

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION:
PROGRAM INNOVATIONS. PG: 4

SPREAD THE WARMTH: WINTER
CAMPAIGN FOR CITYMAKERS. PG: 8

RELEASE OF CITY- MAKERS COMICS

→ CityMakers Comics is a collection of stories of destitution, desires, dreams and destinies all entwined throughout the little publication that makes you see life the way it is led by people who live on the streets. – **The Hindu** (October 13, 2012)

COVER STORY

Right to Food and Public Distribution

IN BODOLAND TERRITORIAL AREA DISTRICTS

Public Distribution System (PDS) is considered to be the most important food security network in India. The main objective of the system is to ensure food security of the poor people of the country. Under this system, staple food grains such as wheat, salt, rice, sugar and kerosene, are distributed among the poor people at a subsidized rate through a network of PDS. Distribution of food grains is managed by State Government. Food Corporation of India (FCI), a Government owned corporation, procures, maintains and issues food grains to the state.

In Assam, the Food and Civil Supply Department (FCSD) implements the PDS and Targeted PDS along with its allied schemes. At present, the FCSD has been implementing welfare schemes sponsored by the Government of India such as schemes for Below Poverty Line (BPL), Above Poverty Line (APL), Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) through Public Distribution Network stretching all over the State.

Under the BPL Scheme, the State Government has been giving 35 kg of rice to



each of the 1,611,210 BPL families in Assam. Besides these families are also provided with wheat and wheat products, edible oil, sugar, salt etc. through PDS at subsidized price. The APL Scheme normally covers the middle class people. There are about 35 lakh families living above poverty line from a population of 175.44 lakh in Assam. These families are provided with rice, wheat and wheat product, sugar, edible oil and salt every month at Government fixed price through family identity Cards (FIC).

As per Government of India guidelines, the Antyodaya Anna Yojana has been implemented since November, 2001 in the State. Under this scheme, the State Government has been providing 35 kg of rice per family, per month, at a price of Rs 3.00 per/kg to 281,406 families selected by the Government of Assam. However, the question that remains is, in spite of PDS scheme, how far food security of the people of the state, especially in BTAD areas, has been ensured? Are these schemes implemented properly? Do these schemes reach the people?

Before arriving at a conclusion, we need



→ The comic strips illustrate how an activity such as opening a bank account, which is fairly simple for most people, is fraught with difficulties for the homeless, even if they have identity cards and are literate. – **Hindustan Times** (October 13, 2012)

→ With the authorities yet to frame a comprehensive policy for the homeless and in the absence of adequate shelter for those on the street, the city's homeless have poured out their heart in 'CityMakers Comics' — Digging the past... building (multi) stories. – **Times of India** (October 13, 2012)

to look at what actually is going on in BTAD areas in the name of PDS. Pradip Das, a poor farmer of Amayapur village under Tamulpur block in Baksa district has an AAY card. Till last year he got 25 kg of rice per month at the rate of Rs 4.30 per kg. He does not know actually how much rice he should get. Fair price agents provide rice without mentioning the quantity on the card. Apart from rice, he gets two kgs of sugar at Rs 17.00 and 1.50 litres of edible oil at Rs 24. "Now I get 33 kg of rice. Besides rice I get sugar and rice but it is not regular. We never get wheat and salt." said Das.

"We complained to the Food and Civil Supply office about the irregularity. But the office has not taken any steps in this regard. The Fair Price agent told us that if we complain, in future we will not get anything," said Manu Sutradhar, secretary of farmers club, of the Nimaigaon village.

According to a survey conducted by IGSSS in collaboration with the local organizations in the four districts of BTAD (Kokrajhar, Chirang, Udalguri and Bongaigaon) the beneficiaries received seven to ten kg of rice less than the actual entitlement, sugar one to two kg less and Kerosene 0.5 to 0.68 litres less than the actual entitlement. Price of rice, sugar and kerosene are one to three Rupees more than the actual price.

