



Swedish Committee
for Afghanistan

Building a Future

Committed to Sustainable Development

SCA STRATEGIC PLAN
2023–2025





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for Afghanistan

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ACRONYMS

| | |
|---------------|--|
| AESTF | Afghanistan Education Sector Transitional Framework |
| ANSOP | Afghanistan National Society for Orthotics and Prosthetics |
| BBC | British Broadcasting Corporation |
| CBE | Community-Based Education |
| CBO | Community-Based Organisation |
| CBR | Community-Based Rehabilitation |
| CCA | Climate Change Adaptation |
| CDC | Community Development Council |
| CSO | Civil Society Organisation |
| DFA | De-Facto Authorities |
| DRR | Disaster Risk Reduction |
| HQIP | Harmonised Quality Improvement Package |
| ISKP | Islamic State Khorasan Province |
| LHL | Learning for Healthy Life Programme |
| NGO | Non-Government Organisation |
| OOSC | Out-of-School Children |
| PC | Parent Committee(s) |
| SCA | Swedish Committee for Afghanistan |
| SHG | Self-Help Groups |
| SMS | School Management Shura |
| TEMP | Teacher Education Master Programme |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UNOCHA | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs |
| WASH | Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene |

Afghanistan is experiencing a deepening humanitarian and development crisis. Spiralling poverty, population displacement and drought afflict communities across the country. Since the Taliban assumed control as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in August 2021¹, the country entered a new political era, bringing both challenges and opportunities. The De-Facto Authorities have initiated a broad range of policy reforms that put many of the gains made over the last two decades at risk. At the same time, the withdrawal of international military forces has effectively brought an end to two decades of conflict, enabling access to parts of the country that were previously inaccessible.

It is in this context that we renew and confirm our commitment to working with rights holders, local communities and duty bearers in Afghanistan. This Strategic Plan covers the period 2023–2025 and provides an overview of our priorities and strategies in Afghanistan and Sweden. It describes how SCA will deliver its mission and live its values. This Strategic Plan is the result of a broad and participatory collaboration between local communities, SCA

staff, SCA members, our partners and external stakeholders. It represents the culmination of internal and external consultations across the spectrum of SCA's target areas, ensuring a highly inclusive exercise. SCA's work falls into four overarching *Strategic Intervention Areas*, each of which pursue independent — though mutually reinforcing — outcomes. These are *Health, Education, Rural Development* and *Building Commitment*. The Strategic Plan also provides guidance for SCA's operations and support functions. It is the basis for annual planning, implementation and monitoring.

Following the recent political transition, national development frameworks such as the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework, were rendered effectively obsolete. In the absence of new national frameworks, SCA will continue to align its programmes with previous relevant frameworks. SCA will also be guided by the short-term engagement frameworks established by the United Nations in 2021, which guide objectives and outline funding and cooperation modalities among aid organisations. The Strategic plan aligns to the *Sustainable Development Goals* as a primary formal development framework. ■

1. Since the Taliban care-taker government is not internationally recognised, SCA refers to it as the De-Facto Authorities (DFA). SCA maintains to remain impartial but at the same time aligns to current international praxis.

Vision, Mission and Values



| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| VISION | Our Vision is an Afghanistan free from poverty, violence and discrimination, where human rights are respected and all live in dignity, enjoy equal opportunity and social justice. |
| MISSION | Our mission is to empower individuals, communities and local organisations so that they may participate fully in society and influence their own development. SCA will achieve this by working closely with communities, local and national civil society organisations and relevant levels of government, and by combining capacity development, service delivery and advocacy. |
| SCA IS CHARACTERIZED BY: | <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ respect for the Afghan people's right to self determination.■ equal treatment of people regardless of religion, gender or ethnicity.■ knowledge and understanding of culture and religion in Afghanistan, as well as■ respect for the importance that cultural and religious values have in people's lives.■ compliance with universal human rights. |
| TARGET GROUPS | SCA shall give priority to girls and boys, women and people with disabilities. SCA shall focus its interventions within the sectors of Education, Health, Disability and Rural Development. |



A new school with community based education in Wardak Province.

PHOTO | MOHAMMADULLAH KAMAL

In all areas of our work, we strive to uphold a core set of values. These values characterize the way we work with our colleagues, communities and partners, while also helping us navigate Afghanistan's complex religious, social and political landscape.

RESPONSIVENESS

We work in respectful cooperation with target groups to address their needs and legitimate demands with an emphasis on local ownership.

EQUALITY

We promote equal opportunities and facilitate equal access to resources for all citizens, including women, girls, boys and persons with disabilities.

IMPARTIALITY

While upholding the duty to be inclusive and non-discriminatory in our approach, we do not take sides in conflict and we do not support specific factions or parties representing various interests in society.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

We strive to be fair to all with whom we work. While working to affirm the rights of all individuals, we recognize that differences in gender, individual capabilities and identities give rise to varied needs and interests.

INTEGRITY

We are true to our mission, maintaining honesty and transparency in all of what we do and say, upholding a spirit of openness and sharing with stakeholders, while always prepared to be held to account for our actions.



Context

A large pipe scheme project, constructed by SCA, which covers an area of 85 square kilometers, now provides safe drinking water for 3,645 families in fourteen hard-to-reach villages of Rustaq district in Takhar Province.

PHOTO | KAJSA WAAGHALS

When the Taliban assumed control of Afghanistan in August 2021, it marked the end of two decades of Western influence, and the beginning of a new chapter for the country. For many people, used to living under either partial or full control of the Taliban for the last two decades, the current situation has not radically changed. For others, particularly those living in large urban areas, the difference is far more significant. There are growing restrictions on basic liberties, particularly for women, and the space for civic dialogue is rapidly shrinking. The hard-won gains of the last two decades are at risk.

After 40 years of conflict Afghanistan remains a highly fragile state, suffering from poor citizen-state relations, lack of accountability of authorities, low public representation and participation, in addition to weak economic growth, limited fiscal capacity, and widespread violence and lack of human security. These challenges are set against the backdrop of a spiralling humanitarian crisis. The context is therefore highly volatile and the future uncertain.

Yet the change in government has also created opportunities. The cessation of war has opened access and physical communication channels to communities in hitherto hard-to-reach areas. This provides opportunities for development and humanitarian actors to deliver on equitable and universal provision of services and community development. The need for SCA's work has never been greater.

Political context

AS THE DFA GRAPPLE with the reality of governing and administering a country of approximately 38 million people, they face three key challenges: liquidity, legitimacy and security. Immediately following the take-over, the international community terminated all on-budget aid contributions to Afghanistan. This cut left public finances at a fraction of previous levels. Although the Taliban at the time indicated that it had become more moderate, its increasingly repressive stance since the take-over on

many social, religious, and political issues, has alienated them further both from the international community and from many segments of Afghan society. It also makes it politically very difficult for the governments of the international community to resume on-budget funding.

The authorities have been able to increase revenues from customs and taxes efficiently, bringing these figures back to 2020 levels², but it still faces significant budgetary shortfalls.

The situation is exacerbated by the mass exodus of former technical and managerial civil servants in key line ministries, leaving significant leadership and operational capacity gaps at national, provincial and district levels. With public services already stretched to the limit, one cannot exclude that this in the future could contribute to a legitimacy crisis for the DFA amongst its own citizens.

There is little clarity from the DFA on the future trajectory of state development. The former parliament has been effectively dissolved, and the current system of governance is based on a higher council of religious leaders that controls the cabinet. The cabinet itself is all male and includes minimal representation of Afghanistan's many ethnic groups. There are currently no transparent processes for debate or policy development. The implementation of policy directives is highly idiosyncratic, varying from one local authority to the next. Furthermore, in the absence of national development frameworks, there is a danger that the transitional frameworks established under the auspices of the UN in Afghanistan for funding and implementation, will create parallel systems that in the longer run undermine state credibility, accountability and the fostering of national ownership. In all this, the risk is also that a weakened state could create space for non-state actors to exploit sectarian tensions and plunge the country once more into protracted conflict.

The security outlook itself is mixed. While the scale and intensity of conflict in Afghanistan has been significantly reduced, the DFA faces a number of challenges. Armed opposition groups could develop into a potential threat to the DFA, especially if the DFA persist with their non-inclusiveness of other ethnic minorities. ►

2. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview#1>

Various groups led by former Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's Political Officials and former members of the Afghan National Security Forces are likely to remain active. Islamic State Khorosan Province also presents a threat to the DFA and is likely to exploit areas of tension between the DFA, anti-DFA Groups, and ethnic groups that may feel marginalised.

Economic context

PRIOR TO THE COLLAPSE of the previous government, Afghanistan's slow economic growth reflected a rapidly worsening security situation and an agricultural sector suffering from severe drought conditions. Even before the Taliban takeover food price inflation in 2021 had reached 17.7%³. After the Taliban takeover international sanctions and frozen assets has crippled the economy and pushed the financial system close to collapse. An increasing share of the population is expected to fall below the poverty line over the course of 2022 due to high unemployment and inflation. The World Bank estimated that 70% of Afghan households have insufficient income to meet basic food and non-food needs⁴, and the UNDP estimates that 97% of the population are heading towards poverty.⁵ We elaborate our understanding of poverty in our Theory of Change later in the Strategic Plan.

