

# Drinking Water without Fear of Germs

It is a sunny morning at Farida Balkh School in Balkh's provincial capital Mazar-e Sharif. About 4,000 pupils from the city go to school here every day. The children in the schoolyard look healthy and eager to learn. But that was not always the case.

Ms Nadera, the school's experienced headmistress who has been working here for many years, remembers: "I was getting 10 to 20 sick notes every day. The pupils suffered from sickness and diarrhoea and parents regularly had to take them to hospital." She explains, 'It was always particularly bad during the hot months of the year. Of course, we all knew why they were ill all the time – it was due to the drinking water's poor quality.' The thirsty children had to rely on the water in a nearby well – like the majority of the people living in Balkh. 13-year-old pupil Yasmine was loathed to recall that, 'The water was always polluted and full of dirt. My father had to take me to hospital after I'd drunk the water because I got really ill and had terrible stomach ache.' Under these conditions, efficient and joyful teaching at school was difficult to achieve.

However, this situation is now a thing of the past. The German government contributed funds of almost EUR 6 million to the Afghan water supply agency AUWSSC in Balkh to provide the inhabitants with a modern, hygienic drinking water supply. To date, an approximately 33-kilometer water supply network, an elevated water tower with a capacity of almost 300 m<sup>3</sup> and two new wells have been drilled and equipped with submersible pumps. Most importantly, chlorination now disinfects the water. AUWSSC's Director General in charge of building the new drinking water system, Eng. Hamidullah Yelani, explains, 'We have a new building with a storage room for the chemicals we need for treating the water. The water is continuously chlorinated. Thanks to new measurement and testing devices, we are able to monitor the drinking water's quality constantly.' These measures are already taking effect – the water's quality has significantly improved.

According to Eng. Yelani, more than 780 households are already connected to the new drinking water network, and the water supplier intends to increase this number to 2,000. 780 households – that corresponds to almost 4,000 citizens that now enjoy clean water. The head of office for the water supply in the Northern provinces, Mr Wahid Ullah Raashed, stresses, 'It is important that people really do pay their water bills on time. We can only extend the clean drinking water supply to the whole province of Balkh if the operating costs are recouped.'



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Many families living in Balkh already have access to clean drinking water. But most people in Afghanistan's villages get their water from rivers, wells or fountains, or collect rainwater. Polluted drinking water is believed to be the reason for often occurring illness and hospital admissions in Afghanistan. Ms Nadera sums up the clean water's impact in a few words: 'Since we have the new water supply, I have not received sick notes because of vomiting or diarrhoea anymore.' AUWSSC's Director General, Eng. Yelani, adds, 'At a meeting with Balkh's health service officials, they reported that cases of illness among children and adults have declined continuously since we started building.' The schoolchildren of Farida Balkh School can finally quench their thirst without fear of bacteria.

Polluted drinking water is a problem in many Afghan provinces. The German government has been involved in improving the drinking water in the country's north since 2004. More than 77,000 households have been connected to a drinking water system between 2009 and 2017, granting up to 400,000 people access to clean water. Germany was involved in constructing the water supply in Balkh from 2012 to 2016.

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