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May 13, 2014 – CAI considers best way to help Afghan landslide victims

Central Asia Institute continues to monitor the humanitarian relief effort in Ab-e-Bareek village in northeast Afghanistan, where torrential rains triggered landslides that killed hundreds of people and left thousands homeless.

Afghanistan's worst natural disaster in a decade occurred May 2 in a remote village in the Badakhshan province's Argo district. CAI supports dozens of projects in the province, but none in the Argo district.

"We want to express our deep sorrow for the families affected by this disaster," CAI Executive Director David Starnes said this week. "CAI is surveying the situation on the ground to determine how best to be of meaningful assistance without interfering or disrupting efforts of the UN and other well-positioned disaster-relief organizations that are the best at responding to such events."

Janagha Jaheed, the CAI-supported project manager in central Badakhshan, is consulting with government and charity disaster-relief agencies. If and when CAI decides to contribute directly, our efforts will be mission-oriented, focused on providing support for children to continue to have access to education.

The Ab-e-Bareek school in Badakhshan was not destroyed by the landslide, "but it is 90 percent at risk of more slides so students won't go to it anymore," Jaheed said.

CAI's history of post-disaster assistance includes setting up tent schools in northern Pakistan's Hunza River Valley after a massive landslide in 2010 dammed the river and created a lake, flooding numerous villages. Later that year, CAI also assisted hundreds of victims of the epic Pakistan floods.



Photo Courtesy of Khaama Press.

Most significantly, after the earthquake in Azad Kashmir in 2005, CAI quickly set up some temporary tent schools and later pre-fabricated earthquake-proof structures so children could continue their education during reconstruction. Some of those temporary structures are still being used as a lack of government funding has limited construction of new schools.

"In times of disaster, often the physical needs of food, shelter and medicine are met, but education needs come last, and children sit around with nothing to do," said CAI Co-Founder Greg Mortenson. "Simply putting up tents, rounding up a few teachers and getting a few supplies or slateboards can be an enormous psychological boost and galvanize a mourning community to focus on the future."

The Ab-e-Bareek disaster actually included two landslides. After the mountain broke loose the first time, people in the area rushed in to help those buried by the wave of mud and rocks. Just 20 minutes later a second landslide occurred, and the rescuers were buried alive along with area residents, according to news reports. About 300 homes were destroyed, and 500 to more than 2,500 people were killed.

The numbers vary so much because no one "could say exactly who was home and who was out," the [Guardian](#) reported.

"The disaster site is going to be left as it is, essentially a mass grave," the [Wall Street Journal](#) reported Sunday.

For those who did survive, the situation is bleak. Many are now homeless and hungry. Even if their homes were not buried, many people are terrified of returning for fear that the visible cracks in the mountain will lead to another slide.

"Right now we have nothing except our life and we are very scared" of another landslide, Ab-e-Bareek resident Mohammad Zia told Dawlat Mohammad, a CAI representative who visited the area last weekend. "Our children are much afraid. They need help. Their school is not destroyed but it is at risk and we cannot send them to that school anymore."



Photo Courtesy of Afghanistan Express.

Provincial and national government agencies, the United Nations, and the Afghan Red Crescent Society have served as first responders to the disaster, delivering medical care, food, water, tents, blankets, and other supplies, according to [news reports](#).

“The scene was very sad and noisy because people were trying to find their dead relatives, but they did not have any useful equipment except one dozer that was very weak,” Dawlat said. “They were also not satisfied with distribution of the aid and support, so they were shouting at government and other NGOs to help them.”

The chaos reportedly escalated and the relief effort was temporarily suspended amid “a host of problems,” including whose names were on the list to receive aid, the [New York Times](#) reported. However those issues appear to have been resolved for the time being.

QUOTE: *Love knows not its own depth until the hour of separation.* – Kahlil Gibran

- Karin Ronnow, communications director

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