

I-PACS II NEWSLETTER

June, 2012

Newsletter issued by Counterpart international's Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society II (I-PACS II)

Edition 05

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF OF PARTY



Welcome to the fifth special print edition newsletter, produced by Counterpart and the Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society (I-PACS II) in Afghanistan, funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Occasionally we produce special print materials, such as publishing our quarterly newsletters, on topics that we feel merit greater attention. This publication focuses on the use of our Community Dialogues to encourage the growth of civil society towards greater participation in the democratic dialogue in Afghanistan, which I believe is one of the most important aspects of Afghanistan's development.

Over the last few months, I-PACS II and its partner CSOs have conducted more than 170 community and regional policy dialogues across Afghanistan. Through these forums, CSOs led discussions on the historical connection between Islam and civil society thereby strengthening linkages between the community and civil society, through culturally acceptable, historically relevant, and mutually advantageous interactions. In total, 3,254 participants including 2,345 men and 909 women have attended these community dialogues in Herat, Mazar, Ghazni, Kandahar, Samangan, Panjsher, Kapisa, Parwan, Kabul, Paktiya, Nangarhar, Laghman, Kunar, Bamyan, Shabarghan, Farah, Takhar, Helmand, Uruzgan, Logar, Wardak, Faryab, Jawzjan, Sari Pul, Badakhshan, and Daykundi provinces.

As result of these I-PACS II initiated dialogues, communities were enabled to discuss and prioritize their basic needs in the areas of health, education, civil infrastructures, and security. The key priority issues from these Community Dialogues and Regional Policy Dialogues (RPDs) will be addressed in the I-PACS II National Policy Reform Conference (NPRC) which will take place in September 2012.

In addition, our team collaborated with the Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIoRA), specifically the Ministries of Economy and Justice, to publish the first ever directory of active civil society organizations. The directory will include updated contact information and areas of geographic and thematic coverage of local and international non-governmental organizations and social organizations in the country. The directory will be shared with I-PACS II key partner and network organizations as well as other governmental and non-governmental organizations participating in the National Policy Reform Conference – Kelley J. Jones.



Counterpart International's Afghanistan and Armenia teams join together to help develop a strong civil society environment.

Afghanistan today – unlike a decade ago – has a visible and vocal civil society sector, a civil society organization enabling legislative framework and a civil society service delivery infrastructure reaching every corner of the country. While the number of registered Afghan Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and informal civic groups has expanded dramatically in recent years, the capacity and performance of the vast majority of these CSOs has not evolved to the stage where it includes popular public support. Additionally, the population at large has little understanding of the role that CSOs play in the new democratic government of the country. In response to this, Counterpart International is continuing its civil society development work in Afghanistan, with the Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society II (I-PACS II), 3-year follow-on to its 6-year I-PACS I program.

The I-PACS II program is a three year program, funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through Counterpart International. I-PACS II works to create and promote a broader and deeper civil society infrastructure that serves the civic needs of the population. Specifically, enabling Afghan citizens to more effectively participate in the political process, solve community problems, and demand good governance from their leaders. Our work provides consistent, long-term assistance to Afghan CSOs and civic groups emphasizing the importance of locally generated solutions to both large and small scale policy and development needs, and stresses the participation and leadership of Afghan women in the socio-economic sphere of Afghanistan.

I-PACS II implementation relies on a unique capacity building and service delivery model, which supports the development of strong Intermediary Service Organizations (ISOs) and Civil Society Support Centers (CSSCs) as integral components of a robust Afghan civil society infrastructure. I-PACS II provides trainings, grants, and technical assistance to build the organizational capacity of these partners. Counterpart works with its 19 key partner organizations and through them, with more than 370 civil society organizations across the country.

Counterpart's I-PACS II program is also actively seeking to improve the visibility and overall transparency of CSOs through generating a positive and accountable image of the civil society sector to Afghan citizens. Furthermore, I-PACS II works with the Government of the Republic of Afghanistan (GIoRA) to improve the legal framework in which CSOs work and encourage more public and private engagement with the civil society sector. By July 2012, Counterpart will publish a CSO directory in Dari, Pashtu and English, which will include details such as contact information, areas of operations, and geographic locations of all CSOs and SOs registered with the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Justice, respectively. The directory will help interested parties to find related CSOs in their relevant areas.

