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Mala News

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An action programme for the elimination of child labour in rural India

Greetings!

Village life India's monsoons

In July we wrote that we were worrying about a lack of water, as the school wells ran dry and we were forced to resort to bringing tanks of water in by lorry. Over the last couple of weeks, however, the schools have been coping with another problem entirely: the late and very heavy monsoon rains.

After a summer where temperatures rose to unbearable levels and the children and teachers had to contend not only with searing heat but also the hot dusty winds that are so dangerous to health and which cover every surface with a fine dust, the long awaited monsoon rains failed to arrive. July passed into August, and still there was no rain. Instead the temperature climbed ever higher and the despairing farmers began to plant their autumn crops regardless. Suddenly, six weeks late, the monsoon rains came down with exceptional force as if they had been conserving their energy for a really spectacular show.



Within hours flood waters were rising, washing away roads and houses, battering the tender rice and wheat and drowning the vegetable gardens. For the last few years the monsoon rains have not been particularly heavy. This year I heard people say that they had not seen such rain since they were children.

In the schools our dry, clay baked playgrounds turned to mud, the books in the library curled up their covers, plaster flaked off walls and any roof that could leak, dripped water. In rain that was so heavy you could hardly stand up in it, our children made their way to school regardless.

Along the roads leading to all our schools you would see four or five children huddled together holding a large plastic sheet over their heads, two children hardly visible under a large umbrella, battling their way through the streams that had turned roads into rivers, drenched cyclists keeping their books as dry as possible while they took the full force of the rain. They arrived in the classrooms steaming, with damp books, muddy feet and wide smiles – proud of themselves for making it through ([see film](#)).

The rain comes so quickly and so fiercely that there is no time to make the decision to inform all the children and close the school, so everyone does the best they can. Teaching becomes quite challenging when the rain is roaring down like an express train and the electricity fails. Sickness is rife too: mosquito borne diseases like malaria and

dengue take their toll of both staff and pupils during the rainy season and in the warm, damp atmosphere infections take hold quickly. Our children are amazingly resilient though, and absentee levels are kept to a minimum.

Uttar Pradesh is a part of India that has always suffered from extremes of temperature and weather, but in recent years, as elsewhere, everything has been exaggerated with colder, later winters, hotter summers and delayed or non-existent monsoons. Places with a better infrastructure can easily cope with unseasonal weather but our children and their families live so much on the verge of poverty, in communities with few resources, that a flood, a drought, an outbreak of disease, can spell financial disaster or death.

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