



## BEST PRACTICES FOR ADAPTATION AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

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**CASE STUDY-2:** < SISHU DURYUG PRATIRODH SAMITI-  
PREPARING FUTURE GENERATION TO UNDERSTAND,  
PLAN AND REDUCE RISKS OF DISASTER IN FLOOD PLAINS  
OF BRAHMAPUTRA RIVER BASIN>



RURAL VOLUNTEERS CENTRE  
VILLAGE+P.O=AKAJAN, VIA-SILAPATHAR  
DISTRICT-DHEMAJI (ASSAM), INDIA  
PIN-787 059



## **Title< Sishu Duryug Pratirodh Samiti- Preparing future generation to understand, plan and reduce risks of disaster in flood plains of Brahmaputra River basin>**

Sishu Duryug Pratirodh Samiti (SDPS) is a village/school based institution aiming to make children understand disaster, plan to address disaster and in turn plan to reduce risks of disaster in their own initiatives.

**ORGANISATION:** <Rural Volunteers Centre (RVC)>

**1. THEME:** Children focused Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction

**2. STATE/REGION/COMMUNITY:** Assam/Upper Brahmaputra River Basin/Flood vulnerable population of Brahmaputra River Basin

### **3. BACKGROUND**

**Context: The economic, social and geographical situation:**

**Geographical context:** The geographic area of operation of RVC covers the flood plains of Dhemaji and Lakhimpur District and Majuli Sub-Division of Assam in particular and whole of the 8 North Eastern states of India in general.

The District emerges from the foot hills of Arunachal Pradesh and stretches to the Brahmaputra River with Subansiri one side and the river Siang on the other. Geographically situated between the 94° 12' 18" E and 95° 41' 32" E longitudes and 27° 05' 27" N and 27° 57' 16" N latitudes, the district covers an area of 3237 Sq. Km and is a basically plain area lying at an altitude of 104 m above the Mean Sea Level.

The District Lakhimpur lies on north bank of the mighty river Brahmaputra. It is bounded on the north by Siang and Papumpare District of the state of Arunachal Pradesh and on east by Dhemaji District. Majuli, the largest River-island belonging to Jorhat District is on the south and Gahpur sub division of Sonitpur District is on the West. The exact location of the district is 26048' and 27053' northern latitude and 93042' and 94020' east longitude (approx.).

Being situated in a strategic location where the steep slope of eastern Himalaya abruptly drops, forming a narrow valley which makes the region, as well as the whole Upper Brahmaputra River-basin, immensely vulnerable to flooding, affecting 50% - 70% population every year for the last 3 decades. The mighty Brahmaputra River, the Subansiri River and numbers of their tributaries originating from the hilly terrain of Arunachal Pradesh account for the perennial flood problem of the region which has already caused irreparable damage to the region. In addition, extensive human interventions (deforestation, river stripping, construction of mega dams etc.) on the Brahmaputra River Basin compounded with probable impact of climate change are gradually making the whole of the Brahmaputra Basin immensely vulnerable to multiple hazards.

**Socio Economical context:**



- The District Dhemaji and Lakhimpur i.e. the immediate area of working of RVC is of rural character (98.5% populations are rural) and the economy is largely agro based.
- Livestock rearing is the main secondary livelihood practice of the community but the sector is yet to be commercially organized.
- Sericulture, fishing and driftwood business are practiced in smaller scale.
- Sand deposition, bank line erosion, shifting of river course and other adverse effects of chronic floods on fertile agricultural land have made even the affluent farmers land-less.
- Temporary or permanent displacement, crisis of water and sanitation facilities, health hazards are associated features of flood affecting the lives of the people every year.
- The depletion of agro based traditional livelihood practices has resulted in inter-District and inter state seasonal and permanent migration in large.

#### **Rationale/ Justification for being a good practice and potential for scaling up /replication:**

The Sishu Duryug Pratirodh Samiti (SDPS) is a good practice and is potential for scaling up/replication because it helps the children to understand disaster, plan to address disaster and reduce risks of disaster in their own initiatives.

#### **Brief on the local condition prior to Project initiation:**

Flood is a perennial phenomenon in this part of the globe creating untold miseries to the live of the people inhabiting in the riverine villages. Among the victims the children are the worst victims. It is globally accepted that children are most vulnerable to disaster hence they should be trained to understand disaster, associated vulnerabilities and risks of a disaster and abled to reduce risks of disaster in their own initiatives. But, if we go through the National Disaster Management Act, National Disaster Management Policy the focus on children is very less mainly in case of flood disaster. The Assam Relief Manual 1976 speaks little about Children. And above all although CBSE has introduced "Disaster" in their curriculum bit Secondary Education Board of Assam has yet to introduce the same.

