

PRAGYA'S RELIEF & REHABILITATION EFFORTS IN FLOOD-AFFECTED LEH

~ A Brief Report

Dear Donors,

I write to you on behalf of all of us at Pragya to express our gratitude for the generous donations and contributions that have, in some small measure, helped address the immediate relief needs of the people affected by the flash floods in August this year.

On 5 August 2010, the districts of Leh and parts of Kargil in the Ladakh region of the Indian Himalayas were severely affected by flash floods after torrential unprecedented rains. This caused huge losses of life, livestock, shelter and infrastructure. More than 233 people were killed, and 79 more are feared dead or missing. The official death toll has not accounted for several migrant workers working in the region. The floods were especially damaging, as the region is an ecologically vulnerable and developmentally overlooked region in the High Himalayas. They have crippled lives and destroyed livelihoods of thousands of people in the district.

As an organisation that has been working with and for the communities of the high altitude Himalayan reaches, Pragya was able to reach out to the affected people and villages, using the organisation's 15 years of experience, insight and interaction with the people and environment of Leh. Our effort has been made possible because of the munificence of donors from the world over.

THE RELIEF EFFORT

The Pragya Team launched into rescue and relief efforts with field workers based around Leh using an office vehicle and our mobile education van to help stranded villagers reach relief camps and hospitals. The teams also helped in clearing debris from badly affected areas and ferrying injured victims to hospitals.

The team simultaneously began working on assessing the extent of damage and specific relief requirements of villages and communities ravaged by the calamity. Pragya staff and the 20-member volunteer team put together by Pragya trekked to the inner villages in the affected area, access to which had been cut off following the floods, which also meant that relief measures and material could not reach them. Village status information, particularly of the remote inaccessible villages, was fed on a continual basis to the Leh district authorities and to the NGO Coordination Committee in Leh set up for managing an organized relief effort, of which Pragya was a key member. This helped ensure that relief reached the affected, but neglected villages and families.

The assessment also helped us understand the nature of the immediate and future relief and rehabilitation requirements for the victims of the disaster. We found that different villages in Leh and Kargil had suffered losses that were not necessarily homogenous. For instance, people from the Choglamsar village had lost their possessions and livelihoods completely, Norgaisling's children could no longer go to their school, which was damaged by the floods, while a substantial number of villages have had their crops and seed reserves destroyed. [For a detailed description of Pragya's Assessment of Flash Floods in Leh and Kargil please visit http://www.pragya.org/Assessment_Summary.php#introduction.]

With the Relief Funds and Contributions collected as part of Pragya's effort to help the affected people in the Leh flash floods, we have been able to carry out the following:

- Installed **18 portable toilets** in 7 different locations covering camps at Spituk Angling, Tibetan refugee camp, Chulung, Solar Colony, Mane Tsering, Lingshed hostel at Choglamsar and Degree College, Leh, to ensure that more than 1200 victims of the disaster lived in hygienic and humane conditions. Specifically requested for by the district authorities, these toilets were particularly helpful in addressing the hygiene needs of the women affected. This was supplemented with provision of personal hygiene items including **household toiletry kits** (2197 numbers) both at the various areas



where the toilets had been erected as also at Saboo, Umla, Stakmo, Shey Maroo, Nimmo, and Karu villages.

