

Public Policy towards Disasters in India

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Abstract- India is highly prone to disasters, and the country has experienced very severe disasters at regular intervals. The devastation caused by the Latur earthquake of 1993-94, the Orissa super cyclone of 1999, the Bhuj earthquake of 2001, and the widespread drought of 2002- 03 are still etched in public memory. More recently, while the Tsunami of December 2004 shocked the nation with its massive destruction and added to the list of serious natural hazards faced by the country, the financial capital of the country, Mumbai, became a mute spectator to unprecedented misery of its people for days together in the floods of July 2005 which also exposed the acute vulnerability of the big Indian cities to the wrath of nature.

The national level disaster management plans/ policies formulated by the numerous expert committees do not seem to have translated to better management of disasters in practice. The approach to disaster management has so far been reactive responding to disasters after they occur. Not much attention has been paid to mitigation. Also, it seems that the important lessons that should have been learnt by the Government apparatus from the severe disasters in the past have been ignored, and some of the important realities in the Indian case have not got adequate emphasis from the policy makers.

When we look at the relevant policy documents in India, it emerges clearly that the financing of post-disaster relief and rehabilitation expenditures has had the major chunk in the resources allocated by the Government for management of disasters over the years. The mitigation and preparedness measures, which have been financed by the Government, are limited mainly to prevention of droughts and floods only. On the other hand, there has been explicit and very significant dependence by the States on financial resources from multilateral development agencies for mitigation and preparedness measures with regard to all kinds of natural disasters. We find that the allocation of financial resources by the Government (especially the Central Government) for long-term measures for mitigation and preparedness has been very little, even during the last decade in which India supposedly has changed its approach towards disaster management; and it reflects a very low priority

given by the policy makers in the country to long-term measures in the pre-disaster phase.

With this backdrop, the present paper makes an attempt to gauge the public policy towards disasters in India as has been evidenced over the last decade.

INTRODUCTION

“The future blue-print for disaster management in India rests on the premise that in today’s society while hazards, both natural or otherwise, are inevitable, the disasters that follow need not be so and the society can be prepared to cope with them effectively whenever they occur” says the Tenth Five Year Plan of India. While the vision reflected in the above statement is worth commending, the reality in case of India defies such optimism. Disasters have always been there since the beginning of human civilizations, but their impact on human beings has been on the rise the world over. Enormous expansion of population, industrialisation and urbanisation across the globe has, on the one hand, forced people towards habitats that are hazardous and vulnerable to disasters, and on the other, they have led to unsustainable pressures on resources causing the erosion of natural ecological balance, both of which have intensified the frequency of occurrence as well as damage caused by disasters. In fact, the costs associated with natural disasters across different countries had gone up 14-fold since the 1950s till the end of the twentieth century. A disaster, natural or man-made, can be defined as “any occurrence that causes damage, economic destruction, loss of human life, deterioration in human life, and deterioration in health and health services on a scale sufficient to warrant an extraordinary response from outside the affected community or area”. Hence, in the context of disasters, there is a pressing need to situate public policy towards threats of such magnitude. Disasters of similar nature and intensity, however, affect the developed and underdeveloped/developing countries differently in terms of the damage of property and loss

of lives caused. While the developed countries are well-equipped to cope with disasters through well-functioning disaster mitigation, preparedness and response mechanisms; the developing countries, ill-equipped in terms of each of the above three parameters, suffer most because of disasters. For instance, during the decade of the 1990s, while two-thirds of the victims of disasters came from developing countries, just two per cent were from highly developed nations. According to the World Disasters Report, 2002, “from 1992 to 2001, countries of low human development (LHD) have accounted for just one-fifth of the total number of disasters, but over half of all disaster fatalities. On an average 13 times more people die per reported disaster in low human development (LHD) countries than in countries of high human development (HHD).” While the developing countries receive greater setbacks from disasters, their resilience to cope with them is also less. The worst affected in disasters, in any country, are undoubtedly the poor and the marginalised sections of the society. Not only are they most vulnerable to losses from disasters, their ability to recover from the shock brought by a disaster is also the lowest. In the aftermath of a disaster, the deprived sections of society face an immediate and acute shortage of resources and lose their access to livelihood in many cases. In a situation where acute levels of socio-economic deprivations still exist in many countries (including India), disasters not only make lives vulnerable, they also exacerbate existing vulnerability. This is apt, perhaps even for developed nations as evidenced by the experience of recent hurricane *Katrina* in the Southern States of the U.S.A. While officially denounced, a great number of people believe that rescue and ‘curative’ action was delayed and non-committal because of larger concentration of people of colour in the affected areas (these States are also the poorest in the country). While the most affluent nation in the world has, by and large, its principal problem related to race, India’s levels of problems are compounded by simultaneous challenges of caste, class, rural-urban divide, gender and discriminations against minority groups. Thus, in a country like India, public policy towards disasters becomes one of the crucial determinants of the welfare capacity of the state. Also, disasters, natural or man-made, though specific to one region do not merely affect the people of that particular region. Loss of lives and damage

