



Shubhodaya

AN ENDEAVOUR FOR THE FLOOD AFFECTED FAMILIES IN NORTH KARNATAKA 2009-2013



National Dalit Watch – NCDHR and Human Rights Forum for Dalit Liberation – Karnataka

About

National Dalit Watch

The National Dalit Watch (NDW) is an initiative coordinated by the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR). NDW emerged out of informed recognition of the rampant discrimination and exclusion faced by Dalit communities during disaster response during the Indian Ocean Tsunami and Bihar floods 2007-2008. As an advocacy unit focused on equity and inclusion in Disaster Risk Reduction, NDW engages in studies and develops tools and methods to identify, render visible and document forms of caste based discrimination in disasters. Additionally, it capacitates community based organizations concerned with Dalit Rights, as well as local activists, and community leadership in various parts of India to effectively monitor discrimination and exclusion during disasters. Finally, NDW collaborates closely with humanitarian stakeholders, including the SPHERE agencies, ECHO and UNDP, including the State authorities. Through evidence based advocacy and mobilization, NDW works towards instituting a policy environment that recognizes such discrimination and aims to define the entitlements of survivors in a manner that holds the state accountable.

The Human Rights Forum for Dalit Liberation – Karnataka

The Human Rights Forum for Dalit Liberation – Karnataka (HRFDL-K) is spearheaded by members of the Dalit community. The Karnataka-based activists who make up the movement have been active members of various social movements, particularly the Dalit SangharshSamiti (Dss). HRFDL-K was brought into being in order to accelerate the Dalit struggle in Karnataka by employing a Human Rights perspective. The forum differs from other Dalit groups in a number of key aspects. Most importantly, it upholds the values of gender equity and promotes Dalit women leadership through a transparent, decentralized, and participatory approach in all its initiatives. HRFDL-K's major target groups include community-based organisations (CBos) headed by women, Dalit lawyers, Dalit Panchayat members, and Dalit students. Lobbying and advocacy efforts at the state level are complemented by campaigns at the grassroots. These include land struggle movements, panchayat election campaigns, campaigns for justice in cases of caste violence, as well as regarding violence against Dalit women, a push for the Right to education of Dalit children, food security [ICDS& NREGA] and Right to Health campaigns, initiatives for SC/ST hostels, the implementation of reservations (especially in the private sector), and the struggle against the impacts of globalisation.

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Shubhodaya is a Kannada word and means 'a better dawn'.

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Cover People walking across the river Bhima to Khedagi village, Block Indi, Karnataka. The Bhima river is a major river in southern India which is prone to flooding during the monsoon seasons.

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Preface

The caste system in India can be described as an elaborately stratified social hierarchy with inherent inequalities. Historically, the caste system has regulated the social and economic life of the Indian people. More than 165 million people - 1/6th of the total population in India - are subjected to discrimination, exploitation and violence on the basis of caste, which not just divides but also decides the vocation of the people depending upon their place within the hierarchy.

Socially, Dalits (constitutionally termed, Scheduled Caste) are placed outside the graded caste system of Indian society. Atrocities and violence, sub-human status, denial of basic human needs and public facilities, denial of land rights, infringement of civil liberties, de-humanizing living and working conditions, impoverishment, high levels of illiteracy and continuing ostracism etc., are some of the extreme human rights violations faced by them. Due to poor implementation of affirmative action policies and legislations, the government has failed to curb the menace of caste-based discrimination which persists in urban and rural India.

The imminent social, economic and political marginalisation have rendered Dalits vulnerable to natural calamities, as has been studied and documented conclusively. Already living on the fringes, their geographical location and socio-economic and political positioning, leaves no room for them to anticipate, cope and recuperate from the impact of disasters.

