

# CASA in Action

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



**DISASTER READY**

Preparing the future  
*LINE OF DEFENCE*



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*Disaster Ready  
The children of First Aid team  
pose for a photograph in  
Astaranga block*

CASA is registered under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860, and with the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Government of India under the Foreign Contributions Regulation act. Donations to church's auxiliary for social action are exempted from Income Tax under Section 80-G.

Printed & published by:  
church's auxiliary for social action  
4th floor, rachna building, 2 rajendra place,  
New Delhi - 110008 | website: www.casa-india.org  
CASA is a member of **actalliance**

**CASA in Action**

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Volume - 130 Issue - 2/2019 April-June 2019

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# EDITORIAL

“Are you prepared enough at the time of a disaster?” is a question for which you might casually answer yes. However, in reality it takes a lot more technique and skills to combat such a situation. The unpredictable nature of calamities brings forth the importance of the project launched by CASA ‘Strengthening Disaster Risk Management’. To fight a calamity, one must be aware and that is what CASA is working upon. Awareness is a pre-requisite to the various steps of disaster mitigation.

Sixty kilometres East of Puri, Block Astaranga - true to its name - explodes in many shades of orange every evening. This ethereal dream-like sunset attracts many tourists from across the country; almost like an illusion that all is well in the paradise. A closer look into the lives of the people residing in the coastal block perhaps gives a clearer picture. Super Cyclone, Phailin, Titli and now Fani - four most devastating cyclones passed right through the coastline of Astaranga Block, counting it as one of ‘Very High’ vulnerable areas.

Odisha is known majorly for continuously being hit by cyclones and floods throughout the year. The state was hit by 110 cyclones between the years, 1891 and 2018, in which the children were affected the most because of the unawareness. This edition of the newsletter focuses on issues around children and the youth primarily because they are the second line of generation who have to look after the well-being of the community.

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# PARTS OF INDIA REELING UNDER SEVERE FLOODS

Over 200 people have lost their lives in recent floods across India. Flood situation in **Kerala, Assam, Maharashtra** remains critical due to incessant rain.



## DONATE NOW

### FLOOD SITUATION

- **KERALA**  
Landslide hit Kavalappara and Puthumala villages in Malappuram and Wayanad districts are among worse affected area. Over 80 people were missing since August 8, 2019.
- **ASSAM**  
Out of total 33 district in Assam 30 districts have been badly affected due to flood.
- **MAHARASHTRA**  
Over 4.48 lakh people were evacuated from flood-hit area and shifted to temporary shelters. 761 villages in 69 Talukas have been affected by floods.

### YOUR SUPPORT WILL PROVIDE RELIEF TO MORE PEOPLE

Sanitation and Hygiene Kits and Non-Food Items (Utensils, clothes, Blankets)



Dry Ration for the affected families

Repair of damaged houses



### WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT

- Rs. 15,000 - To provide relief for 5 families.
- Rs. 9,000 - To provide relief for 3 families.
- Rs. 3,000 - To provide relief for 1 family.

### Yes, I would like to contribute for the flood affected people.

INR 15,000/- for 5 families  INR 9,000/- for 3 families  INR 3,000/- for 1 families  Other INR.....

I would like my contribution to be acknowledged as:

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Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_ Full Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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**World Day  
Against  
Child Labour  
June 12**

Yearning for maternal care, children like Surajini and Lalitha are forced to take up the burden of work at a really tender age. Amidst all the challenges they face, they continue to strive for a better future.



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## FORCED TO GROW UP TOO SOON

**O**n most days, Surajni (15) fills her mother's shoes to look after her younger brother. She chases away Kapil's frequent nightmares after their parents migrated from West Bengal to Kerala in search of work. Down south in a hamlet in Andhra Pradesh, the scars on the palms of Lalitha (16) are a constant reminder of her mother's absence. Working in a cotton field was "the last thing amma would have wanted" for her.

Child workers in Indian rural settings have reduced from 11 million to 8 million between 2001 and 2011, as per previous Census reports. However, agriculture remains one of the major sectors that employ children.

Surajni and Kapil have been living with their aunt and uncle who have become their legal guardians. "My Maa and Baba worked in the nearby Lankapara tea gardens (in Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal). Ever since its shutdown, they moved away so as to provide for us. Uncle tells us they might return anytime soon but his words have started to feel like false hope," says Surajini. In the midst of the distant sound of drums and the tunes of songs of the Oraon tribe early in the morning – Surajni and Kapil wish they could walk to school holding their baba's hand.

Even though geographically separated, the ordeal of Surajini and Lalitha narrate a similar plight that motherless children are forced to face in India.

Lalitha joined cotton plucking work when her mother succumbed to injuries following a mishap. "I was taken in by my aunt because



my step-mother would disapprove of my schooling. Soon, I joined work at a cotton field to support my aunt financially. The burden was such that I had to leave my education mid-way."

Constantly harrowed by her employers in the blistering heat of Krishna district, Lalitha too gave in to the pressure and left work. "I would often feel dizzy and sick because of the work, the pain...it felt like it would last for a lifetime. I would cry for hours because I felt so helpless," she recalls, painting a grim picture of her time as an agricultural worker.

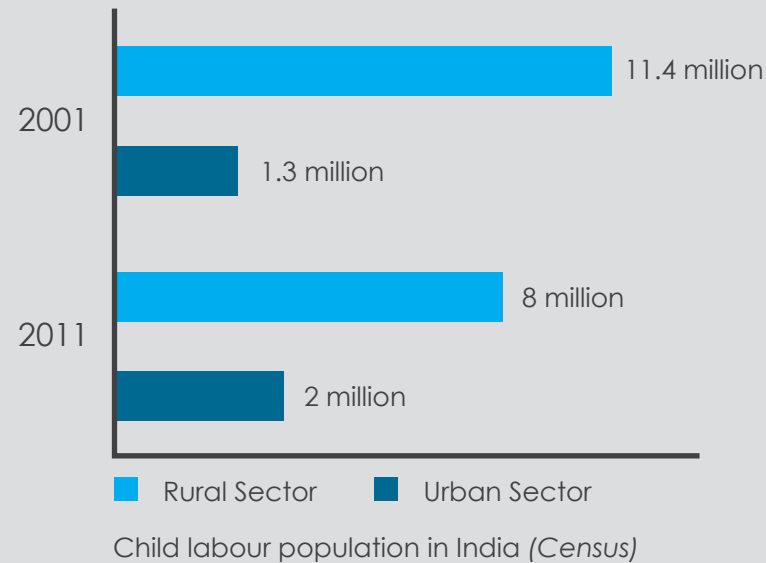
According to a report by UNICEF published on 28th July 2016, Out Of School Children (OOSC) and those children at risk of dropping out can easily be drawn into work and are more vulnerable to exploitation. Girls, especially those from socially disadvantaged groups, tend to be at a higher risk of being forced into work.

Her mother's absence often intensified Lalitha's pain as she yearned for maternal care. "I know amma is



*Consent was taken from the guardians of the children for their photographs*





**32.9%**  
of total child labour  
comes from the  
**agricultural sector**  
involving  
**3.3 million**  
children



always watching over me. If she were still alive, working at a cotton field would be the last thing she would have wanted for me," says Lalitha.

However all hope isn't lost for them. CASA's Bridge School programme took her in as a mere seventh grader and gave her another chance to pursue her education. "I was one of the fortunate ones and felt so grateful to be able to go back to school. I know I can't have my amma back but her memory drives me to do better," Lalitha, who recently sat for her 10th boards says.

Surajini's determination is similar to Lalitha's. For her, CASA and its partners in West Bengal seemed like a blessing. Working for proper rehabilitation of the kids that were left stranded after the tea gardens in the state were abandoned – they have managed to save numerous kids from the horrors of illicit trafficking and arduous agricultural labour.

The economic and social struggle compels many girls to give up their dreams but Surajani has managed to keep the zeal in her heart alive. "I'd be a teacher one day. It was my mother's dream and there is nothing in this world that would provide me more happiness than fulfilling her wishes," the ninth-grader says cheerfully.

