

Humanitarian Assistance Bring a Glimpse of Hope

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Afghanistan continues to be a tough place for women. Decades of conflict have rendered millions of people to be displaced from their places of origin. Humanitarian assistance have been provided to millions of needy Afghans, however, many families remain in severe need of immediate humanitarian assistance.

HRRAC is a leading national organization established in 2006, catering the humanitarian needs of thousands of vulnerable Afghans. HRRAC provides families like that of Zarlisht, a 44-year-old widow living in an informal setting in the outskirts of Lashkargah city. HRRAC protection team evaluated that families headed by single woman are among the most vulnerable, with dire need of assistance. The family lives in one of the poorest and most conflict affected areas in Afghanistan with the area's control frequently contested by the then government, and the Taliban in previous years. There are several families who require acute humanitarian assistance that have been assessed by HRRAC humanitarian team. The assessment team managed to visit 319 households in March 2022, including the family of Zarlisht, which were identified as households with enhanced humanitarian needs. The family had no means of income. At the time of assessment, they had not received any assistance whatsoever from any aid organization.



Figure 1: HRRAC PSS Specialist providing individual counseling to Zarlisht at HRRAC provincial office in Lashkargah, Helmand Province.

Zarlisht, is a survivor of the deadly conflict, but got displaced from her place of permanent residence. The misfortune did not end with the displacement, as her family was hit by yet another misery. Her only son who is 24, was diagnosed with cancer.

Zarlasht, now the only breadwinner for her eight daughters and an ill son and had to find money for her son's costly treatment. She resorted to negative coping mechanism to cover the expenses of her son's treatment by borrowing money from relatives and her husband's friends. The accumulated loan had reached to a little under 400,000 Afghanis. Since she had limited resources and capacity to pay back the loan, the lenders had started intimidating her. One of the lenders even forced her to give her daughter in exchange for the debt, however, determined she was, she categorically rejected the proposal.

This chain of events had taken a toll on her. She was upset with her life and started complaining about her tough living condition and the struggle she had faced. As she had gone through lots of ups and downs, as a result, ended up with severe psychosocial problems.

"My husband was government civil servant with a decent income, with his salary we could afford a reasonable life" narrated Zarlasht. "When my husband was alive, we were living a decent life, free of any difficulty, my children went to school, everyone perusing their dreams. However, it did not last for long and everything has gone disappeared in a flash" added Zarlasht.

Zarlasht was identified by HRRAC team while conducting preliminary assessment for the project as potential beneficiary. After being selected, Zarlasht received first round group counselling. However, recognizing the gravity of her situation, she was referred to receive individual counselling for specialized care. In addition to the Psycho Social Support (PSS), she was verified to be eligible for individual protection assistance (IPA), a one-time cash assistance of \$150 in April 2022. This cash assistance and psycho social support had a complementary effect on her recovery. As she already had good tailoring skills, she purchased a sewing machine along with the necessary tailoring equipment and started sewing clothes in her community. She now takes orders to sew women clothes at a decent price and making enough money from which she can fulfill basic needs of life, and save some of the income to repay the owing debt. She is slowly, but surely returning to a normal life, forgetting all the woes she had to suffer in her life.

"I have started to live without stress again. There are people who care to the needs of vulnerable and marginalized people". Zarlasht continued to share how the cash assistance, and PSS positively impacted their lives. "My children are very happy when I receive orders to sew clothes, they now have a glimpse of hope for future. I am relieved when I see my children happy and smiling."