

Barmer Aashray Yojna

Post Flood Shelter Restoration Programme



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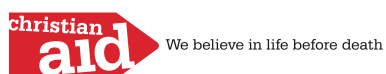
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SEEDS in partnership with Christian Aid and ECHO built 300 intermediate shelter as part of the Post Flood Shelter Restoration Programme in Barmer, Rajasthan, India

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Floods in desert

Incessant rains in the desert state of Rajasthan gave rise to one of the worst floods in Rajasthan in two centuries. Heavy monsoon rains that started on the 16th of August 2006 engulfed several villages of the 12 odd districts of Rajasthan.



Ninety five percent of the villagers were rendered homeless and moved to high sand dunes with little or no belongings. The families that suffered the most are those that lived on marginal lands and had little capacity to reconstruct houses on their own.



Barmer was the worst affected because of heavy rains and the downstream flow of heavy rainwater from Jaisalmer. On the 21st midnight there was heavy rainfall and no early warning was given to the villagers 23 kilometers away from the district headquarters. The district received about 577 mm of rainfall in 3 days, 300 mm more than the annual average rainfall of 277 mm. About 60 -100 villages were affected in the district. Some of the worst hit villages were Kavas, Malua, Bhadaka and Shiv. The water level reached 25 - 27 feet above the ground level. It is officially reported that 103 people died, 95 percent of the villagers were rendered homeless and moved to high sand dunes with little or no belongings. Forty seven thousand cattle died in the floods. Five thousand two hundred houses were damaged and crops worth 300 million rupees were destroyed. Most of the villages continued to be submerged a month after the commencement of the floods, primarily due to the problem of poor percolation of water in the gypsum rich earth. The homes were rendered uninhabitable. Since the structures were mostly made of untreated mud, they were badly damaged and mostly destroyed by the flood water.



The rigid caste system that is divisive in times of peace lost all relevance in the face of disaster. The days immediately after the flood women across all caste, class cooked meals for each other while the men pooled resources for basic needs.



Barmer Aashray Yojna

SEEDS (Sustainable Environment and Ecological Development Society) in partnership with Christian Aid and ECHO (European Commission Humanitarian Aid Department) constructed 300 houses across 15 flood affected villages to meet the immediate housing need. The initiative was primarily aimed at marginalized and socially excluded families that had small land holdings and no resources to rebuild. Women headed households and people with disability were the other groups that we focused on. The families were identified based on genuine need and in consultation with district authorities and local community.

Complete community participation, cultural and environmental appropriateness of shelter design and local capacity building were the other significant aspect of the entire process.

SEEDS decided to build intermediate shelter as against temporary houses as these offered better living conditions and greater strength. Intermediate shelters can also be gradually altered by beneficiary families to permanent housing.

People driven initiative

Community participation is integral to all SEEDS work, which was also the foundation of the Barmer Aashray Yojna. This was achieved through the Village Development Committees (VDCs). SEEDS helped each of the 15 villages to form a village development committee that would be their link at the village level for the project. This was a significant step in the project as the community was made a stakeholder with a sense of ownership of the final outcome.

Each VDC comprised of between six to ten members from a particular village or community. SEEDS held meetings with the entire village orienting them with the project objectives, implementation process and the role and significance of formation and functioning of VDC. Members of the VDCs were also chosen by the people in consensual manner. Members also included teachers, community representatives, those trusted with keeping accounts and capable of monitoring the progress in each village. Most times, the village level government representative (locally known as Sarpanch) was also a member of the committee. The committee was the point of verification of beneficiaries who were then finalized in consultation with the VDC itself.

| Village | Shelters |
|-----------------------|----------|
| Adarsh Basti | 28 |
| Akli | 23 |
| Balaniyon ki Dhani | 5 |
| Bhilon ki Dhani | 13 |
| Giral | 27 |
| Hathi Singh ka Gaon | 11 |
| Kotada | 65 |
| Nagarda | 13 |
| Nimbala | 10 |
| Rasartala | 5 |
| Saraswati Nagar | 13 |
| Sheo | 30 |
| Thumbli | 17 |
| Tibaniyaar | 27 |
| Viradh Singh ki Dhani | 13 |



SEEDS partnered with government at the district level through a formal agreement. District authorities have been actively involved throughout the process and have facilitated community participation to a great extent.

