

Mission EAST

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FOCUS

10 years in Tajikistan



Mission East
- values in action

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Front page photo: Saidbibi and her family lost their house and all of their belongings when a massive mud flow surprised them one April night. Mission East helps poor villages in Tajikistan to be better prepared for the many natural disasters the country suffers from. Among other things we help install warning systems and teach safer construction practices.

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 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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10 years in Tajikistan – and what a difference!



Dr. Kim Hartzner,
Managing Director
of Mission East

“When we got off the plane our luggage was already on the runway. The plane closed the doors behind us and took off right away without any new passengers. There was no passport control. No customs officers.”

“While we were on the plane, fighting in the country had broken out again, for the first time in several months. We didn’t know, but other relief organisations had left the country. The streets were deserted. Only soldiers were to be seen.”

The above was written by Kenneth Whitelaw-Jones, an early Country Director in Tajikistan, about the time we first decided to bring emergency aid to the country. This autumn marks 10 years since that event.

The taxi driver refused to drive Kenneth all the way to the Mission East office. It was too dangerous. Instead Kenneth grabbed his suitcase and walked the rest of the way, passing armed soldiers

and tanks at the ready. Mission East had taken on a task and was not about to let the Tajiks down. Kenneth had come to manage the distribution of an emergency aid shipment from the Danish government. Before long the first shipment arrived and Mission East was able to provide food supplies to 40.000 people.

Ten years on, the changes in Tajikistan are remarkable and there are signs of positive economic growth. However, it is still the poorest country from the former Soviet Union. The apparent signs of prosperity are offset by persistent poverty, especially in the countryside. Enforced cultivation of cotton is a major block to improving land use. The health and education sectors have yet to recover from a massive outflow of qualified personnel and destruction of facilities during the war years. Mission East has moved from providing emergency aid to developing programmes that build community capacity, transfer modern farming technologies, and

provide much needed water supply systems.

Mission East is recognized by the Tajik people as one of the long-standing aid organizations in the country since the conflict years. Donor investments have been greatly appreciated and, we believe, wisely used. We will continue to work in Tajikistan in collaboration with communities, local government institutions and other partner agencies for as long Mission East has something to contribute to supporting the country to become confident, thriving and able to provide its people with the basics of life.

I hope you will help us make that difference.

Thank you.

Dr. Kim Hartzner,
Managing Director of Mission East

1997-2007 From emergency aid to self help

From emergency food aid to long-term development. This autumn Mission East has been in Tajikistan for ten years.

Out of Tajikistan's population of approximately seven million people 60 percent still live beneath the poverty line. There is no doubt that the people of this country have been through an awful lot and that they still suffer the consequences of the breakdown of the Soviet Union, several years of civil war, and the collapse of the economy.

In addition, the situation in Tajikistan is often out of the spotlight and the country remains one of the world's forgotten crises.

But in the dark, Mission East has been able to bring a little light to many of the country's poorest. This year, it has been ten years since we

first reacted to the overwhelming need in the country.

In 1997, our efforts were focused on keeping people alive by distributing food aid. Today we are providing thousands of families with a foundation to support themselves by giving them access to clean drinking water and shar-

ing essential skills in areas such as agriculture and hygiene.

Tajikistan is still one of the poorest countries among the former Soviet republics and many villages still desperately need our assistance. That is why we continue to help.

1997



Emergency aid to a people in conflict

In 1997, the first Mission East emergency aid arrived in Tajikistan. After the civil war (1992-1997) the economy had collapsed, the shops were empty, and people were living in damaged houses with few possessions except the clothes they wore. Our first project, distributing 500 tons of food was enough to feed 40,000 people. From 1997 to 2002 Mission East's work consisted largely of emergency aid. As well as food aid, Mission East also assisted with construction and rehabilitation of water systems in rural areas, bringing clean water to villages who were using infected sources.

2003



Development – a longer term perspective

While some households recovered from the conflict years quickly, other vulnerable families, especially those without land or assets remained in need of support for several years. Food distributions continued for the most needy who were without other sources of help. But by 2003, Mission East was putting an emphasis on self help instead and longer terms strategies – teaching skills and building communities' abilities to help themselves.

2004



Supporting local leadership

It is important to us that the villagers take responsibility for the development in their own village. That is why Mission East supports the formation of village groups in places that we help. The local groups are responsible for prioritising local needs and they play an active role in carrying out the work from setting up water systems to the community-based education in hygiene and farming. This way we make sure change for the better will continue even after we leave.

