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 Afghanistan, Factor 19: Foreign Aid

Afghanistan: Together We Work Hand in Hand

Afghanistan is an unstable country. Each day the citizens face hunger, war, money issues, and multiple other things that cause it to be one of the poorest countries in the world. To the average American eye, we see no remorse for them due to the destruction they have caused within our own country. In my eyes, there are millions of innocents suffering because the rest of us can't quiet our voice of opinion. But do we really understand what they want or need?

Comparing Afghanistan to the United States shows a huge contrast by means of culture and ethnicity. We have to be able to interpret and understand the meaning behind the things they say and do before we can just expect them to want to change. Instead of looking towards the benefits of what could happen if we helped them, we choose to stand against them. It's as if we are afraid of the disease that we caused and are scared of our own doings. If we face what we have done, we could change other countries' opinions of the US. We would be the bigger person in the situation. All of us have total control of the outcome, whether it be wrong or right. What I am going to show you is that Afghanistan is in much need of help that the US is capable of giving. Not only that, but the US could benefit from some of the things that Afghanistan has to offer. Afghanistan may know a cure to something that we are not aware of, how to handle wounds caused by chemicals, or maybe they know how to produce food safer to maintain health. Maybe they don't, but if we don't take a chance and look at all the options available to us, then we are at fault for that; we need to start small, look at all sides and options available, plus it gives us time to fully grasp what we are dealing with.

This whole process could be entirely fair and beneficial if we get enough people to work hand in hand. If we come up with ideas on how to raise money for Afghanistan or use skills such as teaching to help them, every little thing would count, down to the last penny, no matter what the use of the last penny is, whether it's for food, school, or houses, maybe health, and of course, always a little bit of fun. Every day we Americans throw change on the ground because we don't want it, or we spend a little extra on things that don't even matter, the unnecessary things, whatever it may be, we are wasting something that is of value to someone else. What if that penny you threw could save a life? If you were able to donate a penny and look into a child's eyes knowing that you saved their life, would you? We have spent years at war causing distress for millions of people who don't deserve it. Let's take a look at their lives and compare them to ours. Do you see a difference? Are you willing to help now? I believe that it is time to put aside our differences and help Afghanistan.

Before we even begin the process of rebuilding a whole country from within, we have to understand their policy, their vocabulary, and how different their situation is compared to ours here in the United States. In 2014, a new policy on Individual Development Plans (IDPs) was written bringing hope back into many citizen's eyes. Their intentions were to implement the policy the way it was developed, with structure and cooperation from all aspects. It all began with the development of personalities, everyone in Afghanistan is full of fear and anxiety from war tension, we need people to become trustworthy and determined to fix things, especially women. "The main ideas of the new policy branch from the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, Roles and Responsibilities of Line Ministries and other Government Agencies, Guidelines to Provincial Governors for Developing Provincial Action Plans for Durable Solutions, Guidelines for Mitigating Harm and Suffering in Situation of Forced Excites drafted by Afghanistan Protection Cluster, and Housing Land and Property Task Force" (Williams, 2008). When trying to branch from all of those situations and stay within the boundaries of each, decisions can be

tough to make. Another thing that gets in the way is not being able to explain the terms and conditions to the Afghan people when they use other terminology on a daily basis; it would be like someone walking up to you and giving you directions in German and then expecting you to just do what they say. When we approach that way, we make it seem as though we want more power and control. Instead of people that want to help. For instance, instead of entering into a Mozarebat, or a partnership agreement in which some provide money and assets while others provide time and labor and in the end all profits are shared, we could find ourselves entering into a Zor Abad, or an informal settlement or a “place taken by force,” and that wouldn’t be good for either party involved. If we spend more time preparing ourselves for discussion with them, as well as their higher officials, we have a better chance of making a case and helping them out. We have to start small and work our way up.

When it comes to comparing Afghanistan lifestyle to the United States, the amount of difference is mind-blowing. The United States has a population of 321 million, which is almost ten times greater than Afghanistan's population of 32.5 million. If the United States can take care of millions of more people than Afghanistan why is it that Afghanistan can’t take care of their people? The average lifespan of an American is 79-80 years of age while in Afghanistan, you are lucky if you see 60 years of age. If you really think about that, some of us wouldn’t have grandparents right now. The most important people in their lives over there get taken from them just because of the country's instability. The United States has the highest standards of living in the world and Afghanistan is one of the worst. If we worked together we could end up with equal standards in both places. Just because we are better off or we think we have better values and livelihood, doesn’t mean that they don’t deserve a chance to better themselves. You are only as good as the people you surround yourself with, so Afghanistan citizens value multicultural and multiethnic food, people, and culture. They show people just what a good person deep inside is. Over here, we can’t even get over people being gay or a different color than us which shows just how certain situations make you appreciate what you have. They enjoy having people in their communities being involved. I, myself, being born in a small town, know that there is no greater feeling than having support from your community. They also value their privacy and safety, just like many of us do over here, making us not so different. The only thing that they value that really is different is Islamic food prohibitions, which means that meat can only be slaughtered according to Islamic law, as well as no alcohol, pork, or wild boar. Many of those things are a popular necessity of everyday life in the United States. We only focus on our surroundings, which doesn’t open our eyes to what else is out there, or what it could be like. We really lack the true definition of valuing something.

Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world. Forty- two percent of the people living in Afghanistan are in poverty, and the rest of them are very close to falling into poverty. The houses they live in tend to be large with numerous children and several generations living in one space. Afghanistan is poor due to lack of resources. They have little land, not enough precipitation, poor climate conditions, and are dealing with warfare almost everyday. Most of the population use agriculture as a resource to make money, be fed, and to take some stress away. Two-thirds of rural homes in Afghanistan have livestock, and farmers sell their labor in order to survive. Sad thing is, it isn’t of much use when you can’t produce enough to save everyone. Half of the country's children suffer from chronic malnutrition. The malnutrition not only comes from lack of products being produced, but from how or what the children are living off of. One million women in Afghanistan are widows, most of them having lost their husbands in war, leaving them to handle four or more kids all alone. This leaves “160,000 people displaced and most of the time the widows have to become beggars” (Rural Poverty). Think about that for awhile, let it all really sink in. Here in America, most of us are lucky enough to have a roof over our heads and food on the table. I’d say we have pretty decent homes normally with a comfortable 2-4 people in a house. We are constantly growing crops and relying on livestock as a main food source. I know that not everyone is lucky enough to have the brand new iPhone or get to go see the new movie coming out Friday, but most are certainly not fighting for their life like the people over there are. We do not have to deal with war all the time and most of us are very lucky to have what we have. If you

would've sent the \$500 you spent on that new iPhone over to Afghanistan so a mother could feed her children, wouldn't it have felt a whole lot better?

Each and every day of the week here in America kids go to school. If we can't afford to, we get assistance or work towards scholarships. We try our best to get an education so we can better ourselves for the future. In Afghanistan it isn't the same situation. "Ninety percent of women and 63% of men there do not even know how to read and write," the two simplest things that we have known how to do since our younger years (Rural Poverty). Women are afraid to travel too far to get an education because they have kids at home and they are aware of what they may be walking into. We have behavioral disordered kids here in the United States just willing to throw their education away and dropout when there are men and women all over Afghanistan wanting to take their spot. I am not opposed to developing a system where if kids do not want to go to school or if they are in legal trouble, they could be sent overseas for a month to see how they like it. This would allow the women have an opportunity at education and we would be bettering Americans at the same time. There would be a lot of background discussion and tons of people involved to create a system of that sort, but it is an option. We have to be willing to try just about anything and keep a very open mind. Having a man left in a household is very rare for them and if they do he is often times disabled. Nobody has a chance at education when they are living on crumbled ground. It's time that we help out. We need to change that sense of fear into determination and hope to create something better.

The one thing you need to stay alive is a beating heart, but when your health status is one of the worst in the world, the beat slows down a bit. Almost 2,000 babies die each year because of where they are delivered and not having enough people that know what they are doing. You see cases of TB and malaria on a normal basis, which may be deadly. Children are dying from acute and chronic malnutrition. Each and every day Afghanistan is trying to recover from decades of neglect. On the floor of a hospital in America you typically have a doctor and a nurse per 10-15 people. Over there they have 1 doctor and 1 nurse per 2,500-6,000 people depending on location and that's only if you are deemed severe enough to be seen. Only 30% of people are able to get their annual shots, such as your Tetanus, Diphtheria, and Pertussis. Their medical system is way underfunded, and they can't work towards making it better with the lack of funds. The amount of deaths per day is incredible and heart-wrenching at the same time. The practice of medicine is not an easy field of study and without a lot of them knowing the simple things like reading and writing, teaching and training them to become doctors would take years. If you have an opportunity to save a life, you do your best to do so. I think the long hours of training and working with them would be worth it. Everything has its beauty, but not everyone chooses to see it.