The fragility of rural economies and communities in Afghanistan are also driven by extreme vulnerability to climate change. With an economy based largely on agriculture, many communities, particularly those in SCA's programme areas, live in marginal geographic locations and experience the full gamut of environmental challenges including erosion, desertification, drought, landslides, avalanches, earthquakes and flooding. Deforestation, over-exploitation of natural resources and intensive agricultural practices feed into a cycle of environmental degradation. Food shortages are not uncommon in these areas. Improved security

however has eased labour mobility for both on-farm and off-farm work and opens opportunities to strengthen food production systems built around healthy soils, nutrient recycling, efficient irrigation and resilient farm-based livelihoods.

Humanitarian context

AFGHANISTAN IS EXPERIENCING a severe and protracted humanitarian crisis caused by four decades of conflict and recurring natural disasters. Even before the political change in August 2021, Afghanistan's human development indicators were amongst the lowest in the world, with almost half of all children under five expecting to face acute malnutrition.⁶ The crisis has been exacerbated by the current economic decline, over-stretched and under-funded public services, the COVID-19 pandemic, drought, and high food prices.⁷

In Afghanistan, UNOCHA estimates that around 55% of the population are in some form of humanitarian need.⁸ Amongst those most in need are minority groups, children, households headed by women, people with disabilities and marginalised ethnic groups.⁹

Current estimates place almost 20 million people in high levels of acute food insecurity, forcing many households to reduce food intake and employ emergency coping strategies.¹⁰ The humanitarian crisis is particularly acute in remote rural areas, including those where SCA works. The crisis requires development organisations like SCA to collaborate with humanitarian actors, and where possible, adjust existing programme approaches to respond to humanitarian needs.

Human rights context

THE STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS in Afghanistan has deteriorated. The dismantling of the

3. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview#1>, April 13, 2021.

4. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview#1>

5. <https://www.undp.org/press-releases/millions-afghan-lives-and-livelihoods-danger-without-support-says-un-development>

6. Sida (2022): Humanitarian Crisis Analysis, p.1.

7. According to the World Food Programme, the price of wheat alone has increased by around 50% from January 2021 to June 2022. https://dataviz.vam.wfp.org/economic_explorer/prices, extracted 22 June 2022.

8. UNOCHA (2022): Humanitarian Needs Overview: Afghanistan, p.7.

9. UNOCHA (2022): Humanitarian Response Plan Afghanistan, p.27.

10. IPC (2022): IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis March-November 22.

former judiciary and justice system, corrupt and inefficient though they were perceived to be, has effectively elevated the DFA beyond the reach of the law, making it very difficult to seek justice for crimes committed by the incumbent authorities.

Further, restrictions on the media have undermined freedom of expression and limited the capacity of society to hold the DFA to account. Many of Afghanistan's media outlets have closed, particularly those reliant on international funding. Some international news programmes broadcasting in local languages have been banned.

Similarly, civil society has been significantly weakened by new restrictions. Many experienced civil society leaders and activists have left Afghanistan, especially women; those who are left face risk and uncertainty. Activists have turned to organising online now that physical gatherings are illegal. Organisations that focus on human rights are particularly threatened, as they are unable to continue monitoring courts, assisting victims of human rights violations, or raising awareness.

Traditional and community civic structures play a vital role in local governance, and are an important means of strengthening inclusion, citizen participation and addressing inequalities to foster resilience at community level. These structures also include Community Development Councils (CDCs), which remain active in many parts of the country and will likely continue to play an important role in shaping local development trajectories.¹¹ However, there is a concern that CDCs may face limitations on female participation, and the inclusion of marginalised and underrepresented minority groups.

Gender context

AFGHANISTAN REMAINS one of the world's most gender unequal countries according to the recent UN Human Development Report. The restrictive sociocultural norms affecting women and men, predate and transcend the Taliban. At the same time, the gains in equity and rights have been notable over the past two decades. However, with

the Taliban now in control of the country, the outlook for women's and girls' rights is poor.

The closure of the Ministry of Women's Affairs signals a new and challenging context for women's rights in Afghanistan. The DFA have been swift to issue new directives limiting women's participation in society. Afghan women face a multitude of severe restrictions, including a ban on girls' education after Grade 6, loss of employment and income, and highly constrained travel outside of the household, making it very difficult for women to find and maintain paid employment. Women in Afghanistan now have less access to justice as the independent judiciary has been replaced by courts favouring an extreme interpretation of religious and traditional views of gender roles.

In the short term, the Taliban's policies impact individual liberties and contravene basic human rights. In the mid-term, they will have detrimental consequences for women - with increasing risks of child marriage, early pregnancy, gender-based violence, loss of agency, voice and income. In the long term it will severely limit Afghanistan's development potential, by disempowering half of the potential workforce. Depriving girls of education creates a future shortfall in key roles in the public and private sectors (teachers, healthcare professionals, business leaders), which perpetuates the marginalization of future generations of women and girls in addition to weakening Afghanistan's economic and social prospects overall.

Disability context

DISABILITY RATES in Afghanistan have been conspicuously high for decades; the result of malnutrition, poverty and conflict. Humanitarian assessments¹² reveal that of the estimated 24.4 million Afghans in need of urgent humanitarian support, over two million live with severe disabilities. People with disabilities in Afghanistan experience a range of acute challenges, from limited access to public services to discrimination and marginalisation in the employment market. Girls and women with disabilities are at a greater disadvantage than their male counterparts¹³. ■

11. World Bank (2022): Project Appraisal Document for the ARTF, p.11.

12. Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan 2022.

13. Afghanistan 2019 Human rights report.

Theory of Change



Children in primary school on their way to school.

PHOTO | MOHAMMADULLAH KAMAL

Underpinning our strategy is the SCA Theory of Change, based on SCA's Policy which outlines our doctrine as a rights-based development actor. SCA's Theory of Change provides a schematic understanding of how we view poverty, believe social change can happen, and see our role in facilitating and promoting such.

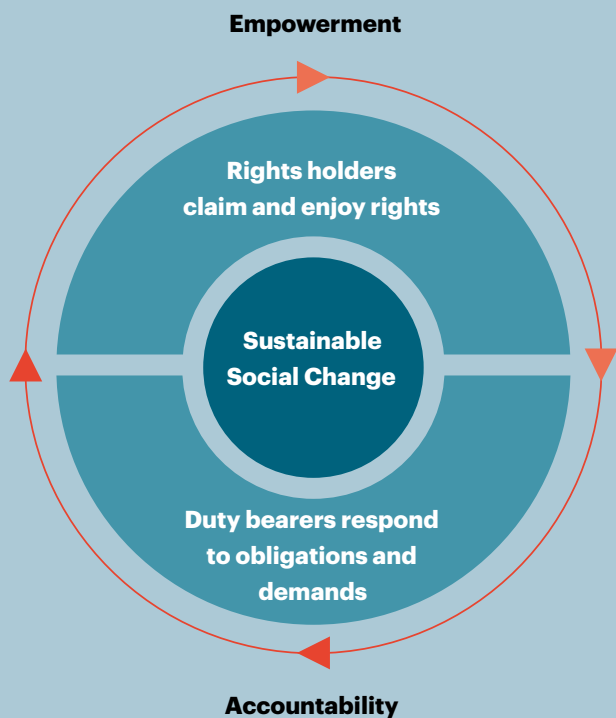
How we understand the problem

THE EXPERIENCE OF SCA is that poverty often is the underlying cause of the challenges facing development and recovery in Afghanistan. Poverty is multidimensional, manifesting itself in a variety of different ways. It entails a lack of resources, lack of agency, lack of opportunities and choice, and insecurity. These factors are interconnected, mutually reinforcing, and are both causes and effects of

poverty. We use the following definitions for each of these terms:

- Lack of resources: a lack of material assets, including money.
- Lack of agency: lacking the confidence, knowledge and platforms to advocate for and enact change;
- Lack of opportunities: an absence of 'exit pathways' from poverty, whether educational, health-related, environmental, economic or political, marginalisation and social exclusion;
- Insecurity: the continuous volatility caused by human violence and conflict.

The above manifestations of poverty interplay with broader constraints and opportunities to development that are context-specific and found within for instance political, institutional, economic, social and environmental spheres. The roots of poverty within these spheres can often be traced to structures of marginalisation and unequal power relations. ►



WE ASSUME

- That empowerment and development are long-term objectives that require maintaining flexibility and pragmatism in “negotiating” with power holders.
- That rights are universal and inalienable, but that the pace and progress towards their realization are conditioned by context, power-dynamics and resources.
- Rights holders will claim and enjoy rights, if having awareness, means and capacity, and opportunities to demand accountability.
- Duty bearers will respond to rights, if having the means, knowledge and capacity, and are held to account.

Poverty in Afghanistan is often experienced more acutely in remote rural areas, as these are commonly the very last places to benefit from investments and developments. As a result, they experience low access to public services (such as health and education), poor transport and communication infrastructure, and limited economic opportunities. They are also places where harmful cultural practices are often the most deeply entrenched, particularly regarding women’s rights.

