



COMMUNITY BASED DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Angeli Qwatra and Nina Khanna

If the capacity of a community to face the perceived disasters is developed before the specialised responders arrive, many lives could be easily saved and infrastructural losses minimised.

Community is the first responder in natural as well as human induced disasters. The initial hours after a disaster, especially the first 'golden hour', are very crucial. Hence there is a need to build the capacity of the community which can be especially difficult in developing countries like India where education levels are

low, people are poor and the community has more pressing priorities like eking out a living. It is thus a challenge for the authorities and concerned organisations to mobilise the community consisting of diverse individuals and groups.

CBDM Approach: Community based disaster management (CBDM) is a bottom-up approach



Photo courtesy: Press Information Bureau, Bihar September 2008

CBDM empowers the community to be proactive in disaster management and creates space for them to develop strategies.

which is universally accepted as a tool to prepare communities for disasters. There are numerous examples of successful CBDMs in countries like Peru, Bangladesh and Philippines. The capacity of a community is built in the CBDM approach to assess its vulnerability and develop strategies and resources necessary to prevent and mitigate the impact of identified disasters as well as respond,

rehabilitate and reconstruct in the post-disaster period. This approach has become crucial due to the effects of global climate change, burgeoning population moving into more vulnerable regions and a heightened recognition of a need for greater linkages between top down government and community level responses. CBDM empowers the community to be proactive in disaster management and creates a space for them to develop strategies on their own terms rather than waiting for already over stretched government machinery to hold their hands.

CBDM in India: The Disaster Management Act 2005 was responsible for setting up the disaster management framework at the centre, state, district and local levels and envisaging a comprehensive and multi-hazard preparedness approach to deal with disasters. Core emphasis was given to developing the capacity of communities. Even the national vision, as outlined in the National Disaster Management Policy issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2009, envisaging “to build a safe and disaster resilient India by developing a holistic, proactive, multi-disaster and technology-driven strategy through a culture of prevention, mitigation, preparedness and efficient response, involving all stakeholders, especially the community”, lays stress on building the capacity of the community. The national strategy envisages a multi-dimensional approach focusing on prevention, mitigation, preparedness (capacity building of National Disaster Response Force, state disaster response force, civil defence, National Cadet Corps, Nehru Yuva Kendras, etc) and CBDM (including public awareness, mock exercises, etc.) during the pre-disaster phase. The post disaster phase is characterised by proactive, prompt and efficient response; and building back is better in reconstruction and recovery phases of disaster. ‘Building Back Better’, propagated by the World Bank, is a universally accepted norm of disaster management. The reconstruction in the Nagapattinam district in Tamil Nadu, which was worst affected during Indian Ocean 2004 tsunami, is a good example of this strategy. Concrete dwellings were provided about one km away from the sea, improving their standard of living and also protecting them from future disasters while the fishermen were given fibre glass boats during the rehabilitation phase which increased their catch

by almost three times.

CBDM has been modified to CBDRM in India, where 'R' is 'risk'—to include working with the community in vulnerable areas to mitigate risks. Several non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as the Bharatiya Agro Industries Foundation (BAIF) and Development Research Foundation are working in drought prone areas in Rajasthan in a community preparedness development programme. International NGOs are collaborating with local NGOs—for example Save the Children is working with local NGOs to carry out child centric drought preparedness programmes in Rajasthan. Such programmes are being implemented in other states too, viz., Gujarat, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, to name a few, through Governmental and NGO mechanisms. Micro insurance and micro finance at the community level have recently begun in India. A pilot project was conducted through the

collaborative effort of Concern Worldwide India, All India Disaster Mitigation Institute, Ahmedabad and 'SWAD Poor'.

In Ambassa district of Tripura, the villages have made their disaster management teams (rescue, first aid, security, warning, etc). Make-shift relief camps with tents made of bamboos are in place and a warning call, the responsibility of a group of women, is sounded during and after an earthquake drill or actual earthquake. Motorcyclists, cyclists and three wheelers within the village have been identified to transport disaster victims to the closest hospital. These procedures were initiated by the gram panchayat with the assistance of the National Institute of Disaster Management, New Delhi.

