



Evaluation of River Basin Programme in India

Full Report

Oxfam GB Programme Evaluation

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Methodology used

- Internal reflection by RBP team members (Gracy, Mani, Jibok) on impact & all sections in the ToR (August)
- Review of documents- OPAL- RBP PIP & India Projects, Impact reports from partners & Oxfam, report of programme review jointly done by Partners & Oxfam team, Project progress & Completion reports, Budgets (August).
- Focus group discussions with beneficiary communities & visit to families in a few areas in Assam, Bihar and West Bengal (August)
- State wise meeting with partners to reflect on impact, gaps, areas for improvement, future focus etc. (August)
- State wise Meeting with stakeholders to seek feedback on impact and possible future direction (August & September)

Context of the Review

This review was planned as part of an overall review of the River Basin Programme located in all Nepal, India and Bangladesh, so as to enable Oxfam particularly RBP team and partners in identifying the achievements and limitations of the programme, and to have the confidence to learn from this regional programme, so as to improve programme quality in future through the process of PIP design.

The three country teams agreed to a common Terms of Reference (see ToR as annexure 1).

The purpose and objectives of the Review are the following:

Purpose of the review

- Assess the effectiveness of RBP in relation to impact and understand how the programme benefits the poor and vulnerable group.
- Understand the changes (positive or negative) in the lives of targeted and non-targeted communities.

Specific Objectives

- Determine how far the various aim and objectives of the RBP have been met;
- Assess the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, appropriateness, cost effectiveness, participation of local community and impact of the programme on the local community
- Identify lessons learnt and replicating components of the programme across the region
- Analyse to what extent mainstreaming gender has been achieved in the Programme
- Look into the management arrangements, donor/government relationship management, media management and consider the efficacy of those arrangements;
- Identify how Integration of disaster preparedness and livelihood has been done

River Basin Programme, India, Review 2003-05

Programme Location: States of Assam, Bihar and West Bengal

Programme Context:

The RBP India Programme operates in the India part of the Ganges and Brahmaputra basin areas and is part of the regional (Nepal, India, Bangladesh) River Basin Programme. It addresses flood preparedness and livelihoods of poor communities living in the states of Bihar, Assam and West Bengal of India.

External context: The east and north-eastern states of India namely Assam, Bihar and West Bengal inhabit 18.473 percentage of the India's population (ie, of 1.1 billion) and half of these people live under potential risk of flooding every year during monsoon. Low lying areas in these states remain inundated and difficult to live for anything between two weeks to 3 months period during monsoon season.

Structural measures like dams and barrages made in the states to control floods have crossed their life span and are more a curse than a blessing to the people today. These big structures breach at several points during every monsoon and cause heavy floods. Non-structural measures like warning and preparedness are grossly inadequate within the states and in the region. Disruption caused during this period affect all life supporting arrangements for the remaining year also. Moreover, repeated floods increase poverty and vulnerability to future flooding of poor communities who inhabit these areas. Vastness of the problem and financial inadequacies make it impossible for communities to address them. Governments are yet to adopt risk reduction strategies and designs in developmental planning.

More than 73 % of the population depends on agriculture as their main livelihood base. They also rear big animals like cattle and buffalos for milk production as well as for supporting agricultural activities like ploughing the field and threshing the crops. Rest 27% depends on daily labour. About 8% of population practice fisheries and other pond based cultivations like " Makhana and Pani Phal" production as their primary / secondary livelihood activity. For the farmers, their traditional knowledge and related practices are not matching with the changed conditions of soil or demands of the market. Governmental support in this field is also not appreciable. Flood seasons see huge loss of livestock, which is an integral part of agriculture-based livelihoods in the remote villages, due to sickness & in the absence of adequate veterinary services and protection measures. Inland water bodies like ponds and canals, which have immense capacity to hold water & hence reduce flooding as well as provide income & nutrition to families get silted and polluted in floods. They remain lost as no re-excavations are done. Fish farmers face risk at every stage of production right from asset loss to market. Regular sand casting during floods cause agricultural loss and challenge traditional cropping patterns. Areas once exported vegetables and fish to other states now remain dependent on others for the same items. Bihar and Assam where poverty and flood impact merge, poor families cope by seasonal migration, especially of male members to outside areas in search of livelihoods. Migration for longer period often leads this group to the risk of HIV/AIDS too. This leaves women, children and the aged behind to the vagaries of flood. These families mortgage or sell off their assets to meet exigencies. 42.6 % of population in Bihar, 36% in Assam and 27% in West Bengal still struggle to live with a daily income that is less than INR 50 (< 1 Dollar). For small and marginal farmers production as well as income are declining in the absence of support services like irrigation, seeds supply, storage and transport facilities.

Improvement in the above context demanded application of both geographic and thematic approaches.

Review of Impact

The current review focuses on the impact the programme made during past three years (FY 2003-04 to 2005-06). During these three years, the programme focused in Upper Assam and central Bihar districts with direct inputs and in West Bengal through advocacy related work. The previous review conducted in 2002 helped the team to shift from larger area coverage (in five micro river basins in four states, including eastern part of Uttar Pradesh) to deploy maximum of resources in the above mentioned worst flood prone districts only (in three micro river basins) to demonstrate intense impact, which could be then replicated.

Policy environment

The programme operated in the following policy environment specific to the issues addressed during this review period.

Major policy approach in the country has been that of ‘controlling floods’ through construction of multi purpose dams and embankments and the proposed river-linking project, linking all major rivers in India.

River linking: Within the country, states hold different opinions based on benefit or loss to them from such undertakings. In Assam, particularly in Dhemaji, administration is empathetic to efforts on rehabilitating families at risk of displacement. While the previous national government held strong commitment for the project, the new government in place was rethinking its feasibility considering the implications.

Response: Government’s support to people’s suffering related to flooding is through relief interventions only. Often States deal with responses, which are inadequate, delayed, far away from minimum standards and do not address women’s differential needs. However, a favourable environment for a paradigm shift from disaster relief to management is emerging as Ministry of Home Affairs (Delhi) and UNDP with funds from multiple donors are initiating Disaster Risk Management programme in 14 states of the country, of which West Bengal is one and the relief department is the nodal agency and implementing partner. There is also increasing appreciation for SPHERE standards in the influencing environment, especially among Donors, Inter-Agency Working groups, local NGOs and affected communities.

