

AFGHANISTAN SAMSORTYA
SURKHRUD COMMUNITY REFORESTATION PROJECT
2008-2009

MARIAM A. RAQIB
200 SWANTON STREET
#418
WINCHESTER, MA 01890
RAQIBM@YAHOO.COM
(617)319-3717

About Afghanistan Samsortya

The purpose of Afghanistan Samsortya (*samsortya* means revitalization, *revitalization of the environment*), a non-profit organization established in Boston, Massachusetts, is to develop and implement community development projects in Eastern Afghanistan that lead to an empowered and self sufficient community. Utilizing local labor and skills together with international expertise and resources, Afghanistan Samsortya aims to undertake projects in agro-forestry in order to introduce good quality seeds to the region and repopulate the deforested region with trees. An important emphasis of our people-centered organization is to generate awareness about the environment and the needs of the local community, training people to plant and take care of the trees, and providing them with the resources needed to accomplish this task. While working towards practical objectives, we aim to develop and provide the tools of empowerment to local community members and leaders who can create hope and inspiration and also work towards gaining practical objectives. Our philosophy is that it is important to plant trees and revive our natural environment, and that tree planting inspires many people to do more to help themselves and play a role in the economic and environmental health of their communities. In this sense they gain empowerment.

Background

Afghanistan was once known for abundant harvests of high quality fruit and nuts that were exported around the world. Previously, 90% of Afghan society was an agrarian society. At the base of the Hindu Kush Mountains lay hundreds of valleys nurturing prosperous farms, vineyards and forests. However, as a result of nearly three decades of war and political unrest, as well as drought, an estimated 60 to 80 percent of the forests and fruit orchards have been destroyed. The land is no longer able to successfully support the bountiful agriculture that once sustained 80% of Afghanistan in terms of food needs, accounted for 50% of the country's GDP, and made Afghanistan self sufficient in food production.

These conditions cause extensive human misery, and have devastating consequences for the country's economy and environment. For example, the country is left bereft of its indigenous natural resources. As a result, fuel derived from wood is scarce and very

costly, and the population relies heavily upon imported fruit and wood. This leads to dependency of the people in perpetuity upon the neighboring countries.

The above realities are harsh and finding viable solutions are time consuming and require extensive resources. Reviving the forests and orchards of the country on a national scale will require that the government assumes this responsibility. However, given the current challenges that the government faces, this important project is left neglected. And, although 80% of the population of Afghanistan lives in the rural regions of the country, only a small percentage of the billions of dollars in foreign aid that have been pledged for Afghanistan since 2001 have been directed to the rehabilitation of rural Afghanistan.

Afghans desperately need training, quality planting stock, and capital to invest in fertilizers, irrigation and tools. Afghanistan Samsortya and members of our community believe that only through investing in local skills can Afghanistan reverse dangerous trends and follow the path to sustainable rehabilitation of our environment. Afghans and the international community must work together to restore the country's longstanding tradition of cultivating trees to deliver food and income.

Activities

The Afghanistan Samsortya, in coordination with local communities in Eastern Afghanistan on the outskirts of Jalalabad City—Surkhrud District (See attached) have initiated a community reforestation project that would be implemented in their region.

Members of this community have recognized the challenges they must face, and have met on several occasions to explore possible solutions. These individuals are local farmers; landowners who have seen their land become barren through many years of misuse and neglect, local peasants, school teachers, and widows who own small parcels of land and would like to use this land for a purpose that would provide them with a livelihood. Through the development of this project, we have gained the attention and participation of a diverse set of individuals in our community, whose knowledge and expertise on farming is extremely valuable. This is a grassroots movement closely connected with the practical needs of the local population. The best development strategy is one which is considered legitimate and credible in the eyes of the population. What better way to achieve this legitimacy and the support of the local population than to form an organization that has emerged as a result of the discussions between local community elders and professionals. The synergy of the individuals and groups involved means that the projects of the Afghanistan Samsortya are operationally viable at the community level. The success of the community development projects will only be known through the organization's successful implementation of the first nursery. As local animators, this crucial community mobilization will have further repercussions in that the reforestation projects in Surkhrud district will serve as an excellent capacity building experience and will be replicated elsewhere in the country at the regional and sub-regional level.

Afghanistan Samsortya has been extremely grateful to receive strong support from the local community in Surkhrud. Individuals and groups from diverse sectors of society have been extremely forthcoming with offers of assistance and cooperation in furthering the objectives of this reforestation project. A strong network in the local community translates into resources, backing, and other types of help, both tangible and intangible, in order to facilitate the smooth advancement of the project. This assistance is extremely crucial in an environment where local support can often mean the difference between the success and failure of a project. Also, very importantly, local support carries with it security for the project and the individuals and property associated with it. This is extremely valuable and is an indication that the project is deemed to be legitimate in the eyes of local decision makers.

Virtually, everyone in this group has either farmed, or is knowledgeable about farming and we are confident that what we do not know, we can learn. We welcome acquiring additional knowledge of farming techniques and available technologies from visiting experts and printed material that can be studied and disseminated.

