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 directly or through local partners in Afghanistan, Armenia, Nepal, North Korea, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Romania and Bulgaria. The assistance offered by Mission East is supported by a range of private and public donors such as the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and the United Nations. Mission East has been verified compliant with the People in Aid Code of Good Practice in the management and support of aid personnel.

Disaster Risk Reduction – Climate changes lead to wilder weather incidents

“Excessive rainfall, severe storms, and extreme droughts have become more and more common and have the harshest impact on the world’s poor. We must act right now to prevent and minimize the impact of these events – especially those that have devastating effects on the world’s most vulnerable,” says Mikael Jarnvig, Meteorologist and Mission East Ambassador, in this magazine’s focus on disaster risk reduction.

Tajikistan – When mountains crumble, women stand strong

During the season when most disasters happen in Tajikistan, many men are abroad, leaving women to take action themselves.

North Korea – Famine threatening six million people

How did it happen that about one million people died of starvation in North Korea in the nineties? Can we prevent such a disaster from happening again soon?

Pakistan – Pakistan team goes the extra mile

Poverty is so profound in Pakistan’s Swat Valley that staff from Mission East’s partner organisation resorted to contributing from their own pockets during a recent distribution of aid.

Bulgaria – Meat, potatoes and an education

The opening of a new community centre in Bulgaria’s capital provides the elderly with a place to satisfy their hunger and youth with an opportunity to educate themselves.
**A stitch in time saves nine**

It is a normal human response to help when we see the huge devastation that results when a tsunami, drought, earthquake or flood strikes. But this devastation can be minimized by prevention measures. So if small amounts of money can make a big difference through prevention, why do we wait until disaster strikes before we act with empathy and generosity?

In a quote for the news agency Reuters, the EU Commissioner for humanitarian aid, Kristalina Georgieva, suggests that prevention is simply not as quick to grab your attention.

The World Bank estimates that it costs seven times more to respond with emergency aid – when, for example, floods force people to flee from their homes in Asia – than it costs to prevent the consequences of the disaster before it occurs. If we work on preventing the devastation that disaster can cause as we work to help those who are most vulnerable, then we can make a bigger difference with our resources. It is for this reason that Mission East helps communities build protection walls and earthquake-proof houses, teaches villagers that cutting down trees will increase the risk of landslides, and helps them to form their own rescue teams.

For more than a decade Mission East has deliberately ensured that disaster risk reduction plays an increasingly important role in our projects. And we will continue this focus on prevention. Through prevention, we can make a lasting difference with your support.

If small amounts of money can make a big difference through prevention, why do we wait until disaster strikes before we act with empathy and generosity?

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Dr. Kim Hartzner, Managing Director of Mission East
Climate changes lead to wilder weather incidents

2010 was one of the worst years in two decades in terms of the number of natural disasters around the world.

Natural disasters are becoming increasingly frequent and strike with such great strength, that we forget the previous one when the next occurs. There is a risk that we simply assume that this is just how the earth works. But there is both a cause and a solution.

Excessive rainfall, severe storms, and extreme droughts have become more and more common and have the harshest impact on the world’s poor; 89 percent of the total number of natural disaster victims in 2010 lived in Asia. If we and the international community have the will to do something about it, we can decrease the human contributions to climate change, but it will take many years to regain “the old balance”.

Some causes we do not know about, but others have been brought to light by science. For example, we know that the still increasing emission of greenhouse gasses (mainly CO$_2$) leads to a destabilisation of the atmospheric heat balance. It is a scientific fact that the temperature has gone up one degree over the last 100 years on average around the world. In the Arctic it is more. One weather record after another has been beaten in recent years. And there is no indication that this could just be a passing coincidence. We must prepare ourselves for increasingly “wild” climates around the world. Extreme rainfall and deforestation has significantly increased the risk of more catastrophic floods, mudflows and landslides.

