Transition and Non-Government Organizations in Afghanistan:
An Assessment and Prospects

Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization

JANUARY 2014

GLOSSARY

ACBAR	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development
ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
AOG	Armed Opposition Group
CSO	Civil Society Organization
NGO	Non-Government Organization – National
INGO	Non-Government Organization – International
I/NGO	International / National Non-Government Organization
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
ANP	Afghan National Police

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

It is widely recognized that international funding for and attention to Afghanistan are likely to begin to diminish as the 2014 deadline approaches for the complete transition of responsibilities from the international security forces to their Afghan counterparts. Also, the funding for NGOs beyond 2014 is likely to become more streamlined and targeted, focusing more on humanitarian aid provision, protection of women's rights, and possibly attempts to tackle endemic corruption.[1]

International funding has been at the core of reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan since 2001, providing for the salaries and other expenses of government officials, Afghan National Army, and Afghan National Police and for funding programs in infrastructure development, education, and health. An early concern has been that of over saturating the fragile and underdeveloped economy of Afghanistan with massive inflows of funds that cannot be absorbed in a timely or productive manner.[2] The oversupply of liquid funds has created an environment rife with misappropriation of resources and funds and fertile grounds conducive to all forms of corruption and corruptive practices by government and non-government organizations, international actors, the private sector, and ordinary citizens.

The reduction of and changes in how international aid will be allocated to Afghanistan in the post-2014 period is likely to cause disturbances in the functioning of the Afghan economy, the sustenance of which is alarmingly dependent on a steady flow of international aid funds. Combined with the specters of the Presidential Elections and the transition of security responsibilities from international to national authorities, both scheduled for completion in 2014, a deteriorating economy is likely to make a significant contribution to heightened uncertainty among Afghans and the myriad of non-government national and international organizations with intentions to continue operating in Afghanistan beyond 2014.[3]

This assessment was undertaken to provide an in-depth analysis of the role and prospects of the international / national non-government organizations (I/NGOs) in Afghanistan in light of the Presidential Elections and the transition of the responsibility for national security to Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), both to take place in 2014.

---

1 This is based on a synthesis of statements made by international donors about their missions in Afghanistan beyond 2014
2 See, for example, Rubin, B. R. (2002). The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System, New Haven: CT, Yale University Press.
3 See, for example, OECD (2010). Do No Harm: International Support for State building.
Available from: www.oecd.org/dataoecd/8/32/44409926.pdf and Holland, B., L. Taylor and C. Taylor (2012). Afghanistan: The Timetable for Security Transition, House of Commons. Available from: http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN05851

OBJECTIVES

This assessment sought to:

- Assess and document how INGOs and to some extent Afghan NGOs currently operating in Afghanistan are adapting to the changing operating environment as 2014 approaches

- Document what preparations and scenario planning processes I/NGOs are undertaking as the military withdrawal concludes, PRTs close, and preparations are made for the Presidential Elections and the political transition in 2014

- Identify the key challenges faced by I/NGOs and the extent to which I/NGOs are prepared to address them. Particular issues of interest are remote personnel and project management, staffing, funding, and access to international donors and the Afghan Government

- Identify the ways in which INGOs, particularly humanitarian organizations, plan to adapt to changing circumstances in light of deteriorating security and lack of protection

- Generate practical recommendations for donors, including the EU, in their support for INGOs operating in Afghanistan and to dispel negative perceptions of INGOs in Afghanistan, and

- Generate recommendations on how INGOs could continue their activities in Afghanistan, given the potentially deteriorating security situation.

METHODOLOGY

The following methods were used to conduct this research:

- Analysis of the secondary data from available reports and documents, and
- Analysis of interviews with key informants drawn from national and international non-government organizations / civil society organizations.

The secondary data was collected through a desk review of online sources. Also, interviews were held with 17 key informants drawn from national and international NGOs operating in Afghanistan as follows: ActionAid, Oxfam Novib, Care International, Helvetas, The Asia Foundation, Save the Children – Afghanistan, ZOA, Civil Society and Human Rights Organization (CSHRO), Equal Access, Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance, Cooperation Center for Afghanistan, Women and Children Legal Research Foundation, Justice For All, Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium, Women for Afghan Women, and Afghan Women Skills Development Centre.

