

ActionAid Field Report on Emergency Response to Floods in Western Nepal in 2006

Introduction:

In 2006, ActionAid Nepal implemented an emergency response to assist the communities affected by floods in western Nepal. ActionAid worked with its long-term partners in Banke, Barduya and Kailali districts.



The overall aim of the project was to ensure the right to human security in emergencies through addressing the immediate needs of flood disaster victims of Banke, Bardiya and Kailali districts, and to sustain the dignity of poor and affected communities. ActionAid also supported the mobilisation of the communities and local and national discussions to address the underlying causes of the floods.

The need for emergency relief was extremely high and ActionAid focused on supporting the poorest and most marginalised communities such as the Freed Kamaiya (bonded labourers), ethnic minorities and dalits. The programme reached 1025 families in Bardiya, 769 in Banke and 825 in Kailali. A total of 2619 households benefited from the programme between 15th September 2006 until 30th January 2007 (4.5 months).

Background to the Emergency Situation:

During late August and early September 2006, incessant rainfall caused floods in the southern plains, and landslides in the hilly areas of 14 districts in western Nepal. Nearly 60 people died and 50,000 households were affected by the destruction to crops and infrastructure caused by the rains. The worst affected of the 14 districts were Bajura, Baitadi, Nawalparasi, Banke, Bardiya and Achham, all of which are remote locations, between 500-800 km from the capital.

The devastation caused by the floods meant that the affected communities had urgent short-term relief needs as well as longer-term development needs. Food, medical supplies and temporary shelter were needed for those who had been displaced by the floods, and in the longer-term affected communities require help to rebuild their homes, resume their livelihoods and better prepare themselves for future natural disasters.



ActionAid Emergency Response:

During the early days of the emergency, many ActionAid partners complained that people in need in their communities were not receiving relief aid because they did not meet the criteria set by the Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) to qualify - which was that they must have lost their roofs, food and utensils. This meant that many of those affected in ActionAid project areas were not receiving aid, even though many of them had no food. Therefore, ActionAid implemented an emergency response programme that supported communities to cope with the immediate impact of the floods in coordination with NRCS, local government and other INGOs.

Immediate Relief:

Most of the households received the following relief supplies:	
Distribution of Food Items:	
Per household, the following food items were distributed:	
(i) Rice	30 kg
(ii) Salt	1 kg
(iii) Oil	1 ltr.
(iv) Soya bean	2 kg
(v) Sarbottam pitho	1 pkt. (500 gm)
Distribution of Non-Food Items:	
Per household, the following non-food items were distributed:	
(i) Blanket (double size)	1 pce
(ii) Plastic	5 mtr.
(iii) Seeds of winter season's vegetables	150 gm (8 proper varieties)

Installation of Hand Pumps for Drinking Water:

10 hand pumps of drinking water for 50 households were installed in Bardiya, and 5 in Kailali.

Health Care Services and Medical Support:

Health care and medical support was provided in different settlements over three months - September/October to November/December 2006. 1365 people visited the health centre in Bardiya district and 1800 people from Banke went through health check ups. ActionAid provided treatment and medical support to 163 people who were affected by Yellow Fever.



Addressing the Underlying Causes of the Floods:

- A mass demonstration led by flood affected people calling for flood mitigation and river control of Babai River took place in Bardiya district's headquarters Guleriya to demand the government to work on flood mitigation and river control of Babai River.
- ActionAid supported a seminar attended by 204 people including local authorities, partners, other international NGOs, journalists and community leaders to share learning on flood relief work.
- A national seminar on Babai River control and flood mitigation was attended by senior government officials - including Mr Sher Bahadur Deuba, former Prime Minister and Chief of the Nepali Congress, international NGOs, local development committees, local leaders and media.



The Main Impacts of ActionAid's Response:

- Flood victim families received food, blankets and tarpaulin to serve as temporary roofing.
- More than 3100 sick individuals received health care services and medicine, and communities now benefit from a medical security scheme initiated by the government with ActionAid's support.
- Seeds for winter vegetables were also distributed and by planting these in their small plots of land, families will secure access to food in the future while also potentially generating

income. Some communities who did not have access to drinking water prior to the floods have now pumps.

- The policy debate around flood issues has been successfully initiated, and many organizations linked together as part of the flood response. The media was mobilized to cover many of the issues - an essential component in promoting effective flood disaster management. Thanks to advocacy work, relevant government ministries have decided to commence activities to control the Babai River and mitigate flooding - a team from the Ministries of Water and Water Resources visited Bardiya district to study the Babai River control and flood mitigation plan. Flood affected communities in Mataiya VDC and Banke benefited from a medical security scheme initiated with support from AAN and the Government of Nepal.

Present Situation:

After the waters receded, the situation normalized in the affected areas. The humanitarian agencies, including the government agencies, have now completed their emergency response interventions and are now focusing on the rehabilitation and recovery plan. The Regional Disaster Relief Committee and the District Relief Committees have carried out their rehabilitation and contingency plans and forwarded a recovery plan to the donor agencies and the government to address the post-disaster situation.

One NGO drafted a bill for the Disaster Risk Management Act which was submitted to the Ministry of Home Affairs calling for an efficient and effective response on disaster management activities in Nepal.

However, minimum efforts are being made to prevent the hazards (e.g. effective river control, looking at the relation between the management of dams and the floods, and other mitigation/preparedness activities), with much of the focus still on relief supplies. Some civil society and local leaders have started the debate but it is limited within the media. ActionAid Nepal, along with its partners and networks in the area has taken up the issue and will focus on advocacy and lobbying with the new dam legislatures in the coming days.



*This was an opportunity to establish the rights of disaster victims. AAN, with support from NELA (Nepal Environment Lawyer's Association), filed a PIL to the Supreme Court that established the **right to assistance**, and ordered the Government of Nepal to respond immediately.*

Key Learning and Future Areas of Action:

- Pre-preparedness of rescue and relief work is essential **prior** to an emergency situation
- Early Warning System (EWS) should be established
- Criteria should be developed in terms of assessing disaster victims for relief support
- Indian dams and barrages across the Indo-Nepal border side have increased the risk of flood disasters, therefore deforestation, cultivation and other encroachment in river bank areas must be checked



- Proper coordination is necessary among the local administration, Red Cross Society, local bodies, concerned agencies, social activists and other stakeholders
- The actual loss in a disaster area should be surveyed in detail before relief work begins
- Relief provided by the central government is insufficient, and the Nepal Red Cross Society was unable to coordinate activities at the village level, therefore, proper coordination is required
- River control and flood mitigation should be implemented as a matter of urgency
- Public awareness programmes for disaster management should be launched

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