Towards recovery
and resilience

Making an impact on
lives in rural Afghanistan
Mission East has been active in the provinces of Badakhshan and Takhar in north-eastern Afghanistan since 2001 and more recently in Baghlan. Its programme supports local communities and their Community Development Councils (CDCs) to address their humanitarian needs and to develop the potential of their own under-used economic and social resources for sustainable rural development.

The key focus areas of the Mission East Afghanistan programme are:

**MEETING BASIC NEEDS**
- Emergency Relief, Response and Recovery
- Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)
- Basic Food Security

**CROSS-CUTTING COMPONENTS**
- Civil Society Capacity Building
- Disaster Risk Reduction

**RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**
- Livelihood Security
- Long-term Food Security
- Natural Resource Management
- Rehabilitation of Productive Physical Infrastructure (roads and canals)

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An integrated approach for recovery and resilience

Since 2001 Mission East has been working in Afghanistan to help secure the short- and long-term recovery and development of vulnerable rural communities by meeting basic needs and building up local capacities.

Mission East is one of the few international NGOs working in the remote mountain regions of north-eastern Afghanistan. Since 2001 we have been working with isolated rural communities suffering from protracted social, economic and environmental instability to help reduce their vulnerability and build their resilience against shocks and crises.

MEETING BASIC NEEDS
These communities are highly vulnerable due to multiple overlapping factors. These include prolonged conflict, recurring natural disasters and badly managed and over-exploited natural resources. Flash floods, avalanches and landslides leading to the loss of homes and property, lack of access to clean drinking water and adequate sanitation, poor hygiene and nutrition practices, food shortages and poor diets and limited livelihood opportunities are the harsh realities of the region. Problems of such a complex nature demand both a holistic approach in order to reduce vulnerability, as well as solutions that are easily applicable, due to the remoteness of the communities in question. Mission East uses an integrated, community-driven approach to relief, rehabilitation and development.

RESPECT FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY STRUCTURES
Mission East supports vulnerable rural communities to lift themselves out of poverty through the provision of training and inputs in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), disaster risk reduction (DRR) food and livelihood security, and community-based natural resource management. All interventions work to build upon already existing capacities, structures and actors in the different target communities.

LONGER TERM POTENTIAL
The programme approach is to meet basic needs as a precondition before further engagement. Following this, we can go on to build community, civil society and government capacities in order to secure long-term economic and social recovery and development. This way Mission East helps to ensure that community vulnerabilities and risks are reduced for many generations to come.
Long travels by donkey to collect water and recurring diarrhea were everyday occurrences in the life of Sayed Ebrahim. Access to safe drinking water has improved life for the 230 households in his village in Takhar province.

Sayed Ebrahim and his family now have enough clean drinking water available at all times near their family compound. Before the construction of the water system, his children would travel by donkey to collect water in plastic jars. Each household needed to fetch water at least four times a day in order to meet typical household needs of 100 liters a day. The water available in the nearest river was contaminated with dirt and microbes, and its use constantly caused people to fall ill.

MEDICAL TREATMENT IS EXPENSIVE

Sayed Ebrahim expressed his sadness when Mission East visited his village and he recalled an incident in 2009. “My 5-year old daughter became sick and was suffering from diarrhea from using the unclean water from the river where we fetched water for drinking. I took her to the district clinic for treatment but they were unable to treat her. So we went to Taluqan city, where I spent more than 5,000 Afghani (68 EUR) for her treatment. I am a very poor man and cultivating one jerib of land (½ acre) is my main source of livelihood. Therefore it was very difficult for me to meet the costs of my daughter’s treatment. This has been a recurring problem for many people in our village due to several years of use of contaminated river water.”

CLEAN WATER HAS IMPROVED THE HEALTH OF THE VILLAGE

“Mission East supported our village to help construct a water supply system and tapstands bringing clean water to the village. A Water Users Committee was formed and trained and volunteer community maintainers were trained and equipped for longer-term operation. Clean drinking water has brought us health and happiness. ”
and maintenance. During the construction work, community members dug trenches for the pipeline, and helped to transport materials to the site.

“It has been one year since the community got safe water on tap in the village for drinking and other household uses. We suffer from fewer diseases, especially diarrhea and skin infections and people have used the money saved on medical costs for other basic needs. Now for the community there is no need to spend a lot of time in bringing water by donkey from far away. My children are healthier since Mission East started the WASH programme here,” says Sayed Ebrahim.

