

CASA in Action

BUILDING RESILIENCE:

Strategies for Effective
Disaster Mitigation and
Preparedness





church's auxiliary
for social action

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EDITORIAL

Over 75 years of CASA's action on the ground, sustainability has governed the direction of our most prominent humanitarian responses. As an organisation that has spent decades assisting vulnerable communities in disaster-prone areas, CASA is not only sensitive but also sincerely observant of the devastating shape that catastrophes have acquired over time.

Responding to the urgencies of disasters such as floods, cyclones, droughts, and the pandemic, CASA arrived at the inference that beyond the conventional real-time disaster response, there is a need to establish long-term processes that help communities build alarming systems, rescue operations, vulnerability check, utilisation of monitoring tools and more in addition to the community awareness, natural resources conservation techniques, green initiatives, and biodiversity protection.

Through this edition, CASA endeavours to communicate the story of our Disaster Risk Management operations, that have helped the rustic population head to safer sustenance. We have compiled the response disseminated by CASA on the ground through disaster risk reduction projects, plantation drives, promotion of organic farming, and climate sensitization workshops while outlining not just the vision and experience of CASA's team members but also the perspective of beneficiary communities.

This newsletter attempts to discuss in detail the battle of rural India against hunger, unhygienic living conditions, financial burden, and unemployment brought about by disaster. Besides being a written record of our climate-centric humanitarian aid, this newsletter must succeed in igniting thought and sparking a sense of urgency in our readers' consciousness to gear up for climate-sensitive actions.

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CYCLONES AND THE FREQUENT FLOODS IN INDIA

Written by: Priyank Samuel



Floods are a recurring phenomenon in our country. Often due to varying rainfall patterns and distributions, areas which are not traditionally prone to downpour, experience extreme inundation. Every year, India experiences devastating floods and at the same time extreme drought conditions in certain regions. These are the results of various drastic climatic conditions and rainfall patterns in various regions. Thus, floods have become the most frequent disaster in India causing widespread destruction in certain parts of the country.

The inadequate capacity of river banks to withstand the high flow brought by the heavy downpour led to the formation of floods. Furthermore, flooding increases the erosion and silting of river beds. Some parts of the country, mainly coastal areas like West Bengal, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh experience cyclones accompanied by heavy rainfall leading to floods in these areas.

The Indian subcontinent is one of the worst cyclone-affected areas of the world. Every year about 5-6 tropical cyclones are formed in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea and about 80 per cent of the cyclones generated

in the Indian Ocean strike the eastern coast region - the entire east coast from West Bengal to Tamil Nadu is the most vulnerable region to cyclones and areas that are in 100 km radius from the cyclonic region are also impacted in various ways.

In 2021, while India was battling with the surge of second wave COVID-19, Cyclone Yaas which intensified into a 'very severe cyclonic storm' hit the eastern coastal region of India from the Bay of Bengal. Orissa, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu were affected by the cyclonic storm which caused immense damage to life and property. Families located mainly in Sundarbans and coastal belts were moved to shelter homes during this time of intense crisis.

One of the major reasons for the strong cyclonic surges in the Eastern Coastal region is the high temperatures in the Bay of Bengal where strong winds push the water into shallow and concave bays.

Cyclones followed by floods in various areas along the eastern coastal region severely impacted the vulnerable communities. The frequent cyclone development in India makes life difficult for people inhabiting these regions.

More eminent than the loss of life or damage to properties is the sense of insecurity and dismay in the minds of the people living on the floodplains. The aftermath of the flood, like the sufferings of the victims, the unavailability of essentials, the spread of diseases, loss of habitat make the flood the most feared disaster.

The homelessness and loss of livelihood due to the natural calamity disseminate among the people. Besides the struggle for existence, a majority of problems are also added to the women for domestic chores and hygiene management during this time.

The citizens in the cyclone and flood-prone areas are often impacted by a lack of necessary resources such as food, clean water for consumption and other livelihood resources. The chances of getting infected with various diseases are high as there's no way for mobility to other areas away from the impacted region.

Most often than not, cyclones and floods destroy the only source of livelihood for the residents who are entirely dependent on farming. Families not only failed to secure their food for the whole year, but they also lost hope in restoring their livelihood after the calamity.

FLOODS AND CYCLONES IN 2021

FEROCIOUS FLASH FLOODS



Chamoli district in Uttarakhand witnessed ferocious flash floods that caused a lot of devastation. This glacier burst flash floods swept down a remote Himalayan valley, destroying homes, and a hydroelectric plant, and affecting nearly 200 people.

CYCLONE TAUKTAE



It emerged from the Arabian Sea, ear's first cyclonic storm that led to severe floods across Maharashtra and Gujarat. The cyclonic storm resulted in heavy rain and caused flash floods in Kerala and the island of Lakshadweep.

CYCLONE YAAS



It was formed in the Bay of Bengal which made landfall in West Bengal and adjoining Odisha coasts leading to floods and affecting approx. 60 lakh people. Several areas of West Bengal's Sunderbans remained inundated even three days after the cyclone, forcing several people to seek refuge in cyclone shelters. The boat-shaped Mousuni island, located in the western part of the Sunderbans, was also submerged due to the floods.

CYCLONES GULAAB & SHAHEEN



Cyclone Gulaab was the reason to have 54 per cent rainfall in September which is much higher than the average rainfall in the country. Cyclone Gulaab turned into Cyclone Shaheen and emerged off the Gujarat coast and slowly traveled south to wreak havoc in the southern parts of the country.

SEVERE DOWNPOUR AND FLASH FLOODS



Eastern parts like Bihar, Assam and West Bengal were also stranded with water leading to the loss of lives and property.

Unprecedented rainfall in the southern Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, and Karnataka resulted in massive loss of life and damage to property.

Chennai was completely waterlogged leaving many people trapped in their homes.

CYCLONE JAWAD AND FLASH FLOOD



Torrential rains and subsequent floods caused by a low-pressure area in the Bay of Bengal battered the state of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.

CYCLONE YAAS



In May 2021, Cyclone YAAS originating from the Bay of Bengal, lashed several coastal towns and villages on the Odisha-West Bengal border, inundating low-lying areas, uprooting trees, and claiming several lives. It was classified as a 'very severe cyclonic storm' by the India Meteorological Department (IMD)

The wind speed nearing 130-140 km per hour made landfall - damaging homes, farmlands and other sources of livelihood.

In Odisha, the location of landfall was Dhamra (Bhadrak district), Bahanaga (Balasore district) and in West Bengal, the coastal areas in East Medinipur and Sundarbans district were inundated by tall waves breaching embankments. The maximum wind speed in the coastal town of Digha in Purba Medinipur reached around 90 km per hour.

A total of 5.8 lakhs people in Odisha and 15 lakhs people in West Bengal were evacuated by the government.

Under our Disaster Risk Reduction strategies, as soon as IMD issued the warning about the cyclone, our DMTF volunteers alerted the locals

living in the coastal regions through SMS and WhatsApp. During the last hour, loudspeakers were also used to alert immediate evacuation. Post the cyclone, within 48 hours, CASA volunteers reached the affected districts and, along with the DMTF team, who were already working on rescue operations, distributed Ration Kits consisting of wheat, rice, pulses etc., to around 8000 families in West Bengal and 350 families in Odisha.

A rapid assessment was done to evaluate the on-ground situation. The communities had not recovered from Cyclone Amphan and were struggling for livelihood which was lost due to the pandemic. Cyclone Yaas exacerbated their miseries. The properties that the affected communities have been re-building again were damaged, and the crops ready to be harvested were swept away.

CASA immediately undertook a major project for three months to provide humanitarian assistance. The project aimed at food security, shelter and availability of clean drinking water.

To prevent the breakout of infectious diseases — water filters

and hand wash stations were installed at the community level. Hygiene Kits and Dignity Kits were also distributed, and Tarpaulins were provided to make temporary arrangements for shelter.

During the three months, awareness programmes, hygiene promotion, capacity building, and training were conducted in all villages under our Disaster Risk Reduction programme to mitigate their ongoing problem and also to deal with such catastrophes in future.

► (left): Interacting with the cyclone affected victims.

► (below): Door to door survey to identify the beneficiaries of Cyclone Yaas victims.





8000
FAMILIES RECEIVED
THE DIRECT BENEFIT

- Hygiene kits: 8000 (Bucket with Handle & lid - 16 ltr. Capacity)
- Food grade quality Plastic Mug – 1 Ltr. capacity
- Bathing Soap: (Lifebuoy) - 58 gms,
- Washing Soap: Detergent (RIN) - 140 gms,
- Women Reusable Cloth Sanitary Pads – 4 pads / Cloth - 1 M) with cotton string - 2 mtr. string 4 pc. of (1mtr. x 81cm.) Sanitary
- Disposable sanitary napkins - Stayfree with 7 pcs. pack
- ORS - 21.8 gm
- NaDcc Tablets 67 mg (10 TAB/Sachet)
- Comb-Regular Size
- Nail cutter - Regular Size
- Alcohol-based (60-70%) Hand Sanitiser Sanitiser - 100 ML
- Cloth Mask - 3PLY

**OTHER INTERVENTIONS
LIKE PROVIDING SAFE
DRINKING WATER AND
HAND WASHING STATION**



25
Water Tanks



35
Foot Operated
Hand Wash Stations



3
Chlorinators



3000

Shelter material and focusing
DRR such as water filters



4000
Tarpaulins



4000
Jerry Cane



1000
Water Filter

THE SPARK OF LIFE IN A LAND OF DISASTER

Story by : Arushi Narchal | Written by : Kajol Tanaya



► Deepali Ghorai from Simanarghat village of South 24 Parganas district, West Bengal.

“ The village has several challenges and shortcomings yet we would never leave our homeland. No matter how tough our lives become each passing year, we at least live with dignity here. ”

The mystical land of Sundarbans stretches across coastal West Bengal as a testimony to the uncountable fables of 'life after recurring disasters'. The fine tributaries of Ganga, that flow into the oceanic core of terrific cyclones, the Bay of Bengal, also join the agitation of nature by perpetrating floods of significant magnitude every year.

The floods and severe cyclonic storms rupture not only the life and livelihood of those residing in the region but also murder a hundred dreams.

However, after every disaster in the Sundarbans, as the violent volumes of water return to the bellies of their sources, the evacuated residents of the rural land head back to their ravaged homes. Despite heavy damages and the impending threat to life, they continue to hold on to their motherland even though it necessitates them to rebuild their lives from rags – over and over again.

33 years old Deepali Ghorai from Simanarghat village of Nagendrapur GP, South 24 Parganas district in West Bengal shares, “The village has several challenges and shortcomings yet we would never leave our homeland. No matter how tough our lives become each passing year, we at least live with dignity here.”

Deepali lives in her humble residence, closer to the river “Moni”, with her husband and three sons. The road leading to Deepali's house is overcome with mud and standing water. To prevent the river water from entering the house, they have built an embankment of mud that can be breached any day by the rain if not the river water.

"There is no clean water to drink or use. The cyclones have contaminated even the groundwater. Following every disaster, I have to traverse 10 kilometres every day by foot to fetch 20 litres of drinking water from far-off places. The standing water near my home is a breeding ground for water-borne diseases. Accessing water for even domestic use is a huge challenge for me and my neighbours", enumerated Deepali.

Given the frequency of natural disasters, work opportunities in the village are very scarce. To meet the needs of the family, Deepali's husband has to migrate to the nearby metropolitan city of Kolkata to find temporary engagement as a daily wage in an organic storage facility service. Conducting agricultural activities in the village is unpromising because the saline and brackish water of adjoining water resources render the farms infertile.

Deepali mentions, "With the COVID-19 lockdown, there were no avenues of job left for my husband. We could hardly have one decent meal a day. It is when I had to step out and handle the reins of earning for my household. In a small group (a group formed by CASA) of women, we prepare and market handmade goods and handicrafts to earn for our families. It has become a small business for us.

