Focus

Meet Greta and the other children from Armenia who has suffered from malpractice
Arménie
– Mon fils est devenu bleu, mais le médecin m'a rassurée. Nous avons fait le bon choix.

On the bus on the way to the doctor, little Garik used to panic. He knew what awaited him. "He cried and he screamed," recalls his mother Sirandukht. But she did what she thought was best for him. Garik’s story is one of many about the mistreatment of children with disabilities in Arménie and a story of a health system that lacks resources.

Pakistan
– Aid to Pakistan’s most needy

First there was the earthquake, then the Taliban militants gained control, and soon after came the flood that washed away roads and bridges and cut off the population from the rest of the world. Families in the unfortunate Swat Valley need our help more than ever.

Tajikistan
– Two lives that went in opposite directions

Both Isabella and Amir experienced complications at birth. Isabella got help and is today evolving normally. Amir has to live with a handicap the rest of his life and has already been kicked out of school once because he did not stand fast enough for the teacher.

Afghanistan
– No more sharing water source with animals

In one month, children and their parents in the village of Taka Tamest in north Afghanistan will no longer have to use the water from the river for cooking and drinking.

Afghanistan
– Why are we sick all the time?

Ghachan village is located an hour’s walk in the mountains from the nearest road. Here you find 123 Afghans families living isolated from the rest of the world.
The only remaining solution

How does a remote mountain village in Afghanistan get clean water?

At first the village elders turn to the District Governor. He generally doesn’t have the necessary resources, so he refers them to the Provincial Governor. The Provincial Governor is also unable to help and suggests instead that they go to the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. As Afghanistan is a fragile state with scarce resources, the only remaining solution for the elders is to turn to Mission East, which has been a long-standing partner working with the communities in the region. And so it happens that in a month's time, the village of Taka Tamest will be able to replace the contaminated water from the river with clean drinking water (see more on pages 12-13).

I visited Taka Tamest and several of its neighbouring villages in April this year. After several hours of driving on dirt roads in the mountains, I felt as if all my bones had been dislocated. Mission East works under tough conditions. And in these areas far from the beaten track we are often the only ones who dare, can and will work. After more than a decade of providing help to these areas, Mission East has gained widespread acceptance amongst the local communities.

This relationship of trust is a unique strength of Mission East. We target the neediest and the most vulnerable. Which is why we cannot accept the fact that families in the Swat Valley are unable to receive desperately needed emergency aid after the devastating floods in Pakistan, because roads and bridges have been washed away (see pages 8-9).

So who is Mission East? It is you and I, uniting to help some of the poorest, most disadvantaged people in Asia and Eastern Europe. We are the ones being called upon to act. Our decisions can determine which reality these people will live in.
My son’s face turned all blue, but the doctor convinced me that we...

On the bus on the way to the doctor, little Garik used to panic. He knew what awaited him. “He cried and he screamed,” recalls his mother Sirandukht. But she did what she thought was best for him.

When Garik was one year old his mother discovered that his hand bent inward, and that he had no control over his fingers. He could not hold his own body firm, and he always fell over to the side when she tried to make him sit up. About every third day they went to see the doctor who prescribed exercises and this continued until Garik was three years old. “Today I know that was a big mistake,” says Sirandukht.

Her eyes turn red when she thinks of how the doctor made Garik lay down, bent both of his knees up towards his chest and then pushed his legs out to the sides, away from each other: “Garik’s face turned all blue. He cried and I cried with him. Every time I asked the doctor to stop, he convinced me that my son needed it.” But Garik’s condition deteriorated.

Poverty makes the situation worse

In Armenia, some doctors prescribe vitamin pills to my son's face turned all blue, but the doctor convinced me that we did the right thing. By Tania Maria Lüders Rusbjerg, Mission East’s journalist

How Mission East helps:

In Armenia, having a child with a disability is so shameful, that some parents hide away the children at home. Many will never receive a diagnosis or medical care, and a great part of those who do end up with wrong and sometimes even fatal treatment. With the increasing poverty, the authorities have enough to do, and it is therefore of vital importance that Mission East and our local partner organisations take responsibility for the following things:
- to educate the Armenian doctors,
- to inform the families about their children’s opportunities, and
- to provide the social safety net that is lacking, which means free medical centers and all the necessary equipment, so that children with disabilities can live a dignified life.

