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Sector Facilitation by Afghan Civil Society

RAHNUMA PROJECT LEARNING PAPER

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Disclaimer

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Abbreviations

ACBAR	-	Afghan Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development
ACEP	-	Afghan Civic Engagement Program
AWN	-	Afghan Women's Network
AICS	-	Afghan Institute for Civil Society
AKF,A	-	Aga Khan Foundation, Afghanistan
ACEP	-	Afghan Civic Engagement program
ASI	-	Adam Smith International
BPHS	-	Basic Package of Health Services for Afghanistan
CB	-	Capacity Building
CSJWG	-	Civil Society Joint Working Group
CBO	-	Community Based Organisations
CSO	-	Civil Society Organisation
DFID	-	Department for International Development UK
EU	-	European Union
FCAS	-	Fragile and Conflict Affected States
IP	-	Implementing Partner
INGO	-	International Non-Governmental Organisation
LNGO	-	Local (Afghan) Non-Governmental Organisation
NSP	-	National Solidarity Programme
NGO	-	Non-Governmental Organisation
OD	-	Organisational Development
RP	-	Recipient Partner
SBCP	-	Sector Based Core Partner
SF	-	Sector Facilitation
UNAMA	-	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	-	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	-	United States Agency for International Development

1. Introduction

The purpose of this 'learning paper' on sector facilitation is to contrast the broader objectives of sector facilitation within Rahnuma to that of the Tawanmandi sector based core partners (SBCPs). The paper seeks to draw out learnings from the experience, in an effort to contribute to donor discussions on future support to Afghan civil society, particularly with regard to opportunities for future Civil Society development initiatives in Afghanistan.

Findings of the paper are based on project documents, past and present; interviews with various stakeholders, including SBCP managers, Tawanmandi and Rahnuma advisors, and sympathetic actors in civil society space in Afghanistan. Interviews were held at various points through the project cycles. In addition, two surveys of self-assessments conducted of SBCP actors and participant observation by the author, in his capacity as Technical Director of the Rahnuma project has been utilised to inform this report.

As detailed in this report, the sector based core partner (SBCP) element of the Rahnuma project has been challenging to implement. The paper will, in its narration, hopefully highlight the lessons learned from this experience, and contribute to future programming design, and implementation.

2. Sector based facilitation: concepts and operationalization

This section provides the theoretical underpinnings of the sector facilitation approach to civil society development. This understanding is fundamental in assessing the approach as applied in Tawanmandi and Rahnuma, and as a basis to assessing the impact of the SF approach.

A strong and vibrant civil society is critical to good governance, understood broadly – a government that delivers and is accountable and responsive to people's needs. It also contributes to improving the quality of government provisioning of goods and services to citizens, in particular when there are opportunities for testing and introducing innovative methods and approaches that enhance the effectiveness of these services, so that they can strategically serve as a basis for change of policy and practice. In this way, civil society provides a frame for citizens to pursue their right to a just distribution of society's resources and to improve their livelihoods. A well-functioning civil society provides citizens with an opportunity to influence and take responsibility for society's development.

Strong civil society is an amalgam of multiple civil society entities (individuals NGOs, movements, platforms, alliances, activists) working together in multiple arrangements, to make impact - based on the principle that 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts'.

Among the different approaches to support building a strong and vibrant civil society is the sector facilitation approach. This approach seeks to develop individual NGOs as leaders in specific sectors, helping, through facilitation of other actors in the sector, to develop sector capacity and improve sector outcomes, contributing to boosting overall civil society capacity. The approach is premised on the logic that organisations that have the wherewithal to take leadership roles in their specific thematic sectors, either because of their unique expertise (in terms of thematic skills or innovative delivery models) or their size (in terms of spread or the resources at their command), can be pivotal for improved sector and overall civil society outcomes.

Partnerships – with established, often leading local CSOs – can potentially help donor efforts to strengthen sector-based and issue-based advocacy. Lead CSO partners also play important roles in fostering improved networks and coalitions with greater collaboration among CSOs working in specific sectors or across different themes.

Ultimately, 'sector leads' as they are often called, encourage local ownership of the change, thus helping make it sustainable. This has been seen to increase programme capability and performance, and increased ability to influence sector development, in areas as varied as human

rights, gender mainstreaming, and peacebuilding. Donors, in search for local ownership and sustainability of reforms have increasingly relied on the model.

For sector leads to effectively act as catalysts for sectoral change, they need to have key strengths in creating and sustaining external linkages, primarily within the following areas, as detailed in Table 1. This ideal-type capacity will form the basis of our own assessment of the roles that SBCPs have played.

