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Public Awareness Has Grown in Balkh About the Monitoring of Construction Projects



People discuss problems identified in construction project

By Sayed Mukhtar Ahmadi

Integrity Watch Provincial coordinator Balkh

The construction of Ostad Mazari school in Balkh has been undertaken by Willio Club company funded by Indian government with the budget of more than \$195000. The construction aims to be concluded at the end of 2016. This initiative has been welcome by the local community and has been recognized as an effective move to address the longstanding problems in education sector in the related neighborhood.

During the first phase of the construction project, local communities were not aware of the role they could play in monitoring process or their right to have access to the information related to the project. When the concept of “monitoring” was put forward by IWA provincial staff to the construction company and engineer department of ministry of education, it cre-

ated much surprise and some even call it frivolous. IWA provincial staff contacted community leaders and discussed “monitoring” and its impact on improving the quality of construction projects. Following these meetings, community leaders showed interest to get involved in monitoring process and selected two local monitors from their own community who could do monitoring on voluntary basis.

Next, some community leaders representing the community visited the construction site of Ostaz Mazari school and got engaged in a conversation with the construction company. They realized that the construction process deals with many shortcomings such as numerous holes in the foundation of the building that needed to be filled out with proper material. After discussing this issue with construction company, community and the head of Education de-

partment, the company and the head of education department promised to address this issue and take practical steps to resolve it.

Integrity Watch’s Community Based Monitoring-infrastructure program promotes social accountability through community mobilization and social audits. The program empowers communities to monitor infrastructure projects that are implemented in their area. The aim of this program is to empower citizens in holding authorities and aid entities accountable and to create active and responsible citizenship by decreasing the gap between the state, aid actors and the civil society. Communities engaged in local monitoring become more autonomous in solving their problems through continued dialogue as well as monitoring and reduce their reliance on external actors or parallel structures.

Women at front of Fighting Corruption

By Kowsar Gowhari

Head of Advocacy and program support at Integrity Watch

Few years ago, Integrity Watch Afghanistan launched a program in some of the provinces in Afghanistan where people were mobilized and educated to get involved in monitoring of several sectors that were ranked, in several surveys conducted by IWA and other institutions, as the most corrupt institutions in Afghanistan. In such monitoring campaigns, women in particular have played a central role.

The majority of these women have experienced direct effect of the corruption in their personal life several times and struggled to find solutions for this dire problem. For instance, during their job hunt, all of them were asked to pay bribe or they were asked if they are related to anybody influential at the work place. Nassima, a local monitor in CBM-T program talks about her sister's experience in job application. In her continues efforts to find a position, she was asked to pay 20000 Afs or more in bribe. In such circumstances, many of them thought about leaving Afghanistan and immigrating elsewhere. Some others completely gave up the idea of working and having a job. Some however, explored ways to fight this situation.

At the beginning, most of these supervisor women were doubtful if their monitoring activities could have any influence on government authorities to make them accountable to citizens. The persistence and creativity of these women together with the support they received from families and office of Integrity Watch of Afghanistan however changed this doubt to belief.

Lameaa, a local monitor in IWA community based monitoring of school program speaks about her problems at the beginning of her monitoring activities. Despite having family support, people of the community were not so easy on participation of women in social activities. Mojgan, another local monitor of IWA community based monitoring of school program was able to secure permission from her father to participate in monitoring of a school that was located in her neighborhood. Her father however, initially prevented her from going to IWA provincial office to submit her monitoring report. Any traffic outside home that was not recognized as "absolutely necessary" was forbidden for these young women. To resolve this issue, Lameaa made a decision to take her young sister or brother to meetings to mitigate this situation. Nasira, the local monitor of community based monitoring of trials program turned to the person who had told her the appropriate place a woman should be "the home" and said: "prophet Mohammad did trading with his wife, why is that we are not allowed to do what Khadija (prophet Mohammad's wife) did?"

Tawana, the local monitor of community based



Photo: Mukhtar Ahmadi

Nasima, Sadaf and Tawana Local monitors of Community based monitoring of Trials

monitoring of trials program who is the graduate of sharia studies had observed numerous times that the judges did not wear official uniform during the court session, the accused and his/her defense attorney were not given a chance to state their argument and the prosecutor was frequently absent in the court session.

Lameaa and Nazeera, local monitors of community based monitoring of schools program also faced the challenge of "Ghost Teacher", where teachers did not show up at school but were paid their full salaries each month. Nazeera reported this issue to the authorities in ministry of education. This incidence put Nazeera in a strange position, confronting school authorities. She even received threats from some people. Nazeera says what saved her from complete despair was the support her husband provided for her.

