BUILDING A CULTURE OF RESILIENCE IN AFGHANISTAN'S PROVINCES

Case studies and success stories | June 2013

Save the Children

The project

Afghanistan is a country that suffers from recurrent natural disasters, including flash floods, extreme winter cold, avalanches, earthquakes, and sandstorms. Seen in historical perspective, three results of these disasters have been the displacement of local populations; severe delays in the provision of humanitarian aid to communities in need; and the disruption of essential services. In addition, natural disasters tend to increase the vulnerability of populations who have already been weakened by longer-term food insecurity that was caused by drought.

The goals of "Building a Culture of Resilience in Afghanistan's Provinces", funded by OFDA, include to strengthen the capacity of communities, local civil-society organizations, and key government authorities at the district, provincial, and national levels to reduce disaster risks through mitigation, preparedness, early warning and resilience; and to respond rapidly and effectively to emergencies, thus preventing the loss of life.

Save the Children signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with ANDMA at the national level for the implementation of DRR activities in Afghanistan. Save the Children works closely in the targeted provinces with ANDMA officials at the district and provincial levels, and participates in ANDMA's monthly Disaster Management Meetings for the coordination of emergency response and DRR. Save the Children has helped to build the capacity of ANDMA officials in order to support communities to prepare for, mitigate against, and respond to emergencies.

Qasim, 46 years old

Qasim is a farmer who grows wheat, potatoes, vegetables, and grasses for animals. His most important crop is wheat. He grows only enough for the family for six months. For the rest of the year he sells his animals and buys from the market.

He has sheep, goats, cows, and donkeys. Last year his harvest was good and he expects this year to also be good. His busiest seasons are spring and summer. He says that this year's snow was only about 40% of the year before. The year before was abnormally high but last year was still not normal.

Qasim has four children aged 21, 18, 7, and 5. The older three go to school. Qasim is team leader of the CERT team in his village. He was chosen by an election of the team.

Qasim, "Before Save the Children (SC) came to work with us our village didn't have a CERT team. We had disasters but didn't always know how to respond to them. Our village suffers from floods, two types – flash flood and also from when the snow melts. We also have avalanches, some earthquakes, and fires because we store hay for the animals during the winter. Before the Taliban came we used fuel for lights – we didn't have solar panels. One time the fuel exploded and two people were burned.

Our CERT team has four sections: health, logistics, search and rescue, and fire. All 16 members of the received training in first aid and search and rescue."

Qasim, "We have an early warning system that is a loud speaker on the mosque and also I have a hand held megaphone. We have only used them in the simulation but they worked well.
In our workshop we learned to draw village maps showing where different buildings, the river, fields, and the safe places are located. We have four maps in the village and people look at them. All the children aged 12-18 understand them because they attend the children's council.

Our biggest problem in the village is floods. Before, during the floods, the water used to come in the houses and damaged them. The floods are also very dangerous for our children. Every year the floods come the same way – the water comes in many directions and meets right outside the mosque.

Sima, 21 years old

Sima is 21 years old and a teacher in a village located at a distance from her home. She teaches social sciences to 2nd grade in the mornings and to 6th-9th grade in the afternoons. She comes home for the weekends.

She knew from a young age that she wanted to be a teacher so after completing grade 12 she went to teacher training college in Bamiyan city for two years. She lives at home with her mother, one older brother, and two younger sisters.

The Taliban killed her father in 2001. She was an IDP in Ghazni from aged 1 ½ until she was about 10. She is engaged and thinks she will get married in a month.

"There are 14 children on our child protection committee, aged 14 to 22. In our village there are seven clusters and the community elders chose one boy and one girl from each cluster to be on the committee. They chose the smartest and most active children.

I am the only one who is finished with school and working. We started our committee about a year ago. I was chosen as the head because I have the most education and at that time I wasn't working. The other committee members chose me.

