



# Jewish Coalition for Disaster Relief

## INDIA EARTHQUAKE RELIEF

American Jewish Committee

American Jewish Joint  
Distribution Committee (JDC)

American Jewish World Service

American ORT

Anti-Defamation League

B'nai B'rith International

Canadian Jewish Congress

Conference of Presidents of Major  
American Jewish Organizations

Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)

Jewish Council for Public Affairs

Jewish Foundation for the Righteous

Jewish Labor Committee

Jewish Reconstructionist Federation

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

National Council of Jewish Women

New York Association for New  
Americans (NYANA)

Rabbinical Assembly

Rabbinical Council of America

Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association

Religious Action Center of  
Reform Judaism

UKJAIID (United Kingdom Jewish Aid  
and International Development)

UJA-Federation of New York

Union of American Hebrew  
Congregations

Union of Orthodox Jewish  
Congregations

United Jewish Communities (UJC)

United Synagogue of Conservative  
Judaism

Ve'ahavta: Canadian Jewish  
Humanitarian & Relief Committee

Women of Reform Judaism

Women's American ORT

## Activities Update

June 25, 2003

### Situation Report

Over two years have passed since the devastating earthquake shook India in January 2001, leaving between 25-30,000 people dead, thousands injured and hundreds of thousands homeless. Of the regional population of approximately 39 million people, an estimated 15.5 million were affected by the quake, with financial losses estimated at up to \$5 billion.

As reported in previous updates, the international community responded quickly, providing major rehabilitation support throughout the affected region. International aid agencies such as the World Bank provided initial assistance that included the construction of temporary shelters; the repair of homes, schools and public buildings; training for those involved in rebuilding efforts; the establishment of rehabilitation and counseling centers; and the improvement of medical facilities, dam safety and irrigation systems.

USAID also conducted immediate relief efforts, including the provision of temporary shelters and emergency food supplies. Today, most activities focus on longer-term development, such as USAID's grants for home reconstruction and building under its Gujarat Earthquake Recovery Initiative, as well as improvements to the medical infrastructure.

Unfortunately, rebuilding has been slow, and reports indicate that much of the new construction does not meet modern western earthquake resistance standards. Many people living in urban areas remain in temporary shelters and primitive tents. In the rural regions, both bureaucracy and corruption are reported to be obstacles to victim compensation, as well as overall reconstruction.

Others in the international community are taking steps to help mitigate the damage of natural disasters in India. For instance, the European Union, the UN Development Programme and the World Bank recently partnered to provide \$10.1 million for projects in India aimed at lessening the impact of earthquakes. According to the director of India's National Center for Disaster Management, "The Indian subcontinent is among the world's most disaster-prone areas in the world. At least 56% of the land is vulnerable to earthquakes, 8% of the land is vulnerable to cyclones and 5%

Throughout 2002, India faced its worst drought in 15 years, affecting an estimated 300 million people. Despite the fact that monsoon rains caused severe flooding in several regions, over half of India's districts received little or no rainfall, including 5,000 villages in Gujarat State. In many areas, 75% of crops were lost and there were acute shortages of drinking water, food and feed for livestock.

Religious violence continued through 2002, albeit on a smaller scale than experienced in the early months of the year. In total, over 2,000 people were killed in mostly Hindu/Muslim violence last year in Gujarat. Beyond the general instability that this violence caused, many NGOs that had once worked in earthquake relief have shifted focus to address the needs of riot victims. Also, as the threat of war, including the possible use of nuclear weapons, increased between India and neighboring Pakistan, the international community became cautious. Many humanitarian projects experienced delays, were postponed or suspended as expatriate missions to India slowed. The security situation has also meant a loss in local staff for humanitarian organizations, as potential employees are not attracted to jobs in the region. As noted below, several of our Coalition partners experienced this shortage of manpower, causing delays in project activities. Fortunately, this situation has improved in 2003 and the presence of international NGOs in Gujarat has increased.

