

# When Disaster Struck Sarkhet

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Early in the morning on the 19<sup>th</sup> of August 2022 a cloud burst took place in a village called Sarkhet. Sarkhet lies in the Baldalghati area of the Raipur Dehradun Uttarakhand, a block that is well known for disaster events due to excessive rain. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of August the storm water drains overflowed, the river swelled and the strength of the water with the debris swept 11 houses 2 schools and a panchayat house away.



The Mountain Children's Foundation (MCF) works in these villages and one of our facilitator's called our coordinator at 2 am telling him of the deluge. He immediately responded by contacting the district disaster helpline 1077, who were prompt in their response. The district team set off immediately but unfortunately the rain had wrecked such havoc that it took time for the team to reach the village.

One family member woke in the early morning to go to the toilet only to find their house inundated with water and their toilet swept away by the river and the overflowing storm drains. The families ran in the dark rainy night taking with them only their sleeping children, not stopping to think of papers, clothes or jewelry in the house. They ran in the dark and rain to safer grounds in the forest above the village.

The government then set up a camp in Maldevta where the MCF team visited the community that had been displaced. The government had provided food and a safe space. The MCF team provided support by sitting down and listening to the family's story of shock, horror and flight, assuring them that they were safe, holding them and sharing some apples. While many community members and organizations were giving food and clothes the MCF team realized that there were a few things that were needed like tooth brushes and tooth paste, hair brushes, chappals, inner wear, sanitary napkins etc which we provided immediately. The MCF was careful not to duplicate what had already being given.



As we all know disasters have a debilitating effect on children and can even lead to depression in children and adults. To help mitigate the horror of losing their homes and the fear they felt the MCF

CHILDLINE team brought some toys for the children, – a tea set, a bat and ball, a volley ball and took time out to play with them - the team drank imaginary tea, hit a six with a plastic bat, sat down to colour in a colouring book and played a game of volley ball, lifting an otherwise somber mood. When children around were cheerful the parents and elders also were able to forget their grief a little.



Our MCF NSF team followed up by meeting with the children everyday, first reading stories and then encouraging the children to start their classes, learning with fun thus engaging children on a daily basis and bringing some normalcy and regularity despite the upheaval in their lives.

In the mean time the other villages the MCF works in were cut off as all the roads connecting them to Maldevta had been swept away. Our team rose to the occasion in each village. Holding meetings with the children talking about the disaster, discussing what they could do before, during and after a disaster, thus provided the children with some action points and building a sense of purpose as well. Schools in the villages too were closed as the teachers could not get to the schools due to the broken roads; our MCF NSF team held their classes regularly ensuring as many children as possible attend and even encouraged the older children to come and study, providing some structure in their day. The MCF team also visited families with a very little children (who were going to the anganwadi) and undertook activities and games with them.



The disaster was a shock for everyone but the MCF team worked together to provide as much relief and support as possible to the children and community we work with.

