



FOCUS

Global Newsletter

FOCUS HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE
An Affiliate of the Aga Khan Development Network

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Photos: FOCUS

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Chairman's Message

Welcome to the FOCUS Global Newsletter.

2011 was a year of many challenges, requiring FOCUS to engage in several parts of the world. Fortunately, we have also seen our Disaster Risk Reduction efforts fulfilling their purpose – saving lives by containing the scale of disaster, thanks to the precautionary measures in place. Successes such as these serve only to strengthen our resolve to better aid communities to be ready to deal with disasters.

Today, climate change is a major concern for all, and Tajikistan is one of the countries whose mountainous communities in particular, are being affected. As the temperatures rise, frequent glacier melts result in the formation and expansion of glacial lakes. These increase in size rapidly and can overwhelm natural dams, leading to floods, as we saw in Sughd. Contrarily, seasonal glacial melts are key sources of clean water and farmland irrigation, and disproportionate, unseasonal melts result in retreating glaciers. This has resulted in both short term destruction, and the creation of a long term crisis.

In this issue we glimpse at FOCUS' efforts to address this concern. We strongly believe that it is in our collective interest to better understand and anticipate the impending effects of global warming which will significantly alter the world we inhabit. We have also highlighted other current activities such as the Global ShakeOut Drill, emphasising the international scale of our network.

As always, it is the champions of our cause – our generous donors, volunteers, friends and tirelessly dedicated staff – who allow us to progress in our mission to nurture a culture of compassion and strive towards a better tomorrow. We are sincerely grateful for your continued support.

Warmest regards,
Aziz M. Bhaloo

Volunteer Training: Understanding Reception Centres

Imagine a disaster – an earthquake, major flood, or tornado – with large numbers of individuals including women, children and seniors, displaced from their homes, seeking help. One of the most important tasks at a time like this is to receive those affected at a "Reception Centre," in an organised manner with warmth, compassion and care. Reception Centres act as a one-stop service site, where evacuees are registered and emergency social services such as clothing, lodging, food, and personal services are provided. Much work can be done ahead of time

to develop the logistics to activate such a reception centre, and FOCUS and Regional Disaster Management Teams at the local leadership level can play a key role by being prepared. Accordingly, in September and October 2011, a one-day "Emergency Social Services Reception Centre" course was offered to approximately 300 volunteers across Canada, in partnership with the Justice Institute of British Columbia. Participants were given an overview of the functions, staffing and planning of a Reception Centre by simulating the activation of a Reception Centre to deal

with the initial arrival of evacuees. At a leadership level, senior members within our institutions need to be familiarised with the main concepts and practices of emergency management. A two-day "Emergency Operations Centre training for Decision-Makers" was held in Toronto and Vancouver in November 2011, during which participants practiced critical site support activities, including building and maintaining situational awareness, enhancing vital decision-making skills, assigning responsibilities and conducting management team briefings.

FOCUS: A Global Initiative

Over the past 17 years, FOCUS has grown into a versatile organisation that provides emergency relief and develops disaster resilient communities through disaster risk reduction programmes in vulnerable regions, predominantly in the developing world.

In 2011, FOCUS played a key role intervening in major disasters globally. In Afghanistan, we responded to over 80 floods and avalanches across Badakhshan. In Tajikistan, rehabilitation initiatives were implemented in the aftermath of the Vanj earthquake. In Pakistan, FOCUS was deployed following the collapse of a building in Karachi, and continued to assist with relief efforts for the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) Flood Response Project.

FOCUS frequently collaborates with external institutions, which allows us to develop our resources and further expand services. At the request of the State of Texas, for instance, we provided support during Hurricane Irene and the devastating wildfires.

In Tajikistan, FOCUS signed an agreement in partnership with Welthungerhilfe, the UK government's Department of International Development and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation in an effort to help mitigate the risks associated with climate change, including glacial lake outburst floods. The programme aims to enhance the response capacities and awareness of village communities, and will benefit over 55,000 people.

Additionally, the Royal Norwegian Embassy has generously pledged USD 1.4 million towards disaster risk reduction in Pakistan.

Earthquake Simulation in Pakistan

In October 2011, four global Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams undertook a largescale training and earthquake simulation exercise in Islamabad. The teams were from FOCUS Europe, FOCUS Pakistan, Rescue and Preparedness in Disasters (RAPID UK) and the Pakistan government's Capital Development Authority. This is the first time that teams from Europe and Pakistan have undergone an exercise to comprehensively test the USAR response, which included deployment, team management, health and safety, and search and rescue logistics. During the 36 hours that followed, the teams repeatedly responded to simulated aftershocks, and conducted search and rescue operations, with each scenario designed to test multiple elements of their skills.



