



A Wide Range of Services for Women and Girls:

Main Achievements during the Past Three Months:

M. (an alias given to the client) is 32-year-old. She is a victim of forced marriage to a drug-addict person who always abused, tortured and physically punished her. She made three suicidal attempts by drinking acid, but she was rescued in time. She finally referred MA lawyers, and MA started to intervene and delve deeply into this case.

M received legal advice from MA lawyers, and she was briefed about women's basic rights according to Islamic law. In addition, M is undergoing psychosocial counseling sessions. M's health has improved now, and her mental state is in good condition. She lives in peace.

During her 52-day-stay in the center she has been introduced to a tailoring skill development course, and she acquired and developed tailoring skills. While she now lives with her parents, she is capable of supporting her family financially by stitching clothes.

During a follow-up session M stated:

"I am so lucky to be introduced and referred to MA social workers and lawyers." She added, "I get to know about my rights through kind and committed women. Life had no meaning for me before. Violence and torture used to be a big part of my life, and I thought it would never end, especially when I realized that my own family was not willing to support me." She concluded, "I am feeling empowered now. I know my rights. I am willing to fight against all difficulties and barriers to make a better life for my children. I appreciate all the support and kindness the MA team has offered me."

Key challenges:

Lack of a safe place for counseling sessions in women's prison: MA counselors of Mazar regional office point out that they have no safe place for counseling sessions in the women's prison of Mazar, making it difficult for them to protect the privacy of their clients.

We communicated this problem with those responsible for finding a solution.



- Security constraints: In general, the security situation and events in Kabul, Herat and Mazar frequently disturb the normal life of people, and these events have a negative effect on literacy participants as well. Due to security concerns, most of the MA literacy participants could not regularly attend classes; therefore, MA had to stop the literacy lessons temporarily in such situations.
- Over time, some women left the class. Marriage, students becoming engaged, or moving their household are the main causes of decreased participation of the literacy learners in districts 6, 7 and 11.

Over the past three months, Medica Afghanistan, through its usual series of activities, continued to provide a range of multi disciplinary services for women and girls such as psychosocial counseling, legal representation, social support, family mediation, literacy classes, referrals for health care, and other appropriate services according to the needs identified in Kabul, Herat and Balkh provinces. In addition, Medica Afghanistan advocated publicly and lobbied politically for women's rights in order to bring long-term, sustainable change for women and girls. We also conducted training in the fields of psychosocial, health, legal aid and advocacy. Moreover, MA organized legal awareness-raising sessions for our legal aid and psychosocial services clients, and our literacy learners with the purpose of empowering them to deal with problems in the best possible manner and strengthening their self- esteem and self-confidence.

Working in Favor of Our Clients

Over the past three months, the legal aid department of MA offered substantial legal aid services to women and girls in need. This consisted of 66 criminal defense, 83 civil case representation, 9 dealing with victim cases, 88 mediation services, and 197 legal advice and awareness. As a result, 3 women received reductions in their punishment; 7 women were released following investigation and subsequent court appearances; 11 cases were resolved in favor of clients in civil proceedings; and 97 victim cases were represented at the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) department, resulting in 1 perpetrators being convicted based on EVAW law.

In addition, legal awareness was provided to all clients during the full process of legal aid, whether it was criminal, civil representation, victim or mediation.



Legal awareness enabled clients to know their rights, the procedures they would undergo, and the possible procedural alternatives they had along, with the legal consequences of the choices they make. Moreover, our social workers were able to mediate among 18 clients and responded to social needs of 97 women with such services as enhancing their individual and collective well-being, making family visits, providing things they needed, and connecting or re-connecting them with their families. This link is not only important for the present well-being of women, but also for their future family reintegration.

Likewise, social workers conducted follow-up sessions with women and girls when they re-integrated into their families in order to evaluate the welfare of their clients.

Skills to Help Traumatized Women

Our psychosocial and health program (PSHP) offered supportive psychosocial counseling in individual and group sessions at the key locations of Kabul, Herat and Mazar.

During the past three months, 301 clients were covered under psychosocial and counseling services. The PSHP program offered training opportunities to 18 staff members of the state-run Afghan hospital in Mazar-e-Sharif on *Violence against women and trauma sensitive approach in a medical setting*.

The training provided basic knowledge to hospital staff in the fields of violence against women, trauma sensitive service approaches, psychosomatic manifestations of trauma, and women's rights.

Furthermore, PSHP professional trainers trained 40 female and male doctors, nurses and midwives in state-run hospitals of Herat to improve the behaviour of medical staff towards traumatized patients and to establish a better professional relationship between female and male staff of the hospital.

Advocacy for Women's Rights

MA representatives participated in Afghan Women's Network (AWN) meetings to help increase of the number of women taking an active role in decision making processes at civil society and state levels. The focus of this work was women's access to human security and their engagement in political processes.



