



The Muleskinner Report

Mo Agri-Business Development Team IV

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Commander's Corner

Cultural dynamics that hinder governance and redevelopment efforts in Afghanistan

In 1980, a Dutch Sociologist named Geert Hostede published a book "Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values" that, in the opinion of many, revolutionized the way in which social scientists view and study cultural differences.

The book was based on a survey of IBM employees from countries around the world. Although Afghanistan itself was not specifically targeted, the survey did include participants from Iran and Pakistan, whose cultures share many of the same characteristics.

According to Dr. Ehsan Entezar, an Afghan immigrant to the United States and author of the book "Afghanistan 101," Hostede's work provided these scientists with some empirical data and a robust method for systematically analyzing deep cultural patterns that guide behavior.

Hostede's book suggests that there are four interrelated, underlying factors or cultural dimensions that shape the values and belief systems of any culture:

- The extent to which people expect and accept differences in power and status among individuals in their society
- The ways in which they deal with uncertainty, risk, and ambiguity
- The degree to which they favor collectivism or individualism
- Their views on gender equality or inequality

Both Hofstede and Entezar argue that a thorough understanding of these factors allows one to make predictions about the way people in a given culture will react to different stimuli and situations. For Coalition Forces working to increase the legitimacy and capacity of the Afghan government and redevelop the infrastructure and economy, such an understanding is important

because it can help us optimize our effectiveness and predict the second and third order impacts of our actions.

In "Afghanistan 101," Entezar uses the results of Hostede's survey and some additional research to compare and contrast American values with those of Afghanistan. The author, who spent three years lecturing U.S. military personnel operating in Afghanistan, also suggests behaviors that can help CF operating in Afghanistan better achieve the desired effects.

This article leverages the information in "Afghanistan 101," along with direct observations by the Missouri Agri-Business Development Team IV, to identify and examine the characteristics of Afghan culture that appear to impede governance and redevelopment efforts here.

It also describes some of the practices ADT IV has

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Cultural dynamics that hinder governance and redevelopment efforts in Afghanistan



Capt. Joh Paluczak participates in a key leader engagement with the Nangarhar Director of Refugees at the Governor's Palace on Nov. 24. A solid understanding of the cultural dynamics optimizes effectiveness and can help predict the second and third order impacts of our actions.

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adopted to help mitigate the impact of these characteristics.

Understandably, much of what the Afghans value and do seems to be centered on improving their own safety and coping with a long history of violence, poverty, oppression, and lack of control.

The first cultural dimension discussed in “Afghanistan 101” is formally named “Power-Distance.” Entezar argues that compared with the U.S., Afghanistan has a high Power-Distance Index. This means that Afghans view their society as having multiple layers, with actors in each successive layer having more power, influence, and privileges as one moves from bottom to top. He says that Afghans not only accept this as a fact of life but they actually expect it.

Using the author’s exact words, “Tolerance for inequality is higher among Afghans than it is Americans.”

Unfortunately, the Afghan way of thinking manifests itself in ways

that negatively impact governance, development, and progress.

For instance, the Afghans tend to:

- Use force and intimidation to establish dominance and power. They respect the power of the person and their connections, not the power of the position or rule – and they obey rules only if the person in charge is authoritarian and forceful. Competence and knowledge are not generally rewarded, especially in the government.
- Try to gain power and wealth by any means possible, which explains the rampant corruption problem here.
- Hire people based on their relationships rather than their qualifications or level of competence, which negatively impacts productivity.
- Rarely fire government officials no matter how incompetent. Even in cases where people frequently complain about a particular government official, the employee is often just moved to another position or promoted to eliminate the complaints.
- Judge people on “their position of power, wealth, and connections more than character, education, expertise, or any other intellectual or artistic achievements”, which helps explain the “brain drain” that has taken place here, according to the author.

Entezar states that these characteristics have several implications for CF working with or supervising Afghans.

First, it is very important that Western leaders establish authority immediately.

Second, these leaders must enmesh and document very clear

policies, rules, and standards; must strictly enforce them; and must reprimand violators in a quick and decisive manner.

