

STRONGER TOGETHER

**A Compendium of Stories
of Courage and
Resilience During Disasters**



About this publication

Individuals at the grassroots have been a vital part of the support system for mitigation and response efforts during disasters in India. These individuals are developing the capacities and leading efforts to drive disaster management and resilience in their communities. 'Stronger Together': A compendium of stories of courage & resilience during disasters, prepared by Reliance Foundation and Sphere India, captures best practices by individuals at the grassroots level for mitigation, preparedness, and response to various disasters in India. It will serve as a powerful source of inspiration for others to learn and draw strength, enabling them to better prepare for and respond to disasters in India.

Disclaimer

The stories presented in this compendium are based on the experiences and perspectives of individuals at the grassroots level who have actively contributed to disaster management and resilience efforts in their communities. The views and opinions expressed in these stories are solely those of the individuals interviewed and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the organisations or agencies that supported the compilation of this publication. While efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy of the information presented, the publishers and organisations involved in this project do not guarantee the completeness, reliability, or suitability of the information contained herein. The stories aim to provide insight and inspiration for individuals and organisations interested in grassroots-led disaster management and resilience efforts. However, readers are encouraged to conduct their research and consult with experts before taking action based on the information provided in this publication.

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgement 01

Damayanti Jena's Struggle for Safety and Dignity for People of Baliapata, Odisha 08

Radha Kurmi, a Youth Leader Making a Difference During COVID-19 in Assam 16

Shikha Das's Efforts for Flood Preparedness in Purnia, Bihar 24

Sudip Majumder's Story of Fighting a 'Double Disaster' in Tripura 32

Vikas Maske's Journey as a Disaster Response Champion in Kerala 40

Editor's Note 02

K. Satyavathi's Journey of Building a Disaster Resilient Community in Odisha 12

Rajib Bora Compassion and Self-Reliance in Nagaon District of Assam 20

Sradhanjali Pattanaik's Journey of Empowering Vulnerable Communities in Odisha 28

Venkateswara Rao, Brings Back Hope During Konaseema Flood of Andhra Pradesh 36

Vinod Shinde, Leading COVID-19 Relief Initiatives in his Village, in Satara, Maharashtra 44

We thank the following organisations and their teams for sharing their stories and insights.



Acknowledgement

In the face of adversity, one person's unwavering commitment can become the rallying cry that unites and empowers the entire community. 'Stronger Together' is a tribute to the ten individuals who have shared their stories of courage and resilience during times of disasters, along with millions other individuals whose efforts often go unnoticed, yet continue to inspire the community with their relentless work, every day, contributing towards humanity by helping each other during times of emergency and crisis.

A compendium is never the work of just one organisation; it is a combination of ideas, suggestions, and contributions from numerous individuals and entities. A special word of gratitude to the ten individuals who shared their stories for this publication. We are grateful to them for not only providing invaluable insights into their experiences but also for their willingness to open up and share their personal accounts, which have enriched this compendium with real-life examples of resilience in the face of disasters.

This publication would not have been possible without the time and support of the organisations that have contributed immensely towards the lives and initiatives, of the individuals captured in this compendium: SEEDS India, Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR), Save the Children India, Swayam Samajik Vikas Sanstha, Ghoghardiha Prakhand Swarajya Vikas Sangh (GPSVS), Centre for Youth Development and Activities (CYDA), Plan India, and Bagma FPO. Their commitment and dedication have been crucial in bringing about positive change and making a significant impact on the lives of countless individuals.

The teams of Reliance Foundation and Sphere India have been instrumental in collating these inspiring stories from various geographies of India, by reaching out to their member organisations and networks. We would like to acknowledge the valuable contributions of the authors of this Compendium, Dr. Bharath Kotta, Ms. Mohini Ganguly, Ms. Nupur Tyagi, and Ms. Varsha Chaudhary, for their insights and capable assistance in the drafting process, Mr. Utkarsh Dwivedi for the design and illustrations, all under the leadership of the editors, Dr. Jayashree B, Dr. Vanita Sharma, Mr. Vikrant Mahajan, and Mr. Senthilkumaran Krishnan who have been indispensable to the project on matters both large and small.

Editor's Note

Over the years, India has witnessed a concerning surge in climate-induced disasters, posing significant challenges to the country's overall resilience. The country experiences a range of disasters, such as floods, droughts, cyclones and heatwaves, which have become more frequent and intense due to the effects of climate change. Examples include the devastation caused by Cyclone Tauktae in 2021 in the southern parts of India, the displacement of people and damage to houses during floods in Assam and in Bengaluru during 2022, the occurrence of heatwaves in Northern India and the forest fires in Nagaland as well as various regions of Uttarakhand.

The Global Risks Report 2021¹, published by the World Economic Forum, has noted that among the most likely risks of the next ten years are extreme weather, climate action failure and human-led environmental damage. It states that in the next decade, amongst the risks likely to have the highest impacts, infectious diseases hold the top spot, followed by climate action failure and other environmental risks. Extreme weather events like floods lead to the emergence of vector-borne diseases like Dengue, Japanese Encephalitis, and Typhus.

While India has been making concerted efforts to deal with these climate change-induced disasters, the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic impacted all aspects of daily life, livelihoods, and the overall social and economic fabric of communities across the world. While these biological disasters primarily affect humans, in the past few years, there has been a rising incidence of diseases amongst animals, like Lumpy Skin Disease Virus, which affects cattle and the Nipah Virus, which affects pigs as well as humans. Such infections are transmitted through contaminated food or directly from person-to-person, causing a range of illnesses from asymptomatic infection to acute respiratory diseases and fatal encephalitis, resulting in lost lives, significant economic losses as well as affecting the livelihoods of people dependent on livestock,

The Prime Minister's 10 Point Agenda

01

All development sector actors must imbibe the principles of disaster risk management.

02

Risk coverage must include all, starting from poor households to SMEs to multi-national corporations to nation states.

03

Women's leadership and greater involvement should be central to disaster risk management.

04

Invest in risk mapping globally to improve global understanding of nature and disaster risks.

05

Leverage technology to enhance the efficiency of disaster risk management efforts.

06

Develop a network of universities to work on disaster-related issues.

07

Utilise the opportunities provided by social media and mobile technologies for disaster risk reduction.

08

Build on local capacity and initiative to enhance disaster risk reduction.

09

Make use of every opportunity to learn from disasters, to achieve that, there must be studies on the lessons learnt after every disaster.

10

Bring about greater cohesion in international response to disasters.

1. World Economic Forum, "The Global Risks Report 2021, 16th Edition" (2021).

causing health and sanitation concerns for the people in the community.

The escalating frequency of disasters presents a pressing challenge for nations, worldwide. In the case of India, this urgency has prompted the government to adopt a comprehensive approach that integrates climate resilience, disaster management, and public health strategies.

To address the critical need for enhanced resilience against natural and human-made disasters, the Prime Minister of India released the 10-point Agenda on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in 2016.

It serves as a guiding framework for enhancing the country's resilience and emphasising the vital role of sustained and collective action in strengthening communities against disasters, while also acknowledging the importance of local organisations with an acute understanding of local needs, challenges, and capacities. This approach fosters a resilient society capable of withstanding and overcoming challenges. Aligning with the core aspects of the 10 Point Agenda, particularly Point 9 to Make use of every opportunity to learn from disasters, **'Stronger Together: A Compendium of Stories of Courage and Resilience During Disasters'**, is developed to serve as a powerful source of inspiration for others to learn and draw strength, enabling them to better prepare for and respond to disasters in India.

The Compendium has captured the best practices adopted by individuals and communities at the grassroots level for response and mitigation of disaster impacts in India, supported by local organisations in building capacities and assisting them to thrive through adversities. Their stories of courage exhibit resilience in the face of crisis and supplements the objectives enshrined in Agenda Point 8, which focuses on building local capacities to enhance disaster risk reduction. This also ties in with the objectives of the 3rd session of the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (NPDRR) which concluded in New Delhi, India, this year. Identifying the need for participatory decision

making in disaster management, the NPDRR was constituted by Government of India in 2013. The theme of the third session, "Building Local Resilience in a Changing Climate" reflects the need for localising disaster risk management at a time when disaster risks are not only increasing but new patterns of risks are also emerging. While building local capabilities is indispensable for resilience, the localisation of disaster risk reduction efforts is equally critical. Representing local expertise, people at the grassroots possess an acute understanding of local needs, challenges, and capacities.

This is also reiterated by the G20 Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group, established under India's Presidency of the G20 in 2023, which emphasised the importance of the role of communities in DRR. The G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration on DRR and the G20 DRR Working Group acknowledged that disasters impact people and communities differentially and can exacerbate pre-existing social and economic inequalities. Therefore, there is a need to prioritise actions for the most vulnerable and at-risk. The outcome document reiterated that the G20 would promote socially inclusive, locally led and owned, gender-responsive, child-centred approaches to DRR, and enable the full, equal, meaningful and inclusive participation and leadership of local communities, and of often under-represented groups such as Indigenous Peoples, migrants, older persons, persons with disabilities, women, and youth. This ongoing theme is also reflected in our Compendium.

'Stronger Together', highlights the efforts of people in the community in response to the increasing frequency of disasters, aimed at protecting lives, minimising impacts, and building resilient frameworks for future incidences. This compendium can serve as an inspiration on how transformative impact can be achieved through collective action and community empowerment. 'Stronger Together', has also captured stories of women at the grassroots, portraying immense courage, building trust and relationships across communities, and building risk resilience in their communities.

During emergencies, relief and support can take months to deliver due to disruptions in the supply chain and restricted movement norms as witnessed during the COVID-19 lockdown. Therefore, it is crucial for people in the community to take charge, lead themselves out of danger and foster a practice of disaster resilience and risk management while also coordinating support and assistance from local organisations, local leaders, or the government response agencies.


‘Stronger Together’, documents the stories of ten individuals, who have shown immense courage and leadership in response to the challenges and the growing local needs in aftermath of a disaster or a recurring calamity. Each story in the compendium narrates a different tale of determination, courage and unwavering resilience exhibited in response to varied disasters, and emergencies. The compendium recapitulates the pointers agreed during the G20 DRR Working Group Meeting, showcasing locally led, gender-responsive, child-centred approaches to DRR, recognising the leadership of local communities, and often under-represented groups. From Satyavathi’s dedication to creating a community emergency fund in Pentakata village in the aftermath of Fani Cyclone, to the collective efforts of disaster management agencies and stakeholders during COVID-19 pandemic, as described in Vinod’s story from Satara village, these stories serve as inspiring anecdotes of individuals living an ordinary life yet unveiling extraordinary strength and unity during crisis and emergencies caused by disasters in India.

This compendium can be seen as an opportunity to supplement the efforts of individuals. It can also provide an opportunity to identify individuals and leaders from the community who can take such initiatives forward across different regions and geographies, to build locally disaster-resilient communities.

