

CERTS and local volunteers are also trained in managing early warning systems such as Codan Ham Radios Systems. FOCUS installed a Codan radio in Murgab, Gorno Badakshan, Tajikistan to pre-warn villagers residing in the remote mountainous areas of any potential hazards.



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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.

regularly trained by FOCUS subject matter experts. Since the formation of CERTs, the vulnerability of many communities has been remarkably reduced.

### Resettlement and Repatriation

Since 1994, FOCUS has sought to assist people affected by displacement. Following serious civil conflict in countries such as Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Kosovo, FOCUS facilitated the relocation of communities to Canada, Germany, India, Pakistan and Russia.

FOCUS has supported resettlement programmes for newly arrived communities to re-establish themselves and their families with dignity, largely through its widespread volunteer network in the Ismaili community.

Programmes have included components to assist with cultural acclimatisation, such as language classes, vocational training courses for men and women as well as education development and local community orientation.

Such programmes are often facilitated with formal partnerships with governments and other international organisations.

As FOCUS moves forward, it continues to strengthen its expertise in effective crisis response and disaster risk management. It will also continue to work in partnership with communities in hazard-prone regions to ensure their increased resiliency to natural disasters.

### Organisation

In each country of operation, FOCUS is incorporated as a registered charity or a not-for-profit organisation and is governed by a voluntary board. An international secretariat (Global Office) provides coordination on strategic and operational activities.

FOCUS offices are staffed by professionals from the humanitarian, emergency response and disaster risk reduction sectors. They serve as the primary implementers of disaster risk reduction programmes and response operations. Thousands of volunteers around the world support FOCUS' programmes, emergency response and preparedness initiatives, as well as its fundraising and awareness events.



## FOCUS HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

An Affiliate of the Aga Khan Development Network

[www.akdn.org/focus](http://www.akdn.org/focus)

## HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE



## Crisis Response and Disaster Risk Reduction: An Overview of Focus Humanitarian Assistance (FOCUS)

Focus Humanitarian Assistance (FOCUS) is an international crisis response and disaster risk management agency. It provides emergency relief to communities suffering from natural disasters or man-made crises. FOCUS implements Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) programmes in areas vulnerable to natural hazards and engages in resettlement and reintegration programmes for populations displaced by civil instability or conflict.

As an affiliate of the Aga Khan Development Network (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 also works with numerous like-minded agencies and donor partners, including government, multi-lateral and bi-lateral agencies, as well as corporations

that share an interest in helping affected communities reduce their dependence on humanitarian assistance and facilitating the transition to self-reliance. Partners include the Government of Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). FOCUS was founded in 1994 by the Ismaili community under the guidance of His Highness the Aga Khan and has operational offices in Central and South Asia, Europe and North America.

### Objectives

**FOCUS seeks to:**

- Anticipate disasters by identifying natural hazards and training professionals and volunteers to address them;

- Enable relief by assessing the immediate needs of those affected by disaster and providing essentials such as food, health care, clothing and temporary shelter;
- Help resettlement by assisting displaced persons in specific situations regain self-reliance whilst retaining their dignity.

Over the past decade, FOCUS has evolved beyond crisis mode operations into strategic disaster risk management programming. The risk management strategy includes comprehensive risk assessment, with both scientific and social vulnerability analyses and corresponding risk reduction programming.

The following is FOCUS' methodology for Disaster Risk Management, Preparedness and Response programmes:

FOCUS delivers aid by boat to reach remote communities affected by the Attabad Landslide, Hunza Valley, Pakistan.



Through DRR initiatives, FOCUS facilitates gender-inclusive environments by empowering women to enhance community resilience. In India, FOCUS aims to train at least 30% of women as Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) volunteers every year. Additionally, in Pakistan and Tajikistan, FOCUS is working diligently to ensure that women are not only being trained, but are also equipped with the skills to become team leaders.

*“...I have an important role to play, which provides safety to the community in my region, especially to the women and girls. With direction from the FOCUS team and a series of sensitisation and awareness programmes, I managed to form a group of committed Disaster Management Deputies and CERT members.”*

— Reshma Keshwani, RCC - Southern India.

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|------------------|--|
| HVRA             | • Hazard, Vulnerability and Risk Assessment and Mapping of Communities   |
| VDMP             | • Village Disaster Management Plan includes evacuation procedures and mitigation projects  |
| Mitigation       | • Implementation of School and Hospital Safety programmes, facility assessments and management of small structural and retrofit projects           |
| EWS              | • Early Warning Systems and basic weather monitoring systems   |
| Public Education | • On-going delivery of seasonally relevant awareness through local civil society organisations and schools to ensure knowledge of relevant hazards |
| Preparedness     | • Emergency response training to develop CERTs, SARTs and DARTs; including access to stockpiles, safe havens and shelters                          |

### Crisis Response

FOCUS' primary engagement is in crisis response and the provision of emergency humanitarian relief to communities in need, primarily in the developing world.

