

## Building confidence, as well as structures

by Maya Alexandri



*Villagers discuss drainage design with Parivartan and RedR India staff in front of Vandana Prakesh Sutar's house.*

For five generations, Vandana Prakesh Sutar's family has lived in a house at the base of a steep, narrow strip of land that runs to the river. Ever since she can remember, her yard has flooded with a foot-and-a-half of water during the rainy season in June and July. For those two months, Vandana and her family have to wade through filthy water every time they have to leave the house. The flooding also erodes the house's foundation, and Vandana is worried that the water damage will eventually cause her home to collapse.

Vandana lives in Chorawne, a village in rural Maharashtra, India. She and her neighbors are subsistence rice farmers who earn extra money as laborers and carpenters. They can only grow rice during the rainy season, so it's critical to their livelihoods that they can remain near their farmlands when the rains come.

Unfortunately, however, Chorawne is prone to flooding. It's also in a landslide zone. **"The majority of landslides in this region are caused when we have excessive rains,"** explains Umesh Lagad, an engineer with RedR India. **"So there's annual risk of landslides with each year's monsoon and**

**consequent flooding."**

In 2005, three days of consecutive raining in Chorawne caused flooding that damaged houses and triggered a landslide that devastated agricultural land. The experience traumatized Chorawne's residents, many of whom were unable to sleep for days. But it also motivated them.

"We are very serious about applying the disaster risk reduction skills we've learned," says Anita Pandurang Sutar, another resident of Chorawne.

**Since September 2008, Parivartan, a local, Chiplune-based NGO, has been working with Chorawne's residents to teach disaster risk reduction skills, as well as to plan and implement structural mitigation projects. This work is phase two of a collaboration between Oxfam-Australia and Parivartan. RedR India has been providing technical support and monitoring.**

In Chorawne, the disaster reduction capacity building includes non-structural mitigation, like the formation of village task forces to prepare village plans for evacuation, shelter, food and first aid



*Pandurang Sutar and RedR India engineer Umesh Lagad measure the drainage path.*

provision, as well as to implement early warning systems.

Two structural mitigation projects are also underway in Chorawne. **First, with the help of Parivartan and Oxfam-Australia, the villagers are building a well to ensure that they'll always have access to clean drinking water.** This resource is especially important during floods, when drinking water supplies often become contaminated.

**Second, Parivartan and Oxfam-Australia are supporting the villagers in the construction of drainage on the side of the path that leads to Vandana's house.** Once

this drainage is completed, Vandana's yard should no longer flood during the rainy season. Vandana feels "very good" that Parivartan and Oxfam-Australia are providing support for work that should safeguard the structural integrity of her home.

**"Nobody else has cared, only Parivartan came,"** says Yetabai Mahadev Sutar. Anita agrees, adding, **"Before Parivartan came, we were not aware of information about disaster risk reduction, but now we are confident** that if there is any danger of disaster to any person, we can help them and help ourselves."



*Vandana Prakesh Sutar, with her daughter, sitting in her house.*

Implementing NGO:

Funding NGO:

Technical and social support NGO:

**Parivartan**, Chiplune, Maharashtra, India

**Oxfam-Australia**, 132 Leicester Street, Carlton  
VIC 3053, Australia, [www.oxfam.org.au](http://www.oxfam.org.au)

**RedR India**, A-14, Nivedita Apartments, Paud Road  
Pune, India 411038, [www.redrindia.org](http://www.redrindia.org)