Wheat and salt are not distributed by any fair price agent, the survey stated. "Various factors are involved in the irregularities of PDS system. Not only fair price shop agent, but the food and civil supply officials are also responsible for it. Besides, local students organizations, insurgent groups, ceasefire insurgent groups have added fuel to the irregularities," said the village head man of Namalpur village. Another factor is that no base line survey has been conducted by the Government for several years as a result of which many poor families have been deprived of availing ration cards. There are thousands of such households in BTAD area, who do not have ration card. Being a very important food, security network, proper implementation of schemes, under the PDS system is the need of the hour. But lack of awareness among the masses and government apathy is making the PDS system ineffective.

The Survey highlighted that creating



No base line survey has been conducted by the Government for several years as a result of which many poor families have been deprived of availing ration cards.

awareness among the masses about the schemes such as Right to Food is required. Government should take prompt action and initiate immediate inquiry into the anomalies as and when reported. The authorities must ensure secrecy and security of the people who lodge complaints and take steps to include transportation charges of PDS items. These are some of the measures that can make the system effective.

IGSSS, along with its four partners, is working in BTAD since 2009 and has organized State Level Student Interface meeting with all the Student Unions in BTC Assam to discuss the anomalies in PDS and to share the findings of Baseline Survey. As a result of this a series of awareness camps have been organized in all the BTC districts with participation of student associations in many villages. Promoting village volunteers to file RTI and seek information was another outcome of this interface meeting.

Major findings of IGSSS Survey are being shared with the people. It highlighted that creating awareness among the masses about the schemes such as Right to Food is required.

-By Mahesh Deka under PEARL's Media Fellowship initiative

Disaster Preparedness, Prevention and Mitigation Consultation

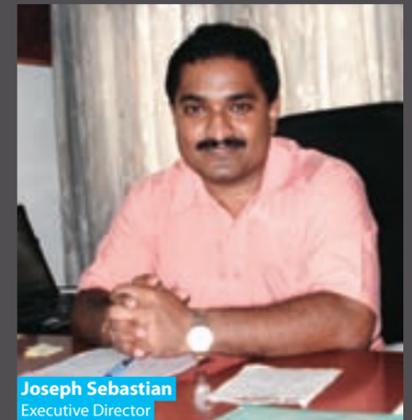
A District level Consultation on Disaster Risk Reduction was organized on August 22, 2012, in Dhemaji District, Assam. The consultation focused on creating a social action movement on 'Disaster Preparedness - Prevention and Mitigation' by the flood affected community and the District Administration of Dhemaji.

Mr. Sunil Kumar Sarmah, Commandant - National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), emphasized on the need of disaster management especially during earthquake and flood, as North-East India falls under seismic Zone V, a highly earthquake prone zone. He along with the team demonstrated 'Search, Rescue and First Aid' exercise. The team showed the process of tackling open injury, deformation, swelling, etc. and the stages that are to be considered and looked into before taking the patient to the hospital. They also demonstrated stretcher making and how to carry a heavy person.

Mr. Joydeep Choudhury, District Project Officer, District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) shared about the work being carried out by the DDMA in Dhemaji District. He said that presently DDMA is concentrating on school safety and is planning to take up hospital safety. In the coming year, DDMA is also planning formation of Disaster Risk Management Committees at the village level along with setting of task forces. He asked the participants to use the district control room helpline of Dhemaji in times of emergency. Mr. Jiwon Sonowal, a community member, urged that the Government should take steps to construct a strong and lasting embankment in place of the one that was washed away in the year 2007.

The consultation was able to outline the future course of action for the key stakeholders.

- The DRMC Confederation Committee should identify the hazardous and vulnerable areas.
- The committee should visit the Water Resource Department and provide suggestions.
- The DRMC and Confederation Committee Members should attend the Gram Sabha meeting and share their plans.
- The Confederation Committee should also visit all line departments with the mitigation plans.



Joseph Sebastian
Executive Director

As the river flows so does life. However the major difference is that in life one can stop (though not actually stopping in the real sense), look back, learn and do things differently and more meaningfully so as to have a better inference of life and thus create more impact through what one does. At IGSSS we undertake the stopping, looking back very seriously and this action – reflection – action cycle enable us to do more wonderful things as we move ahead in this journey called life.

