



The quest for safe drinking water continues

With funding from the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid department, DACAAR has begun providing communities in eastern and western Afghanistan with access to safe drinking water. In addition to wells and hand pumps, 7,400 families will benefit from latrines and hygiene education.

Illnesses caused by unsafe drinking water remain a serious 'silent' killer in Afghanistan. Afghanistan's Ministry of Public Health estimates that every year more than 50,000 children below the age of five die of diarrhoea, a consequence of waterborne diseases. Over the past three decades, DACAAR and other aid agencies have drilled thousands of wells, but the need for safe water is as serious as ever, particularly in rural areas.

With funding of 1,641,565 Euros from the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO), DACAAR has begun constructing 300 water points in Nangarhar, Farah, Kunar and Laghman. As always, DACAAR works in close collaboration with beneficiaries in the planning and construction of water supply facilities.

To counter poor hygiene practices, DACAAR is providing hygiene education while wells and hand pumps are being installed. Each family will receive three hygiene visits emphasising the importance of personal and environmental hygiene and safe sanitation facilities, and demonstrating the correct use and storage of water.

Working for a long-lasting impact

To ensure long-term functionality of the water pumps, DACAAR will train community members as caretakers

and mechanics, whilst local shops will be encouraged to supply spare parts to facilitate repairs and upkeep. To complement these activities and promote hygienic sanitation facilities, DACAAR will meanwhile assist communities in the construction and maintenance of latrines at 900 sites.

In Nangarhar, DACAAR has also been distributing emergency water supplies to Afghan refugee families returning from Pakistan. To ensure future access to drinking water, DACAAR is constructing wells and hand pumps alongside the plots distributed under the Government's land allocation scheme.

Completion of water projects

The new ECHO project follows three previous water and sanitation schemes previously completed by DACAAR in Farah, Herat and Nangarhar in May and June this year. With a total funding of 1,639,920 Euros from ECHO, more than 10,000 rural families received safe water and basic hygiene education.

DACAAR plays a leading role in Afghanistan's development of new WatSan standards, technology and quality control. DACAAR's water and sanitation activities have benefited an estimated 5.5 million people across 26 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces.

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This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Community. The views expressed herein should not be taken, in any way, to reflect the official opinion of the European Community.



The challenge of returning 'home'

The recent influx of vulnerable returnees from Pakistan highlights the challenges of refugee re-integration. Lack of capacity and problems with land allocation leave thousands of families in harsh conditions without proper shelter or basic services.

Since 2002, over five million Afghan refugees have returned home, mainly from Pakistan and Iran. In the last two years this return rate has intensified: after having hosted Afghan refugees for decades, the Pakistani authorities have closed down several refugee camps in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP).

As a result, thousands of refugee families have had to return to Afghanistan, despite having no destination to head for. Many have pitched camp in the largely unoccupied desert areas near the Pakistan border.

These latest returnees have minimal resources and are generally very vulnerable: those who could leave before the camp closure have already done so. Many families have lived in refugee settlements for years - some for as long as three decades - and therefore include second and third generation refugees who have never seen their home country and understand little about their family's original community and culture.



Finding a home

The rate of return is alarming: so far this year 211,000 refugees have arrived from Pakistan alone (UNHCR, August 2008). Earlier UNHCR estimates predicted 540,000 returnees from Pakistan and Iran for 2008 and 2009. This is a very large number given that currently most communities in Afghanistan face serious shortages, including lack of access to safe water and health facilities, and that significant parts of the country suffer from insecurity and humanitarian crises.

Thousands of refugee families returning from Pakistan in 2008 have been forced to build rough shelters in southern Afghanistan, creating unofficial camps in wasteland. To alleviate the most urgent needs through the scorching summer months, DACAAR has been providing water tankering services and hygiene education. DACAAR has also been working with UNHCR, the provincial authorities, and representatives of Afghanistan's Ministry of Refugees & Repatriation to support sustainable solutions. Once plots have been officially allocated under the Afghanistan Government's Land Allocation Scheme, nascent communities will be formed and DACAAR will help provide sustainable water sources by drilling wells. The European Commission's Aid department (ECHO) funds DACAAR's water provision activities in Nangarhar.



The Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Returnees (MoRR) acknowledges that too fast a rate of return may have negative consequences as Afghanistan does not have the capacity to absorb them. There is a severe lack of adequate social protection for refugees and other vulnerable groups; government funding was halved last year and now stands at just one per cent (ActionAid, December 2007). Officials note that returnee influxes have further contributed to shortages of food and housing, creating more competition for scarce employment opportunities and fuelling resentment against the Government.

Landlessness and land disputes are the main obstacles to sustainable return. Whilst the Government does implement a much-needed 'Land Allocation Scheme' (LAS), many LAS sites lack basic facilities such as water, roads and health care access and corruption is manifest. Sometimes, as with the latest returnees to southern Afghanistan, the sites develop organically as returnees set up camp on unoccupied ground. The MoRR needs increased capacity to run the scheme,

and ultimately a comprehensive national housing policy and re-integration programme is required.

For co-ordinated action among the different players, proper planning is also crucial. Effective co-operation is needed among the different ministries of the Afghan Government, UN agencies, NGOs, donors, and regional governments, who should abide by commitments to voluntary return. Planning should provide for timely provision of resources and the channelling of required funding, to support both short-term humanitarian needs and longer-term reintegration programmes.

For returnees to be properly absorbed and to prevent any exacerbation of conflict dynamics or humanitarian needs, clear, co-ordinated and effective responses and national programmes must be developed. DACAAR is already working with UNHCR and the Government to provide sustainable solutions and help meet returnees' needs, and joins other NGOs in calling for improved responses to this serious and growing problem.

Nangarhar's returnee kids

"When we left Pakistan, everyone was crying and afraid. Although we receive water from DACAAR, my family still suffers. We don't have enough food and the heat makes us exhausted. I am worried about myself and my family".

- Emran, aged eight, Chamtala settlement.

"In Chamtala, I clean our tent, wash dishes and fetch water. The worst thing here is the hot weather and the scorpions."

- Sayeda, aged 11, Chamtala settlement.

"My family has twenty-one people and we all live in one tent. The tent is too small, so us children sleep outside. I bring food and water to my family, but there is not enough, so we only eat once each day. I would like a good life – but I don't like to think about the future right now".

- Mosa Jan, aged 12, Chamtala settlement.

Chamtala is one of the newly established settlements in Nangarhar province to which Afghans are returning. With funding from the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO), DACAAR distributes 165,000 litres of water each day to Chamtala's 4,500 families.



“Development projects are more than ‘cement work’”

June 2008 saw the completion of DACAAR’s rural development project in Alishing, Laghman province. 54,660 people across 80 villages benefited from the 1,158,022 Euro project, which forms part of the European Union’s Food Security Programme for Eastern Afghanistan.

Employing a holistic approach, the project led to a sustainable increase in the region’s food security, agricultural productivity and income generation. Key activities included the introduction of new agricultural and livestock management methods, the creation of producer associations and Community Development Committees (CDCs), water supply and hygiene education.

As well as literacy, numeracy and vocational training, the development of infrastructure was a key component in enabling beneficiaries to create new, or expand existing, businesses. Many of the district’s villages are located in narrow, steep-sided valleys which formerly lacked roads, isolating sections of the population and preventing market access.

With contributions from local communities to encourage ownership and participation, DACAAR has improved 12 kilometres of stairs and pathways in particularly remote villages. As a result, communities are now able to market their products more effectively and increase their income. Water, fuel and agricultural products can also be more easily transported by women to their homes.

A Women’s Resource Centre (WRC) has also been set up, aimed at empowering women, improving their economic opportunities and families’ livelihoods: women from eight villages benefit from basic skills training such as tailoring and embroidery. Mohammad Asif, DACAAR’s Rural Development Programme Manager, notes: “Development projects are more than ‘cement work’. Social organisation, infrastructure and capacity building are all valuable. Eventually WRCs and other village organisations will replace DACAAR and become independent and self-sustaining.”

