

WOMEN AND INCLUSIVE PEACE BUILDING IN AFGHANISTAN



National Youth Debate, Kabul, 2012. Photo: Joen Van Houdt

Oxfam Programme Insights

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INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan is one of four Oxfam country programmes delivering the Within and Without the State (WWS) programme,¹ funded by DFID from 2011 to 2016 under the Conflict, Humanitarian and Security Programme Partnership Arrangement (CHASE PPA). WWS is piloting innovative approaches to working with civil society to promote more accountable governance in conflict-affected and fragile contexts.

This paper shares the programme learning within Oxfam and the wider development community.

In Afghanistan, WWS has been working to build the capacity of civil society and to promote the participation of women, youth, and other marginalized groups in the peace process. Essential to this approach has been the facilitation of opportunities for women, youth, and other civil society actors to engage with power-holders – to share their views of what peace means to them and to influence change at community, provincial, and national levels.

AFGHANISTAN: BACKGROUND

Box 1: Development indicators

Population: 33 million (2012)

Human Development Index ranking: 175 (2012)

Life expectancy: 49.1 (2012)

Infant mortality (deaths per 1,000 live births): 103 (2012)

Under-five mortality rate (deaths per 1,000): 149

Gender Inequality Index ranking: 147 (2012)

Seats in national parliament held by women: 27.6 per cent

Population with at least a secondary education: 20 per cent (2010)

Women with at least a secondary education: 5.8 per cent (2006–10)

Men with at least a secondary education: 34 per cent (2006–10)

Female participation in labour force: 15.7 per cent (2011)

Male participation in labour force: 80.3 per cent

Median age: 15.9 years (2012)

Poverty (percentage of people below the national poverty line): 36 per cent

Urban population: 24 per cent.²

Governance and accountability:

Voice and accountability: bottom 12 per cent internationally³

Government effectiveness: bottom 10 per cent internationally⁴

Political stability and absence of violence/terrorism: bottom 2 per cent⁵

Ranking in 2013 corruption index – 175 of 177.⁶

After more than three decades of war, the challenges facing Afghanistan remain immense. Between 1978 and 2001, the country experienced a series of conflicts and regime changes, with the Taliban dominating the socio-political landscape from 1994⁷ The destruction of core institutions of state and a war-torn economy have led to very high levels of poverty, ill health, illiteracy, and gender inequality.

Since the international intervention in 2001, around \$30bn⁸ has been spent by the international community on reconstruction and development; however, poverty, violence, and insecurity are still widespread. The current conflict between armed opposition groups (including the Taliban) and the Afghan government has been characterized by suicide attacks, roadside bombs, and abductions and killings by insurgents. Despite the investment of donors and the efforts and will of the Afghan people, peace and prosperity still seem to be a distant prospect.

The Government of Afghanistan is now democratically elected, with presidential elections to replace President Hamid Karzai held on 5 April 2014, and there is a more enabling environment for civil society than existed under the Taliban regime. But, while the current government has made progress on issues such as the protection and promotion of human rights, it still upholds many traditional practices and relies on patronage networks which many power-holders use to increase their influence or to promote their own tribal interests.

Women in Afghanistan

Since 2001, the government and the international community have been actively engaged in promoting women's rights in Afghanistan. Women now work in the private, public, and government sectors; in some parts of the country, girls and young women have access to primary, secondary, and tertiary education, although this is less the case in rural areas.

Despite these positive achievements, gender-based violence, such as forced marriage and sexual, physical, and psychological abuse, are common – particularly in more traditional areas and communities. Women often lack access to legal recourse because of prejudice, weak law enforcement, and corruption. The use of unofficial, traditional, religious, and tribal justice systems to settle disputes involving women is common. A rape victim may find herself in court accused and condemned to death by stoning for immoral behaviour, and girls are given away in a practice known as Ba'ad to settle disputes between communities.⁹ Traditional thinking is that men can represent the views and opinions of women in public debate or decision-making and therefore women do not need to speak for themselves. Such cultural and traditional attitudes reinforce and perpetuate gender inequality, and are often used and reinforced by powerful local actors such as religious leaders or khans (powerful landlords).

