

# Speaking Out:



## Afghan Opinions on Rights and Responsibilities

The Human Rights  
Research and Advocacy  
Consortium

November 2003

Writer: Dawn Stallard  
Researchers: Timea Szabo, Dawn Stallard, Paul O'Brien and the staff of Consortium member organizations  
Data entry and analysis: Timea Szabo, Sayed Homayun Fakri, Khadeja Ali Madady and Andrew Pinney  
Layout: Joyce Maxwell  
Special thanks to: Paul O'Brien, for providing the creative energy behind this project and to the board members for their continuing support and commitment to this project  
Thanks also to: Rahela Hashim and the staff of Habitat, Hamidullah Natiq and all the people involved in this survey. Special thanks to the United States Institute of Peace for initial funding and support.  
Printing: The Army Press

# Overview

In early 2003 a consortium of twelve NGOs and human rights organizations formed to research and advocate on human rights issues in Afghanistan. The Consortium is unique for Afghanistan and other post conflict settings in its aims, its methods, its partners and its products. *Speaking Out* presents the findings of the Consortium's first piece of collaborative research.

The aims of *Speaking Out* are to promote Afghan voices as an important part of current policy discussions; to ensure that policy makers hear perspectives on rights and responsibilities from different ethnic, gender, age and geographic groups in Afghanistan; and to stimulate further collaborative advocacy by NGOs in Afghanistan.

The survey was conducted from April to June 2003. In total 1,479 Afghans participated in this survey from eight locations across the country. Of these, 1104 people were individually interviewed using a questionnaire and a further 375 participated in group discussions.

The survey and report looked at three specific rights drawn from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948):

Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 21: Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his<sup>1</sup> country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

Article 22: Everyone is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, to the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

## Priorities for Afghanistan

We asked "if you were the President of Afghanistan, what would you do first to help your country?"

- 43% of the responses focused on protection of security rights through, for example, disarmament or army and police training.
- 40% focused on promotion of economic rights such as health care, education or job creation.
- Only 7% focused on addressing political rights such as removing corrupt politicians or ensuring representation of all tribes in government.

Group discussions reinforced the pre-eminence of security rights. Participants consistently talked about being tired of the long years of war, and the negative effects of the conflicts on their lives. Many expressed their hope for peace and stability in Afghanistan. A large majority of respondents mentioned security and economic progress as mutually dependant forces.