BACKGROUND

In June 2005 President Karzai signed the new Law on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to replace the Taliban-era regulation on NGOs. Under the Taliban-era law the many private sector contractors delivering services and humanitarian aid were listed as among some 2,400 NGOs. The new law, still pending approval from the Afghan National Assembly but remaining in full force and effect, redefines NGOs as non-profit / non-commercial entities. All I/NGOs had to first qualify and then re-register with the Ministry of Economy from 2005 onward.[4]

A wide range of programmes and services are provided by Afghanistan's estimated 1,500 – 2,000 NGOs. Among these there is a small number of faith-based NGOs. The majority of the NGOs are national while the large development and humanitarian programs are implemented by long-established international relief and development NGOs, sometimes working with smaller Afghan national NGOs. The main services provided by NGOs are in the health, education, agriculture, community development, and humanitarian sectors while a very small number conduct research and advocacy.[5]

Progressively, since around 2006, Afghanistan has become more and more dangerous for NGOs to operate with an increasing number of casualties from NGO workers, either targeted or as collateral victims. The response to these developments by many of the NGOs delivering humanitarian aid has been to work more closely with local elders and even negotiating and gaining permission from Armed Opposition Groups (AOGs) in the more remote areas. [6]

International NGOs with a long presence in Afghanistan are no longer able to reach some of the areas where they have been active since the early 1990s. These developments have forced many NGOs to stop operations in the most dangerous areas altogether and reduce operations in riskier areas, the net result of which has been the deprivation of many communities of essential services such as basic health. As early as 2005, a survey of NGOs active in Afghanistan reported that 30% of the NGOs had experienced attacks on their staff members. [7]
There is strong sentiment among NGOs and observers that a major contributing factor to the

4 See: http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/afghanistan.pdf, accessed July 20, 2013.
5 See: http://pom.peacebuild.ca/NGOAfghanistan.shtml, accessed July 20, 2013
6 This is based on data collected by APPRO in 2011 in Farah and Kandahar.
7 ANSO and CARE (2005). "NGO Insecurity in Afghanistan", available at: http://www.careusa.org/newsroom/specialreports/afghanistan/20050505_ ansocare.pdf, accessed July 20, 2013.

currently high level of threat toward NGOs is the militarization of aid in Afghanistan. The initial ideas and plans to include in military campaigns such approaches as "clear, hold, and stabilize" or "winning hearts and minds" and reliance on the heavily militarized Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) have led to many NGOs being closely associated with the military. Some NGOs, due to the need for funds but also because of initial naïveté took funds from and interacted with military and other staff in PRTs. With the military coming increasingly under attack by AOGs and disliked by vast swathes of the population, it is inevitable that NGOs – and Afghans working for them – are increasingly looked upon unfavorably if they are perceived to have had a close association with the military.

NGOs have a mixed reputation in Afghanistan. While some are poorly regarded and viewed only as fronts to tap into donor aid funding, others are highly valued and offer humanitarian and development programmes with a variety of other much-needed services. INGOs' work in Afghanistan since around 2005 has also been associated with the presence of the international military forces, resulting in a lack of recognition of their contributions to reconstruction since before 2001 and doubts over their future role in the post-2014 period. In Afghanistan the general view of I/NGOs is often so negative that of late a distinction has had to be made between I/NGOs and CSOs to separate for-profit commercial entities from I/NGOs and CSOs. The phrase NGO has been used interchangeably by some to describe organizations including the UN, private sector companies as well as traditional non-profit aid agencies. This confusion has meant that "NGO" is frequently used, erroneously, to describe for-profit commercial entities that receive donor funds to implement services, particularly in health and education but also in other areas including infrastructure development. CSOs, some of which are also registered as NGOs, can be more organic and made up of a wide range of individuals from citizenry, operating as non-profit entities. The CSO category includes organizations that provide commentary and insight on the development process, conduct research, and undertake advocacy aimed at the Government of Afghanistan and the international donor community.