The group has contributed to our empowerment. Organisations like CASA have been very supportive of our women's group, especially in sensitising us on disaster risk reduction and government-aided schemes to help rebuild our lives after catastrophes like Amphan and Yaas. Moreover, we have also been reminded

of our deserved rights and empowered to raise our voices".

Deepali became a part of CASA's Disaster Management Task Force back in September 2016. Her perspective on surviving and tackling the repercussions of disasters has found an affirmative reformation.

"One day before the devastating cyclones of Amphan and Yaas, we gathered to assist authorities in the evacuation process. Besides early warning, the elderly people, pregnant women and differently-abled ones were relocated to safer locations. The learnings have been invaluable. We never had a skill that capacitated us to such a revolutionary extent. Because of the training given by CASA, we are confident that we can save our lives and important documents."

CASA helped her family in accessing clean water for household usage through support materials like jerry cans, water filters and buckets. At a community level, temporary water stations were also installed to reduce the lengths they walk to fetch water. WASH kits with sanitisers, masks and soaps were supplied to the beneficiaries and women were provided with additional Dignity kits that included pads.

Community awareness of disaster management and hygiene was strongly built through training and programs. Deepali recounts, "CASA helped us sail through the tough times when we couldn't imagine sustaining ourselves. We can never be thankful enough".



► Women's Self Help Group (SHG) formed by CASA.

WOMEN'S BATTLE AGAINST COVID-19 AND CYCLONE IN SUNDARBANS

Story by : Priyank Samuel



► Bihtika Halder a SHG leader identified by CASA.

Orthodox societal norms have always considered women inferior to men; they are deemed not fit to work outside the four walls of their home. Nevertheless, women have been fighting for equality and have excelled in every field, defying patriarchy.

Bihtika Halder is one such CASA beneficiary turned women leader of Self Help Group (SHG) from South 24 Parganas of Sundarbans, West Bengal. She comes from a humble background and has emerged as a leader fighting against all odds. Her contribution to helping COVID-19 and cyclone-affected families is exemplary.

CASA identified her capabilities and appointed her as a leader of SHG that works for the welfare and upliftment of women. The group is an initiative of CASA and its volunteer organisation. Under her leadership, the group raises women-centric issues and helps women and elderly avail welfare benefits from government institutions.

In the last two years, the lives of marginalised communities in Sunderbans have been devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic and frequent cyclones. Halder

elaborating on the misery, says, "The livelihood of people living near coastal areas is mainly dependent on agricultural produce and sea products. But the frequent cyclones destroy our field and deprive us of sea products. Our properties are also destroyed, and many lives are lost."

India Meteorological Department (IMD) has described the Sundarbans as the cyclone capital of India. One of their reports states — Sundarbans within the coastal area of South 24 Parganas is one of the most cyclone-affected areas of the country.

In 2020, Sunderbans was ravaged by Super Cyclone Amphan. Before people could recover from the loss, in 2021, cyclones Yass and Jawad wrecked their lives. And the subsequent lockdown due to the pandemic compounded the misery of the communities living there.

Halder, with a heavy heart, says, "The destruction of agricultural fields led to an extreme shortage of the food; they had to cut short the meals from two to one a day." She is, however, thankful to CASA for helping the affected families during times of crisis.

"The affected families received a dry ration package of rice, dal, salt and spices from CASA," Halder confirmed.

It has been observed that the children and elderly are most vulnerable during cyclones and floods. Therefore, CASA organised several training programmes to help them deal with emergencies.

The locals were trained to instantly prepare life-saving gears using the available materials from the surroundings. Halder, during these training camps, demonstrates that life jackets could be made by tying empty bottles around the waist.

Since there is no hospital in the locality, they were also trained to use first aid and advised to have one in every house. Halder elaborates, "People were trained to use cotton and bandage as first aid in case of minor injury and also explained the usage of ORS in case of dehydration, diarrhoea, and other stomach ailments."

As the head of the women's group, Bihtika leads from the front in helping people. She considers CASA as their ray of hope.



Story by : Priyank Samuel

► Mithu Mondal, a cyclone affected victim provided with relief by CASA.

THE STRUGGLE WITH FREQUENT CYCLONES IN SUNDERBANS

Mithu Mondal, 40, is a mother of two. Her husband is agricultural labour. They reside in Uttar Mundapara of Sundarbans in West Bengal. The locality is cyclone - prone; however, with no option to relocate, they have managed to live there for the past 30 years as they have.

When a cyclone hits, their locality becomes inundated, and water gushes into their house. The frequent occurrence of Cyclones forces them to either shift to the nearby shelter homes or other localities and return after the water level recedes.

She explains, "We faced the plight of natural calamity three

times last year; Cyclone Amphan first wrecked our life, followed by Cyclone Yaas and Cyclone Jawad." She further shared, "The water level goes very high — swamping their locality completely. We have raised the wall of the veranda to stop the breaching water in the house; however, when a cyclone brings havoc, the wall is of no use."

The frequent occurrence of cyclones also makes their livelihood challenging. Their crops in their fields are damaged, and drinking water becomes contaminated. She says, "There are times when they don't have two square meals a day. In the backdrop of natural disasters and the COVID-19

pandemic, they survived one meal a day.

CASA came to their rescue during the subsequent lockdowns. They were provided relief support with Dry Ration Kits and Hygiene Kits. The Ration Kit consisted of rice, dal, sugar, etc., and the Hygiene Kit consisted of masks, soaps, sanitiser, etc. Since their belongings were swept away in the cyclone, they were also provided buckets, mugs, and other essentials.

In the nearby areas, there is no hospital, and they have to go to Raidighi for even minor treatments. Therefore, they were provided essential medicines and ORS for emergency use.

She told us, "During the time of the disaster, we were given shelter by the government in the Christian Mission School." She also confirmed that the CASA looked after the shelter management and added, "We will always remain grateful to CASA for helping them during the tough time."

IN THE LAND WHERE RUSTIC LIFE IS A COMPULSION

Story by : Arushi Narchal | Written by : Kajol Tanaya



As the day began with a gentle sparkle of the sun rising in the east, team CASA started its journey to the interiors of Sundarbans. Closer to 10 am, the team entered the rural premises of South 24 Parganas where the relief action of CASA was active. A petty shop nearby was playing the daily news aloud over the radio, hanging by its dingy walls. Few men had gathered over a round of cards and a few others were tying up the fishing net. It felt like going back in time to the nineties. As if some mystical time machine has teleported us to a nostalgic period of human civilization where advanced technology and mobile phones were yet to take over our lives. But the rustic lifestyle of people in the rural South 24 Parganas did not stem from a willingness to stay untouched by technological or infrastructural advancements.

As shared by one of the CASA's local volunteers, "The fury of cyclones is inescapable for villages in Sundarbans. They lose their farmlands, fishing grounds, roofs, livelihood and livestock to the saline water ingress. With the arrival of catastrophes, major channels of communication such as television signals, mobile networks and wifi services are suspended immediately. Transmission of electricity is held up for weeks and even months until the cyclone-brought water retracts. In such a situation of disadvantage, only radios are utilised for transmitting critical information. Post-calamity, people have adjusted to a life of simplicity. However, such simplicity is again not a choice but a forced

compulsion due to a lack of alternatives".

Narayan Halla, a 40 years old resident of Dakshin Mundapara village in the South 24 Parganas of West Bengal has been adjusting to the tribulations of the catastrophes for years. He has been a living witness to the sufferings of the land ranging from poverty to vulnerabilities. Several fellow residents of Narayan are either daily wage labourers or local workers who are heavily dependent on migration-based work opportunities. Particularly during the COVID-19 lockdown, the villagers suffered a heavy loss in income and were spared with no choice but to return to their disaster-prone motherland. The local fishing grounds provided some avenue of sustenance to these migrating sons. Ironically, the river that provides these fishermen with a livelihood avenue, is also a source of their woes.

Repeated floods and cyclones from the surrounding river and the Bay of Bengal, especially Cyclone Amphan in 2020 and Yaas in 2021, have been deteriorating the quality of life, health and food security in the land.

"Till date, 25 families have relocated from the areas closer to the river bank due to the frequency of the floods and cyclones", shares Narayan Halla. "The river is swelling in size and breaching the embankments every time there is a rise in river water level due to the approaching cyclones or heavy rainfall. These climate change-

triggered catastrophes bring in saline water that pollutes farms and freshwater resources which are critical resources for our survival. Moreover, we are not rich families who could have a safety net to fall on. We are always concerned about the safety of our loved ones", a faint smile of helplessness blossoms for a short while on the ageing face of Narayan as he shares his heartfelt grief.

Following the devastating cyclone YAAS, Narayan and many of his fellow villagers were provided with material support to collect and store clean water from CASA with the support received from UNICEF. They were provided WASH kits to stay clean and maintain COVID-19 protocol which helped him sail through unfortunate times. CASA's Disaster Management Task Force and Climate resilience initiatives also continue to empower lives in the village through DRR training and general awareness.

Narayan adds, "My elder son had to drop out of school because we were unable to afford his textbooks and pens. He helps me on the farm. We are trying our best to at least educate my second son properly and help him escape this cycle of misfortune. The assistance provided by CASA has resolved our concerns related to collecting clean water for domestic usage. As we use the WASH kits, we know we are safe from water-borne diseases and coronavirus. This means a lot to us as a family who has been struggling to protect our loved ones in these trying times".





COVER STORY

REACHING STABILITY THROUGH SUSTAINABILITY

Story by : Arushi Narchal | Written by : Kajol Tanaya

The global concern for climate change is no longer hidden beneath the rocks. The man-made stresses inflicted on the natural resources are damaging the planet way beyond its inherent capacity to replenish and recover. From raging wildfires and fierce heatwaves to unprecedented cyclones and the rising sea level, the stresses of climate change over the past decade have grown palpable to its extremes.

Climate change impacts not only the biodiversity and ecological balance on Earth but also triggers concern about global food security, availability of clean water, health, sanitation & the recorded frequency of catastrophes. Among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals 2030, set by the United Nations, nine goals, namely: Zero Hunger; Good Health & Well-being; Clean Water & Sanitation; Affordable & Clean Energy; Sustainable Cities & Communities; Responsible Consumption &

Production; Climate Action; Life Below Water and Life On Land; demand direct action in mitigating climate change.

The promotion of sustainable development in the most vulnerable communities has been one of CASA's Core Programmes that aim to uplift lives across 13 states in India. Over the 75 years of its organisational establishment, CASA has implemented an expansive range of social action that focuses on building climate-resilient communities through sustainable livelihood initiatives, Disaster Risk Reduction Responses, plantation of fruit-bearing & medicinal plants, organic farming, awareness campaigns, and local leadership buildup.

CASA attempts to help marginalised communities in realising, rethinking & redesigning adequate efforts in becoming climate resilient. The supplementary association with State departments

and democratic institutions further allows CASA's efforts in reaching and relieving a larger segment of society.

From tribal to pastoral and children to the elderly, CASA's action towards climate resilience endeavours to support every individual in the rural precincts without any biases based on race, gender, caste or religion. The specialised people organisations, small farmer committees, women groups and youth groups formulated by CASA through sustainability-oriented workshops, community activities and project planning, open a platform to the members for expressing, discussing and resolving issues concerning their communities. While CASA's Disaster Risk Reduction Projects prioritises zero casualties in catastrophes and assists the disaster-wrecked masses in rehabilitation, nutrition & sanitation, the training program, in its curriculum and structure, also

educates the youth volunteers of the Disaster Mitigation Task Force on survival skills, climate sensibility & community leadership. In the state of West Bengal, CASA is also focused on Child Centered Disaster Risk Reduction activities partnering with UNICEF.

Climate Resilient communities supported by CASA reflect the power of social unity, green initiatives, youth leadership, and community accountability in building a sustainable future.