Table 1: Leadership in Sector Facilitation

Role	Examples of Expertise
Leading project or programme implementation in the same sector	Facilitation of information sharing about or coordination of project implementation by different organizations; promoting common approaches, methodologies and quality standards; strengthening outreach; learning from each other's best practices; sharing assets and infrastructure (offices, equipment, transport) where feasible; bidding for or developing project proposals jointly with organizations that have complementary competencies and implementing projects together.
Leading knowledge creation and sharing:	Systematic collection and dissemination of documentation and evaluation of interventions and results for raising awareness, and sharing 'best practices' based on lessons from implementing innovative projects, for other CSOs to adopt. Developing innovative models of delivery, and sharing those, in a form that is appropriate to audiences. Promoting evidence-based sector research and policy analysis.
Leading capacity building and training in the sector:	Acting as the capacity building leader in the field – planning and implementing trainings, workshops and seminars; organising study visits, and peer reviews, mentoring, and coaching. Developing manuals and guidelines – based on 'good practices' - and using those as resource material for trainings and capacity building.
Leading awareness creation:	Planning and organizing, together with other CSOs in the sector, awareness raising and civic education campaigns on issues of concern to the sector and civil society generally, to educate public (and key stakeholders).
Leading advocacy and lobbying:	Planning and organizing concerted advocacy and lobbying campaigns, addressing key stakeholders on selected policy and practice issues, on behalf of sector/civil society, and working with like-minded groups and networks to push for policy and practice change and impact. This would involve identifying stakeholders required to be influenced, preparing case studies and producing documentation and advocacy materials.

Use of the sector facilitation approach can be beneficial for lead CSOs, smaller entities, wider civil society, as well as the donor community. Benefits include:

- It helps CSOs being facilitated to take advantage of the skills and expertise and reach/resources of sector leads to do things and enable changes that they themselves want to achieve, but might not have the skills and wherewithal for. Also, it guides them in using tried and tested approaches, models and prototypes, some backed up by helpful resource material - manuals and guidelines as well as research evidence.
- It helps lead CSOs to magnify the impact of their work, enabling results to be achieved at much wider scale, working directly with groups and on issues that they work with, thus contributing to their wider mission to enable society-wide change.
- It helps donor communities (and national entities) to get the most out of their investment, through leveraging the strengths of lead civil society entities that they work with to enhance overall impact.

However, there are some commonly faced challenges in practising sector facilitation, for those keen to play sector facilitation roles. Our experience implementing Rahnuma points to the following:

CSO

- It can be resource-demanding - since it takes staff time away from other assignments;
- It is difficult to find funding for;
- It is insufficiently prioritised and/or incorporated in organizational strategies or project proposals;
- it bears the risk of network members seeing the sector lead as a competitor - rather than as a 'facilitator.'

These need to be mitigated for, where the approach is being put to practice.

3. SBCP Programming: Tawanmandi's objectives and implementation

Tawanmandi followed a sector based facilitation model to Afghan civil society development. Sector Based Core Partners (SBCPs) were the centre piece of Tawanmandi's approach, helping with sector based and issue based advocacy, working with key Afghan CSOs.

As detailed in the British Council's end of Tawanmandi project report, the main functions of Tawanmandi's SBCPS were:

- providing platforms for the sharing of experience, knowledge and information as well as facilitating co-ordination and collaboration among CSOs working in specific sectors or themes
- undertaking advocacy and lobbying in support of improved policy and practice in their specified sectors and cross-cutting areas
- providing sectoral/thematic capacity development support to other CSOs, with a focus on Tawanmandi's core and project grantees
- facilitating linkages among local, sub-national, and national lobbying and advocacy efforts
- opening resource centres where CSOs working in specific sectors or themes could access resources, such as research and other analytical work
- encouraging and supporting smaller issue-based groups.¹

Overall, a key objective of SBCPs' role was for their fostering improved networks and coalitions with greater collaboration among CSOs working in specific sectors or across different themes.

The ten SBCPs chosen under Tawanmandi - through a competitive process and based on a set of criteria - were a collection of (i) sector-based core partners – CSOs with established experience in one of Tawanmandi's targeted sectors, (ii) cross-cutting core partners - CSOs known as a specialist organisation in one of Tawanmandi's cross-cutting themes, and (iii) cross-sector umbrella networks - organisations with experience in networking, joined-up advocacy, lessons learning or other CSO collaborative action.

