

Dreams of a future swept away by flood...

38 year old Kaushilya Devi's husband, is now in an Arabian country. He has been working there since the last 10 years to provide for the family. Kaushilya and Paltu got married 26 years ago when Paltu was merely 16 years of age. Now he is 42 years old. Presently, Kaushilya lives with her two daughters, two sons (one of whom is married) and a daughter in law.

Paltu went to Arab, with a wish to earn enough to make a house where his family could all stay together to start a little business and live a simple comfortable life. Kaushilya, spent all the money that Paltu sent from Arab in building a house to fulfill her husband's wish.

In time of her marriage, Kaushilya remembers that *Kamala* River flowed 4 kilometers to the east from their village. 3-week long incessant rain that started since July 2007, flooded the river, changed its course and ended up flooding the entire village. Along with all villagers, Kamala also thought that the flood water was just the excess accumulated due to heavy rainfall. Nobody realized for days that the *Kamala* River, situated kilometers away from Kaushilya's home had changed its course and was flowing through where the village used to be. Once the rain died down after 3 weeks, turning into sporadic showers, Kaushilya realized that the river was flowing past her front door.



Kaushilya with her son in front of her damaged house

"River and snake never stay in the same place", says Kaushilya. She was stunned once it dawned on her that the pillars of her house were actually knocked down and swept away by the river and had not given way merely because of the accumulated excess water.

As the inside of her house started emerging in water, Kaushilya with 5 other family members, left the house during midnight and took shelter in the nearby school building. They were able to take away most of their material belongings but the priceless property - the house itself got destroyed.

Kaushilya gathered up whatever little courage she had left and informed her husband about the disastrous flood. In Arab, the news shocked Paltu Mandal to ill health. To realize that the hard labor and investment of a lifetime got swept away by a cruel twist of fate was more than he could bear. Kaushilya's tears have not dried even over a fortnight. She thinks she might feel better with time, but it worries her that her husband might never recover from the shock. The time her husband spent away from the family in hope of a future in Nepal has come to nothing. Before his dream had a chance to materialize, all efforts and investment of the past 10 years washed away.

According to Ram Udgar Yadav, a village leader, not only Paltu, other 20 young men in Arab, got shocked to ill health once they came to know about the flood back home. He further added, "We have no place to live at this point and don't know where to take these people". The flood victims won't be able to take shelter in the school and VDC premises for ever. Urgent support is required from the government to resettle these displaced families.

Manu Devi, a local woman, informed that as an immediate relief, the government has provided food (beaten rice and sugar) together with CARE Nepal (beaten rice and rice). Along with the food items, CARE has also provided non food items such as water purifier, plastics tarps and soft clothes for children and for the rest of the flood hit victims in the village. The boat provided by CARE Nepal is actually carrying the relief materials and evacuating people from the village.

During the field visit, CARE's team asked the victims what they would like to be conveyed to the district government. Their response was, as *Kamala* river has changed course and is flowing right through where their village used to be, they want the government to move them to some place else the soonest possible. They do not have it in them to face the next blow; as the monsoon will continue till September. They wanted to be assured of arrangements for evacuating them from the flood prone village and resettling them someplace safe.

The entire village comprising of 200 households wants to shift and resettle in a new area, immediately before the next disaster hits. These villagers do acknowledge that their learning from DIPECHO



SAMADHAN, the disaster preparedness project; actually came handy in preventing the loss of lives, their movable assets and properties. However, the flood being the biggest in the last 30 years, it was beyond the capacity of the community to predict, control or significantly minimize the extent of its damage.

Information collected on: 6th Aug 2007. Information and Photographs for the story have been provided by Rita Dhakal, Project Manager – DIPECHO SAMADHAN, CARE Nepal. The story is put together by Aparajita Acharya, Information Officer, CARE Nepal.



Kaushilya's son, in between his home and Kamala river