On the other hand the attitude of the state organs and other stakeholders working on the flood issue is mostly reactionary i.e. largely rescue and relief basis, ignoring the vulnerability and preparedness aspects to mitigate the disastrous impact. Even the Assam Relief Manual, 1976 of Government of Assam is primarily a Government response manual with its primary focus on flood related disaster with limited thrusts on preparedness/risk reduction. Thus it is easily understood that the most vulnerable group to disaster are left unprotected and this critical situation led RVC to think alternatives where the children find a space to understand disaster prepare themselves to reduce risks of disaster in their own initiatives. Thus the idea of Sishu Duryug Pratirodh Samiti was conceived.

#### **Project / Intervention Formulation:**

The concept of Sishu Duryug Pratirodh Samiti (Children Disaster Risk Reduction Committee) was conceptualized during the monthly staff meeting of RVC on December 2006. Some of the concerns that led the volunteers of RVC to think about SDPS are:



First, the traditional coping mechanism of the community with flood are adequately strong and well knitted to combat natural flood (result of monsoon rainfall) but the nature of the flood has changed. Intensive human intervention (deforestation, setting up of extractive industries on the upper reaches of run-off water system, damming of the rivers, obstruction to the river flow by construction of mega bridges etc) on the river basins have changed the character of the rivers thereby making flood more disastrous and unpredictable. The whole happenings have weakened the traditional coping mechanism of the community with flood.

Second, the existing DRR activities undertaken by the Government and also by the NGOs are not at all focusing to capacitate the children to address emergency flood situation all though the children are one of the most vulnerable groups during disaster.

Third, the focus of the big business houses globally is commercialization of the water of the river basins in the name of development (construction of dams). The new trend has turned the flood problem in Brahmaputra River basin more complex. The problems of flood in Brahmaputra basin on date are largely inter state as well as Tran's boundary issue and beyond the understanding and recognition of the common basin people.

The fourth concern emerged is the phenomenon of global warming and its impact on Brahmaputra River basin.

The fifth concern emerged was about the adult centric Assam Relief manual 1976 which has very limited or no thrust on children and their special needs of survival and development during disaster response and rehabilitation.

The sixth concern discussed was about non inclusion of Disaster Management on the curriculum by the education department of Assam although Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has incorporated the same in their curriculum way back.

In the given situation we feel that, as the traditional coping mechanism is not yielding results as on years back hence appropriation of traditional coping practices is the need of the hour. Secondly, the community's understanding of flood (Disaster) has to be changed so that appropriate practices emerge to cope with flood on the basis of their understanding.

We feel that appropriation of traditional coping mechanism with disaster(flood) could be best happened if the children are educated and engaged in Disaster Risk Reduction initiatives from their early ages. Moreover, it would be more convenient to educate the children on the changing trend of disaster with references from their text-books.

The process of translating the understanding into action started with formation of Sishu Duryug Pratirodh Samiti (Children Disaster Risk Reduction Committee) in riverine Lower Primary and Middle English schools in Brahmaputra Basin of Dhemaji District.

### **Goal and Objectives:**



Goal: The flood vulnerable children of Brahmaputra River basin understand, plan and reduce risks of disaster in their own initiatives.

Objective: The flood vulnerable Children of Brahmaputra River basin are trained to reduce risks of disaster.

#### 4. KEY ELEMENTS

**Target Beneficiaries:** The initial targeted beneficiaries are the flood vulnerable/affected people inhabiting the Upper Brahmaputra River Basin.

**Geographical Coverage:** Dhemaji District and Lakhimpur District (presently).

#### Key Project Activities/ Key Innovative Features - (capacity building, institution building, awareness, empowerment, etc) and methodologies/practices



The process of translating the RVC's understanding into action started from the year 2006 with formation of Sishu Duryug Pratirodh Samiti (Children Disaster Risk Reduction Committee) in riverine Lower Primary and Middle English schools in Brahmaputra Basin of Dhemaji District. In the whole actions apart from the volunteers of RVC the teachers of the schools play the pivotal role. The

formation of the SDPS is well documented and charter of role and responsibilities are provided to each member of the SDPS in black and white. Formation of the SDPS is followed by formation of task forces (Early warning task force/Rescue task force/camp management task force/Health task force) under the SDPS. Each task force consists of 6 members (3 boys and 3 girls). The formation of task forces is well documented and role and responsibilities of the task forces are provided to each member.



