Editorial

Illicit drug use of opium, heroin and other opiates has significantly increased throughout Afghanistan and has become one of the country's most worrisome challenges. Overall, it is estimated that there are close to one million adult drug users. For this issue of Tahud Swiss, we share the story of ex-addict Shaima Noorzayee, who is one of the few lucky drug users who had access to treatment, recovered and was socially reintegrated. Shaima was identified for treatment by the community workers of the Shahamat Health Rehabilitation Organization (SHRO), a partner of SDC in the province of Herat. The story of Shaima highlights some of the major challenges encountered by women in the country. Shaima was married in an exchange of brides to a drug dealer at the age of nine, became addicted at 13 as a result of using opium as medicine and was treated and achieved full recovery six years later at the cost of divorcing her addicted husband.

The second article proves the significance and impact of long-term development work supported by SDC. An internal review of the Improved Watershed Management project in Kahmard district of Bamyan conducted by Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation confirms a substantial reduction in flash flood risks and an increase in livelihood security for the local population, benefiting directly and indirectly 5,000 families. The intervention led to less crop damage during floods, which in turn led to increased crop production and food security for at least one month.

Finally, with SDC’s support, the first Women’s Film Festival in Kabul was held in March 2013. Five films, written and directed by Afghan filmmakers (including two women), were screened at the festival. The films depict the life and situation of Afghan women in the country and promote women’s rights from different angles. Miss Gulbaddan, portraying the life of an ordinary woman in the western province of Ghor who every day rides a motorbike to work, was judged by the festival’s jury to be the best film.

Marianne Huber, Director of Cooperation, SDC Afghanistan

Ex-addict: I didn’t know the meaning of life, humanity and happiness

“I was 13 years old when one day I got sinusitis and my husband offered me opium to treat my illness. I insisted he take me to a doctor, but he asked me to take opium for one week and if I didn’t get well, he would then take me to a doctor,” says ex-addict Shaima Noorzayee from Herat province of Afghanistan.

Shaima was only nine years old when she was married to a drug dealer in a bride exchange for his brother. Her in-laws were all addicts except for her mother-in-law. “I never got well and I was in pain for years. I continued insisting that my husband take me to a doctor, but they told me I was not sick and that I had become an addict,” adds Shaima.

Shaima Noorzayee, ex-addict

Drug use and shortage of treatment facilities

Illicit use of opium, heroin and other opiates has increased across the country. According to last drug use survey in Afghanistan conducted in 2009 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the number of regular opium users in Afghanistan rose from 150,000 in 2005 to about 230,000 in 2009 - a tremendous increase of 53%. It is estimated that, overall, there are close to one million adult drug users. High rates of drug abuse are mainly due to widespread unemployment, social turmoil and lack of public awareness about the dangers of using opiates, as well as shortage of treatment facilities... continued on page 2

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Another major factor is that Afghanistan is the world's largest producer of opium. Opium production has been rising steadily since 2001. The UNODC survey indicated that only 10% of drug users surveyed had received some kind of drug treatment, although 90% of them felt that they needed it. This left about 700,000 Afghans with no access to drug treatment. There are 40 structured drug treatment services across 21 provinces in the country. Delivery of treatment provision relies mostly on residential and home-based approaches and focuses on detoxification, residential rehabilitation and aftercare, which happens to be rare and of low intensity.

With the growing number of drug users and the small number of drug treatment facilities in the country, Shaima was one of the luckiest addicts to have access to treatment. It was six years after her addiction that Shaima was identified by community workers of the Shahamat Health Rehabilitation Organization (SHRO) in her neighborhood and was approached for support. She convinced her husband and visited SHRO's drug treatment center where she was first educated about the dangers of drug abuse and then treated for 45 days with a programme that included detoxification and rehabilitation. When she was released she wanted to go back to her parents instead of her husband.

"I was feeling healthy and happy after the treatment and went to my parents because I was afraid I would become addicted again. However, my in-laws came after me to return and I had to go back and live with my husband. My mother-in-law advised me that I should persuade my husband to stop taking drugs; otherwise I would become addicted again. I could not convince him and I gradually started taking drugs again," says Shaima.

Relapse and aftercare

"Relapse among addicts is one of the major challenges we have been facing," says Dr. Manizha Wahedi, Manager of the Child and Women Drug Treatment Center and Advisor of SHRO, "Shaima is only one of the examples of such cases. We used to treat addicts and follow up on them after their recovery, but we did not have the resources to provide them with aftercare services.

As a result, after recovery they would return to their existing circles and society and many of them would start taking drugs again."

"To make sure I didn't relapse, the second time I went for the treatment together with my mothers and decided I would not go back to my husband. Despite my good relationship with my husband, I got a divorce as I couldn't convince him to quit.

Shaima Noorzayee"

It took Shaima another three months to decide to go back for the drug treatment. By that time Shaima's mother and two stepmothers had also become addicted through her sister-in-law. Shaima's mothers would secretly nurture their habit at home away from their husband. "To make sure I didn't relapse, the second time I went for the treatment together with my mothers and decided I would not go back to my husband. Despite my good relationship with my husband, I got a divorce as I couldn't convince him to quit."

