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Transparency in Action: RU-N Sponsors a Public Budget Meeting in Mazar-e-Sharif

More than 300 citizens of Mazar-e-Sharif attended a public meeting to offer feedback on the 1391 municipal budget.



A citizen from Mazar-e-Sharif's District 10 addresses the Mayor during the question and answer session at the public meeting on March 31, 2012.

“The fact that the Mayor and his team have gathered you here and are reporting on the budget proves their desire to be accountable...”

—Dr. Mohammad Afzal Hadid, Chairperson of the Balkh Provincial Council

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March 31, 2012 – RAMP UP-North sponsored a public budget meeting in Mazar-e-Sharif with municipal officials, provincial officials, over 300 citizens, and local, national, and international media outlets in attendance. This is the second annual budget that the Municipality has presented at a public meeting to citizens for their feedback.

RU-N began its assistance on annual budget preparation following the RU-N Mayors' Conference in February. RU-N advisors have been providing intense technical assistance to Mayors and municipal officials, and the draft annual budget was ready to be presented to citizens well ahead of the official deadline of April 10, ensuring ample time to incorporate citizens' suggestions into the final draft.

Muhammad Yunus Muqem, Mayor of Mazar, and Dr. Muhammad Afzal Hadid, Chairman of Balkh Provincial Council opened the meeting. Dr. Hadid stated, “My expectation from citizens is to contribute and to help the Municipality. Because according to the famous proverb, you cannot clap with one hand...The fact that the Mayor and his team have gathered you here and are reporting on the budget also proves their desire to be accountable to you.”

The Cleaning and Greening, Revenue, Construction, and Accounting Managers then presented various aspects of the draft budget and highlighted the municipal projects completed last year as well as the planned projects for this year. In a question and answer session, one citizen addressed the issue of accountability by asking the Mayor to provide information on how much citizen feedback was included in last year's budget after a similar meeting was held.

Participants then broke into ten groups, by municipal district, to generate more feedback. RU-N advisors facilitated the group discussions and noted citizens' suggestions, which were then presented in a plenary session.

One of the main concerns of citizens was the paving of streets. Several citizens commented that a prioritizing process with citizens' input must take place based mainly on the most need and most densely populated areas. During the group discussions, some *kalanTERS* and citizens suggested giving all responsibility for asphaltting roads to one district head, who would be the point of contact for citizens to identify the high-priority areas and report any issues with road maintenance. The Mayor agreed and said that he would work to implement it. He added, “We are hoping to pave all the side roads in Mazar within the next three years.”

A citizen from a women's group stated that the door-to-door trash collection needs to be expanded to include more than just the districts currently covered. The Mayor explained that next year's budget includes expansion of the trash collection to seven districts in total. The woman then added, “I suggest [we] promote a recycling culture. Bottles and plastic bags are everywhere. By recycling we can reuse some parts of trash, and we can also keep the city clean.”

A female school principal from District 7 stated concerns over plans to build more public parking, and asked instead that the Mayor consider expanding green areas.

Citizen feedback will be compiled by RU-N advisors and the Mayor promised to consider all the comments, stating that if he could not include citizens' requests this year, they would be added for next year.

The meeting, which was facilitated with support from UNDP, was deemed a success by citizens, officials, and RU-N advisors alike.