

## Community Advocacy Efforts Bring Peace of Mind

UNDP partner Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium (HRRAC) promotes the importance of community-based advocacy, methods in peacebuilding, and how to identify elements of social cohesion in Surobi District, Kabul



Afghanistan has limited employment resources. The mining sector is one of the few sectors which employs a large number of rural Afghans. Most miners are engaged in artisanal mining, using obsolete and inefficient techniques, thus significantly degrading the local environment, leading to community conflicts. Surobi district is home to aquamarine, and construction material mines, which is being mined on a massive, but traditional scale.

Most communities in Surobi District live in remote, poverty-stricken and neglected areas. Communities in Surobi are among the least developed in Kabul Province. Most communities are without paved roads, schools, health centers, water pumps, adequate shelter, and veterinary clinics.

In January 2022, HRRAC, with the support from UNDP, introduced a project to promote social cohesion within the communities by strengthening the community dispute resolution mechanism,

to communities who had not previously been involved in any kind of such project. Interestingly, communities in 8 villages decided to setup and strengthen the capacity of 8 community advocacy committees, working as community volunteers. The project presented people, particularly community elders, with an opportunity of voicing the community needs. The capacity of these committee members was enhanced through the facilitation of several trainings, dialogues, and advocacy campaigns.

The committee peacefully resolved a community dispute between the miners, and a nearby community.

*“Explosions at the stone quarries harm locals,”* said Abdul Qayum, a community elder and participant of UNDP’s partner HRRAC’s awareness-raising programs.

*“Construction material companies use massive quantities of explosives that make terrible sounds, while small rocks fly into residential and cattle grazing areas. By participating in HRRAC’s advocacy campaigns, our awareness level as a community increased. On behalf of our community, the community dispute resolution committee members shared their concerns with the companies and workers. We requested that they develop a timetable for blasts so the local community can be better prepared and use a different technique that would cause less mental and physical harm”.* Said

The advocacy was successful, and the workers pledged in writing to comply with the community’s requests.

*“They now synchronise their working hours when most of the community members are out too, and not during our rest and sleeping hours as before. The timetable for the blasts is shared with the Community Conflict Resolution Committee members, and now we can herd their cattle in safe areas and times. The stress levels have gone down, as we are aware that the blast is not a security matter. Moreover, by changing the explosives and the methods, the sounds of the blasts and incidents of flyrock-related injuries have decreased significantly.”*

UNDP’s partner HRRAC established and trained community dispute resolution committees in eight villages of the Surobi District, Kabul Province. Each committee has 15 members, comprising community elders, religious leaders, civil society activists, and youth volunteers. The dispute resolution committee members act as community advocates and promote peace and social cohesion in their communities through dialogues, and serve as a bridge between the communities and the local authorities.