

# THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO KERALA FLOOD - 2018

## A REPORT

### AN OVERVIEW OF KERALA FLOODS - 2018

The worst floods in close to a century submerged the state of Kerala between August 8 and 16, killing over 474 persons and affecting over 54.11 lakhs of people. Considering the amount of rainfall received between June 1 and August 19, the state received 2346.6 mm of rainfall, which is 42 per cent higher than usual (Janapatham, September 2018). Kerala is India's most densely populated state with an average of 860 persons per square kilometre (the national average is 450.42 persons). Over 45,000 hectares of farmland was submerged, loss in animal husbandry sector alone crossed 174.5 crores, 75,000 houses were damaged and one of the state's three international airports at Kochi was inundated. It was the first time in the history of the state that its highland, cities and lower plains were all hit by floods. It was the worst flooding in Kerala, in which over 373 people died within a fortnight, while at least 14.5 lakh people were displaced, mainly from Chengannur, Pandanad, Aranmula, Aluva, Chalakudy, Kuttanad and Pandalam. Thirty-five out of fifty-eight dams within the state were opened for the first time in history. Water from the Periyar and Pamba Rivers and its tributaries kept many towns in Ernakulam, Pathanamthitta and Thrissur districts submerged.

The first flood occurred in the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of June 2018. The second flood started in the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of July and continued till 4<sup>th</sup> week of July. The third series of flood started on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2018 and the fourth flood occurred from August 15 to 24, 2018. An estimated 16,000 kilometers of PWD Roads and 82,000 Kilometers of Local Roads were damaged. 134 bridges collapsed and the total Loss is above Rs. 20,000 crores as per Government Reports. Although the cause of such a huge loss to society has been attributed to the floods in general, other related disasters that aggravated the situation include landslides (landslips), rockslides and land subsidence.

### RESCUE & RELIEF OPERATION BY THE CHURCH AND ITS INSTITUTIONS

The entire church and its institutions involved vibrantly in the rescue and relief operations in the event of the Flood disaster. National and International appeals were submitted by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) and Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council (KCBC) in order to mobilize funds for the Rescue, Relief and Rehabilitation operations. Caritas India, the National level organ of the Catholic Church for social development would be the major coordinating agency for implementing the project with the help of Kerala Social Service Forum which is the state level network organization of KCBC and its partner members namely the 32 Diocesan Social Service Societies functioning in the state.

Nevertheless, the Diocesan Social Service Societies, parishes, pious organizations, religious congregations all took to the field without any hesitation or waiting for the funds and demonstrated inexplicable prudence and dynamism to effectively coordinate the rescue and relief operations in the Emergency Phase. 4094 Relief camps were opened in collaboration with Govt. authorities and around 10,80,700 people took refuge in these relief camps. 3000 fishermen rescued 60,000 people and



among them 440 boats & 900 fishermen were mobilized by the dioceses of Trivandrum, Kollam, Alappuzha and Kottapuram. Around 500000 people settled in their relatives and others houses. People of Kuttanad were shifted to houses in Changanacherry and Alappuzha. 192 Help desks were opened by DSSSs. The DSSSs keenly involved in distributing food, clothing, sanitary items, cooking utensils, medicines, drinking water, washing and cleaning materials; organizing medical camps and providing psychosocial support. DSSSs mobilized more than 2 lakh volunteers to assist the flood and disaster affected victims in the various phases of the Emergency, Rescue, Relief, Restoration interventions and covered around 269,276 families.

An estimated INR 317.9 Crores of Flood Rehabilitation Project activities has been demarcated in total by 17 dioceses.

Besides, the DSSSs' mechanisms for reaching out solace to the affected, a plethora of charity works were initiated independently at various levels within the Church. Various pious organizations, especially the youth organizations rushed to the scene and continued laboriously till matters settled down.

Many of the dioceses planned out a variety of schemes to reach assistance to the affected. The non-affected and the affected dioceses used their systems innovatively in this regard.

#### SUPPORT RENDERED BY NON-AFFECTED AND PARTIALLY-AFFECTED DIOCESES IN KERALA

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Diocese of Tellichery is extending livelihood support to affected parishes of Mananthavady Diocese. Women parishioners from Tellichery diocese heeding to a call from the DSSS Director cooked Chapathis at the household level and the same were collected at the central level and delivered in relief camps and houses of stranded victims across several districts like Alappuzha, Ernakulam etc.

