

Relief Administration and Capacity Building for Coping Mechanism towards Disaster Reduction

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Abstract

India has been suffering from frequent multiple hazards and recognition of this fact has resulted in the establishment of a well defined organization system at the Centre and State levels for response and relief management in the event of occurrence of any kind of a disaster. The Central Crisis Management Group, headed by the Relief Commissioner of India under the Ministry of Agriculture, is the nodal central government agency responsible for Relief Control and Management in the wake of disasters. Execution of relief operations under the State Relief Commissioner and at the local level through the District Magistrates is also a well-established system. This paper highlights the functions of this important establishment with information of its future vision and objectives, under the larger umbrella of meeting the IDNDR objectives

Introduction

Disasters are as inevitable as death. They have a multi dimensional effect on several sectors - personal, social, economic and the like. They have a crippling effect on the economy and infrastructure of the country. Disasters not only undermine development efforts and lead to wastage of scarce resources, but also put back development by destroying initiatives. The direct effect of disasters on economy is damage to infrastructure, crops and productive assets of the local population besides huge financial burden of relief and rescue operations. Indirectly, disasters also lead to decline in production, loss of income due to unemployment, indebtedness of the poor and increased cost of goods and services etc.

On account of its geographical position, climate and geological setting, India from time immemorial, has been frequently hit by natural disasters. There is hardly a year when some part of the country or other does not face the spectre of drought, flood, cyclone, earthquake or landslides. During the current Decade, India has faced a string of natural disasters of severe magnitude causing extensive damage to life and property. On an average, these natural disasters took a toll of 3663 human lives, affected 1.42 million ha. crop area, damaged 2.36 million houses annually during the Decade besides other damages. It is an accepted fact all over the world, that occurrence of the natural disasters cannot be prevented altogether. However, their adverse impact can be reduced substantially by undertaking various preparedness and mitigation programmes

Presently, the division is called the **Natural Disaster Management (NDM) Division**. The **Natural Disaster Management Division** within the **Department of Agriculture and Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture** and the **National Centre for Disaster Management (NCDM)** within the **Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA)** are the nodal agencies for natural disaster management in India.

Nodal Ministry : Ministry of Agriculture

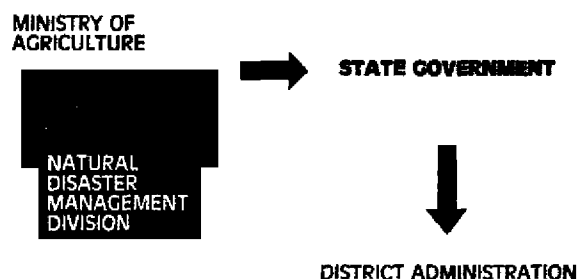
The Department of Agriculture and Cooperation (DAC) in the Agriculture Ministry is the nodal Department for all matters concerning natural disaster relief at the Centre. In the DAC, the Relief Commissioner functions at the nodal officer to coordinate relief operations for all natural disasters.

The Ministry of Agriculture deals with the following disasters :

- **Floods**
- **Cyclone**
- **Landslide**
- **Avalanches**
- **Earthquake**
- **Drought**
- **Bush Fire**
- **Pest Attacks**

Response Mechanism

The basic responsibility for undertaking rescue, relief and rehabilitation measures in the event of natural disasters is that of the State Government concerned. The role of the Central Government is supportive, in terms of physical and financial resources. Relief Manuals and Codes are available for undertaking emergency operations. A broad view of the administrative response at national, state and district level is given below.



National Organisations

The Ministry of Agriculture is the nodal Ministry for management of natural disasters at the Central level and the other Ministries play a supportive role. At the National level, a National Crisis Management Committee headed by Cabinet Secretary has been constituted with the Secretaries in-charge of the nodal Ministries responsible for various types of disasters as Members. The Central Relief Commissioner in the Ministry of Agriculture functions as the coordinating agency at the national level under whom, also a Crisis Management Group (CMG) has been constituted. The CMG meets as often as required in the wake of natural calamities to coordinate at the Central level and also liaise with the State Governments

State Organisations

In the federal set-up of India, the responsibility to formulate the Governments response to a natural calamity is essentially that of the concerned State government. However, the Central Government, with its resources, physical and financial does provide the needed help and assistance to buttress relief efforts in the wake of major natural disasters. The dimensions of the response at the level of National Government are determined in accordance with the existing policy of financing the relief expenditure and keeping in view the factors like :

- i) the gravity of a natural calamity,
- ii) the scale of the relief operation necessary, and
- iii) the requirements of Central assistance for augmenting the financial resources at the disposal of the State Government

Most of the States have Relief Commissioners who are in charge of the relief measures in the wake of natural disasters in their respective states. In the absence of the Relief Commissioner, the Chief Secretary or an Officer nominated by him is in overall charge of the Relief operations in the concerned State. The same set-up is responsible for preparedness measures before disasters.

