PRINCIPLES OF DISASTER REPORTING: HANDBOOK

THE A-F AND S OF REPORTING ACROSS THE DISASTER CYCLE

Preparing Long Term Training and Capacity Building Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction in India, under NCRMP

2014

Submitted to

nidm
Towards disaster free India

Submitted by

seeds TECHNICAL

Knowledge Links
Private Limited

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

UNDERSTANDING DISASTERS 2

DISASTER TERMINOLOGY 3

DISASTER CONCEPTS 15

ADMINISTRATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK 19

MEDIA'S ROLE 23

KEY MESSAGES 24

PRINCIPLES OF DISASTER REPORTING 25

ACCURACY 26

BALANCE 29

CONSISTENCY AND COLLABORATION 33

DIGNITY 35

ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT 37

FOLLOW-UP 40

SAFETY 42

IMPORTANT CONTACTS 44

INTRODUCTION

The media plays a critical role in informing the public during disasters and in promoting risk reduction behaviour during peace time. However, tight deadlines and the 24-hour news cycle amplify the pressure and the hunger for 'exclusive' updates. Images of death, disaster and destruction are powerful. So while journalists, photo-journalists and increasingly citizen journalists are tasked with providing the public with quick and accurate information as it develops; the reality is that it is usually only the dramatic components of disasters that make the front pages.

Reporting has also generally been confined to during and just after a disaster event (response and early recovery). There is little, if any, coverage, of risk reduction aspects during non-disaster times. Part of the limiting factor is the comparative unawareness of people on preventive and mitigative strategies and the linkages to broader stories.

This handbook is structured around understanding disasters and seven vital principles that influence a disaster story. It is meant as a reference that can be used in conjunction with the Principle of Disaster Reporting guidelines.

This handbook references GIZ's Reporting Disaster and Disaster Preparedness Handbook and UNISDR's Disaster through a Different Lens.

UNDERSTANDING DISASTERS

DISASTER TERMINOLOGY

GENERAL DISASTER - RELATED TERMS

Adaptation: The adjustment in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climatic effects to moderate harm or exploit beneficial opportunities.

Assessment: A study or investigation in a target area to collect information on current conditions, to determine the extent of damage for the purpose of recommending an appropriate response or action.

Building code: A set of ordinances or regulations and associated standards intended to control aspects of the design, construction, materials, alteration and occupancy of structures that are necessary to ensure human safety and welfare, including resistance to collapse and damage.

Climate Change

The Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) defines climate change as: “a change in the state of the climate that can be identified (e.g., by using statistical tests) by changes in the mean and/or the variability of its properties, and that persists for an extended period, typically decades or longer. Climate change may be due to natural internal processes or external forcing or to persistent anthropogenic changes in the composition of the atmosphere or in land use”.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) defines climate change as “a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods”.

Disaster risk: The potential disaster losses, in terms of lives, health status, livelihoods, assets and services, which could occur to a particular community or a society over some specified future time period.

Disaster risk management: The systematic process of using administrative directives, organisations and operational skills and capacities to implement strategies, policies and improved coping capacities in order to lessen the adverse impacts of hazards and the possibility of disaster.

Disaster risk reduction: The concept and practice of reducing disaster risks through systematic efforts to analyse and manage the causal factors of disasters, including through reduced exposure to hazards, lessened vulnerability of people and property, wise management of land and the environment, and improved preparedness for adverse events.

Food Security: Access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. This includes the requirements of adequate supply, stable supply and access to the supply (including adequate consumption, adequate income in relation to food prices and access to employment).

Mitigation has different meanings for practitioners in the climate change and disaster-management communities, often leading to confusion. For disaster management, mitigation focuses on structural and non-structural measures undertaken to limit the adverse impact of natural hazards, environmental degradation and technological hazards.

Preparedness activities contribute to the pre-planned, timely and effective response of individuals and communities to reduce the impact of a natural hazard and deal with the consequences of a potential disaster.

Prevention integrates all the activities to provide outright avoidance of the adverse impact of hazards and the means to minimise related environmental, technological and biological disasters.

Recovery consists of decisions and actions taken after a disaster to restore or improve the pre-disaster living conditions of the stricken community.

Vulnerability: The extent to which an individual, community, sub-group structure, service or geographic area is likely to be damaged or disrupted by the impact of a particular hazard. Thereby, vulnerability is the degree to which someone or something can be affected by a particular hazard and depends on a number of factors and processes:

- ***Physical*** (unstable locations, closer proximity to hazards, fragile unprotected houses).
- ***Economic*** (no productive assets, limited income earning opportunities, poor pay, single income revenue, no savings and insurance).

- ***Social*** (low status in society, gender relations, fewer decision-making possibilities, oppressive formal and informal institutional structures, and political, economic and social hierarchies).
- ***Psychological*** (fears instigated by religious and other belief systems, ideologies, political pressures, mental illness).
- ***Physiological*** (status in life – young, old, adolescent, pregnant, lactating mothers, chronic illness, disability, exposure to sexual violence and harassment, HIV/Aids and other infections).
- ***Environmental*** (climate change, exposure to natural disasters, human health, agriculture & fisheries, desertification, biodiversity).[1]

Vulnerability Analysis: The process of estimating the vulnerability to potential disaster hazards of specific at-risk elements.

FLOOD

Flash floods result from intense storms or cloudbursts that drop large amounts of rain within a short time in a specific region or its upstream catchment area. They can also result from the sudden release of water from dams. Flash floods usually occur with little to no warning and can reach full peak in just a few minutes.

Coastal floods usually occur along coastal areas. When there are hurricanes and tropical storms that produce heavy rains or giant tidal waves created by volcanoes or earthquakes, ocean water can be driven onto coastal areas.

River floods are the most common type of flooding. When the actual amount of water in a river is larger than the channel can hold, it overflows its banks. This may be caused by a breach in a dam, snow melt or heavy monsoon rain.

Urban flooding is caused due to un-even distribution of rain fall coupled with mindless urbanisation, encroaching upon and filling up natural drainage channels and urban lakes to use the high-value urban land for buildings.[2]

[1] http://www.sopac.org/index.php/environmental-vulnerability-index
[2] http://nidm.gov.in/idmc/Proceedings/Flood/B2%20-%2036.pdf

Most flood related deaths are due to flash floods, building collapse and electrocution. Just six inches of moving flood water can knock a person down.

LANDSLIDE

A geological phenomenon which includes a wide range of ground movement such as rock falls, failure of slopes and shallow debris flows.

Landslides are usually caused by rain, snow thaws or other forces increasing the top material weight. They can also be triggered by earthquakes or crashing waves. Underground landslides called submarine landslides cause tidal waves and damage to coastal areas.

In fragile hillsides and ecologically sensitive areas, even unmindful road development can be a trigger for landslides. Hillsides are dislodged during the process and trigger slides that keep growing with time. Deforestation further loosens the soil, leading to increased erosion and greater chances of landslides during rains or earthquakes.

EARTHQUAKE

The shaking, rolling or sudden shock of the earth's surface. Earthquakes happen along fault lines in the earth's crust.

Aftershocks: Follow-up earthquakes that occur after the first earthquake and are usually smaller than the first one.