While many children in tea gardens are preys to exploitative employers in the closed tea gardens of west bengal, Lalitha says that in her Krishna district "there are many more girls and minors" like her who are majorly hired for their short heights as they are more useful when it comes to plucking cotton in the fields. Children are more prone to manipulation and intimidation. Those coming from low-income families end up becoming easy targets.

With a huge part of their childhood been ripped apart from them, Surajni and Lalitha - both are united by their whirlwind of situations and have nobody to root for their future but themselves. Amidst the dark clouds, they are determined to -strive, struggle and succeed.■



To be or not to be, Tuisem might have asked himself a similar question, standing on the threshold of choosing one between wisdom and employment. CASA Manipur partner AWID paved a way for him to embrace both, together.

## KEEPING THE CULTURE ALIVE

When most of the pottery makers were shifting from the traditional culture of pottery making to the technologically advanced and easier methods, T. Tuisem decided to stick with his roots and carry forward the wisdom that he was passed on by his forefathers.

"It is an intensive exercise, hunting for the leaves in the jungle, bringing them to use - using it in itself is a tiring process but given its properties, it is worth it", says T. Tuisem, upon the use of 'Kuhi' (Pasania pachyphyla) leaf which is exclusively used in the traditional art form of pottery making. The leaf is known for its properties of producing wax and vines.

The ancient art of Blackstone pottery (Nungbi pottery) making has originated from two Nungbi villages in Manipur, namely Nungbi Khullen and Nungbi Kajui near Ukhrul district of Manipur. It is predominantly practised by the Tangkhul Naga tribe, residing in the hill district of Manipur. It is made from a mixed paste of ground black serpentine stone and special brown clay which is found only in Longpi village. According to a GSI report the serpentinite rock found at Nungbi village is best for making ceramics clay pots.

"The pots are manually shaped, polished and sun-dried, we collect the products and heat them in a bonfire which takes a total of six days to be completed. The craft requires a high degree of skill and attention", says Tuisem, explaining the process and perseverance it takes to make a single pot using the traditional methods.



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“

The pots are manually shaped, polished and sun-dried, we collect the products and heat them in a bonfire which takes a total of six days to be completed. The craft requires a high degree of skill and attention

Nungbi pottery is famous for the use of manual methods like hand shaping and moulds, instead of using the potter's wheel and is necessarily used in performing rituals on festive occasions like childbirth and marriage.

What makes T. Tuisem different from other potters is the use of the leaf 'Kuhi'. "In order to fill the pores and make the pot smooth and shiny, the red-hot pots, directly out of the furnace, are rubbed with the leaf inside-out. Most of the potters avoid using the leaf because it is an intensive exercise, rubbing the hot pot can affect the body and there are chances of burning the hands if one is not careful", explains Tuisem, who doesn't find it tedious and has become an expert in the craft with regular practice.

Given that there is no use of chemicals, machines or wheel in the standard making of pottery, it's hygienic and is also known to prevent morning sickness in pregnant women.

"It was not easy to continue in the profession with many people opting for facile methods with faster delivery rates", says Tuisem. In the light of big automatic pottery machines, his way of manual art of making pottery was threatened. In the midst of the chaos, lack of livelihood and not enough opportunities to explore his own art form, he was losing hope.

**In olden days, before the emergence of aluminium and steel utensils, people from all over the Tangkhul community were believed to have solely depended on Nungbi pottery for their daily use. Even today the Tangkhuls nurture a belief that meat cooked in earthen Longpi pots taste better; this conviction is substantiated by the fact that most households in Ukhul district have earthen Nungbi pots among their other kitchenwares.**

Unavailability of suitable clays, the custom of producing pots only during season when there is less rain, the tedious work of firing Tangkhul pottery are some other factors causing hindrance to the tradition of pottery-making. Without proper guidance and financial assistance, it became hard for Tuisem to sustain in the profession

It was with the joint support of CASA and Action of Women in Development (AWID) that he could "keep on practising the traditional art of pottery making". He could not only use his craft to sustain but also got a chance to explore his artistic freedom. AWID recognised his expertise in the art and entrusted him with the prospect of making big.

**The distinctive Tangkhul Blackstone pots made in Nungbi village serve dual purpose. They are used as crockery items as well as decoration pieces. They offer a variety of pottery wares, utensils such as cups, bowls, jug, food container, food plate, kettle,**

**beer mug, and decorative items like flower vase, designed urn etc in different sizes and shapes**

Tuisem's pottery has become famous worldwide and he gets invited for seminars to demonstrate his established skills to the younger generations. He has become a master trainer and teaches many students all over the country.

In the Hornbill Festival, held in Kohima, Nagaland every year, where it is too difficult to acquire space and time for the demonstration of products, Tuisem every year holds an exhibition of his pottery and achieve good sale.

Tuisem's admiration towards the craft and ambition of carrying forward the legacy of his ancestors along with the support from CASA and AWID has made him what he is today. ■

“ It is an intensive exercise, hunting for the leaves in the jungle, bringing them to use - using it in itself is a tiring process but given its properties, it is worth it ”







The popular myth that women are caring and responsible has unwittingly appointed women the caretaker of not only the household but also farm and livestock.



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## WHERE ARE THE WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE?

Worldwide a trend has been witnessed where women work on farm land without ownership over their own land. This trend has been witnessed in more than 90 countries. Their engagement in farm sector vary from sowing, weeding, harvesting, processing, packaging and other work related to agriculture and related fields.

According to Oxfam (2013), around 80 per cent of farm work is undertaken by women in India. However, they own only 13 per cent of the land. The popular myth that women are caring and responsible has unwittingly

appointed women the caretaker of not only household but also farm and livestock.

The lack of recognition and absence of land rights to women farmers has resulted in denial of due entitlements to women and also led to lack of access to credit from financial institutions, loan and insurance from banks and cooperatives.

This has led to the critical revisiting of what do we understand by farmers? Are we recognising women as farmers? A proper understanding of gender relation in agriculture is crucially dependent on rethinking of our social concepts about men

and women. This can be done by recognising that men are not just farmers but also husband and father. Similarly, women's identities are not just confined to wife and mother but also as a farmer.

In 2011, an effort has been made by agricultural scientist, M S Swaminathan when he proposed the 'Women Farmers Entitlement Bill' as a Rajya Sabha member. The bill at that time was proposed to address the issue of recognising women as farmers but had lapsed in 2013. With increasing feminisation of agriculture and the need of giving proper recognition to the contribution of women in agriculture, it is time that such legislations and institutional reforms in agriculture are addressed to empower women with due rights and entitlements.

There are a number of factors which limit women in exercising their legal rights including, village exogamy, opposition to mobility from men, social norms, social pressure,

**80%**

of farmwork is undertaken by women in India

But only **13%** of the land is owned by women



traditionally institutionalised gender roles, low female literacy and awareness, male dominance in administrative, judicial, and other public decision-making bodies at all levels. After marriage, women are not expected to exercise her right over the land. After her marriage land's title are mostly in husband's name. So, she is nowhere in the picture. Lands are generally inherited from men to men.

However, issues related to land 'ownership, accessibility to entitlements and control, access to credit, farm equipment, subsidies, loan and loan waivers and market are important challenges affecting the economic empowerment of women in agriculture. So, in spite of the fact that she is cultivating her own land, she will remain as agriculture labor in govt record. There are several schemes nowadays announced by govt for the benefit of small and marginal farmers who own small land. Women in the absence of land title in her name cannot gain access to the schemes and thus are at loss. In recent times, male migration to nearby cities and towns has increased resulting in increased burden on women to take care of families and farm at the same time. We need to understand the consequences of this changing scenario on the empowerment of women.

The issue of ensuring recognition

of women farmers is not new and has been raised in the past by various farmers groups as well as civil society sectors. In the various five years plans since late 90s, govt has proposed various provisions and laws have been amended to make women at par with men. But the picture is different on the ground. The decisions regarding rights over family land is taken by strong societal norms which are strongly ingrained and not by legal provisions and legislations. Also, many women are not aware of the provisions in the laws to safeguard their interest.

