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Medical Foundation
Integrating Mind, Body, and Spirit

In early Spring of 2005, I was in Afghanistan working with Future Generations in their project of training mature women in the remote villages. As time since has progressed, we have found that the workshops were not only successful for the immediate work but have continued to be fruitful and helpful. Quoting from the report sent out by Future Generations in the latest newsletter we find the following:

In selected districts of Ghazni and Bamain provinces, mature women with children continue to be recruited and trained in women-only health workshops to serve as community health workers (CHWs). To date, 82 women have been trained and six trainers have received advanced training as "trainers of trainers."

The workshop design, developed in two years of formative research by Country Director Carl Taylor, is now being researched to determine the most effective and least expensive ways to recruit, train, and retain DHWs with the goal of scaling up to different ethnic groups and new provinces in the second half of 2006. Simultaneously, the research group is developing measurements of women's empowerment. The workshops are intended not just to convey useful health knowledge to village women but also to increase their self-confidence and energize them to address community problems more broadly.

The exciting thing for those of us who were involved in the workshops was that these women who are bright, but illiterate, accepted and understood the information that was given. They went back to their villages and spent 3 to 4 days with the women who were not able to go to the workshops. These women gathered around them and heard what they had to share. In one village the woman who had been in the workshop identified seven other women. She taught them what she had learned and they went into the village to help with expanding the understanding. We now hear that they have stopped the practice of not feeding the women when they are in labor and that the so-called cold foods (e.g. milk, eggs and carrots) are no longer restricted for pregnant women. They say that in understanding the nature and process of labor they have been able to support the woman in labor and help her with the delivery rather than using the extreme external pressures which they had been using in the past.

They are in the process of creating latrines for their homes so that the children and the whole community do not just use the fields. When the women began digging water pipe ditches, the men took over. The men have now installed piping so that uncontaminated water can be brought down from the mountain springs into the villages.

This work is spreading so fast that it is difficult to keep up with its needed funds. However, when women are empowered and given understanding as to what is the healthy and best way for them to use their own natural resources, they not only are able to do it, but are usually enthusiastic to accept the challenge and move forward.

There is much work that still needs to be done, but the process has started and our prayer is that we will be able to support this ongoing effort.

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