



IANGEL

INTERNATIONAL ACTION NETWORK
FOR GENDER EQUITY & LAW

Powering Hope — Addressing Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan: Interim Report

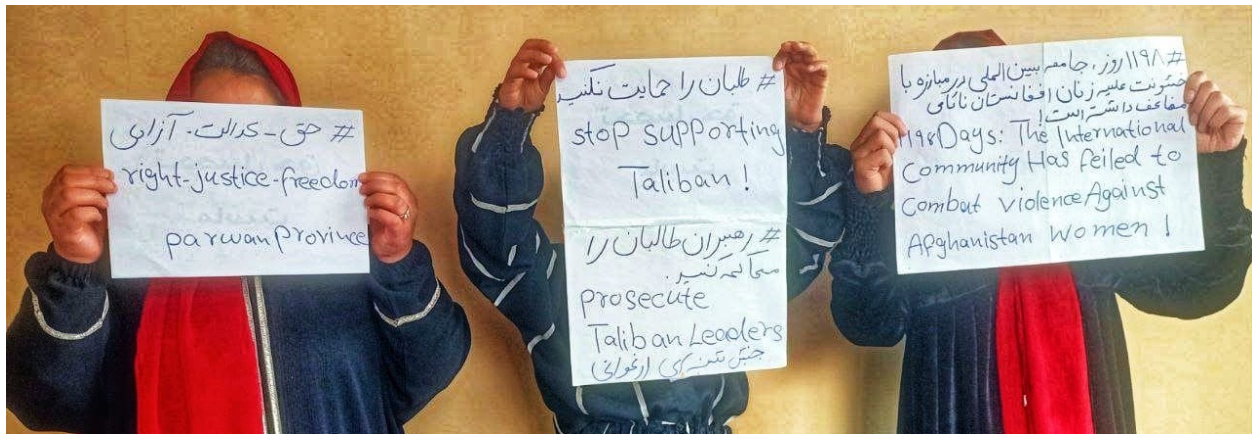


Photo received by IANGEL from the resistance in November 2024

Submitted to: Together Women Rise
Reporting Period: March 2024 - February 2025
Report Date: February 15, 2025

Grantee Name: International Action Network for Gender Equity and Law (IANGEL)
Project Title: *Powering Hope—Addressing Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan*
Grant Amount: \$50,000
Contact Person: Joëlle Santos, Communications and Programs Manager
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1. Note any significant changes within the organization since the grant was approved. (e.g., new leadership and personnel, changes to the project/program, and staff)

Personnel. Since the start of our grant with Together Women Rise, Joëlle Santos, as Communications and Programs Manager, has handled grant administration and grant applications. We also hired an administrative assistant who works on administrative and communications tasks such as social media, newsletters, and graphics for reporting.

Program. The following structural changes were made to our project: our Communications and Programs Manager supervises the administration of our BRIDGE project as well as the aspect of our project that supports underground schools. Our BRIDGE project is coordinated and managed in Afghanistan by Mina Ahmad (pseudonym), assisted by Athena Vassal in Afghanistan. Because the

program has been so successful, we added five more BRIDGE participants to the project in 2025, bringing the total participants to 15. New participants include Afghan women with background and training in psychology and trauma counseling, which will provide an additional dimension to the BRIDGE project's work. Each participant is expected to donate her time and expertise to assisting women in her community.

No other significant changes were made to the personnel structure of the Supporting Underground Schools or the Research for Accountability and Action components of our *Powering Hope* program. The leaders of the underground schools report that their schools are thriving, and they continue robust advocacy for girl's education and empowerment. We amplify their voices.

2. Explain material changes, if any, in the financial situation of the organization. (e.g., increase or decrease in funding, change in key donors).

While still very small, IANGEL's Powering Hope program has inspired support for modest growth. After we received the TWR grant, we were awarded two additional grants totaling \$32,500, and our year-end drive raised nearly \$80,000 (surpassing our goal of \$75,000). As a result, we were able to increase our support going directly into Afghanistan for 2025.

3. Describe what progress you have made with the problems, needs, or opportunities you presented in your grant application. (Use the same rubric in your application – per Q5)

Our Powering Hope project has three components, each of which provides positive impacts to women and girls in Afghanistan, both directly and indirectly. Since the start of our grant period with Together Women Rise, we have made significant progress towards achieving each of our program's goals, and anticipate the same level of success and sustainability in the coming grant period year.

BRIDGE

Recap of project goals: 1) Addressing poverty and despair among Afghan women lawyers by providing a monthly stipend and internet credits as a means of support for participants and their families. 2) Creating a safe space for sharing, connection, and capacity building to empower and inspire participants to securely provide assistance to women experiencing gender-based violence (GBV). 3) Confirming program impact, amplifying participant voices, encouraging further support, and sharing it with others in our network to build momentum for change.