Many poverty challenges in Afghanistan prevail as a result of disempowered communities and insufficient capacity and willingness on part of duty bearers to respond to rights and demands. Duty bearers have neither the means, knowledge nor capacity to fulfil their mandates to serve citizens. Rights holders lack awareness of their rights as well as the conditions and the means through which they can uphold them. Power imbalances within and between groups prevent individuals from exercising their rights. Corruption and cronyism penetrate society.

SCA’s vision and development goals

SCA’S VISION is an Afghanistan free from poverty, violence and discrimination. We believe

the mark of a just society is the way it treats the marginalised, disempowered and vulnerable. SCA therefore seeks to support the growth of a society with i) economically and socially just rural communities; ii) the full participation of women; iii) the full inclusion of persons with disabilities; and iv) all children participating in achieving their full potential. These are SCA’s Development Goals.

How we believe sustainable social change can happen

SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL CHANGE needs to be built on initiatives that are owned and driven from within Afghan society, addressing the underlying causes of multidimensional poverty. Change is possible when rights-holders have access to pathways out of poverty and the liberty to pursue them. Change is furthermore promoted by rights holders being aware of, understanding and having the capacity and platforms to advocate for their own rights. Change is also furthered when duty bearers are aware of their obligations and capacitated and resourced to respond to legitimate demands.

Change occurs when unequal power relations in society, within communities and

households, are transformed to enable equal conditions for women and men, girls and boys to participate in their own right. SCA believes that change is promoted when accountability among duty bearers – be it the state, international community, organisations, communities, families or the individual – is strengthened, and when individuals and communities are empowered to claim and enjoy their rights. SCA therefore adopts Rights-Based Approaches to development, which entails working for a positive transformation of power relations.

One of the key preconditions for empowerment is the existence of a strong and inclusive civil society. The revival of civil society, particularly community-based structures, is crucial in providing forums for citizens and groups to organize, and to formulate and voice their demands from the State and other duty bearers. Further, we believe working within existing social and religious frameworks, and engaging religious leaders and key informants, can facilitate change in for instance attitudes towards women and girls' participation. The principle that universal human rights are critical for social and economic development resonates well with Islamic thought.

What we do, and how

WE ADDRESS multidimensional poverty by supporting the empowerment of rights holders and promoting the accountability of duty bearers. To do this, our programmatic interventions are designed along three strategic means: capacity development, advocacy and service delivery.

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT: SCA works with rights holders, including professional associations, community-level representative bodies and civil society organisations to equip them with the knowledge, skills and tools to advocate for their rights to be upheld by duty bearers. In parallel, SCA builds the capacity of duty bearers, particularly at local and community level, to support them in delivering their mandates to serve citizens. Since the de facto-government lack international recogni-

tion, SCA capacity development support will mainly entail coordinating and engaging with technical state-level duty bearers who have the mandate of public service delivery. SCA will offer institutional capacity support (training, exposures, systems strengthening) to technical state-level duty bearers aimed at sustainability, improved accountability and responsiveness to the legitimate needs and rights of SCA target groups. SCA will adhere to the rights-based principles of non-discrimination, participation, transparency, and accountability and will not accept activities that support or institutionalise discrimination in its engagement with duty bearers. Separately, SCA also builds livelihoods capacities of local producers to increase resilience and income.

ADVOCACY: SCA promotes the interests of local communities, elevating their concerns to duty bearers at local, national and international levels. At the national level, SCA engages with like-minded organisations and the DFA to influence policy decisions and legislation in support of our target communities. SCA applies contextualized advocacy that refers to Islamic discourse rather than solely to international conventions. SCA also engages with international non-governmental organisations and networks to influence global development policies and maintain funding flows to Afghanistan. SCA is also active in Sweden and Europe, advocating for Afghanistan to remain a priority for official development assistance.

SERVICE DELIVERY: SCA serves the most marginalised and vulnerable by providing quality public services in remote areas. SCA delivers public services in healthcare, education and rural development, ensuring that the rights and needs of communities are met, especially for women, children, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. We fill gaps in public services and contribute to continual improvements through testing innovative and inclusive models of implementation. By delivering public services, we strengthen exit pathways from poverty and create entry points for engaging with local communities through which they are stimulated and capacitated to organise and advocate. SCA therefore views service delivery as a core element of its rights-based programming. ■

11-year-old Karim is happy that the new water well is closer to home. The children can go to school instead of fetching water and the villagers avoid getting sick from drinking contaminated water.

Working Approaches and Cross-Cutting Perspectives

SCA operations are shaped by several working approaches and cross-cutting perspectives. They are integrated at all levels of programme design, planning, implementation, and reporting, and are further elaborated under each of the Strategic Intervention Areas of this Plan.

Triple nexus and building resilience

WE DELIVER OUR PROGRAMMES in a complex and highly changeable context, where humanitarian, development and peacebuilding needs often overlap – a so-called ‘triple nexus’. SCA will seek opportunities to align our existing development programmes with humanitarian and peacebuilding interventions. We will also do this by collaborating with humanitarian and peacebuilding initiatives of civil society actors, thereby leveraging combined resources and complimentary skillsets to achieve shared goals.

For humanitarian work, SCA will maintain strategic flexibility to enable our programmes to respond to emergency and humanitarian needs in areas where we are currently active, either through collaboration with partners or direct intervention. SCA will also strengthen coordination with local government authorities to help them develop their contingency plans and enhance their humanitarian functions.

For peacebuilding work, SCA focuses on mainstreaming peace education in its work with community-based organisations to promote cohesion, tolerance and diversity, and to address the causes of marginalisation. SCA also collaborates with expert organisations to promote peace and cohesion on local level.

In a country regularly afflicted by natural and man-made disasters, we recognise the importance of building resilience to shocks. SCA will deliver activities aimed at building the absorptive, adaptive and transformative capacities of individuals, households, communities and their institutions. All activities that aim to enhance

people’s resilience capacities will pay attention to socio-economic diversities, inequalities – including gender – and their intersectionality. SCA will also improve contingency planning to save lives and livelihoods of the most vulnerable groups to strengthen their socio-economic resilience.

Conflict sensitivity

CONFLICT SENSITIVE APPROACHES remain as relevant as ever. SCA shall ensure that interventions do not create, contribute to, or worsen conflicts, and work to promote cooperation and peaceful conflict resolution. SCA will continue to develop appropriate levels of preparedness to respond to conflict-related crises. This includes continuous monitoring of security as well as risk assessments and associated action plans.

SCA will continue to engage closely with local communities to foster strong community ownership, promote trust and reduce local conflict. Communities will continue to play an active role in site identification for schools, clinics, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) projects and disability centres and help in determining structure of various community-based organisations. SCA also involves communities through participatory approaches to identify needs and seek local solutions, transparent implementation and community-led follow up through community-based monitoring and social audits.

Strengthening gender equality

SCA INTEGRATES GENDER-SENSITIVE approaches both within the organisation itself and throughout its programmes. The closure of girls’ secondary schools and limiting women’s participation in public life has hindered women’s ability to earn a living, access health care, education, seek protection and act with agency. It is in this context that work with gender equality becomes paramount. SCA will partner up with female-led organisations and representati- ►

ve groups, community elders, religious scholars and civil society to create an enabling and protective environment for both women and men in the communities to promote gender equality. There will also be an increased focus on men's role and responsibility in promoting gender equality and countering gender-based violence. A foundation for support to this work can be found in the importance of equality and social justice in Islam. Internally, SCA will seek to identify and address structural and cultural barriers to gender equality while investing in building capacity of and providing opportunities for women. We will strengthen complaints mechanisms, provide gender-sensitive training and challenge norms preventing women and men from reaching their full potential in the organisation.

Support to civil society

THE SPACE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY and rights-based advocacy has shrunk. It is therefore very important that SCA continues to support the capacity development of civil society organisations so that they can advocate for the rights of citizens and hold duty bearers to account. We will also build the organisational capacity of CSOs to help them become more financially sustainable, gradually decreasing the level of financial support they receive from SCA.

SCA will continue to focus on supporting community-based organisations and professional associations, including school management shuras, teacher elected councils, health shuras, organisations of people with disabilities and savings groups. SCA will also support and facilitate women's participation in CBOs/CSOs as these provide space and platforms for women's voice and agency. SCA will also build partnerships with other NGOs that create opportunities for collaborating with CBOs. SCA will play a role in re-organising and supporting civil society networks on a national level to facilitate forging common advocacy approaches, collective action and constructive dialogue with the DFA, ensuring that marginalised and vulnerable voices are heard by policy makers.

Disability inclusion

SCA PROMOTES the full inclusion and active participation of persons with disabilities throughout our work. We integrate disabili-

ty-friendly approaches and disability-specific interventions within health, education and rural development. This entails the provision of physical infrastructure to facilitate access to public services; the provision of physical rehabilitation services; preparatory and inclusive education opportunities for children with disabilities, tackling attitudinal biases amongst communities and duty bearers towards people with disabilities; and the provision of community-based rehabilitation and support to organisations for people with disabilities. We include people with disabilities in the design, implementation and reporting of our programmes.