Finally, these leaders must encourage and reward “teamwork, hard work, and a willingness to learn.”

The author goes on to say that Westerners must strive to be a model of work ethic, dedication, honesty, integrity, and professionalism.

They must also put management controls in place to ensure reconstruction funds are not misused or embezzled.

Since our arrival in Nangarhar, ADT IV has emphasized a policy of transparency and anti-corruption with the provincial Director of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock, his staff, and his district-level Agriculture Extension Agents. As a result, the DAIL seems to have embraced this policy and has offered up his support in eliminating corruption from his department.

The ADT has also taught classes to the AEAs on fundamentals of leadership and has worked with the DAIL to develop and document clear standards of conduct for his subordinates.

The second cultural dimension discussed concerns the manner in which the people of a culture cope with uncertainty and manage risk.

Based on Hostede’s work, the author says that cultures, in general, leverage three constructs – technology, rule-of-law, and religion – to do this.

Compared with Americans, Afghans tend to favor religion over technology and rule-of-law. This is

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Interagency integration during stability operations

By Lt. Col. North Charles

The Department of Defense and the United States government must continue integrating and institutionalizing interagency capabilities into military organizations conducting Stability Operations.

Many critical interagency capabilities are present in Afghanistan; however, DoD does not fully integrate those civilian partners into military units. The majority of the most effective civilian-military integration occurs due to well-meaning commanders and staff implementing ad hoc solutions on the ground.

The Nangarhar Agri-business Development Team IV has outstanding civ-mil working relationships with a number of extremely capable interagency partners here in Nangarhar; however, those are personality-based working relationships.

Institutional design is not the driving factor in this type of civ-mil integration. Three significant factors stand in the way of organizational integration

of interagency capabilities. First, the design of the force. Second, the inability of civilians to fill military positions. Third, different manning models.

Many military organizations operating here in Nangarhar are organized, manned and equipped according to a long-standing Modified Table of Organization and Equipment. Despite the modified title, a unit's mission does not generate any adjustment to these tables. Thus, a Military Police Company mentoring the Afghanistan National Police is organized, manned and equipped exactly the same as every other like-type M.P. company in the Army inventory.

This presents unique challenges in attempting to integrate interagency capabilities into these organizations. In our case of the M.P. company mentoring the ANP, there is no room or space in the unit to integrate any civilian law enforcement trainers into the military organization.

Thus, the unit simply tacks on any interagency partners or operates alongside them here.

In the past, the U.S. Army has solved similar challenges by creating augmentation positions in deployed unit. Perhaps the most famous program is the Korean Augmentation to the United

States Army.

Thus, one solution would be to create positions to augment deploying formations. Civilians with the requisite skill set would fill these positions.



Where no MTOE design exists that meet the commander's requirements, DoD uses a Deployment Manning Document or Joint Manning Document to create a special purpose unit designed to fill a specific operational requirement.

ADTs are organized using a DMD. In the case of units organized using a DMD to participate in Stability Operations, it would seem especially logical and relatively easy to create manning requirements that could be filled by interagency partners.

Admittedly, a whole host of institutional barriers stands in the way of this logical approach; however, DMDs

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Mr. George Roemer, USAID, and Staff Sgt. William Fox, agriculture specialist for ADT IV conduct a quality assurance visit to the Cash For Work project in Shin War district on Nov. 27. Fox is also a civilian hydrologist, Understanding water flow is important but the next ADT may not have that skill set available on their team.

Interagency integration *cont. from page 3*

appear to be prime candidates for initially integrating some interagency capabilities into military organizations.

As an interim step, DoD could code certain branch-immaterial and rank-immaterial positions as eligible for fill by civilians in lieu of military.

In the case of ADTs, our agriculture team subject matter experts are a good example of positions eligible for military or civilian fill. Currently the Nangarhar ADT's agriculture teams is manned only with military members as there is no mechanism for integrating civilians into the team.