Although the overall approach of using established CSOs as sectoral leads was sound, the roll-out and implementation of the SBCPs model was marred with difficulty.² Among the main drawbacks, was that selection criteria mostly emphasized 'hard' skills (management, organisational capacity), with little emphasis on 'soft' ones (negotiation, outreach, advocacy), resulting in many CSOs not passing the grade, and smaller, more nimble CSOs - with much grassroots and networking capacity, left out. Adding to the problem was the large size of the Tawanmandi grant, that attracted bids from a large number of CSOs, many well-funded already, not all with the most appropriate

¹ British Council: Strengthening Civil Society in Afghanistan (Tawanmandi), Final Report, 29 January 2016.

² Ibid., p. 48

skill set. This hard skills bias in the selection criteria, meant that the selection did not necessarily result in the most appropriate – meaning sector facilitating - local partners brought on board as SBCPs. In effect –the emphasis on technical meant that because of the inappropriate criteria, local organisations were cut out.³

Anomalies are many. Afghan Women's Educational Center (AWEC) identified as lead for the gender sector, neither sees itself as a sector facilitator, nor is considered as such by other actors in the gender arena. AWEC's self-image is that of an organisation that implements successful projects for women and vulnerable groups. Similar is the case of Da Qanoon Ghush-tonky (DQG), whose principal claim to leadership is its gender justice project and their training of lawyers/paralegals. Another SBCP – the Sanayee Development Organisation (SDO) – whilst claiming to be the leader in the peace-building sector, is happy to implement education and community development projects – indeed any development project where grant funding might be available.

Phase 2 of Tawanmandi tried to adjust for the learning; with a greater emphasis on soft skills, however the original stress on large Kabul focused CSOs continued. Whilst there were some gains – CSO institutional capacity was built - according to Tawanmandi's own assessment, SBCPs had difficulty in developing workplans, and focusing on results and impact. Overly hierarchical management in some cases and lack of leadership in others, prevented effective use of resources to build capacities as envisaged. And in some cases, there seemed only limited effort from Tawanmandi to improve sector facilitation capacity of selected partners, evidenced in the under-utilisation of organisational development budgets.⁴

Overall, whilst the sector facilitation approach might have been the best option available before Tawanmandi, poor planning and operationalisation of the approach, resulted, as we will see in the next section, in the expected gains of Tawanmandi remaining largely unrealised.

4. Operationalising SBCPs: Rahnuma's approach and implementation

Tawanmandi's end of project assessment concluded that there was much to be done to improve the quality of the SBCPs' ability to effectively maintain coordination and leadership roles within their sectors. This outward-facing element of organisational capacity development of SBCPs became the central focus of Rahnuma – Technical Assistance to Tawanmandi SBCPs, the next phase of technical assistance to Afghan civil society.

From the donor perspective, it was clear that this technical assistance was being provided to build the capacity of SBCPs not only for their own sake but due to the pivotal role they could play in achieving progress towards impact within their respective sectors.⁵ The emphasis, under the new facility, on 'Sectoral coordination and leadership', was based on the recognition that SBCPs were chosen as partners, precisely because of their potential to impact on a larger number of CSOs within their respective sectors, and that this would require: (i) building their understanding of their potential for sectoral role; (ii) their capacities on how to provide a more effective leadership function within their sectors, and; (iii) their ability to build coalitions with partners to achieve sectoral change.⁶

The initial capacity assessment of the identified five SBCPs, at inception phase, reinforced these findings. It found that the 5 SBCPs paid only limited attention to acting as catalysts for sectoral change, and to developing wider civil society. Rather, the five SBCPs paid more attention to developing capacities for themselves, with little conception (or specific plans) for using their own enhanced capacity for improving that of other actors in the sector, or to help achieve better sector-wide impact. Their working, the assessment found, was mostly localized in and around Kabul; and

³ British Council: Strengthening Civil Society in Afghanistan (Tawanmandi), Final Report, 29 January 2016, page 48.

⁴ Ibid, page 48

⁵ Adam Smith International. 2016a. Technical Assistance to Tawanmandi SBCPs – Technical proposal. Pp.6-7

⁶ Adam Smith International. 2016a. Technical Assistance to Tawanmandi SBCPs – Technical proposal. p14

there was limited cooperative/joined-up work to pool resources and maximize impact in their sectors.⁷

The prescription that followed this initial assessment, proposed prioritising sector facilitation capacity of the five SBCPs – as was required of the facility. However, not all the five SBCPs were keen or able to play these ‘sector facilitating’ roles. This posed a peculiar challenge: here was a facility for improving sector facilitation skills and capacities of organisations that were not all fully convinced they wanted to play that outreach role.

