

# **COVA Earthquake Relief and Rehabilitation Project Activity Report from April 2006 to March 2007**

## **Operation Salvage**

COVA and VAN Kashmir along with Central Rehabilitation Coordination Committee (CRCC) launched Operation Salvage in the earthquake affected areas of Uri and Karnah. The operation was aimed at providing expert engineering assistance to victims whose houses were damaged in the October 8, 2005 earthquake to enable them to determine if their houses could be salvaged through retrofitting and repairs.

A series of meetings and discussions were held in this regard with heads of various engineering institutes. 185 trainee engineers from 3 colleges were oriented by NCPDP Gujarat, by providing them with technical expertise to enhance their capabilities in a one week orientation programme.

The first batch of 71 engineers, including 19 women, were sent to Uri and Karnah in an impressive ceremony flagged off by the Divisional Commissioner of Kashmir on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2006 from Srinagar. By end-April, 101 engineers spent an average of 8 days each in the earthquake affected areas of Uri and Karnah Tehsils under Operation Salvage.

The volunteer engineers were divided into several teams of two each, and each team was hosted by a local family that provided hospitality and local guidance to the team for the duration of its stay. The engineers gave technical assistance to the people and made valuable suggestions regarding retrofitting and reconstruction of their damaged houses. The data of damage assessment done in 64 villages of Uri and 16 villages of Karnah was collected.

## **Outcomes of the project:**

1. A total number of **5383** households in the affected areas of Karnah and Uri (**4638** in Uri and **745** in Karnah) were assessed and the owners educated and provided with expert technical advice so that they would not unnecessarily demolish their houses and would use quake resistant features in their houses
2. The advice provided was beneficial to the affected people and many refrained from dismantling their houses and have started retrofitting.

## **First phase of Re-construction Programme**

COVA launched the reconstruction phase of its programme in August 2006. In this phase houses were to be reconstructed for the vulnerable and most deserving in Uri and Karnah identified after a thorough survey.

## **Planning for the Re-construction work**

A systematic plan was made to meet the challenge of constructing about 200 houses in Uri and Karnah tehsils. COVA took the assistance of NCPDP of Gujarat, INTAC and the Auto Cadd in Srinagar to evolve the Constructional/Architectural Design and Costing. A group of senior engineers in Srinagar were also involved in evolving the final designs and estimates that were in consonance with the local situation and cost estimates.

After a series of consultations, field visits and debates lasting over three months, the experts finalized the designs and cost estimates by June 2006. It was finally decided to construct houses, each comprising two rooms of 10 ft x 10 ft and a toilet.

### **Identification of Beneficiaries**

The extensive survey conducted by COVA identified 850 families covering 136 villages both in Uri and Karnah. These vulnerable families consist of the elderly, widows, terminally ill, physically and mentally challenged persons, who will never be able to construct their houses on their own. During consultations with the Community Committees in Uri and Karnah it was decided to undertake the construction of 65 houses in Karnah Tehsil and 135 houses in Uri Tehsil if adequate resources could be mobilized for the most deserving among the vulnerable sections.

### **Participatory Approach adopted by COVA**

COVA and VAN-Kashmir in consultation with CRCC decided to go for participatory approach in the reconstruction programme (popularly known as ‘contribution scheme’). It was decided to impress upon the beneficiaries to contribute a certain amount from the compensation received from the government for construction of their houses. It was felt that this way the beneficiaries would be involved in the construction process on equal terms and would monitor the quality of work with greater interest. This would also facilitate construction of more houses which otherwise would be impossible due to budget constraints. Engineers and programme personnel of COVA made visits to each beneficiary family to check the material from their damaged houses that can be re-used in the construction process.

### **Construction Highlights**

The Earthquake Reconstruction Phase was started with the foundation stone laying ceremony of the first house at Uri town on 7th August 2006. The foundation stone was laid by J&K State Minister for Consumer Affairs and Distribution, Mr. Taj Mohi-ud-din. In the first phase at Uri, construction of 7 houses started in ward no.3 Uri, Bijhama, Lachipora, Pringle, Bonyaar, Bimyaar and Jabla.

Similarly in Karnah the construction phase started with foundation stone laying ceremony in Bag Bella village, which was attended by SDM Karnah, Army officials, members of Community Committees and a large number of local people. In the first phase of

reconstruction in Karnah Tehsil 19 houses were tendered of which 16 houses were allotted to the contractors and remaining 3 have been re- tendered for the second phase.

### **Construction of school toilets**

COVA with support from GMR Varalakshmi Foundation, Bangalore, constructed washrooms and toilet facility for two schools of Gabra village in Karnah Tehsil in July 2006. The Government Middle School and Primary School at Gabra were selected in consultation with the Central Village Committee.

