

ANBP SUCCESS STORIES: FOCUS ON PEACE and DEVELOPMENT

DIAG Success Story: Ali Abad district of Kunduz, North-eastern Region

“My Jihad is for Peace and Education for All in Afghanistan”

By Fahim Hamdard

Ali Abad is one of six districts of Kunduz, and is located in the south of the province 20 kilometers from the provincial capital. For years the district was mired in insecurity and low human development indicators. Ali Abad was identified as one of the districts from the north-eastern region for implementing the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) project.

Former commanders from the district who displayed courage and foresight in handing over their weapons to DIAG are today involved in productive activities. Mohamad Haikal has emerged as a positive force for peace and development efforts in the district. We caught up with the former commander at his farm:

“My name is Mohamad Haikal, son of Haji Shah Qul. I am 45 years old and I was born in Lala Maidan village of Ali Abad. I was affiliated to the Hezb-e-Islami and led more than 300 armed men during *Jihad* against the Russian troops”.



Haikal has come a long way from the days of *Jihad*. He is now a full-time farmer. On his 30-acre agriculture land he grows wheat, rice and other vegetables. He is also the head of the district’s National Solidarity Programme (NSP) council and in this role he guides development priorities of his district.

Haikal was a grade nine student when the Russian troops entered Afghanistan. This event caused the security situation to change overnight. Haikal dropped out of school to defend his country. He passed through difficult times fighting against the Russian troops and lost many of his troops in the *Jihad*, he said.

Mohamad Haikal is the father of nine daughters and three sons from his two wives. Four of his children are in school.

“Once the fighting ended, I disbanded my group and handed over my weapons to DIAG. Somehow I realized that the time had come to re-build our country and I wanted to play a role in it. I was determined to bring peace, development and education to my district”, says Haikal. “I have to fight another *Jihad* and this time it is to ensure that my children go to school and university so that they could lead our war-affected country towards a better future”.

Before the implementation of DIAG in Ali Abad, the district was teeming with the activities of illegal armed groups. Today all groups have been disbanded and their weapons handed over to the government. Ali Abad is now secure and peaceful.



“We appreciate the government for its assistance in launching the development project in Ali Abad, as a result of which 30 half deep wells have been dug. If there is no peace, there will not be any durable change in our country. The work is only half-done so far. We have to persist with our efforts,” Haikal notes.

“DIAG brought changes for my father,” says Mohammad Haikal’s daughter

Azizah, 22, is one of Mohamad Haikal’s nine daughters. She is a grade 11 student at the Girls School in Ali Abad.

“I am really proud of my father who changed himself totally after the *Jehad* ended. I am thankful to the DIAG programme that was implemented in our district and brought lots of changes to people’s lives,” Azizah says.



Azizah says that even though she had dreamt of going to school as a small child, it did not seem possible at that time. “My father was a *Jehadi* commander for whom tradition warranted that his daughters stay at home rather than go to school. Besides, a school for girls did not even exist in Ali Abad. Fortunately for me, the Taliban regime collapsed and a new era of peace began in Ali Abad. The implementation of the DIAG programme was one of the key elements for stability in the district.” She says her father has come a long way since his *Jehadi* days. He now encourages her and others in their family to learn and makes it clear to us that he does not want us to grow up like him, without schooling.

Haji Habibullah, the Ali Abad district governor, applauds Haikal for his support to the government and taking part in the social and development activities of the district, as well as encouraging other commanders to support the government for reconstruction of the district. “He has started a new *Jehad* to bring changes and get rid of poverty and illiteracy, and to support the reconstruction processes in the country,” says the district chief.

Habibullah confirms there are no illegal armed groups active in Ali Abad any more. People live in peace and are busy with their normal, everyday lives.

“Peace means a better life for all,” says school teacher

“Until a few years ago in Ali Abad, it was unthinkable for females to go out to school or work due to a climate of uncertainty and insecurity. Not any more. Once again, women can take an active part in the social life of the district, go to school, or work out of home,” says Aqila, a 25 years old teacher at the Ali Abad Girls High School.



“I have bad memories of weapons. My uncle was once a *Jehadi* commander and I remember well how my family would worry about him all the time,” says Aqila.

She added that Mohamad Haikal was one of the most feared commanders in the area, with hordes of armed men working for him. But now he has handed over his weapons to the DIAG programme and is doing an excellent job for his people. He has once again started to live as a farmer.

“In the past I always had to be accompanied by a male member of the family to go to the district. Now that the weapons are collected, I can go to Kunduz city alone without any fear.”

“Now, Former Commanders Only Talk of Peace and Development”



Mr. Faizullah is a teacher and tribal elder in Ali Abad district of Kunduz. Faizullah is 48 years old and a teacher at Girls High School in Ali Abad.

“Former *Jehadi* commanders are now talking about peace and development,” said Faizullah. For a male to teach in a girls’ high school is a sign of peace itself. According to him, in the beginning people were hesitant to send their daughters to school, where they were taught by male teachers. Mr Faizullah believes that situation has totally changed after the disbandment of illegal armed groups. At the moment, 15,500 students

are going to school. Out of these nearly 7,000 are girls.

“This situation can be improved if *Jehadi* commanders are willing to support. Mohamad Haikal is one of the commanders who is really willing to have more and more educated boys and girls equally,” said Mr. Faizullah.

Faizullah felt that several improvements in the district could be attributed to the implementation of DIAG. He hoped that this project will be implemented all over the country and one day all will be able to live in peace and prosperity.