

NEADS Assam-Humanitarian assistance to the communities affected by fire outbreak in Majuli, Assam

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Context

On 12th December 2022, a catastrophic fire erupted suddenly around 12:30 pm in Upper Sonowal village, located under the Majuli development block of Majuli district, Assam. The incident, whose exact causes are still being investigated, swiftly engulfed the homes and belongings of eight families, leaving devastation in its wake. Initial reports from the affected community suggest potential causes such as a short circuit, a burst LPG cylinder, or a fire that originated from a kitchen in the village.

The fire, spreading rapidly, razed houses, assets, properties, and essential belongings of the affected families within a short span of time. Local fire brigade teams promptly responded and managed to bring the situation under control by 3:00 pm, but by then, the affected families had lost nearly everything. Currently, these families are taking refuge in neighbouring communities within the same community area, seeking shelter among households that themselves face economic hardships.

The families impacted by this disaster belong to the Mishing tribal communities, who largely reside in floodplain pockets of the Brahmaputra River basin. Agriculture forms the primary livelihood of the Mishing people, supplemented by fishing and other related occupations. However, their lives are heavily influenced by the region's flood-prone nature, with annual deluges disrupting communication and inundating farmlands.

The Mishing community historically depended on the fertile riverbanks for sustenance, but recurring floods and displacement have forced them into makeshift shelters along river embankments. These households, displaced multiple times over the past decades, are among the most marginalized and landless communities in the region. Their traditional housing, known as Chang Ghar (thatched houses on bamboo stilts), was designed to withstand floodwaters during the rainy season but has proven insufficient against repeated inundations.

The annual floods have profoundly affected the Mishing people's livelihoods, leading to poverty and hardship. Agriculture, the backbone of their economy, suffers greatly from the impacts of flooding. These families, already vulnerable due to internal displacement and lack of land ownership, face heightened risks and challenges following the recent fire outbreak.

In light of these circumstances, urgent humanitarian assistance and support are essential to help the affected families rebuild their lives, restore their livelihoods, and secure stable shelter amidst ongoing hardships in Majuli, Assam.

The Project

The project '**Humanitarian assistance to the communities affected by fire outbreak in Majuli, Assam**' is a critical relief and early recovery initiative targeted towards individuals severely impacted by fire tragedy in the floodplain of the Brahmaputra river basin. This community-centered intervention will focus on Upper Sonowal village under Majuli development block, directly assisting 8 families (37 individuals) and impacting a total of 798 individuals. The primary objectives of this program are to provide immediate humanitarian aid, prevent and mitigate the impacts of the fire outbreak, and facilitate early recovery efforts among the highly affected families.

Specific Objectives of the Proposed Intervention:

1. **Addressing Specific Gender Needs:** NEADS will cater to the specific dignity and hygiene needs of 8 families in the reproductive age group by providing Dignity and Hygiene Kits. This initiative aims to ensure the well-being and dignity of affected individuals.
2. **Distribution of Essential Dry Rations and Nutrition:** The project will provide essential dry rations and nutrition support to 8 families for a period of 75 days to address food insecurity resulting from the crisis.
3. **Shelter and Non-Food Items (NFI) Support:** Affected families will receive support in housing through the distribution of shelter materials and essential non-food items, facilitating their recovery and stability.
4. **Educational Support for Children:** Children impacted by the fire outbreak will receive educational materials to support their continued learning and well-being during this challenging time.
5. **Hygiene Awareness & Sensitization:** NEADS will conduct hygiene promotion activities to raise awareness and sensitize the affected populations on mitigating public health issues post-fire outbreak.
6. **Early Recovery and Livelihood Restoration:** The project will focus on restoring the early recovery and livelihoods of affected families through income generation programs, helping them rebuild their lives and economic stability.
7. **Building Advocacy Linkages:** NEADS will establish advocacy linkages and ensure mainstreaming between affected communities and local administration and line departments, fostering coordination and support for recovery efforts.

Through these specific objectives and targeted interventions, NEADS aimed to provide comprehensive support to the fire affected families in Majuli, addressing immediate needs, promoting resilience, and facilitating early recovery and restoration of livelihoods. The project underscores the importance of community engagement, advocacy, and holistic assistance in the aftermath of a crisis, ensuring a pathway towards recovery and sustainable development in the flood-prone regions of Assam.