



BUILDING BRIDGES USING AFGHAN ADVOCATES

A 3 YEAR PROJECT FUNDED BY THE DEPARTMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT'S DEVELOPMENT AWARENESS FUND

January 2010 to December 2012

Section 1 : Basic project information

Summary description of project

The project's aim has been to raise awareness and change perceptions of poverty, security issues and development opportunities in Afghanistan, using staff and advocates to organise events and activities. We aimed specifically to recruit Afghan and Muslim advocates. By the end of the project

1. Our Advocates - trained via workshops – have proved confident and able to deliver a wide range of events and initiatives aimed at increasing awareness of poverty, security issues and development opportunities in Afghanistan.
2. Six local/regional networks of supporters are functioning in London, Eastern England, South West England, West Midlands, Yorkshire and South Wales, working to increase the general public's awareness of poverty, insecurity and development opportunities in Afghanistan. Afghan Voice, a new charity, plans to sustain work around the country.
3. Over 1500 people have been involved in events and initiatives - including 100 with little knowledge or awareness of poverty, insecurity and development opportunities in Afghanistan. The aim has been to change their attitudes.
4. The project's media strategy has generated some positive publicity and helped to attract the attention of the general public with regard to poverty and development issues in Afghanistan.

Section 2 : Summary of progress and achievements

2.1 Progress over the last year, 2011-12

Outcome 1 - In 2011/12 we recruited and trained 16 paid advocates and during 2012 we recruited 2 more advocates, from North West England and Essex. All our advocates were trained and supported to organise events in the 6 regions.

Outcome 2 – Local contacts and networks have helped us identify and recruit these advocates. This process has helped us build up and strengthen relationships with Afghan and non Afghan groups in the different regions.

Outcome 3 – During 2012, we reached **688** people from all ethnic backgrounds and different faith groups. Our Advocates have predominantly targeted school children, community groups, women’s groups and faith groups. They held 2 events with schools, 2 events with young student groups, 2 events with faith groups, 2 events with women’s groups and 5 events with community groups. In total at least **1915** people have attended our events since the project started. We identified and worked with **103** people with very little or no knowledge of poverty and development issues in Afghanistan.

Outcome 4 - Our public presence has increased significantly. As at December 17 2012, our Facebook page was liked by 327 people, a substantial increase of 70% since the start of the year. Our Twitter page was being followed by 825 people, a significant increase of 35% on 2011, when there were 600 followers. Visitors to our website increased by more than 74% from the previous year. Building Bridges page: total 23192 hits, Afghan Action's website: total 43,000 hits.

2.2 Summary of overall project achievements in relation to the agreed project purpose

The aim of the 3 year Building Bridges programme, which started in January 2010, has been to raise awareness about Afghanistan and change perceptions of poverty, security issues and development opportunities there. Our approach has been to use trained advocates, many of them Afghans living in the UK. Most of the advocates were also Muslims with an understanding of the religious and cultural situation of Afghanistan. Our advocates were provided with training and support in order to enable them, along with our London-based staff, to deliver a range of events and initiatives in 6 regions across the country: London, Eastern England, South West England, West Midlands, Yorkshire and South Wales. Our target was to involve 1500 people over the 3 years and over 1900 people took part in our events and initiatives – including over 100 who said they had very little knowledge or awareness about what life is really like in Afghanistan. The aim has been to challenge prejudices, provide good information and change attitudes. Over the 3 years, the programme benefited from some positive publicity and helped to raise awareness and increase interest in Afghanistan.

Section 3 : Narrative report

3.1 History of significant changes to the project during its lifetime

We implemented some important changes in our project profile over the period of the project, these being agreed by Triple Line in 2011. We found that our original aim, of trying to work with 100 Advocates on a volunteer basis, was not effective - so, with Triple Line’s agreement, we changed the approach and recruited 16 skilled advocates through an interview process (and two more during 2012). We provided them with training and they became active in organising events across the UK on a paid basis (@ £80/day).

Our advocates were recruited from the 6 regions and worked mainly in their regions, with the help of the contacts and networks we already had or developed during the project.

