
ENOUGH: THE STORY OF A PEACE COMMUNITY IN KABUL



Rowe Morrow as told by Hakim Young, May 2016

Acknowledgements

*We cry out
We cry out across the city,
To soothe the pain in our hearts.
Almighty God. Grant our wishes
And help us heal our country's wounds.*

Afghan Poem: Dari translation project, Kabul University supported by USAID¹

As with every piece of human endeavor, it takes a team. Some members are highly visible, others are less visible, and some, not at all. Yet, all participated so seamlessly in this project. The people to be so thankful for are Martin Reusch and Donna Mulhearn who introduced me to the Peace Community. And to Khalid Malikzada in Kabul, field representative for Mahboba's Promise.

Then there was the generous Nancy Shelley Trust which not only paid my fares and visa but gave an extra \$AUS1,000 on trust. As a passionate supporter of education and peace, I hope that Nancy would be pleased with the selection of the project and its results.

The project gathered impetus and extended its impact with other donors. I believe they were moved by compassion and concern for ordinary Afghan people. They could imagine, to some degree, what 40 years of war does to its citizens. Thank you all so much. You are part of peaceful resolution and solutions where ever they can occur as a result of this project.

On my return, Nick McGuigan and Thomas Kern gave excellent editing suggestions for this report. Gary Caganoff supported with the photos from Mark Isaacs and Hakim Young and the volunteers.

In Kabul, it was simply delightful to be hosted by the Peace Guest House residents who with charm and courtesy cared for this 'old lady', carefully making sure she was accompanied everywhere she walked on the streets.

So, such richness of giving at every level, brings up gratitude and a sense of that we are all joined in this community to work for peace in Afghanistan.

Any errors, misrepresentations and boobos are completely mine. I am sorry for any offence.

Thank you all.

Rowe Morrow, May 2016

¹ I could not find one English word for the date of the poem nor the translator, nor the title of the book.

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How It All Began

In an unnumbered house on a dirt road in Kabul there is a small community, the Afghan Peace Volunteers (APVs). They have lived together in Kabul for about four years. Most of them came from Bamiyan province where they first formed a community because they wanted to pursue peace and yet none had first-hand familiarity with peace communities. The members are mostly Hazara ethnicity which has been appallingly discriminated against in all invasions and wars. They have no reason to believe in peace nor even believe it is possible.

A Singaporean doctor, Hakim Tek Young Wee (known by his many friends as Hakim), after seven years of serving with an NGO in Bamiyan, watched the war and its casualties – not only the war-wounded but the poverty, hunger, thirst, social breakdown, dislocation and environmental destruction. He asked himself how effective he was. Through a 12-year-old orphan boy who collected trash for a living he realized that a root cause of the people's suffering was war. He saw the widows, the orphans, the homeless, the dispossessed, the refugees and the immense trauma and attitudes of apathy, revenge and resignation. He saw what fear and uncertainty does to all people.



Hakim Tek Young Wee with the author in Kabul

So, when a tiny core group of young people who have never known peace teams with a visionary Singaporean doctor and determine that they have had #ENOUGH! war, and embark upon active non-violence, it is a strange, defiant and radical act. Against all odds and some threats, they have grown and persisted. And even more remarkable is that, against this

backdrop of survival at any cost and every type of human need, they are all volunteers. No one receives remuneration.

Different from other peace groups who organize to oppose war, the APVs focus strongly on the needs of the poorest people in their community to make a statement about war; its pain and impacts. This is imaginative and dramatic peace making. Deciding that peace can be achieved they follow consensus processes which are new to them and, sometimes, stressful.

The resident APV community lives and thrives just a short walk from the Borderfree Nonviolence Community Centre (BNVCC) where the APV activities happen. The BNVCC gate in the wall also has no number and is unremarkable but behind it unusual people work at unusual activities. Fifty or so young volunteers come and go all day pursuing their peace work and setting aside traditional ethnic differences. The volunteers are young – some only 14 or 15 years while others are close to 30. They, too, completely eschew money. This is simpler and safer where bribes are routinely demanded, and threats made from warlords to local government.

The evolution of such peace work is even more remarkable considering the backdrop of almost forty years of unrelenting war.

The last day of my father's life

I remember that you never carried a gun. I remember that last day of your life when the Taliban came to the mountain and we were trying to find a hiding place where they would not find us. We arrived near Oftoba Mountain and you saw a narrow opening and you told my youngest brother, my sister and me. "The three of you should sit in this opening and I will sit in front of you". I was happy that you were with us but I was also afraid.

The Taliban were very close and were firing at us. You did not want your children to be killed by them. 45 minutes later two or three Taliban soldiers discovered our hiding place and ordered you to follow them to '*talk with the mullah*' who controlled the area. The soldiers told me, and my ten-year-old brother who was disguised as a girl, to return home. My brother had worn a dress because young boys were killed.

That was the last day of your life. We searched for you for two or three days but we could never find you to say thank you for saving us.

You understood what real love is? We are alive, but the Taliban killed you. It has been fourteen years but I still miss you. Now I can't hear your voice.

It has been very hard to forgive the Taliban, but I remember that you never carried a gun. You also taught us never to hate any one, and never kill another human being. I have committed my life to nonviolence and working for peace because of your inspiration.

TASHAKUR, Zarghouna: A Young Peace Volunteer – March 2016

How Afghans Endure 40 Years of War

WAR IMPACTS ON EVERYONE

The gross impacts of war spread their waves over the land and with entire population as its victims. War is a tsunami.

Land destruction: In 1978, Afghanistan was environmentally stable and based much of its agricultural economy on deciduous fruits and nuts. Agricultural techniques were perfectly adapted to the very cold winters, low rainfall and hot dry summers. Food could be stored. Apricots, walnuts, almonds, figs, mulberries, peaches, apples, quinces, pears, olives, raisins – all with high nutritional value and supplemented by wheat and potatoes kept people healthy in a climate where large scale growing of vegetables is difficult due to uncertain rainfall and long cold winters. The scorched earth policies of various invasions have destroyed the predominantly perennial basis of food.



Food imported from Iran and Pakistan is too expensive for most people

Food: The long war years, the bombing, the mines and neglect have criminally destroyed the dependable and necessary foods. Today, not only is the land destroyed, but almost all the food comes from Iran and Pakistan, leaving the people vulnerable to pesticide sprayed foods,

poor nutritional balance, expensive and, a frighteningly easy severance of supply. Most people can't afford imported food like this.

People are well aware of climate change whose impacts are being felt on food supplies. This year the snow was unusually sparse on the mountains and so the snowmelt, which irrigates the crops through spring and summer, has failed. Hunger is immanent.

Drug addiction: One of the most horrifying and disgusting scenes is that of the drug market in Kabul. It runs openly, trading day and night. The scene is like a Brueghel painting of Hell with people in every stage of addiction – dirty, ill, hungry, diseased, fighting. They lie on the ground, sprawled and unable to live any quality of life. There are said to be 1.6 million drug addicts in Afghanistan and their needs fuel distressing random criminality. Kidnapping is common in Kabul. The warlords and other vested interests in drugs have no concern for suffering or social dislocation.

Unemployment and underemployment: War has destroyed livelihoods and created homelessness. Distressingly, it has left millions of widows and children with no breadwinner. Infrastructure is in ruins. It has emptied villages and towns. It provokes sometimes desperate fanaticism. Tens of thousands of young men and women desperate to support their families join the army. Then they desert – about 25% of soldiers are said to desert each year. Unemployment lies between 40 and 80%. International NGOs have left. They were substantial contributors towards a peaceful and well-trained society as well as significant employers.

The economy has stalled. There are empty buildings and half-built ones. I was told that everyone who could has left and taken their assets.

Housing. After the arrival of millions of people into Kabul following the Taliban war, the people living under canvas housed, either by an organization, or by people's own initiative, built homes like the ones pictured below. Many people coming to the Borderfree Centre live in these places with a family of 8-10 members in two rooms. There is no water and no sewerage and no rubbish service. They are neighbourhoods waiting epidemics. It is not good to live at the bottom of the hill. Permaculture could help by locally designed and built compost toilets.



These homes were built over the previous neighbourhood which had been bombed to rubble and have no electricity, water or sewerage. People carry jerrycans up the steep stairs. The residents are mostly from Internally Displaced Peoples' camps. Many come to the APV centre.

Few Afghans smoke cigarettes, nor do they drink. Most are underweight rather than overweight. They are active because most don't have cars, or any other conveniences. Their diet is simple, and with the addition of fruit and vegetables, traditionally healthy. The high, cold climate is also reasonably healthy. Afghans should be among the world's healthiest people especially with so few lifestyle disease factors. And yet...