Gender insensitive practices and system in the institutions further aggravates the problem. As most of our agriculture practices are male centric and don't consider women as farmers. Majority of machines are designed for men and are too heavy for women to handle. Absence of women in Mandis and their committees further sideline the role of women. The current agricultural distress makes it difficult for women to compete with men. The societal norms of men as a farmer and women as helper further asserts the perception towards women.

The lack of societal acceptance and existing policy paralysis in recognizing the role of women and farm widows in agriculture needs to be addressed to empower rural women economically, politically, socially, and psychologically. ■



“Fighting Addiction is a lifelong battle” says Shanskhem who works at a de-addiction centre aiming to save the youth from the tight grip of substance abuse in Meghalaya.



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## DRUGS. RAVE. REDEMPTION.

A four-centimetre long needle seeps deep into the skin. Stronger the substance better the rush. They say ‘the pulse falls faster and the pupils dilate. We just don’t make music here; we feel it our way.’

Jimmy Hendrix, Queen, Led Zeppelin, Jim Morrison - name them and you have them in the list. Shillong valley never returns a musician without a surreal musical journey; for they are tripping on more than just music.

Shanskhem Narbaniang, a fresh teenager in the 70s, devoted his time to the jamming sessions in Shillong’s centrally located Don Bosco Square with his band. “I formed the band after my matriculation. I had long hair back then. We were very famous in the North-East,” he says.

Now 56 and bald, Shanskhem’s musical endeavour – Drugs, Rave and Redemption – was a re-enactment of famous musicians in the west.

For 17 straight years, Shanskhem was deluded in his world of music and drugs. “I started my substance abuse back in 1974 when I was in Class 8th. It must be shocking for you but most users I come across are from 15 to 25 (age group),” he recalls.

“In every school there is some or the other case of drug abuse. Most of these children drop out and resort to drug peddling in order to provide for their own need.”

Continuing his own story, he says, “Even after I got a job, it continued,

I used to go to the job and then come back and follow the same routine”. He was neck deep into drugs and alcohol which was a lot of trouble for his parents who had no other option than praying to the Lord helplessly.

Easy availability of drugs is one of the major reasons behind the problem, the geographical location making the situation complex. As (remove) Shanskhem explains, “It is the Golden Triangle, the border shared by Laos, Thailand and Myanmar. The main supply comes from Myanmar to Mizoram and Manipur. Shillong is not the transit point; it is the destination owing to the high demand and now children have resorted to experimental drugs.”

The year was 1991 when he was at the peak in his life both career wise and addiction wise. He fell unconscious one day and woke up on a hospital bed. He left his job and started working as a counsellor after attending the training at the Regional Resource Centre, Nagaland, conducted by the Ministry of Social Justice.

In 2010, he started working with sex workers and resettling them in the mainstream. One of the sex workers he rescued is now working as a volunteer. Out of the 33 people he counselled, 5 are living a better life.

Shanskhem now works at a deaddiction centre in Shillong. The deaddiction centre was opened last year to extend hand to those in need. With so many challenges, he is determined to fight for the cause. ■

“ I formed the band after my matriculation. I had long hair back then. We were very famous in the North-East. *Shanskhem Narbaniang*







# SPORTS FOR UNITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Since the inception of the 'Millenium Development Goals' in 2000, sports have played a vital role in human development, a fact which has been recognized in numerous resolutions of the General Assembly. Sports have proven to be an important tool in promoting peace and developmental objectives.

'Sports enable sustainable development. We recognize the growing contribution of sports to the realisation of development and peace in the promotion of tolerance and respect.

The contribution it makes to the empowerment of women, youth, individuals and communities as well as to the objectives of health, education and social inclusion,' states the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development acknowledging the role of sports in social progress.

CASA developed an idea of bringing together all civil societies based in Guwahati to organize an event as a pilot initiative under the theme 'Sports for Unity and Sustainable Development' in commemoration of the Republic Day 2019. This was driven by the milestone recognition and the past success of 'Sports for Development and Peace' activities and programmes across multiple sectors.



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Supported by the World Vision India (Northeast) , the concept and initiative of CASA to organise a football tournament was anticipated to be a good example. The concept of the event was how through sports civil societies could come together and achieve sustainable development goals.

With this aim in mind, the event was held to celebrate the growing contribution of sports in development and peace through the promotion of unity; respect; empowerment of women and youth; health; education and social inclusion.

CASA, in association with WVI and the other civil society organizations launched the event as a campaign. The nine agencies were keen to include sports in their projects.



The chief guest, Mr Samuel Therieh, Chairman of the organizing committee in his inaugural speech invited individuals and organizations to continue sharing the "power of sports to promote peace, unity and social inclusion." He said it will inspire more such events in the future which will help build unity among people, organisations and nations.

The event was held in the playfield of Nichols Hr. Sec. School, Satribari, Guwahati, Assam. More than two hundred people including local children, youth and students from nine different organisations attended the event. The teams showcased exemplary skills via their performances. The support exhibited by the crowd was the driving force for the players.

Assam Presbyterian Church FC successfully bagged the first position which was followed by Nichols School FC as the runner up team. Certificates of appreciation were given to the players to boost their spirits.

Guest of honour Lesehu Meru, CASA Guwahati delivered the valedictory speech. He called for a concerted action to cultivate a deep sense of partnership for unity and sustainable development through sports, marking the end of the tournament.

Sports are a valuable asset and teach many important life lessons like the importance of team spirit. The tournament mainly focused on enabling the adults, youth and children to learn to play together with jubilation. It also provided them with a safe platform to freely interact and showcase their football prowess.

The event also divulged social cohesion by creating a sense of belongingness for the participants and the organisers. ■



# → DISASTER READY

cover story



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Preparing the future  
**LINE OF DEFENCE**



# ODISHA

the disaster prone state


Floods, Cyclones, Heat waves, Lightning and droughts have made  
**Odisha the disaster capital of India**

 **37%**  
disaster deaths due to snake bite

Out of the last 100 years, the state has been  
**disaster affected for 90 years**



Floods have occurred for **49 years** | Drought for **30 years** | Cyclone for **11 years**

 **300**  
people succumb to death due to lightning every year

**Lightning has taken more lives than any other natural disaster in last 7 years**



Odisha

Sixty kilometres East of Puri, Block Astaranga - true to its name - explodes in many shades of orange every evening. This ethereal dream-like sunset attracts many tourists from across the country; almost like an illusion that all is well in the paradise.

## cover story

### THAT'S CALLED A BEGINNING

A team of six gather outside a hut on a bright sunny afternoon. With temperature soaring as high as 44 degrees Celsius, the youth aged not more than twenty three pick-up vermilion powder packets (rangoli) and start mapping village resources and hazard points. In an hour of intense discussion, the team starts canvassing the mirror image of their coastal village on a muddy surface. A temple, community meeting points, panchayat office, in-roads, wells, evacuation points in the nearby village, equipment and houses raised on a higher platform - all indicated with different colours. On the same canvas, they also mark out the vulnerable entry points within their village.

Even after 20 years, the horror of 1999 Super Cyclone remains fresh on the minds of the community. And the young kids in their prime fully understand the significance such preparedness. Now, all they want is 'change'.

"If not we, then who?" says 20-year-old Lipi Pradhan. She has been instrumental in bringing together the group of DMTF (Disaster Mitigation Task Force). "We understand the consequences. We want a change now. We can't just keep losing our people in floods, cyclones, heat wave, lightning and snake bites," she says.

Months of training makes the community 'Disaster Ready'. It is not just skills but the need for such awareness that needs to sweep in first.

Having born and raised in the disaster-hit Udayakani village of Astaranga Block, Lipi feels she needs the survival skills now better late than never.

