

# PILOT PROJECT

## NUMBER 4

### TRAINING IMAMS ON WOMENS' RIGHTS IN AFGHANISTAN 2012 CLINTON GLOBAL INITIATIVE (CGI) COMMITMENT

GFMW Partners with the Noor Educational & Capacity Building Organization  
KABUL & JALALABAD, AFGHANISTAN

#### *Empowerment thru Collaboration*

*"At one of the Friday sermons a project monitor noticed an elderly man at the back of the prayer hall who looked troubled. The monitor asked the man if he needed any help, to which the man replied, 'No one can help me. Now time is gone and I have committed all sorts of violence against my daughters. I have received walwar [bride price], I stopped them from getting an education, I forced their marriages. They are suffering every day because of my wrongs. Why were these Imams not talking on these issues before?' "*

*~ A Congregant (elderly gentleman) from one of the Friday Sermons*

In February 2012, GFMW financially supported Noor Educational & Capacity Building Organization's (NECDO) award winning innovative and scalable program to advance its mission. GFMW's support will provide Capacity Building trainings for 100 Imams (50 in Kabul & 50 in Jalalabad) on gender, human rights, leadership skills, and conflict management. NECDO will also provide training for 25 active women on community mobilization, women's rights from the Islamic perspective, advocacy & networking.

The **Imam Training Program**<sup>1</sup> has already shown positive ground impact in

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<sup>1</sup> This program was recognized at the Clinton Global Initiative in 2010 as a Commitment to Action. It won the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding 'Peacemakers in Action' award', which honors individuals inspired by their faith to work on peace initiatives in regions of armed conflict.

Afghanistan by creating awareness on gender rights among men and women and helping change the local mindset on issues of culture trumping faith.

The Imam Training Program was developed keeping in mind the vital roles Imams play *in interpretation and application of many of the customary and religious practices in society* and people accept their recommendations and advice on issues ranging from birth and marriage to death.

Afghani women and girls are negatively impacted by certain cultural traditions, which affect their day to day quality of living. These include:

- Exchange Marriage
- Forced Marriage
- Child Marriage
- High Wedding Expenses
- Marriage Money
- Honor Killing
- Domestic Violence

Local customs and religious interpretations are used to prevent girls from going to school, deter women from visiting male doctors, adding to the challenges of a country with a very high maternal and infant mortality rate.

The six-month **gender-sensitive training program** has a focus on Afghan women's rights in the following five areas:

- Education
- Marriage
- Inheritance
- Property Ownership
- Political and Social Participation

NECDO developed the Imam Training Program with a focus on women's human rights using guidelines from the Constitution of Afghanistan, other national and international legal treaties in collaboration with the 'Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality' (WISE) Compact<sup>2</sup> compiled by Muslim women legal

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.wisemuslimwomen.org/resources/compact/>

scholars and educators as resources.

To create awareness, the training sessions showcased many harmful traditional practices against women many of which are based on traditions rather than the teachings of the Islam. A mix of 25 moderate and conservative Imams were invited to participate in the project, including two Shi'ite Imams in Kabul, to give at least 10 minutes khutbas (Sermons) on the rights of women and allow time for discussion with worshippers on questions related to the women issues. Over the course of the 6 months project, 300 sermons on women's rights were delivered by 20 Imams in different locations throughout the capital.

'Women sections' are created in the mosques and women are encouraged to participate in congregations and discuss their issues with the imams. University students are hired as part of the project to monitor Friday sermons delivered at the mosques and provide feedback.

Plans are underway to extend and scale the project to other parts of the country.