“My 5-year old daughter became sick and was suffering from diarrhea from using the unclean water from the river”

Ebrahim, farmer in a village in Takhar province
Higher school attendance due to improved water facilities

Dehydration, abdominal pains and diarrhea were some of the many problems faced by pupils at a girls’ primary school in Rustaq district. With a new water scheme provided by Mission East the students no longer have to suffer from stomach disease and attendance has increased to nearly 100 per cent.

A girls’ primary school in Rustaq district of Takhar Province used to face many problems in providing safe drinking water to its pupils. Only a few had the option of bringing bottles of water from home. If students did not go home, they were forced to drink contaminated water from unprotected sources such as rivers, streams, dirty rain and meltwater from snow, or not to drink water at all. This caused them to suffer from dehydration, abdominal pains and diarrheal disease.

**MISSED CLASSES**
The lack of clean water had severe consequences for the girls’ school attendance. More than half of the children regularly missed a large part of their lessons because they went home to get water. And nearly 100 out of the 400 students dropped out of class regularly as they were not interested in attending their classes if they could not satisfy their thirst during the day. Fawzia, Bibi Fatima and nine other students from the school explain that those who stayed in class were less attentive, even rushing home after 2-3 sessions.

**IMPROVED ATTENDANCE**
To address the problem, Mission East installed clean drinking water and three tapstands at the school providing clean drinking water to

With safe drinking water now available at the school, class attendance has risen to nearly 100 per cent.
The children at the school enjoy the clean water and splash it on each other during breaks.

Those who stayed in class were less attentive, even rushing home after 2-3 sessions.

The drinking water scheme at this primary school in Rustaq was installed in September 2014 with the support of funding from the German Federal Foreign Office.
People living in camps for the internally displaced face severe health and hygiene problems. With simple hygiene training, Zarifah has now secured her three children against infectious disease.

Zarifah and her husband have been living with their three young children in a camp in Baharak district since they had to flee their home in Badakhshan during fierce fighting in the Warduj district. The family's income is meagre, and they live from what the husband earns by selling bread outside the camp and by doing daily wage labour whenever possible. Due to the unhygienic conditions in the camp almost every month their children would fall ill suffering from amoebic dysentery and sometimes even blood dysentery.

DYSENTERY FROM POLLUTED WATER AND BAD HYGIENE
The closest health centre was several kilometres away from the IDP camp, and Zarifah and her husband could not afford to have the children treated every month. But one day one of the children was suffering severely from blood dysentery, and Zarifah decided to go to the health centre. The doctor there asked her many questions about drinking water sources, and about their use of latrines and checked the child's nails and hands as well. This made Zarifah more aware of how the use of polluted water and unhygienic practices could cause disease and infection, and she approached Mission East for assistance in learning about better hygiene practices.

NEVER HEARD OF THIS BEFORE
Zarifah and her husband learnt about the importance of personal, domestic and environmental hygiene, about child healthcare and nutrition, how to make water safe for drinking and the importance of washing hands after defecation and before eating. Zarifah said: “Some of these things I had never heard about before and when I received the training, I tried to understand my current hygiene practices and tried to link them to my children’s diseases.” The training made her change several of her own and her family’s habits.

BOILING WATER FOR DRINKING
She instructed her children not to defecate in the open and to wash...
their hands properly afterwards, and she started to cut their nails and brush their teeth regularly. Her children are now using the latrine regularly and properly.

Zarifah also realized that she herself did not boil the water before drinking and kept the water jar open day and night which was all very harmful for the family. She started to be very careful about always keeping the water jar covered and cleaning the family’s utensils and clothes, and sweeping the floor and compound of the house thoroughly.

**NO MORE DISEASES**
The changes made to the family’s hygiene habits have improved the children’s health considerably. “Now I am looking after my children very well. They do not complain about their dysentery problems anymore and they have good health. We did not know about microbes before, but now we know that they are the main cause of diarrheal diseases and other common diseases such as skin infections. If we do not allow them to enter our bodies, it is very easy to avoid getting diseases from them,” Zarifah said.

**KNOWLEDGE IS SHARED**
The knowledge that Zarifah and her husband received from Mission East is spreading in the community for the benefit of other families living in the camp.

