The role of civil society in promoting good governance

Sector Factsheet

What is Govern4Afg?

Govern4Afg (Governance Forum Afghanistan) as an overarching platform supports the governance sector in Afghanistan in the implementation of the *BMZ Country Strategy*. Its objective is to foster policy dialogue between Afghan and German *'Drivers of Change'* in the field of good governance.

Context

At the beginning of the transformation decade (2015–2025) in Afghanistan, the *National Unity Government (NUG)* has set benchmarks with the international community to realize the *'Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework' (SMAF)* highlighting 25 concrete short-term priorities for more transparent and effective governance structures.

This factsheet on *the role of civil society in promoting good governance* in Afghanistan reflects one of six areas addressed in the first year of implementation of Govern4Afg. The forum's results are based on the Afghan-international expertise of practitioners, experts and decision-makers with interdisciplinary academic backgrounds who have discussed and developed their views on *good governance* combined with a roadmap which regards sustainability, self-reliance and accountability as guidelines.

The absence or limited presence of formal state institutions in Afghanistan's localities, historically and in the contemporary context, due to persistent violent conflict, has often been translated into a vibrant and active *civil society (CS)*. This, in part, led to the need to have a conceptual understanding of civil society's role in the governance context in Afghanistan where the distinction between CS and government remains blurred. There are about 2,060 registered *Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs)* and 5,789 associations in Afghanistan, which are replacing in major areas state structures and delivering public services for Afghan citizens. In Western concepts CS is a corrective for the state whereas Afghan *civil society organisations (CSOs)* are supplementing the state's role.

In Afghanistan, definitions of CS can also include *shuras, jirgas, Community Development Councils (CDCs)* and other traditional structures and representatives such as the *ulemah* or *maliks*. These different organisations have been a vibrant aspect of Afghanistan's governance structures and continue playing an important role influencing the government and its decision-making processes. They represent in an unofficial way a part of statehood, where the state is yet not ready to cover certain fields. Therefore, engaging the local population and ensuring citizen participation in governance and development policy brings legitimacy to the government and creates an enabling environment for effective governance and policy reforms. As CS is playing the role of state institutions in lieu of a functioning statehood, it can equally be subject to corruption and patronage.

GIZ Afghanistan | Photo: GIZ

Results

The Govern4Afg expert team on CSO held open dialogue meetings with representatives of CS in Kabul and Mazar-e Sharif, including high-level key informant interviews in ministries, and compared various government policies with regard to the role of the CS in society. Govern4Afg established a dialogue on future steps with policy makers in government agencies and with other critical agenda setters. The resulting recommendations are condensed into three intertwined focal areas, where reforms should gain ground:

- Too strong monopolisation of some CSOs;

- Government's unclear position towards CS;

- Advocacy mechanisms for a positive understanding of a more responsive CS.

Recommendations

Recommendations have been categorised in *'government level'* and *'civil society level'*, to address as a first step these categories' very own potential for improvement. A rethinking of the self-perception of both has the potential to lead to more fruitful dialogue positively affecting governance structures.

Government level

- Establish consensus on the role and responsibilities of provincial structures such as *Provincial Councils (PC), Provincial Line Departments (PDs);*

- Strengthen awareness on 'access to information law';

- Ensure access to information for policy formulation and accountability;

- Discussion and coordination in priority policy fields;

- Use a wider definition of 'CSO' including associations, political and religious movements, labour unions, foundations and a whole range of *non-profit organisations (NPO)*;

- Strengthen already existing mechanisms such as the national CDC conference where local councils play their role in planning, formulation and design of nation-wide programs for local communities and taking these mechanisms a step further to ensure their active role from start till end.

Civil society level

- Drive an open dialogue by discussing sensitive and conflictive relationships and developing a code of conduct between Government – CSOs – Community;

- Improve their own accountability performance, responsiveness to citizens and become a more informed partner for the government;

- Follow up on implementation of policies in practice;

- Facilitate networking between CSOs on the regional and international level in order to promote the exchange of experience and learning;

- Develop further youth organisations and groups to ensure their active role as part of CS in promoting a culture for accountability and transparency (youth representing 65 % of the population under the age of 25).

Contact:

Bernd Messerschmidt
Sector Coordinator: Good Governance
Email: bernd.messerschmidt@giz.de

Implemented by: تطبیق کننده:

giz Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

KFW