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has drawn up guidelines for CBDRM which are likely to be released in May 2014. The Authority has also taken the initiative of build-

International initiatives in disaster risk reduction strategies

The UN Assembly Resolution of December 1989 declared 1990 to 2000 as the United Nations International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR), which resulted in a paradigm shift in the approach to disaster management from relief and rehabilitation to prevention, mitigation and preparedness, with core emphasis on developing the coping capacity of the community. The World Conference at Yokohama in 1994 identified the need and ways of building the resilience of nations and communities and adopted the strategy and framework for plan of action for a safer world. This provided landmark guidance on reducing disaster risks and the impact of disasters.

In 1999, a UN Assembly Resolution adopted the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) and created the Secretariat of the UNISDR in Geneva. In 2003 and 2004, UNISDR conducted a review of the Yokohama Declaration. This review formed the basis for the 'Hyogo framework for action (HFA) 2005-2015: Building the resilience of nations and

communities to disasters' which was adopted by World Conference on Disaster Reduction held in 2005, and subsequently endorsed by the UN General Assembly.

The HFA envisaged integration of disaster risk reduction into policies, plans and programmes of sustainable development and poverty reduction. Member states, regional organisations, UN systems, financial institutions and NGOs were expected to engage fully in supporting and implementing international strategy for disaster reduction and cooperate to advance integrated approaches to building disaster resilient nations and communities under this framework. The focus was to be on national implementation, through bi-lateral, regional and international cooperation. So far, 86 countries including India have reported development of a national policy and legislation on disaster management.

Priorities for action declared by the UN include political commitment and institutional framework for management of disasters at various levels; risk identification, assessment, monitoring and early warning; sharing knowledge on disaster management; reduction of underlying risk factors (environment,

social development and land use) and disaster preparedness and prompt response at all levels.

Bangladesh: CARE-Bangladesh has implemented the Bangladesh Urban Disaster Mitigation Project (BUDMP) since July 2000. BUDMP has been emphasising the importance of awareness generation among community groups and other sectors by placing CBDM on the political agenda. The national preparedness day is celebrated on March 29 every year.

Philippines: The Philippines disaster management forum emerged from the reflection workshops on CBDM in 2002. It was conducted by organisations and individuals who were implementing, supporting and advocating CBDM.

Citizens Disaster Response Center Network (CDRN): It is recognised as the key organisation which has been implementing CBDM since 1984. While working together with communities, CDRN has developed strategies to enhance the capacity of the community by forming village level disaster response communities, developing local early warning systems, organising rescue teams and diversifying local sources of livelihood.




The community can be trained to prepare for disasters through mock exercises, which involve them from the planning preparedness stage to the enactment of disaster situations.

ing the capacity of the community and the first responders in areas which fall in seismic zone IV and V for earthquakes. Capacity development programmes (CDPs) for earthquake disaster were conducted in all 11 districts of Delhi, (from 2011 to 2012), in 49 districts of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and UT of Chandigarh, (from 2012 to 2013), in all three districts of Andaman and Nicobar Islands (2013) and in 94 districts of all the eight states of northeast India (from 2013 to early 2014). In order to check the impact of CDPs and the state of preparedness of the community and first responders, review mock exercises were conducted with independent observers for third party audit, on specific days during the training programme. Special sessions were also organised for the judiciary and officials at the district, High Court and at the Supreme Court level. The multi district and multi state mock exercises have been very fruitful in sensitisation of the community and bringing out a number of gaps in preparedness, resources, communications, equipment and systems.

NDMA claims to have conducted more than 600

mock exercises so far, sensitising over 3.5 million people. Ten battalions of the National Disaster Response Force have demarcated geographical areas where they carry out awareness programmes and training of the community, NGOs and government officials during the non-disaster period.

Endnote: The common purpose of all CBDM programmes is to reduce disaster risk of the community. The main understanding behind all such activities should be to find ways and means to mitigate the impact of disasters through the participation and involvement of communities. Imparting skills and effecting change in attitude of members of the community are the key to success of the CBDM approach. We cannot prevent disasters from happening but we can surely attempt to reduce their impact on the lives, livelihood and environment by building the capacity of the community through CBDM approach. 

The authors are founder Chairperson, Philanthrope and research scholar, Manav Rachna International University, Faridabad, respectively. info@philanthrope.in