

SIGAR

Special Inspector General for
Afghanistan Reconstruction

OFFICE OF SPECIAL PROJECTS

WOMEN'S CRICKET LEADERSHIP EXCHANGE GRANT: EFFORTS TO INCREASE WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN CRICKET HINDERED BY A LACK OF SUPPORT FROM AFGHANISTAN CRICKET BOARD



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December 08, 2016

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State

The Honorable P. Michael McKinley
U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan

In September 2014, U.S. Embassy Kabul's Public Affairs Section (PAS) approved a grant of \$470,392 to develop, coordinate, and implement a regional women's leadership exchange for female cricket players from Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan. In February 2016, SIGAR received a complaint questioning whether the funds provided under the grant were used as intended. We initiated this review in response to that complaint and to determine the extent to which the grant achieved its intended objectives. We found that the grantee failed to develop, coordinate, and implement the women's cricket exchange largely due to a lack of support from the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB), and that the grantee and PAS jointly agreed to terminate the grant on February 1, 2016. In July 2016, SIGAR verified that the grantee returned \$329,991 to PAS, or approximately 90 percent of the original \$376,313.42 grant funds disbursed, as well as six unused mobile phones.

We provided a draft of this report to the State Department on October 11, 2016. We received comments from PAS Kabul on November 19, 2016.¹ In its comments, PAS stated that "it appears that SIGAR may not have spoken with any women cricket players or to Ms. Tuba Sengar, the Director of Women's Cricket at the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB)", and that doing so "would have been very helpful in clarifying many of the points that the draft report left as inconclusive."² However, we interviewed Ms. Sengar in conjunction with our meeting with Mr. Shafiqullah Stanikzai, the Chief Executive Officer of the ACB, and have revised the text on page 11 to reflect that meeting. We were, unfortunately, unable to speak with the women that participated in the exchange, due to the inability of either PAS or the grantee to provide a roster of participants.

PAS also reported that while it was disappointed that it was unable to achieve the goals outlined in the project, both "PAS and [the grantee] intensely monitored the project from its inception in September 2014 until its end in January 2016." However, SIGAR's primary observation is that PAS and the grantee gave significant leeway to the ACB to implement project activities and did not exercise sufficient control and oversight of the completion of grant activities, including team selection and coordination with partner cricket boards to ensure that intended outcomes were met.

¹ PAS requested that we not make this report public in order to protect the security and safety of the grantee. It is SIGAR policy that we will publish everything we produce, except for classified information, information the release of which could reasonably be expected to place lives in danger, and personally identifiable information covered by the Privacy Act, or as otherwise prohibited by law. In this case, the State Department has provided a detailed, substantive explanation as to why the release of the subject information would place lives in danger. Therefore, we determined that the request should be granted to the extent possible. We are also committed to being as transparent as possible and believe that this report may allow policymakers to make more informed decisions when investing in efforts to support women in Afghanistan. In response to PAS's request and its concern for the safety of the grantee, SIGAR has removed the name of the grantee throughout the report.

² Terry Davidson, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Embassy, Kabul, *Comments on the Draft Special Project Report on the Women's Cricket Leadership Exchange Grant*, November 19, 2016.

On December 9, 2016, State requested that we not publish their comments as an appendix to this review, as is our normal practice, because their comments included some identifying references to the grantee that could endanger personnel in Afghanistan. Given the nature of State's request and its ongoing concern for the safety and security of grantee personnel, we agreed not to publish State's comments.

We conducted this special project in Washington, D.C. and Kabul, Afghanistan from April 2016 to October 2016, in accordance with SIGAR's quality control standards. These standards require that we carry out work with integrity, objectivity, and independence, and provide information that is factually accurate and reliable. For more information on the policies and procedures and quality control standards for conducting special project work, please see SIGAR's website (www.SIGAR.mil). SIGAR performed this special project under the authority of Public Law No. 110-181, as amended, and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended. Should you or your staff have any questions about this project, please contact Mr. Matthew Dove, Director of Special Projects, at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

Sincerely,



John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

INTRODUCTION

Cricket gained popularity among the Afghan population in the latter part of the 20th century, following the Soviet invasion. By the year 2000, it was the only sport officially recognized by the Taliban. In 2001, Afghanistan became a member of the International Cricket Council (ICC), the global governing body responsible for administering the rules and playing conditions for men's and women's international cricket competitions. Since then, according to the Department of State, cricket has seen a phenomenal rise in popularity and the country has made strides in its development of cricket as a national sport. In 2013, Afghanistan became the only country to be awarded "associate" membership status in the ICC in such a short period of time.³ Obtaining this status allows Afghanistan to receive additional ICC funding for cricket and participate in more international tournaments. Under ICC regulations, as an associate member, Afghanistan must:

- incorporate women's cricket into their country-wide development plan for the sport;
- include women and girls in cricket programs;
- establish and conduct at least four women's cricket competitions annually; and
- submit written and photographic evidence or media clippings to demonstrate females are included in cricket programs.

