CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

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June 2010

*"Help from the international community has consisted of walking together
up a mountain, but then being abandoned there"*

Muslim Mudassir

This report is dedicated to Muslim Mudassir, who made me laugh and made me think.

Muslim was the Monitoring and Evaluation Co-ordinator for Afghanaid in Ghor Province who died when the car in which he was travelling to work was hit by a US military vehicle, he left behind a wife and young daughter

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ACRONYMS

ACBAR	Agency Co-ordinating Body for Afghan Relief
ACSA	Action for Civil Society in Afghanistan
ACSF	Afghan Civil Society Forum
ACSONP	Afghan Civil Society Organizations Network for Peace
AIHRC	Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission
AKTF	Aga Khan Trust Fund
ANCB	Afghan Non Governmental Organization Co-ordinating Body
ANGO	Afghan Non Governmental Organization
AREU	Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit
AWN	Afghan Women's Network
BAAG	British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group
CCS	Centre for Civil Society
CDC	Community Development Council
CHA	Co-ordination for Humanitarian Assistance
CPAU	Co-operation for Peace and Unity
CSHRN	Civil Society Human Rights Network
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DFID	Department for International Development
ENNA	European Network for NGOs in Afghanistan
FCCS	Foundation for Culture and Civil Society
IC	International Community
IDLG	Independent Directorate for Local Governance
INGO	International Non Government Organization
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
LSE	London School of Economics
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non Government Organization
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OSI	Open Society Institute
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
TLO	Tribal Liaison Office
UN	United Nations
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan
UNDP	United Nations Development Fund

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the debates on and progress in the development of civil society in Afghanistan, to undertake further research on this issue and to disseminate the findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Afghan organizations and activists had been struggling with both the concept of civil society and how to develop appropriate programmes. They have received little consistent, substantial or helpful international support as, although it was recognised that civil society could play a greater role in rebuilding a country, donors were at a loss about how to support this. This study found this was still the case. In addition there are differences of opinion within Afghan civil society itself about the inclusion of traditional and religious components. There had been a lack of consensus on the scope of civil society, no comprehensive recording of activities and little information available about the support civil society requires.

The primary research objectives were therefore:

1. to review the existing definition of civil society and the case for developing a new working definition,
2. to examine the dichotomy between modern and traditional approaches to the development of civil society,
3. to review the role of civil society actors as agents for change,
4. to examine progress towards creating a database of civil society actors and activities.

Field studies were conducted in urban, semi-rural and rural areas of Afghanistan. Insecurity had been increasing so there were some constraints on the study, but discussions were held with a wide variety of individuals and organizations. Preliminary findings were discussed with some of those consulted and their views taken into account in this report.

Theory of civil society

The term civil society has origins in ancient Greece, but there is no generally agreed definition. In addition, in Afghanistan there is contention between local and 'foreign' versions of the term. Afghan civil society shows characteristics that academics have identified elsewhere; the family forgotten as part of civil society, the disregarding of local tradition and an ethnocentric view in favour of democracy. Democracy is not incompatible with Islam (there are shared tenets of freedom, justice and equality) and there is substantial evidence that civil society exists in Islamic countries as in others. However, there are dangers in coupling civil society, by promotion and funding, with a particular political model.

The term civil society is in widespread use in Afghanistan where it should be developed on Afghan terms. Afghanistan does have a vibrant civil society despite the difficulties the people have experienced and have continued to endure. The ideal society is one in which there are an effective state, market and civil society, but even when the first two of these three pillars are not present; it is still possible for individuals and groups to act for the common good without being either part of the state apparatus or in paid positions.

Afghans would welcome the opportunity to consider which sort of society they wish for Afghanistan; to build on what has already been achieved and to develop and claim the concept of an Afghan civil society.

Definition of the term civil society

The term civil society, translated as Jama e Madani, has been in widespread use in Afghanistan for the last decade. However, there is no generally accepted understanding of the term, particularly in rural and semi-rural areas of the country and the participants in the study all agreed that it would be helpful to have a practical working definition. This would help to clarify the roles and messages of civil society actors, to facilitate collaboration between and support for civil society organizations and their

activities, and to raise awareness of the sector amongst donors and the general population. It may also help reinstate the sense of voluntarism that used to exist in Afghanistan, especially if coupled with a review of the achievements of civil action in Afghanistan during the last 150 years and a sense of power that membership of civil society can confer.

It is recommended that Afghan civil society actors consider whether the following preliminary draft working definition, an expansion of the one in use at the London School of economics Centre for Civil Society, could be useful in Afghanistan.

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

Database
Developing a working definition of the term civil society is a pre-requisite for building a database of civil society in Afghanistan. All the participants in this study thought such a database would be of value to their work. Access to information about civil society which is taken for granted in other countries is almost non-existent in Afghanistan. Individual organizations have directories, but no single comprehensive country-wide database exists.

Participants in the study were willing to collaborate in the production and maintenance of a database, particularly if a neutral organization would take responsibility for it. The recommendation is that a pilot study be undertaken with women's organizations and in a rural area. This will identify, and hopefully resolve, the practical and organizational issues involved. It is also recommended that, as well as internet options, consideration is given to providing hard copies of the data in existing static and mobile library facilities so that the information is made widely available. Donor funding would be required.

Role for the international community and others in civil society development in Afghanistan
The primary role for the international community has been to bring security to the country. All those working in civil society programmes and organizations felt that there should also be a role for the international community in developing civil society; although how this would be accomplished was much less clear. There was dissatisfaction with the role that donors had played up to now; concerns that they were following their own, often global, agendas, rather than those important to Afghan civil society. Instead they should be using their funding, with a long term commitment, as a catalyst for indigenous development in real partnership with local actors. There are opportunities for using interest groups and programmes in the donor countries to provide the 'support' that have been requested by civil society actors. They could also play a role in the provision of a non-politicized forum to facilitate co-ordination and collaboration within Afghanistan.

Those interviewed felt that neither the UN nor the Afghan government had engaged, other than at a superficial level, with Afghan civil society; to the detriment of their programmes. On the other hand civil society actors need to be much clearer about the kind of support they require while they develop their policies and programmes with honesty and integrity.

The key request made of the international community, after the provision of security, is for meaningful capacity development -'Bring us ten good professors rather than glossy brochures'. Real consultation in setting up all civil society programmes and evaluation of results will continue to be the keys to positive development. It should be possible to use funding from well informed and consultative donors as a catalyst for indigenous long-term development and improved co-ordination. Programmes can provide the pre-requisites for other development; education at all levels, including literacy and numeracy, and the provision of libraries.

There have been positive developments already as a result of the work done by civil society actors in both their own organizations and through joint social action in a variety of forums and across a range of ages. Effective lobbying and advocacy has been achieved through an increase in collective action and this has potential for further achievements, such as holding the government to account. There have also been examples of international support for civil society. It is strongly recommended that all these positive developments should be collected and analysed to provide lessons for future programmes.

Civil society organizations/actors as agents for change

Although civil society organizations and actors have clearly been agents for change they did not find it easy to identify how they and their programmes achieved this. This was partly due to feelings of powerlessness engendered by the deteriorating security situation with their views not being taken into account and the relatively little collective action, but also to the lack of evaluation of their work. It is therefore recommended that time and funding is made available to ensure evaluations are done and that staff has time to reflect on the results and incorporate conclusions into future plans.

There was a perception that if they were to bring about change, the organizations needed to internalize, understand and adhere to the universal values they espoused, such as equality for women. However, even without this, independent evaluators have found many examples of positive change brought about by civil society through education, health and peace-building programmes. Issues of human rights, activism and the roles of government and civil society are keenly debated and private and public lobbying by both men and women does take place.

The importance of the provision of education and capacity development programmes cannot be overstated. The need to establish programmes and opportunities for young people was stressed as was forging relationships with people from religious communities.

There was agreement amongst participants in the study that Afghanistan at the time of the study was not the same as the Afghanistan of

five years earlier; that civil society actors had played their part in some of the positive changes and that ultimately the future was in indigenous hands.

Traditional and Modern Societies – are they opposed?

Almost all the participants in the study accepted that aspects of traditional society, including Islam, enshrined the values that underpin civil society and are worth preserving. Some traditions, such as voluntary action on behalf of other citizens, deserved to be revived A minority feel that it is only democratic values and institutions that should be valued and introduced countrywide. Some disagreements have led to long standing resentments which could be resolved using reconciliation techniques practised in the peace-building programmes.

Research and experience has shown that the stereotyping of religious leaders as reactionary is unhelpful. Younger religious leaders are supportive of development activities and use the language of democracy and human rights. Islam values women and the Afghan Constitution enshrines their rights, but they are far from enjoying their entitlements. Some struggle for empowerment with great courage in the face of personal risks and they deserve greater support from the international community.

Further research by Afghans into the realities of traditional and modern Afghanistan would be valuable; particularly in relation to conflict resolution, including the role of women in this, and peace-building mechanisms. Workshops to identify common values could be valuable. The pace of change cannot be forced; but the tenets of pluralism, peace and equality, provided for by both Islam and democracy, should mean that the best aspects of both can inform the continuing development of Afghan civil society.

Ethnicity

Members of all groups feel that politics and government are imbued with ethnic division, that they have experienced discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity and that this has been exacerbated by both the Afghan Government and the international community. There should be a key role for civil society in countering this reported increase in ethnic

tension head on and the perceptions that have developed. This effort can be supplemented indirectly through peace-building programmes, awareness raising and cultural activities. Longer term there should be a commitment to a multi-faceted educational, cultural and legislative approach.

Peace-building
Peace-building programmes have contributed to a reduction in conflict, positive changes in behaviour and a lessening workload for government officials. They have also made a significant contribution to the development of civil society. Further research is needed into the way in which these programmes can be developed and the international funding that would be required.

The development and extension of peace-building programmes, including the full involvement of women and schoolchildren, is strongly recommended. These programmes would lay the groundwork for negotiations with anti government elements and a climate of peace would be the ultimate aim.

Civil society – how it has been, could be and should be developed
Development of civil society requires time, indigenous effort, evaluation and appropriate international support as well as recognition of the power of collective voices and actions. This would be assisted by the co-ordinating bodies of NGOs and CSOs collaborating and co-ordinating in a more strategic manner.

The international community should recognise that their role is to facilitate the development of Afghan led civil society through a long term commitment rather than assuming that they are there to bring knowledge to an under-developed people. There is social capital in Afghanistan and real capacity development has borne fruit there.

For their part Afghans need to be clearer about the assistance required and to drive their way into an equal partnership; if not the leading role. They should recognise and assess the impact of their actions in order to develop appropriate programming, define funding needs and encourage themselves to continue with the work.

In order to facilitate further development of the capacity of civil society it is recommended that a comprehensive set of examples of civil society development is compiled; listing what has been helpful in the process and why.

Finally Afghanistan has a rich cultural legacy which is forms a key part of the national identity. Fostering this is as important as aid and development programmes in the development of civil society.

Conferences
The outcomes of conferences held to discuss the future of Afghanistan have been disappointing in relation to civil society. They are usually box-ticking exercises with lead times far too short to allow proper planning and consultation and are further compromised by not having clear follow-up.

The participants in this study agreed that it should be possible to run an effective conference with worthwhile outcomes, using as input a review of the key successes and failures of previous conferences. However people were sceptical about the surveys which purported to elicit Afghan opinion but instead were thought to be used to reinforce the wishes of the donor.

It is recommended that a task force reviews the outcomes of the key conferences held to date and makes recommendations about how to improve them. It is further recommended that consideration be given to setting up a standing conference on civil society which could debate key issues, assess policy development and agree advocacy messages that could be fed in to conferences and decision making forums when required.

Civil and uncivil society
It is to be hoped that education of all kinds is provided to people in Afghanistan, at all levels, in order that they may have fulfilling lives and contribute towards a just and peaceful society.

The Future
Afghan civil society is alive and well and stronger than has been supposed. The hope must be that continued efforts by civil society actors, together with appropriate international support, will allow it to go from strength to strength.

1.   INTRODUCTION

1.1   Terms of Reference

The purpose of this study was to explore the current debates on and progress in the development of civil society in Afghanistan, to undertake further research on this issue and to disseminate the findings, conclusions and recommendations.

The role and development of Afghan civil society began to be seriously debated after 9/11. Afghan organizations and activists had been struggling both with the concept of civil society and with how to bring appropriate programmes to fruition. They had received little consistent or substantial support from international organizations and the support which had been provided had sometimes engendered unhelpful competition rather than enhancement of the work. A further complication had been that people tended to conflate Non Governmental organizations (NGOs) with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) rather than seeing them as one category of those.

Although it was by now recognised by donors and academics, as well as CSOs themselves, that civil society could play a greater role in rebuilding countries, major international donors were at a loss about how to support this. 'Thus it remains the burden of civil societies in different political contexts to better define their positions and develop more coherent strategies for organizing and articulating their views in public debates and policy making processes' (Briefing Report of an international workshop; 'Aid Security, and Civil Society in Post-9/11 Context, June 2007)

In Afghanistan a dichotomy had been acknowledged between those civil society activists who believed that traditional structures and mechanisms could be built upon to take Afghan society forward and those who believed that they represent the past. That rather than having something to offer today they have actually contributed to conflict by accentuating tribal and ethnic difference and thus also contributed to the emergence of the Taliban.

Requests continued to come from CSOs and activists to assist them in these debates and

tasks. The constraints upon civil society included a lack of consensus on a definition of the term 'civil society', which is often seen as a western imposed concept. Since there was no working definition of the term neither a comprehensive list of programmes/people involved in civil society nor a shared understanding of who was involved in civil society issues existed in Afghanistan at sub-national, national and international levels. Further there was no information about how they were engaged with the development of civil society, comprehensive mapping of activities or cross-referencing of data. This had meant that those who might consider supporting such organizations and activities would each have to start from scratch in understanding what existed already and identifying which organizations and activists could perform a useful function and might benefit from funding or other support.

The primary research objectives were to:

*   Review, with members of Afghan civil society, the existing definitions of Civil Society and the case for developing a new working definition, and to participate in the process to arrive at one.
*   Examine the dichotomy between traditional structures and mechanism versus 'modern' approaches amongst members of civil society
*   Analyse the presence of non NGO civil society actors
*   Examine the role of civil society actors as agents for change in social processes and the challenges of engaging with them

In addition the work was also intended to:

*   Examine whether there had been any progress towards building a database of civil society organizations and activists, with particular reference to those in the provinces, and to make recommendations about the value of such a database; its development and maintenance.
*   To inform, by means of a briefing paper and seminar(s), CSOs and donors and policy makers of any findings and

recommendations which could lead to further understanding of, and positive developments in, Afghan civil society.

1.2   Field Study Areas

Field studies were conducted in urban, semi-rural and rural areas of Afghanistan:

- Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan

- Farza, a District of Kabul province which could be described as semi rural as while it is not far from a main road to Kabul but otherwise rural in its salient characteristics

- Ghor province in central Afghanistan - rural areas both around Chagcharan, the provincial capital, and in an outlying district.

Security & political context:
All of Afghanistan and its people have been affected by the last thirty years of conflict and during the time of this study insecurity had been gradually increasing throughout the country. There had been 83 civilian casualties in Afghanistan just before the second field study. Civil society action, like the lives of the population, had become increasingly difficult and circumscribed. In addition to the increase in the number of body and vehicle borne explosive devices there had been an increase in the technical skill in the attacks and therefore of the damage they caused. Several serious incidents, with loss of life, took place in Kabul during the second field visit and criminal activities included kidnapping.

People viewed the upcoming Presidential and Provincial elections with trepidation in case security deteriorated even further. They felt that their primary needs, including access to justice, were not being met by either the government of Afghanistan or the International Community.

Kabul:
The population of the city of Kabul has been variously estimated, but is likely to be around three million having more than doubled in the years since the war began; with the consequent pressure on infrastructure and services. The city lies within Kabul province in central Afghanistan. The province has fifteen districts including the provincial and national capital. Livelihoods include agriculture, light industry and commerce.

Farza:
Farza is a rural District of Kabul Province which lies on a hill two hours north of the Kabul. The area, comprising 48 villages, is deprived and in the rainy season is often badly affected by floods which leave the villages inaccessible and damage crops.
The population are mostly farmers and horticulturalists who grow diverse crops including wheat, cucumbers, mulberries, apples, grapes and damsons. However, it is a struggle for people to find enough food, jobs and education.

Farza was a strategic location during the Jihad against the Soviets and remained under local control. Attacks were made from Farza and it became a place of refuge for anti-Soviet Mujahiddin groups. Under the Taliban government the area was itself attacked as the majority of the population supported the opposition.

A few years earlier Farza won an award as the most peaceful District in the Afghanistan; based on the level of conflict and the number of weapons handed in under the Disarmament of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) programme. Whether this was a bona fide exercise and/or had a public relations element; the people of Farza were proud to be selected for the award. The peace-building programmes of Co-operation Peace and Unity, CPAU, were credited with facilitating this situation.

Other NGOs that had worked in the District included the Sanayee Development Organization (SDO), implementing the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), Save the Children with basic health education programmes and to empower women, and BRAC which worked in skill development and micro credit.

Ghor:
Ghor is a remote, sparsely populated province in central Afghanistan west of Kabul. Its mountainous and semi arid areas have severe and lengthy winters with night-time temperatures of -10°C in December and -25°C in February. Agriculture is the main livelihood, but

Ghor is traditionally a food deficit area. Crops include wheat, maize, lentils, vegetables and potatoes and livestock are sheep and goats.
It was the sixth year of drought at the time of this study and poverty and unemployment were widespread.

People in Ghor complained of recent corruption and had felt neglected by central government for decades. As an example in 2007, 47 bodies had been left under the snow for 40 days. It was felt that government officials would have visited had this happened in another province, but no-one came to Ghor.

The literacy rate is estimated to be 59% for men but only 3% for women. Civil society activists in Ghor felt cut off from both Kabul and opportunities for capacity development; complaining that funding went did not come to the areas of greatest need.

Insecurity had been increasing and further encroachment by anti-government elements was feared. Shabnama, or night letters, had been distributed over a dozen times in the year before and three times in the week before the study, but no-one seemed to know by whom. All men and women involved with the government or NGOs had been named, two human rights activists had been murdered and bomb attacks made on civil society offices.

Comparatively few aid agencies operate in Ghor and there is demand for more NGO services. Afghanaid and Catholic Relief Services cover rural development, Shuhada are in health and education, the International Assistance Mission in health, LEPCO for leprosy, and the Sanayee Development Organization has training programmes.

Photo © Peter Grants

1.3 Methodology

I explored, in conjunction with a variety of civil society practitioners, government officials and donors, the current debates on and progress in the development of civil society in Afghanistan. I also drew on previous discussions about civil society with others involved in this area and on views that had been made known at various conferences.

A desk study was undertaken with the assistance of Professor Jude Howell, Director of the Centre for Civil Society and her colleagues at the London School of Economics.

Field studies were conducted on two visits to Afghanistan in 2008; July 26th to August 5th and 10th October to 1st November. (For full itinerary and meetings see Appendix One).

The first was a preliminary study, undertaken during an evaluation of the peace-building programme run by an Afghan civil society organization, Co-operation, Peace and Unity, CPAU. Discussions were held with the staff of CPAU and other civil society organizations in Kabul. Preliminary discussions about the subject also took place with key people at a one day meeting held in Farza.

During the second field visit discussions were again held with a wide variety of individuals and organizations in Kabul, in groups and one to one. A visit was arranged under the auspices of an international NGO, Afghanaid, to Ghor. Meetings were convened with civil society organizations and officials of the government and the UN in the provincial capital, Chagcharan. A visit was made to districts outside Chagcharan to projects for women, boys and girls.

A follow-up visit had also been planned to Farza during this second visit, but this was ruled out by security problems. However, three people from Farza, including the local Member of Parliament (MP) who had been a civil society activist working with CPAU, kindly came to Kabul for discussions.

An open ended questionnaire (see Appendix Three) was used as a guide for interviews and meetings.

