

Site visit to flood-affected villages in Kurnool district (Andhra Pradesh)

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Photos - <http://picasaweb.google.com/chennai.asha/KurnoolDistrictFloodDamage>

[Summary and Suggestions at the end]

Andhra Pradesh Vyavasaya Vruthidarula Union (APVVU) is a trade union federation that represents agricultural workers and small farmers in the state of Andhra Pradesh. It has been working on organizing dalits, landless labourers and women on a variety of issues for more than a decade now. Sahanivasa is an NGO based in Chittoor, Andhra Pradesh that works on education-related projects and is also a legal front for activities of the APVVU.

Given that APVVU has staff and members all across AP including Kurnool district, Mr.Chennaiah was able to give us a good overview of the situation soon after the floods and present a proposal for relief and rehabilitation work that Sahanivasa-APVVU could implement. The proposal involved providing R&R for 36 villages in 6 mandals of Kurnool district in and around Nandyal, and it mentioned that there were APVVU Mandal secretaries in place in these mandals in addition to a district secretary to execute the work.

Nandyal is a municipal town about 70km south-east of Kurnool; River Kundu flows across this town. This river burst its banks on 3rd of October and overflowed into the town and a lot of villages along its course. The main roads of town were sunk in more than 3 feet of water and so the roads were completely cut-off for several days.

I arrived at Nandyal early in the morning of the 13th. I met Mr.Kumar, the Nandyal Mandal secretary of APVVU, for breakfast and we planned our visit for the two days there. Mr.Ramachandra Reddy and Mrs.Lakshmi, the district secretary, joined us soon after.

Mr.Reddy has been a member of APVVU for more than a decade and was working full-time with the Union, focusing on Kurnool district. Given his vast experience related to NREGA and other social programs, he was hired as a State Resource Person for NREGA social audits by the government of AP about a year back, and so has not been involved in the Union activities much since. With the recent floods, he has decided to spend part of his time on the relief and rehabilitation work with APVVU and is setting up base in Nandyal. His plan is to consult for the Government for 15 days and coordinate R&R work with the Union for 10 days every month for the next one year.

We hired a Jeep for the two days, visiting the farther mandals and villages on the first day, and the nearer ones on the second day. The Mandal secretaries for each Mandal coordinated our visit and joined us; I got a chance to meet all of them including Mrs.Savitriamma, Mr.Padmanabaraju, Mr.Rama Rao and Mr.Lakshminarayana (he had fallen sick doing flood relief work, so we paid him a visit).

I have tabulated some information about all the villages we visited over the two days below, and have provided a summary as well.

Mandal	Village/Town	Compensation received (per family)	20 kg rice & 5 litres kerosene received	Observations/Notes
Nandyal	Nandyal (slum)	Rs.7000 (have to confirm)	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Several slums along Kundu were affected - Some houses got flooded and others destroyed - Most families took shelter in a large community hall for 4 days
	Bheemavaram (ST colony)	None	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This village is about 10km from Nandyal - Not much damage to houses though some were flooded - Some families took refuge on terraces/rooftops while others went to a hillock few kms away - Bus services not yet restored, and most people use "share" autos
Bandi Atmakur	Bandi Atmakur (SC colony)	Rs.7000	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - About 150 families in this colony and most houses were flooded, some badly damaged - A lot of anger in the community that the government responded too late and is not providing enough relief - Main concern now is lack of agricultural work because of destruction of crops
	Kakanuru (ST colony)	Rs.5000	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A small community of 50 families - Timely flood warning was given, so all of them took shelter at areas higher up - Only some houses were flooded and very few were damaged
Kothapalli	Battavaripalli	Rs.8000	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One of the worst affected villages with all but three houses, a school and a community hall destroyed - Overflow and backwater from Srisailem reservoir caused the havoc; only 2 hours notice, so most people had to leave their livestock behind - Most families have come back and setup makeshift tents, started cooking and trying to find work; some have not returned - Minister Shilpa Mohan Reddy has apparently adopted the village and has promised to rehabilitate it entirely - Non-governmental agencies, communities, students, etc have been providing relief materials including rice and clothes - Government has sent in health vans for medical checkups as well - Quite far and interior
	Chinna Gummudapuram	Rs.8000	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - About 5km from Battavaripalli; lot of damage and destruction - We saw a continuous stream of trucks, vans and cars come & go providing lot of relief materials and health checkup;

