

WADAN

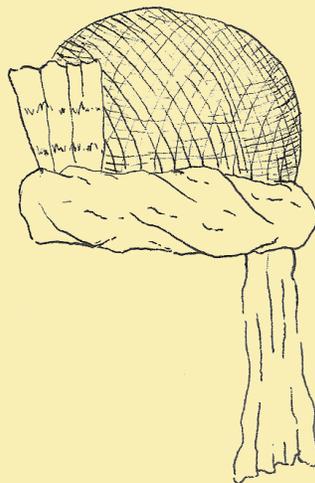
AFGHANISTAN

WADAN (wǎ-dǎn) *noun, verb*: innovation, creating, blossoming, life, inspiring, prosperity, progress, success, enriching, stability, joy, enlightenment,
The Welfare Association for the Development
of Afghanistan

Introduction

WADAN envisions a peaceful, drug free, democratic, developed and prosperous Afghanistan.

Our mission is to define and spread democratic principles, social justice, human rights and freedom; to strengthen communities and local governance; to promote education and institutional development practices and drug control initiatives.



When Mohammad Nasib, Chairman of WADAN's Board of Directors, decided to start an organization in Afghanistan in 2002, he had one thought: to put Afghan talents and energy to work where they could do the most good. "We wanted to work where the need was," he said. "We wanted to set our own mandate."

He gathered a small group together to form the Welfare Association for the Development of Afghanistan (WADAN), a non-governmental organization dedicated to rebuilding the country from the grassroots level. From a modest beginning – WADAN's first project, in 2003, was a \$1200 grant from the United Nations to organize a Drug Awareness Day in Kabul– the NGO has grown into a force for positive change with a network of contacts in each of the country's provinces.

"WADAN has a grassroots approach; it is a national NGO that addresses core problems, local issues. This is a foundation from which we can build the whole country," says Roohul Amin, Governor of Farah province and former Deputy Director of WADAN.

It was not easy. At the beginning WADAN trainers faced some tough questions from their target populations. "They would ask us, 'What is your agenda? Where are you getting your funding?'"

recalls Nasib. “They thought that we might be representing foreign interests. But our people knew the local culture. We would say to them, ‘We are here to learn from you.’”

WADAN trainers spoke to people in their own language and used religious and cultural traditions to spread a message of peace and hope. Slowly, they overcame mistrust and suspicion. “We gained credibility because we were genuine Afghans working for Afghanistan,” said Nasib.

WADAN soon developed a focus on customary local leaders, known as Maliks. “We thought it was a good moment to reconnect local leaders to the government and their communities,” recalls Nasib. “They had a lot of influence, but their role had been undermined through the successive regimes over the past 30 years.” The WADAN team worked with the Maliks on peace-building initiatives. They provided training on democratic principles, conflict resolution, leadership, and helped the Maliks to form their own association to foster networking.

Today, the National Malik Association boasts more than 30,000 members throughout Afghanistan. It is one of the few bodies in Afghanistan to cross regional, ethnic, and political lines, helping to bridge the chasms formed over the past decades of conflict.

Another of WADAN's main areas of interest involves one of Afghanistan's chief scourges: drugs.

Afghanistan is by far the world's largest producer of opium poppy, and the United Nations estimates that up to 90 percent of the world's supply of opium originates here. Much of the harvest is smuggled out of the country, but enough of it circulates inside Afghanistan to cause a growing problem with addiction. Poverty, unemployment, the ready availability of cheap drugs, and a general atmosphere of lawlessness is a potent combination, and has produced more than one million drug users in Afghanistan over the past few years, according to the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

The international community has devoted significant resources to curbing cultivation, to little effect. Even with hundreds of millions of dollars pouring in to supply-reduction programs, such as eradication and alternative livelihoods, there was little left over to help those in Afghanistan who needed it most. WADAN decided to address the gap with programs that focus on demand reduction, drug awareness and treatment.

WADAN has opened drug treatment centers and outpatient drop-in centers in ten provinces, and raised awareness of the dangers of drug use through public outreach events. "The approach must be long-term, and comprehensive," says Nasib.

In addition to direct intervention through the Drug Treatment Centers, WADAN uses its network of local leaders to spread the word about the destructive potential of drug use. “We try to raise awareness by appealing to civic leaders,” said Nasib. “We emphasize that drugs are a problem for our society, they hurt us, and our youth. This has to be a cooperative effort if it is to work.”

The grassroots approach also allowed WADAN to make major strides in community-based schooling. Given Afghanistan’s turbulent history and fragile economy, there are many areas of the country where the state educational system has been unable to build schools. Children who want an education must sometimes walk for hours to reach the nearest educational institution.

WADAN saw a need, and moved to address it. In 2004, it began a project to develop community-based schools, with teachers drawn from the local areas. The program also drafted community shuras, or councils, into the planning and running of the schools. The schools taught the state-approved curriculum, but with an important difference: the active involvement of community leaders in quality control and administration.

The project proved a great success; students outperformed their counterparts in state schools in several standardized tests and in local competitions. In all, more than 20,000 members from 80 villages benefited from the project, which ran from 2004-2010. These children might have had no chance for an education. They can now go on to become productive members of the society.

Unfortunately, funding for the schools ended in 2010. WADAN has tried to keep the effort going, but it has proved impossible without resources. The work that went into the Community Based Schools continues to yield fruit, however: WADAN's connections with local councils have allowed subsequent work through those community shuras to reopen schools that had been closed due to insecurity. With the community involved in guaranteeing the safety of the children and the premises, dozens of schools have been able to reopen their doors.

WADAN's core mission remains the same: building a better Afghanistan from the grassroots level. Its activities revolve around the community, working locally to advance the spread of democracy in the true sense: where people have the power to shape their societies, and where every person has a say in how he or she is governed. "WADAN is founded on

democratic principles,” said Nasib. “We do this through training and networking, through advocacy.”