The lessons we have derived from these ten stories of courage and resilience can serve as a valuable source of learnings to shape future strategies

and efforts for strengthening the resilience of communities in the face of disasters. Some key lessons include:

- 1. Nurturing Local Resilience by Empowering the Grassroots through Training & Capacity Building:** The objective is to foster a network of capable responders. The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the need for training and knowledge sharing on psychosocial support and counselling of children and families affected by the crisis, thus empowering communities to thrive amidst challenges, ensuring their sustainable growth and well-being.
- 2. Harnessing the Power of Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships:** An important lesson learned is that community-led partnership models, guided by multi-stakeholder collaborative approach, hold the key to strengthening, the resilience of local communities across India, offering innovative frameworks for sustaining livelihood opportunities. The establishment of the Mahila Sangh (Women’s Self-Help Group) serves as a testament to the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships in bolstering community resilience.
- 3. Fostering Local Leadership for Resilience at the Grassroots:** During emergencies, the presence of capable local leaders becomes paramount as they can effectively lead and provide much-needed support to affected communities. Notably, local leaders such as Satyavathi and Damayanti play a vital role in mobilising communities, identifying immediate needs, and providing essential support to affected populations. By embracing community-led partnerships, we can empower local people to actively participate in their own resilience-building processes, paving the way for sustainable progress and a brighter future. Thus, by nurturing and empowering local leaders, we lay the foundation for strong and resilient communities.
- 4. Raising Awareness through Demonstrations:** An essential lesson derived from the



experiences documented here is the importance of demonstrative awareness programmes. Educating communities about disaster risks, early warning systems, and the preparation of flood survival kits is vital. Through the dedicated efforts of community workers and enhanced community preparedness, reliance on external aid and government support during disasters can be reduced. This enables communities to handle crises effectively and increases their ability to respond to and recover from adversity.

One of the most important features of this compendium is the potential of replicability of the efforts described in the case studies. The methods used by the local leaders, the approach of the community and the lessons learnt from their efforts, can be potentially learnt from, even applied across regions with similar topographies and demography that are subjected to similar kinds of disasters and distress with positive facilitation and enabling environments.

Stories of Courage and Resilience During Disasters



01

Damayanti Jena's Struggle for Safety, and Dignity for the People of Baliapata, Odisha

The very severe Cyclonic Storm Phailin, which struck the eastern coast of India in October 2013, is one of the strongest cyclones to hit the country in recent history. The State government stated that over 12 million people may have been affected by the cyclone. However, due to the timely and well-coordinated efforts the impact of cyclone Phailin was significantly reduced. The cyclone prompted India's biggest evacuation in 23 years relocating more than 5,50,000 people from the coastlines of Odisha and Andhra Pradesh to safer locations. Despite these measures, the cyclone caused significant damage, including the destruction of houses¹ and critical infrastructure, leading to the loss of livelihood options for many.

In Baliapata village, situated in Ganjam district, cyclone Phailin destroyed essential infrastructure. The toilets and water systems were broken, trees were uprooted, and entire area was flooded. The Gangua canal, one of the city's major drains, overflowed. As a result, contaminated drainage water inundated houses and public spaces, sparing nothing—utensils, clothes, food, and household goods were all submerged. Residents were compelled to leave their belongings and take shelter in neighbouring schools and rescue centres set up by the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation.

Damayanti Jena, a resident of Baliapata for more than a decade, was traumatised looking at the scale of suffering in her area. She migrated to Baliapata, in Odisha's Kendrapara district in pursuit of better livelihood opportunities, along with her husband and two children. Since she couldn't continue her education beyond Class 10, she was determined

to provide both her children with the best possible opportunities. However, after moving to Baliapata, Damayanti and her family had to face a multitude of challenges.

Having migrated to this area for a better opportunity, Baliapata turned out to be a disaster-disease prone area impacting health and livelihood of not only her family but for thousands of people living in this settlement. The area lacked basic amenities like sanitation and electricity, and overall slum management was inadequate. The slum is situated on the banks of the Gangua Canal, which channels all the wastewater originating from the elevated regions of the city. Unfortunately, over time, the canal

“Initially, for the well-being of her own family, Damayanti became actively involved in interacting with the people in the slum to identify their concerns, hoping to seek help and support from government agencies or civil society once the issues were identified. However, as she started engaging with the community, she gained a deeper understanding of their hardships and the dire living conditions people were facing, due to waterlogging and drainage overflow in the area.”

1. Government of Odisha, The Asian Development Bank, and The World Bank, “INDIA Cyclone Phailin in Odisha: Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment Report” (2013), <https://ncrmp.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Odisha-Phailin-report-Final.pdf>.

has become obstructed due to the accumulation of construction debris and waste discarded into it. Consequently, during floods or heavy rainfall, the smooth flow of wastewater is disrupted. Initially, for the well-being of her own family, Damayanti became actively involved in interacting with the people in the slum to identify their concerns, hoping to help and support from government agencies or civil society once the issues were identified. However, as she started engaging with the community, she gained a deeper understanding of their hardships and the dire living conditions people were facing, due to waterlogging and drainage overflow in the area.

Taking matters into her own hands, Damayanti began ensuring the timely collection of waste by monitoring the process and the people involved, in order to prevent excessive waste accumulation around the canal. As people started witnessing Damayanti's efforts and her involvement in managing the waste accumulation issue, they started approaching her for assistance with other concerns, such as contaminated water supply and electricity connections. Damayanti assumed the responsibility of addressing significant issues affecting the people of Baliapata slum. What initially began as an effort to improve the well-being of her own family gradually transformed into a broader community welfare approach. In response to her continued efforts, she was chosen as the President of the Slum Development Association, in a very short span of time.

After cyclone Phailin, Baliapata slum area was severely flooded, with water reaching until the waist. The waterlogging in the canal caused a pervasive stench, and all household items, bedding, and utensils were destroyed. The stagnant water became a breeding ground for mosquitoes and vermin. The hutments in the low-lying Gangua canal banks were washed away, leaving the Kela-migrant families, who belonged to an ethnic Telugu speaking nomadic community (working in traditional professions such as sapera and madaari), with no place to go. Many of the slum residents sought shelter under makeshift shades, but the cyclone winds blew them away. Women, children, and the elderly were huddled in a corner, drenched and shivering in the cold.

In response to the dire situation, Damayanti assembled a group of young men and initiated a rescue mission

“For me, every single life was important. I recalled the time when, in 1999, my natal family was caught in the Super Cyclone. At that time, no one came to rescue us, as everyone feared losing their lives. I did not want the Kela migrants to be in the same situation, and this gave me courage to take the lead”, Damayanti Jena shared.



evacuating the migrants. They worked swiftly and systematically to evacuate the Kela-migrants. Damayanti and her team reassured them of their safety and urged them to remain calm. The rescue operations prioritised the evacuation of children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, followed by women and men who navigated the flooded area using ropes. Despite the heavy downpour and the strong winds, Damayanti and her team persevered for over ten hours until everyone was safely relocated to the centre of the settlement. Their determination and unwavering commitment were evident throughout the rescue operation.

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Everyone was safely brought to the shelter house in Gada Gopinath Prasad (GGP) School with the support of the civil defence volunteers. Meanwhile, Damayanti took initiative to meet with the emergency Nodal officer. With the officer’s support, she obtained rations to prepare food for the affected individuals. Additionally, she made efforts so that the migrants receive government assistance for food and rehabilitation, just like others in the settlement. Damayanti and her rescue team took charge of cooking the food and personally ensured that everyone had a meal. The supportive community members in GGP School also contributed by collecting clothes, which were then distributed to those in need. Moreover,

individuals who were injured or had developed a fever were assisted in accessing the medical centre for necessary first aid and medication. Damayanti’s efforts extended beyond immediate rescue and addressed the immediate needs and well-being of the affected individuals.

Following the aftermath of the Phailin cyclone, Damayanti worked in coordination with the ward emergency officials to ensure that dry groceries, rations, and financial relief were provided for all the Kela migrants upon their return to Baliapata. The community’s youth also assisted in rebuilding their hutments.

In 2018, as part of her efforts in slum development, Damayanti joined the Centre for Advocacy and Research (CFAR) as a member of the Single Window Forum. She focused on improving access to water, and sanitation services in her ward. Additionally, she acquired digital skills and learned to use a mobile-based radio, Janhit Vaani to gather community feedback on WASH concerns and present them to officials.

Damayanti’s initial courage in seeking better livelihood opportunities for her family acted as a catalyst, motivating her to embark on an uncharted path. Throughout her journey, she catered to the needs of the entire community, with a particular emphasis on the marginalised and vulnerable individuals. Her unwavering commitment, empathy, and determination paved the way for transformative change, fostering a stronger, and inclusive community.

INSIGHTS

- *The Importance of Empathy and Advocacy for Marginalised Groups: Damayanti’s journey demonstrates the power of listening, understanding, and using one’s voice to advocate for those who are often overlooked or disadvantaged. Damayanti’s attempts in rebuilding hutments of Kela community, fosters inclusivity, addresses systemic inequalities, and highlights the importance of working towards creating a more equitable society.*
- *Personal Hardships Can Transform into Community Advocacy: Damayanti’s initial ambition to provide better opportunities for her own family gradually evolved into a larger mission of community welfare. This story emphasises on the transformative power of channelling personal ambition towards collective progress. Despite facing numerous challenges, commitment to providing a better future for her family drove Damayanti to act and extend her efforts to the well-being of the entire community.*



K. Satyavathi's Journey of Building a Disaster Resilient Community in Odisha

Odisha, a coastal state in India, has witnessed some of the most devastating cyclones in the country's history. The unique geography and topography of Odisha play a significant role in attracting tropical cyclones. Odisha's location at the curve of the country's coastline exposes its expansive shore, making it an easy target for most storms. From 1891 to 2018, the state experienced over 90 cyclones¹. The 'Super Cyclone' of 1999, the most intense tropical cyclone in the North Indian Ocean and among the most destructive in the region, killed over 10,000 people while destroying more than 3.5 lakh houses².

Approximately 20 years later, another extremely severe cyclonic storm Fani made landfall on the eastern coast of Odisha on 3rd May 2019. The rare summer cyclone flattened Puri and neighbouring areas, impacting several other regions as well. It unleashed copious rain and windstorm and left a trail of devastation in large parts of coastal Odisha, with the seaside pilgrim town of Puri being the worst hit. Pentakata, one of the coastal slums of Puri, also known as the 'Fishing Village of Puri' is home to over 8,000 fishermen families³, a majority of whom belong to Telugu-speaking families, whose ancestors migrated to Puri from the neighbouring state of Andhra Pradesh. Pentakata was severely affected by cyclone Fani, houses were wrecked, leaving them with nowhere to go, and nothing to eat, leading to health and hygiene problems, particularly for vulnerable sections such as women, children, and the elderly.

