



Photo Sayed Aman Sadat

STORIES OF CHANGE IN AFGHANISTAN HEALTHCARE

FOREWORD

True healing extends beyond the curing of symptoms; it is the art of restoring a person's connection to their own vitality, bringing a sense of well-being, and helping them understand the reality of life. We honour the dignity of each individual and every human being whose life we serve.

This collection of compelling stories from Cordaid Afghanistan's health programme not only highlights the impact but also values the life, emotions, and feelings of each member of the communities we serve across Afghanistan.

They show the high demand for our health programme in remote, deprived communities, as well as the great work of health service provision and active contribution to sustainable impact. Each story reminds us of the individuals who benefit from the programme and have overcome stigma, as well as those who still need assistance.

The dedication and enthusiasm of our partners and staff, and the support of our donors, are indispensable, while community trust and resilience are at the forefront of our work.

Although the stories highlight the great interventions of the health programme that heals wounds, Afghanistan's invisible crisis with visible consequences still requires much work. They inspire us to continue our health programme and our humanitarian work.

I am very thankful to our donors for their continued support, which enables us to continue serving communities in need.

Sayed Latif Bashardost
Country Director, Cordaid Afghanistan



> Gholam, a humanitarian worker in an emergency health centre in Zinda Jan District, Herat, set up by the partners in the Dutch Relief Alliance.

CORDAID AFGHANISTAN'S HEALTH PROGRAMME

Afghanistan suffers from a mental health and psychosocial catastrophe that goes largely undiscussed. This crisis is fueled by prolonged displacement, poverty and massive quantities of returns from neighbouring countries.

Evidence from the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF) annual report 2025 highlights growing needs alongside declining funding, with persistent critical gaps in basic services including psychosocial support.

The country also faces critical and growing needs for physical rehabilitation services, driven by decades of conflict, landmine contamination, road traffic injuries, polio, and a fragile primary healthcare system.

Cordaid Afghanistan's healthcare, mental health & psychosocial support and physical rehabilitation programmes reached 357,443 people.

Estimates suggest that between 2–3 million people (around 6–8% of the population) live with significant disabilities requiring sustained rehabilitation; however, broader assessments using the Washington Group on Disability Statistics methodology indicate that up to 15–20% of Afghans experience functional difficulties or physical limitations in one form or another, reflecting a much wider rehabilitation need.

Despite this high burden, access to specialised rehabilitation services remains extremely limited, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas and has been further constrained by reductions in health funding and system capacity.

Women and girls with disabilities face disproportionate barriers due to mobility restrictions, sociocultural norms, and a shortage of female health professionals, making them significantly less likely to access services.

As highlighted by the International Committee of the Red Cross and other actors, without sustained investment in rehabilitation infrastructure, workforce development and expansion of community-based rehabilitation, unmet needs will continue to deepen poverty, dependency and social exclusion for persons with disabilities across Afghanistan.

Cordaid, under its Afghanistan health integrated programming through a consortium approach:

- Provides community-based mental health and psychosocial support services and physical rehabilitation through the Community Resilience Centres (CRCs):
- supports women and girls and vulnerable groups with tailored interventions;
- responds to the needs of returnees and host communities; strengthens local capacity to deliver mental health and
- psychosocial support and physical rehabilitation services.



> Sayed Omar Shah Pacha receives counselling at the community resilience centre in Bar Mirano village.

PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

The story of Sayed Omar Shah Pacha

54-year-old Sayed Omar Shah Pacha from Bar Mirano village in Nangarhar province was experiencing severe sadness and psychosocial distress. He was no longer able to share his problems with those around him. He felt hopeless, his relationships suffered, and he lost confidence in himself.

A sense of hope sparked when one of his friends, who had previously received mental health support, encouraged him to visit a Community Resilience Centre and speak with the practitioner.

'I believe mental health services are crucial in our area. It's a dire need. These are very important and essential services, and we are fortunate to have them available in our own community.'

Sayed Omar Shah Pacha

After his first visit to the centre, he was impressed by the doctor's warm welcome and the safe, respectful environment, which helped him speak openly about his concerns. They prepared a practical support plan with agreed goals for his recovery. Many sessions followed, covering family and social relationships, relaxation and stress-reduction exercises, deep breathing and positive thinking, and eye relaxation exercises.

Sayed Omar Shah Pacha became hopeful again, more confident, and better able to manage stress in his daily life. He regained his ability to communicate and rebuild relationships. Based on his positive progress, he was successfully discharged from the counselling service.



Photo Cordaid

> Hasina receives counselling in a community resilience centre in Zor Shashkhel village.

PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

Hasina's story

Hasina, an 18-year-old resident of Zor Shashkhel village of Batikot district of Nangarhar province, was experiencing severe psychological distress for eight consecutive months after the deportation to Afghanistan, and before seeking support from the Community Resilience Centre. She was coping with insomnia and feelings of hopelessness that significantly affected her daily life and well-being.

Although she had consulted a neurologist and received medication for temporary relief, after a short period, her symptoms returned.

Hasina learned about the centre through a community awareness session conducted by the Humanitarian Assistance and Development Association for Afghanistan. She received a referral slip and decided to attend counselling.

