We have always tried to find positive projects and help to highlight the improvements small donations can make to those in difficult circumstances in Afghanistan. Although the current security situation leads to gloom and despondency, we must not lose sight of the obvious fact that, when life for the people there deteriorates, our support becomes even more valuable. Now is not the time to back out.

You will know the situation is bad and getting worse. Waves of Covid-19 are hitting the people very hard, over half of the population lives in dire poverty, three million children are severely malnourished. The intensity of the war increases and presently over 150 civilians, mostly women and children, are being killed or severely wounded every week. The infrastructure is breaking down. Universities are closed, electricity supplies are collapsing, internet is fragile, food prices are increasing and road travel is extremely dangerous.

At present, the government controls most urban areas, while the Taliban are gaining ground in the bits in between. The situation is changing very fast and will probably be significantly different by the time this is printed and distributed. Afghan forces outnumber Taliban fighters 4:1 but they don’t exhibit the same fighting spirit. No-one can predict what will happen but the situation now is similar to that after the Russians pulled out in 1989. Five years of civil war followed until the Taliban dominated, although they never controlled the entire country.

The existing government are unlikely to achieve outright victory because they haven’t the necessary public support. They have proved to be insufficiently ruthless to prevent lawlessness and control corruption - estimates suggest more than half of the taxes collected go directly to the Taliban or to line the pockets of officials.

However, urban Afghans in particular have changed over the last 20 years and there is particularly strong opposition to Taliban rule in the cities. A recent countrywide survey by the Asia Foundation showed 85% of the total population have no sympathy with the Taliban and ISIS have almost no support. But Taliban justice, although arbitrary and unpleasant, is seen to bring law and order to the streets and eliminate corruption.

The civil war throughout the country, the recent Taliban gains and the strengthening of ISIS are all especially frightening for women. The number of women killed or injured increased by 37% in the first quarter of 2021. Women who symbolise independence, as well as those who defend them, become a target for the terrorists. In just 4 months, 11 journalists and activists were murdered. Two female judges were killed in January. Zarifa Ghafari, the only woman mayor, has survived three attacks.

The Taliban now assure us that they’ve changed, are less extreme and will allow women to receive an education and pursue careers.
But recently a young woman was given 40 lashes in a public spectacle for the ‘crime’ of talking to a boy on her phone. The boy languishes in jail. Another woman was beaten until she was unconscious after being caught by armed Taliban in a market. She was without a face mesh across her burqa. Are these incidents evidence of lack of control of rogue fighters? Have the Taliban changed?

We are encouraged by the response of the Afghan women working for the Pink Shuttle project which we support. Terrorists have recently blown up vans in Kabul and vanloads of women provide an ideal target for them. Nove Onlus, the Italian charity running the project, proposed suspending the service but continuing to pay the salaries. Their women drivers’ answer: ‘No thanks. We know the risks and we are afraid, but the Pink Shuttle must not stop. It is a symbol of freedom and hope; if we give up, the terrorists will have already won. Everyone is in danger in Afghanistan, life must go on. Don’t leave us alone.’

So we won’t. For us to abandon the Afghans now would betray their trust and our principles. We will continue to support the scholarships and existing projects but the needs that arise during such a rapidly changing situation in Afghanistan mean that we have to become even more flexible and adaptable.

It remains for us to thank you all for your contributions over the past six months. Thanks to your generous donations, maintained and increased throughout the Covid epidemic, we now support around 210 students at colleges and universities.

A big ‘Thank you’ from us at LNF here in UK and an even bigger ‘Thank you’ from the women in Afghanistan whose lives have been transformed by your support.
In previous years, we have advertised scholarships and selected students once a year in the Autumn. This year we decided to have two intakes, at the start of the Afghan university semesters in Spring and Autumn.

There is a thirst for education and our announcement of the scholarships at the start of the year resulted in over 1700 applications, far more than previously. We interviewed 130 young women over 3 days and offered scholarships to 34. If the situation allows, we will start the Autumn intake selection process soon.

Undoubtedly, education will be affected by the increased fighting and it’s going to get more difficult. Currently universities are closed due to the rampaging Delta Covid variant, courses have been moved online but students have difficulty accessing them. Electricity, even in Kabul, is available for just a few hours a day and in some provinces there isn’t sufficient to keep mobile phones charged. Internet quality and availability has fallen.

Unless things improve, at some point the students won’t be able to reach the standard required to pass their examinations. We remain steadfastly committed to continuing support for our students, in spite of, and because of, the difficulties they face.

Graduated from her high school with an incredible 99.65% score. She is in her second year studying medicine at Cheragh University, continuing to get high marks. Previously her father, a doctor, paid her fees but he died of Covid last year. Now the family of seven is supported by her sister, recently graduated and with a job. But Tahmina’s university fees add up to half her sister’s annual salary and without an LNF scholarship she would have had to leave.

Graduated from school with 97% grade and was accepted to study English literature at a government university. But she really wants to be a doctor and help women who she sees are not benefitting from a male-centred healthcare system. With an LNF scholarship, she now has a chance to study, graduate and ultimately to help and treat women in her home district.
December
£4,600 pays for the first year of a medical graduate’s three-year residency at the CURE hospital in Kabul.

