

RAHA: MOVING FORWARD

A Lessons Learned Review
of the Refugee Affected
& Hosting Areas (RAHA)
Initiative

United Nations
P a k i s t a n



With approximately 1.5 million registered Afghan refugees, Pakistan continues to host the largest number of refugees worldwide – refugees that have been living in this hosting country for the past three decades.



Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE RAHA PROGRAMME...	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS...	4
BACKGROUND...	5
METHODOLOGY...	6
KEY GENERAL CHALLENGES FACED...	7
PICTURES FROM THE WORKSHOP...	9

SECTOR SPECIFIC FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

EDUCATION...	11
HEALTH...	15
LIVELIHOODS...	20
INFRASTRUCTURE...	24
WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE (WASH)...	27
ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES...	30
SOCIAL PROTECTION...	32
OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS...	35

CONCLUSION

RAHA: MOVING FORWARD...	39
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ABOUT THE RAHA PROGRAMME

The Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas programme (RAHA) has been conceived on the basis of comprehensive needs assessments jointly conducted by UNDP and UNHCR in 2009. It is an initiative headed by the Government of Pakistan, with UNDP serving as the administrative agency and UNHCR as the convening agent of the programme. The programme is being implemented in twenty-eight districts in Pakistan – most of them in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) provinces, but also in Sindh, Punjab, and FATA. The programme has been developed to substantially improve the standard of living of over one million Pakistanis who have been, or who are still, hosting Afghans and to maintain temporary protection space and enhanced community acceptance of Afghans in Pakistan who have documentation. Crucially, it will strengthen the Pakistan Government's governance and public service delivery and enhance social cohesion between refugee and host communities in line with the Government's National Policy on the Management and Repatriation of Afghan Refugees, adopted in 2013.

At the 26th Tripartite Commission meeting with the Government of Afghanistan and UNHCR, held in Kabul in August 2015, the Government of Pakistan presented a draft proposal for its new Comprehensive Policy on Voluntary Repatriation and Management of Afghan Nationals beyond 2015. Pending the endorsement by the Federal Cabinet, the new draft policy emphasizes the need for continued provision of assistance to refugees and their host communities through RAHA, and recommends, *inter alia*, to extend its scope, improve transparency and efficiency of its processes and strengthen resource mobilization in support of its implementation.

The RAHA initiative is also a cornerstone of the implementation of the regional Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) developed to identify and implement solutions for Afghan refugees in the region, and endorsed by the international community in 2012.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This review would not have been made possible without the continuous generous support and donation from the European Union and the United States of America, whose continued support for the RAHA programme's endeavours is sincerely appreciated.

Also deserving of gratitude are the numerous beneficiaries, stakeholders, government officials, and many donors for their honest sharing of the challenges, lessons learned, opportunities, and solutions during the various workshops held throughout Pakistan.

This Lessons Learned Review would also not have been possible without the help and coordination from the RAHA teams at UNHCR and UNDP. Special thanks to both Tabasum Noor Jamal and Zabardast Khan Bangash, who both worked tirelessly to make sure all communities were represented and heard.

It is with sincere hope that this report provides the RAHA programme with the structure, process, and tools necessary to remedy issues facing the Afghan refugees and Pakistani nationals living in the refugee affected and hosting areas.

BACKGROUND

For more than three decades, Pakistan has hosted the largest number of refugees worldwide. The socioeconomic, financial, environmental and political consequences associated with such protracted refugee presence have placed a heavy burden on Pakistan and contributed to an increasing sense of asylum fatigue in the host communities.

To address these challenges, the Government of Pakistan – along with ten other UN agencies, with support from the EU and the Governments of Japan, Germany, United States, Denmark, and Australia--piloted a five-year programme through which targeted assistance was delivered to aid local Pakistani communities and the Afghan refugee population. The objectives were the following:

- To provide development and humanitarian assistance to these groups;
- To form bridges between the Afghan refugees and Pakistani community;
- To expand protection space until durable solutions are achieved;
- To improve livelihoods and rehabilitate the environment.

The RAHA programme has since provided assistance to over 10.5 million people through 3,500 development projects in education; environment & natural resources; health; infrastructure; livelihoods; water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); and social protection. Now in its sixth year, the RAHA programme has successfully and significantly reduced the economic and social vulnerability of some of the disadvantaged segments of society living in the refugee affected and hosting areas.

The RAHA programme model is currently being studied and used by the UN in other countries facing a similar refugee crisis; however, as the program enters a new phase, the future success of the programme will depend upon taking a look backwards. This report is a glimpse at these lessons learned: an honest, snapshot review of what the RAHA programme has achieved, the opportunities there are to grow, and where the programme is headed.

METHODOLOGY

To learn from the RAHA programme and to understand the challenges it might face in its next phase, UNHCR and UNDP staff and a team of consultants traveled to four provinces in which RAHA projects are currently being implemented. There, they met with community members and other stakeholders to learn of the following:

- 1) **Best practices**, so that the programme may take those forward to future projects.
- 2) **Challenges** faced by the local communities and Afghan refugees, so that they may become opportunities.
- 3) **Impact and outcomes** of the RAHA programme's projects in the country – either negatively or positively.
- 4) **Identification of gaps** where the RAHA programme should become involved in the next phase.
- 5) **Potential solutions** to overcome challenges faced by members of the community, the Government of Pakistan, and UN system.

The consultants hired for this review have been associated with the RAHA programme since its early days. They moderated four workshops in each of the provincial capitals and conducted four focus group discussions with members from Refugee affected and hosting communities. Through questionnaires, group discussions, and presentations in both English and Urdu, the many lessons shared by the participants were captured.

In a concluding federal workshop held in Islamabad, beneficiaries, high-level government officials, UN staff, advisors, and donors shared their views on the RAHA programme. These have also been included in this review.

In total, over four hundred constituents participated in this study.

The outcome of these discussions culminates in this report, which identifies best practices and presents recommendations of ways in which the RAHA Programme can improve on its future delivery of projects and further impact its beneficiaries. Recommendations cover mechanisms for identifying, designing, endorsing, and approving projects; for the implementation of projects; the monitoring and evaluation of projects; and how to enhance the visibility and resource mobilisation for the RAHA Programme both inside and outside of Pakistan.

