



Afghans for Progressive Thinking

Narrative Report

April 12, 2019



Table of Content

1. General Information
2. Executive Summary
3. Main Activities
 - Debate
 - Leadership
 - Media
 - APT’s Elementary School – Mehrabonon
 - Research and Dialogue
 - APT’s role in the Current Peace Process
4. Qualitative Impact
5. Challenges and Lessons Learned
6. Impact Stories
 - Rabbany
 - Safiullah Atahi
 - Edris Tajik



I. General Information

Date: 15 April, 2019

Name of the Organization: Afghans for Progressive Thinking (APT)

Website: www.apr.af

Country: Afghanistan

Reporting Period (Dates): 1 January, 2019 – 31 March, 2019

II. Executive Summary

From January to March 2019, Afghans for Progressive Thinking (APT) was able to organize all of its planned activities efficiently. APT successfully conducted a number of debate and research training, tournaments in Kabul, Herat, Mazar, Samangan, Faizabad, Nangarhar and Qandahar. APT also organized two youth debate rounds to mark the black history month and international women's day in Kabul. Additionally, APT announced and shortlisted students for APT's Spring Leadership course. We have also successfully aired 13th live radio talk shows which is mostly focused on violent extremism factors, and women's role on preventing violent extremism. Additionally, APT conducted a panel discussion on "Violence and its Impact on Family and Society" for around 100 participants. Additionally, APT recruited the teacher and developed the school curriculum and distributes the textbook to students in Mehrabanon School.

This report covers the detail of the implemented activities and events, and presents the impact of APT's project in the past quarter.



III. Main Activities

Debate:

During the past quarter, APT successfully held two debate rounds and a number of trainings in Kabul, Herat, Mazar, Samangan, Faizabad, Nangarhar and Qandahar. APT was able to recruit new students and conduct practice sessions for them. Overall, (692) individuals benefited from the debate trainings, practice session and judges training of which (45%) were females.

In addition to that, in order to improve the implementation of the project and raise the quality of our work, APT organized a monthly networking event for the debate club leaders and judges' community in all provinces and organized adjudication trainings its judges in Kabul and provinces.

Debate round on occasion of International women's day in Kabul:

To honor the International Women's Day and to present best policies on why women's inclusion in the Peace Talk is essential to a sustainable Peace in Afghanistan, on 13rd March, 2019 APT organized a round of debate in US embassy Kabul; we encompassed more than 40 student debaters, guests, youths and US Embassy employees including the Ambassador. Participants from four different universities (Kabul, PDI, Bakhtar, and AUAF), debated over an essential topic "This house believes that nothing should be compromised in regards to women gains in peace negotiation". The debaters argued and defied women in terms of their gains and why we should not loss this gain that we recived with so much struggle in the past 15 years. Base on adjudicators' decision the team form representing Kabul University was able to secure the championship and be ranked first in this round of debate.

Debate Round on occasion of Black History Month in Kabul:

To mark the black history month, APT also conducted a youth debate round at the LLC Hub of US Embassy Kabul in which the youth discussed the social inequalities in Afghanistan and compared it with Lyndon B. Johnson's approaches. The debate round was also aired live to LLC Centers in Nangarhar, Sheberghan, and Women Garden of Kabul. The student representatives of four universities named as Kabul University, PDI, Bakhtar University and Kardan University debated around the selected topic 'This House would adopt Lyndon B. Johnson's approaches to address the challenge of social inequalities in Afghanistan.' The competition was judged by Mr. Mustafa Raheal, a veteran debater and a member of APT's judge's community in Kabul, Ms. Sofia Ramyar, APT Executive Director, and Mr. Tim Gerhardson, US Embassy representative.

As a result, Mr. Shokoh Nasiri and Abdullah Mubashir of PDI won the competition, while Mr. Hamidullah Nadeem won the Best Speaker Award of the round. The event was concluded with an award ceremony and closing remarks by Executive Director of APT.

Debate round on occasion of International women's day in Badakhshan:

Similarly, APT Debate Team in Badakhshan jointly organized a youth debate round on women in economy, with the Directorate of Women Affairs in Badakhshan. During the debate round the APT's regional coordinator talked about APT's mission and programs in Faizabad.

The topic for the debate round was that the women's are committed to work for a peaceful and inclusive Afghanistan where efforts of women in every field are appreciated.

Establishing Girls debate club in Balkh and Samangan:

As of cultural barriers and traditional believes, some families are hard to let their daughter's work, study or debate in a co-educational atmosphere. Thus, APT recognizing this challenge came up with a solution to establish and initiate girls-run debate clubs where only girls will shape debate clubs so that families dare to allow their sister and daughter to debate, and further enhance their skills. Hence, following its track of activities, on 25th March, 2019, APT established a **female debate club in Balkh province**. This debate club is centered on girls only, where girl's students of Balkh University can debate openly. Another initiative by APT is that it established a **female debate club in Samangan** province on 23th Feb, 2019, this debate club is also girl-run and we will soon establish a girls' debate club in Kabul as well.

