

road or air and we were completely forsaken. We desperately need permanent roads that can better withstand disasters. The cyclone shelters should be fully equipped. We need knowledge about how to manage with minimum resources at times of crisis. We also need counselling in times of grief particularly if our loved ones lose their lives at such times or we suffer heavy loss of property. The administration should not be aloof and understand the ground reality. We would have been completely at sea but for the efforts of Paribartan programme. We also need to prepare for disasters other than cyclones and floods."

It was very encouraging to observe that the community members acted in accordance with the training they received. Even the pilot options implemented proved their worth. The IRFC units and pisciculture units were unharmed. The people had harvested as much as possible from their homestead gardens and

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horticultural trees and this provided them with food and nourishment during the difficult days that followed. The fuel efficient stoves were carried to the shelters for cooking to meet individual needs, and as the cyclone and rains made the traditional mud chullahs wet; it did not bother the owners of the stoves as they could cook in their stoves. The mangrove plantation escaped damage as the saplings were small.

It was also very encouraging to notice the active role played by women who not only lead the warning system, but also prepared for the evacuation, and also

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helped other women during crisis in the shelter. In one case they helped a pregnant lady in labor pain reach the nearest hospital and safely deliver a baby even as the cyclone was almost knocking at the door and heavy rains and gusts of wind challenged their efforts.

The cyclone helped the community members realize the impact of climate change and also the effectiveness of the programme. It is now certain that there will now be more replication of the pilot options as people have observed the benefits. There will also be more awareness about HH level preparedness. The Govt has also gone into overdrive and it is expected that the

advocacy work done so far will achieve results and the learnings from the Paribartan programme will be given due importance. It is hoped that the forest department will now concentrate on stronger more useful trees than go in for planting fragile fast growing ones. There will be more effort to strengthen river embankments and constructing sea walls and that mangrove plantation in barren coastal areas will receive top priority.

From the programme side micro-insurance facilities for vulnerable families in the target area has already been initiated after consultation with community members. The insurance will cover accidental death and injuries, damage to and loss of house, loss of implements relating to livelihood and loss of household assets. A government owned large insurance company has been contacted for the purpose which has offered a package intended for rural populations at a very nominal cost. For a start the first installment of most vulnerable families will be borne by the Project "Paribartan". This insurance will help the community become more resilient in the face of increasing frequency of climate change induced disasters.

Yet another initiative to be taken up is the creation of a Community Contingency Fund from individual household level contributions to help the community tide over the difficult period just after disasters strike. The fund will be maintained in the bank account of the village level Gram Paribartan Committee and its

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members will control its use. Thus the community will get vital assured access to funds during a critical period.

Constant efforts are being made to achieve the objectives of the programme, which are making communities resilient to climate change impacts and improving their economic condition of the vulnerable communities who are residing in the coastal areas adjacent to the Bay of Bengal, a region that is frequented by natural disasters.

The manner in which the community responded to the Cyclone Phailin and the role of the TF members has to be appreciated. The Cyclone provided an opportunity to practice the learnings from the training programmes and mock drills and everyone rose to the occasion. The community now feels empowered and is confident of similarly tackling future disasters

# Tackling Cyclone Phailin in 'Paribartan' Programme Area



The tropical cyclone Phailin originating from the Gulf of Thailand was a severe cyclonic storm which moved into the Bay of Bengal hitting the east coast of India on 12th October, 2013. The cyclone made its landfall near Gopalpur on the southern coast of Odisha causing devastation across the state. The 14 districts of Odisha affected by the cyclone were - Ganjam, Puri, Khurda, Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapara, Balasore, Bhadrak, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Dhenkanal, Jajpur, Nayagarh, Cuttack and Gajapati. Of these Ganjam, Jagatsinghpur, Puri and Kendrapara districts were the most severely affected areas. The cyclonic storm covered 99 blocks, 1,895 Gram Panchayats, 14,514 villages, 39 urban local bodies and 123 wards across the state<sup>1</sup>.

The Regional Centre for Development Cooperation (RCDC), with funding provided by European Union and facilitated by Concern Worldwide, has been implementing a multi-country CCA-DRR initiative named "Paribartan" involving coastal areas adjoining the Bay of Bengal in India in the two Phailin affected districts of Odisha, Jagatsinghpur and Kendrapara. These two districts had also borne the full brunt of the Super Cyclone that hit coastal Odisha in the year 1999. In these areas the Paribartan team has been routinely preparing the communities in 84 villages of 8 GP's for CCA interventions and DRR trainings since the beginning of the programme. A community supported Community Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (CRVA) has been done to reveal the areas requiring attention. A three tier institution called the Paribartan Committee at hamlet, village and Gram Panchayat level has been formed for decision making and effective implementation of the programme.

Task Forces (TF) were set up in every village to take care of exigencies in case of emergencies and disasters. Each TF is composed of 10 members, five male and five female. Two members each look after the five focus areas of Early Warning, Search & Rescue, First Aid, Water & Sanitation, and Shelter Management. The TF's are regularly trained and participate in mock drill to hone their skills as well as to create awareness in the community. The members of the Task Forces are regularly apprised about DRR concepts and aspects and how to organise in face of disasters. The training programmes also involve all community members, with particular emphasis on

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women, elderly, children, disabled and economically weaker sections. All this preparation came handy and prepared the community members to face Cyclone Phailin.

