Editorial

With 2012 coming to an end, SDC looks back on the achievements of its programmes and partners in the domains of livelihood and governance. The first article highlights some of the main results of both domains. As an important partner in strengthening civil society and promoting human rights, the Civil Society and Human Rights Network (CSHRN) points out the progress civil society made in 2012 but also mentions the challenges CSHRN and its member organizations had to tackle to implement their programmes.

Leading up to the International Human Rights Day on the 10th of December, Human Rights Week was organized by the Open Society Organization with support from SDC and other donors. The week provided a platform to discuss human rights and justice and underscored the interest and potential of young people in particular to engage in a dialogue on this subject.

The last article, on a young Afghan filmmaker who won the award for directing talent at the Winterthur International Short Film Festival in Switzerland, shows how small contributions can lead to major changes. His award-winning documentary was produced during an intensive training programme in film production conducted by Community Supported Film and supported by SDC in 2010.

We therefore thank our national and international partners for all their joint efforts in 2012 and look forward to continuing our fruitful collaboration in 2013.

Marianne Huber,
Director of Cooperation, SDC Afghanistan

Glimpse of SDC’s results in Afghanistan in 2012

For SDC, 2012 is noteworthy as it marks the 10th anniversary of its current engagement in Afghanistan. Furthermore, SDC’s Medium-Term Strategy for Afghanistan (2012-2014) started in January. As 2012 ends, we share some of the major results and highlights of SDC’s efforts, as well as those of one of its important partners, the Civil Society and Human Rights Network (CSHRN).

SDC Afghanistan’s major results in 2012

In its first domain of intervention - Resilience of Rural Livelihoods -, SDC supports the formal education system, local economic development and income generation activities, and water and land management. With this strategic intervention, SDC supported 11 additional government schools (now totaling 210 schools), which led to an improved learning environment for 11,000 additional students; improved teachers’ knowledge of their subjects and their teaching skills; and enabled district education departments to conduct capacity-building programmes on their own. Moreover, as a result of SDC’s contribution, over 6,000 households earned higher income from poultry, vegetable gardening, preserves, paid work in watersheds, subsistence agriculture and livestock products. The SDC-supported beekeeping cooperative, with its 167 members (47 women) in Rustaq, is financially autonomous, functions independently and has earned a total net income of US$57,000 (growing threefold in only two years). This cooperative model is now being replicated by the fruit cooperative, with 62 members ensuring diversified nutrition (vegetables) for their families. As a result of ongoing work in 12 watersheds (50 sq km areas) in two provinces, the communities now understand the impacts of disaster risk reduction and include watershed management in their own development plans... Continued on page 2

In the next pages ►►►

► 3rd Human Rights Week held in Kabul
► Afghan filmmaker wins award at Winterthur Short Film Festival
Glimpse of SDC’s results in Afghanistan… continued

Labor-intensive infrastructure measures led to a decline of up to 30% in male labor migration and a rise in income of about US$106 per family, which in turn contributed substantially to reducing the food gap in the winter.

The establishment of 51 community bakeries prevented 2,485 MT of shrubs from being cut, created 102 paid jobs (for males) and meant that 4,000 households now save US$62 each per month.

In its second domain of intervention - Good Governance and Human Rights -, SDC supports civil society, subnational institutional capacity building, and protection and promotion of the human rights of both duty-bearers and rights-holders. SDC contributed to closer coordination among civil society organisations (CSOs) before and after the Tokyo Conference. As a result of this process, CSOs became increasingly aware of their role as watchdogs in charge of monitoring the government. The capacity of subnational government offices and ministries was further built up and led to an improved strategic organisation of certain provinces and districts and better service delivery of selected municipalities. In human rights, SDC supported the dialogue on human rights and Islam by helping to establish the respective network. In addition, people became increasingly aware of human rights as a result of the continuous efforts of SDC’s partners and many other civil society organisations. As for duty-bearers, SDC continued its support of the Human Rights Support Unit, which developed the national monitoring framework to implement the recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review.

Civil Society and Human Rights Network (CSHRN)
The Civil Society and Human Rights Network (CSHRN) is an important partner of SDC in the field of civil society empowerment and human rights promotion. We interviewed Mr. Malek Sitez, an active member of civil society in Afghanistan and Senior Advisor for CSHRN, on civil society’s major achievements in 2012 and CSHRN’s role and contribution to these achievements.

Malek Sitez considers the attendance of civil society representatives at the Bonn II and Tokyo conferences in late 2011 and 2012 as a major achievement for civil society. Highlighting the role CSHRN played at these conferences, Malek Sitez says: “The CSHRN submitted a plan for a just peace at the Bonn II Conference, and its most important provisions were adopted.” At the Tokyo Conference, “the CSHRN member organizations presented their joint plans to international organizations. The main elements and provisions of this plan were discussed by the participants and adopted in the decisions of the Tokyo Conference, as well as in the action plans of the Government.”

As for legal reforms, one of CSHRN’s important achievements was the drafting of the Law on Access to Information. Malek Sitez emphasizes: “This law plays a significant role in localizing and institutionalizing democracy in Afghanistan and it is one of the important foundations of civil rights in the country.” The first draft of the law was discussed in national debates and then sent to the Ministry of Justice where its approval is still pending.