2005



Improving agricultural knowledge

Many rural households in Tajikistan are dependent on small-scale farming for food and income. For several years now, Mission East has been carrying out agricultural training activities to help people to get the most out of their crops. Improved knowledge of farming techniques and how to take care of the livestock gives them a better chance of feeding their families throughout the year. The surplus from the field can also be sold – providing a vital source of cash income in order to buy important things like clothes and medicine.

2005



Food processing as an income opportunity

Mission East provides training and inputs for a range of food processing and food preservation activities. This has served as a basis for small business development as the products are sold for disposable income. This is especially useful in supporting earning opportunities for women who may have difficulties finding other work.

Emigration – a huge problem for Tajikistan

Six months ago, Mission East's Country Director in Tajikistan, Marydean Purves, sat next to a 36-year-old trained paediatrician on board a flight from the capital Dushanbe to Russia. The paediatrician was on his way to his job as a factory worker in St. Petersburg where he could earn 1,000 dollars a month. For 15 years previously he worked as a paediatrician for

the Tajik Health Department. There he only earned 11 dollars a month.

Emigration is a huge problem in Tajikistan. Many Tajiks have difficulties finding work. And those who have a job have difficulties supporting their family with their low wages.

That is why between seven and eight hundred thousand Tajiks, mostly men cross the borders each year to find work.

Marydean Purves has dubbed the flight from Dushanbe to Russia "The Emigrant Express" because the vast majority of the passengers are Tajiks travelling to work in other countries.

A country of women and children

When the men leave to find work in neighbouring countries, the women have to manage their households and their land by themselves. Children's attendance at school comes under threat, and the young generation risks missing out on vital learning and skills.

"Tajikistan is one of the few countries in the world where the daughters are less educated than their mothers – in this sense

development is actually going backwards," says Marydean.

Efforts to support livelihoods for the poor in their own country are therefore essential to help address the problems of emigration.

Emigration is not just about jobs and money – the results of families living divided is already being seen, and has a deep influence on the prospects for the growing generation.

2004



Fewer diseases due to better hygiene

A lot of poor Tajik people don't know enough about good hygiene practices. They drink from the same water sources as the animals and aren't aware of the importance of handwashing. Mission East teaches children and adults about hygiene which, according to the local health clinics, has resulted in a reduction in waterborne diseases. Local hygiene promoters are trained to continue raising awareness in their communities.

2005



Children go to school instead of fetching water

Unsafe water leads to diseases and many poor people suffer therefore not only from sickness, but from the related effects of lost opportunity to work or study, and have to spend precious money on healthcare. Mission East's water supply and sanitation activities have provided access to safe drinking water and functioning sanitary facilities. 13-year-old Dilrabo used to fetch water for her family from canals 1-2 kilometers away. She lost a year in school because she spent most of her day fetching water in little buckets. Now, her village has a clean water system, bringing safe water close to her home, and she and many other children like her have time to concentrate on school again.

2006



Protection against natural disasters

Tajikistan has a high rate of natural disasters, including floods, earthquakes, and landslides. Like everywhere else, it is the poorest who suffer most from such disasters. Mission East helps communities to recognise risks, and to learn skills to prepare for disaster. Activities also include flood early warning systems, training in more earthquake resistant construction, and establishing village-level rescue groups.



Sharifa offers one of her salty milk balls to Mission East's Marydean Purves. Knowing how to transform the milk from her three cows into different products has changed her life.

Sharifa – making a new life with milk

By Marydean Purves,
Country Director,
Tajikistan

When you ask Sharifa Boboeva, of M. Ghaffor village in Tajikistan, if she has milk today, she will enthusiastically say "Yes!" – and in many forms: yogurt, sweet and sour cream, cottage cheese, 'kefir', and salty milk balls.

Sharifa will show you her products all packaged in modern plastic containers, labelled and ready for distribution. She offers a taste test because she is so proud of the pure fresh taste of her milk products. Sharifa now sells in the market, and claims that she is no longer dependent on charity from relatives for extra income.

She had no idea how to transform the milk into other products. Often she threw away spoiled milk, not knowing how to use it fast enough.