NEWSLETTER VOLUME 3

July to September 2014

As part of its advocacy efforts, in the month of August MA participated in meetings with the ambassadors of the EU and the USA and with Jan Kubis, Special Representative of Secretary General Ban Ki-moon (SRSG) and head of UNAMA. The main aims of these meetings were to express our concern over the prolonged political stalemate which is negatively affecting Afghanistan's economy, security and public confidence in Afghan institutions and to advocate for greater participation of women in ongoing discussions and negotiations to shape a unity government.

Electoral Process in Afghanistan

AWN reminded the representatives of the international community and the SRSG about the significant contribution of Afghan women to the electoral process – women comprised 36 and 38 per cent of voters in the first round and run-off respectively – which was achieved at great personal risk and in defiance of security threats and conservative social norms.

All the above mentioned stakeholders reassured AWN that they are committed to our goals, and they continue to promote inclusivity in the post-electoral political process from their ends. We appreciate the presidential candidates' effort to include women during ongoing discussions and negotiations to shape a unity government. We find it encouraging that some women are standing by both candidates during the August 8th agreement.

MA's position is that any agreement between the candidates must be grounded in the domestic legal framework, namely the Constitution and electoral law so that hard-won gains for women will not be reversed just for political convenience.

Our Engagement in the London Conference

A high level conference on TMAF (Tokyo Mutual Accountability Process) for Afghanistan is to be held in London on November 24 and 25, 2014. On the government side, 40 Afghans will attend this conference to discuss the country's progress in implementing the TMAF process. The Conference will include discussions on refinement of the current indicators and hard deliverables in various priority areas. In anticipation of the London Conference, MA participated in the ACBAR Advocacy meetings; Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) developed four papers focusing on governance, women's rights, humanitarian action, and service delivery.

MA is a member of women's rights working group.



NEWSLETTER VOLUME 3

July to September 2014

MA also participated in a consultation hosted by the Canadian and the German Ambassadors on August 12 to discuss with civil society organizations the status of and major challenges facing human rights and women's empowerment in the future. In this meeting, civil society representatives proposed some revisions to the hard deliverables under TMAF Area 2 relating to human rights, gender, and rule of law. The latest draft of proposed revisions to the TMAF Area 2 - Hard Deliverables has been compiled by respective embassies to be shared with government and donor stakeholders.

Women's concern on the NATO Summit in Wales

The next NATO Summit will take place on September 4-5, 2014 in Wales, UK, and one of the focuses of this gathering will be Afghanistan beyond 2014 after the withdrawal of international troops is complete.

Although the AWN cannot participate directly in the NATO summit, the Head of NATO for the Asian region attended our national conference, and she will share the AWN position paper with NATO members. AWN consulted over five hundred women through one day consultation conferences in eight zones on 17 August 2014, and a national conference was held in Kabul on 27 August 2014 to discuss women's concerns and to make recommendations on what concrete measures are needed to ensure women's political participation, to increase their decision making role, and to implement their safe mobility through security and protective measures. The Medica Afghanistan director, as a senior member of AWN, facilitated a group of 20 people to finalize the Afghan Women's Recommendations to the NATO Summit; this group met August 27th from 8 am to 4 pm at the Intercontinental Hotel. At the end of 2014, NATO will mark the conclusion of its ISAF mission, as well as a new phase of their engagement in Afghanistan. We look forward to a successful Summit in September 2014.

The Situation of Women's Human Rights Defenders

MA representative participated in an AWN meeting with the Director of Amnesty International for South Asia to speak about women's human rights defenders (WHRD) and their situation, challenges and lessons learned, especially how to overcome obstacles in Afghanistan. The MA executive director raised her concern that in Afghanistan there is no effective mechanism in place to ensure protection of WHRD. Although a few measures exist, they are hampered by lack of gender sensitivity, implementation means, or political will.



In this regard, the executive director welcomes the implementation of the newly adopted General Assembly resolution on protecting WHRD. In this resolution the contribution of these individuals and groups toward the protection and promotion of human rights, democracy, the rule of law, economic development, peace and security is acknowledged, and the General Assembly highlights some specific protection mechanisms and measures that states must implement to allow women's rights defenders to carry out their work in a safe environment and without fear of reprisal.

Working Group on Mental Health Regulation

The MoPH mental health department, the EU and EPOS were tasked with reforming the mental health regulations which have been in place since 1978. MA is a member of the technical working group of MoPH. The group consists of 30 representatives from government and nongovernmental organizations. The aim of this group is to amend the Mental Health Act. After amendment of the regulations, a technical/advisory working group of 12 members was assigned to reform the regulations based on the international conventions and Afghan laws.

