

Disaster in Bihar: A Report from the TISS Assessment Team



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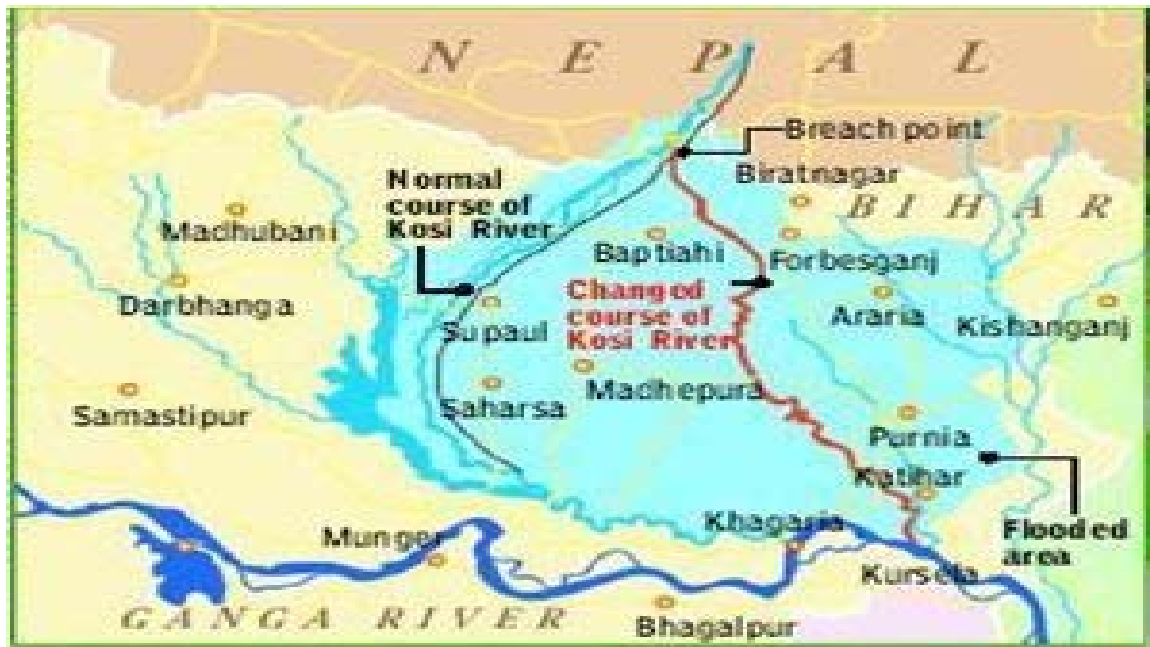
Introduction

This report is prepared on the basis of a 5-day visit to the flood affected parts of Bihar, caused by the changing of the course of the river, Kosi, by a four-member team from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. The team visited three districts of Saharsa, Supaul and Madhepura during the period September 3 to 7, 2008. The TISS team was initially based in Saharsa for data collection purposes and moved from there to nearby districts. The team worked in collaboration with a team of faculty and students from the Delhi School of Social Work, Delhi University. Some of the data presented in this report is therefore, based on the shared data from both the institutions. TISS is grateful to the DSSW team for the support and cooperation provided to it during the visit.

The Context

Though floods are an annual feature in the Kosi region of Bihar, and people have learnt to cope and live with it, this year the situation turned into a catastrophe. The primary reason for this development was fact that the river Kosi, which gathers water from some of the highest mountains in the world, has changed its course due to the breach in the barrage in the river built in the 1950s on the Indo-Nepal border. The river has shifted over 120 Km eastwards, going back to the course it had abandoned more than 200 years ago. What is worth taking note of is also the unprecedented scale and magnitude of devastation, which has rendered useless, more than 300 km of embankments built to control the fury of Kosi. The flooding of Kosi has submerged 1.1 lakh hectares of farmland. Due to out-flushing of debris, Kosi has no permanent channel. Originating from the glaciers of Tibet and Nepal, it has a steep fall in the plains of Nepal and therefore it is known for its turbulence.

Officials in India and Nepal continue to blame each other for the catastrophe. The flooding started at an embankment on Kosi river near Kushaha area in southern Nepal, where the barrage breached and burst. Since the time the barrage was built on Kosi, following Indo-Nepal Water Management Agreement in 1954, the Indian government has shouldered the responsibility (as per the terms of reference of the Indo-Nepal Friendship Treaty) for maintenance and repairing work on the embankment in order to protect the people living down stream in Bihar, whereas the Nepal government is in charge of monitoring the flood waters.



