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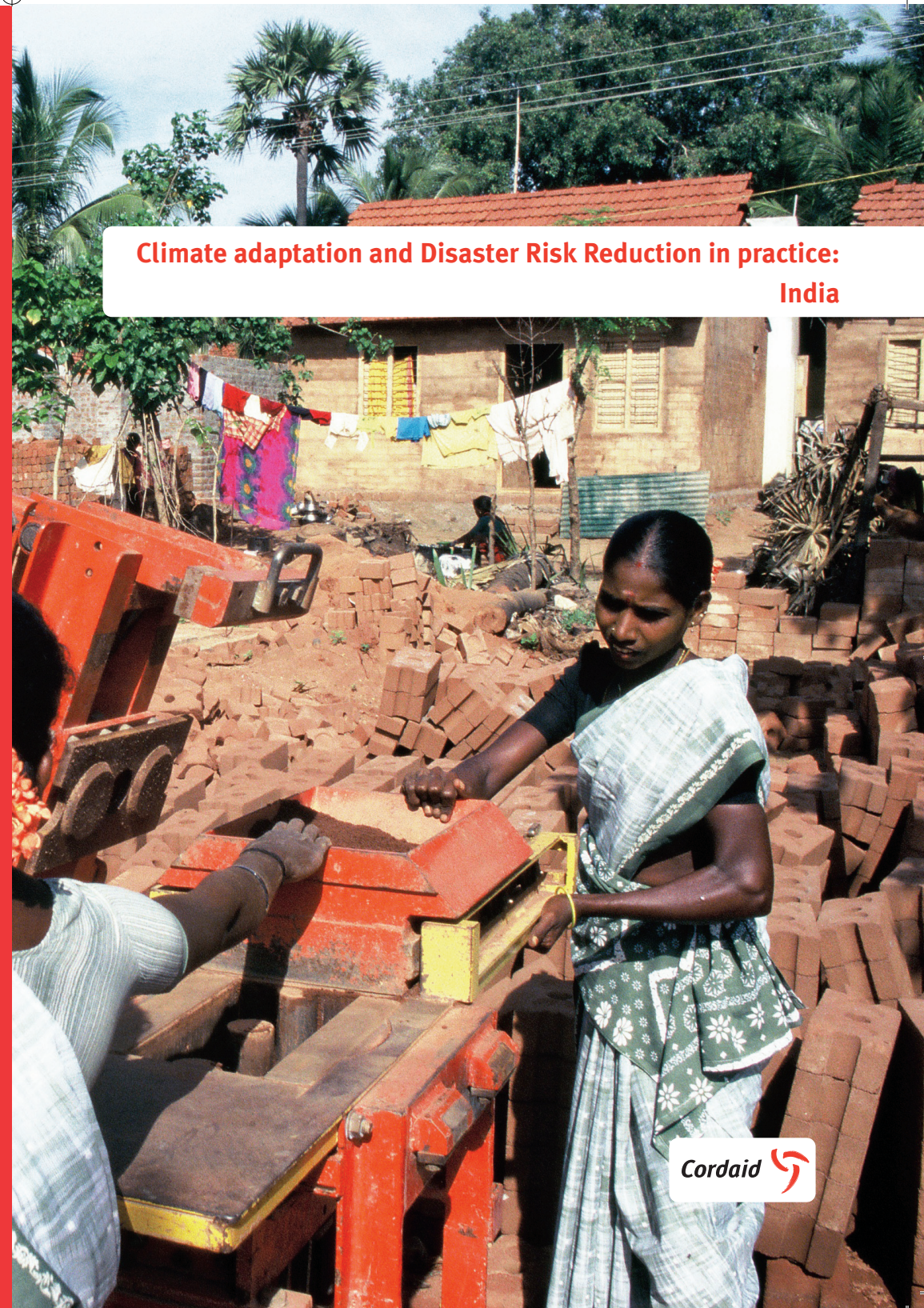
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Climate adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction in practice: India



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Climate change in India represents an additional stress on a country that is already facing tremendous pressure on natural resources due to rapid development. With its growing population, India is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Understanding climate change and its consequences is critical to protect lives and assets upon which India's economy is dependent. Awareness of climate change and its impact on people, the economy and livelihood will be important to balance economic growth and development with a changing resource base.

