Mission EAST

FOCUS

Women leading development in Afghanistan
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After decades of Soviet rule and then civil war Tajikistan remains an impoverished country with a government which cannot cater for the welfare of all. Mission East is helping some villages to solve their local problems by themselves via Community Organisations. In the village of Khuchurkhi inhabitants have just built a school.

**Afghanistan – women must change Afghanistan**
In spite of strong traditions keeping women at home, 45-year old Faozia has chosen to work for Mission East. This has not always been an easy choice in a society dominated by men. But women are the key to solving the problems of health and poor nutrition that every year take thousands of lives.

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Mission East has a long list of local Afghan employees who every day make a huge difference. At the same time they are learning a lot, which will enable them to find good work and carry on changing things for the better in the long term.

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Mission East’s Managing Director Kim Hartzner is taking his family to Armenia for a year to manage Mission East’s programmes there. Armenia was the ‘pioneer’ project country for Mission East. And so for Kim Hartzner, the place will always be special…

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Mission East is a Danish international aid organisation. We exist to deliver relief and development assistance to vulnerable communities with a primary focus on Eastern Europe and Asia. Based on Christian values, Mission East aims to support the most vulnerable, making no racial, political or religious distinction between those in need. Mission East currently operates in Afghanistan, Armenia, Iraq and Tajikistan, and we co-operate with local partners in Bulgaria, Romania and Nepal. The assistance offered by Mission East is supported by a range of private and public donors such as the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, EU and the United Nations.

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No development without women

I buy my own clothes. I save up 20-50 dollars every month, so I can go to university and study to be an engineer. The rest of the money goes to the family.

These are the words of young Afghan Mina, who is an accountant in Afghanistan. She is part of a small group of women in Afghanistan who go to work every day for Mission East. They made a special impression on me when I met them during a visit to Afghanistan. In this magazine you can read about these extraordinary people.

**Knowledge and savings**

As something quite unusual, the women have a proper job – despite the fact that this often leads to disdain and ridicule from the community. But for the women working for Mission East, having a job means earning their own money and contributing to the family – and for some of the women it means they acquire knowledge and savings, allowing them to pursue a university education.

They want an education. They want a job. They want to make a difference for their country – and in their own lives. They contribute with money for their own families and make a difference in the lives of Afghanistan's poor. And equally important, they provide Afghanistan with skilled and experienced professionals, who can carry on when organisations like Mission East eventually leave the country.

**Women can reach women**

And finally, the article about our talented employee Faozia, illustrates the importance of involving women. Because women can reach other women! And in Afghanistan it is crucial that we reach the women.

You cannot develop the country without involving everyone. And the women are in charge of a large part of the household. This is an important role to address in a country where every fourth child dies from diseases which could have been prevented. Bad hygiene, dirty water and insufficiently varied nutrition are some of the factors to be tackled.

And women play a vital part in this. It is also wonderful to witness how the villages where Mission East is working can tell the difference from ‘how it was before’.

"They want an education. They want a job. They want to make a difference for their country – and in their own lives. They contribute with money for their own families and make a difference in the lives of Afghanistan's poor," says Kim Hartzner, Managing Director of Mission East.
Tajikistan – helping people help themselves

By Peter Blum Samuelsen, Vice-Managing Director, Mission East

During the Communist regime in the ex-Soviet republic of Tajikistan everything was decided centrally. Since the collapse of the Soviet regime and the civil war which followed, the country faces huge challenges of governance and of poverty. Mission East helps numerous communities to take development into their own hands and achieve results that will last – even when the support from the international development agencies comes to an end. Peter Blum Samuelsen, Vice-Managing Director of Mission East, has been to Tajikistan.

“I am excited by how far we have come working together here in our village. Previously we just tried to survive each on our own, but now we have a strong community organisation that enables us to solve our problems together step by step,” explains Kabibullo Saiobidov chairman of the community organisation ‘Gairat’, Gulobod village.

Kabibullo Saiobidov is here with the Mission East manager for community development, Ghulomsho Lutfalier.

They are going through the manual of the community organisation where all activities are recorded and planned. The manual holds information on the most important problems in the community, the members of the community organisation, meetings held, activities planned to improve local conditions, members’ agricultural and income-generating activities.