caused to property and resources of various kinds impede the socio-economic development of an entire State and, in some cases, the whole country.

The role played by the state vis-à-vis disasters could be divided into some categories, interlinked with each other, which are: Disaster Mitigation, Disaster Preparedness, Disaster Response, and Rehabilitation and Recovery. India is highly prone to disasters, and the country has experienced very severe disasters at regular intervals. The devastation caused by the Latur earthquake of 1993-94, the Orissa super cyclone of 1999, the Bhuj earthquake of 2001, and the widespread drought of 2002- 03 are still etched in public memory. More recently, while the Tsunami of December 2004 shocked the nation with its massive destruction and added to the list of serious natural hazards faced by the country, the financial capital of the country, Mumbai, became a mute spectator to unprecedented misery of its people for days together in the floods of July 2005 which also exposed the acute vulnerability of the big Indian cities to the wrath of nature. With this backdrop, the present paper makes an attempt to gauge the public policy towards disasters in India as has been evidenced over the last decade.

INDIA’S VULNERABILITY TO DISASTERS

India is vulnerable, in varying degrees, to a large number of natural as well as man-made disasters. 58.6 per cent of the landmass is prone to earthquakes of moderate to very high intensity; over 4million hectares (12 per cent of land) is prone to floods and river erosion; of the 7,516 km long coastline, close to 5,700 km is prone to cyclones and tsunamis; 68 per cent of the cultivable area is vulnerable to drought and hilly areas are at risk from landslides and avalanches. Vulnerability to disasters/emergencies of Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) origin also exists. Heightened vulnerabilities to disaster risks can be related to expanding population, urbanisation and industrialisation, development within high-risk zones, environmental degradation and climate change. In the context of human vulnerability to disasters, the economically and socially weaker segments of the population are the ones that are most seriously affected. Within the vulnerable groups, elderly persons, women, children— especially women rendered destitute, children orphaned on account of

disasters and differently able persons are exposed to higher risks.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT APPARATUS AND POLICIES IN INDIA

It is noteworthy that the United Nations' declaration of 1990-2000 as the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) was not only instrumental in bringing into sharp focus the devastations caused by natural disasters, but it also introduced a paradigm shift from focussing on post-disaster relief and reconstruction to adopting a pre-disaster pro-active approach. In May 1994, a mid-term review of the UN declaration held at Yokohama, which was attended by Governments, NGOs, scientists and representatives of business, trade and industry, concluded that:

- Disasters always affected most the poor and the socially disadvantaged people in the developing countries, owing to their higher degree of vulnerability to such situations,
- Prevention and mitigation of disasters is better than disaster response which is often executed at a very high cost and yields only some temporary relief, and that Prevention contributes to lasting improvements in safety.
- In fact, the general understanding was that while substantial progress has been made in other sectors of human development, much remains to be done towards mitigating the effect of disasters.

APPROACH

A holistic and integrated approach will be evolved towards disaster management with emphasis on building strategic partnerships at various levels. The themes underpinning the policy are: Community based DM, including last mile integration of the policy, plans and execution.

- Capacity development in all spheres.
- Consolidation of past initiatives and best practices.
- Cooperation with agencies at National and International levels.
- Multi – sectoral synergy.