The concern about the perceived loss of independence in activities and approach of NGOs has been a topic of debate between civil society and humanitarian aid organizations on the one hand and the NATO mission in Afghanistan on the other. A statement by Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the NATO Secretary General in 2010, on NGOs being the "soft power" side of foreign intervention in Afghanistan led to a fierce rebuttal by over one hundred largely international NGOs who wished to disclaim the suggested linkages by Rasmussen between the military and NGOs. The ground for concern by the NGOs was that such statements by NATO and other military entities would only contribute to the already existing confusion

about the role of NGOs and "puts at risk the lives of civilians affected by conflict and those delivering assistance to the people of Afghanistan." The joint statement by the NGOs through the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development (ACBAR) stated that the core function of all NGOs was to provide assistance regardless of socio-economic or political motivation.[8]

To make its position clear, ACBAR referred to the Principles and Good Practices for Humanitarian Assistance, signed in Stockholm by the European Union members as well as Canada, Japan, the United States, and Australia in 2003, and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Assistance, signed by the 27 European Union members in 2007. ACBAR draws attention to the fact that by signing these two agreements, the signatories must adhere to three core humanitarian principles of:

Humanity: Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found, with particular attention to the most vulnerable in the population, such as children, women and the elderly. The dignity and rights of all victims must be respected and protected.

Impartiality: Assistance is provided in an equitable and impartial manner without political conditions; it must be provided without discrimination as to etąic origin, gender, nationality, political opinions, social status, race or religion and solely on the basis of needs.

Neutrality: All humanitarian assistance must be provided without engaging in hostilities or taking sides in controversies of a political, religious or ideological nature.

In addition, nations providing humanitarian aid must:

Respect the Operational independence of humanitarian action: humanitarian actors must retain their operational independence.

8 See: http://www.nrc.no/?did=9469185, accessed July 20, 2013.

Respect the Distinction between combatant and non combatant: The independence and civilian nature of humanitarian assistance should be clear at all times – so as not to compromise perception of neutrality and impartiality and endanger humanitarians and intended beneficiaries AND humanitarian actors should ensure that their outward appearance could not be perceived as military.

Observe international law and human rights: Military actors will comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law, human rights and UN Security Council Resolutions to which they are subject.

Respect the neutrality and independence of humanitarian actors: military actors should seek to avoid operations, activities or any conduct which could compromise the independence or safety of humanitarian actors. To the greatest extent possible military operations should be conducted with a view to respecting the humanitarian operating environment. Maintaining a clear distinction between the role and function of humanitarian actors from that of the military is a determining factor in creating an operating environment in which humanitarian organizations can discharge their responsibilities both effectively and safely. Sustained humanitarian access to the affected population may be ensured when it is independent of military and political action.

In light of the above principles, similar declarations as the recent one made by the NATO Secretary General are not only in contradiction with the above mentioned commitments of NATO State Members, but also constitute a denial of NGOs identity and operational principles. ACBAR and its members deplore such statement and take the opportunity of reminding all belligerent forces of the severe and counterproductive consequences of such announcements not only for the Aid community but most importantly for the beneficiaries.[9]

SITUATION IN 2013

Numerous challenges are faced by both NGOs and CSOs in Afghanistan including lack of access to areas most in need of assistance, extortion by those in positions of power, threats by AOGs, pressure from funders to receive positive feedback on the impact of their interventions, pressure by the military for assistance in interface with local communities, and, in the case of Afghanistan, perceived and actual coupling of NGOs / CSOs and the military. Reliance on funds from international governments and, in the case of Afghanistan, from the military, has long been criticized as a major cause of NGOs' losing independence and credibility among the general populace.[10]

The exact number of NGOs / CSOs in Afghanistan is unclear. As of 2011, the Ministry of Economy put the number NGOs at 1,707 and INGOs at 292. Also in 2011, the Ministry of Economy closed down 967 INGOs, followed by another 175 in 2012. The grounds given for the forced closures were inactivity, inefficiency, corruption, lack of oversight, and/or failure to submit 6-monthly reports to the Ministry of Economy as required under the NGO Law. Other sources report the number of NGOs registered with the Ministry of Economy as 1,550 or 2,200 with approximately 72,000 Afghans working for them in Afghanistan.[11]

The next section reports the key findings from the interviews held with key informants drawn from INGOs and NGOs operating in Afghanistan during May–July 2013. At the request of the majority of those interviewed, the findings reported in the next section have not been attributed to the organizational representatives making them.

