

Counterpart

COUNTERPART

A Newsletter of Counterpart International – Afghanistan Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society (I-PACS)

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Issue 5

Conference on Improved NGO-Government Relations for Better Economic and Social Development in Afghanistan

On May 22 and 23, Counterpart and the International Center for Not-for-profit Law (ICNL) hosted a conference on *Improved NGO-Government Relations for Better Economic and Social Development in Afghanistan* in Kabul. The aim of the conference was to improve the implementation of the NGO Law and to strengthen the relationship between the NGO sector and the government.

The planning and staging of the conference was the joint work of ICNL, Counterpart, the Ministry of Economy, and the NGO coordination bodies (Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief; Afghan NGOs Coordination Bureau; and Afghan Women's Network). By design, ICNL planned the conference in close cooperation with these stakeholders in order to ensure that it was as responsive as possible to local needs.

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Conference on Improved NGO-Government Relations for Better Economic and Social Development in Afghanistan—Kabul May 2007.

Counterpart Promotes Gender Equity through Media Awareness

Counterpart International and the South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA) organized a two-day workshop for 24 journalists from Kabul and the provinces on July 27 and 28. The workshop introduced journalists to the theory of gender equity as well as practical steps for promoting gender equity and questions of social justice in media coverage. The workshop familiarized participants with gender concepts, roles, needs and issues. Participants discussed power relations at various levels of society, gender analysis tools and media checklists and compared these issues in Afghanistan with other countries.

The participants appreciated the workshop and confirmed that the promotion of gender equity and social justice is a key responsibility of the media. Upon conclusion of the workshop, the



Gender Awareness workshop for Journalists organized by Counterpart and SAFMA —Kabul, July, 2007

journalists agreed to hold a monthly gender and media monitoring and coordination session, with technical support from Counterpart's Gender Advisor. Feedback and outcomes from these sessions will be shared with media outlets around the country.

Broadcasts of Civil Society Radio Dramas Reach Communities throughout Afghanistan

Counterpart completed broadcasting 20 episodes (10 in Pashto and 10 in Dari) of the Wadan Kalay/ Dehabad (Developing Village) radio dramas on Radio and Television of Afghanistan, which covers 65% to 85% of the population in every province. Radio Danesh is re-broadcasting the dramas for 10 weeks. The purpose of the radio dramas is to educate the Afghan public on civil society and garner grassroots support for its development.

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Resource Centers Provide Sustainable Development Assistance

During May, Counterpart completed work with the ISOs and CSSCs to open dedicated Resource Centers within each partner organization. These Resource Centers constitute a sustainable infrastructure of civil society support throughout Afghanistan, providing technical assistance on conducting needs assessments and writing project proposals, and information on sources of topics like NGO registration, advocacy and sources of donor funding. *(Continued on page 2)*

The I-PACS Gender Strategy: A Move Towards a Gender Equitable Afghan Civil Society

Since early March, Counterpart has been developing a comprehensive and easily adaptable Gender Mainstreaming Strategy for I-PACS. The consultant who developed the Strategy held extensive discussions with Counterpart staff, partners, beneficiaries and other civil society actors, soliciting their views and recommendations for inclusion in the Strategy. Following these discussions, an Action Planning Workshop was held in May and a Stakeholder's Workshop was held in June to ensure the participation of, and input from our staff and partners. Counterpart is now completing a final edit of the Strategy and will soon share it, in its entirety, with our partners and other interested parties.

The Strategy focuses on moving our gender mainstreaming efforts more towards the provision of technical assistance and mentoring to all departments within Counterpart and the I-PACS partner organizations. During the Action Planning Workshop, the Counterpart staff decided upon the gender mainstreaming goal "To promote gender equitable civil society in the context of Afghanistan through institutional capacity building and resource allocation to CSOs." The Strategy facilitates gender mainstreaming within the I-PACS program, while also serving as a guide for other CSOs working to build a more gender equitable society in Afghanistan.

Conference on Improved NGO-Government Relation (Continued from page 1)

The Administrative Deputy Minister of Economy opened the event. He was followed by other speakers including the Deputy Minister of Economy, the Minister of Women's Affairs, the Governor of Parwan Province, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture, the Deputy Minister of Public Health, a Member of Parliament from the Upper House, as well as representatives from ACBAR, Save the Children USA, Ibn Sina, ICNL and USAID.

