



Photo by M Brown.

**W**omen's rights", are words frequently used when discussing the state of Afghan affairs, but what is actually meant by them, especially in the context of Afghanistan?

For some, they mean political rights such as ensuring women's equal protection under the Afghanistan constitution and law and the freedom to equally participate in the civil and political realm. Others would consider civil and political rights irrelevant if basic social or economic rights were not first established. For example if an Afghan woman is unable to access potable water or access primary health care what relevance is there in being able to vote or to run for political positions?

Afghanistan is undoubtedly among the hardest places to be a woman in the world as demonstrated by statistics showing that women have and continue to be the most adversely affected by poverty and insecurity. A recent World Bank report explains how gender inequality is directly related to poverty:

"Gender inequality...contributes to the non-monetary aspects of poverty – lack of security, opportunity and empowerment – that lower the quality of life for both men and women. While women and girls bear the largest and most direct costs of these inequalities, the costs cut broadly across society, ultimately hindering development and poverty reduction..." ("Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals', World Bank Report 2003, Pg1.).

This Newsletter tells the tale of how Afghanaid is assisting Afghan women to use their agency to bring positive change in their own way to improve elements of their families, environment and their own and other women's lives. Their challenges reflect the wider ongoing struggles lived daily by millions of Afghan women.

Afghanaid is working, in partnership with rural poor women and men, to improve women's wellbeing at a local village level, and working jointly with Afghans at national and sub-national levels to advocate for the promotion of women and girls' rights enshrined in the constitution of the country. We work alongside men and women to increase their skills and create new learning opportunities for them to improve their livelihoods and participate in the development of their families and communities where they live.

Poor rural Afghan women are at the centre of Afghanaid's work. Women's perspectives, needs and priorities are given equal space and resources through our programmes. We actively promote rural women to become an equal partner in village institutions with their men counterparts and be an effective part of the local level decision-making processes. To ensure local women in rural communities are not excluded from the benefits of our programmes we seek to employ Afghan women in our organization. Currently we employ over 60 Afghan women in various capacities across our Head Office in Kabul and in provincial and district offices in 18 locations. This allows us to reach out in culturally acceptable ways to

women in rural and remote communities where we work and facilitate them to join the recovery and development processes of their villages.

In Afghanistan, women are over three times more likely to be illiterate than their male counterparts (UN Human Development Report, 2005). Afghanaid focuses on developing capacities of poor rural Afghan women in a range of skills through sustained processes that nurture and support them in exploiting their innate potential in technical areas such as: basic numeracy and literacy; food processing, packaging and labeling; learning vocational and market skills and setting up small agri and non agri-based rural enterprise; getting to know how credit institutions function and learning to access financial services from them; becoming successful local veterinary workers; running micro-scale poultry business; weaving carpets and making jewelry.

These skills and capacities help women to earn income and through it negotiate improved status vis-à-vis men members of their families. Newly developed skills and capacities, and the new roles which these skills are opening up to Afghan women, are also giving them new confidence and empowering them to become an active partner with men in their community decision making. Through becoming contributors to their household and communities women's status is raised, this in turn is leading to women's needs becoming increasingly listened to by others as well as being considered in the decision making processes both at household and community level.

On the non-technical side, we have been facilitating Afghan women living in poor communities to develop their organizational skills and knowledge by establishing women specific village organizations, and learning to run them effectively through inclusive and participative principles and ethos. Members and office bearers of these organizations facilitate other women of their communities to work together in carrying our joint problem analysis and setting development priorities for their communities. Selected representatives of women organizations work together with men at cluster level where women and men representatives from five to eight villages are organised to develop cluster level development plans and negotiate for resources from development agencies and district and provincial government authority. Women, thus, are becoming aware and responsible citizens of the local governance systems and processes.

We know from our last nearly 30 years of working experience in Afghanistan that transferring skills and developing and strengthening capacities are some of the most effective ways to empower women and bring tangible improvements in their lives and that of their families and communities. Planned well, small inputs have large outcomes the effects of which can last a lifetime and even go so far as to literally save lives. In fact, we hope that our work does last a lifetime that is what it's intended for.

