monitoring of its challenges and needs to support reflection on its role and ways forward. One recommendation from the workshop was to support the creation of an institute/think tank with academic credentials to support theoretical and applied research on civil society in Afghanistan.

Even in cases where resources are available, many CSOs are unaware of how to use findings and to incorporate them in their activities planning. There is also increasing recognition that advocacy needs to be based on evidence, structured through greater collaboration between civil society actors, and complemented by clear recommendations. Interviewees highlighted their lack of practical knowledge on how to conduct advocacy and the need for tailored training and mentoring on a number of issues such as stakeholder analysis, identification of groups of interest, understanding of points of entry for advocacy, and development of advocacy strategies.

2.3.5 Gender-Responsive Programming

Significant efforts have been made to improve the situation of women and to support gender equality in Afghanistan over the past 16 years. Afghan women have increasingly demanded – and sometimes obtained – improvements in their access to public services and treatment by their male peers, and supporting women’s rights has become part of the mandate of many CSOs.⁵⁵ Initiatives by youth groups and volunteer networks, in particular, are flourishing in urban areas, building on experiences from civil society in neighbouring countries, particularly Iran. The GIRoA has also demonstrated clear political will to support gender mainstreaming in policy development and implementation, through the approval of the Women’s Economic Empowerment NPP in December 2016, that of Afghanistan’s NAP 1325 in June 2015, and explicit mentions to women’s empowerment in the ANPDF. Gender equality and women’s rights are a cross-cutting theme for the five MS consulted.

However, women’s integration in decision-making remains limited both at the institutional and grassroots levels. At the institutional level, women’s political participation is often presented in terms of the quota of seats reserved for women in Parliament, Provincial Councils, and CDCs with little attention given to the conditions necessary for women’s presence to make a difference. At the grassroots level, women’s participation in decision-making is limited and there remain many barriers to women’s access to work, healthcare, education, and justice, including distrust and opposition from communities. Since 2013, the repeated and sometimes successful attempts by

⁵⁵ BAAG (2014), “[Getting It Right? Examining Gender Programming in Afghanistan](#)”, British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group, London.

conservative elements within the GIRoA against legal provisions for women's rights are manifestations of a backlash and polarisation against women's rights.

A host of organisations describe their engagement in favour of gender equality as high. However, there are persistent weaknesses in gender-responsive programming. Men, for instance, have progressively been involved in gender focused programs, but too little and too late. Religious figures have been and are being engaged, but the extent of their intention to effectively support women's rights remains to be assessed. Evolutions in gender equality require generational change and prolonged, sustained attention at the advocacy, programming and policy levels.

Finally, there is a crucial need for a contextual understanding of gender relations. This includes systematising gender-sensitive assessments as part of program design, but also continuing to develop understanding and capacity of local civil society as well as national and international implementers on gender mainstreaming.

3. CURRENT EU ENGAGEMENT

3.1 STRUCTURED EU DIALOGUE WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

Empowerment of, and partnership with civil society are central to the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy.⁵⁶ In Afghanistan, the EU recognises CSOs as a key stakeholder for development assistance *"not only in their role as watchdog and advocate, but also in ensuring service delivery to the populations (e.g. in health and agriculture) unless and until government capacities to deliver quality public services are strengthened."*⁵⁷ The 'critical role' of civil society in increasing institutional accountability through monitoring and evaluating government performance is particularly highlighted. The Mid-Term Revision of the Multi-Annual Indicative Programme 2014-2020 highlighted good governance, elections and women's economic empowerment as areas in which CSOs will receive further bilateral funding.

The EU maintains close contact with civil society in Afghanistan, both at political and implementation level through different channels: (i) thematic/sector coordination working groups; (ii) meetings and/or information sessions organised by the EU; (iii) direct beneficiaries of EU funds, and (iv) networks. CSOs are also part of the consultative process within the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework, which has proven to be a useful platform for policy dialogue and has given CSOs the opportunity to voice their concerns on and recommendations for Afghanistan's need for development-oriented reforms and inclusive sustainable

development. The EU consulted with civil society throughout the preparations of the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan held in October 2016 and it supported the participation of 10 CSO representatives to the Conference and the joint messaging of civil society towards the donor community and the Government. Donors and government alike addressed civil society at large in their contributions to the conference and showed gratitude for its continued support to Afghanistan.

EU actions in Afghanistan are discussed with other donors and CSOs, particularly during sector working group meetings, and not only during the identification and formulation phases but also throughout implementation. These discussions allow for debate on lessons learnt and recommendations, which are then usually included in subsequent materials related to the action and, depending on the subject, may be taken into consideration in the framework of sector policy dialogue or project/programme implementation. Although the participation of CSOs in the EU programming cycle is not based on a structured consultation system, but rather carried out on an ad hoc basis, between 2015 and 2017, the EU conducted 135 policy dialogues and over 180 formal consultations with civil society and local authorities, including in the areas of agriculture and natural resource management, human rights and democracy and transparency and accountability. Moreover, in the same period, the EU held over 600 informal sessions with civil society and local authorities' representatives. For example, across 2016, the EU Delegation served as Chair of the Agriculture and Rural Development National Working Group, a national forum that gathers donors, Government institution and CSOs to by-monthly discuss sector policies. In the area of

⁵⁶ Council of the European Union, [EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy](#), 2015.