Climate change

adaptation and

building environmental

awareness

CLIMATE CHANGE is having a profound impact on Afghanistan, where drought and environmental disasters are all too common. Our programme strategies have been developed so as to strengthen environmental sustainability and reduce negative environmental impact. SCA implements projects to enhance community resilience against risks that emanate from climate change and environmental degradation in ecologically fragile areas. SCA will assist local communities technically and financially to mitigate, adapt to and withstand negative impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. Moreover, SCA will promote awareness and knowledge about environmental protection among communities and duty bearers, and build capacity of community-based organisations and local institutions to take environmental governance into account in local planning. SCA will improve infrastructure with technologies such as solar electrification in buildings, solar-based groundwater extraction in water supply projects, and safe sanitation facilities within health and education. We will also promote planting native plant species as part of infrastructure and community development projects to demonstrate local plantation techniques. In the spirit of 'living our values', SCA will actively seek opportunities to improve the functionality of our offices, reducing our carbon footprint and upskilling an ecologically sensitive and environmentally aware workforce. ■

Strategic Intervention Areas



STRATEGIC INTERVENTION AREA 1

Health

Afghanistan has one of the highest maternal and newborn mortality rates in the world. Availability of skilled midwives is vital in reducing these numbers. In this picture: Students practice on a mannequin at SCA's midwifery school in Wardak Province.

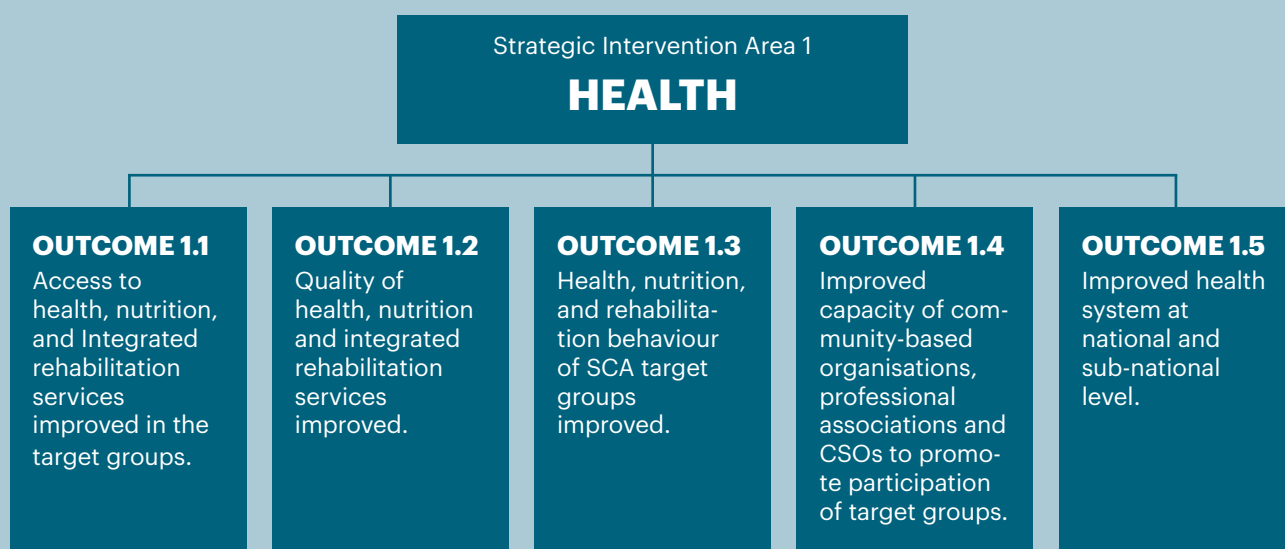
PHOTO | MOHAMMADULLAH KAMAL

The political transition in 2021 radically changed the health landscape in Afghanistan. In the short term, for many, access to healthcare has improved with the cessation of violence, and the volume of patients suffering from conflict-related physical trauma has reduced significantly. Similarly, there have been fewer incidents of staff intimidation and collateral damage to health facilities.

Basic health needs however, have been exacerbated by the spiraling humanitarian crisis. Health services that were already over-stretched are struggling with the demand for treatment. The situation is particularly difficult for women, who face restrictions on travel, and a shortage of female health workers. One of the biggest challenges facing the health sector is the lack of funding. The international community has suspended on-budget aid contributions, leaving a deficit in the DFA's

public health budget. Furthermore, the technical and managerial capacity of public health institutions has been eroded by the migration of skilled workers to neighbouring countries. In response, UN agencies have stepped in to provide support to the health sector through the Transitional Engagement Framework, which acknowledges access to healthcare as a basic human need. Through this framework, international NGOs, including SCA, have continued to implement the Basic and Essential Packages of Health Services.

SCA will provide quality health, nutrition and rehabilitation services that are accessible, equitable and free to the most vulnerable. To achieve this, SCA focuses on following five areas: access to health, nutrition, and rehabilitation services; quality of health, nutrition, and rehabilitation services; health-related behaviors of target groups; capacities of CBOs, CSOs and professional associations; and strengthening health system governance. ►



Outcome 1.1

Access to health, nutrition, and integrated rehabilitation services improved in the target groups.

SCA will deliver quality health and nutrition services through basic health care facilities and hospitals at population centers. This will be supplemented by services that enhance access of women and children to the full continuum of maternal and new-born care services in white areas.¹⁴ These services include night-based ambulance, village-based midwives, motivational packages for midwives and female doctors, community-based nutrition programmes, and outreach sessions to target communities. In addition to engaging women, SCA will also engage with DFA, men and religious leaders to support activities that contribute to improved utilization of health services, especially reproductive health for women and girls.

Malnutrition among target groups will be addressed through a holistic response mechanism entailing community-based nutrition education, earlier detection (e.g. growth monitoring) and intervention, nutritional supplementation of pregnant women, infants and children as well as promoting breast feeding.

SCA will also improve Persons with disabilities' access to health services. Mobility devices, physiotherapy, psychosocial support services and community-based care will be provided, coupled with advocacy to integrate physical rehabilitation into the public health system. Health staff will be trained on disability-inclusive health services, early identification, and rehabilitation to enable health workers to address the health needs of persons with disabilities. SCA will also construct new buildings or retrofit existing ones to improve accessibility for women, children and persons with disabilities. Maternity wards, waiting areas for women, ramps for persons with disabilities/elderly and water & sanitation facilities will be a priority.

To improve environmentally friendly spaces, appropriate waste disposal facilities like incinerators and color-coded bins will be provided. Where possible, energy optimisation will be supported by solar powered sources. SCA will establish a health and nutrition emergency

response coordination and action mechanism.

Outcome 1.2

Quality of health, nutrition and integrated rehabilitation services improved.

SCA's efforts to improve the quality of services focus on building the capacity of staff, particularly female staff, across the healthcare sector. Training priorities include: the early identification of children prone to disabilities, medical ethics, non-discrimination in service provision, counselling Gender Based Violence survivors and addressing their immediate needs, infection prevention, disability prevention and rehabilitation, rationale use of medicine, growth monitoring, and timely referrals.

Services will be offered in line with the Harmonized Quality Improvement Package (HQIP), which SCA will ensure recommended actions are systematically conducted towards achieving quality-specific outcomes. SCA will provide speech therapy to those in need of speech, language, and cognitive communication improvement, and health workers/community-based rehabilitation workers will be trained to identify such needs.

SCA will implement a 3-year diploma training course on prosthetics and orthotics to increase cadres of rehabilitation professionals, thereby filling gaps in the provision of rehabilitation services. Through the Community Midwifery Education (CME) programme, SCA aims to improve the capacity and availability of skilled midwives in Afghanistan, helping to address a critical shortfall of female staff for maternal health services. A two-year midwifery bridging programme is designed for graduated midwives, to provide bachelor level education that will enhance educators' competence and improve quality of services¹⁵.

Outcome 1.3

Health, nutrition, and rehabilitation behaviour of SCA target groups improved.

SCA understands behaviors relating to health,

14. The areas that are in two hours walking distance or ten kilometres away from the nearest Health Facility.

15. Midwives in Afghanistan abandon their profession for better paying opportunities, thereby creating a gap in the pool of available health workforce. The bridging programme upgrades the capacities of the midwives to motivate and enable them take up better opportunities within the health sector.

nutrition, and physical and psychosocial rehabilitation are influenced by a variety of socio-cultural and economic factors. Working closely with community leaders, Health Shuras, and Family Action Groups, SCA will continue to deliver social campaigns aimed at raising awareness of improved health and nutrition related behaviour. This will include sensitisation on negative health impacts linked to practices such as child and forced marriage. SCA will also run campaigns to advocate against domestic and gender-based violence. SCA will engage with influential community members, civil society organisations, and religious scholars to strengthen knowledge and understanding of rights, particularly for women, girls, and people with disabilities. SCA will also raise awareness of disability issues amongst communities, including the importance of physical rehabilitation and psychosocial services in improving the overall physical and psychosocial wellbeing of people with disabilities.