Women's rights and the peace process

Attempts to negotiate a peace agreement between the government and opposition groups, including the Taliban, and involving regional and international stakeholders, are ongoing. The 'peace process' involves both formal and informal political mechanisms and structures such as the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP), the High Peace Council (HPC),¹⁰ and local-level initiatives that are tackling grievances affecting peace and stability at the community level. However, women, youth, and other marginalized groups find themselves excluded from the peace process at all levels, which means that their interests are not being adequately represented and undermines the chances of the process being successful.

WWS IN AFGHANISTAN

WWS recognizes that peace processes offer a unique opportunity to strengthen the voice and rights of poor and marginalized groups in society. For this to happen, such groups need representative and effective organizations able to engage with those in power. The WWS project has therefore focused both on building this capacity and on facilitating links with power-holders.

The model of constructive engagement with power-holders is seen as particularly important. Public protests or campaigns conducted by a weak, fragmented civil society, with little history of influencing and campaigning, would be unlikely to achieve the desired change and could provoke a negative reaction from the government.

WWS is therefore:

- building the capacity of civil society actors and organizations to work together and to engage positively with power-holders at different levels of governance; and
- facilitating opportunities – at national, provincial, and community levels – for civil society, particularly marginalized groups such as women and youth, to engage with power-holders involved in the formal peace process and in conflict mediation at community level.

WWS partner organizations

WWS selected four partners to work on the project, based on their capacities and motivation to implement a number of jointly devised activities to promote good governance at national, provincial, and community levels:

- Afghanistan Women Service and Education (AWSE), working for WWS in Balkh, Kabul, and Herat provinces, and lead organization for the ACSONP peace network (see below);¹¹
- Research Institute for Women, Peace and Security (RIWPS), working in Kabul, Kapisa, Parwan, and Bamyán provinces;¹²
- Empowerment Centre for Women (ECW), working in Kunduz;¹³
- Training Human Rights Association for Afghan Women (THRA), working in Nangarhar province.¹⁴

WWS PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Developing and strengthening the Afghanistan Civil Society Organizations Network for Peace (ACSONP)

In Afghanistan, Oxfam began supporting civil society by strengthening a network of CSOs in order to create a stronger and more sustainable platform for advocacy, campaigning, and influencing power-holders. It chose to work with an existing network rather than to convene one itself, as this was identified as the best way to ensure ownership of the network by its members and sustainability beyond the WWS project.

The ACSONP was established in 2006 to promote more effective collaboration between Afghan CSOs engaged in peace-building work. Until 2011, the network had focused mainly on the celebration of the UN's International Day of Peace each September. Some key peace-building organizations did not participate in ACSONP as they believed it to be ineffective. However, with Oxfam's support, the ACSONP network has been considerably strengthened from 2011 to 2014.

ACSONP now has around 100 member organizations, 40 of which are very active. The network represents a full range of interests, including community- and national-level organizations working in

health, education, peace building, advocacy, humanitarian work, and women's rights. Organizations are motivated to join the network by the realization that collaboration will achieve a greater impact than whatever they are able to achieve on their own.

Initially WWS conducted capacity assessments of both the network and its individual member organizations to identify capacity-building needs. The assessments measured competence in programme management, organizational governance, human resources and administration, financial management, and advocacy. Assessments took place for the first time in January 2012, and were repeated in 2013 and 2014, to measure improvements in capacity over the baseline. So far, these assessments have not included the views of organizations and civil society actors not involved with ACSONP, and future assessments will be stronger and more useful with the addition of their perspectives.

WWS has helped to strengthen ACSONP's own governance by funding two paid staff members and providing support and training in organizational governance, finance, and accountability. With this support, ACSONP was able to elect a steering committee and a co-ordinator, and establish working groups on women and youth. The network has also developed a memorandum of understanding between members, a vision, a mission statement, strategic objectives, and a five-year work plan. Six of the nine members of the ACSONP steering committee are women and the majority of ACSONP members are women's rights organizations.

ACSONP member organizations have received training in project design and proposal writing, conflict transformation, electoral law, and social and political processes. They have been trained to adapt their learning to the cultural practices and attitudes in the provinces where they are based, so that they are able to transfer learning back to their communities. Some CSOs have used their training to build the capacity of local councils to mediate disputes.

Many CSOs had previously felt that they were in direct competition with one another (for funding, status, etc.) and were not used to collaborating. WWS has therefore been working to build trust between them and to support them to work together, through initiatives such as 'member to member' dialogues. For these, the ACSONP committee identified members with knowledge and expertise in a particular field, and asked them to share this with another member organization. Sharing ideas, expertise, and perspectives in this way has helped build trust between organizations and has enabled them to see more clearly their role in representing wider civil society rather than just their own organization or interest group.