Our BRIDGE project has been a great success in its first year. Our monthly meetings have featured speakers on topics of interest concerning women's rights and legal issues and has provided a platform for participants to share their feelings and present to each other interesting topics for discussion, keeping their skills sharp. Our participants are resourceful and determined to make a difference. The nine pilot lawyers in our BRIDGE project assist an average of seven Afghan women in crisis per month and send us regular updates on the work they are doing to support these women. They also support an average of five family members with the stipends they earn through their participation in the project.

Due to the success of the project, we are able to increase the number of participants this year. We anticipate that this will then extend the outreach and support for women in their communities experiencing GBV. The benefit of our BRIDGE project's economic, professional, and personal support is to sustain the extremely valuable resource of women lawyers inside Afghanistan. The benefit of warding off despair and keeping them engaged so that they may one day reclaim their country, continues to be immeasurable.

The key challenge has been safely transmitting funds to the participants inside Afghanistan. In 2024, we started using Convera for this purpose, but have had to modify procedures and recipients as challenges arise. We meet regularly with our project lead in-country to address security issues and develop ways to adapt, as necessary.

Support for Underground Schools

Goal: To invest in the education of girls and young women in Afghanistan by providing them with the tools to survive this crisis and maintain hope for the future.

We continue to be in direct contact with our two Afghan women educators, Freshta and Parsi (pseudonyms), providing financial and emotional support for their brave efforts to continue to educate girls and women, despite the Taliban's bans. They currently operate five underground institutions in the Kabul area. At 2024 year end, over 1,950 girls and women were enrolled in these schools, with 1,600 women and girls above 6th grade. An additional 100 women deprived of literacy are learning to read. We are also working on a new project, using artwork from the Afghan girls attending these schools, and the poetry of celebrated Afghan poet Nadia Anjuman, to build awareness and support for the global fight against gender apartheid.

We anticipate continued success with our Support for Underground Schools project. We are working on updating our grant application documents to elicit more operational information about the schools, to help us adapt our support to their needs. As with BRIDGE, we have encountered security issues associated with fund transfers as the Taliban have now fully infiltrated the banking system. We will continue to communicate closely on these issues and will adapt our fund transfer protocols as needed.

Research for Accountability and Action

Goal: To create a comprehensive report on international laws violated by the 65 Taliban edicts, generate new ideas for global policy makers to influence change in Afghanistan, and to empower civil society advocates to amplify and advance the new recommendations.

Since the start of the grant period, our research team consisting of lawyers from WilmerHale and women human rights defenders from Femena have continued to develop and improve the report. In 2024, 1,062 pro bono hours were donated to the research project, at a value of \$947,365. The report is currently in its final stages. We expect to publish the full report on our website, and then create shorter articles for wider distribution, to spur a more effective international response to the crisis.

4. Identify changes, if any, to the scope of your project and explain why these changes, additions, deletions, or adjustments were needed.

BRIDGE

As mentioned in previous sections, we expanded our BRIDGE project to engage more Afghan women in building resilience in their communities. We plan to implement a mentorship program to virtually connect our BRIDGE members with women lawyers.

We plan to change a few processes for data collection to improve quality. Each month, we ask the participants to share their feelings and life experiences. The questions so far yielded inconsistent answers, and we hope to engage our new BRIDGE participants with psychology backgrounds to create new questions that can better measure participant feelings, concerns, and changes in livelihood throughout their participation in BRIDGE. We also created a new filing system for tracking the forms each of the participants use to record their activities assisting women experiencing GBV. We plan to continue measuring the number of cases each participant works on each month, as well as track the progress of each case to measure the outcome.

One omission we made in our original framework for our BRIDGE project was to consult with skilled advisers to design a six-month training curriculum based on the needs of the group. We no longer work with the Afghan Independent Bar Association in Exile; our contacts distrusted this organization and its commitment to gender equality was uncertain. Instead, we consult regularly with our Project Manager to determine effective and inspiring content for our monthly meeting with the BRIDGE participants.

Support for Underground Schools

One change we plan to implement for our Schools project is to create a standardized form to improve the way we collect information on operational issues. During the year, the teachers have sent us reports, photos, and videos of how their schools are doing, but we hope to develop a more standardized reporting scheme for our teachers to use.

Research for Accountability and Action

In 2025, we plan to publish and amplify the results of this project, but we are sensitive to the dramatic changes in this geopolitical landscape. There is profound upheaval in the community of NGO and civil society activists, so we will include new efforts to build community and solidarity around our advocacy.