There are obstacles, of course. The lack of effective governance cannot help but be felt on all levels; corruption, insecurity, and a growing sense of desperation in many sectors of the population have made grassroots efforts more difficult. But Nasib expresses cautious optimism about the future: “Our programs have had an impact,” he said. “We will continue our work. We have a true commitment to Afghanistan. This is not a job for us. It is a cause.”



A School for Basmina

More than anything, Basmina wanted to go to school. The six-year-old from Miran village in Nangarhar province was determined to try everything to make her dream come true.

One summer day in 2004, a WADAN education team drove to Rodat district in Nangarhar to scout out locations for community based schools. They saw a little girl by the side of the road, waving frantically. When they stopped, she rushed to greet them.

“Are you the people who established a school in Akhon village?” she asked breathlessly. When they said yes, she made her pitch. “My friends and I need a school, too!” she said.

There were no resources for a separate school in Miran at that time, but the WADAN team did what it could to help. With the help of men and women, members of the gender based shuras, they arranged for the children of Miran, both boys and girls, to attend school in Akhon, where there was already a school for girls.

Every day, Basmina and her friends made the journey from Miran to Akhon, crossing a dry riverbed on their

way. Basmina was so happy that she repeatedly urged other children from her village to enroll in school.

On May 20, 2006, at 7:30 in the morning, Basmina and her friends reached the riverbed to find that the spring rains following many years of drought had caused a flash flood, the water raged. Having never seen a flood, they were unsure about what to do, but Basmina would not be kept from her studies. She stepped into the rushing water and was swept away.

One of her classmates recalled that, as the waters closed around her, Basmina held her schoolbooks high over her head before she disappeared. Basmina was nine-years-old and enrolled in Grade Three at the time of her death.

In February 2007, WADAN's female education team met with the women's shura from Miran village in Basmina's family home. The women commended the little girl's enthusiasm and courage; her parents described how Basmina would sit over her studies every evening, including the night before she died.

At the request of the villagers, a community based school opened in Miran in August. But the villagers would like a permanent schoolhouse. They will call it, they say, Basmina's School, in memory of the little girl who brought learning to Miran.



It Takes a Village

WADAN's Commitment to Community Based Schools

At sixteen-years-old, Khaledurahman has a bright future ahead of him. A top-notch student, he has every hope of gaining admittance to university, where he would like to become an engineer. "I want to work to serve my people," says the small-boned boy, who looks much younger than his age. "Thanks to WADAN, this will be possible."

Until he was nine, Khaledurahman worked with his father on their farm in Chaprarhar District of Nangarhar province. He was not able to go to school – the nearest state facility was several kilometers away, too far for the small boy to walk. There was no money for any other transportation, and with every year Khaledurahman watched his hopes for the future recede.

Then, in 2004, WADAN opened a school in his district. At nine-years-old, he was able to enroll in first grade. "I remember my first day – it was such a happy day. It was like going from the dark into the light," he said. Khaledurahman was lucky – many boys his age would not have been accepted. "It's a good thing I am small," he laughs. In Afghanistan, bigger boys are not allowed to go to school with very

young children; a more robust nine-year-old would have been turned down.

Now Khaledurahman is in high school. At sixteen, he is in Grade 9, and is preparing for university. “If not for WADAN, I would not have had any education,” he said. “The community based approach was very good for me.” Khaledurahman is in good company.

WADAN’s community based schools gave more than 5,500 Afghan children the chance for a better life before the vagaries of donor funding put a stop to the program.

Education is the key to Afghanistan’s future. A chaotic past and an uncertain future have combined to keep the country mired in backwardness and poverty, with staggeringly high illiteracy rates and painfully low skills levels. If the country is to progress, it will only be through education. Nothing is more important for the country’s present and future than ensuring that the new generation can go to school.

But efforts in this direction have been woefully insufficient. Schools have been built for which there are no qualified teachers; many school districts lack books and other supplies; the state system cannot reach into many remote areas; and large swaths of the population have no access to learning at all.

In addition, a steadily deteriorating security situation has made many parents reluctant to send their children, particularly daughters, out into an uncertain world for education. With state schools sometimes located more than four kilometers from a village, small children are effectively cut out of the system. If any progress is to be made, it will take the concerted efforts of all layers of society.

WADAN very early on recognized the need for a community based approach to schooling, and set out to develop a program to help those who were not being served by the state school system. Beginning in 2004, WADAN started working in remote areas, finding teachers, arranging for venues, and talking with local leaders and parents to make sure that the program was adequately understood. Under an agreement with the Ministry of Education, WADAN's teachers were in charge of presenting the same curriculum as in state schools, but in locations where the state could not reach. This community based schools project had begun.

In the first year WADAN had 40 classes in four districts. They emphasized that girls were to be an equal part of the project, to try and remedy some of the injustices of the Taliban years. More than 1,300 students were able to attend classes, children who

would otherwise have been denied any opportunity to study.

The project was a great success – in 2005 WADAN doubled the number of classes and students. By the time the program ended, in 2010, more than 5,500 students had benefitted, completing their primary education.

But donor funding has its ebbs and flows, and in 2010 the money for the project dried up. WADAN kept as many of the schools open as possible using private funding, but eventually they were forced to let most of them close.

By then, WADAN had begun a new project, *Increasing Access to Education: Education Envoys as Agents of Change*, to provide assistance to the Ministry of Education to reopen schools in remote locations, and to work with communities to keep schools open in insecure areas. WADAN was able to reopen 48 schools that had been closed due to insecurity within the targeted provinces and furthermore influenced people elsewhere in the country to reopen 223 more schools, making an invaluable contribution to Afghanistan's future.