Different military and civilian manning models also present challenges to fully integrating civilian partners into military organizations. For optimal integration, civilian and military members of the same organization must operate under very similar manning models.

While current manning models differ, those differences can be reconciled. Army National Guard ADTs mobilize for 400 days. Of that time, 365 days are on duty and the remainder are on terminal leave.

During that one-year on

duty, ADTs typically spend 30 to 45 days training at Camp Atterbury Joint Maneuver Training Center in Indiana, ten months in theater and the remaining time in transit. Most Active Component and Reserve Component Army units operate along very similar timelines.



Dr. Gary Hart, USDA veterinarian, has nearly completed his year tour to Afghanistan and will return to New Mexico in a few weeks. He will be the second veterinarian to have worked with ADT IV—Dr. Tom Vermeersch departed last week after completing his tour.

Some civilian partners assigned to Provincial Reconstruction Teams mobilize with their PRT, but the majority of civilians in theater deploy as individuals. Thus, civilian arrive and depart on varying schedules that do not align with the military organizations they are presumably integrated with.

Eventually, civilian and military manning models should align to provide the right civilian, in the right place at the right time to

meet the requirements of the military unit conducting stability operations. Until that goal is achieved, no institutional barriers currently exist to prevent aligning civilian and military mobilizations.

As an interim solution, civilian volunteers should mobilize on the same schedule as the military unit they will work with. The civilians could train and deploy with their military partners.

Currently a number of extremely capable civilian partners operate with the Nangarhar ADT; however, all of those civilians operate under different manning models, meaning they arrive and depart on widely varying schedules.

Integrating civilian and military capabilities is essential to achieve success during Stability Operations. DoD and other civilian partner agencies in the USG must develop and implement both interim and long-term solutions to institutionalize this key enabler.

As the military transitions stability operations to a civilian-led effort, this same argument holds true. Civilian organizations should have an efficient mechanism to integrate military capabilities as appropriate.

“DMDs appear to be prime candidates for initially integrating some interagency capabilities into military organizations.”



Sgt. Guadalupe Rios inspects a proposed Cash-for-Work project to clean a karize in the Boti Kot district on Oct. 20 with the assistance of Staff Sgt. William Fox and an interpreter. Rios is the LNO for Boti Kot and works closely with the AEA who is standing by and observing the process of how to manage a project.

Agriculture Section at Work

By Lt. Col. Raymond Legg

ADT IV has shifted its emphasis from the large-scale infrastructure projects built by previous ADTs to training and supporting the Agriculture Extension Agents in the ten key terrain districts of Nangarhar Province.

From formal classroom training to hands on experience, ADT IV is challenging the AEAs to become more proficient and professional providers of government services.

In addition to training, ADT IV is also continuing construction projects that provide the AEAs with the essential tools to provide those services.

In order to maximize the impact of classroom training provided to AEAs, ADT has encouraged the AEAs to identify, nominate and manage small Cash-For-Work projects.

The identification and management of these small CFW projects is the most visible component of ADT's Leadership Academy for AEAs.

CFW projects are small projects that cost no more than \$5,000. While the total dollar amount for each project is small, much can be accomplished in a country where the average laborer makes only three dollars per day.

CFW projects are one of the major components of ADT IV's mission to build agricultural and governance capacity in Nangarhar. The projects also provide additional income to individual villagers.

Capt. John Paluczak, the ag section officer-in-charge said, "Cash-for-work projects strike at the heart of the Afghan people who experience the direct benefit of the project's successful completion."

The involvement of villagers, maliks and district government officials results in a synergistic effect that creates a lasting impression of a legitimate and responsive government.

CFW projects increase the leadership capabilities of AEAs by applying the principles of the project management

class they attended in September 2010.

Working in conjunction with ADT, the AEA obtains project nominations from villagers. The nominated projects are reviewed by district governance officials and approved by the Director of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock. The CFW nomination and approval process involves all levels of provincial government in providing direct services to the Afghan people.

