



Verein zur Unterstützung von
Schulen in Afghanistan e.V.

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Impressions by Heike Essayie (her first trip) and Marga Flader (her 8th visit) of their stay in Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif and Andkhoi in November/December 2005.

Dear Friends,

A third letter from us this year might come as a bit of a surprise to some of you. A further trip to Afghanistan (as always at the expense of the travellers, of course) was necessary because of the number of projects which come to an end this year and for which detailed reports to the donors are necessary. However, we would also like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support and to report to you. The three weeks in Afghanistan were filled with visits, meetings and another inauguration of a school building. Here are only some of the most important impressions:

At the beginning and at the end of our trip the indescribable poverty in Kabul which is particularly difficult to bear because of the approaching winter – at night temperatures were down to -5°C. People living in ruins with no windows, searching the rubbish for something to burn to keep warm; the unbearable smog in this town with 3 to 4 mio. inhabitants caused by the crazy traffic and the diesel powered generators – still the capital is supplied with electricity only every three days for approx. three hours! There does not seem to be enough air to breathe. A person ending up here in the middle of winter without a shelter has the choice of freezing or suffocating, but hardly a chance for survival.

On the other hand there is the warm reception with which all guests are welcomed which one does not experience so often, particularly so in Andkhoi. What a contrast to Kabul and also to Mazar-i-Sharif! A poor, somewhat sleepy region in the desert where any little twig is picked up, every single drop of water is saved. Almost all children help in the domestic carpet production. Hardly a car – the four dirt tracks which lead to the center of Andkhoi are even difficult to master with a four-wheel drive - instead horses and carts as taxis, packed donkeys, on bazaar days many camels, and in between motorbikes and cyclists. Behind the walls of the picturesque mud villages in the vicinity there does not seem to be any life, only from time to time a blue committee-sign brings a bit of colour into the landscape, and then the big surprise: the schools filled with curious and interested children. The children's eagerness to study and the good functioning of the projects in general is impressive. This gives hope and joy. One big change for example is that the big girls' lycee now has a head mistress!

Our projects: During the last (jubilee) year we collected money for the construction of a school building for the girls of Urgunchikhana which was now ready for inauguration. The heads of education of Andkhoi and Qurghan, the mayor, the village elders and the girls: all celebrated together with us. Girls and boys made music, sang and danced. Everyone was happy. Next spring the villagers will with our help erect a wall around this school for a court yard and garden for the girls.

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The boys at Qazi Baba Murad still have to be patient for a while longer. However, the work on the foundations has already been completed. 10 km south of Andkhoi is a further big building site in the grounds of the Qurghan Lycee. Here we are constructing two school buildings with 11 rooms each. The students wanted to get out of the tents very quickly and so now they are taking their lessons inside the unfinished building. Construction workers, students and teachers are all working at the same time in the same place. In Afghanistan things work slightly differently! The eager headmaster is very happy about the modern seismic proof building of energy conserving construction which is being erected with the help of French experts. Important is also the new covered water reservoir which should help to decrease the great water problems in this arid region. This summer again for several months there was no water because upriver it was used for the irrigation of the fields. Only since the beginning of November water was flowing again along the small river and ditches.

The most important project for us this year is our Education Center: We are constructing class rooms, workshop, office, guest rooms and a water reservoir. The aim of this education center is on the one hand to enable the students to go to university and on the other hand the training in various crafts (carpenter, electrician, solar technician etc.). This year we have rented a building to run these courses which the most motivated boys and girls attend. At the state schools, there are still severe shortages which the committee cannot solve: for example there are not enough text books which should be supplied by the state, the teachers receive only a salary of 50 to 60 USD and, because of the years of war, the younger teachers are not sufficiently qualified. We hope with the work of the education center to bring about improvements in the education system. In future we would also like to carry out teacher training workshops in this centre and ask experts from Kabul or Germany to teach here. We are providing the facilities and this help is welcome as has been confirmed to us in meetings with the heads of education, headmasters and our own employees.

In spring we mentioned our newspaper project. Since then students in cooperation with two teachers have produced the first two issues. It is the only newspaper in Andkhoi and it is really appreciated.

A change of great consequences for the school system was ordered by the education ministry in Kabul. From now on the region Andkhoi does not have long winter breaks but only long holidays in the hot summer. However, temperatures go down well below zero in winter and there have been no possibilities to heat the class rooms! So the head of education asked us if we could help. 429 stoves are needed for all schools in the four districts. They can be produced in Andkhoi and cost only 32 USD. However, a big sum is needed for the fuel – almost 32.000 USD, i.e. a total of 50.000 USD. It is necessary to provide the stoves so that the lessons can take place during the winter months because already now it is almost impossible to manage to teach the whole curriculum of one year in one year.

In a difference province north of the city of Balkh (approx. 1 hour away from Mazar-i-Sharif) we have another new project. With the financial support of the Polish Foreign Ministry we are constructing a school for girls from five villages who up to now had hardly a chance to attend school. In spring the building will be finished.

Everything we have been able to achieve was made possible because of the efficiency and reliability of our Afghan employees and, of course, of Ulla Nölle who founded the committee and the many donors. Many thanks to all of you!

However, still the need is great. The need for further literacy classes, for teaching material, especially for science subjects, for educated teachers and, above all, for trainers for the teacher training. The new head of the board of education said to us that the problems in Afghanistan after 23 years of war were so immense because most educated people either left the country or were killed. The new generation has therefore now to be educated and then they will have the chance to become the real peace keeping force in Afghanistan.

With kind regards

Heike Essayie

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