Memorandum of Understanding

As of quarter, APT is working in the below province with the below universities:

No	Kabul	Balkh	Nangarhar	Herat	Samangan	Badakhshan	Kandahar
1	Kabul University	Balkh University	Nangarhar University	Herat University	Samangan University	Badakhshan University	Kandahar University
2	Avicena University	Taj University	Khorasan University	Jami University	Teacher Training Center	Borna University	
3	Bakhtar University	Nokhbagan University		Kahkashan-e-Sharq	Mawlana University		
4	Kabul Education University	Balkh Education university		Khaja Ansari University			
5	Gharjistan University	Rahnaward University					
6	PDI of AUAF	Mawlana University					
7	Kabul Polytechnic	Nokhbagan University					
8	Kardan University	Aria University					

Leadership

On 7th March 2019, APT announced the call for application to its spring leadership course. After rigorous process of shortlisting the students and a round interview APT recruited 20 student from different universities Kabul, Polytechnic, Kardan, Rana, American University of Afghanistan and Kabul Education to its course. The classes started from 7th April and will continue till 5th May 2019.

The full report and topic discussions will be shared in the next quarter.

Media

During Past Quarter, APT through Ariana Radio Network (ATN) aired 13th live radio talk show. This quarter programs mostly focused on violent extremism factors, women and violent extremism and women on preventing violent extremism. Our radio program targets mother in 34 provinces of Afghanistan as the most influential member of a family who plays a crucial role in raising and healthy children changing children's behavior to play a positive role in society and dissuade them from joining to extremism groups.

Below were the topics APT's Radio Program covered last quarter:

- Socio-Economic, Educational, Political, Immigration Factors of Violent Extremism
- Changing gender roles in Afghanistan, Role of women in Promoting Violent Extremism
- United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 in Afghanistan
- How to promote role of women in CVE, bottom up/ individual approach
- Defining of children and adolescents in Afghanistan

Panel Discussion on "Violence and its impact on family and society" in Kabul:

Following our previous year project, this year our Radio Program focuses on engaging women and adolescent sons in discussion around the concepts that are related to countering violent extremism and to hear their concerns and suggestions about the violence extremism issues, therefore, APT conducted a discussion panel to around 100 participants at Turkish Department of Kabul University at 11th March 2019, The discussion panel focused on violence, the roots of violence, factors of violence, role of society in spreading violence, impact of violence in society, role of family in reducing or expanding the violence and role of government in controlling and making policies for educating people in order to not join violent extremism groups which was define by expert speakers and the at the end the flow given to the audience to share their paper underlining what policies the government should take to tackle the challenge of violent extremism.

APT's Elementary School – Mehrabanon

During the past quarter, APT recruited new kids to its Mehrabanon school and now the total number of our student in Mehrabanon School is 60 kids, of which 40 are females. The classes start based on Ministry of Education public school's curriculum. We have purchased and distributed text books for all our students, which is Include of six subjects such as Dari, Math, Drawing, Calligraphy, life skills and Islamic education. We have also provided the students the need stationary such as (notebook, pen, pencil, eraser, color pen) and toys and game equipment.

Research and Dialogue

Promoting Tolerance Project: APT after establishing 14 debate clubs in 14 public and privet universities and enrolling 240 students (90 female and 150 male) provided its research training to these students in Kabul, Mazar, Herat, Badakhshan, Nangarhar and Kandahar provinces of Afghanistan. APT conducted 190 research trainings in Total.

APT's role in the Current Peace Process

As this is the exciting momentum for all Afghans, including youth, since peace is shaping, at APT we are working on youth's meaningful participation and contribution in this process in two levels.

On National Level:

National Afghan Youth Conference on Post Peace Afghanistan

Afghanistan is getting close to a peace agreement than ever before, as the talks between the Afghan Government and the Taliban moves forward. If the peace is in place, the question will be how Afghanistan would look like? To find an answer to this question, APT will be conducting a one day National Youth conference focusing on Youth's perspectives on how the post war Afghanistan look like in Afghanistan, in October 2019. The first of its kind conference will bring around 90 youth and university students from across the country to discuss different themes such as Democracy, Governance, Women's inclusion, Economics, Education and Youth's inclusions in this one day event. APT will also invite Government official, civil society members and Afghan media to give a coverage of the event.

