



Volume 1 (January - March 2014)

# Newsletter

## Note:

This is the first volume of Medica Afghanistan's Newsletter. It will be further published on a quarterly basis, with update information about MA's activities and achievements.

## Introduction:

Since its establishment in 2002, Medica Afghanistan (MA) - Women Support Organization has continually been able to provide on-demand services to women and girls affected by war or other forms of gender-based violence through psychosocial, legal aid and mediation services. MA lawyers, social workers, psychologists, and mediators regularly visit justice, health and psycho-social centers in different locations of Kabul, Herat, and Mazar to provide quality services to women and girls. Furthermore, Medica Afghanistan team members advocate for national and local policies to bring about positive changes in the legislative system and public attitudes to improve the social status of women and girls. Finally, Medica Afghanistan conducts training programs on health, education through literacy courses, and laws to raise awareness and develop the capacity of public officials and other institutions, all with the ultimate aim of ending violence against women.

MA has specific expertise on the provision of trauma sensitive psychosocial, health and legal services targeted to women and girls who have experienced violence, including severe forms of inhumane treatment and torture. In addition, MA always combines direct services with advocacy efforts at the societal and political levels and has vast experience in this area.

Here is a snapshot of our programs and achievements during the first quarter of 2014:

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## Psychosocial and Health Program:

Starting in 2002, Medica Afghanistan's psychosocial and health program (PSHP) offers psychosocial counseling for women and girls who suffer from psychosocial and mental health disorders in Kabul, Herat and Balkh Provinces. Medica Afghanistan's professionally trained psychologists and counselors offer supportive psychosocial counseling in individual and group sessions at key locations throughout Kabul, such as District 10, Baghe-e-Zanana (women's garden), the juvenile center, women's shelters, and prisons. PSHP also maintains consolation centers in Kabul at Rabia-e-Balkhi and Stomatology Hospitals and at the main hospital in Herat Province.

In 2014, Medica Afghanistan expanded its psychosocial services to Cure International Hospital in Kabul and offers "in ward" counseling services to patients who suffer from psychiatric syndromes such as fear, anxiety, depression, and stigma due to health problems (obstetric fistula).

Experience proves that most of women who are referred for psychosocial services experienced various forms of gender-based violence including domestic violence, forced marriage, and rape in their lives. These problems eventually cause depression, anxiety, feelings of loneliness, and insomnia that require long-term care and psychosocial intervention. Depending on the severity of their specific problems, patients receive counseling services for a fixed term, usually six months or more.

During the first quarter of 2014 we provided counseling services to 59 individual clients, 257 group-formed clients, and 8 "in ward" clients in three provinces (Kabul, Mazar and Herat).



Our counselor during individual counseling session

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## Legal Aid Program:

Medica Afghanistan's legal aid program serves women and girls who have come into conflict with the criminal law or who seek a solution to a civil issue. MA provides legal advice, legal representation and defense, and family mediation services. In addition, MA provides self-reintegration services to women released recently from prison into their families and communities.

In the first quarter of 2014, we managed to follow 132 cases of women and girls. These cases included 22 criminal cases, 45 civil, 25 mediation, and 4 victims. In addition we provided social work support in 36 instances, including the criminal cases of 10 girls (female children) and 12 women in Kabul, Herat and Mazar Provinces. We helped in releasing five girls from a juvenile center. Further, the released clients and five women from prison benefited from our social services in achieving safe reintegration into their families and societies.



45 civil cases were followed up by MA defense lawyers; out of this number, 23 cases were resolved in favor of clients. 25 women benefited from our mediation service, 21 of them reaching an agreement. According to the assessment done by MA, the status of clients' lives improved, and they are now committed to their pledges. 4 cases were referred to the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) department after receiving legal advice.

In addition to legal advice, Medica Afghanistan's social workers, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Women's Affairs, provided employment for more than 15 indigent clients in areas such as food processing and housekeeping. The aim of this program is self-sufficiency and empowering poor women. It is important to note that this program is continuing in collaboration with different agencies. Medica Afghanistan's defense lawyers and social workers received a certificate of appreciation for their hard work and provision of better quality services by Rabia-e-Balkhi Hospital's Administration.



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## Capacity Building and Literacy Program:

Most of the problems experienced in Afghan society today are due to a lack of education. Specifically, most women in Afghanistan do not possess relevant knowledge about their basic rights. Using its 8 years' experience in running literacy classes for enlightening the minds of women and girls deprived of education and working closely with the Literacy Department of the Education Ministry, Medica Afghanistan established 8 literacy classes that offer literacy

*The literacy course focuses on women's empowerment through developing their reading and writing skills and raising their awareness about their rights. Through education, we can improve the quality of life for vulnerable women, enabling them to communicate better, to participate in decision-making in a constructive way, and to reduce family conflict. The literacy classes are being taught in accordance with the Literacy Department of Kabul curriculum. The course is completed in 9 months.*



In February 2014, approximately 192 participants of literacy classes from Kabul, Herat and Mazar Provinces received certificates of graduation, equivalent to third grade of public school. Recently, 190 students joined 8 literacy classes in Kabul, Herat and Mazar Provinces.

Each year, literacy teachers receive professional training conducted by Literacy Department of Kabul. At the beginning of 2014, five literacy teachers benefited from a second round of training on practices and methods of teaching to adults.

Moreover, MA conducted a training program for stakeholders in the area of its expertise. For instance, one round of training was conducted for UNDP staff on "Root causes for violence against women in Afghan culture," with practical examples centering on domestic violence, women's rights, Sharia law, and the psychological consequences of violence. After the session, participants expressed their gratitude for the information and the opportunity to learn more about violence.

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## Advocacy Program:

In addition to providing direct services to women, Medica Afghanistan works diligently to improve the quality of women's lives by advocating for their human rights. The purpose of the advocacy work is to bring about positive changes in legislation, policies, and attitudes towards women. Medica Afghanistan campaigns for mandatory legal registration of marriage as a tool to prevent child and forced marriages which are unlawful in Afghanistan and widely result in severe violence against women and girls.

Furthermore, MA lobbies for implementation of EAW law by prosecutors and judges. MA has also been active within the Family Law Drafting group, pushing for the enactment of a new family law that will respect women's rights. Since April 2013 to mid-February 2014, Medica Afghanistan has taken an active role in the entire Criminal Code advocacy process, and it contributed to amending the language of Article 26 of the Criminal Procedure Code to avoid any misinterpretation and ensure consistency with international standards.

In order to mobilize women and girls to participate in the OBR (One Billion Raise) march, Medica Afghanistan participated actively in the preparatory meetings and was responsible for holding the One Billion Raise ceremony in Mazar Province. Representatives of 50 government and non-government organizations participated in the ceremony, including who had been assisted by Medica Afghanistan's regional office in Mazar Province. The event captured national media coverage. The status of women in Afghanistan has long been dismal, especially in rural areas where few are educated, forced marriages are common, and those who flee abusive husbands are sometimes thrown in jail. The MA team in Mazar used this opportunity to sensitize the participants about sexual and gender-based violence, inhumane treatment and other issues related to women's human rights.

