

Sunflowers bring hope after floods in Pakistan

The floods



Photo: Richard Hanson/Tearfund

Between July and August 2010, families living in the Indus River basin in Pakistan were faced with the worst floods in Pakistan's recent history. The river, which for so long had been their source of life and livelihood, suddenly became their greatest foe. Over 20 million people were affected by the floods which covered an area of land greater than England.

Working through four local partners, as well as through an operational team in Pakistan, Tearfund was able to help local people in the short term by:

- providing and restoring water pumps
- providing emergency food supplies, water filters, health and hygiene kits, cooking utensils, mosquito nets, blankets and shelter materials
- digging latrines
- providing medical equipment and care
- supporting children's education and rehabilitating schools

For the medium and longer term, partners are providing training in areas such as health and hygiene, disaster risk reduction and climate change. They are beginning to focus on restoring livelihoods through the provision of agricultural inputs and training.

Sunflowers

Bangla Khan Pathan in Sindh province was one of the many villages devastated by the floods. The waters destroyed the belongings, houses and sources of livelihood of nearly everyone in the community. The flood washed away the standing crops leaving families heavily indebted having originally taken out loans to purchase seeds which were due to be repaid at harvest time. After the floods, people found themselves without the means to repay the loans, or to purchase new seed. Many animals were also killed.

Tearfund initially responded with food relief followed by the provision of sunflower seeds - enough for farmers to plant two acres each. The sunflowers, when used to make sunflower oil, were expected to provide an income of around 50,000 Rupees (£380) allowing farmers to pay off their loans and purchase new seed for the next planting season, putting them back on track again.

Although much of the vast irrigation system in Pakistan had been damaged, there was enough moisture in the soil from the flood water to allow farmers to plant and raise the sunflower crop without needing additional irrigation. However, the crop had to be planted before the end of January before the heat of the sun dried out the soil. Recognising this, Tearfund paid for local tractor drivers to come and cultivate the fields and help the farmers plant their seeds. One farmer, Rozi Khan, said just before the sunflower harvest in April:

"After the flood I was empty handed with no way of paying off my debts and supporting my family. Now I am satisfied that in a few days I will be able to harvest my crop of sunflowers and earn Rs 50,000 so I can repay the moneylenders and buy rice seed for planting in June."