



DISASTER MANAGEMENT IN INDIA: A STUDY OF 2014 JAMMU & KASHMIR FLOODS

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ABSTRACT

The current Research paper is aimed at to analyze the disaster management plan and various problems faced in the Jammu and Kashmir during 2014 floods. The researcher has conducted interviews of various stakeholders during the field survey consisted of NGOs and administrative officials from agriculture and Floods control Department for collecting the data to complete the present research work. The fundamental question is that whether this disaster is a natural calamity or man-made. It questions the human interference and non-eco-friendly development in J&K which is the major reason for the disaster. There is also a question among environmentalists and academicians that what if this phenomenon of flooding recurs in J&K? Are we ready to prevent or face another flood like this in future? The aim of this paper is to present a realistic picture of recent Floods in J&K, to find answers for the above questions and to take a note on the lessons learned.

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INTRODUCTION

Indian subcontinent is among the world's most disaster prone areas. Almost 85% of India's areas are vulnerable to one or multiple hazard. Out of 28 states, 7 union territories, 22 are disaster prone. Jammu and Kashmir is one of the most vulnerable states of India and has a long history of loss of life and property due to various disasters. The State experiences several disasters of recurrent nature that result in loss of life, livelihood and properties. Such events not only disrupt economic activity but also cause immense hardship to the affected population. The changing climate has already shown its signs in the form of extreme weather conditions which have been further aggravated by many ill practices resulting in deforestation and environmental degradation. The State which was famous for its mighty glaciers is now experiencing a recession of the same.

The State has also witnessed unplanned and ill-planned development practices leading to enhanced vulnerabilities to floods, etc. The State is fast losing its traditional practices especially with regard to construction work and heritage. The recent disaster events witnessed in the State have shown the enhanced socio-economic and physical vulnerabilities and have taught many lessons.

Concepts

The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) of the United Nations (U.N) defines Disaster as "a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society

the affected community or society to cope using its own resources". A disaster is a result of natural or man-made causes. The conceptual distinction between 'hazards' and 'disasters' needs to be brought out clearly. Floods, Cyclones, et al are events in nature until a configuration of factors, which could be man-made or natural or both, cause the hazard to turn to a disaster.

Disaster is the actual occurrence of the apprehended catastrophe. Disaster is disturbance of 'equilibrium' which can be restored/ remedied by proactive policy in this regard. Hence, traditional perception of disasters as natural phenomena outside the realm of human intervention is misconstruing the problem; it is giving way to a 'systems perspective', which encompasses, ecological and social perspective to disasters, whereby disasters are understood as totalizing events in which all dimensions of a social-structural formation involving organized human action in the environmental context in which it takes place is studied" (Oliver Smith and Hoffman, 1999).

As a society interacts with its environment with its values and perceptions and engages in a series of processes over which it has incomplete control and knowledge of, for example, development and planning processes involving production and distribution of goods over long periods of time; underlying hazards turn to disasters (Oliver Smith, 1999).

With this understanding, Disaster Management is an attempt to inquire into the process of a hazard turning to disaster, to identify the causes and rectify the same through public policy. Administrative factors, such as poor building in an earthquake prone zone, poor land use planning in flood prone areas which lead to housing critical facilities in at-risk zones; allowing

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habitation in such zones, poor laws that fail to regulate facilities leading to disasters, such as the Bhopal gas leak, general low risk perception among people, more significantly policy-makers that hinders interest articulation for preventive policy for disaster management create conditions that lead to low lying /inherent hazards turning to disasters. This leads us to the issue of sustainable development since study and research in the area of disaster management is increasingly revealing human causatives behind disaster phenomena.

Disasters are classified as per origin, into natural and man-made disasters. High Powered Committee (HPC) was constituted in August 1999 under the chairmanship of J.C.Pant. The mandate of the HPC was to prepare comprehensive model plans for disaster management at the national, state and district levels. This was the first attempt in India towards a systematic comprehensive and holistic look at all disasters. Thirty odd disasters have been identified by the HPC, which were grouped into the five categories, based on generic considerations viz. Water and Climate, Geological, Biological, Chemical, industrial, Nuclear and Accidental.

Floods come under the category of water and climate. A Flood is a natural event that can have far reaching effects on people and the environment. A temporary overflow of a normally dry area due to overflow of a body of water, unusual building, and runoff of surface water or abnormal erosion.