Also important has been the informal transfer of knowledge between organizations through collaborating around events such as the annual Peace Day celebrations, the network's general assembly, training events, and other workshops. In fact, funding originally allocated to training in leadership and advocacy has been reallocated to other activities, as this need was effectively being met by organization-to-organization learning and collaboration on joint projects.

Another useful capacity-building activity was a learning visit undertaken by members of ACSONP to Azerbaijan. This enabled representatives from Afghan organizations to meet other civil society groups and actors in the region facing similar challenges and to learn from their experience. The Azerbaijani approach of sensitizing charismatic leaders, sports champions, MPs, and the media as part of a strategy to eliminate violence against women (VAW) resonated particularly strongly with Afghan CSOs, who have now built similar strategies into their own work. ECW and RIWPS, for instance, have both begun to engage the support of charismatic religious leaders in campaigns to tackle VAW, and ACSONP as a whole has worked with MPs, the media, and others to build support for a law to fight it.

It is important to remember that a network such as ACSONP is not a homogenous entity, but a dynamic and changing collaboration of interest groups, which may experience its own power shifts and struggles. In fact, CSOs – like civil society itself – can be partisan, self-motivated, and politically aligned. Ensuring that ACSONP continues to build solidarity between organizations, that it effectively represents the most marginalized people in civil society (not the most powerful), and that it is able to work with high-profile peace-building organizations (even if they are not members) will continue to be challenges for the future. Building on the positive start that has been made in organizational management and leadership is also crucial.

Development of a civil society sponsored inclusive peace strategy

Box 2: Peace building in Afghanistan

'There will be peace in Afghanistan only after a ceasefire, when the parties engaged in conflicts can sit down and start a national dialogue for reconciliation. But it is not only talks with the Taliban that are needed. We need to find out the root causes of why young Afghans are joining the insurgency and supporting the Taliban and we need to address these causes. We need to create a dialogue with the many groups, not just the Taliban, who oppose women's participation in a vibrant civil society. And we need to ensure that peace includes social justice and addresses poverty, exclusion, unemployment, and women's rights.'

Babrak Osman¹⁵

One of the major achievements of ACSO NP over the past two years has been the development of a civil society peace strategy (known as the 'inclusive peace strategy') to complement the government's formal peace process.¹⁶

The formal peace process focuses mainly on political processes and negotiation with armed actors. It does not reflect the needs and interests of marginalized groups, which risks perpetuating conflict and undermining sustainable peace. The inclusive peace strategy was developed in consultation with a wide range of civil society actors and groups in order to understand their concepts of peace and to develop a strategy that could be used to influence the formal peace process.

As part of an extensive consultation process, a major conference was organized in Herat by the ACSO NP steering committee in 2012. The event involved 100 participants from seven provinces, including scholars, parliamentarians, religious leaders, women, youth, media, academics, and business leaders. As the objective of the strategy is to influence government, political leaders were also involved in the process from the start, and these leaders have become key allies in promoting it.

The strategy, developed at the conference and subsequently endorsed by communities throughout Afghanistan, emphasizes the need to build trust and positive relationships between Afghan people and the need to ensure civil society engagement with the government and with the formal peace process.

It was formally launched in Kabul in July 2013 by female MPs Shokria Barkzai and Shenkai Karokhel, and was endorsed by the HPC. WWS partners, ACSO NP members, and high-profile women activists such as Wazhma Frogh of RIWPS have continued to promote the strategy in co-ordination with the HPC.

The inclusive peace strategy has no legal or official status in government policy – but the approach and ways of working of the official actors and institutions who have engaged with it seem to be shifting. For example, the HPC is now engaging more effectively with civil society, particularly women and youth, through the provincial peace councils, and it participates actively in events such as the National Youth Peace Debate (see below).

The HPC has also increased the number of women on its steering committee and has even asked civil society groups to take forward particular projects and peace-building activities in their own provinces. RIWPS, for example, has received funding from the HPC for a joint programme to involve more women and youth in the provincial peace committees and to engage them effectively in peace building at the provincial level. Long-term evaluation is required to assess if such changes can be sustained.

Developing the strategy has also enabled diverse civil society actors and groups to work together for the first time, and has significantly built confidence and solidarity within the civil society sector.