### **Signature Campaign and Lobbying**

The members of Central Rehabilitation Coordination Committee (CRCC) of both Uri and Karnah along with COVA-VAN Kashmir launched a signature campaign in the earthquake affected areas of Uri and Karnah to press for the following demands:

1. The Govt. of Jammu and Kashmir should provide tax-free construction material through ration shops in the earthquake affected areas of J&K to facilitate rehabilitation.
2. Long-term interest free loans should be provided to people for reconstructing their houses. (Such a facility would immensely benefit the middle classes who have been devastated with the sudden collapse of their houses).

The signature campaign collected 50,168 signatures in support of the initiative taken up by COVA for submission to the Govt. of Jammu and Kashmir for necessary action.

To lobby for their demands, a delegation of CRCC members visited Srinagar in June 2006 for lobbying with the administration and dealers in support of their demands. Detailed meetings were held in this regard with Divisional Commissioner Kashmir, J&K Bank's Executive Director and IGP Kashmir. They also met the President of the Brick Kiln Owners Association, representatives of truck owners association and ply-wood dealers to persuade them to subsidize their rates. The CRCC members also met SOS and Help Age NGO officials and offered them their support and assistance for their projects in earthquake affected areas.

The Divisional Commissioner assured immediate action on some of the demands, and a number of government depots for supply of wood were opened at different locations for the convenience of the victims of the earthquake. He also assured action in cases where some families have not received compensation if CRCC can carry out a survey to identify the genuine cases of grievances.

### **Lobbying for victims who have not been compensated**

COVA has been striving for justice and rights of the people. COVA programme officers and VRCC members identified 173 cases that have not received any compensation from

the Government in Uri, after a thorough door to door survey. COVA staff as well as Village Committee members were lobbying with the authorities to issue compensation cheques to them. It has been observed that most of the earthquake victims belonged to disadvantaged, elderly and neglected families. The deprived victims were motivated to come to Uri and interact with the authorities for the purpose. In Uri they were provided logistical support as well as boarding and lodging as most of them lived in far flung villages of Uri Tehsil. CRCC members carried out a detailed survey and the administration subsequently initiated action and compensation was released to some of the families.

## **Community Empowerment Programmes**

### ***Community mobilization***

The woman Programme Officer and Programme Assistant in consultation with Tehsil and Village Committees carried out field visits in several villages of Uri tehsil like Hundi Nowshehra, Nowshehra, Khodlan, Pringle, Boniyar A/B, Kholan, Gingle, Bathat, Mohra in the months of June and July, in order to interact with local women and assess their needs. Since COVA was already well known in the villages through its Village Committees and Link Volunteers, the interactions were carried out in an amicable atmosphere. The issues discussed related to health, education, livelihoods, government schemes and infrastructure in the villages. The Programme Officers were in touch with the Link Volunteers and have made several follow-up visits to these villages.

### ***Formation of Women Link Volunteer System***

In Uri tehsil, COVA's woman Programme Officer mobilized 240 women Link Volunteers from 35 villages. Regular meetings were held with these volunteers in which various issues related to women were discussed. Health related problems were more prominent. Besides a workshop on hygiene, these woman Link Volunteers also participated in the training programmes conducted by NCPDP Gujarat in order to generate awareness on earthquake resistant features.

### ***Formation of sports clubs***

COVA in consultation with Village Committees initiated the formation of sports clubs in the villages of Uri and Karnah. To kickstart this activity COVA distributed volleyballs and nets through the Village Committees and also distributed sports items like Badminton racquets, Nets, Shuttle Corks, Rings, Chess and Carrom Boards in schools of both tehsils with priority to Girls schools.

COVA intended to promote local talent and provide members of sports clubs with opportunities to harness their capabilities. The participants from these volleyball clubs were encouraged to take part in tournaments. COVA intends to utilize the services of

these members for various future initiatives in rehabilitation and community empowerment programs in Uri and Karnah Tehsils.

The hill people, especially boys, showed much interest in volleyball due to the nature of terrain, and girls preferred Badminton. The hill society is conservative about girls' education but a slight positive change has been seen after COVA's intervention, which is encouraging for the empowerment of women.

### ***Sports Material Distribution at a glance***

Sports Material Kits distributed in schools

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Number of Schools Covered in Uri Tehsil: 47

Number of Schools Covered in Karnah Tehsil: 22

Volleyball Kits distributed in villages:

Number of Villages covered in Uri Tehsil: 86

Number of village committees covered in Uri Tehsil : 110

Number of Villages covered in Karnah Tehsil: 27

Number of village committees covered in Karnah Tehsil: 29

(Note: Volleyball kits were distributed through Village Committees. Some villages being bigger in area have two or more committees each accordingly.)

### ***Surveys***

COVA with the cooperation of Link Volunteers and other VRCC members conducted a thorough assessment surveys at the grass root level to assess the situation of the local population in the aftermath of the earthquake.

The data received from the surveys described various aspects like:

1. Detailed household cluster wise information till May 2006

In Uri data of 4500 households collected.