SCA will continue to promote improved WASH behaviour. In partnership with rural communities, WASH Cluster actors and public health institutions, we will encourage the active and meaningful participation of women, children and persons with disabilities to ensure equitable access to WASH facilities. Our activities will fall under three thematic areas: increasing access to safe drinking water; increasing access to sanitation facilities; and improving knowledge about best hygiene practices. Finally, SCA will deliver the Learning for Healthy Life (LHL) programme to tackle the negative health impacts of low levels of literacy, particularly amongst women and the importance of immunization and balanced locally available low cost food. The programme equips women in rural communities with knowledge and skills to navigate health services and information with confidence and agency.

Outcome 1.4

Improved capacity of community-based organisations, professional associations and CSOs to promote participation of target groups.

Sustainable health outcomes are contingent on the support of Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) and local actors. SCA will therefore continue to build the capacity of Health Shuras, Community Development Councils and Professional Associations. SCA will focus

on strengthening CBOs' operational and managerial systems and ensure that women are able to participate in these decision-making bodies.

SCA will also continue strengthening capacity of Afghan Association for Physical therapy (AAPT) and Afghanistan National Society for Orthotics and Prosthetics (ANSOP) so that they can advocate for quality physical rehabilitation services. AAPT and ANSOP will be encouraged to have more women members in their general and governing bodies and to promote their participation in all decision-making. SCA will continue to support the Afghanistan Midwifery Association (AMA) through a mentorship programme rendered to midwives in rural areas. Mentors conduct visits to health facilities to provide on-job training and supervise the provision of quality services. SCA will also continue to foster linkages between AMA and Swedish Midwifery Association (SMA) with the aim of creating cross learning and capacity development opportunities.

Outcome 1.5

Improved health system at national and sub-national level.

With the health sector facing a funding and capacity crisis, SCA will continue to work with technical teams within the Ministry and Provincial Directorates of Public Health to preserve the service delivery systems and contribute to long-term sustainability. Moreover, SCA will undertake joint monitoring visits to strengthen accountability and governance capacity. SCA will also continue to promote the collection and use of quality data for decision making. SCA will scale-up the use of Smart Paper Technology, an innovative electronic health solution developed for resource-scarce countries that bypasses infrastructural challenges related to data collection and management¹⁶. Finally, SCA will conduct a range of research studies to generate data for evidence-based policy dialogue with the DEA.

SCA will also strengthen coordination with authorities and advocate for favorable operational policies. To gather evidence for informed decision-making by health authorities and to drive policy inclusions, research studies on key public health issues like COVID-19 and other impending health situations will be carried out. ■

16. Shifo Foundation's Smart Paper Technology can be a Game Changer for Emerging Countries — Healthcare Executive.



STRATEGIC INTERVENTION AREA 2

Education

9-year-old Kulsoom is a first grade student in a new community based school in Halwaqul village, Wardak Province. The priority for SCA over the coming years is to continue improving and expanding access to education in rural areas, recruiting and training more women teachers, and improving quality education for all.

PHOTO | MOHAMMADULLAH KAMAL

The education sector is facing profound challenges, many of which pre-date the Taliban takeover. Despite progress in education in the last few decades, there are still around four million children out of school (OOSC) and 7.9 million in need of education support¹⁷. About 500,000 children with disabilities are out of school. Girls, children with disabilities, children affected by emergencies, children from nomadic communities, those engaged in child labour and children from poorer households, remain especially vulnerable to educational marginalisation. In the current context we see an increased need for community-based education facilities (CBE schools) as many government schools are either closed, have weak outreach and/or are not able to scale up and meet demands.

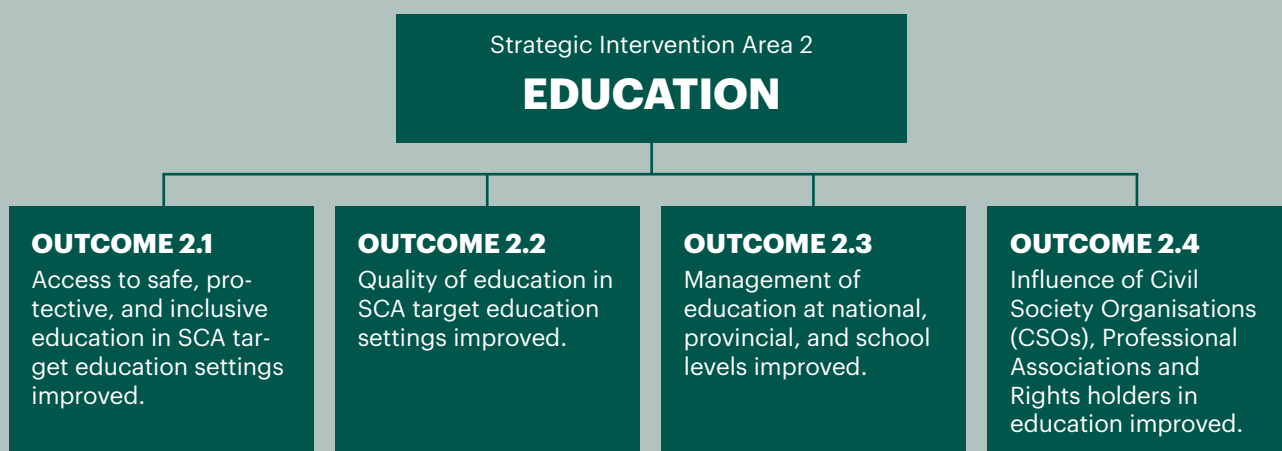
Since the Taliban assumed control, these problems have been compounded. The DFA have banned co-education, and adolescent girls beyond Grade 6 are currently not formally permitted to continue with their education.¹⁸ The DFA's general position on women's rights has raised fears that education of teenage and adolescent girls is unlikely to resume soon. At the same time, the role of civil society organisations in the education sector has been significantly curtailed, closing the space to advocate for inclusive and non-discriminatory education for all.

The country faces a shortage of qualified female teachers following the DFA's ban on co-edu-

cation and requirement for female teachers only to teach girl students. Bilateral funding to education has ceased, leaving institutions such as Ministry of Education Directorates, Universities, teacher training institutions, and staff severely under resourced. As a result, The Education Development Partners Group and the Education Cluster have developed the Afghanistan Education Sector Transitional Framework (AESTF), being the common operational framework guiding programming and investment among donors and NGOs within the education sector.

The curriculum review process initiated in 2020 was put on hold by the Republic, and no new curriculum revision process has yet been initiated by DFA. A future curriculum revision by DFA is likely to put more attention to religious subjects. In the meantime, SCA will continue implementing CBE based on the existing curriculum and previously approved textbooks.

The priority for SCA over the coming years is to continue improving and expanding access to education in rural areas, recruiting and training more women teachers, and improving quality education for all. The demand for community-based education remains high both amongst communities and the DFA, especially as new, previously underserved, areas open up for programming. Other priorities include strengthening the capacity and inclusivity of institutions that deliver education and building the capacity of civil society organisations to advocate for reforms within the education sector. ►



17. <https://www.unicef.org/media/112576/file/2022-HAC-Afghanistan.pdf>

18. A vast majority of girls in SCA-supported CBE continue to attend school and there are no reports of significant dropouts.

Outcome 2.1

Access to safe, protective, and inclusive education in SCA target education settings improved.

SCA aims to increase safe, protective, inclusive, and equal access to quality education for school-age children (7-18 years)¹⁹ in preparatory and community-based education (CBE). SCA's efforts to improve school infrastructure and enhance access to schools will include providing school supplies, improving classrooms, ensuring sex-segregated WASH facilities are available and subsidising transportation for children with disabilities. The increasing malnutrition may adversely affect the students' learning achievements as well as can result in higher absenteeism and higher drop out. In response, SCA will implement school feeding in collaboration with communities and other non-state actors where feasible²⁰. Through school health project, coordination and collaboration with health providers in the coverage provinces will be increased to detect and treat malnourished school children.

SCA will focus advocacy efforts on support to children with disabilities and adolescent girls. This may include capacity building for school stakeholders and local education authority staff to ensure inclusive approaches to education, as well as working with female leaders in local communities to mentor girls beyond grade 6. Children with disabilities will also be provided with rehabilitation services and assistive and mobility devices to enhance their learning.

SCA will work with CSOs, Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (DPOs), School Management Shura (SMS) /Parent Committees (PCs) members and other school stakeholders, promoting child rights, gender in education, inclusion, and raise awareness on the negative

effects of physical and humiliating punishment on student development and wellbeing. SCA will develop accelerated learning programmes to provide second chance to teenage and adolescent girls who dropped out of school an opportunity to be re-integrated into mainstream education.

Outcome 2.2

Quality of education in SCA target education settings improved.

