

QUARTERLYACTIVITY PROGRESS REPORT:

Food Security for Flood-affected Populations in Odisha

Reporting Period: April 1 – June 30, 2014

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Village Road under Construction at Kolkotha-Kendudangiri Village of Badasahi Block in Mayurbhanja District

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Introduction

On the night of October 11th, 2013, Cyclone Phailin - a category 5 cyclone - made landfall on the coast of Odisha, India with wind speeds up to 220 km per hour. During the following three days, more than 200 cm of rain was recorded creating unprecedented flooding in many districts and causing further destruction. According to Government of India reports, the cyclone and the resulting floods, which damaged 800,000 homes and over 860,000 hectares of land and standing crops, affected more than half of Odisha's 42 million person population.¹ Power disruption and damage to more than 210,000 electric poles and over 90 electrical towers left millions without electricity.

The districts of Mayurbhanj and Baleswar suffered severely from cyclone induced flooding during this period. Badasahi and GB Nagar Blocks² of Mayurbhanj district and Nilagiri Block of Baleswar were among the most affected. The resultant loss of crops led to acute food insecurity for affected families who are resorting to harsh coping strategies, including reducing the quantity of food consumed per meal and compromising on nutritional aspects by spending less money on food. The number of meals consumed reduced in frequency from 3 to 2 times a day. As a result, varieties of food like protein, vitamins and fat consumption through carbohydrates are not being consumed and dietary needs are not being met. Adult members of the household, particularly women in some cases, went partially hungry in order to fulfil food needs of the children and men in their household. This marginalization of women's access to food has resulted in more women going hungry.

In order to respond to these needs, Mercy Corps, in partnership with Adhikar, initiated the food security project 'Surakhya' in the affected blocks in Badasahi, Khunta in Mayurbhanj district and Nilgiri block in Baleswar district. 'Surakhya' means security and it was chosen as the project name to indicate that this program will help make households secure in food and other basic needs following the emergency.

Program Overview:

Objective: To improve food security of 17,500 people in flood affected villages of Mayurbhanj and Baleswar districts of Odisha through cash transfers.

The cash transfers were broadly divided into two parts:

- Cash for Work (CfW) for **3,200** households
- Unconditional cash transfers for the **300** most vulnerable labor poor households



Cash Payment to CfW Beneficiaries

Activities Completed under the Expected Results:

During this reporting period, the project team was recruited and trained, target villages were identified and field offices were established. Baseline information was collected in the Mayurbhanj villages and **503 households** participated in the cash for work program from seven villages of Badasahi block. The CfW program supported the rehabilitation or construction of vital infrastructure such as irrigation canals, village roads and community ponds. Households participating in the work were able to use the cash earned to purchase supplies and food to meet their daily needs.

ERI.1 Cash for Work (CfW): The program will focus on Cash-for-Work (CfW) for at least 3,200 households (HH) to weather the next agricultural cycle and support the rehabilitation of infrastructure

¹Reuters, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/13/us-india-cyclone-idUSBRE9990LK20131013> October 2013

²Block is a basic administrative unit of the Government

such as market places, irrigation canals and water harvesting structures, village roads, village markets, and clearing heavily silted areas.

Selection of households:

During the reporting period, HH were selected to participate based on the following criteria:

- HH that are temporarily displaced.
- HH with a total or partial loss of shelter, standing crops, utilities or assets.
- HH without regular livelihood sources assuring stable income.
- HH with poor financial conditions leading to compromises on food intake both in terms of quality and quantity.

The process for selecting the participating villages and households is as follows:

- Secondary data collected during the proposal stage was verified by the affected block offices to identify the affected Gram Panchayats (GPs)³ and villages.
- Local leaders, including Sarpanchs⁴ under the Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI)⁵, helped to identify the most vulnerable and poor villages and households.
- Sample households were interviewed to ensure that they satisfied the criteria.
- Village meetings were held between participating affected households and project team.
- Village committees were formed to represent the selected beneficiary households.
- Agreements/MoUs were signed between the village committee and the project agreeing to the terms and conditions of the CfW program.
- Lists of the participating households were prepared.

Selection and Planning of Infrastructure Projects:

Villagers were consulted to identify common infrastructure to include in the CfW activities. Members from the local PRI institutions, such as ward members and Sarpanchs, also helped identify local infrastructure to include. Common infrastructure that the government decided not to include in its programs during the fiscal year was considered for the program. Most of the construction activities focused on earth work. A local technical expert with a civil engineering background was engaged and assessed the viability of the construction proposals and prepared a basic design and layout of the infrastructure. He, along with the rest of the project team, is also supervising the construction process ensuring that the work follows the proposed design.

