

## Tough school? War, illiteracy and hope in Afghanistan. By Bill Hicks.

The idea of drafting a nation's brightest new graduates to become teachers in the most deprived areas has been used in both the United States and the UK, where the approach was pioneered by *Teach for America* and *Teach First* respectively. But how would this model fare in a country where the education system had been pulverised by four decades of constant war and conflict - Afghanistan?

5 The answer to this question is unfolding in Nangarhar province in eastern Afghanistan, where 80 graduates from Afghan universities are teaching 23,000 girls and boys in 21 schools under the Teach for Afghanistan scheme launched at the beginning of this academic year. The scheme is the realisation of the dream of its founder and chief executive, Rahmatullah Arman, who at 26 has taken on a challenge which might deter the most courageous social reformer. Mr Arman returned to Afghanistan  
10 in 2011 after studying at the University of Pune in India, where he also volunteered for the *Teach for India* scheme.

### No desks, but lots of students

Impressed by the transformation he had witnessed in Indian schools, he decided to attempt something similar back home. But first he had to educate himself about what remained of the Afghan education  
15 system and the country's social fabric. He was both shocked and inspired. After 14 years of US-backed reconstruction, Afghanistan was still a country where 3.6 million children were not in school, where half of the teachers were unqualified, where 75% of pupils dropped out by the age of 15, and where the adult illiteracy rate hovered around 60%.

"For me, the biggest inspiration was when I went into schools where there were no chairs, no  
20 desks, often not even teachers, but the schools were still crowded with pupils," said Mr Arman, speaking in Kabul. "I saw families taking their children to school, even where a blast could happen at any time, with all the security problems of which we are all aware, and yet still there are nine million children at school." "I saw the hope that the people have, the spirit of not giving up. They have lost their futures, but their children might have a future."

25 He was convinced that he could give these children "Not only an education but a very good education, not by others but by Afghans themselves." So in 2013 he started to create what would become *Teach for Afghanistan* with help from the global educational partnership organisation, Teach for All (which was created jointly by *Teach for America* and *Teach First* in 2007). Mr Arman set high criteria for his recruitment drive. To join, applicants needed "not just a degree but at least 75% marks" as well  
30 as leadership experience and communication skills. "Something really wonderful happened," Mr Arman said. "For 80 positions we received 3,000 applications, all meeting the criteria, and 99% were from Afghan universities."

## Educating girls

35 It was important that many of these "fellows" were female, to show by example that a girl could become fully educated, get a good job, and still get married and have children. In traditional Afghan communities, to be able to read and write was regarded as enough education for a girl. *Teach for Afghanistan* has a different view. "It is about changing mindsets, and that is a very long-term process", Mr Arman said. In one example, a female teacher, Manzoora, heard that the parents of two girls in her class of 14 to 15 year olds wanted to take them out of school. She begged the parents to come and see  
40 her; the mother came, observed lessons, talked to the teacher, went back home. And after much discussion, they decided to let the girls stay in school.

Given the continuing violence within Afghanistan, did Arman fear for his own safety? "Actually, no, because the approach we take is very local, we are building good relationships with community leaders and religious leaders as well." "Since we started, we have not witnessed a single attack on any  
45 of our fellows, on any of the schools or pupils." And if, at first, some incumbent teachers and officials saw *Teach for Afghanistan's* fellows as competitors, they quickly learned to welcome them as partners, he added.

## Tackling extremism

The fellows receive the same salary - about 9,000 Afghanis - as state teachers. It's not a good salary, Mr Arman agreed: "But we convince them they can have a better future, which is much more than  
50 just a salary." Throughout their two-year commitment, fellows receive leadership training and support that will open up many different opportunities for them, he added.

Mr Arman is convinced that Afghanistan's future depends on releasing the potential of its youth: "Afghanistan has the youngest population in the world and I believe it could be our greatest asset."

