

INTERIM REPORT ON
POST KOSI FLOODS REHABILITATIVE INTERVENTION IN
Kumarkhand Block
Of
Madhepura District
In
North Bihar
From
March 1 to June 30, 2009



Implemented
by
Samajik Shaikshanik Vikas Kendra (SSVK)
With Financial Assistance
From
HSBC, Mumbai

Background and Context :

A human tragedy of unparalleled dimensions unleashed itself on millions residing in the 7 North Bihar Districts of Supaul, Araria, Madhepura, Saharsa, Purnia, Khagaria and Katihar due to a breach in the eastern Kosi embankment upstream of the Indian border at Kushaha in neighbouring Nepal on the 18th of August, 2008. Following the breach, River Kosi, often referred to as the "sorrow of Bihar", picked up a channel it had abandoned over 200 years ago, drowning towns and numerous villages coming in the way of its newly acquired course, affecting more than 3 million people.

What made matters still worse was that this altered course now cut through an area which ever since the construction of the eastern Kosi Embankment almost 5 decades ago had lived in the relative comfort of being flood protected. And unlike recurrent floods, which have been a bane of North Bihar, this was not calm water but an angry torrent. With the river virulently flowing through its new found course, lakhs of people were caught unawares. Apart from loss of land, crops, homes, human and livestock lives; close to a million found themselves marooned and who had to be evacuated and shifted to dry ground. Damage to the infrastructure was massive.

Caught unawares by the magnitude of the tragedy, it took the government almost 10 days to come forth with a structured response to the daunting task of evacuating more than a million marooned, a task which lingered late into the 2nd week of September 2008. Having got its act together, it next set about addressing the issue of running relief operations for the evacuated and the displaced by setting up relief camps and health and veterinary centres.

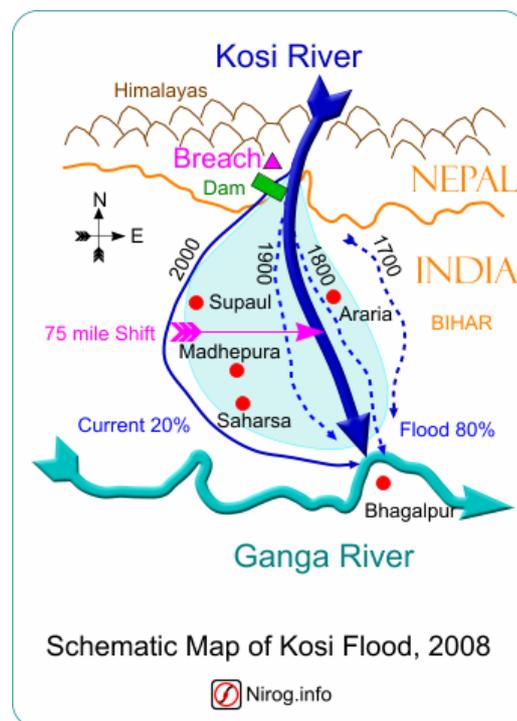
It however goes to the credit of the Government of Bihar that it did not fight shy of the enormity of the task that it was confronted with. Ministers of the Bihar Cabinet were specifically designated to the worst affected districts to oversee the rescue and relief operations. Special District Magistrates were posted to the affected districts for smooth coordination of relief and rescue operations and a host of relief interventions were initiated. Government for the first time came up with mega relief camps with more structured provision of food and basic services like health, drinking water and sanitation. Nevertheless, the enormity of the task placed it beyond the resources the state government had at its command.

While relief in itself posed a massive task, there still remained the more ticklish issues pertaining to the rehabilitation of huge number of families impacted by the floods. SSVK's intervention in the aftermath of floods was defined by a context like this.

Intervention of SSVK with HSBC's Support:

The intervention was carried out in Kumarkhand block of Madhepura district which was significantly impacted by the marauding waters of River Kosi. The site for relief operations was 7 villages of Kumarkhand block. The intervention was targeted at 227 socially and economically marginalised families who, following the recession of flood waters, had returned to their villages from their temporary abode on the embankment of MBD canal but found their travails far from over. With the kharif (summer) crop lost to the floods and chances of rabi (winter) cultivation obliterated due to the still soggy fields, the targeted families had lost their main source of livelihood which came from working as farm hands for wages on agricultural fields and was complemented by their practicing of subsistence farming on small tracts of land taken on a share cropping basis. Other sources of income, an essential risk sharing mechanism adopted by the poor by diversifying their livelihood basis, were constricted by loss of assets to the floods. With prospects for agriculture obliterated by the floods, the intervention sought to provide support for alternative vocations customarily practised by these BPL families through financial support for addressing their working capital needs and restoration of their income generating assets.

