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UNDP Afghanistan Newsletter

Fawzia Koofi: Trailblazer

SEAL: Life as a single mother in Afghanistan is not easy but for Fawzia Koofi, it's only one of the many experiences in her life that have given her the strength and determination to become an MP.

"My husband passed away, that's why I am alone. My father was killed during the first years of the revolution. I learned a lot during my personal life, which is why I became very strong," says Fawzia from her shiny new office in the Secretariat. "I was a victim of the war and I learned a lot from my personal life. I am alone—being a young woman alone in Afghanistan is not easy, and being an MP and Second Deputy Chairwoman of parliament is hard, but I want to demonstrate to the world and to Afghanistan that women have the capacity to do the job."

shan who was previously a Child Protection Officer with UNICEF. Fawzia describes the decision to leave her job and run for parliament as an 'accident'. "It all happened all of a sudden... you don't expect these things in



Fawzia Koofi: Second Deputy Chairwoman of the Wolesi Jirga (the lower house)

many of SEAL's activities but most notably, was also selected to attend the Regional Leadership Course for Young Leaders in Governance, held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in late November. Fawzia says the course certainly

helped empower her and increase her capacity to lead, which in turn helped her be voted as the Second Deputy Chairwoman. One of the most significant achievements of the leadership training course was sharing experiences with other young women from developing countries. "Often you learn from other participants. We had other leaders from other under-developed post-conflict countries as well as democratic countries, so we learnt from their experiences," she says. The Afghan experience, however, is so unique

If anyone is in doubt about the progress in gender equity in Afghanistan, they need only to speak to Fawzia to realize that anything is possible and that progress is indeed being made.

At 30 years old, not only is Fawzia an MP, but she was also recently voted as Second Deputy Chairwoman of the Wolesi Jirga. This is a momentous achievement for a woman from Badak-

Afghanistan," she laughs, quite bemused at how far she has come in such a short time.

UNDP has been supporting the establishment of parliament through its SEAL project; from building the secretariat, supplying equipment for the National Assembly, and installing IT systems, to training civil servants and new members of parliament. Fawzia participated in

that Fawzia felt she was breaking new ground. "We have such young women MPS in Afghanistan. In other countries it's the older women. The average woman in our parliament is between 25-35."

It was conspicuously noticeable on December 19th at the inauguration of parliament, that the majority of women in parliament were incredibly young; a phe-

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“We have such young women MPS in Afghanistan. In other countries it’s the older women. The average woman in our parliament is between 25-35.”

nomena that represents the social shift in Afghan society. “I think it’s because [young women] were the victims. They were prevented from education and they lost their freedom and now that they have the opportunity to express themselves and they feel that being a victim they are now strong,” says Fawzia. “The younger generation are the ones who want change. Secondly, during the war they had the opportunity to go out of the country to get skills—they have good education from Pakistan and Iran and they have skills.”

In her new position, Fawzia emphasizes that whilst women and gender are on her agenda, they

are not the highest priority. Fawzia is focused on the big picture which means addressing the circumstances that cause inequality such as lack of employment, education, policy or culture. “Although it is a concern and a challenge to bring equity to women, it has to go together with men’s development,” she says. “There has to be a balance.”

“Women are on my agenda, but I don’t want to run too fast and only talk about women and gender. What issues are preventing gender equity? Is it the law? Is it culture? What is it that stops bringing women forward? If it’s educating men or getting men employed so they stop being violent at home then let’s do that. If you want to have a healthy father that can support the family and take care of the family then you need to have a service delivery that will support that father.”

Fawzia comes across as a woman of immense strength who possesses a gritted determination to help her country regardless of the personal cost. She says that days of working at UNICEF and being comfortable behind a computer, are over. She now must host innumerable guests on a regular basis from her small apartment, whilst trying to raise her children alone. “I don’t have a normal life like before,” she says. Midnight knocks on the door are frequent, but when she answers, no one is there. But, forever an optimist, Fawzia believes that any attack or intimidation towards her is an attack on democracy and the new political system, not her personally.

Politics is new for Fawzia, who entered the foray with high ideals on what she could achieve and how she could change things. “Politics for me is a game,” she laughs. “I am very

new in politics, and coming into parliament I really didn’t think about being a politician, I just wanted to help achieve things.” Learning the ropes of parliament requires a lot more cunning than she expected, in addition to the intellectual challenges of policy reform. Despite the challenges however, Fawzia insists that she just wants to be an agent of change, along with the many other women who are making strides in their field of work throughout the country.

However, those strides are precariously fragile and Fawzia is very mindful of nursing democracy like a baby; encouraging it to grow through care and attention. “With the current situation I am very hopeful for the conditions for women in Afghanistan. Because of the enthusiasm, they all want to be agents of change, not just for themselves but for their whole communities, so I have lots of hope for the future,” says Fawzia. “But if the international community says ‘you have a parliament now’ and then leaves, then we will return to instability. Democracy is a baby and we need to pamper it and help it grow. If democracy dies, things will be even worse for women than they were before.”

