

QUARTERLY ACTIVITY PROGRESS REPORT:
Food Security for Flood-affected Populations in Odisha

Reporting Period: January 1 – March 31, 2015

Funded by USAID Bureau of Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance/Office of Food for Peace



Construction of a Large Community Pond

Country Contact	Mercy Corps HQ Contact	Project Summary
<p>Julisa Tambunan Country Representative (Interim) India, P1, Green Park Extension, New Delhi Mobile: +91 9560317181 jtambunan@mercy Corps.org</p>	<p>Jared Rowell Sr. Program Officer 45 SW Ankeny St Portland, OR 9720 Phone: +1(503) 896-5853 Fax: +1 (503) 896-5013 jrowell@mercy Corps.org</p>	<p>Award No: AID-FFP-G-14-00016 Start Date: April 1, 2014 End Date: June 30, 2015 (NCE) Report Date: April 30, 2015 Total Award: \$1,457,761</p>

Background

Following the Cyclone Phailin induced flood in October 2013, the economically vulnerable households in Badasahi and GB Nagar development blocks¹ of Maurbhanj district and Nilagiri block of Balasore district suffered huge losses to their standing crops, shelters, livelihoods and household belongings. Those who suffered the most were those from the Scheduled Tribe² (ST) community, who generally have limited assets and resources to cope with such external shocks. This community was also accustomed to smaller floods and were not prepared for the devastation brought on by the cyclone. As a result, the affected households resorted to negative coping strategies (such as compromising on food intake) in the absence of a steady income and are still struggling to rebuild their lives.

Program Overview

Mercy Corps, in partnership with Adhikar, is implementing the “**Food Security for Flood-affected Populations in Odisha**” program supported by USAID to address the needs of the post cyclone flood-affected communities. The program’s goal is to provide cash to 3,500 poor and vulnerable households to help meet their basic needs: 3,200 households under cash for work and 300 most vulnerable households with unconditional cash grants. The money is used to purchase food and improve their livelihood opportunities. The program employs two strategies for the cash transfers: a) Cash for Work (CfW) for beneficiaries to receive livelihood assistance, primarily to buy food, as well as rebuild infrastructure and improve the resilience capacity³ of the communities and b) unconditional cash transfers (UCT) for targeted households lacking the capacity to participate in CfW. The CfW was staggered to meet the critical wage gaps between the cropping season and government planned work opportunities in the respective villages. To date, 3,330 households participated in CfW (against targeted 3,200) and 300 most vulnerable households received unconditional cash to purchase food items.

Progress against Objectives:

The project period was originally set to end on 31st March 2015. However, in early February, Mercy Corps requested USAID to grant a no cost extension for the project for a period of three months (i.e. until 30th June 2015). This was requested keeping in mind the Government of India’s recent instructions to the banks in India to request prior permission before transferring funds originated from Mercy Corps USA (and 13 other notified agencies). This delayed the fund transfers from Mercy Corps to its local partner, Adhikar, from January until March 2015 and as a result, also delayed program activities. By March, Mercy Corps was able to successfully transfer multiple small tranches of funds to allow program activities to continue and will continue to transfer program funds in small batches until all the necessary funds are transferred. As Mercy Corps and partner agency wrap up program activities during this extended period, the requested additional time will facilitate a smooth phase out from the targeted areas and beneficiaries and ensure that all program activities are completed.

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

The ongoing interventions under the project are broadly divided as follows:

- Cash for Work for **3,300** households (against the target of 3,200 households)
- Unconditional cash transfers for **300** most vulnerable households
- Orientation around basic nutrition care at household level in all project villages

¹ Block is a basic administrative unit of the government.

² This is reflected in the baseline survey completed during the initial phase of the program.

³ Through repairing and strengthening of embankments for flood protection, regulating excess/deficient water, reusing water, constructing and reinforcing village roads to connecting villages with markets and other services, raising plinth in the village weekly market space to make it weather accessible, etc.

- Community mobilization and capacity building around institution building and linkages with local government departments

ER1.1 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.

