



## Insecurity as an Obstructing Factor for CSOs Development

### Introduction

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have made significant contributions to the inclusive and equitable development of Afghanistan. CSOs are providing critical services and support to Afghans in hard-to-access parts of the country that the government and other actors cannot reach. CSOs also play a key role in advocating on behalf of the Afghan people to their government for promotion and protection of human rights, access to basic services, and good governance, among other issues. However, despite being bolstered by major progress in their activities, capacity, and reach, CSOs in Afghanistan continue to face risks in terms of security, political stability, and their own sustainability.<sup>1</sup>

Security<sup>2</sup> is critical for CSOs to fulfill their social responsibilities and enhance their accessibility. A flourishing civil society typically depends upon the security provided by an effective and democratic government that ensures the rule of law. Insecurity impedes the vital role of CSOs in terms of limiting their access to specific locations, impacting the smooth implementation of their activities, and compromising their staff security.<sup>3</sup> In Afghanistan, like other crisis-affected countries, insecurity, significantly constrains the humanitarian work of humanitarian organizations (Including CSOs) and hinders the ability of people in emergencies to access vital aid.<sup>4</sup>

According to the International NGO Safety Organization (INSO), a total number of incidents reported in Afghanistan for Jan-June 2018 is 15442 (64.6% by AOG<sup>5</sup>, 21.2% by GOA<sup>6</sup>, and 6.2 ACG<sup>7</sup>). Among this, the NGO incident rate comprises a gross count of all incidents that involved an NGO is about 86 which includes arrest, abduction, robberies, intimidation and improvised explosive devices (29.1% robberies, 24.4% threat, 17.4% direct fire, 11.6% abduction, and 8.1% IED<sup>8</sup>).<sup>9</sup>

This policy brief discusses CSOs security, including the overall situation, the impact of insecurity on CSOs' work and its associated challenges and opportunities. It provides relevant recommendations to CSOs, the Afghan government, and donors. AICS, an Afghan CSO focused on promoting an enabling environment for Afghan civil society, prepared the brief based on qualitative field research conducted in Kabul and key provinces as well as desk review specifically the State of Enabling Environment for CSOs in Afghanistan (SEECA) report published by AICS in the last couple of years.

### Context Analysis

The INFORM Global Risk Index<sup>10</sup> for 2018 ranks Afghanistan amongst the five countries globally with the highest risk of humanitarian crisis and disasters in the world for the third year in a row<sup>11</sup> and the Integrated Regional Information Network, a service of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, rates Afghanistan as the world's most dangerous place for aid workers.<sup>12</sup> Earlier in 2011, Counterpart International found that deteriorating security is among the top three key factors that hamper the effectiveness of CSOs in Afghanistan. Besides, the Asian Development Bank reported that "the deterioration in security conditions has resulted in the delay and postponement of some projects implemented by CSOs."<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, in another measure, 44 percent of CSOs say security has become more of an impediment to their operations in the last three years (in urban areas 51% and in rural or combined rural/urban areas 33 %). 79 to 89 percent CSOs also express concern about possible increased insecurity, political instability and the potential for reduced influence of CSOs which negatively impacting their organizations in the transition<sup>14</sup> period.<sup>15</sup>

This policy brief discusses how insecurity affects CSOs' geographical access, implementation of CSOs' activities, and threats safety of CSOs' staff.

