Assistance to Skilled Afghan Refugees

REALIZING NEW GOALS

A PROGRAM OF THE NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL

A STUDY PREPARED BY
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1991
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A PROGRAM FUNDED BY THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

1991
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*ASAR STAFF*

*APPENDICES*
INTRODUCTION

The Assistance to Skilled Afghan Refugees or ASAR is a self reliance program funded by the UNHCR, administered by the Norwegian Refugee Council and until 1989 co-implemented with the Austrian Relief Committee. The Program was begun in 1984 to provide tools and assistance to Afghan refugees living in refugee villages in Northern Pakistan. In total, close to 12,000 refugees, approximately 30% of whom are woman, have been assisted directly by the program. The indirect assistance this program provides to the beneficiary’s family members and the added trainees/employees they employ in their business, can be conservatively expanded by at least a factor of five.

A SKILLED BLACKSMITH--HE RECEIVED HIS TOOLS IN 1989 AS PART OF ASAR'S TOOLS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
In most refugee villages there usually exists a small bazaar and quite often a much larger local bazaar in a nearby Pakistani village. In each refugee village there are often several different ethnic groups from different parts of Afghanistan. The differences in ethnic backgrounds with their variety of traditional skills, give a good possibility for economic promotion within the village. In most refugee villages, therefore, skills exist to cover the basic needs of manufacturing, repair and service businesses.

A large percentage of refugee villages exist in remote areas. Unlike those near urban areas, they often have a limited cash flow, low availability of employment and limited facilities for marketing. By assisting skilled and experienced people to establish small businesses, such refugee villages become more self-reliant. The type of businesses that can be assisted include such trades as repair and production of household equipment, clothes and shoes, and includes many services such as barbers, mechanics and shops.

These micro-businesses are developed with ASAR tools, guidance and training. The ASAR program has supported 67 different skills from auto mechanics and blacksmiths to shoe repair and barbers. Apart from increasing the participant’s salary, the community's economic base has been broadened and the means to purchase other necessary goods such as food and raw materials has been increased for the future.
In addition, a further factor not easily quantifiable, is the impact this program has on the morale of the individual refugee. It increases their activity level, reducing idleness in a frustrating and often depressing living environment.

Beginning with the 1990 program, assistance has been expanded to include the most vulnerable and neediest members of a particular community identified as part of a survey process. The handicapped and vulnerable groups are now sole targets for this support. In addition to business start-up equipment and materials, extensive vocational training is provided for development of particular skills. Previously, only people with demonstratable skills in a particular trade were eligible for the program.

The ASAR program makes an initial survey of a refugee village to identify likely candidates for the program while assessing the community’s economy and the resultant level of assistance need.
For the skilled vulnerable and handicapped refugees that are identified, a competency test is given in their particular craft. Once accepted into the program, basic tools for their trade are distributed to the eligible participants.

Unskilled handicapped and vulnerable people are enrolled in three to four month long workshops in such trades as tailoring, cloth weaving or shoe making. Upon completion of the course, tools in their newly adopted trade are supplied.

Several months after receiving their tools and assistance, program participants are monitored to measure their progress. Monitors discuss with them any problems they may have in utilizing their skills in operating a successful business and whether further guidance, training or tools are required.

Approximately one year after acquiring assistance, a second monitoring is done to evaluate the total impact of the support. In the past, participants were evaluated at this juncture for eligibility in a Hire Purchase Scheme, with a repayment schedule established for projects requiring significant capital investment. Support for this aspect of the program has dwindled entirely.
"We try to use limited resources to reach vulnerable groups of people. Our emphasis is on life saving type of assistance. We use those resources rationally to give the best benefits for life saving purposes both in NWFP and Afghanistan. We do use as best we can, the implementing capacities of our implementation partners and it can't be said we do implementation activities as part of a dogma."