The Trivandrum Diocese reached out with 21 truck-loads of relief support worth INR 1.6 Crores to 10 affected dioceses.

Quilon diocese launched an innovative project called '*Oppam*' to reach out to the affected communities even outside the diocese. Dioceses of Palakkad, Kothamangalam, Ernakulam, Cochin, Thrissur, Thamarassery, Neyattinkara, Wayanad, Idukki, Kanjirapally and Pala extended relief support to Kuttanad. Kannur, Alappuzha and Malankara (Trivandrum) dioceses also helped flood affected areas of other dioceses.

Dioceses of Hosur, Ramanathapuram, Uduppi, Bangalore, Palayamcotta, Faridabad, Azhakupuram, Kuzhithurai, Coimbatore, Kottar, Shamshabad and Thakkala reached out to the flood-affected dioceses with assistance in cash and kind.

#### SCHEMES DEvised BY AFFECTED DIOCESES IN KERALA

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Ernakulam Diocese trained a team of parishioners of several parishes to render psychosocial support to the affected in its diocese.

Changanacherry Archdiocese declared a 100 crores budget project for the rehabilitation of the affected in its jurisdictional area. In order to realize this



project, the diocese has worked out a twinning parish project under which parishes which are well-off and/or not affected would adopt and support a small parish in the affected area.

Idukki diocese has mobilized around 12 acres of land worth INR 6 Crores to relocate 120 families who lost their land in the landslides and related flood disaster.

#### SUPPORT RENDERED BY RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS

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The Congregations of Religious Sisters and Brothers donated generously in the relief and rehabilitation activities. More than 9 acres of land has been mobilized by the congregations alone, for affected families. They are also directly supporting House construction, Livelihood Restoration and other welfare activities under the project. Over 24 lakhs of Indian Rupees has been committed from the salary of working members of the Congregations to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund.

#### SUPPORT RECEIVED FROM REGIONAL FORUMS

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TASSOS along with TNCRI has mobilized an amount of INR 55,00,000/- for supporting livelihood in 11 dioceses.

The Bihar Regional Forum provided an amount of INR 5,00,000/- for immediate relief activities.

#### CARITAS SUPPORT TO THE DIOCESES IN KERALA

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Caritas India has devised an extensive and scientific plan of intervention for the Relief and Rehabilitation activities in Kerala. In the initial days of the flood outbreak, Caritas India arrived at the sites of havoc and conducted a rapid assessment of the extent of damage. In the light of the appraisal, the most affected districts were determined to include Wayanad, Trichur, Ernakulam, Alleppey, Pathanamthitta, Idukki and Kottayam.

Currently in the Emergency Phase of its interventions, Caritas India has been involving in the distribution of Relief Kits as per SPHERE Standards. The total value of Relief Kits amount to INR 8,98,88,022/- and the agencies that supported Caritas India for facilitating these kits include START, Siemens, UWB, RR, HCL, EA, Kindermission, EA-Austria and Siemens employee contribution.

DSSSs that have so far been supported include Shreyas Bathery; WSSS; Jeevana; COD, Thamarasserry; Santhwanam, Thrissur; SAFI, Irinjalakuda; KIDS Kottapuram; ESSS Varapuzha; WSE Ernakulam; Samridhy Muvattupuzha; KSSS Kottayam; KSSS Kothamangalam; CSSS Kochi; CHASS Changanacherry; ADS Alleppey; Chethana Mavelikkara; Anugraha Pathanamthitta; Bodhana Thiruvalla; PSSS Punalur; HDS Idukki; PSWS Palai; QSSS Kollam and VSSS Kottayam.



Caritas India will soon be entering into the Rehabilitation Phase especially with special focus to Livelihood Restoration. This is based on the decisions taken in the Participatory Review Meetings with Directors of the affected dioceses and as such Caritas India interventions will include Repair of Houses, Toilet Reconstruction, Restoration of Safe-drinking Water, Income Generation Programmes, Community Health programmes like psychosocial support to the affected and Palliative care to cancer patients.