Now the best part of living in America is that we are capable of giving money up that we earn through agriculture. We have everything from corn and soybeans to cotton and hay, as well as cattle, pigs, and chickens; we pretty much have it all. America is about 50% farmland while Afghanistan is working with around 15%. Most of their land is used for livestock or drugs such as opium, making Afghanistan the second largest producer of opium. Livestock is as important as crops over there, but not as important as drugs apparently. They have been put in awful standings for years from war and instability. So many kids are dying, and at my age of 15 years, I could not imagine trying to fight for my life, and they shouldn't have to either. Where is the fun in a childhood? When do they get a chance to enjoy life? It all starts with us. We need to help them out, and this is how we are going to.

"The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) has already carried out research in South Afghanistan cities to explore realities of urban poverty and vulnerability. It was a research project that was tracked for a year and they realized that the investments in safe water supply sanitation and shelter programs are insufficient. Another issue that was noticed was the fact that the citizens right to their city is neglected by a malfunctioning planning system that fails to recognize the urgency in releasing sufficient land for legal occupation" (Beall & Schütte, 2006). I understand that their focus seemed to be economic

development, but that is not the only answer to their problems; we could also extend the thoughts into things like fair trade for products such as hides, wool, fruits, pistachios, and narcotics. There are little bumps and issues with each side of the situation, like making sure the products are being sent to the right places, as well as money, water supplies, and all the other things we are looking towards sending. It takes time and you have to get in contact with the higher officials to make sure it is okay and then work your way down so you have an affect on everybody. Here is a list of multiple people and groups that we can get in contact with: The Department for International Development (DFID), they could help us develop the best approach and get the notice out internationally; The Government of Afghanistan (GoA), one of our biggest contacts they are the only way in and the only way we can get help; The Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD), which would be the people that would help focus on smaller locations; National Development Framework (NDF), helps fix odds and ends to get it all put together; National Solidarity Programme (NSP), would help keep the country in good standings and are the people we would keep in contact with to make sure everything is going smoothly; and Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), puts the main focus on the people in order to make sure they are comfortable and thriving during and after the whole process. There is factual information already to work with as well as more to be found, we just need the right approach and the ability to talk to and get through to the right people.

To start the movement to help them, we are going to educate them and make it so they have a shot at developing into the people they have dreamt of being for awhile. We are looking at dealing with 8 million students and 5 million primary grade students. By working with the USAID, which is the Afghan government, we could improve millions of schools. We could start off with simple things, like improving the classroom setting and getting newer books and other materials. If you have a classroom and the materials along with the kids, the only thing left is the teachers. We could offer training so there is enough teachers for the millions of students we are going to be working with. USAID is already working with us on “The National Education Strategic Plan III (2014-2020) which gives the focus on increasing access to education and improving multiple subjects like General and Islamic Education Curriculum Development, Teacher Education and Science and Technology Education, Technical and Vocational Education, Literacy, and Education Management” (USAID, 2016). If kids are not ready to work with the curriculum yet we could start over with basics like reading and writing. The US could donate millions of books that we do not use anymore due to our change with many books being available online with all the technology available now. If we show them they are capable of much more than what their lives are like now, and give them a chance at a future, demand for higher education will improve. Once education improves and we have kids that are ready to further their educations, we could look towards helping universities. Each little step counts. A mission trip is also an option available for us. We have done mission trips through my church as well as my school and other organizations within the community and I feel that they have a great impact on people. A mission trip would allow the resources to get to the right people as well as giving the Afghan people a chance to learn from us. It may only be a week or two, but if they are recurrent trips and you keep in touch a lot can come from it. Distance shouldn't matter because at the end of the day, we are all under the same sky.

The next thing we need to focus on is the millions of people's health. One of their biggest issues is the lack of access to basic health services. As of right now, the US has begun to help them with some of these issues. Actually, “150,000 babies were delivered by certified doctors due to US Government assistance, but the assistance is slowly decreasing which isn't good for them” (USAID, *Health*, 2016). We need to start working towards meeting the health needs of Afghan people. Once we get them in good health, hopefully health behaviors will improve and they will have less of a reliance on drugs. I think that we could work with organizations like the Red Cross to give proper services and treatments for the people who need it. I am aware when it comes to health expenses nothing is ever inexpensive. I myself have dealt with a great amount of health issues in the past year. It takes a toll on you, your family, and your bank account. If we work with the health care system there and make agreements each of us would benefit from, we could be making great progress. By doing so, we would be addressing the long

term stability of the healthcare system. One of the programs we could work with is The Ministry of Public Health at national and subnational levels. With health expenses being one of the more expensive issues, we would have to be able to fund them. “If the US spent more on health expenses than they did on the military, we would have a better outcome” (Handerson, 2009). I’m not saying we need to weaken their military to give ourselves a better chance. I’m saying if we give the people in the military the chance to survive after being wounded, I’m sure many people over there would be grateful. It’s fathers and sons dying. While we know how much that hurts, they see it every day. Life should not be that way. Around my area we have doctors, dentists, and orthodontists that take a month off every year to travel overseas to help the kids over there. Getting involved in a program like that or creating a program with a team of doctors for that purpose could change the face of medicine.

