

# POLITICAL AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF NATURAL DISASTERS (FLOODS): AN ANALYSIS OF SOME INDIAN EXPERIENCES

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## INTRODUCTION

Analysis of disaster as a development issue, requiring examination of long term policies, emergent community dynamics and identification of correctives; has sought to replace the on-going emphasis on relief; with a developmental perspective and promotive interventions. In order to understand the comprehensive implication of this shift, the disaster management theories are being reexamined through the macro and micro level studies.

The post disaster response requires a lot more professionalism, to manage the forces, that are activated. The convergence of organizations and agencies trying to reach out to the disaster victims, presents another problem. How do these outside initiatives get synchronised and coordinated, among themselves and with the local initiatives? The organic unity in decision making to be achieved through effective overall coordination demands unity of purpose and continuity in action at various levels of operations in post disaster situation.

The frequency and severity of floods is growing faster and accounts for about 30 per cent of world disasters. The

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statistics also show that in underdeveloped countries and more specifically the Indian subcontinent floods accounted for 70 per cent of loss of life during 1960-81.

Floods do not attract any special attention of the general population in India, because of its frequent occurrence; except when they are exceptional even by Indian standards.

The state of India's Environment, 1982 reported that the land areas prone to floods have doubled during 1971-80. Apart from the controversies there is no denying the fact that the flood prone areas are increasing drastically during the recent decades. Deforestation and resulting soil erosion can explain a major part of this increase in flood prone areas.

The flood protection measures undertaken under central assistance, in some of the flood prone areas include building of embankments, dams, reservoirs, drainage improvements and flood zoning.

Because of the State Governments indifference or lack of enthusiasm, developmental activities and settlements are continuously encroaching upon the flood prone areas. The population pressures and rural-urban migration, both of which are beyond the control of state government, explain to some extent the connivance of the state authorities towards the encroachment of flood prone areas.

The resultant risks from development activities are neither studied nor documented properly. The locational decisions, being governed by political considerations creates new risks of flooding, as seen in the case of Jambhulpada (INDIA).

Destruction of natural holding ponds for monsoon drainage, is a direct result of unplanned settlements and in turn brings newer areas under the risk of flooding, as has been seen in Bombay.

The effects of the floods have been varied. The impact on the families could be termed as short term' or 'long term' depending on the type of loss and extent of damage to family assets.

The statistics show that women and children accounted for most of the deaths. One could notice conspicuous absence of children in these flood affected villages. Otherwise, a familiar sight in the indian villages represents predominant child population.

The paper deals with some of the flood experiences with which the author was associated as a relief coordinator under the aegis of different voluntary agencies. While presenting brief notes on three different episodes, one particular experience is analysed in detailed and experience from other episodes is brought in to draw generalizations.

Brief notes on select flood experience :

1. A. Location and the title of the episode Dam burst at Morvi town in Gujarat (1979)
  - B. Nature and extent of damage as witnessed and reported in press. The water supply source for Morvi city constructed across the river burst due to heavy rains, flooding the entire city, destroying housing and depositing the silt from the Dam in all surviving houses. The loss of life was estimated at 3,000.
  - C. Possible reasons assigned by administration and mass-media for the occurrence. Technology of construction of Dam and low maintenance standards were seen as basic reasons, in addition to negligence on the part of officials. There was no early warning to people according to some sources.
  - D. Task undertaken In collaboration with voluntary agencies to help in management of relief camp, house to house survey of the damage and mobilising community members for cleaning of the houses and the other artifacts. Collaboration with Government agency in distribution of relief and compensation to affected families and manning information centres.
2. A. Location and the title of the episode Andhra Pradesh Cyclonic floods (1977).
  - B. Nature and extent of damage as witnessed and reported in press Six meter high tide with a wind velocity of approx. 120 km. per hour hit the areas in coastal Andhra, destroying crops, houses, human and animal lives. Approximate deaths 60,000 to 1,20,000 (includes the local population and the migrant seasonal labour). The survivors were swept away and were caught in the canals and were rescued.
  - C. Possible reasons assigned by administration and mass-media for the occurrence Natural calamity and inability on the part of the Government to alert the people in the region due to inadequate technology support and poor mass communication.

Indifference and reluctance on the part of the local community to take the early warning seriously. Global phenomenon resulting from ecological imbalance.

D. Task undertaken      Providing assistance for distribution of relief supplies, preparing community for clearing of lands and for desalination operation. Organisation of cultural and recreational activities, coun-selling, and emotional support.

3. A. Location and the title of the episode      Floods in Orissa (1982).

B. Nature and extent of damage as witnessed and reported in press      Destruction of crops along the Mahanadi basin and its tributaries in the entire stretch, flooding all low lying villages, isolating the communities from the rest of the country. Loss of household articles utenciles reported by few hundred families.

C. Possible reasons assigned by administration and mass-media for the occurance      For some this was a natural calamity. For other it was a result of the failure on the part of planning bodies with regard to water-management systems and absence of long-term policy directions with regard to management of floods, as also the large scale irrigation projects.

