CHAPTER 5

HOUSEHOLD AND COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO FLOODS
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This chapter examines the response of households and communities in the study villages to floods. It follows the response of the communities through different timelines related to the floods – before the floods, during the floods, its immediate aftermath (within a week of the floods) and longer-term response (upto a year after the floods).

The floods

The river was in spate and by September 30, 2009 water incursions had occurred in all the three study villages. The roads were water logged and people just waited for the rains to stop. The response activities to rains, before the floods began, were primarily household-centred. As seen in the study, each household carried out activities to protect their households assets, such as shifting food stock and livestock indoors, even during the rains. While the decision to leave their houses was taken in the hope that they would be back in a day after the rains subsided, many of the respondents secured their assets before fleeing.

Box 5.1

Securing assets in the context of floods

The assets which were commonly secured in the study villages, and the means of securing them, as a response to floods, are given below:

- **Food stocks**: Most houses in the area do not have lofts and the food stocks were secured in sacks and placed in raised positions on brick walls, stones, and firewood to protect them from getting wet and rotting away. However, in most cases the houses were flooded, especially in the lower lying areas of the village and damaged the food stocks.

  *Cont’d…*

- **Money and jewellery**: While many of the respondents took the money and jewellery with them, some of them reported to have kept them in their shelves or cupboards. They felt that they would be back in a day and did not see the need to carry it with
them. Several of them without cupboards, who kept their materials on shelves lost
their money and jewellery either in the rising waters or it was lost under the rubble if
the houses collapsed.

**Clothes & household goods:** These were mostly damaged in all households due to
the rising waters. In collapsed houses, most of the household goods including clothes,
kitchen utensils and electronic items like TVs and radios were not redeemable. Secure
storage spaces like cupboards minimised the damage. A woman who had secured her
TV also along with other household items in her steel cupboard, thereby protecting
them said: ‘that is why girls are given vessels and Godrej (any steel cupboard) when
they get married...’.

**Livestock:** Goats, cows and buffalos were mostly taken along with the household
members when they fled. Those who could not take all of them with them tethered the
livestock to the roadside poles on higher ground. Poultry damage was seen in all the
three settings.

Protection of assets emerged as one of the primary activities of the households in
response to the incessant rains. The rains and the ensuing floods also brought many
changes in households with regard to their future plans and decisions.

**Modification on household decisions in the context of floods**
It was seen through the course of the study that the floods altered the life course of
several people and households by either bringing forwarding or postponing several
decisions. One of the changes was deferment of marriage due to losses suffered in the
floods.

**Box 5.2**

**Deferment of marriage due to flood loss**
In one of the households, the marriage of the son was fixed. However, in the floods of
October 2009, the family lost their shelter and household goods. They moved in with
relatives in the temporary shelters. The marriage was postponed indefinitely as the
family tries to settle in and regain their house and recoup their other losses.
Another change seen in the study area was the change in household composition with households moving in with family members in the temporary shelters and in other study settings after their house was damaged. In one case, it was seen that decision to move out was more due to family dynamics rather than purely flood damage.

**Box 5.3**

**Decision to move out early facilitated by the flood damage**

In a household with joint family, the family relationships were strained between the two brothers and their wives. The younger brother and his wife had been planning to move out in a year’s time. But their mother was not in favour of them moving and living separately. The floods destroyed a part of their house and could not be reconstructed immediately. The younger brother and his wife seized the opportunity and moved out to a rented accommodation in the village. She (younger brother’s wife) said, ‘my mother-in-law also agreed to it this time (after the floods). Our relationship has improved after we moved out. We go to the (family) house everyday and they also come here.’

As seen in the cases above, the floods directly and indirectly altered the family dynamics in many complex ways. It helped in building relations, while it also strained several family relations.

**Strain on marital relationships in the post-flood phase**

The case of strain on marital relationships in the post-flood phase was reported in several households. The life in temporary shelters caused mistrust between spouses and family members due to the proximity of households, lack of privacy and the kind of living arrangement where the boundaries between households were blurred due to lack of space. The flood loss and the added resource crunch also caused strains in the relationship between husband and wife and between parents and children. A woman who believes her husband is not using his time productively said,

‘He (husband) refuses to go for work. He says that he will only work in our land. But for one year he has not done anything about it. It has been lying like that after the floods. I go for ‘cooler’ work by which we are living. If I tell him
that, he will say, ‘who asked you to go for work?’ He acts as if it is my fault that the crops were spoilt. We haven’t spoken for a long time now.’

The husband said,

‘She thinks I am a nobody. I have been waiting for some loan to clear the land and then put something (seeds). Getting some money for agriculture has become difficult now. If I go to work somewhere else, who will look after the fields. I don’t drink and waste money. Whatever we have I use it for the farm.’

The strain in relationships between parents and children was also found. A man whose son who used to run a petty shop said,

‘I am too old to go and work now. Otherwise I would have worked and put food (on the table). My son lost all the items in the shop during the floods. He has not started anything after that. He keeps going to Badami saying that he will do something there. I gave him my money to start the shop. He took the rest from friends and others. I will give him (money) again if he works. But he doesn’t want to do it. He stay most of the time in Badami and comes only once a week. If he doesn’t have money to do anything here, how will he do something in Badami?’

