



Shelter Now America

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Jewellery making

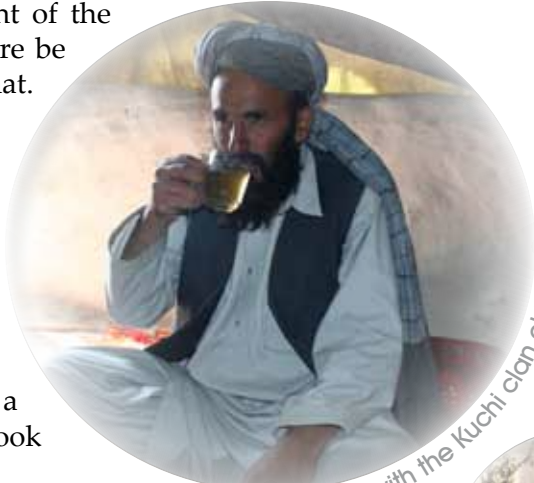


Saffron threads

Dear Friends and Partners of Shelter Now

As I write this report in Herat, in western Afghanistan, the news coming over the radio is that President Hamid Karzai did not get the necessary 50 percent of the ballots, and that a run-off vote will therefore be required. We hope that it will not come to that.

While here in Herat, I have been able to visit our projects in the city and the surrounding area, which you will be able to read more about in this update: there are vegetable and flower plantations, a saffron project, jewellery making and the Herat café.



Drinking tea with the Kuchi clan chief

I also sat and drank tea with the clan chief of a Kuchi tribe not far from Kabul and took a look at the sheep project there.

In Kabul, I was particularly looking forward to visiting our elementary school (see Shelter Report Summer 2009) to see how things are progressing there.



A slide for the school

Read more inside... and find out about some of the happier events happening in Afghanistan!

Best regards,



Herat café



SHELTER report

Kuchi and Saffron

Udo Stolte reports:

As I wait for my plane, which will take me from Herat to Kabul ready to return in a few days time to Germany, I find my mind filled with the many and colorful impressions from this trip. It's been impossible to process them all in the short three weeks that I've been here: my visit to a Kuchi nomad camp, our saffron fields out in the middle of the desert in Herat province, the Herat café with its harmonious mix of Asian and western influences, the beautiful flower and vegetable beds in our training center for returning refugees, the jewelry production, our elementary school and more. Let me tell you a little more...

I have written on a number of occasions about the fascinating Kuchi nomads. I sometimes find it interesting to observe developments over a longer period of time. So I decided to visit one of their summer camps. I was just in time as they were already packing up ready to leave for their winter camp in the southeast.

I was particularly interested in the sheep projects. For the past two years, we have been giving some of the clans microloans so that they can buy new sheep. They lost their previous herds before and during the Taliban period – mainly because of the devastating drought, but also as a result of landmines and the civil war.

A part of the new sheep herd is only an hour's drive from Kabul. I had barely reached the tents, when I was welcomed warmly by Sangeen, the head of the Senzee clan. He showed me the sheep. There were also a few goats. I've discovered that sheep herds in Afghanistan always include a small number of goats. That's because they allow the young lambs – including the ones rejected by their mothers – to suckle, meaning that none of the newborn animals go hungry. As I looked on, Sangeen milked one of them and gave the milk to his children.

Education for Kuchi Children

Bismillah, our Afghan worker, suddenly took some packages out of our jeep and carried them to one of the tents. It was only then that I realized that the tent is actually a school. Around 20 boys were sitting in the tent waiting for us to bring them their school materials: exercise books, pens and textbooks. These are things they don't have. In the past the Kuchis didn't have schooling or access to any form of education. Because of their nomadic lifestyle, they can't go to a state school. So we are now giving them an opportunity to break out of illiteracy. The boys receive two hours of lessons



A young Kuchi with fresh milk



Giving out the school materials



Saffron bulbs



Blossoming saffron



every day. The same applies to the girls, who have their lessons afterwards. There are currently 72 children in the program. We want to continue the schooling at the winter camp. But first we will need to help them build a simple mudbrick building and pay the teacher for another six months (80 euros/month).