⁵⁷ EEAS/ EU Commission, "[EU Development Cooperation Instrument: Multi-Annual Indicative Programme 2014-2020](#)", p. 5.

justice and anti-corruption, the EU co-chairs the Board of Donors where key CSOs update donors on their activities, challenges and areas for future work. In the area of democracy and human rights, a constant dialogue with the CSOs led to the establishment of a protection mechanism for human rights defenders, which is an important element of the EU Delegation's support to human rights. The EU Delegation meets the Human Rights Defenders Committee on a regular basis.

The EU has also taken a lead role in the former Human Rights and Gender Working Group and it actively participated to the Women, Peace and Security Working Group where CSOs, the donor community and the Government discuss, *inter alia*, the implementation of NAP 1325.

It is important to note that, during the reporting period, the EU and ACBAR hosted two Conferences in 2015 and 2017 and a Workshop for Donors, NGO Coordinating Bodies and Civil Society in 2015. The events provided a forum for donors to present their funding opportunities and engage with NGOs and civil society representatives.⁵⁸ Moreover, the EU Delegation built on the Brussels Conference momentum and sustained a prominent level of visibility and strategic engagement with Government, CSOs and other stakeholders i.e. EU leading role in the preparation of various sessions and international community messaging of the Joint Coordinating and Monitoring Board in July 2017 and the Senior Officials' Meeting in October 2017.

Finally, the EU participates to the Civil Society Support Group, established in 2010 and led by UNAMA, to ensure coherent donor support for Afghan civil society. UNAMA facilitates regular civil society-international community

discussions for coherent donor support of the civil society, such as those held in preparation for the Tokyo 2012 Conference, the Senior Officials' Meeting in 2013, the Special Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board Meeting and the London Conference, both in 2014. In addition, UNAMA facilitates information sharing and cooperation between the Afghan Ministry of Finance and Afghan civil society on national development dialogue.

3.2 POLICY DIALOGUE FOR AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

At both the working and Ambassadorial level, the EU has frequently raised issues concerning civil society with the GIRoA, for example in meetings with Afghan officials, in press and social media statements. The EU+ Local Strategy on Human Rights Defenders in Afghanistan, released in 2014 and revised in 2016, and the Human Rights Defenders Working Group provide opportunities to monitor the environment for CSOs working on human rights in Afghanistan while also providing assistance and guidance to human rights defenders (HRDs) under threat. Where appropriate, cases are raised with the GIRoA.

CSOs are considered by the consulted MS as crucial partners in service delivery and provision of humanitarian assistance, particularly at the local level. They are also perceived as important vectors to identify needs and channel information to relevant institutions. A number of challenges have been identified by MS in promoting an enabling environment for civil society in Afghanistan:

- The lack of sustainability of CSOs, due to the weakness of internal structures and processes, high reliance on donor funding, and short-term project based approaches of some donors;

⁵⁸ The EU also actively participated to the First National Conference of NGOs "The Role and Importance of Non-Governmental Organisations in Poverty Reduction and Balanced Development" organised by the GIRoA in March 2018.

- Lack of expertise, as many NGOs diversify their activities across sectors to address donors need, and without a long-term perspective;
- Loss of sight of mandate. Short-term project-based funding has undermined the ability of CSOs to have long-term visions;
- Outstanding needs concerning the ability of civil society to constructively engage in the policy process;
- Persistent competition between NGOs in access to funding opportunities. Emphasis is placed on the need for consortiums to promote coordination, collaboration, and capacity exchange;
- Insufficient recognition by the State of the role of civil society beyond provision of services, in its role as a watchdog, and partner in the formulation of policies.

None of the MS consulted required partners to go through a national certification scheme. Two mentioned having their own requirements, either expecting from grantees to demonstrate they have operational internal procedures and policies in place to address harassment and fraud, for instance, or by requesting international audit standards and internal policies and procedures up to European standards, and providing support to partners to raise to these standards. Some considered that a national scheme without appropriate support in capacity-building, awareness raising on best practices and accountability, and networking would not be effective. One Member State expressed concern that in an environment where space for civil society to carry out their activities is threatened by tense State-civil society relations, increasing bureaucracy for CSOs would limit their ability to operate.

