

I-PACS II NEWSLETTER

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF OF PARTY



I-PACS II is happy to share its second newsletter with you! We hope you enjoy learning more about our efforts in strengthening civil society organizations

(CSOs) in Afghanistan.

In addition to highlighting our work during the last several months, this newsletter also demonstrates the continuation of the work from the I-PACS program that started six years ago. The first phase of I-PACS, implemented from 2005-2010, had a vision for civil society to be a self-sustaining entity that held government agencies accountable and engaged in policy dialogue with citizens.

Given the success of I-PACS I, USAID awarded Counterpart a three-year, follow-on grant in October 2010. Since 2005, our efforts to build capacity and increase the visibility of Afghan CSOs has allowed us to expand our services and, through close cooperation with our partners, ensure that our program has a presence in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan. Today, we support CSOs all over the country, which in turn are able to provide essential services to their individual communities.

The I-PACS II program is also focusing on increasing local awareness of the CSOs role and their effectiveness. We assist in building bridges between communities, CSOs and government institutions in an effort to increase awareness about issues related to the well-being and rights of Afghan people.

Close cooperation, constant support and contributions from our donor and partners have been crucial to the successful implementation of our program. While we celebrate our successes, we are keenly aware of the challenges that remain for the continuing development of civil society in Afghanistan; from increased security concerns to the need to establish and strengthen strategic communication between civil society and the government; we remain engaged and eager for the work ahead. — *Suzana Paklar*

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ESTABLISHED AND AIMS FOR BETTER PARTICIPATION AND COLLABORATION



Deputy Chief of Mission Mr. W. Ash Belly in the bi-annual national network meeting on May 24, 2011. © USAID.

February 2011 — Counterpart and its seven key partner Intermediary Service Organizations (ISOs) formed an Advisory Committee (AC) for the I-PACS II program. Participating ISOs included the Afghan Civil Society Forum organization (ACSFo), Afghan Center for Training and Development (ACTD), Association for the Defense of Women's Rights (ADWRO), Afghan Women's Education Center (AWEC), Basic Education and Employable Skill Training (BEST), Educational and Training Center for Poor Women and Girls of Afghanistan (ECW), and Women Activities and Social Service Association (WASSA).

The new committee will enable these core program partners to gradually assume a more integral role in informing I-PACS II's program strategy, goal-setting, activity planning, individual implementation timelines, and monitoring and reporting. Initially relying on the help of an experienced capacity building consultant with technical expertise in the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) method, Counterpart worked with the Directors of its seven key partners to define a vision, purpose and strategic priorities for the Committee over the next three years.

The group determined that its purpose would be: *To strengthen Afghan civil soci*

ety's capacity to support social improvement and nation building, through both advice for the effective implementation of I-PACS II and enhanced civil society participation, collaboration, and recognition.

"[This] initiative is very useful for the strengthening of civil society in Afghanistan. The participatory approach of the I-PACS II program enables our organizations to feel more ownership; [it] will contribute to the sustainability of our organization."

-Hasina Safi, member of the Advisory Committee, and Director of AWEC

The members of the Committee created a one-year action plan and a meeting schedule, and have met three times since the group's founding. In these sessions, participants discussed progress against the I-PACS II work plan, the selection of new network partners, as well as shared challenges and best practices. Specifically, the committee members were able to review and confirm nearly 80 target CSO partners and nine Civil Society Support Center (CSSC) partners.



I-PACS II CONTINUES EXPANDING ITS CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORK



New selected ISOs & CSSCs participating in first bi-annual national network meeting on May 24, 2011. © Counterpart International Inc.

Counterpart recently announced new partnerships with nine Afghan CSOs, which have been selected and approved by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to become I-PACS II Civil Society Support Centers (CSSCs). The nine organizations are: Peace Organization (PO) in Takhar and Baghlan, Coordination of Rehabilitation and Development Services for Afghanistan (CRDSA) in Badghis, Farah and Nimroz, Legal and Cultural Services for Afghan Women and Children (LCSAWC) in Badakhshan, Help the Afghan Children (HTAC) in Sari Pul and Jawzjan, Development and Education Organization for Women (DEOW) in

Faryab, Development and Ability Organization (DAO) in Kunar and Nuristan, Training and Human Rights Association (THRA) in Nangarhar and Laghman, Afghan Amputee Bicyclist for Rehabilitation and Recreation (AABRAR) in Paktya and Paktika, and the Shuhada Organization (SO) in Bamyán and Daikundi. The main areas of work for these organizations include peace building, rehabilitation, legal aid, gender equality, human rights promotion, advocacy and the rights of the disabled.

