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## Editor's note

CEDAR's vision is 'In Christ we build a just and compassionate world together'. On the way to help the poor, we pay great attention to the Lord's teaching and guidance. In this issue of *SHARE*, 'Focus' shares the beliefs and standards of how CEDAR starts a project. It also shares how we respond to the Lord's grace through the 'Macedonian Call' of Afghanistan. 'Back to the Bible' leads us to care for the poor through the Scriptures of 1 Corinthians. 'Taking Action' interviews a 'Marathon Charity Programme' participant. She was encouraged by the Lord to try her best to complete the 10km race for the poor. 'Join Hands Join Hearts' responds to the teaching in 'Back to the Bible', sharing an Afghanistan project mentioned in 'Focus' and the children's ministry financially supported by CEDAR through the 'Marathon Charity Programme' this year.

## FOCUS

### Macedonian Call

*Written by Clara Chiu (Head of Partnership Development)*

Over the past 30 years, CEDAR has continued to support poverty alleviation programmes in more than 40 countries worldwide to transform poor communities and improve the lives of the poor from the vastness of God's grace. However, apart from the guidance of the Lord, human responsibility is also indispensable. To present the best to the Lord, CEDAR has been careful with the initiation of the projects. At the same time, we are entrusted by our donors to make the best use of our resources so that we can fulfil our duty of helping the poor and the needy worthwhile.

### Two Main Project Categories: Humanitarian Relief and Community Development

CEDAR's projects are divided into two main categories: Humanitarian Relief and Community Development. The former assists the communities affected by sudden natural or man-made disasters. This kind of programme focuses on providing immediate assistance to the victims, such as

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**In community development projects, we often discuss community programmes with the villagers to better understand the local community's needs.**

distributing supplies. The latter enhances the capabilities of the poor and the community through training, provision of resources, mobilisation of social participation, etc., to enable them to become self-reliant.

When establishing a humanitarian relief project, making timely decisions is of utmost importance. In the face of a sudden disaster, the lives of the affected community are at stake, and we must assist as soon as possible. We have cultivated strong relationships with several trusted and seasoned partners with whom we have a tacit understanding. We work closely with our partners every time there is a disaster. They promptly inform us of the needs of the affected areas, allowing us to assess the response plan and approve the funding swiftly.

Contrary to humanitarian programmes, community development focuses not on speed but on long-term effectiveness. When we address issues like child labour or child marriage, it is essential to help parents in impoverished families understand the importance of education for their children. They should be encouraged not to let their children drop out of school to work or be sold while acknowledging these families' pressure. Enhancing their livelihood skills and cultivating saving habits are equally important. When they have a certain economic foundation, children will have the opportunity for education. Poverty is a complex issue that cannot be solved overnight. Therefore, community development projects typically span a significant duration. In fact, several of CEDAR's community programmes have been in operation for over a decade.

The longer the support duration and the more resources allocated, the more carefully we need to plan the programme's content. Before launching a new community development project, CEDAR's colleagues will first examine the situation of the target areas, including the level of poverty, cultural practices, religious dynamics and local institutions. Apart from understanding the situation in the country according to the research data and insights from our partners, colleagues also visit the target to observe their living conditions and the involvement of churches in the community to collect first-hand information.

Of course, CEDAR's resources and organisational strategies are all factors to consider. As a small-scale organisation with limited resources, CEDAR cannot address all poverty-related issues, and therefore, we must act strategically in our

approach.

As the approach of CEDAR is to build up the ability of the communities to help others as well as themselves, purely hardware-related expenses such as building schools or houses, as well as administrative costs such as partner salaries, are not within CEDAR's consideration. We hope to focus our resources on enhancing community development work. Additionally, if our partners request to increase funding or wish to launch new projects, we will first assist them in seeking other local resources or funding before considering a response. This approach prevents CEDAR from becoming the sole or major source of financing for our partners, thereby avoiding dependency and preserving partners' self-reliance.

Over the years, CEDAR has been carrying out poverty alleviation and disaster relief programmes in accordance with the above beliefs and standards. However, the Lord's ways are higher than ours, and He may use the 'Macedonian Call' to lead us to make changes.