District Organisations

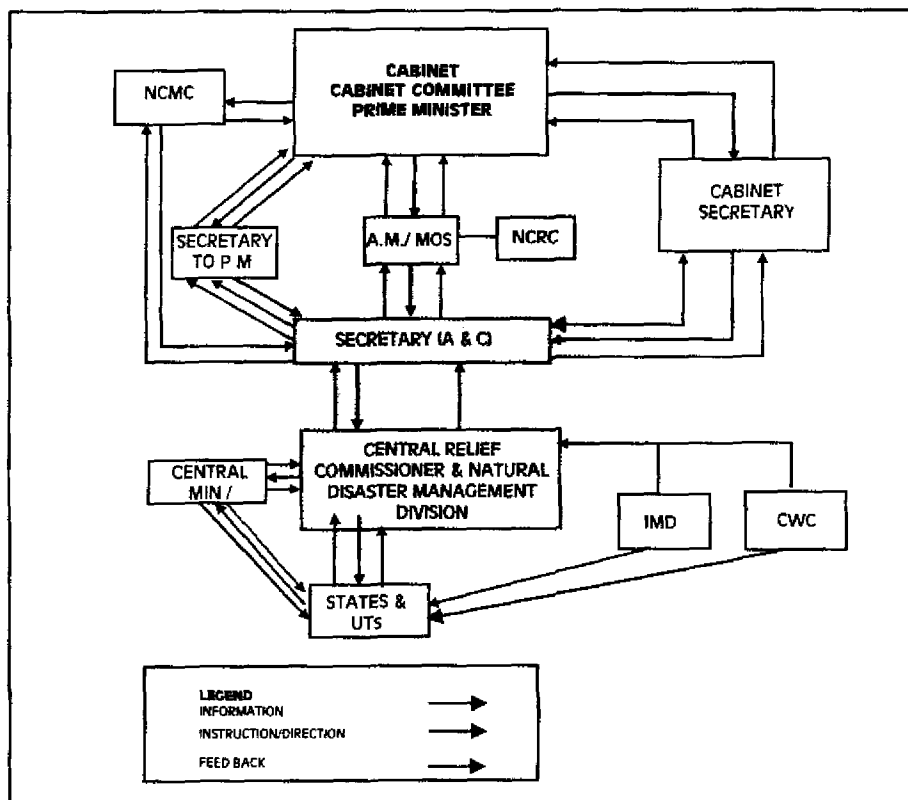
The District Administration is the focal point for field level organizations and implementation of all government contingency plans. Considerable powers have therefore been wrested upon the District Collector to carry out operations in the shortest possible time.

The District Administration in the country is required to prepare in advance contingency plan depending on the type of disaster likely in the district. Contingency Plans are to follow a framework as laid down nationally which comprises type of preparedness, the relief material required to be mobilized and the concerned departments that need to work together and provide a efficient feedback and monitoring system.

The actual day-to-day work of administering relief or implementing contingency plans for disaster mitigation at the field level is the responsibility of the Collector. The Collector exercises coordinating and supervisory powers over functionaries of all the Departments at the District level. During actual operations for disaster mitigation or relief, the powers of the Collector are considerably enhanced, generally, by standing instructions or orders on the subject, or by specific Governments orders, if so required. Sometimes, the administrative culture of the state concerned permits, although informally, the collector to exercise higher powers in emergency situations and the decisions are later ratified by the competent authority.

Contingency Plans

A contingency plan for the district for different disasters is drawn up by the Collector/Deputy Commissioner and approved by the State Government. The Collector/Deputy Commissioner also coordinates and secures the input from the local defense forces unit in preparation of the contingency plans. These contingency plans lay down specific action points, key personnel and contact points in relation to all aspects.



Role of Sub-District Administration

A District is sub-divided into sub-divisions and Tehsils or Talukas. The head of a sub-division is called the Sub-Division Officer (SDO) while the head of a Tehsil is generally known as the Tehsildar (Talukdar or Mamlatdar in some States). Contact with the individual villages is through the village Officer or Patwari who has one or more villages in his charge. When a disaster is apprehended, the entire machinery of the District, including officers of technical and other Departments, swings into action and maintains almost continuous contact with each village in the disaster threatened area. In the case of extensive disasters like drought, contact is maintained over a short cycle of a few days. The entire hierarchy right from the Central Government (the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation in the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation) to the District level, and even the sub-Divisional/Tehsil level, is connected with a telecommunication system.

