

Reducing the devastating effects of flooding in India, Nepal and Bangladesh

South Asia River Basin Programme **direct** funding target: £150,000

For the 180 million people living in the Ganges/Brahmaputra river basin, natural disasters are a fact of life. During the monsoon season, families' homes and land become submerged. They lose their crops, and their animals often perish. Poor people are particularly vulnerable, so being well prepared can mean the difference between life and death. Oxfam's River Basin Programme helps to reduce the threat to people's lives and livelihoods, giving them the security to plan for the future.



A raised village in Bangladesh – an innovative way to escape flood waters
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The Project

Why Oxfam is working on this issue

Launched in 1999, the River Basin Programme works with communities to lessen the destructive effects of the monsoon rains. This can help to reduce casualties, and also the loss of tens of thousands of people's homes, their possessions and their livelihoods.

Project aims

During the floods, the programme provides safe shelters, as well as boats for reaching them. To create the shelters, banks of earth – covering

an area of several kilometres – are raised by up to 15 feet. Local communities dig a huge pond in the middle and whenever the floods come, people can bring their livestock, possessions – even their homes – to safety.

The pond in the middle becomes an important source of food, as it is used to farm fish. The shelters can then be used throughout the year as community halls, schools and market centres. Through the installation of latrines and tube-wells – which can stay above the level of any expected floods – clean

drinking water and good sanitation are available throughout the year.

Many homes in the region are made safer by raising the floor level. In some areas, fruit trees and bamboo are planted around shelters, ponds and homes, to reduce erosion and help protect from flooding.

For many years, the millions of poor people who live in this area have been left completely destitute by the annual floods. Through this programme, money they once spent on replacing belongings and repairing damage can now be put towards saving for a more secure financial future.

Supporters, communities, local partners and Oxfam – working together to change lives

Background



Practical training for preparing for floods in India
© Shailan Parker/Oxfam

The Ganges/Brahmaputra River Basin – which spans Bangladesh, India and Nepal – is one of the most disaster-prone regions in the world.

Between June and September every year, the region receives more than 80 per cent of its annual rainfall in monsoon rains.

As the river basin is scarcely higher than sea-level, vast areas flood every year. Cyclones and regular tidal surges near the coast also contribute to the high levels of flood water. The areas that are prone to frequent flooding are expanding alarmingly. The people who live here risk losing their homes, crops, animals, livelihoods, and even their lives in the floods.

To survive, many people move to higher ground, such as roadsides and embankments. Others take shelter in public buildings, where living conditions are unsafe and disease is rife because of the lack of clean water and sanitation. Recovery from the floods is extremely difficult since agricultural land – upon which most families depend to earn a living – is covered by water, sometimes for as long as six months.

Oxfam and our partners work with the many communities who live in the region, developing long-term, practical solutions to help prevent the disruption caused by severe annual flooding.

The Plan

Activities

We are working with villagers and local communities on several innovative schemes.

This year we will:

In India

- Help to build five community halls (which can also double-up as schools) in five villages, including link roads where necessary.
- Provide lighting for five shelters, to make them safer during floods and so they can be used throughout the year for community meetings and children's study.
- Construct ten rescue boats to get people to shelter safely during the floods, and to get produce to market.
- Build 24 toilets and 12 tube-wells to improve sanitation all year round.

- Re-excavate eight ponds with embanked sides to provide new, sheltered bases where people can farm and earn an income.

In Nepal

- Work with villagers to build five flood shelters and two rescue boats, and repair three village roads. This could improve access to shelter for as many as 3,000 people from five villages.
- Construct 70 toilets and 50 tube-wells.
- Provide training for 75 men and 125 women on agriculture and the growing of cash crops.
- Help to raise awareness about preparing for disasters, the importance of good sanitation, and schooling and health care.
- Build 50 biogas plants.

In Bangladesh

- Work with communities to construct one flood shelter. This will provide safe refuge for the most vulnerable people and their belongings during the floods.
- Repair three flood rescue boats.
- Install 200 toilets and 55 tube-wells.
- Raise the floor levels of 200 homes to protect them from flooding.
- Install seven solar panels to provide electricity to shelters and communal spaces.
- Provide training on duck and pigeon rearing and other farming techniques.
- Help to raise awareness of the importance of good sanitation, and of people's rights to basic services.

The Impact

Achievements so far

Oxfam has been working on reducing people's vulnerability to flooding in the river basin since 1999. Much progress has already been made, including the construction of flood shelters, and raised wells and houses throughout the region. The many rescue boats that have been constructed have already helped to save countless lives, and get people to shelter as quickly as possible.

This year, we will:

- Protect people's belongings, livestock, seeds and other valuable items, helping to end the cycle of loss that occurs every time floods hit. This can help people to

have a more stable existence, enabling them to plan and save for the future.

- Provide safe places for villagers to shelter during floods, and safe means of transport to reach the shelters. This will help to prevent loss of life and lessen the terrifying after-effects of the floods.
- Help to improve the health of those living in the river basin, through the installation of more latrines and wells. This improved sanitation will help to prevent the spread of water-borne diseases such as cholera.
- Work with villagers so they have the skills and supplies to earn a living

throughout the year. When the floods come people will be more prepared, and the disruption to their lives and livelihoods will be diminished.

