

First Conference on

**REGIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN GREEN DIALOGS:  
PROMOTING PEACE AND STABILITY THROUGH EQUITABLE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

**Kabul, 24<sup>th</sup> November 2015**

*Report*

Since its formation in 2014 the National Unity Government of Afghanistan has in different occasions, expressed its commitment to share the benefits of Afghanistan's geographic centrality through regional cooperation - particularly economic integration - with its neighbors and countries beyond the immediate neighborhood. Being located in the heart of Asia and adjoined to the historical route of the silk road the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan becomes a crucial determinant for regional management of natural resources. Yet, as recent developments and statements from both governments show, the relationship is still fragile and practical steps for reaching a lasting peace can be shattered in seconds. Considering the sensitive political relation between Afghanistan and Pakistan the hbs project "**Regional Civil Society Engagement in Green Dialogs**" seeks to shift the discussion from its primer focus on security aspects to shared interests and mutual benefits by managing natural resources equitably. Regional dialogs and cooperation on equitable resource management will not only build confidence on a regional level but will also create the space for raising of joint interests and mutual contributions to a peaceful, stable and prosperous Afghanistan.

While the discussion on shared resource management, i.e. the TAPI pipeline or the CASA 1000 projects, is a highly technical subject, it is also a highly sensitive social and political subject. Regional resource management, developing of standard procedures and negotiation of treaties often touching upon national security interests are generally been dealt with by representatives of the respective governments. Civil Society actors of both countries, not to mention affected communities who are at the core of the negotiated sphere are left out in these negotiations. However, an inclusive development and participatory decision making processes play a central role in reducing conflicts and establishing peace. Against this backdrop, Heinrich Böll Stiftung (hbs) envisaged as part of its three-year strategic work in Afghanistan and Pakistan (2015-2017) to focus on peace building aspects of equitable natural resource management, featuring the engagement of civil society actors in these processes.

The three-year hbs project aims to engage national and regional civil society actors from both countries in confidence building dialogs, focusing on common interests for regional cooperation and social and economic stability.

As a kick-off event, **the Regional Conference on "Regional Civil Society Engagement in Green Dialogs: Promoting Peace and Stability through Equitable Resource Management"** aimed to establish a platform for exchange and bring forward knowledge generation on peace building instruments with focus on the equitable and sustainable use of natural resources, especially water and energy. It also attempts to raise awareness, identify stakeholders and explore common interests and strategies for engagement of both countries in a stable cooperation. Hbs invited representatives of Government and civil society from Pakistan and Afghanistan to discuss the significance of inclusively planned cross-border

projects which can elaborate peaceful utilization of shared water resources and its positive impact on peace and stability of the region in the decade to come.

**Mr. Zia Moballegh**, country director of Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Afghanistan opened the conference by defining its two goals: 1) Transition to build trust and peace as well as to end the ongoing conflict through focus on equitable utilization of joint economic opportunities 2) Preventing the emergence and spread of potential conflicts over Trans boundary water resources through dialogue and conversion of the threats to opportunities for cooperation in the future.

He said that several options can be found to strengthen convergence through joint economic integration including energy cooperation, water resource management, particularly in Trans boundary waters and transit between two countries. Mr. Moballegh emphasized that water is the origin of life, it is vital to sustain human life and can either be a mean of understanding and convergence or conflict and instability. While explaining the potential potential and opportunity for the further cooperation related to the water management, conflict prevention and regional stability in the region, he also mentioned that management of trans boundary water basins is politically very sensitive since governance and ownership of water resources are often seen from a lens of national security by the respective countries. Coming to the second theme of the project Mr. Moballegh reminded the audiences that the world today is in more need of energy than ever before and that this is a good opportunity for the countries of the region. He said that one of the most effective strategies for the integration in the region is strengthening the economic ties and joint projects in the field of trans-regional economy.

To support this regional cooperation and integration Mr. Moballegh emphasized the role of academia and civil society to arrange dialogs and bring experts of various kinds together to influence policy makers and politicians positively. He said that trans-national civil societies have to answer the transnational issues, because problems cannot be solved on a national level anymore.

