

# Aga Khan Foundation, Afghanistan Newsletter



September 2015 - Volume 31

## Message from the New CEO

Dear Colleagues,

I arrived in Afghanistan on 5<sup>th</sup> August. Since my arrival, I have had the opportunity to see (part of) field operations in Takhar, Badakhshan, and Bamyan. Unfortunately, urgent meetings taking place here in Kabul disrupted plans to travel to Baghlan. I am sure the next visit will be to Pul-e-Khumri.

During these field visits, I met with our Aga Khan Foundation field staff. I met extraordinary teams of very dedicated professionals. I want to thank you and acknowledge your commitment and dedication. It is clear that program communities appreciate our work, value our opinion and trust our support.

**Security:** Our field operations are taking place in an increasingly insecure environment. I want to stress that staff security needs to be the first priority when we are discussing work plans and field travel. Staff security should be a priority for everyone everywhere, from buckling seat belts in vehicles and consistently checking office access, to traveling to the remote areas where we work and meet with program groups.

**Innovation and Learning** One of the reasons I joined Aga Khan Foundation Afghanistan is our commitment to long term development work in our focus regions. I have seen that our long term presence allows us to forge stronger ties with communities and local institu-

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*The CEO speaks with a member of a women's' co-operative in Bamyan that creates Baluchi needle-work products. AKF provides training and inputs to women and also links the cooperatives to markets, September 2015*

## “Partnering for Public Good” Summit in Afghanistan Institute for Civil Society (AICS)



*Ahmad Zia Massoud, Special Representative to the president in Reform and Governance Affairs, speaking in the Partnering for Public Good Summit*

*By: Nazilla Ataiee, Communications and Outreach Specialist-AICS*

Afghanistan Institute for Civil Society (AICS) as an independent Afghan civil society organization, mandated to support a credible and competent civil society sector in Afghanistan, organized the Partnering for Public Good (PPG) Summit on June 10, 2015. The purpose of this summit was to promote cross-sector collaboration to support sustainable development within each sector and the national development processes. The summit brought together a hundred and fifty leaders of civil society, government, private sector, media and academia to discuss and identify shared goals, concerns,

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## On the Path to Localisation

An Interview with Abdul Zia Noori, Deputy Director Operations



In this issue, we ask Abdul Zia Noori, the Deputy Director of Operations, who recently graduated with a Masters degree, for his perspectives on localisation, professional development and the challenges of balancing work and studies.

**Tell us about your career with AKF. When did you join the organization?**

I joined AKF in June 2003 as a Procurement Officer, ten months later I was promoted to Deputy Procurement Manager. In 2007 when discussions about localisation were intensifying, I was promoted to Procurement Manager, a position previously held by an international staff. I have been working as the Deputy Director of Operations since April of 2015.

**How did you end up taking a Masters in Advanced Studies in Humanitarian Logistics and Management (MASHLM)?**

I first considered the Masters in Development Policy and Management degree offered by Bradford University. But once I learned of the MASHLM program, I knew it was a better fit for me based on my professional background having worked in procurement for several years.

During my second year of study at Kabul Polytechnic University, my education was interrupted. Like many, I fled to Karachi in Pakistan, taking on several jobs as a labourer. I also worked as a Medical Record Keeper with AKHSP in a refugee camp while undertaking business administration courses with financial support of Jamati Institutions.

**Given what appears to have been a successful career on the upward trajectory in Procurement, why did you decide to undertake an academic course?**

Everything I knew in the development and humanitarian sector I learned from practice not through formal training. Taking a course was a way to gain theoretical knowledge that would support my practical experience. Today, I know what humanitarian principles are, operations in emergencies and how they differ from operations that are development oriented. I understand how different people communicate and how some prefer to be managed and also what it means to respect everyone's opinion.

**What has been the most significant change that the MASHLM degree has had in your life?**

Today, I can say that I'm a certified humanitarian professional. I really feel confident to say this. This degree validates my practical experience and certi-

## “Partnering for Public Good” Summit in...

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challenges and priorities in order to promote effective partnerships that encourage all partners' contribution to the sustainable and inclusive development of Afghanistan.