'When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night, Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.' (Acts 16:7-10)

'Macedonian Call' is the Lord's way of transforming His servants' visions, and He used it to alter Paul's missionary strategy. CEDAR has received many different 'Macedonian Calls' over the years. Despite the strategy of the organisation and the professional judgement of staff, we are still willing to listen attentively and submit to the Lord's leading to change our plans. I want to share with you one of the experiences of the 'Afghanistan Call'.

## **Changes in Afghanistan's Ministry**

CEDAR has been serving in Afghanistan for many years. Still, due to the unstable situation, we have been unable to send staff to inspect projects and visit beneficiaries on-site. Instead, we have been communicating remotely with our partners and relying on their reports every six months to monitor projects. Because of this, we have been praying and

seeking the Lord's guidance on whether CEDAR should withdraw from the country and relocate resources to neighbouring countries. The Lord answered our prayers through the response of a partner colleague's personal ministry: an Indian co-worker whom we have been working with for a long time went to Afghanistan to serve as the Executive Director of our partner organisation — our years of collaboration and mutual trust, coupled with the colleague's experience and network in relief work, made us more confident about our work in Afghanistan. We decided to continue to serve the poor in that country.

By May 2021, the United States and NATO forces withdrew from Afghanistan, and the Taliban quickly seized control of all major cities, leaving the country in dire straits. Tens of thousands of people were forced to flee and seek refuge elsewhere. In June, our partner requested funding from CEDAR to initiate relief efforts, and we responded promptly. As the situation became more critical, the partner submitted a second request for additional support, and CEDAR once again allocated funds. By August, the deadline for the completion of the US military withdrawal was approaching. At the time, the situation became increasingly dire, as many countries urged their citizens to evacuate Afghanistan immediately. Under the Taliban regime, CEDAR's partner was in a perilous circumstance because it is a Christian organisation. Nevertheless, the Indian Executive Director remained steadfast and continued his service without fear. He evacuated Afghanistan only upon the request of the organisation's adviser.

## Afghan Co-Workers' Call

In November, we received an urgent request from the Executive Director seeking CEDAR's assistance covering staff salaries. With supporters from the West unable to provide assistance, our partner has not had enough cash to pay wages for two months. Many colleagues were the breadwinners of their families. If the salary arrears continued, they would have no choice but to leave their jobs, and the relief projects would have to be terminated without colleagues to carry them out.

CEDAR has always adhered to its policy of not subsidising partner wages. At that time, we were in a dilemma - we understood their needs but were hesitant to break our usual practice. For this matter, CEDAR's staff prayed together and eventually obeyed the Lord's call to allocate funds to support their salaries. Subsequently, we received feedback from the partner that if it had not been for the timely support from CEDAR, their families would have been left without livelihoods. They would have not only lacked food and winter fuel but might have also lost hope in life.

I am deeply thankful that we allocated funds to support partner salaries in accordance with the Lord's guidance before initiating fundraising for this purpose. However, we were pleasantly surprised to receive numerous responses from supporters. This was unexpected, given that voices in the community suggested that many donors prefer organisations to allocate funds towards the underprivileged rather than staff wages. The positive response from supporters gives us confidence that, in fulfilment of His will, the Lord will ensure His 'Macedonian Call' reaches various people.

## Responding to the Lord's Touch

Paul's willingness to obey and respond to the 'Macedonian Call' resulted in the spread of the Gospel to Europe. Similarly, CEDAR's response to the 'Afghanistan Call' has enabled its partner to continue the ministry in the country to this day, providing educational opportunities for disabled and ethnic minority children in Afghanistan.

Our assistance was just a drop in the ocean. Still, the courage and perseverance of our Afghan partner has led them to remain steadfast in their positions, serving those in need in the face of upheaval in their homeland and extremely challenging circumstances. I believe that, like us, they have responded to the cries of the poor and obeyed the Lord's call by willingly setting aside their own desires to serve others.



Thanks to 'Macedonian Call', CEDAR was able to help children in Afghanistan this year.

