



FOCUS HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE



AN AFFILIATE OF THE AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

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*The South Asia earthquake in 2005 devastated the mountainous city of Balakot in Pakistan-administered Kashmir*

“World communications beam instantly around the globe the image of death and misery—of earthquakes, tsunami, plague, and of man-made disaster of violence and hatred. For a time, they capture the world’s attention and generosity. Governments, themselves overwhelmed, do their best and carry most of the burden of the basic recovery. But they and the world’s donors must very often look to existing, specialised, non governmental organisations that have the knowledge, professional manpower and experience to respond to the great array of ills that follow social trauma.”

*His Highness the Aga Khan, Convocation of the Aga Khan University Karachi, Pakistan, 3 December 2005*

## INTRODUCTION

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 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 and the AKDN agencies also collaborate to provide health and livelihood recovery and rehabilitation initiatives for vulnerable groups during protracted crises.

FOCUS was founded in 1994 by the Ismaili community under the guidance of His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan, the 49<sup>th</sup> hereditary Imam of the Shi'a Imami Ismaili Muslims. Currently, FOCUS has operational offices in Central and South Asia, Europe and North America.

The organisation's approach to its work is philosophically rooted in the ethical values and traditions of the Islamic faith, emphasising an ethic of compassion and care for those most in need.

Central to FOCUS' work is the aim to reduce human suffering and ensure community dignity is maintained as the aftermath of a disaster is endured.

The AKDN is a group of development agencies with mandates ranging from health and education to architecture, culture, microfinance, rural development, disaster reduction, the promotion of private-sector enterprise and the revitalisation of historic cities. For more information on AKDN, please visit [www.akdn.org](http://www.akdn.org)

*Under FOCUS' Milk Programme, milk was delivered daily to the border districts of Afghanistan. Milk provided daily nutrition to schoolchildren and staff and also increased the number of girls attending school.*



## 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. 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.

In addition to large-scale crises that reach the international media, FOCUS also responds to ongoing 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.

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

Where community volunteers have been trained, FOCUS deploys search and rescue teams, local first response teams and volunteer manpower to assist in the coordination of humanitarian response operations before advanced levels of assistance arrive.



*Top: Aga Khan Foundation helicopters were vital in enabling FOCUS to deliver humanitarian relief to remote mountain communities following the Kashmir earthquake in 2005*

*Bottom: Loading food and other supplies for families affected by severe flooding in Mozambique in 2004*

## CRISIS RESPONSE

Vital supplies such as safe drinking water, temporary shelter, high nutrition foods, warm clothing, blankets and basic household items are amongst the relief items that FOCUS may distribute to those most in need. Procurement and distributions are often organised in collaboration with other agencies and non-governmental organisations operating in the region of impact.

A longer-term commitment to humanitarian assistance was made in Badakhshan—a mountainous province of Northern Afghanistan. Following the fall of the Taliban regime, immediate relief and recovery efforts were vital to the lives of remote communities living at high altitudes on the border with Tajikistan.

Food assistance, provided through food for work programmes, contributed to community livelihoods and were supported by the Canadian International Development Agency and the United Nation's World Food Programme.

In collaboration with the Afghanistan Ministry of Health and UN agencies such as UNICEF and WHO, FOCUS provided nutrition and emergency health care support including an immunization service to remote underserved communities in line with national policy.

Infrastructure rehabilitation included road and bridge reconstruction as well as the rehabilitation of schools and health care facilities.

*FOCUS staff in Gujarat distribute basic supplies to families affected by heavy rains and flooding in India*



## A TRADITION OF VOLUNTEERISM



*FOCUS volunteers around the world play a vital role in organising emergency supplies to be collected, individually packed, loaded onto donkeys, helicopters, lorries, or boats for safe delivery to communities in need*

An integral strength to FOCUS is its international volunteer network. This dedicated human resource can be mobilised to assist FOCUS crisis response operations especially at short notice.

