



# **NARRATIONS FROM THE MARGINS**

## **Voices of Manipur Flood Victims**

September 2015  
Anamika Dutt & Lorina Anal

## STOP PRESS

As Manipur coped with the worst floods in the past century in July-August 2015, Praxis visited the affected villages to take stock of ground realities. Narrations from the Margins: Voices of Manipur Flood Victims is a report based on the rapid assessment carried out. Below is a quick update on the situation on October 9, 2015, a few months after the floods.

- *Intermittent rains since October 5 have led to a rise in river water level*
- *A temporary bridge made of bamboo and wood planks that was built by the community after the floods got washed away. This was the only lifeline for the people of villages, including Rungchang. The bridge was serving its purpose, even though it could only be used by foot. It was too unstable for two wheelers or carrying load*
- *As of now, the villages are cut off from the nearest subdivisional town of Chakpikarong*
- *A few weeks after the flood, the Autonomous District Council of Chakpikarong tried to build a hanging bridge to supplement the temporary bridge built by the community. After laying the foundation, the work was taken over by the Border Road Task Force. But not much progress has been done till date. This was a crucial miss as it could have provided relief to the people of the affected villages*

## Reports from the Ground: Manipur Floods<sup>1</sup>

### A. Background

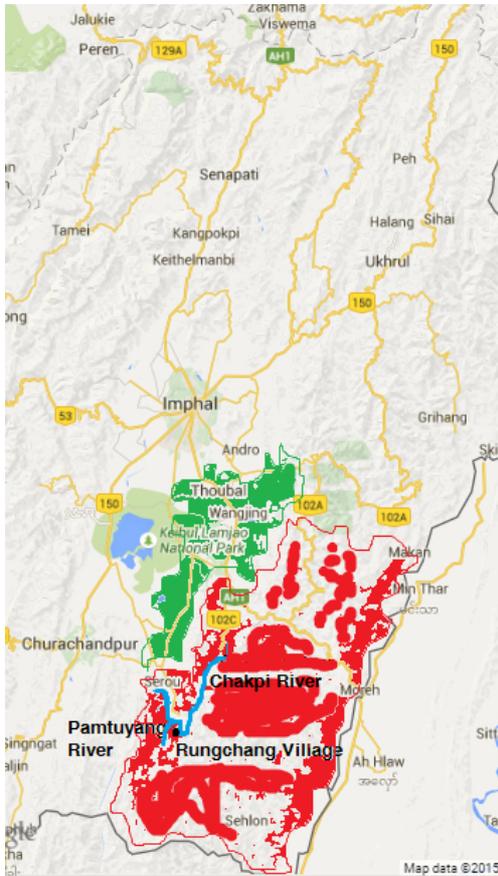


Figure 1: Flood hit areas

Chandel (formerly known as Tengenoupal district) was declared as a district on 13<sup>th</sup> May 1974. It borders with Myanmar on the south, Ukhrul district on the east, Churachandpur district on the south and west, and Thoubal on the north. The district is inhabited by several communities belonging to about 20 tribes, with a population of 144,028 (2011 census). The district lies on National Highway 39 with a total geographical area of 3,313 square kilometres in the south-eastern part of the state of Manipur.<sup>2</sup>

Many districts in Manipur were hit by floods in the month of July 2015, the effects of which were worsened by the overflowing of the Chakpi river. Rungchang village, located in Chakpikarong Sub-division, Chandel District, Manipur, was one of the most affected. Schedule Tribes form 99.83% of the population of Rungchang<sup>3</sup>. The village has 140 households consisting of 800 individuals.<sup>4</sup>

The rivers flooded Rungchang village on the 31<sup>st</sup> of July around 4pm. Several villagers were displaced and took shelter in the neighbouring villages.

Apart from Rungchang, several other villages, including Chakpikarong, Hringphe, Hnaleral, Chakpikarong Bazaar and Kh. Khunou/ Novokom in Chandel district and a few in Thoubal district were also affected by the floods according to media reports. Even though the water has subsided, the situation has not improved.



Figure 2: The series of photos show the Chakpikarong Bridge being washed away and the community coming together to build a temporary structure to ensure people can cross the river Chakpi.

