

RAPID ASSESSMENT: THANE CYCLONE AFFECTED VILLAGES IN CUDDALORE

Women's Federation, Cuddalore, January 7th, 2012

Thane Cyclone

Cyclone Thane hit Tamil Nadu coast on 29th and 30th of December 2011 destroyed houses, boats, standing crops, livestock and livelihoods. As per the Government sources the cyclone killed 35 people. The storm brought wind speeds of up to 135 kmph (83 mph) and tidal surges reaching 1.5 metres (5 feet) which forced coastal fishing and farming communities into relief shelters set up in schools.



The Impact

Deaths in Cuddalore occurred mainly due to electrocution, falling of trees and collapse of house or walls. A large number of cows, goats and buffaloes were killed in many villages. Trees, lamp posts and electric poles were uprooted, hand-pumps and bore wells have been damaged that lead to water scarcity and lack of safe drinking water. Major roads were blocked in almost all areas of Cuddalore district for a whole week.

Need Assessment Visit

After the tsunami disaster, a large number of self help groups of women were actively involved in relief and rehabilitation process. They were also active after Nisha Cyclone in 2006. Subsequently these groups have undergone several training programmes on disaster risk reduction offered by SSP and Groots International. These trained women's groups came together and formed a Federation to work and offer their knowledge on disaster preparedness and risk reduction on a sustained basis. There are two such Women's Federations; one in Cuddalore and another at Nagapattinam.

Disaster Task Force: Right after Tsunami 2004, SSP facilitated women groups to form disaster task force in many villages. The first task force team was formed in 2008 with 6 groups of 30 members (15 men and 15 women) in Keelamoovarkarai village, Nagapattinam. The experienced team successfully intervened in Nisha cyclone and other disaster events. Now they are providing training to other village communities to form such task forces. They have given training and formed task force team at Savadikkuppam, Thennampattinam, Kuravaloor, and Vanagiri. Drawing the lesson from Nagapattinam Cuddalore women groups also formed task forces in 4 villages at Akkarappettai, Thazhanguda, Kandankadu and Puthuppettai. The Task Force women members are well experienced in understanding community

needs, negotiating with govt, preparing community to reduce risk, train them in search, rescue, warning, and rehabilitation.

On 7th January 2012, the Women's Federations did needs assessment of living conditions of the affected communities with the support of SSP. The purpose of the visit was to see the impact of cyclone, discuss with affected communities and identify priorities for immediate action. The grassroots team was led by Federation leader Chitra, carried out this exercise in Nochikadu, Singarathoppu, Kandankadu, Tsunami Nagar and Thazhankuda villages.

The assessment team consisted of: Nagapattinam Women's Federation nominated M.Chitra, B.Gouri, Rani, Maheshwari, Padmavathi and Annalakshimi and Cuddalore Women's Federation was represented by Mohana and A.Vijaya Lakshmi all of them active community leaders.

The team met affected people, analysed the situation, provided moral strength and confidence especially for women and children. Using the evidence collected, they met with local Panchayat leaders and Government officials to jointly evaluate the response and action taken/planned to rehabilitate the displaced communities.



The families who lived in thatched houses were the most affected. They lost their entire homes and are staying in temporary halls like schools or government buildings. There is no electricity and people face severe drinking water problem. Since all the roads are blocked, basic supplies such as rice, milk, grocery items and vegetable cannot be reached to the affected people. Due to non-availability of petrol/diesel transportation is at a standstill; buses and lorries were not on the roads.

EARLY WARNING AND PREPAREDNESS

Nochikadu

Federation leaders from Cuddalore informed us in advance about Cyclone Thane on December 27th. So we have alerted our group members and neighbors in the village. At the same time we also received messages from local panchayat and TV channels", said Rajeshwari from Nochikadu.

Nochikadu village is totally depends on agriculture. But the Thane cyclone played havoc in the village by uprooting their major cash crop of cashew nut trees. Most of the houses were fully or partially damaged, entire electrical lines and drinking water supply was totally broken. According to a women leader "the village has gone back by 30 years. Now we have to start from the scratch."

Singarathoppu



Singarathoppu, a fishing village near Cuddalore Old Town was worst affected in the cyclone. The Federation members have made several efforts to pass cyclone warning messages “We sent SMS messages and made phone calls to many our group leaders to alert their communities on the cyclone,” said Mohana, leader of Women’s Federation in Cuddalore. As a result, women, children and the aged were alerted, this saved several lives. But they lost their houses and

livelihoods due to heavy wind and rainfall.