Working closely with the Ministry of Education, starting in 2011, the Schools Safety and Security

Initiative has provided 33 vehicles to Departments of Education throughout Afghanistan and WADAN's work in forming and maintaining local school security committees that allow officials and committee members to encourage and protect schools, staff, and students in areas where security is threatened. In addition, WADAN has used its networks of local contacts to keep schools open even in locations plagued by violence. Parents, local councils, and tribal elders come together to guarantee the safety of the schools, and to intervene when opposing groups try to shut them down.



Also from 2011, WADAN became involved as part of a large-scale teacher education effort for the eight central provinces; in an agreement with the Ministry of Education and local organizations, WADAN works in Kabul to improve the quality of education provided to Afghan schoolchildren by training schoolteachers and principals from districts in Kabul province.

Amir Gul, who worked as a supervisor for WADAN's school project in districts in Nangarhar and Laghman provinces, is a big fan of the community-based system. With eighteen years of experience as a teacher in Afghanistan, Amir Gul knows what he is talking about. The schools set up by WADAN helped save his village, he believes. He is also convinced that the system put in place by WADAN is superior to the more centralized state system.

“We get the village councils, the shuras, involved,” he explained. “If there are problems, for example, if a teacher is absent, it is very difficult under the state system to do anything about it. But in our schools, the shura will take responsibility. Someone will go and talk to the teacher, see what is going on. If they are not satisfied, the teacher can be fired.”

The same thing happens if a child is absent for a prolonged period. A shura member will visit the home, ask the parents what is wrong, and provide

support and encouragement to the parents to send the child back to school.

The shura will also often take on the delicate task of ensuring the safety of the school; they may negotiate with various groups in the environment, explain the school's background, and talk to them about the need for education. That way, the school becomes a project for the whole village.

The approach piloted by WADAN schools works, insists Amir Gul. "We had a competition with a state school in our province," he said. He smiled. "Our children won. They were much better prepared."

Amir Gul and his colleagues are concerned with the demise of the WADAN school project, and hope that something can soon be done to reopen the schools in remote districts.

"The children are now sitting at home, there is no school," said Saifurahman, who taught in Chaparhar District. "Some go to the mosque, so at least they learn the Quran. But if they miss those first years, and are too tall, they will never be able to go to school." Saifurahman added, "There is more control in these schools. The shuras are involved, and this helps to bring teachers, students and parents all together. The state cannot reach all remote areas. These

community schools were a very positive development.”

Amir Gul sees support for community based schools as vital to Afghanistan’s future. “It is a mistake to think that people do not want to educate their children,” he continued. “When we ask parents if they want schools, they overwhelmingly answer ‘yes.’ But they cannot send their children far away, and in many areas there just are no state schools at all. International people say that ‘education is the right of the child.’ I hope they will help Afghan children to gain their rights!”



Working with Local Leaders

The National Maliks Association

On September 13, 2011, a small group of insurgents staged a spectacular attack on the center of Kabul. For more than 20 hours, they rained rockets and grenades down onto the U.S. Embassy and NATO headquarters. The incident shocked the nation and the world.

Conversely, as the battle raged, quite a different event was taking place on the other side of town: the annual meeting of the National Maliks Association, which seeks to foster peace and stability by bringing together local leaders for training, networking and liaising with the government. It was an impressive display. Men and women from all regions and ethnicities shared the hall. Turbans could be seen cheek by jowl with the flat felt pakool. White prayer caps shared the stage with the occasional karakul cap. This was truly a representative gathering.

For two days more than 400 local leaders conferred, sharing their experiences, swapping advice, commiserating over setbacks. The attacks that paralyzed the city could not prevent these dedicated men and women from trying to bring to Afghanistan a future where such incidents would be unthinkable.

The National Maliks Association is one of WADAN's crowning achievements. Well before Mohammad Nasib began to set up his grassroots organization, he realized that local leaders, or Maliks, were the key to resolving many problems at the local level. With the respect they command in their communities, Maliks can help people communicate with their government, resolve local disputes, promote good governance, and ensure that local services reach those who are most in need.

“WADAN is the only organization working with the local communities to bring community leaders together to share their concerns with the government,” said Nezamuddin Wahdat, cultural advisor to the mayor of Kabul, speaking at the NMA meeting. “They come together to solve their problems. This national assembly of Maliks is the best example we have seen of this type of effort.”

Today, the National Maliks Association (NMA) boasts more than 30,000 members, from almost every district of Afghanistan. WADAN has taken on the task of training local leaders to be more effective at promoting peace and stability in their communities. “The main function of Maliks in the community is to lead,” says Mohammad Ayaz Tarnak, who heads WADAN's NMA project. “If there are problems, the Maliks take practical steps to resolve them.”