Activities:

- Planned CfW activities in the identified worksite in consultation with the village committee and participating households.
- Upgraded the design for each infrastructure project with active participation from community representatives. This includes layout, person days, earth work estimation, superstructure requirement, etc.
- Finalized superstructure design with material estimations to ensure infrastructure is strong and durable.
- Engaged households in CfW activities and transferred money to individual bank accounts.
- Initiated exit level activities and handing over of community assets to ensure proper utilization and maintenance for lasting utility.

Implementation:

The main thrust during the reporting period was to continue providing CfW opportunities and complete all remaining human working days (total 80 days per household) targeted by the intervention. The wages received against the cash for work helped the poor households to address the immediate food needs, besides meeting other basic needs (e.g. paying tuition fees for children, buying cloths and uniforms, meeting health needs, etc). The guaranteed payments also gave households the confidence they needed to restart their livelihood activities by initiating share cropping and the collection, processing and selling of non-timber forest products. Some have also started their agricultural activities (where women participate in CfW and men in agricultural fields).

During the period, the following numbers of beneficiaries participated in CfW activities in three clusters:

- 1) Nilagiri Cluster - 916 households
- 2) Sialighati cluster – 980 households
- 3) Durgapur cluster – 950 households

A total of 2,846 households out of 3,330 beneficiary households participated in the CfW activities during the period. As January through March was intended as the last quarter of the program, most participants already completed more than 65 days of work (total committed 80 days). Planning sessions to complete the final CfW activities were completed at the village level with beneficiary participation. Stress was given to reserve the unskilled labor for the construction of support structures.

To date, 74% households completed more than 60 days of work and 16% completed more than 41 days of work (the total allotted days of work is 80 days for each household). Thus, three quarters of the households are in the last stage of participation in CfW.⁴

Support Structures to Strengthen Village Infrastructure Rehabilitated under the CfW

The project hired technical experts (those with civil engineering backgrounds from Planature Pvt. Ltd⁵), who visited 45 large infrastructure sites to understand the situation and the status of the work. Based on the survey, the technical expert gave suggestions to the field team to improve the infrastructure created

⁵ Planature Pvt. Ltd provides experts in feasibility assessments for infrastructure projects. They assist in preparing layouts, material requirements and cost estimation as well as monitoring assistance.

under the cash for work with proper alignments, depths, lengths, heights and gradient of the slopes (e.g. raised village roads, community ponds, irrigation structures, etc.). The infrastructure where additional support will be required are: four water harvesting structures, sixteen community ponds, fifteen village connecting roads, three embankments, and seven high rise platforms for market and flood shelters. In order to give stability and strengthen the village's infrastructure, the program uses grass patching, small stone on the roads, and pipes in the culvert for better drainage systems.

Work Site Support Services:

Support services are provided at the work sites to create an ambient work atmosphere for the beneficiaries. A mobile nursery that provides childcare for the working women, toys and food packets for children, clean drinking water, and a temporary shed for protection against the harsh sun were provided.

Initiate Exit Activities:

Meetings were held with staff and the community to discuss issues related to the usage of the community assets and their maintenance in order to sustain the long term services of these structures. A series of meetings were conducted at the village and Gram Panchayat level to discuss these issues and find workable solutions. In most cases, the village committees, with active participation from community members, agreed to repair the infrastructure whenever required so that they last longer and continue to serve their purpose. Furthermore, the committee members were informed of the relevant government departments who will provide future support and maintenance under their budget. This is supported by the communication linkages the field team established with line departments like fishery, animal husbandry, horticulture, agriculture, soil conservation, and the block development office in an effort to build a meaningful relationship between the government and the communities. Interactive workshops are planned during the NCE to facilitate relationship building for future resource mobilization by the communities from the local government.

