

Helping communities in Bangladesh and Nepal to cope with disasters

End of Year Report for Beautiful Store

—May 2009 to March 2010

Key achievements: This project has provided 396 wells and 361 latrines for some of the poorest and most vulnerable communities in Nepal and Bangladesh. Over 8,300 people will be better able to protect their own lives and possessions during the next floods as a result of the homes that have been raised, and the flood shelters that have been constructed by this project. More than 2,500 have made their livelihoods more resilient, and will be better able to cope in the event of future disasters.

Background

The inhabitants of Bangladesh's low-lying sandy islands or 'chars' live in extreme poverty and are increasingly threatened by severe flooding. Flooding not only endangers the lives of these communities and the agriculture that they rely on for their income, but also threatens to harm the progress that has been made in education, women's rights and sanitation in these areas. Oxfam's River Basin programme has been helping to develop sustainable ways to reduce the impact of flooding in Bangladesh since 1999.

In southern Nepal, people are also becoming increasingly at risk from flooding and unpredictable weather patterns. There has been a rise in mortality rates from water-borne and exposure-related diseases and support from the government has been limited. Flooding and localised droughts ruin crops and threaten food supplies.



Shaharon and Ambia Begum with their raised latrine in the Char area of Bangladesh.

Credit: Dan Chung/ Oxfam

The Project

This stage of the River Basin Programme has aimed to reduce the impact of flooding and extreme weather. This has involved working with local partners and empowering communities to protect life and property in the face of changing climate conditions and to demand improvements in disaster resilience from the government.

Recent events

In Nepal, the project area was affected by an outbreak of an illness associated with cholera and Oxfam's emergency staffs was involved in responses in four districts. The project area was then hit by severe flooding between July and September, causing further delays. In Bangladesh, the project area received roughly 40 per cent less rainfall than is usual for a monsoon period. This has led to serious concerns at a national level about water scarcity for irrigation and power supply. These recent events highlight the difficulties that the communities this project is working with have to face year after year and illustrate the importance of undertaking these activities.

Note on reduction of planned activities: The budget was initially set in 2008 (see Financial Report). Since then, many of the planned activities have been constrained by external impacts such as increasing prices for building materials and extreme exchange rate variations.

In some cases this has meant that we have not been able to reach the numbers we initially targeted in the plan. In other cases, the communities we are working with have requested changes such as extending drainage channels and increasing support for primary schools. Where these changes are appropriate, Oxfam and partners have agreed to adapt the planned activities and project budget accordingly.

Activities and Impact

Bangladesh

Train 500 people in Disaster Management and 50 as Community Health Volunteers. Provide emergency supplies at eight locations and build two rescue boats

- 400 people (314 women and 86 men) have been trained in disaster management
- Oxfam's partner has improved capacity to respond immediately to any local disasters
- 62 people have completed training as community health volunteers
- 50 women have completed training on mother and childcare and hygiene promotion
- 3 rescue boats have been provided to communities for use during flooding

In total, 400 people in seven districts have completed training in disaster management. The individuals volunteered to participate at village level meetings, which were conducted at the start of the year. Training covered topics such as: the various causes and impact of disaster; how to prepare at home and in the community; and how to disseminate early warnings. As a result of the training many people in these communities have started to consider the specific risks that they face, and how to mitigate them. For example, many households have started to keep emergency cash, fuel and food reserves so that they are better able to cope during any future floods.



Pregnant mother Salma Akhter, 23, is checked by Aleya Hossain Alo, in Char Atra, Bangladesh.
Credit: Dan Chung/ Oxfam.

The disaster management training has also helped communities and families to understand how to disseminate early warning information and how to access emergency services in the event of a disaster. Volunteers have already organised several early warning drills in their respective communities. Three boats – each with capacity for approximately 125 people – have been provided to the communities for transporting people and their belongings during floods.

Meanwhile, local partners have started to store emergency materials (such as first aid kits and torches) in warehouses nearby in order to be able to respond immediately to any local disaster without waiting for external assistance. At least 4,000 people will now be able to receive immediate support and supplies in the event of an emergency.