### A PARADISE THAT COMES WITH A PRICE

Sixty kilometres East of Puri, Block Astaranga - true to its name - explodes in many shades of orange every evening. This ethereal dream-like sunset attracts many tourists from across the country; almost like an illusion that all is well in the paradise.

A closer look into the lives of the people residing in the coastal block perhaps gives a clearer picture. Super Cyclone, Phailin, Titli and now Fani - four most devastating cyclones passed right through the coastline of Astaranga Block, counting it as one of 'Very High' vulnerable areas.



By Isha Banerjee  
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*A farmer in Odisha narrates his ordeal of losing his house and belongings to cyclone Fani in May this year*

When we talk about disaster, importance is usually given to cyclone, floods, tsunami and heat wave. In June 2015, Odisha government declared eight disasters - lightning, heat wave, whirlwind, tornado, heavy rain, boat accidents, drowning and snakebite (other than flood) as state specific disasters. Victims or families of victim started receiving relief assistance under State Disaster Response Fund and National Disaster Response Funds.



The Disaster Management Act, 2005 defines disaster as "a catastrophe, mishap, calamity or grave occurrence in any area, arising from natural or man made causes, or by accident or negligence which results in substantial loss of life or human suffering or damage to, and destruction of, property, or damage to, or degradation of, environment, and is of such a nature or magnitude as to be beyond the coping capacity of the community of the affected area". The United Nations defines disaster as "the occurrence of sudden or major misfortune which disrupts the basic fabric and normal functioning of the society or community".

## What defines a disaster?



## THE SHORT & LONG IMPACTS OF DISASTERS

Astaranga region is subjected to difficulties as their mode of livelihood comes to a halt even at the announcement of disasters. Farming, fishing and labour work are the primary occupations of the residents living in this part of Odisha. Situated just 60 km from the coast, tidal waves are a frequent visitors, causing water logging problems in the villages. Inconvenience in the cultivation operations, then becomes a bigger cause for concern.

The real challenge is to see not just witness the visible effects of disasters, but also the prolonging impact it leaves during the aftermath. Outbreaks of water-borne diseases often become major threats indirectly linked to disasters. Frequent disasters could contaminate water sources, in turn bringing upon the Salinity Hazard due to the high chlorine intensity.

## DISASTER HITS CHILDREN FIRST

In situations like disasters, the risk factor increases for the affected people. This is the greatest for the children. Children are unable to comprehend or withstand the intensity of disasters either physically or emotionally.

Children, particularly the poor and those in developing countries, are at risk. Apart from being physically harmed, disasters can cause serious mental health problems among children. Loss of home, migration, losing loved ones, neglect and abuse are some feelings a child would only be able to share having undergone cruel conditions. The children suffer the worst. They migrate for safety, yet face acute risk of child labour, drugs and trafficking.

Disasters can interrupt children's education by displacing families, destroying schools, and pushing children into the labor force to help their families make ends meet in straitened times.

## IT'S MORE THAN WHAT MEETS THE EYE

In June 2015, Odisha government declared eight disasters - lightning, heat wave, whirlwind, tornado, heavy rain, boat accidents, drowning and snakebite (other than flood) as state specific disasters. Victims or families of victim started receiving relief assistance under State Disaster Response Fund and National Disaster Response Funds.

By now, the usual conception about disasters must start fading from the formed minds. As a matter of fact, lightning kills more people than other natural calamities in Odisha.

CASA's programme on Strengthening Disaster Reduction Management (SDRM) stands strong on two basic pillars – preparing community to shield all forms of disaster and giving more voice to the children and youth.

## THE FUTURE WILL LEAD

"This is the first time when CASA has taken up a project to train children to safeguard themselves from disasters. We were already active within communities but there was an emerging need to prepare children as well," says Anthony Das, project coordinator.

Schools are generally considered to be safe havens for millions of children and the greatest socializing institutions after the family. However, the recent experiences with natural disasters, in-school violence, and health issues demonstrate the need for schools to be prepared for all-hazard crisis possibilities. Community awareness of the school's disaster plan will optimize a community's capacity to maintain the safety of its school-aged population in the event of a school-based or greater community crisis.

The current project on disaster mitigation provides youth preparedness courses and programs to help children develop the skills and confidence they may need in an emergency. ■



A student asks for a clarification as CASA DMTF volunteer explains him the pre-questionnaire form before commencing a workshop on health and sanitation

Odisha government declared eight disasters - lightning, heat wave, whirlwind, tornado, heavy rain, boat accidents, drowning and snakebite (other than flood) as state specific disasters.





## I could have lost my mother to snake bite if it weren't for the first aid training I received



**P**ayal Senapati is a 14-year-old who resides in the flood and cyclone prone village of Edbansh in Astaranga Block. She discusses how the first-aid training under CASA gave her assistance in saving her mother from a snakebite.

"Last summer I was able to save my mother. She was bit by a snake inside our house. I remembered by first aid training classes. I took a cloth, tied my mother's snake and took her straight to the hospital where she was given proper treatment. I also stopped my mother from sucking the wound, advising her that might be adverse for health," says Payal.

Payal was being selected as the part of CASA's first-aid group. "The volunteers from CASA came to our school and eventually selected members for the task force. I had an interest in the first aid training. In that training, we were taught of how to deal in times of flood, how to relocate to high lands and how to pack dry ration, how to conduct preliminary first aid," says the 14-year-old.

A teenager with the aspiration of becoming a teacher, the 10th grader discusses how floods refrain her from attending school. "There are a lot of inconveniences that occur each year due to floods."

Sharing the plight of her family she states, "We feel very bad, it is as if the water has been spilled over all the hard work." She reports that farmers often take up loans and under non-repayment of the same during disaster. But she also feel "prepared" for the next time.

"If it weren't for my training, I could have lost my mother to a snake bite. I feel much more confident now. I believe I can save lives," says Payal. ■

**A**nganwadi worker Gitanjali Parida is under constant worry whether she would be able provide for her daughter Anuradha's higher education under the circumstances of regular flooding in her island village Edbansh of Astaranga Block in Odisha. Her husband is a daily wage labourer and lives in the city for work as there is not enough work opportunities available in the village.

She chooses to shift her daughter to a hostel, across the river as there are no colleges available in Edbansh. "The river aggravates the problem of the villagers as it becomes difficult for us to commute to the mainland. The only mode of commute to the mainland is by a ferry," says Gitanjali.

Working as a health agent of change, Gitanjali finds it "extremely important" the training given to her 13-year-old daughter in school.

"Anuradha is receiving first aid training under CASA's programme. No other organisation has come to teach us all of this. Awareness building and practice should start from an early age," the mother responds.

She confers of leaving the village whenever the area is flooded every summer. Her entire house is pervaded with floodwaters, with her abode completely running out of electricity.

"Children suffer the most during disasters. If they are not aware of health and sanitation practices, they might become vulnerable to faster spreading diseases.

Gitanjali is a firm believer in the betterment of conditions, especially in rural villages like her. She is convinced about CASA's project, "I believe that the training is crucial for the future of these children". ■

## AN EXEMPLARY DUO

### The mother-daughter's sheer motivation stands out

Top left: Payal Senapati at a school

Below left: School girls take a ferry ride to reach their school in the main land, away from there Island village.