K.Satyavathi, a fifty-year-old widow, lives in the coastal slum of Pentakata. Her two sons had migrated to nearby villages in search of better livelihood options, leaving her to care for two granddaughters. When cyclone Fani struck, their lives took a turn for the worse. The family had to live without food for days. Satyavathi's house was destroyed and the family had no place to sleep. In the absence of a proper roof to sleep under, access to toilets was a distant dream. They were left with no choice but to resort to open defecation. The lack of proper livelihood options took a toll on their health. The situation worsened when they started to develop fever and skin rashes due to hygiene and sanitation issues.

While some villages of Puri received cyclone preparedness support, Pentakata could not receive any assistance due to issues of road connectivity

Satyavathi wasn't alone in this suffering. The entire community faced scarcity of food for up to a month, in the aftermath of Fani. Many houses were ruined, road connectivity was hampered, and the community was living with no access to light, fuel, and safe drinking water.

1. Revenue & Disaster Management Department, Government of Odisha, "Phailin and the Subsequent Flood: Memorandum on the Very Severe Cyclone, Special Relief Commissioner" (2013)
2. ActionAid India Association, "Odisha Super Cyclone 1999," ActionAid India Association,
3. Samhati Mohapatra, "Cyclone Fani: Puri Fisherfolk Caught in Troubled Waters," *The Federal News that Talks Sense*, May 14, 2019

caused by flooded roads. Even the Community Health Centre underwent complete destruction after the cyclone.

Witnessing the ordeal of the people, Satyavathi took the lead in helping herself and the community, acknowledging that response agencies would take time to reach them. Satyavathi along with 653 women from the Pentakata slum started collecting money for a community-pooled fund known as the 'Resilience Fund'. These women later formed a Self-Help Group called the 'Mahila Sangh' to discuss and take measures to resolve the critical issues faced by the village. Satyavathi led the formation of Mahila Sangh and devised plans for how and when to use these funds.

The Resilience Fund was initially created to provide for the immediate and pressing needs of the cyclone-affected families. It is a step towards community readiness to meet the needs of the affected and at-risk population to make them self-reliant for small expenses and urgent needs. Women from approximately 60 hamlets in Pentakata pooled in amounts ranging between Rs 10 to Rs 200 into the Resilience fund resulting in a corpus of 1,30,000 rupees, in a fortnight.

Satyavathi and other members of the SHG made arrangements for food and shelter needs using the funds. Additionally, these funds could also provide first aid to the villagers who had sustained injuries during the cyclone.

The idea of the Resilience Fund was to be self-sufficient for the immediate needs in response to any disaster. Together with this, the constitution of Self-Help Group ensured funds were available for disaster recovery processes, to provide people with livelihoods, to help individuals in case of emergencies or crisis in exchange for small instalments at timely intervals. This initiative enabled Satyavathi's neighbour to restore the roof of her dilapidated house. Satyavathi also took a loan to set up a small tiffin shop to sustain her family including her two granddaughters.

Rukmini (name changed to protect the privacy of the individual), a 20-year-old pregnant woman, lived in the cyclone affected area of Pentakata. A few days after cyclone Fani, her health condition worsened overnight. Rukmini's neighbours alerted Satyavathi about Rukmini's deteriorating health. Satyavathi, along with other members of the Mahila Sangh, immediately reached Rukmini and took her to the nearest health centre in an auto. Despite their best efforts and quick response, neither Rukmini nor her infant could be saved. Rukmini is survived by her two children, a 9-year-old boy and a 12-year-old girl. In the absence of a guardian to look after Rukmini's kids, Satyavathi proposed that the Mahila Sangh (SHG) take the responsibility for both the children. The decision was taken in consensus by all and the children were later admitted to a boarding school of Andhra Pradesh. Satyavathi and Mahila Sangh members attempted to provide immediate medical support



to Rukmini only because of the ready access to the 'Resilience Fund'.

As the cyclone receded and rebuilding efforts began, ideas around sustaining the Resilience Fund started coming up. Women of the migrant fishing community in the Pentakata coastal slum initiated the discussions on the funding mechanisms for emergencies in the community. As a result of their deliberation, the women of Pentakata began contributing a minimum of Rs 10 every month into the fund. This fund gives the affected families the confidence and a sense of security during times of crisis. In addition to the community Resilience Fund, SEEDS (Sustainable Environment and Ecological Development Society) and its local non-government organisation partner, SPANDAN supported the community rebuilding the lives and livelihoods of the population affected during cyclone Fani.

This idea of the Resilience Fund soon took the form of a movement and continues to exist even years after cyclone Fani. It proved to be a critical source of support when coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. As many people lost their source of livelihood, the Resilience Fund helped in providing the required support to the families of Pentakata village. Satyavathi and other members of the Mahila Sangh contributed effectively towards the fund even during the pandemic.

“We are utilising the Resilience Fund to ensure our people have access to essential facilities and to provide support where needed. We have initiated efforts such as distributing hand sanitisers and masks and raising awareness regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. We are also looking for additional ways to support those in need,” said Satyavathi.

The preparedness support in the form of Resilience Fund has helped the members of Mahila Sangh in overcoming disasters like Fani and has provided the capacity to overcome the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The contribution of the Mahila Sangh under the strong leadership of Satyavathi is a lesson on how a crisis pushes people to ideate and think beyond themselves for the people of the village and the community.

INSIGHTS

- *The Effective Role of a Community Leader During a Crisis: Satyavathi emerged as a leader within her community, taking charge during the time of crisis and inspiring others to come together for the collective well-being. She demonstrated the qualities of a true leader and her story stands as an example of how community leadership can bring about positive change and foster resilience.*
- *Acknowledging the Potential of Women Leadership: Satyavathi's story highlights the transformative impact women can have when they are actively involved in the development process. Her leadership and the formation of the Mahila Sangh showcase the power of women's collective action and their ability to address pressing issues. Women possess unique perspectives, essential for creating inclusive and sustainable environments.*



03

Radha Kurmi, a Youth Leader Making a Difference During COVID-19 in Assam

The COVID-19 Pandemic has been one of the most agonising crisis in recent times. It has caused global devastation, bringing multiple fundamental operations, processes, and livelihoods to a halt, including school education. School closures in South Asia due to the COVID-19 pandemic have interrupted the learning of 434 million children, as stated in a research paper by UNICEF. A substantial proportion of students and their parents reported that students learned significantly less compared to pre-pandemic levels¹.

During the COVID-19 lockdown in India, students were forced to adapt to online methods of education. The pandemic called into question the readiness of these systems, including teachers' adaptability and understanding of online education. One evident outcome of such circumstances was rising dropout rates, as children and parents who could not afford to adapt to the online learning mechanism eventually dropped out of school and college. Radha, a youth leader in Lepetkatta Tea Estate was working towards reversing such dropout trends in her village.

Radha Kurmi, a 17 year old resident of Jungle Line in Lepetkatta Tea Estate, Assam, has a deep love for attending school and excelled in her Class 10 examination with first division in 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent nationwide lockdown, she was unable to attend school for nearly two years. The Lepetkatta Tea Estate was declared a Red Zone during the second wave of COVID-19, posing

a high risk of infection in the rural settlement. Individuals with mild symptoms or travel history were quarantined for 15 days, and schools in the area were closed. The local community was unfamiliar with the challenges brought about by COVID-19. Nevertheless, Radha persevered with her studies at home, utilising books and occasionally accessing the internet. Unfortunately, not everyone in the estate had the means to continue their education. Radha witnessed many of her friends discontinuing their formal schooling

After realising that teaching her friends or children in the neighbourhood was a temporary plan, Radha felt compelled to find a more sustainable approach, as schools remained closed for an extended period. She discussed the situation with her parents, and her father guided her in brainstorming potential solutions. With support from Save the Children, Radha approached the local Panchayat, and as a result, a makeshift school was established at the village community hall. Local teachers were able to conduct physical classes while strictly adhering to COVID-19 safety protocols.

1. Alka Gupta and Sonia Sarkar, "Repeated School Closures due to COVID-19 Leading to Learning Loss and Widening Inequities in South Asia, UNICEF Research Shows," UNICEF Press Releases, September 9, 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/india/press-releases/repeated-school-closures-due-covid-19>

due to various reasons such as the unavailability of devices, books, internet services, or other basic resources. Being part of the adolescent group, she empathised with the struggles faced by children and took it upon herself to teach her neighbours and friends while strictly adhering to COVID-19 safety guidelines. Eventually, she formed a group of four individuals who would each teach another four people, creating a networked approach to ensure continuous learning.

After realising that teaching her friends or children in the neighbourhood was only a temporary plan, Radha felt compelled to find a more sustainable approach, as schools remained closed for an extended period. She discussed the situation with her parents, and her father guided her in brainstorming potential solutions. With support from Save the Children, Radha approached the local Panchayat, and as a result, a makeshift school was established at the village community hall. Local teachers were able to conduct physical classes while strictly adhering to COVID-19 safety protocols.

In Assam, Village Child Protection Committees (VCPCs) have been established as crucial entities dedicated to safeguarding the rights and welfare of children. These committees, formed under the Women Development and Child Welfare Department, play a pivotal role in promoting child protection, education, and overall well-being within rural villages. They actively work to prevent issues

such as child marriage, child labour, trafficking, and other forms of exploitation faced by children. The VCPCs collaborate with local authorities, schools, and community organisations to raise awareness, intervene in cases of child marriages, ensure access to education, and advocate for the protection and welfare of children in Assam.

Radha became a part of the Village Child Protection Committee in 2020 in collaboration with and through the efforts of Save the Children organisation. She actively participated in various interventions of the VCPC and was eventually chosen as a youth leader in 2021. Under her leadership, along with her adolescent group

“As Asha shared her traumatic experience, I was devastated! But I knew what I had to do. Thus, I reached out to the Village Child Protection Committee, to ensure necessary protection for the children and took the necessary steps after that. The system will take time for action, but that should not deter their healing processes, which the entire family is passing through; so, I ensured tele-counselling for both Asha and her mother,” said Radha.



Radha in conversation with the District Magistrate of Dibrugarh, Assam



members, she engaged in discussions about the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the children of the tea garden. With the support of the local Panchayat, they successfully enrolled eight boys and girls into the village school during that time.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the unfortunate consequences has been the increase in child marriages as families face various challenges. However, Radha, as a member of the Village Child Protection Committee took proactive measures to prevent at least five child marriages.

Radha took the initiative to help Asha (name changed), whose parents had physically assaulted

her and forced her to dropout from school and get married. Radha with the support of Save the Children's Community Mobiliser, Manu, provided counselling to both Asha and her parents. They guided Asha to file a complaint at the local police station and ensured the support of the Child Welfare Committee in the district, despite the challenges posed by the stringent lockdown during the second wave of the pandemic. Radha also took personal initiative, with support from Save the Children, to provide psychological support through telephonic conversations, aiming to prevent any unforeseen harm.

