How Governments Can Create a More Sustainable Approach to Humanitarian Aid Through Social Enterprise
The World Government Summit is a global platform dedicated to shaping the future of governments worldwide. Each year, the Summit sets the agenda for the next generation of governments with a focus on how they can harness innovation and technology to solve universal challenges facing humanity.

The World Government Summit is a knowledge exchange center at the intersection of government, futurism, technology, and innovation. It functions as a thought leadership platform and networking hub for policymakers, experts and pioneers in human development.

The Summit is a gateway to the future as it functions as the stage for analysis of future trends, concerns, and opportunities facing humanity. It is also an arena to showcase innovations, best practice, and smart solutions to inspire creativity to tackle these future challenges.
A sustainable humanitarian aid model to inspire the next generation of governments
FBMI believes firmly in the sustainability of its model. Instead of simply donating resources, whether money or food and other such means of support, FBMI has focused from the beginning on building a long-term strategy to empower people so that in the future, they can help themselves and their communities. Essentially, to empower people to take control of their lives. These projects require an initial investment and a commitment to implementing a lasting infrastructure, but the responsibility is ultimately in the hands of those FBMI empowers in order for them to be the leaders of their own transformation into the future. Trust is a critical component of this approach, and FBMI is focused on the provision of direct help and meaningful opportunities to those who need assistance to improve their own circumstances.
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The Fatima Bint Mohamed Bin Zayed Initiative was founded in 2010. The initiative and its two social enterprises were established to initiate a change in the stark realities of Afghanistan’s women and children. FBMI invests locally in healthcare, education, numerous social and economic reforms and provides employment opportunities. About 70% of FBMI employees are women who work from home, many of them widows. Each employee receives free vocational training, medical care and schooling for their children.

A unique collaboration between the UAE government and Afghanistan’s Tanweer Investments, the FBMI model represents an economically viable approach to sustainable development that could be adapted by governments around the world to create meaningful and impactful change while minimising economic risk.
The Role of FBMI in Afghanistan

The UAE is deeply committed to the security and welfare of the Afghan people who over the last three decades have suffered immense challenges from war to natural disasters. An essential component of the UAE’s humanitarian mission in Afghanistan since 2003 has been to address the country’s challenges while also supporting the long-term social and economic development of local communities.

The positive vision of FBMI is consistent with that ambition. Rather than delivering aid alone – which remains a critical need – the initiative provides Afghans, and in particular, women, with dignified employment that is culturally relevant, economically empowering, family friendly and physically safe. FBMI demonstrates that even in the most challenging of circumstances, the will to work and the capacity to create can flourish when people have access to meaningful opportunities, including options that are embedded in local cultures and that have been passed down through generations.

Bringing Meaningful Change to The Lives of Afghan Women

Women have always been a critical focus for FBMI. With significant responsibility for supporting their families and raising the generations of the future, and as a vital source of economic activity and participation in Afghanistan, women are at the heart of all FBMI does and stands for. Since its launch, FBMI’s initiative in Afghanistan has hired over 8,000 Afghan artisans, making them the sole bread winners of their families. FBMI’s impact has had a true ripple effect throughout Afghanistan’s economy, benefiting not only FBMI employees, but the children and relatives of FBMI artisans, as well as farmers and other blue collar workers. A carpet produced by FBMI involves a much larger supply chain where participants are treated fairly and offered work with dignity.

In addition, FBMI works to further strengthen ties with rural communities and promote social cohesion by providing humanitarian relief and charitable support including the construction of clinics and bridges, the refurbishment of orphanages, educational material supplies, distribution of hygiene kits, and vital grassroots development projects including purchasing agricultural produce and handicrafts.
FBMI’s Social Enterprise Model
The case for ‘Zuleya’

Zuleya is the retail brand in the UAE which sells carpets and handicrafts made by the initiative in Afghanistan. The majority of profits from sales are invested back into the initiative to preserve this ancient craft for generations to come. The Afghan women are paid a good wage above United Nations guidelines, which in turn empowers them to help themselves. They also benefit from numerous social services such as free healthcare, vocational training and full time education for their children. It is a truly sustainable initiative and a highly successful social enterprise that empowers people to empower themselves.
Preserving Afghanistan’s heritage for generations to come

Carpet weaving is at the heart of Afghanistan’s intangible heritage, a craft passed down throughout generations. FBMI provides underprivileged women with employment in the traditional carpet production process. At FBMI, we ensure every stage of this ancient craft from shearing the sheep, to spinning the wool, to knotting award-winning carpets are carried out by hand. The entire process is 100% organic and 100% made in Afghanistan.

