

AFGHANISTAN: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ON CIVILIAN PROTECTION



RECOGNIZE. PREVENT. PROTECT. AMEND.

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COVER

*Community Civilian Protection Council (CCPC) group
work session, Nangarhar Province, Afghanistan.*

CIVIC Photo

Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) is an international organization dedicated to promoting the protection of civilians caught in conflict. CIVIC's mission is to work with armed actors and civilians in conflict to develop and implement solutions to prevent, mitigate, and respond to civilian harm. Our vision is a world where parties to armed conflict recognize the dignity and rights of civilians, prevent civilian harm, protect civilians caught in conflict, and amend harm.

CIVIC was established in 2003 by Marla Ruzicka, a young American activist and humanitarian who advocated on behalf of civilian war victims and their families in Iraq and Afghanistan. Building on her extraordinary legacy, CIVIC now operates in conflict zones throughout the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and South Asia to advance a higher standard of protection for civilians.

At CIVIC, we believe that parties to armed conflict have a responsibility to prevent and address civilian harm. To accomplish this, we assess the causes of civilian harm in particular conflicts, craft practical solutions to address that harm, and advocate the adoption of new policies and practices that lead to the improved wellbeing of civilians caught in conflict. Recognizing the power of collaboration, we engage with civilians, governments, militaries, and international and regional institutions to identify and institutionalize strengthened protections for civilians in conflict.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

AAF:	Afghan Air Force
AIHRC:	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
ALP:	Afghan Local Police
ANA:	Afghan National Army
ANA-TF :	Afghan National Army Territorial Force
ANCOP:	Afghan National Civil Order Police
ANDSF:	Afghan National Defense and Security Forces
ANP:	Afghan National Police
AOGs:	Armed Opposition Groups
CCPCs:	Community Civilian Protection Councils
CHM:	Civilian Harm Mitigation
CIVIC:	Center for Civilians in Conflict
COMAC:	Conflict Mitigation Assistance for Civilians
CPWGs:	Civilian Protection Working Groups
ICRC:	International Committee of the Red Cross
IEDs:	Improvised Explosive Devices
IHL:	International Humanitarian Law
IMF:	International Military Forces
ISAF:	International Security Assistance Force, NATO security forces in Afghanistan
IS-K:	Islamic State of Khorasan
NDS:	National Directorate of Security
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
POC:	Protection of Civilians
TOR:	Terms of Reference
UNAMA:	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Decades of protracted armed conflict in Afghanistan have caused thousands of civilian deaths, injuries, property damage, and displacement, creating the need for myriad protection tactics to reduce the toll on civilians. One emerging approach is local communities engaging with armed actors to influence them to change their fighting tactics to reduce civilian harm. Local populations impacted by violence are not just passive actors but, as we see in Afghanistan, trying to influence the behavior of armed actors. This briefing paper examines how communities engage with parties to the conflict on protection of civilians (POC).

In 2018, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) recorded over 10,000 deaths and injuries and attributed 63 percent of casualties to Armed Opposition Groups (AOGs),¹ 14 percent to Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF),² six percent to international military forces (IMF), and two percent to other pro-government armed groups.³

Parties to the conflict, including the ANDSF, international forces, and AOGs are obligated under International Humanitarian Law (IHL) to not engage in indiscriminate attacks and minimize incidental harm to civilians and civilian objects. In 2017, President Ashraf Ghani signed the “Policy on Prevention and Mitigation of Civilian Casualties and Damages,” which demonstrates the commitment of the Afghan government and its forces to mitigate and prevent civilian casualties and property damage. The effective enforcement of the policy however, requires more efforts. At the same time, community-based approaches to reducing violence at the local level are beginning to show promise in improving civilian protection.

