



Two Women in Sar-e-Pul Inspire Others to Get Involved



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Zuhal and Nasima joined the Service Delivery Advisory Group (SDAG), a group of citizen volunteers who provide a bridge for communication among citizens and municipal officials, in September 2011. The SDAGs were facilitated by the Regional Afghan Municipalities Program for Urban Populations, Regional Command North (RAMP UP – North or RU-N) to provide a way for citizens and municipal officials to communicate constructively and in a non-confrontational manner. Since joining the SDAG, these two women have regularly and actively participated in SDAG meetings in an effort to work with the Sar-e-Pul Municipality to provide better services to citizens.

Nasima, who is currently the Head of the Directorate of Women’s Affairs (DoWA), was elected Vice Chair of the SDAG. She said that she joined the SDAG because she was interested in serving her community, and as an SDAG member, she could work with both the Mayor and the citizens for the provision of better quality municipal services. Zuhal is the Director of an NGO called Women for Afghan Women, which advances women’s rights and helps women who are victims of domestic violence.

Not only do Nasima and Zuhal participate in regular SDAG meetings, but they also dedicated themselves to becoming the most active members of the SDAG Monitoring Committee. The Committee was tasked with weekly monitoring of the RU-N-sponsored park improvement sub-project, where several improvements were made to the central park in Sar-e-Pul. The project reached the scheduled completion date in May 2012, but the SDAG requested a delay in order to fix some defects spotted by the Monitoring Committee. “We found defects [in the sub-contractor’s work] on several occasions and asked the sub-contractor to fix them,” said Nasima.

“These two women are the most active members of the Monitoring Committee. This is really admirable that they are supporting the Municipality to this extent, with all the cultural and security concerns that exist for women in Sar-e-Pul,” said Abid, a RU-N embedded advisor in Sar-e-Pul.

“My expectation is that we will increase transparency in terms of municipal activities through the SDAG. This transparency will come with our monitoring and observation of the services provided by the Municipality and provision of constructive suggestions and advice on how to improve services,” stated Zuhal.

Nasima added, “Sar-e-Pul is a remote and very [traditional] province. Women seldom work outside. I am doing this in order to encourage other women to participate in the development of their city, and I know how important women’s participation is...the women of Afghanistan play the most important role in managing households, and our city is only a larger model of our homes.”

According to Zuhal, other women working for her NGO were inspired by her role in the SDAG, and have expressed their interest in getting involved as well. In fact, these two women hope to be an inspiration to all of the women in their community. Zuhal pointed out that “Mayors will be elected in the near future. It is important that women participate in these elections, and for that they must be informed about the Municipality’s roles and responsibilities.”