Community Disaster Awareness Programme
Ghatal, Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal

Organized by
MICRODIS-JU

In collaboration with
Department of Physics, Ghatal R. S. Mahavidyalaya
23rd. June, 2010
10:00 A.M. INAUGURATION

Welcome Address: Prof. Tuhin K. Das, P.I., MICRDIS-JU
Inaugurator: Dr. B.N. Chattopadhyay, Principal, Ghatal, R.S. Mahavidyalaya
Chief Guest Speech: Pradipeta Acharya, Information Officer
President: Ashoke Kumar Saha, SDO, Ghatal Sub-division

10:40 A.M. TEA BREAK

11:00 A.M. AWARENESS SESSION
Ashoke Santra: Social Worker, Ghatal
Dr. Ashoke K Bandopadhyay, Institute Teacher, Ghatal, R.S. Mahavidyalaya

1:00 P.M. LUNCH
Dr. G. C. Debnath, Weather Expert, Director, IMD, Alipore

SURVEY REPORT PRESENTATION

Dr. Jugranjan Barman, Co-PI, MICRDIS-JU
Dr. Sangeeta Kundu, Research Associate, MICRDIS-JU
Dr. Ivy Dasgupta, Research Associate, MICRDIS-JU

4:00 P.M. INTERACTIVE SESSION
Presided by: Dr. D. Lohar, Co-PI, MICRDIS-JU
On behalf of MICRODIS-JU Project I welcome all participants to the “Community Disaster Awareness Programme”. Ghatal R. S. Mahavidyalaya has provided us infrastructure to make this awareness programme successful. I thank college authority for their full cooperation.

MICRODIS is a project funded under the European Community’s Sixth Framework – Thematic Priority 6.3 Global Change and Ecosystems. This project has partners from different countries in Europe and Asia. The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disaster (CRED), University of Catholique de Louvain, Belgium coordinates it. The name MICRODIS originates from its objective to look at the MICRO level of DISaster in Europe and Asia. The Official name of the project is “Integrated Health, Social and Economic Impacts of Extreme Events: Evidence, Methods and Tools”.

MICRODIS Project has been aimed to build a detailed understanding of the relationship between occurrences of disasters and their consequences on health, society and economy. Findings of this project will help in establishing a common integrated framework for disaster response, which in turn is expected to facilitate the policy-makers to plan for long-term institutional mechanisms for sustainable development and decreased vulnerability to disaster.

Department of Economics, Jadavpur University is a partner of MICRODIS Project as MICRODIS-JU, and Department of Physics is also associated with MICRODIS-JU. The objective of the MICRODIS-JU is to explore the relationship between disasters and their economic impacts through Field Survey and Scientific Study. Also, it has the objective to improve human resources through training and knowledge sharing. Today’s programme is to achieve the later objective of MICRODIS-JU Project.

Persons from different fields assemble here to share their specialized knowledge with the local participants from Ghatal Subdivision. I hope all of us will be benefited from today’s programme, and we shall disseminate our knowledge among other affected communities.
An Awareness Programme was organized under the banner “Community Disaster Awareness Programme” at the GHATAL Rabindra Satabarshiki Mahavidyalaya (Ghatal College) on 23rd June, 2010. We collaborated with Department of Physics, Ghatal College. Eminent personalities of the localities were present in the Programme. Among them, A.K. Saha, Sub-Divisional Officer, Ghatal Sub-Division, Principal, Ghatal College, Pradipto Acharya, Information Officer, Information & Cultural affairs Department, G. C. Debnath, Director, India Meteorological Department, Kolkata, have kindly exchanged their valuable views and comments. The number of participants were 60 which includes some students of the College. The proceedings of the Workshop took the following course:

Prof. Tuhin Kumar Das, Principal Investigator, Microdis-JU inaugurated the program with a brief elaboration on Microdis Project, its objective and functioning. He then went on acknowledging the College authority for their all-round support to make the program successful. He sought the opinion of various experts present in the program and invited the general audience to exchange their views in the interactive session of the program.

Sri Ashoke Kumar Saha, the Sub-Divisional Officer, Ghatal Subdivision congratulated the organizer of the program to discuss a serious problem of the locality. He divided disaster into two broad categories: natural and man-made. Flood, cyclone, earthquake, tsunami are, according to his view, are the natural disaster and incident like Bhopal Gas tragedy is man-made or caused by human carelessness. He opined that man-made disaster could be avoided or minimized through careful planning or alertness.

But what about natural disaster? Does human society have any role to play to prevent natural disaster? Scientific knowledge about nature is an important tool in this respect. If natural disaster is unavoidable, a proper planning and suitable measures in this respect can mitigate the sufferings, to some extent, caused by natural disaster. Through prior information, warning we could alert people and taking defensive steps, ex-ante, adverse impacts of natural
Community Disaster Awareness Programme

disasters could be neutralized to a great extent. Co-ordination among concerned agencies is the fundamental duty during flood. Reaching relief such as food, drinking water and medical facilities to the affected people and rescuing marooned people at the quickest time are the top priorities of any sensible authority. After flood, there is a threat of spread of epidemic like cholera, diarrhea and other waterborne diseases. Incidence of snakebite also increases during flood. Flood does not spare children and particularly newborn babies. Child immunization program and Child human capital formation get adversely affected as school premises are either closed or occupied by flood stricken people. As a part of the administration he also mentioned some of his limitation. Collecting so many man-power so quickly a time is almost impossible. Torrential rain makes their job more difficult.