CFW projects also familiarize AEAs with a formal structured budgeting process. Before ADT agrees to fund a project, the AEA must provide an itemized budget showing the number of workers and their daily pay as well as any supplies and materials needed to complete the project. Each project proposal includes a work schedule that shows a start and end date.

A representative of the district governance council conducts a shura with the local village explaining the scope and cost of the project.

Agriculture Section at Work *continued from page 5*

When the project is complete, a district official meets with the local village again to explain how the projects funds were spent. Pre- and post-project fliers provide a telephone number villagers can call if they feel funds for the project were not used properly.

The CFW process is designed to institutionalize a transparent government spending process that demonstrates corruption-free government programs to affected villages.

The management and supervision of these CFW projects are key steps in ADT's efforts to mentor the AEAs to become more responsive government servants and extending the reach of AEAs to villages in their district.

The most commonly submitted CFW projects are irrigation, karize and canal cleaning and repair projects. These projects increase the district's agriculture capacity by increasing essential water inputs allowing the Afghans to farm previously underutilized farmland.

Another popular CFW project submitted for approval is planting demonstration orchards to provide agriculture training opportunities for youth who are the future farmers in Afghanistan.

Six ADT sponsored CFW projects are currently underway in Nangarhar Province. Irrigation canal and karize repair projects have begun in the Kuz Kunar, Bati Kot, Shinwar, Surkh Rod, and Muhmand Dara districts. Additional projects in the Muhmand Dara and Surkh Rod will replace and repair irrigation canal sluice gates.

The total costs of these six projects are just under \$27,000. While CFW projects are not intended

as an employment mechanism, each project employs 15 to 50 Afghans for up to 30 days for 6,450 total man days of employment.

Additional irrigation CFW projects in the Dari Nor, Kuz Kunar, Bati Kot, Behsood, Muhmand Dara and Khogyani will begin before the end of November. A demonstration orchard in Shinwar and a greenhouse for the Jalalabad agricultural high school are in the initial planning stages.

CFW projects are not the only projects for the ag section. ADT IV continues to supervise the completion of several large Commanders' Emergency Response Program projects that were started by ADT III.

At least once every 30 days, ag section members visit the project sites to conduct a quality control and assurance inspection. The inspections ensure the contractor is complying with the technical specifications of the project's statement of work.

Agriculture Extension Centers provide a central location in each district for AEAs to work and provide services for farmers. To support the AEAs efforts new Agriculture Extension Centers are under construction in the Achin and Rodat. The AECs will provide the AEAs with a space for a soil testing lab and a large classroom. The AECs are scheduled to be completed in January 2011. Additional AECs are planned in the Dih Bala, Behsood, Muhmand Dara and Surkh Rod districts; ADT anticipates beginning those projects in January 2011.

While ADT IV has stopped building new solar wells, solar well projects in Achin and Setudeh Village

are scheduled for completion by the middle of December.

The reclamation of 175 hectares of land in Sangui Village was completed in October. The project drained swampland and dug drainage canals to reclaim the swampy area as farmland. A cold storage facility in the Surkh Rod District and solar wells in the Nazyan and Shinwar districts were also completed in October.

Section members have been developing Training Support Packages that AEAs can use to teach classes in their AECs to local farmers. Small bag silage, composting, drip irrigation, small ruminant health, row cropping, experimentation by farmers, record keeping, fruit tree management, soil enhancement, food preservation, food safety, flood irrigation and potable water are some of the TSPs under development.

ADT is also working with Afghanistan Water and Technology Transfer, a USAID implementing partner, to develop additional TSPs to support the Farm Resource Management program. FRM seeks to improve the lower watershed through the establishment of forage crops and restricted grazing of ruminants.

One of the most difficult aspects of TSP development is adding illustrations and keeping the contents simple and straight-forward so that all levels of education can understand the material.

The work has been challenging, forcing the team members to embrace challenges and work unlike anything they have previously done in their military or civilian careers. Instead of buildings and wells, ADT IV will leave Afghanistan with better trained and motivated government officials.

