



Special Edition: Empowering Afghan Women

In celebration of International Women's Day on March 8th, this Special Edition of the Afghanistan Weekly newsletter highlights programs dedicated to building the capacity of Afghan women and girls.

Ensuring basic and higher education for girls and women

Accelerated Learning for girls who missed out on education: Given the years of missed schooling, in 2003 USAID established an accelerated learning program in which over-age, out of school girls can advance two grades per year. There are currently 170,000 students enrolled, of which 56% are female—compared with government schools where enrollment is 35% girls. Across 17 provinces the program has trained 6800 teachers, of which 40% are women, for this accelerated learning program.

National Women's Dormitory: The rehabilitation of the beautiful *National Women's Dormitory* in Kabul was completed in September 2004, with inauguration by President Karzai. The dorm will enable 1,100 young women from primarily rural areas to attend medical school or the Afghan Education University, the Polytechnic Institute or Kabul University. They will begin filling the dorm at the start of the new academic year in March, 2005. USAID also has committed funding for three years to ensure solid management, maintenance and food services for the young women.

The Literacy and Community Empowerment Program (LCEP): LCEP is a pilot initiative that builds upon and strengthens the largest movement for grassroots democracy and empowerment of women in the history of Afghanistan: the National Solidarity Program (NSP). LCEP integrates literacy, numeracy and life skills with income generation, and is managed through locally elected women's and men's Community Development Councils of the NSP. In 2005 LCEP will reach into 200 villages where there is over 90% female illiteracy, training almost 400 village teachers and 8,000 learners, 65% of whom will be girls and women. Literacy linked with enterprise development helps ensure female participation and increased income. The integrated approach strengthens participatory local governance and the voice of women in these new institutions. Training for the literacy component is through the new *Women's Teacher Training Institute* in Kabul.



Accelerated learning students in class in Qasaba, Jalalabad city, Nangarhar province.



With the start of the academic year in March, women will begin entering the new women's dormitory in Kabul

Literacy critical to increasing rural women healthcare providers

Learning for Life: Health-focused literacy, numeracy and life skills: This innovative accelerated health-focused literacy program is designed to help reduce maternal and child mortality. With 90% female illiteracy in rural areas, there are few women to become healthcare workers. Yet generally, only women can treat women in these cultures. *Learning for Life* builds literacy skills for 8,000 primarily young rural women and older girls, of which 5,500 are being selected and trained as community healthcare workers, community midwives and midwives. The link with health and hygiene makes literacy relevant to something a woman cares about most—her family's health—which motivates participation and retention of new literacy skills and health practices.



A village woman provides women literacy classes to her fellow villagers for two hours per day. After one year, the class passed third grade equivalency exams.

Addressing one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world

Rural Expansion of Afghanistan's Community-based Healthcare (REACH):

In Afghanistan, a woman dies every 30 minutes from complications related to childbearing. It is the single greatest tragedy for Afghan women and their families. One region of Afghanistan has the highest maternal mortality rate ever recorded globally. REACH specifically targets maternal and child mortality by increasing women and children's access to quality health services. This major USAID program improves mother and child health through prevention of maternal and neonatal tetanus, polio and malaria; improved services related to post-partum hemorrhage; family planning; training midwives and other health professionals; access to health information; building and rehabilitating clinics and hospitals; and provision of equipment to health facilities.



A woman has her child weighed as part of the mother-child health services offered by this clinic in Shakar Dara/Kabul.

Empowering women with enterprise skills

Revitalizing Agricultural Livelihoods for Women: 75% of all Afghans live in rural areas, and most families are very poor and undernourished. Multiple USAID programs are increasing skills training for women and access to resources. In one initiative, 11,000 women have been trained in poultry technology and management, with 55,800 chicks distributed to increase family incomes and nutrition. 5,000 more women will join the program in 2005. In another effort, USAID and Development Works Canada have joined to develop a vegetable dehydration factory that employs 400 women. Some 1,400 farm families, using female home labor, will supply the factory with various produce. Microcredit programs across the country specifically target women. 6,000 women received micro loans in 2004 with USAID funds, with an average loan size of \$550.

Private sector enterprise development: USAID has supported the *Women Entrepreneurship Development (WED)* program through the Ministry of Commerce since August 2003. *WED* has helped create significant breakthroughs for Afghan businesswomen. It established the 400 female member Afghan Women Business Association (AWBA), which has introduced women's products locally and internationally, assisted ten women to sign export contracts, supported creation of the first "Afghan Women and Business" magazine, and trained 380 women in basic and advanced business courses.



Women loan officers process agricultural micro-finance assistance

Fostering women's participation in civil society

Civil Society Organizations support development of women and girls: To increase the impact and foster capacity building of women's role in civil society, USAID recently launched its three-year *Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society (I-PACS)*. The program provides training and mentoring for capacity building of small civil society organizations (CSOs). *I-PACS* has set aside \$5 million for small grants to enable qualifying non-governmental organizations, groups, associations and community institutions to foster political participation, income-generation, health education, and advocacy. At least 50% of these grants will go to women-focused and women-led organizations. The first grants, to women-led NGOs, were awarded in February 2005.

Women's Resource Centers: 17 *Women's Resource Centers* are being built in provincial capitals under the auspices of the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA). These create culturally appropriate, critical training and meeting spaces for outreach to women in the provinces. They provide a base to extend MoWA advocacy for women and girls. Local and international organizations implement activities including training of trainers for women's literacy, health education, income generation and political participation throughout the provinces. As of February 2005, five Centers were completed.



Women's centers, like this one in Charikar, Parwan Province, provide educational and training opportunities



Groundbreaking ceremony for the construction of a women's center in Jalalabad last August.