During this reporting period the following was repaired or constructed:

- Four connecting roads in the village
- Three approach roads from the village to river banks
- One renovation and repair of an irrigation canal
- One village pond



Construction Underway to Dig Ponds in Askund VillageBadasahi

³A Gram Panchayat is the local self-government at the village level in India and provides a large number of basic services for citizens living in rural locations in India.

⁴Sarpanch is the elected member of the Gram Panchayat.

⁵Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) is a three-tier system in the state with elected bodies at the village, taluk and district levels. It ensures greater participation of people and more effective implementation of rural development programs.

The below table details the infrastructure projects:

Type	Location	Dimension(LengthX BreadthXHeight)	Population Likely to Benefit
Earthen road	Village Mankadapal, GP- Sialighati , Block - Badasahi	L-150m B-4m H-1.5m	160
Earthen road	Village- Rangapani, GP- Durgapur Block- Badasahi	L-1000m B-4.5m H-1.5m	350
Earthen road	Village- Kolkatha GP- Durgapur, Block- Badasahi	L-280m B-4.5m H-0.9m	550
Earthen road	Village-Kolkatha (Kendudangeri)GP- Durgapur Block- Badasahi	L-110m B-5.5m H-1.5m	550
Approach road	Village- Asukand GP- Durgapur Block- Badasahi	L-2000m B-4m H-0.9m	650
Approach road	Village- Patarapada GP- Paunsia Block- Badasahi	L-200m B-4m H-1m	175
Approach road	Village- Tunagambaria GP- Chandanpur, Block- Badasahi	L-600m B-6m H-2m	1000
Repair of irrigation canal	Village- Aguad - GP- Durgapur, Block- Badasahi	L-1250m B-1.25m H-1.5m	1250
Village pond	Village-Tuna Gambaria GP- Chandanpur Block- Badasahi	L-45m B-30m Depth-5m	1000

Implementation

A total of 503 households from seven villages from Badasahi block in Mayurbhanj district participated in CfW during the reporting quarter. Community infrastructure projects were selected in consultation with the village committee. Team members inspected the proposed sites and made an initial assessment on the feasibility and utility of the infrastructure selected. The technical expert prepared the design for the project and the team conducted a cost assessment to determine the number of person days and material to use. Once this was determined, the CfW activities were conducted under the direct supervision of the village committee, project team and the technical expert to ensure that work was not duplicated and that all the beneficiaries participated. Upon completion of the project, the technical expert visited the sites to certify that construction was completed as per the proposed design. Once the projects were completed, they were handed over to the village committee who are responsible for protecting and maintaining it.

Payment Mechanism:

In consultation with the village committee and beneficiary groups, payments were made after 7-10 days of work. In most cases, both women and men participated in the CfW activities in an approximate ratio of 60:40. Seventy percent of women received cash for their household which increased the probability that the cash would be used for food for the family. Informal interactions and focus group discussions with the villagers indicated that the cash for work has supported the participating households in purchasing food in the affected villages. The food purchased was mostly rice, pulses, vegetables, oil and fish/meat.

While the plan is to pay the CfW participants through their bank account wherever feasible, villagers were initially apprehensive about this payment system as they were not getting their wages in a timely manner while participating in Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) work. As a way to gain the participant's trust for this payment system, the project team and the villagers mutually agreed that they will receive cash for the first 15 days of work and the subsequent payment will be made through a bank transfer. Initial assessments indicated that many beneficiaries opened a bank account to receive wages for MGNREGA work, however, some of them may need to be reactivated.

Those without accounts were encouraged to open bank accounts. Households participating in CfW were paid INR 165, which is the average prevailing local wage rate for unskilled labor and at par with the MGNREGA wage rate.

The local market is stable and without any sharp fluctuation in prices. The price range of food commodities like rice, pulses, vegetables, fish/meat remained the same after people purchased food items with the cash received. The vendors are well stocked and the increased demand did not lead to a rise in prices.

Baseline Survey to Assess the Pre-Intervention Status of the Beneficiary Households:

A baseline survey is being conducted to assess the status of the beneficiaries related to food consumption, income-expenditure and availability of livelihood options. The survey will find the critical gaps with statistical figures and substantiate the assessments made during project formulation. Similarly, an end line survey will assess the changes in status and overall situation of the beneficiaries and will be conducted towards the last quarter of implementation.

