

World Vision

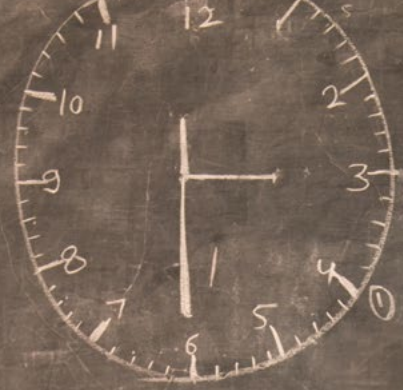
Singapore

Lives  
Changed  
Communities  
Transformed

We couldn't have done it without you.  
Thank you!



DHEMAJI, INDIA



## BACKGROUND

Dhemaji is one of the 32 districts within the state of Assam, located in Northeastern India between the Brahmaputra River and the Arunachal Himalayas. Many of the communities living there have occupied the land for generations and have developed a strong connection with their land. Large expanses of fertile land in the area have provided a conducive environment for padi farming, the predominant agricultural activity in the area.

Dhemaji is plagued by debilitating floods that have been getting worse over the years. While floods often increase the fertility of floodplains, the Dhemaji floods blanket crop fields with large sand deposits, decimating the crops and rendering the land difficult to grow on. This causes widespread economic instability and severely hinders access to schools and markets for as long as 5 months at a time. In the past, children who crossed the flooded plains to get to school risked drowning. As a result, many children dropped out of school to find manual work to supplement their household income instead, typically in tea gardens or tea stands. Thus, low levels of education significantly affected their ability to break the cycle of poverty.

# DHEMAJI AREA DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (ADP)

TOTAL POPULATION: 40,384  
TOTAL CHILDREN: 20,210

 FEMALE: 9,962  
GIRLS: 9,985

 MALE: 10,212  
BOYS: 10,225

ADP start date: 1st October 1996  
ADP end date: 30th September 2017

## HOW THE JOURNEY BEGAN

World Vision began work providing emergency relief programmes in Dhemaji in 1993 after it was identified as one of the most flood affected areas in Assam. To tackle endemic poverty, child labour and a lack of basic services, World Vision started Dhemaji ADP in October 1996, fully funded by World Vision Singapore. Key development interventions targeted food security, water and sanitation issues, barriers to quality education, poor economic prospects, disaster resilience and gender inequality.



## HEALTH & NUTRITION

When World Vision first began work in Dhemaji, the people suffered from poor health. Firstly, as the community experienced annual flooding, children were at high risk of diseases such as typhoid, malaria and pneumonia. In addition, the floods prevented people from accessing health clinics that were found only in towns. Thus, free check-ups, vaccinations, medical treatments, pre and post-natal screening and healthcare training were not easily accessible. Moreover, children survived only on low-nutrient diets, resulting in a 50% child malnutrition rate.

Aside from poor health and nutrition, the local community had poor sanitation and hygiene practices. More than 70% of the population practiced open defecation and 13.33% lacked access to clean water. As a result, children suffered from hygiene-related diseases.

Therefore, to improve the health status of children, World Vision partnered local health authorities to conduct regular awareness programmes on immunisation, preventable and common diseases as well as the importance of ante and post-natal care. This was especially important as families did not know how to handle childhood illnesses and did not realise the value of getting their children vaccinated early. To address the high incidence of malnutrition, rehabilitative feeding programmes were started and the nutritional status of all sponsored children was monitored regularly. World Vision also provided water filters, drilled wells and installed piping systems to provide safe drinking water to families.

As a result of holistic healthcare efforts, almost 70% of children under two years of age have been immunised and the percentage of underweight children fell to 13%.

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*World Vision has done great work for our community. Our community has changed their mind and attitudes towards cleanliness, alcoholism, sanitation, behaviour, health and education.*

— MR. PHULESWAR PEGU

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## EDUCATION

At the start of the programme, the literacy rate in Dhemaji stood at about 30%, significantly lower than the then state average of 66%. School dropout rates were high as children had to support their families through cattle rearing or domestic work. Parents were also not persuaded on the importance of education. The quality of teaching was low, and there were no secondary schools in most of the target villages.

World Vision invested in the quality of basic education and constructed secondary schools. At the end of the programme, all 36 villages in Dhemaji ADP had access to a school. In addition, **life skills and vocational training programmes** were also established to equip youths to make the most of new livelihood opportunities. For children who lacked access to schools because they simply lived too faraway, World Vision **provided bicycles** and school materials to encourage their attendance. Lastly, efforts at **sensitising**

**parents and caregivers to the importance of education** were also carried out.

As a result, 100% of all children under 12 years old are now enrolled in primary school and 95.95% of children between 12-18 years old are enrolled in secondary school. Literacy rates have increased to 66.57% among children 11 years and younger.

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*With education I see my children's mindset change. They want to learn more and acquire more knowledge. Now my girls are actually giving me advice, and telling me not to worry about them.*

— MR BIREN PEGU

Father of 4 children with 2 girls studying in colleges outside the state

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## ECONOMIC LIVELIHOOD & FOOD SECURITY

When the programme first started, Dhemaji was highlighted as one of the poorest districts within the state of Assam. 44% of households were classified as the 'poorest of the poor' and the unemployment rate was greater than 60%. Yearly floods devastated harvests and blanketed the land with sand, rendering it very difficult to farm.