In 2016, Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) undertook research in Baghlan, Kandahar, Herat, and Kunduz to understand how communities protect themselves in conflict-affected areas. We found some communities engage with the Taliban or Afghan forces

on their protection concerns to convince them to change their behavior and reduce violence with mixed results.⁴ To strengthen these efforts, in 2017 CIVIC facilitated the creation of gender-inclusive Community Civilian Protection Councils (CCPC/*shuras*) in Baghlan and Kandahar, led by respected community leaders to better identify the most urgent protection needs of civilians in areas experiencing armed conflict and to build their advocacy capacity using IHL and Islamic law to engage on protection with both pro- and anti-government forces. In 2018 and 2019, the CCPC model was expanded to Herat, Nangarhar, and Balkh provinces respectively.

To complement community-based protection activities in rural areas, CIVIC also worked with Afghan non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in urban centers and facilitated the formation of Civilian Protection Working Groups (CPWGs) in Kandahar, Baghlan, Herat, Nangarhar, and Balkh provinces and began to build their capacity to advocate on POC. CCPC members engage with the Taliban, government forces, and officials, whereas CPWGs engage at the provincial capital level with government and ANDSF.⁵

As discussed in this briefing paper, the CCPCs have had positive results through engagement on their protection concerns, albeit at the local level. For example, the Kandahar CPPC convinced the Taliban to remove Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) in Maroof district in Kandahar. In Herat, the CCPC requested improved security and deployment of the ANDSF on the Herat highway to deter attacks on civilians using the highway, which was acted on by the ANDSF with increased presence. CCPCs and CPWGs are also helping families impacted by conflict to link up with government post-harm assistance program such as Code 91 and Conflict Mitigation Assistance for Civilians (COMAC), which provide some monetary and non-monetary assistance.

Protection of civilians necessitates creative approaches to reduce violence. Community-based protection and empowering communities to be advocates for their safety is one such important tactic. The CCPCs

1 AOGs includes the Taliban, Islamic State of Khorasan (IS-K), and other armed groups.

2 Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) also Known as Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) operate under Afghan government legal structures, and consist of Afghan National Army (ANA), Afghan National Police (ANP), Afghan Local Police (ALP), Afghan Air Force (AAF), Afghan National Army Territorial Force (ANA-TF), Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP), Afghan Border Force (ABF) and National Directorate of Security (NDS). Conversely, pro-government armed groups and militias do not operate under formal government structures.

3 UNAMA, Afghanistan: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict Annual Report 2018, February 2019, (hereinafter “2018 Annual POC Report”). UNAMA attributed 42 percent of casualties from the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in suicide and non-suicide attacks by AOG, 31 percent during ground engagements between pro-government forces and AOGs, nine percent due to aerial attacks, and eight percent due to targeted killings by AOGs.

4 CIVIC, *Saving Ourselves: Security Transition and Impact on Civilian Protection in Afghanistan*, (2016)

5 To date CIVIC staff has not had any direct engagement with the Taliban or any other AOGs.

and CPWGs are showing the potential to be effective protection advocates at the grassroots level to reduce violence and yield better protection outcomes. The success of these groups, however, will be impacted by the cohesiveness of the CCPC irrespective of tribal and ethnic differences, the mentorship and trainings the groups receive to be effective advocates, how seriously their protection concerns are considered and acted upon by government and armed actors, and the safety of CCPC members as their work becomes more known. Finally, should intra-Afghan talks eventually lead to a ceasefire and roadmap to end the conflict, these community protection actors could support Kabul-level commitments to reduce violence at the local level.

- Engage in dialogue with communities to address their protection concerns without civilians fearing reprisals.

CPWG AND CCPC STRUCTURE AND TRAININGS

CIVIC has been working with Afghan NGOs and communities to develop their capacity to advocate on POC with government, ANDSF, and AOGs.⁶ In 2015, CIVIC piloted the CPWG in Kabul; in 2017, we piloted CPWGs and CCPCs in Baghlan and Kandahar; and in 2018, expanded both CPWGs and CCPCs to Herat, Nangarhar, and Balkh provinces. CIVIC selected the target provinces based on the level of conflict-related violence and CIVIC’s access to the areas for intervention.

