

Cyclone Phailin and after: Case Study of Bisu Soren and family



Bisu and his wife with granddaughter in front of his temporary hut which he constructed after the floods

Bisu Soren - son of Jayaram Soren, aged about 58 years is a resident of Daruha village in the GP-Mahagav¹, Bhogarai Block in the District of Balasore, Odisha state. He is a landless laborer with a family of seven members. He and his wife are daily wage earners and other members (sons and daughters) are dependent upon them. Bisu does occasional share-cropping as the daily wage is not sufficient to feed a family of seven. He lives in a two-roomed mud and thatched house, called a *kutchahouse*, with two sons and three daughters aged between 12 to 18 years. All are school drop-outs and do nothing except a son who helps occasionally in the share-cropping work. This year they had cultivated paddy in 50 decimile of land [sharecropping] and expected it would ensure the food security for the family for 4 months. But that was completely washed away by the recent floods.

Bisu states: "during recent floods after Cyclone Phailin, my house was completely submerged and destroyed. I along with other members of the family shifted to the village school, which was used as a temporary shelter by the Government. We had to stay there for 28 days as three consecutive floods took place this year. There was free food for 3 days. We received 25 kg of rice and Rs. 300.00 from the Govt. as relief which was not sufficient for the family. Now the major problem we are facing after the floods is absence of a proper house and non-availability of a daily wage. Over and above [sic], the standing crop is entirely gone. We both [husband and wife] are hardly getting 8 to 10 days of work a month now. I can not migrate out in search of work due to my old age."

¹**Gram Panchayats** (GP) is local self-governments at the village or small town level in India, and the Sarpanch is in charge of it. Under British Colonial rule role of Panchayats were strengthened. Whereas under the post-independence they were given little right of co-determination. After attempts to deal with matters on the national level panchayats were reintroduced as institutions of local self-governance in 1992.

Bisu has built a temporary hut by taking kind donations from the villagers. Unfortunately it is a pity that he is not eligible to be assisted by the government under the scheme *Indira Awas Yojana (IAY)* - a national scheme on housing to the poor, because he does not own a piece of land, which is the basic criteria for this assistance.

Bisu got relief assistance from Darbar Sahitya Sansad (DSS) supported by Concern Worldwide India during November 2013. Bisu says "we received food items like 3 kg flattened rice, 1 kg sugar, 2 kg Mung dal (lentils), 1 litre cooking oil and 1 kg of salt. The food items although they were not in good [sic] quantities (as compared to government scheme of 25kg rice for 1 Rupee) still it was very good quality, and because we got 2 kg dal and 1 litre of cooking oil which were the costliest food items and nobody would assist us with that. Normally our family occasionally tastes Dal as it is costly [around Rs.100 per kg], so Dal and oil was precious for us as food items which could last for two weeks."

The family also received a sanitation kit and shelter kit. The sanitation kit helped the family in fetching and storing drinking water, the soaps were also used for bathing and washing. The family also had lost household utensils during the floods. But the shelter kit was most useful for them relays Bisu. With the two polythene sheets, Bisu is planning to rebuild his old house, which was completely washed away: "I will take kind donations like straw and bamboo from the locality and rebuild the house, as the temporary hut hardly being sufficient" says Bisu. "Secondly the mosquito net will be used first time in our house, as we never used it before. Sarpanch has said it will reduce malaria. We would prefer that our children should use it" says Bisu.

Bisu needs 3 major things now to return the *status quo* before the floods. There should be a supply of adequate daily labour by anybody whether government or NGO. He also needs some assistance financially to start summer paddy [share cropping]. As he does not have anything to invest, either a grant or loan may help him to do that. Both the things would help him ensuring food security for the family. The third thing he wishes is that his house will be rebuilt properly and that it will withstand the next flood sometime next year.

According to DSS' Secretary Kedar Chaudhury today Bisu and his wife dream of having a proper house and sufficient food for the family. May God give him the mental strength to overcome the situation. But when we asked whether he is happy with this assistance from DSS/ Concern Worldwide or anything else he wished instead, he promptly said that the assistance was good during the difficult time "but Sir, I would rather prefer to opt for a labour intensive work in my area, which could give me daily wages for a longer time. That would be a better proposition."

Story by: Kedareswar Chaudhury, Secretary, Darabar Sahitya Sansad, Odisha, India, December 13, 2013.