Margaret Sinclair
The UNHCR Program Manager for Income Generating Programs

The Assistance to Skilled Afghan Refugees (ASAR) has had as its basic overall goal to provide skilled refugees with tools and some support services to begin businesses. It is a small business assistance project in which beneficiaries find their own customers. ASAR is a mobile project that has travelled to many refugee areas of the NWFP (North-west Frontier Province). Giving skilled refugees tools, the goal of the program has been to encourage the formation or growth of a bazaar. It was hoped that this growth would further stimulate the purchasing transactions within the community rather than from the outside economy. An additional desire was for the community to benefit from these improved services including retail and repair services.

The program’s goals also took into account the restricted number of people that could be supported in a village because the volume of work is small and the purchasing power is limited. The program also assumed that outside food assistance and work in the local Pakistani labor market to support refugee cash needs would always be required by the majority of able bodied Afghan heads of households.

The program’s goals have also assumed that each recipient will not make a full livelihood from their trade. If the program’s intention had been the opposite, then "we should reduce beneficiaries greatly, increase the research into the feasibility of each business and increase the benefits," says UNHCR’s Margaret Sinclair. Ms. Sinclair says the ASAR project would have begun to change in that direction had it not been for the Geneva Accords. She says businesses would have been targeted for greater support including loans.

After the signing of the Geneva Accords and the pullout of Russian troops in Afghanistan, the scope and direction of the ASAR project was changed for the 1990 program. This shift in policy direction reflected the anticipated needs of repatriation. The possibility of refugees returning to their homeland compelled the UNHCR to re-examine the single criteria of assisting skilled
refugees only. The conclusion was made that vulnerable and disabled groups should be the only target for the limited assistance that is available. After the beneficiaries had been identified, training would be provided to them if needed. Skilled needy individuals would be tested as previous recipients had been and then provided with tools while unskilled people would be given apprenticeship training or formal course work schooling in a particular trade. The intention has always been to increase marginally the number of craftsmen in a bazaar without much loss to existing proprietors. Those extra craftsmen are now the vulnerable and disabled under the 1990 ASAR program.

There are several reasons for this change in policy. In most cases refugee villages have existed for six to eleven years. According to UNHCR's Margaret Sinclair, capital investments by the larger capital merchants in the refugee villages, including the Maliks, have slowed considerably to a level of very little activity, despite the existence of capital in the villages. She says, "the 1990 program is geared 100% to vulnerable refugees. The previous idea of stimulating the economy was not deemed appropriate any longer."

The rational for changing priorities as part of an anticipated repatriation process, is based on several reasons. The disabled have been especially targeted for assistance and they reflect an essential part of this changing strategy. This group is clearly vulnerable and in need of

A PAST BENEFICIARY OF ASAR MAKING FURNITURE & MATS FOR HIS CUSTOMERS.
support. In training and equipping the disabled to work in a trade, there is a higher degree of probability that this group will use their training and skills once they return to Afghanistan. For able-bodied men returning to Afghanistan, the options for work could be varied. Many will choose to return to farming, the occupation of most refugees before the war, while others may become laborers as the reconstruction of their country begins. The choice for the disabled man is severely limited, however, and there is a strong likelihood that he will indeed use his tools and skills to support his family when he no longer has rations. One must add that assumptions such as this can never be fully verified until after repatriation.

There is also strong similar reasons for helping vulnerable women. Women, in general, have received limited direct relief assistance. Vulnerable women, which mostly includes women heads of households, should be a high priority for self-reliance programs because of their clearly desperate needs. In addition, the money they earn is certainly spent on their most immediate needs including their children. As is the case with the disabled, it is not certain that women will be able to practice their skills in Afghanistan. However, given the limited possibilities to earn
money and the possibilities for bartering and trade with village and nomadic traders, these groups would appear to have a greater chance for continued use of their skills.

The changing concentration on the type of beneficiaries in the ASAR program has narrowed the focus of the skills that can be supported and provided with training. Apart from the past skills such as handicrafts that were supported under the previous program for skilled women, two projects; tree nurseries and later, sewing centers, were introduced beginning in 1988. These programs were instituted after a completion of a study investigating women's earning potentials. The study explored questions about how changes in the ASAR program or further kinds of assistance could improve women's lives as refugees. Projects such as these provide vulnerable women with benefits that are not purely related to income generation. While giving them a chance to learn a valuable new skill that can be transferred to their native Afghanistan and the ability to produce products that can benefit their community, programs like these can help women cope with depression that isolation and idleness bring in a restrictive world of refugee camp living.

