

A Case Study on Island Village Kishkindapalem: Human Story 3:

“When Relief Misses the Mark: Community-Led Grievance Redressal Make a Difference in a Flood-Hit Village” - Vignettes from Kishkindha Palem

Background

In February 2024, unusually intense rains triggered flash floods across several low-lying mandals of **Bapatla district** in Andhra Pradesh. **Kishkindha Palem**, a small village in **Kollur Mandal**, saw its streets, homes, and farmlands submerged within hours. With over 65% of its population belonging to **Dalit and Backward Caste communities**, the village depends on **tenant agriculture, beedi-rolling, daily wage labour, tailoring, and small-scale vending**. Most families live hand-to-mouth with limited savings or social security buffers.

While the government swiftly announced compensation—₹10,000 per affected household—the process of distribution revealed **gaps in reach, identification, and equity**. It is in this context that the **Dalit Bahujan Resource Centre (DBRC)**, a grassroots organisation with a long-term presence in the area, stepped in to support those left behind.

Key Points

- **Relief was fast but exclusionary:** Many eligible households were left out due to errors in lists, informal land arrangements, and unlinked bank accounts. The absence of community participation in the humanitarian cash transfer process led to both exclusion and unintended inclusion errors.
- **Gender-specific needs were poorly addressed,** g. Women-headed households, tenant farmers, and informal workers were hit hardest—both in terms of loss and invisibility in relief records. Women tenant farmers were not recognised as eligible for crop loss compensation, despite existing legal provisions.
- **DBRC played a critical role** in grievance redress by setting up local helpdesks, supporting documentation, and coordinating with the Mandal administration. The episode showed the need for village-level redress platforms, better targeting of relief, and recognition of informal losses.
- **Relief helped, but usage patterns revealed gender roles:** Collective recovery efforts within households fostered cooperation in rebuilding. Women prioritized food, school supplies, and health needs, while men leaned towards asset repair and debt repayment.

Main Story: Recovery in Kishkindha Palem

“The water came with such speed, we didn’t even take our footwear,” recalled **Annapurna**, a 42-year-old widow who supports her family by cleaning fish. Her home, a single-room mud house with a tin roof, was completely flooded. **“We lost the rice sack, clothes, books—everything.”**

Kishkindha Palem is used to seasonal floods. But this time was different. The bund near the village breached around midnight. Water levels rose waist-deep in hours. People clambered onto terraces or fled to the panchayat school. "We were wet for three days. Children had fever and rashes. We had no dry clothes or food," said **Nagendra**, a construction worker whose thatched roof caved in.

When the water receded, what remained was muck, broken walls, spoiled grain, and despair. Relief announcements came quickly—₹10,000 per household. Survey teams came with smartphones and checklists. But as the lists were published, **many realised their names were missing**.

"I live alone with my mother. My brother, who lives in another village, is the owner of this house. His name came, but not mine," said **Parvati**, a garment stitcher. "They said only owners will get relief."

Across Kishkindha Palem, **tenant farmers, women-headed households, and those living on temple or government land** were frequently left out. Others found that their names were listed, but the money had gone to dormant bank accounts they could no longer access.

Rushed Relief, Missing Names & the Challenge of Accessing Compensation

In the aftermath, the Mandal Revenue Officer (MRO) sent a two-member team, accompanied by the village sarpanch. The enumeration process to determine who would get the INR 10,000 flood relief lasted barely two days.

"We had no idea what they were noting. They came, asked for names, and left. No one asked if we lost documents or if more than one family lived in the same house," explained *Nagaraju*, a daily wage labourer.

The Sarpanch himself lamented, "Even if I know the NDMA guidelines, it is of no use. The MRO already sent the list for payments before we could verify anything locally."

About 25% of households were left out in the first round. Some were excluded because they shared houses with extended families and only one member was listed. Others found their names misspelt or their bank accounts marked as frozen.

Sudha, a farm worker, shared her struggle: "I gave my bank details, but they entered the IFSC code wrong. When I went to the bank, they said my name doesn't match. No one told us whom to go to."

In the absence of any formal grievance redressal system, most affected families had to walk to the Mandal office to seek clarity, often spending a full day and forgoing daily wages.

DBRC's Role: From Relief to Rights

The **Dalit Bahujan Resource Centre (DBRC)**, a longstanding partner in the area for education, nutrition, and rights-based work, responded within days. "People didn't know where or how to complain," said **Subbarao**, DBRC's community organiser. "There was a silence—but also simmering anger."

