

Peace and stability through cultural dialogue and psychosocial support in Afghanistan

Kabul, Baghlan, Balkh, Herat, Bamiyan,
Takhar, Kunduz, Badakhshan, Nangarhar



ipso

International psychosocial organisation



german
cooperation

DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT

این چه رسمیت که خود بینیم و دنیا ز نظر اندازیم
 نه وقار و نه بقایت نه راهی که دین رسم به پیشیم
 این چه آئینست که خود خواهیم و مردم به هم اندازیم
 این چه کجاست که همه در دایره سوزند و گزند اندازیم
 این چی عقلست که به هر رنگش نظر عیب اندازیم
 باید یکبار به گل های این گلستان نظر اندازیم
 این چنین رنگ که هستیم بدان باید بپذیریم
 ورنه از کالبد انسانی خود را بدر اندازیم



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OVER THE LAST TEN YEARS

THE PSYCHOSOCIAL COUNSELLORS HAVE HELPED MANY PEOPLE IN AFGHANISTAN THROUGH THEIR PSYCHO-SOCIAL COUNSELLING SERVICES.

Men and women, older and younger people, who were suffering from family conflicts, very often accompanied by violence and caused by a different understanding of cultural values and traditional practices.

The cultural change taking place in Afghanistan, even more so in rural Afghanistan, provokes many intergenerational conflicts. Traditional values are at stake. Changing gender roles, digital globalization, films and soap operas from countries such as India and Turkey question traditional and cultural values and demand a reflection, re-negotiation and re-discovery of cultural values and practices. This cultural change does not necessarily mean to leave old values behind. It can also mean embracing the own culture while adapting and changing certain restrictive practices, which hurt people in their fundamental rights and lead to violence and victimization. Most of such conflicts could have been avoided or solved if people would have been able to talk to each other about their cultural understanding, their own values, their family values, the differences between these values and the consequences of these differences. These experiences and insights have motivated us to develop the cultural container project which combines cultural expression, cultural dialogue

and psychosocial support. The project's core are the cultural containers and their "cultural field workers", which were placed in the six northern provinces Kabul, Bamiyan, Herat, Balkh, Badakhshan and Nangarhar. Our containers serve as hubs for cultural expression and dialogue and take an active part in the local Afghan life by inviting interested, local people and artists from all generations and from all social and ethnic walks of life. Discovering the cultural diversity of the respective communities, we worked on improving the understanding of Afghan cultural identity through story-telling, poetry, calligraphy, drawing, theatre and reflecting on Afghan cultural values. This was communicated to the Afghan population through smaller and bigger exhibitions, concerts and other cultural events. Pictures, short reports and films were posted in the project's blog: www.ipso-cc-afghanistan.org.

The first year of the project was dedicated to the exploration of the cultural expression of the people living around the container: "Mapping the arts and artistic expression, culture and cultural expression around the container" was our overall aim and defined all activities. The six teams of cultural fieldworkers developed their own action plan and activities and put emphasis on what

mattered in their close communities. For instance, the team in Kabul started with exploring how street children expressed themselves through music and theater.

The containers also offered the possibility for people to express themselves through art. Different workshops encouraged people to try a new way to express themselves symbolically. Many of the Afghans, who came to the container during the two years (16 346 visitors) had been exposed to traumatic events or forced marriages, were displaced, had experienced migration or communal or domestic violence. For all of them, artistic expression, music, poetry and painting had become a way to express what could not be said with words. Cultural symbols as inner places of reconciliation were creating meaning in life, could be communicated to others and were understood by others. This proved to be a huge resource, especially as Afghans have such a long tradition and history of culture and cultural expression. Many people were playing a musical instrument, were singing, reciting poetry or painting, although they had never had the chance to learn these arts professionally. At the end of year one, the cultural fieldworker teams had organized big, local exhibitions on different topics*.