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#### RESPONSE OF KSSF

KSSF prepared a Report on flood situation and got it published through UCAN Catholic News. The Forum initiated dialogue with donor agencies including Caritas Network partners and other agencies for mobilizing support to Dioceses. Advocacy was done with CSR companies like HCL, EY, Goonj, Hope Kolkota Foundation, Facebook Network in USA etc. KSSF was part of the Joint field visits to flood and disaster affected areas along with Caritas India. KSSF made special efforts to visit relief camps. It has involved in liaising work with 10 Regional Forums in India to get support for the relief efforts of the Kerala Church. KSSF is actively engaging in the Collection, Compilation & Consolidation of Data from 31 DSSSs on the extent of damage, relief and rehabilitation plan, panchayath-wise intervention strategy etc. An estimated INR 1.9 crores of damage has been incurred to schools of Dioceses (based on data received from 44 schools of 18 Dioceses).

KSSF is entrusted with the responsibility of collecting and consolidating information on the response of the Kerala Catholic Church to the Kerala Floods and disseminate the same to authorities, public etc through various modes including website, social media and print media. In order to effectively document the Response of the entire Catholic Church in Kerala in the event of the Kerala Floods, KSSF has devised a Common project title 'A Rehabilitative Initiative for Flood Stricken Kerala by the Catholic Church' referred to as ARISE Kerala - 2018 in short. The programme shall encompass the entire humanitarian and project works engaged by Caritas India, the DSSSs, Dioceses, pious organizations, congregations etc. for Flood Relief, Rehabilitation and Disaster Risk Reduction.

KSSF has been vigorously engaging to mobilize relief materials from different agencies like TASSOS, Archdiocese of Goa, Karnataka, non-affected dioceses, Parishes, Prayer groups in and outside Kerala (including the Gulf), CSR institutions for the benefit of the affected in the various DSSSs. KSSF is also offering a helping hand to DSSSs for Project Preparation and Documentation.

KSSF under the guidance of Caritas India has initiated four clusters for effective programme planning, Sharing of information/resources, programme monitoring and especially to ensure the evasion of duplication in programme implementation. The Regional clusters thus formed are Wayanad Region, Idukki Region, Kottayam Region and Ernakulam Region.



JOINT MEETINGS OF CARITAS & KSSF

- First Joint meeting of Directors & KSSF with Caritas, CRS & KCBC on 24<sup>th</sup> August 2018
- Inter-Faith Prayer and Solidarity for the Victims of Kerala Flood and Fury (organized by Caritas India and KSSF), 31 August 2018
- Executive Meeting of KCBC, 31 August 2018



- Bishop Lumen Monteiro, Chairman, Caritas India visited the flood affected dioceses in Kerala during the period from 28-31, August 2018. He visited KSSF and dioceses including Changanacherry, Allepey,

Vijayapuram, Pathanamthitta, Tiruvalla, Kozhikode and Manathavady and its affected areas

- Second Joint meeting of Directors of the major affected dioceses, KSSF, KCBC & Caritas India on 6<sup>th</sup> September.2018.
- Third Joint Review Meeting took place on and 6<sup>th</sup>, October 2018.

CONCLUSION

The church has presented a praiseworthy response in the extraordinary Flood situation that subdued Kerala. Generous and concerted efforts flowed in from different parts of the state, India and abroad with the Church institutions in a lead role. The mutual help rendered, and solidarity expressed was exemplary and praiseworthy. The contribution of the fishermen (mostly from the Latin community) in the rescue operations was especially laudable as it played a decisive role in reducing the death toll. KCBC has donated INR 1 Crore to the Chief Minister’s Relief Fund as a sign of solidarity with the Government’s efforts.

Nevertheless, a lot remains to be done and the institutions of the Church must work in a coordinated fashion hand-in-hand with other government agencies and other NGOs. Even though, out of paucity of funds, house-restoration may not be included exhaustively, wherever possible, Restoration of Livelihood, Water and Sanitation should be covered extensively. Sustainability should be a key focus in all interventions and environment-friendly, low-cost technology that is ecologically suitable (context-specific e.g. lowland or highland) must be promoted. Care should be taken to reach out to the maximum deserving irrespective of caste or creed and evolve replicable models in Management of housing, water and sanitation.

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