10 See, for example, Davis, M. (2007). Plant of Slums (NY, NY: Verso).
11 From: : http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/afghanistan.pdf, http://moec.gov.af/en/page/1209, http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/07/05/us-afghanistan-aid-tokyo-idUSBRE8640G720120705, http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/afghanistan.pdf, http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/04/22/299659/afghanistan-bans-activities-of-140-ngos/, and http://www.rferl.org/content/afghanistan_shuts_down_hundreds_of_ngos/24457124.html, accessed July 20, 2013.

POSSIBLE SCENARIOS FOR POST-2014 PERIOD

Most organizations appear to have considered two or three scenarios for the post 2014 period in Afghanistan. However, most discussions appear to be speculation and nobody is sure of what will happen in Afghanistan after 2014. The most commonly considered scenarios are:

Positive scenarios:

The peace talks will lead to an agreement, more stability and increased access to the target communities of NGOs. Also, funding will continue though it is likely to be more targeted and, hopefully, more wisely allocated. There will be fewer security constraints because of peace. Some I/NGOs do not consider this as very realistic at the moment and view it as more a hope than a predicted outcome. Others speculate that there could be an increase in tensions and conflicts but this will only affect the ability of the NGOs in doing their work in a limited way, and only in some areas.

Negative scenarios:

Afghanistan will continue to be a fragile state despite the upcoming elections and continued international aid. There will be attacks here and there, but there will be no civil war immediately. However, security deterioration and general disorder will affect the work of the NGOs. Even if the NGO community is not a direct target, they may well become collateral victims, which might lead to a decrease in NGO presence in Afghanistan. In this scenario, only essential international staff would remain and the rest would have to work from neighboring countries. In general, NGO activities would decrease, but activities would not be shut down completely.

Worst case scenarios:

Afghanistan will fall into a state of chaos and access to communities will be very difficult because of increased hostilities that will adversely affect national and international staff and their movements. The state will not exist anymore and local traditional powers, including AOGs, will assume power over pockets of influence. In this scenario the NGO community is likely to become a direct target, in which case NGOs would have to pull out all of their staff and decrease activity considerably. The activities would not stop completely, however, since many NGOs were able to continue their work during the civil war and later under the Taliban rule. Under this scenario it is expected that the international staff would leave Afghanistan, at least temporarily, while local staff would work from home. Only a few basic humanitarian programs would remain. The scope of NGO activity under this scenario would be confined to only standard humanitarian response since the impartiality of many NGOs involved in other activities has come to be questioned by AOGs over the last few years.

A precedence is already being set to operate under this scenario by some humanitarian NGOs who have been making their own peace with AOGs in the areas in which they operate.

The negative scenario is the most commonly held one, based on these interviews and the views of interviewees of how other NGOs are assessing the situation. None of the NGOs interviewed indicated that they would shut down their activities completely even if the worst-case scenarios became the reality in Afghanistan.

Future prospects:

NGOs will attempt to maintain their current levels of activity while others are planning to design and implement new programs, particularly NGOs delivering humanitarian aid. None of the NGOs have immediate plans to cease operations.

CHALLENGES AND RISKS:
CURRENT AND EXPECTED IN POST-2014 PERIOD

The most common challenges and risks foreseen and discussed by INGOs are:

Program monitoring and management:

Having to rely on remote program monitoring and management has increasingly become a subject of debate for many NGOs seeking to overcome the challenges of increased insecurity and inaccessibility, particularly in rural areas. In some areas it is possible to do remote management, but most recognize that remote management cannot be a permanent substitute for ongoing onsite management because the quality of the work would very likely suffer. Remote management may nurture corruption which, in turn, will undermine quality in delivery. Remote management should best be viewed as an interim measure until the decision is made to fully withdraw or return to onsite management on the account of improved security.