D. Task undertaken      Organising community participation in distribution of relief, preparing the community for re-cultivation of crops, cultural and recreational activities. Liaision with Government departments.

#### 4. Floods in Maharashtra

A more comprehensive account of the 1989 floods in Maharashtra is presented here, with a focus on the theme of this paper. The floods occurred in July 1989 in the Raigad

District, adjoining the mega city Bombay. Jambhulpada was one of the worst affected villages.

## THE FIRST REPORT FROM A NGO

### The Episode

On the 24th early morning at 2.00 a.m. a worker from the local agency woke up and found dampness all over. He opened the office door and a wall of water rushed into the office. He managed to keep his cool and rescued the people and took them to the first floor of the office premises. Meanwhile the water was reaching up to the first floor, which is nearly 10 ft. high.

1. Unofficially nearly 100 people are said to be washed away. Officially, 85 people were reported missing, of these 65 bodies had been found.
2. Sixty pucca houses have been completely demolished right from their foundation. Over 150 houses have been extensively damaged. The carcasses were lying all over the place in the village.
3. The local NGO office has been extensively damaged and records completely destroyed.
4. There was no early warning.

### Immediate Requirements :

- (a) Need of potable water.
- (b) Need of safe food.

(c) Medical assistance to treat the injured

(d) Need to organise the removal of carcasses of cattles to avoid large scale health hazard.

Even the Police Personnel who have been camping at the site (about 40 in number) are without food for last 72 hours.

#### Collaboration with District / Village :

Met District Collector and other officials who are patrolling the devastated area. They are willing to collaborate with us for helping the affected people.

People are very badly hit and need immediate assistance. Other villages are also extensively damaged. The damage in the entire Taluka through which we moved appears to have been extensive. The whole area appears very badly devastated and in need of immediate attention."

River Amba flows along the villages, located in the Western Ghats. Most of the low lying areas were totally isolated due to severe damaged caused to communication network, roads and bridges. More than 10 hours were required to establish any contact with the disaster victims, and the survivors.

#### COMMUNITY PROFILE

The affected area in Raigad District was divided in three operational zones for the purpose of analysis.

## ZONE I

The community in "Pali" Zone I, can be divided into two major groups. This being a Taluka headquarter (a revenue unit consisting of about 100 revenue villages) and an important pilgrimage centre, the educated and the elite consisted of the bureaucrats, and those who were connected with the religious and commercial activities around the pilgrimage centre. They formed one group.

This first group did not suffer any losses due to their location, except indirectly and also marginally when the place was cut off because of communication breakdown due to floods for about 10 days. The second group consisted of the uneducated, nonelite engaged in agriculture and village artisans. The impact of the disaster was essentially on the second group, who lost their house, properties and crops.

The NGO sector, in this Zone, essentially mass based organisation in character was engaged during the last couple of years, in mobilisation had identified critical issues around which, a number of local actions and confrontations were planned and executed in a successful manner. This had resulted in exposing political party structures and weakening them to the extent that they became defunct. The bureaucracy, knowing the potentials of this lobby, had started either respecting them or taking the line of least resistance.



In such a situation two types of pre-existing conditions were observed : (i) The mobilization process had heightened the level of development consciousness and sharply focussed on the long term implications of development policies. (ii) The on-going mobilisation revolved round the objective of establishing peoples rights over the resources. This mobilisation process had challenged the normal community politics (which is generally manifested through processes of manipulation of resources and corruption at the community level, by the local elites, either through the political nexus or the commercial interests).

The community profile in Zone I, in terms of the local community politics in the pre-disaster situation, thus, had the following scenario : (A) the political party/institutions were on the decline or almost delegitimised or defunct, (B) the government channel essentially represented by bureaucracy was inadequate with limited access to community groups, (C) mass-based organisations or what can be termed as the NGO - channel was active and had the required legitimacy.

## ZONE II

Typically, the major village in Zone II attracted the educated, lower level bureaucrats for residential accommodation because of its central location, access and infrastructure. Secondly, most original residents are educated and at least one member from each family has migrated to Bombay for employment; and many of these residents visited the village periodically and

invested in housing, as a provision for their retirement, thus making a housing stock with modern conveniences available. Hence, the overall quality of the population residing in this village was characterised by high density, educated and a loosely integrated heterogenous community. The major losses were suffered by this group both in terms of life and property.

This zone is characterised by a weak political party structure, hazy zone of influence with unidentifiable pockets of influence and less competitive. The NGO sector essentially playing a second-fiddle role to local bureaucracy and the political structure. In these villages there existed a nexus between the local business community, the contractors, the forest department and other levels of bureaucracy. The degree of political mobilisation at community was marginal. The local elites' approach was philanthropic, paternalistic.

### ZONE III

Mostly the agriculturists and the artisans formed the major bulk of the population. The quality of population and its life style was similar to that of its counter part at Zone I.

The area was characterised by the presence of active political leaders and aggressive lobbying by the main political parties, resulting in well defined constituencies and pockets of influence. The NGO sector had neither the sensitivity, nor any acceptance or legitimacy at community level.

