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COUNTERPART

SUCCESS STORY

Counterpart and ICNL work with the NGO Department to improve its capacity to implement the NGO Law

The results are evident. If we compare the capacity of the NGO Department in 2005 with its capacity today, we note a remarkable difference.



Staff NGO Department

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(Head of NGO Department)

As the government department responsible for the registration and supervision of NGOs in Afghanistan, the NGO Department has come under criticism for its lack of capacity and professionalism to carry out its daily tasks properly. Complaints from NGOs have alleged that departmental staff-persons lack legal awareness, that registration procedures are carried out inconsistently, and that reporting requirements are unpredictable.

The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), with the support of Counterpart International through the “Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society” (I-PACS), has been working closely with the NGO Department since 2005 to improve its capacity and to implement the NGO Law properly. Supportive activities have included educational workshops on the NGO Law for governmental regulators, the publication of educational materials on Afghan law and international good regulatory practices, the deployment of a computerized NGO database for the Department and, most recently, assistance in revising the NGO reporting forms. Significantly, these capacity-building efforts targeted not only the Department in Kabul, but the provincial offices of the Ministry of Economy as well.

The results are evident. If we compare the capacity of the NGO Department in 2005 with its capacity today, we note a remarkable difference. In 2005, not a single staff-person at the NGO Department had sufficient awareness regarding the NGO Law; today, nearly all staff-persons working at the NGO Department have at least a basic understanding of the Law, and of registration and supervision procedures required by the Law. Perhaps the most compelling evidence of increased capacity is the decrease in the number of complaints from NGOs against the Department.

In addition to the lack of legal understanding and capacity, the NGO Department staff has also struggled with poor English language capacity and inadequate computer skills, which has been a major obstacle in communicating with representatives of international NGOs. These gaps made the registration and supervision process more difficult for both the NGO Department and for NGOs, especially for international NGOs. Relations were strained, and trust between the sectors poor.

Typically, ICNL focuses on building *legal* capacity. Given the problems facing the NGO Department in Afghanistan, however, ICNL made an exception and commissioned the teaching of both an English language course and a computer training course for staff-persons of the NGO Department. ICNL contracted the Afghan Women Rights Organization (AWRO), a local NGO with experience in conducting language courses for government departments, to lead the teaching of the English course. The course has been ongoing for nearly two years, and six staff persons, including the Head of the NGO Department, have now become proficient in speaking and understanding English.

The computer training course, though launched more recently, has included 12 course participants from the Department and also led to transformational results. *“We had a few desktop computers at the NGO Department, but since nobody could use them, they were useless. Now nearly 12 people can use computers and work in word and excel programs, and we need more computers.”* (Head of NGO Department)

Thanks to the ongoing support from Counterpart and ICNL, both courses will continue into 2009.