The Rahnuma project team tried to square the circle by taking a selective approach to capacity development – working with SBCPs that showed the promise and appetite for sector lead roles (IWA, CSHRN, even SDO), through prioritising sector facilitation capacities in the mutually agreed workplans; and helping build basic institutional capacity of SBCPs not so outwardly inclined (AWEK, DQG), whilst advocating for greater sectoral role with them.

Recognising that a great deal of the sector catalytic role required developing soft skills (networking, advocacy, partnership), along with ‘hard’ ones, central to the capacity building support that was designed. This included mentoring and handholding SBCPs, to jointly identify capacity gaps, planning interventions to fill those, and ensuring appropriate follow up, including through periodic participatory reflections and course corrections. The approach preferred was iterative, requiring an organisational development manner of supporting SBCPs, from changing their mind set (implementing projects as NGOs) to trying to understand what catalytic role they could play in the sector, and what projects to devise and implement, to be able to achieve that change, working with other actors in the sectors. Difficult a task as this was, the approach would still have worked, was it not for the other flaw with the TA support – specifically its fragmented nature.

Whilst Rahnuma provided capacity building support to identified sector leads, Tawanmandi continued to provide those very CSOs, along with other ‘legacy partners’, grant funding for specific projects, as well as core funding. This arrangement seemed like an opportunity for Rahnuma, to be able to use the Tawanmandi facility as incentive for improved traction by SBCPs on Rahnuma outputs. It turned out - rather rapidly in the Rahnuma cycle - that the opportunity had morphed into a threat: Tawanmandi project management, especially fund releases, were mired in serious delays, resulting in several SBCPs cutting back on staff and activities, leaving little resource to practically make use of the capacity development assistance provided through Rahnuma. In any case, without sustained and predictable fund inflows, it was difficult for SBCPs, even those keen on sector leadership, but with no alternative sources of funding, to keep up with Rahnuma expectations. This mismatch between the two sister facilities persisted, and Rahnuma continued to be dragged down by administrative delays in Tawanmandi.

The internal mid-term review of the project, in September 2016, concluded that the sector facilitation focus of the project had lost steam. It called for pushing the envelope on ‘sector lead’ role, through proactively handholding SBCPs to identify their niche sector strengths, and building their sector capacity around those. However, recognising the structural difficulties involved, the review proposed that capacity development be grounded in specific issues, so as to link SBCP’s expanded sectoral role to tangible results on the ground.

The proposed refinement of capacity support included:

- i. Proposed actions, including greater coordination and sharing, mostly around advocacy and learnings, between SBCPs (and potential other CSOs) at national level; and identifying select provinces for joined up/shared working, coordinating with local civil society, for enhancing impact for local communities.

⁷ Adam Smith International. 2016b. Inception Report

- ii. encouraging SBCPs' joined-up working, pooling resources and synergizing efforts, so that their individual strengths were leveraged to better support civil society development

The proposals justified the refinements on grounds of results orientation – arguing that better sectoral focus, orientation, and capacity were good not only in itself but also for improving the lives of the citizens that the SBCPs serve. Whilst some of these ideas were implemented, specifically the SBCP platform monthly meetings as sharing and exchange forums, other more demanding calls – such as for provincial collaborations - proved difficult to operationalise. Some of this is contextually unavoidable, however some of this was due to the SBCPs own weaknesses in linkages with their provincial offices, etc.

5. Outcomes – SBCP experiences

Findings of a mapping exercise to understand SBCPs' ability to catalyse sectoral change, conducted towards the end of the Rahnuma support cycle, in February 2017, is presented in Table 2 below, scoring on each element of the ideal-type sector facilitation (SF) functions.

Table 2: SBCPs' sector facilitation performance
(Scoring on a scale of 1-5; 1 being 'very poor', 5 'very good')

Sector facilitation functions	IWA	CSHRN	SDO	AWEC	DQG
Coordination / joined up working in the sector	2	3	2	1	1
Knowledge creation/sharing with sector partners	4	2	2	1	1
Capacity building of sector partners	4	2	2	1	1
Awareness creation in the sector	3	3	2	2	1
Advocacy and lobbying on the subject	4	4	2	1	2

Clearly, some SBCPs have benefited more than others, whilst also showing greater appetite for playing the role (notably IWA and CSHRN), across the range of SF functions. Some elements of the SF functions, compared to others, seem not to have been particularly popular with SBCPs, notably coordination and joined up working across the functions, a key SF role. This may be because of the poor sector focus and orientation of SBCPs themselves – all seeing themselves as working in silos, implementing their own projects working with their own set of clients / stakeholder organisations that they are comfortable dealing with.