The first panel “**Water Management and Trans-boundary Waters**” was chaired by **Ms. Khwaga Kakar**, an independent development consultant. After appreciating the conference as first of its kind in Kabul, because of the focus on trans-boundary waters, she explained that there is often confusion with the statement that Afghanistan is a water rich country. She stressed that first of all there is a problem to get reliable data, not only on the water resources (surface and groundwater), but also on water consumption, water needs etc. Technically Afghanistan has enough water per capita in total, the problem Ms. Khwaga reiterated is the management of water resources. According to her there is a big difference between the five river basins: whereas there is sufficient water in the panj-amu basin, the northern basin is touching absolute water scarcity due to a mismatch between irrigation needs and the water resources. Further she said that a lot of the river basins are shared with neighboring countries without any agreements on the usage of the water. Ms. Khwaga informed the audience that Afghanistan has the lowest storage capacity in the region and one of the lowest storage capacities in the world despite of huge investment since 14 years, due to political reasons very few projects have been implemented so far. She said that in the absence of storage, the amount of water really available falls short of the potential availability, as Afghanistan receives most of its precipitation during summers when the demand is high. This reduces the opportunity to harness surface resources and renders the country

more vulnerable to drought and other climate shocks, Ms. Khwaga explained further. As additional problems she mentioned the quality of water, the slow ground water recharge and the expected population growth. She offered following recommendations:

**Developing supply and reducing the infrastructure deficit**

- Improving storage dams through building both small-scale water harvesting and large-scale dams
- The rehabilitation of Karezes and the development of traditional and modern harvesting structures
- Irrigation infrastructure rehabilitation, including low-cost technologies

**Reducing irrigation water demand**

- Promoting less water-intensive crops and cultivation methods in irrigated areas
- Improving efficiency through more effective water management in farm fields

**Support in the preparation of dialogues on trans-boundary water management**

- Improve the hydro-meteorological knowledge base in Afghanistan and the region
- Develop the capacity and expertise of Afghanistan in water management
- Mobilize the support of the international community

The next speaker on the panel **Mr. Najib Fahim**, lecturer at Kabul University spoke about “Trans-boundary Waters: Conflict prevention through Dialog” said that this conference is a taboo breaker, as talking about trans-boundary waters was considered a topic not to be discussed in public. According to him many reports on the topic could not be published in recent years. Mr. Fahim said that Afghanistan should prioritize water in discussing its foreign policy and national security. In his opinion the issue is getting more importance if one considers that it has only 12% of agricultural land while 46% are made of deserts and pasture, 39% mountains and abadis (oasis) and only 3% of forest. As Ms. Khwaga before him, he underlined that the distribution of water resources in Afghanistan and the precipitation it gets are very imbalanced. He additionally emphasized the risk of climate change, as rain patterns change and the glaciers which store most of the water are melting down. Despite these challenges, Mr. Fahim explained that Afghanistan has the great advantage of being the upper riparian to most of the neighboring countries. Though there is an agreement with Iran, Afghanistan doesn’t have any agreement with the other neighboring countries. Mr. Fahim pointed out that trans-boundary water basins are not border waters and they have to be managed in cooperation with each other. With regards to Pakistan he said that joint projects and investments on the shared river basin are needed. IN his opinion this dependency would lead to regional cooperation and should serve regional peace and stability.

As a second speaker on the issue of trans-boundary waters, **Ms. Arya Nijat**, head of research and program assessment at Duran Research and Analysis, gave an overview of the situation in Afghanistan. She again recounted the four trans-boundary river basins: Kabul Indus, Helmand and Harirod-Murghab flow to the neighboring countries Pakistan (Indus River Basin), Iran and Turkmenistan and Panj-Amu marks the border with Central Asian Republics. Like the speakers before she emphasized that despite these resources, Afghanistan doesn’t have the capacity of water management, there are no clear

policies and Afghanistan is not party to any international conventions on trans-boundary waters. Ms. Nijat explained that regional cooperation is pertinent to effective water resource development and management. In her opinion, it has the potential to improve trade and generate lasting economic development, as well as improved border management and security, and regional customs cooperation. She said that Hydro-diplomacy, in this context, gains increased significance given the political dimensions of this issue and the need to begin bilateral or regional dialogs. In order to gain from these benefits, Ms. Nijat proposed the following recommendations:

1. Trans-boundary waters should be considered as natural resources from political and legal perspective.
2. Afghanistan should be part of any international trans boundary conventions
3. More researches needed to be conducted in trans boundary waters in Afghanistan
4. Civil society should build their capacities in this regard to have strong voices on the government
5. Media's role is very important to publicize the Trans boundary issues by providing reports and researches.