In the second year our main aim was to introduce "cultural dialogue" as a key activity of the containers. We wanted to establish the containers as a safe place where people could explore their own values and those of their own traditions and cultures. The cultural and artistic expression stayed as an ongoing activity. During the year 2014, 3727 people have been involved in dialogues, moderated by our cultural field workers. The aim of the dialogue was to become more conscious of the present situation: "Being rooted in a world in transition, partly following tradition, partly being influenced by other new values and cultures, we started looking at the artistic expression and asked: What is expressed? What are their experiences, thoughts and values which are being expressed?" In these dialogues people explored their own values, the values of their family and community. They asked: "Where do our own values match with those of our families and communities and where do they differ? How do they differ? How do we cope with differences? How is our behaviour aligned to these values?" For many people it was the first time that they were able to reflect such topics with others. A good example is the video "My life", which can be seen on the blog www.ipso-cc-afghanistan.org As a further component of the project,

psychosocial counsellors functioned as an important back up and gave psychosocial support to many people who needed a personal, confidential talk. Our counsellors provided counselling in public health clinics all over Afghanistan and online through our online video portal: www.ipso-ecare.com. In this project we aimed to strengthen social and cultural identity as a precondition for peace and reconciliation. Through insight and awareness, created and strengthened through dialogues and personal talks, our assumption was confirmed that people who can communicate with each other, who can allow themselves to be curious, who can discuss their values and align their behavior to those values, such people experience themselves as active and socially responsible. They enjoy a state of psychosocial well-being.

This project so far has been a most wonderful experience for all of us: for our team in Kabul, for the six teams in the provinces and for the people who came to the containers. Although we might have different traditions and different histories, we all share the same ability to experience joy, love and empathy. We all have a natural tendency to be curious as to who we are and who the other might be. We are curious how people live in Bamiyan and how they

live in Balkh, what people believe in Badakhshan, listening to music in Herat and to poems in Nangarhar.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all people who were contributing with their dedicated and hard work and their vision to make this project a success: I want to thank our teams in Afghanistan and Germany for their commitment, our teams in the provinces, working through the containers, engaging people by daring to go out on the streets, meeting people, talking to people, being curious of what they have to say and how they express themselves in their own culture. I want to thank all Afghan authorities in Kabul and in the provinces, who were supporting this project through their cooperation and with their encouraging ideas.

I want to thank our donor the German Foreign Office and all the people from the Afghanistan Department in Berlin and the German Embassy in Kabul. I want to thank them for their openness, readiness and generosity to engage in this unusual project. [Inge Missmahl](mailto:Inge.Missmahl@ipsocontext.org)

* http://www.ipsocontext.org/images/AUSSTELLUNGSKATALOG_SCREEN.pdf

SINCE JANUARY

PROVIDING PSYCHOSOCIAL COUNSELLING SERVICES AT HEALTH FACILITIES OF NINE PROVINCES

Our psychosocial counsellors (PSCs), who are working in primary and secondary public health care clinics all over Afghanistan, provide psychosocial counselling services in health facilities and hospitals to Afghan women, men and children in need. Individual sessions, group sessions, awareness and psychoeducation are delivered daily by our psychosocial counsellors.

With this project we were able to continue providing these supervised services in the six northern provinces Balkh, Badakhshan, Baghlan, Takhar, Kunduz and Kabul. Commonly clients show somatic, depressive and anxiety symptoms. These symptoms are mostly an expression for psychosocial stressors such as family conflicts, domestic violence, financial hardship, insecurity and intergenerational conflicts through the rapidly changing society. The clients who are coming to the clinics mostly feel very helpless and hopeless towards their situation. Our psychosocial counsellors help them to understand their situation better and to regain influence in their lives.

The Ministry of Public Health appreciated the work of the Ipso PSCs, who served their people and who were ready to travel to support people in emergency situations, such as after the flood disaster in Badakhshan in April 2014.



JANUARY

INTRODUCTION & SET UP OF THE PROJECT

In the first phase of our project the aims and activities of the action were explained and discussed with our Ipso team and all stakeholders active in the field of culture, such as the Ministry of Culture and Information, relevant NGOs and various authorities and institutions. We first developed a detailed action plan and then hired additional staff to be able to implement all activities of this exciting project.