Control Rooms

An **Emergency Operations Centre** (Control Room) in the Department of Agriculture and Co-operation assists the Central Relief Commissioner in the discharge of his duties. The Control Room functions full-scale and round-the-clock, with a full complement of staff after receipt of first information about the occurrence of a major natural calamity. It remains operational on these terms for a period specified by the Relief Commissioner for dealing effectively with the crisis arising out of a natural calamity. At other times, the arrangement for receiving messages outside office hours are by way of a Night Duty Cell a communication facility. The Control Room is intended to be the nerve centre of all emergencies; therefore it is adequately equipped and optimally located.

- **Central Control Room**
- **State Control Room**
- **District Control Room**

The Central Control Room is responsible for:

- i) collection and transmission of information concerning natural calamity and relief;
- ii) keeping close contact with the governments of the States affected by a calamity;
- iii) interaction with other Central ministries/departments in connection with natural calamities and relief;
- iv) maintaining records containing all relevant information relating to action points and contact points in Central ministries/departments/State Governments; and
- v) performing such other functions and duties as may be entrusted by the Relief Commissioner

The State Control Room is responsible for:

- i) Transmitting to the Central Relief Commissioner information as to the development of a crisis situation as a result of natural disaster on continued basis.
- ii) Receiving instructions and communicating to appropriate agencies for immediate action
- iii) Collection and submission of information relating to implementation of relief measures to the Central Relief Commissioner, and
- iv) Keeping the State level authorities apprised of the developments on a continuing basis.

The District Control Room is responsible for:

In the wake of natural disasters, a Control Room is set up in the district for day to day monitoring of the rescue and relief operations on a continuing basis.

Financial Mechanism

Schemes for financing expenditure on relief and rehabilitation in the wake of natural calamities are governed by the recommendations of Finance Commissions appointed by Government of India after every five years. In the beginning of the current decade, the system of financial response underwent a change so as to reduce the time between occurrence of a calamity and the provision of relief to the victims of the calamity. Under the existing scheme, in operation for the period 1995 - 2000, each State has a corpus of funds called Calamity Relief Fund (CRF), administered by a State Level Committee, headed by the Chief Secretary of the State Government. The size of the corpus is determined having regard to the vulnerability of the State to different natural calamities and the magnitude of expenditure normally incurred by the State on relief operations. The corpus is built by annual contributions of the Union Government and the State Governments concerned. At present, the aggregate accretion in the States CRF for a period of five years from 1995 - 2000 amounts to Rs. 63042.70 million. The States are free to draw upon this corpus for providing relief in the event of any natural calamity. In the event of a major disaster warranting intervention at the national level, a provision exists in the form of National Fund for Calamity Relief with a corpus of Rs. 7000.00 million (for 1995-2000) for the Union Government to supplement the financial resources needed for relief operations.

Mitigation and Preparedness Initiatives

India besides evolving effective post-disaster management operations, has also initiated pre-disaster mitigation programmes and sectoral development programmes to reduce the impact of disasters as well as reduce the socio-economic vulnerabilities. A Central Sector

Scheme on Natural Disaster Management Programmes (NDMP) is being implemented for the first time from December 1993 during Eighth Plan. The main objective of the programme is to enhance the national capability for disaster reduction, preparedness and mitigation. The programme is also expected to enhance the level of awareness of the community about disasters they are likely to face and prepare them adequately to face the crisis situation. This programme emphasis on human resource development encouraging research and consultancy services, raising community awareness. As a part of institutional strengthening, a National Centre for Disaster Management has been established in 1995 in IIPA, New Delhi to carry out the disaster reduction related activities. Similar, Centres have also been created in States Administrative Training Institutes. The other activities undertaken include documentation of Earthquake in Uttarkashi (U.P.) and Latur (Maharashtra), research study on Landslide in Kerala, preparation of a resource book for use of disaster managers, organising seminars/training programmes, public education and community awareness campaign through newspapers, postal stationery, observation of World Disaster Deduct on Day.

Strengthening of Institutional Mechanism

Institutional strengthening is utmost essential for carrying out the disaster preparedness and mitigation measures. A positive step towards this has been taken by creating a National Centre for Disaster Management in a premier Institute, Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi during 1995. This Centre is required to carry out the disaster reduction related activities in the sector of human resource development, research, training, building up data base in addition to coordinating various programmes undertaken by different institutions/organisations both in government and non government sectors. Similar Centres have been created in various States to carry out these activities. In addition to above, steps have also been taken to involve various technical institutions like IITs, Research Centres, Universities and leading NGOs for supplementing the efforts of government in this field.