The ASAR's program for men continues its Individual Case Program of identifying skilled individuals who are assisted with tools and in turn are expected to provide training for unskilled persons in their trade. The
difference of course with past beneficiaries is these men have been identified as being needy. Skills as diverse as bicycle repair, barbering, to stone masonry are possibilities for unskilled beneficiaries to learn in an apprentice setting lasting usually for three to four months. For disabled people, training centers in tailoring and shoe repair comprise the major efforts to aid this group. A trainer is recruited from the local community and is assisted with the design for a teaching course with the help of NRC staff. Graduates of the program usually finish in three to four months with a supply of equipment to begin their trade. Occasionally courses have been offered in Persian typing if a qualified number of recipients can be identified in a community. In some cases, disabled people are assisted with the establishment of grocery shops and other income generating possibilities.

In addition, the UNHCR is also sponsoring training in key skill areas such as health services, veterinary care and construction with other implementing partners. The NRC's Technical Training Center in Peshawar (TTCP) contributes to the repatriation skills training effort by offering courses such as auto and tractor repair. The TTCP program was started in 1983 and operated by the Austrian Relief Committee. The program offered training to hundreds of Afghans in technical
skills. In 1986 the operations of the center changed from training to production. In early 1989 the center's NRC staff began training Afghans in 3-6 month courses providing skills that can be transferred to Afghanistan. A sampling of the facilities offered by the center to its students include, in addition to the earlier mentioned vehicle maintenance; metal work, Persian typing, blacksmithing, carpentry, tinsmithing and tailoring amongst others.
REALIZING ASAR’S NEW GOALS

Beneficiaries in the past ASAR programs have shown that many make encouraging changes in their earning power over a one-year period. These recipients, during their second monitoring by ASAR staff, chronicle increases in their income by as much as seven times their previous wage. The average beneficiary reports an increase of three times their past income in most refugee camps. This indicates strongly that many skilled refugees participating in this program are able to obtain some level of self sufficiency from their skilled trade. Further careful monitoring of the program for the vulnerable will show if this group will fair as well in the program as beneficiaries have in the past.

It is understandable given the anticipation of repatriation to foster a program which aims to reach as many handicapped and vulnerable people that can be identified and feasibly trained. Concern should be given however to the possibility of lengthy delays for repatriation. Identifying and training as much as fifteen disabled beneficiaries in shoe making for one or perhaps two small refugee villages in close proximity to each other, without a commercial base locally, or an outside marketing plan to support them, is surely a
debatable point in any discussion of how a program like this should proceed. The ASAR program does strive to provide the economic base for its graduates to practice their newly learned skills when possible. However, there is evidence that this concern is a peripheral one and that in many cases receives little or no consideration when candidates and teacher have been selected for a course.

Another overall concern is that participants in the program will not have the chance to practice their trade, will forget some of their newly acquired skills and some percentage will elect to sell their equipment. Monitoring over the past several years has shown that skilled beneficiaries do not sell their tools but this may not be the case in some circumstances for a recently trained person attempting to market his skills in a skill glutted bazaar. Continued monitoring of these disabled beneficiaries in this new program will provide evidence if attention should be drawn further to these issues. These concerns should not be outweighed by the fact that the ASAR program provides a skill that is durable and gives a beneficiary some income for their family in most cases.
Since its beginning, the disabled program has focused almost entirely upon tailoring and shoemaking. It is unclear from interviews with NRC staff and UNHCR's Margaret Sinclair that other skilled trades have been explored for handicapped individuals. From a review of bazaar activities it would appear that other trades could and should be considered for the disabled beneficiary. (One NRC staff member suggested leather works or jewel making as possible examples.) Of course the usual considerations for product marketing should also be studied for both Pakistan and later in Afghanistan.
ASAR'S IDENTIFICATION, TRAINING AND MONITORING