► Pics: Disaster Mitigation Task Force (DMTF) group of children, formed by CASA, demonstrating the early warning systems and techniques to tackle with any disaster, which can help alert people to impending disasters and give them time to evacuate or take other protective measures.



REACTIVE TO PROACTIVE: THE EVOLUTION OF DISASTER MANAGEMENT IN INDIA



PRE-INDEPENDENCE

- Famines of 1905, 1907 and 1943, the Bihar-Nepal Earthquake of 1837 and occasional droughts/ floods were the triggers for setting up relief departments for emergencies.
- The disaster relief departments were activity-based and reactive.
- The approach involved shouting for help, calling up ambulances, first-aid and relief distribution which were mostly post-disaster-oriented actions.

POST-INDEPENDENCE

- In the initial years, Task forces were created for managing disasters under the Commissioners of state-specific Relief Departments.
- The approach continued to be mostly post-disaster based where relief was distributed and funds were allocated to the affected mass.
- In 1956, the Government of India formed a "Standing Fire Advisory Committee" under the Ministry of Home Affairs, the mandate of which was to examine technical problems in Fire service departments and advise its upgradation.
- The Standing Fire Advisory Committee was renamed as "Standing Fire Advisory Council" in 1980 and had representatives from all the State's fire service departments, Ministry of Home, Defense, Transport, Communication and Bureau of Indian Standards.
- Flood disaster action was addressed under "Irrigation Command Area Development and Flood Control" every five years until the 1980s.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF DISASTER MANAGEMENT- 1990 ONWARDS

- 1990 was declared the International Decade of Natural Disasters by The United Nations General Assembly.
- Latur Earthquake (1993), Malpa Landslide (1994), and Odisha Super Cyclone (1999)

were major disasters of the decade that propelled authorities for better disaster control.

- Under the Chairmanship of J.C.Pant, Ex-Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, a high-powered committee was set in August 1999 to design a systematic, comprehensive and holistic approach to disaster management and risk mitigation.
- The disaster risk mitigation division went under the supervision of the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2002 and a hierarchical structure was ideated.
- The focus of disaster management shifted from a reactive response to a proactive one including early warning, forecasting and monitoring systems for weather-related hazard.
- The Disaster Management Act came into force on 23rd December 2005, paving the way for the National policy creation in conformity with the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, the Rio Declaration, the Millennium Development Goals and the Hyogo Framework 2005-2015.
- The NDMA was authorized to allocate funds towards disaster relief and assisting other countries in times of natural emergencies.

- A National Executive Committee was constituted in 2006 to assist the NDMA in its functioning, monitoring and implementation of the National Plan.
- National Disaster Response Force was constructed by converting 8 standard Battalions of Central Para Military Forces, 2 battalions each from Border Security Forces, Indo-Tibetan Border Police, Central Industrial Security Force and Central Reserve Police Force.
- The States were also advised to set their own Specialist State Disaster Response Force.
- While the Central Government provides training to the Response Force and advises states to allocate at least 10% of the State Disaster Response Funds and Capacity Building Grants for training purposes.

IMPORTANT FACTS RELATED TO DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

- Historians believe that the Harappan civilisation succumbed to 200 years of drought caused by the Eastward shift of the monsoon- indicating the possibility of climate change to perish the Indian subcontinent's population.
- The First Disaster Management Training Institute of India was the National Civil Defense College of Nagpur, established on 29th April 1957.

- NCDC Nagpur conducted specialized skill training for the National and state Response Task Force in emergencies.
- Fire Service Department, Home Guards, and Non-Governmental Organizations form a support group for the National And State Disaster Response Task Forces.
- In the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (1990), a National Centre for Disaster Management was established at the Indian Institute for Public Administration in 1995.
- The centre was upgraded to National Institute for Disaster Management on 16th October 2003 and achieved the status of a statutory organization under the Disaster Management Act of 2005.
- The National Institute for Disaster Management develops training modules, conducts research, publishes courses and frames strategies for training disaster risk mitigation for Response Task Force.
- The vision of the NDMA is "adopting a Technology-Driven, Proactive, Multi-Hazard and Multi-Sectoral strategy for building a Safer, Disaster Resilient and Dynamic India".

Source: NDMA.gov.in, Deccan Chronicle, Osmania University



CHILD-CENTRED DISASTER RISK REDUCTION IN COLLABORATION WITH UNICEF INDIA

Disaster Risk Management, which is essentially the process of strategizing and implementing a set of hyperlocal policies on diminishing the existing disaster risk, preventing potential disaster risk, and managing additional risks, is not as simple as it might seem on paper. Moreover, aspects involving the community's behavioural patterns, cultural sentiments, gender-based susceptibility and so on require sensitivity along with sensibility.

Therefore, civil societies play an indispensable role in assisting the hyperlocal implementation of disaster risk mitigation plans by leveraging their association and familiarity with the local population and lifestyle. CASA, over 75 years

of organisational existence, has not only charted disaster mitigation and risk reduction avenues for the residents of its project areas but has also contributed significantly towards strengthening the overall climate resilience of the vulnerable population.

One of the most riveting evolutions of CASA's Disaster Risk Reduction strategies has been the Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction Programme. Unarguably, children comprise the segment that is highly susceptible to disasters. The disruption and challenges brought by catastrophes have time and again compromised the rural children's access to basic rights, pushing them into the inescapable gyves of illiteracy, poverty, child

labour, trafficking, hunger and diseases.

The lack of an "integrated programme approach" in the Humanitarian responses surrounding disaster management makes the life of children and women more vulnerable. Proper Child Risk and Impact analysis, following the "Do No Harm" principles enhance not just the quality of response strategies but also improve the acceptance on the ground. To make this concept come to life, CASA, having worked over several years as the Nodal Agency of West Bengal State Inter-Agency Group (IAG), joined hands with UNICEF and the Department of Disaster Management & Civil Defence (DM&CD), Govt. of



West Bengal over a collaborative venture on the Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction Programme (CCDRR) in the state.

The program received direct supervision, guidance, and administrative approval from the Department of Disaster Management & Civil Defence of the Government of West Bengal. Cooperatively, all the member organisations of the State IAG West Bengal participated in the implementation process and advocated for the institutionalization of the "Child-centered DRR Approach" with a "Core Commitment for Children in Humanitarian Action". The commitment necessitated an integrated effort toward enhancing the capacity of State Government Officials and Chief Security Officers on Emergency disaster preparedness and response.

Designing and Implementing CCDRR

So how exactly did we pilot the programme successfully in the year 2019

- State-level meeting with the Department of Disaster Management and Civil Defence was held to plan, identify and implement disaster mitigation measures through orientation and regular mock drills at the school level.
- In the subsequent meeting with the senior members at UNICEF India, a final plan was prepared for the Comprehensive School Safety and Security Programme.
- Elaborate discussions were held on the development of IEC materials, implementation of the School safety measures at school, mock drills, checklists, training of nodal teachers, volunteers, etc.
- In the inception meeting held in the four most vulnerable districts of the state, namely Malda, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas and Purulia, 100

schools from each district, ranging within 3 km of radius from the most vulnerable villages, were selected to implement the Comprehensive School Safety & Security Programme.

- Plan for 2019 **Comprehensive School Safety & Security Programme** were shared with the District Incharge of secondary education, outlining:
 - » 100 School Safety Plan in Phase Manner
 - » Nodal Teacher's Training
 - » Students training at 100 Schools
- Through DI of Secondary Education, verification and confirmation on the final list of schools were sent to the DDMOs of the selected 4 districts with necessary information on the project.
- The DI of the school's secondary education made a list of nodal teachers for the training from each school in coordination with the headmaster/headmistress and forwarded the list to DDMO. The list was then checked by the ADM(G) for approval of the Nodal Teachers Training.
- District level orientation meeting was organised to share the details of the School Safety and Security Programme with; School Education Department, Department of Disaster Management & Civil Defence and Other Stakeholders

Training of Teachers and Students

Through the District Administration, Teachers are given instructions and a Comprehensive School Safety and Security Programme. The implementation further narrows down as follows:

School level training

The selected nodal teachers were

informed about the functioning of the Comprehensive School Safety Plan and the dates for the mock drills to be held at respective schools. The civil defence volunteers/ IAG volunteers visited the schools and collaborated with the assigned teachers to initiate the School safety activities.

The school students were given an orientation on the first day, followed by an activity on identifying the hazard within the school premises. The students noted the potential dangers on a sheet and prepared a profile of the school with the help of civil defence volunteers, IAG volunteers and trained nodal teachers.

The school students were then oriented on the need for School safety and were encouraged to share their views on how to make their school environment safe and clean. The Orientation concluded by providing the students with clear information on Safe evacuation, Basics of first aid, Knots making for rescue, Rescue Techniques during any kind of disaster, Quick assistive evacuation with a proper plan to an open and safe area.

Distribution of responsibility

A Template of the School Disaster Management Plan was shared with the Nodal Teachers to ensure the safety of the students and staff during an emergency. As the schools have access to many resources at the community nodes, they also have a responsibility towards the immediate locality. To leverage this potential the following procedure was followed:

1. **Sensitisation and Preparation:**
A meeting was held at the school level where the Principal played the lead role.
2. **Formation of Teams and Groups:**
 - The School Disaster Management Committee,
 - The Disaster Awareness group and
 - The Disaster Response Group

3. **Delineation of Roles and Responsibilities of the respective groups.**
4. **Supply of Emergency Materials and Equipment** as per the Training Requirements.
5. The plan for handling **Children with Special Needs** was explained and practised
6. **Dissemination and Mock Drills:** After all the plans were consolidated, the necessary information was disseminated to all participants, staff, volunteers and trainees utilising Innovative methods.

Mock drills were held to test the various elements of the response plan by

Teaching students, staff and parents how to respond to the complications of an actual disaster, and Helping in the evaluation of all the parts of the emergency plan Including the training of staff and students.

Special day observation

With an objective to aware and equip school children to learn pre and post-disaster preparedness and apply it in the time of need at school as well as in their respective communities, Special Day observation and Periodical awareness programmes were held with the organisation of rallies, quiz

competition, sit and draw contest, vulnerability assessment and various cultural activities related to the preparedness before, during and after any kind of disaster. A group activity was done mentioning what could be done to make their school safe and secure. The students, according to their understanding, wrote that:

- Every classroom should have a dustbin.
- The 2nd Floor terrace of the school should be covered with iron grills so that no one falls from the place.
- No one should throw any kind of plastic as it pollutes the environment.
- Adequate sanitary napkins should be kept as it is essential for every girl.
- Proper school gate to be fixed so that no one can go out of school during school hours.

The school plan needs to be periodically evaluated and updated on a quarterly basis.

CHILD CENTRIC DRR PROGRAMME

Partner involved:
UNICEF India,
Government of
West Bengal

Started in 2019



400

School covered



1,04,089

Children



Training up to class

VI to XII





During our visit to the area, we had the opportunity to meet with Adesh Mondal, an 18-year-old member of CASA's Disaster Mitigation Task Force (DMTF) from South 24 Parganas district in West Bengal. Adesh took us on a tour of his school and showed us the hazard map that he and his classmates had created as part of the project. The map showed the various hazards that the school could face, including flooding, storm surges, and cyclones.

Adesh also showed us the various evacuation routes that were marked on the map. These routes had been identified by the school DMTF group members themselves.

The project in Canning block is just one example of the many initiatives that CASA is undertaking to help vulnerable communities in the country to become more resilient to natural disasters.

DMTF GROUPS (FORMED THROUGH COLLECTIVE FORM OF COOPERATION PROJECT INTERVENTION):



About youth groups

16 youth groups have developed separately apart from 74 DMTF groups within the CFC WB working area.