Extended family support in disaster recovery

In the non-intervention village of Budihala, though the incessant rains caused water logging and damaged several houses, the main village which was away from the river was not flooded. However, eight families lived in the fields almost permanently in houses made of bamboo and plastic sheets. These families were mostly nuclear families who were living there, due to lack of space in the main village, or had moved out of their families after differences within the family. The fields were completely waterlogged and in danger of being flooded by the river. All the eight families moved in with the family in the main village before the floods. In one of the eight households was a woman whose son and daughter-in-law had moved out because of constant fights with her, said:

‘The rains united our family. We are now happy together. I had even thought of committing suicide because of the tension….. Now, they realise my worth.’
While social pressures and lack of other alternatives were the cause of reconciliation in some cases, reorganisation of resource sharing was reported from other households. A woman from one household said,

‘When difficulty arrived, we came together. We lost all our standing crops and lost all our food grains. One side of the walls collapsed. Our nephew (husband’s sister’s son) immediately got it repaired. He has been staying with us after the rains and also spends for all the household expenses now.’

It was seen that people moved also out of the village to stay with relatives in nearby towns. Once the roads leading to the study villages became motorable after five days of the rains, a few families with relatives in Badami (taluk headquarters) moved in there, but would visit the village everyday. A man whose older sister runs a firewood depot in Badami moved into her house with his family of five. He said,

‘I had helped my sister and her husband to set up the firewood depot five years back. We stayed with them until our house was rebuilt. We waited for the flood assessments and compensation to be announced and then rebuilt the house with the amount we received. I had to go there everyday to keep track of the announcements in the village and also to receive relief materials being distributed by different agencies.’

The number of households moving out of the village to find shelter was very few, in spite of the high rate of shelter loss, as keeping abreast with the local information was critical to claim the benefits of the relief process.

As seen in the study, the process of supporting the family in times of crisis also seems to have helped bridged differences which existed prior to the floods. However, there were also instances of families deciding against receiving family support. A teenage girl, whose family has relatives in Badami threw light on an important factor which influenced the moving out to stay with relatives in towns. Her family was among those who had complete shelter damage and was living under big plastic sheets used to dry jowar. She said that while her family was considering whether to move in with their relatives in the town, she had vehemently opposed it. Explaining the reasons, she said,
‘Our relatives in the town consider themselves as being superior to us. They look down on us as being lazy and enjoying all benefits, while they work very hard. When I finished my tenth standard, my aunt in Badami insisted that I should not be sent for PUC as she was scared that I may stay with them if I get admission in Badami college. But she sends her own daughter to college. When they don’t like us to stay with them, why should we impose ourselves on them?’

A person from another household echoed a similar sentiment, while highlighting another aspect related to the floods, that of flood related compensation.

‘In the town they have smaller houses with no free space outside. In the village even if we don’t have a roof over our heads we can manage somehow. …….. Also there is the issue of compensation. If we stay with our relatives, they will want to know all the details. Once they know that we have money in our hands, some of them will come asking for loans, and we cannot refuse. They think we can easily manage without any money in the village. We waited for the Government to build temporary shelters and moved into them when they were built.’

In the case of flight to safety, the neighbours were the ones who were most useful when households needed help. However, in the post flood situation, when most household faced some or the other loss, the extended family in the village and outside the village were seen to be the source of support. While no cases of support being declined by family members was reported in the study, the asking of support was weighed in different aspects such as family ties and financial transparency between the families.

As seen in the study, the sphere of decision-making and action was at the household level during the pre-flood phase with regard to securing assets and in the post-floods period with regard to long-term recovery. In the intervening period, there was a gradual shift to community-centred actions in response to floods.
Household-based to community-centred actions

There was no information or warnings issued by the meteorological department regarding the heavy rains. By October 1, 2009 the rains increased and the low-lying areas were beginning to get flooded. By the night of October 1, 2009 as the villages began to get flooded, people had to decide whether to leave their dwellings and seek shelter in higher places, or in the open fields away from the river. But the decision to leave or stay on in the village was not based on individual household threat perceptions alone. The consultation with neighbours and gauging the overall sense of threat perception was important in making the decision on whether to move out to safer places or to stay on.

Box 5.4

Voices of respondents on fleeing from rising waters

- ‘...we decided to see what everybody was doing, before moving.’
- ‘...we did not know what was happening in other places as we were not getting any news (due to power-cuts). We had to rely on what others were saying....’
- ‘...nobody was leaving.... Everybody kept saying it would stop... it would stop. So we just waited and waited...’

