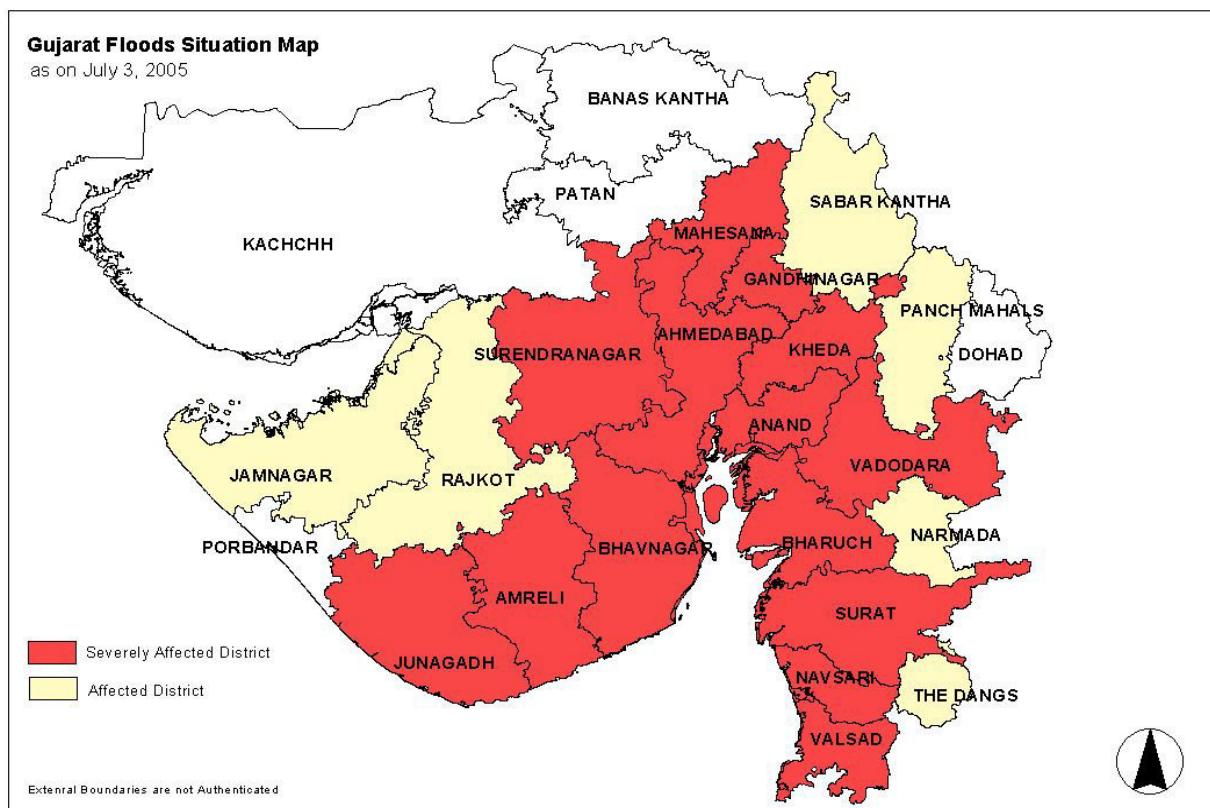


THE RISING

There have always been times and situations when we have witnessed Nature's Fury. Coming through them has been difficult, but never impossible. Human community, with all its diversities, differences and variations comes together when nature calls. Gujarat is jinxed if we go by our tryst with natural and man made disasters in the recent past. Our state has an affinity with problems. The Kandla cyclone, the 2001 earthquake, the communal carnage (2002) and now the **Floods** (2005).

This happened owing to unprecedented heavy rains due to monsoon's upper air cyclonic circulation over Saurashtra and Kutch districts. This resulted into flood situation and inundation of low lying areas in the state of Gujarat. Due to topography and poor drainage of rain water, the rain water changed its course and flooded whole region, affecting the roads, power supply and other life – line infrastructures. The state received a cumulative average rainfall of 100 – 300 mm. A total of 18 Districts were affected, of which 10 were severely hit namely Valsad, Navsari, Bharuch, Surat, Vadodara, Anand, Kheda, Ahmedabad, Amreli and Surendranagar. The total number 10,000 villages and 11 cities were affected. The most severely affected districts were Vadodara, Anand and Kheda, with an average rainfall of 125%, 113% and 97%, respectively.



Areas Affected – More than 65% of the geographical area affected, affecting 2 crore population (40%).

Affected Districts – Out of 25 districts 18 districts were affected, 10 districts were severely affected.

Affected Talukas – Out of 225 Talukas, 117 are severely affected.

Death Toll – 202 persons have died so far.

It started raining on the 25th June 2005 and it rained continuously for five days. The rains were pouring down as heavily as they never had done before. Within hours, whole regions were flooded. Monsoon is always a much waited season in most parts of the country. But this time the waiting turned out to be a misery for the people of Gujarat. Such rains had come after 30 years!

