

## Monsoon Flood 2010: Early Recovery in Pakistan in spring 2011

### The scent of peach trees in flower and hard work: a visit to Malteser International's early recovery projects. By *Christine Prokopf, April 2011*

#### Restoring the livelihood of flood affected families in the Swat District

There are many stories to be told after travelling along the Swat River. How the immense floods washed agricultural land away. How the water running down the hills to meet the river destroyed houses and shops. How people just disappeared in the floods and their bodies were never found. Now, in spring 2011, the emergency relief, which had begun in 2010 directly after the floods, has been officially declared finished. However, for the people living along the Swat River and its tributaries, the disaster is far from over. To restore their livelihood and support them on their way back to a normal life, Malteser International, together with its partner organisation Lasoona, has started to implement so-called early recovery measures.



The first stop is at Amlook Tall. The village was hit hard: Houses and shops were destroyed; even the road has to take another course now. The stream which feeds the Swat River does not seem very aggressive during our visit; it looked like an ordinary mountain torrent. People cross it using large rocks dropped in the shallow riverbed. But this will change soon: in a few weeks, the water level will rise due to the melting snow up in the mountains, and the four villages on the other side of the river will be cut off. This means: no access to the schools, to health facilities, and to the bazaars and markets.

Forty men from the surrounding villages are working on the river bank to build a simple bridge over the river that will not only connect the villages, but hopefully also resist future floods. They have already constructed a retaining wall to keep the river from washing away further parts of the hillside on which Amlook Tall is situated. Malteser International employs the labourers as part of a "cash for work" programme. They were heavily affected by the floods, lost family members or houses, do not own land and have to feed big families.



*At the moment, the river can still be crossed stepping from stone to stone but in some weeks this will no longer be possible.*

The labourers are employed through a “cash for work” scheme. They were heavily affected by the floods, lost family members or houses, do not own land and have to feed big families. Some are even more vulnerable as they have to care for someone with a chronic disease or are handicapped themselves. Under the supervision of Lasoona, they will work at the river bank for 34 days to complete the project. The profit is twofold: The most affected by last year’s floods get an opportunity to earn money to support their families, to repair their houses or shops, and to start anew with their daily life, while the whole community will benefit from the new bridge and the preventive measures.

The next stop is at Cheetor, a village crossed by the same stream. Some houses are grouped around a courtyard, where a group of women is sitting in the shadow with their children. Ten of them are working on embroideries, another “cash for work” measure. As women are only allowed to work in their homes in this part of Pakistan, they are very happy to have the opportunity to participate in the project. Right now, only the most affected can participate: young widows who became the head of the family after they lost their husbands, or women who have to cope with difficult living conditions. Before the flood, many of the families cultivated rice fields next to the stream. The last harvest was destroyed by the floods and their land is now partly washed away.

When the women are sitting together, it is like everywhere in the world: They chat and laugh while the children bustle around in play. Saima is one of the women participating in the project. She is 26 years old and has three children. Her youngest son has a heart problem. Fortunately, it can be treated, but life isn’t easy for the mother. She is glad to get compliments for her work and emphasises that she wants to work more, as this is currently the only source of income for her family.



*Saima and her son are happy to participate: She even continues working while telling her story.*

Crossing the Swat River, the beauty of the valley is striking once again: Meadows are covered with fruit trees and the pink peach flowers give a colourful accent to the hills of the valley, which has just started greening. Then, the huge riverbed comes into sight. Some 60 men from the next village, Shakar Dar, are working on a retaining wall that is intended to recapture agricultural land from the river. The work they are doing is hard: Stone after stone is transported by the lined-up men and, slowly, the wall grows. But the value of their work is clearly visible – an already existing retaining wall that saved the majority of the peach trees during the floods in 2010 is within sight.

The villagers of Shakar Dar don’t want to be passive receivers of relief aid: The community is actively investing in the retaining wall. They collected money to operate two tractors transporting stones from the vast river bed to the construction site. Nur Rahman, the supervisor of the site, is one of those villagers. The village community chose him for



*These walls have kept the peach trees from being flooded away*

his task and Lasoona accepted the decision. For his work, he earns 350 Pakistani rupees (around 3 Euros) per day. However, he decided not to use the money for himself, but to reinvest it in the project and to contribute to the financing of the tractor.

Badsha Hosani is one of the labourers working on the site. He makes a wide gesture to indicate the location of his destroyed peach orchards, now a part of the riverbed. A second personal disaster after his home was destroyed by Islamic militants in 2009. "We need your help here", he insists. In the afternoon, the daily work is done. Nur Rahman, Badsha Hosani, and the other villagers wander through the peach orchards to return to the village. When they have completed the wall in a few days, the area will be reconverted into agricultural land.

Another part of Malteser International's early recovery measures has yet to start. Peasants who have lost their harvest, tools, and stocks in the floods will receive seed, fertilizer, and tools to start anew. They will also receive training to learn how to use these agricultural supplies efficiently. Not only will the supported families benefit from this measure, but it will also contribute to the area's self-sustainability regarding nutrition.

In June or July, the monsoon season will start again – this time hopefully without vast floods, destruction, and personal disasters for the people in Swat, who have already suffered so much over the last years.



*Every stone added to the wall is one step further to some more secure agricultural land.*