

**National Conference on  
Civil Society Development in Afghanistan**

**(Development of Working Strategy for Civil Society in Afghanistan)**

**December 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> 2009**

**Funded by: (HBS, CPI & DED)**

## **1. Background**

Three Afghan Civil Society Development Conferences i.e. 2003, 2006 and 2008 was implemented in Kabul. There was a keen interest to conduct a fourth Afghan civil society development conference in order to review the situation and revisit the findings. It was also deemed necessary to check the mile stone and achievements set in the previous meetings and conferences.

The previous three Civil Society Development Conferences have been useful to bring the civil society organizations closer for establishing better working relationships and coordination, therefore, it was felt necessary to “Draft a Working Strategy for Civil Society in Afghanistan”. Afghan Civil Society Forum Organization (ACSFo) leading its partner Afghan CSOs along with partner International Organizations in a series of meetings agreed to follow up the previous conferences and proceed with the Fourth Afghan Civil Society Development Conference in Kabul for addressing various policy issues.

One of the main objectives of holding the conference was “finalization of the pre-developed working strategy by international and national experts, approving and adopting it for Civil Society in Afghanistan”. Hence, a two day conference on “National Working Strategy for Civil Society in Afghanistan” was convened in collaboration of international and national organizations on 14<sup>th</sup> and 15 of December 2009 at Safi Landmark Hotel.

### **1.1. Overview of civil society in Afghanistan:**

According to the speech delivered in the conference by Mr. Mohammad Hashim Mayar, Deputy Director of ACBAR, Civil society includes all formal and informal, non-governmental, not-for profit, independent groups and associations, which are engaged in serving the public good and have common objectives. Civil Society in Afghanistan includes, Councils, Khanaqa, Jirgas, Maliks System, Elderly System, CDCs, Social Organizations, Associations, Non Government Organizations (NGOs), Human Rights Organizations, cultural and literature organizations, women organizations, unions and labor associations, youth unions and associations, religious organizations, tribal groups, research and advocacy groups, lawyers unions and associations, media members, marginalized groups, trade unions, teachers associations, doctors associations, teachers associations and students associations. Some of these bodies are formal and registered with government while some of them are informal and are not registered with government.

On legal side the following laws are the basis of civil society in Afghanistan,

- i. First MoU for NGOs signed with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) in 1991
- ii. First law draft in Afghanistan was developed during Mujahedin government in 1993
- iii. 1995 first NGO regulations were developed and amended by the Taliban in 1997
- iv. 2005 First NGO Law was approved by the Council of Ministers, endorsed by the President and published in the Official Gazette, the law yet to be passed by the Parliament.
- v. 1980 Social Organizations Law was enacted and amended in 2003 and yet to be passed by Parliament.
- vi. New version of NGOs law and SOs law are currently under discussion in the parliament.
- vii. Currently 1774 NGOs, more than 1700 social organizations, 35,000 Mosques and Religious Organizations have been registered with the government.

After the fall of Taliban many International Organizations engaged for empowerment of Civil Society in Afghanistan. For this purpose different projects on have been launched. Such initiatives have positive impact in empowerment of Civil Society.

## **2. Organization and implementation of the Conference:**

The Afghan Civil Society Forum Organization (ACSFo) a leading afghan national civil society organization has implemented the project in collaboration with its civil society partners. ACSFo was developed as a

partnership between Afghan civil society actors and swisspeace at the request of 76 participants of the first Afghan Civil Society Conference in Bad Honnef, Germany (29 November – 2 December 2001).

The following prominent civil society and human rights organizations were partner with ACSFo in the implementation of the conference;

- i. Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC)
- ii. Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA)
- iii. Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium (HRRAC)
- iv. Agency Coordination Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR)
- v. Afghan NGO Coordination Body (ANCB),
- vi. Afghan Women Network (AWN)
- vii. Foundation for Culture and Civil Society (FCCS)
- viii. Civil Society and Human Rights Network (CSHRN) and
- ix. Southern and Western Afghanistan and Baluchistan Association for Coordination (SWABAC).