Zuleya: From Afghanistan to the world

From Zuleya’s showroom in Dubai Design District (D3), the finely crafted rugs are showcased and made available to the world. They can now be found in prominent locations such as the UAE’s Presidential Palace, high-end restaurants such as Cipriani Abu Dhabi, and luxury retail boutiques such as Gucci in Dubai. They have also been purchased and provided as gifts to high-profile visitors to the UAE including government, business and religious leaders from around the world.
Mira Farms - Reviving an Ancient Tradition

Agriculture is an integral part of Afghan history and cultural identity. As an agrarian society, agriculture is central to life for millions of Afghans. However, the practice was significantly disrupted by decades of armed conflict that charred the land and plunged its people into darkness. Today, once again, flowers of saffron, almonds, pistachios, figs and walnuts rise from the fertile Afghan soil, thanks in part to projects run by FBMI. These flowers of hope sustain livelihoods and help to provide Afghan farming communities with a renewed sense of purpose and opportunity.

930+
Farmers trained

Building on an integral part of Afghanistan’s cultural heritage, FBMI’s traditional farming techniques have provided over 930 farmers with vocational training in 2020 alone. FBMI’s farms are spread across the country from East to West, in various regions such as Kandahar, Helmand, Kabul, Herat, Uruzgan, Zabul, Samangan, Kapisa, Ghazni and Nimroz. These include some of the most remote and inaccessible areas of the country.

Crucially, FBMI has managed to build trust with local farmers and establish strong relationships with them all over Afghanistan. Determined to share Afghanistan’s natural bounty with the world, FBMI launched Mira Farms. The brand grows the finest quality saffron, dried & fresh fruits and nuts. Most of Mira Farms’ products are native and grow naturally on Afghan soil. Working directly with independent farmers, FBMI offers our growers a stake in the sustainable future we aim to build through safe, secure and just means.
How the social enterprise model of aid can help governments meet the UN sustainable development goals and empower communities in their own transformation

Across various fields, FBMI has demonstrated an ability to blend the UN SDGs with its own approach to humanitarian aid and development in forging a path towards both peace and a better life for individuals and communities. FBMI contributes to 14 of the 17 SDGs, contributing to a better and more sustainable future for all. These include the creation of employment opportunities at a fair market wage and the fight against malnutrition across Afghanistan.

Through its healthcare initiatives, FBMI has provided mobile and in-house healthcare services to vast numbers of people. More than 20,000 children under the age of 15 have enrolled in FBMI’s educational programmes. Under its equal rights to work policy, FBMI offers equitable salary and benefits to both men and women - a goal it has maintained since its inception 13 years ago.

Environmental sustainability is also central to FBMI’s mission. Supporting the people of Afghanistan must go hand in hand with preserving the natural environment. It’s an ethos we have championed throughout our supply chain, for example, Zuleya uses natural dyes in the carpet-making process and eliminates the dumping of harmful waste in local waterways.
Women’s Empowerment in a Challenging Landscape

8,000+ Employees since inception

The basic premise of FBMI is to provide sustainable employment opportunities for female artisans while preserving the ancient heritage of traditional craft making and carpet weaving. By earning a good wage for their work, they are empowered to help themselves and their families.
Challenges And Opportunities to Getting Women Into the Workplace and Enabling Them to Become Financially Independent

With the recent spotlight shining on the importance of education for women and girls in Afghanistan, it is more important than ever to ensure females in Afghanistan have the skills and knowledge to develop and participate in the workforce. As more than half the population, women’s empowerment will be essential to Afghanistan’s future progress.

From as far back as 1990, women have comprised just 15% of the workforce other than a small peak of 19% in 2019, according to the World Bank.¹

By the end of 2021, women saw a 16% drop in employment levels as the economy plummeted, compared to just 6% for men, with women’s employment expected to be 21% lower than it had been before the events of August 2021.²

Long before the most recent economic challenges facing the Afghan people, through FBMI, the team wanted to empower women with safety and security, giving them the independence to work and feed their families.

As a traditional society and developing country, many Afghans have skills handed down through generations, such as carpet weaving or farming. That is why FBMI focused on offering employment opportunities in areas that are culturally appropriate, and where there is an existing base of human resources with unique skills that are valued in global markets.
Early marriage:

An estimated 28% of Afghan women aged 15–49 years are married before the age of 18.

In 2019, Afghanistan was ranked 166 out of 167 countries on the Gender Development Index.

In 2021, Afghanistan ranked last (170 out of 170 countries) on the Global Women, Peace and Security Index.

