Every Voice Counts (EVC) Program
Third National Advocacy Conference
Position Paper

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OVERVIEW OF SITUATION:

Afghanistan is one of the countries in the world that needs to improve education and health services for its citizens and intensify the efforts that have already been taken by the Education and Health Ministries. According to Afghanistan’s Constitution, access to health and education services is a fundamental right of citizens, which requires serious actions and support from relevant official authorities.

THE ISSUE:

In recent decades Afghan rural women and girls have been experiencing marginalization of proper access to education and health services. Moreover, they have been denied equal opportunity to participate in local decision-making processes. Their roles have been limited to household activities rather than meaningful participation in community social and development activities, despite the commitment that the Afghan Government has made for women’s empowerment in different aspects. The Every Voice Counts (EVC) program functions within the government framework to contribute to empowering women’s and girls’ capabilities, supporting their access to education and health services, and promoting their inclusion in local decision-making processes on issues that concern them. Fortunately, there have been some positive changes\(^1\) observed in the EVC program’s target areas, specifically in the attitude and responsiveness of local government officials towards women and girls’ education and health rights and needs. Furthermore, communities’ perception of women participation in the decision-making process has changed positively at the local level. However, despite these achievements, still there are vital barriers that limit women participation in decision-making processes and service accessibility, such as: harmful social norms and practices, poor awareness on women rights and basic needs from an Islamic perspective, illiteracy, and limited budget allocation and assets for health and education local sectors.

PROGRAM RESULTS:

Since 2016 the EVC Program is implemented by CARE and its partners, namely Afghan Women Resource Center-AWRC, Women and Children Legal Research Foundation-WCLRF and Human Rights, Research and Advocacy Consortium-HRRAC. We work in eighty targeted communities in four provinces namely Balkh,

\(^1\) Community Scoring Card Findings
Khost, Parwan and Kabul. EVC is a program that invests in social cohesion and community development, while contributing to women and girls’ empowerment, an enabling environment, civil society strengthening and government responsiveness through different interventions such as capacity development, rights awareness raising, lobby and advocacy, social accountability, research and knowledge management. As a result, there are increases in girls’ access to education (re-enrolment of girls at school), women access to local health services, women participation in local decision making processes (e.g. in community development councils), women recruitment in local official structures and community groups, and in renovation, approval and start of construction for new schools and class rooms, clinics and hospital in some of the target areas. We see positive changes in teaching relations and methods for students, improved interaction between patients and health clinic staff, as well as an increase in teacher and clinics’ staff attendance, and in monitoring by senior officials from health and education local services. And finally worth mentioning that here is a decline in harmful practices, thanks to community male members support in the target communities. *(For more reference please refer to complete report of CSC findings and presentation)*.

## TOOLS:

Through the EVC program, CARE and its partners facilitate and implement social accountability tools (Community Score Card and Social Audits), in order to identify women’s and girls’ needs, to improve accessibility to education and health services, and to increase their participation in local decision making processes. The social accountability tools help to promote mutual relation and information sharing, to strengthen community trust towards local authorities, as well as to obtain formal support and commitment to address education and health needs and priorities of local schools and clinics. CARE’s specific approach to the use of the tools is to promote women active participation in community development council and local official structures.

In the follow-up of our long term advocacy process on behalf of women and girls from the communities where the EVC program is being implemented, we as representatives of communities call on local and national authorities to address the needs and fulfill the rights of women and girls at local level.

## OUR POSITION:

According to the findings of the second and third round of community scorecard processes conducted on education and health sectors in Khost, Balkh, Parwan and Kabul provinces, health and education services still need further improvement, and women’s active participation in the Community Development Councils and local structures should be further promoted.

In order to help women and girls to engage equally in the social, cultural, political and economic spheres of their communities, the Government of Afghanistan, and specifically the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, Ministry of Rural and Rehabilitation Development, Ministry of Hajj & Religious Affairs, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Women Affairs, Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Finance and Parliament should take sustainable measures. These include, but are not limited to: provision of sufficient financial resources and assets in education and health sectors, provision of quality and sufficient education and health services in targeted areas, ensuring and promoting accountability and information sharing mechanisms towards community needs, creation of conducive environments for women’s participation in social and community development activities and enhancing women employment opportunities in local government structures.

