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ROLE OF NON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The NGOs play an important role in different phases of disaster management and risk reduction, but very often the efforts of the NGOs do not succeed in achieving desired results due to lack of effective coordination with other stakeholder groups, especially government machinery, and among the NGOs themselves. In the absence of proper Guidelines on the role of NGOs in DM, the huge capacity of NGOs, CSOs and faith-based organizations available in India are not being optimally utilised. The ad-hoc systems of NGO operations also raise certain concerns.

KEYWORDS: *Disaster, NGO, CSR & PPP.*

INTRODUCTION

The NGOs play an important role in different phases of disaster management and risk reduction, but very often the efforts of the NGOs do not succeed in achieving desired results due to lack of effective coordination with other stakeholder groups, especially government machinery, and among the NGOs themselves. In the absence of proper Guidelines on the role of NGOs in DM, the huge capacity of NGOs, CSOs and faith-based organizations available in India are not being optimally utilised. The ad-hoc systems of NGO operations also raise certain concerns. We need to bridge the gaps in implementation of disaster management framework, to institutionalize the role of NGOs in disaster management and to strengthen the quality and accountability of NGOs in India. NGOs play a pertinent role in all phases of disaster management.¹

The NDMA has brought about detailed guidelines on the role of NGOs in disaster management. There are many types of NGOs:

- NGOs with large field operations and substantial resource base such as Red Cross Society, CARE India, OXFAM
- NGOs deal with development technology such as disaster management institutions run by non-governmental control
- Interest Groups such as environment groups
- Local occupation groups of traders, doctors, etc.
- Resident Welfare Associations
- Education and training bodies run by NGOs.²

In the recent past, the role of NGOs in disaster management (DM) has started changing from providing post-disaster relief to strengthening pre-disaster preparedness and mitigation through capacity building, public awareness campaigns, mock exercises, workshops and conferences, etc. NGOs have also started to collaborate with corporate entities in Public-Private Partnership (PPP) projects and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives in the field of DM at State, District and Sub-district levels. Till recently, the work of NGOs in the field of DM has been mostly sporadic, reactive, responsive and driven by local level compulsions in the geographic areas where they are implementing development projects and very often they faced enormous challenges in coordinating with the government machinery and even among NGOs themselves.

In line with its mandate as envisaged in the Disaster Management Act 2005 (DM Act 2005), the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has circulated National Disaster Management Guidelines on Role of NGOs in Disaster Management defining the role of NGOs in disaster management.

KEY ROLE OF NGOS IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT

ROLE OF NGOS IN DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

- Strengthen policy, technical and institutional capacities in regional, national and local disaster management, including those related to technology, training, human and material resources.
- Promote and support dialogue, exchange of information and coordination with the aim of fostering a holistic approach towards disaster risk reduction.
- Promote the establishment of emergency funds, and to support preparedness measures.
- Develop specific mechanisms to engage the active participation and ownership of relevant stakeholders including communities in disaster preparedness, with the spirit of volunteerism.
- Thus, the tasks they are engaged in focus on:

- Creating awareness
- Early warning dissemination
- Resource mobilization
- Capacity building at different levels
- Promotion of alternative technology for housing/agriculture sectors etc.
- Linkage between service providers and end users in disaster affected regions
- Sensitizing community/other stakeholders
- Resolution of Conflict
- Facilitation of the process of Contingency Plan
- Vulnerability and Risk Assessment ³

ROLE OF NGOS IN DISASTER RESPONSE

Disaster response planning is guided by a set of key processes among humanitarian NGOs. To deliver adequately on their humanitarian responsibility at the time of crisis, NGOs have devised specific ways of working. The essential aspects of NGO processes in disaster response and related opportunities and constraints are as follows:

- **EARLY WARNING ALERTS AND DISSEMINATION**

National, State and Local Governments receive alerts and warnings which serve as common protocol for initial emergency evacuation and saving lives as well as moving pre-positioned stocks to the potential disaster areas. However, due to lack of prior agreements with SDMA, DDMA and local administration, NGOs and CSOs face difficulties in responding to disasters and providing humanitarian assistance to the disaster-affected communities.⁴

RAPID AND PROGRESSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

As the first critical action in every emergency, all NGOs involved in humanitarian response undertake a Rapid Assessment within 24 to 48 hours after the disaster. NGOs also triangulate assessments by drawing on information from local government, media and other national and international actors. This form is the basis for decision making to launch resource mobilisation and response efforts. NGOs may also conduct an integrated multi-sectoral assessment by deploying teams with multi-disciplinary professionals within 72 hours of the disaster occurrence and use the outcomes of such assessments to raise resources and initiate response operations. The Government machinery also conducts rapid and comprehensive damage assessments. The daily damage assessment bulletins brought out by local administration provide useful information to the public and civil society organizations.

