

ASSAM FLOODS: AN INSIGHT INTO THE PREPAREDNESS JOURNEY OF ASSAM STATE DISASTER MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

Shared By: Assam State Disaster Management Authority

Assam with its refreshing greenery has a positive effect on people but the miseries related to various disasters faced by the State every year give sleepless nights to its residents every year. One of the major disasters that faced in Assam is Flood. The State's unique geographical location situated in the southern part of Eastern Himalayas with two major rivers Brahmaputra and Barak having large network of tributaries create havoc of flood adding to the miseries of the people. Assam's extremely dynamic monsoon regime combined with unique physiographic setting of the basins and increasing effects of rapid climate change in the region has been considered as the most significant cause of frequent floods in the State.

Brahmaputra happens to be the largest water carrying river in India and the second largest silt carrying river in the world. Almost every year, flood occurs in river Brahmaputra, with the legacy of affecting all the districts of Assam, taking lives of scores of people, rendering several thousands homeless and damaging infrastructure. About 40 per cent of the state is affected every year in three to four waves of deluge. Every year, more than 500 relief camps run during disasters in the State with more than 2 lakhs people including children, pregnant/lactating mothers, persons with disability etc. in the camps. Additionally, more than 100 relief distribution centres used to be set up to distribute essential relief supplies to those who are not staying in the camps. Every year, more than 100 people used to lose their lives during various disasters and many people are reported as missing.

In view of the recurring floods every year, Government of Assam takes various preparedness measures throughout the year to minimize the adverse effect of floods and more rigorously before the official Flood Season which begins from 1st May every year and ends on 31st October to minimize loss of human life and property.

As part of the flood preparedness initiatives, Assam State Disaster Management Authority (henceforth ASDMA) conducts six thematic meetings for flood preparedness every year i.e. (i) Coordination for Response with responding agencies, (ii) Critical Infrastructure Preparedness, (iii) Ensuring continuity of services viz. Health, Water & Sanitation, Education, Social welfare services etc., (iv) Relief Camp Management, (v) Risk communication and (vi)

Reporting and Damage Assessment as part of its preparedness this year with various stakeholders.

ASDMA also conducts Video conferencing with the District Disaster Management Authorities (henceforth DDMA) to review flood preparedness and the designated Nodal Officers from state HQs visits districts to review their flood preparedness at the district level. State level flood preparedness review meeting is conducted under the chairmanship of the Chief Secretary, Assam also helps to assess status of preparedness of the state machinery to response to the flood. Intensive relief and rescue operations are undertaken every year utilising the services of NDRF, SDRF, Indian Army, Indian Air Forces and all the government machinery. More than 4000 relief camps and shelter places are pre-identified during pre-monsoon period as a part of flood preparedness by DDMAAs.

Besides these efforts, ASDMA with all its District Project Officers in all the 35 districts of Assam and 157 Field Officers at the Revenue Circles make a coordinated effort during the entire flood season and work dedicatedly for better response, relief and rehabilitation. ASDMA has taken up several initiatives such as Flood Early Warning System, Flood Mock Drills, Emergency Exercises in all GPs, Project on Flood Resilient Villages, sensitization in schools and communities alike, message dissemination thorough SMS and other media (Print, electronic, social media) to make people more prepared for the floods.

Moreover, ASDMA also developed a SoP on Relief Camp Management to ensure adequate supervision of the relief camps during the entire flood season. Along with this, Assam Government also notified sanitary pad and baby as a compulsory relief item for the inmates. However, ASDMA also provided sanitary vending machine and incinerator in some of the schools which act as relief camps.

Another important initiative of ASDMA is the Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) in Relief Camps. ASDMA in collaboration with UNICEF, Assam developed a guideline for operationalisation of CFS in Emergencies which helps the children to continue their education and learning activities in a camp set up while they are affected by natural calamities. In a CFS, the mental and physical well being of the children affected by natural calamities is taken care of by grass root government officials like teachers, AWWs and ASHAs. For children below 6 years, all kind of food under SNP is provided to the children in camps. For above 6 years, educational curriculum continuity is taken care of by the school

teachers through special class room schedule during their stay in the camp. For adolescent girls, sufficient nos. of sanitary napkins are provided by the school authorities/health workers. Breast feeding corners are established for lactating women in camps. The pregnant women undergo prenatal care through visiting health professionals/Asha workers in the relief camp.

ASDMA has capacitated the model relief camps in each revenue circles of the districts with "School in a box kit/CFS kits" consisting of teaching and learning materials including notebooks, pencils, recreational tools etc. for children in the camps. This was provided to support the educational loss of children as well as to give them an environment to heal from the trauma of losses during disasters.

ASDMA also conducted various trainings for capacity building of the field level officials during disaster response. One of those is the training on Child and Women Care in relief camps and temporary shelters during emergencies to equip the ICDS functionaries at all levels with relevant training and enable them to deliver proven nutrition-specific interventions during a disaster, to reduce mortality and morbidity associated with malnutrition.

For effective response and relief Government of Assam places advance GR funds to the district Commissioners and Sub Divisional Officers (Civil sub division). Allocation of rice under OMSS(D) were made for each of the district and civil subdivisions after analysing historical data of flood affected people in these districts and civil subdivisions.

Online disaster reporting in Disaster Reporting & Information Management System (DRIMS) portal by the districts has brought transparency of disaster reporting for close monitoring and immediate intervention by the Government of Assam.

However, all the efforts can be successful in the truest terms only when there is a cohesive approach from the Government and the Community alike. ASDMA has recently launched community response portal to channelize both the response in a cohesive form supplementing each other. The responders can log in at <https://onlineasdma.assam.gov.in/ngo/public/> and register themselves by providing all the necessary details, documents, their skills or the activities undertaken by the individuals and organisations. Once approved from ASDMA, these responders will be mobilized by the administration during times of need. The Administration will have a comprehensive catalogue of these community responders district wise and loop them for disaster response, recovery &

mitigation activities. ASDMA and DDMA's will be able to communicate and monitor the activities of Community Responders through this portal.

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