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Disaster management in India

Dr. Vinod Kumar

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Vallabh Government College Mandi, Himachal Pradesh, India

* Corresponding Author: **Dr. Vinod Kumar**

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Abstract

Disaster Management can be defined as the body of policy and administrative decisions and operational activities which pertain to the various stages of a disaster at all levels. Broadly disaster management can be divided into pre-disaster and post-disaster contexts. This research paper goes on to discuss the disaster management framework, financial arrangements, and role of NGOs, CBOs and media. In the end, will review and analyze the way the disaster management system is evolving in India.

Keywords: Prevention, reduction, mitigation, rehabilitation, response and relief

Introduction

It will be seen from the Disaster Management Cycle as depicted in the diagram that it consists of six broad stages. To begin with, a disaster event occurs and creates the associated disaster impacts. The duration of the event depends on the type of the hazard. For example, during an earthquake, ground shaking may occur for seconds, while flooding may take place over a longer sustained period.

Response and Relief refer to the first stage response to any disaster, which includes setting up control rooms, putting the contingency plan in action, issuing warning, acting for evacuation i.e. taking people to safer areas, and rendering medical aid simultaneously providing food, drinking water, clothing etc. to the homeless, restoration of communication, and disbursement of assistance in cash or kind.

The recovery stage includes activities that encompass the three overlapping phases of emergency relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction. Emergency relief activity such as immediate relief, rescue, damage assessment, and debris clearance are undertaken during and immediately following a disaster. Taking precautions against spread of diseases is also an important activity during this stage. Rehabilitation includes the provision of camps with temporary public utilities and shelter as interim measures to assist long-term recovery. Reconstruction efforts are made to return communities to improved pre-disaster functioning, which include repair and reconstruction of buildings, infrastructure and lifeline facilities so that long-term development prospects are enhanced.

The next stage of development process is an ongoing activity which has to be resumed. It deals with long-term prevention/disaster reduction measures. In this regard, construction of embankments against flooding, irrigation facilities as drought proofing measures, land use planning, construction of houses capable of withstanding the onslaught of future disasters are taken up as part of development plans.

Thereafter comes the stage of prevention and mitigation which refer to such preventive actions during disaster free period that would lessen the impact if a disaster recurs. Thus, mitigation embraces all measures taken to reduce both the effect of the hazard itself and the vulnerable conditions of the community in order to reduce the adverse impacts of a future disaster. Lastly, the preparedness process embraces measures that enable the government, community and individuals to respond rapidly to disaster situation in order to cope with them effectively.

It includes the formulation of viable emergency plans, development of warning systems, maintenance of inventories, mock drills, and training of personnel.

For effective disaster management, it is essential to have workable action plans at all levels from community level upwards. The aim is to have a tested and tried system in place, which comes into action at very short notice. This system becomes a powerful risk reduction tool. A wide range of tasks needs to be addressed in the planning sequence for disaster management, and the plan will need regular checking and updating.

Disaster management in India

Due to highly variable nature of monsoon rains, there have always been droughts or drought like conditions in some parts of India. Traditionally ours has been an agricultural economy, which was greatly affected by droughts, disaster management was vested in the Ministry of Agriculture both at the Centre and States. However, conditions changed with the economy

getting more wide based and a more central location seemed desirable for responsibilities related to disaster management. Therefore, the Ministry of Home Affairs is now the Central Ministry of the Government of India for disaster management since 2002. However, the drought management remains with the Ministry of Agriculture. Similarly, other Ministries have been assigned nodal responsibilities for specific disasters. Detailed organization is described below.

At the Central Level

At the Central level, depending on the type of disaster, a nodal ministry is assigned the task of coordinating all activities of the State and District Administration and the other support Departments Ministry. The nodal ministry for each type of disaster is indicated in table 1.1. The nodal ministries form part of the National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC). They prepare detailed Contingency Plans for each type of disaster falling in their area of responsibility.

