

# Welcome to Bamyan!

## The place in Afghanistan where the child you sponsor lives Community Newsletter April 2010

Dear Sponsor,

A warm welcome to Bamyan. This relatively peaceful province is homeland to the Hazara Turko-Mongols, one of the three largest ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Centuries ago, the beautiful valley of Bamyan was the intersection where western and eastern civilisations met, making it a popular trading centre.

However, Bamyan gained international attention in 2001 when the Taliban regime caused mass genocide, with thousands of Hazaras (belonging to the Shiite faith of Islam) being killed. You may remember the news stories of the ancient - Buddha's, which were the largest standing carvings in the world, being destroyed by the Taliban these were in Bamyan.

Today Bamyan is one of the worst poverty stricken areas of Afghanistan. ActionAid has been working in the country since 2002, and began working in this province last year. Thanks to your generous decision to sponsor a child living in Bamyan, we are now able to help rebuild the lives of people here.

In this first update to you, you will learn a bit more about life here, the problems people face and the work you are helping to make possible. We are very thankful for your generous support and most grateful for your kindness in helping us with this good work.

Yours sincerely,

Fazal Ali  
Child Sponsorship Manager  
ActionAid Afghanistan

### Meet Nasiba, she wants to share her Drawing with you

Nasiba is seven years old. She lives in Alibig village, Bamyan and has just started at Alibig Primary School. She lives in a family of seven, headed by her older brother. Nasiba's favourite subject in school is drawing. Here, she is doing a drawing for you and hopes you like it.

On page three of this newsletter you will be able to read more about education in Bamyan.



Here is Nasiba drawing

## Learn about life in Bamyan

- Bamyan lies at an altitude of 9,200 feet.
- Winters last for six months, with temperatures dropping to -40 degrees Celsius.
- Only 35% of families have access to safe water. Most families collect water from streams which often freezes during the winter months.
- 40% of children are enrolled in school. The average distance to primary school is five kilometres.

## Education an important role for children

During the Taliban's rule education, particularly for girls, was banned. Schools were burnt down and the entire educational system was ruined. Today, the strength of the people living in Bamyan has become clear, with the most number of girl students now being in Bamyan! Students of Bamyan are scoring top positions in entrance exams for Kabul University.

However, because education is seen as important, it has caused overcrowding in schools, and a lack of school equipment. When talking about her daily life at school, Fahima (9) told us, **“Our school is 30 minutes walk away. I walk with my friends to school every day at 1pm.**

**Girls and boys of lots of different villages come to one school.**

**Our school is very small but there are many students. Because there are not enough classes, we have to sit outside under the open sky. When the weather is very hot or if it rains, we have to run back to our homes.”**

ActionAid plans to work with education, improving school life for students. We look forward to updating you as this work happens.



Girls learning in class under an open sky

## A universal game of pull the rope (Tug-of-war)

Tanawo Kashi is the local name for pull the rope, a famous game played by people of all ages, from children up to elders of the village. Two opponent groups stand opposite each other and pull a rope with their full force. Whichever group pulls the rope to a certain point will win the game.

As this game is so popular at bringing people together, ActionAid has included this game in many organised events. During these events children are able to play games, learn poetry and eat food that they wouldn't usually be able to afford.



A pull the rope competition taking place

## Women - the backbone of Bamyan

Unlike other parts of Afghanistan, the people of Bamyan are open-minded towards the freedom and equal rights of women.

The women of Bamyan stood shoulder to shoulder with the men to protect themselves from the Taliban. Today, the first woman governor in the history of Afghanistan is in Bamyan! And if you came here, you would see women driving taxis, and female police officers; an absolute rarity in Afghanistan.

However, this doesn't mean the women in Bamyan are not suffering. Many have been left widows following the Taliban regime, so are now struggling to raise their children and earn an income alone. Many working women lack the skills needed for business. Many don't know the techniques of using tools for weaving carpets.



ActionAid will help women improve in skills such as weaving carpets

Our initial project, which we are carrying out right now with ninety women, is to train women with skills like reading and writing, learning about their rights as women and skills to earn a living. We will keep you up-to-date with their progress.

## Meet the cave dwellers

When Buddhist monks used to visit the giant Buddha's in Bamyan valley, they would live in caves carved into the cliff face. These caves still exist, with hundreds of people still living in them!

During the Taliban invasion, many refugees fled to Iran and Pakistan. When they returned, they were homeless, and so moved to the caves to find shelter. Today, we would like to introduce you to one family living here. Chaman Ali (65) has been living in a cave with his eight children for seven years. He told us:

**“When the Taliban killed my brother and son, they arrested me. I was injured with a bullet to my hip. They put me in prison for over a month with hardly any food or water. Because of that bullet, I am now disabled, so my younger son is the only breadwinner for the family. He has gone to Ghazni province to work on a construction site.**

**Life is difficult here. It freezes in the harsh winter and burns in the hot summer. Children collect bushes from the nearby mountains to use as fire wood.”**

Charman Ali's granddaughter, Hussnia (7) adds, **“Most of the hours during the day, I sit in our room beside the fire to warm myself and Esmatullah [her younger cousin]. I sometimes play with my school friends but, because we live in the mountain caves, I more often play with my family.”**



Chaman Ali cave dweller of Bamyan



Hussnia and her cousin at the cave

## Cultural traditions of Bamyan

In Afghanistan, we are often asked about traditional ceremonies. This time, we would like to share with you a commonly asked question about marriages.

### What are the cultural traditions of a marriage?

Most marriages in Bamyan are arranged. It is the responsibility of the parents to find a girl in the surrounding villages to marry their son. Once they have found a girl, the elders of the boy's village arrange the marriage with the parents of the girl.

On the day of the wedding, the bride is often portrayed as being sad because she is leaving her parents to move to a new village. The newly married couple will live with the boy's parents.



Wedding in Bamyan

## Bamyan News!

### Increasing food production for farmers

With your kind support, ActionAid plans to establish a Food Security Network for farmers in Bamyan. This will include training with modern farming techniques, providing good quality seeds and organising groups for farmers to get together and discuss issues. Farmers across Bamyan use cows for sowing seed, or their bare hands. This training will provide much needed assistance to increase food crops and save time.



You are helping increase food production for farmers

### Providing cleaner water for the community

As water collected by households is from streams and unprotected sources of water, many have to travel long distances to fetch the water and often end up falling sick from drinking it. ActionAid has already started working with the community to change this situation.

So far, we have dug two shallow wells and installed a hand pump in Bamyan. A water reservoir has also been built for storing and protecting the water for all the community to access. With your valuable sponsorship, we will continue to assist the community of Bamyan to get clean, safe water.

**Thank you! I hope you have been able to build up an understanding of life in Bamyan through this report. Your support will be of great value to families living here, helping them gain an education, get safe water, gain more job opportunities, and thus improve their lives. On behalf of everyone living here, thank you so much.**