



Captured in Tajikistan 5

Still catching up... December 2008: The winter break at home was great. One highlight was the shkarnuz (plastic bag) sleigh ride with the Ege brothers in Ardez, 2256 m a.s.l. We didn't get very far. But it was such fun.



Esther getting prepared at her “Nichtisch”: Her exhibition at the Kunsthhaus Langenthal was another winter highlight.



And of course Gomera, the hippie island of the Canaries, with Annegreth, Steven and Manuel. Lost in the mist of the beautiful forest reserve and body surfing at the beach – what a nice change directly after Tajikistan.



Back at my Muminabadi home in the beginning of February: Winter morning view through the foggy windows. This winter was much less cold than the last one. But much longer too.



And there was much less power. Somehow they changed the strategy this year: fewer power cuts in the big cities – and almost no power in the regions. When I came back there was no electricity for several weeks. That the fridge was not working was no problem thanks to reliable bio-cooling in front of the window. But taking showers with water at 10°C was tough. And when the tank was empty the electric pump was of no use and I got the opportunity to make the genuine experience of fetching water from the standpipe on the street like all the others.



Someone I forgot to present to you over and over again: This is Rex the compound dog. He is half wild so you always have to be on your guard. But he likes me. Probably for all the bones and tons of fat he gets because there's no meat without that on the market. Like most dogs he got his ears cut as a puppy. This tradition is a remnant of the times when the dogs were guarding livestock and had to fight off the wolves all the time; makes them less vulnerable. Today, it's just nonsense. But like it is with traditions: it's hard to leave them behind. Rex is one of the standard dog names. The other two are Rambo and Tarzan.



Spring came slowly this year. In Muminabad the last snow fell in the middle of April, just after we planted tomatoes and strawberries outside. The strawberries survived. And there was much rain too.



Very much rain. On 3rd of May, finally, I got an idea of what our natural disaster risk management project was actually here for. So far it had been dry. Since September 2007 there were no real rainfalls and I had seen the riverbeds only without water. Now this was suddenly different and within a few hours the flash floods rushed through the villages and the fields...



...causing damage to crops, roads and bridges.



And as most of the channels in the villages are filled with sediments that nobody takes out like in Soviet times they overflow quickly and the water runs directly through the compounds of the people and washes away the kitchen gardens and with them the harvest, which is an important part of the subsistence farming everyone is living from.



Like every year spring was green. “Tajik green” I choose to call it because I have not seen this intensity anywhere else. This spring was much greener and longer lasting than last year. The harvest of grass for fodder was incredibly high compared to last year and people are looking forward to the wheat harvest that just started. And the trees: Not only our tree planting projects were very successful thanks to the rain but also those thousands of trees that the government plants every year along the roads – without protection nor care – found much better conditions this year. While last year most of them were dry only a few weeks after planting, many survived this year.



This is how fast change comes over the hills. Now, three months after the previous picture and just after the wheat harvest the hills have returned to their dry and yellowish look.



Here is my very own agricultural show-off: Sending you much delayed Easter greetings with chard from my green house (no fertilizers, just water and sun and love – and these leafs were not even the biggest ones).



Two new faces in our team (and here in a poppy field on the way to Dushanbe): Catherine, intern from Luxembourg, did a great job managing the production of our natural disaster movie from March to July; and Barbara is our new junior on watershed management projects for a year. She arrived in February and introduced “Röschi und Zürigschnätzlets” as the Friday evening special.



Here's the rock in the rough sea of a country facing many challenges, His Excellency President Emomali Rahmon, upright in the wheat field, the claimed basis of the nation's prosperity (Tajikistan annually imports wheat for millions of dollars). Admittedly he is not very original in posing. But always good for a new idea...



Here is one: Maybe realising that the expansion of the energy production may still take awhile the Tajik government decided to get serious with energy saving: Last month, the selling of conventional light bulbs was forbidden and energy saving bulbs were introduced. It was surprising how fast the bulbs were exchanged in all government buildings, even in the rural areas. Usually innovation takes time... But maybe there is another good reason for this striking green move: it's good business. The main importer of these bulbs is from the president's clan, of course. And the second major importer was just recently taken to court...



Finishing this edition: Sa'dy, our watershed project officer and counterpart of Barbara, blowing out the candles on his birthday cake. A very nice May evening behind our office.

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