



Terre des hommes

Letters from Afghanistan

Volume 17, February 2004

We report about our maternal health projects in Afghanistan, and about the growing danger of a narco-state.

With this newsletter we want to inform you about growing concerns inside and outside Afghanistan that insurgents and terrorist organizations are profiting from drugs cultivation, drug refining and drug distribution. Alarm bells are already ringing in Kabul and capitals around the world. Opium cultivation in Afghanistan is not only threatening public health in Europe, but is also plaguing the whole region of southern Central Asia.

“Iraq may have no weapons of mass destruction. But Afghanistan, despite its invasion by the US over two years ago, certainly does. Afghan WMD does not come in the form of refrigerated vials or chemical warheads or nuclear devices. It is a more natural, even organic product. It grows in the fields and on mountain slopes. It costs very little to make. And in a refined state, it is utterly deadly. This weapon is the opium poppy, used to produce heroin for sale in western Europe. According to UN’s office on drugs and crime, this year’s opium crop is the second biggest ever. Despite a ban imposed by the interim administration in Kabul, nearly 200,000 acres are said to be under cultivation. Once refined in illicit laboratories, the heroin is moved to Britain and other markets via Russia, Turkey and the Balkans. The trade is worth an estimated USD 2.5 billion annually, roughly as much as the combined international aid effort and equivalent to half of Afghanistan’s legitimate gross national product. On present trends, future crops may be even bigger if not more lucrative.” (The Guardian www.guardian.co.uk/print/0.3858.4788991-108920.00.html)



A little girl in Peshawar – she belongs to many street working children who enjoy play and education in Terre des hommes’ street children project

Heroin in Afghan veins

“When I arrived in Afghanistan last month, I expected to find a lack of security, a resurgent Taliban, corruption, warlords, economic woes, and a weak central government. I found all of that, but I came away thinking that Afghanistan’s most serious long-run problem is something quite different, though closely related to all of the above: heroin. The Taliban suppressed the opium poppy for a short time, but for Afghan farmers opium is a crop that pays like no other, and more and more are now turning to it. The danger to a weak and unstable state cannot be overestimated. “Provinces that never grew poppies are growing them now,” said President Hamid Karzai. “We have an excellent chance to have a legitimate economy, but we will never have stability here if the economy is criminalized.”

Afghanistan is now the world’s largest producer of opium. It accounts for about 40 percent of the

Afghan economy, generating some \$2 billion annually - "equal to all the money we have for reconstruction," said Haneef Atmar, minister for rural reconstruction and development. Opium has the ability to finance not only the warlords, whom the government is trying to co-opt and cajole into surrendering their power, but also the lurking Taliban and even Al Qaeda.



They belong to a warlord in Rustaq

Afghanistan is mostly in the wholesale opium business, with the heroin refining and distribution going on in neighboring countries. But that is changing, and about 85 percent of Afghan heroin stays in the region, experts say, with only 15 percent reaching the West. Afghanistan itself has an estimated one million addicts. "This is a disaster for us," Karzai says. AIDS, that handmaiden of heroin use, is also on the increase. "Everything could be threatened if the government doesn't take this seriously," said Ashraf Ghani, a former World Bank official who is now Afghanistan's minister of finance. "The U.S. is not helpful. They say we can be O.K. in 10 years, like Thailand, but if we wait 10 years there will be a drug dealer sitting in my house."

The United States would like to be helpful but is of several minds. The military doesn't want to touch the problem, saying there is no point in alienating the countryside by getting into the drug eradication business until the U.S. troops there



Opium farmers in northeastern Afghanistan

can get on top of the security problem. But there are civilians in the American embassy who fear that the Afghans "are in danger of losing their country" to drug dealers, that a situation like Colombia's could evolve. Even if the United States were to assist in ridding the country of only 20 percent of the opium crop, one American argued, that would "send a signal that drugs dealers can't act with impunity here."

Afghan leaders in the provinces warn that it is no good destroying opium unless there is something to replace the farmers' lost income, that too-sudden eradication without a moneymaking crop replacement would be destabilizing. The British, who under the Bonn agreement for international cooperation in Afghan reconstruction are in charge of antinarcotics programs, agree, but no one has come up with a crop as lucrative as opium.



Opium poppy cultivation has become the backbone of Afghanistan's agriculture

Afghans complain that an earlier British effort to buy some of the crop backfired because when word got out farmers who had been growing food switched over to opium hoping for buyouts. American donations of wheat to Afghanistan also backfired, making it more difficult for Afghan farmers to sell their wheat at a profit and encouraging more opium growing, Afghans say.