Early Warning: Flood warning, which normally caters largely to informing Government levels remain within states and country boundaries and has little reach to citizens. Lack of good will, coordination and linkages between states and the three countries that share the basin, Nepal, India and Bangladesh, have kept away the possibility of envisaging an effective early warning system across the basin. However, Oxfam’s efforts on people friendly warning has gained appreciation in West Bengal and similar efforts are welcomed by Bihar and Assam administration. This indicates support to regional efforts on the issue.

Mainstreaming of preparedness in development planning / vulnerability reduction: Both post- flood and longer-term development support remain status quo ones, without vulnerability reduction aspects inbuilt into them which perpetuate vulnerability. Sectors like Housing, Water & Sanitation, Agriculture and allied sectors and Infrastructure development are examples. Investments in preparedness measures like early warning, contingency planning, insurance of life, crop & assets are meagre. Recent interest shown by NGOs in taking ahead insurance schemes to rural and remote areas as well as UNICEF & State government's commitment to rural sanitation are seen as an enabling environment to take ahead practice and policy change.

Livelihoods: Land and water management with focus on fisheries: Ownership, control and management of common natural resources differ in the three states. Policy around resource management of inland water bodies like ponds is favourable and gives priority to women's groups in West Bengal, compared to other two states.

Government of India is currently emphasizing promotion of small-scale agriculture (SSA) in rural areas for boosting the country's economy. International community is showing greater cooperation for livelihood improvement with large funds to government and NGO sector.

It was thought that the project could develop good models, showcase them for replication and advocate for governmental support to larger number of families in agriculture sector. Planned activities around situational analysis of SSA & related consultations with key stakeholders in Bihar will be an opportunity to influence their program designs to benefit the poor best and maximize our linkages with them.

Programme vision

With the above analysis and taking forward from where it was, the programme decided to aim at a change model of villages becoming resilient to flooding.

Change model: "Villages resilient to flooding"

The concept of resilience to flooding meant to the villagers being able to live comparatively safely in the context of flooding with greater knowledge, by taking floods a reality, being able to regain normalcy faster after flood events and being able to rearrange their life support systems and livelihoods to suit the context of floods. With Oxfam's support both asset less families as well as small / marginal farmer households will be able to explore & avail better land & water management and livestock management practices. This will earn them better income from agriculture and livestock sectors and give them greater bargaining power in markets. As producer groups they will be able to attract credits from financial institutions. These demonstrations in three contiguous areas will become the source of inspiration for neighboring areas.

This concept will also challenge and influence the Panchayats, Government as well as UNDP and other bigger stakeholders who are into disaster management in the states to enable all flood prone villages to become more resilient. Villagers will be able to make linkages with Panchayat, Government departments and with mainstream financial institutions like banks and make use of different facilities for their own benefit. Oxfam's RBP team, partners as well as VDPCs in all the villages will advocate these models and facilitate the process of linking the needs of the flood prone villages with the mainstream poverty reduction measures by the Government in the states.

In 2003-04 the project focused on developing the understanding and skills of poor village communities and mobilized them as Task Forces on flood- preparedness. In 2004-05 & 2005-06 it continued to strengthen these Task Forces with specific skills and a range of activities to support resilience building in the context of flooding around preparedness and livelihoods.

The major thrust was on moving the leadership from partners to village communities themselves and in initiating livelihood improvement along with Flood preparedness and demonstrating that both complement each other.

A two-pronged approach was adopted by the team and partners to develop effective change models on ground through direct interventions and simultaneously address changes in policy and practice changes at government and other stakeholders level through advocacy and lobbying work to impact larger areas and ensure sustainability on the other hand.

Partners and programme delivery

The programme was implemented in partnership with seven local non-government organisations (NGOs). RVC, MMM, SSUP-SPADE, BSS, Abhigyan Disha, SAKHI and ADITHI were the partners of the RBP programme during 2003-06. These partners have distinctive capacities in community mobilization around a range of aspects like flood preparedness, response, early warning, livelihoods, gender and women's self help groups and effective linkage with government systems and offices. They delivered the agreed program effectively, with better performance from older partners and the new ones like ADITHI and MMM catching up skills. While all the partners worked on preparedness, BSS, SAKHI and Abhigyan Disha worked on livelihoods also, SSUP-SPADE on Flood Early Warning and ADITHI focussed on engendering Partner Organisations. An external review was done for RVC in 2003 to ensure better finance compliance and confirm areas of strengths. On aspects of widening the impact through advocacy and lobbying work, the programme partnered with Government departments, Panchayati Raj Institutions, a few academic institutions and many other international NGOs who are based in the three states in a non-funded manner.

The objectives were developed based on the felt needs of the communities and in close consultation with them as well as partners. Existing as well as new partners were assessed both programmatically and financially before final selection as program partners for this period. Appropriate partners are selected as per the demands of the programme in terms of deliverables, seeing / building on their expertise and focus areas. Every year the partnership had a process of working on the lines of the MoU that is signed off on approval of Grant. For effective deliverance of the programme Oxfam team provided continuous support through identifying capacity building needs and subsequently addressing them. There is mechanism of analysing the impact of the programme through a mid-term and an annual review along with the partners to identify the best practices and gaps for future development. Learning and sharing events were conducted twice a year wherein all partners work together and develop strategies for the year to achieve the objectives.

Key Objectives & Activities of the programme

The following seven key objectives and related activities were developed based on the felt needs of the communities and in close consultation with them as well as partners. These objectives had both backward and forward linkages.

