



Every Voice Counts (EVC) Program

Second National Advocacy Conference

Position Paper

OVERVIEW OF SITUATION:

For decades Afghan rural women and girls have been deprived of proper access to education and health services. Moreover, they have also been denied of an equal opportunity to participate in decision making processes and public service accessibility. In addition to this, their roles have been limited to households' activities rather than participating actively in community development activities. This is despite the commitment that the Afghan Government has made for women's empowerment in different aspects. The Every Voice Counts (EVC) program also functions within the government framework to contribute in bringing changes toward women's and girls' statuses while empowering and supporting their inclusion in decision making processes that take place around them. Fortunately, there have been some positive changes¹ observed in the EVC program's target areas specifically in the attitude and responsiveness of local government officials towards women and girls education and health rights and needs. Furthermore communities' perception of women participation in the public decision making process has been changed positively at the local level. However, despite these achievements, barriers that limit women participation in service accessibility and decision making processes, such as: harmful practices, lack of awareness on women rights and basic needs from Islamic perspective, poverty, limited job opportunities, and illiteracy and negative perception, still exist.

Furthermore, needs for improvement in education and health services in the locations where the EVC program is operating continue to persist. This includes: inadequate financial resource and asset allocation for clinics and schools at the community level, centralized system of government and decision making hierarchy by local departments and directorates, and absence of mechanisms for information sharing between communities and authorities on communities' basic needs. Moreover, women's participation in community-based entities particularly in Community Development Committee (CDC) structures is limited and not significantly productive due to the fragile setting and rigid perceptions.

CARE's implementing partners, namely Afghan Women Resource Center-AWRC, Women and Children Legal Research Foundation-WCLRF and Human Rights, Research and Advocacy Consortium-HRRAC have been leading and applying social accountability tools (Community Score Card and Social Audit) in eighty

¹ EVC Midterm Evaluation report

targeted communities in four provinces namely Balkh, Khost, Parwan and Kabul. The main aims of using a social accountability approach are to identify women's and girls' needs, to make improvements of accessibility to education and health services and to increase their participation in decision making process. These aims can be achieved by promoting mutual relations, accountability and accumulation of community trust towards local authorities as well as obtaining formal support to address obstacles in education system in community schools, health service in community clinics and women active participation in local structures.

CARE and its partners WCLRF, AWRC and HRRAC are jointly implementing the EVC program in above-mentioned provinces by advocating for women's and girls' rights as well as their visible positions in decision making process that would enable a supportive environment for their access to education and health services and participation in local decision making. This is, to some extent, achieved via the implementation of the Community Score Card, Social Audit, and advocacy efforts to promote inclusive governance while incorporating lessons learnt and constructive ideas into policies, priorities and programs of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Public Health, Independent Directorate of Local Governance and Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation & Development and Ministry of Hajj & Religious Affairs. Therefore, through this paper, on behalf of women and girls from the communities that EVC is being implemented, we as representatives of communities call on local and national authorities to address the needs and fulfill the rights of women and girls at community level.

OUR POSITION:

According to the EVC program's recent Mid-Term Review conducted in target rural areas of Khost, Balkh, Parwan and Kabul provinces, education and health services and women's participation in local structure needs further improvement in order to meet and fulfill the women's and girls' rights and access to education and health services and enhance their decision making roles at the grassroots level.

In order to help women and girls to engage in the social, cultural, political and economic spheres equally with their male members in their community, the government of Afghanistan, specifically the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, the Ministry of Rural and Rehabilitation Development, the Ministry of Hajj & Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Public Health should take sustainable measures. These include, but are not limited to: provision and extension of quality and sufficient numbers of education and health services in rural areas, ensuring and promoting accountability towards community needs, creation of conducive environments for women's participation in local activities and decision making processes, enabling and promoting women employment opportunities and recruitment of women into meaningful positions in local government structures.

