

LEH FLASH FLOODS RAPID ASSESSMENT

August 9-12, 2010

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This assessment is to be followed up with a detailed Shelter and WASH assessment being carried (12-14 Aug) by a three member technical team from Redr India.

Areas of Assessment: Leh Town and adjoining areas/ villages – Choglumsar, Saboo and Tashi Gyatsal

Oxfam India Partners: None at the moment- Partner being identified

Background:

The town of Leh and its adjoining areas have been hit by massive flash floods on the night of August 05, 2010 (Early morning of Aug 06, 2010 between 00:00 – 02:00Hrs). The flash floods happened due to unprecedented and sudden cloud burst over the Leh town which caught the residents completely unawares resulting in heavy casualties. The number of dead has crossed 160 and the number of missing is around 700. Most of the old town has been washed away with the bus stand, BSNL communications hub and the radio town completely devastated. Majority of the people died while they slept and scores of families have altogether been washed away when they tried to escape from the floods. Hundreds are believed to be buried in 7-8ft of slush and mud. Search and rescue continues in the affected area especially for missing family members.



Location:

Ladakh- an autonomous district, under Karakoram, in the trans-Himalayan region of Jammu and Kashmir State is a remote region with high altitude topography rising to 20,000 feet. It is a large rain shadow region and classifies as a high land- desert. Ladakh is a vast landscape of wind, high desert and remorseless sun covering roughly 45,000 sq kms in area which is larger than the state of Himanchal Pradesh. Leh is the capital city of Ladakh and has a population of approximately 25,000 households.¹

¹ Content from discussions with the CEC of Ladakh Autonomous region (Tsirin Dorje), Ladakh Information leaflets and *Ancient Futures- Learning from Ladakh* by Helena Norberg-Hodge

Affected Population and areas:

Urban: Leh – Old town and Choglumsar

Rural: Sabu, Stakmo, Igoo , Phyang , Taru , Umla, Nimoo , Basgo , Ney

Approximately 6000-7000 households have been affected by the flash floods (directly and indirectly) which is around 20 % of the entire population of the Leh town. The vulnerability of these areas was also heightened by the fact that most of the washed away settlements were encroachments on civil land with very poor site planning and minimum access for emergency / evacuation services.

Access: Logistics

There is road access to majority of the affected areas and villages. There are however, certain isolated villages affected by the disaster, where road connectivity is difficult. Trucks carrying relief goods would have access to most villages.



The major issue is the road connectivity to Leh from Srinagar and Manali. Both are not accessible now. This is a concern especially if relief materials have to be bought by road to Leh, especially shelter materials etc.

The Leh town is connected with the rest of the country through air support from Delhi and Jammu with operators like Air India, Jet Airways and Kingfisher airlines. The Leh town is connected by two major

roads one from Srinagar and other from Manali. The CEC has suggested that the Border Roads Organisation is working round the clock to restore the roads. The Manali access would be restored in the next 3-4 days while the Srinagar route could take anywhere from 15-20 days. The major concern of the Ladakhi administration is that with approaching winters (all roads close by October) , stockpile of ration and other essentials have drastically reduced and of the two access routes cut off – the Srinagar route is the lifeline for Ladkash as the major depots for rations, cement, steel, bitumen, and other construction materials are all housed at Srinagar.



However, there is a possibility that the major roads to Leh would continue to operate even in November and December because the govt and the

military would need that access to stockpile for the winter.

Camps:

The number of the displaced include around 700- 1200 households in the areas like Choglumsar Shey village, and other areas. Most of the camps are located at higher ground where the people have moved owing to fear of a repeat flood event. Cooked food rations are supplied by the army and the administration. Dry food ration has been distributed once so far by the administration. The camps are made of tents provided by the army and the rest are makeshift tarpaulin or plastic shelters. Families in the camps have lost everything and many their relatives and family members. With approaching winter, these families are going to be the hardest hit, because they do not have the resources to quickly build or construct houses that can withstand the harsh winters here. Water to the camps is supplied by tankers managed by the army. Water is supplied once a day. During interactions with the affected households we were told that women and children travel a few kms to fetch water while the men go back to their destroyed houses to recover whatever they can. Handpumps are used in the area, but at the campsite area there was just one handpump and 400-500 (including host families) families depended on it.

Emerging Needs

The assessment team visited the areas in the Leh town and the adjoining villages like Tashi Gyatsal. The team interacted with the villagers who included women and children. The emerging needs of the affected populace are as follows:

Priority Needs

(as prioritised by the villagers and the CEC in separate interaction sessions)

1. Winterised Shelter
2. Drinking water
3. Hygiene structures (Bathing cubicles, Toilets and Water points)
4. Utensils for cooking
5. Gas stove

Shelter: Approaching winter

The single most important need of the people of the affected villages in Leh is shelter. The houses have all been washed away. The army has provided the some people with tents at distant hillocks. The people on their have managed to send the elderly and pregnant women to their relatives. The rest stay on in the vicinity of the damaged villages but at higher altitudes. They fear a reoccurrence of the flash floods. Many have managed to make makeshift tents on their own with



parachute materials. The tents provided by the army are good quality but do not have proper thermal insulation and with the approaching winter, the people face grave risk.