Opportunities for dialogue and debate will be facilitated with all segments of society on issues of civic engagement, civil society, democratic values, culture, and religion in Afghanistan to increase the public's understanding of civil society's role. Citizens will further be encouraged to engage in the policy-making process through Counterpart's small grants program and the various activities under I-PACS II.



www.counterpart-afg.org

www.counterpart.org

COUNTERPART
INTERNATIONAL
In partnership for
results that last



Counterpart International's Afghanistan and Armenia teams partner to strengthen Afghanistan's civil society environment.



Members of the study group visited a local NGO focused on youth and human rights

A group of government and civil society representatives from Afghanistan visited Armenia in April 2012. The objective of the visit was to exchange information regarding the reform process pertaining to NGO legislation. The weeklong study tour, organized by Counterpart International Afghanistan within the framework of their Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society (IPCAS) project, gave representatives from Afghanistan's Ministry of Justice, Economy, Social Security and Foreign Affairs, as well leaders of various NGOs, the opportunity to observe their counterparts in Armenia.

The study program covered various topics spanning from financial sustainability, registration, reporting and accountability of non-profits, code of ethics and social contracting. An informed group of experts shared their experiences with participants during workshops and trainings. NGO participants visited the NGO Center in Vanadzor, a children's non-profit focused on the arts in Echmiadzin and a Yerevan based think tank.

In addition to visiting local organizations and Counterpart International Armenia, the group visited Vanadzor's Municipality to take note of their social contracting experience. The study program also provided access to the State Registrar's office to learn about the One Spot System for NGO registration. Armenia's One Spot System has eliminated the need for registering organizations to visit multiple departments and submit multiple application documents. A registering organization is assigned a single point of focus and this individual assumes the responsibility for the application from start to finish. This streamlined process has greatly reduced application processing times and cross department miss-communications. Lastly, they visited the Ministry of Justice to observe trends and challenges related to NGO legislation.

Upon their return to Afghanistan, participants will propose recommendations to the Afghan working group which is currently working on reforming the NGO sector in the country. This has included the improvement of non-profit legislation, and the creation of an enabling environment for NGO operations in Afghanistan. One of the participants from Afghanistan's Ministry of Economy stated that: "Civil Society Organizations in Afghanistan, along with the government, should bring reform to the registration process of NGOs in Afghanistan. I saw that the registration process in Armenia was really amazing while doing the overall registration of an organization in less than five minutes, in comparing five working days in Afghanistan".

Counterpart International works in partnership with Afghanistan Parliament for increasing citizen interaction

In order to increase citizen interaction with Parliamentary officials, Counterpart International - in particular its Community and Policy Engagement team - has been collaborating with the Afghanistan Parliamentary Assistance Project (APAP). Through the establishment of this relationship with APAP, Counterpart has improved access to various Parliamentary officials, and become more visible facilitating the opportunity for issue based discussions between civil society and Members of Parliament (MPs).

In February 2012, 12 civil society representatives, selected in accordance with APAP and AWN suggestions, attended a meeting

with Afghanistan's Chief of Lower House, Mr. Mohammad Kazim Malwan, and other Parliament members to link the civil society organizations with Parliament. The group participated in discussions about the formulation of a possible Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between CSOs and Parliament to foster collaboration and increase the voice of CSOs within Parliament.

The Chief of Staff of the Lower House appreciated the initiative taken by civil society to arrange the meeting and indicated that he believes there is room for cooperation and coordination between civil society and Parliament. He stated that: "Parliament has three

main areas of work - representing the people, approving laws, and monitoring government activities - and that civil society can be a potential partner in each area of concern for the Afghan Parliament".

In order to maintain regular contact with Parliament and foster a more systematic and long lasting relationship, civil society representatives and Parliament signed a MoU in order to articulate their future working relationship. This is a huge step forward for civil society as a whole, as through this MoU USAID partner organizations such as CPI and APAP will facilitate a formal partnership between Afghan CSOs and the Parliament.



