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VUSAF-Verein zur Unterstützung
von Schulen in Afghanistan e.V.

Ulla Nölle and Tanja Khorrami report from their trip to Afghanistan in October 2010:

Andkhoy, 17.10.2010: We are sitting on the terrace of our education centre. We can hear dogs barking, crickets chirring, frogs croaking and somewhere people are celebrating a wedding with loud music. This is Afghanistan, too – not only war, terror, corruption and poverty.

Ulla (who celebrated her 86th birthday during this trip): „Because of the long and serious illness of my husband I had not been able to visit Afghanistan for almost three years and I was overwhelmed and astonished by what the members of our committee in Germany and Afghanistan have achieved since then. The weeks in Afghanistan started with long discussions about Afghanistan in general and our committee in particular. We also found time to visit the German Ambassador and the family of Rahmanqul. Mardanqul got married a year ago and now has a lovely daughter named Arzo ("Hope"). All sisters are very interested in everything and are successful in school and university”.

During our visits to the projects and the many discussions, we could feel that the people – despite all the problems – are on the way to a better future. Kabul has changed. New houses are being built, roads have been improved with a green central reservation, drainage pipes have been installed, many more women are going shopping or visiting without the burka and in the evening coloured electric lights are blinking from the hills where many people are construction small houses. In the evening, however, not many people can be seen in the roads – because they are worried about security.

This was the same in Mazar-e-Sharif: During the day the roads were busy with lots of dealings in shops or along the roadside, in the evening it was quiet. We visited the schools which we built in 2009 and 2010. Especially happy were the teachers at the Maqсадullah Shaheed School who could now teach the more than 2000 male and female students in a beautiful new building. Just as happy was the headmistress of Nahr-e-Top school when she went with us to the construction site. 3000 girls are waiting for the inauguration of the new building which should take place in spring when school starts again after the winter break. In Chooghdkak (which got a second floor last year) 60 girls and boys are now also studying English and computer programs – a privilege. A big contrast was a boys' school for 3500 boys to which the new head of education took us. The boys were crowding in very small dilapidated classrooms under ceiling beams which seemed near to collapse. Everything else was the same bad state of repair and damaged by termites. Rain and snow during the coming winter could be life threatening. 13 classes are studying in tents. The situation is said to be similar to this in around 40 % of all schools in Mazar or Kabul. On the last day in Mazar we had a big meeting with all responsible persons of our projects. We had many points for discussion and worked from 8:30 until 20:00 hrs. Early next morning we left for Andkhoy with two cars. The trip went well without any incidents, just near the end we got caught in a sandstorm and could not see anything. Despite this, we arrived safely in Andkhoy and were greeted by many friends.

One of our first visits took us to the new Waliswal (district governor) of Andkhoy. Yar Mohammad (our regional director) had already briefed him on our project and he was impressed by the good conditions of the education system. He had already been to some schools and made suggestions for a future cooperation. We hope that it would stay like this.

During the following days we visited twelve schools for which we had either constructed or repaired the buildings and many other projects of our committee. Everywhere people were very grateful, but we also

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received many more requests for help. For example, in one big girls' school we saw the new four-classroom building now used by girls who were still sitting in tents last October. However, already now it is clear that these rooms should get a second floor. The situation is the same in Yuldoz Lycee. Although we constructed a building with 8 new rooms, three of the 74 classes are now sitting in tents and the number of students is rising – at present 3220! In grade 9 there are 18 parallel classes, 7 in grade 10 and even in grade 12 there are 4. It is great that we find so many girls in the upper grades, however, we will need a lot of financial help to build more classrooms. Please help us if you can!

Daulat Gildi Fidaee chool built by us in 2002 got a second floor this year and looked very inviting. At another site we saw the foundation of a new building and in a third place the workers were laying the bricks for the walls of a new building, hopefully they can put up the roof before the winter. Unfortunately, we could not see this school because part of the district was not safe for travel because some young men from that area had joined the Taleban and from time to time they return to their homes. This is a great burden for their families because some of the girls go to our home schools with the permission of their parents but on such days they do not leave the house. But we can say that it is not everywhere like this. The girls of Arab Shah whose building was set on fire last spring and which had been repaired by the school authorities were going to school regularly.

The parents and people of the village are supporting their schools and are involved in new projects. For example, when we are constructing a new building, the community is building the boundary wall. For smaller projects schools can send proposals to our Small Projects Fund for a grant of 100.000 Afghani (2.000 USD), but they have to contribute around one quarter of the value of the project. Other parents help maintain the school building, i.e. collect money for painting. Our help is continuing along the direction of *help for self-help*.

Our courses for students of grades 7 to 12 in our Education Centre are still popular. They really enjoy learning English and get to know computers. Here we have the best teachers and the students can learn what the state schools cannot offer. Teachers, heads of educations and also the district governor asked us to provide a course for modern methodology for new teachers who just started with their education. Our office in Kabul is trying to organize such courses or workshops.

We watched with interest the lessons in health education in two of our sewing courses. The young women of these courses are learning not only sewing and embroidery, but hear about hygiene, nutrition and illnesses. Furthermore, they are learning to read, write and arithmetic. They are selling their dresses to neighbours and traders who gave fabric to them. We were very happy to see older women in some of our Home Courses whose aim is to join the state schools – just like their daughters who go to school nowadays.

Many teacher households now have a special kind of income: With the 20 chickens which they got from us last year they build up small chicken farms. One family raised 200 chickens of which they could sell 100 making good money. Every week they can sell between 50 to 100 eggs earning around 50 USD a month. A great success! We are now trying to expand this project for another 200 families with 20 chickens each. Our regional director has just signed the contract with the GTZ.

We saw many successful projects and we also saw that further help is still necessary. “Please say thank you to everyone in Germany and please do not forget us in future”, we were told by many Afghans and this we would like to pass on to you.

Kind regards

Ulla Nölle and Tanja Khorrami

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