Diminished funding for I/NGOs:

The availability of funding in Afghanistan will most likely decrease and international agencies will increasingly channel funding through UN agencies, the World Bank, or the Afghan Government. Spending through the various entities of the United Nations and the World Bank is the preferred option and justifiable in home countries where fewer questions will be asked by domestic politicians or the citizenry that might have become alerted to development projects having been funded directly by their government. Channeling funds through the Afghan Government will present new, and as yet unknown, challenges for I/NGOs and the donors alike. Less availability of funds in general is also likely to lead to more competition among NGOs with the likelihood of diminished coordination and collaboration among I/NGOs.

There is diminishing donor interest in Afghanistan and commitments by some international actors are not guaranteed. With the withdrawal of IMF, donor aid (US funds especially) will continue to go to US private contractors, shrinking resources for NGOs. Over the past two or three years, looking at USAID Requests For Proposals (RFPs), reveals that very little is geared towards NGOs directly, though all such RFPs call for US contractors working with Afghan national firms and NGOs. Regardless, most of the funds from the United States are likely to be absorbed by international, for-profit development businesses.

Some donors have reduced or stopped providing development funds for insecure areas such as the south and the east of the country, partly because access has become more difficult due to a deterioration of security. There has been a shift toward the north and the west, mostly in Herat, as more secure areas. This approach worsens the already dire situation in some of the most neglected areas.

Tensions between I/NGOs and communities:

Community needs will at least remain the same as present and are likely to remain so in the immediate future. Less humanitarian aid and other programming, either due to less overall funding or due to increased security or both, is likely to reduce the ability of I/NGOs to maintain the current levels of service delivery and programming. Fewer programs by the government and I/NGOs in general could mean that communities in need will have increased needs and expectations from those I/NGOs that still operate in their areas.

This is likely to create tensions and conflict between the communities and the few I/NGOs that will continue to maintain a presence in those communities.

Pressure on I/NGOs to sign agreements with Armed Opposition Groups:

In some parts of the country where AOGs have established bases of some permanency there is pressure on I/NGOs to sign agreements with AOGs as a condition to continue operating. There is ongoing discussion among many I/NGOs and some have already taken steps in this direction. The rationale of signing such agreements for the I/NGOs is that without signing agreements, it would not be possible to deliver services. At the same time the I/NGOs recognize that by signing agreements they give legitimacy to AOGs and while undermining the government's authority and legitimacy.

I/NGOs and local politics:

Traditional power holders in the communities, in some situations, force I/NGOs to work with their own people and at the expense of other community members, undermining the impartiality of the I/NGOs. There are numerous examples of local power holders manipulating the beneficiary selection process and forcing I/NGOs to serve certain segments of the community as a condition for continued operation.

Challenges in Human Resources:

I/NGOs face major problems in staffing. There is a high turnover rate among international staff due to constrained quality of life, lack of mobility, and an increasing sense of not feeling welcomed. International aid personnel come only for short periods and longer periods of stay in the country are interspersed with frequent and long leaves. Also, the international media's negative portrayal and exaggeration of the situation in Afghanistan makes it very difficult to recruit qualified people.

I/NGOs are also facing difficulties in finding qualified national staff in some of the semi-secure to insecure provinces due to the perception by AOGs that anyone who works for the Government, I/NGOs, or has connections to Kabul in any capacity is a "collaborator". This creates problems in recruiting national staff and monitoring programs in these less secure areas.

PLANS TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES AND RISKS

Anti-corruption plans:

Plans to implement monitoring of cash flows and enforcing tighter reporting systems were mentioned as methods to deal with corruption. Financial reporting and auditing of national partner organizations will take place more often to identify corruption at the early stages. However, there is also recognition that there is much less control in how funds are used once they leave the systems of the I/NGOs.

Market price of goods and services will be looked at more closely to ensure that invoiced expenditures are adequately monitored and checked against actual market prices.

Attempts will be increased in setting up Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems and applying strict rules in the selection of the national partners by testing their ability to monitor, report and perform. This is often a costly but necessary process to fight corruption.

Some I/NGOs with internal anti-corruption policies make sure that staff members working in the same reporting line are not related.