There is pollution. Of every imaginable type, it threatens health and, indeed, life². Air pollution has recently been listed by UN agencies as a highly significant feature in reducing life expectancy and there is no lowest threshold. Any particle may be enough to trigger cancers, emphysema and other chronic life threatening illnesses. The Afghani health services cannot cope with normal illnesses and accidents. The air in Kabul is foul. Even early in the morning, a pall hangs in the air and many people now wear masks. A few minutes outside and people start to cough. The long term cumulative effect of air pollution will be a vast cost on the country already straining under so many other debilitating factors.

Smoke is one major cause and the other, filthy car emissions. The firewood merchants are some of the most noticeable in the towns³. Homeless people burn plastic to cook and keep

² Radio National. ABC May 2016. 15,000 people in Kabul die of air pollution each yearand those are only the recognized deaths.

³ No significant numbers of trees are being planted to replace the scarce supplies.

warm in winter. People cough reflexively from the fumes as cars go past. They hold up scarves and try not to breathe.

Water supplies are mainly from the aquifers. Every year the wells have to be dug deeper because of the emptying of the water table. It may be the toll of five to six million residents in Kabul but it is also over-use by foreign military forces. There is some town supply. However, the river is a filthy sewer and many people live in it. Raw sewerage empties into it.



The main river flowing through Kabul. Goats and people live in it. The garbage items are unimaginably disgusting. And much is plastic.

Most people drink weak green tea if they are able to boil water. Others buy bottled water or carbonated drinks if they can afford them. Plastic bottles, and every other type of plastic, litter the city, fills its drains and dumps.



A normal city gutter in Kabul – the water is stagnant, thick, gluey and blue-black

Distrust in government and in achieving an equitable peace. With the government in disruption and unable to unite for the common good of the country, with warlords and political factions each having their own agenda, and with corruption and self-interest rising due to a sense of hopelessness, I heard that rural and urban people are arming themselves towards a time, believed to be soon, when the country may implode into civil war.

No country can sustain such injuries. Everyone is traumatized. **The collective, accumulative impact** is not just present suffering during the on-going war, but more suffering in the future; more refugees and greater problems for all countries in the region and worldwide.

War solves none of these problems.

Against this social backdrop the tiny peace community saw no other option except peace and non-violence.

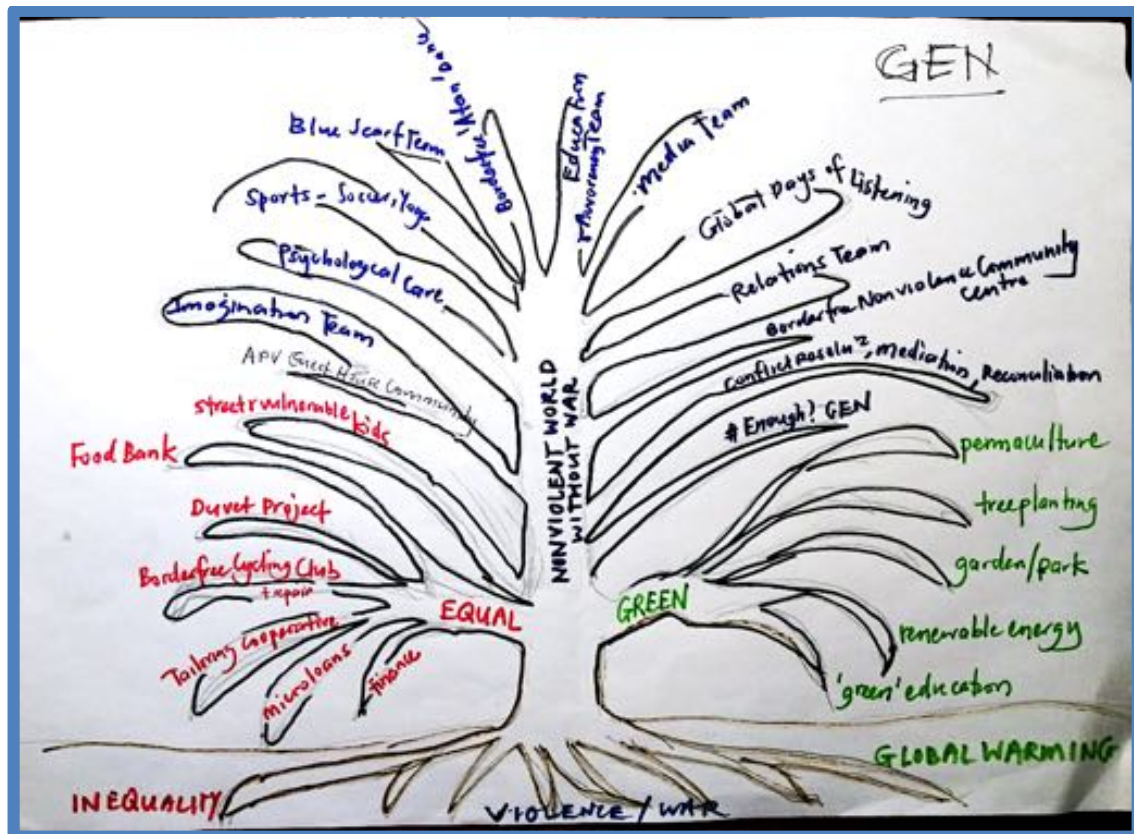


Behind the gate in a street in Kabul are active and committed young people working for peace at the Non-violent Borderfree Centre. The walls are 5.0 metres high. This is the site of the new garden for teaching street children and widows.

#Enough!

STRANGE, DEFIANT AND RADICAL ACTS

The APVs have worked out a diverse program based on three platforms, represented by the three branches of the tree diagram:



A nonviolent world without war
A green world
An equal world

Their aim is to build a critical mass of nonviolence relationships for a green, non-violent and equal world without war. The original volunteers who live in the Peace Guesthouse, and the 50+ volunteers coming from everywhere in Kabul and working at the Borderfree Centre, have together organized 22 teams working in the three major areas, each of which has several components or projects, each is self-managing, and, again, follows consensual processes. This organization means every volunteer has responsibilities and their voices can be heard in small committees. Following is a more detailed look at each of the three areas.

1. A Non-Violent World Without War

TEAMS AND PROJECTS

The WAR is the source of physical and social problems and causes most suffering in Afghanistan, so not surprisingly, this is the APVs' largest platform with about 12 teams. They call themselves #ENOUGH! and also #Enough! GEN, for their Green, Equal and Nonviolent objectives. The 12 teams are:

1. #Enough! GEN Team

This team organizes discussion circles whose aim is to build a critical mass of relationships, person-to-person. The discussions in the circles are about inequality, war and climate change.

2. A Conflict Resolution, Mediation and Resolution Team provides peer and conflict resolution training and this year wants to build relationships with at-risk youth who were formerly associated with armed groups in the wars, or who are thinking about joining armed groups.

They are proceeding carefully. One of the huge difficulties is that the war is still going on. Cessation of war is absolutely necessary to enable healing.

3. The Borderfree Nonviolent Community Centre (BNVCC) team maintains an open and, safe place for practicing non-violence and has facilities for many workshops and classes. The owner of the house and yard rented by the APVs for its Centre is open to peace work.

4. The Relations Team builds relationships with Afghan youth and facilitates support and care for volunteers.

5. The Global Days of Listening Team has managed, since the inception of the APVs four and a half years ago, to have monthly Skype conversations over the web, establishing and maintaining relationships with empathetic communities in 40 countries.

6. The Media Team had difficulties in getting established. It is now taking shape with a new web blog and Facebook page in Dari. A Borderfree Radio team is working out how to broadcast regular internet radio programs. Caroline from the U.S. has been teaching

recording and editing skills for short radio programs. A Borderfree Theatre Group started a year and a half ago with an Afghan artist giving the team four months of training. Unfortunately, it has been dormant recently. They gave performances about drug addicts in Kabul at the BNVCC and at the Afghan National Theatre. This group now lacks a theatre instructor though they are still keen and instead are discussing establishing a You-tube theatre channel. They say no mainstream channel would share the same mission, so they want to go alone.

7. **The Education Team** has had weekly awareness discussions on global issues open to the public. This year, they are looking to do the same through seminars. The team also hopes to start study groups in which volunteers from the 10th to 12th grade help one another to grasp and understand better what they are learning in schools. The team also manages the library which has a good collection of theoretical and practical peace and non-violent books. Some books and materials need translating from English to Dari.
8. **The Borderfree Dance Team.** ‘Atan’ is a Pashto word for the Afghan national dance. Although Atan is a Pashtun dance, the APV ‘Atan’ dance team is composed of volunteers from many ethnic groups. It is only for men and boys. The Centre has 22 dancers from different ethnic groups. About 16 are regular and they want a larger team. They aim to do ‘flash mob’ presentations in public areas.
9. **The Blue Scarf Team** now has 15 Afghan women and girls who sew blue scarves with ‘Borderfree’ on them in English and Dari. They receive a small fee for each scarf. It is good to have international visitors buying the scarves, taking some home and using the scarves in nonviolent and anti-war actions.