MEASURING EARTHQUAKES

Modified Mercalli Scale: The Modified Mercalli Scale measure the intensity of an earthquake (its effect on the Earth's surface). It is based on observation of effects, rather than mathematics.

Richter Scale: The Richter magnitude scale (often shortened to Richter scale) was developed to assign a single number to quantify the energy released during an earthquake. It was created by Charles F. Richter in 1935.

The scale is a base-10 logarithmic scale. The magnitude is defined as the logarithm of the ratio of the amplitude of waves measured by a seismograph to arbitrary small amplitude. An earthquake that measures 5.0

on the Richter scale has a shaking amplitude 10 times larger than one that measures 4.0, and corresponds to a 31.6 times larger release of energy.

Magnitude (Richter scale)	Intensity (Modified Mercalli scale)	Typical Observations of MM scale
1.0 - 3.0	**I**	I. Not felt except by a very few under especially favourable conditions.
3.0 - 3.9	**II - III**	II. Felt only by a few persons at rest, especially on upper floors of buildings. III. Felt quite noticeably by persons indoors, especially on upper floors of buildings. Many people do not recognise it as an earthquake. Standing motor cars may rock slightly. Vibrations similar to the passing of a truck.
4.0 - 4.9	**IV - V**	IV. Felt indoors by many, outdoors by few during the day. At night, some awakened. Dishes, windows, doors disturbed; walls make cracking sound. Sensation like heavy truck striking building. Standing motor cars rocked noticeably. V. Felt by nearly everyone; many awakened. Some dishes, windows broken. Unstable objects overturned. Pendulum clocks may stop.
5.0 - 5.9	**VI - VII**	VI. Felt by all, many frightened. Some heavy furniture moved; a few instances of fallen plaster. Damage slight. VII. Damage negligible in buildings of good design and construction; slight to moderate in well-built ordinary structures; considerable damage in poorly built or badly designed structures; some chimneys broken.

6.0 - 6.9	**VII - IX**	VIII. Damage slight in specially designed structures; considerable damage in ordinary substantial buildings with partial collapse. Damage great in poorly built structures. Fall of chimneys, factory stacks, columns, monuments, walls. Heavy furniture overturned. IX. Damage considerable in specially designed structures; well-designed frame structures thrown out of plumb. Damage great in substantial buildings, with partial collapse. Buildings shifted off foundations.
7.0 and higher	**VIII** or higher	X. Some well-built wooden structures destroyed; most masonry and frame structures destroyed with foundations. Rails bent. XI. Few, if any (masonry) structures remain standing. Bridges destroyed. Rails bent greatly. XII. Damage total. Lines of sight and level are distorted. Objects thrown into the air.

Source: Magnitude/Intensity Comparision.
http://earthquake.usgs.gov/learn/topics/mag_vs_int.php (Accessed in January 2014)

CYCLONE

A dangerous wind storm with high wind speeds, circular patterns, swathe of a few hundred kilometres and sustained duration of a few days. Also known as a typhoon in the western Pacific Ocean and China Sea and hurricane in the Atlantic.

Eye: A name used for the centre of a cyclone, it is the point where the storm rotates in an anti-clockwise direction in the northern hemisphere. In the eye of a storm, the winds do not blow.

Formation of Cyclones: The right place and the right sea temperature are needed for a cyclone to form. The place is usually within +/-5 degree to 15 degree Latitude from the equator over the ocean. The surface temperature of the ocean/sea needs to be 27 degrees or above. A low air pressure system (depression) with convection currents starts to gather clouds.

Warning systems

Pre-cyclone Watch: Issued when a depression forms over the Bay of Bengal irrespective of its distance from the coast and is likely to affect Indian coast in future. The pre-cyclone watch is issued by the Director General of Meteorology at least 72 hours in advance of the commencement of adverse weather. It is issued at least once a day.

Cyclone alert: Issued at least 48 hours before the commencement of the bad weather when the cyclone is located beyond 500 Km from the coast. It is issued every three hours.

Cyclone warning: Issued at least 24 hours before the commencement of the bad weather when the cyclone is located within 500 Km from the coast. Information about time /place of landfall is indicated in the bulletin. Confidence in estimation increases as the cyclone comes closer to the coast

Post landfall outlook: This is issued 12 hours before the cyclone landfall, when the cyclone is located within 200 Km from the coast. More accurate & specific information about time /place of landfall and associated bad weather indicated in the bulletin. In addition, the interior distraction is likely to be affected due to the cyclone are warned in this bulletin.

Category	Wind speed (Kmph/ Knots)	Storm surge (metre)	Potential Damage	Action
Deep Depression			*Minor damage* - Minor damage to loose/ unsecured structures and some breaches in Kutcha road due to flooding. Minor damage to Banana trees and coastal agriculture due to salt spray. Damage to ripe paddy crops. Very rough seas with waves about 4-6 m high. Minor damage to kutcha embankments.	Fishermen advised not to venture into sea
Cyclonic storm	62 -87 kmph		*Minor to Moderate damage* - Damage to thatched huts. Minor damage to power and communication lines due to collapse of tree branches. Major damage to Kutcha and minor damage to Pucca roads. Some damage to paddy crops, Banana, Papaya trees and orchards. High to very high sea waves about 6-9 m high. Sea water inundation in low lying areas after erosion of Kutcha embankments	Fishermen advised not to venture into sea
Severe cyclonic storm	88-117 kmph	Up to 1.5 metres	*Moderate damage* - Major damage to thatched houses / huts. Roof tops may blow off. Unattached metal sheets may fly. Minor damage to power and communication lines. Major damage to Kutcha and some damage to Pucca roads. Flooding of escape routes. Breaking of	Fishermen advised not to venture into sea. Coastal hut dwellers advised to move to safer

			tree branches, uprooting of large avenue trees. Moderate damage to Banana and Papaya trees. Phenomenal seas with wave heights of 9-14 m. Movement in motor boats unsafe. Major damage to coastal crops. -Storm surge damage to salt pans and embankments. Inundation up to 5 kms in some areas.	places. Other people in the affected areas are to remain indoors.
Very severe cyclonic storm	118-167 Kmph	Up to 2 metres	*Large* - Total destruction of thatched houses/ extensive damage to kutcha houses. Some damage to pucca houses. Potential threat from flying objects. Bending/ uprooting of power and communication poles. Major damage to kutcha and pucca roads. Flooding of escape routes. Minor disruption of railways, overhead power lines and signalling systems. Widespread damage to standing crops, plantations and orchards. Uprooting of trees. - Phenomenal seas with wave heights of more than 14m. Visibility severely affected. Movement in motor boats and small ships unsafe. Inundation up to 10 Km in specific areas.	Fishermen not to venture into sea. Evacuation from coastal areas needs to be mobilised. People advised to remain indoors. Judicious regulation of rail and road traffic
Very severe cyclonic storm	168-221 kmph	2 – 5 metres	*Extensive* - Extensive damage to all types of kutcha houses and some damage to pucca structures. Potential threat from flying objects. Extensive uprooting of power and communication poles. Disruption of rail / road link at several places. Extensive damage	Fishermen are not to venture into the sea. Evacuation from coastal areas is essential.