The CPWGs and CCPCs are both gender-inclusive and made up of 20 to 30 volunteers per group, per province.⁷ CPWG members are comprised of individuals who represent different registered NGOs in Afghanistan. On average, 27 percent of CCPC members and 34 percent of CPWG members are women.

The CCPC structure depends on the province and may be comprised of tribal elders, religious scholars, former government officials, teachers, and civil society actors. CIVIC is cognizant of Afghanistan’s complex social, tribal, and ethnic structures and the divide between urban and rural areas and thus brought together a diverse group of inclusive leaders who represent their community and are committed to improving the safety of civilians.

The CCPCs ensure participation of influential actors at the district level, who represent the full tribal and ethnic composition of the district. For example, in Kandahar and Nangarhar tribal structures are stronger, and as such, tribal elders play greater roles than others in driving the protection discourse. In Baghlan, where communities are structured more along ethnic lines, individuals with greater ethnic community recognition are more effective. In Herat and Balkh, we organized the CCPCs to reflect ethnic composition of the provinces such as Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, and Baloch.

Recommendations

To the Government and ANDSF

- Develop a community-based approach to protection, including planning and timely response to protection threats that consider community concerns. Engagement with communities should not expose people to risk and should take place on a monthly basis, at a minimum. Civilians should be encouraged to raise protection concerns with officials, without fear of reprisals.
- Prior to operations, ensure communities are effectively warned when feasible so as to allow civilians to take necessary steps to protect themselves.
- Ensure timely response to civilian casualties caused during operations through apologies, acknowledgments, and access to post-harm assistance programs such as Code 91 and COMAC.

To Armed Opposition Groups

- End the use of suicide attacks and IEDs in areas frequented by civilians.
- End the use of civilian homes as sites from which to launch attacks, thereby exposing civilians to risk of harm.

6 CIVIC provided technical assistance to the Afghan government’s 2017 civilian casualty mitigation policy and is undertaking civilian harm mitigation trainings of the ANA, and engages NATO’s Resolute Support on its operations on civilian harm mitigation.

7 CPWG are composed of: 20 members including seven women in Herat; 30 members including ten women in Baghlan; 20 members including six women in Nangarhar; 22 members including five women in Kandahar and 25 members including 12 women in Balkh. CCPC consist of : 25 members including seven women in Herat; 28 members including eight women in Baghlan; 26 members including six women in Nangarhar; 25 members including seven women in Kandahar; and 27 members including seven women in Balkh.

Each CCPC and CPWG has a chair, co-chair, and secretary, elected by the members for six month terms. CIVIC developed Terms of Reference (TOR) for the CPWGs and CCPCs that define the purpose, structure, and key duties and responsibilities of the members. The CCPCs' key functions include but are not limited to: establishing linkages and engaging with ANDSF, AOGs, and local government authorities; collecting data on civilian protection concerns from communities experiencing violence; discussing and using the information for POC-related advocacy in their dialogue with government forces and AOGs; and improving public awareness of POC in their localities on a regular basis. CCPC members also link community members eligible for post-harm monetary and non-monetary assistance with the relevant governmental and non-governmental authorities.

The CPWG has similar functions but does not engage with AOGs. It relies on data from the CCPC for advocacy and has more of a public profile as members frequently hold press conferences to raise awareness on civilian harm.

In 2018, CIVIC provided a three-day POC and advocacy workshop to CCPC and CPWG members on fundamentals of IHL, Islam and IHL, Civilian Harm Mitigation (CHM) in practice, as well as communication and advocacy skills. The workshop aimed to disseminate basic understanding of these topics to enable the groups to frame their arguments from a religious, legal, and strategic lens when engaging the AOGs and ANDSF. CIVIC is committed to providing more training and mentoring on POC in order to further equip the members of both groups with required tools, skills, and knowledge to better advocate on protection issues.