The objectives of the national policy on disaster management are:

- Promoting a culture of prevention, preparedness and resilience at all levels through knowledge, innovation and education.
- Encouraging mitigation measures based on technology, traditional wisdom and environmental sustainability.
- Mainstreaming disaster management into the developmental planning process.
- Establishing institutional and techno-legal frameworks to create an enabling regulatory environment and a compliance regime.
- Ensuring efficient mechanism for identification, assessment and monitoring of disaster risks.
- Developing contemporary forecasting and early warning systems backed by responsive and fail-safe communication with information technology support.
- Promoting a productive partnership with the media to create awareness and contributing towards capacity development.
- Ensuring efficient response and relief with a caring approach towards the needs of the vulnerable sections of the society.
- Undertaking reconstruction as an opportunity to build disaster resilient structures and habitat for ensuring safer living.
- Promoting productive and proactive partnership with media in disaster management.

The subject of disaster management does not find any specific mention in any of the three lists (Union, State and Concurrent Lists) in the 7th Schedule of Indian Constitution, where subjects under the Central and State Governments as also subjects that come under both are specified. However, the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Central Government, which is the nodal Ministry for disaster management, seems to endorse the opinion that “disaster management is deemed to be a State subject”. While rescue, relief and rehabilitation in the event of a natural disaster have been considered to be the direct responsibility of the State Government concerned, the question that needs to be raised is-whether taking adequate measures for disaster mitigation and preparedness should also be deemed as the direct responsibility of the States?

Given that the States' ability to mobilise financial resources has been much less in comparison to that of

the Centre, expenditure commitments of the States have been far greater than that of the Centre, the discretion of the Centre with regard to resource mobilisation has increased in the era of economic liberalisation, and that most of the States have been facing an acute fiscal crisis since 1997-98, it is not logical to expect the States to take the major financial burden for the crucial task of managing disasters. All through the post-Independence period, States have been held primarily responsible for relief and rehabilitation activities following disasters. In 1990-91 was in fact the recognition of the inability of the States to bear the burden of relief expenditures also. Hence, the responsibility for setting up appropriate disaster management mechanisms in the country has to lie primarily with the Central Government. The country has had an integrated administrative machinery for management of disasters at the national, State, district and sub- district levels. The basic responsibility for undertaking rescue, relief and rehabilitation measures in the event of disasters has been that of the State Government concerned. The role of the Central Government has only been supportive, in terms of physical and financial resources and complementary measures in sectors such as transport, warning and inter-State movement of food grains. Relief Manuals and Codes have been available for undertaking emergency operations.

Paradigm Shift in Disaster Management(DM)

On 23 December 2005, the Government of India (GoI) took a defining step by enacting the Disaster Management Act, 2005, (hereinafter referred to as the Act) which envisaged the creation of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), headed by the Prime Minister, State Disaster Management Authorities (SDMAs) headed by the Chief Ministers, and District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs) headed by the District Collector or District Magistrate or Deputy Commissioner as the case may be, to spearhead and adopt a holistic and integrated approach to DM. There will be a paradigm shift, from the erstwhile relief-centric response to a proactive prevention, mitigation and preparedness-driven approach for conserving developmental gains and to minimise loss of life, livelihood and property.

INSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS

Disaster Management Act, 2005

The Act lays down institutional, legal, financial and coordination mechanisms at the national, state, district and local levels. These institutions are not parallel structures and will work in close harmony. The new institutional framework is expected to usher in a paradigm shift in DM from relief-centric approach to a proactive regime that lays greater emphasis on preparedness, prevention and mitigation.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK UNDER THE DM ACT

National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)

The NDMA, as the apex body for disaster management, is headed by the Prime Minister and has the responsibility for laying down policies, plans and guidelines for DM (and coordinating their enforcement and implementation for ensuring timely and effective response to disasters) . The guidelines will assist the Central Ministries, Departments and States to formulate their respective DM plans. It will approve the National Disaster Management and DM plans of the Central Ministries/Departments. It will take such other measures as it may consider necessary, for the prevention of disasters, or mitigation, or preparedness and capacity building, for dealing with a threatening disaster situation or disaster. Central ministries/ departments and State Governments will extend necessary cooperation and assistance to NDMA for carrying out its mandate. It will oversee the provision and application of funds for mitigation and preparedness measures. NDMA has the power to authorize the Departments or authorities concerned, to make emergency procurement of provisions or materials for rescue and relief in a threatening disaster situation or disaster. The general superintendence, direction and control of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) are vested in and will be exercised by the NDMA. The National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM) works within the framework of broad policies and guidelines laid down by NDMA. The NDMA is mandated to deal with all types of disasters, natural or man-made. Whereas, such other emergencies including those requiring close involvement of the security forces and/or intelligence agencies such as terrorism (counter-insurgency), law and order situation, serial bomb blasts, hijacking, air