Table 1: Type of disaster and the nodal central ministry

Type of Disaster / Crisis	Nodal Ministry
Air Accident	Ministry of Civil Aviation
Biological Disaster	Ministry of Health
Chemical Disaster	Ministry of Environment
Natural Disasters except drought and overall coordination	Ministry of Home Affairs
Drought	Ministry of Agriculture
Major breakdown of any of the essential services posing problems	Concerned Ministries
Nuclear Accident inside or outside the country which poses health or other hazards to people in India	Department of Atomic Energy

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs

Ministry of home affairs

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is the nodal ministry for managing natural disaster situations, at the Central level, it is supported by other Ministries. In the MHA, the Central Relief Commissioner as the Nodal Officer to coordinate relief operations for natural disasters. The MHA deals with disasters like Floods, Earthquake, Cyclone, Landslide, Forest Fire, Avalanches, etc. The Central Relief Commissioner receives information about forecasting/warning of disasters from the India Meteorological Department (IMD) or from the Central Water Commission (CWC) on a continuing basis and channels the information and coordinates action. The National Crises Management Committee (NCMC) is well informed by MHA through the Cabinet Secretary, Government of India, He disseminates the information to different Central Government Ministries / Departments and the State Governments for the appropriate follow-up action, While the Ministry of Home Affairs is the nodal ministry managing disaster situations, other ministries support it as well. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare through the Emergency Medical Relief Division of the Directorate General of Health Services makes an important contribution. In a typical disaster situation, this Division gets in touch with the Central Control Room in Home Ministry and obtains feedback on the extent of disaster situation like details of a particular day, number of people affected and the health profile of the victims. On the basis of such data and information, the concerned medical agencies are put into action for providing medical relief to the victims.

Other Committees

The various committees involved in co-ordination for disaster management at the Central and State Levels are:

- Cabinet Committee
- National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC)
- Crisis Management Group (CMG)
- State Crisis Management Group (SCMG).

Cabinet Committee

The Cabinet may set up a committee for effective implementation of relief measures in the wake of a disaster. The Secretary in the MHA acts as the Secretary of this Committee. In the absence of such a committee, all the matters related to the relief are reported to the Cabinet Secretary.

National crisis management committee (NCMC)

The NCMC has been constituted in the Cabinet Secretariat. It works under the Chairmanship of the Cabinet Secretary, and the other members of this committee are the Secretary to the Prime Minister, Secretaries of the Ministries of Home Affairs, Agriculture and Defense along with the Directors of Intelligence Bureau, Research and Analysis Wing, and an officer of the Cabinet Secretariat. The NCMC committee is a High Power Committee which comes into action immediately in case of an anticipated or actual disaster in the country. It gives direction to the, Crisis Management Group as deemed necessary.

Crisis management group (CMG)

This is a group under the Chairmanship of the Central Relief Commissioner comprising the senior officers from the various ministries and other concerned departments. Its function is to review every year contingency plans formulated by the Central Ministries Departments. In addition, it also reviews the measures required for dealing

with a natural disaster; co-ordinate the activities of the Central Ministries and the State Governments in relation to disaster preparedness and relief, and to obtain information from the nodal officers on measures relating to the above. The CMG meets at least twice a year under the Central Relief Commissioner. In case of disaster, it meets daily or as frequently as the situation demands.

Central Control Room

An Emergency Operations Centre (Control Room) in the Ministry of Home Affairs assists the Central Relief Commissioner in the discharge of his duties. The Control Room functions round the- clock, with a full complement of staff after receipt of first information about the occurrence of a major natural calamity. It remains operational for a period specified by the Relief Commissioner for dealing effectively with the crisis arising out of a natural calamity. The Control Room is intended to be the nerve centre of all emergency situations. Thus, it is adequately equipped and optimally located for collection and transmission of information concerning natural calamity and relief keeping '-- in close contact with the affected State Government; interaction with other Central Ministries Departments; maintaining records containing all relevant information regarding action points and contact points in /Central Ministries /Departments / State Government; and performing duties as may be entrusted by the Relief Commissioner.

At the State Level

State Government is responsible to formulate its response to a disaster situation and also for long term preparedness and rehabilitation measures. However, the Central Government has a limited role with its resources, physical and financial, in providing needed help and assistance to buttress relief efforts of the State Government in the wake of natural disasters. The dimensions of the response at the Central Government level are determined according to the existing policy of financing the relief expenditure and keeping in view the gravity of situation, scale of relief operations, and requirements of the central assistance for augmenting the financial resources of the State Government.

In a State, the Relief Commissioner is in charge of relief measures in the wake of natural disasters in his State. In his absence the Chief Secretary or an officer nominated by him is in overall charge of relief operations. Every State has important Departments in State administration under the overall supervision and control of the concerned Chief Secretary. The State deals with disaster through their Revenue Department or Relief Department. The organization at State level is depicted in Table 1.2.