Appropriate shelter design

The houses built were in complete compliance with local environmental and cultural nuances both in terms of design and technology used. At the same time, hazard and vulnerability profile of the area was also considered to ensure safety from future disasters.

Traditional Houses

Made of mud, circular in design and had thatched roofs

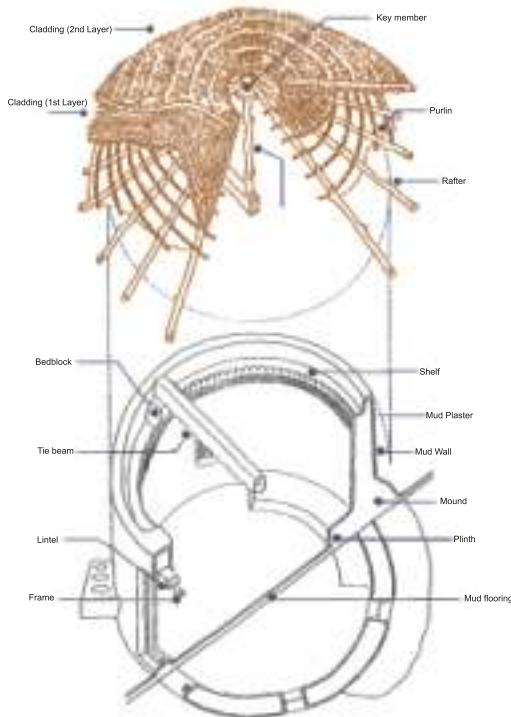


New Houses

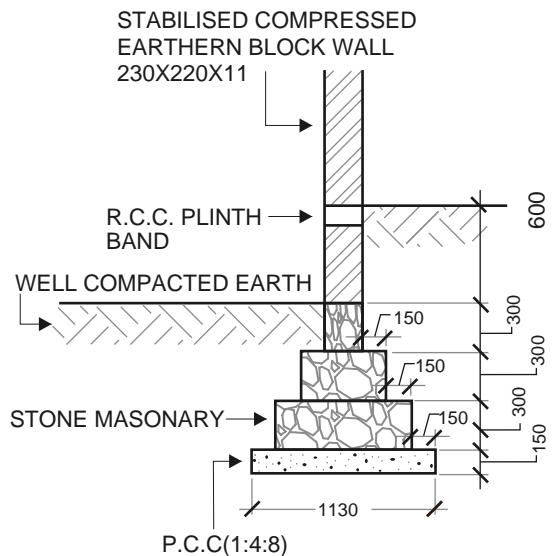
Mud stabilized with 5 % cement and compressed for strength

Circular with interlocking blocks, proper foundations, and structural bands for strength

Thatched roofs for thermal comfort



Foundation Detail



Foundation and roofs were done by the families themselves

Learning to build back better

Building houses was just one aspect of Barmer Aashray Yojna. Rebuilding lives and livelihood is equally crucial for any disaster affected community. SEEDS addressed this issue by engaging local masons at all levels of the recovery process. Beneficiary family members were also involved in the on-site construction activities. A team of highly skilled construction workers guided them throughout the process. SEEDS also provided training for those already engaged in masonry. Twenty three masons (mostly from Aadarsh Basti) were trained in a workshop with the help of other masons from the western State of Gujarat, who are part of a masons association formed in that State as part of a project undertaken by SEEDS in the aftermath of the 2001 earthquake. They were not only trained with increased masonry skills but were also imparted with technical knowledge of safe construction practices - flood and earthquake-resistant houses. Following the training, most of the houses were built by these twenty three masons.



Local masons were trained in block making and safe construction techniques. Five manual machines and four strategically located block fabrication unit were entirely managed by community workers.



The role of women in the region is relegated to carrying out the daily chores of household. The project ensured women were involved not only in consultation and planning but also decision making.



Women in focus

India has close to sixteen percent of the world's population but less than three percent of global fresh water resources. The desert state also finds no reprieve from the forces of nature. Geographically situated at a disadvantage, Rajasthan has a rainfall history that can be described as dismal at best. When SEEDS went into Barmer, one of the worst affected districts by the floods, the objective was not only rebuilding homes, lives and livelihoods. The larger aim was to lay the foundation to longer term goals that would help the people live more stable lives. These involved constructing water storage facilities to be able to address some of the water concerns that the inhabitants of the driest state in India faced. Simultaneously, another goal was to introduce the practice of using toilets.