In December 2014, Mr. Nasimullah Danish, the chairman of the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB),⁴ reportedly stated that Afghanistan hopes to become a full member of the ICC by 2025.⁵ Under ICC regulations, Afghanistan must support the development of women's cricket if it is to become a full member of the ICC.⁶ However, opportunities for Afghan women to participate in cricket are still rare. Reuters reported that the founder of the Afghan women's cricket team claimed that the development of women's cricket has been obstructed by the ACB because of beliefs "that women should not leave home unescorted, or be given the chance to learn the sport."⁷

According to U.S. Embassy Kabul, in September 2014, in an effort to increase women's participation in sports and civic life, its Public Affairs Section (PAS) approved a grant of \$470,392 to develop, coordinate, and implement a regional women's leadership exchange for female cricket players from Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan. The performance period of the grant was 18 months.

³ Nagra Gollapudi, "Afghanistan Get Associate Membership," June 28, 2013, accessed September 7, 2016, <http://www.espnccricketinfo.com/ci-icc/content/story/645971.html?CMP=chrome>.

⁴ The ACB is the official governing body of cricket in Afghanistan. It oversees domestic cricket leagues throughout the country, including junior leagues, as well as Afghanistan's international men's cricket team. The ACB manages multiple cricket academies through Afghanistan, including the Afghan National Cricket Academy in Kabul, which recruits and trains youth, domestic players, and international elite players.

⁵ Reuters, "Afghan Women's Cricket Crushed by Bombs, Threats, and Tradition," December 24, 2014.

⁶ For a country to be a full member of the ICC, it must first be an associate member. Under associate member criteria, the development of women's cricket must be incorporated within the associate member's National Development Plan. Girls must be included in junior involvement programs, and there must be at least four senior and/or junior women's competitions. See ICC, "Associate Membership Criteria and Guidelines Requirements," June 2016, p. 2; and ICC, "Guideline Criteria for Full Membership of ICC," 2003 p. 1.

⁷ Reuters, "Afghan Women's Cricket Crushed by Bombs, Threats, and Tradition," December 24, 2014.

SIGAR reviewed the women's cricket leadership exchange grant to determine the extent to which the grant was effective in meeting its intended objectives. To conduct our review, we reviewed records including the grant proposal, financial statements, monthly and quarterly financial reports, and changes to grant and budget activities. We interviewed State officials working in PAS at U.S. Embassy Kabul, as well as officials from the grantee responsible for implementing and overseeing the grant. We also interviewed officials from the ACB who were responsible for working with the grantee to implement the grant, as well as the former head of the Afghan Cricket Academy, to obtain their perspectives on grant implementation and women's cricket in Afghanistan. We contacted the Asian Cricket Council and the ICC to assess Afghanistan's progress in meeting ICC standards for establishing and supporting women's cricket in country. The Asian Cricket Council provided us with information on women's cricket in Afghanistan.⁸ The ICC did not respond to our requests to meet.

Afghanistan: A Difficult Environment for Women's Cricket

While there is clear evidence that the Afghan government has supported women's cricket in the past—for example, we found that Afghanistan had a women's national cricket team in 2012 and that it won an international competition in Tajikistan that year—reports analyzed by SIGAR found that women's cricket in Afghanistan has not been fully embraced by Afghan culture or society. In August 2012, a report by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty found there was little public will to support women's cricket in Afghanistan for several reasons, including (1) traditional attitudes throughout the country, especially among Pashtuns, who found it unacceptable for women to play cricket; and (2) fears that donor funds would be redirected from the men's national cricket team.⁹ The report stated that funding for women's cricket comes mainly from private donors, and women in Afghanistan play cricket with limited equipment in their backyards because the necessary accommodations for women's cricket had not been provided by the ACB.¹⁰ Four months after PAS awarded the cricket grant, a December 2014 Reuters article reported that, when asked about women's cricket, the chairman of the ACB stated that "it does not exist. The situation is not very much prepared for developing women's cricket in Afghanistan."¹¹

