

مؤسسه تعلیمی و انکشاف ظرفیتهای نور

**NOOR EDUCATIONAL & CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION
(NECDO)**



**Final Monitoring Report of the Monitors
From
'Imam Initiative Project for End Violence Against Women (EVAW)'
Nov 09- (Kabul)**

May 30th 2010

1. Executive Summary:

The **Imam Initiative Project for End Violence Against Women (EVAW)** is aimed at facilitating positive change in the Afghan community towards the lives of women. The project has been developed in consideration of Afghan culture, based on past experience and personal knowledge of the Afghani community. As Afghans, it is clear to us that the only solution for improving the quality of life for women is to aim for improvements within our home country.

2. Project background:

Afghanistan is an Islamic country. The majority of its population is Muslim, and most of the country's historical events are deeply rooted in religious issues.

Mosques play a central role in Afghanistan, as they are both a place of worship and a place of teaching. It is in a mosque that children are taught about their religion and learn how to recite the Holy Quran, free of cost. Although more than 80% of Afghanistan's population is uneducated, the majority of the population has received mosque education.

An Imam is treated with great respect. It is his role to call people five times a day for prayer, and once a week on Fridays, he delivers a speech on different topics regarding religious and social affairs. An Imam is also referred to in many family and individual matters. He is sometimes invited to the traditional councils (Jirga) to help find a solution to problems in light of Sharia (Islamic law). Many cases are handled this way because it is without cost (they do not charge) and Imams are generally accessible.

3. Project Description:

3.1. Project description of the initial six months (Nov 09-May 2010):

NECDO began its networking phase when we received formal support letters from the Ministry of Women Affairs (MOWA), and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) agreed to introduce 20 Imams from 20 famous Kabul mosques to work with us on women's rights issues from an Islamic perspective.

In the first month of the project, five booklets were designed by Mr. Hayatullah Talibzada – a Muslim scholar on the issue of women's rights. His writings addressed customs that have mixed interpretations in Islamic teachings, using solid quotations from the Quran and Sunnah. These were then shared with the 20 Imams individually, with the purpose of learning their opinions on the content. The aim was to find common thoughts which could be incorporated.

Some Imams believed the booklets were written with a Western mentality and did not belong in Islamic culture. We arranged four meetings with a mixture of moderate and conservative Imams to pave the way for those who were reluctant to work with us.

While we were working with the Imams on the booklets, we identified 20 Kabul University students to work with them, for better communication between religious leaders and youth. We found great interest among youth, and a large number frequently visited our center. However, we could only include 24 students.

The students monitored the Friday speeches of Imams after training. The five issues discussed by Imams were marriage, inheritance, property, education and mobility. By the end, we had more than 300 reports.

These booklets were reviewed by Women In Successful Enterprises (WISE) advisors. After six months of reviewing the booklets, with contributions from Imams, consultants, students, WISE advisors and NECDO's director, they were in the final stage of printing. These were printed in the format of small hand books, for further reading and distribution.

During the last month (May 2010) we worked on a review of the reports, finding the crucial achievements of the project. Based on those results, we designed the second phase of the project for the next 12 months.

4. Project Goal & Objective:

4.1-Goals:

To mobilize and raise awareness of the community on women's rights from an Islamic perspective; to eliminate all violence against women; and to facilitate positive changes in the status of women by changing male-dominated attitudes.

4.2- Objectives:

- ⇒ To create a network among government bodies, civil society groups and Imams for reaching project goals, and gaining a formal letter of support from MORA.
- ⇒ To develop five booklets on five major women's right violation issues from an Islamic perspective, with the solid justification from the Quran and Sunnah.
- ⇒ To identify 20 Imams from Kabul to spread the message of the booklets verbally and freely distribute the book
- ⇒ Provide monitoring training for 20 youth from Kabul University from vulnerable groups, to monitor Imams' speeches and provide NECDO with reports, including support documents.
- ⇒ To establish contact between Imams and community organizations for the inclusion of Imams in changing community behavior.

