



What we do in Afghanistan

- We're helping 25,298 children get a better education
- We've saved lives by distributing woolly hats to 60,000 newborn babies
- We're protecting 6,624 children from harm and abuse
- We provided practical help to 16,030 children affected by floods and drought



Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world, and is ranked second for its child mortality rate – **one in four children die before they reach their fifth birthday**. The fall of the Taliban in November 2001 ended more than two decades of conflict, during which the country's infrastructure and systems have been almost totally destroyed. It's estimated that 70% of the population live in poverty. More than half of all children under five (54%) are stunted due to poor nutrition. Life expectancy is just 44.

The fragile security situation continues to prevent people rebuilding their livelihoods. Presidential elections went ahead in August 2009 with security forces on high alert. Followers of the Taliban have re-grouped and control much of the south and east, despite an intensification of military offensives by NATO soldiers. Millions of Afghans are still living as refugees, in Iran and Pakistan.

More than half of Afghanistan's 27.1 million population are under 18 years of age. Two-thirds of the population live on less than US\$2 a day, so many children have to work to support their families. Many do not have enough to eat, have no school to go to and cannot get treatment when they are ill. Children are often caught up in the fighting which continues in the south and east. The Afghan government has very limited capacity to meet the basic needs of its citizens.

Save the Children in Afghanistan

We've worked in Afghanistan since 1976, when we provided emergency healthcare and education.

Despite a difficult working environment, in 2008 we expanded our programme considerably, reaching 238,843 children (compared with 57,293 in 2007). Our activities focus on getting more children into primary school and protecting children from harm. We're starting to provide more and better healthcare for children and their carers in the rural areas. We're enabling children to realise their rights to education, health and nutrition, protection, recreation, and participation. We work in Kabul city and its surrounding rural areas, Balkh, Sar-i-pul and Jawzjan in the north, and Kandahar and Uruzgan in the south.

We work in partnership with local community groups, government ministries, other members of the International Save the Children Alliance, as well as international NGOs and UN agencies.

We're helping children get a good quality education

In 2001, just 1 million Afghan children went to primary school. Today 5 million do – but that still leaves 7 million who don't, including some 60,000 who are working on the streets of Kabul, and up to 92% of girls in some rural areas. The standard of education is poor. There are shortages of qualified teachers and a lack of textbooks and equipment. Girls are discriminated against and there are not enough female teachers. The presence of mines in some areas makes it dangerous for children to go to school.

In 2008, through our Rewrite the Future programme, we've provided a good quality education for 25,298 children. This includes 13,650 children who are going to school for the first time. Working with five local partners in Balkh, Jawzjan, Sar-i-pul, Kabul, Kandahar and Uruzgan, we've set up 455 accelerated learning programme (ALP) centres to help children who've missed out on school catch up on their studies to the point where they can join mainstream schools. We also support 40 formal primary schools, providing textbooks, stationery and teachers' kits. Our experience shows that it is possible to increase children's enrolment and retention rates, and that using non-formal classes is an effective way to reach children who were missing out on school.

We work with local communities to mobilise them to encourage school enrolment and attendance, and to get parents more involved in their children's education. In Balkh, for instance, parents and the local community raised funds to build new boundary walls around two girls' schools.

We're also trying to make schools safe learning environments for children, so we're training more than 2,000 teachers in child-centred teaching and learning methods, and positive forms of classroom discipline, avoiding use of corporal punishment.

We're enabling children to catch up on what they've missed

We've set up 13 drop-in centres to provide non-formal classes and basic healthcare for children not in school, including children who work or live on the streets. They can come here for a couple of hours a day to catch up on basic schooling. We provide them with textbooks, stationery, hygiene kits and other items. For many girls, these non-formal classes are a rare opportunity to learn basic literacy and arithmetic.

We also encourage these children to move into formal education where possible. We help many of them to get official identification cards, making it easier to enrol in primary school. Often their parents are illiterate and unable to manage the complicated registration system.

