

Alert Task Force Members Ready for More



EUROPEAN UNION

CONCERN
worldwide



RCDC



Regional Centre for Development Cooperation

HIG-26, K-6, Kalinga Vihar, Bhubaneswar, 751 019

Alert Task Force Members Ready for More

Case Study from Khadikadanda, Kushupur GP, Balikuda

The Regional Centre for Development Cooperation (RCDC) in Odisha is involved with Disaster Risk Reduction measures as a part of the multi-country climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction (CCA-DRR) project titled “Paribartan” being implemented in the vulnerable coastal districts of India and Bangladesh along the Bay of Bengal. In India RCDC is implementing the programme in 84 villages of 8 GP’s in the Rajnagar and Balikuda blocks of Jagatsinghpur and Kendrapara in Coastal Odisha, an area that is frequented by natural calamities in the form of cyclones, strong winds, lightening strikes, floods, and sea surges. The programme is facilitated by Concern Worldwide and funded by the European Union.

Organizing Task Forces

The programme area of the Paribartan Project is extremely vulnerable to natural disasters. The Super Cyclone that struck Odisha in 1999 and completely ravaged lives, properties and livelihoods in coastal areas had its maximum impact in the two districts of Jagatsinghpur and Kendrapara where this project is being implemented. In Jagatsinghpur district alone 6000 lives were lost as per the official report. It was observed that the lack of information regarding the intensity of the Cyclone reached the area very late and the communities were not ready for a storm of this magnitude. Official help reached the areas after an inordinate delay leading to loss of lives due to injuries sustained and the people suffered acutely. Lack of drinking water and abysmal sanitation facilities in the post disaster scenario led to disease outbreaks as people had to use contaminated water.

There was thus the need for trained groups in each village to deal with crucial issues immediately before, during and after disasters. Accordingly the programme facilitated the process of having a Task Force in all the 84 villages where the programme is being implemented. Each Task Force consists of 10 members, 5 male and 5 female, and are formed into 5 sub groups trained in Early Warning, Search & Rescue, First Aid, Water & Sanitation, and Shelter Management by accredited trainers from reputed organisations. The annual training programmes are supplemented by refresher trainings and also trainings for new Task Force members who join as existing members leave due to various reasons. The Task Force members take part in mock drills to hone their skills and make communities aware about disaster issues. Enthusiastic adolescent boys and girls belonging to the Task Forces also take part during mass awareness programmes in the context of CCA-DRR by holding cultural programmes, street plays and singing thematic songs.



Alert Task Force Members Ready for More

We are always alert and ready to do more!

The Task Force members of the village Khadikadanda in the Kushupur GP of Balikuda block in Jagatsinghpur district of Odisha are an enthusiastic lot. From enthusiastic young people to the cautious elderly all have but one goal – to save the villagers from disasters and their aftermath. Having been trained in all the five areas of Early Warning, Search & Rescue, First Aid, Water & Sanitation and Shelter Management they feel confident of facing any exigency or disaster that may visit their village.



Ms Rojalin Swain, a teenage girl and a member of the Task Force, described the various threats that this small coastal village has faced over the years. “The threats from cyclones, floods and sea surges have always been upon us. We have faced the terror of the Super Cyclone of 1999 that will never fade from our memories. The entire village was ravaged. Houses were damaged, livestock were lost, and property amassed across generations was simply swept away. The entire village looked barren as all trees were felled. We lost six from our community; two due to coastal surges and four died from wall collapse. All animals, wild and domestic, fled the village. The entire thing was so unexpected. We did not have TV and we took the radio warnings lightly. We had weathered many a storm earlier but we never imagined what hit us. The official alert to evacuate came after the Cyclone started and by then it was too late.”

“Had this Task Force existed then,” Minati Swain picked up the thread, “the loss could have been minimized. There would have been early warning and people could have been evacuated. There were no shelters and the few semi-permanent structures could not stand against the fury of the storm. People went without regular food for 10 days. We picked up coconuts and fruits from the felled trees and ate them. The damage was so great that it took three years for us to stand on our feet once again. The winter followed and increased our misery. All our ancestral savings and property vanished in a flash.”



Mr Brundaban Swain, the eldest of the Task Force members at 61, narrated, “We came to know about the Paribartan programme in the year 2011. They made us aware about climate change impacts and climate change induced natural disorders. Community institutions like the Sahi Paribartan Committee at the hamlet level, Gram Paribartan Committee at the village level, and the Panchayat Paribartan Committee at the Panchayat level were formed where these issues and local vulnerabilities were discussed in detail. The need was felt for training groups on crucial early warning and survival skills. When the Gram Paribartan Committee decided on it the Paribartan Team facilitated the process and built Task Forces in all target villages. Around 42 villages in strategic locations also received an Early Warning Kit consisting of mega phones, rafts, first aid box, essential medicines etc.”

Alert Task Force Members Ready for More

“Training was imparted to the Task Force members from experts who had received their training from eminent organizations like the Red Cross, St John’s Ambulance etc. There was an initial hesitation from a few community members who thought that the attempt would not be followed up and become unsustainable. However as the trainings started the people started warming up to the process and today participation in mock drills is spontaneous and overwhelming.”