In Karnah data of 1500 households collected.

2. No. of disadvantaged families identified for rubble clearance and reconstruction in Uri was 527.

No. of disadvantaged families identified for rubble clearance and reconstruction in Karnah was 267.

No. of Volunteers available for assisting in reconstruction work at Uri was 745.

No. of Volunteers available for assisting in reconstruction work at Karnah was 456.

3. Locally available skilled and unskilled workers for reconstruction
  - in Uri were 2615 out of which masons were 800, carpenters were 750, and laborers were 900. 165 ponies were available.
  - in Karnah were 987 out of which masons were 238, carpenters were 169, and laborers were 405. 175 ponies were available.

### ***Training programmes***

A four day training programme was organized by COVA in the month of May 2007. The whole staff of COVA underwent training on logical framework, planning, effective management in the field and report writing. Participants included members of the COVA staff from Srinagar, Tangdar and Uri.

A one day training programme of engineers was conducted at Uri on 27<sup>th</sup> of May 2006. About 32 volunteer engineers from National Institute of Technology were mobilized by COVA for the training. NCPDP of Gujarat gave the training to the engineers on different aspects of retrofitting of the damaged houses.

One day On-Site training for 32 Students of NIT Srinagar was facilitated by COVA in May 2007. The training programme was conducted by NCPDP from Gujarat. The Trainee Engineers were oriented on the basics of retrofitting techniques.

People's Science Institute (PSI), Dehradun conducted a one day training programme on the Basic Principles of Reconstruction of Seismic resistant houses. The training was held on 28th June 2006. In all 47 persons consisting of COVA staff members, selected link volunteers and VRCC members from all the five blocks of the Uri Tehsil attended the session.

Red Cross India conducted a First Aid training programme in Karnah on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2007, facilitated by COVA. The Training was attended by COVA staff, link Volunteers, Other VRCC members and some teachers.

Two one-day training programs on the theme "Overview of Voluntary Sector and Project Design" were held at COVA facilitation centre Srinagar in first week of August 2006. COVA staff from Srinagar, Uri and Karnah attended the training programme along with the representatives of several other NGO like Hope Foundation, SOS, DOC, Life-Help, E.H.A, I.R.R.T, Midah Rehabilitation, NGO's Co-ordination Federation and Islamic Relief & Research Trust. COVA resource persons from Hyderabad Mr. Abdul Samad and Mr. Chandra Sekhar conducted the training programme. In all 35 persons participated in the trainings.

A two day training programme was conducted by IMPA (Institute of Management and Public Administration) Srinagar for COVA field staff in "Participatory Rural Appraisal

Techniques”. The staff was acquainted with a professional approach to carry out accurate need assessment during a village visit. After the theory, the practical application of the training programme was made through a field visit in a village at Uri. Senior Programme officers of Karnah and Uri staff participated in the fieldwork.

Senior COVA Coordinators participated in a seminar titled “Natural disasters and Role of Ngo’s” held at IMPA Srinagar. The seminar had experienced people like Mr. Hanjura as expert resource persons.

On 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2006, one day Trainers’ Training orientation Program was conducted at base camp Uri. Dr. G.M. Dar, resource person from Institute of Management and Public Administration (IMPA), trained the community committee members of Uri and staff of COVA on how to initiate and manage a group discussion.

This program was followed by one day training programme on “Seismic Resistant Construction Measures and Community Initiative for Rehabilitation” where in 2946 (2249 in Uri and 697 in Karnah) local people took part. The programme participants included the Link Volunteers, community committee members, local masons and carpenters who benefited from the program. The first module of the training program, on “Seismic Resistant Construction Measures”, was administered by the engineers from NCPDP Gujarat, who made people understand the importance of using the new techniques for building earthquake resistant dwellings and also showed them how to retrofit the existing structures. The second module, on “Community Initiative for Rehabilitation”, was dealt with by COVA staff and the Community Committee members who were trained on this topic earlier.

### **Resumption of Operation Salvage and Rubble clearance in Uri**

COVA resumed Operation Salvage and Rubble clearance from 21<sup>st</sup> September 2006 in the earthquake effected areas of Uri. The programme continued for one week A team of volunteer engineers from the Civil Engineering department of National Institute of Technology (NIT) Srinagar was sent to Uri to join the field engineers and programme officers of COVA for the purpose. Operation Rubble Clearance that aimed at clearing the rubble of houses belonging to vulnerable families was also resumed in the affected areas of Uri. For this purpose a separate team of volunteers from the Education Department of Kashmir University was sent to Uri.