Winning Hearts and Minds for Women's Rights/The sound of change can start with a television show

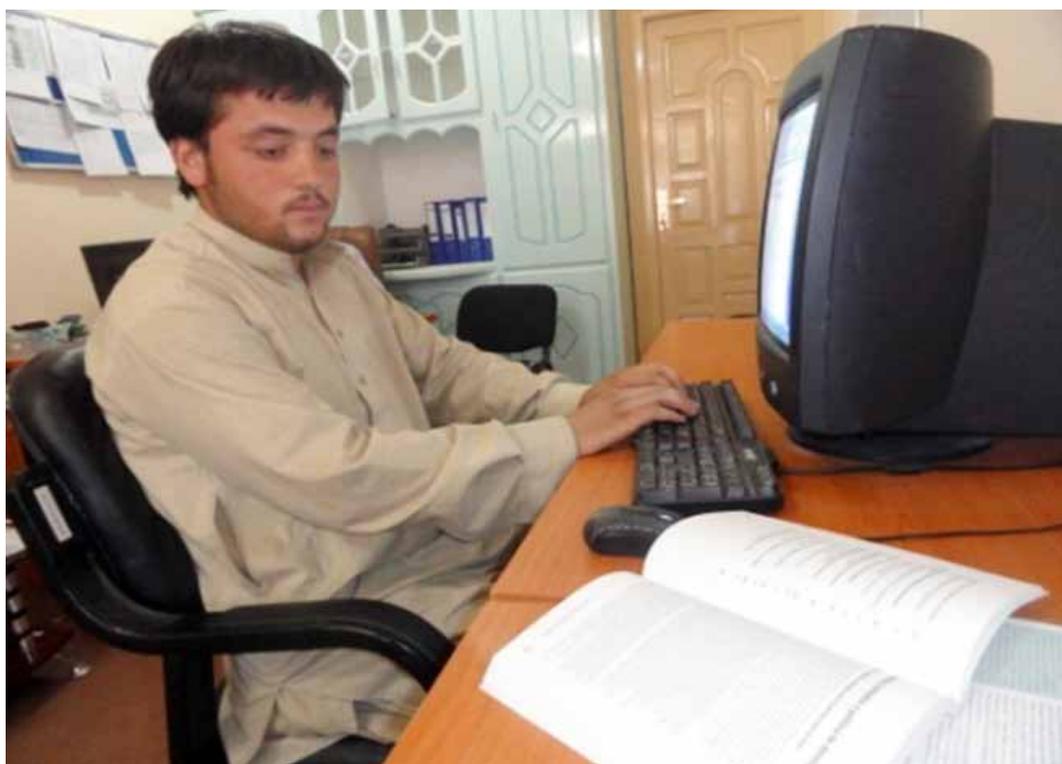


In northern Afghanistan, change can sound a little like this: “Previously, I was opposed to female education; I thought that it was unlawful, not in accordance to Islam and the holy Quran. After watching the TV shows on Friday nights through Arzu TV, I realized that in a democratic environment, both women and men have equal rights and according to Islam.”

That was a resident of Aqcha district in Jowzjan Province. The man, who added that he will “allow his daughter to continue her education”, had been watching a televised roundtable discussion, during which participants discussed Islam and the traditions of democracy and human rights. The broadcasts generally feature a diverse

group of participants, including community leaders and government officials, discussing the role of civil society and Islam in promoting democracy. These roundtable debates were organized by the Assistance to Defend Afghan Women's Rights Organization (ADWRO). ADWRO is one of 19 “core” Afghan-led civil society organizations funded by USAID's Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society (I-PACS II). As clearly demonstrated by the comments of the man in Aqcha district, ADWRO is having considerable success with its radio and television campaigns for the promotion of women's rights in northern Afghanistan and is an example of how the sound of change can start with a simple television show.

Education Access a Struggle for Low Income Families



There was a huge demand from students needing the library and computer services and almost no one is willing to limit their use to one hour.” Fedah Mohammad Yosufzai Photo by: CPI, I-PACS II, Communication Team, June 2012

Limited access to libraries and the internet continues to pose problems for Afghan students that are trying to continue their education. In Kandahar, young people face many hurdles in their efforts to gain access to such resources such as traveling long distances, insecurity, and long queues at most public facilities further limiting entrée to only a few individuals. One solution is being offered by USAID and the Initiative to Promote Civil Society, IPACS II program through Resource Centers, located in numerous locations across the country. The resource center in Kandahar is accessible eight hours a day, six days a week and provides a much needed resource for many young people that have few available options and limited resources.

