

The work of FOCUS Humanitarian Assistance

Focus Humanitarian Assistance (FOCUS) was established in 1998 in Pakistan, with a vision to save lives, reduce suffering and create resilience in communities prone to man-made and natural disasters. FOCUS Pakistan is the lead implementing agency for humanitarian assistance of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), and draws upon extensive experience in disaster management and response. During its initial years, FOCUS Pakistan hosted a large influx of Afghan refugees through camp management, providing food, shelter, education and skill development programmes. With support from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), FOCUS facilitated the return of approximately 43,000 Afghans to their home country. FOCUS Pakistan's programmatic areas include

- Disaster Risk Reduction - community based disaster risk management, mapping and assessment, provision of stockpiles and early warning system
- Climate Change Adaptation
- Emergency Humanitarian Response and Relief

FOCUS has carried out over 1,600 village based mapping and assessment in its program areas in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

The Pamir region is considered to be rich with natural resources i.e. glaciers, lakes, peaks and mountains, pastures, mineral and medicinal plants - nationally and internationally the Pamir region has been viewed as vitally and strategically important because of its rich natural assets and unique opportunity in the future socio-economic development of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan. However, due to climate change related issues possibly leading to resource degradation and increased environmental fragility, its isolation and remoteness, lack of basic services including health and education facilities and infrastructure, scarcity of land and security issues, many areas of the Pamirs have remained ignored and underdeveloped. In addition, out-migration and a resulting brain drain from the Pamir region can be seen as another critically significant issue.

It is an open question if the Pamir mountain communities will directly benefit from mega projects such as the China Pakistan Economic Corridor project (CPEC). The people in Gilgit-Baltistan for instance are quite uncertain about the possible benefits for their own livelihoods of such a huge international endeavour. The existing feasibility and environmental studies are not made public yet and there remains serious doubt as to the local effects of the CPEC.

Box: The work of Focus in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

The DRR work carried out by Focus encompasses the components of Hazard Vulnerability and Risk Assessments (HVRA), Community Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) and School Safety Programmes (SFP). In 1999, FOCUS Pakistan helped to pioneer the concept of Community Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM). The CBDRM aims to build upon local knowledge and technical skills that enable and empower communities to cope with, prepare for, prevent, mitigate, respond to, and quickly recover from natural and man-made disasters in urban and rural areas. Over the years, FOCUS Pakistan has trained over 36,000 community volunteers (over 50% women) as first responders under an institutionalised structure called Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). Emergency stockpiles with items such as tents, blankets, search tools and first aid packages are also provided at the community level to strengthen local response capacities.

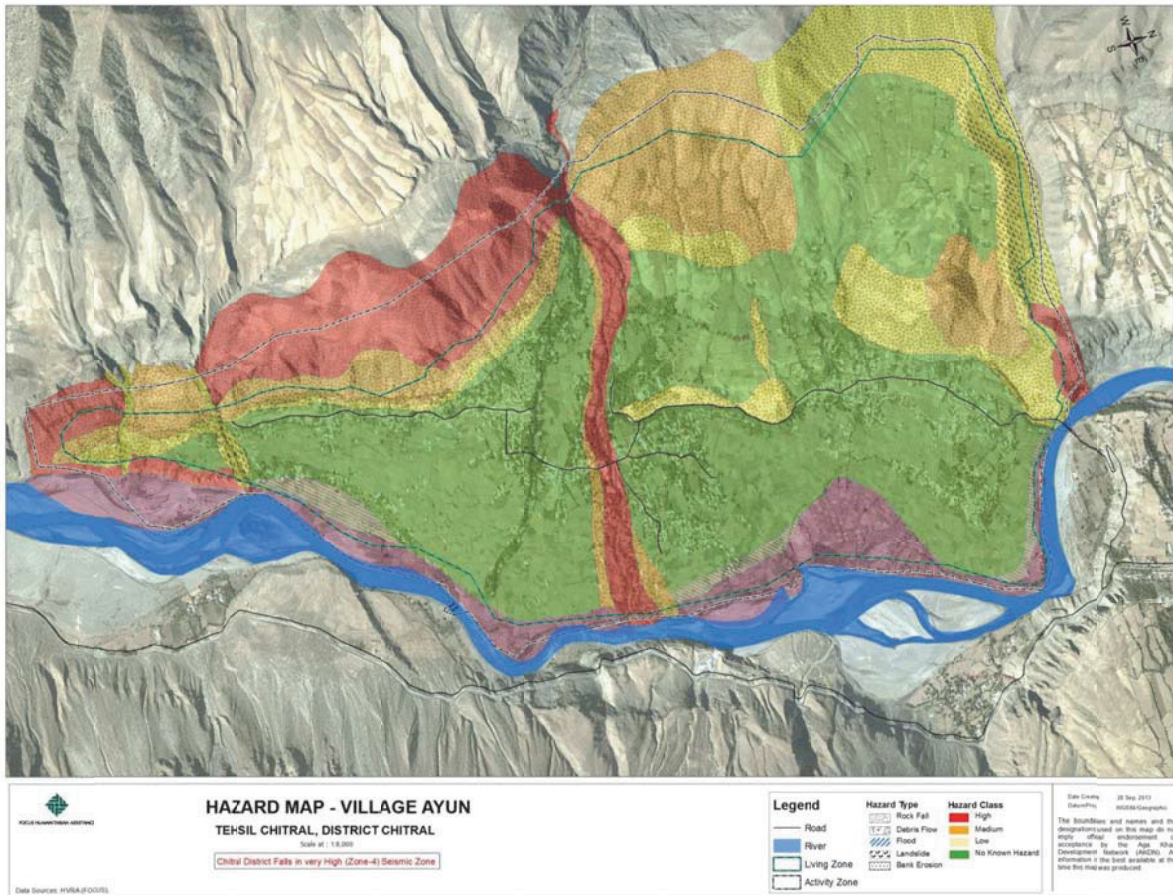
FOCUS Pakistan has produced hazard and risk maps for 658 villages with over 600,000 inhabitants in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral (GBC) and also 112 such maps for urban settlements. These maps are among the best informed tools for Disaster Risk Management (DRM) planning, early warning systems and mitigation that help in reducing risks for vulnerable communities. Moreover, an inventory of natural hazards such as landslides, debris flow and avalanche has been developed for seasonal monitoring.

