



FROK: UK Friends of Khwendo Kor

FROK

Reg charity no: 1095857

UK Friends of Khwendo Kor

Spring 2009

Report of FROK members visit to Khwendo Kor

The six months since our last Newsletter have been particularly stressful for Khwendo Kor, but KK is emerging stronger and with a renewed vision. This Newsletter aims to give members a sense of some of these challenges and also of the skill and courage with which KK has met them and the work it is continuing to do.

The newsletter outlines the response of FROK's Executive Committee to issues raised by Oxfam-Novib, a major donor, and reports the visits of FROK's representatives to the donors' meeting in Islamabad which followed and some examples they saw of KK's work.

We also give more information about the security situation and staff changes at KkK.

Security Situation

For the last two or three years, Bannu has been, along with Khyber, the Tribal Area in which KK has made the most progress, opening around 30 schools. Sadly, a member of the KK staff was kidnapped there last autumn. After 3 months his release was negotiated by the tribal leaders on condition that the Bannu Regional office was closed. Maryam wrote to us:

"Shakir visited the Peshawar office for the first time after his release. He told us horrible stories about his time of captiv-

Come to the FROK AGM on 11th July in Oxford where you can hear at first hand from Caroline, Elma and Ian about their time in Pakistan with Khwendo Kor

ity. He was kept in a dark room with tied hands and chained feet. They would not feed him daily. There were Afghans, Arabs and Wazirs, which Shakir could identify from their speaking as he couldn't see them....He saw big knives which they used to slaughter the so-called spies for US/NATO. He had a narrow escape from a snake in the cave."

The Bannu office staff have now moved to the Karak Regional Office, from which they continue to support work in the Tribal Areas. However, two Women's Learning Centres in Bannu funded by the J A Clark Trust have had to close. The ambulance funded by Pinner Church to provide health education and medical care in FATA, which had been planned to start operation in February, has also had to be moved and will now be serving the same number of villages in Karak as soon as the new arrangements are finalised.

Maryam Bibi herself has received many threats including "Brown Envelopes" with the message, "Here is the money for your shrouds if you do not stop perverting our women". Ibrash Pasha and the staff of the Dir



FROK members visit Khwendo Kor, April 2009

District Office have also been under daily threat. They had devised strategies such as varying their routes and routines, but, despite these, the military offensive in SWAT has finally forced them to move their offices to Mardan. Dir is sandwiched between the Afghan border and SWAT, where the current conflict between government troops and the Taliban is centred.

In January, Maryam had written, "Our schools unlike the government ones do not have buildings, they are run in spaces given by the community and therefore are not easily identified by the miscreants. In addition, when these people come to look for schools in the villages where our schools are, the parents and other community members deny their existence. We work in very low profile, do not travel in official vehicles and work through the community members. All this has helped in surviving and the girls are still getting education."

SEE BACK PAGE FOR KK'S WORK WITH DISPLACED PEOPLE

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Special points of interest:

- Security situation continues to be a major concern
- Donors renew their commitment to funding KK
- First hand accounts of KKs' ongoing work
- Notice of FROK AGM— see back page

SPREAD THE WORD— PASS THIS NEWSLETTER ON!



Khalid Usman, KK's new Director of Programmes outside KKHead Office

KK STAFF

Following Aneela's resignation because of her family's move abroad, KK has appointed Khalid Usman as Director of Programmes. Khalid worked for KK for many years, starting up the work in FATA as head of the Bannu office, before moving to work for VSO. We were delighted to hear that he had agreed to return to KK to replace Aneela.

It was of immense value that someone with such experience of KK's work and ethos was in position to conduct negotiations with the donors while KK adjusted to the new situation in which it must work.

The security situation has finally had a considerable impact on KK's work and major donors are now unwilling to send monitoring staff into FATA (the Tribal Areas) and NWFP. In addition, following a change of leadership, the Dutch charity Oxfam-Novib, KK's most important donor, has strengthened its emphasis on rights-based advocacy rather than service provision and demanded KK change its method of working if funding is to continue.