Mandal	Village/Town	Compensation received (per family)	20 kg rice & 5 litres kerosene received	Observations/Notes
	Singarajupalli	-NA-	-NA-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We only passed through this village and there was limited damage - Some relief materials were being handed over to the people there
Pamaluapadu	Vempenta (SC colony)	Rs.7000	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Considerable number of houses flooded; about 350 families affected - Two bridges leading upto the village are destroyed, so movement is pretty restricted now - Story of a family of four including two children that stayed on top of a tree for 3 days and were eventually air-lifted
Velegodu	Velapanuru (SC colony)	Yes, but not sure about the amount	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A one-year old bridge to the village completely damaged, so only foot traffic from & to the village - Biggest complaint was lack of work
Gospadu	Rayapadu (SC colony)	Rs.8000	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minimal damage to houses and property; life is almost back to normal though the school is yet to reopen - APVVU distributed blankets to about 54 houses; a lot of commotion with people fighting over relief material and demanding more from the Union
	S.Kulur (SC colony)	Rs.7000	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quite an interior village but reasonably high-lying, so no damage to any houses here - Streets and fields were flooded, so most agri. labourers don't have work to return to
	Tellapuri	-NA-	-NA-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We only passed through this village and there was limited damage to houses and property, though the crops were all destroyed

Summary

- The water has completely receded and dried out in all the villages I visited.
- Advance alerts and notices of anywhere between 2 hours to 2 days were issued in all places and so families had enough time to move to higher areas. Government officials and police made sure that people vacated and moved, so the human casualty was minimal overall. In fact, there was not a single casualty in any of the villages I visited.
- Most of them moved their livestock (cows, goats, etc) as well and brought them back on return.
- There was no shortage of food provided in relief camps and shelters by the government. Similarly, there seems to have been continuous flow of food dropped from helicopters to families stuck in rooftops and other areas.
- The government announced and issued compensation pretty quickly, and all but one village we visited had received the money. The local officials did quick assessments of the damage in villages and the compensation issued was based on the level of damage.
- 20 kg of rice and 5 litres of kerosene have been provided in all the affected villages.
- The health and sanitation situation also seems to be well under control. We didn't hear of spread of any water-borne diseases even a week after the floods. We saw government health vans going to several villages during our visit; likewise, we noticed that large areas that had been flooded were sprayed with bleaching powder to control infestation by insects and pests.
- All along the visit, we could see extensive damage to crops because of water flooding the fields and staying stagnant for several days. Men and women in a lot of villages are agricultural labourers and so they are completely out of work now.
- In most villages, the schools have been damaged as well and so the children are yet to go back to school. Most schools in flood-affected areas are supposed to re-open on the 19th of October.

Suggestions

- Government and other helping hands have been providing the most important relief material in all places. In a couple of villages, I asked people what they would need the most apart from what they had received so far, and their answer was that they'd use anything that is given to them! When I asked them to be more specific, one woman said cooking utensils and clothes for children. This was in a village that was flooded quite a bit, and so this doesn't apply to lot of other villages. The point is – any non-food relief material has to be village-specific and need not be general. Having said that, I think any relief material that we fund provide might be too little too late.
- It would be better for Asha to be involved in rehabilitation work than any immediate relief work. The most important thing is to make sure people get their livelihood back and earn a living. All relief that is provided (money, material) is going to run out pretty soon, and so it is important for people to get back to work.
- Mr.Ramachandra Reddy and the APVVU folks felt the same way, and are very clear that rehabilitation work in the following year is critical. In my opinion, the Union is well-placed to coordinate and execute any rehabilitation work that we fund.
- In this regard, they see NREGA as the solution, only with a broader scope. As it stands, only mud-related work can be taken up under NREGA but APVVU is already talking to government officials to see if NREGA's scope can be increased to include health and sanitation works, re-tilling of farming lands affected by the floods and re-building houses/streets/tanks/etc in their villages.
- Mr.Ramachandra Reddy, with his experience and reach to government officials, is a key resource to coordinate any rehab work. APVVU believes strongly and is well-placed to do advocacy work, and a lot of such work will have to be done to get NREGA working under these conditions.
- The Union does have a good penetration in terms of members in different villages. The mandal secretaries are well-recognized by the villagers and seem capable of carrying out any rights-based work necessary.
- If Asha decides to fund, we should seek clear job profiles/descriptions for all staff that we fund. We should also get short-term and long-term milestones for the rehabilitation work in order to evaluate the project periodically.