At the end of the second field visit preliminary findings were presented to and discussed with civil society activists at a meeting convened by the Open Society Institute, (OSI) in Kabul. It was agreed that they and others who had been consulted would give their comments and make suggested for incorporation into the Report. (Those who did so are listed at the end of Appendix One)

After the electronic publication of the report there will be further discussions with civil society actors, donors and academics. A final updated version will then be produced for publication by the Centre for Civil Society

1.4   The Theory of Civil Society

Many academics have written on the term "civil society", its origins, re-emergence in the 1990s and the way it has been applied. There is no agreed definition of the term.

Hegel saw the state as paramount and below this were civil society and the private sphere. Marx saw civil society as a primarily economic structure in which it was not possible for the proletariat to benefit from democratic governance and civil and political liberties since they were 'formulated to serve the interests of a bourgeois dominated polity'.

Gramsci saw civil society as a product of asymmetric power relations but de Tocqueville emphasized the role of autonomous individuals who 'by means of a rich associational life composed of diverse autonomous civic organizations, influence the democratic process'.

As Glasius et al (Exploring Civil Society, Political and Cultural Contexts, 2004, Ed Glasius, Lewis and Seckinelgin) have said 'there are multiple interpretations of the concept that depend on predilections'.

The origins of the term date back to ancient Greece. It was revitalized at the end of the seventeenth century as political thinkers sought to understand the enormous social and political changes that were occurring as a result of early capitalism. It fell into disuse again in the early twentieth century, but in the 1980s east European dissidents resurrected the term to articulate their demands for democracy. With the collapse of the Soviet state socialism, the term entered the political discourse of international development, and what resulted was, according to Glasius et al, op cit, 'an uneasy coalition between local and imported or imposed versions of civil society'.

The classical political theory definition, according to Chandhoke, ('The Limits of Global Civil Society', Global Civil Society 2002, Oxford University Press) is 'space where ordinary men and women, through the practices of their daily life acquire political agency and selfhood'. She posits that it is what the inhabitants make of it, with values of freedom, associational life and the politics of self-realization and voluntary membership in organizations. This explanation would seem to allow for individual actions as well as those conducted in groups.

Saltmarshe ('Identity in a Post-Communist Balkan State: An Albanian Village Study' Chapter 3 'The Theoretical Setting' 2001) stresses the importance of language. He quotes Anderson 'the dispersion of ideas through growing numbers of people having access to literature permitted them to think about themselves and relate to each other in very different ways' to support his view that 'print languages laid the basis for national consciousness by unified fields of exchange and communication in vernacular languages' leading to what Anderson has called 'nationally imagined communities'. Saltmarshe argues that education confers an identity on the individual and that 'the nation state requires a system of mass education to meet the demands of a technologically advanced society and to provide its members with a common conceptual currency' (op cit). This is very much in tune with the universal respect for education shown by Afghans at all levels, even if some of the more conservative elements in Afghan society do make it difficult for women and girls to obtain it.

Traditions are also important in creating a sense of identity and affiliation, of common bonds and continuity. The difficulty comes in attempting to modernise a state which has been based on traditional societies without compromising the very values and relationships which will be relevant to the development of the future state. According to Kabeer (1994, quoted by

Saltmarshe, op cit) the distinction between modernized and traditional societies is never straightforward'. Kabeer states that familial relationships are a primary mechanism through which social meanings and social control can be brought into effect, however Pateman (quoted by Saltmarshe, op cit) argues that 'the family has become separated and forgotten as a part of social life in the civil society debate'.

A western view of civil society as secular and formally organized can 'prevent the recognition of local forms of civil society, and, as Chandhoke (op cit) argues lead to 'the collapse of the idea that ordinary people are capable of appropriating the political initiative'. Saltmarshe (op cit) posits that there is 'an ethnocentrism and a disregard of local tradition associated with the way in which western models of civil society are thrust on emerging democracies. Glasius et al (op cit) also talk about 'local conditions not being taken into account' but Hann and Dunn (1996, 'Civil Society, Challenging Western Models', London, Routledge) write that 'all human communications are concerned with the establishment of their own version of civil society and civilization' and that civil society loosely equals the 'moral community' with all the problems of accountability, trust and co-operation that all groups face. In Afghanistan people have had to overcome their feelings of powerlessness, often in the medium of English or by reasserting their right to communicate in local languages.

According to Chandhoke (op cit) global civil society organizations have 'expanded the agenda of world politics through focussing attention on, for example, human rights, the environment, development and landmines' but they have done so through the state rather than establishing an alternative global order. Despite using the term civil society, Chandhoke (op cit p.45) thought that it has been over-theorized and had therefore become 'even more will o' the wisp'.

Issue can be taken with her view that 'we hardly expect to find a civil society in countries like Afghanistan and Somalia where the state itself leads a precarious existence as a result of civil wars that have wrecked their countries and their politics'. Glasius et al (op cit p.51) write

that there is 'little support for the idea that the civil society concept is culturally alien to non-western societies' and 'both concept and existing forms of civil society are evolving, diverse and unpredictable'.

It can be argued that Afghanistan does have a vibrant civil society despite the difficulties the people have experienced and have continued to endure. It cannot therefore be the case that civil society only exists when there is a strong effective state though society certainly functions better if the three pillars – state, the market, and civil society are all operating well. A state has legitimacy if it can provide protection and empowerment for its own citizens, but even without these conditions individuals and groups can manage to act for the common good without being part of the state apparatus or being paid. This is true of civil society in Afghanistan.

1.4.1 Civil Society and Political Ideology

Olivier Roy, wrote about 'certain aspects' of the promotion of civil society that he felt had not so far been addressed; such as relations with traditional societies and power networks, said that he thought it was necessary 'to address the real political issues, (nationalism, Islam) and engage the real political actors, even if their democratic credentials have been only recently acquired' since 'democracy cannot be rooted without taking into account political legitimacy'. ('The Predicament of 'civil society' in Central Asia and the 'greater Middle East', International Affairs 81, 5 (2005) p 1002).

Others have given democracy as the reason for the existence and promotion of civil society. Roy cites the Greater Middle East project, devised by the United States government for the G8 summit of June 2004. This advocated democratization through the promotion and development of civil society. He argues that while support to civil society organizations, including NGOs, could be positive this initiative would seem to be co-opting them into promoting a particular political system rather than the universal values which arguably should be the basis of their work.

One might agree with Roy that 'the kind of society which is encapsulated in the notion of

"civil society" seems increasingly disconnected from the political society', and that 'aid and development policies are not geared to a coherent political strategy' but one should perhaps ask whether in Afghanistan they are reconnecting.

Roy asks whether the concept of 'civil society helps in reaching out to the 'real' society and finds problems with the existing definitions, particularly when 'presented as a ready-made, compulsory blue-print for reforms to be implemented in "oriental" societies'. In his view the main issue is how to root democracy into society and there are 'only two ways to engage in democratization: regime change or building civil society from scratch'. The latter implies that no civil society exists unless in relation to democracy in this author's view that is unsustainable, certainly in relation to Afghanistan, and an example of the western ethnocentric view talked about by Saltmarshe. However Roy does 'believe that democracy and human rights are universal'. He would like to see a system which is 'neither a western plot nor a benevolent scheme, nor even a mix of both, but a relationship that reflects both ways', and this seems to be a more appropriate aim and to open the door to the values of other systems such as Islam.

In 2008 Tadjbakhsh set out with an Afghan research team attached to Kabul University, to study the legitimacy of 'liberal democracy' and 'liberal peace' being used by the international community as models. The team found that Afghanistan had its own models; that democracy was not incompatible with traditional Islamic society and the tenets of freedom of expression and democratic practices as well as the belief 'that Islam is the best methodology of peace'. They concluded that while the international community had contributed to freedom for civil society, and its role in monitoring international aid, the model of 'Liberal Peace' required serious revision and in the meantime should not be taken to other post conflict situations. A mixture of models was recommended which allowed 'for an Afghan alternative to come forth' which was likely to encompass the values of Islam.

Some scholars, Muslim and non Muslim alike, have questioned whether civil society and

Islamic societies are compatible and this question will be addressed in the next section.

1.4.2   Civil Society and Islam
The scholar Mardin considers civil society to be 'a western dream which does not translate into Islamic terms' whereas the Muslim dream is said to be 'a yearning for social equilibrium created under the aegis of a just prince' ('Civil Society in the Muslim World: Contemporary Perspectives', London I.B. Tauris, 2002 p.1). Sajoo says (p. 214 in the same publication) that 'some say Islam, that is Muslim values, is incompatible with if not inimical to modern civil society but these arguments are grounded in dubious assumptions and Islam does not have a unitary faith, history or socio-economic conditions any more than other religion'. He points out that there are 1.2 billion Muslims, the majority in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, and Pakistan, that are in South Asia rather than the Middle East, and that English and French are more widely understood than Persian or Arabic across the Muslim world.

Sajoo argues (op cit) convincingly against civil society being only applicable to western societies with 'substantial evidence of civic institutions and cultural elements in Islamic countries'. For him civil society is an 'ensemble, like jazz, in the public sphere, a series of imagined communities, national and international, outside the political sphere, in which some include and some exclude the market economy'. He argues that it would be wrong to apply the characteristics of western civic structures as a standard against which to judge Muslim societies.

For Arkoun (Civil Society in the Muslim World, op cit p.35) civil society is about 'citizens taking control of their own destinies', pluralist and interacting between multiple communities.It is necessary to do mapping, and not just of the formal institutions, in order to understand power, wealth and emancipation of the human condition. Just governance, according to Arkoun, is the sine qua non for the capacity to build an enduring civil society in Muslim societies where 'religious reason has survived' but 'the collective memory of Islam is ignored'.

Alaa Al Aswany, author of The Yacoubian Building' has written (Guardian 21.7.09) that the

westerner will not find out 'that Islam gave men and women equal rights and obligations. He will not find out that in the eyes of Islam if someone kills an innocent it is as if he has killed everyone. He will never find out that the niqab has nothing to do with Islam but is a custom that came to us with the money of the Gulf from a backwards desert society. He will never find out that the real message of Islam is freedom, justice and equality, and that it guarantees freedom of belief in that those who wish may believe and those who do not, need not, and that democracy is essential to Islam, in that a Muslim ruler cannot take office without the consent and choice of Muslims'.

1.4.3 The future for the understanding and development of civil society

A contemporary and comprehensive review of civil society has been undertaken by Howell and Pearce (Civil Society and Development, A Critical Exploration, 2001, Howell J. and Pearce J.). One of the major purposes of this was to examine the engagement of donor agencies with civil society. Their contention (p 2) was that if the concept was to be reinvented, with some equality in the context of 'intense ongoing debate', then the 'mainstream' view of it would have to be subject to 'rigorous scrutiny' and the 'alternative' vision would have to be clarified. They also stressed the importance of having the intellectual and political space in which this debate can take place between the relevant actors to 'discuss how to build the kind of world in which they want to live'. Afghans certainly would welcome the opportunity to do this.

One could conclude that since the concept of civil society is highly contested, as is the question of who defines what is for the public good, then the term might not be useful in the development discourse. However there does seem to be sufficient common understanding `and acceptance of the term in Afghanistan and it is in any case in widespread use. Research conducted in April 2008 in the provinces of Kandahar and Uruzgan (van Oosten, H. 2008, 'Enhanced Community Capacity for Peace Building and Development, p3) said that although the environment, in which security was a major problem, was 'not favouring civil society to flourish' they had found a 'vibrant but diverse Civil Society'.

Howell and Pearce (op cit p 3) state that in the twenty-first century reinvention of civil society it is 'above all an arena where the possibilities and hope for change reside'. Perhaps Afghans need to build on what they have already achieved, to comprehend and develop the concept in their own terms and, if found valid, to explain it and claim it for themselves.

2. DEFINITION OF THE TERM "CIVIL SOCIETY"

2.1 Existing definitions in Afghanistan

The term "civil society" has been used in Afghanistan since at least 2001 when it was decided that the views of civil society should be taken into account during the Bonn peace process. A separate conference for civil society participants was arranged alongside the political and diplomatic one. Assistance in this process was provided by international actors, notably Swiss Peace. The term was used by the World Bank and other international bodies and this led some Afghans to believe that the concept was a western import and therefore problematic.

Nonetheless new civil society organizations did begin to emerge and to identify themselves as such. These organisations made a distinction between themselves and NGOs, which they saw as one component of civil society. NGOs, they argued, tended to run programmes while the term CSO, while also relating to non profit organizations, covered a much broader scope involving professional, social and cultural interest groups. Donors however tended to conflate the two, and therefore to think that they had consulted civil society if they had only talked to some NGOs.

Consultations before the first London Conference in 2006 were countrywide and, when debated in Kabul, included vigorous discussion about the place of international NGOs and their international staff in civil society. The accepted conclusion then was that international NGOs and their international staff were part of international civil society and/or that of their country of origin and as such they could and should support and collaborate with

Afghan civil society. Similarly Afghan NGOs were a component of Afghan civil society.

There is not only confusion between NGOs and civil society, but also between civil society and civil society organisations. It may be that the use of the western concept of civil society has encouraged a narrow understanding of the term and how progressive it might be. Howell and Pearce (op cit p64) argue that the definition of civil society as 'an arena of "non profit" weakens the political function civil society as a critical eye on both state and market'.

2.2 Afghan Understanding of the Term

One aspect of this study involved asking those engaged with civil society what they understood by the concept and whether, in their view, it would be helpful to have a working definition of the term.

The direct translation of the phrase 'civil society' into Dari is 'Jama e Madani' . This has been adopted by people who have set up civil society organizations and by those who describe themselves as civil society activists. However, a variety of definitions of the term civil society itself have been used in Afghanistan by the organizations that have a mandate to work with and develop civil society. As elsewhere, this has resulted in ambiguity about the term and in the way has been used. However there is a view that, as the term has been used so far by urban and educated Afghans, that there is a shared understanding of the term. On the face of it this may seem true, but it had not been tested by attempts to agree a definition. In the discussions with people from various organizations held as part of this study, it very soon became clear that this was not the case. There was not always agreement on one definition between people in the same organizations and some admitted that they did not understand the term themselves.

The following section draws on the interviews conducted with representatives of various civil society organizations to illustrate the variety of definitions, areas of commonality and difference, and the key issues that arise in discussions of civil society in Afghanistan.

The study revealed that many organizations had no written definition, but instead made the assumption that all staff had the same understanding of the term. Others had definitions that were based on terms used elsewhere in the world, but had been modified, according to personal and organizational preference, over time. For example the Afghan Civil Society Forum, ACSF, uses a definition based on one in use by LSE, but with the addition of the concept of democratic values. Staff at the Foundation for Culture and Civil Society, FCCS, thought that a lot of definitions existed in Afghanistan, some of which included shuras and some of which did not. These staff felt that 'in the end it is the elders who make decisions, regardless of peoples' wishes and the system is not democratic and does not include women'. In addition, one of the study participants from FCCS thought that NGOs could not be left out of the definition.

FCCS analysts had strived to clarify the meaning and the concept for the research they conducted for a baseline survey of Afghan civil society in 2007. The authors described the groups that they thought constituted civil society, but they did not attempt a definition for the term itself. In the directory which emerged from the baseline survey, FCCS instead states that while the term is '*used regularly by various political participants and scholars .... there was not an agreed understanding between them of what Civil Society entails*'.

FCCS included local groups that were independent from the Afghan Government and excluded political parties and private commercial companies. They made a distinction between NGOs, Social organizations and Associations/Unions, but said that the categories were 'very flexible and not well delineated'. They concluded that the core function of 70% of CSOs was to compensate for the lack of specific social services. The four categories of organizations listed in this directory were: Umbrella, NGO, Social Organization and Association/Union and Network with 17 categories of activities between them. Other information in the directory included; budgets and sources of funding, number of male and female staff and the importance of training for staff.

The Tribal Liaison Office, TLO, which is an Afghan NGO aimed at improving local governance, stability and security in the south-east and south of Afghanistan, uses a general definition of civil society as 'a group of people who can gather together to talk about their communities' interests'. However, in their view, this definition is for the literate and educated and what is needed is a bridge to traditional society. Businessmen have their own networks and there are tribal and ethnic councils, such as the Baluch Assembly, which they considered to be a part of civil society.

2.3   The breadth of the term

There has been interest and discussion about whether there are common features of civil society in each country in the world or whether the components are different in each. During this research one senior civil society activist suggested that it would be helpful to have a comparative analysis of the definition, values and understanding of civil society in one or two other countries. He thought that civil societies would not be uniform; that Indian civil society for example would be different from Afghan in that the former was a traditional one whereas Afghanistan's civil society had been adopted and was perhaps dependent on exposure to the outside world. His view was that no-one is entitled to say who or what is or is not part of civil society, that it will not be static. He asserted that in Afghanistan action is required to support and strengthen civil society so that it is more universally accepted but that change cannot be imposed.

A second question is then whether/how the concept of civil society could develop in Afghanistan. One donor thought the whole concept of civil society had been unclear in Afghanistan and therefore there had been no agreed vision. As a result civil society had had little effect on the actions of the Afghan Government. He did not find this surprising after so many years war.

Within the various definitions which emerged in discussion with the participants in this research a significant difference of opinion centres round whether to include Afghan shuras and councils and religious groups (for further discussion see section 6.1).

Mullahs, in one senior civil society activist's view, are part of civil society because they have a stake in it, and therefore a role, even if their views might be considered as 'backward' thinking; socially, politically and in relation to everyday life. The activist felt that those who hold such views would not change them overnight, but, given the right support, over time they would be able to consider the options. The ideas of the 'invaders' could not be imposed and the tolerance of different viewpoints would be required from all concerned.

The debate surrounding the breadth of the term 'civil society' also extends as to whether the private sector, professional bodies and trade unions should be included. Some private sector actors in Afghanistan have played the role of philanthropists and, while their profit making activities cannot be said to directly contribute to civil society, their activities to assist the poor could be. The then head of one of the co-ordinating bodies felt that it would help in defining 'civil society' if agreement could be made on which type of organizations should be included. She proposed that Trade Unions should be included, but that members of Parliament should not given the questions about how are they elected and who they represent.

For donors, civil society is often thought to be synonymous with NGOs; partly because they have been the most obvious and accepted component of civil society and partly because this definition has become the norm. It may also be that as formally constituted organizations with recognizable bureaucratic structures NGOs are more readily identifiable to donors than organisations with informal structures. NGOs also have an honourable history of interventions that have benefited people in Afghanistan.

There have been Afghan initiatives to clarify the role of civil society organizations and activists and to facilitate collaboration. Action for Civil Society in Afghanistan (ACSA) was formed after an open consultation in 2004 when the need was expressed for 'joint co-operation and co-ordination amongst the CS actors ....who want to enable and empower CS to become directly involved and participate in the future of Afghanistan' (Fazil, Overview of the challenges/recommendations found in previous

documents and newly emerging challenges, 2007, p2). An agreed strategic planning document was produced providing vision, mission and values as well as joint strategies to increase active Afghan participation 'in the political, social, cultural, and economic affairs of Afghanistan'. However, despite an ongoing enthusiasm for the initiative, participants have found it too difficult to follow their own recommendations without the help of outside resources. Another Afghan network, the Afghan Civil Society Organizations Network for Peace (ACSONP) has co-ordinated activities around the annual National Day for Peace.

The lack of an agreed definition for civil society was seen especially in the rural and semi-rural provinces visited during the research. In Ghor some staff working in government organizations said they did not know the definition of civil society. One NGO worker said he thought that an urban society was a pre-requisite for building a civil society in Afghanistan. An MP felt that 'real' Afghan civil society was a long way from his understanding of modern civil society, that no-one was trying to bring the two together and that the President did not understand who belonged to civil society or what they wanted.

The Farza MP who participated in the research said that most people, except in two or three cities, did not understand what the term meant and a definition would be very helpful. In fact he recommended having working definitions of a lot of other concepts because people wanted to understand them in practice rather than theory. Even people in districts of Kabul in his view do not understand the term and do not see themselves as part of civil society.

At the debriefing meeting in Kabul at the end of the second field visit the staff of civil society organizations agreed that even their identified fellow members of civil society did not understand the term, let alone have a consensus version. FCCS staff said they had tried, like other organizations, to explain it for 4-5 years and they thought it would be very beneficial to have a practical definition. This would help to clarify a clear role for civil society in contrast to the current situation in which CSOs are mixed up with NGOs and are in danger of being ignored.