Over time, the Government of India and Humanitarian agencies have opened up to dialogue on the issue, and begun to understand the impact of caste induced vulnerabilities during disasters. This allowed for further negotiations to make inclusion for caste affected communities a reality. While the Disaster Management Law of 2005 (Chapter XI, Miscellaneous section) prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex, caste, community, descent or religion, the endeavour is to get the state to explicitly acknowledge caste as a social determinant for vulnerability that cuts across markers of age, gender and disability. Unless all assessments take this into account, and report in a disaggregated fashion, the most vulnerable will continue to be excluded by omission. Disaster Management needs to imbibe Human Rights principles of social justice and substantive equality into the policy framework, as well as disaster management laws and guidelines.



A Dalit house in Kotyal Village, Bijapur district, Karnataka. *Jai Bhim* literally means "Victory to Bhim," i.e., to Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar, a prominent civil rights leader, and the principal architect of the Constitution of India.



Caste destroys public spirit, public opinion & public charity. His responsibility is only to his caste. His loyalty is restricted only to his caste. Virtue has become caste- ridden & morality has become caste bound. There is no sympathy for the deserving. There is no appreciation of the meritorious. There is no charity to the needy. Suffering as such calls for no response. There is charity, but it begins with the caste and ends with the caste. There is sympathy, but not for men of other castes.

~ **Dr. B. R. Ambedkar** (Annihilation of Caste)





Karnataka Floods - 2009

Around 18 million people were affected by the floods.

The October 2009 floods in North Karnataka were the worst in the recent times. The floods claimed more than 230 lives, inundated around 4,300 villages, damaged 220,000 hectares worth of crops, and destroyed more than 600,000 houses, 400 schools and 1050 anganwadis.

The catastrophe that struck Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh in September–October 2009 will remain etched in the memory of the people forever. The destruction left scores dead, rendered millions hungry and homeless, flattened lakhs of acres of standing crops, and orphaned and dislocated many more.

According to the Karnataka government sources, 6.55 lakh (over half a million) houses had collapsed; 7,882 livestock perished; 4,292 villages affected in 75 talukas (blocks) across 14 districts, of which 346 villages need complete rehabilitation. In all, 400 schools and 1,050 anganwadis have been washed away, and 3,000 more schools severely damaged.

The loss that these figures manage to capture is an understatement when compared with the mental agony that the people have been going through. Weeks later, when the flood-hit populace limped back to life, they were in for another shock. The world around them had changed dramatically. In some places, there was no sign of the past at all. As it is, life was hard for a majority of the affected populace. The second round of agony struck them without a respite. Death, disease, hunger, deprivation, dispossession, distress migration, rural indebtedness, and unremitting poverty stalked them relentlessly.

A tragedy of such monumental proportions naturally called for mammoth relief operations. Caught unawares, the Karnataka Government launched emergency operations focusing on immediate relief and rescue efforts. However, the devastation was so widespread that by the time the relief teams reached the flood-hit places, the victims had already suffered the worst ever crisis of their lives.

Amidst such a crisis, however, some things remained unchanged. The people were up against a system that is yet to respond whole-heartedly to the grief-stricken lot. Although the fury of the floods was indiscriminate as it wreaked havoc on every living thing under its spell, the Dalit population found itself left out of the relief and rescue operations for obvious reasons. Thanks to the age-old caste system that inevitably relegates them to the background; the plight of the Dalits lays bare serious violation of human rights.

Excerpt from, "Exclusion of Dalits in Flood Rehabilitation, Karnataka 2009", a report of National Dalit Watch

Emergency Response,
what went wrong?





Inappropriate Emergency Response

During enumeration, several Dalit families were left out of immediate relief distribution.

The Karnataka State Government initiated immediate relief and rescue efforts. Community kitchens (*Ganji Kendra*) were opened for the affected families and more than 1000 relief camps were set up across Northern Karnataka. Most relief materials were primarily given to the dominant caste families and even in several *Ganji kendras*, food was not served to Dalit families. The communities reported that in a few villages the *Ganji Kendras* were shut down after a month, leaving people to fend for themselves.