SCA will improve the quality of education in target schools by recruiting more teachers, increasing the number of qualified female teachers and improving provisions for children with disabilities. More women teachers will be supported by in-service training, coaching classes for girls, and on-site mentorship. In areas where qualified women teachers are especially scarce, SCA will employ 12th grade graduates as teachers and let them undergo in-service training in content and pedagogy. SCA will also recruit graduates from its Coaching Classes and lobby, together with the Teacher Elected Councils, to have them certified as teachers by DFA. SCA will build on its existing cohort of graduate teacher education master trainers to conduct in-service trainings for teachers in public teacher training facilities.²¹ SCA will use DFA's segregation policies – that girls must be taught by women teachers – as leverage to advocate for the absolute necessity to train and recruit more female teachers.

SCA will work to improve outcomes for children with disabilities by adapting a curriculum and incorporate activities of daily living and co-curricular activities. Care givers, Community and SMS/PC members will be supported to advocate for provision of quality education to their children. SCA will prioritise creating healthy, barrier-free learning environments that

19. Includes boys, girls, children with disabilities, children from nomadic communities, out of school children (OOSC), IDPs, returnees, children in hard-to-reach areas such as mountainous areas.

20. School feeding will include provision of mid-morning snacks among other modalities.

21. Administered by the DFA.

emphasise physical and emotional wellbeing as well as remedial classes for students with learning difficulties.

SCA will implement a broad range of teacher training programmes to strengthen the quality of education. SCA will develop an affirmative action to identify and train more women teachers and women educators to address the national shortage of qualified women teachers. SCA will continue to implement the Teacher Education Master Programme (TEMP) that aims to improve the professional capacity of Teacher Educators in public Teacher Training Centers and address gaps in teacher professional development. SCA staff, special education personnel and Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) workers and teachers will be trained to deliver a reformed preparatory education curriculum with the aim of improving students' overall development.

As part of School Health, school stakeholders will benefit from health awareness sessions while students' health will also be assessed periodically to determine their health status. Students requiring specialized diagnosis will be referred to the nearest health facility. SCA will develop distance learning platforms as well as EdTech tools to provide remote learning for those living in areas where girls beyond grade 6 are unable to attend schools.

Environmental considerations will be further integrated into our education work. SCA will review primary school textbooks to identify opportunities for updating content with relevant environmental learning. SCA will also support the provision of child friendly learning environments and learning through establishment of environmental clubs, school gardens and the expansion of vegetation cover in education settings.

Outcome 2.3

Management of education at national, provincial, and school levels improved.

SCA will continue to build the management capacity of duty bearers, focusing on technical staff at education authorities at national level, local education authority staff at provincial/district levels, SMS/PC, headteachers and community mentors at school level. Key areas of capacity building will include improving access and quality of education, engendering education, non-discrimination, school safety, equity and inclusion, rights-based programming and effective delivery of quality education. SCA will continue to advocate for more inclusive SMS/PC membership that includes women, youth, people with disabilities and people from other under-represented groups. SMSs/PCs will be supported to play an enhanced role in management and improvement in school settings. To enhance ownership, sustainability and accountability, SCA will conduct joint monitoring and support visits to education settings alongside local duty bearers and school stakeholders.

Outcome 2.4

Influence of civil society organisations (CSOs), professional associations and rights holders in education improved.

SCA will work directly with international, national and local (formal and non-formal) education-focused CSOs to strengthen the role of civil society in education. This will include capacity building for local CSOs, including on non-discriminatory educational practices, child rights, gender and environment in education, peace and conflict mitigation, the benefits of employing and engaging more women in education, school management and decision making, and supporting adolescent girls facing challenges such as pressure to drop out from school and child marriage. SCA will provide grants to national and grassroots-level civil society and community-based organisations, for example teachers' elected councils (TECs), to support advocacy for child rights and teachers' welfare. SCA will focus on building the capacity of SMSs to enable them to provide better support and sustain delivery of education in target schools. ■



STRATEGIC INTERVENTION AREA 3

Rural Development

Maqbullah Amirullah, Patria Aidi Mohammad and their school friends learn how to keep water clean and how to store it.

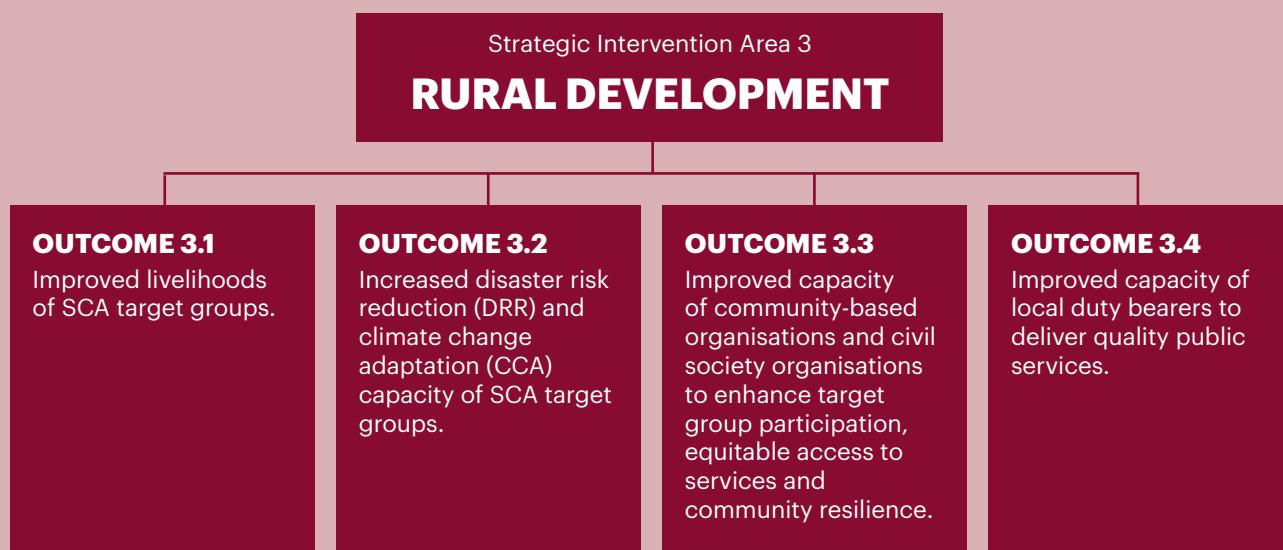
PHOTO | KAJSA WAAGHALS

The recent political changes have pushed the country into a severe socioeconomic crisis. Rural economies have suffered dramatically with the disruption of markets, financial systems, trade mechanisms and the sudden drop in development assistance. Soaring food and fuel prices and loss of income and employment opportunities have intensified the pre-existing vulnerabilities of the poor and disadvantaged. In addition, recent drought has devastated food supply, ravaging agriculture and animal production in rural areas. The decline in incomes compounded by the ongoing drought is leading to high levels of food insecurity.

In parallel, there has been a significant weakening of civil society in rural areas, coupled by dramatic reversals on women's rights and fundamental freedoms, impacting their right to work and participation in community-level decision-making mechanisms. In the current emergency, leveraging the country's longstanding community development platform is critical to delivering vital services and providing emergency livelihoods support to the Afghan people. In this context, the future of commu-

nity development councils (CDCs) as representative public authorities and focal points for local governance and development is uncertain due to the lack of a policy framework following the political transition. Despite the uncertainty, CDCs are active in most provinces, and, in many cases, they are helping in the coordination of assistance in their communities. However, on the current trajectory, the CDCs' scope is likely to be limited, and they may not be able to fulfil the delivery of infrastructures and ensure the participation of disadvantaged groups, particularly women, in society.

To address rising poverty and improve the living conditions of the poorest and most vulnerable in rural areas, SCA will deliver across four areas: improving the livelihoods and incomes of target groups; increasing the capacity of local communities to mitigate the risks and impacts of disasters and climate change; strengthening the capacity of community-based organisations to ensure that they promote target group participation and equitable access to services; and finally, strengthen the capacity of local duty bearers to address the needs and demands of rights holders. ►





Children fetching water in Yousaf Khail, a village in Paktika Province where a pipe scheme is being constructed.

PHOTO | EVA KELLSTRÖM FROSTE

Outcome 3.1

Improved livelihoods of SCA target groups.

SCA will promote sustainable agricultural systems that increase production and resilience to climate change. To improve smallholders' income and food security, SCA will promote sustainable and climate resilient farming practices and support the construction or rehabilitation of agricultural infrastructures (e.g., small-scale irrigation, storage, market structures). SCA will also provide agricultural support to the most vulnerable farmers to help them sustain or recover their production, move away from reliance on food aid and build viable livelihoods.

SCA will provide vocational and entrepreneurial skills as in demand by women, persons with disabilities and youth. SCA will assist producers with skills, finance, and market access to help them increase their production and earnings. Producers will be encouraged to establish producer groups for collective production and marketing activities. SCA will work with rural businesses, employers and vocational training providers to promote employment opportunities for target groups. SCA will work with the private sector to adapt to inclusive business models that allow small-scale entrepreneurs or producers to engage in, influence, and profit from high-potential value chains.

SCA will provide support to micro and small businesses, with a particular focus on women and pro-poor initiatives. We will continue to support community savings groups, Self Help Group (SHG) for persons with disabilities and associations, by providing training and grants and strengthening the institutional linkages between

these groups and business and financial service providers. To improve livelihoods of persons with disabilities, SCA will promote employment/self-employment through skill-building, technical and financial support (provision of revolving loans) for entrepreneurship and facilitating jobs in private and government sectors. SCA will organise exhibitions and support in the opening of outlets in local markets for the sale of products made by persons with disabilities.