The CCPC meets in their provincial capital every month, discusses issues pertaining to violence and protection concerns in their districts, and seeks options to advocate on those issues. Similarly, the CPWGs hold monthly coordination meetings, in addition to ad-hoc meetings as necessary to respond to any protection-related developments such as large-scale attacks on civilians.

Members of the CCPCs and CPWGs hold joint meetings to discuss the current POC concerns and security challenges at the provincial and district level. The CPWG comes up with several advocacy action points on engaging with local government and ANDSF on protection concerns, relying on information from districts where the CCPC members reside. CPWGs also release statements, hold press conferences, and talk to the media as well as engage with the government and

ANDSF officials to raise POC concerns at the provincial level.

EFFICACY OF COMMUNITY-BASED PROTECTION APPROACH

The CCPCs and CPWGs are starting to raise POC awareness in their communities. They are also expressing their protection concerns and expectations for improved behavior with local governments, security forces, as well as AOGs in their respective provinces and districts with positive results. CIVIC has provided technical support and mentorship to both groups on their engagement and continues to oversee their progress. Below are some results of CPWG and CCPC engagement.

Engagement with Community

CCPC members engage with local communities where they reside to identify protection concerns in a safe way, without naming the individual person/family who is impacted to avoid retaliation. They then raise these concerns with armed actors to convey how their military tactics affect civilians. For dialogue with the Taliban, CCPC members may also mobilize other influential elders within their communities for joint discussions on civilian protection concerns.

CCPCs play an important role in improving public awareness on self-protection measures a community may take in response to kinetic activities. For instance, in late 2018, as ground operations between ANDSF and Taliban intensified in Obeh district of Herat, CCPC members met with the ANDSF and Taliban. They then spoke with community elders in the district on practical measures they could take to protect the community during operations. Based on the pre-operation warnings from ANDSF, the community opted for different self-protection measures; some went to neighboring villages and districts, whereas those who could not leave were advised to stay indoors and not let children outside to play.

Moreover, CCPC members in all target provinces inform and provide recommendations to civilian victims on how to access government post-harm assistance programs such as Code 91 and COMAC. Code 91 provides monetary payment for death or injury either by ANDSF or by AOG in the amount of AFN 100,000 for death (US \$1300) and up to AFN 50,000 for injuries (US \$650). COMAC is a non-monetary assistance program that provides basic food and hygiene items to victims' families, and referrals for physical rehabilitation, psychosocial counseling, vocational training, and

income generation assistance.

CCPC awareness-raising on these critical programs allowed families of victims impacted during operations in Afsaj village from Obeh district of Herat, and Sharkhilo and Mahmammadzo villages of Maroof district, Kandahar to receive COMAC assistance in November 2018.⁸

Engagement with Armed Opposition Groups

Civilians are impacted by AOGs' use of IEDs, shelling during ground engagements, suicide attacks, and targeted killings, which result in death, injuries, and damage to property. Civilians are used as human shields by some AOG members and forced to provide shelter, food, and water to AOGs, exposing them to risk of harm during fighting. Civilians are also threatened by illegal armed groups who engage in extortion, kidnapping, and murder without accountability.

To address these concerns, CCPC members routinely engage with the Taliban and in Baghlan with illegal armed groups. While the Islamic State of Khorasan (IS-K) is active in eastern Afghanistan, the CCPC in Nangarhar has, as of this writing, not regularly engaged in dialogue with IS-K as CCPC members have not yet identified an influential person who can ensure safe methods of engagement.

CCPC members live in areas controlled by AOGs and have access to leaders who control these areas. Identifying and understanding the motivations of the Taliban and other AOGs is key for CCPC members to be able to engage with them and establish trust, to be able to say things that others cannot, and to be listened to.

