



Bihar Flood Response

reliable and timely information

Introduction

In August 2017 large parts of Bihar were flooded along with other parts of North India, Nepal and Bangladesh. First Response Radio (FRR) India responded with dedicated radio programmes providing vital relief information, psychosocial support and opportunities for affected communities to communicate with authorities and each other. Community responses varied from appreciation for the radio team's presence to extreme frustration with the difficulties accessing vital supplies and information. The listeners' responses confirmed the life-saving value of receiving timely information and creating opportunities for affected people to be heard.

Background

Bihar is a particularly flood-prone state. Between 12 to 20 August 2017, heavy rains in Seemanchal and neighbouring Nepal, in the catchment areas of major North Indian rivers, resulted in a sudden increase in water discharge and flash floods in several rivers – Gandak, Burhi Gandak, Bagmati, Kamla, Kosi and Mahananda. The floods affected the districts surrounding Patna in Bihar. FRR India has pre-existent relationships with local AM/MW radio stations in these districts, an SW broadcaster covering all of North India and with local NGOs. FRR India was able to mobilise these partnerships rapidly and responded to the flooding with disaster radio broadcasts on AM and SW from 18 Aug to 23 Sept 2018.

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Ramp-Up

First Response Radio India's response objectives were to see that:

- Communities affected by the floods were able to take precautions to observe good hygiene and prevent disease.
- Households were able to take precautions to preserve essential belongings and paperwork to minimise the long-term effects of flood damage to homes and property.
- Stories of community-led responses to the floods would be disseminated to encourage to other flood-affected communities.
- Individuals and families received psychosocial counselling and support that would aid in recovery and restoration of livelihoods and family life.

First Response Radio team members, who produce content for a SW broadcaster, responded initially by adapting the SW programmes to provide WASH and Relief information.

An FRR worker from Delhi visited the affected area to assess needs and visit local partners. A local AM radio station invited the FRR team to provide a pilot programme relating to the floods. Listener response to the pilot demonstrated the need for more programmes, and the station asked FRR to make a series of disaster radio programmes, to be shared with other local AM stations. FRR India mobilised funding to pay for airtime and to meet costs for team deployment in the district. Two trained FRR teams were deployed to the Patna area, each for a week at a time. The AM programmes were broadcast for four weeks, and SW broadcasts continued for five weeks.

Implementation

The FRR teams consisted of radio producers, workers from local relief and medical aid NGOs, and community volunteers. During their deployment week, the teams visited the communities, obtained information from government hospitals, local NGOs, schools and local communities. Each team produced fourteen disaster radio programmes, to be broadcast daily for 15 minutes by the broadcasting partners.



Local NGOs provided expert medical and relief information. They also assisted in recording field interviews with doctors and other NGO workers. The presence of local NGO workers and community volunteers encouraged local leaders and community members to accept the FRR teams. Collaboration also helped with local travel and accommodation. By travelling with relief distribution partners, the FRR team had better opportunities to meet with a wider audience.

Community members told team members their stories of endurance, pain, loss and perseverance. Some shared needs and others inspirational stories of how they overcame the floods.

“ We were sleeping in the night around 2 am. the flood came slowly in our home and increased within few minutes ... the water level was up to two feet, and after a few minutes more it was more than four feet ..without any delay we rushed to go out from our home and came out for a safe place [middle of National Highway] In the morning when I have seen our home it was broken and full of waters....all the villages were under the water. It was very terrible, scary ... Our all harvest and whatever little was left over all finished. My four buffalo and two goats died. I lost my all precious things, and I do not know what I have to do the next.”

“ I am 60 years old. After the 2008 floods, some NGOs taught us how to save ourselves in the event of a flood. ... We learnt from those NGOs that we should run to the roof of any pukka concrete house. ... When the flooding happened, everyone ran to the roof of the pukka house. However, since I couldn't climb the steps, I was left alone in the flood. I held on to the bamboo tree for three hours. I could feel the water current below my waist. I could not hold for any longer, and I almost gave up when some villagers made a small boat using a banana tree, they were searching for me. They found me and saved my life.”

In one place, the villager sang folk songs as inspiration to other affected communities. The women sang to encourage other communities to depend on the creator god and to pray to the god for protection and rain before harvesting.

For most of the second week, internet services were restricted in response to some violent demonstrations which meant the team struggled to transfer programme files to the broadcasting partners. In some areas, the team experienced hostile responses where local communities expected monetary assistance.

Transportation was a challenge due to submerged roads in many areas. In other areas, community members blocked the highways to express their agitation that responders had not heard their voices.

FRR programmes gave out phone numbers so the listeners could call the local station or call the FRR team directly. FRR team members provided counselling as required. Listener responses also allowed the team to advocate for affected communities and to monitor the impact of the programme.

The programme content developed during the four weeks of broadcast. In the early acute phase, FRR India provided life-saving information such as WASH information. In the latter stage, there was more focus on trauma counselling and information on rehabilitation. The team also changed the area of operations to engage with different communities within the affected area.



Impact

Listeners reported that the programmes and presence of radio teams helped them in getting relief, safety and hygiene information, and resulted in government and relief agencies getting timely aid or care to them.

“Our house collapsed, and we don’t have food and water. No medical facilities and transportation were available. Thank you for your radio programme through which we have been informed about flood situation. Thank you for giving us the helpline number of the organizations which are doing relief work in our area. “

“I listened to your program. We don’t have any media to communicate to anybody except radio. We appreciate your love and concern for us which you show through radio programmes in this situation.”

“People in our area are suffering from malaria and high-grade fever, due to a lot of mosquitoes. Please guide us what we do as a precaution. At present, our houses are destroyed and there is no pure water to drink”



“ Many don’t even have medicines to treat themselves. We do not have drinking water now. It was through your programme that we heard a Doctor’s interview on homemade water purification methods. ... Along with me, there are another 20 people who are listening to your programme in this critical situation. Radio is vital to us to get important information from people like you.”

In Katihar district, after listening to the listener’s voices and needs through the FRR programmes, the local authorities made a priority of arranging for food and supplies distribution. Around 250 families benefited directly.

#Communicationisaid

Lessons Learnt

- The affected area was large, and transportation difficult. **It would be more effective to deploy teams simultaneously to cover a large area, particularly in the acute phase when community confusion is at its height.**
- The response was timely, responding a matter of days after the initial flash floods. However, we did not meet FRR's goal to be on air within 72hrs of a disaster. **To speed up future responses, local FRR teams should be encouraged to raise and maintain deployment start-up funds.**
- **Out of desperation, community members sometimes act with hostility towards CwC teams. FRR training should prepare teams for this.** Good presence of mind and sensitivity is essential for team leaders and anyone interfacing directly with community members.
- FRR India teams consist mainly of radio professionals and local NGO workers. During a crisis NGOs channel their personnel resources to their response, limiting availability for supporting the radio response. **It would be good to partner with and train other local groups e.g. local faith groups, or community volunteer groups in disaster-prone areas**

Conclusion

When people were in chaos, FRR India programmes provided a local presence with reliable and timely information, which facilitated a return to stability. The programmes helped bridge between government organisations, NGOs and the affected communities. On-the-ground teams and helplines to trauma counselling provided listening ears so that communication was truly local and truly two-way.

Partner with FRR

FRR plans to equip and train teams in 4 new disaster-prone countries over the next 2-3 years. To partner with FRR in this venture contact: Mike Adams, FRR International Co-ordinator
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Train
Respond**