**The spread of the symbol of the blue scarves:
People and organisations wearing them**

- **Jacob**, a USA war veteran, determined to cycle across the United States until the war in Afghanistan ended but in December 2013, despite being active in veteran and peace circles, he took his own life. He wore the scarf.
- **Adele**, teaching anthropology in the States, has worn the scarf in solidarity with us, despite her struggle with end-stage cancer.
- **The Peace Jam project** was set up by two U.S. people who work with school children to educate them about war and peace building. They are sponsored by two Nobel Laureates, Mairead Maguire and Oscar Arias Sanchez. A peace jam group in New York used the blue scarves for their annual conference.
- **Mairead Maguire, a Nobel Peace Laureate** from Ireland in the time of ‘The Troubles’ visited the APVs and been very supportive, and wears the scarf.
- **World beyond War**, a movement to abolish war the APVs are a part of, uses the Blue Scarf as a symbol.
- **The Upstate Coalition against Drones in the U.S.** has been working for three years and regularly wears the blue scarves. Many have served time in jail for their nonviolent protests.

- **In Wisconsin, Steve Clemens and his community, in blue scarves**, regularly protest against the arms manufacturers.
- **The Jeju Peace Community**, on Jeju Island in South Korea has demanding daily protests against the construction of a naval base on Jeju Island. Hakim visited them to build relationships with them and the anti-military base movement. He has also had the opportunity to participate in the Okinawa Peace Walk, where Okinawans have been faithfully protesting against the expansion of U.S. naval bases in Okinawa.
- **Julian Assange** of WikiLeaks has a blue scarf.
- **Gail Malone**, who organizes Wikifriends, introduced the APVs to the director of the Afghan Music School in Kabul, and is hoping to facilitate music classes for the street kids school run by the APVs. She has bought instruments for them.

10. The Sports Team.

A boys' soccer team began to build multi-ethnic relationships and have sport as an alternative to violence. The Sports Team also set up exercise days for women and girls. On one day of the week boys are not permitted at the Centre so that girls can do yoga or other exercises. The APVs are hoping to have a volunteer gym instructor run weekly gym sessions for the girls.⁴

11. The Psychological Care Team.

Two Afghan female psychologists have begun initial work with the APVs. Also Dr Patricia Cane and her husband, George, from the U.S. organisation, Capacitar, come twice a year to share and build trauma and stress healing skills. However, it is very difficult to resolve trauma when war continues and the future is uncertain.

12. The Imagination Team, as part of their long-term vision, produced a concept paper to establish a non-violent, equal and sustainable eco-farm. The team members meet fortnightly to discuss community, gender, equality and other such issues normally taboo in Afghan society. They are building on the experiences and lessons learnt from two previous multi-ethnic nonviolent communities (one male and one female community) the APVs had in Kabul from 2011 to 2015. One of the hopes in the near future is to build relationships and trust with Afghan foundations and charitable groups so they can buy land to establish a permanent peace community within an eco-farm village, like the San Jose Peace Community in Colombia and the Tamera community in Portugal.

Additionally, APVs are developing **peace circles**. There are currently two peace circles, both facilitated by two U.S. peace builders experienced in facilitating peace circles.

⁴ See note about girls' health in the accompanying report: A PDC in Wartime is Different.

2. A Green World

MULTIPLE PROJECTS

Understanding that without a habitable world, other activities are fruitless, A Green World is another platform for APVs. An early initiative was the Peace Parks, with a vision to establish a Peace Park in every province of Afghanistan. Currently, the ongoing war makes establishing Peace Parks in most provinces impossible.

While VOICES for Creative Non-Violence from the U.S. has helped and supported all the #Enough! teams above, it proves challenging for anti-war communities like APV to raise enough resources to support the initiatives of the Green and Equal branches. Some peace groups around the world have yet to connect the challenges of war with climate change and socio-economic inequality. They do not always make the links between the endemic violence of inequality and degraded environments which cause, and continue, wars. However, the APVs see how important it is⁵.

Permaculture can help the APVs grow the Green branch of their work through building a critical mass of nonviolent relationships. Already, since the permaculture design course in February and March of 2016, the number of green projects has increased. APVs have three green teams and the following projects.



First discussions on ‘greening’ the world – Permaculture students

⁵ There is a frightening lack of plant diversity in Kabul. Slight changes in weather due to climate change could wipe out the existing tree species leaving the city with few amenity and food trees.

1. **The Green Education and Permaculture Team** holds priority this year. Green education and home gardens is a future outreach and education project. It will start with 100 street kids and aims to involve their mothers. It will be a show-and-teach project using the Borderfree Centre's garden. Currently, it has \$AUS100 working budget. Teachers are volunteers who completed the recent permaculture course. Towards this objective, short courses were given by Rowe Morrow on Fridays during the PDC to enthusiastic young teachers-to-be wanting to develop skills in learner centred education

In addition, The Green Education and Permaculture Team has already designed, and is implementing, the following:

2. **'Amuzish'**, the Borderfree Centre's learning garden, is developing intensive food production⁶ as a priority. It will require about another \$AUS750 to complete. The total budget of \$AUS1,100 for the first year is for:
 - **This summer:** beans, pumpkin and potatoes to cover the entire area for soil conditioning, provide organic matter and give energy crops which can be stored.
 - Tools – shovels, pickaxes, working gloves, 2nd hand clothes, manure, lunch for volunteers working on Fridays.
 - Bamboo frames for walls and wire.
 - Nuts and bolts to erect roof and water catchment.
 - Compost toilet.
3. **The APV Guest House** community garden was designed after the PDC, by the residents of the Guest House. It has been fully funded with \$AUS225 for the full implementation of the project.
4. **Borderfree Permaculture Land** will be the Volunteers' Food Farm. This piece of rented land, about a 30-minutes' drive from the BNVCC, is also a priority. Designs for the land were made during the PDC with a final plan collated by the Permaculture team. Work has started on it. Money from scarves and T-shirts to go to the land. Paid \$US200 (cost of making the scarves not deducted).
5. **Bamiyan Peace Park and Kabul Peace Garden**

The APVs planted tree saplings in both Peace Gardens in March 2016. These are small urban forest initiatives. Estimated cost \$AUS694.

 - **Kabul Peace Park**, beside the river, is a brave endeavor to work with corrupt and incompetent government officials, amidst risk of losing it or it being destroyed.

⁶ Another huge difficulty is the almost complete lack of resources to build gardens. Straw, sawdust and hay are used for animal feed in winter, for building houses, and for heating and cooking. They are extraordinarily expensive and it is not evident where renewable resources for gardens, such as mulch, can be sourced. Human waste is the major organic polluter which could be harvested to profit green projects.

Sixty trees had already been planted and another 120 went in on March 13th. The APVs will consider making seats and paths.

- **The Bamiyan Peace Park** sign was carved into stone in March 2016, replacing the old brick sign whose brush-painted words kept being vandalized. The APVs also planted 33 evergreen trees.
- **Kalula Pushta hill** in Kabul will be made into a park in February 2017, beginning with 200 seedlings on a slope and also incorporating a pond. It has been inspired by permaculture course.

6. **The Renewable Energy Team** is working on small scale water recycling with a turbine to provide energy for households⁷ and to implement it at the Borderfree Centre. Along with this, the team is looking at bicycle power. **Its objectives are:**

- Capture roof water and recycle it for energy
- Provide water for the garden
- Energy for the Borderfree Centre.

The concept plan was designed by an engineering student in consultation with his lecturer and is mostly implemented. The cost, \$Aus720.00, was supplied from Australian funds.

7. Other Projects:

- **Kabul University.** Discussions with Kabul University are on-going for a partnership with the APVs' permaculture project team.
- **Clean one street.** A cleaning campaign is held once a year in Kabul. \$AUS100 has been donated and will be mainly used for meals for volunteers.

⁷ Energy from the government facility is irregular and undependable. Simple back-up household technology is essential.

3. An Equal World

Gross and disruptive inequalities exist in Afghanistan causing injustice and are often a crippling brake on full human potential. The APVs are well aware that many are completely avoidable, so they have decided to work where the impacts of such inequalities impact the most. The causes are mainly poor government, corruption, and, of course, war. Among the most debilitating are the impacts on:

- Children, and especially girls, denied literacy and numeracy – normally considered a basic human right and necessity.
- Women, and particularly widows, denied the right to engage in the economy and earn a fair wage.
- Poor families with insufficient food to maintain health and energy.
- Families who suffer and often die from cold during Afghanistan's fierce winters.
- Girls and women's inability to move freely without harassment on the streets of Kabul.

Of course there are many others however, the APVs have selected these as subjects for their projects and are engaged in working with each of these populations.