The Volunteer Engineers accompanied by Engineers and Programme officers of COVA visited Bela Camp where the IDPs (internally displaced people) were being rehabilitated by the government. The IDPs belong to various villages like Udusa, Maria, Kamalkot, Gwalta, Gawhalan, Ishm, and Garkot. A total of 260 houses were being constructed in the Bela camp by the IDPs themselves. Plinth level construction of almost all the houses was in progress. During the visit to the Bela camp, it was observed that no safety norms or earthquake resistant features were being observed in the foundation laying of these houses and the plinths commonly laid were weak and unsafe, worse than before. Therefore on spot advice was provided to the people for adopting earthquake proof

measures in the plinths of their houses, so that they become safe for living. There was an overwhelming response and enthusiasm among the people and they wished that at least one engineer should permanently oversee the construction phase in the camp.

The volunteer engineers also visited three other villages, viz., Kechen, Noorkha and Qazipora, which were partially damaged by the earthquake. They gave expert engineering advice to the people who were reconstructing their houses afresh as well as assessed the other houses for retrofitting. A total of 100 houses were covered in the three villages.

## **Public Programmes, Coordination with other NGOs & Media interactions**

### ***Press Conferences***

CRCC, COVA and VAN Kashmir organized a press conference on 27<sup>th</sup> of April to highlight the cause of the quake-hit victims in Uri and Tangdar. Members of CCRC and COVA addressed the press conference. It was an effort on part of COVA and VAN Kashmir to direct the attention of the Government towards the suffering of the quake-victims and to their needs and priorities.

### ***Coordination meetings with other NGO's***

COVA took the initiative to reconvene the NGOs' coordination meeting in June 2006 after several months. The meeting was attended by several NGOs' and the representatives presented updates and activities in the meeting. It was decided to hold the coordination meeting fortnightly. A significant feature of this meeting was the participation of the Executive Director of J&K Bank who assured that his Bank would try to develop a special package for the Earthquake Victims.

On February 16, 2007, COVA hosted another NGO coordination meeting at Uri base camp. Around 8 NGOs participated in the meeting. They were all active in Uri area. Not many of these organizations have opted for house reconstruction except for Aga Khan Development Network.

The objective of convening NGO Coordination meetings was to know each other's area of intervention and to avoid duplicating and confusion.

On January 20, 2007, the Project Manager COVA, J&K attended a day-long conference on "Rights of a Child in a Conflict Situation" The conference was organised by Save the Children in Srinagar at IMPA. Director, School Education was the chief guest of the day and the conference was attended by various eminent persons of the town and some other NGOS.

On Jan 22, 2007, ICRC (International Red Cross Committee) conducted a meeting with different organizations working in Kashmir. General sharing of work status of various



NGOs took place in the meeting. COVA representative discussed the distribution of first aid kits provided by Indian Red Cross society.

On March 6, 2007, COVA coordinated a meeting of several organizations working in Kashmir to discuss about “Right to Basic Services (RTBS)”. The meeting was attended by some academicians as well as media representatives. Dr Mazher Hussain spoke about the RTBS campaign and its importance for the poor and underprivileged of India. It is important to understand this campaign in J&K in a different perspective, said Mr. Shujaat Bukhari, a well known journalist. It was also discussed in the meeting that in the state of J&K electricity and roads have to be incorporated in the campaign.

**Meeting with EU delegation:** On Feb. 23, 2007 various civil society groups, intellectuals, journalists had a meeting in Srinagar with a European Union parliamentarian Mr. Richard Howitt who was on a two-day visit to Kashmir to take stock of HR situation in war torn Kashmir. Cova was also invited to share its ideas on “the scope of civil society activism in Kashmir”. State Manager, COVA, Mr. Feroze Ahmed Wani represented his organization in the meeting and gave a kit of CDs pertaining to COVA’s present and future interventions in Kashmir and the annual report of COVA to the visiting dignitary.

**Certificate Distribution Ceremony for the volunteers:** COVA-VAN Kashmir in collaboration with CRCC organized a certificate distribution ceremony to honor the volunteer Engineers, Doctors and University Students who participated in different community programs initiated by COVA, like Operation Salvage, rubble clearance, and first aid training. The function was held at Gandhi Bhavan, Kashmir University and was attended by various academicians, principal and staff of various engineering colleges like KGP, SSM, and NIT, besides a large number of students. On the occasion various speakers spoke about the emerging scenario of voluntary sector in the state, especially in the aftermath of Oct 8<sup>th</sup> earthquake.

**The Talent Hunt program** was held at a community hall in Tangdhar in collaboration with Social Welfare Forum (a local NGO). 125 students took part in the program. Prizes were distributed among the best students and two teachers. Sub Divisional Magistrate was the chief guest of the program. The program is first of its kind in the history of Tangdhar, said the SDM Mr. Hamid Khan. The role of COVA in the community and its objectives were also discussed by the Project manager COVA.