In April 2016, the *New York Times* reported on the status of women's sports in Afghanistan, including women's cricket. According to the article, "with few exceptions, women's sports programs in Afghanistan have become riddled with corruption and been undermined by conservative Afghans who have never liked the idea of young women on sports fields."¹²

U.S. and international media have highlighted the lack of institutional support for women's participation in sports in Afghanistan. According to a July 2016 article by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, while female participation in Afghan sports has grown since the fall of the Taliban

⁸ The Asian Cricket Council assists member countries in developing women's cricket by providing them with funding and educational support, among other things. The council reported that as a member country, Afghanistan is entitled to receive support for the development of women's cricket development. However, in 2016, the council reported that is unable to provide support similar to that provided to other member nations for women's cricket in Afghanistan because Afghanistan does not have a functional women's team.

⁹ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Afghan Women Fight for Peace on Cricket Pitch," August 23, 2012; and, United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan, "Afghan Women Break Ground through Sport," June 2, 2013.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Reuters, "Afghan Women's Cricket Crushed by Threats, Bombs, and Tradition," December 24, 2014.

¹² *The New York Times*, "Afghan Women, Eager to Play, Are Kept on the Sidelines," April 27, 2016.

in 2001, “conservative traditions continue to deem exercise to be damaging to women’s moral and physical health, limiting opportunities for many.”¹³ Women in Afghanistan who play sports are often subjected to threats, violence, harassment, and lack of funding for space and equipment.¹⁴

Support for Afghan Women’s Participation in Sports

The United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP) has found that sport can be used as a means to challenge gender norms “because sport itself is so heavily identified with the masculine domain.”¹⁵ UNOSDP maintains that “[p]articipation in sport offers girls and women opportunities to alter their own and others’ perceptions about their capabilities and the range of roles they might assert in their community and in society,” and “individual girls and women who challenge gender norms also help to create greater opportunities for others.”¹⁶ According to UNOSDP, women’s access to sports is essential to attaining the rights and freedoms set out in several international human rights documents endorsed by the member states of the United Nations, including Afghanistan.¹⁷

The Afghan government claims to support these ideals, and Afghanistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs has called for government entities to increase gender equality by supporting women’s leadership, educational, and civic opportunities.¹⁸ The Afghan government’s *National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325-Women, Peace, and Security* states that “Transforming the lives of our women, youth and the poor through creation of equality of opportunity is the key objective of the Government of National Unity.” Despite this key objective, Afghan females remain largely excluded from participation in some sports, including cricket.

In September 2012, the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan approved the *U.S. Embassy Kabul Gender Strategy* to guide the embassy’s policies and activities relating to Afghan women. The gender strategy serves as a basis for U.S. Embassy Kabul’s policy and programmatic engagement on gender issues and supports programs that provide Afghan women with the opportunities for entry and advancement into and within the public sector, as well as projects that help to develop women’s leadership skills.¹⁹

WOMEN’S CRICKET EXCHANGE GRANT

PAS intended the women’s cricket exchange project to be a way of empowering women and countering the negative narratives about the role that women should play in Afghan society. According to the request for proposal issued by PAS, “women who play sports are powerful symbols

¹³ Farid Tanha, *Afghan Women Dream of Sports*. The Institute for War and Peace Reporting, July 31, 2016.

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ United Nations, *Harnessing the Power of Sport for Development and Peace: Recommendations to Governments*, 2008, p. 149.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*, p. 135.

¹⁸ Afghanistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Directorate of Human Rights and Women’s International Affairs, *National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325-Women, Peace, and Security*, June 2015.

¹⁹ U.S. Embassy Kabul, *U.S. Embassy Kabul Gender Strategy*, 2012, p. 1.

of moderation, equality, and progress. Their participation in sports in public fora is a powerful visual that counters negative narratives about the role that women should play in Afghan society.”²⁰

The goals of the exchange were to: (1) promote regional cooperation and understanding between Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan; (2) build Afghanistan’s capacity to support a women’s national cricket program; (3) encourage Afghan women’s participation in and exposure to cricket, given the increasing popularity of the sport in the country; and (4) build a core group of skilled female cricket players who can serve as roles models for girls within the country. Specifically, the grantee was to organize and facilitate week-long training programs for approximately 15 women from each country that included professional cricket training, leadership skill development, team-building activities, and friendly matches between the women of the three countries.

