

ACBAR's Anniversary NGO seminar

On Monday 24 September ACBAR commemorate 30 years of existence as a coordinating body with NGO colleagues and university students at Afghanistan Center at Kabul University (ACKU). Fiona Gall, Director of ACBAR, welcomed the participants and then two panels of invited speakers presented lively views on the past, present and future on the role of NGOs in Afghanistan.

Looking back – the work of NGOs in the last 30 years

The first panel looked back on the assistance NGOs had provided for the Afghan people to overcome suffering from conflict and disasters. Chair of ACBAR, Ms. Palwasha Hassan said that Afghans had been seriously affected by the conflict in the last four decades and this had especially impacted on the youth in Afghanistan resulting in lack of opportunities. NGOs had made efforts to mitigate the effects of war by working structurally for example by working in remote areas and by developing the leadership of women. Mr. Amanullah Jawad, Deputy Director of RRAA, highlighted the active role of NGOs in humanitarian and development sectors in capacity building of local communities and delivering vital services. NGOs were also an important link between the UN agencies and Afghan government to make policy and implementation solutions. Mr. Raz Mohammad Dalili, Director of SDO, emphasized that the characteristics of NGOs are non-profit, Non-Government and non-political. He urged the students to be innovative and establish their own NGOs within the NGO Law. Transparency and accountability are the core building blocks of NGOs; they are essential for NGOs to achieve principled work. Mr. Fazel Rabi Haqbeen, Director of TEO, noted that while insecurity continued to be an increasing problem, NGOs had an advantage as they were able to access areas where Government could not go to respond to the needs of the people. Challenges faced by NGOs included increased bureaucracy; while the Government was engaged in state-building and increased control, this also caused impediments to efficient delivery of NGO activities.

Looking forward – the role of NGOs in the future

The second panel focused on the future and was introduced by Mr. Tamim Sabri, Deputy Director of ACBAR. Ms. Najiba Sangar, SCA Takhar Regional Manager, had a clear message on how the role of NGOs should be empowered and to focus on developing Afghanistan in an integrated manner instead of working within humanitarian and development silos. There is a need for strategic coordination between the Afghan government, UN agencies, donor states and NGOs. For example, an integrated approach of services should be delivered in each area with an analysis of the challenges there and the tangible solutions. Ms. Mahpekay, Deputy Director of KOO, stated that there were not enough facilities for people with disabilities to give everyone an opportunity in life. She was personally inspired by NGOs to work hard after she became disabled by the conflict, and to completed her higher education and got a Master's degree. Now, she is passing her knowledge and skills to empower those affected by the conflict and hardships of life in order to work towards a more equal society. Mr. Javid Mousavi, NAC, talked about the lack of employment opportunities for the youth, when they graduate from universities, there are no jobs. There was a need for long term and short term programs to build their capacities, also scholarships were a tool to educate young people. He mentioned that including young people in higher-level decision making processes was crucial because it was the future of youth that was at stake. Ms. Mina Safi, NAC, continued the message that there was a great lack of involvement of youth in general policy and decision-making processes. There was also a lack of quality in the education sector and inequality in society that affected everybody. She noted that poverty was one of the root causes that made the youth stay illiterate and that there should be more effective programs for the youth to empower their capacities and skills so that they could create the lives that they deserved.

ACBAR Commemoration Events in the Provinces

As part of ACBAR's anniversary, three round tables were held in the regional offices of Herat, Mazar-i-Sherif and Kunduz during September 2018. Achievements and challenges were highlighted, also the potential future role of NGOs in Afghanistan. Each gathering ended with a small celebration.

Anniversary Round Table in Herat

On 4 September 2018 there was a vivid discussion among NGOs. The long, rich history of NGOs in Afghanistan was highlighted by Eng. Abdul Raziq Kiani, Regional Director of DACAAR. He noted that NGOs had played a critical and historical role in providing humanitarian and development services for the Afghan people. NGOs did most of the work because there was no functioning government before 2001 and implemented programs on health, education and humanitarian needs. After the fall of the Taliban, NGOs exceedingly added value in implementing governmental programs such as Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) in the health sector with the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH). Despite more insecurity, weak governance structure and corruption, NGOs did make a change in bringing health services to the rural areas, investing in teachers capacity, making society aware of the status of women and the benefits of empowering

women and developing Afghan civil society as well as more recently lessening the negative effects of crisis like returnees and drought.

Mr. Said Wase Sayedi, Director of WASSA, stated that the future of the NGOs depends on NGOs becoming more financially self-reliant and to act more like social entrepreneurs instead of being dependent on external funding. This is a large challenge that needs multiple networking and other creative ideas. The linkage between humanitarian and development programs is also crucial in this, added Eng. Abdul Raziq Kiani. Ms. Zahra Hamnabard, Head of WAW, said that the inclusion of youth, women via the UN resolution 1325 and persons with disabilities is fundamental for NGOs to develop Afghanistan as a better society. NGOs should still focus on providing facilities for marginalized groups by ensuring for example by hiring at least 3% persons with disabilities to give people a professional chance.

Anniversary Round Table in Mazar-i-Sherif

On 5th September 2018 ACBAR members, CSOs, professors, students and Government officers had a debate on the role of NGOs. ACBAR's regional manager Mr. Eng. Abdul Rauf Qaderi gave background on the establishment of ACBAR in the eighties.

Ms. Hafiza Merzaye, Chair of ACBAR's Advisory Board, said that NGOs had played an important role to provide services in hard-to-reach areas in order to save lives of thousands of deprived people. NGOs were flexible and impartial and also driven to fulfill the needs of people and support the development of Afghanistan. NGOs had created a lot of job opportunities which was appreciated. Now the cooperation between the Afghan Government and NGOs was becoming more and more constructive and accountability and transparency were part of the governance culture. Mr. Najibullah Yazdanpanah, Regional Director of SCA, highlighted the important responsibility of NGOs to include marginalized groups in all projects and in Afghan society. SCA was proud that more persons with disabilities and women have been empowered to participate in the labor market.

Eng. Sharafat, Director of Economy Department of Balkh province, stated that ACBAR had played a central role to advocate for governance issues and also to advertise jobs through their popular job vacancy website. He also gives the advice that NGOs should focus on primary needs of people and design their projects based on the need of people and suggested that ACBAR should celebrate the anniversary every year to have a societal discussion on the role of NGOs.

Anniversary Round table in Kunduz City

On 23 September 2018 a round table was held in Kunduz to discuss the role of NGOs in Afghanistan. Mr. Mohammad Tahir Rozzi, Kunduz Economy Directorate, noted that during the period of the Soviet aggression and Taliban many NGOs were based in Pakistan and provided support to the people within the country. He identified one of the biggest achievements of NGOs was in the Education sector and in bringing education opportunities to the rural areas.

Mr. Engineer Shafiq Imran, Regional Director of ACTED, stated that NGOs and Governmental offices were two faces of the same coin; both hope for transparency and accountability from each other. In times of conflict, the role of NGOs in humanitarian sectors is crucial to deliver emergency services to people in need. The situation is not getting better with lack of security and natural disasters like drought combined with displacement. Therefore there should be effective coordination between development and humanitarian programs. For example, when agriculture programs are implemented, they should also integrate the role of IDPs to provide them livelihoods.

There was also consensus that youth, women and people with disabilities can play a significant role in the rehabilitation and development of Afghanistan. Fortunately, there are now more opportunities for women, not only as potential employees but also in special programs for the empowerment of women.