			to standing crops, plantations and orchards. Blowing down of Palm and Coconut trees. Uprooting of large bushy trees. Phenomenal seas with wave heights of more than 14m. Movement in motor boats and small ships not advisable. Inundation may extend up to 10-15 kms over specific areas.	Diversion / suspension of rail traffic may be required.
Super cyclonic storm	Over 222 kmph	Over 5 metres	*Catastrophic damage* - Extensive damage to non-concrete residential and industrial building. Structural damage to concrete structure. Air full of large projectiles. Power and communication poles uprooted. Total disruption of supply. Extensive damage to kutcha roads and some damage to poorly repaired pucca roads. Large scale submerging of coastal roads due to flooding and sea water inundation. Flooding of escape routes. Major damage to bridges, signals and railway tracks. Total destruction of standing crops / orchards. Uprooting of large trees and stripping of tree barks. Phenomenal wave heights of more than 14 metres. All shipping activity unsafe. Extensive damage to port installations. Inundation up to 40 kms in specific areas and extensive beach erosion.	Fishermen not to venture into the sea. Large scale evacuations are needed. Rail and road traffic to be totally stopped in vulnerable areas.

Adapted from: Indian Meteorological Department, http://www.imd.gov.in/section/nhac/dynamic/faq/FAQP.htm#q51. (Accessed on 25 July 2014). Internationally there are various measurement scales. An example of this can be seen at Tropical Storm Risk (http://www.tropicalstormrisk.com)

TSUNAMI

An ocean wave produced by an event at sea, such as an earthquake, landslide, or volcanic eruption.

These waves may reach enormous size and have been known to travel across entire oceans. Their effects can range from unnoticeable to devastating. Once generated a tsunami can travel at speeds greater than 800 kilometres an hour.

A tsunami is not a single wave but a series of waves (also known as a wave train). The first wave is not necessarily the most destructive.

Inundation is the maximum horizontal distance inland that a tsunami penetrates.

One of the warning signs of a tsunami is the retreating of the sea from the land. It seems like a spectacle to watch, but the sea instantly returns with a great energy. In fact, the U.S. Geological Survey estimates that the earthquake that generated the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami released the energy of 23,000 Hiroshima-type atomic bombs.

DROUGHT

An extended period of deficient rainfall relative to the average for a region.

There are generally three types of conditions that are referred to as drought:

Meteorological drought is brought about when there is a prolonged period with less than average rainfall.

Agricultural drought occurs when there is insufficient soil moisture for an average crop of that region/area.

Hydrological drought is brought about when the water resources available in sources such as aquifers, lakes and reservoirs fall below the statistical average.

Desertification is the process whereby productive land, in arid and semi arid regions, becomes economically unproductive. The steady and gradual expansion of the land to aridity means lack of water for normal life and activities such as agriculture.

Aridity results when, in any given region, the intake of water from rains or rivers is exceeded by the loss of water through evapo-transpiration.

Identifying drought

The Indian Meteorological Department defines 'drought' as a situation occurring in any area where the annual rainfall is less than 75% of the normal rainfall. Besides evident shrinkage of water resources, crop failure and health problems, other symptoms are possible warning signs:

- Reduction in money lending
- Unusual movement of flocks and herds in search of pasture
- Unusual migration
- Rapid rise in price of daily food
- Remarkable decrease in train travel and festival attendance
- Abnormal unemployment
- Abnormal variation in liquor consumption
- Abnormal sale of family jewellery at inadequate prices

Droughts themselves do not cause desertification. They are common in arid and semi-arid areas and can be recovered from when rain returns if they are well-managed.

It is a myth that people die of thirst during a drought. Deaths are caused by acute malnutrition since crops fail and livestock die.

Famine is the "triple failure" of (1) food production, (2) people's ability to access food and, finally and most crucially (3) in the political response. Crop failure and poverty leave people vulnerable to starvation. The severe and widespread shortage of food results in large-scale starvation, malnourishment and death. It leads to disease outbreaks and economic and social collapse of the community.

Drought is one of the causes that lead to famine. However, famines are presently uncommon in India.

(Sourced from http://www.oxfam.org/en/emergencies/east-africa-food-crisis/famine-somalia-what-needs-be-done; and http://www.worldvision.org.hk/en/learn/hunger-whats-the-difference-between-drought-food-crisis-and-famine; accessed on 25 July 2014)

DISASTER CONCEPTS

The disaster cycle

A **disaster** happens when a "**hazard**" (earthquake, flood, drought, landslide etc) coincides with a '**vulnerable**' situation (cities or villages in earthquake/flood prone zones, impoverished people and others). This is often written as:

Disaster[3] = Hazard[4] + Vulnerability[5].

Without both these conditions, a disaster would not occur. For example, a hurricane at sea affects nobody and volcanic activity in Hawaii is a tourist spectacle. Therefore development actions need to be targeted at reducing vulnerability (social, physical, economic) amongst those who are the most vulnerable.

Mitigation and preparedness measures are actions which are taken before a disaster occurs to reduce vulnerability. It is like preventive health care. Whilst most efforts are directed towards post disaster relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation (where the need is all too visible), mitigation and preparedness are often the ignored stage of the cycle of disaster (the 'invisible' side to disaster). There is often little interest or political will to take measures to prepare for a disaster that hasn't happened yet. Yet failures to address this can result in enormous losses of life and livelihoods.

Disaster preparedness: This works on the assumption that disasters will happen and that measures can be implemented to reduce risk.

---

[3] Disaster is defined as "a serious disruption of the functioning of a society causing widespread human, material, or environmental losses which exceed the ability of the affected society to cope using its own resources."

[4] Hazard is "a phenomenon that poses a threat to people, structures or economic assets and which may cause a disaster. It could be either manmade or naturally occurring in our environment."

[5] Vulnerability is defined as "the extent to which a community, structure, service, or geographic area is likely to be damaged or disrupted by the impact of a particular hazard, on account of its nature, construction and proximity to hazardous terrain or a disaster prone area"

Preparedness therefore concerns immediate measures to reduce risk just before, during and after a disaster. It is defined as *"measures which enable governments, organisations, communities and individuals to respond rapidly and effectively to disaster situations."* Preparedness measures may include:

- Risk assessment (to pinpoint to which measures to implement); including secondary and tertiary hazards
- Early warning systems and community-based preparedness methods
- Safeguarding life through appropriate shelters
- Resources and emergency kits in anticipation of need
- Maintaining emergency rosters and evacuation plans
- Emergency information and communication systems
- Capacity and resources; including institutional arrangements and organisations for disaster management
- Coordination mechanisms; including a responsibility matrix
- Training to ensure adequate emergency response capacity (particularly amongst the local populace) and maintenance of preparedness levels
- Public education and preparedness campaigns
- Standard operating procedures and checklists
- Financial resources

Disaster mitigation involves implementing long-term risk reduction measures. These approaches can be categorised as development projects. These include:

- Policies such as land regulation, low income housing schemes, environmental regulations and national food/grain security policies
- Training of policy makers, NGO staff and communities
- Identification of vulnerable groups
- Information systems for monitoring, documentation and dissemination
- Integrating local disaster management technical and planning principles into educational disciplines such as construction, architecture, urban planning, agriculture and othersStructural measures such as retrofitting, raising plinth level, lintel bands, tying of roofs and other building safety measures as appropriate to the local context
- Non-structural mitigation measures such as securing movable objects and ensuring clear exit paths among others

Disaster response: Disaster response work includes any actions taken in the midst of or immediately following an emergency, including efforts to save lives and to prevent further property damage. Ideally, disaster response involves putting already established disaster preparedness plans into motion. Typically, this phase of the disaster cycle draws the most attention.