In community based monitoring of trial, due to the principal on independence of judiciary, the monitoring IWA local monitors is limited to the procedural safeguards so they do not go to the substance. According to Tawana, Sadaf and Nassima, the local monitors, at the beginning, their role was not recognized and taken seriously. Nowadays however, at the end of many of the court sessions they are asked if they are happy with the way the court session was handled. While at the beginning the court sessions were held at office of judges, now because of the persistent follow up of IWA local monitors, these sessions are held in the official court room. Creating such type of dialogue

between local monitors and court officials has been a big achievement in the process of improving the quality of the judiciary in Afghanistan.

All these women believe that the participation of women at monitoring is vital to eradicate corruption at Afghanistan. Nassima, the local monitor in community based monitoring of trial program says that she was so persistent in her monitoring activities even in hot days of summer and month of Ramazan. Her determination always has surprised court authorities. What even more surprised the court authorities was the volunteer nature of their monitoring. When most people realized that the local monitors are ordinary people and did not receive any compensation for their monitoring, their surprise turned to admiration and appreciation.

Achieving transparency and accountability in Afghanistan is a challenging issue that requires participation of all people from all layers of the society. Integrity Watch Afghanistan therefore, actively endeavors to mobilize all social groups in this struggle.

Local Monitors Strive for Rule of Law in Trial of a High Profile Murder Case in Nangarhar

By Hanif Hashimi

Integrity Watch provincial coordinator Nangarhar

Integrity Watch Community based monitoring of trials aims to educate local people and get them involved in monitoring of open court sessions.

A while ago, following an inheritance and land dispute, a criminal incident occurred in Bahsood district of Nangarhar province, in which eight people including several children and women were murdered. After primary investigation, the case was assigned to the primary court of Bahsood district. From the early stage of this case, IWA Local monitors insisted on holding a public trial for the accused to assure the consideration of rule of law in the process of trial and to guarantee that the accused would receive penalty if he is convicted. Due to security considerations during past few years, the court authorities in Nangarhar province showed little interest to hold public sessions. Continuous efforts of local monitors and the staff of Integrity Watch Afghanistan however resulted on holding the trial session openly at primary court of Bahsood district of Nangarhar Province and local monitors of Integrity Watch Afghanistan Mr. Nazir Ahmad and Mr. Shabir Ahmad participated to observe the trial.

The case which was also observed by delegations from Attorney General Office, has officially started by the statements of judicial committee and the assigned prosecutor Mr. Abdul-Qadeer Haidari read the indictment (Accusation Statement). The defense attorney of the accused defended his



Photo: Haneef Hashimi

The accused in high profile murder case in Nangarhar

client and pressed on his innocence. Finally, the hearing session ended up with the public announcement of the verdict against the accused. During the court process, local monitors of the Integrity Watch Afghanistan closely cooperated with court authorities in order to make sure the rights of the accused were upheld and both the accused and his defense attorney are given proper opportunity to state their arguments. In return, the court authorities continued their support and cooperation with IWA local monitors.

Community based monitoring of trials is one of the IWA community based monitoring programs that has been implemented in Nangarhar province since 2014. One of the purposes of the program is to address communities' concern about judicial processes and build up trust between Afghan judiciary and citizens.

Through this program, local monitors regularly participate in open judicial sessions and report irregularities to IWA and subsequently to the court authorities. Since the inception of the program in Nangarhar province, community awareness about their rights in trial sessions have considerably increased and IWA local monitors have received continuous support and appreciation from their own communities.

Creativity and Persistence of IWA Local Monitors Resolved Problems in a School in Herat

By Nawid Raai

Integrity Watch Local Monitor Herat

Olya high school at Enjil district of Herat was only a quadrangle, did not have doors, desks and chairs and the students of only one class had access to desks and chairs. In addition, the school did not have library and its facade was extremely old and in serious need of immediate renovation. These problems had left a destructive impact on students and had wiped away any incentive in them to continue their studies.

These problems were identified by Integrity Watch provincial staff and local monitors in collaboration with the school authorities. IWA staff and local monitors in addition to community elders and school authorities attended several meeting to discuss the problems and their solutions with the related authorities, yet the only response they received from the ministry of education was: "We do not have budget line for these problems." They also met with W.F.P and Chise.V and other institutions to find solution for school's problems.

Following the meetings, all the participants in the said meetings decided to use the money the village had gath-



Nawin Olya high school before and after renovation

ered from community members to purchase two metal doors plus a gate costing around 19000Af and they repaired the doors by the assistance of local people. Chais. V NGO undertook the expense of the new paint for the school and prepared 110 desks and chairs, so 330 students benefited from this assistance. In addition, few book shelves were donated to the school library by Chais.V NGO and two computers and two desks were provided by Abdulqadir Asimi, director of W.F.P to Olya high school.

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