

I-PACS II NEWSLETTER

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Issue 03

The Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society (I-PACS II) is a three-year United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded program that endeavors to increase the role and viability of civil society and civil society practitioners in Afghanistan by providing capacity building, training and small grants to civil society organizations (CSOs) that show the potential to be sustainable and effective organizations.

I-PACS II has three primary objectives:

- Legislative Strengthening to improve the accountability, legal and regulatory frameworks for civil society;
- Policy Engagement to enhance civil society's capacity to mobilize members of their communities and engage them in the policy process;
- Civil Society Strengthening to build the capacity of civil society throughout Afghanistan.

Through these three objectives I-PACS has achieved the following:

- Held community dialogues on civil society, the role and history of democracy in Islam, and advancing community needs into policy priorities, in more than 25 provinces of Afghanistan to increase understanding of the vital role of civil society in the transition to democracy.
- Built the organizational development capacity of over 200 local Afghan civil society organizations to date.

Awarded over \$2,000,000 in grants to local Afghan civil society organizations. Counterpart awards grants to Afghan civil society organizations as an important part of its capacity building efforts in Afghanistan. Linking grant awards with capacity development through trainings and partnerships allows I-PACS to produce a more tangible impact than generic grant giving initiatives. This targeted support ensures that grants are in line with both USAID objectives and local needs. Counterpart's I-PACS II is empowering Afghan citizens, both women and men to more effectively participate in the political process, solve community problems and demand good governance from their leaders. To meet these goals, I-PACS civil society strengthening programs has developed gender mainstreaming strategies to ensure the full participation of women alongside men.

Historic Conference Assembles Afghan Civil Society Leaders To Begin Government Policy Reform Effort



Deputy Minister of Education, Mohammad Sadeq Patman in a group discussion During National Policy Reform Conference, in Kabul.

KABUL, AFGHANISTAN – Two hundred of Afghanistan's civil society leaders and government officials converged for a historic meeting last week to begin working together on ways to reform national policies so they are more responsive to community needs.

The two-day National Policy Reform Conference, organized by the non-governmental organization (NGO) Counterpart International and funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), explored how Afghanistan's government and civil society organizations can partner effectively to represent and advocate for community interests, influence policy and legislation and promote improved civic education and accountability. This national gathering was an important step in helping Afghanistan's civil society organizations become more effective as advocates for citizens and as a link between citizens and government.

"When civil society comes together around one issue or a group of issues, we start to see a vibrant civil society and a vibrant democracy," said USAID Mission Director Dr. S. Ken Yamashita. He noted civil society's deep roots in Afghanistan – where village elders and community members have a history of gathering together to solve problems – and said that Afghan citizens are well prepared for the types of dialogues that must take place in order for the country to advance.

The Afghan government reminded attendees that civil society must be active in policy discussions. In particular, the Director of Budget Policy and Reform with the Ministry of Finance, Zia-Ur-Rahman Halimi, explained how national spending priorities are set and stressed that there are many opportunities for civil society organizations to work with the government to help establish the budgetary priorities.

During this past year, Counterpart and its Afghan partners have organized more than 425 community and regional dialogues in nine provinces that brought together non-governmental organizations, religious leaders, provincial government officials, and citizens to discuss their concerns and ideas for how to improve life for many Afghan citizens. In all, more than 9,830 individuals (6,949 male, 2881 female) participated in these dialogues.

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Counterpart Int'l, I-PACS II staff development



Azizullah Noori from Panjsher province began working with



Counterpart International Inc. in under the first phase of the I-PACS program. Having worked in various capacities with I-PACS over the past 6 years, Mr. Noori says that “Counterpart has provided me with opportunity, motivation and capacity development, allowing me to grow with an organization that is doing really important work with Civil Society in Afghanistan.”

Farzad Farzam from Farah province joined Counterpart International,



under the first phase of the I-PACS program as a Program Support Officer, in June, 2008; currently working as the Grants Manager, Mr. Farzad finds that “Counterpart motivates its staff to learn and gain experience from the available resources, I appreciate the promotion opportunities the management always provides to the staff and understands how to increase staff morale through their motivation and hard work.”