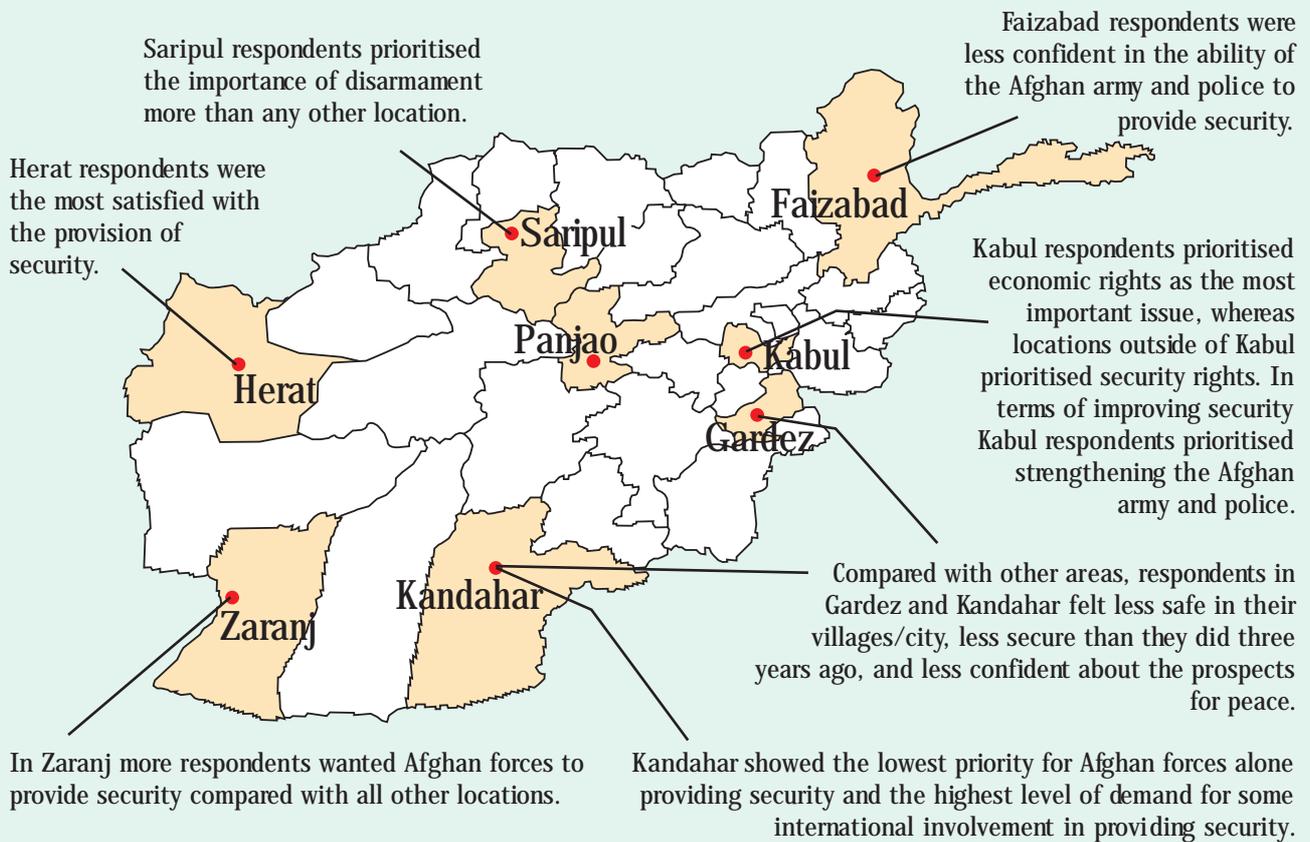
The following sections present the key findings of the survey under each rights theme.

<sup>1</sup> The use of 'his' reflects the original wording in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

<sup>2</sup> Two key facts are likely to have informed respondents' high levels of confidence about security:

- To protect respondents, NGO staff and programmes, the survey was carried out in secure areas only. Many areas of the country were already 'off limits' for many NGOs.
- People defined security differently. Sometimes they meant a lack of fighting at that point in time, sometimes they referred to their immediate vicinity only.

## SECURITY RIGHTS: KEY DIFFERENCES BY LOCATION



## SECURITY RIGHTS

### Right to Physical Security

A mixed picture emerged about security issues. Whilst most respondents (92%) felt safe walking around their village or town, all 31 group discussions prioritized security as the key issue for Afghanistan moving forward.<sup>2</sup> Those surveyed in Gardez (76%) and Kandahar (80%) felt significantly less secure than elsewhere.

Overall 83% of respondents felt more secure now than three years ago, but there was significantly less optimism about security in Gardez (23%) and Kandahar (53%). Group discussions revealed fears about the rise in theft, the presence of armed groups and the related lack of rule of law and central authority.

Women generally felt the same level of security walking around their village/town as men, possibly as the boundaries of public space women are allowed to travel in are extremely restricted. Group discussions revealed this may also be linked to perspectives on the Taliban. Women recognised that security was good in an abstract sense under the Taliban, but personally felt insecure and restricted at that time, and therefore much safer now.

### Security Responsibilities

Most respondents (48%) held the police responsible for providing protection against crime. The majority (82%)

of respondents thought that those they held responsible for providing security were fulfilling their responsibilities satisfactorily.