Enabling civil society, particularly women and youth, to engage with power-holders at national and provincial levels

WWS has organized a number of events at national, provincial, and community levels which have enabled youth and women to engage with power-holders and ensure that their voices are heard and their needs and interests are represented.



National Youth Peace Debate, Kabul, June 2013. © Joen Van Houdt

National Youth Peace Debate, Kabul, June 2013: Some 50 per cent of the population of Afghanistan are under 15 and around 70 per cent are under 25.¹⁷ Young people are particularly affected by the conflict: violence is part of their everyday lives and limits their life chances and opportunities. Young women in particular often face physical and verbal violence, which effectively excludes them from work and public life. Yet young people are usually left out of the peace process, denying them the opportunity to express their concerns and failing to engage with a group that is so crucial to creating a positive future for Afghanistan.

In June 2013, WWS partners brought over 500 young people from all over Afghanistan together to meet and question power-holders at the National Youth Peace Debate in Kabul. The panel at the event included high-profile figures involved in the formal peace process, including the chief of the National Security Council (NSC), a minister of the HPC, and the chairperson of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission. The debate enabled excluded women and youth to participate in public life by creating a specific, well managed, safe space for them to engage with the relevant authorities. Debate organizer RIWPS used its contacts and positive reputation at national, provincial, and local levels to invite participants and encourage them to take part.

Youth leader Jaheeda Javaisa commented at the event: *'This debate is important as young people are sharing their experiences and challenges. We can now communicate these issues to power-holders – and get them to take action.'* An Oxfam staff member observed: *'The debate enabled marginalized groups to have a platform from which to express their thoughts, concerns, and aspirations for the future.'*

The panel answered questions about the role of the HPC in community peace building, agreed to involve youth representatives, particularly women, in the provincial peace committees, and offered to raise the role of youth in peace and reconciliation with the Afghan President. Since the debate, provincial peace councils in Parwan, Bamyán, Logar, and Kapisa have been working directly with women and youth, enabling them to feed their views and experiences into the formal peace process.

The event was broadcast free of charge by a national TV channel, which was persuaded of the social benefits of promoting youth participation in public debate, and also saw it as an opportunity to increase viewing figures and raise its own public profile.



Parwan Provincial Peace Hearing. © Oxfam

Provincial peace hearings: ACSONP has also facilitated ‘peace hearings’ in three provinces. In August 2012, a hearing was held in Parwan, north of Kabul, bringing together a wide range of influential actors and CSOs, including the governor of Parwan (previously a warlord), the chief of police, and the head of the Provincial Council. The event was organized by ACSONP member Afghan Women Skills Development Centre (AWSDC).

The provincial governor was questioned in front of the media for the first time, and a range of issues were openly discussed, including ending VAW and creating the security needed to enable women to participate in society. The hearing discussed the public stoning of a woman that had taken place in July, and CSOs called for the issue of VAW to be actively addressed.

The governor had not previously expressed any interest in women’s rights, but hearing the testimonies of women activists in the presence of a number of prominent women leaders, including MPs and the deputy of the human rights commission, made him publicly shift his position. Media coverage of the event also helped to emphasize that VAW is not a private matter but an issue of public concern, and ensured that the governor’s commitments were put on record.

Following the peace hearing, the governor gave instructions that incidents of rape and VAW should be reported directly to him by women leaders. He also agreed to promote a culture in which VAW is not tolerated. Women leaders and organizations in Parwan now report that the governor has become something of a champion for the promotion of women’s rights. They continue to talk regularly with him and provincial officials about women’s security issues.

Community-level peace building: The major focus of WWS activities over the past three years has been building the capacity of civil society to engage with power-holders at national and provincial levels. However, the importance of community-level peace-building activities has been increasingly recognized during the first phase of implementation, and such activities will be given more emphasis over the next two years of the project.

Working with religious leaders: WWS has become increasingly aware of the power of non-state actors who are able either to block or enable change at the community level – for example the Ulema, traditional Islamic religious leaders.

Religious leaders conduct prayer services, marriages, and funerals and teach Islamic doctrine, but they also arbitrate local disputes on Islamic principles (e.g. conflicts over water and land or family disputes). As such they also have a powerful role in shaping public opinion and behaviours. WWS became aware that a good way to tackle harmful traditional practices would be through raising the awareness of religious leaders about the impacts of these and enlisting their support in working for change.

