



COUNTERPART

Counterpart

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

Issue # 9

January 2009



H.E. Hamid Karzai the President of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan during his speech in the First Women's Council - Kabul



Working Groups meeting in the First Women's Council - Kabul

Counterpart Announces RFA for Human Rights Grants

On November 26, 2008, Counterpart announced a Request for Applications (RFA) for the Human Rights Grants for Fiscal Year 2009. In response to the RFA, Counterpart received nineteen concept papers from Afghan civil society organizations (CSOs).

The human rights grant program is an important component of I-PACS. The program aims to provide funding for specific activities to promote and protect human rights of the citizens of Afghanistan. Human rights projects may include those designed to assist one or more disadvantaged or discriminated groups in fulfilling their human rights as provided by relevant international covenants as well as domestic legislation. These rights can include, but are not limited to, the right to life, liberty and security of person; freedom from

Afghan Women "Heard by their Leader"

Women constitute roughly 49% of Afghanistan's population. Poverty, insecurity and conservative traditionalism negatively affect Afghan women and their access to the services, opportunities, and resources that are necessary for normal living. They are subject to forced marriage, physical, sexual and verbal abuse and their access to education and justice is limited. This is a serious challenge in the process of Afghanistan's democratic transition.

For development to be successful and sustainable, women must play an equal role as change agents and as beneficiaries in the democratic development process of the country. The National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA), approved in May 2008, outlines a plan for empowering women and advancing gender equality in six core areas that are critical to accelerating improvements in the status of Afghan women.

Counterpart International, with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and in cooperation with the Ministry of Women's Affairs, held the First Women's Council in Kabul on October 28 and 29, 2008. The goal of the Council was to advance NAPWA and draw public and government's attention to the need for better understanding of contemporary issues facing Afghan women. Over 500 women from thirty-three Afghan provinces participated in this pioneer event. They discussed issues that affect their lives and developed a list of short-term achievable priorities to bring about a positive change in their communities and in Afghan society as a whole. *(Continued on page 3)*

torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; freedom of religion and expression; the right to an adequate standard of living (including food, clothing, housing, water and sanitation) and the right to the highest attainable standard of health.

The grants will also support activities to advocate for the fulfillment of the Government of Afghanistan's human rights obligations and the enjoyment of human rights for all, regardless of sex, social, ethnic, religious affiliation, or other status. In addition, human rights grants may support initiatives which advocate for accountability for human rights violations. Following a discussion on each individual concept paper, Counterpart's Proposal Review Committee panel decided which applicants should submit full proposals based on their approved concept papers. *(Continued on page 4)*

ACSF's I-PACS Team Delivers Training and ToT on Introduction to Advocacy and IPDPW to I-PACS CSSC Staff

From December 14 – 18 2008, the Afghan Civil Society Forum's (ACSF) I-PACS team conducted a five-day training on Introduction to Advocacy for nine I-PACS staff of Civil Society Support Centers (CSSCs) in Faryab and Kandahar. The training covered a variety of topics, among which were basic concepts in advocacy, the advocacy cycle, problem analysis, and selection of target groups, among others.

On December 21, ACSF delivered a one-day Training-of-Trainers (ToT) on Basic Advocacy to Training Officers and I-PACS Managers of the Faryab and Kandahar Civil Society Support Centers (CSSC).



ACSF I-PACS staff conduct Introduction to Advocacy training to Kandahar and Faryab CSSCs—Kabul

Counterpart Conducts Radio Roundtable Discussion on Civil Society

On December 31, 2008, Counterpart conducted a radio roundtable discussion on the concept of civil society and civil society organizations which was aired across Afghanistan. The thirty-five-minute roundtable discussion introduced the concept of civil society and highlighted the role of civil society organizations in the current and future development efforts in Afghanistan.

The roundtable featured the Head of the NGO Department at the Ministry of Economy and the President of the All Women Union Organization, both of whom are strong and knowledgeable advocates for the cause of civil society in Afghanistan.

The roundtable discussion was broadcasted on two national outlets: the Radio Television of Afghanistan's (RTA) National Radio of Afghanistan (NRA) and Radio Killid. NRA broadcasted the event twice, reaching a population of approximately six million listeners through its nation-wide coverage in thirty-four (34) provinces. Additionally, the roundtable was broadcasted on Radio Killid, which ensured reach to an additional population of listeners in Kabul and the neighboring provinces. Even though this was the first in a series of such events, Counterpart is confident that spreading the voice of civil society through the capacity of mass electronic media will make a significant

contribution to Counterpart's efforts to ensure informed policy and equitable resource allocation decisions concerning civil society and CSO development in Afghanistan. Based on Counterpart's previous experience with similar initiatives, it is expected that the roundtables will echo among the relevant civil society and government stakeholders and the general public alike.

Counterpart Signs New Round of Institutional Support Grants with I-PACS Partners

During the month of December 2008, Counterpart signed Institutional Support Grant Agreements with nine I-PACS partner organizations. The grants will cover I-PACS-related training and Organizational Development (OD) activities for period from January – September, 2009.