"As Asha shared her traumatic experience, I was devastated! But I knew what I had to do. Thus, I reached out to the Village Child Protection Committee, to ensure necessary protection for the children and took the necessary steps after that. The system will take time for action, but that should not deter the healing processes through which the entire family is passing through; so, I ensured tele-counselling for both Asha and her mother," said Radha.

Youth advocates like Radha serve as an inspiration to their communities, going above and beyond to ensure the support and protection of every child. Radha realised at a young age the importance of working for the betterment of society and received significant support from her family in pursuing her passion for social service.

INSIGHTS

- *The Resilience and Determination of Individuals: Radha's story underscores the power of resilience and determination in overcoming adversity. Despite facing numerous challenges and the fear of COVID-19 virus, she never gave up and continued to support her neighbours and friends. Her commitment towards child rights serves as an inspiration for others, highlighting the importance of perseverance in the face of obstacles.*
- *The Transformative Power of Education: Radha's story emphasises the transformative power of education in improving lives and breaking the cycle of poverty. Through her education, she gained knowledge, skills, and confidence, which enabled her to challenge societal norms and pursue her aspirations. Her journey demonstrates the significance of providing equal educational opportunities to all individuals, irrespective of their socio-economic background, as it can empower them to create positive change in their lives and communities.*



Rajib Bora Compassion and Self-Reliance in Nagaon District of Assam

The Brahmaputra Valley, located in the northeastern part of India, experiences frequent floods almost every year, resulting in a significant loss of life and destruction. In 2022, the flood affected approximately 5.5 million people across 32 out of 35 districts of Assam¹ leading to extensive erosion and displacement. The floods caused severe damage to houses, roads, railways, and bridges. The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) reported an excess rainfall of 109 percent in Assam during June 2022.

Amidst the widespread loss of life and property caused by these floods, the destruction of agricultural lands remains overshadowed. The floodwaters submerge cultivated fields and wash away the crops that have been sown. According to the reports from the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), in June 2022 alone, over 11 lakh hectares of cultivated land were affected by the floods. These floods affected approximately 2.9 million people across 26 districts, covering around 80 percent of Assam's total area.

Boro Rice is a significant crop grown along the banks of the Brahmaputra River and have a high yield. Extensive irrigation techniques are used to cultivate the crop leading to high productivity. However, the recurring floods result in substantial damage to the rice crop, causing significant agricultural losses in the region.

Rajib Bora, a paddy farmer residing in a flood-prone village in the Nagaon district of Assam, has

experienced hardships caused by frequent floods and heavy monsoon. In the devastating floods of 2022, the villages situated along the Brahmaputra River were completely washed away due to breached embankments. The affected families had to seek shelter in makeshift huts along the roadside, stretching across the rivers. Tragically, many lives were lost, and Assam faced extensive damage, including ruined crops, loss of livestock, and crumbling infrastructure. Consequently, thousands of individuals were forced to relocate to safer areas. The persistent floods in Assam not only disrupts people's livelihoods but also cast a bleak shadow over the future of millions.

In response to the catastrophic floods of 2022 in Assam, Plan India, a humanitarian organisation dedicated to improving the lives of underprivileged children in the country, swiftly took action. Collaborating with the Assam State Government and the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) of Nagaon, Plan India initiated a humanitarian response programme to address the urgent needs of the affected communities. Among the severely impacted districts, Pakhimoria Block in Nagaon became the focus of relief efforts, receiving vital support from Plan India to assist vulnerable families.

Understanding the significance of empowering local communities in emergency response, Plan India took the initiative to conduct training sessions for selected community volunteers in Nagaon district. These volunteers were provided with the necessary skills and knowledge to become

1. Jyoti Bania, "A Historical Understanding of Assam's Floods," *Engage EPW*, July 29, 2022, <https://www.epw.in/engage/article/historical-understanding-assams-floods>

agents of change within their villages, focusing on raising awareness about water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) practices, as well as emergency preparedness. Motivated by a desire to support his own family and contribute to the welfare of the community, Rajib at the age of 45, participated in this programme. Following the training, Rajib and other volunteers led strategic awareness campaigns throughout the village, emphasising the importance of building a resilient community and promoting WASH practices.

Recognising the urgency of water and sanitation issues in their villages, Rajib and other volunteers took proactive measures by approaching the Gram

Panchayat and local authorities. Their aim was to seek resources and support, to create disaster-resilient WASH infrastructure. The primary objective was to secure funds from the Gram Panchayat in order to establish sustainable WASH facilities that could withstand future disasters and contribute to the overall resilience of the community.

With the effective support of the Gram Panchayat, numerous awareness programmes were organised within the village to prepare residents for potential future disasters. The focus shifted towards the establishment of disaster-resilient infrastructure, aiming to minimise disruptions to critical resources necessary for the optimal functioning of society. Rajib's dedication went beyond building resilient communities to include the development of resilient infrastructure, with the ultimate goal of creating a healthier and better-prepared community in Nagaon district, Assam.

As time passed, Rajib emerged as a catalyst for change, taking a leading role in various initiatives and campaigns to raise awareness about emergency WASH practices. With the invaluable support of fellow volunteers, he effectively led these efforts and strategically collaborated with local authorities to organise community-level awareness programmes. Through these initiatives, Rajib and his team empowered villagers with the knowledge and skills necessary to respond effectively in the face of future disasters. As

Rajib served as a committed leader of a team comprising 750 community volunteers. This shows the power of community-driven initiatives and the positive impact they can have on society. His efforts extended to guiding and inspiring thousands of individuals in his flood-affected community over the years. Rajib's compassion and dedication have made a profound difference in the lives of those he has touched.



the movement gained momentum, Rajib and his dedicated team shifted their focus towards establishing disaster-resilient WASH infrastructure in flood-prone districts of Assam, receiving support from the Gram Panchayat and other local bodies.

Rajib served as a committed leader of a team comprising 750 community volunteers. This shows the power of community-driven initiatives and the positive impact they can have on society. His efforts extended to guiding and inspiring thousands of individuals in his flood-affected community over the years. Rajib's compassion and dedication have made a profound difference in the lives of those he has touched.

As emergencies and disasters continue to rise worldwide, spreading knowledge and awareness about mitigation is considered the most effective way to prevent or reduce their impact. While vulnerability to disasters may be unavoidable for certain communities and individuals, individuals can play a role in reducing these risks by enhancing system resilience and disaster recovery capacity. Evidence shows that most injuries, damages, and deaths resulting from disasters can be prevented, and disaster preparedness measures, such as adjusting housing to mitigate risks, can reduce the overall damage caused by such events and enhance recovery efforts.

Effective disaster training multiplies individual efficiency and fosters seamless collaboration with local agencies. Rajib's vision includes engaging young volunteers, amplifying impact, and cultivating future change-makers. Tailored volunteer opportunities nurture youth creativity and innovation, enhancing resilience and sustainable solutions. Empowering the youth unlocks inventive problem-solving, ensuring Rajib's initiatives endure and expand, leaving a transformative legacy. Empowering the next generation paves the way for ongoing progress, forging a brighter future together.

Moreover, by instilling a sense of ownership and responsibility in the younger generation, the efforts initiated by Rajib and his team can be sustained and scaled, ensuring a legacy of positive transformation. Through empowering the next generation, communities create a pathway for continued progress, enabling them to build a better future together

INSIGHTS

- *Building Resilience through Knowledge and Preparedness: Rajib's attempt to involve young volunteers in his initiatives underscores the significance of empowering the next generation as agents of change by equipping individuals with the necessary skills and information. Using acquired knowledge, individuals can actively contribute towards reducing the impact of emergencies and disasters.*
- *Collaboration and Coordination with Local Authorities: Rajib's collaborative approach in engaging with the Gram Panchayat and other local authorities can serve as a model for other communities, emphasising the importance of building strong partnerships between community members and local authorities to drive meaningful and sustainable change.*



05

Shikha Das's Efforts for Flood Preparedness in Purnia, Bihar

Bihar's topography is marked by several perennial and non-perennial rivers, with those originating from Nepal known to carry high sediment loads that are then deposited on the plains of Bihar. Most of the rainfall in this region is concentrated in the three months of monsoon, during which the flow of rivers increases up to fifty times causing floods in Bihar.

In 2021, Bihar received 111 percent surplus rainfall, resulting in floods in the low-lying areas. Mainly monsoon-driven, these floods inundate villages after villages, displacing thousands in the process. Approximately, 73.63 percent of the geographical area of North Bihar is considered prone to floods, with 28 out of 38 districts getting flooded every year¹. One such badly affected district of North Bihar is Purnia District, which gets flooded every year.

Budhiar village in Purnia is surrounded by Mahananda River which makes it susceptible to flash floods every year, affecting an average of 89 percent of households in the village. The primary occupation in the village is farming, and due to recurrent floods, majority farmers suffer losses every year. This exacerbates poverty levels and contributes to poor health and hygiene conditions within the community. Given the health situation in the village, community health workers emerge as the backbone of rural healthcare infrastructure in India. While their main role revolves around raising awareness among the community and providing information on various health factors, they also

assume the responsibility of being catalysts for change. They are individuals from the community who have dedicated themselves to serving their people for the greater social good. Shikha Das, a community health worker in Purnia is one such individual involved in this transformative work since years.

Shikha Das, is a 57-year-old Anganwadi worker in Budhiar village of Purnia. She has been living in the flood prone regions for more than two decades now and understands the need for raising awareness regarding flood preparedness. Over the past 19 years, while serving as an Anganwadi worker in her village, Shikha has witnessed numerous instances

Shikha, resident of this village, leveraged her existing knowledge of the community to take the lead in organising flood awareness programmes. With valuable support from the ASHA worker and other Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) members of the village, Shikha initiated a flood preparedness plan that actively involved the villagers and community members. Beyond sharing knowledge about flood hazards with the community, she also played a pivotal role in training various PRI members to conduct awareness campaigns.

1. Bihar State Disaster Management Authority, "BSDMA Know your Risks," <http://bsdma.org/Know-Your-Risk.aspx?id=3>.

where the health and hygiene situation suffered due to lack of preparedness. In response to these challenges, Shikha has dedicated herself towards making significant contributions by organising community awareness sessions. She emphasised on the necessity of flood preparedness, educating the community on safeguarding measures, and provides essential knowledge regarding basic first aid.

These programmes focused on educating the villagers about early warning systems, the preparation of flood survival kits, and the importance of community-level health and hygiene practices. Special attention was given to the flood-vulnerable communities within the village. The importance of creating a flood survival kit or grab bag for individuals and families, and community-level health and hygiene practices were also discussed during these trainings. In addition, the participants were taught how to create bottle RAFTs, a simple and effective means of floating during floods, and even learned how to construct local traditional boats for safe transportation to different locations during flood situations.