WWS began to explore this idea at a regional conference of Ulema in Kunduz province in August 2013. Having talked about the problems of community conflict, the violation of women’s rights, and the use of retributive justice, mullahs suggested that women who had graduated from faculties of Sharia law or in religious studies could work with religious leaders to promote a culture of tolerance and to prevent and resolve community conflicts.

Following these discussions, WWS ran a pilot activity from November 2013 to February 2014 to test this model of change. The pilot was implemented by partner group ECW, which has excellent organizational experience and very strong relationships with local authorities and religious leaders in nine communities in Kunduz of around 9,000 people. The pilot was being evaluated in April 2014 (at time of publication), and learning from it will contribute to the design of the second phase of the WWS project (from April 2014 to April 2016).

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACTS

Strengthening the ACSONP network

Working through a civil society network rather than individual CSOs has enabled WWS to extend its reach and make a significant impact on civil society capacity in Afghanistan.

Capacity building of the network (the steering committee, the network itself, and individual member organizations) was well targeted to meet the needs revealed in the initial assessment and has significantly increased capacity above the baseline during the first three years of the project. The horizontal learning between organizations has gone beyond what was originally envisaged, and has been a positive unintended impact of the project. While CSOs in Afghanistan often see themselves as being in competition with one another, WWS has been able to strengthen and connect many organizations across the country – giving them an identity under the ACSONP 'brand' and developing their ability to take action together. The network is now recognized as a potential forum from which civil society can influence the peace-building process in Afghanistan.

Engaging with wider civil society

WWS has successfully gone beyond working with constituted CSOs and networks to engage with wider civil society in Afghanistan. Using ACSONP as a platform, and enabling civil society to mobilize around activities such as the development of the inclusive peace strategy, WWS has been able to build relationships with a wide range of both 'traditional' and 'modern' civil society actors and institutions, such as Ulema, tribal leaders, media, academia, intellectuals, and grassroots communities. Such interactions have contributed to building trust between different segments of civil society and have increased their capacity to mobilize, take action, and work together for change.

Engaging with power-holders

WWS has been able to engage effectively with power-holders at many levels of governance, and there is evidence that such engagement has led to changes in attitudes, policies, and practices and has extended the space for civil society participation in the peace process.

WWS's experience is that bringing together citizens and power-holders in dialogue and discussion is a very positive way to build trust between them. Forums such as the provincial peace hearings, the national youth debate, and consultations around the inclusive peace strategies have allowed citizens and power-holders to share their concerns and challenges with each other, and build constructive relationships.

Many power-holders would not normally have the opportunity to hear the experiences and testimonies of women and youth, and this opportunity has generated a real sense of responsibility and a desire to be accountable – which in turn has led to commitments to better defend women's rights in Parwan and to include women and youth in the peace process, particularly at provincial level, and endorsement of the inclusive peace strategy. Monitoring and evaluation is required to assess whether successful engagement of this sort leads to longer-term change.

Enabling participation by marginalized groups

WWS has successfully enabled the participation of marginalized groups such as women and youth in many areas of governance, and has increased their confidence to actively participate.

The project itself has provided many opportunities for women to exercise leadership in a safe environment, which has boosted their confidence, capacity, and self-esteem to engage effectively with formal and informal institutions, raise their voices, and access their rights. All four of WWS's implementing partners are women-led organizations, with a focus on women's rights. Six of the nine members of the ACSONP steering committee are women, and the majority of ACSONP members are also women's rights organizations. Most WWS activities and events have been conducted, organized, facilitated, and moderated by women.

Now women's groups are more organized and more willing to trust one another, and there is more cohesion and synergy between them, which increases their power and boosts their confidence. In addition, many women and young people in communities, as well as individual leaders and activists, have been mobilized and connected to media, government, and traditional and religious leaders through events such as peace hearings, provincial consultations, round tables, and debates.

Working with the media

The media have a crucial role to play in building a culture of tolerance around the peace process, and can help to promote a culture of integrity and accountability within government institutions. WWS project partner RIWPS has created a consortium of different media to provide a voice for civil society. As a result, most of the project's main activities have been covered by major TV channels. High-profile TV channel Tolo News, based in Kabul, moderated and broadcast the National Youth Peace Debate, while local TV channels and radio channels in Parwan, Nangarhar, and Kunduz have provided coverage of public peace hearings and debates. The media have been seen by the project not just as a communication channel, but as a partner in promoting social change and participation.