Engagement with the Taliban has yielded some promising results, albeit limited to the area of engagement, time, and agreement with particular Taliban commanders. CCPC members try to convince the armed actors to consider POC as a legal, religious, and moral obligation during their military operations. Some examples include:

- In November 2018, Kandahar CCPC members successfully negotiated with a local Taliban commander in Maroof district to remove IEDs from a public road used by civilians. The Taliban

promised the CCPC members that they will no longer plant IEDs on the public roads as a military tactic in the district. As of this writing, this commitment is still in place.

- Similarly, in March 2019, Kandahar CCPC members and community elders reached out to both the local Taliban commander and the district governor in Takhtapul district to request that they remove roadside IEDs. Consequently, in March 2019, both ANDSF and Taliban removed IEDs planted by the Taliban from the areas under their control.
- During December 2018 and February 2019, Baghlan CCPC members began engaging with various illegal armed groups in Fring district on the issues of reduction of threats to civilians and disarmament. One group decided to hand over their weapons to the Afghan Local Police (ALP) and is in discussions to join formal police units after undergoing a vetting process. Nonetheless, illegal armed groups remain a major protection challenge to the civilian population in almost all districts of Baghlan province.
- In Mohmandara district, Nangarhar province, CCPC members reported that the security situation improved in late 2018 because police have increased their patrols in the district following meetings with them. The CCPC also had several meetings with local Taliban commanders to ask them to allow girls to attend school in Basawal village. After several meetings between September and October 2018, the Taliban accepted their request and announced that girls can go to schools in Basawal village.
- In October 2018, CCPC members, along with other community elders, engaged the local Taliban commander in Kariz Sultan area, in Pashtun Zargon district, Herat and urged the Taliban to leave civilian areas and not attack ANDSF from civilian homes. The Taliban commander accepted their request and promised not to attack polling stations in this district. Taliban combatants did not attack polling stations during the parliamentary election and are no longer using civilian houses as bases.

8 This report does not analyze challenges and administrative bureaucracy of Code 91, which CIVIC is currently examining. For our prior analysis on government post-harm assistance programs, please see *Caring For Their Own: A Stronger Afghan Response to Civilian Harm*, 2013.



*Press conference by Herat Community Protection Working Group (CPWG), Herat Province, Afghanistan.
CIVIC Photo*

- In January 2019, Nangarhar CCPC members successfully negotiated with a local Taliban commander in Nazyan district to halt the planting of new IEDs along public roads and to refrain from using civilian homes and properties as bases to attack the ANDSF. As of this writing, the Taliban are no longer using civilians' houses and planting IEDs in the Nazyan district.

These examples of positive engagement with the Taliban and armed groups are limited to a district in a province and do not have a country-wide impact on violence. Nevertheless, they are important localized improvements for civilian safety and their impact is felt in terms of lives saved.

Engagement with Government Authorities and Other Organizations

Initially CIVIC facilitated meetings between CCPCs, CPWGs, and civil government officials, including provincial governors, district governors, and provincial councils to discuss protection concerns. However, the CPWGs and CCPCs now directly hold meetings with government officials at the provincial and district level with minimal support from CIVIC. These independent engagements by the CCPCs and CPWGs speak to the success of CIVIC's approach focused on empowering the community to bring their security concerns and challenges directly to government officials.

Concerns raised by the CCPCs and CPWGs in all provinces, where they are active, include but are not limited to: the need for local officials to do a better job of acknowledging incidents of civilian harm, improving oversight of forces, as well as allocating more resources and improving access to post-harm assistance programs.