The disaster struck in a period of festivity when the people of the state were readying for the very important festival of Durga Puja and Dussehra. Alerted by the media about the impending disaster the members of the Sahi Paribartan Committees and Gram Paribartan Committees convened emergency meetings to discuss the situation at hand and engaged themselves in protecting the community members and their property. Trained in Early Warning the TF members, along with community volunteers, swung into action and utilizing the early warning equipment provided went around the villages announcing the disaster and instructing people to evacuate to the nearest cyclone shelters or shift to safe permanent structures along with their valuable belongings, and documents. The community members were asked to release their livestock untethered on high ground. The TF members and volunteers then set about cleaning the cyclone shelters and storing water and first aid medicines in them. Though the Govt of Odisha promised cooked food during shelter stay and dry food while returning, the community members were asked to carry dry food with them while going to the shelters.

The people responded very well to the call and all villagers living in low lying areas, those very near to the coast, and those living in thatched houses moved in to the shelters, many on the 11th October and the rest on the morning of the 12th. This evacuation saved a lot of lives. During the super cyclone of 1999, the maximum deaths were from the Jagatsinghpur area, but this time there was no casualty in the project areas of both

The evacuation saved a lot of lives. During the super cyclone of 1999, the maximum deaths were from the Jagatsinghpur area, but this time there was no casualty in the project areas of both Jagatsinghpur and Kendrapara. It could be possible due to the early warning and evacuation actively initiated by the community.

Jagatsinghpur and Kendrapara. It could be possible due to the early warning and evacuation actively initiated by the community. The target community members and the Paribartan team coordinated with the local administration to set up kitchens in the shelters and carry food provisions to them. The coordination effort was not easy considering that the rain that preceded the cyclone damaged the mud roads

and made them very difficult to negotiate. Moreover the local officials were reluctant to venture into inaccessible areas and political compulsions often prevailed during the relief operations.

From the extremely vulnerable coastal village of Balijori located just 500 metres away from the sea, Ms Kshira Behera, F 45, from the community had this to recount, "We became aware about the cyclone from TV, Radio and newspapers. Our relatives staying outside also informed us. The Task Force members informed us about the exact date and time of the landfall and reminded us about the evacuation procedure besides giving information about the nearest shelter and the road reaching to it. We were very afraid having experienced the devastation of the Super Cyclone of 1999 when wind speeds exceeded 300kmph and we saw and experienced huge sea surges. We can never forget the destruction wrought

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and lives lost in the wake of that cyclone. The memory helped keep us in focus and understand the importance of early evacuation with our belongings. In 1999 we did not have any cyclone shelter but this time we had one in our village which was helpful. We are extremely indebted to Project "Paribartan" for taking the initiative of organizing and training us and also providing us with livelihood models which survived the cyclone. This time we were prepared in all fronts and touch wood emerged unscathed from the disaster."

The cyclone struck the project area on the evening of 12th October with wind speeds ranging from 125 to 150 kmph accompanied by very heavy rains. It lasted the whole night and cleared up somewhat by the 13th noon. The villagers, aided by the search and rescue teams of the TF's, returned home to assess the damage to their houses. There has been some damage to thatched houses, and the standing crop has been destroyed. A lot of trees planted by the forest department were uprooted and horticulture trees also bore the brunt. Some livestock were lost. The crop suffered further damage as the rains continued and led to flooding in some areas and water logging in most. The members of the institutions set up under the programme resolved to link the community members who have suffered losses with the various post disaster relief operations of the government.

According to Mr Ramesh Parida, M 24, "Our stay in the shelter was very scary as the rain and winds were heavy. We spent the night dreading breaches and consequent floods. We had locked our houses and harnessed our boats. We were also worried about the

"After the cyclone we survived by plucking coconuts from the coconut trees and also dug up rice stored in underground vaults. The villagers accumulated all eatables from their gardens and kitchens. We cooked in makeshift community kitchens and the entire village would sit down to have the food. It is very important that the communities unite to face and survive disasters."

standing crop. We faced communication problems as all vehicles stopped plying and our mobiles were not working. After the cyclone we survived by plucking coconuts from the coconut trees and also dug up rice stored in underground vaults. The villagers accumulated all eatables from their gardens and kitchens. We cooked in makeshift community kitchens and the entire village would sit down to have the food. It is very important that the communities unite to face and survive disasters." "We are not happy with the response of the local administration," he continued. "We did not get the cooked food in the shelter that the government had promised. We only got polythene which we used to sleep upon and cover ourselves."

Ms Madhusmita Jena, a young woman of 18, had this to share, "Our shelter had just been completed and was yet to be furnished. Consequently, devoid of generators and light, we had to spend the night in utter darkness. We felt protected as only people from our village were present in the shelter; otherwise we would have felt very insecure. The latrine too lacked basic amenities and was soon overflowing from the heavy use. Particularly the ladies felt very inconvenient."

Mr Rakesh Parida, M 28, recounted the nature of the loss from the cyclone. "Almost all of the tall trees of our village were felled. The temporary roads were breached cutting off communication. There was acute food shortage as we were virtually marooned for 15 days. The government relief did not reach us either by

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/phailin-causes-rs-2-300-cr-crop-loss-in-odisha-113101300267\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/phailin-causes-rs-2-300-cr-crop-loss-in-odisha-113101300267_1.html). Accessed on 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2013