About 30 million people are affected annually in India by the floods. Floods are the most common disasters and the leading cause of natural disaster fatalities worldwide. Risk of catastrophic losses due to flooding is significant given deforestation and the increasing proximity of large population to coastal areas, river basins and lakeshores. Flood is a combination of heavy rainfall, oceans to overflow their banks, and can happen at any time of the year. It develops over a period of days, when there is too much rainwater to fit in the rivers and water spreads over the land next to it. However, they can happen very quickly when lots of heavy rain falls over a short period of time. Coastal areas are also at risk from sea flooding, when storms and big waves bring seawater onto the land which India witnessed in the form of Tsunami 2004.

METHODOLOGY

The data for the study has been collected by employing primary and secondary data. Primary data has been collected from field after interviewing the SDRF, affected population and some non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Secondary data has been collected from books, journals, research papers etc. The data so collected has been combined and analyzed and is presented as follows.

Floods in Jammu and Kashmir

In June 2013, the floods which had ravaged Uttarakhand and adjoining areas and had rendered hundreds of thousands of people homeless. More than a year later in September 2014, Jammu & Kashmir witnessed the worst flood in 100 years. Close to 200 are dead and thousands are still waiting for help after heavy rain left majority parts of state underwater. Around 5 million people affected (4.5 million in Kashmir and 500,000 in Jammu areas) Over 2,500 villages, hamlets and towns were submerged in water. As army troops along with Navy, air force and disaster response agency and locals battled to rescue the stranded. The floods in Kashmir demonstrated how the

government is still grossly unprepared to deal with unprecedented natural calamities and Uttarakhand flash floods did not teach us a thing. Even with the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) predicting heavy rainfall in the valley days in advance, it led to people questioning the purpose of the NDMA and other concerned agencies of government.

SDRF Rescuing the Flood affected People in Jammu and Kashmir



The monsoon last year brought devastation to nearby Uttarakhand when similar flash floods and landslides killed 4,500 people. Every year, Assam is devastated by floods and river erosion and this year in just one district, 188 villages were submerged and 25,000 hectares of crops destroyed. The picture was not much different in J&K. Environmentalists and journalists are already starting to make claims about why the floods in J&K have caused so much destruction, among them: deforestation in the catchment areas of rivers, The Kashmir region had recorded a huge loss of forest since 1992. Comparison of forest survey reports for the period show that the valley lost about 10% of its dense forest cover during the period indicating that ability of forests to retain water has been reduced. It meant more rain water flowed directly into Jhelum River causing flooding. Unplanned construction in flood plains, it is natural for water to overflow its banks in the event of rainfall in its upper catchment and spill into flood plains which are basically its right of way. Extensive and often unplanned use of flood plains, disregarding the basic fact that it is a part and parcel of the river, leads to flood damage. Thus the uncontrolled and indiscriminate development of flood plains due to pressure of population can be considered as one of the main factors responsible for the ever increasing flood damage in spite of the substantial investment in the flood-sector during the last six decades, rampant dumping of garbage in the rivers, and overuse of chemical fertilizers by farmers, are also considered responsible for the flooding.

Lessons Learnt

The floods in Jammu & Kashmir demonstrated how the government is still grossly unprepared to deal with unprecedented natural calamities and Uttarakhand flash floods did not teach us a thing. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) was formed after 2004 tsunami and is tasked with "disaster mitigation, coordination between government agencies during rescue and relief operations, providing information about medical supplies required, collection of data on deaths, diseases and missing people" has been rendered headless since vice chairman quit after the UPA government was ousted from power during 2014 polls.

The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) which functions under NDMA and was formed in 2006 worked autonomously in J&K in coordination with other agencies. But in absence of the nodal agency, response to the rescue operations was slow with organisations like NDRF in the picture which lacks such expertise. The absence of a vacuum in the leadership of the NDMA has left a huge gap in the face of another unprecedented natural calamity. With the top brass absent, the body has not been screening weather reports and has not been able to sound warnings which could have helped save a lot of lives and its former chairman has asked the body be re-constituted at the earliest. The need for it to be done at the earliest can perhaps be highlighted from the fact that the floods in Jammu and Kashmir have found no mention on their official website of the NDMA.

