

Two months after the floods in Ladakh **GERES priority: getting ready for winter**

Aubagne, 19 October 2010 – Two months after the floods in Ladakh, the final local toll amounts to 233 people missing. In the disaster areas, 638 houses have been completely destroyed, 597 houses and 514 shelters and temporary structures have been partially damaged, while 1420 ha of farmland have been devastated. In total, losses are estimated at €34.5 million (€27.5 million in the agricultural sector and €7 million in the housing sector).

The local government has identified the most severely affected areas that require emergency aid before winter. Around 20 local and international NGOs have been deployed in various activities throughout the territory, including launching repair and reconstruction work.

Given that GERES involvement in bioclimatic architecture draws on 20 years' experience in the region, it is entirely legitimate for our NGO to take part in the various co-ordination meetings and offer its technical skills. Our immediate focus in the run up to winter is on three main activities:

1. **Taking part in rebuilding permanent shelters.** With one of its faithful local partner NGOs, LEHO (Ladakh Environment & Health Organization), GERES is helping to build solar walls (an adapted version of the "Trombe" wall) for some permanent shelters in one of the isolated villages in northern Ladakh. Initial construction work has begun and should be completed before winter brings activity to a halt. During the next construction season starting in April 2011, these shelters can be converted into proper houses for local people, who will receive financial assistance from the government and technical assistance from NGOs.
2. **Distributing flat chimneys to some of the families hit by the flooding.** With temperatures often falling below -20°C in winter, villagers need to protect themselves against the cold. GERES and the local association LNP (Leh Nutrition Project) are in the process of identifying potential beneficiaries for the distribution of this equipment, which has been developed by GERES in partnership with local craftsmen to improve home heating. (*Illustration: photos available on request*)
3. **Providing studies and technical plans to share skills** in respect of sustainable building: GERES teams have been working with the local NGOs LEDeG, LEHO and LNP together with national organizations such as SEEEDS and CASA on an earthquake-resistant passive solar model for homes to be repaired or rebuilt in Choglamsar and the affected villages.

PSH project. In addition, the staff of the "Passive Solar Housing" (PSH) project, who had been mobilized to help with emergency aid and relief work following the flooding, have now resumed their regular activities insofar as these can be continued. Most of the project regions are now accessible.

We have been able to assess the situation, establishing that around 15% of the project's houses were affected. It must also be pointed out that, in view of the current wave of repair and construction work, mainly focused on roads and public infrastructure, the availability of equipment and labour represents a major constraint on achieving annual targets. This has already resulted in a considerable increase in costs.

The revised plan of action for the next three months will be available shortly. A full evaluation of the impact on our PSH project will not be finalized until early 2011, when we have taken stock of the work done before the winter and the government and other agencies have clearly defined their plans of action.

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