PROJECT TIMELINE
JANUARY 2013 - DECEMBER 2014

Peace and stability through cultural dialogue and psychosocial support in Afghanistan (Kabul, Baghlan, Balkh, Herat, Bamiyan, Takhar, Kunduz, Badakhshan, Nangarhar)

FEBRUARY

DEVELOPMENT OF CURRICULA FOR THE TRAININGS

Cultural toolbox – The challenge was to develop a curriculum for the training of our cultural field workers. The aim of their work in the first year was clear: “Mapping the culture and artistic expression around the container.”

Then we had to imagine and define the activities with which this aim could be reached and decide on the skills, knowledge and attitudes they would need in order to fulfill this task in the best possible way. In many small workshops and discussions we developed our “cultural toolbox”.

Community health workers –The community health workers are well integrated members in their community and are responsible for basic health care such as vaccination. They can play an important part in awareness and psycho-education regarding psychosocial well-being and promotion and prevention of mental health. We prepared a 5-day training for them.

Teachers – Many students in school have difficulties in concentrating and learning, quite a few students also show a behavior which is either aggressive or regressive. According to our data this has to do with the exposure of these children and young people to difficult family situations and to violence in general. We developed a training that facilitated understanding to the teachers, on why their students are behaving in such ways. We developed a 5-day curriculum for this training.



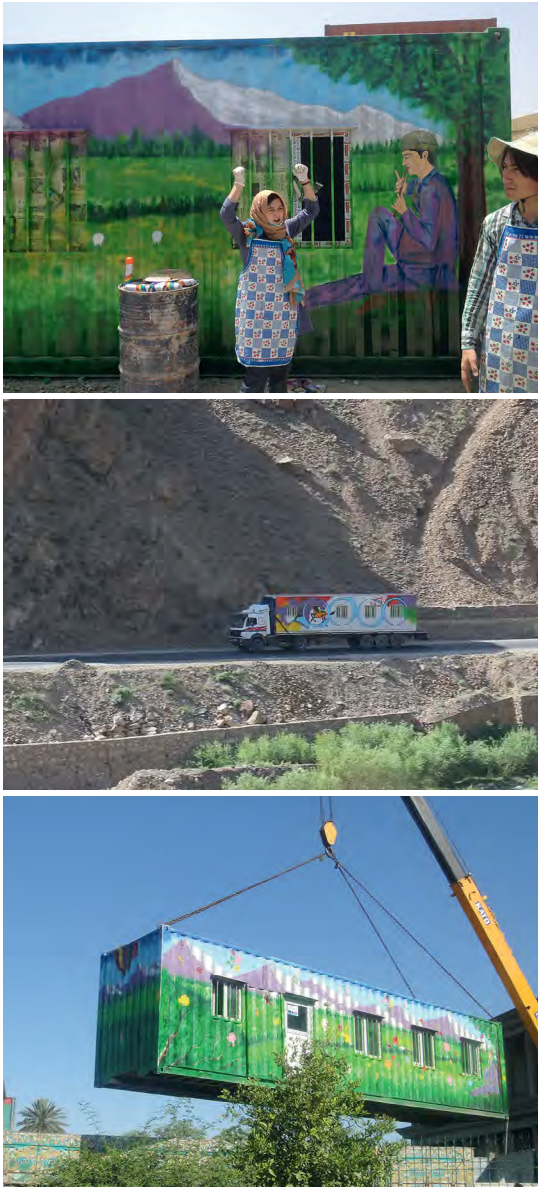
MARCH/APRIL/MAY

SETTING UP SIX CULTURAL CONTAINERS

Our six cultural containers to be set up in the six target provinces were first colourfully painted by students of the department of Fine Arts of the University of Kabul.

Together with the students we developed ideas for designs which would fit the culture of each province. The students came up with wonderful ideas and at the end we had six amazing containers. They were loaded on trucks and transported to their final locations in the provinces by our logistic team. This was quite a performance. The people in the villages, where the trucks passed through, were surprised when they saw these colourful containers!

The locations for the containers were provided by the respective municipalities. Together with the local authorities, our team spent a lot of time to look for suitable locations for the cultural containers. The local ministries of information and culture supported the setting up of our containers and were more than happy to support these activities for all the people in their province – for old and young, women and men and different ethnic groups.