The formation of the task-forces is followed by training of the task-forces by volunteers of RVC and also involving concerned Government departments. Follow up orientation camps are organized in periodic basis as per





decision of the school management committee. After being oriented for 2-3 times the SDPS along with the Task-forces with support from volunteers of RVC and school teachers work out the vulnerability and risk map for the school as well as the school safety plan. Mock drills to address flood and earthquake are taken up by the SDPS/TFs on regular basis with support from volunteers of RVC and school teachers.

### Key Technical Inputs:



The key technical inputs provided to the task forces are-how to disseminate early warning message traditional methods as well as using megaphone, how to lift and carry injured persons safely, how to treat minor injuries, how to bring out water from the stomach of a drowned person, how to make life-jacket from locally available materials, how to prevent and treat minor ailments etc.

### Impact – Social / Environmental/ Economical/ Policy Changes.

#### Social impact:

- The major social impact that the “Sishu Duryug Pratirodh Samiti” has brought is community, the School Management Committees and many NGOs working on the flood plains of Upper Brahmaputra River Basin is taking concerns over Children focused Disaster Risk Reduction. The same is understood from the facts that several schools in flood plains of Dhemaji District have sent proposal to Sarva Siksha Abhijaan Mission for constructing schools on raised stilts.
- The other impact is inception of Sishu Duryug Pratirodh Samiti has grounded the practice of vulnerability and risk mapping and work out school safety plan every year.
- Initiative to reduce risks of disaster through household level and contingency planning has cropped through engagement of the children.
- Taking concerns of Children’s planning and implementing disaster risk reductions actions has increased manifold.





### **Environmental impact:**

The major environmental impact of the “Sishu Duryug Pratirodh Samiti” is maintaining a hygienic environment during emergency as well as in post emergency situation in the school, at household level as well as in their respective villages which is largely maintained by safe WatSan practices and taking up frequent cleanliness drive. The process has largely attributed towards control of water borne and vector borne diseases. *The engagement of the children on the issues largely influences the elder persons which ultimately lead to involvement of the whole community.*

### **Policy change:**

The major policy issues emerged out of inception of Sishu Duryug Pratirodh Samiti are that the school authorities are getting critically engaged with Sarva Siksha Abhijaan Mission for flood resilient infrastructures for schools as well as with the department of PHED for flood resilient WatSan structures for schools under Total Sanitary Campaign(TSC).

### **5. COST INCURRED:**

“ZERO” BUDGETED.

### **6. MONITORING MECHANISM:**



- fields which helps monitoring the whole efforts.
- The SDPS registers are kept regularly updated so that if a child-member leave the school then same can be replaced immediately.

- The volunteers of RVC attend the monthly meetings as well as mock-drills of the SDPS on regular basis.
- The members of SDPS are engaged in various trainings/workshops conducted by RVC.
- Regular orientation of the task-forces is carried on both in

### **7. CHALLENGES:**

1. Convincing community, school-staffs and management committee initially.
2. To ensure effective participation of the children in initial stage.
5. To ensure that the mock-drills and other exercises are carried out by the SDPS on regular basis.
4. Influencing policy to adopt the mechanisms under course curriculum.

### **8. LESSONS LEARNT** (both Positive & Negative)

**Positive:**



1. Children have their specific problems in time of disaster.
2. Children learn and adapt to changes promptly and the learning and adoption sustains.
3. Children have a very intrinsic community feelings and that act as a major strength during collective actions.
4. Engagement of Children on DRR issues largely influence the elder for the same.
5. Engagement of children on DRR planning ensures an in total planning.

#### **Negative:**

None significant. The only negativity that RVC feels is targeting only schools keep a huge chunk of children (out of school children) out of the process.

#### **9. CONCLUSION**



Thus, a humble process was initiated by RVC during the period 2006-07 through formation of 35 numbers of SDPS in 35 numbers of schools of Dhemaji District with support from the school teachers and School Management Committees. On date the same has been extended up to 80 numbers of lower primary and

Middle English school in the flood plains of Dhemaji District and Lakhimpur district. The approach has been largely appreciating by the communities as well as by the concerned Government department of Dhemaji and Lakhimpur District of Assam. RVC is planning to constitute another 100 numbers of Sishu Duryug Pratirodh Samitis in another 100 schools before monsoon 2009 in flood plains of Dhemaji District, Lakhimpur District and Majuli Sub-division of Jorhat District.

#### **10. Submission may include photographs, graphs, charts, and other illustrations.**

Photos are included.