Below right: Gitanjali with her daughter Anuradha Sahu







# TOWARD A SAFER FUTURE

CASA's SDRM project in Odisha has gained trust among the disaster hit communities in Astaranga block, enforcing a belief that they can combat it together

**375**

Children  
Task Force Members  
trained

**288**

Youth/Community  
Task Force Members  
trained

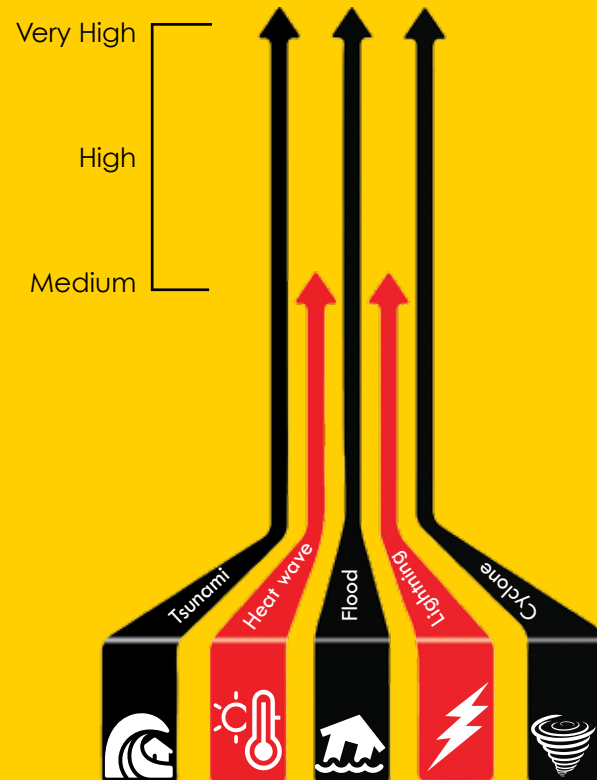
**12**

Volunteers  
across 24 villages



# Why Astaranga Block?

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## Hazard Vulnerability of Astaranga Block in Puri District, Odisha

DUE TO WATER LOGGING PROBLEMS, ASTARANGA BLOCK HAS BECOME **PRONE TO WATER BORNE DISEASES** DUE TO CONTAMINATION, SEDIMENTATION, CONTAMINATION OF WATER BODIES AND POND SYSTEMS AND CONTAMINATION OF DRINKING WATER SOURCES

THE BLOCK COMES UNDER THE **DRINKING WATER AND FLOOD VULNERABLE AREA**. IT IS A CYCLONE PRONE AREA WITH A TOTAL NUMBER OF 751 FUNCTIONING TUBE WELLS AND 86 SANITARY WELLS WITH 9 PIPE WATER SUPPLIES AND 9 OTHER DRINKING SOURCES.

ASTARANGA BLOCK IS AN EPIDEMIC AREA (5GPA) AND THE POPULATION OF THE BLOCK IS **PRONE TO VECTOR BORNE DISEASES** SUCH AS DENGUE, MALARIA, ETC.

Source: District Management Plan 2017-18, Puri, Odisha

Source: District Disaster Management Plan 2017-18 Puri, Odisha



**Inakhi Patra**  
 Project Coordinator (Operations)  
 Astaranga, Odisha

Every alternate year, there is an occurrence of some disaster like flood, cyclone and flashflood in Odisha. In March 2018, we launched the Strengthening Disaster Risk Reduction program which covers 27 schools and 24 villages.

This is CASA's first intervention for students. Prior to this, CASA has never really worked with school-going children.

When we went to identify villages prone to disasters, we were shocked figure out the awareness level. They didn't know what had to be done during a snake-bite, where to relocate in case of lightening and whether to stay under the tree or not. They were unaware.

When we started with it, the local volunteers of the area were identified based on sustainability. We gave an orientation and informed them about the process. Training was given in 3-4 phases. We went to the village, held meetings. Made people aware of the importance of disaster risk reduction in their villages. The villagers were asked to volunteer for the skill-based training. However, the role of children is different. Children usually take their meals and use the loo without washing hands. They are vulnerable to diseases. If they are prepared, they can safeguard themselves.

In case of disasters, parents are unable to look after their children, so if the children are aware, they can help themselves accordingly. The access to safe drinking water, the usage of the same, preparing ORS solutions and the usage of clean toilets is taught to them.



In case of disasters, parents are unable to look after their children, so if the children are aware, they can help themselves accordingly.

Below: Project coordinator Inakhi Patra interacting with community in a coastal village of Udayakani.







# Children and Youth most affected during disasters

Exposure to natural disasters increases the likelihood of acute illness in children

Exposure to natural disasters increases the likelihood of stunting and being underweight in children

Exposure to natural disasters reduces the likelihood of timely immunizations among children

Exposure to natural disasters leads to mental and psychological trauma in children which has a lasting impact

Exposure to natural disasters makes the children prone to unsafe and insecure environment

Exposure to natural disasters makes children more prone to violence and trafficking





# Nearing coastline in Udayakani village demands better preparedness

**N**eering sea shore year after year is the cause of worry for the residents of coastal village of Udayakani. Barely 200 metres away from the sea shore, the people are “afraid” as they might have to vacate their homes in the near future.

The village of Udayakani in Puri district of Odisha is surrounded by the Bay of Bengal on three sides of the village due to which they have to endure a lot of devastation every year.

“The shore was earlier one kilometre away. Now it is just 200 metres away. Every season during floods (as a result of excessive rainfall) or cyclone leads to saline water flooding our farmlands making it incapable of growing crops. We are a farming community and our livelihood depends upon cultivation. With our village being prone to almost all disasters, it has become unbearable for us to live here now,” says 20-year-old Lipi Pradhan.

Migration with regards to work or labour is not the only concern for the residents of Udayakani. Disaster due to weather changing pattern also forces people to become migrants. “If the situation persists, we are afraid we might have to vacate our homes and stay at a safer location,” says resident Buddheshwar Kandi.

The eastern coastal state of Odisha is highly vulnerable to floods, cyclones and tsunamis. Apart from that, the state has been also hit by other forms of disasters like lightning, heat stroke and state specific disaster snake bite. According to a report by the Special Relief Commissioner of Odisha, snake bite deaths account for about 37% of the total number of disaster deaths in Odisha.

Living in constant fear and loss, CASA team reached out to the community with a preparedness and mitigation plan. Youth volunteers like Lipi Pradhan were put to use to spread awareness on battling the impacts of disasters.

Most thought-out idea of building a barrage to divert the saline water to a canal; thereby saving their farmlands. “To be frank we did not know this. It was beyond the idea to even build a barrage to divert water flow. Awareness has given us hopes to re-build this village again,” says Lipi.

“If that’s put to use, I don’t think we have to leave our village,” says Lipi. ■



“  
With our village being prone to almost all disasters, it has become unbearable for us to live here now

Top: the coastline has now neared from one kilometer to 200 meters in flood and cyclone prone Udayakani village of Astaranga Block. The farmers complain of ruined farm lands due to constant flow of sea water at the time of disaster. They suffer from huge income and agricultural losses.

Below: CASA has prepared a team of Disaster Mitigation Task Force (DMTF) that majorly consist young volunteers along with community members to minimize the impact of disasters. Village mapping has been taught to equip the village residents of Udayakani and map their resources and hazard points.

Left: 20-year-old Lipi Pradhan is a member of first aid team of DMTF in Udayakani village.





# DIFFERENT ROLES TO PLAY

DIFFERENT KINDS OF TRAINING ARE PROVIDED TO YOUTH AND CHILDREN. WHILE ADULTS HAVE THE CAPACITY TO PRACTICE AND PERFORM ALL FORMS OF DIFFICULT MOCK DRILLS, CHILDREN ON THE OTHER HAND ARE GIVEN TRAINING ON SOFTER SKILLS.

## FOR YOUTH

- Early Warning
- Search & Rescue
- First Aid
- Shelter Management
- Relief
- Livestock Management

**24 VILLAGES**

## FOR CHILDREN

- Early Warning
- Search & Rescue
- First Aid
- Environment Protection
- Health & Sanitation

**27 SCHOOLS**

**IN ASTARANGA BLOCK**





**Aspires to become a scientist**

But can't see his future every time a disaster hits his village

Studying in Belabhumi High School in a small village of Belabhumi village, Odisha, Prono (name changed) can't see his career as a scientist every time a disaster strikes his village.

He forms a picture of his future self in an attire of a scientist, discovering new concepts in a lab.

"Every time my house is flooded or a cyclone hits my village, my future ambitions take a back seat. It is really difficult to cope up with the education when your books have flooded along with debris," he says.

The 7th grader is unsure of the time ahead, but finds will to fight with CASA's training on early warning.

