

HOW CIVIL SOCIETY CAN ASSIST AND ENHANCE THE APRP

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1. Introduction

The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) has established various committees and councils at the national and provincial levels, with district councils still taking shape. Despite the existence of Provincial Peace and Reconciliation Councils (PPRCs) and national level consultation with Afghan civil society, a clear strategy on how to use the strengths of diverse civil society actors and engage more traditional elements such as community elders and spiritual and religious leaders (*ulema*) is still missing. Furthermore, bringing marginalized elements of civil society such as women, youth, *Kuchi* and displaced populations into the process needs fine-tuning.

In order for reintegration to be sustainable, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA) must empower communities to absorb returning insurgents and address the underlying reasons why individuals joined the insurgency to begin with. Communities must have a say about the conditions that will be set for peace and reintegration to be carried out, as they will have to live with returning fighters. This includes consultations on what “red lines”, such as violations of the Afghan Constitution, are not to be crossed. Linking grass-roots reconciliation processes to national GIRoA initiatives through community-level consultations will give communities a sense of ownership over the peace process.

The goal of this presentation is to demonstrate the role civil society in general, and diverse civil society actors in particular, can play in supporting the APRP in implementing a successful peace and reintegration strategy.

2. Strengths of Civil Society in Peace/Reintegration Process

The APRP Joint Secretariat (JS) and High Peace Council (HPC) have already begun consulting with civil society in order to enrich their strategy and programing. Yet, civil society actors have far more to offer than their ideas and concerns only. The following points highlight the ways civil society can support and strengthen the APRP:

Provision of neutral platform to link two parties to be reconciled (government – insurgency). One of the key challenges the APRP faces is the threat to HPC members as they represent the Afghan government which is a party to the conflict. When negotiating for peace, a neutral party is needed. Here civil society—community elders, mullahs, youth and women—can provide a neutral bridge between the insurgency and GIRoA. Key is the identification of individuals who are seen as unaffiliated with the insurgency and/or government and can mediate between the two parties. These individuals should interact with the PPRCs but be independent of them.

Customary mechanisms (jirgas) as tool for reconciliation. Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms are an ideal tool for peace and

reintegration as they focus on restorative justice and can assist the healing process within communities. This is crucial in order to avoid situations where a decision to reintegrate an insurgent is made at more senior levels but is rejected by the community. In order to guarantee the voices and rights of women, they should be involved in conflict resolution processes.

Ensure an inclusive and participatory process. Reintegration is important to all members of communities, hence mechanisms for community consultations need to be developed that allow the participation of youth, women and marginalized groups, such as *Kuchi* and displaced populations (the latter needing special attention as often they support the insurgency because they are excluded from decision-making processes). Such consultations help to identify grievances, solutions and red lines, which provide for community ownership of the process.

In order to ensure that different elements of civil society come together, it is best to mobilize each group separately first, and then begin linking them together to join forces to bring peace in their respective communities. Such unity and collaboration, also with the PPRCs, is key as the insurgency often capitalizes on the prevailing fragmentation and discord within communities to infiltrate and recruit.

3 How Civil Society can assist and support APRP and PPRCs

3.1 Step 1: Assistance in understanding complexity of insurgency recruitment and underlying grievances

Reintegration needs to be understood as a process rather than a one-time event. Part of this process is to gain a deeper understanding of the grievances of

insurgents *and* the communities they are to be reintegrated into. As the JS and HPC is fully aware, a meaningful peace and reintegration strategy can only succeed if it is based on a detailed understanding of the insurgency not blinded by propaganda of the Taliban leadership that tends to propagate the unity of the movement. Grievances and motives for joining the insurgency are diverse and context specific, ranging from economic issues such as underemployment or resource competition/conflicts to political exclusion and marginalization.

3.1.1 Civil society support of PPRCs – Socio-Economic Assessments/Actor and grievance mapping

Civil society actors can offer support to APRP by providing socio-economic assessments that identify the distinct environment in provinces and districts that have given rise and support to the insurgency, and identifying reasons that have facilitated insurgency recruitment. Such assessments can identify actors, help prioritize reintegration opportunities, and determine what conditions need to be set for communities to support peace and reintegration.