£5,521 funds the winterisation of the beehives of the successful Chaharde Women’s beekeeping Coop.

£13,304 fees for 50 women’s scholarships at the Gawharshad University.

£40,515 fee payments to 6 universities and colleges for 86 medical, dentistry, midwifery and nursing scholarships.

£1,000, doubled by AfghanAid’s ‘Big Give’ fundraising initiative, supports farming families struggling due to droughts, floods and covid.

January
£4,415 allows Serve Afghanistan to continue their programme of Braille book production, allowing blind children to access local schools.

February
£2,392 pays for practical training for our medical students in the CURE hospital in Kabul.

March
£6,485 enabled Italian charity Nove Onlus to convert a minibus for wheelchair access, extending the capacity of the Pink Shuttle bus service.

£8,000 enables Aschiana, an Afghan charity, to equip, open and run a basic school for a year for 50 kids within a refugee camp in Kabul.
When the fighting stops

Our decision-making can be very quick, so when we were approached by Serve Afghanistan who were mounting a relief operation to help people displaced by heavy fighting in Laghman province in June, we were able to send £5,000 within two days. Relief kits costing £60, mostly foodstuffs, were distributed to needy families.

This is the situation Fatima, a widow with a family of eight, found herself in:

“My house was near the public road. When the fight between the Taliban and the government started, a tank went off the road, broke our wall and came inside our house. The Army told us to leave. I was afraid for my young daughters so we left home and came to the city. That same day we came to know that our house has been burned down by the Taliban. We have lost everything and all our belongings have been destroyed.

We are taking shelter in a house owned by a widow. Though we have a roof over our head, I cannot go for work outside the house, as I cannot leave my young daughters alone at home. The place where we are staying has no walls or gate.

We face a lot of economic hardship, two days ago my young son was selling handicraft in the market to earn some money so that we can buy food. But unfortunately, he met with an accident with a vehicle and now he is in the hospital. We pray that God will bring peace so that we can return to our village.”
May

£6,990 allows Afghan charity AGFO to help 20 women from a disadvantaged area to start street trading businesses in their local neighbourhoods, normally the province of men.

£6,485 to French charity Afghanistan Libre to open and run a midwifery clinic in a marginal area outside Kabul.

£7,000 to UK charity Concern’s ‘Ration Challenge’ in which volunteers raised money by limiting their eating to a refugee camp daily allowance for a week. Our money doubled what they raised and funded the AWARE programme which helps women to start and run very small businesses in rural areas in the northern provinces.

£17,460 to the French Children’s Hospital in Kabul to carry out 15 surgeries for children, 17 treatments and surgeries for women from refugee camps, and to distribute 200 hygiene kits to families within the camps.

June

£5,000 towards relief efforts organised by Serve Afghanistan to help families who fled their homes during intense fighting in Laghman province.

£4,924 allows two schools in Bamyan province to instal additional security to boundary walls and for a drinking water supply to one.

£5,054 enables the Afghan Children’s Circus to stage their annual circus festival which, Covid restrictions allowing, comprises a series of performances and competitions in circus skills across the country.
Fundraising

Once again, our sincere thanks go to our supporters who have put time and effort into raising funds to help women and children in desperate need in Afghanistan.

Rebecca Ellis and Will Medd gave donations collected at their annual Christmas Eve Yin and Yoga Nidra session via Zoom. Cat Moore donated a proportion of sales of prints inspired by her trip to the Western Isles. Emma Duff asked for donations on her birthday, and Andrew Gow is selling Admiralty Sea Charts on Ebay with 10% to LNF (ongoing). Alessandra Silvestrini has been paying for an Afghan woman to study to become a doctor by providing online yoga and sMove classes. Thank you to all of you for your support.

Following the success of our open water challenge last year, we invite swimmers to join us and swim on a calm day of your choice before the end of August in your favourite loch or bay, perhaps challenging yourselves to increase your distance.

Saturday 2nd October is the date for our annual 10k run/walk. We hope to be able to hold the main event on the Bhaltos Peninsula on the Isle of Lewis but, as always, you can take part wherever you are in the world. More information and entry forms for both events are available on our website.

Our 2022 LNF Calendar will feature some cracking images taken by Afghan photographers working in Afghanistan. More information regarding this and our Christmas cards on our website in due course.

Thanks for all your support

If you would like to help transform the lives of women and children in Afghanistan, please complete the form below and send it, together with your donation to:

The Linda Norgrove Foundation, 3 Mangersta, Uig, Isle of Lewis, UK, HS2 9EY.

If you prefer to donate online, please visit our website www.lindanorgrovefoundation.org

☐ I would like to know more about setting up a monthly donation:

If you wish your donation to be treated as Gift Aid and boost your donation by 25p on every £1 you give, please tick the box and sign the declaration below:

☐ I want to Gift Aid this donation, future donations and any donation over the past 4 years to The Linda Norgrove Foundation.

I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year, it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Please notify us if you change your name or home address, want to cancel this declaration, no longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/or capital gains.

Signed: .................................          Date: ............................

Our privacy policy, which details how we keep and protect your data, is available on our website.

If you no longer wish to receive communications from us, just tell us, and you won’t hear from us again.