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ROLE OF NGOs IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY



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Abstract

Disasters are either natural, such as floods, droughts, cyclones and earthquakes, or human-made such as riots, conflicts, refugee situations, and others like fire, epidemics, industrial accidents, and environmental fallouts. Often, the difference between them is marginal. Globally, natural disasters account for nearly 80 percent of all disaster-affected people. NGOs are organizations that are nonprofit making, voluntary and independent of government, engaged in activities concerning various societal and developmental issues. The role of the NGO's during a disaster is to have quick response and to try and save as many lives as it can with the given funds. NGO's have a faster

response to situations because it does not need to clear paperwork. The findings, the people of the disaster affected area should inform the details of the disaster sufficiently ahead. Friends and relatives followed by electronic and print media were the better source of information about occurrence of disasters. The study also found that the role of the NGOs in disaster management were providing relief materials, involvement in rescue operations, arranging temporary shelters; organize health camp and developing communication facilities. NGO also provided training and education to the children.

Keyword

Disaster, Cyclones, NGOs, Epidemics etc.

INTRODUCTION

I) Introduction :

Disaster management and its fully functioning infrastructure is an indispensable asset within any modern society and country looking to protect the lives and integrity of the general populous and the surrounding flora and fauna. Apart from the need for such a unit, there should be the willingness of the people to help their fellow citizens in their time of pain and suffering. Most NGOs are normal citizens concerned about the welfare of the people and the ecosystem around them. NGOs have become a huge part of the Indian development infrastructure as the country suffers from problems like poverty, unemployment, lack of education, natural and man-made disasters, etc. The need for such NGOs arises from the massive disparity between urban and rural lifestyles.

The activities and anxieties of voluntary agencies turned to relief measures during two successive drought years in India in the mid-sixties. Flood, famine and cyclone relief programmes had been undertaken even earlier too, but nothing was as large and sustained as efforts mounted to fight the famine in Bihar and elsewhere. This was also a land mark in the scale of foreign funding, entry of foreign NGOs and other forms of international support. Contributions in the form of food grain, milk-powder, clothes, medical supplies, drilling rigs, etc., started pouring in the large quantities. Eventually, the Government decided to channelize these donations through an official “Freedom from Hunger” campaign office in the Ministry of Food and Agriculture. This later on became the “People’s Action for Development in India (PADI) an official agency with non official representation, for allocating the rupee counterpart of foreign donations in kind – food grain and other food supplies, to Indian field agencies on the basis of approved programme.

The disturbing fact is that even in a region like South Asia, where poverty, deprivation, and death due to disasters are a common enough feature of life, India remains the worst-affected country. In fact, the frequency of all categories of disasters, varying from epidemics to road accidents and perennial droughts and floods, is escalating, resulting in a multifold growth of injuries, disabilities, diseases, and deaths, disrupting life-supporting systems, and adding to the

health, social and economic burden of an already impoverished people. In India, between 1988 and 1997, disasters killed 5,116 people and affected 24.79 million every year in India. In 1988, 9,846 people died and 34.11 million people were affected by disasters. cyclonic Storm Aila wrecked havoc on the coastal South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal on May 25, 2009. Aila was the second tropical storm formed in Northern Indian Ocean in 2009. According to the Government data more than 11, 00,000 people who fled (their) homes had been sheltered in several hundred shelters in eight coastal districts so far. The Government survey estimated that the total Aila affected areas were: Blocks 111, Municipality 39, Villages 15401, and Population 4,53,8018.00 (GOI 2009). The purpose of NGOs is not to supplant the governmental relief agencies but to act as a coordinating mechanism between the government apparatus and the affected populace. The role of NGOs assumes significance in view of their wider engagement in civic and development initiatives. Experience and study tell us that the actual figures greatly exceed the documented ones.

II) Objectives of the Study :

- 1) *Role of NGOs*
- 2) *Classification of Disasters –*
- 3) *Needed for Stronger GO-NGO Collaboration for Disaster Management -*
- 4) *Peoples Participation -*
- 5) *Commitment To Sustainability -*
- 6) *Eco-efficiency –*

1) Role of NGOs -

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Private Voluntary Organisations (PVOs) are by definition non-profit making organisations. Some are religious, others secular, some are national, others of foreign origin. However, they all have one thing in common -their aim -alleviation of human sufferings and development. It must be borne in mind that NGOs/ PVOs do not mean either large private foundations or private firms, which are in search of profit, though they too are clearly both private and non-governmental organisations. NGOs and PVOs mobilise the enthusiasm and commitment of volunteers for disaster mitigation on one hand and for developmental activities on the other.

Natural disasters such as famine, earthquake, drought and floods and man-made disasters such as riots and fires, move them into action. They also swing into action through educational efforts to draw the attention of the public to the crying needs of the society such as arresting population explosion, disaster preparedness, environmental protection etc. These organisations are, however, best known for their relief and rescue activities. As against this, it is observed that the Government finds it very difficult to manage and mitigate disasters; as it tends to take upon itself many responsibilities that could have been better left to agencies like NGOs and PVOs, who could handle the job. In addition to NGOs, which can be treated as an organised sector, there is an unorganised sector of the local level individual experts that could also help in the cause of disaster management and sustainable development.