Water storage tanks locally called tankahs, were damaged in the flood. To help people deal with their immediate water needs following the floods the best solution was to build tankahs. SEEDS built in seven such massive wells. Each tankah is 10 by 12 in area and can hold up to 32,000 litres of water. Water and sanitation are inseparable issues. Open defecation is a widespread practice in Barmer, be it men, women or children. As a preliminary step, only five dry toilets have been built though the SEEDS mission extends to fifteen villages. The five latrines with an attached bathroom are built in Aadarsh Basti, Kotra, Virat Singh ki Dhani and Tibimiyar. These are community latrines, perhaps one too little to accommodate an entire village but in conformity to Sphere standards. However, SEEDS was aware that it was not enough to merely construct toilets but it was important to sensitize and re-orient the residents of these villages to the new habit that they would have to get accustomed to.

As SEEDS completed the construction of toilets, it undertook a series of workshops to introduce the people to a new routine and it to make it easier on the women, the workshops was limited to women participation. It is a widely agreed upon fact that once the woman of the house takes home a message, there is no turning back. The primary objectives of the workshop were to address the following areas: personal hygiene, family hygiene and cleanliness of the house.

Open defecation is a widespread practice in Barmer. Toilets with attached bathrooms have been built in five villages. SEEDS also undertook a series of workshop, targeting women, to highlight the issues of personal hygiene, family hygiene and maintenance of toilet facilities.





Sustainable Development

When SEEDS went into Barmer, one of the worst affected districts by the floods, the objective was not only rebuilding homes, lives and livelihoods. The larger aim was to lay the foundation to longer term goals that would help the people live more stable lives.

A lot of focus during the entire initiative was on the process and people participation. SEEDS in the process also ensured informal exchange of knowledge on sustainable practices. Rainwater harvesting, use of solar energy and disaster preparedness were often highlighted in community workshops and discussions.

The benefit of using earthquake resistant earthen blocks and its features were often discussed with the practicing masons and community members. Similarly rainwater harvesting was demonstrated while the tankahs (storage tanks) were being built. SEEDS also provided solar panels to the families which could take care of their limited energy needs. For an area with zero electricity, it was a significant step towards fulfilling the aspirations of people.

The other most significant aspect was involvement of women in decision making process. The role of women in the region, like most parts of the country, was relegated to household chores. SEEDS ensured women take an active part not only as passive learners but also express their viewpoints on key decisions like location of houses and design of toilets.



Mud architecture: Low energy, thermally comfortable and culturally appropriate



Solar lights: Clean renewable energy



Locally driven process: Socially sustainable

Stories from the Field

TRANSFORMING LIVES

the story of pushpa devi

BARMER, INDIA'S WESTERN-MOST DISTRICT IN RAJASTHAN STATE IS STILL THE EPITOME OF regressive social stigmas that this part of the world was known for many years. Child marriages, female infanticide, female foeticide, oppression of women, illiteracy, the list goes on. Girls are considered the bane of a family and women a burden. For decades now people living in these simmering kilns have been bound by these malpractices. According to the 2001 census, only little over 44 percent women are literate In India literacy is determined by a person's ability to read and write simple text. Additionally, the sex ratio of the state is pegged at 922 women for every 1000 men and this ratio falls to 909 for the age group 0-6 years, a further drop from 916 in the 1991 census. In certain districts of the state like Ganganagar, this number is even lower, in the eight hundreds.

Child marriage is an inevitable fate girl children are born into in this desert state. Numbers collated by the UNICEF reveal that eighty two percent girls are married by age eighteen. Forty eight percent are married by the time they are fifteen. Though banned by both Central and state laws, the practice continues with impunity.

In a similar fate, twelve years ago, Pushpa Devi who had also barely entered her teens was forced into wedlock. Her groom was a couple of years older. Today, as Pushpa Devi walks out of her home, pot on her hip to fetch water, she could easily pass off as being middle aged. However, she is just 25 years and several problems old. She gave birth to five sons, only two survived, Gopal and Mangilal. Her first three sons died in infancy one of them within twenty four hours of the delivery. This is not an unusual scenario. Fifty eight of every one thousand children born in India die before they see their first birthday. In Rajasthan, this rate is higher at sixty seven. But Pushpa's problems are more than statistics can explain.

