

Afghans Informed, Engaged By Debates

Author: [IWPR Afghanistan](#)

Forums provide important resource for raising public awareness on key issues.

Debates organised by IWPR across Afghanistan are proving highly informative for the hundreds of men and women taking part each month.

In June, events were held in 12 different provinces, covering issues including economics, reconstruction work and gender violence.

Discussions in Ghor, Parwan, Paktia and Kandahar focused on the widespread use of foreign currency and the harm this did to the Afghan afghani. (See also: **Afghans Warn of Currency Slump**)

“This debate was important because people found out about the benefits of using their own currency,” said participant Mohammad Naim Karezi. “They were introduced to the mindset of using afghani in their daily transactions and avoiding foreign currencies, which damage their economy and identity.”

Economist Arabuddin Hamdard told the Paktia event that the public had an important role to play in strengthening the national currency. He explained that instability and a shortage of domestic products, combined with a high level of imports, had encouraged people to rely on foreign banknotes.

“The state is not solely responsible for keeping the afghani’s rate stable,” he said. “The public is also responsible for using the national currency and avoiding the use of foreign currencies.”

Another guest in the Paktia event, also called Hamdard, said, “This is the first time a debate in which young people were able to participate was organised in Sayed Karam district. I congratulate IWPR on its efforts. This debate helped boost awareness among our young people.”

In Baghlan, Herat, Laghman and Kunar provinces, participants discussed the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) a flagship programme that helps fund local communities to run their own development projects. (See **Afghans Question Reconstruction Scheme**)

While acknowledging the achievements of this initiative, speakers also complained that corruption was harming its implementation.

Jamaluddin Sayar, the vice-chairman of the provincial council in Kunar, said that in more remote regions, the NSP was exploited by powerful people.

“In areas where the government has little access, the NSP councils and members carry out fraud or implement projects at the behest of village leaders or local commanders. For instance, if a road is built, a well is dug or some other similar activity takes place, they are built next to the houses of these powerful people and the general public usually does not benefit.”

“Up until now, I knew that the NSP was digging wells and building schools, bridges and roads, but in this debate I also learned about fraud committed by the NSP councils,” said one participant in the Nangarhar event. “These debates really wake people up and make them aware of their rights.”

Nargis Tasal, a participant in the Kunar debate, said that women could draw an especial benefit from the IWPR initiative.

“These debates are essential for women, who are [usually] illiterate and stay in the home, because they should know about their rights. These debates play a constructive role in raising the awareness of the entire nation.”

In debates organised in Helmand, Khost, Nangarhar and Paktia provinces, participants discussed the long-overdue parliamentary election. (See also **Afghans Angry at Election Delay**)

Ahmad Zaher Zahir, a representative of the youth association in Nangarhar’s Sorkhrod district, said, “These kinds of debates among the younger generation helps improve our political awareness. To be honest, it was a very interesting debate for me.”

Mohammad Asef Shinwari, an analyst, told the Nangarhar event that the election should have been held on June 22 when the current parliamentary term expired. This had not happened due to political tensions, ongoing security problems and a lack of engagement from the international community, he said.

“In my view, it will be fine even if it takes two or three more months to hold the elections, but the state

must take action and use the resources available to it.”

The Afghan parliament’s term has since been extended by presidential decree.

Debates were also conducted via video link. In an exchange between audiences in Herat and Kunar provinces, participants discussed names given to children, and the impact this had on their future lives and Afghan identity.

“Over the past four decades as our people migrated to other countries, they reintroduced cultural values [to Afghanistan] such as clothing, food, language and names,” said Ahmad Shafiq Behruz, a social expert in Herat. “Some of these foreign values are positive and others are negative. It is our duty to benefit from the positive ones and to remove the negative ones from our culture.”

He highlighted names given to children as one of the most important of these values.

Zahuruddin Sherzai, a participant in the Kunar debate, agreed. “Naming children is a fundamentally important matter,” he said. “People need to pay close attention to it. I thank the IWPR office for holding such debates, and would like to see this process continued.”

The same topic was also discussed via video link by young people and civil society representatives in Nangarhar and Parwan provinces.

Ahmad Jamil Popalzai, a lecturer at Nangarhar university, said that names had an extraordinary impact on the personality and character of children.

“We are grateful to IWPR for turning their attention to such important and sensitive social issues,” he said. “This was a very valuable topic. We can address problems in Afghan society through such debates.”

Participants discussed domestic violence in a live radio call-in show organised by IWPR on June 14, broadcast on the private Rabia Balkhi Radio station.

“When people complain about violence within the family, it becomes clear after incidents are investigated that the main causes of violence are unemployment and poverty,” explained studio guest Nadia Samar Osmani, legal director at the department of women's affairs in Balkh province.

“When I heard the programme on the radio, I wished that government officials would be forced to listen to such broadcasts, too,” said Gul Mohammad, a shopkeeper in Mazar-e Sharif. “They are deaf to our problems. They do not care about people. If they provided us with jobs and employment and if our economic situation improved, we would not have to struggle with so many problems.”

*This report is based on an ongoing series of debates conducted as part of IWPR’s **Afghan Youth and Elections programme.***

Location: Afghanistan

Topic: Strengthening Accountability
Media Development

Focus: Youth and Elections, Afghanistan
Impact

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/afghans-informed-engaged-debates>