Even before the events of 2021, Afghanistan struggled with over 4.2 million children out of school; 60 percent of whom were girls.³
Following the Events of August 2021, the Need to Empower Women with Work is More Urgent Than Ever

While the right of women to work is enshrined in Afghanistan’s constitution of 2004, swathes of women have reported job losses since 15 August 2021, due to new restrictions on women’s mobility and conditions on participation in the public sphere.

Job loss has been observed across most sectors, however, women in particular professions—such as media and civil society—are reporting additional challenges due to the regime’s position on women working. Many women remain unsure of the latest directives and, as such, are in some cases self-removing themselves from the labour market.4

With these massive job losses, child malnutrition is also increasing as mothers are unable to earn and feed their families in the wake of the economic crisis. In June 2021, 30,000 children were treated for severe acute malnutrition in Afghanistan; in June 2022, 57,000 children were admitted — a 90 per cent increase. One additional consequence of this worsening situation is that more children may be obliged to work to support their families instead of going to school.5
Violence Against Women: Studies suggest that 87% of Afghan women and girls have experienced at least one form of intimate partner violence in their lifetime.

Gender equality: In 2019, Afghanistan was ranked 166 out of 167 countries on the Gender Development Index.

Early marriage: An estimated 28% of Afghan women aged 15-49 years are married before the age of 18.


Education: As of last available data
- Approximately 60 per cent of out-of-school children are girls.
- 4.9 per cent of women are accessing tertiary education, compared to 14.2 per cent of men.

US$1 billion or up to 5% of GDP is the estimated immediate economic loss of restricting women from working.
Barriers to Education

Afghanistan’s school population had registered an eightfold increase, from less than 1 million in the early 2000s to 9.2 million students (38 per cent girls) by 2018. Before August 2021, there were no directives in place barring girls from accessing secondary school and girls could access all levels of education in all 34 provinces. However, equal access to education has changed dramatically for girls. Since March 2022, girls from grades 7-12 have been barred from education and continue to face challenges accessing university level education.

Research from UNICEF published in August 2022 shows that the ongoing exclusion of girls from high school education harms not only the girls whose opportunities are hampered, but the country’s economic growth too. The organisation found that keeping girls out of secondary school costs Afghanistan 2.5 per cent of its annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and claims that if the current cohort of three million girls were able to complete their secondary education and participate in the job market, girls and women would contribute at least US$5.4 billion to Afghanistan’s economy.

In addition to the economic impacts, UNICEF acknowledges the consequential impacts such as the inevitable upcoming shortages of female teachers, doctors and nurses and social consequences such as the ensuing impact on decreasing attendance for girls in primary school and its increasing health costs related to adolescent pregnancy and child marriage, also on the rise since the events of August 2021.6, 7, 8
Educational Policy

Opportunities for access to education under FBMI

20,000+  
Children enrolled in school

930+  
Adults enrolled in vocational training

FBMI’s education department works to prevent child labour with a positive and heavy focus on facilitating education. Earlier this year, Save The Children claimed that one fifth of starving families in Afghanistan are sending children to undertake harsh manual labour in areas such as brick factories.9

All children in the FBMI programme under the age of 15 must attend full-time education. FBMI’s supervisors work closely with the schools to ensure attendance with mentoring and support at every stage. Women receive adult life training in health and hygiene, literacy and vocational subjects.
FBMI’s mobile healthcare provides medical treatment and vaccination across Afghanistan. Doctors visit registered family homes once a month to conduct health checks. FBMI’s staff also work around the clock to provide health education and to dispense essential supplies and simple medications.

FBMI works shoulder to shoulder with international organisations, NGOs, governments and most importantly local communities to implement integrated health services and, as a priority, a timely vaccination programme particularly against polio.

FBMI’s strength lies in providing healthcare to remote communities across rural Afghanistan. Alongside this, FBMI works collaboratively with local women and men to monitor and evaluate why the Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) fails to reach so many each year.
The Fight Against Polio

Afghanistan, along with Pakistan, is one of only two remaining polio-endemic countries in the world with Afghanistan witnessing an increase of cases in the last three years as the poliovirus continues to spread through provinces which have remained free of polio for years. Polio circulation remains particularly high in the southern regions of the country, which represented 66 per cent of the total national cases in 2020.10

Polio challenges
The global polio programme has faced numerous challenges in Afghanistan, especially in provinces more impacted by war in recent years. These areas have felt issues like population displacement to a greater extent, as well as being neglected by previous governmental programmes focused on cities and urban areas. There is also the inherent challenge associated with rural populations about providing access to polio vaccinators, given the relatively high levels of scepticism around vaccines.

