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PRESS RELEASE
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Afghanistan Innovation Labs in Mazar-e-Sharif Creates Unique Technology-Based Solutions for Daunting Challenges Faced by Communities

(Sep 17, 2015/ TechNation- Mazar-e-Sharif): Afghanistan Innovation Labs (iLabs) 2015 in Mazar-e-Sharif wrapped up after improvising unique innovative technology solutions for Afghanistan's most critical social, economic and environmental problems. iLabs, a social innovation program, covered a series of meetings of over 100 civil society and technology activists and experts in the city of Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan. The iLabs IV took place between September 14 and September 17 in IT Center, Computer Science Faculty of Balkh University, in Mazar-e-Sharif. iLabs is a series of workshops working on social innovation and its third and fourth rounds started in February from Herat and extended to Herat and Jalalabad, and now to Mazar-e-Sharif.

iLabs Mazar-e-Sharif participants discussed social and environmental problems, covering issues related to healthcare, education, agriculture, poverty alleviation, governance, justice, human rights, particularly women's rights, natural disasters and responses. The participants identified and developed technology-based solutions to address these issues. During this workshop, technology-based solutions were identified addressing gaps in seven domains.

The workshop format consisted of a Pre-Lab session where participants engaged in identifying social problems and possible technology-based solutions, followed by a Main-Lab session, where they designed prototypes on paper, which were converted into computerized prototypes. "iLabs provides unique opportunities for Afghans to come up with innovative technology-based solutions. If implemented, these solutions can transform Afghanistan." said Omar Mansoor Ansari, President of TechNation.

On September 17, 2015, iLabs Mazar-e-Sharif was concluded with an Awards Ceremony at the IT Center of Balkh University. Participants of the ceremony included government officials from Balkh province, civil society leaders, industry representatives and academia, including Chancellor of Balkh University.

The three best prototypes were selected for Best Prototype Awards after being evaluated by judges and participants through voting mechanisms. The prototype that was ranked best among the top three will be transformed into a full-fledged software application within three months. These applications, once finalized, will be made available for the participating NGOs and government institutions to utilize in and enhance their respective organization's activities.

About Innovation Labs:

The Innovation Lab project was launched as Kabul Innovation Lab in 2012 by Internews Network with the support of USAID. In 2015 TechNation, a Kabul-based technology and consulting firm, was tasked to organize the event in Kabul, Herat, Jalalabad and Mazar-e-Sharif. iLabs helps create a vibrant social entrepreneurial community of men and women in Afghanistan. It promotes communication, learning and sharing experiences, developing new technologies for social good and establishing contact with the wider world. iLabs is an activity of the Afghan Civic Engagement Program (ACEP) co-implemented by Counterpart International and Internews.

TechNation's community partners include TechWomen Afghanistan, TechAfghanistan, TechLabs, Ibtikaar, DEWAE, Alerts Network, Balkh University, Ministry of Information and Communication Technology and RelAsia. Also, there are other organizations joining hands with the iLabs team to help improve organization of Innovative Labs and promote technological innovations targeting social issues across Afghanistan.

About TechNation

TechNation is Afghanistan's most innovative technology firm with a global reach and a local focus. We organize our activities in the following eight major areas: apps development, coaching and education, incubation and small business support, community technology, community media, ICT market research and policy analysis.

About Internews Network:
Internews is an international non-profit organization whose mission is to empower local media worldwide to give people the news and information they need, the ability to connect and the means to make their voices heard.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
Technology-based solutions identified by iLabs Mazar-e-Sharif

1. ***Education-*** the team created an application prototype to help schools, its management and teachers to collaborate with parents online.
2. ***Healthcare***- an application prototype was created to help citizens locate doctors, view their profiles and make online booking.
3. ***Good governance-*** the group has created app prototype providing information on government services to citizens-- this project has been branded as “enfo.”
4. ***Poverty eradication-*** proposed a prototype that helps promote local products by connecting the producer with buyer in the local and international market. The app has been branded as “Sawda.”
5. ***Agriculture-*** the team has created an app prototype to help identify agricultural diseases and propose the right medicine, provide information about agricultural products. The app has been branded as “4Zare.”
6. ***Security-*** the team has created an app prototype that provides alert in case of a potential security threat. The app has been branded as “eHoshdar.”
7. ***Environment-*** a mobile app for creating alerts in case of a natural disaster such as foold. The product has been branded as “Eqdam.”