As seen in the study, this process of decision-making signalled the shift of activities from the sphere of households to a more community-based one. The information that was available with others in the community and their opinion on the threat perception was important in making the decision on whether to move from the village. As seen above, the consultations with neighbours mostly helped in reassuring their own thoughts and in not being left behind in case others decided to flee. However, reliable information on the situation and the forecast was still not available within the community for them to make informed decisions. This role of trying to secure reliable information was being done by the recognised power structures in the village such as panchayat members and groups such as the dalit youth group in Khyada.
Power structures and reliable information

The panchayat member of Thaminala explained the situation before the floods. He said,

‘When it rained continuously for two days we didn’t know whether it was going to be a repeat of 2007. The memories of 2007 were still fresh in our minds. Due to heavy rains, we couldn’t even go to the panchayat or Badami to get more information. Even the TV and radio news did not give any warning. People began making their own news. Some people said that the dam waters would be released. Some people said that notices had been issued for us to leave. Nobody knew where such information was coming from. I and the SDMC (School Development Monitoring Committee) member called up Bagalkot (district headquarters), but they had not heard of any information.’

In the absence of a panchayat member in the temporary shelter of Khyada the Madiga youth group was recognised as the de-facto leadership group. The president of the youth group in Khyada said,

‘We were trying very hard to know if we needed to leave (evacuate). But there was no communication from anybody. Since we didn’t have power in our village, and none of us had charge in our phones, a few of us went to Hole Alur to listen to the news in our friends’ house and to know if they had heard of any warnings. The only news we got was that the ministers of the government were at a ‘bajpa’ (Bharatiya Janata Party) meeting [BJP the ruling party in Karnataka had an internal party brainstorming meeting from September 29 to October 1, 2009]. They were not bothered even when we were being submerged by heavy rain.’

Lack of reliable information and panic

With the failure of the recognised power structures in the study settings to get any official information or warnings regarding the floods, rumours started about whether the dam waters would be released and whether a flood was expected. This was seen mostly in Thaminala where the community was next to the river and people would not have much time to flee if the waters rose. It resulted in causing fear among the community.
Box 5.5
Voices of respondents on the fear of floods

- ‘…as it was getting dark, people were getting more and more afraid…’
- ‘…we didn’t want to lose everything again. Everybody was feeling so helpless. Some people were praying, some were cursing. I don’t want to remember that night…’
- ‘…I didn’t know how I would escape with the children and my mother-in-law who can’t walk. People were talking of running away. I couldn’t do everything on my own. I thought we will just stay here and die, and nobody would even know.’
- ‘…we all thought that we were going to die…’

Community influence in decision to flee

Some of the households had decided to move to the fields in the evening of October 1, 2009 itself and had begun shifting things like plastic sheets & sticks to pitch tents. However nobody anticipated that they would have to move during the night itself. By about 11 p.m., when the waters began to rise, all the households in the study villages, had to leave in haste (except Budihala, where the people living in the fields were the ones who were first affected). All of them carried mostly shelter items to protect themselves from the rain.

As reported by most households in the study the act of fleeing from home was difficult for all the members. What finally convinced members to move was the fact that everybody else was moving too. In some cases, households moved only after pressure was put on them by their neighbours and community members.

A woman respondent said,

“We would have waited longer. But the waters rose quite rapidly in the village. Most people were leaving and we too decided to do so. However, many of our neighbours were reluctant to leave their house and had to be forced by us.”
Community support and flight to safety
As reported by many households, even with the rising waters, instances of households helping each other, mostly their neighbours were reported.

Box 5.6
Life saved by community support – a case vignette

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A 26 year old resident from Khyada T.S. shared her experience on the night of October 1, 2009:</th>
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<td>We were just praying that the rains would stop. A few who tried to go to the main village found that they couldn’t get to the main road as the mud (access) road was washed off. We didn’t have electricity mostly during the three days of rains and none of our phones were working. We couldn’t contact the people in the village if ever we needed help. We also feared for their safety since the village was closer to the river and we didn’t know what was going on there. Many of the (temporary) shelter roofs had blown off in the winds and we lived in constant fear of the whole shed collapsing. The mud floor of the shelters had become soggy because of the rains and we were sleeping on the sacks of food grains. At mid-night, our neighbour called out and said that they were going to spend the night on the ‘gudda’ (hill). Knowing that I was in my eighth month (of pregnancy), they waited for me and even carried my things_OVERRIDE. I wouldn’t have been alive if they didn’t help me at that time.</td>
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An elected member of the village panchayat said,

‘Along with the panchayat president and few others, we helped more than 3 families with elderly and sick people to escape from the village. But they could not be taken over the culvert into the fields. We left them at the bus shelter (concrete structure) and all of them survived for almost 2 days there without any food, before we could reach back to them with some food’.

These instances of helping other households were reported in cases when there was a known need in a household, such as the presence of a pregnant woman, infant or the immobile elderly who needed to be carried to safety. While most of the support was given by neighbours who were from the same caste, instances of community support across castes were also reported.
Box 5.7

Community support across castes

A household with all three members with visual impairments (low or no vision) shared that they were not only taken to safety by neighbours, but received help from other caste members, including regular supply of food. Similar experiences were shared by elderly persons or couples staying alone.