## CSOs' Geographical Access

Insecurity continues to be a major problem for Afghan CSOs, especially in rural areas where military forces are more thinly spread and the Taliban insurgency has been active.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, CSO activities are urban-focused and indeed in many cases Kabul-centric, with difficulties reaching rural Afghans given both security and accessibility. As a result, only 12 percent of Afghan CSOs overall have expanded their activities to new provinces (less-secure areas). The government's diminished influence away from urban centers and the weaker relations between CSOs and the people are among accessibility challenges, especially in the case of Kabul-based CSOs.<sup>17</sup>

The majority of aid personnel interviewed in 2016 by Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) said that they would not accept funding to expand programming into a new region, in which they were not well established, due to security reasons.<sup>18</sup>

Some CSOs stated, "the districts where we work are fairly secure but reaching those districts from Kabul or any other part of Afghanistan is not safe". The majority of respondents (72%) stated that access to different locations is completely (50%) or somewhat (22%) restricted. The number of districts where aid agencies were implementing their projects has dramatically decreased by 40% between 2012 and 2014.<sup>19</sup> CSOs' representatives believe that this coverage has reduced further in the last three years.<sup>20</sup>

## Impact of Insecurity on Implementation of CSO's Activities

When CSOs are able to access a location, overall they are able to safely implement their programs or projects. In accessible locations, 79% of respondents stated that the environment is secure (24% stated fully secure and 55% stated secure to some extent) to implement projects.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, some CSOs face different threats due to their role as advocates for human rights, justice, and women's rights. The threats come from different sources and are not necessarily limited to insurgents or the Taliban. CSOs implement relief projects reported insurgents, powerful local individuals, and militia leaders demanded bribes to allow groups to bring relief supplies into the country and distribute them.<sup>22</sup>

CSOs also realize that having community support promotes their safety and viability for project implementation. Provincial and district-based CSOs enjoy more community support than organizations based in Kabul.<sup>23</sup> To deal with insecurity, most CSOs in Afghanistan employ localization – a means of maximizing community acceptance – as their primary coping strategy.<sup>24</sup>

For media organizations, it is also challenging to ensure the protection of their journalists when they publish critical reports on sensitive matters (e.g., bribing, human rights violations, and corruption charges).<sup>25</sup> This is even more challenging when journalists operate at the subnational level

or especially in areas under the control of local strongmen.

Some international NGOs, many UN agencies, and donors travel with armed escorts and they use curfews, convoy, radio checks, security around accommodation and insurance coverage. This sends a signal to insurgents that humanitarian and aid agencies (including CSOs) and the military cooperate closely.<sup>26</sup> In addition, some CSOs said that INGOs spend a lot of money to support the security of their staff, but when it comes to the local CSOs who go far-flung and less secure areas to implement the programs, no sufficient budget is allocated for their security.<sup>27</sup>

## Threats and Personal Security of CSOs staff

The personal safety and security for CSO staff and members is depending on location and on gender. The majority of respondents (74%) perceived the environment to be secure for CSO staff and members to work, with 26% feeling insecure.<sup>28</sup> Insecurity has been a major challenge for women working with CSOs. When asked if the gender of the staff affected their security, the majority of the respondents (68%) confirmed that gender was an important factor.<sup>29</sup> Thus, women face various threats in form of harassment, intimidation, retaliation and even murder.

The number of major attacks against aid workers in Afghanistan is the highest, in absolute numbers, of any humanitarian context.<sup>30</sup> In Afghanistan, the most common form of attack is kidnapping and has also had a relatively high number of 'complex' attacks employing sophisticated weaponry and explosives.<sup>31</sup>

Despite all the progress in the last decade, implementation of laws has often been inadequate, particularly on the issue of violence against media. Afghan Journalist Safety Committee (AJSC) reporting a marked increase in 2018 attacks by 21.9% compared to first six months of 2017. AJSC has recorded 89 cases of violence against journalists, which included killing, beating, inflicting injury and humiliation, intimidation, and detention.<sup>32</sup> Government-affiliated individuals or security forces also committed violence against journalists and were responsible for 34 instances of violence, leaving 39 instances attributable to the Taliban and ISIS-K.<sup>33</sup> Media organizations and journalists operating in remote areas were more vulnerable to violence and intimidation because of increased levels of insecurity and threats from insurgents, warlords, and organized criminals.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, cases of violence against media workers including reporters and journalists are not followed up properly by the judiciary.