“The first Task Force training was held in the year 2012 in the Kushupur Panchayat Office,” says Nandini Pradhan. Now the trainings are held locally at the Khadikadanda High School premises. The turnover among Task Force members happens because the young girls get married, some leave for higher education. We have always given preference to educated boys and girls. But while leaving they do not fail to tell us how much they would miss the Task Force activities. This has now become an essential part of our lives.”

“We tackled the very severe Cyclone Phailin very successfully and with a great deal of confidence. We came to know from the TV channels on the 9th of October 2013 that a major cyclone was approaching that could rival the Super Cyclone of 1999. We immediately started following the protocol. The Sahi Paribartan Committees and the Gram Paribartan Committee held meetings and decided that this major cyclone requires all out effort and cooperation. The Task Force was called and put on high alert. “

“We set about displaying the danger flags at visible locations and started going about beating gongs and blowing conches to alert the public,” narrates Rojalin Pradhan, another teenager. We first went to the households that were very close to the sea and asked them to evacuate by the 11th of October morning, the day before the Cyclone was predicted to make landfall and they obeyed by leaving their homes that very night and proceeded to the shelter. They were accommodated at the CARE Cyclone Shelter in our village. As this shelter filled up we arranged accommodation in the school and other permanent houses that have come up as people have realized the importance of cement and brick houses with a concrete roof and raised bases after the bitter experience of the Super Cyclone.”



“Even as the Early Warning team was alerting the public, the Search & Rescue team bolstered by volunteers approached those households where the elderly, disabled and sick resided and they were carefully carried to the shelters. The Water & Sanitation and the Shelter Management teams and the volunteers cleaned the shelter and the school and made provisions for drinking water, stoves, match sticks, candles, polythene sheets, and bags of rice, vegetables and pulses to be stored in them. The people were asked to carry plucked vegetables from their kitchen gardens and dry food (beaten rice, jaggery, and biscuits) with them while evacuating to the shelters. They also brought along the cash they

Alert Task Force Members Ready for More

had in their houses and important documents like land records and education certificates. They were also asked to release the domestic animals and leave them on high ground.”



“It was very traumatic and people became tense and fell silent as the storm approached,” narrates Ashish Pradhan, a lad with a smiling face even as his smile faltered as he dipped into those days. “Everyone was thinking about the Super Cyclone and the loss they had suffered. The silence was broken only when as the winds peaked up and started screaming. You could see the terror in everyone’s eyes. Those who had lost their own in the Super Cyclone started crying and the people found a way to release their tension by consoling them. We were there with them assuring repeatedly that they were safe. But we too had our own fears and memories.”

“This Cyclone saw us fully prepared. Apart from damage to the thatched houses and the trees, and the loss of a few livestock we did not suffer much. Our food lasted for about 5 days and by that time communication was restored.”

When asked, the Task Force members narrated how they ensure year round preparations for disasters. People have been made ready at the household level by informing them about steps to be taken for preparedness and ensuring that they follow them. During the cyclone season they keep dry food ready in their houses. They look around for high ground where they can leave their livestock. The shelter is kept clean and bags of rice and pulses are stored in a room. The people living close to the coast are asked to keep a check on the weather and become alert when low pressures build up. The Task Forces scour the newspapers and watch the TV for any alerts. Mock drills are regularly conducted to keep the community prepared and ready.



Our training comes handy in emergencies

“It is not that we are useful only during disasters,” says Rojalin. “Our first aid and search & rescue skills come handy when there is any emergency in our village or nearby areas. A person of our village had a heart problem and suddenly lost consciousness. The family members immediately called an ambulance. We immediately reached the house and using our CPR skills revived the person and stabilized him by loosening his clothes, clearing the space around him and allowing him to sip water slowly from a glass. When the ambulance arrived the health staff examined him and found him to be out of danger. The ambulance then returned.”

Alert Task Force Members Ready for More



In another case from the nearby village of Talagaon of Baramundali GP, Ms Mita Das, a Task Force member narrates how she treated a girl who suffered a burn injury when boiling rice water spilled on to her leg. It was at night and help was not easily forthcoming. Mita went to the house and asked the girl to repeatedly dip her leg in a bucket of water till the burning subsided. When the next day the girl was taken to the nearby Primary Health Centre the doctor said that her skin was intact and no boils had appeared. She gave some medicines even though the girl felt no discomfort and recovered completely.

Demonstrating a skill

The enthusiastic Task Force members of Khadikadanda village were not content by narrating their activities, achievements and experiences. They were also interested to demonstrate their skills. They were requested to handle an accident victim in a busy road. Immediately Rojalin Pradhan became the “victim” and Rojalin Swain attended to her. She first cleared the crowd around the victim and then loosened her clothes. She checked for external injury marks and then checked if she was breathing. When the breath was not felt, she opened the mouth to check if the tongue had entered the throat. She cleared the air passages and then began her CPR techniques. After the victim started breathing she was put in a comfortable position till the ambulance arrived. On being congratulated for such an excellent demonstration, the response was, “We are ready to do more”.