“People used dirty floodwater to drink, wash and swim. There were lots of diseases: diarrhoea, fever, dysentery, skin diseases and eye infections. Now we have done a lot of training on health issues, we hope things will improve. Working as a Community Health Volunteer has also improved my life and place in the society.” Jayeda, 40, Dakkin Gupdighi, Mithamoin, Bangladesh.

A total of 62 women have completed training as community health volunteers and 50 women have attended refresher training on mother and child healthcare and hygiene promotion. Training included: nursing during pregnancy, food and nutrition for pregnant women, delivery plans, the

importance of breast-feeding, pre- and post-natal care, and how to cope with diseases. The community health volunteers play a vital role in improving health in remote areas where there are no medical services. They will also help to raise awareness about safe hygiene and sanitation practices, which is urgently required in areas that regularly suffer from outbreaks of water-borne diseases.

Raise 300 homes above normal flood levels; install five solar panels in schools and flood shelters. Install 330 latrines and 110 hand-pumped wells

- 288 homes have been raised above the highest flood levels
- Both men and women have been involved in the construction of the raised plinths. They were selected from the community and equal wages were guaranteed
- 333 latrines and 81 tube wells have been provided to ensure safe water and sanitation
- 5 solar panels have been installed to provide electricity to flood shelters, homes and shops

By March 2010, a total of 288 homes were raised by two - three feet in order to provide a safe place to stay during the floods. As each raised home will host an average of three families, they are expected to shelter roughly 2,800 people and their possessions. Raising the area surrounding homes will also enable families to grow vegetables throughout the year, which will improve household income and food security. The project has targeted the most vulnerable people to benefit from this activity including: elderly, female-headed, and extremely poor households. It is expected that families with more resources will see the benefits of these raised homesteads, and work towards raising their own homes above flood levels. In addition, the work to raise homesteads has generated more than 23,000 days of employment for people living in the communities.



Sufia, Abul and Shilpi Chowkidar, stand in front of all their belongings, whilst their home is raised above the flood level. Credit: Dan Chung/ Oxfam

“Several times in my life, I have faced the terrible experience of losing all of my household possessions. Now I have less fear as SKS (Oxfam’s partner) has helped me by raising my home above the flood level.” Ms. Faziron, 38, Tengrakand’, Upazila Union, Gaibangha District.

Oxfam has also worked to ensure that families have safe water and sanitation facilities when the floods occur. Currently in the Char and Haor areas of Bangladesh, most people do not have a secure supply of drinking water. Tube-wells become inundated during the floods and the water becomes contaminated which exacerbates health problems. In order to address this, Oxfam has raised 81 wells above flood levels and secured them with concrete platforms. The wells will provide at least 5,000 people with a clean and regular source of drinking water.

Meanwhile, 333 latrines have been installed for households in 7 districts and are expected to directly benefit at least 1,664 people. Community members were actively involved in every stage of the process. This has helped to foster a sense of ownership and importance in maintaining the latrines. Water-borne disease is the biggest source of death for children in Bangladesh; the latrines and hygiene awareness activities will go a long way towards improving health levels in the targeted communities.

The project areas have little or no access to the national electricity grid. Each solar panel provided by this project is enough to light six flood shelters, houses, shops or schools according to the needs

of the community. Solar panels mean that students can continue to study at night, and women in particular can continue running their businesses when it is dark. Community members have taken on the management of the electricity supply, and setting money aside for making any repairs.

Train 500 people in agriculture, and provide them with seeds. Train 500 people in livestock rearing, and provide 350 families with livestock

- 425 women have been trained and provided with seeds to grow vegetables on their homestead
- 441 women have been trained in livestock-rearing; 314 families have received livestock

During the year, 425 women completed training in agricultural techniques that will enable them to grow vegetables in the homesteads. Project staff selected the women according to their levels of need and vulnerability. The women learned about aspects of vegetable growing such as preparing seedbeds, sowing, composting and pest control. Following training, each participant was provided with seeds to put their new skills into practice. The women will use the vegetables to improve the diets of their families, and to generate income where there is a surplus. Unfortunately it was not possible to reach the target set at the beginning of the year due in part to budget constraints, and to the challenge of persuading families to allow women to leave home for the training period.