The need for a working definition was similarly expressed by others whether they were CSO staff and activists or were members of other agencies such as the UN and donors. One participant even went so far as to say that having a working definition might even lead to greater understanding between and therefore an improvement in relations between NGOs and CSOs. He also thought that an even greater benefit could be to reinstate the sense of voluntarism in Afghanistan that used to exist, but had largely been lost in the thirty years of war.

2.4 The need for a common operational definition

It was agreed in many forums during the current research that a practical and workable definition would assist in clarifying the role of civil society and so allow people and organizations to identify with civil society. It would be easier to discuss with those who wished to join and/or support civil society through the development of publicity/training material and databases. A practical definition would help those in civil society to clarify their messages, provide a voice for communities and act for the public good.

One MP felt a definition would help identify who else is a part of civil society. It would then be possible to be pro-active in making contacts and working together have a broader perspective and play a stronger role. A human rights worker went further in saying that the definition could then be followed by awareness-raising amongst the general population (see next section 3).

The Director of ACSF, following on from preliminary discussions with this researcher, decided to add the question of definition of the term civil society to the agenda of the ACSF workshop, with Afghanistan-wide participants, on a strategy for Afghanistan civil society. Their current understanding of the term was solicited from the participants by means of a questionnaire; 41 people responded (of whom at least 29 were NGO staff). In all 49 definitions were suggested together with those organizations considered part of civil society. (Four people gave 3 definitions and two gave 2 definitions)

Analysis, based on English translations, showed that no two definitions out of the 49 were the same and that the definitions were based on a very personal understandings of the term. Common themes emerged however; the importance of dignity was mentioned by so many participants that the inference could be drawn that they had experienced having their dignity compromised. Respect and values were mentioned by a quarter of the respondents. Values were mentioned in detail in the workshop outcome document and the first principle which the participants agreed on was that civil society is value based.

Another theme mentioned by several people was a role for civil society in monitoring government processes and institutions, including justice and the rule of law, and identifying weaknesses in them. Only five out of the 41 respondents mentioned 'democracy'.

Donors also have a need for a commonly understood workable definition of civil society. For example the Minister in charge of development for one major European country was reported as saying he did not understand civil society and found himself not listening to anything said about it.

When interviewed during the current research, representatives from donor countries all saw the benefits of having a working definition as helping to develop an understanding among both Afghan and international civil society of the scope of CSO activities in Afghanistan. They welcomed the possibility of linking up with Afghan individuals and organisations who had mutual interests. Enabling donors and the media to be in contact with them would also allow new voices to be heard alongside the 'usual suspects'.

In March 2008 the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) posted a short article on its website about how it works with civil society. Civil society is described as 'a value laden and highly contested concept' with 'multiple meanings and associations' which results in 'an ambiguity concerning the scope and boundaries of its empirical referents, rendering both research and programme operation particularly complex'. Little wonder perhaps that it has been difficult to get funding from DFID for civil society development in Afghanistan despite the importance they place on this in policy documents. The article goes on to say that 'there is general consensus that civil society can play a politically significant role in checking the power of the state and holding government officials to account' and 'general recognition that civil society is a site of complex and unequal power relations, which are often challenged and renegotiated'. The latter is certainly true in Afghanistan but the former had only begun to develop at the time of this study.

The DFID article also states that describing civil society as 'an arena of associational life' does not distinguish between 'civil' and 'uncivil' organizations'. This concept is deeply rooted in European and American thought and therefore the article recommends that 'development practitioners and scholars need first to make clear their own normative expectations of civil society before embarking upon practical programmes or research' and that 'donors seeking to strengthen civil society have to identify clearly their expectations and objectives'. This is certainly true for donors in Afghanistan.

2.5   Proposals for a common operational definition

Scholars have examined definitions of the term civil society; the definition adopted by the Centre for Civil Society (CCS, at LSE) dates from 2004. It was intended to take account of the diversity of the concept and to guide research activities and teaching without being interpreted as a rigid statement. The CCS view is that ultimately civil society is about how culture, market and state relate to each other. International institutions and national governments have to open up to civil society and they still have some way to go.

The CCS operational definition is as follows:

Civil society refers to the arena of un-coerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in

their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organizations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organizations, community groups, women's organizations faith-based organizations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups.

This definition would seem to cover the general understanding of the term in Afghanistan and includes the word 'values' which has been regularly mentioned as being important to those consulted. The only possibly contested phrase could be 'faith-based groups' since there are differences of opinion amongst Afghan civil society about whether religious society can be part of civil society (see Section 6.1).

In addition there are two aspects of life which are arguably part of civil society in Afghanistan, but not included in the definition. Firstly there are cultural activities, which contribute a great deal to fellow feeling and national identity. For example compared to the West, where few people describe themselves as poets, a far larger proportion of Afghans do so; poetry and literature are valued. There are thriving professional associations for writers and poets. The second aspect is that of individual activities. Activists have contributed a great deal to the development of Afghan civil society and this has sometimes been through individual involvement in supporting people in need or in advocating for commonly held views. They have operated alone, sometimes in conditions of great insecurity and therefore should be considered part of the 'gestalt' of the term. They may have joined the Government, temporarily or permanently, but pursued individual courses of action that have supported the positive development of civil society. Others who have been working in government posts may have left to join CSOs; this is perhaps the 'complex, blurred and negotiated boundaries' to which the LSE definition alludes.

In conclusion; it would be time wasting and unnecessary to spend a great deal of time trying to reach agreement on a universal definitive explanation of the term 'civil society' but, given its widespread use, it would be very helpful to a local working definition for Afghanistan. This would be an explanation was understandable to those who hear it and acceptable to those who use it. It would be employed in raising awareness of civil society, thereby increasing its role and effectiveness.

So which individuals and groups should be included in such a working definition? In addition to staff and volunteers with CSOs, there would be individual members of civil society; students, members of professions such as doctors, lawyers, journalists and teachers, writers, musicians, and religious figures in the community together with those who belong to social and cultural groups.

Building on the many common elements in people's understanding of the term it should be possible to reach the agreement among the main actors. By doing so people will begin to see themselves as having power derived from their membership of civil society. One of the reasons that this has not been done before is the lack of time that staff in Afghanistan CSOs have had to address the question in between running and fundraising for their programmes. I believe that if a neutral outside organization were to facilitate a discussion on definitions then it should be possible to reach consensus on a working definition.

2.6 Preliminary Draft Working Definition for Discussion with Afghan actors

Building on the operational definition devised by the Centre for Civil Society at LSE and the definitions used by Afghan civil society activists and organizations the following is suggested as a basis for further discussion.

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

associations, faith based organizations, umbrella groups and coalitions.

2.7 Suggested process for discussion

A series of informal discussions could be held to examine whether this definition, in English and translated into Pashto and Dari, could be useful in Afghanistan.

One of the respondents to this study, with many years experience of Afghan civil society, has recommended a two stage process. The first stage should be to look at the history and evolution of civil action in Afghanistan in the last 100-150 years and identify the best examples and practices of it during that time span. The second would be discussion of civil action with those who have a good understanding of what it had been and could and should be.

3. DATABASE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND ACTORS

It had been thought previously that a database of civil society in Afghanistan would be a valuable contribution to developing civil society activity. Included in the aims of the research for this study was an examination of:

- whether the need for a comprehensive country-wide database of civil society organizations and actors in Afghanistan still existed'
- what progress, if any, had been made in the development of such a database;
- what practical issues need to be addressed in the development and maintenance of a database.

It is difficult to work with people if you do not know who they are or how to contact them. In Europe it is possible to get this basic information, and much more besides, through telephone and other directories and by electronic means through the internet. Organizations, activists and interest groups can be contacted for information, to share experiences and policies as a precursor to lobbying and advocacy and by donors who might be able to offer support of various kinds.

In Afghanistan very little of this information is available in a systematic form.

3.1   Existing databases

At the time of this study there had been a variety of lists of agencies held by CSOs, NGOs and networks such as ACBAR.   These lists include information about NGOs and CSOs and their activities and contact, tailored to the needs of the compiling agency. Co-ordinating bodies such as ACBAR or AWN hold details on their member agencies, but there is still no single, comprehensive database of civil society in Afghanistan.

Examples of lists available at the time of the fieldwork included:

ACBAR: The Agency Co-ordinating Body for Afghan Relief is a long-standing umbrella group for 100 national and international NGOs. It has a directory of its members, which can be updated on the internet, and provides provincial directories on its website.

ACSF: The Afghan Civil Society Forum has a contact list of 314 CSO contacts and organizations and a database of youth groups dating from 2004.   However ambiguities in definitions have hampered the development of these sources and the director felt that 'it would be a dream to have an all embracing one'. ACSF also has a database of affiliated organizations in Afghanistan and has said that holding a nationwide database, or collaborating with others on one, could be a core activity for them

AIHRC: The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission has a database, but there may be sensitivities about making it public.

ANCB: The Afghan NGO Co-ordinating Bureau aims to co-ordinate members' activities, which are mainly cultural, social and capacity building, with government, international organizations, the UN and other agencies. It keeps a list of the details of its Afghan NGO members.

AWN: The Afghan Women's Network is an umbrella group for women's organizations working to empower women and ensure their equal participation in society.   They were updating their Directory at the time of the study, but list 49 members on their website.

CSHRN: Civil Society and Human Rights Network works to promote human rights and to strengthen civil society in Afghanistan.

FCCS: The Foundation for Culture and Civil Society, which works to promote civil society and cultural activities, produced a Directory in 2007 from a baseline survey and provincial analysis of civil society in 2004 -2006. This is the closest this researcher could find that any organization has come to a publicly available database of Afghan civil society. It includes the following types of organizations; Social Organizations, Associations/Unions, NGOs and Networking Organizations. Social Organizations are defined as 'non-profit organizations that are formed for ensuring social, cultural, scientific, legal, artistic and professional objectives as defined in Afghan law'. It excludes political parties, governmental organizations and international organizations.

The FCCS Directory lists the organizations' names and that of the chairperson, with the address, telephone number, and, where it exists, an email address. 1,119 active CSOs were identified in 33 provinces. 2,918 CSOs were identified in the 34th province, Kabul, which was surveyed separately. The figure given by FCCS for active CSOs in Kabul province was 567, 41% of which were focused on cultural and social activities, welcomed after years of war, 19% on service delivery, 18% on capacity building, 14% on information/advice, but only 8% on advocacy and representation. Since the production of the directory the numbers for Kabul will have reduced. There are some drawbacks to the Directory. Firstly the numbers had been bolstered by multiple registrations of organizations. Secondly some agencies that were initially registered as NGOs may have subsequently been de-registered following the introduction of new procedures.

The goals of the FCCS study were 'to define Civil Society in Afghanistan and to provide a clearer understanding of the situation of Civil Society Organizations'. The study was funded by international donors, but the publication of the Directory itself was not. FCCS struggled to find the money for publication and subsequently donors have not provided funding to keep it up to date. A quick crosscheck of CSOs mentioned in the Directory made during the field visit to

Ghor found that some active organisations were not mentioned and others that were mentioned could not in practice be contacted. This is a common problem with all directories. FCCS would, like other organizations, be interested in collaborating on a comprehensive database.

Despite the challenges associated with compiling and maintaining information many organizations involved in this research expressed an interest in collaborating to do so. For example women activists in Kabul were keen to have a database. OSI, the Open Society Institute, had done some preliminary mapping of human rights organizations and were also interested. Civil society activists in Ghor too were keen on having a database; government officials in the Province had been scathing about the lack of information available about civil society organizations or programmes there.

It would therefore seem sensible to start with a pilot project with those CSOs and activists most committed to the idea: women in Ghor, with Afghanaid's assistance, and women's organizations in Kabul, using existing formal and informal networks. AREU, the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit in Kabul would be interested in supporting the initiative and working with Afghan researchers.

3.2   Practical Issues and Challenges in the development of a database

Although a desire for the development of a database was identified by a number of research participants, they acknowledged that considerable practical challenges need to be overcome in order to ensure its relevance and sustainability.

These concerns centred on issues relating to data breadth and format and the upkeep, accessibility and security of the database itself.

3.2.1   Breadth of Data: What to include?

One MP emphasised the need to recognise informal and unregulated groups as well as formal structures since they do exist and they could be consulted politically. Some initiatives had been taken to develop links between parliamentarians and civil society as there were advantages in each being able to inform the

other about relevant issues. This would be easier if a database including such details was to be available. Some significant members of civil society, who had been elected to the Afghan parliament, were instrumental in fostering these links.

One CSO activist stated that she found visiting cards to be more useful than any list. She would however welcome a database that worked, which, by having a working definition which clarified what information was required, could then be presented in a user friendly form and be updated regularly.

3.2.2 Information-sharing and issues of Trust

At least two agencies suggested that they would be willing to host the database and possibly share that task with each other, and other CSOs were prepared to provide the data they collected for inclusion in a database, but all felt that only one organization should be responsible for running it. The level of trust in CSOs to make this work did not yet appear to be there. With the increasing emphasis on ethnic differences (for political and other gains), and a continuing competition for funding, the trust between organisation has continued to diminish. A body/person that is perceived as neutral, to work with organizations to decide on the structure and content was thought to be advisable. FCCS suggested their existing database could be updated by CSOs using the original FCCS questionnaire, redesigning it together and sharing the information/gathering. They recommended hiring an Afghan sociologist to assist with this as they felt it was not something a non Afghan would be able to interpret. (Since then FCCS has become the Foundation for Culture and a separate organization; the Civil Society Development Centre, has been set up.

3.2.3 Issues of format and upkeep

Each agency expressed the view that it was difficult to maintain a database; people are not very good at informing them of changes so that they can keep contact and other relevant details updated. It might be possible to have a self-generated one but this would also have the problem of updating unless organizations felt that the database was of some benefit to them.

Electronic and hard copy versions would both be essential and other methods would be needed to provide information to those who are illiterate. The Director of ACBAR at the time of this study felt that self entry could degenerate into a mess and that people would not be motivated to enter data unless they were paid to do so, ACBAR's database was not up to date even though people could complete and update their own entries on line. ACBAR also found that people need bullying to give data which then needed editing.

During the research participants agreed that it would be good to consult a specialist in information technology to see if there might be innovations that may be appropriate for use in Afghanistan. Initial consultations were made with experts in electronic databases who identified a number of possibilities.

One suggestion was that a database could be held and managed in Europe (fees were found to be reasonable) which would avoid the necessity for one organization in Kabul to host it. Another suggestion, which was met with enthusiasm by those consulted, would be to start with a pilot scheme so that the need for the site to be moderated, the advantages and disadvantages of the methods of collection, classification and perhaps verification of data could be assessed and improvements made before embarking on a countrywide database and possibly a website.

Data entry would be easiest with a keyboard but could be web-based and accessed with a PDA or laptop. A central web-based SQL system which people enter and update is another option. Detailed costs of more advanced set-ups would need to be calculated.

3.2.4 Security

Only one person, a donor, questioned the security problems that might arise, particularly for women and human rights defenders. When Afghans were asked about this however all said the people who worked in these sectors were already identified and used to running the risk of coming to harm. They did not think these risks would be increased by the availability of a comprehensive database, but perhaps the situation should be monitored.

3.2.5 Dissemination and Accessibility:

Another issue is whether a hard copy will also be needed and how to get information to and from the illiterate and those with no internet access.

Whatever method is chosen it should be easy to access and simple to use as well as to update. Cost will be a factor in initial set-up, moderating and updating, and some donor funding would be required for this. The public information sections in libraries have an important role to play in holding such information in the UK and, were they to be developed in Afghanistan, they could provide an additional raison d'etre for libraries as well as a tool to empower people. The databases could also be held as reference books in other information centres and community associations. International support could be given to training Afghans in the necessary skills and links maintained with libraries in other countries.

The conclusions of the study were that people still wanted a database and were prepared to contribute to one if it were to be held by a neutral process. They would like it to be in Dari, Pushto and English, available nationally and internationally, in hard copy and electronic versions. Preliminary discussions with experts in electronic databases for non-profit organizations have been illuminating. The advice was that electronic databases were definitely the 'way to go'. Sites, such as Dabble.com, with which you can manage, share and explore data on the web, and salesforce.com, can offer basic database packages free to charities. A simple form, in which organizations were categorized by type in a drop down menu could be set up and a workshop held to agree on possible categories. Funding should be sought for a pilot study with women's organizations, programmes and activists in Kabul and Ghor. UNAMA and other donors should be approached for assistance. Added benefits of a database could be greater understanding of the sector amongst the various stakeholders.

4. ROLE FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND OTHERS IN CIVIL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

4.1 Introduction

One of the aims of this research was to inform donors and policy makers of any relevant findings and recommendations which could lead to further understanding of, and positive developments in, Afghan civil society. The interviewees were therefore asked about the role that the international community had played and could play in civil society development and whether there had been any positive outcomes so far.

All those working in civil society programmes and organizations felt that there was and should be a role for the international community in developing civil society. What was much less clear was how this would be accomplished. Funding for programmes is an obvious need, but people also made rather general requests for 'support' though they usually found it difficult to be precise about the nature of that support.

Afghan civil society has been left to muddle through as best it can. Sometimes results have been impressive; with examples of dedicated Afghans working all hours at the cost of their personal lives, sometimes with effective donor support. However there have been also been unsatisfactory donor programmes which provide salaries for a fortunate few to perform work that is donor driven and often unevaluated. Civil society requests for non-specific 'support' and sometimes ambivalent feelings towards receiving help from foreigners, together with a fairly universal lack of understanding from donors about what help to provide and how to provide it, has led to confusion with stop/start/stop programmes or no programmes at all.

Resentment of the way foreign assistance is delivered, however much it might be desirable, is not uncommon in countries dependent on aid. Jelani Popal, Founding Director of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) voiced this during an international conference in Stockholm ('Peace building in Afghanistan, Local, regional and Global Perspectives, November 6-7, 2008) when he said "Expats become Experts very quickly". The implication, echoed in many discussions, is that many expatriates, however young and inexperienced, do not consult or listen to Afghans but pursue their own ideas, often based on short term acquaintance with the country and the issues. That is not to denigrate those expatriates who have taken the time to get to know the country and its people, and made a solid contribution to its present and future, but to suggest that being in 'receiving mode' is pre-requisite to delivering aid effectively.

The Director of one Afghan organization working for civil society development also talked about needing the IC to be 'supportive' by complementing the shortcomings that exist in CSOs. For example in their capacity for fundraising, when producing development strategies and for their skills in research. Eventually of course Afghan civil society would have to be competent in these activities so capacity development was necessary. Another activist thought that it was essential that the IC should be offering 'moral support' and, in addition to funding NGO programmes in emergency, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development projects it should be supporting projects to facilitate debates and discussions to further the understanding and development of civil society.

He thought one aim should be that the meaning of civil society in the Afghan context, its roles and responsibilities, the characteristics of effective civil society organizations and support mechanisms would be understood by the Afghan government and rural and urban Afghans. Another aim would be the development of civil society but that would require donors to see civil society organizations as their counterparts and to treat them as equal partners.

One MP felt the keynote was certainly 'support' but that people should also be 'mobilised'. The question is whether there is a role for the International Community in this and, if so, how it could be done. Afghan civil society actors might be able to support each other by sharing experience, building relations and being in contact with one another. It may be that 'support' should be considered where that links interest groups and programmes together – for example the UK has a long history of providing shelters for women in fear of abusive partners. If the staff of these were able to take an interest in the few that exist in Afghanistan; to give advice, provide reading material and provide moral support, then this could make a difference.

There are precedents for support being valued by Afghan civil society actors: BAAG and ENNA for bringing Afghan civil society actors to decision making forums in Europe and the support received by people from their membership of Action Asia. This is a network of individuals and organizations Asia who are committed to action for conflict transformation through the sharing of skills, knowledge, experiences and resources.

Another recommendation that was made was for Afghans with potential to be given support to develop leadership and other skills so that the dearth of counterparts in the diplomatic and government fields can begin to be addressed. The UK was seen as in a prime position to offer this.