Challenges:

During the quarter, cash for work activities were conducted for only 17 days. All project activities in the field were suspended on 18th of January after Mercy Corps learned about the Government of India's prior permission notice. On January 15, 2015 the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in the Government of India circulated a list of ten donor agencies/INGOs (included four more later on) and instructed the Reserve Bank of India to restrict the flow of funds of those on this list. Should any of these agencies transfer funds to a bank account in India, the bank is instructed to inform the MHA and only after their clearance, are the funds allowed to be credited to the accounts of the recipient. All ten agencies are kept under the "prior permission category" before funds can be transferred from them to individuals, NGO or organizations in India.

Unfortunately, Mercy Corps' name was included on this list. This prevented Mercy Corps from making any payments under this project after 17th January 2015 and obstructed the flow of funds to the partner agency, Adhikar. This resulted in delays for the cash transfer activities and pending payments to the beneficiaries who participated in cash for work.

Mercy Corps informed USAID of its status in India and the plans to find feasible options to transfer the funds in order to clear their liabilities in the field and complete the deliverables. In parallel, meetings were conducted with the Ministry of Home Affairs and legal firms to understand the reason why Mercy Corps was placed in the prior permission category and how to get it resolved. By March, Mercy Corps was able to successfully transfer multiple small tranches of funds and will continue to do so until all the necessary funds are transferred. However, this requires extra work and time to execute.

Due to these challenges, partner organization, Adhikar, took proactive steps to keep the motivation level of the community intact. Village meetings were conducted to inform the community of the reasons why

the work was suspended. Communities and the suppliers appreciated Mercy Corps' and Adhikar's efforts and agreed to wait until a solution was found and the pending activities are resumed. The local administration is appraised of the program's progress and the reasons for the delay in implementation. The Block Development Officers and the District Collectors were informed of the activities and the improvement in the food security status of the affected community. They appreciated the initiatives and have assured the program team that they will cooperate in community mobilization. They are considering further improvement and utilization of the infrastructures created by the program for long term benefits.

ER1.2 Cash grant to most vulnerable and 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.*

Activities:

- Households received cash to purchase food.
- Households assisted in food purchases.
- Improvements monitored in food consumption pattern leading to better nutrition.

Implementation:

During the project period, 201 most vulnerable households who otherwise could not have participated in cash for work activities received INR 3,050 in cash, the overall total reaching INR 613,050. The cash received will provide food support to each family for a month and they have some additional sources to supplement the deficit to meet the nutritional needs. The most vulnerable households include disabled persons, the elderly and the chronically ill. The remaining 99 households were not reached during this period due the cash transfer delay. These households will be reached in the next quarter.

Monitoring:

Household level monitoring was used to monitor the beneficiaries' utilization of the cash. For households that had mobility issues, the program staff, particularly community mobilizers, accompanied members of these households to markets to assist them with the purchase and transportation of their food. The program also increased beneficiaries' awareness of the benefits of a nutritious diet and further strengthened this message through household-level counseling and village meetings. The nutritionist hired by the project conducted village-level orientation programs. A total of 22 orientations were conducted in January and they focused on educating the participating members, specifically women about the concept of a balanced diet and its positive impact on their health. The trainings were participatory in nature and the participants were encouraged to identify locally available food that can be prepared to fulfill their nutrition requirement. The M&E consultant visited the operational villages and monitored the progress in beneficiaries' food intake in terms of quantity and dietary diversity. The report indicated a significant improvement in the purchase and consumption of food items related to carbohydrates, vegetables, edible oils, and meat/fish/eggs. The program team monitored these initiatives on a regular basis and encouraged the participants to apply the learnings in their daily lives. About 70% of the participating HHs purchased non-perishable food items in bulk like rice, pulses, oil, etc. The perishable items were purchased once or twice a week. This decreased the number of purchases and reduced the hardship of daily purchase from the market, which are far away from their homes.

