

Policy Issues

1. Demand for a comprehensive disaster management policy :

The recurring natural disasters in various parts of the country is one of the main manifestations of the ecological and development crisis in the country. This is not merely just a natural calamity which occurs cyclically but essentially a societal crisis which is man made.

The historic political process, the economic and ecological processes and its cumulative result has created this acute crisis. These are the same processes which have prolonged and aggravated the impoverishment of a vast majority of the poor.

The increasing manifestations and effects of natural disasters is caused to a great extent by the present developmental processes in which the more powerful and rich allocate the nation's natural resources in their favour and modern technology and the methodology of its use subserves this process.

All the combined factors along with administrative interventions have created increasing encroachment into the natural environment. Apart from recurrent natural disasters, this has created mass poverty and reduced self sufficient human beings to dependent objects of the more powerful process. The present method of disaster interventions has increased this dependency.

Politicians, policy makers, bureaucrats and the majority of the NGOs, often understand and characterise natural disasters as a merely meteorological phenomenon. This is primarily due to lack of proper analysis and understanding or due to calculated attempts to distract from the root causes of natural disasters inherent in the system and process, or simply due to the urge to jump onto the bandwagon of relief operations.

As stated earlier, the reasons of most of the natural disasters and its impact are primarily man made or societal caused phenomena-meteorological factors only reinforce the same.

Today, what has become urgent is the need for an **ALTERNATIVE AND COMPREHENSIVE DISASTER MANAGEMENT POLICY**.

Apart from the various policy questions and operational strategies stated in the earlier sections, the other aspects which should be incorporated, especially by the NGOs, are :-

not to undertake isolated, short term and merely relief based operations oriented only to the outward and symptomatic manifestations of natural disasters.

also incorporate along with other factors, the promotion of the fight against degradation of the natural environment.

should be based on community's and people's participation and action.

should be directed to the most neglected and disaster-prone eco-regions and to the most marginalised groups.

should be multi-dimensional and an integrated social, economic and ecological action.

should build up or contribute to joint action, public opinion, advocacy and movements on the issue of specific natural disasters

the alternative and comprehensive disaster management action should rule out all purely relief-oriented vertical interventions of only emergency character. The relief operations, during times of disaster should be designed in a manner to fit into a mid-term and long term action within a community based action in favour of the poor and marginalised. All actions should be designed to regenerate and/or stabilise the abilities of the poorer section to face and live with natural disasters with dignity.

Disaster Management Actions should rediscover, adapt and promote the ecologically sound traditional patterns, practices and technologies for agricultural production, forestry, soil and water conservation, disaster warning, housing etc., thereby enhancing significantly the survival and sustenance ability of the people also during the critical situations of natural disasters.

This alternative Disaster Management Action demands a fairly high level of conceptual, training and organisational competence which needs corporate response and support from the more experienced individuals and organisations, technical bodies which facilitates complementarity, mutual help and learning and strengthening of each other is therefore the only realistic and effective approach in the given situation of the vastness of the country and increasing trends of natural disasters.

- II. With the global warming scenario and the possibility of more natural disasters in the long run, the choice between investing in disaster preparedness or in disaster mitigation is getting narrower. The focus today is on disaster preparedness with an intermingling but well planned components of both disaster mitigation and relief programmes for the reasons mentioned in the previous sections.
- III. Any comprehensive disaster management policy should clarify links between population policy, agriculture development strategy, irrigation and water policy, employment policy along with the related aspects of disaster preparedness and disaster mitigation.
- IV. NGOs should play a more positive role in building up community organisations, training, awareness building, action as pressure groups for just distribution of disaster aid, promotion and development of scientific traditional systems and reduce its present role of being predominantly relief agencies.
- V. Social accountability especially to the benefactors of Disaster Aid should be made mandatory.
- VI. With Increased emphasis being placed on disasters, the focus should not be on intervention but on pre-disaster planning and helping local institutions cope with the problems by strengthening disaster preparedness and responsibilities of local Government, institutions and NGOs.
- VII. There should be restriction on the unilateral intervention by donors. Norms of support, especially support for disaster preparedness, physical infrastructure development work, should be strictly adhered to.
- VIII. Regular periodic evaluation of the role, activities and long term impact of both the implementing agencies **AS WELL AS THE DONORS** should be undertaken
- IX. Lack of appropriate land use planning and practices and supportive land reforms measures.
- X. Inadequate scientific research and documentation on various aspects of disaster relief and management.
- XI. No policy of disaster management for earthquakes.

EXISTING GAPS

Most of the individuals, institutions and NGOs, have pointed out the below mentioned critical gaps in disaster management, apart from what has been mentioned earlier.

The major gaps in the operations and methodology of intervention during natural disaster are

- a) lack of more comprehensive training and development of appropriate training manuals for workers at all levels engaged in disaster intervention.
- b) lack of appropriate communication materials for awareness building of the local communities for disaster preparedness in different situations and for different natural calamities in the form of documentaries and other audio visual aids.
- c) lack of clear cut sector and inter-sectoral policies and adequate data base both for disaster management and related developmental activities.
- d) There is no policy to link between short term relief operations and long term disaster management or development needs of disaster-prone areas and also with the environmental variables needed to be considered in the environmentally vulnerable areas.
- e) lack of flexibility in the amount and form of support leading to ignoring of local priorities in the use and adoption of material aid.
- f) over adherence to achievements of physical targets and non-assessment on reduction of the impact of interventions in disasters and community self reliance as indicators of monitoring and evaluation.
- g) Coordination with Govt., amongst donor agencies and NGOs only exist during and immediately after disasters. There is very little coordination and planning for pre-disaster actions and lack of insurance policies for disaster prevention.
- h) There is very little attention paid to the protection and development of animals in disaster-prone areas.



- i) Increasing disasters and environmental degradation is leading to changes in the eco-health relationship and causing the emergence of new diseases or higher incidence of some major diseases in the disaster-prone zones (mainly floods and drought areas).
- j) There is no comprehensive administrative policy for placements of skilled and field experienced personnel in specific disaster prone areas. Transfer of such key officials adversely affect the efforts disaster intervention.
- (k) Much more emphasis is needed on the aspect of capacity building of both the workers of the NGOs and the government as well as of the community in disaster management in the already identified disaster-prone areas. This still remains a grey area and should be given top priority.
- (l) Since the disaster-prone areas are already identified and more emphasis is given today on pre-disaster planning and disaster preparedness, the NGOs, especially the relief agencies, should be located in such areas before disasters strikes instead of rushing into the areas with relief after the disaster strikes. This creates not only a better state of disaster preparedness but a different relationship between relief agencies and the community which is more conducive to long-term developmental activities.