While many families received compensation worth INR. 37,000/- for damaged pucca houses and INR. 7,000 for other damages, Dalits' losses and damages were not even recognised and enumerated, being 'insignificant' small they were. In many villages, the village accountant and the secretary refused to set foot in the Dalit colony to assess the damage. During the survey, many Dalits complained that the officials sat in *panchayat* offices or temples and fixed the compensation arbitrarily.





Biased damage & loss assessments

The relief and recovery programme needs to address the socio-cultural realities of the communities and ensure participation of vulnerable sections into the recovery and rehabilitation processes.

Sixty-year old Revansiddha Jannappa Patne Madar, from Nagarhalli village lost his house to the ravaging floods. He was part of the initial beneficiaries list. Revansiddha left to work in Maharashtra and upon his return to the village, he was no longer considered a beneficiary for the housing entitlement. The local officials paid no attention to his pleas and as a result he had to take a loan to construct a new house.

The government representatives, conducted the initial survey in a very shoddy manner. Many Dalit families who were genuinely affected were left out and families who were out of town for employment were not even enrolled in the initial list. Damage assessment was biased and based on peripheral information at the convenience of the officials. Information was collected sitting in *panchayat* offices to which Dalits didn't have access under normal circumstances.

Community participation was negligible in the entire survey and the existing prejudices were evident in the way data was collected and recorded. The officials relied on *sarpanchas* for damage and loss information, which left out the Dalits from enumeration. As a result, the initial relief turned out to favour the dominant caste groups. Thus, lacking sensitivity to the ground social realities.





Inhospitable temporary sheds

The programmes should be designed in such a way that they are sensitive to the rights of Dalits and the other most vulnerable communities relevant to their socio-cultural and economic (livelihood) needs.

After the 2009 floods, the government built 2058 temporary shelters (tin-sheds) for the flood affected families in the Bijapur Block. Caste discrimination was evident during the allocation of temporary shelter after the floods. Members of the dominant castes chased Dalits out of the sheds constructed to house the victims immediately after the floods. The former could not tolerate the fact that the 'untouchables' were seeking shelter right next to their sheds. Even in cases where Dalits were able to occupy the sheds, segregation occurred quickly and they were once again sent back to the periphery. The situation was further compounded by lack of basic amenities including safe drinking water and toilets for women.

The community reach-out and assessment process should use participatory methods to further effective inclusion than depending on partial and peripheral information. To ensure the concerns of Dalits are counted in, the only approach is to directly reach out to them.