Activity covered:

Pre & post disaster initiatives –

- Early warning
- Trained on KOBOT for JRNA [Joint Rapid Need Assessment] process

- Shelter management
- Running of community kitchen
- First aid services
- Making of life jackets by utilizing local resources
- Developing Micro-planning and inclusion the priority issues under GPDPs

About female/male groups

89 Women pressure groups have developed under CFC WB project activity covering:

- Identify trafficking cases
- Child marriage issues
- Awareness
- Engage in different Livelihood opportunities
- Women Federation
- Menstrual hygiene & WASH
- Promotion of Women's leadership
- Inclusion of PWDs
- Formation of gender statutes
- During relief: distribution of Dignity Kit
- Distribution of Reusable Sanitary Napkins
- Unsafe migration, Child protection and child safety
- Domestic violence
- Gender participation in decision making
- Formation and functioning of Milk Federation by women



What has changed in the pattern of natural calamities attacking the Sundarbans?

The frequency of Disasters in India and Southeast Asia has increased over the last decade. From 2010 to 2020 and beyond, there has been a drastic surge in disasters such as super cyclone Amphan, Yaas, drought, flood, and landslides. More than 10 disasters occur in a year. These incremental disasters are mostly man-made.

The Sundarbans area of West Bengal is a huge natural forest. Millions of people in Sundarbans exploit the forest resources for settlement and survival. A majority of the inhabitants clear out the Mangrove plantations for building their abode. These natural barriers are selfishly destroyed by human communities for livelihood as well. The shrinking Mangrove belts render the Sundarbans coast defenceless to the rising water level, resulting in the infiltration of seawater into the land.

Undoubtedly, the frequency and intensity of cyclones in the past were not as severe as they are today. Human activities are disturbing the balance of nature. Over usage of Biofuel, global warming and the rise in sea levels have disrupted several such natural habitats across the river embankments.

How has CASA attempted to improve the situation?

Those living in the coastal area of Sundarbans are the most vulnerable to disasters. CASA has planned a nuanced Disaster Risk Reduction programme for the Sundarbans area and other such coastal regions. Under the CMDRR programme (Community Managed Disaster Risk Reduction), we are arranging training for youth from within the community to form the Disaster Mitigation Task Force.

The Task Force is trained and taught to extend life-saving responses to their community during disasters. The group is provided training for

rescue missions, search, warning and community-relief distribution, besides the soft knowledge on the importance of mangroves, the importance of the embankments and the ways to protect these resources. The DMTF group is also preparing the local community to combat any sort of disaster. The DMTF group has also developed a Contingency plan for their village and incorporated this plan with the Panchayat Development management Plan.

What are the most prominent features in the training of the Disaster Mitigation Task Force?

The Task Force is provided with a clear understanding of what to do before, during and after a disaster. The DMTF members also work toward educating their communities in reducing the panic and fear during the disaster, which further helps in avoiding any collateral damage.

Post-training, the volunteers are added to the DMTF group on WhatsApp where the warning and necessary information on disaster and the mitigation plan is forwarded timely. The volunteers inform their community members digitally and physically to initiate the rescue operation. Such efficient mechanisms for disaster risk reduction have proven themselves to be life-saving. During the 1999 super cyclone in Orissa, the death toll was over 10,000; however, in recent years, the death toll during cyclones Amphan and YAAS has reduced. The credits can be heavily attributed to the intervention of Disaster risk reduction capacities of the youth in the communities.

What all activities and objectives come into play when CASA aims to elevate community preparedness to tackle

disasters in Sundarbans?

- Community Level Preparedness
- Resource Mapping
- Formation of DMTF Group
- Early warning decommission group
- Trained volunteers on Child Protection in Emergency
- Trained Volunteers on Child-Friendly Space Management
- Trained Volunteers on Digital Data Collection (on Emergency Situation-related information sharing and Rapid Need Assessment)
- Water Tanks installed in Strategic Locations
- Mangrove Plantations
- Saline Tolerant Paddy Cultivation
- Sack Cultivation
- Traditional Seeds preservation
- Awareness Programmes on Cyclone, Safe Waste Disposal and Human-Animal Conflict

► ALOKE KUMAR GHOSH

Additional Emergency Officer (HQ)
CASA supervises Humanitarian Response
and Disaster Risk Reduction



What makes CASA's Disaster Response unique and efficient in the state of West Bengal?

CASA's key segments of focus in the field of Disaster Risk Reduction in West Bengal are child-centred on Disaster Risk Reduction & Community-level preparedness. We are working as a partner to UNICEF in West Bengal and collaborate strategically with the state administration and other institutions. We share our learning and experiences with the Department of Disaster Management and also organise training programmes for respective officials as well as Civil Defence Volunteers in the State.

Is CASA implementing a Child-Centred DRR programme (CCDRR) in consultation with parents or teachers?

Yes, as a part of the Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction Activity, community members jointly decide on enhancing the capacities of children in pre and post disaster situation. In implementing the child-centred DRR programme, we are closely associated with the state government and the schools.

We have piloted Comprehensive School Safety and Security Programme in 400 schools of West Bengal.

How were the 400 schools selected for the programme?

Strategically, CASA conducts training programmes in the vulnerable districts of the state of West Bengal. During the Inception meeting, the most vulnerable blocks were identified for implementing the Comprehensive School Safety And Security Programme. A list of 100 schools (Secondary, MSK, Govt. Sponsored, etc.) within a 3 km radius of the identified vulnerable blocks were selected from 4 districts, namely: Malda, Murishdabada, South 24 Pargana and Purulia.

Can you give a brief update on the status of the CCDRR Programme?

Through the joint intervention of UNICEF, CASA and the State Government, we have completed the first round of a Comprehensive School Safety and Security Programme.

As an implementing agency, recently we have concluded an online training programme for both the Department of Child Welfare and the Department of Disaster Management & Civil Defence. In November 2021, CASA conducted an online training on child protection in an emergency for 100 officials.

What tools is CASA using in the Task Force training?

We are using our Training Module for the Volunteers and Children. Basic training equipment like chart papers, markers, flip charts, and IEC Materials are used as training tools. We believe in a Participatory approach we give more importance to group-based activities and role plays.

We are using low-cost and locally available materials for first aid and rescue training.

Civil Defence Volunteers from a peripheral line of Defence provide rescue services, first aid, relief work, transport, etc during disasters. These trained volunteers not only support DDMA in the pre-disaster phase of conducting awareness and mock drills but also work as a response force effectively in the aftermath of any disaster. Inter-Agency Group Members, selected from the community-based organisations, work through the year in the disaster

response and collect first-hand data from the grassroots level for a better understanding of the situation & implementation of the response at the earliest.

The CDVs and IAG volunteers are selected from the chosen blocks in the 4 districts. The volunteers are oriented on the CSSSP and its link to the CBDRR programme to better carry on their roles as volunteers and conduct these processes in the field.

Awareness of School Safety, basic first aid process, techniques of rescue, identification of vulnerability and measures to reduce vulnerability are the main tasks they illustrate to children, teachers and community people.

► DEBOJYOTI CHAKRABORTY

Coordinator for the state programmes in West Bengal



17-YEAR-OLD GIRL UTILISES DRR TRAINING TO HELP LOCAL COMMUNITIES



Priyanka Naskar, 17, is a passionate social worker. In 2019, she enrolled as a trainee in CASA's Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR) programme while studying in class 12th. She comes from the disaster-prone South 24-Parganas district of West Bengal.

Her passion for working toward the welfare of local communities at such a young age is exemplary, and it manifests in her concern for vulnerable communities.

She lives in a seven-member house with two younger siblings. Her father is a fisherman who toils hard to feed his big family. But for the last couple of years, fishing has not been a stable source of livelihood for them and others in the coastal areas of West Bengal.

"Last year, during the peak of the season, my father returned home empty-handed from the fishing port several times due to untimely thunderstorms and depressional rainfall," says Naskar.

The marginalised families, especially those from fishing communities living in the coastal districts of East Medinipur, South 24-Parganas and North 24-Parganas, have been at the receiving end of climate change. These

areas are frequently hit by cyclones inflicting large-scale damage to human habitat and sources of livelihood — fishing avenues, farmlands etc.

Last year, after Cyclone Yaas ravaged the lives of people in Naskar's village, she volunteered to work with CASA, utilising her DRR training. As the underground water had contaminated with rising salinity, she went door to door explaining to people the harmful effects of using contaminated water and convinced them not to use water from handpumps.

Naskar's village witnessed an outbreak of diarrhoea around the same time; she actively participated in the CASA's mobile awareness camps and distributed halogen tablets, ORS etc.

Naskar is one of the victims of the digital divide exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. She is a good student and wants to make a name for her family, community and village.

"Initially, during the lockdown, I was unable to study because I couldn't afford a smartphone, and it was frustrating for me," shared Naskar.

She has also been at the forefront of the CASA's COVID-19 awareness campaign explaining the locals' necessity to use masks, demonstrating proper handwashing methods and emphasising other Covid Appropriate Behaviour.

LEARNING AND TEACHING THE SKILL OF DISASTER RISK MITIGATION

■ Kajol Tanaya

"I love my birthplace. Although cyclone-prone, my domicile is where my solace lies. There is a beauty in the waves of the ocean that plays on the laps of the mangrove-covered coast. The flora and greenery infuse an inexpressible love and motivation within me to work towards protecting nature".

Shares a 17 years old member of CASA's Disaster Management Task Force, Lokesh Mondal.

Residing in his humble abode along the Sundarbans coastal area of the South 24 Parganas district in West Bengal, Lokesh is an avid lover of nature. Besides his incomparable love for his hometown, Lokesh is also sensitive to his community's concerns in the disaster-prone area. To his awareness, infusing a deeper love towards one's climate-fragile motherland becomes possible only when safety is ensured. Therefore, in his very early years of life, Lokesh took the initiative to learn disaster risk reduction activities such as basic First Aid, search and rescue operations, the process of evacuation and more such community preparedness measures against calamities.

Lokesh was only a 15-years-old, studying in standard 10 when he undertook the training. He shares, "Over two years ago when the Comprehensive School Safety and Security Programme was initiated in our school, I participated in the orientation and assessment along with my friends".

Enumerating the process that Lokesh and his friends followed to make their school a better place, he mentions, "Our teachers and staff members guided us thoroughly in preparing the School Safety Plan wherein we identified all the vulnerable areas of the school and the potential assembling point in case of the occurrence of any disaster during the school hours. We worked as a team to prepare an evacuation map and educated all the students about it. Our peers were also sensitised on DRR-related issues like lightning, fire safety, and cyclones".

During the planning phase, the team could identify a major hazard within the premises. The school has an adjoining pond that overflows during the rainy season and threatens the safety of small children. Lokesh and his friends immediately approached the school management committee and convinced them of the importance of fencing. The vulnerability of the students could thereby be largely minimized after the fencing was done.

Even today, Lokesh continues to work proactively during the monsoon season. Upon getting any information about cyclones or floods, he assembles the local volunteers and initiates an immediate operation to disseminate the information to the coastal areas. During the COVID-19 pandemic Lokesh played a very significant role in safeguarding and educating his community. During the reopening of schools in West Bengal, Lokesh, along with other volunteers visited most of the schools in his block and trained more than ten thousand students on COVID - 19 do's and don'ts.

Lokesh has set an example before others in his community

that together they can make their vagary-prone coastal area into a habitable place. Instead of migrating due to the potential dangers of disasters, Lokesh stands as a community saviour to defend his birthplace. He expressed his heartfelt gratitude to CASA for providing an elaborate platform for him to be able to root himself in safeguarding the environment he loves.





'PARAGONS OF HOPE' IN SUNDARBANS

Story by : Priyank Samuel

The lush green mangroves of the Sundarbans are one of the eye-catching regions of West Bengal. The Sundarbans' Mangrove forest lies on the delta of Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers on the Bay of Bengal. However, beyond the serene beauty, there's also various unpredictable and frequent catastrophes. The recurrence of cyclones and floods in this region leads to bereavement and loss of livelihood.

