



## Executive Summary

### Civil Society in Transitional Contexts

Afghan non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are [struggling to survive](#) as donor contributions continue to wane, according to *Reuters*. While the international community pledged to provide [USD 4 billion](#) per year for Afghanistan through 2015 at the July 2012 Tokyo Conference, it remains unclear how much aid will ultimately be disbursed and how any change in aid levels could affect Afghan civil society, which is a broad category that includes NGOs as well as other voluntary bodies involved in governance or development.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of how Afghan civil society may be affected by the on-going period of transition, this report examines three other countries that previously experienced periods of transition and [declining financial donor support](#): Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Timor-Leste. Those case studies, which are outlined in the full report, point to a number of key lessons learnt, such as those noted below, related to civil society in transitional contexts. The following points emerge from reports such as the [“Mozambican Civil Society”](#), [“The Civil Society Landscape in Sierra Leone”](#) and the [“Situation Analysis of Civil Society Organisations in East Timor”](#).

- **Diversify Funding Sources.** There is a need to gradually reduce dependence on international stakeholders for funds and capacity building. By diversifying sources of funding, civil society organisations (CSOs) may gain greater flexibility and be more independent of fluctuations in aid levels, as noted in the case study of Sierra Leone.
- **Coordinate or Collaborate.** When funds are scarce, collaboration and coordination among CSOs becomes particularly important to maintain cohesion within civil society and to enable coherent or complementary activities. The alternative is a rise in inter-CSO competition, as was identified in the case of Mozambique.
- **Integrate Women.** While there are many CSOs focused on women as beneficiaries, in Mozambique and elsewhere, women remained underrepresented in a significant portion of CSOs. Moreover, women tend to make up a smaller portion of the paid staff of CSOs when compared to men.
- **Enhance Understanding of Traditional CSOs.** Research suggests that traditional institutions should be more closely studied in order to determine how they can more fully engage with registered CSOs, donors and government agencies. In Sierra Leone it was noted that rural residents preferred indigenous forms of civil society.
- **Consider Simplifying Funding Requirements.** The difficulty of navigating complex funding requirements was described as another obstacle facing civil society in transitional contexts. The result tends to be the concentration of financial support among only a few CSOs.

Such lessons, while based on contexts other than Afghanistan, may be useful to Afghan NGOs, as well as other CSOs, which flourished after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001. As of June 2012, the Ministry of Economy said that [1,707 local NGOs](#) were registered in Afghanistan. [Research by Counterpart International](#) suggests that CSOs in Afghanistan are particularly concerned about their future levels of funding and are also grappling with insecurity and capacity deficits related to fundraising, project development, proposal writing and organisational management. However, the same study found that Afghan NGOs have also become increasingly professional; 90% of NGOs have written rules about how they are governed, and nearly [80%](#) reportedly have procurement and accounting policies in place. As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated at the recent Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan, the question now remains whether the international community will provide [a sufficient investment](#) to enable civil society to continue to develop and contribute to governance and social and economic development.

**WANT TO READ MORE?** The full report on “Civil Society in Transitional Contexts” delves into further detail. To read the full report and others from the CFC, visit our Afghanistan Homepage at: [www.cimicweb.org/cmo/afg](http://www.cimicweb.org/cmo/afg).



# Civil Society in Transitional Contexts

## *A Brief Review of Post-Conflict Countries and Afghanistan*

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*This report provides an overview of the current activities of Afghan civil society and the upcoming challenges it may experience in the face of a withdrawal of foreign assistance by drawing on past experiences of other post-conflict contexts. Related information is available at [www.cimicweb.org](http://www.cimicweb.org). Hyperlinks to source material are highlighted in blue and underlined in the text.*

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Afghan non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are [struggling to survive](#) as donor contributions continue to wane, according to *Reuters*. While the international community pledged to provide [USD 4 billion](#) per year for Afghanistan through 2015 at the Tokyo Conference in July 2012, this amount represents a 33% decline from the USD 6 billion provided in 2010. Moreover, research shows only a portion of aid pledges are ultimately contributed by donors, thus making it increasingly likely that less than USD 4 billion will be disbursed annually. Hence, the future level of financial support for Afghan civil society has been the subject of recent discussion. Furthermore, the *Associated Press* notes that [Afghans and civil society groups are worried](#) that a rising level of violence could pose new threats to daily life and to NGO operations. Yet the United Nations notes that civil society – a category that includes NGOs – is “a [vital component](#) of governance and decentralization” and thus requires safeguarding through periods of transition.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of how Afghan civil society may be affected by the on-going period of transition, this report examines three other countries that experienced periods of transition and declining financial donor support: Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Timor-Leste. This report first addresses the definition of civil society and the selection of these three contexts before proceeding to case studies. The report then addresses civil society in Afghanistan before laying out experts’ recommendations regarding how civil society can adapt during periods of transition.