The intervention also focussed on children who despite counting amongst the most vulnerable in the event of disasters are seldom the focus of relief organisations. The majority of the programmes for children are designed just to address their survival and hence rarely go beyond meeting their immediate physical needs and fail to take into account the debilitating impact of disasters on the children's mental, social and emotional development. The relief packages of most agencies provided for basic needs, such as food, shelter, health care and sanitation. The survival of children after a disaster must be a priority. Meeting physical survival needs is not sufficient to ensure that the disaster does not impair children's However, despite the increased recognition of the importance of education, psychosocial support and protection measures, there is no common attitude or set of interventions that go beyond meeting these needs. In recognition of these wider needs of children and the role of education in the normalisation of the lives of children affected by disasters, SSVK also decided to run two child friendly centres to address the special needs of the disaster affected children.



Objectives:

Objective 1

To facilitate the process of livelihood restoration

Objective 2

To promote emotional, mental and social rehabilitation of disaster scarred children

Activities and results reached

Objective 1

To facilitate the process of livelihood restoration

Activity and results reached

Activity
The intervention was targeted at 227 such poor families (spread over 7 revenue villages of Kumarkhand Block) who prior to the floods supplemented their incomes from agriculture wage labour by practising a host of off farm activities which brought them cash income on a regular basis. It provided financial support for addressing the working capital needs and restoration of income generating assets.

Activity wise, following table illustrates the details of coverage:

Activity	Amount/Unit	No. of Units	Total support in INR	Nature of support
Milk Vending	2500	20	50000	Working Capital Support for purchase and sale of milk
Restoration of fishing nets	2000	105	210000	Financial support for restoration of fishing nets
Fish Vending	2000	27	54000	Working Capital Support for purchase and sale of fish
Spice Vending	2000	5	10000	Working Capital Support for purchase and sale of spices
Vegetable Vending	1500	10	15000	Working Capital Support for purchase and sale of vegetables
Tea Stall	3000	5	15000	Financial support for capital items like utensils nad storage jars and working capital support for recurring expenses
Betel Shop	3000	7	21000	Financial support for capital expenses and working capital support for recurring expenses
Basket Weaving	2000	11	22000	Working capital support for purchase of bamboo
Barber's Tool Kit	2000	18	36000	Financial support for capital expenses on purchase of tool kit and working capital support for recurring expen on consummables
Carpenter	4000	9	36000	Financial support for restoration of toolkit required to pursue the business
Cycle Repair Shop	4000	5	20000	Financial support for restoration of toolkit required to pursue the business
Rickshaw Purchase	10500	5	52500	Financial support for restoration of toolkit required to pursue the business
Total		227	541500	

Gender and hamlet wise coverage details are as follows:

Activity	Male	Female	Names of hamlets
Milk Vending	19	1	Korlahi, Ranipatti Rahta, Sukhasan, Koornama
Restoration of fishing nets	103	2	Sukhasan, Korlahi, Shivnagar Jamuaha, Korlahi Rahta, Kusha Purvi
Fish Vending	24	3	Korlahi, Ranipatti Rahta, Sukhasan, Kusha Purvi
Spice Vending	3	2	Korlahi, Sukhasan, Kusha Purvi
Vegetable Vending	7	3	Sukhasan, Koornama, Korlahi
Tea Stall	4	1	Kusha, Ranipatti Rahta, Sukhasan, Korlahi
Betel Shop	7	0	Sukhasan, Korlahi, Ranipatti Rahta
Basket Weaving	11	0	Sukhasan, Koornama, Shivnagar, Ranipatti Rahta, Kusha Purvi
Barber's Tool Kit	17	1	Ranipatti Rahta, Korlahi, Sukhasan, Shivnagar Jamuaha
Carpenter	9	0	Sukhasan, Ranipatti Rahta
Cycle Repair Shop	5	0	Sukhasan, Bisanpur Korlahi
Rickshaw Purchase	5	0	Sukhasan, Korlahi, Ranipatti Rahta
Total	214	13	

Results

Against a stipulated coverage of 227 beneficiaries, 227 have actually been covered by the intervention. The profile of activities and the numbers covered against each remain the same as proposed. Livelihood restoration initiatives have ensured regular cash incomes to the aforementioned 227 families and with the summer crop season round the corner they look forward to supplementing their incomes from opportunities for wage income as agricultural labourers and subsistence farming as share croppers.

