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TURNING DISASTERS INTO DEVELOPMENT

Introduction:

Over the last two decades India has faced serious large-scale natural disasters like floods, droughts, cyclones and earthquakes. Responses of people's organisations, NGOs and the government to these situations have been in some instances, unique, innovative and appropriate. The last 2 decades of work have led to building up of considerable expertise amongst the NGOs in various areas ranging from short-term relief to long-term rehabilitation and development.

Keeping in kind the size of the country as well as the need for disaster preparedness, the scope of this dossier is limited to the following aspects:

1. The Historical Perspective of Disaster Aid.
2. Overview of Natural Disasters in India - Types, Occurrences and Impact.
3. Relief and Rehabilitation System in India
4. NGOs role in Disaster Management - strengths and weaknesses.
5. Some NGO concerns -
 - Are disasters man made - a result of the present natural resource management and development policies.
 - Disasters and Development
 - Coordination with Government, Donor Agencies and among NGOs
 - Disaster Preparedness and its implications.
6. The Lessons Learnt.
7. Policy Issues
8. Conclusion

What needs to be done?

The objectives of this dossier are to highlight responses to natural disasters and

- a. The present status of disaster management in India-the existing trends, methodologies of disaster management and its impact on the population.
- b. The socio-political implications of natural disasters and existing policies of relief and rehabilitation and its impact, especially on the poor and vulnerable.
- c. Clarifying links between overall developmental policies and strategies of disaster management.
- d. Choice between investing in disaster preparedness or in disaster mitigation.
- e. Existing gaps in areas of priorities in disaster management.



Fresh from Venkatadurgapuram.....

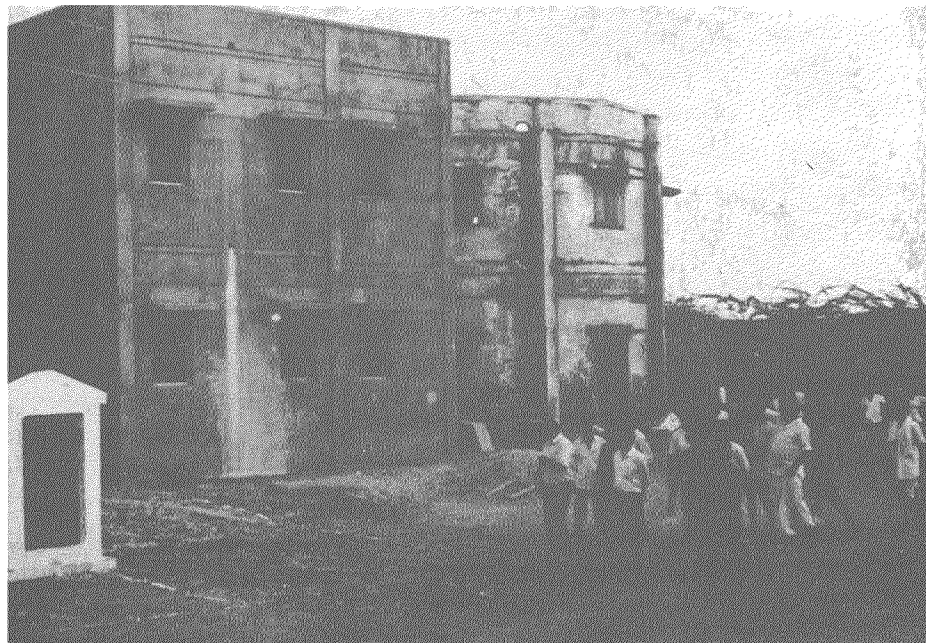
Date : 11th January, 1993.

Time : Around 12 noon.

“Prawns mean prosperity” said Oduguramatata, Age around 40 years. Oduguramatata is the President of the Venkatadurgapuram Sangam, a small coastal village, 21Kms. south of Manchilipatnam town, in Krishna District, Andhra Pradesh.

Today Oduguramatata and his wife are proud lesse's of one hectare of a prawn cultivation tank. Oduguramatata is not alone in 'prawn prosperity'. Very soon (perhaps by the time this dossier goes into print) all the 148 households of Venkatadurgapuram will be lesse's of prawn prosperity.

Oduguramatata stands nearly 6 feet tall, well built and spells strength. However, in the 1977 cyclone, Oduguramatata said they were “helpless” - they have seen 216 lives lost, who were next of kin and all livestock swept away. Oduguramatata describes the height of the water during the 1977 cyclone as almost 3 times his own height; they had no where to go, no hillock, no building not even enough high trees - some fled to Manchilipatnam and largely those are the ones who survived.



“Once the water receded we were asked to go back to our villages. But going back to Venkatadurgapuram meant going back to nothing - not even traces of what used to be our homes”.

“Then of course the government built the shelter - see it - it looked good for some time but look at it now, all broken down we can't think of taking shelter there. We will now take shelter this building - which we are confident of because we have built it - we know how much cement, what quality of bricks, how much iron and what foundation has gone into it. We survived the 1990 cyclone with no loss of life. We were better prepared. A few months back we took shelter in this building during cyclonic weather conditions. The cyclone task force organised everything. Above all we no longer have to go out to sea and for creek fishing - where the catch is low and the risk to life high in our little boats.

THE RECONSTRUCTION BEGINS

This is a common story of the 148 households of Venkatadurgapuram. The devastation of the 1977 cyclone left people homeless and it is then that CASA (Church's Auxillary for Social Action) came into action, first with relief and then with reconstruction. Now there are 148 houses constructed as shown in the photograph. The cost of the houses have been worked out on the following basis.