55 He also believed education was the most effective way of countering the appeal of extremism and terrorism. He quotes Pakistani education activist Malala Yousufzai: "I don't want to kill terrorists, I want to educate the children of terrorists". "That is the true way to eradicate extremism in my country". With help from the Malala Fund, *Teach for Afghanistan* has just recruited a further 30 fellows - 20 female, 10 male - to begin teaching in schools in Parwan province this month. Ultimately, he hopes  
60 to be able to supply teachers to all 34 provinces: "The need is to go national, the need is huge, and we will go for it."

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### 1. According to the text, the programs *Teach for America* and *Teach First* were created in order to provide education to

- a) the brightest new graduate students.
- b) students from schools that had been pulverised by war and conflict.
- c) students who live in impoverished regions.
- d) bright graduate students who can't afford to pay.
- e) Afghan students who live in areas of conflict and war.

2. Rahmatullah Arman decided to start the *Teach for Afghanistan* scheme because:

- a) he wants to disqualify the *Teach for India* scheme.
- b) he intends to control Afghanistan's educational system.
- c) he plans to challenge social reformers in Afghanistan.
- d) he witnessed blasts in Afghan schools crowded with students.
- e) he saw the positive results from the *Teach for India* scheme.

3. The expression ***dropped out*** (line 17) is closest in meaning to:

- a) join the military forces
- b) graduate from school
- c) dislike studying
- d) stop attending school
- e) run out of money

4. Identify the correct statements about Afghanistan's educational system.

- I. Parents are reluctant about sending their children to schools because of terrorist threats.
- II. The majority of teenage students leave school without finishing their courses.
- III. Girls remain illiterate throughout their lives.
- IV. More than half of the adult population do not know how to read and write.
- V. Fifty percent of the teachers lack the proper qualifications for teaching.

The correct statements are:

- a) I, IV, V.      b) II, III, V.      c) I, III, IV.      d) II, IV, V.      e) I, III, V.

5. The underlined word ***all*** (line 31) refers to:

- a) 3,000 applications.
- b) communication skills.
- c) 99% of Afghan universities.
- d) 75% marks.
- e) 80 positions.

6. The *Teach for Afghanistan* scheme...

- a) has the financial support of local Afghan entrepreneurs.
- b) represents an attempt for Afghan professionals to be recruited in order to teach in the USA.
- c) has received financial aid from other already established organisations.
- d) is more relevant to maintain than the *Teach for America* partnership programme.
- e) is likely to be discontinued due to lack of qualified professionals.

7. The term ***regarded*** (line 36) is closest in meaning to:

- a) imported.
- b) failed.
- c) discussed.
- d) transformed.
- e) considered.

**8. According to the text, the transformation of minds in Afghanistan...**

- a) is never going to be accomplished.
- b) can take some time to be achieved.
- c) is certainly going to be a less painful process for female students.
- d) can only take place if parents keep to their more traditional values.
- e) will prove that some families still have old-fashioned views about marriage.

**9. Bonding with local community and religious leaders has helped *Teach for Afghanistan* because**

- a) it has reduced the number of deaths among the teachers participating in the scheme.
- b) students of the scheme are not getting involved with terrorism and bomb attacks anymore.
- c) the local teachers have learned to view the fellows of the scheme as collaborators, not as competitors.
- d) the linguistic barrier has reduced and learning is now more effective.
- e) the academic performance of the students has reached a level of excellence like never before.

**10. Based on the text, identify the true (T) and false (F) statements regarding Mr Arman:**

- ( ) He is the founder and chief executive of the *Teach for India* scheme.
- ( ) He has already studied and volunteered in India.
- ( ) He was initially unaware of how the Afghan educational system worked.
- ( ) He was positively impressed by the enduring spirit of the Afghan families and their children.
- ( ) He claims that education is the only alternative to put an end to children terrorism.

**The correct sequence is:**

- a) F-T-F-T-F    b) F-T-T-T-F    c) F-T-T-F-F    d) F-F-T-F-T    e) T-T-T-F-F