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE RAHA PROGRAMME

RESOURCE MOBILISATION

Over the last six years and owing to generous support of the international community, the RAHA programme has improved the living standards of and prospects for 10.5 million people in Pakistan with 3,500 projects across six sectors. Moving forward into 2016, the programme will need reinvigorated financial support to continue providing vital assistance and opportunities for Afghan refugees and Pakistanis in the refugee affected and hosting areas. The continued provision of assistance to Afghan refugees and their host communities is a cornerstone of the implementation of the next phase of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) in Pakistan (2015-17), and an important element of the current Government's policy as well as the future draft Comprehensive Policy on Voluntary Repatriation and Management of Afghan Nationals beyond 2015. Provision of financial support to the RAHA programme is as such an important demonstration of burden-sharing and solidarity by the international community with the Government and people of Pakistan who have been hosting Afghan refugees for nearly four decades.

A Joint Resource Mobilization Strategy (JRMS) has been developed to mobilize resources for the implementation of SSAR, of which RAHA is a fundamental part, and can serve as a basis for future reinvigorated advocacy, lobbying and fund-raising efforts.

COMPLEX IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISM

The RAHA programme operates on various levels and there are many approving and implementing agencies involved. The success of projects relies upon seamless coordination from the federal and provincial government in close collaboration with UN agencies, implementing partners, all the way through to the community organisations. Streamlining this process will not be easy, but programme activities will only be fully efficient once people are connected and working in accordance with the programme objectives.

SECURITY

Pakistan's unpredictable and volatile security situation creates a difficult operational environment. The ongoing sectarian violence, security incidents, and military operations regularly impede work in the refugee affected and hosting areas. This may affect individual project schedules, but perhaps – most importantly – the overall well-being of the people the RAHA programme is intent on helping.

VISIBILITY

The Government of Pakistan's stake in the RAHA programme is unclear to many of the beneficiaries who were involved in this Lessons Learned Review, and there is limited public awareness about the RAHA programme in general. Improving the visibility of each of the programme's projects and of the programme as a whole — its objectives, outputs, and progress — is key for the future success of the programme.

EXPERTISE

The spectrum of projects in the RAHA programme's portfolio presents exciting opportunities for the future of the programme, but an honest look also reveals its challenges. Projects that fall across sectors call for diverse experience at the planning, approving, and implementation level, and this is not always easily found.

SCHEDULES

It was noted that project schedules do not sufficiently account for the time required to plan individual projects. Additionally, external factors such as the deteriorating security situation, delayed delivery of construction materials, and difficulties working in harsh weather conditions cause unexpected delays. Sometimes, the programme has limited time to respond and giving each and every project the long-view is unfeasible when time is of the essence.

MEASURING/ASSESSING IMPACT

Existing monitoring frameworks have proved inadequate to reflect the full impact and outputs of the RAHA programme as a whole, and of the sectoral interventions. Development and implementation of comprehensive and regular monitoring, reporting, and evaluation mechanisms can help to collect and process data and information needed for enhanced visibility and efficient robust resource mobilisation in support of continued implementation of the programme.

Aligning the programme interventions with the overall objective of empowerment of refugees and host communities, particularly the youth, through inter-linked interventions in the areas of education, skills training, and livelihoods support:

More than half of the Afghan refugee population in Pakistan is under the age of 15, 64% of whom are children between 5 and 14 years. Youth (15-24 years old) make up another 20% of the total Afghan refugee population.¹ Children and youth thus constitute nearly 70% of the Afghan refugee population in Pakistan, a fact that underlines the vulnerability of the displaced communities but also points to the significant human capital that these new generations can offer in the context of the future reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. Empowerment of refugees, particularly the children and youth, is thus a cross-cutting priority theme of the implementation of the regional Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR) in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, towards the achievement of the overall objective of voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration in Afghanistan, and enhancing self-reliance pending return.

¹ See UNHCR Population Profiling and Verification of Afghan Refugees (PPVR), 2012.

FOCUS GROUP & WORKSHOP DISCUSSIONS

Men and women sit together, working to uncover lessons learned from their projects.



— GROUPWORK DURING THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS



— STAKEHOLDERS LISTEN AS OTHERS PRESENT IN A WORKSHOP



EDUCATION

To date, one of the RAHA programme's areas of focus in all four provinces has been the education sector with approximately 415 interventions, or 12% of the 3,500 interventions undertaken so far. The programme provides infrastructure and equipment to schools. Some examples include additional classrooms and classroom furniture; science laboratories and laboratory equipment; libraries; boundary walls and playgrounds; washrooms and clean drinking water; and necessary repairs to school buildings. Through the programme, parent-teacher councils are also mobilised and trained.

Schools are missing facilities; classrooms lack equipment; and buildings are in a state of disrepair:

Many schools in the RAHA programme area are in poor condition, and due to lack of classroom space, some classes are conducted outside. By providing 'bricks and mortar' help in the shape of classrooms, school facilities, equipment, and repair works, the RAHA programme makes it easier for teachers to focus on teaching effectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The RAHA programme should replicate its infrastructure and missing facilities provision model to benefit more schools.
- For greater impact, the programme may adopt an integrated approach when targeting a school.

Education projects help strengthen relationships, but parents should be involved at an earlier stage:

Owing much to the RAHA programme, Afghan refugee children and local Pakistani children have been able to develop and foster friendships in schools. The RAHA programme also forges a space for the parents in these communities to strengthen their relationships through parent-teacher associations and councils, which have encouraged members of the community to think about the state of education their areas. These bodies enable Afghans and Pakistanis to voice their concerns and shape the learning environment of their children.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Parent-teacher associations and councils should be part of every education project and formed at the project identification stage. This would allow them to shape the nature of the project.
- Parent-teacher associations and councils should be informed and trained about their roles and responsibilities.
- There is a missing link between parent-teacher associations and the EDO-Education office, which is responsible for the maintenance of public primary schools. NGOs should coordinate trainings between parent-teacher/school management associations and the EDO-Education office to ensure the sustainability of the project.