**8<sup>th</sup> Oct Quake Anniversary:** 8th October earth quake anniversary was observed by a galaxy of NGOs in Srinagar. The event was organised by IIPA (Indian Institute of Public Administration) in collaboration with Indian Red cross Society in which around ten NGOs were honored for their commendable relief and rehabilitation measures taken in earth quake affected areas of J&K. This meeting was chaired by the chief minister of J&K Mr. GH Nabi Azad who appreciated the relief and rehabilitation efforts put in by various organizations to save quake survivors from post disaster ramifications. The role of COVA in post disaster scenario in terms of reconstruction of houses, community mobilization and capacity building measures was highly praised. A memento was

presented by the Chief Minister to the Representative of COVA. Similarly other organizations like MSF, Save the children, J&K Yateem Trust, Action Aid, J&K Yateem Trust, NIMHANS and Van Kashmir were also honored for their work. A group of people from Uri and Tangdhar were also present to discuss their forthcoming winter challenges.

**Handing over ceremony:** Two houses were handed over to two beneficiaries of Bimiyar and Nowshera villages in District Uri during a handing over ceremony on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2006. Representatives of Van Kashmir, Controller (Finance & Admin), COVA, Program Manager Uri, CRCC, VRCC, and TRCC members were present on the occasion. Town hall Lagama which is at a distance of 4 kms from COVA Uri office was the venue for the ceremony. Block Medical Officer, Uri and the Chairman of Municipal Committee were also present.

Identification and short-listing of 10 new cases for house reconstruction has been done in Uri.

### **COVA's Other Interventions**

- **School bags distribution**

COVA facilitated distribution of School bags in various schools of Karnah Tehsils sent by CRES (Child Rights Education Society), Budgam. The bags were distributed in two phases in various blocks of Karnah.

- **Distribution of CCDU booklets**

COVA distributed CCDU booklets published by IMPA in various blocks of Karnah Tehsils. The booklet carries information of various rural development and rural employment schemes undertaken by the State Government for rural and far flung areas. The distribution aimed at creating awareness amongst the Karnah youth regarding the schemes that they can utilize for their upliftment.

- **Distribution of First Aid Kits**

165 First Aid kits were distributed by the COVA among the community medical volunteers of five blocks of Uri on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2006 for the community. These kits were provided to COVA by the Indian Red Cross Society- Kashmir. 97 of such kits were distributed to the medical volunteers of Tangdhar in the month of December. Medical volunteers were identified by the village committee on the basis of their first Aid knowledge.

- **Women Empowerment/ Advocacy**

Hill Society is deeply rooted in conservative religio-cultural ethos that has left little space for women's expression and activism. In a male dominated society most of these *pahari* (ethnic group) women were confined to their homes for cooking and reproduction. Keeping in view the cultural sensibilities of the area, some women Link Volunteers were

mobilized with the full consent of village committees for their long term participation in community developmental issues. In our meeting with them we found them more expressive and leading than their male counterparts. So far we succeeded in mobilising 240 women link volunteers in Uri alone.

A group of people belonging to various vulnerable categories were identified by our COVA staff for pursuing their respective cases in the social welfare department. The staff took a lead to educate these women about various government schemes for them that they were ignorant about. The staff met the various government officials (Tehsildar, BMO) concerned to apprise of these helpless women. Most of the formalities were fulfilled which include filling and submission of forms in the departments concerned with the assistance of COVA staff.

Our women program officer conducted two meetings in February 2007 with the women Link Volunteers of Boniyar and Chandanwari blocks. One among the two happened in presence of project Evaluators who had come from Ahmedabad to assess the construction work. These women Link Volunteers spoke on their roles with respect to mobilization of community to the visiting team. Around 240 women Link Volunteers were enrolled in Uri and were actively participating in the programs of the organization.

### **Exposure Visits**

The VAN Executive Committee Member Mr. Harminder Singh and State Project Manager Feroze Ahmed went for an exposure visit to Hyderabad where they visited different departments of COVA and went for a field visit to see the District Networks of COVA. A visit to several NGOs working on different social issues in Andhra Pradesh was also made to explore different work mechanisms and patterns. The Kashmir delegation also took part in the Future Search Conference of COVA. The duo put forward their views on the scope and future of COVA in Kashmir. They also witnessed the Mr Hyderabad Body Building Competitions conducted by Youth TRAC (Department of Youth in COVA).

“It was a real great experience to see how people were working in NGOs”, said Mr. Feroze a young Kashmiri COVA humanitarian relief worker. “My vision has broadened, perspective widened and now I can improve my work back home”, further asserted Feroze.

**World Social Forum Meet:** Four Community Committee (CRCC) members, two each from Karnah and Uri Tehsil, Director COVA, Mr. Feroz (COVA) & Mr. Harvinder Singh from Van took part in the World Social Forum conference in Delhi. The team had an opportunity to interact with a large number of participants.

**International Seminar in Mumbai:** Peace Mumbai, a voluntary organization conducted a seminar on Peoples Foreign Policy in Mumbai on 7th- 9th December 2006. Two members of COVA attended the seminar. The delegates from various countries like Pakistan, Palestine, Bangladesh, Tibet, Lebanon and Sri Lanka participated in the

seminar. Mr. Ashraf from COVA spelt out the issue of human rights violations in the state of J&K.

