



SOCIAL MONITORING COMMITTEE IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Introduction

In August 2018, Kerala received heavier than usual rain leading to severe floods across the state and landslides in the mountainous districts of Idukki and Wayanad. In addition, out of 54 dams in Kerala, heavy rains caused 35 dams to release excess water, adding to the increased water levels.

Agricultural lands were destroyed, crops were submerged underwater, and huge economic losses were incurred by the farmers. The floods also resulted in an increase in food prices, making it difficult for the poor to secure even one meal a day. The impact on animal husbandry was equally severe.

CARE India responded to the destruction and loss caused by the flooding and landslides, in Idukki and Wayanad, promptly and in a concerted manner.



Approach

CARE responded in 17 panchayats and 174 villages in Wayanad and Idukki were selected as the areas of intervention because they were amongst the worst-affected districts.

As per the organisation’s mission and humanitarian mandate, CARE India focussed on helping single women-headed households, households with pregnant and lactating mothers, persons with disabilities, sole survivors of families, and people from socially excluded tribes and Dalit communities.

Intervention

Rapid Needs Assessment and Rapid Gender Analysis were conducted to identify the most marginalised communities who survived the floods in the most far-flung areas. The findings highlighted the immediate need for initiating relief kit distribution. The assessments also revealed that the needs of women and girls are different from those of their male counterparts.

After completing the initial phase of distributing relief kits, the next stage involved recovery activities. With the support of our on-ground NGO partners, ESAF in Idukki and Shreyas in Wayanad, activities like shelter repair, well cleaning and repair, awareness building meetings on WASH, and community centre repairs were undertaken. Distribution of bleaching powder, capacity building and awareness generation were also an integral part of the overall project plan. Accordingly, 60 women were trained in well repairs.



The Challenge

In a post-disaster context, the state and non-governmental relief agencies play a crucial role in helping survivors reclaim their lives. However, the role played by the local community, irrespective of the scale of the devastation, is usually not visible. The inherent value of engaging the local community in relief and recovery is also not fully realised.

Local communities can play a critical role in issues like assessing damage, identifying and prioritising beneficiaries, distributing aid transparently and effectively, and developing recovery plans. From a preparedness perspective, they are critical players for conducting disaster risk assessments and implementing disaster risk reduction (DRR) features in the community, with the future in mind. Communities can also play an important role in ensuring the protection of vulnerable members, like women and children who face a higher risk of getting trafficked in post-disaster situations.

It is in this context that the Social Monitoring Committee (SMC) becomes relevant and important.

Initiative

During the Kerala flood response and recovery initiative, CARE was mindful about ensuring that the community plays its part through SMCs; they were the core of any action undertaken. The SMC members stepped up to the task because they realised that their ability in helping the entire community return to normalcy was immense.

The creation and strengthening of SMCs were an important part of the project intervention. Their constitution included representation from various marginalised groups, including persons with disability. Along with at least 50% seats filled by women, the SMCs also strived to include representatives of all formal/informal collectives in the village. They were responsible for supporting effective participatory, transparent and accountable management of response interventions, aligned with the globally agreed Emergency response procedures. The SMC members played a vital role in beneficiary selection, supporting assessments, monitoring progress on various interventions, conflict resolution, and recommending and authorising the release of funds for shelter repair. They were also held accountable for maintaining the necessary documents like resolution register, attendance, correspondence, for implementing the project.

Impact

SMCs played a key role in successfully planning the project interventions in a transparent and accountable manner. This was done by ensuring that they decided to include community interventions under cash for work programme in consultation with the larger community. They were also involved in decisions regarding identification of community wells, community centres, individual shelters for repair, ensuring that the most marginalised groups benefit. The SMC members were also involved in regularly monitoring project initiatives, until their completion. The available project resources were optimally utilised, and beneficiaries were able to access funds without any difficulty.



Good Practices

The implementation of this project brought forth some examples of the following good practices:

- Adopted a participatory method of designing and monitoring project initiatives, ensuring that the marginalised communities take the lead, starting with thorough needs assessments
- Held CARE India and local partners accountable for timely and smooth implementation
- Designed project initiatives in consultation with women and men, allowing both genders to participate and benefit, equally
- Validated the eligibility of the selected beneficiaries prior to the provision of support for various benefits under the project

Lessons Learned

The implementation of relief, recovery and rehabilitation activities and the role played by SMCs yielded the following lessons:

- In post-disaster situations, community members often expect that a universal approach will be the basis for beneficiary selection. However, since SMCs are a part of the community, they adopt a targeted approach, based on the actual damage caused by the disaster
- SMCs can leverage their existing links with other collectives within and outside the community, thereby saving money and time, and increasing project durability
- They can leverage the available social capital because SMC members belong to various existing and well-functioning collectives. This generates a considerable amount of positive social dynamism
- The marginalised sections of any community find it more difficult to access aid or support for themselves. Thus, there is a need for a forum like SMCs to help them gather the required information to ensure that aid reaches the community
- SMCs can hold organisations accountable for their decisions, actions and impact, while maintaining accountability to the community

- They have the potential to oversee complaint and dispute resolution and harness local knowledge and information
- It is easier for the community to access information from SMC members, which improves transparency and builds trust during the project implementation
- SMCs create a space/platform for those sections in a community who have traditionally been marginalised. They can instil a sense of confidence and agency, allowing new community leaders to emerge

Replicability & Sustainability

SMCs can play a critical role in planning, implementing and monitoring relief and recovery initiatives.


Participatory designing, implementation and monitoring project initiatives can empower vulnerable communities. With strong systems and clearly defined roles and responsibilities in place, SMCs can also play a critical role in ensuring transparency and accountability in community-level initiatives undertaken by gram panchayats.

CARE has been working in India for over 68 years, focusing on alleviating poverty and social exclusion. We do this through well-planned and comprehensive programmes in health, education, livelihoods and disaster preparedness and response. We also focus on generating and sharing knowledge with diverse stakeholders to influence sustainable impact at scale. Our overall goal is the empowerment of women and girls from poor and marginalised communities, leading to improvement in their lives and livelihoods. We are part of the CARE International Confederation working in over 90 countries for a world where all people live with dignity and security.

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