

AFGHAN WOMEN'S FUND

Courage, Compassion, Change

Fall 2022

A Word from Our Director

Dear friends and supporters,

This year, the Afghan people, including AWF volunteers on the ground, faced more severe challenges. Working in the Taliban's Afghanistan is very hard, yet the resilience of our volunteers, teachers, and the women, men, young people and elders is unmatched in the face of their harsh situation. Many local efforts have been successful due to their determination and resourcefulness despite the circumstances, although limited by desperate needs for funding.

While it is possible to move supplies and money to support projects, everything must be done very carefully due to poorly functioning infrastructure in many sectors and the harsh and inconsistent rule of the Taliban. For example, many AWF vocational training projects have been on hold because two key volunteers were killed and another jailed and tortured and now is in hiding. In some locations the teachers and volunteers who have run AWF-supported adult literacy and vocational projects just cannot publicly do so at this time.

So this is a time of working as hard as possible where we can, and working delicately and persistently to expand that space. In the past year this has meant a focus on elementary education and supporting dogged local efforts in several provinces to make high school level education available for girls.

As always we deeply appreciate and need your help. Please see our "Looking Ahead" plans on the last page. Your donations and other assistance literally make the difference. AWF would welcome your support in any form. Please be in touch!

Best wishes in these difficult times, Fahima



North Kabul

In this region, as in others, over the past year AWF has provided school supplies to thousands of girls. This includes both elementary students (whose schools are open in most places) and many high school girls who must learn from home. In some cases teachers are instructing them virtually, via intermittent Facebook or WhatsApp

contacts for assignments, questions, and feedback. Most families cannot afford hours of internet for full classes, and entire families often share one

smart phone or computer. In rural areas electricity and internet are even more sparse, giving older girls there much less access to teachers and instruction.

Older girls' learning must be discrete everywhere, but local Taliban rule varies. In some areas Taliban are very strict. In other places they tolerate or even support it. But none can openly defy the national Taliban ban on girls' high schools, amid stories of strong disagreements among high-level Taliban. In North Kabul and beyond we support local education efforts as much as possible, materially and with communication and encouragement.



Volunteers unloading school supplies

Paktia Province

Paktia is one place we have been able to continue vocational training classes, with over 100 women in 2022. Efforts have focused on sewing, tailoring, and curtain making, because there is a local market for them. Under Taliban rule, imports (such as inexpensive curtains and clothing from China) are restricted, so there is demand for locally made items. However, the local people have very little money, so prices are depressed,

making it difficult to survive. At the same time, the export market is barely functioning. The Istalif women's shura (with which AWF has a long partnership) reports they are exporting some goods for sale in India, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, but less than a third compared to previous years, at lower prices, and with much more difficulty. This means members earn much less money.

In 2012 AWF and local people built a modest building in Mushwani Olia that housed a school and a vaccination clinic. Now, 10 years later, we are allowing an Afghan organization to use it for a full health clinic, and they are adding onto the building to provide more capacity. The elementary school has been moved nearby.

In addition, new hope has literally sprouted for 267 destitute widows living near Gardez in Paktia. In late 2021 the local women's shura contacted AWF about restarting a project that was started but not finished by an aid organization years ago. With the leadership of a local volunteer, we were able to do so, turning barren land into a nursery growing fruit and nut saplings which the widows (their families' only breadwinners) tend and then sell to orchards.



Saplings growing

AWF helped with support and funds (only \$10k total) to complete a 2 km irrigation stream and buy supplies. The narrow strips of arable land beside the stream are not large enough to sustain mature trees, but — starting in January 2022 — growing and selling yearling saplings is offering a sustainable source of much needed income.

Logar Province

The three AWF-built schools in Logar Province (Malalai, Sher Mohammad Khan, Mirtaqi Shah) are all operating, although under difficult conditions. However high school girls must learn at home currently. In some cases small groups of girls meet, sometimes with a teacher, in someone's home. Students and teachers also communicate online when possible. None of these replace attending a fully functioning school, but all are

valuable strategies to minimize gaps in their education. AWF continues to provide them with school supplies.

The Malalai school is expanding, with four more classrooms. There are more elementary students in the area now, and a small school held in a private home was damaged during fighting and had to be vacated due to structural instability. Therefore, local hands are building several additional classrooms with AWF support.

In both Paktia and Logar provinces there have been repeated demonstrations of families, led by fathers, pressing Taliban to open girls' schools all levels. Local Talibs say they are working with their higher-ups to create "suitable" arrangements to permit this, but no one can say what that means or will lead to.