- Short term provision of emergency services during a slow onset emergency (e.g. conflict, drought) or immediately after a sudden-onset disaster (e.g. earthquake, industrial accident).
- High risk of mortality.
- Affected population are often the first responders.
- Immediate relief focuses on saving lives e.g. search and rescue, critical medical care, food, drinking water.
- Ongoing response focuses on reducing vulnerability and meeting basic needs e.g. family tracing, food, nutrition, health care, sanitation, water, shelter.

Disaster recovery: Disaster recovery happens after damages have been assessed and involves actions to return the affected community to its pre-disaster state or better. It ideally seeks to make it less vulnerable to future risk. Risk identification includes understanding the nature of hazards as well as understanding the nature of vulnerabilities. Subsequent efforts may range from physical upgrades to education, training, and public awareness campaigns

- Longer-term support in restoring 'normal life'.
- Local ownership and participation of affected populations is critical to recovery.
- Important in linking humanitarian activity with longer term development plans.
- Rehabilitation focuses on public and social services, livelihoods, education and making changes needed due to the disaster impact e.g. protection measures.
- Reconstruction seeks to re-establish and improve infrastructure, housing and pre-disaster services and social conditions.

Community-based disaster management

A community themselves are the first responders to any disaster situation. In the context of disaster management, a 'community' can be defined as a group of people that may share one or more things in common, like living in the same environment, similar disaster risk exposure or being affected by the same disaster. They best understand the requirements and assets for coping with a disaster situation. Thereby, community based disaster management allows for a community to strengthen their skills and build on their coping capacity to become an effective first responder. It aims to help the community take a lead position in the disaster management process. A community is involved in the sustainability of their community and surroundings. They are also the best judge of the opportunities and vulnerabilities of the area.

Community Based Disaster Management (CBDM) is a process in which communities at risk are actively engaged in the identification, analysis, treatment, monitoring and evaluation of disaster risks in order to reduce vulnerabilities and enhance their capacities. This process allows for the needs of the community to be catered to as the initiative and the method for disaster management is being done efficiently by the community itself. This process is effective not only because a community is resilient enough to respond to a disaster situation, but it can also take the lead in preparedness and mitigation measures. Also, CBDM allows the community to implement and monitor such measures. Thereby, CBDM empowers the community to address the root causes of vulnerabilities by transforming social, economic and political structures.

Major Vulnerabilities in India

- Almost 58.6 per cent of the landmass is prone to earthquakes of moderate to very high intensity.
- Over 40 million hectares (12 percent of the land) are 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.
- All hilly areas are at risk from landslides and avalanches.

Source: India Disaster Report 2011, (http://nidm.gov.in/PDF/pubs/India%20Disaster%20Report%202011.pdf

ADMINISTRATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

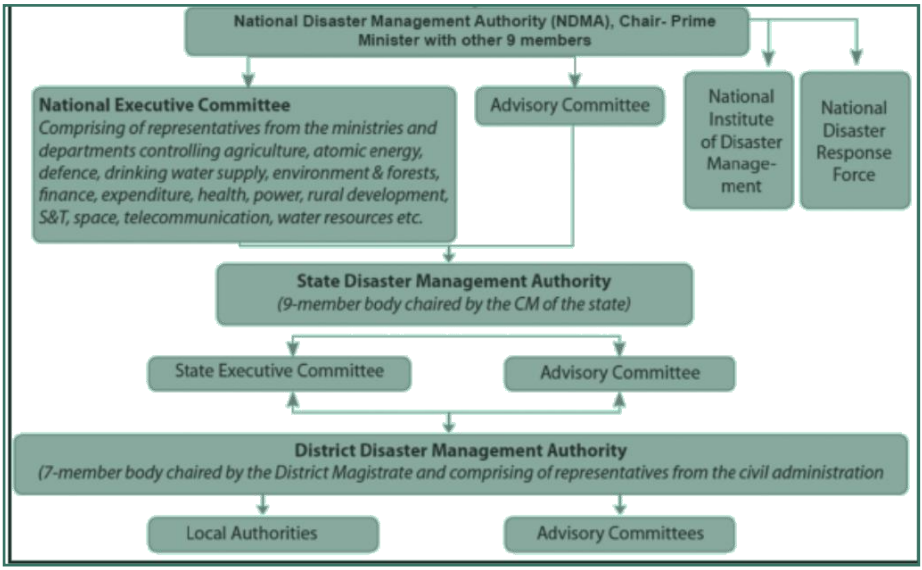
The administrative response

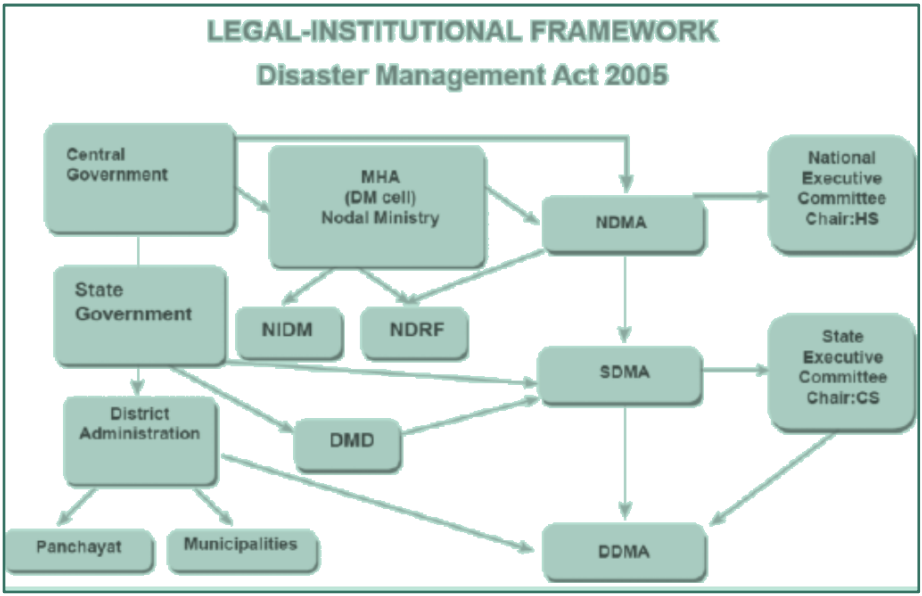
In the federal set-up of India, the responsibility to formulate the Government's response to a natural calamity is essentially that of the concerned State government. However, the Government of India, with its resources, physical and financial, does provide the needed help and assistance to buttress relief efforts in the wake of major disasters, primarily in the form of financial and logistic support including deployment of National Disaster Response Force's Rescue teams, if needed The dimensions of the response at the level of Government of India are determined in accordance with the existing policy of financing the relief expenditure and keeping in view the factors like the gravity of a natural calamity; the scale of the relief operation necessary; and the requirements of Central assistance for augmenting the financial resources at the disposal of the State Government. The situation is monitored, in case of major disasters, through the National Crises Management Committee under the Cabinet Secretary and the Crisis Management Group under the Home Secretary. If necessary, a Group of Ministers is constituted to oversee the response and relief activities and determine the support required to be provided.