4.2 Foreigners' involvement in civil society; their role and responsibilities

The paramount role envisaged by Afghans for foreigners in Afghanistan to date has been to improve and maintain ambient security. According to many participants, donors are therefore perceived to have military rather than humanitarian priorities in their aid programmes.

Other perceptions are that:

- Most foreigners are reluctant to relinquish any "driving seat" to an

Afghan or if they did their feet would still be on the dual controls as for a learner driver. (There was a time when Afghans could be said not to even be in the vehicle; so that at least has improved.).

• Some foreigners are in Afghanistan to make money rather than help; working as private security and other contractors, or consultants who earn what are seen as disproportionate amounts of money. There has also been talk in Kabul of corruption amongst foreigners as well as Afghans.

An experienced NGO worker involved in peace-building programmes summed up the exasperation felt by many Afghans about foreign involvement to date - "people are happy to eat bread and onions and can do the rest for themselves if only there is security and good governance". Another commented that the international community's policy on civil society had been 'as inconsistent as their commitment to Afghanistan and the resulting failure to reach a common understanding on how to handle security, military, political and other policies'.

4.3 Technical/intellectual/capacity development assistance

Despite their exasperation with the continuing deterioration in security those interviewed stressed the importance of the provision by the international community of real technical assistance and capacity development based on a 'knowledge of concepts' rather than on donor driven assistance. "Bring us ten good professors rather than glossy brochures for the ANDS" was one request. Expertise was seen as coming from elsewhere and provision of it, combined sensitively with indigenous knowledge and input, would result in more success in the long run.

The USAID funded Counterpart International conducted a civil society assessment in 2005 as a result of which it set up the Initiative to promote Afghan Civil society (I-PACS), which is due to run until September 2010. The aim was 'to build a more democratic, prosperous and gender equitable society in Afghanistan'. The main beneficiaries of this programme have been the Afghan Women's Education Centre, AWEC,

and the Afghan Civil Society Forum, ACSF and eight civil society support centres set up to access remote geographical areas.

Analysis of the data from the FCCS baseline survey (op cit) published in 2007, identified that training was needed in 'very basic tools to build solid financial structures and gain the respect of international organizations'. When the CSOs were asked about their training needs the majority of respondents ranked the following as most important in descending order (p.44); fund raising, governance, proposal writing, financial accounting, report writing and the monitoring of projects. The provision of such courses would not be costly. The survey (op cit p.7) also showed that the CSOs which were interviewed had received a very small amount of international funding which had 'serious implications for the development of civil society'. Interestingly this study found that, while there were very low levels of female staff in small organizations, in larger organizations 'female staff tended to occupy central positions'. This might show a move towards civil society development, but further and more nuanced research would be required before this conclusion could be drawn.

The Deputy Governor of Farza felt knowledge about and the role of civil society were needed and therefore education on this issue was important. One activist felt that difficulties came to the government from 'outside' and that the IC should support both the government and civil society to develop their capacity.

Programmes designated as 'capacity building' have not always been effective, partly because they have been designed elsewhere, with little or no consultation with those who were to receive them and partly because they have rarely been evaluated by the donors let alone from the perspective of the recipients. UNDP has produced useful material on the concepts of 'capacity building' and 'capacity development' and how to programme them effectively, but few UNDP staff had been aware of the existence of this material during the years leading up to this study let alone staff in the other UN and aid agencies.

The issue of balance between the need for input from elsewhere and the use of indigenous

knowledge to develop an Afghan civil society remains. Perhaps if experts/expats believed more in that and in partnership and also evaluated the effects of their programmes then they would be more successful and Afghan practitioners could in turn have more confidence in their own abilities and judgement.

4.4 Role and responsibilities of donors in relation to civil society

The aid departments of countries assisting Afghanistan, the UN agencies, and the larger international NGOs have all been donors to the NGO component of civil society in Afghanistan either directly, or indirectly via national programmes such as the National Solidarity Programme, NSP, which is implemented by national and international NGOs.

Donors were thought by the interviewees to have a responsibility to be informed about Afghanistan and to undertake their funding with integrity and to follow the precepts of the Paris Declaration (for good donor-ship) which the majority had signed. The experience of civil society expressed in all fora during the study was that donors lacked understanding of what people were doing and thinking. This was stressed also by the MP for Farza. Despite the fact that donors talked of and wrote about the need for a strong civil society in practice they either did not follow their own ideals or they were unsure how to do so. Having apparently received long-term commitments, many NGOs found their funding streams cut prematurely. These problems were exacerbated by changes in donor staff, sometimes after as little as six months, resulting in altered priorities and policies, set for global rather than Afghan specific development goals. The participants in this research indicated that this in some cases had resulted in programme ideas being shaped to match perceived and actual donor requirements. Civil society organizations strongly recommend that they should be consulted about the programmes, and especially the outcomes that would be beneficial, rather than be channelled towards calls for proposals which relate to donors' aspirations.

Many other concerns were expressed about donors' involvement in supporting civil society; and since most donors conflated NGOs with civil society, their funding was seen as going to NGOs, if at all, rather than the wider group of CSOs. One MP said 'civil society is always disturbed by a lack of money and unsatisfactory interface'. The women's organizations interviewed felt that not only was the lion's share of money going to NGOs, but to programmes headed by men. Since it is men who head Community Development Councils the bias was there in Afghan government flagship National Solidarity Programme too.

Similar worries were expressed about consultation processes – by and large most of those interviewed said that donors and officials considered that they had consulted civil society if they had consulted an NGO co-ordinating body or group of NGOs. It was felt that these consultations often only consisted of one meeting, held at the last minute with inadequate time for preparation and seemed designed more to tick a box than to generate real information.

In this study, one civil society activist reported that the priorities of the donor countries (particularly the United States and her allies) are military and therefore so is their funding. (For further discussion of the complexities see BAAG/ENNA Report, Afghan Hearts, Afghan Minds). The research participants felt that in addition to these military priorities, donors also like to fund programmes that their political and aid representatives can visit even though they are needed everywhere. This respondent would recommend that donor funding should be flexible, with civilians in the driving seat.

Donors are generally perceived to lack an understanding of what Afghans are thinking, or need, but to be 'spending all this money on projects' which may well be dormant or ineffective or premature. Donors, including the European Commission, the UK's Department for International Development, have stated their intention to support civil society and their wish for the Government of Afghanistan to do so too. There is little evidence however that links with donors are being built with civil society despite the fact that a relatively small amount of money and support could act as a catalyst for locally driven development. One notable exception was the conference organized by the EC's DG Relex in Brussels, (Afghanistan Day in December 2008) at which the only speakers were members of Afghan civil society.

It should be possible to use donor money and support as a catalyst for indigenous development, and for improved co-ordination within civil society. This should be combined with a longer term investment strategy in collaboration.

In DFID's recent Country Programme Evaluation Report, it was found that DFID 'has a good track record on aid effectiveness issues in Afghanistan' (p xvi, May 2009), the same Report also recommended (p xviii) that as it had 'not fully explored the value of engaging more fully with Afghan civil society, including improved relationships with NGOs as intermediaries' more attention should be given to 'the role of NGOs and Civil Society Organizations in monitoring and advocacy'.

In their response to the evaluation (p69 op cit) DFID agreed that 'more emphasis should now be given to engagement with civil society on corruption and accountability' and would be 'taking it forward' in the new DFID country plan. DFID had demonstrated the value of working with civil society in Afghanistan according to the evaluators but 'this was not sustained'.

DFID has expressed interest in the findings of this report on the development of civil society in line with their view that holding the state to account and reconciliation were important and that in DFID's Statement of Purpose it says that DFID works 'in partnership with civil society'. The view was expressed that a workshop with the key Afghan actors to explore the possibilities would be welcome and subsequently DFID have been collaborating on a multi-donor plan to support civil society development. This is welcome as it should be possible to use donor money and support as a catalyst for indigenous development, and for improved co-ordination within civil society. This should be combined with a realistic appraisal on all sides and a longer term strategy for investment in collaboration.

4.5   Responsible donor-ship

Money can cause problems if distributed unwisely; one respondent explained that care should be taken so that civil action is not too dependent on donor funding and that it therefore retains its grass roots and voluntary nature. Funding opportunities could however

help to act as catalysts to civil society development and those who contributed to this study said that they would not be able to achieve as much without financial assistance.

There are thought to be pros and cons of foreign donor funding, whether the money comes from donor governments' international aid departments or from large international NGOs. There is a question about whether it can have an undue or negative influence on what would otherwise be a more local development, by engendering unhelpful competition for funding and donor/project driven programmes.

In this study, some expatriates argued that these were dangers, whereas all the Afghans interviewed argued that funding was needed to support their indigenous efforts. The Afghans interviewed also argued that it was more cost effective to fund Afghans to manage events – they gave examples such as a Conference of women that they felt was not only distorted in purpose by the funder, but also cost ten times the amount that Afghans thought was necessary.

Funding for two years, or less, is not thought to be helpful for civil society development. Examples cited included grants to a co-ordinating body of CSO activists and organizations that had been abruptly terminated despite a substantial investment in time and money to set it up, and despite having already agreed a programme of activities. In the preparatory work done for a database, there were numerous examples of disappointment with funders.   No funding was granted to publish or update the work, resulting in a team of experienced staff being disbanded. It was stressed that organisations need longer term and consistent investment if organisations are to show results.

Even when grants have been agreed money can take a long time to arrive and gaps in funding have meant facing the choice of laying off experienced staff and hoping to be able to re-hire them at a later date, putting people on part-time salaries or delaying salary payments until the donor money is received.   Major international NGOs have been forced to resort to all of these tactics at times when there have been delays of months in receiving payment for

work with NSP. Departments of the Government of Afghanistan have contributed to the delays in disbursing the funds which has meant that international civil society (INGOs) have been subsidizing donors, projects have been severely delayed and communities have blamed the INGOs, accusing them of broken promises and/or corruption. The independent evaluation of DFID's programme in Afghanistan found that the 'current role of Afghan NGOs/CSOs is more that of project implementer than defender of public accountability. A director of one of the networks, in evidence given for this study, stressed that competition for funding does have the potential to distract agencies from the main mission they have set for themselves and impact their normal development.

The difficulties in obtaining and retaining funding from international donors experienced by CSOs came up at every forum held for the purposes of this study and in other gatherings of CSOs and NGOs. The report of the strategic planning process for CPAU in 2008 included views from a wide range of NGO/CSO actors. Concerns raised during this planning consultation included the issue of money coming late, and short term nature of programmes instead of programmes implemented with local partners to address local needs. The Report on this processs recommended that donor guidelines and a code of conduct for recipients and donors alike should be drafted.

Photo ©Melanie Brown

In the past donors would accept proposals for projects and programmes directly from NGOs/CSOs but few do so now. One reason for this has been the understandable aim of putting money through the government so that it will be spent in line with the government's priorities

and policies, rather than a more haphazard selection of organizations. The difficulty is that the system of calls for proposals sits within a framework and objectives set by the donors. As few donors even attempt to consult civil society on what programmes are needed, their design and outcomes and the support that would be necessary, the results may be less attuned to the needs of those they are aimed at. While the original procedures were not ideal as they could result in piecemeal programmes, and there are now Afghan government country plans such as the Afghan National Development Strategy and Ministerial sector plans, the current system makes it less likely that innovative ideas will be tested and local solutions found.

4.6   Governance; sub-national and community

One of the commonly accepted roles for civil society is to hold governments to account and a strong civil society voice is necessary for that. Civil society respondents thought that an effective and caring government would see them as partners in a common endeavour. They believed that Members of Parliament should have an even closer relationship with civil society given their representative role. Civic groups are an important component of civil society – people interacting with and helping each other, developing a sense of citizenship based on principles and values. It was thought that it was the role of government to promote and encourage these groups and for the groups to press for good policies in relation to 'social evils' such as violence against women, drug abuse, and sexual abuse.

In Afghanistan the outcome of the debate on whether Community Development Councils should become part of the elected local governance structure or should remain recognised civil society entities will obviously have a bearing on the development of civil society itself.

At the time of this study the IDLG policy was that CDCs should have a legal entity as civil society organizations rather than as part of the elected local governance structure, but that they had to become' mature' organizations first. One civil society activist of long standing felt strongly that, with adequate training, the elected representatives of the people, from

those in parliament and provincial and district councils down to CDCs and their clusters, were in a far better position to keep the government accountable than were NGOs and human rights groups. He held this view partly because the latter were funded by western donors, partly because he thought that development workers had enough to do to sort out their own work and partly because they had been reluctant to take on this role when they felt the structures were unlikely to be successful. Elected representatives on the other hand were accountable to their electorate and could in turn expect accountability from the government.

There would nonetheless still be a role for effective civil society institutions and activists.

4.7   Responsibilities of Others - The United Nations and the Government of Afghanistan

Afghans interviewed for this study, including those working in co-ordinating bodies, said that they had found the UN to be rather uninterested in civil society development and that they did not seem to know how to support civil society or the associated area of peace-building. There was no department within the management structure of UNDP at the time that addressed such social structures and issues as a whole. In other countries UNDP would have had a role in fostering civil society as well as developing the capacity of the government.

A better trained government might be more responsive to the needs of civil society and better able to relate to people. DFID is one of better donor governments according to the independent evaluation (op cit) and had improved the capacity of the Afghan Ministry of Finance. However the evaluation also found that the 'creation of professional cadres' should involve 'supporting further education and private professional training bodies in addition to civil service training on the job'.

Civil society activists were clear that the responsibilities of government are to govern well, with integrity and patience. The government should build relationships with local communities which will in turn play their part in monitoring the government and in holding it to account for their actions if they are perceived to have fallen below expected standards. Holding

the local elections in Afghanistan, postponed indefinitely at the time of this study, was seen as an important step.

The Government, like donors, was thought by those interviewed to be reluctant to consult or trust civil society, except as an after-thought or when a box had to be ticked, and officials were thought to ignore civil society for the majority of the time, despite the fact that programmes were more likely to be successful if they could act in partnership It is possible that language has been a barrier at times and, as the term 'civil society' is not well understood, he use of other more direct phrases like 'the wish of the people' might be helpful as well as a discussion about how civil society could push for more effective consultation. It is also a dilemma for governments everywhere that, while they might recognise that civil society has a role in scrutinizing government, and in advocating for change in policies and practice, they might not find this comfortable and may therefore balk at paying for it.

One civil society worker remembered that as a child he was told tabout historical figures such as Khalif Omar who would go hungry rather than take public money and he was taught to respect public property and the importance of underlying values in his life. While not everyone had followed these precepts in the past he recommended that one of the ways civil society could act in partnership with government would be to push for a return to these values and good behaviour, to take a pride in public service rather than taking as much personal benefit as possible out of a job. A variety of tools could be used to encourage values in public life – legal, administrative and managerial but individual behaviour would be the most important. However as Tolstoy said 'Everyone thinks of changing the world but no-one thinks of changing himself'.

4.8   Results of the support that is available

The media are an important part of civil society. Without international support, both from governments and from individuals, people would be less well informed than they are. Examples of programmes include training in media skills funded by the BBC, the author Ahmed Rashid, and the Institute of War and

Peace Reporting, IWPR, and local entrepreneurs such as the Mohsenis in Tolo TV. One respondent described the media in Afghanistan as 'better than that of most Asian states'. International support given to the Ministry for Communications and the consequent explosion (of course also driven by commercial imperatives) in mobile phone use has also been significant.

The more worrying aspect of the results of international support was thought to be the increase in awareness of ethnicity as a divisive issue – "when an international researcher arrives in Afghanistan the first question will be about ethnicity (for further discussion see section 6.2).

There will be other examples of positive and negative results of the support that has been made available and it is one of the recommendations of this report that these be collected, written up and analysed.

4.9   Specific Ideas

All interviewees felt that the international community could and should provide ongoing support for the development of Afghan civil society in a variety of ways. In order to do this, the IC should have a better understanding of the situation. To do so, it would be necessary for members of the IC to talk to influential Afghans as well as to the 'usual suspects', (that is government appointed District Governors and Administrators). More work would need to be done on how to identify these people, to set up channels through which they could communicate, and to avoid being thought to be interfering inappropriately in internal Afghan affairs, but discussions should result in a better idea of what people are thinking. Some donor government staff thought this was an unrealistic suggestion, especially in such insecure times, but it should be possible.

It is not just members of the international community involved in Afghanistan who need to improve their understanding but Afghans too at times – an educated Kabuli may be just as distant from the minds of the rural poor as an expatriate. In a private communication to the author a senior government official confided that he had no idea how to relate to Afghan civil society when planning for countrywide programmes.

The International Community has a role to play in ensuring that people are educated and aware of both their rights and their responsibilities as citizens. Literacy and numeracy are the prerequisite for this and for empowering civil society. The provision of libraries is essential; with greater knowledge people would have a stronger voice with which to decide on and to make their views known. Until 2007 Ghor province had no library at all. At the time of the study there was one library in the provincial capital of Chagcharan, with 500 books provided by the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), but it remained closed. In the current research, young people in Ghor said that access to books was one of their top priorities and literacy training was a pre-requisite for the majority. Other ideas included funding places for people to meet, to produce newsletters, hold seminars which would provide information, and thus reduce differences between people, and space for discussion of candidates and their programmes before elections.

Members of civil society in Ghor said that they wanted the IC 'to support, mobilise and strengthen us'. If that happened then they felt it would be easier to act against the writers and distributors of 'shabnama' or 'night letters which threaten harm to those working with the government or NGOs or for other reasons.

It may be that as Professor Jeffrey Sachs has said 'cell-phones are the single most transferable technology for development'. You do not need to be literate to use mobile telephones, they have made a great difference in Afghanistan, allowing people to check market prices (including that of opium) but perhaps of more lasting impact is the ability of people of all ages and genders to talk privately to each other however far away they might be geographically.

4.10   Young Men and Women

Education of all kinds for both boys and girls and men and women is the single most important factor in developing the future potential of Afghanistan.

Traditionally men have been allowed a more significant role in decisions about society than have young people and women. Nonetheless achievements have been made by young men and women, and not necessarily with

international support. Young people's groups in Mazar i Sharif and Kabul were active participants in civil society conferences in 2001 and 2004 and the Afghan Youth National Organization also organized its own conferences. The youth 'movement' in Ghor, through the Ghor Province Youth Committee, part of the non-governmental National Youth Committee, has been promoting culture as well as awareness of political and social issues. Young people accept that civil society has to take responsibility for its own development, and feel that it members have done so, but they also think that they could achieve much more with some funding and support. For one thing they would like to attend meetings in Kabul to exchange ideas and advice and, since the roads are too dangerous to travel, flight and accommodation costs would have to be covered.

Members of the international community may at times have been very vocal about the need to improve the rights of women but neither they nor Afghans have always been strategic or smart in their attempts do so. The introduction of the concept of 'gender' was often premature; in the late 90's when a CPAU trainer asked a group in Ghazni, at the end of their training, what the term meant to them there was silence. One villager then responded 'we have a crazy fellow in the village called gender'.

Young Afghan women are disheartened by the way they feel that their views have been ignored and fear that their rights will be negotiated away in deals with the Taliban. They are therefore 'doing it for themselves'.

Photo: ©Leslie Knott

4.11 Civil Society responsibilities

Civil society members have responsibilities to develop their organizations, policies and

programmes with honesty and integrity in order that lives improve. They also have the responsibility, in the same way that the international community does, to understand the communities that they aim to help and represent. This has not always been the case of city based activists and their knowledge of rural Afghans and an appreciation of traditional practices.

It is the responsibility of civil society too to work out what kind of support they need in order to be firmer and clearer with donors, rather than asking for generalized support, and thus stand a better chance of succeeding.

Civil society actors emphasized the need to bring values into their work, rather than being donor driven, in what would be a long process during which attitudes and behaviour would change. One senior CSO staff member strongly recommended the establishment of a non-politicised forum which would help with co-ordination and collaboration during this process.

Another made two specific suggestions for civil society to follow:

- Firstly that, rather than keeping silent, at a time when peace and security are more of a priority, civil society should instead be active and make its presence known politically. Secondly a peace movement should be developed, open to people on all sides of the argument, but whose members will not be willing to put up with the existing situation.