Many parents are incognizant of the importance of education; others have limited resources; and many fear for their children's safety:

There are a number of reasons parents do not send their children to schools or withdraw them from schools: poverty, a lack of awareness on the benefits of education, and Pakistan's volatile security situation are to name a few.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Awareness raising campaigns on the importance of education — especially for girls — should be spearheaded with education interventions under the RAHA programme. Over time, these campaigns will hopefully change parents' attitudes and behaviours toward education.
- Children should be provided with uniforms, school bags, stationary, shoes, etc. to relieve some of the costs for those parents living beneath the poverty line.
- Law and order agencies should ensure security and district authorities need to work with the schools to have appropriate security measures in place to protect students.
- Under the RAHA programme, school security can be increased by constructing boundary walls and school gates.

Schools are in need of dedicated and well-trained teachers:

In the education sector, finding and retaining dedicated teachers is a difficult task, especially in remote areas. Among those who are committed, there are still many who lack in skill or knowledge of teaching methods and techniques. Improvements in teaching performance would allow teachers to be more responsive to the needs of their students.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The RAHA programme's partners must coordinate closely with the EDO-Education office to ensure that teachers are available when a school project is completed.
- When selecting new school projects, the RAHA programme should consider whether or not the institution has sufficient teaching staff.
- Under the RAHA programme, teacher training manuals could be developed in coordination with the EDO-Education office, and master trainers could be trained. The EDO-Education office could make such trainings a permanent feature of the department.

Scattered populations and difficult geographical terrain make it challenging to develop schools where they are most needed:

With poor road infrastructure and difficult terrain, schools are inaccessible to children who live in isolated areas. The government does not see establishing or upgrading schools in these areas as a priority. Where a school is accessible, commuting proves to be challenging for many children. It is also difficult to recruit teachers, who are often unwilling to move to regions that lack the most basic facilities. This is particularly true for female teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Community-run schools should be considered for remote and scattered populations, and mobile schools could be pilot tested. UNICEF has used distant learning models for indigenous populations in Kenya, which could serve as an example. However, the RAHA programme would have to take local conditions into account.
- The RAHA programme could consider introducing a transport provision for children who live in isolated and/or hilly areas. If possible, the programme should also look into projects that improve access to infrastructure in these remote regions.

Project duration must correspond with the remoteness and complexity of project sites:

Some of the schools that have been established by the RAHA programme fall in remote areas. Navigating difficult terrain can cause delays in the delivery of construction materials, and a volatile security situation in the region can often prolong a project's duration. Severe weather conditions also hinder construction. Implementing partners that are taking the lead on these projects can find it challenging to deliver on time.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- A more flexible project schedule should be considered for projects that are implemented in schools located in remote areas.
- Remote monitoring and reporting methods should be adopted for remote areas, or where the security situation does not allow for regular monitoring.

“The RAHA programme is awareness, knowledge, and change at the individual and community level.”

Female education programmes are in demand:

Ensuring education for women in Pakistan is a challenge, particularly in remote areas where girls face social and cultural barriers and are unable to go to school. Although the RAHA programme has prioritised female education programmes, many of the beneficiaries who were involved in these Lessons Learned workshops have voiced a need for more education projects for girls, especially in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) region.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The RAHA programme should prioritise FATA for education projects in the next phase.
- School construction projects for women should consider the cultural barriers they face. School facilities should be close to villages and boundary walls should be constructed for privacy and security.

Join hands with volunteers to raise awareness and control the dropout rate:

Children have increased chances of reaching their potential when there are others around to motivate and mentor. Teachers often play this role; however, the success of a school is the responsibility of an entire community — after all, it takes a village to raise a child. Teachers, in coordination with volunteers registered with the school, can follow-up with dropouts and encourage them to continue with their education. Additionally, volunteers can help parent-teacher associations and councils launch campaigns on children's rights, particularly those related to education.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Volunteer programmes could be made a part of the RAHA programme's education projects.
- For greater impact, the RAHA programme may consider linking projects with government education initiatives, such as “Education for All”.
- Accelerated learning programs should be promoted to help dropouts catch up with their classmates.
- Parent-teacher associations and councils should be empowered to pursue fundraising from the corporate sector and/or those who are locally influential.



HEALTH

The RAHA programme focuses on primary and secondary health providers. Basic Health Units (BHUs), Rural Health Centres (RHCs), as well as district and provincial hospitals provide target communities with direct health care. In turn, these health centres and staff receive infrastructure support, equipment, and trainings through the RAHA programme. The programme also caters to the needs of those living in remote areas such as FATA with health care kits, each of which includes medicine and instruments that can benefit up to nine thousand people for a period of three months. Health interventions make up about 4%, or approximately 140 interventions, of the RAHA programme's total project portfolio.

Health units are in need of doctors, health care workers, and equipment:

The RAHA programme rehabilitates and equips health care facilities in communities, but a portion of these BHUs and RHCs are still unable to provide beneficiaries with some basic services. Medical tests, medicine, clean drinking water, washrooms, and medical and non-medical equipment are among the necessities still unavailable in some health facilities in the RAHA programme area. Hospitals also lack equipment, making it difficult for doctors to practice. In other cases, specialised doctors and health professionals find little incentive to come from the city and serve in rural areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- BHUs and RHCs should be upgraded with equipment and provided with “brick and mortar” help. Equipment needs and improved infrastructure identified for hospitals should be met in the next phase of RAHA.
- Communities would benefit greatly if incentives were introduced for doctors to stay at BHUs and RHCs for a prolonged period of time. Under the RAHA programme a scheme with the government should be introduced to make it mandatory for doctors to work rotations in rural areas.
- Implementing partners must improve their coordination with the health department to ensure that medical staff is available and ready to take up their positions once a project is ready to be handed over.
- When selecting a new project facility, the RAHA programme should consider the presence of sufficient medical staff for the project.
- Because the RAHA programme's beneficiaries are poor, free medical care and medicine should be offered to prevent and combat disease in these small and close-knit communities.
- Remote communities should be linked with the National Rural Support Programme's Micro-Health Insurance Programme (or similar programmes) for marginalised communities.