Wahida Mohammadzai from Kandahar joined Counterpart International in 2010 working



towards building the capacity of I-PACS’s local civil society organization partners. Ms. Mohammadzai finds her work rewarding because “not only does Counterpart build the capacity of its partner organizations, it is the capacity building of staff which is really valuable. I have been trained by International experts colleagues and I feel lucky to be able to transfer that knowledge to our partner civil society organizations.”

Abdul Wali Hayat from Logar province joined Counterpart International in 2010 as a valuable



member of the Communications and Outreach Department “I’m very happy that today Afghanistan is moving toward its development path and I’m happy that I’m working with Counterpart International and working towards Afghanistan’s development. Working with Counterpart I have understood that today citizens building is very important, it is civil society who can make the future sustainable and push government toward good governance and

stability.”

Patrees Akbari from Kabul province joined Counterpart in



2011 as a Monitoring and Evaluation Officer. As an experienced Monitoring and Evaluation specialist, Mr. Akbari says that he joined Counterpart to explore new opportunities and has been happy to learn that Counterpart provides such essential development to the Civil Society Sector in Afghanistan. He said, “it is my understanding that local capacity improvement is very essential in Afghanistan which Counterpart International is addressing very well. This is important because improv-

ing civil society means improving the country and moving the government towards implementing good governance.”

Gulafroz Azeemi from Bamyán province, started working



as a Head of Cook with Counterpart International Inc. in 2007 under the first phase the-PACS program “since I have joined Counterpart International I feel very much happy and I’m very satisfied here, working in the office feels like I am working at my home. Counterpart has built my capacity, by providing trainings and workshops for me even though I am not part of the program staff, this shows me that they value my work and I promise as long as Counterpart is in Afghanistan I’m with

Counterpart.”

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October, 16 — Counterpart's I-PACS II team conducted its initial meeting at Counterpart's I-PACS II office in Afghanistan. Nine individuals including two females (participated in this meeting), representing the Ministry of Justice's Social Union and Political Parties Department; the Ministry of Women Affairs (MoWA) Law Department; the Ministry of Finance's Legal Advisor; the Director of the Ministry of Haj and Awqaf's Policy and Planning Department; and representatives from core and coordinating NGOs including the Afghanistan NGOs Coordination Bureau (ANCB), the Agency Coordination Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR), the All Afghan Women Union (AAWU), and the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI).

The outcomes of the Task Force meeting included: approval of the Task Force's Terms of Reference; selection of Ms. Suraya Perlika, Head of the AAWU, as Chairperson; and selection of Mr. Sharafuddin, Policy Officer of ACCI, as Deputy Chairperson.

The Task Force identified challenges such as the Presidential Decree on Prohibition of Social Organizations which prevents SOs from receiving foreign funds and opportunities such as article 22 of the NGO Law, that al-

Counterpart International and its I-PACS II funded project will begin publishing its newsletter on quarterly basis in 2012.

lows NGOs to engage in economic activities to achieve their not-for-profit goals.

Follow-up meetings will be held with the Ministry of Haj and Awqaf's Awqaf (endowment) Department on the current status of endowment and possibility of some kind of mechanism for collecting Zakat from individuals and the business community, in coordination with the Ministry of Finance; on possibility of tax incentives for individuals and the business community, and finally to meet with Legislative Department of Ministry of Justice to ensure that the Social Organizations based on the law can benefit from private giving.

Two businessmen will be invited as members of the Task Force by ACCI; the Task Force will hold its meetings every 6 weeks.

The Legislative Strengthening (LS) department also worked on the CSOs directory with the support of Communication unit. The Directory was created to provide basic information regarding civil organizations and other national and international organizations to government agencies, public and other donor entities. The directory will be in three languages (Pashtu, Dari and English).

Community Voices Leads to Action

Kabuli, a village in Samangan Province, is in desperate need of vital services. The 500 families that live in the village have no health clinic, no electricity, and a scarcity of potable water. One school serves all of the children in the village. The road leading to the district center, which is 45 km away and home to the nearest available health facility, is nearly impassable due to poor road conditions.