Outcome 3.2

Increased disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA) capacity of SCA target groups.

Afghanistan is prone to intense and recurring natural hazards such as flooding, earthquakes, avalanches, landslides, and drought, due to its geographical location and history of environmental degradation. Drought frequently results in severe food shortages. In addition, drought has a severe impact on the availability of water for drinking, washing and sanitation. Rural livelihoods are vulnerable to disasters and have limited resilience to absorb and recover losses. To improve disaster resilience, SCA will enhance the capacity of target groups and their communities in DRR and CCA, including natural resource management.

SCA will work with diverse stakeholders, such as community institutions, public institutions, and other development actors, to analyse and map disaster risks, establish community-based early warning systems, formulate disaster management plans, and strengthen sub-national coordination mechanisms for humanitarian

responses. SCA will work with community institutions to raise awareness on environmental risks, develop small-scale structural mitigation measures, rehabilitate degraded lands and watersheds, repair of small-scale irrigation systems, foster agroforestry and tree plantations, and promote sustainable management of natural resources, such as land, forest and water resources. As women, children and persons with disabilities are among the most vulnerable, socially excluded and disproportionately affected by disasters, SCA will ensure that these groups are empowered to actively participate in vulnerability and capacity assessments, and community-based disaster risk mitigation and preparedness interventions.

SCA also aims to expand its areas of intervention in the field of humanitarian response to provide life-saving support to the most vulnerable, including female-headed households, persons with disabilities, internally displaced people and returnees. We will engage with national and local emergency coordination mechanisms, as well as nurture working relationships with relevant public institutions. SCA will collaborate with humanitarian actors/partners to provide critical lifesaving and livelihood assistance to crisis affected people, with an emphasis on food and non-food items, emergency shelter, assistive devices, and emergency livelihood support. SCA will adhere to humanitarian principles and standards, the do no harm principle, and conflict-sensitive approaches while designing and implementing emergency interventions.

Outcome 3.3

Improved capacity of community-based organisations and civil society organisations to enhance target group participation, equitable access to services and community resilience.

SCA will support community-based organisations to facilitate local development planning and delivery of services. SCA will strengthen the capacity of CBOs for participatory development planning, targeting and selection, undertake collective actions, participatory monitoring, and social audits. SCA will strengthen the capacity of CSOs and CBOs to manage community conflicts that may arise as a result of social, cultural and natural resource disputes. SCA will also provide CBOs with the knowledge and skills necessary to comprehend peacebuilding with an emphasis on social cohesion and

positive peace, allowing them to define peace from their own perspective and begin creating peace from their own families, cascading upwards to villages and wider communities. SCA will strengthen the capacity of CBOs and CSOs to advocate for their legitimate needs and rights through capacity building of local change agents, creation and sustenance of dialogue spaces, and build alliances and partnerships with other actors.


SCA will improve knowledge and awareness amongst local communities about women's rights to create an enabling environment for women's participation. SCA will also continue dialogue with community members and CBOs to include the views and concerns of women, persons with disabilities and minorities in community-based decision-making processes and in other ways enhance the agency and meaningful participation of women and other underrepresented groups. SCA will also improve the capacity of DPOs and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) of persons with disabilities to do awareness-raising activities and advocacy towards duty bearers and improve the knowledge and attitude of key stakeholders on the potentialities and rights to health, rehabilitation, education, livelihood and social inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Outcome 3.4

Improved capacity of local duty bearers to deliver quality public services.

SCA will assist public institutions at sub-national levels in building capacity to strengthen their systems and practices, such as citizen engagement and inclusive development, participatory planning and monitoring, and social accountability, in order to fulfil their responsibilities and promote participation of citizens in decision-making. SCA will facilitate interactions to engender greater collaboration between citizens and duty bearers to identify and address community development needs.

SCA will improve coordination among disability stakeholders by facilitating the establishment of stakeholder coordination platforms at the provincial level to discuss challenges of persons with disabilities and seek collective solutions. These platforms will contribute to improved responsiveness of public institutions. Workshops, training, and awareness sessions will also be organised to improve the knowledge and practices of public service providers. ■



STRATEGIC INTERVENTION AREA 4

Building Commitment

One-year-old Bibi Zuhra is being treated for malnutrition at the SCA hospital in Maidan Shahr, Wardak.

PHOTO | MOHAMMADULLA KAMAL

In these very difficult times it is of utmost importance for SCA to advance clear policy messaging and mobilise commitment through advocacy and communication, in support of the rights of the people in Afghanistan. As the Taliban steers the country in a new direction, many of the core values and principles of SCA will be challenged. We must speak with one voice, advocating for the changes we want to see and defending the positive gains that have been secured over the last decades.

Since our founding in 1980, we have worked with a diverse range of stakeholders across the political spectrum in Sweden, Afghanistan and globally. Our credibility stems from our long-standing commitment to the development of Afghanistan and the deep and broad networks we have cultivated amongst local communities. This gives us a unique responsibility to elevate community voices to national and international policy-makers as well as the public, demanding that the rights of Afghan people are respected and upheld at all levels of society.

The new authorities in Afghanistan have limited ability to support the basic needs of the population. The DFA policies, coupled with international sanctions, are severely hurting the Afghan people. Restrictions on women's movement and limited access to education and jobs, endanger recovery and obstruct sustainable resilience. Afghanistan therefore faces a protracted and escalating humanitarian crisis as well as a high level of dependency on international humanitarian aid and development actors. Since the Taliban takeover, the international community has primarily through UN, and civil society, stepped up its efforts to provide primarily humanitarian aid, without providing support through the DFA. While there is a general understanding that humanita-

rian aid alone will not rebuild the country, the majority of support is aimed at alleviating the most urgent needs.

Given these concerns, SCA needs to promote the importance of constructive policymaking. It is also in the interest of the Afghan people that international actors and donor countries are re-engaged to bring development back to Afghanistan. With its longstanding credibility in Afghanistan, SCA is ideally positioned to take on the role of intermediary, keeping the focus on the rights of the people. SCA also needs to strengthen and build new partnerships to ensure influence and secure resources for the work. SCA has an important role to play in supporting the resurgence of local civil society in deep crisis.

SCA has earned a strong reputation as a people-driven movement. SCA members play a very important role in increasing knowledge about Afghanistan and mobilising support of both the public and decision-makers in Sweden. During the months leading to the collapse of the previous regime, interest in Afghanistan reached new heights. Donations surged and new members joined SCA. Despite emerging conflicts and crisis in other parts of the world, this situation provides opportunities to strengthen the membership movement and increase donations. Engaged members can act as ambassadors for SCA breaking through the noise and ensure that Afghanistan is not forgotten.

SCA expects that Afghanistan will remain in the current transitional state during most of the strategic period, with limited room for SCA and partners to influence this. Donor fatigue is a major risk across the international community. As the effects of deepened poverty, conflict and climate change become more pronounced, this warrants an increased effort for high-level advocacy. ▶





PHOTO | BEATRICE SKOGLUND

SCA's biennial international conference in Stockholm gathers experts, policymakers, civil society, and academia. In this picture, Aminulhaq Mayel, SCA, Jamila Afghani, Afghan section of the International Women's League for Peace and Freedom and Najwa Alimi, journalist, discusses the conditions for continued support to women's rights after the Taliban takeover at the conference 2021.

Outcome 4.1

Increased political commitment for the rights of the people in Afghanistan.

Currently, Afghanistan's government is not recognised internationally and faces significant international sanctions. This will lead to challenges, both politically and practically, in the daily efforts to deliver humanitarian assistance and development interventions. Our priority over the coming years is to promote a strong political commitment for the rights of people in Afghanistan, from the DFA and from the international community.

Effective aid and development policies are critical to rebuilding Afghanistan. Current aid frameworks are short-term and of transitional character and they risk creating parallel systems to those established (or seeking to be established) by the DFA. This is problematic for a number of reasons: firstly, it would widen the gap between domestic and international policy makers; secondly, it would undermine efforts to reform the DFA's own frameworks and ownership; and thirdly, it would allow international funds to be channeled purely through off-budget modalities, weakening state capacity to deliver basic public services, and increasing

dependence on aid and development organisations. SCA will advocate internationally for the formation of frameworks that support long-term sustainable development. This will also enable sustained institutional funding for SCA and other aid organisations.

Women's and girls' rights and opportunities have been increasingly curtailed by the DFA. If women are unable to take full part in all areas of society and the economy, Afghanistan's recovery will be severely hampered. By limiting access to education, the DFA will create shortages of qualified women to fulfil important public and private sector roles in the future. The primary focus of our advocacy work will therefore be the promotion and advancement of women's and girls' rights.

SCA will continue its engagement with the Swedish government to ensure that Afghanistan remains a priority for Swedish aid and to ensure that our values are well-reflected in policy decisions. SCA needs to work with other aid organisations in Sweden to ensure commitment to current levels of overseas aid expenditure, and to contribute to sound policy formulation.

