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GDPRD Civil Society Organizations and Aid Effectiveness in Agriculture and Rural Development Applications Initiative

Good practices in AFGHANISTAN

BACKGROUND

With up to 80% of the Afghan population dependent on agriculture, the significance of the ARD sector cannot be underestimated. After more than 20 years of conflict, civil unrest, severe lack of investment and recurrent natural disasters, rural infrastructure has been debilitated and populations have been displaced. The 1998-2002 drought blighted wheat yields, land, livestock and savings, displaced populations and caused the forced migration of rural workers. With up to 53% of the population living in poverty, it is estimated that 6.6 million Afghans do not meet their minimum daily food requirements.

There have been significant flows of aid to Afghanistan since 2001. The 2006 Afghanistan Compact, a series of agreements between the Government of Afghanistan and the international community, seeks to ensure effective and timely delivery of aid which achieves outcomes and benchmarks consistent with the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS). However, against a backdrop of instability, insurgency and narcotic cultivation, there have been limitations in achieving effective aid.

In this fragile state, political instability over the last quarter century has decimated institutions of the state, making it difficult to distinguish among types of CSOs and their roles. Within this context, this summary report is the outcome of a national consultation held in Kabul as part of a global initiative to follow up on the 2005 Paris Declaration (PD) agenda. Present at the National Consultation were eight international and national CSOs, two representatives from key government ministries and one donor representative. It was a unique opportunity for multiple stakeholders to engage substantively on issues of aid effectiveness (AE) in ARD.

FINDINGS

Recognition and Voice

The consultation revealed that donor policies of channelling funds through Government and UN agencies are pushing CSOs into the role of implementers only. This singular, subordinate role can potentially limit the extent to which CSOs can actively participate in debates and the extent to which they can influence policy and strategy. Afghanistan is a complex environment and CSOs have responded to this by adopting multiple roles as humanitarian actors, defenders of rights, promoters of issues, advocates of democratic principles, service providers to the Government, capacity builders of the Government, contractors and implementers of donor policies.

Applying and Enriching the Aid effectiveness Agenda

The AE discourse has moved on significantly since 2005 and a majority of development actors acknowledge the limited extent to which CSOs can engage in a framework from which they have been omitted. Consequently, an AE framework that both recognizes the potential input of CSOs and their legitimacy as development actors, in terms of their right to participate, is essential if the agenda is to be relevant and functionally applicable.

CSOs can contribute to enriching the prevailing AE agenda in Afghanistan by encouraging the framework focus to be centred on the people for whom the aid is meant, rather than focusing only on the recipient government and its understanding of ownership. CSOs can also enrich the agenda by opening up the entire

development architecture, increasing participation and making interventions more representative of people's needs. While the Government is given a specific role in terms of owning the strategies which will be used for the reconstruction and development of the country, the people of Afghan population are not recognized as a legitimate owners of their own development. It is here that CSOs can contribute to the debate and act as advocates to raise such issues.

Improved Understanding of Good Practice

CSOs and their primary constituents: Participants commented on successful relationships with beneficiaries based on the establishment of local-level decision-making platforms and participatory approaches. Utilization of local skills in problem identification and monitoring and reviewing of programs are contributing significantly towards enhancing AE. They are also contributing to the acceptance of CSO presence at the village level. However, CSOs are more accountable to donors who provide funding than to the recipients of that funding, which significantly limits the extent to which CSOs can be outspoken in their representation.

Relationships between and among CSOs at country level and beyond: Participants noted the need for distinction between national and international CSOs. While the bigger international CSOs reported on collaborative approaches with each other, participation of this nature with local CSOs was often limited because of restricted resources preventing local CSOs from engaging in coordination efforts.

Relationships between Northern and Southern CSOs: In Afghanistan, Northern CSOs have predominately engaged with national CSOs in terms of capacity building. A recent trend has been larger international CSOs 'giving birth' to smaller national, community-owned CSOs. This type of collaboration is characterized by a supportive relationship. Some international CSOs think the trend will continue, whether these smaller organizations come from larger CSOs or from private sector firms. However, continued low participation from national CSOs, whether due to lack of resources or an unwillingness to contribute, continues to constrain inclusion of input from national CSOs in the country.

Relationships between CSOs and the Afghan government: Participants noted that a lack of internal government coordination made engaging with the government challenging. In addition, current donor trends of channelling assistance through the government have changed the role of CSOs, forcing them to move from service delivery operators to implementers of National Priority Programmes (NPPs). This is therefore restricting the extent to which CSOs can be flexible and dynamic in their approach to development. It also potentially limits the extent to which CSOs can focus on the most vulnerable groups. Thus, a reduced role for CSOs may result in limiting innovation and reducing the overall plurality of approaches as well as taking the focus away from rights awareness-based projects.

Relationships between CSOs and donors: A disproportionately high level of aid is being directed towards opium-intensive or insecure areas. Donors have failed to engage CSOs and as a result intensive focus on these areas is not based on need and the aid is not thought to be more effective. Aid used to achieve counter-narcotics or counter-insurgency objectives overlooks development needs in areas which are comparatively stable and can create perverse development incentives.