The States have Relief Commissioners who are in charge of the relief measures in the wake of disasters in their respective states. Normally the State Crises Management Committee under the Chief Secretary monitors the situation and ensures coordination among various departments. The State Headquarters has, in addition, a number of Secretaries who head the various Departments handling specific subjects under the overall supervision and co-ordination of the chief Secretary. At the level of the State Government, disasters are usually the responsibility of the Revenue Department or the Relief Department or the Disaster Management Department, if a separate department has been set up.. While important policy decisions are taken by the Cabinet of the State headed by the Chief Minister, day-to-day decisions involving policy matters are taken or exercised by the Secretary in the Department and implemented by the

Relief Commissioner and other concerned officers in the respective departments.

States are further divided into districts, each headed by a District Collector (also known as District Magistrate or Deputy Commissioner). It is the District Collector who is the focal point at the district level for directing, supervising and monitoring relief measures for disaster and for preparation of district level plans.





Policy framework

Disaster Management Act, 2005

The Disaster Management Act, 2005, laid down institutional, legal, financial and coordination mechanisms at all levels (National, state and district). These institutions are expected to work in close harmony. The entire institutional arrangement from national to local level emphasises on taking a paradigm shift from a relief-centred approach to a more proactive one with greater emphasis on preparedness, prevention and mitigation.

The Act established a National Disaster Management Authority to lay down policies and guidelines on disaster management; State Disaster Management Authorities lay down the State disaster management policy; District Disaster Management Authorities ensure that the guidelines laid down by NDMA/ SDMAs are followed by departments at the district level; and gives DDMAs an important role to play at the local and grass root level in order to encourage Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction.

National Policy on Disaster Management

The National Policy on Disaster Management (NPDM) was approved by Government of India on October 22, 2009. The policy envisages a safe and disaster-resilient India. The policy covers all aspects of disaster management including institutional and legal arrangements, financial arrangements, disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness, techno-legal regime, response, relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and recovery, capacity development, knowledge management, research and development. It focuses on the areas where action is needed and the institutional mechanism through which the action can be channelled. It also looks at differently-abled persons, women, children and other disadvantaged groups in terms of recommenending/ formulating relief and rehabilitation measures.

Climate Change Action Plan

The National Action Plan on Climate Change was released in June 2008. It identifies eight core national missions running through 2017. The plan identifies "measures that promote our development objectives while also yielding co-benefits for addressing climate change effectively." The eight missions include:

- National Solar Mission
- National Mission on Sustainable Habitat
- National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency
- National Mission for Sustaining The Himalayan Ecosystem
- National Water Mission
- National Mission for Green India
- National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture
- National Mission for Strategic Knowledge On Climate Change

MEDIA'S ROLE

The movement of information is extremely important in a disaster situation, which is why the role of media and communications is very crucial in such situations. There needs to be a constant flow of information to cover the information needs of various stakeholders. To begin with, the information needs of the people affected by disasters should be met. Such information actually helps the condition of the victims which is of supreme importance. Such information is usually of facilities on the ground that could help them make their condition better. Further media coverage of disasters is a direct dissemination of information to the government, donors and the people at large. This coverage actually shapes opinion of the people on the ground situation. In fact such coverage also influences donor policy and various government policies for the affected region. Thereby, it is essential that the coverage of disaster situations in done efficiently and accurately.

- The information needs of the people affected by disasters should be met. This could include information on aid distribution, safety measures, and relief.
- Media coverage of a disaster can certainly influence donor policy and government policy on their decision making criteria for the area.
- Journalists should also keep in mind that the proliferation on New Media is increasingly being used even at the site of a disaster situation for flow of information.

What key role can Media play at each stage?

Preparation: Early warning; educating the public on various disaster components; reporting on initiatives and plans to address vulnerabilities.

Response: Immediate impact on affected areas; projecting core needs of communities and informing affected people where they can access aid; and tracking ongoing initiatives.

Recovery: Accountability in usage of aid; lessons to be leant; success stories; sustainable construction practices and material usage in recovery; alternate livelihood options.

Mitigation: Reporting on and influencing larger policy and development agendas; connections to climate change. Mainstreaming DRR discussion and measures into topics such as water, construction, food security, health, livelihood and women and child welfare

KEY MESSAGES

Key messages on disaster risk reduction (UNISDR)

1. Disasters are not “natural”; hazards are. Disasters can often be prevented and their impact mitigated.
2. Prevention pays and has an immediate return. Prevention is not a cost, it is an investment.
3. Disasters do not only cause immediate human suffering and destruction but impede long-term development by keeping people trapped in a vicious spiral of poverty.
4. Disaster risk reduction is about saving lives and livelihoods by changing people’s mindsets. It is about shifting from response to prevention and reducing communities’ vulnerability.
5. People have a right to live in safety and with dignity. It is the state’s responsibility to protect its citizens. It is therefore vital that disaster risk reduction policies are systematically integrated into sustainable development strategies at all levels, national to local.
6. Hospitals, schools and all critical infrastructure safety are essential for reducing societies’ vulnerability. Governments have a responsibility to protect critical buildings such as schools and hospitals, making communities more resilient to disasters.
7. Early warning systems can save lives. If alarms are sounded before disaster strikes, human loss can be avoided.
8. Educate to build a culture of prevention. People need to be provided with knowledge, skills and resources to protect themselves from disaster risk, same as in health or traffic.
9. A safe and healthy environment is vital. It is everybody’s responsibility to protect the environment to mitigate the impact caused by natural hazards.
10. Climate change adaptation starts with disaster risk reduction. Climate change is predicted to increase frequency and intensity of storms, floods and droughts. Communities need to be prepared to be able to deal with the impact of climate related hazards.

PRINCIPLES OF DISASTER REPORTING

ACCURACY

Background information on the area and community

Background information on geographic areas and affected communities (especially more remote areas) must go beyond boilerplate descriptions and include nuances. Things to consider include:

- Vulnerability profile and past disasters
- Major livelihoods and way of life
- Economic background
- Social mix of the community
- Types of buildings (construction type and materials)

Facts and figures

Facts and figures change rapidly in the weeks after a disaster event. Often, there are conflicting rumours of the facts and figures. These need to be looked at carefully to ensure that misinformation is not being spread. For in the age of social media, rumours can spread like wildfire. There is a danger of these wrong messages then affecting perceptions of the disaster and ultimately aid. Things to consider include:

- When there are many different facts and figures, ensure that you clarify which source you are using.
- Where there is misinformation, what can be done to clarify it?

Word choice

There are many words that are commonly used or used interchangeably. This changes the perspective of the audience and can often result in sending across the wrong message.