Basic health issues are still major cause for concern in refugee affected and hosting areas:

There were a number of health issues that were highlighted by the beneficiaries who participated in this review. Among the major health problems ailing these communities are maternal and child healthcare; malnutrition; respiratory problems; malaria; STDs/HIV/AIDS; hepatitis C; tuberculosis; infant and neonatal health; polio; and rehabilitation of the physically handicapped and aging populations.

Additionally, immunizing children against diseases is still a challenge. The country's fickle power situation makes it difficult for healthcare providers to keep vaccines at regulated temperatures, and accessing children who live in remote areas adds to the problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The RAHA programme should focus on projects related to maternal and child healthcare; malnutrition; respiratory problems; malaria; STDs/HIV/AIDS; hepatitis C; tuberculosis; infant and neonatal health; and polio.
- Immunisation campaigns should be introduced with support from political representatives, religious leaders, government officials, and celebrities.
- Solar generators should be installed to keep refrigerators and freezers functional during power outages, keeping vaccines and other medication safe and effective.
- Health units should be equipped to support the rehabilitation of the physically handicapped and aging population.

Communities need to be educated on health and hygiene for disease prevention:

Communities would benefit greatly from health and hygiene education. There is a clear lack of understanding in these areas regarding health issues, and many are also unaware of the hygiene measures that would prevent the spread and contraction of diseases.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The RAHA programme should support campaigns to create awareness around health and hygiene at union council level, and in community groups and schools.
- Trainings should be developed to educate communities on disease prevention and healthy lifestyles.

For health projects, short project durations are frequently impractical:

A number of reasons are to name for the delayed completion of health projects in the refugee affected and hosting areas. For one, handing over dates of BHUs and RHCs veer off-schedule because provincial authorities find it difficult to approve designated staff in time. Medical equipment provided by the RAHA programme may remain inoperative until there is a skilled doctor or technician available to operate the equipment. Also adding to the prolonged duration of projects is the challenging nature of delivering construction materials and equipment to sites in far-flung and remote areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Implementing partners should carefully consider a project site's geographical area and related logistical challenges when planning project schedules.
- The project duration for health projects should show some flexibility depending on the nature and scope of the project.
- NGOs must familiarise themselves at the beginning of a project on government procedures for the allocation of staff, so that there are resources available to operate specialised equipment once the project is completed.

Communities can be more involved in health projects:

The procurement of specialised equipment makes it difficult to involve those without the technical know-how in the planning and implementation phases of health projects. For this reason, community participation during these stages has been limited — but that is not to say that the input of community members is not important.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The involvement of the community in monitoring and maintenance of BHUs and RHCs should be increased by forming joint committees between members of the community and BHUs/RHCs management.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

“Because of the RAHA programme, we identify our problems and try to resolve them together, as a community.”

The RAHA programme's Basic Health Unit in Chamkani (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) is highlighted as a best practice for the following reasons:

Social Mobilisation: The need to upgrade and renovate the health unit was identified in close consultation with beneficiaries, honouring the voice of this marginalised community.

Needs-Based Project Design: The project design was finalised only after numerous discussions with the community and BHU management, where problems with the current health unit were identified.

Community Involvement: Community members generously helped construct various parts of the BHU, taking ownership and responsibility for the facility.

Doctor Incentives: Due to a high turnover of medical staff, a free residence and basic amenities on site for the hired female doctor were offered as incentive.

Organised system: The management adopted a token system to organise patients. Those who needed tests were referred to the BHU laboratory and ultrasound facility.

Raising Awareness: BHU staff briefed mothers on the importance of vaccinating their children, and disease prevention posters were displayed in the waiting area to educate patients on health and hygiene issues.

Monitoring: Maintaining a daily record of patients at the BHU ensured that members of both the Afghan refugee community and the Pakistani host community benefit from the program.

Impact and Sustainability: Community members, who normally had to travel to Peshawar for specialised medical care, could now receive effective medical treatment in their home village. Members of the community remain in close contact with the BHU management and regularly discuss required maintenance of the health unit.



Health projects miss opportunities to build relationships between host communities and refugees:

Members of host communities realise that medical services have vastly improved in their area because of the hospitality they extend to Afghan refugees. While other sector interventions clearly incorporate a coexistence component, health interventions have few joint activities planned for the local community and Afghan refugees at the implementation stage.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Joint capacity building trainings on health issues for both Afghan refugees and host communities could play an important role in bringing them closer together.

Women in the community need to be educated about women's health issues:

The RAHA programme's health projects focus significantly on women's health issues. While labour rooms, ultrasound machines, and test facilities are provided for by the RAHA programme, many of the female beneficiaries know very little about lifestyle and health risks specific to women.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Women's health trainings should be incorporated into health projects to help raise awareness in the community about women's health issues.

There are opportunities to expand health initiatives and serve more rural communities and vulnerable groups:

There are numerous tiny villages in each of Pakistan's four RAHA provinces, and many have little or no access to medical facilities. Residents from these remote villages will walk miles to receive any kind of health care, and for many — especially vulnerable groups — seeing a doctor is an unaffordable luxury.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- In coordination with health departments, the introduction of mobile health clinics or dispensaries could be considered to better aid residents of remote areas.
- The training of community health workers in remote areas should be supported through the RAHA programme.
- The RAHA programme should initiate projects on rehabilitation of patients with special needs.
- The RAHA programme should increase the number of interventions for mental health and family planning.



LIVELIHOODS

Of the total 3,500 projects that have been carried out by the RAHA programme since 2009, 8% of them — or 269 projects — have been focused on strengthening the livelihoods of Afghan refugees and Pakistanis. The RAHA programme's livelihood sector bolsters members of the communities in the refugee affected and hosting areas mostly through skills development and trainings, reducing poverty in both urban and rural areas. Many of the graduates from these trainings go on to find employment or start their own businesses — in some cases, even selling their work abroad. But as the country's political and economic situation changes, there is an increasing need to link the men and women with the markets and financing institutions.

Training centres offer limited courses; lack modern facilities; and are too few and far between:

Beneficiaries in the target areas noted that the number of skills offered are limited for men, and that skill and vocational training centres lack modern facilities, equipment, and sufficiently qualified trainers.

