

# News from the Roof of the World



# Issue

# 4

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OPERATION  MERCY



Working toward rural development is not always easy. Roads are bad and villages are often inaccessible due to weather. The culture is often more traditional so it is more difficult to be able to communicate clearly with the people in need. These challenges can lead to what Robert Chambers (development Guru and professor) refers to as development biases.

We can find ourselves starting projects in areas where there is already development work, areas easy to reach, with the easier and more vocal groups of people to work with, visiting at the times of year where the locations are most accessible but not necessarily exhibiting the most need, and narrowing our work to the professional skill we have available. Falling into these biases can mean that the most vulnerable are forgotten.

Here in the Pamirs we are trying to reduce the chances of falling into these biases. As you will read, we want to reach the most isolated with our development projects and show that we support them throughout as much of the year as it is possible to reach their homes. That means being prepared to go to the end of the road and beyond; working with those others have given up on; respectfully moving beyond the opinions of the elite to enable the marginalised to have a voice and direct the development work; recognising that development work goes beyond helping people with specific physical needs in specific professional areas we may have experience of in our team, to helping them consider the role of social and spiritual dimensions to their poverty too.

It is not always easy to work toward rural development and not let these biases influence us. Our one office car is in need of regular attention leaving us to use everything from Chinese mini-mini-busses to everyday cars not fit for the roads. It means long days too, and a constant state of questioning whether we are really reaching those are in the most need. It means that much of our project budgets are set-aside for transport and car repairs, and we thank all our donors for understanding this need. But, as you read the stories in this issue, we hope you will see that this extra effort pays off.



## On the Road Less Travelled

Late July on a cloudy day I found myself heading from Khorog toward our partner village loaded with greenhouse building supplies. Our small lorry started off earlier with my partner coming in the other one. The village was nearly a four hour drive up the valley. The driver swerves this way and that to avoid the all too many bumps and potholes. The new road that was blasted from the mountain due to a landslide in 2015 is unpaved and kicks up enough dust to slow our progress. The numerous bumps don't just cost time they cost money as driving on these roads are merciless on any vehicle. The driver looks at his sideview mirrors after every hard bump to see if the wire that keeps his tailgate attached has fallen off. It has. We stop and attach it again, prying with a screwdriver to untwist the wire to attach the loop and using the same screwdriver to twist it tight again. CRACK! And flash! What was cloudy weather in Khorog has now become a rainstorm with driving sheets of rain. Bump and we felt the weight shift again. Go out again in the rain and fix the wire. We finally arrived and delivered the supplies.

We have delivered building materials to three villages this year with two more to come. We have had to wait for building supplies from the capital city since this summer there was a landslide on the neighboring country that blocked the main road from the capital city. We were once again reminded that despite our plans we are still bound by the infrastructure of this country, we work among people who live remotely. Our hope and aim is that farmers can see that they don't need to travel four hours from where they live to get fresh vegetables, with a little financial input and technology they can grow the food themselves. To showcase this technology requires us to travel along these roads to where our partners live. We and they live and work on the road that is less travelled.

## A Wheelchair to the “End of the Earth”

Three weeks ago I was traveling with our local colleague Madina to fit a child size active wheelchair to a Shahruh a young boy with cerebral palsy in one of our “health villages” As we were sitting with the village nurses they started to discuss how to best get to Shahruh’s house, “are you afraid of foot bridges” was the first question that gave me some idea of the little adventure ahead of us. “What kind of foot bridge?” I carefully asked ... “oh you will see”.

A young male nurse was recruited to carry the wheelchair and off we went – after a few minutes by car we stopped at a rickety bridge swinging over the river still high with water from the snow melt.

We crossed one person at a time. From here we walked about 30 minutes till we saw the first house of the “village”—a string of single houses dotting the side of the mountain along the river. After following the narrow footpath some more we arrived at the house.

Shahruh and his twin sister were expecting us on the outside porch and soon more women from nearby houses came to have a look what this strange procession was all about.

Shahruh was soon placed in his new wheelchair and we were able to fit it exactly to his size, making him sit comfortable but able to be active. Next was to teach him how to propel himself in the wheelchair. Being unused to being able to move and not having much stimulation otherwise he kept falling back into his stereo type movement but after some time he became interested and started to touch the wheels himself.