Under the terms of the grant, the grantee was responsible for implementing the program and documenting the activities of the exchange using social media. One of the grant’s key objectives was to use social media, such as blogging, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and a dedicated website, to increase enthusiasm for women’s cricket in Afghanistan by challenging current stereotypes of women in sport and encouraging government officials to take notice of the importance of women’s participation in sport. As determined through negotiations between the grantee and the ACB, the ACB was responsible for selecting and training Afghan women to participate in the exchange. In return, the grantee would provide funds to the ACB for purchasing cricket equipment, reimbursing travel accommodations for team selection and tournament participation in selected locations, and providing mobile phones for women participants so that they could document their activities on social media.

According to PAS officials, at the time it awarded the grant in September 2014, PAS was unaware of any women’s national cricket team in Afghanistan or any formal, institutionalized women’s cricket programs. Because Afghanistan did not have a formal women’s cricket program in place at the time, PAS and grantee officials agreed that the ACB would select women for participation in the cricket exchange from local provinces throughout Afghanistan. According to both PAS and grantee officials, as well as documentation provided by the grantee, the ACB selected 16 women to participate in the cricket exchange. Photo 1 shows women at cricket practice, purportedly selected to participate in the cricket exchange.

²⁰ U.S. Embassy Kabul, PAS, *Regional Cricket Leadership Exchange Cooperative Agreement*, May 2014, p. 3.

Photo 1 - Women's Cricket Practice for the Cricket Exchange at the Afghan Cricket Academy



Source: Grantee's Cricket Weekly Reports to State, January 30, 2015, and April 30, 2015

The Grantee Returned Over 90 Percent of Grant Funds

From September 2014 through February 2016, when PAS and grantee officials made the decision to terminate the program, the grantee spent \$46,322, or a little less than 10 percent of the total grant funds. The funds spent were primarily allocated for grantee staff expenses, which accounted for approximately 70 percent of total funds spent by the grantee. Approximately 30 percent of the funds spent by the grantee included the purchase of 16 passports for travel with the exchange program, 6 mobile phones for the female cricket players to use for media publicity, and 30 cricket equipment kits that were provided to the ACB to train the women selected to participate in the exchange program. Outside of the expenses incurred by the grantee staff to coordinate the exchange with the ACB, no funds were expended to develop or support cricket exchanges in either country.

Funds provided to the grantee were not tied to progress or project milestones. According to PAS documentation, over the course of the grant, PAS disbursed a total of \$376,313.42 out of the \$470,392, in accordance with the following schedule:

- First installment on September 18, 2014: \$94,078.36
- Second installment on February 19, 2015: \$141,117.53
- Third installment on May 18, 2015: \$141,117.53

In July 2016, SIGAR verified that the grantee returned \$329,991 to PAS, or approximately 90 percent of the original \$376,313.42 grant funds disbursed, as well the unused mobile phones.

SIGAR's review found that the grantee accounted for all expenses incurred in its financial statements provided to PAS. However, PAS disbursed the majority of grant funds during a time when it appears that no activities related to the development and facilitation of the cricket exchange were being undertaken by the grantee or the ACB. For example, we obtained documentary evidence from the grantee that the ACB had made purchases for passports for the participants of the cricket exchange and for travel to designated provinces to meet with exchange participants in February 2015.

However, neither the grantee, PAS, nor the ACB were able to provide documentation of any activities

to implement the exchange program after February 2015.²¹ Table 1 provides a description of expenses incurred by the grantee through March 31, 2016.

Table 1 - Total Expenses Incurred by the Grantee on the Cricket Exchange Program, as of March 31, 2016 (U.S. Dollars)

| Category | Amount |
|---|-----------------|
| Staff Expenses | |
| Staff and Personnel | \$32,245 |
| Subtotal | \$32,245 |
| Contractual Expenses for Women Cricket Players | |
| Meals and Incidentals ¹ | \$1,606 |
| Visas ² | \$1,504 |
| Domestic Travel ¹ | \$1,504 |
| Cricket Equipment ³ | \$7,154 |
| Mobile Phones | \$2,309 |
| Subtotal | \$14,077 |
| Total | \$46,322 |

Source: Grantee final interim revised financial summary, May 17, 2016

Notes:

¹ When requested, neither PAS nor the grantee provided documentation for the types of incidentals, travel logistics, and domestic travel that was incurred during the course of the grant. The grantee officials, however, reported that such expenses were used to provide travel and accommodations for the women who traveled to Kabul to participate in the cricket exchange.

