



Australian Support for Elections in Afghanistan

Fact sheet: January 2015

Overview

Australia is working with the Afghan Government, international partners and other donors to increase voter participation through civic awareness and to help build more effective electoral institutions. Australia provided \$22 million over four years (2011-15) to support the Afghan electoral process, including the 2014 presidential elections.

Objectives

Australia's electoral assistance in Afghanistan has two main objectives:

- › To ensure that electoral institutions and process are more sustainable and fair; and
- › increasing meaningful participation by Afghan women and men from diverse backgrounds in democratic institutions and processes.



Photo credits: Internews 2014

Activities

Australia's support for Afghan elections focuses on electoral institutions, independent media, and civil society.

- › 1. The United Nations Development Program *Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow Phase II* (\$10m / 2 yrs) supports Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission to manage and administer elections. Australia's contribution supported the 2014 elections.
- › 2. The Internews *Afghan Capacity for Media and Elections* program (\$9.5m / 3 yrs) is strengthening the capability of independent Afghan media to report on elections and develop news stories. The program reaches remote communities - raising awareness of democratic rights and election processes, and supporting transparent, fair and effective electoral institutions. It played an important role in improving media coverage of the 2014 presidential elections and is continuing this support through to the forthcoming parliamentary elections.
- › 3. The Asia Foundation *Public Outreach Democracy and Elections* program (\$2m / 3 yrs) supported the training and deployment of election observers for the 2014 elections and the deployment of independent observers from the Asian Network for Free Elections during the 2014 Presidential election audit.

Female Salam Watandar reporters acknowledged by the Independent Electoral Commission for elections coverage

Ms. Sofia and Ms. Wahida - two Salam Watandar (SW) journalists who participated in Australian-funded training on elections reporting received awards from the Afghanistan Independent Electoral Commission's Media Commission. This was in acknowledgement of their efforts to provide impartial coverage of the Presidential and Provincial Council elections.



In an interview with the two women after the award ceremony, Ms. Sofia said, grinning, “Before [SW’s training], I did not know how to cover the elections... [SW’s] mentorship was helpful in improving the quality of my work... At the beginning he [the mentor] used to make a lot of changes, but now there are much fewer changes... This award of recognition makes me feel very happy. It is the first time my work is being recognized. It encourages me to continue doing the work that I am doing!”

Ms. Wahida echoed the sentiment, similarly adding that, “We [Sofia and I] worked hard to maintain impartiality in our elections coverage... I think that Salam Watandar had the best coverage – particularly of the Provincial Council Elections, which were not as covered by many media outlets [in Afghanistan]. I learned so much from [the SW] training and mentorship... I feel so happy and proud. There are so many other journalists – but I got recognized for my work. I hope to cover the electoral process through the Parliamentary elections. I learned so much and I want to continue using these skills.”

Speaking proudly of his reporters accomplishments, Mr. Najib Amiri, SW’s Chief Editor said, “They [Sofia and Wahida] were both interns, but they learned a lot, and were keen to participate in the [elections reporting] training. They have both followed our elections reporting procedures very well. They work hard and they work late – which is actually quite difficult for a woman in Afghanistan, but they were absolutely committed to reporting on the electoral process. I am so pleased for them because they deserve this recognition for their hard work. I am so proud and I wish them every success!”

More information

More information can be obtained on our website at:

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/afghanistan/Pages/afghanistan-country-brief.aspx>