



## INDIA'S NEW DISASTER MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES

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### **Introduction**

The developing countries are becoming increasingly exposed to greater numbers of natural and man-made disasters, resulting in larger numbers of people becoming victims. It is estimated that between 1980 and 1984, about 800 disasters affected the lives of about 400 million people in the world. However, between 2000 and 2004, about 1300 disasters affected the lives of about 1.4 billion people, thereby reflecting both an increase in the number of disasters and in the number of people affected during the recent past few decades. According to the Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), some 75% of the world's people live in areas that have been affected at least once by an earthquake, a tropical cyclone, flooding or drought between 1980 and 2000.

In 2004, about 238,000 lives were lost in more than 13 countries in the Indian Ocean region due to the devastation caused by the Indian Ocean tsunami, which also resulted in loss of lives of people and damage to property and assets in the coastal districts of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Puducherry, Andhra Pradesh and Anadaman & Nicobar Islands. In 2006,

it is estimated that 426 disasters in 108 countries affected 143 million people and caused \$ 34.6 billion in economic losses. In 2008, more than 300 disasters resulted in the loss of 235,000 lives, affected the lives of more than 200 million people and caused economic losses and damage worth \$ 181 billion. Most devastating among these disasters in 2008 were the earthquake which hit China in May 2008 and the cyclone Nargis which hit Myanmar in May 2008.

The high density of population in the developing countries, especially in the high risk coastal areas, results in several millions of people getting affected by natural disasters, especially in recurring disasters like floods, cyclones, storm surges, etc. The vulnerable communities in the developing countries are most likely to become greater victims of climate change-related disasters in the future, if appropriate strategies are not developed to incorporate climate change adaptation solutions while preparing development plans in such disaster-prone areas.

### **Disaster Management Initiatives in India**

In 1999, the Government of India set up a High Powered Committee to develop disaster management plans at the national, state and district levels. While the HPC was engaged in consultations with various stakeholder groups around the country, the super cyclone which hit Orissa in October 1999 and the Bhuj earthquake which hit Gujarat on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2001 exposed major weaknesses in our disaster preparedness and emergency response capacities. The National Committee on Disaster Management constituted by the Government of India reviewed the High Powered Committee Report and approved some of the recommendations, one of the most significant ones being the shifting of the primary responsibility for disaster management from the Ministry of Agriculture to the Ministry of Home Affairs in Government of India.

India became one of the first countries after the Indian Ocean Tsunami of December 2004 to declare a national commitment to set up appropriate institutional mechanisms for more effective disaster management at the national, state and district levels. The Disaster Management Bill was unanimously adopted by both houses of Parliament and the Disaster Management Act 2005 demonstrated the national vision of a paradigm shift from post-disaster response to improving the pre-disaster disaster preparedness, initiating disaster mitigation projects and strengthening emergency response capacities in the country. The Disaster Management Act, 2005 stipulated the establishment of requisite institutional mechanisms for drawing up and monitoring the implementation of disaster management plans, ensuring measures by various wings of the government for prevention and mitigating the effects of disasters, and for undertaking a holistic, co-ordinated, and prompt response to any disaster situation.

### **The New Legal and Institutional Framework**

The Disaster Management Act 2005 envisaged the establishment of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), chaired by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, as the apex body for disaster management in the country, the State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMAs) chaired by the respective Chief Ministers at the state level and the District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs) chaired by the respective District Collectors and co-chaired by the elected representative of the Zilla Parishad in the respective districts. During NDMA's first meeting, the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India directed that the Union Minister for Home Affairs, Union Minister for Finance, Union Minister for Agriculture and the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission should be permanent invitees for the NDMA meetings henceforth to facilitate greater synergy in decision making and for more effective mainstreaming of disaster management in development planning.

A dedicated agency called the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) has been established with personnel from the para military forces for strengthening the preparedness and emergency response in the country. Eight battalions of the NDRF have been setup and deployed in strategic locations in the country and the NDRF personnel are being trained and equipped with state-of-the-art life saving equipments, search and rescue equipments, inflatable boats, etc. The NDRF personnel are also being trained for preparing and responding to Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) emergencies. Since their inception, NDRF personnel have been deployed in many natural disaster situations to assist the local administration. During the Kosi floods in Bihar in 2008, the NDRF personnel evacuated more than 100,000 people from the flood-affected villages through the sustained effort of NDRF search and rescue teams using inflatable boats, baupts and local country boats.

The National Institute for Disaster Management (NIDM) has been established as the apex training institute for disaster management in India. NIDM coordinates the capacity building efforts of disaster management faculty in State Training Institutes and is also offering a few distance education programmes in disaster management in collaboration with the World Bank Institute. The NIDM also hosts the SAARC Centre for Disaster Management.

The Disaster Management Act 2005 also stipulated that Disaster Response Funds and Disaster Mitigation Funds will be set up at the National State and District levels. As the 12<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission recommendations are applicable till 2010, the rationale and the modalities for the setting up of these funds are being discussed with the 13<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission for their consideration and approval.