² Grantee officials agreed to provide SIGAR with a copy of the team roster to verify the number of female participants in the exchange, but did not provide it before the end of our review. In July 2016, the grantee provided SIGAR with copies of the passports purchased for women participants in the exchange, as well as receipts for those purchases. However, SIGAR was unable to match all of the names on the copies of the passports with copies of the receipts provided. Neither PAS nor the grantee provided any information to clarify this discrepancy.

³ According to grantee officials, the grantee made two equipment purchases for the women's cricket exchange. Each purchase consisted of approximately 16 cricket kits. According to the grantee, at the conclusion of the program, the first round of cricket kits was donated to the ACB, and the second round was subsequently donated to PARSA, a nongovernmental organization found in 1996 that helps disadvantaged women and children of Afghanistan.

²¹ While the grantee reported that coaching and training sessions were being held between April and August 2015 in provinces where the participants were located, grantee officials stated that they relied on the ACB to provide status reports on participant progress and did not independently verify that such training was taking place.

LACK OF SUPPORT FROM THE AFGHANISTAN CRICKET BOARD HINDERED IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

From September 2014 through December 2015, the grantee was unable to meet its obligations under its agreement with PAS to develop, coordinate, and implement a women's cricket exchange between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. The grantee was also unable to make progress in challenging current stereotypes of women in sport, or in encouraging government officials to take notice of the importance of women's participation in sport. In February 2016, PAS and the grantee agreed to terminate the grant because it "was not in a position to successfully carry on the activities due to the lack of willingness of the ACB to support the initiative."²²

PAS officials stated that cultural issues related to gender norms; regional politics; the security situation within country; and the bureaucracy of the Afghan, Indian, and Pakistani Cricket Boards all made it difficult to implement the program as planned. However, in our view, had PAS coordinated or been more involved with the ACB prior to issuing the grant and throughout the grant planning process, some of these issues could have been addressed up front and increased the likelihood of success. According to PAS officials responsible for the grant, PAS did not coordinate with Afghan government officials or the coach of the ACB's Afghan Cricket Academy to discuss the feasibility of a women's cricket exchange prior to issuing the request for proposal for the grant.²³ Those officials stated that PAS relied on the grantee for coordinating all activities related to the grant with the Afghan government. As part of the requirements included in the grant request for proposal, the grantee was responsible for obtaining letters of intent from "cricket, regional, or governmental bodies" outlining their roles and responsibilities in relation to the proposed project activities.²⁴ According to the grantee, it obtained letters of intent from the ACB and various media outlets before the start of the grant. However, despite the signed letters, the grantee was ultimately unable to get the ACB to support the exchange.

In July 2016, SIGAR met with Mr. Nasimullah Danish, the ACB Chairman, Mr. Shafiqullah Stanikzai, the Chief Executive Officer of the ACB, and Ms. Tuba Sengar, the Director of Women's Cricket at the ACB, to obtain their views on the women's cricket grant. Both officials told us that they believed that the cricket grant was a bad idea. Mr. Danish stated that this was because women's cricket in Afghanistan was underdeveloped, and they were concerned that an underperforming women's team would risk taking money and status away from the national men's cricket team. Mr. Danish also cited societal norms and challenges with women traveling as barriers to standing up a women's cricket exchange.

In both its December 25, 2014, weekly report to PAS and in its 2014 calendar year fourth quarter report to PAS, the grantee reported that President Ghani was supportive of women's cricket, and both Mr. Danish and Mr. Stanikzai were willing to assist in facilitating the grant. According to the grantee's April 30, 2016, close-out report, it felt "re-assured that the program was thus going to the right direction and that the new leadership at the ACB would do everything possible to ensure the successful completion of the program."²⁵ However, over the course of the grant, the grantee found

²² [Grantee], "Close Out Report: Women's Cricket Leadership Exchange," April 30, 2016, p. 8.

²³ PAS officials, however, reported that they coordinated with local non-governmental organizations, such as the Sport Youth Development Organization, prior to issuing the request for proposal.

