

PEOPLE'S RESPONSE AND PREPAREDNESS

There is a vicious cycle of disasters, poverty, environment, climate change and population growth and urbanization. Complex interactions among these factors exacerbate the situation and affect the ability of a given population to deal with disasters.

It is well known that environmental factors play an important role in creating disasters. For example, deforestation results in erosion, leading to sedimentation of riverbeds which reduces the water-holding capacity of rivers. Thus, disaster planning and mitigation strategies require a holistic and integrated approach. Such approach should be developed at the local level using the traditional and indigenous knowledge of the local people about survival in disasters. The people's perceptions and responses may vary from country to country but the survival strategies will have almost the same trend depending on the country-specific nature of the disasters. This local survival strategy should be strengthened.

The people and community-based organizations play a critical role during disasters. They are the front-line soldiers in the war against disasters. Their preparation, organizational capability to face disasters and other associated activities decide their fate and the level of casualties. At times, however, the gigantic nature of disasters goes beyond the coping capability of the local people and community. They will need urgent help and assistance from other communities and the national government. Sometimes international help will also be needed. Thus, the local social capability to cope with disasters should be strengthened and traditional mitigation approaches be streamlined.

Disaster is a social phenomenon and depicts the inherent human dimension of the issues related to it. From a sociological point of view a disaster is an event, located in time and space, that produces the conditions whereby the continuity of the structure and process of social units becomes problematic. Disaster agents may differ as to their cause, frequency, controllability, speed of onset, length of forewarning, duration, scope of impact, and destructive potential. Therefore, an understanding of the victims' perspective becomes a critical consideration in reducing loss in disasters. The impact of natural disaster is also likely to differ depending upon the 'cultural and resource-context' of a particular country. There is great value in looking at the disaster behavior and response from a cross-cultural perspective. Preparedness must be based at the village/local level since measures and strategies can be better coordinated at this level. Proper utilization of household, neighborhood and village/local levels in disaster mitigation programs will significantly fulfill the bottom-up approaches and

avoid the top-down approaches, which is a long felt need in disaster mitigation and loss reduction strategy in many disaster-prone countries.



Irrigation by traditional swing basket



Manual plantation of paddy