In addition to the three zones, comprising of the communities described earlier, two more groups need to be mentioned who stand out distinctly in terms of the nature of losses : (i) being in the close vicinity of the city of Bombay, a major industrial headquarter, a number of industries have come up in the areas, which were submerged during the floods. Their losses were heavy but they had the requisite outside support systems, including the insurance agencies responding to cover up their losses. These establishments were more or less alienated and were outside the post-disaster relief activities. A major section of these industrial complexes were in the industrial area identified by state-Government and were provided with service infrastructure at concessional rates, as a part of the conscious promotional drive to attract industries in the undeveloped regions, for decentralisation of industrial location; (ii) a large population of Tribals settled specifically in the hilly terrain, depend, in all these three zones, for its livelihood on the economic activities of this region, by serving as daily wage labor. None of them have either a permanent employment or a regular foothold in the economic / socio-political activities of the region and were therefore not even considered as an integral part of the village communities. However their dependency on the smooth functioning of the communities, in the plains, was total and any disruption in this had a direct and severe impact on their lives.

## Post Disaster Dynamics

While understanding the relative roles played by government and the NGOs, one may find that their perceptions differ and so do the relative postures of these organizations. In all the three zones, the NGOs had different perceptions with regard to the causative factors, nature of episode, type of disaster impact and the government response. All these contributed to dividing the NGO lobby, into two major blocks i.e. one believing in 'accident/coincidence' theory and the other endorsing the 'inherent' theory. For instance, in Bhopal Gas leak case the Management of the Industry was trying to establish the accident theory, where as, the activists' lobby strongly promoted 'inherent' theory. Under such conditions, the emergent relationship essentially got characterised and manifested in the types of confrontations and mobilisation activities, which were legitimised at various points of times. In the present case, however, many NGO's accepted the government position on 'accident/coincidence' theory, and had tried to cooperate and collaborate with Government efforts rather than pressurise the government, to examine long-term development policies.

Within twentyfour hours the state government established the Central zone at the Secretariate, and a District Co-ordination Committee (DCC), was formed at the District level. The Taluka Development Committee (TCC) was located in a most approachable village in Zone II, which had also suffered heavy casualties. The authorities appointed the Additional District Collector and a

DIG to set up relief operations at the TCC. The village where the TCC was located also had a Village Co-ordination Committee consisting of the local NGO, whose support and collaboration was sought by the TCC, to accelerate relief and assistance. This had created problems of identity and role VCC members had their own ideas on relief and rehabilitation, however, the close co-operation between the TCC and VCC further complicated the process. VCC's attitude towards NGOs in other Zones interfered with the working of TCC. The spurious authority and control over resources gained by the VCC was resented by other village committees and NGOs. The role of the TCC therefore was restricted to this village level, thereby adversely affecting the relief work.

Village Committees and NGO's in different Zones started mobilising under one umbrella. From Zone I, a Charter of Demand and ultimatum was served to the Government. Mass-Media was approached for exposing the weaknesses of structural arrangements. In Zone III, the political parties were activated.

#### ZONE I

A direct reflection of the pre-disaster scenario in Zone I could be observed in the post-disaster situation particularly after the first-two weeks of immediate response. An usual patronising approach, along with the relief aid and assistance which was used for establishing credibility and enhancing political power by the local political elite, was rejected by

these NGOs' immediately after two weeks. The 'accident' theory of disaster was consciously being rejected by the NGOs who started emphasising the 'inherent' theory of disasters, thereby directly promoting a view that the flood were not a mere accident or multiple factors coinciding but were essentially inherent in the long-term water resource management and development policies adopted by the Government. For these NGOs therefore the post-disaster situation was only an extension of their earlier position of attacking the manipulative development policies and corrupt practices. The situation was also seen as a more convenient opportunity to re-inforce the rights of the people over the resources.

The social activists were quick to mobilize the coping mechanisms at community level. Even as the aid was reaching the area, the community groups had gone through the exercise of defining the priorities; nature of resources or assistance required; the terms, conditions and manner in which the resources will be presented and put to use. Although one finds that such pressures at the initial stage were non-palatable to the bureaucracy and other relief agencies, a retrospective assessment brings out very important aspects of post-disaster activity.

In the villages the process got intensified. Regular meetings, data gathering and analysis, confrontation with bureaucrats, pressurising for certain long term measures, policy

changes, etc. were in full swing (It is also important to note that 90% of the demands have already been accepted by the government and the others are under consideration.). It must also be recorded that the tone, content and mechanisms used in the intervention by the NGO channel were defined at the community level itself.

Efforts were directed towards promoting and seeking official support through negotiation and, when necessary, through confrontation. since NGO channel was more active and legitimate the bureaucracy opted for non-compliance to political and elite bosses. This had resulted in a multi-political party effort for the transfer of a bureaucrat, which could not succeed because of the alert and authentic support from the NGO sector.

## ZONE II

On the other hand in Zone II, since neither the political channel nor the NGOs could assert themselves, or put any pressure on the bureaucracy, the bureaucracy had practically taken over a total control over the distribution of resources, yet allowing the other two channels to play a supportive role. Bureaucracy, therefore, did not experience any pressures from either of these lobbies.

