

## RAISING THE BAR

Just as water can separate, it can unite too. During floods when water rages and sweeps away almost everything that comes in its way, separating families and its members. In Parri village under Barwara panchayat, the story is however different. Water united the people; not only the families but the entire community.

Our vehicle stopped under a shady mango grove, from where we took to walking, crossed a short bamboo bridge and entered Parri village. By the time we set foot in the village, children and adults had already joined us. Snaking through the winding village roads, crossing over people's house to avail short cuts we eventually reached in front of a house. A few feet from the house, in an open field stood a tube well, like a king on his majestic throne. It was this piece of machine that helped unite the entire village.

The tube well donated by the panchayat way back in 2005, never won a battle with flood. Each time there was flood, it went under water.



Members of Nirmal Bimal Mahila Vikash Samuh with the raised tube well (below)

People couldn't find a way to solve the problem of drinking water during flood time. Ganesh Paswan, the present animator of Community Based Disaster Preparedness (CBDP) in this village elaborated the story. ***'In the meetings they would talk about the problem, but couldn't find a solution,'*** he said, ***'eventually they asked us to provide a new tube well that could fight flood water. But we said we can only show you the way to come out of the problem, but cannot dig a new tube well for you. Go ask your panchayat to help you and raise the tube well,'*** Ganesh completed in a breath.

Raising the tube well was something that struck the community. How can you raise the tube well? Raising a child is possible, one can even raise a fence around the house, but how can a tube well already dug and is functioning be raised?

CBDP came to rescue. You open the top portion of the tube well, it said, then add an extra piece of pipe to its base and put back the top and the tube well is raised. Amazing! thought the community. But the all these required money and labour. It was then the village "Self Help Group (SHG)" Nirmal Bimal Mahila Vikash Samuh that took up the responsibility.

The SHG has 10 members and all agreed to contribute Rs. 10 to raise the tube well. But that was not enough so the SHG decided to take contribution from the community also. ***'We required around Rs. 700 to raise the tube well and make the platform around it,'*** said a member of the SHG. So at last in 2009 the tube well was raised to a height that was considered safe from flood; around 3 and half feet from the ground.

There are a total of 7 tube wells in the village. But all are not so lucky to have been raised. Md. Abdul Razak Nadaf, a resident of the village has his own personal tube well. ***'I too raised my tube well and cemented the platform after I saw these women doing it,'*** he admitted without hesitation. To find the truth of the matter we visited his house and found he had indeed raised it to around 2 feet from the ground.



(Above) Md. Abdul Razak Nadaf with his personal tube well. (Below) Raised tube well in Chiknaowa Sadai Tol.

***'After the flood in 2007, the following year we came to know from CBDP about raising the tube well,'*** said Sumitra Devi from Nirmal Kanchan Mahila Vikash Samuh SHG. Raising the tube well was an urgent need since in 2007 the tube well was inundated in the flood. ***'So we collected a contribution of Rs. 2 from each family and remaining was given from the SHG.'*** With that amount they purchased materials and raised the tube well with a high platform around it. Approximately 50 families draw water from it today.

***'How do you maintain the tube well, what if it needs repair?'*** we asked.

***'We collect contributions from the community to repair it,'*** she replied.

But raising the tube well is just one small habit of the CBDP empowered community. Numerous small habits when taken up on a regular basis empower the community to reduce their vulnerability to disasters like flood.

The instance of protecting cattle fodder and fuel wood is an example. Cattle are an important resource for the villagers. But fodder for cattle becomes a dire problem during and after flood when everything is under water. Mamun Devi of

Parri village informed how they have to go to Champaran, a two hours journey by train to obtain cattle fodder. ***'We are subject severe harassment by the police while bringing it in the train,'*** she said. She also pointed out how CBDP animators discussed the technique of protecting cattle fodder and fuel wood.

**'What is the technique?'** we asked.

**'We can keep it on a high platform, so that flood water does not reach up to it,'** she replied as she showed us her buffalo shed where she kept these things. The fuel wood was kept atop a platform made of bamboos and the fodder was packed in big polythene packets and placed on bricks.

In Dhoighat village, under Dhoi panchayat, we found Shoba Devi doing a similar practice of keeping her fuel on a high platform inside her kitchen.

**'First is fuel and only then food,'** said Shoba Devi as if revealing a mystery, **'without fuel we cannot cook food.'** In 2007 flood, there was one and half feet water in her courtyard. **'All my fuel was destroyed since I had kept it on the ground, here and there, all scattered,'** she pointed out. Most of the 32 women in her women's group have taken up the practice of protecting fuel, she informed.

In Chiknatowa Sadai Tol, we had the glimpse of what is known as the mobile oven. **'This is handy,'** said Sumitra, **'as we can carry it anywhere and use it for cooking.'**

The CBDP villages in Dharbhanga seem to be celebrating disaster preparedness in almost every aspect of their lives.



(Above) Mamun Devi showing us how she stocked her cattle fodder and fuel wood. (Below) Shoba Devi with her fuel; Gorha.



LE GOUVERNEMENT  
DU GRAND-DUCHÉ DE LUXEMBOURG  
Ministère des Affaires étrangères  
et européennes

Direction de la coopération  
au développement et  
de l'action humanitaire

**caritas**  
L U X E M B O U R G