Mitigation of human resources challenges:

Increasingly since 2009-2010 several major I/NGOs have come to rely on their national employees and limited their intake of internationals. Local employees are increasingly the main means of monitoring to ensure projects are being implemented efficiently and effectively. Efforts by I/NGOs to train national / local program staff and implementers are likely to intensify in the immediate future. In part, this is due to changes in the security conditions but also consistent with the longer term strategy (by some I/NGOs) to build local capacity. Building the capacity of national staff lessens the need for reliance on international staff and ensures continuation of work by I/NGOs despite the deteriorating security situation.

Mitigation of security risks:

Another form of mitigating security risks is the adoption of participatory approaches by some I/NGOs. This approach gives communities ownership of aid programs by allowing them to identify and articulate their own needs. Based on the identified needs, beneficiaries can be selected within certain thematic areas and based on criteria defined by the communities. The participatory approach combined with a non-military / low profile status is the preferred method of mitigating security risks for a number of I/NGOs.

Mitigation of lack of access:

Closer cooperation often means coaching and capacity enhancement of national organizations. In some cases, an individual capacity development plan is developed for a specific national partner. Some I/NGOs invest in their national partners' reporting, auditing and M&E skills. This enables I/NGOs to operate in remote areas where they themselves do not have access.

ABILITY OF I/NGOs TO COPE

Dependence on international experts:

One major shortcoming felt by some organizations is their heavy dependence on international experts. This dependency is likely to undermine the ability of the I/NGOs to continue their work in situations where security deteriorates significantly, dissuading internationals to become involved in projects where life risks are perceived as too high.

Variations in ability to conduct risk management:

Most I/NGOs are looking at mitigation plans and are conducting various forms of risk analysis. Some organizations will find conducting risk analysis more challenging than others due to a lack of experience and resources. Larger, more established I/NGOs are better equipped to manage risks than smaller and less experienced national and international NGOs. The more established I/NGOs have experience of working in complex emergency settings in other countries. In the majority of cases I/NGOs stated that they would continue operating in Afghanistan unless significant deterioration in security conditions prohibited them from doing so. There are, however, varying understandings of what constitutes "significant" change as far as security is concerned.

The widely held view is that working directly with communities and having their acceptance is key to I/NGO's continued ability to operate in a less secure Afghanistan. Organizations that have adopted a community participatory approach are more likely to continue their activities beyond 2014, even if insecurity increases. Communities that want I/NGOs to stay are reported as preparing the ground to allow I/NGOs to continue delivering services by engaging with local commanders and the AOGs, to ensure the security of I/NGO staff.

Low visibility, use of national staff, and speaking the local language were listed as three main pre-requisites for any I/NGO to continue its work in Afghanistan. In addition, a no-arms policy is recommended by I/NGOs as crucial for reducing the risk of being targeted by AOGs.

CONCLUSION

The increasingly explicit, though seemingly uncoordinated, steps taken by the Government of Afghanistan and its international allies to negotiate peace with armed opposition groups could risk a further weakening of the gains made by I/NGOs in Afghanistan since 2001. In addition to delivering humanitarian aid, there is a sizeable number of I/NGOs whose focus is women's rights. Arguably, women-centered I/NGOs are the most at risk with increased lack of security. This risk is ever present due mainly to the fact that women's rights have been at the heart of the international reconstruction project in Afghanistan and, as such, are viewed by opposition actors as a politically negotiable issue. That women and women's rights advocates have a negligible role in the peace process is indicative of the reluctance of national and international peace negotiators to risk alienating armed opposition groups involved in the peace talks, most of whom are vehemently against the central place given to Afghan women and their rights since reconstruction commenced in late 2001.

The approach to peace making without due commitment to protect the few gains made by civil society actors, particularly women's rights organizations, in Afghanistan will present major challenges for the government, the international donor community, and national and international non-government organizations. There is a general worry among I/NGOs that the lack of coherent action to serve the many needs of Afghans, particularly the most vulnerable segments in rural areas and particularly women, will very likely undermine many of the initial gains made in the post-2014 period.

Many rights-oriented I/NGOs worry that to a large extent the plethora of policies, regulations, signings of international conventions and protocols, and the numerous resources and funds to build civil society in Afghanistan will be laid to waste if international donors reduce, remove, or spend development aid funds unwisely.

