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## Saving lives in rural Maidan Wardak

*Contribution from the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan*

Farzana Hussaini still remembers what happened one winter day in Rashak, her remote home village, when a woman started feeling her delivery pains: “Since there was no midwife available in the village, neighbours put her on a bed and tried to carry her to the hospital. Due to the heavy snowfall, they couldn’t reach the hospital. When they carried her home – she was dead.”

Farzana is now 21 years old and one of 24 midwifery students in Maidan Wardak who is expected to graduate in 2019. In Maidan Wardak, the maternal mortality rates may have been as much as four times the national average, as the province mainly consists of rural and remote districts.

“When we started the midwifery education programme in 2004, we had to knock on doors to convince families to send their daughters to our school. Today we have 85 candidates competing for 24 positions,” explained Mirwais Haleem, Deputy Project Manager at the Maidan Wardak Regional Management Office. Improvements have been made to the



Photo: Swedish Committee for Afghanistan

quality of the education by extending the programme from 18 months to 2 years, updating the curriculum and installing a well-equipped laboratory. Since 2004, the Swedish Committee (SCA) for Afghanistan has graduated 157 midwives in Maidan Wardak. 70 more students will graduate in 2019, Farzana Hussaini being one of them. “When I finish my studies, I will go back to my home village to combat maternal mortality,” she said.

A total of 369 women die per 100,000 births in Afghanistan, compared to 4 women in Sweden. One contributing reason may be the lack of adequate healthcare and a severe shortage of trained female healthcare workers. In order to address this, SCA operates schools for midwives and nurses. Since 2004, 328 midwives have graduated from SCA’s schools. The majority work at SCA’s clinics, where there would otherwise not have any maternal care services.

Maryam (not her real name) began her midwife training at the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan in 2010. Maryam, who comes from a small village in Samangan province, now works as a midwife.

**“Being a midwife is a sacred job. I am proud to work with the community and the people. Sometimes I am tired and my family tells me that I need to rest, but I don’t have the time.”**

The clinic where she works is often closed due to fighting in the area. *During a period of intense fighting when the clinic was closed for 20 days, she received 240 patients in her own home, which does not have any electricity or running water. Not only pregnant women came to see her but also patients injured by fighting. On average, Maryam assists ten pregnant women a month to safely deliver.*

## New hope for peace and a brighter future through education

*Contribution from NRC*

*“Now, we have a bigger school playground where the students can play and feel safe. The high and sturdy boundary walls also provide protection against any attacks or flying bullets.”*

During a short break between classes, Ahmed (not his real name), 11 years old, and a couple of his classmates sat down to work on their lessons. They have lost several years of schooling and now that they are finally back in school, they have no time to lose.

In 2015, Ahmed’s school in Charamgar in southern Afghanistan was occupied and used as a checkpoint by a non-state armed group (NSAG). When the NSAG left and school resumed, the students and teachers returned to nothing more than an empty shell. All of the roofing, windows and doors had been either destroyed or stolen.

About 300 students and several teachers crammed into the least damaged parts of the building and are doing their best to keep the school going. In the spring of 2019, with support from ECHO and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) some basic repairs were carried out on Ahmed’s school along with three other schools in the area.

There is still fear that the fragile peace will not last, but for now their smiles have returned, as they are finally back in school.

Despite efforts to rebuild the public education system, particularly for girls, over the last two decades, the number of children out of school is on the rise for the first time since 2002. An estimated 3.7 million boys and girls – nearly half of all school-aged children – are out of school.

Among other activities, NRC is supporting a return to education in Afghanistan by rehabilitating schools such as providing new roofing, windows and doors, as well as gates and boundary walls around schools.

NRC has also established a school-based protection committee for each school. In 2018, NRC ensured that 80,500 children and young people could receive an education in Afghanistan.

“We feel more secure now after boundary walls and gates were installed. Now, we have a bigger school playground where the students can play and feel safe. The high and sturdy boundary walls also provide protection against any attacks or flying bullets,” explained Nida Mohammad, the head teacher of the school in Charamgar.

There is a great need for education funding in Afghanistan, but resources are very limited. “Thousands of girls and boys would have studied here if there was enough funding to rebuild the school,” said Turyalay Saheem, NRC’s field office coordinator in Uruzgan.

Every day, hundreds of children are forced to flee their homes due to insecurity and violence in Afghanistan, thus interrupting their education. Many displaced children are unable to enrol in school due to lack of space or because they have trouble obtaining the necessary documentation – or because they need to work in order to provide for their families.

A report published by NRC last year revealed that more than half of children do not feel safe at school. 12 per cent of children had experienced attacks on their schools, and many had missed exams or periods of schooling because of attacks or threats. In 2018, approximately 700 schools were destroyed, damaged or occupied by NSAGs or Afghan and international military forces, or were closed due to the conflict – leaving more than 325,000 children unable to attend school. Uruzgan Province in the southern part of Afghanistan is particularly affected as it is one of the areas that is heavily contested by both parties to the conflict.