The year 2020 had been life-changing for everyone, but the unprecedented blow of the pandemic and frequent cyclones and floods left the people of Sundarbans with great hardship. Residents here had to go through the loss of their livelihood, home and properties and other things.

The past two years turned out to be a vexatious period in everyone's life that even today people are still recovering from the unprecedented blow of the pandemic. People living in the Delta region faced greater hardships during this period, adding to it, the unexpected natural disasters hamper their daily life.

The recurring disaster in the Sundarbans region affects hundreds of people who are desperate for a normal, safe and steady life. Many of them wished to move to an area where the occurrence of cyclones and floods

are least expected. Unfortunately, as many come from a marginalised background, their desperation goes in vain.

The uncertain disasters in the Sundarbans region hit hundreds of people and the marginalised are worst affected. During these times, a speculative factor increases and mainly impacts young children and women, who long for a safe and steady life. Children are majorly vulnerable to cyclones and floods, without appropriate knowledge and skills, they lack the ability to comprehend the next step of action amidst calamity. Thus, it affects their mental and physical well-being.

In times like these, the risk factor increases and mainly affects young children and women. Children are majorly vulnerable to cyclones and floods, their inability to comprehend the next step of action amidst any calamity affects them physically and mentally.

In view of the chronic calamity-prone conditions of Sundarbans, CASA introduced a Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) programme in the pregnable districts of West Bengal namely Malda, Murshidabad, North 24-Parganas, South 24 Parganas and other vulnerable pockets in the State of West Bengal.

This DRR programme through Disaster Mitigation Task Force

(DMTF) mainly focuses on the school children, developing their skills and enabling them to act immediately amidst any sort of emergency.

The DMTF youth volunteers started training students on the important components such as First aid, emergency stretcher, rope utilization, transporting a wounded victim etc. CASA has been able to provide necessary training and capacity-building programs to the young children ensuring their safety and inculcating the ability for alarming situations at times of disasters.

CASA Communications team from Delhi HQ made a visit to the affected areas of Sundarbans post all the pandemic restrictions were eased. The years 2020-21 had been a roller coaster in all our lives for everyone but when we saw the miserable situation in the Sundarbans district, it encapsulated an entirely different version of pain and suffering.

We visited Canning Swanirbhar Shiksha Niketan School and met a few young DMTF volunteers Adesh Mondal, Jathagata Mondal, Lokesh Naskar and Mahuya Mondal from the same school. The meeting with this team corroborated hope. When Conversing with this dynamic team of four volunteers who have been training all the school students and locals in their block for

the past 3 years on emergency first aid, search and rescue operations, COVID safety measures, and making the locals self-sustained for any situation, I was left flabbergasted.

The result of capacity building, training and awareness dissemination enabled the adolescent students to be prepared and act maturely and smartly during calamities and made a difference in disaster prone districts of Sundarbans. This DMTF team of four, demonstrated passionately the activities of emergency first aid and effective utilization of minimal items for rescue, being in the vantage point of any disaster situation.

Before visiting Canning I block of the South 24 Parganas district in West Bengal, it was known that the hardship faced by the locals during these difficult times was unfathomable. However, seeing the youth actively performing their task to help each other in being self-sufficient during the calamities made me see them as paragons of hope for their localities. The DMTF volunteers had done a great job training and helping young children and women to be disaster ready.

In conversation with Mr. Asis Kumar Mondal, the Chief Patron of the school, he observed tremendous change in the nature and intent of the children after CASA introduced DRR programmes to the school. "I have witnessed the transformation the children have gained through these programmes, the children are very vigilant and advise each other to avoid playing and going out and playing during rainy seasons and storms. Recently, when cyclone Amphan, floods and COVID-19 hit the Sundarbans region, the youth were engaged in keeping the locals of this block aware and secure. I am delighted to see the youth working as a team to safeguard each other at the time of need" shared Mr. Mondal.



► Pic: Guardians of the Sundarbans! A villager proudly displays a mangrove plant, an essential part of the unique ecosystem found in the Sundarbans region of West Bengal.

SUCCESSION OF HOPE IN CHILDREN FOR A PREPARED TOMORROW

Story by : Priyank Samuel

Disaster Mitigation Task Force (DMTF) is one of CASA's disaster relief programme intending to train and help people in the disaster prone areas across the country to address certain situations during the calamity. The DMTF team has been actively involving many young children, adolescents and even women to be part of the emergency first aid training that enables them to intercept challenges amidst any hardship that can occur in such disaster-prone areas.

Adesh Mondal, an 18-year-old member of CASA's Disaster Mitigation Task Force (DMTF) from South 24 Parganas district in West Bengal, was one of the adolescent students who received training from the DMTF team 3 years ago when the Comprehensive School Safety and Security Programme was initiated in Swanirbhar Shiksha Niketan school.

Although he is just a young boy, he is disquiet about the safety of the people of Canning I block. Therefore, having got such an opportunity to learn the importance of disaster preparedness is of great value to him. During the training session, the children were taught of the different ways to tackle the unforeseen situation without panic at the time of calamity. Most importantly, children were also taught how to keep important documents and other belongings prepared and organised in safe folders, to avoid losing them.

Adesh was in his 10th standard when he undertook the training. He conveyed that this programme has helped him be prepared mentally and physically to approach any sort of emergency. He then expressed, "When I was in 10th standard, I enrolled myself for the training conducted by the DMTF

team and now I am a part of it. The disaster management training imparts knowledge related to the disaster including preparedness, mitigation and rehabilitation. Initially, we all were trained in first aid practices, emergency search and rescue operations and evacuation techniques. The training is not only subjected to floods and cyclones alone, but we are ready to face any unfortunate circumstances, be it floods, cyclones, fire incidents, earthquakes etc."

After thoroughly attaining the knowledge to tackle the situations during the calamities, Adesh built a team along with the help of his supervisors from school to identify certain vulnerable spots and find a safer potential rescue path. He said "We designed a rescue sitemap for the school in which we train other students to follow meticulously to easily vacate the school premises in case of the occurrence of any disaster in a uniform way to avoid confusion or chaos."

"Our district is very prone to frequent disasters, making this training a much-needed prerequisite for enabling us to tackle circumstances and save/rescue as many locals as we could. Also if any relocation is required we must not waste time and swiftly evacuate with all important documents and belongings. We are a lot aware now of the subject of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and are prepared to face the unforeseen. We impart these teachings to our juniors and we prepare them to pass on the torch, and this will keep on following."

- assures Adesh.

He continues to work actively in the school and the locality as well. Lastly, he proudly conveyed that he was indeed glad to have received the training from the CASA volunteers team. It has been a life-changing opportunity for him and the other children in the village. They are now well equipped and are prepared to handle any disaster situation in their village. He expressed his gratitude and gratefulness towards CASA and the team for providing the requisite training to be fully prepared to face the unforeseen disaster in the Sundarbans region.





► Pic: Struggling for survival! Villagers in the drowned East Medinipur district of West Bengal face an uphill battle to access even basic necessities like fresh water.

ENTERING THE HELL LOOPS OF THE DROWNED TERRITORY

■ Kajol Tanaya

Nearly 130 km from Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal, lies the coastal district of East Medinipur. Inhabited by a mass of diverse cultural and linguistic groups, the district exemplifies the intangible beauty of unity and harmony. Even in its geographical placement, the shimmering ocean waves of the Bay of Bengal touch the mainland to the East of the district while the parent state West Bengal shares its border with the neighbouring state Odisha to the South of the district. Indeed, the atmosphere at Purba Medinipur could be perceived as a symbolic yin-yang.

Historically, the district has earned a name for itself for being the birthplace of several brave sons

of the nation who have sacrificed their lives for India's freedom from tyrannical British rule. The land was the epicentre for freedom revolutions such as the Santhal Revolt and Chuar Rebellion. Quote it as mythology or history, but tales narrated about Medinipur reveal that Gautam Buddha visited the area in the last year of his life, predicting a bold and prosperous future that will head into destruction from fire, and flood and feud. As sincerely as we concede to the bold contribution of Medinipur to India's struggle for independence, we can not turn deaf and blind to the district's gradual depletion under the rage of frequent natural calamities.

The year 2021 unleashed a series of unprecedented blows on the district while its recovery from the devastating pandemic was impending. Right when the second wave of COVID-19 started descending from the peak in April 2021, a severe cyclonic storm, Yaas, originating from the Bay of Bengal made landfall at Digha in Purba Medinipur on 26 May 2021. Cyclonic wind at 140km/h speed battered the district. Ocean water inundated the land, ruthlessly drowning the sustenance of the inhabitants. Following the catastrophe, in less than a span of four months, heavy downpours in the southeast monsoon season sprouted flash floods and rainfall crises in the land.



The last time I was on the ground to cover the aftermath of a flood was in Kerala, back in 2019. However this time there was no noise in the news media that could have indicated a severe flood in West Bengal, so I assumed it might not be as worse. Never in my wildest dream had I imagined what I was going to witness in Purba Medinipur”

Covering a 3 hours journey from Kolkata to Purba Medinipur, the team reported at the Panchayat

Building where arrangements of distributing the warm cooked meal were made for the flood-affected. Up until this location, everything appeared fine. The scorching bright sun rays were shining on the Panchayat house. The team walked further into the villages to witness the unimagined. The villages were drowned in a massive pool of flood. Wrecked houses, broken farmsteads, fences and the residents themselves were standing in the waist-high floodwater. “There was a sickening smell

The On-Ground Situation as Witnessed By Team CASA

The communications team of CASA headed to West Bengal from the Delhi Headquarters to cover the programme at Sundarbans. After arriving at the capital city of Kolkata, the team was informed that owing to the threats of a cyclonic depression in the Sundarbans, the visit had been deferred. Updating the plan of action, the team moved to cover the East Medinipur area.

Arushi Narchal, Digital Media Manager at CASA, recalls, “We got to know from the office colleague that the Purba Medinipur area has been suffering under floods for several days. CASA was initiating the distribution of cooked meals to the affected families in the region for one week.



► Pic: On the front lines! The CASA communication team braves difficult conditions to assess the situation on the ground in the drowned villages of East Medinipur of West Bengal.



in the air. I tried talking to a few people around to realise that the flood has destroyed everything from fishing grounds, and cattle farms to crops and shops. The area we were standing by used to be a farm for the wheat crops. The destroyed crops were rotting under the flood stream, emitting a foul and unbearable smell. As we were entering the village, we saw a few men trying to catch fish in the water collected around the roads. Back then I thought it was a pond but after hearing the people out, I learned that it was the usual village premise. The fishing ground being destroyed, people were expecting to catch fish in the flood water near the road-bound areas. The situation seemed desperate.", shares Arushi.

There was neither drinkable water nor any arrangement for a washroom across the flooded territory. The residents shared that they have built a higher platform-like structure out of bamboo and sticks where they excrete into polythene bags lined by dry newspapers. These bags were later disposed of in areas where the flood water has retracted.

No one could tell if a poisonous reptile was sitting deep underneath the floodwater. Several cases of snake bites and poisonous insect bites sprung up every single day in the area. Mosquitos and germs were visibly proliferating. Houses were half-drowned. People continued to walk past barefoot, with half of their bodies drenched,

soaked and underwater.

The condition of women was more concerning. Most of their skin over the heels and feet had started to patch and peel off. Menstruating women had to shift far or stay over cots and benches all day with restricted movement. "I was moving deeper into the village when suddenly a woman held my hands and dragged me back. She told me, 'Didi (sister), please do not step ahead, it is a pond'. I was shocked. No one could expect a pond there as nothing about the ground was visible over the water surface", reveals Arushi.

The villagers were provided shelter in the nearby government school building to sleep in the night whereas the elderly were relocated to a camp. They returned to their houses in the morning to throw plenty of bleaching agents in the standing water.

CASA volunteers carried food to the families in the other villages of the district who could not access the camp or move out. Women in the region were highly grateful for the aid. Many of them revealed that they have been unable to access cooked meals. At best they managed to cook only once and eat out of that throughout the day or two. Surviving out of bare puffed rice and dry bread, these families were in desperate need of food security.