All I/NGOs engaged in this assessment expect that the situation will change significantly after 2014. None of the I/NGOs expressed intent to leave or change the scope of their activities in Afghanistan after 2014. However, almost all I/NGOs expressed worry that without funding allocated and sustained accountably and purposefully to protect the gains made since 2001, their operations are likely to be adversely affected due to inability to raise funds to sustain their activities.
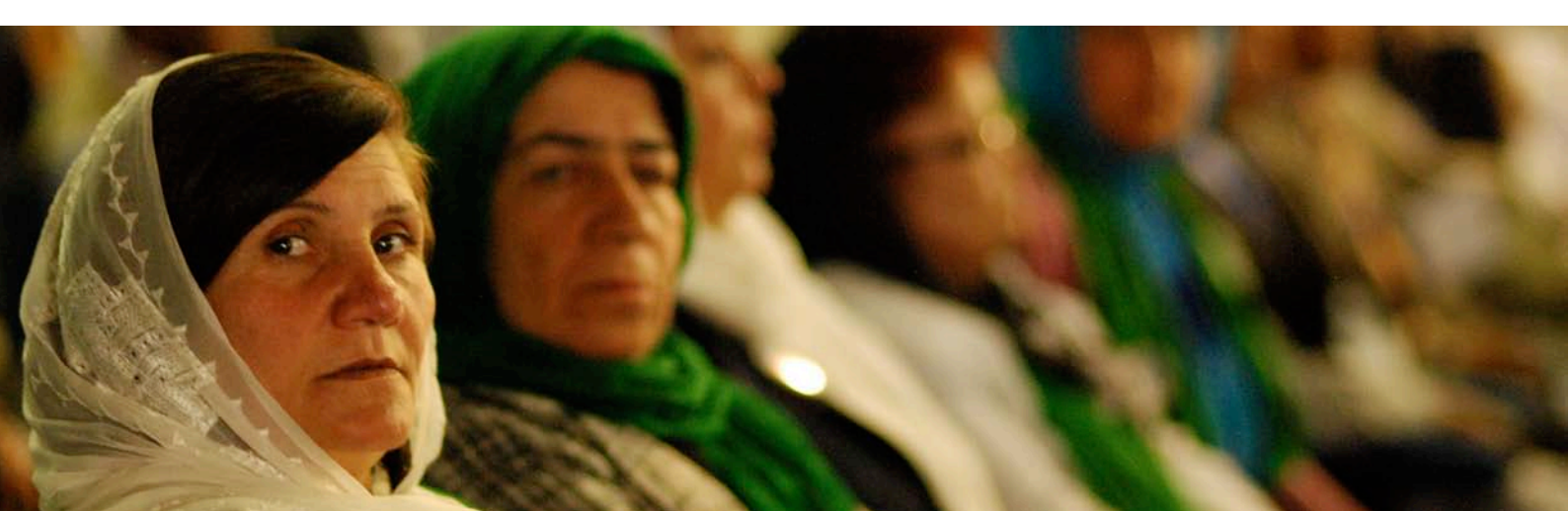
RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations collated from the interviews with the key informants are summarized below.

Explore Remote Program Management Possibilities:

A number of donors are not in favour of remote management and insist that expats travel to the field. With further deterioration in security the presence of internationals in the field could become a hindrance, if not a liability. International staff members attract attention when they visit a school, for example. The communities want their girls to be educated, but do not want their decision to become associated with the presence of foreigners. Donors should act more sensitively to such situations and ensure that internationals are posted in the field in consultation with community leaders and members.

Incorporate Flexibility in Management of Funds:

With the security conditions changing, deviations are sometimes necessary from budgeted and planned activities. The changing security situation creates delays in meeting program implementation targets due to uncertainty. Donors should tolerate delays within reason. Lateness of projects should not be equated with the failure of recipient I/NGOs, or the failure of their implementing partners, to deliver.