After joining the early warning group, Prono finds a behavioural shift within school children, teachers, parents and the community members. "They are taking my lessons on disaster management more seriously now. They want me to attend all trainings and tell them what I learnt during the mock drills," he says.

On being asked why it was more important for children to be aware to tackle such serious situations, he said "we should be prepared right now, to avoid panic later. We can also teach our parents and neighbours at home and help them."

Unaware of the potential of power of information, Prono and other task members have now become the messengers on disaster management for their communities. ■



Top: School children assemble for a mock drill session at Belabhumi High School with all 10 active school level DMF members.





# A SPECIAL PROGRAMME FOR CHILDREN



Children assemble for a training on sanitation, water contamination and purification methods. Dr. Bikram Keshwari Mohanty one of the resource person of CASA with social worker Nirmla Behera.





When we spoke to them about their habits and practices, we found that hand washing was something that was never really taken seriously by them, especially if the hands had to be washed using soap

**H**ealth and sanitation are matters which are given the least importance during disasters. By imparting training on health and sanitation measures, we are helping them not only stay safe but also to help others around them in times of need or distress.

“When we spoke to them about their habits and practices, we found that hand washing was something that was never really taken seriously by them, especially if the hands had to be washed using soap.

“Diseases like diarrhea and consumption of unsafe drinking water are quite common. In those moments the adult is often concerned about the loss of their belongings and seldom notice what the little children especially girls are going through,” says accredited social worker Nirmala Behera, one of the resource person for CASA SDRM project.

CASA has been extensively working for the same. There are task forces developed for health and sanitation; a special training for school children on topics of health, sanitation and personal hygiene, on ways to handle minute but important matters of hygiene before, during and after the disaster.

“With the help of diagrams, we explain children how intake of polluted water can lead to plethora of diseases which, in turn, turns deadly. As I often talk to the children about whether their grandparents wear slippers to the washroom or do they wash their hands after using the toilets, to which they promptly say “no”. This implies that these elders themselves are not well aware of the risks,” says Nirmala, a member of National Rural Health Mission.

Health and sanitation demands to be included as part of school curriculum. Through the medium of school, this message needs to be duly spread. ■



**Nirmala Behera**  
Sanitation expert and trainer

*Right: Sanitation expert Nirmala teaches step-by-step hand wash mechanism to school students in Astaranga block of Odisha.*







# SAVING LIVES PROFESSIONALLY

Contrary to what we see in movies and television productions, people do not split up and go their separate ways during search and rescue operations. Search and rescue is a technical activity rendered by a group of specially trained personnel, who rescue and attend to the casualties under adverse conditions, where life is at threat. Search and rescue is organized in close cooperation with the community and in a team approach.

Throughout the mock drills conducted by CASA on search and rescue, the rescuers' efficiency level is given priority at the time of practice and demonstrations period. The rescue team undergoes a standard training from time to time.

"I believe the instinct to search and rescue at the time of disaster is present in everyone. However, we are not well versed with techniques or methods to do so," says a young DMTF volunteer. He further adds that many a times, the rescue by non-technical or professional people may work in the wrong direction which can lead to stressful situations.

The bottom line remains that management means safety and efficacy. And a team of children and youth are in the line of defence, the future of preparedness. "Technical and emotional steadiness becomes a norm during the trying times. My search and rescue skills were first put to test during 2018 May cyclone Fani. With my aptitude I was able to save and evacuate a lot of people," the 20-year-old volunteer says.

## A TRAINED PROFESSIONAL IS AN ASSET TO THE NATION

To rescue the survivors trapped under the debris, from the damaged buildings or from a cyclonic storm surge, flood, earthquake and fire.

To provide First Aid services to the trapped survivors and to dispatch them for medical care.

To hand-over, recover and dispose-off the bodies of the deceased.

To take immediate necessary actions, as necessary, for temporary support and protection to endangered collapsed buildings to structures.

To train, demonstrate and raise awareness on how to use the local materials for self-rescue amongst the community people.



I believe the instinct to search and rescue at the time of disaster is present in everyone. However, we are not well versed with techniques or methods to do so



Members of Community level Task Force perform rescue and evacuation using tight rope during an exercise in Astaranga block.





Top: Youth members of DMTF showcase where traditional equipments made from waste glass bottles, aluminium utensil and plastic bucket that are useful in rescue.

Below: Youth group demonstrate rescuing a drowning person at the time of a disaster

Right: CASA's DMTF youth volunteer shows his rescue technique using a rope.

# SKILLED TO RESCUE







“

The basic objective of the civil defence training is that the civilians should know how to take care of themselves first, as help never reaches on time.



**Ganesh Barik**  
Civil Defence Trainer

*CASA volunteer Dibakar explains students of Belabumi High School on ways to tie knots during rescue and evacuation operations*

joined CASA as research personnel. We train school and community level volunteers to prepare themselves before a disaster strikes them. We teach them the skill and the technique. Basically, on a community level we start by giving them mock drills on warnings. They are taught how to receive warnings, how to interpret them and how to pass it on further. After this, we teach them the evacuation procedure. If someone is stuck in the village, how they can be rescued.

At the school level, survival skills are taught to the children of all age groups. They are taught to survive if a disaster strikes while they are still at school. For example, if there is an earthquake or lightning. Then, what should they do? The precautions they need inside and outside the house.

We conduct mock exercises at school and community levels. We call it the dry-run before a disaster strikes. All the communities of the village come together as one and are taught on ways to take care of their livestock. Further, the people are made to find spaces where they can keep the dry ration and the documents they might need in an emergency.

From evacuation to the path of shelter, we tell them about it all. Whether it's a temple or a strongly-built house - It is important to establish who will seek shelter first. The vulnerable groups should take shelter first. Pregnant women, physically handicapped, children and old people given the first preference.

The basic objective of the civil defence training is that the civilians should know how to take care of themselves first, as help never reaches on time.

Every year, there is some disaster- be it earthquake, cyclone, flood or lightning. In India we have a lot of road accidents which have casualties in it. In first aid, when we see an accident, we give victims water first. But this is wrong. Taking them to the nearest hospital after giving them first aid would be the right choice that needs to be as part of your instinct. ■









## cover story

Who could've thought that Cyclone Fani could not only teach a lesson but open doors for a lucrative career option too? The youth of Block Astaranga in Odisha has undergone the test of a lifetime. With the civil defense training from CASA, they are now up and ready to fight, come rain or shine.



By Neha Kher  
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# CIVIL DEFENSE TRAINING A CAREER OPTION TOO?

**B**lessing in disguise" best describes the state of the youth of the Astaranga block in Odisha right now. The youngsters of the area were made aware of a career option they never knew before. Adorning neon-colored life jackets, the youth of this disaster-prone block is full of energy and want to serve their community in the best possible manner.

An enthusiastic member of CASA's Disaster Mitigation Task Force (DMTF), 21-year-old Rautikand Kandi plays an active in the force and is motivated to help people - rather selflessly. From wanting to be an engineer to pursue career in civil defense, this young lad has come a long way.

For the first time, Rautikand and his team's skills were put to real-time test in early May this year when strongest summer Cyclone Fani made its landfall in Puri district, bringing a vast trail of devastation. Having undergone the training for a year, Rautikand and team were ready to take on their first disaster mitigation challenge.

"It all started with a warning for the disaster on May 1 when we made announcements in the villages through three-wheelers (autorickshaw) to spread awareness using banners and loud speakers before the disaster. On the 2nd of May we had a meeting at the nearby resource center. On May 3, prepared a plan for disaster risk management. We were training on rescue, search, evacuation and first aid for a year and this was the time when our composure and skills was tested on the ground. We were prepared for the disaster as we had already made a list of the most vulnerable people and villages. We took evacuation measures on May 2 and relocated them to the safer shelters," he said.

Rautikand says that not a single human or cattle life was lost during the

disaster due to our team's safety and vigilant efforts and government's excellent planning. Inspired from the events Rautikand sees himself sharing the same podium with civil defense experts in a few years.

