

AKHS has established Health Promotion Development Units which provide resources and training to enable medical staff to continually update their knowledge.



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The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is a group of private development agencies working to empower communities and individuals, often in disadvantaged circumstances, to improve living conditions and opportunities, especially in Africa and Asia. Its agencies work in over 30 countries for the common good of all citizens, regardless of their gender, origin or religion. Its underlying impulse is the ethic of compassion for the vulnerable in society.

Health Promotion Development Units

Health Promotion Development Units (HPDUs) have been established in Khorog and five other districts in GBAO and Gharm region to provide health professionals with opportunities to update their knowledge and attend courses on novel topics in medicine.

HPDUs provide resources such as computers, books and periodicals to allow health professionals to continuously enhance their knowledge. The units also conduct courses on English and information technology, enabling doctors to study evidence-based practices written in English and perform Internet searches.

By the end of 2007, all six GBAO district HPDUs had been handed over to district health authorities as resource centres. In the future, these centres will be used to promote clinical excellence amongst health professionals.

Looking Forward

AKHS is working with local governments and civil society organisations to continue to support CHPs and their sustainability, facilitate the implementation of national health reforms and explore the development of public private partnerships to address healthcare needs. It also continues to expand the topics covered in its informative trainings and brochures, including on the issue of HIV/AIDS.

TAJIKISTAN



Aga Khan Health Services

Tajikistan's health indicators, especially concerning the country's growing younger population, show that much investment is required in the country's health care systems.

The Aga Khan Health Services (AKHS) is working to improve the health status of the overall population in the country, with a focus on mothers and children under the age of five. In driving towards this aim, AKHS places a specific focus on increasing the involvement of communities in addressing health issues.

AKHS has implemented a number of projects since the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) began its health activities in Tajikistan in 1997. Among its most recent are:

- *Training over 500 Community Health Promoters in the Gorno-Badakhshan*

Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) and four districts of the Khatlon region to educate communities about essential health issues and advocate on their behalf with local governments;

- *Developing a national Nursing curriculum in partnership with the World Health Organization;*
- *Creating a Revolving Drug Fund with the aim of providing good quality affordable and accessible essential drugs to the population of GBAO;*
- *Rehabilitation of hospitals and extensive training of medical staff in GBAO.*

Community Health Project

AKHS' Community Health Project works to empower community members and community-based organisations to

address their own healthcare needs. The project trains volunteer Community Health Promoters (CHPs) to serve as a communication and advocacy link between communities and local governments. Part of a CHP's role is also to refer community members to appropriate health facilities when needed. Since inception, the Project has trained over 400 CHPs in GBAO and 100 in the Khatlon region of Tajikistan.

The Project distributes educational brochures containing culturally appropriate health messages concerning common health issues, including immunisations, treatment of infectious diseases, HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and maternal and child health.

At over 195 existing primary healthcare centres (PHCs), the Project has trained staff members

Bahor Navruzova, a Chemistry teacher in Khorog, has been volunteering as a CHP since 2002 and covers 150 households. "Preventing illness before they occur is important to reducing health risks and medical expenses in the communities where I work," she says.



"The Community Health Promoters (CHPs) are very hard working and enthusiastic; they like gaining knowledge and feel it is their duty to share the information they learn with the community. They said that they would continue this work, even if AKHS is no longer supporting the project. Many said it was their responsibility to their community."

CHPs have been very successful in improving the cleanliness of their environment, educating the community on prevention of diarrhoea and increasing use of oral dehydration salts. As a result the morbidity and mortality from diarrhoea has been greatly reduced."

— Excerpt from an Assessment of the Community Health Promoter Strategy of the AKDN Community Health Programme by Susan Ross, August 2007

Cover Photo: Gulshan Yusupova and Tahmina Niyozmamadova, nurses in the village of Tusyan, GBAO have been trained by AKHS in a variety of health topics such as HIV/AIDS and safe motherhood.

on a range of basic health topics including safe motherhood, immunisation, nutrition, prevention of HIV and STIs and integrated management of childhood illnesses.

The Growth Monitoring and Promotion (GMP) component of the Project trains PHC staff and mothers in the community on how to monitor the health and nutritional status of children under five years of age. Since the introduction of GMP, over 8,000 children have been reached.

