



FOCUS HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE
An Affiliate of the Aga Khan Development Network

FOCUS

Global Newsletter

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Editors' Message

Welcome to the 6th edition of the global newsletter!

Volunteerism represents an aspect of humanness that is often overlooked in a world where we are surrounded by stories of disaster and tragedy. In this issue we feature three of our volunteers who, after an intensive two-year training and selection process, have recently become members of FOCUS Europe's Search and Rescue Team (SART). They are part of a vast volunteer network that forms the core of our organisation, and allows us to fulfill our objective of reducing the scale of damage caused by natural disasters. They are on the frontlines in the event of a disaster, the first responders who make the difference that saves lives. It is inspiring to see individuals of all ages, from all backgrounds choosing to devote their time and effort towards the assistance of those in need, sometimes even at the risk of their own lives. Thank you volunteers, for all the sacrifices you have made, and motivating us with your dedication.

Our mission is to limit the magnitude of disaster through Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) initiatives, which have proven successful during the recent drought in Afghanistan and the Tajikistan avalanches. However, we strongly believe in the need to continuously improve and increase the efficiency of our work, and to this end FOCUS engages in collaborations with several external DRR-related organisations, thereby enhancing the skills of staff and volunteers.

It is the continuous generosity and assistance of our donors, friends, and wonderful staff and volunteers that makes this work possible. Thank you so much for all your support!

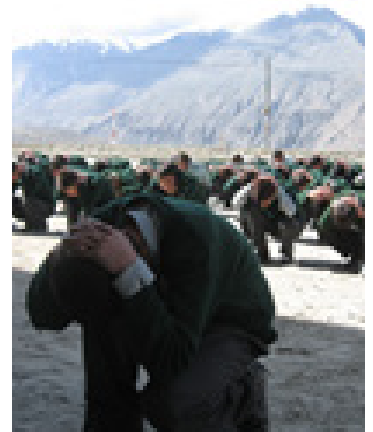
Warmest regards,
The FOCUS Global Newsletter Team

Celebrating School Safety Day

Ensuring the safety of children at schools is one of the primary objectives of FOCUS, and is often featured in our newsletters. This year in Pakistan, the development of school safety programmes have been enacted at the national level. One of the undertakings of FOCUS Pakistan and the Aga Khan Planning and Building Services Pakistan was an international conference on school safety, held in May 2008. The conference established a road map for future DRR ventures in schools across Pakistan, and several projects, such as the retrofitting of schools, are now underway as a consequence of those discussions. Furthermore, 16 May was declared as National School Safety day, which is

now celebrated annually, serving as a reminder of the need for constant vigilance and preparedness. This year, school safety day was marked across the Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan with government patronage and in partnership with other awareness programmes in the different districts of the region. Events were also held in the cities of Chitral and Karachi. In the capital city of Islamabad, FOCUS organised a National School Safety seminar where experts and practitioners from various organisations addressed key topics. Speakers at the conference included Dr. Zafar Iqbal Qadri, chairman of the National Disaster Management Authority, who stated his appreciation for the Aga Khan Development

Network's school safety initiative, and highlighted how the application of the efforts on a federal level would go a long way to protect children from the detrimental effects of natural disasters.



Children participating in an earthquake drill. Photo: FOCUS

The Spirit of Volunteerism

FOCUS Europe is proud to introduce our three newest Search and Rescue Team (SART) members: Selina Ransome (SR), Abbas Dhanani (AD) and Aliyah Kurji (AK). They have just completed two years of intense training and now join our existing team to be on call in the event of an international disaster. We spoke to Aliyah, Abbas and Selina to find out what motivated them to make search and rescue a part of their lives.

FE: What is your motivation for being involved in FOCUS?

AK: I have previously participated in Hike4Life and have been on the FOCUS National Committee, and so have done a lot of fundraising and awareness building. However I wanted to be more hands on and help people who are affected by disasters. It's unfortunate that those people happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time through no fault of their own. This experience has helped me learn so much more about FOCUS and the world of disaster relief and

recovery, as well as teaching me the practicalities of working in tense political environments.

