

OUTLINE CONCEPT PAPER THE VIABLE VILLAGE

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1. Introduction

This concept paper outlines a holistic, geographical approach to the work of the NGO Khwendo Kor (KK). Khwendo Kor's vision is of a compassionate society where women live with dignity and self-reliance. This vision can only be realised if it is accepted in the settings where people live and by men as well by women. The paper gives in broad outline the approach whereby KK will seek to bring this about.

The approach is particularly adapted to the dangerous area in which KK works. The intention is that it should eventually underpin all KK's work and allow easier collaboration with other NGOs with complementary expertise. It should also make KK's work more sustainable, better co-ordinated, more cost effective and easier to replicate on a wide scale.

It is important to mention here that this paper is not a proposal. It provides a basis for discussion with funders who might finance a pilot or full programme based upon the approach. Funders who are considering this may also wish to look at the profile of KK itself which is attached.

2. Background

Khwendo Kor works in the conservative, deprived, and dangerous rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA (the Federally Administered Tribal Areas bordering Afghanistan). In this region, NGOs are deeply distrusted and commonly seen as disseminating a degenerate Western culture.

The most difficult part of development work in such areas is gaining access to local people (particularly women) and establishing the trust which will allow the work to begin. It is wasteful and potentially counter-productive to then use such access and trust to deliver only one type of aid and the costs of monitoring, accounting and reporting can be disproportionately high. Most importantly, such piecemeal aid does not educate the villagers in how to sustain their own development when the project money ceases or security concerns interrupt the flow of aid.

Over time Khwendo Kor has developed ways of gaining such access, reducing distrust and building on local people's deep desire for a better life. This requires an ability to negotiate with villagers on an agenda for development which they support and help to form. So work sometimes begins with the provision of medical camps or relief work after a (man-made or natural) disaster, which are generally valued, opening the way for more controversial forms of aid such as schools for girls. Girls' education is known to be a crucial factor in successful development and one of Khwendo Kor's more striking achievements has been the opening of girls' schools in an area hitherto as fundamentally opposed to them as FATA.

This careful approach reduces the risk to development workers, since the Taliban are less likely to attack those NGOs who are locally popular and local people are able to warn the NGO of current dangers. It is also more sustainable, since the involvement

of local people in monitoring and providing (say schools) makes it easier for these to carry on when aid is withdrawn or work has to cease temporarily because of military activity.

Given that funding for such work is typically found from outside, the goals, timespan and geographical area for projects often have to be agreed in advance with donors rather than negotiated with local people. Additionally, donors who wish to provide (say) education are reluctant to pay for the painstaking work needed to introduce it. KK's work, like that of most agencies on the ground, has so far has been funded mainly by large international agencies who determine what type of intervention (e.g. education or health) they will fund in which geographical area. In such a desperately poor region, each village needs many kinds of help, but KK report that education may be offered to one group of villages, health care to a different area and micro-credit to a third – each requiring separate accounting, reporting, training and monitoring visits.

KK has come to believe that this 'donor driven' approach is not appropriate in areas where the survival and success of projects depends crucially on the partnership formed with local people. It is therefore seeking a partner or partners who are interested in developing a more holistic and sustainable approach and funding it over the longer term.

3. Objectives of the approach

A programme based on KK's methods will target an agreed proportion of villages over an agreed geographic area. It will aim to make these villages 'viable', so that they have access to rudimentary services and become able to develop these further on their own. A complementary aim is to lay the ground for widespread development of the approach, which will spread 'virally' as nearby villages demand it and through work with politicians and government.

These aims reinforce each other. Work within the villages on practical and valued services with priorities determined by discussion between KK and the villagers themselves reduces distrust, gives confidence and valuable experience to the villagers, provides models which other villages wish to copy and identifies issues that need to be tackled at a wider policy level. Work with politicians and government builds on this success, and enables it to be sustained and to spread.

In order to bring all this about KK will negotiate entry to these villages and work with local people to

- Form local village groups which can identify needs for development and help with staff recruitment, monitoring and supervision – in some areas it will be possible for these groups to mix men and women, but in others it is necessary to form different groups with special objectives but in all areas the participation of women is essential
- Set up a minimum of basic services in each village (maternity services, education, including education for women, micro-credit or village banking, again with priority given to women and disaster management plans which are sensitive to women's needs)
- Increase local voter registration and help local people to use their political voice in order to sustain these services after Khwendo Kor withdraws (and here again the priority is to reach women who are traditionally grossly under-represented in these areas)

- Show them how to access other NGOs or government agencies for developing services (e.g. road building) which do not fall within Khwendo Kor's area of expertise (these initiatives will benefit all and is useful in getting all committed to the work)
- Provide examples of successful practice which appeal to nearby villages and which lead to demands for similar work there (for unless this vision appeals and spreads, the impact of the work will remain restricted)
- Work with politicians and the line departments of local government in order to ensure that they become more receptive to local demands (an essential for ensuring that the work is not short-lived and limited to a particular area).

