Editorial

It gives me great pleasure to introduce TAHUD SWISS (formerly Switzerland’s Commitment to Afghanistan), which is the newsletter of the Swiss Cooperation Office in Afghanistan. It provides reports, stories and articles on Switzerland’s activities and programs in Afghanistan.

Published quarterly, this newsletter will enable readers to review and assess Switzerland’s humanitarian aid and development work in Afghanistan.

The present edition covers a field visit to our projects in remote districts of Badakhshan province, the introduction to a paper on the Afghan Civil Society Forum and an interview with one of our Swiss colleagues.

Our goal is to inform you on a regular basis about the latest developments regarding Switzerland’s engagement in Afghanistan and to share news on our program, our partners and the communities we are working in. We welcome any feedback or comments you might have.

Yours faithfully,
Willi Graf
Country Director

The Afghan Civil Society Forum – watchdog for a better future

What in the Western world is a widely accepted principle, namely, that there can be no democracy without a civil society, is still hard to accept in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the first fruits of civil society’s growing influence are increasingly visible. Eight years after the fall of the Taliban, Afghan civil society is calling for a say in the overall process of reconstruction and upcoming elections, as recently highlighted in the debate on the so-called Shia Law. Given the adverse context in which civil society is evolving, this is a considerable achievement. Afghan civil society draws one of its strengths from coordination and cooperation. The most important coordinating body is the Afghan Civil Society Forum (ACSF) supported by Switzerland from its very beginnings in 2002.

For further information on ACSF’s performance and SDC’s role of a small donor with a high potential in Afghanistan read the latest issue of SDC’s Asia Briefs on our website at www.sdc.org.af.

The Asia Brief Paper Series aims to inform the development practitioners and the (Swiss) public about new innovations, results and impacts of Swiss development cooperation in Asia.

To outsiders Afghanistan is a mystery

After the fall of the Taliban, the process of rebuilding the country began, bringing many foreigners to Afghanistan with private businesses, NGOs or diplomatic missions and representations. Afghanistan is now home to thousands of foreigners although, for the most part, it is not really very safe for them. In this issue of our newsletter we are introducing one of our Swiss colleagues, Kathrin Knubel Ahmed, who has been working with us since the beginning of 2009 replacing Thomas Boeni as Head of Finance and Administration. We have asked her to talk about her working experience and first impressions.

How would you describe your past six months in Afghanistan?
It has probably been the most interesting half-year in my life. I have met many committed and helpful people, especially among our staff. I have also experienced many new things (I even tried to learn some Dari) and seen the beauty of the countryside in Bamyan and its various districts. I had a pleasant spring and summer, well aware that I was privileged to be able to enjoy this type of weather at this time of the year. Compared to Switzerland the situation in Kabul is far more unpredictable. This is mainly because of the tense security situation but also because of different processes. I have learned that decision making may take a longer time but once a decision has been taken, its implementation can be very quick.

What attracted you to come and work in Afghanistan?
To outsiders Afghanistan is a mystery. I love this opportunity to understand a little bit of it.

With my husband I took the decision of coming here and together we are now exploring this fascinating country and its people. Furthermore, the West has to bear part of the responsibility for helping Afghanistan recover from its war-torn past. I am pleased that Switzerland is able to contribute its share and that we can be here to support improvement and sustainable development.

Encouraging testimonies of change

An SDC team traveled recently to Yawan, one of the remote districts of Badakhshan province, for a field visit. Read a brief account of their contacts with the people living there in the second page of our newsletter.
Encouraging testimonies of change

Women Shuras and girls schools - these are only two of Oxfam’s activities in Badakhshan focusing on women, with gender as one of the programme’s pillars. An SDC team traveled recently to the remote district of Yawan for a field visit. Here is a brief account of their contacts with the people living there.

Yawan is five hours away from Faizabad, the centre of Badakhshan province, on one of the bumpy roads that oftentimes require crossing rivers without bridges and waiting for trucks blocking traffic because of a flat tire. “The road was opened about a week ago,” Mohammad Yasin Ahmadzai, Oxfam’s project coordinator in the province, told the visitors. “For six months of the year, the village is not accessible by any type of motor vehicle because of snow, flooding and landslides.”

Now, in mid-July, the bazaar’s many shops are once again being supplied with goods from Faizabad, Kunduz, Mazar-i-Sharif and elsewhere. The bazaar looks just like many other bazaars in rural Afghanistan: shopkeepers are men and shoppers as well. If you catch sight of a woman’s glance here, then it is just the fleeting image of a blue shadow rushing by. Women wear the burqa whenever they step out of their homes. They only take it off when they are among themselves.