We meet every month and identify problems that children are having in our community. We raise these issues among ourselves and discuss what can be done.

We have identified two problems in our community. One is economic. Some families can't afford to buy school supplies for their children. We talked with the families about why it is important for their children to go do school but we haven't been able to do anything about this problem.

The other problem is physical punishment by the parents. When we saw this we went to the home. The father wasn't there but we talked with the mother. We told her who we are, about our training and we convinced her to discuss this with us. We told her that beating the child damages him and the child won't develop. We told her instead of beating the child they should take them into the house by the arm, talk to them and encourage them. We don't know if the family made any changes; it's too soon.

In other villages we have seem child marriages and teachers who beat the children but those aren't problems here.

Reza Rafat, , 35 years old

Reza is Provincial Director of the Afghan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) for Bamiyan Province. He is from Bamiyan Province. He has been director for four years and worked with Save the Children for the last three years. He graduated from the science faculty in university and then worked as a teacher for three years. While he doesn't have a degree in DRR he feels his experience makes him an expert.

Reza communicates with the DRR office in Kabul twice a day to let them know of any emergencies they have in the province. He gets all his information locally about disasters in the province, as Kabul doesn't have the equipment to monitor them. The government in Kabul has developed its own DRR plan and plans to expand to other areas. They expect most of it to be done by NGOs.

"Our office has been working with Save the Children (SC) for three years. I worked with DRR one year before that. In that year we were not organized. Now, with SC's help, we are organized and have 40 projects, 30 in Bamiyan district and 10 in Yakawalang. The first program was toolkits for disaster awareness. These kits contain supplies for search and rescue like ropes and flashlights and some food and drinking water.

The people of Bamiyan are very poor and are often affected by disasters. They are very happy with any projects but especially with the building projects to protect them from floods and also the awareness the children gained on where they can safely play. If you go to villages and ask the children they can tell you what the dangers are.

Bamiyan suffers from three kinds of disasters: floods, droughts and avalanches. There are more incidents of avalanches than the other two.

I know that the programs are making us safer. In 2011 sixteen people died from floods and avalanches and in 2012 there were twelve deaths. Before that we didn't keep records so maybe 20 or 30 died each year. Now villagers have phones and communicate with us. They have our phone numbers and call us to let us know when disasters happen.

I have received about 40 proposals from villages to reduce their vulnerability to disasters. Unfortunately, I don't have enough budget to fund them. I have only funded one – repairing a road in Surkhqul village. If the proposals are for big projects, I send them to Kabul.

I report to Kabul twice a day either by phone or email. They just told us that the budget has been approved and we will be receiving equipment to be able to respond to disasters.

The DRR program has emergency stocks in all districts. The biggest is in Bamiyan city center. The last time we used stocks was in April when a flood in a village destroyed five family homes. In one year we use a large amount of the stocks maybe three to five times in the whole province. In the same time each district might use small amounts (enough for five house) of the supplies three to five times.

I hope that after 2014 the government will focus on DRR. They plan to expand slowly. When I ask for transport and capacity the Kabul office says to ask the NGOs for help."

Shirin Gul, 47 years old

Shirin Gul has seven children, four sons and three daughters, aged 11 and older. She lives in her two room house with her 70 year old husband, three sons, one daughter, one daughter-in-law and two grandchildren. All the children go to school. The family has a solar panel for electricity and in the winter they cover the veranda frame with plastic to keep in the heat.

They keep chickens in the courtyard. They don't grow fruits or vegetables, as they don't have piped water. Shirin Gul went to school through grade four. Her husband used to be a farmer but is old now. One son supports the family as a gardener in the agriculture department. Except for 13 years as an internally displaced person (IDP) in Baglan, she has lived in this village.

"I was chosen to be the head of the women's group because I am active and am the head of our village's women's shura. I am also the oldest member of the group. The other members of the group chose me to be the head.