Methodology for baseline survey:

1. Primary data from sample HH collected for analysis and interpretation using an interview schedule. Random sampling will be done where 25% of households from each selected village will be interviewed.
2. Focus group discussions are used to capture the general trends and scenarios.
3. Local leaders are interviewed to understand the situation

Progress So Far: The baseline questionnaire was prepared and field tested. Project staff was oriented on the survey and data collection methods. Approximately 125 HH (25% of the 503 HH participating in the CfW during the reporting period) have been surveyed. As the baseline survey could only be completed following the selection of villages and beneficiaries, the baseline data will be completed by the end of August.

Communication with Government Functionaries:

The district administrations of Mayurbhanj and Baleshwar under the government of Odisha were appraised of the intervention. They have assured cooperation in planning and implementing program activities. The government block officials provided the list of affected GPs and villages. This helped in narrowing the focus and identifying the participating villages and households.

ERI.2 Cash grant to most vulnerable labor poor households: *Approximately 300 severely food insecure and labor poor HH lacking the capacity to participate in CfW or other livelihood restoration activities will receive unconditional cash transfers for 120 days to meet acute food needs.*

Nineteen severely food insecure and labor poor households were identified in seven villages of Mayurbhanj who lack the capacity to participate in CfW. These households are unable to send a family member to participate in CfW and thus require unconditional cash transfers (UTC). Households who do not have a regular earning member and compromise on food were selected to participate. Widows or older women who cannot participate in CfW are given priority during the selection process. The selection process includes:

- Orientation of the beneficiary groups at village level about the need for unconditional cash transfers to labor poor households for survival.
- Identification of labor poor households in village meetings as per the suggestion of the village committee members.
- Physical verification by the program team members and final listing of households.
- The local Sarpanch certifies the poor condition of the households and need for cash.
- Cash transfer occurs.

The village committee members requested to delay the UTCs prior to CfW activities as it may create resentment among community members. Cash transfers to these households will be implemented in synchronised phases with the CfW activities undertaken in those villages.

Indicators:

- ER 1.1.1 **503** households participating in CfW and receiving CfW payments – target: 3,200 households from Mayurbhanj and Baleshwar districts.
- ER 1.1.2 **12** community infrastructure sites partially rehabilitated – target: 60
- ER 1.1.3 **70%** of cash received used for food purchases and for livelihoods recovery – target: 80
- ER 1.2.1 **Selected 19** most vulnerable households receiving cash grants for food – targets: 300
- ER 1.2.2 % of cash transferred used for food purchases – target: 90%

Observations:

The MNREGA work is implemented in some villages in the operational area. The MNREGA provides local infrastructure building projects and provides wages to the local poor households. As the project's CfW activities are similar, care was taken not to duplicate MNREGA's efforts. In order to do this, the village committees were asked to propose only those infrastructure projects that are not planned under the MNREGA scheme. The ward member who is part of the village committee and knows about the annual work plan of MNREGA assists in the planning stage. The Sarpanch, who is also part of the MNREGA planning committee, certifies that the proposed work plan is not part of MNREGA and the infrastructure will benefit the villagers. The list of proposed infrastructure projects is shared with the Block Development Officer (BDO) who is responsible for avoiding duplication of efforts. The BDO and the District Magistrate and Collector then appraise the project's progress periodically.

Community feedback indicates that the CfW program will help reduce distress migration in the future. Usually during this part of the year, marginalized populations from the selected villages migrate to other townships like Balasore, Baripada and Bhubaneswar within Odisha and also to other states like Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka in search of jobs.

Constraints and Challenges:

Unconditional cash transfers were delayed based on community feedback. As most households in the selected villages are very poor and have no means to meet their daily needs, the general feedback was that giving cash to a few HH would create tensions or resentment among community members. Though the community understands that HH selected for UCT cannot participate in CfW work, the village committee members requested not to pay them prior to CfW activities. Therefore, the payment of UCT is synchronised with CfW and the 19 very vulnerable labor poor HH will be paid at the beginning of July.

HH participating in CfW refused to be paid through the bank as many of them have experienced delayed payments or disputes about amount paid while working for MNREGA where payments are made with bank accounts. To address this challenge, the project team built trust with the community by agreeing to pay regular cash at the beginning and then shifting to bank payments afterwards.