Originally from Jaisalmer, a neighbouring district, Pushpa Devi now lives in Sheo, her husband's home town, in Barmer. A wedded woman in these parts of the country is welcome at her in-laws home as long as her husband is alive. Pushpa's husband died three years ago, when she was twenty three. She got very little help from her in laws who live near by bringing up her two boys. Pushpa was faced with the Herculean task of dealing with life by herself. It is said lightning doesn't strike the same place twice, but in Pushpa's life it did. After her husband's death, her home razed by the flash floods in August 2006. She lost more than she had - her home, possessions and a life she could ill afford. Being a widow (widows are considered to be harbingers of bad luck) and having no education to speak of, she and her sons was left to fend for themselves with no respite from relatives or neighbours. Even today, in rural India, earning the bread is predominantly a male domain. Women do not often venture beyond their domestic chores.



However, Pushpa works as a manual labourer whenever work is available. She earns seventy three (fewer than two dollars) rupees a day, which at times could go up to one hundred rupees. This sum is guaranteed only if she can complete a given task. To top the pittance of a wage, work was also not available everyday. Sometimes she worked only seven days a month. It was under these circumstances that SEEDS helped Pushpa turn her life around.

In January 2007, SEEDS began reconstruction and rehabilitation work in Barmer to help the flood victims as part of their 'Barmer Aashray Yojna'. SEEDS' priority was to address the needs of the socially marginalized, oppressed and ostracized. The project involved constructing culturally and environmentally (earthquake-proof, as Barmer is also a seismic zone) compliant houses for those devastatingly affected by the floods. The success of the project was highly dependent on the pro-active participation of the beneficiaries and their families and communities at large. Pushpa Devi was a model beneficiary. Hailing from a backward caste called Mali (which according to the government falls under the OBC or Other Backward Classes category), widowed and shunned by society, Pushpa thanks the SEEDS initiative for this new lease of life.

As customary in India, every occasion is inaugurated by a "VIP", an acronym for Very Important person at an opportune date and time. However going by tradition, Pushpa Devi would not be the "VIP" one would want being a widow and in effect considered unlucky. Nevertheless, breaking the gauntlet of custom, SEEDS invited Pushpa to inaugurate the 'Barmer Aashray Yojna'. Superstition was shattered and today, the SEEDS project is a success. A model of endurance, passion and humanity. Yet, it was not as easy as it sounds. At the inauguration, several local-level block officers were present to lend their support. After Pushpa laid the very first foundation stone of the project for her own house and the officers left, Pushpa's problems still confronted her. Within the framework of the SEEDS project, community initiative and involvement forms the heart of the mission. Tasks like excavating for the houses' foundations, roofing, etc. are to be completed by beneficiaries themselves. They are often helped by their family, relatives and neighbours. In Pushpa's case, yet again, she was left with cold comfort that SEEDS would help her with the roofing, which would otherwise have pulled her down by another two thousand rupees.

After days of cajoling and convincing by social workers and SEEDS, Pushpa's relatives and neighbours relented. Finally with their help, her house is complete and among the first ones to be finished, complete with three layers of roofing, a mud fence around the house and a thorn hedge as a second layer around the fence. It is impossible to miss that Pushpa's house stands out in the area much to the envy of relatives and

¹<http://www.censusindia.net/profiles/raj.html>

²<http://wcd.nic.in/> (Ministry of Women and Child Development)



neighbours. And though she is soft-spoken and not boastful of her accomplishments, she has every right to stand tall, especially in front of her sons, who are only going to learn from their exemplary mother.

