

Transforming Women's Lives

Afghanistan Project Update Winter 2013

As one year ends and another begins, we hear from Habibah Barati, a leader of one of newly established women's shuras, on the impact the project has had in her village, and AWEC staff member Mohammad Faiz Younos shares exciting news about the influence the participating communities have gained.

Working together, becoming stronger

Habibah Barati is a busy mum of six. She had her first son, Zabi, when she was 17. Now aged 38, she leads a female shura in Khwaja Sabz Posh District, Faryab Province.



Habibah Barati is the leader of the Haji Akar shura in Khwaja Sabz Posh District. Its members now have a say in their community.

Like all parents the world over, Habibah hopes for a better future for her children. Taking care of her children is her top priority and she likes nothing better than to spend time with her family. But lack of education and jobs, combined with the unstable security situation, make it difficult for people in her community to support their families.

Up until recently women in Habibah's community had no say in the day-to-day running of their community and often did not have a voice in their immediate family either. Basically, if you were a woman, your views and opinions didn't count.

The project you are supporting to help women set up their own *shuras* (Dari word for council) and speak out for change is increasing their knowledge, and is helping them to improve their lives and their futures.

Habibah's message to you is that her community really appreciates your support, which makes our partner AWEC's work possible.

Habibah explains: '[In our] village shura, we are able to share our ideas with each other and work in partnership. AWEC has provided a lot of workshops such as peace building, conflict solving, women's rights, and children's rights and health. We have learned a lot.'

For women who previously were ignored by the government, their community and even members of their family, the opportunity to speak out and be heard is nothing short of life-changing.

Habibah says: 'The things we've learned from this project mean we are able to work strongly in our society.'

Green shoots: from grassroots to government

Mohammad Faiz Younos works for AWEC, helping to run its programmes. He has seen the lives of women and young people transformed by the project.

He explains: 'Since the project started, there have been many changes in the lives of the community members taking part. The women involved in the new monthly meetings of female shuras and accompanying training programmes are aware of their rights, have been trained in peace building and can express their needs to their families, to men in their communities, and to government departments.'

'In some villages, women are invited by the male shuras to share their ideas and participate in decision making.'

'Now we can solve problems we are facing in our families and communities'



Monthly meeting of the women's shura in Pul-e-Babo, Dehdadi District

As well as the monthly meetings to discuss community problems, local elections have also been held so that communities can vote for representatives for the provincial women's shuras, which have now been established in each of the three provinces the project is supporting.

Mohammad says: 'The provincial shuras have been introduced to the relevant government departments, which have agreed to invite them to take part in any decision making at the provincial level.'

Women are finally being able to have a say in the decisions taken by local government that directly affect them.

Habibah's final words sum up how valuable this project has been to women in her community: 'Now we are having good life and can solve problems we are facing in our families and communities easily. We are very happy and we have a bright future.'

'The things we've learned from this project mean we are able to work strongly in our society'

Key achievements

- 80 women's shuras have been established in the eight districts of each of the three targeted provinces.
- 24 youth shuras have been established in the participating provinces.
- At the provincial level, three women's shuras were established (one per province) and were officially introduced to the relevant government departments. These departments have offered to support the shuras during their activities and they will invite them to all decision meetings at provincial level.
- Relevant government departments at district and provincial level were briefed regarding the project's activities and achievements.
- Community women and youth shuras conduct monthly meetings in their districts where they discuss community issues such as family problems, poverty, unemployment, violence against women and other challenges among themselves.
- In total, 294 meetings have been conducted in the three targeted provinces during this reporting period (August – October 2013).
- AWEC field staff visit shura meetings regularly and provide feedback and comments to help the shuras improve and evolve.
- Resource centres have been established in all three targeted provinces with equipment such as books, shelves and chairs. The aim of the resource centres is to help members to organise their monthly shura meetings, share their knowledge with other shuras and find out more information on issues relevant to them.

Prayer points

Lord God,

We thank you for the commitment of our partners like Mohammed at AWEC.

We praise you for the strength of ordinary women, like Habibah,

using their voice to bring their communities together.

You sent your Son to walk among us,

a living symbol of your love,

so that we, your children, would know your peace.

In the villages, districts and provinces of Afghanistan,

we pray that your love, which knows no boundaries, unites families, communities and nations.

Amen.



If there is any way we can help your group, please contact your local Christian Aid office, email partnership@christian-aid.org or visit christianaid.org.uk/partnerships