Cultural dynamics *cont. from page 2*

because most Afghans have little access to technology and have lived in an environment where rule-of-the-ruler and rule-of-the-gun have taken precedence over rule-of-law.

Although they don't necessarily like it, Afghans are used to seeing police, judges, government officials, and warlords operate above the law.

Thus, because Afghans feel they have little control over their safety and treatment, they tend to rely on religion to help them cope.

The phrase "Insha' Allah" is very common and means "God willing." Afghans believe that God has a plan for them and that they are somewhat helpless to influence it.

Afghan reliance on religion tends to have some negative consequences for governance and redevelopment:

- Afghans sometimes see Western ways, including Western technology, as undermining Islam.
- They don't put much stock in rule-of-law and rely on their own tribal councils, rather than government courts, to resolve disputes.
- They don't see any point in long term planning because God does that for them. They therefore focus much more on the present than they do the future and tend to be unwilling to defer gratification.
- They are risk averse and therefore hesitant to try new technologies. This is because any loss in productivity can impact their near-term ability to feed their families.
- They tend not to hold themselves or each other accountable for their failures or actions because they believe that God is in control of everything that happens.

Entezar points out that their lack of familiarity with planning and their tendency not to hold themselves accountable implies that a Western supervisor or mentor of Afghans should put heavy emphasis on developing goals, strategies, performance criteria, teamwork, and work ethic.



Sgt. Guadalupe Rios interacts with villagers, workers and elders at a Cash-for-Work project site in Bati Kot on Nov. 20. ADT members take the Afghan cultural dimensions into consideration during each mission.

ADT IV has helped the DAIL document a vision for an "end state" and is actively working with him to develop short- and medium-range plans intended to get him to that end state. We are also helping him build an operations and maintenance budget which will allow him to sustain his current infrastructure.

Finally, we are developing Training Support Packages that we think will convince farmers to try out some simple but effective new technologies despite their aversion to risk.

The third cultural dimension is people's recognition of and respect for individual rights versus the needs of the community at large.

Just as many youth in urban America join gangs to keep themselves safe, Afghans find safety in closely aligning themselves with family, clan, tribe, and ethnic group. In doing so, they put the needs of the group ahead of their own needs and remain loyal to that group no matter what the circumstances. These values drive them to:

- Try to weaken and undermine rival groups and strengthen their own groups; primarily along ethnic lines, but also temporarily along ideological, sectarian, tribal, village, clan, and familial lines as the situation dictates.
- Rely more on family and other groups for safety, opportunity, and advancement than they do on the government because government officials have their own agendas and alliances, and the government sees them more as "subjects" than citizens.
- Put a lot of emphasis on relationships because they view close relationships as a form of protection and power.
- Dismiss any notion of national-level unity or pride. Even when occupied by unwelcome foreign forces, Afghans tend to respond based on local objectives and alliances, and not in any nationally unified or cohesive manner. During the Soviet occupation, Sunni and Shia Mujahedeen groups fought the Russians separately, and occasionally, even fought with one another.
- Practice nepotism to an extreme due to close alliances with, and loyalty to, family, tribe, etc. Afghans in positions of power tend to hire based on family, tribal, and

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Mentoring AEAs

By Capt. John Paluczak

Mentoring the Agriculture Extension Agents is critical to the success of ADT IV's Leadership Academy.

To facilitate an effective mentoring program a primary and secondary Liaison Officer from ADT IV has been designated for each AEA in Nangarhar's Key Terrain Districts.

The LNOs are responsible for the mentoring process. Mentoring opportunities occur during visits to the AEA's office or project sites, AEA meetings at Forward Operating Base Finley-Shields, or during telephone calls.

During these mentoring sessions with the AEAs, the LNOs cover several topics Cash-for-Work programs to teach management and supervisory techniques, anti-corruption, transparency, the AEA's relationship with farmers, and leadership.

This article will address these separate tasks of ADT's mentoring efforts.

The CFW program requires the AEA to identify suitable small projects to improve the district's agriculture infrastructure and maintain detailed accurate records for the project. The purpose of

the projects is to legitimize the government through the ability of the AEA to get work in his district done.