- **The Borderfree Street and Vulnerable Kids School Team**
About 100 kids attend the Centre where they are taught literacy, basic mathematics and nonviolence by APV volunteers. There is also a tailoring class for some of the older kids. In addition, once a month, kids are given food (rice and oil) to assist their families' basic needs and to encourage the children to work fewer hours on the streets, so giving them free time to attend government schools.
- **The Food Bank Team** has 11 volunteers who visit and persuade religious leaders, shopkeepers, charitable foundations, community leaders and organizations to donate food items for the street kids. The goal is to have a locally supported food bank so the food rations at the Borderfree Street and Vulnerable Kids School are locally sustainable.
- **The Duvet Project Team**, organized every winter, produces 3,000 duvets sewn by 60 seamstresses who are paid for each duvet they sew. These are distributed to the poorest families in Kabul each receiving two duvets.⁸
- **The Borderfree Cycling Club** meets and cycles for health and leisure early on Friday mornings. On Tuesday afternoons, girls learn to ride at the Borderfree Centre. Along with this club, it is hoped that a bicycle repair shop can be set up so some youth can earn an income.

⁸ A volunteer manager of this project told me how upsetting it was not to be able to meet the requests from all families for duvets. The requests are always greater than they can supply. It is very hard for the volunteers to have to refuse some families.

RIDING FREE: EMANCIPATING YOUNG WOMEN

"It will often be found that a little suspected cause has had far-reaching effects. Thus the invention of the safety bicycle about 1890 probably did more towards the emancipation of women than the granting of woman suffrage." Quaker newsletter, 1926.

As a woman going into the streets in Afghanistan you must be so covered up that you feel like a package and it is difficult to walk fast and freely. If there is a man with you, you walk behind. And many of girls are not strong because they miss the normal physical activity that happens in other countries. For example, the girls' exercise class had girls and young women struggling with exercises most girls without their restrictions would find easy.

There have been several initiatives in Kabul offering girls more active lives. One is the skateboarding which some of you have heard of. However, it is indoors and for a short time. Girls enjoy and appreciate it but it is enclosed. No one can skateboard in the streets because of potholes, crowds and, the open drains are a danger to life and limb even on foot.

How exciting and daring then for the Afghan Peace volunteers (APV) to offer cycling classes for girls and young women as part of their commitment to equality and nonviolence. On Tuesdays there are classes when the Borderfree Nonviolent Centre is closed to men and boys, and, the girls get on bikes, sometimes fall off them and get on again. Then, one day, they are in the Bicycle Club.

Early on Friday mornings, the Bicycle Club composed of boys and girls goes for a couple of hours on a leisure outing just after dawn through the near empty streets of Kabul. They return exhilarated and laughing

And on March 8th, the cyclists participated in the International Women's Day.

I realized that this is an extraordinary and exciting initiative when I spoke to one of the Afghan girls in the PDC. I asked her, one of the 20 or more young women in a class of 60 students if she could ride a bike and her response was wonderfully enthusiastic. *"I came here by bike", she said, "and I ride to all my university classes. I love it. I love the exercise and the freedom to come and go, and the quietness. I don't need money for petrol and I'm not polluting the city."*

Her response reminded me of the Vietnamese who declared when Ha Noi had 10 million bicycles – 'that it was the only real freedom of transport'.

A bicycle is an enormously liberating option. These girls could never own a car, can't afford taxis which may not be safe, but a bicycle offers them exercise, openness and speed and liberty. Indeed, I suspect it is emancipating young women.

Rowe Morrow, Kabul, 2016

- **The Tailoring for Women Team** works to establish viable livelihoods despite meeting with several problems this year. Despite four years of multiple set-backs, the youth managed to train and facilitate the work of two batches of trainees.
- **The Microloans Team** worked this winter with four Afghan labourers and in the year ahead, they will work with another six. This project addresses poverty. 40% of Afghans live below the poverty line and 80% of Afghan households are multi-dimensionally poor. Unemployment is officially at 40% but one Afghan labour union puts it at close to 80%.

Ways Forward

POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS FOR THE PEACE COMMUNITY

The APVs have, of course, many options and will choose the most pressing and relevant, as they have before. However, given no sign of the war abating, and, as the world seems to forget the country and search for more sensational news, it is apparent that disaster training is a tool that can easily be added to their peace ‘toolbox’.

Even if the war stopped today, the spectre of famine is not far away as unpredictability of climate change, and the ‘scorched earth’ policies of invading armies and their own, has severely curtailed agricultural products, food and water supplies. The dependence on Iran and Pakistan to supply these needs is physically tenuous, and financially a drain on Afghani finances.

- **Disaster planning** with its focus on avoiding or enduring hardship and designed to meet as many needs as possible by the household, and store necessities for a three-month difficult period, would assist in building morale and practical supplies to an already stretched city.
- Providing **community training** in small-scale food production and sanitation would address short term needs. It would also assist in cleaning water supplies, and greening a polluted environment. It will support local economies. This training has been proven effective and having a plan creates hope where people’s hearts are fearful of the future. It would assist the community with longer-term resilience in food and water supplies, sanitation and address short-term needs and give some security.
- Additional **teacher training** focusing on learners and respect for them would add to the APVs’ skills which are more and more needed to facilitate many types of basic learning in their communities.
- Finally, the enthusiastic new permaculturists require longer term, detailed courses in a ‘**boot camp**’ where they cover all practical skills, and reinforce their design skills to achieve greater effectiveness in the Green arm of their work.

At the moment there is no program or proposal for these courses. They would immeasurably consolidate the Green projects of the APVs and are highly desirable, indeed, it seems negligent not to provide them given the needs of the country and its problematic future.

Project Finances

DONORS, BUDGET AND ACCOUNTS

An **APV Finance Team** manages all the monetary resources as well as other resources within the community. All accounts are kept on Excel file. Anyone can access the accounts to ensure they are transparent.

The Chicago Centre for Creative Non-Violence, and some anonymous Singaporean doctors donate to the APVs through paying the rent for the Centres and some other non-personal costs.

The funds, which enabled the permaculture project to establish so well and quickly in Kabul, were generously given from Australian sources. A project proposal (see appendix) was submitted to the Nancy Shelley Trust of the Blue Mountains Quaker Meeting. Other completely unsolicited gifts came from the heart.

| | \$AUS |
|--|-----------------|
| Budget submitted to Nancy Shelley Fund | |
| Return airfare Sydney-Kabul-Sydney | 2,300.00 |
| Visa | 200.00 |
| *Lunch for 50 participants at the PDC | 1,000.00 |
| Require quote from Kabul where employing a cook is less than buying in lunches | |
| Occasional expenses such as taxis, transfer and | |
| Airport fees at Kabul(not known) | 200.00 |
| Books and stationery, copying etc. | <u>200.00</u> |
| Estimated total | 3,900.00 |
| Other donated funds | |
| Rob | 1,000.00 |
| Janice | 100.00 |
| Liz | 150.00 |
| x | 500.00 |
| Anonymous Quaker donor | <u>3,000.00</u> |
| Total project funds | 8,650.00 |

| EXPENDITURE: Support for following projects | | \$AUS |
|--|----------------|------------------------|
| Peace Hostel garden | | 225.00 |
| Borderfree Centre garden | | 570.00 |
| Volunteer Food Farm (fully funded) | | 1,100.00 |
| Support for teaching widows gardening | | 100.00 |
| Support for renewable energy project recycling water | | 720.00 |
| Excursion to farm: food, transport | | 100.00 |
| Mahboba's Promise | | 500.00 |
| Scarves and T-shirts | | 278.00 |
| Gulum and Zarghourn | | 100.00 |
| Ticany | | 50.00 |
| Books: Text, Teachers, Seedsaving books | | 600.00 |
| Course Materials | | 200.00 |
| Meals and snacks + workshops | | 300.00 |
| Fares | | 2,350.00 |
| Visa | | 250.00 |
| | TOTAL | |
| Total income | | 8,650.00 |
| Total expenditure | | <u>7,443.00</u> |
| | BALANCE | \$AUS 1,207.00 |

An email has been sent to all donors except the Nancy Shelley Trust asking how they would like the remaining funds to be dispersed. Two have indicated that they leave it to my discretion. Already the Jason McLeod books *People Power* have been purchased and with postage would be about \$AUS100. They would be a very useful addition to the APV Centre in Kabul.

Summing up

The time in Kabul was hard and personally confronting. The worst issue was, that peace is not about to arrive and I could not suggest that there were happier days ahead.⁹ The streets of Kabul are heartbreaking with women and children begging at intersections, with young mal-nourished children struggling to earn living to support their families. The APVs' work addresses these. The clutter of war, sandbags, soldiers and snipers does not help.

The APV projects are somewhat surprising because they do not confront head-on the world war industries which have invaded their lives. They are addressing its impacts.