Men, who are often the main providers in these areas, would benefit from training courses on conventional trades such as plumbing, electrical installation, refrigeration, carpentry, and welding.

Both men and women described an urgency for more training centres. For women, the need to have vocational trainings and training centres nearby and accessible is particularly dire. Because of cultural barriers, women are forbidden to travel long distances. In many cases, the traveling precludes them from learning any skill. As the RAHA programme has seen in the past, skills development projects for women improves their confidence and self-reliance. This confidence has facilitated women in expanding their businesses to other markets – even abroad.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Under the RAHA programme, a labour market survey should be considered to explore the demand for existing and emerging trades in target districts. This is especially needed for Afghan labour markets and in those areas where most Afghan refugees reside. This ensures that pragmatic and results-oriented courses are offered.
- In addition to providing more courses in conventional trades, trainings on carpet weaving; polishing and grinding of precious and semiprecious stones; and farming and agriculture should be considered in the future.
- Specialised agencies, such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Technical Education & Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA), and National Vocational & Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC), should be consulted prior to finalizing a course for beneficiaries.
- Livelihood interventions for women had a positive impact on communities. The RAHA programme should develop more training facilities close to home for women.
- In training centres where modern skills are taught, the RAHA programme should consider upgrading training facilities and related equipment.

Graduates of training programs need job placement assistance:

Currently, there are no services offered to graduates of training programs that assist in finding employment. Curriculum vitae preparation, communication skills, and interview preparation are a few of the necessary skills needed to find adequate employment post-training. These are not included in skills trainings funded by the RAHA programme. Additionally, apprenticeship opportunities and job placement services for skilled graduates do not exist, and some trainees struggle to find employment as a result.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Training facilitators should form links with potential employers, such as the chambers of commerce and industry and employers' associations, to facilitate apprenticeships and job placements for graduates. These associations could extend their support under their corporate social responsibility (CSR).
- Curriculum vitae development, business communication, and public speaking should be made a part of any syllabus, equipping beneficiaries with the social skills needed to find jobs, run businesses successfully, and become more confident.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

“Trainings brought change to our lives, and we also became aware of our rights.”

Skill-trained Afghan refugees must be marketable in Pakistan and Afghanistan:

Overall, livelihoods projects have had a positive impact on the relationships between Afghan refugees and members of the host communities. The RAHA programme ensured that Afghan refugees benefitted from projects; for example, in public skills and vocational training centres, a quota was allocated to encourage the refugees' participation. Providing Afghan refugees with skills and trainings that are in demand and recognised in Afghanistan might make their decision to repatriate easier.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- In the next phase of the RAHA programme, skills trainings should be offered to Afghan refugees of trades that are in demand in Afghanistan. Those trainings must be certified by TEVTA and recognised by the concerned Afghan authorities.

Skilled graduates need financial help setting up businesses:

The RAHA programme has contributed its resources into strengthening members of hosting and refugee communities with skills trainings. Some graduates of these programmes are entrepreneurial, but to set up small-scale businesses, skilled graduates lack capital. Those who desire to start up their own shops need microfinance assistance.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Training providers under the RAHA programme should develop networks between microfinance providers and beneficiaries, giving the latter a better chance of starting their businesses.
- Unique business plans could be developed for beneficiaries after a demand assessment in the local market.

Short and uncertified trainings make it difficult for trainees to develop ability and find jobs:

The short duration of the skills trainings provided by NGOs to date makes it difficult for beneficiaries to become 'true' experts in their field. Not all courses provided to the beneficiaries are certified by TEVTA or NAVTTTC, and therefore, they are unrecognised by employers.

Ensuring a job for every single beneficiary is too ambitious, which means that graduates of training programmes must have the confidence, knowledge, and necessary know-how to practice their trade.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Projects on livelihoods must adopt a follow-up mechanism with beneficiaries to provide them with after-service assistance. AHAN model has emerged as a best practice because AHAN retains a database of trainees and graduates and provides them with continuous support.
- The duration of trainings should be long enough to ensure that the skills imparted enable participants to master their trade.
- Where feasible, courses offered under the RAHA programme should receive certification from TEVTA or NAVTTTC.
- Tool kits should be provided to all skills training graduates, enabling them to seek jobs or set up their own small scale businesses.

The Aik Hunar Aik Nagar (AHAN) Skills Development Model is highlighted as a best practice for the following reasons:

Need Assessment & Social Mobilisation: Heeding to the needs of women in the targeted areas, the RAHA programme worked with AHAN to develop skills trainings on dress designing, which included cutting, sewing, block printing, and embroidery. Skills development institutes were established near the targeted area to save women from having to travel. The institutes were also sensitive to cultural norms and traditions, which won trust from the communities.

Selection of Implementing Partner: AHAN was selected because the organisation was well known for its talent in conducting skills trainings for women. Additionally, AHAN had connections in local markets and markets abroad.

Training Components: Skills training were theoretical and practical. The project provided material and tools at the training facilities, and modern designs and techniques were taught. The course also included enterprise development, business communication, and linked the trainees to the markets.

Sustainability and Post Graduation Advice: Women were provided with tool kits that included sewing machines and other accessories, which enabled them to start up small scale businesses post-graduation. A database of women who have gone through trainings had been developed to follow up with them on their progress. Graduates were provided technical and business advice, and some graduates who were successful even came back to become master trainers.

There must be better coordination with government line departments:

Because of a lack of coordination with the government line departments, teachers are sometimes not hired on time for the vocational training courses that have been strengthened by the RAHA programme in terms of equipment and infrastructure. This creates unfortunate and unnecessary delays.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Training courses should be held at established (public) & recognised institutes. Facilities, equipment, and tools procured under the RAHA programme will benefit a large number of trainees in the future.
- NGOs should timely coordinate with concerned provincial departments to obtain administrative letters for appointment of teachers in the next provincial budget. Some interim arrangement must be maintained with the concerned departments by hiring a human resource person until the permanent staff is approved in the next budget.