5. Main findings of the pilot phase:

- In the initial two months, monitoring reports indicated that 70% of the audience did not accept women's rights issues, and showed little interest.
- The total number of monitoring reports gathered from the 20 mosques was 240. 98% of the reports had information regarding the marriage issue, 90% of the reports contained information about education, 85% of the reports had information about inheritance, 70% addressed property rights, and 35% mentioned women's political participation.
- We found that youth were facing major problems regarding marriage – the issue of marriage money, forced marriage for men and women, child marriage, exchange marriages, and other problems. The exchange of women for animals/materials was also mentioned frequently.
- The increase in the number of divorces, sexual rights & domestic violence were another concern.
- The issue of inheritance was a concern, and the audience shared stories about the violation of this right in their communities.
- The right to education had also been violated by the majority of communities.
- Domestic violence was considered un-Islamic by all Imams. The negative effect of violence on children was addressed, and it had significant effect on the audience.
- The issue of women's political participation was addressed directly by two Imams throughout the project and other Imams spoke on the topic indirectly.
- Some older mosque visitors raised questions regarding a woman's ability to select their life partners - their arguments were that women are uneducated and not socially active, and not able to make the right decision for their future.
- The Hijab was another issue raised by the majority, and they asked about the limitations on a Muslim woman to wear it. Many blamed the lack of observation of proper dress for women in public spaces for an increase in immorality.
- The target group of women wearing the Hijab was between ages 16-60, but the majority fell in 25-60.
- Zainab, daughter of the prophet, was introduced to the Shia audience as a political leader, which attracted attention.
- Audiences showed interest in education for girls, but had concerns about sexual harassment in public and education institutions.
- There was an increase in number of Namazi, ages 18-35, in the mosques.

6. Main problems of the pilot phase of the project:

- Some Imams were strict and connected all immorality with not wearing a Hijab.
- There was an increase of domestic violence cases in the community.
- The role of parents in marriage, especially the father, is very important – but paternal mentalities tend to be more restricted with past customs.

- There was a lack of acceptance about practices which were addressed by Imams as ‘not Islamic’. The reports show that people were reluctant to discuss this, as it was difficult to accept that certain customs were not actually Islamic.
- Some of the Imams were very successful in convincing people by providing very logical arguments. However, some Imams were weak when placed under pressure for receiving money from Westerners.
- Demand for the booklet was consistent throughout the reports, and it would have been better if it could have been finalized by end of the project’s first phase.
- There was a noticeable lack of confidence on behalf of the Imams, in openly talking about women’s rights issues.
- In almost 70% of prayer, people raised the question about why Imams had not shared these issues before. Many thought the Imams were only speaking on women’s rights because a Western organization was paying them for it.
- The issue of women’s political participation was barely addressed.
- The right to property was a new topic, and when monitors spoke to the audience, most replied that it was new to them that women can have property.
- Some Imams did not talk about women’s rights issues during the Friday prayers, to avoid ‘repetition’.
- Certain mosques were far away, and the transportation allowance was not enough. Some monitors on each Friday were not able to have lunch – after returning from the Friday prayer, dormitory lunch was closed and the money for transportation was only able to be used on a taxi.

7. Suggestion for next phase of the project activities:

- Overall, the pilot phase of the project faced obstacles, but it was very successful in raising awareness. We see vast room for the extension of such a project.
- There was a lack of acceptance by people in the initial two months. However, we clearly saw that the situation improved, with regular speeches every Friday. NECDO took a creative step by encouraging the monitors to raise some questions regarding women’s issues. The audience was encouraged to share their family issues in the mosque, which gave ideas to others.
- Booklets should contain information on other issues, such as the importance of a healthy family environment, the Hijab, training children, and the impact of domestic violence on people’s lives.
- Some of the Imams were very strong in communication skills. However, some of the Imams bowed under pressure from the audience. We believe it would be worth training Imams on the content of the booklets, and give them some additional presentation training before they begin talking about women’s issues.
- The project should be extended to the other provinces, especially those areas where women still are exchanged for animals and materials.
- Such a successful project should not be less than one year.
- There is a need for the involvement of women, to teach other women about their rights. This would be suitable for female graduates of Sharia Law.

- There is a need to provide chances for the students, as most come from other provinces, and have a lack of awareness about the topics and new developments in the area of women's rights.