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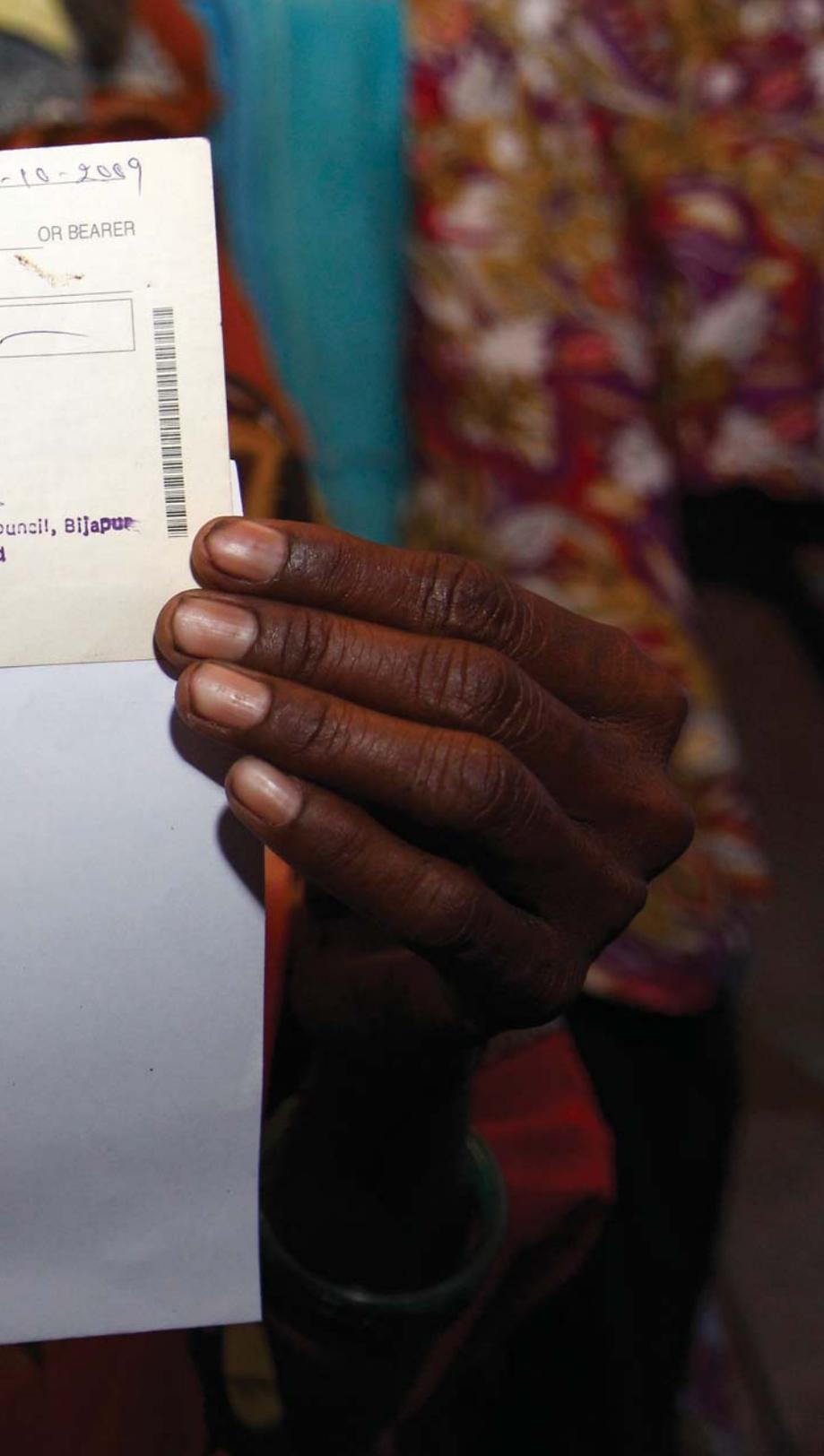
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Name **BEHAR DREMA**

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Unfair Compensation

Thirty-nine year old Prema Jagrup Benkar is a widow and her family has been living in Ibrahim Roza slum for the past 15 years. The slum is comprised of 40 families that have come from Mahmadpur, Uttar Pradesh, and settled in the Bijapur city. They are popularly known as ratt wale (cardboard waste pickers) in the area and their houses are also made from cardboard.

She was given a cheque of Rs 37,000 as compensation a month after the floods. It was taken away from her the very next day by government officials under the pretext that her family did not own the land. They were compensated with a mere pittance of Rs. 2000. Eight families in the area were given compensation that was later cancelled by the officials.





Non-participatory approach

No disaster can be dealt effectively only with administrative set up, alienating the varied forms of vulnerabilities and exclusions suffered by the vulnerable communities.

The government followed a non-participatory approach in building shelters for the affected families. The construction of shelters was allocated through a contract system without consulting the local community. This resulted in dissatisfaction amongst the community because of poor construction quality. Due to the lack of drainage systems the newly built toilets are still not in working condition. The post disaster housing reconstruction was not an owner driven process and did not give the affected Dalits the chance to have a say in the planning process at any level.





Unfriendly procedures

Tedious government processes and unfriendly environment serve as deterrents for the affected families in claiming their entitlements.