We're protecting children from harm

Children's rights are still a new concept in Afghanistan. Although the country ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1994, many children suffer from abuse and exploitation, and are highly vulnerable to being trafficked. We work to raise awareness of children's rights among teachers, communities and children themselves. We put pressure on the authorities to make sure children's rights are respected.

We've helped set up children's groups in schools and drop-in centres in Balkh, Jawzjan and Sar-i-pul. In 2008, these groups benefited some 6,624 children. The children discuss issues that affect them and express their views directly to the appropriate adults in the local community. We've also helped children to produce their own radio programmes talking about children's rights, and the problems that affect their lives. These radio programmes have reached around half a million listeners.

We're also coaching social workers in three provinces, whose role is to protect vulnerable children's wellbeing. We're helping the government to develop national standards for social work, and helping to set up a professional network of social workers as a source of peer support and professional development.

Our working relationship with the Afghan government is continuing to improve. Last year, we helped children actively take part in the government's reporting on its obligations under the UNCRC, thereby helping children get their voice heard by those who make decisions about their lives.

Back in the UK, we've been producing videos to let people know what life is like for Afghan children, some as young as five, who have to work to support their families. We're also finding innovative ways to get children's views heard – for instance, in the run-up to the presidential elections, using 'YouTube' to show what children said when we asked: 'What would you do if you were president?'

(www.youtube.com/watch?v=abzbFf3Zjwc&feature=channel_page)

We're making children healthier

Afghanistan has made good progress in improving its health services, but much remains to be done. Infant, child and neonatal mortality rates are among the highest in the world.

Women face a 1 in 8 lifetime risk of dying during childbirth. There are shortages of qualified staff, materials and drugs. Many children die from illnesses that are easily prevented and treated, such as diarrhoea and respiratory tract infections.

Afghanistan has been designated a 'champion' country in Save the Children's newborn and child survival campaign. So we'll be stepping up our activities to save children's lives and improve their healthcare, hygiene and nutrition.

In 2008, we ran training workshops on hygiene, nutrition and disease prevention, for 7,000 children, as well as 510 parents, teachers and government officials. In one project, children are trained to pass on knowledge about health and hygiene (such as the importance of immunisation, vitamin supplements, de-worming, etc) to their peers. More than 1,300 children have received training, and are now acting as peer educators for other children.

We're also helping malnourished children, especially those in rural areas, and children who are working or live on the streets. With funding from UNICEF, we've successfully completed a pilot project providing community-based therapeutic care (CTC), which helped save the lives of 359 severely malnourished children in Jawzjan province. We now plan to extend the project to all the districts in the province. We're training 244 health staff from hospitals and clinics in child health and nutrition screening, as well as follow-up systems to ensure that children at risk are referred for appropriate help. And we're reaching more than 15,000 women in rural areas with advice on the best child feeding practices for newborn babies and children under five.

As well as providing practical help through our programmes, we know that we need to secure changes in policies on health and nutrition so that many more children across the country can benefit. At the moment, the government's Basic Package of Health Services does not include a CTC nutrition element, so we're talking to officials in the Ministry of Public Health as well as donors to push for this to be included, as it will make a real difference to children's health and survival.

We're safeguarding children affected by emergencies

Afghanistan is prone to natural and man-made disasters such as heavy snow falls, floods, landslides, and disease outbreaks, and armed conflict has regularly led to large population displacements. Because of this, we're working with government ministries, the Afghan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA), UN agencies, other international agencies, and our partners in the International Save the Children Alliance, to integrate children's issues into disaster preparedness and response.

During 2008, we also provided practical help to 16,030 children in four provinces who were affected by a heavy winter, flooding and drought. We supplied them with blankets, warm clothing, shoes, hygiene kits, and other items.

We've set up a pilot project using a child-focused, participatory approach to help communities prepare for a rapid-onset disaster such as flooding. This project is taking place in two districts – Hazrat Sultan in Samangan province, and Sholgara in Balkh province. We're working with a local partner who has mobilised children's groups, youth clubs, women's groups and district authorities to make sure children are fully involved.



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