



Evaluation of River Basin Programme in Nepal

Executive Summary

Oxfam GB Programme Evaluation

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Executive Summary

River Basin Programme of Oxfam GB Nepal is implemented since 1999. This programme is as a part of the regional River Basin programme and is designed to address the problems faced by the vulnerable and marginalized communities in the *Terrai* Region. The current initiatives began only in 2005 with four local partners¹ in 74 villages in five districts, three in the western region and two in eastern region of the country.

During last 30 years, the floods are annual phenomenon and are getting worse. Some of the reasons attributed for flooding are reduced carrying capacity of rivers (siltation), construction of dam along the border by the Indian government and absence of preparedness culture among the local authorities.

There are positive changes in communities understanding on disasters. Initially communities had notions that disasters are the acts of gods and goddesses. There is a change in their perception and realization that disaster impacts can be mitigated and impacts reduced by the community. Trainings, orientation, rallies and campaigns in communities have increased their understanding.

Boats are the most prominent contingency stock utilized by the communities during floods (more than 60%). In few FGDs, communities explained how boats were useful to rescue elderly people, women and children to flood shelters.

Village and Community Disaster Management Committees, set up by the partners, prepared evacuation plans and were able mobilize communities to establish emergency funds. Role of volunteers during search and rescue operations and relief distributions was appreciated. Survey findings shows that 82.1% of respondents are aware of these committees and 28.4% were the members. The process followed by the partner agencies to form these committees and the training meetings organised was good, and they managed to have women elected as members of these committees. In some districts, the community disaster preparedness plans have established links with VDC and allocated budget for preparedness activities including coordination meetings among disaster affected VDCs. However, in some cases the committees are depended upon the NGOs. To increase their sustainability, linkages should be established with the Village Development Committees (VDC) and other local government systems.

Household survey findings indicate that only 47% have access to latrines. About 76% respondents prepared before floods. The types of preparation include stocking food (rice & dry vegetables) and seeds, saving money, repairing houses, etc. Women also kept some clean cloths for the sanitation. There is some awareness among the communities on flood preparedness that can be strengthened. But the awareness on hazards, vulnerability and different risk reduction actions among the communities, VDC and other actors were insufficient and could be improved.

Pre-dominant livelihood strategies in the area are farming (29.9%) and engaging in casual labour (37.3%). There are no other alternative economic/ employment opportunities. Only 62% own land and availability of food stock from own source (22%) is limited to due to lack of agriculture inputs, recurrent flooding, etc. Each year floods destroys crops of farmers, especially for small land holding and those who work as sharecroppers. About 73.1% of the respondents made adjustments to the number of meals eaten per day after floods. As a part of the project, some villages have initiated grain banks. Partners are also encouraging communities to diversify income sources through activities such as vegetable gardening, goat rearing and other income generation activities that can be promoted at larger scale.

Majority of households have only nominal assets like cooking utensils; bed, mat, bucket, blankets, and agriculture equipments and small livestock like goats and small poultry. Quality of drinking water that communities collect at the wells and its storage at household level is a major concern.

¹ Indreni Rural Development Centre (IRDC) in Kapilvastu, Centre for Disaster Management (CDM) in Rupendehi and Nawalparasi, Rural Community Development Service Council (RCDSC) in Mahottari and Koshi Victims Society (KVS) in Saptari district

Water quality is open for contamination by recurrent flood and surface water stagnation due to poor wastewater drainage.

Sanitation is other issue that requires addressing. 22.4% of the respondents had raised plinths and most of them had contributed their own resources. Partners and staff also informed that many neighbouring communities have also started replicating plinth-raising activities. But the plinths of the raised homesteads were not above highest recorded flood level and can be improved. Choice of materials for construction of latrine and homestead could have been better made, if locally available materials were used and helped in wider replication. There are some innovative practices where partners have coordinated with VDC to declare some areas restricted for open defecation.

Major loss from floods includes loss of crops (56%) and loss of productivity of livestock. About 58% respondents lost one or other productive assets. The major productive asset loss included land (50%), seeds (30%) and clothes (19%). Loss of land and seeds are particularly important for increasing their vulnerability and widening poverty gap. In case of non-productive assets loss, 44% respondent lost mainly dwellings (that were fully or partially collapsed) and or cooking utensils. The project needs to design interventions on how to reduce the asset loss of the communities along with saving lives.

During and post floods, the employment opportunities were limited. At times, people have taken loan from moneylender and sold their household assets for food. In one of the FGDs, the men told that they had taken loan of 25,000 NPR with 36% annual interest. Creating opportunities (employment, financial, etc.) for recovery after disasters is another factor that project needs to take into consideration.

Flood shelters constructed were helpful for people to take shelter. But they are small and were not able to accommodate all affected persons. Other than flood shelter, most of the time people took shelter in houses of local elites, schools or embankment during flood. The flood shelters were used for 2-3 days and there was no drinking water or toilets and separate space for livestock.

The main cooking fuel is mixture of cow dung + wheat/rice straw mixed and dried. In one village *biogas* is introduced. 6 households have adopted biogas and are quite successful. Biogas provides household fuel, and helps in safe excreta disposal need by producing organic manure for agricultural fields.

All four partners have training and capacity building as one of their core organizational objectives, and have conducted various meetings and training sessions with their respective communities. The local communities and district level stakeholders value the disaster management initiatives promoted by them.

Partner agencies have tried to address this gender issue in the communities, and have gender and health awareness raising focal point staff in their organisation. During formation of VDMC and CDMC, they have encouraged the selection of women members in the committees. A positive change in the lives of women is that they are able to speak in front of men and committee members and express their views, which was not the case earlier. Livelihood input support is prioritised for women and they also own business and other assets (like goat, treadle pumps, etc.) But, there is a need to do more work for empowering women and supporting gender-sensitive activities in this regard.