**Gujarat visit Feb 13-18, 2007:** Non technical as well as technical (Engineers from both Uri and Tangdhar) field staff of COVA went to an exposure visit to Gujarat to know more about earth quake safety features for the construction of houses and the importance of community participatory approach in the rehabilitation program. It was a learning experience for all of us, said Mohd Ashraf, Program Manager, Uri. The team was accompanied by Dr. Mazher Hussain, Director, COVA. The team visited various organizations like Drishti, Saath, and Unnati to get an insight into their work.

The team visited Bachaw, Bhuj and Sham-e-Sarhad which were earth quake hit areas of Gujarat. The team also came to know about Hunnar Shalla and Kutch Abhiyaan (a net work of local NGOs) who have done a remarkable job in seismic safety measures and various post earth quake architectural designs.

**Project Evaluation Feb 3-9, 2007:** Evaluators from Unnati, Ahmedabad had a week-long stay in Kashmir to assess house reconstruction work funded by Cord Aid in Uri and Tangdhar. An informal interaction with the evaluation team was held at Srinagar office. The Project Coordinator made a presentation about the response of COVA to Oct 8 disaster with special focus on house reconstruction program that started in the later phase of humanitarian response of COVA. The evaluators gave a feedback. In a very stimulating interaction between the village committee members at URI and the evaluators, the former made a presentation on Operation Salvage, community committee formation, trainings and lobbying with govt., Relief distribution, Link Volunteers, Medical Training Program, distribution of sports material, seismic resistant training and the process of identification of beneficiaries for COVA program. Through these presentations they spoke about COVA's intervention and its impact on their lives. Village committees formed by COVA were a permanent feature and will work even after the completion of the intervention. In the meeting Dr Mazher Hussain made a brief presentation on "Right to Basic Services." The evaluation team went to different project sites of Uri and met COVA beneficiaries under Kashmir earthquake reconstruction program. They also had an interactive session with women Link Volunteers and contractors at Chandanwari (Uri) base camp.

All the beneficiaries of 70 houses under COVA Kashmir Earthquake Reconstruction Program in Uri were given their copies of Legal agreement between house owner and the organization.

### **International Women's Day**

The abode of Internally Displaced Persons, Bela Boniyar, was the place selected to celebrate International Women's Day on March 8, 2007 at Boniyar Higher Secondary School.

A colorful program was presented by the girl students of Boniyar Higher Secondary School on the occasion of International Women's Day. The event was organized by VAN-COVA in collaboration with CRCC members of Uri. The dignitaries who were present on the occasion were Principal of the school Ms. Saleema Sherwani, Zonal Education Project Officer, Station House Officer, VRCC members, and Director, COVA. Students spoke about the role of women in society. Prizes were given to the students in order to encourage them. A memento was presented to the Principal of the school by the Director of COVA.

### **Tough times**

Constant political disturbances, adverse weather conditions and security concerns were the major hindrance in the progress of any work in Kashmir. Strike calls, encounters, mine and grenade blasts were constant phenomena. The whole month of January 2007 was dedicated to frequent frisking and crack downs to ensure security for the Indian Republic Day celebrations.

After the period of strikes, one faced blocked roads due to snowfall and landslides. The whole of January and February months were wrecked by harsh weather resulting in severe road blockades, landslides and shooting stones. The Tangdhar region was cut off from the rest of the world almost two whole months. Even supply of essential goods was an uphill task.

The month of March 2007 also proved fatal to many lives due to heavy rainfall and unexpected snow in the valley. Several casualties occurred due to harsh weather, causing severe disturbance in routine life.

A lot of incidents of unrest occurred in the valley due to announcement of hanging of Afzal Guru a Kashmiri accused in the case of attack on Indian parliament, and a huge uproar against the hanging of Saddam Hussein. Fake encounters of innocent people also came to limelight this year.

The result was that one was to work for at most 12 to 15 days in a month. Thanks to the committed volunteers and staff members of COVA and VAN Kashmir who stayed back in the offices and at the field Base Camps on most occasions to work round the clock, COVA was able to achieve some results despite the very difficult conditions prevailing during the January, February and March 2007 because of very adverse weather conditions and highly volatile political situation.

### **Critical Analysis of community committee formation**

Community committees were formed immediately after the earthquake with an aim to provide a proper mechanism to relief distribution. Massive relief material was mobilized from general public and from various local civil society groups for quake hit region in an unorganized fashion resulting in the improper distribution of relief. Not all the relief distribution from various relief agencies took place through these committees. It was

quite difficult to motivate people for the formation of committees during the early phase of post disaster situation when people were desperate to get something from relief agencies in whatever manner.

Initially people were quite insensitive towards these committees but started becoming responsive after they realised their usefulness in relief distribution. Several NGOs made their own village committees which became defunct with the end of their relief intervention.