²⁴ [Grantee], "Close Out Report: Women's Cricket Leadership Exchange," April 30, 2016, p. 13.

²⁵ Grantee, "Close Out Report: Women's Cricket Leadership Exchange," April 30, 2016, p. 9.

that “the promises of the ACB leadership have usually not been followed by actions,” and the ACB had ultimately not been supportive of the grant.²⁶ Grantee officials reported that they attempted to modify the grant’s objectives on three different occasions during the period of performance to accommodate these circumstances, but ultimately could not get the ACB to support the exchange.²⁷ According to PAS officials, the grantee worked to develop, coordinate, and implement the project, but, because of the ACB’s unwillingness to cooperate, the decision was made to terminate the project.

According to the grantee’s close-out report dated April 30, 2016, the cricket project failed for numerous reasons. First, the grantee reported that the ACB was unwilling to share written communications between the ACB and the other cricket boards regarding the development and coordination of the cricket project. The grantee also reported that the ACB feared that international exposure of a weak women’s team, through the cricket exchange, “would damage the reputation” of the national men’s cricket team “which benefited from a lot of good press.”²⁸ In addition, the grantee reported that the ACB refused to allow it to provide media coverage of exchange activities. Finally, the grantee reported that despite having a security-risk mitigation strategy in place for the cricket exchange, the ACB continually used security as an excuse from holding any events related to the exchange.

The ACB’s unwillingness to work with the grantee also hindered the oversight of grant activities by the grantee and PAS. For example, we found that the grantee did not independently verify claims, photographs, or activities of the ACB in its purported efforts to develop and train women for the cricket exchange. Under the grant, the grantee was responsible for developing, coordinating, and implementing the cricket exchange. However, rather than implement activities directly, the grantee relied exclusively on the ACB to both recruit and train the women for participation in exchange events. The grantee also gave the ACB responsibility to coordinate with the Cricket Boards of India and Pakistan, which was necessary to obtain their buy-in and coordinate training for women participating in the exchange. Grantee officials told us that they did not verify the extent to which the ACB actually coordinated exchange selection or training activities, and relied solely on photographs provided by the ACB to demonstrate training activities related to the cricket exchange. In its April 30, 2016, close-out report to PAS, the grantee reported that it relied on the ACB, but had little control over its activities. The grantee ultimately recognized this total delegation of authority as a critical flaw in its implementation of the project.

QUESTIONS REMAIN ABOUT THE STATUS OF WOMEN’S CRICKET IN AFGHANISTAN

Our review found conflicting reports regarding the status of women’s cricket in Afghanistan and the very existence of a women’s national team from 2010 through 2016. There is evidence that

²⁶ *Id.* p. 8.

²⁷ Grantee officials reported that they had attempted to move the venue for the cricket exchange to the United Arab Emirates instead of India or Pakistan. They also reported that they redesigned the grant plans to focus specifically on providing opportunities for cricket training and coaching for Afghan women rather than pursuing an exchange program with India and Pakistan.

²⁸ Grantee, “Close Out Report: Women’s Cricket Leadership Exchange,” April 30, 2016, p. 13.

Afghanistan had a women's national cricket team in 2012 and that it won an international competition in Tajikistan that year.²⁹ However, over the course of the following 4 years, including the 17-month duration of the PAS exchange program, the team was reportedly unsupported and disbanded, and we found conflicting evidence as to whether a women's national cricket team was formally in existence at all after 2014. Media reports analyzed by SIGAR between 2011 and 2016 found that there was little will among members of the ACB to support a women's national team in Afghanistan, and when women did gather to play cricket they often played on underdeveloped fields, with inadequate equipment, and in facilities not suitable for the sport.

For example, in May 2014, *Afghan Zariza*, an Afghan media outlet, reported that the coach of the women's team resigned, claiming that the ACB had redirected funds received from donors for women's cricket leaving women cricket players with limited resources and without facilities in which to play.³⁰ The article also reported that officials within the ACB were selecting women to participate on the "basis of region and tribe, rather than merit and performance," but when the women lodged a complaint about ACB activities, "nothing came of it."³¹ Furthermore, the Afghan Women's Cricket Facebook page reports that the Afghanistan women's national cricket team was formed in 2010; however, this page has not been updated since 2014.³²

In May 2016, SIGAR met with the former head coach of the ACB's Afghan Cricket Academy. He managed the academy when PAS awarded the women's cricket grant in September 2014, and he left the position in February 2016. According to the former head coach, in 2014, he was in charge of training between 30 and 40 women at the academy and assisting the ACB in helping to select women to participate in PAS' cricket exchange program. The head coach stated that he trained the women's cricket exchange team about six times, and that the team had its last practice with him on November 24, 2014, before it was disbanded in December 2014.