FOCUS Pakistan's School Safety Programme (SSP) aims to actively engage students and school management in raising awareness, developing emergency and evacuation plans, assess school hazards, and develop response capacity at the school level, by training students, teachers and parents. FOCUS Pakistan, together with its donors and partners, has reached over 600 schools across Pakistan through its school safety programme benefitting over 60,000 students, teachers and parents.





FOCUS Pakistan responds to disasters through its specialised forty-member volunteer Search and Rescue Team (SART) with over 36% women. This team has been trained by experts from United Kingdom, France and Switzerland. The team has been responding to various disasters including the horrific South Asian earthquake in 2005, Marriot Bomb Blast 2008, two collapsed buildings in Karachi 2009 and several local disasters including snow avalanches and debris flow events in Chitral and Gilgit. A Disaster Assessment Response Team (DART) is in place in Gilgit-Baltistan, Chitral and Karachi to help FOCUS and AKDN make informed decisions to respond effectively in an emergency situation. FOCUS has formally built institutional linkages with government, UN and donor agencies in the country.

In 2006, in recognition of its humanitarian and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) work in Pakistan, FOCUS was awarded the "Sitara-e-Eisar" by the President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

In 2009, FOCUS' global DRR work was acknowledged by the Jury of the United Nation's (UN) Sasakawa Award for Disaster Reduction and awarded with Certificate of Merit for enhancing disaster risk reduction in Pakistan.



Hazard Map of the Village Ayun, Tehsil Chitral District, Pakistan
 Design & cartography Focus Humanitarian 2013

Hazard and risk map in village planning	
	zone: Stop! High degree of hazard. High risk for existing buildings and structures; total collapse or heavy damage possible. Any new development should be omitted.
	zone: Caution! Moderate degree of hazard. The construction of new houses can be tolerated; important infrastructure should not be built in this zone.
	zone: Caution! Low degree of hazard. Low risk for houses and infrastructure; damage has to be assumed but not total collapse. Important infrastructure can be tolerated but needs local protection.
	zone: Go! According to today's knowledge hazards do not occur in these areas. These zones can be considered safe from mountain hazards and suitable for development. Earthquake risk may prevail in this zone and needs to be expected

Degree of hazard

high	
moderate	
low	
no known hazard	

Source: Focus Humanitarian (2013): Hazard and Risk Maps - What are they used for? How are they produced? How are they interpreted?

With the observed increased frequencies of disasters occurring in the region, the already limited local resources are further depleted. Deforestation through free grazing practices of livestock is now very common, and people have not much alternative other than to build their homes in areas at risk to mudflows or landslides. Access becomes a critical issue during disaster as the only accessible roads to these regions are prone to wash away with high costs and prolonged time needed to rehabilitate these critical infrastructures after disaster stroke.

With such situations faced by local communities in Gilgit-Baltistan, natural resource management and adaptation to climate change plays a key role in overcoming the looming disastrous situation. A better understanding of local practices in resource management is a pre-requisite for making informed decisions that could help to support an improved utilisation of natural resources. In this respect, a participatory approach with full accountability and transparency and trust in and a recognition of the ability and capacity of the mountain people to manage their affairs is most helpful. For it is true that in face of scarcity of natural resources and high environmental risks and threats, mountain communities have developed sophisticated indigenous strategies grounded in local knowledge and skills that may indeed represent effective adaptation and mitigation measures.

However, in addition to an improved understanding of local resource management and disaster mitigation systems, the role of regional and cross-border development in resource management and diversification of livelihood options is overly important. For instance, there exists a huge potential for hydro-based power generation, or to promote which could boost local economies, cultural exchange, heritage preservation, and improve capacities in community based development practices.

In light of these broader perspectives, what is needed is more cross-border research and dissemination of knowledge across the Pamirs, possibly to be facilitated through more exposure visits and exchange of expert and community views that would likely result in the sharing of best practices also about the shape and scopes of local early warning systems for disaster risk reduction across the region.