Objective 1: To enable flood affected poor households (small & marginal farmers and landless households) living in the Ganges and Brahmaputra river basins falling in the three eastern and north - eastern states of Bihar, Assam and West Bengal reduce their vulnerability through capacity building on flood preparedness, leadership & loss/risk reduction efforts at family, community levels

Objective 2: To improve water and sanitation condition of focus villages through hygiene promotion, demonstration of appropriate models and advocacy of the same for larger coverage

Objective 3: To demonstrate and improve flood resilience of selected pockets through structural inputs like construction of flood shelters, raised homesteads & latrines, raised drinking water tube wells and showcase them for replication

Objective 4: To undertake qualitative humanitarian assistance and facilitate standard & women friendly relief support from government and other humanitarian agencies

Objective 5: To improve livelihood bases of such communities through land, water, livestock management and market access led livelihood initiatives

Objective 6: To create wider impact through advocacy on early warning and appropriate designs in developmental schemes & infrastructure development per se housing schemes, drinking water support and sanitation by integrating risk reduction measures in their design itself to ensure sustainability and larger coverage

Objective 7: To improve the status of women in the programme areas as well as in the partner organisations through increased participation, involvement in decision-making, direct support to women as well as by mainstreaming gender in all the programme interventions

Achievements against Objectives and their impact on the lives of poor families

Objective 1: To enable flood affected poor households reduce their vulnerability through capacity building on flood preparedness, leadership & loss/risk reduction efforts at family, community levels

Formation of Village Disaster Preparedness Committees (VDPCs) and building their skills on critical crisis management aspects during floods was the buzzword to get it right to enable communities take lead in their own flood preparedness. A total of 92 VDPCs were facilitated in seven community development blocks (21 in Assam, 51 in Bihar and 20 in West Bengal). The members of these committees were selected by the villagers themselves, based on their attitude, skills and trust the villagers have on them to perform different support activities during floods. Partners, Oxfam staff and in some cases hired experts gave orientations to these members in groups on

family & village level disaster preparedness, first aid, rescue, identification of higher places for shifting, early warning, safe drinking water measures (including tube well repair & maintenance) and relief camp management. Further, each committee was divided into four / five Task Force teams leading the above mentioned key aspects and trained regularly on respective fields. The task forces demonstrated their roles and responsibilities when flood hit most of the areas in 2004 and some areas in 2005. While this reduced loss of lives and suffering, they also boosted loss reduction efforts with the help of partner NGOs. They popularised the earlier efforts to encourage families to have family level food, fuel and fodder stock. **The achievement to date is that 32000 families have family survival kits ready to meet their immediate needs for a minimum of seven days during the first week of flooding.** The VDPCs also took lead in mobilising and maintaining community level funds and grain storages to support their own needs / reach out to needy neighbouring villages during floods. In 20 villages where grain storages have been supported either independently or as part of the flood shelters through the unrestricted and TOP project funding, villagers stock food grains together. **Assam food grain storages on stilts have been replicated within the programme area, outside areas and the design is adopted in RBP TOP project too.** In FY 2004-05, 2500 households in Madhubani district, Bihar were provided with family level food grain containers (of three sizes to hold rice, pulses and wheat) made of PVC material. The demonstrated effect of these containers made other families to purchase similar containers and the use is popular today in many more villages. Strong linkage between food security and preparedness thus became part of the process.

The project adhered to a step-by-step **approach** of initially building the flood preparedness by formation of community based preparedness groups, mainstreaming gender and subsequently building the capacities around leadership over all other aspects of life. The current ratio of men and women in the VDPCs is 60 : 40. In all the concerned villages VDPCs lead both preparedness and overall developmental ambitions of the villages.

The major impacts of these initiatives are visible in the form of steps the village communities are taking to reduce loss thereby reducing the stress in the context of flooding. Collective effort to mitigate disasters is visible in villages. People have started looking at solutions / opportunities rather than problems alone, which used to be the earlier practice.

Objective 2: Objective 2: To improve water and sanitation condition of focus villages through hygiene promotion, demonstration of appropriate models and advocacy of the same for larger coverage

Public Health had been a major focus of the programme the aspects that the programme covered were in terms of access to safe water, sanitation and better hygiene. Various aspects covered through trainings and orientations were improved Environmental Sanitation, safe drinking water collection, handling and storage, Personal Hygiene esp. of women and children, Cleanliness of villages, First Aid kit with training, Capacity building of the community over the linkage between diseases, hygiene and livelihood, Generating demand for latrines by building promotional latrines and linkage with PRAKALP for larger coverage on latrines. There had been a significant reduction in water borne diseases in the programme area as gathered from focus group discussions and partner reports, which indicate the success of the activities.

The programme, which demonstrated low-cost latrines as an alternative to open defecation practice and promoted hygiene aspects around drinking water in the past, highlighted the need for popularising latrines in the focus districts (Bihar and Assam). Several meetings with and exposure trip for UNICEF and PHE department staff to program areas facilitated by Partners and Oxfam team convinced the larger stakeholders in public health on the need for and demand for latrines, especially in Bihar. The public demand, which was zero at base line increased by approximately 2% and in 2004 UNICEF and State PHE Department reopened its commitment to sanitation support in 3 districts in Bihar. Linkage for better coverage and quality are the current concerns being followed up. Several NGOs in these districts are partners to UNICEF and PRAKALP in implementing the Total Sanitation Programme in Bihar, by engaging themselves in the construction of latrine slabs / toilets and providing the same to public on demand.

Objective 3: To demonstrate and improve flood resilience of selected pockets through structural inputs like construction of flood shelters, raised homesteads & latrines, raised drinking water tube wells and showcase them for replication

The programme received the badly needed support for constructing a few structural components like flood shelters, country boats for rescue & relief, grain storages, more raised tube wells, raised homesteads etc. from the TOP project funding. In total the programme could provide 23 flood shelters (19 in Assam and 4 in Bihar together), 24 grain banks, 38 raised tube wells, 30 country boats during the past three years as part of regular programme and as part of humanitarian response. The VDPCs and villagers own and manage these flood shelters. Approximately 2500 displaced families take shelter during floods. These shelters are also used for multi purposes in off-season to take care of other needs like children's study, village meetings, keeping guests, market interaction etc. The initiative to encourage raised plinth housing started in 2000 and today it has become a culture in the program areas, learning taking place from community to community.

Again, the concept of structural support demonstrated a holistic approach to meeting various essential needs of the families living in basin areas like need to stay longer in own houses in times of flooding, take shelter in times of displacement, store food grains / keep seeds, safe drinking water, sanitation, livelihoods etc. This together with the capacity of the VDPCs helped the villagers to look at future with this holistic approach and access similar opportunities from government schemes that can fulfil their outstanding needs.

