



Disaster Management Community



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Transforming Knowledge into Development Effectiveness

Action Group Concept Note

Topic: Governance in Disaster Management & Response

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Background

India is a country highly vulnerable to natural disasters. Enormous population pressures and urbanization have forced people to live on marginal lands or in cities where they are at greater risk to disasters and the damage they can cause. Whether a flood, a regional drought or a devastating earthquake, millions of Indians are affected each time a disaster occurs. In addition to large-scale displacement and the loss of life, these events result in the loss of property and agricultural crops worth millions of dollars annually. These catastrophes typically result in the substantial loss of hard won development gains.

In India, the primary responsibility for responding to disasters lies at the State level. The Government of India (GOI) is in the process of developing a national disaster management plan. The GOI provides financial and technical guidelines to the states and would mobilize human and material resources required to supplement the efforts of the state Governments.. Many Indian states have limited resources and lack their own disaster management plans. Because of these factors, India's disaster response record has been mixed. Case studies of recent disasters list some shortcomings such as:

- ◆ Delayed response of the government to cover all the affected areas;
- ◆ Absence of early warning systems;
- ◆ Lack of resources to undertake mass evacuation;
- ◆ Non-existent and non-familiarization with standard operating procedures for effective rescue and relief;
- ◆ Inadequate stock piles of items such as sand bags, medicines, and life saving equipment.; and
- ◆ Inadequate coordination with the defense and civilian forces as well as with other humanitarian partners

Constraints

While there is awareness in India that better disaster response mechanisms are necessary, the overall trend has indicated the need to overcome numerous challenges. Although India's national capacities to respond to disasters of small or moderate size with relatively without external assistance are generally adequate, the overall trends suggest that current Government response mechanisms are to be strengthened to respond to major events. Deaths and economic losses have increased. The reasons for this are varied including increasing

population pressures in urban areas; increase in poor people occupying marginal lands, e.g., flood plains, which are susceptible to disasters; poor or ignored zoning laws and policies; lack of proper risk management (insurance); and several other physical and social factors.

Even though the Central and State Governments have been taking steps, the level of preparedness is extremely uneven and in general requires considerable strengthening. While the States and local communities need better response and mitigation mechanisms, they are dependent on the Center for assistance.. Historically, India has preferred to manage disasters on its own. Interest is high in the GOI for addressing major weaknesses such as: poor planning and coordination in emergency response; lack of relevant technology for forecasting; inadequate human capacity and skills for response; inadequate attention to good zoning and building; and ineffective warning systems.

Emergency Response

Each disaster has unique circumstances and the response needs to be tailored to meet the specifics of the situation but the general areas requiring response include:

- ◆ Search and rescue - finding those who may be trapped by building collapse
- ◆ Assessment of needs - working out what is required, in what quantities, and for whom
- ◆ Health - provision of medical care and preventing the spread of disease through immunization, provision of safe water and food, waste disposal and burial of the dead
- ◆ Basic needs - procuring and distributing food, shelter and clothing
- ◆ Gender - understanding the roles of men and women in families and communities to identify needs and ensure fair distribution of resources
- ◆ Livelihood and economy - assisting people to earn a living to help them recover
- ◆ Emotional support - counseling and reuniting separated families
- ◆ Logistics - transportation of people and equipment
- ◆ Finance - obtaining, allocating and accounting for money
- ◆ Communication - media coverage, information for families, fundraising
- ◆ Infrastructure - rebuilding roads, electricity, telephones, water pipelines, waste disposal systems

Few countries would have all the resources necessary to meet the demands of a large scale disaster but the survivors and people living in the area do much before international assistance arrives. The emergency response therefore needs to be coordinated at the local level initially for the survival of the maximum possible number of victims. Such coordinated response cannot be entirely the responsibility of the Government. Therefore, the on-going initiatives to enhance the capacities of the communities in various states would reduce substantially the delays in response. However, recent disasters have shown that involvement of NGO community has been useful in supplementing the efforts of the Government. Recent events also showed that if the responses of the NGOs were not coordinated properly, it would lead to waste of precious resources. Some of the state Governments, especially at the district level established platforms for sharing of information and coordination of the activities of the NGOs. Such synergistic efforts, though in isolated pockets, have been observed as optimum utilization of resources, there are no concerted efforts to establish mechanisms for bringing together NGO partners to fulfill the gaps in demand – supply.

Need of the Hour

The need of the hour is to develop a comprehensive and integrated strategy / guidelines for Governance in Disaster Management and Response at the local level with the help of NGOs. Pre-positioning of critical relief supplies, Incident Command System training and capacity building activities and search and rescue operations training are some of the activities that will ensure faster, more efficient responses to disasters.

Systems and structures must be flexible, responsive to and accommodate the values, priorities and practices of local communities. Hence improved capacity of NGOs to meet critical needs of vulnerable groups in disaster response is necessary to ensure successful achievement of this goal. With the right combination of administrative structures, institutional capacity building, and coordination with centralized agencies, input NGOs at local level into large-scale disaster management initiatives can lead to successful response and mitigation of disasters.

Solution Exchange: An Initiative of the UN Country Team in India: www.solutionexchange-un.net.in

In view of the above, the Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority (GSDMA) is willing to coordinate the development of an action project in collaboration with the Disaster Management Community of Practice of the Solution Exchange platform. Therefore, GSDMA would like the members to provide inputs for the following:

- Identify partners to undertake specific tasks
- Studies that could be carried out to capture the lessons learnt with respect to coordination of NGO activities
- Provide Access to previous studies carried out
- Suggest mechanisms for implementing the project

GSDMA would like to complete the formulation of the proposed project within 6 months and suggest the following work plan

- Finalization of objectives, scope, partners and areas of collaboration – (end February 2008)
- Identify cases to be studied and commissions studies (March/April 2008)
- Review existing studies, documents (March 2008)
- Draft Report with recommendations (April/May 2008) – leading clearly to a more workable approach to better Government – NGO coordination
- Organize a focus group consultation to review the report and to finalize a framework of action for strengthening the Governance system with respect to NGO involvement, capacity building of partner NGOs, develop SOPs, etc.

Budget

GSDMA would consider funding the project development with the support of other partners.