MARCH/APRIL/MAY

SELECTION OF CULTURAL FIELD WORKER TRAINEES

The selection of the cultural field worker (CFWs) trainees was announced nationally through the internet and local announcements in the target provinces.

We were looking for young and enthusiastic people who were willing to engage themselves, who had a background in culture and who had good communication skills. The main selection criteria were: university education and/or practical work experience in the field of artistic expression and culture, to be at least 25 years old, high-sensitivity to local socio-cultural specificities and long-term commitment. More than 200 men and women applied for this position. After a written test and oral interviews, we chose 32 very interesting, talented and enthusiastic men and women and invited them to the first training in Kabul in the beginning of June.



2013

JUNE

TRAINING OF 30 CULTURAL FIELD WORKERS IN THE IPSO TRAINING CENTER IN KABUL

The motto for the first year of the CFWs' activities was "Mapping the culture and artistic expression around the container". First the CFWs had to deeply understand the aim and intention of the project.

Further topics of this first training were: communication skills, the psychosocial situation in Afghanistan today, the transition from traditional society to a more open society which is influenced by the media, public relations, administrative procedures and reporting. Finally, we also touched the rich cultural history of the country and looked at Afghan painting, calligraphy, poetry, music and narrative theater today.

In a next step the teams of the containers selected a team leader and developed first ideas of how they wanted to implement their activities. The teams, respecting and considering their local culture and traditions, developed their action plans for the first 2-3 months. From the beginning we wanted the teams to take responsibility for what they do.

We discussed those action plans in the big group, revised some of them and then explored how to organize their planned activities. We also talked about how to reach the people who lived around their containers and how to encourage artists to participate and community members, children and young people to explore and enjoy their culture and art.

Another topic was the visibility of the project and the cooperation with cultural development centers, shuras and artistic organizations.



SETTING UP A WEBLOG DOCUMENTING THE ACTIVITIES OF OUR CFWs IN THEIR PROVINCES

Following our mission statement – to contribute to a world in which the people are conscious, creative, taking responsibility for themselves and their environment, reaching out in dialogue relating to the others and the world, passionate, curious and empathetic – we wanted that the social and cultural activities of our CFWs are accessible to all interested people in Afghanistan and all over the world. Therefore, we set up a weblog (www.ipso-cc-afghanistan.org) documenting the activities of the CFWs, presenting interesting artists and their skills, providing information about Afghan culture and inviting people to up-coming community activities.



JULY

JULY

CULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN SIX PROVINCES

Our CFWs started their work in the provinces.

They communicated the aim of the project and visited officials and local authorities, schools and artists inviting all of them to the cultural containers to participate in cultural activities such as painting, reciting poetry or listening to story tellers and musicians. The cultural containers were immediately accepted by the people, they were enjoying the creativity, enthusiasm and happiness that could be experienced at these places. The containers became a place for everybody. People came to participate in artistic activities and to learn new skills so that they got to know more about their culture. They enjoyed the peaceful environment away from the stressful daily obligations, thoughts and feelings.



OCTOBER

SEPTEMBER

SECOND TRAINING OF 30 CULTURAL FIELD WORKERS IN THE IPSO TRAINING CENTER IN KABUL

The second training for the CFWs was very interesting: Each team reported their experiences. All were very enthusiastic about the resonance of their activities.

It was wonderful to see how each team had set a different emphasis. Some were engaged with street children, some were more connected with professional artists. We also discussed their challenges and developed coping strategies. New skills especially in communication, documentation, photography and filming were also part of this training. The teams adapted their action plans in order to get a better balance by addressing all people, including the professional artists as well as the poor people of the region. Finally, the whole team visited the container in Nangarhar. It was an emotional experience for all when the Hazaras and the Pashtuns danced together and we all enjoyed the hospitality and the cultural activities of the Nangarhar team. Our cultural field workers from Bamiyan, Herat and the northern provinces were amazed how much this visit had opened their minds and reduced the prejudice they had about the province of Nangarhar with its Pashtun population.

Back in Kabul we visited the exhibition at Babur's Garden "The Mughals: Art, Culture and Empire." This excellent exhibition inspired the whole team on how Afghan culture and art could be documented today. This visit to the exhibition was the starting point to discuss and reflect on our final exhibitions in the provinces at the end of the year. The homework for each team was to develop an idea, a motto for their exhibition in December 2013.