The bureaucracy enjoyed certain advantages in concentrating their work in Zone II. The factors explaining the motivation of bureaucracy are the following :

- (i) The areas had the maximum deaths totalling to 85 and a massive visible impact of the ravages caused by floods, which had attracted media-attention. Mass-media exposures created tremendous pressures on Government and bureaucracy had to appear to be doing something immediately.
- (ii) A direct access and communication available to the area were convenient for arranging the VIP visits, which generally precede such disasters. This access also facilitated, the demonstrative effects, thereby countering the pressures created by mass-media.
- (iii) The NGO channel and political channel was weak and hence the situation permitted unquestioned authority of bureaucracy in managing post-disaster relief.
- (iv) The weak political party scenario allowed the state ruling party to penetrate and create its pockets of influence by using the disaster resources.

The elite took the line of collaboration with aid giving agencies, including the Government. Their emphasis was more on the management of the resources received than on the verification of the appropriateness of the resources. The local community continued to be the recipient and had no say in the type of assistance provided. It is interesting to note that the elite did not take any initiative either for identifying the local needs or in defining the priorities.



It was observed that the enthusiasm of the elite lasted as long as the government considered the situation as an emergency. After about 6 weeks, the government response started subsiding and hence the activity at the village level also started shrinking. A routine got established for the relief activity in these villages; with a backlog of surplus relief material waiting for distribution.

### ZONE III

Since an NGO was keen on participating in the post disaster activity in Zone III, it made several efforts but could not succeed in ousting the relatively legitimised political structure. On realising that there is no role at the local community level, that it could play effectively, the NGO diverted its efforts to taking on the responsibility of coordinating the work of smaller NGOs. Although the agency did not have a legitimacy among the smaller NGOs, it was allowed to play the limited coordinating role by smaller NGOs for three convenient reasons : (a) at no stage the coordination work was seen as a threat by the smaller NGO because of the limited competence of this coordinating agency to penetrate at local levels; (b) the proposed coordinating agency had a good 'Big-brother' image outside the affected area, which could be used in mobilizing the resources for these small groups; (c) That the agency had the infrastructure and facilities for storage of materials and transit facilities for the relief workers.

The political party channels which could establish their legitimacy brought tremendous pressures on bureaucracy and distorted the process of resource management, resulting in manipulation of relief materials and corruption. One could observe the effects of this politics resulting in the transfer and arrest of certain bureaucrats, who by then were deserted, for complying with demands of local politicians in the distribution of resources.

### **The Industries**

Although during the immediate response no visible activity could be noticed from the management of these units, one expects that such a lobby will take a more analytical view of disaster causes and possibly will be able to pressurise the state-government to take the necessary corrective measures in order to prevent recurrence of such disasters in the future. However, there is no indication as yet to suggest that this scenario will emerge.

### **The Tribals**

The NGO lobbies, in all 3 zones, were sensitive and alert to this issue and were trying to consciously promote the interests and inclusion of these tribals in the post disaster relief and assistance programme. However since the tribals did not suffer any direct loss, its inclusion posed a major problem as it could not qualify for any assistance, under any eligibility criterion in the post-disaster assistance. Even in the long term post-

disaster plans the bureaucratic approach did not promote its integration with the non-tribal communities nor visualised any special programme.

### **Role of International Aid-Agencies**

Very typically, this post disaster relief situation was characterised by absence of multi-lateral international aid agencies. Their concerns were reflected by the immediate visits of the agency representatives for assessment of damages, situational analysis for assessing the long-term needs and the exploration of the possibilities of long-term collaboration on development issues.

A very conscious approach of non-involvement in the immediate relief was obvious in their approach, barring the exception of one agency, which come forward with nominal assistance.

### **A SECOND LOOK AT IMMEDIATE RESPONSE**

During the post disaster period people demonstrated a typical victim behaviour. People responded immediately, creatively and helped each other in rescue operations and management of locally organized relief camps. One could see a spontaneous organized effort on the part of the community. The innate coping mechanisms demonstrated tremendous tenacity and responsiveness.

One of the tasks in the post disaster situation after the immediate rescue and relief was to organize on-going relief till

the community infrastructure is restored to operational levels - a hectic and tiring job - which continued for a few weeks. A capacity and willingness demonstrated by most communities, to strive for near normalcy after the destruction, indicates the strength and reliability of coping mechanisms operating at local community level.

The strengths of relationship, the concept of neighbourliness, roles, responsibilities, obligations and reciprocities, as transmitted through the socialization process and life experiences play a significant role in activating coping mechanisms. Religious beliefs provide a feeling of security and promote optimism. Restoring temples thus gave a lot of psychological boost to most communities. It raised the morale.

The floods were unexpected, although, heavy rains were lashing on the previous day. The sudden and forceful entry of the water into the village divided the village Jambhulpada into three parts. The community, therefore, was responding at three different locations. As the disaster hit the community during 2.00 a.m. to 4.00 a.m. in early hours, the power had also failed by then and in the darkness the visibility was nil. All that people could do was shout out to each other. The real help could come when the day light came around 6.00 a.m. This may account for the heavy loss of life.