Background

From the early 1990s India has gradually opened up its markets. Economic reforms brought foreign competition, led to privatization of certain public sector industries, opened up sectors formerly reserved for the public sector and led to an expansion in the production of fast-moving consumer goods. GDP Growth has been high the past decade, and inflation low. But not everyone benefits from the economic growth. While the rich are becoming richer, the Indian poor continue to struggle with harsh realities such as deaths due to hunger, unclean drinking water, lack of access to health infrastructure and education, gender disparities and violence against women. As per the Constitution of the democratic India, the Government is to guarantee Basic Services of food, water, shelter, education, health care, good governance and social security. Unfortunately still many people are excluded of these rights. Religion, the caste and the joint family systems, play an influential role in shaping economic activities. The caste system keeps the Dalits and Tribals on the margin of the society and the women among them being the lowest in the social ladder. The power oriented structure of the society also adversely affects and marginalises other groups such as the physically and mentally challenged, old age persons, children, persons affected by diseases and ailments such as leprosy, Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. Considering the recent trend in the developmental debate of increased emphasis on Inclusive Development, and considering the almost 400 million people below the poverty line, India faces a huge challenge.

The Cordaid approach

Natural disasters are common in India and every year parts of the country are hit by floods, cyclones, droughts, earthquakes and so on. The worst affected communities of natural disasters are without exception the poorest of the poor. In India usually these people belong to the lowest cast or are Dalit (without caste) or tribal, and suffer serious forms of discrimination and exclusion/marginalisation. The Disaster Risk Reduction programmes (DRR) in India therefore is especially targeted to Dalit communities and other marginalised groups which are considered extremely vulnerable for natural disasters.

Working together

Cordaid is working with a range of partner organisations on Community Managed Disaster Risk Reduction (CMDRR) in different areas of India, focussing on floods, drought and cyclones.

A concrete example of joint collaboration is the case of NCDHR, Dalit Watch, and ASKS, who have strengthened their forces to combine the results of their studies in the flood affected areas in Bihar. The results of the studies undertaken will be compiled together into one research document consisting of the mapping of damages & exclusion of Dalit and Adivadis (tribal) communities, the mapping of their vulnerabilities and a study on traditional coping mechanisms. The outcome of the study will be used for advocacy issues

DRR in practice: adaptation measures

Bihar, Bettiah

In March 2008, Caritas India, through its local partners in Bettiah, started with CMDRR in Bettiah, Bihar. The area faces floods every year. Another problem the communities have to deal with is the riverbank erosion, which leads to the loss of land every year again. The rivers in the region change course almost every year during the flood season therefore people are never sure whether they live in a safe place or not. No development work was done earlier in part of the selected villages, and no social organization/mobilization work was done here before. Every year the same circle of floods –relief – rehabilitation- recovery – floods was taking place, and Caritas India took up the challenge to break through this vicious circle. After only 6 months of implementation several positive changes can be seen already at the community level. People are quite well organized now, and women's participation is very good. Core groups on CMDRR have been formed in all 56 selected villages and Task Forces have been formed and trained. Communities themselves conducted risk assessments, and keep the information updated. Local authorities were involved in the training and in conducting the risk analysis, and there is now good coordination and cooperation with the government.

Rakhai village of Bairia Block: a success story

In June 2008, as the water level started to rise in Rakhai village of Bairia Block, this caused soil erosion and some houses were washed away. There was a state of chaos among the villagers. All were afraid and started to leave their houses and move to high land. Caritas staff members were with the villagers boosting them up and told them that instead of running away they should try to face the situation. As a result, people chose to stay and do something. They came together and decided to stop the erosion by making barriers on the bank. They managed to stop the river from entering their village. Their effort proves that nothing is impossible, and their courage has become an example for others.