During disasters, no organization focuses on the essential paperwork that the allocation of entitlements. In addition there is hardly any help available to the calamity stricken survivors in the procurement of said entitlements. Especially Dalits and other marginalised groups frequently even lack information on the type of entitlements they can claim and the procedures to do so.

The tedious process of unfriendly paperwork, poor departmental coordination and clarity, and upfront discrimination while going through the government system often discourages Dalits from approaching the authority/ duty bearers. Hence, they require external facilitation, particularly at the time of disasters. Awareness generation and dissemination of information on the rights and entitlements of victims of disasters should be ensured by the government at the local levels and be included in the DRR work of humanitarian stakeholders.

The onus should be on the duty-bearer (the state) and not on the affected (the rights-holder) to ensure entitlements are secured.





Rows of incomplete constructed shelters in Tegalli village, Indi Block, owing to land dispute.

Shelter reconstruction

Current Scenario

The quality of construction, the lack of basic infrastructure and the distance of the new shelters from the native villages are some of the major issues faced by the community. In many cases, the constructed houses have not been officially handed over to the affected families. Following the floods, a total of 140 villages were to be rehabilitated completely. Four years ago, the State Government constructed 51,030 houses under the Aasare scheme, with the assistance of donors. Yet, as many as 19,038 (37 per cent) of them remain unoccupied to this day.

Many instances of atrocities against Dalits came to the fore when the district units of the HRFDL-K visited the flood-hit areas immediately after the floods. Struck by the blatant bias against the Dalits, the HRFDL-K and NDW, came together and stepped up their efforts, toured many flood-hit villages, and gathered information on such incidents. Meanwhile, it met some Bangalore-based NGOs that had participated in the relief operations. Their reports revealed that discrimination against Dalits was widespread and that in some places, the NGO staff was not even allowed to enter the Dalit colonies by the local officials. The latter, while giving priority to the needs of the dominant caste people, had reportedly ignored the pleas of the Dalits for basic human needs like food, clothes, and shelter. Also, the victims' repeated requests to survey Dalit colonies had fell on deaf ears.

The objectives of the joint interventions were to figure out if Dalits received equal attention and care as did the dominant caste people when the relief operations were underway; to check whether the response initiated by the government was helpful; to assess whether the compensation given for the losses suffered was sufficient; and also to explore the current situation in general, and the plight of women and children in particular.

Interventions 2009-2013

National Dalit Watch

&

Human Rights Forum for
Dalit Liberation - Karnataka





People centered approach

Besides monitoring relief and rehabilitation activities of the Government, it is impertinent to empower the communities with information.

The team visited the flood-hit areas immediately after the floods and gathered evidence in three worst affected districts of North Karnataka, namely, Bijapur, Raichur and Yaadgiri.

The surveys conducted exposed discrimination at various levels and violations of human rights in both relief and enumeration processes. The survey called for a collective action upon gathering firm evidence for the families seeking their rights.

Moreover, getting the voices of the survivors to the forefront was essential to empower the families with information on the entitlements of which they were oblivious. HRFDL-K involved the Dalit leadership, the village presidents (sarpanches), women and youth in all its activities during the assessments. This way, the movement generated a lot of awareness and solidarity among affected families and created a cadre of women and youth volunteers across the districts of intervention.

KAS

Addl. Dy. Commissioner, And
Addl. Dist. Magistrate Bijapur



Engaging with the State

The survey gathered substantial evidence to engage with the state actors to demand corrective actions and ensure recovery aid to the excluded Dalit families.

- HRFDL-K reached out to the State Human Rights Commission through a Public Hearing to facilitate a more inclusive rehabilitation approach.
- The initiative resulted in the notification to District Collectors across the affected region to initiate corrective measures.
- Memoranda were submitted to the district collectors and other concerned officials from time to time seeking redress and action on the specific problems and issues concerning the survivors.
- Consistent follow-ups were done to ensure the government departments addressed the issues and initiated suitable actions.
- Through the Right to Information Act, the authorities were made to provide disaggregated information and report on the steps taken by the government in combating the floods.
- Efforts also led to a government re-survey of the areas and hence the enumeration of Dalits who were left out initially from the list of beneficiaries.

