

Case Study



Building safer communities in South Asia

Group work - the building block for building safer communities - the Gujarat DRR Project - India

Supported by:
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Disaster Risk Reduction
South Asia Regional Framework

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Community Participation and Ownership through program implementation and sustainability is the key that mobilized the entire communities of Vaghrech and Rustamwadi, a target population of 8,000, whereas the project objective was for 1,250 only. To ensure 100 percent participation and representation community level committees, task forces and activities were designed to involve them in key stages of DRR project planning, development, and monitoring.

At the outset, we have been able to create two active nuclei of implementation – the CDMC and the First Medical emergency Responders - who are able to impart vital help, create the base of disaster response with the distribution of Rescue Kits, and generate a high level of confidence to be able to reduce the disaster risk in many ways.



FMR Training at Rustamwadi & Vaghrech

Navsari district, at the first glance does not impress with its disaster history of floods and droughts in small areas, more due to man-made causes of haphazard development of roads, lack of construction of proper water drainage and incomplete village development across its 393 villages divided into 5 talukas. Yet, when an in-depth study of vulnerability and hazards was carried out, it turned out to be one of the most disaster prone areas in Gujarat, in a seasonal scenario of floods and mudslides.



Kaveri & Kharera river confluence Vaghrech & Navsari District Map

Three main rivers overflow into civilizations every monsoon causing regular damage, distress and disorders – Ambika, Kaveri and Poorna and their not so small tributaries that lace across one of the most verdant spots in Gujarat – the Southeastern area, a total of 2,196 km.

And then, there are the annual occasions of cyclonic disturbances along the Arabian sea, disturbing the little fishing hamlets dotting the west coast adding to the economic harm.

On top of this, about nine villages of the Jalalpur taluka are vulnerable to cyclones and tsunami.

All blocks of the district are equally prone to fire, drought and earthquake (III).

In addition, the actual analysis of vulnerability is described in greater details as follows.

Vulnerability at Vaghrech and Hazards at Rustomwadi:

At Vaghrech, a population of 3,200 in more than a thousand households spread over 245.63 hectares, the village sixteen streets strong, “even normal monsoon spelled disaster”.

At Rustomwadi, a population of 5,800 living in twenty-five divisions covering a small area of 11000 sq. m. the hazards of health and sanitation were substantial so that even with no flooding, monsoon meant epidemics.

Yet, similarities in vulnerabilities, risk and hazard are many: both at Vaghrech and Rustomwadi malaria, dysentery and malnutrition are endemic and other seasonal epidemics are common.

Both have a community who think disaster risk reduction means “running to the school shelter” or “informing Red Cross” or “calling the nearest hospital ambulance”. This represents the greatest vulnerability as they do not link climate change to seasonal disasters to man-made hazards to interventions. “We have to accept nature”. During the months of June, July, August and September both communities mapped the highest numbers of disease occurrence, domestic violence, fatal accidents while also reporting highest expenses with festivals and lowest incomes due to loss of agriculture or occupation due to floods.

Though they say that they did not get direct flood waters in the last couple of years, there is the overflowing sewage and flash floods in the streets due to blocked drainage. But this they said is due to the rains even before the rivers swell as the newly constructed roads create a “reservoir” that collects rainwater.



**Vulnerability/Risk/Hazard
Map Rustamwadi**

At Rustomwadi, about 20% of the population, more than a thousand in number, live along the river Poorna. At Vaghrech, more than five streets were flooded with 1-3 m of water every year, for the last five years.



The Project in Gujarat

The most important highlight is on the existence of strong community centers which make the DRR program activities possible at every step.

Vaghrech has nine local organizations with more than 800 members who are our sum total of the extended CMDCC and a potential resource to develop.

Rustomwadi has six local organizations with a total of 200 members.

As the CMDCC took birth and grew into a fledgling trying its wings and practicing its moves, we saw like the beautiful formations of the birds, all kinds of configurations and alignments taking place, making the DRR project and its activities possible, which we share in brief here.

Characteristics of the community group work: One rural and other urban:

Through the demographics of the two communities which are diverse, it is clear that both need the same strategic approach to develop and initiate DRR.

Keeping in mind the objectives of the Hyogo framework, the community group work centers around three main strategies

- to link DRR activities with developmental programs at the village level,
- to increase the resilience at every level of disaster response and last but not the least,
- to integrate the DRR action into the response and rehabilitation plan of action.

"The poetic justice is to use this opportunity to practice rainwater harvesting"

Also, guided by the HFA New Delhi (2007) aims, the group work is designed to first focus on creating water safety, constructing sanitation facilities, linking with power, creating instruments for maintaining cleanliness, fostering awareness about health and prevention of disaster-related risks of health hazards, corresponding education to activities, and creating a supportive structure that will sustain these efforts and will continue to grow. This structure depends on the small groups of threes and more who come together and dissolve at the community mobilization and interactions.

"Before CDMC, after doing homework, I used to watch TV. Now we get together and we have something important and useful to others, that we talk about (or dream about), ways we can do things for the community" [a teen workshop participant].

Introducing forming, norming, storming and performing in the community: Though there were many orientation and training activities before, the solid feeling of fraternity was born only after the FMR workshops, during which the participants carried out many exercises of learning to demonstrate the group dynamics.

"Now we feel one with the others and know that everyone has similar difficulties. If we had known how to work in groups like this before, everything would have been much easier, fun and better" [a participant at day 4 of FMR workshop after the group work session]

Group work – Capacity Building:

Most of the groups are adults, beginning with the teens, from the twenty strong CDMCs, though as an exception there are a few proactive children ready to do community work, who are the extension of the CDMC. Learning is implied in all of the twenty-nine diverse activities, including orientation, workshops, and community outreach such as the tree-planting. These are in keeping with the principles, practice guidelines of the south Asian regional framework. The grass-root wisdom from the movement's collective pool of knowledge trickles down back to the new grassroots in development.