Education and health are just a few of the issues Afghanistan needs help with. Due to the political stagnation with presidential elections there were serious setbacks with security development. In order to make up for the time lost they need help putting together a support mission. “They are trying to keep their country from becoming a “sanctuary for terror”. Afghanistan is struggling to improve capacity and showing signs of organization/ structural divisions. As of right now, they are working with Pakistan to improve relations so they can meet shared challenges” (Burakat & Smith, 2015). If the US gets involved, the situation may be beneficial for Afghanistan even more. According to Tarnoff, more than half of the US assistance that is already being sent over there is spent on training and equipment for Afghan forces. The rest of it went to the basic things you need to live, which in my eyes is more important for them right now. “All of the programs that I’m sure would be willing to work towards better days for Afghan people are The Department of Defense, The Agency for International Development, and The Department of State” (Tarnoff, 2010). Those are the sorts of people we have to get in contact with in order to get a movement going for better development and safety of the Afghan people. If we have to we could train police officers and more powerful officials to control things over there, maybe set a new course of laws with the USAID that both countries have to abide by so nobody runs into conflict.

The last issue I am going to address is agriculture. If we got together dishes, pots, or long trays that are capable of holding seeds and send them over we wouldn’t have to spend a cent. It could be based on donations. They could drop them off at certain locations and then they would be filled with healthy soil, a couple packets of seeds, and 2 milk jugs of water for them to use. Not only would it help them be able to feed kids and people within their community, they could see what actual farming is like when you have access to reliable resources. I know that we would have lots of people, especially kids involved in FFA, willing to help. Another thing that we could look into is the possibility of starting a test plot during a mission trip. If we find a small community that is in need of help with planting crops that would be great. The test plot would serve the purpose of showing Afghanistan citizens that they can grow crops better with the resources around them, such as manure. If we put 4 or 5 rows of crops planted with manure or fertilizer next to 4 or 5 rows of how they normally plant, we could show them how reliable some of those resources can be. It would also help them understand how other materials benefit their crop production. In the end you build a relationship with a group of people, and they are able to run an efficient test plot themselves. If we start off with little things like working towards helping them with livestock and the millions of products each animal could be transformed into, that would cover just about every issue they are dealing with, and it could be done with that simple penny.

In conclusion, in order to fulfill all the goals we have set, and all the dreams we have dreamt, we have to be willing to endure. “The US can reduce risk of terrorist organizations from finding safe haven in ungoverned spaces and planning attacks” (Olmstead, 2014). We need to “work towards building credibility even if it takes years” (Felbab-Brown, 2015). To make sure we are not going to go backwards, “the US needs to adopt a more strategic approach to providing assistance to Afghanistan” (Olmstead, 2014). In doing so we would all benefit from the situation. That one penny would mean so much more each time we looked at it. Everyone would realize what could be done to resolve situations. It seems like

such a big issue and can be so overwhelming trying to fix it, but in the end it is worth it. Not everyone makes the same choices in situations, we all think differently; that's why it is very important to work with multiple resources and put your ideas together to become one major power that can exert a positive influence on so many lives. Each and everyday counts. We set goals for ourselves, we work for what we want in life, and in this case, it is the same thing we are dealing with. I want to save lives, that is what I was put on the Earth to do, and if I died knowing that I did what I had always wanted to do my whole life, it would be worth it. Instead of spending time doing useless things or getting into trouble, I look for ways to better the situation. I actually plan to be in the Army when I get older, and I understand that many people may think it would be going against what I am talking about, but really it's not. You need to look at the bigger picture: not all the people are bad, and the good deserve to live, and I would be willing to give my life and time and dedication to ensure that everyone is viewed and treated as equals. I support that all the way. No one deserves to live their whole life in complete sadness, not knowing if they are going to survive one more day. It's time to give up that extra penny up. Maybe an extra dollar, it will not hurt you. You are safe and you have so much more than you need in life. Take that penny put it towards something useful and be able to wake up in the morning knowing you saved a life. It all starts with us or the US. It always seems impossible until it's done. We have to change our thoughts, and then we will change the world.

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