

Afghans Engage With Officials in Public Policy Debates

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Events offer rare chance to speak frankly with officials.

Discussions in which ordinary people get the chance to put questions to officials are a model way of bringing the Afghan government and its citizens closer together, according to participants.

Raz Mohammad Mokhlis, the district government head in Khair Kot in the southeastern Paktika province, took part in an **IWPR event** last month in which security officials discussed rising combat casualties following the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan.

“Holding such debates not only helps raise public awareness, it also facilitates the exchange of ideas, questions and answers between the public and the authorities,” he said. “Although various methods have been used to try to promote public awareness, what IWPR is doing has had the best results.”

The debate was part of IWPR’s **Peace and Reconciliation Project**, designed to create an open, safe space for discussing ways towards peace and stability. The same topic was also discussed in debates held in Zabul and Urozgan provinces.

Audience member Saifuddin called for the programme to be extended to more isolated parts of Afghanistan so as to promote public awareness there, too.

“Debates like these should be launched in remote areas of the country,” he said. “People there are in urgent need of such programmes.”

Another set of debates held in Kabul, Kunduz, and Badakhshan provinces discussed the role that NGOs can play in promoting peace and reconciliation. (See **[Calls for Better CSO-Government Coordination in Afghanistan.](#)**)

Nur Hamza, who took part in the Badakhshan event, said it was the first time he had seen members of the public confronting officials.

“When I heard questions and answers being exchanged between the audience and the authorities, I was afraid that the officials would get angry,” Hamza said. “It was all very interesting for me.”

Meanwhile, debates held in Badghis, Badakhshan, and Takhar provinces looked at how best to identify potential **friends and foes** in the peace process.

*This report is based on an ongoing series of debates conducted as part of the IWPR programme **Afghan Reconciliation: Promoting Peace and Building Trust by Engaging Civil Society.***

Location: [Afghanistan](#)

Topic: [Accountability](#)

Focus: [Afghan Peace and Reconciliation Project Highlight](#)

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