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FEFA 2015-19 Strategic Plan

I. Introduction

The Free and Fair Elections Forum of Afghanistan Organization (FEFA) has sought since 2005 to develop and pursue a long-term strategic plan. While FEFA has succeeded in establishing itself as Afghanistan's premiere national domestic election monitoring organization, the broader democracy and governance agenda has proved more difficult to pursue.

Between the elections of 2005 and 2009, the organization was able to implement several initiatives. However, these activities were pursued in an ad hoc manner and were to an extent a response to donors and the purposes for which donor funding was available.

Conscious that the grander goal of democracy building requires a longer-term focus and engagement, FEFA secured the support of its international partners – particularly UNDP and NDI – to facilitate the development of a strategic plan in January 2010. At the end of January 2015, FEFA conducted facilitated sessions for staff, to update FEFA's strategic plan for the next five years (2015-19). In addition, key external partners were engaged for their views on FEFA's performance as well as elements that should be included in the new strategic plan.

With this new strategic plan, FEFA wishes to deepen the gains achieved under the previous plan particularly as relates to such areas as human resource management, program management and monitoring and evaluation.

II. Situation Analysis

Afghanistan has arguably made democratic progress over the past 10 years, and the last five in particular. Elections are held regularly and progress is generally being made to strengthen electoral administration. The legislature meets, engages citizens and passes legislation. The emphasis on women and youth is growing, with strong suggestions that the youth are rising to the democratic challenge and opportunity, and increasingly leading the needed change. Afghanistan's media is possibly the freest in the region, while the use of technology to enhance democratic processes is growing, including through the use of social media. There is evidence that disputes are increasingly being resolved through more peaceful means.

Progress in electoral quality and citizen confidence in elections arguably rose to a peak for the first round of the Presidential elections in 2014, only to be undermined by rigging and administrative weaknesses at the second round. While the achievement of a unity government holds some promise for papering over the cracks in Afghanistan's

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body politic, it also represents a challenge to the rule of law and the constitution. Some may well ask “why have elections if we can negotiate outcomes?”

The events of 2014 effectively eroded years of efforts by FEFA, the IEC and others to build public confidence in the electoral process. Details of how political parties and election officials variously demonstrated either incompetence or corruption, or both, have likely scarred the public so significantly as to warrant heightened efforts in 2015 and beyond to repair the damage.

In addition to the damage to democratic institutions and processes in 2014, Afghanistan must now also grapple with looming economic gloom as well as increased insecurity. These twin challenges to the very life of Afghans will undoubtedly be national priorities in the short- to medium-term for all national actors. In this context, FEFA must support the use of democratic processes – including elections and public participation – to address the country’s economic and security concerns.

Accompanying these developments is the gradual reduction of international support for Afghanistan at both the military and financial levels. For groups like FEFA that depend in particular on financial support from international development partners, this is a highly significant change. At the same time, enough international attention will continue – even if levels are reduced – sufficient to support groups that are able to demonstrate value for money.

III. Proposed FEFA Vision, Mission and Theory of Change

Based on the above analysis and background, FEFA establishes its vision, mission and theory of change as follows:

FEFA VISION: A peaceful, democratic and well-governed society where all citizens have equal rights and opportunities for participation.

FEFA MISSION: FEFA is a national, independent and impartial institution working through partnerships, citizen participation, good governance and professional programs to enhance transparency and accountability in democratic processes.

FEFA THEORY OF CHANGE: **IF** FEFA adheres to its key values in implementing its programs, **WHILE** maximizing opportunities for citizen participation and good governance, **THEN** the quality of democratic processes in Afghanistan will be enhanced.

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IV. Key Values

The following values, with definitions, were considered to be at the core of a successful FEFA. If pursued effectively, these values will significantly and positively increase the impact of FEFA's work.

1. Impartiality: Impartiality as a value for FEFA has to do with not being prejudiced or biased. Together with the value of professionalism, impartiality better assures objectivity, fairness and balance. Work and opinions that are impartial have a better chance of being correct.

2. Independence: The value of independence reinforces the values of impartiality and professionalism by emphasizing that you are free from undue influence. While independence of thought, word and action are all associated with this value; independence also suggests self-sufficiency and particularly financial sustainability for FEFA.

3. Integrity: Integrity is about honesty. FEFA staff and actions are expected at all times to be honest, adhering to strong moral principles.

4. Volunteerism: Volunteerism is about doing something freely without the promise of material reward. It is usually associated with the value of commitment. In FEFA, citizens who are passionate about FEFA's vision and mission will be encouraged to volunteer their time and skills to support the organization.

5. Professionalism: This value is associated with the skills, competence, proficiency and technical know-how to get a job done to a high standard. In addition to aptitude, professionalism is also about attitude - how one works effectively with others on the job.

6. Commitment: Commitment is about keeping promises to each other and being dedicated to the vision and mission of the organization.

7. Partnerships: A partnership exists when two or more entities agree to cooperate to advance their mutual interests. This cooperation can be formal or informal.

V. Challenges to and Opportunities for Achieving FEFA's Vision

The following challenges, in no order of priority, were identified:

Internal (sample)

- Admin/finance policies are not usually adequate to respond to the new challenges

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- Authority and responsibility are some times not proportionately distributed
- Absence of regular capacity building programs
- Occasional gaps in internal communication
- Excessive bureaucracy
- IT challenges
- Less information on outcome of M&E's work in the office
- Lack of job security

External:

- Security threats while field visits
- Lack of permanent provincial offices
- Reduced scope for resource mobilization
- Increased political polarization
- Significant drop in public's confidence in electoral processes
- Shrinking of space for free political participation specially for women due to increased security threats

VI. Key Strategies for addressing challenges

Using the sample list generated in section V above, FEFA examined the relationship between each idea and the key organizational values. This examination revealed that while all of the organizational values were important (including the defining value of *impartiality*), the values of *professionalism and partnerships* were particularly important in helping FEFA to address its internal and external challenges.

These two values would thus be elevated to the status of strategic means for realizing FEFA's vision and would inform the ways and means by which FEFA identifies, develops and implements activities.

VII. 2015-2020 Strategic Goals:

The following five strategic goals will define FEFA's operation and direction for the coming FEFA years. Taking the changing environment in Afghanistan, FEFA believes that the strategic plan is a living document and shall be subject to review throughout the coming five years.

1. To increase citizen's participation and their awareness of the democratic political participation, specially of women and youth
2. To increase accountability of, and to promote transparency of conduct of democratically elected officials including Members of parliaments and members

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- of Provincial Councils
3. To improve legal, institutional and financial aspects of electoral processes and mechanisms
 4. To improve independent electoral observation through increased citizen participation
 5. To further develop organizational capacity of FEFA as a national citizen-owned organization.