There needs to be a stronger focus on helping vulnerable groups:

The RAHA programme has limited standalone projects on livelihoods for the most vulnerable groups. These including widows, orphans, and the physically handicapped, although widows are given priority during the beneficiary selection process.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The RAHA programme should focus on encouraging standalone projects for the most vulnerable in the next phase. The programme should provide this segment of the population with skills according to their needs, which would strengthen their financial position and help them earn a decent and respectful living.



INFRASTRUCTURE

Pakistan has limited resources, and its needs for infrastructure are extensive, especially in the RAHA programme areas. Currently, there are 1,310 infrastructure projects that have been carried out under the RAHA programme, which accounts for approximately one-third of the total projects under the programme over the past six years. Some of these infrastructure projects include paved streets and farm to market roads; bridges and flood protection walls; waste management systems; or solar panels for households that are off the national electrical grid. These types of projects facilitate socioeconomic growth for the most vulnerable and marginalised communities.

The RAHA programme responds well, but communities need more infrastructure projects:

The RAHA programme funds many of the infrastructure needs identified by communities in the target areas. Much to the programme's credit, beneficiaries are appreciative and have expressed that they would benefit from more infrastructure projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Responding to infrastructure needs identified by communities should continue to be a focus in the next phase of the programme. Improved infrastructure would lead to enhanced economic opportunities in the RAHA programme areas.

The community organisations need advice:

The RAHA programme's community-based approach is undoubtedly popular with the programme's beneficiaries. Involvement of community organisations, village organisations, and local support organisations — some of which the programme helps establish in the earliest stages of a project — gives community members a sense of ownership, strengthens their ability to resolve challenges faced in their communities, and increases their capacity to maintain a project after its completion.

But as the RAHA programme steadies to step out of the projects, the question remains: will the community, village, and local support organisations be independent enough to identify and resolve their own issues?

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Since the formation and training of community based organisations has proven to be a successful strategy, it should be replicated and strengthened in the next phase of the RAHA programme.
- The RAHA programme should develop a system to provide advice and support to community, village, and local support organisations after project completion.

Project timelines for infrastructure projects are impractical:

Community mobilisation is the backbone of any project implementation. In some places, social mobilisation has proven to be a challenging and time-consuming process. Adding to the delay of some construction projects is the unpredictable supply of construction material to isolated areas. The scattered and remote nature of some of these infrastructure projects also makes them difficult to monitor.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- A period of two to three months should be included in the project schedule to allow for social mobilisation and social mobilisation training.
- For infrastructure projects in remote areas, a flexible timeline should be considered.
- Remote monitoring systems should be encouraged for projects that are in far-flung areas or inaccessible to ensure successful project implementation.

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

“Social mobilisation is the mother of every project”

The technical capacity of communities to maintain care for infrastructure projects and ensure their sustainability requires strengthening:

Giving ownership of projects to communities is among the chief priorities of the RAHA programme. At the initial stages of a NGO project, community organisations establish “operation and maintenance committees”. These governing bodies operate and maintain completed projects and raise funds for repairs when needed. However, some committees lack technical capacity when it comes to specialised and major repairs.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Technical operation and maintenance training of community bodies must become part of every infrastructure project — not just predominantly NGO projects.
- Coordination between relevant government line department and the community organisation needs to be strengthened for the long-term maintenance of projects.

The refugee voice could be a little louder:

From the start of any infrastructure scheme, plans ensure that the project benefits the community at large. In most cases, Afghan refugees make decisions alongside their Pakistani brothers and sisters as members of community organisations, village organisations, and local support organisations.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Afghan refugee membership should be made mandatory in all-male and all-female community, village, and local support organisations.

Women could benefit from infrastructure projects that are female-only:

Although women have formed all-women community organisations, there are currently no infrastructure projects that are fulfilling solely women's needs. Cultural barriers and religious beliefs prohibit women from interacting with men, and many would be relieved to have centres that are self-supporting, independent, and pro-women.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The RAHA programme should empower women through creating more all-women community organisations in the next phase.
- Under the RAHA programme, community centres for women should be established and managed by all-women community organisations in the future.



MORE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Infrastructure projects must be qualified as “community physical infrastructure” as the word “infrastructure” is too broad a term.
- Larger infrastructure projects could be considered by the RAHA programme in the next phase for greater impact and visibility.
- During the project proposal assessment implementing partners that have expertise in infrastructure development should be given preference over NGOs who do not have similar expertise.
- Preferably, a single NGO should implement projects in one union council or village to avoid confusion among communities and to reduce project management costs.



WATER, SANITATION & HYGIENE (WASH)

Poor sanitation, water, and hygiene have many serious repercussions that can lead to impoverishment and diminished opportunities for thousands of people. To help, the RAHA programme has implemented a total of 1,150 WASH projects, which amounts for over one-third of the total projects the programme has implemented since 2009. The programme has funded the construction of washrooms, water supply schemes, irrigation channels, tube wells, hand pumps, sewage lines, water tanks, or dams. These projects have decreased the spread of waterborne diseases, improved the health of some of the poorest people in Pakistan, and have increased the productivity in communities.

Clean water supplies are distant, causing local communities to retrieve water from contaminated sources:

The water shortage in some of the programme areas forces members of the community to fetch water from open water resources. These water supplies are oftentimes contaminated with pollutants, introducing life-threatening diseases. This fact, coupled with the lack of health & hygiene education, can cause diseases to spread throughout communities.

Moreover, many members of these communities travel long distances to fetch water. Those who live in remote areas must navigate difficult terrain. In urban and semiurban areas, community members retrieve water from the main water supply lines traveling either on foot or hired carts.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Water shortages sometimes occur because surplus water is not stored. The RAHA programme should introduce rainwater harvesting and water conservation projects.
- The RAHA programme should undertake water saving campaigns and raise awareness on water as a valuable resource.
- The programme should look into reactivating traditional irrigation systems (*karaiz*) rather than using water from tube wells for irrigation purposes.
- The programme should also consider increasing health and hygiene awareness campaigns in schools and communities in combination with the introduction of solid waste management systems.

NGOs and electricity supply companies are not coordinated:

The lack of coordination between electricity suppliers and NGOs creates problems for community WASH projects. In some instances, tube wells remain inoperative for long periods of time because electric supply companies delay providing and installing transformers.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The programme should avoid approving tube well projects if the electrical supply of transformers cannot be guaranteed prior to the commencement of the project.
- Through the programme, more solar-powered water supply schemes should be provided.