Pressure on the concerned authorities eventually mounted as HRFDL-K didn't allow the Dalit struggle for fair relief and rehabilitation to lose its momentum. Thus, when Dalits were enumerated, other communities who had been left out were also taken note of.





Involving the Media

Media advocacy ensued in wide reporting of the issues of caste based discrimination just in time.

While advocating rights and entitlements with the state machinery, the survey findings were also shared with the national, state and local media representatives, who were periodically briefed about the plight of the Dalit families; the inadequate government responses and the efforts made to secure the entitlements. The media was receptive and supportive in handling the survey findings. The issue of inappropriate and faulty compensation was one of the most important aspects of rehabilitation and received maximum criticism in the media, thereby, ensuring better compliance and accountability at the ground level.





Mobilising the flood survivors

Sustained efforts post floods have led to the formation of collectives of the survivors of the catastrophe, which are now proactively leading the struggle to securing the entitlements.

In Karnataka, the affected communities demonstrated their rage over biased processes of enumeration and compensation, which led to the suspension of the village accountant. The formation of a committee, called the Bijapur Rehabilitation of Victims of Flood, was facilitated at the district level.

Since 2009, HRFDL-K has mobilized community members across 40 villages in Bijapur district and has organized public programmes voicing the demands to the district administration for basic amenities to the rehabilitated beneficiaries.

On the other hand, National Dalit Watch amplified these concerns and advocated for urgent attention at the national level with the humanitarian agencies, including the state. Based on these evidences, policy dialogue was carried out consistently with the National Disaster Management authority and State authorities.



Handwritten signature: *Arjun...*

Handwritten text: *Project - 2015*



Strengthening volunteer cadres

Engagements with the flood survivors empowered them towards resilience and equitable Disaster Risk Reduction.

NDW has held periodical orientation workshops with the identified volunteers on Vulnerability Mapping and Inclusion Monitoring (VM-IM) processes. In September-October 2011, the testing of its VM-IM tool was initiated in 30 villages across the districts of Bijapur, Raichur and Yadagiri, with 200 trained volunteers. The volunteers shared their insights with the community and identified the problems they faced before and during disasters. This tool has also been sharpened with its consistent application not just in Karnataka but also other states of NDW's interventions, in consultations with several humanitarian stakeholders.





Success Stories

Laxmibai – a volunteer

Thirty-eight year old Laxmibai Madar from SC Colony, Agarkheda village, is physically challenged. She is also a volunteer and has received training on Vulnerability Mapping and Inclusion Monitoring pre and post disasters.

She conducted vulnerability mapping exercises for four wards in her village. Laxmibai also sensitized the villagers on risks of hazards (floods and droughts), the preventive measures, and helped them put forward their grievances to government departments. She continues to advocate for the provision of basic amenities in the village like, water and sanitation.





Entitlement secured

Sixty-year old Gangabai is a widow and works as a daily wage labourer. Her daughter is married and she lives alone in a mud house in Nad KD village. She earns around Rs 400-500 a month as work is not easily available. Somehow, she manages to fulfill her day-to-day needs.

Her house was partially damaged during the floods and after continued efforts she received a compensation of Rs. 5000 in 2009. However, the classifications of damaged houses as partially and fully damaged is already contested, if aiming at resilience, as in both cases, the house is rendered uninhabitable.

Gangabai has also been helped in availing the Government Pension Scheme Sandhya Suraksha.





Re-orienting schemes towards the most vulnerable

In 2012 the HRFDL-K team conducted a survey along with the village accountant and village secretary in Nad BK village. A year later in 2013, the panchayat helped him to get the houses sanctioned under the *Baswa Basti Yojna*.

