

NEWSLETTER

Issue 14 December 2002

A New Day for Afghanistan

An interview with a recent visitor to Kabul

Health and Development Aid Abroad

ABN 43 739 862 351
Registered Charity No. 1273

Inside this issue....

1. A New Day for Afghanistan
2. Interview continued
3. Tangke Yak
Micro-loan Project

Student Sponsorship

Dege School
Renovations

4. Shiqu Hydatids
Project

Current HADA
Projects

You've been visiting Afghanistan for the past seven years. What changes have you seen?

My first visit was in 1996 just before the Taliban took control of 80 per cent of the country. At that time a taxi driver in Kabul reckoned life would get better under the Taliban. At first law and order improved and it did look positive, but it wasn't long before a wide variety of restrictions were imposed with an iron fist. This year there was some unseasonal rain during April and May leading people to say that God was blessing them now that the Taliban had gone!

How do things look now?

My first impression was of a city waking up after a long sleep. There was much activity with yellow cabs (the main means of public transport) jostling for a gap around Plaza Square. Some women have thrown aside their veil and young men walk about beardless. Girls, as well as boys, are attending school, and young men and women are embarking on

delayed courses at college or university. Refugees are returning to Kabul .. some are professionals and others are house-owners or both.

Westerners criticised the Taliban for making women wear the burka and depriving them of work. Has there been any change?

Yes, to some extent. We need to remember that this is part of Afghan and Islam culture, but now women have a choice. Some women still prefer to keep fully covered, others use headscarves, while yet a few are prepared to throw off the whole covering. Most significantly, of course, women are free to attend college or go to work. It can't have missed people's attention that there are women in the new government!

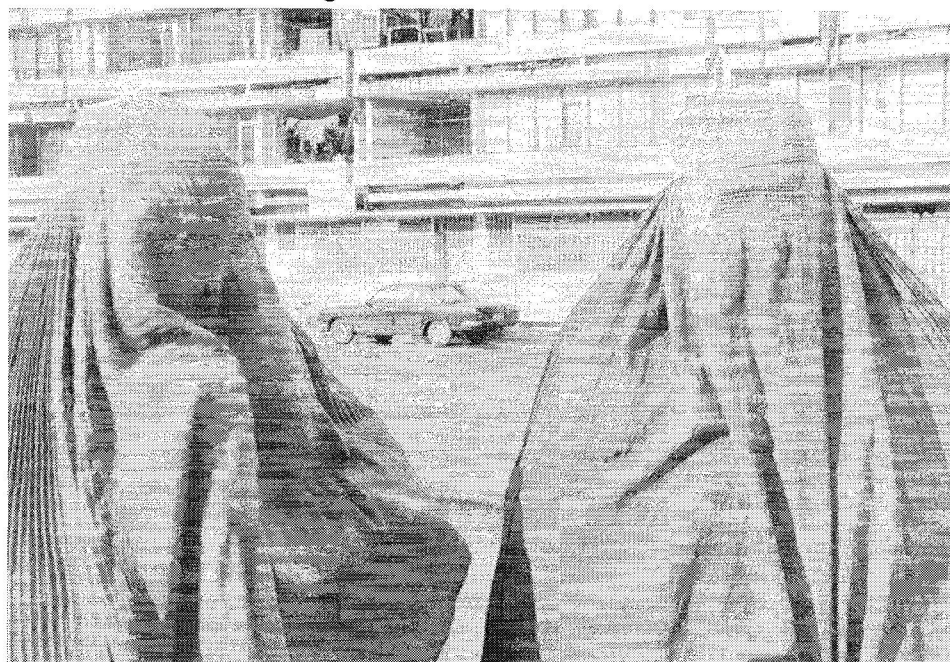
It sounds great that refugees are returning!

It is, but the down-side is a serious housing shortage. Many buildings were destroyed during the tribal fighting prior to the

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Taliban takeover. Now, returning owners are reclaiming their houses and tenants are being evicted with nowhere to go. There is also an exorbitant increase in rents. Many foreign NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations) can afford to pay prices that are out of the reach of the local people. The rapidly increasing population puts a growing strain on services such as water supply and sanitation, bringing a fear of water-borne diseases which would particularly affect the poorer segment of the city's community.

What was the purpose of your visit?

To attend a board meeting of an aid organisation which has worked in Afghanistan for over 36 years. The Taliban authorities had forced the members to leave in August 2001, but they were invited to return around December last year, having received a written invitation from several Afghan Ministries.

That's amazing!

Yes, but it shows the esteem in which this agency was held by certain government officials. In fact, a couple of years ago, one official observed that his country would need all the help it could get from sympathetic sources.

There has been criticism of the American bombing. How do people view the intervention of the Americans and other armed forces?

While no one wants war and bloodshed, many Afghan people felt that the war was necessary. They had already been asking when would the Americans come and help them remove the Taliban. Negotiations with the Taliban have always proved unproductive. They believe that they alone were right and everyone else was misguided so there was no room left for bargaining. As for Al Qaeda, they already had their agenda and had no intention of moving from it.

What is the attitude of the people in the street?

Basically friendly and open. Some were prepared to come and introduce themselves, ask where we were from and talk for a while. Also some welcome visits from expatriates and are also prepared to visit them.

Is it true there are thousands of aid agencies crowding into the country?

Rumour had it that there were around 2,000 aid agencies. But in May 2002 the actual make-up was 430 national NGOs, 118 registered international NGOs with a further 80 in process of registering. Many of the new agencies are short term and will probably be in the country for no more than two years. The

agency whose board I attended provides long-term service to the people of Afghanistan.

