



FOCUS HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE
An Affiliate of the Aga Khan Development Network

FOCUS

Global Newsletter



July 2015

Thank You For Helping To Build Community Capacity For Disasters!

FOCUS has successfully entered its 20th year as an international crisis response and disaster risk management agency.

This newsletter will take you on a brief journey, starting when FOCUS was first established, then highlighting our activities, milestones and response efforts over the years. You will also have a look at FOCUS' current and future initiatives.

Aziz Bhaloo, Chairman of FOCUS' International Coordinating Committee, spoke of his most memorable moments during the establishment of FOCUS in 1994 during an interview with the Global Newsletter. He recalled when FOCUS and His Highness Prince Aga Khan Shia Imami Ismaili Council for Canada signed an agreement to sponsor refugees with the Government of Canada. "This was a very proud moment as this was the first agreement a non-governmental organisation had signed with the Canadian government to sponsor refugees." Through this and similar agreements with the Canadian and Quebec governments, approximately 10,000 Afghan refugees were resettled in Canada between the mid 90's and early 2000's.

Shakeel Hirji, FOCUS' Global Coordinator, also recently noted that, "in the last decade, FOCUS has evolved beyond crisis response operations into disaster risk management. The risk management programmes include conducting assessments and drawing maps to identify hazards and risks that affect isolated communities." He added, "FOCUS also analyses the vulnerability levels of communities from a geographic and social aspect, and identifies appropriate programmes that reduces the risk of hazards."

The US Geological Survey estimates that several million earthquakes occur in the world each year. Many of these go undetected as they have very small magnitudes or hit remote areas.

This is an important reminder of the frequency and unpredictability of disasters. Countries with a high risk of natural disasters, such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan, must be adequately prepared as many people live in mountainous, isolated locations. As such, FOCUS is strengthening its ability to predict and communicate timely warnings and alerts to these communities.

FOCUS is also building the capacity of vulnerable communities and governments to make them more resilient to disasters. Globally, FOCUS has mobilised a volunteer and professional force totalling over 400 staff and over 46,000 Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) members to address disasters and emergency situations. CERTs play an important role in building capacity in disaster preparedness. They raise awareness of hazards, help distribute aid even in extreme weather conditions, assist with evacuations, conduct weather monitoring, and perform other functions in order to provide the best assistance in times of crisis.

Through the generosity, support and dedication of countless donors, friends, staff and volunteers over two decades, FOCUS is able to respond to numerous natural and man-made disasters, implement Disaster Risk Reduction programmes in areas vulnerable to natural hazards, and engage in resettlement and reintegration programmes for those displaced by civil instability and conflict.

FOCUS thanks each one of you for helping to make a difference to improve the lives of those affected by crisis, and building disaster resilient communities.

Warmest regards,
FOCUS Team



Hazard Vulnerability Risk Assessments, Pakistan



Codan radios are installed as early warning systems, Tajikistan



Community Emergency Response Team training, Afghanistan



FOCUS' JOURNEY OVER 20 YEARS

For over 20 years, Focus Humanitarian Assistance (FOCUS) has provided emergency relief to communities suffering from natural disasters or manmade crises.



FOCUS:

- Is an international crisis response and disaster risk management agency
- Implements Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) programmes in areas vulnerable to natural hazards
- Engages in resettlement and reintegration programmes for populations displaced by civil instability or conflict

THE BEGINNING: CRISIS RESPONSE

1994 - 1998

- **1994:** FOCUS was first established in Canada by the Ismaili community under the guidance of His Highness the Aga Khan to respond to emergency situations and crises arising out of natural and man-made disasters.
- **1995:** FOCUS was set up in the USA.
- **1996:** FOCUS was established in Europe. (Headquartered in the UK, with an office in Portugal). Programmatic activities began in Russia to provide humanitarian assistance to Afghan and Tajik refugees who had fled crises in their respective countries in the 1990's.
- **1997:** FOCUS was established in Afghanistan and programmatic activities commenced in Tajikistan.
- **1998:** FOCUS was established in Pakistan.



Delivering water post Gujarat Earthquake, India

2001

Gujarat Earthquake: A 7.9 magnitude earthquake devastated the Indian state of Gujarat. FOCUS set up camps to assist the affected population and provided emergency food and non-food items.

Afghan Repatriation and Programmatic Activities: FOCUS delivered over 20,000 metric tons (MT) of food and non-food aid to 500,000 beneficiaries in Afghanistan. This was complemented by agricultural support to farmers, vocational training, food-for-work initiatives and shelter provision to returnees. High-energy provisions and milk were also distributed to schoolchildren, and tens of thousands of children were immunised.

2002

FOCUS was established in India.