## Back to the Bible

### Care for the Impoverished Body Parts

*Written by Tony Chan (Senior Communications Officer)*

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul emphasises the diverse nature of the spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit, affirming the value of believers with different gifts by using the metaphor of the body. Just as a body needs all its parts to function properly, the Christian community also needs the participation of believers with versatile gifts to accomplish the kingdom of the Lord.

In the metaphor, Paul utilises four pairs of body parts: 'the hand and the foot', 'the eye and the ear', 'the eye and the hand', and 'the head and the feet' and assigns them dialogues. In the first two pairs, the foot and the ear compare themselves to what appears 'more important' – the hand and the eye, expressing their belief that they are inferior and do not belong to the body. And in the latter two pairs, the eye and the head, considering themselves 'more significant', dismiss those who appear 'subordinates' by saying: 'I don't need you.'

Paul vividly depicts two attitudes often observed within a community: arrogance and self-deprecation. Individuals with lesser gifts tend to compare themselves to others, leading to doubt about and denial of their own value. Meanwhile, those with greater gifts often exhibit tendencies to despise and dismiss others.

And what the Lord desires is 'there are many parts, but one body' (v.20). As a part of a community, no one could leave or seek to exclude one another based on the abundance or scarcity of gifts. The scriptures further instruct those with greater gifts: 'the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unrepresentable are treated with special modesty ... giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.' (v.23-25)

While this passage's teachings are directed at a community of believers, we extend the spirit of caring for one another beyond the boundaries of faith. Ultimately, in the eyes of the Lord, everyone is cherished as His precious child.

Residing in a prosperous city with ample resources, we parallel the analogy of the eye and the head in Paul's metaphor. Being body parts seemingly more capable, we must embrace the lesson of humility. Aside from refraining from dismissing others, a humble person also appreciates the importance of prioritising others' needs over their own. Shifting our focus away from ourselves enables us to notice others – many 'unpresentable' impoverished individuals who are, metaphorically, parts of our collective body. While they may become self-deprecating as poverty deprives them of dignity, they remain integral parts of the unified body.

All body parts in a body share the same empathy: when the poor endure hardship, we suffer; when they receive assistance, we rejoice. The beauty of the term 'body parts' in Christian communities lies in our unity as one body, without division, and having equal concern for each other. May all believers genuinely care for the impoverished body parts.

## Taking Action

### Run for the Poor

*Written by Clara Chiu (Head of Partnership Development)*

I know Queenie through a marathon event. This year, CEDAR has participated in the Standard Chartered Hong Kong Marathon 2024 'Marathon Charity Programme' and obtained 50 quotas for the '10 km race (Non-Challenge Group)'. We invited our donors and friends to participate and donate to CEDAR to support local and Afghanistan children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and their families.

Queenie is one of the participants. She learned about this event through her colleague and immediately signed up when her colleague asked for participants. Looking at her slender figure, I initially thought she was a regular joiner in running competitions. However, she said she seldom runs because she prefers playing tennis and Anaerobic exercise. As for participating in this Run, Queenie said she was doing good deeds. She knows that many organisations have limited resources to help the poor, so when she learned about the Standard Chartered Hong Kong Marathon's fundraising plan, she was moved to participate, hoping to raise more funds for poverty alleviation ministries. Being full of kindness, she not only supports CEDAR but also fundraises for another organisation.

Donating money alone might not be challenging for Queenie, but she hopes to raise more funds for those in need by personally participating in this 10 km race. She believes that she must try her best, so after signing up, she invited a coaching friend to develop a 10-week training plan: practising three days a week, running for at least 15 minutes each time, and gradually increasing the running time.

Queenie is very busy at work. She gets off work late and is exhausted every day. However, except for the time that she had to suspend her training for two to three weeks due to being infected with COVID-19 and business trips, she insisted on running after work every week. She bit the bullet

even her knees got hurt during training and continued running. When asked if she had ever thought about giving up, she said she absolutely did, significantly since her knee problems relapsed every time she ran. However, when she was about to give up, she noticed many different cross signs along the road, as if the Lord gave them to support and encourage her. She was then willing to continue practising and asked a physical therapist for advice on how to relieve the pain of running and not to let the injury affect her response to the Lord's calling.