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### Defining Civil Society

The World Bank defines civil society as “non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in [public life](#)” and help to facilitate collective action among groups, generally to promote the interests of their members or of the society at large. Civil society thus includes a wide range of organisations, from traditional local councils and farmers associations to national and international NGOs with tens of thousands of staff members. CSOs may be legally registered and recognised, as are most NGOs, or they may involve relatively informal groups of individuals working together. This report concerns itself with those CSOs that are involved in either delivering assistance or which play some role in supporting governance. These particularly include NGOs, which are a form of civil society and a relatively formal type of CSO.

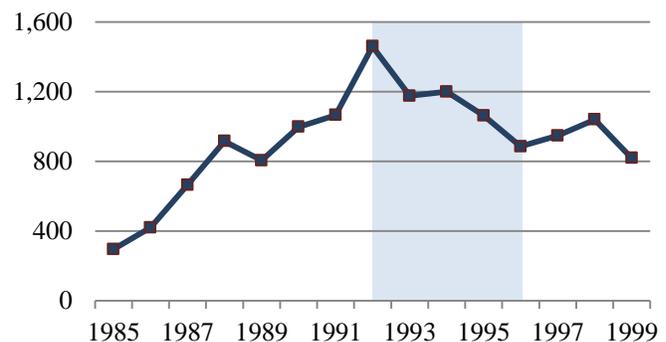
### Selection of Case Studies

When exploring the challenges facing Afghanistan’s civil society, it may be useful to examine other countries that have experienced related processes during and after conflicts. Most notably, the countries chosen for inclusion in this report – Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Timor-Leste – all experienced a significant drawdown in official development assistance (ODA) after or during periods of conflict.<sup>1</sup> The experience of such an aid decline, as reflected in data from the [Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development](#) (OECD), was the primary criterion used in case study selection. However, despite such drawdowns in aid, no two conflicts or circumstances are necessarily similar, and nothing included in this report should be taken to suggest that Afghanistan will or will not follow the paths seen in any of the countries reviewed herein. Furthermore, it must be noted that little information exists on how CSOs adapted to a drawdown in aid. As a result, the following case studies provide an overview of civil society both during and after transitions; they are not intended to reflect a comprehensive portrait of civil society in each country.

### Mozambique

According to the report, “Slow Progress towards Democratic Ownership in Mozambique” by Alliance 2015, after the end of the 15 year war civil war in 1992, Mozambicans became increasingly able to draw on the [political freedoms](#) awarded to them by the 1990 constitution.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the majority of [Mozambican NGOs](#) were established in the 1990s, according to Stefano Bellucci in his paper for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). NGOs, often in partnership with international organisations, played a [key role](#) in the democratic transition and consolidation of Mozambique, states the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA). Some NGOs and other types of CSOs also engaged in reconciliation programmes both at the national and grassroots levels through “plays and dances that condemned the war, peace marches, conciliatory soccer matches between

Figure I. Mozambique, Net ODA (USD, Mil.)



Source: [World Bank, “Databank”](#).

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<sup>1</sup> According to the International Monetary Fund, Official Development Assistance (ODA) can be defined as the “flows of official financing [administered with the promotion](#) of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as the main objective, and which are concessional in character with a grant element of at least 25 percent (using a fixed 10 percent rate of discount)”. ODA comprises disbursements by bilateral donors and multilateral institutions. Loans without a significant grant component are excluded.

<sup>2</sup> Out of a total population of 16 million, [one million people](#) died, three million civilians were displaced and two million had become refugees as a result of the civil war, wrote Ann L. Phillips from the George C. Marshall Center.



the opposing sides, and special ceremonies to heal and reintegrate victims of the war into their communities”.<sup>3</sup> Initially recognised for their contribution to the provision of humanitarian assistance, civil society increasingly undertook [development efforts](#) intended to improve social and economic conditions in the long term and participated in research and advocacy actions intended to monitor and influence public and community development policies, states the Foundation for Community Development (FDC). Yet, the [Civil Society Index](#), a rating system developed by the World Alliance for Citizen Participation (known as CIVICUS), found that Mozambican civil society’s ability to contribute to governance and development [often remained hampered](#).