Participants agreed that such partnerships are essential for ensuring Afghanistan's self-reliance, accountability, transparency, good governance, and an enabled environment for all sectors and entities to function and flourish. During the summit, many significant concerns emerged – including impact, promotion and sustainability of PPG partnerships in the long-term. As a result, participants prepared and proclaimed a declaration that constituted the main parameters of the PPG partnerships, aim, coordination structure, key areas of concerns and interests, roles and responsibilities of each partner and commitments on promoting this initiative across the country. It also included an agreement on ten priorities for the PPG partners.

Priorities encompassed proposed policy reforms, equal access and safe work environment for women, improved government transparency and accountability, quality service delivery, and an enabling environment for civil society, business, media and academia.

Among the participants, H.E. Ahmad Zia Masoud, the Special Representative to the president in the National Unity Government (NUG) in Reform and Governance Affairs, in his opening remarks touched on various unmet needs by the government and all non-government entities face in the country in day-to-day basis. With an overview of state of each sector, the role of civil society in meeting national needs and creating a conducive environment for all sectors to function and grow, he added: “The key to removing obstacles and overcoming challenges during transformation decade and beyond is to establish, promote and reinforce sustainable cross-sector partnerships.”

Dr. Habiba Sarabi, the Afghanistan Institute for Civil Society board chairperson said: “The significance and impact of cross-sector partnerships on sectorial as well as national level development processes to be of vital.” The PPG Summit ended with a consensus on actionable recommendations that emphasize empowering, promoting, mobilizing and sustaining PPG partnerships in the country.

Mr. Maiwand Rahyab, AICS Executive Director stated in his closing remarks: “It's all partnering sectors' responsibility to mobilize their respective entities throughout the country to involve in PPG (Cross-sector Partnerships).”

Overall, the impression of participants affirmed strong support from all partner sectors for this initiative, which as a result makes it a remarkable success for the AICS in its initial months of operations.

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## Good Governance under One Roof

By: Qurban Ali Sami, Regional Governance Coordinator, Bamyan

Accessing government services for poor communities in Yakawlang district of Bamyan is easier since the establishment of a “One Stop Service Centre”. Before the establishment of the Center, also referred to as a Single Window Service Center, government services were delivered from various locations. Bureaucratic processes meant service delivery was slow and time consuming, and many travelled for up to three days from distant villages bearing the costs of travel.

The idea of delivering services from a central location was conceived after the governors of Baghlan and Bamyan visited Thailand on exposure visits in 2013 and 2015. In Thailand, they visited the site where a Single Window Service Center model was running. The governors were keen to adopt a similar practice in Afghanistan. The Bamyan Region District Governors appealed to AKF who provided technical and financial support for the establishment of a One Stop Service Centre in Yakawlang district in 2014. The Yakawlang center is located in the district governor’s office. Twenty-two departments including the National Police Commander are based in the service center. In 2015, the district governors of Saighan and Pundjab in Bamyan were interested in establishing similar centers in their areas. Officials from Bamyan took part in an exposure visit in Thailand this year.

Resources are now used more efficiently as centralizing operations has reduced administrative costs and increased transparency. In addition, accountability to delivery of quality services has increased. The communities are satisfied with the timely delivery and the ease of access to services.

“This is one of the good governance models, especially for those poor people who come from remote villages and can get good services in an open and



Officials serving a customer in the One Stop Service Centre, Bamyan

transparent environment [free of] corruption,” Abdul Ahmad Mobarez, District Governor of Yakawlang.

Populations access services weekly on Thursdays. The local government officials, District Development Assembly and the Community Development Committees are responsible for informing communities in the villages of the weekly service.

## On the Path to Localisation

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fies my skills.

To be recognized as a professional or to compete for jobs in Afghanistan and globally, you need to have a degree and this Masters degree gives me confidence to compete.

**You studied in Switzerland with professionals from other countries with diverse professional knowledge. How did that experience change you?**

To be honest, this was an incredible experience. It was the first time that I was working in this diverse environment. My peers came from different cultures, religions and professional backgrounds. I learned of the Syria crisis, Ebola in West Africa and conflict in South Sudan, especially the ways humanitarian organizations act in emergency situations there. These were incredible learning experiences that I could not have got anywhere.