The ban on house-to-house campaigning since May 2018 by some local forces has impacted negatively on the polio eradication progress, leading to 3.4 million children being missed in every round of a National Immunisation Day (NID). Similarly, the emergence of COVID-19 disrupted polio campaigns and other essential health services, creating additional immunity gaps which have resulted in an increase in polio cases in the country.11

Routine immunisation coverage remains low in the polio high-risk provinces and requires strengthening, and the quality of Supplementary Immunisation Areas (SIAs) needs improvement and backing by a strong surveillance system. For Afghanistan to eradicate polio for good, all children must be vaccinated. That is the goal which FBMI and the UAE government and its partners are working towards at pace. While community awareness has increased around the importance of polio vaccinations in some areas, efforts are still needed to dispel myths around the vaccine and to convince families who are afraid of immunisation.
FBMI’s Healthcare Policy - Succeeding in Restricted Areas

FBMI Healthcare was founded in 2010 and it was in April 2020 that a critical turning point transformed the work FBMI does on the ground, when FBMI signed an MOU with the Ministry of Public Health in Afghanistan (MoPH). The agreement has seen FBMI implement basic health services in areas where the government faces limitations in delivery, including essential maternal, child health services and immunisation campaigns with a specific focus on polio eradication. Defeating polio is a key goal for the Afghan people, UAE leadership and the wider world.

FBMI Healthcare implements an integrated multi-sectoral approach, conducting charitable activities alongside healthcare operations. FBMI’s overall mission is to provide social welfare and employment opportunities to inaccessible and remote areas of Afghanistan using this innovative approach.

The model has proven that inaccessible areas and populations can be reached with the right approach, respecting local norms and traditions and by offering citizens a stake in their future progress. FBMI supports local farmers and buys their produce directly for Mira Farms, generating much-needed trust that can help to facilitate healthcare efforts including vaccination programmes.

In a sign of its effectiveness, FBMI’s vision for healthcare in Afghanistan has been the only concept accepted to access restricted areas where other NGOs have been banned from door-to-door access. This is a huge source of pride for FBMI and testament to the responsible way its operations have been carried out from day one.

As of October 2021, FBMI Healthcare operates 22 clinics and mobile health teams with a team of 220 individuals. Each clinic is staffed at minimum with a doctor, nurse, midwife, vaccinator, and community specialists. The mobile health teams ensure access to vital healthcare to those who cannot visit the clinics. These teams are critical for door to door immunisation campaigns helping reach every child in local communities.

1,300,000 Beneficiaries
In the month of August 2021 alone, FBMI Healthcare provided vital healthcare services to 21,153 individuals. As of April 2020, it provided healthcare to more than 1,300,000 individuals including immunisations for the likes of BCG, Penta, OPV, IPV, Measles, ANC and PNC.

Clinics and mobile health teams are located in 10 high risk districts across 6 Afghan provinces including:

- Nesh district in Kandahar
- Washir district in Helmand
- Shaheedasas and Chinartoo districts in Uruzgan
- Mizan district in Zabul
- Sherzad and Hesarak districts in Nangarhar
- Bargimatal, Doaab, and Mandol districts in Nuristan
Diplomacy Policy

The Diplomacy Lab - A Training Ground for The Diplomacy of The Future

As a regional diplomatic power and peace-maker, the UAE has carved a niche for itself by being a leader in diplomacy. From its part in the 2020 Abraham Accords to its role in taking in thousands of refugees from Afghanistan in the wake of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, the UAE has played a vital role in major diplomatic successes.

In 2022, the Fatima Bint Mohamed Bin Zayed Initiative (FBMI) and the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy (AGDA) jointly launched the region’s first Diplomacy Lab - a unique community-powered platform for open dialogue and innovations in diplomacy.

Engaging with a range of ministries, government entities, diplomatic missions and multilateral platforms, the Lab aims to promote and facilitate the collaborative and impactful engagement of its community with the wider diplomatic world, all in an effort to enhance dialogue and mutual understanding. It is a platform for ideas as the UAE and FBMI prepare for the challenges of the future.

The core role of the Diplomacy Lab includes examining and exploring the evolving objectives and emerging practices of the diplomatic community today. This will be done through engagements with local, regional and international thought leaders from diplomats to academics, addressing the key challenges facing us today, how diplomacy can adapt to the changes of the 21st century and where programmes like FBMI can be most effective in an uncertain, rapidly changing geopolitical world.

