

## Promoting 'Information as aid' for flood recovery and resilience through Community Facilitation and Resource Centres in Gaon Panchayats- The Case of Cachar floods 2022



### Summary

UNICEF collaborated with District Disaster Management Authority, Cachar and Deshabandhu Club (an NGO based in Cachar, Assam) to support government led response and recovery to Cachar floods 2022. Community Facilitation and Resource Centres were piloted in 3 Gaon Panchayats by DDMA Cachar in collaboration with the Zila Parishad, Inter Agency Group Cachar led by Deshabandhu Club and with technical support of UNICEF. The objective was to support communities in understanding the eligibility criteria for compensation packages or rehabilitation schemes planned the documents to be provided, department to be approached and the process of approvals for improved access to disaster recovery assistance. CFRCs are playing an important role in providing 'Information as aid' to the people affected by floods and are gradually expanded to cover initiatives for building resilience of communities for future disasters. Inspired by the initial community uptake, the DDMA and Zila Parishad are in process of opening the CFRCs in 15 Gaon Panchayats by 1st quarter of 2023 with a plan of further expansion.

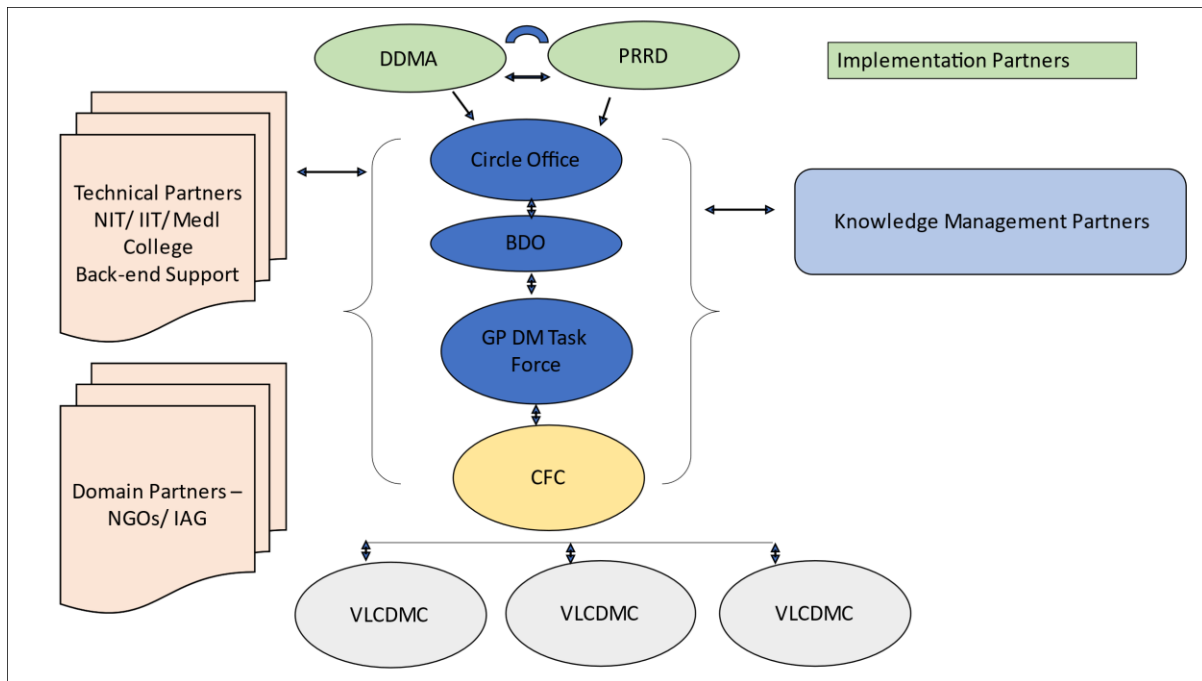
### Background

However, floods in 2022 have been abruptly unusual affecting new areas and causing massive impact on lives and livelihoods. While the 1st wave of flood that started since 12 May resulted in extensive damage and disruption in the North Cachar Hills and Barak Valley Districts while the 2nd wave which started from 14 June affected 32 of 35 districts. Cachar is amongst the worst affected districts with 1.45 million people including 369,928 children from 826 villages in two waves of floods which started from 16 May 2022. 303,694 people including 70,491 children resorted to relief camps during these two waves of flood. 746 houses in Cachar were damaged

while 12135.36 hectares of crop area was affected in the district (Source- DDMA, Cachar). The district has not seen such a scale of flooding in recent decades and had faced multiple complexities in managing the situation including the immediate aftermath of the flooding. District Disaster Management Authority in collaboration with stakeholders has been at the forefront of response. UNICEF in collaboration with DDMA and CSO partners has pitched in multi-sectoral response program. As floods, receded recovery became a mammoth task because of the scale involved. UNICEF deployed a high-level technical assistance to support social sector recovery planning at district as well as expanded the partnership with Deshabandhu Club to support DDMA led recovery action at field level.