All partners have good coordination with VDCs and others I-NGOs and were able to influence VDC to allocate resources for transportation of relief materials from their own fund and advocate to DDC for more resource allocation. In some areas, VDC members were also members of the District Development Committees (DDC). The partner effort was effective during flood response to coordinate, mobilise outside support and avoid duplication.

The evaluation concludes that disaster risk reduction initiatives has benefited to the community. Individual benefited have gone mainly to few households who have their plinth raised, and for communities where water points were raised.

Working with Partners: a right way of implementation

Oxfam's four partners have strong local base and gives an advantage to Oxfam for such strong and capable organisations as partners, who have excellent local knowledge and long-term interest of working with the communities. Partner's capacity building can be further improved in certain areas such as on participatory approaches, community mobilisation, DRR approaches, etc.

Geographical area coverage and measuring impact

The RBP programme in Nepal covers five districts in geographically two separate areas: the West and East regions. Access to the areas is a difficult process by air or over eight hours drive by car. Even though the work is implemented by partner agencies based in these two development regions, monitoring of the implementation and providing technical support by Oxfam staff has not been that easy, and this will continue to be so unless additional resource is acquired.

The following factors should be considered while deciding target areas:

- Concentrate in the most needy and vulnerable area
- Develop a framework to measure the impact of our programme

Strengthening Disaster Management Committees

Village and Community Disaster Management committees are functioning during implementation of disaster relief responses, which is one of the roles they need to play, not the sole and main role. It is imperative for the partner staff to have clear understanding about institutional mechanisms on disaster risk management, and train and support disaster management committee members to play a wider role in disaster risk reduction.

Contingency Plans and Stocks

Contingency plans may be shared, updated regularly (at least before monsoon) and disseminated to the community members. Mass awareness is needed on existing contingency plans, stocks and traditional methods such as preserving dry food and cash savings for flood. The messages should target vulnerable families, VDCs, other agencies and the local government.

Early Warning Systems

Develop effective early warning systems that combine scientific knowledge and traditional wisdom can help in reducing risk and help communities and share with the communities. The early systems can be developed between downstream and up stream and can be also shared and collaborated with the district and national government.

Food Security

The analysis shows that food security scenario in the area is shows a chronic problem. Most of the families don't have sufficient food availability before floods and post floods that deteriorate. Livelihood enhancement activities initiated by the partners and that focus on women should be taken up at a larger scale. Different other innovations on food security can be designed.

Public health

The gap on public health capacity is very evident, from the design of latrine and drainages at water distribution systems in the RBP programme. . Funds spent on these uncompleted works could have been used on something else that could have benefited the community. Water quality is other area that needs to be looked. The partners will need and can benefit from technical support and timely monitoring from Oxfam. This will help to demonstrate good practice and identify alternative approaches

The evaluation team is of the view that public health awareness raising training is a pre-requisite for the partners' staff and communities to understand the importance of public health and its relations/impact to disaster risk reduction interventions.

Introduction of Biogas and energy saving stoves

Availability of fuel for cooking is very limited in all the villages. The community are mainly dependent on dried cow dung. Some of the partners have been working on energy saving stoves and community have adopted biogas system. This can be followed up further, and its viability tested. The set up of biogas system does require initial capital but it has an advantage in solving

sanitation problem, with by-product of renewable energy for cooking and manure for agricultural field and at the same time helps prevent deforestation. This activity can be taken a large scale.

Flood shelters and other small-scale mitigation activities

More flood shelters are need and especially in villages where disasters are frequent and targeting vulnerable people. The location and size of the flood shelters needs to be decided in discussion with the community members. Appropriate facilities for men and women (e.g. water and sanitation) needs to be taken into account in flood shelters. Possibilities of having separate space for livestock and household assets should also be explored. The

Gender and RBP programming in Nepal

Gender issues need to be addressed in all aspects of programme implementation in the RBP programme, right from project planning, to design, site selection for latrine, tube well, awareness raising on rights, health, family planning, training on leadership development and resource mobilisation and resource management. At the moment women are represented in the disaster management committees at village and community level, but this should not remain to be nominal representation, more support is required to have women play equal role with their husbands on matters and have access to resources and involve in decision making.

Targeting

Better targeting of the most vulnerable communities. In such situation, provision of communal latrines could have been considered in consultation with the communities. Selection criteria for beneficiaries need to be understood and agreed by all staffs.

Advocacy

Partner agencies and Oxfam need to work out an advocacy strategy to lobby with responsible authorities for the rights of these marginalised people and acceptance by the higher-class members of their community. The advocacy and lobbying experience of KVS partner can be used can be shared with all the other partner agencies².

The programme needs to have a campaigns and advocacy framework through which programme can identify advocacy issues, and develop methodology for campaign. Influence the District Natural Disaster Relief Committee and national government on certain key issues like planning before monsoon season, resource allocation, quality response, early warning can also be potential issues for advocacy.

Long-term programming and lesson learnt

It is necessary to have greater impact from DRR programming. RBP /DRR programme in Nepal have been going on for the last 6-7 years, but the partnership with the current partners started in 2005-6, i.e. what ever experience from the previous partners is lost, and we seem to be starting all over again. It will be good to build on the experiences attained from earlier interventions. This is also the case with in Oxfam staff as well, most of the current DRR team have started 2-3 years back, there should be a mechanism for transfer of experience and lessons learned from previous to new staff members.

² KVS lobbied for compensation for the people who were displaced from their agricultural fields when the Koshi river dam was constructed by India inside Nepal and still active on different flood management issues.

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