Joint cash box

“The tools we have received from Mission East have been very useful. One of the most important ones is the tool for administration of a common cash box to which we all contribute, and by which we jointly control loans for members’ income-generating activities. It has been possible for us to build up a fund which gives us peace of mind and hope for the future,” explains Kabibullo Saiobidov.
Community organisations like Gairat are the cornerstone of Mission East’s work in Tajikistan. It is such local structures, their motivation and choices which leads development and ensures its sustainability in the long run. In an ideal situation, organisations are formed without the help of Mission East and established community development organisations reach the point where they no longer need the support of Mission East.

Community organisation builds school

The community organisation of Khucharkhi in the same region is a good example of local initiative.

“We were moved from here to the cotton cooperatives in the valley by the Soviet regime in 1953. We returned in 1992 after the Soviet regime had collapsed. We were in the middle of a civil war and we returned to nothing. It was tough and is still tough but it has taught us to manage by ourselves and we have for instance built this school for our children,” explains Nurali Nuraev, who is teacher at the school and chairman of the community development organisation.

In 2005 Mission East helped 42 community organisations with their initiatives to improve the conditions for 48,000 inhabitants in their communities in Tajikistan. It is good to see when communities take development into their own hands and we help them in the direction they wish to go.

“...It is such local structures, their motivation and choices which leads development and ensures its sustainability in the long run. In an ideal situation, organisations are formed without the help of Mission East and established community development organisations reach the point where they no longer need the support of Mission East.”

Facts:

Tajikistan

The security situation in 1991 after the Soviet Union fell apart was tense in all of the Central Asian republics. However, in no other country was the end of the Soviet Union to trigger as bloody a conflict as in Tajikistan. The little republic north of Afghanistan gained independence in 1991, but was soon thrown into civil war lasting from 1992 to 1997.

Tajikistan was already prior to independence one of the poorest republics of the Soviet Union. The effects of the civil war as well as droughts and earthquakes in 2000 led to a worsening of the situation. Large parts of the population depend on foreign assistance.

Source: Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Poor village builds school

When the civil war in Tajikistan broke out, the livelihoods of thousands of people who were used to working on state-owned farms quickly disappeared. The little village of Khuchurkhi consists of a group of people who lost their livelihoods as the large collective state farms went bankrupt. Now the villagers are trying to improve their lives together and have just built a school.

During Soviet times the inhabitants of the little village lived on a kolkhoz; a state-owned farm that provided jobs and income to the families. Salaries were paid, the children went to school and the state provided the services needed.

But as the civil war broke out in 1992, reality changed for the families who had lived at the farms since 1953. There were no longer state resources to maintain the farms and the farms went bankrupt. For the poor families living there this was the beginning of a period where the state would no longer be able to provide any form of help.

A number of farmers created the little village Khuchurkhi, where they try to survive by raising cattle, kitchen gardening and forestry. In the village however, the people have now decided to take development in their own hands and make significant improvements. Recently, the villagers decided to build a school which caters for the 146 children of the village.

There are eight teachers in the school. The village managed to convince the authorities to pay for the buildings, while facilities like chairs and tables were paid for by the village. With a loan from the World Bank the villagers were able to pay for books. The village had started building the school when Mission East began helping the village. However, Mission East has helped the village build latrines for the school and now helps the village make decisions about other improvements that the village needs.

“We were impressed with the initiative that this poor community had taken by building a school. It is important that the villages take development into their own hands and see that they can make changes in their lives. Now that Mission East assists the village, we make sure to not just provide them with aid, but rather assist them in their own decision-making in their community organisation” explains Peter Samuelsen, Vice Managing Director, Mission East.

Facts:
Tajikistan

The southern part of Tajikistan is one of the poorest areas of the former Soviet Union. Mission East continues to offer assistance to communities who are trying to leave behind the legacy of civil war and drought. Activities include:

- Development of Community Organisations to manage local projects and needs
- Agricultural inputs and training to help households grow their own food
- Provision of clean water supply
In spite of strong traditions which keep many women at home, 45-year old Faozia has chosen to work for Mission East. This has not been without problems in a society dominated by men. But women are the key to solving the health problems and poor nutrition that every year take the lives of thousands of men, women and children.

Out on the street, Faozia steps into the white Toyota four wheel drive that is waiting for her. She lifts her veil a bit as she is inside the car. As a rarity in this remote mountain town of Baharak in the northeastern part of Afghanistan, Faozia has – in spite of being a woman – a job. As an agricultural adviser in Mission East she visits some of the most poor and remote villages of Afghanistan every day.