In reference to where she sees herself in 20 years and whether being president is on the cards, Fawzia demonstrates that she is already adept at the craftiness of political rhetoric. “Let’s see...” she says. “This is a game”.

Achievements of UNDP’s SEAL project:

1. Parliament Support Taskforce established
2. Parliament Support Working Group established and coordinating all parliament support activities
3. Recruitment of SEAL Project Management Team
4. Intensive 4 week training of 123 newly recruited staff completed (11 June - 6 July 2005)
5. Rules of Procedures drafted and under review
6. Staff Regulations drafted and under review
7. Security Regulations drafted and under review
8. Needs of the Members of the National Assembly being assessed
9. Computer training commenced on 16 July
10. English training by the British Council for the staffers completed
11. Planned 2005 study tour and attachment programmes for 152 Parliamentary staffers completed
12. National Seminar on Parliamentary Process and Best Practices for the Afghan National Assembly Secretariat (23-25 October) completed
13. Three houses rented, furnished and equipped for secretariat staff to be used as temporary office
14. Provision of equipment (e.g. vehicles, computers, mobiles, etc.) for the National Assembly
13. Information communication technology including LAN, VSAT, telecommunication, and voice system installed at the newly refurbished National Assembly building.

Seal project is supported by EC (European Commission)

Deh Sabz Protection Wall



Pic above: young girls wash dishes in the spring; top right, colourful wish cloths are placed on a branch in hope of maintaining the spring's abundance; middle, the retaining wall structure; bottom, a villager talks about the microhydro unit.

NABDP: It's one of those rare moments of natural beauty; contrasted against Kabul's arid brown dust, a clear blue spring bubbles to the surface, creating what can only be described as an "oasis". Located on the outskirts of Kabul, the village of Deh Sabz relies on the spring for its livelihood and income; it irrigates 30,000msq of land per 24 hours, which in turn produces some of the sweetest and juiciest grapes on the market.

However, what is beautiful can also be equally ugly during flood season when flash floods destroy houses and carry river bed materials downstream causing blockages and erosion. However, thanks to NABDP, a protection wall has been built which now protects 1420 families from six villages.

"We have saved water, there is no more flooding and the water is clean" says one villager as he jumps over rocks in the stream

before leaping onto the roof of a microhydro unit. The spring serves eight microhydro units which in turn provide electricity for 300 families. During flood season, not only were some houses destroyed, but the blockages caused by debris halted the irrigation waters for farming and the microhydro units from producing electricity.

The new retaining wall has benefited the whole village: farmers have their fields irrigated, the electricity supply is reliable, and women have reliable access to clean water for cooking and cleaning.

When UNDP visited the village, the women confirmed that they had been one of driving forces behind having the wall built. The women's shura meets once a week to discuss the issues facing the villages—they then consult in their families, sharing views and opinions from the women's and men's shuras, before reconvening to make

decisions.

This decision-making system seems to suit the women well. Collectively, they have decided that the next project they want to embark upon is the construction of a clinic. A week prior to the UNDP visit, a woman died from pregnancy-related causes; there are no midwives in the village and no access to the city. The next priority is a school, particularly for the girls who cannot walk the one hour trip to the nearest school — many boys don't even embark on the journey.

The new wall in Deh Sabz is one of NABDP's many projects that are contributing to the physical rehabilitation of Afghanistan.

Qali Chaman Yaka Tooth Road



August to October last year, NABDP helped rehabilitate the Qali Chaman Yaka Tooth Road; previously in such a bad condition that even walking on foot was treacherous. In winter, the deep mud and uneven surface isolated the village from access to goods and services whilst vehicles were regularly stuck for long periods of time.

Through community participation, the villages prioritized the road rehabilitation and submitted a request to MRRD as a group decision. The project activities included gravelling, compaction and digging the side ditches of the 800-metre road and construction of three culverts.

Through their own initiative, the community contributed to the work by lining the side ditches with stone masonry; paid for by

each family who contributed 500Afs (USD\$10). In total, 29,000Afs were collected from the community.

When UNDP visited the village in December, the locals expressed their satisfaction with the project, adding that surrounding villages now used Qali Chaman as a transit route because it is the best road in the area. The elders also added that the women are happy because they have better access to hospitals.

Next on the village's agenda is water and sanitation. The elders understand that development is a step at a time and believe that progress so far is "good and significant." They also wait for the day that their daughters are educated which is evidence that in-roads are being made in more ways than one.



NABDP: As the snow falls and Afghan streets fluctuate between sodden mud and slippery ice, there is one village very thankful for NABDP's support to the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. From

Pic top: the new Qali Chaman Yaka Tooth Road. Pic left: village elders discuss their needs with UNDP representatives.

Housing rehabilitation: good and bad



A village elder stands outside a window frame supplied through the recovery programme.

NABDP: What was once referred to as the Orchard of Kabul, became a site of destruction and devastation through the war years. The Shomali plains, a picturesque valley just outside Kabul, had once been a peaceful fertile valley. Today, however, it is struggling to recover from the war when entire villages were razed to the ground.