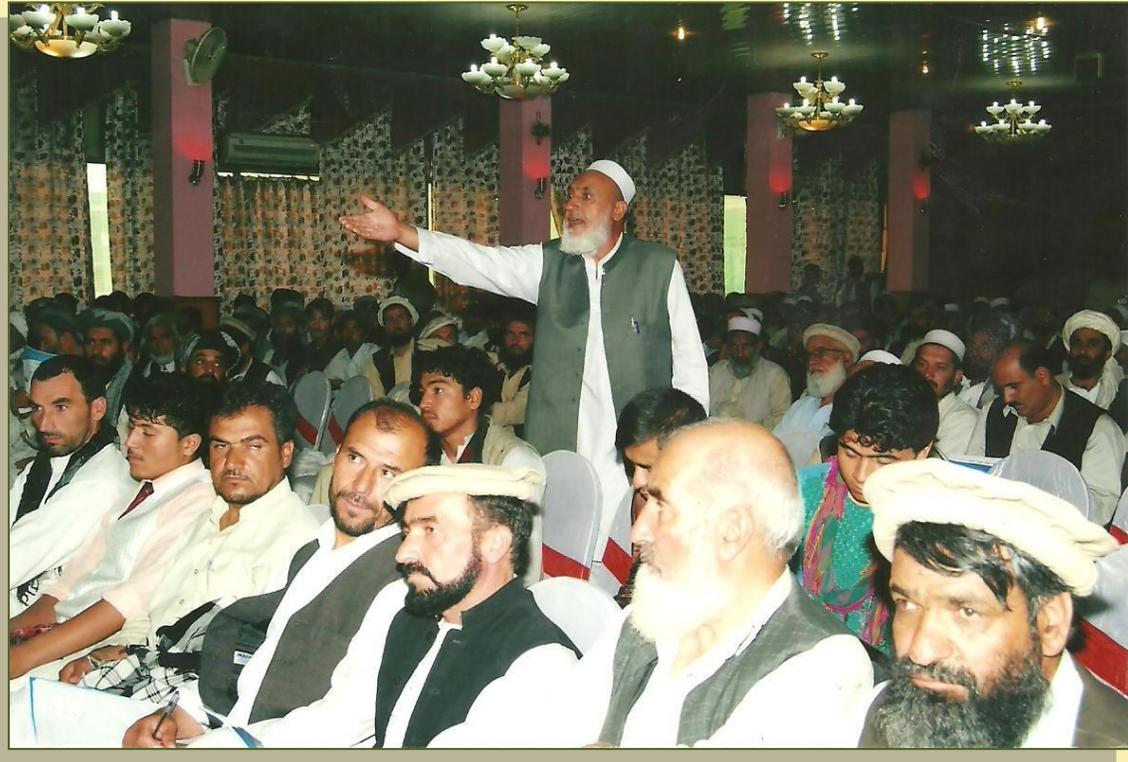
Among the main functions of the Maliks are dispute resolution and liaison with the government.

According to numerous surveys conducted in Afghanistan, about 80 percent of civil disputes are resolved on a local level by informal or traditional councils. The reasons for this are many: the formal state court system is seen as inefficient and corrupt, and many Afghans are reluctant to engage in what could be protracted and expensive legal battles. The state system also does not reach the entire country. In some areas, courts and judges are hours away from local villages. In Afghanistan's traditional, largely rural, society, people prefer to entrust their fates to those they know and respect.

This is where the Maliks come in. The title of Malik is one of great respect; it can be handed down from father to son, but only if the son enjoys the support of his constituents, or it can be conferred on a local leader who is elected to the post. When two families get into a dispute over land, water rights, inheritance, or certain social issues, they head for the local Malik to resolve the issue.

“People prefer to settle disputes through the Maliks,” says Tarnak. “It is less expensive and time-consuming, and there is less corruption. Maliks also know the community and the people, so they can try and find a solution that does not leave bad feelings in

the hearts of the participants. That way they do not pave the way for future conflicts.”



WADAN seeks to optimize the influence of the Maliks by providing training and networking opportunities. In a round of workshops throughout the country, WADAN has provided training in leadership, conflict resolution, and communication skills.

There are, of course, bumps along the road. Local leaders must be trained in some issues that go against the practice of centuries. “We do train local leaders in human rights issues,” said Nasib. “There are certain traditions, such as when young girls are given to a family to settle disputes. The theory is that the

families then become partners, and will not fight any more. But in practice this often does not work out. The girls are unhappy; they run away, which leads sometimes to honor killings and other bad consequences. We tell the leaders that they must try to avoid these things.”

It is working, but slowly. “We try and convince the Maliks that certain customs have a bad overall effect on the community,” adds Tarnak. “Customs such as ‘baad’ and ‘badaal’ (in which young girls are often exchanged to help families reconcile after a dispute) do not contribute to long-term stability. They can create bad feelings that lead to further conflict.” It will be a long and difficult road, he said. “This is not like building a building,” says Tarnak. “We are trying to change people’s mentalities. It will require long-term efforts.”

The project has been extremely successful in bringing local leaders together and increasing cooperation among various regions. But there was some resistance initially, both from the Afghan government and from the international community.

“Many said we were trying to promote the informal justice system at the expense of the state system,” recalls Nasib. “But that is not the case. We seek to link the informal system with the state system, slowly.”

Now, adds Nasib, there is greater recognition among international experts of the value of the informal justice system, based on local traditions. “This customary system is quick and effective,” he said. “But the state system must be strengthened.” Once the state system is fully functional, purged of corruption and available to all, then it will enjoy greater respect. “When there is justice and rule of law, when everyone is equal under the law, then people will trust the system,” said Nasib. “But the customary system will continue for centuries.”

In the meantime, the influence of local leaders can be utilized to bring greater benefits to their communities. During Afghanistan’s elections, Maliks have been instrumental in helping people to register, getting them to the polls, and ensuring security in their areas. “They organized carpools for the disabled and women,” said Nasib. “They helped with election training and they mobilized their communities.”

Now WADAN is working with the Maliks to spread the message. “We give the leaders an initial ‘warm-up’ training,” said Nasib. “Then they go and talk to the people in their communities, at the mosque or the local community center. They introduce them to new concepts.” As the Maliks receive further training, they continue to spread the word. “This is a type of multiplier effect,” said Nasib. “It is working.”

In addition to training in dispute resolution, WADAN is now working with the local leaders on record keeping. When decisions rendered locally over troublesome land and water issues are codified and preserved, there is less likelihood that conflict will reemerge in a future generation.

But much more remains to be done. While the National Maliks Association has been very successful at spreading the word, networking members, and increasing their capacity, it cannot change the reality of Afghanistan today. There are simply too many people who do not want the current crisis to end. “We face certain frustrations,” said Nasib. “Our Maliks are being targeted and killed in some provinces like Helmand and Kandahar.”