Some key examples include:

Hazard vs. disaster: A hazard is a flood, drought, cyclone, landslide, earthquake or tsunami. A hazard turns into a disaster due to (mostly manmade) vulnerabilities. Overtime, the continuous interchanged use of these terms results in a perception that there is nothing we can do.

Natural disaster: There is no such thing as a 'natural disaster'. There are natural hazards, but they turn into disasters due to human action. Again, implication over time becomes that this is 'natural'; that there is nothing we can do to prevent it.

Climate change vs. changing climate: Climate change is a scientific term that refers to actual degree change in the average temperature of the planet. Changing climate can refer to any unusual weather activity that has occurred in the area.

Victim vs. survivor: Depending on the context, the use of one of these words over the other can change the tone of the reporting.

Looter: The word looter is very strong. In a desperate situation, painting people in this light may result in a skewed perception for the audience.

Riot: Often when food or relief distribution is being done, it becomes difficult to control the massive crowd trying to access this aid. However, the use of the word 'riot' suggested a law-and-order problem that may blow it out of proportion. The word should be used with caution.

Backward vs. poor or marginalised: Backward has a socially imposed implication which is often derogatory. Poor is a purely economic description and marginalised can be used to refer to groups that live on the fringes of that community and are generally left out.

Illiterate vs. ignorant: Illiterate refers only to not being able to read and write. Ignorant or uneducated has a much broader social perception. The use of these words interchangeably or together subconsciously makes the assumption that all illiterate people are ignorant.

Charity vs. aid: Charity has an implication of something being handed out. Aid still conjures an image of helping the community help themselves. At a time when communities need to be empowered, these subtle differences can make a difference.

Development vs. infrastructure construction: These words are used interchangeably so often that it is now almost taken for granted that all new construction is development. Is it really though?

Change vs. progress: Again, change and progress are used interchangeably in a way that signifies that all change is progress. Is it really?

Staying in context

Areas that are hard to reach are sometimes portrayed through canned footage or represented by other areas. One story is generalised to represent the entire affected area without widespread study. This kind of reporting can again influence the way the disaster is viewed and the aid that is given to the area. Keep all visuals, footage and stories in context by identifying specific villages and people who are being reported on and by clearly labelling all representative footage.

Case in Point | **One word changes the story**

During Hurricane Katrina there were media reports which referred to the African-American community as 'looters' in their distressed attempt to take food and supplies. However, the white community doing the same was not viewed in the same light. This kind of discrimination in reporting was also a case in point of insensitivity. It sparked tensions and led to law-and-order problems where there really weren't any.

Story choice

Factors influencing story choice

When there is a disaster almost literally every day of the year, it is no surprise that the vast majority go unreported. Story choice is currently determined on a number of criteria that include:

- How dramatic are the numbers if dead, injured or homeless?
- How dramatic are the visuals?
- Can it be covered remotely or does a journalist need to be sent to the scene?
- Will my audience be interested in the story?
- What other news is there today?
- What is my connection to the victims?

Yet, for media to fulfil a role in disaster prevention and stronger recovery, there needs to be consideration of several other factors.

- What will not covering the story mean for the affected community? (Coverage often impacts aid)
- Even if the 'numbers' are not large in a traditional sense, how badly affected are the community?
- What impact does the story have on a larger context (developmental, environmental, social or political)?

Balance of voices

Stories need to take into account different perspectives that in themselves will bring out new issues. These emerge primarily through engagement with different stakeholders. The groups defined below are not only some of the most critically affected in the aftermath of a disaster; but also play a key role in promoting individual and collective action that will help reduce risk. At the same time, it must be ensured that the most socially and economically marginalised from across these target groups and the community as a whole are addressed.

i. Local Panchayati Raj /Urban Legislative Body leaders

As the last level of elected representatives, this group serves as a key link to the government and has the legal power to enforce decisions in the community. They can influence policy decisions. Through budget allocations

and running of schemes, they can effectively form links between government policies and local risk reduction. Their voices offer a local political perspective.

ii. Local champions

A community's teachers, doctors, self-help groups and other educated professionals serve as the unspoken, unelected advisors to the community. They are looked up to and trusted; and are often emulated even more than elected leaders. These local champions serve as the link between general people and the panchayat. Through their various vocations, they offer new perspectives on how disasters and risk reduction link to various other facets of life.

iii. Children

Children both enrolled in and out of school, are often more receptive and open to information than adults. Internationally, the campaign on 'children at the heart of DRR' puts them in the driving seat. As the next generation, they will be the ones to carry on sustainable risk reduction practices. In the aftermath of a disaster, children's voice can help unearth critical issues including those related to education and safety.

iv. Women

The heart of their families, women generally spend the greatest amount of time at home and are one of the most vulnerable groups. In many villages, migration by the men to the cities for work means that the women are left alone; making it even more critical to build their awareness and action.

v. Persons with Disabilities (PWD)

Unless particular attention is given to PWDs, they are always left out by default. There is an urgent need to empower and include them in any disaster risk reduction action. For a community can only be safe when each one of its most vulnerable members are safe.

vi. Elderly

Though they are usually respected, the elderly are another group who are often left out. At the same time, the elderly are repositories of traditional knowledge and local innovations on disaster risk reduction. They are often

more receptive to using and improving these techniques; which can be vital in small communities with limited facilities.

vii. Livelihood-based groups

Livelihood compulsions can often restrict 'safer' behaviour. This includes fishermen going out to sea despite cyclone warnings or farmers refusing to evacuate during a flood. Targeting groups such as farmers, shepherds, fishermen, labourers and masons is therefore critical. Some of their inherent activities play a major role in DRR. So any breakthrough in getting these groups to incorporate risk reduction and preparedness measures as part of their daily routine will go a long way towards mainstreaming DRR.

Balance of positive and negative stories

Coverage of local innovations and positive actions is encouraging and builds hope. It also serves as good examples that can be replicated elsewhere and as validation of efforts. Thing that could be considered include:

- Positive work being carried out by the government, NGOs or the community.
- Local innovations (either in early warning that prevented casualties) or in the aftermath that are helping people cope and rebuild their lives.
- Coming together of the community to recover, bridging previous divisions

Mix of areas and regions

Often, reporting of a disaster gets confined to the supposedly worst-affected area. The other regions and surrounding places get left out. It is important to look at all of these areas as well.

Activist vs. neutral reporting

Particularly in post-disaster situations, the media tends to take on a more activist role. There is a rush to assign blame, to politicise and to miss the other angles. This sometimes takes away the focus from the actual event and affected communities. Reporters also need to be careful of their own tone and pitch. A very fast, really loud report sends a very different message. Reporters must also strike a balance between telling the story and getting involved in physically helping the community.

CASE in POINT | **Empowering local action through the inspiring story of the man who moved a mountain**

In the small village of Gehlor in the middle of Gaya district, Bihar, one man proved that with determination and commitment he could solve a local problem alone. The nearest small town, Wazirganj, was only a few kilometres away. Yet, the lack of a road meant that the villagers had to endure a dangerous 70-km trek over the rocky mountain. School, markets and other facilities that fell on this route were all cut off. One day, his wife slipped and fell and he was unable to get her to a hospital. The year was 1960. Dashrath Manjhi decided he would do something himself. Selling off his cows, he used the money to purchase a chisel, shovel, hammer and rope. The entire village, including his wife and family, thought he had lost his mind. When has a man ever managed to move a mountain, they asked? Dashrath chipped away alone at the mountain day and night, even shifting his hut closer to the road he was carving.