5. Share challenges you have experienced in achieving your goals or timeline (e.g., natural calamity, pandemic, war, runaway inflation) How have these challenges been addressed or overcome in your project/program implementation? What lessons did you learn, or unintended impact did you experience in pivoting your project?

With much of our programmatic work occurring in Afghanistan, we encountered several challenges that are a result of working abroad. So far, we have only faced small, more technical obstacles and have been

able to figure out a solution, however we continue to closely monitor these issues for safety reasons. We have encountered the following challenges in at least one of our three *Powering Hope* projects:

- Internet connection: program activities can be delayed due to the unpredictable nature of public utilities and internet connectivity in Afghanistan, including poor internet connection during meetings, or participants being without power or experiencing blackouts.
- Translation and interpretation: for BRIDGE, interpretation often takes time during monthly meetings. We have adjusted our meeting time from one hour to 90 minutes in order to accommodate for the time it takes to translate. We have also had issues with understanding some reports, due to translation issues. Many participants are still learning English and much of the language in the forms they use to record their activities supporting women affected by GBV in the community can be confusing or incorrect. We are enlisting our Project Manager and others fluent in Dari to address these issues.
- Stipends and sending funds abroad: occasionally, authorized individuals assigned to pick up stipends for our program participants have been unnecessarily interrogated by Afghan banks. We are closely monitoring these issues, coordinating with our manager, and changing protocols as needed.
- Monitoring and evaluation: one obstacle we faced over the past year is managing the volume of information, communications, and data that we need to measure outcomes for our program. We are working on developing protocols so that necessary data to measure outcomes will be easily accessible for analysis and reporting.

6. Do you anticipate future challenges to complete your project in line with your application? In addition, how can these be addressed?

We do not anticipate any challenges that would compromise the completion of our program within the timeframe of the grant.

7. Provide a detailed list of all expenses incurred during the reporting period, which have been paid for with the Together Women Rise grant.

Program Expenses	Year 1		
	Together Women Rise Grant Share	IANGEL Share	Notes
Personnel			
<i>Nancy Newman (CEO)</i>	<i>donated time</i>		
<i>Joelle Santos (Program Manager)</i>	3,800	5,725	15% of Program Manager time dedicated to project = \$9,525/yr
<i>Mina Ahmad (BRIDGE Project Manager)</i>	2,100	2,100	\$350/mo for 12 mo = \$4,200
<i>Mahwish Moazzam (Advisor)</i>	<i>donated time</i>		
<i>Kawser Amine (Advisor)</i>	<i>donated time</i>		

Contractual Expenses			
<i>Stipends for Underground Schools</i>	6,000	6,000	\$500/mo for 12 mo x 2 teachers = \$12,000
<i>Stipends for BRIDGE participants</i>	17,500	13,220	\$320/mo for 12 mo x 8 participants = \$30,720 total
Supplies			
<i>None</i>			
Equipment			
<i>None</i>			
Travel Costs			
<i>None</i>			
Other			
<i>Transaction costs (Transfer fees, bank fees, and other associated fees)</i>	600	420	
<i>IT/Web/Tech maintenance</i>		300	
Total	\$30,000	\$27,765	

Research for Accountability and Action

No expenses made. The value of pro bono hours donated to the research project in 2024 exceeds \$1 million, and the personnel supervising this program donate their time as well.

8. Include any other relevant information in the comments box.

We are immensely proud of the work our colleagues in the country have done to fight gender apartheid, and share some powerful quotes and words of gratitude:

“It is a huge work you are doing; all these women will remember it for the rest of their life. Having the opportunity to speak, the opportunity to be heard and the opportunity to work and show their qualifications, talents, strength, and capability in the situation that we women are forgotten but the majority of the world.” — Mina (pseudonym), BRIDGE Project Manager

“My dream is that I can teach a thousand girls. If one day I am no longer around, there will be a thousand Freshtas. I teach them to be strong.” —Freshta (a pseudonym), teacher

“With each passing day, the condition of Afghan women is getting worse, their faces are hidden and even their voices are suffocated in their throats. And your presence by our side gives us strength and energy to fight not only for ourselves but also for our fellow women whose rights are lost.” — Bahara (pseudonym), BRIDGE Participant

High-resolution images (in JPG or PNG format) of the project:

BRIDGE



BRIDGE meeting from February 7, 2025 with guest speaker Pashtana Durrani

Support for Underground Schools



Inside Parsi's classroom



Freshta and her graduating students



Inside Freshta's classroom



Parsi and her teachers protesting the anniversary of the Taliban taking over Afghanistan - August 15, 2024.