EMERGING GOOD PRACTICE

Northern Afghanistan Veterinary Association (NAVA)

The establishment of NAVA by the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) in response to the Government of Afghanistan 'Master Plan for Agriculture' is one of four examples of good practice in the ARD sector in Afghanistan. In terms of AE, the cluster approach taken by AKF – evident in the establishment of meso-level institutions such as NAVA – is significant. This approach provides an opportunity for the voice of local CSOs and communities to connect with institutions that would typically recognize them. In establishing NAVA, the AKF has given the elected Livestock Development Service Provider (LDSP) members – on behalf of their zones – a channel through which they can access, and be heard by, the

Afghanistan Veterinary Association (AVA). The contribution to AE in ARD – specifically through the implementation of a systematic paradigm shift towards working in clusters and establishing meso-level institutions – is significant. This process establishes a sustainable role for both Northern and Southern CSOs in giving Southern CSOs recognition in larger ARD institutions such as AVA. It also establishes productive working relationships between CSOs and the government, and continues to provide a systematic avenue for capacity building and service delivery.

Afghanistan Participatory Poverty Assessment (APPA) and the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS)

While there have been many instances of direct CSO consultation on behalf of the ANDS Secretariat, such as the establishment of an advisory board with representatives of CSOs, a key example of best practice is the APPA. The APPA, which is overseen by the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR), was implemented by partner CSOs in four provinces. Its aim was to inform the ANDS of the views of civil society. Through two major components – working with rural communities to identify their needs and implementing communication and advocacy activities – the APPA firmly established a voice for CSOs in developing government and donor strategy. In this way, APPA fulfilled its role as a provider of opportunities for communities to engage in decision-making processes that affect them.

Badakhshan Development Forum: Integrated Rural Rehabilitation Program to Improve Livelihoods and Curb Poppy Production in Northern Afghanistan

The Badakhshan Development Forum is a civil society initiative established in 2005 to facilitate effective coordination of CSO activities and priorities in Badakhshan province. The Forum is comprised of four CSOs and acts as a platform for engaging with and training government institutions. It is highly valued by provincial government and line ministries.

A successful initiative implemented by the Forum, the rural rehabilitation program aimed to create benefits to attract poor rural people away from opium farming, while generating lessons that can be scaled up and used to inform alternative livelihoods and development policy. The program utilized the members of the Forum in a joint initiative allowing the project partners to incorporate in-depth research and identify key approaches, methodologies and best practices in agriculture and livelihoods programming. It also allowed for relationship building between Northern and Southern CSOs in working with community groups, improved coordination between CSOs at the country level, and presented an effective program and strategic consensus on behalf of CSOs to donors and government agencies.

Kandahar Model – Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD)

The Kandahar model is a new methodology being used by MRRD that has evolved over the last year and provides a framework for working in insecure or high-risk environments. A Government of Afghanistan initiative, it is currently implemented in the southern state of Kandahar and specifically focuses on construction in insecure rural areas. It is an excellent example of how to work within a fragile state context and clearly has the foundations required for the model to be utilized in other provinces – and by other actors - regardless of the level of insecurity.

The key features of the model are the decentralisation of procurement and financial management coupled with community contracting of projects. While the model seeks to engage communities with the MRRD through the foundational CSO institutions of *Shuras* and Community Development Councils, larger and/or external CSOs could be involved using the same modus operandi with room also for the establishment of tri-partite agreements. AE is enhanced as projects are delivered at a lower cost and in a shorter timeframe. Local governance and CSOs are strengthened while promoting the relationship with the Government of Afghanistan at a local level.

More collaboration is required between larger CSOs and donors in agreeing to this methodology. The beginnings of this are already evident in the current review of the Kandahar model by the World Bank. This collaboration serves to strengthen not only developing-country government initiatives and capacity,

but also with the issues surrounding the politicization of aid in a fragile state such as Afghanistan, it allows for CSOs to be more actively involved in regions where there is funding, and where they have been excluded due to security concerns.

Recommendations for Advancing the Aid Effectiveness Agenda

The perception of CSOs as implementers only is detrimental to the potential of effective aid in the ARD sector in Afghanistan. Consultation participants recommended that CSOs working within the ARD sector be consulted as key development players, as they possess decades of varied and valid experiences which are central to the AE debate. In order for development policies and strategies to be effective, it is of fundamental importance that an accurate picture of the current situation is painted. CSOs, who are heavily involved in ARD and implementing current development interventions, are important contributors in this regard. They possess and can relay important information about the current situation. This is an important aspect of the CSO collective 'voice' in ARD and it is essential that it is heard to ensure that emerging policies link together well with activities that are already under way.

While acknowledging the inherent challenges that would come with the establishment of an AE 'Compact' for CSOs, Consultation participants recommended a framework including an interpretation of the 5 PD principles that would allow them to engage more fully in the international aid architecture. There is also a need for increased consultation between CSOs, government and donors at the country level with a focus on the effectiveness of implementation and increased attention to key issues such as politicization and militarization of aid. As a final step towards sustainability in this sector, donor funds need to be channelled towards capacity building of national CSOs in order for them to contribute more fully in the AE debate and agenda.

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