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Community Voices Lead to Action

Community members in Samangan use innovative dialogue formats to express their needs and work toward action



Villagers, district and provincial officials, religious leaders, and members of civil society meet to discuss community needs and methods for community development action.

Photo: USAID/IPACS III/Counterpart

USAID helped build community trust in civil society through a dialogue forum where community members can meet with government officials and civil society stakeholders to discuss development needs.

Kabuli, a village in Samangan Province, is in desperate need of vital services. The 500 families that live in the village have no health clinic, no electricity, and a scarcity of potable water. One school serves all of the children in the village. The road leading to the district center, which is 45 km away and home to the nearest available health facility, is nearly impassable due to poor road conditions.

Due to recent water shortages and drought, the multi-ethnic tribes living in Kabuli's desert climate have been unable to farm their fields. Most residents are out of work and quickly running out of food.

Through USAID and its local partner, the Association for the Defense of Women's Rights Organization, the community members had their first opportunity to convey their concerns to a group of non-governmental organizations and development professionals as well as government officials. This community dialogue allowed community members to discuss needs and discuss ways in which villagers and the government can work together to achieve mutual goals and resolve problems. Twenty community-development council members and religious leaders attended the dialogue to share concerns about education, employment, health care, infrastructure, and water.

The association is one of seven intermediary service organizations partnered with the USAID-funded project, which empowers Afghan civil society organizations and the communities they serve to participate in the political process, solve local problems, and demand good governance from their leaders. USAID builds the capacity of civil society organizations to design, implement, manage, monitor, and evaluate their activities and achieve organization objectives with transparency and accountability.

Bahadar Khan, a participant, had negative impressions of civil society organizations before the dialogue, but it helped him understand that civil society organizations are working to bring Afghans together with government representatives to create a stable Afghanistan. "I am fully ready to support the association and to become more involved in civil society," said Khan. "I am thankful to USAID for implementing such a program."