After the signing of the [Rome Peace Accords](#) between the government and rebel forces in 1992, net ODA dropped significantly through 1996 (*see Figure 1*).<sup>4</sup> According to the United Nations Children’s Fund, the proliferation of CSOs, particularly NGOs, in Mozambique led to [competition for funding](#) and programme support. Moreover, research shows that the growth of civil society was [uneven](#) and inconsistent across the country. For instance, more than [70% of the country’s 4,853](#) non-profit institutions were concentrated in fewer than half of the provinces, according to the Civil Society Index. Most CSOs were reportedly [located in districts](#) and rural communities rather than in the main urban centres. Accordingly, many reportedly were overlooked by the donor community, which tends to be based in major urban areas and which partners with registered, urban CSOs. Rural CSOs in Mozambique commonly found it difficult to interact with or seek support from international donors and other city-based sources. Establishing mechanisms to ensure that donors are aware of capable CSOs, even if they lack a large presence in major cities, is one goal noted in several of the sources reviewed for this report.

## Sierra Leone

The civil war which began in 1991 was the result of years of autocratic rule and a [narrowing of political space](#), according to the “Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report”.<sup>5</sup> The Peace Accord was signed at Lomé in 1999, at which point ODA began to increase after a half decade of decline (*Figure 2, next page*). Despite a drastic decrease in ODA during the civil war, CIVICUS reports that Sierra Leone saw a [proliferation of CSOs](#). According to the World Bank, many of these CSOs were [gap fillers](#), providing basic services in lieu of the government, and were also involved in the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) process. According to Regional Stakeholders Consultation data, [42.6%](#) of service provision activities undertaken by CSOs were directed towards marginalised people, including poor communities and women. Hence, civil society, regardless of general problems, provided a crucial safety net that reached into key under-served population groups. But CSOs in Sierra Leone had [limited access](#) to resources and remained highly dependent on donors’ support following years of ODA decline, notes CIVICUS.

CIVICUS says that there was a need to gradually reduce Sierra Leonean CSOs’ [dependence on international organisations](#) for funds and capacity building. The World Bank also stated that civil society had a [weak financial resource](#) base, noting that many CSOs “chase whatever project has money, even where they lack the expertise or mandate to design or implement such projects”. By diversifying sources of funding, CSOs may gain greater flexibility and be more independent of donor priorities and fluctuations in aid levels.

<sup>3</sup> Mary H. Moran and M. Anne Pitcher, “The ‘basket case’ and the ‘poster child’: explaining the end of civil conflicts in Liberia and Mozambique”, *Third World Quarterly* 25:3 (2004), 511.

<sup>4</sup> Despite a sharp total decline in ODA, Mozambique was still considered of the world’s most aid-dependent countries, having received more than USD 8 billion during the 1990s and with ODA comprising [81.3%](#) of Gross National Income (GNI) in 1992. This level dropped to 29.4% of GNI by 1996.

<sup>5</sup> The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) says that between 1991 and 2002, approximately [70,000 people](#) were killed in Sierra Leone’s civil war and that a further 2.6 million were displaced. In 2001, UN forces moved into rebel-held areas and began to disarm rebel soldiers.



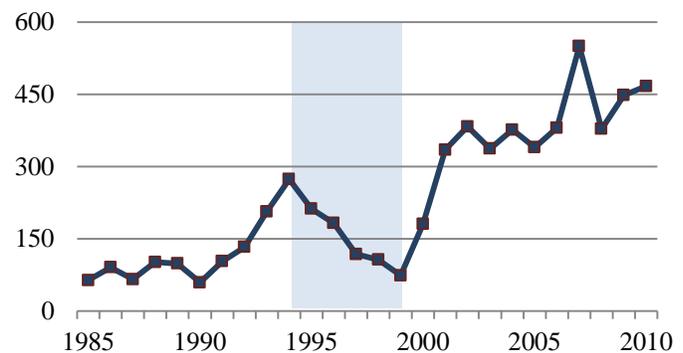
Research indicates that collaboration and coordination among CSOs becomes particularly important when funds are scarce; the alternative is a rise in inter-CSO competition for funding and attention which undermines the intra-societal connections civil society is intended to forge. In Sierra Leone, [poor communication](#) amongst CSOs negatively impacted their effectiveness and undermined chances for collaboration, according to CIVICUS. In addition, existing umbrella organisations were also noted to be relatively ineffective. CIVICUS recommended that relevant stakeholders “[build an alliance](#) between bigger and smaller CSOs in the area of capacity building, and enhanced networking and collaboration in order to ensure their effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability”.

Research from Sierra Leone also indicates that traditional institutions should be more closely studied in order to determine how they can more fully engage with foreign donors and host-nation government agencies. The World Bank noted that rural residents commonly preferred [indigenous forms of governance and civil society](#) such as religious associations called *sodalities* and microfinance associations known as *osusu*. The World Bank points out that these groups reportedly “build the social capital and moral pacts necessary for influencing, countervailing or participating in the political, social and economic governance of local societies”. Hence, the Sierra Leonean case raised questions regarding how such traditional institutions could be supported by institutions and donor agencies commonly oriented around formal CSOs. This may be particularly applicable in Afghanistan, where a large portion of rural Afghan civil society is conducted through community-based organisations such as *shuras*.

