



### IN THIS EDITION:

**Providing food aid in remote mountainous areas of Afghanistan**

**Search and Rescue**

**India: Strengthening capacity of communities in disaster preparedness**

**Disaster Management**

**Disaster Risk Reduction**

**School Safety and Disaster Risk Reduction**

**Looking Ahead in 2010**

*Photos: FOCUS, Shiraz Maherali, Alim Nagji and RAPID UK*

### Chairman's Message

Welcome to the first issue of the Focus Humanitarian Assistance (FOCUS) biannual Global Newsletter!

As you may be aware, FOCUS was founded in 1994 by the Ismaili community under the guidance of His Highness the Aga Khan, the 49th hereditary Imam of the Shi'a Imami Ismaili Muslims. FOCUS' approach to its work is rooted in the ethical values and traditions of the Islamic faith, emphasising compassion and care for those most in need.

Over the last 15 years, FOCUS has gained substantial experience in disaster preparedness and response. With offices in Central and South Asia, Europe and North America, FOCUS operates in accordance with its overarching mission to "save lives and reduce suffering as well as create resilience in communities prone to man-made or natural disasters."

As an affiliate of the Aga Khan Development (AKDN), FOCUS works alongside the global agencies of the AKDN in regions where longer term development is viable and sustainable after a social crisis. FOCUS and AKDN agencies also collaborate to provide health and livelihood recovery and rehabilitation initiatives for vulnerable groups during protracted crises.

The aim of this Global newsletter is to keep our stakeholders informed of some of FOCUS' global activities in disaster planning, risk mitigation, crisis response and recent events and achievements. I hope you find the articles included both interesting and informative.

I would like to personally thank all donors, partners, supporters, volunteers, friends and staff for enabling FOCUS to carry out its activities and for contributing to our global mandate to foster safer communities around the world.

Warmest regards,  
Aziz M. Bhaloo  
Chairman  
FOCUS International Coordinating Committee

### Providing food aid in remote mountainous areas of Afghanistan

Drought, famine, severe weather conditions and other climate change-induced hazards pose significant risks for most of Afghanistan, often adding to the impact of the global food crisis on local populations. Coupled with a volatile economy and labour market, these hazards leave isolated mountainous communities with restricted access to food. In 2009, through partnerships with the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and the Afghan Ministry of Rural

Rehabilitation and Development, FOCUS distributed over US\$2m in food aid to over 15,000 vulnerable families in Shiva, Darwaz and Shughnan districts of the Badakhshan province. Between May and July 2009, FOCUS also responded to 28 flood incidents in Badakhshan and Baghlan by supplying tents, blankets and food to affected families. Currently, FOCUS is conducting a European Commission funded Food for Work project for 199 flood affected families

in Shughnan, Ishkashim and Zebak in the Badakhshan province to provide food until the next harvest in June 2010.



Food distribution in Shiva, Afghanistan

## Search and Rescue

Earlier last year, FOCUS volunteers from the UK completed an 18-month intensive training programme in Search and Rescue Team (SART) skills with RAPID UK, the UK representative of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group for the United Nations (UN). On September 30th, 2009 a powerful earthquake with a magnitude of 7.6 on the Richter scale hit Sumatra, Indonesia, impacting 1.25 million people and causing severe loss of life and destruction.

Arif Jaffer, a FOCUS Europe SART member, was selected as part of the RAPID UK response team to travel to the affected area. Arif's experience would put to test the theory and many hours of training that he had completed. The team was the first from the UK to arrive in Sumatra and they worked closely with the UN to coordinate search and rescue efforts.

The team travelled to areas that needed to be searched and evacuated; they worked hard to rescue any casualties

trapped under the rubble. Arif was involved in a range of activities, from conducting searches to working out transportation logistics and liaising with the UN. On returning to the UK, Arif reflected, "I saw much devastation and sadness, and only wish that I could have done more, but at the same time, I was grateful that I was able to do something."

Members of the FOCUS Europe SART team were recently in India, where they trained a team of 15 vol-

unteers to respond to local disasters.



