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G-Concerns

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Afghanistan Special

KHABERI KAWEN

Project Update

Building communication and support for female leaders in Afghanistan



Afghan female MPs connect for action and support In Khaberi Kawen Project

Gender Concerns is pleased to announce the completion of the Khaberi Kawen project in Kabul after a year-long series of events, trainings and activities. The term “khaberi kawen” literally translates as to “speak” or to “converse” in the local Pashto language. This was the goal of this project: to utilize cotemporary methods of communication such as social media to build an effective dialogue between female Members of Parliament in Afghanistan and with their supporters. As a result, new opportunities exist for women leaders to connect for support – and networking can be built upon skills



the Khaberi Kawen project has provided.

The need for this project was recognized due to the distinct lack of social media use for political purposes amongst female MPs in Afghanistan. Prior to this project, out of the 69 women in Afghanistan’s parliament, only 22 had a social media account. Furthermore, out of these 22 accounts, only three featured political content. The potential of social media is large to act as a tool for change and as a means of connecting people. Gender Concerns acted in alerting these female MPs to the potential that social media could have when used to connect political colleagues and supporters.



Gender Concerns would like to thank our valuable project partners, Women Human Rights and Media Organization (WHMO) and Media Support Partnership Afghanistan (MSPA), as well as the office staff of Gender Concerns Afghanistan who have worked tirelessly make this project a reality. We also would like to express our sincerest gratitude to all the wonderful female MP participants whose passion and energy made this project a truly worthwhile endeavor.

Bringing Our Faces to the Public at the Khaberi Kawen conference

Gender Concerns is looking forward to our conference on 09 June with the US Embassy to Kabul and Women Human Rights and Media Organization (WHMO). The conference will be centred on upcoming elections in Afghanistan through the standpoint of the KHABERI KAWEN project overall objective: ***Achieving Sustainable Communication through Creative Connecting***



The programme title KHABERI KAWEN means to “converse” or to “talk” in Pashto symbolizes the project’s ultimate goal of encouraging female members of parliament (MPs) in Afghanistan to use social media and sustainable platforms to communicate and network with the press, their peers, and the public.

This interactive conference creates an opportunity for female MPs to discuss and showcase their public speaking skills as they utilize additional public exposure to help build their communication network.

On the Radio: Voices of Change and Support



MP Najiban Hussini during a Khaberi Kawen radio interview

Radio interviews with Khaberi Kawen programme participants provide a direct platform to discuss key issues that affect women of Afghanistan. Participants will be able to create a sustainable platform to communicate with the public through these radio broadcasts.

Female Members of Parliament (MPs) can better reach their counterparts in government and establish better connections with their supporters, and with communities that may not otherwise be familiar with who they are and their programme efforts.

Topics discussed in radio broadcasts allow the interviewee to share their own views on the subject, and to incorporate a female leadership perspective from inside the government. Topics of radio broadcasts include women's rights, the role of women in elections, the peace process, women's role in government and problems faced by women in Afghanistan.

A radio broadcast with a programme participant examining **the role of media for reducing violence against women** provided an opportunity to raise the social and health issue that is confronted by a number of Afghan women.

"The role of media is essential in reducing violence against of women, because we can raise our voice to all the world. Many things affect this type of violence, but low literacy, cultural factors, and poverty are the biggest issues. A better knowledge of family law on the rights of women and children will help protect families." Interview with Afghan MP Sohila Sharifi, April 2014



Radio interviews help create sustainable communication platforms

Modern Communications: Speaking, Tweeting, Sharing and Posting

Delivering effective communications is taking on new definitions as trends in technology influence where groups of people interact and get their information. The importance of social media has grown across geographical borders and occupational sectors to the point where it is necessary to use media such as Twitter and Facebook to inform the public of programs, challenges and opportunities. Just as social media played an integral role in the Arab Spring; it can continue to be used as a tool for change.

