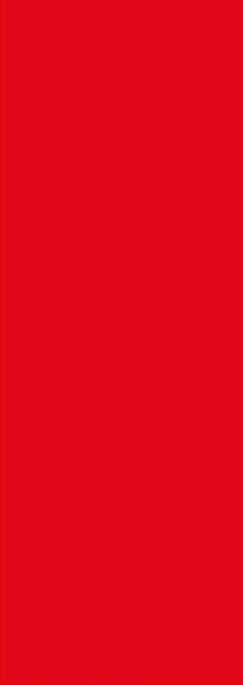


Case Study – September 2009

Earthquake Rehabilitation Project Gujarat, India

2001–2009



skat Swiss Resource Centre and
Consultancies for Development

GLÜCKSKETTE
CHAÎNE DU BONHEUR
CHADAINA DA FORTUNA
CATENA DELLA SOLIDARIETÀ



Swiss Red Cross 



Background

On 26 January 2001 an earthquake of 7.9 on the Richter scale devastated Gujarat. It was the second largest recorded earthquake in India and the worst natural disaster in India in more than 50 years. The earthquake left more than 20 000 people dead, 167 000 injured, around 300 000 homeless and most public infrastructure in ruin.

Gujarat is a disaster prone area with high likelihood of earth-quakes, cyclones, floods and droughts. This makes sustainable development very difficult, as every disaster throws people back to a mere struggle for survival.

The Swiss Red Cross (SRC) reached the disaster zone within 48 hours of the earthquake with emergency relief. This was followed by support to reconstruction of housing, water and sanitation infrastructure, as well as health promotion and livelihood promotion activities.

Strategy & Approach

The levels of vulnerability are remarkably high in Gujarat. Therefore the SRC chose a strategy, which bases reconstruction and rehabilitation interventions on a thorough needs assessment, taking existing risks, vulnerabilities and capacities of the local population as the starting point to jointly design a holistic development strategy.

In practise this lead to a multi-phased and multi-sectoral project with the following elements:

- Physical reconstruction of 1139 houses
- (re)construction of water supply and sanitation infrastructure
- Establishment of Community Learning Centres (CLCs)
- Development of livelihood opportunities for the affected population
- Promotional activities in the field of hygiene, disease prevention and mother and child health
- Increase in disaster preparedness and reduction of disaster risk.

Alliances

The SRC established a partnership with the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) as the implementing agency of the project. SEWA is a women's trade union very well rooted in the earthquake affected area and shares the core principles of the Red Cross approach to humanitarian and development cooperation. In order to assure sustainability, the project activities were designed to fit into the existing portfolio of SEWA activities.

For the reconstruction of the houses, technical backstopping was provided by Development Alternatives (DA) an Indian NGO as well as skat_consulting, a Swiss consultancy centre specialised in appropriate technology and community oriented development.

For the health interventions close collaboration was sought with the Ministry of Health.

Following a vision

In order to turn the tragedy into a livelihood opportunity, from the very beginning considerations went beyond reconstruction of the houses towards an integrated and sustainable revival of livelihoods. In view of the frequency of natural disasters and the fragile rural economy, the SRC together with its partners undertook a thorough and community based risk, vulnerabilities and capacities assessment.

Based on the result of this initial assessment, an integrated set of activities was planned with a clear vision in mind. After the initial emergency phase the vision was to secure sustainable livelihoods for vulnerable rural communities in four disaster prone districts, including improved income and food security, reduced vulnerability and enhanced wellbeing. The four phases of the project (2001–09) gradually worked towards this objective.



Physical reconstruction

Within the framework of the project 1139 earthquake- and cyclone-resistant houses were reconstructed. The core unit of the houses were constructed with ecological building techniques and in a way to allow for individual modifications and extensions according to beneficiaries' preferences and capacities.

To meet the need for safe drinking water, a rainwater harvesting system with a storage tank was constructed for each of the houses.

In addition, nine Community Learning Centres (CLCs) were established, each with a community hall, training and administrative rooms, a computer room and sanitation facilities. These were used as hubs for decentrally carrying out community activities and trainings and thereby better reaching the families in need.

Support to livelihood opportunities

The project's approach to livelihood promotion is based on the Framework for Sustainable Livelihood Development, originally developed by DfID.