But the Maliks will continue to do their part to bring peace and stability to this troubled land. Despite the dangers, the all too frequent setbacks, and the enormous body of work to be tackled, they are committed to bringing about a better future. In the minds of many, the National Maliks Association, and the work it has done with WADAN’s help represent the best, perhaps the only, way out of the chaos and conflict of the present.

“This gathering, this experience,” said Aziz Agha, a tribal elder from Uruzgan, gesturing at the assembled Maliks. “It is more important than Land Rovers.”



Nonviolent Dispute Resolutions by the National Maliks Association

Nonviolent Dispute Resolutions by the National Maliks Association

From damaged donkeys to threats against national interests, from June through September 2011, sixty disputes in the restive northeastern, eastern, and southeastern provinces were peacefully resolved by efforts led by the National Maliks Association, a nationwide network of 30,000 local leaders established by WADAN. The following descriptions are a sampling of those cases; they include disputes involving land and water, and rights of inheritance—each solution reflective of a localized traditional legal system that considers aspects of human nature, custom, Sharia, or Islamic law, as well as formal law, before reaching solutions that met with immediate approval and are apt to be accepted for the long term.

Murder Dispute

Traditionally when a man is killed, a young girl from the murderer's family is given to the victim's family to pay for his life. In this case, members of the National Maliks Association, along with the local council, convened a jirga, a customary court. As a solution, the murderer agreed to pay 900,000 Afghanis, around \$20,000 US, to the victim's family. The murderer also visited the victim's family home to offer an apology, which the family accepted. This

innovative use of the jirga served to avoid further bloodshed and the virtual enslavement of a young girl.

Land Donation Dispute

Although the members of a remote community welcomed a local road-building project, two of its landowners refused to give their land to the effort. It looked like the much longed-for road was not going to be built. Trained in conflict resolution by the United States Institute for Peace, NMA members stepped in, along with elders. After a jirga, each man agreed to provide one meter of land for the road. Furthermore, they agreed that if the two men did not keep their word, they would have to pay a fine.

Land Dispute between Tribes

Two different communities were at odds over a parcel of land, yet neither had evidence, or a deed, that the land belonged to its people. NMA members and other community leaders conducted a jirga; they asked both parties to present evidence of ownership. However, neither could produce documentation of ownership. The jirga's decision was that the land belongs to the government and people of Afghanistan, and should not be used for private purposes. Therefore, a customary solution helped to establish national unity.



Inheritance Dispute

When Kamal Khan died he had two married daughters but no son. His nephews took it upon themselves to divide the dead man's land and personal property between themselves. Kamal Khan's daughters were given nothing; the daughters claimed their rights of inheritance and a dispute erupted. To resolve the dispute and avoid future conflict, community leaders and NMA members conducted a Jirga to resolve the case. Based on Sharia law they decided all the inherited property should be inventoried, then divided into three parts. Two parts would be given to Kamal Khan's daughters and one part to his nephews. All accepted this solution, documents were signed and the nephews returned

what was designated by the settlement to their cousins.

Dispute about a Donkey

Sulimankhil borrowed a donkey from Qadir. While in Sulimankhil's possession the donkey was injured and became crippled; it was no longer useful as a pack animal. Qadir wanted Sulimankhil to pay compensation, but he refused. A Jirga, agreed to by both parties and led by an NMA member and other community leaders, concluded that Sulimankhil should buy a donkey in good condition for Qadir and Sulimankhil could keep the crippled donkey. Both men agreed to this settlement.

Water Dispute between Tribes

One common source of dispute in remote communities is access to water. In this case, and in others, a jirga led by tribal leaders and NMA members decided that, instead of the community themselves, a third party, the Arbaki (specially tasked local police) would manage water distribution since they were already charged with guarding the local dam. And the Arbaki would receive a salary for this service, paid in part by every family.



One Family's Story

One Family's Story

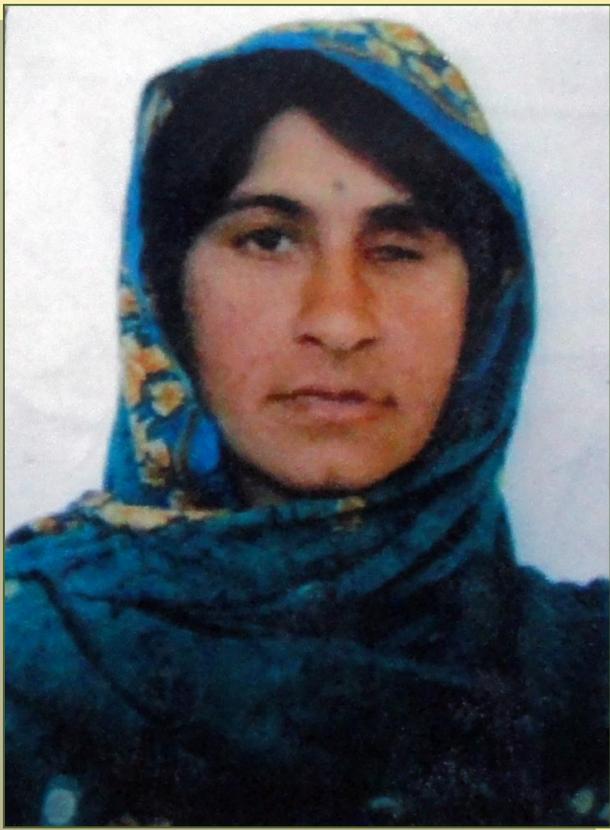
Fatima and her family live in Ghareshk district in Helmand province. The first of her husband's two wives, she is around forty years old and the mother of five children, two girls and three boys. Her husband, Mir Ahmad, was forty-five when Taliban insurgents killed him. Both she and Rukshana, the other wife, have been shot at because of their husband's work. Rukshana lost her eye.