A relatively smaller number (65%) believed that the Afghan army or police would be able to provide security in local areas in the next five years. Similarly, group discussions revealed the hope of a strong national army and police force as a prerequisite for security. Over half of those surveyed (53%) wanted Afghan forces to be responsible for providing security, most of the remaining (42%) wanted either international forces alone or both international and Afghan forces working together.

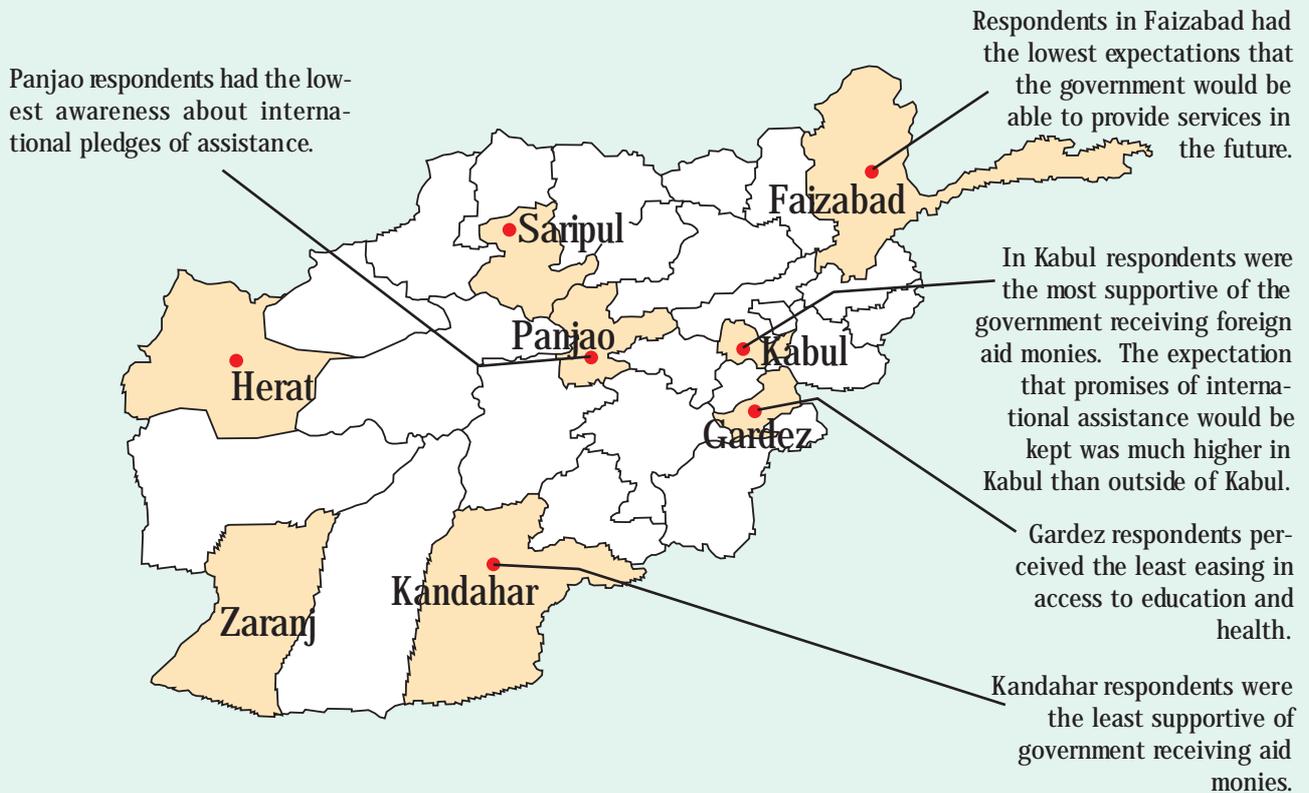
### Improving Security

Disarmament was prioritised as the most important thing to do to improve security. Group participants also thought that without disarmament it would be extremely difficult to hold free and fair national elections, or to make significant progress with reconstruction.