Table 2: Disaster Management at the State Level

State Crisis Management Group	State Government Chief Secretary Relief Commissioner	Emergency Operations Centre
Other Department	Revenue	Police
	Divisional Commissioner	
District	District Magistrate	Civil Defense
Sub-Division	Sub Divisional Magistrate	
Tehsil	Tehsildars	
Village	Patwari	

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs

State crisis management group

A State Crisis Management Group (SCMG) functions under the Chairmanship of Chief Secretary Relief Commissioner. It comprises Senior officers from the Departments of Revenue Relief, Home, Civil Supplies, Power, irrigation, Water Supply, Rural Development, Agriculture, Forest, Health, Public Works; and Finance. The SCMG is expected to take into consideration the infrastructure and guidance received from the Government of India and formulate action plans accordingly for dealing with different disasters. This group is primarily involved in coordinating efforts at the State level and maintaining liaison with the Central Government.

State Control Room

The Relief Commissioner of the State establishes an Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) or a Control Room as soon as disaster situation develops. The EOC collects and disseminates the latest information on forecasting and warning of the anticipated disaster. It functions as the contact point for coordinating disaster relief efforts with the other concerned Agencies and the Central Government.

At the District Level

An effective and accountable district administration is the single most important entity for field level organizations, and implementation of all government contingency plans. Thus, considerable authority is vested in the District Collector to carry out disaster management operations. The district's day to-day administration centres around the District Collector, (in some states he is also known as District Magistrate or Deputy Commissioner) who heads the administrative organization in a district. He is responsible for administering relief or implementing contingency plans for disaster mitigation at the field level.

The Collector exercises coordinating and supervisory power over functionaries of all the Departments in his area. During actual operations for disaster mitigation or relief, the power of the Collector are considerably enhanced by standing instructions or specific government orders. The District Collector is entitled to seek the help of defense services in disaster situations.

Contingency Plans

The District Collector develops a contingency plan for the district, which is submitted to the State Government for approval. These plans lay down specific action points, key personnel, and contact points in relation to all aspects of disaster management. Police plays a very important role in preparation and execution of contingency plans.

District Relief Committee

The various relief measures undertaken at the district level are establishment of Control Room; administration of relief, medical care, epidemics, salvage, disposal of the dead, outside relief, special relief; and proper information including interaction with the Media. These measures are reviewed by the district level Relief Committee consisting of official and non-official members including the local Legislators and Members of Parliament.

District Control Room

A Control Room is established immediately after receipt of

warning in the district as soon as a natural disaster is anticipated. The Control Room monitors the overall situation including rescue and relief efforts on a continuing basis. It keeps close liaison with the State Government Headquarters, NGOs, and other agencies involved in disaster management.

Disaster management a financial arrangement

The financial policy framework for expenditure to provide relief to the victims of natural disasters is based on the recommendations' of the successive Finance Commissions. For meeting the relief expenditures, two types of funds are provided by the Government of India viz., the Calamity Relief Fund (CRF) and National Calamity Contingency Fund (NCCF). The CRF is used for meeting the necessary expenditure for providing immediate relief to the victims in cases of cyclone, drought, earthquake, fire, hailstorm and flood. The amount of annual contribution to the CRF of each State is as indicated by the Finance Commission. A total of Rs. 11,007.59 crore was provided for the CRF from 2000-05. Of the total contribution, the Government of India contributes 75 percent of the total yearly allocation in the form of non-plan grant, and the balance amount is contributed by the State Governments.

Apart from the CW, a National Calamity Contingency Fund (NCCF) scheme came into force with effect from 2000-01 and would be operative till the end of the financial year 2004-05. It is intended to cover calamities such as drought, earthquake, cyclone, fire, hailstorm and flood, which are considered to be of severe nature requiring expenditure by the State Government in excess of the balance available in its own Calamity Relief Fund. The assistance from this fund is used only for immediate relief and rehabilitation. In the context of disaster management, any reconstruction of assets or restoration of damaged capital should be financed through re-allocation of Plan Fund. In this regard, the initial corpus of the National Fund is Rs. 500 crore, which is provided by the Government of India. Assistance provided by the Central Government to the concerned State Government from the National Fund may be financed by levy of a special surcharge on the central taxes for a limited period. Assistance is also

provided from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund according to the merits of the situation. The government of India has a long history of using funds from the Five Year Plans for disaster management. The funds are available under Plan schemes of Government of India, say for drinking water; employment generation, inputs for agriculture, and flood control measures etc. The schemes that help in reducing disaster vulnerability are : Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP), Desert Development Programme (DDP), Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme (ARWSP), Food For Work (FEW), Sampurn Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY), Wasteland Development Programme (WDP). In addition, there are facilities, specially for rescheduling of short-term loans taken for agriculture purposes upon certification by the District / State Administration. The Central Government assets / infrastructure are to be repaired / rectified by the respective Ministry /Department of Government of India. In addition, at the occurrence of a calamity of great magnitude funds flow from donors at the national and international level for relief and rehabilitation and in few cases for long-term preparedness /preventive in measures also. Funds for the latter purposes are also available from multilateral funding agencies like the World Bank. These types of funds form part of the State Plan.

