

2019

Annual Report



Afghanistan Institute
for Civil Society
www.aicsafg.org

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Message from AICS Chairman of Board

Dear AICS Family,

While 2019 has been a difficult year for the country, the Afghanistan Institute for Civil Society (AICS) has continued to deliver on our long-term commitment to the development of Afghanistan's civil society.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I wish to extend our gratitude to the management for their determined leadership and the entire AICS team for their hard work and dedication over the past year. I would also like to thank our donor agencies for their financial contribution and technical expertise.

I am honored to be serving as Chair of the Board of Directors and I am grateful to have the support of Board members who have provided their time, knowledge and experience for the benefit of AICS.

While 2020 is likely to be another challenging year, I believe that AICS can rise to the challenge and continue to advance civil society in Afghanistan.

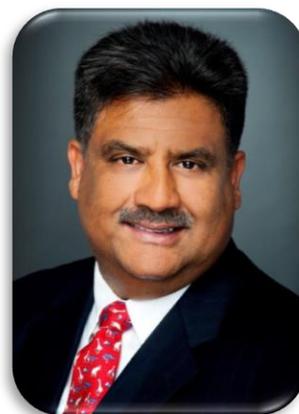
Thank you for everything that you do, and I look forward to working with you in 2020.

Sincerely,

Karim Khoja

Chair of the Board of Directors

Afghanistan Institute for Civil Society



Message from AICS Executive Director

The year 2019 was a dynamic and successful year for Afghanistan institute for civil society with significant accomplishments, capping off nearly six years of empowering Afghan civil society focused exclusively on policy engagement, partnership, and organizational strengthening.



Highlights from the year 2019 achievement include assessment of 34 CSOs of which 15 CSOs were conferred certification. AICS hosted an event on “Stakeholders Coordination for CSOs Empowerment”, conducted and launched the first ever research on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Afghanistan and organized the National Civil Society Week and developed and launched four policy papers. In addition, AICS developed, and launched seven generic policy reference manuals in key management functions, held information sessions addressing CSOs capacity gaps and conducted certified CSOs working group meetings.

We are also part of other networks and coordination mechanisms for national level engagement and learning, When the Coronavirus appeared in Afghanistan, we as member of Civil Society Working Committee (CSWC) joined a number of civil society organizations and issued an early warning on the potential, severe consequences of the virus. We called for a comprehensive ceasefire in order to help paramedics and emergency institutions to expand their services to all.

The year 2019 was full of unique and deep experiences in assessing CSOs, policy engagement and research initiatives, understanding and anticipating challenges through our research reports, supporting CSOs through the networking, engaging with our certified CSO members as our active change agents, and providing development opportunities for the CSOs.

I take the opportunity to thank all the supporters and invite you to forecast the future and explore opportunities to engage with us to help co-create innovative solutions to promote civil society in Afghanistan. We look forward to partnering with you in promoting civil society in Afghanistan.

Mohammad Zakir Stanikzai

Executive Director

Afghanistan Institute for Civil Society

In Numbers

34	Large, Medium and grassroots CSOs Assessed
15	Large, Medium and grassroots CSOs Certified
51	Certified CSOs participated in Certified CSOs Working Group Meetings
36	CSO Participated in Information Sessions on CSOs' Capacity Needs
18	CSOs participated in Internal Exposure Visit
77	Representatives of Donors, CSOs, Media and INGOs participated in "Stakeholders' Coordination for CSOs Empowerment"
7	Policy Reference Manuals Developed
64	CSOs Attended Orientation Sessions on Policy Reference Manuals
4	Policy Papers Produced
110	Representatives of CSOs, Media and Academia Attended Launch of 4 Policy Papers
1	Research Paper Produced on "State of Corporate Social Responsibility in Afghanistan (CSR)"
200	Representatives of Donors, CSOs, Media and INGOs Attended Launch of Research Paper on CSR
01	National Civil Society Week Organized
150	CSOs Participated in National Civil Society Week