Discussions with the local people, activists and media persons point towards widespread corruption at every level in the process of awarding and executing the annual maintenance contract by the politician-bureaucrats-engineer-contractor nexus, which has allegedly minted money under the pretext of maintenance work. It is alleged that the contractors and the engineers overlooked the looming threat of breach in Kushaha which finally burst and inundated the area. However, an Indian Embassy spokesman from Kathmandu says the engineers knew there was a problem in the flood defenses in April but apparently, Nepalese officials physically prevented them from fixing it.

Whatever the arguments and counter-arguments about the reasons behind the disaster, it is clear that degradation of the vast catchments of Koshi spread over large parts of India and Nepal, negligence of the repair and maintenance of Koshi barrage, massive siltation in the absence of catchments area treatment and the embankments resulted in breach and a change of river course. The infamous river 'Kosi' took a route where it used to flow 200 years back. This has resulted in submergence of thousands of villages in several districts of Bihar. Experts have opined that jacketing of Kosi river has proved disastrous because the barrage managed to control the flow of river but there was no mechanism to check the siltation. It is important to highlight here that the Kosi carries over 81 million MT silt every year. The heavy silt deposits and the land tilt from west to east has turned the river eastward which resulted in change of course.

A Situational Analysis

A four member team from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, reached Patna on September 3rd, 2008 to make an assessment of the situation prevailing in the districts which have been affected by the floods caused by the changing of the course of the river Kosi. This assessment was undertaken with the objective of understanding the magnitude of the situation and to explore the possibilities of intervening in this human tragedy.

On reaching Patna, the team first has a series of meetings with the Chief Secretary, the Development Commissioner, the Home Secretary and Additional Secretary, Disaster Management Department. These meetings helped the team to get an overview of the prevailing situation and to elicit their suggestions to undertake the task at hand. They mentioned that the government is not encouraging any NGO to start relief camps unless they are willing to give at least 3-6 months commitment. The Development Commissioner informed us that adequate relief measures are being taken by the government and there is not much need for outside help as far as relief is concerned. Besides, they mentioned that the issue of livelihoods of lakhs of people will have to be planned after the water starts receding. In case the river does not abate, alternate land will have to be identified for rehabilitation.

According to media reports, around 40 lakh people have been affected, and a large number of these people remain cut off from all channels of contact. The evacuation process has been unable to reach out to all areas. The total evacuation (one of the biggest evacuation exercises in the world as has been claimed by the officials) has been less than one fourth of the affected people. Villagers as well as armed forces personnel shared with the TISS team that lakhs of people are still stranded and no relief materials are reaching to them. People are still languishing in water trying hard to survive.



Madhepura, Supaul, Saharsa, Araria and Purnia districts are the worst affected as they are in the direct path of the Kosi river after it changed its course. Many families are still stranded on roof top or in higher spaces. While the male members have to wade through neck-deep water to get to some form of relief, women, children and the aged have to be often left behind. According to local sources and news reports, it took the government more than a week to realise the magnitude of the situation and therefore the process of evacuation and relief got delayed. Based on our discussions with the affected people, civil society groups and our observations, it can be said that by and large, the State has been unable to respond to growing needs of the catastrophe, which requires prompt effective action with a humane approach and sensitivity. Faced with uncertainty and insecurity, thousands of men, women and children had to leave their villages with whatever they could manage to carry along leaving their inundated homes. Some of the people in the relief camps shared that they had to make choice as to whom they could save and whom they had to leave behind. Many a time, the elderly were left behind as it was difficult for them to wade through the turbulent flood water.



The flood victims' need for food, shelter, medicines and clothing are far from being met by the government. Even after nineteen days of cataclysmic disaster, thousands of people remain trapped in homes or are just sleeping hungry on embankments, roads and other places. Those who managed to reach relief camps in towns were fortunate as they managed to get some food. The response of the Central and State governments, as also civil society has been rather disappointing to the tragedy. Generally one observes that at such times, civil society compensates for the failure of the State, but our observations in the field indicates that this is also in disarray.

There are very few NGOs working in these areas and their capacity to respond in the disaster of this scale is therefore limited. Similarly, the response of International agencies has also been far from encouraging. However, spontaneous action has been initiated by citizens' groups and they have responded to the situation in a substantive manner. People are all praise for local youths

who rose up to the occasion and undertook an uphill task of feeding all those who came in relief camps. Meera Devi, a flood victim, had lost all hopes when turbulent floodwater gushed into her house in Kumarkhand block in Madhepura district. Sheltered in Saharsa Law college relief camp run by LJP workers, she safely delivered a girl child in the camp.

