Alternative livelihoods prove profitable

Once a destitute elderly farmer with a small mud house and backyard, Mohammed Akbar is now comfortably living in a newly built house with his family and moving around his business on motorbike which he has also recently bought.

The key to success for Akbar was hard work and saffron – a tiny fragile flower whose stamen are worth their weight in gold. Akbar is a pioneer in Afghanistan in planting saffron as an alternative crop to substitute poppy cultivation. A resident of Gulmir village in Pasthun Zarghun District, Akbar took up his pickaxe to make history by taking the challenge of introducing a new crop to his country through an “on-farm-trial” pilot project on his backyard with the aim of substituting poppy in the region and eventually in the country.

He started at a demonstration field in which the Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR) is still providing technical support in an area of approximately 1,000 square meters located along the Pashtun Zarghun road. Over the past eight years, he has worked hard to earn a living for his family and demonstrate to fellow farmers in the village how hard work pays off. He is now an icon of a success in his village, his district and the province at large. With the support from DACAAR, he was also sent on working/experience sharing tour to neighbouring Iran, which is a major producer and exporter of saffron. Moreover, upon his return, he travelled widely in Herat and Badghis provinces, where he shared his experience and encouraged farmers to plant saffron as an alternative crop.

Last year alone, Akbar earned over USD1,000 from 150 square meters of his saffron farm. Buoyed by the harvest, he started buying more land, growing orchards and livestock and he is now the head of the Saffron Farmers Association; a group of over 50 farmers who are also planting saffron in Pashtun Zarghun District.

In the region, he is now known as the “Father of Saffron”, and also considered as the pioneer of the Jihad “holy war” against poppy cultivation.

Justice Conference

The Government of Afghanistan and the national justice institutions presented their ten-year justice sector strategy, “Justice for All”, at a National Justice Conference held from August 15 to 17, 2005 in Kabul. This strategy was developed with the support of UNDP through its Justice Programme which also helped organise the conference.

A broad spectrum of stakeholders attended this conference, including staff from the Ministry of Justice, Supreme Court, Attorney General’s Office, professors and students from Kabul University, UN agencies, donors, NGOs, and civil society groups. Day one of the conference was an exhibition to provide an opportunity for actors in the justice sector to make their work known. Exhibitors included the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, UNIFEM, UNODC, UNICEF, UNDP, Italian Justice Project, Norwegian Refugee Council, Global Rights, UNDP-NPAD, AREU, Emerging Markets Group, MSI, Checchi,
Afghans participate in negotiations for UN Convention on People with Disabilities

One of the major concerns of the government, the donor community and UNDP in Afghanistan, is the constant increase in the number of persons living with disabilities in the country. War is not the only cause for disability. Other contributing causes are malnutrition, poor and inadequate health care services, lack of accesses to satisfactory water/sanitation, substandard personal hygiene practices, chronically poor living conditions, population growth, increase in the aging population, high unemployment resulting in extreme poverty, domestic violence, inter-marriage and the high rate of accidents. For these reasons disability related issues will remain a major cause for concern and present increasing challenges to the Ministry of Martyrs & Disabled in the future in trying to meet the ongoing and growing needs of the disabled. It is a recognized fact that the estimated two million peoples with disabilities in Afghanistan can and want to be important contributors to society and therefore the allocation of resources for their rehabilitation and rehabilitation is an investment and not an expense.

The U.N. World Program Of Action Concerning Disabled Persons, the Internationally agreed upon development goals as contained in the UN Millennium Declaration obligate member states to ensure that people with disabilities are not marginalized. However, it is generally felt by the international community that these instruments were not comprehensive enough to safeguard the rights of people with disabilities. In Resolution 56/168 the General Assembly decided to create an Ad Hoc Committee to formulate a new International Convention on the Protection & Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities, based on social development, human rights and non-discrimination.

The 6th Session of this Committee was held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, from August 1 to August 12. UNDP, through NPAD, sponsored two senior government officials to participate in this national important event in order to build national capacity, to ensure that Afghanistan’s participation drafting this international treaty, and to give Afghan participants an opportunity to learn from the experiences of other countries. Phitalis Were Masakhwe, International Disability Advisor for Rights and Advocacy, and Rudy Rodrigues, Institutional Reform Advisor, represented UNDP Afghanistan in this convention. This also gave the country visibility to donors and it demonstrated the government’s commitment in meeting not only its national but also international obligations on issues relating to disability.
Sweet success

Ali Juma, whose father Haj Khan Shirin was killed by the Taliban in 1999, was displaced from his home in Bamyan to Behsood. His house was burnt, livestock stolen and properties looted. Juma, with his wife, six children and his mother remained in Behsood as IDPs and remained completely destitute. When the Taliban was ousted in 2001, Ali Juma returned to his home village and procured a small amount of land however consequent years of drought have meant it could not be cultivated. Last year EAC, a local NGO, introduced apiculture (bee keeping) in Bamyan. People were reluctant and believed that apiculture was not feasible in Bamyan due to its harsh climate and long winter.