Moving away from trans-boundary waters towards national water management, **Ms. Sediqa Hassan** presented on **“Community Involvement in Integrated Water Resource Management”**. Like the speakers before her, she emphasized that Afghanistan lacks on water storage and water infrastructure, which makes it difficult to meet its development goals. In her opinion constructing water dams is a very costly solution and has to go hand in hand with the awareness of citizens that water is a scarce source and vital for sustainable socio economic development of Afghanistan. Ms. Hassan informed the audience that in the current decade, Afghanistan has started replacing its traditional and centralized water management system with an Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) system with the support of international donors' agencies. As Ms. Hassan explained IWRM is based on principles of (a) water being a finite and vulnerable resource, (b) water development and management should be based on a participatory approach, (c) in which women play a central role and (d) water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognized as an economic good as well as social good. She explained that the transformation will only be successful, if these principles are followed, community involvement being the most important factor.

Talking about the praxis, Mr. Rainer Rothe, from the European Union presented the lessons learnt from a water user association (WUA) program at the Panj-Amu river Basin. He said that the establishment of WUAs contributed to more equitable distribution and reduced conflict, as before WUA establishment in the communities, there were conflicts induced by water sharing every year. Mr. Rothe explained that after the implementation of the project, three persons control water day and night and share it equally amongst farmers according to their irrigated lands. He said that people have the real opportunity to resolve their problems together, not only those related to irrigation, but also other agriculture and community-related issues. During the implementation of the program, Mr. Rothe emphasized, it has been proved that the bottom-up approach has been very effective and that WUA formation lead to a strengthening of the traditional *mirab* system which has been weakened due to many years of conflicts.

**Comments from the Audience:**

- *Afghanistan lacks water policies. The government should consider water as security and economical means in Afghanistan because there is no substitute for water. There should be a political will for the responsible usage of water in the country. Today we share our water resources with less or no cost to our neighboring countries and in return we buy electricity in very high costs. This needs a strict and responsive approach of the government, academia, civil societies and Media.*
- *We appreciate hbs for opening the discussion on trans-boundary water which was a taboo since long time ago and not body hardly dared to talk about it. Now we can openly talk about our waters and share our ideas. To discuss such issues with our neighboring countries, at the first stage we need to build our capacities, gain more information and broaden our knowledge on trans- boundary waters then we can professionally discuss and find practical solution for sharing our waters. Secondly we don't have updated data; we need to do researches to access to updated data and information.*
- *Demand for water is steadily increasing in the world. There is no life on earth without water. Afghanistan is an agricultural country and most of its income depends on it. Therefore we need to build dams on our water basins for our irrigation needs, for hydropower (production of electricity), for water supply, for flood control and as well as for fish farming.*
- *This conference mainly focusing on projects and technical issues on water but the political part is not included. Since our government implements the development policy so the presences of politicians are very essential to discuss, share the information. There is a gap that both government and civil society do not consider the importance of their roles. For instance civil societies are not part of the policy meetings of the government and so the government is not part of the civil society programs. hbs as an international aiming at strengthening the role of civil societies in Afghanistan should consider this matter seriously and provide the open environment between both to come to a discussion on one table. In addition the role of media in dissemination of information needs to be strengthened in certain issues.*

**Mr. Basiri**, who represented the Ministry of Water and Energy, gave a spontaneous short introduction of the **Supreme Council of Water Affairs Management**. The Supreme Council of Water Affairs Management is the key policy making body in Afghanistan for water related issues led by president Ghani. It is composed of seven Afghan ministries that have responsibility in various aspects for the water sector.

1. **Ministry of Energy and Water:** Develops and manages water resources and water resources infrastructures and hydropower
2. **Ministry of Urban Development:** in charge of policy making and legislation of urban water supply and sanitation;
3. **Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development:** In charge of rural water supplies and sanitation as well as irrigation (village level) and rural micro hydropower projects
4. **Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock:** Develops and manages irrigated agriculture and livestock, on farm water management and water application to crops
5. **Ministry of Health:** Regulates and monitors quality of drinking water
6. **Ministry of Mines:** Handles underground water resource management
7. **National Environment Protection Agency:** Regulates and monitors any activity related to the environment, including water

Mr. Bashir further explained that the council consists of two secretariats 1) Water 2) Land and each secretariat contains of many committees affiliated with the relevant ministries. He said that currently the council is working on trans boundary water regulation in which the recommendation of civil societies and academia have been incorporated and soon will be sent to Parliament for review and approval.