MA was involved in both technical working groups and most of our comments were integrated in the revised MoPH regulations.

In addition, MA is a member of a newly established technical working group established by the women's rights organization, Paywand Afghanistan. The main priority of this group is to reform prison regulations, amending them to accord with international conventions and national laws as well as to advocate / lobby with relevant organizations to approve and implement the regulations. The primary goal of this technical working group is to safeguard the rights of women /girl prisoners. The group includes the members of MoI, women's organizations, professors from Kabul University, defense lawyers, and a presidential representative. In August 2014, the group conducted its introductory meeting.

Police Women within the Afghan National Police

According to Ministry of Interior (MoI) strategy for strengthening the role of police women within the Afghan National Police (ANP) a police working group was formed by the MoI which is including Medica Afghanistan. The purpose of establishment of this group is to draft an implementation plan in accordance to priorities of police women since March 2014.



The working group prioritized four main needs of police women and submitted to the commission that was assigned to work on implementation/action plan. Finally, the plan was approved by the MoI minister.

MA representative provided some comments by using its experience in working with police since 2002 and advocated for rights of police women which were appreciated by group members.

Rally in connection to gang-rape case

The rate of crime has dramatically increased during the recent months in different part of Afghanistan: During the last few weeks we got to know about the following cases.

Murder of a woman by her brother-in-law in Herat province

- Murder of a woman by her husband in Herat province
 - Rape and beheading of a young girl in Dasht-e-Barchi area of Kabul
 - Sale and marriage of a 8-year-old girl in Sholdara district of Balkh province.
 - Discovering an unidentified body in front of west gate of Kabul at early morning on last Wednesday.
- Gang rape of a family (3 women, 1 girl) in Paghman district of Kabul province. Outrage and condemnation of this act by people through media and social media was unprecedented.

On September 7 Medica Afghanistan together with other civil society group launched a rally to demand for justice for four women victims of gang-rape, more than thousand men and women's rights activists were attended to show their empathy with the survival of this case. Interestingly, women and men equally participated in this protest regardless of discrimination, nationality, gender, sex, language, race and etc. Since the participation of men in such gatherings was pale in the past, but culture wise when it comes to prestige and honor; they are more sensitized and ready to contribute to eliminate this ominous phenomenon. Though Medica Afghanistan condemn the act of gag rape by all means, we do not support the idea of accelerated trail of the accused and death penalty for the accused as by practice of accelerated trail, the right of fair trail of accused people will be violated. Thanks to police at least four people were arrested in connection to robbery and rape of case of four women in capital Kabul and two from Ghaznai. The Kabul police chief, Gen. Zahir Zahir, told to the activist group that the suspects have confessed to their crimes and they all have background in crimes but they were freed before they had served their full sentences. The issue has raised concerns about corruption in the legal and judicial organs.



As a result, one of the victims, an 18-year-old girl, died in the hospital after the attack. This case sadly demonstrates that the Afghan justice system, despite more than a decade of promised reform, still has a long way to go before genuine justice is handed down.

Raise Awareness of Women's Rights

In addition to direct services and advocacy, Medica Afghanistan also builds capacity in the fields of health, education, and law. It seeks to raise awareness of women's rights and to sensitize all those, regardless of gender, who deal with women at risk. For example, the organization offers advanced professional training to male and female lawyers, doctors, social workers, religious leaders, and police personnel on the multiple ramifications of violence against women.

In addition to learning reading and writing on a regular basis, our literacy students are taught issues such as women's basic rights, legal rights, and basic health and life skills. Recently, the literacy department established a library for literacy students in Herat and Balkh provinces. As a result, 40 literacy learners from Mazar and 37 from Herat now have access to a library.

Quote from one of our literacy learners:

"I learned reading and writing. I use the books from the library and these help me a lot in practicing my reading skills. As a result of my efforts and my teacher's encouragement, my reading is improving considerably. I feel stronger and more independent. My husband now shows respect for me. I feel happy that when I am not at home, and my husband needs to tell me something very urgent he leaves me a written note and I can read and understand it. I do the same. I also learned how to calculate the money when I go shopping."

Introduction:

Medica Afghanistan –Women's Support Organization (MA-WSO) – is a non-profit, non-governmental Afghan women's organization working to eliminate violence against women. The organization was launched in 2002 by medica mondiale. Since 2010, the organization operates as a self-contained national organization run by Afghan women for Afghan women.



The main focus of its work is to provide psychosocial counseling, legal aid and mediation services to women and girls who have survived domestic violence and conflict including severe forms of inhuman treatment and torture. In addition, MA always combines direct services with advocacy on the social and political levels and has vast experience and expertise on the provision of trauma sensitive psychosocial, legal aid services. Medica Afghanistan carries out advocacy work to make progress in protecting the rights of women in Afghanistan.