On International Level:

APT as the only Youth organization since the adoption of R2250 work hard to localize this resolution and worked closely with the government, UNOY and other stakeholder for youth's positive role in shaping the policies. In 2018, APT with the support of Netherlands Embassy in Afghanistan worked on the first ever initiative of the selecting the first ever Afghan Youth Representative to UN and Ramiz was selected. The ministry of foreign affairs, UN mission in

Afghanistan and Youth Affairs Department of Ministry of Culture and Information supported this initiative.

We did not want this to be a one-time event but take it beyond a project life and make it annual. Therefore, APT with the support German Embassy in Afghanistan is working on selection of the second Afghan Youth Representative this year. The applicant will meet with youth across Afghanistan in APT's national Youth Conference , hear their prospective about peace process, meet with the Afghan government and then travel to Germany and to the United Nations and brief the UN members on Youth and take their message on Peace. The Afghan government, the UN is in the picture and they are supportive of this.

IV. Qualitative Impact

During past quarter, APT staff have been working tirelessly and we are observing the desired outcome through the implemented activities, students were provided with opportunities to research and debate around different topics. Students who got a chance to participate in APT's debate round on the occasion of Black History Month at the Embassy of United States, Kabul, not only learned about the importance social inclusion, but also learned about how policies can bring people closer and make an inclusive society. Students also researched and learned about Lyndon B. Johnson's policies such as 'Great Society' and compared it to the current state of affairs in Afghanistan. In addition to that, they also shared with us how APT's programs have increased their critical thinking and improved their knowledge. They also shared how these programs were effective in increasing their confidence and through these programs they build good network and relationship with different kind of people. Moreover, our radio program listeners have shared how the radio program has positively affected their lives. They are telling us about seeing things from a different perspective particularly focusing on increased awareness on family relationships and behaviors.

Hamidullah Nadeem, a senior student of Law faculty at Kabul University who attended the competition wrote us: "The information I found when I was researching about the topic was absolutely an incredible experience and so much eye-opening. I learned about the challenges Lyndon B. Johnson was facing and how he came up with some very useful solutions. However different in some extent, we Afghans are also facing the same challenges. I learned how important it is to make all the citizens believe they are included and not forgotten. I learned that social inequalities exist and have been existed from very far past in almost every corner of the world, but this is useful policies that can counter this major challenge of the world".

Shokoh Nasiri, a student at PDI, wrote us how she was empowered by the research: "when I was preparing myself for debate, I went through a bunch of articles and researched about topics with similar theme. For instance, I read an article about how to counter and solve social inequalities in poor countries. In those articles, I learned how education on even money, currency system, and technology can help reduce social inequalities and lead to a more balanced society".

Likewise, in debate practice sessions, the students also practiced critical thinking as a method to construct persuasive arguments. They practiced a structured and more civic method of critiquing and disagreeing by adapting randomly assigned roles encouraging them to see through others' perspectives as opposed to traditional self-focused approaches. During the practice sessions, students debated variety of topics ranging from sports to politics and from economics to gender issues, further adding to the diversity. After the competition, students reported improved critical thinking, public speaking and reasoning skills, self-confidence.

Mr. Ali Ahmad Akbari, a junior student of Economics at Herat University said: "Since joining the program, I have remarkably developed my critical thinking skills as I can see multiple angles of things whether it's a debate practice session or day-to-day life. It has helped me to convince people more easily and accept the differences while staying calm when I encounter objections and disagreements."

Here we brought a quote of a woman who said about Hosa Zhuwand's Radio Program:

Shazia, a housewife and a mother of 3 children from Kandahar said that: Indeed, this radio program brought hope for millions of mothers across Afghanistan to raise their children in a healthy way. Those mothers which had many challenges in raising their narrow minded children but, through these talk shows they could find a solution.

I. Challenges

Lack of cooperation from universities: Following of this challenge in the past, there were still some delays in signing MoUs with universities and as a result we could not recruit the expected students on the time. Secondly, government universities do not cooperate regarding signing the MoUs. They requesting for extra paper works, bring excuses for having busy schedule and not having the authority, which caused additional delays.

Security Issues in provinces: In this quarter, we faced and overcame at least two challenges. First, Security challenges in some provinces that made us postpone or reschedule some of our activities. For instance, in Mazar, the assignment of new governor and the political conflicts between the ex-governor of Balkh, and the government, made us reschedule our trainings due to road blockades and turbulent security situation in Mazar.

Winter holidays: As most of our grants started during the winter, winter holidays made it quite challenging to reach students and specially the females. They are not available for trainings and most of them who are coming from remote areas, usually go back to visit their families into their villages or provinces. This makes it hard for us to regularly communicate with them and keep them informed of our activities. However, we try to keep them in the loop by prior communication with them and their fellow debaters.