Nahrin Earthquake: Following the Nahrin earthquake in Afghanistan, the affected populations were faced with issues related to accessibility, water and sanitation, landmines, and changing weather conditions.



FOCUS distributed food aid to support 20,000 people.

"We worked closely with UNOCHA to see how we could help those affected. Access was blocked by landslides and routes were not cleared of mines," said Farid Daya, (then) FOCUS Programme Coordinator. "FOCUS teams distributed food supplied by the World Food Programme (WFP) and other essential items."

"Water sources were blocked by dams created by landslides and our engineers put in place reservoirs to meet immediate needs, and looked at sanitation for the intermediate term," Mr. Daya continued. "FOCUS' work built on existing rehabilitation efforts and led into long term development programmes that AKDN implemented in the province," he said.

BRINGING RELIEF

2002

Lake Sarez Risk Mitigation: In Tajikistan, FOCUS implemented the social component of the Lake Sarez Risk Mitigation Project (LSRMP). The project helped reduce the vulnerability of communities situated along the Bartang and Pyanj River valleys, as these areas are prone to natural disasters.



In the event of an outburst flood from Lake Sarez, preparedness activities such as training in emergency response, constructing evacuation paths, as shown, and the installation of emergency radio systems were implemented.



2003

FOCUS was awarded a grant from the Japanese Social Development Fund (JSDF) to enhance disaster resilience of local communities in the Bartang Valley in Tajikistan, where FOCUS reached more than 150,000 beneficiaries.



In Afghanistan and Tajikistan, FOCUS transported milk to schools which provided daily nutrition to schoolchildren and staff and also increased the number of girls attending school.

2004

FOCUS responded to Cyclone Gafilo, in northern Madagascar, while providing relief interventions as well as education and health care support serving many of the over 200,000 people affected. This was part of a US\$100,000 commitment made by His Highness the Aga Khan to (then) President Marc Ravalomanana.



Providing humanitarian relief, Madagascar

2005

Indian Ocean Tsunami: In response, FOCUS provided relief aid in the state of Andhra Pradesh, India to approximately 4,000 people who benefitted from food kits comprising of rice, lentils, oil and other nutrients. Non-food items such as blankets, tarpaulins, bed and ground sheets, towels, kitchen utensils and clothing were also distributed.



Post the Kashmir earthquake in India, FOCUS provided family packs including a winterised tent, blankets and clothing to isolated villages.

Forest Fire in Portugal: In response to the second worst forest fire to be recorded nationally, FOCUS collaborated with the local government to distribute over 1,000 food packages to vulnerable families and assisted with livelihood rehabilitation projects.

Hurricane Katrina and Rita, United States: FOCUS provided support to those affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and directed their efforts towards preparedness and evacuations.

Kashmir Earthquake Relief: Over 70,000 individuals lost their lives to this devastating earthquake, which hit both Indian and Pakistan administered Kashmir.

FOCUS immediately engaged its Search and Rescue Teams from Gilgit and Chitral. Coordinating its relief efforts with the Pakistan Army, FOCUS reached approximately 150,000 affected individuals who benefitted from food, safe drinking water, clothing, shelter, blankets, vital medical aid as well as toys for the youngest affected.



Following the Indian Ocean Tsunami, FOCUS procured and distributed fishing nets and boat repair kits to help restore livelihoods with support from the Canadian government.

REDUCING RISK



In conjunction with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), AKDN and FOCUS established and managed relief distribution warehouses in Tartous, Homs and Salamieh. Over 100 local community volunteers were mobilised to provide logistical support to WFP.

2006

Helping Lebanese Families in Syria: At the peak of the Lebanon crisis, AKDN agencies and FOCUS established a Mother and Child Health Centre at Damascus University campus, which provided specialist medical care, a pharmacy and a day care centre for young children. This facility accommodated 1,300 displaced persons.

Salim Sumar, Executive Officer of FOCUS Europe said, “Two key features have really stood out about this intervention; first is the generosity of the Syrian public and in particular, the many thousands of host families that provided shelter to the Lebanese families and second, the dedication of AKDN-FOCUS volunteers has been truly inspirational.”

Award: FOCUS was awarded the Sitare –e- Eissar award from the Government of Pakistan from then President Musharaff for its outstanding service during the 2005 Kashmir Earthquake.

2007



Distribution of blankets, Bangladesh

Bangladesh Cyclone Response: Following Cyclone Sidr, which struck the south-western coastal areas of Bangladesh, FOCUS and His Highness Prince Aga Khan Shia Imami Ismaili Council for Bangladesh, in collaboration with the Van Leer Foundation, provided 50,000 blankets to communities.

Award: FOCUS received the Campanula Municipal Award for Merit and Dedication, by the Portuguese Government for its contribution in the wake of the 2005 Portuguese forest fires.

