SYNTHESIS OF AFGHAN AND INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY PAPERS FOR THE GENEVA CONFERENCE ON AFGHANISTAN

27TH – 28TH NOVEMBER 2018

SUMMARY

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

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

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

ACRONYMS

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

1. PURPOSE

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

2. CONTEXT

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

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

3. CONSULTATIONS

As part of the GCA, 10 Afghan civil society delegates (5 female, 5 male) were invited to participate in the conference proceedings and side events and meetings on the 27th and 28th of November. Their selection and participation in the GCA was managed by the Civil Society Working Committee (CSWC). In addition, international and national civil society organisations operating in Afghanistan came together for a day of preparation on the 26th of November. The position papers summarised in this document were prepared to inform civil society participation at GCA. The Afghan Civil Society Joint Statement was delivered on day two of the conference (28th November 2018), and built upon the previous day of civil society dialogue.

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

4. THE PAPERS

Developments since the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan in 2016

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

- President Ghani's February 2018 offer to the Taliban, for peace talks with no preconditions;
- GoA commitment to the National Action Plan for UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (NAP 1325), including appointment of ministerial Focal Points, delivery of regional Focal Point workshops, and preparation of two annual reports (2016 and 2017);
- GoA's steps to improve implementation of Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) Law;
- GoA's preparation of the Afghanistan National Strategy for Combatting Corruption (2017), related anticorruption commitments made in the SMART SMAF (2016), and joining of the Open Government Partnership in 2017;

- GoA's efforts to exceed international best practices for the extractives sector, including ongoing revision of the Minerals Law (2014) and committing to governance reforms relating to anticorruption in the industry;
- GoA's partial, yet increasing, enforcement of the Safe Schools Declaration; and
- GoA's adoption and support of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF).

Peace and Security

Across all the GCA position papers there is agreement that security in Afghanistan is deteriorating. The Taliban presently control, or influence, more than 45 percent of the country.[1] The so-called Islamic State have firmly established themselves in the north and east of the country. Criminality continues to rise. And, in the first nine months of 2018 alone, UNAMA reported 8,050 civilian casualties (5,252 injuries, 2,798 deaths).[2] This is a 5 percent increase from the same period a year prior. In addition to these harrowing figures are high levels of casualties amongst the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). Arresting this decline, and indeed securing a peace agreement to end the conflict, are of paramount importance.

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

Second, it is also vitally important that no concessions are made with regard to hard-won achievements secured since 2002. Peace negotiations must preserve the Constitution of Afghanistan and protect women's rights and the rights of minorities. One civil society position paper summarises these points succinctly: "We do not accept any preconditions preventing the participation of women in the peace process or solutions that harm and curtail their rights".[3]

Lastly, Afghan civil society "calls on the US not to replace Afghans in negotiations with the Taliban";[4] it is imperative that peace negotiations are Afghan-led. While the United States and the wider international community have a vested interest in achieving peace in Afghanistan, it is key that they do not agree terms with the Taliban on behalf of the GoA and the Afghan citizenry. Such

[1] BAAG, 2018a.
[2] UNAMA, Protection of Civilians Report, 2018.
[3] AWN, 2018: 2.
[4] CSJWG, 2018: 6.

an agreement might include concessions unacceptable to Afghans and, lacking Afghan ownership, would be unsustainable.

Citizens' Rights and Protection

In line with UNAMA's tracking of civilian casualties in 2018, international civil society organisations working in the health sector note not only equally high levels of war-wounded patients, but also an increase in insecurity (measured in mass casualty attacks).[5] Given these trends, civil society calls upon all parties of the conflict to protect the civilian population, civilian hospitals and the transportation of the wounded or medical equipment, as stipulated in international humanitarian law.

Women's rights still stand as a major issue for civil society in Afghanistan. In addition to calls for women's participation in peace talks, highlighted above, chief concerns are women's political participation and their legal and social protection. Women's representation in leadership positions and government employment remains below 30 percent.[6] Causes include the lack of political support for women's participation, lack of educational and training opportunities afforded to women, and harmful practices constraining women. Further action must be taken to overcome these limitations. Positive steps taken since the BCA should be noted, including the GoA attempts to improve delivery of the NAP 1325 (including appointment of ministerial Focal Points, delivery of regional Focal Point workshops, and preparation of annual reports in 2016 and 2017). Yet, further implementation, localization and monitoring of the plan is required.