The Second Panel “**Energy Cooperation & Role of Civil Society and International Community**” was chaired by **Ms. Wazhma Frogh**, Gender Specialist and co-founder of the Research Institute for Women, Peace and Security. In the first presentation, Mr. Alias Wardak, Civil Engineer and Secretary General of the New Beginnings Network, proposed recommendations for **Regional Cooperation Through Joint Energy Projects**. As Afghanistan is located between the energy-surplus countries of Central Asia and energy deficit countries such as Pakistan and India, he explained, this central location should be used to accelerate regional cooperation. Mr. Wardak said that Afghanistan has vast domestic resources for energy generation, mainly from renewable resources such as hydro, solar and wind that can be developed and transmitted to Pakistan and through Pakistan to India. In his opinion, major projects, such as the CASA 1000, TAPI, TUTAP and ATGP, are the first steps towards a right direction, which can pave the way for economic growth, political stability and peace in the entire region. He advocated for regional power trade that can reduce the cost of energy in each country, as the least-cost option can be selected. As an example, Mr. Wardak stated that inexpensive and eco-friendly hydropower can be purchased by Pakistan from Afghanistan, which replaces the more expensive fossil energy, such as oil. He listed the benefits of Joint Energy Projects for Afghanistan and the Region as below:

**Economic:**

- Generation reserves can be utilized more economically in an interconnected regional system.
- Increase of revenues for exporting countries and Afghanistan as transit country.
- Decrease of power shortage in importing countries and increase of revenue through cost efficient and eco-friendly energy supply.
- Less dependency on cost intensive petroleum products for importing countries.
- Technology transfer and Human Resource Development more possible and accessible.
- Enhancement of foreign investors

**Political:**

- Interdependency among countries lead to more cooperation in other fields.
- Existing and future conflicts between countries can be solved in a more peaceful environment and the light of common interests.
- Security improvement through joint initiatives in the related fields.
- More trust of people in national governments through provision of better services, which lead to strengthening of the society and increased legitimacy of the government.

**Social:**

- Better living conditions (health, education) for the people through growth economic in the region.
- More Employment opportunities, especially for young generation.
- Poverty Reduction through GDP growth.
- Improvement of education and health standards, due to increment of national budget.
- Cooperation between social society in the country and between CSO’s contribute to a peaceful environment and cooperation (student exchange programs, cultural events etc.).

As obstacles for Joint Energy Projects in the region, Mr. Wardak identified lack of (a) security in Afghanistan and the Region, (b) trust between AFG & PAK and PAK & INDIA, (c) strong institutions (governmental and non-governmental) and facilitators, (d) human resources, (e) clear strategies on national and regional level – “Where are you?” & “Where will we be?” and finally (f) personalities who can act as “influencer”. In order to overcome these obstacles, he recommended to establish an institution that is responsible for the realization of these regional power cooperation programs. Through such an institution, he reiterated, a framework can be developed, which defines a clear strategy for the intended cooperation in the energy sector. Mr. Wardak proposed that such an institution should have a clear legal status and mandate and should be established on a nation level in each country as “Energy Task Force” consisting of representatives of CSO’s, Private Sector and Independent Experts from various fields ( Engineering, Economy, Law, Social Sciences etc.). Further he explained, a “Regional Energy Office” would be established, consisting of members of the national “Energy Task Force” teams of each country.

**Mr. Arshad Abbasi**, a civil engineer and energy expert from Pakistan in his presentation on “**Energy Engine for Economic Growth for Regional Peace**” underlined his previous speaker’s words by saying that a transformation of the energy sector of Afghanistan could lay down the foundation for a socio-economic revolution and bring change in the common life of Afghans. After giving a detailed analysis of Afghanistan’s energy sector he emphasized that Pakistan and Afghanistan should work together beyond the boundaries having a vision of regional development which would benefits both the countries. For Afghanistan he proposed a combination of renewable energy solutions liek local biogas, wind, solar and biomass potential to replicate micro grids. He pointed out that energy being the driver of the economy would not only improve the socio-economic conditions of people but also end the culture of warfare.