There is a common agreement that change towards a more enabling environment will take time and requires constant and

consistent engagement of donors at several levels:

- Strengthened engagement with partner CSOs, including through direct consultations, and by expanding support beyond Kabul to grassroots CSOs in the provinces;
- Strengthening the capacity of civil society. From a technical perspective through needs assessment, monitoring and evaluation of activities, targeted capacity exchange on project cycle management and advocacy, and partnering in advocacy and implementation activities. From an institutional perspective to improve internal governance systems and processes;
- Conduct evaluations to produce an evidence base identifying good practices, areas for improvement and develop long-term visions to support civil society;
- Encourage and support coalitions and joint partnership of CSOs to move away from a culture of competition and encourage knowledge exchange;
- Building state-civil society relations, by engaging the GIROA on enabling environment, encouraging state-civil society dialogue across all areas, and supporting civil society in conducting constructive advocacy. International donors can use their political leverage to raise awareness within the Government on the need to protect the space in which civil society operates; bring Government and civil society together and engaging both to resolve tensions;
- Focus on sustainability, by moving away from short-term, output-based approaches, including through long-term and/ or core-support with donors as an active partner, as well as building the institutional and operational capacity of CSOs, including in

identification of alternative funding opportunities;

- Strengthen coordination between MS and with broader international community in support to civil society across the country.

3.3 FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Mechanisms used by MS to support civil society vary based on MS representations' individual strategic development and cooperation objectives. These include indirect support through multilateral development agencies, direct bilateral support through project-based grants, capacity-building through joint partnerships, and for one of those consulted, core funding. Forms of engagement with civil society representatives, amount of direct financial support allocated to CSOs as part of development or humanitarian aid, and perspective on the stability of current mechanisms of engagement in the coming years also vary. That said, there is a general agreement on the need for sustained, and for some, increased support by donors of the civil society as the GIRA does not have the financial ability to provide direct support to CSOs, and mutual trust between the state and civil society is persistently lacking.

Support at the political level is provided through dialogue with the government, including direct engagement with relevant ministries and public institutions on sectoral issues (health, education, gender equality, freedom of expression) on the importance of recognising the role of civil society, and support to civil society independence at high level meetings.

Among those who provide direct bilateral support through project grants or core funding, mechanisms of engagement with civil society include regular consultations with project partners and engagement of

CSO coalitions and networks. These are used to define appropriate strategies and identify priority areas based on needs assessed, identify challenges faced in operationalisation of projects or civil society initiatives, as well as ways to overcome them and mitigate risks. Other forms of engagement include joint platforms and working groups bringing together donors, the UN, and civil society to discuss thematic issues, and round tables organised by civil society platforms. Access and reach, however, are hampered by restrictions on mobility due to security concerns. This entails that most of those consulted are Kabul-based CSOs and access beyond established networks outside of the capital, is limited.

3.4 COORDINATION

Despite numerous bilateral interactions, there is currently no specific system for coordination on civil society among EU MS. Coordination between the EU Delegation and MS on civil society related issues is done on an *ad hoc* basis when specific issues arise at Head of Cooperation meetings, in action-oriented discussions as well as in political level meetings where relevant. However, Heads of Cooperation meetings and working groups such as the Human Rights and Gender Working Group are considered effective mechanisms for coordination and cooperation, though its functioning has been hampered by turnover and reduced presence of permanent staff in Kabul.

There are currently no specific mechanisms for joint action and division of task between EU Member States – with the exception of members of the Nordic+. A common mapping has been planned, but not carried out, and is identified as a key need. Reduction of staff across all representations due to security concerns has further hampered rationalisation of support between Member States. Both donors and civil society respondents

believe that more coordination is needed among development actors to avoid duplication of work. More frequent sharing of information on existing projects and on future funding priorities among donors will help move towards better coordination and joint programming, and will lead to a more strategic level of support to civil society.

3.5 LESSONS LEARNT

Increase awareness on the legal and regulatory framework related to CSOs to facilitate joint actions tackling its bottlenecks. Positive developments have been noted in the legislative and policy provisions with civil society actively engaged in some of the initiatives to improve the regulatory framework. This includes, *inter alia*, the revision of the NGO Law, and of the Associations Law, the development of a draft Law on Foundations. CSOs acknowledged the efforts made by the government to reform the legal framework. At the same time, there are concerns over the translation of existing laws and policies into practice. Among Afghan CSOs consulted through the survey, 60% of respondents considered laws and policies of the Afghan Government did not sufficiently support the activities of civil society. When it comes to administrative processes, in general, they are still considered cumbersome and lengthy. Registration processes for NGOs have been simplified and are largely perceived as adequate. The government is considering centralising all processes for delivery of certificates for various civil society organisations, currently split between different ministries under the authority of a single government institution, an initiative advocated for tax processes, in particular, continue to be perceived as complex and often corrupt by most civil society actors.

The EU will support the analysis of bottlenecks in government administrative processes for CSOs (e.g., on registration

and fiscal regime). The EU will further facilitate multi-stakeholder consultations to tackle the challenges identified in the regulatory environment and to increase awareness of the legal framework.

Increase and systematise reach outside of Kabul and established NGOs.