Pushpa's story is just a grain of sand in the Barmer desert. The SEEDS project has instigated many like her to transform their lives and it has also give many more the support they needed to start their lives anew. Leela Devi Chand of Sheo, who is physically handicapped, was also a priority beneficiary, just like Ghazi Khan of Thumli who is partially blind and deaf and abandoned by his wife. These people are prime recipients of SEEDS' aid not only because their's are harsher realities than others but because many are also from the socially marginalized communities as dictated by India's degenerative caste system. Most importantly, through this project, SEEDS has been able to mobilize people to the extent that in Sheo the entire community came together to build a house for a neighbour after it was revealed that Ratan Lal was mistakenly omitted from the list of SEEDS' beneficiaries. Contractors involved in the project contributed extra bags of cement, SEEDS pooled in with bricks and the community helped in the construction. They knew that without their help, Ratan Lal would be left to nothing but the fate and the forces of nature. The most significant achievement of the SEEDS project is not that it was able to complete the construction of 300 homes but that it was able to mobilize a community to come together in their most desperate time of need.

NEW KOTRA

a model village



CASTE AND CASTE POLITICS ARE SYNONYMOUS WITH INDIA. CASTE CONFLICTS ARE THE epitome of politics in India. There is perhaps nothing that describes Indian politics better. These battles are clearly marked and guarded at all times. All the above are holds true for the western desert State of Rajasthan. People from various castes and sub-castes reside in Rajasthan. There are the Rajputs, Rana-Rajputs and the Brahmins who form the upper crust of the caste canopy. The lower castes classified as Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in Indian law is constituted by the Meenas, Manghniars, Gujjars, Bhils, Other Backward Castes (OBCs) and the list goes on. In the sub-continent's nascent years, castes were not only defined by the family you were born into but your birth also, by default, determined your profession and livelihood. These demarcations have been blurred today, except, perhaps, for a few castes like the Manghniars - this group used to sing folk songs for a living and they still do today.

Professions are no longer predetermined by birth. Multiple reasons can be attributed to this change. Development in the country has, perhaps, given people the choice. On the other hand, extreme poverty could have pushed them to move away from traditional professions to take up mining, quarrying, masonry and other menial labour jobs. However, the caste system and the lines that demarcate caste are still irrevocably etched in the soul of society. Castes are not only distinguished by religion, tradition and/or profession but also by dress. Though their turbans, shirts and skirts look all the same to an outsider, people living in Rajasthan can classify a person by caste by just their dress.

It would be not untrue to say that in urban areas, caste divisions are less explicit and less obvious than in rural areas. Traveling from the city to the villages of any one district would cause anyone to make that distinction. This sense of stronger caste divisions is what one gets driving into the district of Barmer - the Western-most district of the State of Rajasthan. In order to review the Barmer Aashray Yojna project of SEEDS, six to seven villages in the Barmer district were surveyed - Akli, Bhillon ki Dhani (within Akli), Kotra, Aadarsh Basti, Virat Singh ki Dhani, Sheo, Thumli and Bhallaniyon ki Dhani. Barmer district was one of the most affected in the August 2006 flash floods. Within a period of one week, the incessant rains that transformed into furious floods claimed the lives of 140 people, 50,000 livestock and crops worth one thousand crore rupees (around 250 million USD). Under the project, three hundred houses were built across fifteen villages, which included those mentioned above. The primary focus of the project was to assist the most socially, economically and physically marginalized individuals and/or families. This, in turn, meant that the primary beneficiaries would be the lower castes, who, most often than not, form the underbelly of the socially marginalized groups in India.

Arriving at any one of the villages, it is easy to spot the homes of the lower caste families. One would only have to look further into the horizon away from the main cluster of houses in a village. Lower castes

are always kept away from the rest of the village. This, at times, does not mean at arm's length but a good three to four kilometres. The terrain gets harder as one travels into the thorny desert land. Nevertheless they have been living as socially, economically and physically ostracized groups for centuries and will continue to do so. SEEDS' initiative to help the marginalized groups was not with any intent to break caste lines. It also does not mean that the project did not aid families of upper castes because the objective was not only to help lower castes but to bring aid and assistance to those in dire need.

This is most evident in the case of New Kotra. It has been tagged a 'model village' and rightly so. New Kotra is the only village that has been relocated out of the fifteen villages under the project. Residents here were relocated from their home village of Jalela. In Jalela, the caste structure was maintained. The lower castes lived closer to the banks of the river, while the upper castes had their homes on higher safer grounds. However, nature is indiscriminate. Upper and lower caste families were equally affected and most of Jalela was inhabitable after the floods. Sixty five families had to be relocated. Since SEEDS worked in consultation with the local administration from the very beginning, the government was only happy to allocate land for the relocation. One hundred and two plots were allocated, of which sixty five houses have been built by SEEDS. Any further relocation or rehabilitation as seen fit by the government will be made in the remaining land in New Kotra within programmes undertaken by the local authority.