In addition, community leaders such as the panchayat members took the initiative to check whether anybody required assistance in moving. The panchayat president of Thaminala said:

“All households were moving to the fields with whatever they could carry with them. We had to cross waist-deep water to cross to the fields as the water channel was over-flowing. There were many families who did not have anybody to help them. A few of us went to all the houses and ensured that everybody left for the fields.”

Community—the first responders

During the flight to safety, people had gathered together as small groups at the foot of the hills or in the plains away from the river. One the morning of October 2, 2009 the rains had still not stopped and the water levels were still rising in the shifting village of Thaminala. It became evident that the flight for safety was not a short-term measure. That was a crucial period since people had to begin thinking of food and meeting their other needs till they could go back to the village. They were cut off from the road to the village for most parts of the day and were mostly hungry. A few of them had carried dry rotis from the previous night which was exhausted soon. Some young people who managed to reach the road brought back stories of how the village was submerged and several houses had collapsed. It was only by late evening of October 2 that the rains subsided. On October 3, the people could enter the village though it was still water-logged. It took another three days (that is a week since the rains began) for the government to send any relief or to organise ganji kendras (gruel centres, organised in some villages). People from all the groups went as far as they could move around and gathered food and soppu (leafy greens) which were shared by all the members who were gathered together. They even shared the collected food
with the livestock they had taken with them. In the boundary of Khyada, food was airdropped from helicopters which helped groups stranded on one side of the river, but that reached only one group.

The first-responders in the floods which affected the study area were the community members themselves. The response of the households and community groups to the floods ensured that loss of life was minimal and loss of livestock and household goods were minimised.

**Surveying losses and community psychological support**

The type of destruction and nature of losses suffered by the households varied immensely. Shelter damage was the most common. Partial or complete collapse of the walls was seen in all houses, except the lone concrete house in the village and some of those who had been rehabilitated after the July 2007 floods. Linked to the type of shelter damage was the loss of other household and food stocks.

The sight of one’s home destroyed and all belongings being lost were devastating for the community members who were often at a loss to describe their feelings at that time. A woman who lost all her household goods described the situation:

> ‘As I walked into the village, I feared the worst. All around me people were screaming. I saw many people crying. Clothes and household goods were strewn all around in the muck. Our house was in the last part of the village. By the time I reached there I had a good idea about what I was about to see. As I reached my home, the sight was as I expected... it was much worse. There was nothing standing. It was as if somebody had deliberately wiped out my home. Nothing could have prepared me for this... I wouldn’t have even believed it if someone told me this is how my house looked like. I just sat down there. I didn’t know what to do or where to begin. I don’t remember too much after that. It was my neighbours who helped me get on my feet.’

The stories of neighbourhoods coming together to help each other was common. The living arrangement of the communities was along caste lines, with mostly family
members living close to each other. These family and caste based groups were the first source of support during the initial periods after the floods.

A woman who too had received support from her family members and neighbours said,

‘The rains seemed to have washed away the homes and the divisions between the homes. Each was trying to do their best in the situation. It did not matter who was being helped as long as work was being done in pulling out the valuable things from the rubble. People were comforting each other and were nice to each other. It did not last too long, but when it was there, it was very useful and it helped everybody.’

**Food and caste divisions**

Most of the food stocks in the village had been submerged and were not edible. And finding food became an important priority for all the households. The situation was particularly serious in the first week after the floods as dry firewood or cooking fuel was also very scarce and hard to be found. Informal group cooking was organised by people pooling in whatever food grains, cooking ingredients, vessels, cooking fuel and labour could be found. These too were largely structured along neighbourhood, caste and clan lines. In Thaminala there were three informal groupings around which the cooking was organised, while one was led mainly by the Kurubas, where the other OBCs and Muslims were also involved, the second was largely the general caste groups while the third was largely the Madigas and other Schedule Caste communities. Women in addition to the cooking were also involved with the men and children in salvaging whatever household items could be restored and reused.

While the community support in the flight to safety phase and in the immediate aftermath of the floods often crossed caste boundaries, the divisions again began to reappear in the disaster recovery period when people returned to their village and engaged in rebuilding their lives. As seen in the study, food, water and cooking materials associated with its associations of purity and impurity in the context of the caste system was the first instance in the flood recovery period when its appearance was profoundly felt.
Labour, caste and economic divisions

It was seen that the caste divisions got even stronger as the disaster recovery progressed. Due to the alignment of caste and landholdings as seen in the third chapter, the occupations were also aligned largely with different caste groups. The divisions widened in the context of finding labour for helping with the disaster recovery. It was particularly hard for land owners and those with larger houses and livestock to find labour for salvaging food stock, agricultural produce and household belongings or tending to the livestock. The landless labourers who were readily available at other times for labour work refused to go for work as they were busy in their own households. A youth from a landless, dalit household confided,

‘The upper-castes and landlords who are not used to heavy work used to come and beg us to go and work in their homes. We would always tell them that we were busy, or we would give another excuse. They would expect us to work for the same wages or even lesser as it was not agricultural work. Some of them promised us grains when the stocks dried, but even we could get it after the food stocks dried. We wanted firewood, cooking fuel and cooking ingredients right then. Also we wanted higher wages. But they are also clever and did not offer to pay more. They thought that if they paid us more then, we would demand the same wages later on. None of them offered to pay us more. We too got together and decided to not work until they offered us more money.’

