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Marga Flader and Tanja Khorrami reporting from their October-visit

Afghanistan –failed state, dominated by war, terror, corruption and economically without hope, dependent on foreign help, with everyone worried about the future, especially after the irregularities in the last election ...???

Yes, all this is true: But there is so much more to tell - about the people and their life in the towns and vil-lages. Much has happened during the last years. Many big and small roads have been built; the traffic is start-ing to work according to rules. Electrification is reaching more places and is mostly available 24 hours/day. Water is still a problem; however, also this problem is being tackled. The pump stations and pipes from the Amu Darya to the northern region of Andkhoi are almost completed. Now the people are waiting for the next project – getting their houses connected to the water supply. Then drinking water which is not salty would be available. The weather was also merciful this year: The harvests were good. All this gives rise to hope, pro-vided that security does not worsen. There are no signs for improvement at the moment; the many check-posts at the roadsides make it obvious: The country is not safe.

Of course, also the people in Andkhoi feel this, however, right now the situation seems calmer here than in other places. Lots of construction projects are going on: houses, schools, roads, shops and petrol stations. Every day there are wedding parties with music till late in the night. We took also part in a wedding party. Rahmanqul's son married a girl from Andkhoi and celebrated there together with his friends. It was a nice celebration. Everyone was remembering our beloved friend and regional director who was murdered 2 ½ years ago. It made us glad to learn during this visit that finally the Khancharbagh High School would be named in his honour. Also two more schools will bear the names of two other headmasters who were mur-dered in the last two years.

We spent 12 days in Andkhoi which gave us enough time to see many schools and other projects. We were very impressed by the many young people (130 boys and 60 girls) who do not only attend the schools, but also take part in English or computer courses starting at 7 o'clock in the morning and after school go to classes in our education centre (EC) for extra tuition in Dari, English, mathematics, physics, chemistry and religion in preparation of the university entry exams. We found the students tremendously open, inquisitive, determined and critical and at the same time thankful for the chance for additional tuition at our education centre. In the hands of such young men and women the future of Afghanistan will certainly look different than in the past.

We could see how necessary it is to continue the support when we went to the state schools. Some schools are really excellent, teachers and students are giving their best; there is a good working atmosphere, the buildings are well looked after, different cultural activities are organised and sports clubs are working well. Unfortu-nately, there are also some schools which have a good building but the lessons are not so useful. Text books are missing, there are not enough teachers or the teachers are not qualified enough. Most students who leave school after 12th grade get a job as a teacher if they do not pass the university entry test. The need for teachers is still great because every year many more children start school. However, as the tuition of these young teachers had been flawed because of the years of war, they cannot pass on any more to their students than that contained in the textbooks. We met teachers who were teaching English without having learned English them-selves. These young teachers attend teacher training college in the afternoon and only after completion of this three years' course they are entitled to receive their full salary. In a meeting the responsible heads of education at district level promised to support the schools in their endeavours to get extra help from the education offices in Kabul (capital) and Maimana (province). They were grateful for the new school building which we could inaugurate during our visit.

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The Parents-Teacher-Associations (PTA) now take care of small repairs of the school buildings: They replace broken window panes, put a layer of mud on the mud roofs to waterproof them, paint walls and fill small holes. For some repairs they have asked us to provide the material while they organise the labour. For bigger repairs we were asked to carry out the repairs, i.e. termites have attacked some schools buildings and we shall have to replace the wooden windows with metal ones. In some villages new schools buildings are needed. In Galikhana for example more than 400 girls are taught in four rooms which they themselves call „stable“. In summer they are sitting under the trees. The committed principal promised to build a boundary wall with the help of the villagers around the new school plot. We shall try to obtain the necessary funds for a new school building. In another village the situation is similar. Here too the villagers would be very happy to get a new school building and they promised to help as much as they can.

In some remote areas, where some years ago the girls were hiding their faces behind their scarves, we now met very open-minded inquisitive young girls who demanded better lessons, more teaching material and more support. Some of them are now attending teacher training college. They start from grade 10 and after five years they will be a qualified teacher. It is obvious that they have the support of their fathers – something which we could not imagine some years ago. Many girls together with their mothers and aunts came to the „women’s day“ which took place on 8 October in our education centre. They enjoyed their chats, played games or took part in sports activities. In a very nice ceremony certificates were handed out to the students of our home courses, computer and English courses.

We enjoyed very much our visits to some families in the district of Khancharbagh where we had organised our first „chicken project“. After some theoretical training 23 families received 20 chickens each for which they had built some houses from mud. The women were very hopeful to be earning their own money from selling eggs in the near future. On this day we could see again with our own eyes: The endeavours of our committee are bearing fruit, even if it takes some time. We hope that you will continue your support of our projects.

In Mazar-e-Sharif we visited four schools during our three day stay. The school in Chooghdak was already using four of the newly built classrooms although the building was not finished yet. During the break the students were crowding the playground which was fitted out with new swings, seesaws and climbing frames during the summer.

The principal of the agricultural school where we have almost finished the last of our construction projects (school building, dormitory and kitchen/dining room) told us enthusiastically that he had just received a letter that the school has now been promoted to an *Agricultural Institute*. This means that from now on the students can attend the institute from grade 10 to grade 14 after which they would have a very good chance of getting a job in agriculture or administration.

At present we are constructing a double story building for another school, Maqsadullah Shaheed with the financial help of the German Foreign Ministry. We were impressed by the quality of this school, however, not only us, but also the representative of the Foreign Office who accompanied us; especially the young chemistry teacher impressed us. She openly talked about her problems and asked for a laboratory for the school which, we think, would be a good investment for this school where only well qualified teachers teach the 972 girls and 856 boys.

The representative of the Foreign Ministry also accompanied us to the Nahr-e-Top Girls School which urgently needs a building for their more than 3000 students and 60 teachers. The land is available and the principal promised to build the boundary wall around the 6000 m² plot with the help of the parents.

For the many projects and new schools we shall need quite a lot of money in the next years. Even if we receive financial help from the German government, our committee needs to bear 25 % of the project costs from private donations. We trust that you will – as always – continue your support to enable us to continue our work.

With best regards

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