- Years of struggle and insecurity, together with a lack of funding, have contributed to mistrust and interagency competition which in turn has resulted in less than harmonious interpersonal and inter-organizational relationships at times. One respondent talked of the negative consequences of inter CSO competitiveness for funds, such as denigration of other CSOs, and the lack of inclusiveness of networks which were often largely composed of NGOs rather than the wider civil society community. There was great sadness amongst many of the long standing civil society activists about some of the

fractured relationships. An improvement in this situation may require the kind of reconciliation work conducted in communities by the peace-building CSOs and facilitated by people perceived as neutral. There are some examples of people putting aside long-standing differences in order to campaign together on particular issues, notably women's rights.

In conclusion, providing security for the Afghan population was seen by Afghans, overwhelmingly, as the main role for the international community and if that was provided "we could do the rest for ourselves". Civil society development will also be a function of time and indigenous effort rather than external support but with well thought out support, and a willingness to consult people and to fund pilot projects, it could be hastened. Howell and Pearce (op cit pp11 and 237) question whether 'funding of civil society organizations by large multilateral and bilateral agencies is appropriate' since their values are unlikely to be those of CSOs but they could provide opportunities and fora for dialogue. They recommend that they should listen to the poorest and most vulnerable voices 'not as a concession, or to appease or to co-opt, but because those voices have a right to be heard'. They conclude that civil society strengthening is best carried out by 'organizations with a historical record of promoting progressive values and goals in their own and host communities'. This would seem to be a good road too for Afghanistan.

5. CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS/ACTORS AS AGENTS FOR CHANGE

5.1 Introduction
The staff of civil society organizations and civil society activists found some difficulty in answering questions about how they and/or their programmes had acted as agents for change. This seemed to stem partly from a sense of powerlessness and partly from not having the mechanisms, or time, to evaluate their actions and achievements. Those who

worked in the provinces felt that decisions were made in Kabul and they were therefore out of the loop for training, funding and an audience. Those in Kabul felt the need to be more in touch with the international community outside Afghanistan, both to influence and to be influenced by those with a longer history of civil society and social action. But a local human rights worker was succinct in the view that "From a cow only a small bone reaches the poor".

It was not always this way; one experienced civil society worker said he thought considerable progress had been made in education during the '50s, '60s and '70s as a result of civic action. People organized themselves to make representations to and pressure the government to provide schools for their communities and they were also in the vanguard of positive change in the status of women.

In contrast examples of the powerlessness to effect a change that people feel today was exemplified by the lack of knowledge about, let alone consultation on, plans to build a new capital city on the outskirts of Kabul. Civil society actors also felt that they were dependent on outside funding for their activities but that grants were very difficult to get. They believed that government officials were not interested in the views of civil society/people whether in Ministries or IDLG.

Some officials however, including the Head of IDLG, felt that people had more power than they realised and that if they were only able to come together to express their views then they would be able to effect changes. Years of conflict and living in exile has done significant damage to sense of community. One research participant cited the following example; 'the number of community representatives coming to an NGO to ask for assistance to clean their irrigation channel was a lot higher among the returnee communities than among those who had not emigrated. The cleaning of Karez (underground water streams) and channels has always been partly voluntary (those who can't afford to pay, contribute labour) and partly funded through community action'. One of the reasons they did not do the work themselves may have been lack of resources or knowledge.

Another, he felt, was the impact that long term dependence on aid had had on people's knowledge of or willingness to be involved in community action.

The local authorities in Ghor felt that they did not know enough about civil society organizations; basic information such as a name, an address and contact details were lacking. As they were not visible, the organizations, far from being seen as agents for change were even described by one official as 'useless'.

Perhaps Afghans who are in the middle of personal and professional struggles in today's Afghanistan are not going to recognise the link between civil society action and some of the positive changes in Afghanistan. However when people were asked to think about how things had or had not progressed over the last few years there was usually recognition that there had been improvements during that time and that there had been developments in civil society and an increased willingness to take collective action. The demonstrations and 3 day closure of their shops in May 2009 by shopkeepers in Herat against the insecurity that was damaging trade, the potential of trade unions and the march of women, on April the 3rd 2009, against the Shia ordinance were cited as events which would not have happened before.

Small scale developments have occurred such as those in Kabul where women have been taken, by an agency assisting small scale enterprise, to bazaars to get an idea of what people are looking for, what they are wearing, and what they might therefore make to sell, as well as to wear themselves, as part of the whole process from design through product development and marketing. Technological influences in the development of society cannot be underestimated – television (though a wider cross section of civil society should be seen rather than the same old faces was one complaint) and the internet and the mobile phone.

One activist, now attending university, dated the improvements to the arrival of new ideas after 9/11, when he thought CSOs had first arrived in the country and begun to disseminate information on human rights concepts. These were then transmitted through groups ranging from school and youth groups to university students, and had an effect on those attending the workshops on these concepts and the attitudes of their families.

Another long term activist thought that it was important to discuss the transformation and changes that were needed within civil society organizations. In his view the internalization of certain universal values in these organizations was essential especially if they were to bring about changes and development in others. In his experience however many of the leading organizations talk and write about participation, cooperation, equality and so on as their core values, perhaps to reassure donors, but do not adhere to them in practice. The lack of inclusion of women, especially in decision making roles, in these organizations exemplifies this (but this is not only an Afghan trait of course).

5.2   How to influence

There was consensus that it is most important to establish relations with young people, not only are they the future of the country and its civil society but some of the present activists wish to pass on their knowledge and responsibilities after 30 years of war. The young people in their turn are enthusiastic to be 'used' in this endeavour and should be given every opportunity to develop into leaders of their communities. In Ghor they already have vibrant discussion groups, under a tree, on such topics as Afghan civilization. They held a conference in March 2008, when their first office was inaugurated, of one third girls and two thirds boys which included reciting of their own poetry and art competitions. They thought this had been a success but only wished that more local government officials had attended. Their work had continued with weekly meetings, short training courses and now have a second office having 'started from zero'. One participant suggested that the ideal is to allow a process that garners the enthusiasm of the young and the wisdom of the old.

Ghor also has an active association of journalists but speaking out is risky, particularly for women working in NGOs or local government jobs, as everywhere in Afghanistan, and for human rights defenders. All had been threatened in shabnama and offices and staff in Ghor had

been attacked. One prominent activist had been assassinated.

Peace education is thought to be a fundamental component of programmes for young people and there is a pilot scheme to incorporate it in the classes for Years 5 and 6. Several CSOs; AWSDC, CPAU, SDO and others, have made attempts to get it included in the curriculum for school children. They have already produced teaching material with text and pictures. The next step, made by SDO, was to make 2 films on peaceful co-existence and on peace education in schools which have received positive reactions.

It was also thought by most respondents that it is equally important to forge relationships with people from religious communities and not to assume that they will be traditional in their views at best and reactionary at worst. One human rights defender said that she had been in close touch with the Minister for Religious Affairs, Nehmatullah Shahrani, for several years. He had been very supportive of her work, particularly in relation to cases of child abuse and women's rights, for which he also advocated during this time. She had never thought that she would have had access to such a senior person let alone his support.

5.3   Changes that have occurred

The concepts of civil society, human rights, and activism and advocacy, while they may not always be well understood, are debated and acted upon in Afghanistan. Some Afghans feel that all these concepts are contained within Islam.

There are many men, though fewer women, who have come up through the ranks of civil society (NGOs and CSOs) and entered government as staff of Ministries, and several of these people have subsequently become Ministers and Governors of provinces. Parliament has also been enriched by people with this background and by CSO staff who have been briefing them on the issues relevant to people and the expectation is that legislation will be improved as a result. There is a core group of them who are anxious to push for forward thinking social agenda. Some MPs however, particularly women, feel that there is a very long way to go and one even said that she thought she had therefore made a mistake in getting herself elected.

The confidence that training by and working in CSOs has given people cannot be underestimated. It is now possible to find people of all ages who are willing to brief and lobby government officials, even young women in Ghor are now appearing regularly on local television. These appearances will in turn familiarise people with the sight so that it becomes easier for others to do so. International networks, such as BAAG and ENNA, have also played their part by bringing Afghan men and women to Europe to engage in policy discussions at various levels and, crucially, to inform the policy positions developed by these networks and European institutions.

There is a sense that citizens are now more likely to speak out and advocate for change publicly. The demonstrations, against insecurity and corruption, by shopkeepers in Herat, is one example of this already mentioned. There are numerous examples of communities saving aid workers in Afghanistan from attacks or abductions by armed opposition groups, by peaceful means, or by force. There are also occasions on which they have resisted attempts to make them support the Taliban. However the risks associated with taking these actions have increased.

Nonetheless women seem more likely to speak out now; as in other countries where women have been in the forefront of resistance to further encroachment on their rights and they initiate and participate in meetings in Kabul. Many educated women now have more confidence and better English language skills so they have been more in evidence in international conferences such as those of the European Commission and the European Network for NGOs in Afghanistan in Brussels and Stockholm. In Iraq it is the women who have organized themselves in a more strategic manner and have therefore made great strides in asserting themselves within the constraints of the political and security situation. Afghan women have begun to do the same despite the risks.

Specific examples of changes in Ghor which have resulted from civil society pressure were cited - including an alteration in police behaviour away from violence to reasoning with people following civil society remonstrations

about a teacher having been hit by a policeman in an unprovoked attack in the spring of 2008. Once they were confident that police behaviour had improved members of the youth organization had also played a role in encouraging families to allow their sons to join the police force.

There have also been changes for particular individual s that have had a profound effect on their lives. One young girl of 14 was engaged by her father to be married but this was against her will. When her classmates from her child peer group heard about it both boys and girls demonstrated outside her family home. Her father found this extraordinary and complained to the Afghan staff of Afghanaid, the INGO which ran this programme which taught children about their rights and organized peer to peer projects.

After several discussions in which it was stressed that it was against the law to marry so young and without consent of the girl, and the importance of the girl's rights to education, the father agreed that his daughter could be released from the engagement and this action was supported by other adult community members. There were other examples of children taking home the information they had received on human and child rights and effecting a change in their parents' views and behaviour.

NGO run programmes have been successful in improving the lives of people in a variety of sectors; mother and child and adult health, education, agriculture, and income generation. Afghan organizations such as AWSDC, CPAU and SDO, working in peace-building have brought major changes in the way people interact with each other.

In Kabul local and international civil society organizations have played a role in working towards greater freedom and fairness in elections by lobbying for good practice and monitoring the electoral processes as they occurred.

Those who were interviewed did feel that civil society actors could have a greater role to play in advocacy and therefore a greater impact for change. While there were issues that were sensitive and, therefore trickier to go public on, it was felt that it was essential to do so and there was strength to be found in collective action. Issues which warranted advocacy included corruption, civilian casualties and the actions of the Taliban and other armed opposition groups. There were requests for capacity development to improve the effectiveness of the work.

Civil society activists have been agents for change even if they have not always recognised this or the changes they have achieved. This seems to be due in part to a lack of confidence but there were many signs of a growing assertiveness and further examples of change might be given if the question were asked again. There will be no substitute for time which will allow for inevitable changes in awareness and attitudes. Increasing the education available to girls and women, as well as boys and men, would help and so would well-designed capacity development programmes.

6.   OTHER ISSUES

6.1   Traditional and modern civil society – are they opposed?

One of the results of there being no accepted working definition of civil society is the division between those in Afghanistan who believe that there can be no civil society except as a part of a democratic system, (although they believe steps can be taken towards 'civility') and those who believe aspects of traditional society, including an adherence to Islam, enshrine the necessary values and that it is therefore important to update and incorporate these traditional institutions into society. Almost all of those interviewed would seem to accept that there are things about traditional society that are worth preserving and that change can only be gradual, not forced.

It is a small proportion of the population, the educated, and only a minority of them, who feel

that only democratic values and institutions, rather than traditional ones, should be promulgated in order to progress and to preserve the rights of individuals and minorities. One such participant in the study posed the

following question: 'which could better respond to the needs of Afghans - traditional or a modern society? One that relied on 'traditional, tribal, customary, and religious views and values or one that, with the help of awareness raising by civil society, paved the way towards a democratic, law enforced, pluralized and universal system in Afghanistan'. However making this an either or scenario would not necessarily move Afghanistan forward.

There is a perception held by some that these views, and the interpretation and management of 'civil society' is the province of the Afghan elite. They feel that those who identify themselves as members of civil society need to be more in touch with the majority of Afghans and their values, which include a strong sense of fairness. (Urban Afghans can be as patronizing and lacking in understanding of rural Afghans as any foreigner). They would like members of civil society to act as a bridge between people and the government as well as taking part in developing systems of monitoring and accountability and modernizing existing institutions rather than inventing new ones.

There are various questions which arise; are traditional and tribal values the same as democratic values, or equivalent to them, when the institutions which underpin them by and large exclude women and young people? What are these values – human rights, co-existence, globalization, change, knowledge and accountability? While aspects of democracy and human rights might be universal they, and the language associated with them, still need to be interpreted locally. Were traditional values of use and more equitably interpreted in the past or has something been lost in the years of war? Certainly some women activists feel that some of the positive aspects of the role of women have been lost.

Are the values and institutions that the international community has been supporting and funding the appropriate ones for Afghanistan? Does liberal democracy offer a good way forward? Is religious society part of civil society or can it be part of a push towards fundamentalism? Is it possible to counter the view some have that democracy + the west = sex and pornography.

There would appear to be some common ground; for example programmes run by some CSOs to modernise Shuras. The aim is that they will be representative of all parts of the community and use more effective methods of conflict resolution which, rather than making summary decisions, achieve lasting results. Kristian Berg Harpviken and Suleman Kakar's comparison of a traditional village based shura with a desired village based organization (see below) illustrates this point.

There are those who believe that religion has no part to play in civil society and that following a family of Sayyids since the 14th century has no place in a modern country, that religious society is not civil society and that obeying the obligation of religion is not a civil act. Respect for the Royal family is permissible but not their right to rule. People have been excluded and tortured in the name of Islam (and ethnicity) and there are therefore those who do not want a society organized by these tenets. Others believe that Islam contains all the necessary values for a well run society. One cited Rumi as the first to talk of religious pluralism and values, without which reconciliation will not be possible. These are topics which are hotly debated by Afghan university students. The Shura e Ullema, or Council of religious leaders, which might be expected to advise on religious matters is said to be government run and therefore expected to follow the government view rather than a neutral one.

It would be easy, particularly for a non Muslim, to presume that religious leaders would be less likely to embrace values of rights for women etc yet such stereo types can be wrong as has been seen with The Minister of Religious Affairs, Nehmatullah Shahrani, who has written supportively about women's rights and Islam and who is particularly concerned about child abuse.

Village-based Traditional Afghan Shura Vs Desired Village-based Institution

Type of Shura / Characteristic	Traditional Village-based Shura or Organization	An Ideal or Desired Village-based Institution or Organization
Membership	• Open	• Fixed
Member Characteristics	• Age • Only male members • Religious competence • Economic power • Social power • Contact with Authority	• Having development vision • Have modern education • Representative of whole population (male and female) • Contact with agencies
Objectives	• Problem solving • Conflict resolution	• Planning • Implementation • Running community projects • Conflict transformation
Approach	• Top-down and individual centered	• Bottom-up-and people oriented
Function	Reactive (In an ad hoc basis reacts when an incident takes place)	• Proactive (Acts before, during and after events taking place)
Role	• Arbitrator	• Consensus building
Access	• Limited access to government institutions	• Sufficient access to government institutions
Documentation	• Lack of documentation	• Proper documentation

Source: Cooperation for Peace and Unity (2002)

Another activist explained that there is a strong legitimacy for religious leaders but if they try and negotiate for peace they risk being portrayed as anti Islam. Mullahs who have tried to negotiate with the Taliban have been beaten and even killed. CPAU has made a study of the emerging issues related to religious groups and their potential role as civil society actors, ('Religious Civil Society: The Role and Functions of Religious Civil Society in Afghanistan, Case Studies from Wardak and Kunduz, Nawabi, Wardak and Zaman, July 2007). They concluded that religious leaders, at least those in the provinces of Wardak and Kunduz where their field studies took place, had overstated their influence, the foundations of which were limited. They thought that the religious leaders did still have control over three issues; apostasy, women (particularly in relation to 'honour') and the presence of foreign troops. They found that older religious leaders were being sidelined but the younger ones were more effectively involved in bringing younger Afghans into religious processes. These younger religious leaders were using the vocabulary of democracy and human rights and wanted to reconcile these issues with Islam, to encourage peace, provide education and serve the needs of their communities.

CPAU found a common will and interest among the mullahs to be involved in development activities as long as they did not contravene Islamic principles and see themselves as key to reaching the people. One Mullah was quoted as saying "ordinary people are listening to us".

They also found that NGOs were among the most important players in the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan but that making recommendations to NGOs that they should collaborate with religious actors had been very difficult, even though they were

missing out on a way of improving their projects and their own protection.

CPAU concluded that the realities of Afghanistan were under-researched and that further examination was required of the role of religion in the public sphere.

Some resent what they see as the interpretation of civil society to include religious civil society. It seems that while there are real differences of opinion between Afghans who address these issues there are also misperceptions of each others' points of view which might be laid to rest by using the techniques of reconciliation they themselves practise so successfully with local communities. ACSF's director is known for his concern about the inclusion of religious actors in the term civil society yet ACSF in its Project Completion Report identified a way forward, noting that 'over and over again the evidence identifies that those NGOs with good links to leaders, (traditional and religious), had better access to communities (including women) and could cope better in insecure environments' (op cit p. 55).

Some foreign funded programmes can be likened to social engineering which would be all very well if well informed, benign and effective, and enjoying the support of Afghans but all too often they are theories and architecture which do not take local conditions into account. Afghans resent the naive assumption that understanding tribal structures will provide the key to Afghanistan. However well intentioned these efforts might be the results can be counter-productive. Afghans have also noted that the NGOs, like the UN and governments do not always follow their own precepts on equality as, for example, women are seldom included in high level missions or appointed to senior positions and at the time of the study there was a smaller proportion of women in many European parliaments than in the Afghan parliament.

Afghan women have had a valued place in society, albeit romanticized perhaps, but 30 years of war have undermined it and the customary practices that were the outward expression of this. Deniz Kandiyoti found that *'in a context where a wide chasm exists between a small urban literate population and a much*

larger rural and tribal hinterland that is fractured along religious and ethnic lines, women's formal rights have relatively little bearing on their rights and entitlements in practice ....women continue to be wards of their communities and households and have little recourse to protection or justice outside these domains' (The Politics of Gender and reconstruction in Afghanistan, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development 2005).

International involvement in the gender situation in Afghanistan has not always been helpful – from prescriptions for Afghan behaviour that international organizations themselves did not honour, appointing young Afghan women as 'gender focal points' to western women in public life railing against the 'burka' and jumping on the bandwagon of what appeared to be synthetic and and short lived feelings. Deniz Kandiyoti states that there had been 'sustained efforts' by the international community, the government of Afghanistan and local women's groups in relation to reform and civic and political participation but that 'it is incumbent upon the international community and the government of Afghanistan to equip the women of Afghanistan with the organizational capacity to form the broadest possible political alliances, to work creatively with opinion leaders and power holders in different regional contexts, and to exercise voice in the difficult times ahead'.

There have been historical examples of women playing a particularly significant role in conflict resolution; stopping their sons fighting, and bringing community conflicts to an end through traditional practices, once the men have failed. This is part of the Pashtoon tradition of 'Nanawatai' (derivation entering into) and can involve throwing the chaderi down and not allowing men to step over it until a resolution has been found. Men cite this as an example of a centuries old Pashtoon tradition which honours women since none have ever been refused their request for reconciliation, (Source: DVD made on Bad and Nanawatay by AWSDC with the assistance of Norwegian Church Aid). Traditional Afghan conflict resolution/peace-building mechanisms deserve more research to see what if any role they are playing and could play now.

Women are beginning to assert themselves in public life; nationally in parliament, locally in CDCs though not in more remote areas, but even in Ghor young women are appearing on local television and at meetings and staff members of NGOs. (The other side of this is the documented occurrences of the selling of female children by poverty stricken families to enable the remaining members to eat and the incidents of physical and sexual abuse).

