

## Floods in Bihar in 2017

The flooding situation experienced by India is deteriorating severely. The floods wreaked havoc in the states of Assam, Odisha, Gujarat, West Bengal and Manipur. They are now unleashing their wrath on the state of Bihar.

The extent of flooding taking place in Bihar is unprecedented in its recent history. Not only have these floods led to widespread distress and deprivation among the people of Bihar, they have also caused loss and damage to the state's growing economy.

As of August 16, 2017 the death toll from the floods in Bihar stands at 72. Similarly, 73 lakh people across 14 districts have been severely affected by the incessant rains in Nepal and northern part of the state. This is not new, the rivers flowing out of Nepal into Bihar more and more swell up during the monsoons giving rise to a lot of trans-boundary flooding risk for Bihar.

Mr. Anirudh Kumar, Special Secretary in the State Disaster Management Department of Government of Bihar has provided a disaggregated death toll according to districts. He has informed that Araria district accounted for 20 flood deaths, followed by Sitamarhi (11), West Champaran (9), Kisanganj (8), Madhubani and Purnea (5 each), Madhepura and Darbhanga (4 each), East Champaran (3), Sheohar (2) and Supaul (1). Relatively low levels of loss of life is worth noting.

He further apprised that 73.44 lakh people are in the grip of floods which have engulfed 110 blocks and 1,151

panchayats spanning 14 districts of Bihar, which means nearly half of the state's geographical area has been flooded in 2017 monsoon so far. The local economy has taken a severe hit particularly the agriculture sector and the state's artisans. This disaster has led to an exponential reduction in production, consumption and trade activities by the low income families.

The special secretary has said that 2.74 lakh people have been evacuated and taken to safer places with special medical care and local efforts. Out of them, 1.16 lakh people have been put up in 504 relief camps set up by the state authorities. Setting up camps that work is not an easy task in rural Bihar. A wide range of needs have come up from food to water to toilets to the education of children.

The state authorities and voluntary organizations have set up Community Kitchens for victims in marooned areas and available line hotels, *aganwadi kendras* and railway stations in Katihar district are being used for running such kitchens, the principal secretary to the disaster

management department, Shri Pratyay Amrit said this week. The Bihar Risk Reduction Road Map is put to use to focus on key areas, sectors, and communities in need of relief and recovery.

Shri Pratyay Amrit held meetings through video conferencing with districts officials and gave them directions on helping the flood victims and also launching rescue operations whenever necessary. Saving lives is the highest priority on Bihar's agenda. Reducing loss and damage is second on the agenda.

The UNICEF in Bihar has developed a step-by-step way ahead to reduce disaster risks in Bihar. Lars Bernd, UNICEF, Delhi, in this process has pointed out to the power of participation of citizens, and putting children in the centre in response and recovery.

Train services continue to be affected due to the calamity and rail movement is disrupted in many sections. As a result several trains passing through these sections have been cancelled, diverted, short terminated and short originated. This



Photo: AIDMI.

means delay in the supply of relief materials to the victims.

Bihar is a leader in forging civil society partnership for disaster risk reduction in India. In these floods the state is making its relief governance more responsive, decision making more decentralized, and civil society participation wider. Shri Surya Prakash, faculty at National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM) and a flood and drought expert has argued for reaching out to local networks and private sector establishments for flood relief and recovery.

The following are possible key ways to address the challenges and looking beyond relief: building resilience.

1. Disaster insurance, if suitably designed, can be a valuable risk management tool to support adaptation. Bihar can show the way to other states of India by designing disaster insurance pilot in at least 7 to 10 districts.
2. Looking at high flood risk reducing the number of affected people and direct disaster related economic loss is challenging. Bihar needs to build a better understanding to deal with loss and damage due to extreme events such as floods. Bihar may not have effective DRR investment without building understanding and database on loss and damage across its governance system.
3. Bihar has shown a strong performance of building awareness on school safety. This performance needs to be continued by capacity development actions for making key schools and hospitals safer in Bihar.

'Remember that relief is the enemy of recovery, so minimize relief to maximize recovery' said by Otto Koenigsberger (1978). ■

- Vishal Pathak and  
Vipul Nakum of AIDMI.

## SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY

# Mumbai Deluge and the Civil Society

Between the night of 28th August 2017, Mumbai once again witnessed a deluge. The city received precipitation amounting to 315 m.m. in 12 hours, the heaviest since the downpour of 26<sup>th</sup> July 2005 (944 m.m.). Normalcy was disrupted in this "busier than the bee" metropolis. Suburban trains, supposed to be the life-lines of Mumbai, came to a standstill in most sectors of the network serviced by three different lines. Water-logging resulted in to most other public transport systems also coming to a grinding halt in the middle of their journeys.

This resulted in to people getting stranded in places they were visiting or working at. Most people were far from their homes. Family members were in different places in the city. There was chaos. Pedestrians waded through waters with the fear of getting drowned or getting sucked in manholes. The official agencies were alert and well spread out in the city. However, what was striking this time was the selfless help offered by individuals, voluntary organisations and self-motivated groups (either residential societies or religious groups).

What they offered was amazingly simple and practical. They offered facilities to trapped commuters to relieve themselves from nature's calls. They offered place to rest, even lie down. Large community halls, auditoria were converted to dormitories for tired people who had no choice but to wade back home through knee-deep waters. They also offered snacks, meals, tea, coffee and water. Mobile numbers of individuals or organisations were broadcast by WhatsApp messages to be called for emergencies and rescue. Most messages were warm and welcoming.

A sampler of one such message read like this: "We stay at Matunga / Dadar (East) very close to both the stations. Anyone needing help in any manner whatsoever, including stay, meals, need to use washroom, dry clothes, etc. for self, family or friends, please feel free to connect to-(Two numbers were given)... Be safe and enjoy the rains. Regards, (two names of citizens)."

All the religious organisations also played their role by offering space to relax, relieve and refresh for people on seeking respite from the water-logged streets of the "over planned" city. In this case also, though the resources might be of the organisations, the initiative and efforts were of volunteers from the civil society. Among these religious groups were Jain groups, Christian churches, Sikh Gurudwaras and Hindu temples.

The municipal corporation had published the contact numbers of the disaster management control rooms of all the wards. And, during and after the downpour, hundreds of citizens posted messages reporting about trapped citizens requiring help, learning from which, police and other rescue workers reached these sites.

In my opinion, this is what is known as Community Based Disaster Management (CBDM): owned, managed and controlled largely by the civil society on its own initiative. It reflects love for fellow citizens, concern for the discomfited, sensitivity towards needs of others, warmth of fraternity and faith in humanity. This takes us a step forward in the process of strengthening the civil society vis-à-vis the State and the Market. This is surely a sign of progress. ■

- Rajesh Bhat, Managing Trustee,  
Swapath Trust, Ahmedabad