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

Second, women's shelters were also a pressing issue. While shelters remain deeply controversial in many quarters of Afghan society, one civil society organisation called for a shift, "from secrecy to mainstreaming".[7] Acknowledging that such shelters do have shortcomings, the position paper reminded us that "women's shelters in Afghanistan are providing hundreds of women and children across the country with safety and immediate protection".[8] Civil society recommends, amongst other points, establishing women's shelters in underserved areas (including Kandahar, where no shelters exist); simultaneously securing sustainable funding for shelters from the GoA, whilst also maintaining their independence from government influence; raising public awareness of the value

[5] EMERGENCY, 2018.
[6] AWN, 2018.
[7] APPRO, 2018i: 1.
[8] Ibid: 1.

of shelters and that there functioning is consistent with Islamic principles; and supporting shelters to develop their capacity to offer much-needed training for residents.

In 2016, it was estimated that 2.2 million children between the age of 8 and 14 work in Afghanistan.[9] And, child labor is on the rise. The growth in working children is driven by both poverty and conflict. Poverty results in households sacrificing long-term investments in children's education in favour of short-term needs, such as having them work to provide immediate income for the family. Conflict equates to high dropout rates caused by uncertainty, low quality and inaccessible schooling, and schools being targeted in armed conflict. To protect children's rights and diminish the negative social, physical and mental health impacts of child labour, civil society calls for the GoA to develop better policies to protect children for hard labour and ensure employers of children are punished. Children's rights should also be preserved in apprenticeships, where the GoA should work closely with employers and parents to ensure suitable protections are in place for those working children over the legal age of employment. To support legislation, further research and monitoring of child labour will be required. It is also expected that the GoA better support orphanages to provide education for the children in their care and ensure schools remain safe places for students.

In 2005, 10.8 percent of Afghans suffered from a severe or very severe disability.[10] Since 2005 many more Afghans suffer from disabilities caused by the ongoing conflict, including from increasing levels of civilian casualty. To ensure protections for persons with disabilities, Afghan civil society believes it is necessary to both build upon and extend existing commitments. This includes the GoA reporting regularly on the UN Convention on Rights for Persons with Disabilities, as a means to measure progress in securing said rights. Furthermore, the GoA should endorse the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, committing to render humanitarian assistance inclusive of persons with disabilities.

Displacement is worsening in Afghanistan. One international civil society organisation indicated the scale of the problem: "Afghanistan has experienced unprecedented levels of return in recent years and, compounded by exponential rises in internal displacement, the situation now constitutes a major humanitarian crisis".[11] From 2012 to 2017, over 1.2 million Afghans were internally displaced.[12] In 2018 alone, conflict in 32 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces drove 250,000 people from their homes.[13] Furthermore, drought in 2018 displaced 275,000 Afghans.[14] Added to these high levels of internal displacement are significant numbers of Afghans returning from Pakistan, Iran and other countries. From 2012 to mid-2018, more than 1.3 million Afghans returned from

[9] APPRO, 2018a.
[10] GoA, National Disability Survey of Afghanistan, 2005.
[11] BAAG, 2018b: 1.
[12] NRC, 2018.
[13] ADSP, 2018.
[14] ARC, 2018.

Pakistan and over 445,000 from Iran.[15] Returns from Pakistan were just over 25,000 in 2018.[16] Yet, 2018 saw Afghans returning in record numbers from Iran. Almost 700,000 people returned from Iran in this one calendar year.[17] This was driven by Iran's economic downturn, related currency devaluation and intimidation by Iranian authorities.[18]

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

The EU, on the other hand, has made it easier for its Members States to return refugees or migrants; leveraging its aid to pressure the GoA into accepting increasing numbers of returnees without sufficient capacity to absorb and support these new arrivals. This, alongside the increasing tendency for Member States to repatriate Afghans back to precarious situations, is deeply questionable and arguably in contravention of the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. There is also evidence the UK, Norway and other EU Member States are using bureaucratic loopholes to knowingly deport minors. International civil society are opposed to the use of such questionable methods, particularly given the levels of violence and vulnerability returnees are likely to experience upon arrival in Afghanistan.