Rearing livestock is an important and sustainable livelihood for people living in the Char and Haor parts of Bangladesh. In these remote areas they are treated as moveable assets, which in disaster-prone-areas provide a greater degree of income security. In total, 441 women participated in training on livestock rearing. Training focussed on key areas of cow rearing, including cultivating crops that can be used for animal feed, disease management and vaccinations.

The project has also been able to provide livestock to a total of 314 people, 107 of whom received one cow, while 207 people received two goats each. Each animal was checked by government livestock officials prior to distribution. The beneficiaries were extremely enthusiastic about this aspect of the project, and have volunteered to assist with purchasing, examining and transporting the livestock. Early monitoring showed that the livestock is bringing about a sustainable increase in the incomes of the households of some of the poorest families in Bangladesh. For example, some of the beneficiaries have reared their animals for a few months and sold them on for a better price. Others have sold the animal they received originally with a profit and reinvested the proceeds in more cattle or assets. Finally, as cows and she-goats are likely to deliver calves and kids soon, beneficiaries will be able to increase their livestock shortly.

Train 500 women in business skills, and provide eight rickshaws to transport goods

- 441 women have been trained in small-scale business skills
- Rickshaws have been constructed and provided to 8 families

In total, 441 women have been trained this year on skills that will enable them to earn new sources of income. Training focussed on how to manage a small-scale business and make a profit. Over 100 of the participants also received some capital (roughly £100 each) and coaching to start-up new businesses, such as driving rickshaws. The rest of the participants already had businesses running and the training will help them to increase their revenues. This activity is expected to benefit over 2,500 people as the women break from traditional gender-roles and provide their families with greater incomes.

Support 15 non-formal primary (NFPE) schools with training and teaching materials – identified as a priority need by communities

- The project has supported 25 NFPE schools to improve their educational standards
- Teachers have received training in teaching techniques and the schools have received educational materials such as books

Education remains the best long-term strategy for poor communities to lift themselves out of poverty, and become more resilient to disaster. In the areas targeted by this project, there are no government-funded formal schools. This is why the communities have requested that Oxfam support their non-formal primary schools. The project has supported local partners to provide teacher training and salaries, while the local government has begun to support the schools with books and schoolhouses. The 25 schools are providing enormously valuable educational opportunities for at least 750 disadvantaged children. These schools are providing an excellent model for other communities to demand basic services from their government.

Run ten workshops for local authorities and volunteers on basic services, five workshops on adapting to climate change, and meetings on building better market links

- 5 one-day workshops were held to promote collaborative working amongst farmers in order to link them to markets and get a fair price for their produce
- 40 women participated in a joint meeting on climate change with government officials

A long-term constraint for communities living in Haor areas to improve their economic situation is that they have little power or presence in their nearest village markets. Five workshops were organised to promote collaboration between farmers and improve their links to markets. As a result of the workshops, the farmers formed producer groups and began looking at opportunities to collectively sell their produce. It is too early to assess the full impact of this strategy, but early indications are that the farmers are already negotiating better prices through collective bargaining.

Meanwhile, much scientific research and analysis is indicating that Bangladesh is one of the countries that will be most-affected by climate change. Already, the areas where this project is taking place have experienced a steady increase in extreme weather-related events. It is therefore necessary to improve awareness on the local impacts of climate change and work towards building resilience in the poorest communities. This project has organised four workshops for community groups, local government officials, journalists and other stakeholders to build a common understanding of the issue and to discuss opportunities to work together to reduce the impact of climate change. The workshop has already resulted in government officials developing contingency plans such as early-warning systems and promoting the use of drought-resistance crops.