### Prospects for Peace

While more than 90% feel safe now, only 78% think Afghanistan will be more peaceful a year from now. In Gardez (52%) and Kandahar (55%), optimism was significantly lower. In group discussions many referred to the current situation as 'partial peace', 'relative peace' or 'temporary peace'. Concerns about threats to long term peace included armed groups, rule by gun, lack of rule of law and impunity for commanders and warlords.

## ECONOMIC RIGHTS: KEY DIFFERENCES BY LOCATION



## ECONOMIC RIGHTS

### General Sense of Economic and Social Rights

Respondents had high expectations (81%) that the government would be able to deliver services in the next three years, although those in Kabul (89%) were significantly more optimistic than elsewhere (77%).

Group discussions revealed these expectations often to be aspirations rather than forecasts. Many raised frustrations that they had seen little impact thus far, while they had heard of misuse of funds by government and aid actors. There was also a strong sense from the group discussions that there is a time limit on the delivery of services. Without tangible reconstruction progress, many feared the country would descend into anarchy again.

### Responsibility for Reconstruction

Most respondents (85%) were aware that foreign governments had promised money to reconstruct Afghanistan, but only 54% thought these governments would keep that promise (a surprisingly low number given the generally high levels of optimism in the survey).

Participants were asked whether international aid money should be given directly to the Afghan government or

to NGO's and the UN. Thirty-eight percent thought it should go to the government, 40% to the UN and NGOs and 12% said to both.

In group discussions most supported giving aid money directly to government, and held the government responsible for service delivery. Nonetheless, participants recognized that the government currently has weak capacity, and there is a need to staff ministries with people that are educated, responsible and appointed on merit rather than because of social or political affiliations.