Workshops in the Khaberi Kawen project have worked with female MP participants to employ best practices in raising levels of communication reach with supporters and peers who are facing the same challenges to gender equality in Afghanistan. The workshop activities as part of the program have helped to build applicable skills in making the best use of live presentations and online social media as communication tools.



Making an impact with first impressions: workshops building live presentation skills; It can be intimidating to face a crowd when preparing to deliver a message. Whether the audience is filled with supporters or critics, Khaberi Kawen workshops have helped participants gain presentation speech techniques and build self confidence that will help them deliver their message.

Through the use of established public presentation methods used in practice sessions and conferences, women leaders' ambitions of building support through live communications can be better realised.

Building online communication skills:

It was realised early in the project that not enough female MPs were actively using social media accounts to build support and communicate with colleagues. Gender Concerns set out to help change this.

Programme participants created Facebook and/or Twitter accounts and blogs. Using online communication will help them build support in their own areas, as well as reaching beyond the borders of Afghanistan for the world to see challenges and successes of women leaders.



Time for change: strong turnout in Afghanistan presidential elections

It was truly encouraging to see the large turnout of women who were eager to participate in their country's future in the April Afghanistan presidential elections. The inked voter-identification finger became an individual symbol of democratic participation representing "I have a voice and a mark to leave in this world," a particularly poignant notion for the women of Afghanistan who for so long have had their rights and voices restricted. Photographs of the ink-stained fingers of smiling voters—especially younger voters – on social media and websites have become one of the most defining images of this election.

The elections were, on the whole, an encouragingly peaceful event, symbolizing the optimistic visions of the future for the people of Afghanistan. Gender Concerns would like to congratulate the women and men who came forward peacefully as active, thoughtful citizens – some voting perhaps for the first time, despite reports of pre-election threats from Taliban. The



courage of the voters is an inspiration to all those who work towards socio-economic progress in developing countries. US President Barack Obama said about the elections that "the most critical voices on the outcome are those of Afghans themselves."

Gender Concerns is looking forward to opportunities of engaging with the Afghan people in the 2015 parliamentary elections through our **Gender Election Monitoring (GEM)** programmes to support the full and fair democratic participation of women. GEM programs implement trainings, partnerships, observations and reporting to address the status of women as voters, candidates and policy-makers. Visit genderconcerns.org for more GEM information, as well as our [GEM Report Pakistan 2013](#).

Up close in Kabul to address security of female Afghan voters

A senior representative from the Gender Concerns's headquarters in The Hague, the Netherlands travelled to Kabul, Afghanistan, in late April. The purpose of the visit was to co-ordinate planning with the Afghanistan-based Gender Concerns team as well as with the Director of the Afghan Women's Network (AWN), Hasina Safi, regarding issues surrounding the Afghan Election Commission.

Enhanced Self Expression for Women through the Bayan project

Gender Concerns would like to thank all those who were involved in making our vision of the Bayan project a reality. The year-long Bayan project ran from 1 December 2012 to 30 December 2013, with the intention of strengthening the position of women in Afghanistan so that they might become increasingly active as participants and leaders in the dual processes of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Gender Concerns believes that only with the inclusion of women can these two processes be effective in bringing forward a fairer and more democratic society. When implementing Bayan, Gender Concerns aimed to address the problem of widespread gender inequality in Afghanistan, which often takes the form of discrimination, curtailed opportunities and even outright violence against women.



Specifically, Bayan focused on capitalizing on the unique advantages of living in an age of digital activism through creating a dedicated, indigenous social media platform by which effective communication between Dutch NGOs and Afghan women's organisations could be structured. This focus gave birth to the name "Bayan" which literally translates as "to express oneself." Gender Concerns wanted to highlight through this project the importance of self-expression in bringing about meaningful change. Moreover, this project aimed to build effective and sustainable partnerships between Dutch NGOs and Afghan women's NGOs. Through the establishment of this platform and the strengthening of the professional relationships, Gender Concerns is confident that the aims with which this project began have been fulfilled. In the future, Gender Concerns intends to expand the Bayan project, broadening its reach and expand the number of civil society organisations, target groups and participants.



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