Nepal

Build three emergency shelters with wells and latrines and provide emergency response volunteers with rescue and first aid kits

- Three shelters have been constructed in Nawalparasi, Sarlahi and Saptari districts
- 284 emergency response volunteers from communities in the three target districts have been trained and provided with emergency equipment, such as first aid and rescue kits.
- 32 evacuation routes have been created and are painted on various public display boards

The three emergency shelters will be able to provide a safe place for over 5,500 people to stay during periods of heavy flooding. Shelter management committees have been established in each district. The committees were involved in designing the shelters to ensure that the needs of the elderly, women, children and people living with



Volunteers participate in First-Aid and Light Search Rescue training. Credit: Mr Dilip, NRC

disabilities were taken into account. Local government and community members have been very enthusiastic in supporting this activity, and have even provided the land for the shelters to be constructed upon free of charge. In Nawalparasi, the local development committee has also contributed some funding towards the construction of the flood shelters.

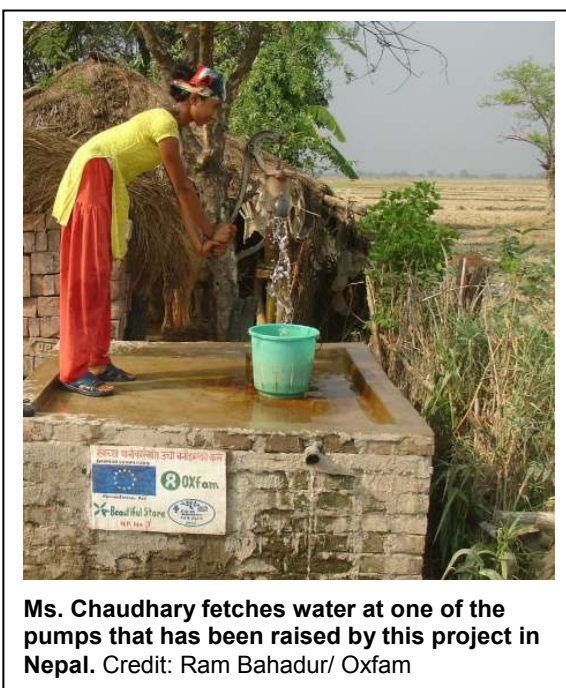
All three shelters are permanent concrete structures and are located above the highest flood levels. The buildings have a basic design and are equipped with at least one easily accessible tube well and two toilets (one for men and one for women). There is a secure room that can be locked so that displaced people have a safe place to store valuable items during emergencies. The shelter management committees have been provided with tarpaulin sheets that can be used as partitions or makeshift shelters. The shelters are intended to be a best practice model so that local government can have something on which to base their future emergency shelter designs.

In total, 284 volunteers from 28 communities have participated in a five-day training session on First-Aid and Light Search and Rescue. This will greatly improve the capacity of the communities to deal with local emergencies immediately and effectively. Each group has been provided with kits containing emergency rescue items such as: life jackets, whistles, raincoats, rope, flashlights, stretchers and first-aid kits. A total of 32 evacuation routes have been created so that communities can quickly get to the shelters during floods. Information boards and signs highlighting the evacuation routes have been installed in central locations.

Construct 310 hand-pumped wells, and train 155 people in well maintenance

- 315 pumps have been raised above flood levels and are providing safe drinking water
- Each well has been tested to ensure safe water quality; Oxfam staff members have been trained to use Delagua kits which enable more accurate water quality tests
- 162 people have been trained in the repair and maintenance of hand pumps, and they have been supplied with repair and maintenance kits

As in Bangladesh, there is a serious problem in Nepal with wells becoming contaminated with dirty water during periods of flooding. The project has raised and secured 315 pumps above potential flood levels. This model has been viewed as ‘best practice’ and already 62 pumps have been raised in a similar fashion by various local development organisations. As a result, 1,440 families in the three districts will have a greatly reduced risk of serious illness during the next floods.



In total, 162 people from Saptari, Nawalparasi, Rautahat and Rupandehi districts have been trained to repair and maintain the hand pumps. Each participant has also been provided with a repair and maintenance toolkit in order to be able to put the training into practice. These volunteers will have the skills to be able to raise existing hand pumps in their local communities at cheaper rate and using locally available materials. Training these individuals, particularly those that have previously been discriminated against, enables these groups to earn an income by providing professional skills for self-employment.