FE: How tough was Phase 2 of the selection process?

AK: It was five days of living as if we were actually in a disaster. We only had six hours of sleep in total and hardly any food. It was much tougher than I imagined and the gale force winds and heavy rain didn't help! 12 of us were being assessed and there were over 100 people behind the scenes making it

happen. As well as testing our core skills, our endurance and patience were pushed to the limits.

FE: How would you describe your SART experience?

SR: It's been a huge learning curve, which I've thoroughly enjoyed. Every month we learn tonnes of new things. It's ironic how I don't even own a hammer, and yet I use an industrial strength disc cutter during training.

FE: What is it like to be part of such a dedicated team?

SR: It's incredible how everyone started with such basic knowledge, and now we are ready to be deployed - the breadth of knowledge across the team is phenomenal and everyone has a real sense of responsibility for each other. It is incredible what your mind and body can do when it has to, and the Phase 2 assessment showed us what we are capable of achieving.

FE: How do you feel now that you have passed?

AD: After being selected from more than 900 applicants and then battling through two years of intense training, failing my final assessment was not an option. It's a great honour to have passed, and to be working alongside some of the most courageous and skilled people you're ever likely to meet, such as firemen with 20 years of experience. Although the last two years have been formidable; with the sleep deprivation, the freezing weather and the unending exertion, I've enjoyed (almost!) every minute.



From L to R: Aliyah Kurji, Abbas Dhanani, Selina Ransome.
Photo: FOCUS

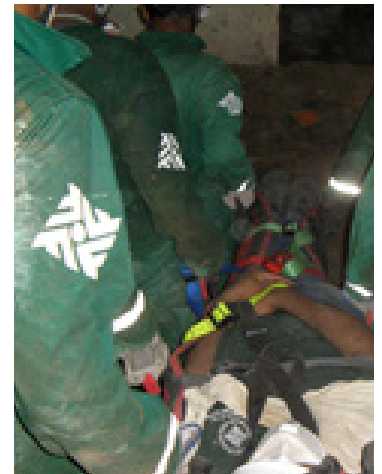
Training SART Members in India

The FOCUS India SART is a highly skilled special response unit made up of 28 first responders from various regions in India. The majority of the SART members are community volunteers who have undergone a demanding selection process and completed intensive trainings based on simulated real life scenarios to aid practical learning. Along with its ongoing commitment to develop disaster resilience, FOCUS India is in the process of significantly enhancing this capability with the procurement of additional equipment, and training more of its members in these life saving skills. Recently, in collaboration with Rescue and Preparedness

in Disaster UK, FOCUS India organised a seven-day refresher training on Water Rescue and Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) for its SART members. Twenty-three members were trained in Water Rescue with the aim to reduce the number of water related accidents and deaths by providing safety education and awareness, demonstrating techniques such as swift water rescue, rescue site organisation, use of personal protective equipment and recovery services. An additional 21 SART members were trained in USAR with the aim to further strengthen their response capacities by using innovative equipment such as the Vibra Phone, Snake Eye Camera, and by learning to

set up a Base of Operations and using International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (an international network of disaster-prone and disaster-responding countries dedicated to developing and strengthening USAR techniques) marking. "This training has enabled me to contribute to society and protect the lives of my family, friends, neighbours and the community in the event of a disaster situation. I feel proud to be associated with an organisation that aims to create a safety net for communities", said Aftab Dhanani (27), SART member, Yavatmal, India. Trained SART members will also be assigned the responsibility of educating

local communities, creating a cadre of volunteers that would then be the first responders in a disaster situation.