In December 2014, President Ghani appointed Mr. Nasimullah Danish to be the chairman of the ACB, a position he still holds today.³³ According to the former coach, Mr. Danish officially disbanded all women's cricket, including the cricket exchange, when he was made chairman. The former coach also stated that Mr. Danish disbanded the women's team at that time because he believed it was inappropriate for women to play cricket and because of purported threats made against the team by the Taliban.

After the women's team was disbanded in December 2014, the coach reported that he did not see any women in the cricket academy. However, he reported holding an informal coaching session for female cricket players in May 2016, but the session did not receive support from the ACB. While SIGAR is unable to independently verify the statements made by the coach, as mentioned earlier,

²⁹ United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan, "Afghan Women Break Ground through Sport," June 2, 2013, and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Afghan Women Fight for Peace on Cricket Pitch," August 23, 2012.

³⁰ Sayer Zaland, "Afghan Women Cricketers Resign to Protect Misbehavior, Double Standards of Cricket Board," *Afghan Zariza*, May 5, 2014.

³¹ *Id.*

³² We reviewed the Afghan Women's Cricket Team Facebook page and found there were no posts or updates to the site after August 18, 2014. See <https://www.facebook.com/Afghanistan-Women-Cricket-Team-121993821209289/>, accessed October 7, 2016.

³³ Ghanizada, "Ghani Appoints New Chairman, CEO for Afghanistan Cricket Board," *Khaama Press*, December 14, 2014. Also see Afghanistan Cricket Board, "Chairman's Message," accessed September 16, 2016, <http://www.cricket.af/page/view/1>.

neither the grantee, State, nor the ACB, were able to provide any additional documentation of exchange activities undertaken by the ACB after February 2015. Further, our analysis of ACB's website also found that the team had likely been disbanded. Specifically, we reviewed changes to the ACB website from June 2013 to May 17, 2016, and found that while the ACB claimed to support women's cricket during this time, links to information on women's cricket directed visitors to pages that were blank, except for the message that information would be "Coming Soon."³⁴

In July 2016, Mr. Shafiqullah Stanikzai, the Chief Executive Officer of the ACB, told us that Afghanistan has a women's national team, but that the team has had very limited activity and has not played any regular games or matches. Mr. Danish also told us that the women's cricket exchange was not successful because the women's team was not ready to play, and he feared that allowing them to play would risk the money and status that he received for the men's team. Shortly before the release of our draft report to State in November 2016, we found that the ACB had updated its website to include a new section on women's cricket.³⁵ According to the website, the ACB has been looking after the welfare of women cricketers since the women's national cricket team was established in 2010, and women's cricket has gradually improved in Afghanistan.³⁶

While the current status of the Afghan women's national team remains uncertain, at best, in February 2016, the ACB posted an article on its website describing a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Education to launch a school cricket project. The project plans to make cricket a part of school curricula by the start of the 2017 school year and include cricket programs for girls.³⁷ If implemented, this could be a positive step towards giving Afghan girls and women a meaningful opportunity to participate in competitive sports.

³⁴ Using software to identify changes in website content overtime, SIGAR reviewed changes to the ACB's website between June 2013 and May 2016. SIGAR found that web links directing visitors to sections on women's cricket were left with blank content between June 2013 and February 2014. SIGAR found that on February 13, 2014, the ACB placed content on its website acknowledging that women's cricket exists in Afghanistan, and that the ACB had a strong commitment to women's rights and is progressing with the development of women's cricket in country. SIGAR found that this content was removed from the website sometime between March 2, 2016, and May 17, 2016.

³⁵ Afghanistan Cricket Board, "ACB Women's Development Cricket," accessed September 7, 2016, <http://www.cricket.af/page/view/10>.

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ Abdul Hadi Dareez, "ACB Plans to make Cricket part of School Curriculum," *Afghanistan Cricket Board*, February 21, 2016,

CONCLUSION

While women's participation in sport has grown since the fall of the Taliban, conservative views toward women continue to prevent them from participating in cricket in Afghanistan. We commend PAS and the grantee for their effort to facilitate opportunities to empower Afghan women through sport, and for working together to terminate a project that was not successful and recover unspent funds.