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2 Conducted twelve provincial and two national advocacy conferences
We call upon Ministry of Education to:

1. Strengthen provision of text books and class room equipment including chairs, tables, boards, computer laboratories, and libraries, as well as electricity and potable water for community schools;
2. Further observance by higher education authorities on teaching methods, implementation of curriculums, time management and school staff attendance in order to strengthen teaching quality within community schools;
3. Improve and promote a conducive environment through sufficient provision of separate classrooms, latrines for girls and boys, school surrounding walls, play-grounds, and school building maintenance at the community level;
4. Give a high priority to the recruitment of female teachers and supporting staff at the village schools;
5. Construction of school buildings in Isakhkail, Sherullah khail, Bori khail and Chob bakhsh communities of Bagram, in Jabul seraj district of Parwan province, in Khan aqa and Pakbar communities in Charkint district of Balkh province, and in Mallayan community of Matoon district of Khost province;
6. Maintenance for Boys number 1 high school of Mirbach kot district of Kabul;
7. Provision of on time Teacher Salaries according to formal administration degrees;
8. Integration of Community Score Card approach in annual planning;

We call upon Ministry of Health to:

1. Strengthen the provision of quality and quantity of medicines, and improve treatment at the community level clinics;
2. Ensure recruitment of professional staff at community clinics;
3. Provide ambulances (with drivers), electricity, and maintenance of community level clinics;
4. Promote information sharing and awareness raising mechanisms regarding health services and vaccination periods at community level clinics.
5. Integration of Community Score Card approach in annual planning;

We call upon IDLG and MRRD to:

1. Strengthen women’s active and meaningful participation in local structures and decision making processes, particularly in Community Development Councils and District Development Councils;
2. Promote community involvement and surveillance by using of bottom-up approach in community development planning, budgeting and implementation;
3. Improve responsiveness and accountability of CDC administration for women active participation;
4. Practical mechanisms for CDC sustainability;
5. Ensure and secure filing systems for CDC structures at community level that properly store administration materials and documents that relate to community development projects;
6. For CDCs to recognize and actively interact with CAGs on the implementation of community development projects;
7. Implement the Citizen Charter program in the Bagram and Jabul seraj districts of Parwan province.

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3 EVC Community Score Card findings
4 EVC Community Score Card findings
5 EVC Social Audit findings
We call upon Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs to:

1. Ensure provision of appropriate messages from an Islamic perspective regarding women’s and girls’ education and health rights through local and community mosques and related publications;
2. Enhance and strengthen dissemination of appropriate messages from an Islamic perspective regarding women’s participation in social structures and decision-making processes;
3. Promote cohesion from an Islamic perspective between religious leaders and community elders that jointly contribute to reduction of harmful practices.

We call upon Ministry of Finance and Parliament to:

1- Allocate sufficient budget for women and girls' education and health needs and priorities;
2- Prioritize and approve sufficient budget for education and health sectors in general.

We call upon Ministry of Women Affairs to:

1- Register community advocacy groups as community women focal points;
2- Strengthen and support advocacy initiatives of CAGs regarding women and girls' needs and participation in local decision-making processes;
3- Promote interaction and inclusion of community women in different events and official celebrations;
4- Actively represent MoWA at the district level;
5- Enhance awareness of women and girls on related laws and justice mechanisms.

Abbreviations:

CSC- Community Score Card
SA- Social Audit
CAG- Community Advocacy Group
CDC- Community Development Council
IG- Inclusive Governance
EVC- Every Voice Counts
MoE- Ministry of Education
MoPH- Ministry of Public Health
IDLG- Independent Directorate of Local Governance
MoH&RA- Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs
MoWA- Ministry of Women Affairs
MoF- Ministry of Finance
CARE- International Organization
Partners- National organization implementing EVC program (AWRC, WCLRF and HRRAC)
AWRC- Afghan Women Resource Center
WCLRF- Women and Children Legal Research Foundation
HRRAC- Human Rights, Research and Advocacy Consortium

6 EVC Community Score Card findings
7 Lobbying Meetings and CSC findings