

Disaster Management: Fallacies and Solutions: An Indian Perspective

Sir,

Generally a disaster results in significant loss in social, psychologic, and economic aspects. It not only leads to structural damages, but also leaves families torn apart, children orphaned, livelihoods destroyed, and communities traumatized.^[1]

Nonstructural factors such as lack of responsiveness of government officials and ineffective leadership are mainly responsible for any disaster mismanagement.^[2,3] India is vulnerable to a variety of natural and man-made disasters.^[4] Strong and effective emergency management has been a felt need in all corners of the world.^[5] Effective policies play a vital role in mitigating the impact of disasters and reducing likely losses of life and property.

Economic resources are important for any disaster management. Yet, it has been recognized that economic resources did not

necessarily translate into greater investment in this domain, as there is no dearth of issues that demanded governments' attention and resources. Disaster management has seldom acquired importance in the agenda of governance, unless there is a major natural or man-made disaster. The major shortcomings observed in Indian disaster management, along with their probable solutions, are discussed in Table 1. It has been observed that states which have suffered major disasters are more likely to undertake policy reform in building capacities for tackling them.

In rural areas, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are democratically decentralized bodies that can display tremendous potential in disaster management as they are closer to the scene and have a better knowledge of local resources/weaknesses. However, their role has been limited mostly to the response phase of any disaster.

Given that natural disasters do not always follow national boundaries, cross-boundary issues of disaster management should be addressed through enhanced regional – national – international cooperation. The need of the hour is to undertake a vulnerability analysis and an all-hazards planning on an international level to develop generic capacities. Furthermore, an effective regional response system should be developed to pool capacity for mutual benefit.

To conclude, for good outcomes it is required to have an

Table 1: Disaster fallacies and solutions

Rigid bureaucratization, lack of structured involvement of community based organizations and non-governmental organizations	Sustained political commitment is the essential ingredient for any public health initiative Facilitate vertical and horizontal linkages between government departments, scientific and technical institutions, NGOs, CBOs and local bodies PRIs be entrusted a larger role in governance, especially in disaster preparedness and mitigation
Lack of implementation of the existing standard operating procedures, communication disconnect, lack of coordination	Define specific roles and responsibilities of each individual to ensure efficient and smooth implementation of the scientifically approved plan ^[6] Provision of a framework for monitoring, evaluation and further improvement of the plan
Deficient early warning systems, inadequate resources for mass evacuation	Undertaking hazard profile of the states (GIS format)* along with maps and details of zones Early warning systems to predict occurrence of disaster with lead-time to have orderly evacuations protecting all lives potentially at risk reducing property damage ^[7] Systematic acquisition and application of resources (personnel and equipment) in accordance with the emergencies requirements
Low budgetary allotments in the absence of recent disasters	Fixed budgetary allocation for disaster management irrespective of the occurrence of any disaster Utilizing these funds in disaster preparedness activities and establishment of early warning systems and conduction of large-scale research/mock drills
Minimal involvement of community	Communities, being the first responders in any disaster, community-based disaster management plans ensure local ownership, address local needs, and promote volunteerism and mutual help to prevent and minimize damage ^[6]
Lack of large-scale research and flawed decision making	Large-scale research projects in the fields of disaster prevention and preparedness Decision making based on the technical and rationale findings of such studies Conducting mock drills at regular intervals depending upon the hazard profile of the state
Inadequate international cooperation	Develop integrated strategies by means of promotion of international cooperation

PRIs: Panchayati raj institutions, *GIS: Geographic information system, CBO: Community based organizations, NGO: Non-governmental organizations

organized learning, an intergovernmental context of shared governance, economic resources, adoption of technological change, subjective abilities of leadership, and experience of calamitous events. If the suggested measures are implemented in India as well as in other parts of the world in an integrated and systematic manner, all the nations will be in a better position to prevent the occurrence of any disaster in future, and even if such calamities occur, the implementation of systematic, integrated mitigation measures can reduce their impact on an international scale. So, it is never too late to make fruitful investments in developing capacities to deal with disasters.

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