Garik's mother paid a decent amount of money to the doctor for each treatment. Visiting the doctor 360 times, the family ended up spending a great deal of money on these treatments. At the local center, built by Mission East, treatment is free.
people suffering from muscular dystrophy and tell parents that it is totally normal that children do not begin to speak until they are seven years old. General knowledge about children's health is so flawed that the families fail to detect a congenital disability, until after several months or years of their life. And in the villages, where Mission East is working, poverty makes everything worse. Ignorance, poverty, poor education, few resources, guilt, shame and taboo turn thousands of children with a disability into hostages in today's Armenia. Until recently, Garik, who is now eight

**Herbalism, needle therapy and healing did not help Greta**

Although Greta was born eight weeks premature, three years would pass, before doctors told her mother Mary that her daughter suffered from cerebral palsy, a spastic paralysis. Mary knew nothing of the disease and had to make the doctor explain to her that this disease is very difficult to cure. Today Mary blames herself that she didn't try hard enough to find out what was wrong with her little girl. But the way Mary carries Greta, smiles at her, and makes sure she sits comfortably in her seat, clearly shows that this mother does not lack interest or love for her daughter.

In the following years Mary tried Chinese herbalism, needle therapy and spiritual healing. But none of this helped Greta. A year ago, she was persuaded to visit the new Mission East center in her local area, and today Greta receives help from trained specialists. "My greatest wish is that she learns to talk and walk," says Mary. "I do my best to take care of her, but it's difficult," she continues with tears in her eyes.

Greta is not the only one who is offered help at the center. In support groups parents like Mary get the opportunity to talk about feelings of guilt and to find encouragement from other parents in the same situation. And for Mary it is crucial for her to have someone to share her thoughts with.
When Azat was seven years old he fell down from a tree. He lost consciousness and was sent to a hospital in the region. But his stay was brief, got neither diagnosis nor treatment. His family simply could not afford it. For several years thereafter, Azat suffered from headaches, concentration problems, nausea, nervousness, learning disabilities, memory loss, aggression and sleep problems. Azat and his family are extremely poor, and without a social safety net he and many other children won’t get the help they need. Therefore, Mission East and local partner organisations in Armenia provide that safety net. Azat was examined, and a scan showed he had too high a blood pressure in his skull. He was referred to a neurological clinic, and from here he received free medical care.

Surgery required
After three years and about 360 visits to the doctor, another doctor witnessed the ‘exercise’ and told Sirandukht...
that she should not let the boy's doctor do this to her son. She then immediately cancelled the treatment. Instead she brought Garik to a medical center which cooperates with Mission East in Armenia. At this place doctors, with help from Denmark, has received teaching and training about how to treat children with disabilities, so they actually get better. Shortly after that Garik was able to use his hands and hold his toys himself. He was able to walk a little but he still had hip pain (an injury that probably came from the painful treatment at the first doctor) and it would require surgery to fix.

"Garik still hasn't got his appetite back and he doesn't like to be touched. But I am so happy I can finally give him the right treatment. Now he just has to learn to walk,” says an optimistic Sirandukht, as she watches her son recovering from his second surgery earlier this year.

Doctors prescribe vitamin pills to people suffering from muscular dystrophy and tell parents that it is totally normal that children does not begin to speak until they are seven years old.

No money = no health care

Asya was born two months premature and weighed only one and a half kilograms when she was born. Doctors advised her mother Mary to ensure follow-up treatment for her daughter about every two months. But Mary could not afford the two hours of travel to the capital, which was the nearest place for her to get help. During her first four years of life Asya was therefore only seen by a doctor three times. Born with cerebral palsy due to premature birth and because of the lack of help Asya learned neither to walk nor speak. "I felt horrible. I did not understand her. When she had a stomach ache, I didn't know where it hurt,” Mary says.