accidents, Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) weapon systems, mine disasters, ports and harbour emergencies, forest fires, oil field fires, and oil spills will continue to be handled by the extant mechanism i.e., National Crisis Management Committee.

NDMA may, however, formulate guidelines and facilitate training and preparedness activities in respect of Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) emergencies. Cross cutting themes like medical preparedness, psycho-social care and trauma, community-based disaster preparedness, information & communication technology, training, preparedness, awareness generation etc. for natural and manmade disasters will also engage the attention of NDMA in partnership with the stakeholders concerned. Resources available with the disaster management authorities at all level, which are capable of discharging emergency support functions, will be made available to the nodal Ministries/Agencies dealing with the emergencies at times of impending disasters/disaster.

The National Executive Committee

The National Executive Committee (NEC) comprises the Union Home Secretary as the Chairperson, and the Secretaries to the GOI in the Ministries/Departments of Agriculture, Atomic Energy, Defence, Drinking Water Supply, Environment and Forests, Finance (Expenditure), Health, Power, Rural Development, Science and Technology, Space, Telecommunications, Urban Development, Water Resources and the Chief of the Integrated Defence Staff of the Chiefs of Staff Committee as members. Secretaries in the Ministry of External Affairs, Earth Sciences, Human Resource Development, Mines, Shipping, Road Transport & Highways and Secretary, NDMA will be special invitees to the meetings of the NEC. The NEC is the executive committee of the NDMA, and is mandated to assist the NDMA in the discharge of its functions and also ensure compliance of the directions issued by the Central Government. NEC is to coordinate the response in the event of any threatening disaster situation or disaster. NEC will prepare the National Plan for Disaster Management based on the National Policy on Disaster Management. NEC will monitor the implementation of guidelines issued by NDMA. It will also perform such other functions as may be prescribed

by the Central Government in consultation with the NDMA.

State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA)

At the State level, the SDMA, headed by the Chief Minister, will lay down policies and plans for DM in the State. It will, inter alia approve the State Plan in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the NDMA, coordinate the implementation of the State Plan, recommend provision of funds for mitigation and preparedness measures and review the developmental plans of the different departments of the State to ensure integration of prevention, preparedness and mitigation measures.

The State Government shall constitute a State Executive Committee (SEC) to assist the SDMA in the performance of its functions. The SEC will be headed by the Chief Secretary to the State Government and coordinate and monitor the implementation of the National Policy, the National Plan and the State Plan. The SEC will also provide information to the NDMA relating to different aspects of DM.

District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA)

The DDMA will be headed by the District Collector, Deputy Commissioner or District Magistrate as the case may be, with the elected representative of the local authority as the Co-Chairperson. DDMA will act as the planning, coordinating and implementing body for DM at District level and take all necessary measures for the purposes of DM in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the NDMA and SDMA. It will, inter alia prepare the District DM plan for the district and monitor the implementation of the National Policy, the State Policy, the National Plan, the State Plan and the District Plan. DDMA will also ensure that the guidelines for prevention, mitigation, preparedness and response measures laid down by the NDMA and the SDMA are followed by all Departments of the State Government at the District level and the local authorities in the district.

Local Authorities

For the purpose of this policy, local authorities would include Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI), Municipalities, District and Cantonment Boards and Town Planning Authorities which control and manage civic services. These bodies will ensure capacity building of their officers and employees for managing

disasters, carry out relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities in the affected areas and will prepare DM Plans in consonance with guidelines of the NDMA, SDMAs and DDMA. Specific institutional framework for dealing with disaster management issues in mega cities will be put in place.