Fedah Mohammad Yosufzai is a 19 year old student that travels two hours to reach Kandahar to access the library and internet services. Public libraries are often very distant

from the villages and the cost of internet is out of reach for most people. Fedah faced similar obstacles as he sought ways to use library and internet services to continue his university education. Prior to using the Resources Center in Kandahar, he was only able to access the library once a week for a two hour period – all the time that could be afforded him with the high demand by many other students as well. In Fedah's words, “I was standing in line, I need a place to study and research and collect school related reading materials. There was a huge demand from students needing the library and computer services and almost no one is willing to limit their use to one hour.” Fedah, determined to continue his studies, tried using private internet providers but it turned out to be very costly to purchase even one hour of computer time and he was still unable to access books and other important publications. Before there were USAID Resource Centers, Fedah had few options available to him. Today, it is different for Fedah, “I did that [purchase private internet time] sometimes, when there were no civil society centers.” Today, large numbers of students and others are able, at no cost, to access the Kandahar Resource Center to use computers, find books and other publications and use internet services. Fedah continues to encourage almost all of his colleagues to access the center, particularly females.

CPI-IPACS II Staff Development



Taqdeerullah Aziz is from Nanagrhar province, he joined Counterpart International as a Communication and Reporting Officer in April 2012. Taqdeerullah has been working in the field of communication and reporting for about seven years. He likes Counterpart because the organization provides various kinds of opportunities to its employees as well as the organization's objective to create a sustainable civil society network in the country. He is very delighted working with I-PACS II, Mr. Aziz says that: "I-PACS II was

a brilliant initiative of USAID for the Afghan civil society. Before 2005, civil society was unknown to the people and people had negative thoughts about it. I am sure that through the democracy and media programs people will have at least basic understandings of their rights."



Ahmad Jawid Shakib is from Khandahar province and has been working as a Training Officer with Counterpart International since September 2011. Mr. Shakib completed his bachelor's degree in Law and Political Sciences from Kabul University. He brought several years of working experience in his relevant field. He is pleased to work with CPI because it helps citizens build their future with their own hands: "I-PACS is one of the largest projects in the civil society sector in Afghanistan; Cascading capacity building

and service delivery models makes I-PACS unique in supporting the development of strong Intermediary Service Organizations (ISOs) and Civil Society Support Centers (CSSCs). Moreover I-PACS capacity building model has provided a vast opportunity of capacity building for I-PACS staff."



Ahmad Masoud Kawa from Balkh province joined Counterpart International Inc. in May 2012 as Procurement Officer. Mr. Kawa is currently studying for his bachelor's degree in Political Science at the American University of Afghanistan. He brought several years of working experience in this field and states "the educational opportunities Counterpart International provides for the development of its staff is amazing, and the merit based promotion CPI provides for its employees is also unique".



Shaheem Nasir is from Panjshir province and joined Counterpart International Inc. as a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Coordinator in January 2011. Mr. Nasir has completed his bachelor's degree in Business Administration from one of Afghanistan's private higher education institutions. Shaheem has ten years of working experience in the field of Monitoring and Evaluation. He has worked with different national and international organizations.

According to Shaheem, "When the Taliban regime was toppled in late 2001 all social and political infrastructures in Afghanistan were demolished. Through the assistance of the international community in Afghanistan, right now, we cannot compare 2012 with 2001. In establishing a peaceful environment and a developed state, citizens play a major role in helping government activities. To establish this, civil society is the only way of maximizing peoples' contribution across Afghanistan"



Rahimullah Morshidi is from Kabul province and has completed his Masters in Public Administration and Policy from Kabul University (affiliated with Washington State University). In June 2011, Mr. Morshidi joined Counterpart International as a Civil Society Organization Liaison Officer; however he was soon promoted to the Director of Community and Policy Engagement position within CPI I-PACS II team. He feels pretty good working for Counterpart International (CPI) and the US-

AID funded Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society (I-PACS II) project, adding: "IPACS is an outstanding program that focuses on strengthening the civil society environment and fostering public participation. Public participation provides a source of special insight, knowledge and experience, which contributes to the soundness of community solutions."



Mohammad Qais Ayobzai is from Laghman province and completed his Bachelor in Law (LLB) from Kabul University in 2003. Mr. Ayobzai joined Counterpart International as Director of Legislative Strengthening in April 2011. Mr. Ayobzai has more than eight years of working experience in legal and policy reform with different governmental and non-governmental organizations. According to him "working with Counterpart is like working with a training institution, I have learned a lot working with CPI".

