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VUSAF Union of Assistance
For Schools in Afghanistan

Marga Flader and Mucke Kudrass report about their trip to Afghanistan in Nov./Dec. 2008

Dear Friends

Once again we experienced Afghanistan as a land of contrasts: During the day it was still nice and warm, in the evenings very cold. Andkhoi was quiet, Kabul hectic, noisy, dusty and polluted. The roads were shared by herds of sheep, camels, carts, donkeys, and lorries. While travelling through the dense Kabul traffic just before Eid, we saw many beggars. We watched men pulling heavily loaded carts, women wearing chadories (burka) balancing parcels in their heads, other women moved about in elegant dresses. The Jade-Maiwand still looks as if the rocket attacks had only just stopped while in other parts of the city modern apartment ((??))blocks are being erected, especially along the new ring road around Kabul. At some of these building sites we saw homeless people living in tents in appalling conditions. It is said that as long as there is still a boom in construction, there is hope. However, many people are very worried about what the future has in store. We too left Germany with mixed feelings. Unlike our previous trips, we moved about only in cars and never walked anywhere. Shortly before we arrived at a destination a phone call was made so that we were able to enter the grounds without stopping the car. In traffic jams, particularly when close to a military convoy, we felt insecure. In Andkhoi we were always accompanied by an armed policeman and our guesthouse was guarded at night. Although we were never in direct danger, while we were in Andkhoi there was an attack on a car of the German Embassy in Kabul where we had had a meeting a few days previously.

In Andkhoi people expressed their thanks for the rice, flour and oil which we provided for 1300 families this year with the support of MISEREOR. It was a great help during the drought which unfortunately has not yet come to an end. Until now there has only been 14 mm of rain. Since the beginning of November the river and the ditches carry water again as it is no longer used for agriculture further upstream. As nothing was harvested in the Andkhoi region this year, the people hope that we will again be able to help this coming winter. However, for this we would need the help of the Foreign Office, the BMZ Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development or MISEREOR.

We have had many discussions with our staff and the authorities in Kabul, Andkhoi and Maimana (the capital of the province Faryab) where we talked with the head of education for the province and the governor of the province who did not have much information on our committee. It is very important for our staff that we help to set up a good relationship with the authorities at province level as they have to get their approval for all our projects. Unfortunately, many so-called NGOs are working in Afghanistan whose work is unsatisfactory. Our discussions went well and we could convince the head of education as well as the governor of our work. On the following day, some representatives from the provincial government took part in a ceremony laying the foundation stone of a new construction project.

In Andkhoi we were present at the graduation ceremony for the participants of our computer course. It was a very nice event with speeches, music and some fun: Some boys from our education centre surprised everyone with a funny play about a lazy teacher. The district governor of Qaramqul used the

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opportunity to inform the public that the murderer of our regional director Rahmanqul as well as the head of education of Qurghan and the headmaster of Qaramqul High School had been arrested and had meanwhile been sentenced to death. He had confessed and, therefore, some people behind the killing could also be arrested. The murderer received 500 USD for the killing of one person. Further evidence lead to the Taleban based in Pakistan.

Another important point which was discussed during this trip concerned our vocational training. We would like to train electricians and start commercial training. At present we are training carpenters in their second year. The young men should run the training workshop like a business and produce tables, benches, windows and doors for our projects in order to raise part of the high costs for the training material. It is not easy for them as many of them had only started learning to read and write and do arithmetic with the beginning of this carpentry training. We had to convince our construction manager to give the young men a chance to show him that they can actually produce good quality products.

We also had discussions with the team of the Andkhoi Magazine. This project should also run like a small business. The Andkhoi Magazine is now officially registered; four copies per year should be published. They are sold at 20 AFA per copy, i.e. 0.40 USD. However, the income is not even enough to cover the printing costs.

We visited all construction projects which we carried out this year: The water reservoirs which have been covered with copulas, the repairs on the two buildings of Rahmatullah Shaheed, the additional school buildings for Kulalkhana Girls' School (4 rooms) and for Igambirdi Shaheed Boys' School (7 rooms) and for Yuldoz Girls High School (8 rooms).

Of course, we have again been asked for new school buildings and for more school furniture. Two school buildings in villages near Andkhoi are urgently needed. However, worse than the situation in the Andkhoi area, where we have worked for 20 years, is the situation in Mazar-i-Sharif. The head of education of the province told us that three quarters of the schools in the town have no building. We visited a school for 780 girls and 696 boys who are being taught in a small derelict building and nine tents. They only have very few assorted chairs and tables which the headmaster managed to gather where he could. Also our school on the outskirts of Mazar-i-Sharif - in Chooghdak – which we built in 2002 has become two small. From next spring onwards seven classes will have to be taught outside. We showed pictures of this school in Andkhoi to make clear to them that other regions have great needs also.

We were happy to see the result of our work in the school grounds of the agricultural school where a very nice big school building has been constructed which is almost finished. The hostel is also under construction. A representative from the BMZ and the head of education of the province of Balkh were also present during this visit and it seemed that they also like what they saw.

Inflation and consequently higher prices and wages, official requirements of the Ministry of Education and the dropped value of the Euro will increase the costs of our projects so that we will have to face great challenges in the coming year. We hope very much that you will continue to support us.

With best regards

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