3.2 Progress towards achievement of outcomes

Project Outcomes	Indicators	Actual achievement of the outcomes demonstrated by the end of the project (including numbers of beneficiaries)
<p>1. Our Advocates - trained via workshops - are confident and able to deliver a wide range of events & initiatives aimed at increasing awareness of poverty, security issues and development opportunities in Afghanistan.</p>	<p>1a) All 100 advocates fully aware of the historical and socio-cultural background of Afghanistan and of the poverty & development issues related to this country. Also able to describe Afghan Action's work and its vision for Afghanistan. By April 2011, 25% of advocates recruited will be female.</p> <p>1b) 16 skilled advocates selected by Jan 2012 from among the 100 Advocates. They will be trained and confident enough to deliver awareness raising activities around the UK focusing on development issues in Afghanistan.</p> <p>1c) The advocates independently organise and run at least 30 events and initiatives across the UK over 3 years in order to raise awareness of poverty,</p>	<p>1a) 100 Advocates recruited initially through personal contacts and then through 9 structured workshops. We used a questionnaire about Afghanistan at the beginning and at the end of these workshops; the average score at the beginning was 43% and at the end 89%.</p> <p>Feedback forms stated that the workshops had been very helpful. Participant lists showed that 30% of the 100 advocates were women.</p> <p>1b) Following changes (described above in 3.1) introduced in year 2, in total 18 skilled advocates from across the regions were recruited via an interview process. Through training and practice, all these advocates were made familiar with our training resources, which have mainly focused on five of the Millennium Development Goals. They became confident in organising events in their regions They were fully aware of the project's overall aim and the target groups we wanted to reach. We paid our advocates according to their attendance at training and events.</p> <p>1c) Our advocates organised 13 events in 2012 with community groups (5), faith-based organisations (2), women's groups (2), schools (2) and children's groups (2). These events covered a spectrum of target audiences. In total our staff and advocates organised 34 events since the project started. Events or activities took place in England (London, Birmingham, Leeds, Middlesbrough, Durham, Manchester, Southampton and elsewhere) Scotland (Glasgow), Northern Ireland (Belfast) and Wales (Cardiff) between 2010 and 2012.</p>

Project Outcomes	Indicators	Actual achievement of the outcomes demonstrated by the end of the project (including numbers of beneficiaries)
	<p>insecurity and development opportunities in Afghanistan. (6 events in year 1, 10 events in year 2, 14 events in year 3)</p>	<p>The typical method used was as follows: a questionnaire at the beginning of events would assess participants' prior knowledge of Afghanistan and its development issues. The same questionnaire was then used at the end of the session to measure their understanding and assess learning outcomes achieved. Analysis showed that scores at the beginning of an event ranged between 0 - 41% and at the end 60 - 91%.</p> <p>Feedback received after each event from participants was very positive and encouraging.</p>
<p>2. Six local/regional networks of supporters fully functional in London, Eastern England, South West England, West Midlands, Yorkshire and S. Wales, working to increase the general public's awareness of poverty, insecurity and development opps in Afghanistan.</p>	<p>2a) To have six networks established in the regions with the support of Afghan Action and its advocates by July 2011.</p> <p>2b) Each network will organise at least 1 event each year, with the support of the advocates and Afghan Action team.</p> <p>2c) 1,500 people across the UK, over three years, will attend a wide range of events and initiatives: 300 in year 1, 500 in year 2, 700 in year 3.</p>	<p>2a) & 2b) We recruited advocates from 6 regions [see above, 1a) and 1b)]. With their involvement, we built up and strengthened relationships with Afghan and non Afghan groups. Organisations involved with or supporting us have included: Afghan Association of London, BAAG (British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group), Faith Regen Foundation (London), Iranian Business Centre (London), Afghan Association of Leeds, Refugee Support Group (Exeter), Afghan Orphans (Coventry), Zara Foundation (Birmingham), OISIS (Cardiff), Bassalag School(Newport), Somali Community in Cardiff, The Salvation Army (Essex), Mitalee Centre(North London), Rotary Clubs of Durham & Flitwick Vale, various faith groups (churches and madrasas). For events held, see 1c).</p> <p>2c) In total 1915 people attended events organised by our team and advocates since the start of the project, actively participating in different activities and providing feedback. In 2012, 688 people participated in events, 300 of whom completed the questionnaires. 150 were school children who had done activities and taken part in question/answer sessions. 238 adults took part in question/answer sessions.</p>