Mir Ahmad was a farmer who had been tending his vegetable garden when assassins on five motorbikes drove by and shot him to death. He had been a National Shura member for the Nurzu tribe and this was one of the reasons he was killed. Mir Ahmad had received four or five threat letters that had been delivered by his brother, Haji Burjan, who had received them from a stranger. One of the letters said, "Do not work with the government. Do not work with the National Shura. Do not send your girls to school."

Four of Fatima's children are still alive. A Marine killed her son, 12-year old Ihsanullah, in June of 2011, when a military vehicle hit him one afternoon while he was walking home from school. The first time a Marine commander, Fatima knows only as John, came to her house he brought the driver and heeding Islamic teaching Fatima forgave him, saying, "God

gave me this son twelve years ago before America came.” She was not at home when the commander returned. “I was at my son’s grave.” He gave the second wife a letter, which she signed for, delivering 200,000 Afghanis, about \$4,000. Fatima says it was distributed to needy people.

Fatima, too, has received several threat letters. Hers say: “We will never leave you alone. Your life is in danger.” In answer to one she wrote a reply that stated: “My father was a Mullah and I will work for society.” Her job title is Director of New Helmand City, an organization for women focused on creating handicrafts and carpets that are sold to the Provincial Reconstruction Team. This PRT income generation project has 250 women members from Ghareshk, around fifty of the members meet daily at someone’s house.



The man in the photograph at the top of this story is Mir Ahmad. The photographs following are from his family. The woman in blue is Rokshana. The smiling boy in the group of schoolboys is Ihsanullah. The next photograph is of Fatima and three of her children; in it they are contemplating the blood stained clothing worn by Mir Ahmad on July 13, 2010, the day of his death.







Afghanistan's War on Drugs

WADAN Tackles Demand Reduction and Advocates for a New, Comprehensive Approach to the Problem

Behind a blue gate inside a nondescript white wall in the quiet Kabul neighborhood of Khushal Khan Mina, small wonders take place every day. In this modest 40-bed facility, men are overcoming one of the worst scourges in Afghanistan today – drug addiction. Welcome to WADAN’s Kabul Drug Treatment Center, where doctors, counselors, former drug addicts and family members come together to provide a network of support for those who are struggling with their deadly burden.

The process is never easy. Relapse is common here; as it is in treatment centers all over the world. But for those who make it through the 90-day program, the WADAN DTC is, quite literally, a lifesaver.

Farhad hopes to be one of them. The young man began to use drugs during Taliban times when a tragic accident changed his life. Sitting in the WADAN office, his shaved head still shaking slightly, Farhad shared his story.

When Farhad was sixteen-years-old, his mother left him at home to watch his younger brother while she

took care of a family emergency. The brother, just eight-years-old, was flying a kite on the roof of their house. Distracted and excited by the sport, the boy lost his footing and fell to his death.

Farhad could not get over his guilt. “Every time my mother looked at me, I knew she was thinking that I let my brother die,” he said. He turned to drugs, which were, and are, everywhere in his densely populated central Kabul neighborhood, Deh Afghanan.

“In Deh Afghanan, you can get drugs as easily as raisins and nuts,” he said, with a wry chuckle. Farhad’s drug of choice was heroin. Working as a driver, he spent all of his salary on drugs. He was fired, and started stealing money from his family. It was more than two years before his family noticed that something was wrong, and seven more before they convinced him to enter a treatment program.

“We heard about this center,” said his sister, a shy but determined young woman who comes to see Farhad often. “We were told there was a private hospital, but it cost 1,000 Afghanis (\$20) per night. We could not afford that. But then a neighbor told us about WADAN. If not for this program, I don’t know what would have happened. We had another relative who was also addicted. He killed himself – shot himself

with a pistol. I was so afraid the same thing would happen to my brother. But now he seems happy, he looks healthier. He has gained weight and talks about the future. This is all thanks to WADAN.”

Farhad wants to get married, but his fiancée’s family will not accept him unless he remains clean for at least two years. With his family behind him, Farhad has a good chance of recovery. But it will be a struggle.

All over Afghanistan, there are hundreds of thousands of Farhads, with millions of family members. Afghanistan now has more than one million drug users, ranging from opium eaters to hashish smokers to full-blown heroin addicts. This amounts to eight percent of the population, which is twice the global average.

More than a decade after the Taliban’s fall, drugs are one of Afghanistan’s most pressing problems. Poppy cultivation brings farmers into conflict with the government and fuels the insurgency. Not only are the Taliban and other groups funded by the “taxes” they levy on the lucrative poppy crop, but they also benefit from the anger and fear of farmers who are trying to protect their livelihood from the government or the foreign soldiers.

The heroin produced by the crop – which amounts to close to 90 percent of the world’s supply of illicit opium, according to the United Office of Drugs and Crime --poisons countless lives around the globe, and risks making Afghanistan into a pariah narco-state.

The effects of these drugs are being felt in Afghan homes. Until recently, aid money has been devoted to expensive and ineffectual “alternative livelihood” programs; the Afghan government and the foreign forces have tried eradication, and various organizations have proposed radical measures – up to and including the licensing of poppy farmers –to control the problem.

The international community has also poured millions into the counter-narcotics effort, to little effect. This is in part because of the focus on supply reduction, says Mohammad Nasib, Chairman of WADAN’s Board of Directors. Eradication and interdiction have been the main weapons used in the war on drugs, but neither has shown the intended results. “Farmers are an easy target,” he said. “But most are just working for their survival.”

So far, nothing has worked effectively. Poppy cultivation, despite some temporary setbacks due to weather and price fluctuations, is inexorably on the rise, with 2011 showing a marked increase over the

previous year. Worse still, the number of addicts in Afghanistan is increasing out of all proportion to the population.

“We have to tell our people that drugs are our problem as well,” Nasib says. “It is not just an evil we are shipping to other countries. Drugs are damaging our youth and our society. We cannot rely on quick fixes. We have to find a global solution.”