Few organizations are working with the Kuchis. They live a semi-nomadic life and are generally considered wild and dangerous. But that has not been our

The Shelter Now Kuchi Project

This project involves giving microloans. These allow each recipient family to buy five ewes in Autumn, plus one ram shared between three families. They become pregnant that same autumn, the lambs are then born the following spring. The loans are paid back after 12 months, either by selling some of the sheep or sheep products. The money is then given to other families once again as a microloan.

In the first year, we gave loans to 50 families. In the second year we were able to give loans to another 40 families, and now in this third year 30 families have received loans. By 2012, all 950 families from these three clans will have sheep. The herds are in the meantime growing. After five years, each family has around 50 sheep and can live from them.

The interesting thing is that around half the Kuchi families do not want to pay back their loan in cash, preferring instead to give five ewes from their herd to a family in their clan. We have agreed to that arrangement and actually think it's a good idea.

A sheep committee, elected by the Kuchis themselves, has been set up to oversee the proceedings and ensure everything is done correctly and fairly.

Herat-Saffron



Dental clinic in Herat

experience. On the contrary they have found them to be extremely hospitable and hardworking. The loans which we give them are paid back on time. If you are interested in helping the Kuchis, please support our projects, quoting the project number 10652.

While in Herat, in addition to the jewellery production and the Herat café, I was particularly keen to visit our agricultural projects.

Ewald and Gudrun Göttler are teaching returning refugees how to grow fruit, flowers and vegetables to sell for a living. The blossoming roses were beautiful, but I was more interested in seeing the saffron fields. I am convinced that saffron could help replace a part of the opium production.

As is widely known, over 90 percent of the opium consumed worldwide comes originally from

Afghanistan. The Afghan army has tried

to solve the problem by destroying the poppy fields just before harvest time – but that hasn't served to discourage the farmers. Alternatives need to be created. We are trying to do exactly that through fruit – and saffron. Saffron is the most expensive spice in the world. The consumer price at times rivals the price of gold. The producer price is also extremely attractive for people in this part of the world. However the quality needs to be right. The conditions with regard to climate and soil are optimal. Our staff member Ewald Göttler is an expert in this area and is passing on his knowledge of saffron production to the Afghans.

One year ago, we began growing saffron. The first harvest was, as expected, not much to speak of. But I have been able to steal a few grams from Ewald to take back to Germany for selling.

As we stood in the saffron fields, I felt really excited. You couldn't see anything above ground yet. Two weeks previously, the fields were watered which serves to "awaken" the dormant saffron bulbs.

As I stood there, Ewald dug his spade into the ground and lifted out some of the earth. After shaking it a little, we could see clearly that the bulbs had begun to sprout. Some even had several shoots, these will all produce blossoms. And that's not all, the bulbs had grown considerably and many of them had already formed offsets - four, five, even six. That was more than we had expected. Everyone was delighted and we are all now hopeful of a good second harvest. Hopefully winter won't come early this year.

Unfortunately there's not enough space to talk about all the projects that I was able to visit this time. But the photos help to tell their story. Just a few words on our dental clinic: our staff member Dr. Azar Eyni did her training in Germany and worked as a dentist there for ten years. After overcoming many obstacles, she has now been able to set up a small dental clinic in Herat. Dr. Azar treats patients according to western standards

and is also training dentists. I was very impressed by the medical standards I witnessed there. We are particularly grateful to those who donated the dental chairs and to those who installed them.

Some projects (such as the dental clinic) we began because they were necessary, even though the financing available in some cases is only sufficient for a few months. In order to be able to continue these important projects, we urgently need more funds. (Dental clinic project no. 10615)



Thank you for your help!

On behalf of the men, women and children who benefit from our projects, I would like to sincerely thank all of you who support our work. We wish you a meaningful period of advent, a wonderful Christmas holiday and a blessed new year.

Best regards,
Udo Stolte and the Shelter team

Sadly I have just had some bad news which I would like to add here: our Afghan project manager in Kandahar has just come in and told me there are thousands of refugees living in Kandahar right now in appalling conditions. They fled the fighting between the Taliban and the coalition forces and they urgently need help. We plan to give them food so that they can survive the winter far away from their homes. We would greatly appreciate your donations to allow us to do this (Project no. 10613). For more information, see our website: www.shelter-now.org

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Flowerage of Herat