By mid of October winter would set in. the temperatures here by mid Nov and Dec would dip to -30. This would mean that the shelter support would have to address the use of thermal conditions within the shelters. Oxfam has brought in a shelter specialist from Redr to carry out a detailed shelter assessment and provide specifications for shelter design, which would be quick to build, cost effective and easy to make.

Logistics around shelter would be very challenging. Oxfam would have to procure and transport



all shelter materials into Leh by mid September. The cost of the shelter would be higher than the usual emergency shelter (plastic sheeting) that Oxfam provides in flood prone areas such as Bihar, Assam during emergencies. This component would also demand technical staff within the team. The approach would be to have prototypes built at strategic locations and shelter kits distributed to the community so that they build their own shelters. In addition, Oxfam would also recommend to the community that they use materials from the debris or damaged houses for shelter

construction in addition to the materials that Oxfam would provide. Our WASH intervention would seek to add value to the shelter work.

Public Health-Water Sanitation: WASH

The women folk have specifically asked for Bathing cubicles and toilets in the field interactions.



The team also ascertained that the lone hand pump in the camps is dysfunctional. Drinking water is an issue with people having to walk long distances to fetch water. Given that the families have moved to higher areas their access to water is now much more remote than before. However, one has to note that here in Leh and many adjoining villages drinking water was supplied by army tankers even during peacetime. Which means that there is a major water scarcity issue here in Ladakh.

It is important to note that there is a high degree of hygiene awareness in the area and almost all houses have latrines. It is said that 100% of the population use latrines. In Ladakh the latrine type that is used is dry pit type and

water is not used. Design for sanitation support would have to be aligned to the cultural practice here in Leh and the affected villages.

Debris cleaning is another major issue in the villages. Most of the villages are 2-3 feet under sludge and this needs a major cleaning operation. The army and the administration have put into service earth movers/ excavators for clearing up of the roads. However, villages need support through excavators to clear the debris and this is a major need expressed by the people affected by the floods. In the affected villages existing drains are all clogged and in need of repair and new drainage is required in many areas. Leh/Ladakh is an area where rainfall is very scarce. However, the government and local people do mention that rains have become frequent and people are not used to it. Infact, construction of houses is with unbaked mud bricks and these are said to be rather unreliable when it comes to combating rainy weather. The suggestion from the government during one of the coordination meeting has been that communities in Leh and Ladakh need to change the way they construct their houses and the materials that they use.

Livelihood support: Canal Repair: An area that has emerged as a major issue is the damage that has occurred to the irrigation canals/small channel that feed into the agricultural field in the villages. The canals are small channels that sources water from local springs. In Ladakh, 90% of agriculture is irrigated. Without these canals / or small channels people would be left without a livelihood and this would increase food insecurity. Most of the canals/channels are made by the community themselves and are unable to repair them because they have lost both their houses and are left with no resources.

As a part of the humanitarian response a component of support would include repair of major irrigation channels by Oxfam in some of the worst affected villages. Repair work would consist of those channels that are community owned and serve large community land for agriculture.

Approaching winter: Leh is situated at an altitude of almost 20,000 feet and is a place of few resources and extreme climate. With the winter temperatures dipping to minus 40 degrees centigrade, the civil administration and the villagers alike are very concerned about the need for safe and weather proof shelter options.

Gender – Women and children are worst affected by the floods. With approaching winter, the situation is turning even grimmer. A number of families (3-4) are living within the same tent and women's privacy is a major concern. During interactions with women members living in tents, they expressed the need for extra shelter support so that families can begin to live in a dignified manner. The tents provided by the army are not sufficient shelter for the families. This is more so because the tents are not suitable as shelter for the coming winter months.