Achievements against Indicators:

ER 1.1.1	3,333 households participating in CfW and receiving CfW payments – target: 3,200
ER 1.1.2	157 community infrastructure partially rehabilitated – target: 60
ER 1.1.3	83% of cash received used for food purchases and for livelihoods recovery – Target: 80%
ER 1.2.1	300 most vulnerable households receiving cash grants for food – target: 300
ER 1.2.2	70% of cash transferred used for food purchases – target: 90%

Constraints and Challenges:

As explained above, the sudden suspension of the cash transfer activities and the payments to the beneficiary households resulted in a certain amount of discomfort among the participating households. There was also apprehension among the community as they did not understand the reason for why their payments were suspended. A series of meetings were conducted at the village level to inform the community that the reasons behind this delay were beyond the reach of the program team and to request their patience. This yielded positive result as gradually some of the village leaders and most of the beneficiaries realized the issue and cooperated with the project team. The program team, led by the program manager, continuously reached out to the community and assured them about their pending payments and the plan to restart the activities. The community showed admirable patience and supported the program despite all these unforeseen problems.

Annexes:

Annex A: Photos from the Field

Annex B: Working Day Coverage in Three Clusters

Annex C: Details of Community Infrastructures and their Utilities.

Annex D: Details of HH Participation in Operational Villages

Annex A: Photos from the Field

Canal Renovation in Ranibandh



Construction of a Raised Platform in Sialighati



Construction of Village Market in Badasahi

Annex B: Working Day Coverage in Three Clusters**Total Human Working Days for CfW Activities for Targeted (Table 3)**

Cluster	Number of families	Number of families worked in different categories of number of days			
		0 - 20 days	21 - 40 days	41 - 60 days	61 - 80 days
Durgapur	1,100	12	86	137	865
Nilagiri	1,050	0	14	131	905
Sialighati	1,180	47	177	263	693
Total	3,330	59	277	531	2463
Percentage	-	2%	8%	16%	74%

Annex C: Details of Community Infrastructures and their Utilities.**Details of community infrastructures of the three clusters**

Types of community infrastructures	Sialighat	Durgapur	Nilagiri	Utilities
Canal renovation and repairing work	4	2	3	Irrigation to the agriculture land.
River embankment	1	0	0	Disaster Risk Reduction
Pond Excavation work	2	5	12	Domestic use, pisciculture and irrigation.
Water Harvesting Structure	2	2	0	Irrigation to the agriculture land and domestic and other purpose use.
Approach road to agriculture land and main road.	11	25	20	Better communication for all purpose.
Elevated Platform	6	4	0	Protect from flood water, safe shelter to both humans and domestic animals during flood.
Village Market land high raising.	1	1	2	Easy accesses to the market during flood, easy to market local products, safe shelter during flood.
Land leveling	3	0	2	Community space for meeting
Check Bund	0	2	0	Protect from flood water
School compound land leveling	3	4	4	Easy access to school and avoid water logging during rainy season.
Plantation	0	2	0	Check soil erosion and promote green environment
	33	47	77	
Grand total	33+47+77 = 157 community assets			

Annex D: Details of HH Participation in Operational Villages

The following table details households, community assets, person days planned and actual coverage in each village.

Cluster – Sialighati; District - Mayurbhanj

Name of GP	Name of Village	Infrastructure	Total HH	Total Human days planned	Achieved by 31st of March. 2015	Balance Human days
SIALI GHATI	BAGHUAPAL	Platforms raised at Baghuapal 400 square meter.	36	2880	1767	1113
	KENDUGADI	Raised platform for Disaster Risk reduction	26	2080	1783	297
	PATRAPADA	Village connecting road about 800 meters	60	4800	3249	1551
		Repairing of Earthen canal				
	BHANJABATI	Repairing the damaged road of Bhanjabati 150 meters	91	7280	6959	321
		Raising of platform in the school and temple areas				
	MANKADPAL	Repairing of connecting road 250 meters	41	3280	3186	94
		High raised platform for DRR				
SAKUA	Repairing the river embankment	91	7280	5850	1430	
	Digging of pond					
KAUCHI	Embankment for flood barrier and connecting road 310 square meters	119	9520	9092	428	
	Repairing of water harvesting structure 250 square meters					
RANIBANDHA ANDHA	RANIBANDHA	Renovation of WHS 200 square meters	224	17920	16701	1219
		Repairing of canal				
	MANKADIA	Village connecting Road	30	2400	2046	354
TIRLDIHI	Village connecting road 1.5 km	30	2400	2046	354	
						Repairing of earthen canal
BADA SAHI	BEPAL	Raised platform in the temple compound	110	8800	6124	2676
		Construction of weekly hat				
		Renovation of canal				
		Connecting road to agri. field				
KHUNTAPAL	Raised platform in the school and temple compounds 150	117	9360	5125	4235	
						Construction of raised platform about 40 square meters
						Repairing of water harvesting structure
SAHADASUNI	Construction of new pond					
MADH APUR	CHAKAMADPUR	Construction of village Connecting road 200 meters	100	8000	4609	3391
	UCHABALI	Construction of new village	51	4080	2848	1232