To discuss the implications of these developments, KK called a conference of its donors in Islamabad in March. **Ian and Elma Sinclair** attended the meeting as representatives of FROK, and **Caroline Pym**, also a FROK member, attended as representative of the J A

Recently, a Marketing Director, Nishat Babar, has been working from the Peshawar District Office to improve and market the products of women in some of the micro-enterprise schemes. We were very impressed by the new products which we saw on our visit and hope to work with Nishat and her assistant, Shehla, to develop outlets for them in the UK.

Caroline's visit to KK projects following the donors' meeting

After the donors' meeting, Caroline was able to spend an additional week in Peshawar visiting KK projects. The accounts here and continued on the back page are selected to show some aspects of KKs work which are perhaps less well known to FROK members:

Women's Learning Centres (WLCs):

With a grant from the J A Clark Trust, two WLCs

DONORS' MEETING IN ISLAMABAD

Clark Trust, which has worked alongside FROK from its earliest days. The outcome of this meeting was very positive for KK.

As soon as KK alerted us to Oxfam-Novib's demand that KK change the emphasis of its work from the provision of schools, health and micro-credit to rights advocacy, the FROK Committee became involved in discussion both between ourselves and also with KK staff, particularly Khalid Usman and Maryam. As a result, we submitted a paper for the Donors' Meeting, stating our belief that KK's work was already rights-based but that the particular nature of FATA and the NWFP meant that advocacy had to be integrated with service provision. KK works in a conflict area where government at any level is often ineffective and women can be in danger of their lives if they speak out. In these circumstances, Oxfam-

COME AND SEE SOME OF THE MICRO-ENTERPRISE CRAFT PRODUCTS ON DISPLAY AT THE FROK AGM

TELL US OF ANY POSSIBLE OUTLETS FOR THEM

Novib's insistence that people should be encouraged to demand their rights from government, however correct elsewhere, has to be adapted, and we believe that KK has developed a uniquely skilful way of doing this.

Ian, Elma and Caroline arrived in Islamabad in time to hold further discussions with the KK staff before the meeting. On arrival they were overwhelmed by the warmth of KK's welcome and hospitality ("garlanded with flowers, showered with rose petals, presented with bouquets and gifts"). They returned inspired by both the outstanding ability and courage of KK's staff and the appreciation expressed by other donors for the quality of its work. By the end of the conference, Oxfam-Novib had agreed to continue its funding at the current level for this year and probably at a reduced but substantial level for the following two, subject to some reorganisation by KK. We felt that Oxfam-Novib had gained a wider understanding of KK's work and hoped they had been impressed by the support from its other donors for its current methods. The whole process was ultimately positive in increasing the confidence of KK and its supporters that current difficulties will be overcome.

were started in 2008 in the district of Molagury and Landi Kotal, a mountainous, dry, arid area adjacent to the Khyber Pass, now the main supply route to British and US forces in Afghanistan. The literacy rate for women in the area is 4%. After the Talibanisation of the area, the security risks increased significantly

for the teachers at the WLCs. Visits of the KK Community Facilitators to supervise the WLCs were severely affected. In December, in a remote mountainous area, a facilitator returning from Molagury was caught in cross fire between the Taliban and FC forces for 30 minutes, putting her life in danger. (*contd on next page*)

KK's HOLISTIC VISION AND METHODS

Like the rest of the FROK Committee, Ian Sinclair found the discussions initiated by Oxfam-Novib had added to his understanding and appreciation of KK's work. Following his visit and the donors' meeting, he wrote,

"I feel that in the past I have not fully understood what KK was about. In essence I have seen it as meeting needs for education, health and micro-finance. Clearly it does these things. However, the key to its work now lies to my eyes in the way it sets up and

works through men's and women's village committees. These are intimately linked to service provision – for how can local people learn how to organize themselves or even wish to do so if they do not have something practical to work on? At the same time they add value to direct provision. For example, teachers are often absent from government schools, paid for work they do not do. KK's school committees prevent such abuses. And they are probably essential for KK's survival in the very difficult areas in which it works. All the warring factions in these areas – Taliban, ISI, army, maliks etc - need the support of local

Ian Sinclair reports.....

