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SNAPSHOT

iLabs connect technology enthusiasts with civil society to solve real-life problems

USAID Civil Initiative Support Program bridges the gap between civil society and technology community.



Civil society and members of the technology community worked together to develop solutions for problems faced by the Afghan people.



The winning team of government representatives, civil society, and technology experts celebrated their success at the iLabs in Mazar-e-Sharif

“We learned so many skills that aren’t covered at University... But the best thing was the teamwork. All members of the teams worked together to identify a real issue and solve it.”

--Mr. Shinwari, computer science student and member of the iLabs Education team, Nangarhar province

Over the past decade Afghanistan’s technology sector has grown dramatically and consequently Afghan youth become increasingly tech-savvy. However, the links between civil society, the government, and the tech community still remain limited.

Under Afghan Civic Engagement Program (ACEP), Internews worked with local partner TechNation to connect Afghan technologists with civil society and government representatives and organized Afghanistan Innovation Labs (iLabs) in Mazar-e-Sharif and Jalalabad. The events created a unique opportunity for knowledge and information sharing among participants and developing innovative technology-based solutions to daunting challenges faced by the community.

iLab participants (education team) developed a mobile phone application designed to increase access to learning for people living in the most remote areas of Afghanistan. The app teaches users to read, write, and count. “I loved the opportunity to talk to people we wouldn’t normally meet, learn about their problems, and work together on finding solutions using technology. It’s a great idea to solve social problems faced by the people and I’m sure this [type of initiative] will lead our community in the right direction.” said Mr Ahmadi, a member of the winning team and a computer science student at Nangarhar University. Ms. Fazli, who was one of the civil society representatives in the team commented “I didn’t think we had such technically skilled people in Afghanistan... When I worked with the team, and saw them working on mobile applications, I felt so happy that Afghanistan has people with such skills... Some of the technology solutions would be very useful for civic engagement and definitely benefit the people.”

Members of the technology community in Mazar-e-Sharif were also happy to work with the government and civil society. A recent computer science graduate, Ms. Ansary, said “we used technology to solve actual problems... I am proud I participated in this event. I hope technology will be used more to assist all the citizens of Afghanistan.” Meanwhile, Mr. Zia, a Department of Public Health representative, said “I was so happy to see young tech people develop solutions to real social problems. CSOs should work closely with the technology community... I’m sure they’ll develop more solutions.”

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