Kosi region is known for the political consciousness and sharp caste based political polarization and therefore, the local political leaders are, to some extent, conscious about their role. They are certainly trying their bit to help people in their dire need. Most of the relief camps are managed by the workers of local MLAs, religious groups and youths of the nearby locality. The local political leaders, businessmen and religious groups are pitching in and trying to reach out to people in various camps. The relief camps are mainly aided by workers of RJD, LJP, JD(U), RSS, ABVP, Seva Bharti, local Madarsas, Marwari Yuva Manch, Patanjali Yoga Sansthan, etc. The local media has been active in reporting the gaps in relief operations but the national media's reporting has been in fits and starts, barring a few exceptions. In fact, it took the media one week to wake up to the tragedy and view it as a national interest issue.



From our observations and discussions, it appears that in the initial phase, the administration, civil society groups and the media kept seeing the disaster as an 'annual flood' which is nothing new for this part of the country. They failed to recognize that changing the course of the river has engulfed hundreds of villages where people were totally unprepared. It completely washed away hundreds of these villages and many people have simply vanished. Hundreds of other villages were completely marooned and inaccessible. After Prime Minister's visit, it has been declared as a natural calamity and monetary contribution is pouring in from various quarters. However, the officials of local level administration claims that they are still waiting for the disbursement of the relief package declared by Government of India. Although one recognizes the enormity of disaster faced by the government, the TISS team's assessment after a fortnight of the breach indicates that the system and structures of the State have not been able to rise to the challenge.

There is enormous requirement of man power to coordinate and manage relief in the makeshift relief camps. In the areas of downstream, people had seen hundreds of human bodies flowing along with the flood water. The official death toll was 75 (as on September 7, 2008). However, victims claim that thousands of people have died as they were washed away with floods, completely unaware and unanticipated. People watched helplessly as their near and dear ones were taken away by the currents of the flowing river.

According to P V Unnikrishnan, Emergency Adviser for Action Aid in Asia, the State government has been playing down the loss of lives and magnitude of the problem. "The government refuses to register the number of missing people. Even when families move to camps, their missing members are not registered", Unnikrishnan said (Mumbai Mirror, TOI, September 7, 2008). This view was corroborated by many in the flood affected areas. Besides, people also shared that the wave of the river was so furious that in many cases, the evacuation team failed to identify villages even after hours of the search operation along with local guides. For a vast section of people in this area, cattle rearing are the main occupation and their livelihood depends upon the cows, buffalos and goats. Most of the cattle were washed away in flood. Remaining cattle are also dying due to unavailability of fodder.

"The Government of India and Bihar are going about the relief work as if it is a favour they are doing for the people," writes Himanshu Thakkar, the journalist and water rights specialist. "That favour is being doled out in a totally haphazard, unplanned, callous way" (www.blogs.telegraph.co.uk/4-09-08). The State officials we met gave the impression that things are under control and relief work is going on well, whereas the ground situation tells a different story. It is being observed and reported that district officials are not geared to receive the relief materials which is being sent by voluntary groups and several other sources. An air of calm and inactivity was observed by the team in the control room of one of the district that the team visited. The team was stunned to know that government organized mega relief camps were inaugurated by cutting of ribbons amidst lot of fanfare by the minister. It is another matter that people are not inclined to shift in government run camps as food arrangement is far inferior than citizen run camps.

At several relief camps and distribution centres, it was observed that flood victims were not being treated with dignity. The crowded camps for flood victims have serious issues of sanitation and hygiene and clean drinking water. This is threatening the lives of thousands of women, men and children. Hundred of cases of diarrhoea and many deaths are already being reported from the camps as also from several parts of the flood affected area. Majority of them are children. Most patients complain of vomiting, loose motion and stomach ache, the main symptoms of diarrhoea.

Lack of access to clean drinking water is a major cause of the spread of diarrhoea as people are forced to consume water from contaminated sources for survival. The threat of epidemic is looming large and cases of gastro-intestinal disorders, high fevers, cough and cold are reported from everywhere.

The need for comprehensive medical services is being stated by all but in the relief camps and also in several other places where people are staying in makeshift arrangements, such services are not available. It has been observed that medical practitioners and medicine is in real short supply all across the districts of Saharsa, Supaul and Madhepura. Shortage of medicines, water, milk (for children), clothing, has been mentioned by most of the people. Besides, people are tired of eating uncooked food. Due to lack of nutritional food, lactating mothers are not able to feed the infants. One woman in the camp delivered a baby on the way to the hospital from the camp, the day before the team visited the camp. At the time of the visit by the team, she and the baby had not been provided with any medical help. A large number of children are seen roaming around in all the camps in extremely unhygienic and unclean surroundings. It is very difficult to find organisational presence to take care of health, hygiene and recreation needs of the child. A sense of hopelessness, indignity and insecurity is looming large and people are in a state of shock. There is an urgent need of psycho-social care and support; however, the specialised agencies have yet to respond to the need.