School Children activity:

Group work – Local Area Meetings:



The groups configure around spontaneous linkages during the interactions rather than according to preferences or street association or personal relationships.

Often because of life contingencies new partnerships emerge. New friendships happen.

Group work – Advocacy and community learning in both communities:



"action learning combined with the right approach to community advocacy"

The success indicator of such multifold activities reflect in the attendance of people at mass communication such as the play hosted at Vaghrech school on the Republic day where more than 800 village population received the message of the role of IRCS and DRR where the villagers said as one,

"Now we shall be part of the RC activities and help you in making DRR a success story".

To integrate all the learning from the various community events such as - the painting and designing of the CDMC centers with area maps and photographs, the making and display of the CDMC banners, identifying and preparing the 38 locations at both places for wall paintings, putting up the project hoardings at four strategic sites, digging bore-wells and fitting with bore-pump at Vaghrech - it is necessary to understand that learning is integrated with doing at events like health screening for anemia and sickle cell disease, blood donation camp, blood grouping, and other mass communication activities at health promotion events such as the distribution of seventy-two mosquito nets at both communities; dedication of sixteen toilet facilities in total at both sites; donation of a garbage cycle at Vaghrech with health information and dissemination about the advantages of garbage management and cleanliness; distribution of five hundred iron supplementation tablets to identified women.

This coupled with meetings and discussion led to reflection and critical understanding of the challenges ahead, while often releasing the group from a crippling sense of inadequateness that is associated with poverty, or skepticism arising from the long term experience of public systems.

At the mass communication activity in the city community more than 200 attended and encouraged with active clapping and showing of their support to the guests invited from the Civil Hospital.

Throughout the development phases of the project, with more frequent awareness meetings the number of the groups represented and representatives kept growing.

A meeting of local volunteers was convened to bolster the courage as they faced the challenges at the meetings, often feeling overwhelmed and defeated by voices of experience and importance, who have failed in the past to make any progress with the local authorities.

The DRR team started making personal visits to key figures, identifying stakeholders necessary for that stage of the development, who in turn brought in their links.

The Outcomes - Before and After :

At Rustomwadi, Keshaben and her group became more active on the health advocacy front along with Deepikaben.

While at Vaghrech, the social leaders Kamleshbhai and Anishaben, motivated people to come to the meetings and also justified the changes in the offing. Alongside construction and repair of the overhead water tank at Vaghrech and the septic tank connections at Rustomwadi began with the engagement of marginal figures, who previously refrained from meetings and communication.

There are the people who remain silent, who have lost hope and their voice being the least privileged and the most vulnerable of both the communities. Now, most of the participants and members of the CDMC know what Red Cross is, what it stands up for, what are the fundamental principles and why the disaster risk reduction activities.

Before they thought Red Cross is an organization that sells blood or the one that helps in disaster or provides ambulance to the sick.

Now they can name Henri Dunant and know the story of Solferino!

Psychological challenges overcome and empowerment by knowledge:

The biggest challenge for the local unit was to stay aligned with the national and SARD frameworks for CBDRR – from the perspectives of the climate adaptation linkage – because most of the participants at the workshops who were queried about their perception of what they can do about the climate was that they could not control nature. Thus, the idea, that we can aim to reduce the vulnerability, enhance livelihood and increase the community resilience all at the same time by following some of the climate risk management approaches is fantastic for them.

Next, the major block to enforce the Strategy 2020 aim 2 – “to enable healthy and safe living” – is shared by the 50 participants at the five-day workshops in their definition of disaster risk reduction – as most of them still think their role is passive – “to relay information to Red Cross Coordinator about an event or to contact the nearest hospital”.

The third major hurdle is in the acceptance of the fact that the river swells, caused by the increased stormy weather at sea at one end and the overflow of dams releasing excess water on the other, are surmountable - because they are caused due to climate changes. “How can man control climate?” asks one of the older residents, getting many agreeing nods from those sitting around her.

The 4th IPCC Assessment Report certainly warns of more of such problems and the moments of anxiety are quickly transformed into a knowledge led discovery that these diseases are all preventable and that the initiative is for the very reason, here to take them through the difficult behavior change process needed.

All of them realized in a defining moment that the change from the 'must do's to 'can do's will change their lives forever. Released from a paralysis of many seasons of fear, mobilization takes place in the form of smiles of understanding, increased interest in the activities and greater capacity to participate (HFA1).



Review visit at Rustomwadi

The biggest challenge was in getting the group around the central idea, in the first place. Once that was done, the ice was broken and then it was relatively smooth sailing.



CDMC Center, Vaghrech

Lessons learnt: Guarded by a well-knit organization, we spring forth to the challenges



"The road ahead is certainly not lonely it is in groups, together."

This significant attitudinal change leads the way to a greater receptivity to behavioral change communications, as evidenced by the plays staged by the school children at the Republic Day gathering in the village.

As the Sarpanch Mr. Shantubhai Patel said at the conclusion of the FMR workshop, "Our CDMC now has become stronger in each person. Also the group work we did has shown us how strong we are against disasters and we feel less afraid in facing the seasonal contingencies".

Just as this volunteer who demonstrated the use of garbage loading cycle or luggage cycle for Vaghrech.



And the impetus provided by the workshops and the groups have created a springing forth to the work ahead – livelihood creation.

As they sang the song of hope, "we shall surely succeed, one day, now we have confidence in our hearts, and hope in our eyes, we shall surely succeed one day".

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