

Background

Heavy rainfall across the Ladakh region and cloudbursts in some areas including Leh town, on August 5th and 6th 2010 resulted in large scale floods and landslides in the town and 52 villages across Leh district. The migrant settlements near Choglamsar and parts of Leh town were the worst hit in terms of loss of human life and damage to houses. The villages suffered extensive damage to agriculture land, either heavily silted or washed away with the standing crop. The government declared 248 people dead and 76 missing. More than 1400 hectares of agriculture land and 1200 houses were reported damaged in the flood and the loss estimated at 204 Crore Rupees (close to \$ 50 million). Damage to public infrastructure such as roads, bridges etc. were also extensive. This was the worst natural disaster ever in the region.



LEDeG's Involvement

LEDeG has been working for close to three decades on promoting sustainable development in the region. Despite a lack of prior experience working in post disaster situations, given the enormity of the disaster, we felt that LEDeG, and for that matter every local organisation, needed to pitch in to the relief and rehabilitation efforts spearheaded by the local administration.

We near-suspended most of our regular projects for weeks after the floods and dedicated all our energy in helping the administration with immediate relief activities and needs assessment studies in the worst affected Zanak Mane area near Choglamsar village. Towards promoting collaborations and avoiding duplicity, we actively supported a coordination mechanism amongst local NGOs active in the region and those that came in the wake of the floods. The inter agency coordination effort, spearheaded by Sphere-India, was based out of the LEDeG office, where regular meetings were organised to share field assessments and discuss intervention strategies. This coordination soon extended to one between the government and NGOs as well.

Shelter Initiative

While we were still into the relief and coordination efforts, we realised the need to start planning on rehabilitation initiatives. Shelter came out as one of the sectors that needed the most immediate

attention given the harsh winter that was just months away and also one that was quite skill and resource intensive. Given our vast experience in promoting people centred energy efficient houses using environment friendly local materials, we decided to take this as an opportunity of helping the people build back better.

Key features of the shelters built:

- A blend of Ladakhi architectural style with energy efficiency and disaster resistance features
- Passive Solar heating features (Solar walls and big windows to the south to trap sunlight and insulation in the walls, roof and floor) to reduce the dependence on biomass and fossil fuel during the long and severe winters
- Stone and RCC foundations, seismic bands and corner reinforcements to increase chances of withstanding earthquakes (given the region falls in a high seismic threat zone)
- Use of compressed stabilised earth blocks (93% mud and 7% cement under mechanical compression) in the walls up to the sill (windows) level to withstand damage from water logging
- Use of local materials as far as possible (mud bricks for walls, poplar beams and willow rafters for roof, straw and wood shavings for insulation)
- People's participation in designing as well as building of their houses



The beneficiaries:

According to govt. sources, more than 500 families sustained complete damage to their houses and a slightly larger no. reported partial damage. Close to half of the fully damaged houses were from the Zanak Mane area near Choglamsar village and parts of Leh town. In order to streamline the reconstruction efforts, the administration decided to assign distinct areas of intervention to the various organizations that had come forward to help. LEDeG and SEEDS were assigned parts of Choglamsar, Shey and Leh town. Accordingly, after extensive visits to these areas and speaking to the victims as well as village representatives and assessing their loss, the support they received as well as their capacity to bounce back on their own, our team identified 14 families who were seen as the most vulnerable and in need of our help. The work in field started towards the end of August and lasted till mid-November, way into sub-zero temperatures.

Of these 14 families, 6 were from Shey, 4 from Choglamsar and 4 from peripheral Leh town.



Winter support

Given that a large no. of families were still left without a house while the winter was in their face, we decided on helping them by taking care of rented accommodations for the winter along with heating and warm beddings. During visits to the far off villages, our teams got the impression that the social support systems in these villages were still strong and most of the families who lost their houses were being taken care of by relatives and neighbours, at least in the form of a room to get through the winters. We did not want to destroy the existing social capital in these communities by offering rented

accommodations to them. On the other hand, the poor migrant families living in the suburbs, like the 24 families living on the outskirts of Spituk village who, for the second time in the last five years, lost their one room shelters to the floods and many families living in rented accommodations in Choglamsar who got no support from while the govt. rehabilitated their landlords in the Solar Colony.



