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SUCCESS STORY

Overcoming Access Challenges to Deliver Assistance in Afghanistan

USAID implementing partners defied significant access barriers, including security- and weather-related challenges, to address humanitarian needs in remote Afghan communities.



Photo courtesy of FOCUS

In the absence of road access, FOCUS staff transported construction materials by boat and donkey through neighboring Tajikistan to Darwaz following heavy rains in July 2015.



Photo courtesy of SC/US

SC/US staff faced harsh winter conditions to deliver relief items, including blankets and warm clothing, to previously inaccessible communities in Bamyan's Panjab and Waras districts.

Ongoing conflict and frequent natural disasters continue to displace populations and generate significant humanitarian needs throughout Afghanistan. The UN estimates that natural disasters, such as avalanches and floods, affect 250,000 Afghans each year, while armed conflict, displacement, and malnutrition affect nearly 8 million people.

From April–September 2015, intensified conflict in northern and western areas of the country left many communities inaccessible, while flooding induced by heavy rains resulted in further inaccessibility. Relief actors faced several barriers to delivering humanitarian assistance in remote areas of the country due to security- and weather-related challenges, as well as limited transportation infrastructure. USAID partners Focus Humanitarian Assistance (FOCUS), International Medical Corps (IMC), and Save the Children/U.S. (SC/US) developed creative solutions to overcome access challenges, bringing assistance to conflict- and natural disaster-affected communities.

USAID supports FOCUS to conduct community-based disaster risk reduction activities, including establishing stockpiles of emergency relief supplies in disaster-prone areas. In the aftermath of the July 2015 floods, which damaged dozens of houses in Badakhshan Province's Darwaz District, FOCUS established a cross-border agreement with the Government of Tajikistan to restock relief supplies—blankets, plastic sheeting, tents, and tools—in affected areas via alternate road access through the neighboring country.

In Nuristan Province, where insecurity and natural disasters intensify existing vulnerabilities, IMC addressed access challenges in Afghanistan during 2015 by establishing and training community response teams. IMC trained five 20-person teams, including two consisting entirely of women, to provide emergency medical care and conduct rescue operations in the event of a disaster. Following a magnitude 7.1 earthquake in April 2016, IMC trainees rescued a child during search-and-rescue operations and used IMC-provided tools to clear the road to the local hospital.

Extreme weather conditions in 2015 posed many access challenges for SC/US staff working in mountainous Bamyan Province. For example, a September 2015 landslide restricted access to affected households, requiring SC/US staff to walk for four hours to assess humanitarian needs. After conducting the assessment, SC/US worked with community members, who provided donkeys and logistical support, to facilitate the delivery of relief items to affected households.

USAID continues to support FOCUS, IMC, SC/US, and other partners to provide lifesaving humanitarian assistance, despite access restrictions, and to work with communities throughout Afghanistan to strengthen local disaster response capacity.