This assessment is further annotated below, providing a catalogue of Rahnuma's key conclusions on the roles of partner SBCPs on sector facilitation, and where we see potentials for strengthening these. This is based on the year and half of Rahnuma's working with SBCPs. The assessment is structured by different aspects of sector facilitation roles (as presented in section 3), notably, (i) coordination/joined up working; (ii) knowledge creation and sharing; (iii) capacity building of sector partners; (iv) awareness creation/raising in the sector; and finally, (v) advocacy and lobbying.

Coordination / joined up working in sector

This is about, illustratively, sharing information, coordinating project work, sharing assets, joint implementation of projects, and joint bidding/projects.

All of the SBCPs, in varying degrees, are involved in sector coordination efforts. But it is probably only CSHRN that can be said to have an accepted a 'leading' role in this – because of CSHRN acting as umbrella and a platform for its member organisations. DQG has had a similar role in the access to justice sector, at least in the past, with coordinating legal aid training and capacity

development, especially in the gender sphere. But over time, with a challenging organizational context, DQG's coordinating role has been diminished. For the rest of the SBCPs, their leadership role is more by virtue of how they engage in coordination efforts in the sector, on a case by case basis, rather than that of an accepted lead organisation. Tawanmandi has tried to instigate joined up working in the sector and across, but the results, as we have been discussing, have been limited, for the reasons cited above.

IWA, for instance, is member of various anti-corruption networks, e.g. Mining Watch Afghanistan and Afghanistan Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (AEITI), and has been heading the Monitoring Commission on Access to Information. These networks and the role IWA plays in them, as a facilitator and key actor, gives it traction to push the anti-corruption agenda at different fora. Similarly, SDO took part in forming Salah Consortium, a peace network, together with four others key CSOs in this sector, and therefore is able to influence decision making there. CSHRN has also, worked jointly with INGOs and ACSOs on projects to support the work of human rights defenders, and thus also has a lead expert status, in the sector.

There are complexities here. A more formalised 'lead' role does not necessarily guarantee more effective sector coordination status to the SBCP. For example, because of shortage of funding and other issues, CSHRN has for the past years been unable to maintain provision of key services to its member organisations, and is also seen to be suffering from a common conflict of interests in terms of putting a higher priority on ensuring funding for its secretariat-led human rights monitoring and advocacy work than on facilitating active involvement by and support services to its members.

Another example of this is AWEC, selected by Tawanmandi as the sector lead in the gender sector, but in reality, lacking a strong desire to be leading other CSOs, for a variety of reasons, the principal being the potential such a situation creates for conflict with AWN - the thematic network organisation on women issues, of which AWEC is also a member. At the same time, AWEC is not seen to have strong capacities in systematic gender approaches; rather, their strength lies in providing services to poor and vulnerable women and children - and in women empowerment efforts.

Overall, the ability to have traction with other sector partners, in coordinating efforts is a desirable capacity to have for any SBCP. To what extent an organisation can actually play that role, and to what ends, will depend on a combination of factors, notably, the particular SBCP's capacity and resources at its command, and its unique features relative to other actors in the sector. Motivation towards the role, is of course the key driver here.

Knowledge creation/sharing with sector partners

This is about research and documentation, documenting experiences and lessons; developing good practices, and models and prototypes; building a body of resource material, developing resource persons as champions; and organising consultations, seminars, workshops to engender debate and discussion on the issue and distil learnings.

Some of the SBCPs have tried to play a stronger role in the area of sector knowledge creation, innovation and resource mobilisation. IWA in particular, but also SDO, have strategically sought to strengthen the research and documentation aspects of their organisation's work. IWA publishes a series of research and survey reports on the subjects of integrity, transparency and anti-corruption, that set the standards in the sector. SDO has researched the state of domestic and school violence, and published findings. Similarly, AWEC has conducted research on war widows, and CSHRN undertakes annually, preparation of shadow reports and position papers on the situation of human rights in the country, that form part of civil society submissions to UN agencies.

Several organisations are seeking to improve the quality of their research work as a means to document practice and outcomes, and to form the basis for advocacy work. A coordinated coherent intervention to provide assistance to these efforts, is a requirement, given that all organisations struggle with the challenge of the technicalities of research and knowledge management - formulation of research questions, design of surveys, undertaking analysis and

reporting results in a form most suitable to the purposes. IWA, for instance, has realised that it is not cost-effective to have a full-fledged research department, and that it makes more sense to buy that capacity on a case by case basis.