We decided to help these families tide over the winters and help some of them with shelters in 2011. While we were arranging help for the 24 families from Spituk-Spang, the govt. sanctioned them land in Palam, close to Choglamsar. The Bamboo Promotion Board of India that was distributing pre-fabricated bamboo huts to flood victims decided to help them as well. Given the inappropriateness of these structures in the cold Ladakhi winters, we supported these

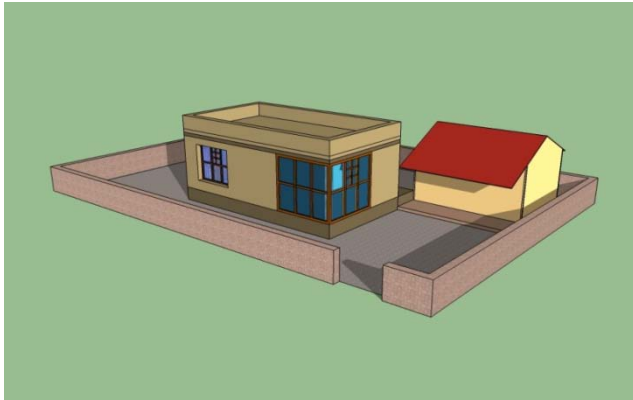
families with *bukharies* (locally made metal braziers with chimneys that serve as improved stoves as well as room heaters) and fuel wood to heat their rooms through the winters. Since most of the blankets they got through relief were very not suitable for minus temperatures, we bought for them thick quilts and blankets. For the 19 families living in tents after their rented houses in Choglamsar fell to the floods, we supported them with six months of rent, *bukharies*, fuel-wood and quilt-mattress sets. There were many more families who lost their rented houses in the floods but many of them had decided to move back to their villages for the winter while many others who could afford to, had taken up alternative houses elsewhere. All of these 43 families we thus supported belonged to the poorest and most vulnerable of all flood victims. We had also planned on supplying solar lanterns for electricity to these families but some other agencies pitched in with that and we didn't need to.



Plans for 2011

For this year, we have taken up the earlier mentioned 24 families, most of whom lived in one room houses on the outskirts of Spituk village close to the airport and worked as casual labourers with the army contractors. Their houses had sustained damage during the floods of 2006 as well and the govt had declared the area vulnerable and had planned to allocate them land in Palam, on the other side of the Indus River from where they lived. This plan finally materialised after their houses were damaged again during the floods. From our assessments, these families were amongst the most vulnerable and needed our support in building permanent shelters for themselves. The bamboo huts provided to them, much against the claims, were very inadequate in protecting from winter cold and the people, and especially the kids and elderly had a tough time through the peak winter months. And it was comparatively a pleasant winter this year, a harsh winter would make these huts even more unliveable. The families also had to spend a lot more towards heating costs from their precious little savings.

While we stick to the basic features promulgated last year, we are making some minor changes in the design from last year. One major change from last year is that instead of one room core shelters and a toilet for each family, in case of the Palam families, we are building a one room and kitchen set for each family and building 6 shared toilets between the 24 families.



Proposed 2 room design at Palam



Bamboo huts in which the Palam families spent their winters

The other group that we have identified for this year are the six families in Domkhar village in Khaltse block, around four hours drive from Leh, whose houses were fully damaged in the floods last year. We are building one room core shelters for these families and hope that they would be able to add more rooms on their own. Similarly, we are also building houses for the 2 families in the remote off-the-road Photoksar village in the trans-singe-la area who lost their houses in the floods.

Last year, we had also identified 6 more families from Leh town (3 from Maney Tsilding and 3 from Mitsik Chulung) for our support but could not take it up over some issues between the families and the administration. The local administration declared the areas were vulnerable to future floods and advised against rebuilding at the same places. But the families were not happy with the alternate land the govt. had allocated to them. If the issue gets resolved soon we could be taking them up as well.

So, as of now, we are committed to helping 32 families from Palam, Domkhar and Photoksar villages this year and are open to going beyond that if needed.