Nursing Development Project

The Nursing Development Project (NDP) of AKHS aims to improve the education of nurses in Tajikistan. In partnership with the World Health Organization, the NDP has developed and implemented a new four-year nursing curriculum in all medical colleges of Tajikistan. Teachers from nursing institutions throughout the country are now trained in an expanded range of disciplines including sociology, psychology, research methods, nursing management, family health, communication, health promotion and safe motherhood.

At Khorog General Hospital (KGH), NDP has developed and implemented a programme on nursing competencies in Pediatrics. It also organises trainings and meetings for nurses from various medical facilities in GBAO to come together at KGH to share knowledge and discuss best practices. These nurses also have access to the Internet through a library

established by AKHS at the hospital. NDP has partnered with institutions such as the Aga Khan University's School of Nursing in Karachi, Pakistan and the Tajik Postgraduate Medical Institute to send nurses and nurse teachers in Tajikistan for further skill enhancement. It also helps nurses prepare to take up leadership roles and management responsibilities within their medical workplaces. It supports Tajikistan's National Nursing Council, an organisation which advocates for the professional development of nurses at a national level.

Rationalising Pharmaceuticals Policy and Management Project

The Rationalising Pharmaceuticals Policy and Management project has been making essential pharmaceuticals available throughout GBAO since the late 1990's, including in the aftermath of the country's civil war, when few other sources of medicine were present in the region. Training provided by the Project enables doctors to make better diagnoses and to prescribe pharmaceuticals more rationally.

The Project introduced the Revolving Drug Fund (RDF) in 1997 in GBAO, which requires patients to pay a small percentage towards the cost of the drugs which they would otherwise receive for free. This requirement generates funds that can be used for procurement, delivery and distribution of good quality and affordable essential drugs to the community. To date, the fund has collected enough

revenue to become almost completely self-sustaining and expects to operate with minimal external funding in the near future.

Health Sector Reform Project

The Health Sector Reform Project (HSRP) aims to build the capacity of the GBAO Department of Health (DoH) so that it is able to successfully implement the health reform strategies put forth by the Government of Tajikistan.

HSRP is currently promoting the introduction of Family Medicine in GBAO to improve access to quality and efficient health care. In the Rushan district of GBAO, a Family Medicine pilot project is being conducted in which two doctors and six nurses are undergoing training at the Tajik Postgraduate Medical Institute.

Upon returning to Rushan, these individuals will work as family doctors and family nurses in their respective health facilities. The main expected outcomes from the initiative are increased access to healthcare services in local communities, greater participation in health-promotion and disease-prevention activities, reduced hospitalizations and reduced utilization of specialists.

Other HSRP initiatives include study visits, trainings and discussions to build capacity amongst GBAO DoH staff. In 2007, HSRP gave members of the DoH the opportunity to attend a two-week management course in

Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic. During the trip, health professionals from the DoH also visited AKDN health facilities in the Osh oblast in order to exchange experiences.

Finally, HSRP has conducted a number of Public Health expenditure reviews in GBAO. These studies enable comparisons between the funding provided by the government, non-governmental organisations and local communities to the health sector. The technique is now being used as a model by the Tajikistan Ministry of Health in conducting studies elsewhere in the country.

Hospital Infrastructure Support

AKHS has supported district hospitals in GBAO, including Khorog General Hospital (KGH), in rehabilitation efforts and provision of hospital equipment.

From 2001 through 2004, with the support of the Swiss Agency for International Development and Cooperation (SDC), AKHS completed renovations at six hospitals in Ishkashim, Vanj, Murghab, Darvaz, Rushan and Khorog and provided equipment for their intensive care units and laboratories.

Since 2004, AKHS has worked with the support of the Japanese Government to provide equipment and renovations to address diagnostic, treatment, kitchen and laundry needs in the KGH, Rushan and Darvaz hospitals.

Selected AKHS Accomplishments in GBAO from 2001 to 2004

- Children under 5 who are underweight decreased from 35% to 23.1%
- Children (0-6 months) immediately breast fed increased from 72% to 90.5%
- Children exclusively breast fed for four months increased from 58.5% to 81%
- Women reporting use of modern contraceptive methods increased from 38% to 45.1%
- Children receiving at least one course of worm medicine increased from 0% to 92.3%
- Households with iodised salt increased from 2.5% to 77.3%
- Children 6-12 years with urinary iodine >30 increased from 46.7% to 69.3%



AKHS disseminates to community members and health practitioners relevant information on common health issues affecting Tajikistan, including on maternal and child health, treatment of infectious diseases, immunisations and healthy eating.