National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM)

The NIDM, in partnership with other research institutions has capacity development as one of its major responsibilities, along with training, research, documentation and development of a national level information base. It will network with other knowledge-based institutions. and function within the broad policies and guidelines laid down by the NDMA. It will organize training of trainers, DM officials and other stakeholders. The NIDM will strive to emerge as a 'Centre of Excellence' in the field of Disaster Management.

National Disaster Response Force (NDRF)

For the purpose of specialised response to a threatening disaster situation or disasters/emergencies both natural and man-made such as those of Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear origin, the Act has mandated the constitution of a National Disaster Response Force (NDRF). The general superintendence, direction and control of this force shall be vested in and exercised by the NDMA and the command and supervision of the Force shall vest in an officer to be appointed by the Central Government as the Director General of Civil Defence and National Disaster Response Force. Presently, the NDRF comprises eight battalions and further expansion may be considered in due course. These battalions will be positioned at different locations as may be required. NDRF units will maintain close liaison with the designated State Governments and will be available to them in the event of any serious threatening disaster situation. While the handling of natural disasters rests with all the NDRF battalions, four battalions will also be equipped and trained to respond to situations arising out of Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear emergencies. Training centres will be set up by respective para-military forces to train personnel from NDRF battalions of respective Forces and will also meet the training requirement of State/UT Disaster Response Forces. The NDRF units will also impart basic training to all the stakeholders identified by the

State Governments in their respective locations. Further, a National Academy will be set up to provide training for trainers in disaster management and to meet related national and international commitments. Experience in major disasters in the last decade has clearly established the need for pre-positioning of some essential reserves at crucial locations, including some for the high altitude areas. These reserves are intended to augment the resources at the State level. Mitigation reserves will be placed at the disposal of National Disaster Response Force for enhancing their emergency responding capabilities for assisting the State Governments during a disaster or disaster like situation.

EXISTING INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Cabinet Committee on Management of Natural Calamities (CCMNC) and the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS)

CCMNC had been constituted to oversee all aspects relating to the management of natural calamities including assessment of the situation and identification of measures and programmes considered necessary to reduce its impact, monitor and suggest long term measures for prevention of such calamities, formulate and recommend programmes for public awareness for building up society's resilience to them. The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) deals with issues related to defence of the country, law & order and internal security, policy matters concerning foreign affairs that have internal or external security implications and economic and political issues impinging on national security.

High Level Committee (HLC)

In the case of calamities of severe nature, Inter-Ministerial Central Teams are deputed to the affected states for assessment of damage caused by the calamity and the amount of relief assistance required. The IMG, headed by the Union Home Secretary, scrutinises the assessment made by the Central Teams and recommends the quantum of assistance to be provided to the States from the National Calamity Contingency Fund (NCCF). However, assessment of damages by IMG in respect of drought, hail-storm, and pest attack will continue to be headed by the Secretary, M/o Agriculture & Cooperation. The HLC comprising Finance Minister, as Chairman and the Home

Minister, Agriculture Minister & Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission as members approves the central assistance to be provided to the affected States based on the recommendations of the IMG. The constitution and composition of HLC may vary from time to time. The Vice Chairman, NDMA will be a special invitee to the HLC.

Central Government

In accordance with the provisions of the Act, the Central Government will take all such measures, as it deems necessary or expedient, for the purpose of DM and will coordinate actions of all agencies. The Central Ministries and Departments will take into consideration the recommendations of the State Government departments while deciding upon the various pre-disaster requirements and for deciding upon the measures for prevention and mitigation of disaster. It will ensure that Central Ministries and Departments integrate measures for the prevention and mitigation of disasters into their developmental plans and projects, make appropriate allocation of funds for pre-disaster requirements and take necessary measures for preparedness and to effectively respond to any disaster situation or disaster. It will have the power to issue directions to NEC, State Governments/SDMAs, SECs or any of their officers or employees, to facilitate or assist in DM, and these bodies and officials shall be bound to comply with such directions. The Central Government will extend cooperation and assistance to State Governments as required by them or otherwise deemed appropriate by it. It will take measures for the deployment of the Armed Forces for disaster management. The Central Government will also facilitate coordination with the UN Agencies, international organisations and Governments of foreign countries in the field of disaster management. Ministry of External Affairs in coordination with MHA will facilitate external coordination/cooperation.