		connecting road 800 meters				
	ATILAGADI	Digging of pond	26	320	1305	-985
	ARAPATA	Repairing of connecting road	58	0	2013	-2013
		Total	1,180	88,000	72,632	15,368

Cluster – Durgapur; District - Maurbhanj

GP	Village	Name	No. Of HH	Total No. Of P. Days Planned	No. Of P. Days Completed Till Date	Balance Person Days
Joginugaon	Dingira	Road repairing & Height raising, Canal renovation, Plantation.	106	8480	7372	1108
	Barihapal	Road protection high land raising, village and agriculture field approach road.	90	7200	6279	921
Durgapur	Aguad	Canal work, Check Bond, Road	108	8640	8092	548
	Asukanda	Plantation, Road	105	8400	7536	864
	Rangapani	Road, School compound levelling	90	7200	6401	799
	Kulkotha	Road, Pond digging	126	10080	8974	1106
Chandanpur	Tuna Gambharia	Pond, road, high raised earthen platform as flood shelter	151	12080	11459	621
	Chandanpur	Pond renovation.	32	2560	2062	498
	Sarbeswarpur	Road development and repairing.	50	4000	2919	1081
	Jalananda & Tentala	Pond excavation and approach road.	72	5760	5304	456
	Bidyadhar Khunta		55	4400	3908	492
Kendudiha	Kuliana	Village local market land raising and Pond excavation	79	6320	5888	432
	Mendhamundia		39	3120	1749	1371
			1,103	88,240	77,943	10,297

Nilagiri Cluster

District -Balasore

Gram Panchayat (GP)	Name of the village	Community Assets	No of household participating	Total person days planned	persons days covered up to 31/12/14	Balance
Begunia	Dobati	Digging of village pond & Repairing of River Embankment at 4 different weak points	70	5600	4682	918

Kansa	Sangrampur	Construction/Development of village Market(Hata Pindi-50nos) & Digging of village pond	88	7040	6645	395
	Kansa (Khamarisahi)	Excavation of Village Pond,	63	5040	4858	182
Narsinghpur	Ambikapur	Repairing of River Embankment u to 500mtr, Construction of village Road-2 nos, Aadibandha of Pond, Soil filling of low land & Renovation of Village road side drainage system.	93	7440	6589	851
	Durgapur	Renovation of Village Drain, School cleaning, landscaping & filling of low land.	73	5840	4112	1728
	Narsinghpur	Construction of Ring Road inside of River Embankment	71	5680	5321	359
Matiali	Adiasahi	Excavation & expand of Village Pond, New connecting Road to AWC & School	71	5680	5294	386
	Barpada/Ghantibania	Excavated & expanded Village Pond, New connecting Road .	95	7600	7115	485
	Dumuria	Village Pond, New Road	69	5520	4783	737
	Dumuria (Ramsingh sahi)	Construction of Village Road-2 nos	61	4880	3803	1077
Ajodhya	Balipala	Construction of Village Road-3 no & Water Harvesting	73	5840	5091	749
	Pratappur	Constructed Veddi Bandha School Campus Lawn development & Connecting Road	99	7920	7920	0
Bhauniabad	Tentuliapada	Excavation of Village Pond and 2 nos of village road	62	4960	4432	528
	Godisula	Digging Pond and 1 nos of village road	62	4960	4396	564
TOTAL			1,050	84,000	75,041	8,959