Elaborating on a specific regional energy project, **Mr. Javed Noorani**, a researcher and mining sector expert from the Environmental presented his study on **TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline) and its Impact on Security and Development of the Region**. He informed the audience that of the TAPI pipeline's total 1,680 kilometer length, 144 km will be in Turkmenistan, 735 km in Afghanistan, and 800 km in Pakistan, bringing it to the Indian border. Of the 90 MMcmd of gas pumped through it, India and Pakistan will get 38 MMcmd each and Afghanistan 14 MMcmd. Mr. Noorani explained that the pipeline is borne of the necessity for energy in the growing economies of the regional countries and offers an opportunity for the symbiotic integration of the countries of the region. He said that the implementation of the TAPI pipeline could be the first step in the revival of the Silk Road and a step that is likely to boost peace and give new shape to regional energy cooperation. Mr. Noorani also warned that on its journey through Afghanistan and its entire route the TAPI pipeline passes through some of the most volatile districts. For being a success story Mr. Noorani formulated following recommendations for the governments of Afghanistan, Pakistan and India:

1. In order for energy security to become a central part of the national security discourse and for the TAPI pipeline to become a trans-national energy project, the regional countries must engage in regional security dialogue and secure their national interests as well as collective interests through it. One way is to jointly design plans to secure the project and then cooperate on training and deploying a police force.
2. For the implementation of the TAPI pipeline to be a success, India and Pakistan must first seek deeper engagement at a senior level and iron out any differences. To achieve solutions through integration may require a serious demonstration of statesmanship, but given the necessity of the TAPI pipeline, this project offers an apt opportunity for this. Trade and cultural exchanges have

been helpful in other contexts for building confidence and creating an environment of trust among hostile parties.

3. There has to be immediate creation of a joint steering committee made up of senior representatives of governments from the participating countries to address existing and emerging concerns with regard to implementation of the project in a timely manner. For example, all hurdles to the project must be assessed and this committee must address them quickly.
4. The participating countries must work together to jointly design a security mechanism that will monitor the security of the pipeline. The security force created must be sensitive to human rights concerns and the voluntary principles on security. The project needs to be protected by a force trained for this kind of job.
5. Each participating country should also initiate a detailed assessment of the threats and opportunities in each province hosting the pipeline and encourage private investment. For example, provinces in Afghanistan have natural resources and the potential for agriculture and farming. Investment must be facilitated in those provinces. Baluchistan has the potential of being a major transit corridor and this could be leverage both for regional and national development and integration. It may lead to the creation of road networks, the provision of connectivity and access to people and products.
6. The participating countries must involve the civilian population during the implementation and operational stages of the project in order for social interests to be presented and protected, thus avoiding a negative social and environmental impact. For example, they should seek the views of civil society on the social and environmental impact of the project and look at how they can mitigate its negative impact. Also important is consultation with members of the civil society and the compensation of affected people. Civil society may also collaborate with the government in building capacities of the local people to benefit from the opportunities brought by the pipeline.
7. There must be dialogue and an exchange of information and proposals among the participating countries at CSO level. Their recommendations must be given serious consideration and offered a response.
8. Local CSOs in each participating country must engage with communities in order to promote their awareness and inform them about the project, its potential impacts, the opportunities it offers the local population, as well as providing a platform for dialogue for proposals and reappraisal.
9. Environment and social impact assessment must be carried out in line with internationally accepted standards. This should provide the basis for genuine consultation with the communities living close to or affected by pipeline so that they get a sense of security and can see a better future coming with the success of the project.
10. In light of the feasibility study, the environment and social impact assessment and factors of local security, the participating countries must in coordination with supporting international donors come up with inclusive development projects that combine benefits for the local people with the success of the project. This will help increase security for the project.
11. The final map for the TAPI gas pipeline must be shared with the public not only to publicize its route, but also to facilitate the gauging of the impact area and to come up with internationally acceptable compensation plans for the impacted communities.

The last speaker of the panel, **Dr. Ibrahim Jafari**, a natural resource expert and active member of the Environment and Natural Resources Monitoring Network (ENRMN), emphasized how civil society



organizations can constructively interfere on above mentioned issues by theorization of topics and encouragement of their governments. He discussed various effective examples of role played by civil society organizations in preventing crises in other countries of the world keeping in view the current capabilities of and existing level cooperation between Af-Pak civil society organizations.

The second half of the conference was dedicated to further brainstorm on the issues, by splitting the audience in two working groups, in which they collected ideas for policy inputs and advocacy strategies to further focus and disseminate the findings of the Panel discussions. On the next day of the conference speakers as well as selected stakeholders met at the hbs office for a first steering committee meeting and developed an action plan for concrete further steps to enhance cooperation between