Comments

The intervention came as a critical input to enable the beneficiaries to tide over a period when floods had left them bereft of any livelihood opportunities to sustain themselves and they were on the threshold of starvation. More, importantly the HSBC support came in at a time when the Bihar government, despite the best of its intentions and efforts, was being able to reach out with its relief interventions to less than 10% of the flood victims and the non governmental actors, who had registered a tumultuous presence in the immediate aftermath of the floods, had either started getting scarce from the area or else were being driven by their sectoral agendas (hardly any of it with livelihood restoration as its focus) irrespective of the real needs of the people. The intervention has helped provide these flood victims a measure of food security.

Objective 2

To promote emotional, mental and social rehabilitation of disaster scarred children

Activity and results reached







Activity				
SSVK has set up 3 child friendly centres locational and coverage details of which are included in the table below:				
Name of the hamlet where the centre is located	Name of the Panchayat	Total No. of boys enrolled at the centre	Total No. of girls enrolled at the centre	Total No. of students enrolled
Kusha Purvi	Belari	53	62	115
Sukhasan	Ranipatti Sukhasan	104	130	234
Korlahi	Bisanpur Korlahi	74	69	143
Total		231	261	492

The 3 child friendly centres have been operational since March and will continue till August 2009. Each centre has two educators cum counsellors and is being used for a wide variety of purposes, including games, tuition classes, peer activities and pre schools. Teaching and learning materials in the form of books, copies, blackboards, slates, pencils, chalk, duster, eraser, pencil cutters, school bags and recreational material in the form of toys and games have been made available at all the centres.

Results

Against a scheduled coverage of 300 children, 592 children are actually enrolled at the 3 centres. The centres operate from 12 p.m. to 3 p.m. and activities comprise a mix of educational and recreational activities. Children at each centre are organised into sub groups in accordance with their learning levels and educational inputs to the sub groups are provided on the basis of their learning levels. This not only helps keeping the children enthused but also keeps the teaching learning objectives of the centre more focussed.

These centres have enabled children to have a friendly space of their own and not be merely on the periphery of adult activities. Apart from responding to their educational needs, these centres fulfill the no less important needs of children for peer interaction, recreation and fun. The increase in proposed coverage by almost 100% is in itself a testimony to the relevance of this intervention. What is particularly inspiring is the fact that girl students outnumber the boys at these centres. The teachers at these centres remain regularly in touch with the guardians of the students and make every effort to counsel them out of a difficult situation so that it does not impact the attendance of their wards at these centres. Even in imparting education, they take recourse to playful and joyous methods so that the interest levels of the children are sustained at a reasonably high level.

Comments

The quantum increase in the number of students against what was proposed for coverage has obviously put the educators under a lot of pressure and to some extent even compromised the optimally desired standards of quality. It has also put under strain the financial resources available for the intervention with the organisation having to put in its own resources for the enhanced demand for teaching and learning materials. However, despite the best of its efforts and intent, it has been able to provide school bags only to 300 children budgeted for in the proposal.

The constraints, notwithstanding, the intervention has been an extremely valid intervention and with compromises here and there been able to address its wider objective of emotional, mental and social rehabilitation of disaster scarred children. Little wonder then that you have so many of them at these centres.

Monitoring by SSVK:

After a thorough survey of the intervention villages, the beneficiaries were identified on the basis of the following criteria:

- They were poor and vulnerable (though not the most vulnerable who basically comprised those groups who apart from working on land and with no other skill sets or history of having practised an alternative vocation could not have been extended any meaningful support within the time frame of the intervention)
- They had customarily practised vocations that they were seeking support for
- The quantum of support sought was in line with the minimum support required for viably carrying out the activity
- In the aftermath of floods they would be the first ones to bring in income for the family
- The beneficiaries were from families who had been extended relief support by SSVK when displaced from their original habitation they were forced to take refuge on the embankment of the MBD canal.