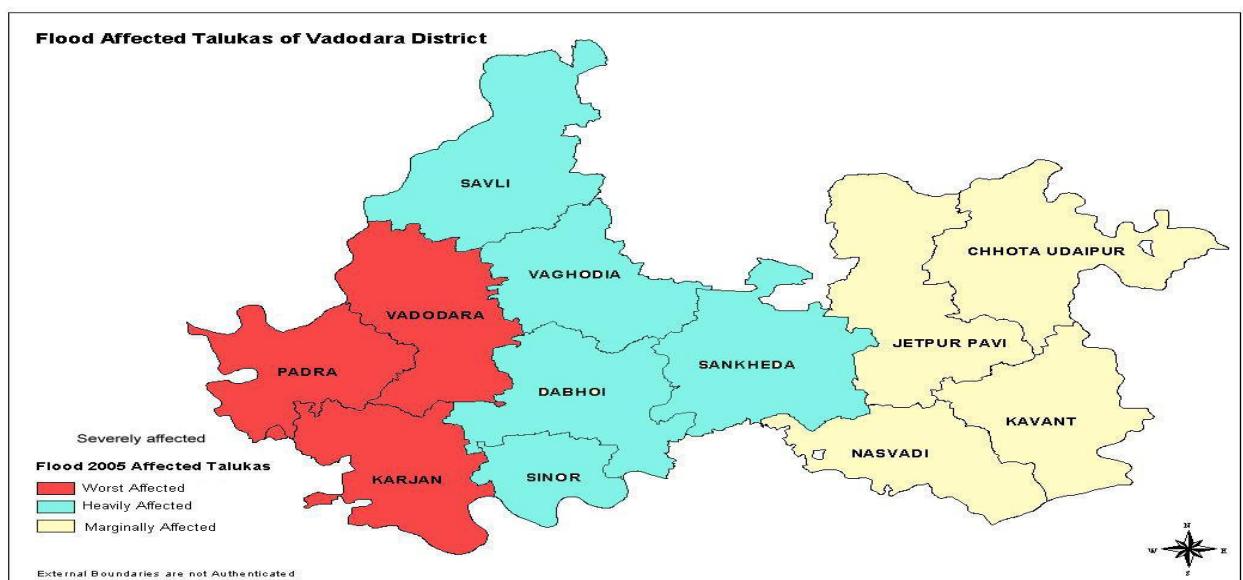
The power supply was affected in 5,949 villages, 56 Towns, while 2,227 electricity feeder and 1,050 electricity distribution transformers were disrupted. 394 regional water supply schemes were affected, while water supply in 5,752 villages and 32 towns were affected. **A total of 202 persons have been reported dead either due to drowning or collapse of building walls.** Approximately, five lakh people, residing in 10,000 villages, suffered the fury of the floods.

The rains with all their might struck most parts of the Gujarat: water was everywhere. Grains, mattresses, beds, cots, clothes, electronics, books were either washed off or damaged irreparably. Rains this time proved to be more of a bane than a boon. Nature lashed out with full fury as the helpless people watched. Water largely considered being a life giver proved to be a life taker this time. Amongst the worst sufferers is the poor and farming community of Gujarat. The labour class of the state faced major losses. These are the people who work on daily basis. Most of them live in villages and in the urban slums. They were almost in a helpless state when they saw water all around. Initially it was hard for people to leave their hard earned belongings, as re-building is one huge and bare reality for them. Many shifted their goods to higher places within their houses and themselves sat on roof – tops to guard. But they had to move once the situation worsened with waters crossing their roof – tops. They were either forced by neighbours or other villagers or by the teams working for relief.

Flood Affected Vadodara

Vadodara district was one of the most severely hit in the state. Vadodara city, as well as its different blocks has been the worst affected in Gujarat. The city witnessed the heaviest rainfall in more than thirty years. People are still shocked by the sheer amount and unexpectedness of the rain. On June 29th evening rain started and by 30th morning, Vadodara city was declared to be in high state of alert.

In the current state of affairs, it was very difficult to get a clear and all-encompassing overview. The data as on 5th July, 2005 collected by the government showed that 28 urban pockets, 239 villages, 22313 families and 99022 people have been affected. The worst affected blocks are Padra, Karjan and Vadodara. Most parts of the city, like Sama, Nizampura, Karelibaug, Sayajigunj, as well as the outskirt blocks were under water for more than five days.



Heavens Bursting

The first spell of heavy showers in the city started on the eve of 29th June 05'. Till then people were under their daily routines. It was no where seen or felt what the next hours would turn into. But in a few hours, we received as much as 800 - 900mm of rainfall, the highest in many years! The rains constituted almost 69 per cent of the average annual rainfall.

Initially, people carried the feeling that it would just be a usual phase of first heavy showers. The next day on 30th June, the city was declared on high alert. The main reason behind this was not the amount of water that was pouring, but the over-flow in the Ajwa and Pratap-pura lakes of the city. These two are one of the main sources of water storage and supply for the city of Vadodara. When water levels increase in these bodies, it is released in the adjoining Vishwamitri River. Also, it should be known that Vishwamitri River flows from the heart of the city, cutting the entire city into two parts.



The main passage of the river in the city is near the Kalaghoda circle.



*Many houses were completely under water for days.
(Kamati Pura)*

Once water was released, most of the areas in the city and surrounding neighbourhoods were entirely under water. Most affected were those situated near the river banks and other low – lying places. For the initial two days, as water levels kept increasing, people from these areas kept shifting all that they could. They posted themselves on their roof – tops. There was a constant fear of losing their goods. All that was built up with great efforts could be gone in a few moments.

But when Nature strikes, we humans become mere mute spectators of the devastations. Water levels were increasing every hour, which forced people to then leave their homes and move to safer grounds. The Government and even the local bodies rose to the cause. Many municipal schools, marriage halls, temples

situated on higher lands were opened for people to shift in. There were many who were stuck at the railway station and bus stops. Later, even these places were under water, which led to closure of transportation for 3 – 4 days.

There was a severe disruption of electricity, phone networks, mobility and transportation and acute shortage of primary necessities, such as safe places, drinking water, clothes and food. In all the heavily affected vicinities, whole neighbourhoods of houses had been completely under water, which had also led to forced migration to nearby places. 30 – 35% of the houses or more were destroyed. People were left confused and helpless. Most of the cattle drowned, fields were destroyed irretrievably, local factories and businesses closed down, as their buildings were flooded. This has led to a vicious circle of economic hardship, especially in the slum areas. The women faced heightened anxiety mostly due to the loss of work by them or their husbands including daily wages. Unemployment can also lead to severe social, psychological and domestic problems. The academic life of children too takes a backseat due to all this.

Apart from this, there were areas and localities where though water had not flooded the region, but due to major blocks on roads, bridges, were cut off from the main stream. It was difficult to approach them. People were totally helpless and isolated for days.