The APVs are young, brave and highly motivated. They take responsibilities a westerner would consider only suitable for people five or more years older than they are. They manage budgets and people with style. They are also traumatised and where I stayed, would often just come home and go to bed. I wanted to as well.

Everyone teaching non-violence and co-operating for peace is heroic, no matter how small their part in the struggle.

In addition, they are building a future. They build it through skilling young people, giving them a purpose and hope. They build it through service. Whatever the standard of the schools and universities, the experience of working in an APV project should enable any one of them to succeed in life wherever they find themselves. Sadly, these skills may not be recognized.

The focus on peace in the midst of a vile war is so defiant that it takes your breath away.

The focus on peace when no one active in the project has known peace is paralleled by such visionary heroes as Mahatma Gandhi taking on British force of colonization, and Martin Luther King taking on apartheid.

The three platforms

- Non-violence and a world without war
- A Green world
- An Equal world

cover the causes of violence, climate change (which they have never added to nor benefitted from) and social injustice.

⁹ The same presumption applies when working with refugees whose security is unstable.

The Green platform being largely undeveloped has been given a huge impetus by this project. The APVs could see what to do and develop priorities. They were enormously enthusiastic. On an 'optional' work-in day on techniques at the end of the course, almost every student turned up. I expected 20 and more than 40 turning up was quite disconcerting.

The garden work began as the course was ending and reports show that the three major sites are planted and should yield good harvests this year, as well as serve as demonstrations for the future garden education team.

Email from Hakim Young, June 1, 2016:

The community garden is 'blooming' and we're already harvesting coriander and lettuce, but the other two gardens, the Centre's learning garden and the plot, are 'struggling' a little.

The mini-hydro power plan has been shelved because of the lack of facilities to 'test' a mini-version. In its place, Niamatullah is pursuing designs for 'pedal' power. Is it possible to raise some funds to build a 'pedal-power' model at the centre, with a long-term view to possibly running a small business, and also for us to be introduced to someone in Australia who can advise us on the technology?

About twenty APVs further explored their thoughts and feelings about 'disaster' plans. Zarghuna started off by saying, *"If the past is anything to go by, we won't even have time to make a phone call."*

But, everyone agreed at the end of the discussion that a small group of APVs at the Centre can continue to look at setting up simple disaster 'responses' as 'options'. Abid said, *"Even if we don't have an APV plan, as fellow human beings, I would hope that each of us will be able to respond to one another in a humane way."*

This project offered a new set of skills to the young people, and especially those which they can carry into every place they may find themselves and any time. They gave hope to some at solving some intractable problems existing in Kabul.

I hope to return one day, and soon, to find the war has stopped and that the APVs' work is yielding enormous harvests for the people.

As I waved goodbye and left the volunteers at the airport my heart and mind cried out "stay with them, don't go".

Appendices

1. THE NANCY SHELLEY TRUST PROPOSAL

A PROJECT FOR AFGHAN YOUTH PEACE VOLUNTEERS (APV) TO LEARN PERMACULTURE AND AVP

AN APPLICATION FOR FUNDING FROM NANCY SHELLEY BEQUEST

BACKGROUND

About five years ago, distressed and outraged by war, a group of young men and women aged 18-25 years and each of whom had suffered tragically or in their families from the long unceasing wars in Afghanistan, decided they had had Enough War.

With assistance from a Malaysian doctor, Hakim Young, who works with and studies non-violent resistance for peace, they founded hostels for young men and women. Inspired by non-violent action they started to protest war in their country. They wanted to be part of a peaceful solution and to be active. Not one of them has ever known peace.

They studied Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and others who lived and acted nonviolently for peace. They adopted non-violence as the only way to peace. They are very brave.

Last year, 2015, they contacted me and ten of them asked to learn permaculture by skype. We tried very hard and below are the photos of their work on the only land they could find. The web access usually broke up, I couldn't hear individuals and we ran out of time very quickly. It was extremely frustrating and we could not continue.

Some land they had obtained was taken over by someone else but they continued to ask for permaculture. Last year they mentioned how good it would be if I could teach the full international certificate course.

I said I would try, and also offered a course in AVP.

AVP has been a major factor in my life as I have used the AVP process in all my teaching with excellent results. So to offer the permaculture course and the AVP would be a symbol of confidence in the possibilities of peace, support to these magnificent young people and a pledge from Quakers for non-violent peace processes.

In addition, the well-known NGO, Mahboba's Promise, has asked me to work with their staff in Kabul to refine and redesign their land towards increasing their food supplies. The APV volunteers will do this under guidance to reinforce their skills and add to Mahboba's work, as well as develop another site to which they now have access.

PROJECT PROCESS – Learner centred AVP based

I had been aware for many years that teaching methods need to be a process rather than pure instruction to develop the capacity within the students to think within the discipline rather than leave the course knowing only the slight but not the profound importance of non-violence in life and learning permaculture.

Permaculture's second ethic is Care of People. Many experienced teachers do not know how to model this, so students can learn and practice it.

The main process I found and used, apart from proven non-formal adult education strategies, is the almost totally experiential Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP). It requires utmost transparency of content and process. I have used their "agenda structure called What's On, as fundamental. Its value:

- Everyone is seen as a teacher and learner
- Everyone is seen and heard without interruption several times a day – demonstrable respect for each other
- Listening skills are developed through several exercises
- Non-violence is practiced by facilitators and modeled for participants
- Students monitor the teacher's effect on others through seeing, hearing, interacting and observing.
- Each day has a structure which enables students to learn from each other through practice and reflection.
- The “meta” aspects of the course contribute to its impact and students learn in several different roles. In each they remember or learn appropriate behaviour. These are the “meta” components.
- Participate in various exercises in groups and learn group skills
- Feedback appropriately
- Solve real life problems personally and in groups
- From the first session of the first day, everyone learns to observe each other and practice the skills of a permaculture teacher who models Care of People – permaculture's second Ethic.

PROJECT TIMING

Four weeks in Kabul from February 21 to March 22, 2016.

Three weeks with APVs for permaculture and AVP training

And one week with Mahboba's Promise.

BUDGET

| | |
|---|-------------|
| Return airfare Sydney-Kabul-Sydney | \$AUS 2,300 |
| Visa | 250 |
| *Lunch for 50 participants at the PDC | ***** |
| (WAITING on quote from Kabul where employing a cook is less than buying in lunches) | |
| Occasional expenses such as taxis, transfer and | |
| Airport fees at Kabul (not known) | 200 |
| Books and stationery, copying etc. | <u>200</u> |

PART- TOTAL \$AUS 2,950

****Waiting on quote for employing cook from Kabul – estimate maximum \$1000.00 but not sure.

RISKS

The risks are considerable, as in a country at war, however since most of the work is inside and quiet, the project is not expected to increase risks for myself, nor for the participants.

As applicant for funding, I have experience in countries at war, and in dangerous situations and feel competent to live within the environment.

Martin Reusch, an attender from Blue Mountains Meeting, will be in Kabul at the same time working for Edmund Rice on problems of returned refugees.

As it is winter in Kabul much of the militia and military movements across the country slow down because active warfare is inhibited by snow and cold -30oC.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

The 50 participants will be able to carry out the competencies seen in the Appendix, and so be useful to their country both during war and post-war. The confidence of participants will be increased through the learning process, and afterwards. AVP training will re-inforce skills and ability. Mahboba's Promise will benefit as will the APVs in their ability to harvest water and raise food. It is difficult to think of any negative outcomes.

MANAGEMENT

The APVs will take responsibility for my food, accommodation, teaching venue and transport in Kabul. They supplied the recommendation for my visa.

REFERENCES

ENOUGH <http://ourjourneytosmile.com/blog>
<http://www.bing.com/search?q=Afghan+Peace+Volunteers&form=APMCS1>
<http://www.globaldaysoflistening.org>

CONCLUSION

This project held in the heart of war will contribute to the morale building of the APVs, offer new skills for peace which are necessary in war conditions. The long-term effects will be demonstrated by the 50 participants coming from many NGOs in Afghanistan in addition to the APVs. The learning contributes substantially to peace and the knowledge to rebuilding the environment, food supplies and skilled young people.

As the applicant for funds from the Nancy Shelley Bequest, I do hope that this fits Nancy's hopes for its use and the outcomes will be significant for her memory.

In love and peace,

Rowe Morrow, Blue Mountains Local Meeting

78 Cascade Street
KATOOMBA
Email: rowemorrow@gmail.com
Phone: 0477 933 464

Blue Mountains Permaculture Institute
101 Wentworth St
Blackheath 2780

Fundamental permaculture design skills, competencies and practices acquired by PDC graduates

“A nation is food secure only if each and every one of its inhabitants is food-secure, that is, has access at all times to food required to lead a healthy and productive life. To achieve this, each individual or in practice each household must grow sufficient food or be able to purchase food from income earned either through selling agricultural products or non-agricultural employment.”

