

## Developing Rural Education Quality in Bamyan, Afghanistan

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### **A two-sentence summary of the goals of your project**

The project was designed to promote education quality by reconstructing a war-torn classroom to establish a library at Ahangaran Elementary Public School, located in rural Bamyan Province of Afghanistan.

### **Did other fund-raising efforts contribute to your project? What were they?**

Despite trying to get other fund-raising efforts to contribute to the project, I was not successful in receiving any financial support for the project. However, I would like to take this opportunity and sincerely thank the Manager and owner of Peshgham Institute in Bamyan, Mr Asif Sultani and the volunteer teacher at Ahangaran Elementary Public School, Mr Ali Yasir for their consistent assistance to execute the project successfully.

### **How did you come up with the idea for your project?**

On my first visit to the Ahangaran Elementary School for my high school CAS (Creativity, Action, and Service) project, I did a basic reconstruction of seven war-torn classrooms and installed carpet. While implementing the first project, I noticed the severe need of people for educational resources such as a library. Therefore, I intended to equip the school with a mini library with the Davis Projects for Peace fund. After the cosmetic construction of the room for the library and installing new carpet, the library was stocked with 1800 books, eight bookshelves, two large reading tables, sixteen chairs, and a registration desk with one laptop. The project is designed to serve students from neighbouring schools in addition to 120 students, seven teachers, and five staff members of the Ahangaran Elementary Public school.

### **Why do you think the issue your project is responding to exists?**

Afghanistan is considered to have the lowest literacy rate among other countries in Central Asia. According to numerous international organizations and NGOs, a large number of Afghan children which could make up to 3.7 million of the population do not receive a formal education. Rural areas like Bamyan has been the most neglected places in Afghanistan to access quality education. The Bamyan province is located in central Afghanistan which is home to mainly Hazaras. Hazaras are a minority group that has been systematically discriminated against and are the victims of numerous massacres over the last centuries. The Ahanagran region in Bamyan and the Ahanagaran Elementary Public school are notable examples of neglect. Therefore, reaching out to the most neglected areas like Ahanagaran valley in Bamyan province and providing educational facilities in the region came up immensely important to me. I believe that the education of the young generation is the key factor for a sustainable future and peace in my country.

### **Why did you choose your host site to work in?**

I chose the Ahangaran school for this project based on my acquaintance with its environment and staff members. I had a wonderful experience of working with the people in the Ahanagran neighbourhood and executing my previous projects. Previously the students and community volunteers had assisted with the work and pledged to assist with the establishment of the library. In addition, Bamyan has been the safest province of Afghanistan for implementing such projects with minimum threats. Therefore, Bamyan has been the best place for implementing my CAS projects as well as the Davis Peace Project.

### **What was it like to work in your host site?**

Before I got to know that I have been qualified for receiving the funds for Davis Peace Project, I was pretty sure to work in the host site, Bamyan. However, over the weeks the security situation in

Afghanistan became quite concerning. After consulting with my family and friends on the ground as well as here in the United States of America, I decided to run and execute the project online. Although I used to doubt my decision of not working in the host site, the recent events in Afghanistan especially the fall of the entire country to the hands of the Taliban reassured me that I made the right choice of running the project online.

**Did you feel at any point that the project was not going to work? In what ways?**

The project was half done when the Taliban appeared to be taking over of few provinces in Afghanistan. It came as a serious concern to my attention as well as to my contacts in Afghanistan. After a few urgent online meetings, my team on the host site suggested speeding up the project pace. Understanding that rushing would put a negative impact on the quality of the project, we had no choice left. Although each of us in the team did our best to execute the project as soon as possible, we could not make to execute the project completely. A week before the deadline set for the project, Bamyán province fell to the hands of the Taliban and the project stopped. My connections in Bamyán made their way to Kabul to seek safety. We resumed the project after the government took back the province; however, it did not last long that the whole country fell to the hands of the Taliban. Therefore, we could not make to register the books in the database and have the opening ceremony for the library.

**What were the challenges you encountered in communicating with people?**

My prime connections for following up with the progress of the project were Mohammad Asif Sultani, the owner and manager of Peshgham Institute in Bamyán and Ali Yasir Rasuli, a volunteer teacher at Ahangaran school. While running the project, I did not encounter any significant challenges in communicating with my connections at the host site. My communication frequency and pace with my connections in Bamyán as well as Kabul remained dependent on the progress of the project.

**How do you define peace?**

For me as an Afghan who has grown up seeking asylum and witnessed war over the years in my country, I would define peace as a concept of having basic human rights; where one could access food, shelter, health, and education in the absence of war and violence. Based on the same concept, I intended to practice and develop peace among my community by establishing a library at Ahangaran Elementary Public School.

**How does or will your project contribute to peace? Short-term? Long-term?**

The library was built with the purpose of providing access to educational resources for the new generation of the Afghan community. Projects as such this in a short time would assist the students and faculties of Ahangaran Elementary Public School to empower themselves with knowledge. It will allow students to explore and learn topics that are not discussed and mentioned in the public schools' curriculum. Moreover, in the longer term the library will not only serve one batch of Ahangaran students but multiple batches of students over a couple of decades. Each student body who will learn and explore a concept and idea would not only be able to use the knowledge to serve his/her own purpose but to serve his/her entire community.

**Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has it changed you?**

The project allowed me to witness the low-quality education in Bamyán that could be a sample of hundreds of other regions in Afghanistan. Similarly, Afghanistan with its lowest rate of literacy in the region could represent most of the third world countries with the lack of access to education. While conducting the project, I reflected on the idea of how many schools could the Ahangaran Elementary Public School represent all around the world. Then, I used to think of how much work and investment needs to be done in order to assure quality education all over the world. Therefore, I will remain committed to play my part in improving the education quality in one of the third world countries.

**If you were able to implement your project remotely, speak to the highlights and challenges of**

**conducting a remote project.**

Due to the Covid, I had to implement the project remotely. Initially, it was difficult for me to find people in Afghanistan who would willing to help me accomplish my project. I had to get in contact with several of my friends and ask for their assistance. After I have found a couple of volunteers, I spent time to explain the concept of the project in details with them. I was immensely grateful for the volunteers who agreed to assist me with the project. Although, following up with them was another challenge since the internet connection in Bamyan is not very reliable, yet again the positive attitude and the contribution of the volunteer group has helped to expedite the process.

**Provide a one- to a two-sentence personal statement, suitable for use as a quotation, addressing how and why this project was valuable and what was the most important thing you learned as a result.**

“I have always been of the conviction that education is the core essence of developing a community and bring a sustainable future with peace. Knowledge is the right nutrition to the brains of a country for a better future and advocating for such a concept is immensely gratifying.” Ismatullah Musafir.

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