Empowering the land-mine victims with mobility
Afghanistan
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This project was designed to rehabilitate disabled people in Afghanistan and to assist their integration into the community by implementing a training program that equips them with the skills needed to live an independent life. The Davis Foundation contributed most of the funds, but I also received extended help from my friends and others, including the Peter M. Goodrich Foundation and the Calhoun family, and in an email sent by one of my friends to a large list, many people donated individually.

Despite the difficulties that I encountered while implementing this project, the joy I felt and the happiness I observed towards the end of the project was much higher than the barriers could reach. But I would still like to point out the factor that contributed to some minor changes in the project. As we all know, security is deteriorating day by day in Afghanistan, and this poses a threat for implementing any projects in some parts of the country. The constant upheaval and rising civil unrest in the country is becoming a major problem for most humanitarian aid. Due to security reasons I had to add some creativity and flexibility to my project, in particular in my travel plans. I was not able to travel to one of the provinces that I initially had hoped to visit. Furthermore, the available funds were not enough to meet the excessive demand for tricycles among the target group. I began my project with a need assessment and need analysis of my target group. First, I travelled where I wanted to launch my project, reached out to the provincial council for the disabled, and had interviews with the land-mine victims and youth with predispositions. I was aiming to select people with an entrepreneurial attitude and those who could optimize this opportunity and thrive in the current market. But, after I conducted multiple interviews, (which was very valuable for my own understanding of the complexity and heterogeneity of the community) I gave the first priority to those who were responsible for feeding a family.

I had initially planned to buy new mobile carts (tricycles), but after a survey that I did in the market, I realized that buying spare bicycle parts and then assembling them is much more cost effective, not to mention efficient, than buying new ones already made in the market. In addition, I found this to be an organic process, which also provided a job for a local mechanic. I made 20 tricycles and distributed them in different provinces among twenty disabled people. The age of the beneficiaries of my project varied greatly. As I mentioned earlier, decades of war has widened the gap among Afghans; I put a lot of effort into using my project as a bridge to bring people from different tribes together. I wanted this to be a completely heterogeneous project, and I was very successful in recruiting people from different tribes.

I strongly believe that this is a very sustainable project; it is designed to be sustainable. These people will be working daily and generating income for their families, and if they break their tricycle, they will be able to make enough money to repair the bikes with that
income. This project reversed their disappointing situations and will help them to fight poverty and financial dependency on their families. This project has great future prospects; I say this because I witnessed the positive reaction from people, beneficiaries, anyone else involved in the project, and also the excessive demand for the project. I wished that I had had more funds so that I could have reached out to more people. Wherever I went to hand in the tricycles, I had one oft-repeated request from everyone: the Federation for the Disabled People, the families of the disabled, and the land-mine victims themselves. It was whether or not I could provide more tricycles for them. Furthermore, my project was aired on the Afghan National Television. This in itself set an example for other organizations to pay more attention towards the needs of the disabled people. I am very optimistic about the future of this project.

Section II

Peace, harmony, tranquillity; these are the words that are overly discussed in poor and instable countries, such as Afghanistan. I believe that everybody has his or her own definition of peace. For a hungry man, peace is when he finds something to eat; for a homeless man, peace is when he finds a shelter above his head; and for the war-torn people, is absence of conflict. But for me, peace is stability and prosperity in my country: where everyone is treated equally, given access to education, and many other opportunities. Peace is not something that one can impose upon people in a community. I find peace in myself when I contribute to the well being of a human, regardless of his or her beliefs and ideology. Peace to me is when I see a disabled person ride that tricycle and make a living for himself and his family. Land-mine victims are the result of turmoil in a country. Any attempt to help these people and to reintegrate them in to the society is a smaller peace that will develop into a greater peace.

This project has tremendously shaped my understanding of Afghanistan and of the world in various different ways. I had my initial interaction with these disabled people during the summer of 2009, when I was working for Counterpart International. I worked with the public outreach department to conduct awareness program for the disabled to educate them about government, democracy, election, and women’s rights. I was deeply touched by their awe-inspiring life stories, and ever since, I wanted to find a way to help them. They are mainly struggling with job insecurity, so this sustainable project will help them reintegrate into society and give them the feeling that they are no different than any other human being. Another very tangible achievement is that this project has given them the ability to compete with other people in the market, regain their confidence and financial security, and finally, at the end of the day bring a little food for their families.

This project helped me thoroughly understand that the power to bring change in a community, by bridging racial gaps, and by reintegration, lies within our grasp.