



Afghans for Progressive Thinking

Narrative Reports

November 10, 2018

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I. General Information

Date: 10 November, 2018
Name of Organization: Afghans for Progressive Thinking (APT)
Website: www.apf.af
Country: Afghanistan
Reporting Period (dates): 1 July, 2018- 30 September, 2018

II. Executive Summary

During the past quarter (July to September 2018), Afghans for Progressive Thinking (APT) conducted its planned activities effectively and efficiently. APT organized four provincial level debate tournaments, the fifth national debating championship that hosted around 150 students in Kabul, published applications for its 2018 fall leadership course and officially started pre-courses for its Mehrabonon school students in Balkh, Mazar-e-Sharif. Additionally, through its Radio Program, APT impacted 200 women directly and 7 million people in 20 provinces of Afghanistan indirectly by raising awareness on the issue of violence and the role mothers play in preventing their children from joining these groups.

Through the above-mentioned activities, APT managed to provide safe spaces for the students to contribute to the vision of APT and to practice becoming more tolerant and respectful towards their peers, families, societies and anyone who has different opinions from their own. This report also highlights the challenges that were laid out as an obstacle in front of our work and, to a certain extent, affected negatively the implementation of our activities. A total of 1670 individuals (1032 male and 638 female) benefited from our activities.

The following report covers the details of the planned and implemented activities for the past quarter.

III. Main Activities

This part of the document delineates the facts and the statistics, while the following section explains the impact of the events and why they matter in the context of Afghanistan, taking into consideration the vision of SPC and APT.

Debate

During the past quarter (July – September 2018), APT conducted 52 training and practice sessions for newly recruited students, organized four inter-varsity debate tournaments in Kabul, Herat Mazar, and Faizabad, and organized the fourth Debate without Borders Tournament through Skype and the fifth National Debating Championship in Kabul. Furthermore, APT staff in Kabul, Badakhshan, Balkh, Samangan and Herat organized the monthly networking event for its debate club members and representatives. The aim of these events was to rate the progress and performance of the debate clubs, as well as to assess their sustainability in the long-term.

Debate without Borders: on 5th October 2018, APT organized its fourth Debate without Borders tournament over Skype. This year twenty teams from Afghanistan, the United States of America, China, India, Pakistan, and Kazakhstan participated in the competition and competed in three preliminary rounds. As a result, after three rounds of debate, Ms. Jordan Nickell and Mr. Joshua Hendricks of Middle Tennessee State University won the championship, and Mr. Abdul Rahman Aziz of American University of Afghanistan was ranked as the best speaker of the tournament. The event was also a good opportunity for all students to interact and exchange ideas about different topics such as culture during the time break.

National Debate Tournament: on 24th September 2018, APT organized the fifth National Debate Tournament in Kabul and hosted around 150 students after competing in their provincial levels debate competitions in Herat, Samnagan, Mazar, Faizabad and Kabul provinces during a four-day event. During the event, students debated with each other on various topics such as religion, politics, society, human rights, and the role of women in the society. The president of Kabul University, people from media outlets and civil society organizations attended the closing ceremony of our event. The president of Kabul University delivered a short speech to acknowledge our work and to show their commitment for the continuation of their support for our work inside Kabul University. The event concluded with an award ceremony and closing remarks by representatives from Afghans for Progressive Thinking.

National Debate Tournament is happening annually in which students from different public and private universities from across Afghanistan will get a chance to engage in different topic discussions, meet their old friends and make new friendships.

Leadership

On 15th March, 2018, APT announced a call for application for its 2018 fall leadership program. We received over 100 applications from students from different public and private universities in Kabul, of which only 30 were selected to enroll in the course. The course will provide three types of opportunities for the students:

- 1) For new students, it will be an opportunity to learn about what servant leadership is, how to be a servant leader and how APT defines leadership in the Afghan context;
- 2) For former students, APT will provide an internship opportunity to eight alumni who will have the chance to lead the program and exercise leadership.
- 3) APT will also conduct 1 to 2 leadership sessions at the Netherlands Embassy in Kabul and students will have the opportunity to interact with people who have already practiced leadership in different context such as the ambassador. The course started on October 8, 2018 and will continue till November 22, 2018. The detailed report of this course will be shared in the next quarterly report.

Leadership Session at the NL Embassy, on 18th September 2018, APT organized a leadership session for APT's 2018 spring leadership students at the Netherland Embassy in Kabul. In a three-hour session students learned about the different types of leadership, the differences between old leadership and new leadership, and asked their questions from the ambassador and his first secretary. The course was taught by the first Secretary of the embassy. Twenty five students and APT staff attended the session.

