Telling Our Story

What's up, DOC!

The Afghan Youth Voices Festival showcased the talents of young Afghan musicians, photographers, filmmakers and artists.

Tip of the Week

Kevin O'Loughlin has returned to Kabul to join our DOC team and is Acting Senior Outreach & Communications Officer.

He can be reached at KO'Loughlin@state.gov and 0702-323-262. Kevin will be making an appearance at an office staff meeting near you very soon!

Afghan Youth Voices Festival

Afghan youths filled the Afghan Cultural House in Kabul on Nov. 15 to celebrate the launch of the USAID-funded Afghan Youth Voices Festival. The event showcased the talents of young Afghan photographers, filmmakers, artists, and musicians.

It also marked the kick-off of several months of activities to encourage young people to express themselves through new and traditional media tools. Multimedia training, including sessions focusing on blogging, journalism and digital video editing, as well as participatory art events will be held across Afghanistan in the coming months, culminating in a nationwide festival next year. The festival will feature the airing of radio stories, poetry reading recitations, publication of newspaper stories, and a photographic exhibition.

Speaking at the launch, U.S. Embassy Cultural Affairs Officer Michelle Jones, declared, "The Afghan Youth Voices Festival is a testament to the essential role that youth play in the development and expansion of media and technology in Afghanistan. Young people are the future of this country, and USAID supports youth engagement around the world and across our programs."

Since the Afghan Youth Voices Festival began in 2010 with the support of USAID, more than 2,500 young people have participated in Youth Voices activities, representing 16 of 34 provinces. The past two festivals have been highly successful in building the skills and confidence of Afghan youths. Eighty-three percent of participants said they felt more confident approaching community leaders as a result of their participation in the festival, and 71 percent said they were more active in their communities overall.

The Afghan Youth Voices project aims to empower young people to engage in civic and community activities by providing them with the tools to express themselves through art and media.

Afghan Women Writing Their Own Futures

Khatira Faizi starts every day writing news scripts at a local radio station in Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand province. This could hardly be called controversial activity, but Khatira remains conscious that she is crossing a line by working outside her home.

Khatira is one of many women journalists trained by USAID as part of a nationwide gender strategy aiming to empower women as well as change the way that municipalities in southern Afghanistan reach out to female residents. Khatira was one of nine local women who participated in the USAID sponsored workshop for women journalists on photography and news writing.

Khatira hard at work at a radio station in Lashkar Gah

In Helmand, restrictive local customs combine with a difficult security situation make it quite difficult for women to work outside the family home. Even those who brave the disapproval of family and community find it difficult to acquire the skills necessary to be considered for good jobs. In partnership with the Afghan government, USAID is trying to increase economic opportunities for women, especially for employment options which are deemed sustainable post transition.

Khatira says the training was invaluable. “Now when I write for news agencies, my friends tell me that I copied the news from the internet because they do not trust how much I improved,” she says.

USAID’s RAMP UP-South has trained 66 women in a variety of topics including Gender Awareness, Photography and News Writing, Data Entry Training, Solid Waste Management Committee Establishment, Parcel Registration, and Basic Communication.

Community Celebrates Canal Rehabilitation

After an almost 19-month-long refurbishment process, local farmers and community leaders in Baharak District, Badakhshan Province, recently celebrated hosted the completion of Sakha Canal.

Local farmers struggled to irrigate their crops, but now farmers can now rely on a regular flow of water (three cubic meters per second) to 647 hectares of arable land. The canal, which is now the longest one in all of the province, also will supply a nearby hydro-power plant with the capacity to deliver one megawatt of electricity serving nearly 2,400 farming families across seven villages.

The existing canal structure was badly damaged following several seasons of flooding, leaving it filled with silt and debris. USAID assistance funded the dredging, further excavation and widening of the entire canal, reinforced its lining, and covered two kilometers of the canal with stone masonry.

Local farmers gather to celebrate the completion of the 7.2 kilometer long Sakha Canal rehabilitation.

The project supported the development of high-value and sustainable agricultural efforts and gave workers an

opportunity to participate in improving village infrastructure, generating 114 full-time jobs for local laborers.

USAID is accelerating sustainable economic development in the northeastern region by providing support through a wide variety of long term projects.

New Life for Boy with Bullet in Brain

Five-year-old Muqadas is lucky to be alive after being shot in the head during an insurgent attack on U.S. troops near his village. Though the bullet is still lodged in his brain, Muqadas has made a remarkable recovery thanks to the expert emergency medical treatment provided by the U.S. military.

Anwar and his son Muqadas

The military doctors saved Muqadas's life, while USAID has given the little boy a new life. After the initial treatment, Muqadas was left partially paralyzed. No one was sure that he would ever be able to lead a normal life again, but USAID's Afghan Civilian Assistance Program paid for Muqadas to have follow-up treatment at a hospital in Kabul.

After just ten days of intensive physiotherapy, Muqadas regained partial use of his right arm and leg. Now, Muqadas can walk and speak again. His father, Anwar, told us that Muqadas can stand, run and play like regular children. "Seeing him brings joy and laughter to our family after many tears of sadness."

Anwar says the long-term help provided by USAID changed his son's life. "The foreign soldiers took Muqadas to their hospital for treatment and saved his life but he still had many problems. USAID helped solve these problems."

USAID's Afghan Civilian Assistance Program has helped more than 11,000 families across Afghanistan since 2007, and will continue to help Muqadas and his family.

Crediting Dreams to Become Reality

M. Rafi in the business that expanded from a struggling store to a thriving general merchant with an exciting and diverse inventory.

Born into a family of limited means in Kandahar, in southern Afghanistan, Mohammad Rafi busied himself selling biscuits, candy and other food items out of the small shop close to their home. He would rather have been at school, but Rafi's family was so poor that he had to leave school half-way through to help his father with the family's tiny grocery store. Despite their hard work, they never earned more than $120 per month, never enough for the family, and Rafi grew up dreaming that he would one day own a thriving general store.

It always seemed like a dream too far, until a friend told Rafi about the shariah-compliant financial services and products on offer from the Kandahar Islamic Investment and Finance Cooperative supported by USAID. Rafi joined the Cooperative

and used his first loan (totaling roughly $1,000) to expand the family business. He bought new merchandise and attracted new customers. Soon enough, the small store was on its way to becoming a big attraction.

Rafi paid off his first loan on time and applied for a second loan worth $3,000 to further diversify the shop's inventory. He now plans to use a relatively recent third loan to open two new shops and employ his younger brothers.

Rafi's monthly income has grown four-fold from the days when his father struggled to support his extended family. "It is all because of the Kandahar Islamic Investment and Finance Cooperative that my dream has come true. Life was very hard before. I had to work more and earn less. The Cooperative's continued financial assistance has provided me additional working capital to expand my business."

The Kandahar Cooperative was established by the World Council of Credit Unions and is supported by the USAID's Rural Finance and Cooperative Development (RUFCOD) project. This project helps such cooperatives provide shariah-compliant financing to small and medium-size businesses, households, entrepreneurs and women in Kandahar and thirteen other provinces throughout Afghanistan.

PHOTO OF THE WEEK

The Afghan Youth Voices Festival provides great opportunities for youth to express their ideas through new media tools and social media. The festival also features media training for more than 1000 young boys and girls in Kabul and other provinces.

Project: Afghanistan Media Development and Empowerment Project (AMDEP)

Location: Kabul, Afghanistan