Objective 4: To undertake qualitative humanitarian assistance and facilitate standard & women friendly relief support from government and other humanitarian agencies

Two emergency stores have been constructed, one in Bihar and another in Assam, under the regular programme to ensure timely initiation of humanitarian support to affected families. These stores are located in strategic locations and with Star partners of Oxfam (Star partners in Response). The RBP has recognized three of its partners, Bihar Sewa Samiti (BSS), Rural Volunteers Centre (RVC, Assam) and Sanskriti- O- Samaj Unnayan Parishad (SSUP, West Bengal) as Star partners in response. In Assam, the Kebangs (village Communities) take care of the emergency stores and the participation level is high. In Bihar, community is aware of the stores, location, management etc. but they are not directly managing it. Partner NGO

manages the store. However, assets like country boats are placed with communities and they manage them round the year. These are small stores can cater to a portion of such needs only. More such community stores are needed as the impact of flood affect large areas.

2003 and 2004 floods affected large areas in Assam, Bihar and West Bengal and the humanitarian intervention from Oxfam was to the tune of INR 7.97 Crores. Oxfam and the RBP programme supported 26000 families with shelter, WatSan, livelihood and livestock support. On the other hand, the RBP team and partners took up several discussions, meetings and trainings on SPHERE standards with key stakeholders like Relief Department (recently named as Disaster Management Department) and other International NGOs like Action Aid, UNICEF, CARE, CARITAS, LWS etc. to ensure quality in response support provided by these agencies to affected people. Clear example of change came from Mennonite Central Committee, an INGO based in West Bengal, which adopted the standards Oxfam is following (closer to SPHERE standards) in Midnapur response. Government officials in all three states are more convinced about the need to improve quality of relief items. Discussion relating to incorporation of women specific needs in response has started only.

Objective 5: To improve livelihood bases of such communities through land, water, livestock management and market access led livelihood initiatives

Three key areas addressed under livelihoods were agriculture, livestock and small entrepreneurs and disaster sensitivity has been considered at all stages.

In 2003 the RBP Oxfam team and partners conducted a three months study on the changing trends and gaps in livelihoods of small/ marginal and landless farming households in six blocks of Madhubani district in Bihar. Reduced agricultural production due to loss during floods, inability to invest, and due to inappropriate cropping pattern, lack of storage facility, markets; inadequate market prices for products and technical knowledge gap, livestock loss due to diseases during rainy season etc were the major findings.

Major strategies used to improve food security and income of families were the following: exploring floods tolerant cropping pattern, introducing pre-flood and post – flood agriculture to reduce loss of crops to floods, livelihood enhancement by supporting key inputs like seeds & irrigation, linking with grain / seed storages, livestock vaccination to reduce loss during floods as well as provision of small livestock to selected number of families and vending support to women. The financial support provided under the program was for three purposes- inputs for agriculture, procurement of small livestock and for initiation of vending activities for women.

Each of these was a great success as evident from the results. 500 small and marginal farmers households (200 in Assam and 300 in Bihar) experimented alternate crops and **reaped good harvest from multi- cropping and pre-flood agriculture practices**. Families learnt and practice alternative pre- and post monsoon cropping in terms of agricultural practices suited to their soil and weather conditions and in turn reduce the risks of loss because of floods, thus improving their basic livelihood means and income sources, learn scientific and sustainable methods to increase their crop produce and begin practicing these techniques after being provided with necessary inputs. Partners and Oxfam team facilitated a series of trainings to selected farmers with technical assistance of Government Agriculture

Extension Department and its network agencies. These practices are getting replicated (farmer to farmer learning) and farmers speak about the need to think about changing climatic conditions like agricultural drought also.

On Livestock management the programme promoted livestock vaccination before monsoon season so that animals do not get fatal infections during rainy / flood season and produce good quality of milk. This was done by mobilising communities on the need and motivating the Animal Husbandry Department to reach out to the villages to provide vaccination to livestock, especially cows, buffalos and goats. Protection of animals from diseases directly benefited livelihoods work as small farmers use them extensively in agriculture. Livestock vaccination has picked up momentum as a fast growing campaign in Bihar rural areas and is expected to make a revolution in the land of milk production.

Further, the programme supported 250 families to procure small livestock like goats (Bihar) and pigs & fowls (in Assam). Insurance of livestock was another aspect attempted, with is facing many hurdles but being followed up. The small livestock intervention benefited women as this was designed exclusively for them. Women who brought livestock (goats) are rearing them, in some cases they have given kids and they were able to sell them. These families are able practicing animal husbandry / livestock management and care to supplement their income and thereby increase their food security after being provided with the initial capital support.

Vending support provided to 78 women in Bihar proved the best results- they have been able to improve their income by two to three fold. These families are practicing animal husbandry / livestock management and care to supplement their income and thereby increase their food security after being provided with the initial capital support.

The livelihood supports and its benefits helped families to save small amounts of money at VDPC and SHG levels. This makes them feel confident about immediate flood requirements, get support in exigencies and also some level of freedom from moneylenders.

Objective 6: To create wider impact through advocacy on early warning and appropriate designs in developmental schemes & infrastructure development per se housing schemes, drinking water support and sanitation by integrating risk reduction measures in their design itself to ensure sustainability and larger coverage and the land rights issue in Dhemaji, Assam, in particular

Five different agendas relating to the seven key objectives were addressed through analysis of the policy environment, based on which advocacy strategies were decided and lobbying and advocacy work with government and other stakeholders was done.

Agenda 1: Early Warning

This agenda was selected by the team and partners because well ahead timed appropriate EW information can help families living in the vulnerable areas to prepare themselves and move to safer places thereby save lives. Through a close analysis of existing systems and its effectiveness in the states, the RBP team and major partner in this work SSUP-SPADE identified that early warning message needs to be reliable, timely and simple and should also propose actions following it.