- **PARTICIPATION AND SELF RELIANCE**

Mobilizing the community's own resources, skills, adaptability, fortitude, etc. can be valuable to the relief efforts and can restore some measure of hope, confidence and dignity to people. Organizing communities into appropriate governance structures responsible for administering various services is central to NGO operations and maintenance of services.

- **PROACTIVELY ADDRESSING VULNERABILITIES**

NGOs make target to response towards the most needy or vulnerable sections of the community. Many NGOs and humanitarian organisations have the mandate to work with the beneficiaries of their programmes (women, children, senior citizens, socially excluded etc.). In practical terms, NGOs spend considerable amount of time and resources for meticulously developing the beneficiary lists and good distribution system with standard protocols (family card, muster roll, checks and balances against misuse, etc.) that ensure quality and accountability.

- **APPROPRIATE TECHNICAL SUPPORT**

NGOs normally bring in the optimal level of technical support; ideally they would try to use local skills and capabilities. They would devote special attention on social aspects of technology during selecting technology.

- **CAPACITY BUILDING**

Capacity building of local people to develop coping strategies is an important aspect of humanitarian assistance. Organising affected people, building local institutions etc. is the part of the technical inputs that NGOs provide during disaster response.

- **MANDATE**

As mentioned above, some NGOs draw their mandate from the target group they work for (women, children, aged, disabled, etc.) while others draw their mandate based on the post disaster sectoral needs (water, sanitation, education, health care, etc.) that they can address.

- **CO-ORDINATION**

To link the response of individual agencies, coordination mechanisms are setup by District administration. In some cases these coordination mechanisms are supported by UN or NGO networks that may setup information and resource centers. NGOs can play an active role in forging partnerships with corporate entities in strengthening disaster preparedness and in launching disaster mitigation projects, in evolving Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects and in mobilising relief supplies from corporate business houses for distribution among the disaster-affected communities as a part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

- **INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**

The continuous collection of specific information, analysis and contextual action is required for emergency response to remain relevant to the dynamic situation in complex disasters. Some of the important and predictable action taken by humanitarian actors to collect information to support decision making are assessments, disease surveillance or epidemiological surveillance, nutritional surveillance, water quality surveillance, food security surveillance, wellbeing surveys etc.

- **PLANNING FOR DRR**

Most humanitarian NGOs understand the link between disasters and development, and hence mainstream DRR into short, medium and long term disaster response.

- **RESOURCE CENTRE**

Providing timely and need based information and material resources to the disaster affected communities is used by some of the NGOs as a primary or supportive response strategy. For example, a building materials and building components bank might be established by NGOs to provide critical building elements, technology and knowhow to the most vulnerable families along with information on how to construct multi-hazard resilient houses.

- **ADVOCACY**

NGOs engage in advocacy as a standalone work or in support of other operational programmes. NGO advocacy is to defend or promote a specific cause, practice or approach. They may typically try to raise awareness, acceptance and knowledge by lobbying, working with the media and public events.⁵

ROLE OF NGOs IN RELIEF & REHABILITATION

A number of different scenarios such as earthquakes, floods and conflict zones might require responses in camps or gathered groups or self settled camps. These may vary in size but the assumption is that people no longer have access to their normal home environment. In short term, the purpose of NGO response is to prevent an increase in mortality and morbidity due to inadequate nutrition and likely outbreak of communicable diseases such as Diarrheas and Malaria, and spread of Respiratory diseases and skin infections. Some of the sectors for NGO response in temporary relief camps may be:

- **WATER**

- a) Providing clean potable water;
- b) Drilling wells, capping springs, gravity supply water systems
- c) Chlorination of bore wells and hand pumps, pumping water from rivers into tanks for treatment with alum and Chlorine

- d) Providing distribution systems like tap stands, washing areas for clothes and for bathing.
- e) Water source protection: Ensuring existing water sources are protected from further contamination.

- **SANITATION**

- a) Construction of field latrines and soak pit latrines at relief camps and final disposal of excreta.
- b) Design and commissioning of drainage facilities.