While the AEAs are very knowledgeable about the problems of their district, they require mentoring in identifying and planning suitable projects within the capabilities of villagers to complete.

The records ADT IV requires as part of the cash-for-work program often require detailed explanation so the AEA can complete it accurately. LNOs explain to the AEAs, the records serve as documentation of

Mentoring the AEAs on anti-corruption will make them a successful and respected government employee. ADT IV's goal is to have the AEAs realize the negative effects taking bribes or extorting money from people have on the ability of the government to obtain the support of ordinary Afghan.

Col. Mike Fortune, Nangarhar ADT commander, says, "The ADT will track every dollar the team spends to make sure it goes to the people who earn it."

The LNO makes sure the AEA embraces the anti-corruption concept and applies it to everything else he does.

Because corruption has gone relatively unchecked in Afghanistan, the LNOs explain to the AEAs that a government official has to be above the corruption. When villagers see the AEAs are not out to take money from the government, but rather make sure the money is spent to advance agricultural opportunities in the village, they will see their government working hard for them.

The AEA should make sure every afghani, the national currency, the government provides goes to the people

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"Through the mentoring process, the AEAs will learn management and supervisory skills, anti-corruption, transparency, improve the relationship with farmers and develop leadership."



Sgt. 1st Class Dannie Thompson, LNO to Muhmand Dara district, reviews the Scope of Work for a Cash-for-Work project with Rahmatullah, the district AEA.

expenditures and work performed to establish transparency within the cash-for-work program.

Mentoring AEAs *continued from page 8*

because it is people who will ultimately reject a corrupt administration.

One way to show the villagers a corruption free government is to have the AEA operate in a transparent manor.

ADT IV requires the AEAs to document and show how they spend their operational funds. ADT IV holds the AEA accountable for every dollar provided for cash-for-work projects, because the money is intended to assist the people of Afghanistan.

The LNOs are teaching transparency to the AEAs through the cash-for-work process. The LNOs also emphasize that the AEAs will have to continue these practices on their own to create a responsive, transparent government to improve the lives of the Afghan people.

In Afghanistan, relationships are everything. When the AEA operates in a transparent manner the farmers of the district create a long lasting relationship built upon trust and mutual respect. The perception of openness and transparency establishes the foundation upon which the people perceive the AEA and how they are going to treat the AEA.

Each LNO must inspire his AEA to get out to all of the villages in the district and establish a relationship with the village maliks and farmers. These relationships are important because the villagers need to trust what the AEA is telling them. Unless the villagers trust the AEA, they will not listen to his advice on agriculture improvement.

After establishing a good relationship with the farmers, the AEA can demonstrate his leadership abilities. Each AEA has the potential

to influence the individual farmers in his district.

The AEA can influence farmers through training and demonstration plots. For example, farmers will not adopt new methods and technology from the AEAs unless they trust their AEA. AEAs must work hard to connect with the farmers. When the people of the district trust and respect their AEA, the AEA can lead the villagers of his district to a better and more fruitful future.

Through the mentoring process, the AEAs will learn management and supervisory skills, anti-corruption, transparency, improve the relationship with farmers and develop leadership. ADT's hopes the lessons the AEAs learn will show the rest of the government that with a little mentoring, the rest of the Afghan government can work just as well. This will give the people a government worth fighting for.

Cultural dynamics *continued from page 7*

ethnic ties and not on qualifications. This negatively impacts the effectiveness of many government organizations and businesses.

The author of "Afghanistan 101" says that when working with Afghans, it is important to study and learn their ethnic, tribal, and familial relationships. He claims that this knowledge will allow a deep understanding their allegiances, behaviors, attitudes, and motivations.

He also says that Western leaders should be careful in befriending Afghans as they expect special treatment and favoritism from their friends. He recommends treating all Afghans equally but rewarding them for good performance; especially teamwork and professionalism.

The fourth and final dimension, according to the author, is the degree to which a culture sees and treats men and women as equals. In Afghanistan, men are expected to be assertive and women, nurturing.