In her first session, she could hardly talk because of the grief. Only two days after she had lost her mother, she was forcibly returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan.

Hasina's forced displacement put her in great uncertainty; no home, limited educational opportunities for girls, and financial hardship severely affected her mental health and well-being. Community doctors provided Hasina with a comfortable, safe space to discuss her experiences and emotions.

The doctor helped her understand the connection between her life experiences and her psychological symptoms. Hasina adopted practical coping strategies: she engaged in physical

"My family and I were forcibly returned from Pakistan just two days after my mom's death"

Hasina

activity, maintained a healthy sleep routine, and ate balanced meals, and she was happy to share her feelings with trusted family members.

Hasina demonstrated significant improvement after attending four consecutive counselling sessions. She learned about stress management, relaxation techniques, deep breathing exercises, emotional regulation, positive thinking, strengthening social support, and developing healthy coping mechanisms.

Steady Hasina reported feeling noticeably calmer and more hopeful about her future.

Hasina says, 'I know all humans experience grief and sorrow at some point in their lives, and by God's grace, they can share their feelings with others. The doctors are angels. They listen and heal. Now, I can continue with my life.'

Her journey illustrates that accessible, client-centred mental health services, combined with professional guidance and an individual's commitment to recovery, can significantly improve psychological well-being and quality of life.



> Rohanullah receiving physiotherapy because of knee stiffness in Daga village.

PHYSICAL REHABILITATION

Rohanulla' s story

18-year-old Rohanullah from Daga village of Batikot district, Nangarhar province, was suffering from knee stiffness which limited his ability to walk properly and perform important daily activities.

As part of community health assessment activities, he was identified by health workers as being in a vulnerable position and referred to the rehabilitation centre for physiotherapy assessment and treatment.

After evaluation by the physiotherapy team, a rehabilitation plan was developed according to his condition. Rohanullah was receiving regular sessions for knee mobility and strengthening exercises, range-of-motion and stretching techniques, accompanied by a series of training sessions in pain management and functional mobility, counselling, and continued monitoring of rehabilitation progress for several consecutive weeks.

Gradually, Rohanullah showed significant improvement in knee movement and walking ability. Pain and stiffness were reduced, and he became more independent. He was able to walk with better balance and participate more actively in family and community life.

Rohanullah: 'I am feeling well. Before treatment, as you witnessed, I could not move easily because of knee stiffness, but now you see, I can walk better and do my daily activities independently.'

Like Rohanullah, many people in similar vulnerable positions receive daily physical rehabilitation and psychosocial support services within their communities through the Community Rehabilitation Centres. And it's a testament to strong partnerships in the communities that Cordaid Afghanistan has already invested in through the No Peace Without Peace of Mind project. The project is implemented by the Humanitarian Assistance and Development Association for Afghanistan and the Rehabilitation Centre of Youth.

"I am feeling well. Before treatment, as you witnessed, I could not move easily because of knee stiffness, but now you see, I can walk better and do my daily activities independently."

Rohanullah



Photo Cordaid

> Rohanullah receiving physiotherapy because of knee stiffness in Daga village.

PHYSICAL REHABILITATION

Palwasha's story

23-year-old Palwasha, a resident of Inaam Band village from Goshta district of Nangahar province, was suffering from persistent low back pain. The pain caused her great discomfort while sitting, standing, and walking. It also affected the quality of her life and her independence.

Through a community outreach initiative, Palwasha was referred to the local community resilience centre for proper screening and treatment. After a rigorous assessment by community doctors, she received cycles of physiotherapy under Reema's supervision. She was using pain management techniques, therapeutic exercises to strengthen back muscles, posture correction training, education on proper body movements and regular follow-up sessions to improve Palwasha's health condition.

Luckily, Palwasha showed significant improvement; her pain decreased, and she was able to participate in daily activities comfortably. She steadily returned to her normal routine.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This booklet features stories that reflect the strength and resilience of the individuals, families and communities we work for. It is a testament to successful local partnerships that drive positive changes in these communities.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to those who were willing to share their experiences, challenges, and the impact the programme had on their lives.

Cordaid Afghanistan acknowledges the hard work of the field team and implementing partners, who work tirelessly to deliver assistance to people in need.

We also wish to express our heartfelt appreciation to our donors for their continued support. Their generous contributions enable us to reach people in difficult circumstances and provide life-changing and timely services.



> Rona is a health worker in a clinic set up by members of the Dutch Relief Alliance to support women and children affected by the earthquake in Zinda Jan District, Herat.

ABOUT CORDAID

Cordaid Afghanistan remains committed to providing humanitarian assistance and fostering long-term recovery in Afghanistan, focusing on creating inclusive, sustainable solutions that uplift all members of society.

Cordaid Afghanistan also has a strong commitment to the localization agenda. Moving away from a traditional project-based partnership mindset toward a real culture of strategic partnership with the local partners.

Cordaid Afghanistan create long-term alliance where we share both the risks and the rewards. It's about more than just technical cooperation - it's about creating lasting change and social impact that simply couldn't achieve on our own.

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