



Editorial

Dear Reader

My Afghan friend is a Tajik. He fled to Switzerland seven years ago. As a young lawyer, he had come under pressure in his country because he refused to get someone out of prison unlawfully. He preferred to flee. Through a friend of my brother-in-law, he was able to train as a ventilation technician in Switzerland. Last summer, he married a nice woman in Afghanistan who was referred to him by his mother. She is a psychologist and works for the UN Food Programme. Just his type, he enthuses. He hopes to bring her to Switzerland soon.

With PartnerAid, we are active in Central and South Asia through various small projects. Most people in this crisis-ridden region have to find their way locally. Whether here or there, people need friends and partners to get through and move on.

Thank you very much for your partnership and support.



Christof Kräuchi
Member of the
Board of
PartnerAid

South and Central Asia: Old and New Silk Roads

The area in southwest Asia, where the Iranian and Indian plateaux meet and high mountain ranges run into vast deserts and steppes, has been a region steeped in history and a rich habitat for thousands of years. Strategically important traffic arteries and trade routes have run through here since time immemorial. We know them by the somewhat clichéd name of Silk Roads.

Under the banners of nearly a dozen empires and influenced by religions such as Buddhism, Christianity and eventually Islam, a complex mix of ethnic and political entanglements emerged over the centuries that still strongly shape the culture today.

The common thread that emerges again and again in this patchwork is the constant change and shaking of people's living conditions. Thus through political and military influences – for example the armies of Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, the British Empire – or natural disasters such as droughts, earthquakes and floods.

This thread also seems to find a continuation in recent history, such as the abrupt takeover of the Taliban in Afghanistan or the ambitious Belt and Road initiative with which China wants to closely link the economic areas of Asia, Europe and Africa through a new edition of the Silk Roads, as well as local conflicts over land, supremacy and water.

The local population has suffered and continues to suffer from these shocks. This is evidenced by high illiteracy rates, maternal and infant mortality, great food insecurity as well as poverty and underdevelopment of the economy. According to the UN Food Programme (WFP), at least 19.7 million people in the region suffer from acute hunger. The trend is rising.

The states of Central Asia belonged to the Soviet Union until 1991 (except Afghanistan).



Project Work: Big Challenges

PartnerAid is engaged in partnership with local aid workers in the fields of emergency relief, particularly against food insecurity in remote areas of South Asia, as well as in supporting local projects to promote small businesses and income generation in the region.

Despite the political challenges, a sewing project for vocational skills' training was carried out with local partners last year. The 30 participants, all illiterate women from a remote region, successfully completed the six-month course. Other small projects in the area of income generation, project support and counselling were also able to continue. For example, a multi-day training course on small business development was held with 15 participants.

Emergency aid for more than 3,000 people

Thanks to close and proven cooperation with local people, emergency aid was continued last year and urgently needed support was brought directly to the people in need. This was mainly in areas not covered by other aid organisations.

Fourteen emergency food distribution operations were carried out in two remote provinces between October 2021 and October 2022. More than 3,000 people or 542 households were provided with urgently needed food. Of these, 305 households were headed by women alone and 267 households involving internally displaced persons (IDPs), of which there are 4.3 million in the said region, according to the UN.

Not left alone

Again and again, the recipients expressed deep gratitude, especially that they were not "forgotten" as the suffering population and that they were "not left alone" in their suffering. For the local helpers, the distribution campaigns were associated with risk and uncertainty, as security is not guaranteed in all regions. In addition, it is a burden to experience the need and despair on the ground at first hand. After their missions, they always discuss together what they have experienced and seen.

Dr. S., an emergency aid distribution worker, thanks all donors with the following words: "Seeing those scenes of poverty hurts me. But today I am very pleased because I know that we have made many people happy. This is a great satisfaction and joy for me. I don't know what words to use to thank you. I wish you much success and peace."

Purpose of donation:
South Asia, Emergency Aid

Donations via TWINT:



A single woman confirms by thumbprint that she has received the aid package.




PartnerAid
partnering for change

Life in the refugee camps is very hard, especially in winter.





The traditional felt tent of the nomads: Yurts at Songköl Lake at over 3000 m above sea level.