World Vision provided farmers who had been hit by the flood with the seeds of more resilient crops, such as mustard seeds, which can grow in the harsh sand ridden land. By **introducing new crops** to the community, farmers now have larger and more frequent harvests. With more available food, almost **97% of all children now go to bed with a full stomach!**

To supplement the income of families between harvests, World Vision also **trained them on alternative livelihood skills**. For example, training in motor repair, sewing and tailoring provided new opportunities for young people. World Vision also facilitated organising locals into 282 **Savings Groups**, where they were sensitised to the long-term benefits of saving. With this new pool of capital, many have started small businesses.



As a result of these interventions, the percentage of families in Dhemaji who feel that they are financially better off, **increased by 100%** between 2011 and 2016. This represents **close to 70% of households** who feel that they benefited significantly from the programme.

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*I am so happy earning Rs 8000 a month. I send Rs 1000 to my parents and save Rs 5000 per month. My dream is to start my own workshop, create jobs and make others smile.*

— MR. PURNANANDA DOLEY

Recipient of motor training, currently working in an automotive repair shop

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## DISASTER RELIEF & PREPAREDNESS

Earthquakes and floods are two natural disasters that the Dhemaji district is all too familiar with. As Dhemaji encompasses many low-lying areas in proximity to the Brahmaputra river, floods cause especially widespread damage and interruption to the livelihoods of many communities.

In the immediate aftermath of floods, World Vision provided essential relief to protect and sustain vulnerable displaced villagers until rehabilitation projects could be initiated. Following the 2014 flood, World Vision provided food and hygiene items for 5,150 families from 41 flood affected villages, and 1,040 tarpaulin sheets to erect temporary shelters.

To equip the community for the future, World Vision organised volunteers in each of the 36 villages into Community Disaster Preparedness Plan (CDPP) committees to alert and evacuate villages in the event of a serious flood. World Vision also facilitated closer links between village leaders and relevant government departments to enable sustainable emergency support in the coming years.



To **increase flood resilience**, the stilts of houses in areas identified as extremely flood prone were replaced with **concrete pillars**. World Vision also constructed **raised platforms** just beneath roof level in houses to stockpile emergency food and store essential documents and other valuables on higher ground. In addition, each household has also been **equipped with a boat** that can be used to paddle them to safety.

## ROAD DEVELOPMENT

The lack of proper communication and roads proved a serious hindrance to development work in the early phases of the Dhemaji project. No roads meant impeded access to financial services, water sources, healthcare, schools and disaster relief sites.

World Vision supported road construction to better link communities with one another. The increased connectivity created essential access to hospitals in emergency situations, markets to trade crops and goods, and colleges as far as outside the Assam State.



## FEMALE EMPOWERMENT

Men have traditionally been viewed as decision-makers in Dhemaji. When World Vision first intervened in the Dhemaji ADP, boys were preferentially given an education over girls, and women were not trusted to hold money or manage finances.

In response to this, World Vision ensured that female empowerment was a cross-cutting theme that was considered in all areas of intervention. For example, World Vision organised a number of all-women Savings Groups, where women are taught to understand the value of saving as well as practical financial management skills. Vocational training conducted by World Vision, in areas such as sewing and tailoring, has also equipped women with the skills to earn an income and become financially empowered.

To encourage the community to alter their traditional mindsets, World Vision introduced communities to the **value of education, especially for girls**. World Vision also **provided girls who excelled academically with bicycles**

to reduce the likelihood of parents pulling them from school to have them work in fields and save transportation costs.

After years of development and work in Dhemaji, girls can now complete college degrees and come back to the community as educated women. These women earn money, participate actively, have gained respect in community based organisations and act as role models for younger girls looking for confidence in their potential to achieve a brighter future. **Girl enrolment in schools has now surpassed that of boys**, and continues to increase every year. **Several households have sent their girls beyond the state of Assam to obtain university qualifications.**

The status of women in Dhemaji has improved significantly since World Vision began interventions. Educated local women are less dependent on their husbands, have **more personal confidence** and are unafraid to **inspire their daughters** to become stronger women of tomorrow.

# STORY OF CHANGE

## SONIA'S ROAD TO SUCCESS

In the past, children in Dhemaji never really thought about school. It was not that they did not want to learn, but that they knew school was too far away. Literally. There were no roads connecting villages. How would they find their way to school?

Over the years, World Vision partnered local authorities to develop roads in the area, connecting villages for the first time. This created access to essential services such as schools of different levels. For the first time, many children were able to dream of entering classrooms and reading books. Many who dropped out after primary school as there were no accessible high schools could now consider a brighter future that higher education could bring.

At age 17, Sonia Jimey was determined to complete high school, but the nearest school was situated 20 kilometres away from her home. Each day, she would wake up between 6 and 7 in the morning to take a 40 rupees bus to school; but the bus was irregular and often did not show up. To catch the last bus home, Sonia often missed afternoon classes and tuition, causing her to fall behind in her studies.

This frustrated Sonia because she was a quick learner. She could do well in school. She just needed to get to school on time and regularly in order to complete her classes.

After receiving a bicycle from World Vision, Sonia now attends school regularly as she has full control of her transport. Regular attendance enabled Sonia to improve her grades and with diligence and hard work, she qualified for a Bachelor's Degree in Arts in the local town college.

Furthermore, Sonia did not have to fret about her college fees. She saved 40 rupees every day from using the bicycle instead of taking the bus. Her parents also benefited from income generation activities conducted by World Vision. As a result, Sonia could afford higher education and a chance to rise above her circumstances.

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*This bicycle helped me a lot in my education and my journey towards a career. If I didn't receive it, I would not have been able to continue my education. My dream is to become a lecturer one day.*

— SONIA JIMEY

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Sonia with bicycle from World Vision



Other youths who received bicycle help from World Vision

**“Our vision for every child,  
life in all its fullness.  
Our prayer for every heart,  
the will to make it so.”**

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