**Have you been able to apply what you learned in your work?**

I was always involved in operational things but I feel that I understand the language of management and strategies now. I’m very comfortable understanding high-level discussions and also management issues. I learned about managing different personalities, project management, process management, optimization, organizational behaviour, strategy and scenario planning. These courses gave me the tools and knowledge to elevate the way I think about the



Customers in the One Stop Service Center, Yakawlang, Bamyan

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## Plastic Mulching Makes Dry Land Farming Possible

By: Sanjer Ziahi, Regional NRM Manager, Baghlan

Land in Afghanistan is largely arid receiving less than 400mm of rainfall annually. To increase agricultural yields given these conditions, farmers in Baghlan are adopting innovative technologies and improved farming practices to cultivate once arid lands. Working with communities through Community Development Councils (CDC), AKFs Natural Resource Management department (NRM) trains farmers on plastic film technology, an innovative agricultural technique that has been successfully tested to increase agriculture productivity in Arid terrain.

Plastic film technology, also referred to as plastic mulching, involves using plastic film to retain solar energy and moisture in the soil. Higher night-time temperatures and higher levels of moisture in the ground promote micro-organismic activity which improves soil properties. Improved soils also require less fertilizer application, thereby reducing inputs.

Perforated plastic film can be spread over ridges of soil and seedlings planted through these openings; or in early stages of growth, young seedlings are covered with perforated plastic film and grow through the perforations in the plastic film. If in good condition, plastic film can be re-used.

Haji Mohammad Ishaq, a 60-year old smallholder farmer from Ahweli village in Dana-e-ghori district, Baghlan, is an early adopter of plastic film farming. He was trained by the Baghlan NRM, on plastic mulching techniques and also received crop selection advice. He has cultivated and harvested cultivated melons, watermelons and cucumbers on his previously uncultivated land. Initially ridiculed by other farmers, his success has paved the way for other farmers in the community to adopt similar farming and cultivating methods.

In June, 2015, the NRM department organized a farmer field day, a platform that enables farmers to share experiences and learn from each other. Below, Haji Mohammad Ishaq, a beneficiary of AKFs livelihood programs in Baghlan, shares his story with other farmers:

“Before AKFs support and intervention, my land (1,172m<sup>2</sup>) was barren; insufficient rainfall meant I could not cultivate food crops. The AKF Rangeland Forestry team gave me training on the plastic film mulching technique. I was able to grow watermelon on 700m<sup>2</sup> of land, melon on 300m<sup>2</sup>, and cucumber on 172m<sup>2</sup>.

I had doubts in the beginning - it was the first time I had used this technology and other farmers teased and laughed at me. As the crops flourished, their perceptions changed and their interest was piqued. In two months, I was harvesting from my fields.

From the sale of my harvest, I received revenues of Afs 47,591. Inputs and labor costs were Afs 5,860, resulting in a net income of Afs 41,731. I paid back the local village shopkeeper, who provided the initial capital that enabled

me to practice plastic film farming. The rest is spent on my family and the education of my children. I am encouraged. This farming technique has changed the way I think of dry land farming: it is possible to get good yields from dry land! Plastic mulching is indeed innovative technology, it



Haji Mohammad Ishaq demonstrates the results of plastic mulching to farmers

is cheap, easy to practice, promotes soil moisture retention, keeps land soft and controls growth and spread of weeds.”

Concluding his story, Haji Mohammad Ishaq thanked AKF for equipping farmers in the community with the appropriate knowledge and tools on plastic farming. He encouraged farmers to follow and practice plastic mulching which is cost effective, requires less inputs as compared to some more traditional agriculture practices, and brings more barren land under cultivation.

## On the Path to Localisation

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way organizations accomplish their objectives.

The things that concern me today are optimizing operations in order to improve service delivery at minimal costs. Operations is about people relations, and the operations department is concerned with how we can improve the quality of the services we deliver to our customers, and how we can support operations at the field level.