But things changed soon enough. Some older members among the landless labourers, both men and women gave in to the pressure and went to work, in defiance of their group’s understanding. This led to a sharp divisions and fights among the landless labourer households.

A woman who has been working in one of the landlord’s house for over three decades, ever since she came into the village after her marriage expressed,

‘We couldn’t just turn our backs in their time of need. They have always helped us with loans whenever we had a need for money or food. It is true that they never offered to pay more, but we also didn’t demand it. Our people were very angry with me and my husband for going to work, but we had no choice.'
Tomorrow if we need work where will we go? We are too old to go to the town like these boys and girls and seek work.’

These divisions which surfaced were in the context of continuing and increasing need such as food and shelter. Many of those who temporarily moved back into their houses also had to move out because the houses were unsafe for living. Finding shelter turned out to be one of the major tasks for those who had to move out of their houses.

**Shelter and caste**

One of the limiting factors in finding suitable accommodation, even rented ones was caste, where houses were not let out on rent or shared with members of other castes. Hence in communities where most of the members suffered complete shelter damage, finding suitable accommodation was a problem. For instance, in Thaminala, eight out of nine families from the Ganiger caste were homeless after the floods, while the lone house which escaped complete destruction was partially damaged. A householder of the Ganiger caste said,

‘...........There are no temporary shelters in our village....... Where will we all find a house if nobody gives us a place to stay? They don’t think that tomorrow they can also be (in the same position) like us. I have put tarpaulin sheets and some old broken (asbestos) sheets to cover the roof. We don’t know when all this will fall on our heads.’

In cases like the one above, prompt response from the Government in providing temporary shelters could have helped the homeless families. The delayed action by the government with regard to shelter and all other aspects of disaster recovery put the families at risk of being killed by the partially destroyed houses. The Government policy was not only delayed, it also was not enabling communities to recover from the disaster. On the contrary it laid roadblocks to early recovery as seen in the following section.
Government action and community inaction

Previous experience of the floods had taught the community that they needed to wait for the Government assessment of the shelter damage before they could make any changes. This was imperative if they wanted to receive compensation. The process could take two weeks or more to begin, but they had to wait if they wanted their names included in the list. A person whose house was partially damaged said,

‘Many of us could easily have patched up the house and rebuilt the mud walls. But last time many people were denied any flood related benefits because they had rebuilt the walls, and the surveyors refused to include their names in the flood-affected people’s list. They not only lost the shelter damage compensation, but also other benefits such as special ration supplies, and other relief supplies.’

Box 5.8

Rewarding the lazy – A reflection on government policy

A school teacher of one of the villages said,

‘The government punishes those who try to help themselves while those who are lazy get rewarded. This time everybody has learnt the trick, and they are even breaking down walls further to claim additional compensation.’

Disaster recovery and indebtedness

The Government’s disenabling actions meant that people’s relevant needs were not met in a timely manner. The focus was mostly on building temporary shelters. However, even that was not available in Thaminala. The case of this 36 year old man from Thaminala illuminates the problem. Recounting his experience of the floods, he said,

‘It was like starting our lives new (afresh). We had to begin everything from the beginning – our house, our household goods, food and water. Even a place to pour water and a bucket had to be bought again. ………..there was no help from anyone, not even the Government. What is the use of saying you will get a house three years from now? What will we do for three years? We had to take a loan from the ‘loan sangha’ (Micro Finance Company).’
A 16 year old student of a pre-university college from Budihala too shared her household’s experience,

‘We lost a lot of things. Our houses were partially damaged and a lot of things could not be recovered from under the rubble. My books were washed away. We lost all our clothes. Some money kept in the house could not be found. We needed to start buying everything all over again. We had painted the house and made some modifications only last year. Now, the rains wiped out everything and we are trying to start all over again. May father has taken a loan from our relatives and for interest from money lenders......... we didn’t get a single paisa’s help from the Government.

The lack of relevant and timely support from the Government or any other sources ensured that the recovery was slower. As seen in the study, households had to take loans from sources like relatives, micro finance institutions and private money lenders to buy even basic household goods. However, a major part of the disaster recovery in terms of reconstruction and rebuilding livelihoods still remained to be done.

**Inadequate compensation and unmet needs**

Reconstruction and repair of broken or damaged houses was one of the first things that needed to be done for people after the massive shelter damage that occurred in the floods of 2009. However, most of the households decided to wait until the damage assessment could be done by the government. In the shifting village of Thaminala, the decision to shift the entire village was taken by the government within a month of the floods. And subsequently the compensation given for repair of houses was reduced by over one-third, since they were to be provided with new houses. But the process of providing new houses would be a long-drawn one and would take atleast two years. Many of the houses were damaged severely and were unliveable. The compensation received was hardly enough to even buy materials for repairing the damage. Many households used the money for food and other essentials, since they had lost all their food stocks, and had to buy them from the open market.
As seen in the case above, the amount meant for shelter repairs, being grossly inadequate was utilised for other needs by the household. This was mostly seen in the shifting village of Thaminala where there was reduced compensation provided because of new shelters being provided. However in cases where houses were being built either with the full compensation being provided by the Government and in the Government housing rehabilitation plan, several structural changes were visible in the repair and construction of new houses.