No child marriages anymore!
It was in a garden that we met the women of the female Shura of Sar-i-Pul village sitting in the shade of trees. The meeting was extraordinary. Usually, the ten Shura members meet twice a month. What is their agenda, what are the issues they talk about, what are their needs and concerns?

Women Shura of Sar-i-Pul Village

The woman chairing the Shura is older than most of the other members. She explained: “We talk about violence against women, education of our girls and boys, and child marriages: until recently it was common for girls to marry at the age of 12, 13 or 14…”. And now? “Nowadays, only a few girls get married before 20,” because Oxfam’s community health workers explained that it wasn’t healthy for a 12-year-old to bear children.

And it was not only the women who received the training, the men Shura did too. Nowadays a close link has been established with the male Shura. “Both Shuras - men and women - are in charge of the community, both have a say and both have their responsibilities.” In another village - Awanji - members of the women’s Shura reported exactly the same thing and added that education is very important for their daughters. Both the male and female Shuras were originally established by Oxfam in 2004, but are now also functioning as Community Development Councils (CDC) for the National Solidarity Programme (NSP).

A girl’s vision
In 2004, the Bibi Maryam Girls High School in Yawan had only 72 students. This year, however, the number of girls has increased to 1,005 mainly because of the relocation of 15 female teachers from Faizabad, who are being paid an incentive of US$220 per month by Oxfam, in addition to the salary they receive from the government, to work in this remote district.

Impressive achievements and huge challenges ahead
Shuras for women are a recent evolution in Afghan society. Bearing in mind that these Shuras have been functioning for only five years, we were impressed by the changes they reported in the traditional habits of their communities. The fact that these councils are led by elderly women is a key factor for their widespread influence and status. Elderly women - who are often the mothers of men holding important positions - are highly regarded and appreciated within their community. These Shuras work very much like their male counterparts do. Their members are elected by the community. To ensure that the changes taking place in cultural and traditional customs such as child marriage and girls education will be fully mainstreamed into the social life of the communities, support must not simply end here. Afghan women still have a long way to go before they can secure what their country’s constitution has promised them: equal rights for both women and men. Oxfam is working in Badakhshan with SDC’s support in 40 villages in two districts: 15 villages (out of 69) in Yawan and 25 villages (out of 64) in Shar-i-Buzurg focusing on agriculture, livestock, natural resource management, gender issues, and governance.

For further information, please contact:
Mohammad Shaker Sayar, Communication Officer
Telephone: 0093 (0) 700295387 / 0093 (0) 799 239 538
Email:mohammad.shaker@sdc.net
Website: www.sdc.org.af
Address: Swiss Cooperation Office Kabul
Street 13, Lane 3 right, House 486,
Wazir Akbar Khan, Kabul.

About us:
The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) is Switzerland’s international cooperation agency within the Swiss Foreign Ministry. The Government of Switzerland established the Swiss Cooperation Office Afghanistan in 2002 with a view of supporting the processes of political stabilization and reconstruction of the war torn country. Today, the Swiss Cooperation Office Afghanistan is running and supervising a broad development and humanitarian program.

Women Shura of Sar-i-Pul Village

The women chairing the Shura is older than most of the other members. She explained: “We talk about violence against women, education of our girls and boys, and child marriages: until recently it was common for girls to marry at the age of 12, 13 or 14…”. And now? “Nowadays, only a few girls get married before 20,” because Oxfam’s community health workers explained that it wasn’t healthy for a 12-year-old to bear children.

And it was not only the women who received the training, the men Shura did too. Nowadays a close link has been established with the male Shura. “Both Shuras - men and women - are in charge of the community, both have a say and both have their responsibilities.” In another village - Awanji - members of the women’s Shura reported exactly the same thing and added that education is very important for their daughters. Both the male and female Shuras were originally established by Oxfam in 2004, but are now also functioning as Community Development Councils (CDC) for the National Solidarity Programme (NSP).

A girl’s vision
In 2004, the Bibi Maryam Girls High School in Yawan had only 72 students. This year, however, the number of girls has increased to 1,005 mainly because of the relocation of 15 female teachers from Faizabad, who are being paid an incentive of US$220 per month by Oxfam, in addition to the salary they receive from the government, to work in this remote district.

