

BIHAR FLOODS

2008



In 2008 Bihar saw the ugliest face of Kosi when she changed her course and inundated vast areas of land. Nearly 2.3 million people in North Bihar were affected by these floods. Wipro Cares assisted the victims by being a part of an owner driven collaboration and partnering with UNDP, the State, Civil Society and the communities affected by the floods.

ECOLOGICALLY SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE

The project is a part of an owner driven collaboration (a forum comprising Civil Society Partners from India, UNDP and State representatives and the community itself) to provide ecologically sustainable housing and infrastructure support to the community in a small hamlet in Bihar. The collaboration was led by Megh Pyne Abhiyan, a campaign promoting rain water harvesting. Wipro Cares was specifically supporting the ecologically sustainable infrastructure such as eco sanitation, rain water harvesting and solar lighting, at both, community and individual levels.

The objective of this project was to ensure that this pilot mechanism becomes a part of the reconstruction policy package of the government and not just be seen as a 'village adoption' by an NGO. The Government of Bihar accepted this project to launch across all the flood affected areas of Bihar.

The pilot project was implemented at Mandal Mehta Tola, which was a part of Puraini village in Basantpur Panchayat and Block, with 90 households and a total population of 500.

At individual household level, Wipro Cares supported eco sanitation, rain water harvesting and solar lighting systems. At community level our support was towards the construction of an open well, fixing hand pumps and building platforms around it, providing rescue centers at cluster level, solar streetlights, paving storm water, drainage of the settlement, tree plantation (shelter belt to prevent soil erosion) and bamboo plantation as a resource for housing material.

Our partner for providing household services and community infrastructure facilities was Gramyasheel. Gramyasheel brought in resource groups for different projects.

Wipro Cares realized the need to build awareness around eco sanitation and rain water harvesting. As a part of the campaign, we implemented a social advocacy campaign. The campaign included awareness building, educating and monitoring the usage patterns and user feedback through an institutional mechanism comprising of village level workers, volunteer groups, resource individuals and groups.

The activities carried out by the project were:

Eco-San toilets

Eco-san toilets were constructed for 89 households of Mandaltola in Puraini. A periodic exercise of creating awareness about its usage and maintenance was organized by the community workers. Similar programs, exclusively for women, and girls were undertaken by the female workers of Gramyasheel & Megh Pyne Abhiyan. The introduction of Eco-san as an alternative sanitation practice for flood prone areas captured enormous attention amongst the sanitation experts, state officials and the local organizations with the possibility of adding a new discourse to the existing sanitation practice in the state.

Solar Light

Solar lights were installed in all the newly constructed houses in Mandal Tola. Sahjeevan is the resource group that helped in executing the solar work in the tola. The work on this issue commenced with generating awareness regarding the facility amongst the stakeholders. Solar street lights have been installed in 17 places in Mandaltola in Puraini. As a result of this, villagers can now be seen on the roads even at night.

89 households were also provided with solar lights. This has helped each household save at least 2 – 3 liters of kerosene every month. School going children and women are now able to continue with their work even in the evenings. To ensure proper management and functioning of the equipment, a samiti has been formed at the village level and efforts are on to strengthen and sustain this facility.

Dug Well

Two dug wells have been constructed in Mandaltola of Puraini in Basantpur block Panchayat Supaul district in September 2010. Main objective to construct dug wells was to provide permanent means of safe pure drinking water after changing the view towards traditional source of water. The dug wells have been constructed in such a way that they may not inundate in normal flood situation. Selection of site for dug wells was done by the geo-hydrology specialists from ACWADAM, Pune. A bathroom has been constructed next to the dug wells so that women and girls can use it freely.

Shelters

The process adopted for constructing the shelter was similar to that of the construction of dug wells. Help of technical experts of Katch Nav Nirman, Abhiyan, was taken in the construction of the structure of the dimension 75 ft X 50 ft X 5 ft.

Rain Water Harvesting

Several rainwater storage units, made of bamboo and plastered with sand and cement, have been constructed. Kosi Seva Sadan, a Saharsa based organization and a partner of Megh Pyne Abhiyan was involved to accomplish this task. Ninety such rainwater harvesting structures have been constructed in the tola; each of these units store approximately 1200 – 1300 liters of rainwater and have been made entirely with the help of local artisans, materials and wisdom. This rainwater harvesting system developed in the Mandal Tola has been developed specifically for flood prone areas, therefore can be easily replicated in similar areas across regions. The construction of the rainwater storage facility locally also provided livelihood options for skilled bamboo workers. Like the Eco San toilets, rainwater harvesting system for flood prone areas is also a new concept that can help redefine the existing discussion on drinking water needs during floods in north Bihar.

Road Construction

The devastation caused by the floods necessitated the reconstruction of roads at the onset. With mud, sand and bricks, a 20,000 sq. feet of brick soling road was constructed. All the decisions regarding the construction were taken by the villagers themselves. The various construction activities too were undertaken by Gram Vikas Samiti, a village based organization.

Plantation

An old tributary of Kosi River, near the Purainitola, flows throughout the year. There are frequent instances of land being eroded by the river and it acquiring a fierce proportion during the monsoon. Hence, in order to get rid of the problem 6,000 saplings of Khus were planted along the river bed. Bamboos play a pivotal role in minimizing the impact of floods, which was evident during the 2008 floods in the affected region; hence the inhabitants of the tola showed their interest in undertaking bamboo plantation in the hamlet. They also requested for fruit saplings, which according to them could be a source of livelihood. In this regard, 100 plants of guava have been planted in the hamlet.

Sanitation

A series of interactive awareness programs were held specifically with children and women to make them aware about hygienic practices related to sanitation and water. The programs encompassed painting and dialogic competition with equal opportunities being provided to girls and women of the community. The intent of the programs was to create opportunities for women and children to share, discuss and clear their apprehensions and point of view regarding safe drinking water and hygienic sanitation practice.

Social Mobilization

To ensure consistency and continuity in the progress of the rehabilitation work along with a systematic redressal system, a participatory public meeting was organized every Tuesday in Puraini. This process was adopted from the beginning of the intervention and continued till the very end. A team of folk artists from Gramyasheel initiated interaction and knowledge dissemination through cultural folklores on Kosi floods, sanitation, water management and many other issues that had the potential of facilitating the process of implementation and simultaneously developing a healthy perspective of the community concerning the work.

Puppet shows were also organized at the tola level which were performed by the team of Water Action, a Paschim Champaran based non-government organization, for highlighting the importance of cleanliness and hygiene amongst the villagers, school teachers and students. Initiatives like prabhat pheris (going around the village at dawn, spreading spiritual messages and motivating people to look at collective gains through individual and collective efforts) were undertaken at frequent intervals. These activities have resulted in enhanced awareness and the willingness to change and adopt appropriate practices at the village level.