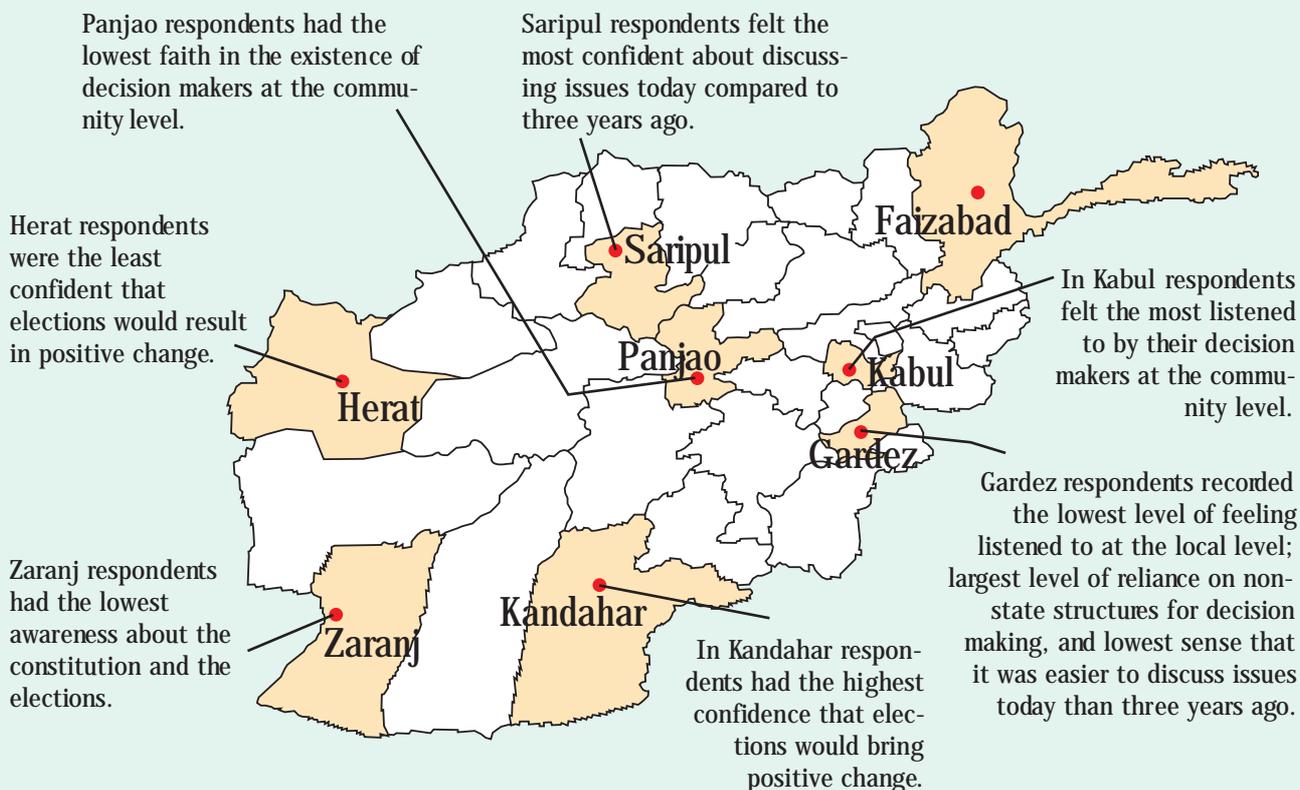
### The Link to Security

A consistent theme arising out of discussions on government and the international community's role in reconstruction was the link to security and in particular disarmament. Participants thought that without disarmament it would be extremely difficult to hold free and fair national elections, or to make significant progress with reconstruction.

### Right to Education and Health

Ninety-four percent of respondents said it was easier for their children to go to school today than it was three years ago. Health care (83%) is also perceived as easier to access today than three years ago. The results, however, do not give any insight into the quality of education or healthcare.

## POLITICAL RIGHTS: KEY DIFFERENCES BY LOCATION



## POLITICAL RIGHTS

### Right to Political Participation

The level of awareness about the constitution-drafting process and the national elections was high - 70% and 69% respectively. Even higher (87%) was the number of respondents who want to exercise their fundamental right to vote in national elections.

Respondents had high expectations (73%) that national elections would bring positive change to Afghanistan.

Most thought that elections would result in good governance - they expected the elections to deliver a government which would be strong, legitimate, accountable and representative. However, group discussions revealed serious concerns about whether it would be possible to have 'free, fair and representative' elections until disarmament had taken place.

Also in group discussions, people expressed a desire for a strong central government, perhaps indicating the lack of confidence in existing power structures which many saw as based on the rule of guns. Yet many referred to the current central government as weak and in need of support in order to exert its influence in the provinces.

### Women's Right to Participate

Seventy-two percent of those surveyed thought that women should be involved in community decision making. When asked why, many responded either that it was their right under Islamic rule, or simply because they were humans who made up half of the population. In group discussions, many observed that the abstract recognition of women's entitlements had not translated into fulfilment of those rights.

### Local Decision Making

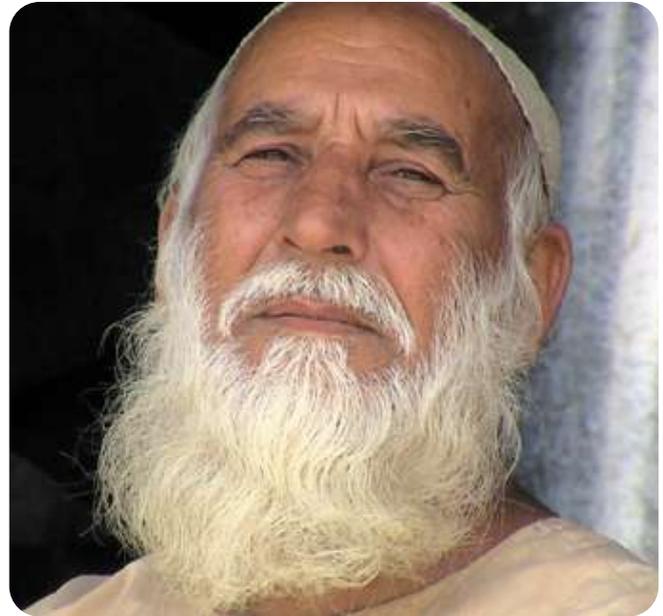
The survey aimed to find out who people held responsible for political decision making at the local level, and their ability to voice their opinions with those responsible bodies. Most respondents (75%) said that local mechanisms for decision making were functioning (local *shura* - council or assembly - or elders).