The families on the higher plain were safe and they were the first to come for rescue. These families offered temporary

shelter and food to all the survivors. A phenomenon which was observed universally in all the affected villages.

Providing food and shelter was the first task for those, who suffered the least loss. Searching and identification of the dead, helping the police in preparing the list of missing people and inventory of artifacts and property lost in the flood were all critical functions.

In Andhra Pradesh the cyclone hit in the afternoon, but the situation was the same, as the clouds had already blocked the light. It was practically dark, when the tidal wave hit the villages. The poor visibility had affected the rescue even then.

During Morvi floods, the first group to respond were the families who were least affected. Again you find that even in Morvi for almost 24 hours, it was the local community which took a major initiative in rescue and immediate relief work. The immediate response of the community goes a long way in maintaining the morale and confidence of the survivors. It is this help which draws people out of numbness and shock.

One could observe the leadership qualities coming to the fore, even under the devastating conditions. The formation of a committee for coordinating relief in a number of villages in Maharashtra floods was yet another example of the capacity of the local community to maintain its cool, composed character.

Disposal of damaged / soaked food items and grains from farmers' stocks and in market godowns which started decomposing within 48 hours posed a major challenge as tonnes of these food grains had to be carried to the sea located some 80 kms. away. This became an activity by itself in and around Jambhulpada. However realising the health hazards the major initiative for disposal came from the wholesale grain merchants from the nearby town 'Nagothane'. The administrative response was equally forthcoming by way of assisting the local community in mobilizing the transport. The labour involved was by and large voluntary. On the third day, some transport contractors obtained the contract from the state government's control-room for disposal of the remaining decomposed items.

Another health hazard was the carcasses, which had to be located and disposed of. The local community volunteers were scouting around to locate the dead as well as the carcasses. With their assistance the Municipal authority from the nearby town 'Khopoli' organised the disposal of carcasses. Khopoli Municipal Council also arranged to supply fresh drinking water, by providing tankers, in the area.

Absentee house owners, whose houses were damaged or destroyed came back to the village to ensure rehabilitation benefits. They worked on salvaging operations, but essentially worked on their own properties. It was difficult for them to

relate to other members of the community, but they could empathise with those who suffered human loss.

In Morvi, people began cleaning shops, houses, removing debris and smeared silt. Similar response was observed in Jambhulpada. People engaged themselves in activities to bring back the semblance of normalcy in the otherwise ruined situation. Fresh water had to come from outside in all these places for a little longer than expected. The reason being that the administrative machinery took longer to mobilize the equipments for desilting the wells or pumping out the water from the drinking water wells. the Morvi water works took longer to start normal operations in affected areas, because of the damage to the existing pipelines. But the temporary water supply started soon in Morvi town.

In Andhra Pradesh, many villagers were reluctant to go back to their villages. The total destruction had completely demoralised the survivors. Also a heavy life toll had created a fear. The NGOs working in relief camps and on land reclamation programme had to demonstrate the possibility of recovery through their efforts before the people could be motivated.

During the rescue operations large families forming chains and moving to safety found difficulty in keeping track on all members. Many casualties were reported by those having large human chains. These members also experienced guilt feelings for a long time; when the member of the chain was lost.

## Effort towards rehabilitation

The government assistance for rebuilding the damaged and collapsed houses was welcomed by the victims. The major issues were (a) the housing loans and subsidies, (b) the sites for housing, (c) the housing material.

There was an unanimous agreement that the housing material should be similar to the one's normally used in the village and hence was accepted by the government. But it was observed that the materials were not available in required quantity. However, in order to ensure that the housing loans and subsidies were not misused, it was decided to monitor the assistance.

Three distinct responses were observed with respect to house sites : (1) A small number of families decided to settle in nearby villages, where they had their close relatives. These people could find safety and security with the relatives, (2) Most of those who were the residents in the villages opted for alternate sites within the village. For them the shifting provided the required security and an opportunity to start afresh.

It may be noted that the state government has taken a policy decision that post-disaster assistance in flood prone area can be given only when people agree to shift out of the area to a safer sites. As regards the housing sites, therefore, it was proposed that alternate housing sites should be selected to avoid the repetition in future.



But the third group of absentee owners (i.e. those who owned the houses in the village but did not reside there) opted for the same sites. It is interesting to note this for it has consequences. It was found that for the absentee owners maintaining the land marks and physical locations intact had a significance. They had not gone through the nightmare.

While deciding on the relocation sites, a lot of political activity was observed. State level leaders and members of legislature representing this constituency, became active and tried to woo the people to different sites, with a promise of additional incentives, but the conflicting proposals and the resultant delay exposed the political motives and the community decided to take its own decisions.

Many political groups were galvanised into action, party big-wigs visited the area, bringing alongwith some resources, and a lot more promises. The visit of the VIP's including the Chief Minister gave added thrust to the ongoing repairs and restoration activities. While appreciating the positive impact of the VIP visits and the accompanying publicity of the disaster impact through mass-media, one noticed that in another area flood victims neither got any publicity or any sizeable resources, due to non-visits of the VIP.