SART members rescuing a victim from a collapsed building during USAR training. Photo: Gillian Dacey

Building Bridges



Tine Rossing, Global Coordinator for Climate Change Adaptation at CARE International. Photo: Hakam Bhaloo

Reaching out to like-minded organisations and individuals continues to provide us with many excellent opportunities for networking and knowledge sharing. Three recent examples are:

External Speaker:

Tine Rossing, CARE International Global coordinator on climate change adaptation, spoke at the Ismaili Centre Burnaby, as part of a speaker series on how climate change is already having a profound impact on the livelihoods and food security of people in the developing world, particularly women and the poor. In addition to climate change-triggered natural disasters, subtle changes such as rising temperatures and shifts in the timing or rate of annual average rainfalls are affecting land productivity. Poverty, poor governance and the inequitable distribution of resources further limit the adaptation capacities of

Aiding Drought-Affected in Afghanistan

Food insecurity in Afghanistan is a consequence of short and long-term factors such as a lack of agricultural input, hazard damage, weak markets, unemployment, crop and livestock disease and environmental degradation. In 2008, Afghanistan suffered from a major drought, which was then further aggravated by the rise of global food prices. Last year, once again, a drought resulted in crop failure across the north of the country, and an estimated two million people are currently experiencing severe food shortages along with a loss of income. In order to survive until the next harvest, families resort to solutions that often harm their long-term economic prospects. One farmer in Badakhshan reports, "I used to collect 700-1050 kg of wheat, but last year I only managed to collect 70-140 kg of very poor quality wheat. We don't have any other source

of income in the village and had to sell our capital such as animals and trees, and borrow cash and food from neighbouring villages, which is very difficult to repay." In order to overcome the food gap and prevent households from selling their assets, FOCUS, in partnership with the World Food Program and the United States Agency for International Development is distributing food (including wheat, pulses, oil and salt) to over 100,000 vulnerable people across the northern provinces of Badakhshan, Baghlan, Takhar and Kunduz. In order to meet the health and nutritional needs of pregnant/lactating women and young children, supplementary food is also being distributed through Aga Khan Health Services clinics as part of this programme. The Aga Khan Foundation, alongside other like-minded organisations, hosted an

the affected people. Ms. Rossing described how CARE assists farmers by employing various methods, including a community-based adaptation strategy, which provides advice on how some of these effects can be mitigated by switching to more climate resilient crops, income diversification and capacity building.

Training Session:

For a number of years, FOCUS Canada has been a member of the Policy Action Group on Emergency Response (PAGER), an informal forum of operational Canadian humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organisations whose mandate primarily involves responding to humanitarian emergencies worldwide. In March 2012, FOCUS Canada hosted a two-day training session for PAGER members in Toronto on the Sphere Handbook. The handbook is one of the most

widely known and recognised sets of common principles and universal minimum standards in the live-saving areas of humanitarian response. The training involved group learning and case studies, where topics included a review of existing and new standards in food, nutrition, health, camps, shelter, water and sanitation.

Collaboration:

One of FOCUS' priorities for the next ten years is to establish collaborative relationships with external agencies in order to develop integrated DRR policies. Discussions were held with Emergency Social Services, British Columbia and the Red Cross (Ontario Zone) on simulations, human resources and technical expertise that can be applied both in Canada and internationally. Stay tuned for further news on this exciting new programme!

international conference entitled "Strategies for Development and Food Security in the Mountainous Areas of Central Asia" in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. As a result of these discussions, we are in the process of implementing projects that

include the promotion of interregional coordination in agricultural research, which encourages investment in diversified and stable food crops, and increasing the level of community involvement in this process.



An Afghan farmer receiving food aid. Photo: FOCUS

Responding to Avalanches in Khorog, Tajikistan

The World Bank reports that Tajikistan has experienced its harshest winter in over 50 years, with unusually low temperatures accompanied by heavy snowfalls. According to the Committee of Emergency Situations and Civil Defence, more than 155 natural disasters in the form of floods, earthquakes and avalanches were recorded from February to April in 2012.

On the evening of 15 March, heavy snowfall began and continued through the night. FOCUS staff, concerned by the possibility of avalanches mobilised its Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) to issue an evacuation

advisory to residents living in high-risk zones. Within two hours, the first avalanche hit Khorog, high up in the Pamir Mountains. Over the next four days, 52 avalanches struck Gorno-Badakhshan, 19 of them in residential areas, damaging and destroying several houses, footbridges and other infrastructure. The subsequent snowmelt resulted in multiple mudflows. Qasoyov Suraj, whose house was partially damaged, expressed his gratitude to the FOCUS-trained CERTs. "It would have been impossible to cope with that amount of snow without FOCUS and its teams. The CERTs helped clear

up the snow and assisted with the rehabilitation of my house too."