WE SLEEP IN FEAR, BREATHE WITH DISGUST AND EAT IN DESPERATION

■ Kajol Tanaya

In the mid of September 2021, heavy and incessant rainfall in the East and West Medinipur area swell five rivers into breaching several embankments and flooding the two districts. Close to three lakh people from both states suffered homelessness and loss of livelihood resources due to the flood. The water kept standing high above the land in the villages, immersing people, houses and cattle from feet to the waist. Inconveniences piled up as the struggle for existence continued.

Besides the overall pain incurred on the impacted population, a majority of the trouble about the management of domestic chores and hygiene added on to the women from the region. CASA, while distributing cooked meals to the impacted villages, came across several women whose predicament suffered massively under unspeakable distress. One of them was Manju Bag, a woman in her mid-thirties, belonging to the village of Chak Srikrishnapur.

Narrating her story Manju shares, "It has been 15 days since the flood water has been standing in the area. There is no food, no clean water to consume, and no livelihood resources spared. The only tubewell from which we fetched drinking water is under the unclean flood water. We cannot even access the roads to commute to another place yet we somehow manage to walk far distances to bring clean water for the family. Living across this pool of stagnated water is not only unpleasant but very disturbing. But what can we do? Our concerns are unheard, we feel helpless and unsafe. All the shops that catered to the local daily needs have been shut. There is no food item that we can feed the children with."

"We are surviving a huge difficulty that cannot be spoken in words", Manju adds, "We lost all that we had accumulated be it in terms of crops or our house or livestock. We are extremely helpless in this sort of situation, everything seems over. Amidst the pandemic, the hassle added by these natural calamities, first, in the form of cyclone YAAS and then the disruptive flood have impaired our everyday existence, halting transactions for an indefinite period. Is there any recovery from this? I wonder not." Standing barefoot in the floodwater, draped in a head-covering light blue saree, Manju was speaking of the reality of the land. They belong to a family of farmers who survive out on the crop and harvest. With the flood ruining their budding crops, not only did the family fall out of food security but also was insecure about never being able to recover the monetary and livelihood loss. Showing us her small farm holding that now resembles a pond, Manju glances in the direction with lost hope in her eyes and mouth squeezed into a thin straight line that conceals her emotional hurt.

"The fishes in the ponds have swum out during the floods. People who depend on the fishery are also out of a livelihood. We manage to light the stove only once in our flood-logged houses and cook for two days straight. Reptiles and big serpents exist in these waters. They could be roaming down here beyond our attention. We sleep in fear, breathe with disgust and eat



in desperation. Menstruating girls are unable to get decent meals for a day. What would they think of buying sanitary pads? Where will the money come from? Even if there was money, no shop was open from where we could buy pads."

Reeling under the danger of infection, poisonous creatures, and mosquito bites, women from the region are suffering hell. With cooked meals provided by CASA for one week, they could finally sense some respite from the heavy distress. Manju expressed her gratitude to CASA for the support and wishes that the troublesome days are over soon.

TESTIMONIALS

■ Kajol Tanaya

MENAKA GHORAI

Chak Shri Krishnapur
East Medinipur
West Bengal



"My entire house has been submerged. There's waist-length water standing all around the locality. No farms have been spared. Cattles are standing in high water. We have also lost our life savings. All the avenues to life and livelihood have drowned in the floodwater. The environment has turned dangerous. Our sustenance is at stake. You can not even figure out where an underlying pond lies. Repeated flooding in this area has paralysed our everyday function.

The fear of accidents, parasites, poisonous creatures and infections prevails across our everyday existence. Such high-standing water makes it tough for menstruating women and girls to take care of their intimate hygiene. At best we excrete in newspaper or polybags which are then disposed of at distance. The muddy and grey-greenish water reflects the heights of our misery. No doubt it is a conductive ground for mosquitoes and other germs that cause fatal infections during the sensitive time of a woman's menstrual day".

MALTI

Chak Shri Krishnapur
East Medinipur
West Bengal



"No food, loss of savings, reptiles, the threat of water-borne diseases and loss of livelihood resources have left us feeling disenfranchised in our own homeland. Our miseries are feeding on our sanity. Fishermen are standing at the roads expecting that the high roads might have blocked some fish that have escaped the broken fishing ground. Farmers are trying to drain and filter their drowned crops, hoping that some edible parts could still be recovered and utilised. Cattle care has become a tough job.

Nobody will tell you all of this. Partly no one cares and partly we are too helpless to explain. Very few organisations have recognised our pain. One of them is CASA. Through CASA's cooked meal support we would be able to survive for a week. Amidst this soaking grief, the food support is of immeasurable help. We hope this curse of surviving inside the Stagnated and standing water is over soon".

SAVITRI

Chak Shri Krishnapur
East Medinipur
West Bengal



"For 4 days we have not even had a decent one-time meal. Due to the flood, our kitchens and cooking spaces have been doused in brackish water. Preparing an everyday meal is a challenge. Shops are also closed. We cannot access dry ration materials or vegetables easily. For a few days, I kept frequenting my relatives' place to cook a one-time meal in their kitchen. This meal was portioned out to be consumed over two days by our family.

The unclean flood water stinks. The corpses of our farm crops are under it, and so is our sustenance. I have a 12 years old son and 8 years old daughter to care for amidst this crisis. Children are highly vulnerable to the infectious diseases proliferating in this floodwater. The handpump that we used to extract Underground water has also drowned in the flood. Cooking, cleaning and caregiving are posing tough challenges against the women in the community".



FOLLOWING UP AT THE GROUND-LEVEL

Director of CASA, Dr. Sushant Agrawal visited the Cyclone Amphan IREACH Beneficiary Houses in the Sundarban island which borders Bangladesh and is administered under the Hingalganj block of North 24 Parganas in West Bengal.

The beneficiaries under IREACH were assisted with sanitation-related resources and means to access clean water through the trying times. The Follow-up visit by the Director himself did not only ensure that the sprouting collateral needs of the victims were assessed properly but also provided the organisation with a trail of genuine feedback.



SAVING LIVES IN THE BORDERLINE

With the logistics and security support offered by the Border Security Force (BSF), CASA conducted vaccination camps for immunizing the vulnerable residents of Lawngtlai district from Mizoram. A meeting with Aizawl BSF commandant Promod Kumar and the Administrative Officer Dr. Chhantea was concluded by the team of CASA on 29th April 2022, informing the attendants of the vaccination initiative and securing the support.



ON 27TH APRIL, CASA VISITED THE TORNADO IMPACTED AREAS OF COOCHBEHAR I, WEST BENGAL.

Assessing the losses and suffering brought about by the disaster, the team identified 425 heavily affected families to be assisted with dry ration support including food and non-food items.

The team was extended surveillance support by Local Gram Panchayat and Community representatives.

Furthermore, a brief plan for immediate disaster response was shared with the community members in a meeting attended by village representatives and community leaders.

The relief reached the beneficiaries over a span of few weeks, ensuring that the harm caused by the catastrophe was lessened.

LOCAL CAPACITY FOR PEACE MEETING

A three day LCP meeting of the South Asian Regional Coordination Committee was organised in Nepal from 25 to 27 April.

Head of the Programme, CASA, Dr Jayant Kumar, was one of the participants invited to the meeting. Other participants included representatives from Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Myanmar.



VERSATILE LIVELIHOOD OPTIONS FOR THE CLIMATE-UNCERTAIN REGIONS



Two day training on Biofloc pisciculture (Fish farming) was conducted at Rupamari in Sundarbans on 27th and 28th June 2022.

The training focused on the practical methodology and latest technology in aquaculture. The concept of fish farming in artificial tank, infusing biosecurity and raising organic hormone-free fishes turned out to be a blessing for the cyclone and flood prone coastal areas and the regions with water scarcity, where fish farming was disturbed by natural calamities.

Even a marginal farmer with small land holding can opt for it, making biofloc pisciculture a robust livelihood option for the people living in disaster or minor-drought prone areas.

20 participants (11 female and 9 male) joined the training. 15 of these participants were the members of Peoples' Organisation, responsible for the development activities at CASA Rupamari.

MENSTRUAL HYGIENE- A BASIC RIGHT ABOVE NEEDS

According to UNICEF, 1.8 billion women menstruate each month, globally. This seems to be natural. With a lack of proper access to menstrual hygiene products and proper knowledge about this cycle, menstruation is an anomaly to many. Seen as a taboo even in the 21st century, menstruation is still a mystery for many, a natural, painful yet concealed mystery.

Menstrual Hygiene Day is celebrated on the 28th of May every year. To spread awareness and information surrounding menstruation, several project areas of CASA observed Menstrual Hygiene Day.

From the Sundarbans in West Bengal to the Champhai district of Mizoram, CASA's determination to focus on this social battle against menstrual taboo was put into action. On Menstrual Hygiene Day, volunteers and Health Officers educated groups of women on the importance of menstrual hygiene, health, and sanitation.

The know-how and the benefits of, usage, and disposal of sanitary napkins were discussed adequately. Activism against period taboos was also a topic that was heavily focused on. CASA encouraged the participating schools and women groups to contribute towards "making menstruation a common fact of life by 2030" which underlined the theme of the year. The observation was not limited to sensitising the women alone as men in the programme areas also joined in the awareness initiatives and pledged support.



A WAKE-UP CALL FOR ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

Under the greed to attain material convenience, humankind is the species that has damaged its natural environment the most. From trees to animals, the exploitation of nature has been in practice for a long time. Environmental consciousness is a responsibility of every human today more than ever.

With global warming at its worst, several climatic atrocities erupt as a response to the damage caused by us. Observation of World Environment Day necessitates awareness and activism which is crucial to make people understand the consequences awaiting us on the line.

World Environment Day 2022 marked 50 years since the Stockholm Conference in 1972. Reflecting the urgency of environmental sensitivity, Sweden, the host for the year, gave out the slogan "Only One Earth", with a focus on "living sustainably in harmony with nature".

CASA, in its consistent green initiative-centric approach, encouraged people to pledge to a sustainable lifestyle in all of its core programme areas. Advocating for the conservation of mother nature, CASA celebrated World Environment Day in 4 locations of the Rural Resource Centre, Bilaspur, Chattisgarh which collectively covers 70 villages. Taking appropriate steps towards recovering from the environmental damage that has

already been caused, community members, representing the villages, participated and planted nearly 1500 saplings of different varieties in their regions.

The Arangi Gram Panchayat of Gumla district in Jharkhand witnessed an awareness cum celebratory campaign on World Environment Day. Team CASA sensitized a group of 70 villagers and 50 School students on the Importance of World Environment day theme "Only One Earth". Following the necessary COVID-19 protocols, several green-campaign events were held. CASA conducted:

- An Awareness rally on World Environment day.
- Drawing competition among the School children.
- Distribution of 40 fruit-bearing plants to the Community members.

Such small steps are taken in hopes to meet the larger cause of replenishing the currently dented environmental state.

A MASSIVE DRIVE TO REPLENISH GREENERY WITH 30,000 SEED BALLS!



In Banswara, Rajasthan, CASA trained community members from 30 villages to prepare seed balls of 9 different seeds. Each village was handed over the responsibility to prepare a minimum of 1000 seed balls and collectively prepare a village map that highlights the placing points for the seed balls.



The plantation was done just before the rain starts. After 15 to 20 days of placing the seed balls, community members visited the places, as indicated on the map, to monitor the condition of the seed balls and witnessed the saplings rising with lush green heads above the soil.

The monsoon downpour brought in a fresh flow of happiness as the communities feel proud to be raising a green premise that passes a legacy of caring for nature to the upcoming several generations.



► Pics: "Sowing the seeds of change! Villagers in Banswara, Rajasthan, trained by CASA, preparing seed balls to help restore degraded land and promote biodiversity."