**FOCUS Europe SART member Arif Jaffer and the Rapid UK SART Team**  
Photo: RAPID UK

## India: Strengthening capacity of communities in disaster preparedness

The three-year Andhra Pradesh Relief to Development (APR2D) Project, which stemmed from the devastating South Asian tsunami of December 2004, was completed in August 2009. The APR2D project was implemented in 15 remote villages, reached out to over 4,000 families and trained over 350 volunteers in emergency response in the Krishna district. It aimed to enhance disaster preparedness, reduce vulnerability from health and hygiene risks, and

establish partnerships with key government institutions. The positive impact of activities implemented during the project became evident in the community's response to torrential rains that caused flooding in October 2009. The newly trained community emergency response teams were better prepared to respond to the disaster and reduced the community's vulnerability by utilising the infrastructure developed by the project, such as cyclone shelters, early warning

systems, village based stockpiles and a 5.75 km evacuation road. The APR2D project was a collaborative endeavour between the Canadian International Development Agency

(CIDA) and several agencies of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), including FOCUS, Aga Khan Planning and Building Services and Aga Khan Foundation.



**Volunteers conduct a mock rescue to practice their disaster management skills**

## Disaster Management

In 2009, in conjunction with the Justice Institute of British Columbia, FOCUS organised emergency management training and planning sessions for several Regional Disaster Management Teams (RDMTs) in North America. Capacity building through training enables RDMTs to better prepare, monitor and respond to disasters such as hurricanes and flooding, thereby ensuring

the safety of the community. RDMTs utilised their new skills and experience to successfully respond to several major fires including the California wildfires, a chemical fire in Texas and an apartment fire in Vancouver. This year, FOCUS will organise similar capacity building exercises for RDMTs and looks forward to the community's participation in disaster simulation exercises planned

across North America. In addition, FOCUS will continue to provide support to RDMTs and work closely with the Aga Khan Health Boards for Canada and USA to provide information on the H1N1 influenza pandemic and steps to help prevent the spread of influenza.

FOCUS in North America and FOCUS in Russia are collaborating to expand operations and programmes across Russia. Current

interventions include providing emergency support and medical care to communities.



**Fire Safety Training**

## Disaster Risk Reduction

During 2008-09, working with AKDN agencies and the European Commission (EC) Humanitarian Aid department's disaster preparedness project (DIPECHO), FOCUS implemented the project entitled, "Building Local Leadership and Mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction in Northern Pakistan." The programme supported, strengthened and institutionalised disaster risk reduction management

through community based interventions and school safety programmes in Northern Pakistan. Key activities included hazard mapping and assessments, the development of evacuation plans and mock drills. Furthermore, with the support of the *Pompiers de l'Urgence Internationale*, FOCUS and DIPECHO initiated multiple disaster management and awareness-raising sessions at the school level.



School children experience an earthquake simulator

## School Safety and Disaster Risk Reduction

FOCUS, with financial support from the United States Department of Agriculture, has implemented a School Safety Initiative Project in Tajikistan. As a component of the project, FOCUS conducted structural modifications, non-structural mitigation measures and earthquake risk awareness and preparedness trainings in 12 schools in the districts of Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast, benefiting over 15,000 people. In late September 2009, FOCUS completed and handed over 12 seismically modified schools to the Government of Tajikistan.

In October 2009, FOCUS

completed its fifth cycle of the Disaster Preparedness Programme of the European Commission for Humanitarian Aid (DIPECHO) project on "Fostering Disaster Resilient Communities in Isolated Mountain Environments" in Tajikistan. During the project cycle, FOCUS implemented disaster risk management activities in 41 communities in Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Activities include, the implementation of 18 structural mitigation projects, awareness initiatives for over 5,000 children and education staff at 23 local schools, and capacity building with 120 government staff members.

In November, FOCUS conducted a Geographic Information System (GIS) and Remote Sensing training for government and non-governmental agencies working in areas of disaster risk reduction in Tajikistan. Through support from the Swiss Agency

for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Department for International Development (DFID), the training is part of a commitment to enhance the capacity of government institutions to respond to natural disasters.



