

## Some NGO Concerns

The central questions that is being debated at various levels in the governmental and NGO forums :

- Are Disasters man made?
- Does the present natural resources management and economic development policy enhance and perpetuate natural disasters. Today, what is being discussed widely amongst policy makers, developmental agencies, environmentalists, governments and in international Forums is that :
- Natural Disasters will occur.
- However, human interventions, besides faulty and misconceptualised natural resource management policies have created the basis for greater impact of natural disasters.
- The present development policies have further accentuated the impact of natural disasters and have created increasing vulnerability, especially of the weaken sections of the population.
- the enviornmental connection in the planning and interventions during disasters as well as for disaster preparedness is usually overlooked.

The following needs to be highlighted :-

- : Relief operations usually damage or substantially reduce the effectiveness of local coping mechanisms and have a negative effect on the society as a whole in the long-term because the focus remains on achieving only short-term emergency. needs.
- : Either non-identification or failure to understand the role of local coping mechanisms in a specific eco-cultural context and lack of social and anthropological data creates a gap in the information needed for planning leading to faulty plans and negative effects.
- : Few intervenors are familiar with the local environmental conditions and the developmental needs, reinforce the status -quo and patterns of under-development, obscure underlying political realities and create increasing dependency.

The major concerns raised by various people and NGOs are :-

- : Reviewing the Relief Agency - Disaster Victim relationship especially in terms of its impact on the society as a whole and not merely on the physical achievements of the relief and rehabilitation activities in terms of :-
- Concept of accountability to the victims of the disaster.
- a question of paternalism - whether aid and subseequent interventions supplements and compliments existing community processes or ignores them.
- the methodology of interventions during disasters in remote/under developed areas and flow of modern goods and services is the determinant factor for the recipients to perceive not only such goods and services but the delivery mechanisms in a particular way, creating increasing dependency.
- the adherence to relief/welfare approach of the pressure on agencies adhering to the developmental approach during times of natural disasters created by competitive relief agencies.
- the economic impact relief on disaster relief and reconstruction leading to disruption of the local distribution system and distortion of the normal economic system, especially becoming unfavourable to local skilled labourers and delaying the recovery of the local economic system.
- an increasing belief that mishandled relief programme can have extensive disincentive effect not only on recovery from disasters but also on long term development.

- the set back or the negative consequences to development due to post-disaster interventions.
- the existing competition for funds between relief and reconstruction efforts and development programmes.
- the increasing expectation of aid and reduction in local initiative.
- since NGOs operate in small micro situations, there is very little understanding of the larger environmental questions while planning and implementing micro based operations leading often to incompatible activities in the context of the environmental needs.
- Without a coordination amongst all agencies, critical gaps remain in the environmental activities for reduction/control of disaster impact. As a result, the damages occurring in subsequent disasters is often greater.

The pre-dominant development approach leading to increasing industrialisation and urbanisation, big development and disaster management project (dams, embankments), the increasing rural-urban dichotomy and consequent increasing marginalisation of the weaker sections, have led to increasing both in the area and impact of natural disasters.

## DISASTERS & DEVELOPMENT :

Though it has been often discussed about the possibility of disasters having the potential to become developmental efforts during the reconstruction period, there are hardly any instances where attempts have been made to use disasters as opportunities of change. The maximum that has been achieved is to return to the pre-disaster situation.

However, there are a number of opportunities to do so.

- : Improvement on the use of local materials (e.g. housing) that does not outwardly affect the appearance of performance of a particular item or activity.
- : The other method is to identify, introduce and popularise appropriate substitutes without much disturbance to the existing production pattern (e.g. new seeds).
- : The third approach is to introduce slow changes after achievement of normalcy, through limited innovations.

However, the approach has to be subtle, the understanding of the cultural variables perceived properly, the extent of the demand properly gauged and also the other aspects mentioned in the previous pages of this section conceived, especially the local and large environmental questions

There has been a partial initiation towards turning disasters into developmental initiatives. However, all the factors mentioned above need to be considered. Any partial approach and gains in one type of activities will negate the impact in the other sectors. A comprehensive and integrated approach is yet to emerge.

Documentation and evaluation of such approaches has been absent. The other important aspect which needs to be urgently evaluated is the norms of support and the role of Disaster Aid Agencies as even aid content for similar disasters in the same area for the same year by the same agency varies from organisation to organisation. Even minimum technical norms are not adhered to while extending aid even for physical infrastructure work in disaster prone areas (e.g. houses and disaster shelters after the 1977 A.P. Cyclone).

## COORDINATION WITH GOVERNMENT, AMONGST DONOR AGENCIES AND WITHIN NGOS :

In the immediate aftermath of natural disasters, there is a high degree of interest amongst NGOs to establish cooperation and coordination with Government, amongst themselves and also amongst major relief agencies (e.g. A.P. & after the Uttar Kashi earthquakes).