Through the support and generosity of the members of our community, Afghanistan Samsortya has acquired a four acre parcel of land for the purpose of establishing a tree nursery. We are anointing this community reforestation nursery as our first pilot project. We are also grateful for a donation of 5 kilograms of high quality tree seeds species from the Newforests Project. Unfortunately, as in other regions of Afghanistan, Surkhrud district's irrigation systems have been destroyed and in addition, many years of drought has rendered the land barren. It is important to us to have water for our nursery and later to water our saplings. It is therefore crucial that we construct a bore hole in order to support our community nursery.

Additionally, one time costs necessary for the successful implementation of this project include the purchase of a tractor and the construction of a modest building in which individuals employed can board.

In addition to the walled tree nursery, we have additional community land consisting of hundreds of acres that we may develop and utilize for future projects. This land consists of three types of soils, desert, land for farming purposes, and a mountainside. The mountains in Eastern Afghanistan are such that they can sustain large forests and orchards, and are capable of producing large quantities of wood and nuts, such as pistachios and walnuts. Through this reforestation project, we hope to utilize the resources at our disposal, including this land, to develop practical models that if successful, may inspire other development projects. It is our hope that the proliferation of future similar projects can potentially resolve our deep concerns with dependency upon others, and allow us to play an active role in resolving the significant challenges before us.

Very significantly, this project will provide employment to individuals who may otherwise either attempt immigration, or become involved in drugs and violence. On April 4, a container being used to transport 110 individuals to Iran was opened to find

that 46 of them had suffocated. Three of the individuals found dead were teenagers between the ages of 12 and 15. This act of desperation illustrates the lengths some individuals will go to and the risks they will take to escape a life of extreme poverty and disenfranchisement. What Afghanistan requires now is an investment in its most precious resource--its people-- so that they are not lost to immigration, poverty, crime, or violence. Providing individuals with a viable alternative means of a livelihood means they will have the opportunity to choose a life other than becoming involved with the drug trade, joining a militia, or using criminal or political violence.

Through these practical measures, we will realize our vision of working to improve our community and see this project and the use of our land as a laboratory where efforts that allow Afghans to become self sufficient are pursued and nurtured.

Conclusion

Without question, the best investment the government of Afghanistan and the foreign donors can make in Afghanistan is to direct their attentions and funds to agriculture and the forestry in Afghanistan and to rehabilitate the destroyed irrigation systems. This will put an end to the dangers of the Afghans' dependency on the international community and nurture a self sufficient and autonomous Afghanistan. These projects are particularly important in Ningrahar Province, because this region of the country is politically stable compared to other regions. Stability in this area should hold great strategic importance for the government in Kabul and the foreign military presence in Afghanistan because Ningrahar Province is geographically close to the volatile border of Pakistan.

In our community, we have abundant land and local skill. Our reforestation project is a community generated idea. We have established networks in community at the local level, the district level, and the provincial level. We must revitalize agro-forestry industry in our community so that refugees can return home. However, our challenges are many, and we lack the resources to bring these ideas to fruition. We therefore require international support and resources from organizations that support similar missions. Such support resources provides crucial elements that are lacking locally. There currently exists a heightened awareness of the requirements for environmental and economic development in our community. With the infusion of resources and commitment by Samsortya Afghanistan and contribution from international organizations, this awareness will lead to practical action.

Exhibit 1: Population and area by Province/District		
Province/District	Population	Sq Km
Ningrahar province	1,334,000	7,727
Surkhrud District	110,278	380

Exhibit 2: Map of Afghanistan and Ningrahar



The Afghanistan Samsortya
Three Year Program Funding Budget
July 1, 2009-June 30, 2012

OPERATING EXPENSES			
ONE-TIME COSTS			
Tractor ¹			8,500
Truck ²			10,000
Office Equipment/Furniture			2,800
Digging and preparation of irrigation wells (2)			14,000
Construction of living quarters for gardeners ³			10,000
Subtotal			27,300
RECURRING COSTS	JULY 1, 2009- JUNE 30, 2010	JULY 1, 2010- JUNE 30, 2011	JULY 1, 2011- JUNE 30, 2012
General			
Nursery	10,000	10,000	10,000
Office rent \$350/month	4,200	4,200	4,200
Office expense \$100/month	1,200	1,200	1,200
Soil testing ⁴	1,000	800	800
Transportation	1,600	1,600	1,600
Subtotal	\$25,800	\$25,600	\$25,600
Personnel			
Project Director \$250/ month	3,000	3,000	3,000
Project Coordinator \$200/ month	2,400	2,400	2,400
Gardners (2) \$100/month	2,400	2,400	2,400
Subtotal	\$7,800	\$7,800	\$7,800
Equipment/Material			
Farming implements and tools	1,000	1,000	1,000
Technical material ⁵	800	800	800
Subtotal	\$1,800	\$1,800	\$1,800
TOTAL (YR.)	\$35,400	\$35,200	\$35,200
GRAND TOTAL	\$133,100		

¹ This figure constitutes the estimated cost of a used tractor that can replace the use of oxen.

² This figure constitutes the estimated truck for transportation of personnel and material.

³ This figure includes labor, material, and construction cost of building a small one room structure.

⁴ This figure includes equipment and personnel costs of soil testing.

⁵ This figure includes photocopying and distribution of material.