### Scope of the Project

The idea of Community Facilitation Resource Centre was introduced to localize recovery efforts of the administration by enabling access to recovery information to the last mile. This was inspired by the concept of Village Information Centres as implemented after Gujarat earthquake 2001 and Indian Ocean Tsunami, 2004 where these centres were used not only to provide information to the community but also to understand field level concerns that led to policy formulations. More importantly, concurrent tracking of rehabilitation process at the field level also was done through these centres, enabling the District Collector to take timely action. The CFRCs in Cachar is instituted at the GP level under the stewardship of the Panchayath President/ Wad Member and Block Development Officer and is housed within the GP Office or its premises. It is managed by volunteers from Inter Agency Group, Cachar and members of Self Help Groups from the community itself. The structure of the CFRC is as follows:



### Objectives of CFRC

The CFRCs in Cachar are designed to meet the following objectives

1. Function as an information and knowledge sharing bridge between the administration and affected communities to ensure that the affected communities are aware of their entitlements and are able to access them smoothly

1. To build decentralised community-centric platforms that provide for a two-way communication between the affected communities and Service Providers
2. To enhance the capacity of affected communities in making informed choices on their development
3. To build a resilient community that is increasingly able to withstand shocks and stresses to their system.

## Process followed

The idea of CFRC was introduced following a consultative process as follows:

- **Conceptualization-** The idea was conceptualized jointly by UNICEF technical assistance deployed in Cachar with DDMA team and was presented to Zila Parishad followed by consultations with Inter Agency Group, Cachar. Upon consensus, this concept was presented in a meeting of the DDMA chaired by the Deputy Commissioner which accorded approval for implementation. Decision was taken to initiate the CFRC in 3 Gaon Panchayats, test the feasibility and then scaling up based on learning.
- **Preparation-**Groups were formed involving representatives of DDMA, PRRD and IAG to initiate preparations. IAG volunteers were trained to prepare baseline database for the CFRCs, instruments such as computers, printers etc were arranged using contributions from CSR agencies, mapping of schemes were done through extensive engagement with line departments which included development schemes that can support recovery, exclusive recovery related programs, process of application, formats and eligibility criteria etc. Communication materials were developed various schemes.
- **Ceremonial Inauguration-** The CFRCs were ceremonially inaugurated by the Deputy Commissioner, Cachar on 18 October 2022. The events were so designed to ensure optimum participation of wide range of stakeholders for popularizing the role and scope of work of the CFRCs. The line departments were also given exposure through this event for obtaining their support.



*Deputy Commissioner, Cachar interacting with CFRC stakeholders and representatives of local communities in a CFRC*

- **Operationalization-** The CFRCs started functioning as an interface between the communities, PRIs and line departments. Households have been provided with information and necessary support to access various schemes through the CFRC. Additionally, community level actions such as GIS mapping households and community assets, especially camps for disability screening and certification, sectoral consultations to identify sectoral needs and priorities were also conducted. Various recovery programs implemented by NGOs and CSR agencies have also been linked to the CFRCs
- **Scaling Up-** Currently DDMA is working with partners to operationalize 15 more CFRCs in flood vulnerable GPs. More partners have been enrolled to support this initiative. The engagement and role of CFRCs is gradually being expanded to include village level risk assessment, preparing village DRR plans and implement community engagement campaigns around rights and entitlements.

*“Post disaster information Gap affects people’s access to the assistance flowing in from various sources. CFRC is a promising concept and will play a crucial role in filling those information gaps by being the interface between the community and the administration.”*

H.P. Fernandez

BDO Borkhola Dev. Block, Cachar

## Results

The intervention has shown excellent initial uptake from communities. As the pilot Gaon Panchayats were amongst the worst affected by floods, the CFRCs are helping to connect the affected vulnerable households with available schemes/norms and resources to aid their recovery. Because of the integrated approach being followed, community-based interventions such as disability screening camps, medical camps have also shown higher mobilization and participation of at-risk communities and have enabled resolution of challenges related to awareness, access and empowerment. Though these are very initial results, the leadership of DDMA, the ownership and openness of Panchayat and Rural Development Department, the coordinated engagement of CSOs and the involvement of CBOs such as SHGs is indicating a string recipe for a model that can be scaled up.

## Sustainability

Because of tested feasibility, shared mandate and promising initial results, the interest amongst the involved stakeholders is high. While non-governmental organizations have contributed their strength of community mobilization and engagement, Corporates have pitched in with support (such as providing office equipment, technical expertise in GIS mapping etc). At the state level ASDMA has shown interest to take this model to other districts, ASRLM has also been reached out for uptake and scale up.