The above mentioned organizations are the leading afghan civil society organizations and implementation of the conference by the organizations was a great success which raised the voice of civil society in Afghanistan

### **2.1. Donors of the Conference :**

The main donor of the conference was Heinrich Boll Stiftung (HBS) while Counterpart International and DED also contributed to the end.

### **2.2. Working Committees of Conference:**

In order to have more organized and result-oriented conference ACSFo along with relevant donor and partner organizations decided to establish the following working committees for holding of the conference:

- i. Oversight committee,
- ii. Organizing committee,
- iii. Facilitation committee,
- iv. Invitation committee,
- v. Reporting and Media/PR committee.

These committees were established for arranging the conference. Official of the mentioned nine organizations were member of committees. The oversight and organizing committees used to meet before the conference and discussed overall organization and management of the conference. The committees were responsible for developing agenda, contents, identification of speakers and invitees of the conference.

### **2.3. Participation:**

There were 199 participants on the first day of the conference and 125 participants during the second day. One third of the participants were female. Two participants i.e. one male and one female participant were invited from each of the 33 provinces of Afghanistan. In this way 66 participants were invited from province but 73 participants (Mahram/spouse of female participants) participated from provinces. The rest of the participants i.e. experts, activist, representatives etc. were invited from Kabul. The list of the invitees was prepared in consensus of the other all the partners.

The participants were invited from the civil society organizations, social and civil activists, university professors, youth organizations, women and disabled associations including Afghanistan National Association of Blinds (ANAB) and other resource persons. Pashto, Dari and English language was medium of the conference.

### **3. Goal and objectives of conference:**

The goal of the conference was “To enrich the pre-developed working strategy by international and national experts, approve and adopt it for Civil Society in Afghanistan”

The objectives of the conference were as follows,

- i. To agree on common short-term and long-term working directions of the Civil Society in Afghanistan
- ii. To agree on an applicable, reachable and achievable objectives of a common strategy
- iii. To agree on coordination, cooperation and partnership approaches among the civil society organizations and other stakeholders .

### **4. Conference Contents:**

The conference was held for two days and during the first day of the conference the following sessions were held,

- Speeches – Day 1
- Zonal presentations – Day 1
- Group work - Day 1

During the second and final day of the conference the following session were held,

- Group work results presentations - Day 2
- Penal discussion – Day 2 and
- Question and answer session - Day 2.

#### **4.1. Speeches**

The first day of the conference started by recitation from Holly Quran. After opening speeches were made by the following speakers,

- i. Ms. Bente Aika Scheller, Country Director of HBS, talked on behalf of donor community who support civil society on "the donor's support and policies for Afghan civil society actors".
- ii. Mr. Aziz Rafiee, Executive Director of ACSFo was the first speaker, who talked on "purpose of the workshop, background and future plans".
- iii. Mr. Mohd. Hashim Basirat, Head of NGOs Directorate in ministry of economy, talked on "government plans and expectations from civil society on peace & conflict resolution".
- iv. Dr. Suraiya Subh Rang, AIHRC Commissioner, talked on "gender & human rights from a civil society perspective".
- v. Mr. Hamid Mobariz, Chairman of Afghanistan Journalists Union, talked on "a glance on the role of civil society for accountability & transparency".
- vi. Mr. Asadullah Walwalji, A Civil Society Activist, talked on "civil society and current situation in Afghanistan".
- vii. Mr. Mohammad Hashim Mayar, Deputy Director of ACBAR, talked on "CS development and its chronology".
- viii. Mr. Laurent Saillard, Director of ACBAR, talked on "London Conference and its requirements

#### **4.2. Group work**

The third component of the conference was group work and there were eight working groups constituted. The participants were divided into eight working group and each of the group contained up to 25 persons. Following were the topics of the working groups to consider;

- i. Coordination and participation
- ii. Advocacy, research and public awareness
- iii. Capacity building and organizational development
- iv. Monitoring and evaluation, transparency and accountability
  - v. Disaster management, security, peace and conflict resolution
- vi. Good governance and rule of law
- vii. Human rights, humanitarian law and gender
- viii. Vision, mission, goal and objectives of civil society organizations

There were three facilitators with each working group who were responsible for facilitation, note taking and reporting of the group's findings. The facilitators were selected from the partner and donor organizations. All the groups discussed one of the eight topics and after deliberation the findings of the group work were presented before all of the participants who put their questions and got answers.