Although it will soon be five years since the fall of the Taleban regime, it has not been easy for Faozia to work.

“Your husband is weak,” said a neighbour to one of Faozia’s female colleagues recently. His only offence was that he – like the husband of Faozia – lets his wife go to work.

Faozia does not seem to be too bothered however:

“My husband does not differentiate between men and women. He thinks I should be able to do the same as him, no matter what other people say,” Faozia says, and adds: “He is brave.”

Particularly in the beginning there was a strong opposition in the town against Faozia and her female colleagues working in an international organisation.

Office attacked

This opposition worsened, however, when riots broke out in the town last year after reports that US interrogators at the Guantanamo Bay detention facility had desecrated a Koran. In the outburst of anti-western sentiment in Baharak, foreign aid organizations became targets. A group of rioters attacked and burned Mission East’s office, where Faozia was based.

“Afterwards people told us that women should no longer work in international organisations. But we kept on working here. If I stopped now and gave up, the other women would not work here either,” Faozia says.
Some progress
It has been nearly five years since the Taleban regime fell. During Taleban times women were not allowed to work or go to school. Since then, particularly in Kabul, more women have started to work. There are women represented in parliament. And 40 percent of girls now go to school. But all this is mainly in the capital Kabul. But in the countryside, traditions are still strong.

In the northeastern province of Badakhshan, where Faozia lives, conditions for women are bit less strict. But there is still a long way to go.

Faozia actually was not intending to live here in the countryside. For 18 years she lived in Kabul, first studying literature and then teaching, right until Taleban conquered the city in 1996. Suddenly she was without job. For two months she stayed at home teaching her daughter, whom the Taleban denied school education.

That made Faozia decide to go back to her birthplace in the northeastern part of Afghanistan although she had escaped from there 24 years earlier when her mother, her 14-year old sister and 12-year old brother were killed.

I stopped now and gave up, the other women would not work here either,” Faozia says.

Faozia’s story is not unique. Everywhere in Afghanistan women face opposition when they want to work outside the home. Human Rights Watch reports threats against women working for NGOs.

Most women in Afghanistan wear a burka covering their body and face.
apparently because they were well-educated. Now her surviving siblings are in Canada and Germany. But the Taleban had not conquered Baharak – and never did. In Baharak her daughter could go to school.

**Tough journey**
After nine days of travelling by foot and car, crossing mountains and passing Taleban checkpoints, she made it to Baharak. For Faozia it was quite a change to return. Although the Taleban were never here, traditions are strong. But Faozia has chosen to stay.

“This is my home and the people here need my help,” says Faozia.

“I have a degree. I have knowledge and I want to share this with the poor families here,” says Faozia.

That she is needed is beyond a doubt. In Afghanistan it would highly inappropriate for a male aid worker to teach the local women.

“Only a woman can reach the women in the villages and give them the knowledge they need in order to break out of their poverty.”

“But if you want to improve the health of the villages, you must reach the women. They control the household. They take care of the children and cook the food,” Faozia explains.

As an agricultural adviser, she visits remote villages every day and teaches the inhabitants – especially women who find it difficult to leave the home - how to cultivate vegetables. Other women hygiene trainers employed by Mission East teach better hygiene to prevent disease.

**Women lack knowledge**
The mountainous Badakhshan is one of the least developed provinces of Afghanistan. Four years of war between Taleban and the Northern Alliance – and decades of war before that time – meant that the only easy access road to the region was blocked and the province was without outside development assistance.

People, unsurprisingly, have little knowledge about hygiene techniques or about cultivating vegetables, which are rare in the mountain diet. Added to this is the lack of clean water. The consequences are devastating: every fourth child dies before the age of five. By getting access to clean water and by learning a bit about hygiene and nutrition, health can be significantly improved.

**Teaching saves lives**
Mission East’s team has devoted much time to persuading village
leaders to allow Faozia and her colleagues to teach local women.

In the little village of Payensar, women have over the last year received teaching. Like other villages, the villages is marked by the decades of war that made any development impossible. Nevertheless, the village was sceptical when Mission East first offered assistance. As the head of the shura, the village council, explains: “First we were shocked. Will a woman teach us? Will a woman talk to men in the village?”

He points up to Faozia who is with her female colleague sitting in the shade under a tree wearing her burka twenty metres away. From there she looks over to the men who are gathered for a meeting of the shura. Although the meeting also touches upon Faozia’s work, she is not participating but watching it from distance.