We call upon Ministry of Education to:

1. Strengthen² provision of text books and class equipment including chair, table, board and computer laboratory and library for community schools that are required based on education standards;
2. Improve community schools hygiene and sanitation services;
3. Promote observance by higher education authorities on teaching methods, implementation of curriculum, time management and school staff attendance in order to strengthen teaching quality within community schools;

² EVC Community Score Card findings

4. Improve and promote a conducive environment through sufficient provision of separate classrooms, latrines, schools buildings for girls and boys, surrounding wall, play-ground, and school building maintenance at the community level schools;
5. Give a high priority to the recruitment of professional female teachers at the village schools;
6. Improve accessibility of safe potable drinking water to students and school staff;
7. Construction of school buildings in Isakhkail, Kharzar, Cheshma Daraz, kololasang, Qole Bahlol communities in Jabul seraj district and Chercherak community in Bagram district of Parwan province, Khan aqa, Ramoza, Pakbar, Nanwayee communities in Charkint district of Balkh province and Mallayan and Mardi Khil in Matoon district of Khost province; and
8. Ensure quality of construction materials in Abu Zar Ghafari School in Bagram district of Parwan and Boys number 1 high school of Mirbach kot district of Kabul.

We call upon Ministry of Health to:

1. Strengthen the provision³ of quality and quantity of medicines and diagnosis of diseases including gynecology sections for patients of the community level clinics;
2. Ensure recruitment of professional staff at community clinics;
3. Provision of ambulance (with driver), conducive environment including access to hygiene and sanitation, electricity, staff punctuality, proper patient caring and surrounding wall at the community level clinics;
4. Promote the capacity of community level clinics to serve with better quality for number of patients at one time; and
5. Promote information sharing and awareness raising mechanisms regarding health services and vaccination periods at community level clinics.

We call upon IDLG and MRRD to:

1. Strengthen women's active participation⁴ in local structure and decision making process particularly in Community Development Councils and District Development Councils;
2. Promote community involvement and oversight in community development planning, budgeting and implementation;
3. Improve responsiveness and accountability of CDC administrations for women active participation;
4. Sustain and promote functional CDC structures at community level;
5. Ensure and secure filing system of CDC structures at community level that properly store administration materials and documents that related to community development projects;
6. Enhance and promote interaction and dialogue mechanism between male and female CDC members; and
7. Ensure installation of proper water scheme and well digging at community level i.e. Benevorsok community.

³ EVC Community Score Card findings

⁴ EVC & RAPID Social Audit findings

We call upon Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs to:

1. Ensure provision of appropriate messages from an Islamic perspective⁵ regarding women's and girls' education and health rights through local and community mosques and related publications .i.e. Monthly Magazine of Payam Haq
2. Enhance and strengthen dissemination of appropriate messages from an Islamic perspective regarding women's participation in social structures and decision making process
3. Promote surveillance mechanisms for community mosques performance regarding diffusion of appropriate messages from an Islamic perspective related to women's and girls' rights and participation
4. Raise awareness through local mosques on harmful social norms – such as exchange of girls⁶ with money, high price of wedding proposed by girl elders (Walwar), exchange marriage, forced marriage, limited access to public services, and exclusion and deprivation of fundamental rights, all from an Islamic perspective.

Abbreviations:

CSC- Community Score Card

SA- Social Audit

IG- Inclusive Governance

EVC- Every Voice Counts

MoE- Ministry of Education

MoPH- Ministry of Public Health

IDLG- Independent Directorate of Local Governance

MoH&RA- Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs

CARE- International Organization

Partners- Local Organization implementing jointly EVC program (AWRC, WCLRF and HRRAC)

AWRC- Afghan Women Resource Center

WCLRF- Women and Children Legal Research Foundation

HRRAC- Human Rights, Research and Advocacy Consortium

⁵ EVC Community Score Card findings

⁶ EVC Midterm review-outcome harvesting