IDENTIFICATION

Identification of program beneficiaries is the beginning cornerstone of ASAR's efforts to assist refugees. Past beneficiaries interviewed for this study unanimously expressed satisfaction with the successful identification of beneficiaries in their community. An added dimension to the 1990 ASAR program from earlier projects, has been the inclusion of the Social Welfare Cell of the Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees; a department of the Government of Pakistan (GOP). The Social Welfare Cell (SWC) has social workers who identify priority locations and recommend vulnerable people for NRC's assistance program. The changing priorities of ASAR and the added partnership with the SWC must bring increased scrutiny to this increasingly important aspect of the program.

Difficulties with communication between NRC and the SWC concerning timely identification of beneficiaries and meeting times has been a source of confusion since this partnership began. If the present relationships and understandings are to continue between the UNHCR and SWC regarding SWC's work with NRC then expanded cooperation between the groups must begin immediately. Non-variable meeting dates should be established (e.g. the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month). Meetings should be held two to three times per month and any cancellation should have an alternative date scheduled. A UNHCR representative should always be present at these meetings, at least for a period of 6 months and then periodically thereafter. This will give both parties a chance to coordinate their activities in a more methodical way. Minutes of these meetings should be taken.

The SWC should also establish timetables for completion of surveys and they must be established well ahead of NRC's plans to assist a refugee village. This schedule must be realistic and take into account inevitable delays SWC may encounter. If SWC has not reached a particular target date set by the proposed schedule, NRC and UNHCR should be notified so alternatives can be planned.

Consideration should also be given to a closer working relationship between NRC field staff and SWC staff at the tribal agency level. A plan for coordination of meetings between the groups should begin. These discussions will give the field level implementors a chance to familiarize each other with their separate difficulties, pass on knowledge of their field experience and alert management of their respective organizations to matters needing their attention.
The UNHCR does not pressure agencies such as NRC to work in any particular area nor is there any ideological focus on work in those areas, according to the UNHCR’s Margaret Sinclair. She says identification of needs is very difficult and sometimes requires a capable group to come forward and identify needy individuals to the project or SWC social workers. In most cases however, the NRC and SWC staff are able to identify needy refugees through mosques, the Malik and especially in the case of women, through contact with various families.

During the period of preparation for this report, the NRC was focusing their activities in the tribal agency of Kurram near the border with Afghanistan. In interviews with NRC staff members it was felt that consideration for assistance should next be turned to more urban areas both surrounding as well as in the city of Peshawar.

While income generation assistance has been given to urban areas in the earlier stages of the refugees arrival, there are valid reasons for a renewed concern for this refugee group. The ASAR’s shifting focus in priorities to the needy and disabled has special importance for these refugees. Apart from the unskilled but needy individuals excluded from the ASAR program in the Some will go to live in the few new arrival camps set aside for them, while a large proportion will
in Afghanistan has insured a steady supply of new arrivals who are ineligible for any kind of GOP assistance. The needy population in this group should be studied in the near future. The unregistered refugee must be a part of any criteria for determining a vulnerable refugee family.

Further cooperation should continue with agencies working in new arrival camps. NRC should work closely in cooperation with other NGO self-reliance programs in these rural camps and transfer their knowledge in identification, training classes and monitoring so NRC’s skills transfer efforts can be expanded significantly and then later duplicated by other NGOs to help this under-served population. The UNHCR should be notified by NRC of any future plans to work in any new areas.

A secondary consideration when identifying skilled needy beneficiaries and indeed all past participants, is the testing of their actual abilities in the trade they claim knowledge of. ASAR has assisted beneficiaries in close to seventy different skills. The NRC field staff report that testing for some skills are not completely adequate. The NRC should begin a process of re-evaluating some aspects of their testing in certain skill areas that increase the assurances for vulnerable beneficiaries possessing adequate skills for a working business using ASAR tools.
TRAINING

Training has become a key element in the ASAR program. Its success has a direct relationship to the quality of its trainers and their curriculum. Improving the training process is of course an on-going matter of continual refinement. More definitive proof of its adequacy and effectiveness will be known soon as second monitoring reports on the graduates of the programs become known:

An essential ingredient for the success of these training programs is the instructor. Finding as well as keeping quality trainers is a matter of real concern for the program. It is sometimes the case that beneficiaries have been selected to begin a course but a qualified instructor cannot be found to teach the course. This study has found one of the major reasons for this shortage to be a lack of financial incentives for teachers.