FOCUS is able to rely on community volunteer manpower to assist in packing, delivering and distributing emergency relief items to those in need. Leveraging local volunteer resources facilitates the speed of relief operations in a disaster-hit region, and importantly, capitalises on the use of local knowledge including terrain and language familiarity, cultural awareness and community understanding.

### STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES THROUGH VOLUNTEER TRAINING

As part of its endeavour to foster disaster resilient communities, FOCUS invests in training volunteer community members to be part of emergency first response teams in their local regions.

In the Northern Areas of Pakistan, in collaboration with specialist organisations, FOCUS has trained and developed volunteer capacity in search and rescue, information and communication, disaster assessment as well as active local emergency response teams.

Additionally in Canada, India, Tajikistan and USA, community volunteers have been trained in implementing preparedness measures, to utilise basic technical skills and disaster communication skills to enable an efficient community-based response following a crisis.

In Europe, FOCUS is working towards developing a highly trained, volunteer international search and rescue team to be deployed at any given time.

## DISASTER RISK REDUCTION



*Top: In high mountain areas of Badakhshan, Tajikistan, FOCUS works with local communities to build irrigation channels, pathways, and other structural mitigation projects to protect communities from the effects of avalanches, flooding, mud slides and rock falls*

*Bottom: In high altitude areas of Pakistan, FOCUS holds simulation exercises with specialist partner organisations to ensure its search and rescue team have updated skills and are ready for deployment at any time*

A significant 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 local capabilities of populations to be better prepared and more resilient against the natural hazards prevalent in their respective regions.

One important activity in Tajikistan has been the installation of high frequency CODAN radios and training community members to operate them. Operators are able to relay critical and timely information about local hazards across the mountainous region and request help where necessary. In addition, FOCUS has worked to train government personnel especially within the Ministry of Emergency Situations and Civil Defense (MoESCD), to cope with disasters through information management and capacity building initiatives.

In collaboration with international and local disaster preparedness organisations, government departments, communities in schools, hospitals and civil society institutions, FOCUS has facilitated numerous disaster risk reduction projects, particularly in South and Central Asia.

AKDN and FOCUS have developed a strategic risk management approach with disaster risk reduction measures at the core. The overarching goal is to enhance the state of preparedness among disaster-prone communities.

Disaster preparedness education, specialist training and awareness initiatives include small-scale mitigation projects at all levels of community and institutional structure.

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 relocated 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 drawing up disaster management plans and holding simulation exercises in schools and hospitals.

Disaster preparedness education and ongoing 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.

Many of the community-based disaster preparedness initiatives undertaken by FOCUS are supported through development and humanitarian agencies such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office and Disaster Preparedness Office (ECHO and DIPECHO), the Japanese Social Development Fund (JSDF), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), as well as several United Nations agencies and other organisations.

*In Europe, a volunteer search and rescue team practice handling casualties. The team undergo vigorous training exercises as part of their certification process.*



# HUMANITARIAN RESPONSES OVER THE LAST 15 YEARS



Food assistance to communities who lost crops after forest fires in Seia, Portugal



Basic supplies to displaced families arriving at a camp in Jordan after the second Gulf war



Clothing to families who lost their possessions during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita



Unloading tents for displaced families crossing the Syrian border during the Lebanon crisis



Receiving food and basic household supplies after severe flooding in Mozambique



Humanitarian relief flown in by helicopter to communities affected by Cyclone Gafilo in Madagascar

Efforts to better prepare families and communities against disasters, include drawing up disaster management plans and holding simulation exercises in schools and hospitals.