In the absence of any massive programme of land reclamation, one observes that a number of farmers have left lot of land unreclaimed for the agriculture. Many have not taken any crops

on their lands. Being in the vicinity of a industrial zone and close to a city like Bombay, this non-attention to land reclamation has resulted in attracting the land speculators and the other elite. The prices of lands thus, have gone up from US \$ 500 a hectare to US \$ 6250 a hectare, thereby further discouraging the farmers from reclamations for cultivation. Many families now prefer to dispose of the land and collect the attractive price. Yet there are others who are now waiting for further price escalation: the area is fast opening up to outsiders who can pay the price.

Total neglect of the land reclamation programme in Jambhulpada area by the government indicates a design rather than just an accident. A large number of schemes of farm houses (i.e. week-end hideouts for the elite) have been approved and necessary infrastructure such as watter supply and power is being made available. A large number of estate agents are seen going round in these village trying to strike a deal. A nexus is emerging and is active.

In Andhra Pradesh, the government had taken up a major programme of land reclamation and desalination by diverting the funds, manpower resources and water by depriving irrigation to some others. The area, therefore, continued to be and is still under agriculture and thus the recovery was faster for the local community.

In. Morvi, which was a major centre for manufacture of Wall Clocks and Watches, the destruction had affected the locals as well as out-side business community, who were dependent on the supplies. More than the local community, it was the business community from outside which was interested in the rehabilitation and recovery of these industries. Thus a massive support came from outside Morvi for the reconstruction programme. The town, thus, got a face lift after the disaster. The rehabilitation of wall clock industries, with added modernization, has given a further boost to the economy of the township.

#### **Findings (Socio-Political Aspects)**

The personnel converging on the disaster site are very much alike in most other disaster situation. However the initial phase attract more the 'anxious' and the 'curious'. The 'helpers' were primarily the local community members who were trying to salvage the situation and hence the first phase of post-disaster situation activated the pre-existing coping mechanisms' at community level which were routinised in the later period. The difference in the quality of post disaster intervention in Zone I and Zone II in Jambhulpada case can, then, be understood in the context of predisaster dynamics.

At the direct service level, there were very few people with either previous experience or the required skills. For a long time, therefore, no new leaders were seen to be emerging in any of the zones. The mutual support function excessively dominated

the community ideology and re-inforced many of the pre-diaster social control mechanism. Apart from the conflicting information on the causative factors, very typically the situation did not support any emergence of rumours. Dessimination of information was systematic, thereby highliting internal solidarity.

In view of the differing perceptions, perceived roles and the nature of interaction with government relief system, the pre-existing differences emerged sharply and were accentuated into a conflict within the NGO sectors in the three areas. The factors of 'domain-legitimacy' were aggravated "Why should they decide for our area?" "We have to think for the entire area"; "We don't need anyone, we have enough capabilities"; "How can we work, if each one wants to be independent, we can never present a united demand"; "The Government will get away with promises, if we do not consolidate" were some of the expressions which bring out the nature of conflict, anxiety and the dimensions of legitimacy. Although one noticed the process of centralisation in all the three zones, it was lowest in Zone I. The organisational pattern of the mass-based NGO's, characterised by de-centralisation and multiple centres of decision making continued even in the post-disaster situation. Mobilisation process based on team approach to organisational decision making helped the NGO's in Zone I, in effective channelisation of resources, damage assessment and consolidation of community response. However, inter-personal cleavages coupled with the ego

needs of certain individuals in NGO sector, posed the problems of coordination at multi-organisational level across the zones.

In families, where human losses were suffered, the coping mechanisms varied. In some families, young males, who had lost their spouses got married to the relatives of the dead. All families did not get the immediate help from the relatives. Most cases of trauma were reported from families, who lost 4-8 members. Most cases blamed fate and tend to generalise the deaths thereby finding relief.

The economic losses, to some extent were compensated through relief and compensation offered by the NGOs and the government respectively. However those who lost the bread earner or the jobs were struggling for more than six months, to achieve some stability in their family incomes.

The smaller families reported lesser loss of life. The major reason being their ability to escape or rescue each other. These families reported only the death of children, in some cases, where the children were too small to go through the ordeal and receive the help offered. Capacity to respond to rescue seems to be an important factor in the case of survivors. Survivors support to each other provided a great strength.

The immediate reaction to crisis is important to note. Rather than save oneself from the impact, the individuals were trying to save each other. There were some who saved 8 to 10

members of the community and yet had a guilt that they would not save more. Some rescuers died in the process of helping others.