Improving food security is one of the key areas of our partnership with Afghan women and men who we work with to improve their nutritional status, health and overall well being. A recent joint mission report produced by the WHO/WFP/UNICEF/FOCUS in June 2009 looking at Shewa Villages of Arghanjkhwa District (Badakhshan) serves to demonstrate just how lifesaving Afghanaid's work is:

In a neighbouring district in Badakhshan from where Afghanaid work, villages since the winter have been experiencing a food crisis. The lack of food has led to desperate measures with people resorting to eating grass and other non-nutritional shrubs some of which were poisonous. The human death rate especially amongst children and women has been very high since the winter. To make matters worse in these areas, villages have reported losing over 50% of their animals. Afghanaid's programmes work to reduce these food insecurities. Communities where we work are better protected against droughts and other natural and man-made disasters and adversities.

The urgent economic needs in Afghanistan motivated Afghanaid to strengthen its focus on income generation and sustainable economic development with a focus on rural poor producers and small landholders. For several years, Afghanaid has also been bringing together Community Development Councils (CDCs) and interest groups such as farmers (including many Internally Displaced Persons / returnees), women and youth to discuss issues of joint concern towards social and economic interests and to participate in capacity development processes in market-oriented rural enterprise development sector.

Rural communities often engage in a variety of micro-enterprise activities, e.g. vegetable production, dairy or livestock rearing, and non-agro-based enterprises. However, these micro-enterprises rarely expand or become truly profitable due to a lack of collaboration, available cash for investment, and knowledge regarding micro enterprise development / markets. When community groups can access credit, poor households generally opt to either expand their existing micro-enterprise operation or engage in a new area of entrepreneurship. For rural communities, particularly the poorer sections which typically predominates with women headed and/or managed households, collaboration and solidarity for micro-enterprise builds and strengthens their family and collective economy. It, and also provides an opportunity to develop their personal confidence, capabilities and abilities, enhance their skills set in business and social networking, and creates an enabling environment especially for women to have increased mobility as well as a say in decisions affecting their personal lives and future. Women realize their own strengths and potentials when they understand that they can operate as a group and can consolidate their resources to generate sustainable means of income and economic empowerment.

Considering the above, in 2005, Afghanaid launched Facilitating Rural Enterprise Development programme in its 3 areas of operation, out of four, – Samangan, Ghor and Badakhshan provinces. The Self Help Group (SHG), comprising of 15 to 20 women or men members, is an innovative approach to community empowerment which has been shown to assist poor rural women and men in savings, mobilizing



**“Lack of food has led to desperate measures with people resorting to eating grass”.**

community credit, and facilitating enterprise development and market participation. SHGs also empower community members to participate in community affairs, increase local opportunities for sharing technical and business knowledge and assist community groups to create linkages with external institutions.



Today, Afghanaid supports 90 SHGs (of which 51 are women SHGs) and 60 CIGs (of which 28 are women) across Badakhshan, Samangan and Ghor. There are numerous successful case studies that demonstrate the value of linking grassroots based women producers and entrepreneurs groups i.e. ‘matured’ SHGs and CIGs with external financial credit institutions and the ability of these grassroots groups to access the credit. The maturity of these grassroots groups depends on the capacity development, mentoring and coaching in a range of skills including business development planning, backward-forward linkages, value chain analysis, market assessment, technical feasibility of the business idea, and the like, which is an ongoing process facilitated by Afghanaid staff.

# Farhana Faruqi - Stocker: Afghanaid's Managing Director



Social anthropologist Farhana Faruqi Stocker has close to two decades of experience with poor and conflict-hit countries in the developing world, from Sri Lanka to Somalia and particularly Afghanistan. In her career, she has held strategic management positions, leading multicultural teams in complex humanitarian emergencies, long-term development programming, and policy and advocacy work, while operating in challenging socio-political and security environments.

In her varied roles working for organisations spanning from the United Nations to the World Bank and Oxfam, she has played a key part in developing funding strategies, mobilizing and managing resources, and ensuring financial reporting and donor contract management for budgets of millions of pounds.

## Strength in Numbers - Working with UK Communities

Helping a cause you care about can sometimes seem like a rather daunting task especially for those of us who find it hard enough to organise their own lives, let alone thinking about organising a fundraising event!

Did you know, it doesn't have to be hard? It is easy to forget that as part of our social and professional lives we come into contact with many different groups, made up of individuals like us who want to make a difference. Individually it is sometimes hard to muster the resources and skills, however as part of a group one plus one equals three which is why we want to work with your social networks.