Any Government, however well-equipped it might be, cannot all alone handle the problems of disaster management and economic development. Its efforts have to be supplemented by social, educational, professional and voluntary organisations, which possess tremendous potential and therefore can help in large scale peoples' involvement. Exploitation of full potential of these organisation has, however, remained untapped so far, mainly on account of lack of coordination and inspiration. Role of civil society and professional societies have gained paramount importance in the present decade.

2) Classification of Disasters -

Definitions and categorization of disasters vary according to geosectors, the geographical and social settings in which they are located. Every new disaster adds a dimension to human suffering. The realities that confront disaster-affected communities in developing countries often challenge conventional Western academic definitions. In the absence of 'official' definitions, observations from the field suggest that disasters be classified under three broad categories : natural, human-made, and other disasters. Amongst these, there are the major disasters and the minor disasters. It is not just the damage-destruction potential that defines a disaster as major or minor : categorization under the former may just be result of being comparatively will discussed and reported by the media. For a large number of people in several states of India, the distinction is academic: for them, most disasters are major and occur constantly.

CLASSIFICATIONS OF NGO's

NGO's can, be broadly classified as under:

- a) *Educational institutions*
- b) *Voluntary agencies*
- c) *Multi-disciplinary societies*
- d) *Professional societies*
- e) *Micro-specialised societies*

a) Educational Institutions:

The country today has a largest network of educational institutions like schools, colleges, universities, research centres, etc., functioning in the non-governmental sector side by side with the government institutions. These institutions however have so far not played any significant role at the local level planning except for some institutions associated for conducting services for Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP). They have remained unconcerned and uninvolved with the social problems related to disaster management and sustainable development. Some of the social work that many schools take up are also mainly in the field of campaign for literacy, hygiene, etc. This large population of educated youth could be used in educating the public on disaster mitigation, availability of natural resources, developmental programmes, environmental impact assessment and need for conservation as a part of their school curriculum either under special social service or socially useful productive works (SUPW). Participation of over a million student volunteers apart from NCC, National Service Scheme, Nehru Yuvak Kendras, Bharat Scouts and Guides can make success of rescue, relief and rehabilitation in disaster besides creating proper public awareness.

b) Voluntary Agencies:

There are many voluntary agencies in the country today engaged in the task of relief work and rural development. The earliest among these were the Sewagram set up by Mahatma Gandhi and Shantiniketan set up by Rabinder Nath Tagore. These agencies due to their better understanding of local needs, problems and resources, can evolve new programmes, strategies and approaches through local people in fulfilling many social needs without much expenditure.

These agencies are of different sizes. Some of the larger agencies which cover from 40 to 100 villages through one or more programmes are Sewa Mandir, Kishore Bharti, Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, Agrindees, Smanvaya Ashram and Tamulpur Anchalic Gram Dan Sangh, Xavier Institute of Social Services.

c) Multi-disciplinary Societies:

These societies are those which have among their members people from all walks of life rather than a particular profession who have direct or indirect interest in disaster mitigation, developmental projects and environmental management. Some of such notable multi-disciplinary societies in India are:

1. *Assam Science Society*
2. *Marathi Vighyan Parishad*
3. *Kerala Sahitya Parishad*
4. *Indian Association for Environment Management*
5. *Indian Institute of Public Administration*
6. *Indian Environment Congress Association*
7. *Indian Society of Training and Development*
8. *Industrial & Chambers Federations like ASSOCHAM, CII, FICCI, PHDCCI*
9. *Institute of Directors*
10. *Society for Environmental Conservation*
11. *World Environment Foundation*

These societies are well organised and have been successfully carrying out seminars, workshops, exhibitions, etc. for dissemination and propagation of knowledge and have many eminent people amongst their members. They are capable of taking up for study to advise on various problems and projects for disaster mitigation. These societies not only create suitable mass awareness but also deliberate upon to evolve consensus on future strategy in planning and tender suitable advice to the government at crucial times.

d) Professional Societies:

Professional societies and institutions are those whose aims & objectives relate to a

specific profession and their activities connected to the development in the concerned discipline.

Some of the prominent Indian institutions/societies are:

1. *Computer Society of India*
2. *Confederation of Tourism Professionals of India*
3. *Engineering Council of India*
4. *Indian Medical Association*
5. *Indian National Science Academy*
6. *Institution of Engineers (India)*
7. *Indian Society for Technical Education*
8. *Institute of Cost Works Accountants*
9. *Institute of Chartered Accountants*
10. *Indian Economists Association*
11. *Indian Law Association*
12. *Indian National Academy of Engineering*
13. *Indian Council of Arbitration*
14. *Indian Society of Valuers*
15. *National Academy of Agricultural Sciences*

The membership of these societies is limited mainly to the related professions. These societies are highly technical and have eminent scientists, engineers, doctors, economists, lawyers, chartered accountants, tourism professionals etc. as their members. Their opinion carries a lot of weight and often influences the policy decisions of the government. They however should gradually broaden their objectives with a view to take up activities involving general welfare of the society, particularly for disaster mitigation and sustainable economic development.

e) Micro-specialised Societies:

The emphasis and need of micro-specialisation in various fields of engineering, science, agriculture, medicine and surgery, town planning, architecture, public administration, etc., have given birth to many professional societies. Their membership and activities are limited to a particular functional area of that profession. Such societies have many prominent experts as their members who strive hard to keep them abreast of the state of art in various challenging topics of

that specialisation. The societies in this group deliberate and publish papers covering research and developmental activities belonging to that micro profession. They can render considerable help in promoting awareness and advice to government on specific projects and problems of their concern.