However women CDC members are rare and face tough challenges.A large proportion of them are illiterate, unlikely to have been exposed to information on their rights, and therefore likely to be influenced by the men in their family. Women are also at greater physical risk. Aid workers and those who are employed in international, local and national government offices are menaced by Shabnama, or night letters, so called because they arrive during the night. During the field visit to Ghor a night letter was distributed in which staff of NGOs, including those working for the researcher's host agency, Afghanaid, were named and threatened. Others who held jobs in NGOs or government departments had been physically attacked.

Attaining the status of Member of Parliament has been a disillusioning and frustrating experience for some women – the lack of strategic planning in evidence, the restrictions of travel and ethnicity placed on some women, the disproportionate attention given to a few women who are perceived as seeking the limelight compared to others who really work for the benefit of women, and the unwillingness to band together to have a stronger voice and greater influence. However there is a network of women within and outside parliament, the Womens Activists Network, WAN, which is attempting to address the problems and work out how to harness the energy they have.

There are numerous examples of strong women achieving a great deal; such as one who has successfully represented the interests of a colony of 6,500 families in Herat province, which would normally be done only by a man. Another has negotiated a complicated issue through a tribal jirga in an eastern province.

Effective support, such as that from international women's organizations and movements, could be helpful in facilitating the natural development of Afghan women and organizations. The Afghan pioneers have made a great and brave start and what they are asking for above all is moral support.

The future will perhaps see a continued flowering of civil society organizations and a greater confidence, particularly among women, in expressing their opinions. It will also see a greater understanding by donors about how they can support this without worrying so much about transaction costs thereby becoming further removed from the people they are aiming to help. It will be necessary to move away from the "civil and imposed war" and to develop a shared vision for life. Civic education could help in the effort to raise awareness of and struggle human values. A workshop on neutral ground in which common values are identified could begin this process.

The alternative would be the parallel growth of an uncivil society in which an urban elite despises the rural poor as "a bunch of farmers who are not worth consulting as they know nothing" (a maybe apocryphal quote of the reported words of a civil society doyen) and tells them what to think instead of asking them their views and in which Shabnama and capital punishment flourish.

As one of the activists interviewed said "The civil society we talk about is not yet born" Perhaps he meant the civil society of the west had not been born in Afghanistan however this study would suggest that Afghanistan is on the way to developing its own.

6.2   Ethnicity

All who contributed to this study, Afghans and non Afghans alike, were concerned about the growing problem of the use of ethnicity to separate people, ethnic tension having become palpable. The general feeling was that whatever ethnic group you belonged to you would be suffering some sort of ethnic discrimination. They feared that violence would increase and that as people felt more insecure they would retreat further behind physical and metaphorical walls and resent any inequitable distribution of funds, real or imagined.

One activist was reluctant for the subject of ethnicity to be raised during the meeting which

had been arranged with civil society activists to discuss the preliminary findings of this study. He warned that the subject was too sensitive and that people would be unwilling to discuss it honestly. The researcher explained that sometimes friends had to raise uncomfortable subjects and that as the author had been made aware of this as an increasing problem it was important to bring it into the discussions. In the event people were willing to discuss the matter.

When participants were asked how more recently it had come about that ethnicity was being used to divide people two main reasons were given: firstly that people, already used to a kinship system, had begun to see an advantage in declaring and adhering to an ethnic identity. They saw this in the process for obtaining a job in the government, getting elected to parliament or achieving a high score in the reality TV shows such as Afghan Star (similar to Pop Idol) and in the production of publications on an ethnic basis. Secondly the first question that foreigners are likely to ask Afghans when they meet them is "what ethnic group do you belong to" which accentuated the importance of the issue. One experienced activist however did say that he thought it was good if the international community was aware of ethnic imbalances. Most INGOs have undertaken regular monitoring to try and maintain an ethnic balance within their staff - this can become distorted when people respond to pressures to ensure employment of immediate and wider family members.

Politics had become ethnically based both in voting and in nascent political parties (the Afghan Constitution has no place for political parties). One Minister is said to have refused to attend Parliament for his ratification because he was worried about a lack of support due to his ethnicity. The elections to be held in 2009 were expected to increase ethnic differences.

Another reason given for the growth in ethnic divisions and the resulting problems was jealousy of those who had managed to get funding for their organizations. They were often accused of doing so for unethical reasons, based on tribal or ethnic affiliations which further fed the speculations.

One Member of Parliament thought that employing ethnicity in making decisions was a male agenda which people should refuse to follow. It had been unfortunate that when the Shia family law was introduced into Parliament at the end of 2008 none of the five female Shia Members of Parliament attended any of the debates. They apparently feared being identified and open to reprisals by extremists. One respondent thought that ethnic tensions had come about due to the failure of governments down the years to develop a sense of being Afghan and therefore of national unity. This mirrored the structure of the anti-Soviet movements; which had been based, both in Pakistan and in Iran, along ethnic and religious lines. Not only is voting in Parliament seen as ethnically based but so is the distribution of foreign aid. PRTs have been run by individual governments with great variations in their budgets and there is therefore suspicion that this is deliberate. The New Zealand PRT, with a low budget has been based in Bamian, a largely Hazara province, Lithuania, with an even smaller budget, runs the PRT in Ghor – weak PRTs to weak provinces, an inequitable distribution of assistance which could therefore be interpreted as ethnically biased.

In Ghor one of the reasons given for an increase in ethnic problems was the way it had been used to gain power whether for Government or Ministry officials, and to obtain more resources. Poverty was given as the underlying reason for the way in which ethnic groups had allowed themselves to be given financial and other incentives by "foreign hands".

Other examples of ethnic prejudice were quoted, and while there was no means of checking their authenticity, it is in any case the perceptions which are important. Vice Presidents were reported to have refused to meet people from ethnic groups other than their own, parliamentary votes were made on ethnic lines and people were thought to have been hired for and fired from Ministry jobs on an ethnic basis rather than that of merit. It was said that all the key Ministries, 8 Customs Houses and 30 of the 34 Tax Collection Offices were run by Pashtoons (the President's ethnic group, said to be the largest in the country), as

was the Board of Commerce. One of the main civil society groups is often accused of employing a majority of the minority ethnic groups. While there are no doubt ethnic imbalances in CSOs and NGOs it is difficult to distinguish between reality and genuinely held perceptions and between truth and inaccuracies promulgated to enhance one's own position. Another accusation was that people were working for foreigners: the Pakistanis, the British or the Iranians. The British were said to be favouring tribal structures and values, for example by supporting the largely Pashtoon Electoral Commission. One of the German Democratic parties was perceived to be supporting Afghan Millat, the Pashtoon nationalists. Radio stations were thought to be biased in favour of particular ethnic groups.

The situation of ethnically based divisions was exacerbated by anxiety about impunity and the absence of the rule of law. However some felt that it had not yet reached the point of no return and various remedies could be considered. Local peace-building work, employed and developed in more than a decade had been found to have a positive impact on conflict in and between communities and, in the past, UN Habitat had reduced conflict between ethnic communities by bringing them together gradually to get to know each other and then to work on common tasks. A reconciliation process organized between the CSOs to discuss the current situation and to agree on ways forward would be possible and desirable.

While the researcher's experience has been that people are very proud of being Afghan and wish to preserve the existence of the country, it is also clear that ethnic tensions are increasing. One thinks of the Irish joke – when asked at an unofficial checkpoint in Northern Ireland "Are you a Catholic or a Protestant?" a man replies "I am a Muslim". "Ah .." came the response, "but are you a Catholic Muslim or a Protestant Muslim?".

Any efforts that have been made to counter this trend have been slow in emerging and piecemeal yet Afghanistan has a rich tradition of poetry and song lyrics which talk of the ethnic diversity of the country. The Hazaras, based in Central Afghanistan have a song composed in

Hazaragi and Dari by Safdar Tawakuli, which celebrates each ethnic group in turn, and is played by Pashtoons and others alike at national and family celebrations. The National Anthem mentions all the ethnic groups and other songs stress the importance of unity. Patriotic songs can be very powerful and transformative – one thinks of the songs of the Cretan composer Mikis Theodorakis resisting the rule of the Colonels in Greece in the 1960s. More could be done to build on these aspects of Afghan cultural history before predictions of serious ethnic conflict becomes self fulfilling. It is a problem that needs a multi-pronged educational, cultural, legislative approach and a very long term commitment.

6.3   Peace-building

Peace-building can be seen as an important contribution to civil society development. According to Mohammed Suleman, (a founder member of CPAU which had pioneered peace-building in Afghanistan), described by another of those interviewed as 'the Grandfather of peace-building', "There is magic in peace-building". Raz Mohammad Dalili, the Executive Director of SDO, which had, in turn, founded 240 peace shuras in 9 provinces described them as an important component of Afghan civil society.

Mary Akrami, a pioneer of peace building with women, stressed how important it was for women to be involved in these activities and to be helped to regain their traditional role and "play their part in re-building peaceful minds". That it is very difficult to live without a peaceful mind is an understatement.

There is evidence from independent evaluations of peace-building programmes (by Mhd. Suleman, Copnall, D. 2006 of peace-building programmes in Western Afghanistan and Winter E., 2008 Peace-building Evaluation of CPAU) that they have contributed to a reduction in conflict and a lessening of the workload of government officials due to the sustainable security they have succeeded in establishing. The wish of those experiencing these programmesis that they could both be continued in their own area and be expanded throughout the country. A first step would be to include peace-building in the school curriculum, something for which the peace-building CSOs have been lobbying.

Those who have been directly involved in community peace-building have come under pressure, especially from internationals looking for solutions, to expand their work to include negotiations with the Taliban. However this is an entirely different situation in which they could be seen as working for political, pro government ends. To play an accepted part in any negotiations they would have to be trusted interlocutors first and, while community peace-building could be a precursor to that, it would be important not to be seen as interfering politically or in attempting to thwart the aims of the Taliban and other anti-government elements because of the personal risks that would entail.

The risks in being seen as a threat are real; the Taliban have strong religious legitimacy and those countering them could be portrayed not just as pro government but also as against Islam and therefore laying themselves open to beating and assassination. Other perceived risks are in trusting the Government to be an honest participant and in deciding who to negotiate with, some Taliban being members purely for economic reasons. However if the climate of peace was encouraged in a greater proportion of the country, including through civic education and peace-building programmes, then this could have a positive effect on many of the participants in the conflict and the long term outcome.

Women have played an important role in the past, as described in the previous section, 6(i) but this seems to have been forgotten by most people and research into this could be valuable. At least one civil society organization had been trying to develop the capacity of women in peace-building and it would be an important endeavour to understand and to support.

It is arguable that peace-building is as important as education for civil society development in the current situation. Thought therefore needs to be given to how to support further Afghan led peace programmes, whether any foreign support might be required and what can be learned from programmes in other countries as well as the lessons that Afghans can teach others. Afghan peace-builders have been in demand for international conferences and teaching. Afghans are confident that as Muslims they know about peace through their practice of

Islam but 'we are increasingly seeing in this "war" that humanitarian workers and NGO representatives are becoming legitimate targets for insurgents and terrorist groups. This is a huge challenge for all of us involved in peacemaking, peace-building and conflict prevention at any level anywhere on this planet'. (Promoting Peace, Norwegian and Irish Experiences, Norwegian Embassy and Glencree Centre for Reconciliation 2005)

6.4 Civil Society: How it has been, could be and should be developed

This study has concentrated on the aspects of civil society which relate to social and economic life. There is another facet of civil society which has always been a significant component of national identity for the majority of Afghans, and is just as important, and that is cultural life. Literature, written and spoken debate, poetry, music and the other arts have always played an important part in Afghan society and continue to do so. Many had to create or listen clandestinely to the arts during Taliban rule but now, especially in cities, male and female writers, poets, painters and musicians are able to pursue their art despite some social restrictions on appearing in public.

The baseline survey that FCCS carried out (Op cit p 52) found that in most sectors 'there was a high level of local initiative particularly with cultural activities and in the education sector' and that they provided services that the government did not which indicated 'a significant grass-roots commitment to influence the Afghan reconstruction process'.

From 2003 FCCS, the Foundation for Culture and Civil Society, had been providing a home for music, film, theatre and poetry in their restored traditional building in Kabul. FCCS, with the support of the Open Society Institute put on art exhibitions 'with the aim of promoting cultural diversity while strengthening a sense of national identity'. FCCS also initiated cultural mapping of the provinces and recording of oral history. They have been involved in other aspects of civil society development, but, like other organizations, FCCS have found funding difficult to come by.

Herat was for centuries the home of a revered school of miniature painters. In Kabul the CHA

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put on concerts and exhibitions of crafts as part of its work and to fundraise. The 'Kite Runner' brought great acclaim for its Afghan author and further publicity for the difficulties being experienced in Afghanistan through the film that was made of it.

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture, under the direction of Jolyon Leslie, initiated the restoration of the architectural glories of Kabul and Herat, necessitating the revival of crafts of construction, plasterwork and wood carving. AKTC encouraged Afghan officials to appreciate the beauty and the potential of their revival as tourist attractions tourist attraction and therefore the need to preserve this heritage. The Mughal Palace complex and gardens, Bagh e Babur, now provide not just a well used pleasant oasis for walking and picnics in a city denuded of trees and plants which Afghans were famous for appreciating, but, also a stunning backdrop for concerts and exhibitions.

The Turquoise Mountain Institute of Arts and Architecture has become involved in similar city rehabilitation in Kabul, necessitating the removal of waste and improvement of sanitation as well as restoration of merchants' houses. At the time this study was undertaken Jemima Montagu, late of the UK Arts Council, the Director of Culture and Heritage for Turquoise Mountain, in partnership with AKTF, brought together the exhibition 'Living Traditions' in the Queen's Palace in the Bagh e Babur. The exhibition came about because of 'a desire amongst Afghan artists and their international colleagues to bring an outstanding exhibition of contemporary art to Kabul' and showed the work of artists from Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan before transferring to the prestigious Venice Biennale.

The programmes of the AKTF and the Turquoise Mountain could be seen as good examples of contributions made by the international community in collaboration with indigenous skills resulting in lasting achievements.

The 2004 Conference on Civil Society organized by Swiss Peace and what is now the Afghan Civil Society Forum, ACSF, brought together Afghans from throughout the country as well as from the diaspora. Arrangements were made for those who had not seen their country since before the

war or had never visited Kabul, to see the sights and to hear their music and poetry in a final concert. It was significant that these aspects of life were thought just as important as the discussions that took place on key messages to send to the Government and to the International Community.

The pre-war Director of the National Theatre Afghanistan, who starred in the film of the Kite Runner, was reappointed in 2004 and for several years has been working, with the support of the Norwegian Der Nationale Scene to revive the National Theatre in Kabul. The building, dating from 1905, had been ruined in the war but part of it has been resurrected. The first production was a puppet theatre production for children based on a traditional Afghan story from the ancient past; Dragon Mountain.

Physical activity is important for mental and physical health, particularly in stressful times. Some agencies have offered sporting activities including football, volleyball, cricket, boxing (even for girls, through CPAU's Fighting for Peace programme) and judo and Afghanistan was represented at the Olympic Games. Afghanistan has also quickly risen up the ranks in Twenty/20 cricket after only four years international involvement in the game, (the documentary film of this story leading to qualification for the World Cup will be shown in 2010) and the programme run by Afghan Connection, which links schools in the UK, and funding from the MCC, is bearing fruit for a new generation of schoolchildren (boys so far) in terms of physical fitness and pride.

Support should continue for all the activities which are as much a part of identity and the building of civil society as other more obvious ones; art, literature, theatre, music, architecture and traditional crafts.

There are other examples of ways in which civil society has developed in Afghanistan, despite the lack of community facilities. Some activists felt frustrated that it was less developed than they wished and put some of the blame on colleagues, but others were realistic in their estimation of the developments that had been achieved. Some felt that the real barrier to development was that, despite the best efforts of activists and staff of civil society

organizations, people had not yet realised the strength they would have if they were more tolerant of each other and worked and advocated together. That strength, together with the support of committed nationals and internationals, would result eventually in change to a society that people wished for – one based on the promotion of values and a culture of peace.

Those that were not in touch with international donors had very small budgets and most had therefore developed coping strategies to enhance their effectiveness. It was the relative immaturity of the institutional structures of these organizations which had meant that they did not attract funding and this in turn had serious implications for their sustainability when the costs such as rent were so high. When the organizations were able to raise funds there was an issue about dependency. During the FCCS survey (op cit) the researchers recommended 'a clearer co-ordination between donors and the Civil Society Organizations' and the production by FCCS of a basic guide to help CSOs with essential administration skills as well as capacity development of the smaller organizations.

It became evident during the course of this research that it would be beneficial to civil society activists, if a comprehensive collection of examples of civil society development, was compiled listing what has been helpful in the process and why. One government official in Ghor was quite clear that he wished members of civil society would tell him what they felt he and his staff had done well and what they could do better and how. Of course rural Afghanistan has other challenges; Ghor had only one qualified lawyer, electricity has to be provided by generator and is rare outside the provincial capital. Health care, education and other services are patchy. There is a library of 5,000 books donated by the PRT, but the building is closed. Developing civil society in this context, let alone in increasing insecurity, is very difficult. Enthusiasm for it is high however amongst those involved and they keenly expressed the need to be sent for exposure visits and training outside the province.

Mhd Suleman, a founder member of CPAU felt that the development of any civil society must include tolerance of other people and the views

they hold. CPAU together with other CSOs and national and international NGOs have played a very considerable role in building this tolerance and in the development of the capacity of Afghan members of civil society and the organizations they run. The experience and training they have received during their time with NGOs have resulted in effective managers and leaders in other spheres. Some of the many examples at the time of the study included Dr Sima Samar and Fahim Hakim of the AIHRC and Electoral Complaints Commission, Haneef Atmar, in his third Ministerial post, and Kanishka Nawabi adviser to Atmar at the Ministry of the Interior, Ehsan Zia, Minister for Rural Development, Mhd Suleman Kakar, Deputy Minister of Education, Jelani Popal head of the IDLG, and Jawed Ludin, Ambassador to Canada.

Some success has been achieved members of civil society collaborating on specific issues such as campaigning against the Vice and Virtue and Shia family laws which led to the first demonstration by women and ultimately to some improvements in the draft, although there is still some way to go. These initiatives were conducted by email, in meetings, and with a delegation of tasks such as research into international and civil law. The fact that those taking up issues relating to the rights of women have also reached the ear of the President was used by one activist to demonstrate that others could do so too, as part of the process of influencing for change, if they only realised their power. However it is not necessarily given to all activists to be so outspoken in ways and places where it is normally men who normally speak and are heard, to risk being unpopular or to lose out on 'normal life'; which is the price activists, especially women, often pay if they decide to take up sensitive cases.

When women have co-ordinated their views and collaborated on developing an event they have not always been supported. A number of NGOs and networks decided in 2008 that it would be a good idea to hold a women's jirga and thought that they had a commitment of funding. However the large bilateral donor then decided that it was inappropriate to hold a women's jirga since 'they are for men' and the meeting became one purporting to look at strategies for women. Those involved in the initiative would still have liked to hold a jirga

and were again looking for funding. Their collective view is that women of civil society need to set their own agenda, informed by connections to the rest of the world, and build a coalition for development.

All respondents stressed the importance of coordination of approaches and efforts by members of the international community and Afghans alike.

Co-ordinating bodies have existed for varying lengths of time. Three of the first co-ordinating bodies to be set up for national and international NGOs were Afghan Co-ordinating Body for Afghan Relief, ACBAR, the Afghan NGO Co-ordinating Body, ANCB and SWABAC, the South Western Agencies Board for Co-ordination. There are also three long-standing umbrella groups for civil society; the Afghan Civil Society Forum, ACSF the Foundation for Culture and Civil Society, FCCS, and the Afghan Women's Network, AWN. The FCCS became the Foundation for Culture, and civil society and human rights issues were passed to the Civil Society Development Centre.