### **The National Vision**

The Disaster Management Act 2005 envisages a paradigm shift from the erstwhile relief-centric response to a proactive prevention, mitigation

and preparedness-driven approach, so as to conserve the developmental gains and also minimize losses to lives, livelihoods and property. The National Vision for disaster management is to build a safer and disaster-resilient India by developing a holistic, proactive, multi-hazard and technology-driven strategy. This will be achieved through a culture of prevention, mitigation and preparedness to generate a prompt and efficient response at the time of disasters. The entire process will centre-stage the community and will be provided momentum and sustenance through the collective efforts of all Government agencies and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

### **Mainstreaming Disaster Management in Development Planning**

The Eleventh Five Year Plan document observed that “the Tenth Plan has set into motion the process of shift in focus from response-centric disaster management covering rescue, relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction to laying greater emphasis on the other elements of disaster management cycle – prevention, mitigation, and preparedness – as a means to avert or soften the impact of future emergencies. The Eleventh Plan aims at consolidating the process by giving impetus to projects and programmes that develop and nurture the culture of safety and the integration of disaster prevention and mitigation into the development process. The guidance and direction to achieve this paradigm shift will need to flow from NDMA, and in the true spirit of the Disaster Management Act, to all stakeholders including State Governments and UTs, right up to the PRIs.”

In the words of the Planning Commission as spelt out in the Eleventh Five Year Plan document, “Mainstreaming disaster management into the development planning process essentially means looking critically at each activity that is being planned, not only from the perspective of reducing the disaster vulnerability of that activity, but also from the perspective of minimizing that activity’s potential contribution to the hazard. Every development plan of a ministry/department should incorporate elements

of impact assessment, risk reduction, and the 'do no harm' approach. Examples of this approach are urban planning and zoning, upgradation of building codes and their effective enforcement, adoption of disaster resilient housing designs and construction of school and hospitals, flood proofing, response preparedness planning, insurance, establishment of early warning systems for various types of disasters, generating community awareness, creating technical competence and promoting research among engineers, architects, health experts, and scientists."

NDMA, in consultation with the Planning Commission and the concerned Ministries of the Government of India, has worked out the modalities for scrutinising the incorporation of disaster management concerns in the development plans of Ministries and Departments of India and State Governments and these formats have been circulated for compliance while submitting plan proposals for their approval by the Planning Commission. Thus, the Government of India has become one of the first national Governments to operationalise the mainstreaming of disaster management in development plans, as envisaged by the Hyogo Framework for Action.

### **Centre-staging Communities**

As the neighbourhood community is always the first to respond in any disaster situation, NDMA is encouraging the involvement of all stakeholders in strengthening community based disaster management through comprehensive training programmes, public awareness campaigns, mock drills, etc.

Over the past few years, disaster situations have also witnessed the changing roles of women from passive victims to social change agents, transforming the quality of life of the disaster-prone communities in their neighbourhood through large scale social mobilisation efforts.

### **Investing in Improved Preparedness**

The most important activities in strengthening disaster preparedness include the preparation of Guidelines, the improvement in risk assessment, vulnerability analysis and early warning systems, capacity building, public awareness, mock drills, etc. NDMA has already prepared and released National Disaster Management Guidelines for the Management of Earthquakes, Floods, Cyclones, Chemical Disasters, Biological Disasters, Radiological and Nuclear Emergencies, Medical Preparedness and Mass Casualty Management, Landslides, etc. Guidelines have also been prepared for the National Institute for Disaster Management (NIDM) and for the preparation of State Disaster Management Plans. Several other Guidelines on the Management of Tsunami, Psycho-Social Care and Trauma, Community Based Disaster Preparedness, Minimum Standards of Relief, Role of NGOs in Disaster Management, etc. are in the process of getting finalized.

Civil Defence is being revamped, with disaster management as one of their primary mandates. From the existing state police battalions, State Governments are being encouraged to set up State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) for preparing and responding to natural and man-made disasters in their geographic jurisdictions.

Along with Civil Defence, Home Guards, Indian Red Cross Society volunteers, National Service Scheme volunteers, Nehru Yuvak Kendra Sangatan volunteers, NCC and Scouts and Guides will also be encouraged to participate in improving community preparedness, especially in disaster-prone areas. As outlined in the Guidelines on Medical Preparedness and Mass Casualty Management, special efforts will be made during the Eleventh Five Year Plan to improve the medical preparedness through integrated ambulance network, helicopter ambulances, containerized mobile field hospitals, improved bio-safety laboratories, etc. Several lakhs of people have participated in the mock drills conducted in several parts of the country in collaboration with the state governments,

district administration officials, NDRF personnel, fire and emergency services personnel, civil defence personnel and local communities.

### **Mitigation Projects**

NDMA has initiated the steps for launching national level mitigation projects for the management of earthquakes, cyclones, floods, landslides and for strengthening the disaster communication network upto the last mile connectivity and for setting up national disaster mitigation reserves. The work on risk assessment and vulnerability analysis, microzonation and hazard zonation mapping, etc. have also been initiated with the involvement of various stakeholder groups. A National School Safety Project is also being launched to strengthen the disaster preparedness, mitigation and emergency response capacities among school children, teachers and other stakeholders, especially in high risk seismic zones IV and V which are vulnerable to high intensity earthquakes.

### **Conclusion**

Disaster risk reduction can be achieved only if all citizens participate in complying with the techno-legal regime, actively support the capacity building and public awareness campaigns and disseminate the need for carrying out mock drills in their neighbourhoods. The vision of a disaster-resilient India can be achieved only by spreading the culture of preparedness among all sections of the society. It is especially important for the corporate leaders to extend their support to this national cause by strengthening disaster preparedness efforts in their neighbourhood as a part of Corporate Social Responsibility.