Osman Hemat, a program manager for Help the Afghan Children (HTAC), an organization that is dedicated to improving the lives

of children in Afghanistan through quality education, stated that, “During I-PACS II’s bi-annual national network meeting [on May 24, 2011], I learned what an enormous opportunity it is to work with Counterpart and the I-PACS II program – and the opportunities it provides to Afghan civil society organizations, in general, to help their country. Strengthening civil society in a country that has experienced decades of war is essential for us to become a real democratic state.”

He went on to say, “We just applied for one of the grants from I-PACS II [that are only open to network partners] and we are so excited and proud to begin our work.”

WORKING TO INCREASE ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY OF AFGHAN PARTNER CSOS

January 2011 — Stephanie Sullivan, An Organizational Development (OD) expert, visited the I-PACS II office in Kabul to introduce the OD process to Counterpart staff. She worked closely with staff to adapt Counterpart’s OD tools to fit the specific needs of Afghan CSOs; She also supported staff as they led OD-related trainings for I-PACS II’s seven partner ISOs, each of which will be working closely with two I-PACS II CSSCs. Ms. Sullivan shared, “Working with the dynamic I-PACS II team is so exciting... especially as we are kicking off the enhanced organizational development component. I look forward to tracking this project over the coming years and seeing the partners grow beyond traditional project implementers to leading Afghan institutions.”

Following these sessions, I-PACS II began supporting key partners with capacity building interventions that capitalize on their specific organizational strengths while addressing their institutional weak-



Counterpart consultant Stephanie Sullivan discusses the revision and adaptation of OD tools with Counterpart staff. © Counterpart International Inc.

nesses. Amin Amini, from AWDRO, shared his impressions of the training, “I had only recently joined AWDRO as its Organizational Development Officer and the training directly targeted my professional needs. Not only did I learn about the tools I would be using, but I got to practice writing organizational assessment reports. I have used that experience and I have since developed other assessment reports for my organization.”

Counterpart has begun planning annual OD

assessments of all its key partners for June and July 2011. Following another five-day workshop on how to conduct OD assessments, teams of Counterpart staff will work with ISO partners to conduct OD assessments of each ISO. Then, teams of Counterpart and ISO staff will visit the offices of each CSSC partner organization in their respective provinces. These assessments will take place through mid-July and the reports will be presented before work planning begins for the coming program year.

“This was my first training in OD – and now I can see how this OD work is really the backbone for everything else the I-PACS II project does.”

-Wahida Mohammadzai, Counterpart International training officer.



DIALOGUES TO UNDERSTAND COMMUNITY NEEDS



A community dialogue session in Safi Kot village of Deh Sabz District of Kabul, between I-PACS II team.
© Counterpart International, Inc.

March 2011 — Counterpart’s I-PACS II team conducted its first trial community dialogue session in the Safi-Kot village of Kabul’s Deh-Sabz district in early March. These community dialogues, which will be led by I-PACS II’s key partner organizations, act as public forums where communities can identify challenges and problems, discuss priorities, and brainstorm practical solutions and changes they would like to implement. The dialogues aim to increase trust and understanding within communities, as well as between communities and the civil society organizations that work with them.

In this trial dialogue, 20 Deh-Sabz community members - mullahs, provincial council members, and CSO representatives – were provided the space to identify how the principles of Islam and democracy relate to and support the creation of a foundation for citizen engagement, as well as a better understanding of how communities, CSOs, and government can work collaboratively. Participants shared their thoughts about civil society in general, the government’s effectiveness in their communities’, and instances where community, civil society, and government have come together to overcome challenges in their communities.

One of the participants Mr. Haji Azeem

Khan stated, “After the Taliban regime collapsed in 2001, our minds have been changed we have chosen they way of literacy and we put down our weapons, put pens in the hands of our children and started a campaign against illiteracy, ignorance and ineptitude.”