The work got initiated in West Bengal in 2000. Based on the impact it made as well as addressing the need to facilitate early warning communication support across states, similar efforts were initiated in Bihar and Assam and are followed up. The major targets of this advocacy were Department officials at district and state level, key institutions, EW Task force in village committees and other INGOs and PRI members

Strategy/Techniques used were

- Sensitizing various stakeholders in the EW message system from collection--processing and distribution of information.
- Dialogue with government department (IMD, WRD, I&WD, CWC) for simplifying the message so as to make it easily understood by the community
- Dialogue with Media regarding smooth broadcast of EW message to make it timely and maximizing reach
- Awareness among communities to access the information from river gauges and toll free numbers and aware about what to do if there are floods.
- Dialogue with other INGO/NGO to make the approach more people friendly and increase the coverage and impact
- Demonstrate changed models at community level for learning and replication- Kandi and Nawadwip blocks of Nadia and Murshidabad districts of West Bengal.
- Facilitating state level workshops to inform needs and improve departmental coordination on EW
- Explore the scope of improving regional EW systems

Outcomes were

- Appropriate, simplified and timely EW messages from CWC, I&WD, Media in West Bengal
- Large population aware of actions after the reception of message and loss reduced
- West Bengal Relief Department, Oxfam and UNDP together looked at the scope of strengthening EW in the state. Recommendation for a State level Task Force to follow up recommendations has been proposed.
- DRM programme has invited SPADE trainers for field level training under DRM project in Murshidabad District. One Block level and Two GP level trainings under DRM Project were conducted by SPADE Kandi Team, so also for preparation of IEC materials.
- Behrampore Radio station has assured to broadcast do's & don'ts instructions for flood, before & during monsoon from June'06 onwards. Greater pressure from all stakeholders prompted the MHA to alert most of the national level news papers to publish disaster notice with do's and don'ts as and when needed
- Berhampore Radio has also proposed SSUP - SPADE to prepare short duration programs on EW which will be broadcasted during the interval of their popular programmes
- Irrigation Dept., Berhampore, Murshidabad came out with the proposal that as at present there is no post for the 'Beldar' (the person who became responsible for the maintenance of the dam or barrage) thus if the members from EW task force agree to take this responsibility then they could provide them training to learn about the technical systems of dam or barrage.
- Community, Panchayat Pradhans of Kandi & Nabadwip, BDO & BRO of Kandi Block appreciated the skit on Early Warning & also demand more such skits to be conducted.

- The Irrigation Department has developed a system through which the data on fluctuations of water level from gauge station can be disseminated to mobile phones. Though the system has not yet been inaugurated officially, it is being experimented only at Durgapur Barrage & Diana river of North Bengal. But the Department is trying to launch it in other places of West Bengal.
- Efforts to ensure that the toll free number 1070/1077 put up by state machinery is functional on ground are on .
- As a process of mainstreaming the Flood EWS, State Institute of Panchayat & Rural Development (SIPRD), Kalyani has recognized Oxfam & SSUP-SPADE's EW advocacy work through incorporating it in their PRI training program

In Bihar and Assam, state level dialogue amongst EW stakeholders occurred. This was followed by a workshop in Assam. Many International Agencies like LWS, CRS, IAG (consistorian of INGOs in WB) in Bihar and Assam are giving equal importance to EW as CDBP. It has become popular in disaster management that preparedness and EW are two components of non-structural measures for disaster mitigation.

- **Impact on the lives of poor were two fold:**
- A few Gauge stations in West Bengal pass the water level information to the community during the monsoon months.
- At present community is collecting information related to flood from the BDO, local Irrigation office, Gauge station over telephone
- Many people able to access flood level information from West Bengal IWWD website on a regular basis

The above changes have come due to the cooperation and efforts from different stakeholders –Government and Civil society organisations, Oxfam playing the lead role in it.

Interstate meeting with Government and visit to Nepal did not take place due changes in government and key officials and due to the security situations that existed in Nepal.

Agenda 2: Flood resilient houses and latrine in flood vulnerable areas through IAY

Indira Awas Yojna (IAY) is a central government scheme for housing of the families below poverty line. RBP is advocating for increase the sum in IAY to raise the homestead of the houses and include latrines to the housing design to reduce displacement and disease during floods. The focus for this advocacy work was Bihar .

Strategy/Techniques

- Demonstrating raised homestead houses and latrines in focus areas
- Discussing with community for appropriate measure required for reducing flood displacement
- Dialogue with implementing agencies, block and district authorities for ensuring risk reduction into IAY component by incorporating plinth concept.
- Discourse with other agencies on similar issues

Department officials at district and state level, PRI and other INGO were the target of this advocacy

Outcome & Impact were admirable

- **Latrine component is now made compulsory in the IAY scheme**
- **An additional INR 10,000/- in the IAY scheme, to ensure raised plinth aspect.**

Agenda 3: Safe drinking water during floods

Logic / argument placed: During floods most of the water sources are inundated and get contaminated. To avoid such occurrence water sources especially TW in vulnerable locations should have raised platform with proper drainage.

Strategy/Techniques

- Demonstrating change model
- Sensitizing PHED about the importance of raising platforms of TW
- Exposing to models and design of similar TW with PHED and other agencies for similar replication.

Target

- Department officials of PHED at district and state level
- UNICEF – the key donor to states for Water and Sanitation

Outcome

- **We have raised adequate number of models**
- **PHED has build in similar models and has increased the budget of TW installation from INR 12000 to INR 17,000/-.**

Agenda 4: Popularizing SPHERE among relief agencies including government in the state

Logic placed: SPHERE provides minimum guidelines for an emergency response and also helps in designing an appropriate response mechanism. Following of SPHERE will help to increase the quality of benefits to affected persons/families

Strategy/Techniques

- Sensitizing various stakeholders about the content of the SPHERE handbook and how it helps
- Dialogue with government and other agencies about designing a response with SPHERE
- Dialogue with Media regarding the content and importance of SPHERE handbook
- Awareness among local NGOs and community about SPHERE Handbook through its translation.
- Influencing relief agencies in planning response items

Target

- Department officials at district and state level and other agencies
- Local NGO and INGOs

Outcome

- Agencies and government aware of and more open to SPHERE principles and standards

Agenda 5: Ensuring Joint Pattas (Land deeds) to communities affected by displacement by floods in the name of husband & wife

Logic placed: Poor communities are often displaced by floods and by erosion. Having a land deed ensure such community to access government relief and compensation. Joint land deeds in the name of husband and wife also gives the woman control over resources, improve their status and stake in decisions relating to assets

Strategy/Techniques

- Discussion with block, district and state officials for awareness of the importance of land right
- Documenting and dialogue with district official to prepare a list of such communities who require land rights.
- Campaigns for land right with communities, taking help of media to propagate the issue at state and national level
- Land deeds were given in the name of husband and wife thereby reinstating the gender equality and access of women over resources.

