



Restoring Livelihoods after Chitral flood disaster

“The reason of my smile is my new restored water mill churning amidst maize fields”

Noor Afzal, A water mill owner in Chitral.

Sadaf Tahir
Arjumand Nizami

Monsoon reached Chitral in full force during 2015 and within few days took Chitral district decades behind in terms of development. Over 300,000 people were affected by floods in a district of 585,000 inhabitants. Floods and intense rains badly damaged some of the major livelihoods assets of communities. These included irrigation channels which serve as a lifeline for food production in Chitral, drinking water supply schemes, conveyance roads, bridges, food shops and water mills. The rains also took away the seed accumulated by farmers for the next crops. HELVETAS reacted fast and mainly focused on restoring drinking water supply, ensuring that irrigation channels are operationalized to an extent that they can feed the standing crops, restocking seed, restoring food shops with supplies and restoring some of the most strategically located water mills that offer services to a number of villages to produce flour and use for household consumption.

Until February 2016, 17 drinking water supply schemes for 1115 households, 72 irrigation channels catering for 6242 farmers in 72 villages, 59 food shops were restocked and reopened, 31 water mills were rehabilitated and reopened and 141 tons of wheat seed



was provided to about 7000 farmers for sowing in early winter. In addition, water purification kits were provided to 3550 households and two water filtering units were installed serving 360 households on daily basis.

Noor Afzal was one of the water mill owners in Chitral who lost his water mill during flood. The mill remained inaccessible to the communities for over three months and this created crises in the households fed by this mill. Wheat bread is a staple diet in Chitral and due to unavailability of mill the households fell into deep difficulty due to their inability to acquire flour in adequate quantity.

Noor Afzal S/O Sher Afzal, the guardian of 150 years old legacy of fore fathers who migrated from Nuristan to this Village Navegal Payen of Sheikhandeh Bala Valley saw many ups and downs in 60 years of his life. In all such odds his family was a source of strength for him. He has 2 sons and one daughter.



To earn subsistence for the family all he has is a piece of cultivable land, and water mill. For him the months from March to November are the busiest as the valley experiences long stretch of severe winter and it is only in these months that farmers grow maize. Amidst of maize fields his mill churns, grinding the grains into flour. For every 40 Kg he grinds, people give 2.5 kg in lieu of service rendered. In this way he manages to collect about 600 KG in a season and sell this in the market at a rate of PKR 1200 per 50 KG. He also collects grass as fodder for cattle and sell the surplus; which enables him to secure roughly PKR 45000/- in a season.

The flood of 2015 turned Noor Afzal's life upside down. He still remember the horrid midnight when he along with his family had to

run for their lives leaving everything behind; his land, his standing crops, his mill... The flood engulfed everything that came in its way. All his belongings, the essence of efforts of so many years was slipping out of his hands in front of his eyes and he was helpless against the ruthless wrath of nature that left nothing but devastated crop fields, broken & eroded houses, uprooted trees, a collapsed mill and unending despair.

Can you imagine what it means to someone of his age losing all the possessions especially the source of livelihood? The pain Noor Afzal and his family had gone through cannot be explained in words. His son- his only hope for family wellbeing, was a student in government college Chitral; he always dreamt of him getting higher studies and for that Noor Afzal worked day and night to keep his education on. The flood devastation had shattered all of Noor Afzal's will power, he felt paralyzed! His mill was laying silent under the debris and the desolated maize fields meant no other crop for the whole year. His eyes could foresee a lengthy span of hunger and financial insecurity for his family. At that moment his son decided to shoulder him in supporting the family, sacrificed his education and left for Lahore in search of job.



In the meanwhile many organization came to village Navegal Payen for damage assessment. HELVETAS was among those organizations. Good thing Noor Afzal admits about HELVETAS is that it noticed the vulnerability of water mill owners and helped restore their main source of livelihoods. HELVETAS provided them with the CGI sheets and other material including cement and 50% cost share in skilled labor. With this assistance Noor Afzal managed to build even a better water mill than before. "My new mill has more capacity to grind flour for more customers. With my new mill I manage to collect 80 KG flour per day". God has also bestowed his son with a job in Lahore and he is able to send PKR 10,000-12,000 monthly which is indeed a sense of relief for Noor Afzal.



"Today, I really feel delighted when I look at my new mill – churning amidst the maize fields. Now I can pay attention to restoring my damaged agricultural land. But as I am stepping into old age so I am thinking of retiring slowly with gradual hand-over of the responsibilities to my son as in the hard times he proved himself a worthy guardian of the family and the associated 150 years old legacy" says Noor Afzal with the contented smile.