Exercise Cultural and Contextual Sensitivity:

Programs related to women's rights require more and better understanding by donors. In some situations, I/NGOs prefer not to openly state that they have arrived in a community to conduct gender work because of cultural sensitivity around this issue. However, there are a variety of discreet approaches that could be employed to work on women's rights issues. Strict markers in the request for proposals by donors that demand women's rights to be a condition for access to funding should be avoided. Projects should be adapted to local conditions and feasibility, to gain acceptance and to maintain presence despite deteriorating security.

Continued Commitment – General:

After so much investment in Afghanistan, donors should have the commitment to complete the mission and create a stable country and a civil society, to improve human rights and access to quality services. There is a general sentiment among I/NGOs that Afghanistan is no longer a priority for the international donor community with 2014 approaching, and with new programming opportunities opening up in North Africa and the Middle East. I/NGOs argue that Afghanistan remains a fragile state and in need of many basic humanitarian forms of assistance in the years to come.

Continued Commitment – Specific:

The many women's rights organizations that have emerged since 2001 with encouragement and support from the international donor community feel particularly vulnerable and threatened. International aid assistance to Afghanistan must continue well beyond 2014 and innovative ways must be identified to protect and maintain the gains made by civil society organizations, particularly women's rights organizations.

Setting Clear Milestones:

Donors and the international community should establish clear milestones for the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework. Well-defined commitments and milestones should be made public and presented as the basis of the plans for post-2014 in Afghanistan.

Support and Create Spaces for Nurturing National Capacity:

Donors should directly invest in building and expanding national capacity. Many of the more tecqical humanitarian programmes are likely to need reliance on international experts and international organizations. However, without clear provisions to transfer tecqical skills to national personnel and organizations, it would be difficult to ensure sustainability of programme impact. Supporting and investing in local organizations would create sustainability and cost efficiency. Afghanistan has come a long way since 2002 with access to a pool of educated young human capital. Focus on enhancing local capabilities by investing in the youth, for example, is likely to yield dividends in the longer term.

Allocate Program Funds Thoughtfully:

National organizations should be contracted by international donor agencies for conducting feasibility / needs assessments before setting program objectives and issuing Requests for Proposal. This would enable the donors to understand what is feasible and what might work, while adding to national capacity and increasing human capital in Afghanistan.

Assess Capacity of I/NGO Fund Recipients:

Some donors assess the organizational capacity of I/NGOs as potential fund recipients based on their size or experience in certain geographic areas. I/NGOs should be assessed based on their unique competences, implementation skills, and ability to access communities.

APPRO

Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization (APPRO) is an independent social research organization promoting social and policy learning to benefit development and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. APPRO is a non-profit, non-government organization, registered with the Ministry of Economy (registration number: 1212) and headquartered in Kabul, Afghanistan. APPRO's mission is to measure development progress against strategic reconstruction objectives to provide insights on how to improve performance against the development milestones set by the Afghan government and international donors.

For more information, see: www.appro.org.af
Contact: mail@appro.org.af

ENNA

The European Network of NGOs in Afghanistan (ENNA) is an alliance of NGOs and networks based in Europe who are actively involved in non-profit humanitarian and/or development assistance to Afghanistan.

ENNA's aims are to support its members with lobbying and advocacy work and to encourage collaboration among members on matters of mutual interest with a view to improving humanitarian assistance, reconstruction and development efforts in Afghanistan. ENNA's overall goal is to ensure that national and international policies and decisions help to support Afghans to build a safe and just society.

ENNA provides high quality information to, and engages in debate with, European donors, parliamentarians, the media and other organisations and individuals with an interest in Afghanistan.

For more information visit www.ennanet.eu

BAAG

British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG) is a unique advocacy and networking agency which supports humanitarian and development programmes in Afghanistan. BAAG aims to ensure that Afghan voices are heard at national and international levels. Working with 30 member agencies and others, BAAG raises awareness of the needs and aspirations of Afghans, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable. BAAG promotes policies to counter poverty, encourage good practice and policy in development and humanitarian work.

For more information visit www.baag.org.uk

European
Network of
NGOs in
Afghanistan

BAAG (British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group)
Romero House, 55 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7JB

www.baag.org.uk

Registered in England & Wales 06880188 / charity 1135700