Without waiting for the government agencies, Mohana a federation leader with a group of women, evacuated some families from low-lying area in Singarathoppu village. Those who were relocated to government schools and cyclone centre for nearly three days struggled for basic needs like food, milk and water. Women and young girls were the most vulnerable group due to lack of toilets and privacy in public building.

Kandankadu

People in Kandankadu village were also suffered for basic needs like food, drinking water, transportation etc. Sudha, a women leader from this village has mobilised other SHG members to get basic food materials from NGOs and distributed to people. They also helped to get drinking water. “The day after the cyclone, our women’s group met the Village Administrative Officer (VAO) and requested for arranging drinking water but we didn’t get any good response from him. So we locked the officer in the room. We held negotiation with higher officials and after they promised to address the water issues, we released the VAO in the evening.” Said Sudha.



Women’s Federation leaders Rama and Mohana with group of other women helped Cuddalore municipal officials and voluntary organizations to distribute drinking water, food materials in Singarathoppu and Tsunami Nagar villages. They also insisted with the officials to immediately clear trees and electric posts which was lying on the road.

Some of the government officials went to Nochikadu village for damage assessment. But people did not allow them because they came after three full days. Finally they called higher officials and allowed them on 5th day to assess the damage and repair electrical work.

DAMAGES

The following table shows the approximate estimation by women groups in 5 villages.

Village	Total houses	Totally affected houses	Partially affected houses	Livestock & Livelihoods	Infrastructure
Kandankadu	250	150		More than 400 acre crop Loss of Kitchen utensils 18 goats and cows	Many trees were uprooted Three bore wells and 20 hand pumps have collapsed Lamp posts and wires were lying on the road
Thazhankuda	400	200	-	-	-
Sonankuppam	800	300	200	-	-
Singarathoppu 2 persons died in this village	450	300	100	-	120 boats damaged (including S.T.P Boats, I.B boats, Fiber Boats, F.R.B boats)
Nochikadu	550	150	100	20 goats, 10 cows	100 hand pumps are damaged 150 Trees are uprooted More than 1000 acre crop damaged

- o All Electricity posts and telephone lines have broken up
- o Most of the trees including coconut trees, jack fruit trees have fallen down
- o Hand pumps have broken or uprooted
- o Kitchen gardens have been washed out

GOVT RELIEF:

“We have lost our houses, agriculture crops in the cyclone and it will take nearly 10 years to get yield from cashew nut trees. Government has given us only Five thousand rupees as compensation to rebuild our houses. Truly we are using the relief amount for our daily food expenditure and we don't know what to do after that” said Kashturi from Nochikadu village.

The state government has announced relief package to the affected people, as a fully damaged house would be able to get Rs. 5000 and Rs. 2500 for partially damaged house. The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister also said that the fishermen will be eligible to get between 20 thousand to Rs.1 lakh depending on the model of damaged vessels. But the government is yet to announce any relief for crop damages.

Two people have died in Singarathoppu village due to wall collapse on the day of the cyclone and the relatives of the victims have received Rs.2 lakh for each person.

Usha Nanthini from Singarathoppu village says, “we have lost our boats and we can't go for fishing. Government officers came only on third day of cyclone. They promised us compensation for damaged boats but still we are waiting for it. Unless they give compensation we can't repair our boats and earn livelihood.”

Role of SSP and Women's Federation

SSP is facilitating post cyclone initiatives in Cuddalore district with Women's Federation. The women groups are interacting with local authorities, Panchayats and communities in bringing normalcy by addressing the problems of drinking water and food. They are also identifying various livelihood options for the affected community.

The Disaster Task Force formed by Women's Federation was active in all these villages. Due to the team effort and early warning messaging and alerting people, numerous casualties have been avoided. After this assessment, the team explained the village situation to Municipal Commissioner, VAOs and other government officials. They have made several calls to Collector's Office to get an update on relief work. Several Federation leaders such as Rama, Mohana, Sudha, Kalavathi and Vanita are involved in relief work with government and NGOs. The team will visit these villages every week to appraise the progress being made.

Recommendations

Immediate:

- o Involve women led disaster task force as volunteers to oversee relief and rehabilitation
- o Afforestation involving women's groups in planting and maintenance
- o Organise health camps to address problems by women, children and aged

- o Distribute relief according to needs assessment by women's groups
- o Address drinking water issues
- o Provide basic privacy and sanitation facilities in the temporary shelters
- o Increase the compensation for damaged houses
- o Compensate the farmers who have lost their crops and provide loans at low interests to resume cultivation and business

In one year:

- o Form/strengthen disaster task force in all coastal villages to reduce the risk
- o Provide livelihood support for the affected community
- o Hand over early warning system to community CBOs to manage properly

In a couple of years:

- o Build permanent houses for all vulnerable communities