In response to the awareness campaigns, and in anticipation of the upcoming floods (2022), approximately 89 percent of the most affected families at the household level (identified by GPSVS, prior to initiating the awareness programmes) took proactive measures to safeguard their well-being. They prepared family survival kits, ensured the

safekeeping of important documents, and made nutrition kits specifically tailored for pregnant women and children. These families packed and relocated their essential items to higher areas within their own houses or to the homes of trusted neighbours, based on past high flood levels (HFL). Because of the collective effort of the community, Shikha, and other community workers and GPSVS, a total of 173 vulnerable households in the village successfully assembled their family survival kits, secured important documents, and organised nutrition kits, all in preparation for the then expected flood (Bihar Floods 2022).

Additionally, these households also prepared emergency kits, ensuring they were well-equipped to mitigate the risks posed by the flood. These kits contained essential items such as non-perishable food, torch lights, hygiene kits, cash, clothes, whistles, ropes, and extra batteries. As the flood hit, these households relied on these materials to reduce their vulnerability to the disaster. Moreover, their preparedness helped decrease their dependency on money lenders, anti-social elements, and government departments, fostering a greater sense of self-reliance within the community.

Shikha's role as a frontline worker extends beyond the conventional duties of health check-ups, immunisations, and providing information on women's health, family planning, and well-being. While carrying out these services, she also



embraced the role of a social worker, actively contributing towards enhancing the village's flood preparedness. By combining her expertise in healthcare with her commitment to the community's welfare, she played a crucial role in reducing casualties and injuries in the aftermath of the Bihar Floods, 2022. The collective efforts of Shikha, ASHA Workers, GPSVS, and the community led to an improved ability of villagers to confront the challenges arising out of the emergency. This success became evident during the flood, as the



village demonstrated a decreased reliance on external assistance and skilfully managed the crisis, displaying their newfound resilience.

To enhance a region's flood preparedness, it is crucial to recognise and replicate the qualities that made Shikha's work impactful. Her commitment and belief in the betterment of people and the community should serve as a guiding principle for others. It is crucial to recognise the positive impacts of selfless service and we should encourage individuals to embrace this spirit. Engaging local leaders, community organisations, and educational institutions and by fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility within the community, a culture of preparedness can be cultivated.

Essentially, scaling up the efforts of individuals like Shikha requires a multi-faceted approach that involves empowering community health workers, facilitating knowledge sharing, and fostering community-wide awareness and engagement. By harnessing the power of collective action and embracing the spirit of community empowerment and resilience, we can build more resilient communities that are better prepared to face the challenges of flooding. Community involvement is essential in developing effective preparedness plans. Community health workers can take the lead in organising demonstrative awareness programmes at the grassroots level, educating communities about disaster risks, early warning systems, and the preparation of survival kits. By enhancing community preparedness, the dependency on external aid and government departments can be reduced during disasters, allowing communities to handle crises effectively.

INSIGHTS

- *The Role of Frontline Workers in Disaster Preparedness: In disaster-prone regions like Bihar, community health workers, such as Anganwadi workers and ASHA workers, are already embedded in the rural health infrastructure. They can serve as agents of change by developing and implementing disaster preparedness plans, prior to the disaster seasons.*
- *The Significance of Grassroots Community Engagement: By involving villagers, ASHA workers, PRI members, and other stakeholders, Shikha created a collective sense of ownership and responsibility which not only improved the village's flood preparedness but also empowered the community as a whole. Shikha's approach to flood preparedness and community health work thus highlights the significance of engaging the community at the grassroots level.*



Sradhanjali Pattanaik's Journey of Empowering Vulnerable Communities in Odisha

In May, 2021, Cyclone Yaas in the Bay of Bengal affected large parts of the eastern coastline, causing severe damage in West Bengal and Odisha. Additionally, other states such as Bihar, Jharkhand, and eastern Uttar Pradesh were also affected. The cyclone made landfall near Balasore district of Odisha on May 26. It was categorised as a 'Very Severe' cyclonic storm. Although a massive evacuation drive minimised casualties, the state government estimated that it affected 60 lakh people in 11,000 villages and caused damages to infrastructure amounting to losses of approximately Rs. 610 crore¹. The neighbouring Bhadrak district also suffered greatly during the cyclone.

Sradhanjali Pattanaik, hailed from the village of Chanuri in Bhadrak district, Odisha, with a population of approximately 300 people. Bhadrak district is highly susceptible to cyclonic storms that form in the Bay of Bengal during the monsoon season and traverse the state². Additionally, heavy rainfall, often accompanied by cyclonic storms, leads to flooding in low-lying areas from the catchment areas of Baitarani River. Over the past 16 years, the district has witnessed eleven floods and three major cyclones, highlighting the recurring challenges faced by the community.

Sradhanjali's father, a farmer, had imparted to her, a deep understanding of the community's vulnerability to disasters. She vividly remembers his accounts of the first cyclone they experienced

in 1999, when she was just a toddler. The lack of accessibility to basic necessities, such as food and shelter, left an indelible mark on her and ignited a passion to help those in need. Her interest in responding during disasters was sparked during a training programme on disasters she attended in her school days.

As Sradhanjali progressed to college, her interest in volunteering during disasters grew. She participated in a two-day course on preparedness, which expanded her knowledge and skills. In 2014, she attended a one-week training camp that not only increased her awareness but also connected her with like-minded individuals who shared her passion for helping others during and after disasters. Through these training programmes, Sradhanjali acquired valuable skills in first aid and learned how to effectively support people in times of crisis.

In 2019, she became a Reliance Foundation Youth Volunteer and remained actively involved in vulnerable areas. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, she attended a physical training programme, and even during the pandemic she participated in two

1. Kheyali Roy and Shaurya Prakash, "Impact of Disaster 'YAAS': A Case Study of the Coastal Areas in Odisha," *Empower - The Journal of Social Work* 2, no. 2 (2021), <http://kaps.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Impact-of-Disaster-YAAS-A-case-study-of-the-coastal-areas-in-Odisha-by-Kheyali-Roy-and-Shaurya-Prakash.pdf>
2. District Disaster Management Authority, Bhadrak, "District Disaster Management Plan, Bhadrak" (2023-24), <https://www.osdma.org/district-plan/bhadrak/#gsc.tab=0>.

virtual trainings. She played a crucial role in raising awareness and distributing masks door-to-door, contributing to the community's safety and well-being. These trainings were organised by Reliance Foundation in collaboration with the Odisha State Disaster Management Authority and Civil Defence Organisations, providing Sradhanjali with technical support and guidance.

Despite her part-time teaching responsibilities, Sradhanjali was a self-driven volunteer, whose enthusiasm shone through, inspiring other volunteers. She enlisted the support of fifteen other young individuals from the community, including inspiring her younger brother!

Sradhanjali's dedication to supporting her community before and during cyclones led her to actively engage in various relief efforts in and around Chanuri village. With the help of pre-cyclone advisories received from Reliance Foundation, she was well-informed about the cyclone details, including the time and place of landfall. She focused her efforts on reaching out to flood-prone areas such as Mukundpur, Gudupala, Saya, Talapada and Dahapania village under Tihidi block.

During another cyclone, Sradhanjali witnessed her neighbouring household narrowly escaping harm when a large tree fell in their backyard. As the public services were already overwhelmed dealing with communication and electricity issues, rescue

Sradhanjali encountered some challenges during her work to provide support to cyclone-affected communities. After evacuation, they received rations for people in shelters. However, volunteers were needed for transporting the rations to the shelters. Despite the risks posed by the ongoing cyclonic storm, Sradhanjali and her friends took it upon themselves to personally transfer the rations; they were conscious of minute details required in addressing these essential bottlenecks.

efforts were delayed. As a result, the community came together and utilised household tools to gradually dismantle the fallen tree and clear their backyard, ensuring everyone's safety.

While Sradhanjali's parents express concern for her safety, they are today, proud of her and offer their support. While her mother wishes for her to delegate such tasks to individuals better equipped for them, she acknowledges Sradhanjali's role as a beacon of hope for their community in times of trouble. At the age of 25, she is already a focal point during the times of crisis.



“When they have problems, they come and find me, and we try to solve it together,” says Sradhanjali, her commitment to her community and her willingness to tackle challenges head-on demonstrating her invaluable role as a reliable support system during times of crisis.

The zeal of Sradhanjali highlights the significant impact that a single passionate leader can have on a community. By supporting and empowering individuals through targeted disaster preparedness training, it becomes possible to initiate a positive ripple effect that extends to the entire community.