Women benefit greatly from WASH projects, but need hygiene education:

Previously, women and girls spent a portion of their day traveling long distances to collect water for their families. Because of the RAHA programme's water supply projects, women now spend more time on other household or economic activities, and girls are able to spend their time in schools. However, many still practice unsanitary behaviours and lack knowledge of water as a valuable resource, thus negatively impacting the entire community.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The programme should conduct trainings for women on health and hygiene, and educate them on the economic value of water.

Communities would like to be more involved:

A project allows a community to find its strength more often from working together rather than through the project itself. For some of the programme's WASH projects, this Lessons Learned Review found that communities were mostly uninvolved during the implementation stage. Unfortunately, some government line departments are too occupied with their day-to-day activities to certify proper monitoring of WASH projects, and communities need help developing a strong management system to ensure the project remains a dependable water source.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Coordination between relevant line departments and community needs improvement. This relationship should be strengthened to ensure the longevity of projects.
- The programme should introduce community-based monitoring and reporting mechanisms to assist the government line departments.
- The programme could develop water and sanitation (WATSAN) committees comprised of community members who promote responsible usage of water and/or call the community to action to address sanitation needs.
- Community organisations formed should collect a small monthly fee to undertake maintenance activities, if required.

Dasht-e-goran is a small village in a remote area of Pakistan, near the Afghan border. Here, water was a scarce commodity, and it was often up to the women in the village to lift water from wells as deep as 80 feet.

The RAHA programme assisted in creating community organisations, who quickly identified easy access to water as a priority for the community. Solar water pumps were installed and water storage tanks were built.

The women in the village coordinated the installation of the water pumps and the men were trained to operate and maintain them. Not only was this project beneficial for the village at large, but also for the women, who now felt empowered and confident enough to make decisions for their community alongside the men.



ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES

As home to 1.5 million Afghan refugees, Pakistan's resources have been stretched to provide for its population. The influx of Afghan refugees and Pakistan's growing population – combined with little to no education regarding environmental issues -- enhances the burden on the environment and natural resources in some of the programme districts. For this reason, one of the RAHA programmes main objectives is to restore and improve the environment

KEY ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES CHALLENGES

Some of the challenges that have been mentioned by beneficiaries and stakeholders are as follows:

- Communities lack awareness on environmental conservation;
- Deforestation is happening on a wide scale, and there are few greenhouses, nurseries, and planting initiatives to compensate for it;
- Many communities have suffered from the effects of floods and droughts, affecting livelihoods;
- Advocacy on environmental issues is poor.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The programme should consider including “Environment and Natural Resources” as a stand-alone sector.
- The RAHA programme’s projects across all sectors should address the environmental needs of the community.
- The programme should anticipate projects on environmental conservation, including land management and natural regeneration.
- Alternative energy projects are good for the environment and would solve some of the energy problems faced by these communities.
- Pakistan is currently facing a water shortage and the problem will not get any better if the situation continues as is. Projects replenishing ground water resources would help relieve the country of some of the burden it currently carries.



SOCIAL PROTECTION

Protecting the most vulnerable populations and safeguarding their rights is one of the RAHA programme’s priorities. Although social protection is considered in all sectors, there is enthusiasm among those involved in the programme for projects that specifically address vulnerable segments of the society.



“RAHA empowered us and now, we work *with* our men.”

KEY SOCIAL PROTECTION CHALLENGES

There is currently no real framework for social protection in the RAHA programme, though the projects give due consideration to vulnerable populations such as the elderly, handicapped, children, and women. Many of the following issues have been discussed earlier in this report, but some of the needs that stand out and are worth highlighting again are as follows:

- Cases that require social protection are not well documented;
- The poorest communities need support in the form of help lines and shelters;
- Families opt to engage their children in labour rather than attending schools
- Domestic violence and workplace harassment are issues that need combating;
- Refugees need formalised rights, such as the ability to apply for driving licenses and open up bank accounts so as to enhance their self-reliance and ability to contribute to the local host economies;
- Child protection laws do not extend to Afghan refugee children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Social protection should be a cross-cutting focus in all of the RAHA programme’s projects, and more projects that address the needs of vulnerable groups should be implemented.
- Under the RAHA programme, community centres should be created for women. This will empower them and could also serve as a safe haven for abused women.
- Communities at large would benefit from cross-cultural and sporting events, but women and children particularly need these types of team-building exercises.
- The RAHA programme should define social strategies that raise awareness on gender-based violence that are responsive to local contexts.
- Where possible, the programme should establish links with social welfare departments at the provincial level so that the most vulnerable receive the help they need.
- The programme should provide counselling services to marginalised populations and train community-based volunteer counsellors.
- Under the RAHA programme, there should be a system to carry out mapping of social protection providers and roll out projects to strengthen them.





OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

The previous chapters have illustrated in greater detail the potential that the RAHA programme has to serve both the refugee and local populations in Pakistan. Due to the breadth and depth of this Lessons Learned Review, the following proposals provide general ideas for consideration, all of equal importance. For more detailed recommendations, please refer to the sector-specific sections of this review.

Project Identification and Planning:

- There should be more involvement from the community to identify projects that will be implemented by government line departments.
- Gender disaggregated data analysis should be conducted for identification and justification of projects.

Selection of Partner Organisations:

- The programme should select NGO partners according to their proven expertise within sectors.
- NGOs that are local and/or physically present in the targeted areas should be given preference for the implementation of projects. These NGOs have a better chance of being accepted by the local communities, and they will be better positioned to implement projects. Where possible, NGOs can follow the integrated approach.
- The programme should avoid selecting different NGOs for projects in the same union council to minimise the operational costs of implementing partners. This would also make the RAHA programme more visible.

Implementation:

- Communities should be more involved in the projects run by the government line department during the implementation stage, which would create a sense of ownership. Community members would have more interest in maintaining the project and seeing it succeed.
- The programme should communicate to the implementing partners the importance of adhering to the project designs and strategies that have been approved by the Provincial Task Force.
- All project schedules should allow for social mobilisation and preparation of ground work.
- If possible, the RAHA programme should include overhead costs for projects that are implemented by resource-constrained government line departments.
- The RAHA programme should provide a RAHA “helpline” to support partners and communities that need guidance and technical support.