In fact, Sharifa feels her life has turned around in the last two years, thanks both to her involvement in the dairy group production activities,

and to her participation in the larger community development activities supported by Mission East in her village. Born and raised in M. Ghaffor, Sharifa went to school up until the 10th form. She is a young-looking 43-year-old widow whose husband was a victim of the tragic civil war that devastated Tajikistan from 1992 to 1997. Sharifa was left to raise six children alone, depending on the extended family network which, while vital to her and her children's survival, also reduced her freedom and possibilities for self-development.

Sharifa has three cows and, prior to joining the women's dairy group, she only managed to process pasteurized milk for home consumption and occasional sales. She had no idea how to transform the milk into other products. Often she threw away

spoiled milk, not knowing how to use it fast enough. Mission East's "Livelihood Improvement through Community Development" project provided start-up equipment, materials, and most importantly, training that gave Sharifa the skills and the confidence to do her own production. She now has a personal income that ranges from 20 to 30 tajik somoni (6-9 USD) per day – with which she can buy school supplies for her children, sugar, butter and matches.

Overall, the "Milk Maid" of M. Ghaffor is on track to improve her life and the life of her growing children. She has big plans – in the future she hopes to develop a line of ice cream products and have her own stand in her village.

This project received support from the EU via the EuropeAid Cooperation Office



Saidbibi and the rest of her family watched as their house collapsed and their possessions were carried away by the mud.



The arrow shows how high the mud reached that night in April. Down by the river you can see the small wall of stone that the desperate women build in fear of the next flood.

Destroyed by mud

Mission East helps victims of natural disasters in Tajikistan

Mudflow is a major challenge in the Pendjikent district of Tajikistan. Every year many communities are hit by mudflow, sometimes with dramatic consequences, like the massive mudflow in the village of Sinj, that killed four people in 2005. Mission East has been active in this district for two years now within 18 communities, working to build their capacity to be more resilient to earthquake risk. But the threat of mudflow is a tangible hazard that is jeopardizing the development of these communities and Mission East is now working at integrating mudflow risk reduction in its approach.

It happened on April 17th 2006 at three o'clock in the morning. It had been raining for two days already, the river was quite high but Saidbibi was not worried. She had lived in the small village of Ziddi for 45 years and the regular floods she witnessed had never seriously affected her household.

In the middle of the night, the rain turned into a deluge which lasted 30 minutes, so the leader of the community reported. The 13 residents of the house were sleeping when a rumbling noise woke them up. They did not even have even time to open the door when a wave of mud rushed into the room. They were all trapped inside, desperately trying to escape from the mud that was filling the room. They screamed in terror.

Mud three metres deep

65-year-old Saidbibi lived with her husband Mahmatulov and their children in a two storey house made of mud bricks. The house, which they shared with three other families, was situated just above a nice river in a charming little valley. As one of very few families they had a small garden of 120 square metres where they cultivated vegetables for most of their food needs.

Saidbibi and her husband were far from wealthy. But they were able to provide their children with a roof over their heads and food on the table. Until that night in April.

A young boy living just above them heard their screams and came to help them out of the house. As soon as the last child was evacuated, the second level of the house collapsed.



– houses and livelihoods



By Christophe Belperron,
Disaster Prevention and
Preparedness Coordinator,
Mission East Tajikistan

They could not take with them any tools and belongings from the house. All the women were in their nightdresses as they watched their possessions and clothes being washed away little by little by the torrent of mud that rose to three metres above the ground level.

Preparing families for the next flood

When daylight came, they could only observe the desolated scene of their house completely destroyed.

Since then, the family has been living under a tree in the backyard and in the one room remaining intact. Their garden has been totally washed away with all their plants and seeds. In a desperate attempt to avoid further flood, the women built themselves a small wall made of stone, which will

certainly not stand even a minor flood more than ten minutes.

Since April, the family has been waiting for help but except from a little emergency nobody has come to their assistance.

Every day, the family fears another flood.

While Saidbibi is desperately waiting for help, Mission East staff have begun a small project to help her and the 17 other families affected by this event in two neighbouring villages.

Together with local partners, Mission East will not only support the reconstruction of homes but will also train masons from the villages in safer construction practices, help the community to

draw up a risk map and provide awareness training for protection against natural hazards. A small-scale mitigation project will help reduce the next mudflow impact.

And the next mudflow will come. That is for certain. But this time, Saidbibi will be prepared.

They did not have even time to open the door when a wave of mud rushed into the room. They were all trapped inside, desperately trying to escape from the mud that was filling the room. They screamed in terror.