For the most part, trainers in ASAR's program are drawn from tradesmen active in the village bazaar. To teach a three to four month course, that instructor spends a significant amount of time away from their business. The present form of payment to instructors in tailoring and shoemaking is a new sewing machine. For tradesmen already working in these professions, it means receiving a piece of equipment they often already possess. The instructor, in most cases, is then interested in selling one of the tools to earn needed cash.
Future budgets should be planned with a fair cash compensation included for a skilled person's time in teaching a training course. The cash amount should be adequate to attract a significant interest on the part of potential instructors to teach a course. The salary for these trainers should be standardized to a daily or weekly schedule. Teachers should also be eligible to receive extra merit pay if their performance has been exemplary and it is determined that the majority of their graduates have exceeded the training standards of earlier courses in the same craft. In certain cases when a good trainer is available in a region but their commute distance is significantly far, NRC staff should have discretionary spending to subsidize some of the instructor's transportation costs. These same costs for trainees themselves should be subsidized if in certain instances extensive travelling is necessary for some beneficiaries.

Flexibility should be integral to all training courses. Efforts to mandate standard course lengths should be avoided if possible. Graduates should instead satisfy certain skill requirements. The length of time to achieve this skills transfer will vary according to the teaching competencies of the instructor and the skill being taught.
Numerous interviews with past beneficiaries have pointed to an endemic problem for many refugee traders to overcome. The skilled and unskilled beneficiaries should be provided with a mini-course in useful strategies for saving minimal amounts of money to replace worn out tools of their trade. Varied ideas for saving will exist for different refugees depending on circumstances. It's important for NRC to at least provide their beneficiaries with the knowledge of saving. A refugee can then choose how they will use that information. In addition, some beneficiaries assume the program is more than just a one-time assistance effort and expect worn out tools to be replaced by ASAR staff. Participants in future programs must be reminded of the limited nature of the program.

The ASAR program for women continues its training program, reaching the especially needy and vulnerable widowed female-headed families effectively as it can. The program, must always contend with rejection on the part of certain communities for its services. This presents the program with one of its greatest handicaps. As one NRC staff member commented, "We have no problems with markets. We have markets for every product we produce. Our difficulty is in getting permission of the community to work in a particular area". The reticent acceptance of
programs for women in a conservative Muslim culture has not hindered the progress ASAR has made in many refugee villages throughout the NWFP.

Many of the concerns mentioned earlier in regards to the men's program implementation exist similarly for the women's programs as well. More specific program considerations include the tree nursery project for women which continues its efforts to reduce deforestation and increase women's self-reliance. The program should be examined to see if any changes could be made that would help expand its mandate for reforestation. Women's knowledge of tree care information could be widened while at the same time increasing the kinds of trees that are grown in nurseries based upon the soil and weather conditions in different growing areas.

Another concern for NRC women staff members is the need for increasing the types of products which are produced in the women's tailoring program. At the moment shalwar kamizes, the national costume, are the exclusive form of workmanship made by the women. While markets are guaranteed for this labor, other tailoring lines may have market popularity close or equal to the making of shalwar kamiz.

**MONITORING**

The concluding part of the ASAR program gauges its overall effectiveness in assisting each individual beneficiary in achieving their goals.

The NRC staff interview each past participant in the program on two occasions. The first inquiry takes place several months after distribution of tools and the second monitoring follows one year later. Field staff are especially interested to learn from beneficiary's information on their business and how it has progressed since they received assistance as well as what problems they may have encountered along the way.