In an anxious state,

Olakh, a Feminist Women's Organisation based in Vadodara, is situated in Karelibaug locality of the city. During floods, the entire locality was full of water. Most of us had been working on the 29th June, even when the city experienced heavy rains. The next day, on 30th June, most of us tried coming for work not knowing what was in store for us. Those few who did come did not realize the seriousness of the rains. Till noon they kept working. It was only when one of them got a call from their home that water was entering the city, as Ajwa Lake was flowing above the danger mark. Then too, not imagining the ugly face of the rains, they just shifted the computers, mattresses, on higher platforms. Recalling their movement of confusion and anxiety, they say that all the three tried their best to move many of the stuff to safer places but none of them had thought that water would actually come inside.

Shahina laughs as she says, "We took turns to go out and check the position of the water which had started entering the backside". Margi explains with a tensed expression how they managed to reach their homes after crossing water that was chest – high. The three walked through holding each other's hand.

Rai and Ajay, who were with them also had a tough time reaching their home. They all tried to approach the main road from different ways but were not successful. Finally, they somehow reached there and took their different routes. The two, Rai and Ajay had to cross one of Vishwamitri's bridges that were quite dangerous. On reaching the Fatehgunj circle water was above their waist. The current was so high that they had to take help from other people to move ahead.

Olakh under Water

Our office remained closed on 1st July. But it was shocking to learn from our neighbours there that there was around four feet water in our premises. Actually, the whole society was in water. Our backyard wall had torn apart due to water's force, which had led to water entering from the adjoining 'nalla' (water stream).



Water's force tore the office wall apart leading to water logging in the premises.

Only on 2nd July, were Mamta and Shanti able to go to the office. They were in a great shock to see the stationary, hard records, other equipment and even the fridge and gas bottle floating on sticky brown mud. It was a sight too depressing; nobody had imagined that the office could have been flooded. Most of the items have been irreparably destroyed. Many of us managed to come only on 4th July. We too, were in a shock to see the condition of our office. It was little relieving that at least the computers were safe. But the hard documents, which were too precious for the organization, were totally damaged. We had to move all the wet stuff to dry, knowing that most of it would be of no use now.



Damage to the hard documents is a great loss to the organisation.

One of us, one of many

Four of our team members lost all their belongings. They experienced what thousands of families had to go through at the same time. **Shanti narrates her story as one of us;**

On the morning of 30th June itself, the water in the streets was already so bad, that Shanti went to the office only to give the keys to Mamta and Margi. She was worried about her house, as it is situated in a slope. She had to wade through water to reach there, and when she left the office again and stepped out of Jalaram Park Society, the water was chest- high. It would take one almost two hours to cross 2 kilometres. Nevertheless, she started walking. On her way, she picked up her mother who had opened the families ironing shop. Her mother was

scared, as the water had a strong current. Hand in hand, they made their way home. Being exhausted, they started packing everything in the house and put it up on the storage spaces under the roof. After six hours of packing, at 6 p.m., the water entered the house, pushing in fast. Half an hour later, they had finished their work and shifted with all the family members to a municipal school. There, nobody could sleep, as they feared the worst. It was terribly dirty, as people and cattle shared the space. Every hour, someone would try and survey the area. At 2.30 a.m., they knew that the water was covering their houses completely. The next day, when the water had receded, they tried to enter their house. Everything was floating on muddy and polluted water. They had to employ helpers to clean the house and throw everything away – more than 300 kg of wheat, which were their precious savings for the year, and all other belongings, including the brand new mattresses.

"I felt as if my life was gone, I could not eat, I was very depressed. Everybody caught a fever and had to take medicines. My younger daughter did not stop to cry, she continuously asked, 'What will become of us now, how can we live'", Shanti recalls.

But at the back of her mind was her community. She felt that her husband and her mother who lives next to her house could manage her house and family. But the communities were in greater needs. So she left for the communities. She now feels that much saving and not enjoying the present steals the joy of today, as just in few moments all can be lost.

She has learnt a lesson for lifetime that one should always be ready to help others in times of need, as you never know when all your belongings are gone. So instead of throwing them away, they would be of use to someone or the other.

She then went to Kalyan Nagar on 31st June and was deeply concerned to see the situation the people were facing. She met Shanawaz, one of our team members living there and expressed her concern. The two talked of what could be done for the community centre, as it had been under water. Shanawaz said that nothing could be done at that time because even he had to move to safer grounds with his family.

Both of them saw the books, computers and other material from the community centre, floating in dirty water. They were very sad to see this state but were equally helpless as their houses too had been completely under water. This surely makes one reflect what would have been their state of mind at that moment.

Further, Shanawaz recalls the first night of the rains: "In my area, people were crying, running and fleeing from the water. Whole roofs, bamboo sticks, boxes, suitcases, blankets and gas bottles were floating on the water. I realized that to save lives was most vital now. As the rain did not stop, people stayed on the roofs of their houses. They were sitting there as the rain was pouring down; they even managed to cook there. Some friends told me of the four rafts the municipal provides in our area every year, as a safety precaution for the huts that are built right next to the river. We started to use the raft to bring people to the municipal school in Fatehgunj, using a bamboo stick to move on. We managed to save 20 to 24 people. They were shivering and asking for help. But a lot of the others did not want to come with us. They were afraid there were thieves in the area and wanted to protect their houses. But how can one protect a house when the ground has turned into rushing streams of water, deeper than an average man's height? "

Our other team members, Runki and Bela, both live in areas which were amongst the most affected in the city. Runki had to shift with her family to one floor above hers as water had reached to such a high. Also, she used rain water for drinking purpose for quite some days. Bela's locality was also full of water, making it impossible for her to even come out of her house.

Mamta, who had to stay for two days at a friends house expresses that she was not much aware of the large destruction that had occurred, until she visited the communities. The larger scenario was known once she referred to the media. She kept thinking about the pains of the people, most the affected were poor and vulnerable who situations were already in distress due to their lives in general.

Nimisha, who was in Sabarkantha when the floods happened, did not realize the affect of the large scale devastation that had occurred. Earlier she thought that on her way back she would find water everywhere. But to her surprise, water was no where in the city, though the damage was more invisible than obvious. She was sad to see the condition of the office on her return.

In short, all of us were in a state of shock and pain to see the damage, but we then got together to clean our office. By then most us knew about the general scenario of the floods destruction in the entire state. We were aware of the huge devastation that had occurred and realized what the population was going through.