At one end of Triveniganj near Bhutahi dam, thousands of people are living atop the dam embankment. These people have decided to stay back rather than move to relief camps. Their demand is that the administration should get them supplies there rather than them moving out of their area to a relief camp. However, the team got a sense that the government does not agree with this approach. They feel that people should come to the relief camps being set to get relief and help. Contrary to government view, army officials felt that a relief camp should be set up at the spot people are offloaded from the boats so that they can get some food, rest and medical help on reaching land. As of now, people have to walk for 7-8 kms before they reach the nearest relief camp. "Mother and daughter lived 13 days on a collapsed bridge in the middle of an infinite gray lake, alive on hope and two daily handfuls of rice-jaggery *prasad*. Then, just as a piece of dry land found its way under her tiny feet, Kajli (4 years old) lost her battle with hunger" (Indian Express, September 3, 2008)

Similar was the situation in Kattaiya. All along the 100 km drive to Kusaha (in Saptari district in Nepal) near Birpur in Supaul district in Bihar, we saw people living in relief camps or living by the side of the roads in makeshift structures (plastic sheds). Most of the camps were run by local and voluntary groups. Kattaiya is not a relief camp but more of a settlement of people staying together, having been rescued or walked from far-flung areas of Chatapur, Basantpur, Raghopur

and Pratapganj, staying without any government support. At Kattiaya, there is only one borewell available for the entire population. There are no sanitation services. The village boatman shared that there is a place near Raniganj where a large number of dead bodies have flown into the forest. It is extremely difficult to bring boats from that area as the area is stinking. Apart from providing the people with plastic sheets for building their huts, no help from the district administration had reached them so far. Food was given for some days and then stopped since 01-09-08. A sense of helplessness was writ large on flood victims who have taken shelter here. One could easily observe the spectre of starvation as people kept saying “Pl don’t come empty handed, bring at least something to eat”.



There is no systematic mechanism for coordination between the government and NGOs and between NGOs working in the area. Those who are coming to help the victims are operating in an isolated manner.

Social Exclusion in distribution of relief

A society where caste-based inequality is deeply entrenched, instances of exclusion during evacuation process as also in providing relief was narrated by many communities and individuals. Villages after villages, the dalit and extremely backward caste people were excluded at the time of boarding the boats during the evacuation process. Socio-economic influence and physical might may have influenced decisions as who would be rescued first. The impoverished in hard hit villages in Narpatganj, Pratapganj and other places in Supaul district were denied boats for evacuation; the reason being the fact that they belong to dalit community and they had no money to pay for the boat. Many narrated incidents of boats being appropriated by influential people to save their families while others remained stranded the rescue team did not return back.

Shyam Sada, one of the people we met, shares, “Invariably the administration acted through representatives of panchayat institutions who cared more for their families, relatives and supporters”. “While dominant people influence the administration and got away safely, we are never counted and left behind”, added Sada. An illiterate Sada tried to succinctly put the meaning

of electoral politics in perspective, when he opined, *“Election jitney ke baad to Mukhiya saba pratinidhi hota hai na ki sirf unka jo unko vote dete hain; agar waisa nahi ho to election ka matlab hi kya hai”* (After getting elected Mukhia is the representative of all and not only those who voted for them; if that doesn’t happen, then what is the meaning of election). Siddhi Ram, who claims to have seen several people drown while trying to cross a ditch to the overtopped highway, said “We were promised that the rescue boats would come back for us over ten days ago. We saw some criss-crossing the area. They never touched our village...Even though boats are official and meant to evacuate each one of the marooned, the boatman demand bribes for the crossing” (The Hindustan Times, September 5: Page 2). In the relief camps in far flung areas, influential people managed to get bigger share of relief material. Even at the time when food packets were air dropped, dalits and EBCs were shouted at and denied access to such supplies.

The TISS team came to know about the instances of social exclusion faced by people coming from poor and marginalised sections in distribution of relief material. This discrimination happens on the basis of caste, social class, age factor and gender. For example, we interacted with a group of people from the Mussahar community in Sukhasan village (Madhepura district), who told us that they were staying along the banks of the canal in the open. They further alleged that they had not received any relief material so far. To reach to the camp they had to walk for more than a day and for a long time were waiting to receive help.

The team met another person who claimed to be from Ward No 2, Panchayat No 2 in Madhepura block and said that there were around 300 families from the Mussahar community who had not received any supplies so far. Another group of people from Yatiram community from the same village reported similar conditions. They also alleged that when they called the R&R officer, they were told that a boat will be sent for their rescue which never came.

