



EVALUATION OF ECHO DISASTER PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS IN CENTRAL ASIA

SYNTHESIS REPORT

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(Field visits)

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A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GLOBAL OBJECTIVE

The main objective was to assess the need for a regional DIPECHO strategy for Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) based on an evaluation of the five most recent ECHO-funded DIPECHO operations in the region. From the outset it was decided to limit the scope of the assessment to the three most vulnerable countries (in terms of disasters and ability to respond), i.e. Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The report identifies the major natural threats in each of these countries and assesses the ability of local, national and regional disaster-preparedness mechanisms to deal with them. Based on the assessment of the five projects and on the actions and mandates of other donors and EC services, the report recommends how a regional strategy could be implemented.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES & FINDINGS

To identify the major threats to population, property and infrastructure.

It is difficult to accurately quantify the impact of natural disasters in Central Asia over recent decades. Local experts regard statistics collected during Soviet times to be subjective and inaccurate. Furthermore, since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, much of the data has been lost. Data collection since then has been hindered by the lack of trained staff and appropriate hard- and software. Nevertheless, enough evidence is available to identify major patterns and future threats. The most devastating and destructive types of natural disaster in the three countries are droughts, earthquakes, floods and landslides. Floods, earthquakes, and landslides (in that order) are the biggest threats to property. Floods, landslides, earthquakes and droughts are the biggest killers. Tajikistan is the most affected country in terms of the number of disasters, level of damage and loss of life. National statistics often overlook small-scale disasters that are considered to account for nearly two-thirds of total disaster-related costs. These small disasters are increasing in number due to climatic changes, demographic growth, and man-made factors.

To catalogue local, national and regional disaster-preparedness mechanisms

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the capacity of the emergency structures of the governments in Central Asia has decreased drastically, leaving rather a sad picture of what was once a very effective, although costly service. The three countries in question have developed their respective structures, in all cases based around a Ministry of Emergency Situations (MES) and the National Red Crescent Society (NRCS):

- Ministries of Emergency Situations (MESs). The MESs are responsible for disaster planning, preparedness, response and mitigation. They co-ordinate disaster preparedness activities and working relations with operational agencies involved in disaster management. MESs are the most important tool for disaster preparedness and are an excellent base on which to build further. Whereas MESs are well organised and structured at central levels (along military lines), they are much weaker at local levels, in spite of on-going reforms aiming at administrative decentralisation. The operational capacity of MESs is largely dependent on the financial/technical means available and the political context of the country. The availability of equipment is strongly dependent on external procurement assistance. The higher hierarchy of MESs is well trained in disaster

preparedness and is fully knowledgeable in training techniques. Training is routinely delivered in-house. All MESs are currently developing their monitoring and forecasting capacity and GIS (geographical information system) systems. Since independence, MESs have kept regional ties to a minimum. However in the last few years some of these have resumed, especially between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The overarching national legislative frameworks are generally weak, leading to obstacles in MES' co-operation with other agencies in their own countries and lack of proper support from the Governments to disaster preparedness activities in the countries as a whole. This structure has seen MESs tending to work nationally in isolation within a self-containing approach, sometimes even competing with other national preparedness structures (NRCS).

- National Red Crescent Societies (NRCS). The NRCS structures were basically inherited and copied with very few changes from the former Red Cross/Crescent Society of the Soviet Union. NRCS are still playing an auxiliary role in disaster preparedness activities in their countries, strongly supported by IFRC and ICRC. However, the deterioration of economic and social conditions since the collapse of the Soviet system have created enormous new burdens for NRCS and stretched their ability to fulfil their mandate. Staff numbers and motivation have fallen and the basic volunteer organisational structure of NRCS is functioning much less efficiently, especially at a local level, due to lack of professional experience or special training. NRCS' strategic approach needs to be re-directed towards expanding community-based activities, promoting an integrated approach with other actors in disaster preparedness activities and focusing on grass root level training for NRCS staff and volunteers. Programmes will have to increase disaster awareness among the community at risk and at selected disaster prone areas. Rapid response/first aid teams with more emphasis on volunteers/youth will have to be established at local level.

To evaluate these mechanisms' ability to deal with existing threats

MESs and NRCSs both suffer from the same basic flaw: preparedness mechanisms and training at local level has been largely neglected over the last decade. Assistance mechanisms have a national focus while at local level, staff from MESs and NRCSs are either absent or lack the necessary experience and basic equipment. Furthermore, local populations are neither sufficiently aware of potential threats nor equipped to react when disaster strikes. International assistance can be more easily sought and obtained for large disasters. It cannot for small ones. And yet low intensity local disasters are the most common and cause the most aggregate damage.

