

At the Savnob School in the Bartang Valley, FOCUS rehabilitated a previously vulnerable structure with seismically safer construction techniques.



Partners

Agency on Hydrometeorology
European Commission Office for Humanitarian Aid (ECHO)
German Agro Action
Government of Germany (German Embassy)
Government of Japan
Government of Tajikistan Committee of Emergency Situations and Civil Defence
Head Department of Geology
International Finance Corporation (IFC) Mission East
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
Oxfam
Swiss Agency for International Development and Cooperation (SDC)
United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
World Food Programme (WFP)
World Bank
World Health Organization (WHO)

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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.

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Agency for International Development, the Government of Switzerland, the Government of Tajikistan, the World Bank and the Aga Khan Foundation.

FOCUS' strategy encompassed several disaster risk reduction activities. First, it provided preparedness trainings covering topics such as search and rescue, first aid, survival methodology and response to early-warning alarms. Second, FOCUS concentrated upon the development of village disaster management plans, which assist communities in preparing for local hazards, such as rock falls and avalanches, as well as more remote hazards, such as a possible outburst of Lake Sarez.

Third, it assisted in the identification of evacuation paths, safe havens and stockpiles, which provide hazard-free escape opportunities and supplies to support communities before the response of disaster management agencies. Additionally, FOCUS developed a geographic disaster management information system to assist government partners tasked with emergency response in Tajikistan in policy-making and response planning.

LSRMP Accomplishments at a glance:

- Developed hazard assessments and disaster management plans for over 150 villages
- Conducted over 100 village disaster management trainings
- Facilitated over 150 riverbed clearance, slope stabilization and forestation projects
- Identified over 90 safe havens and evacuation paths and established over 18 stockpiles
- Installed 11 wireless communication systems in Bartang Valley

Looking Forward

Going forward, FOCUS looks to continue its ongoing disaster management activities and enhance them in the following ways:

- Expand its coverage to communities not yet reached in GBAO
- Further remote hazard sensing and preparedness abilities
- Increase disaster response capacity building trainings
- Incorporate disaster risk management into school and university curriculums in Tajikistan

TAJIKISTAN



Focus Humanitarian Assistance

Focus Humanitarian Assistance (FOCUS) is an international crisis response and disaster risk reduction agency. It is an affiliate of the Aga Khan Development Network and currently has offices in Central and South Asia, Europe and North America.

Tajikistan is uniquely prone to natural disasters, being located along a rift and with 90 percent of its land in the mountains. The Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) region, home to the Pamir Mountains, has some of the world's largest glaciers and is extremely vulnerable to flooding, mudslides, rock falls, avalanches and earthquakes. Many communities within GBAO are also located in remote areas, creating difficulties in disaster relief efforts.

FOCUS works to meet these challenges by fostering disaster-resiliency in the

country. Its activities include promoting disaster awareness and safety instruction in communities while working with the Government and academic partners to strengthen disaster management capacities. FOCUS also conducts response activities for affected communities in the wake of disasters.

Since its establishment in Tajikistan in 1997, FOCUS has responded to over 40 natural disasters by providing relief support to communities, as well as training, planning and disaster mitigation projects that have reached nearly 100,000 beneficiaries.

Disaster Resiliency

FOCUS undertakes projects to strengthen the abilities of local communities and institutions, especially those of the Government of Tajikistan's Committee of Emergency Situations

and Civil Defence (CoES), to cope with disasters through initiatives in information management, capacity building, community-based risk reduction and scientific knowledge generation.

Funded by the Disaster Preparedness component of the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office grant (DIPECHO), these programmes operate in vulnerable areas of all districts in GBAO.

DIPECHO Programme

Accomplishments at a glance:

- Partnered with 270 communities in GBAO to build their preparedness and response capacity to natural disasters
- Implemented 98 large-scale disaster risk mitigation projects
- Installed 52 wireless communication systems across GBAO

FOCUS' community-based disaster awareness and preparedness activities aim to strengthen communities' ability to alert themselves and react to potential disasters.



Selected FOCUS Accomplishments:

- Implemented over 250 community-based hazard, vulnerability and risk assessments and developed over 250 village disaster management plans
- Conducted over 250 disaster awareness and preparedness trainings in villages, schools and hospitals reaching over 100,000 individuals
- Conducted over 100 small-scale structural mitigation projects including road rehabilitation, car and foot bridge construction, river bank protection and mud-flow clean-up
- Identified and established over 300 safe havens and evacuation paths
- Installed over 95 wireless communications devices linking communities with FOCUS and CoES

- Conducted capacity building activities with the CoES and other organizations

Reducing Poverty in High Mountain Areas

In 2004, FOCUS was awarded a Japanese Social Development Fund (JSDF) grant by the Japanese Government and the World Bank in support of a multi-year project entitled "Reducing Poverty in High Mountain Environments around Lake Sarez."