### **Coalition Activities Update**

#### **I. Building Community Water Tanks – SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association),**

*Coalition funds are being used by SEWA to support the construction and repair of 194 "roof rain water harvesting tanks" in the hard-hit districts of Patan, Surendranagar and Kutch.*

To date, SEWA has constructed the following 125 roof water harvesting tanks with Coalition support:

- Patan: 50 (the total goal is 65)
- Kutch: 25 (the total goal is 64)
- Surendranagar: 50 (the total goal is 65)

SEWA expects the remaining 69 tanks to be completed in the upcoming months.

In addition to storing rainwater, the new structures also hold water that is brought by tankers to the villages during the summer months and other periods of drought. In this way, safe drinking water is available to villagers even in times of severe water shortage. In an informal survey conducted with participants throughout the area, 60% of the women felt that the quality of the water supply had improved with the use of roof rainwater harvesting. Over 75% of the respondents felt that this system of water supply was very reliable. Combined with SEWA's hygiene awareness programs, rainwater tanks have had a positive impact on the health of the women and their families.

SEWA also reported that indirectly, the construction of these structures has given their members increased confidence, as they are managing their own water and are no longer dependent on private water vendors or other suppliers. At a policy level, the success of these tanks has encouraged the Gujarat Government to formally include roof rainwater harvesting techniques in its regional water programs.

JDC Country Director for India traveled to India in November 2002. While visiting the Jewish Community and JDC-related projects, she was also able to visit a Coalition-supported CRY project in the village of Barada in Surendranagar. Excerpts from her report follow:

*“The village of Barada was completely destroyed by the earthquake and as the houses in the village had to be rebuilt, an ideal opportunity arose to put in place the infrastructure of roof rainwater harvesting tanks. Many technologies exist for the harvesting of rainwater but roof rainwater harvesting is one of the simplest to establish and maintain. In fact this system has been in existence for over 2000 years and can still be seen in Jerusalem, where many old houses still have water cisterns under the house. Rainwater is captured on sloping tiled roofs and through a series of pipes and drains the water is fed into underground tanks...*

*Women are taught to use lime and traditional herbs to disinfect their water tanks. At one of the homes I visited, the wife explained to me, with the aid of an interpreter, that they have been instructed not to harvest the first rain of the season but rather let it clean the roofs and pipes. According to Bharti Bhavsar, the senior coordinator for the Water & Natural Resource Management Campaign, 125 tanks have already been constructed in the three districts of Banaskantha/Patan, Surendranagar and Kutch.*

*This project is extremely impressive as in addition to providing clean supplies of water it also creates work opportunities for the women within the beneficiary community. The project also reflects SEWA's theory that women's health and their livelihoods are directly related to water security. If clean water is not available, there is an increased burden on the women of the village who have to literally "fetch" the water and often from distant wells or other water sources. Having to secure water is often a time consuming process, taking the women away from their families and their paying jobs, this can affect the women's physical and mental health and can create a financial burden if medical treatment is needed after drinking unsafe water.*

*The house that I visited appeared to be quite large compared to others that I had seen. It was situated in an enclosed compound and of one room with an attached small room for stable for some goats and a donkey. The roof up of red tiles sloping into a drain and pipes into an underground rectangular shaped tank, underneath a concrete laid covered patio house. In addition to the one room in the patio is also used for sleeping. When we the house the husband and one of the elder having a siesta while the wife was out doing a baby on her hip and a number of small tagging behind. The wife was very young, or 19 years old, striking looking, dressed in a vibrant red and yellow sari. This woman, with all the hardship in her life, spoke proudly as she explained to me how the water harvesting system worked and how she had been part of establishing the infrastructure. The area we were in is an area of repeated droughts and the water that the family manages to save in the tank is used mainly for drinking purposes. The rest of the water has to be carried from a well or from the village pond. This water has a high salt content and therefore is mainly used*



*comprised cooking, a was made that lead situated outside the house this arrived at sons were chores with children possibly 18*

*for sanitary and other household purposes although it is often mixed with the rainwater for cooking.*