To assess the relevance, impact, efficiency and sustainability of the five most recent ECHO-funded DIPECHO projects. Five operations were selected by ECHO for evaluation, out of which one was a regional project concerning all five republics except Tajikistan, one a cross border project between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, and three were national projects in Tajikistan. The regional project was executed by IFRC together with the national Red Crescent societies and concerned mainly the training of staff, based on training material designed by IFRC in a previous project also financed by ECHO. The project was successful. However, the Federation cannot be considered as a model and basis for a regional approach, due its very particular and unchallenged international status, and to its close linkages with the national societies that shares the same ideal, strengthening the convergence towards a common goal. The cross border project aimed at conducting parallel disaster preparedness training in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, based on twinning between cities in Germany/Holland and the two Central Asian countries. The main issue related to the possibility of river overflow, washing away uranium tailings that would pollute the two

countries downstream. It failed because of a lack of interest of Uzbekistan and the partner's inexperience in project implementation. The first of the three national projects concerned NRCS operation in Tajikistan also executed by IFRC. It was intended to reinforce the regional operation. It turned out to be more a stock management training operation with linkages to disaster preparedness training than a straightforward disaster preparedness project. It was mildly successful. The second national project concerned disaster preparedness training directed mainly towards the higher staff of the Ministry of Emergency Situation in Tajikistan. It was marred by a misunderstanding between the partner and the beneficiary, but otherwise was a good project. The third national project in Tajikistan related to early warning of a possible collapse of the Lake Sarez natural dam, based on a VHF radio communications system. The project was very successful in involving the local communities.

- **Relevance.** All five operations were relevant. The partners addressed threat preparedness at institutional levels (MESs and NRCSs) mainly based on training or on the production of training materials, or at local levels mainly based on Search and Rescue (SAR) teams, and early warning systems.
- **Impact.** *The most positive impact of the five operations is that the Central Asian countries now recognise disaster preparedness as an integral component of their overall disaster planning policy.* This represents a shift from the former soviet position centred on mitigation and response. It also marks a broadening of disaster planning policy that had previously focused on the threat of military attack. The early warning system operation (Lake Sarez) had a very positive impact at the local level. It gave the threatened population a sense of ownership of the system, strengthening their confidence, accountability and empowerment. It also developed the contacts between villages leading to the emergence of joint requests over issues of common concern such as transport, schooling, health care, water and power supply. The regional project has standardised the disaster preparedness methodology by designing, editing and distributing 17 high quality booklets addressing disaster preparedness topics. They could however have been more widely distributed and utilised. The impact of the training programme is less clear. On the one hand it addressed high level staff that did not really needed it. On the other hand when it addressed lower level staff, and that was not frequent, training programmes were not tailored or professionally delivered. The beneficiaries voiced many concerns on the delivery system that was deemed to be too theoretical and academic. The participatory bottom up approach was generally ignored, causing disinterest.
- **Effectiveness.** The degree of effectiveness of both the partners and the operations was found to be largely proportional to two factors: (i) the partner's experience in disaster preparedness work, and (ii) the existence of an overall strategy that includes disaster preparedness in the wider trilogy of disaster awareness, preparedness and prevention. The early warning operation included the three components, and built on an in-depth knowledge of the beneficiary region. IFRC of course has a proven track record based on a world experience and a formidable professional back stopping from HQ. Two implementing partners lacked a long-term strategy and professional regional knowledge and their operations were therefore relatively ineffective. Disaster preparedness operations should not justify a fund-raising policy or the development of awareness of the European counterparts to disaster issues in Central Asia. *In all five cases, need assessments were generally very poorly presented, if at all.*
- **Sustainability.** Sustainability is very much linked to impact. The disaster preparedness concept has become embedded in the countries substantially thanks to the actions of the multilateral organisations, some being financed by ECHO and ECHO's partners. This would justify ex-post the efforts made. The sectoral sustainability of the operations

however raises some concerns. Training activities were probably in part misdirected and did not reach the most appropriate beneficiary, and consequently are not sustainable. When the results of the operation include a physical component, equipment or teaching media, sustainability is in great part insured, as for the early warning system or the training booklets, as long as they are utilised. There are some concerns about the durability of the radio system, and on the actual utilisation of the training material. Stock replenishment is not sustainable except if a national permanent source of funding can be activated. This is not the case in Central Asia. Sustainability also covers LRRD (Commission's policy of Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development). Little attention has been given to LRRD. Partners were more preoccupied by the extension of their operations than by the sustainability of it. There are however opportunities to fund disaster preparedness projects in areas where development programmes will take place e.g. uranium tailings in Taborah, Tajikistan, drought and water management and supply in Karakalpakstan, Uzbekistan, TACIS poverty alleviation programmes in South West Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