“I was surprised when CDM [Oxfam’s partner] asked for me to participate in repair and maintenance training. Our society considers women as physically weaker and we are not allowed to do hard work. I was in search of an opportunity to show that I am capable of doing construction work. I actively participated and now I am confident that I can repair my house water system and I plan to make it my profession.” Poonam Pal, from the Rohinihawa village development committee, Rupandehi district.

Construct 28 raised latrines

- 28 public latrines have been constructed and raised in three districts
- The latrines have been designed to meet the requirements of all of the community including elderly people, women, people with disabilities and children.

The construction of 28 safe latrines will ensure that users protect themselves and others from the water-borne diseases that cause enormous health problems during the rainy season. The latrines are constructed above the highest flood levels and are easily accessible during periods of flooding. The availability of latrines will also serve to change hygiene and sanitation habits throughout the rest of the year. Each latrine acts a model demonstrating best practice to individuals, families and local development organisations in the area. Because of this intervention, an estimated 4,469 people will have significantly less risk of water-borne disease during the next period of flooding.

Strengthen three riverbanks, repair four drainage channels and construct raised community grain stores in five villages

- 3 riverbanks have been strengthened using saplings, deep-rooted fodder trees, hedge plants, bamboo and sand bags
- 5 drainage channels have been repaired, and 5 grain stores have been raised

Most of the communities located on riverbanks in Saptari, Sarlahi and Nawalparasi are highly vulnerable to erosion during floods. Often these embankments are strengthened with stone and metal cages, but such interventions are costly both to construct as well as to repair and are therefore unsustainable at the local level. As an alternative, the project supported communities to strengthen the existing embankments using locally available materials. Trees, bamboo and sand bags have been used to reinforce the weaker part of three riverbanks. The communities can easily maintain the structures, which will protect over 4,800 people from flooding. In Saptari district, community members are attempting to replicate this method of strengthening riverbanks at other sites.

The majority of people living in the targeted communities live in areas where even after the rainy season it can take months for the floods to subside. Oxfam has placed concrete pipes in five drainage channels in order to improve the rate of drainage. An evacuation bridge was also constructed in Rampurmalinya to allow people to reach safe areas and the health post during floods. In total 1,541 people will benefit from the drainage improvements.

Meanwhile, the project has constructed five community managed grain storage facilities above the highest flood levels. Each of the communities has set up a committee to manage the use of the storage facilities. They have also voluntarily contributed labour, materials and some of the financial costs for the construction. It is estimated that the activity will benefit 1,428 vulnerable families in seven communities who will be able to protect their seeds and grain from flood damage.

Distribute waterproof seed containers to 150 households

- 150 families in remote areas - over half of whom are from socially excluded groups - have been provided with waterproof seed containers

In total, 150 vulnerable families were provided with waterproof seed containers. These families live too far away from the grain storage reserves to access them. The provision of seed containers is already having a positive impact on food and livelihood security. On average, each of the

households that have been provided with waterproof containers have been able to protect 10kg of wheat seeds from the recent floods, which means that they can plant these seeds and produce crops to earn an income. These seeds would have previously been lost in the floods.

Provide 450 families with flood and drought-resistant crops

- Flood and drought-resistant varieties of crops were piloted in seven communities
- 638 families in flood and/or drought prone communities have been provided with seeds for the next planting season.

Results from the crop piloting have been used to determine the most suitable crops to improve flood resilience and food security in the communities. The findings were shared with technical experts and farmers, and based on this, four varieties were recommended for growing on a larger scale as they either matured earlier or produced higher yields using less water. The project has provided 638 families with a 15 kg selection of these seeds each. Similarly, different varieties of wheat and lentil were tested for drought resilience and the most suitable varieties will be shared with communities in the following year of this project.

“I know more about the crops, what time to harvest, the kind of seeds to be planted. I can do farming in a better way. I advise people in my community, they come to me, just because I was directly involved in piloting the new variety”. Dulari Chaudhari, Member of Dhaptol DMC, Sarlahi District.