Engaging with decision-makers at all levels, through events, campaigns and in public



To support our members, SCA is providing tools and materials to raise awareness among the wider public and politicians. In this picture: The RFSU Stroller March is an annual march against maternal mortality in the world.

debates, are entry points for SCA advocacy in Sweden and internationally.

Outcome 4.2

Increased public support for the rights of the people in Afghanistan.

SCA will continue to engage with the members and the public in Sweden and Afghanistan to raise awareness and build commitment for the human rights of people in Afghanistan, through strategic communication in both our own channels such as SCAs social media, web and magazines as well as in mainstream media and through events such as seminars and conferences. By elevating the voices of our target groups in Afghanistan, we will contribute to greater knowledge of the situation and increased public support for their rights.

Our diverse membership is engaged, informed and passionate about advocating for the rights of people, especially women's and girls' rights, to both the public and to decision-makers. SCA will increase its efforts to sustain member and donor interest as Afghanistan is overshadowed by other emerging crises. It is important that SCA communicates clearly that it is still possible

to work successfully in Afghanistan and that donors' contributions are critical to this success.

To support our members, SCA will provide tools and materials to raise awareness among the wider public and politicians. SCA already has its own channels through its magazine, social media presence and website. SCA spokespersons have become relatively well-known as Afghanistan experts and frequently appear onto national media and news, reaching millions of people. This work remains vital, and SCA will continue to engage with the public in Sweden, Afghanistan and internationally through events, media appearances and publications.

While SCA communication goals face competition in a crowded media environment in Sweden, we face the opposite challenge in Afghanistan, where communication is instead challenged by the radical reduction of media channels since August 2021. SCA needs to navigate what can be seen as an increasingly closed media environment in Afghanistan. SCA has an important role to play in sensitively communicating the values that guide the work SCA does to both the Afghan public as well as to the authorities, and motivating support for progressive policies grounded in Islamic thought and traditions. ■

Driving Impact: Results-Based Management

This strategic plan period will be characterised by a new donor landscape. There is a trend towards shorter-term grant periods suited to the rapid-deployment of humanitarian programmes. As SCA continues to diversify its funding portfolio, we must adapt our reporting systems and tools to provide agile and accurate results data. One of the key priorities in this regard is the transition to digital tools that enable faster and more accurate data collection and enabling a smoother integration of results from each of the Regional Management Offices.

Regular monitoring will be carried out to track and report on programme progress, deviations from target, community perceptions, impact, lessons learned, innovations and best practices. SCA will employ a range of participatory monitoring instruments including social audits, to ensure greater accountability to target groups.

Evaluations will be carried out both internally

and by external consultants. The internal reviews and evaluations are also used as a tool to follow-up on our Theory of Change and its assumptions, results and best practices. Formal management responses will be systematically conducted after each evaluation, and a tracking system developed to ensure that project and organisational learning is captured, analysed and scaled, where appropriate.

Evaluation approaches that SCA will adopt include baselines, mid-term reviews, end-line surveys and other assessments. SCA will undertake a baseline data collection exercise in the first quarter of this Strategic Plan period in 2023 followed by an endline evaluation in 2025. SCA will use M&E data to make informed decisions and document lessons. Regular learning sessions within and across programme teams and support units will help to identify best practices and operational challenges. On the basis of these sessions, SCA will continue to adapt and improve programme approaches. ■

Risk and Mitigation

Given the complexity of political and security factors, it is difficult to predict future developments. The current security stability may deteriorate over the coming years if the DFA does not constructively engage with international community and domestically come to agreement with political and religious factions. Growing humanitarian crisis, pockets of open conflict, drought and development challenges may also again lead to instability and violence.

The context necessitates a broader awareness and understanding of risks. The main risks prompted by the new context in which we operate are exacerbated poverty, restricted banking sector, further reduction in aid, which if materialized could lead to increased demand towards SCA, further brain drain, continued repressive policies by DFA towards girls and women, and a protracted humanitarian crisis. All of the above could interrupt implementation of SCA activities. To address and mitigate such risks,

SCA will continuously scan and analyze the context and devise relevant prevention and mitigation strategies in its annual planning.

Our priority is also to ensure the safety of our staff, stakeholders and communities. Over this strategic period, SCA will instill safety and risk management across all levels of the organisation, building policies and procedures that ensure shared accountability.

Moreover, we will further develop a unified security management system, providing clear operational guidance on safety and organisational and programmatic risk management, and delineate clear roles and responsibility for each area of work. We aim to foster an organisational culture of both personal and collective responsibility enabling our teams to deliver programmes safely and confidently in a fast-changing operational context. Emerging sets of risks requires context specific adaptations nationally and locally that will be managed in annual work planning and regular follow-ups. ■



Developing Who We Are

Building on our legacy and a steadfast commitment to the people of Afghanistan, we seek to continue making an impact by being an organisation characterised by credibility, sustainability and relevance.

PHOTO | KAJSA WAAGHALS

Having steadily grown and achieved results for more than 40 years, SCA has proven to be a resilient organisation. We have developed an ability to navigate and adapt in a volatile context plagued by protracted conflicts and political instability, and lately also by the pandemic and a turbulent regime-change. Building on this legacy and our steadfast commitment to the people of Afghanistan, we seek to continue making an impact by being an organisation characterised by credibility, sustainability and relevance.

Credibility starts by living and safeguarding our values, being a reliable employer and partner. We seek high standards of integrity and transparency, and a work environment where all staff – women and men – feel safe, are treated fairly and can grow. Our credibility also emanates from being a learning organisation where we continuously evaluate ourselves and our results and are open to amend and develop.

Sustainability as an organization entails that we have a solid and diversified funding base, and

excel in attracting, retaining and developing a diverse cadre of staff whose competence and motivation we nurture. It further builds on us having robust and efficient systems and being effective in our coordination and communication. We also see the importance of ownership among target groups and staff, an engaged membership movement, and long-term trustful relationships with stakeholders.

Relevance concerns always seeking to make a profound difference in the lives of our target groups. Only then can we claim to be doing the right things. This demands of us that we be an agile organisation that is clear in vision yet humble in how best to get there. It requires that we are skillful in listening and involving, competent in assessing contexts and designing interventions, and backed up by structures, mandates and policies that enable us to be fit for purpose.

Being guided by the above aspirations, and in the pursuit of effectively delivering on the Strategic Plan, we will over the coming three years develop who we are within following objectives and key interventions: ▶





Objective 1

Strengthened efficiency and accountability in SCA structures, including improved delegation and ownership.

In the new fast-moving context, characterised by both humanitarian and development needs and grants diversification, SCA aims at maximizing efficiency and accountability in its structures, approaches and mandates. Key interventions will include: organisation-wide structural adjustments; simplification of procedures while maintaining accountability; improved capacity and integration of cross-cutting themes; roll out of additional information technology modules; and strengthened resource mobilization and donor diversification.

Moreover, SCA will ensure that mandates and capacities are strengthened closer to the point of delivery, including systems that support effective delegation.

Objective 2

Strengthened strategic direction setting, including research and learning.

As the context is likely to remain unpredictable and volatile into the near future, SCA needs to continuously reflect on emerging strategic issues and assess potential changes in direction, ensuring that required adaptation takes place that is aligned with SCA identity and based on learning. Further, SCA needs to be responsive to changes in the policy environment while also able to influence such through advocacy. Key interventions will include: establish a policy analysis function with enhanced capacities to drive policy development and associated dialogue and advocacy; the revision of SCAs overarching Policy; improved linkages between research, learning, advocacy and communications; strengthened influence of target groups into policy development; and tighter linkages between policy analysis and risk management.



Alina Azimi learned embroidery at the vocational training and can now support her family of 15 people. She lives in the village of Larghan in Aybak district, Samangan Province.

PHOTO | BASHIR AHMAD FAYAZ

Objective 3

Gender equality, diversity and non-discrimination practices further developed.

Women in Afghanistan face increasing challenges. Access to education and employment is restricted, as well as freedom to travel. Cultural conservatism in society and the effects of DEA policies on women, are also experienced by SCA and require mitigation efforts. Key interventions will include; ensuring all staff are aware of SCAs values and policies on gender equality and non-discrimination; instilling accountability among leaders to consistently take action to promote gender equality, diversity and equal opportunity; setting targets and strengthen follow up mechanisms to ensure policy compliance regarding living values; further developing harassment-free work environment mechanisms; and adopting competence development plans for women and other underrepresented groups to enable their advance to leadership positions.

Objective 4

Strengthened leadership and key organisational functions, including strategic human resources management and change management.

SCA is a huge organisation with a large workforce. SCA's staff and members are the most important assets of the organisation. Moreover, SCA operates in a highly complex and volatile context and thus requires strong leadership, navigation and adaptation skills and effective coordination.

Key interventions will include: resourcing the organisation with dedicated change management capacity; upgrading the human resources management apparatus for providing strategic support to managers, strengthening people management and driving organisational culture reforms; and broadening and deepening engagement within the membership movement. ■





Swedish Committee
for Afghanistan

Building a Future

Committed to Sustainable Development

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