The identified beneficiaries were made to fill an application form which carried their photo identity, the name of the vocation for which they required support and the quantum of support required. This application became the basis for the eventual disbursement of financial support to the targetted families.

Following the disbursement of funds, the project coordinator alongwith a team of volunteers and in presence of the beneficiaries facilitated the purchase of assets wherever was the case. In instances where assets of a particular type (like fishing nets) were to be bought in large numbers a favourable cost was negotiated for the beneficiaries. Following the disbursement of the financial support and the acquisition of income generating assets, coordinator alongwith his team of volunteers has been closely following it up at the level of beneficiaries that they are viably engaging in the activity they have been supported for and where need be even offer business counselling support.

At the organisational level a **Monitoring Committee** comprising organisational staff and some local community leaders has been ensuring that the intervention has been able to reach out to the targeted, that the finances are being used for the purpose for which they had been earmarked and that standards of fairness and transparency were being met. They undertake regular field routes to review the work in progress, conduct meetings to resolve any problems coming on the sites, ensure adherence to the targeting process and supervise the upkeep of records.

Disbursements were made in public spaces with banners clearly displaying the name of the funder and details of the proposed intervention along with the budget line for the various activities. At all child care centres banners clearly display the same details as above.

The relevant government officials were given a copy of the proposal and the approved budget and the support of the panchayat representatives in the effective implementation of the intervention was successfully leveraged.

Organisational records with regard to the implementation are regularly updated.

SSVK is maintaining a separate project accounting system for the project. All accounts, records and assets registers contain clear audit trails and adequate project management records in relation to expenditure.

Apart from all this the organisation has done an extensive photo documentation of the activities associated with the intervention.

Overall Assessment:

Overall SSVK could effectively meet the objectives of the rehabilitative intervention carried out with the support of HSBC. That SSVK had an operational presence in the intervention area even prior to the floods as part of its mobilisational and developmental and the fact that it moved into the area in the immediate aftermath of floods not waiting for resources to come and stayed on helped it in gaining the confidence of the local populace. Engaging the key local stakeholders like the community leaders, the PRI representatives, the local government officials, the local volunteers and to the extent possible the beneficiaries themselves, significantly smoothened out problems that could have cropped up over beneficiary selection, quota entitlement, quality of materials purchased, location of disbursement centres and credibility of targeting the intervention. The transparency and efficiency with which SSVK carried out the rehabilitative intervention earned it the respect and cooperation of the local stakeholders. Experience of previous years in carrying out post floods relief and rehabilitative operations qualitatively contributed to operational efficiency this year.

Samajik Shaikshanik Vikas Kendra (SSVK), with its project area in one of the most backward pockets of Bihar, has been involved in grassroots mobilisation, organisation, and facilitating mass activities to enable the most marginalised sections of society **[the dalits (the scheduled castes) in particular]** to access their rights and entitlements. In its perception the way to effective empowerment is one hinging on and oriented towards evolving autonomous community based organisations endowed with capabilities required for the actualisation of a spirit of self-determination and self-reliance. The organisation's approach received a major thrust in the direction of activism through its extensive capacity building at the grassroots geared towards creation of a trained and informed pool of social animators, mostly from its target community. A significant fall out of this intervention has been the evolution of a strategic network of community based organisations, under the banner of Lok Shakti Sangathan, a frontal organisation with an avowed aim to facilitate issue based interventions from time to time and advocate for desired changes in the policy framework. Most of these trained animators come from the organisation's target community and have been instrumental in setting up community based organisations now part of the 'Lok Shakti' umbrella. They still stay very active in mobilisation, organisation and the petition, protests and struggles of the poor without ever having drawn any stipendary support from the organisation. They share their linkages with the organisation in terms of guidance on perspective and strategic choices.

