

# An Assessment of National NGO's Engagement in Afghanistan

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**Abstract:** *Afghanistan is one of the poor countries in 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is mountainous and land locked country. However, due to decades of war, conflicts and the environmental degradation it is left with only 12 percent arable land now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In Afghanistan more than 85 per cent of the total population depended on agriculture for their living. As a result, Afghanistan comes on the 171<sup>th</sup> position among 188 countries in the Human Development Index in 2015. This worst humanitarian emergency condition is further aggravated by multiple disasters. This is a difficult challenge for the National Government of Afghanistan to manage with very tiny revenue. He the dynamic role of NGO comes to the picture through various life saving acts.*

**Key Words:** *Natural Disasters, National NGOs, Afghan Development Association, Afghanistan Relief Organization, Afghan Red Crescent Society, Afghanistan Health & Development Services*

The concept and idea of NGOs came to existence only to provide the basic needs for human beings in society, where the highest organisation that is the State is failed. Their presence is inevitable where people suffer due to insufficient of their needs- food, cloth, shelter, health, education and so on. In this context Afghanistan is such a country where peoples' suffering is beyond the capacity of government. The country almost for 30 years has suffered from the wars since 1979. This long war has damaged every element of national power that could have helped the country as well as the people to shape a prosperous society. The agricultural land was damaged by landmines, forest has been destroyed, thousands of people were killed, and millions of people had been left as displaced. Even before the year 1979, the country used to be listed in the list of underdeveloped states.

In addition to that, the frequent devastating natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, drought, landslide and epidemics have made the situation of the people worsen that before. Like wars, they have also demolished the decades of developmental gain of the country. Therefore poverty, starvation, malnutrition, landlessness, illiteracy, unemployment, conflict, etc are common in the country. In fact a state of emergency exists in Afghanistan. And there the role of NGOs is very essential and found in every developmental work - from relief to rehabilitation.

Therefore, the number of NGOs- national and international- is mushrooming to meet the growing demand of population and the demand of donors from both external and internal. They reach to the people of every corner and distribute the aids impartially among the vulnerable people. Afterwards of 2001, the President of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai announced and adopted many pro-people policies such as health development program namely Basic Package of Health Services, National Solidarity Plan with the help of external aid. These two programs have contributed a lot to the country's journey towards development and progress (Padamsey, 2004). Presidents' this statement reveals that how far the country depends on the external aid for

the well being of its people and for its future. By 2006, there were around 800 NGOs- national and international- were involved in the humanitarian works (Olson, 2006). Therefore the involvement of NGOs is highly beneficial to the whole country, particularly to the population who live in the rural region where the actions and functions of the government are weak. In every phase i.e. mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery the contribution of NGOs is significant.

### **Cooperation with Government**

In Afghanistan the government has build up a sound environment for the existence and well functioning of NGOs. There, are many agreements have been established between the Afghan government and NGOs in various fields such as Food Security, Emergencies and Basic Social Services, sanitation (Jawad, 2002). According to the Afghanistan Development Forum, 2005, NGOs in Afghanistan are not only doing help to the people but also to the governments such as they provide financial assistance to the assistance of man power in time of implementation of various programs and policies. They help the staffs from government at all level such as district, provincial, and national. Thus NGO in Afghanistan is considered as one of the key actors whose contribution in the process of growth, development and managing humansecurity is appreciable (Olson, 2006).

Afghanistan, in 2005, is having a precise document of laws on Non Governmental Organisation. It has Seven Chapters consisting of 48 Articles. The Article 5 has defined the NGO as an organization could either be a domestic or a foreign, or non-political or non-profit organization. If such organisation is established in a country, which is called as national Non Governmental Organisation; if that is created outside of Afghanistan called as foreign Non Governmental Organisation. The foreign Non Governmental organisation that is operated in more than one country is called as International Organisation (IO). It is the High Evaluation Commission who has been authorised to observe the criterion and eligibility of NGO to be registered in Afghanistan under the Ministry of Economy (ICNL, 2012). However, in Afghanistan they deal with the development of health, food, education, agriculture, good governance, etc. which are partly caused by the frequent disasters and partly by the wars.