Afghan civil society organizations and NGOs have a body of knowledge and expertise that can support the PPCR's understanding of why individuals join the insurgency, what underlying conflicts exist in communities, and then can identify local solutions to address these conflicts and grievances. Often the strength of civil society organizations is their network of community leaders, religious actors, youth, and women—all of whom can be integrated into the peace process.

Once actors, grievances and conflicts are understood, the following can be undertaken:

“Red lines” drawn to ensure that no fighter is reintegrated before community concerns are addressed and justice is served. Though APRP biometrics and registration procedures are building a database of reintegrees, these measures have not stopped opportunistic individuals from claiming to be insurgents in order to take advantage of the peace process. Nor are they reliable in identifying “hard core” or “criminal” Taliban that must be treated differently from the majority of potential ex-combatants. There is no technological solution to this problem.

What is needed instead is actor mapping at the district and sub-district (e.g., *manteqa*) level that identifies insurgents that must be dealt with through the Afghan criminal court system or a local *jirga* as part of any re-integration effort. The list of those Taliban who have crossed a “red-line” would be made available to the PPRCs. A specific subcommittee could be formed to deal with these individuals and ensure that their cases are handled by the courts, or *jirgas*, before they would be eligible for reconciliation/re-integration assistance.

Tailored reintegration package devised identifying where civil society is best suited to contribute to and support the process.

Identification of, and liaising with, local capacities for peace which are individuals considered neutral by communities and able to lead a peace and reconciliation process. While the threat to official APRP members is substantial, there is an equal, if not greater, threat to community leaders who choose to work with the APRP councils. Recent assessments by TLO have shown that many community leaders, even in insurgent-dominated areas, are interested in participating in the peace process but are fearful of retribution, or simply of losing credibility in the eyes of their people if they are seen to be siding with the

government. Thus, civil society organizations can serve as a neutral communication bridge between PPRCs and local capacities for peace by maintaining open lines of communication while at the same time guarding their own independence and that of local capacities for peace.

3.2 Step 2: Helping PPRC to develop and implement solutions for sustainable reintegration

3.2.1 Information Dissemination

Despite outreach activities by APRP, their efforts rarely make it beyond provincial and district centres. Communities in general are under-informed about the peace process and as a result are unsure of how they can participate. Here civil society can support APRP and implementing government ministries in conducting outreach and information campaigns. Many civil society organizations have long worked on civic education (e.g., the Afghan Civil Society Forum) and facilitated outreach campaigns (e.g., the Afghan Women’s Network).

Outreach activities may include:

- Workshops and information sessions at district and sub-district levels about the APRP and how civil society can become active. It is crucial to ensure that communities from insecure areas are able to participate in order to make them part of the national peace and reintegration process.
- Coordinate further outreach activities with mobile information teams that can penetrate remote rural areas.
- Explicitly develop mechanisms for dissemination of information to women and marginalized communities in order to make them part of the national process.



- Engaging elders and spiritual figures as well as local women and youth leaders to play a prominent role as messengers of peace in their respective areas and in helping people to understand the peace process.

3.2.2 Conflict Resolution and Restorative Justice

As the insurgency has worn on an increasing number of individuals have joined (or allied with) the Taliban because the insurgency represent a source of power. These insurgents are not just driven by a lack of employment or political representation, but by the need to seek revenge for feuds or low-level land, business, or water disputes which escalated with the introduction of weapons. In this context, individuals either use the insurgency as protection, or try to preempt their opponent by having the insurgency launch an attack or destabilize the region for personal interests.

Jobs and political representation may mean little to those whose motive for joining the insurgency is to right a perceived wrong or as a means of restoring personal or family honour. In these cases the key is to resolve the underlying conflict and address grievances. PPRCs must be focused on resolving these disputes, however time and security constraints do not allow them to investigate the conflicts fully. Additionally, given the long-term nature of these conflicts and the multiple actors involved, a neutral third party (in this case an NGO or civil society organization) may be best placed to collect relevant information on the conflict and prepare the ground for successful resolution.