### Timor-Leste

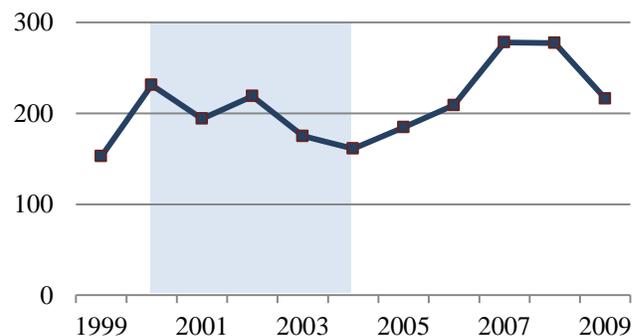
“Prior to the UN-supervised vote for independence on 30 August 1999, Timor-Leste was among the [poorest areas](#) in East Asia after more than 20 years of military and civil resistance against Indonesian rule, states Ian Patrick in an article on the role of NGOs in Timor-Leste. According to an article on “NGOs in East Timor” by Janet Hunt, civil society began to flourish, and local CSOs, particularly NGOs, [grew rapidly](#) once the environment in which they were operating became broadly supportive and permissive. Local NGOs expanded geographically and sectorally, undertaking new types of activities, though they were primarily concerned with agriculture, education, health, small business development, livelihoods, women’s empowerment and human rights. While ODA to Timor-Leste declined between 2000 and 2004 (*Figure 3*), by early 2002, CSOs had “established themselves as [key stakeholders](#) in the new nation’s development, with views and ideas, and a commitment to a participatory and inclusive approach to national development and respect for human rights”, states Hunt. Yet Patrick found that “[local participation](#), involvement and capacity building” still remained challenges for many CSOs.

Figure 2. Sierra Leone, Net ODA (USD, Mil.)



[World Bank, “Databank”.](#)

Figure 3. Timor-Leste, Net ODA (USD, Mil.)



[World Bank, “Databank”.](#)



Hunt noted that there is “a group of quite [well established](#) NGOs with good reputations, running programs and advocating to the government on a range of issues”. However, a UN survey found that small and under-resourced NGOs faced significant challenges. According to Hunt, while some NGOs had [developed relationships](#) with international organisations, others reportedly attempted to generate their own income through commercial-type activities. In the latter case, NGOs would charge a fee to their ‘clients’ to pay for services at discounted rates compared to commercial prices. However, most remained heavily reliant on international donors. As international development expert William Easterly wrote in 2002, navigating [complex funding requirements](#) can obstruct civil society by imposing requirements that only the most administratively proficient are able to meet in full. This may result in the concentration of foreign funding among a narrow number of NGOs.

Formal on-going links have developed across civil society via the NGO Forum in Timor-Leste and through [networks](#) such as *Dai Popular* (Popular Education Network) and networks focusing on particular issues such as sustainable livelihoods and parliamentary monitoring, reports UNDP. Most NGOs remain concentrated in the capital city of Dili. While this has some advantages given that government policy making remains centralised, the majority of Timor-Leste’s population, particularly most of its very poor, [reside in rural areas](#). Most organisations at the district level are also very small; the majority classified themselves as having one to twenty members but spread their resources across large districts. A [2002 UN report](#) stated that the capacity of CSOs, particularly NGOs, to strengthen their links to Timor-Leste’s villages was one determinant of effectiveness and sustainability in the long term. This suggested that new capabilities and strategies were required to assist CSOs in their communication with the public, particularly in rural areas.

## Afghanistan

The Asian Development Bank’s (ADB) “[Overview of Civil Society Organizations: Afghanistan](#)” notes that, under Soviet rule and during the civil war of the 1990s, CSOs remained active. Under the Taliban, NGOs – along with other types of CSOs – worked in local communities and continued to engage with UN agencies in order to deliver humanitarian assistance. CSOs flourished after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001. In 2007, the Afghan Foundation for Culture and Civil Society (FCCS) indicated that there were [1,119 CSOs active in 33 provinces](#) aside from Kabul. This represented a significant increase from the 120 CSOs active in 33 provinces in 1990.<sup>6</sup> By May 2010, Counterpart International reported there were a total of [1,468 NGOs](#) registered with the Ministry of Economy (MoEc) and 1,716 social organisations officially registered with the Ministry of Justice.<sup>7</sup> In June 2012 the MoEc recorded [1,707 local NGOs](#) operating inside the country.<sup>8</sup> An article entitled “Can Civil Society Save Afghanistan?” published by *Foreign Policy* in 2012 recorded the number of registered CSOs in Afghanistan at [4,280](#). There are thousands more CSOs, many of them traditional in nature and unregistered, working in Afghanistan today, including more than 20,000 Community Development Councils (CDCs) established under the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) as well as *shuras* (councils) in most villages. In a 2010 study of civil society development in Afghanistan, Elizabeth Winter of the London School of Economics observed the lack of a “single comprehensive [country-wide database](#)” for CSOs. Winter concluded that the main challenges facing the creation of such a database included: information sharing and issues of trust, format and upkeep, security and the breadth of data. The following organisations have attempted to produce civil society directories: The Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief ([ACBAR](#)), Afghan Civil Society Forum ([ACSFo](#)) and the Afghan NGOs Co-ordination Body ([ANCB](#)).