Chaos and confusion in Distribution of relief

In the distribution centre at Madhepura (to supply relief materials to villagers), there is certain procedure to be followed, which is somewhat like this: villagers from a particular ward have to put in an application addressed to the BDO specifying the name of the village, ward number, name of the Panchayat and the block to which they belong. The application should also contain a rough estimate of the affected families in the ward and type of relief material required - food, polythene sheets, bottled water, etc. The application has to be endorsed by at least one member of the ward committee or the panchayat or other representatives like the Mukhiya. These applications have to then be submitted to the BDO or the District Collector Land Revenue (DCLR) stationed in the relief camp, who then scrutinizes the application and issues a receipt or a token number which specifies the type and quantity of material to be given. Food packets are kept in packed

poly bags consisting of *chuda* (flattened rice flakes), *sattu* (ground gram), jaggery, candles, matches, etc. These packets are then packed into jute sacks each containing around 10 such bags. Depending on the assessment of the DCLR, he issues a token specifying the number of packets or sacks to be given to the villagers.

During our visit to one of the distribution centres, the team found that there was no fixed place or designated area where the BDO/ DCLR sits and he kept shifting his base from one building to another. As people kept following him, it increased the chaos and confusion in the camp. Women and old persons were unable to access the DCLR/BDO due to the chaos prevailing. We came across a number of people, many of them women, who told us that the ward and panchayat members in their village had shifted out of the village after the floods. They were therefore unable to get their applications endorsed by the representatives concerned. The scrutinising officer, instead of helping them by identifying a solution or an alternative, expressed their inability to provide relief material to them.



Many people whom we met were illiterate and could not write applications. The TISS team helped at least 15 village representatives to write their applications and explained the process to them. A near food riot situation was witnessed by the team where two people from the same village got into a scuffle over a sack of food that they had received. Soon a crowd gathered around them and no efforts were made to diffuse the situation. Finally, the situation was controlled by a woman Panchayat leader. Relief distribution was chaotic where the dominant manage to get relief materials and the weak are left behind.

The TISS team was told that the hunger of thousands of flood victims turned into a rage a day before when people attacked government vehicles carrying relief materials. This had happened because of victims failed to get relief even after hours of waiting in queue. In spite of the fact that people went on a rampage for food just one day back, the administration's response remained callous and arbitrary as far as distribution of relief material was concerned. It became clear to us that these procedures are excluding a large number of victims and also denying them relief. It

could be simplified by just writing the names and giving the supplies. One fails to understand why flood victims need approval or endorsement from authorities to get food and relief.

In all the discussions with the affected people in the camp, it came out that people in large numbers are still staying in their villages where not much of the relief material has reached. The people who had come to pick up the relief material had left their women, children and elderly behind and had to pick up the relief for them. Many of them were even reluctant to have food themselves, as they had hungry children and parents back home. They shared their miseries of travelling long distance in deep water.

In one particular case, an old man from Murliganj Block, Ward No 9, claimed that he and a few others from his village had come on behalf of around 450 people in his ward and that they had not received any relief supply so far in the village. He also told us that near about 35 people had died in his village due to the floods. The TISS team members helped this person to get his application written and reach the DCLR. After receiving the relief material, we realised that he had only received one sack of food packets and no plastic sheets at all. A TISS member accompanied him back to the Distribution Centre to find out why he did not get adequate supplies. He was told that since the application did not mention plastic sheets only food packets were given. The food packets given were apparently so inadequate that he was reluctant to take it with him saying how he will distribute this in the village. The TISS member wrote another application for him asking for plastic sheets and more food supplies.

The poor and the dalits have suffered the most in terms to damage to lives and property. People who lived in pucca houses and double-storied structures were able to survive when the flooding happened, as they could live in their terraces till the boats reached to rescue them. The poor had no option but to wade through the strong water currents with the river in full spate to survive, leading to many deaths.

The Muslim population is sizeable in all the three districts, but the marooned families are facing the worst ordeal in the holy month of Ramadaan. Due to the enormous pressure on relief camps, it is very difficult to organise food at the time of 'shehri' and 'iftar'. Flood affected people are generally appreciative of citizens' effort for relief, but they do not have space to offer Namaz. Several Muslim-populated villages like Basmatia, Muharrampur and Madhiopur in Supaul and Puraini, Rajapur and Ranipatti in Madhepura have been inundated and people are stranded in different places.

"Anuj Paswan, a strapping young lad of 21, wants to find his seven missing family members – his parents, sister and four brothers. But, he does not know where to look for them (The Hindustan Times, 4-09-08)". There were numerous cases where people shared that their family members were missing. "I have not been able to trace my father and other relatives even after two weeks", a flood victim in Madhepura relief camp shared. Such cases of families being torn asunder by the

furious river abound. Across the three districts where the team visited, there was no effort to make arrangement to help trace missing people. People complained that there was no system to record the the complaints of the victims. Similar was the situation in Saharsa, Sonbarsa, Murliganj, Triveniganj and other places.