In a post disaster situation generally it has been observed that apart from immediate relief, a number of other resources by way of compensation and long term assistance get mobilised as part of disaster resources. One observes pressures and at times an undue haste in distributing these resources to the victims. The mass-media pressure add to this haste resulting in inadequate assessments and at times manipulation of beneficiary list. The confusions resulting from extensive loss; inadequate information and breakdown of communication in the post disaster situation, coupled with the eagerness on the part of disaster aid managers (essentially the bureaucrats) to reach out, collectively force the relief workers to either rely heavily on the local elite, particularly the elected representatives, or are otherwise pressurised by these elite groups, to accept their dictates, thereby distorting the process of identification of beneficiaries and distribution of relief assistance. The basic motivation of such political elite is to divert as many resources as they can to their own constituencies, thus seeking a political advantage for the future. One finds therefore that the post relief situations are characterised by a number of charges and counter-charges of corruption and manipulation, resulting in action against defaulting bureaucrats, including their transfers and other punitive actions taking place. It is pertinent then to analyse such community dynamics and the processes, in the post

disaster situation in order to develop our understanding and perspectives on community politics in post disaster situation.

It is observed that the pre-disaster community dynamics has a lot of significance for the post disaster relief and rehabilitation. It explains the degree of 'preparedness' obtained at community level as also the types of possible coping mechanisms emerging in post-disaster situation. Both the individual/community or the organisational coping mechanisms are shaped and defined by the pre-existing dynamics, in the community.

A definite link between disaster and development and the need for a critical intervention, in eliminating the risk and the management of vulnerabilities, were a basic agenda in most of the discussions with International Aid agencies. We will have to wait and examine the initiatives that emerge from these quarters.

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In a historical perspective and within the context of the emerging ideologies, we may have to look at certain concerns which were raised by the NGO sector regarding the role of International Aid agencies in the present case :

- (i) Many governments while agreeing on a relationship between disaster and development, may not be very keen on accepting interational aid agencies, to take on the role of development oriented organisations. Resulting from certain reservations towards international agencies, the

governments may be reluctant to encourage them to comment on development issues;

- (ii) International aid agencies in their anxiety to evolve a more scientific approach to disaster response may undermine the genuine resource demands for immediate post disaster situations, thereby depriving important disaster resources to the disaster victims;
- (iii) The possibilities of nurturing specialised skills in post disaster situations among disaster management personnel may get side-tracked if pursued too far, resulting in a lack of response to the immediate situations.
- (iv) The development agency scenario represented and managed by development resources may experience the threat from the scientific involvement of disaster relief systems on development front.

#### INTER ORGANIZATIONAL COORDINATION

One can observe differences in the perspectives of the NGOs and the Government functionaries. These emerge out of the structural arrangements or the motivation of the groups involved. The motivations range from ego satisfaction, service, political gains to personal gains. However, the overall orientation and perspective of the NGO has been emotional. Most NGOs worked on a time bound programmes of relief and rehabilitation. Only in



recent years, one observes the emergence of NGOs committing themselves to long term policies and programmes.

The NGOs contribute their expertise and motivation, and help in focusing on the specific problems of vulnerable groups and weaker sections and hence their concern and involvement in long term policy and programme is welcome.

The basic idea of the early warning system has elements of prevention of loss through effective information system and would also assist in early reporting. It enables a measure of control through interventions to prevent the outcomes.

Early response : How early is the question. It is determined by the technical competence, resources and the support systems available. It is increasingly realised that NGOs can play a significant role in the early warning, monitoring and immediate relief and they have the potential of countering the formal power. They draw their strength from the moral authority of the people, when legitimised.

The involvement of the Government, on the other hand, seem to be bureaucratic, policy oriented and rational(!). It is seen that the administrative response in post disaster emergency situation has been most effective and efficient, but it could last only for a few weeks. The capacity of a bureaucracy to convert emergency situation into a normal routine situation seems

to be tremendous. Once the normalcy is declared the bureaucratic response becomes routine, slow and ineffective.

In all these post disaster situations, inspite of the best of intentions and experience within the Governments, inter ministerial coordination is found wanting. At no stage one could confidently predict the degree of coordination that could be achieved at the inter ministerial level.

In the overall dynamics of community politics very few constituencies take interest in disaster relief.

The NGOs can also play an effective role in dissemination of information across levels (Local, National and International) particularly in the third world, wherein the free flow communication either does not exist as a tradition or is being discouraged because of unfounded fears. Interactions are threatening to many organisations. The anxiety relate to the purpose, content and the levels. Basically the problems of interaction are the problems of communication emerging from information flow. Formal arrangements for information exchange are not always feasible, which explains the very reason or need for coordinations.

In the absence of formal agreements, efforts to coordinate can lead to : (i) cross purpose communication, (ii) limited/screened or censored communication, (iii) at times intended or unintended miscommunication.

The problem of coordination and communication can be seen at the understanding level and at the level of perception of accountability in a given situations. These can also lead to conflicts.

It is essential to define the levels of coordination. The job is critical as well as difficult. Many a times coordination efforts are sabotaged by vested interests. Political pressures, public opinion and bargaining processes would like to hide facts and make coordination difficult. Inability to mobilize support at community level or at administration level may result in redefinition of the problem.

Grass-roots level manifested certain universal characteristics of relief and rehabilitation. These include,

(a) In each of the episodes it was observed that there was a general spurt in anti government mobilization and extraordinary activity of development lobbies. In these situation attempts were made to put the blame squarely on the government policies and development programmes, as major causes for the disaster. Opposition parties have demonstrated overbearing unity to lash-out at the government. Thus the tendency to maximise political gains through protest and use of mass-media was evident.