WADAN is the primary organization working with the addicts themselves; has opened ten in-patient drug treatment centers and two outpatient drop-in centers throughout the country. WADAN has pioneered a treatment center inside Kandahar’s Sarposa Prison, which also provides primary health care and drug addiction prevention.

Among the many aspects of the drug problem, emphasized Nasib, is the lack of rule of law. It is difficult to tell farmers or small-time traffickers that dealing in opium or heroin is *haram*, or bad, when major dealers and high-level officials engage in drug trafficking with impunity. “The law is not applied to everyone equally,” said Nasib. “This has to be addressed. The profits go to the big-time traffickers, while the blame goes to the farmers.”

If Afghanistan is to make any progress in combating this scourge, there must be a unified approach among

donor nations and the Afghan government that addresses all aspects of the problem. “We have to work with farmers to create other types of opportunities, so that they have an income without poppy,” said Nasib. “We must strengthen rule of law. And we have to bring the major criminals to justice.”

For some of these aspects, WADAN relies on its links with local leaders to educate rural people regarding the hazards of economic dependence on the poppy as well as addiction to opium. Drug awareness is a message that can be propagated through the influential members of the local community. Local leaders can also advance demands from their communities that the government step up its campaign against corruption and for rule of law. But it is in demand reduction that WADAN has concentrated its efforts.

WADAN's Drug Treatment Program



Dr. Atal Ahmadzai heads WADAN's Drug Treatment Program. He oversees the ten in-patient Drug Treatment Centers and two outpatient Drop-In Centers, as well as the facility inside Sarposa Prison in Kandahar, contributing his considerable expertise to dealing with the problem.

In early 2012, WADAN has DTCs in Khushal Khan Mina and Ahmad Shah Baba Mina in Kabul City, and eight more: Faizabad, Badakshan; Lashkar Gah, Helmand; Saraposa Prison and Shar-e-Naw, Kandahar; Khost City, Khost; Maidan Shar in Maidan-Wardak; Jalalabad, Nangarhar; and Gardez,

Paktia. The Drop-In Centers are located in Ghazni City, Ghazni and Pul-e-Alam, Logar.

The most important aspect of any patient's recovery, Dr. Ahmadzai emphasizes, is attitude. "We have the recovering addicts go through a series of motivational conversations before they are admitted," he said. "We have to make sure that they are committed to treatment. We cannot treat them by force. It will not work."

Nasir is a case in point. He began smoking hashish as a teenager, introduced to the drug by his friends. By the time he was twenty-years-old he was an addict. His family did not know for years. They noticed that Nasir was not eating, that he often scratched his arms, but thought he had some kind of skin disease. One of his friends finally told Nasir's mother that the young man was using drugs, and thus began a long struggle for the boy's life. They kept him at home. They took him to doctors to prescribe medicine. They begged and they bullied. Nothing worked, until Nasir was on the point of suicide.

Then they heard about WADAN. The motivational phase worked: realizing that his life was on the line, Nasir agreed to be admitted for treatment. "It was terrible for the first few days," he recalls, at five weeks into the program, sitting neat and clean, in the

WADAN DTC office. “I was sick all the time. But now I am much better.”

His mother and two sisters are thrilled. “He has gained weight, he can speak normally,” said his sister, who is obviously the driving force in the family. “We now have hope he will be able to have a normal life, look for a job and get married.”

The in-patient phase lasts for approximately 90 days. “The first stage is detoxification,” explained Dr. Ahmadzai. “New patients are isolated from the general population. We do not lock them up – we don’t need to – but it is better if they are on their own. They tend to be lethargic and disoriented as they go through withdrawal.”

Once that first difficult phase has passed, the patient enters an active phase of counseling, where he or she re-enters society at the level of the Drug Treatment Center. “We reintroduce the patient to the environment,” said Dr. Ahmadzai. “There are classroom exercises, group and individual counseling. The patients progress naturally. We do not force them.”

The second rehabilitation phase includes physical activity, and organized sessions where patients are taught the elements of basic hygiene and social skills.

In the final phase, the family is included in the counseling, to learn how to provide support for their daughter, son, brother, husband, wife, mother or father when they are released. “Family counseling is crucial,” said Dr. Ahmadzai. “If the patient is to make it through, the family must have a proper understanding of what the patient is going through.” Nasir, he said, had a good chance of success, since his family had rallied around him.

Yet social factors such as rampant unemployment, combined with the easy availability of drugs, make it difficult for former addicts to stay clean. Relapse rates are high. “We have to get the community involved,” said Dr. Ahmadzai. “This is a society where friendships are strong, and where social life revolves around the family and the village. This can help.”

Regardless of the challenges and setbacks, Dr. Ahmadzai is confident that the Drug Treatment Centers are worthwhile. “Even if the patient is only healthy for a short time, it is worth it,” he said. “He has some time with his family, he makes contact again. This can only help.”

But he knows that it will be a long and difficult road ahead, “This is a very serious problem,” said Dr. Ahmadzai. “Most of it is still hidden. So far we are seeing only the tip of a very large iceberg.”



From Drug Addict to Role Model

The Story of Mohammad Anwar

In many ways, Mohammad Anwar's tale is a typical, if tragic, chronicle of war, displacement, alienation, and drug addiction. What makes Anwar so different is the ending: the former mujahedeen commander, political activist and heroin addict now works as a counselor in WADAN's Drug Treatment Center in Kabul.

"I come from an educated family," said Anwar, speaking in the office of the Kabul DTC. "My father was an influential figure in the Islamic Revolutionary Council; when the Communists took over, we had to flee to Iran." Anwar's family was among the millions of Afghans displaced by the Soviet invasion. Iran and Pakistan were the primary destinations.

