

Early Warning in Action: Kanchanpur, Nepal

Floods and landslides pose a significant risk to a majority of communities in Nepal. The Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium Flagship 4, Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction (CBDRR), is focused on supporting communities reduce their vulnerability to natural disasters, particularly floods and landslides. A crucial aspect of reducing this vulnerability is ensuring a community based early warning system (EWS) is implemented and sustained for upstream and downstream communities. Mercy Corps has been a leading partner in community based early warning and CBDRR in Nepal.

Supported by ECHO through its VI DIPECHO Action Plan for South Asia, Mercy Corps has been implementing CBDRR in Nepal, which includes community based early warning. This work is being implemented in Kanchanpur district in 2012. This is the first project of its kind to be implemented in Kanchanpur. As a result, there has been no recorded data on river and rainfall levels, making it difficult to ascertain threshold levels of water that would affect downstream communities. In the first year of this project, the focus has been on

operational capacity and developing the knowledge needed for sustained EWS in the future.

On 18 and 19 September 2012, heavy rainfall was recorded across Far Western and Western Nepal. This downpour created significant flood risk and tested the operational capacity of EWS in Kanchanpur.



Damages caused by floods on 18 and 19 September

As a result of the established EWS in Kanchanpur, no casualties were reported and many families were able to evacuate their homes before the oncoming flood with their livestock and other valuables. In Tiliki, community members have stated that the early warning system provided enough time to store grain supplies on upper floors. While many homes were inundated due to floods, families were able to prepare and respond in a timely fashion because they were

given enough time to act.

Effective implementation of the EWS during this flood relied heavily on community and government gauge readers, who were crucial in recording water levels and communicating flood risk to downstream

communities. While the EWS in Kanchanpur proved to be a success, there are areas that require strengthening. Particularly, communications networks during the flood were either down or congested, making it difficult for individuals to disseminate flood related information to all stakeholders.

While there were certainly setbacks, the performance of the EWS in its first year in Kanchanpur has been remarkable. The 18 and 19 September floods also provided an opportunity to record important information on threshold levels. This information will feed into improving the EWS in Kanchanpur to ensure communities receive timely warning to react to flood risk. A sustained EWS will save lives and livelihoods in Kanchanpur.