*SEWA's "women, work and water" strategy involves the whole community in the decision making process and not just the individual female community member. The entire village is often involved, fully participating in the rehabilitation process. The community's involvement is not only paramount in the reconstruction of homes and village infrastructure but it also encourages micro-planning and sustainable village development. Disaster relief turns into development opportunities. An impressive and highly commendable project!"*

In a recent report, SEWA described some of the problems encountered during construction including communal riots in early 2001, which hampered project progress, as organizers were not able to travel to the rural districts. Technical problems also arose, such as that caused by the rocky terrain in some villages, which made it impossible to dig the underground tanks. Fortunately, the incidence of rioting has lessened and other technical problems are being successfully addressed.

## II. Rebuilding Dalit Housing – Navsarjan

*Navsarjan received Jewish Coalition funding to help support the reconstruction of 566 homes for the Dalit ("Untouchable") community in non-Kutch areas affected by the earthquake. The balance of funds is to be used towards related building expenses for additional homes.*

To date, all the homes for which the Coalition provided material subsidies have been completed. Construction took place in the *talukas* (counties) of Muli (68 homes), Lakhtar (29) and Limdi (469), in 66 different villages within these *talukas*.

In their final report to the Coalition, Navsarjan noted some of the project highlights, including obstacles that were overcome. For instance, Navsarjan noted that the amount of money received in response to the earthquake was four times greater than their normal budget, making it necessary to establish a comprehensive financial system to ensure that funds were utilized properly and efficiently. In addition, staff had to be hired to supervise and audit the newly computerized accounts that had been set up for each *taluka*.

In an effort to ensure the highest quality work, 15 engineers were hired to oversee the quality of construction throughout the project. In previous projects, these aspects were entrusted to the individual builders, a fact that many experts now agree played a role in the amount of destruction following the January 2001 quake – despite claims to the contrary, most buildings were not structurally sound. Handbooks explaining the importance of seismic proofing were produced and distributed to all of the project beneficiaries. In addition, 100 masons and 500 trainee masons were provided with official training in proper construction. Finally, the builders were paid in five installments throughout the project, and payment was made to each only after the work was evaluated by the site engineer and approved for compliance to set building standards. This system ensured high quality standards at each step of construction.

Navsarjan reported that because of the bureaucratic procedures involved in receiving official assistance, they decided not to apply for Government support. For example, they had hoped that state assistance would enable them to receive a lower price for cement. After evaluating the

requirements, they determined it would be less expensive and much more efficient to buy cement on the open market.

Navsarjan also noted that their earthquake relief projects provided a great learning opportunity for their organization. They found that the success of any project related to longer-term development depends greatly on community participation. Although in this project, community involvement varied from region to region (in two villages, women were beaten by their husbands when they demanded to participate in the village committee), the vast majority of beneficiary community members played a large role in the rehabilitation project, even if it was to simply confirm shared values and concerns with the implementing organization.

After witnessing several incidents of violence against Dalits in Surendranagar as they attempted to access disaster aid to which they were legally entitled, Navsarjan reconfirmed their belief that caste identity continues to play a major negative role in the lives of too many people in India. The organization also concluded that in a post-disaster situation, it is better to undertake rehabilitative efforts on one's own, without waiting for government assistance. Based on their experience, they concluded that the most vulnerable sections of society are often ignored despite the provision of official aid.

Finally, Navsarjan noted that their post-earthquake rehabilitation efforts enriched the experience of the organization and helped it to strengthen its own base in the communities with which it works. They stated that from the feedback they have received from beneficiaries, it is clear that everyone is pleased with the reconstruction, as well as the community-centered process that Navsarjan utilized to assist them.