Target were Communities, Department officials at district and state level, other INGOs and NGOs

Outcome

- **6000+ Land deeds in the name of husband and wives**
- **Another 4000 in process**

River Linking

In 2004-05 the programme organised workshop to understand the concept behind the project on Inter linking of Rivers in India. This helped both the RBP Oxfam team and partners to understand the major possible changes that can happen in the geography per se agricultural drought and its impact on the lives of poor. Each of the state partner teams also looked at the scope as well as problems relating to the project. The outcome has been that river linking is a fact, which has to be considered when the programme plans on livelihoods.

Objective 7: To improve the status of women in the programme areas as well as in the partner organisations through increased participation, involvement in decision-making, direct support to women as well as by mainstreaming gender in all our programme interventions

Women’s participation in disaster management activities and livelihoods

Disaster management: Women were enthusiastic to be part of the Village Disaster preparedness Committees in 90 large villages and be part of the different Task Forces like Rescue & Relief Team, Camp Management etc. They have taken active part in group- discussions relating to scaling up household level preparedness measures like having a Family Kit with essential items to support families needs during displacement or marooned conditions. In the context of building flood resilient

systems like raised tube wells, flood shelters etc, women actively involved themselves in site selection and planning of the same with other VDPC members and respective partner Organizations.

Women's needs and the programme

Safe transport and safety during time of flood	<p>Country boats, raised homesteads, raised TWS, Flood Shelters, First Aid Kit, Knowledge of Hygienic practices around drinking water and defecation.</p> <p><i>Toilets are a big concern both in normal times and emergency situations. The programme has promoted safe defecation campaigns and a few safety latrines in Bihar and Assam. Safe defecation through construction of family latrines is picking up momentum in Bihar. This needs to be replicated thorough collaborative work with UNICEF and Public Health Engineering Department.</i></p>
Food security worries	<p>In Bihar family level grain storages were experimented by providing three containers of different sizes to 3000 families. This gave excellent results in normal as well as flood times. Families carried these containers with food items to the raised grounds/ flood shelters etc. floating the same in floodwaters but not getting them wet. This gave great relief to women. Others noticed the usefulness and purchased big Dalda containers and use them for similar purposes.</p>
Livelihoods: Control and ownership of assets	<p>The programme supported several initiatives to augment and improve women's livelihoods / income. E.g. Trainings on agriculture and Livelihood Management, Fisheries, leadership for enterprise development Linkage with RGVN, Banks etc., Providing inputs like seeds, fertilizers and irrigation. Women were given ownership of pump sets provided for irrigation. They manage them and earn an income out of it. 180 Women were provided with small livestock, supported for cultivating vegetable gardens etc.</p>
Entitlements	<p>Advocacy work for land rights in Dhemaji, Assam</p> <p>6000 families got land deeds in joint name of husband and wife of the families. Another 4000 cases in progress</p>
Safe Home deliveries	<p>By improving the skills of Traditional Birth Attendants on safe deliveries, Encouraging families to keep delivery kit, Provision of privacy in camp situations</p>
In emergency situations	<p>Preferred women as recipients of relief items, included women specific items like sanitary napkins, livelihood support given to women as rehab efforts (2004 flood). Joint ownership of houses created under flood response.</p>

Workload and access of the women in community activities

Women's participation in community activities improved their status in the community and at home. It was observed that men encouraged women more and more to take up trainings under the programme. Some amount of sharing of household level work was also noticed, especially when women come out for community level activities.

Community now recognizes women's role in the public arena. More women candidates get elected in Panchayat elections in the project area (7 in Bihar and 3 in West Bengal during last panchayat elections).

However, workload is a concern for women.

Increased mobility of the women through the programme

Mobility increased in three areas- skills & knowledge, leadership and physical mobility. Women members of the family were earlier confined to home front more and involved in a limited way in activities relating to livelihoods of their families. The programme increased their interaction with and access to Banks, Block and Panchayat Offices etc. for different benefits for themselves and for the community. Women involvement and leadership in the political process showed up as 10 women from the VDPCs got elected as panchayat representatives.

Women's decision- making and participation in the programme

Initially it took time to bring women into the VDPCs, due to the normal custom of men dominating any such community level decisions. Enforcement from Oxfam and partners that both men and women need to be represented in VDPCs changed the scenario. Once women were acquainted with the process of discussions on disaster related discussions and decisions thereafter, they became part and parcel of such forums. Today 50% of VDPCs members are women and several of them hold management positions in the VDPCs. The process also liberated their leadership potentials to the extent that 10 of them were elected as Panchayat members in last elections. Engendering the programme was one of the conscious strategies the Oxfam staff and Partners used to facilitate women's involvement and this gave the above impact.

Improvement in the gender relation in the family, community and organizational level

In the focus villages, gender relation has improved at family community level. Women views are being heard in the meetings and to a great extent in their own homes. At Organizational level, strong inputs were given towards engender the organograms of the partner Organizations. All seven organizations appointed / moved upward women staff in their programmes (8 women employed in second line positions). RBP partners have completed a gender analysis of their organizations and are aiming at developing gender Policy document for their respective organizations by April 2007. The programme supports ADITHI, a women's organization (NGO) with an annual support to the tune of INR 350,000 for this purpose. In Bihar, ADITI facilitated the partners on gender related orientation, analysis and desired changes at their organizational levels to improve gender relations & equality. The impact being greater gender awareness and commitment from the management levels of the organizations for change.

Ensuring women's control over productive resources like land, savings, credit and access to local market

The programme used the following strategies to ensure women's control over productive resources.

- Livelihood supports primarily targeted women
- **Joint ownership of land and houses were encouraged**

- Collective ownership of livelihood support work like management of Pump sets for irrigation
- Independent / separate savings by women's groups (SHGs); Joint savings in VDPCs
- Training for women on a variety of entrepreneurs and livestock management
- **Encouraging direct interaction with market. Eg. through vending and through running of Amar Bazar in Assam (market operated and managed by women alone).**
- Direct support for purchase of small livestock, kitchen gardening to women.