Through USAID and its local partner, the Association for the Defense of Women's Rights Organization, the community members had their first opportunity to convey their concerns to a group of non-governmental organizations and development professionals as well as government officials. This community dialogue allowed community members to discuss their needs and ways in which villagers and the government can work together to achieve mutual goals and resolve problems. Twenty community-development council members and religious leaders attended the dialogue to share concerns about education, employment, health care, infrastructure, and water.

The association is one of seven intermediary service organizations partnered with the USAID-funded program, which empowers Afghan civil society organizations and the communities they serve to participate in the political process, solve local problems, and demand good governance from their leaders. USAID builds the capacity of civil society organizations to design, implement, manage, monitor, and evaluate their activities and achieve organization objectives with transparency and accountability.

One of the participants in this community dialogue Bahadar Khan had negative impressions of civil society organizations in the past. Now that they come together in such gatherings, he understands the role civil society plays in an urbanized province, "I am fully ready to support the association and to become more involved in civil society activities and I am thankful for the countries who are supporting Afghanistan for a developed country. USAID is implementing such programs in Afghanistan to increase people's influence on the development of our country".



Facilitate organizational assessment and action plan for I-PACS II, ISO's network



CSS Coordinator talking to I-PACS partner organizations' representatives during 2nd Bi Annual National Network meeting in Kabul

In May and June, the Civil Society Strengthening (CSS) team began preparation for the upcoming, annual Organizational Development (OD) assessments of its key partner organizations. These were conducted in late June and continued through the first half of July 2011. In late May and early June, the team developed detailed schedules for the assessments and selected assessment team members from Counterpart and I-PACS' seven key Intermediary Service Organizations (ISOs). Prior to the starting of the assessments, the CSS department conducted a four-day OD workshop on June 19-23, 2011. This gave the assessors a better understanding of the scope and methodology of the assessment. The workshop

was facilitated by Counterpart's lead OD consultant who also participated in the assessments.

The first assessments began on June 26, 2011 and the last set of assessments finished on July 14, 2011. Following the completion of OD assessment for I-PACS II key partners (ISOs and CSSCs) the assessment reports were developed by assessment teams and the results were shared with senior management of key partners. The findings were issues related to leadership, management, quality control, financial management and communications. In an agreement with management of key partners the reports were finalized by consultant. To follow-up on the re-

sults of the assessment, I-PACS II Civil Society Strengthening department (CSS) team along with the consultant scheduled action plan sessions with the partner organizations. The new tools for developing action plan were introduced and the activities were prioritized for the coming year. As the result of I-PACS II efforts, partner organizations were able to develop the action plan for October 2011- September 2012. In addition, the CSS department used OD assessment findings while preparing its annual work plan for the year 2012 in order to address organizational development and capacity building interventions of partner organizations .

Facilitate capacity building for Civil Society Support Center network organizations

The second I-PACS II bi-annual National Network Meeting was conducted on September 27, 2011. A total number of 60 participants (53 male, 7 female) attended the meeting. Participants shared with one another common challenges, experiences and information. The meeting also allowed participants to network

with one another and learn from their peers a variety of information regarding the day to day enhancement and sustainment of CSOs in Afghanistan.

Participants were divided into three working groups to discuss capacity building, holding government account-

able, and providing communities with a link between themselves and governments. Each group identified important challenges, lesson learned, and recommendations for the way forward.

On August 3, 2011, the Civil Society Strengthening Department held it's Monthly



I-PACS Managers meeting with all 19 civil society organization key partner managers. This meeting allowed Intermediary Service Organization (ISO) and Civil Society Support Center (CSSC) employees to share their experiences, present their success stories, address problems and their challenges, and establish stronger networking among partners. It also allowed I-PACS II's Civil Society Strengthening Department to gain a better understanding of individual partners' needs and provided face to face contact with partners' managers. As one of the participants state "while we as the representative of civil society organizations are gathering here, we are committed to enhancing the role of civil society organizations and our sustainability for a positive change."