We received training about child rights. We used to send the children to do hard labor like collecting firewood. The children used to go to school just to attend. Now we know that they have homework and studies that they must do so we don't send them to work now. I also learned that that a person is a child until age 18. I learned about child protection in emergencies (CPiE). We found out we should have a response team so we asked the village to form one.

This response team has two children on it, one boy and one girl, and men and women. They have a microphone to spread the word about dangers and they also meet once a month to spread the word about what to do in emergencies. My son is on the committee. The response team makes sure that the children are taken to safe places when there is danger.

We have two safe zones now, on top of hills. The women's group's job is to be sure that the children are safe when there is an emergency. We teach the families what to do and follow up. Before the women's group and the response team people used to help each other but now it is more organized.

When we see children working we meet as a team and choose one person to talk with the head of the family to explain why the child shouldn't be working. The families are a bit nervous so we start in a friendly manner before we talk about the child working. These families are not educated and they say "Rubbish". We say it is your own family and they come around.

Our group is new so we haven't noticed too many changes yet. There hasn't been an emergency since we formed.

We would like Save the Children to give us some sort of identification so that when we go to the homes to talk with the families we can show that we have permission to discuss this with them."

Zahir, 17 years old

Zahir is in grade 11 of the Waras Central High School. His school is very basic. His class, 11 A, doesn't have chairs so the boys (around 30) sit on the floor. Other classrooms have chairs but many are broken. The school sits on the side of a hill, above the town of Waras. It is dusty now in the summer. There is not much equipment in the school for the teachers or students. The students would like a "proper" school with a library and a boundary wall around it.

Zahir has five brothers and four sisters. One older brother is studying engineering at university in Kabul and one older sister is studying in the education department at Bamiyan University. One older brother did not go to school and works with the parents who are farmers.

Zahir walks one hour each way to school. After he returns from school he helps his parents who are farmers. He prepares the grass for their animals and helps his parents with other chores.

"We have a solar panel at home but the battery doesn't always work. Right now it isn't working. When we got the solar panel we removed the other lamps so now we don't have any lights at night. When the battery doesn't work I can't study.

I walk to school, one hour each day. When I get home I help my parents by getting the grass for the animals and then what other work they need done. My parents are farmers and raise wheat and potatoes. We also have cows and sheep.

I want to take the university entry exam and want to serve my people anywhere in Afghanistan. Where that is depends on the job I get. I know my district has weak points such as education and it is remote. My parents would like me to become a doctor.

With this new solar light I will be able to study now at night."

Matin, 14 years old

Matin is 14 years old and in eighth grade. He is a very small boy for his age and soft spoken. He is head of Chap Dara's Child Council. He is the youngest of seven siblings; he has four brothers and two sisters. The oldest sibling has finished school and the others are still in school.

Matin's parents are farmers growing potatoes, wheat, and vegetables and have sheep and goats. His parents did not go to school.

"Our children's council has 24 members, 12 boys and 12 girls. We are between seven and 17 years old and all from different families. The shura representatives chose us all. We are all in school. I was chosen by the other children to be the head – I don't know why. Our adult members are two teachers, both men.

We had training in child protection in emergencies (CPiE). We have the right to go to school and our parents must provide school supplies. We also must not do hard labor.

We learned to read the hazard maps that the adults developed. We pass along this information to the other children everywhere, on the playground, in school and at home.

We learned to identify emergencies in our village. We have two kinds of floods, from the rains and from the snow melting. They both happen in the spring. We also have danger when small children walk near the water. If there is a flood we know the first thing to do is to go to the safe places – they are on top of the hills.

We tell our parent what we learn too. Our parents listen to what we tell them.

We meet weekly in the shura building. We talk about what we have learned like child rights and avalanches. We feel safer now because we know what to do in emergencies.

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Save the Children

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Our vision is a world in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation.

Our mission is to inspire breakthroughs in the way the world treats children and to achieve immediate and lasting change in their lives.

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