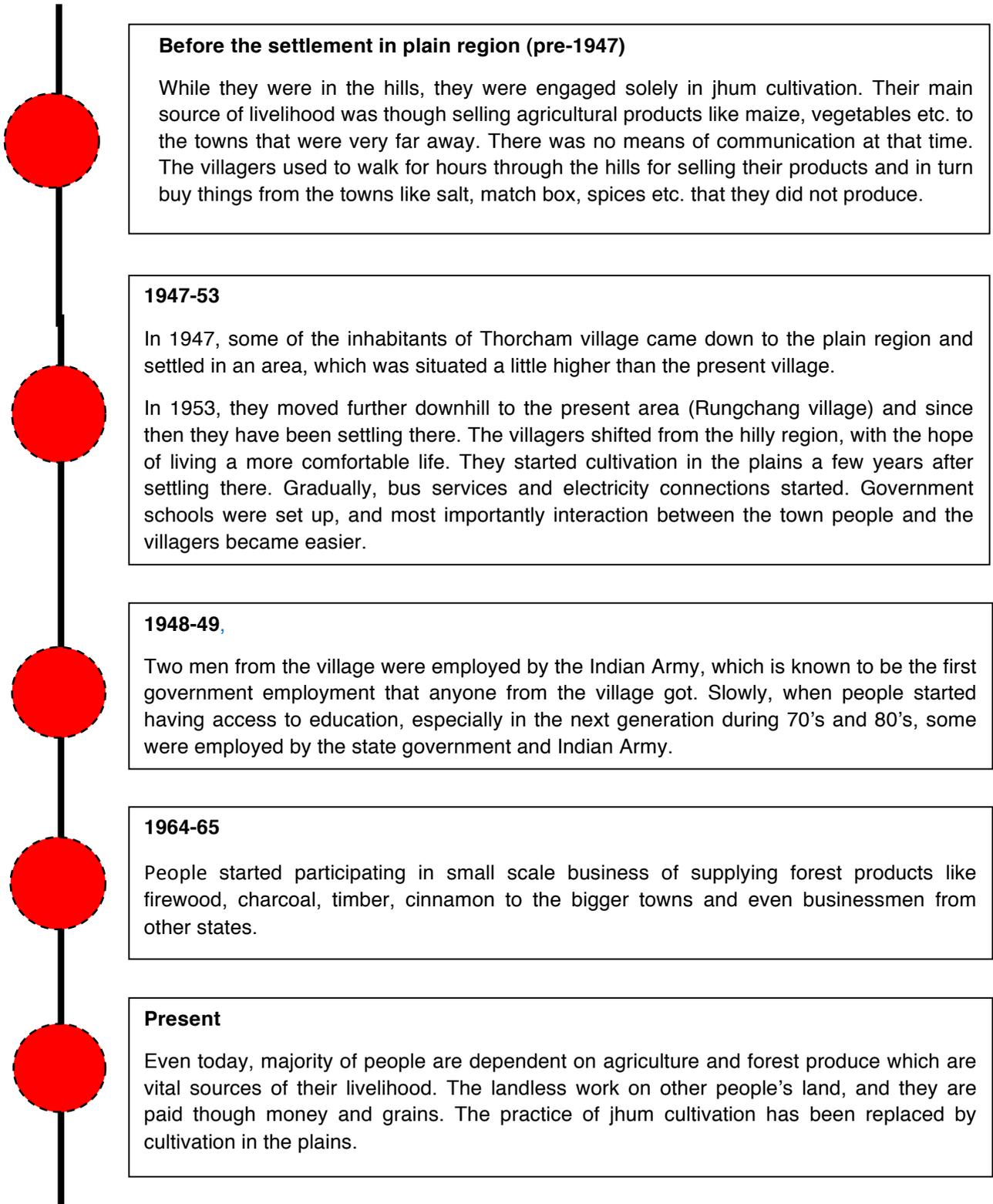
<sup>1</sup> This is a rapid assessment carried out of the situation in Manipur by a team from Praxis a week after the floods in Manipur.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.icssr.org/chandel.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Census 2011

<sup>4</sup> According to the 2011 Census, there are 115 households. The remaining 25 have not been included as most of them migrate for daily wage work and were left out of the enumeration.