While we can make changes in our lives to limit our CO$_2$ emissions with hope of slowing down the overall trend of climate change, we must also in the meantime, act right now to prevent and minimize the impact of these events that are already taking place as a result of the current changes in our climate – especially those that have devastating effects on the world’s most vulnerable.

“IT has not always been like this. I have been living in this village for years and a flood had never struck before,”
says Sayed Shah, whose home in Afghanistan’s Badakhshan Province was destroyed by a flood last spring.

“There is a greater risk of floods and landslides in particular. Among other things, overpopulation, overgrazing and deforestation have increased the number and extent of disasters,”
says Jonathan Bartolozzi, Mission East’s Province Manager in Afghanistan’s Badakhshan Province.
Risk-reduction by radio

If you turn on your radio in the mountain villages of Nepal, you can hear people singing about natural disasters.

Songs and radio drama have taught 80,000 villagers in the remote mountain areas of Nepal about floods, mudslides and earthquakes. Each year these disasters destroy harvests, block paths, or in the worst cases, take the lives of residents of these mountainous areas.

The short melodic jingles that play on the radio are easy to remember and remind people about good risk-reduction practices. For example, one song teaches people that they should not cut down all the trees on a mountainside if they want to avoid dangerous mudslides. Information about how to build a good protection wall is also being spread. Radio journalists have interviewed survivors of recent disasters and shared their stories on air so that others can learn from their experience.

In most of the mountainous regions of Nepal, 70 percent of the population is illiterate. But most people have a small radio which is their way of gaining new knowledge: in this case valuable knowledge about preventing disasters.

Mission East contributes to a new publication about natural disasters

Mission East has recently contributed to a new book on disaster risk reduction. “Risk Returns”, published by the UN secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, gathers a large amount of international experience on disaster prevention. Mission East contributed a chapter about disaster risk reduction in the remote mountain areas of Nepal.

With support from Mission East, radio journalists have been able to visit remote villages to interview the villagers about their experiences with natural disasters.
Your one Euro is worth seven

How can your money grow to seven times its value?

While you are reading this, a stone wall is being built in Afghanistan. Not far from the wall is a school where 1,100 Afghan girls and boys from three poor villages learn how to read and write, and where 24 teachers make a living to support their families.

It is costly to build the wall. So why does Mission East not spend the money on school books or chalk? What good is a pile of rocks for the children, who could buy a large amount of pencils and books for the same amount of money? The explanation is very simple and illustrates the kind of work, which increasingly is needed in countries like Nepal, Tajikistan and Afghanistan; work that prevents the massive and tragic consequences of more and more natural disasters such as mudslides, earthquakes and floods.

Water moving closer

The school has cost about 67,000 Euros to build and is located in the province of Badakhshan, where the population struggles with an increasing number of landslides and floods. In recent years, the nearby river has “eaten” away more and more of the bank and the water is moving closer and closer to the school. At the same time the river threatens to flood the agricultural fields around the school and destroy the harvest.

The World Bank estimates that it costs seven times more to respond to a natural disaster, than to prevent its impact through risk reduction.

Right now the water level in the river is low. But next spring when the snow melts in the mountains, the children’s school is at risk of being flooded without the new protection wall, which is pictured here.
It was the school’s headmaster who asked Mission East for help to protect the school:

“The wall has brought hope to our students and teachers and also to the farmers who own fields surrounding the school. It is wonderful. We are all so grateful for the protection.”

If the water during a spring flood reaches the building, the clean-up, rebuilding and replacement of damaged school materials and destroyed crops will cost several times more than it will cost to build the stone wall which protects against the damages. Not to mention the lives that can be saved.

The World Bank estimates that it costs seven times more to respond to a natural disaster, than to prevent its impact through risk reduction. For every Euro spent to build a wall in Afghanistan the value is multiplied for the school and the fields nearby.
When mountains crumble, women stand strong

During the season when most disasters happen in Tajikistan, many men are abroad, leaving women to take action themselves.