Besides, no effort to initiate psycho-social care and support was observed during the visit. One observed that though people were suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), unlike disaster situations in the past when organisations rushed to respond, no one was even talking about the need to respond to this issue.

Migration

Large numbers of people, mainly labourers, do not have any work to do and have to sit idle throughout the day in absence of work. When asked about work, they answered that they are willing to work and will definitely like to work and earn their livelihood if such opportunities are created, such as through the NREGA. Such people could be involved in rescue, construction of mega shelters and reconstruction work through the NREGA and paid wages for the same. However, a large number of males have already started migrating from the area. While talking to victims in the relief camps and makeshift huts, one realizes that thousands of people are leaving the area in search of livelihood to Patna, Delhi, Ludhiana, Amritsar and several other places. They are aware that their livelihoods are gone forever and they have to start life afresh.

Many of them are not even aware as to where they are leaving for but they know for sure that if their families have to survive, they will have to migrate to earn a living. "At least 200 flood-hit families from Murliganj in Madhepura district, who were rescued and brought in relief camps in Purnia, left for Punjab and Delhi in search of a livelihood" (The Hindustan Times, 4-09-08). Information about distress migration is pouring in from all across the flood affected region. In many families, the men have migrated and women and children are living in a state of fear and anxiety. In the Kosi region, which has always been at the margins of existence and which is infamous for out-migration, people are yet to get convinced that the State will rise up to the huge task of livelihood restoration and rehabilitation of people.

Issues of land disputes due to change in river course

The change of course of the river would have a lasting impact on the topography of the area. Hundreds of villages and hundred kilometers of land tracts might get submerged forever and there would be the need of comprehensive resettlement and reconstruction. Unlike other rivers which bring fertile silt with them, the Kosi brings with it coarse sand and gravel from the upper reaches of the river system. Thousands of acres of farmland might become barren resulting in

severe livelihood concern for people. As Bihar is one of the most densely populated States and the State government does not have enough land for such purposes, land related disputes is likely to emerge as a major issue. Besides, the floods have washed away the demarcation lines on farm lands, through which fields are identified and separated. In the absence of proper land records, it would be difficult to identify and demarcate the fields owned by the people. This might also result in large number of disputes and litigations. The socially affluent and politically powerful individuals and groups can become beneficiaries of such a situation. People's lives and livelihoods need to be reconstructed all over afresh.

Trafficking of women and children

As is wont to happen in such disaster situations, there is an imminent danger that women and children may get trafficked from the region by traffickers and vested interests. Since family disorganization is a defining feature in the current situation, it is an ideal time for such elements to spread their net and lure women and children to migrate with them out of the State. The only way to prevent such incidents is to create awareness among community leaders and the youth of the area to remain alert to this issue. There is a need to work with the leaders and the youth on this issue. There is also a need to alert both the State machinery and the police in destination districts to the possibility of increase in trafficking activities. Such trafficking may take place primarily towards commercial sexual exploitation and child labour.

Possible areas for intervention

Based on the rapid assessment of the situation, the TISS team, has identified the following areas for intervention by civil society groups and the State actors:

1. Coordinating rescue and relief work – There is a need to coordinate the rescue and relief work being carried out by the NGOs, local groups and the government, so that relief reaches all corners and affected areas, in a coordinated manner. There is a need to set up coordination mechanism for this purpose. For example, the District Collector could have bi-weekly meetings with all organizations and individuals in the district who are involved in rescue and relief work. The same structure could be duplicated at the blok level by the BDOs. This will lead to two-way communication, bring better feedback about the ground situation and create pressure at both ends to deliver better as far as rescue and relief is concerned.
2. Arranging for medical teams and medicines – This is going to be the need of the hour in the next few months. The existing facilities are too inadequate to address the scale of the problems. The district administration should identify areas with the help of civil society organizations and the army the areas where such facilities are in dire need. A start can be made by reviewing the situation in relief camps and also temporary settlements where people are voluntarily residing. A list of essential drugs need to be made by consulting local doctors and an appeal made to pharma companies to supply such medicines to both the district administration and local groups and NGOs working in the area.
3. Psycho-social care and support – There is a tremendous need to reach out to women, children, old persons and people cutting across caste and class in terms of the suffering and trauma they have and continue to undergo. People need to be ‘listened to’, responded and feel ‘cared for’. Various simple and innovative methods will have to be adopted to achieve this. Volunteers may have to trained in large number to be able to reach out to such a huge population.
4. Needs assessment exercise – At some stage in the near future, a needs assessment exercise is required to be done, in terms to damage to lives, property and livelihoods. This can be done by interacting with people living in relief camps as well as those living in temporary settlements and in the villages if possible. It may not be possible at this stage to carry out a systematic needs assessment process. Such an exercise will have to be carried out by thinking and acting on the feet. Data can be creatively captured through informal discussions with individuals and groups and collated in a systematic manner for this purpose.