Our Communities

Olakh works in three communities. Two of them are urban slums, Kalyan Nagar and Fagvel Nagar and one is a village called Maretha, situated near Maneja on the outskirts of the city. The organization has been working in these areas since the past three years. Relief here was not a new process. Earlier we had done it at the time of the Communal Carnage (2002) and Floods (2004). But the only difference this time was the large scale of destruction and huge losses to the people.

This time also the entire **Kalyan Nagar** community was under water as it is located on the bank of the Vishwamitri River. People were on roofs for days as they feared that they would lose their belongings. Also, the fear of thefts was largely prevailing. There was a complete state of chaos and helplessness prevailing in the community. Positivity was seen only when people were putting in their best efforts to help and support each other. Food and water packets were coming from many sources, but most of them worried about the day to come.

People had to walk through chest – high water in many areas. (Kalyan Nagar)



Mornings and day time was better as compared to evenings and nights. There was no electricity for days. In the dark, the calmness of the surrounding water scared the people. Children kept crying due to fear of the unknown. Also, as the city zoo is close to the community, most of them feared to move about as many animals were then moving freely in the water.

The situation was such that even when they were asked to move from their houses, people hesitated. They were worried for their children, the elderly and differently able. Anxiety and feelings of deep grief was all prevailing.

In Fagvel Nagar, where two of our team members Asha and Manju live, people expect a flood in the mid-term of monsoon, but never at its beginning. This is why they did not do their usual preparations. Everything was washed off. Already on Sunday, 3rd July, Asha started to visit evacuated people in the municipal buildings, Anavil Bhavan, Meghduth Hall and Lohana Seva Mandal. When she asked them what they needed, the people became very rude and aggressive. They were full of fear, as they had never experienced rains that were incessant for four days. They were afraid of having lost even their houses. They would say, "We don't have to say anything. Everything is destroyed." But when Asha sat with them quietly and asked again what they needed, they started to tell her they wanted water and food.



Floods had never been so devastating before.

At our Community Centre at Kalyan Nagar, we later learned from Shanawaz as he recalled his moment of grief: "When I opened the community centre on Sunday (3rd July), I was very upset. All the computers were lost and furniture totally damaged. The water had destroyed all of them, and just as well the books. The water was still feet high. Everything was covered with brown mud, smelling badly. Kayyum, one of the boys that always come to my computer classes, helped me to clean the centre. We had to clean everything: the walls, every single item, one by one." It was quite depressing for him and he kept calling other team members to ask how to go about the things. He was in a much helpless state, he too had to shift to a safe place with his family. But eventually, we have lost everything and now it has to be re – build completely.

*The backyard of our community centre
at Kalyan Nagar.*



Responding to the Crisis

At Olakh, we were in the process of deciding and finalising our work for the next two years. In the early days of June itself we had decided that all of us would work on completing our earlier pending works. All of us needed time to breathe and reflect and recap all that Olakh had done and undergone in the past years. We had decided that all the work that was to be completed and concluded would be done first. No new and major programmes and projects would be then taken up.

For a long time, routine work and activities had taken a back seat and we were totally involved in emergency intervention after earthquake 2001-2002 and during conflict 2002 which prolonged till 2004. So, we thought that getting back to routine was very important. But this is Nature's Drama – in few moments dry and patched lands were flooded, leaving everyone look up for help. Alas, this was again a state of emergency which called us to stand by the people.

Looking at the condition and situation of our communities and meeting with the people, we decided to be with them, to provide emotional and mental space and support, to the best of our capabilities. We deeply felt our duty as citizens to help. We were determined to do so, even though we did not know what resources to draw on. We did not compromise, we did not indulge in project – planning, we were simply working hard under the motto: "Hands on!" This was our set of mind:

Our responsibilities: Helping and reaching out to the people at the earliest.

Our problems: Lack of time, resources and the widespread calamity made it difficult for us to work to our optimum.

Our strengths: It lies in the very core of our mission, which was to help people cope up with their difficult situations. Teamwork, commitment and dedication are the roots of our success.

Once again witnessing the helpless state of those people, we were determined to serve the cause; we decided to be with people in the moment of helpless, first to be with the communities where we are working, but the questions aroused what should we do? How should we go ahead?

Haste is not always waste

We thus, rushed into the decision and made up our minds to distribute cash doles to the women of the family as we were not in position to provide relief in kind immediately. We later realised that the affect was on a large population and such a big amount could not be managed by us alone. So we actually had to collect back the money, which was already given out to a few of the families. In critical situation how can we ask money back when they need most, but on the other hand we had no choice. Thus, we went to the community, had a meeting with the women to explain our concern and also our limitation.

Here, we experienced a great amount of co – operation from the women. Once we explained to them the actual scenario, they were ready to accept ration kits instead of the money. They themselves expressed that ration would be of a much greater help to them, at that time of their needs. It was agreed commonly that money would be spent not very systematically, but ration would suffice their entire family for a minimum of a week. And this period they could earn their daily wages, which they could use for reconstruction of their houses.

One empowering incident of this time was when the women asked us to destroy the sheets on which that had given their thumb impressions and signatures. This shows their awareness and alertness. Also, we saw that in spite of protests and fights with their families and relatives, women took the initiative to accept ration and return the money. They actually stood against their people.

Hands on, to reach out to the larger community

From July 5th, we have been working on our toes round the clock to do both rapid and detailed need assessments and then pack and distribute the requested rations kits to the worst affected families. Thus, we ensured that our help was directly reaching the worst affected families. We were covering communities in Vadodara City as well as different areas of Padra, Dabhoi, Sankheda and Vadodara Rural. After first visits to these areas, talking to people and from government sources, we knew that about 8,500 families had suffered severely.

In the careful need assessment and door to door visits, we came across 6,585 families, who were in the most serious distress, as their houses were completely or partly destroyed, they had lost their savings in forms of grains, as well as furniture, mattresses and beddings; they had lost livestock and sometimes even family members, and also now they did not have any means of income.