Where the community was unable to make decisions or resolve problems, most respondents (87%) said they would go to the government administration, judiciary or police for help, clearly indicating that people still held government institutions responsible. Yet in group discussions many said that the local government was unable to deliver fair decisions because of problems of corruption and partisan decisions based on social and political affiliations.

Photo courtesy of HRRAC



Photo courtesy of HRRAC



Overview

## SUMMARY OF KEY GENDER DIFFERENCES

### Security Rights-

- Forty-four percent of women wanted Afghan forces (rather than internationals) in comparison to 60% of men. Women (59%) were also less confident in the Afghan army and police than men (70%).
- Women seemed slightly more optimistic about the prospects for peace than men. Eighty-one percent of women thought Afghanistan would be more peaceful in a year's time in comparison to 75% of men.

### Economic Rights

- Men were far more likely to know about aid pledges to Afghanistan than women – 91% of men were aware in comparison to 78% of women.
- There was no significant difference between men and women in their perceptions of access to health and education.

### Political Rights-

- Sixty-one percent of women knew about both the constitution and the elections, in comparison to 78% of men. Men generally (79%) were more optimistic than women (68%) that elections would bring positive change.
- Most men (95%) said they would vote in the election compared with 78% of women. In fact the number of women willing to vote was lower than men in every location, but significantly so in the villages around Gardez, where 65% of the overall sample said they would vote, measured against 27% of women.
- Women (30% compared to 17% of men) were far more likely to cite peace as the positive outcome of elections and men (73% compared to 50% of women) thought elections would bring good governance.

## QUESTIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

Consider this...

### Security Rights

- ❖ Why are so many Afghans comparatively pleased with their security situation on the one hand, and concerned that security is the most important issue for Afghanistan on the other?
- ❖ Why do respondents in Gardez and Kandahar feel less optimistic than elsewhere about security now and the prospects for peace in the future?
- ❖ Why do Afghans put disarmament as their top priority for improving security?

### Economic Rights

- ❖ Why are people so optimistic about receiving reconstruction benefits when there have been such challenges in delivery of services?
- ❖ Why are so many Afghans comparatively sceptical that donors will come through on their commitments to Afghanistan?
- ❖ Why does optimism about the ability of the government to deliver services in the future significantly decrease outside of Kabul?
- ❖ How long can people's frustrations regarding the misuse of aid money and the lack of tangible reconstruction be contained?

### Political Rights

- ❖ Why are so many people optimistic that national elections will bring positive change to Afghanistan?
- ❖ Why is there less optimism in political processes and the right to participate in Gardez and Kandahar?
- ❖ Why does the high rate of recognition of women's right to participate politically not translate into reality?
- ❖ Why do so many women feel listened to given the male dominant nature of most decision making bodies?
- ❖ Will the optimism in elections as a process for positive change remain over time?

# About the Consortium

**T**he Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium is a group of 12 Afghan and international NGOs working in the fields of humanitarian relief, reconstruction, human and women's rights, peace promotion, research, and advocacy. It was established in early 2003 to engage in proactive research and advocacy on human rights issues over a sustained period.

This project is a unique initiative both for Afghanistan and for other countries emerging from conflict and insecurity. It is distinctive in its aim, its methods, its partners, and its products.