2009

Andhra Pradesh Relief to Development Project, India: This three year initiative stemmed from the Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004. Implemented in 15 remote villages, it reached out to over 4,000 families, and trained more than 350 volunteers in emergency response in the Krishna district. The positive impact of this project became evident in the community’s response to torrential rains that caused flooding in October 2009. The newly trained community emergency response teams (CERTs) were better prepared to respond and reduced the community’s vulnerability by utilising the newly developed infrastructure, such as cyclone shelters, early warning systems, village based stockpiles and a 5.75 km evacuation road. *This project was a collaborative endeavour between the Canadian government, FOCUS and several agencies of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN).*

Drought Response, Afghanistan: In response to chronic food insecurity due to drought and severe weather conditions in Afghanistan, FOCUS worked with the UN World Food Programme and the Afghan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) to provide over US\$2m in food aid to approximately 15,000 families in vulnerable districts of the Badakhshan province.

Awards: FOCUS Pakistan was selected by the Jury of the 2009 United Nations Sasakawa Award for Disaster Reduction to receive a Certificate of Merit for enhancing disaster risk reduction.

The Canadian Government honoured FOCUS and His Highness Prince Aga Khan Shia Imami Ismaili Council for Canada for their contribution to improving the lives of refugees.

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 in the United States.



Search and rescue training, UK

Search and Rescue Training, UK: FOCUS volunteers from the United Kingdom completed an 18-month intensive training programme in Search and Rescue skills (SART) with RAPID UK, the UK representative of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group for the UN.

MITIGATION & PREPAREDNESS

2009



In September 2009, FOCUS completed and handed over 12 seismically modified schools to the Government of Tajikistan.

School Safety, Tajikistan: FOCUS and the United States Department of Agriculture, implemented a School Safety Initiative Project in Tajikistan. 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 (GBAO), benefiting over 15,000 people.

2010

Vanj earthquake: The impact of the earthquake that struck Vanj in Tajikistan resulted extensive damage to infrastructure. Three schools that were retrofitted through FOCUS' School Safety project withstood the earthquake's tremors without damage, whereas six other schools in Vanj district were significantly damaged.

Attabad Landslide: FOCUS' emergency response teams were immediately mobilised to respond to the devastating landslide that hit the Attabad region of the Hunza Valley in Northern Pakistan. FOCUS, in collaboration with the Ismaili Council for Pakistan, agencies of the AKDN, local government, and the Pakistan army, provided food and non-food aid, assistance with evacuation efforts, and managed internally displaced persons camps for those affected.

Pakistan Monsoon Floods: FOCUS, in collaboration with AKDN agencies, and other civil society organisations, launched a relief effort to assist the thousands of people displaced by the devastating floods in Gilgit-Baltistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh Provinces in Pakistan. With assistance from thousands of trained volunteers and support from the community, FOCUS and AKDN supported the safe evacuation of vulnerable communities, construction of bridges and roads, as well as camp management.

FOCUS transported approximately 230 tons of relief goods to affected areas and procured food packages for over 15,000 beneficiaries. FOCUS also utilised 86 of its existing community stockpiles consisting of tents, blankets, and other non-food items to assist affected people during the Attabad landslide disaster and the Pakistan floods. These stockpiles play an essential role in the survival of communities who have been severely impacted by disasters.



Attabad landslide, Pakistan



Providing relief aid post monsoon floods, Pakistan

2012



Devastating impact of avalanches, Tajikistan

Avalanche Mitigation and Response:

During the avalanche season, CERTs in all districts of GBAO, Tajikistan stayed on alert and advised families living within possible avalanche zones to evacuate for a period of time to a safer place.

"It would have been impossible to cope with that amount of snow without FOCUS and its team. The CERTs helped clear the snow and assisted with the rehabilitation of my house." - Gayosov Suraj



One neighbourhood avoided impact due to a mitigation initiative carried out in 2009. A terrace hill slope and protective wall constructed as part of a mitigation project sheltered households that were directly in the path of the avalanche, allowing them to escape unscathed. The overall project cost was only USD \$10k but protected assets worth over USD \$370k.

BUILDING CAPACITY

2013



The MOU builds on the 2009 Agreement of Cooperation between the Ismaili Imamat the State of California.

Reducing risk and responding to threats to public health, safety and welfare

MOU Signing, USA: California Governor's Office of Emergency Services signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the AKDN-Disaster Risk Management Initiative (DRMI) and FOCUS USA. The signing was an informal agreement between all signatories to reduce the risk of, and respond to, threats to the public health, safety and welfare of communities at risk and strengthen the commitment to reduce loss of life and suffering due to emergencies.

"We, at the Governor's Office, are excited at the signing of this MOU in an area that is much needed in the world we live in today - preparedness, emergency management, earthquake safety and intelligent rural and urban planning," said Nancy McFadden, Executive Secretary to California Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr.