Challenges for donors still persist when trying to get the balance right between supporting the ‘usual suspects’ of Afghan civil society and the smaller grassroots CSOs. The nature of funding systems and the imperative to manage few bigger contracts makes it problematic for some CSOs to participate. This is further exacerbated by security restrictions which make direct engagement with CSOs outside of Kabul difficult and lead to a degree of Kabul-centricity. As a result, those CSOs with a better access to the donor community and knowledge of the development jargon remain the primary civil society interlocutors and beneficiaries of international funding. New programmes in support of civil society should include provisions for grassroots organisations to be supported and coached through sub-granting schemes. In combination with an increased use of sub-granting, the EU will support capacity-building opportunities for grassroots organisations active outside Kabul and other cities.

Support CSOs to structure and consolidate coordination and collaboration efforts among themselves, while facilitating engagement opportunities with the government.

Afghan CSOs have become increasingly active in legislative and policy processes, advocating for their expertise to be taken into account in policy development, making numerous recommendations for policy reform, requesting amendments of existing documents, participating in consultations on policy reform, and in technical and advisory boards for policy implementation. The emergence of sectoral networks and thematic groups,

pooling together expertise has improved the ability of CSOs to structure their advocacy efforts and hold the government accountable for the provision of services at different levels. Despite these improvements, overcoming the lack of systematic interactions between the civil society and the government and tackling the capacity needs of CSOs in the area of monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation seems essential to increase CSOs' engagement. Improvements are also needed with respect to the civil society participation in development programming where limited interactions with the donors took place mainly because of security and mobility restrictions. A key condition for CSOs to be recognised as legitimate partners in the policy process and as watchdogs, with a mandate to ensure the accountability of the government, is to improve their own accountability and demonstrate the transparency of their internal processes.

The EU will continue to advocate for the meaningful inclusion of civil society in the follow-up to key government commitments and support the role of civil society in provincial budgets' development and monitoring. The EU will continue to work on strengthening coordination and collaboration among CSOs by supporting the networks at provincial, national and regional levels.

Mentor and continue to build the capacity of Afghan CSOs with a focus on institutional capacity-building. Due to international recognition of the shortcomings and external pressure from the international community, the capacity of civil society has improved in terms of organisational management and technical specialisation. Harmonised capacity building efforts and peer exchanges between CSOs with different capacity levels have proven instrumental in facilitating capacity development.

Despite extensive improvements, the Roadmap identifies a number of challenges, including limited organisational capacity, lack of technical expertise, gaps in understanding and practice of project management and strategic planning, limited research, communication and information technology skills, little knowledge and limited capacity of systematising gender-sensitive and conflict sensitive situational assessments as part of program design, among others.

The EU will support knowledge sharing and targeted development of CSOs' capacity, through capacity building and mentoring initiatives in the areas where gaps were identified, by building on existing expertise best practices within civil society.

Ensure effective coordination among donors and work on inclusive support models for CSOs through regular consultation mechanisms. Most donors and civil society representatives recognise the need for more coordination, both among the EU and the MS and with other international partners, to know who supports what and where. Coordination needs to go beyond information sharing to include, to some extent, coordination and division of labour in programming to strategically support civil society.

The consultation for this Roadmap highlighted, despite numerous bilateral interactions, that there is currently no specific system for coordination on civil society issues among the EU and the MS. Coordination between the Delegation and MS on civil society related issues is done on an ad hoc basis when specific issues arise at Head of Cooperation meetings, in action-oriented discussions as well as in political level meetings where relevant. Building on the development of sectoral networks and thematic groups, pooling together expertise and contextual knowledge, it is important to formalise

mechanisms for coordination moving from an *ad hoc* basis to structured and regular efforts. Building on previous positive experience, the EU will initiate a coordination group to monitor the follow-up to the CSO Roadmap, to strengthen coordination and to facilitate joint actions. The EU Delegation will also organise follow-up workshops to the EU Roadmap on key issues (e.g. capacity, sustainability, sub-granting, advocacy, reaching out to traditional civil society, etc.), including regular follow-up with partner CSOs to identify lessons learned and means to overcome challenges in future programming. The Roadmap highlights that donors' support models are often quite diverse, project-based with the involvement of civil society been envisaged merely during implementation. The EU will initiate a coordination group to monitor the follow-up to the Roadmap, strengthen coordination and provide a forum for dialogue on civil society's enabling environment. In terms of programming, the EU will support a more active contribution of civil society in priorities identification and program design and it will conduct a review of sub-granting in its ongoing and past projects and make a more extensive use of this mechanism.

ANNEX I

List of recommendations provided by the stakeholders during the consultation process

Priority Area 1: Enabling Environment

General

- Support efforts towards multi-stakeholder dialogue and consultation to develop a common working definition of civil society.