Information Officer, Mr. Pradipto Acharya, as a second speaker on the occasion, he mentioned that it is his Department that make the announcement and alert people regarding the incoming flood. His experience in the area is that the people of Ghatal subdivision have become accustomed to flood and try to live with flood. It is not an administrative failure rather a challenge to overcome flood related problem due to the geographical specificity of the locality. He invited and reminded the media persons present in the program of their roles and duties during flood.
Community Disaster Awareness Programme

Dr. B.N. Chatterjee, Principal, Ghatal College, thanked the eminent personalities and Microdis J.U for organizing such a Program in his college. He welcomed the student community in general to take active participation in rescue and relief work during flood. Ghatal has inherited the problem of flood and rich agricultural productivity from its past. But the former destroys the latter.

Shri Ashok Santra, Social Worker, Ghatal narrated the history of flood of Ghatal area dates back to 1793 with the enactment of Permanent Settlement Act, by which local Zaminders were given ownership to rule over specific territory. Local zamindars built their circuit dam to prevent their own lowland from being flooded. But these dams were built in a decentralized way and scientific planning was absent in the construction of the dams. As a result sediments in the river could not spread and used to accumulate in the river belt itself. Since then millions of gallons of water have flowed through the rivers in this area. The river Silabati is responsible for flood in Ghatal. With time, Silabati had lost its water carrying capacity. The water flows over both sides of Silabati and keeps the area flooded. The water of Silabati ultimately meets the Rupnarayan. Before that Silabati floods 4100 square mile area on its way to Ghatal. During the end week
of August and September, depression at the Bay of Bengal and torrential rain causes flood in this area. The outlet where through flood water in Ghatal meets the Rupnarayanpur is too narrow and the flow of Rupnarayanpur itself collides with it pushing the water level up. Our suggestion to the authority concerned is to widen the outlet first and dredge the Rupnarayan river bed. Flood has become part and parcel of Ghatal. After Independence, the Man Singh Committee was formed in 1959. The Commission after assessing the area submitted its report to the Central Government. But the report was nipped in the bud. After the devastating flood in 1978, The Ghatal Master Plan was formed and the Central Flood Prevention Committee sent its instruction to the Government of West Bengal. For reasons unknown the files were closed again. To him, Ghatal Block has always been neglected and ignored from the power lobby of the country. People should come forward irrespective of their political loyalty to enable the residents of this area to move along other parts of the country.

Dr. G.C. Debnath, Director, Regional Meteorological Centre, Kolkata presented a paper, through power point, entitled “Role of Weather Forecasting for Flood Management in West Bengal”. In his paper, he clarified the interconnection among disaster, hazard and vulnerability. According to him, flood can be defined as an excess of inflow over outflow of water through the rivers. Thus if inflow/outflow ratio is greater than one, one can say that flood has occurred. The paper also educated the audience with the ‘do’s and do’nts’ during flood. He explained the problem of accurate forecasting of flood well in advance. He also showed the various nature of flood through power point presentation. To him, flood at Ghatal is a consequence of both torrential rains during monsoon and release of excess water from big dam like Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) and Kangsabati. He also assured the audience the future improvement in the field of weather forecasting technology.
Dr. Ivy Gupta, Research Associate, Microdis JU spoke about the ongoing project and shared her experience of the field survey with the audiences. The behaviour of households before, during and after the flood was her topics of discussion. The nature of problem revealed by the households during flood was elaborated.

Dr. Jugaratan Barman, Co-Investigator, Microdis JU explained the role of community as a whole taking flood as a public bad. Flood destroys labor and capital both. Children who experiences dangerous flood for the first time get traumatized. The quality of labor diminishes. Infrastructures like road, schools, health centers get destroyed and the local community can come forward for immediate recovery of all these.

Dr. Sangeeta Kundu, Research Associate mentioned about the logistic problem in conducting the survey. She conducted the entire program with her usual grace. She discussed about the ongoing project and shared her experience of the field survey with the officials. The behaviour of households before, during and after the flood was her topics of discussion. The nature of problem revealed by the households during flood was elaborated.

Interactive Session with the Audience:

The Program ended with an interactive session with the audience at large. Dr. D. Lohar, Co- PI, Microdis- JU conducted the session.

The problems expressed by the audience in the interactive session can be summarized as follows:
1. Contaminated drinking water was supplied by relief agency.
2. Schools remain closed for two months.
3. Important examination schedule had to be changed.
4. Problem of drinking water.
5. Transportation is a real problem during flood.
This programme was reported in Bengali News Papers: Ananda Bazar Patrika (District Page) and Sambad Pratidin dated 24th June, 2010
Field Investigators at Ghatal
Resource Persons and Surveyors

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