Piloting flood resistant varieties of crops in Nepal. Credit: Credit: Bishnu Paudel/ CDM

Give 50 families leases on two community fishponds, and train 25 people in fish farming

- Two community ponds in Sarlahi and one in Rupandehi have been leased for fish farming
- 59 individuals have been trained in fish farming techniques

In total, 59 individuals have been trained in fish farming and have been supported to lease two community ponds. Prior to this the individuals were dependent on less reliable sources for fish such as rivers and nearby floodwaters. The trainees learned about the technical aspects of fish farming which will enable them to manage their ponds in a sustainable way. They have also been supported with feed, fingerlings (young fish), and pond maintenance costs. Roughly two-thirds of the fish harvested from the ponds are being used to feed the families of these individuals. This year, the surplus was sold for an average profit of £375. As agreed with Oxfam, the fish-farming committees have deposited 50 per cent of their net profit into a community Emergency Management Fund. As well as significantly improving the average household income level, this activity is helping communities to diversify their livelihoods, which will help to improve resilience.

Financial Report

Activity	Total Programme Cost (budget) GBP	Beautiful Store's contribution (budget) GBP	Total Programme Expenditure GBP	Beautiful Store's contribution GBP
Bangladesh	150,000	46,729	150,000	46,729
Train 500 people in Disaster Management and 50 people as Community Health volunteers	6,524	2,032	5,314	1,655
Provide emergency supplies at eight locations and build two rescue boats	11,520	3,589	11,047	3,441
Raise 300 homes above normal flood levels in Char and raise 60 homesteads in River Basin Hoar	28,080	8,748	30,491	9,499
Install 330 latrines and 110 hand-pumped wells (10 for irrigation)	19,516	6,080	16,968	5,286
Construct solar panels	1,400	436	1,358	423
Train 500 people in agriculture, and provide 1,500 people with seeds	2,940	916	3,530	1,100
Train 500 people in livestock rearing, and provide 350 families with livestock	17,340	5,402	20,245	6,307
Train 500 women in business skills, provide eight rickshaws to transport goods and provide capital support for 125 beneficiaries	13,020	4,056	12,060	3,757
Support 15 non-formal primary (NFPE) schools with training and teaching materials	7,860	2,449	12,954	4,036
Run ten workshops for local authorities and volunteers on basic services, five workshops on adapting to climate change, and meetings on building better market links	1,860	579	930	290
Project management and administration	28,071	8,745	25,951	8,088
Monitoring, evaluation and administration	11,868	3,698	9,142	2,848
Nepal	150,000	46,729	150,000	46,729
Raise Emergency shelters (with tube wells and latrines) in three target districts	33,130	10,321	32,074	9,892
Construct 310 hand-pumped wells, and train 155 local people in well maintenance	27,900	8,692	24,882	7,751
Construct 28 raised latrines	3,652	1,138	5,656	1,762
Construct raised community grain stores in five villages	8,522	2,655	9,783	3,048
Strengthen three riverbanks and repair four drainage channels	14,723	4,587	13,185	4,107
Distribute water-proof seed corn siners to 150 poor families	181	55	174	54
Provide 450 families with flood-and-drought resistant crops	2,250	701	2,102	655
Give leases to 50 families on two flood-proof community fishponds, and train 25 people in fish farming	3,818	1,189	3,878	1,208
Construct 35 evacuation routes and give 28 communities access to search and rescue equipment, and first aid kits	8,207	2,557	9,320	2,903
Pilot food resistant crops with 10 communities and, pilot drought resistant crops with five communities	10,200	3,178	8,880	2,766
Project management and administration	33,737	10,510	35,688	11,118
Monitoring and evaluation	3,680	1,146	4,378	1,364
Contribution to Oxfam's overall work		6,542		6,542
Total Project Costs	300,000	100,000	300,000	100,000

Thank you for your generous support of this project.
With your support, the River Basin Programme has helped to secure the lives and livelihoods of over 40,000 people in Nepal and Bangladesh this year.