When Mission East together with local partners built the region’s first rehabilitation center for disabled children in 2008, Asya was among the first patients. The center is located in walking distance from her home. Here she has been assisted by physiotherapists to train her legs and hands: “Now she can hold the bread herself,” the proud mother says.

She participates in the center’s support group for parents: “There I find rest, when we share our problems with each other,” says Mary, who’s still dealing with the feeling of guilt, because she could not afford to bring her daughter to the doctor back then.
Aid to Pakistan’s most needy

First there was the earthquake, then the Taliban militants gained control, and soon after came the flood that washed away roads and bridges and cut off the population from the rest of the world. Families in the unfortunate Swat Valley need our help more than ever.

Does "Swat Valley" sound familiar? Precisely two years ago the media told the story of over a million people fleeing from the area while the Pakistani army fought Taliban in the valley. Only few months earlier the Taliban had implemented Sharia Law in the area which meant closed girl's schools, whipping in case of alcohol consumption and stoning as punishment for adultery. Only three and a half years before that, a massive earthquake hit

The problems in Swat Valley:
- Roads and bridges have been washed away and has cut off the area from receiving the needed emergency aid. Much of the promised help has never arrived.
- The area was still recovering after the earthquake in 2005 and the population has therefore struggled harder than other areas in handling food deficit, illnesses and instability after the flood.
- A lot of internally displaced people from the fighting in 2009 have not been registered after their return and are not listed at the authorities to receive help.
- Nine out of ten children suffer from diarrhea because of infected water.
- Assistance to traumatised women and children are lacking.

Should one not eat just because she is a woman?

56-year-old Gulmeena received none of the first emergency aid which was distributed in her district. She is a widow and has no sons who can fetch the bags in the male-dominated society. Only when Mission East and partner arrived in the area and assured her that there would be female staff present at the distribution, did she dare to show up and get her ration.

Gulmeena lost both her home, her one cow and the two goats to the flood. Since her husband died in a road accident, the animals and a few cleaning jobs have been her way to provide for the three daughters. "But there was not enough money to send the children to school, and therefore none of my girls have an education," says Gulmeena.

Now there's nothing left at all, and Gulmeena is dependent on humanitarian aid until she gains back her life. She is glad that she was contacted by Mission East and partners, so she can have her aid. The first distribution provides her and her daughters with food for the next two months.
In September a team from Mission East travelled to Pakistan. None of the areas visited, neither in the north nor in the south, could measure up to the needs of the population in the Swat Valley. Mission East is therefore working intensely in cooperation with a local partner to help people in this area to survive and rebuild the life that once was.

Kashmir and wounded, killed and destroyed homes in the Swat Valley too. But the flooding in 2010 remains the worst disaster this tortured valley population has endured to date.

Committees will be formed to protect the rights of children in the Swat Valley and the teams will be trained in seeking out orphans and helping traumatized children after the flood.

How Mission East and our local partner organisation are helping:
- Distribution of emergency aid in form of food, hygiene kits etc.
- Distribution of livestock to help families reestablish their agricultural production.
- Clean water supply.
- Seeking out the most vulnerable groups (people with a disability, orphans, and elderly) and making sure their special needs are met.

Arshad provides the food

Arshad, 28, was struck by polio when he was little, and has since then lived with a disability that makes it hard for him to walk. When the flood hit his village, and swept away the path to the family’s house, his possibility to move around became even more confined. People in the village saw no reason for him to go outside the house since he was handicapped, and his own family had never encouraged him to take a job. No one figured that he could contribute with anything.

One day there was a knock on the door from the Mission East project, offering emergency aid. The family had lost all it’s possessions in the flooding. Arshad was asked what his needs were and he replied: “For all people, their first need is food.” Then he told how shameful he was that his old father had to go and search for food for him. Our partner organisation encouraged him to come down to the square where emergency aid was distributed, and they also arranged transport for him.

