

Afghanistan Relief Organization Relief distribution in Badakhshan Province, Afghanistan

Distribution period:

August 30 – September 4, 2006

Geographical area of distribution:

Badakhshan is located in the northeast region of Afghanistan, adjacent to the countries of Tajikistan, China, India and Pakistan, and in Afghanistan, bordering the provinces of Takhar, and Nuristan. The remote Badakhshan province was outside Taliban control, however, was impacted during the post-Soviet occupation and post-civil war period by related economic conditions, lack of access to other parts of the country, harsh weather conditions, drug trafficking, and its inaccessibility for supplies, commerce, communications and infrastructure.

Ethnic demographics:

Badakhshan is home to Tajiks, Uzbeks, Pushtoos, Hazaras, Kyrgyz, and Baluch (Source: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit and The World Bank, 2003 assessment)

**ARO relief team members:**

The ARO-Kabul relief team was headed by ARO's chairman, Abul Khalili (second from left), Nur-EI-Haq, Hashmat, and Naim.

An advance visit was made by a small group representing ARO-US in May 2006, headed by volunteer Salah Yaftali as preparation for the distribution.

Duration of trip:

One week (21 hours travel time each way, three days in the region distributing aid).

Cost of trip:

Approximately \$1,420.00(US). This includes \$1,000.00(US) for truck rental, \$110.00(US) for fuel, and \$310.00(US) for food and lodging for the relief team.

Route to Badakhshan:

The relief team passed through Parwan, Pul-e-Khumri, Baghlan, Kunduz, Taloqan (Takhar) provinces without incident.

**General details:**

Relief supplies were transported by large truck (rental), and followed by key ARO staff. Badakhshan it is around 190 km from Kabul, which equates to 21 hours travel time each way. The relief team traveled nine (9) hours the first day on the Taloqan-Badakhshan Road. Badakhshan is physically remote and roadways are not paved (dirt roads), making the travel challenging and fatiguing.

The relief team spent the first night along the road, and on the other nights in Badakhshan was able to stay at a government guesthouse in Faizabad.

The relief team reports they did more than expected during their three-day stay in Faizabad. The first morning, the ARO team visited the official government representative for the Ministry of Economic Development, and to call on the office of the Governor of Badakhshan Munshi Abdul Majid with documents from the ministries of economic development and finance in Kabul.

The ARO team met for two hours with the Governor's assistant (Governor Majid was in Kabul) to discuss the areas of greatest need in Badakhshan and the relief distribution procedure. Afterward, the ARO team and Governor's office were joined by representatives of the ministry of economics, the Red Cross, and the education department. This "task force", along with the ARO team, conducted a site survey in order to locate the neediest people. With the task force's supervision, the ARO team decided to distribute aid to four villages around Faizabad (Badakhshan's capital). Many of Badakhshan's districts are inaccessible by vehicle, with some having no road access.

The relief team reports the Badakhshan region is an area of high need, *"People in Badakhshan were very happy to receive relief supplies...they looked very poor and their clothes were very old. Most of their children didn't wear shoes..."*



The relief team further states, the trip to the Badakhshan region was "outstanding", in terms of reaching an area of great need. Badakhshan is categorized as an area of extreme need, with a very poor provincial economy. *"You don't find paved roads, you see poor people every where. They don't have enough facilities to live properly. You see very few cars (only in the capitol) In the villages people not only had not seen Kabul, most of them had not seen a car yet."*

Most of Badakhshan is without electricity, and has limited telephone or radio communication.

The cost of food and other material was much higher than Kabul. For example, one kg of gas for cooking and heat is 34 Afs but in Badakhshan it is 50 Afs for one kg. One *naan* (bread) in Kabul is 6 Afs, but in Badakhshan it is 10 Afs. One kg of beans in Kabul is 35 Afs but in Badakhshan it is 70 Afs.

