

# AKDN Civil Society Programme Afghanistan

2006-2008

*“Of the three sectors—government, private business, and civil society—civil society is the most diverse and the least well understood.... Civil society organisations need to reach for the highest levels of competence to justify their support. The sector combines energy and creativity, with a social conscience. Together, these constitute a powerful impulse and should be nurtured. At the same time, capacities for management, programme design and implementation, fund-raising and self-study and evaluation need to be strengthened.”*

For more information about the AKDN Civil Society Programme, please see [http://www.akdn.org/civil\\_society.asp](http://www.akdn.org/civil_society.asp)

## Introduction

The Aga Khan Development Network is a global structure that supervises the work of the Aga Khan agencies in the fields of economic, social and cultural development. Recently it has approved an eight country Civil Society Programme, and Afghanistan is one of the countries in which this programme will be implemented.

The agencies of the Aga Khan Development Network are well known in Afghanistan – ranging from the large rural support programme of AKF that works in Badakshan and Danyan with the Government’s Rural Solidarity Programme, the work of AKTC on restoring historic buildings, the work of AKFED with the Serena Hotel and Roshan, the disaster prevention and relief work of FOCUS, the work of AKES and AKHS, and the work of AKAM in micro-finance. The latest addition is this Civil Society Programme.

## I. Considerations framing the Programme

### Civil Society

The term “civil society” refers to the range of actors and organisations in society which are (i) non governmental and (ii) not-for-profit. Such organisations will have diverse forms, goals and purposes, but all have the potential to improve the quality of life of the citizens in the countries where they operate. NGOs are understood as a sub-set of civil society characterised by size, development orientation, formality, and reliance on foreign funding.

The overall goal AKDN is trying to achieve through this programme is seeking to ensure that over time there are a sufficient number of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in quality, geographic distribution, and spectrum of activities so that “civil society,” as a component of society at large, has an unmistakable positive impact on the quality of life for significant segments of the national population.

### AKDN:

The programme is contextualised within AKDN’s over-arching goal of promoting improved quality of life; equity of access to quality education, healthcare, and economic opportunity; ethical behaviour; good governance; pluralism; and peace and stability. The Civil Society Programme will reinforce the other programmes and institutional work of AKDN.

### Seven Building Blocks for a Strong Civil Society Sector:

The programme takes as a premise that there are seven building blocks for developing a strong civil society sector.

- Sound information about the breadth, depth, diversity, level, inter-relations, resources, and legal environment of the sector
- Effective and available support, training and organisational capacity building of CSOs, including for resource mobilization
- Strong liaison with the government for collaboration, policy influencing, and resource mobilization
- Productive liaison with the business sector for partnerships and philanthropy
- Good thematic networking between CSOs
- Standard setting and quality control
- Resource mobilization

## **II. Key Components of the Programme**

The programme will be implemented over a three-year period: 2006, 2007, and 2008. It will focus on eight countries of direct interest to the AKDN, in four groups: Ex-Soviet: Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan; South Asia: Afghanistan and Pakistan; East Africa: Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda; West Africa: Mali.

### **Outcomes**

The programme in Afghanistan will seek to achieve five main outcomes:

1. A better baseline of information about the civil society sector, which will be updated on a regular basis.
2. AKDN more systematically working with and building the capacity of an increasing number of high quality and sustainable CSOs.
3. A better appreciation by government, business, CSOs, and citizens in each country of the need for integrity, ethics and good governance in the management of the country's future, and a determination to apply such principles.
4. Better understanding on the part of government of the comparative advantage of CSOs leading to mutually advantageous collaboration between them, and the creation of an enabling environment for CSOs.
5. Better understanding on the part of businesses about the usefulness of programmes of corporate social responsibility.

### **Components**

These outcomes will be achieved through the following five programme components and sub-components:

1. Building a sound baseline of information on the civil society sector in each country
  - 1.1. Annual updates of information
2. Enhancing the competency and sustainability of high quality CSOs
  - 2.2. Helping CSOs build public approbation
3. Fostering ethics and integrity in development agencies
  - 3.1. Integrity in development agencies
  - 3.2. Civic education
4. Fostering strong and effective collaboration between governments and CSOs
  - 4.1. Demonstrating valuable collaboration
  - 4.2. Working with local government
5. Fostering strong and effective collaboration between the business sector and CSOs
  - 5.1. AKFED businesses practicing Corporate Social Responsibility

### **Components in Greater Detail**

#### **1. Building a Sound Baseline of Information on the Civil Society Sector**

A robust and comprehensive baseline information on the civil society sector in Afghanistan is essential, which must be kept up to date. Baselines will be fashioned which will make it possible to measure impact and progress of the programme over time. Weaknesses in existing information, such as an over-concentration on development NGOs at the expense of professional organisations, faith based groups, traditional or tribal organisations, and self help groups, will need to be addressed. Data is often not broken down by sub-geography and, most importantly, information is weak on the key building block functions necessary for a robust civil society (and the organisations playing those roles).

Baseline studies will be conducted (or existing baselines accessed) and updated annually in partnership with selected international and national CSOs. The information will be published annually in an easily understandable form. National workshops to review the studies will be convened with the intention of clarifying to all stakeholders the actual nature and extent of civil society organisations in Afghanistan.