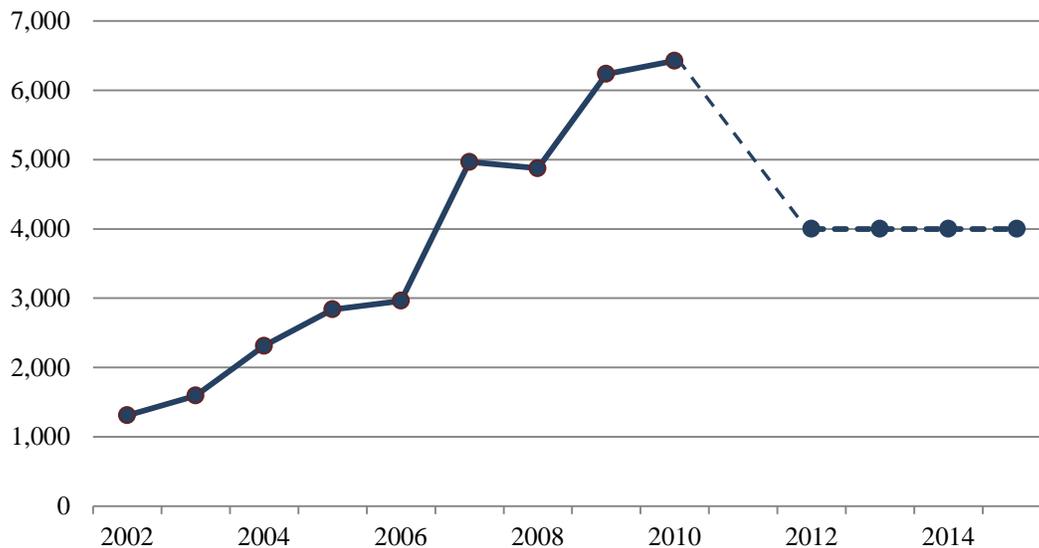
<sup>6</sup> The total number of registered CSOs in Kabul province at the time of the survey was 2,918; however, this number may be misleading as many CSOs register multiple times in different locations. The directory defines CSOs as “local groups independent from the Afghan Government and from international organizations”. It excludes commercial non-governmental organisations and private enterprises, but includes other NGOs and social associations.

<sup>7</sup> A social organisation, according to Article 2 of the “Law on Social Organizations”, is a “[volunteer union](#) of natural persons, which have formed for ensuring social, cultural, scientific, legal, artistic and professional objectives according to the provisions of this law”. Some of the traditional *shuras* are registered as NGOs or social organisations.

<sup>8</sup> The Ministry of Justice offers a list of “[Licensed Social Organizations](#)” in Pashtu.



Figure 4. Afghanistan, Net ODA (USD, Mil.)



*World Bank, "Databank" and Reuters.*

A Counterpart International study which involved a survey of [registered and unregistered](#) CSOs, including NGOs, social organisations, *shuras*, CDCs and other community-based groups, found that they are most heavily involved in delivering education, pursuing gender equality, providing programmes for youth and promoting human rights. The study notes there has been a shift away from the main sectors addressed by CSOs in 2005, which included health, water and sanitation, infrastructure and conflict resolution.