"Women are perceived to be kind and affectionate by nature and men rational and logical," according to Entezar, and the many widows in the country "need education and training, and mini-bank loans to engage in small businesses."

Accordingly, ADT IV is planning to develop a set of Training Support Packages to further engage Afghan women in agriculture-related activities such as poultry farming.

In conclusion, Afghan values do not appear conducive to developing

leaders that care for and support people outside their own family, tribe, or especially, their ethnicity. In fact, the opposite tends to hold true – they see Afghans who reside outside these groups as competition and try to undermine their leaders – without regard for the health of the nation as a whole.

For Afghanistan to develop into a true nation-state, it requires leaders who are willing to transcend their own ethnicity and embrace all Afghans as brothers. Although ADT IV does not operate at the national level, we are leveraging AEA leadership training and developing public service announcements to encourage Afghans to come together as a team and take charge of their own development at the provincial and district levels.

American women and Afghan girls

By Capt. Marie Orlando



A crowd of girls wait to be checked by Capt. Mary Danner-Jones at the entry control point while the boys hang behind wanting to join the girls for their weekly meeting held at FOB Finley-Shields.

Nearly every Saturday the Entry Control Point of Forward Operating Base Finley-Shields is overrun, leaving the guards sometimes confused about what just happened.

One new guard recently arrived with the Provincial Reconstruction Team stared incredulously and asked, “This is o.k., right ma’am? They have permission?” as he watched a hundred smiling, wiggling, pushing, giggling, children stream through the ECP to line up for their weekly meeting.

Two weeks after the Finley-Shields Girls Outreach Program was started at Forward Operating Base Finley-Shields, ADT IV arrived.

Since then, ADT females have continued to join the other female volunteers in a field, which is also a goat pasture. It is part of the FOB, but is within full view from three sides to

the villagers.

The goats became a part of the meetings as the girls routinely drive them off; the billy goats seemed to have the same idea about the women and girls.

The meetings evolved after a member of the civil affairs team started an Afghan Boy Scout troop. The girls watched the boys from behind the fence, and Maj. Jocelyn Leventhal, the PRT executive officer, asked Air Force Capt. Mary Danner-Jones, the PRT public affairs officer, to establish a meeting for the girls to coincide with that of the boys.

Danner-Jones says, “Women and children in Afghanistan are often severely neglected. This girls program allows the girls to be the most important people in the world for just one hour. These girls have nothing, ask for nothing, and have low expectations. But they come alive as soon as they enter through the gates and when they see us giving time to them each week. It makes a difference to these girls.”

She continues to say, “I hope they know that despite the different languages we speak, the different beliefs we hold, and the different worlds we live in, we can still communicate, have fun, and become friends and sisters; because really, in the end, we’re not that different.”

At the first scheduled meeting, no one showed up. But after speaking with a few of the girls, and with full permission from the village malik and elders, the next meeting was successful. The female Soldiers and Airmen came to the meetings to play games with the girls and do art and craft projects.

Word spread, and by the time the ADT arrived, 30 to 35 girls were participating in the meetings.

Spec. Courtney Armour, security force platoon, said she wasn’t prepared to be overwhelmed with the girls. Armour, who also served in Iraq, said, “This is the most rewarding thing I’ve done so far.”

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American women and Afghan girls

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In October, the holiday of Ramadan ended and the girls were going back to school. A special Afghan meal was ordered, s'mores were cooked over a fire, and with the assistance of civil affairs, backpacks were put together with school supplies, a stuffed animal, and a winter coat along with a few small personal hygiene items. The details were kept secret right up to the start of the meeting, but sensing that something special was about to happen; that meeting had over 50 kids.

As expected, the meeting grew the following week. But even though the girls were told in the future gifts would not be handed out, the numbers continued to swell and the numbers have stabilized between 85 to 115 kids ranging in ages from 1 to 12 years, and include many young boys.

While the increase of children is a positive sign for the volunteers, it also presents challenges to the female Soldiers and Airmen that volunteer each week.