On the way to Rustaq, near the border to Tajikistan

The Bush administration was quick to declare victory in Afghanistan so that it could clear the decks for the invasion of Iraq. But the war is not yet won in Afghanistan. Security continues to deteriorate, and to succeed the United States and the international community are going to have to stay involved for another seven to 10 years. International donors and U.S. taxpayers will be less likely to support Afghanistan if it evolves into a narco-state. That should worry the United States, not just Afghanistan. H D S Greenway in *International Herald Tribune* (in the Kathmandu Post, January 27, 2004)

The Mother-Child Health Project in Kabul

The community-focused maternal health project has now entered its 9th year of implementation. It started during the time of the Mujaheddin Government beginning of 1996, and it not only survived the following Taliban government, but also significantly expanded during this difficult period into 12 areas of Kabul city – and remained as one of the very few female-employment projects in Afghanistan up to the fall of the Taliban regime.

Terre des hommes' (Tdh) maternal health project signed recently a new agreement with the Ministry of Health, called « Basic Package of Health », which reflects the new policy of the Interim Administration of Afghanistan to rebuild the national health system.



Many mothers and children of the target group are living in extreme states of impoverishment. Still, in many areas the homes of clients are, in fact, remnants of bombed buildings, without any access to potable water.

Most of the mothers face violence at home, and suffer from a lot of psychological problems. About 90% of project clients suffer in one way or another from any type of violence, and in most cases, the husbands are the primary perpetrators of violence.

Almost all project clients are illiterate, and they do not have any access to educational opportunities. They do not know their date of birth and some even don't know their father's name. Although the political situation has changed, people's mind has not. Many women are still not allowed to leave their homes for literacy classes and many girls are unable to attend schools.

The Mother-Child Health Project in Kabul – A Profile of 2003

The team of 30 female health professionals improved again its services during the year of 2003:

- The midwives visited a total of 7,752 new homes, and identified 4,814 new clients.
- The midwives visited 31,637 project clients, and identified also 4,793 new clients.
- 87,657 women and adolescent daughters participated in home-based health education in neighborhoods.
- The MCH team interviewed 4,031 participants about domestic violence.
- 7,702 mothers have been referred to clinics and hospitals for routine care, immunizations or complications.
- 600 mothers could access family planning services, provided by the project.
- 3,906 newborns entered the project, and 491 mothers delivered at home.

The Mother-Child Health Project in Kandahar, southern Afghanistan

Terre des hommes (Tdh) established the second home-based maternal health project in July 2002 in Kandahar, southern Afghanistan.

Kandahar is still a very difficult place to work. During the Soviet occupation of 1979 – 1989 Kandahar was firmly under Soviet command. Following the Soviet withdrawal it changed hands several times. It was towards the end of 1994 that the Taliban emerged from the city and began from here to conquer the south, east and centre of the country; the city is still the 'spiritual' home of the movement with all its negative implications for women and girls.



Meeting of Community Health Workers of Terre des hommes (Tdh) in Kandahar – seven community health workers, two midwife trainers and one field midwife together with a male health professional as coordinator form the Tdh team in Kandahar.

The Mother-Child Health Project in Kandahar – A Profile of 2003

The team of 10 female health workers significantly improved the maternal health of Kandahari mothers:

- The teams visited a total of 3,310 houses, in order to find mothers in need
- The teams visited a total number of 9,853 clients in their homes. 1,450 women became new project clients.
- A staggering number of 35,485 women and their adolescent daughters participated in home-based health education sessions.
- 1,271 newborns entered the project.
- 2,639 mothers have been referred to clinics for routine care, immunization and treatment of complications.



A small boy in Rustaq town

Post-Earthquake Rehabilitation Project in Rustaq – North-eastern Afghanistan

The project in north eastern Afghanistan started in the year 2000 and has been successfully completed in December 2003. Of course, *Terre des hommes* (Tdh) will remain in the region and continue and expand with some important project components.

Post-Earthquake Rehabilitation Project in Rustaq – A Profile of 2003

The team in the field, female and male health professionals, completed following tasks:

- Four times national immunization campaigns have been carried out, each time vaccinating 41,511 children in average.
- 26,221 children have been vaccinated against measles.
- 40,712 women and children have been vaccinated against the so-called six killer diseases EPI.
- 120 community health workers participated in training sessions in seven villages.
- 6,458 children could go to school, with a share 40.2 % of girls, most probably one of the highest in Afghanistan.

Delegation of *Terre des hommes*

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