## B. Historical transect



## C. Why the floods?

Heavy rainfall led the river Pamtuyang to overflow and flood Rungchang on the 31<sup>st</sup> July 2015, damaging almost all houses and displacing villagers. The villagers moved to neighbouring villages to

take shelter. The villages call this the worst flood in the state in the last century. Other villages lying near the Chakpi River were also affected. In the block of Khengjoy, Chandel district, the village Joumol was buried by a landslide, killing at least 20 people.

#### D. History of natural disaster

- Natural disasters have been very rare in Rungchang. In 1920, there was a flood caused by overflow of Pamtuyang river in the nearby area of present Rungchang village. However, this was hardly remembered by anyone as this did not cause any destruction
- In 1972, there was a drought which affected the cultivation of paddy. This led to a famine like situation in 1973. The staple food rice was partially replaced by maize and some other locally available food.
- The recent flood is the disaster that has occurred the third time in the last century. Apart from natural disaster, people from Rungchang village have been victims of ethnic conflicts (Naga-Kuki rivalry) during the 90s, during which many lost their life and property.

#### E. The scale of damage

**Table 1: List of villages with details of households affected by the floods**

Sl.No.	Name of Villages	No. of Affected Households
1.	Rungchang	136
2.	Chakpikarong	100
3.	Hringphe	30
4.	Hnaleral	20
5.	Chakpikarong Bazaar	30
6.	Kh. Khunou/Novokom	39
7.	K. Molnom	5
8.	Chahkap	7
9	Pal dai	3
10	T. Zion	1
11	Gelbungjang	1
12	Sillen	9
13	Gamngai	1
14	Kananphai	2
15	Phaijang	3
16	K. Phailen	2
17	Akaphe/KolpilTampak	9
18	SajikTampak	2

*Source: Sub-Divisional office, Chakpikarong.*

In Rungchang alone, 136 households were affected by the floods. Of this, 90% of the households were severely damaged. Many households lost paddy, which is the most important source of their livelihood and livestock.

The situation was worsened by the collapsing of the Chakpikarong bridge – the only bridge which connects the village to the nearby sub-divisional market and towns. The collapse of the bridge posed problems for transportation and travel, also leading to small businessmen accruing losses.

The scarcity of potable water was also cited. With the rivers having overflowed, water

resources for purposes of drinking, bathing washing were either scarce or not available. The burden of fetching water, from few water resources like streams and few hand pumps along with drudgery of displacement is a major setback for the community. The Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) provided a pipeline for water supply but people still had to commute at least half a kilometre to fetch potable water. The water supply from PHED is also not regular as the supply is divided among more than ten villages.

The villagers faced a lack in support to clear the mud and silt from their houses. Even though the water level has subsided, the after effects that the villagers were facing included inhabitable houses which are lying buried under 2-3 feet of mud. There has been no support or assurance from the government for reconstruction of houses affected by the flood, most of the people with whom the

Praxis team interacted pointed out that “we have not received any help from the state to clear the mud and debris from our house. We have to put everything from money to manual labour on our own.”

Public institutions and infrastructures like the government high school of the sub-division, community hall, anganwadi centre and the government aided primary school of Rungchang were affected. This led to preventing children from accessing education in the past weeks since the floods.

Some of the public offices did not manage to render services to the flood affected communities. Government veterinary doctors did not cater to the dying and sick animals, forcing people to approach private chemists to buy medicines. “My pig is sick and I have to go all the way to the chemist and buy an injection for which I have paid Rs 500”, said a resident of Rungchang village.