USAR teams during the simulation

India: A Child is the Key to Change

When the earth shook under Gujarat at 10:48 PM on 20 October 2011, it was the moment the students of the Aga Khan School at Chitradad exceeded all expectations. The earthquake measuring 5.3 on the Richter scale lasted for 25 seconds. Many people rushed out of their homes in panic, and a few were injured as they attempted to jump off their buildings in order to escape. It was the children who, with their training and presence of mind, demonstrated to their parents the basic seismic risk mitigation strategy of 'Drop, Cover, Hold On.' Mr. Joydeep, Chief Financial Officer, Aga Khan Education Services India later wrote, "Parents...informed us that it was their children who guided them to safety. [The children] asked them not to panic and run out of the house, but to stay in, look for cover, hide underneath and hold on."

The 2011 Hike4Life Team



Hike4Life: Scaling Kilimanjaro

The 2011 Challenge saw participants from Canada, England, Kenya and the United States attempt to reach the Peak of Africa. Flight cancellations and delays resulted in the group having to begin their hike a mere five hours after landing in Tanzania. Despite the rain and cold, the group rallied together as they progressed on the climb, and on 31 December 2011, 40 out of 44 participants made it to Gilman's Point, at a height of 5,681m. Thirty eight of these intrepid participants continued to Uhuru Peak, the highest point in Africa, which stands at an incredible 5,895m above sea level! The ascent is a virtual climatic world tour, ranging from the tropics to the Arctic, making it one of the most breathtaking – and difficult – climbs in the world. We congratulate the team for successfully embracing this challenge and thank all donors and sponsors who supported them so generously!



ShakeOut participants of all ages!

Risk Reduction in Lari Babaji

FOCUS Afghanistan undertook a hazard vulnerability capacity and risk assessment exercise in Lari Babaji, a high risk village in the Dushi District. This demonstrated that the three main flooding channels, when at high intensity, cause frequent severe inundations that threaten the villagers' lives and property. Sparse local resources make it difficult for them to prevent potential and existing damage, leading FOCUS to establish a Community Emergency Response Team, trained in rescue procedures, first aid provision and casualty management. Akber Bahi Arbab tells us that "our children now...run very quickly to safe areas on the hills when the weather gets worse and when there is possibility of a flood." The tools provided for search and rescue operations and first aid saved many lives during a recent flood in May.



An information session with FOCUS



The map provides a glimpse of the various activities that FOCUS has been involved in over the last few months.

Global ShakeOut Drill

On 20 October 2011, over 100,000 members of the AKDN participated in a worldwide ShakeOut drill alongside 7.9 million other global participants. ShakeOut is an earthquake drill originally developed in California, to educate the public in self-protection strategies to adopt during an actual earthquake.

According to the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, more than one-third of all earthquakes that took place between 1991 and 2005 occurred in Central and South Asia. Consequently, the AKDN has launched an initiative aimed at countries such as Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and Tajikistan – which are particularly vulnerable – to enhance and develop institutional capacity to maximise the mitigation of the risks associated with disaster, and encourage preparedness.



School children take cover during an earthquake drill

'The Pakistan Floods, 2010': A Video-Documentary by Faridoun Hemani

With his documentary 'The Pakistan Floods, 2010,' international broadcast journalist Faridoun Hemani brought to Canada and the UK a firsthand account of the devastation wreaked on Pakistanis by the 2010 floods, described as one of the worst disasters in human history. Accompanied by a film crew, Faridoun visited the affected areas in June 2011 with the support of the Aga Khan Foundation, and returned with detailed footage highlighting the plight of the victims. The extensive

work of FOCUS was evident in Faridoun's account. The displaced population was provided not only with basic rescue and relief facilities, but also with healthcare, clean water, sanitation, education and assistance with rehabilitation. The wide-reaching AKDN network made these services available promptly, and the Aga Khan University Hospital played a major role in the rapid mobilisation of healthcare teams throughout the disaster zone. The overwhelming tragedy

of destroyed homes and lost lives are countered by stories of heroism and hope, as demonstrated by the healthcare worker who walked 45 km to Gupis to provide relief, or that of FOCUS volunteers who trekked up a mountain to Darkut to ensure food supplies. The role of women in the rescue operations with Search and Rescue Teams was vital, and appropriately emphasised in the film. Even as they worked in tandem with the men, they were in a position to better assist

affected women, who were more comfortable with and reassured by their presence. Faridoun's speaking tour in Canada was part of the annual FOCUSSTAR awareness and fundraising campaign. In addition, FOCUS Europe organised for him to speak across the UK. The theme 'Resilience in an Age of Disaster,' was adopted to underscore the importance of being prepared for natural and man-made disasters in advance, as evidenced by the lessons of these events.



Women and children receiving FOCUS aid



A child stands before his collapsed home



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