KEY LEARNING AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Gender inequality as a driver of conflict and fragility

WWS has become increasingly aware that not only does conflict have different impacts on women and men, but that gender inequality is itself a driver of conflict.

In Afghanistan, Oxfam-funded research has identified practices and beliefs around gender, and unequal power relations between men and women (women are usually seen as under the control of a man and young girls are given away to settle family disputes), as a major driver of conflict at community level.¹⁸ The research has also confirmed WWS's programme experience: women are peace makers who facilitate the resolution of local conflict but they are also the victims of conflicts that oppress women and reinforce the cycle of domestic violence, as well as 'pawns' given away in Ba'ad as the price of settling conflicts.

The relationship between gender inequality and conflict at national level is complex and requires further consideration. The attitudes of the Taliban and other conservative forces towards women deepen gender inequality. As women can be a great force for reconciliation and conflict mitigation, their exclusion from the peace process is likely to make it less effective (although some parties may think that it will better facilitate agreement in the short term).

A gender audit of the WWS programme in all four focus countries, completed in July 2013,¹⁹ reached the same findings: that gender inequality is a driver of conflict and that gender should be addressed in all aspects of programming, not only to protect women's rights but as a strategy to tackle conflict and promote peace.

Governance programmes working in fragile contexts should consider the role of gender inequality as a driver of conflict and fragility. They should aim to address gender inequality through all aspects of programming, not only to promote and extend women's rights but as a strategy to ensure that governance work in fragile contexts is as effective as possible.

Working with religious leaders and traditional actors

WWS has identified the importance of engaging with traditional civil society groups and actors such as Ulema, khans, and tribal leaders, and ensuring their interaction with 'modern' civil society groups and organizations.

While, historically, traditional and religious leaders have tended to reinforce the status quo and oppose change, WWS's experience has been that they can actually act as effective allies and enable change. Understanding the motivation, context, and constraints of traditional leaders is essential to supporting them to become agents of change. It has been important, for instance, to understand Islamic religious teaching and the cultural, historical, and political contexts within which religious leaders operate, before engaging with them. It has also been important to understand that fear of marginalization and losing power are more likely to make traditional leaders act as blockers to

change; equally, however, they can derive a sense of responsibility and pride from being seen as 'change makers'.

WWS has therefore consciously managed events, activities, and campaigns where traditional leaders have been involved in designing and delivering activities. Through this approach, their leadership role has been acknowledged and they have not felt marginalized. They have been able to interact effectively with civil society groups, particularly women's rights groups, breaking down barriers and helping to challenge prejudice and negative assumptions. This has led to the formation of productive relationships with traditional leaders, who are now working in partnership with civil society on activities such as community peace building in Kunduz.

Governance programmes 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.

Building collaboration and solidarity between civil society groups

A key lesson is the need to make concerted efforts to build trust and solidarity between different civil society groups, and to be aware of the different ways in which this can be achieved.

At the start of the project, there was considerable mistrust between different CSOs in ACSO NP, who were competing for funding and profile. WWS has actively sought to address these issues and to build trust and co-operation through training and mentoring opportunities. Beyond this, the opportunity to work together on joint activities has also encouraged solidarity and co-operation. Activities such as peace hearings and debates, which have been seen to influence power-holders and lead to change, have built the confidence of those involved and their belief that they can contribute to change.

Civil society groups (both those in ACSO NP and others) are now working together on a nationwide campaign to ensure that legislation to combat VAW is implemented. The campaign involves co-operation between many different civil society groups around this key issue, which may not have been possible without the enhanced sense of solidarity and co-operation fostered by WWS.

Those working on governance programmes in fragile contexts should be aware that 'civil society' is not homogenous, that groups may not always share the same interests and perspectives, and that there may be a need to actively foster solidarity and co-operation between them. Helping civil society groups to identify and build on their common interests is important. This may be achieved through training and by providing, and guiding, opportunities to work together.

Role of Oxfam and partners in WWS

Partner selection has been crucial to the success of the WWS project. First, Oxfam assessed the capacity of all ACSO NP members to identify a lead organization; then the ACSO NP steering committee helped to identify three further partners to implement activities who were willing and able to work together to plan and implement the project.