**Table 2: Quick glance at the ground realities**

<b>Recommendations from National Disaster Management Plan</b>	<b>On the Ground</b>
<b>First Contact</b>	
National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) will encourage identification of such situations and promote the establishment of mechanisms on the lines of Mutual Aid Agreement for coordinated strategies for dealing with them by the States, Central Ministries and Departments and other agencies concerned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Local Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA), Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) and District Commissioner (DC) were quick in responding to the floods.</li> <li>b. A minimum amount of fund has been received from local MLA, Autonomous District Council (ADC) and individuals. The money is being utilised for clearing blocked bridges and public road.</li> </ul>
Last mile connectivity at the disaster site for control and conduct of rescue and relief operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Villagers from other villages are carrying out relief operations in villages which have been hit by the flood.</li> </ul>
Decision makers and disaster managers at all levels.	NA
<b>Preliminary Aid</b>	
Role of the Nodal and Other Central Ministries and Departments- or various types of disasters, the nodal Ministry concerned will chart out detailed Response Plans, which will be integrated into the National Response Plan. The NEC may coordinate response in the event of any threatening disaster situation or disaster	Nothing from the departments which deals with disasters and relief. However, local bodies and state governments have been responsive
Role of State, District and Local Authorities- It is the primary responsibility of the State Governments/ State Disaster Management Authority (SDMAs) to monitor and assess any developing situation and keep the NDMA and NEC apprised of the same. They will also be responsible to constantly evaluate their own capabilities to handle that situation and project the anticipated requirements for the Central resources well in time	PHED, local Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA), Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO), District Commissioner (DC) and Autonomous District Council (ADC) have responded to the floods.
<b>Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)</b>	
Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) will be prescribed for activities like search and rescue, medical assistance and casualty management evacuation, restoration of essential services and communication at disaster sites, etc. The other important activities are provision of food, drinking water, sanitation, clothing and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. PHED has managed to provide a pipeline for water supply however people still have to travel for fetching portable water.</li> <li>b. Assam Rifles have helped in evacuation of villagers from areas hit by landslide.</li> <li>c. The Community health centres have</li> </ul>

<b>Recommendations from National Disaster Management Plan</b>	<b>On the Ground</b>
management of relief camps. Detailed SOPs will also be devised by all concerned for despatch, receipt and deployment of Central resources	been opened for the villagers. However, they shortages of medicines and doctors on a daily basis.
The relief needs to be prompt, adequate and of approved standards. Guidelines defining minimum standards of relief will be prepared by the NDMA.	The Assam Rifles provided tents to provide for make shift shelter for villagers.
Agencies to supply the necessary stores will be identified in the pre-disaster phase. The use of premises of educational institutions for setting up relief camps needs to be discouraged.	Agencies have set up relief camps as even educational institutions have been flooded and are closed. No relief camps were set up by any agency except the make shift shelter provided by the Assam Rifles. Most of the places where people stayed are mostly community owned.
Temporary relief camps will have adequate provision of drinking water, bathing, sanitation and essential health care facilities. Wherever feasible, special task forces from among the disaster affected families will be set up to explore the possibility of providing food through community kitchens, and provision of education through restoration of schools and anganwadis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. PHED has managed to provide a pipeline for water supply however people still have to travel for fetching portable water.</li> <li>b. There are no specific care or services which are formally in place for children, women, disabled and the elderly.</li> <li>c. Community kitchens were not set up.</li> </ul>
SOPs will be put in place for ensuring the procurement, packaging, transportation, storage and distribution of relief items, which needs to be carried out in an organised manner. The affected community and local authorities need to work in tandem in managing the relief camps.	Though community discussions we have found out that there is no clarity about the SOPs which are being followed.
<b>Post Disaster Reconstruction and restoration</b>	
Reconstruction plans and designing of houses need to be a participatory process involving the government, affected community, NGOs and the corporate sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The collapsed bridge has been replaced by laying wood planks, bamboos etc. to make a semi-permanent structure enabling volunteers and relatives from other villages to come and help in rehabilitation activities which have been helpful for the villagers in terms of support.</li> <li>b. Some NGOs have also been able to assess and intervene in the situation.</li> <li>c. Local MLAs have provided machinery to clear debris at the community level but the support for reconstruction of houses have not been clarified.</li> </ul>
<b>Livelihood Restoration</b>	
State governments will have to lay emphasis on the restoration of permanent livelihood of those affected by disasters and special attention to the needs of women headed households, artisans, farmers and people belonging to marginalised and vulnerable sections	NA
<i>Source: Based on field interactions</i>	

**F. Effects of the floods**

Villagers are facing destruction of infrastructure; houses in the villages are inhabitable still lying buried under 2-3 feet of mud. The situation was worsened by the collapsing of the only bridge which connects various villages to the nearby sub-divisional market and towns. The collapse also led to delayed relief because relief committees were unable to reach the villages. They were able to do so after two days of the floods. The nearby villages came together to build a semi-permanent bridge with the help of local materials like bamboo, wood planks to make Rungchang more accessible.



**Figure 3: A latrine that is used by at least 8-10 households**

Most of the village population is currently at the relief camps, issues which have been cropping up in the camps are of food, water, health, sanitation and other basic necessities; water and sanitation are the most crucial issues amongst these. The river which is the only source of water has remained muddy till now making it unfit for use.

