

Poverty alleviation through mitigation of integrated high mountain risk in the Pamir region of Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan

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The extended Pamir region of Tajikistan (including the Gorno–Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast–GBAO) with its border regions to Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan, characterized by high altitude and continental climate with extreme seasonal precipitation regimes, is suffering from the effects of global warming. Melting glaciers, rising permafrost boundary, and higher climate variability accelerate the degradation of soil and vegetation, the decline of biodiversity and (as a consequence) influence the water flow regime including quality and quantity. But there is also a dramatic human-induced degradation process. During the last two decades it is estimated that dramatic clearing has reduced the once dense primeval forests by 70–80%. The remaining forest cover and shrubland has covered an area of 42,8 km in 2002. Forests have been converted to cropland and meadows to keep up with dramatic population growth. Widespread poverty and fuel scarcity, but also lack of forest management, have accelerated this process. As a consequence, dwarf-shrub communities covering the steep mountain slopes are facing increased pressure. With energy crisis continuing, they are used as source for heating. In areas cleared of shrubs, erosion by wind and water are further worsening the situation. On the Afghan side, the World Bank-financed unfinished Kunduz–Khanabad Irrigation System is diverting large amounts of water to rice fields. Several years of droughts have contributed to Pyanj river banks and levees suffering from erosion which increases the risk for floodings. In addition to, deep poverty is increasing with most people heavily depending on remittances of labour migrants. A lack of resources and technical capacity with regard to disaster preparedness and response on the local as well as national level leaves remote and isolated communities in the Pamir particularly vulnerable. Therefore, the PAMIR project has been running since 2011 on promoting the research on the linkages between disaster preparedness, environmental sustainability and poverty reduction in the Alai–Transalai Range (Tajikistan/Kyrgyzstan) and the Pyanj River Valley / Wakhan Corridor (Tajikistan/Afghanistan) and build up capacity of key stakeholders at different levels.

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