ICNL then facilitated a panel discussion by asking the head of the NGO Department and representatives from NGOs targeted questions regarding the role of civil society, the NGO Law, and the relationship between the NGO sector and the government. The panelists also responded to questions from the audience.

Some 300 people participated in the conference, including at least 100 government representatives and sundry NGO and donor representatives. Significantly, staff from the Ministry of Economy's provincial departments from all 34 provinces participated. The conference was the first event that brought together such a large contingent of Ministry of Economy officials from the regions.

The conference provided a forum for real dialogue between the government and NGOs, thereby increasing trust between them. One important long ranging impact of the conference is the decision that problems will be brought to the attention of the appropriate government offices through the

coordination bodies in order to improve communication between the two sectors.

Civil Society Radio Dramas (Continued from page 1)

Together, the 10 episodes tell the story of a village that is struggling to recover from the devastating civil war and the conflict between two competing forces at the local level. On one side, village youths are being inspired by a local teacher who is encouraging them to work together to develop their community. On the other, the villain of the story has ties to a group that has a vested interest in the status quo and does not want to see change because it will disrupt their privileged lifestyle. Work through civil society organizations is presented as the way for the village to develop.

Resource Centers Provide Sustainable Development Assistance (Continued from page 1)

From May to July a total of 1,327 people visited the support centers, 26% of whom were women. Some came for technical assistance in community appraisal, needs assessment, project design and proposal writing, media relations, gender mainstreaming, advocacy and legal issues, while others came seeking technical assistance on computer use and/or to use the Internet for research and information gathering.

Counterpart is already seeing tangible benefits from the Resource Centers. They are providing technical assistance in key aspects of project planning and design to I-PACS target CSOs and to non-target organizations alike. Further, in some cases the Centers have provided either the first public Internet connection in their province (Faryab) or one of the only places where women are able to go for Internet access (Kandahar), thus giving hundreds of people—especially women—critical access to information about the outside world. There have been other benefits as well. Two I-PACS partner Directors noted that the Resource Centers have resulted in improved relationships with local government officials, who use the Centers. They also stated that the Centers have helped improve the image of their organizations and of NGOs in general, as they are providing valuable services that are unavailable elsewhere in the community.



Beneficiaries the I-PACS Resource Center at ACSF, Kabul -August 2007.

Community Development and Advocacy Grants

Counterpart is pleased to announce that 13 community development and 11 advocacy grant agreements have been signed in the last four months totaling \$1,050,346 in new project funding. Each proposal undergoes a rigorous review by the Grant Review Committee. The new grantees include:

Community Development Grants

#	Organization	Project title
1	Shahamat Health and Rehabilitation Organization (SHRO)	Residential and Community Based Drug Prevention, Treatment, Rehabilitation and Re-integration Program for Drug Addicts in Kabul City
2	Ibn Sina Public Health Program Afghanistan	Community Self-Help and Quality Primary Health Care Provision
3	Deh Khudaidad Shura (DKS)	Improving Sanitation Conditions for the Inhabitants of Deh-Khudaidad
4	Afghan Civil Society Forum (ACSF)	Awareness Raising for Peace Building and Conveying Conflict Transformation Skills
5	Bakhtar Development Network (BDN)	Building Local Capacity through an Integrated Sectoral Approach to Enhance Livelihood Security
6	Cooperation for Reconstruction of Afghanistan (CRA)	Empowerment of Local Communities
7	Foundation for Culture and Civil Society (FCCS)	Capacity Building for CDCs
8	Culture and Relief Foundation for Afghanistan (CRFA)	Hydroelectric Power for Qarayee Center
9	Coordination of Rehabilitation and Development Services for Afghanistan (CRDSA)	Community Development Project
10	Basic Education and Employable Skill Training (BEST)	Legal Education and Capacity Building Program
11	Agency for Humanitarian and Development Assistance for Afghanistan (AHDA)	Integrated Community Development Project
12	The Welfare Association for the Development of Afghanistan (WADAN)	Community Development through Training Students

In addition, a grant agreement was signed with the Afghan Civil Society Forum through which they will re-grant funds to 9 CSOs for community development projects worth a total of \$108,029