“Nothing beats the feeling of meeting the people



Text and photo: Peter Blum Samuelsen, Vice Managing Director, Mission East

It was a deeply touched Vice Managing Director who returned from a visit to Mission East's projects in Afghanistan in July. Here Peter Samuelsen tells us more about his visit, and his encounter with a thirsty little boy.

As I arrived at Kabul airport, there were medical helicopters with wounded soldiers sitting outside, waiting to be flown out for proper medical treatment.

I felt the city was tense with weapons and security personnel.

In Kabul I saw the Afghanistan that the worldwide media portrays; a country of war and conflict.

But as soon as I followed the convoy of traffic up into the mountains, heading north towards where Mission East works far away from the war in the south, a different picture of the country was waiting for me. Even though burnt out tanks from the Soviet

era were lying upside down on the side of the mountains all around, I experienced a side to Afghanistan that seldom reaches our newspapers and TV screens. Here, in a more peaceful part of the country, development is blossoming. A development that partly is because of support from Denmark.

Without losing face

We had been standing by the water pump in the village of Ishan Khalifa for a while when a younger woman approached us. Some of the local men had been telling us how the pump that Mission East had built with the support from EU's Humanitarian Aid Department ECHO and the resulting clean drinking water had changed life dramatically in the village.

It was day four of my visit and the temperature at noon was so high and the air so dry that my face was covered in sweat.

The woman had come to the pump with her donkey to collect water in

small metal buckets. She was a bit shy and probably also felt uneasy about interrupting a gathering of men. In Afghanistan, women are not supposed to interrupt men or have contact with strangers.

The woman hesitated. But despite the cultural gap between men and women, right away one of the men came to help her pump water up from under the ground.

That is when it hit me that the water pump with clean drinking water is not only preventing the deaths of children from water-borne diseases like diarrhoea in the village year after year. It is not only sparing the women long, and often dangerous, journeys across narrow mountain paths to collect water from the nearest lake. The pump has also become a point of common interest for both men and women. A place where a man can help a woman with her chores without losing face.



The villagers are very happy with the water pump from Mission East. A man is cooling down his face in the afternoon heat while one of the elders is helping the young woman pump water.

we help”

Together with Mission East, the village men have built the pump themselves. They feel responsible for it. And even though collecting water is a job for a woman, the pump is connected to a great deal of pride and ownership by the men.

Dead children in every family

I asked the group if the pump had made a difference in their life.

“Yes,” they answered.

“Before, we were constantly struck by disease. We saw how our children died one after the other because of contaminated water. Each family in the village has lost one or more children. But now nobody dies.”

In one of the other villages I met one of the children who may have been saved by the clean drinking water.

We were gathered around the water tank that Mission East

helped build when a small boy made his way through the crowd. In his hand he was holding a metal cup which he held under the tap while the clean, clear water filled it up.

When drinking, he looked up at me and gave me a shy smile. And I felt honoured. Imagine that we are touching this life.

I was filled with joy over the fact that the water the little boy and other children are drinking is clean. They no longer need to be afraid of getting sick whenever they feel thirsty.

Still a great need for help

My first visit to Afghanistan confirmed that in unity we are able to reach the heart of the

Afghan population. There is nothing that can beats the feeling of meeting these human beings to whom the help is

real and often makes the difference between life and death.

But there are still a lot of poor people in Afghanistan to whom war, disease, and fear is every day life. They too deserve our help. Together we are able to do more good in Afghanistan.

” When drinking, he looked up at me and gave me a shy smile. And I felt honoured. Imagine that we are touching this life.”





Udaya (front) and Ram proudly show their work. Udaya received a loan from Mission East's partner in Nepal to start his own business and today he is able to give others, like Ram, a second chance too.



Bricks to support the future



By Alex Ramos-Peña,
Desk Officer, Nepal

Udaya thought about leaving his wife and newborn baby to look for work in a neighbouring country. A 100 dollar loan from Mission East's partner in Nepal changed his mind and his life.

Three years ago, 25-year-old Udaya Bishwakarma had just married and was expecting his first child. For most people this is a time of happiness. But living in Nepal, Udaya was very insecure as to what the future could bring for him and his new

family, particularly for someone in his social situation, belonging to the lowest of the Hindu castes.

At that time, there were very few opportunities of finding a job

and supporting his family, the situation was becoming increasingly difficult and he did not know what to do. Should he leave his wife and child and go to India in search of work? Or should he try to find something he could actually do in his village?