Who will benefit?

- In Nepal, 34,800 people, including 6,000 school children, from 4,800 families.
- In India, 75,000 people, including 45,000 children, from 15,000 families.
- In Bangladesh, 22,500 people, from 4,500 families.

In total, 132,300 people's lives will be improved by this work in India, Nepal and Bangladesh.

The People



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Our homes did not go under water

"Because these homes have been raised, they weren't damaged by the floods. We can grow vegetables such as pumpkins on the roof, and fruit trees such as mango and jackfruit that can be eaten during or after the floods. These households did not go under water so this food remained available to the families living here."

Kodvanu, Fulhara village, Bangladesh

The water was up to our necks

"We'd hung the bed from the ceiling and so were living near the roof of the house. The water was rising fast and was soon up to our necks. We would not have survived if the boat hadn't have come. As soon as I saw the boat I knew we'd survive. After it had picked us up the walls and door of the house were swept away."

Surju, Bangladesh

If I leave anything in the house it will be lost

"We know there's likely to be a flood when the rain is very heavy and the river level goes up and the fields are covered with water. Then we know a flood is likely. We get a warning on the radio too. I watch the situation, and when I hear the radio warning I start packing, because after the flood everything will have gone – even the walls. If I leave anything in the house it will be lost."

Sohagi Haldar, West Bengal, India

The Partners

"Every year, we use the boat to rescue people. River erosion is a continual problem and families can be suddenly stranded. If our organisation didn't have these boats we couldn't rescue people... with them we can save lives, and where we can, we save their livestock, houses and possessions as well."

Mozibur Rhaman, Director of Oxfam partner SDS, Bangladesh. We work with eleven local partners in Bangladesh, five in Nepal and seven in India.

About **direct**

By supporting **direct projects** you're joining a global network of supporters, local people and partner organisations, all working with Oxfam to end poverty and suffering for good. From helping whole communities to protect themselves against disaster, to working with national governments to transform a country's schools, to helping individual families to earn a living, all **direct projects** offer you the chance to change lives.

Our commitment to you:

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- You'll receive 6 and 12 month progress reports on your project.
- Email alerts when new information is posted on the website.
- A dedicated account manager to answer questions and keep you informed.

Other countries needing your support

Albania, Armenia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Honduras, India, Liberia, Malawi, Mauritania, Nepal, Philippines, Peru, Sudan, Tanzania.

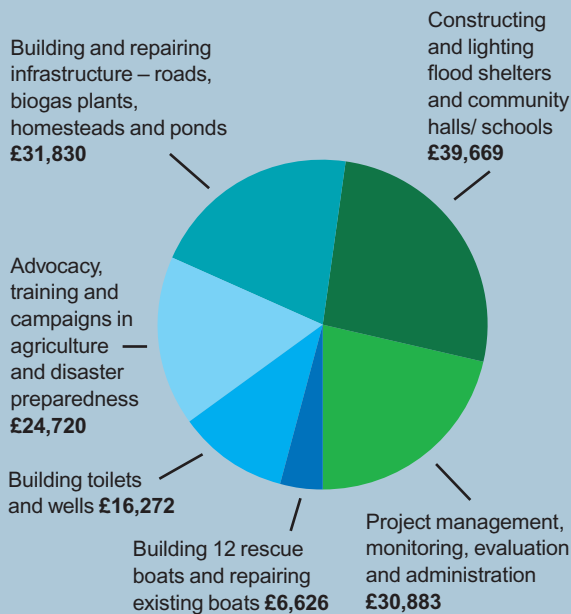
The Budget

Your money will pay for:

- Building and repairing infrastructure – roads, biogas plants, homesteads, and ponds
- Constructing and lighting flood shelters and community halls/schools
- Building 12 rescue boats and repairing existing boats
- Building toilets and wells
- Advocacy, training and campaigns in agriculture and disaster preparedness
- Project management, monitoring, evaluation and administration

How we'll spend your money:

Total £150,000



South Asia: profile



Population	India: 1,136 million Nepal: 28 million Bangladesh: 147 million
Development	HDI ¹ position out of 177 India: 126th Nepal: 138th Bangladesh: 137th
Life expectancy at birth	India: 63 years Nepal: 61 years Bangladesh: 63 years
GDP per capita	India: \$3,139 Nepal: \$1,490 Bangladesh: \$1,870 (UK: \$30,821)
Percentage of population living on less than \$1 a day	India: 35% Nepal: 24% Bangladesh: 36%
Percentage of population under-nourished	India: 20% Nepal: 17% Bangladesh: 30%

Source: UNDP Human Development Report 2006.

¹The UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite measure of three dimensions of human development: life expectancy, education and standard of living.

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Contact:

Sarah Thomas
Oxfam House
John Smith Drive
Cowley Oxford OX4 2JY
Telephone +44 (0)1865 47 3915
E-mail sthomas@oxfam.org.uk

Contact:

Annie Lewis
Oxfam in Scotland
207 Bath Street
Glasgow G2 4HZ
Telephone +44 (0)141 285 8873
E-mail alewis@oxfam.org.uk