About AICS

The Afghanistan Institute for Civil Society (AICS) is a concept that has been incubating for several years amongst Afghanistan's Civil society community. In 2007, the Enabling Environment conference convened by the Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Aga Development Network, in partnership with the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program and the Asia Development Bank. One of the key recommendations from the conference was to establish independent certification bodies for civil society organizations that are recognized by Government, the private sector, donor agencies and civil society. In 2010, a working group comprising of civil society network, donors and INGOs was established. The working group developed AICS vision, mission and strategic objectives. In 2014, AICS was established by the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) through a partnership between AKF and Counterpart International under USAID funded Afghanistan Civic Engagement Program (ACEP) with the long-term goal of enabling Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to realize their potential in support of the development of Afghanistan. Behind this initiative are key CSO networks, civil society professionals, Government, and representatives from national and international CSOs with an interest in Afghanistan.

The strategic objectives of Afghanistan Institute for Civil Society are: 1) Certification; 2) Knowledge & Learning; 3) Policy Engagement; and 4) Self-Reliance.

Strategic Priority One: Certification

AICS's certification program aims to raise the effectiveness and credibility of the civil society sector by certifying CSOs against locally defined and international recognized standards. The certification program enables CSOs to align their policies processes, structure, programs, and activities with the International best practices, contributing to the growth of a competent, transparent and effective civil society in Afghanistan.



Certification in 2019

AICS assessed 34 CSOs during 2019 comprising of 11 large & medium CSOs and 23 grassroots CSOs. Thus far 107 Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have been assessed from all across Afghanistan. Out of these, 57 CSOs have successfully obtained the minimum score of certification model and were conferred AICS certificate. In the current year, 15 CSOs were certified including nine medium & large CSOs and six grassroots CSOs. The remaining 19 CSOs were

deferred as they could not obtain the minimum score of the certification model. Through the certification assessment, AICS identified the areas of improvement for the deferred CSOs and hopes to certify the CSOs once they address these gaps during the deferral period.

Certified CSOs Working Group (CWG) Meetings

CWG was established as a part of an effort to increase the effectiveness of certified CSOs by connecting and engaging them with stakeholders and institutionalizing an environment of sharing mutually rewarding knowledge and experience. AICS convened three working group meetings during 2019 that was attended by 51 CSOs. These meetings included continuous meaningful interactions, cross-learning and forming consortiums among the working group members.



Post-Certification Assessment Survey

To assess the certification program's effectiveness, AICS conducted a post-certification assessment survey to assess the impact of AICS's Certification program. Twenty-eight certified CSOs who were certified a year before or longer participated in the survey. The results of the survey indicate:

- 80% of the participants reported improved accountability.
- 70% of the participants reported improved effectiveness in their organization systems.
- 80% of the participants reported improved transparency; and
- 46% certified CSOs reported that AICS certification played a positive role in attracting funding.

Stakeholders' Coordination for CSOs Empowerment

In January 2019, AICS hosted an event titled "Stakeholders' Coordination for CSOs' Empowerment". The goals of the event were 1) to promote AICS certification program 2) increase AICS networking, partnership, and coordination with donors, CSOs and government agencies 3) enhance credibility and effectiveness of AICS, and 4) promote the work of certified CSOs. Seventy-Seven individuals representing government, donors, private sector, think tanks, media, and CSOs attended the event. AICS staff, leadership and board members played an active role as forefront face to stakeholders and engaged in conversation about AICS with the goal of giving major national donors and government officials the information about AICS mission, programs and achievements. Mr. Baryalai Omarzai member of AICS Board of Governance said that AICS through the certification scheme, seeks to enable the environment for credible and active CSOs as the trustable partner for government and international community and private sectors.



AICS Program Manager presented a detailed presentation about CSO's certification, progress, impact, and challenges related to this process in Afghanistan.

Two Certified CSOs, Supporting Organization for Afghanistan Civil Society (SOACS) and Organization for Research and Community Development (ORCD) were given space to present their practical experiences and present AICS certification's impact on their organizational performance, their performance/value creation, CSO credibility and trust amongst the CSOs, donor agencies and the government.