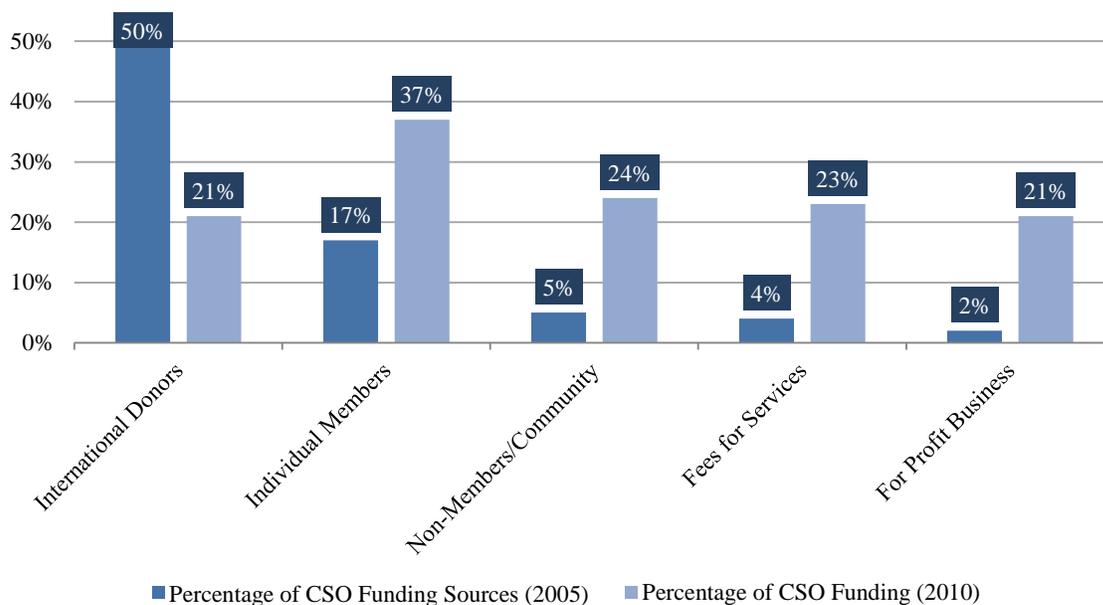
The Afghan Constitution provides the legal basis underpinning much of civil society activity.<sup>9</sup> The "Law on Non-Governmental Organizations" signed by President Karzai in 2005 [created a legal framework](#) for NGOs and replaced the Taliban's "Regulation for the Activities of Domestic and Foreign NGOs", according to the Council on Foundations. Under the 2005 [NGO law](#), all Afghan and international NGOs are required to register with the MoEc.<sup>10</sup> Despite registering with the Afghan government, NGOs and other types of CSOs do not always involve local governments in project plans. Only [two in ten](#) CSOs surveyed by Counterpart International reported a great deal of local government involvement with their work.

#### *Challenges Facing Afghan Civil Society*

Counterpart International found in 2011 that a lack of funding, security concerns and capacity limitations are [three key factors](#) that hamper the effectiveness of CSOs in Afghanistan. Indeed, [83%](#) of organisations ranked financial constraints as the primary factor impeding project implementation, far surpassing the 37% who rank security concerns first. According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), US funding to support democracy, governance and civil society dropped by [more than 50%](#), from USD 231 million to USD 93 million between 2010 and 2011. Many aid agencies and CSOs are already downsizing or eliminating key programmes. Some 70% of CSOs have [annual budgets](#) of less than USD 100,000, and organisations not supported by international donors generally have very small budgets.

<sup>9</sup> See Articles 34, 35 and 36.

<sup>10</sup> CDCs may register with the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, although they are not mandated by law to do so.

Figure 5. Afghan CSOs Funding Sources (% of CSOs)<sup>11</sup>

Source: Counterpart International *“2011 Afghanistan Civil Society Assessment”*, 2011.

Counterpart International found that the [primary sources of funding](#) for CSOs in 2010 included contributions from individual members (37%), contributions from non-members and communities (24%), fees for services (23%), for-profit businesses (21%) and international donors (21%). These findings represent a significant shift from 2005 when survey results showed that 50% of sources came from the international donors. However, the Counterpart International assessment included not only NGOs but also tens of thousands of unregistered CSOs and community groups which generally have little interaction with the international community.<sup>12</sup> The complexity of international donors’ application and grant management processes mean CSOs with limited capacity are frequently [unable to access](#) the large amounts of aid being provided by international donors, states the FCCS. As a result, a relatively small proportion of CSOs have directly and disproportionately benefited from international assistance, which has increased the risk that others may perceive themselves as excluded or marginalised within the reconstruction and development processes.

According to Counterpart International, CSOs’ [most urgent capacity needs](#) include the following: fundraising, office space or equipment, project development and proposal writing and organisational management, governance and strategic planning. Only [17%](#) of the CSOs had conducted fundraising activities in the previous 12 months. Such factors vary based on location. A lack of funding does not automatically lead to a low level of performance. The most effective organisations have reportedly developed [coping strategies](#) to implement their activities with very low budgets, according to the FCCS. CSOs involved in “publication and media” activities, for instance, have relied more on volunteers, which constitute 90% of their workforce and enable them to keep costs to a minimum.

Some CSOs participating in Counterpart International’s assessment stated that they believe the [image of CSOs](#) has generally improved since 2005 as their work has become more transparent and accountable. According to the study, 90% of CSOs have written rules about how they are governed, including statutes, bylaws or mission

<sup>11</sup> This includes in-kind and financial contributions.