"I came to feel that KK's work was holistic and powerful enough to survive the tactical changes required by funding and security. It could also address problems with sustainability. In the most dangerous areas, the

task, for the moment, may be to keep the spark alive in village communities and to ensure that, even in the most difficult areas, some work continues as an example on which others may build when peace comes."

(WLCs) contd:

This situation affected the programme so it was shifted to a safer area in Khyber and a new WLC was set up in Jan 2009 at a village in the district of Jamrud (itself only 5 km from a recent suicide attack on the local mosque), teaching basic literacy, embroidery and fruit preservation.

Caroline writes:

"KK staff decided it was too much of a risk to take me to Jamrud, so 15 women

came to the Peshawar office. They were shy but gained in confidence. I asked what they liked best about the WLC. An immediate answer: "I have learned to use a cell phone, and when I first phoned my husband in Dubai [a migrant labourer] he was very surprised and he nearly shocked." So is teaching illiterate women to use mobiles Value for Money? They were very happy with the teacher and said there is a demand for more Cen-

people. It is not in their political interest to destroy the work of an organisation that has grassroots support.

"This grassroots support is also essential to another aspect of KK's work to which I have given too little attention – its role in advocacy. We came across numerous examples of this in our brief trip to Pakistan. Maryam had recently had a meeting with Richard Holbrooke, US 'policy coordinator for Afghanistan and Pakistan'; KK had, against opposition, played a crucial role in registering female candidates in the local elections; it had worked with the government to enable 4000 women to get identity cards and so be eligible for certain financial benefits; and it had enabled a change of policy on corporal punishment in some government schools. Maryam and Ibrash Pasha (Regional Director, Dir) appeared on national television, on the evening of the donors' meeting, to talk about the security situation in SWAT. In these ways, KK is a conduit for the feelings and views of local people, particularly women, both by enabling them to speak for themselves and also by representing them authoritatively to the powers that be".

tres. When asked about the Taliban, they said the known contact with the Taliban had left the village and security is good. The men are co-operative and the village headman is notified when visits are planned, and he advises on the security situation. The women did not want to be photographed, except from the back. "



Caroline Pym with the Women's Youth Forum, Pishtakhara Village

'We drove out of Peshawar to the village of Pishtakhara to a Young Women's Forum in one of the houses. There were about a dozen women, mostly literate, and some at college, a confident leader and 2 older women in attendance, one of whom is a local councillor. Nassim, the KK trainer, had visited all the homes to talk to the men before setting up a women's group. Now there are requests for the same from neighbouring villages' (see page 4).

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STOP PRESS

As a result of current military operations in SWAT and Dir, about 1.4 million people have migrated to camps at Mardan, Swat and Swabi district and numbers are increasing daily. Basic needs include food, clothes, kitchen items, counselling, medicines, books for children etc. Protection and security for women & children against trafficking and harrassment inside and outside the camps needs more attention as most are without their males. KK is planning to provide some basic services.

**ALL FINANCIAL DONATIONS
WELCOME**

A VILLAGE IN THE EARTHQUAKE AREA

FROK provided the initial funding for KK's work in the earthquake area in 2005. More recently Oxfam-Novib has also supported this programme. Caroline was taken to see some of the current work:

"A very long journey, 2 hours beyond Abbottabad to Mansehra, finally ascending the hills by a relentlessly twisty road. No remains of the devastation; the universal corrugated metal sheeting roofs of the rebuilt houses stand out as a reminder. The school was in a small partially walled barn with strips of metal sheeting crashing about in the wind. A demure but confident young teacher, about 20 children from 3 to 13 taught in 3 classes, boys of 8 able to read simple English and high quality writing books. The government school is several kilometres

away, and not so good I was told. Outside we met the Men's Group led by an English speaking soldier. He complained about the lack of services in the remote areas. I did my advocacy act, suggested they should lobby as a group. We moved on to the Women's Group. Faces were covered, but one or two were confident to speak. They were pleased with the micro-enterprise: a small grocery shop, and buffalos. On the way up we gingerly inspected one buffalo and calf, tethered in shit, emaciated and in need of foot trim. At the office, I asked about training for agricultural and animal health. They said it is provided, but not free. Back at the Regional Office, we were shown some high quality quilted bedspreads produced by the Women's Groups."

