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AFGHANISTAN



SUCCESS STORY

Protecting Girls' Rights through Human Rights Education

Informing community members of their legal, Islamic and human rights



Counterpart I-PACS

“The marriage decision is only, and entirely, your daughter’s right, not yours,’ I told him.”

-Yar Gul, after receiving human rights training from the Afghan Women’s Resource Center, a Counterpart partner.

In March 2009, Yar Gul, the General Secretary of the NGO Kandi Shura, attended a two-day training session on human rights conducted by the Afghan Women’s Resource Center (AWRC), a Counterpart International partner, in coordination with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.

As part of Counterpart’s Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society, the AWRC is providing regular support to a local Civil Society Organization (CSO) – Kandi Shura – in the Qarghaie district of Laghman province. This CSO, established in 2005, works with and through its local *Jirga* system (a local, informal system of justice) to resolve conflicts within their community of 300 families.

In the training, Mr. Gul and the other participants were introduced to human rights from an Islamic point of view, human rights conventions signed by the Afghan government, women’s and children’s rights as well as the role of civil society with regard to those rights. Mr. Gul returned to Qarghaie and delivered this same training to the ten members of Kandi Shura with the aim of enabling them to resolve the local resident’s problems and cases in a more effective and lasting way.

Upon returning to Qarghaie, a woman visited Mr. Gul, complaining that her husband wanted to marry their 16 year old daughter to a 50 year old man. Although the father, Fazel Karim, agreed to meet with Shura members about this issue, he made it clear that he had the right, and he did not feel comfortable with the Shura’s involvement. He said, “As a father, I have the right to marry my daughter to any one I want.”

Mr. Gul and his colleagues sat with Mr. Karim and discussed the issue of marriage. Using the Quran and other human rights resources from Counterpart’s training, Mr. Gul informed Mr. Karim: “The marriage decision is only, and entirely, your daughter’s right, not yours.’ The basic rights of a girl and woman, based on the human rights conventions and more specifically based on Islamic principles, are protected. Islam says that ‘the girl has the right to choose her spouse herself’. The Afghan government supports this notion and forbids forced marriages.”

Mr. Karim was visibly surprised by the information shared with him during their discussions. And yet, Mr. Karim listened and, ultimately, was persuaded. That week, he rejected the 50 year old man’s proposal for his daughter.

In many parts of Afghanistan, women encounter not only the challenges of accessing health care and education, but also the traditional practices of domestic violence, forced marriages and child brides. After more than three decades of conflict, the recent establishment of the national government provides a great opportunity for CSOs to reach and support vulnerable groups such as women. As part of I-PACS, more than 200 CSOs in the country’s 34 provinces are offered trainings, technical assistance and small grants to build their capacity. I-PACS aims to build these CSOs’ capacity to serve the needs of their communities, increase civic activism and in many cases, protect the rights of their community’s most vulnerable members.

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