One such instance was naming of this newsletter. Formerly known as the IGSSS Newsletter, as part of our reflection, we realized that we needed a more lively name – and thus was born PRATIBIMB (meaning REFLECTION). This is what the newsletter does for us. The newsletter shares about the news gone by and in the process it also provides space for reflection and thereby enlightening and energizing us to do more.

It is only apt to share that the whole process of re-naming the Newsletter was undertaken in the true spirit of participatory Reflection-Action. I am proud of our team at IGSSS, they give so much to the people who we are privileged to serve. Yes we are truly privileged – so many wish but we are able to do it.

A warm military salute to all my colleagues. Wishing each of you and your near and dear ones a joyful Christmas time. May the Hope, Joy and Peace of Christmas be with you throughout the New Year – 2013.

Smiles... Joseph.



A Seed bank in Selajan village, Dhemaji, Assam

MAJOR PROGRAM INTERVENTION

Innovations

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) approach is designed towards protecting lives, livelihoods and assets including natural resources of communities from the impact of hazards. Primarily, it is done through encouraging indigenous disaster resilience methods which help curb losses and also contribute towards increasing productivity.

The critical components of the program are as follows:

High Raised Platforms safeguarding communities

Kechukhana kachari is one of the perennially flood affected villages in Dhemaji district, Assam. Recurring floods every year leave the village dilapidated, houses being submerged under water, most of the villagers evacuate their home and either shift to their friend's or relative's place for shelter or else they would construct a raised floor within the house and spend their days living on that. In spite of falling prey to the vagaries of nature every year, the villagers are very attached to their land and return immediately after the flood water recedes.

IGSSS while working in this village

was strongly urged by the villagers to construct a High Raised Platform (HRP) so that they need not look for other housing alternatives during the flood. Likewise, a 100/100 sq.ft high raised platform was constructed for the villagers to take shelter in time of emergency and also for other utility purposes.

The HRP is now being used during the monsoon season. It shelters the villagers and also it is being used as a school helping the students to resume their academic session and safeguards them from any loss in studies due to floods. The toilet and the hand pump constructed on the HRP proved to be handy to the community as all the toilets and the hand pumps of the village and the adjacent villages gets totally



submerged and damaged in the flood.

During the non – monsoon season the HRP is used effectively for community gatherings, meetings etc. The platform has become a very essential component for the populace of Dhemaji specially during the monsoons and also for shaping into a community space.

Boats providing access

The floods of 2007 and 2009 left the state of Dhemaji in a drastic condition specially the villages that fall under the Chamarajan block. The floods led to the breaching of embankment of the Kumutia and Jiadhhal rivers at Dihiri and Ratua villages resulting in the change of the river course and drowning the nearby villages.

The road which connected the villages was submerged and turned into a river disrupting all channels of communication between villages and forcing them into isolation. It was serious concern for the inhabitants of the village as they needed a boat for the children to attend their classes as the lower primary school lies in one side of Nepalikhutti village and the middle elementary and high school is situated on the other side, in the Ratua village. Moreover, the villagers were also unable to pursue their work or meet their relatives outside the village without the use of a boat.

Considering the situation of the Ratua village, IGSSS provided

schools on time as well as pick them up. Besides that, it was also used for search and rescue purpose during the flood emergency apart from transporting the passerby or villagers. Moreover, the DRMC members also unanimously decided to collect a sum of Rs.40/- from each family per month for the maintenance and for remuneration of villagers who helped in rowing the boat.

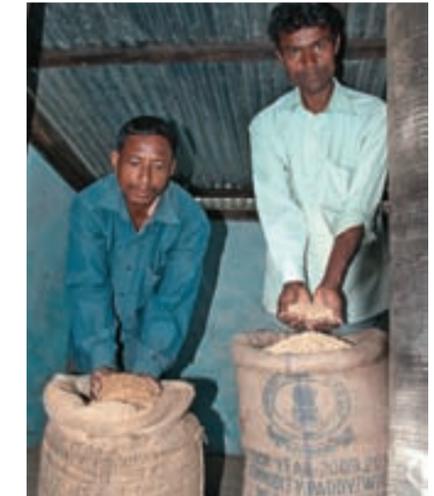
The boat had a valuable usage in Ratua, specially the school going children never had to miss school due to communication breakdown during the floods.