The fresh report published by FICCI India Risk Ranking 2018 indicates the risk position of the incidents related to Natural Hazard, Fire and Accidents such as Heat Stroke and Lightening. The ranking has ascended from the previous years' report. This certainly indicates the dire need for the youth to re-think of their decision of taking civil defense training as a career option.

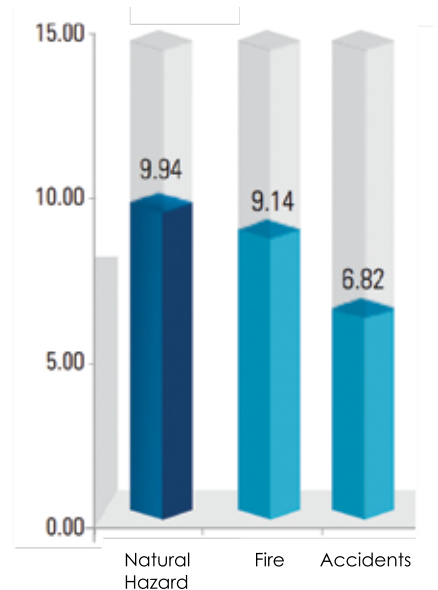
"As youth we volunteered for civil defense training because we feel there is a need for such awareness within our community that face at least one major disaster every year. It would be even great if we can make our careers out of it. We will be able to contribute so much for our people," says Rautikand.

Trained under expert Ganesh Barik, one of the civil defense consultants working with CASA's Strengthening Disaster Risk Management (SDRM) project in Odisha, many young leaders like Rautikand see a role model in him. "Ganesh sir trained us. He inspired us to believe in practical training rather than theoretical knowledge. He shared his experiences on how he received training for civil defense as a kid. His belief in us, that the young generation must take the lead for better preparedness has encouraged our passion even further," says another DMTF member Kartik Kumar Kandi who is a part of the CASA's search, rescue and evacuation group.

The team members are resolute in their decision to make a career in civil defense training. "I wanted to be an engineer but now with the knowledge of civil defense as a profession, I am determined to pursue it. Only after joining the task force did I come to know about the importance of such a profession," says Kartik. ■

## India Risk Ranking

### Overall Risk Trends - 2018



**Natural Hazards** has evidently ascended to the second position from the previous year's report ranking of No. 2, following the increasing uncertainties and incidences which has colossally affected the country.

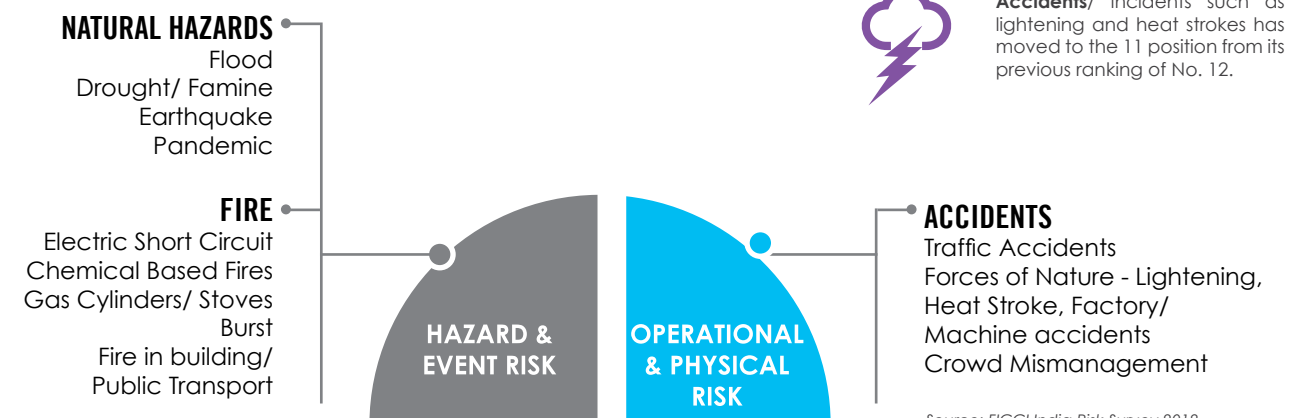


**Fire** has moved up to the third rank from its previous ranking at No. 5. There has been a significant number of reported incidences causing losses to material and physical assets.



**Accidents/** incidents such as lightning and heat strokes has moved to the 11 position from its previous ranking of No. 12.

## The India Risk Survey consists of 12 risks that indicate the most significant threat to the development of India



Source: FICCI India Risk Survey 2018





## cover story

The preventive measures and excellent management by Odisha Government to tackle cyclone Fani in May this year gathered praises from around the world. What lessons did we learn post Odisha Super Cyclone 1999 that took over 10,000 lives?



By Pankhuri  
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# WORLD LEARNS FROM ODISHA

**C**haos and confusion had hit the state of Odisha in October 1999 when the Super Cyclone had pummelled the territory. There was complete pandemonium as panic had taken over everyone's state of mind. Lack of preparedness and unawareness were the two main factors as complete mayhem broke out.

The conditions were comparatively great in May 2019 as Cyclone Fani approached Odisha. Although, the windspeed for both the cyclones fell around the same parameter, preventive measures had been taken in order to handle the situation unlike before.

Super Cyclone and Cyclone Fani have been the most destructive

tropical cyclones that have hit Odisha in the past two decades. Keeping both the figures of both the tragedies in juxtaposition, it is depicted that the death toll in the latter was just 0.6 per cent of the former.

The State Government of Odisha took great measures to tackle disasters after the 1999 cyclone as eastern state on the coast already stands on high vulnerability on the radar. In the backdrop of poor socio-economic conditions and 83 per cent of the population of the state falling in the rural group, the state government built 'pucca' houses in the cyclone prone areas. With just 21 shelters back in the 1999 cyclone, the Odisha State Disaster Management Authority constructed more than 900 shelters over the period. However, installation of modern

communication systems and implementation of programmes to increase awareness has been an exemplar the world can learn from.

Project Officer for CASA for over 25 years, Jonathan Rout has seen many disasters during his lifetime. Hailing from the state of Odisha, he says that the people were shocked to see so much devastation around them in 1999 and urged for not just relief but for a permanent solution.




"CASA worked in five districts in Odisha when the Super Cyclone took place in Odisha in 1999. It was our first intervention in the field of disaster preparedness. After that, we worked on restoring livelihood, shelter and relief for the community. But the newest thing we worked on at that time was known as Community-Based Disaster Preparedness. Our objective was relief but we were also trying to focus on getting people ready to face all these types of disasters by building their capacities," says Rout.

Government accredited Civil Defence trainer Ganesh Barik is actively engaged with CASA's Disaster Risk Reduction programme in Astaranga block of Odisha. He feels that the Odisha government is re-enforcing the idea of preparedness within the psyche of the community after suffering huge trauma following 1999. He shares that "the skills and techniques for disaster preparedness should be initiated at school level, from a young age. Because if we teach a child the survival skills then they can survive in any disaster or incident. CASA has taken the initiative first and we hope that everyone adapts. It is our main objective to be able to reach young children and train them."

CASA has been an active member in providing support to the affected people through relief programmes. A number of new projects have been initiated to combat the impact of disasters. With Odisha being transect point for disasters, the mitigation efforts taken up by the State Government during cyclone Fani has set an example for the world. ■

CASA DMTF member on an early warning duty in villages prior to cyclone Titli hitting the state of Odisha

## A REMARKABLE DIFFERENCE

	Super Cyclone, 1999	Cyclone Fani, 2019
	10,000 lives lost	60 lives lost
	162 mph	155 mph
	21 shelters	900 shelters

## MEASURES TAKEN BY ODISHA GOVERNMENT

Installation of **modern communication systems**

Construction of **cyclone shelters and improved infrastructure**

Construction of **'Pucca' houses** for the poor

### Priorities for Action

There is a need for focused action within and across sectors by States at local, national, regional and global levels in the following four priority areas, according to sendai Framework

INDIA BECOMES THE FIRST COUNTRY TO CREATE NATIONAL PLAN FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

**PRIORITY 1**  
Understanding disaster risk

**PRIORITY 2**  
Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk

**PRIORITY 3**  
Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience

**PRIORITY 4**  
Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response, and to (Build Back Better) in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction



From struggling to make ends meet as a daily labourer to becoming the pioneer of cashew farming in Damal Asim - one of the earliest project villages of CASA in Meghalaya - Marson has come a long way.