Role of Central Ministries and Departments

As disaster management is a multi-disciplinary process, all Central Ministries and Departments will have a key role in the field of disaster management. The nodal Ministries and Departments of Government of India (i.e. the Ministries of Agriculture, Atomic Energy, Civil Aviation, Earth Sciences, Environment and Forests, Home Affairs, Health, Mines, Railways,

Space, Water Resources etc.) will continue to address specific disasters as assigned to them.

National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC)

The NCMC, comprising high level officials of the GoI headed by the Cabinet Secretary, will continue to deal with major crises which have serious or national ramifications. It will be supported by the Crisis Management Groups (CMG) of the Central nodal Ministries and assisted by NEC as may be necessary. The Secretary, NDMA may be a member of this Committee.

State Governments

The primary responsibility for disaster management rests with the States. The institutional mechanism put in place at the Centre, State and District levels will help the States manage disasters in an effective manner.

The Act mandates the State Governments inter alia to take measures for preparation of Disaster Management Plans, integration of measures for prevention of disasters or mitigation into development plans, allocation of funds, establishment of early warning systems, assist the Central Government and other agencies in various aspects of Disaster Management.

District Administration

At the district level, District Disaster Management Authorities (DDMAs), will act as the district planning, coordinating and implementing body for disaster management and will take all measures for the purposes of disaster management in the district in accordance with the guidelines laid by NDMA and SDMA.

Management of Disasters impacting more than one State

At times, the impact of disasters occurring in one State may spread over to the areas of other States. Similarly, preventive measures in respect of certain disasters, such as floods, etc may be required to be taken in one State, as the impact of their occurrence may affect another. The administrative hierarchy of the country is organized into the national, state and district level administrations. This presents some difficulties in respect of disasters impacting more than one State. Management of such situations calls for a coordinated approach, which can respond to a range of issues quite

different from those that normally present themselves – before, during and after the event. NDMA will encourage identification of such situations and promote the establishment of mechanisms on the lines of Mutual Aid Agreement for coordinated strategies for dealing with them by the states and central ministries, departments and other agencies concerned.

OTHER IMPORTANT INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Armed Forces

Conceptually, the Armed Forces are called upon to assist the civil administration only when the situation is beyond their coping capability. In practice, however, the armed forces form an important part of the Government's response capacity and are immediate responders in all serious disaster situations. On account of their vast potential to meet any adverse challenge, speed of operational response and the resources and capabilities at their disposal, the armed forces have historically played a major role in emergency support functions. These include communication, search and rescue operations, health and medical facilities, and transportation, especially in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. The air and heli-lift and movement of assistance to neighbouring countries primarily fall within the expertise and domain of the armed forces. The armed forces will participate in imparting training to trainers and DM managers, especially in CBRN aspects, heli-insertion, high altitude rescue, watermanship and training of paramedics. At the national level, the Chief of the Integrated Defence Staff and the Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee has already been included in the NEC. Similarly, at the State and District levels, the local representatives of the armed forces may be included in their executive committees to ensure closer coordination and cohesion.

Central Para Military Forces

The Central Paramilitary forces, which are also the armed forces of the Union, play a key role at the time of immediate response to disasters. Besides contributing to the NDRF, they will develop adequate disaster management capability within their own forces and respond to disasters which may occur in the areas where they are posted. The local representatives

of the CPMFs may be co-opted/invited in the executive committee at the State level.

State Police Forces and Fire Services

The State Police forces and the Fire Services are crucial immediate responders to disasters. The police force will be trained and the Fire Services upgraded to acquire multi-hazard rescue capability.

Civil Defence and Home Guards

The mandate of the Civil Defence and the Home Guards will be redefined to assign an effective role in the field of disaster management. They will be deployed for community preparedness and public awareness. A culture of voluntary reporting to duty stations in the event of any disasters will be promoted.

State Disaster Response Force (SDRF)

States will be encouraged to create response capabilities from within their existing resources. To start with, each state may aim at equipping and training one battalion equivalent force. They will also include women members for looking after the needs of women and children. NDRF battalions and their training institutions will assist the States/UTs in this effort. The States/UTs will also be encouraged to include DM training in their respective Police Training Colleges and basic and in-service courses, for gazetted and non-gazetted officer.