Displacement and Integration

After being displaced, people's needs grow. One of the position papers elaborates: "IDPs in Afghanistan are poorer, have reduced access to education and livelihoods, and face significantly increased protection risks as they struggle to make ends meet".[19] Regarding return: Civil society assessments indicate that 20 percent of those returning need humanitarian support and 72 percent of returnees are displaced on return.[20] These vulnerable returnees effectively become internally displaced. Most of these returnees-cum-IDPs do not have a sustainable source of income, without which "food insecurity looms and negative coping mechanisms range from unsustainable debt to child labor".[21]

While the effects of displacement are significant, Afghan and international civil society see opportunities to more effectively respond to the growing humanitarian crisis. This requires galvanising national policy processes, while also capitalising on regional and international

[15] NRC, 2018.
[16] BAAG, 2018b.
[17] Ibid.
[18] ADSP, 2018.
[19] ADSP, 2018: 2.
[20] BAAG, 2018b.
[21] NRC, 2018: 3.

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

In 2018, the GoA also agreed to participate in and pilot the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). This news was warmly received by members of international civil society. CRRF, a structure through which to plan a more predictable and complete response to displacement issues, will likely have positive impacts upon humanitarian response in Afghanistan. Yet, concerns remain for international civil society organisations. First, the framework's emphasis on voluntary repatriation is problematic. One of the position papers states: "In a context where asylum opportunities for Afghans are under sustained erosion, both in the region and in Europe, and despite the widely acknowledged deterioration of security conditions, such an emphasis is unjustifiable and should be publicly acknowledged as such".[22] As discussed above, in many cases "voluntary" repatriation is not truly voluntary or free of coercion. This needs to be made explicit, counteracted and factored into implementation of the framework.

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

Governance and Corruption

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

[22] ADSP, 2018: 2.

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

A novel solution promoting schooling as a method to overcome corruption was outlined in one position paper. This argued: "cross referencing anticorruption education to legal and religious norms can instil anticorruption values in students".[23] Engaging schooling for anticorruption purposes is undertaken in two main ways. On the one hand, curricula should be updated to include anticorruption principles, educators should be retrained to use these revised curricula and parents engaged to raise student awareness. On the other hand, extracurricular activities should be initiated, to build on classroom learning and engage the wider community.

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

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

[23] APPRO, 2018c: 1.

realised through the establishment of a NPP focused on developing a vibrant and sustainable civil society.

The Economy

The Afghan economy continues to struggle since the onset of the economic downturn in 2013. According to the Central Statistics Office, deteriorating security coupled with poor economic growth has led to rising poverty and unemployment. The most recent data shows that between 2012/13 and 2015/16 national unemployment had risen from 25 to 40 percent.[24] Over the same period the percentage of people living below the national poverty line reached 54 percent, up from 38.3 percent;[25] an increase of over 5 million people experiencing poverty.

One major source of possible government revenue and economic growth is from extractive resources. Yet, as President Ghani has himself stated, this may deliver a "resource curse". Afghan and international civil society see a number of cautionary issues in relation to extractives in Afghanistan. While the sector may drive growth, it also drives conflict and corruption. Indeed, one position paper highlighted that "mining is the Taliban's second largest source of funding".[26] The same paper went on to detail that while the GoA makes estimated annual revenues of $36 to $40 million from extractive industries, almost $300 million per year is lost to illegal mining.[27]

Acknowledging that the GoA has taken significant steps to improve the sector since 2016, including surpassing international best practices, initiating an ongoing review of the Minerals Law (2014) and making commitments to incorporate further anticorruption measures in the sector, a number of concerns were raised by civil society. These included the need for a series of safeguards to be introduced into existing legislation including, for example: the publication of payment and production data; the creation of a public register of beneficial ownership; and increased transparency in bidding and contracting processes. The goal of such safeguards is to further integrity, accountability and transparency in the extractives sector.