Legal Framework

- Analyse bottlenecks in government administrative processes for NGOs including registration, project authorization process, tax declaration, including corruption vulnerability assessment (related to NGO sector as a whole).
- Engage with Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Justice to keep record of project reports and evaluations and share information provided during registration for better mapping and categorization of CSOs.
- Protect and enhance public access to information legally and practically including through intensifying efforts in support of effective implementation of the Access to Information Law.
- Support the development and adoption of additional regulations seen as needed by civil society, including a clear legal provision for the inclusion of civil society in legislative processes, the development of a Social Protection law, a Public Grievances Redressal law, a Public Consultation Law (for instance through the Open Government Partnership), and the implementation of an operational Whistleblower's Protection Law.
- Identify and support mechanisms to increase government responsiveness to corruption complaints, including through engagement of relevant ministries and departments. Consider, for instance, the establishment of an independent institution where citizens can lodge complaints against government and civil servants' malpractice, centralizing and assessing citizens' complaints on inadequate implementation of the law.
- Work with the ministries to improve and streamline lengthy administrative processes which can otherwise provide opportunities for corruption.
- Encourage CSOs to anonymously report corruption cases during the registration process, approval of reports, and tax payment
- Increase awareness of the legal framework, especially the new Law on Associations, and tax exemptions for CSOs, e.g. through a public outreach campaign.

Self-Regulatory Initiatives and Certification Schemes

- Support and assist ongoing reflection among Afghan CSOs on the development of accountability tools to improve the effectiveness of their systems, raise awareness about their benefits, and reach an agreement on what constitutes a legitimate scheme
- Build on existing capacity within national CSOs to encourage capacity exchange.

State-Civil Society Relations

- Support initiatives to strengthen legislative provisions and protections for civil society's involvement in policy processes.
- Support coordination between civil society and state institutions at the national and local levels. This includes technical support and capacity building that ensures knowledge and consultations mechanisms and practices are institutionalized within administrations and civil society organizations.
- Engage Government to set up inclusive and regular coordination mechanisms with civil society, including collaborative platforms for interaction and collaboration, and follow-up mechanisms
- Support the role of civil society as monitors and evaluators of government action, e.g. implementation of Citizens' Charter and government service delivery.
- Create opportunities and support for knowledge exchange and collaboration with civil society and state actors, including through exposure to best practices in other countries.
- Support constructive advocacy by civil society to relevant government entities.
- Continue to engage the Government on enabling environment at the political level.

Donor-Civil Society Relations

- Continuing and intensifying political support for the inclusion of civil society in policy and decision-making processes, strong commitment to fundamental rights by denouncing rights violations and moral support to civil society initiatives in defense of rights, sustained development aid and financial support to civil society.
- Continue to provide financial support to civil society for development, and intensify institutional support for administrative and management processes, and M&E. Focus on building local capacities through the establishment of trusted relationships with CSOs duly assessed for their work capacity and ethics.
- Focus on sustainability, by moving away from short-term, output-based approaches, including through long-term and/ or core-support with donors as an active partner, as well as building the institutional and operational capacity of CSOs, including in identification of alternative funding opportunities other than project-based grants.
- Increase transparency of monitoring and evaluation processes and results. Properly evaluate the work of CSOs, and discuss evaluation results with them. An open and transparent monitoring and evaluation of projects and programs is considered as crucial both to strengthen trust between donors and those who implement their programs, but also for local CSOs to be able to identify areas of improvement.
- Increase consultation and opportunities for interaction with Afghan civil society, including in the provinces, and establish mechanisms to institutionalize consultations.
- Strengthen coordination between MS and with broader international community in support to civil society across the country.

International NGOs-Civil Society Relations

- Continue and strengthen capacity exchange between INGOs and national CSOs. Partnerships for capacity exchange and joint collaboration, building on complementary areas of expertise, can contribute to both empower national civil society, and give more space for development of innovative programming focused on needs and results rather than predefined strategies and outputs.

Security and Basic Rights

- Support the establishment of mechanisms for the protection of defenders and promoters of human rights.
- Regularly monitor the effects of security on access to fundamental rights.
- Support strengthened state-civil society dialogue on peace building and rule of law.

Economic Environment

- Privilege long-term support focused on outcomes rather than short –term and quick impact projects focused on outputs. Expand the use of core-funding to support institutional capacity building and of non-solicited proposals as opposed to Requests for Applications in order to support local initiatives based on experience and contextual knowledge.
- Raise awareness on the need for, and build the capacity of CSOs in, developing sustainability plans. Support reflections on alternative sources of revenue.
- Provide moral and in-kind support, in the form of venues for instance, to emerging volunteer initiatives.

Public Perceptions of Civil Society

- Develop capacity in civil society for improved communication skills and the use of information technology.
- Institutionalise Do No Harm principles and Conflict Sensitive programming.. This includes engaging civil society on the implication of interventions, and systematizing gender and conflict sensitive assessments as part of project design and prior to implementation. Within civil society itself, it has become urgent to discuss, agree on, and clarify the role and mandate of civil society and to explain it to the greater public and specific communities with which CSOs engage.
- Encourage CSOs to be more transparent about their activities and mandate, including through better and sustained communication with communities and beneficiaries.
- Promote the role of media in reporting on successes and failures of CSOs in implementing projects and their results
- Promote the engagement of beneficiaries and the wider community in the design, implementation and monitoring of projects
- Identify and support drivers of mutual trust between CSOs and communities.