- The aim is to bring together a group of organizations to systematically promote human rights through ongoing primary research, training and collective advocacy.
- The method attempts to capture the voices of ordinary Afghans to promote a wide array of policy changes over a sustained period.
- The partners are a consortium of six Afghan and six international agencies. These partners, who equally co-fund this project, include some of the most experienced and respected agencies working in Afghanistan today. The extensive programming experience of Consortium members gives us unrivalled access to communities.
- The products will offer an array of innovative resources, designed to impact policy change, both in Afghanistan and abroad. Focusing not just on what we say, but how we say it, our research capacity gives us access to a living database of photographs, film and

individual perspectives of hundreds of Afghans. Those resources will be captured in a variety of intellectually and visually compelling ways to influence debate on the contemporary human rights concerns of ordinary Afghans.

The United States Institute for Peace (USIP) and each Consortium member jointly funded this survey.

## Consortium Members

### Afghan Organizations

- ❖ Afghan Development Association
- ❖ Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission
- ❖ Agency for Rehabilitation and Energy-conservation in Afghanistan
- ❖ Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (advisory organization)
- ❖ Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance
- ❖ Cooperation for Peace and Unity

### International Organizations

- ❖ CARE International
- ❖ Mercy Corps
- ❖ Ockenden International
- ❖ Oxfam International
- ❖ Rights and Democracy
- ❖ Save the Children Federation, Inc.

## CONSORTIUM MEMBERS



Afghan Development Association (ADA) was founded in 1990. Its mission is to eradicate poverty from Afghanistan. ADA provides support to returning refugees, internally displaced persons, poor families, women, the unemployed and the uneducated as well as to community based organizations.



The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) was based on the provisions of the Bonn Agreement and was established by a decree issued by Mr. Karzai (Chairman of the Afghan Interim Administration) in June 2002. The AIHRC is mandated to monitor the human rights situation in Afghanistan and initiate effective measures for the protection and promotion of human rights.



Agency for Rehabilitation & Energy-conservation in Afghanistan (AREA) is an Afghan non-governmental organization established in 1994 operating (at present) in the sectors of community development, alternative technology/environment protection, mine action, vocational/skill training and construction.



The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is an independent research institution that conducts and facilitates quality, action-oriented research and analysis to inform policy and improve practice in order to increase the impact of policies and programmes in Afghanistan.



CARE is a confederation of 11 organizations, working in more than 60 countries around the world (and in Afghanistan since the 1960s). CARE seeks a world of hope, tolerance and social justice, where poverty has been overcome and people live in dignity and security. CARE strives to be a global force and partner of choice within a worldwide movement dedicated to ending poverty.



Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (CHA) is an Afghan NGO. Its objective is to help the development of Afghan society through cooperation in rehabilitation, reconstruction and sustainable social and economic advancement of communities.



Co-operation for Peace and Unity (CPAU) is an Afghan NGO working in the areas of social peacebuilding and promotion of human rights with the aim of achieving a viable peace in Afghanistan.



Mercy Corps is a non-profit organization that exists to alleviate suffering, poverty and oppression by helping people build secure, productive and just communities. Mercy Corps operates in more than 25 countries reaching 5 million people worldwide and has been working in Afghanistan since 1986.



Ockenden International works in partnership with communities and vulnerable people affected by displacement. By involving people in resolving their own problems, we work to build more confident, stronger and self-reliant communities.



Oxfam International is a confederation of 14 organizations that is committed to invest its moral, personnel and financial resources to the shared promotion of a worldwide initiative for economic and social justice.



Rights and Democracy (The International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development) is an independent Canadian institution with an international mandate. It works in cooperation with civil society and governments around the world to promote, advocate and defend the democratic and human rights set out in the International Bill of Human Rights.



Save the Children (SC/USA) is a leading international nonprofit children's relief and development organization working in more than 40 countries, including the United States. Our mission is to create positive and lasting change in the lives of children in need.