FOCUS aims to save lives, reduce suffering and provide support in the immediate aftermath of a natural or man-made disaster. FOCUS also responds to on-going natural hazards that cause particular damage and destruction to remote mountain communities. Seasonal events such as spring flash flooding or winter avalanches in northern Afghanistan, Tajikistan or the Northern Areas of Pakistan affect hundreds of communities by cutting off vital transport and communication links and also hinder access to emergency support. Since 1994, FOCUS has responded to the emergency needs of communities who have suffered from the devastating effects of hurricanes, cyclones, avalanches, tsunami, flooding, earthquakes and civil conflict.

FOCUS has mobilised volunteers to facilitate humanitarian operations in countries including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Madagascar, Mozambique, Pakistan, Portugal, Syria, Tajikistan and USA.

Globally, FOCUS has experience in mobilising a volunteer and professional force totalling over 400 permanent staff

and over 46,000 CERT (Community Emergency Response teams) volunteers. Working through local volunteers capitalises on the local knowledge, cultural awareness, language and community understanding, strengthening its ability to respond to the complexities of crises.

In addition to CERTs, FOCUS has trained Search and Rescue Teams (SARTs) and Disaster Assessment Response Teams (DARTs) and deploys these teams along with volunteer manpower to assist in the coordination of humanitarian response operations before advanced levels of assistance arrive.

### Disaster Risk Reduction

An important area of FOCUS' work concentrates on community-based disaster risk reduction initiatives. Efforts to increase awareness of disaster risks in communities living in both urban and rural areas aim to strengthen the capabilities of populations to be better prepared and more resilient against the natural hazards prevalent in their respective regions.

As part of the disaster risk reduction process, FOCUS facilitates small-scale mitigation projects such as building flood retaining walls, reinforcing foot and vehicle bridges and creating irrigation channels.

In partnership with local communities, FOCUS has also retrofitted vulnerable

buildings in regions of seismic risk such as schools and health facilities as well as built evacuation paths, safe havens and created stockpiles of vital supplies for use by local communities.

Efforts to better prepare families and communities against disasters include conducting hazard vulnerability risk assessments (HVRAs), drawing up village disaster management plans (VDMPs), holding simulation exercises and installing early warning systems (EWS) and monitoring systems.

Disaster preparedness education and on-going awareness activities are central to FOCUS' programmes, especially in regions of disaster risk. FOCUS works with communities and institutions in schools, health centres, civil society organisations and local civic authorities to ensure disaster awareness training and education reaches all levels of the community.

The combination of hazard vulnerability risk assessments, village disaster management plans, early warning systems / monitoring systems, public education and the physical response capabilities of CERTs, SARTs, DARTs, safe havens and stockpiles, enable FOCUS to deliver a complete and robust response effort while developing as much resilience as possible within a village or community.

### Community Response – Afghanistan

Lari Babaji village is in a remote mountainous area of Dushi District in Bhaglan province of Afghanistan, which has been affected by flooding for many years. Most inhabitants are farmers. The closest school and village are in another village 4km away.

FOCUS undertook a HVRA exercise in Lari Babaji, which demonstrated that the three main flooding channels when at high intensity cause frequent inundations that threaten the villagers' lives and property. Sparse local resources make it difficult to prevent potential and existing damage. This



led FOCUS to establish a CERT comprised of 14 male and 10 female local community members trained in rescue procedures, first aid provision and casualty management.

### Mitigation – Tajikistan

Over a span of five days in mid-March 2012, heavy snowfalls led to 52 avalanches, of which 19 were in residential areas of Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast. The avalanches destroyed several houses, footbridges and other key infrastructure and the loss of one life. In one neighbourhood where an anti-avalanche terracing hill slope and protective wall project was implemented by the Disaster Preparedness Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department of the European Commission (DIPECHO V), six households located in the avalanches path were sheltered from the damage and the families assets and livelihoods were protected. The seven DIPECHO projects have built the capacity of over 71,000 beneficiaries including communities, government and FOCUS staff.

### School Safety – India

In a bid to build preparedness and safety measures in regions prone to disasters, FOCUS collaborated with the Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority to conduct training on the earthquake Shakeout drill with representatives of 400 schools across the districts of Kutch and Jamnagar. After the training, the drill was conducted and information shared on how to be prepared when an earthquake strikes with a number of schools benefitting 87,300 children.

### Harnessing Capacities in DRR – Pakistan

In Pakistan, community based emergency response and disaster assessment response teams are the backbone of daily responses to natural hazards across the country. The Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) has declared FOCUS as a pioneer in the field of Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction Management (CBDRM). FOCUS has established 152 CERTs across Pakistan, which is comprised of volunteers who are

*“I am also concerned there is still too little attention being paid to design for communities to protect residents from the effects of earthquakes, many of them in remote rural areas. Two million people died as a result of earthquakes in the last century and 100 million were severely affected. There are vast populations that live in seismic-sensitive high-mountain areas where we must focus attention...”*

— His Highness the Aga Khan, speaking at the Aga Khan Scully Seminar, Washington DC, USA, 26 January 2005.

Every year, hundreds of schoolchildren undergo earthquake and disaster awareness training in Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and Tajikistan. In India, schoolchildren prepare school disaster management plans, learnings of which are shared with their families.