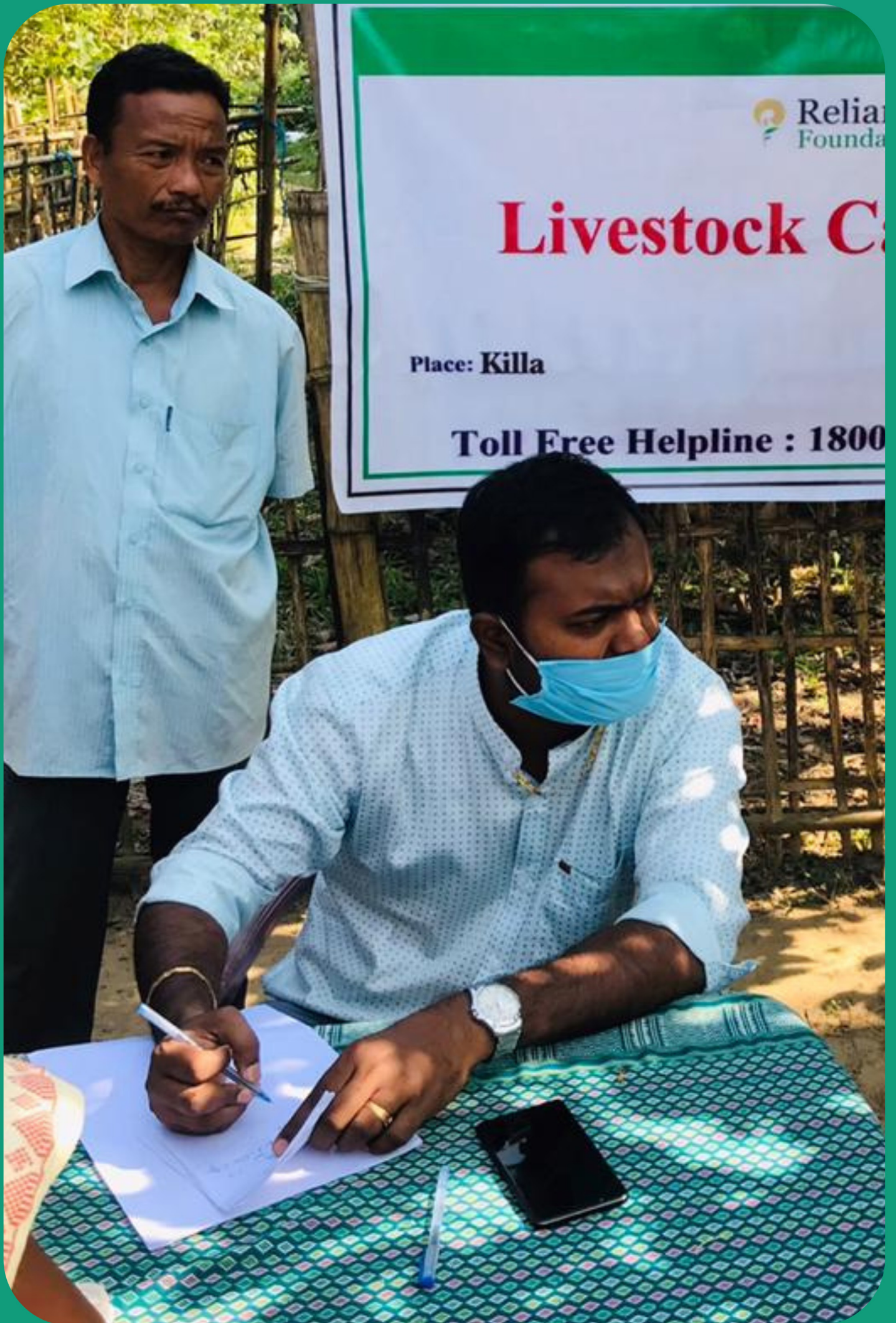
INSIGHTS

- *Importance of Capacity Building of Community Leaders: Building the knowledge and skills of community leaders through short training courses can empower them to play a crucial role in disaster preparedness and response. When a passionate leader is equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills, they become catalysts for change and can inspire others to actively participate in disaster preparedness efforts. By providing focused training to these leaders, they gain the tools and understanding to effectively engage their community, raise awareness about potential risks, and implement preparedness measures.*
- *Community Support is Invaluable During Emergencies: The support and involvement of the community are vital in driving effective disaster response. Sradhanjali's collaboration with other young people from her community exemplifies the power of collective action and community support in times of crisis.*

Livestock C

Place: Killa

Toll Free Helpline : 1800



Sudip Majumder's Story of Fighting a 'Double Disaster' in Tripura

Lumpy Skin Disease Virus (LSDV) emerged in Asia and the Pacific region in 2019, affecting countries like China, Bangladesh, and India. In India alone, the disease caused deaths of over 1.5 lakh cattle in 2022¹. LSDV is highly contagious, with an infection rate ranging from 2 to 45 percent². While it is a non-zoonotic disease and the milk of infected cattle is considered safe for human consumption, LSDV has a mortality rate of 10 percent and negatively impacts milk production in infected cattle. As noted in the NIDM's guidelines for management of livestock disasters, distribution of livestock wealth in India is more egalitarian than land resource distribution; management of livestock is important from an equity perspective as well. Moreover, India has the greatest number of cattle and buffalo in the world and is the largest producer of milk. From all these perspectives, it is crucial to contain LSDV, which has quickly become endemic in large parts of Africa and has the potential to be so in India.

Sudip Majumder is the Managing Director of Bagma Farmer Producers Company (FPC). Since years, he has been working towards improving the condition of farmers, and has become the backbone of his community for nearly two decades. He lives with his mother, wife, and two daughters, as well as his younger brother's family. Sudip's father who was a school headmaster supported him to expand his horizons and do everything in his capacity to help people around him.

In 2005, Sudip helped set up the Gram Vikas Farmers Club in line with NABARD guidelines, and this eventually became Bagma FPC. The FPC has 300-odd members, with 45 women members, and is currently working in 28 blocks. Soon after this endeavour started, in 2007 he also became a member of the voluntary humanitarian organisation, the Indian Red Cross Society when a District Magistrate invited him to join one of their training programmes.

In May 2020, Gomati district in Tripura faced what Sudip refers to as 'a double disaster.' Some of the first cases of COVID-19 in Tripura had been from Gomati district³, and the people of the area (largely in Tepania block) were already suffering from the impact of COVID-19, when they found that their calves were dying. Soon, they realised that the cattle were suffering from Lumpy Skin Disease Virus (LSDV). During the challenging period of the double disaster in Gomati district, Sudip and his team at Bagma FPO played a crucial role as a bridge between the government, doctors, and Reliance Foundation, connecting these resources to livestock farmers. He explained the challenges faced by farmers in accessing veterinary services due to COVID-19, which had led to service shutdowns. In the absence of professional assistance, farmers resorted to unscientific methods such as smearing mud to the lumpy skin disease marks on their cattle.

1. Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying, "Vaccine for Lumpy Virus Disease, Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question no. 2024," December 23, 2022, accessed on November 1, 2023, <https://dahd.nic.in/sites/default/files/RS2024.pdf>.
2. Eeva Tuppurainen, Tsviatko Alexandrov, and Daniel Beltrán-Alcrudo, "Lumpy Skin Disease, A Field Manual for Veterinarians, FAO Animal Production and Health Manual No. 20" (2017), <https://www.fao.org/3/i7330e/i7330e.pdf>.
3. Manogya Loimal, "Coronavirus in India: Woman Tests Positive for Covid-19 in Agartala, First Case in Tripura," India Today, April 6, 2020, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/coronavirus-in-india-woman-tests-positive-for-covid-19-in-agartala-first-case-in-tripura-1664074-2020-04-06>.

To address these challenges, Sudip and his team actively reached out to farmers in the region. They organised ten to fifteen discussions and livestock health camps during the critical months of May and June, 2020. Prior to the outbreak of LSDV, Bagma FPO had already established milk collection centres to prevent milk spoilage before it could be sold. This network facilitated regular communication with dairy farmers, enabling Bagma FPO to leverage it for organising meetings. Experts from institutions such as NDRI and the Animal Welfare Division also participated in these meetings, providing valuable insights and addressing farmers' concerns. Additionally, Sudip and other members of Bagma FPO also established a system to ensure the availability of essential medicines that were otherwise difficult to obtain in the area.




Sudip, a small farmer himself, understands the profound impact that the loss of essential resources like livestock can have on small farmers. While larger farmers may face losses, for small-scale farmers, such losses can be devastating. Fortunately, after the area recovered from the double disaster, the recurrence of LSDV was prevented, bringing relief to the farming community.

The instance highlights the power and potential of Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and similar community-driven groups across the country. These groups have established networks within their community, and with appropriate awareness building and access to resources, they can effectively support people at the grassroots level, particularly during dire circumstances.

Throughout his journey, Sudip consistently acknowledges and expresses gratitude to the

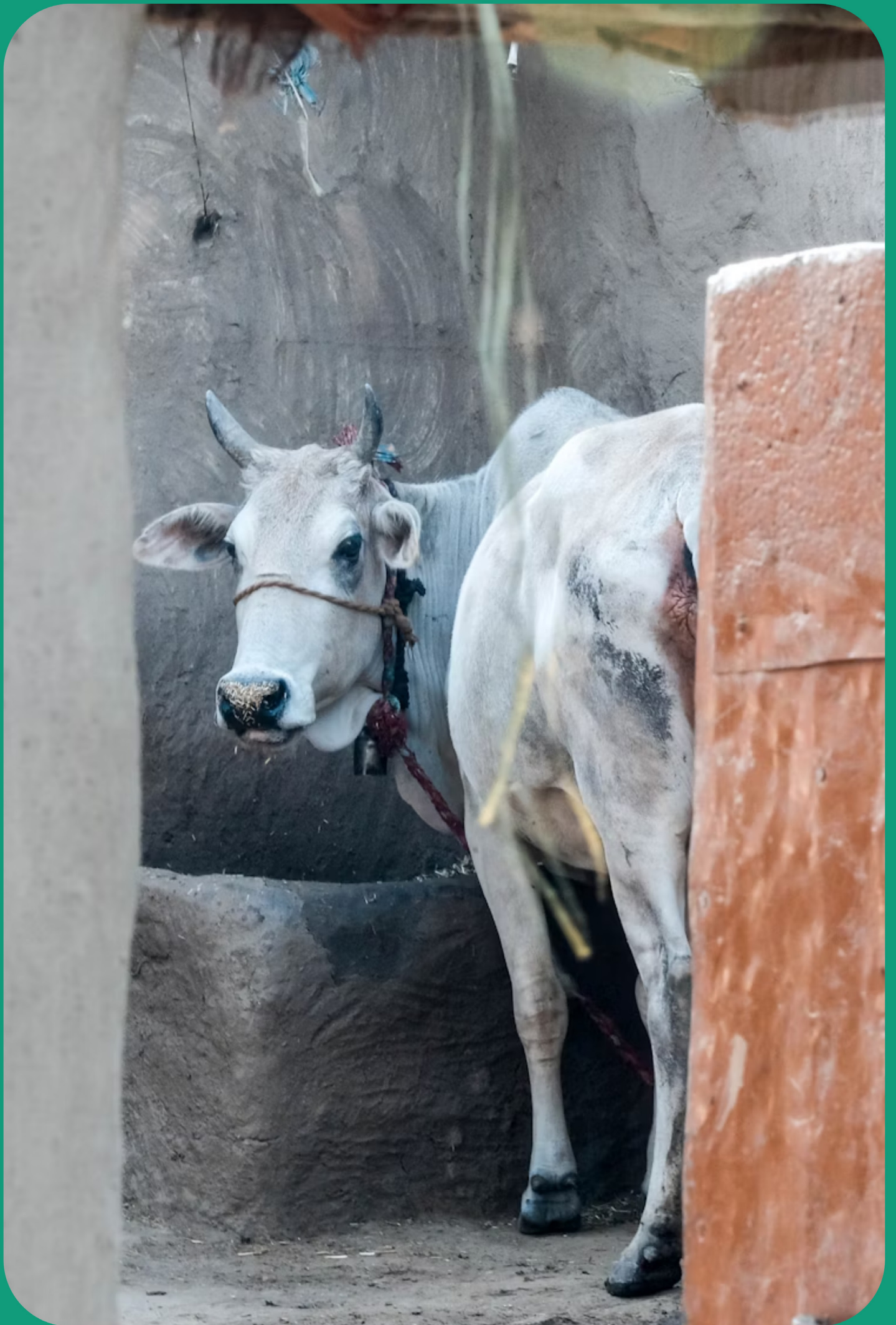




institutions and individuals who have supported him and Bagma FPC. These include selling improved seeds acquired from NABARD and accessing trainings from Indian Council of Agricultural Research, supporting farmers to access solar energy through partnership with IIT Bhubaneswar. These valuable partnerships have played a significant role in the organisations's success and their mission to uplift the lives of farmers. This demonstrates the importance of building partnerships and empowering communities to enhance their resilience and create positive change.