At the concrete level this lead to the definition of the following livelihood activities:

- Development of alternative sources of income
- Skills training in relevant trades
- Revolving credit schemes
- Improvement in agricultural productivity (seed, fertilizer, fodder banks and training)
- Use of alternative sources of energy (solar energy and biogas)
- Linking producers to relevant networks of marketing and information.

SEWA has adopted the livelihood approach as their principal approach, which is an asset for their collaboration in this project.

Empowerment and increased resilience

The project aims at empowering women and their families to become more resilient towards crisis in their existing socio-economic and ecological environment.

An important part of facilitating empowerment and resilience is to connect the families to existing networks of information, training, service provision and marketing. SEWA follows this strategy by providing access to information (computer rooms, information meetings, trainings), by linking individuals and groups to specific public or private services available and by facilitating agreements between producers and the demand side.

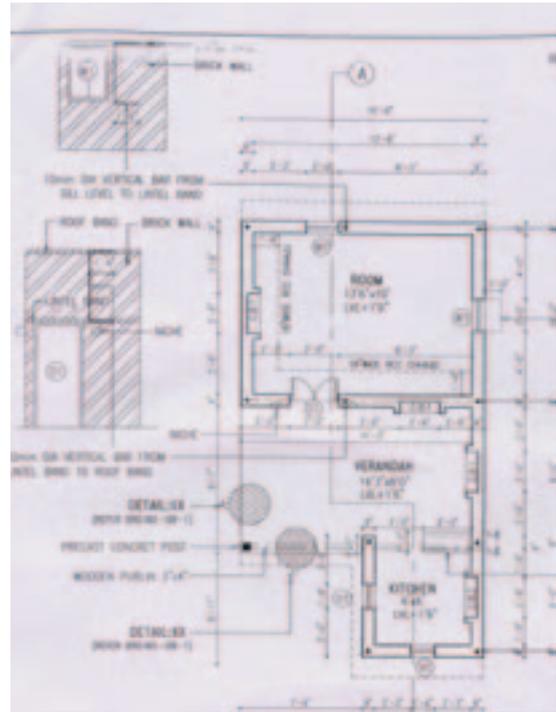
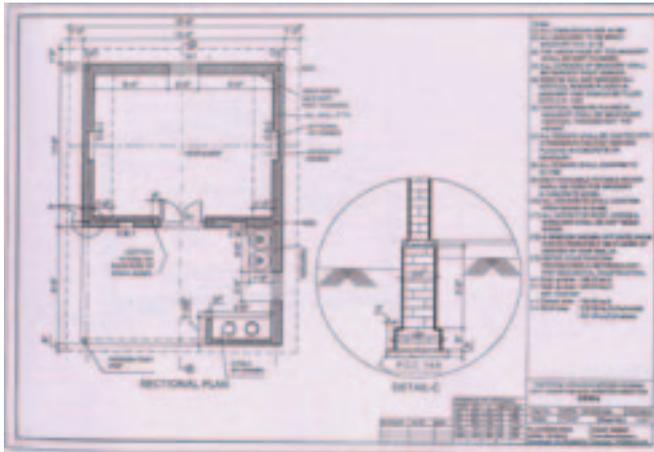
In addition, beneficiaries of the project are provided with information about their rights for information, as well as existing laws and regulations in areas relevant to their livelihood strategy.

Challenges

The diversity of strategies to securing livelihoods of different groups in the project area is a challenge in terms of designing appropriate solutions for each group. The projects responds to this challenge of designing appropriate solutions by participatory and needs-oriented approaches, which again bears the challenge of being timeconsuming. Nevertheless it seems to be the only way to long term empowerment and increased resilience.

Another challenge is the fact of SEWA being a membership based organisation. Criteria of inclusion have to be defined with much diligence in order to live up to the Red Cross principle of universality.

Rural Gujarati face extreme poverty, which at times leads to visions of development being suppressed by the everyday struggle for survival.



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Lessons learnt & best practices

Holistic planning approach

Already while planning and providing emergency relief, it is important to consider issues related to rehabilitation in a holistic way. The reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts have to take the needs, risks, vulnerabilities as a starting point for further developing the existing capacities of the beneficiary communities. Reconstruction and rehabilitation should not only aim to replace what was destroyed, but to incorporate improvements, i.e. follow the principle of «building back better». With regard to reconstructing individual houses this may include the provision of water and sanitation components or promoting disaster-resistant constructions. And going beyond physical aspects, the sustainable improvement of livelihood opportunities and empowerment are relevant steps towards «building back better».