**Structural and qualitative changes in the post-flood construction**

The first visible change after the floods was with regard to use of construction materials and style of construction. The use of cement and concrete was one of the changes. This was in place of the random rubble masonry which was prevalent in the area. The use of concrete doors and frames in place of wood was also seen.

A mason in Budihala who worked in all the three study villages after the floods said,

‘*Because of the heat in these parts, people prefer the old type of construction (random rubble masonry). But these walls cannot withstand floods. Good*
materials are not available for this kind of construction now. People saw what happened in the floods and everybody wants only concrete structures. It is very difficult to get sand, and the cost is very high, but people are scared to build using traditional methods.'

Several design changes were also seen in the new constructions that were coming up. One was the elevation from the ground. Some of the houses were elevated over three feet from the ground as compared to other houses which were at ground level. The second was the construction of retaining walls around the house in some cases. This was in place of the thorn fences that were common in the area. The third change was the introduction of lofts in the reconstructed houses.

Speaking about the introduction of lofts, one of the householders who has built a loft in his modified house said,

‘We received thirty five thousand rupees as compensation since our house was completely washed out. We spent an additional forty-forty five thousand rupees to rebuild our house. Laying the foundation was very expensive since we raised the floor level. We built a loft to store food grains. We lost everything this time and we don’t want it to happen again.’

The structural and qualitative changes in construction reflected the new needs of the area in the context of floods. A corresponding change was with regard to the skill levels of the flood affected people.

Seeking new opportunities through diversification of skills
Diversification of skills was another change that was seen in two of the study villages. Women attended tailoring classes conducted by an NGO in the area. It was the first time that women were attending formal classes to learn tailoring. Only men worked as professional tailors in the villages before.

One of the tailoring class participants shared about how and why they began learning tailoring,
‘After the floods we could not find work anywhere near and we had to travel far to find work. The madam from the NGO had come many times and conducted meetings on “narega” (Mahatama Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act). She told us how we could get hundred days of work per household if we got our job cards done. Some of us went and told her that we wanted to do something other than coolie (agricultural labour) work. That madam knew tailoring. She used to teach tailoring before she began working with the NGO. She told us that she was ready to teach us tailoring if more than ten of us gathered together. By the next day, twelve of us had given our names to her. First we had one machine given by somebody. Later they bought three more machines. Now we can stitch children’s clothes and home clothes. The madam has said that after we finish our training, she will take us to a garments factory in Bagalkot if we are interested. We will also apply to the panchayat for getting a loan for buying machines under the rojgar yojana. This year we wanted to apply, but they said that they had already given it to others and the quota was over. We will apply next year.’

Three young men from one of the study villages, attended driving classes in Badami. Three of them have completed their training and have been working as a taxi driver in Badami. He explained how they arrived at driving as skills which they wanted to learn.

‘We were doing coolie (agricultural labour) work in Mustigeri and Badami. But even that work was not regular. We had formed a “yuvaka mandali” (youth group) in the village. Two of my friends who are group members were planning to go to Mangalore for work. All preparations had been done. Padiyappa, one of the older youth group members knew a driving school owner in Badami. While talking to him, Padiyappa told him that some of the group members were planning to leave to Mangalore as we couldn’t find work here. He immediately told Padiyappa that there was a lot of demand for drivers in Badami and also in Bangalore, Mangalore and other big cities. He told that if atleast three students joined his driving class, he would waive complete fees for one of the students from a flood affected house. Padiyappa came and discussed the idea with us. We spoke about it with our family
members also. They said that if we would get jobs here, then we should go for the driving classes. But we didn’t have money. The yuvaka sangha members decided that we could take a loan from the members’ savings, if the three of us agreed to repay the loan jointly. That’s how we went for the training. I have got a job here with a travels (travel agency) and my other two friends have gone to Mangalore recently. They are looking for work there as drivers.’

When asked why his friends had not found driving jobs in Badami, the youth said,

‘They had actually been offered work here. But they were always interested in going to Mangalore where our other friends are already staying. They informed their parents that there were better opportunities in Mangalore and went there. I never wanted to go that far. So I stayed back. I hear that they have still not got a job there.’

The diversification of skills and finding skilled jobs such as driving and tailoring after the floods was a new phenomenon in an area which was used to people migrating mainly as construction workers.

**Migration in the post-flood phase**

Migration is seen as an adaptation where the risk to livelihoods is distributed over space and is not a new practice in the region, or linked only to hazard events such as drought or floods. The study explored the significance of migration in all the three study settings in the context of the floods. While distress migration was not reported from any of the villages in the post-flood situation, out-migration was observed from all the villages. In-migration was also seen in all the three study villages immediately after the floods.