Exposure Trip

On 29th September 2018, APT sponsored a team of 8 students including a team leader to participate in a youth peace festival in Chandigarh, a city of India. Two of APT's team participants joined the panel discussion as Afghan Peace Ambassadors and introduced a different image of Afghanistan – one that strives and yearns for peace. The participants also engaged in discussions and built cross-cultural relationships with youth from around the world. At the end of the program, APT's team visited Taj Mahal for a team building purpose. The students are back with a lot of energy and excitement for more such activities in the future.

Media

During the past quarter, APT's Radio Program focused on conducting interviews with program beneficiaries to assess and learn the impact of our one-year program. APT invited around 10 mothers and adult sons to Kilid Radio Station where they shared about the contribution of our program to their family relations. The mothers also shared about the positive changes in their children's behaviors as they have become more patient and understanding with their siblings and the rest of their families. Since all women were not allowed to come to our radio station, APT also conducted site visits interviews to reach more mothers. Many of the mothers praised our program and its positive role in their family life. All of them expressed their gratitude and requested that we continue to engage the public with similar topics of discussion in the future.

Additionally, APT, with the support of Lincoln Center for Women Garden, held a panel discussion at the Lincoln Center of Women Garden. The panelists were APT's radio program speakers and government members. The event was targeting mothers with the purpose of teaching them about the vital roles they play in reducing violence in their family and changing their children's behavior. At the end of the discussion, the floor was open for participants to ask their questions from panelists and suggestions for future topics of discussion for next year's program were also talked about.

APT's Elementary School – Mehrabonon

During the past months, APT has managed to enroll 50 new students (30 girls and 20 boys), who are in desperate need to receive educational support. In addition, APT also started conducting preparatory courses to teach the children basic academic skills and help them prepare for next year, as they will officially begin their first grade of school in March 2019. APT has provided the children with clothes which they can wear to go to school and also with books, stationary and lunch. This year, we also plan to focus on developing the course curricula and improving the methods of teaching for next year.

IV. New Initiatives

Dream Big Workshop

APT hosted more than 130 students and debaters from Kabul, Mazar, Herat, Samangan and Badakhshan provinces for the Dream Big Workshop in Kabul on September 25th and 26th. The Dream Big Workshop helped students to define their future goals and work on finding the motivation to pursue things they have always dreamed of. The students were also presented with simple approaches towards putting their ambitions into action which will enable them to play an important role in building a just and peaceful Afghan society. The participants also engaged in group discussions with the students from different universities and exchanged their future goals and their ambitions for their country.

Afghan Youth Representative to United Nation

On 27th September 2018, Ramiz Bakhtair, the Afghan Youth Representative, who was elected through a joint initiative of APT and the Embassy of the Netherlands traveled to the UN and had the chance to speak with the UNSC and address world leader during events which were covered by international media. The global community had the chance to hear that Afghans strive for peace and that war is not our choice. The Youth Representative was a model and an example of millions of other youth who are working very hard in Afghanistan to create a stable, inclusive, and peaceful society.

Expansion to new provinces: APT expanded its operational reach from six provinces: Herat, Mazar, Kabul, Fazaibad, Samangan and Nangarhar, to seven provinces by targeting the Kandahar province under its Open Society Foundation Project. The Kandahar province is located in the southern part of Afghanistan, where several regional extremist groups have a stronghold. As this region is particularly susceptible to violence, the activities of this project and its projected impact are much needed.

V. Qualitative Impact

During the past quarter, students shared with us how attending different APT programs had a significant positive impact on different parts of their lives, how it has developed their critical thinking and improved their behaviors and attitudes. Furthermore, our programs served as a platform for students to make new friends and become part of a community and a generation that strive to create a more open Afghanistan toward diversity.

Ms. Jamila Muradi, a junior student of Economics Department at Kabul University said, “I realized that I am getting more confident in expressing my thoughts and influencing others with the skills I learnt from debate, especially the critical thinking skill that I managed to develop. My ability to construct my thoughts and communicate them well has even increased my family’s respect for me. This is encouraging, and it has a constructive impact on my personality and the ways I want to contribute back to the society.” Similarly, Musa, one of our exposure trips participants, shared the following: “I learned about tolerance and respect from the people I met in India during this trip. Everywhere we went people were very respectful to us – who are different from them in many ways – and that amazed me. Bahara Hussaini shared, “Through the exposure trip I made new friends with people across the world.”