However, the tag of a model village is not attributed to the fact that it is an example of relocation but that it is a model in eradication of caste barriers. In all other villages under the project, SEEDS merely reconstructed damaged or destroyed homes without disturbing the social fabric. But when people were relocated from Jalela to New Kotra, it was decided by the people themselves that they would like to live together without having to re-draw previous caste lines. The harmonious setting of rows of houses is a sight for sore eyes. The only differentiating or even telling



aspect of the houses is in its construction. Keeping with the SEEDS campaign of safe construction practices and culturally and environmentally-friendly houses, the foundation of the houses are built in ascending order of height from the roadside to keep it in proportion to the sea-level. The default height of the foundation of the houses built by SEEDS is three to three and a half feet. This means that the houses are better protected from natural disasters, such as floods.



Of the sixty five houses, twenty six were built for OBC families, fourteen for SCs, two for STs, two for Rana-Rajputs, fourteen for Rajputs and seven homes for Brahmins. Ask any family - man or woman - and there is only one answer to this new living arrangement. They could not be happier and they always wanted to live as equals. The women were more vocal on their united effort to survive during the floods. Mimi - a Manghniar - narrated the struggle that all had to undergo in Jalela before any help came their way. She said that all the women gathered at the village community hall for three to four days cooking and staying together with their children. It cannot be reiterated enough that castes aside, the whole village was able to come together as a family in a time of crisis. Another survivor and beneficiary, Rashida - SC, told the story of how her home was completely razed and a Rajput family gave her a roof over her head and food to keep her family going till help came their way.

Under present living conditions, the women were also quick to state that although they are of different castes, they have no inhibitions about using the same tankah to draw water or use the same toilet built by SEEDS. SEEDS built two tankahs and two toilets in New Kotra. New Kotra is more than a model village or an example of harmony. It is an instance that shows that given a chance, people would like to break out of traditional bonds and create new lives with new choices and a better future. If we were to take away any lesson from New Kotra, it would be that people only need to be given a chance.



REBUILDING LIVES

the story of sadhula ram

THE EYE CATCHES ONLY ENDLESS STRETCHES OF DESERT SAND THAT YIELDS CLOSE TO nothing. Yet, almost eighty percent people depend on cultivation for a livelihood in the most arid parts of the desert State of Rajasthan. When their precious piece of land gives them nothing, the people of Barmer district take up manual labour. If there is not enough work on the back-roads of this sandy stretch, male members in a family head to other districts in the State or even neighbouring States in search of menial work for a pittance that accounts for daily wages. So, when the 2006 floods ravaged everything in its path, it left nothing for the people to fall back on.

Understanding this deprived socio-economic situation, SEEDS took into consideration the various existing ground realities of the communities they intended to help. Rebuilding three hundred houses was only one element of the Barmer Aashray Yojna. The project enabled a parallel mission of rebuilding lives and livelihoods of the beneficiaries. This aspect fell comfortably within SEEDS' campaign for 'Community Mobilization'. Mobilizing the people is a crucial element in all of SEEDS' initiatives to promote Community Based Disaster Management, which empowers the individual or community at risk to make informed choices for themselves and their families. Apart from initiating communities to make informed choices for themselves, SEEDS also provided training for those already engaged in masonry.



The training helped the community become more hands on in the project. Twenty three masons (mostly from Aadarsh Basti) were trained in a workshop with the help of other masons from the western State of Gujarat, who are part of a masons association formed in that State as part of a project undertaken by SEEDS in the aftermath of the 2001 earthquake. They were not only trained with increased masonry skills but were also imparted with technical knowledge of safe construction practices - flood and earthquake-resistant houses. Following the training, most of the houses were built by these twenty three masons with a little help from colleagues in Gujarat.

