

### Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, is a philanthropic organisation. It has a century-long history of humanitarian response throughout the world, be it in ordinary times or during emergency. Humanitarian response has been conceptually reinterpreted from relief/welfare capacity building

intentions responded to disasters with relief support in all possible ways. This has been re-emerged and converted into capacity development of community for understanding the level of vulnerability and risk situation in which people can be severely impacted by natural disasters.



Ramakrishna Mission Lakshadweep – the rural development wing of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, has been working in Sundarban area for more than four decades. Primarily relief work began in Sundarban area in 70s as part of basic humanitarian response to natural disasters. The introduction of structural Rural Development work, began as a part of immediate relief work after the devastating natural calamity of cyclonic flood during the mid-80s. The authority felt that the capacity building of the people is more

important for long term development. The Rural Development Project was launched in Sundarban area with the financial assistance of Walthungshille (German Agro Action), Bonn, Germany. Experience of more than four decades of work in Sundarban shows that there would be at least one severe natural disaster after every 3-4 years. In such a situation Ramakrishna Mission felt the need of a shift in paradigm in its strategy for Disaster Management in Sundarban area.

Strengthening people with their own and local resources and efforts appeared to be more important than to make the affected community relief-dependant. As a result Ramakrishna Mission in collaboration with DPECHO and Walthungshille (German Agro Action), Bonn, Germany decided to conduct a pilot work on Community Based Disaster Risk Management or CBDRM in selected villages in Sundarban. Enigmatic yet tangible, fearful yet awe-inspiring, dangerous yet charming, Sundarban is indeed a place of reckoning where discovery is an ever evolving phenomenon.

### Sundarban – An Undiscovered Enigma

#### SUNDARBAN

The extent of Sundarban is spread over five districts of West Bengal – North 24 Parganas and South 24 Parganas.

Block	Total Islands	Area (sq. Km)	Population (in lakhs)
Chandernagore	108	54	1.91
East Medinipur	191	2,355.824	1,38,00,000
Total Population	311	4,13	1,48,28,004
M			77% (M) & 23% (F)
Average Annual Rainfall		1200 mm	
River Freshwater		3,500 Km	

But for the people who have made Sundarban their destiny for ages, it is tangible yet dreadfully enigmatic, awe-inspiring yet cruelly fearful, charming but ruthlessly dangerous.

A conglomeration of 102 islands in the southern most part of West Bengal nestled in Bay of Bengal (21° 32' N latitude – 22° 40' N latitude and 88° 05'E longitude – 89° 00' E longitude) Sundarban is a classic example of man and beast living in conflicting harmony, struggling in the bottle of the threat.

The single-most danger that threatens the life of the people in Sundarban is the disobedient waters of the sea. Unless the human-made embankments are high and strong enough the sea water is surely going to spill over into the villages destroy houses, crops and intimidate the life of people and livestock.

To enable the community to defend themselves against the furies of nature by reducing their vulnerability and enhancing their capacities the CBDRM pilot project was launched in November 2007.

### Vulnerability of Sundarban to Natural Disaster

- Typically low-lying area.
- Most Cyclonic depression brewing over Bay of Bengal strikes Sundarban.
- Swelling tidal waters breaches the embankments and destroys cultivable land and houses.
- Saline water rapidly erodes houses and other mud structures and poses long term uncertainty for agriculture.
- Soil Erosion

### Record of Major Disasters in Sundarban Since 2003

Date	Disaster	Area Affected	Population Affected	Nature of Damage
12/Mar/2003	Cyclonic storm & high tide	130 villages	1,69,800 people affected	1,799 house damages, 331 hac. crops damaged
30/Mar/2004	Cyclonic storm	85 villages affected	2,000 people affected	1,483 houses, 375 hac. land damaged
11/13 Sep/2004	Heavy rainfall	208 villages affected	1,84,800 people affected	633 houses, 1,662 hac. land damaged
4/7 Oct/2004	Heavy rainfall	1,431 sq. km, 208 villages	1,550 people affected	
18/19 Sep/2005	Cyclone with heavy rainfall	140 sq. km, 149 villages	1,27,904 people affected	
16/18 Sep/2008	Cyclonic storm & high tide			

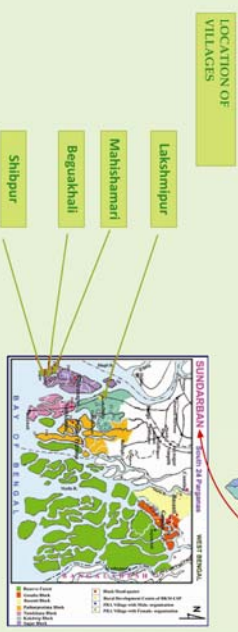
Source: Disaster mitigation & Relief cell of Kaldang sub-district, Sundarban

### What is CBDRM?

Community Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) is a process of disaster risk management in which at-risk communities to disasters are actively engaged in the identification, analysis, treatment, monitoring and evaluation of disaster risks in order to reduce their vulnerabilities and enhance their capacities.

This means that the people are at the heart of decision-making and implementation of disaster risk management activities. The involvement of the most vulnerable is paramount and the support of the least vulnerable is necessary. The process envisioned that even after the end of the project period the community would institutionalise the

Name of Villages	No. of Family	Gram Panchayat	Block
Lakshimpur	210	Mahisadalpur	Kakdwip
Mahishamani	322	Gangasagar	Sagar
Begunbhali	863	Gangasagar	Sagar
Shibpur	491	Bhabhal	Sagar



process of preparedness. Raising of public awareness, capacity building of local people, modal mitigation activity, systematising early warning system, study of breakage of river bund and capacity building of local people were the major activities of this endeavour.

Keeping geographical situation of Sundarban area, the frequency, intensity and vulnerability of natural disasters in mind, four villages of Sundarban had been selected in this Community Based Disaster Risk Management Project. These were Shibpur, Mahishamani, Begunbhali & Lakshimpur, in collaboration with DPECHO and Walthungshille (German Agro Action) Bonn, Germany.