**Return-migration after the floods**

The floods of October 2009 in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh made big news and was called the ‘century’s worst floods’ in the region (The Times of India, 2009; Asian Tribune, 2009). Those who had migrated from the study villages heard the news and rushed back to their villages fearing the worst. Since electricity and telecommunication system had been affected, people could not even contact their families. The road
infrastructure had also been destroyed as many bridges had been swept off. Over half the migrated population returned to their villages after the floods (except in Khyada).

Table 5.1

Return-migration after the floods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Return from migration</th>
<th>Thaminala (n=40)</th>
<th>Budihala (n=29)</th>
<th>Khyada (n=25)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>22 (55)</td>
<td>17 (58.6)</td>
<td>9 (36)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Khyada the proportion of returned migrants was lesser at thirty six percent. The floods of October 2009 had added newer members from the main village to the temporary shelters, creating a severe space crunch. The mother of one of the persons who had migrated from Khyada, explained about why her son did not come back. She said,

‘He called me after a week of the floods. I told him that things were getting back to normal and also some of our family members had moved in with us (into their temporary shelter) after the floods, as their shelters were completely destroyed. There was no space for everyone. He calls me up everyday or I call him.’

While for some, the reasons for not returning was economic. A woman spoke about her family members who had not returned. She said,

‘They went to Gujarat for “nokari” (work) just before the floods came. Even finding the train fare for all of them was a problem. But somehow they managed. The “seth” had told them that they would be given their “pagaar” (payment) only after three months. He is a very good man and has given them a place to stay. They will be there at least for three years before they come back.’
Table 5.2

Department of the return migrants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In-migration</th>
<th>Thaminala (n=22)</th>
<th>Budihala (n=17)</th>
<th>Khyada (n=9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gone back after returning in October 2009</td>
<td>14 (63.6)</td>
<td>3 (17.7)</td>
<td>7 (77.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stayed back after returning in October 2009</td>
<td>8 (36.4)</td>
<td>14 (82.3)</td>
<td>2 (22.2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Return migration and livelihood opportunities

Majority of the migrants who had returned after the October 2009 floods, returned back to their places of work. Some of them stayed back. In a group discussion with the migrants who had returned back to their village after the floods and not gone back, the primary reason given from staying back was the anticipation of livelihood opportunities opening up in the area. One of them said,

‘When I returned (after the floods), I planned to go back soon after. I still have some of my clothes and belongings in the room (where he was staying in Mangalore). But the situation was very bad here, and I had to stay back to help my house get back up. There was “suddi” (news going around) that entire villages were planned to be relocated. So, I thought there would be “gaare” (masonry) work available and I stayed back here. Work was available immediately. Karnataka Land Army employed many of us for the putting up the temporary shelters in different villages. Then we got work in the permanent shelter construction. Payment was also good. The work will last for another year atleast.’

A woman had set up a tea stall near one of the permanent shelter sites. She said,

‘In Mangalore I used to run a tea stall while my husband went for construction work. When we came back he began working as a mason. He spoke to the contractor and asked him if I could set up a stall near the worksite. He was very happy. He only provided a table and a tarpaulin sheet. The workers are given tea twice a day. They also buy biscuits, banana and beedis which are kept in the stall. I also keep small sweets for the children of workers and women who come to feed the children.'
The woman’s husband added,

‘The tea stall has now become like an anganwadi, as all the children come there to play. My wife looks after the children while the mothers are working. We are happy that we can work here instead of being in an unknown place. The payment is less here – two hundred and fifty for a skilled mason and one hundred and fifty for helpers. In Mangalore, it is four hundred and two hundred and fifty (respectively). But our other costs are less as we stay at home. Our family is also happy when we are here.’

Return migration and family reasons

For some others, the reasons were more sentimental and family-oriented. One of those who came back after the floods and never returned said,

‘We were not sure what the situation at home would be like. I feared the worst. Knowing that our homes were near the river, I was really scared. I had left my pregnant wife and two year old daughter, and my parents back here and gone to Mangalore to work at the port. I rushed back on hearing the news. A few of us hired a Trax, but we could not reach the village. We had to walk the rest of the way to reach our village. I was carrying all my things. The scenes on the way were scary. Houses had been destroyed, and the water level was still waist deep in the village when I came back. At many places it was even neck deep. I then decided that I was not going back again leaving my family.’

A 52-years old women recalling how her son came back from Mumbai with food and dry rations and shared it with the others said,

‘….. my son used to work in a hotel in Mumbai. On hearing about the floods, he tried to contact us, but could not get through as nobody’s phones were working for 3-4 days (Electric lines had been snapped and even after they were repaired, electricity was not restored for fear of electrocution in places submerged under water. Land line phones were not available and mobile phones could not be charged.) He immediately asked his “seth” (hotel owner) for a few days leave and returned with a lot of food, pickles and dry ration. He faced a lot of trouble in reaching back to the village as bridges were washed off and the roads had been cut off. He walked a lot and finally got here. We
were living in the school where a “ganji kendra” (gruel centre) had been opened. We shared the food with all the people there.’