Priority Area 2: Structured Participation and roles

Coordination and Collaboration among Civil Society

- Support CSOs to structure and solidify their coordination efforts among themselves, but also to develop clear engagement strategies with the government based on evidence and recognized competence in a given sector.
- Support, strengthen and institutionalize coordination mechanisms between umbrella and network organizations and regional and provincial based CSOs in order to support their advocacy efforts, move away from a culture of competition and encourage knowledge exchange.
- Expand the representation of consultations by reaching out more to grassroots CSOs and including those in the provinces.
- In the medium term, support the development of a data base of Afghan civil society organizations, based on prior agreement over a workable definition.
- Support civil society joint initiatives for advocacy, monitoring and evaluation and public policy reform.

Participation in Public Policy Formulation and Reform

- Build the capacity and knowledge of CSOs about policy processes to identify entry points for constructive engagement and advocacy.
- Support knowledge sharing and targeted development of CSO capacity in research, analysis, and constructive evidence-based advocacy, including by building on existing expertise within civil society and bringing best practices of similar situations from other parts of the world.
- Support cooperative civil society sectoral networks that pool together organizations with specific expertise on a given sector, to initiate reflections on key sectoral needs and develop concerted approaches to constructively engage the government in the making of policy
- Ensure inclusion of CSOs in local policy processes, such as Provincial Budget Development and monitoring.
- Involve CSOs in the monitoring of policy implementation. Support sustained partnerships and support between national and international experts and civil society organizations, to contribute to the knowledge base and capacity of civil society to follow up on policy implementation.

Participation in Strategic Consultation and Program Design

- Structure donor consultation mechanisms with civil society for strategic input and program design.
- Support initiatives of civil society for agenda setting and non-solicited proposals based on sound expertise and experience.

Service Delivery

- Support efforts to increase knowledge sharing and capacity exchange between Afghan CSOs on research and monitoring and evaluation , and civil society engagement of communities to monitor and assess service delivery through community based mechanisms.
- Conduct proper evaluations of what is effectively delivered on the ground, and take into account gaps identified in the design and implementation of future projects and programs.
- Engage CSOs to identify and better define priorities on needs, and most effective and efficient ways to address them, i.e. collection of evidence through systematic evaluation of projects/ programs, needs assessments and research, etc.

Transparency and Accountability

- Capacity building of civil society at all levels in institutional management need to be supported, as well as proper monitoring and evaluation of civil society’s work, and availability of resources (human, time, and financial) to effectively focus on institutional capacity building.
- Engage with civil society to ensure there is agreement on what constitutes a legitimate certification scheme, including criteria on internal accountability mechanisms (e.g. recruitment processes, financial audit, anti-corruption measures)
- Build on existing capacities among CSOs to support peer-to-peer capacity building and mentoring on internal governance and transparent management

Conflict Prevention and Peace Building

- Conduct long-term civic education and peace education to induce cultural change. This includes paying more attention to “soft impact” projects such as cultural or artistic initiatives.
- Privilege long-term stabilization projects focused on community cohesion, and incorporating conflict sensitive methodologies, rather than short term and quick impact projects.
- Combine bottom-up approaches and top-down approaches, with a role for CSOs in both advocating to the government about needs, and supporting the government in identifying projects to implement for peace building.
- Replace the narrative on fighting armed opposition groups with a narrative on making peace.
- Advocate for more inclusiveness and transparency of ongoing peace processes.
- Support the development of a common civil society understanding of the peace building concept.

Priority Area 3: Capacity

Technical Capacity and Expertise

- Support the institutionalization of knowledge exchange between and within organizations to increase and retain knowledge and build expertise, sectoral cooperation networks and knowledge transfer between those CSOs with recognized expertise and others.

Institutional Capacity

- Increase awareness and understanding of the use and benefits of policies and procedures by CSOs, including for increased sustainability and crisis management.
- Complement capacity building with mentoring and follow-up to ensure institutional reforms are accepted and practiced.
- In budgeting for projects, ensure there are sufficient funds to support administrative, finance and human resources management costs.

Project Management

- Support more robust and systematic external monitoring and evaluation of CSO activities.
- Support capacity building in M&E, risk assessments, Do No Harm and Conflict Sensitive Programming

Research and Advocacy

- Support capacity exchange to raise understanding of why, how and under which circumstances research is necessary, and build capacity throughout the research cycle, including research methodology, tools development, data collection, research planning, data analysis, presentation of research findings, dissemination, and proper referencing.
- In order to facilitate access to resources and their use, this needs to be complemented by wider dissemination of findings, including in local languages, both through online platforms and physical resource centers.
- Conduct regular monitoring of the condition, challenges and needs of civil society to support reflection on its role and ways forward to overcome challenges.
- Support tailored training and mentoring on constructive evidence-based advocacy, including stakeholder analysis, identification of groups of interest, understanding of points of entry for advocacy as part of the policy process, and development of advocacy strategies.