Project Outcomes	Indicators	Actual achievement of the outcomes demonstrated by the end of the project (including numbers of beneficiaries)
	2d) Events and initiatives organised will target different groups in society, eg faith groups, businesses, schools, community groups, women's groups and the media.	2d) While advocates predominantly targeted schools, community groups, women's groups and faith groups, there were also meetings with Government, Rotary groups and other business organisations (eg London Property Professionals Group, Institute of Electrical Engineers).
3. To have 1500 people involved in events and initiatives - including 100 who have little or no knowledge or awareness of poverty, insecurity and development opportunities in Afghanistan. The aim is to change their attitudes towards Afghanistan	<p>3a) 50% of people who have attended an event / initiative can provide some information on the main poverty and development issues affecting Afghanistan</p> <p>3b) Of the 1,500 people attending events we will reach 100 people with little or no prior knowledge of the main poverty and development issues affecting Afghanistan.</p> <p>3c) After an event, 30% of those 100 people can provide some information on the main poverty and development issues affecting Afghanistan.</p>	<p>3a) In the events we used a questionnaire to assess the prior knowledge of our audiences at the beginning and then to measure the information retained by them at the end of the events. There was a significant increase in correct responses to questions in the questionnaire after participants had joined our session. The questionnaires were rough guides about knowledge of Afghanistan prior to and after a presentation. After analysing the events, questionnaires and feedback we found that more than 69% of people participating could understand and share information about poverty and development issues affecting Afghanistan and Afghan communities. Many of those attending our events from across the demographic spectrum expressed real interest and concern about the issues raised.</p> <p>3b) & 3c) We identified 103 people with very little or no knowledge about development issues in Afghanistan. On their feedback form they ticked 'didn't know anything before joining this presentation'. After the presentation they answered most of the questions correctly. 70% of them ticked 'I know a lot / a bit about development issues in Afghanistan'.</p>

Project Outcomes	Indicators	Actual achievement of the outcomes demonstrated by the end of the project (including numbers of beneficiaries)
<p>4. The project's media strategy will have generated positive publicity and will have attracted more attention from the general public on poverty and development issues in Afghanistan.</p>	<p>4a) Our Facebook page will be "liked" by 100 people in year 1 and increasing by 30% annually.</p> <p>4b) Our Twitter page will be followed by 200 people in year 1 and increasing by 30% annually</p> <p>4c) Website visitor numbers will increase by 30% each year.</p>	<p>4a) 327 people had liked our Facebook (as assessed on 17 December, 2012, see <i>Annex 6</i>) and in early 2012 our Facebook page was liked by 130 people, showing an increase of above 70%.</p> <p>4b) We had 600 Twitter followers in 2011. In 2012 we had 825 followers (<i>Annex 7</i>) which showed more than 35% increase. We have posted over 170 tweets.</p> <p>4c) The number of visitors to our website increased by more than 70% in 2012 from the previous year</p> <p>Building Bridges Page: Total 23,192 hits Afghan Action's website: Total 43,000 hits</p>

3.3 Key factors affecting progress

3.3.1 Positive factors supporting project achievement

The 18 advocates we recruited and trained, along with our staff team, have successfully achieved the project aims.

3.3.2 Negative factors adversely affecting project achievement

Staff illness had an effect during the overall programme and also one key staff member had to return to Afghanistan. Refocusing the work onto a small but effective group of advocates helped achieve outcomes.

3.4 Management response to factors adversely affecting progress

When the Senior Project Co-ordinator became ill, the Chair of Afghan Action provided management oversight. Two colleagues recruited in 2010 moved on in 2011, one returning to Afghanistan, the other due to family illness. Two new colleagues were recruited and proved very effective. During the final year in particular, important new work was developed with Muslim networks (madrastas and community organisations). This was very significant.