(b) Some sections of the population, at times the least affected ones have tried to grab resources, particularly when these were not distributed through coordinated efforts. At times

some of these vested interests attempted to sabotage the efforts of the NGOs with the help of political elements to discredit the NGO or the Government Officials.

**Lessons Learnt from post disaster relief and rehabilitation :**

- i. The context of development must be kept in mind.
- ii. The process is equally important as the task.
- iii. Community self-help is feasible and desirable.
- iv. Victims like to be left alone to take their own steps.
- v. Programmes and priorities must be changing as the situations change - phasing possibilities in the post disaster relief and rehabilitation must be constantly pursued.
- vi. The agency must integrate itself with ongoing activities on the disaster site. The elements of flexibility rather than opportunism should be emphasized.
- vii. NGO should provide support through activities and resources not available locally.
- viii. Undue competition among relief workers and unhealthy debates and conflicts on the definition of needs, must be consciously avoided.
- ix. Excessive relief and unwanted relief items are non-productive or counter productive to the process of recovery.

- x. Outside assistance isolates or discourages local coping mechanisms from operating, resulting in over dependency of the community on the external intervention.
- xi. The response of the NGOs should be natural and not unnecessarily appear to be highly technical.
- xii. Local purchase of material is desirable to normalize market system, the economy and in general the total recovery process.
- xiii. Low level of disaster awareness at official and community level.
- xiv. Absence of preparedness at official and community level.
- xv. Rest area and facilities are very essential to maintain the energy and morale of the volunteers.
- xvi. Agencies, at times, over identify themselves with specific area/community/problem, which makes them appear partisan and blocks their overall perception.

## REFLECTIONS

The realization that it was a community crisis has helped people to identify with each other. The intensity of the crisis at family level was reduced as a result. There was a collective response to the disaster. The emotional support and rebuilding the confidence essentially came from the relatives and

neighbours. The neighbours were the first to respond to family crisis, and joined by relatives a little later. The grief reaction was in the form of immediate involvement in practical problems and relief organisation. Keeping one self busy seem to be the effective coping mechanism.

The relief materials were pouring in through NGOs and individuals without knowing the quantum required. For instance the clothing received at the relief centres far exceeded the demand.

In most disasters the unity of purpose experienced during the first few weeks, start fading afterwards. More and more survivors think that the relief organizations do not understand their problems. The agencies start realising that they are not wanted anymore for the tasks that they are performing. The families want more privacy and autonomy in leading their lives.

The bottlenecks in resettlement and rehabilitation start becoming more prominent, and acquire political dimension. People want to be left alone, with only a financial support from outside.

Understanding disaster politics thus will require identification of various levels of decision making and the degree of unity of purpose that is achieved. The micro analysis of the post disaster situation becomes helpful in locating these levels and the nature of their interactions. One may come across

a situation where in these levels conflict in their perceptions, priorities and, hence, in their response.

This micro level analysis brings out certain critical issues that highlight the nature of disaster response in Indian situation. Very briefly one may review the situation in terms of the following:

- (i) there was no early warning to the community nor was there any preparedness on the part of the administration to respond to the impending floods,
- (ii) the immediate response from the individuals and the community brought into sharp focus the coping mechanisms which set the tone for all the subsequent relief activities,
- (iii) the nature of NGO intervention, including the mechanisms used for mobilisation, had consequences for the types of coping mechanism emerging at community level,
- (iv) the pre-disaster relationships, amongst the political parties and within the NGO sector at organisational and individual level, manifested themselves prominently, resulting in the type of polarisation and collaborative action,
- (v) non-regulated in-flow of resources and the failure of central co-ordination created a very familiar post-disaster relief scenario characterised by hyper-activity and diversion of resources.

A pre-requisite for a concerted action in a post disaster situation demands an unity of purpose and an organic unity in decision making manifested through the community dimension, as well as the organisational dimension. This is intended to be achieved through efforts towards co-ordination of various initiatives both from within and outside. This particular micro-level analysis highlights, three related aspects of a concerted action which demand our attention (a) the interface, (b) the autonomy, (c) the mobilisation.

The nature of interface, as observed, raises issues relating to the role of NGOs, political parties, and the administration vis-a-vis the community and the situational demands. This will have implications for organizational structuring.

The degree of autonomy that the post disaster situation permits, the type of autonomy that the community would like to exercise and the organisational autonomy which the sponsors would like to retain, all these will have to be synchronised and accommodated with. The significance of this dimension of autonomy, therefore, will need further discussion.

The dimension of mobilisation refers to both the human resources available at community level, the man power converging at the disaster site, as well as the material resources being mobilised through the administration and the private initiatives. However, human resources more specifically the community coping



mechanism seemed to be defining the quality and the effectiveness of material resources. It is observed that the pre disaster mobilisation efforts had a direct bearing on the level of preparedness of the community as manifested through their ability to engage in concerted action, thereby raising the question of role of various actors in community mobilisation, as an overall approach to community preparedness for post disaster response.