

FLOOD RELIEF INTERVENTION IN
Patarghat Block
Of
Saharsa District
In
NORTH BIHAR
From
November 19 to December 3, 2008



Implemented
by
Samajik Shaikshanik Vikas Kendra (SSVK)
With Financial Assistance
From
Swiss Red Cross

Background

In the aftermath of Kosi Floods 2008, SSVK approached Swiss Red Cross for relief support. Swiss Red Cross, which had been a longstanding development cooperation partner of SSVK from December 1991 till December 2006 and had also extended relief assistance in earlier instances of flooding in the state in 1993, 1995, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004 and 2007, responded positively and agreed to support 1000 families in Patarghat Block of Saharsa district.

Assistance from Swiss Red Cross for Patarghat block was operationalised through organising the targeted 1000 families (1012 actually covered) with a total population of around 4'956 into 2 relief camps. Though the needs were manifold, the intervention was prioritised and confined to addressing the food, drinking water, shelter and health related needs of the people in light of the limited resources available for the moment and extended over a 15 day period from November 19, 2008 to December 3, 2008.

The Intervention

The intervention provided for two meals a day, one in the form of dry ration support of flat rice and jaggery to account for break fast and the other in the form of cooked food comprising rice, pulse and a vegetable to account for at least one wholesome meal through setting up of community kitchens. Community kitchens were preferred over dry ration support as the latter would have left the beneficiaries with the difficult, if not impossible, choice of arranging for fuel. Moreover, by engaging the victims in various tasks associated with running the community kitchens helped maintain a modicum of community conviviality which also helped the victims in overcoming their enormous grief.

At each camp provision was made for five hand pumps each and five water storage containers to address the drinking water needs. Additionally each family was provided with a plastic jerry can of 5 litre capacity to take care of drinking water storage and ensuring water security at the household level.

All the 1000 families were provided with a polythene sheet measuring 18 feet by 12 feet to account for their shelter related needs.

At each camp provision was made for 4 gas lamps to keep the site illuminated during night thus ensuring greater safety of the residents. Additionally 4 torches were provided per camp for running errands after dark.

The intervention also provided for medical relief and assistance. Having run a community health programme in the past, SSVK's trained cadre of community health workers adept in symptomatically diagnosing the commonly occurring health problems during floods addressed the health needs of the affected families. 2 health workers, 1 in charge of each of the 2 camps were responsible for addressing the health needs.

SSVK out of its resources ran a child care centre at each of the 2 camps for a wide variety of purposes including games, tuition classes, peer activities and pre schools. These centres continue to this day although they have been relocated to the villages from which the beneficiaries came.

The Impact

Food related interventions came as a critical input to enable the beneficiaries to tide over a period when floods had left them bereft of any livelihood opportunities to sustain themselves and they were on the threshold of starvation. Moreover it prevented them from getting deeper into the debt trap as with food assistance they did not have to depend on the moneylenders for the same. The interventions could provide them a measure of food security and were appropriately timed as they came when relief assistance from the government was as yet to reach the victims.

The installation of new hand pumps ensured access of the target group to clean and safe drinking water. The availability of safe drinking water reduced the vulnerability of the target group by acting as a check on incidence of morbidity. For the entire period of relief operations, no significant outbreak of any water borne epidemic was reported from the field.

Provision of polythene sheets gave them shelter against the vagaries of nature.

Medicinal Assistance was extended for flood induced diseases like diarrhoea, fever, gastroenteritis, abdominal pain, deworming, acidity, cold and cough, pneumonia, skin and eye infection and malaria. This intervention provided much needed medical succour to the flood victims.

www.ssvk.org or <http://www.ssvk.org/koshi.htm>