Public Awareness and Community Participation Programmes

The aim of the community awareness is to increase the level of awareness of the community about disasters they are likely to face and ways and means to minimise their impact. The public awareness programmes inform the people about risk and vulnerability in order to understand the need for preventive counter measures. Such programmes held in understanding government programmes launched in this field and encourage the people to involve themselves in effective implementation. Government agencies, what so ever large and active, are unable to take the big task of public awareness and community participation. The NGOs and CBOs and on going related Programmes/Missions such as National Literacy Mission (NLM) and Adult Education Programme (AEP), which play a very crucial role, are being involved in this task. Krishi Vigyan Kendras, Panchayat Raj Institutions, cooperatives, NGOs, which are working for the farmers, are also being involved. These organisations are working in the grass root level and the people and community have more trust on them than the Government agencies. These organisations work as the real bridge between the Government and the people at large.

Use of Modern Technologies

Efforts are on to make use of the latest technologies viz, GIS and Satellite Remote Sensing, in vulnerability analysis, risk assessment and damage assessment. Geographical Information System (GIS) can be used to effectively encode, store excess co-relate, analyse display and

distribute land related or geographical information. A GIS uses geographical position or location as a common thread to integrate and analyse information from various sources. GIS technology is increasingly being used in spatial decision support systems. GIS can also be put to use to assess risk to property and life stemming from their natural hazards such as earthquakes, cyclones and floods. India Remote Sensing Programme has vital role to play inter-alia in the management of natural disasters in the Country. NRSA has taken the task of providing near real time information on agricultural conditions at the district levels on a monthly basis. The Satellite remote sensing in the recent time has assumed an important role in the field of disaster management particularly relating to the aspects of forecasting, warning of impending calamities and assessment of damage etc. This system can be useful in scientific assessment of the extent of damage in various sectors.

It is proposed to involve this agency and other related agencies under Department of Space effectively in the disaster mitigation and preparatory measures. This technology is developing very fast. There is a utmost need of adequately educating the Government functionaries at various levels and other related with disaster management, about this technology and its use. The services of NRSA are being taken to increase the level of awareness of the Government and other functionaries about the use of remote sensing technology in the natural disaster management

Involvement of Private Sector

Natural disasters directly or indirectly affect all sectors of the society. Private Sector i.e. industries etc. are also affected in the wake of natural calamities. The workers are affected and infrastructure of the industrial units damaged. As such involvement of the public sector in the field of natural disaster reduction is essential. In many other countries, the private sector is contributing some percentage of their profit in the disaster mitigation efforts. As these efforts are going to reduce the adverse impact on their installations and workers. In India, so far no efforts have been made to activate this sector. It is very essential that active co-operation and participation of this sector should be explored in the field of natural disaster mitigation and preparedness

Extension Services in NDM

Extension Services are considered very effective in informing the target groups on a given theme/subject. So far no systematic efforts have been made to involve these services to educate the target groups under Natural Disaster Management, particularly the farmers about calamity conditions likely to effect on the crops, steps required to be taken to save the crops or go for alternative crops. To quote an example, if the farmer is going for cotton crops, he should be told (keeping in view the monsoon behavior during that period and other climatic conditions of that area about the likely pest attack and other kind of diseases danger to their crops. Similarly relevant educative programme can be inter-linked with Extension Services in the wake of flood and drought conditions.

Regional Co-operation

Keeping in view the actual and potential consequences of natural disasters, the Decade of 1990 has been declared as International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) by the United Nations. The objectives of the Decade call for concerted international action for reducing the occurrence and minimising the adverse impact of natural calamities. India is committed to the goals and objectives of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction

A special plan programme is now being implemented for development of human resources, encouraging research and documentation and enhancing community awareness in the field of natural disasters. Every year World Disaster Reduction Day (2nd Wednesday of October) is observed in a befitting manner. State Governments, State Level Training Institutes and some organisations observe this day by organising various activities of public awareness. India has taken the membership of Asian Disaster Reduction Centre, Kobe in Japan working in the field of disaster preparedness activities in the Region. Constant liaison is also being made with Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre, Bangkok.

UNDP Project

Government of India is implementing a UNDP Project for improving country's capacity to mitigate the effects of natural disasters by building institutional capacities and developing human resources and thus protecting sustainable socio-economic development and well being of its citizens. The project has two components namely strengthening capacity of training institutions and enhancing the capacity of the country.

Impact of Preparedness Measures

It has been experienced that the timely preparedness measures coupled with effective administrative response, results in reducing the adverse impact of natural disasters. This is evident from the two situations of 1977 and 1990 at Andhra Pradesh coast that was hit by cyclone accompanied by high storms of almost the same intensity. The number of deaths in 1977 was over 10,000 whereas the loss of human life in 1990 was less than 1000. Technological improvement in the forecasting and warning system, effective administration in evacuating the people, construction of cyclone shelters, public awareness are some of the factors contributed towards reduction of human losses.

"There is only one thing worse than the devil and that is the educated devil. We are not afraid of the primitive people today. We are afraid of the educated people who have the techniques of modern science in their grasp, psychological skills for propaganda purposes, men who have the power without the goodness to use it properly."

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan