

I-PACS II NEWSLETTER

December, 2012

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

Issue 06

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF OF PARTY



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

(USAID).

On our quarterly based publications we normally use our achievements during the last three months and our major activities that highlight civil society organizations development under I-PACS II coverage. In this special print newsletter we have mentioned the National Policy Reform Conference NPRC 2012, the number of community dialogues took place across Afghanistan and through them the key priority issues raised by Afghan citizens as well as the print of Afghanistan civil society directory and the civil society assessment report 2011. One of the achievements of I-PACS II during the program year was the successful convening of the second NPRC 2012. Hundreds of civil society activists, members of Afghanistan Parliament and government attended the I-PACS II biggest public event. Over the last few months, I-PACS II and its partner CSOs have conducted more than 141 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, 2,564 participants including 1,938 men and 626 women have attended these community dialogues in thirty provinces of Afghanistan. As promised, we have also finalized the printing of our publication - the CSOs Directory in Dari, Pashtu and English. If you are interesting in having a copy of this directory, you can find them at your local I-PACS partner organization; and they will soon be available as PDF download on the I-PACS website (www.counterpart-afg.org). Additionally, we have also printed the Civil Society Assessment Report for 2011. These too will be sent out and available at partner organizations, resource centers, and online for download.

Afghan Civil Society Leaders Gather for the Second National Policy Reform Conference in Kabul, 24-25 September 2012



Dr. Sima Samar, giving her speech in the first day of the conference. She is motivating the enormous role CSOs plays in pushing government for action. Photo: CPI Sept-2012

Hundreds of civil society activists from across the country gathered in Kabul to participate in the September 24-25th second annual National Policy Reform Conference funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Key actors from local and national civil society organizations, government, the National Assembly, and other guests announced policy action plans to address citizens' concerns related to economic and social development, empowering women and youth, education, health, and democracy and governance. These action plans will serve as mechanisms for local groups to strive to reach their collective goals for change.

During her opening remarks, Dr. Sima Samar, Chair of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission emphasized that the "existence of civil society in a country shows the promotion of democracy and institutionalization of human rights ... civil society should be empowered." Prior to the conference, working groups drafted five policy papers on democracy and governance, socio-economic development, women and youth empowerment, public health, and education. Also, 715 community dialogue sessions and 32 regional-level policy dialogue sessions in 29 provinces involving some 16,000 persons were held over the past two years.

Conference participants recommended increased funding for pre-school education, greater access of women to healthcare, and increased government transparency. Whether advocating for increased parent involvement in the schools, scholarships for women in the healthcare field, or the fight against corruption, the groups emphasized the need for civil society cooperation with national and local level authorities. Civil society is an essential partner in restoring and sustaining peace and stability in Afghanistan. U.S. government is committed to continuing to support civil society sector activities after 2014. The Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society (I-PACS II) is a three-year program is funded by USAID and implemented by Counterpart International. I-PACS II builds national networks and enables Afghan citizens to more effectively participate in the political process, solve community problems, and demand good governance.



Afghanistan's TEDx event

Afghanistan's first-ever TEDx event, which featured innovators in education and social media as part of its "ideas worth sharing" mandate, highlighted civil society's growth and success as a key to the country's advancement.

"I could see how people within civil society can make changes and progress in their own communities who are directly or indirectly under suppression and vulnerability," said Aziz Rafiee, a civil society leader.

In a talk to a packed auditorium in Kabul on Oct. 11, Rafiee said that civil society is not a new phenomenon for the country, but that a modern civil society with a global context could only emerge after the fall of the Taliban in 2001, which restricted such organizations. Rafiee was selected to speak because of his experience with Counterpart International's Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society, a USAID-funded program with a distinct focus on strengthening small civil society organizations and advocating for women's rights. In addition to the Counterpart program, Rafiee has been working to construct a robust civil society in Afghanistan for 15 years. Besides his role as a founding member of no fewer than 12 organizations, he has represented the country at conferences in London and Berlin. The invitation to present a TEDx event is a unique opportunity - important in and of itself in showing the impact civil society has already had, and the possibilities for its future, said Rafiee. "[I'm] excited to talk on the progress, the space and the hope that the civil society has brought to the people of Afghanistan," said Rafiee. "It is important as we can see the other [organizations'] work and can better judge on our shortcomings and achievements."



Aziz Rafiee, director of (ACSFo) delivering his speech and emphasizing the role of CSOs in have a developed state. Photo: TEDx, Nov 2012

Rafiee's speech, "delivered with professionalism and just the right touch of flare," according to Lamont Patrick an NGO worker who helped to organize this conference, has already generated positive audience feedback. Many attendees commented that the TEDx event was one of the most positive days they have ever spent in Kabul. Lamont hoped that this display of optimism and creativity would translate into a sense of motivation, inspiring people to challenge their environments and contribute to positive change. The best way to do this, he said, was by continuing to promote and invest in civil society in Afghanistan.

I-PACS II Team Regular Field Visits

Counterpart's I-PACS II team conducts regular field visits with the partner organizations in order to assess the progress of project implementation, assess successes and achievements, and collect impact stories and to discuss recommendations and challenges facing partner organizations. The information gathered from partners and grantees will help Counterpart to measure program progress and take necessary actions to reform policies and procedures based on feedback and recommendations from partners. In August 2012, I-PACS II Monitoring and Evaluation and Grants teams traveled to Mazar-e-Sharief (Balkh) province in order to visit I-PACS II key partner organization Assistance to Defend Women's Right Organization (ADWRO) and its umbrella organization in the region. The team visited the on-going Better Life project, which is aiming to promote reproductive health and family planning through raising awareness of families regarding women rights, children rights and improve communication within families to minimize violence. The number of direct beneficiaries from this project totals 216 families - Shamila a 25 year lady, who have four children, is one of the disabled women benefited from the project. When asked about the effect the project has had on her life, Shamila said, "This program helped me to know my rights as a woman and a mother. I learned to take care of my kids, keep them clean



"This program helped me to know my rights as a woman and a mother", Said by Sheela, one of the beneficiaries of Hygiene project.

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- and give them proper food. This organization provided me with a first aid kit which helped me to wash my wound.”

ADWRO have also monitored the implementation of youth and civic engagement program, as well as human rights and emergency care. The aim of youth and civic engagement project was to support and encourage active civic participation of youth through trainings, multi-media campaigns, and through learning opportunities in Sari Pul, Balkh and Jawzjan provinces. The project trained 30 beneficiaries, of which 17 of them were girls.

Nagina, one of the women beneficiaries says that; *“It [voting] is our right. We must be careful when voting. We must select a good person to vote for. If we vote for a person who is good, he/she will do well for us.”*

When another beneficiary, Sameer, was asked about the importance of elections and the campaign to eliminate violence against women, he commented; *“I know more about elections and violence against women now than before, CSOs should work with community members and plan ways for the elimination of violence against women.”*

A Success Story from Bamyan



One of the male participants of the training, Mr. Ghulam is providing information on the impact of such projects in the area in particularly for women. Photo by: I-PACS II partner organization Shuhada Organization (SO).

BAMYAN PROVINCE, Afghanistan – Women in Afghanistan have suffered tremendously through the last few decades. The Taliban were especially harsh to them, but even without that heartless regime, the overall attitude towards women here remains disappointingly old. Domestic abuse is flourishing, families still sell their daughters into marriage like livestock, and honor killings are still in the news.

The United States Agency for International Development USAID with the assistance of Counterpart International CPI implementing the biggest civil society program in Afghanistan. The Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society I-PACS II with the assistance of its local implementing partner Shuhada Organization (SO), implemented a four months women rights and advocacy project in Bamyan. As a result, 240 illiterate women were benefited through this short term grant on women’s right in this province. Mrs. Tayeba whom she has 22 years, says; *“I was interested in attending school, learning Sharia and serve my people in this province, unfortunately, due to the old customs here, did not provide the opportunity by families that females attend school”.*

She further elaborates, *“My family didn’t have problem with me attending this course in our village, but there a traditional issues in which my parents feel unsafe. My family and other male members were convinced by a religious scholar in the Friday prayer that women have the right to education. This caused my family giving me the opportunity to attend”.* Through this short term training course in Bamyan let hundreds of women same as Mrs. Tayeba understand about her rights, the rights in which derives from the Sharia and the Afghan constitution for an equal opportunity for man and women. Continue..



She says “The other main issue I was interested in this course was the right I was given by Islam and the right which gives me the opportunity for selection in which many girls are forced for marriage due to several custom and traditional reasons”. She also states; “I am thankful to the USAID local partner SO in Bamyan, this will save lives of many women for very unsafe customs



More than 60 people including 32 women and 28 men have attend the Women Rights and Advocacy project funded by U.S. Agency for International Development USAID, implating by Counterpart International CPI and its biggest civil society program the Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society I-PACS II. . Photo by: I-PACS II partner organization Shuhada Organization (SO) .

Counterpart to Increase Focus on Gender

In PY3 Counterpart will significantly expand its gender initiatives to support I-PACS II partners and non- network CSOs as they promote citizen understanding of legal rights for women, promote judicial awareness, and advocate for better implementation of Afghanistan’s many pieces of legislation on gender equity. Afghanistan ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) on March 5, 2003; on May 1, 2005 legislators created the National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan (NAPWA), and in 2009 created the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) law which codified 17 acts as violence against women. Despite the legislation, government implementation and enforcement has been slow to follow and public awareness of these strategic interventions and their capacity to affect the daily lives of the public remains very low.

Subsequently, Counterpart expanded its programming portfolio to target support to key CSOs interested in addressing these critical gender rights issues through the implementation of projects that raise citizen awareness for women’s rights and advocate for better implementation of existing legislation...

Counterpart will provide approximately \$1 million USD for up to 10 grants (up to \$100,000 each) to both network and non-network CSOs to support their efforts in the following broad based themes: a) building citizen awareness of existing legislation that supports gender equity, such as the EVAW Law, CEDAW, and NAPWA; b) advocating for better implementation of existing legislation; and c) promoting judicial awareness and access, all supported through the Women’s Awareness Raising and Empowerment Grants. Counterpart will further support grantees in building tailored support mechanisms, such as advocacy kits, working with grantees to promote their advocacy measures, supporting grantees by providing “Communication Prep” through in depth technical assistance and preparation for interaction with media or legislators.

One such organization that has continued to strive towards better gender equality is Afghanistan Civil Society Forum Organization. Their gender related achievements have included the conducting of awareness workshops; government accountability actions, advocacy, and the broadcasting of social petitions through national media. Additionally, the Afghanistan Civil Society Forum Organization recently completed the drafting of its Gender Manual - This manual offers a practical, hands-on approach for why and how to integrate gender balance into the work of the organizations programmatic activities. Additionally, the manual is to provide practical methods and tools with which to integrate gender into their partners’ programs. This manual adopts a multi-level perspective that offers insights to both individuals and institutions. It combines a top-down approach (gender integration) with a bottom-up approach (empowerment) to holistically address inequalities at their root causes.

Through continued support from Counterpart International’s USAID funded Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society (I-PACS II) program – Gender mainstreaming will continue to receive support throughout the I-PACS network and wider civil society as a whole.

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