

# CIVA Approves \$30,000 for Flood Relief in Bihar and Orissa



**Canada India Village Aid** wants to thank our donors for making it possible for us to answer the immediate pleas from our Indian partners, **Rashtra Seva Dal** and **ASHA**, for help in the wake of the devastating flooding of August and September 2008. Due to our enthusiastic Board and strong relationships with our Indian NGO partners we were able to send over **\$30,000 Canadian dollars** immediately to help in necessary relief efforts. These floods have garnered a dismal amount of Western media coverage and highlight CIVA's ability to react to situations and help out in tragedies that my fall out of the mainstream spotlight.

It is estimated that over two million people were left homeless and many killed by the worst flooding in India in half a century which Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh has called a "national calamity". The waters rose in one of India's poorest states, Bihar, after the Kosi River, swollen by monsoon rains, burst an upstream dam in Nepal on August 18, 2008. The waterway reverted to a heavily populated course killing at least 55 people, destroying 250,000 homes and leaving thousands of acres submerged. The death toll since August has risen significantly as water-borne diseases took hold and adults and children, already weak from malnourishment, were unable to access food and shelter. In addition, food riots broke out in several areas.



Interestingly, comparisons have been drawn to the Katrina emergency in New Orleans in that the horrible effects of the Kosi River flooding may have been avoided had the embankment been maintained properly. Experts said that a river embankment in Nepal — for which the Indian government is responsible under a treaty between the two countries — failed on August 18 when the river was flowing at only about a sixth of the design capacity of the defense. Locals, who noted that the river was about to breach the embankment three days before it did, were ignored. Villagers stranded in remote areas of Bihar were forced to resort to desperate attempts to summon help. Sanjeev Kumar, a victim of the flood, was able to send a text message from his mobile phone which read: "Time is running out for me and there is no relief in sight and I have not eaten for days."



**Rashtra Seva Dal**, an impressive Indian grassroots organization that CIVA has worked with for the last couple of years sent us a letter in early September requesting support:

Dear Canada India Village Aid,

This is to enquire whether CIVA could help us to cope with the emergency situation caused by the Kosi floods that have devastated the area in Bihar where RSD (Rashtra Seva Dal) has been working since 1993. The river broke through the man made embankments and washed away thousands of huts carrying the meager belongings of these extremely poor people. Unlike at the time of Tsunami when international aid poured into the affected areas in an unprecedented measure, very little aid has reached the interior areas of Kisangunj, Katiyar, Arariya, Madhepura and some parts of Purnea. This is the area where we (the workers of RSD) have developed a fairly successful project among Muslim and Dalit women farm workers who are poor even by Bihari standards.



In 1993, we started by holding a camp for Muslim and Dalit women with the dual purpose of impressing upon them the importance of education and also of being organized for their legal rights. (Last year CIVA had funded a similar camp in another part of Bihar.) We were encouraged to expand our activities in the area. We started schools for child laborers by persuading the community to donate small pieces of land for building these schools. These schools were housed in simple structures just like the huts their parents lived in. We had started 20 such schools in 4 districts of Bihar. We had similar structures built to hold meetings of the women's groups. All these structures have been washed away. Similarly, the huts where the families of these children lived have been washed away. We do not have resources to rebuild everything that Kosi has swallowed but we would at least like to do our part in helping a part of the community to put their lives back together. We would like to help them rebuild their shelters and restore some of the essential belongings that they have lost.



We would like to request CIVA for a sum of Rs. 10,00000 (ten lakhs). Ideally, we would like to use Rs. 4,00000 for rebuilding the schools (= 20 X Rs. 20000) and the rest for helping the community members to replace their huts and the most essential things that they are missing and



this includes books and school supplies. You should note that this is not all that we are doing. We arranged to send a medical team from Pune who attended to the medical problems in the immediate aftermath of the floods. The funds for medicines and medical help were raised separately. Our request to CIVA is confined to an absolute minimum that we require to put our project back on its feet. Education is the hope for these children and we do not want the lamp of hope that we lit so many years ago to be extinguished simply because a river changed its course.

We would very much appreciate an early response since time is of essence.

Sincerely

Sudha Varde  
Trustee  
Rashtra Seva Dal.

As aforementioned because of the generous support of our donors we are proud to report that CIVA was able to send RSD the full amount they requested. We wish them the best of luck in this impossibly difficult time and look forward to hopefully some heartwarming stories in their report for 2009.

**ASHA**, also contacted us and asked for immediate help to deal with the incredibly catastrophic effects of flooding in the poor state of Orissa. They reported that:



The Orissa state in India has faced an unprecedented flood disaster commenced from 17th September 08 caused by heavy rains due to low pressure. The flood has hit more than 6 million people and affected more than 10 million villagers. The swollen rivers have wrought havoc in 19 districts out of 30 districts and 5915 villagers. Since one week millions of people are marooned. Road and railways, telecommunication has been cut off. People have taken shelter on highways, upland, rooftops without food, water, medicine, tents. Old persons and children have been worst vulnerable to survive. This is a first kind of flood that has devastated the state after 26 years. Till now on 26th September 80,000 people are marooned by flood water needs rescue and relief, more than 1,33,000 houses have collapsed and washed away. River embankment in 170 places have broken, more than 70 persons died and large number of animals have died and washed away. Now the

worst sufferers are women, pregnant, lactating, children including old persons need special rescue and rehabilitation supports.



ASHA asked CIVA to take up a sustainable rehabilitation program urgently to rebuild the economic condition as well as to help restore social life to the affected people. The objectives laid out by ASHA were:

- To enable 300 most flood affected families to restore their income and economy through rehabilitation activities.
- To enable 400 children to resume their regular study in schools.
- To enable 300 women and adult girls to resume their normal social life.

They proposed the following activities to achieve these objectives:

1. House reconstruction for 300 families through food for work.
2. Crop production for 300 families by seeds supply.
3. Schooling children by study material and dress supply for 400 children.
4. Resuming normal social life for women, young ladies, old, disable persons through cloth supply for 300 persons.
5. Improving health of villagers through health checkup camps.
6. Enable the affected villagers to link and access to government rehabilitation schemes.
7. Disaster management training for community leaders.



Canada India Village Aid is pleased to report to our supporters that we were able to send ASHA approximately **CAN \$10,000.00**, the full amount they had requested. ASHA has recently received the funds and has begun to tackle the inordinate challenge of helping to rebuild the lives of these Indian villagers.