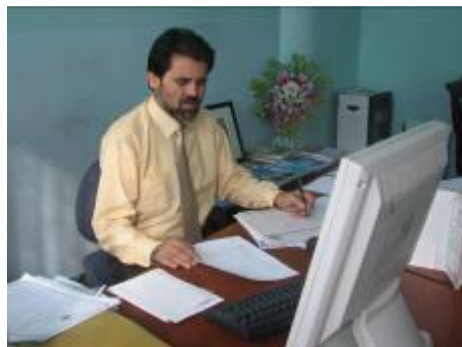
Advocacy Grants

#	Organization	Project title
1	Humanitarian Assistance for the Women and Children of Afghanistan (HAWCA)	Titien Village School
2	Afghanistan Women for Afghan Women (AWAW)	Family Recovery Center
3	Women and Children Legal Research Foundation (WCLRF)	Reducing Harms of Traditional Practices on Women and Children
4	Loy Kandahar Reconstruction Organization (LKRO)	Support to Street and Working Children in Kandahar City
5	Central Afghanistan Welfare Committee (CAWC)	Mosque based Advocacy on Civil and Political Rights in Districts 6 and 13 of Kabul
6	Educational and Training Center for Poor Women and Girls of Afghanistan (ECW)	Equal Rights - a Right Way to a Prosperous Life
7	Association of Defense for Women Rights of Balkh (ADWRB)	Legal Support and Assistance for People
8	Culture and Relief Foundation for Afghanistan (CRFA)	General Awareness about Human Rights
9	Afghanistan Reconstruction Federation (ARF)	Advocacy on Low Enrollment of School Aged Girls and Boys
10	New Afghanistan Women Association (NAWA)	Introducing Individual Rights, Especially Women's, through TV Programs
11	Welfare Association for the Development of Afghanistan (WADAN)	Project Title: Women's Right under Islam

SUCCESS STORY

Government Media Agrees to Seek Joint Solutions to Issues within the Framework of the Law

Counterpart works with the government and independent media to promote civil society



Mr. Bashir Ahmad Shabeer at his office
Story by Halim Fidai and photo by Kamal

“We suggest that all negative propaganda against CSOs, particularly NGOs, should cease. All disputes, concerns and problems should be solved within the framework of the NGO Law, the Social and Cultural Organizations Law, the Mass Media Law and through dialogue and effective communication.”

Joint Declaration

In Afghanistan, government and public attitudes about the civil society and non-governmental sector have oscillated between support and outright disdain. The Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society (I-PACS), implemented by Counterpart International, employs various methods to better inform these positions and bring clarity to the role that civil society can play in Afghanistan’s future.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Information and Culture (MoIC), Counterpart convened a workshop for nearly 100 participants including 68 Provincial Directors from the MoIC. The goal of this workshop was to improve communication between government media and civil society organizations (CSOs), to develop collaborative relationships and to foster greater understanding and a more positive attitude towards one another.

Mr. Basher Ahmad Shabeer, the Director General of the Bakhtar Information Agency (BIA), participated in the workshop and indicated that the meeting had a tremendously positive impact on the work of BIA. Shabeer, 42, holds a Master’s Degree in mathematics and physics and has also studied project management, economic and social planning and statistics at the Asian Studies Center in Islamabad.

BIA was established 68 years ago and currently has 126 staff in the Kabul office and 33 representatives and correspondents in 33 provinces of Afghanistan. Every day, BIA produces and publishes an average of 80-90 reports, news stories and interviews, which include news from the provinces, the offices of the President and Vice Presidents and other governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Prior to participating in the I-PACS workshop, one of the biggest challenges that the BIA correspondents faced was the lack of clarity about the concept of civil society; in particular, they were often unsure or ill-informed on the function of civil society organizations (CSOs) and the role they play in Afghanistan’s development.

After participating in the I-PACS workshop, Shabeer said “all of the participants gained an understanding of civil society organizations, their activities and how they operate. This workshop helped us overcome some of the doubts that we had about the efficiency of NGOs and CSOs ... what was very important to all participants was the comprehensive and in depth information about the government, private and civil society sectors.” Ahmad went on to say that “The most important thing I learned from this workshop is the practical ways for initiation of communication between CSOs and the government media.”

The more in-depth knowledge gained during the I-PACS workshop enabled BIA’s staff to prepare more accurate stories. According to Ahmad, “Understanding the differences between the various development actors such as NGOs, United Nations Agencies, Provincial Reconstruction Teams, contractors, companies and corporations, helped us prepare accurate, balanced and impartial reports and address some of the existing misperceptions resulting from the lack of understanding.” Ahmad also indicated that by bringing representatives of government and civil society media together, the workshop did much to negate misperceptions at the policy level.



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