- **PUBLIC HEALTH PROMOTION**

- a) Dissemination of information on public health risks
- b) Distribution of items essential for maintenance of health e.g. blankets, clothes, soap, hygiene kits, water containers, ORS.
- c) Community mobilisation for efficient use of water and sanitation facilities & distributed items
- d) Promote early detection & treatment of primary diseases
- e) Monitoring health trends

- **VECTOR CONTROL**

- a) Solid Waste disposal
- b) Drainage of waste water
- c) Insecticide spraying against flies & mosquito's & promotion activities to encourage further use
- d) Distribution of Mosquito Nets and education on use

- **FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION**

- a) Food Distribution
- b) Food monitoring / Nutrition monitoring including promotion of breast-feeding
- c) Cash interventions
- d) Supplementary feeding centres
- e) Distribution of cooking kits

- **SHELTER**

- a) Distribution of the emergency shelters / plastic sheeting and other local material
- b) Provision of appropriate access to electricity in temporary relief camps, especially in bath rooms and toilets
- c) Distribution of Blankets
- d) Distribution of Clothes
- e) Distribution of fuel for cooking
- f) Provision of safe space for children

- **RECONSTRUCTION**

- a) Housing re-construction including provision of water, sanitation and other services.
- b) Construction of social infrastructure like schools, anganwadis etc.
- c) Provision of building materials
- d) When large number of houses are destroyed and damaged due to disasters, NGOs often facilitate the reconstruction of houses by encouraging owners to actively participate in the construction of houses. This is called “Owner-driven Reconstruction” as against “Contractor-driven Reconstruction” wherein the housing reconstruction is carried out by engaging housing contractors.

- **MAN POWER**

The manpower available with the voluntary sector is very large, very prompt and highly motivated as it comprises basically volunteers who are involved at their own initiative. There are no procedural problems such as those of maintaining rolls and handling related legal issue.

- **FINANCES AND MATERIALS**

Voluntary agencies have very flexible means of mobilizing resources and a number of them specialized in just resource mobilization to be able to fund the activities of other NGOs working in the field.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES OF NGOs

- NGOs can play a very important role in mobilising communities and in linking ULBs with corporate sector entities for initiating DRR related activities.
- The strong linkages which NGOs have with grassroot communities can be effectively harnessed for creating greater public awareness on disaster risk and vulnerability, initiating

appropriate strategies for strengthening the capacity of stakeholder groups to improve disaster preparedness, mitigation and improving the emergency response capacities of the stakeholders.

- In addressing the emerging concerns mitigation, NGOs can play a very significant role in working with local communities and introducing innovative approaches based on the good practices followed in other countries.
- NGOs can bring in the financial resources from bi-lateral and multilateral donors for implementing pragmatic and innovative approaches to deal with disaster risk and vulnerability, by effectively integrating and converging the various government programmes, schemes and projects to create the required synergy in transforming the lives of at-risk communities.

SOME OF THE CHALLENGES FOR NGO

• WEAK COORDINATION

Inadequate coordination among Government officials and Civil Society humanitarian personnel results in weak response and suboptimal performance, as well as differences in the quality of inputs provided by different NGOs.

• BRIEF TIME-SPANS FOR RELIEF INTERVENTIONS

Many NGOs provide relief in the first 15 to 60 days, shut down the operations and move away without any linkage to long term rehabilitation and recovery of the disaster-affected communities.

• NEGLECT OF REMOTE AND INACCESSIBLE DISASTER-AFFECTED AREAS

Inadequate physical access to the affected communities and officials hampers assessments, information coordination, of climate change adaptation and convergence and sustained operations.

• TENDENCY TO RUSH TO THE EPICENTER OF DISASTERS

While the epicenters require special attention, it is also equally important to ensure that the peripheral areas impacted by disasters are not neglected or ignored while formulating intervention strategies.

• INADEQUATE ADHERENCE TO HUMANITARIAN STANDARDS AND GOOD PRACTICES

In general, there is a growing realization that global instruments setting minimum standards in disaster response have not been contextualized to India.

• INADEQUATE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY TO DONORS AND DISASTER AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

The process of disaster relief is sometimes seen as a charitable humanitarian activity which does not require the practice of transparency and accountability towards donors and disaster-affected communities.

• NEGLECT OF RURAL-URBAN DIVERSITY AND PRIMACY OF ATTENTION TO RURAL AREAS

The humanitarian assistance is still primarily targeted towards rural areas and the diverse needs of vulnerable urban poor are often not addressed adequately.

• LACK OF CLEAR EXIT STRATEGY DURING TRANSITION

Most often, the scope and timeline of the response is not defined. When an NGO withdraws from the area, the communities are left to fend for themselves.

• ADVOCACY ROLE OF NGOS – “DO NO HARM APPROACH”

Developmental projects, if not formulated with a comprehension of disaster risk and vulnerability profiles at the local levels, can increase disaster risk and vulnerability of people, assets, environment and their livelihoods.⁶

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