#### **4.3. Presentations**

From developmental point of view Afghanistan was once divided into seven zones by UN for its activities. Each of the seven zones was invited to present a presentation on the situation civil society of their respective zones. Representative of each of the zones presented situation of civil society organizations, their activities and challenges ahead of them in their respective areas. The details of the seven zones and their representatives are as follows;

- i. Mr. Aminullah Zazai from Paktya – Southern zone.
- ii. Mr. Amanullah Nasrat from Nangarhar – Eastern zone.
- iii. Mr. Mohammad Shah Storai from Qandahar – Southern zone.
- iv. Mrs. Suriaya Pakzad from Herat – Western zone.
  - v. Mr. Rajab Ibrahimy from Balkh – Northern zone.
- vi. Mr. Haqjoo from Qundoz – North Eastern zone and
- vii. Mr. Hadi Besharat from Bamyán – Central zone

The representatives were selected by the invitation committee from different prominent civil society organization.

#### **4.4. Penal Constitution and Q & A**

A panel of sixteen people including representatives of working groups and their secretaries were formed to answer the questions of participants created during the conference and especially during the group work presentations.

In the end of the session each of the participants was asked to write one definition and four priorities for civil society organizations of Afghanistan. During the session many questions were asked by different participants and answered by relevant representatives.

### **5. Challenges**

During the implementation of the conference the following challenges were successfully met with,

- i. Fixing of the date of the conference was readjusted two times because of the oath taking ceremony of President Hamid Karzai and his deputies
- ii. SDC workshop was also fixed before the event.
- iii. Precautionary measures were announced by govt. against the potential threat of Swine flu in Kabul.
- iv. There was suicide attack in Wazir Akbar Khan on the second day of the conference.
- v. Cold weather

All the activities of the conference held according to the already developed work plan.

## **6. Achievements**

The achievements of two-day long conference on development and finalization of working strategy for civil society in Afghanistan can be outlined as bellow:

- The participants and civil society organizations got further Information on situation of civil society, their activities and challenges ahead of them in seven different zones.
- The future activities and strategic line for civil society were out lined, categorized and prioritized.
- The priorities for CSOs were proposed and outlined by the participants
- Information and data for development and finalization of civil society strategy were collected.

## **7. Conclusion**

As the result of all hard working, preparation and coordination among all involved entities the two day conference could take place in a way which had very useful and tangible outcomes. Both participation and organization of the conference were great.

Mr. Aziz Rafiee, Executive Director of ACSFo who talked on "purpose of the Conference, background and future plans" added that the past eight years has not been a good experience for CSOs and we all have missed the opportunity of institutionalizing democracy in Afghanistan. The CSOs were engaged with providing social services; while their key activities are institutionalizing civil values and advocacy. CSOs not only paid attention to key activities of CSOs but also provided incomplete social services. He hoped that the conference could pave the way for strategic line for CSOs as well as future. Mr. Rafiee also mentioned that "successful implementation of the conference is the result of donor organizations and local partners support and cooperation. We really thank them in this regard".

Ms. Bente Aika Scheller, Country Director of HBS, talked on behalf of donor community who support civil society on "the donor's support and policies for Afghan civil society actors". She mentioned that this is actually the third conference in a row that has been served to develop the strategy for CSOs and what can be more impressive than CSOs becoming as active that they can over a number of years really work on a common strategy. She added that they as donor can be there and can give the right support and therefore, they are looking very eagerly at the discussion and at the results of the conference. It is of course one of the facts that the progress is not quite enough and would need some more support in some areas. Also in the last conference a number of areas have been identified like civil society and security, civil society as a watch dog, civil society as fighter corruption. In the mentioned areas the international community has not done enough to support civil society; but there is way for improvement. According to her idea on the basis of developed strategy will be easier for international community to really support civil society. Of course the next step is the implementation of the strategy because it is the goal of each strategy to be implemented. As part of commitment with Afghan Civil Society, Ms. Bente mentioned that "external support for civil society can be only as good as the international community tailors its support to the desires and needs of civil society - and therefore it is important to let everybody know what the priorities of Afghan civil society are".