40-year old Gulya points away from her house and past the harvest of apricots that are drying on the hard stone ground in the backyard. This is the escape route for her and her children if another mudslide hits the village of Puthrin.

Last year this village in the Zerafshan Valley in Tajikistan was hit by the worst mudslide in 80 years. Huge masses of mud and rocks came crashing down the mountain, killing one woman when she tried to save her most valuable possession: her only cow.

Inside the house, Gulya has hung a plastic bag about two metres above the ground. It is her emergency bag, and contains, among other things, the family's important documents. Through its rural disaster risk reduction programme (funded largely by the European Commission) Mission East has taught her to be prepared.

Once the mud starts coming in, there's no time to get things out of drawers and cupboards. For now everything is quiet. But Gulya feels the pressure. It is her responsibility to save herself, her mother-in-law and her four children when a disaster hits the village.

A village without men

Every spring, the village of Puthrin turns into a village of women and children, when nine out of ten men travel to Russia to find work and don't return home until the winter is near. Meanwhile the snow is melting in the mountains, leaving wives and mothers with a constant fear of floods and landslides. Like her neighbours, Gulya is also alone with her children.

In the past it was only the village leaders who knew how to react to a disaster. Today the women have been trained by Mission East and have been taught to go to the meeting place, calm each...
other down and follow the evacuation routes that have been planned amongst the villagers.

“I would prefer to have my husband here. It is a big responsibility to manage alone. But when he is gone I have to do all I can for my family,” Gulya says. And in an area which is extremely vulnerable to natural disaster she now feels better equipped to save her own life and the lives of others.

For now everything is quiet. But Gulya feels the pressure. It is her responsibility to save herself, her mother-in-law and her four children when a disaster hits the village.

Gulya’s mother-in-law tells about last year’s mudslide that destroyed several houses in the village. The evacuation routes and the disaster preparedness training saved the family’s life.

“Beware! Mudflow risk zone” reads one of the signs which Mission East has posted in the parts of the village most at risk for a mudflow.

Water, food and the emergency bag with important documents are at hand and easy to grab during a quick evacuation.
How did it happen that about one million people died of starvation in North Korea in the nineties? Can we prevent such a disaster from happening again soon?

The nineties were a dark period in North Korean history. The collapse of the Soviet Union and several natural disasters played a role in the famine that killed about one million people.

Since the birth of the republic, North Korea has tried to be self-sufficient. During the Soviet period, however, the agricultural sector was highly dependent on materials and cheap oil from the Soviet Union. This close financial relationship therefore had huge consequences for North Korea when the Soviet Union collapsed at the beginning of the nineties. Trade ceased and agricultural yields fell drastically.

Natural disasters and today’s situation

In 1995 and 1996, the already difficult situation was worsened by severe floods followed by a drought and a windstorm in 1997. These disasters destroyed crops depleting the country’s food supply and resulting in a famine which killed approximately one million people.

The land is cultivated by hand and with oxen. Agriculture in North Korea requires innovation to meet the need for food, and Mission East wishes to train farmers in improved techniques. Photos: Kim Hartzner, Mission East.
Today, North Korea is facing a situation much like this grave food shortage in the nineties. Eighty percent of this year’s spring harvest of barley and wheat has failed due to floods and extreme winter cold. In June the authorities lowered the daily ration of rice to 150 grams per adult. This equates to one small bowl of 400 calories, which is only a fifth of what a human being needs.

The UN estimates that ¼ of the North Korean population of approximately 24 million people are in dire need of help.

Food storages are empty. North Koreans must supplement their small daily portion of a bowl of rice with herbs and seaweed.

The children Mission East attended to in kindergartens and nurseries in June, had wounds and skin diseases as a result of serious malnutrition: “I’ve never seen children so emaciated, apathetic and affected by hunger”, says Managing Director Kim Hartzner.
The opening of a new community centre in Bulgaria’s capital provides the elderly with a place to satisfy their hunger and youth with an opportunity to educate themselves.