PRODUCTION OF THE SONG "KHANE E AFGHAN" - THE HOUSE OF THE AFGHANS TOGETHER WITH THE SINGER SHAHZAD ADEEL

Together with the famous Afghan singer Shahzad Adeel, we developed and produced a song named "Khana e Afghan" (The house of the Afghans), showing our CFWs in their provinces and promoting the idea of unity in the cultural diversity of Afghanistan.

The song was played by many local radio and TV stations and was performed live at our cultural conference in Kabul in December 2013 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kRIDHvn9G00>). The teams in the provinces started to collect "peace letters" from young and old, from women and men. The intention was to encourage people to describe their idea of how a peaceful life in their community would look like and what they could contribute to it. Many people wrote moving statements. We collected them all and selected the 40 best ones to be presented at the cultural conference in Kabul.



DECEMBER

KABUL OPENING CONFERENCE AND PROVINCIAL ART EXHIBITIONS

The cultural conference in Kabul was supposed to be the opening for all provincial exhibitions of the containers.

The motto was “Unity in cultural diversity”. With this conference we wanted to emphasize the rich cultural expression present today in Afghanistan, to bring attention to culture and artistic expression as a resource for all people. We also had invited many artists from the provinces who were performing their music, reciting poetry and painting a picture: six artists were oil-painting on a screen 4 meters by 1,50 meters. They painted live at the conference without talking. The motto of the painting was “Peace”.

The German Deputy Ambassador Oliver Owczka opened the conference. The advisor to the President Eng Pashtun, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, authorities from the provinces and the Ministries of Culture and Information, artists and others talked and recited poems. It was a wonderful event and the people left happy and inspired. After the conference each province opened their doors to the public, inviting them to experience their local culture through art pieces, theater plays, music performances and installations. There were thousands of people visiting the exhibitions. The feedback on these events and their atmosphere were amazing and motivating for all of us.



NOVEMBER

THIRD TRAINING OF 30 CULTURAL FIELD WORKERS IN THE IPSO TRAINING CENTER IN KABUL

The topic of this training were the local exhibitions. We discussed their topics in detail, as well as all of the action plans. We wanted to define how to curate their themes and how to organise such a big event. Administrative and financial aspects, the communication strategy of these events and the inclusion of all relevant local stakeholders and authorities were considered. Full of enthusiasm the teams left our Kabul office to start their preparations. The topics for each province were: Kabul – Color of Life; Nangarhar – Peace; Herat – Youth; Balkh – Freedom; Badakhshan – Nature.

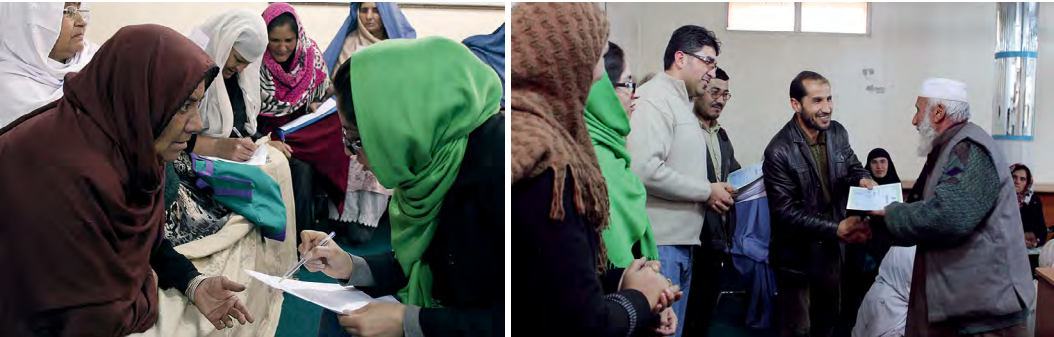


DECEMBER

TRAINING OF 450 COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS

Our national mental health trainers for psychosocial counselling with the support of our master trainers conducted 5-day trainings in Kabul, Herat, Bamiyan, Badakhshan, Balkh, Nangarhar, Takhar, Baghlan and Kunduz for the Community Health Workers (CHW).