“When they first started teaching here nobody liked it and they had to fight for it. But today we see the results. We have food which we can eat and sell. We have clean water and better hygiene. Before 20-30 children died every year. Now no one dies,” explains the village leader.

**Step by step**

For Faozia, however, the work is not just about providing food on her family’s table.

“The women in the villages like me and wish to follow my example. They become inspired to change lives, to strive for an education and improve their health. By teaching them we change their lives gradually. It is hard to change everything from one day to another,” Faozia says.
Mission East makes no distinction in hiring staff based on gender, politics, religion or race. In Afghanistan, however, it was not easy at first for women to work in an international organisation like Mission East. Today a number of talented women are proud to work for us and have done so in spite of different reactions from their community.

Waheda, logistics administrator:
“I have worked three years for Mission East, since 2003. First as radio operator, now as logistics administrator. Before, I was a teacher in high school for six years, until 1995. I was married eight months ago, and my husband is happy that I am now working for Mission East. I would like to see Mission East develop as an organization and get bigger and bigger, with more and more work in the provinces. It is good to have dreams about the future. Personally, my ambition is to learn more about computers, and to improve my English. For my country, I wish that women should have the same rights as men do. In 10 years, my dream is to become a politician.”

"For my country, I wish that women should have the same rights as men do. In 10 years, my dream is to become a politician”
Waheda, Logistics Administrator
Bilkis, female member of the public health team:

“Some mullahs and some of the uneducated people do not like what we do, but our own people and families support us. Before, we were afraid to meet non-muslims, believing that Islam teaches a woman not to show her face. Under the Taleban, all women and girls remained in the houses. We realise it is difficult to please all people. When we go to the villages we explain to the villagers why we are there, that we come from Mission East, and that we have come to help the people. We really want to work to see improvement in the lives of the local communities. When we are in the villages we meet many examples of bad hygiene practices: places where the villagers have no access to latrines, the women will defecate in a corner, and the children have their special place where they defecate. Under such circumstances, we explain the need for latrines, why they are necessary in order to prevent disease. We explain the connection between animal faeces ending up in the river and people getting sick from drinking river water. In some villages we manage to teach the villagers to give boiled water to children with diarrhoea, who subsequently get well, and who then serve as an example to other villagers, so they all can get well.”

Mina, Administration and Finance Assistant in Faizabad office:

“I have worked with Mission East for two years, the first year as radio operator, and during the past 5 months as admin and finance assistant. I live at home with my parents and 7 other siblings. Only three of those living at home are making money: my father as a gardener earns 100 dollars a month, my one brother earns 280 as a teacher, and I make 280. I buy my own clothes, I save up 20-50 dollars per month so that I can go to university and study engineering. The rest of my earnings go towards our household. Our whole family is happy and proud that I can work for Mission East. I am sure my future husband will approve of me getting an education: Afghan men understand more and more that the women need an education in order to get a job and earn a living. After I finish my education, I would like to work for an international organisation or for a hospital.”
Mission East’s Managing Director is moving to Armenia with his family for a year, to lead our programmes there. Armenia was a ‘pioneer’ country for Mission East, early in the organisation’s history. And for Kim, who took part in distributing the first relief supplies there in the early 90s, the Armenia projects are especially close to his heart.

In 1988 Kim Hartzner visited Armenia for the first time on holiday, while Armenia was at peace. He probably would not have believed that only a few years later he would be arranging a large relief effort with Hercules planes, hospital equipment and food distributions in the middle of a war. Or that he would be travelling to Armenia on a regular basis during the following years, in order to promote the rights of handicapped children. Now he and his family are going one step further.

After having held overall responsibility for the organisation’s country programmes including those in Armenia for many years as Managing Director, it is now time to spend some time ‘hands on’ in the field. From August Kim will be heading Mission East’s office and programmes in Armenia.

His wife Dorte and their three sons, Philip, Peter Vincent and Alexander, are leaving their house in Holte, Denmark, for a year and moving to the Armenian capital Yerevan, where they have rented an apartment. This will be their home for the next year.

Jumping into the action
Kim has been busy these last several years building Mission East as an organisation and guiding its rapid development to an operation which stretches through offices in Copenhagen, Belgium, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Armenia as well as partners in Romania, Bulgaria and Nepal. Now it’s time for him to get closer to the action.