<sup>12</sup> Some 36% of the Counterpart International study survey sample was made up of USAID-affiliated CSOs who generally had little access to other funding.



statements; nearly [80%](#) have procurement and accounting policies in place. A majority of organisations also have [employee manuals](#) and financial policies and procedures. The Counterpart International study states these are marked improvement from 2005 and indicate a significant increase in professionalism by Afghan CSOs. On the other hand, the authors of the aforementioned *Foreign Policy* article argue that CSOs reportedly face [serious obstacles](#). These obstacles include corruption within civil society itself. In addition there seems to have been a decrease in the number of projects being implemented by CSOs since 2005, indicating, in part, [a need for capacity building](#) in project design and proposal writing to stimulate new project development.

According to *Foreign Policy*, the formation of many CSOs in Afghanistan over the past decade has been initiated by a [younger generation](#) of urban-based, educated Afghans.<sup>13</sup> Due to security concerns, most registered CSOs are [based within urban centres](#) with operations mainly confined to the surrounding areas and out of reach of the nearly 80% of Afghans who live in rural communities. Winter found that [2,918 CSOs](#) were active in Kabul province in 2010. Approximately, [38% of CSOs](#) in Afghanistan in 2010 had a main office located in Kabul. Urban CSOs are more likely to have a larger number of full-time employees and focus on the provision of healthcare and education. Gender, human rights, media, the environment and religious activities are more commonly prioritised by CSOs in rural settings.

Table I. Urban hubs of CSOs (excluding Kabul)

Province	Number of CSOs
<i>Balkh province (incl. Mazar-e Sharif)</i>	48
<i>Nangarhar province (incl. Jalalabad)</i>	103
<i>Herat province (incl. Herat City)</i>	43
<i>Kunduz province (incl. Kunduz City)</i>	19

Source: [FCCS](#), 2007.

Donor countries such as the United Kingdom have pledged a commitment to civil society in Afghanistan and have noted that it is particularly important to work with CSOs to ensure [women and girls](#) are able to access social, economic and political opportunities now and in the coming years. While women are playing an increasing role in CSOs, both in paid and volunteer positions, the [limited mobility of women](#) remains an impediment to both women’s empowerment and civil society. It can be difficult for CSOs to meet with women in remote areas and to provide services such as education and training to girls and women. The Counterpart International study states increased communication and cooperation between NGOs and local *shuras* might help [increase access](#) for women in remote areas and enhance women’s awareness of the services that are available to them.

*Post-Transition Security & Civil Society*

With fluctuating security conditions, it remains unclear how the drawdown of international forces will affect Afghan civil society. There already appears to be a slowdown in the registration of CSOs. Between 2001 and 2004, FCCS found that an additional new [1,339 CSOs](#) formed outside of Kabul province (and even more within Kabul). In 2005, the number of new CSOs decreased to 82 and to 69 in 2006; more recent data is not available. FCCS reported that this decrease may in part have resulted from the [reduction in security](#) in Afghanistan around 2006. Half of CSOs say that security has become [an increasing impediment](#) to implementing activities, reports Counterpart International.

The Counterpart International study indicates that CSOs face security challenges from insurgent attacks to [criminality](#). Staff members of several NGOs have experienced kidnappings and killings. According to the Asian Development Bank, “NGOs are adversely affected by the absence of the rule of law, continuing impunity and lack of access to criminal justice. These constraints exist in many parts of the country and can greatly limit the ability

<sup>13</sup> According to the Afghan government Central Statistics Organization, [76%](#) of Afghanistan’s population is under the age of 35.



of NGOs to function”. According to one participant of the Counterpart International study, local organisations perform much better than the international ones because they tend to be more willing to work in [less secure areas](#) where there is a limited government presence. Deterioration in security conditions has also resulted in the delay and postponement of some projects implemented by some NGOs and other CSOs. A lack of security can also impact the levels of trust in and between social groups. Jenny Pearce from the University of Bradford states that [insecurity and fear](#) can hinder people from participating in even local community development projects.<sup>14</sup>

## Lessons Learned on Civil Society in Transition

This report has thus far shown that a wide range of factors contribute to the trajectories of civil society during and after conflict and once foreign funding begins to decline. Below are several lessons that have been extracted from the various sources cited within this document, including the following: “[Mozambican Civil Society](#)”, “[The Civil Society Landscape in Sierra Leone](#)”, “[The Civil Society Index Report for the Republic of Sierra Leone](#)”, “[Situation Analysis of Civil Society Organisations in East Timor](#)”, “[2011 Afghanistan Civil Society Assessment](#)” and the “[Afghan Civil Society Baseline Survey Report](#)”.<sup>15</sup>