**Return migration and housing**

Budihala which had the highest proportion of those who stayed back after returning (14 out of 17), the reasons were economic as well as linked to housing. In Budihala, housing was a major issue due to lack of land availability for housing. One of those who stayed back said,

‘When we heard that jobs would be available in the temporary shelters and permanent construction sites, we stayed back. But living at home was difficult since there were hardly any space for all of us and our families. We got work with the Karnataka Land Army (KLA) in reconstruction work and they were providing shelters for workers near work sites. We moved in there and stayed there for a few days.’

The livelihood opportunity coupled with the free housing option was the main attraction for the migrant workers from Budihala. However when the full fledged work on the permanent shelters started, they were asked to vacate the shelters provided for construction workers. They asked them to stay in their own villages and commute to the construction sites. The shelters were then allotted to those workers who had come from outside the district. The workers from Budihala protested against these norms since they would not be able to stay in their houses due to lack of space. The workers from Budihala requisitioned the KLA officials to send them to other construction sites where accommodation would be available. The officials understood the plight of the workers and sent them to the neighbouring district so that they could get accommodation. The workers stayed in the shelter provided at the construction sites and visited their homes in Budihala once a week and during festivals village and temple *jatres* (fests).

As the norms related to housing for workers on construction sites went against those who had smaller houses, a similar disparity was visible in the norms for compensation of crop loss.
Compensation for crop loss and landholding
Since the process of claiming compensation for crop loss was complicated and a meagre amount was fixed for non-irrigated lands (to the tune of Rs. 2000 per hectare), many of those who had lost their crops, especially the small and marginal farmers did not receive any compensation. Those who had taken loan for seeds and farm inputs were indebted and had to further spend money on removing silt from the fields. The process of receiving compensation was again complicated and a minimum of 3 inches of silt had to be proved to receive compensation. These norms completely ignored the plight of small and marginal farmers whose major concern was not silt settlement alone, but the loss of top soil and farm inputs, depending on the location of the land. Also the norms for any compensation being fixed at the hectare level, the small and marginal farmers could at best expect a pittance as compensation if they managed to satisfy all the norms for claiming compensation.

Box 5.10
Filing for compensation more expensive than compensation received

H. Madar owns less than an acre of land. He spent over a month running around to file his loss claims and in bringing officials to his field for verification of the loss. He spent over Rs.1,500 in travelling many times to the taluk headquarters, paying for relevant officials to visit his farm, and food expenses for himself and friends, who helped him in going to different offices and filling in the forms. The compensation amount received was Rs.967. He said, ‘I gave up my work and ran around like a dog for a month and the amount I received won’t even cover my funeral expense if I die today. They have made a joke of our problems. If they had told me in the beginning that I won’t get much benefit, I would not have wasted my time. Each officer kept saying, come tomorrow, come day-after tomorrow and I will get everything ready for you.’

The compensation received hardly matched with the kind of losses the farmers had incurred. This also had a further impact on the farming choices they made.
Farming choices

Many of those who had lost the crops were in debt due to the losses they suffered. The credit they had availed from the suppliers of seeds and farm inputs had to be cleared. They had bought time from the suppliers, but the amount had to be repaid before the next season began. Many of the small and marginal farmers decided not to go in for farming in the next planting season and instead preferred to work as an agricultural labour. One of the small land holders shared the plight of people like him who had decided not to go in for farming in the season following the floods.

‘We couldn’t repay the amount we had received as credit from the seed and fertiliser supplier. Because of the floods, they went slow on us. But as the next season approached, they were also in need. We had to face their harassment and also not expect much help from them. There was also the fear that due to the floods of last year, there would be drought this year and we were not ready to take the risk of another loss. We told the supplier that we would do “coolie” (work as an agricultural labourer) work and repay their loan within three months. He was not ready to leave us. The amount is still not cleared fully. We have not put any crop on our fields, except some seeds for our home use. I don’t know when I will be able to start farming there again.’

However those who had access to credit facilities, decided to take the risk again since it would otherwise damage their fields rendering it unusable for a long time. As seen in the fourth chapter, credit was linked membership of co-operative societies which was a function of one’s landholding and caste. The investment required to clear the land at a later date would be higher. This was shared by a farmer in Thaminala who took an external loan from a money lender and cleared the credit of the supplier. He decided to take the risk by farming again. He said,

‘If I didn’t work on the farm this year, by next year it would become unusable. I needed to remove the silt and work the land. It could not be postponed any further. Seeds and other inputs were needed and I had to clear the previous credit I received. I took a loan from the Society and repaid the suppliers. If I didn’t do that I would have to sell the land and go and work as a coolie. I have recovered a part of the money this year. If there are no floods or drought for two or three more seasons I will be able to repay all my loans.’
The access to credit through the co-operative societies proved very useful in the post-flood situation and made the difference between restarting farming or going to work as agricultural labourers.

This chapter examined the nature of households and communities’ response to floods. It also presented the impact of floods on the household and community level assets which affected the disaster recovery process. Another important part of the disaster recovery process was the acts by external agencies, mainly the State. The role of the government and non governmental organisations (NGOs) in the context of the floods in the study area is discussed in the following chapter.