Role of non-governmental organizations, community based organizations, media and communications XN disaster management

The important function of the Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) is that of being a link between the Government and the Community. It is important that this link is maintained effectively at all the three stages of disaster management viz. pre-disaster, during disaster and post-disaster stage. This function is rendered through different mechanism as per the requirements of a situation such as distribution of relief material, ensuring sanitation and hygiene, and damage assessment. The various other functions that these organizations are performing in disaster management are listed in table 1.3.

Table 3: Role of NGOs and CBOs in Disaster Management

Stages of Disaster Management	Activities performed by NGOs / CBOs
Pre-Disaster During Disaster Post-Disaster	Generating awareness Providing training to local volunteers Advocacy and local planning Providing immediate rescue and first-aid Prevention of rumours with help from Media Supply of water, food, medicines, and temporary shelters. Maintaining sanitation and hygiene Help in disposing dead bodies Help in damage assessment Providing technical and material aid and guidance in reconstruction and rehabilitation Assistance in arranging and distribution of financial aid to disadvantaged groups, such as orphans, widows Monitoring of relief and rehabilitation work

Source Manual on Natural Disaster Management in India, Ministry of Agriculture

The activities mentioned in table 1.3 indicate that the NGOs and CBOs are playing important role in disaster management specially in assistance and co-ordination. They can contribute effectively in communication with local people, arranging manpower, mobilizing resources, and providing technical and professional services. In addition, they are the vital link between the Government and Community.

Role of media in disaster management

Media in the form of print material, broadcast and display is user friendly. It can reach millions of people in short-time specially in emergency. Audio-video media transcends the limits of illiteracy and at the time of disaster helps in mobilizing resources and outside help also.

Role of effective communications in disaster management

Effective and reliable communications are necessary for disaster reduction. In this regard, new communication technologies play a very significant role because the traditional communication channels like landline are easily disturbed during disasters. In this context, the contribution of amateur radio (HAM) operators in providing emergency communication during disaster situations has been spontaneous, useful and praiseworthy. Now that India operates its own amateur radio satellite (HAMSET), this sector of volunteer effort, which has proved its worth in disaster situations, would prove to be even more effective in overall disaster management.

Review of existing disaster management system

It is evident that facing natural disasters by way of preparedness, mitigation, evacuation, relief and issues relevant to the main them viz., Disaster Management has been part of administrative ethos and has come to be its sub-culture. The State, now a days, has the support in technological, material, and financial terms, and the will of the leadership as well: Legal and Administrative frameworks are also in place and are being strengthened. However, there is need to make the system react more quickly and more effectively. This objective demands that the Disaster Management system at all levels, from Community to the Central Government, be subject to frequent trial, review and updating. Most of the States still have antiquated Scarcity Manuals, though most of them issued detailed instructions for dealing with disaster situations.

At the district administrations were required to prepare District Disaster Management Plans. The exercise is not complete as yet for many districts in the country and it needs to be completed fast. It has been commented upon by several study teams that the Level of requisite preparedness to deal with a disaster often left much to be desired. The main flaw could be that the revenue administration is fully apt to face situations like drought / acute scarcities, where there is enough time to prepare and provide relief and succour. However, the response is not adequate with regard to the quick onset contingencies like flood, earthquake etc. The administrative systems ethos change slowly while the disaster situation warranting a quick response has moved much faster, thus leaving the management system far behind both in the matter of preparedness and relief. If a disaster is followed by widespread disease or breakout of epidemic, the gap in the response of the disaster management system becomes all the more apparent.

Conclusion

It is essential that all the States, which are vulnerable to one or more types of disaster draw preparedness plans / action plans to deal with each type of disaster. Needless to emphasize, action plans against each disaster have to be different even if the government machinery and support organizations to implement the action plan may be the same. It is essential that the Disaster Management Plan, at all levels, should be fully known to all the stake holders including the public. It will be helpful if these are subject to citizens scrutiny and audit. Expert NGOs and CBOs can, and should, play a leading role in such exercises and provide very useful feedback. Such a review system will ensure public participation and support, and will generate confidence and cooperation.

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