3) Needed for Stronger GO-NGO Collaboration for Disaster Management:

- State and NGOs should overcome their historical differences; see their respective roles as mutually supplementary and not as competing alternatives (John Clark, 1993); and work towards greater establishing greater synergy in efforts for optimal use of resources;
- Make efforts at information sharing and social audit to strengthen transparency and accountability, which would raise their credibility and prepare ground for mutual respect and collaboration;
- Set minimum parameters for humanitarian aid and standardise people's rights and entitlements to rule out confusion among NGOs and with the government;
- Prepare adequate data base on NGO skills, capacities, resources and needs so that the government could identify support NGOs who would play a role in strengthening skills and capacities of grassroots NGOs in disaster management;
- Take steps to bridge 'learning gaps' by documenting disaster experiences and successful response stories for wider dissemination among people;
- NGOs should engage in issues-based advocacy and the government encourage the same to strengthen disaster preparedness and reduction initiatives;
- NGOs should take steps to strengthen alliances and networking amongst them in order to scale up their initiatives in disaster management;
- Finally, NGOs should bring in changes their governance structure in order to strengthen their representative character and enhance their credibility and institutional stature in eyes of people and the government.

4) Peoples Participation -

Let us appreciate that disaster management and ecological degradation cannot be taken care of by a few experts and government agencies. Every individual has some role to play for sustainable development in a country like India. Proper orientation of people's mind is a pre-

requisite in this task. The common man's mind is preoccupied with the problems of hunger and drinking water. He is too busy fighting with the vagaries of floods during monsoon and droughts during dry season.

Three legged system for sustainable development should be based on bringing awareness among people, continuous monitoring and interdisciplinary research and implementation of such findings. This would require close cooperation between government agencies and non-governmental organisations. A net work of environment awareness programme should include collection of information, analysis, evaluation and documentation followed by dissemination of information through lecturers, seminars etc. Hence, people's active involvement and suitable changes in their habits are of paramount importance for sustainability of economic developmental projects.

5) Commitment To Sustainability -

Sustainable development should be regarded as a fundamental component of social responsibility, sound business practice and natural resource management. Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development requires the integration of three components – economic development, social development and environmental protection – as interdependent, mutually reinforcing pillars. Eradicating poverty, changing unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, and protecting and managing the natural resource base underpinning economic and social development are overarching objectives of, and essential requirements for sustainable development. Sustainable development is the collective responsibility of government, business, civil society, consumers and individuals. It is committed to working cooperatively with these sectors in achieving sustainable outcomes. We should care for the values of eco-efficiency and a precautionary approach to environmental management.

6) Eco-efficiency -

We should support the opportunities to create more value with less environmental impact through the concept of eco-efficiency. Eco-efficiency is founded on the idea that becoming more efficient makes good business sense and is concerned with three broad objectives:

- Reducing the consumption of resources
- Reducing the impact on nature
- Increasing product or service value

III) Conclusion -

It is a challenge before us where the services of thousands of young men and women - highly qualified, with professional knowledge and commitment - who, presently, do-not fit in the existing governmental structure, can be utilised for the cause of disaster management and sustainable development. Professional societies and voluntary organisations can play a vital role in the preparedness, mitigation and management of natural disasters and optimum development of natural resources with due care of environmental management. Environment is either science or engineering, which can - not be so well understood by novelists, journalists and self- styled activists. Such persons repeatedly use media to create fantasies since they have excellent command on language, media relationship and have nothing else to do except whole hearted full time tirade against large river valley projects, on many shifting grounds. Efforts of few non-professional activists in blocking large number of infrastructural projects should be curbed while replicating excellent examples of careful sustainable models like Delhi Metros, large number of river valley projects and planned cities like Chandigarh. It is also essential that water and energy sensitive planning is undertaken for cities and new urban centres.

We should promote greater consideration of environmental, social and economic aspects in the sustainability assessment of new infrastructural projects and the management and operation of existing schemes. Thorough sustainability assessments should ensure that detrimental social and environmental impacts are avoided, mitigated or compensated and positive outcomes are maximized. Of necessity, the principles are generic since each particular development project will have its own unique set of circumstances influenced by scale, geographic location, social, legal and political constraints. We must remember that India has to support more than 1/6th of the world's population and 1/6th world's cattle, on just 1/50th of global land; with meager 1/25th of the world's water resources. In India, 80% of all diseases and over 1/3rd of deaths are caused due to contaminated water. World Bank has estimated that water pollution accounts for about 60% of the major annual environmental costs in India.

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