

Desperate Times call for *Calm Measures*...

"We were always under the misconception that in occurrence of disaster, the government would come to save our lives and property", said a flood victim of Balasagara VDC. These people now understand that entirely depending upon external help from agencies would be unwise during emergency situation like this severe flood. "Better awareness, alertness and appropriate action during the time of need is important to minimize loss", said 45 year old Rajeya Devi, an inhabitant of Barerawa Tole. Her house was swept away on the very first day when *Kamala* River changed its original path towards 4 kilometer west and flowed through Barerawa Tole of Balasagara VDC. She along with other neighbors moved their family members and material belongings to school and VDC premises which were identified as evacuation centers.

Balasagara VDC is one of the remotest VDCs in Dhanusha district, which is located on the bank of *Kamala* River. Every year flood threatens this community and disconnects their link from external worlds for a month or more. The roads, culverts and bridges to this VDC from headquarters get flooded and remain under water mostly through the monsoon season. Landline telephone services are unreliable in Balasagara. Due to poor network in the areas, mobile phones on the other hand are unhelpful in time of emergency.

Two wooden boats have been managed for transportation and relief service; one from CARE Nepal's community based disaster risk reduction project and a simple private boat belonging to a native sailor which is rowed by a bamboo stick instead of an oar. When the river has high current, the boat service becomes untrustworthy. In such situations people get stuck in the village for many days, says Ram Udgar Yadav.



there from nearby villages.

The persistent rain keeps cutting the bank rapidly bringing more houses in high risk of being swept away within a few days. More than 20 houses have already been swept away, 50 more are at risk and 20 other families have been evacuated to safe sites.

"The river changed its course after 31 years causing massive devastation", said one of the elder community members, Jibach Mandal. Since the last three years, his three sons have been working in the Gulf Country. They invested their earnings in building the six-roomed brick house where Jibach lived. The house got swept away overnight by the river. The number of inhabitants in Jibach's area has kept increasing with the increasing number of displaced families (flood victims) who come

Most of the young male members from these poor families are working in Gulf Countries as laborers and



needed resources to carry out the task more reliably.

and their families are indebted to moneylenders. Now with houses and lands lost within this short period; these already poor families are further more deprived. Loss of material properties equivalent to more than 8 million rupees and about 200 bigha¹ of cultivated land have been swept away within two weeks said Ram Udgar Yadav, chairperson of Disaster Risk Reduction Committee.

He added, since the last 13 days, all villagers have been keeping a watch on the river and have been involved in some community mitigation work. They have cut trees, branches to create a blockade for the river from entering the village. Another village leader, Ramworup Mandal expresses his uncertainty as to how effective such voluntary blocking efforts could be, in the absence of

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¹ 1 hectare=1.48 bigha (Nepali way of measuring the land)