A dark-haired woman with sunken cheeks and puffy eyes is sitting in the social centre’s dining room. Her skin is pale and her hair is thin and disheveled. After a long life of hard work, this is what she is left with: a pension so meagre that it is not even adequate to cover her daily meals.

The social centre celebrated its official opening in June, and since then many elderly people have been queuing for the soup kitchen each week. The Roma population, in particular, find it difficult to manage without some additional assistance. Officially, the Roma population represents 750,000 people in Bulgaria, but the unofficial estimates site twice as many. This ‘unofficial’ population lives without any record of their existence and therefore has no access to social services – however small the benefits may be.

On the next floor young people from the ghetto and other impoverished parts of town are offered an education. Here they can learn to become plumbers, electricians or construction workers.

While the soup kitchen provides the elderly with hope for today, a floor up the next generation embraces a hope for the future.

The dream for a community centre

Mission East has worked in Bulgaria since 1997, ten years before the country joined the EU. Together with a local partner, we spent these early years providing food to children on the streets and vulnerable elderly people, and gave children living in institutions the opportunity to go on holiday camps. The idea of a community centre in Sofia from where the local partner could coordinate all of its social support activities, is a dream from long ago which has finally become a reality.

When the potatoes are gone, the dishes are empty, and hungry bellies are full, those who have been served leave the soup kitchen with a feeling that other human beings care about them.
The average pension in Bulgaria amounts to approximately 60 Euro per month for those who are eligible to receive it.

Many defenseless Roma girls are abducted at a young age, often to be sold into prostitution in countries in Western Europe. In order to “save” them before that happens, desperate parents rush to marry off their daughters unwillingly at the age of 13.

In parts of Bulgaria, especially in the ghettos, unemployment rates reach as high as 80 percent.

The workers at the social centre also visit the ghettos and distribute relief to those from the Roma population who are living in poverty. At the same time they inform youth about the opportunities available at the centre for vocational training, computer courses and English lessons.

The children’s smiles hide the sad reality of their uncertain future.
Pakistan team goes the extra mile

Poverty is so profound in Pakistan’s Swat Valley that staff from Mission East’s partner organisation resorted to contributing from their own pockets during a recent distribution of aid.

“I particularly remember one family when I was in Swat Valley last week,” says Nauman Shah, who is the Executive Director of the NGO which Mission East partners with in Pakistan. “Both children had problems with their joints, and the mother’s disability prevented her from working. There was no one to provide an income. With support from Mission East we gave them a goat and feed among other things, so they can slowly start to build up a life again.”

But seeing the children in their misery, so dirty and still affected by the tragic floods last year, Nauman wanted to do more for the family.

“When I asked them about clothes and soap, they said they didn’t have any. They didn’t even have mattresses to sleep on. My colleagues and I reached down into our own pockets and gathered some money so they could...
Meeting the boy and his family made a big impression on Nauman Shah, who is the Executive Director of Mission East’s partner organisation in Pakistan.

“When I asked them about clothes and soap, they said they didn’t have any. They didn’t even have mattresses to sleep on.”

Children are back in school, but many buildings have been severely damaged.

buy two mattresses for the children,” says Nauman. “We complain about the things we have been given, but seeing them made me thank God for his blessings to me and my family.”

Bridges and roads washed away
A year after the floods, which affected nearly 20 million people, those who live in the Swat Valley are still suffering. Bridges and roads have washed away and it is difficult to reach the area with help. There is a need for cows, goats and seeds to help restore agriculture. Schools need to be rebuilt. There are almost no health clinics. And the children need extensive help to recover from their traumas. Mission East and our partner organisation continue to help the desperate population in one of Pakistan’s least accessible areas.
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.

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

Thank you!

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