4. Stages in the approach

The programme will move through a series of overlapping stages which variously relate to gaining access, implementing the programme and widening its scope and scale. In more detail it involves:

- *Selecting a geographical area.* This will be done in collaboration with the funder(s) and will take account of need, absence of other NGOs working from a women's point of view, access to a local Khwendo Kor office, and absence of large scale current military operations
- *Selecting villages within this area.* An agreed number of villages will be selected for initial work. Again, criteria will include need (lack of functioning schools and maternity health care), accessibility (careful work is needed to identify those with key influence in the village and gain their initial consent) and enthusiasm (the commitment of both men and women to the project)
- *Agreeing an agenda for change with the local people.* Participative rural appraisal or similar techniques will be used and will identify those things with which Khwendo Kor itself will be able to help and those which require the involvement of Government and other NGOs
- *Setting up these services on the KK model.* This will involve establishing local men's and women's or joint groups to steer and monitor the project, working with them to identify and select local people who are able to act as teachers, traditional birth attendants, or entrepreneurs using microcredit, and training them to perform this role, while the local committees will provide oversight of day to day performance (e.g. ensuring that the teachers attend and looking after the building) and professional monitoring will be provided by KK
- *Helping local people to contact government departments and NGOs able to provide those services which KK cannot.* As KK knows about various NGOs and government departments who provide specific services and have good terms with them; therefore it is easy for KK to help the local community to do networking with the relevant service providers.
- *Working to provide the political support that is needed to ensure long term sustainability,* while simultaneously seeking to ensure that plans exist for the survival of services after KK moves on. This is likely to include detailed agreements with line departments of the local authority, ensuring that all training meets government standards and ensuring that very small financial contributions from local people provide a reserve fund for future use
- *Working to increase voter registration* in the villages, particularly among women, and to help them use their potential political influence constructively (e.g. to ensure the maintenance of services)
- *Inclusion of women in decision making forums at grass root level.* Most of the

decisions in the villages (especially in FATA) are taken by the informal structures/ decision making forums (Jirga or Shura etc) which are always gender blind. The formation of women organizations (WO) is one of the intervention which contribute to the involvement of women in decision making forums.

- *Responding to a 'second wave' of requests for assistance* from other villages attracted by the success of developments in KK villages
- *Reinforcing and widening this process by publicity and by work at a political level on the issues that arise.*

5. Monitoring and Evaluating the Approach

The measures needed to assess the approach follow from its aims and way of work. It requires:

- *Interim process measures:* number of villages actively engaged in the project, evidence of increased contacts between the villages and other NGOs, government departments and politicians
- *Service process outcomes:* quantitative evidence of the use of new services introduced by the project and qualitative evidence of their quality
- *Village outcomes:* by the end of an agreed period each of the participating villages should have made significant and measurable progress towards accessing a set of specified services and show evidence of effective locally based groups taking responsibility for supervising and furthering the village's development
- *Programme outcomes:* evidence of widening demand for development of this kind and that official policy is adapting to promote this.

Details of the way in which these measures would be collected would be agreed with the donor(s) as would the nature of the evidence required (e.g. to establish that a local group was 'active').

6. Conclusion

As KK has worked in these areas over two decades following the same type of approach therefore KK has become convinced that this approach is logical, will yield sustainable, cost-effective, holistic development and can be scaled up to cover wider and wider areas. Its experience in establishing schools and maternity services and developing micro-credit schemes suggest that it depends on:

- A deep if sometimes latent desire on the part of local people for development (in KK's experience this is certainly there in the areas in which it works)
- An organisation with the image, values and experience to implement it (in this area, this requires a base in Islam, a non-partisan approach that is accepted as neutral by all sides, and a high proportion of local staff)
- Enough backing from local people and influential activists to enable effective political lobbying
- A funder or funders who understand the approach, along with its risks, potential and timescale and are willing to work with KK to develop it, pilot it and implement it on a wide scale.

KK believes that all the conditions are in place except the last. It is now seeking a

funder or funders who will work with it and finance a pilot project with a view to longer term and much wider scale development.