“The role of these committees was not confined to distribution only but extended to working towards community empowerment,” said Mohd Salim Khan, a TRCC executive. “We will work for the growth of these committees so that our community will become empowered”, asserted Salim Khan of Noorkha Uri.

“Once the humanitarian intervention of COVA ends, the community committees will vanish in thin air,” said one TRCC member from Tangdhar. He further observed, “People have not understood the concept of community empowerment yet because it was told to them when they were under the shock of disaster and were worried for rebuilding their shattered lives”.

Bashir Ahmed of Uri, a TRCC member and a shopkeeper by profession, was convinced that the active role of committees was not subject to the presence of COVA, but will be functional even without it. He said, “We are under the process of understanding community empowerment with the help of COVA. Our participation in Delhi World Social Forum and other exposure visits enhanced this understanding”.

These committees have played a vital role in identification of the most deserving persons in the village for the program of house reconstruction and other assistance, but at several places these committees have lost interest in a long term association with the organization and have become passive for which the following reasons were found:

1. The members were not getting any benefit (Honorarium) out of this whole exercise (Community mobilization).
2. Influence of other big NGOs like Action Aid, Help Age India, and Save the Children who preferred to make their own village committees and deploy several paid volunteers in the area.
3. Some were still busy in rebuilding their shattered lives and couldnot devote their time. Initially they thought they would get some material assistance from the organization, which was meant for the destitute only.
4. The committees have become passive in those villages where COVA was not constructing any house.
5. People were yet to understand the concept of community empowerment.

### **Visit of Christian Aid team**

Mr. Brian and Ms Natalie from Christian Aid, UK, visited Kashmir on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2007 to learn about the progress of the project in earthquake hit Uri and Tanghdar regions. Christian Aid funded the reconstruction of 58 houses for the most deserving families in Uri and Tangdhar.

The visiting team had an interaction with the Srinagar staff and VAN members on March 24, 2007. The team also visited some of the construction sites at villages Zehanpora, Pehlipora and Noorkha in Uri. At Noorkha village the team interacted with the community committee members, women link volunteers and a group of youth from the village. It was a festive look in village Noorkha where people were anxiously waiting for the UK team especially children who saw foreigners for the first time.

The committee members in their welcome speech said that the disaster gave them a chance to interact with the outside world. COVA introduced the concept of civil society in our area, said Mr. Nazar Boniyari a central rehabilitation committee (CRCC) member. It is also working for the empowerment of our community and not just relief and rehabilitation work like others were doing, he further said.

## **Activity Report from April 2007 to March 2008**

### **Construction**

195 houses were constructed and handed over to the beneficiaries. 138 of these houses were supported by Cord Aid and 37 houses by Christian Aid.

### **Distribution of Stretchers**

The hilly terrains in these Uri, Karnah and Boniyar tehsils make access to medical facilities very difficult for villagers. During the earthquake relief and rehabilitation work, when COVA formed village committees for fair distribution of benefits, the committees frequently reminded COVA about the plight of carrying patients for long distances to the nearest hospital. They requested for provision of foldable stretchers that would ease their burden. COVA was able to utilize part of the grant from CASA to meet their need and distributed 200 foldable stretchers to Village Committees in 136 villages in these tehsils.

The stretchers will be in the charge of and will be maintained by Village Committees. They are centrally kept in the village mosques to be used in medical emergencies. In some villages, they are also being kept in schools where they are strategically located. The Link Volunteers, village committee members and VRCC members and teachers, who were trained in first aid by Red Cross in association with COVA, will also assist the community in proper transportation of patients during medical emergencies.

### **Awareness Melas**

Two awareness melas in each of Uri and Boniyar tehsils on schemes and policies of departments of Employment, Agriculture, Social Welfare, Animal Husbandry. The

officials from these departments participated in these *melas* and sensitized people on the schemes of their respective departments. 250 people participated in these melas. Disadvantaged families, physically challenged people, unemployed youth, mentally challenged children benefited from these melas, which built linkages between these people and the government departments and NGOs concerned.

30 disadvantaged families were identified for pensions under Social Welfare Schemes and were mobilized and referred to the Social Welfare Department (Laghama,Uri). Likewise physically challenged people were introduced to CRC and VRC for rehabilitation. 48 youth benefited through the employment department which got the loans sanctioned for them under the self employment scheme @ Rs 2 lakhs for each. COVA referred 8 mentally challenged children to Life Help Chennai for rehabilitation.

### **Need Assessment**

Need Assessment was done in 29 villages in Boniyar and 20 villages in Uri tehsils. Bad roads, irrigation and drinking water scarcity, and lack of health care centers emerged as the major concerns. In a meeting 9<sup>th</sup> September 2007 the matter was discussed with the concerned TRCC/Staff members. The members of committees at various levels were given individual responsibilities to explore ways to resolve these issues.