It took 22 years, but Dashrath was successful in his mission. He managed to carve a road through the mountain that reduced the distance to just 7 kms. Slowly, the road widened to allow bicycles, motor bikes and even cars to pass. Unfortunately, the wife who had inspired this mission wasn't with him to view this accomplishment.

His story in itself became a communication tool about the power of one man to create local solutions. With support, how many local problems could be solved by the community themselves? However, it only became an inspiration because it was spread far and wide. It's not only children from the village who hear this tale of the man who moved a mountain. Spread through TV, print articles and online, Dashrath has become a national ambassador of local action. Unearthing and widely promoting such stories can be an important communication vehicle to spark and encourage more community-based solutions.

CONSISTENCY AND COLLABORATION

A collaborative rather than antagonistic model between different media organisations, the government and NGOs can improve the quality of disaster reporting and can help build the resilience of communities across the country. This is particularly true when considering the dual role of media in a disaster context. It is the key channel for both disseminating key information down to the general public and affected communities; as well as a spark for humanitarian action and government response.

Who needs to collaborate?

Along with different media units, government officials at the national and local levels (especially PIOs/PROs) and NGOs on the ground all play a vital role in disseminating information. This collaboration can be strengthened by planning beforehand.

- Identify credible and authoritative sources of information that can be used to support messages in potential emergencies.
- Develop a plan for using information from other organizations in potential emergencies.
- Develop contact lists of external subject-matter experts able and willing to speak to the media on issues associated with potential emergencies.
- Issue media communications together to be more credible and trustworthy to the target audience.

Consistency of reports

Building consistency on the way of reporting within the varied team members in different areas strengthens the overall report. At the same time, extremely conflicting reports from within one company, as well as across different media can create massive confusion. This is especially true of life-saving information such as safe routes or aid distribution.

- Present information in a format that aids understanding and helps people act accordingly.
- Cite credible and authoritative sources.
- Aim for consistency of key messages across agencies. If real differences exist, try to clarify sources and course of action to your audience.

- Determine information clearance and approval and procedures in advance when possible.
- Identify significant misinformation, being aware that repeating it may give unwanted attention.

Common goals

In the larger context and as part of media's public service prerogative, journalists play a key role in building public awareness. Public awareness campaigns are often scattered and done in silos. Collaboration between these three key stakeholders can bring consistency and greater weight to a nationwide campaign.

- Encourage media organisations to repeat or echo the same key messages – such repetition and echoing by many voices helps to reinforce the key messages for target audiences.
- Devote effort and resources to building bridges, partnerships and alliances with other organisations (including potential or established critics) before an emergency occurs.
- Respect the unique information needs of special and diverse audiences.

Interviewing

The manner in which disaster survivors are interviewed can badly affect their psychological state. Clearly, reporters are in a position of power. Taking care never to exploit this is vital.

Interview tips

- Always introduce yourself, clearly stating who you are and why you would like to speak to them.
- People may have expectations that you have come to offer aid. Never promise anything – cash or kind – in exchange for the interview.
- Don't expect people to jump at the chance to talk to you. Always confirm that the person is willing to speak to you before you begin. Make sure to respect their feelings if they say no.
- Ask whether they are comfortable with you taping/filming/taking notes. Always give the option of turning this off somewhere along the way if they begin to be uncomfortable or don't want something recorded.
- In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, do not say 'I know how you feel.' You don't. Instead say something along the lines of "I am sorry that this happened to you".
- Do not place blame on anyone.
- Don't ask leading questions that convey a bias. For example, "Don't you feel that the government has done an excellent job of evacuation?" Instead ask. "How did you feel about the government evacuation?"
- Watch your body language. Make sure it is appropriate to the cultural context.
- Never yell or convey frustration if your interview is not going as you hoped.

Visuals

The imagery of a disaster situation is often gory and filled with unimaginable destruction and suffering. Photojournalists and reporters must walk a fine line between telling the story to the public and keeping the dignity of the people intact.

Where, how and in what size the visual is used may also make a difference. There may be some shots that are just vetoed altogether.

Overall reporting

In putting together the whole story, including the anchoring/ editorial/ layout, ensure that it reflects a sense of dignity for the community. There are always ways to over-hype or subdue any story. Finally and perhaps most importantly, do no harm.

CASE in POINT | **Disrespecting the community**

In the wake of the 2013 Uttarakhand floods, one reporter from a local station thought it appropriate to report while sitting on a survivor's shoulders. The survivor was apparently carrying him through a flooded area as a mark of respect. Though his actions were widely condemned among the media community, the case itself points to a broader problem of journalists thinking they are 'superior' to the communities they visit.

Climate change and small-scale disasters

Climate change is expected to increase the number of large-scale unprecedented hydro-met events such as flash floods. It will increase the incidences and intensity of new hazards such as glacier melting, sea level rise and extreme weather events to levels never seen before. This will aggravate the existing disaster risks and vulnerabilities and expose millions of people never affected before around the world. Rural livelihoods are put at risk by the local impacts of global climate change or environmental degradation. Balancing diversity and sustainability with the need to compete in a globalising economy poses a great challenge. This is currently undermining coping capacity. At the same time, small-scale climate-induced stresses such as water shortages that are leading to disasters of their own.

Examples of day-to-day stresses

- Water shortages and quality
- Changing crop patterns
- New insects and pests
- Increased health hazards
- Retreating glaciers
- Livelihood-compelled migration
- Food shortages and malnutrition

The economic impacts of these disasters may be small individually, but add up to be a massive portion of the economic loss due to disasters annually. For instance, floods accounted for 2/3rds of the total damages due to disasters in India between 1990 and 2011.

This is not counting the spiralling effect on chronic poverty, health, education and livelihoods that in themselves compromise development. Above all, addressing these problems can lead to greater community resilience that will have spin-off effects on every walk of life.

What can be done?

- Make disaster risk reduction a national and local priority, with strong institutions to implement decisions.
- Set up early warning systems that reach all people, in time for appropriate action and accompany the warnings with helpful advice.
- Incorporate climate risk in all urban planning and water and forest management processes.

- Maintain and strengthen coastal wave barriers, river levees, flood ways and flood ponds. Have adequate drainage systems to avoid flooding.
- Incorporate climate risks in infrastructure projects, especially in hospitals, schools and water supplies.
- Diversification, including new sources of income, new crops and agricultural techniques and new ways to improve water uptake and reduce erosion.
- Build mechanisms that will get people out of harm's way in a hazard and prepare shelters to protect them when they are forced to move.

'Development'

What role is 'development' playing as a trigger for these disasters? Conversely, how much are hazard and vulnerability issues taken into consideration during construction planning.

