

DISASTER

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CENTRE FOR DISASTER MANAGEMENT
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PREFACE

“Disaster means a catastrophe, mishap, calamity or grave occurrence in any area, arising from natural or man-made causes, which results in substantial loss of life or human suffering or damage to, and destruction of, environment, and is of such a nature or magnitude as to be beyond the coping capacity of the community of the affected area.”

– Definition of disaster as per the National Disaster Management Act 2005

Consciousness about safety is a state of mind and as a society we are not very safety conscious – this attitude is evident in approach to managing disasters too. India is a country that is extremely vulnerable to disasters and the situation is exacerbated by climate change factors, increasing human activity in the fragile eco-systems of the Himalayas and the Western Ghats. In addition, the rapid urbanization is rendering large sections of population vulnerable to industrial disasters.

Given the Hazard Risk Vulnerability profile of the country, sensitization and capacity building of the society at large and that of the government, especially the civil services in particular is a must. And this awareness and sensitization has to come at every level from the political to permanent executive– and from general administration to the line departments.

Disaster Management is slowly emerging as an academic discipline in its own right with institutions like the Tata Institute of Social Sciences awarding a post graduate diploma in Disaster Management, and in the process creating pool of resource persons who can be drawn upon by the states to provide the requisite intellectual capital in this area. These developments notwithstanding, Disaster Management is and will remain an experiential discipline and the best way to learn and to prepare is to draw upon the experiences in handling and managing disasters world over. With the

complexity in governance and the higher vulnerability of populations owing to their concentration on account of urbanization the focus of Disaster Management has shifted from the earlier focus primarily on response and relief to mitigation, prevention and preparedness. Equally important is the Mainstreaming of Disaster Management into the development process and creating a culture & ethos of Preparedness & Prevention across the country. Disaster Management can thus be broadly sub-divided into the following:

- Prevention: Disaster Risk Reduction
- Mitigation
- Response
- Relief and Rehabilitation

From an administrator's standpoint the first two points merit maximum intervention and involvement. In fact, due diligence if carried out in the planning and development stages of the various schemes as far as disaster risks are concerned, can reduce the loss of lives and damages to assets considerably. Even in case of extreme natural calamity like earthquake, cyclone adequate safeguards in planning and construction stage can prevent damages and loss of lives. Best case in point being the Haitian earthquake in 2008 which was 7 in Richter scale caused 160000 casualties whereas Japan routinely experiences shocks and tremors of such magnitude with hardly any damage and destruction. There is a popular saying "earthquakes don't kill people, buildings do". Latur quake of 1993 was not that severe in intensity (5.8 in Richter scale) but killed over 20000 people, most of whom were asleep in their stone houses that abounded in that region. Thus embedding Disaster Risk Reduction in administration is something that should receive a high priority in general administration and line departments.

It is however the response part that gets maximum attention whether one is in the business of disaster management or when is generally looking at the subject. Response is the end result of a prolonged preparation that ideally should go into overall Disaster Management plan. The promptness and effectiveness of response is, quite naturally, a function of training, capacity building and the capability of the responders, especially the state. Therefore a concerted program of the government in this field, from creating

a strong institutional edifice to rendering that edifice capable, has been the need of the hour.

Best Disaster Management is one that we do not hear or read about because in media good news is no news and bad news is good news, and perhaps this is what takes the sheen off Disaster Management: it just does not elicit good PR: how many of us know cyclone Nilam or Thane being as severe in intensity as the 1999 super cyclone of Orissa? But because of advance warnings and preparations Nilam and Thane caused far less casualties and destruction and that is probably why media did not cover it as extensively as it did in case of Orissa.

Disaster Management, though an important function of state, is not a very popular discipline or an important department, as is evident from lack of interest of the higher bureaucracy. Normally, the Secretary in-charge is a reluctant fellow, who has the charge virtually thrust upon him. This is quite ironical because India has one of the most comprehensive legislation in Disaster Management anywhere in the world. The National Disaster Management Act 2005 addresses the issues of scope, definition, institutional chain of command and accountability quite unequivocally and exhaustively. The institutional edifice that the act provides- the three tier structure- fits in seamlessly with India's administrative structure. Yet growth and capacity building in this area have been haphazard. Our response and preparedness, in most states (with the exception of Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and a few North Eastern states) has been tardy. There is delay in response and more importantly inadequacy in prevention and mitigation. Most of these lacunae stem from a lack of understanding and capacity and are exacerbated by lack of coordination between departments and organization and the inability to integrate technology. Disaster Management is an emerging discipline and the best way to impart training and awareness is through the medium of live examples and case studies. This is what this journal proposes to attempt: the endeavour has been to pick up case studies from the recent past from different parts of the country. These studies are based on extensive fieldwork and primary data. The range of coverage is vast in its geographical spread: Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Assam and Andaman and Nicobar islands. The disasters covered include floods, cloudburst and flash floods, earthquake and Tsunami. The treatment of post-disaster Relief and Rehab in Nicobar is

a first-hand account of a young administrator, currently working in the capacity of Private Secretary to a Union minister, and holds invaluable lesson for the field officers.

Uttarkashi has witnessed major cloudburst and flash floods year after year. The incident referred to in this journal is the flash flood of 2012. Although conclusive evidence is yet to be clinched, the rapid climate change is said to be a major cause in the aberrations in precipitation in the Himalayas and this has been compounded by uncontrolled human activity in the region necessitating urgent interventions by the state.

The case study of North Sikkim, prepared jointly by Assistant Professor CDM Dr Indrajit Pal and the then District Magistrate North Sikkim Sh Aunjaneya Kumar Singh highlight the practical issues in the initial post-disaster response and underscores the invaluable need for a viable District Disaster Management Plan (DDMP) and safety drills especially in remote areas.

Brahmaputra valley is one of the chronic flood prone areas in the world. The annual frequency of floods over so many years has resulted in a rich institutional memory of flood management by the administration; with the result that the state machinery with the help of remote sensing technology, is able to plan for the contingencies better. But then recurrence is so widespread the issue warrants a more in depth look at long term planning and resettlement of the population.

In this effort of CDM an attempt has been to compile a practical reference journal with inputs from the members of CDM and significantly the young administrators in the field. It should be a guide and an enabler for the young Officer Trainees to get a feel of what a disaster is like. Thus a deliberate effort has been to avoid making it too academic and pedantic.

Learnings from each of the cases reinforces the need for greater sensitization and capacity building of the field level officers and the need for integration of plans with the aim of bringing all stakeholders on the same page as far as managing/mitigating disasters is concerned.

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