Documentation for these monitorings is noted on a form used for all beneficiaries. Several changes should be considered in the format of this form. Presently it uses a series of yes/no answers for much of the enquiry, with some space for general comments. Extra space should be added to these general comments section on beneficiaries. This will provide, when necessary, additional information that may be missed in the general questions section.

The monitoring forms should also include questions relating to the usefulness of tools for beneficiaries. It would be important information for ASAR to know which tools were practical and indeed used by most beneficiaries and which were not. The NRC field staff should also be consulted on current changes to be made on tool lists for certain skills used in distribution.
NRC field staff from both the men and women's program report the need for more additional time than what is presently allotted for monitoring activities. Investigation of this matter by NRC management is warranted.

ASAR STAFF

This study has found the ASAR staff to be very professional, hard working and strongly devoted to the welfare of refugees. Staff members have shown a commendable degree of dedication to every task they perform. ASAR staff praise each other for their work and honesty. Their morale appears to be quite high.

NRC management received praise for the staff development courses offered to them, especially the English language courses. They expressed an interest in more management courses, if it is possible.

The only major concern raised by both the women and men staff members concerned the lack of adequate transportation to their respective field sites. A study of this problem should be undertaken to see if any changes could be made in the use of the vehicle pool of the NRC. A future budgetary proposal that includes additional transportation should be considered if current inventories of vehicles prove to be inadequate.
CONCLUSION

The Assistance to Skilled Afghan Refugees (ASAR) program of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) deserves the continuing support of the international donor community. The program provides one of the most dynamic forms of assistance. Its durability gives refugees an empowering skill that continues to provide them with dignity and pride. Its a program that embodies the philosophy of self-reliance and discourages welfare dependency. Combined with the program's resilience and flexibility, it should serve as a world-wide model for UN and NGO income generating projects.

The ASAR program continues to provide an essential service to the Afghan refugee community. This study has highlighted some concerns to be rectified. It is hoped that its suggestions will be useful and be implemented in the spirit of fine tuning an already successful program as it enters a new phase in its important work.
Forty two past beneficiaries were interviewed for this study. They included 1987, 1988 and 1989 participants. The following are the locations where these refugees live or work.

1. Tando Camp Bazaar
2. Thall # 1 Bazaar
3. Arawali Bazaar
4. Satin #1 Bazaar
5. Enzeri Bazaar in Beghzaid Camp
6. Bagan Bazaar in Parachanar #2
7. Shin Dand Bazaar

The following NRC staff were interviewed for this study.

1. Gunnar Anderson - Director
2. Kabir Salimi - Assistant Project Director
3. Jamila - Field Officer - Women's Individual Case Program
4. Fariha - Coordinator - Sewing Center Program
5. Najia - Coordinator - Tree Nursery Program
6. Mansoor - Coordinator - Men's Individual Case Program
7. Amin - Coordinator
8. Sober - Coordinator

An extensive interview was conducted with Margaret Sinclair, UNHCR Program Manager for Income Generation Programs

An effort was made to reach Mr. Jehanzeb, Director of the Social Welfare Cell for the Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees. Repeated phone calls to his office were never returned. Two letters urging a meeting were never answered.

Tallied monitoring forms, contractual agreements, annual reports from 1987 to the present, as well as other NRC file items, were consulted for this study.
TAILORING STUDENTS
STUDENT SPINNING CLOTH
The last paragraph on page 15 and continuing on page 16 should read as follows.

"While income generation assistance has been given to urban areas in the earlier stages of the refugee's arrival in Pakistan, there are valid reasons for a renewed concern for this refugee group. The ASAR's shifting focus in priorities to the needy and disabled has special importance for these refugees. Apart from the unskilled but needy individuals excluded from the ASAR program in the past, the continued war in Afghanistan has insured a steady supply of new arrivals who are ineligible for any kind of GOP assistance. Some will go to live in the few arrival camps set aside for them, while a large proportion will choose to live with relatives living in or around the district of Peshawar. The needy population in this group should be studied in the near future. The un-registered refugee must be a part of any criteria for determining a vulnerable refugee family."