The girls often times bring along much smaller brothers and sisters which are their duty to care for, but which are too young to participate. It is normal for a few of the girls to have babies under a year old on their hips. The older toddlers, not used to such activities and so many new faces, sometimes cry and fuss.

Everything takes twice as long to organize, no matter how simple it seems when planned before the meeting. Language is only one challenge, and not as great as one would expect- a lot can be communicated through demonstration and tone of voice. And usually, there is at least one interpreter that volunteers to help.



Spec. Virginia Fletcher, ADT SECFOR member, helps the girls glue feathers on a drawing of an outlined hand, making turkeys the week of Thanksgiving. Some of the girls gave the project an Afghan twist, and decorated their drawn hands with designs like henna they paint on their own hands.

But, for example, explaining the rules of a relay race, the use of glue (and that it has to dry), or how to tie a friendship bracelet are not so simple to those that do not have the concept of what is being taught. Nothing can be taken for granted; these children have not had the educational experiences of U.S. youth.

The lack of communication brings interesting twists to traditional school yard games. For example, "Ring Around the Rosie" becomes- "swing Capt. Orlando by both arms until you fling her to the ground," and leap frog becomes a boisterous game of "Pile Up on Capt. Orlando." They never did get the idea of the jumping over, or happily decided their version was more entertaining.

The program volunteers are reluctant to turn girls away at the gate, but the various ages pose a challenge on the kinds of activities that are planned. One solution is to set up games for free play- they love to color, play volleyball, jump rope, and to play duck-duck-goose.

Another is to attempt to organize the children by ages. This is much more difficult to do than one might expect. The younger siblings are so used to the older girls' presence, and the military uniforms are so foreign, that the kids were reluctant to leave their older siblings.

It took weeks of practice using colored panels to separate the age groups, but finally, a meeting was successfully conducted with a story book session for the younger kids and the older girls were allowed some peaceful time together to talk about the different ways their families spent Eid al-Adha, an

(Continued on page 12)

American women and Afghan girls

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important Islamic holiday.

This kind of exchange between the girls and female volunteers allows the volunteers to reach out to the girls, learn about their lives and needs, and to share aspects of Afghan and American culture with each other.

The meetings have developed a routine. The group sings songs, exchange English and Pashto phrases, and the volunteers introduce some learning topic followed by an activity.

The songs were taught to the group using the talent of Capt. Alison Salerno, a physician's assistant with Task Force Spartan, 1st Special Troops Battalion, 101st Airborne Division, whose mother was a music teacher, along with two guitarists, Capt. Ken Huenink, ADT S-3, and Dr. Tom Vermeersch, USDA veterinarian. They played "I'm a Little Teapot," "Itsy Bitsy Spider," and "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes," to an enthusiastic group.

In one meeting the girls were introduced to Maj. Robert Paul, a visiting veterinarian from Cooperative Medical Assistance, Task Force 62d Medical Brigade, and veterinarian technician Staff Sgt. Catherine Miles. The team spoke to the girls about animals and they had an activity to demonstrate ways to avoid aggressive stray dogs by being a "tree" or a "log"; in Afghanistan rabies is a widespread problem.

The volunteers are working to introduce civic responsibility to the group by letting them select their own group name, letting them vote on leadership positions and having them participate in the selection of future group activities.

The irony is that the boys are hanging onto the fence and watching the girls, begging to be allowed in. Sometimes a few of the older boys sneak in and sheepishly promise to behave and help if allowed to stay. This reversal is encouraging for the women that have come to love and cherish the hour spent each week with the girls and their young siblings.



Spec. Courtney Armour and Spec. Ashley Soles, both ADT SECFOR members, sit and play with a group of girls, with the goats lurking behind.

Contact Information

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The Muleskinner Report provides insights and analysis on the Nangarhar Missouri National Guard Development Team's mission.

If you have questions or comments on the Muleskinner Report, please contact Col. Mike Fortune at mike.fortune@afghan.swa.army.mil

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