Some examples of CCPC and CPWG engagement include:

- In October 2018, Baghlan CCPC and CPWG members reached out to the provincial governor to request the re-opening of a road in Deh Gory village. The road was blocked off for all usage by ANDSF for a month before parliamentary elections for security reasons, but also resulted in civilians being unable to travel from the city to their farms. The governor promised to see whether the road could be re-opened or alternative routes could be made available for civilians. In November 2018, the road was reopened.
- In February 2019, there was a high incidence of illegal armed group activities along major roads in Khinjan and Dushi districts such as kidnapping, murder, and theft. Baghlan CCPC members and community elders met the district governor and shared their concerns. The district governor coordinated with the Afghan National Police (ANP) district commander to address the issue. In late February, the ANP arrested a key member of the illegal group who was responsible for crimes against civilians.

- In January 2019, Kandahar CCPC members shared their concerns with the provincial governor's office regarding an ALP commander's behavior with nomads (*Kochi*). In response, the provincial governor assigned a committee to investigate the issue.
- In February 2019, Nangarhar CCPC and CPWG members jointly met the provincial governor in Nangarhar to discuss National Directorate of Security (NDS) night raids and proximity of some ANP checkpoints to residential areas in different districts, which expose civilians to risk of harm as checkpoints are frequently attacked. In a follow up meeting in March, these issues were discussed and the chief of staff of the provincial governor told the CCPC and CPWG members that concerns regarding NDS raids and impact on civilians are being discussed at monthly operations meetings. Moreover, the ANP removed its checkpoint away from residential areas in Khogiyani district.

These examples speak to the success of joint advocacy efforts of CCPCs and CPWGs with government officials and the responsiveness of the government to civilian concerns.

The CCPCs and CPWGs are also in contact with organizations, such as the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), UNAMA, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to share protection concerns. All CCPCs regularly engage with COMAC and refer cases of civilian harm in their communities for post-harm assistance.

Engagement with Government Forces

In 2018 and early 2019, CIVIC facilitated four civilian-military dialogues between representatives of the CCPCs and CPWGs and senior officers from Afghan National Army (ANA) Corps 207 in Herat, 205 Corps in Kandahar, 201 Corps in Nangarhar, and 209 Corps in Balkh province. The dialogues provided space to share civilian protection concerns from the community with security forces charged with protecting them. During the introductory dialogues, CCPC and CPWG members gave short presentations, highlighting their concerns such as illegal armed groups, use of heavy weapons, air strikes, and night raids. ANA Corps welcomed engagement with the community and agreed to address their concerns on threats from armed actors and prevent casualties during operations.



*After Civilian-Military Dialogue Session between Community Civilian Protection Council (CCPC), Community Protection Working Group (CPWG) and 207 Corps senior officials, Herat Province, Afghanistan.
CIVIC Photo*

These dialogues built on CIVIC's previous work in Baghlan and Kandahar in 2017 where CIVIC facilitated dialogue between the CCPCs and the ANP in those provinces.

The CCPCs and CPWGs are more frequently sharing their protection concerns with the ANDSF, with some positive outcomes. These include:

- In September 2018, in Arghandab district in Kandahar, civilians had concerns that the Taliban would increase their military operations during late summer and fall because the fighters normally return to their homes during the winter.

Therefore, Kandahar CCPC members reached out to the district chief of police to share their concerns

- In October 2018, the Afghan Air Force (AAF) conducted airstrikes, which resulted in deaths, injuries, and a damaged vehicle in Maroof district, Kandahar. CCPC members, together with community elders, met the 205 Corps commander, the provincial chief of police, and governor to raise their complaints. The ANA Corps commander acknowledged their mistake and committed to improving GPS coordinates to prevent mistakes in the future. Assistance was provided to families from COMAC, but as of this writing not under Code 91, which offers monetary assistance.

- In February 2019, the Chief of Staff of the 207 ANA Corps in Herat heard concerns from the CPWG and CCPC members regarding a live-fire exercise near residential areas, which resulted in one death and one injury. He promised to move the firing range away from residential areas.

Similarly, CCPC and CPWG joint engagement with local government and security forces improved civilian safety. Following a request from the CCPC and CPWG in Herat province, the security situation in Pashtun Zarghon and Obek in 2019 improved when ANP units were deployed to these areas.