Once ACSO NP and key organizations took over the lead on important decisions and day-to-day project management, Oxfam project staff focused on coaching and mentoring the partner organizations and providing technical input and funding where appropriate. This approach allowed the partners to develop a strong sense of responsibility for the direction and success of the project, enhanced their confidence and capacity, and ultimately will ensure the sustainability of civil society mobilization. While this approach to partnership and project management was not new, it was particularly important in this fragile context where, as it is so hard to achieve change in the external world, changes in trust, transparency and accountability in relationships with partners (which model the governance changes Oxfam seeks) are particularly important.

Governance programmes in fragile contexts should strive to select appropriate partners capable of building relationships and implementing governance activities. Oxfam's aim should be to work alongside, and yet give space to, partner organizations to plan and implement activities and ensure that the project is driven by those it represents.

Programming in insecure contexts

WWS also faced the challenge of developing longer-term governance programming in a context of daily violence and insecurity. ACSONP members were often unable to participate in trainings and workshops at the last moment. Threats to her personal safety prevented woman's leader Wazhma Frogh from attending the provincial peace hearing in Kapisa province, and the event was less effective than Oxfam had hoped.

Building on the experience of the wider country team, WWS found that developing good relationships with government and security agencies, and constantly gathering and reviewing information about security and the socio-political context, was vital. Using this analysis, project staff could ensure that activities were appropriate and not likely to provoke violence or threats. They also made sure that plans were flexible and could be adapted in the light of security challenges if needed.

Experience from WWS shows that it is possible to plan an ambitious and effective governance programme in an insecure context. However, it requires constant context and risk analysis to identify potential problems, creative ways to overcome them, and to maximize opportunities for change. This requires additional time and resources and staff energy and commitment, and staff need to be adequately supported to work in this agile and responsive way.

NOTES

- ¹ WWS is working in Yemen, Afghanistan, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel (OPTI), and South Sudan.
- ² All figures above from UNDP Human Development Index.
- ³ World Bank dataset (2013).
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Transparency International (2014) 'Corruption by country/territory: Afghanistan', <http://www.transparency.org/country#AFG> (accessed May 2014)
- ⁷ The Taliban, who dominated Afghanistan from 1994 to 2001, derive from a form of Sunni Islam which aims to enforce hard-line Sharia (Islamic) law. During Taliban rule, men were required to grow beards and women were required to wear the *burka*. The Taliban banned television, music, and cinema and disapproved of girls aged ten and over attending school.
- ⁸ Erin Blankenship (2013) 'Afghanistan: Contested Spaces', Boston, MA: Oxfam America. Some sources indicate that the international community may have spent up to \$60bn.
- ⁹ *Ba'ad* is an ancient Pashtun tradition, still commonly practised in Afghanistan, in which young girls aged between four and 14 are used as a means to settle conflicts by older relatives. The girl is given (typically by a male family member) to a family against whom a crime or misdemeanour has been committed (rape, adultery, murder, or theft of resources). In theory the girl marries into the family; in practice, however, she may be treated as a slave.
- ¹⁰ High Peace Council, <http://www.hpc.org.af/english/> (accessed May 2014).
- ¹¹ Afghan Women Leaders Connect, <http://www.afghanwomenconnect.org/awse-human-rights-training/> (accessed May 2014) and Afghan Civil Society Organizations Network for Peace, <http://www.acsonp.org> (accessed May 2014).
- ¹² Research Institute for Women, Peace and Security, <http://www.riwps-afghanistan.org/> (accessed May 2014).
- ¹³ Empowerment Centre for Women, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Empowerment-Center-for-Women-ECW/141381389266076> (accessed May 2014).
- ¹⁴ Training Human Rights Association for Afghan Women, <http://www.thra.org.af/> (accessed May 2014).
- ¹⁵ Babrak Osman (2012) 'Building Peace in Afghanistan – How Civil Society Can Make a Difference', <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/blog/2012/10/building-peace-in-afghanistan> (accessed May 2014).
- ¹⁶ This is supported by the Glenree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation and is part-funded by the EU-backed project, 'Promote Community Peace – Non-state Actors'.
- ¹⁷ World Development Indicators, World Bank (2012).
- ¹⁸ Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization (APPRO) (2012) 'Women at Community Level: Peacemakers, Conflict-instigators and Pawns', funded and published by Oxfam under the EU-funded Community Peace Building Project.
- ¹⁹ Enarsson, Jenny (2013) 'A Push and A Shift, Gender Audit of WWS Programme', Oxford: Oxfam GB.

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