- Provided **16 Water Storage facilities** in 5 different relief locations; 10 at Solar Colony, 6 at Chogmasar village, 2 at CRO camp and 1 each at Spituk Angling and Chulung to provide a steady source for water for close to 2000 persons seeking refuge after the disaster. The storage capacities were selected based on the number of persons at each location and has helped in the prevention of water borne diseases in the post flood period. These would continue to be available to the communities in the months and years ahead.
- A large quantity of relief material has been distributed to victims of the flash floods across villages, with special focus on the more remote villages and communities. The specific day to day needs in the immediate aftermath of the disaster was addressed through provision of dry rations in the form of large quantities of **biscuits and baby food** (273 packets/tins) for the very young at Chilling, Karu, Igoothang, Lingshed and Phyang in addition to the various camps, including ITBP shelter, Himank camp and Golf field camp. **Blankets and shawls** (1075 numbers), **groundsheets** (205 numbers), **shoes** (1500 pairs), **torches** (230 numbers), were distributed and provided relief to people in distress in the relief camps. The relief material distributed also included more than **81,000 water purification tablets & 10,000 bottles of drinking water**, as well as **medicines and first aid kits**, that were flown in the first few days after the flood when there was acute need for these items.
- Constructed **Warehouses in 6 villages**: in Tarchit (also serving Khatpo), Gya (Rumtse, Sasoma, Lato & Rong), Hanu Yogma (Hanu Gogma & Hanu Thang), Igoos Inshay (Igoos Lankur, Igoos Nakle & Igoos), Kungyam and Umla, to guarantee provision of a safe shelter for grains during this winter and for agricultural produce and seeds for marginal farmers going forward - a small gesture to enable future sustenance for more than 2937 people.
- Provided substantial number of **agricultural implements** to affected farmers of Choglamasar village to enable them to reconstruct their livelihoods once again. **8 tonnes of concentrated feed** have also been distributed to 336 households dependent on animal rearing, in 18 flood-affected villages of Khalste block. The villages are Photuk, Skurubuchan, Achinathang, Hanu, Domkar, Beema, Kanji, Wanla, Hinju, Urshi, Hanutata, Khaltse, Skindiang, Gia, Temisgam, Hemischukpachan, Yangthang and Saspochey.
- **Solar lanterns** (48 numbers), **LPG Gas Heaters** (8 numbers), and **household utility kits** (45 numbers), were also provided to cover about 70 households in the relief camps and critically affected villages to hasten the process of recovery.



THE REHABILITATION NEEDS

Despite having reached out to so many families, we at Pragya are aware that there is much more that needs to be done to sustain the people of Leh and lead them to recovery. The floodwaters washed away much of the standing crop as well as the fertile topsoil that permitted agriculture to take place, and the lands have been covered with rubble in many places. Most canals that bring water from distant sources (springs or glacier-fed streams) to the village fields have been destroyed. Next year's crop would require immense effort and the harvest would likely be very poor. Loss of livestock and cattle has been extensive and given the agro-pastoral lives that the people of Leh lead, the road to recovery looks onerous.

THE WAY AHEAD

Given below are some of the few measures suggested for Reconstruction and Sustenance of the region and its people [*involving both physical inputs and capacity building measures*]:

Physical Inputs

- ! Large rocks will have to be cleared off the farmlands and debris removed using heavy earthmoving equipment. The lands would also require considerable inputs of manure and other nutrients, for rejuvenating them and making them cultivable again. Equipment support and soil nutrients would have to be provided to the marginal farmers.
- ! For restoration of irrigation facilities, the government is expected to repair the main canals, but work will still need to be done to connect the canals to individual fields. The smaller *kubls* (channels) that cater to the individual fields would need to be repaired locally. Wherever water cannot be channelized from the main irrigation canal due to change in water-course as a result of flood damage, water storage structures [*zing*] would have to be built between the water source and the fields for storing water for subsequent use. These activities would require support for material and some external labor that may be required.
- ! Seeds of cash crops would be procured and distributed to the needy farmers for the coming sowing season. For sustained cropping, Seed Banks would need to be established at cluster level for exchange and storage of seeds- of both cash crops and food crops.
- ! Pre-fabricated weather resistant warehouses need to be provided to villages to store their food grains and cash crop for the harsh winters, as well as a safeguard against future events of the same nature.



Capacity Building Measures

- Extensive training on Disaster Management issues [both mitigation and post disaster] needs to be undertaken in the Ladakh region and in other parts of the Himalayas that are prone to such environmental risks. Since, the region is very remote and many villages are inaccessible at most times, it is necessary to build up a trained cadre of first aid / casualty workers across distant villages, to ensure effective disaster response.
- Small and marginal farmers in the Himalayas are being increasingly affected by recurrent droughts and floods, and resulting crop loss. Training on improved agro-techniques and cropping would help them adapt their farming practices to these changes, and reduce the risks to their livelihoods.

We at Pragya sincerely hope that we will continue to receive your support for our efforts at making a difference and would request you to access our site at www.pragya.org for updates on our latest activities and events.

Seasons Greetings and hoping for a better and safer world.

Gargi Banerji
Director
Pragya