*Distributing vital supplies to families to survive the harsh winter after a large earthquake in Nahrin, Afghanistan*



*The South Asia earthquake flattened the city of Balakot in Pakistan-administered Kashmir*



*In Indian-administered Kashmir, emergency supplies were delivered to isolated villages after the South Asia earthquake*



*Ensuring displaced survivors of the Gujarat earthquake had safe drinking water*



*Humanitarian relief to Indian Ocean Tsunami survivors in Andhra Pradesh included clothing as well as other essential items*



*Volunteers packing food items for families following Ogní Cyclone*

## DISASTER PREPAREDNESS



Top: Through the Andhra Pradesh Relief to Development Project, FOCUS works with communities to foster disaster resilient environments. One initiative is the building of boathouses to protecting fishing boats from future damage.

Opposite top: Female members of a FOCUS community response team in Chitral. Both females as well as males are encouraged to participate in community-based training to prepare themselves for potential hazards.

Opposite bottom: Community members receive training in first aid and handling casualties in Badakhshan, Tajikistan

### INDIA

Among the regions affected by the Indian Ocean Tsunami, were remote villages in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. Through the support of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), a multi-year, multi-million dollar programme aiming to provide relief and development to coastal communities is being implemented by FOCUS and agencies of the AKDN. The programme aims to enhance the state of resilience and preparedness in fifteen villages, benefitting a population of 16,000. The programme also seeks to develop capacity in community-based institutions to facilitate the growth of better protected communities.

#### *Sanjeev's Story*

*Twenty-year old Sanjeev is a fisherman. He and a group of others from his village are trying to cope as best they can to return to a normal life. The tsunami had devastating effects on his village in the Nagayalanka mandal (sub-district), the second most affected mandal in the Krishna district. The look of fear is still visible in his eyes as he describes the destructive wave that hit his village. His voice heightens as he talks about the most recent disaster – a cyclone. Coastal areas are prone to such hazards. Still mourning the death of his sister, and dealing with the loss of his fishing livelihood, his home and possessions, Sanjeev also looks to non-governmental agencies for hope to re-build his life. Through a FOCUS and CIDA partnership, Sanjeev and other villages are being trained to develop village disaster management plans to identify vulnerable areas, plan safe evacuation routes and establish multi-purpose cyclone shelters to house safety equipment and communications systems.*



## PAKISTAN

In Pakistan, FOCUS engages in community preparedness in urban and rural environments and has specific expertise in high altitude areas. FOCUS trains men and women in a variety of integral preparedness and technical skills to enable communities to be equipped to save lives and be better able to respond to natural hazards, safely and effectively.

### *Asham Bibi's Story*

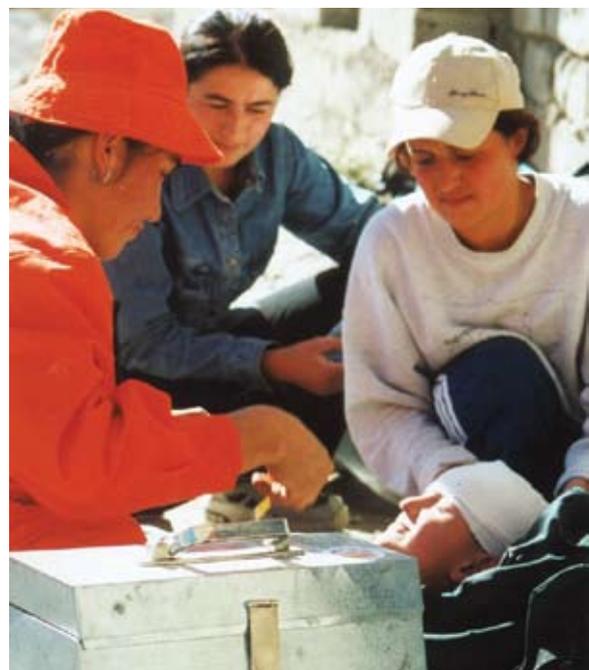
*A mother of two young children, Asham Bibi is team leader of the information unit of a Community Emergency Response Team in Baghust, Chitral. From her FOCUS training, Ashan Bibi had come to learn that the pastures near her home were prone to snow avalanches at the start of spring, so when families began to settle there with their livestock, she realised they were on a dangerous path. Asham Bibi asked her father-in-law to visit the families on her behalf and persuade them to move. Initially they were reluctant to move, however when Asham Bibi's father-in-law told them she was a FOCUS trained CERT team leader, they accepted his warning and moved, leaving their livestock behind. As fate would have it, that same night there was an avalanche. It destroyed livestock and property, but due to Asham Bibi's timely warning, no lives were lost. Asham Bibi feels that without her training from FOCUS, she would not have known about the local dangers and she is now known as a life saver.*