3.5 Sustainability

The work of Building Bridges will be continuing under the auspices of a newly formed charity, Afghan Voice (www.afgvoice.org). Afghan Action's main focus is on work in Afghanistan, but this necessarily requires us to be constantly aiming to raise awareness in the UK and obtain the support of people for work in Afghanistan.

3.6 Lessons Learnt

Questionnaire completion – From our experience we found that completing a series of questions is not the best tool to measure an audience's learning progress. Our original plan was to start events by giving groups (not individuals) questionnaires as ice breakers. However, this could not provide a measure of knowledge gained, so the idea of using questionnaires completed by individuals at the start and end was implemented. In practice, measuring 'knowledge' is less important than changing attitudes – and that cannot easily be measured or quantified. During the final months, we put less stress on completing questionnaires and concentrated more on extending question/answer sessions.

3.7 Information, dissemination and networking – Describe any activities undertaken to share learning and/or network with other relevant organisations.

As well as holding our own events, we also organised a number of events with different organisations who shared the same ethos as us.

The Rootless Forest (Birmingham) - The Rootless Forest, a landscape and soundscape, is a new project by Beth Derbyshire, Wheatley Fellow, Birmingham Institute of Art and Design. From *The Rootless Forest* we heard recorded stories about adjustment, homecoming and relocation told by two families from the military and UK Afghan communities in Birmingham. Afghan Action's Building Bridges team supported Beth's artwork and she subsequently secured Big Lottery funding. Our advocates joined the inaugural ceremony and talked about poverty, female education and security issues affecting Afghans. <http://www.therootlessforest.com/collaboration.php>

Rotary Club, Flitwick Vale, Bedfordshire – Following a talk to 50 people at the Rotary Club (in 2011) about Afghanistan and Afghan Action, the local Club ordered a carpet with its logo in and is now promoting support for Afghanistan across Rotary Clubs in Eastern England. Rotary members are now becoming advocates and speaking to local clubs. This will sustain the awareness raising around the country.

Made in Europe (London) - In May 2012, two of Afghan Action’s advocates spoke at Made in Europe’s monthly cafe at the London Muslim Centre, Whitechapel. Our advocates delivered a presentation on development challenges in Afghanistan, specifically focusing on issues regarding poverty and security through analysis of the Millennium Development Goals. The event attracted a group of gregarious young graduates and students from various academic and professional backgrounds.

Somali Community (Cardiff) – Afghan Action’s presentation to 35 refugees and asylum seekers covered general information about Afghanistan, linking this with the Millennium Development Goals and providing a special focus on poverty and women’s lives.

The Riverfront Theatre (Newport) – Our advocates talked about Afghan women’s education and rights at the International Women’s Day organised by The Riverfront Theatre and attended by more than 100 women.

Section 4: Contribution to the DAF programme objectives

Contribution to the DAF programme objectives	Mark relevant objectives
Challenges and prospects for development and poverty reduction	x
Interdependence and the global consequences of poverty	x
International efforts to reduce poverty and promote development	
The role of individuals in working towards poverty reduction	
<p>All events were designed to impart information and interest people sufficiently to raise their awareness and change their attitudes. We presented the challenges and prospects for Afghanistan in as realistic a way as possible, recognising the significant problems but also demonstrating that the media portrayal of Afghanistan is far from complete. By drawing on the knowledge and passion of our Afghan advocates, we were able to provide accurate and interesting information and participants of all ages and backgrounds were fascinated by what they learned. We also stressed the importance of interdependence and presented carefully the international community’s efforts to assist Afghanistan, linking what is happening to the Millennium Development Goals. We also drew people’s attention to the role of the British Government in supporting and assisting Afghanistan’s development.</p>	

Section 5: External Evaluation

Comments on External Evaluation Report

Dr Mark Goodwin's report was submitted in April 2013. It is a thoughtful and helpful reflection on the problems and opportunities our project has encountered. He makes the point, rightly, that it is hard to measure impact. We are pleased that Afghan Voice has been formed to follow up the Building Bridges work and that groups like Rotary are starting to become involved in awareness raising and direct support for Afghanistan. Our work will also be fed into the British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG) and through BAAG to NGOs operating in Afghanistan. We are in touch with the Secretary of State for International Development and met with her in December 2012.

ADVOCATES 2012

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