



Dhemaji

Area Development Programme

Background

The project is situated in Sisi Tongani Tribal Block in the District of Dhemaji, Assam (North East India). This district is one of the poorest in Assam because of the yearly flooding caused by the severe silting of the Brahmaputra River.

Annually the river causes severe floods that destroys houses, crops and turns fertile lands into barren sand plots unfit for cultivation. As a result, 80% of the people live below the poverty line and the Mising are forced to seek greener pastures.

The total number of people who will benefit from the project is 34,593 comprising of 17,602 males and 16,991 females. Known as Mising, they migrated to the plain of Assam during in the 6th century and were known as the "boat people" of Assam.

In the Mising culture, men are highly regarded and play a dominant role as the heads of the household. On the other hand, women enjoyed very low status and are considered inferior to their men. As such, most of the women are lowly educated and are usually made to marry at a tender age. Basically, the women do not have much freedom over their lives.

The Mising are animistic in their religious beliefs. They believe the Sun (Do:Nyi) and the Moon (Po:Lo) are their father and mother respectively. However, Hinduism is slowly permeating into their religious beliefs and practices.

The Mising depends on agricultural farming and fishing as their means of livelihood. In addition, they rear domestic animals such as pigs, cows, goats, buffaloes and fowls.

Concerns of Dhemaji's Communities

Low Literacy Rate

Being poor, education for the children is usually not the top priority of the parents. At a very young age, the children are already needed to help in the farms and daily chores around the house. The lack of proper education facilities further discourage the parents from sending the children to school. As a result, the literacy rate of the communities is only 30%, which is lower than the State's literacy level of 52.89%.

Poor Health Status

Generally, the health condition of the communities is poor as they do not have sufficient health facilities and access to clean drinking water. They are vulnerable to water-borne diseases which become even more rampant during the flooding season. Other common diseases are malaria, tuberculosis, leprosy, typhoid and various skin diseases. The child mortality rate is high as the result of these diseases and malnutrition.

Low Income Generation Ability

Besides farming and fishing, there is no alternative source of livelihood for the Mising. There are no industries nearby which can offer them employment when their crops failed when the river floods.

Poor Leadership Capacity

The communities also face a lack of trustworthy and capable leaders who are able to lead them in addressing the above issues. Without this level of leadership, it will be difficult for the communities to break out of their poverty cycle and find a sustainable solution.

Project Goals

The project is implemented with the partnership of the communities, government and non-government agencies. The project plans to increase the capacity of the communities and improve their well-being in health, education and income level. World Vision started helping the project on October 1, 1997 and plans to phase out on September 30, 2012.

Improve the education system

A phased approach to education will be adopted to meet the specific needs of the children and adults. This will be done using appropriate formal and non-formal educational programmes developed by the various Indian government bodies. It will use innovative education-for-life packages developed through other sources. Along with this, the project will also conduct supplementary tuition classes for the children who are unable to attend classes because of the floods.

By 2004, the project seeks to increase the literacy rate to 40% (from 30%). The project will also build two community libraries and form Village Literacy Committees to encourage reading and studying.



The women in the villages attending adult literacy class.

Improving the health condition of the communities

The project plans to reduce the incidence of water-borne diseases and lowers the infant mortality rate by as much as 50% by the year 2002. It also aims to encourage 70% of

the communities to boil their drinking water and stop collecting water from contaminated sources. These health initiatives will focus on women and children.

The common ailments will be met through health camps, regular clinics and referral to other suitable health institutions. A proper health record database will be maintained to monitor the health status of the children in the communities. The project will also install wells for the communities and health seminars on water-borne diseases.

Increase agricultural production

New and appropriate technologies will be introduced to the communities to increase and improve their food production in the target areas. At the same time, the communities will be educated on food preservation and knowledge on food storage to improve their food security. This is especially critical during the flooding seasons when most of the food crops will be destroyed.

By the year 2003, the project plans to reduce the period of food shortage in 80% households from 6 months to 2 months. It also plans to reduce the malnutrition rate from 50% to 25% by 2003 in 5,799 households. This will be achieved by increasing the food production from 600 kg to 1,000 kg per family by 2003. Some 70% of the farmers will be received training on the scientific method of cultivation and 50% of them will have the opportunity to use modern farming technique and machinery.

Increase income level

The project will organise and form self-help groups of women for savings and small enterprise development. These groups will be received training in the relevant trades, skills or loan administration. Initially, World Vision will manage the loan schemes, but this will be gradually transfer to the communities. Part of the income from these enterprises will be used to support the education of their children and their welfare. The project will also assist women to access bank loans to finance their business that are identified as viable and profitable ventures.

The project aims to benefit at least 50% of the women in the target areas by 2004 and increasing their annual income from 30% to 80% by 2003. Through all these, the project wants to ensure that 80% of the families are sending their children to school by 2004 using part of the income generated.

Leadership development

The project will conduct discussion group, seminars, meetings and organize exposure trips that focus on development issues in the communities. World Vision will identify potential and enthusiastic leaders from these activities. These leaders will be singled out for further training based on their needs and capabilities in order to take on greater responsibilities for the development of the communities.

The project seeks to identify and develop at least 100 leaders for 60 villages. These leaders will have the support of at least 60% of the communities by year 2004.

Develop the communities' relief preparedness

As the project areas are usually affected by the yearly flood, it is essential to improve the communities' preparedness to these disasters. This will be done through planned programmes with the long term benefits of the children in mind. These programmes seek to address areas like disaster assesment, food distribution and logistic issues so that widows, orphans and children in the communities will be able to receive help promptly.

Child Sponsorship brings Hope to Dhneswar...

Dhneswar Taya lives in Tongani Lakhimi village which is serve by the Dhemaji Area Development Project. He lives with his father, mother and two other sister in a house built from stilts. His father is a farmer but the land does not produce enough to support the family. Therefore, they have to depend on fishing to supplement their family's income.

Dhneswar had a bad accident when he was three years old. He was playing near a burning fire when one of his friends mischeviously pushed him into the fire which badly burnt his left hand. Although medical help was sought but very little was done because his parents could



Dhneswar (standing in the middle) and his family.

not afford the medical fees. Dhneswar's left hand was badly scarred and he was not able to move his elbow easily. He became depressed and discouraged after the accident and even refused to go to school when his friends started to tease and laugh at him.

When World Vision started the Dhemaji ADP, Dhneswar was spotted during a health check up session and referred to Dibrugarh Medical College. After a thorough examination, an operation was arranged for Dhneswar to correct his defective limb. Plastic surgery was also performed to treat the scars on his hand.

The operation was a huge success. Dhneswar was able to move his hand freely and the scars were not as obvious as before.

Today, Dhneswar is behaving like any normal boy of his age. He is happy and no longer sad. He has many friends to play with who no longer tease and make fun of him. In fact, things have improved so much that Dhneswar has even agreed to attend school.

Dhneswar's parents are happy with how everything has turned out. They are grateful to World Vision for all the help. "Without World Vision, my son will not be complete. He will not be able to live to his fullest potential." said Mr Lakeheswar.