INSIGHTS

- *Community-driven Initiatives are Crucial: Community driven initiatives led by passionate individuals can play a significant role in building disaster resilient communities, as well as address broader community needs. Moreover, their nuanced understanding of the local context, needs of the community, and strong networks enable them to drive positive change and empower the community.*
- *Importance of Multi-stakeholder Partnerships: Collaborations between community organisations, government agencies, research institutions, and other stakeholders can leverage their respective expertise and resources to create comprehensive solutions that address the diverse needs of the community. Hence, multi-stakeholder partnerships are vital in providing communities with essential resources, knowledge, and support.*



Venkateswara Rao, Brings Back Hope During Konaseema Flood of Andhra Pradesh

The coastal belt of the state of Andhra Pradesh is prone to frequent floods, which impacts the lives and livelihoods of the population inhabiting low-lying areas and island villages called 'Lankas'. Every year, the remote catchment areas of Konaseema and other districts are regularly flooded due to incessant rainfall during and outside of the monsoons.

The flooding of Godavari River in 2022 affected almost 628 villages, particularly the lankas with over 30,000 families impacted by the unprecedented floods. Heavy rains lasting over 10 days resulted in the rise of the Godavari River levels causing it to overflow into neighbouring areas¹. The flooding witnessed the highest water levels of the river in the last 40 years². Moreover, the flood waters took over 10 days to recede from these low-lying habitats compared to the usual four to five days. Many of the inhabitants were evacuated earlier, reducing the loss of lives but the impact of the disaster on their lives and damages to houses, livestock cannot be stated enough.

With elevating fears under dreadful conditions, the thoughts of people continuously revolved around their cattle. It was not just the fear of losing the source of their livelihoods, but the attachment and affection for their livestock that were causing them distress. This was also the reaction of M. Venkateswara Rao and many livestock farmers living in lankas, the Island villages in the Konaseema district of Andhra Pradesh that were inundated in

floods in 2022. After almost 36 years, they were witnessing such wrath from what they consider as the foundation of their livelihood, River Godavari.

Residing near the Godavari River, the villagers are accustomed to floods and waterlogging every year. Besides causing temporary damage, these floods make the soil fertile and positively impact agricultural productivity. But in 2022, the impact of floods was disastrous on people as well as their cattle. The village was submerged, and all the available fodder was either washed away or spoiled as the village and agricultural fields faced approximately 10-foot-high water logging in the village and agricultural fields for more than ten days. Moreover, the land for cattle grazing also turned muddy, further limiting fodder potential for livestock.

Lack of access to essential services such as clean drinking water during the flood caused people to be innovative. Though a water purification plant was established in the village by the government, it was not always adequate or functional. The villagers were left with no option but to switch to river water for drinking purposes or come up with ingenious methods of water purification. Due to unavailability of clean water they had to resort to the use of traditional method of cleaning water using the seeds of the tree with the botanical name "Buchanania Lanza", also known as the Almond tree and Charoli. The seeds possess the natural ability to clean water while retaining

1. Rajulapudi Srinivas, "Andhra Pradesh: More than 30,000 Families Affected Due to Floods in Eluru, West Godavari Districts," *The Hindu*, 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/andhra-pradesh-more-than-30000-families-affected-due-to-floods-in-eluru-west-godavari-districts/article65671795.ece>.

2. Press Trust of India, Amaravati, "Andhra Pradesh: Floods Hit 2 Million, Godavari Level Breaches 25L Cusecs Mark," *Hindustan Times*, July 17, 2022

essential minerals. Farmers like Venkateswara Rao used river water during the floods using Charoli seeds in the vessels to clean and drink pure water. This is a prime example of coping mechanisms developed by the farmers for their survival that reflects their resilience and ingenuity.

To protect the livestock, Venkateswara moved his cattle inside their homes and he himself took shelter on the rooftops along with his family till the water receded. As a survival strategy, other villagers also used similar methods to save their livestock by moving them to higher grounds.

The floods washed away the dry hay bundles and submerged the green grass in water leaving inadequate cattle fodder. Venkateswara managed to safeguard the cattle with the little supplies they had at their disposal. While the animals were saved with the efforts of Venkateswara and his neighbours, it was tough to provide adequate fodder for them during the floods.

“As our village is in a low-lying area and close to the Godavari coast, we were left in 4-5 ft level water for more than 4 days. We managed to save our lives and our animals by moving to higher grounds” said Venkateshwara.

Farmers did make all the efforts to ensure that their animals were fed. Venkateswara along with his neighbours placed the available grass and fodder on top of a jute cot while the flood waters flowed beneath it. This gave relative comfort to the animals in relieving their hunger. Such practices are not taught to framers or backed by adequate scientific evidence, instead are improvised hacks employed by them to respond to emergency situations, all learnt through experience.

In addition to fodder unavailability during the floods, shortages continued even after the water levels dropped. Milk is the major or sole source of income for a majority of the farmers, when distressed animals were not able to produce adequate quantities of milk, it in turn affected their livelihood. The minimal fodder available was not sufficient for the animals to produce milk with the same quality of fat content as before the flood.

The Animal Husbandry Department provided TMR (Total Mixed Ration) that helped the cattle maintain the minimum levels of nutrition needed. They also relentlessly engaged in serving the cattle throughout the flood. However, the department was not able to provide much-needed support for retaining milk secretion and production to support the livelihoods of livestock farmers.

To fill this critical gap, Reliance Foundation through its Disaster Management programme, extended support to the livestock farmers in the flood-



affected villages of the Konaseema district. As part of its livestock health improvement plan through the Animal Husbandry department, the team provided much-needed Mineral Mixture and Calcium Solution to relieve the animals' stress and return milk production to normal levels. This supported Venkateswara and other farmers to recover quickly from their losses in a shorter time span.

“Reliance Foundation came forward to address our issues. They conducted a camp for the cattle. As soon as I came to know about the camp, I decided and brought my cattle to the camp hoping for recovery. The doctors screened my cattle and provided a mineral mixture and calcium solution. They mentioned that this supplementary feeding will help the recovery of the animal and assured a normal milk yield. They also provided deworming medicine for two of my calves. Such an initiative is helping farmers like me to recuperate from the damage caused by the flood”, as expressed by Venkateswara regarding the critical and timely support extended to them.

The district authorities opined that it was very tough to support livestock farmers during floods. The animals were already stressed battling excess floodwater and coping with the situation. Due to the stress, the milk secretion had also decreased. Hence, supplementary feeding was initiated by the department that provided TMR to livestock farmers, that was also supported by Reliance Foundation. The farmers were reached by boat and the supplementary fodder was distributed to them directly at the grazing point in the island villages. This helped the animals in relieving stress and retaining milk production.

During the Konaseema flood, Reliance Foundation distributed mineral mixture and calcium solution to 3,663 farmers and treated 10,746 animals. Having worked intensively for livestock health, particularly during natural disasters, Reliance Foundation have provided crucial support to farmers, and have also reduced the associated burden of morbidity and mortality, thereby supporting farmers like Venkateswara who rely on traditional practices and practical solutions to address the immediate challenges posed by disasters.

INSIGHTS

- *Benefits of Traditional Practices: Despite facing daunting situations, farmers like Venkateswara employ several traditional practices. For instance, the farmers in this frequently flooding village use traditional methods to protect themselves and their livestock. While these practices support them to some extent, their coping mechanisms are exhausted beyond a certain capacity and need external interventions. Empowering farmers to make use of traditional practices along with new methods would reduce the impact of disasters.*
- *Need Assessment is a Crucial First Step: Understanding the needs and gaps in a disaster situation can result in effective interventions that alleviate the burdens of affected population. For instance, understanding the lack of adequate nutrition for cattle to resume normal milk production levels enabled Reliance Foundation to support the farmers with the required supplements. This helped the farmers secure their livelihoods as well as help the distressed animals.*



Vikas Maske's Journey as a Disaster Response Champion in Kerala

On 15th August 2018, while the rest of the country was celebrating Independence Day, Kerala was facing one of the biggest natural disasters in India, with red alert in over eight districts¹ including Ernakulam. Usually, the Kerala monsoons have short thundershowers, but, the 2018 downpours were different. Several dams in the state were flooded. Eventually, the dam shutters were opened to release water, resulting in the overflow of the Periyar river. The floods killed over 400 people² and displaced more than a million people from their homes. In addition to the havoc created, another distinct aspect of this climate change-induced disaster was the crucial role played by volunteers throughout the emergency period.

In Kerala, volunteers, particularly youth volunteers, took up the relief and rescue operations on a war-footing. They were involved in sanitising the affected areas, preparing food packets for the flood victims, running common kitchens, and distributing food packets and medicines to the affected people in various places, along with participating in rescue operations. In light of these developments, the Honourable Chief Minister directed the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority to establish a common platform for all volunteers and voluntary organisations in the State to collaborate effectively with Government functionaries³.

With their energy, agility, and resilience, youth volunteers become invaluable assets during

emergencies as they provide immediate assistance, distribute essential supplies, and assist with evacuation efforts. Vikas Maske, a dedicated youth volunteer from Maharashtra, played a vital

Vikas grew up in a small village of Ahmednagar district, Maharashtra. His father is a farmer and since childhood he had witnessed the negative impacts of climate change and irregular monsoon on the farm produce, affecting their livelihoods. At a very young age, he understood the vulnerabilities related to disasters since Ahmednagar is a drought prone area. During his college days, he actively participated in the NSS (National Service Scheme), which instilled in him the values of social welfare and further strengthened his willingness to help those in need. As part of the NSS, he volunteered in providing food, clothing and first aid to the disaster affected families and individuals. Over the years, his inclination towards social work has grown immensely.

1. Ramesh Babu, "Kerala Floods: Red Alert in 12 of 14 Districts, Kochi Airport Shut Till Saturday as Rain Fury Returns," *Hindustan Times*, August 15, 2018
2. K.M.R. Hunt and A. Menon, "The 2018 Kerala Floods: A Climate Change Perspective," *Clim Dyn* 54, 2433–2446 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00382-020-05123-7>.
3. Kerala State Disaster Management Authority, "Sannadha Sena," <https://sdma.kerala.gov.in/sannadha-sena-2/>.

role in the relief and rescue operations during the devastating Kerala floods in 2018.

After completing his education, in 2017, he joined the Centre for Youth Development and Activities (CYDA), a voluntary organisations that focuses on empowering young people and recognises them as a potential force and agents of social change. During his engagement with CYDA, he has been involved in various disaster response initiatives in Maharashtra and neighbouring states. During the Kerala floods, Vikas with a team of volunteers from CYDA, visited Thiruvrappu Village in Kottayam to provide support to the flood affected people of the village. Vikas and his team identified people who needed relief and shelter support. Approximately, 145 families were identified and were provided relief services through resources mobilised through different stakeholders.