Institutional & Coordination Mechanisms:

- Proven project selection criteria, monitoring, and reporting mechanisms should be unified and made mandatory to facilitate the complex implementation mechanism of the RAHA programme.
- To develop better coordination and increase transparency, RAHA programme representatives should meet regularly with communities and relevant implementing partners.
- The programme should encourage increased participation from Afghan refugees in parent-teacher associations, school management committees, community organisations, village organisations, and local support organisations.
- The RAHA programme should encourage implementing partners to meet and share their experiences and ideas with each other.
- Few know that the RAHA programme is a federal government initiative. Most think of it as a welfare organisation or a NGO. The RAHA programme should make efforts to change this perception among communities.
- Representative of the RAHA programme and its stakeholders should be tasked with ensuring that recommendations from this lessons learned review process are implemented. Annual follow-up events should be held to take account of the improvements.

Monitoring & Reporting:

- The RAHA programme should introduce remote monitoring systems for inaccessible and/or insecure areas. The RAHA programme could also develop an online monitoring and reporting database with GIS technology.
- The programme should increase monitoring missions to the project sites to keep better tabs on projects.
- The programme should establish a community-based monitoring system and mechanism for registering complaints.

Sustainability:

- The programme should encourage communities to regularly raise funds through operation and maintenance committees for project repairs.
- Programme partners could facilitate community organisations to register with relevant government departments (Social Welfare Department, EDO-Community Development Department) to become legal entities. This would allow them to apply for funding for new projects and to maintain the operation costs of projects.
- NGOs from the same target district, or NGOs that have permanent field offices in the target districts, should form close relationships with community organisations in order to maintain long-term coordination.

Co-Existence:

- The programme could organise cultural shows, community walks, festivals, and sports contests for targeted communities, particularly for women and children, to strengthen relationships.
- To emphasise the value Afghan refugees bring to the community, the programme should increase the number of Afghans involved in community organisations.

Expansion:

- The programme should include “Environment and Natural Resources” and “Social Protection” as distinct sectors in the next phase.
- The RAHA programme should also prioritize youth empowerment through education, skills training, and livelihoods.
- Depending upon the resources and donor priorities, the programme could expand by increasing the number of projects in Sindh and Punjab, where there is a sizable population of Afghan refugees.
- The programme should develop specialised projects to address the needs of women, children, the physically handicapped, and the elderly.

Fundraising:

- The programme should carry out a resource constraint analysis and create a plan for reaching out to traditional and new international donors for funding, involving all actors, including the Government, participating UN agencies and other stakeholders.
- Given that the RAHA programme is a fundamental cornerstone of the implementation of the regional SSAR, the Joint Resource Mobilization Strategy adopted by the Governments of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran in 2013, and the SSAR Pakistan portfolio of projects, can serve as a basis for renewed and concerted fund-raising efforts by all stakeholders.
- The programme should approach local donors for fundraising. Large corporations, industries, and local chambers of commerce may be interested in donating to help a cause, in line with their corporate social responsibility strategies.
- The programme could submit sector-wise joint proposals involving other UN participating agencies to international donors.
- Improving visibility at the national and international level will help tremendously in putting the RAHA programme on the map. Some ideas include creating a fundraising tool online through a revamped website, or utilizing traditional mail/e-mail fundraising campaigns.

- Devise a “Visibility and Communication Strategy” for the RAHA programme that covers print, television, radio, internet, and social media.
- The programme should create documentaries of “RAHA success stories” and share them with various audiences - either through social media, radio campaigns, or on television. The content of these documentaries should be adjusted to the diverse audiences and media for which it is being produced.
- Articles regarding the programme’s interventions and achievements to international development magazines, national magazines, and newspapers should be pitched.
- The programme’s achievement could be shared through talk shows, radio programmes, and with journalists. The programme should also be on the constant lookout for “news hooks” and relevancy when pitching stories.
- The RAHA programme should organise campaigns, such as picture and painting competitions, among stakeholders and the public.
- The programme should introduce a revamped website, which could include tabs for stories and pictures; fundraising; social media, e-mail, and take action campaigns; and a discussion forum.
- Establishing relationships with journalists, celebrities, and bloggers will help ensure coverage of the programme’s events in electronic and print media.

Moving Forward...



The lessons learned in this document present the RAHA programme with a unique opportunity. Taking a retrospective look at the workshops held with beneficiaries and other stakeholders in Pakistan's four provinces, as well as results of other existing assessments, we have heard the reasons behind some of the successes and shortcomings of this programme; delved into best practices to be carried forward; and suggestions made to improve the specific areas geared towards the achievement of the programme's objectives, hoping to make it stronger and even more effective for years to come.

While the RAHA programme has room to grow, its role in bringing together refugees and their host communities remains unprecedented at the global stage and critical for the future well-being of all concerned.

The discussions held show that communities are receptive to the RAHA programme's interventions and look forward to being more involved across all its processes, starting with identification of projects, through implementation and towards sustainability. This in itself is a tribute to the programme, which, only six years ago, started working with communities from the hosting Pakistani population and refugees which inadvertently ended up living shoulder to shoulder in a peaceful manner. Now, Afghan refugees and Pakistanis work together to benefit their communities through various interventions sponsored by the programme.

Looking forward, it is essential that all concerned stakeholders take what has been learned from this study and use it to adjust and empower the RAHA programme so that it may go from strength to strength. The RAHA programme, supported by the Government of Pakistan and international community, is undoubtedly unique in what it has accomplished and it is with our hope that the programme achieves greater success in future.

About the consultants:

This report was prepared by GFC Pty Ltd, which was founded in 2011 on the belief that through connecting people, ideas, and resources, we can help improve living conditions and enhance lives for many in developing regions. From the outset, we shape projects, provide strategic advice, evaluate, and help our clients make the best of their resources to combat the many problems faced by the communities that they represent. For more information, please contact info@gfcgroup.org.