We were able to do house to house visits to 6,140 families till today, and give them the rations in the shortest time possible. Thus, we have covered around 4,142 families in 55 Villages of Vadodara District and 1,998 Families in 14 Urban Slums. (Detailed list attached).



All the items were selected keeping in mind the basic and most urgent needs of the people.

The ration kits, that were distributed, contained 23 basic items like wheat, rice, pulses, vegetable oil, salt, sugar, spices, tea, candles, matches and other necessities like soap and sanitary napkins. The kit would suffice to sustain a family for at least a week. This would lift some weight off the shoulders of the people who are not able to find work right now, gives them time to overcome their trauma and rebuild their lives. Still, the need for long term relief in the form of rebuilding agriculture and providing clean water sources is high. Also, basic amenities like reconstructions of roads, repairing water pumps etc, the rebuilding of small-scale business etc. have to be achieved in the near future.

To assess the need, pack and distribute ration kits, we received the help of approximately sixty volunteers per day, who are cadets of the M.S. University NCC Cadets (Army, Navy and Air wing), members of the Ex Army Service Men's Association, friends from various other NGOs (Marag Kutch and Surendranagar, Sewa Rural Jhagadia, Shaishav Bhavnagar, Students from Shree J.C.Kumarappa Gadhada and Anand Institute of Social Work, School Children from Kadva Patidar Kelavni Trust and Kamlaben Deaf and Dumb School, Community Volunteers from Kalyan Nagar and Fagvel Nagar, and many other individuals and well-wishers.

We are thankful to Bhagini Samaj and Patel Kelavni Mandal, Vadodara, who kindly provided immediate storage space. We found that our immediate requirement was of Human Force, as our determination was strong and decision firm, to reach to such a large population in a short time. This is when we approached our families and friends.

Feeling of a real Human Touch is what all of us experienced, then. With no efforts and at one call, we had N.C.C volunteers and volunteers from different organisations, with us. To support us and help in the entire relief process. It shows that “**When the going gets tough, the tough get going with all their force**”. All of them were just ready to work, for hours and days. This was without any motives or gains. Alas, we were able to build a human bank of more than 60 volunteers.

Also, now that we were aware of the larger scene, on one hand we were helping our communities and on the other hand few of us visited the different rural areas of Vadodara block and Padra block, which were among the worst hit. On their return, they shared with us the sorry state of the people and areas at large. All the approach roads were severely damaged. People were just staring in thin air, not knowing what to do and whom to approach. Their faces reflected their sheer helpless states. We now knew about the other needy areas, apart from our communities, in a better light.

After rapid assessment, we moved on to carry out a need assessment survey in other urban as well as rural areas of Baroda, with data collected from the collector's office and panchayats of different villages. The data showed that the floods had a very huge effect and many of the human communities were affected. Initially, we ourselves came across around 8,000 severely hit households. We started working for the cause keeping in mind all these families.

People were completely helpless as most of the village roads were completely out of sight.



As days went by, identification of areas, houses and families was done. After which, assessment followed in each individual household. One the one hand, we assessed and then distribution was carried out. After almost one entire month of sheer hard work, determination and sense of responsibility, the end result is worthy for all.

We reached a total of 6,215 families and households, in person. This is inclusive of 15 urban slums of Vadodara and 56 rural areas of Vadodara rural and Padra, Dabhoi and Sankheda blocks of Vadodara district.

Flow of Humanity

We had started to contact our friends and several funding agencies asking for help. Responses were prompt and positive. Within 48 hours, we were able to raise the means for 5000 kits. Our major donors were Oxfam India, CARE India, Action Aid (Kutch), Bread for the World (Germany), Medica Mondiale (Germany), Citizens Initiative (Ahmedabad), Windsor Biscuits (Baroda) and individuals who are from our family and friends.

As it was decided earlier, we were unable to reach out to all the people of our communities through cash relief and community kitchens. Both proved to be neither practical nor feasible. So, we decided to provide them with the food kits. These we prepared with the joint help of our donors.

Meanwhile we found facilities for the storage and packing of the kits. Kadva Patidar Kelavani Mandal – Jivan Bharti School (Vadodara) and Bhagini Samaj Trust (Vadodara) were kind enough to permit us to use their premises for these purposes. In addition, students and team members from these organisations extended us great support. We also needed transportation for moving the stocks from one area to the other. Dr. Shailesh Shah (Anand), Dr. Rupesh Shah (Vadodara), Mr. Chandrash (Vadodara) and the Ex Army Servicemen Association kindly provided us with the necessary vehicles.

Changing Scenario

We had done relief work three years back during the communal carnage in the state. The communities were the same (Kalyan Nagar and Fagvel Nagar). Then, people were not that close and concerned for each other. The communal disharmony had caused a breach in some communities during the carnage.

Socially, there was a marked improvement in people's behaviour. This time we saw that people stood by each other and provided moral support to all those who had been affected. There was no discrimination or communal tension. In fact, despite the calamity people forgot their own personal tragedies and helped the others with whatever little resources that they possessed. Apart from destruction, the floods also brought people together and taught them that however big or small a problem is it can effectively be solved through teamwork, respect and tolerance for each other.

As Niyazkhan a fruit vendor from Tarsali said," When the floods started I distributed bananas to children as I couldn't go for business and it was an opportunity for me to provide service. Our neighbouring pocket, Bhaliyapura was affected badly. Hence, in our area every body made more chapattis as per their capacities, packed them in plastic bags and gave it at the temple. The collector of this area said that this was nature's game where like 2002 we don't have any one against whom we would file a FIR. There was no one to be blamed.

At the Stores

We started our purchases for the rations from stores unknown to us. We had to collect different things from different places. Still, we were able to convince most of our dealers to give us the material at low rates as it was for relief purpose. They agreed that, being citizens of this country and moreover humans, it was their responsibility to help fellow humans.



*A bunch of enthusiastic and eager volunteers.
(Jivan Bharti School)*

Gradually, we explored new places for purchase. We even used few of our own contacts that would serve us in the process. Thus, we had the Windsor Biscuits free of cost for our first set of ration kits. The dealers also helped us with the packing and storage facility at times. This surely shows that in crucial situations like these all wake up to the cause.