That day Arshad provided not only food for the family’s survival in the weeks ahead. He gained back some self esteem, “I am so proud that I have helped my father to provide food. It makes me grateful.”

After the distribution Arshad said he would no longer let people discourage him from participating in neither work nor social activities outside the house: “It is my right,” he says.
Two lives that went in opposite directions

Both my daughter Isabella and Amir were born after complications at birth. Isabella received help and is today evolving normally. Amir has to live with a handicap the rest of his life and has already been kicked out of school once because he did not stand fast enough for the teacher.

Before my daughter was born, her head was stuck too long in the birth canal. The nurses monitored her heart beat, and when it was time to get her out, we took the elevator to the second floor where they had the equipment to pull her out.

In Tajikistan I recently met a woman, Daheammo, who could tell the same story. But only to the point where her son Amir’s head was stuck too long in the birth canal. Because there was no equipment to monitor the heart beat; no elevator; and no equipment to pull out the baby; Amir today suffers from a physical and mental disability caused by the prolonged lack of oxygen during birth.

Daheammos story made a big impression on me. It could have been my daughter.

"School is not a place for children with disabilities" Daheammo told me that she has two daughters and three sons. Amir is the youngest. Her husband is unemployed so the family is provided for in her salary only. Yet Daheammo agreed to lead the local support group that Mission East has started for parents of children with disabilities. I asked her why she spends time to volunteer when she has five children – one with a disability – a full time job, and a home to be cared for? "It is natural for me to help others, like I have been helped myself," she replied.

In Tajikistan, it is decided by law that children with disabilities have as much right to go to school as children without disabilities. But it is often a challenge to get to use that entitlement. When

“Daheammo’s story made a big impression on me. It could have been my daughter,” says Filip, here with four year old Isabella.
Daheammo began her work as leader of the team, Mission East made her aware that the law gives Amir the right to education.

Daheammo therefore showed up at the headmaster’s office to have her son enrolled. The headmaster agreed only reluctantly. Shortly after, she could send Amir to school, but it didn’t take long before he was kicked out of school again. She was told that they had no room for children with disabilities. The headmaster himself had noted that Amir lacked behind the other students both mentally and physically. Daheammo was sorry and asked about the problem in more detail. It appeared that Amir didn’t stand up fast enough when the teacher entered the classroom, and “that was a problem”.

**Presented legislation to headmaster**
An employee from Mission East in Tajikistan was eager to hear how Daheammo’s son was doing in school, and Daheammo explained that he had been expelled. Mission East gave her copies of the legislation, and once again she showed up at the headmaster’s office to demand Amir’s right – just to get the same message: Your son is not welcome here. But Daheammo didn’t quit. One more time she presented the legislation, black on white, to the headmaster. Today Amir is back in school.

The Soviet Union inheritance where the strong, independent man was hailed still makes many people see a wrong and useless child instead of a child with a disability. The school system in Tajikistan doesn’t have the resources, the experience or the skills to take care of children who differ a little. Many people focus on problems rather than on the children’s potential. Amir gets a little help from his friends, but not nearly enough to live up to his full potential. Yet he is only one year behind, because Mission East helped Daheammo to intervene. And it is clearly a proud mother, he comes home to after the school day is over!
No more sharing water source with animals

In one month, children and their parents in the village of Taka Tamest in north Afghanistan will no longer have to use the water from the river for cooking and drinking. Waterborne diseases like diarrhea (which kills more than 4,000 children every day worldwide) have so far been common because of the infected water. But in June the village’s first water system will be finished. In other villages, that have already been provided with clean water, parents are no longer carrying away small size coffins a couple of times every month. The clean water will surely save children’s lives in Taka Tamest as well.

By Kim Hartzner, Mission East’s Managing Director

We need your help
In a district like Argu in north Afghanistan there are 166 villages, but so far Mission East has only been able to provide four of them with clean water, latrines and the necessary hygiene education. You can help save lives in the other villages. See the back page for more info on how to donate.