“We shared information about the health benefits amongst the community people. Even the Mullah advised us in the mosque to use the improved latrine, wash hands after defecation and before eating and to clean nails, clothes and our homes regularly. The Mullah also gave some examples from the Holy Quran. We are thankful to Mission East for providing this support to me and to the IDP community and in helping us to change some of our bad habits,” Zarifah said.

Zarifah was a beneficiary under the ECHO-funded Emergency Response Mechanism (ERM) project in 2013. Mission East provided 51 temporary household latrines and hygiene kits, organized 25 hygiene sessions and trained 90 members of the IDP community including Zarifah.

“My children do not complain about their dysentery problems anymore.”

Zarifah, mother of three children and living in an IDP camp
The maid **started her own shop**

Every day was a struggle against hunger for the 50-year-old widow Maja-bin and her five children. With help from Mission East, she has now started her own small food business.

Around 0.70 Euro per day and a single meal is what Majabin was paid to work as a maid in the house next door. It was not enough to buy food for her five children, all of whom suffered from skin diseases, had protruding ribs and constant stomach-aches because of malnutrition.

**WAR WIDOW**
Majabin’s husband was killed in the war many years ago, and the family has since lived a life of poverty in a hut on a small piece of land in a village in north-eastern Afghanistan. The children are still young, and Majabin is their sole provider. So when she heard about a new Mission East project, she asked if she could join.

**BUSINESS PLAN**
The project was to teach groups of women to produce and sell food. During the first three months, the women were given trainings in hygiene and health, on how to process food, and on how they could sell it at the right price. Afterwards, Mission East helped Majabin and the other women to create a business plan for selling the processed fruits and vegetables. They each received a meat grinder, a grater, and necessary ingredients for seasoning and preservation, such as lemon drops, sodium and black pepper.
Majabin started her own shop. She was also trained in growing vegetables on her little piece of land. With the help of her children, she began to grow eggplants, tomatoes and peppers. Now she uses the vegetables from her little piece of land. Majabin uses the vegetables from the kitchen garden to produce chutneys, tomato sauce and pickles. She buys fruits at the local market to make jam and apple jelly. She does all this to earn more money for her family.

**GROWING VEGETABLES**

Majabin’s business has grown considerably since she began, and her products are popular. A local grocery store now buys her products, and she has a profit of around 12 euros per week. Other local buyers also purchase her products, and sell them at the market in the district’s major city. She spends the money on providing proper food for her children, and has also saved a lot of the money, and plans to expand the production.

She does not dwell on her impoverished past:

“I do not want to look back. I want to make sure my children are educated, so they can provide for me in the future,” she says.

**PLANS OF EXPANSION**

Women from 350 families participated in the food groups.
Women start up small businesses

With support provided through Mission East's Self Help Group programme, 24 women from a village in the Taluqan district of Takhar province have successfully started up businesses for the production of handicrafts. The extra income makes a considerable difference to their families.

In a village in the Taluqan district of Takhar province, 24 women meet to sew and embroider napkins, pillow covers, blankets and small rugs. This is part of Mission East's Self Help Group programme where group members have received trainings as well as some basic material inputs such as a metal money-box, in order to start up a savings-and-loan group.

MEAGRE INCOME
The village is located in a saltwater area where agricultural production is neither productive nor sufficient. This forces local village men to go to the center of the province to work as daily wage labourers. However the earnings from this daily wage work is not always enough to meet a household’s basic needs.

UNABLE TO SAVE MONEY
The group members explain how the group was set up: “Mission East SHG staff facilitated the election of the chairperson, secretary and treasurer for better management of the group tasks, and the responsibilities of all the group members were determined.” Trainings were conducted for all members on how to make savings, how to receive loans and how to conduct meetings. Because of their economic situation the group members were previously unable to save money and all the members had been looking to start up income-generating activities to make their group more sustainable. The group received 21 kg of thread for stitching to produce handicrafts.

REINVESTMENT ENSURES THE FUTURE
Now the women in the group are able to produce their own handicrafts. On one occasion the group managed to sell their handicrafts in a local market and earned 6,000 Afghanis (83 EUR). The earnings were saved in the group account for reinvestment in the enterprise. With this money, 2,000 Afghanis
(28 EUR) were invested in the purchase of more thread and wool for sewing. The process was repeated several times and now the group has 12,000 Afghanis (166 EUR) in their collective account.