Opening of a School Safety Initiative Project School

## Awards and Agreements

In April 2009, FOCUS and the Republic of Tajikistan signed an agreement to insulate a water channel in the district of Rosh-tqala and rehabilitate a debris flow channel in the district of Ishkashim. In addition, the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and FOCUS signed

an agreement to implement a project aimed at reducing the vulnerability of communities to the risks associated with glacial lake outburst floods in Tajikistan.

On June 16, 2009, FOCUS was selected by the Jury of the 2009 UN Sasakawa Award for Disaster Reduction to receive a Certificate of Merit for enhancing disaster risk reduction in

the mountainous regions of Northern Pakistan. In collaboration with specialist organisations, FOCUS has trained and developed local communities in search and rescue, information and communication, disaster assessment as well as to mobilise local emergency response teams.

On October 9, 2009, the Canadian Government honoured FOCUS and the Ismaili



Gulam Juma, Coordinator of the FOCUS International Coordinating Committee and Mina Mawani, CEO of the Ismaili Council for Canada accepted a letter from the Government of Canada, recognising and honouring their respective organisations for their work in refugee settlement.

Council for Canada for their contribution to improving the lives of refugees, at a ceremony marking its 30th Anniversary of the Private Sponsorship of Refugee Programme. Over the past 15 years, FOCUS, on behalf of the Ismaili Council for Canada, has assisted approximately 10,000 Afghan refugees in rebuilding their lives. With support from the community, FOCUS and the Ismaili Council for Canada have supported

newly settled refugees with the identification and provision of housing, food, medical care, English language classes as well as vocational and business training.

Later that same month, FOCUS was honoured by the South Asian Chamber of Commerce (SACC) of Houston, Texas with the 2009 Outstanding Community Organisation Award for its disaster response and relief efforts in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina, Gustav,

Rita and Ike that affected the Southern United States. SACC President Mustafa Tameez remarked that, "the reason Focus Humanitarian Assistance was chosen for the Outstanding Community Organisation Award was because it's doing impressive humanitarian work for the community at large, not only in the U.S., but globally." Chief Guest, CNN business anchor Ali Velshi presented the award to FOCUS leaders.



Ali Velshi and SACC President Mustafa Tameez present the 2009 Outstanding Community Organisation Award to FOCUS Board Member Nasir Panjwani. Photo: Shiraz Maherali

## Looking Ahead in 2010

Looking to the future, FOCUS will continue to strengthen its operational and programmatic capabilities to increase its international presence as a world-class humanitarian organisation that specialises in disaster response and mitigation.

In 2010, FOCUS' areas of priority include:

- Addressing the seismic vulnerability of communities in Central and South Asia through the Seismic Risk Management Initiative which promotes collaboration between AKDN agencies and FOCUS in the assessment of seismic risk to local communities in the areas across Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and Tajikistan.
- Ensuring communities

are prepared for a disaster situation through education, awareness and training initiatives.

- Enhancing its capability to respond to climate change and its impact to vulnerable communities.
- Working with governments and partners to ensure that schools and young children are aware of and

prepare for natural hazards and risks within their environment.

- Strengthening its search and rescue capabilities through continued training of volunteers.
- Enhancing its ability to respond rapidly and effectively to a crisis while maintaining the dignity of vulnerable communities.

## Hike4Life

The first Summer Hike4Life fundraising event took place in Kyrgyzstan. Forty participants from around the globe hiked through the mountains surrounding Lake Issyk-Kul, the second largest mountain lake in the world. The 2009 Winter Hike4Life took place on December 25, 2009 in Uganda where participants climbed Mt. Elgon (4321m) and Mt. Kaddam (3068m). We congratulate and thank all the Hike4Life participants, their sponsors, the volunteers and the team for their dedication, commitment and generous support.



Summer Hike4Life, Kyrgyzstan  
Photo: Alim Nagji

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An Affiliate of the Aga Khan Development Network

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