FOCUS was established in Beirut, Lebanon.

Ice Storm, Canada: FOCUS in partnership with His Highness Prince Aga Khan Shia Imami Ismaili Council for Canada mobilised 500 volunteers to assist the community by delivering food packages and hot beverages to affected seniors serving over 2,000 meals and setting up a warming centre for all local residents.

Hospital Emergency Preparedness Training, Afghanistan: FOCUS in collaboration with the Afghanistan Disaster Management Authority conducted training in Baghlan. The hospital team and the Provincial Disaster Coordination Committee learned how to manage mass casualty incidents using hospital resources. A Hospital Emergency Preparedness Plan was developed and stakeholders took part in a subsequent mass casualty management drill that helped test their preparedness plan. Training was provided with support from the US government.



Volunteers support the social services hotline, Canada

2014



Women making gabion baskets, Afghanistan
Photo credit: Social Protection Directorate, MRRD, Afghanistan

Gabion Weaving Centres, Afghanistan: Through the Gabion Weaving Centre project, FOCUS in partnership with Aga Khan Foundation, has empowered women and vulnerable communities, providing them with disaster risk mitigation skills and business development knowledge. These skills enable women to become community level advocates for disaster risk reduction.



Gabions are walls that are constructed by filling large galvanized steel baskets with rocks, which helps to block floodwater and debris from landslides, reducing the effects of natural disasters.

ENHANCING DISASTER RESILIENCE

2014

Search & Rescue Team skills development

Search and Rescue Training, India: FOCUS' National Search and Rescue Team (SART) in India was formed in 2009. In 2014, the 35 member team had undergone an intensive training programme in Urban Search & Rescue as well as Water Rescue training, building the skills of the team in components such as the stages of rescue, mapping operations, casualty care, and incident and structural assessments.



"We have developed our search and rescue techniques in addition to skills of handling heavy equipment, arriving at a considerable degree of competence." Sarfaraz Jivani, Deputy Team Leader, SART



School children practice the earthquake drill "Drop, Cover, Hold On", Angola

Global Earthquake Preparedness: ShakeOut is a multi-country earthquake drill that is designed to educate people on how to prepare for and protect themselves during an earthquake. The AKDN and FOCUS has been participating in ShakeOut since 2011. Originating in California in 2008, the AKDN ShakeOut was conceived as part of the institution's collaboration with California's Office of Emergency Services under the Agreement of Cooperation between the Ismaili Imamat and the State of California.

FOCUS manages the AKDN ShakeOut drill, which took place in 20 countries across various AKDN agencies in 2014. More than 300,000 people participated in the AKDN ShakeOut drill last October. Participants practiced DROP, COVER, and HOLD ON!, the mantra considered by emergency management experts and preparedness organisations as the appropriate action to reduce injury and loss of life during an earthquake.

The next ShakeOut will take place globally on Thursday October 15th, 2015.

2015



Avalanche preparedness training, Afghanistan

FOCUS' work in avalanche mitigation in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan is centred on: i) identifying avalanche zones through hazard vulnerability risk assessments, ii) creating awareness and educating communities on avalanche risk, iii) establishing weather observation teams and iv) working with hydro meteorological agencies.

Over the past two years FOCUS has trained 32 weather observation teams to observe, collect and report on weather conditions. Weather observers have been trained in basic early warning signs, basic snow rescue and the use of rudimentary measurement tools.



CERT volunteers clear the avalanche snowfall, Tajikistan

The avalanche season of 2015 was aggressive with a large number of avalanche occurrences. FOCUS, in collaboration with the respective Councils and the local government, evacuated approximately 4,400 individuals to safer areas between mid-February to mid-March.

FOCUS continues its efforts in avalanche mitigation as one of its priorities to safeguard at risk communities in mountainous remote hazard prone areas.

Looking Ahead

FOCUS looks to continue its on-going disaster management activities and enhance preparedness and response capacity among staff, government partners and local communities. In particular, FOCUS will expand the assessment of hazards and hazard mapping, and prepare communities to respond to local and remote hazards such as glacial lake outburst floods, avalanches, landslides, floods, tsunamis and earthquakes.

FOCUS plans to expand its team of CERTs in Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and Tajikistan; strengthen stockpiles of vital supplies that may have been depleted due to recent disasters, train FOCUS staff globally in the incident command system model to enable effective, efficient incident management by integrating a combination of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications operating within a common organisational structure.

FOCUS will also further strengthen its external relationships and partnerships with the governments and local communities within the countries of its operation to respond to disasters effectively.



Women learn about hazards prone to their village, Afghanistan



School children experience the tremors of an earthquake simulator, Pakistan



Installation of an early warning system, Tajikistan



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