Vikas also visited a senior citizen's home in the Thiruvrappu village, which was severely affected

by the floods. The entire place was covered in mud, and even the toilet drains were clogged. Vikas and his team provided support by shifting those in need of first aid to a nearby healthcare facility. Later, Vikas and his team cleaned the senior citizen's home, removing the debris. He also made arrangements for food packets for the senior citizens and for people residing in the relief shelters, till the time flood water receded.



His work extends beyond providing relief or reaching out to affected populations. He has actively made efforts to collect and mobilise resources, coordinating with various stakeholders such as the government, civil society organisations, police personnel and the community. This coordination has been aimed at mobilising resources and provide response and relief activities during and after disasters.

Vikas's key motivation during the 2018 Kerala Floods was his passion to reach out to the affected population and provide the necessary assistance to vulnerable communities, utilising resources mobilised from various sources.



Vikas's passion for social service continued to grow with each opportunity he encountered. He eventually started providing response and relief services, during emergencies across almost all the villages of Aurangabad. Despite the dangers involved in crisis response activities, he has always been careful in abiding all the safety protocols and precautions.

During his early career, Vikas recalls that his mother wasn't very supportive of the career choices he made. The reason behind this was that Vikas's mother wanted her child to be safe and healthy always. Eventually, as people began to recognise and acknowledge Vikas's dedication and the positive impact of his work, his entire family started supporting him. Although they didn't fully understand the complexities of disasters, they recognised the importance of social work, and helping those in need.

To complement his work, he underwent multiple training sessions on how to strategically assist in relief activities. With time, he has now imparted these training and the additional experiences gained, and lessons learned to other youth

members of CYDA, and the youth of his village. According to him, training, and capacity building of the Youth, is integral for compounding an effective disaster management framework with resilient structures.

For Vikas, helping others is not just a profession; it is his passion in life. He possesses a strong understanding of the positive impact one can make in the lives of those who are struggling. For him, training the youth is a single most integral step towards disaster preparedness and by building linkages across geographies, a robust disaster response network can be put in place.

INSIGHTS

- *Early Training and Capacity Building For Children: Vikas's passion for social work was sparked during his volunteer work at NSS. Similarly, introducing children to social work, first aid, and disaster management at a young age can cultivate a sense of responsibility and preparedness. By incorporating these teachings into the school curriculum, we can empower youth to become skilled and informed contributors to disaster management.*
- *Youth as Resource Mobilisers: Youth possess unique perspectives and skills that enable them to mobilise resources effectively. Their understanding of innovative channels, such as social media platforms, can be harnessed to engage diverse stakeholders in disaster response, such as government entities, civil society organisations, police personnel, and local communities. By involving youth in resource mobilisation efforts, we can tap into their creativity and ability to explore new avenues, enhancing the efficiency of relief operations.*



Vinod Shinde, Leading COVID-19 Relief Initiatives in his Village, in Satara, Maharashtra

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on Maharashtra, much like the rest of the states. However due to high population density and mobility, it remained one of the worst affected states right from the beginning. It experienced the largest single day spike on 18 April, 2021 with 68,631 cases, surpassing all of India with over 7 lakh¹ cases as of May, 2022. This significant surge highlighted the severity of the situation in the state.

To curb the spread of the virus, lockdown measures were imposed, which resulted in significant challenges in the daily lives of the residents. However, the lockdown also prompted communities to come together and support each other. People volunteered to distribute essential supplies, and various organisations and individuals stepped up to provide food and financial aid to those in need.

During the initial days of the lockdown, the residents of the villages in the Satara district were not following the rules, and regulations seriously. There was a presumption that the spread of the coronavirus would not reach their villages. However, this complacency was shattered when three positive cases were recorded in the district, highlighting the risk associated with not following the COVID-19 safety norms and behaviours. While the impact of the pandemic has been challenging, the resilience and unity shown by the people of Maharashtra has been commendable in navigating through difficult times. One such story that exemplifies this is about Vinod Sarpanch from Panmalewadi village of Satara.

Shree Vinod Mohanrao Shinde, born in a farmers' family in Panmalewadi village of Satara, is the grandson of the former village sarpanch. From an early age, Vinod developed a keen interest in social work. He cherishes his childhood memories of sitting beside his grandfather, when people from the community would visit his grandfather seeking assistance on different matters. As he grew older, his passion for community service intensified, and he actively began engaging in social activities. He frequently assisted his father and grandfather in their work for the Satara-Panchayat Committee.

These experiences ignited his desire to work for the welfare of his community, neighbours, and fellow villagers, and motivated him to address their issues and concerns. Throughout his college years, Vinod remained dedicated to assisting his father in social work and participating in Panchayat meetings. As time went on, he increasingly became involved in community development processes and attended various meetings. The villagers began to recognise his commitment towards the village and his friendly demeanour, leading them to elect him as the Up-Sarpanch (Deputy Sarpanch) of Panmalewadi village for three consecutive years. Through his dedicated endeavors, he gained the trust and confidence of the people, leading to his unanimous election as the Sarpanch in 2019. He became widely recognised and respected by the community, with people affectionately referring to him as '*elected by the people - Vinod Sarpanch*'.

1. Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme, Public Health Department, Maharashtra, "COVID-19 related Bulletin, Media Bulletin" (May 1, 2022), <https://arogya.maharashtra.gov.in/pdf/ncovidepressnotemay01.pdf>.

In early 2020, with the imposition of nationwide lockdown to curtail the spread of coronavirus, the livelihood of people, particularly those employed as daily-wage labourers came to a complete standstill. The vulnerable segments of the population started losing their employment and livelihood, and there was large-scale migration of people from urban to rural areas, that resulted in multiple issues including starvation, homelessness, and deteriorating health conditions. Certain groups within the community, were in dire need of necessities such as groceries, ration, facemasks, sanitation, and healthcare support.

Living at the grassroots, working closely with the people, Vinod was always aware of the immediate needs and requirements of the community. And, with this heart wrenching situation all around, Vinod being a representative of his village, resolved to help his people. He roped in charitable persons and joined hands with Swayam Samajik Vikas Sanstha, a charitable NGO in Satara. In association with Swayam NGO, Vinod initiated his COVID relief efforts by distributing essential food kits, two-layer cotton masks, N-95 masks, and other necessary relief supplies.

Vinod, with the valuable support of Swayam NGO, arranged for establishment of a health camp for the residents of his village. Alongside basic health check-ups, he distributed medicines, sanitizers, and facemasks in these camps. As the number of reported cases surged throughout the country, the government school in Panmalewadi was converted into an isolation and quarantine facility. Unfortunately, the situation in the neighbouring village deteriorated as individuals from cities began returning to their hometowns, causing a rise in COVID-19 cases within Panmalewadi. To mitigate this spillover effect, a Satara Jumbo COVID-19 Centre was established as an isolation facility outside the village. Vinod managed to secure a Bi-PAP machine and gained access to oxygen concentrators and nebuliser machines at the Satara Jumbo COVID-19 Centre.

Vinod also started a Helpline Service aimed at dispelling misinformation and myths surrounding the virus, as well as emphasising the importance of testing and vaccination. Through this helpline, he provided counseling and guidance to the community on effectively managing the COVID-19 situation within their village. As a result, there was a notable surge in queries directed to the Satara Jumbo COVID Centre, leading to the availability of more than 500 beds specifically designated for the residents of Vinod's village.



Sarpanch Vinod was continuously seeking help and support from various NGOs, charitable individuals and Government through donation appeals. As a result of his efforts, additional 50 beds were also made available at Satara Jumbo COVID Centre for people of Vinod's village. Through a collaborative effort of Reliance Foundation and Swayam NGO, Sarpanch Vinod took the lead in organising multiple community awareness programmes. Vinod spearheaded these initiatives with the collective participation of Panchayat committee members, village mandal, anganwadi workers and the youth volunteers. Initially, only a few individuals contributed to the relief efforts and awareness campaigns. However, with time, and concerted efforts of Vinod and community health workers, the number of volunteers for relief work, helpline operations, and other services grew to over 30 dedicated individuals.

Livelihood opportunities for people in the village were severely impacted, especially for the families affected by the virus. Recognising this, Vinod prioritised not only their immediate needs and providing short-term relief but also concentrated on creating sustainable livelihood opportunities for these affected families. To empower COVID-19 widows, he supplied sewing machines and ancillary material to the widows and trained them on the basic skillsets needed for sewing to earn and sustain a livelihood on their own. Additionally, Vinod facilitated employment opportunities at the local mill for the people in his village.

Sarpanch Vinod dedicated himself towards the ongoing effort of up-skilling and training the residents of his village, aiming to enhance their skills and capabilities to meet their livelihood needs. By providing these opportunities, he aims to foster resilience and self-sufficiency among the families in the long run. Vinod envisions expanding the concept of "Social Work" by educating the youth and women in the village about the existing challenges and how every individual can contribute to the improvement of society. He believes in empowering the community through knowledge and awareness, inspiring them to actively participate in creating a better future for themselves and their society.

INSIGHTS

- *The Power of Community Engagement: Vinod's story highlights the invaluable impact of community engagement or community service. By actively involving himself in the concerns and needs of his community, Vinod was able to tailor his efforts to meet the specific requirements of the people he served. The lesson here is that genuine community engagement is vital for creating meaningful change and addressing the pressing issues faced by a community.*
- *Resilience and Adaptability in the Face of Crises: Vinod's ability to remain resilient and adapt to unexpected crises showcased his strength as a leader. This story highlights the importance of adaptability when faced with challenging circumstances, and serves as a reminder that being prepared to overcome obstacles is crucial for successfully serving and supporting a community in times of crisis.*

The Compendium, 'Stronger Together' has illuminated the path towards local resilience, showcasing the power of collective action, local leadership, and multi-stakeholder partnerships in disaster risk reduction. The lessons derived are invaluable, highlighting the importance of empowering the grassroots, nurturing local leadership, and raising awareness through demonstrative programs. These lessons are not confined to the pages of this compendium; they are a beacon of hope, guiding communities, and policymakers alike. The potential for replicating these actions in similar regions facing similar disasters is immense, making this publication a powerful tool for creating resilient communities across India. As we look to the future, these stories serve as a source of inspiration and a roadmap to a brighter, more resilient, and united India, where we are truly Stronger Together.

Stronger Together

*In the tapestry of resilience, we find our way,
Stronger Together, we seize the light of day.*

*Collective action, a force that's unsurpassed,
Guiding our journey, resilient and steadfast.*

*Local leaders rise, their courage unswayed,
In the face of disasters, they never fade.*

*Lessons drawn from tales, like treasures, they gleam,
Empowering grassroots, like a lifelong dream.*

*These lessons aren't confined, not hidden from sight,
They blaze like beacons in the darkest of night.*

*As we look to the future, our spirits unite,
These stories ignite, like stars in the night.*

*'Stronger Together', our anthem, our song,
In the face of adversity, we all belong.*



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