Children fetch water from the river which is contaminated by the excrements of the donkeys and other animals. Analyses show that the number of microbes in the water is so high that waterborne diseases are epidemic in the area.
Approximately one in four children in Afghanistan doesn’t live to see his or her fifth birthday. Largely because of contaminated water. Besides the eight tap stands in the village, the children of Taka Tamest will get their own tap stand at the local school.

This boy will only need to collect dirty water from the river for another 30 days. The village also receives latrines, soap and hygiene training. In a part of the world where washing hands after going to the toilet/before cooking is not common knowledge, education is extremely important.

Mission East provides all materials such as water pipes, tap stands, cement, digging tools and the needed technical expertise.

“I was encouraged to see how much the villagers contributed of their time and energy,” Managing Director Kim Hartzner says.

Last year, the village elders asked the local authorities for clean water. As Afghanistan is a fragile state with scarce resources, the solution for the elders was to turn to Mission East in the end.

Clean water comes from a spring in the mountains, 2.5 kilometres from the village. In March the snow finally melted and the 42 villagers could start digging the trench for the pipes. Experience shows that involving the village creates ownership and encourages better maintenance.
Why are we sick all the time?

Ghachan village is located an hour’s walk in the mountains from the nearest road. Here you find 123 Afghan families living isolated from the rest of the world.

Less than a year ago, children and their parents in the village were sick all the time. But why? None of them understood why they were constantly struck by stomach pain, fever, and diarrhea. While they wondered what they had done to deserve this they kept drinking the water from the irrigation canal that passed through their village – when it didn’t freeze during the winter that is.

One of Mission East’s strengths is to provide help in desolate areas where no or only a few others are present: To help people who live in remote areas and feel forgotten by the rest of the world. In a village like Ghachan the distances often mean that employees have to spend the night in the villages to carry out the job.

Today, Ghachan has received clean water which everyone can collect from one of eight taps. Why are we sick all the time?

By Khaliq Dad, Field Supervisor, Mission East, Afghanistan

“It was hard for us to get water”

“Before, when we didn’t have water, we used to use the water from the irrigation canal and from the valley. We brought water from far away and it was hard for us. Now we use the water from these taps and when we use the water from these taps we don’t get sick anymore. Before, we didn’t have toilets either. We used to go to the bathroom in the yard, the street, or anywhere we felt like it. Since Mission East helped us build latrines and told us to use them, we just use them and we don’t get sick.”

Aziza, 10 years old

The local community helped digging the trench for the 2.6 kilometer pipeline from the spring, which now provides the village with clean drinking water.
This project is carried out in cooperation with Humanitarian Aid department of the European Commission, ECHO.

tap stands around the village. This Spring, the last of the latrines will be finished. And everyone has learned about hygiene and now knows about good hand washing practice, always putting a lid on perishables, and why they should use the latrines and avoid drinking the infected water from the old irrigation canal.

“We already feel a difference – people in the village are getting sick less and less. I am grateful for the help and because we have learned about clean water and hygiene and about how to stay healthy. Especially considering the distance to the nearest clinic,” says Faiz-ur-Rahman from the village.

The work is carried out in cooperation with the villagers who have transported pipes, cement and other materials on donkeys from the road to the village. This way the community members gain a sense of ownership and feel a greater responsibility in maintaining the latrines and the tap stands when Mission East moves on to the next village.

Everyone is happy to finally be able to fight and avoid the several water borne diseases that have been troubling their community members, especially for the sake of their children. When they do face illness, the nearest health clinic is hours away from the village by foot.

“Now I use the latrine!”

“The organisation that built these taps did a good thing for us! Before, we used to bring water from far away. Now the taps are near our house and we are very happy. Now I use the latrine! Thank you!”

Mohammad, 8 years old
We need you to help others

Last year Mission East extended urgent relief and long-term development aid to more than half a million people in Eastern Europe and Asia. Our work is only possible through donations that we receive from private individuals and other donors. You can help us help those in need by making 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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With your support, Mission East can continue to transform lives.

Thank you!