



## SUCCESS STORY

### Herat sponsors a Documentary Film Festival to encourage citizen cooperation on municipal services



Head of Herat Cultural Department responding to media questions about the criteria to select the best films



Photo: RAWP UP West

Elahe Sahel receiving a computer set as the third runner-up prize

**The Herat Mayor commended the views of young film makers reflected in their movies, saying “It’s one of the best ways to engage youth to understand municipal services.” He added: “I will support Cultural Department to sponsor the second festival next year.”**

#### Telling Our Story

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Through recent survey and citizen outreach efforts, Herat officials realized citizens lacked knowledge about municipal services and how they might contribute to making them better. Officials decided they wanted to emphasize better citizenship to enlist the support of citizens in maintaining services and infrastructure and resolved to try a more modern and progressive approach.

Herat asked USAID’s Regional Afghan Municipalities Program for Urban Populations (RU-W) program for assistance in organizing a documentary film festival entitled: “Herat from a Citizen perspective”. Officials had two goals for the festival: 1) attract the interest and cooperation of citizens toward their city, and 2) encourage a sense of ownership and urban responsibility among citizens.

The municipality announced the competition and asked for 3-10 minute films concentrating on aspects of urban life and municipal services in Herat. 50 filmmakers submitted films and a preliminary review narrowed those to 11 for the finals. The films explored themes like municipal staff cleaning garbage, painting medians, watering green spaces, lax citizens throwing garbage away, bumpy streets, traffic jam, parched plants in the city medians and etc.

More than 100 municipal representatives and citizens attended the final ceremony and local station ASR TV broadcast the entire event. A panel of judges: Mr. Ali Ahmad Kaveh, Herat University Sociology Instructor, Mrs. Khalada Khursand, poet and film critic, and Mr Jawid Noorzad, Director of Itfaq-e-Islam Newspaper, reviewed all 11 films and chose the top three. “The main criteria for selecting the winning documentaries included clear and concise messages and relevance to the subject”, said judge Mr. Ali Ahmad Kaveh.

Jawad Salehi submitted the winning film “Sokot” (Silence) depicting municipal employees around the city providing different services. Khaled Yaqubi won first runner-up with “Thirsty Boulevards” about city efforts on boulevard greenery to improve city appearance. And Elahe Sahel captured second runner-up with “Marg dar yak Address (“Dying at an address”) about the lack of addresses and street names and its impact on residents.

Remarkably, Miss Sahel never shot a film before. She appreciated the opportunity, saying, “These kinds of audio-visual activities and contests will increase the public interest toward their municipality and motivate young citizens to take a proactive approach toward their municipality. It also encourages young film makers to reflect the municipal problems in their products and encourages citizen cooperation”. She added that her film came from personal experience. Given the lack of addressing, she thought, what would happen if there was an urgent need? She imagined a person who had heart attack waiting for an Ambulance! That became the basis of her movie.

Herat’s Documentary Film Festival allowed residents to better understand municipal services and also provided municipal officials a better sense of how citizens view municipal services.

Following this success, Herat already is already looking forward to sponsoring a second festival in summer 2013 and has started spreading the word to potential filmmakers in the city.