

Inclusive emergency response

reaching out equitably in Leh-Ladakh



Identifying the most vulnerable

After the devastating 2010 flash floods, shelter was a priority. Yet, progress in the villages was slow with an unclear government strategy. In Achinathang's stream valley, 11 houses had been completely washed away and the government had decided that these homes were too vulnerable to be resurrected. While still allowed to farm there, they would face fines if they tried to rebuild any housing. CASA advocated for a new location. Sitting along the only paved road in the area, it may help these houses start small businesses.



People-based accountability

Committees were formed in each village to ensure true transparent consultation and not just consent. These had 4 community members including the Goba (village leader), one representative from CASA and one from the local partner. Involved from start to finish, they were responsible for overseeing all decisions made; including beneficiary and contractor selection, material procurement and actual construction.

Support was extended to six households, centring on economically backward families, families with no means to rent accommodation, female headed households and families of the infirm and differently abled.



Core stone shelters with a twist

The core shelters consisted of a single room with a fusion of sustainable Ladakhi design and modern safety standards. Built with local stone hewn from the hills, they used passive solar heating. This includes double-paned south-facing windows, several layers of ceiling insulation as per the local custom, one foot of insulation beneath the floor and one sawdust-insulated wall in each house. The shelters even passed a temperature test conducted during the bitterly cold months of January and February – water left in a container inside did not freeze overnight.

CASA has also incorporated elements of earthquake resistance such as iron rod corner reinforcements and a 6-foot deep stone foundation.

Reviving essential water lifelines

Water scarcity and the resulting impact on livelihoods was unearthed as another core problem. So rather than continue shelter reconstruction, the restoration of canals was taken up in the second phase.



In Phyang...

"The new irrigation canals have made life much easier. It's benefited the whole society – even the poorer households."

Sonam Richin, Phyang resident

Located just below some glaciers, the irrigation canals in Phyang have historically been vulnerable to repeated floods. This large village houses 450 families, many of whom are completely dependent on agriculture. When all 42 of the village's canals were destroyed in the 2010 flash floods, the need to rebuild swiftly and strongly became imperative.

With CASA and RDY's help, a main irrigation canal here was restored. It followed a stone and concrete model, but added an extra layer of protection. An underground side wall measuring 15 foot length, 4 foot width and 5 foot deep was built just before the sluice gate to protect the actual gate itself.

The simple gate contraction means that the traditional water sharing method can still be followed. When the shadow of the mountain hits the designated stone in the village, the canal closes. When the birds start chirping, it opens again.

The canal brought relief to about 110 families who use this water for both household and irrigation purposes and will have a long-term impact on livelihood security. Cost benefit analysis has revealed that 250 kanals of land (1 kanal = 8 acres) will be irrigated by this canal alone, with the total profit per kanal per year estimated at Rs.20,000.



And in Temisgam



"The committee-managed process is by far the most important innovation to have been used in any development project seen in the village, ensuring transparency throughout and reducing the amount of conflict."

Tashi Dorje, Goba of Temisgam

In Temisgam, water has always been so plentiful that traditional rotation systems were seldom needed and conflicts over water access were few. The floods, however, transformed a meandering and green stream valley into a wide and rugged channel, devoid of vegetation. The original canals have been left shattered under 30-50 feet of silt.

CASA's three canals built here collectively covered over one thousand feet, irrigating 400 acres and benefitting 220 families. From now onward, the canals will be maintained as they always have been. Before sowing season, the users of a particular canal agree on a date to collectively do routine maintenance, cleaning and small repairs. In other words, everyone shows up and does their part!



LEARNING CURVE

- Over the years, the principle of inclusion has been tangibly incorporated into various international standards, including the benchmarks of the Human Accountability Partnership and the Core Standards of Sphere.

"The agency shall enable beneficiaries and their representatives to participate in programme decisions and seek their informed consent." - Benchmark 3 of HAP

People's capacity and strategies to survive with dignity are integral to the design and approach of humanitarian response. - Core Standard 1: People-centred humanitarian response

The priority needs of the disaster-affected population are identified through a systematic assessment of the context, risks to life with dignity and the capacity of the affected people and relevant authorities to respond. -Core Standard 3: Assessment

- A 'khul' is a traditional Ladakhi system of canals. Water is tapped far upstream in stone dams to raise its level and then diverted through sluice gates. The number of khuls in a village can vary dramatically depending upon the topography and extent of cultivatable land.
- When rebuilding canals, you often have to rebuild the banks as well. 'Crates' are used in this process. These are essentially heavy stone embankments wrapped in metal chain link to build up the banks. These long walls also protect farms along the newly carved stream banks, adding flood protection to particularly vulnerable spots.
- A community-led approach gives villagers a chance to understand the project and raise questions. It helps enable transparency. In projects like the canal where the placement and design is an age old practice which went on long before modern engineering or instruments were available; this process also allows for inputs on the local materials and traditional design.
- The use of local contractors who are known to the village helps engage the community in the rebuilding process.

Inclusive response principles

Ensuring social inclusion and resource equity during the recovery process is a vital cross-cutting issue. This includes five core principles:

- **Begin with the marginalised and most vulnerable:** Be it responding rapidly for relief or arranging accommodation.
- **Be responsive to less visible needs:** Engage intensively with the community to unearth these.
- **Leverage local structures:** To build capacity and create community-led projects.
- **Focus on rebuilding or strengthening lifelines:** Making sure to include vital aspects such as water.
- **Spark longer-term change:** Through education or diversifying livelihoods.