The financial support provided through these grants allows partner organizations to continue building their internal organizational capacity while providing training and technical assistance to the target CSOs in their regions. The institutional support grants were approved on the basis of grant proposals designed in accordance with action plans developed by each organization.

Human Rights Training for Counterpart Staff

The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) delivered a six-day training on human rights to Counterpart's Senior Program Team members. A total of twelve Counterpart staff, including five females, attended the training. The training was conducted pro-bono, under a Memorandum of Understanding signed between Counterpart and AIHRC.

In the course of the training, the participants learned about the concept and history of the human rights movement, international human rights treaties, states' responsibilities for implementation of international human rights conventions and comparison of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights to the Afghan Constitution and local legislation.

The participants also learned about the issues surrounding family violence against women in Afghanistan and the relationship between customs, tradition and violent behavior.



Human Rights Training for Counterpart staff—Kabul

Afghan Women “Heard by their Leader”. (Continued from page 1) During the first day of the council, the participants were divided into six working groups to discuss the six core areas of NAPWA: (1) security; (2) legal protection and human rights; (3) leadership and political participation; (4) economy, work and poverty; (5) health; and (6) education,

At the end of the first day of the event, the facilitators from each group, the Minister and Deputy Ministers of Women’s Affairs, and Members of Parliament combined the recommendations/ priorities of each working group into the First Women’s Council Declaration which was presented to the President of Afghanistan on the second day of the event. The President expressed his commitment to ensure government’s effort to accelerate improvements in the status of Afghan women. The President also emphasized the importance of women’s participation

in nation’s development efforts and applauded participants’ efforts and contribution during the two-day event.

The First Women’s Council was the first opportunity for the women of Afghanistan to take an important step towards ensuring women’s participation in decision-making, empowering women and advancing gender equality for the good of Afghan women and men. Nazia Baharistani from Badakshan, one of the participants said, “We are thankful to the organizers of this historic event which provided an opportunity for the Afghan women to be heard by their leader” Following this extremely successful event, which echoed across the country and abroad, the participants urged Counterpart to maintain the momentum created the First Women’s Council and facilitate creation of a mechanism to monitor government’s implementation of NAPWA.

Counterpart and WASSA conduct training on Women’s Rights in Islam

Counterpart Gender Department with the support from Women Activities & Social Services Association (WASSA) conducted a one-day training on Women’s Rights in Islam for the I-PACS partners’ Gender Focal Points. A total of eleven participants attended the training, including three staff from the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit.

The training was interesting and beneficial for the I-PACS partners, as it provided an insight into women’s rights in Islam and in Afghanistan’s constitution and civic laws.

Counterpart and ICNL Produce and Disseminate Educational Materials on NGO Law

Since the enactment of the Law on NGOs, the International Center for-Not-for profit Law (ICNL), one of Counterpart’s lead implementing partners on the I-PACS program, has produced a series of educational materials relating to the legal framework for NGOs. Some of these are easy-to-read, client-friendly brochures to help Afghans navigate the legal system and to help NGOs know their rights and responsibilities. Others are more in-depth guides and commentaries targeting government officials, lawyers and academics. ICNL now ensures that these educational tools are available to the Government, Parliament, NGOs and the general public. To date, Counterpart and ICNL have released the following publications:

NGO Registration Brochure. The brochure supports the NGO registration process. It is a critical support for those individuals or organizations who wish to establish an NGO in Afghanistan.

NGO Reporting Guidelines. The Guidelines target both NGOs, to help them comply with reporting requirements, and government regulators, to help them implement the law more consistently and professionally. Before publishing, the guidelines were reviewed by the NGO Department at the Ministry of Economy, the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR), and other NGOs in Afghanistan. The Guidelines contain information on international regulatory practice relating to the government supervision and reporting, a question-and-answer section on reporting procedures in Afghanistan, and an

explanatory section on how to complete the reporting forms.

Commentary on NGO Law. The Commentary is designed as an in-depth analysis of the NGO Law for use as a reference guide and educational tool by lawyers, government officials and civil society specialists and as an educational tool on the compatibility of the Afghan law with international standards, it promises to serve as an invaluable resource for ongoing legal reform efforts in Afghanistan.

Guidelines on Laws Affecting Civic Organizations. Originally published by the Open Society Institute (OSI), in cooperation with ICNL, the guidelines were translated into Dari language by Counterpart. The Guidelines are an important resource to practitioners and government officials alike on international standards and best regulatory practices, and could assist future reform efforts in Afghanistan.

The said education materials are available in English and two local languages – Dari and Pashto. A large number of copies of the NGO Registration Brochure and the OSI Guidelines have been disseminated through the NGO coordination bodies, NGO Department and I-PACS partner organizations in Kabul and all the other provinces of Afghanistan. Counterpart and ICNL will also disseminate the NGO Reporting Guidelines and Commentary on NGO Law to the interested stakeholders throughout the country.



SUCCESS STORY

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



Staff of NGO Department Ministry Of Economy—Kabul

“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)

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.

Human Rights Grants. (Continued from page 1) The Proposal Review Committee approved five concepts papers to be developed into full proposals. After receiving full proposals from the applicant organizations, the Proposal Review Committee will re-convene to decide which full proposals will be approved for funding.