In addition, civil society organizations can build the capacity of PPRCs to improve their conflict resolution skills and support addressing such conflicts through:

Training/Facilitation to PPRC members. Many civil society organizations have relevant formal/informal dispute resolution experience and could be immediately engaged to provide training on conflict resolution to both provincial and district peace councils. Furthermore, civil society can draw on the currently underused conflict resolution skills of local elders and religious leaders.

Facilitating and strengthening customary mechanisms that focus on restorative justice. Several civil society organizations have worked with the traditional *jirga/shura* mechanism for years in order to strengthen justice provision in rural areas. These mechanisms strongly emphasize the notions of equity and community consensus for sentences.¹ Instead of focusing on retributive justice (as formal systems in the West do), *jirgas/shuras* emphasize restorative justice that is based on local conceptions of fairness in order to reconcile conflict parties and restore harmony to the community.² While men dominate traditional leadership councils and informal justice bodies, TLO workshop participants identified numerous historical mediation roles that women have played—both in Pashtun and non-Pashtun communities—that could be employed to bolster local reconciliation and grievance resolution efforts.

Monitoring delivery of aid and reintegration packages. Aid and development can be a powerful

¹ Barfield et al., *The Clash of Two Goods: State and Non-State Dispute Resolution in Afghanistan*; (Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2006).

² *ibid.* It is important to note that an integral part of a restorative justice system is a certain set of values, principles and lifestyle. It focuses on the needs of the victim, accountability of the offender, while also giving him a way back into the community. See Rachel Monaghan 'Community-based Justice in Northern Ireland and South Africa', *International Criminal Justice Review*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (March 2008), pp.83-105.



carrot, but only if sequenced correctly. Outside assistance should come only after communities have resolved underlying conflicts and grievances that facilitated insurgency recruitment, as opposed to the current practice which is to give aid first and hope that this will prompt stability. Community ownership means a willingness to address existing problems and grievances first and then request development assistance to strengthen community cohesion. Aid needs to be used as a reward. Civil society actors can alert development and humanitarian actors when communities are ready for assistance and have fulfilled a set of agreed upon conditions.

Civil society can also

- Conduct workshops and seminars on peace according to Islam for mullahs, tribal leaders and other powerbrokers.
- Develop transitional justice processes that are mediated by elders who should encourage victims to focus on forgiveness rather than retribution.
- Create forums for reintegrees and community members to discuss their respective grievances and engage in solution-focused dialogue on how to ensure security and stability in their village and district.
- Support exchanges between the women of the community and the female family members of the reintegrees to discuss the importance of peace and how it can be sustained.

3.2.3 Vocational Training

The Afghan government has already worked on many job-creation programs, having understood the problems of economic exclusion, especially of youth

in the employment market. While government can devise and sponsor such programmes civil society can assist in managing a speedy implementation.

Civil society and NGOs can play an immediate role in providing vocational training for ex-combatants and the communities in which they attempt to reintegrate. Vocational training is not an end in itself, but is an immediate step. If connected to real long-term employment opportunities it can provide ex-combatants with a post-insurgent life that does not involve transitioning immediately to an *arbakai*/militia or state security force.

The key to successful vocational training is building skill sets that meet market demand, such as construction and agriculture. A concrete example would be developing and running vocational schools at provincial levels, with special training programmes offered between agricultural peak seasons at district/village levels. This could be implemented and managed by Afghan NGOs in conjunction with the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD) and the Ministry of Agriculture Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL).

Other suggestions include:

Construction: The emphasis on this training will be to provide the skills necessary to move individuals from the common labour (300AFS/day) to the skilled labour (800AFS/day) with specific training in the areas of carpentry, masonry, electrical, and plumbing.

Conduct comprehensive market surveys prior to development of job training programs or industry promotion

Target women for enterprise skill training and employment promotion

Agriculture/livelihoods: Immediate impact projects would be to create demonstration farms at the

provincial level using government land, with technical expertise and management of the farm provided by DAIL and local NGOs. The goal of the farm would be instruction in orchards, nursery and water management, as well as value chains and value added processing.

Promote industries with heavy production requirements that warrant construction of factories that would employ Afghans

Enhance Afghanistan's mineral extraction capacity to both increase employment opportunities and ensure that profits from mineral extraction are captured by Afghan private- or state-owned enterprise

3.2.4 Harnessing positive energies of youth

While the lack of leisure activities is rarely a main reason for joining the insurgency it contributes to an overall frustration and sense of alienation by rural youth. Such programs are important even if fighters are successfully reintegrated they may turn to criminal activities without alternatives to expend their energy. Here civil society actors can help facilitate local sport clubs and cultural events that are initially state-sponsored.