Knowledge creation also involves identification and sharing of new and innovative ideas and best practices. There are a number of examples within the work of the SBCPs that fall in this category: IWA's long-term experiences with community based corruption monitoring within several subsectors and their building of a cadre of 'integrity champions'; CSHRN's human rights monitoring system and database; SDO's incorporation of peace education in the school curriculum.

Overall, the challenge is for some of the SBCPs to play a more active role leading knowledge creation and dissemination; and for SBCPs as a whole to try to develop prototypes, and share experiences and impact, in an accessible coherent language/form, for other CSOs to use as guides and models, and do this in a systematic ongoing manner.

Capacity building of sector partners

This is about trainings, coaching/mentoring other sector partners, on technical areas of the issue at hand, supporting smaller CSOs in the sector learn from new knowledge and capacities and to get them to imbibe those, helping raise overall capacity in the sector, with the potential to influence desired sectoral outcomes.

Again, the results are mixed. CSHRN in particular, has had a long-term and systematic approach to capacity building of its member organisations, on the specific theme of human rights. With support from international human rights organisations, CSHRN has been able to develop a set of nine manuals, and it has provided trainings to its members and other interested organisations on technical subjects such as human rights monitoring. Lately, however, these effort by the SBCPs have shown a let up. Similarly, IWA has entered into a partnership with ACBAR and has provided two sets of trainings in integrity building to ACBAR members – and is planning follow-up activities too. The other SBCPs have shown less of a desire and ability to develop this potential of their SF function.

CSOs that are commonly recognised for their sector competencies, integrity and human resources, have a good potential for offering capacity building services for fellow CSOs in their sector; in particular the smaller organisations based in the provinces around the country. Their prioritizing providing capacity building services in their area of expertise is likely to bring several benefits, to CSOs that benefit from the training, but also to the service providers themselves. By having to systematically analyse experience and learnings, and to present these in a pedagogical manner – all critical to capacity building in the sector – will help advance analytical and reflective capacities of SBCPs. There is also scope, that capacity building could become a source of revenue for some of the cash strapped SBCPs. It is important, however, that capacity building is not only seen as organising trainings and workshops, but that they have elements of coaching and mentoring, are linked to strategic management and overall organisational development.

Awareness creation in the sector

This is about identifying and mobilizing target groups for awareness creation or building; producing learning materials; carrying out campaigns.

Several important project interventions undertaken by the SBCPs have had a direct aim of increasing awareness among citizens (rights holders) and government officials and traditional leaders (duty bearers) on issues of peace building, anti-corruption, women's rights, access to justice, and human rights. Some of these could be seen to be a mixture of awareness raising and capacity building efforts; e.g. SDO's provision of trainings to 600 community based peace councils and 500 religious leaders. The setting up of information and resource centres in provincial capitals is also a means of direct engagement with the public. Students use these centres to access resource materials, and workshops and public debates are held on issues of current importance.

All SBCPs have different ways of creating awareness in the public and among key stakeholders and influential decision-makers about issues of importance to their work. There has been a tendency to rely on fairly traditional types of written publications, in particular newsletters and magazines. Even if some of these are published in several thousand copies, there is no doubt that a shift towards a more focused and specialised attention to using electronic and social media (which some of the organisations are gradually developing) would have potentials for greater impact. Websites and Facebook pages need to get increased attention in terms of regular updating and providing stories and resources of interest to identified target groups. Others are using various public media channels – radio and TV – to transmit key messages, through news and discussion programmes.

Advocacy and lobbying on the subject

This is about identifying and mapping stakeholders in various sectors – in government, private sector, civil society, media, wider audience - designing and implementing joint campaigns and other types of action; preparing case studies; producing documentation and advocacy materials).

Initiating and coordinating joint efforts in lobbying and advocacy work is a key sector facilitation role, and all of the SBCPs have had a focus on this. IWA works with a variety of stakeholders, in civil society, in government and in the private sector, to advocate for anti-corruption efforts – one of the important and continuous efforts being the annual National Corruption Survey. CSHRN is playing a key role in various central multi-stakeholder groups (representing civil society, government, media, the international community) that have direct influence on human rights legislation and implementation. The organisation is also a key voice through its collaboration with international human rights organisations, reporting on the human rights status in Afghanistan.