Each of these bodies has had some success at some time but dissatisfaction with the overall effects is widespread; people talk about having given up on attending meetings because they had achieved so little while all agree that there is a great need to collaborate. Outside assistance was thought to be the key to this – provision of resources that will give continuity and capacity to civil society collaboration – still Afghan driven but neutrally facilitated. The co-ordinating bodies could collaborate and co-ordinate in a more strategic manner both in Afghanistan and internationally. At the time of writing discussions were taking place between ACBAR and the British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG) about future collaboration between these two long established agencies as well as with the European Network for NGOs in Afghanistan (ENNA).

International support for civil society development in Afghanistan is seen as very necessary; and those interviewed felt strongly that it was important to build the capacity of the government and civil society concurrently.

Lobbying and advocating internationally is the required adjunct to lobbying in Afghanistan. Some Afghan CSOs have quite extensive affiliations with national and international networks working for human rights, peace, justice and poverty eradication. SDO for example cited a large number of international organisations to which it was affiliated.[1] The national organizations to which SDO belongs include the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) which represents national and international NGOs working in humanitarian, reconstruction and development programmes, and the Afghan Civil Society Organizations Network for Peace (ACSONP), a network of organization working for peace, human rights and justice.

During the course of the research, however, civil society activists said they would welcome further links with and support from international civil society. Activists in Ghor pointed out that their province was so poor that it would not be possible to get the necessary funding for their work locally. The dilemma that they faced with regard to funding is that the acceptance of foreign money could be interpreted locally as bowing to foreign agendas. Donors are thought to lack knowledge about how to support civil society, including peace-builders, but also to be more interested in giving assistance to initiatives that follow their own agenda rather than that of the people of Afghanistan. Neither is the UN thought to be interested although they have been responsible for some initiatives as a result of the dedication of particular staff members driving projects

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[1] SDO included the following among its affiliations: Global Action Against Poverty, (GCAP) an international alliance of trade unions, community and faith groups, organizations for women and for youths, NGOs and other campaigners from 100 national platforms, South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE), which focuses on poverty eradication through policy research, advocacy, lobbying and campaigning, ACTION Asia, a network of individuals and organizations in Asia which are committed to action for conflict transformation through the sharing of skills, knowledge, experiences and resources, Least Developed Countries (LDC) Watch which aims to build strong national networks to engage in regional and international processes in the development agenda, Social Watch (SW) a network of national citizens' groups working on poverty eradication and equality, and the Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network (ADRRN) which promotes co-ordination and collaboration between NGOs and others for effective and efficient disaster reduction and response in Asia.

forwards rather than the organisational commitment to civil society development. The UNDP for example did support the civil society input to the Berlin and London Conferences in 2004 and 2006 but this support was seen to be transient.

Internationals, including staff of INGOs, must recognise that their role is to facilitate Afghan led civil society development rather than assuming that they are there to bring knowledge to an under-developed group of people.

Investment in Afghan capacity has been shown to bear fruit. Academic institutions such as Responding to Conflict in Birmingham UK, invested in developing the capacity of Afghans in conflict resolution and peace-building. CPAU was the result and CPAU in turn trained others such as SDO, now recognised also as a leader in this field, and AWSDC, the first NGO to work on peace-building with women. Civil society activists in Ghor had not been aware of such programmes but having learned about them from the researcher they thought they could be extremely valuable in their province in which long standing local conflicts could escalate and be reinforced by insecurities and encroachment by the Taliban in neighbouring provinces. Despite a lack of financial and other support this young activists in Ghor have been developing their capacity, in IT and media work and at the time of this study were preparing a brief to inform the new Governor of the Province when he arrived to take up his post.

The AWN, WAN, ACBAR and ACSF have collaborated on collecting information about child sexual abuse and have developed policies to counter it and advocated for them. The speaker of Parliament, Qanooni had taken up the cause as a result and had announced on television that he was ready to support the necessary legislation.

Capacity development that is based on need and well executed has not just borne fruit in Afghanistan; real Afghan capacity has been developed – CPAU, AWSDC and SDO have been able to advise people from other countries on conflict resolution and peace-building and are invited to take part in international events for the contributions that they are able to make

rather than as part of a learning audience. The investment that international NGOs like Afghanaid in agriculture and community development, Dacaar in water and sanitation and the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan in health and education have made in community programmes and developing the capacity of their staff has also had an impact. This is against a background that they, like the communities themselves, have enormous security problems as well as a struggle to fund and therefore keep continuity, in their programmes.

The child to child work by Afghanaid in Ghor is another example of a civil society development programme which has had an impact on attitudes of both children and adults and therefore on the lives of those involved. Not only had girls and young women, as well as boys and young men, become literate which is the first step to empowerment. Deaf girls, who would have had difficulty living a fulfilling life in the past, learned to read and write. They had also been given skills in embroidery and beadwork which allowed them to earn an income and feel they were contributing to the family, and therefore gaining respect.

There is some valuable social capital in Afghanistan; economic investors, entrepreneurs, parliamentarians and civil society actors. Women in Parliament do not always feel that the best use is made of it however. One said "there is everything in Parliament but we do not know how to use it - we are less than zero now". Sensitive material has been collected by a variety of people over time about human rights abuses without putting organizations and individuals at risk. For those living in rural communities their social capital includes experienced village people and as the MP for Farza said forcefully, they were the people who should be consulted rather than government appointed people who were not true representatives and could not therefore give good advice. Even if information is available that could support the views of civil society and parliamentarians they feel they cannot always make it public.

One very experienced individual activist said his hope was that organizations and individuals in Afghan civil society would be responsible for bringing about appropriate changes during a

transitional period which would facilitate navigation out of the current situation. That he hoped would lead to a time when people could freely advocate for their rights rather than challenging and opposing the government, and be looking out for their fellow citizens rather than only themselves. Ethnicity has played a negative role in this at times, publications being produced on an ethnic basis.

The media have already been playing a watchdog role in some instances, as well as entertaining the population. However at the end of a civil society conference in 2007, although this may have changed since then, one respected journalist said privately that he thought those involved in civil society work were politically naive. They did not understand the reality of how things worked and it was time they did if they wanted to have a long term effect for good. This chimes with others who believe that there needs to be a discourse with all components of society to effect progress. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commissions has been disappointed in the lack of support they feel they have had for their Transitional Plan for Justice, which has been agreed but not implemented.

More networks were not thought to be the answer but real donor support for a framework, a strategy and an action plan would be. The MP for Farza, a rural district of Kabul province, summed up his view on civil society with the words "The civil society I would be interested in is not that of small organizations based in Kabul and girls and boys wearing trousers". He was interested in technical assistance and jobs for his constituents and for the international community to talk to the people he saw as the real decision makers with the real knowledge of his country. He, like others, did not want Afghans to be only recipients of aid but to play an equal part in the development of their country.

The author concluded that there should be funding for training and for social and cultural programmes to strengthen processes that will have an impact in improving the lives of the people. Impact has been difficult to assess due to the lack of evaluation throughout all programmes in Afghanistan. Civil society members could play a useful role in assessing

the impact of their own actions in order to recommend more appropriate programming and funding in future and to encourage themselves to continue with their work.

6.5   The role of conferences in civil society development and advocacy

International conferences co-hosted by governments, the UN and the Afghan Government have included those which took place in St Petersburg, which produced the Bonn Agreement in 2001, in Tokyo in 2002, Berlin in 2004, which produced the Berlin Declaration, in London in 2006 which produced the London Compact, in Paris in 2008 where the Afghanistan National Development Strategy was received, and again in London in 2010. Civil society conferences have taken place as an adjunct to these conferences, sometimes at the request of and with the support of the hosts and sometimes at the instigation of civil society organizations. Some were funded by governments and the UN with the stated aims of consulting civil society in order to inform inter-governmental meetings on Afghanistan, and some were organized by CSOs and INGOs with the stated aim of assisting civil society organizations to develop their joint messages to decision and policy makers.

There was great scepticism amongst those interviewed for this study about the benefit of the majority of the conferences which had taken place so far.. The international ones tended to be convened at the request of donors, in haste and without sufficient time or resources to consult civil society in an effective way and therefore led to people feeling there had been no time to express their views properly, or to draft statements, and as therefore they lacked ownership they had been seen as largely a PR/box ticking exercise. The apogee, however, was felt to have been reached with the one day conference held in Paris in 2008, before the inter-government conference there in July.

Even when the conferences had had more preparation time and at least adequate processes, (such as those in Kabul in 2002, Berlin in 2004 and Kabul in 2006) and key messages were therefore transmitted nationally and globally, the outcomes were undermined by a lack of follow up. The perception was that there had been too many conferences and that

they were influenced by foreign agendas. 'The Enabling Environment' conference held at the Serena Hotel by the Aga Khan Development Network in June 2007 produced a statement but was given as an example of a conference that disappointed people as it had no follow up and therefore was not expected to achieve the outcomes the participants had agreed to in that statement. Perhaps well conducted surveys could provide a better indication of peoples' views but people were also very sceptical about the findings of surveys as they were thought to reflect the wishes of those who funded them rather than a genuine reflection of Afghan views.

National civil society conferences were thought at times, though not always, to have provided a talking shop, and to have boosted the profile of its organizers and exacerbated competitiveness between agencies rather than enhanced the development of the sector. Neither international nor national conferences were thought, by Afghans or internationals to have had much impact on programmes or advocacy. There was also a feeling from some Afghans that, while significant expatriate involvement had been necessary in the earlier years, and donor funding was still necessary, Afghans were now able to conduct their own conferences.

One activist felt that a profound drawback was the lack of vision, held by Afghan and international actors, of an Afghan civil society and that the concepts promoted by NGOs were disconnected from those held by people in the community. These problems had been exacerbated by a variety of contributory factors; a lack of Afghan capacity, a civil society leadership in the hands of an unrepresentative few, and international staff on short rotations in the country.

Far more effective than conferences was thought to have been the ad hoc co-ordination of groups around a specific issue however this had not so far contributed greatly to facilitating the powerful voice of the people that all respondents felt should be brought forth if things were to change for the better.

While all felt wary of expending time and effort on large scale conferences again there was a feeling that they could and should be made to work and that it was essential that any

foundations that they had laid down should be followed up. There was considerable support for the idea of having a civil society consultation process and conference before the Presidential elections but concern also that it would achieve as little as its predecessors. One way forward in future could be to have task force of different actors to review the design, reasons for successes and failures and the outcomes of the key conferences held to date and make recommendations for future ones. A suggestion made by one respondent was that a conference be convened to discuss a strategy for conferences and their follow up, that it should fully represent civil society and have the support from the IC which would ensure sustainability.

Afghans and internationals alike had similar ideas for the design of future conferences. These included; having an annual civil society conference, with clear objectives and funding which allowed for good preparation, facilitation and follow up, with a realistic budget. Donors should be sought for the Conference who would be seen as more neutral in the process (the Scandinavians and the Dutch were mentioned). Expatriates with relevant expertise could be employed to assist with facilitation and reporting but the whole process should be Afghan led and owned. The agenda should be set by Afghans and build on what has been learned and expressed in public statements so far. A good 'salesperson would be needed to gain support for it and to travel the country to set it up. The tent used for Loya Jirgas could be employed rather than an expensive international hotel, and a representative sample of people invited to participate from throughout Afghanistan. Databases of people and organizations present at key conferences can be useful in identifying constituencies for change and support and ensure that, as far as possible, representatives of the constituent parts of Afghan civil society are present.

Consideration should be given to having a standing conference of civil society and ways in which it could be supported financially by donors without losing independence of thought, which would enable continuous assessment, policy development and drafting of key messages by Afghans.

6.6   Civil and Uncivil society

Striving to benefit ones fellow citizens in working as a civil society activist or staff member of a CSO can have personal consequences. Researchers presenting their findings to an LSE Centre for Civil Society workshop attended by the author during this study have found that activism 'has connotations of sacrifice', a loss of personal security and freedom (Tom Yarrow) and this has certainly been borne out by the lives of many activists in Afghanistan, particularly those of women as already mentioned. This might be partially mitigated by the satisfaction gained from being engaged in what they perceive as worthwhile activity.

A generational difference was posited for western activists – that the older generation tended to be involved in activism through a sense of idealism whereas the younger generation had more of a sense of professionalism coupled with an awareness of earning potential. It had been noted that there are people who continue to describe themselves as activists even after they join a government (The term 'femocrats' was given to feminists who did this) and some do so in Afghanistan.

Certainly in Afghanistan expectations were high of those activists who joined the Afghan government. Once they had been able to see things 'from the other side of the fence' however the different pressures and requirements of their new jobs tempered their activism even if their sympathies remained with their erstwhile colleagues (for example in relation to adding peace-building to the curricula of schools). It is possible to have different identities over time and alternate between governmental and civil society employment, and to adhere to the values of civil society in work and in private life.

It is important to remember that North and South do have things in common and therefore people should identify and build on these as achieving change is more complicated than simply doing good research, writing a good report and advocating for the recommendations it makes, (David Lewis) and one must ask what kind of civil society are the Afghans and the international community hoping to develop in Afghanistan?

One of the complications would be if the civil society that is being supported decides to pursue policies or activities that the supporter finds uncivil. A case in point is that of capital punishment which no longer exists in the vast majority of the countries assisting Afghanistan. The death penalty was a live issue at the de-briefing meeting convened to discuss the preliminary findings of this study with civil society activists in Kabul. The day before the majority of them had been at a meeting attended by President Hamid Karzai to discuss issues relevant to women. One of the participants appeared to argue for public punishments, including capital punishment, for kidnappers and those who abused children, in fact she was arguing for public and transparent court hearings for offenders. The President indicated, while looking at the Acting Head of UNAMA, that while he might be in favour of such punishments his 'friends would not allow them'.

The de-briefing meeting also embarked on an animated debate about what should be done in relation to the recent cases which had aroused great anxiety and horror – an unprecedented increase in kidnapping for ransom, such as an elderly well respected man and a young boy who had been imprisoned for more than a week in a very deep drainage ditch and given a piece of bread and some water once a day, and a case of twelve men who had been abusing a boy of eight were cited as examples. What became clear was that all except one person present thought that capital punishment was essential for serious crimes such as murder, kidnap, rape and sexual abuse since they were unforgiveable and that was the only way to prevent them. Violence to answer violence was necessary in the short term, there was God's right and the right of revenge and if their relatives had been victims they would want the death penalty for the perpetrator.

The person who argued against this pointed to research that has shown the contrary is true and that crime and corruption were likely to increase. She argued for restorative justice as the appropriate answer. All however agreed that as there was currently no rule of law or due process in Afghanistan, and therefore would be no safe verdicts, such punishment should not be implemented.

Perhaps this illustrates the way forward – bringing new knowledge into a situation and debating the implications, underpinned by Afghan led research into topics that Afghans consider the most important.

6.7   The Future

As the first draft of this report was being written Afghanistan was gearing up for elections and civil society was playing its part in preparing for them.   Afghan television channels were arranging and broadcasting searching interviews with candidates and involving the diaspora too in the issues.   Civil society had organized debates, disseminated information, highlighted failings in government and elected representative, and engendered interest in the processes and the outcomes, in other words fulfilling some of the functions of civil society anywhere in the world.

By the time this report is published there will have been further developments in civil society and it is to be hoped that these will be matched by those in governance and security.

7.   CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1   The overall conclusions and recommendations

Afghanistan has a vibrant civil society whose members can and do act for the common good both individually and collectively.

Life had become increasingly difficult and insecure in both urban and rural areas of Afghanistan and this in turn had exacerbated poverty in a country already suffering drought and unemployment.   Civil society activities, including NGO programmes, had of necessity become more circumscribed although the demand for them in the areas visited had increased.

Civil society activists and organizations continue to debate and to struggle with the meaning of the concept of civil society, as do the donors. Without a common understanding civil society has the continual burden of having to define the support required for its positions and strategies. Much of the international support is still

experienced as inconsistent, insubstantial and unhelpful.   There is a growing awareness that NGOs form part of civil society, but that the concept includes a far wider group of people and organizations.   A multi-donor review of the needs of civil society aimed at designing a programme to support its development would be a positive contribution.

A dichotomy still exists between those who have concerns about including traditional and religious society within civil society, and see democracy as the way forward, and those who take a broader view of the term.   However there is common ground.

There is still no accepted working definition of the term civil society and no comprehensive database of the constituents.   Both would be helpful to CSOs, activists, donors, the media and the wider public.   There are civil society actors outside NGOs and there is a need to identify who they are and to make them accessible to other members of civil society.

Civil society has been responsible for some positive changes in Afghanistan although the lack of evaluation of programmes and time for reflection has often made it difficult for this to be recognised and appreciated.

7.2   The theory of civil society

The origins of the concept of civil society date back to ancient Greece but, as the review of literature shows, it is contested and evolving, and may be interpreted locally.   There are tensions between the view that civil society is essential for democracy and vice versa.   The contention that no civil society exists except in relation to democracy is unsustainable unless perhaps the term is very broadly defined.   Nor is it true, as some have claimed, that the existence of civil society is incompatible with life in an Islamic country.   While democracy does not seem contradictory to the tenets of Islam, since it shares the same ideals of freedom, justice and equality, capitalism might be seen to be so since that system does not address the needs of the poor.   There are dangers in the co-option of civil society for a particular political system, whether liberal democracy or some other form, which does not recognise the

importance of the traditional aspects of the society.

Rather than adopting a system for society which has emerged from elsewhere and arouses sensitivities and invites criticism; a mixture of indigenous and community models, incorporating values and dignity, might offer the best way forward for Afghanistan. Afghans will want to build on what they have already achieved, to comprehend and develop the concept on their own terms, and to claim it for themselves.

7.3   Definition of civil society

The term 'civil society' is in common use amongst the urban and educated in Afghanistan, translated as Jama e Madani, the nearest equivalent in Farsi. However the meaning of the term, and the way that it has been used, has varied. There is neither a single understanding of the term nor an agreed operational definition and even within one organization views can differ.

In addition, neither donors nor other international actors have reached consensus on the meaning of the term. It has been synonymous in the minds of most donors, and the public, with NGOs; perhaps because they are more easily identifiable and accessible than other components of civil society. Civil society however encompasses a much larger arena of professional, social and cultural actors and organizations.

Those interviewed agreed without exception that a practical working definition of the term would be useful by helping to clarify the roles civil society actors and their messages. It would also facilitate collaboration between and support for civil society organizations and their activities.

This study found that the term civil society is in widespread use in Afghanistan and that there is sufficient shared understanding of the term to continue using it. It is recommended therefore that the Afghan CSOs should continue to refine its meaning in the Afghan context on their own terms, to explain it to others and claim it for themselves.

It is further recommended that consideration is given to Afghan researchers making a comparative study of the definition, values and understanding of the term in one or two other countries, with international assistance if this was felt necessary. One activist felt that a different translation of 'Jama e Madani' could also be helpful and the one might inform the other. . However it would not be fruitful to spend too much time on a definition when it is the aims and activities of civil society that will be more important in the long run.

This author would argue that the operational definition drafted by the Centre for Civil Society at LSE covers a lot of the common ground and has been a useful addition to the debate in Afghanistan. However it is missing two essential ingredients; cultural activities and individual action for the good of other citizens. While it would not be necessary to spend time on what is likely to be a fruitless pursuit of an ideal and agreed definition it would be helpful to have a working definition that is responsive to understanding the norms and the way that it might be used in Afghanistan. Such a working definition would need to be understandable and acceptable enough to contribute to awareness about the actual and potential role and effectiveness of civil society in Afghanistan.

The following is a modified version of the CCS definition, based on interviews and writing of Afghan civil society actors, which will be translated into Dari and Pashto, and is offered as a basis for further discussion:

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

7.4   Database

Information sources and access to them that are taken for granted in other countries do not on the whole exist in Afghanistan. Each large CSO and umbrella group has set up some kind of database of their members or constituents and they have maintained and updated them with varying degrees of difficulty. The one CSO that has produced a more comprehensive countrywide database, in hard copy, based on information gathered in 2006, had not been able to raise the necessary funds to improve on and update it.