Developing local sports clubs/sport events to create space for sports (e.g., cricket, volleyball, football, wrestling) and interaction of youth from across the entire province. The goal is to make this interaction regular with the formation of leagues so that community members and players can interact in a continuous manner. APRP funds would help to facilitate the development of village and district-level sport clubs where youth can access sports training, and adults (possibly even ex-combatants) provide training for children and youth.

These sport clubs/leagues can then compete locally and ultimately come together at the district and provincial levels for competitions. These events can be sponsored by the APRP, and implemented by local NGOs in coordination with the Olympic Directorate. At present, the Olympic Directorate already has sport competitions, however they suffer from the fact that they are often concentrated in Kabul or limited to participants from provincial capitals.

More specifically, APRP funds could be used to create or refurbish the necessary venues to hold these competitions at village, district and provincial level and provide start-up support for such sport clubs with encouragement of private sector for continued sponsorship.

Developing youth centres offering cultural activities: Often youth lack a space for gathering and exchanging ideas. In some western countries there are youth centres staffed by one or two social workers that help coordinate cultural events, while also providing access to education, libraries, and computer training. As with the sports clubs, the APRP could sponsor the construction or refurbishment of such youth centres.

As poetry has become a main vehicle for political discussions, the organization of poetry competitions at the district/provincial level is a beneficial engagement among youth.

3.2.5 Constructive engagement of religious and spiritual figures

Islam is the pillar of Afghan society. With this in mind, the APRP has begun to engage with religious leaders, however much more must be done in this regard and civil society can play a role in furthering the depth and breadth of the APRP's religious engagement. For example, civil society could



facilitate religious and spiritual actors into a network (including the creation of a madrassa union) that then in turn could be linked to the state. Such religious networks and/or a union of madrassas could work on

- Improving infrastructure/buildings
- Standardizing curriculum and training of talibs (religious students)
- Provision of libraries and reference materials
- Sponsorship of graduation ceremonies

3.2.6 Constructive engagement of women

The APRP has long identified the need to engage women in the peace and reintegration process. For this purpose it set up an HPC women's group. Yet the engagement of women has not yet trickled down to the grass-roots level. TLO recently held a workshop with women from rural conflict areas and found that women's readiness for peace and commitment to supporting government-led reconciliation and reintegration processes is strong.

That being said, there is still limited understanding of the value of women's political contributions. Women are often selected symbolically on political bodies. The engagement of women by the APRP and HPC has not yet reached rural communities where insurgent recruitment is high and reintegration opportunities have yet to emerge. In order to develop the local capacities of women leaders further and integrate them into the APRP process, civil society actors could

- Provide thorough actor mapping creating a database of local women's leaders willing to engage in the APRP process and skills they can offer. Such a database can then be made available to the PPRC and local GIRoA officials.

- Support the development of female peace groups at district and provincial levels to engage women more fully in the process
- Foster linkages between women's groups and customary justice providers to ensure women's rights are not violated in the peace and reintegration process

4 Conclusion

In order to work together constructively, GIRoA should understand that civil society can complement (and not compete with) government peace and reconciliation initiatives and, in turn, civil society should understand its role as a facilitating partner to GIRoA.

Going forward, the most pressing task is bringing the peace process to the district- and village-level: civil society can and should be the vehicle to bring the peace process down to this level. What is needed is a relationship that is formalized to the point that it allows civil society to tap into APRP resources, but not so formal that it will hinder civil society's flexibility, access, or credibility.

About TLO

The Liaison Office (TLO) is an Afghan non-governmental organization that seeks to improve local governance, stability and security through systematic and institutionalized engagement with customary structures, local communities, and civil society groups. Our mission is to facilitate the formal integration of communities and their traditional governance structures within Afghanistan's newly emerging peace, governance and reconstruction framework. TLO's three main areas of activity are: Research and Analysis; Peacebuilding and Mediation; and Natural Resource Management.