Seed Banks – Mechanism of Survival against Odds

Every year floods derail livelihood options of thousands of people in the Lakhimpur and Dhemaji districts of Assam. After every flood, besides repairing shelter and restoring normal life the major challenge is also to revive agriculture. Being the livelihood mainstay, it became imperative to find ways that would ensure sustainability

before or after the monsoon. It focused on strengthening food security of the vulnerable communities, by creating additional livelihood options. This meant that even if the main crops get destroyed by floods, the farmers could depend on the earnings accrued through growing crops during the lean agricultural seasons.

The structure of the seed bank is



From left: The high raised platform is being used by a villager to set up his shop. The boat provided by IGSSS ferries the school children and teachers to the school.

From top: Farmers with preserved seeds which would be used in the next crop season. A traditional Seed Bank built by the farmers to store grain and seeds.



a country boat to the Disaster Risk Management Committee (DRMC) of Ratua. The presence of the community boat in the village had an immense impact. A feeling of ownership was seen and the boat was used optimally during the floods.

It was decided that the boat would carry the students to their respective

in agriculture practice and minimize losses during recurring floods.

This vision inspired IGSSS to start an intervention aimed at creating seed banks in the flood affected villages of Lakhimpur and Dhemaji districts. The program focused mainly on supporting lean season crops that could bring additional income to the community,

very unique. Drawing lessons from the houses on raised platforms, which helped families to survive during floods, the seed banks are likewise constructed on raised platforms. This ensures safety of the storage during floods. The seed bank is managed by the village Seed Bank Management Committee (SBMC).

Assam Flood Response

IGSSS has reached out to 761 families in the late September 2012 floods in lower Assam. The beneficiaries included Muslim - 40%, Bodo- 40% Rajbongsi-7%, Adivasi-6%, Hajong- 2%, Nepali-5%. The relief was provided in the areas of Adivasi, Rajbongsi, Hajong, Bodo and Kungkrajora.

Huge areas of human habitation and cropland in Dhemaji district have been submerged. The second wave of floods affected nearly 150 villages in Assam uprooting a population of nearly two lakh people.



From top: Relief Material being distributed to the victims of ethnic conflict at the Kungkrajhora Block, Chirang District, Assam. Distribution being carried out at the Rangeejora Block, Assam. Children returning after their school being hurriedly shut down due to sudden flash floods in Dhemaji, Assam. **Below:** Urgency exhibited in transporting the relief material.



IGSSS winter campaign for homeless people in Delhi



Spread the warmth

In Delhi, extreme cold weather during the months of November to February threatens the lives of approximately 150,000 homeless men, women and children sleeping outside in the city. Without winter shelter, clothing, meal, sanitation and medical facilities, homeless people are at an even greater risk of injuries, illnesses and fatalities.

IGSSS under its CityMaker's (Homeless) Program every year carries out 'Winter Campaign' to mobilise support from people like you to provide relief and comfort to homeless people. This year IGSSS has planned its Winter Campaign for a period of four months - **November 2012 - February 2013**.

How you can spread warmth?

BE A VOLUNTEER: As a volunteer you can be part of our Night Vigil Team and support the relief activities for the people on streets.

DONATE IN KIND: Donate blankets, thermals, woollens, mattresses, shoes which will provide warmth to the homeless people.

MONETARY DONATIONS: Your donation will be used to provide meals, health check-ups, blankets and woollens to homeless people. Please send your cheque in favour of 'Indo-Global Social Service Society' to the IGSSS Delhi office.

→ **To know more about the Campaign,**
write to us at doc@igsss.net.

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 **Indo-Global
Social Service Society**
Towards Prosperity and Justice with Equity

28, Institutional Area, Lodhi Road,
New Delhi 110003. Tel: +91 11 45705000.
www.igsss.org

CREDITS

EDITORIAL

Leena Bhanot,
Mukesh Dubey,
Sally Faria
Sohini Bhattacharjee

DESIGN

Mustard Tree

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