

Pre-Positioning Emergency Supplies Project in India

Pre-Positioning of Relief Supplies Saves Lives in India

Though a land of verdant beauty, India is a nation plagued by natural disasters such as cyclones, floods and earthquakes. The states of Assam and Bihar have experienced more frequent and intense flooding in recent years.

This is due to a number of reasons including river beds becoming clogged with silt from large-scale deforestation resulting in increased runoff and changed river courses or spill over, often causing massive displacement and loss of resources among the rural poor. Large-scale flooding in 2009 in India killed hundreds, displaced millions, and left many with few if any resources to recover.

A Recurring Problem

With a long history in India, Catholic Relief Services has responded to such disasters, conducting large-scale distributions of critically needed emergency supplies such

as shelter materials and hygiene kits to meet the immediate needs of the affected populations.

Very often, at the onset of an emergency, it is difficult to quickly and economically procure the necessary quantity of relief

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Fuljens Nag, male
Reviewer, DSS Assistant and Accountant at
CRS partner agency Tezpur Social Service Society



CRS beneficiary Agati Kerketta sits with her youngest son in the village of Baligaom, in the Assam state of northeast India with the sleeping mat she received immediately after the 2009 floods. The mat is from the pre-positioned emergency relief supplies that included non-perishable items like tarps, buckets and soap. She also received other items including a tarp which she said was most useful, allowing them to make a temporary shelter.

• Photo by David Snyder for CRS

items that meet international standards. Competition for emergency supplies sharply increases in the first days after a disaster event causing a spike in prices and depleting supplies. In addition, relief items may need to be purchased in cities far from the disaster-affected areas and trucked over bad roads or perhaps delivered by other means if the roads are impassable. Precious response time may be lost to logistical challenges.

To address this problem CRS has purchased non-perishable relief supplies and has stored them in warehouses close to disaster-prone areas so that items may be distributed immediately to expedite the initial response. Areas targeted for establishing a supply of critical

“Before responding we do the emergency assessment on all the things that are required.



After two or three years we found that there were some common items that people very much needed during

floods, like tarpaulins, buckets, and some sanitary things. So through this experience and also after conducting these needs assessments we decided there should be some pre-positioned items to respond to the flood in a timely and better way.”

Fuljens Nag, male
Reviewer, DSS Assistant and Accountant at
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emergency inputs are strategically identified in disaster-prone locations that may be difficult to reach or, where it would otherwise take considerable time to purchase, transport and deliver essential relief supplies.

“We couldn’t get bulk quantity of goods if we ordered it [during emergencies],” said Fuljens Nag, a coordinator for CRS partner agency Tezpur Social Service Society (TSSS) in the state of Assam. “Everybody agreed that it was a good idea to put supplies in place before

the disaster so we could respond to a flood immediately. It may take time in advance, but if we pre-position some items we know we will need, we can respond much faster.”

Ready for the Worst

To meet the emergency needs of future flood victims in Assam and Bihar, two of the most commonly flood-affected states in India, CRS pre-positioned tarps and rope to serve as temporary shelter as well as soap, water purification tablets and plastic buckets. With these supplies, partner agencies were able to reach 2,900 disaster-affected families while a larger, longer term response was moving forward. Pre-positioned supplies will be available for immediate distribution to disaster-affected communities not only in Assam and Bihar but also in other areas of north and northeast India where flooding is likely to occur. For residents like Agati Kerketta, who was displaced for four months after floods hit her village in Assam in 2009, the supplies that reached her through CRS were perfectly suited for her needs in the wake of the disaster.

“All are useful but the tarp is the most useful,” Kerketta said. “Any time a flood may come, and if we don’t have a tarp we can’t make a shelter.”

Part of a Broader Solution

Pre-positioned relief supplies is one solution to the many challenges caused by disasters in northeast India. While emergency response in the wake of flooding is essential, the pre-positioning of critical relief supplies is part of a broader CRS disaster risk reduction effort that also builds community capacities to prepare for floods through Community Based Disaster Preparedness initiatives. Villagers engage in identifying their disaster risks and put disaster mitigation and response plans in place to increase their resilience to recurrent hazards.

For the times when even the best efforts cannot prevent flooding, however, CRS will have pre-positioned emergency supplies close by to more quickly and efficiently respond.



228 West Lexington Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
410-625-2220

crs.org