Packing in progress at Jivan Bharti School



The packing, loading and unloading activities were quite a scene. Everyone present there was always on his or her feet. The group included women, children and men from different age groups. They were very enthusiastic about helping others as fast as possible. Even more so, as most of the volunteers actually had lost their belongings (Fagvel Nagar). The atmosphere at the packing locations was cheerful and busy, as everyone was happy to share the feeling of helping. One could see and hear them cheering and motivating each other to work a little more.



Loading and unloading was a learning experience by itself.

Our Uniqueness laid in,

Reaching to the most needy, vulnerable and diverse population or group. After we assessed the families, it was the women of the households who were registered and given the ration kits. They were asked to give their names along with their thumbprints or signatures as identity.

The basic idea was to make the women identify and realize their own identities. Women in general are not much aware about their own strengths and hardly consider themselves as an equal human being. Thus, we thought that if household goods are handed over to them, in a way their confidence would increase.

At the time of identification as well as distribution, it was the women who came with the identity vouchers to collect the kits. We came across incidences where the women were not ready to take their husbands names or they wanted their (husbands) name to be registered. We made it sure that women realise their own identity, though it was only a small effort. At many places women were able to come out of the four walls of their houses, for the first time to get something. At times they were shy and happy at the time. The opportunity was worthy for many, especially in rural areas where till today we have the 'Ghoonghat' (Veil) culture.

Support that was for the entire family, was given into the hands of the women of the households.



It was not just the women who were focussed, but our entire efforts were put to reach to the most diverse of the population possible. This aspect was always there in the minds of all the assessors. Following this strategy, we were able to reach to people of different religions, castes, classes and even from various professions.



We moved on with a 'Women – centred' approach.

The most important aspect of the entire relief process was the identification and selection of the affected families. Water had entered many households and quite a lot of destruction and damage did take place but, the criterion for selection varied. The affected families or households were categorised as;

- Houses that were completely broken or had been washed off.
- Food grains spoilt or washed off.
- Household goods lost entirely.
- No labour due to land being washed off.
- No labour due to illness.
- Death in the family due to floods.
- Differently able, elderly or single persons whose financial condition is not well.
- Dalits, Muslims or people from other vulnerable sections whose social, financial is weak and they have not get benefits from any of the Government schemes or programmes.
- Suffered physical or psychological damage due to floods.
- No relief gained from any other organisation or agency.

One can also see the variations in the geographical areas that were covered. We started with the urban slums and went on to support villages, roadside basties and areas falling under the Nagar Palikas.

City Tales

Najma Nafis Ahmed, a cycle-rickshawwala's wife (Indira Nagar), said, "In earlier floods the water had reached the ceiling but this time it even washed off our roof. We are left with nothing as all our valuables have been either damaged or lost. I feel very scared to see so many people crying everywhere around me. More than 2500 people like us were shifted to near-by school in Hatikhana. A certain Muslim organisation provided us with food. We are in need of money at present as the men in the house are jobless."

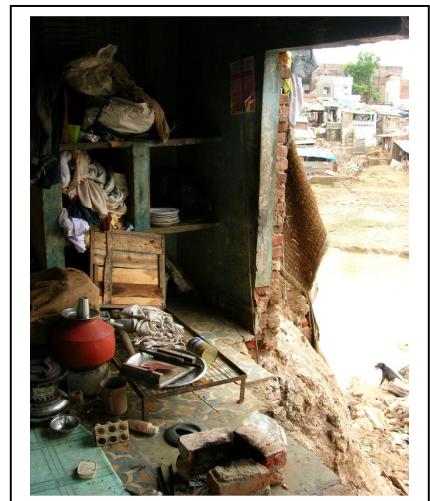
Majidunnisa, a wife of a cycle-rickshawwala's wife (Indira Nagar), said, "Water started coming in after we had had our morning tea. We couldn't take anything with us and left fast to save our lives. Till date members in my family are in the hospital as they had taken ill due to rains."

Kids:" We like to make boats but such a lot of water doesn't help."

Nasim Bibi, 28, Wife of a daily wage earner, living in Kalyan Nagar, says "When the flood happened, I spent one night, a day and another night on the rooftop of my house. We were five, my husband and my three little daughters. In the second night, my children fell ill. This is when we moved to the municipal school in Fatehganj. I have lost all my clothes and stored food, and the CD-Player. For ten days, my husband did not have any work. I was very disturbed. I asked myself constantly, why this happened, why God did this to us. Now, with the relief kit, I can calm down."



Noorabibi Gulam, 50, Cleaning Woman, living in Kalyan Nagar, says, "When the rains started, the water from the river came up to my house and soon entered. When it was knee-high, we left our home, my son, his wife and their daughter. We took nothing with us except our clothes. We stayed in the municipal school. We have lost blankets, rice, flour, everything.... On this picture, she is showing us the water level in her house."



The river Vishwamitri has washed off half of this house in Kalyan Nagar, as it is built on the riverbank.

These were not the situations only of one or two areas of the city. The similar conditions were present everywhere. People were struggling hard to get drinking water and food. There was no electricity in most of the areas, which scared the people all the more in the nights. With water all around, life especially for the slum dwellers was full of fright of the unknown. Apart from water, they were in fear of water animals that were moving all over the places.

Time for Action

The first day of the distribution took place at Fagvel Nagar. There was lot of excitement, anxiousness and nervousness within our minds. We wanted to give out the ration kits as smoothly as possible. As the truck with the kits couldn't enter the community, we had to place it on the roadside. This created quite a scene. We had curious passer-bys, people from near-by societies and from the community. It took long to actually distribute the kits as we did the registration and distribution at the same time.

Happy and contented faces of women, children and men were the success of the day. There were few who were complaining for being left out. They were given reasons for the same. We would only issue the distribution chits on the household's female head. Still, a lot of people did not understand our motivation or took us for some government official and abused us, ventilating their anger.