## TAJIKISTAN

In landlocked Tajikistan, FOCUS drives a broad spectrum of disaster risk reduction activities. These range from disaster awareness seminars, training and education for village communities, schools and hospitals, to enhancing awareness and building risk management capacity in government institutions and other organisations. FOCUS uses geographic information systems and risk modelling to enable communities to be aware of local hazards and plan to avert such disasters affecting local populations.

### *Shabnam's Story*

*Shabnam, 18, is from Shujand village in Rushan, Badakhshan. "I know I live in one of the most hazardous villages in the Bartang valley. Mudflows occur very often. Last year, when I was at school, we had lessons from FOCUS about disaster preparedness. I learned that we should not be afraid of mudflows and landslides, but we should prepare ourselves for when they come, and then we will be able to save many lives. After this, I agreed with my family to walk 5 km every day to learn how to rescue myself, my family and neighbours quickly and safely. The most important thing I learned was first aid skills. My father is old and often sick and needs support during disasters. We also have many small children in our village and I feel it is now my responsibility to help them during such times."*



## RESETTLEMENT AND REPATRIATION



*Youth from Afghanistan, newly-arrived in Quebec, Canada look to the future with a renewed sense of hope and opportunity*

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, such as the protocols of agreement signed by the Quebec government in Canada between 1992 and 2001 to assist the resettlement of over 1,600 Afghan refugees in the province of Quebec.

*Young children and adults actively engaged in education and re-training*



FOCUS' repatriation programme commenced in 2002 and lasted several years. It facilitated the safe return to Afghanistan, of families who had been displaced by civil conflict and instability.

Nearly 8,000 families voluntarily returned to various parts of Afghanistan.

In the northern province of Badakhshan, FOCUS implemented vocational and on-the-job-training to over 1,200 individuals, including 700 women in a variety of disciplines. The training aimed to enhance skills for employment and income generation and to aid effective reintegration into Afghan society. In addition, community caseworkers helped thousands of Afghan returnees access AKDN-established health care facilities and education programmes.

In close collaboration with the US Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, FOCUS facilitated the building and rehabilitation of more than 7,800 seismically resistant homes. Families also received training in earthquake reinforcement methodologies, as well as health and hygiene awareness.

These efforts were complemented with community-based road, water and sanitation reconstruction projects in collaboration with agencies of the AKDN in Afghanistan.

Currently, FOCUS is researching and compiling best practices in the field of community resettlement and repatriation in collaboration with academic and other not-for-profit organisations.

*Returnees to Afghanistan work together to build temporary housing in Badakhshan Afghanistan, under the FOCUS-UNHCR programme*

*Vocational training included culturally appropriate skills such as dressmaking for women. This allowed females to contribute to family income on their return to Afghanistan.*



## 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 provides coordination for 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.

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United States Agency for International Development  
United States Department of Agriculture  
United States Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration  
University of Central Asia  
World Health Organisation



FOCUS HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

## THE SYMBOL

The symbol of Focus Humanitarian Assistance (FOCUS) is built around the human figure, reaching out to four points of the compass from the centre, and communicating the institution's mandate and geographic diversity. A repeat pattern of a caring gesture—extending arms—lends harmony and unity to the human contour defined by the elongated “F” shape. The four triangular forms rotate around a common centre and indicate the active nature of the institution creating an image of motion.

## IMAGE CREDITS

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