### **Lobbying**

COVA's Lobbying with J & K Bank resulted in sanction of house building loans at reduced interest rates, and with government agencies concerned resulted in sanctioning grants for a Water filtration plant, a road and a hospital.

The General Manager of J&K Bank agreed to provide house building loans to the people recommended by COVA at the reduced rate of interest (i.e., the interest rate was reduced from 12% to 6.5% for them). A signature campaign was carried out at Noorkhah village in Boniyar Tehsil by the TRCC members on the issue of scarcity of irrigation and drinking water. A report was submitted to the Chief Engineer concerned. This made the officer to allot an amount of Rs.10 lakhs for installing a water filtration plant at Noorkhah. COVA carried out another signature campaign out at Bijhama,Uri Tehsil and as a result of the joint efforts of the TRCC members, COVA and the local community an amount of Rs.3 crores was sanctioned by the Minister concerned for the construction of a road and a hospital at Bijhama.

### **Career Counseling Programmes**

540 students were counseled between June and September 2007 in various career counseling programs organized in Uri and Boniyar Tehsils in the following educational institutions:

<b>Name of the educational institution</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>No. of students who participated</b>
Govt.Boys High school	9 <sup>th</sup> June	50



Balkote URI		
Govt Higher secondary school Boniyar	12 <sup>th</sup> June	100
Govt.High school Salamabad Uri	16 <sup>th</sup> June	50
Govt Boys High school Nowshera	19 <sup>th</sup> June	50
Govt. High school Trikanjan Boniyar	26 <sup>th</sup> June	50
Govt. higher sec. School Uri	12 <sup>th</sup> July	30
Govt.Degree College Uri	19 <sup>th</sup> July	20
Govt. Boys high sec. Uri	26 <sup>th</sup> July	30
Govt. high school Nambla URI	9 <sup>th</sup> August	30
Govt. higer sec.school Boniyar	18 <sup>th</sup> August	70
Jawahar navodaya Vidhalaya, Shahkote, Boniyar	23 <sup>rd</sup> August	10
Noor-ul-uloom Noorkhah, Boniyar	4 <sup>th</sup> September	30
Govt. high School Sultandaki URI	6 <sup>th</sup> September	30

For organising this successful programme COVA collaborated with the Dy. Director Employment, Baramulla and Mr. M.R. Sofi (Retired Principal) with the support of the school authorities themselves. The outgoing students of the higher secondary schools and Degree colleges were informed about various career options according to their performance and aptitude. The junior students of the higher secondary schools were given information regarding various newly introduced streams and subjects which they may take up after qualifying the secondary school and which have greater scope of employment opportunities the world over.

### ***Halla Sheri***

*Halla Sheri* used to be an old common practice in the area in which people would jointly solve their problems but unfortunately the practice had vanished. COVA could mobilize people for *Halla Sheri* at various places. At Bagna in Boniyar Tehsil, an irrigation channel (Bijamber cool) was made functional due to the revival of this community practice. As a result people there were able to switch over to cultivation of maize from rice. With cultivation of rice earlier the people had to incur income loss of around Rs 4 lakhs per annum in this area. Through the active participation of local people and some TRCC and Staff members the work was completed successfully on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

Like wise a land slide on the Bardien road Banali,URI had completely suspended the traffic for almost one month .COVA mobilised five people from the area who along with the TRCC members approached the R&B engineer concerned. The officer promptly sent a JCD crane for road clearance and thus the problem was solved .j

On 17<sup>th</sup> August 2007 COVA mobilized 17 local people from Trikanjan who actively participated in the clearance of the road from Trikanjan to Bardan which had been damaged as a result of rainfall in the area and had almost suspended the traffic for some two days.

### **Environmental Awareness**

Environmental Awareness Programmes at Noorkhah and Chandanwari villages of the block Chandanwari in collaboration with Noor-UI-Uloom High School, Noorkhah, Boniyar, sensitized people on environmental pollution.

### **Health Camp**

A Health Camp was organized by COVA in collaboration with the BMO Boniyar at Bagna village. 30 children got checked up in a day for common cold, cough, and the diseases common in the village.

### **Volley Ball Tournament**

A Volley-ball tournament was organised at Kamalkote and Jhula Blocks of Tehsil Uri from the 8<sup>th</sup> of September 2007. 20 teams from various villages participated.

### **Follow Up of various re-construction sites**

10 training camps were organised in collaboration with NCPDP at Chandanwari Block OF Tehsil Boniyar for 32 masons and 100 local people.

### **Elections**

Village level elections were conducted for revamping of the village committee over a period of two months .The block members, one from each block, were elected. Subsequently in July 2007 elections for the posts of office bearers were conducted for all the three Tehsil committees and new office bearers were elected as president, vice president and secretary for each of the three Tehsil committees. In all three Tehsil committees were constituted, each comprising 15 members.