**If you could advice anyone interested in professional development courses or training, what would you say?**

My advice to anyone is, don't go for short-term training. With longer training programs, you build foundational knowledge, which is important. It is better to accumulate the funds being used on short-term training and invest in a long term program like a Masters degree, a requirement for many jobs today. It requires lots of sacrifices and commitment and balancing studying, working and personal responsibilities can be challenging. One really has to make tough choices.

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tions, and reinforces our understanding of how to program based on our successes in these areas. At the same time, there is a risk that, because we have long experience and can show obvious successes in program areas, we become complacent, repeat what we know how to do, and we stop innovating and expanding program interventions. This is not acceptable in the Afghan environment. We need to program more ambitiously.

I am interested in exploring with you how we can create an AKF organizational culture where impact, innovation, effectiveness and efficiency are pursued every day through active learning and analysis. This process needs to run through the whole organization, from the field to the field offices to NPO in Kabul. Field workers know better than anyone what the limitations and opportunities are in their work zones. The analysis and learning also need to be channeled through our information systems, where data needs to form the basis of appropriately detailed analysis, so that we can effectively cull and share lessons learnt. This will inform our current programming and the proposals that we need to develop for future donors.

**Strategic Vision:** We have many prospects for new funding, and are about to sign important new agreements, which will require hard work from many in the next few years. At the same time, we need to think strategically about what we want to achieve with AKF in our core regions, across all sectors, so that we can build a coherent and strong development program with a MIAD approach. Over the next year, we will design and follow a process that will give us all strategic elements we need to give us clear direction for the years to come in Afghanistan, and in every region we decide to work in. This will require careful thought processes and coordination within the AKF and AKDN family.

**Donor Compliance:** We have many projects financed by a diversity of donors. This requires attention to detail in project management, not only in terms of the objectives we need to achieve, but also in carefully following donor rules and regulations so that we do not run into problems that cause substantial losses. I invite everyone to think always about how we can produce better results and impact, how we can avoid unnecessary work, how we can be more effective and efficient. This is very important in the Afghan context, where donors are saying that aid budgets are unlikely to grow, and competition for development resources will become fiercer.

**Our People in this scenario:** we all know that our greatest assets are our human resources. We need to make sure that we attract the best people we can, and that we retain them, by creating an environment where compensation is met by a positive work atmosphere, a stimulating environment, and an enthusiasm for doing excellent work. We will need to look at our performance management systems and human resource policies, so that we can create an en-

vironment where people will continue to learn, explore, and find ways to achieve more impact for our program participants. This depends on people themselves, and on their supervisors who need to have the required skills to coach, mentor and grow their teams on the job.

**Synergies:** We are not alone. Another reason why I wanted to join Aga Khan Foundation is that AKF is part of AKDN. With our sister agencies, we can build synergies, so that together, we can become more than the sum of the different parts. We need to explore new ways of collaborating and designing new programs, so that we can build on the whole network, not only on Aga Khan Foundation.

I am sure we can do all of this. We have a solid foundation; we are building on our program success and experience. Together, we can achieve more for the Afghan people.

Sincerely yours,

Jan Schollaert  
Chief Executive Officer  
Aga Khan Foundation, Afghanistan

## Administration Department & the AKF

*Ramin Attahi, National Manager, Administration-Kabul*

Administration department are the backbone of an organization, supporting primary and secondary activities, which enable the organization accomplish its mission. The AKF Afghanistan Administration department (Admin) is no different: it supports program implementation and facilitates logistics such as travel arrangements, visa processing and personal or business communications. The department consists of a team of 68 working in various units from transportation, travel, warehousing, auto workshop, guesthouses and radio operations to facilities management among others. This team is committed to providing the best services to ensure that program implementation runs smoothly.

There have been significant achievements as a result of the department's hard work, aspiration and commitment to meeting the organization strategic objectives. One of the recent achievements was the establishment of "Charchata House" on May 2015. Charchata House hosts official meetings and workshops. AKF(A) is also committed to ensuring staff welfare, and the facility is also used for leisure activities that boost physical and mental wellbeing. Staff can be frequently seen playing football, volleyball and badminton while table tennis and chess are being played in office compound.