1. A personal home design analysis and a design ready to implement
2. A group design develops diverse group skills and professional activities

| Themes | Analysis of | Design to |
|---|---|---|
| Sectors | Wind, fire, sun water, all forms of pollution | Deflect or Use |
| Maps | Contours, maps, aspects, slope | Use useful land, or reserve it for protection to filter or modify elements. |
| Water | Full audit domestic and rural | Restore and clean water in topography rivers, lakes, keylines, aquifers |
| Soil | Zones I to V | Site nutrition via zones |
| Climate | Sun, wind, radiation | Windbreaks, structure, plant placement, risks |
| Microclimates | Vegetation soils, water, structures, topography | Thermal belts, cold sinks terraces/swales, avoid or enhance microclimates |
| Disaster | Risk and analysis | Design to avoid or endure two most likely disasters |
| Produce a concept design – use graphics, models, drawings | Site analysis through models, drawings | Concept design derived closely from the site analysis. |
| Strengthening design | IPM, aquaculture wildlife | Include these elements to support the design |
| Social | Economics, city, village, neighbourhood design | Bioregions, ethical income and money, community economics, land tenure |

Plan transition from what is present to a concept plan for 15 years in the future

Order of work plan – site analysis, design and implementation

Design: Scale/ pens/ pencils/ shading/cross-sections/colour/ pictures/ key/ materials/ blow-ups/ transects

Practical work and skills acquired through sitting a PDC

Sector analysis

Microclimate analysis

Whole site water plan: source to sink

Whole site soil analysis and zone nutrient planning

Whole site plant identification, propagation and design

Sheet mulch garden in Zone I

Site analysis and whole site design

Weeds, IPM, disaster and wildlife analysis and restoration

Detailed design of zones and whole site to concept standard

Inventory of bioregional economies, tenure and invisible structures

Analysis of urban, village and neighbourhood and, transition to restoration for sustainability and resilience.

Site visits

Permaculture sites to see different approaches to sustainable house and land design, and water/energy and food systems.

Visit traditional sustainable homes/farms

2. A PDC IN WAR TIME IS DIFFERENT

LEARNING PERMACULTURE IN KABUL

Life in Kabul

The Afghan Peace Volunteers¹⁰ (APVs) organized a Permaculture Design Course (PDC) In Kabul from February to March this year and invited me to facilitate it. Reflecting on the destructive impacts and damage of war I am still outraged. The wars have continued for 40 years. The consequences have tentacles deep into society and affected the course.

Street life consists of huge military surveillance blimps in the Kabul sky, sandbags, Chinook and other helicopters, heavily armed soldiers, snipers on the skyline and cavalcades of tanks. These, together with, broken drains, polluted rivers, civilian crime and air pollution that burns your throat, all, physically and emotionally, destabilises everyone. And yet amongst this the admirable citizens go to school, to market and to work. However, the pervading atmosphere is one of uncertainty and breakdown of civil society.



The Surveillance blimp over Kabul is very threatening and hasn't prevented suicide attacks.

There were similarities with Cambodia where the war was on-going during the first PDC I taught there. However, at that time the Khmer Rouge were retreating and peace had been established in most provinces. Hope in a lasting peace was starting to emerge.

¹⁰ See article, ENOUGH: A Peace Community in Wartime.

In Afghanistan there is no sign of peace and more provinces are falling to various militia and the Taliban. Life and future prospects are dimming.

Most NGOS and international businesses have shut up and left. They were major employers and part of the civil society. Unemployment is officially 40% but others say the reality is 80% and especially among the young. Those who have education have little or no hope of a job, income stability and satisfactions of work. Neither will they have the means to leave home. And yet, all the young ones want to contribute. After all, employment is a symbol of trust and maturity that all teenagers aspire to.

Most Afghans are young. The population of Kabul has increased to about six million in a decade and a significant proportion is due to people fleeing occupied or dangerous areas. There are at least two large Internally Displaced People's (IDP) camps in Kabul. They are on the outskirts of Kabul.

Under war conditions learning is different

In this case, and underlying everything, is that all Afghan learners are traumatized from the past and fearful of the future. They live in troubling uncertainty. Because each one had memories of terror and grief these emotions underlay their learning:

Trauma Fear Grief Uncertainty

They affected the actions and attitudes of the students and gave me deep respect and admiration for their undertaking a PDC.

In addition, many young ones had never lived in stable families. Some lacked the social skills a family teaches its young ones. Others were responsible for their families and had known this responsibility since they were very young. None had really had a childhood. Sometimes students seemed immature perhaps because they recognised a safe environment.

PDCs in non-consumer countries share some qualities and all these existed in a heightened way in Kabul. And, with Afghanistan being an Islamic country, religion¹¹ seems to compound the complexities.

- **Food and water:** Never take it for granted that everyone has eaten. As in other countries where there is hunger we had funds to provide morning snacks. At first we began with a very white cake and cream but then moved to dates and fruit, sometimes juices when there was no water at the Centre as happened for three days and so we bought juice to drink. In one discussion on food I asked how many families eat one chicken and three eggs a week. Everyone said "yes" and I was surprised because we didn't at the Peace Guesthouse. One young man with good English said to me "*They are lying of course they don't. They can't afford it*". I think their response was a group wish and I should not have asked publicly. Always look after the food for learners. Hungry students cannot concentrate. In the poor provinces of Vietnam, we had bananas and rice every day before the first class.

¹¹ Hakim Young (Private Communication): "Islam in Afghanistan is the most conservative of any Islamic country". Since my first visit in 1973 it has become more conservative. RM

- **Awareness of personal history:** Every day I was aware that any student may have had some enormous difficulty to deal with that morning, or perhaps it was the anniversary of sad memories. As in Cambodia, normal conversations had to be carefully edited not to ask such questions as:

What would you like to do with your life?

Where is your family?

What is your family composition?

What is your birthday? Most don't know.

Not to comment on the government or religion.

Neither could I take any freedoms or rights for granted.

It was very hard and personally confronting that peace was not about to arrive and I could not suggest that there were happier days ahead.¹²

Other interactive issues

Every day was a challenge.

- **Venue:** The long thin room, T-shaped at one end where Hakim and I were, was not an optimal teaching space but the light, acoustics and visibility were good. The problem was everyone sat on the floor along the walls getting sore necks from looking sideways. Also the boys sat further way and the girls were huddled in the T top bar so that maintaining good eye contact was difficult.



Venue: A corridor room but with good light, carpet and acoustics.

- **Size:** I am strict about class size and this class, which began with 68 students and graduated 43, was far too big for learner-centred processes. It was difficult to

¹² The same presumption applies when working with refugees whose security is unstable.

remember students' names, their interests, education and hopes. Yet these factors are key to learner-centred teaching.

- **Energizers:** The class was too big for many energizers and was also constrained by Islamic taboos about boys and girls mixing. They weren't used to them and boys especially, often just fooled about quite violently while girls being, more self-conscious simply refused.
- **Literacy:** Ranged from almost illiterate to highly literate, as did the knowledge. There were, for example three agriculture science students hungry for up-to-date knowledge.
- **Resources:** Scarce in every field: visual, printed, on-ground including cultivars, species, soils, water bodies, forests, mulching and so on.
- **Language and culture:** The official languages of Afghanistan are Dari and Pashtun and some students had Tajiki and Hazaragi as their mother tongues. Learning in a second language is always stressful since stopping to work out one word can be enough to lose the thread.

Writing up translations of the main points the night before was important for Hakim and the class the next day.



Every night we translated the next day's main points and wrote them on these sheets

- **Ages:** From about 15 to 30-ish with lots of testosterone and heightened awareness of the same, or different sex. This caused distractions for them as the engagement ring on the hand of a small 14-year-old girl had for me. The boys and young men tended to push, shove, and sometimes threaten each other. Many need skills to discuss maturely. They entered and left the room many times every session. A small group sat at the back and chatted with other boys. Girls tended to huddle

into very small sitting spaces (as is universal, boys took up more space simply by the way they sat on the ground). Girls glued themselves together and were so used to being cramped that they didn't even move at the tea breaks as they waited for the refreshments to be brought to them. A minority seemed unaware that activity and stretching was good for them and their learning. A few girls used Facebook with tiring, irritating obsessiveness. Phone seemed stuck to their hands and they reverted to looking at them in their handbags. They whispered to each other a great deal. I noticed some fall in love.

- **Gender issues:** Are extremely important and delicate in social Islamic culture. Many students had not previously worked in a class with the opposite sex and Hakim reported that this course helped them interact with the other sex through being in groups with a time limit and set topics. This stopped awkwardness and enabled them to discuss neutral topics. So group work was some of the best times.¹³ A couple of boys tried to sit close to, or stare at the girls and this was perceived as threatening by the girls, so such behaviour had to be managed. Simply looking at them very firmly sometimes caused the boys to pull themselves back.