In March 2019, the Baghlan CPWG and CCPC requested increased security presence along the Baghlan and Mazar-e-Sharif highway as the Taliban had intensified their military operations in the Chesma Shir area, located along the highway. This escalation had caused harm to civilians who travelled along the highway. The Baghlan CPWG held a press conference during which they asked the Afghan government and ANDSF to maintain security along the highway and requested that the Taliban not target civilians while they are commuting on the highway. After the press conference, the CCPC and CPWG held a meeting with Afghan military officials, following which the Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP), jointly with ANA, set up five military posts along the highway to maintain security.

These examples illustrate that community engagement with ANDSF can result in improved safety for civilians.

CHALLENGES AND THE FUTURE OF CCPC

The CCPCs face considerable risk when talking to armed groups, but have developed locally-based approaches to reduce this risk. For example, in Nangarhar in some districts, community elders who have connections with the Taliban join the CCPC in discussions with the Taliban in order to ensure security for CCPC members. As many CCPC members live in districts controlled by AOGs, striving to be impartial is essential to avoid reprisals. AOGs target tribal leaders and other influential locals mainly in Pashtun areas, such as the southern province of Kandahar and eastern province of Nangarhar, if they are seen being close to the government.

Sustaining a protection result presents a challenge. CCPCs' efforts to encourage an armed actor to reduce violence or change tactics may be accepted at one point, but may be undermined by subsequent operations. Thus, sustainability of a civilian protection commitment may not hold and could force CCPC members to be perceived as biased in favor of one party to a conflict versus another party.

A challenge within the CCPC is the membership of women and ensuring safe space for dialogue on gender protection concerns and devising advocacy strategies around it. Women's membership in the CCPCs averages 27 percent across the current five provinces. While this is progress for conservative and rural Afghanistan, women's active participation in the CCPCs to ensure their ability to raise gender protection concerns safely needs further encouragement, mentoring, and support. CIVIC will be exploring women-only CCPC sessions to allow space for gender concerns to be discussed more freely.

Regular engagement by the CCPCs with government and ANDSF to discuss concerns, grievances, and needs is not yet formalized. Afghan forces and local government meet with communities on an ad-hoc basis rather than linking their protections strategies with community needs. This deficiency could impact CCPC members' motivation to raise and follow up on their concerns regularly.

Another possible impediment to the CCPCs' success is the turnover of members. The driving factors of CCPC members' turnover include but are not limited to: security threats, financial problems, and relocation of CCPC members to other provinces. Identifying influential CCPC members and building his or her capacities to engage with armed actors on POC can be time-consuming.



*Community Civilian Protection Council monthly meeting, Baghlan Province, Afghanistan.
CIVIC Photo*

Community engagement work needs continued technical support and mentorship. Arranging monthly meetings and providing a stipend to cover basic costs such as travel and administration for CCPCs is necessary to help members better perform their duties and develop institutional capabilities to deliver on behalf of communities. CIVIC is, however, cognizant of not creating dependencies, but sees some basic support for the CCPCs as necessary for them to carry out their volunteer functions and be effective advocates on civilian protection.

CONCLUSION

The survival and success of the CCPCs and CPWGs very much depends on their recognition by government and armed actors as legitimate local protection bodies.

The increasing toll on civilians in Afghanistan requires creative solutions to assess how violence can be reduced. CIVIC is exploring new ways and working with Afghan civil society and at the community level to build the capacity of these groups to be key players in contributing to solutions to reducing violence.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Since 2017, CIVIC has facilitated the creation of Civilian Community Protection Councils (CCPCs) and Civilian Protection Working Groups (CPWGs) in Balkh, Baghlan, Herat, Kandahar, and Nangahar, who advocate on their protection concerns with both government forces and armed opposition groups. This report discusses localized protection results attained by these gender inclusive community groups and challenges on community based protection efforts with armed actors.

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