- **Diversify Funding Sources.** In Sierra Leone it was noted that there was a need to gradually reduce dependence on international organisations for funds and capacity building. By diversifying sources of funding, CSOs may gain greater flexibility and be more independent of donor priorities and fluctuations in aid levels. Evidence suggests that a large number of CSOs in Afghanistan have already begun to adopt this strategy, though reports also indicate that many of the largest registered CSOs continue to be heavily if not entirely dependent on foreign aid flows.
- **Coordinate or Collaborate.** When funds are scarce, collaboration and coordination among CSOs becomes particularly important. The alternative is a rise in inter-CSO competition, as was noted in the case of Mozambique. While civil society coordination bodies exist in Afghanistan, collaboration reportedly remains limited. Referring to Sierra Leone, CIVICUS recommended that relevant stakeholders “[build an alliance](#) between bigger and smaller CSOs in the area of capacity building, and enhanced networking and collaboration in order to ensure their effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability”. In Timor-Leste the revival of the NGO Forum brought together a wide range of large and small NGOs both urban and rural-based. In Afghanistan, Counterpart International recommended donors encourage CSO collaboration by [providing funds](#) for joint initiatives and networking events that include participants from multiple CSOs from all regions of the country.
- **Integrate Women.** While there are many CSOs focused on women as beneficiaries, in Mozambique, as in Afghanistan, women remain underrepresented in a significant portion of CSOs. Moreover, women tend to make up a smaller portion of the paid staff of CSOs when compared to men. Yet involving women in CSOs is often considered necessary, particular in Afghanistan, to ensure that CSOs can reach out to and provide assistance to women and girls.
- **Enhance Understanding of Traditional CSOs.** Available research suggests that traditional institutions should be more closely studied in order to determine how they can more fully engage with foreign donors and host-nation government agencies. In Sierra Leone it was noted that rural residents frequently preferred indigenous forms of governance and civil society to more formal means. In Afghanistan, CSOs find ways to increase communications with community-based organisations such as *shuras*. Especially in rural areas where civil society is less visible, *shuras* carry a significant legitimacy and level of trust amongst the people. One

<sup>14</sup> Jenny Pearce, “Security and Development. Between Structure and Agency” (Presentation at the 11<sup>th</sup> EADI General Conference on “Insecurity and Development-Regional issues and policies for an interdependent world”, Bonn, September 2005.

<sup>15</sup> As many of the points below emerge from all or several of these reports, hyperlinks and references to individual sources are included only where a finding is particularly rooted in a single document.



Afghan man in Mazar-e Sharif told Counterpart International that *shuras* are the most indispensable form of civil society in Afghanistan: “The *shuras*, I shall say, are managed totally by our own people for our people.” Thus the challenge becomes how international stakeholders and government agencies can support and engage with these traditional CSOs without compromising their credibility.

- **Link Rural CSOs with the Donor Community.** Rural CSOs commonly find it difficult to interact with or seek support from international donors and other city-based sources, according to many of the reports cited above. In Mozambique, for instance, civil society was prevalent in rural areas, a fact which made it difficult for CSOs to access resources from the international community. Establishing mechanisms to ensure that donors are aware of capable CSOs, even if they lack a large presence in major cities, is one goal noted in several of the sources reviewed for this report.
- **Consider Simplifying Funding Requirements.** The difficulty of navigating complex funding requirements was described as another obstacle facing civil society in transitional contexts. The result tends to be the concentration of foreign funding among a narrow number of CSOs that may not represent the full social spectrum in heterogeneous societies such as Afghanistan. The need to simplify proposal processes and reporting requirements was noted in several reports, as was the need for the international community to provide greater assistance to CSOs in meeting donors’ expectations. Doing so is reportedly also beneficial in facilitating support to effective rural and traditional CSOs.

## Conclusion

A decline in external assistance could reportedly have [widespread ramifications](#) for Afghanistan’s political and economic landscape well beyond 2014, according to the World Bank. Similarly, post-conflict environments have shown that an increase in foreign aid, while helping civil society to expand, does not necessarily increase the capacity or sustainability of CSOs. Indeed, the survival of Afghanistan’s civil society through years of war and instability “was due as much to the [strength of the social fabric](#)—family and community networks and systems—as to any international assistance” reports the Asia Foundation. *Shuras* continued to function, and assistance organisations were formed. Such progress was achieved despite dynamic security conditions, which experts believe may persist in the coming years. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, speaking at the July 2012 Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan, said that without investment in civil society following the withdrawal of foreign combat forces, the previous 10 years of sacrifices could be [undermined](#). The aforementioned reporting shows that the [ability for CSOs to continue and expand](#) operations depends greatly on the availability of development assistance and their ability to access it – while moving towards more sustainable, long-term sources of support.