**EQUAL ACCESS TO SAVINGS**

All group members feel that they have equal access to the collective account and everyone feels proud of what they are doing. When their children fall ill and need medical treatment, they take a loan from the group and then return the money later. Group members feel more independent and they feel they have more power to make their own decisions. “Their husbands were also very happy with the success of their activities”, said Bebe Nasrin, the group’s chairperson.

With the support provided by Mission East under the Danida-funded programme ‘An Integrated, Community-based approach to relief, rehabilitation and development in north-eastern Afghanistan, the women in the Self Help Group have sewn napkins, pillow covers, blankets and small rugs which they sell on the local market.
Irrigation water
for all in Ghozmargh

The poorer families in Ghozmargh village in Badakhshan did not have access to adequate irrigation water for their crops, and food gaps were common. With better constructed canals, everyone in the community now gets their share of irrigation water.

Every spring when the snow melted in the mountains of Badakhshan, the village of Ghozmargh was hit by flash floods which destroyed the traditional irrigation canals in the area and damaged the crops in the fields. And every summer, when the canals were poorly repaired, the villagers would quarrel over who had access to the scarce amount of water that the canals could distribute, explains Muhammad Yaquib, 69 year-old farmer and father of six.

POOR FAMILIES LET DOWN

The result of the quarrels was that the poorer families of the village who had less political influence than the more affluent families were unable to get enough irrigation water to cultivate their crops. Some of them had to leave farming to become day labourers. Those with no alternative to farming – such as Muhammad Yaquib – could not produce enough wheat for even two months of consumption for their households. And the vegetation as well as the orchards in the village suffered from the limited supply of water.

REBUILDING OF CANALS NEEDED

The community members sat together to find a solution, and they realized that they needed to rebuild the canals completely. Rehabilitated canals would not be destroyed in the spring flash floods and they would have the capacity to distribute water to the entire village. But the community could not afford to initiate such large-scale work. They therefore decided to request support from the government authorities or some NGOs.

NEW CANAL AND MAINTENANCE TRAINING

Upon the request of the village’s Community Development Council (CDC), a team from Mission East visited the village to assess the situation and to discuss the matter further with the community and the CDC. They too found that the poorer families of the village were highly vulnerable due to the lack of access to adequate irrigation facilities. Ghozmargh was therefore included in a canal rehabilitation scheme where Mission East with community support helped to rehabilitate a short stretch of an irrigation canal serving 21 villages including Ghozmargh. The newly rehabilitated irrigation canal can supply irrigation water to up to 5,000 jeribs (2,475 acres) of land. Since the rehabilitation of the canal, all the 200 or so households in Ghozmargh village are able to use the water from the canal to irrigate their fields.

Together with skills trainings on canal maintenance and repair, the community members also had trainings on community-based hazard and risk mapping, on sustainable Natural Resource Management techniques, and a water management committee has been set up in...
Proper irrigation gives higher yields

Due to the improved irrigation the farmers in Ghomargh hope to increase their yield considerably.

- For wheat and barley the farmers expect an increase from 70 kgs to 175 kgs per jerib of land (1 jerib = 2.02 acres).
- For vegetables such as potato, tomato, cauliflower and cabbage the farmers expect an increase from 140 kgs to 420 kgs per jerib of land.

order to ensure the fair distribution of water.

HIGHER YIELD FOR ALL FARMERS
Now all farmers including the poorer ones get a regular supply of water every two days to irrigate their lands. Some of the farmers in the village who had stopped farming due to the lack of irrigation water, have now started to cultivate their lands again. The vegetation in the village is increasing and some households have started to plant more trees, both in the orchards and in the roadside tree plantation. The community’s farmers hope to have increased wheat and barley production, and much higher yields than before in the cultivation of vegetables.

Moreover, peace among community members has been restored and they are no longer fearful of the damage done to their crops every year by the annual spring floods, says Mohammad Yaquib.
Institutional funding for Mission East Afghanistan includes

Mission East is an international relief and development organisation, working in Eastern Europe and Asia.

Our aim is to meet urgent humanitarian needs, to implement and support long-term development projects and to empower local civil society organisations to carry on the work independently and sustainably. Making no racial, religious or political distinction between those in need, we aim to assist the most vulnerable.

Mission East is a member of

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