Questions about being acceptable occur for all teenagers worldwide

- **Being accepted is important:** From T-shirts to language. I felt these young ones want to join the world of global teens. Being a victim of war in your country gives them a special outsider role which isn't comfortable. They did not want to be seen as 'violent enemies'.
- **Knowledge:** This was disturbingly low even when students were literate. For example, many couldn't find Afghanistan on a world globe. There was the lack of a vocabulary for science because for about the last 400 years, their religion-influenced education has ignored or refuted science. They lacked primary school knowledge of the study of nature, causes of global warming, photosynthesis and

¹³ The longer they had been with the APVs the better their skills. The APV mixed project groups have enabled social skills to develop through service projects. They were noticeably more mature, co-operative, and responsible.

concepts that Australian students learn in primary school. However, some were very aware and asked me to talk to their teachers or university lecturers.

- **Attitudes and expectations to learning:** These were very different from cultures where students expect to find subjects inviting (Greece) or, have been drilled into giving full attention to the teacher (e.g. Viet Nam). About a quarter of the students were extremely motivated, most had only been exposed to harsh ‘sage on the stage’ teachers and loved being in the class however some were disengaged because they don’t value learning or expect to find it relevant or stimulating. Most boys were edgy so it was difficult to obtain a quiet co-operative learning environment. After a few days some students realized that this could happen and began observing. As Hakim and I established a different learning culture, many students became very motivated.
- **Learning resources:** Hakim is a superb translator and we prepared all lessons the evening before in the Peace Guest House. We made posters of the main points in Dari. We had no outside translated materials at all which is a big disadvantage to students who want to verify the verbal information and revise. There are few translations of anything in any languages and students are disadvantaged and also not accustomed to printed materials. For those who read English, my books were in considerable demand. Many students could not read graphics on the board i.e. plan or profile view. We used photographic slides where possible.
- **Meeting assignments:** Until told for about the tenth time, that there was no certificate unless assignments were completed, many students simply ignored these conditions for receiving the certificate. Then, there was delightful ‘co-operation’. However, two students who submitted the same design had to be asked to do their own. Possibly some students customarily subvert assignments in their formal system.



Such professional work, and interpreting it, demonstrates thorough learning.

- **Interpretation:** How lucky can a facilitator be? Hakim Young is a doctor and so had a sound grasp of biology and quickly connected with ecology. His English is faultless. So is his Dari. So I relaxed and he extended explanations where he

knew they were necessary. It is a very big ask to translate 84 + hours of permaculture. He worked well with my processes and I have admiration and gratitude for him because it would have been nightmare with a less calm and capable translator.

We also prepared the night before, often taking some hours to get the words right and look the correction translation up in several dictionaries. That was a wonderful help the next day.

Hakim is also very, very funny and at times had the class in shouts of laughter. I didn't always ask for translation because it detracts from the rhythm of the class but had tiny pangs of need. We were both committed to nonviolent processes. Occasionally he would ask a few boys to leave *saying "I know what you need to say is important, please go outside and chat and come in when you have finished your conversation"*. And they did peacefully.

Some accommodations

- **Venue:** We adapted. We tried but it didn't work to change the place of the girls and boys in the room. They weren't happy to sit alternatively. We asked the agitated boys at the back to come to the front and two became top students.
- **Content:** In general, Hakim and I selected the key points from each lesson/session and had to simply let the rest go. The time taken for translation, and for explanations of normally 'known' information eroded the time. I had to be extremely clear myself what information was necessary to become Permaculturists e.g. site water, soil and vegetation audits, and, ability to read landscape. We taught over 21 days and two days of field visit and practicals.

We had no model site of any type to work with. We couldn't find a garden or orchard. This was very difficult as students had to imagine them from words and drawings.

With the extreme vulnerability to food and water in Kabul I made these a priority. People lack food security and the roads to Iran and Pakistan where 90% of the food comes from could easily be cut. I concentrated on small scale, urban highly producing gardens and water re-use and saving – at least for the worst disasters. In a course like this discussion on ethical investment is largely irrelevant and so is land tenure but community and bioregionalism is basic for survival. We covered much on small-scale intensive food gardens. Disaster planning was a slightly uncomfortable session but necessary. Water was always a major theme since the snow had failed this year and so famine is predicted this summer as the snow melt will not be there.

- **Practical work:** Almost everyone really loved the practical work. We had a kitchen garden fair. Some made trellises, others compost, some prepared soil and sowed seed, others made cuttings, some planted potatoes and another group made a pond. Everyone tried several of these skills. All was directed towards having abundant food. There was a sense of purpose and happiness and peaceful interaction in this skill learning.

Three sites were designed and practical work: was carried out on the first two.

1. The Borderfree Nonviolent Learning Centre as a model for kitchen food garden.
2. The Borderfree land just out of Kabul to grow food for the volunteers
3. The Peace Guest House



Some people made compost, others planted, others ponds, sowed seed, made trellises and then they changed around to try all techniques.

- **Process:** It was necessary to change the usual methods of teaching and opportunities to hear every voice. Sometimes we'd ask every second person or a group. We used much group work where I could ask for an interpreter and see each person's drawings or lists. We had feedback from the groups. One outcome was that several girls were seen, by boys and the whole class, as highly knowledgeable and worth listening to.
- **Resources for teaching and implementing permaculture:** We lacked all except the most basic resources. We had enough poster paper for groups to work and make their designs. We had enough pens and all these were paid for by Quaker money. We lacked seed of any except the most basic varieties. We sent to the market for bean seed, potatoes and garlic. We found some bamboo. Even if one variety of fruit tree was available, more were not. We only had one type of worn out soil to work with. Every type of diversity has been reduced by the long war period.

Finally

I don't know how any student learned anything because it was chaotic but the standard of design work by around 60% of the students was comparable to anywhere else in the world. About one third with some English language skills told me of the importance of the content and asked for specific references (thank you, Lis Bastian, for sending these). One asked me to visit his university faculty to talk to his lecturers. Another

said he knew what to do now about land in his home village. The final formal feedback was very good¹⁴.

The group work was in the top bracket. Some students could have done better except for serious and ongoing family problems. A few had problems focusing. Keeping the group size to about five was ideal but difficult. The keen students changed their groups to those where some students were good thinkers or very knowledgeable, or, they liked the others, or disliked the others. Some groups doubled and it was difficult to re-sort them. Many taught others and I had been warned this was against the school culture where teachers saw it as 'cheating'. This co-operation was a great help where we had such different levels of education, language, vocabulary, age and, especially if, occasionally, translation or concepts were difficult.



Group work with a focus enabled young men and women to hone their social skills in mixed groups.

My admiration for the students grew and grew and grew. They applied themselves even if the outcomes seemed unclear. They began to ask questions and to engage with the content. Many could see applications. Often there was a palpable air of excitement and always enthusiasm.

Where possible I asked knowledgeable students to teach a concept or give their experience. **See next photo.**

¹⁴ The evaluation reports are held in Kabul by the APVs and could and will be analysed if there is another PDC in Afghanistan.



Two agriculture students were able to teach the class some science concepts



Co-operation, even in drawing plans is a part of every permaculture course

Fringe benefits of the PDC

- **Distraction:** The course provided distraction from fears and sad memories. During the 21 days of this course all students reported valuing their time at the course regardless of their input and engagement.
- **Learning social skills:** It was a valid meeting place with a purpose for young men and women to socialise. Everyone seemed to need a space where they could simply talk with their own age group and different sex and, this course went some way to meet that need. After all, in this age group it is important to assess, compare and normalize peer relations.
- **Valuing each other's knowledge:** With learner centred techniques, students listened to each other and became aware of the experience of others and they began to look for knowledge among themselves. This is always a major goal of a PDC and was highly gratifying. The teaching convention in Afghanistan is that only the teacher has knowledge.
- **Valuing relevance:** Many saw the PDC as highly relevant to their country and present needs. Some realized the skills, knowledge and the concepts traverse time and place. And for this group, which may be displaced at any time, permaculture is universal, mobile and very light to carry.
- **Comparison with international peers:** And also, some wanted to 'know' they had the same level of ability as their peers in other countries 'out there'.
- **Hope** is intrinsic in permaculture.

Recommendations

1. Recognise present and past suffering and problems without focusing on them.
2. All students to receive as much freedom and responsibility as possible.
3. Watch for distressed students and acknowledge through a nod or quiet word in a break that you are making allowances for them. Don't ask for their story unless they offer to tell you.
4. Take into consideration the lack of science education and sometimes the inability to read diagrams. However, they will learn.
5. Provide breakfast if possible, and if not, then substantive snacks.
6. Keep class size at less than 30 or, offer two consecutive courses.
7. Observe normal culture where it works for learning but be prepared to stretch it a little to help students learn better.
8. Use drawings on whiteboard, chalkboard or paper and colour code your work.
9. Use group work and monitor closely for participation, subject knowledge and expertise and adherence to the topic. Each person should feel free to contribute.
10. Find a brilliant interpreter and prepare the night before.
11. Decide between 'essential' and 'non-essential' content and let go of what isn't necessary.
12. Allow knowledgeable or experienced students to 'teach'.