There are many examples of the drive for economic growth and social improvement generating new disaster risks. Rapid urbanisation is an example. The growth of informal settlements and inner city slums, fuelled by growing populations and rural migration, has led to unstable living environments. These settlements are often located in ravines, on steep slopes, along flood plains or adjacent to dangerous industrial or transport facilities. The unsustainable build-up and use of new materials in fragile eco-systems has compounded the risks.

Disaster risk reduction

DRR can be built into almost every aspect of life; including housing, livelihoods, civic infrastructure, education and environment.

Silent disasters

The Red Cross stated in 2012 that 91% of disasters worldwide are silent. This silence can be attributed to a number of reasons including media interest.

What defines 'silence'?

- The story is not widely known or reported.
- Assistance is not given, is extremely delayed or vastly inadequate.
- District, State or National policies don't consider it a disaster.

What makes a disaster silent?

- Scale: The amount of perceived damage and numbers of people killed/affected

- Site: The place affected and its accessibility
- Significance: Economic and/or political significance of the affected areas
- Stresses: Day-to-day events that aren't classified as a disaster
- Slow-onset vs. sudden onset disasters

Linking stories

'Disaster' stories are not disaster stories alone. They are linked to many mainstream issues including health, education, women's rights and the economy. They are also linked to each stage of the disaster cycle.

Poverty: Poverty and socio-economic inequalities are aggravating disaster factors. They not only exacerbate vulnerabilities, but can keep people trapped in a vicious circle of poverty.

Health
- Impact on infant mortality
- Water-borne and communicable diseases

Education
- Ongoing, frequent disasters (especially small-scale flooding and drought) that cuts off access to schooling
- Continuing / restarting education in the wake of a disaster
- Incorporation of disaster awareness and climate change into the school curriculum

Women and child welfare
- Why do more women die in disasters than men?
- Safety and trafficking issues in the aftermath of a disaster

CASE in POINT | **Environmental days and infotainment programmes**

Several TV channels now run environmental awareness programmes and campaigns. Done more in an 'infotainment' format, these shows do help generate interest among the general public. However, since they are not a regular feature, these issues still haven't become daily discussion or attained that level of seriousness. They are a good first step, but more needs to be done to mainstream these issues.

FOLLOW-UP

Follow-up stories are important to keep the issue alive. In the days after a disaster event when interest wanes off and the media withdraws, the community is left to recover alone. Yet some of the greatest challenges come in the medium and long-term. Follow-up stories can also result in insightful lessons and replicable good practices.

Use of or delivery of aid

In larger disasters, there is a giant influx of aid money and government sanctioned relief funds in the initial days. Follow-up on the usage of this aid can help promote accountability. In cases where relief is not sanctioned at all, the ongoing media scrutiny can help the delivery of aid. Follow-up stories can include:

- Which areas received aid? How has it been used?
- What kind of monitoring systems are in place for this?
- Where the aid was in kind, has it been helpful? What challenges have been faced?

Long-term recovery

The reconstruction activity and recovery programmes should incorporate disaster risk reduction practices. Follow up stories can include:

- Use of sustainable construction practices and disaster risk reduction features in reconstruction
- Government schemes and compensation that can be applied to recovery programmes
- Alternate livelihood options
- Any new policy initiatives
- Long-term political and diplomatic implications of such disasters (including large-scale migration)

Lessons and good practices

Often there is a reinvention of the wheel after every disaster; from a communications perspective, an aid perspective and a reconstruction/recovery perspective. Reporting over the longer-term on the lessons and good practices (perhaps even small local ones) can make a difference for the next one. Follow up stories can include:

- Interesting innovations by communities or NGOs.
- Where did the problems in the recovery occur? What can be done differently to help this for next time?

CASE in POINT | **Helping people access aid years later thanks to the story being kept alive**

Though it wasn't due to a natural hazard, the case of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy of 1984 is a great example of how continuing media coverage keeps an issue alive. Even the sporadic media coverage (usually around the anniversary of the disaster) has meant that the community who are still suffering 30 years later can keep their fight alive. Disasters due to natural hazards are usually less political and thus lose interest much faster. Applying this same principle to disaster situations can play a major role in better recovery.

Keeping yourself safe

Trying to keep yourself safe is one of the most challenging aspects to covering a disaster.

Physical harm

No story is good enough to risk death or serious injury.

- Plan your escape routes in advance if you are entering a narrow or closed area.
- Never walk under or over a landslide. Always walk around it.
- Be alert and prepared for unexpected situations.
- Weigh up the risk and decide if the story is worth it
- Learn first aid, especially how to stop bleeding.
- Never carry a weapon or travel with a journalist carrying a weapon.
- Always identify yourself clearly if challenged. Never describe yourself as anything other than a reporter.
- Wear a bracelet or tag indicating your blood group in case you are wounded.
- Learn and respect local customs. Something you say or do may be interpreted as hostile.
- Insurance – If working in a danger zone, check that your employer has you adequately insured.
- Wear shoes that you can run in when covering potentially dangerous situations.

Psychological harm

- Be frightened, it's normal, but don't panic.
- Many people go into disaster zones unprepared for the level of devastation that they will see. It is vital to prepare yourself mentally. Make sure that there are systems of counselling available for those who need it. Have strict policies about checking in with the office at regular intervals while in a disaster zone.

Adequate preparation

Always have the safety basics with you:

- Fully stocked first aid kit
- Battery operated torches
- Solar charger
- Drinking water and food supplies
- Warm clothes
- Preparations to sleep outside in extreme situations (tent, sleeping bag)

Safety of the community

When dealing with sensitive topics, always ensure that people's safety is not compromised. Any reporting you do must consider potential impact on individuals, a group within the community or the area as a whole. Often, these may be sparked by internal divisions or social pressures that you don't know. So while ensuring dignity, also ensure safety.

At other times, the community may be put at risk in trying to accompany or rescue you when you are doing a dangerous report. Weigh the consequences to others before taking this call.

In conflict zones, humanitarian organisations apply the concept of 'do no harm'; a vow to not leave the community in a worse state than they found them in. Media organisations may consider following a similar approach.

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Important contacts to keep in mind for an emergency include the following:

- Prime Minister's Office
- Cabinet Secretariat, Central Ministries and Departments of Government of India
- National Disaster Management Authority Officials (NDMA)
- Ministry of Home Affairs Disaster Management Division
- National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM) Ministry of Home Affairs, GOVT. of India
- National Disaster Response Force (NDRF)
- SAARC Disaster Management Centre
- Chief Secretaries of States and UTs
- Director Generals of Police of States and UTs
- Principal Secretaries/Secretaries (Revenue & Disaster Management)/Relief Commissioners of States and UTs
- Principal Secretary/ Secretary/ Commissioner (Home) of States and UTs
- Resident Commissioners of States and UTs in Delhi
- State Disaster Management Authority of States and UTs
- Administrative Training Institutes of States and UTs
- Faculty, Disaster Management Centres, Administrative Training Institutes of States and UTs
- National/State Institute of Rural Development in India
- National Level Institutes dealing various aspects of Disaster Management
- Resource Persons/ Experts in the field of Disaster Management
- International NGOs, National NGOS and hospitals

Contact details of key contacts in these offices and institutes are available at http://nidm.gov.in/PDF/IEC/DM_Directory_310712.pdf.