



## Women's empowerment and peacebuilding in Afghanistan

### INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM ANALYSIS:

Women in Afghanistan have generally little access to provincial and national peace processes in conflict areas, meaning their concerns are seldom heard. NCA and its partners in Afghanistan have for many years been working towards increasing women's participation in peace process, in line with the UNSCR 1325 and Afghanistan National Action Plan on women, peace and security.

### RESULTS:

As part of its Building Resilient Communities for Sustainable Development and Peace project, NCA and its partners **contributed to organizing rural women in community peace structures and subsequently into District Women Peace Shuras (DWPS)**. During the programme period (2013 - 2015), 302 women from 120 communities in Far-yab, Daikundi and Uruzgan consisting of various ethnics and tribal groups were organized in ten DWPS. The DWPS demonstrated increased women outreach and the formation of a common platform for women from various communities experiencing a diversity of conflict situations. The established platform enabled women to come together and discuss their roles and challenges in working as peace actors.



Women from a peace shura meeting Deputy Minister for Women for Affairs Photo: Norwegian Church Aid, Afghanistan

The results of the pre- and post-training survey made for the 302 DWPS members trained showed a significant increase in knowledge and understanding on peace, conflict resolution, human and women's rights, advocacy and communication skills. The capacity development also enabled them to develop 128 action plans and solve or mediate 178 community level conflicts on irrigation water, land or pasture rights. Family conflicts on, for example, inheritance rights, child and forced marriage were also addressed by these DWPS.

The programme led to **positive results in addressing practices such as dowry** paid by the groom. For instance, in 2015 the DWPS members of Kijran district of Daikundi Province conducted six dialogue sessions with religious and community leaders on decreasing woman's dowry, which has been a major issue for young men, frequently causing family conflicts and violence against girls. The attempt by the DWPS resulted in the amount of dowry to decrease from \$11,800 to \$4,400.

There is a clear indication that the programme has increased women's participation in social activities and community-level decision-making, with a reported change in attitudes in the perceptions of women's role in peacebuilding. At the end of the project, **51.5% of the targeted population considered that women have a role to play in resolving community conflicts**. In 2013, only 29,1% had responded affirmatively to this question. Likewise, support has been committed by elders to allow women to be involved in project activities like participation in peace building trainings, meetings with Department of Women's Affairs, literacy education and work as member of DWPS.

A key initiative was to **connect DWPS at community and district levels with provincial and national level formal and informal peace structures** as well as national authorities. Six meetings between DWPS and formal peace structures were organized during the programme period. In the meetings, the DWPS conveyed the grassroots and women's views and concerns to those formal peace structures. As a result relationships have been established between these bodies allowing them to share their experiences, learn from each other and share resources for managing conflicts. In 2015, a delegation of DWPS from Faryab province visited the High Peace Council, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Afghanistan National Independent Peace and Reconciliation Commission. The authorities visited, besides acknowledging and appreciating the efforts of DWPS, promised and assured their support for their initiatives. In Daikundi province, the DWPS advocated for women's inclusion in Provincial Peace Council (PPC) which did not have female representation. As a result of this advocacy effort, the governor of the province promised to appoint two female members from a DWPS to the PPC .

A literacy programme for 3,225 women's from DWPSs, CDCs, and women's Self-Help Groups was a good starting point for promoting female education and participation, in a culturally restricted environment where women rarely take part in social activities. According to 2015 data, **eighty-eight percent of the literacy students are now able to read and write**, contributing to the Ministry of Education's strategic target to extend education to remote areas and to raise the literacy rate to 53 % by 2015.

## **LESSONS LEARNED:**

Women's empowerment in building peace not only contributes to better conflict resolution and add a gender perspective into peace processes but also have wider effects in changing traditions and customs and expanding the public space for women. To connect women peace shuras with formal structures at the provincial and national level is a strategy that pays off, though it calls for continuous efforts to formalize that link. Efforts are to be made to ensure peace shuras are as inclusive as possible, also when it comes to age. Collaboration between male and female shuras is to be encouraged, to make conflict transformation more representative of the perspectives of all—and when such collaboration exists, it strengthens women's role in peacebuilding.

## **PARTNERS:**

Afghan Development Association (ADA), Afghan Women Skills Development Centre (AWSDC), Cooperation Center for Afghanistan (CCA), and Sanayee Development Organization (SDO).

## **SOURCES:**

NCA and partners' monitoring reports, reflective sessions, baseline and endline studies; Evaluation of the Building Resilient Communities for Sustainable Development and Peace, 2015.



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