#### **2. Enhancing the Competency and Sustainability of high quality CSOs**

Initiatives to build organisational capacity of indigenous CSOs often concentrate excessively on the mechanistic detail of administrative management, at the expense of giving attention to good practice in such as areas forming partnerships, constituency building, participation, joint planning with stakeholders, mediation, encouraging pluralism, and peace building. The demands of meeting external donor funding and reporting requirements often reinforces this imbalance. One consequence of this lack of attention to core dimensions of value-based and participatory partnership practice has been the growth of opportunistic, donor-driven CSOs which have contributed to citizen and government suspicion of the CSO sector itself. While development of transparent and accountable management remains essential, the lack of

attention to representational and participatory values and good practice needs redress. Part of a better reputation for CSOs comes from their seeking increased support for their work from inside the country, which in turn will come once good quality CSOs explain their work and the value of it to citizens and government - rather than only to external donors. Work will be carried out to document and disseminate to the public the work of high quality, effective CSOs so that the public realize their value. Such good quality CSOs would be the partners of choice for AKDN agencies working in the field.

### **3. Fostering Ethics and Integrity amongst Development Agencies**

Efforts in poverty reduction, civil society strengthening, and development in general are frequently thwarted by the widespread prevalence of corruption among entrenched bureaucracies, with private commerce and leadership structures uncontrolled by mutually agreed social contracts. In response, the case for good governance (as demonstrated through integrity, accountability, and transparency in decision making) by all types of institutions has been made increasingly strongly over the last ten years by citizens and the international development community.

This component will be implemented with selected international and national CSOs to research the areas in which integrity is a problem and how citizens respond to this. Based on this information modules will be developed to show ways to pre-empt the risks of corruption, identify problems when they occur, and introduce corrective measures. These modules will be piloted with AKDN agencies, with the eventual goal that they can evolve into training courses that would be attractive to secondary, tertiary, and in-service adult education providers. AKDN agencies are well situated since they reflect the conduct of development programmes with integrity and have the potential to show others how it can be done. It is, however, a very sensitive topic for AKDN and guidance will be sought at all stages from the AKDN representatives. Efforts under this component will be piloted exclusively within the AKDN system. Only once it is satisfied, will third parties be introduced to the work.

Recent changes in many countries from centralised to decentralized forms of government administration has often left citizens puzzled about their role. With changing institutions, they are unclear about their opportunities to contribute to the common future. The expansion of institutional networks has enabled individuals and organisations to take advantage of opportunities for self-seeking and corrupt practice. Citizens are often unclear about what integrity means in their modern world, and are exposed to many examples of lack of integrity from those in power. The suggested response is to empower citizens through education, both in civil terms (i.e., the citizens' place in the state), and civic terms (i.e., the citizens' involvement in civic institutions). Agreements will be made with local organisations to research existing materials and the roles/responsibilities of citizens in each country; develop modular training materials; introduce these via workshops to those responsible for educational institutions; and seek to introduce such modules into formal curricula.

### **4. Fostering Strong and Effective Collaboration between Governments and CSOs**

An impediment to more public-private partnerships between CSOs and government is that governments often unfavourably view CSOs (especially NGOs), based on a range of perceptions including about the legitimacy of their right to exist, their probity, governance, and patriotism, and excessive personal benefits. Such perceptions, of which there are many local versions, may be more or less accurate. Aside from such concerns, many government officials are unaware of what CSOs do or the valuable contributions they make (or could make) to the development agenda. CSOs often do themselves a disservice by not informing government of their activities and achievements. At the same time, governments are often impressed by the links that CSOs have to local communities and can be persuaded of the value of listening to the community 'voice', and involving CSOs in local government initiatives. They can see the value of CSOs, and particularly Community Based Organisations (CBOs), in raising and representing community issues on the one hand, and educating the public about new government policies on the other.

This component will work with local organisation, to research what collaborative arrangements between CSOs and government are actually taking place, and then disseminating this information widely. This will be followed by workshops to bring both parties into discussion on how to educate further each side about the work of the other and, in particular, to get both parties to sit together on development planning bodies at all levels. There would be joint government-CSO study tours to countries which demonstrate good collaboration.

### **5. Fostering Strong and Effective Collaboration between the Business Sector and CSOs**

While the case for corporate social responsibility is increasingly accepted, actual practice is often closer to corporate philanthropy, corporate marketing, or reputational risk management. There is need for businesses to learn more about the ways that pro-poor development is managed and the part that they can play with help from CSOs. CSOs are familiar with development practice but are generally unfamiliar with (and sometimes suspicious of) business intentions. Businesses generally lack understanding (and are sometimes dismissive) of CSO attributes. AKDN, with businesses as well as CSOs, is well placed to identify compatibilities and act the "marriage broker" role between these oft-polarised entities.

Many commercial sector professionals in developing countries are interested in actions of social responsibility but are not clear about what they can do. AKDN businesses are often promoters and enthusiastic members of professional and business associations, making them likely candidates and proponents for corporate social responsibility programmes, and well placed to explain and promote the functions and advantages of such programmes to other business people.

The first part of this component, AKFED businesses practising CSR, will involve research on the range of different businesses that exist and their varying expectations; will offer training and orientation on the philosophy and practice of CSR from the International Business Leaders Forum followed by local training courses; “match-making” with local CSOs; grant provision for specific pilot activities; study tours to countries where good practice can be observed; and implementation of CSR programmes to support CSOs.

### **III. The Range of Activities**

The range of activities (i.e., the programme’s “toolkit”) encompasses:

- (i) research,
- (ii) workshops to present the results of research,
- (iii) development of training materials,
- (iv) training of trainers (TOT) courses,
- (v) participant training courses,
- (vi) study tours,
- (vii) national conferences,
- (viii) funding, and
- (ix) the development of communication and information materials.

These activities will be contracted with international and local organisations, in many cases involving a comprehensive programme contract involving many of these elements.