After a few weeks, this interest starts diminishing. At this stage, coordination is restricted to the fields of common interests/areas with sharing of information amongst NGOs working in nearby areas. Coordination also tends to become sector oriented at this stage. There is broader inter-agency cooperation during reconstruction but mainly at the executive level. However,

- : Competition amongst agencies, not only for resources but for publicity, negates cooperation.
- : Difference in methodology creates obstacles to cooperation.
- : Need for having separate identifiable programmes for respective donors also negates coordination.
- : There is very little planning and hence no coordination for Disaster Preparedness, i.e. there is no pre-disaster planning
- : The structures of larger organisations are often rigid and are not flexible to changes. Field experiences are often not incorporated into future planning.
- : Most agencies are only active during the emergency period and leave only a residual staff for post-disaster work as they are not involved in long-term reconstruction and development programmes and are thus unable to incorporate the field experiences into their future programmes.
- : There are very few effective evaluations of disaster interventions.
- : There is a lack of system documentation and accompanying research to facilitate changes in relief and disaster management operations.
- : Lack of trained personnel with field experience. Due to the over-reliance on temporary staff or volunteers the collective knowledge is therefore never institutionalised.
- : There is a lack of training, lack of appropriate training manuals which can be adopted in various situations without being stereotyped, scarcity of well designed training programmes on disaster management and lack of trainers with field experience.

However, there are some recent encouraging tendencies to fill this void. The efforts are however very inadequate and uncoordinated in comparison to the needs.

#### **PRE-DISASTER PLANNING :**

This consists of three types of activities :-

- : **Disaster Prevention** - focusing on the hazards that causes natural disasters and steps to eliminate or reduce its direct effect.
- : **Disaster Mitigation** : focusing on measures taken to minimize the destruction and disruptive effects of natural disasters to lessen the magnitude of a disaster.
- : **Disaster Preparedness** : focusses on plans to respond to disasters or to plans for structuring the post disaster response to ensure that emergency aid is managed so that each lays the foundation for the next and so that intervention in one sector contributes to some extent to other sectors which will create the basis and guide reconstruction activities so as to reduce vulnerability and mitigate recurrences of the disasters.

Today the emphasis is more on Disaster preparedness, though on a more sophisticated level than in 1950s. The reason for this swing is that prevention is not being seen as the ultimate answer to disasters. Most control measures are now seen to have adverse effects and the emphasis has shifted more to mitigation and finding ecologically suitable alternatives. Mitigation is however a complex process, especially in a developing country like India.

Preparedness includes the following :-

- : Preparation and dissemination of training manuals, training and awareness, stockpiling of relief goods and development of inventory of resources and personnel.
- : the other aspects are development of comprehensive response plans, monitoring of threatening hazards, intensive training of emergency personnel and methods of emergency response.

## The Lesson Learnt

The new environmental ethics have taught us that nature is the main entity in which all of us will have to survive.

All forms of interventions have to be gentle and sustainable. The onus of adaption lies with the human society and not on nature.

Disasters, endemic in certain areas, can be mitigated both in frequency and intensity by long-term development as disaster prone areas are generally neglected areas. These areas are characterised by poor delivery systems of health, public distribution system of essential commodities, high illiteracy, poor communications and transport facilities, low productivity, denuded and/or depleted natural resources and increases in the vulnerability of the weaker sections.

Without clearly articulated plans for sustainable development of water and land resources, floods and droughts are unavoidable.

Effective disaster management require :

established lines of communication, especially in high risk prone areas for quick dissemination of warnings and development of early warning systems along with micro level hazard mapping of flood, cyclone and disaster prone zones.

Coordination between the concerned Governmental departments, NGOS and other agencies.

Road and other linkages to the disaster prone areas, construction of disaster shelters in cyclone and flood prone areas, stockpiling and supply of adequate resources at risk prone zones.



Training for personnel involved in disaster management, especially for field functionaries in accordance to types of disasters and categories of functionaries.

Materials for dissemination in local languages and preparation and updating of training manuals and guidelines.

Supportive research efforts needs to be intensified.

While constructing roads, embankments, etc., proper drainage facilities should be made.

Preventive measures for all disasters should be integrated with normal development programmes.

A comprehensive and integrated water and land resource management policy should receive high priority.

3. NGOs are engaged in relief and rehabilitation programmes. Not enough thought and action on disaster mitigation is observed. The form and content of disaster aid and structure and policies of existing NGOs limits the opportunity for being involved in disaster management and associated long term development activities in disaster prone areas.
4. The Press mainly concentrates on reporting after disaster occurs. The press and media could play an important role in creating public awarness about disaster preparedness. There should be a greaster freedom of press. The present expression and association usually cushion the impact of disasters on the poor. These and other social measures like a comprehensive land use and land reforms policy, social accountability of relief expenditure are as essential as physical engineering to enhance disaster proofing.