Local authorities and ministries appreciated the training a lot as there do exist a lot of psychosocial problems within the communities, which stay undetected and untreated. Now qualified CHWs have the knowledge and skills to raise awareness within the communities for psychosocial difficulties and to introduce them to PSCs working in health facilities nearby. The work of the CHWs enables the health system to early recognize and better manage the care and treatment of mental health problems and to decrease the level of stigmatization.



JANUARY

SUPERVISION MEETING AND TRAINING OF 30 CULTURAL FIELD WORKERS IN THE IPSO TRAINING CENTER IN KABUL

After the wonderful response of the Afghan public to the exhibitions, we evaluated what we did content wise and also from an administrative and logistic point of view to be prepared for the next event and to integrate the lessons learned.

Then the main topic of the second year of the cultural containers was introduced: “Cultural dialogue”. First questions we discussed were: “What does it mean and why do we need such a societal dialogue? What is the aim, with whom do we lead the cultural dialogue and with which methodology?” Then in a skill-based learning, using role plays and experiencing the cultural dialogue ourselves, we approached the topic. We also introduced a psychosocial counsellor to the container as a support. As the aim of the second year was to establish the container as a “safe place”, we wanted to continue with the artistic activities as well to further provide the possibility to express oneself artistically. Each day one activity was scheduled and offered to the visitors – one day for painting, one day for poetry, the next for music and so on.



MARCH

SUPERVISION MEETING AND TRAINING OF THE CULTURAL FIELD WORKERS IN THE IPSO TRAINING CENTER IN KABUL

During this training the CFWs could share their experiences on a personal level. Next we discussed again the aim of the dialogue, which is to become more conscious about personal values, family values, and collective values of traditional society, the difference between them and how we deal with this difference. Also automatically this discussion led to topics, which touch taboos and sensitive issues from which people suffer, but which are so far not addressed in public or even private discussions. Topics are for instance, child marriage and forced marriage, the right to be educated, gender issues and responsibilities within families. It became evident that the cultural dialogue is not intended and cannot be a replacement for the psychosocial counselling. Therefore, if people really suffer from psychosocial stressors and are in need of counselling, our PSCs will provide counselling sessions either in a personal meeting or online. All CFWs went back to their containers with new courage, insights and skills. We announced a short movie festival and encouraged young people to make a 1 minute film with the title: "My Afghanistan" with their smart phones.

SUPERVISION AND TRAINING OF THE CULTURAL FIELD WORKERS IN THE IPSO TRAINING CENTER IN KABUL

During that meeting the CFWs from each province presented their experiences in facilitating the cultural dialogues.

They found this activity more and more interesting and were impressed by the openness of the people, who participated in the dialogues and their readiness to discuss sensitive topics. Obviously there is a need to reflect upon the values and to negotiate personal values newly. It became evident that the aim of the cultural dialogues – to start a societal dialogue – could be reached.

JUNE

SINCE FEBRUARY

STARTING CULTURAL DIALOGUES IN OUR CULTURAL CONTAINERS

While the CFWs continued their socio-cultural activities at community level, they started to facilitate first cultural dialogues as well. They started with people they knew to gain some experience. Soon it became evident that the CFWs felt overwhelmed by the topics and the individual suffering. Therefore we supported them through personal talks, self-experience and more skills.



JULY

RAMADAN

During Ramadan all offices in Afghanistan are only half day open. All activities slow down. We used these months for documentation, for filling our database and for improving the skills of our online counsellors. We were now ready to go online for the general Afghan public. Also outside of the Ipso project, as we had been testing the software extensively and adapted the technical usability to the low and changing internet availability in the country.

IPSO'S ONLINE COUNSELLING SERVICE GOES ONLINE!

Additionally to the psychosocial counselling services in health facilities all over Afghanistan, Ipso developed an online counselling service, which started its work in Afghanistan in August (<https://www.ipso-ecare.com/home.html>).