“I think it is healthy to get out and get the projects ‘under the skin’. And my relationship with Armenia is very special,” explains Kim.

Since 1992, during the war with neighbouring Azerbaijan, Kim has been to Armenia over 20 times. During the war, Mission East implemented its first major relief distribution. Right after the war Mission East quickly saw the need of the country’s disabled.

Desperate conditions for the disabled
Thousands of disabled children were kept in dismal conditions
“There were only a few organisations helping in Armenia. The country is desperately poor following the war. For Mission East Armenia was also a ‘pioneer’ country. This was where we first started our work,” explains Kim.

In institutions, without adequate care or education and were perceived as a disgrace. At the same time the country’s economy and infrastructure had been seriously damaged, which made change difficult.

“There were only a few organisations helping in Armenia. The country is desperately poor following the war. For Mission East Armenia was also a ‘pioneer’ country. This was where we first started our work,” explains Kim.

At the same time a couple of the projects have a medical element, which makes it especially interesting for Kim who is a doctor. But in the daily work he will primarily be tasked with the overall management of the country office and the 8 employees. However, there will also be a little time for the work of the Managing Director to continue. Kim will keep his hand on the reins of the organisation, retaining his Managing Director position, but with a reduced workload.

During Kim’s absence Vice Managing Director Peter Blum Samuelsen will take charge of the day-to-day organisational management from Copenhagen, while Kim will oversee long term, strategic decisions.

It is a poor country the family is heading for, explains Kim.

“At the same time the largest neighbour, Turkey, continues a blockade which hinders Armenian exports and economic recovery is not as fast as hoped.

For the Hartzner family it will also be a big change. But the family has already been down to take a look at the place. 10 - year old Philip and 6 - year old Peter Vincent will both be attending an international school. With a whole new country to get to know, one thing is certain - the Hartzners are in for an exciting year.

“Mission East delivered emergency aid to the poor in Armenia during the war against Azerbaijan. Mission East has continued its work in Armenia since and now works to improve conditions for disabled children.”
The Ministry of Emergency Situations and Civil Defence held an international conference on disaster risk management in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan from 28th – 30th June 06 with the support of international organisations and donors. The aim of the conference was to develop standardized methods for information gathering and its analysis with a view to develop appropriate response to disaster, based on a clear analysis of risks and needs.

Mission East actively participated in the conference along with many other international agencies. During the conference, representatives of government, ministers, international organisations, local NGOs and media visited Mission East’s stand taking keen interest in the exhibits, asking about the photos, communities, our activities and took interviews. Mission East used this platform to explain and share the future strategies of Mission East in Tajikistan and the collaborations it could have with other agencies.

Do you have a good idea – or a question?

Are you left with a question, after having read an article in Mission East magazine? Something you would like to find an answer to?

Do not hesitate to write Mission East’s editorial team, if you have something you would like to have us find out. You may also have a particular interest relating to our projects that you would like us to investigate? Please contact us and we will see if we can find an answer for you.

You can contact the editorial team by writing to Morten Østervang at morten.ostervang@miseast.org or call Mission East at +45 3961 2048.
You can help

Last year Mission East extended urgent relief and long-term development aid to more than 250,000 people in Eastern Europe and Asia. Our work is only possible due to the donations that we receive from private individuals and other donors.

Help us to help the most needy by making a donation.

Please use the enclosed donation slip or make a donation via Mission East’s website www.miseast.org. You can donate an amount of your choice online, using Visa or MasterCard.

If you live within Europe, you can also make a donation to us by bank transfer for free, as long as the donation is in euros and you have some form of electronic banking.

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If you would like to make a donation to Mission East but prefer not to do it online, we would be more than happy to receive a cheque from you.

With your support, Mission East can continue to transform lives.

Thank you!

Afghan families need your help

In northern Afghanistan’s villages families suffer from poor nutrition. They do not have access to clean drinking water. And after decades of isolation they lack proper knowledge about hygiene practices. These are some of the reasons that every fourth child in Afghanistan dies before the age of five. Mission East is changing this in the villages where we work.

Every day Mission East’s local female staff travels to the villages to teach other women about hygiene and agriculture. The women can reach other women in these isolated villages. With posters and simple messages about hygiene in the kitchen they save lives. And with simple agricultural techniques the women can give their children a more nutritious diet. And together with the villages Mission East builds new wells. All this is reducing child mortality dramatically.

Help Mission East improve life in Afghanistan’s villages.