*“In earlier years, the river water used to remain muddy for few days only when it rained, but this year, even after the rain has stopped the water remains muddy. We are in shock as we are experiencing this for the first time in our life”.*

-Siju (Name Changed)

Sanitation was affected as most of the household’s latrines/toilets are buried under mud, and could not be accessed. Therefore, the existing 2-3 community toilets were shared by many households. The varieties of food consumption had also reduced due to two reasons i.e. affected income and less availability of vegetables as most vegetable gardens were damaged/buried under the mud. This in turn affected the health of many due to the decrease in nutrient levels as the community’s diet was limited to pulses, grains and potato.

Villagers also needed support for building infrastructure within the village. Institutions and infrastructures like the government high school of the sub-division, community hall, anganwadi centre and the government aided primary school of Rungchang were affected. This prevented children from accessing education in the past weeks since the floods.



**Figure 4: Make shift shelters at community spaces**

*“Since the flood, we have not been earning even a single penny but only have to spend. Now that all petty businesses are on halt due to flood, we are really worried about meeting our daily expenses”.*

-Koko (Name Changed)

Livelihoods within the villages, especially of daily wage workers were affected.

The villagers faced scarcity in support to clear the mud from their houses. The issue of potable water was also high as the rivers overflowed and water resources for purposes of drinking, bathing, washingetc. are either scarce or not

available. The burden of fetching water, from few water resources like streams and few hand pumps along with drudgery of displacement is a major setback for the community.

### **Case story**

Khikhi (name changed) is a 28-year-old married woman; she has a daughter who is about two years old. Khikhi was in her last month of pregnancy during the flood. It was a more difficult situation for Khikhi's family as her mother-in-law is differently abled. During the flood, she helped herself and the child as her husband had to carry her mother-in-law with the help of a relative to a safe place. She said "it was not an easy situation at all because it was raining and slippery everywhere while we were running through a paddy field to a nearby village. I carried my daughter and a small basket on my back to the nearby village. I wonder how I managed to do that. There were also some other women along with me but they were also with young kids and hence it was not possible to ask them any help. I could not even ask any help from my husband. By the time we reached the nearby village, it was getting dark."

Within a week after the floods, Khikhi delivered her baby at the camp where she was living with her family. She could not have her delivery at the community health centre (CHC) situated nearby because of the poor state the centre was in after the floods. It was not possible to take her to one of the hospitals in the nearby town as the bridge had collapsed and it was too difficult to carry her in that situation across the temporary bridge. Therefore, she had to deliver in the relief camp itself with the help of a local health worker.

Scarcity of water and nutritious food was another severe problem that she and her family had to face. Hygiene was another issue with the kind of space available (make shift tent) that they lived in. The absence of a proper toilet only added to the situation. There was also the concern of the baby's well-being as the mother was deprived of nutritious food and exposed to unhygienic surroundings.

### **G. Coping mechanisms**

Being a tribal community, people were coping with hardships through their own indigenous knowledge and resources. The collapsed bridge was replaced by laying wood planks, bamboos etc. to make a semi-permanent structure enabling volunteers and relatives from other villages to come and help in rehabilitation activities which have been helpful for the villagers in terms of support.

There were no specific cares or services which were formally in place for children, women, disabled and the elderly. During the floods it was the men of the village who took care of various activities to help children, women and the elderly.

### **H. Response to the floods**

According to authorities, the response they got from the local Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA), Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) and District Commissioner (DC) were positive and quick. All of them came to the visit the affected villages without delay. Various NGOs, civil society organisations, Assam rifles, church bodies and local youth club helped in distribution of relief materials.

Some NGOs were also able to assess and intervene in the situation. Apart from relief material, a minimum amount of funds were received from local MLA, Autonomous District Council (ADC) and individuals. The money was being utilised for clearing blocked bridges and public road.

Based on the recommendations of the team led by Union Minister of State for Home Kiren Rijiju, the Centre sanctioned Rs 8.5 crores<sup>5</sup> as relief. Contrasted against the Rs 55 crores<sup>6</sup> spent on National Yoga Day for the 'wellbeing' of citizens and the immediate need of the flood-affected, the amount

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.newsgram.com/manipur-floods-centre-to-sanction-rs-8-5-crore-relief-fund/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/VzjFgC8zyqqZ8WT7AEBFOI/NDA-govt-spent-Rs55-crore-on-anniversary-Yoga-day-ad-push.html>

seemed low. The Centre sent the National Disaster Response Force teams to Manipur soon after the floods.