### III. The Creation of Children's Activity Centers – CRY (Child Relief and You)

*Jewish Coalition support was used to build ten children's activity centers operated through Marag, one of CRY's partners in Gujarat. The activity centers are located in the Surendranagar district in Gujarat. There are four centers in the taluka of Chotila (in the villages of Dhudheli, Pajvali, Navagam and Panchavda) and six centers in the taluka of Sayla (in Shirvania, Noli, Ghundiavada, Dhinkvali, Ninama and Ratadaki).*

As reported in the previous update, the CRY/Marag activity centers were initially expected to operate for nine months after the earthquake. It was felt that at that point, the Government would have most of the earthquake-damaged schools repaired or reconstructed and operational. Within the year, it became clear that the Government's plans for full reconstruction were unattainable, and CRY redesigned the project to continue activities through January 2003 ("Phase II").

The initial goals of this project focused on child protection, and the provision of counseling and education to those affected by the earthquake. In Phase II, these activities were consolidated, and a greater emphasis on formal education was added to what had been a relatively loosely structured program.

One aspect of this "formalization" is utilizing Government professionals. In some villages, Government teachers who expressed interest in taking part in the activity centers were incorporated into both the management of the school as well as student instruction. In addition to recreational activities, arts and crafts, theater and sports, children are now learning to count and read. More advanced activities relating to the children's overall development were also introduced. Initial project activities continued, such as regular health check-ups, follow-up with children and their

mothers, outreach to those not attending school, and tutorial support for students in need of extra assistance.

At the same time, Marag is working to increase community participation and build local capacity. Young adults are encouraged to participate in community activities and become involved in decision-making. *Bal panchayats* (youth assemblies) and *bal adhikar samitis* (youth responsibility committees) were formed in all 10 villages. With CRY supervision and guidance, the *bal panchayats* organize “planting days,” hygiene sessions and recreation/entertainment activities. To date, over 160 youth have become involved in these groups, which teach leadership skills and democratic values. The *bal adhikar samitis* work to ensure community participation in the operation of the Activity Centers, so that buy-in could be established and center activities would become an integral part of regular village activities. These groups also work to raise awareness among their peers regarding their own rights. Mothers groups were also formed to sensitize and empower mothers about the rights of their children. Trained facilitators work with approximately 250 women, focusing on gender issues, the importance of education for girls and negative aspects of early marriages.

CRY and Marag reported that the training of *baldosts* (facilitators) proved to be an integral element to the success of their work. As noted in previous Coalition updates, these *baldosts* received intensive training before beginning their work at the centers, including sessions to build their skills in management, organization, writing, child monitoring and tracking, and appropriate care for children with special needs. The *baldosts* were also successful at building strong relationships with local authorities, such as the Government Office of Education and the Labor Commission. In part due to their efforts in outreach, CRY/Marag have reached over 1,780 children in the Coalition-supported centers. Of these, approximately 450 are attending the centers on a regular basis, while the rest participate in center activities through outreach programs and other interventions.

Although Jewish Coalition funds have been expended, CRY has extended project activities through March 2004 (Phase III) with support from other donors. In addition to fortifying current activities in areas such as education and children’s rights, CRY will now focus on assisting those who have not had success in securing post-earthquake compensation, such as those in the migrating communities. They have increased communication with the local government in an attempt to determine a fair and timely solution to this problem. This approach has proven successful regarding center activities – as coordination with the local authorities improves, the number of children being serviced increases.

#### IV. School Reconstruction – GIAN (Grassroots Innovation Augmentation Network)

*Coalition funds were provided to GIAN to help reconstruct a part of the Gram Swaraj Sangh School in Neelpar Village that was destroyed in the earthquake.*

As noted in the last Coalition update, there was a significant delay in construction on the school, due in large part to a shortage of engineers and laborers, and a backlog of relief commitments undertaken by GIAN. Construction began in November 2001, with the school’s former students and nearby residents helping to remove the rubble. To date, construction is complete with the exception of the floors, ceiling, doors and windows. As soon as these items are added, the building will be furnished. GIAN expects that the school will be fully functional by August 2003.

The building includes three classrooms, a laboratory, a library, a staff-room, the main office, a general store and a water room. The school also has a dorm area and dining room for students who

live in villages that are not close by, as well as residential facilities for teachers and other staff. The school will be able to accommodate 300 students.