The development of a working definition of the term civil society, by delineating its components, would be a precursor to the establishment of a database of civil society. Those consulted for this study could see the benefits of a database including; allowing civil society organizations and activists to link more easily with each other and with donors and enabling MPs to contact and consult interest groups in their constituencies and nationally, particularly when relevant legislation was being planned. Existing co-ordinating bodies of CSOs, including NGOs, expressed an interest in assisting in the development of a comprehensive database. There was general agreement between them that facilitation of the process by a neutral 3rd party would be advisable and there was interest in the idea of the database or directory being held and managed by a specialist company available outside Afghanistan.

Initial discussion took place with a UK based specialist in information technology and seed money for a pilot phase has been identified. A pilot project is recommended which could identify, and hopefully resolve, some of the practical and organizational issues inherent in such an initiative; breadth, format, upkeep, information-sharing, trust, accessibility and security.   Women   activists   who   were interviewed were particularly in favour of taking this forward, with women's organizations being the basis for the pilot study. It is recommended that the pilot study take place in Kabul, where there is the largest number of civil society organizations, and they are some way towards being documented, and in Ghor where Afghanaid and other NGOs have said they might be willing to assist in doing so. This could begin

to give a picture of activities in both urban and rural settings.

Practical considerations could also be addressed at this time; how to produce and manage hard copy and electronic versions and access to them for people with no opportunity to use the internet. A survey of existing library facilities, static and mobile should also be conducted.

All organizations and actors interviewed would welcome a database that is simple to use and to maintain and they are prepared to contribute to its development. It is recommended that this idea be taken forward by Afghan actors and that international donors consider supporting it with technical and financial input.

7.5   The role for the international community and others in civil society development:

One of the aims of this research was to inform donors and policy makers of any findings and recommendations that would be relevant to their operations in Afghanistan. The paramount role for the international community was seen to be to provide security. Some ambivalence was expressed towards donor countries, which were seen to be furthering their own aims, and towards foreign assistance, with its intermittent funding, lack of long term strategies and sustainability.   Respondents complained that the views of Afghan civil society were not being taken   seriously   nonetheless   all   those interviewed felt that there had been and should be a role for the international community in supporting civil society development. However there was much less clarity about how it should be accomplished.

There was a general view that civil society and government should be developed in parallel and that very basic training courses were needed for the staff of civil society organizations. Links to international organizations and actors and real technical assistance and capacity development were greatly valued.   Further assistance was requested to allow Afghans to use their indigenous knowledge with new skills in order that to do the essential jobs that Afghanistan needs. Evaluation of assistance and capacity development programmes was vital both to allow for adjustment and improvement in them

and to motivate staff to continue with and develop their work.

Donors were thought to have the responsibility to keep themselves informed about Afghan civil society and to follow the precepts of the Paris Declaration which all major donors have signed. In practice donor programmes are often found wanting when it comes to civil society; funding has been short term, priorities have been changed without warning or consultation and programmes have been designed according to donor goals and policies which are often global rather than Afghan specific.

Conflation of NGOs with CSOs has been an issue, but there has been inadequate consultation with either; despite statements of support in donors' policy documents. There is little evidence that the majority of donors are building worthwhile links with civil society; with some honourable exceptions – for example the Swiss Development Cooperation has a good track record.

DFID is an example of a donor country ministry that had demonstrated the value of working with civil society as laid out in its Statement of Purpose. At the time of this study this initiative did not seem to have been pursued for some time. However consideration was being given by DFID as to how it could begin to do so again working with a consortium of donors.

It should be possible, and desirable, to use donor funding as a catalyst for indigenous development and to support a long term strategy for co-ordination and collaboration. There should be a balance between external funding and entirely locally driven programmes which would allow the organic growth of a civil society based on deep rooted notions of community solidarity. In the longer term an Afghan driven strategy incorporating consistency of approach of outcome and evaluation would be valuable. Too often the experience of ANGOs and NGOs has been as supplicants; not even junior partners. However some NGOs have decades of experience working in Afghanistan and in some cases have been subsidising the national programmes such as the National Solidarity Programme, often at the cost of their own reputation and financial security.

It is not just donors that were said to have shown a lack of engagement with civil society; the same was said of the Afghan Government and the UN, other than superficial consultations to meet for "box-ticking" purposes. As with international donors, the problem is to define how proper engagement can be achieved.

A crucial first step is the empowerment of people through literacy and numeracy programs and knowledge of their rights and responsibilities as citizens through access to information and education. Mobile phones have already had a great impact on information exchange allowing those who own them to communicate and gain information.. This and other developments in the media have resulted in the increase in available information and the expansion of people's horizons.

Civil society organizations and activists have responsibilities too. They need to be clearer about the type and level of support they require and to develop their policies and programmes with integrity and honesty. Donors could and should assist these efforts with a willingness to provide longer term funding and to employ staff whose responsibility is to relate to civil society. These staff should have a budget to fund small scale and pilot projects and to evaluate the work they fund. Both the international community and civil society should aim for improvements based on the values that are important to them, however in the long run real progress will be made through local Afghan commitment and effort.

7.6   Civil Society organizations/activists as agents for change

The consensus of those interviewed was that there had been positive developments in civil society in Afghanistan over the last few years; some as a result of civil society actions and some by the advent of mass media and telecommunications.

The staff of CSOs and activists did not find it easy to identify how any of their programmes might have been agents for change. This was due in part to feelings of powerlessness as the general situation in Afghanistan seemed to be

deteriorating and their views were not taken into account and partly because the work had not been evaluated. The relative lack of communication about civil society work in Afghanistan to the outside world exacerbated these feelings. There was a view that the power people could exert through collective action was unrecognised and therefore under-used.

The involvement of young people in their own future and that of the country was considered essential, and in that they should be supported by the national government as well as the international community. Education about civic and individual rights and responsibilities and in peace and reconciliation should be a paramount objective. Peace-building programmes have had positive outcomes and unexpected benefits according to independent evaluators.

The fact that concepts such as human rights, activism and the role of civil society are now debated, at least by a proportion of the population, is an example of development. People who have come up through the ranks of CSOs, including NGOs, have not only done valuable work in their organizations but have taken their experience in management and social action into the government at all levels. Men and women of all ages are available and willing in growing numbers to brief and lobby opinion formers and decision makers, privately and publicly in Afghanistan and internationally. In doing so, and in being visible, women and young people play a part in normalising these actions for others who follow. Their activities have also had spin offs in improvement in other sectors (health, child care, agriculture etc), in family attitudes and ultimately in incomes.

It is often difficult to see these improvements when preoccupied with daily struggles and difficulties, but the Afghanistan of today is different from the Afghanistan of 5 years ago and civil society actors have played their part in the changes. They however feel that they should have and could have had a greater impact if they had acted collectively. Issues which claimed their attention at the time of the study included corruption, civilian casualties (whatever their cause), and the actions of anti-government and international forces. NGOs and

CSOs should also endeavour to collaborate wherever possible since this will speed up the processes. All those interviewed stressed the need to come together. With strength in numbers would come an enhanced ability to influence the government and, with international links, the possibility of influencing international decision makers.

Civil society activists have been agents for change even if they have not always recognised this or the changes they have achieved. This seems to be due in part to a lack of confidence particularly among women and girls. Improving the opportunities for education will have a great impact as will well designed capacity development programmes. NGOs should set an example by employing women on an equal basis, including at senior level.

There was some unease about the leaders of civil society becoming too involved in politics. As a result some organizations have been reluctant to become involved in advocacy because they have seen it as too 'political' and therefore risky, but it was recognised that it was more necessary than ever and that advocacy for human security is essential. CSOs staff members recognize that security is paramount - if people are hungry and fearful then they are less likely to have the energy for peace-building and other civic activity.

7.7   Other Issues

7.7.1   Traditional and Modern societies – are they opposed?

Almost all of those interviewed seemed to accept that there are aspects of traditional society that are worth preserving, albeit in modernised form, and that some, such as voluntary actions to assist fellow citizens, deserve to be revived and maintained.

The stereotyping of religious leaders as being likely to be more right wing in their views, for example in attitudes to women, has been unhelpful. Their inclusion in the debates and capacity development programmes are likely to prove more fruitful in the long run. Younger religious leaders have been found using the language of democracy and human rights and supporting development activities. They reconcile these concepts with the values of

Islam; to encourage peace and poverty reduction and to serve the needs of their communities. NGOs and others have seemed reluctant to accept this might be the case and therefore said to have refused to engage with them. If true, this is short sighted and self defeating.

Women have an apparently valued place in society, but (despite some kind and honourable fathers, husbands and sons) even educated and urban women are still far from enjoying, in practice, their rights and entitlements under the Constitution. The lives of others are being lived in abject misery. The international community should concentrate more on supporting Afghan women who are struggling for empowerment, with their male supporters. Women are more restricted in their lives, but some have emerged with great courage to transcend social norms and they and their sisters deserve more support and protection.

People are affected by a complexity of relationships, dependencies, power through weapons, money, influence and fear. While there are real differences of opinion between civil society actors, there are also misperceptions and long standing resentments. These could be resolved using techniques that many activists practise in their peace-building and reconciliation programmes. Fundamental changes cannot be forced beyond a certain pace. There are similarities in the tenets of Islam and democracy such as religious pluralism, peace and equality which should mean that the best aspects of both can inform the development of Afghan society.

7.7.2 Ethnicity
All who contributed to this study, Afghan and non-Afghan alike, were concerned by the use of ethnic delineations by government officials, parliamentarians and international actors. Each ethnic group feels that it has experienced discrimination and it is often impossible to distinguish perception from reality.

Civil society could play a key role here, firstly by discussing how to bring the issues into the open and then instituting ways forward to reduce the discord. Cultural activities and awareness-raising through the media could also be used to good effect.

7.7.3 Peace building.
This has been an important part of and made a significant contribution towards the development of civil society. Peace building programmes have contributed to a reduction in conflict, positive changes in behaviour and a lessening of the workload of government officials in the districts in which they have been carried out. There is a need for these programmes to be extended to cover the whole of the country, and to begin to engender a climate of peace. The development and extension of peace-building programmes, especially for women, and those offering civic education is strongly recommended.

7.7.4 Civil society developments
Afghanistan has a rich cultural legacy which is part of the national identity and is crucial to the development of civil society. National and international institutions have been instrumental in fostering this, and the national pride that comes with it, through the preservation and restoration of historic buildings and gardens, art, music, theatre, film, poetry and literature. These aspects of life are seen as just as important as other aid and development programmes.

Except for young, urban Afghans, usually male, access to recreational physical activity has been difficult for young people, including school children, . Where programmes, such as those offering cricket, boxing and judo have been provided they have borne dividends in health, confidence and enjoyment.

Development will be a function of time, indigenous effort and appropriate international support as well as recognition of the power of collective voices and actions. Evaluation of and consequently awareness raising about the achievements of civil society are equally important. As a precursor to that, it is recommended that examples of civil society development are collected; and what has been helpful to them, the processes that have brought them about and the recommendations arising from them. The recommendations are likely to include support for the efforts of young people, the continuation of training in, and opportunities for, management experience that will result in them being able to work effectively in a variety of government, non government and civil arenas.

Some success has been seen, often at the risk of personal life and security. Outside assistance, despite its drawbacks, is still seen as key, with the provision of resources that will improve capacity and continuity to civil society work. The co-ordinating bodies could collaborate and co-ordinate in a more strategic manner and international support for civil society development is seen as essential, not least in the opportunities it provides for international level advocacy to complement that of national advocacy.

There is the dilemma of foreign money coming with foreign agendas. It is incumbent on international personnel to recognise that their role is to facilitate Afghan led civil society development, rather than assuming that they are there to bring knowledge to an under developed society. They must therefore recognise the existing social capital and provide or support well designed and well executed capacity development programmes with long term strategies which do not encourage a short term and competitive project driven culture.

It is incumbent upon Afghans to be clearer about what assistance they require, to bring about change and help to navigate out of the current situation to a time where people can freely and collectively advocate for their rights and the development of their country. This may mean being less politically naive and more media savvy and insisting on being part of relevant planning for strategies, frameworks and implementation, and to drive their way into, at least, an equal partnership if not the leading role.

7.7.5   Conferences.
Many conferences have taken place in Afghanistan and elsewhere which have involved civil society to a greater or lesser extent, but the outcomes had usually been thought disappointing. One reason for this had been the lack of preparation time, another that follow-up had rarely been built into the process, and thirdly the perception that the agenda and findings had been set in advance by the international donor(s).

Despite the level of disappointment there was still a feeling that it should be possible to run an effective conference with worthwhile outcomes.

There should therefore be a process to review a selection of key conferences that have taken place and the lessons learned from them. It is likely that one of the recommendations from that review would be that that Afghans should run the process, set the agenda and decide on the participation, extent and nature of any external expertise they deem necessary.

Another idea worth recommended for consideration would be to have a standing conference on civil society. Rather than depending on high profile one off events and all the costs associated with such processes, introducing an ongoing process of debating key issues and agreed key messages and decisions arising from the discussions can be fed into conferences and other fora as they occur.

7.7.6   Civil and uncivil society
The basis for a vibrant society in which people will live fulfilling lives is education of all kinds and it is to be hoped that ways will be found to provide it at all levels. It is also hoped that the personal sacrifices made by pioneering activists, particularly women, will pave the way for less risky times for their successors.

7.8   The future
Afghan civil society is alive and well, and is not as weak as some might think it is. Civil society organizations and actors will hopefully request and receive more appropriate international support but it is to be hoped that it is on its way to bigger and better things with or without it.

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APPENDIX ONE: Itineraries and Meetings

Itineraries for field visits to Afghanistan

First field visit for preparatory work: 26.07.08 to 5.08.08 Kabul, the Capital City and Farza a District of the Province of Kabul.

Meetings and preliminary discussions were held in Kabul and in Farza, with the following people and organizations:

ACBAR   Afghan Co-ordinating Body for Afghan Relief; Anja de Beer

ACSF   Afghan Civil Society Forum; Director Aziz Rafiee and Consultant Jawed Nader

AWSDC   Afghan Women's, Skills Development Centre, Director Mary Akrami

CPAU   Co-operation Peace and Unity; Chairman Mhd Suleman Kakar, Director Kanishka Nawabi and Head of Programmes, Mirwais Wardak

IDLG   Government Independent Directorate of Local Governance; Director Jelani Popal

SDO   Sanayee Development Organization; Director Raz Mhd Dalili

TLO   Tribal Liaison Office; Director Massoud Karokhail

Second Field Visit: 10.10.08 – 1.11.08 Kabul and Ghor

Meetings and individual semi structured interviews were conducted as follows:

12.10.08   Informal off the record meeting with members of an occasional civil society group

13.10.08   Hamidullah Natiq, Independent Consultant

                Belquis Ahmadi, Independent Consultant and human rights expert

14.10.08   Farhana Faruqi Stocker, Director Afghanaid

15.10.08   Jawed Ludin, Government of Afghanistan, previously with ACBAR and CPAU

16.10.08   Meeting of civil society activists hosted by ACSF

                CPAU senior staff

17.10.08   Masoom Stanekzai, Government of Afghanistan, previously with civil society

18.10.08   Anja de Beer, Director ACBAR

                Shinkai Karokhail, Member of Parliament, Mary Akrami, AWSDC, Marzia Meena,

                Independent consultant

Paula Kantor, Director AREU

19.10.08   Rina Amiri, Regional Adviser, Open Society Institute

Kanishka Nawabi, Director CPAU

20.10.08   Hakimyar, Director FCCS and Dr Niazi, Adviser

Hanneke Kouwenberg, Independent Consultant

21.10.08   Kerry Jane, Director of Zardozi

22.10.08   CPAU senior staff

Andreas Huber, Swiss Development Cooperation

Ian White, Sean O'Boyle Glencree

24.10.08   Ewen Mcleod, Country Representative UNHCR

25.10.08 - 28.10.08 - Visit to Ghor Province, capital Chagcharan and outlying

Districts, hosted by Afghanaid Director, Farhana Faruqi Stocker and Provincial Manager Zia Ahmed together with Sultani, Livelihoods Adviser and sectoral staff

-   AIHRC, Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission Provincial Office
-
-   Director Abdul Ghaffar Malikzai and staff member Saara, previously with ACSF
-
-   DOWA, Provincial Department Minister of Womens Affairs, Chief, Masooma Anwari, Candidate for Parliament and CDC member and staff Siamoy Jalai and Sharifa
-
-   Meeting with civil society activists; Nabi Sakhi, Teacher Training Centre and the youth organization Anjuman Jawan, Mhd Hassan Hakimi, and Lydia

    National Foundation for Youth
-
-   Provincial Manager Ministry Rural Rehabilitation and Development Taj Mhd Zuhar
-
-   Head of UNAMA Provincial Office, Haji Mhd Gul Seddique and Human Rights Office
-
-   Deputy Governor of Ghor

Visit to District outside Chagcharan to a boys school, a girls school and Child to Child Peer Groups

29.10.08 – 1.11.08 Kabul and later the following joint and individual meetings were held:

Discussion of provisional findings with civil society activists (some could not attend as it was on the day of a government invitation to civil society and at the time a deadly attack was made at the Ministry of Culture) at a meeting hosted by OSI

Mary Akrami, AWSDC

Sultan Fazil, Independent consultant

Shinkai Karokhail, Member of Parliament

Dr Niazi, FCCS

Soraya Palikar, head of a women's NGO

Nilofar Sakhi, Country Representative, OSI

Other follow up discussions took place with:

Aziz Rafiee, Director ACSF

TLO, Masood Karokhail

AWSDC, Director Mary Akrami

IDLG, Director, Jelani Popal

AWSDC, Mary Akrami, Shinkai Karokhail, MP, Marzia Meena, Independent Consultant

AREU, Director, Paula Kantor

SDC, Country Representative, Andreas Huber

CPAU, Mirwais Wardak

Dawn Ericcson, Consultant to FCCS

Seema Ghani, Director Khorasan charity for children and business adviser on Tolo TV equivalent of Dragon's Den

H.E Homayoun Tandar, Ambassador to the United Kingdom

DFID, informal discussions

Irfanullah Ghazi, MP for Farza, Mhd Hakim, CPAU Farza and CHECK, Head of Shura Paghman

Commentators on the first draft of the Report:

Mary Akrami, AWSDC

Abdul Basir, BAAG

Raz Mhd Dalili, SDO

Jawed Ludin, in his capacity as a civil society activist

Hamidullah Natiq, Independent Consultant

Mirwais Wardak, CPAU

Kanishka Nawabi, CPAU

Aziz Rafiee, ACSF

Mhd Suleman, Chair CPAU

APPENDIX TWO OPEN ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INTERVIEWEES

for CSO activists and staff of civil society organizations, Co-ordinating Bodies, Afghan and international NGOs, the UN, donors, and researchers.

Introductory remarks were made about the purpose of the study and general questions asked about the participants' views about the state of civil society in Afghanistan and, where appropriate, referring to previous conversations with the researcher.

Specific questions used as a guide in discussions

1.   Definition:
    -    What do you/others understand by the term?
    -    Who do you include/exclude?
    -    Do you think there is agreement on the term?
    -    Do you think a working definition might be helpful and if so in what way?
    -    How could this be achieved?

2.   Database:
        Do you have access to a database?
    -    Does your organization have one?
    -    Do you think an amalgamated one would be useful and if so how?
    -    How do you think one could be achieved?

3.   Role for the International Community and others:
    -    Has the international community played a part and if so how?
    -    What role could the international community play now?
    -    What role if any should others play?

4.   Civil Society Organizations/Activists as Agents for Change:
    -    Have you/CSOs played a role in changes in civil society?
    -    What examples can you give?
    -    What needs to be done now to develop civil society in Afghanistan?
    -    What role have you/CSOs played in lobbying and advocacy?

5. Other issues:
    -    What role has there been/should there be for traditional structures/religious civil society and women in the development of civil society?
    -    What are your views on the apparent increase in ethnic reasoning in civil society and how it came about?
    -    What is the role for peace-building as a civil society activity?
    -    Has civil society developed in Afghanistan and if so how?
    -    What processes/consultations have occurred to date, e.g. conferences and what should occur now?
    -    Any other comments such as the dilemmas of civil and uncivil society?
    -    What recommendations should be   made?