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Linking Technologists with Civil Society

iLabs' use new technology to find solutions for social change



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The winner team at the iLabs in Nangarhar

“iLabs was a new event in Jalalabad and we were not aware of the new technologies that we learned here, in overall this was a great and successful event.”

— Basmana Sarabi,
2015 Nangarhar, Afghan Women's Network

2015 was the iLab year for the Afghan Civic Engagement Program (ACEP), implemented by Internews, Counterpart International and the Aga Khan Foundation. The iLabs (or Innovation Labs) bring technologists and civil society activists together to innovate solutions for pressing problems in Afghanistan. Over 1,200 civil society activists, technologists and students participated in four competitions held in Herat, Kabul, Jalalabad and Mazar-e-Sharif, respectively. Social media coverage of the events attracted over one million views, making iLabs one of the most successful technology-based civil society events of the year.

Participants worked in teams to compete for mentorships and business planning assistance to make their idea a reality. The most recent round of iLabs were implemented by Tech Nation, who also included as co-organizers Techwomen, an organization dedicated to promoting technology for Afghan women.

“During these four days of iLabs I have learned as much as I could in four months. iLabs showed me different ways I can use my technical skills”, said Rohullah, a Software Engineer.

The winning apps have included iNobat, which allows users to reserve their place in line at government offices; Hayat, which regulates blood donations; and S-alerts, which allows parents to follow their children's progress at school.

iNobat has already attracted interest from the Afghan government. It is currently being incubated at the Ibitikaar institute, a government supported organization that provides business support to internet based businesses.

The iLabs program encourages civil society activists to be innovators in their field by giving them the technical support they need to creatively address social problems. Pairing that with mentoring and business development training in turn promotes an independent, sustainable, and strong civil society.