The present government was found lacking in terms of their disaster preparedness and delay in reaching out to the affected people in time. Much was being talked, about disaster management and its preparedness after the last earthquake in Uri and Kupwara sectors and some people were reported to have been trained at district levels too, but none was seen on the trouble spots except the local youth, Indian Army and some NGOs who have shown an exemplary bravery to save the people in distress. Though Ministry of Home Affairs had initiated NDRM programme in all the flood prone states, providing assistance to draw disaster management plans at the State, District, Block and village levels, yet it yielded no results. Further the loss of total communication added to the misery of people. What lessons should our policy makers and town planners have learnt to deal with the floods in future.

About flood duty preparedness, a flood control committee comprising of the concerned heads of departments should be nominated every year. Besides flood duty, charts should be also circulated every year beforehand which would assign engineers of all departments and their other staff on their respective beats. Every year there should be a day fixed for flood rehearsal, when river banks would be examined and necessary strengthening of the weak spots recommended besides arrangement of trucks, storage of empty bags, boats etc. ensured. Also the location of flood beats would be conveyed to the staff according to the flood duty chart. On declaration of floods, responsible officers would manage the control room, monitoring the latest situation including on-spot inspections round the clock and passing the directions regarding deployment of labour, dispatch of empty bags, rescue boats, trucks etc. The activities be monitored at the highest level and the concerned authorities should be informed about the latest situation. Important decisions to save the population would be taken at highest level. Messages should be conveyed on phones, wireless followed by written messages/orders for record and reference.

Lack of a well-established institutional mechanism and technological regime at the state level, at present, is leading to an unprofessional approach towards managing disasters. It is in this context that the Government has recognized the need to have a proactive and comprehensive approach towards disaster management at the State and lower levels.

The aim of the approach is mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction into all the developmental initiatives to ensure sustainability of investments and minimizing the losses due to disasters by taking all necessary measures and precautions such as:

- To institutionalize Disaster Risk Reduction into governance as envisaged in Disaster Management Act, 2005 and National Disaster Management Policy, 2009.
- To promote and mainstream DRR into developmental planning.
- To build capacities and promote effective institutional mechanisms for mainstreaming DRR.
- To promote community-based DRR to reduce vulnerabilities and effective responses through awareness-generation and capacity-building.
- To promote research and development for Disaster Risk Reduction through appropriate disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness measures and strategies.
- To develop mechanism for an effective, well coordinated and timely response system.
- Besides the above mentioned approach, there are various other important policy measures which the policy makers in the government should be considering in, such as:
 - Forecast and Warning Systems should be established in different districts of the states, there is no doubt, that we cannot stop them from occurring but with advanced technology and skilled manpower, we could reduce and minimize their magnitude of destruction.
 - Afforestation should be encouraged by government among people, NGOs, corporate sector, School & higher education departments
 - There is the great need to strengthen weak bunds of the major rivers of J & K well in advance
 - Disaster management requires social and individual consciousness along with administrative efforts
 - Disaster management has to be made a part of the curriculum
 - The subjects like ekistics and architecture need to be introduced in colleges besides giving a boost to professional Social work in State Universities.
 - Mitigation plans need to be put into place to deliver relief and initiate effective and timely rescue operations.
 - Proper river bank protection by constructing embankments and using anti-erosion measures should be taken up on a large scale
 - Construction of residential colonies on river banks and flood plains should not be allowed and offenders should be strictly dealt under law
 - The state needs a serious environmental policy and discourses on practicable strategy to stop eco-destruction, which has been ignored like anything and the fallout is before us today.
 - We need to be extra cautious post the floods as disaster always brings with it diseases, epidemics, etc. which the State needs to plan for and tackle efficiently.

CONCLUSION

Natural calamities and nature's fury has time and again not only caused severe damage, but has also exposed the deep rooted lacuna in the disaster management system in India and our lack of preparedness which makes us even more prone to damage in such an eventuality. Our preparation for such incidents is even more disastrous, as seen in the recent floods in Jammu and Kashmir we had to look for boats, man power, and connectivity at the time of the happening of floods. Our government needs to go into the deep introspection and come

up with a policy which could at least minimize the risk of destruction and be resourceful in such ways which could helpful to all.

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