He found hope with Mission East and our local partner in Nepal, NASSO. Udaya received a loan of approximately 100 dollars of which he bought a water buffalo. The loan was to be paid back over one year.

A second chance

Udaya worked hard during the year, using his water buffalo to help in the fields and for transport, and the buffalo also gave him a calf. The fruits of this hard work allowed him to pay his debt – on

time – and also to provide for his wife and child.

Realizing Udaya's potential as a hard worker and someone with good ideas, the community credit group that he was part of requested he be given an even greater opportunity, taking over a “factory” in the village of Chitalnagar, southwest of Nepal.

Today, this young man makes pre-cast concrete pieces including bricks, fencing posts, latrines, and decorative items for the facades of houses. All the work is done manually and each piece individually made.

Udaya has made sure that the business is profitable and he is even able to give his customers credit.

Udaya's situation was becoming too difficult and he did not know what to do. Should he leave his wife and child and go to India in search of work?

Micro-finance gives poor Nepalese a sense of dignity and a chance to support their families

Mission East's partner organization NASSO has been supporting micro-finance activities in Nepal for over four years and has seen how they make a difference in people's lives – especially for people that would have no other chance of having a loan, due to the caste into which they were born. It has been quite a positive experience with a rate of payment of the loans of 95 percent. This allows for further lending to other members of the communities who desperately need such a lifeline. The loans are used for starting small businesses or buying livestock. The beneficiaries all have in common the desire to realize their own potential and to be able to support their families – not through handouts but because of their own hard work.



Today, Ram Bahadur can afford to send his children to school because of his job at the pre-cast concrete factory.

But Udaya's story does not end here

Because Mission East's partner saw Udaya's potential and gave him a second chance in life, today he himself is able to touch other people's lives and give them the chance *they* deserve.

50-year-old Ram Bahadur is the father of two children and a former rickshaw driver, who at his age could not continue with the extreme physical demands of driving a rickshaw and saw no chances of other work. A man his age was considered too old to have a job in the area and there were plenty of young men wanting to take over his rickshaw. His children were also looking for work – the family could not contemplate the possibility of schooling. However,

since Ram has been working with Udaya, he has gained an income, has the pride of being able to support his family, and the satisfaction of having the means to send his children to school.

Udaya hopes that his business will continue to grow so that in the future he will be able to offer work to more people who also need a second chance in life.

Armenia's first parents conference

On July 27th, more than 50 parents of disabled children from seven Marzes of Armenia gathered for a conference entitled 'Parents to Parents'. The conference is the first of its kind in the history of the Armenian republic, and among the participants were representatives from the Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and Ministry of Health.

As part of the 'Towards Education for All project', Mission East and our Armenia partner organization Bridge of Hope have organized, worked with and built the capacity of more than 25 Disabled Children's Parents Groups across the country during the past four years. These parents groups have undergone extensive trainings on issues related to the special education of their children and the promotion of their children's interests, including leadership and management, organizational capacity building, conflict management, and family counselling.

At the conference, representatives of various parents groups discussed their personal stories,

the challenges they faced and the work they need to do in the future so for the integration of people with disabilities into Armenian society.

Lucy Tonoyan from Yerevan said:

"The long way we have gone can be served as an example of a success story to many people. My son, Eric, is autistic. He was three years old when we went to 'Arbes' Centre, where he started getting help from professionals. Positive results came after years of truly hard work. Now my son is enrolled in an inclusive school supported by Mission East and partner. My son is still different from the rest, but he is now more independent and can learn without my interference. I could not even dream of something like this. And at all times, I had the parents group on my side. This help is indispensable."

One of the issues raised was the necessity of the establishment of a Parents Network so that the activities of various parents groups in different regions of Armenia will be coordinated and the advocacy work will become more effective.

Speakers also included representatives of various local and international aid organisations, as well as government representatives. All of them stressed the need for ongoing cooperation between the civil society and the state authorities to find solutions to the many problems of disabled people in Armenia.

"My son is still different from the rest, but he is now more independent and can learn without my interference. I could not even dream of something like this."

Lucy Tonoyan, parent of disabled child

Mission East's Raffi Doudaklian speaks at the first conference for parents of disabled children.





We need you to help others

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.

You can help us to help the needy by making a donation

using the donation slip or via Mission East's website www.miseast.org. You can donate an amount of your choice online, using Visa or MasterCard.

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Thank you!