

Rebuilding communities

A report on rehabilitation of Bihar flood survivors



EUROPEAN COMMISSION



Humanitarian Aid

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ActionAid works with poor and excluded people in 24 States in India and over 50 countries worldwide to end poverty and injustice. Together we claim legal, constitutional and moral rights to food and livelihood, shelter, education, healthcare, dignity and a voice in decisions that affect their lives. In India we are supported by some 300 civil society organisations.



European Commission Humanitarian Aid ECHO provides emergency assistance and relief to the victims of natural disasters or armed conflict outside the European Union.



Photo credit : ActionAid

The Tragedy

On the night of August 18, 2008, a breach occurred in an embankment on the swelling Kosi River near India-Nepal border. The river changed and started flowing on a course that it used to over a century ago, sweeping homes and villages in its path.

Districts Supaul, Madhepura, Katihar, Araria, Purnea and Bhagalpur faced most of the fury with thousands going missing and over 2,000 dead as per local citizens groups.

The flood was the worst that Bihar has seen in recorded history. The water-levels sustained for over four months in many areas.

The breach grew over a thousand meter wide, spewing 0.15 million cusecs of water into the villages every day. Within four days of the flood over 2.3 million people were directly impacted in northern Bihar.

Monsoon floods are an annual event in eastern India and are a part of life for many people in the region. Floodwater swept through 400 villages and submerged areas that had not seen floods in over 50 years under six to seven feet of water.

Transport system broke down, village roads and rail tracks remained submerged. Boats were the only means of transportation to access most affected areas. There were not enough boats and boat-runners were cashing in on the tragedy.



Immediate Response

ActionAid was on the ground with flood survivors through its partners. It immediately stepped up resource mobilisation for relief to save lives of the flood affected. It began distributing tarpaulins, medicines and food to people, especially women and children, within the 48-hours of the flood.

ActionAid rushed to provide food through community kitchen in the second week of its operation, following the immediate distribution of food packets, and fresh water through hand pumps, for victims pitching on embankments or raised places in a scattered manner.

ActionAid took over these “unorganised” clusters and started community rehabilitation, including information dissemination on their relief entitlements. With water receding gradually, ActionAid initiated emergency response in inaccessible villages.

Long-term Response

ActionAid started the relief and rehabilitation work in Triveniganj and Raghapur block of Supaul District in November 2008.

As the women, children and men returned to their villages from relief camps and shelters, they needed livelihood support and rehabilitation. We also felt that most villagers desired to manage their own lives and only wanted basic support to resume their lives.

We decided to reachout to the most vulnerable families. We did this by engaging village councils or panchayats in the area. For this we conducted the Participatory Vulnerability Analysis(PVA) survey to identify the most vulnerable people, with a special focus on women.

We also addressed the specific needs of the flood survivors by providing them utensils, transit shelters and livelihood support. We also identified the assets that needed rebuilding and repairs in the village to provide them work against cash.



Photo credit : Pramod/ActionAid

Neelam Devi

Forty-year-old Neelam Devi has found a new role in life after the floods swept away her life. She now runs a daycare for children of the villagers who have found employment at a Cash for Work project as a part of an intervention in Satanpatti village in Raghapur Block.

“I look after 50 children at this daycare. They are given food and medical support when required,” says Neelam Devi.

“My life has become better and I can now afford to feed my family vegetables and pluses, as opposed to just rotis and onions,” she adds with pride.



Photo credit : Pramod/ActionAid

Saliman Khatun

“I am very happy that I got this stitching machine. My life is made now.” “Zindegi Ban gai hai meri, thanks to god,” says Saliman Khatun, 50, a widow, as she stitches a new skirt for her grand-daughter sitting with her small but beautifully kept shop.

She received the machine as part of ActionAid’s livelihood initiative for flood-affected families. She lost her house and livestock and took shelter in a nearby government-run camp.

“With what I earn now, I am able to pay the school fee of my two children.” says Saliman Khatun. She now receives several orders from neighbouring villages and earns about Rs. 75 a day.

“The support from ActionAid has allowed me to get my life back on track,” she adds.



Photo credit : Pramod/ActionAid

Sarita Devi

“This foot-enabled machine allows me to stitch clothes faster than I used to, when I had a hand machine,” says Sarita Devi.

“I can now take many more orders and deliver them on time, which is helping me earn more money,” she adds.

Sarita, 40, mother of four children is a very happy and brimming with confidence of being able to become a bread-winner for the family, after her husband passed way.

She received the foot sewing machine as a part of the livelihood initiative taken up by my ActionAid Partner soon after the floods.



Photo credit : Pramod/ActionAid

Geeta Devi

“Both my daughters, Phul Kumari and Salita Kumari, go to a government school now,” says Geeta Devi.

“I want them to get education and have a good life,” she adds.

Gita is a mother of four children. She had a comfortable life with a brick house and cattle but the floods took away everything.

With help from ActionAid partner she received a ready-to-move-in house, where she now lives with her family. She is now also being able to re-pay a loan.

She now works as a daily wage worker while her husband works in another state.



Photo credit : Pramod/ActionAid

Ram Dev

“I own this!” says Ram Dev, pointing to a shiny cycle rickshaw. This 52-year-old from Pillahua village supports a family of seven, including three sons and three daughters.

He was handed over a brand new rickshaw by an ActionAid partner under a livelihood support program.

“Earlier, I used to pay Rs. 20 – 30 as rent for the rickshaw. Now as I own it I can earn Rs. 40 – 50 a day,” he adds.



Livelihood Support

To provide immediate income generating options to the flood survivors, ActionAid/ECHO provided locally available livelihood options as a means for empowering communities. A major focus was cash for work intervention. The local community was involved in identifying the community resources that needed rebuilding. Following this, activities like rebuilding of roads and schools were taken up in 11 villages. This generated 28,501 days of work. Benefit of the livelihood generated through these projects reached 4,254 families.

In Raghapur, 14 such projects were completed. These generated 8,568 days of work benefiting 1,673 families. Similarly in Triveniganj, 34 projects were taken up generating 17,796 days of work, benefiting 2,070 families. A large chunk of the beneficiaries who participated in the Cash for Work programmes came from marginalised communities. These not only helped the villagers by providing cash for their daily needs but connected villages through new and repaired roads. The Cash for Work programme implemented by ActionAid followed the NREGS guidelines to make people aware of their right to work and the legal minimum wages. A minimum wage of Rs. 92 a day was paid by ActionAid. This was higher than what is paid in government run projects.



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