Impressive achievements and huge challenges ahead
Shuras for women are a recent evolution in Afghan society. Bearing in mind that these Shuras have been functioning for only five years, we were impressed by the changes they reported in the traditional habits of their communities. The fact that these councils are led by elderly women is a key factor for their widespread influence and status. Elderly women - who are often the mothers of men holding important positions - are highly regarded and appreciated within their community. These Shuras work very much like their male counterparts do. Their members are elected by the community. To ensure that the changes taking place in cultural and traditional customs such as child marriage and girls education will be fully mainstreamed into the social life of the communities, support must not simply end here. Afghan women still have a long way to go before they can secure what their country’s constitution has promised them: equal rights for both women and men. Oxfam is working in Badakhshan with SDC’s support in 40 villages in two districts: 15 villages (out of 69) in Yawan and 25 villages (out of 64) in Shar-i-Buzurg focusing on agriculture, livestock, natural resource management, gender issues, and governance.

For further information, please contact:
Mohammad Shaker Sayar, Communication Officer
Telephone: 0093 (0) 700295387 / 0093 (0) 799 239 538
Email:mohammad.shaker@sdc.net
Website: www.sdc.org.af
Address: Swiss Cooperation Office Kabul
Street 13, Lane 3 right, House 486,
Wazir Akbar Khan, Kabul.
دری نشان‌دهنده تعداد زیادی از کشورها و دانشگاه‌ها است که در زمینه روابط بین‌الملل، فراموشی‌های انسان‌شناسی، و تحقیقات اجتماعی فعالیت می‌نمایند. اگرچه این مرکز دارای تعداد زیادی از اعضای دانشجویی و اهل کشور است، اما به‌طور عمده از سوی اعضای دانشگاهی و دانشجویانی که در زمینه روابط بین‌الملل، فراموشی‌های انسان‌شناسی، و تحقیقات اجتماعی فعالیت می‌نمایند، بروزرسانی می‌شود. این مرکز دارای تعداد زیادی از اعضای دانشجویی و اهل کشور است که در زمینه روابط بین‌الملل، فراموشی‌های انسان‌شناسی، و تحقیقات اجتماعی فعالیت می‌نمایند. اگرچه این مرکز دارای تعداد زیادی از اعضای دانشجویی و اهل کشور است، اما به‌طور عمده از سوی اعضای دانشگاهی و دانشجویانی که در زمینه روابط بین‌الملل، فراموشی‌های انسان‌شناسی، و تحقیقات اجتماعی فعالیت می‌نمایند، بروزرسانی می‌شود. این مرکز دارای تعداد زیادی از اعضای دانشجویی و اهل کشور است که در زمینه روابط بین‌الملل، فراموشی‌های انسان‌شناسی، و تحقیقات اجتماعی فعالیت می‌نمایند. اگرچه این مرکز دارای تعداد زیادی از اعضای دانشجویی و اهل کشور است، اما به‌طور عمده از سوی اعضای دانشگاهی و دانشجویانی که در زمینه روابط بین‌الملل، فراموشی‌های انسان‌شناسی، و تحقیقات اجتماعی فعالیت می‌نمایند، بروزرسانی می‌شود.
دستورهای مورت و چشلی های بزرگ
شورای زنان پیش از خاتمه قانون، پنجاه و سومین سال خاتمه داده شد. این جلسه به منظور توضیحات، توضیحات و اطلاعات مربوط به نکاتی که در این دوره بر مبنای این طرح در شورای زنان و در این دوره بر مبنای این طرح در شورای زنان پیش از خاتمه قانون، پنجاه و سومین سال خاتمه داده شد. این جلسه به منظور توضیحات، توضیحات و اطلاعات مربوط به نکاتی که در این دوره بر مبنای این طرح در شورای زنان و در این دوره بر مبنای این طرح در شورای زنان پیش از خاتمه قانون، پنجاه و سومین سال خاتمه داده شد. این جلسه به منظور توضیحات، توضیحات و اطلاعات مربوط به نکاتی که در این دوره بر مبنای این طرح در شورای زنان و در این دوره بر مبنای این طرح در شورای زنان پیش از خاتمه قانون، پنجاه و سومین سال خاتمه داده شد. این جلسه به منظور توضیحات، توضیحات و اطلاعات مربوط به نکاتی که در این دوره بر مبنای این طرح در شورای زنان و در این دوره بر مبنای این طرح در شورای زنان پیش از خاتمه قانون، پنجاه و سومین سال خاتمه داده شد. این جلسه به منظور توضیحات، توضیحات و اطلاعات مربوط به نکاتی که در این دوره بر مبنای این طرح در شور