### **Dealing with Natural Disasters**

The NGOs are mainly involved in the areas which are mostly affected by the drought, and flood, as well as to the land where Internally Displaced People (IDPs) are concentrated. Every NGO is abided by to the authority of the government, but also with the rest of the international community that are involved in the process of recovery and rehabilitation in Afghanistan (Jawad, 2002). Moreover, the NGOs reach to the location and people which are ignored by the mandated governmental authorities. For example the socio economic issues of women are projected to the list of target and implemented by the NGOs namely, "Save the Children Fund" (SCF). To make them self-sufficient it provides them much monetary assistance and takes care of other basic needs such as health and sanitation. In addition to that thousands youths earn money under the schemes that are implemented by NGOs (John 2001). There are many NGOs under which every year more than one thousand people gets opportunity of income. Therefore population in remote rural areas consider it as the major source of their income and livelihood (Olson 2006). Causes of vulnerability of disasters in Afghanistan are the

'poverty' that forced the people to be settled in the risky areas; the effect of decades of war i.e. environmental degradation, destruction of infrastructure and public buildings; water scarcity food shortage joblessness displacement, increased children death and drugs production. This all problems are nothing but extra burdens on the Government of Afghanistan with the insurgent groups in the country. Though huge economic assistance gets from the United Nations Platform, the government was unable to utilise in proper way; due to the lack of human resources in the field. This gap has been filled by the NGOs, which helps the government in execution of all policies effectively and provide the grass root information from the local rural areas. In this way, day by day, the scope of functions of NGOs in Afghanistan starting from rehabilitation to sustainability of natural resource, from providing basic needs to making the weaker (vulnerable) section empower, from rescuing the people to making them resilient to disasters. In following, some major National and International NGOs have been discussed.

### **List of Major National NGOs**

Since 2001, the number of NGOs in Afghanistan is in rise; by 2006 there were 1600 NGOs. For this reason, the Government of Afghanistan had to scrutinise their function and reduced the number into just 160, which again reached 1000 in 2007 (ARO, 2015). Though it is being talked in many places that Afghanistan is on the way towards a stable country in terms of both economic and political fields and that has been possible because of huge amount of external aids to the country. Still the environment for the existence of a NGO is not suitable for further growth. Many people from the country oppose the entrance of foreign donors and the NGOs that are linked to them. Therefore in terms of number the National NGOs are much larger than an international NGO (Olson 2006). Though it is evident that after 2001, there was a massive drain of huge aid and as its result the number of NGOs has also increased. However from 2005 to 2012 there were total 3415 number of local NGOs were registered and the number of registered International NGOs was 4016 (ICNL 2012). Some of the significant national Non Governmental Organisations those are active in Afghanistan have been elaborated in the following paragraph.

### **Afghan Development Association (ADA)**

Afghan Development Association (ADA) is a national Non Governmental Organisation of Afghanistan (NGO) that was established in 1990, which has been registered under the Ministry of Economy (MoEc). It gives importance to the activities of development of the nation and also takes care of issues that are related to human development. Some of its most involved areas are such as agriculture, construction of infrastructure for education, health, and for better transportation in the country. The NGO also has been conducting many training programmes for awareness of importance of education in life. It has a substantial contribution in providing basic services including food, cloth and temporary shelter to the refugees, who have returned back to the country and to the displaced people of Afghanistan. It has been focusing on addressing every problem of rural people. For this reason, poverty reduction through providing all governmental services to the community is the driving force for the staffs of the NGO. In this regard, it has emphasised on following three things such as transparency, accountability and efficiency in implementing all programs and schemes. With taking consideration of environmental issues i.e. soil erosion, deforestation, degradation of water etc. it has taken

three steps such as 'climate change mitigation'; under which the reduction of carbon emission has been importance. The second step is 'climate change adaptation'; under this the reduction of vulnerability of human and natural environment is emphasised. 'Advocacy on environmental issues' is the third step, under which informal strategies are encouraged to be adopted in communities. Furthermore, the NGO has a strong coordination and cooperation with Community Based Disaster Risk Management Training (CBDRMT) (ADA, 2011). It aims at the preservation of peace, empowerment of people and sustainable development.