With years of trust among the villagers, DBRC set up a complaint box and built a protocol to act swiftly. Complaints were categorised and assigned standard operating procedures (SOPs) with fixed turnaround times. For example:

- Incorrect beneficiary names: rectification in 7-10 days
- Frozen accounts or IFSC mismatches: resolved within 20 days
- Unintended recipients receiving funds: 20-day process to reassign funds

The NGO also coordinated with banks, followed up on NREGA-linked post office accounts, and kept community members informed. "We didn't just submit papers—we followed up weekly at the Mandal office, met the MRO, and kept pushing until the files moved," said **Vasantha**, a DBRC field volunteer.

"We didn't just drop complaints. The DBRC team would come back and tell us what happened. That made us feel heard," said *Lakshamma*, a widow living with her daughter.

Relief Reached, But Who Used It and How?

Where the ₹10,000 relief landed, it mattered. But it also **opened up new tensions**.

"My husband said, 'We'll pay back the loan first.' But I said no. First we need to buy bedding, mosquito nets, and uniforms for the kids," said **Suguna**, a tailoring worker. "We argued, but finally split the money."

Men often prioritized repair of motorbikes, tools, or borrowing repayments. Women tended to **focus on food, daily needs, and school-related expenses**. In some households, this led to negotiation. In others, the money disappeared into debts controlled by male relatives.

Notably, some women didn't even know the money had come. Their **bank accounts were dormant**, or they didn't have ATM cards. DBRC and the SHG federation helped link Aadhaar, activate accounts, and teach women how to check balances using feature phones.

Tenant Farmers and Informal Workers: The Invisible Loss

Kishkindha Palem has a large number of tenant farmers who lease land without formal contracts. "I took 2 acres on lease for chilli. The flood destroyed it—but I got no relief because my name isn't in land records," said **Mallesham**, a 29-year-old who now works as a tractor helper.

Women who worked as **tenant labourers on nearby banana and turmeric farms** faced similar exclusion. "We had just harvested part of the turmeric and left the rest for drying—it got washed away," said **Kameshwari**, who had leased a patch of land near the canal. "I had

borrowed ₹3,500 for seeds and fertilizer. Now it's gone—but because I don't own the land, no one counts it as loss."

Despite significant roles in farming and household management, women's economic and health losses were not considered. Women who worked as tenant farmers got no crop compensation. Most compensation was routed to landowners, some of whom shared the amount out of goodwill, but only in rare cases. "I lost all my turmeric. One acre. We were supposed to harvest it that week. But since I don't own land, no one even asked me what I lost," said *Yashoda*, who leases land from a distant relative.

"I lost my shop in the floods, but no one came to ask what I needed." Savithri ran a small tea and snacks stall near the main road of her village. It was her only source of income. When the heavy floods came, the water swept through her shop, destroying all her goods, stove, utensils, and wooden structure. She tried to salvage whatever she could, but most of it was beyond repair. "It's been months," she says quietly, "and I have received nothing. No one came to check what we lost, no one asked if we needed help to start again." She has been borrowing money to feed her children and is now struggling with debt. With no formal registration or license, her petty shop was not counted in the list of flood-affected businesses eligible for compensation.

Reflections and Recommendations for Future Programming

What happened in Kishkindha Palem reflects deeper structural issues. But it also shows **what works when community-based actors like DBRC step in.**

What Helped

Handholding support—from filling forms to activating bank accounts—empowered first-time claimants. **Local grievance support** shortened the feedback loop and made officials more accountable. **Collective follow-up through CBOs** gave voice to otherwise invisible claimants. "More than the ₹10,000, it was the feeling that I was not alone," said **Parvati**, looking at her rebuilt mud stove. "Someone listened. Someone helped us speak up."

This flood response effort in Kishkindha Palem reflects the mixed realities of top-down relief mechanisms and the untapped potential of locally led systems.

The learnings are rich and must inform future planning:

- **Strengthen community engagement:** Enumeration and listing must involve panchayat representatives, SHGs, and local NGOs with experience in disaster response.
- **Institutionalise grievance redressal:** Every relief effort must include an accessible, time-bound grievance redress mechanism at the community level.
- **Recognise women's losses:** Relief packages must consider tools of production used by women and compensate for health-related expenses and hygiene needs.
- **Address tenant farmers' rights:** Implement the Cultivators Compensation Rights Act effectively and ensure tenant farmers, especially women, receive crop loss support.

- **Tailor cash transfers to real needs:** Flat-rate compensation overlooks variability in crop values and household needs; a more nuanced, need-based approach is required.
- **Support intra-household equity:** Programmes should include messaging and nudges around joint planning and decision-making for better use of relief funds.

As the climate crisis deepens, floods will continue to test rural resilience. But how we respond—and who we choose to involve—can either reinforce vulnerability or lay the groundwork for a more equitable recovery.