Ipso observed during its work in the health facilities that a huge group of people would not be reached through these direct services in the clinics. We observed that the educated Afghan middle class avoids going to the crowded primary health care clinics and instead visits private clinics, which are not offering these psychosocial counselling services. Therefore, Ipso developed an online video portal with psychosocial counselling service guaranteeing confidentiality and anonymity and being easily accessible through internet. Our psychosocial counsellors received an extra training in order to be enabled to use the developed software and to get used to the slightly different setting.



PARTICIPATION AT THE INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY IN KABUL

The United Nations had organized this celebration to put attention to young people's mental health burden. Ipso was invited to join the International Youth Day and to participate in a panel discussion.

Dr. Freshta Quedeas, the director of Ipso Afghanistan, was one of the panelists and stated that Ipso's experience shows that providing a space for self-expression through arts for young people allows them to speak about their personal and social values which can be a preventive measure against social isolation and self-destruction.



AUGUST

OCTOBER

TRAINING OF SCHOOL TEACHERS IN SIX NORTHERN PROVINCES

600 teachers in the six provinces received a training in which we discussed and reflected their own situation and the situation of young people and children today. The aim of the trainings was to enable school teachers to better understand, from a developmental, cultural and psychosocial perspective, the challenges students have, possible reasons behind aggressive behaviour and why students have difficulties in learning and keeping their concentration. This training was highly appreciated by the Ministry of Education and by all teachers.

In the course of the project Ipso proposed to the Ministry of Higher Education to provide a psychosocial training to school teachers. The ministry was very happy about our idea and supported our initiative very much. We were able to include 600 teachers of the six provinces where the containers are located (Kabul, Badakhshan, Bamiyan, Herat, Balkh, Nangarhar) in our trainings. The trainings were conducted by our trainers and NMHTs with the help of the CFWs of each province. The training consisted of knowledge transfer and self-experience in order to raise teachers' awareness regarding students' challenges, and at the same time to better understand own challenges and their influence on daily life as a teacher. While reflecting on their own life experiences, many teachers realized the challenges they had faced and the resources they have used to overcome difficult life situations. They became aware of psychosocial stressors and realized that their students suffered from difficult life situations as well. And as much as their own difficulties effect their own behaviour in the classroom, their students' difficulties do as well. The teachers worked in groups on the challenges of students and teachers and the teachers named many problems of their students, such as not having a private place for learning, family conflicts, exposure to traumatic events and poverty; similar challenges they found for themselves. The question "What kind of teacher did you like best, when you were a student?", made them think and they stressed that teachers were very important to them, when they were students and that they liked those who treated them well and kindly – because this motivated them as children to do better. The teachers understood that assisting and supporting the children's efforts and to recognize their problems, will help to improve the students' performance in school and will help to facilitate a joyful working and learning atmosphere for their students and themselves. This empowerment helped the teachers to develop good and new ideas of how to shape the interaction with the students. They planned to give students a more positive feedback, such as writing encouraging words in their note books and to ask their families for personal talks. Overall, the teachers were very thankful for the training and the opportunity to better get to know themselves and the challenges a student faces in every day life. One of the teachers said the training opened her eyes and gave her back the joy of teaching. Our trainers were also very impressed of the huge impact this short training had and they agreed with the teachers that it is crucial to train more teachers and to even support students through psychosocial counselling within the schools.



NOVEMBER

PROVINCIAL EVENTS



The local events in the provinces were related to the cultural dialogues. For instance in Nangarhar the team had a public cultural dialogue on mistrust in society, in Bamiyan marriage customs were explored and forced marriages and child marriages were discussed. In Badakhshan the challenging question was: "How old traditions and modern culture can influence each other in a positive way". In Balkh the topic was "the poet Dschalal ad-Din ar-Rumi" and Sufi dances were shown and spiritual aspects of his poems were brought to attention and discussed. All teams appreciated the great experience of bringing a large number of people together and to discuss social and personal values in an open and friendly atmosphere.

DECEMBER

"CULTURAL JIRGA" – KABUL CONFERENCE

This year, the Kabul cultural conference was called "Cultural Jirga" as our main emphasis in the year 2014 was to establish cultural dialogues in the containers.

The German Ambassador Markus Potzel spoke about the need for freedom of cultural expression and cultural activities to build a peaceful society. Then he announced the continuation of the project which made everybody very happy. Mr. Quayum Wafa spoke about the responsibility every Afghan has to build up a peaceful society in Afghanistan and Dr. Fareshta Queredes reflected on the activities of the last year. Poets accompanied the speeches with their recitations.