### **Afghanistan Relief Organization (ARO)**

Like other NGOs, the Afghanistan Relief Organisation is also a non-profit organisation that keeps religious faith aside and works for the humanitarian cause in Afghanistan. Its registration is found in both USA and Afghanistan, since 1998. The Organisation is funded by USA. During the emergency time the Afghanistan Relief Organisation provides every basic need such as food, cloth, medicine including of educational materials to the affected people. The NGO has made the Kite Runner a partner to use its social action campaign for making the people aware of the need of education and encourage the parent to educate their children for a secured and better future. It promotes education both inside and outside of Afghanistan. Through Kite Runner programmes, students in USA are taught about the Afghanistan; its history containing peaceful past, its geography, and culture. At least once in every year, the ARO members distribute the educational kit to children in Afghanistan (ARO,2015). By this, most of the rural children get an opportunity of education.

### **Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS)**

Afghanistan Red Crescent Society is a national/local NGO that was established in the year 1934 however its origin goes back to the society that was created in 1929 in capital city- 'Kabul' of Afghanistan, in order to help the affected people by the disasters. Later, its name was changed into Mehrab Ahmar in 1951; however the King of that time had changed its name into Afghanistan Red Crescent Society. It gets much assistance from the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) and from the International Committee of the Red Cross for active involvement to the concerned objectives (ICRC, 2001; ARCS, 2014). With more than 10,000 volunteers, it has established its offices in almost every provinces of the country. It is mainly aware of people's sufferings in time of disaster. It takes care of the health of child and mother.

The Organisation has a separate organ to deal with disasters that is known as ARCS Disaster Management (ARCS-DM), which since 1997 has been helping the affected communities through spreading the awareness of disasters, training them to act first, and improving the coping capacity. It also helps other agencies and the government for implementing the strategies to minimize the disaster risk and consequences. ARCS-DM has maintained a strong coordination with all its offices of provinces to act effectively in a sudden disaster; it aims at the permanent solution to hazard risks through various phases such as risk reduction- preparedness-response. After a drought hit the country, in 2008 the NGO had distributed 80,000 food kits among the worst affected communities. In terms of recovery that is the last stage of disaster management, it provides tents as substitute of houses, basic health care, and rebuilds the destroyed roads, bridges, buildings, houses etc. It encourages the participation of common people in making of every decisions of disaster management; so that the risk could be minimized in the vulnerable society of Afghanistan. For making their participation effective, the ARCS

educate them on disaster causes and consequences. With the assistance of International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC), it makes the strategies of community strong enough to take actions fast and effectively in time of disaster; so that the impact could be lessen on human beings. In order to do this, it provides proper training and maintains number of voluntaries at the local level. Moreover, the NGO searches the separated family members and unites them after the disaster (ARCS, 2014; ICRC, 2001).

### **Afghanistan Health & Development Services (AHDS)**

The Afghan Health & Development Services (AHDS) is one among other national Non Governmental Organisations that aims at providing a quality service in the areas of health, education, sustainable livelihood, emergency response, food security, environmental protection and support to the vulnerable people in the entire country, for disaster risk reduction. It was established in the year 1990 and was the first one in terms of signatory to the code of conduct of NGOs on the humanitarian ground in Afghanistan. The NGO was partners to many governmental ministries and authorities such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), Ministry of Economic and Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD). Apart from this cooperation with task forces and local people is also highly important, which enables the NGO to work out properly as per the need of the society. Till today, AHDS has implemented its various projects on water, sanitation, health and food in across the country, however following provinces such as Kabul, Logar, Daykundi, Helmand, Kandahar, Kapisa, Kunar, Nangarhar, Uruzgan, Wardak and Zabul were highly focussed due to their worst condition. In 2010, the drought affected farmers were given animals and training for farming. In 2008, 5,000 sanitary kits were distributed among the population of 106 villages in rural Afghanistan where the shortage of water is critical. In the period of two years from 2000-2002, the NGO had constructed 2250 latrines based on hygienic codes and 450 wells for drinking water. From 2001-2007, more than 192,000 people were treated in Kandahar province through its Mobile Clinic Service. In 2009 also, there was such a project to help the farming section, by which more than 4,400 people were benefited from the packages and training. A Community-based Management of Acute Malnutrition project was began in 2011. In 2014, the NGO provided food and other basic needs to the affected people in Kandahar province. With the partnership of World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2015, it provided emergency health services to the people in high risk regions of the country. And many other projects have been implemented in the country which directly helps to decrease the impact of disaster on vulnerable population (AHDS, 2018).

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