The beneficiaries, Kanappa Doni, 55 and Shantabai Koti 45, had suffered crop loss and had completely lost their thatched house during the floods. They had somehow repaired their hut using their own resources, which was very difficult for them.

Now with the interventions made with the administration, their house is in the second phase of construction.





Enabling Livelihoods

Malik Arjun's wife Sunanda Malik Arjun Harijan is a member of Bhiabai Mahila Swasahaya Sangh, a Self Help Group (SHG) in Karjol village. After the floods, the SHG was helped in getting a loan of Rs. 2.5 lakhs. The 16 SHG members shared the money amongst themselves.

With the help of the loan that was secured by his wife, and drawing on additional credit and his savings, Malik Arjun, purchased a brick-making machine for Rs. 40,000. Each brick is sold for Rs. 20 and earns a profit of Rs 5.

Earlier he would go to Maharashtra, the bordering state, for work, but now his financial situation has improved drastically. He also provides employment to the people working with his brick-making machine.





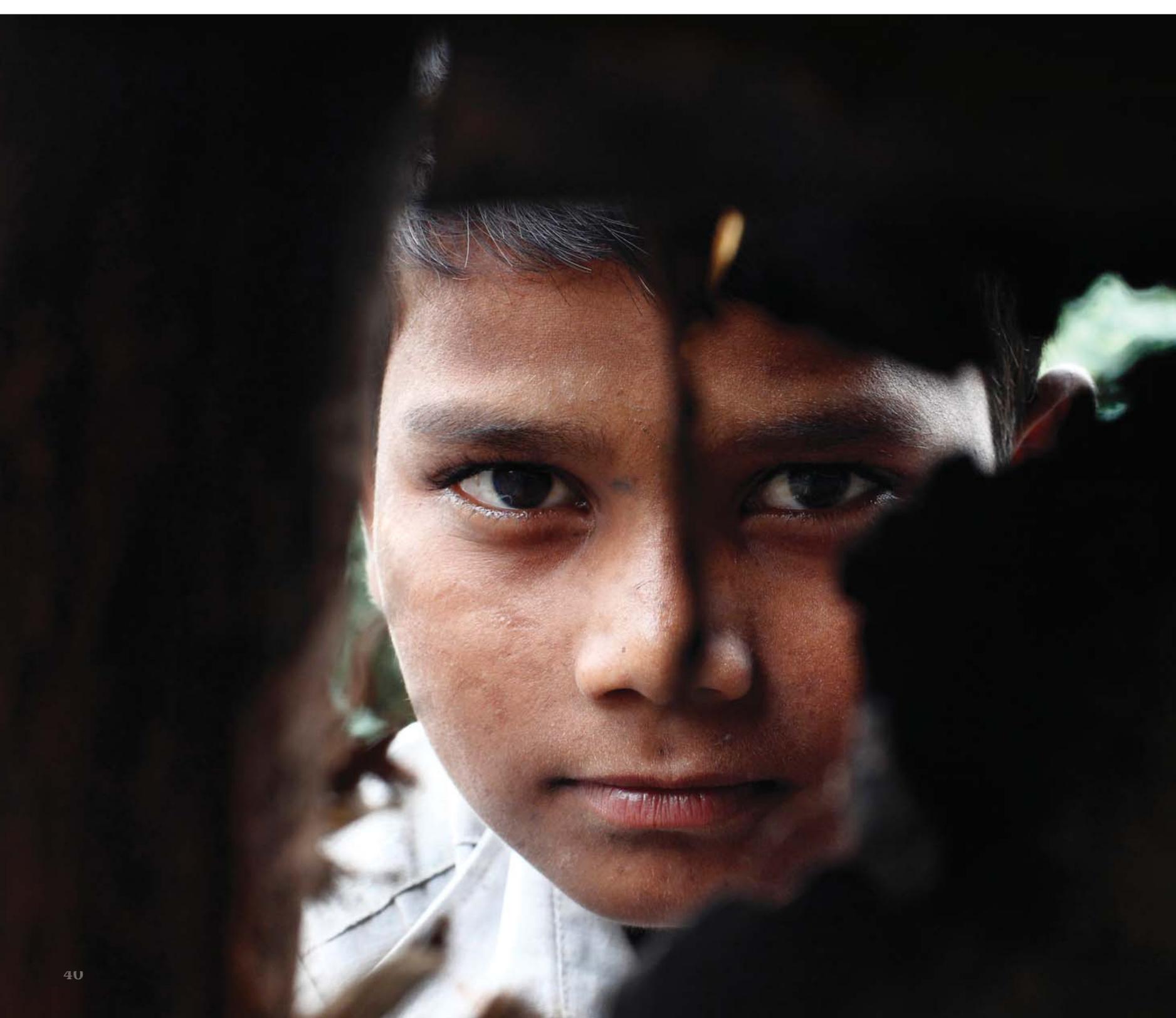
Sixty-year old Kasturibai and sixty-six year old Sidniggappa from Jumnal village suffered complete crop loss on 4 acres of their land during the floods. After the floods, they experienced drought for three consecutive years and found themselves in debt. During that time, they worked as daily wage labourers on other fields.