Despite public opinion, Ali Juma enthusiastically started to keep bees. He received one box of bees from EAC and set about increasing their numbers. This year, he has four boxes and hopes to have six by the end of the year. Each box produces 14kg pure honey which produces a satisfactory 84kg of honey per year. He sells one kilo for Afs.400 (USD10) in the Bamyan market. While he is in the market his wife takes care of the bees.

Juma has encouraged other IDPs and refugee returnees to keep bees. He explains that it is quite easy and does not cost much. Now about 60 families are involved with apiculture activities. People from neighbouring villages come to him for advice and instructions, most of whom are women.

Ali Juma wants Afghanistan to become a producer instead of a consumer. “All Afghans should create job opportunities for themselves and move towards self-sufficiency” he says.

(Note from the editor: I bought 5kg of honey from Ali Juma which was sold within two hours of returning to Kabul, which is extremely unscientific proof that there is a market, if only there was access!)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Women and Children’s book fair

The first book fair for women and children will take place at the University of Education in Kabul from 3-13 September 2005, between the hours 9:00-13:00 and 14:00-18:00.

The book fair is organized and hosted by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and Rawzana organization. United Nations Development Program along with other international organizations is supporting the event.

The book fair aims to revive culture by encouraging women and children to read books as well as integrate women into all cultural and social events and as well as exchange cultural views by exhibition of books from abroad.

The book fair is going to be attended by 15 women’s NGOs, international organizations and the UN and all cultural and women’s-based organizations are invited to take part. It is expected that 10,000 people will visit the fair over ten days.

University of Education, September 3-13, Contact fulya.vekiloglu@undp.org
Global Microentrepreneurship Awards

The Global Microentrepreneurship Awards (GMA) Programme promotes and illustrates the role that microfinance plays in supporting the entrepreneurial spirit in impoverished communities throughout the world, and the contributions that microentrepreneurs make to the economic sustainability of their families and communities.

UNDP is helping to launch Afghanistan’s second GMA event, to be held in November. Microfinance Institutions throughout Afghanistan are broadly encouraged to nominate their clients to participate in the GMA Programme. All GMA nominees must be submitted through a microfinance institution. Microentrepreneurs may not nominate themselves directly to the GMA team in their country.

If you would like more information on GMA, please contact Emma Sutcliffe emma.sutcliffe@undp.org

Gender Training Program Certificate Ceremony

Ministry of Women’s Affairs with support of UNDP will be hosting Gender Training Program Certificate Ceremony on September 4th, 2005 at 13:00, in MoWA Training and Advocacy Building.

The certificates will be distributed by the Minister of Women’s Affairs Dr. Masouda Jalal to the graduates of NGOs and seven ministries, which are Ministries of Interior Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Information and Culture, Pilgrimage and Religious Affairs, Higher Education, Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled.

The gender training programme, has also been implemented at the provincial level in the provinces of Kunduz, Nangarhar, Bamyan, Badakhshan, Mazar.

September 4th, 13:00

Total of 145 five people received gender orientation seminars, and total of 136 people, 93 female and 43 male, has been trained in has been trained in the program consisted of training modules of Gender Awareness, Gender and Development and Gender Relation Analysis.

DONORS

The following represent all donor contributions to UNDP projects over the month of August:

Canada DFAIT, Anti-Personnel Mine and Ammunition Stockpile Destruction project, ANBP USD 322,639
Denmark MOFA, Support for the Afghan Human Rights Commission USD 52,000
Denmark MOFA, National Assembly Elections USD 1 million
European Commission, Law and Order Trust Fund of Afghanistan Euro 30 million
Netherlands MDC, National Assembly Elections Euro 8 million
New Zealand, NZAID, Support for the Afghan Human Rights Commission NZD800,000
Norway MOFA, Civil Service Leadership Development 7 million NOK
Norway MOFA, National Assembly Elections 6.7 million NOK
Norway MOFA, Support for the Afghan Human Rights Commission 138,000 NOK
Norway MOFA, Support for the Afghan Human Rights Commission 3 million NOK
Norway MOFA, DDR USD 740,000
United Kingdom DFID, Disarmament of Illegally Armed Groups USD 1 million
United Kingdom FCO, National Assembly Elections USD 2 million
USA, USAID, National Area Based Development Programme USD 3,165,309

For more information on any of these stories, or to make contributions, please contact Emma Sutcliffe Emma.sutcliffe@undp.org 070152874