Project Partners

Even though many organisations had expressed interest in partnering with LEDeG in building shelters last year, given the short period we had before the winter would set in, we decided to keep our expectations realistic and work towards a smaller target. We partnered with Sustainable Environment and Ecological Development Society (SEEDS) -India and Habitat for Humanity (HFH) - India, our common approach based on a belief in providing solutions that are socially as well as environmentally sustainable. We set out with a target of building 50 core shelters between the three organisations, but owing to the acute shortage of labour and materials in the market that we were soon faced with, we had to bring down the target substantially. We jointly decided on taking up the reduced no. of shelters with SEEDS in what remained of the summer of 2010 and take up the remainder with HFH in 2011. SEEDS was a working partner of LEDeG last year and jointly managed the shelter initiative with us. They brought in project finance as well as their expertise in building disaster resistant houses. Most activities of LEDeG in 2011 are in partnership with HFH, who have committed to contributing around 2/3rd of the project expenses on the 24 shelters in Palam village besides some material support for the other shelters.

Partners through our fundraiser drive

Besides the two project partners mentioned, we also had the pleasure of getting the support of scores of individuals and many groups from across the world who felt for the people of Ladakh and extended their warm support. We worked through the relief phase of our intervention with whatever organisational money we could use and the donations from staff members. But once we decided on continuing in the rehabilitation phase, LEDeG circulated an appeal for support through its various networks, which was received by an overwhelming response. A large no. of individuals from across India and various parts of the world started donating to LEDeG's proposed initiative. Many individuals and groups raised money from their friends and networks. GetOffUrAss, BCM Touring and Himalayan Bikers, travel groups/companies, raised donations from their members, organised events and continuously spread the word. A group of friends in Bangalore raised money by collecting 6,000 kgs. of waste paper. A few other groups also raised money from organising photo exhibitions, selling Ladakh Calendars and similar initiatives. We would like to make a very special mention of the Belgium based 'Help Ladakh' group and the driving force behind it, Natalie Lycoops, who set out with the hope of raising € 500 from her friends in Belgium and wound up collecting, needless to say with a lot of tireless effort, € 42,836, that included donations from her neighbouring countries. Similarly, Daniel Piringer, an ex volunteer from Austria raised € 6,793, largely from making presentations in schools. Prasad Menon and his friends in Bangalore raised Rs. 6,00,000. Berlin based RESET raised € 2,985 from their online donation site. Our Institutional partners BORDA and Arghyam graciously pitched in with € 15,000 and Rs. 5,00,000 respectively. All employees of CDD donated a day's salary. Incidentally, all these three partners and many of the fund raiser groups are based out of Bangalore.

Financial overview

At the end of April 2011, we have received Rs. 65,59,044 towards our post flood initiatives. Of this, we have spent Rs. 13,64,189 in 2010 on the shelter and winter support initiatives. The remaining Rs. 51,94,855 would be spent on part/full funding of the 32 shelters for this year.

A large no. of LEDeG employees were involved with the post flood activities last year, but none of us drew any salary from the donations or from our partners' contributions. We were happy to put in extra hours to work on the relief and rehabilitation besides managing our regular programmes. Our volunteers also contributed their time without charging the organisation. With a lot of conscious effort, we also managed to keep the overhead/administrative expenses to a minimum. Much of your donations have thus gone straight to the flood victims.

We are committed to total transparency in our accounts and thus the relief related account books and records are open for scrutiny by anyone who would wish to do so.

While we are not actively fund raising this year, we are keeping our bank accounts open to receiving donations as we are not certain about the expenses for this year. If we are left with any surplus money at the end of the summer, or get a clear indication earlier that we would, we will spend the remainder money from the donations in supporting farm based livelihoods (another major casualty of the floods).

Thanks are due to many

A lot of people have supported this initiative in a lot of different ways. The core project team worked extra hard beyond working hours and working days. Many volunteers, both from SEEDS and LEDeG, helped in the assessment and reconstruction stages. A large no. of people and groups donated / raised donations to support our work. Heartfelt thanks and a round of applause to all of you!

The work last year also got some media attention with CNN-IBN selecting LEDeG-SEEDS as one of the six nominees for the CNN-IBN Indian of the year award in the Public Services category and the people's vote electing us as the winner in that category <http://www.indianoftheyear.com>. We share this award with everyone who has been a part of our efforts.



For quick updates and photos on this initiative and news on LEDeG's other programmes, do join our facebook group at <https://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/group.php?gid=179281624354>

As always, for any queries, do write to us at [ladakhfloods\(at\)ledeg\(dot\)org](mailto:ladakhfloods(at)ledeg(dot)org).