This Lok Shakti Sangathan network is now intensively spread over 1399 villages of Madhubani, Saharsa, Supaul and Darbhanga Districts and is registering a growing presence in 14 other districts (310 villages) of Bihar, including the intervention district of Madhepura. Thus SSVK presence in Madhepura ante-dates its post Kosi Floods intervention. In fact it was the presence of the Lok Shakti Sangathan network in the district that facilitated its intervention in the aftermath of Kosi Floods. It was at the behest of this already existing volunteer force in the district that SSVK decided to intervene. This volunteer force came in handy not only in terms of prioritizing the interventions in areas underserved by relief and rehabilitation operations but also played a critical role in actual running of the relief and rehabilitation operations through their engagement in a host of activities ranging from beneficiary identification, to running and monitoring of relief operations to prioritization of beneficiaries for livelihoods support initiatives to continued monitoring of families extended livelihood support. Being locals with an activist orientation, these volunteers played a vital role in mobilizing the support of key local stakeholders in amicably resolving disputes/conflicts as and when they arose.

While subscribing to the standards of statutory compliance as laid down by the government, SSVK reposes even greater belief in measuring up to the highest standards of public/social accountability. In fact one of the corner stones of its developmental enterprise has been holding to account the various development actors most notably the government.

Given its leadership role in holding others to account, SSVK is fully aware of the standards of rectitude, accountability and transparency that it needs to pursue in order to retain its credibility as a social watch dog. Important initiatives undertaken by it in this direction include the following:

- Adhering in letter and spirit of the standards of statutory compliance set up by the government
- Having representation of target group members in its governing body. Differentiation of oversight role of governing body and management roles followed.
- Making information about its interventions as widely public as possible through sharing of intervention related details with local stakeholders, to putting up of public display boards at its intervention sites, to uploading details about the organisation and its interventions on its website (www.ssvk.org) or kosi page <http://www.ssvk.org/koshi.htm> to making such information available to nationally renowned web sites like (www.indiannqos.com , www.karmayog.org/biharfloods/ , <http://www.indiawaterportal.org/bihar/?p=214#more-214>
- Prominently displaying on its web site details of sources of its funding
- All accounts, records and assets registers contain clear audit trails and adequate project management records in relation to expenditure.

- It maintains a separate project accounting system for the various projects. All the financial transactions incurred by SSVK for the related project tend to meet the standard process of financial management.
- Procurement of goods mandatorily follow these guidelines:
 - the goods are to be of satisfactory quality
 - the goods must be delivered in good order and condition and in accordance with the project timetable – disbursement according to timetable
 - the price paid for goods represents value for money
 - there is open and effective competition in the purchasing process
 - a professional approach must be reflected in the purchasing process, including ethical behaviour and fair dealing
- Engaging key local stakeholders like the local administration, representatives of panchayati raj institutions and local community leaders and opinion makers in all its interventions
- Setting up of monitoring/coordination committees with representation of key stakeholders like the beneficiaries, representatives of panchayati raj institutions and local community leaders and opinion makers in all its interventions. Such committees undertake regular field routes to review the work in progress, conduct meetings to resolve any problems coming on the sites, ensure adherence to the targeting process and supervise the upkeep of records.
- Conceding the right to donors to visit the program at any time and giving access to them to all relevant records, books and accounts.
- A keen votary of right to information even before it became an act, SSVK applies the principles inhering in it most stringently to itself.

With such institutional safeguards in place, SSVK always finds itself ready to respond to any demands of accountability from it. The apprehensions expressed in the query do not find a space in SSVK's scheme of things. <http://www.ssvk.org/rti.htm>

Key lessons learned from this project:

This intervention underway could not target the poorest because manual labour is the only skill that they have which they complement by having goats which they rear for sale in the market. With prospects for winter agriculture obliterated by the floods, their only succour for wage income lay in the cash for work programme on government public works. Providing goats would have required a minimum gestation period of 6 months before they could realise income from the sale of it. Hence, the intervention had to be confined to those poor families who prior to the floods supplemented their incomes from agriculture wage labour by practising a host of off farm activities which brought them cash income on a regular basis. In order to respond to the livelihood needs of the poorest, SSVK would, in its future interventions, would incorporate a cash for work component to reach out to the poorest segments. Such works would be in the nature of public works with a rejuvenative potential for the region and would involve wage for manual work for the poorest. Illustrative of such work could be interventions like digging of drainage channels to drain the water logged tracts, removal of sand from sand cast lands to render it fit for cultivation etc.

The strategy of engaging key local stakeholders like the local administration, representatives of panchayati raj institutions and local community leaders and opinion makers, as pursued by SSVK helped in amicably resolving conflicts and disputes emerging from the generally prevalent hiatus in demand and supply in post disaster contexts.