KK Youth Forums

At the Peshawar Regional Office, Caroline attended a Youth Forum for Men, funded by the British Council:

"I was expecting a group of teenagers, not so - they are a group of educated enthusiastic young men in their 20s. They meet monthly, discuss local issues of concern to them and international affairs. Their motto: Inform Inspire Involve. They were proud to have taken part in demonstrations against the confinement of the Chief Justice and lawyers, and are passionate about democracy. One bright young man asked about funds for promoting democracy - I am going to try the Democracy organisations here, and the EU. He comes from FATA (the Tribal Areas), has 2 sisters teaching there and 2 sisters at college. They finished with dancing."

"We drove out of Peshawar to the village of Pishtakhara to a Young Women's Forum in one of the houses (see photo on page 3). There were about a dozen women, mostly literate, and some at college, a confident leader and 2 older women in attendance, one of whom is a local councillor. Nassim, the KK trainer, had visited all the homes to talk to the men before setting up a women's group. Now there are requests for the same from neighbouring villages. I was garlanded on entry. I asked on what topics they wanted training. They said computers, English and reproductive health - a stage beyond embroidery! We discussed provision of computers and access for practice, and the village hiring an English teacher - they said they could not afford that. I did my bit of advocacy, told them to work together to pressure for help, and for free government agricultural advice when they told me all the buffalos on a neighbouring farm had died. The Forum is far behind the men in ability and confidence, but a budding vehicle for empowering women to demand improvements, reminiscent of the UK Women's Institutes!"

We drove back to Peshawar past the Fort Headquarters of the Frontier Corps through the dust, smog smog smog, thin horses and men, men, everywhere; a few women mostly wearing white burqas".

'The school was in a small partially walled barn with strips of metal sheeting crashing about in the wind. A demure but confident young teacher, about 20 children from 3 to 13.....'



Men's Youth Forum dancing

For details on how you can join FROK or make a donation, please visit our website—www.frok.org.uk—or contact the Membership Secretary, 50 Middlethorpe Grove, York YO24 1LD marilyn.crawshaw@btopenworld.com

A CAMP FOR DISPLACED PERSONS

KK took Caroline to see its work with IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) in a camp on the outskirts of Peshawar:

"The camp had been built for the Afghan refugees from the Russian occupation and mujahaddin insurrection. It is now being used for refugees from Bajour, the Tribal Area in the North where the Pakistan army has recently had a concentrated campaign to drive out the Taliban, and there was considerable destruction of villages. Here we met an educated Bajouri man who had been distributing hygiene kits which KK had obtained from a Swiss NGO. The dilapidated tents appeared to have had much previous use. We were ushered in to listen to a group of women with one voracious leader who did all the talking. They complained about the camp, were apprehensive that coming from the mountains, the summer heat of Peshawar would make them ill, the firewood supplied had too many thorns and the hygiene kits contained women's sanitary packs which they did not use. I asked about life in the village before the campaign. They said it was good, the Taliban came and made them wear burqas but provided madrassa schools for the girls and security for the village - the men are migrant workers - so they did not mind wearing burqas. Now their houses are destroyed and the farming at a standstill. I was told that they believe that it was the Americans who were fighting the Taliban. A milling band of ragged children had to be shooed off before we could be introduced to a few old men".

NOTICE

FROK

UK FRIENDS OF KHWENDO KOR ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

11th July 2009 at 2.30 p.m.

(‘Bring and Share’ lunch available from 1.30 p.m.)

Burford Lodge, Pegasus Grange, Whitehouse Road, Oxford OX1 4QE

Caroline Pym (Trustee of the J A Clark Trust and FROK member) and Ian and Elma Sinclair (FROK Committee) will talk about their visit to KK in March/April 2009, illustrated by Caroline's slides.

Please let Polly Griffith know if you are planning to attend, telling her know of any access or dietary needs or need for transport from York. **Map available on request**

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