One neighbourhood managed to avoid the fury of the avalanches altogether due to a mitigation initiative carried out in 2009 under the Disaster Preparedness European Community Humanitarian Office (DIPECHO) V project. The terrace hill slope and protective wall that were constructed as part of this project sheltered households that were directly in the path of the avalanche, allowing them to escape unscathed. An essential part of DRR is learning from incidents such as these, which we follow-

up with a data analysis and assessment process that can supplement future response efforts. Furthermore, in conjunction with DIPECHO and Project PAMIR (Poverty Alleviation through Mitigation of Integrated High Mountain Risk) we are working on developing hazard maps for 57 villages. FOCUS, in collaboration with Disaster Risk Management Initiative, has identified an avalanche expert to understand avalanche risk, mitigation techniques, as well as how to monitor avalanches using the latest technologies. This will help to inform FOCUS' future programming in this area.

Volunteers in Action

Volunteers on the FOCUS Regional Disaster Management Teams (RDMTs) like to say they have more than a 24/7 job. As Navid Kapadia, Data Collection and Implementation Lead on the Southeast United States RDMT says, "We are on the lookout 25/8."

At 4:00 PM on Monday, 30 April 2011, Southeast RDMTs Communication and Monitoring Lead, Saleem Dellawalla, received notification via a state-wide alert that the Mississippi River

faced imminent flooding. Immediately, the RDMT-trained volunteers were mobilised in Tennessee, Arkansas and Mississippi. A team of 12 Atlanta-based volunteers, working closely with FOCUS staff operated in high emergency mode. They utilised resources and launched an extensive call, text and data management campaign. Within a short period of 48 hours, families in the affected areas had been contacted and assigned to host families who

provided them with shelter, route plans and resources in the interim.

"I volunteered a year and a half ago, and we have practised for an emergency ever since," said Shams Madhani, Cluster Management Lead. "So when we were notified of the floods, we put these tools into action." The Mississippi River did not crest until nine days later, and volunteers had ample time to make arrangements for the affected families. The floods also allowed

FOCUS to test its systems in a previously untested area and thus be prepared for future emergencies.

"When we got that call, it did not matter what was happening in our own lives," recalls Saleem, "Everyone's goal was the safety of potential victims." The volunteerism and citizenship displayed during the Mississippi floods show the critical role that RDMTs and CERTs play in ensuring the safety of communities in which we live.



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FOCUS International

789 Don Mills Road, Suite 201 Toronto, ON M3C 1T5, Canada
Tel: +1 416 422 0177
ficc@focushumanitarian.org

FOCUS Afghanistan

House 42, Street 02, Qala-e-Fatullah, Kabul, Afghanistan
Tel: +93 79 934 5001
focusafghanistan@focushumanitarian.org

FOCUS Canada

789 Don Mills Road, Suite 201, Toronto, ON M3C 1T5, Canada
Tel: +1 416 423 7988
focuscanada@focushumanitarian.org

FOCUS Europe

205-209 Addiscombe Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 6SP, UK
Tel: +44 20 8654 6131
focus europe@focushumanitarian.org

FOCUS India

305, Maker Bhavan No. 3, 21, New Marine Lines, Mumbai 400020, India
Tel: +91 22 220 17175 / 326 63549
focusindia@focushumanitarian.org

FOCUS Pakistan

Level 9 Serena Business Complex, Khayaban-e-Suhrawardy, Islamabad, Pakistan
Tel: +92 512 072 500-30
focuspakistan@focushumanitarian.org

FOCUS Tajikistan

137 Rudaki Avenue, Tajikmatlubot, 4th Floor, 734003, Dushanbe, Tajikistan
Tel: +992 (37) 221 9830 / 224 7650
focustajikistan@focushumanitarian.org

FOCUS USA

1700 First Colony Blvd, Suite 300, Sugar Land, TX 77479, USA
Tel: +1 800 423 7972
focususa@focushumanitarian.org