In 2012, the CSHRN also significantly contributed to the national dialogue on strengthening the role of women in the peace-building process. “The dialogue,” Malek Sitez explains, “started in the provinces, gathered the Afghan people’s viewpoints about peace, especially those of women, and shared useful suggestions and recommendations with the government and the international community as a result of a national conference.” Respect for the role of women in the peace process underscores the most important part of this dialogue. On the basis of recommendations made by the national conference, a joint action plan was drawn up by the High Peace Council (HPC) and the CSHRN.

Despite these achievements, 2012 was a difficult year for civil society in the country. The major challenge, according to Malek Sitez, was that anti-government elements were undermining civil society values, which “led to difficulties in the implementation of civil society activities, especially in the provinces.” Another challenge, Malek Sitez continues, “was lack of commitment by the Government of Afghanistan to the implementation of international human rights laws,” which made it “difficult for human rights programmes such as transitional justice to gain ground.” Furthermore, “disregard for and lack of fair political programs aimed at enforcing international humanitarian law were the main reasons that more and more civilians became victims of war casualties in Afghanistan, especially children, women and the elderly.”

Against the background of these challenges, Malek Sitez sees CSHRN’s role for the future clearly: “In 2013 and 2014, CSHRN will focus its activities on the active participation and role of civil society in fostering the values of peace and establishing a strategy and manuals on humanitarian laws.” He adds: “CSHRN will make efforts to play an important role in empowering citizens, women in particular, to participate in politics and democratic processes, especially for the upcoming elections. In this area, useful programs could be initiated such as elections observations or conducting dialogue on the importance of elections and the system’s legitimacy.”
The 3rd edition of Human Rights Week was held at the Institute of France in Afghanistan from December 8 to 11, 2012. It offered an extraordinary program of events, including a photo exhibition, film screenings, poetry readings, a theatre performance, a multimedia workshop for journalists, civil society representatives and human rights activists, and four roundtables on the promotion and protection of human rights in Afghanistan.

“The main goal of this year's human rights week events, but most importantly the roundtables, is to continue with what we started three years ago, to raise awareness about the human rights situation in Afghanistan, but also to keep strengthening the promotion of human rights values through art and cultural programs, as well as to build the capacity of human rights activists in the country,” said Zahra Mobtaker, Director and Co-founder of Open Society Organization.

She added that “Human Rights Week in Afghanistan is one of the first and only events in the region that gathers Afghan and international human rights activists working together for the promotion of human rights and using multimedia and other tools to better address and promote human rights issues. Like every year, Human Rights Week is a great opportunity to celebrate human rights, highlight specific issues affecting our citizens, and advocate the full enjoyment of all human rights by everyone, everywhere.”

Assessment of the human rights situation in the past 10 years, access to justice, child rights and education, and protection of human rights after 2014 were the four topics discussed at the roundtable panels.

The speakers of the roundtables included national and international human rights experts and activists, representatives of the government, members of parliament, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, national and international NGOs, UN agencies, civil society members and journalists.

At the closing ceremony of Human Rights Week, Pia Lignell, SDC Deputy Director of Cooperation in Afghanistan, said, “I consider the last four days as an encouragement to continue in a joint effort to work towards the protection and promotion of human rights. Switzerland has been working in the field of human rights for ten years. In our work we support both the duty bearers/government and the rights holders/citizens with the aim to increase the capacity of the government to protect the rights of the citizens and to be held accountable for their obligations, and to increase the public's understanding and knowledge of their rights so that they can defend them.”

Human Rights Week was organized by the Open Society Organization and supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in Afghanistan, the Royal Norwegian Embassy, the French Embassy, the European Union and the Institute of France in Afghanistan.
Sayed Qasem Hosaini, a young Afghan filmmaker, won the promotional award for directing talent for his film Death to the Camera at the 16th Winterthur International Short Film Festival in Switzerland in November 2012.

“The Jury of the festival gave the prize, worth 10,000 Swiss francs (US$11,000) to this documentary because it provides men and women from the margins of society with a stage to raise their voices and reflect upon injustice and manipulation. The magnetism of the documentary medium is powerfully present in this film,” reads the website of the film festival.

The film Death to the Camera was selected from more than 3,800 submissions and was one of only 35 films taking part in the International Competition of the film festival in Switzerland.

The International Short Film Festival Winterthur is Switzerland's largest short film festival. The festival takes place every year in November. The festival is supported by the Department for Culture of the Swiss Federation and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

Death to the Camera is one of ten films from the 'The Fruit of Our Labor' (Afghan Perspectives in Film), which is a collection of short documentaries produced by Community Supported Film (CSF), USA, and supported by SDC in Afghanistan. Community Supported Film provided intensive five-week training in documentary production for 10 young Afghans in the fall of 2010. After three weeks of in-depth exercises, each student developed and produced a character-driven short documentary, hence contributing to the collection, 'The Fruit of Our Labor.' These films provide a fresh perspective on the needs and discussions of Afghans beyond the media's relentless battlefront coverage. The prize won at Winterthur by Sayed Qasem Hosaini is indeed one of the fruits of this project's labor and a great success.

After growing up in Sari Pul and Balk provinces, Sayed Qasem Hosaini earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Kabul, in the Department of Cinema and Fine Arts, in 2011. Prior to his Winterthur prize film, he had produced a short video report on carpet making and served as a sports reporter for a community newspaper. He now works as a producer/script writer for Tolo Television in Kabul.

SDC will continue its support of Afghan youth. It believes they are the driving force behind change in their country. Reaching such a broad audience is a major achievement not only for the director Sayed Qasem Hosaini, but also for the entire project.