PLEASED TO PROCEED



In the Jogeshganj Gram Panchayat of the North 24 Parganas in West Bengal, micro level preparation for honing and implementing the Child Centered Disaster Risk Reduction "mitigation plan" had begun.

The gradual progress in the CCDRR plan ensured that the consideration of all key vulnerabilities of the children, in and around the disaster-prone regions, finally give way to fostering a more climate-resilient generation.

WORKSHOP ON "TRANSFORMATIVE MASCULINITIES"

CASA conducted a three-day workshop on "Transformative Masculinities" between May 10th and 13th through 20 male staff in Gumla, Jharkhand. It was a follow-up on the first session conducted in September 2021. The interactive, self-reflective and inclusive training cum workshop was facilitated by Men Against Violence and Abuse (against women), MAVA, a premier organization that actively involves boys and men towards making gender equality a reality in India since 1993.

It involved:

1. Exploring pre-conditioned perspectives on gender and sexuality to deconstruct them with a factual, feminist perspective.
2. Viewing gender in all contexts from a non-toxic, non-patriarchal point of view to shape the transformed male gaze.
3. Understanding the good practices that could promote gender equality.
4. Addressing sexual harassment at workplace, gender-based violence, verbal abuse and it's use.

5. Understanding power dynamics and privileges of men in patriarchal societies.
6. Experiential sharing, discussing masculinity and men's health through educational & interactive games.

With these learnings, the male staff undertook the responsibility to introduce transformative masculinities to 10 male youth each within CASA's programme areas and direct them to educate villages and communities on the same.





VERSATILE LIVELIHOOD OPTIONS FOR THE CLIMATE-UNCERTAIN REGIONS

The diverse landscape and specific climate sensitivity of India have made it one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world. Catastrophes not only threaten the lives of the people inhabiting the region of vulnerability but also injure their properties and livelihood. To revive livelihood avenues for the population which has been gravely

impacted by the devastating cyclones such as Aila, Bulbul, Amphan and Yaas in the Rupamari region of Sundarbans, West Bengal, CASA conducted a 2-day training on Biofloc pisciculture (Fish farming) at Rupamari in Sundarbans on 27th and 28th June 2022.

The 1st day of the training took place at the CASA Rupamari office and the 2nd day was a visit to Basirhat to see the Bio floc demo site where the participants learn many aspects of its practical methodology on biofloc fish farming.

The training focused on the practical methodology and latest technology in aquaculture. Due to floods, the salt water from the sea inundates freshwater fish ponds and imposes a heavy loss on the

fish farmers. The concept of fish farming in artificial tanks adds biosecurity in terms of mitigating the losses where traditional aquaculture fails. The concept of fish farming in artificial tanks, infusing biosecurity, and raising organic hormone-free fishes with high-density production in limited space to traditional pond systems can be a blessing for cyclone or flood-prone coastal areas. Such advanced aquaculture can also benefit farmers in regions with water scarcity.

Dipayan Chatterji, an aquaculture consultant, assisted CASA in this attempt to provide versatile livelihood options and food security to the residents of climate-uncertain regions. A marginal farmer with small land holdings can also opt for biofloc pisciculture, making it a robust livelihood option for the people living in disaster or minor-drought-prone areas. Such versatility and flexibility of livelihood options provide means of recovery to deprived populations in the wake of catastrophic and grave climate events

A total of 20 participants (11 female and 9 male) joined the training. 15 of these participants are members of the People's Organisation, responsible for the development activities at CASA Rupamari. Such skill and resource training can aid the vulnerability and stresses of people who count their days in uncertainty post major calamities.





SUPPORTING THE ONES OVERLOOKED

Most people in their old age face brutal abandonment and a lack of dignified attention.

People who once were the breadwinners and constant support system for raising a family start getting treated as weak and a burden, incapable of contributing to the family once they reach an age of retirement and rest.

Once an asset gets perceived as a liability. At such an age where any human demands the most attention, both physically and emotionally, the loss of family or house can have a prominent impact on overall health. For the elderly who suffer sheer mistreatment in the place which was once their abode and get forsaken by people who once counted on them for their own lives, old age homes become the only place to hide their heads.

CASA, as an organization, has always been sensitive towards the suffering of people- young or adults or the elderly. In Chhattisgarh, on the occasion of Independence Day, CASA visited old-age homes Mana camp Kuldeep Nigam Vridha Ashram, Sanjeevani Ashram and Anand Ashram to lend emotional and material support to the people residing there.

Dry ration and utensils were distributed to 18 beneficiaries from Mana camp Kuldeep Nigam Vridha Ashram, 28 beneficiaries were from Sanjeevani Ashram and 38 beneficiaries were from Anand Ashram. The support provision took place on 15th and 16th August 2022. The elderly were overwhelmed to have young volunteers keeping their company and extending support that underlined a sense of compassion and care.



LOCAL CAPACITY FOR PEACE (LCP)

Youth Mentors Action Learning Workshop Local Capacity for Peace (LCP) Youth Mentors Action learning workshop is in progress at the Hope Foundation, Bangladesh. 22 youth mentors from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal are participating in the workshop that spans from 13-15 July 2022

Here's a glimpse from the ground where Suresh



Satapathy, the chief coordinator for LCP SOUTH ASIA network, and organiser of the program, could be seen addressing the participants and highlighting the objectives and road map of the action learning workshop.

FOOD TO SUSTAIN THE ONES IN DISTRESS

69 per cent of under-five deaths in India happen due to malnutrition. India ranks 101 out of the 116 countries on the Global Hunger Index, indicating serious levels of hunger in the country. The first wealth is health and good food is mandatory to maintain it. Emphasising the importance of nutrition and raising awareness of people on the value of healthy eating habits, India observes National Nutrition Week from September 1st to 7th every year.

The theme for 2022, "Celebrate a World of Flavors", recognized and emphasized the taste-based significance and benefits of food. As an organization that prioritizes food security and meets the nutrition needs of people in distress, CASA understands the diverse role that food plays in each and every life and the value it has, including that of taste. Well-cooked sumptuous meals are synonymous with satisfaction. Food symbolizes care, affection and security. Food relates to happiness, energy, power and health at large.



Be it the satisfaction brought by the local staple on your palette, or the cravings for aromatic spice, the significance of the taste and aroma of food is undisputed.

The promotion of kitchen gardens, nutrition support to the disaster-hit population, training on fish farming, preservation of traditional grains, seed banks, organic farming of millets, raising of nutrient-rich mushrooms, cooked meals assistance in flood-impacted areas and midday meal for children in Bridge schools are some of the initiatives that CASA has taken in the direction of establishing food security in the lives of the marginalised population.

Nutrition is not only a basic need but also a right. National nutrition week is celebrated in India to recognize the importance of healthy and quality dietary hygiene. To take this message to the rural corridors of the county, CASA celebrated National Nutrition Week in the villages of Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand.



In Maharashtra, alongside an awareness campaign on a balanced diet, certain local strains of organic seeds and neem manure were distributed among the beneficiaries, under the UMCOR COVID-19 and FSMRP Beed programs. In Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, CASA promoted the concept of a nutrition garden or kitchen garden in 25 villages, where 1250 people from 325 families, including children, women, men, Anganwadi workers, youth and panchayat representatives attended the awareness program to work on self-sufficiency and improving health. In Jharkhand, CASA distributed food materials among 137 families who belong to the deprived sections.

CASA also visited schools that serve mid-day meals and raised the awareness of school-going children on the importance of protein, vitamins and minerals in their everyday diet. The children also learned about the food sources that can provide them with essential nourishment. CASA collaborated with Vanchiton ka Sansad, a People's Organization in the Korba district of Chhattisgarh and women from the local Anganwadi to spread awareness on nutrition, especially during the menstrual cycle and pubescent age. The session also emphasised the issue of anaemia in pubescent girls and pregnant women. The session also educated the participants on how to schedule vaccination for expecting women.



CASA RELIEF RESPONSE IN DIMA HASAO/HAF LONG DISTRICT ASSAM



Torrential rain and landslides in the past few weeks have eroded sections of roads and railway tracks in Dima Hasao district affecting thousands of people's life connectivity to the rest of the state. Three people including a woman died in landslide incidents. The local people stated that the most affected areas are Mahur, Maibang, Jatinga areas of Dima Hasao district Assam have never experienced such horrible situations in the past ten decades.

The number of people affected are more than the reported and the number will keep on increasing in the days to come. The condition is worsening as the torrential rain continues and it is creating havoc among the people. Apart from human lives and loss of livelihood there is a total cut in the road and rail connectivity for more than a month. Due to the heavy rains over the past few days, sections of the roads and railway tracks in Dima Hasao district have been eroded affecting road and rail connectivity to the Barak Valley Region.

The situation will bring more difficulties and suffering to the people in the days to come, especially in the rural areas. Despite the best efforts of the government many rural roads remain cut off since 13th May 2022 till end June '22.

Many PHE water supply pipes were thrown out of function which makes the water supply impossible for urban areas as well as rural areas. Many villages relief were airlifted initially but now that has stop. Many roads require 4x4 vehicles to reach the villages which were recently open with the help of volunteers and JCBs. But still many villages were cut off and part from the dwelling houses destruction many paddy fields including Jhums field in the Dima Hasao District. This is just the beginning as the usual furry monsoon is approaching the district which normally received heavy monsoon rains in a year make people worry and fear of returning to their homes from relief camps and return to normal life.

Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA) directly implemented with the emergency relief response plan for the affected families/ victims of flood and landslides in Dima Hasao district.

As of 5th July'22 CASA have distributed dry ration set of rice 25 kgs, Dal 2 kgs, Mustard oil 1 lit and salt 1 kg each to 286 families and GCI sheet two bundles each to 35 families.

So many villagers have not only lost their house but also their whole plot has been washed away by



landslide. They are in confused now where to go and what to do, besides the loss of houses, plots and struggling for day today meal, children education is going to be a big challenges for the victims' families.

State Government of Assam had given dry ration relief but it was exhausted meanwhile CASA coming and extending relief is a great help which will be last for about 20 days, beneficiaries had expressed their profound thanks and happiness to CASA .

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY TO GET THE REMOTE PREMISES VACCINATED



COVID-19 has been one of the most disastrous periods for the global community. To recover from this pervading curse, mankind had to leverage social distancing and increased vaccination rates. Despite all the best efforts on the part of governments, leaders and influences, a huge section of the society: some misguided, and some not privileged enough, were deprived of the information that essentially compromised their basic human rights of Healthcare.

The remote premises of rural areas in Manipur were seriously prone to the fast spreading of misinformation. Their inaccessible geography intensified the propagation of such darkness. To battle the misinformation and lead the minds of the residents to the light, CASA, one of John Snow India's empaneled organization working on *MOMENTUM Routine Immunization Transformation and Equity*, a project funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), began operating on raising COVID-19 vaccination rates in four districts of Manipur: Kamjong, Kangpokpi, Senapati and Ukhrul districts. The program continued from mid-March till July, targeting the core of the hilly regions of Manipur where misconceptions fired a vaccination-averse attitude among the residents.

CHALLENGES TACKLED BY TEAM CASA UNDER THE VACCINATION PROGRAM

The rugged terrain of the hilly districts of Manipur raised the difficulty that one faces in reaching and travelling through them, resulting in much lower vaccination numbers than those recorded in the plain region. The State has vaccinated more than 50% of the eligible adult population.

People were not willing to come forward due to confusion created in their minds through social media, religious faiths, lack of infrastructure and Human Resources, ineffectiveness among people with co-morbidity, and the population being busy with agricultural activities.

District teams set up a communication chain with the remote places that were hard to reach, making it easier to create programs for awareness and vaccination camps even at border areas of Myanmar. By adopting the idea of Door to Door vaccinations CASA made sure that every individual gets the opportunity to access correct information and get vaccinated.