II. Impact Stories

Rabbany, student of English Department at Samangan University shared his debating experined with us

I am Rabbany Rasikh, and grew up in a traditional family in which there are more than 7 members are living together. My father passed away about 10 years ago and me and my mother supports my family and the rest of my families' members' expenses. It was too tough to continue or being the supporter of the family without father, but I have given promise to myself to keep up my education and I did. In 2015 I could find access to passed Kankor examination and, Fortunately, I started my higher education at Samangan University in Education faculty, English and literature Department.

It is mentionable, I am a member of Samangan University Debate Club and I am fresh graduated from education faculty of Samangan University. And also, I am a freelance journalist and civil activist on my own province. Moreover, I am working with Radio Shahrwand as a reporter and presenter; it is a private Radio station in Samangan province.

I became acquaintance with APT and its programs through my friend, Mirhussain "Walizada" who was the former of APT's Samangan coordinator. . I was always wanting to find a way to boost up my public speaking skill because I was a journalist and this was very important to me. I also believed joining debate club would increase my debating skills and improve the quality of my work. And final goal was to have a Brilliant future, I started debating since 2016 by participating in Samangan debating training

Familiarizing with the APT family was not only an event; but a positive motive that shaped a new and professional life for me APT has brought more changes to my career and skills. For example, I changed my thoughts, attitudes and views about life, and I learned to be a prominent and trusted person.

Right now, I respect the ideas and views of others, because my discussion has taught me how to deal with diverse ideas, cultures and religions. Because each person has his or her own thoughts and each of the arguments is acceptable to express such an idea or view.

Fortunately, in 2018, I could participate to national debating championship in Kabul, and I gained more experience from this wonderful debate. The only part that has remained from national debate program was having hope for a progressive Afghanistan, as many youth gathered from the provinces of Afghanistan for talent competition at an academic place. This program brings such high-energy young Afghans to progress.

I really want to continue the discussion and encourage others to join APT in the future. The expansion of discussion clubs among school students is one of my goals, and I intend to create such an opportunity for students in the future.

Safiullah Atahi from Kabul University shared his impact story with us after his participation in APT's Research Program:

“I am Saifullah Atahi; currently studying communications studies at Journalism faculty of Kabul University. I am 20 years old and I have been an immigrant for about 15 years in Iran and Pakistan. The reason I participated in APT's research program was just to learn what is research, why is it so important and to mainly find answers to the question that why we afghan had to flee our country and why our country is in current situation?

It was a Friday evening in winter 1397 and I was busy visiting different pages in Facebook, I suddenly saw the Kabul University Debate Club's application form on Afghans for Progressive Thinking page. I instantly filled the form; after receiving confirmation email, I was invited for a face to face interview which led to my acceptance in Kabul University Debate Club. While studying about research methodologies, I came to learn about critical thinking which a basic part of research is. We learned how to frame a question and persuade someone to share his/her opinions. We learned that we need to be honest and also justify and respect various opinions.

On the cold winter days, we had our two-week research trainings in a friendly environment. We had many chances to question issues and research on them, as I now believe that if university students learn to do research on the controversial issues, we will have less conflict in our society.

Beside these benefits, I have also improved my communication skills right after I learned these skills and I believe that APT has really helped to build my capacity. Today I and my friends at the club believe that we can find solutions through research and avoid conflicts through debate. Since my family lives in a district in Ghazni province, I always call and share my new experiences at the club and they really appreciate me and feel proud of me. They ask about my weekly sessions and their interest in it shows that they are pleased with me and the APT. As far as I have a lot of seminars and researches to do at university, I am not worried about it because I have learned enough about how to do research. I thank the APT members and intend to have full cooperation regarding the Kabul University Debate Club.

Mr. Edris Tajik, a junior student of Law and Political Science at Herat University shares his debating experience with us:

“My name is Edris Tajik, a person who has experienced war and immigration. I was just four years old that I and my family migrated to another country and it was 2016 that I came back to Afghanistan because of continuing my education. Now I'm at second year of law and political science at Herat University. In addition, I am working as a volunteer with APT.

It was 2018 that I knew that there is an organization by the name of Afghans for Progressive Thinking or APT which is organizing social programs for youth like debate championships. I decided to be a debater and I needed a platform which APT made it for me. In my first debate championship experience I couldn't pass the regional level and enter to the national championships but I learnt many new things that helped me to be a better person in my life and for my people, a person who wasn't listening to the other people ideas now his view has changed and respect other people opinions about different things, By joining APT, the way of my thinking was changed and I met with new people. As a person who is studying law and political science APT helped me to respect new ideas from new people also this organization helped me to improve my leadership skills, also I've learnt to how organize a program for youth. Before joining APT, I did not have a good communication with other people but now I have completely changed and I can strongly say that my communication has remarkably changed. As a person who wants to help new generation of Afghanistan and who wants peace, I believe that APT is and can be one of the most important organizations for me to achieve my goals. I want the new generation of Afghanistan to not go through what I have experienced as a refugee."