The government, which is usually quite vocal on the social media, was mute about the floods in comparison, with a few tweets here and there from ministers.

Ironically, the website of the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund had no mention of contributions which could be made for the floods in Manipur. The contributions for flood relief made by individuals were at a small scale and few and far between<sup>7</sup>. Forums for contributions on a larger scale were not set up. Structures for distributing donations, clothing and food in the form of aid and other basic goods had been informally set up.

### **I. Media reportage found wanting**

The NDMP states: "The media plays a critical role in information and knowledge dissemination in all phases of Disaster Management. The versatile potential of both electronic and print media needs to be fully utilised."<sup>8</sup> However, the floods in various districts of Manipur barely managed to surface on national news, though about 60% of the population was affected by it<sup>9</sup>.

The newspapers and news channels that did report the floods in Manipur limited their reportage to destruction<sup>10</sup> or the aerial assessment which was done by the Union Minister of State for Home Kiren Rijiju<sup>11</sup>. The mainstream media did not report much about the realities on the ground such as the coping mechanisms adopted by the affected communities, food provisions, how shelter was being organised or how aid work was being carried out. What seems to lend credence to the feeling of alienation often reported among people from North Eastern India is that 'godwoman' Radhe Maa's mini skirt and the blind bhakti<sup>12</sup> of her devotees managed to garner more media space during the floods.

Senior journalists like Rajdeep Sardesai initiated discussion on the social media by tweeting "**FloodsinManipur**, no news. Waterlogging in central Delhi big breaking news. And there lies the tragedy of 'natl' media." However, the acknowledgement is not enough. As the responses to Sardesai's tweets show, there could have been more movement in terms of reportage from the ground in the national media.

A few weeks after the floods, the situation approached normalcy but it was not completely safe. Several weeks after the floods, a news report in Imphal Free Press noted that flood relief activities were still on. A Praxis team on the ground also found continued action towards recovery from the floods.

### **J. Steps forward**

The National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP) states: "Mobile medical hospitals and other resources available with the centre will also be provided to the States/UTs in a proactive manner. Post-disaster management of health, sanitation and hygiene services is crucial to prevent an outbreak of epidemics. Therefore, constant monitoring of any such possibility will be necessary." Thus the first steps listed by the government in its extensive NDMP documents are hardly followed because of lack

---

<sup>7</sup> [http://epao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=news\\_section.Press\\_Release.Press\\_Release\\_2015.Manipur\\_Flood\\_2015\\_How\\_to\\_donate\\_to\\_Helping\\_Hands\\_Manipur\\_H2M\\_20150810](http://epao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=news_section.Press_Release.Press_Release_2015.Manipur_Flood_2015_How_to_donate_to_Helping_Hands_Manipur_H2M_20150810)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.ndma.gov.in/images/policyplan/dmplan/draftndmp.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.ibnlive.com/news/india/manipur-floods-affect-60-of-population-centre-to-sanction-rs-8-5-crore-1031202.html>

<sup>10</sup> 70 people were killed according to NDTV. <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/around-50-die-as-floods-landslide-hit-bengal-manipur-odisha-1203017>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.oneindia.com/india/rijiju-makes-aerial-survey-of-flood-hit-manipur-1828778.html>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.dailyo.in/politics/radhe-maa-religion-mini-skirt-satsang-sex-bhakti-godwoman-godman-asaram-hindu-gajendra-chauhan-dolly-bindra/story/1/5538.html>

of accountability mechanisms in place. The support provided by the government staff, especially in sanitation, was minimal and tokenistic. This needs to be adequately addressed.

On the other hand the media needs to ensure that such disaster situations are reported with inputs from local sources who would be best placed to provide accurate data and analysis because of their proximity to the situation.

Monitoring of the distribution of development aid is vital to ensure accountability and transparency from the state as well as the donor agencies. For this, community involvement is a must.



[www.praxisindia.org](http://www.praxisindia.org)  
[info@praxisindia.org](mailto:info@praxisindia.org)