In 2012, with the help of HRFDL-K they received a loan of Rs 2.5 lakhs from *Gram Panchayat*, of which Rs. 1.25 lakh was subsidized. Water being a huge problem in the area, they purchased two bore wells and started the grape plantation.

Apart from paying off their loan they have earned a profit of Rs. 2 lakhs in the past year. Life has changed immensely for Kasturibai, her husband Sidniggappa and their two sons who take pride in their field.

The path to claiming and securing rights and entitlements post disaster was marked with certain challenges. These challenges, however, did not discourage HRFDL-K and NDW from surging ahead.

Challenges and Achievements





Challenges

Some of the initial challenges were:

- Getting communities together on a single platform to demand their entitlements;
- Getting community based organisations to see through the issue of caste discrimination in disaster response;
- High inertia since years of discriminatory practices on a daily basis have become part of normal life for the Dalit survivors; &
- Dealing with the apathy of the public authorities.



16 damage assessment surveys conducted

8 public hearings held

Demanded process follow up from the officials 18 times

36 RTI applications filed to get information on flood recovery and rehabilitation initiatives of the government

20 rounds of meetings with the legislative members in Bijapur District

8 Meetings in Bijapur alone with the parliamentarians

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Milestones achieved

Since 2009, with sustained the advocacy efforts of HRFDL-K & NDW in Bijapur, Karnataka

- **20** villages rehabilitated- 06 from Bijapur block and 14 from Indi block.
- **1950** new houses built and handed over to the beneficiaries in Bijapur (these beneficiaries include members of all castes).
- **2101** households facilitated to get housing compensations.
- **52** women based SHGs strengthened and trained as Village Disaster Management Committees.
- **73** active volunteers working across 37 villages.
- **21** Dalit families received land titles.
- **09** Devadasis were helped in accessing entitlements.
- **257** Ration cards issued.
- **317** Water tanks supplied to the drought affected Dalit villages in Bijapur.
- **7** bore wells installed in 7 resettled villages.
- **159** Job cards issued under MGNREGA across 36 flood affected villages.





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This photo essay is a small attempt to showcase the mammoth work done by the teams of HRFDL-K and NDW, together with the affected communities, in the aftermath of 2009 floods in Karnataka. The small successes that are encapsulated in this document would not have been possible had the communities not trusted the processes and the vision of inclusive disaster relief and rehabilitation. It was certainly the perseverance of the community that motivated HRFDL-K and NDW to surge forward in pursuit of re-claiming the rights and entitlements of the caste discriminated and other vulnerable population. No amount of words can be sufficient in explaining the journey and the accompanying highs and lows. Nevertheless, where we have reached today in our endeavour to build empowered and resilient communities is what we wish to share with you. We hope that you will find this document interesting and inspiring.

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