Role of National Cadet Corps (NCC), National Service Scheme (NSS) and Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS)

Potential of these youth based organisations will be optimised to support all community based initiatives and DM training would be included in their programmes.

International Cooperation

Disasters do not recognise geographical boundaries. Major disasters may often simultaneously affect several countries. It will be the national endeavour to develop close cooperation and coordination at the international level in all spheres of DM.

Financial Arrangements

Approach

In order to bring about a paradigm shift from the relief-centric approach to the one covering prevention,

preparedness and mitigation, efforts would be made to mainstream prevention and mitigation measures into the developmental plans and programmes by enlisting cooperation from all stakeholders.

DM to be inbuilt in Developmental Plans

NDMA will ensure mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction in developmental agenda in all existing and new developmental programmes and projects shall incorporate disaster resilient specifications in the design and construction. The Planning Commission will give due weight age to these factors while allocating resources.

National Disaster Response and Mitigation Funds

A National Disaster Response Fund may be constituted as mandated in the Act. The National Disaster Response Fund will be applied by the National Executive Committee (NEC) towards meeting the expenses for emergency response, relief and rehabilitation, in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Central Government in consultation with the NDMA. The proposal of merger of National Calamity Contingency Fund (NCCF) with National Disaster Response Fund shall be as recommended by the Finance Commission from time to time.

Similarly, as mandated by the Act, the National Disaster Mitigation Fund (NDMF) may be created for projects exclusively for the purpose of mitigation. NDMF shall be applied by the NDMA and shall be as recommended by the Finance Commission from time to time.

Techno-Financial Regime

Considering that the assistance provided by the Government for rescue, relief and rehabilitation and reconstruction needs, cannot compensate for massive losses on account of disasters, new financial tools such as catastrophic risk financing, risk insurance, catastrophe bonds, micro-finance and insurance etc will be promoted with innovative fiscal incentives to cover such losses of individuals, communities and the corporate sector. In this regard, Environmental Relief Fund under Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991, enacted for providing relief to chemical accident victims is worth mentioning. Some financial practices such as disaster risk insurance, micro-finance and micro-insurance, warranty of newly constructed

houses and structures and linking safe construction with home loans will be considered for adoption.

Concluding Remarks

Thus, as regards management of disasters, at most levels, focus of the Government machinery in India has been on rescue and relief operations only. The Government machinery lacks proper training in disaster management and it is ill equipped to tackle natural disasters through effective mitigation and preparedness measures. While the crucial aspects of coping with natural disasters, like, disaster mitigation and preparedness, have always been ignored, even the post-disaster response of the state through rescue, relief and rehabilitation measures have been found inadequate most of the time.

Over the last decade, activities related to disaster management at the planning/ policy-making level in the country have expanded significantly. However, very few would argue that the vulnerability of the country (or most of its regions) to losses from natural disasters have reduced over this period of time. The national level disaster management plans/ policies formulated by the numerous expert committees do not seem to have translated to better management of disasters in practice. In terms of priorities for disaster management, we find that the allocation of financial resources by the Government (especially the Central Government) for long-term measures for mitigation and preparedness has been very little, even during the last decade in which India supposedly has changed its approach towards disaster management; and it reflects a very low priority for long-term measures in the pre-disaster phase. In the recent guidelines of the Central Government to the States, we find a mandate for giving higher priority to those ongoing Government-funded projects which have a potential for disaster risk reduction, and inclusion of disaster mitigation elements into the ongoing projects where it is feasible to do so, however, there is no provision for channelizing additional Government funds into projects meant for disaster mitigation. Also, there exists a strong case for mobilising financial resources for disaster management from the corporate sector, however, it requires a strong political will and commitment on the part of the government for prevention of and mitigating losses from disasters.

Finally, while the initiative for legislative backing is commendable, the actual commitment of the present Government to setting up a comprehensive and effective disaster management apparatus in the country would reflect from – its willingness to channelize substantial financial resources for this purpose and its ability to learn from the experiences of the past disasters.

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