SDO, AWEC and DQG play somewhat similar roles in their sector areas. They take part in or initiate advocacy campaigns, that would benefit from planning and better alignment with their ongoing advocacy efforts. Peace education and school enrolment campaigns (SDO), women's rights campaigns (AWEC), access to information ones (by IWA and CSHRN), whistle-blowers' protection (IWA), are all campaigns that could be done better, with better impact. Some of these advocacy efforts could benefit from a more effective use of the organisations' own network (in particular CSHRN and AWEC), to increase the effects and spread around the country. There is also a need at time to make campaigns more focused on short-term changes, so that advocacy messages and methods are geared towards specific target groups and with clear expected outcomes.

6. Conclusion

What has been the net impact of the intervention – in this case, the use of the sector facilitation approach by Tawanmandi and Rahnuma, to developing afghan civil society, especially in the sectors of gender rights and justice, human rights, transparency and anti-corruption and peace-building? What was gained and what was lost with the SBCP approach? We present our main conclusion here.

Firstly, the question, did theory (of the sector facilitation approach) correspond to practice, as observed with impact on the SBCPs that Rahnuma provided support to? The point of using the SF approach was to help develop Afghan civil society capacity in the identified sectors, in an efficient and effective manner that would be locally-led and sustainable. Where conditions were favourable, specifically in terms of the capacity and relative competency of the sector lead, and the wider sector eco-system itself, this assumption has held ground, as with the IWA experience and to a lesser degree, CSHRN's. In other instances, the outcomes have been less sanguine, it is our claim, not due to any flaws with the idea itself, but with its operationalisation, and specifically with the context of its implementation: the choice of sector leads to partner; their prioritising their internal capacities rather than the more outward looking and sector facilitating ones, and the difficulties with Tawanmandi's project management, acted as significant barriers to the potential of the SF approach being realised.

Yet, as we saw in the last section on outcomes, there have been notable achievements. The support helped build up the capacity of SBCPs (IWA and CSHRN more than SDO and AWEC), on a range of specific capacities. This allows them to better influence dynamics in their sectors towards desired sectoral outcomes – knowledge creation and dissemination; capacity building; awareness raising and advocacy and networking. Given the challenging context of civil society capacity building in Afghanistan, Rahnuma was a minor actor. Yet, within the limited role it played to positively influence SBCP capacity, the gains assume significance. IWA has, during the Tawanmandi period, become the leader in the anti-corruption space in Afghanistan. The support helped it fill capacity gaps to play that leadership role better – in strategic planning, and research and knowledge creation and dissemination, particularly. Similarly, CSHRN was able to make use of the technical support to shore up its human rights monitoring functions, helping it with the potential to better support its member organisations in carrying out their mandate.

But challenges have been many. Firstly, the environment for good governance in Afghanistan, and for civil society's role in it, is fraught, with increasing conflict and insecurity, impacting the working of actors within those, and limiting their autonomy to operate and obtain desired outcomes. Within that harsh context, the chosen sectors – anti-corruption, human rights, gender justice et al - are the most challenging, given, these are the arenas of contestations between different social forces in the country. This further constraints the ability of Afghan CSOs to make sustained impact. A case in point is the reported threats faced by CSHRN, a direct result of its human rights reporting work. Given the already insecure environment, these threats have severely compromised the CSHRN's ability to operate.

A further challenge has been programmatic, in particular Tawanmandi's choice of SBCP organisations, compromising sector facilitation potentials of the Tawanmandi approach. Most lacked much enthusiasm for playing sector lead roles, rather, made strong push for acquiring competitive (rather than collaborative) advantage in the sector. SBCPs that did show promise for sector facilitation were adversely affected by project management issues (in particular tardy release of resources), compromising their ability to show SF results.

The way forward

Discussion at the end-of-project review with stakeholders (SBCPs mostly, but also other civil society support actors), raised the issue how sector facilitation was organized, as crucial for its result - either 'top down', where development partners appoint a lead agency, or 'bottom up', where CSOs themselves form a coalition or an alliance, based on need and mutual comfort levels, to lead the effort. The experience from Tawanmandi, as we have noted, is that sector leadership is much less sustainable when there is a top-down thrust. A bottom up approach, where the partnership is self-mobilised and mutually beneficial, besides being sustainable, also helps with joined up working, crucial to sector facilitation and civil society development.

The changing donor landscape too will have implications. Reduced donor funding, means that CSOs will, on the one hand, be competing for less funding opportunities, and on the other, potentially also coming together, to bid for projects jointly, incentivizing collaborations and joined up working. This will be an opportunity, especially for provincial CSOs that are unable to attract donor funding – because the donors are mainly limited to Kabul, and subsequently, it is difficult for the locally based CSOs to be visible and to get access to capacity building support. These will have implications for how any future civil society support is structured.