Achin School supply Distribution

Nangarhar Province

Our girls' elementary school in Achin opened in September of 2021 and now educates more than 700 students. As the Taliban took national power in 2021 many families moved back to the area from big cities, seeking relative safety. They also wanted to continue their daughters' education. At the time, local Taliban promised (on video) that the Achin school would allow high school instruction as well as elementary, but that has not happened yet.

Ironically, however, Taliban are allowing the building to be used as a community college for teacher training in the evenings— with 15 young women currently enrolled. More are expected to enroll in the elementary school and community college in January. Currently, Taliban in many parts of Afghanistan allow young women to attend (gender segregated) colleges and universities, often with mostly male instructors, while girls' high schools remain closed in many areas. This reflects re-

gional variation in Taliban rule, and differences and displacement between local and national Taliban leaders. Some local Taliban are “moderate” enough to support girls’ education, but they must not step too far out of line with the national decrees.

Paktika / Khost Earthquake

A devastating 5.9 magnitude earthquake struck Paktika and Khost provinces in June, 2022, killing thousands of people and destroying many villages. Survivors, including children who lost all adult family members, were left with nothing and no one to support them. There were aftershocks for days. AWF was able to send money to trusted volunteers in the region, Dr. Noor and Khalid. They and others purchased, moved, and distributed emergency food and tents for hundreds of families in the quake zone, and more who had walked many km to a neighboring town in search of help.

While the Afghan economy is certainly not functioning well, some local banks are operating, under restrictions, and some companies are producing goods. So we are usually able to move funds and buy supplies, with difficulty. Yet most government agencies are not functioning sufficiently to help people in need.



Badakhshan Province

Another dedicated volunteer, Masad, is an educational leader in Badakhshan Province. He personally teaches classes for people who had to drop out of school for various reasons, with over 100 women of various ages attending in 2022. Additionally, he leads beginning literacy and beginning English classes for women. He also counsels students on finding ways to build a better

future in Afghanistan’s difficult circumstances. AWF supports his efforts by providing school supplies for all the students in his programs.



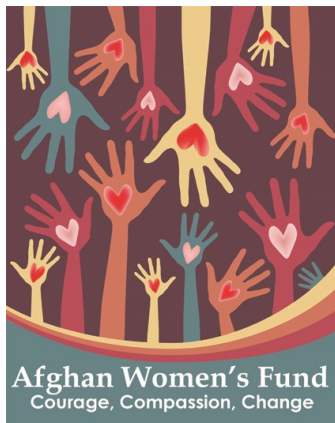
In another district, local volunteers working with AWF added over 1,000 books to a small grass-roots library. They used AWF funds to buy the entire personal library of a local educated man, who had to sell them for his family to survive. While lamenting his loss, he and they (and all of AWF) are glad that we are able to continue to make them available. Local people in this area are dedicated to literature, and many poets come from this region. These range from Sayyida Makhfi-Badakhshi (b. 1876; she is famous for her ghazals.) to Partaw Naderi (b. 1953; a famous modernist Afghan poet) and many others. So, the library is very popular and a wide range of books are treasured.

With winter on the way we also distributed food to 30 or 40 families living in the Sheghnan area of Badakhshan. It is very cold there, and the people are so poor they are malnourished. Therefore winter is a dangerous time for them. We wish we could help many more such families.

AWF Looking Ahead

AWF remains dedicated to women’s rights and empowerment, no matter the circumstances. This year has been trying for the people of Afghanistan and we are honored to work alongside them to find ways around the obstacles.

We are very careful doing our work and always emphasize caution to our volunteers. Many activists, organizers, and average people (including AWF volunteers) have been killed, tortured, or jailed by Taliban in



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the past year. Others have had their homes confiscated and had to go into hiding to stay safe, only to have family members harassed and even abducted. Many struggle to have enough food and adequate living conditions. But they still do what they can, as we must as well.

Recently we began working on a new program that could put education in reach of literally tens of thousands of Afghan girls and young women. We can't share details yet, but we look to 2023 determined to make it work. And to share it with you.

Afghans are knocked down over and over again, yet they stand up again each time. And you, who believe in humanity, thank you for being there for them. Every help – small or large – gives them hope. Thank you for your trust, love, and support.

AWF is 100% volunteer organization committed to helping the people, especially women and girls, of Afghanistan forge a better future. This is a huge task and is not possible without your support, for which we are so grateful. Thank you for your help and trust these many years, and into the future.

COURAGE
COMPASSION
CHANGE

Courage to create a new and peaceful society.
Compassion for the women, children and all those who suffer in these times. Change through education, healthcare and sustainable employment.



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