13. Find a site without five-metre-high walls so students can see some landscape, or sky.
14. There is an urgent need for the skills of this course to be reinforced and new ones offered in a type of 'boot' camp which offers a series of techniques in everything from compost making to pond building and water catchment at household scale.

Final thoughts

It was a difficult PDC unlike any other. My heart was deeply engaged with the students, their courage, their plight, and with concern for their future.

Their evident intelligence when faced with new science and thinking; with radically testing learner-methodology, and establishing a collegiate relationship, was rewarding.

I was reminded minute by minute of the cultural differences between us, and the awareness I had to bring to situations which give different class responses e.g. students left books and papers on the floor because they had no books or papers and they did not value them. They valued knowledge in a different medium. It was up to me to find out what it was. I had to keep before me their history and their possible future.

I cannot say what outcomes there will be. I know that many are competent and able to carry permaculture forward. I had to focus on what they could use in permaculture if their lives deteriorate further. I focused on the essentials but also gave glimpses of a much better future than any of them had known. It was a delicate balance.

They responded with generosity, warmth, curiosity and appreciation, and some with outstanding work.



Final graduating group

I continue to carry them and daily concern for their future. If possible I will return and follow their lives and assist some to become the first trainers of permaculture in Afghanistan.

To the lovable brave Afghan Peace Volunteers in Kabul

Rowe Morrow, May 2016

3. REVISITING THE WORK OF MAHBoba'S PROMISE

CONSOLIDATION OF A WORTHWHILE PROJECT

Its history

In 2002, I visited Mahboba's Promise in Kabul with Gary Caganoff, film maker. Gary made the film "*Garden at the End of the World*" which won global human rights awards. Many people found the very factual documentary almost unwatchable. Most cried for the Afghan people and understood the tragedy that is war.

Kabul at that time was a heap of rubble. Violence was everywhere. The orphanage venues that Mahboba, the founder of Mahboba's Promise, was finding for the 'too many' orphans and street children, were houses, lent by her family. Life was precarious as the residents and internally displaced newcomers (IDPs) tried to find a place for themselves and establish lives with some degree of normalcy. I witnessed what it took to get children enrolled in schools when they had no papers and so no evidence of their existence.

The children were quite wild. They had lived events and seen horrors that would not be allowed on family television. Mahboba's hope was to give every widow and homeless child, a home, a secure retreat and life with dignity.

The boys slept on mats in one room downstairs and the girls upstairs. I would sit in the boy's room as they slept and watch over them through their nightmares. They'd stand up, thresh around with their fists, shout then lie down again. If they woke I would massage their shoulders and make soothing noises.

In the girl's room, eleven-year old Malia fought the nurse to have her small five year old brother¹⁵ sleep in the girl's room so she could look after him and her younger sister. I'd wake in the night to hear her give her brother or sister a drink of water, or take her small brother's hand and lead him down the steps, out the door and across the yard to the outside pit toilet, then bring him all the way back again.

The children fought. And the adults fought. The other side of this was that everyone was very needy. Children lined up for morning health inspection of skin and hair and a vitamin C tablet. Then the adults would join the queue. An enormous barefoot carpenter would put his foot through the window to show a tiny scratch needing a bandaid.

Kabul had few consumer goods. The IDP camps were huge and unserved. There was almost no waste. Every bit of jettisoned stuff was gone through many times for sale or utility.

Now Kabul is awash with the cheapest consumer goods with no lasting quality and the amount of garbage that cannot be re-used, or recycled clogs drains and rivers. There are small hills of rubbish at the end of streets.

¹⁵ Once the boys had gone to bed she would regularly go downstairs and bring her little brother upstairs to her bed. Finally, she was given permission for him to be in the girl's room.

Mahboba's Promise Homes for Children

Due to my teaching obligations I was only able to visit two homes, one in Kabul and the other in the Panjshir Valley where I had spent time on the previous visit and schools and clinics were being built.

I missed the wonderful Haji Sahib who had been in charge and was so passionate, caring about his country and the children washed up on the shores of war. This time we met inspiring and hospitable, caring [Khalid Malikzada](#), field representative, who, lead us to the two sites and made it possible for us to meet staff and children and talk to them through Martin who speaks Dari.

Khalid spoke movingly of the children, of his care for them, concern and fears for their future but also with pride in their accomplishments. We had some profound conversations with him about the present difficulties and the future uncertainties. He has a sharp awareness of the country's problems.

The children must leave Mahboba's Promise at 18 years of age. After that they return to their village where they are supported in future study or apprenticeships until they are self-supporting. So much work goes into seeing the older children are realistically and well launched in life.

Khalid gave his time, so that I, with Mark Isaacs and Martin Reusch, on two occasions could visit the new residences. Martin had been told that Mahboba's Promise was among the best NGOs in Kabul and was known to deliver well to children and staff. The Australian Embassy is showing an interest in the project as well.

Overall there was a remarkable difference in the decade. The children looked well. They were taller for their ages, more settled and wanted to play soccer instead of fighting. They had tutors to help them with their schoolwork and some had already succeeded at University. In fact, the present accountant of Mahboba's Promise is a graduate from University and a past orphan resident of the project. She expressed pride in how the children achieve.

Sadly, I did not have the time nor resources to follow up on children from the video. Some had gone to Pakistan, others to Iran, a few had died, and all had moved around many times. Those who had gone to University were known but tried to leave the country. There is no tracing mechanism in Afghanistan. It is easy to lose friends or family.

Kabul Residence and office

This site has two solid buildings:

- The residence, classrooms and dormitories for children
- The offices for Mahboba's Promise

The gardens were dormant for February is winter in Kabul. Evidently some slight design changes would be possible but the Kabul Hope House had a fine orchard and a polyhouse of plastic beautifully positioned against a warm clay wall. The watering system was in place however the polyhouse grows only ornamentals. Growing food is strongly recommended.



The children's home in Kabul



The office block in Kabul on the same land

It was heartening to find that MP had been able to establish a bakery and make confectionary and patisserie for the market. Some of the older orphans are apprentices and we were able to meet them. There was a large range of products and MP had secured a year's contract to supply the President of Afghanistan's palace.



Produce from the patisserie

In addition, this locally financially successful project supplies many shops in Kabul and has its own outlets. They use quality ingredients. The income is returned to the needs of the project and is MP's big effort to become locally sustainable. This is very difficult to achieve in Kabul.



These boys from MP in Kabul came over to chat with us

Panjshir Valley Residence

The population of the Valley has grown and the project changed since the film.

The Health Clinic built by MP is now under the administration of the Provincial Health Department which is very sensible. The girl's school has turned out literate and numerate girls for some years.

The new residence was financed by an Australian philanthropist whom they spoke of with gratitude. The children here are from the Panjshir Valley and it is a brave attempt to meet the inequities of rural resources and education in Afghanistan. Rural areas have few resources to serve widows and orphans, and the quality of institutions such as education is very low.

We met all the children who gave us an admirable concert before lunch. These are very different children in temperament from the first children Mahboba rescued off the streets of Kabul. They sang, spoke in English, did a small play/dance and totally entertained us. We were delighted.



Some of the concert presenters – such fun

In return we sang a few songs, not nearly as good as theirs, at which they laughed and joined in. Then we shared a meal. The children were at ease. They looked in much better health than the rest of the children we saw in the Valley.

The residence is a two-storey building with a large undercroft serving as a dining room and playground. Indeed, after lunch Mark got involved in a dramatic game of soccer with the boys. Before this fun game, Khalid handed over money, so a child could go to the market and buy a soccer ball.

The Australian Embassy in Kabul has promised sports equipment. MP had also been supported through the Ambassador's discretionary fund.

Mahboba's Promise has provided stability, health and education for almost two generations of children now. The difference now from its difficult beginnings is remarkable. There is stability and it offers lives of quality and opportunity to very poor children.

However, the spectre of the country's future hangs over this successful project as it does for every endeavor in Afghanistan. It would indeed be a tragedy if the success of this project and what it gives children cannot to be perpetuated into a stable peace.

It is a model for other NGOs which could build on its strengths not the least of which are the country field representatives they employ, their principles, their records and reports.

Mark Isaacs is writing another longer report on Mahboba's Promise and Gary Caganoff has made a short follow-up video since I returned.

When I again asked what message I could take back, and what do they need, the response was: PEACE.

Thank you, Mark and Khalid, for your support and for the photos, and Martin for your warm support.

Rowe Morrow, May 2016