Nevertheless, while the intention behind PAS's grant was laudable, the challenges encountered throughout the implementation of the project indicate that more direct involvement from PAS in the project planning phase and more direct engagement from the grantee in the implementation of project activities could have improved project outcomes. However, because so much responsibility for coordinating and implementing the grant rested with the ACB, neither PAS nor the grantee could verify in a timely manner the extent to which the ACB actually took steps to implement the grant and achieve intended outcomes. While the Afghan government has committed to help broaden opportunities for women, the ACB appears, at best, reluctant to support women's participation in cricket.

AGENCY COMMENTS AND OUR RESPONSE

We provided a draft of this report to the State Department on October 16, 2016. We received comments from PAS Kabul on November 19, 2016.³⁸ In its comments, PAS stated that "it appears that SIGAR may not have spoken with any women cricket players or to Ms. Tuba Sengar, the Director of Women's Cricket at the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB)", and that doing so "would have been very helpful in clarifying many of the points that the draft report left as inconclusive."³⁹ However, we interviewed Ms. Sengar in conjunction with our meeting with Mr. Shafiqullah Stanikzai, the Chief Executive Officer of the ACB, and we revised text on page 11 to reflect that meeting. We were, unfortunately, unable to speak with the women that participated in the exchange due to the inability of either PAS or the grantee to provide a roster of participants before the end of our review.

PAS also reported that while it was disappointed that it was unable to achieve the goals outlined in the project, both "PAS and [the grantee] intensely monitored the project from its inception in September 2014 until its end in January 2016." However, SIGAR's primary observation is that PAS and the grantee gave excessive leeway to the ACB to implement project activities and did not exercise sufficient control over the completion of grant activities, including team selection and coordination with partner cricket boards, to ensure that intended outcomes were met. SIGAR remains concerned that neither PAS nor the grantee could independently verify the extent to which the ACB implemented project objectives, and continues to believe that delegation of some of the

³⁸ PAS requested that we not make this report public in order to protect the security and safety of the grantee. It is SIGAR policy that we will publish everything we produce, except for classified information, information the release of which could reasonably be expected to place lives in danger, and personally identifiable information covered by the Privacy Act, or as otherwise prohibited by law. In this case, the State Department has provided a detailed, substantive explanation as to why the release of the subject information would place lives in danger. Therefore, we determined that the request should be granted to the extent possible. We are also committed to being as transparent as possible and believe that this report may allow policymakers to make more informed decisions when investing in efforts to support women in Afghanistan. In response to PAS's request and its concern for the safety of the grantee, SIGAR has removed the name of the grantee throughout the report.

³⁹ Terry Davidson, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Embassy, Kabul, *Comments on the Draft Special Project Report on the Women's Cricket Leadership Exchange Grant*, November 19, 2016.

most substantive elements of the project to the ACB was an inherent flaw in the grant's management and oversight.

PAS also stated that, "Throughout the report, there is a suggestion that the purpose of the PAS grant was to facilitate the ACB's development of a national team." We disagree. The report states numerous times that the purpose of the grant was to develop, coordinate, and implement a regional women's leadership exchange for female cricket players from Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan. Finally, PAS noted in its comments that, "SIGAR's primary criticism is that PAS did not coordinate with the Afghan Cricket Board (ACB) prior to issuing the grant, and that [the grantee] relied on the ACB for critical activities. PAS coordinated very closely during the project planning phase with then-CEO of the ACB, Dr. Noor Murad."⁴⁰ However, as noted above, SIGAR's primary criticism is that PAS and the grantee gave excessive leeway to the ACB to implement project activities and did not exercise sufficient control over the completion of grant activities. Moreover, we found that PAS did not coordinate with other relevant stakeholders, such as the coach of the Afghan Cricket Academy, to discuss the feasibility of a women's cricket exchange prior to issuing the request for proposal for the grant. Ultimately, because of the ACB's unwillingness to cooperate, the decision was made to terminate the project.

On December 9, 2016, State requested that we not publish their comments as an appendix to this review, as is our normal practice, because their comments included some identifying references to the grantee that could endanger personnel in Afghanistan. Given the nature of State's request and its ongoing concern for the safety and security of grantee personnel, we agreed not to publish State's comments.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

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