NABDP, with MRRD, implemented a recovery programme in the Mir Bacha Kot, Shakadara and Qarabagh districts of the Shomali Plains in September 2002 where vulnerable families were assisted in rebuilding their homes. Community shuras identified widow-headed families and other vulnerable households to qualify for assistance.

Selected families were entitled to a kit of material of its choice worth USD\$350. Most of the 3300 families chose to purchase roofing beams, doors and windows, and then undertook the reconstruction of their houses by themselves with the help of their neighbours. Of the 3300 recipients, 642 were widow-headed families.

Most of the local villagers escaped to Pakistan during the war and faced the challenge of returning to their houses and picking up the pieces of their lives, both physically and mentally. Getting their land back was the first step in recovery, however rebuilding their houses was the next hurdle. Many families had no male members and had

to rely on neighbours to help with construction.

Local villagers say that water and sanitation is still a priority, but that life is certainly getting better. This is reflected in the UNDP Omnibus Survey which was conducted at the end of 2005, in which 77% of Afghan respondents believe the country is headed in the right direction compared to only 64% a year ago. However, in housing and rehabilitation, 27% of respondents thought the UN system had not performed well enough in housing reconstruction. This statistic is to be addressed by the UN system as well as UNDP and NABDP as it considers its way forward in 2006.

ANBP celebrates successes

ANBP: The last month of 2006 was a remarkable period to be celebrated by all involved in the Afghanistan New Beginnings Programme (ANBP) as it paved the way for scores of more people to start a new life, away from guns and conflict, towards peace and prosperity.

First it was the turn of field commanders: 24 of them adorned their choice for a new life with well-deserved documentation on December 8, 2005 when they received their diplomas at the end of a month-long Business Management Training Course in Kabul.

From trigger to cash register....

The senior commanders, thanks to their newly acquired business skills through this programme, will now use their index fingers more on the buttons of calculators and cash registers than on triggers.

It was the fourth round of graduations under the Commanders' Incentive Package scheme under Afghanistan New Beginnings Programme (ANBP) of the UNDP. The latest graduation brings the number of senior field commander turned business managers to 74.

The overall goal of the ANBP is to encourage and support fighters of the last three decades to shed their guns and rifles to take up various tools to earn their livelihoods through peaceful means. The programme has already made great headway in empowering thousands of war

veterans to take up new jobs or to start their small businesses, be it in agriculture or in trade.

But convincing the field commanders proved to be much more difficult than to persuade the regulars and more assistance was needed to accomplish the task, assistance that the Japanese government generously donated to make it happen: A US\$5m scheme is currently being implemented by ANBP specifically to address the



sustainable livelihood issues of around 550 field commanders. Half of the funds are being used to support the commanders by payment of monthly "incentives" ranging from \$350 to 600 and getting them involved in various vocational training programmes like the business management scheme. The other half is being used to equip selected commanders with new vocational skills including by sending them abroad to observe and learn from the experiences in the countries they visit.

ANBP officials say they expect to contribute more business leaders to the thriving Afghan private sector by conducting many more business training courses. They say they hope to

graduate as many as 300 field commanders from such business courses in the next few years.

....and from trenches to classrooms

Later, on December 28, in a ceremony at the Teacher Training Institute of Ministry of Education, 151 former officers and soldiers, having opted for the education package from among the alternatives offered by the ANBP, graduated as teachers,

bringing the total number of fighter-turned instructors to 378.

The ceremony was attended by officials of Ministry of Education, Head of the Teacher Training Center Mr. Ashrafee, trainers, trainees, officials from Afghanistan's New

Beginning Programme (ANBP) and journalists.

Speeches were made by the Director of the Training Center and officials from ANBP, and the certificates were awarded to graduates.

ANBP staff express satisfaction with the outcome of the training programmes and say they feel themselves more enthusiastic to keep up the training schedules as they witness the transformation of former fighters to productive individuals.

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**A knowledge
organisation**

An image of Afghanistan



Deh Salah of Andarab, a district of Baghain province, by Mohammed Nasser

Do you have an image of Afghanistan you'd like to submit? All UNDP staff members are invited to send in high resolution images that show how they see Afghanistan. Please email to emma.sutcliffe@undp.org. Files not to exceed 3MB.

Non-profit sector experience brought to Intaglio

Shabnam Mallick, UNDP Programme Officer on Gender and Disability, was among the key speakers of Intaglio last month, an annual event organized by Calcutta's prestigious Indian Institute of Management.

The topic of this year's event, which took place on Dec. 23, was the challenges of leadership changes in a changing world. And coming from

the non-profit sector, Shabnam was a in a unique position among her fellow panelists, most of them women, from the business world, to raise the issue of gender challenges in leadership.

In her speech, Shabnam touched particularly upon the hardships facing women executives in the non-profit sector, who "need to earn their author-

ity" as opposed to women business executives.

She also emphasized that women in the leadership positions of the non-profit sector needed to think of wider repercussions in decision-making as compared to their peers in the commercial/business sector.

