



Ritinjali's Disaster Relief Efforts in Bihar: A Report from the Ground



On the way to Rampuria Vasa: Partially Submerged Under Water

After a successful emergency relief effort phase, when the focus was on providing food supplies, medicines, clothing and shelter to the people affected by floods, Ritinjali is moving ahead with its long-term efforts by putting in place an educational plan to prepare and nurture children to become lifelong learners and responsible members of a pluralistic society.

Needs Assessment

Crucial to providing relief is to remain closely connected to the needs of the people on the ground. As part of conducting a needs assessment, the Ritinjali team travelled extensively in the flood-affected districts in Bihar to assess the damage to the schools and its impact on providing educational services. Over the last few weeks, our team has been visiting villages and meeting with the District Administration Officials, District Education Officials, local NGOs and the evacuees to assess and understand the current educational situation and to formulate a plan for future efforts.

Village Visits

As the water has receded, most of the evacuees who were seeking refuge at the Zero Mile Camp, where much of our relief efforts were focused, have returned to their villages. The Ritinjali team, therefore, visited several villages to track the families we were working with. During our field visits, we came across villages which were extensively damaged and water logged. Many villages are still out of reach and are like islands, cut off from transport and communication.

The first village visited by our team was Rampuria Vasa in district Madhepura, which continues to remain submerged in water. Almost eighty per cent of the evacuees who had taken refuge at the camp Zero Mile were from this village. The population of this village is approximately 1000 people. There is one primary school in the village with 274 children (148 boys & 126 girls) and 8 teachers. The school building consists of 3 classrooms and one staffroom. Fortunately, the school building is only partially damaged. The team also tracked and met with the teachers who were facilitating teaching-learning in the temporary shelters set up by Ritinjali at Zero Mile.



Classroom in Rampuria Vasa's Primary School

The team visited the adjoining villages, Akhri and Bakhri. While neither of these two villages have a formal school, there were approximately 261 students, who were seen studying in the open. The team then visited Aunahi village in Gwalpada block of district Madhepura. The primary school building

there was completely damaged. A makeshift outdoor school has been set up to provide education to approximately 200 children.

The team visited a middle school at Naya Nagar, where damage to the roof affected 8 classrooms and one classroom had no roof. This School enrolled about 345 children and 6 teachers. Another village, Shekpura, had a primary school with 9 teachers and 472 students. This school building too had extensive infrastructure damage to the roof in all 5 classrooms.

The team also visited the Primary Schools in village Rampur and in village Tapra of Murliganj block in Madhepura district. Both these schools, with approximately 200 students each, were found fully operational. The team visited schools in the villages of Girjapur (no school building), Fareba (school building partially damaged) and Kheravasa (school building partially damaged) of Beldaur block in Khagaria district.



Outdoor school in Girajpur Beldaur

Findings from Needs Assessment

Bihar continues to face significant challenges in providing educational services, even when not complicated by natural disasters. In a region hobbled by poverty and a lack of infrastructure, schooling has not been a hugely successful exercise. Now, with the quality of life at its lowest ebb, especially in the 5 flood affected districts (Madhepura, Supaul, Saharsa, Purnia and Araria), and the education infrastructure severely impacted, the damage is indeed huge. Indeed, the floods have left many children orphaned or rendered homeless, and with significant mental scars. They will require more than the

customary initiatives to heal their mental wounds before they start their education.



Submerged School at Aunahi Gwalpada

The floods have set Bihar back in many ways and relegated even more children to the most vulnerable tiers of society. The needs assessment study shows that rehabilitating the school infrastructure is imperative to the task of stabilising the people. Not only because it will allow the provision of education to many displaced children, but also to help them overcome their trauma.

Ritinjali's Action Plan: Upgrading Access to Quality Education

Moving forward, Ritinjali proposes to provide quality education to the children in the Madhepura district through the primary school in village Rampuria Vasa. The School is intended to cater to students from Rampuria Vasa and the other surrounding villages of the district. Since the floods have partially destroyed the existing school building in Rampuria Vasa, the immediate task will be to clear the school compound that is littered with debris and trash and repair the damage to help the children continue their education. The other activities that we will be focusing on include:

- Improving the physical infrastructure. This will include painting the classrooms, building a boundary wall around the school for security, building a toilet, providing furniture, fixtures and swing and play material.

- Providing teaching aids such as blackboards, books, copies, pencils and other materials to support teaching and learning.
- Empowering teachers through regular teacher training programmes, including those from surrounding villages.
- Rampuria Vasa Primary School will become a nodal point for facilitating teaching-learning in the surrounding villages of Madhepura district.
- Imparting social awareness and responsibility to the students of the school and empowering them to become better citizens.
- Improving the quality of life and decision making of the students and families of the students of the school.
- Providing scholarships to 2 students to continue their higher education. We identified 2 children, a boy named Mohammed Rustam and a girl named Rasina Khatun who we will support so that they can realize their ambitions and become leaders in their community.

Ritinjali's educational plan is intended to serve as a catalyst for the teachers in the area to empower them with renewed skills, vigour and commitment in their role and performance in the classroom, school and wider community.



Mohammed Rustam, one of two students receiving Ritinjali Scholarships

Volunteer Support

Many of you have contributed generously to our relief efforts in different ways. We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support, without which neither our work so far, nor future activities would be possible.

Since we take a long term approach to relief work, we plan to continue our involvement in the Madhepura district for at least 12 to 24 months. For these efforts to be successful, we will need a lot more support from you. Specifically, we need volunteers to spend time in Rampuria Vasa and surrounding villages and interact with the children.

Volunteers could listen to their stories and share their experiences with the children. They could also talk to them about health and hygiene and contemporary social, economic, political and global issues and concerns. The students could be encouraged by reading plays, poetry, short stories and conducting sessions on art and craft, pottery, drama, music, yoga and meditation. The volunteers could play cricket and football matches with the children. They could also help in implementing the curriculum.

When we require more funds, we will come back to you. Please do pass this information along to your friends and request them to support the relief efforts as well. In case you want to be a volunteer, please get in touch with **Anju Dhar at 9312211876, Ashish Alex at 9911144046 or Deepika Nanjappa at 9811066550**. You could also write to us at ritinjali@ritinjali.org

We will continue to keep you updated on our educational work in the area. This information will be updated regularly on our website: www.ritinjali.org.