By Ankita Yadav  
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## ONCE A HIRED HAND NOW OWNING FARMLANDS

Just a look at the cashew-nut shell is enough for Marson R. Marak to tell its traits. Years of experience allows Marak to distinctly select the poisonous ones from the edible nuts. But this is not how it had always been. Once a labourer toiling for meagre wages, he didn't anticipate any change in his livelihood.

Hailing from a small village cut-off from the district headquarter Tura in the West Garo Hills of Meghalaya, Marak had no scope of opportunity and financial stability. It was only in the early 90s that he could see the light of hope when CASA the first NGO to enter in Tura gave him a chance to build a self-sustainable life - in form of two kilograms of cashew seeds.

"I was 26 years old, stranded with no financial support and forced to earn a living for my family. The only job that I could get was raw, unskilled labour, that too for minimal wages and I had no hope to improve my poor conditions," says Marak, recalling his times of struggle.

"CASA's intervention, more than anything gave me a belief. They provided me with two kgs of cashew seeds and gave me the confidence to start my own farming. When I started cultivating cashew-nuts, the first harvest gave me the source of income which I utilised to sustain for months. Since then my income is only increasing," says the now contented Marak.

Indian Cashew industry provides employment to around 0.05 million people, both directly and indirectly. It is an export-oriented industry and hence called 'Dollar Earning Crop' of the country. It is noteworthy that Meghalaya has managed to achieve success in the cultivation of non-traditional crops like tea, cashew-nut and oilseeds, out of which West and South Garo Hills districts are known for growing the cashew crop extensively.

Marson was the first family in their village to pursue the profit-making cashew cultivation, inspired by the trends in the adjoining villages.

Marak says, "I started horticulture with two kgs of cashew seeds in my hands, later on when the venture paced up, I started doing multiple cropping with Areca (Supari) alongside cashew. Now, when the season is good, I earn around two lakh rupees a season."

Marson has not only escalated his own livelihood but also has provided employment to many deprived people in his village. He has become an expert in cashew cultivation and is maintaining a larger farm. He is also training people on better cultivation methods.

Almost three decades later, he is now leading a quality life. He says, "I have seen it myself how CASA brought transformation to my family's life and lives of people from the adjoining villages. I can never forget the kind of support I received from CASA when I needed it the most." ■



On an average, a farmer from West Garo Hills sells around

**100-200 kgs**

cashew nuts per year. Farmers sell cashew nut to middlemen who in turn sell it to the factory.

The cashew in Meghalaya is grown under the

**Natural and Organic system**

which fetches a premium price.

**Intercropping**

plantations along with cashew helps check soil erosion

It is more

**Labour-Intensive**

rather than technology-intensive, thus it helps in generating employment.

There is a

**Huge Potential**

for farmers of Meghalaya to produce better quality cashews through better maintenance.

Source: from the 2014 research report submitted to MEGHALAYA BASIN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (MBDA)



The world might see them for their disabilities but being a special education professional, Banrihunlang Myrthong sees her students for their possibilities. The schools established by AFSDI in partnership with CASA provide these little ones the agency to strive for a better life.



## STEP-UPS FOR SPECIAL SCHOOLING

As you enter the gates of Mairang Vidyajyoti Inclusive School, you come across the rare sight of children communicating in slow non-verbal gestures. Banrihunlang Myrthong, who has been a patron for special education for 10 years recalls parents being against the prospect of their kids learning sign language at first; Some of them even calling it “a waste of time”.

Located in the West Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya, the school lays the foundation for what should be a successful future for special schooling in India. Myrthong was one of the people who made this idea of first inclusive school in the district come to life. “After spending countless hours on preparing projects and attending meetings - the school started in 2008. It was incredibly challenging at first,” she says.

“A lot of parents of abled kids were doubtful about sending their children to our school, not wanting their little ones to mingle with other children with disabilities.” Myrthong blames their “Us and Them” mentality on lack of awareness.

In a country where the term ‘Inclusive Education’ still turns faces sour, She aims to make people see past their own prejudice.



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Anybody who knows Myrthong, knows of her incredible passion for special education. “I believe it is a gift, it’s like this is the only place I am supposed to be at; You can say it’s meant to be.” Even with all her experience in this field, listening to parents speak of her students like they are “the bad apples of the lot” never fails to make her heart sting.

Four years after the establishment of the first school, AFSDI set up the Amirkha disabled school, From little children to young adults - Myrthong, who currently heads the school has a place for all of them. “In this world deluded with stigma, I believe it is our responsibility to provide them with a safe environment - they are not what the world thinks them to be,” she says.

Under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 educational institutions funded or recognised by the Indian government must provide inclusive education to the children with disabilities. However 34% of Children with disabilities in India are still out of school (UN report, 2015)

The stigma towards the education of the differently-abled is deeply rooted in society. Even affecting the most educated individuals. AFSDI, in partnership with CASA works on conducting awareness programmes in the school to counter this ignorance .

These workshops make parents and teachers informed about the rights of children with disabilities; they teach them ways to cope with challenges the kids might face in the real world. With this collaborative effort, Myrthong mentions, ‘Things are slowly improving, their mindset is changing at a slow but significant pace.’”

The Mairang School which started with just one student is now home to 323 students including 34 students with disabilities. Two of the students who have been on this journey with them since class KG now excitedly await their 10th grade result. “We’ve come a long way since 2008,” she says.

What began in April 2012 now is known as Amirkha Disabled School. It is equipped with two rooms, owned by the church, where 17 students with multiple disabilities are receiving education.

Both the schools follow a similar structure – hosting three units including day school, home management unit and prevocational training unit.

The day school hosts 16 regular students with disabilities (C.W.Ds), they are, Cerebral Palsy (C.P.), Intellectual Disability (I.D.) Hearing and Speech Impairment (H.I. and S.I.) and Multiple Disabilities (M.D.). The one non-regular student receives emotional support from the school.

In the prevocational unit, children as well as adults with disability are given training related to embroidery, decorative items and tailoring. “Every child has a different capacity and limit, we value simplification in our training.” Monetary value is their main concern as money is a challenge for both the school and the students.

“Most of these children come from broken families and can’t afford to emigrate to places where special education is available.” All the current students belong to local villages, as the school doesn’t have a transport facility available.

As most parents deem the school responsible for transportation, it is a challenge for the school to accommodate students from outside the village. “It is essential for parents to also cooperate with us, and to make the same effort for special schooling like they might for mainstream schools.”

The Amirkha Disabled School currently has a staff of four and Myrthong recognizes the importance of money in running an institution like this. “Investment is obviously a necessity, we need to provide teachers with a good salary,” she says.

AFSDI in partnership with CASA believes in “mushrooming new projects eventually.” The CBR programmes conducted by them currently cover 30 villages in Mairang and 5 villages in Mawthadraishan region.

Even if they have a long way to go, these schools will prove to be a stepping-stone for inclusive education all over the country. Amidst all the challenges faced, and overcome – what remains clear is that like all the other kids of this nation, the future of these beautiful minds deserves a fair and equal chance to be just as bright.■





A young girl with dark hair, wearing a vibrant, multi-colored patterned dress, is seated at a wooden desk. She is focused on writing in a notebook with a black pen. The desk is cluttered with papers and a pen. The background shows a simple room with blue-painted walls and wooden beams. A yellow bag is visible on the floor in the background. The overall scene suggests a child engaged in education in a modest setting.

**World Day Against  
CHILD LABOUR  
June 12**

*Every child deserves a school*





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