5. Training of volunteers – There a large number of local youth and citizens who have spontaneously come forward to provide help to the affected people. Such efforts need to be encouraged and sustained. For this purpose, it may be necessary to organize some formal processes by way of training or orientation sessions or programmes, so that the efforts can get better channelized and becomes more sustainable.

Annexure I: Expressions at a Glance

- Despite the flood situation in northern Bihar being well-covered in media, the reality "is beyond the imagination of many people as well as beyond the control of the authorities as well as agencies", says well-known Mumbai-based social activist Medha Patkar, who is presently in Bihar. Patkar says after travelling from the worst-flooded areas in Purnea to Aheria and then to Muraliganj in Madhepura district, it is that rescue operations are incredibly slow, she says. "People are surviving on the banks of the canals without food or plastic tents and yet not been declared flood-affected." Lack of boats to ferry people to safer areas is a major problem, she says. The state will have to move in full force if it is keen to manage the disaster, she says.
(Gulfnews: Bihar flood survivors struggle to keep afloat <http://archive.gulfnews.com/world/India/10242819.html>)
- "This is several times worse than the floods in 1991 and 1995," said Rajiv Ranjan, the former headman of Tatanpura village in Madhepura. With his village under water, he is currently staying at his house in Madhepura, which was hit by floods Aug 27. With the Kosi having swept away agricultural land, livestock and houses, it will be difficult for the people of Bihar to get back on their feet. "It is the end of a chapter. A new one has to be started from scratch. Nobody knows when and how," said Rajiv Ranjan.
http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/News/Politics/Nation/Kosi_flood_highlights_need_for_water_management_Montek_Ahluwalia/articleshow/3461829.cms
- "When our own men have deserted us what help we can expect from 'sarkar' (government). We can now only trust God to come to our rescue," says Sarsatia Devi. Phulia Devi (50), sheltered at Harwat Raj High School relief camp reportedly died of starvation, but the local administration denied that hunger caused her death, saying there was enough food available. "We have been reduced to being refugees in our own land. Only God knows how long we have to live in this condition," says Kumia Devi, also at the same camp, saying the food available was too little for the people taking shelter there.
(<http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/Bihar-flood-In-mad-rush-to-escape-men-abandon-families/358142/>)
- Some were seen frantically waving at a few boatmen to come and rescue them."I presented my buffalo to the boatman in exchange for a place in his boat since I don't have any money," Shambhoo Yadav, a rescued villager said.
<http://in.reuters.com/article/topNews/idINIndia-35254220080831?sp=true>
- In Banmankhi in Purnea, a local doctors run NGO Janlakshya, which was treating flood victims at the Samrit high school relief camp, was asked to clear out. Keshav Singh, the SDO, who personally came to get the doctors removed, told *TOI* that while the doctors had come here on their own, the camp was officially being given to Baba Ramdev's Patanjali Yogpeeth Trust to run. As the baba is against allopathic medicines, the doctors had to be removed. Apart from providing food, the Trust will also teach yoga to the flood victims. But what about the treatment of diseases like diarrhoea and fever, which are already being reported, and measles, conjunctivitis and malaria, which are also likely in flood situations? "When an important person like the baba decides to bless Banmankhi by his visit, you don't offend him", the SDO told this correspondent in the tone of a patient teacher explaining something obvious to a dull student. Whether Ramdev knows what was being done in his name is not clear.
(Kosi floods: Reality sinks in; hope floats--13 Sep 2008, 0206 hrs IST,TNN)

Annexure II: Daily Diary of the TISS Team

Day 1

- Reached Patna from Mumbai.
- Had discussions about the prevailing situation with Shri Raman.
- Met the Chief Secretary, Development Commissioner, Home Secretary and Addl. Secretary, DMD
- Left for Saharsa

Day 2

- Debriefing with DSSW Team
- Visited MLT Saharsa College, Law College Relief Camps
- Left for Supaul district
- Visited relief camps and temporary settlements at Kattaiyya and Kusaha area along Indo-Nepal Border (parallel to Mahendra Rajpath)