The Counterpart team found that there is a great need for these dialogues, to open communication, empower citizens, and build trust. In the upcoming quarters, Counterpart plans to roll out a series of multi-stakeholder policy dialogues at the local, regional, and national levels in order to identify and prioritize key policy issues – all of which will feed into the national reform agenda. Then, later in March, Counterpart organized and conducted the first training in the practice of conducting community dialogues. Over the course of two days, the I-PACS II Community Dialogue Officers and I-PACS Managers of the seven ISO partners were introduced to new facilitation skills to effectively utilize community dialogue forums and were also trained on the “Appreciative Inquiry” method. Since that training, more than 40 I-PACS community dialogues have been conducted in the Ghazni, Heart, Kunduz, Kapisa, Kandahar, Balkh, Parwan and Samangan provinces.

GENDER STUDY TOUR TO JAIPUR AND DELHI, INDIA

January 2011 — The I-PACS II program and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) organized a study tour to Jaipur and Delhi, India, where Counterpart and IFES jointly implemented the USAID-funded Rule of Law and Reproductive Health (Garima) project.

For 11 days, staff from Counterpart and its key partners, WASSA, ECW and AWEC, visited various sites and met with partners. As a result of this exchange, I-PACS staff were able to identify similarities and differences between gender-related problems in India and Afghanistan.



Counterpart’s Gender Coordinator, Massoda Nawabi, also found real benefits from this trip. “I had not known much about the ‘volunteer’ approach to gender and development work before this trip and now I have started working with an Afghan CSO that is using a volunteer network. I feel committed to helping Afghan civil society find the most effective strategies and practices and this trip gave me tools to do that.”

The I-PACS team learned about Garima’s advocacy work, gender mainstreaming approaches, awareness building among community members on their basic rights and role and responsibilities and women’s empowerment. Muqadas Atalwal, the Gender and Media Focal Point of AWEC, shared, “I really benefitted from this visit to India. The staff of the organizations there shared their best practices and now I have new ideas to share with my own organization. Together with my staff we can figure out how to make those strategies work in Afghanistan.”

Since January 2005, Counterpart International Inc. has been the lead implementer of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society (I-PACS). In recognition of the success of that project, USAID awarded Counterpart International a follow-on grant, I-PACS II, which will extend through September 2013. USAID and Counterpart International are working to enable Afghan citizens to more effectively participate in the political process, solve community problems, and demand good governance from their leaders. In order to accomplish that goal, I-PACS II is working to: (1) improve civil society accountability, legal & regulatory frameworks, (2) strengthen civil society capacity and sector infrastructure for democratic processes, and (3) increase citizen mobilization and policy engagement, all while ensuring that its activities are gender mainstreamed.

VIDEOGRAPHY AND PHOTOGRAPHY TRAINING



Photo taken by the Communications Team following the one day training in Photography, showing the street scenes of Kabul. June 13, 2011

As part of the Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society II (I-PACS II) broader capacity building efforts, Counterpart International held a one-day photography and videography workshop for the staff of its key Intermediary Service Organizations (ISOs) and Civil Society Support Centers. Led by Counterpart's own Director of Communications, Mr. Michael Zamba, and photography expert, Mr. David Snyder, the workshop was the first communications-related training for most of these NGO workers.

The 36 participants received tips and guidance on how to capture the best images of the situations they typically encounter in their civil society work, for example, how to create strong and effective images of conferences and meetings. Following this, the I-PACS II key partner staff was sent out into the surrounding neighborhood, to take photographs according to these new guidelines and instructions. In the afternoon session, while they learned the basics of using a video camera to capture 'success stories' of their work, David reviewed and compiled specific feedback on the photographs that the participants brought him. It was clear that the some of the basic techniques of 'good composition' had resonated with the trainees – some of the photographs were striking and most were of a high enough quality to be used in a publication. One trainee, Mohammad Nadar from DAO, shared, "It was a very important and effective workshop and we learned how to take good photos which indicate messages as well. The principles and techniques used in this workshop if considered will be a good achievement and the photos and videos will be responsive by themselves."

Counterpart plans to hold a longer and more intensive communications training for its partners, focusing on interviewing techniques and writing success stories, in the autumn of 2011.

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