7. Recommendations

The donor community in Afghanistan, especially those looking to influence stability and good governance beneficial to Afghan citizens - is at a cross roads. Various choices need to be made:

- Whether to support civil society development, as contributing to good governance and stability?
- What sectors/thematic areas to focus on for support
- What specifically to support, in terms of activities and projects?
- What approach to take, given the deteriorating security situation?

The case for supporting civil society capacity development, as an aid to good governance, remains strong. Most of the context will continue to remain the same or worse, further deteriorate, as we move forward, with state legitimacy further compromised. This is all the more reason for donors to support good governance in Afghanistan, through building demand – raising public awareness, creating coalitions, and undertaking advocacy – and through the work shore up state legitimacy. The question is what form and modality, this support should take, that maximises benefits and mitigates against past risks.

Increasing conflict in Afghanistan demands that the civil society support is aimed at shoring up state legitimacy. This is achievable by focusing on a handful of ends/sectors:

- Enhancing services for citizens
- Enabling wellbeing and opportunities for the vulnerable (women, children, minorities, the poor, the old)
- Contributing to conflict mitigation

It will be critical to do all of this, in a manner that links non-state contributions to state efforts at reaching out to all citizens. Table 3, outlines some ideas for sectoral focus for any future support, and the specific interventions which could be considered for future support.

Table 3: Future SF opportunities

Thematic area/sector	Specific intervention (for CSO support)	
Basic services	Working with GoIRA Citizens Charter programme, to help local communities	Community engagement/transparency
		To identify needs and plan, prioritise projects locally; implement those; and report.
		Transparency and inclusiveness
Rights of the most marginalised: women, minorities, the poor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - documenting, tracking, reporting rights delivery and violations - raising awareness among public - capacity building local groups and communities - advocacy: legal, and policy 	
Youth engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - opportunities for gainful lives - civic engagement - youth as change-makers 	
Transparency, conflict mitigation, and peace building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - raising awareness - coalitions and networks, at local level - advocacy 	

What will work, is a minimalist model, that is mindful of the challenging context, and avoids the mistakes of the past, especially to counter the past practice of large grants chasing a small set of already well-connected NGOs. Any possible support should rather focus attention on capacity/deliverables for all actors in the sector and wider civil society, to make use of. Our experience demonstrates that a sector facilitation model based primarily on supporting individual CSOs to carry out specific leadership roles will not work.

What is proposed in its place is establishing Resource Centres, Kabul-based, specific to each sector/thematic area – that are directly managed, with no grant making to CSOs - to act as open spaces for all civil society actors to leverage, and make use of, to further their agenda; not as doers, rather as facilitators.

Civil society -the target end users of the facilities/capacity - ought not to be limited to grant seeking NGOs, rather they should be open to and actively seek out all actors within civil society, including the media, platforms, activists, as well as large and small NGOs/CSOs.

The potential activities these resource centres should undertake might mirror the ideal-type roles of sector facilitating CSOs of the SBCP model, viz.:

- i. capacity building and training actors in the sector on issues of concern; developing training material and resources, for equipping end users with necessary capacity
- ii. producing analysis and practical resource material, based on local (and selectively, regional) experiences, on identified thematic areas/sectors, and their active dissemination among potential users
- iii. developing models and capacity for advocacy with stakeholders on thematic concerns, for greater impact
- iv. communication and engagement with civil society actors in the sector, for effective sectoral coordination
- v. alongside, the resource centres will also support individuals – through fellowships (grant and capacity building support) – to act as champions in the sectors, helping incubate long-term civil society capacity

Where the resource centres will differ from SBCP model would be in their not being run by individual CSOs – thus avoiding the fraught intra-sectoral/civil society dynamics at play – but by donors directly, with the express purpose of diffusing capacity and resources within Afghan local civil society. The direct management model – clearly not an ideal situation – chosen as a temporary measure to rapidly maximise issue-based gains. In future, these resource centres could form the springboard for more local-led capacity development measures.

It will also help if this measure works not in isolation of state sector, but in coordination with it, to leverage the potential for more direct impact on governance outcomes. The coordination could take various forms – agreement with state structures for targeting specific programmes. A good and potentially beneficial example here of the Citizens Charter programme, where donor support for enhancing ‘voice’ and ‘demand making’ will benefit from partnerships with state agencies.