Development in Health, Education, Agriculture and Livelihoods

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

[24] GoA, Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey, 2017.
[25] Ibid.
[26] GW/IWA, 2018: 1.
[27] Ibid.

Health: In 2018, 1.5 million Afghans residing in underserved areas of the country required trauma and emergency primary health care.[28] Civil society advocates for the development of a comprehensive and accessible trauma care system in Afghanistan. For this to be possible, it has to feature comprehensive provision and be free of charge. To fulfil this right to healthcare, civil society seeks an increased allocation of funding from the GoA and international donors. Moreover, the delivery of such a system of care can only be realised if investments are made in training a future cadre of healthcare professionals. In particular it is important that women are increasingly trained as healthcare personnel, in a bid to produce more inclusive healthcare provision.

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

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

Education: Children have borne the brunt of conflict in Afghanistan. And, while increasing numbers of children have been attending school since 2001, this continues to be the case. Presently, 3.7 million children (2.2 million girls, 1.5 million boys) do not go to school and, for the first time since 2002, the number of children out of school is increasing.[29] A number of factors are driving this reduction in schooling, and attacks on schools, students and teachers, which have dramatically increased in 2018, are having a significant effect. With the control of non-state armed groups growing across the country, attacks on education are rising; with perpetrators being both non-state armed groups and ANSF. Existing data indicates that schools that have been used for election-related or military purposes are especially susceptible to attack. On a positive note, however, ANSF have been reducing the use of schools for military purposes year-on-year since the adoption of the Safer Schools Declaration in 2015. To minimize attacks on education, civil society calls on the GoA and non-state armed groups to avoid using schools for purposes other than education, to

[28] UNOCHA, Humanitarian Response Plan, 2018.
[29] GCPEA, 2018.

maintain safe access to education during armed conflict, and to strengthen monitoring of attacks and prosecute perpetrators.

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

Children with disabilities suffer especially badly in Afghanistan. Many have no access to education as a result of conflict, and social and physical barriers. According to one international civil society organisation, "Afghanistan needs specialised teachers, awareness of the need for all children to attend school, including children and girls with disabilities, and sufficient funding in order to focus on inclusive education".[30]

Agriculture: Eighty percent of Afghans rely on agriculture as their primary source of food and income.[31] However, conflict and climate change are devastating agricultural systems in Afghanistan. In 2018, approximately 9.8 million people (43.6 percent of Afghanistan's rural population) experienced severe food insecurity, with an estimated 2.6 million Afghans facing emergency levels of food insecurity.[32] This has contributed to widespread malnutrition, negative health impacts and massive internal displacement in the country.

A tentative method for combatting food insecurity was raised in one of the GCA position papers. It is argued that, "mosques could play an instrumental role in addressing food insecurity through organized and systematic awareness-raising and advocacy for donations from the wealthy to those in need, identifying the families in the community most in need of food assistance, and ensuring transparency and accountability in food distribution".[33] This suggestion builds on systems already employed by mosques, including: the distribution of *zakat*, or obligatory Islamic alms, which is collected and dispersed through mosques to the poor; and the distribution of food that takes place alongside religious celebrations, such as *eid ul fitr* at the end of Ramadan.

Drought, currently experienced in 20 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, is one of the major natural hazards driving food insecurity. A 70 percent deficit in precipitation has impacted food production and depleted farmers' assets.[34] The drought has stunted already low levels of crop production.

[30] HI, 2018: 3.
[31] ARC, 2018.
[32] ACF, 2018.
[33] APPRO, 2018d: 2.
[34] ARC, 2018.