There was no one more proud of this fact than Sadhula Ram - one of the twenty three masons and beneficiary from Aadarsh Basti. Thirty five year old Sadhula Ram has not had the privilege of schooling or professional training of any sort. His family eked by his wages and those of his four brothers who also



worked as labourers. Sadhula Ram took up any menial labour job that came his way. Most jobs that he took up were at construction sites. He started with these menial jobs twelve years ago when he left home to go to the neighbouring district of Jaisalmer. With every additional job, Sadhula Ram picked up on the basics of masonry (and lesser on wages) with no formal lessons or guidance - just grasping whatever tips he was given on the job.

When SEEDS first surveyed Aadarsh Basti, most residents there reiterated and insisted that aid be meted out to Sadhula Ram as soon as possible. He was struggling to survive and the floods only made his situation worse. A single father and widower he had to also fend for his three children - two daughters and a son. His wife passed away two years ago. And as manual-labourers are a dime a dozen, work was also not easy to come by. His living situation was going from bad to worse. The SEEDS masonry training helped Sadhula Ram get back on track and lay the foundation for a better tomorrow. He not only absorbed the training in its entirety, Sadhula Ram was able to gain the respect and trust of his neighbours that they were all too willing to make him the contractor-cum-supervisor of the project in Aadarsh Basti. As every other mason, Sadhula Ram also took home one hundred and twenty rupees (about 3 USD) for a day's work. This was much more than he previously made in a month. This also brought him into the mainstream because Sadhula Ram had to get official authorization to be able to undertake his tasks. With the help of SEEDS, our protagonist applied for a pan card (for tax requirements), opened a bank account to deal with financial matters and also printed a bill book to keep everything in check. The process involved orienting Sadhula Ram to the institutionalized system of doing business, which will only help him in further ventures.



The training also involved methodical instructions on operating the manual block-making machines. These earthen blocks, which are earthquake-resistant, were used in the construction of the houses. The five manual machines require seven workers each who reported to a supervisor who in turn kept SEEDS posted on the daily progress of work. The man-run equipment produced up to five hundred blocks a day. Aadarsh Basti had one manual machine, which was under the care and supervision of Sadhula Ram. SEEDS has transformed the lives of many like Sadhula Ram giving them a second chance.