This year Afghanaid is launching a communities programme and asking supporters to put us in contact with their church, school, mosque or other community group. We have produced letters and resource packs which you can forward on to these groups on our behalf, or pass us their details and we'll contact them directly. Like most things in life, establishing a personal connection means that people are far more willing to listen to and support us.

***Are you a teacher? Does your child attend school? Do you have a local school you could approach?***

**Schools:** As part of the UK's national curriculum children learn about the developing world and what it means to be a globally aware citizen. Afghanaid has created educational packs which we will be ready to distribute in the new school year and for downloading from our website. These packs will look at the situation in Afghanistan and will use Afghanaid's work as an example of a development agency in a post-conflict country.

***Do you attend church, are you a member of a church group?***

**Churches:** We will be asking churches to participate in our Harvest appeal. Much of Afghanaid's work focusses on making sure Afghans are able to feed themselves and their families, as well as helping them produce products for market. The appeal will discuss how vulnerable rural Afghans are to malnutrition and starvation and how small interventions such as creating a vegetable plots can reap large benefits.

***Do you attend a mosque, are you linked to any Islamic community groups?***

**Mosques:** During Eid and Ramadan we will be asking for special 'zakat' donations from muslim congregations and community centres.

***Are you a business owner who could host a collection tin? Do***

***you use any local shops that are owned or run by members of the Asian and Afghan Community - could you let us know where, be our ambassador?***

**Afghan and Asian Business:** We are working with small/medium Afghan owned business to encourage them to host our collecting tins and talk to their customers about our work.

***Are you a member of any other group like the Rotary club or Soroptimist?***





# Green Tea Morning



On Wednesday the 14th of October Afghanaid will be launching our second annual Green Tea Morning campaign.

And we need your help to make it a success. This autumn why not try your tea a little differently. Afghans mix green tea with cardamom for a refreshing blend that cools you when its hot and warms you when its cold. Does the mixture seem to complicated? If so, let us make it even easier.

Pukka Herbs are supporting the Afghanaid Green Tea Mornings with their Protect tea, a blend of jasmine green tea, cardamom & rosemary. If you choose to host a Green Tea Morning we will send you a box with 20 tea sachets. It's just that simple.

Green tea is the perfect addition to any pre-scheduled office meeting, book club or dinner party.

Choose a day that works best for you and your guests. Invite co-workers, friends, neighbours or relatives to join you in a traditional cup of Afghan tea.

Just complete the registration form included with this newsletter or call our Afghanaid on 0207 065 0825. Once you've signed up, we will send you a Green Tea kit complete with party and fundraising ideas to help make your tea party a success!



**PUKKA**  
To find out more about  
Pukka Herbs visit  
[www.pukkaherbs.com](http://www.pukkaherbs.com)

# Afghanistan Election 2009



Earlier this year, NATO officials announced that 15.6 million Afghans had registered to vote, roughly half of the country's population.

"By the end of August, Afghanistan will hopefully be unified and strengthened, rather than fragmented and weakened." -Dr Zahir Tanin, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations.

Join Afghanaid for a **Afghanaid Post-Election Panel Discussion** led by BBC correspondent, Lyse Doucet.

Sir General David Richards, who is expected to take the role of Chief of the General Staff in August 2009, will also take part in the panel discussion. The chair of Afghanaid, David Page, will also join the panel. David worked in the BBC World Service for twenty years specialising in broadcasting to Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka. Additional panelists from media, politics and the NGO sector are still to be confirmed.

The panel discussion will be held from 6.30 - 8.30 pm on Wednesday 7 October at University of London SOAS Brunei Gallery. Drinks reception to follow discussion. Tickets are £20. Purchase your ticket by phone 0207 065 0825 or by using the attached form.

# Challenge Yourself.

This year, Afghanaid has places at the Virgin London Marathon, adidas Half Marathon at Silverstone and the BUPA London 10,000 Race. In addition, we host a variety of challenge events around the world.

To find out more please visit [www.afghanaid.org.uk](http://www.afghanaid.org.uk), email [amanda@afghanaid.org.uk](mailto:amanda@afghanaid.org.uk) or call 0207 065 0825



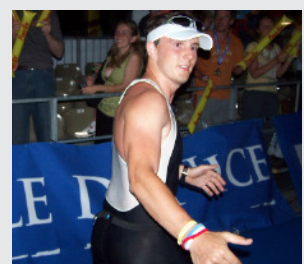
BUPA 10,000



London Virgin Marathon



Challenge Events Worldwide



Ironman Competition