Starting from people's needs and following a participatory approach

SRC and SEWA have from the beginning taken the beneficiaries' perspective by including them systematically in the assessment, planning and implementation stages. Adequacy to existing needs and capacities is core of developing meaningful project activities for improving livelihood opportunities of beneficiary groups and individuals. The most vulnerable are in the centre of attention, in order to address the «silent emergencies» of extreme poverty. With regard to the reconstruction of housing the preferences and needs of beneficiaries must be given space in planning and implementation to a maximum possible extent.

Sustainable and safe construction practices

Within the framework of the project a construction manual was developed, providing practical orientation on safe, environmentally sound and economical construction practices adequate for the disaster prone area of Gujarat. The manual helped to assure quality standards and made a contribution to increased resilience to further catastrophes. It is available both at SRC and skat_consulting.

Building on existing partnerships

In its emergency relief and reconstruction/rehabilitation efforts the SRC has built on existing partnerships with local organisations, such as Initiatives in Development Support (IIDS) and Development Alternatives (DA) in India, as well as skat_consulting in Switzerland. This assured both local adequacy of operations and technical up-to-datedness. SEWA on the other hand explored its network to facilitate the linkage of beneficiary communities to public and private services and information available, in order to bring beneficiaries closer to meet their needs. As a whole, all partners involved collaborated in an open framework of exchange and mutual feedback to adapt the approach to changing circumstances.

Integrated approach to livelihood

In order to address people in a context of extreme poverty, a comprehensive livelihood package should necessarily include the following components:

- Organizational Development – to build collective strength and bargaining power
- Capacity building for improved productivity
- Credit and other financial services, e.g. insurance or pension schemes, in order to foster resilience to financial shocks
- Linkages to relevant markets, sources of information and mutual support
- Investments in human development through improving services and linking beneficiary communities to services available in the field of health and education

The project's approach to reconstruction of individual housing

Approach to construction

The design of the houses is based on basic core unit, which at any time allows modifications and extensions, according to the individual needs and the financial possibilities of the beneficiary family. This creates flexibility even though a standard approach is chosen. The core unit approach has equity as the guiding principle. It aims at providing affected families across social categories and classes with a functional and disaster resilient dwelling unit of uniform size with provision for future expansion to be done by the families at their own expense. The concept is ideal for large groups of people with individual needs, capacities and preferences.

If urgently needed the core units can be used as shelter even before the house is fully completed. This helps to reduce the time beneficiary families have to stay in temporary shelters and helps families to return to a normal life much quicker. Beneficiary families were systematically involved in the planning and implementation of the reconstruction. Extensive consultations were held with the communities on beneficiary identification, designs of houses, the building materials to be used and the construction process. This resulted in having a context-specific solution based on local materials and construction techniques and a decision to re-build houses in the original place (in situ). At least one family member had to participate with his or her own free labour and seismic safety standards were introduced. The expansion of basic knowledge among families about seismic safety in reconstruction enabled them to effectively participate and monitor the construction of houses. All of this contributed to a feeling of ownership for the reconstruction process and the new houses.

Beneficiary families within the village were identified on a needs basis, i.e. only the most destitute families were eligible to obtain a new house. The process of beneficiary identification was done in a participatory way by the communities themselves. This process was not free of conflict, but diligently mediated it finally helped to unite the villages in their endeavour to support the most vulnerable and needy families.

Capacity building, sustainable sources for income generation and institutional development

As part of the project, SEWA built up its own construction labour force. Women were trained as masons and had an opportunity to gain an income even during the process of reconstruction. Quality assurance and technical backstopping was provided by specialised Indian and a Swiss NGOs on a regular basis.

By now SEWA has established a construction company whose main objectives is to organize the construction workers, provide them with recognition, as well as to foster legally secure and safe working conditions. Workers are also trained in new technologies, which enables them to take up higher value assignments. In addition, the company takes up the production, distribution and marketing of low cost building materials and set up a training academy for further professionalization. The SEWA construction company fulfills all necessary requirements to carry out (re)construction projects.

The construction project in a nutshell:

Number of houses:	1139 in 8 villages (each with water tank)
Living area per house:	24–33 m ² (core unit, in different phases)
Cost per house:	960–1080 \$ (in the different phases of the project)
Number of Community Learning Centres:	9 (2 more were sponsored by another organisation)