The Civil Society and Human Rights Network (CSHRN), one of the major implementing partners of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), launched a campaign against domestic violence on December 14, 2009, in Herat.

Herat is one of the provinces with widespread family-related violence. “There is domestic violence in many parts of the country. The reason why Herat is perceived to have more cases of family-related violence is women’s awareness about their rights, which is in itself an achievement. Other provinces may have even more cases but they are not reported,” said Mr. Abdul Qadir Rahimi, the Regional Program Manager of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) in Herat.

At the start of the campaign, CSHRN also launched a handbook on domestic violence shared with several civil society players, the police force, and the regional AIHRC office in Herat; it was written by four authors from Herat and published by CSHRN. It was viewed as a sound tool for the campaign against domestic violence. According to Mr. Malek Sitez, CSHRN Program Manager, the campaign in Herat will be used as an important model for CSHRN programs aimed at reducing domestic violence in other parts of the country.

The campaign will start in January 2010 and will last for a year. Campaign activities are planned in four stages.

First stage: CSHRN Regional Office in Herat will conduct a survey and establish a baseline to learn about the current status of domestic violence in this province. During this stage CSHRN will also provide training and hold workshops for civil society organizations, government entities in Herat, the human rights section of the police force, women’s organizations, and media agencies, which will be facilitated by the authors of the handbook.

Second stage: Awareness-raising campaign through the media, influential leaders, clerics and mullahs, school teachers and civil society organizations. This stage also includes debates with mullahs so they can be well informed about domestic violence and can raise awareness through the mosques.

Third stage: Advocacy with stakeholders. All those trained in the first and second stages, especially influential leaders, mullahs and civil society organizations, would be asked to work jointly with CSHRN on advocacy activities.

Fourth stage: A survey will be conducted to compare the baseline survey and the lessons learnt from the campaign to plan the next steps.

The campaign against domestic violence in Herat is part of SDC support to CSHRN since 2005. The third phase of this contribution started in January 2009 and shall end in December 2011.
Civic education requires time and coordinated action

On the 17th and 18th of November 2009, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) held a consultative workshop on civic education in Kabul. The participants of the workshop included representatives of donors, national and international civil society organizations, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Information and Culture, the Ministry of Finance, and two international consultants conducting an assessment of the current status of civic education and its potential for the future.

The two-day workshop was aimed at sharing results and recommendations stemming from recent civic education exercises, raising awareness about overall efforts to promote civic education, and identifying the main elements to be considered for the next coordinated strategy, focusing on their feasibility. Electoral processes have often been seen as the primary instrument to promote civic education, but recent presidential and provincial council elections have clearly demonstrated the limits of systematically linking civic education with elections. These democratic processes require more time and a coordinated long-term strategy to enable the Afghan people to better understand what it means to be a citizen, to spearhead the rights and obligations that exercising citizenship entails, and to be more effective in calling upon their duty bearers to be accountable.

Since last year, SDC has been paying particular attention to civic education strategies and activities. In line with its past efforts and commitment to its longstanding tradition of listening to citizens, SDC decided to organize this workshop in order to make clear and coordinated progress in this regard, as well as to share and build on what has been learned so far.

To identify the main elements for the next coordinated strategy, the following themes were discussed:

1) ensuring a long-term civic education strategy and inclusion of civic education into the Afghan formal education system; 2) providing technical assistance and an effective funding mechanism; 3) targeting women and youth; 4) ensuring ownership of Afghan civil society organizations; and 5) strengthening project implementation, coordination and cooperation.

At the end of the workshop, the participants reaffirmed their willingness to stand together on this very important issue of civic education and agreed on feasible elements and recommendations for the next coordinated strategy. The main recommendations agreed upon are indicated below:

- Future support to civic education should be over the long term and based on a comprehensive strategy extending beyond face-to-face voter education, with a special focus on nation-building and basic rights and responsibilities.
- Ensure comprehensive donor coordination and collaboration for long-term support.
- Establish an Afghan institution to fund and build up the capacity of partner organizations, thus contributing to a culture of accountability.
- Ensure that programming and messaging are defined by civil society itself.
- Civic education activities need to be implemented in various ways, including mobile theater and cinema, radio, forums, public debates, workshops, etc.
- Use of print and broadcast media.
- Integrate civic education messages and topics into Afghanistan’s formal education system by developing the curriculum and building up the capacity of Afghan educators to enhance the political and civic knowledge and awareness of students.

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About us:
The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) is Switzerland’s international cooperation agency within the Swiss Foreign Ministry. The Government of Switzerland established the Swiss Cooperation Office Afghanistan in 2002 with a view of supporting the processes of political stabilization and reconstruction of the war torn country. Today, the Swiss Cooperation Office Afghanistan is running and supervising a broad development and humanitarian program.