

## CASA RESPONSE ON NORTH SIKKIM EARTH QUAKE

**23 September 2011**

Today Mr. Debojyoti Chakraborty and Mr. Anup Sinha, two of CASA staff visited the effected areas of North Sikkim in the district of Mangan. The most devastated area is Tung which is near 18 kms. away from the North Sikkim's district capital Mangan. Indian Army is trying to reconstruct the road and clearing down the debris from the roadways. The road keeps ascending higher and higher and was getting narrower and steeper as we continued through the journey. Condition of roads remained bad due to continuous landslides that prevented any road work. There was no tarmac in parts of the road and sometimes the jeep had to wade through streams that ran right through the road. As we moved further, the hills seemed to get taller and the valleys deeper.



**The mangled utensils of a family in the crushed house**

During our trekking towards worst hit area we noticed several helicopters are flying towards far North. As explained by the Army officials that rescue operations of the effected area is on its move with rapid intervention.

At Mangan Bazar two feeding programmes are running by the locals and business community. Free Medical camps have been setup and Free Telephone booth is also being provided for communication by the local

voluntary organizations and institutions.

Presently, Mangan area is the transit point of outstation workers mainly the labourers who trek for reaching from far away places like Lachen (122 km from Gangtok, altitude - 9800 ft.), Lachung (116 km from Gangtok, altitude - 8800 ft.). It is worth mentioning that at Tung it was noticed that quite a good number of workers are coming by trekking for their livelihood.



**Interaction with the affected people who were coming from Lachen area**

We communicated with one of them, Mr. Sekh Mamtajul Islam, who is working as a surveyor in I.T.B.P new road construction project, along with seven persons described the terrified and miserable condition of the North Sikkim villages. According to them the road which was the only means of communication for the civilians is wiped away. The area has been delinked and has become inaccessible by roads. Landslide has now become a regular

phenomenon. In places like Lachung, Lachen, Chungthang people are spending the cold nights in open air at high risk. In North Sikkim this is the month for the onset of winter therefore the temperature is already at its gradual decrease. The landscape of those areas are generally in accessible and the quake has made it worst.

Although State Government and Army is providing food and shelter but the trauma and fear and horrified experience of 18<sup>th</sup> evening have made villagers couch with fear. Besides the women, children and aged are most vulnerable at this hour. Loss of belongings has already made them landless and the trauma of the devastating earthquake and its sudden impact has reached them to a state of shock. The winter months are ahead and the deplorable condition of the habitants is in need of support and care from the humanitarian Organizations.



**Smashed Houses at Tung area**

As they were sharing that, the villagers particularly in the Lachen area are in fear that there is a chance of breaking down of the upper lake embankment and once this embankment of the lake is broken then there will be a flash flood and their houses will come under it. At an altitude of **16890 ft**, Gurudongmar is one of the highest lakes in the world which falls under the North Sikkim district.

It is has been noticed that the community has developed a fear of further devastation and is in need of guidance and a sort of assistance on psycho social preparedness during the earth quake. Since there was no such preparedness for the community to handle the situation of sudden quake the loss of life and property exceeded beyond the imagination. The need of Disaster preparedness is the most essential venture that needs to be imparted into the community.



**CASA able to reach upto Tung and Indian Army is working day and night**

As per the interaction with affected villagers at Tung on 23<sup>rd</sup> September, the Army personnel could reach and the affected village which is totally cut off from the Naga and Mangan from 18<sup>th</sup> evening. Five houses at a time smashed under the rolling stones occurred due to landslide. On 23<sup>rd</sup> September afternoon those families were shifted towards Mangan. According to them since 19<sup>th</sup> September Army has opened a relief camp and food is somehow managed from there. One of the biggest problems is the non availability of the drinking water. In Tung area where operation is in progress the community somehow managed to get drinking water from the water falls. But due to heavy rainfall the water is muddy and not suitable for drinking. It was a tiresome but informative journey to the north Sikkim.