Gender Programming

- Evolutions in gender equity and equality require generational change and prolonged, sustained attention at the advocacy, programming and policy levels. Increasing focus on purely humanitarian aid or peace building instead of, rather than alongside, development programming with a gender perspective has direct consequences for empowered and educated women who work as teachers, nurses, doctors, lawyers, journalists, and in government and NGOs. While the humanitarian needs have to be addressed, these must not be viewed as a priority over, or opposed to development.
- Systematise gender-sensitive and conflict sensitive situational assessments as part of program design.

- Continue to develop understanding and capacity of local civil society as well as national and international implementers on gender mainstreaming and gender sensitivity.
- Support civil society monitoring of the implementation of NAP 1325, in close collaboration with relevant State institutions.

ANNEX II

EU Priority Actions 2018-2020

1.1. Enabling Environment

| Challenges | Priorities | Indicators | 2018-2020 EU Priority actions |
|--|---|---|---|
| Lengthy and multiple registration processes, corruption, interference, lack of awareness and lack of specific recognition of networks. | <p>GENERAL PRIORITY</p> <p><i>The legal and institutional framework is revised to become more enabling for CSOs to operate.</i></p> <p>SPECIFIC PRIORITIES</p> | | |
| Persisting challenges in agreeing on a common workable definition of civil society. | <p><i>1.1. Administrative processes for NGOs and CSOs are leaner, less vulnerable to corruption or interference and equally accessible by CSOs beyond Kabul</i></p> | <p># Actions taken to identify and respond to specific bottlenecks in government administrative processes for CSOs</p> <p># Programmes which include provisions for grassroots CSOs</p> | <p>1.1.1 Analyse bottlenecks in government administrative processes for CSOs including registration, project authorisation process, tax declaration, including corruption vulnerability assessment (related to CSOs sector as a whole).</p> <p>1.1.2 Support efforts towards multi-stakeholder dialogue and consultation to tackle the challenges identified in the abovementioned analysis.</p> <p>1.1.3 New programmes in support of civil society include provisions for grassroots organisations to be supported and</p> |

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| | | | coached through sub-granting. |
| Lack of awareness of legal provisions concerning CSOs | <i>1.2. CSOs have a better awareness of the legal framework, working relations with the Ministries and registration process</i> | # Initiatives to increase awareness among CSOs of the legal framework as it relates to them. | 1.2.1 Increase awareness of the legal and regulatory framework among the CSOs. |

1.2. Structured Participation and Roles

| Challenges | Priorities | Indicators | 2018-2020 EU Priority actions |
|---|---|------------|-------------------------------|
| Lack of political will on the side of the government to actively and effectively engage CSOs in policy discussions Lack of | GENERAL PRIORITY <i>Afghan CSOs' roles in key political and policy processes and in strengthening governance and the rule of law, at central as well as local level is</i> | | |

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| engagement of CSOs at the sub-national level. | <i>promoted</i> SPECIFIC PRIORITIES | | |
| Tokenistic and/or symbolic consultation and dialogue processes prevail Limited CS networking and advocacy skills, and fragmentation of CS efforts leading to limited input into policy and political processes. | <i>2.1. The role of civil society in domestic accountability systems and policy dialogue mechanisms and programmes (including follow up of Realising Self Reliance, National Priority Programmes, Open Government Partnership, Citizens' Charter, etc.) is strengthened</i> | # Government strategies and policies developed with inputs from civil society # CSO networks strengthened at provincial level # Sub-national governance programmes that have mainstreamed civil society participation # Government projects where CSOs are engaged in provincial budget development and/or in monitoring. | 2.1.1 Donors to advocate the inclusion of civil society in the follow up to key government commitments 2.1.2 Build on recent achievements and better structure the activities of existing networks and platforms at the national and provincial levels. 2.1.3 Support the role of civil society in provincial budget development and monitoring |
| Mechanisms for coordination among CSOs are often loose, and more <i>ad hoc</i> than regular. | <i>2.2. Coordination and networking CSOs efforts for effective advocacy and lobby are strengthened at national and provincial level.</i> | # Observed improvements in CSO ability to share information through structured networks # Observed increase in evidence-based advocacy | 2.2.1 Support networks at regional level to increase collaboration, networking, sharing of information, constructive evidence-based advocacy, capacity building and exchange opportunities between CSOs in different parts of the country. 2.2.2 Support knowledge sharing in research, analysis, and constructive evidence-based advocacy, including by building on existing expertise within civil society and best practices. |