Oxfam Response Mechanism and Support Needs (Early Reports)

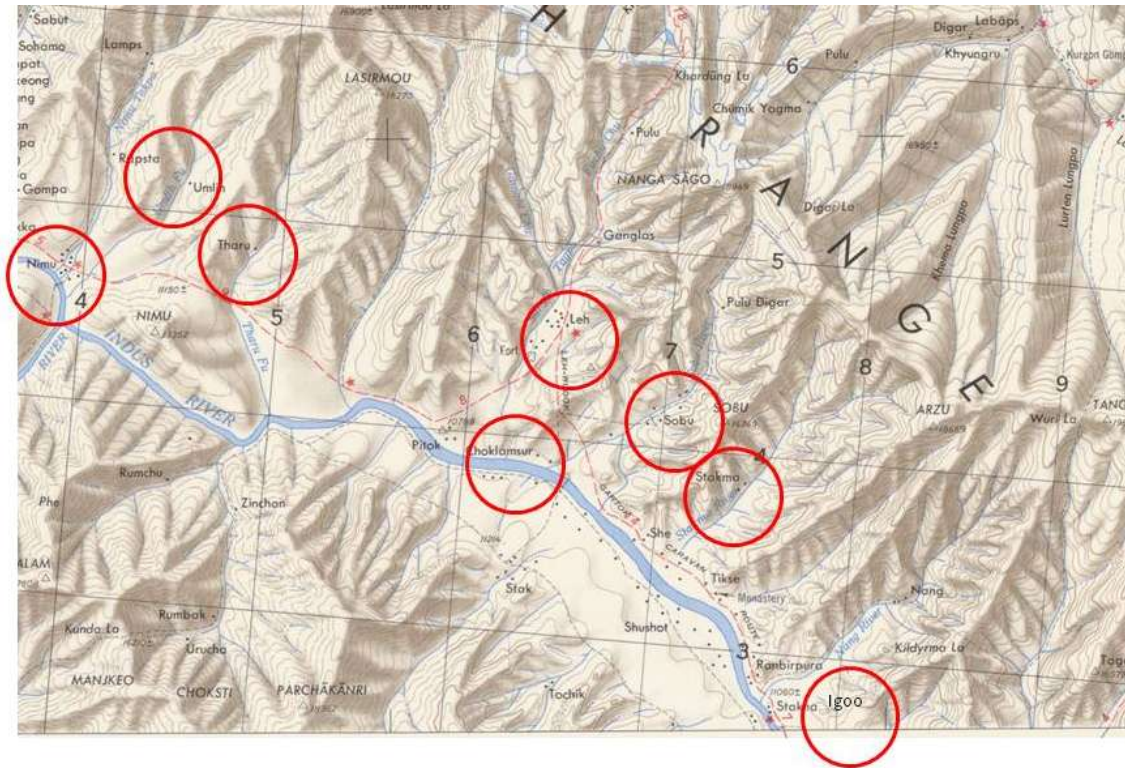
Warehouse: Oxfam has identified warehouse for response.

Office and Accommodation: Oxfam is planning to be operational in Leh. Oxfam staff are based currently in Leh.

HCC support:

Oxfam is closely coordinating the response with Hindustan Construction Company Company (HCC), and Redr India.

Map



Itinerary

Day / Date	Activity	Remarks
01- August 09, 2010	Field visits to Chogmulsar Interactions with HCC, CEC, Councillor (Saspul), RDY	
02- August 10, 2010	Field visit to She village and later to the camp area in the hill adjacent to Chogmulsar, Coordination meeting with NGOs Partner meeting on HR and budgeting and logistics	
Day 3	Meeting with Board members of partner NGO, debriefing of WATSAN and Shelter engineers; coordination	

	meeting with local NGOs; visit to the field	
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Role of Government

The government of Ladkha has been very proactive in responding in the region. However, given the remote access and the limited relief stocks, the administration is relying heavily on the Indian Army and the Indo Tibetan Border Police for help. The armed forces initially responded with quick actions like search and rescue as well as erecting bailey bridges, repairing broken bridges and ensuring smooth transit of the injured. The Indian Air Force has been ferrying relief supplies through their heavy lift aircrafts like IL-76. Foreign tourists are being airlifted from trek routes and also from Leh to Delhi.

Government has started distributing tarpaulin, flattened rice to the villages; but the amount is too small to cater to the needs of the victims. However, with no access to stoves and utensils to cook, the people cannot do anything. The Chief Executive Councillor has suggested that the people are already asking for cooking gas stoves and utensils. Given that Leh has its bottling plant for LPG, the availability of the cylinders may not be an issue.

Role of NGOs and INGOs

We have observed that there are a large number of tourists who have volunteered to help the affected population and have refused to leave Leh. They are involved in debris removal, search and rescue, and have moved to the affected area to help in any way they can. This is a large group, and they work either independently or join the volunteer corps of Ladakh Buddhist Association (Buddhist religious group) , Anjuman Moin ul Islam, Leh and other groups here in Leh.

Oxfam operations-

The team recommends supporting 2500 most affected families of 9 Villages around Leh Town in areas of **SHELTER and WASH Interventions. Oxfam India would be working with local partners in Leh.**

S.No	Affected Area
1	Nang
2	Stakmo Village
3	Choglumsar (Tashi Gyatsal Village)
4	Phyang Village
5	Taru Village
6	Umla Village
7	Nimoo Village
8	Basgo Village

9	Ney Village
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