Other notable achievements include; maximizing the capacity of the office grounds, improving safety to ensure security of staff, reducing guesthouse operational costs, creating savings by moving some operations to the warehouse, establishing a travelers tracking system, establishing a competitive and transparent airline ticket purchase program and entering into

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## Human Resources Role within an Organization

By: *Kiramuddin Malikzada, HR Officer, Kabul*

Organizations achieve their objectives when they have the best people, processes and technology that supporting its core competencies. And since people are the business of Human Resources, HR functions to attract and retain the best people. Human Resources help organizations meet their strategic objectives and good HR practice is to align HR strategy with the organizations strategic objectives. Through several functions including recruitment, safety, compensation and benefits, compliance, training and development, HR departments can provide the structure and ability of an organization to meet its needs.

The recruitment of expatriate staff, for example, is one way that HR brings people with technical skills into an organization, where these skills may be unavailable or are insufficient in the local market to meet a business need. Within the HR department, expatriate professionals help build technical capacities and develop or improve work processes.

HR is interested in capacity building of staff. Performance appraisals, a responsibility that requires commitment from leadership and managers, can help identify competency or skill gaps making it possible for HR to provide the most appropriate intervention from on-the-job training to professional development courses. Having good and interactive relationships with people in the organization can help ensure that the performance appraisal process is success and the most appropriate intervention is recommended.

Another key role for HR is developing and putting in place policies and procedures that guide actions. Compliance with rules, regulations or laws, can help create an environment where employees feel respected and feel safe to work in. The AKF HR team is committed to supporting people comply with the organizations policies and procedures.

### DEAR AKF COLLEAGUES,

**The purpose of this newsletter is to let AKF staff know more about the work the organisation is doing. We want your input. If you have any feedback, any ideas for articles, any reports on events or announcements about upcoming events of interest to AKF staff, please contact the editor, Najibullah Dehzad, in the Kabul office: [Najibullah.dehzad@akdn.org](mailto:Najibullah.dehzad@akdn.org)**

**This newsletter is published quarterly. The deadline to submit stories for the next edition is 30 November, 2015.**

To be effective, various functional areas within HR must work together to ensure the organizations' people are not only well served, but the best people are attracted to the organization.

In summary, through job announcements and by creating a good and safe work environment, HR tries to attract, recruit and retain the best-qualified people at the right time in the right place.

## Administration Department...

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strategic corporate agreements with airline and hotel companies.

The department has experienced some challenges recently but is on the path to resolving most of these issues. It is obvious that Admin is a large department, in terms of number of staff, with numerous responsibilities. It should be mentioned that the teams' efforts have led to significant improvements. Everyone on this team is committed to providing the best quality service and helping the organization successfully accomplish its' mission.

## New employees

*The following employees have recently joined Aga Khan Foundation:*

### National Staff:

**Kabul:** Mohammad Raza as National Senior Officer -Audit, Aalam Gul Farhad as Certificate Officer-AICS, Nazilla Ataiee as Communication and Outreach Specialist-AICS and Hamidullah Safi as M&E and Research Manger-AICS

**Baghlan:** Masood Haidari as Regional Senior Assistant-Finance and Ali Mohammad Ramzi as Regional Coordinator-NRM-PMIS

**Badakhshan:** Dad Mohammad Azizi and Ismatullah as Area Senior Teacher Educators-Education and Shamshad as Regional Coordinator-Gender

**Bamyan:** Ahmad Sakhi Wahdat as Area Senior Teacher Educator-Education

### International Staff:

Jan Schollaert as the Chief Executive Office, Judith Dsouza as Senior Technical Advisor-Gender, and Maria Rengifo De La Sota as HR Specialist-Recruitment

*We wish them all the best in their work as part of the AKF team.*

**Aga Khan Foundation (AKF)** is a private, international, non-denominational and non-profit development agency within the Aga Khan Development Network, founded by His Highness the Aga Khan. AKF seeks sustainable solutions to long term problems of poverty, with special emphasis on the needs of rural communities in mountainous, coastal and other resource-poor areas. In Afghanistan, AKF manages and implements a multi-sectoral development programme which includes natural resource management, enterprise development, renewable energy, rural infrastructure and civil society components.

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