In Iran, Anwar became a political activist, with the Al-Nasr Mujahideen group, which opposed the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. As a high school student, he excelled; he gained admittance to university, a rarity for Afghan refugees in Iran. "I had the highest grades of any student in my class," he said. "And the fact that I was affiliated with a strong political organization also helped."

Anwar majored in Farsi literature, and dreamed of becoming a writer. His future looked bright. But then

his life took a dark turn, and all because of love. “I had a girlfriend,” he recalls. “She was Iranian, and her father was a writer. He was also an addict.” Anwar wanted to get closer to the father to hone his creative skills, but he also wanted to marry his chosen one.

His parents had other ideas, and allowing their son to marry an Iranian girl was not high on their list. “They told me it would be better to marry a dog,” he sighed. Without his parents’ permission, he could do nothing. He broke the news to his girlfriend, who helped him gain access to drugs from her father. “I wanted to get revenge against my family,” laughs Anwar, a bit sadly. “So I took the drugs and ran away.”

Thus began Anwar’s descent into violence and addiction. As he was becoming more seriously involved with drugs, Anwar was also forging a reputation as a fierce mujahedeen commander. He would go over the border from Iran into Afghanistan to battle the Soviets, then retreat back to Tehran. Most of the time he was fighting, he confesses, he was high on drugs. “I took heroin, crack cocaine, crystal meth,” he said. “That was when I was in Iran. In Afghanistan I took opium, or injected heroin.”

The Soviets left Afghanistan in 1989; but the country entered an even darker period of civil war. It was not

until the Taliban restored a harsh but nevertheless welcome order that Anwar was able to come back to his native country. “I returned in 2000,” he said.

But life was difficult for the young man. The eldest son of a wealthy family, he did not have to worry about money. But his family eventually disowned him because they could not accept his drug use. “One day I was standing on the street next to a beggar,” he recalls now. “My clothes were clean enough, and expensive. But the beggar could tell by my face what I was. “Go away”, hissed the beggar. “With you here, people are afraid to come close enough to give me money.”

That was a wake-up call for Anwar. He realized that he had sunk about as low as he could. He had been living in the northern province of Jowzjan, where he was trying to help out in political organizations, as he had in Iran. But he was mentally and physically unable to hold a job.

His family had arranged a marriage for him, but his fiancée’s family would not allow the match until he had stopped using drugs. He decided he had to get clean. “There was a drug treatment center there, in Jangalak,” he said. “I got on the waiting list.” Aided by one of the center’s counselors, who saw Anwar’s potential, Anwar began the long process of recovery.

“The detox period was very, very difficult,” he says now. “I had a very strong temptation to relapse. But I considered it an ordeal sent by God.” Anwar had not been a practicing Muslim during his years of addiction, but he found consolation in his religion during the ordeal of weaning himself off drugs.

“The WADAN center helped me through it,” he said. He smiled with gratitude at one of the counselors, who had been his primary caregiver during the recovery phase. “If not for them, I do not know what would have happened to me.”

Anwar has been clean for almost three years now, and he wants to try and give back to WADAN, and to his fellow sufferers, the benefit he has received. “My counselor first asked me to work as a volunteer,” he said. “And I was keen to keep his trust, so I agreed.”

Anwar was so successful in working with the patients that he soon became a full-time counselor. He has now studied social work, and has proved indispensable at one of WADAN’s Kabul drug treatment centers. “It makes a big difference when the patients see me with the doctor,” says Anwar. “They may dismiss the doctor as being too bookish. But with me they know it is the real thing. I went through it all myself.”

Anwar is happy in his new profession, and has even found an outlet for his political activism. “I have found a new cause,” he smiles. “We are taking revenge on the drug mafia by reducing the demand for their product. I am a warrior again – but it is the war against drugs.”



A Look to the Future

Education is the future of Afghanistan. Our goal is to create informed, empowered and motivated citizens who will work together as a unified social force. Craftspeople, tradesmen, artists and professionals, young women and young men, the literate and illiterate, people from rural areas and urban dwellers would build change for the better. Nation building would be accomplished over time through including all segments of Afghan society. Similar to the National Maliks Association, these networks would link people together as a social force strong enough to maintain momentum over time. The result: a reformed society and an Afghanistan that stands as a strong, functional and productive member of the international community.

Biographies



MOHAMMAD NASIB

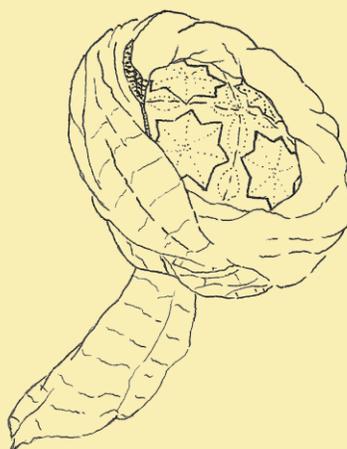
Born in the mountains of Nangarhar, Mohammad Nasib learned the value and skills of relationships running errands and pouring tea for the guests of his Malik father. Fleeing Afghanistan in the wake of the Russian invasion, he settled with his family in Peshawar where he graduated from a refugee high school. He left his job with an NGO to continue his education, earning a BS and an MBA. Most recently he participated in the Stanford Summer Fellowship on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law Program. He has continually practiced his relationship building skills working for NGOs, UNODC, UNDP, the World Bank, and in 2002 founding WADAN. Nasib currently works as Country Director for CIPE and is very involved as Chairman of the Board at WADAN.

JEAN KISSELL

Born in Vermont, Jean Kissell left home in 1987 to organize, coordinate and teach the first International Rescue Committee journalism course for Afghan refugees in Peshawar, Pakistan. In 2004, she went to Kabul to work with WADAN for a few weeks. In March 2012, she will have completed eight years with the organization and currently holds the title of Executive Director. A realistic optimist she remains hopeful about Afghanistan's ability to learn to thrive as a nation after its people have practiced decades of survival techniques.



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