Strategic Priority Two: Knowledge & Learning



AICS strengthens the CSOs through the collection, analysis and sharing of information and learning. This is achieved through various follow up activities and reports of the certification process. AICS strengthens the CSO capacity through referring them to capacity building service providers, facilitating exposure visits and, developing customized roadmap for capacity building of the CSOs to help and guide CSOs through continuous

engagement.

Information Sessions for CSOs' Capacity Needs

To increase CSOs' access to efficient, quality and relevant capacity building opportunities, AICS developed two reports on "CSOs' Capacity Needs" and presented them in two Information Sessions attended by representatives of Donors, INGOs, and 36 CSOs. The reports included analysis of AICS assessment data from assessed CSOs. The report identified CSOs' strengths, common and major gaps and provide recommendations to address the gaps. Following presenting the reports, the participants discussed the prevalent gaps in capabilities of the CSOs that were assessed by AICS under its certification model. In addition, the meetings provided an opportunity for CSOs and other relevant agencies to discuss the report, evaluate existing capacity building mechanisms and exchange views on how to improve the existing mechanisms for civil society institutions in the areas of monitoring & evaluation, project management, financial management, communications and human resource management.

Exposure Visits

AICS organized a cross-learning exposure visit for non-certified CSOs to learn from certified CSOs on their experience of certification process, policy framework, operational structure, and management functions. The three-day interactive event provided an opportunity to non-certified CSOs to discuss, exchange ideas and learn about the five areas of AICS certification model, enhance participants' knowledge on CSOs operational structure increase non-



certified CSOs organizational performance and promote the work of certified CSOs. Eighteen CSOs which included 5 Certified and 13 non-certified CSOs participated from nine provinces including Kabul, Herat, Ghor, Baghlan, Balkh, Daikundi, Bamiyan, Nangarhar and Kandahar.

Development of Policy Reference Manuals

The assessment of CSOs under AICS certification program and analysis of key findings showed that a considerable number of CSOs required assistance in the development of policies for



various organizational functions. To address this need AICS developed a generic set of seven organizational reference manuals in key management functions including Internal Governance, Human Resource Management, Project Management, Communication & Outreach, Monitoring & Evaluation, Procurement and Finance Management. AICS organized four orientation sessions in Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar and Takhar to discuss the manuals, obtain feedback and revise the manuals accordingly. The

sessions comprised of presentation of the manuals and a productive question and answer session. Sixty-four CSOs attended the session representing 15 provinces.

Strategic Priority Three: Policy Engagement

AICS Policy and Engagement focuses on the facilitation of policy dialogue and engagement with stakeholders. As a part of this, AICS conducts various research and policy papers as well as organizing conferences and roundtables on policy issues affecting the civil society. In the year 2019, AICS continued research efforts in the areas of civic space and corporate social responsibility (CSR). These researches are not stand-alone efforts but part of a roadmap and larger policy engagement effort. The following activities were undertaken in the year 2019:



Policy Papers

AICS produced and published four policy papers on the following topics: 1) Civic Space in Afghanistan, 2) CSOs' Institutional Capacity, 3) CSOs Advocacy in Afghanistan, and 4) Volunteerism and 5) Unregistered CSOs in Afghanistan. These policy papers were officially launched in four separate launch events, participated by 110 individuals representing CSOs, academia and the media.

National Civil Society Week 2019

AICS hosted the National Civil Society Week 2019 from October 29 to November 01, 2019 in Herat province. This event which is unprecedented in its kind in Afghanistan was attended by 150 participants representing CSOs, government, media, academia, and private sector representatives from across the country. The objective was to bring together CSOs and their partners, from different regions provinces, and backgrounds and

provide them with an open space for reflection, learning and networking on issues related to the enabling environment for CSOs and CSOs development in Afghanistan.