The Lab will also bring its community together to explore how diplomacy can interact with technology as well as promoting cultural programmes and interactive exhibitions that can inspire young Emiratis interested in pursuing a career in the foreign service of their country.
In 2022, the UAE took over the rotating presidency of the UN Security Council, assuming formal responsibility for the body’s schedule in one of the most turbulent times in recent history.
Recommendation: Sustainable Development and its Place in Humanitarian Diplomacy and Foreign Policy

Humanitarian diplomacy is persuading decision makers and opinion leaders to act, at all times, in the interests of vulnerable people, and with full respect for fundamental humanitarian principles.

The rapid expansion of the number of humanitarian actors in recent years, working for or with governments at all levels and often in complex situations, makes humanitarian diplomacy increasingly important.

Humanitarian diplomacy aims to mobilise public and governmental support and resources for humanitarian operations and programmes, and to facilitate effective partnerships for responding to the needs of vulnerable people. Humanitarian diplomacy includes advocacy, negotiation, communication, formal agreements, and other measures. It is a field with many players, including governments, international organisations, NGOs, the private sector, and individuals.
The UAE Model of Aid

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) remains one of the world’s top three donors of humanitarian aid relative to gross national income and was among the top five humanitarian assistance state-donors in the world in terms of US dollars in 2018, a year in which humanitarian aid reached 18 percent of the UAE’s overall foreign aid budget. Among other things, this commitment to humanitarian diplomacy has helped the UAE retain a position of trust in a region beset by conflict, using its influence in a positive way to create meaningful changes through humanitarian policymaking. The understanding that an economically stable country leads to a politically stable landscape is a trademark of UAE policy and a core principle that the country continues to promote in the region and around the world.
The UAE Model in FBMI Strategy

Under this ‘360 aid model’, FBMI has proven that with just one round of initial investment, it has been able to cut down administration and operational costs and succeed in an extremely challenging terrain because of FBMI’s local know-how and culturally relevant employment. Sustainability at the grassroots and implementing a model familiar to the local population has enabled FBMI to cross barriers that even some of the world’s biggest humanitarian organisations have not yet managed.

Between 2014-2015, FBMI helped increase employment in the rural areas that it worked in from 25% to 40%, showing the quick, tangible results of its approach. This is largely due to the relationships that FBMI was able to carefully build with individuals and local community leaders. This trust has in turn given us unprecedented access to remote parts of the country where humanitarian needs are often greatest.
How FBMI Made It Work

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<td>On-boarding whole families</td>
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<td>Incentivising study for school children to increase retention</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Culturally appropriate work opportunities which connects to a nation's heritage, engaging a population's hearts and minds</td>
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Proof of Concept

1
Initial Investment

13
Years of FBMI

1,300,000
Healthcare Beneficiaries

700,000+
Vaccines Administered

8,000+
Employees Since Inception

70%
Women Employees
Transforming Lives

The People Behind The Success: Meet Maliha, From Carpet Weaver To Parliamentarian

Maliha Jami was one of FBMI’s first employees. Hired 13 years ago, she worked for several years as a carpet weaver for the initiative. She lost a leg to polio aged just one, and faced many challenges in her life as a result, though she never lost her tenacity and desire to progress. Born in Kabul, she fiercely pursued her education once within the FBMI system, and has reached the position of senator within the Afghan national assembly.

“With the support I had from FBMI, I was able to complete my higher education and set myself free from the prison of poverty.”

“As a senator, I have faced a lot of problems and disrespect from ignorant people, but I still stand in the face of these barriers and tell myself that I must continue until this oppression and disrespect of women ends. It is a great honour for me to reach my current position as a member of the Senate to take the hands of those in need and be a voice for them.”
Conclusion


As one of the world’s leading providers of humanitarian aid, the UAE has consistently demonstrated its commitment to improving the lives of people and communities in need around the world.
Summary

Following the success of FBMI in Afghanistan, the next steps will be to take this model and implement it elsewhere, not only in the Middle East and Central Asia, but globally. By demonstrating the model’s viability in Afghanistan – with its uniquely challenging social, economic, political, security and geographic landscape – FBMI believes that its model is potentially applicable almost anywhere in the world. By focusing on truly empowering local people, the social enterprise model is an appropriate, effective and sustainable way of strengthening humanitarian assistance.

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Endnotes

1 https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS?locations=AF
7 https://www.unesco.org/en/education/emergencies/afghanistan?TSPD_101_R0=080713870fab200003d94430dac9be534133c2715cbf8346a965d-01091a01425b11eb5c6f9b4578708efce54cb143000731d984ef5f359e-09042b31a5362b424cbaf126d22d071280e6188b144d6244c02b9bc4fb-d3e7cf5c08f9ba62c2b6
10 https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/polio-eradication
11 https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/polio-eradication

Disclaimer: Information and figures are accurate at the time of going to print, but the situation in Afghanistan is constantly changing.