As the name of this event was "Cultural Jirga" we organized a public cultural dialogue on two topics:

- » "The unlimited use of technology and internet": Most of the participants were in favour of an unlimited use, but recommended to educate people first to be selective and responsible and use it for education and information.
- » "Violence against women": The role of education was stressed. Traditional practices and the understanding of the role of women in traditional settings were seen as the main reasons for violence against women.



THE CULTURAL DIALOGUE

DURING THE SECOND YEAR OF OUR PROJECT WE AIMED AT INITIATING A REFLECTION ON CULTURAL AND TRADITIONAL VALUES IN A CHANGING WORLD THROUGH MODERATED DIALOGUES AND DISCUSSIONS.

A further intention of the cultural dialogues was to raise awareness and consciousness for the need of a positive development of cultural and social life in Afghanistan.

Therefore, the dialogues' concept is first to explore the personal values, and then compare them to family and collective values. In this way we can find out the origin of possible differences and develop ideas of how to bridge the differences, how to renegotiate values if needed and how to align own behaviour to personal values of increased social responsibility. Further questions are how to differentiate between culture and tradition and how to balance the tension between traditional cultural values and modern values.



This activity was very much accepted by the Afghan people. Especially the younger generation appreciated the dialogues – one of them was the young girl Humainra, who said:

“One of my friends called me in the morning and told me to be prepared, because she wanted to take me to a good place. After some minutes she picked me up and we took a taxi. I was curious where she was taking me to. I was guessing that it might be an exhibition, but after we got off the car I realized it was somewhere I had never been before. I saw a colorful painted container, inside of it were paintings and photographs hanging on the wall. We were warmly welcomed by the cultural field worker team who treated us very friendly. Together with some other visitors we sat in the container and talked to each other. The cultural field workers facilitated the dialogue and we got to know each other. I liked the freedom we enjoyed during our talk and I got to know new and interesting people who shared their ideas with us.”



Topics such cultural dialogues covered were:
Peace, education, the gap between the generations and how to close it, the adversities between ethnic groups, the role of art and artists, family life, the role and importance of trust, changing gender roles and what it means for men and women – just to mention a few. People who attended our dialogues realized very emotional, thoughtful and meaningful insights such as:

“We can make our world better by accepting each other.”

“One day my mom said: ‘When I was 16 years old I was married to your father. I had never seen your father before. Now I have four children and one of them is you. I do not want you to be in the same situation as myself, therefore, you will have the right to choose your husband!’”

“Although, I am a father of three children, I still don’t dare to talk in front of my father about any issue important to me.”

“The personal value and respect for our Elders means everything to them. Therefore, they do not allow us, the younger generation, to sit with them to discuss topics as they feel that this would dishonor them.”

“We need to strengthen and to increase our knowledge and information about our own culture and customs, then we will stand on a firm ground.”

“Women can have a key-role in the future of Afghanistan, without the active participation of us in society there will be no progress.”

Our Ipso team is very happy that so many people came and were able to express themselves without the fear of not being accepted, just as Mustafa said:

“I was very pleased to find this container. I felt safe and secure to express myself, everybody was respectful and friendly towards me. I am so happy that I have found a place of people, who have a positive mind and an encouraging behavior. Considering the insecurity in our country and the uncertainty, I feel that I have found a treasure.”



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Ipsos gemeinnützige Gesellschaft mbH

International Psychosocial Organisation

Trade register local court Freiburg i.Br. B 207 197 on 01.03.2008

Purpose:

Ipsos is specialized in the field of mental health and psychosocial care, in developing locally adapted concepts, delivering trainings for psychosocial counsellors, medical doctors, nurses and community health workers for treating mental health-related problems including depression, anxiety and posttraumatic stress following war, insecurity and challenging living conditions.

Furthermore, it aims at strengthening the cultural identity of war-torn societies through cultural programmes, which is a precondition for peace and reconciliation, and the rebuilding of civil society in the aftermath of a civil war and natural catastrophes.

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