To assess the coherence, co-ordination and complementarity of the funded actions with regards to other actions funded or carried out by other actors. There was little close co-ordination with other Commission instruments. The Council makes no references to disaster preparedness threats or issues in its Regulation No 99/2000 of 29 December 1999 concerning the provision of assistance to the Partner States in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, except indirectly to nuclear safety and very generally to environmental protection. The coherence with other donors' policy is good. IFRC and UNDP (OCHA) are running a number of projects/programmes that directly or as a component include disaster preparedness operations. The relations with the Delegation have developed smoothly, based on the confidence and excellent working partnership between the ECHO expert and the Delegation staff. The Delegation is not accredited in Uzbekistan and consequently relations are insured through the Uzbek National Co-ordinating Unit. There is room for improvement in this regard. The co-ordination between the partners and ECHO was generally satisfactory. ECHO Dushambe made great efforts to ensure some monitoring of the operations though this was restricted due to staff and time limitations. There was one case of misunderstanding between two partners that wanted to carry on their actions in the same area and that had to be resolved through Tajik's MES arbitration. One excellent example of co-ordination refers to the ECHO-funded production of training booklets that was a concerted effort of the main donors. Few Member States have any initiatives in disaster preparedness, and there is little scope for complementarity.

LESSONS LEARNT for a Regional Strategy

The Central Asian countries are relatively young States that are still busy cementing their own identities. A regional approach can only be built on solid national bases. However, these bases are still fragile and it is clear that not all the countries are ready to co-operate with each other. Almost all large- and small-scale attempts at regional programme implementation have failed until now. ***Therefore, this mission does not believe that a full-fledged regional approach in Central Asia will be possible in the near future.*** Nevertheless, it would be possible to adopt a reduced regional co-operation strategy focusing on Kyrghyzstan and Tajikistan. These are also the two countries that suffer most from disasters. Cross-border co-operation between the two countries at MES and NRCS levels is already well developed. It would be advisable for DIPECHO to take advantage of this willingness to co-operate. It would probably, if successful, call the attention of Uzbekistan that has not yet shown the same attitude, though sharing some of the same threats (uranium tailings, lake Sarez floods).

RECOMMENDATIONS based on Lessons Learnt at Projects Level.

The main policy recommendation for DIPECHO is to work at local level (oblast, rayon and community). A local focus will enable DIPECHO to build on the momentum of the on-going restructuring and decentralisation process in Central Asian Republics. Given the limited DIPECHO funds, disaster preparedness activities will be more cost effective and sustainable on the local level where positive incremental changes could also occur faster. DIPECHO should have a single unified goal shared by all implementing partners. It should continue to have a programme rather than a project approach. This unifying goal should read “*to strengthen the capacity of local authorities, institutions and communities for disaster awareness, preparedness and prevention of disasters.*” The best way to ensure sustainability at local level with participating communities is to revive and support volunteerism programmes. DIPECHO should focus on awareness and disaster preparedness training programmes for brigades of volunteers, including the youths, schools and the education system. This has proven in other region of the world (Latin America) to be a powerful tool in shaping a disaster preparedness culture.

In summary:

- ***DIPECHO should focus on disaster preparedness at the local level and concentrate on the lower levels of disaster preparedness staff and communities.***
- ***DIPECHO projects should target and empower the most vulnerable communities using bottom up participatory methods and adapted materials that could be replicated in other projects.***
- ***DIPECHO should look at ways of promoting the development of volunteerism.***
- ***The trilogy awareness, preparedness and prevention is the core of DIPECHO intervention and should be reintroduced in proposals.***
- ***DIPECHO should select implementing partners who have disaster management experience, would have a particular value-added and would help build local capacity to increase sustainability.***
- ***DIPECHO should adopt a results-based approach to project planning, monitoring and reporting. This approach would clearly define expected quantitative/qualitative results and indicators, and measure project outputs, outcomes and impact***
- ***DIPECHO should develop its networking with relevant institutions.***