ACBAR اکـــبر

اداره هماهنگی کمکهای بشری و انکشافی برای افغانها دافغانانو لپاره د بشری او پرمختیایی مرستو د همغږی اداره

Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief & Development

RE: Open Letter to the Senior Officials Meeting in Kabul 5th September 2015

Dear Members of the Press,

The Senior Officials Meeting (SOM), planned for 5th September 2015, presents an opportunity to demonstrate actual progress on the mutual commitments of donors and Government to supporting governance reforms. During the SOM, the Afghan Government and the international community will reiterate mutual commitments in the form of a refreshed TMAF, or the "Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework" (SMAF).

It is also an important time for those of us working in Afghanistan to highlight progress, challenges and recommendations for the SOM. NGOs in Afghanistan have a unique role in development and a long experience in delivering services to the population in health, education, agriculture, livelihoods and humanitarian needs in partnership with government and local communities. NGOs are also independent not-for-profit members of civil society and must hold the government accountable for its actions.

As a lead coordinating body with 135 international and national NGO members, the Agency Coordinating Body of Afghan Relief and Development (ACBAR), wishes to make a number of recommendations that we hope will be considered during the SOM. These recommendations relate to four areas: aid effectiveness; governance; service delivery and women's rights; they are discussed in more detail in the attached position papers.

Aid effectiveness

1. The international community should meet aid commitments as outlined in the TMAF and sustain aid through to 2017 and beyond. Budget-tracking mechanisms must be more transparent. The Donor Assistance Database (DAD) needs to be kept up to date and should be accessible to the public.

2. Ministers of the Government of Afghanistan need to be directly accountable for the funds they receive and act to prevent corruption. Until now the TMAF has primarily centered on the Ministry of Finance, therefore an increased sense of ownership is recommended to encourage other line Ministries and parliamentarians. This will demonstrate to the international community that the Government of Afghanistan is increasingly capable of using donor funds effectively and responsibly. Ministries need to increase their internal capacity and reduce unnecessary bureaucracy, which slows processes down and prevents timely service delivery to the population. This includes any bureaucratic impediments that hinder or prevent the work of the NGO and CSO community.

Governance

1. The Government of Afghanistan has to clarify the structure, roles, responsibilities and reporting lines of all layers of sub-national governance bodies, particularly from the district level and below, and between elected and appointed offices. It has to prioritize developing a work-plan on how to strengthen these bodies and communicate this to existing sub-national stakeholders. It has to design mechanisms that enable sub-national governance entities to be consulted and their feedback absorbed into national budgetary and planning processes, so that current bottom-up and top-down planning processes are more coherent and coordinated.

2. Access to information with regards to the use of public resources, legislation and decision making should be improved so that NGOs and CSOs can effectively contribute to improving practices at national and sub-national levels. As part of this, NGOs and CSO's must be meaningfully consulted, and be able to actively participate in designing and providing inputs on the new National Priority Programmes, including the next round of the National Solidarity Programme.

3. The Government of Afghanistan has to set out some of the specific reforms they will implement to create a system for oversight and control of natural resources, which includes 'the strongest available measures to counter the threat of conflict and corruption', in line with their commitments at the Tokyo and London summits. The

international community should do its part to support these reforms and to help the government of Afghanistan set up effective oversight mechanisms to ensure accountability from the private sector.

Service delivery

1. The international community should commit sufficient long-term funding for the development of the country, in particular in areas of health, education and rural development, with programming focused on answering the current gaps and improving overall quality of services. This has to be based on the needs of the local population and not on military or political agendas. Independent funding mechanisms and practical delivery of humanitarian aid to meet these needs should be supported.

2. In an effort to deliver services to its people, the Government of Afghanistan has to recognize the role of NGOs and CSOs in the development of Afghanistan and ensure an enabling environment for their work. The space for humanitarian actors to operate in an independent, neutral and impartial manner must be respected and protected. NGOs have experience working in communities which are difficult to access for government institutions. The continued work of NGOs is essential to ensure effective service delivery.

Women's rights

1. The Government of Afghanistan and the international community have to report annually on measures they are taking to fulfil obligations towards Afghan women and girls enshrined in international mechanisms, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Afghan National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security in implementation of UNSCR 1325.

2. The Government of Afghanistan has to comply with targets laid out in the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) and promote the effective participation of women from the community and district level to national and international bodies. This is important as Afghanistan currently has higher female representation at national and international levels compared to community, district and provincial levels.

3. We recommend that the Government of Afghanistan and the international community work closely together on gender mainstreaming efforts to track progress, to reflect on lessons learnt and to replicate good practices such as disaggregated data and gender- sensitive budgeting with a particular focus on the most vulnerable groups.

Thank you for your consideration of these issues.

ACBAR members believe that the Senior Officials Meeting can ensure that there is a serious and measurable framework put in place that will allow increased participation from NGOs and CSOs as representatives of civil society. ACBAR assures you that our members will continue to contribute to humanitarian aid and development in Afghanistan.

Yours sincerely,

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