Shahruh’s form of CP isn’t that severe but being from a far off mountain village really reduces his chances to rehabilitation, once a year he and his mum go to the next city or to the capital 12h away for rehabilitation, but now one ever had provided them with tips or equipment for ongoing exercise or stimulation. After showing his mum some basic movements and explaining what else beside the wheelchair would be beneficial for him, we had to say good bye for this time. It broke my heart to see how much more potential he has, if he could access a regular service like Operation mercy provides in some of the more populous areas. The challenge of reproducing such programmes and services in the mountains is huge. But I hope we can be back to provide other assistive devices that will support his development to Shahruh and other kids like him.



# Fruit Production in the Pamirs

Anytime of the year in the Pamirs, we face challenges as we try to reach the villages where we work. In the spring as temperatures heat up, precipitation increases, and snow begins to melt, the roads we travel on are quite often closed. We work hard to find and gather interested farmers to attend our orchard management seminars out in various villages. These farmers face their own transportation challenges as they try to attend.

This spring was a particularly difficult one because of the amount of avalanches, rock-fall, and mudslides which blocked the roads to villages. Seminars were scheduled then rescheduled maybe a dozen times. After about a month of plans continually falling through we learned to adapt to this challenge, which we and our partners were facing.

During the spring months, we were able to identify who were the more influential and ambitious farmers within the villages we work in. These are people who have put into practice things that we have taught in trainings as well as people who have a good network of neighboring farmers. We found that it was much easier to confirm a time and place with just a couple ambitious farmers, rather than gather 10-15 farmers from nearby villages.

We shifted our focus from organizing large meetings to simply meeting with a couple

ambitious farmers in each village. This reduced the amount of variables that could possibly keep us from gathering. We would then sit and have tea and walk around orchards with one or two farmers, giving them information on best practices and discussing traditional practices. This intentional focus on just a couple ambitious farmers provided them with an opportunity to process any new information with us in order to understand it well. It also gave us a chance to sit and listen to them as they described traditional management practices and the rationale behind them. We would then leave them with materials to distribute to their neighbors so that as neighbors come by and see their newly applied practices in their orchards, our farmers are prepared to provide them with any information needed. Whether this be by demonstration in their garden or by handing out orchard management materials provided by Operation Mercy.

Already this summer, we have seen new practices put in place by these farmers. A couple ambitious farmers have also made commitments to give a presentation at their jamoatkhona (community gathering place) about orchard biodiversity and the implications for managing pests. Though accessibility in the Pamirs is difficult, there are new creative alternatives that may develop as we work closely with the community.





## In Other News

In the past months we have been privileged to witness a team from Operation Mercy Khojand work with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection to distribute high quality durable wheelchairs to people with mobility problems.

With the health workers we have been training we have battled through snow to a village with no local health care. There we helped them to share the problems they face so that we might support medical workers from the nearest health point to train them on basic health issues next year.

We worked with our health worker partners to put on a fun educational event for children celebrating International Children's Day. The children learned about oral hygiene and handwashing as well as playing a lot of games. These were the first such events in these villages and a wonderful time was had by all.

Two schools, high in the Roshtkala district, have completed greenhouses and are now able to provide vegetables as part of school meals already supported by the WFP. More greenhouses in the Shugnon District are being completed at the moment.

With a member of one of the orchard groups we have been working with we have overcome the natural national border of the river Pyanj to enjoy a brief visit to Afghanistan with the AKF to demonstrate how to make juice from their waste apples.

Running the risks of wolves and extreme cold we worked with another greenhouse partner to pilot stoves in his greenhouse again this year.

As of the 11th September we will be running a Global Giving campaign. GG is a crowd funding platform. If you would like to give toward our projects please go to [BIT.LY/PAMIRS-GIVING](https://bit.ly/pamirs-giving). Even if you can't give please share this URL on your social media pages.

September 19th is a bonus day. Give on that day and your gifts will be matched by other GG donors. Please email Johnny if you need more information ([jhh@opmercytj.org](mailto:jhh@opmercytj.org))

If we are able to raise at least \$3,000 we will have full access to all the fundraising services that they offer.

# OPERATION MERCY

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

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