## Conclusion

CSOs and their activities are responsive to insecurity, both in the sense of insecurity as a general state where anybody is targeted and in the sense of civil society being specifically targeted. The security situation in Afghanistan has been deteriorating significantly in the last few years, particularly in the rural areas where there is no proper security protection. It has a serious impact on CSOs' development in the country.

Besides, CSOs' staff are not only targeted by insurgents but also by the government officials and local power-holders. As a result, insecurity has impeded CSOs accessibility to the majority of districts and their populations, slowed down implementation of CSOs activities and put the lives of CSOs staff at risk. Insecurity has specifically affected the outreach of media organizations and women led CSOs. On the other hand, the government has neither been able to sufficiently follow-up the cases of CSOs' security threats nor has created effective mechanisms to reduce CSOs' vulnerability to security threats. Therefore, CSOs ability has been

impeded and often they suspended their programs in insecure sites.

Keeping above constraints in mind, CSOs and government should consider CSOs security issue as a priority. The government should increase consultation with CSOs to come up with effective mechanisms to reduce the threats deteriorating the space for CSOs and media organizations. And CSOs should tighten their security preparations, build their capacity and awareness as well as raise more community support to expand their viability and accessibility.

## Recommendations\*

CSOs need to develop a follow-up mechanism for CSOs' security needs. Though corruption, the existence of warlords, favoritism, nepotism, lack of awareness make it difficult for CSOs and media workers to follow up their security threats. There should be an effective information-sharing system from the intelligence agencies through which they share information about any probable attack or threat to CSOs and Media organizations.

By building a sustainable relationship with the community (through formal agreements, negotiations, conducting meetings and delivering clear public statements) as well as by respecting community norms (appearance, culture, and behavior), CSOs should further boost their acceptance from communities and increase their local protection.

CSOs should be able to operate without being affiliated to any armed group and part of the conflict. They should observe neutrality, professionalism, impartiality, and independence to increase their local security.

CSOs and media organizations should train their staff on "Safety and Security Guides" prepared as per the requirements of CSOs' security needs and local security threats.

Gender equality should be strictly followed and integrated into security compositions and processes. Needs of female CSO staff should be considered in preparing security structures, policies, capacity building plans and resource-allocation by the government.

The government should also train security and judiciary personnel to ensure cases of violence against CSOs are fairly treated. The training should include respect to humanitarian space and principles. The government must ensure that cases of violence against CSOs and media personnel are addressed without unnecessary delays.

Security agencies should adhere to Article 46 of the NGO Law that states "security bodies can acquire information concerning the activities of organizations only through the Ministry of Economy".

CSOs working in fragile contexts should consider working with traditional and religious leaders, who are able to play an important role in changing community attitudes and practices and influencing state actors. It is important to understand the contexts in which traditional leaders are working and identify factors that will motivate them to become change agents.

Ministry of Interior Affairs and CSOs coordination bodies should increase their mutual consultation about CSOs security issues and establish an emergency unit in the Ministry of Interior to reach CSOs in case of emergency threats and insecurity.

Donors should allocate sufficient budget for CSOs' safety and security measures in order to ease implementation of CSOs' security policies and procedures.

## About Afghanistan Institute for Civil Society

To Support a credible and competent civil society sector in Afghanistan by linking CSOs, donors, government and capacity building services through culturally appropriate certification schemes. The institute will encourage the growth of a vibrant civil society, promoting pluralism and participatory, non-discriminatory development in Afghanistan.

### AICS's Objective

1. Raise credibility of the civil society sector by certifying local organizations against locally defined and internationally recognized standards;
2. Systematize capacity building efforts of local organizations by coordinating initiatives against measurable performance indicators;
3. Strengthen the role of civil society in Afghanistan's development through collective efforts of policy dialogue and active engagement with government, donors, the private sector and the broader civil society sector;
4. Provide a channel for resources for civil society by strengthening philanthropic and corporate social responsibility efforts.

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