Financial resources and their utilization as per sectors

River Basin Programme Budget (INR) for 3 Financial Years				
Category	2004	2005	2006	Total
Unrestricted	6464131	7493254	13462442	27419827
Restricted	0	0	4100000	4100000
Total	6464131	7493254	17562442	31519827
Budget utilisation along sectors				
Strengthening Preparedness, Resilience including structures:				42%
Livelihood				8%
Public Health				20%
Gender				5%
Programme Management and monitoring				25%

Overall impact of the programme

Overall impact of the programme can be summarized as follows:

The programme intervention has focussed on building the capacities of the poor and flood vulnerable families in the river basins both through structural and non-structural measures. The structural and non-structural measures had helped these communities to reduce losses and build better environment for their development through their enhanced capacities. 32000 families in 91 focus villages feel more confident to face floods in the initial days through preparedness steps and risk reduction measures. Their resilience to flooding has improved in the key aspects of water, sanitation, housing, livelihoods and livestock management. A culture of preparedness has taken over in the program areas in particular and the same has been advocated in larger areas of the three states. Over one million people got support through early warning during floods in 2003 and 2004 and moved to safer

places. 25800 families who were affected by floods received immediate and short-term support during floods through humanitarian support, which reduced their suffering.

Today as we look back, we can boastfully report that the programme has demonstrated replicable models in several aspects of flood preparedness and resilience to flooding at community level and harnessed improvement in governmental levels on preparedness

Changes can be viewed from three premises also- belief, practice and policy

Belief change

- Communities now believe that they can reduce loss during disasters if they are prepared; they no longer take floods as God-given situation alone. They feel confident and responsible to take steps to overcome the troubles during flooding.
- They have started looking beyond floods too to other areas of development with the help of government schemes etc.
- Women now take part in community-based initiatives and are an integral part of the preparedness committees & Task Forces. They share public space now. Their own as well as other community members' outlook on women is changing. Women are considered as resourceful and powerful human beings who can make changes in the family & community and lead development & political processes.

Practice change

- Communities learnt how to be prepared for the first one week of flooding – family level and community level arrangements. The idea of Family kit and community level funds and task forces are spreading to neighbouring villages, use of flood shelters. Families are able to cope with family survival kit including food stock, fuel and money for at least one week of flooding.
- Affected communities practise loss reduction measures like homestead raising, rising of water systems, livestock vaccination, grain banks, crop rotation etc. These are getting replicated extensively from community to community.
- People have started to consider solutions to their problems rather than think of problems only.
- Exploring more livelihood options and opportunities, especially women have started taking initiative.
- The programme has helped communities to organise their strength and pull more resources for the development of their villages from various government schemes like IRDP (Integrated Rural Development programme), Shram Vikas Yojna, NFFW (National Food for work)
- Change in cropping pattern (focussing more on pre- flood and post-flood agriculture) initiated and has reduced stress during floods and increased food security and income of s/m farmer households.
- Direct interaction with markets, different service delivery systems like Block Offices and Panchayat offices have increased, especially for women
- Families in Dhemaji, Assam showed the way to have joint ownership over family land and the same practice is becoming a desired norm in Dhemaji, Assam

Policy change

- Panchayats and local self-governance appreciate community based disaster preparedness – its process and structure
- There is clear shift of focus from pure relief to disaster management. This is evidenced in their plan outlay for flood shelters, DRM program roll out etc.
- Government of West Bengal listened, showed openness and initiative to improve flood early warning. A few steps initiated are on increasing frequency, simplifying messages, installing a website, river gauges replying to common person on flood information and coordinating with NGO sector on the issue (co-opting meetings etc.)
- IAY (Housing support scheme) has increased its subsidy by INR 10000, to enable families to raise the plinth of the houses they make with this support (Result of our advocacy on risk reduction on housing)
- Tube Well budget has been raised from INR 12000 to INR 17000 in Bihar to ensure raised platforms and drainage in flood prone areas (Oxfam model).

Influencing other stakeholders' work

Programmatic coordination with other stakeholders like government, other INGOs, PRI and Media were strengthened on planned manner through state, district, block and panchayat level meetings. Examples: popularization of SPHERE through joint trainings, Joint assessment of flood in 2004 with SPHERE India member organizations, Partners being members of State, District and Block Emergency Committees & Contingency Planning, formed by Administration. RVC is one of the four Civil Society Members of NDMA. Sharing of good practices on risk reduction has influenced the stakeholders to learn and adopt such mechanisms in their own programmes. There is a constant engagement with local media and there has also been coverage by international media like BBC for the risk reduction work done by Rural Volunteers Centre (Oxfam RBP partner in Assam) but this area is still in a very nascent stage and more work can be undertaken. The capacity building efforts of the VDPC members by partners has strengthened many women members to stand for elections to represent communities in their local self-governance thereby giving more thrust to the coordination aspect in future.

However, both Oxfam and partner teams consider that coordination at all levels needs further strengthening to ensure a culture of preparedness and resilience.

Oxfam and partners through their efforts of building effective models on preparedness have helped to improve work on disaster management work in the three states. While there are many other factors, Oxfam and partners' constant interactions with state governments of Assam, Bihar and West Bengal contributed to the paradigm shift of Government's approach to Disaster Management. E.g., Re-coining of nodal department's name from Relief to Disaster Management Department. The very name of the relief department has gone through a concept shift from providing relief to undertake work in preparedness and Disaster Management. Government has undertaken efforts to replicate the flood resilient structures like Flood shelters designs, raised tube wells, raised latrines etc. in the flood prone areas of Bihar and Assam. The DRM programme (Disaster Risk Management) sponsored by UNDP also looks into incorporating the communities in the initiative to reduce vulnerability and increase preparedness just on the lines of our CBDP programme (Community Based Disaster Preparedness). Our partners have also supported this effort by providing themselves as resource persons to build the capacities of the Task Forces under these programmes. Our linkage (and non-funded partnership) with agencies like UNICEF, CARITAS, CRS, ACTION AID, UNDP,

IISWBM and other agencies has encouraged and helped to incorporate Disaster preparedness in their ongoing programme. e.g., IISWBM, Kolkata initiating a three months course in Disaster Management from this year. On the other hand, there were lots to learn from these agencies like their method of engaging communities in the bottom–up planning process through the panchayat system.

In Assam, the State Government replicated 150 flood shelters after seeing the impact of the flood shelters Oxfam and partners made. In Bihar, Government has approved 100 flood shelters (yet to be implemented). Government draws a lot of confidence seeing the impact of our efforts on flood preparedness at family and community levels to implement the mandate of the DRM programme, which is targeting 16 districts in W.B., 12 in Assam and 12 in Bihar.