Nationwide wheat production deficits have risen from 1.5 to 2.3 million metric tonnes from 2017 to 2018, respectively. Drought has pushed 1.4 million people into acute food insecurity in 2018. [35]

Two main solutions to mitigating drought, and other natural hazards, have been suggested by members of civil society. These are Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Integrated Watershed Management (IWM). In DRR, a community-based approach is utilised to identify and action strategies that mitigate the impact of natural hazards. This includes, "supporting communities to identify disaster-prone areas and protect themselves, introducing improved farming techniques and diversifying household income, thereby enabling them to better withstand economic and environmental shocks and invest in their families' futures".[36] IWM, on the other hand, involves introducing techniques such as terracing, trenching, damming, and using vegetation to catch rain water and slow its run-off. This has the effect of creating improvements in the soil and water, and "bringing substantial improvement in sustainable agriculture, livestock and food security at the community level, and dramatically reducing the risk of flooding and vulnerability to drought".[37] Investing in either, if not both, solutions would build community resilience to climate change.

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

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

Civil society also noted that the impact of UNHCR cash grants requires further exploration. Evidence presented by one international civil society organisation, from 2016, indicated that grants were, "prompting Afghan refugees to return prematurely and that this had adverse longer-term impact on the ability of returnees to (re)integrate".[38] It was suggested that early return, prompted

[35] ACF, 2018.
[36] ARC, 2018: 3.
[37] Ibid: 4.
[38] NRC, 2018: 7.

by cash grants, undermined preparedness in relation to building social networks and skills-readiness.

Finally, IDPs and returnees are driven to utilise negative coping strategies in response to their financial vulnerability. Displaced households often find themselves caught in a cycle of poverty that ultimately leads to growing debt. In addition to indebtedness and, often as a response to it, displaced families rely on child labour. In one study conducted in 2017, 20 to 24 percent of displaced families included children who worked.[39] In some cases, also as a result of debt, displaced families resort to child marriage as a coping strategy.

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

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

There is growing recognition amongst Afghan and international civil society that humanitarian response alone is insufficient to address the displacement challenges Afghanistan faces. As highlighted above, Afghanistan has growing numbers of IDPs and returnees. Many are highly vulnerable and have long-term needs, which have been created or are compounded by ongoing conflict. Presently, humanitarian efforts to improve the welfare of displaced people focus solely on providing immediate assistance. Development efforts rarely target these populations and peacebuilding interventions largely exclude them. As such, a gap exists in the aid architecture in Afghanistan: Afghans facing long-term displacement-related needs, and who are impacted by the effects of conflict, are being failed by the aid system. IDPs and returnees living in protracted displacement in Afghanistan receive less support over time. Their ability to break cycles of poverty and vulnerability is undermined and, in many cases, unlikely.

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

[39] Ibid.

In response to these challenges Afghan and international civil society call for a collective approach that spans the humanitarian–development–peace nexus. This approach "involves a wide variety of actors, working based on their comparative advantages and over multiple years, to reduce need, vulnerability and risk and increase peace and resilience for sustainable development".[40] It is not about sequencing activities better, but actively collaborating, having common outcomes (and joint monitoring frameworks) that bridge conventional humanitarian–developmental–peacebuilding divides, and securing predictable and flexible funding streams that allow for this to occur. The role of donors is, therefore, crucial in developing flexible and quick response funding models. The provision of suitable incentives from donors to adopt the proposed approach will also be vital. The United Nations — with its mandate of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding assistance — will have a core leadership role to play in formalising and overseeing the delivery of a nexus approach. And, the GoA will hold responsibility for delivering the key functions of articulating collective outcomes, creating an enabling policy environment, and monitoring results.

A nexus approach would also be needs-based and people-centred. Moving beyond a categorical targeting of beneficiaries, nexus interventions would be based on, and respond to, local realities. Instead of using status as a determinant of assistance, people-centred interventions would embrace the complexity of real-life circumstances experienced by those in need, allowing for the delivery of more appropriate and effective assistance. This requires local-level data collection and bottom-up planning (in line with GoA policies), which effectively places people at the centre of the approach.

[40] ACBAR, 2018: 1.

5. ANNEX: POSITION PAPERS FOR GENEVA CONFERENCE ON AFGHANISTAN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

APPRO (2018h). *State – Civil Society Relations in Afghanistan: Forward or Backward?* Kabul: Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organisation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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