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| <p>Grassroots CSOs in particular deplore limited coordination affects their performance and ability to efficiently approach decision-makers</p> <p>Lack of ability and/or capacity of CSOs to obtain and analyse data to produce evidence that supports advocacy efforts.</p> | | initiatives conducted by CSOs | |
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1.3. Capacity

| Challenges | Priorities | Indicators | 2018-2020 EU Priority actions |
|---|---|---|---|
| <p>Kabul-bias of capacity development interventions (benefitting networks and well-connected CSOs) to the detriment of CSOs in far provinces.</p> <p>Donor-driven capacity development agendas and absence of systematic needs assessments</p> <p>Many CSOs lack a clear mandate and clear areas of expertise, trying to constantly adapt to changing donor priorities.</p> | <p>GENERAL PRIORITY</p> <p><i>Capacity development efforts better target the real needs of Afghan CSOs (including remote CSOs not based in the capital) to help CSOs improve their technical and institutional capacities as well as internal governance structures.</i></p> <p>SPECIFIC PRIORITIES</p> | | |
| | <p><i>3.1. Provincial, remote-based and rural CSOs have increased opportunities to benefit from capacity</i></p> | <p># Capacity opportunities provided to beneficiaries from grassroots organisations outside Kabul</p> | <p>3.1.1 Support capacity building and mentoring opportunities to grassroots organisations that are active in provinces, districts and villages outside Kabul but have limited access to such opportunities.</p> |

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| | <i>development opportunities.</i> | | |
| <p>Weak CS internal accountability systems, politically-affiliated NGOs and cases of internal corruption or malpractice. Low level of public acceptance</p> <p>Limited institutional support from donors, further aggravated by cuts in administrative and management costs that would allow effective follow-up and administrative reform.</p> | <i>3.2. CSOs' internal governance and accountability systems are strengthened.</i> | # Capacity opportunities provided on internal governance and accountability (e.g., transparent management, M&E, risk assessments, Do No Harm and Conflict Sensitive Programming, ICT) | 3.2.1 Support capacity building and mentoring on internal governance and accountability (e.g., transparent management, M&E, risk assessments, Do No Harm and Conflict Sensitive Programming, ICT). |
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| There are persistent weaknesses in gender programming, and misunderstanding of gender mainstreaming. | 3.3. Improved understanding among CSOs of gender mainstreaming and of gender principles in development programming and humanitarian action | # Donor/ CSO programs/ projects with integrated gender components, including gender sensitive assessments as part of program/ project design | 3.3.1 Continue to develop understanding and capacity of local civil society as well as national and international implementers on gender mainstreaming and gender sensitivity. |
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1.4. Donor support models and coordination amongst donors

| Challenges | Priorities | Indicators | 2018-2020 EU Priority actions |
|--|--|------------|-------------------------------|
| <p>High dependency of Afghan CSOs on funds provided by the international community.</p> <p>Limited local fundraising opportunities coupled with weak fundraising capacities.</p> <p>Donor driven funding</p> | <p>GENERAL PRIORITY</p> <p>Coordination amongst donors supporting CS in Afghanistan is enhanced, including in the development and use of adapted support models and tools.</p> | | |

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| <p>priorities (i.e. funding priorities are often not set by CSOs, or in consultation with them) Donor support models are too diverse, project-based and not suiting governance related and advocacy CS work. Coordination amongst donors is lacking</p> | SPECIFIC PRIORITIES | | |
| | <p>4.1. Priorities are set by civil society and are not donor-driven. Support goes to grassroots organisations.</p> | <p><i># Ongoing projects whose sub-granting component has been reviewed</i></p> <p><i># New projects that incorporate findings from sub-granting reviews</i></p> <p><i># Follow-up workshops to the EU Roadmap on key issues, including regular follow-up with partner CSOs to identify lessons learned and means to overcome challenges in future programming.</i></p> | <p>4.1.1 EU will conduct a review of sub-granting in its projects and make a more extensive use of this mechanism.</p> <p>4.1.2 EU Delegation to organise follow-up workshops to the EU Roadmap on key issues (e.g. capacity, sustainability, sub-granting, advocacy, reaching out to traditional civil society, etc.), including regular follow-up with partner CSOs to identify lessons learned and means to overcome challenges in future programming.</p> |
| | <p>4.2. Donors coordinate</p> | <p><i>Functioning coordination group with</i></p> | <p>4.2.1 EU to initiate a coordination group to monitor follow-up to the CSO Roadmap, strengthen coordination and provide a</p> |

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| | <p>more regularly, among themselves and with civil society, on who supports what and where, as well as on funding priorities and modalities. Coordination informs joint programming and a more strategic support.</p> | <p><i>regular reporting on progress</i></p> | <p>forum for dialogue on civil society's enabling environment.</p> |
| | <p>4.3. Institutionalise mechanisms for engagement of civil society in strategic consultation and program design</p> | <p><i>% Programmes/projects that include civil society consultation in the design phase</i></p> | <p>4.3.1 Support a more proactive contribution of civil society in program formulation and design.</p> |