The people of Badakhshan have difficult land for agriculture, because much of the terrain is mountainous or valleys. Historically, most have relied on forestry and animal husbandry, although by 2001 Badakhshan had become one of the country's top poppy growers for opium production. Since then, Afghanistan is developing alternative livelihood programs to find acceptable and sustainable options for the local economy. This will be challenging in Badakhshan, which has a relatively cold climate allowing for only one crop per year on average.

In February 2006, it was reported by Reuter's news service that heavy snowstorms in Badakhshan province killed at least 42 people and damaged more than 100 houses. Heavy snow also killed more than 1,000 livestock. Badakhshan province is prone to severe weather conditions, especially during winter. Heavy snow, avalanches and landslides are not uncommon in the area, as well as cold-related illnesses such as whooping cough. In June 2005, over 1,000 people were reported injured or affected by flooding as a result of rapid snowmelt. Houses, canals, roads were destroyed and livestock were killed in the flooding. Lack of resources, an unstable economy, harsh weather conditions and its inaccessibility create difficult conditions for residents.

Since 1998, ARO has provided relief aid to provinces such as: Samangan, Mazar I Sharif, Kunduz, Takhar, Bamiyan, Jalalabad (Tora Bora), Logar, Parwan, Paghman, Wardak, Pul-e-Khumri, Baghlan, Maidan, Kapisa, Punjsher, and relief camps or poor areas in the Kabul region. Badakhshan is an area of critical need, complicated by the fact most of the province is difficult to reach by aid groups and without regular communication systems.

The relief team documented distributions with video and photography.

List of relief supplies distributed:

Approximately 196 boxes (estimated weight 6,000 to 7,000 lbs) of relief aid were trucked to Badakhshan for distribution by ARO, including:

Winter clothing and footwear for men, women and children

Over one thousand winter coats were donated to the Afghanistan Relief Organization by a clothing distributor in Los Angeles, California, Kaiser & Associates, with only slight rain damage from heavy Southern California rains in 2005. Volunteers professionally laundered all the coats, sorting out any that might be considered unacceptable. Winter clothing also includes men's and women's shoes, donated from various sources. Also, the California-based non profit organization Afghans for Afghans, www.afghansforafghans.org, donated hand-knit hats, sweaters and socks produced for winter relief by American knitters from around the country.

Blankets and bedding

Donated by the Southern California Ayres Hotel chain, www.ayreshotels.com, high quality blankets and sheets were distributed for winter relief. Ayres Hotels delivered

these donations to ARO, and assisted in their packing. Additional new blankets in original packaging were donated by Southern California volunteers.

Tents

ARO was able to procure some tents through the Boy Scouts of America, West Los Angeles County Council. These tents were new from the manufacturer, having been used one or two nights for charity “walks”, and then made available for non profit organizations. These can be used to provide supplemental shelter material to families impacted by flooding, snowstorms, or to returning Afghans.

School supplies

ARO airlifted close to 6,000 lbs of school supplies in the 2006 airlift, all of which were donated by Southern Californians. General school supplies are always in high demand and have been included in every ARO relief distribution. Children of Badakhshan received basic school supplies, such as pencils, notebooks, markers and paper.



Home garden seeds

Vegetable and flower seeds have been collected from American home gardeners as part of the “re-greening” of Afghanistan and to encourage food production for Afghan home gardeners. The Seeds for Afghanistan project, created in October 2001, partnered with ARO in 2003. Hundreds of home gardeners, individuals, nurseries and seed companies have contributed seeds, including Seeds of Change, Botanical Interests, Inc., and Seed Savers. ARO *did not allow* the donation of poppy flower seeds, or seeds that can spread quickly and impact the land and grazing animals negatively (such as kudzu, jimson weed, datura). ARO distributed seeds to Badakhshan residents to encourage home gardens and a healthy diet.

Additional information:

Satellite image of Badkhshan region, <http://www.maplandia.com/afghanistan/badakhshan/>.

Provincial boundaries and cities in Afghanistan,
<http://www.mapsofworld.com/afghanistan/afghanistan-political-map.html>.



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