CASA assisted the mainstream health department in the hilly districts for mobilization, demand generation, capacity building of potential frontline leaders and community leaders, assistance to medical teams for vaccination drives including mobile vaccination, provision of mobility support to physically challenged and elderly citizens for COVID vaccination, development of "Information, Education and Communication" (IEC) materials for spreading awareness about the benefits of the vaccination and setting up of the communication systems at the village level for effective dissemination of information regarding the program.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Under the MOMENTUM Routine Immunization Transformation and Equity Project, CASA in Manipur undertook various initiatives to generate demand for vaccination, mobilize various organizational platforms, government institutions, Church institutions and engage in direct consultations with village chiefs and chairmen in the hills.

State Level Review Meeting:



In addition to the State Level Orientation Meeting in the mid-march during the kick-off of the project, another State Level Meeting was held on 2nd May 2022 at CASA State Office with all the District Coordinators and animators. Each district made a presentation on the activities and achievements in the respective district. The State Team reviewed and shared the further steps to be undertaken to improve the demand generation and vaccination rate in the four districts.

District Level Review and Planning Meeting:



District level review and planning meeting was held with all the stakeholders of the Senapati district at the Deputy Commissioner office on the 2nd of June 2022. There was a long discussion done on the Har Ghar



dastak 2.0, the status of vaccination in the district compared to routine immunization as well as the hardship on vaccinating students in the district schools (private and government administered schools). Meeting was also conducted at Kamjong along with the partner organization SELCO Foundation team cross reviewing its progress and strategy for the months ahead on the 16th of June.

District level planning meeting was held at Kangpokpi CMO office. A discussion was also done on the matter of the realistic approach to the district target and what steps has she taken to rectify it.

Similar meeting was held along with the visit of JSI state team as well as CASA team where discussion was done on strategizing and planning for greater mobilization in the district on the 9th of June.

Consultation of church leaders & interfaith at district level and civil organizations

The role of Church institution and its leaders is significant in the hill districts as the residents are 95 percent Christians. The words of the pastors, evangelists or preachers, therefore, carry a significant weightage in the people's decision making whether or not to get the vaccination. Recently, some church leaders have spoken against vaccination by linking the COVID vaccine with various anti-Christian elements, which consequently there was huge resistance from people.



To clarify the myth and misunderstanding the CASA Team approached various Church Organizations and Churches for clarifying the misunderstandings from public narratives. Some of the para-church organizations include Manipur Baptist Convention, Tangkhul Baptist Church Association, Tangkhul Naga Baptist Churches, Poumai Naga Baptist Association, Maram Naga Baptist Association, Thangal Naga Baptist Association, Kuki Baptist Convention, Khoken Catholic Church; and some Civil Society Organizations and partner NGOs include DACO (District AIDS control officer), PRORURAL, AAMYA, CARE Ukhrul, Ngariching Living Centre, PASDO, Laii Students Organisations, Chingmai Khullen and Khunou Student's Organisation, KSO, etc.

Village Planning and Review Meeting:







Village planning and review meetings have been the cornerstone in mobilization and demand generation for COVID vaccination throughout the four districts. There are certain set of village systems where we cannot just bypass the practice. The people of these villages are from tribal communities Any organization to organize a program in the village has to have the approval from the village which applies the same for door-to-door vaccination or awareness programs.

Therefore, getting the support from the chief of the village and village authorities is paramount. Almost all the village chiefs were supportive of the CASA team for mobilization or vaccination in the program.

Setting up Communication systems at District and Village Level:

The popular communication methods adopted by CASA Manipur consisted of Interpersonal communication (1-1 communication, 1-group communication), IEC materials-banners, and billboards, posters, Telephonic calls and Miking at the villages. Miking is considered as the major source of reaching vast number of people in the village as well as a great tool to spread of the activities for people in and around the vicinity during our vaccination programs.

COMMUNICATION & ADVOCACY		126308
	Mid Media (miking)	80847
	IPC	32774
	Mobile & Telephonic	12617
	Hard Print Outs (banners, posters)	70



VACCINATION CAMPS

We have also been successful in establishing vaccination camps in the interior parts of the four districts where PHC's are non-existent and non-functional. We have done so with the help of M.O in-charge for the districts. During the Health Melas organized by the Manipur Government, CASA Team has actively assisted in establishing Vaccination Camps in all the districts by providing mobility support to the medical staff, supplying vaccines to the camps, and hiring vaccinators due to shortage of vaccinators in the PHCs/CHCs.

Vaccination camps were organized at border areas with Myanmar where medical facilities are almost non-existent, Centres for Persons with Disability, Schools and colleges and interior villages. CASA Team has established as well supported various COVID Vaccination Centre(CVC) in all the four districts for vaccination:



795
COVID-19
VACCINATION
CENTRE

Established
CVC
276

Supported
CVC
519

IN
4
DISTRICTS

UKHRUL | SENAPATI
KANGPOKPI | KAMJONG

PIC CAPTIONS:

(Top) Awareness cum Vaccination Camp at Ramlong village, Senapati district.

(Middle) Mr. Kunal Shrestha, studying in standard VI at Roses Eng. School, Kanglatombi;

(Bottom) Mr. Paokhohen Haokip, 80 years of Luwangsangol Village got his first dose



The poor road condition to the villages, where the roads are extremely muddy and slippery due to monsoon rainfall, was a big hurdle in door-to-door vaccination. Many a time, vehicles broke down in the middle of the journey leaving the vaccination team stranded for many hours. In Spite of all the challenges, through this program a good number of beneficiaries was received. The people also expressed their appreciation for the service provided right at their door.

Some of the experiences during the door-to-door program include

- "How much does the government pay you to get any of us vaccinated? I won't get vaccinated, but let me pay you. Tell me how much they pay you?"
- "Whether vaccinated or unvaccinated, everything goes on normally. They said they don't want to inject any vaccines/chemicals into their bodies".
- "The government does not stress much on the necessity of covid vaccination nowadays as it was in the couple of months back. Thus, the unvaccinated ones argued that even when the government doesn't give priority as the situation is normal, why should the citizens be concerned about it!"

DOOR TO DOOR AWARENESS AND VACCINATION DRIVE

Door-to-Door Awareness and vaccination programs were conducted in all the districts. Given the fact that the majority of the populace is based in the villages as they are primarily engaged in agriculture, this was the best mechanism to wide people's coverage. Door-to-door visit is extremely time and energy consuming, not to mention the resources, however, this gives us the platform to reach out to all sections of society-from the youngest to the oldest.



PIC CAPTIONS:

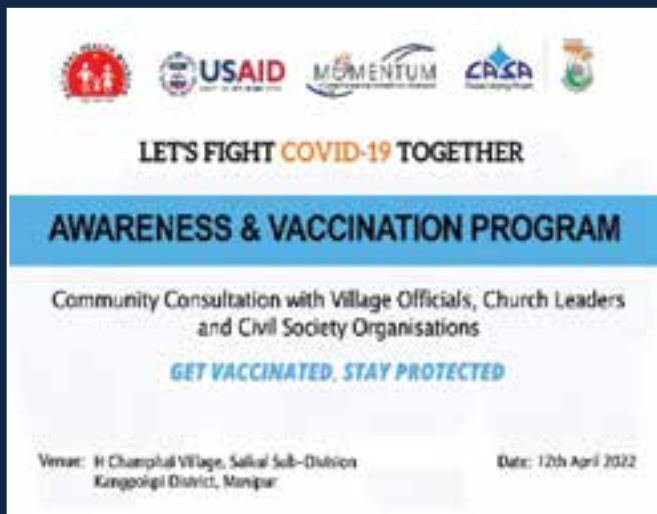
(Top) Door-to-door vaccination program at Khamasom Phungdhar, Ukhurul

(Left) Vehicle broke down during door-to-door visit at Kamjong

(Right); Door-to-door Vaccination at Kangpokpi



IEC MATERIALS



IEC Materials in the form of banners and posters are designed and printed in order to reach more people at the district level. Banners are confined to vaccination

and awareness campaign hosted by the staff whereas posters are used in public places accordingly.

Special banners were printed for World Health Day, World Environment Day and likewise. With the addition of our focus to reach people with disabilities, we have created a banner solely to target the community as well.

Altogether, we have printed 70 IEC materials for the entire project till date.



VOLUNTEERS

Presently, we have 10 part-time volunteers and 3 full time working volunteers at Senapati district. This is because of the hardship in terrain especially with the monsoon that has deprived us of the availability of mobility to reach to the inner villages of the district where the distance is stretched and the road not suitable for public transport. Our district team has set up a communication chain with them in order to create an awareness and vaccination program. This has ensured our ground coverage to different villages in the district at the same time and in return, they are rewarded in kind during our visits.

ASHA/AWW AND OTHER COMMUNITY LEADERS CAPACITY BUILDING

ASHA/AWW workers have been the constant support for the team in all the districts from data gathering to vaccination and follow up. The team are in cooperating with them in their respective blocks so as to maximize its reach and cover. they are the right people to contact as they are aware of who exactly in the village have been vaccinated or not, and they have all the data for their same.

CASA has facilitated in capacity building for 230 ASHA/AWWs in the districts.



MOBILE VACCINATION

Due to the shortage of vaccinators in the PHCs/CHCs, Team CASA had no option but to hire a freelance vaccinator so that the team of volunteers could carry out the vaccination in different villages. However, the expenses incurred for mobile vaccination were huge, and the result has been quite satisfactory and up to the standards estimated. As the freelance vaccinators were more flexible in schedule, compared to the government-appointed ANM, it was possible for the team to leave early in the morning and get the villagers vaccinated before they left for the fields. The time efficiency of the campaign, thereby, enhanced the number of vaccination.



COVERAGE OF VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

CASA made the best of its efforts to keep the vaccination process inclusive. The pandemic has impacted the population irrespective of the differences in human society. It does not consider the categorizations. However, for various reasons, several sections of the population were left out of receiving the benefits from the implementation of government policy and programs, and for some reasons, they also didn't come out to get the vaccination.

CASA Team Manipur tried it best to reach out to the vulnerable population:

Vulnerable Population	Number of Vaccination
Pregnant/Lactating women	16
Drug Addicts	100
Migrants	27
Co-morbidities	214
Physically challenged	10
Transgender/ LGBT	01
Border Villages	72
Construction Workers	3
People without ID cards	11
Refugees	4
NREGA/Daily wage Laborer	532
Adolescent girls (15-18)	7439
Female Sex Worker	6
School Children (12-14yrs & 15-17 yrs.)	7568
Orphanage Children	49



16052
PEOPLE REAHCED



CASA VACCINATION ACHIEVEMENT

	Total Vaccination Coverage till 31 July	Districts Vaccination Coverage as per COWIN Portal (from the onboarding of Sub-Awardee till 30 th of July)	% of Sub-Awardee contribution to District's Vaccination Coverage since the onboarding.
CASA-Kamjong	2906	3382	86%
CASA-Kangpokpi	2906	3382	61.4%
CASA-Senapati	3746	16546	53.2%
CASA-Ukhrul	6408	16546	38.8%
CASA-Grand Total	20813	39598	52.6%

CONCLUSION

CASA in Manipur has contributed and assisted the district health departments in all possible capacities in four districts of Manipur- Kamjong, Kangpokpi, Senapati and Ukhrul, especially in mobilization, demand generation and vaccination since March 2022 till July, 2022. Very close to 21,000 got vaccinated during this 1st phase of the project, however, a huge segment of the

population in the districts remain very skeptical and hesitant with respect to COVID vaccination. Mobilization and demand generation programs were organized at different villages and schools in all the districts. Door-to-door vaccination programs were conducted at the village level, which enabled the delivery of the service right at the beneficiaries' doorsteps. The vaccination process covered all the people of all the age groups and vulnerable populations. CASA Manipur has contributed 52.6 percentage of the total vaccination in Kamjong, Kangpokpi, Senapati and Ukhrul districts.



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