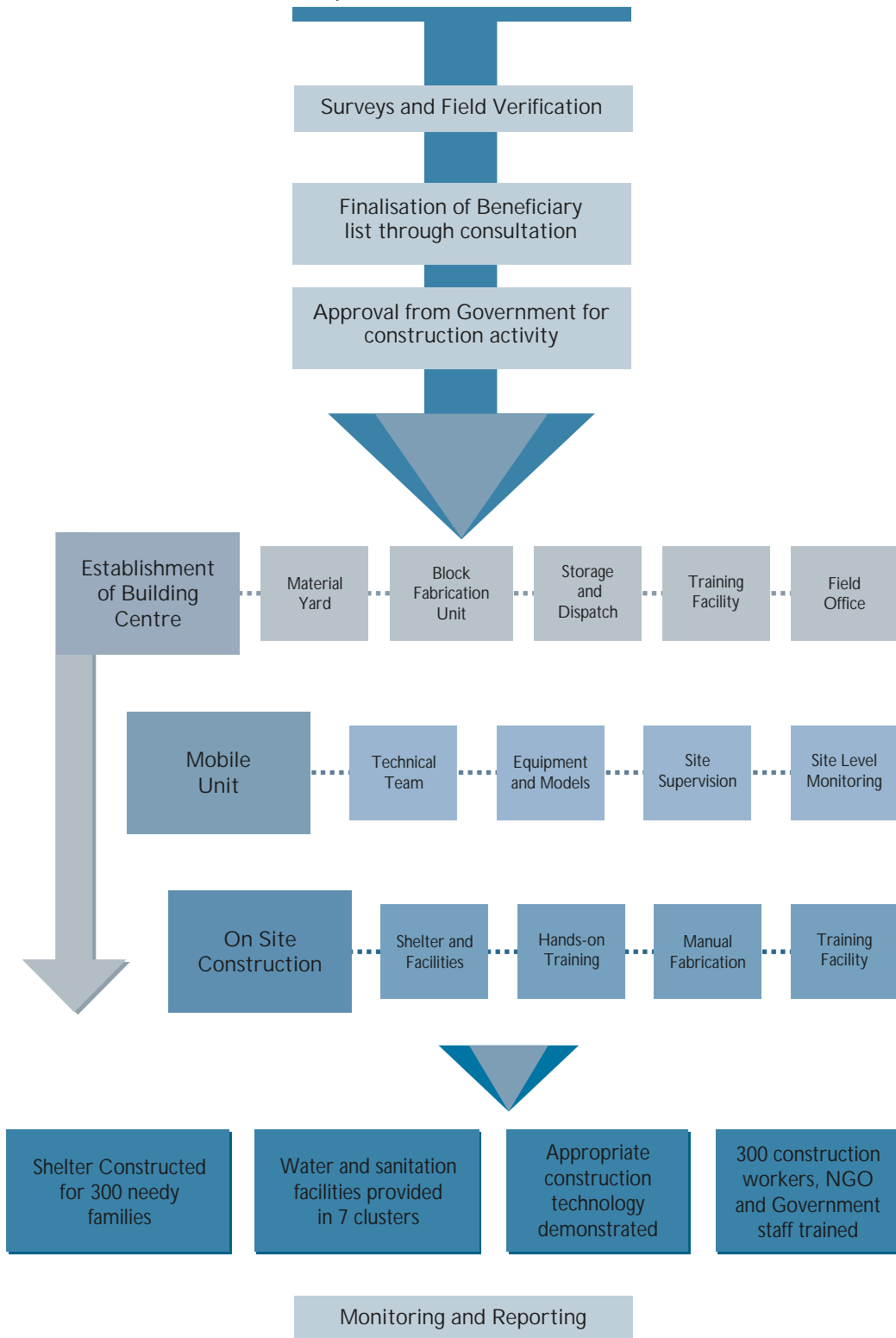
Operational Framework and Monitoring

The work was accomplished through a combination of central fabrication of material, on-site fabrication of material and masonry work at site. Local masons and beneficiary families were involved in the on-site construction activities. Construction teams were formed each comprising a team leader and assistant masons. The team leaders were brought in from Gujarat, trained by SEEDS under its Mason Training Programme over the past three years, and been associated with SEEDS in the post tsunami shelter construction in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and post earthquake shelter programme in Jammu and Kashmir.

The construction process was closely monitored for all activities, at all levels and on all locations. The monitoring was carried out by a team of technical experts led by SEEDS, and also included personnel with local knowledge, and social experts for taking into account community issues. The monitoring was thus real time, participatory and facilitated corrective decisions.

The entire project was carried out in complete adherence to red cross code of conduct and the Sphere : Humanitarian charter and minimum standards in disaster response.

Operational Flowchart







Challenges faced

Floods in Barmer were an aberration. Eight months on, water continues to be trapped between high sand dunes. Most roads were completely or partially damaged and this posed a major hindrance to reach out to the remote villages. Undulated terrain compounded with far reaching distances made it a daunting task for our team.

Barmer falls in the great Indian Thar Desert. Extreme weather conditions and uncertain rainfall often damaged the earthen blocks. This not only delayed construction but often dampened the spirits of the local workers. Further, scarcities of water lead to long period of curing for the earthen blocks.

The prevalence of caste system in the region demanded constant interaction and counselling with the community to ensure a smooth workflow. Such factors played significant role in collective decision making process.

One major accomplishment was the timely completion of the shelter project. The initial task was to build three hundred houses in six months but due to adverse conditions the effective time period was only four months.

Direct Beneficiaries

Intermediate Shelter:
300 families

Basic Community Facilities:
5,000 people

Shelter Construction Training:
100 workers

Shelter Construction Awareness:
100 Government and NGO staff

About 85 percent of the beneficiary families belonged to marginal communities, including socially excluded groups, widow headed households, and households headed by persons with disabilities. The remaining were selected on the basis of their being highly vulnerable and very poor, thus having low coping capacities.

The road ahead

Community participation was the most crucial element of the Barmer Aashray Yojna. SEEDS along with other partners are in the process of reconstructing schools damaged due to the flood. The initiative also involves risk education and awareness and training on disaster preparedness. This is in keeping with the organization's vision to make communities resilient to disasters.



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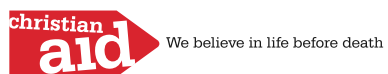
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