Knowledge is power: Jawana participant uses newly acquired legal expertise to assist women in her home village

Last month, Seema Samadi, 20, a Jawana participant, returned to her home village in Nangarhar to startling news. A family friend had recently become widowed, and the woman’s family was forcing Seema’s friend to marry her deceased husband’s brother, otherwise known as a levirate marriage. “I was shocked,” says Seema, “but I also knew that if the woman rejected the decision that her in-laws could deprive her of inheritance and future support.”

Levirate marriage is a common, yet relatively unacknowledged, tradition in Afghanistan, designed to keep wealth within the deceased husband’s family. It is derived from the Afghaniat code, which outlines a code of honor for Afghans—an informal justice system that is not formally recognized by the Government of Afghanistan. Seema was aware of the tradition, but she had never witnessed it in practice. She was determined to help her friend.

Seema, a fourth-year student at the Medical Faculty, learned about women’s legal rights in the Jawana program.

She began discussing what she learned about legal rights with her father. Together, the two discussed what they had learned with the widow’s in-laws and community elders. “Jawana taught me that according to Islam, that the woman does not have to marry her brother-in-law, and we were able to convince the community elders, who have promised that the woman will not be forced to marry and deprived of her legal rights,” Seema says.

Although Seema is studying medicine, she will continue to empower women by informing them of their rights under the law and helping to influence policymakers to make greater efforts to expand knowledge and awareness of legal rights.

Promote Women’s Leadership and Development builds on the gains Afghan women have made over the last decade by providing 25,000 educated women between 18 and 30 from across the country with leadership skills to advance into decision-making positions in the political, economic and social sectors of Afghan society.