What type of work is the agency engaged in? Are more personnel needed?

They have been involved in a wide variety of activities: teaching English as a foreign language, helping poor people set up small businesses, eye care (both in hospitals and also in camps in remote areas), schools for the blind and partially sighted, physiotherapy training, mental-health training and care, the development of products related to renewable energy sources, and using new technology to improve cereal grain production. Personnel with the necessary skills and training will find an opening in these and other projects. Long-term or short-term surgeons, nurses and technicians with skills in eye care are desperately needed to train Afghans in modern techniques.

What changes do you observe in the culture of Afghanistan?

Many people have died as a result of the wars or drought. Others have injuries which prevent them from earning a living. There are widows with no means of support, an enormous number of orphans and an influx of returning refugees and displaced persons. Poverty makes it increasingly difficult for extended families to assume responsibility for the care of more than the closest family members. It is becoming clear that Afghan society has had a huge shake-up. The new Afghanistan is a complex social mix in which family and cultural traditions have often been lost.

What do you see to be the future of Afghanistan?

Anyone forecasting the future of that country is taking a great risk. However, there are many moderates in government who are trying to bring about changes in the country. The major cities in the north are more or less peaceful, but the same assurance cannot be given for the more rural and remote regions. There are certain warlords unwilling to relinquish power in their area unless they are appeased some way. The most I can say is that there are possibilities for a more settled country, but there's a long way to go.

HADA will forward overseas 100% of all funds received for projects, less bank charges.

A gift was recently given to HADA for forwarding to SAI, a sister NGO operating in China. This was to assist with the purchase of a new computer for the office.

Dege School Renovations

In mid July a board member travelled to Dege County, to secure permission at that level, for the Go Mae Primary school renovations and repairs. They were successful in obtaining this from Dege County Officials. The Project application was then handed to the Ganzi Prefecture Foreign Affairs in Kangding. Early September an oral agreement was given for this project to go ahead. SAI are working together with Friends of China on this project as they have made a significant financial contribution to it and want to be involved in the next follow-up visit in Spring 2003.

Student Sponsorship

Student sponsorship continues at several institutions. SAI currently have one student at the South West Minorities College, two English students at a private school in downtown Chengdu, four students at the Sichuan Tibetan School in Kangding, and 50 students at the Ganzi Poverty Alleviation Primary School.



TangkeYak Micro-Loan Project

Barbara travelled with another person to Ruoergai County for the Yak micro-loan project. On arrival they were informed of several changes, without prior SAI knowledge. Project guidelines were discussed with the village leader and the project put 'on hold' for one month. A repeat visit took place August and the project successfully commenced.



A four year contract has been signed after which time money will be repaid to the village and SAI donors. The project will be assessed and the future discussed. During the four years it is hoped that other Community Development projects may be initiated in this area. Alpha Communities (AC) is also involved in this project, and responsible for sponsoring and monitoring of one child per poor family who do not already have a child at the Tangke Primary School.

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 Donation Project Name : _____ \$ _____
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Credit Card Facilities

We are pleased to be able to offer credit card facilities to those supporting HADA projects or for payment of annual memberships. Please use this slip if you wish to avail yourself of this service.

*Please note that the bank charges fees in excess of 7% for the use of this service/facility.

Donations to any of the projects that HADA supports would be gratefully received.

Current HADA Projects

Yunnan, China

- ♥ Pig farming
- ♥ Rebuilding school
- ♥ Sponsoring children for schooling
- ♥ Training English teachers

Astana, Kazakhstan

Pregnancy Crisis Centre

HADA has provided funding to the following Associate Organisations for some of their projects.

SAI, China

- ♥ Sponsoring mature rural students to language and medical school
- ♥ Sponsoring children for schooling
- ♥ Assisting a hospital for the poor
- ♥ Supporting a school for the children of nomadic families
- ♥ School renovation
- ♥ Hydatids treatment and eradication project
- ♥ Yak micro-loan project
- ♥ Community health training

IAM, Afghanistan

- ♥ The Herat Ophthalmic Centre
- ♥ Herat Community Development Program
- ♥ Herat Mental Health Clinic
- ♥ Ophthalmic Technicians Training Program
- ♥ Maternal Child Health – training women health workers
- ♥ Primary Mental Health Program
- ♥ Disaster Management Program

Harvest International Services, Cambodia

- ♥ Vocational training
- ♥ Village education
- ♥ Street kids

Shiqu Hydatids Project

Several projects have continued since Barbara's return and at the end of June. She travelled with a team of five to Shiqu County to continue with the Hydatids Treatment and Education project. Several setbacks were encountered, and a new plan was set in motion, several days after arrival. Working with the help of the Education Commission, 73

patients were examined, and treated for Hydatids disease.

Each group of patients were taught the disease process, its prevention, and treatment with Albendazole. The patients were requested to return to the County for a follow-up visit early November 2002.

At that time an SM team will return. A repeat ultrasound will be required and if necessary a further course of medicine administered. Twenty boxes of Albendazole

are in storage in Shiqu. Barbara is currently working on the plan for this project, and hoping to secure the help of a Mandarin speaking doctor and ultrasound technician. Contact continues with the New Zealand Government's Research team who will be returning to China early October to recommence the Datangma Project. They have indicated interest in using the teaching brochure.



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VISION:
To see medical, literacy,
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