Kyrgyzstan: from Nomadism via the Soviet Union to Independence

Chinese writings indicate that the Kyrgyz founded a semi-nomadic confederation of states in what is now western Mongolia as early as the 3rd and 4th centuries BC. After an interlude with the Huns, the Kyrgyz people had their own state for a long time, the so-called Kyrgyz Great Empire, which had a heyday in the 8th and 9th centuries. The trade routes of the Silk Road, which were very important at that time, had some of their crossing points here.

Mongols and their successors

In the 12th century, the Kyrgyz were defeated by Genghis Khan's Mongols. It was not until the 16th century that a reunification of some Kyrgyz tribes emerged. In the 18th and 19th centuries, however, the Kyrgyz were under the rule of the Khanate of Kokand, an Uzbek principality. As the Kyrgyz were imposed high taxes and conscripted into the army, they repeatedly rebelled and sought rapprochement with Tsarist Russia.

Russia and the Soviet Union

In the mid-19th century, the Kyrgyz officially placed themselves under the protectorate of Russia. The October Revolution of 1917 and the establishment of the Soviet Union ushered in a major change in the country's economy, politics and culture, which the Kyrgyz initially viewed positively to some extent. The economy was nationalised and the agriculture collectivised. Individual freedoms were restricted, however, and Islam as the predominant religion was suppressed and restrained. Russian as the state language partially prevailed as the language of everyday life.

Independent Kyrgyz Republic

This changed when Mikhail Gorbachev initiated perestroika (restructuring) in 1985/86. The dissolution of Soviet structures increased poverty and disorientation. After the end of the Soviet Union, the country became independent in 1991.

The unified economic system collapsed, Soviet support fell away and the social safety net collapsed. As a result, Islamisation has progressed since then. Strict conservative movements are supported by the construction of mosques and Koranic schools with funds from the Middle East.

In contrast to neighbouring countries, the communist elite was deposed through democratic elections. In 2010, however, there were massive demonstrations, the government was overthrown and the transition from a presidential system to a parliamentary republic was decided. With the pandemic, 2020 was a difficult year. The parliamentary election in October was marked by manipulation, the election result was annulled after protests. The president then declared his resignation.

In January 2021, Sadyr Dzhaparov won the presidential election. The return to the presidential system of government came into effect. Since then, things have quietened down in the country, but armed clashes continue to occur in the border regions, especially with Tajikistan.



A medieval overnight stop (caravanserai) on the Silk Road on the border with China.

Education for Children with Disabilities

Children with any kind of impairment are given little attention in Kyrgyz culture. They are rarely seen in public. Many families are ashamed to have such a special child. Accordingly, integration and support in society are rare.

Unfortunately, this attitude means that most of these children do not have access to schooling. The vision of Crosslink Development International (CDI), our local partner, as well as that of PartnerAid, is that they experience support and individual promotion at an early stage. We want their parents and society to perceive them as a person and appreciate their individuality so that they can become an accepted part of society according to their potential.

Care for 50 children

Two locally trained staff members, a special educator and a speech therapist, look after about 50 children from pre-school to primary school age. These



Children with disabilities rarely have access to normal schooling in Kyrgyzstan.



A speech therapist at work: the tongue plays a crucial role in speech.

children are impaired in various ways, such as through hearing or speech disorders or physical disabilities. They are supported with the help of logopaedic, ergo- and physiotherapeutic measures as well as special educational support. Ways are sought to compensate for their weaknesses.

Small, big successes

What a special moment when a child who could not walk was able to participate in normal school lessons. It was the first time ever that such a thing happened here! What joy when children significantly improve their language skills and can be released from the project into school. Other impaired children, who have been attending school for a few years, finally learn basic reading, writing and arithmetic.

Families, their relatives and acquaintances are also starting to rethink. In order to support the local community and encourage independent development, the project management is handing over more responsibility to the staff. Again and again, we are amazed that they not only grow professionally, but also in their personalities, reflect on the newly learned things and pass on their knowledge.

Regional recognition

The regional education ministry has recognised the need for this work lo-

cally and has provided two additional teachers since September 2022. At the same time, these teachers will undergo further training and learn from the existing staff. There are also first interested parties from the surrounding villages who want to learn from the work in the project.

And now more than ever

While the current work is mainly dedicated to children with language and learning difficulties, there are also positive developments in the area of support for the physically impaired. At the same time, the project management is currently trying to create more awareness of the issue in society through seminars in order to lay further foundations for future integration and prevention.



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