Day 3

- Debriefing and Planning with DSSW Team
- Meeting with Shri Rajan Khosla and Shri Ram Kishen, Christain Aid
- Left for Madhepura
- Visited Mission Hospital, Madhepura
- Visited Distribution Centre and Relief Camp, TP College, Madhepura
- Interactions with government officials, media persons and affected people
- Visited Relief Camp near Mathahi village enroute Madhepura to Saharsa
- Returned to Saharsa

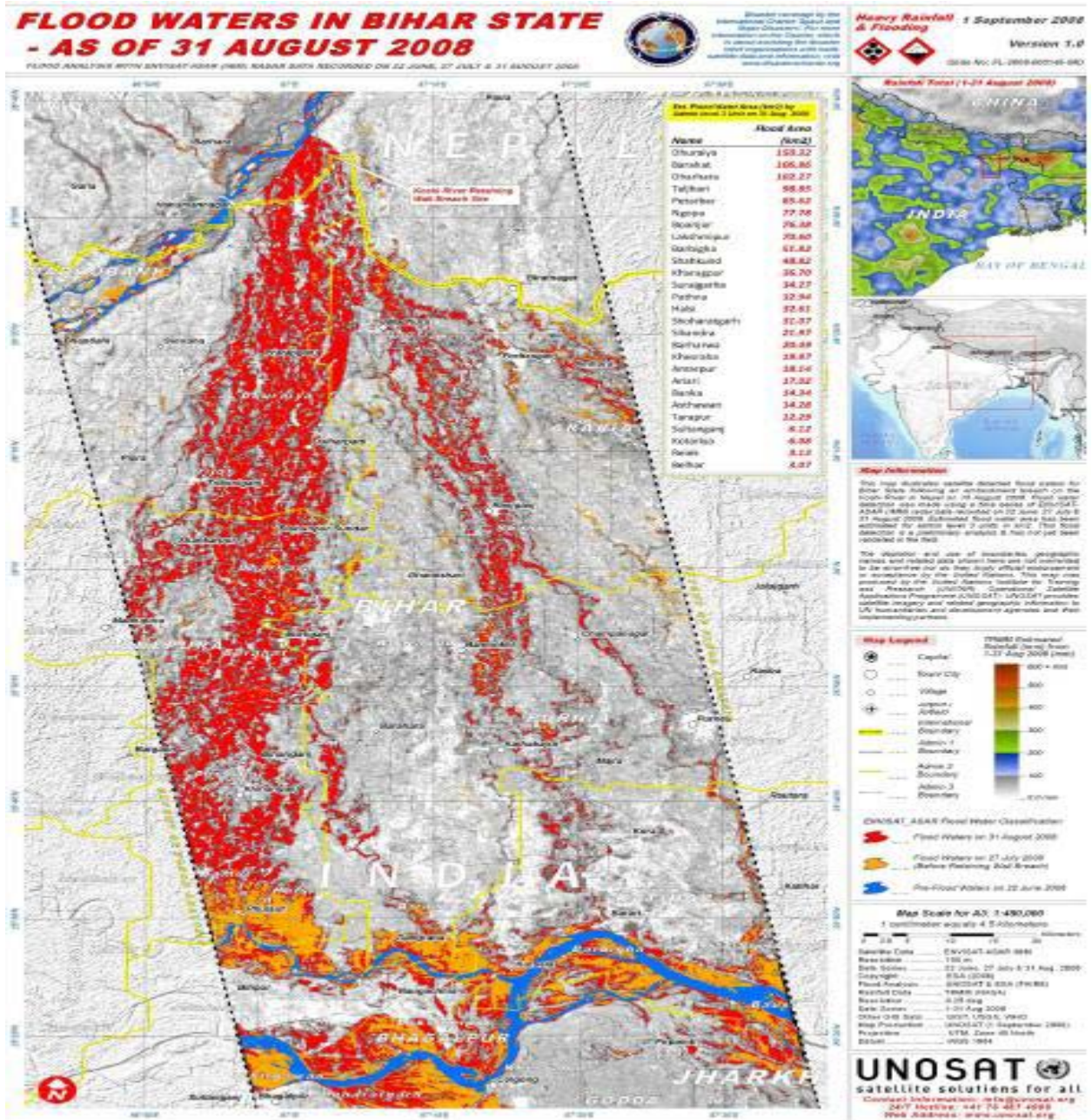
Day 4

- Debriefing and planning with DSSW team
- Meetings with SDM and DDC, Saharsa
- Visit to Control Room, Collector's Residence, Saharsa
- Visited Mega relief Camp, Patel Ground, Saharsa
- Debriefing with DSSW team and preparing operational plan for TISS intervention

Day 5

- Return from Saharsa to Patna
- Discussions with army personnel and local people at Saharsa Station
- Return from Patna to Mumbai

Annexure III: Flood Map



Annexure IV: Satellite Images of Flood Affected Districts