The distribution for Indira Nagar, Ramdevpeer ni chali and Ashoka Nagar took place at a military bungalow. The kits were brought from Jivan Bharti School in an army truck. For the entire process of loading and unloading, volunteers from the National Cadet Corps (NCC) assisted us. Once the distribution started, people came in groups from Ashoka Nagar and Ramdevpeer ki chali. Most of them were very excited, happy and curious. The entire distribution went on quite smoothly, except for a few incidences, when people from other areas came asking if they would also get the kit. This has been the condition at almost all the places where the distribution took place. People did feel left out and discriminated.



Distribution in Kalyan Nagar. Hundreds of women came at the same time to collect their relief kits. At first peaceful, this line resulted in a big chaos, when people started fearing they could be left out.

At the time of Need Assessment in Kalyan Nagar, there were a series of situations and actions that took place. As decided, we were to assess the houses firstly according to the area census that we had prepared earlier. Later, if we came across houses that were in need and greatly affected, they too would be included for the distribution.

This was not the scene of just one place. But we did come across a few incidences of disagreements in the community, at different places of our distribution. People began questioning and doubting us. They felt left out and discriminated. It took serious efforts of the assessors to actually convince them. It was difficult for the assessors also to leave certain houses. But we have to stand by the aim and purpose of the entire process. It is to support the flood affected families. The criteria of the affected are different from that of people being poor. If that were to be considered, then it would totally lose its entire essence. We are all aware of the 'poverty' scenario of our country. So the demarcation between the poor and the affected was essential.



Distribution: Chits, issued on the name of the female head of the household, could be exchanged for a ration kit. Every beneficiary signed a census list, or gave her thumbprint.

On the final day, when the distribution took place at Kalyan Nagar, things were not so smooth in the beginning. We had placed ourselves in front of Bal Bhavan. It is near the community (Kalyan Nagar). We had decided in advance that few persons from our team would go in the community's different pockets (chalis) and send people (women) to collect their kits. But then they just came in groups and created difficulties for us. All were so eager to get the kits that they were just not ready to listen to us. As we were finding it difficult to manage them in such an unorganised way, we stopped the distribution for sometime. We asked them to get into proper queues. To add to all this, we had people coming with complaints of they not being registered for receiving the kits. After much shouting and explaining was done, we started off with the process. At the end of the day we saw many happy and contended faces. We heard them blessing and praising us.

But the chapter doesn't close here. We had a group coming to our office the next day with all their complaints. We had to literally drive them off. They were not ready to take our justifications for the selection of households. As this was continuing for too long, we decided to meet with the area leaders again to bring and end to all the problems and keep our relationship in the community intact. Five of the area leaders came to our office for the discussion. We discussed as what could be done of this issue. They agreed on taking the responsibility of solving the matter with their own people. We told them that a few families were still remaining but due to the community responses, we now cannot do the distribution like before. They assured us that they would look into the matter. They would talk with the ones who hadn't received the ration kits and those who have. This could bring some common resolutions.

The Truth is,

We had a lot of different experiences while assessing and distributing the ration kits. We got to know our own weaknesses, we were stunned and annoyed by both the people's generosity and narrow-mindedness, and we deeply felt the misfortune that most of them had to suffer from.

Fagvel Nagar:

Being the first day of the distribution, it was not well organised. The identity vouchers were given on the spot so much time was consumed. There were few complaining people who wanted their names to be registered. There was one lady who started crying because we did not include her son's name in our list of beneficiaries.



Balancing the families' needs: a woman in Fagvel Nagar seems happy after receiving the ration kit.

Indira Nagar/Ramdevpeer Ni chali/Ashoka Nagar:

People from Indira Nagar and Ashoka Nagar did not create any issues at the time of distribution. But when residents of Ramdevpeer ni chali came, there was quite a commotion. They were complaining for being left out though they had suffered equally.

Here too, the local support was insufficient. The area leaders were not co-operative. They asked us to go by their terms.

A burkha clad woman, "This is the first time that I have come out of my house for some purpose. I do all household chores and remain in the house. I feel good."



One old lady who came to collect the ration kit said, "Though I have no one left in this world, you (our team) came to my house to see its condition. I thought that nobody would mention my name from my area. But as you are true people. I am now very happy to receive this help. All my blessings are for you and your organisation."

A youth when asked to help a lady to carry the ration kit replied, "When they want the kit so badly, then they should also have the capacity to carry it."

Kalyan Nagar:

Said one of the female from Ajmeri Mohalla, "I feel extremely happy and relieved to receive this ration kit. I was very worried as there is no money left with us. I just didn't know how things would be managed. But now with this ration, few days' food is arranged. So when my husband would be back to work, that money will be used for repairing our house".

Naseem bibi from the same area said, "Your organisation has come as help send from God. At the right time when we need the ration the most".



It was hard to tell where the river actually ended (Kalyan Nagar).

Gandhi Kotar and Jalaram Nagar:

The condition of people in these areas was very pitiful. We were shaken by their plight. It was then when some of the volunteers realised how insignificant we humans are against the forces of nature. Wherever we went, people had many tales of sorrow to narrate. Some even caught hold of our feet. The major problem with the residents of Gandhi Kotar was that in spite of constant Government alerts, they did not move out from their area.

Raine Basera:

The majority of the ration kit recipients of this area are from a community of Muslims. This made the other community people feel discriminated and left out. They said that the organisation was being partial for its own hidden gains.

We were surprised to know that a day before our distribution took place in this area, the local leader collected money from the residents saying he was helping us in our task.

We even got to hear comments like, "Let us loot their truck if they don't give kits to the entire area." and "Why are we giving only to the Muslims "at the time of distribution.

One man, Ganibhai, wanted four kits in the name of his tenants. We refused directly and asked the actual persons (women) to come and collect their own kits.

Sama:

The men in this area were not ready to help the women at the time of distribution because the registration wasn't in their names. They kept saying that now it would be the woman coming first in all places.

Though we had come across incidences of women consuming liquor at many places, the surprise factor here was that almost all the women folk were involved in drinking and other addictions. They were bold enough to tell us that we could give them money instead of ration kits so that they could buy liquor.