This project builds upon earlier activities implemented by FOCUS through the Lake Sarez Risk Mitigation Project, described later in this document, and targets the same project area: the vulnerable and isolated villages in the Bartang and Pyanj Valley, extending to the Moskovsky District and the Khatlon Oblast in the south.

The project consists of multiple components: disaster mitigation, road rehabilitation, communications enhancement and income-generation activities. Communities are provided with assistance to undertake relatively small-scale projects such as flood protection measures, diversionary channels and other activities to protect against natural hazards that are common to this region.

FOCUS has also been working with communities to rehabilitate roads in the Bartang Valley to facilitate travel, particularly during the difficult winter months. The installation of Very High Frequency (VHF) and High Frequency

(HF) radios in project areas has enabled efficient emergency response and has also created income-generation opportunities for local residents.

Disaster Response

FOCUS' Disaster Response Team (DRT), in collaboration with the Committee of Emergency Situations and Civil Defence (CoES), responds to disaster situations such as flooding, avalanches and landslides within the GBAO region.

FOCUS established the DRT with the dual responsibility of tackling immediate response needs of communities in GBAO in the short-term and facilitating capacity building in local agencies, authorities and communities in the long-term. The team is composed of response staff, geologists, communications personnel and engineers.

In its short-term emergency response role, the FOCUS DRT is on alert 24 hours a day, ready to respond to disasters at a moment's notice. Members of the response team communicate constantly through CODAN radios with all districts of GBAO. In the event of a disaster, information is quickly relayed to FOCUS through this highly sophisticated radio network.

By way of example, on June 28th, 2007, FOCUS' DRT received notice of a mudflow due to extreme rains in the village of Choshtkandez, GBAO. DRT members arrived promptly on

site and quickly evacuated more than eight families to safer areas where they were provided with emergency supplies including blankets, mattresses, tents, shovels, galoshes, buckets and warm robes. A second mudflow eventually occurred, but by this time FOCUS' quick evacuation efforts had saved more than 30 lives from harm's way.

In its long-term role, FOCUS' DRT works to increase the capacity of local agencies, authorities and communities to respond to natural disasters through the recruiting, training and equipping of community-based volunteer response teams.

Since 2006, it has been conducting basic disaster awareness training for school students, teachers and administrative staff, as well as other government and development partners in GBAO. FOCUS' DRT will continue to develop its programmes and expand them to cover more communities throughout GBAO.

Earthquake Safety Initiative

The Central Asia Region Earthquake Safety Initiative (CARES) project aims to equip government, civil society and community partners with the tools necessary for public education on earthquake safety through the production and dissemination of disaster awareness publications and training materials.

FOCUS is the implementing partner of CARES through its partnership

with GeoHazard International, the United States Agency for International Development, the Office for Foreign Disaster Assistance and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

CARES projects disseminate knowledge through a cascading model in which lead instructors train local ones, who then pass knowledge on directly to the local population through schools, health centres and community gatherings. FOCUS has partnered with the Tajik Ministry of Education in an effort to incorporate disaster awareness training into the curriculum of schools throughout the country.

In collaboration with CARES and its partners, FOCUS has conducted trainings for over 1,500 communities in Tajikistan. In total, these sessions have reached over 20,000 individuals in Tajikistan; in Central Asia as a whole, FOCUS and its partners have reached over 1.5 million individuals.

Lake Sarez Risk Mitigation

FOCUS was the implementing agency for the social component of the Lake Sarez Risk Mitigation Project (LSRMP). The project aims to reduce the vulnerability of communities situated along the Bartang and Pyanj river valleys to natural disasters, with particular emphasis on preparedness against a Lake Sarez outburst.

LSRMP was supported by a consortium of agencies, including the United States

In June 2007, as rains poured for two days in the village of Choshtkandez in GBAO, residents quickly mobilized to community safe havens identified in previous trainings by FOCUS, aware that there was a chance for a mudslide.

When a mudflow eventually ensued, a channel constructed with FOCUS' support was able to divert it to a nearby river, causing minimal damage and allowing the villagers to continue to safely evacuate belongings and livestock.

As rains continued, a much larger mudflow occurred, damaging several homes and blocking the main road. By this time, however, community members were already evacuated with their essential needs.

FOCUS' Disaster Response Team, which was notified of the incident by villagers using CODAN radio, arrived within hours of its commencement and helped the community evacuate while providing them with supplies and shelter.



FOCUS conducts gabion-construction workshops in villages throughout the Bartang Valley. The construction of these structures protects roads and river banks from natural hazards like flooding. It also serves as an income-generation conduit for communities.

Cover Photo: A primary component of FOCUS' activities is fostering communities to undertake disaster-preparedness activities, such as the construction of this underground drainage system in Shegnan, Afghanistan.