While most of the above impact is evident in low-lying flood prone areas, the programme has not addressed river erosion as such in a big way during these past three years. However, there are ample good examples in the past (1995-2001) of resettling erosion-affected people in both Ganges and Brahmaputra basin areas (West Champaran in Bihar and Dhemaji in Assam), supported by Oxfam Kolkata office.

Learning and Replication

Major learning have been:

- When Oxfam & partners gave opportunities to communities and facilitated the process, they led their preparedness and development process. Example is of VDPCs and the SHGs
- Integrated approach to Disaster preparedness and development gives better results
- Diversified approach to livelihoods is more appropriate rather than single line approach as poor families depend on several modes of production.
- Simple and effective models get replicated and we need to develop replicable models rather than unique ones.
- We need to include PRI more inclusively to reach to larger population and ensure sustainability
- Government opportunities can be and need to be used extensively by communities and our facilitation can help a lot. Example: NREGS for preparedness or development / livelihood work
- Structural measures proved Oxfam's mettle to Government, PRIs and other INGO, NGOs. We can point out models and speak now. These blue prints help greatly in advocating for larger replication. Soft ware work alone would not have brought out this much impact.
- Sustained efforts in advocacy give results, e.g. Early Warning.

- Our response capacity needs to scale up with continued interaction and development of all stakeholders involved

Close external environment analysis helps in programme development (understanding of River Linking and its impact on poor & the environment)

Replicable components

- 1. VDPCs and the Task Forces on preparedness and response**
- 2. Vaccination of cattle before floods**
- 3. Raised plinth housing**
- 4. Raised Tube Wells**
- 5. Flood Shelters**
- 6. Grain Banks on stilts**
- 7. Star partner concept for effective humanitarian response**
- 8. Engendering of Organizations**
- 9. Integration of preparedness and livelihoods**
- 10. Early Warning work including Community based early warning model**

While some of the above depict hardware designs, others are soft ware components

Limitations and challenges

- The programme has focused on particular geographic locations (a few districts in the three states). Models are ready. Need is too large. Strategies for wider spread have to be worked out. Learning from advocacy work as well as learning from other agencies on working with PRIs etc. will help to some extent
- Limited direct work with PRIs and Government departments
- Identification of common regional issues to work together
- The programme had not developed a base line in the beginning. This limited in quantifying the changes made in many aspects. This is an area for improvement.

Possible Regional advocacy issues

Early Warning

Integration of risk reduction in developmental work

Multi hazard approach

A summary of Feedback and suggestions received from beneficiaries, partners and stakeholders of Assam, Bihar and West Bengal

There is great appreciation in all the three states for Oxfam's work in the basin areas leading the mantle of flood preparedness and in initiating inter agency networks

Suggestions for improvement have been

From Assam

Strategic partnerships can be developed with local self-governance and youth clubs to ensure sustainability

DP approach and methodology can be integrated in schools

Need to focus on erosion and sand casting

Have strategies to address conflict situations; Work with internally displaced people who are in camps for longer term

Larger convergence of PRI members in the DP groups, especially women members

From Bihar

Be mindful of exit strategies too

Work with UNICEF and Government on flood resilient latrine models

Make women aware of government schemes

Sand casting needs to be considered, livelihoods in sand casted areas also needs to be addressed

From West Bengal

Inclusion of departments at the conceptual level of projects may help more ownership and coverage by them in the latter years, ensuring sustainability

Flood shelters need to be used for multiple purposes to ensure optimum use and avoid miscreants from capturing the same

Build greater linkages with government schemes to make best benefit for people

Single focus on disaster preparedness will enable communities to take care of themselves. Mandate of both preparedness and response can dilute the concept

Address river erosion in West Bengal, as this is one of the major issues many districts are facing

Work towards convergence with all engaged in disaster preparedness

Annexure I

RVC	Rural Volunteers Centre, Akajan, Assam. Oxfam Partner
MMM	Morigaon Mahila Mehfil, Morigaon, Assam. Oxfam Partner
ADISHA	Abhigyan Disha, Madhubani, Bihar. Oxfam Partner
BSS	Bihar Seva Samiti, Madhubani, Bihar. Oxfam Partner
ADITHI	ADITHI, Sitamarhi, Bihar. Oxfam Partner
SAKHI	Sakhi, Andrathari, Madhubani, Bihar. Oxfam Partner
SSUP	Sanskriti O samaj Unnayan Parishad. Oxfam Partner
SPADE	SPADE, Oxfam Partner
LWS	Lutheran world services, International NGO
CRS	Catholic Relief Services, International NGO
IAG	Inter Agency Group, A group of NGO in West Bengal
PHED	Public Health Engineering Department, State government
PHC	Public Health Centres, Health department state Government
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institution, 3 tier local self-governance
UNDP	United nations Development Programme
DRMP	Disaster risk management programme, funded by UNDP
DP	Disaster Preparedness
VDPC	Village Disaster Preparedness committee, comprising of villagers
TF	Task Force, a smaller entity in the VDPC
CBDP	Community based disaster preparedness
BDO	Block development Officer
PVC	Poly Vinyl Chloride, a non-corrosive toughed polymer
SHG	Self Help group
TW/HP	Tube Well / Hand Pump
EW	Early warning
ATMA	Agriculture technology and management agency
NGO	Non Government Organisation
NREGA/S	National Rural Employment guarantee act/scheme, a wide scale programme by government of India
CWC	Central Water Commission
NDMA	National disaster management authority, government of India
IEC	Information Education and Communication
TSC/P	Total Sanitation Campaign/Programme
EQ	Earthquake
IAY	Indira Awas Yojna, Government of India scheme to provide housing for people below poverty level
PUSA	Rajendra Agriculture University, PUSA
PH	Public Health
ATI	Administrative training institute
W.B.	West Bengal
BIPARD	Bihar Institute of Public administration and rural development
RGVN	Rashtriya Gram Vikas Nidhi, a national level credit organisation
NABARD	National Bank for agriculture and rural development
SIPRD	State Institute of Panchayat and Rural Development
AIR	All India Radio
P&RD	Panchayat and Rural Development
PWD	Public Works department
I&WD	Irrigation and Water ways Department
IISWBM	Indian Institute of social works and business management

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