Jambudiya pura:

Here, a lady who wanted her name to be registered offered alcohol to one of the volunteers.

It was sad to know that one boy from a Bharwad family broke his hand when his family was moving to safer land, away from the flooded area.

When the ration kits were distributed, few of the ladies eagerly opened them to see what all they received. They checked the contents with the list and said, "We are very happy to get all these. Especially all the women related things like the filter and sanitary napkins. That you have kept them in mind before distribution is the best thing about the kit."

Hanuman Nagar:

One middle age woman said, "This is for the first time anybody came and approached us to inquire about our well-being. It made us feel that we are also Humans and are citizens of this country".

Manjalpur:

The most shocking and sad fact of this area is that all the 70 houses whom we visited have been using water from one tap only, since the past 30 years! There is no sanitation facility in this area so, the women bathe at houses where they work and men use the public facilities.



Excited, confused and eager, the women gathered to collect the ration kits.

Village Calls

Padra particularly was the most severely hit area, as it was completely flooded on a large scale. The damage was beyond imagination. For rescue and relief operation the Army was called. Still, many parts of the area are not approachable by road and food packets are sent with the help of the Navy. On our surveying trips, we were deeply shaken when we saw the people living on islands of mud, in shattered houses, deprived of any means to clean up things. And it was not only a few who were in an utterly pathetic situation. In total, we identified 8,462 families who were in dire need of help, having not only a destroyed house, but also no means of income in the near future.



Within days, the flood had destroyed whole villages, changing their entire faces.

A villager in Sapla village said, "In our village 60 houses have collapsed till now. Oh! Did you hear that sound? That's number 61".

A lady in Vadu village, "There was water till the neck within five minutes in all the houses. We had no time to carry anything with us. We just ran to save our lives."

Kids in many of the villages kept saying to the Olakh volunteers who were working for relief distribution, that," We like the rain as we get to play in the water. But this time it's not good because we are unable to make any boats. Even all are books and bags are completely wet".

Kids gathered for the camera being little aware of the disaster that had struck their area.



An old woman, seeing the Olakh team, sadly narrated that, "We are left with nothing as all are valuables have been either damaged or lost. I feel very scared to see so many people crying everywhere around me. We are in need of money at present as the men in the house have no work."

A woman in Govindpura village, "When the rains started, the water came up to my house and soon entered. When it was knee-high, we left our home, my son, his wife and their daughter. We took nothing with us except our clothes. We stayed in the municipal school. We have lost blankets, rice, flour, everything...."

Commonly,

Most of the villages and families were affected due to the flood, but not all could be supported. A great deal of internal and external migration had taken place. So this did make it a little difficult to locate people.

The people, when they received the ration kits seemed very happy. But the great losses that they had faced due to the floods had instilled deep-rooted sadness in their hearts. The most depressed were the vulnerable or weaker groups consisting of single women, old age people, and handicaps. The daily wage earners were the most affected, as now they were rendered entirely workless.



Work is scarce after the flood. Vendors have lost their stock and still have to pay off loans.

The Navi Nagris that have been built by the Government have been amongst the worst hit pockets. The main reason behind this is that all of them are situated near riversides or near lakes and ponds. They are almost inside the water bodies. Their low-lying area-structures made the water enter very fast and easily in their houses.

We saw incidences in many of the villages where women were not ready to take the names of their husbands. They insisted on writing the men's names, as they believed that their identity lies with their husbands or any other man of their family.

There is a great difference in the people living in the urban slums and villages and those residing on the roadsides. The homeless were confused when we approached them. They are basically migrants from different states of the country. As they do not stay in one area permanently, their residence is not confirmed. So they are not considered when any relief or aid is given out. They were later very happy to have the kits.

At many places people were hesitant because they felt that due to the corruption and selfish nature of leaders and the Government in our country, they would never get their fair share. Someone else would be benefited by his or her names.

When people saw help coming they had expressions that revealed happiness and hope. They are habituated to live in crises situations like these. This has built their coping mechanisms.

People in general weren't crying or complaining about their situation and states of helplessness. They have their own fighting instincts and coping mechanisms to help them survive in such cruel circumstances.

People started to rebuild their houses, even though the ground was still wet and muddy.



Many had started re-building their houses even before any external help or aid had come to them. They had accepted the heavy rains and the accompanying floods as God's will.

Though there were past incidences of disharmony in few of the areas at the time of the communal carnage in the state, but this time all of them united and came together to help and support each other. This was before any other help was available to them.



Getting rid of debris and stinking mud.

People's participation in terms of joining the assessment or distribution tasks was less. Even the workers as well as the beneficiaries faced external pressures from either local leaders or political candidates of the areas.

Facing Reality

In times of need, the true quality of people often shows. We were dependent on the help of Sarpanch and other local leaders. Not all of them treated their kinsmen and us fairly. We got an insight into local politics, customs and injustices that we would like to share here, as they are interesting examples and show further fields of interaction.

Govindpura:

The Sarpanch in this village is corrupt. He doesn't support all the villagers. This has created conflict in the minds of the people. As he didn't give a true picture of the flood affected families and those in dire need, the people blamed the organisation for being unfair.

The young men in this village do nothing but just wasting their time. They do not help or support their mothers and sisters who work.

Vishrampura:

Here we saw affected women facing more problems and difficulties due to their single status. If they had lost their houses, rebuilding was a greater issue with them.

The young people here, on seeing the N.C.C volunteers were very keen and curious to know about them.

One revolutionary incidence that took place here was that it was for the first time in the village the women had come out of their houses and gathered in a large group for any purpose. Though they were confused as what they were to do it was surely a great positive and pleasant sight to see. The volunteers were also excited to see that.



Loss of household items has left people helpless.

Shahpura:

We found incidences where the men folk remained at home and the women worked. Most striking was their indifference towards these women. Neither the husbands nor the sons or brothers were sensitive towards their work.

The Panchayat in this village had earlier refused to accept relief as they had bitter experiences at the time of receiving cash doles from the Government. We made them understand our purpose and how we are different from the Government.