Queenie completed the 10 km race with the support of the Lord.

Queenie did her best to support communities in need. For someone who is not a regular runner and only started running training seven to eight weeks before the race, she only took one hour and two minutes to complete 10 km on the event day, which is very impressive. I praised her for her running talent, but she said she had only completed an entire 10 km training session for the first time a few days before the competition. She was amazed and grateful.

When asked Queenie how else believers can help the poor besides joining charity running competitions, Queenie believes that as long as we care for others with our hearts, no matter how we do it, we can be a blessing to others and bear witness to God. I hope Queenie's testimony will encourage all readers to make good use of their gifts and talents and use all possible ways to do their best to lend a helping hand to people facing difficult situations.

## 2023/2024 Operating Statements

In the period of Jul 2023 - Feb 2024

Income	HK\$	10,686,898
Donations		9,333,950
Appeal for Relief		1,007,000
Other Income		345,948

Expenditure	HK\$	12,529,376
Development Projects - Asia		5,077,605
- Middle East		1,149,208
- China & HK		1,246,459
- Africa		1,195,922
Disaster Relief & Rehabilitation Projects		399,864
Partnership Development		2,406,872
Administration		1,053,446

**Account profit and loss / (Deficit) HK\$ (1,842,478)**

Note: CEDAR's fiscal year is from 1st July to 30th June of the following year. The total budgeted expenditure for the fiscal year 2023 to 2024 is HK\$25,058,000. Please pray for and support CEDAR and its partners in their ministry.

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## **'Giving Honour' to SEN Children in Afghanistan**

*Written by Ken Wong (Communications Officer)*

This year, CEDAR Fund participated in the 'Marathon Charity Programme' to raise funds for local and Afghanistan children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and their families. SEN children face many challenges as they grow up, especially in developing countries, where their circumstances are particularly concerning. In response to the teachings of caring for the 'less honourable' body parts in this issue of 'Back to the Bible', I would like to share how CEDAR has helped SEN children in Afghanistan.

Under the prolonged devastation of war, the people of Afghanistan have suffered various hardships: economic decline, extreme poverty, malnutrition, and a nearly collapsing public health system. Due to a severe lack of hygiene and medical support, many illnesses remain untreated. According to a survey, 17.3% of Afghan children aged 2 to 17 have disabilities. If these children cannot receive timely assistance, they will face even greater challenges in the future.

Education empowers children, providing them with more opportunities as they grow. However, due to the lack of support for SEN in local schools, Afghan children with disabilities struggle to access education, leading to dim prospects. Additionally, the societal stigma surrounding disabilities is seen as a source of disgrace for families, making the children 'less honourable'. These children are often socially isolated, confined to their homes, and

deprived of outdoor activity and interpersonal interactions. Data indicates that they are at a high risk for conditions such as muscular atrophy, anxiety, and migraines.

'Less honourable' children, even when they have the opportunity to attend schools or other public places, still face humiliation. In our project to help SEN children in Afghanistan, there is a beneficiary named Rafi (pseudonym) who has a hearing impairment. He once attended a mainstream school, but unfortunately, the school had never accommodated hearing-impaired students before. They lacked the experience to help him integrate into campus life. His classmates did not understand or empathise with him; instead, they often mocked and made fun of him, causing him great distress.

Although these children are deemed 'less honourable' from a secular perspective, we believe they are also precious children of the Lord. Therefore, we collaborate with local partners to help 'give honour' to children with visual and hearing impairments by providing them with life skills training, teaching them braille and sign language, assisting them in attending inclusive education schools, and providing braille and sign language training for teachers. Like Rafi, many of the assisted children excel in these schools, proving that even in the face of obstacles, they have the ability to learn and showcase their talents.

Despite many still believing that people with disabilities are 'less honourable', they are also part of our community. We are grateful that through the grace of the Lord, CEDAR can 'give honour' to these children and raise awareness in the community about special education, enabling acceptance and inclusion. Please continue to pray for our ministry so that more SEN children can experience a dignified and joyful childhood.

**A child with SEN in Afghanistan is learning sign language.**