Photo: Norwegian Refugee Council

## Emergency food security, agriculture and livestock assistance for drought-affected communities in Afghanistan

*Contribution from FAO*

Saleha lives with her five children in Robat Sahib Zada Village, Guzara District, Herat Province in Afghanistan. She is raising her children alone as her husband died several years ago.

*“I feed my animals with good animal feed and they got fatter and healthy. And they produced more milk. Before my cattle produced about a half litre of milk, but now they produce 3 litres of milk each day. I sell the milk and the money is enough to cover our expenses.”*

Saleha received concentrated animal feed and fodder crop seeds as part of the FAO response to the 2018 drought in Afghanistan. Like most small livestock holders in Afghanistan, she only had two cows and two calves which she had been keeping as a source of income to cover her family’s expenses. The recent drought severely affected all farmers and livestock keepers in her village. Saleha lost one of her cows during the drought and had only low-quality animal feed for her cattle.



Photo: FAO

“Due to the drought, there was no fodder available. The cultivated land didn’t yield well, and I couldn’t afford to buy good quality animal feed for my livestock. I fed my cattle dry bread and sometimes straw. The cattle became puny and ill, so they didn’t produce much milk. Finally, one of them died.”

After receiving animal feed and fodder crop seeds from FAO, things began to improve for Saleha. “I feed my animals with good animal feed and they got fatter and healthy. And they produced more milk. Before my cattle produced about a half litre of milk, but now they produce 3 litres of milk each day. I sell the milk and the money is enough to cover our expenses,” she said.

With the income from dairy products, she can now support her family. Between July 2018 and September 2019, FAO reached about 1.6 million people with livelihoods protection assistance in 22 provinces affected by drought, thanks to the generous contributions received from several donors including the [Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund](#) and the [Central Emergency Response Fund](#).

## Mobile health teams bring life-saving care to fragile communities

*Contribution by UNFPA*

Raihana Bibi is a 30-year-old mother of four children – one boy and three girls. Their family returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan and settled in Nangarhar Province about two years ago. They were among the more than 600,000 returnees to make the journey from Pakistan and Iran back to Afghanistan that year.

The mass influx left the health system overstretched and economic hardship made access to essential care even more difficult.



A woman has her child immunized at a mobile health team visit.

*UNFPA has reached over 120,000 crisis-affected people with health care so far in 2019 – including those in Kabul, Nangarhar and Laghman in the east, Kunar in the northeast, Baghlan and Kunduz in the north, and Nimruz in the southwest of the country. The organization is also supporting midwives working for 10 mobile health teams run by the Afghan Red Crescent Society.*

A year into their return, Raihana discovered she was pregnant. “We were extremely worried because we did not have enough money to take care of my health,” she explained. “One day, my husband heard about a mobile health team that comes to our area once every 15 days. He insisted that I meet the midwife on the team.”

“I went to see the midwife the day the mobile health team came to our area. She examined me and told me that I was five months pregnant. She also gave me some pills for the prevention of anaemia and a kit that contained some items for delivery. She instructed me to go to a clinic at the time of delivery,” added Raihana.



Photo: UNFPA

From that point on, Raihana met the

midwife every month throughout her pregnancy. “There was no vehicle in our village to take us to the nearest clinic when I went into labour, so we called the midwife to ask for help. Fortunately, she said that a team was working in Siasang Village in the Surkh Rod District, a nearby area. About 40 minutes later, the mobile health team arrived and took us to the clinic. I delivered a healthy baby girl two hours later,” she explained.

Three days after the delivery, when the baby was diagnosed with jaundice, Raihana reached out to the midwife once again. She was advised to continue breastfeeding, and her daughter was treated during the next mobile health team visit.

For Raihana, this care made all the difference in the world for her and her family. She is determined to help others access essential services. “My cousin’s family was one of many displaced families that came to our village after fleeing the conflict in Khogyani District in Nangarhar Province. His wife became sick. She had a fever, body pain and was vomiting. They did not have enough money to take her to the hospital,” she recalled. “I took her to meet the mobile health team and she was treated for malaria.”

UNFPA is working to expand access to life-saving reproductive health care among vulnerable returnee populations in Afghanistan. The organization is supplying health services at several border entry points, including at the Torkham border in Nangarhar and the Kandahar/Spin-bold border point.

In addition, UNFPA supports nine mobile health teams that are serving internally displaced persons, returnees and host communities in seven provinces of Afghanistan. These mobile teams provide a range of services, including reproductive health care, gender-based violence prevention and response, as well as psychosocial services.

For further information, please contact:

**Ian Ridley**, Head of Office, OCHA Afghanistan, [ridleyi@un.org](mailto:ridleyi@un.org)

**Noroarisoa Rakotomalala**, Deputy Head of Office, OCHA Afghanistan, [rakotomalala@un.org](mailto:rakotomalala@un.org)

**Linda Tom**, Public Information Officer, OCHA Afghanistan, [toml@un.org](mailto:toml@un.org), Cell: +93 79300 11 10

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