Based on our Radio Program evaluation and site visits, we learned that 70% of the women asked were satisfied with this program and wanted to have more radio talk shows like the ones we offer. Meena, mother of two children from Kunduz said: “This radio program has positively impacted myself and so many of my neighbors and we want to have more programs such as this for the betterment of Afghanistan. I have seen that many of the neighbors are more attentive to their children including watching who they spend their time with. They want to make sure that their children are not influenced by extremist groups. ”

VI. Challenges and Lessons Learned

Security: In the past quarter, APT staff had to work from home during Moharram, a month when Shia Muslims mourn for the Imam Hussain, the grandson of Prophet Mohammad. During this month, ISIS’s attacks increased on the Shia people, as Shia communities celebrate this month in the streets of their cities. In the past quarter, these attacks have affected negatively APT staff as well. One of our Shia colleague, Ali Favez, lost his close friends and relatives in an attack on a sports club close to his home. Similarly, in another attack on an education center in southern part of the country where some of our colleagues live, more than 100 school kids were killed and injured. Furthermore, due to these attacks and other security issues some of the Afghan airlines stopped flying from Kabul to Badakhshan. APT had to bring teams and debaters from Badakhshan

for the national tournament in Kabul by car. The Kabul- Faizabad roads are not very safe and security threats are very high, especially for females, as most of the time the Taliban stop cars and detain passengers. Luckily, our team arrived and returned back to their homes safely.

International Skype tournament: the tournament was firstly planned in the second quarter of the project, but since most of the international teams were either having their exams or their universities were closed, we had to postpone it till the end of the project. Coordinating an event with the participation of several international teams always carries a lot of coordination challenges, so we needed to make sure that the timing was convenient for all. The university course schedules are different in every region, so the only date which accommodated everyone was October 5, 2018. For the Afghan teams, however it was hard to attend the program at 6 am early morning, but we managed it so that we could welcome diverse teams from other countries.

Site Visits: Due to the regressive customs that our society is upholding, inviting uneducated mothers to participate in the interviews continues to be a big challenge for us. These regressive customs are based on conservative religious interpretations which Afghan men uphold, and they make them unwilling to let their wives, sisters, mothers and daughters attend public events like interviews, or be out in the society at all. In order to be able to interview the mothers, we requested their husbands to accompany them and allow the women to cover their faces during interviews.

Impact Stories

Soraya Azimi, a freshman studying Law, shared her excitement after her return form APT's exposure trip to India:

"Excitement could be seen all over my face after travelling to India, especially as this was my first trip out of the country. I was excited to experience a new environment, to meet new people whose beliefs and culture are quite different from ours. I has no idea about India before. The day we got to Delhi, I found it a quiet and a peaceful city. People were behaving kindly and were ready to help us at all time, and that makes you feel like you are home. This is what I loved most about Delhi and India.

Becoming a delegate at the 13th Global Youth Peace Fest 2018, representing Afghans for Progressive Thinking (APT), was a great opportunity to learn different things and to explore the beautiful city of Chandigarh. During the three days of the GYPF 2018, I learnt about networking with people from around the world. I was in a large group of people with different ideas, discussing global issues, and this helped me to learn about tolerance and respect. I defended women's right, I marched for peace, and I understood the real meaning of peace and peace building. The very first thing I learnt on the first day of the program from the delegates and leaders was the importance to contribute to your society, serve others, your family, your nation and humankind. No matter whether you get something in return or not, there will always be one thing in return and that is a peaceful mind, a peaceful life and a peaceful society. We can start with small actions and the first one may not be a big one, but for sure it will affect at least a small number of people. If we have a

chance to change someone's life for the better, then it is not fair to delay it. GYPF 2018 was one of the greatest programs I have ever experienced. All the things I learnt there are enriching my soul and my mind that words can't express it well. Now I have good friends from different countries of Asia and I am committed to work for my country's peace and, as I mentioned, if I know that I can change someone's life for better, I won't delay it. Saying goodbye to the GYPF and all those amazing people was hard for us. But we were excited for another incredible experience, and that was visiting Taj Mahal. It was about people coming from different part of India and the world to only see this majestic view of love. This made Taj Mahal so unique and special in the area. More than being a symbol of love, Taj Mahal was a symbol of diversity. APT is the reason that this amazing journey happened. All APT's programs teach something very important and it is up to the people to learn as much as we can with every experience. I got the most benefit out of this four-day trip. The special part for me was that I got the chance to know my partners to the very depth, making incredible experience together with all the learning and fun, and building strong friendships. Thanks to APT for their trust and contribution to the society. All efforts will pay off one day and APT is getting the result of their hard work."

Ms. Marzia Qadami, a student of English Literature at KSU, shares her debating experience with us:

"I am very happy that I took part in APT's program. One day I noticed the poster on the wall about a new seminar on debate. That was how I was introduced to the program.

APT had a great impact on me. After engaging with APT, I felt different about dealing with people around me in terms of speaking and understanding their ideas. The way I talk and explain things to other people has changed positively. The debate also changed the basis of my thinking about respect and accepting other peoples' ideas. Now after participating in the seminar and attending the competition, I feel that I am a more open-minded person. I respect other people's ideas too, even if they are different.

APT has a great impact on my leadership too. I think that now I see more characteristics of a leader within myself after I engaged in discussions with people. I am so thankful for all I learned from APT."

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