Further details on the event can be found here: <https://bit.ly/2YAXp5E>



Strategic Priority Four: Self-reliance

The funding context is becoming increasingly challenging in Afghanistan and internationally. As part of this shift, donors are encouraging organizations to work in partnership, become more innovative, and seek public and private sectors funding leading to self-reliance of the CSOs. AICS has already recognized the importance of self-reliance as evident in the research we conducted about private sector funding, corporate social responsibility (CSR) and philanthropy. The research is currently informing AICS discussions on various strategies and initiatives to persuade the private sector into partnering with the civil society. AICS will aim to act upon some of the recommendations of the research in the year 2020.

Research Report on “Status of Corporate Social Responsibility in Afghanistan”

AICS conducted a comprehensive research on the state of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Afghanistan to highlight the state of awareness, policies governing CSR and to assess the drivers and challenges of CSR in Afghanistan. AICS launched the research paper on CSR in a distinguished event and comprehensively presented the research paper’s findings and recommendations to an attendance of 200 participants representing CSOs, government, media, academia, and private sector.



Link to CSR Research: <https://bit.ly/2xF4jeY>



CSR-Follow Up

A follow up workshop was organized in response to the CSR research in Kabul to attract CSOs attention to CSR mandate of the private sector. AICS engaged with the CSOs in the implementation of CSR research recommendations and assessing approaches to turn CSR into a national discourse for the CSOs and their partners (government agencies and private sector). The meeting participants recommended the

following points in relations to strengthening CSR in Afghanistan.

- A detailed research on topics that are related to CSR such as research on relations among CSR, Zakat and Khairat (Sadaqa) is important for private sector to engage especially in a religious society like Afghanistan.
- Due to high level of corruption in both government and nongovernment institutions, the CSOs need to take measures to ensure transparency prior to attracting private sector support.
- AICS should present CSR findings to a wider group of private sector representatives and CSOs to increase their understanding.
- The CSOs should increase their own understanding and also government's awareness of CSR and subsequently work together on a law/policy related to CSR in Afghanistan.
- A joint CSR follow up committee of relevant members comprising of 5 representatives each from CSOs, government and private sector will be formed to develop a plan for implementation of CSR recommendations in Afghanistan.

Success Story

Rehabilitation Association and Agriculture Development for Afghanistan (RAADA) experiencing remarkable fundraising post-AICS Certification

Established in 2002 in Herat, Rehabilitation Association and Agriculture Development for Afghanistan (RAADA) emerged as a CSO with multiple areas of expertise. Implementing more than 100 projects in Farah, Ghor, Badghis, Jalalabad and Balkh Provinces, RAADA succeeded in livelihood, agriculture and animal husbandry, emergency response, human rights, women empowerment, disaster risk reduction, water supply, health and hygiene, funded by UNHCR, UNFAO, WFP, Italian Cooperation, IRC, CRS, Christian Aid, JICA, Tawanmandi-DFID, US Embassy, and WARCHILD UK.

As a partner of Counterpart International, RAADA applied for AICS certification in July 2017, getting certified in November 2018, after being deferred for lack of some improvements. *“We applied for AICS certification because we always seek the opportunities to standardize the organization’s policies, to work according to the standards in providing humanitarian and development services to our community,”* said Mr. Humayoun Aryan, Admin-Finance Manager at RAADA.

RAADA experienced increase in their fundraising as they followed the certification recommendations and also after they were certified. Mr. Aryan said, *“The certification enabled RAADA to acquire funds from CHF (now AHF) by completing the requirements of its due diligence and successfully pass the process.”* Bringing reforms recommended by certification process, RAADA’s annual budget in 2018 increased to **\$624500**, surging around three-folds. In 2017, their annual budget was **\$239000**. The certification had its remarkable impacts on RAADA’s organizational capacity and development. As they walked through the certification process, they updated their HR, Communication and M&E policies to meet new requirements of the donor agencies.

Budget

AICS 2019 Income in USD



Donors



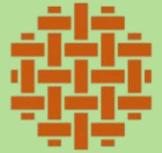
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