To address the relapse of addicts, SHRO now provides aftercare services to recovered addicts with support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), including counseling, vocational and life skill training, and a literacy course. "As part of aftercare services, we also introduce and recommend recovered addicts to public and private organizations for jobs. Shaima is one of the two ex-addicts employed by SHRO and works as a cleaning person in its office in Herat. I hope others also replicate this and employ recovered addicts," explains Dr. Manizha Wahedi.

"When I was an addict, I didn't know the meaning of life, humanity and happiness. It was like living in hell. Now that I am fully recovered and have a job, I know these values and I am very happy and satisfied with my life", concludes Shaima.
Review of the watershed management project in Kahmand shows positives signs of change

An internal review of the Improved Watershed Management (IWM) project in Kahmand district of Bamyan highlights a significant reduction in flash flood risks and an increase in livelihood security of the local population, for over two years, benefiting directly and indirectly 5,000 families (almost 60% of Kahmand’s population).

The main findings of the review, conducted by Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation (HSI), show a 70% increase in natural fodder growth and 50-80% reduction in shrub cutting in the watershed areas as a result of the measures applied, such as planting trees, building terraces, checking dams and controlling grazing and shrub cutting, among others.

The intervention led to less crop damage during floods, which in turn led to increased crop production and food security for at least one month. The watershed management project also contributed to constantly supplying 350 ha of lands with irrigation water and to protecting village assets, such as at least 600 ha of fertile cropland, 320 ha of orchards, 10 irrigation canals, 342 houses, 2 schools, 2 mosques, 1 km road, a clinic and a number of community bakeries.

The findings are based on interactions with the Community Development Councils, members of the District Development Authority, selected female and male beneficiaries, the District Governor, site visits, discussion with team members and several reports drawn up by HSI.

The aim of the IWM project is to increase the livelihood security of selected communities in Kahmand district by mitigating flash floods and drought risk; by enhancing livelihoods with the introduction of diversified income-earning options; and by strengthening organizational capacities of local stakeholders. The project started in 2010 and since then has been working closely with the CDCs in Kahmand district.

As part of the watershed management, the project established 11 community bakeries, which led to a decline in shrub cutting as people needed less wood for fuel purposes. The IWM project is being implemented by Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation and supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and an International Resource (Swiss Re) award. In 2009, Helvetas received the award for sustainable watershed management, with prize money amounting to US$150,000 from Swiss Re which contributed to the project’s implementation.

Kahmand is a remote and mountainous district of Bamyan province, with a population of 55,000 people (8,500 families), where agriculture is the main source of livelihood. Flash floods and drought are common natural hazards. In 2010, there was massive destruction. Despite being a drought year, in 2011 about 57 houses, about 850 ha of farmland and orchards, and 35 irrigation intakes were damaged due to flash floods in several villages of Kahmand... continued on page 4
SDC supports landmark women’s film festival in Afghanistan

The first Women’s Film Festival in Afghanistan was held on the 6th of March 2013 in Kabul on the occasion of International Women’s Day. Five documentary films were screened at the festival, all depicting the life and situation of Afghan women in the country.

The film Miss Gulbaddan, portraying the life of an ordinary woman in the western province of Ghor who every day rides a motorbike to work, was judged by the festival’s jury to be the best film. Miss Gulbaddan, directed by Shafi Zargham, competed with four other documentary films: Star, Semin, Destiny and The Day I Become President. The audience was also given the chance to vote for the best film, and Miss Gulbaddan won this award as well.

In the run-up to the first Women’s Film Festival in Afghanistan, the festival’s organizer, the Open Society Organization, selected and supported five films after receiving and evaluating, at the beginning of January 2013, over 40 submissions of documentary film scripts and treatments promoting women’s rights from different angles written by Afghan filmmakers. The five winning filmmakers received each a grant of US$2,500 from the Open Society Organization and produced the films over a 45-day period. Two out of the five films were directed by young women directors.

Zahra Mobtaker, Director and Co-founder of the Open Society Organization, said: “The Women’s Film Festival is part of our annual human rights week program that focuses on human rights from various cultural and artistic perspectives. We are striving to promote human rights through artistic means and by bringing officials, civil society organizations, media and citizens closer to each other.”

Over 800 people attended the inaugural film festival, which was held at the Institute of France in Afghanistan (IFA) in Kabul. Civil society representatives, government officials, national and international human rights activists, and representatives of national and international organizations were among the audience.

The Women’s Film Festival was organized by the Open Society Organization and supported jointly by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in Afghanistan, the Royal Norwegian Embassy, the French Embassy, the European Union and the Institute of France in Afghanistan.

Review of the watershed management project... continued

The review also points out that people settling in flood-prone areas are at risk and that more awareness and sound land use planning and regulations are needed. Moreover, integrated community-based approaches with long-term support are important for disaster risk management and improved livelihods.

Therefore, the review recommends that land ownership in the rangelands should be worked out carefully, with the involvement of all stakeholders. Policies and bylaws for forest and rangeland management, with emphasis on community-based natural resource management, are now in place. However, official recognition of watershed management committees and government support are also necessary, and this still needs to be followed up.