

Chapter 8

Conclusions and Recommendations

India is going through a phase of intensified preparedness for all disasters. Disaster management gained momentum from the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) and the devastating impacts of severe events over the decades. It has come a long way towards establishing a robust system for disaster risk reduction.

The shift in paradigm brought about by IDNDR has affected a shift in attitude within the government. The initiatives undertaken in recent years are geared to address all major activities in the disaster management cycle. The aim of these initiatives is to usher in a culture of prevention across the spectrum of stakeholders in the short and long term. The shifting paradigm has ensured a focus on pre-disaster preparedness and mitigation activities. Long-term mitigation activities, such as techno-legal back-up and institutional mechanisms, disaster resistant construction, retrofitting, flood and cyclone shelters, mass awareness generation, human resource development, and capacity building, have been taken up with great enthusiasm and preparedness activities for better response have received due attention. Preparedness initiatives include the constitution of dedicated response forces, search and rescue teams in states, regional response systems, and incident command systems for better management. Inter-agency and inter-departmental coordination in the form of emergency support functions have been taken up by the government. However, the approach has been holistic, rather than compartmentalised into mitigation, preparedness, response, and rehabilitation. Efforts have been made to merge all the components of disaster risk reduction into a comprehensive whole. Moreover, with the state governments having the primary responsibility for managing disasters, the priority for action depends on individual states to a great extent. Long-term mitigation for building disaster resilient communities is reinforced by preparedness measures at various levels.

The status of disaster management plans in the country can be summarised in the following points.

- The exercise of disaster management planning has been introduced throughout the country, but some states have been more proactive than others. This has resulted in differential capacity development and progress among the states.

- In the federal structure of the Indian polity, disaster management is a state subject; and so each state acts according to its own priorities. This means some states, especially those that face devastating disasters, have taken more initiatives than others, so the entire country is not together in terms of disaster prevention and mitigation.
- In the absence of dedicated disaster management instruments, such as legal and institutional back-up, the process and implementation of plans have faced impediments. These have been addressed to some extent by the Disaster Management Act of 2005.
- In view of the differences in geography, hazard profiles, and socioeconomic characteristics across the country, community-based disaster management planning was introduced to build resilience.
- The Disaster Management Authority set up recently has started working towards forming a robust institutional mechanism for disaster management.

Disaster management planning in India is dynamic and is experiencing a rise in impetus at the moment. Although considerable initiatives have been taken, more effort is needed to take the entire country forward in mission-mode for disaster risk reduction. Although the new national legislation is expected to bring about a uniform and dedicated mechanism for managing disasters from the national to the sub-district level, the following recommendations are being given keeping the current status of disaster preparedness and management in mind.

- Disaster management requires proactive ‘pre-action’ by each state to prepare for various calamities, both regular and unexpected. The differential capacity of states needs to be standardised into time-bound actions.
- Plan preparation at each level should be completed within a specified time, following which a standardised evaluation by a designated authority comprising of senior administrators, disaster management practitioners, and sector specialists should take place.
- Periodic rehearsals are required to streamline emergency functions and coordination mechanisms. Rehearsals also reveal the weaknesses in planning during non-emergency situations, providing scope for improvement before a disaster strikes. It also gives the administration a fair idea of the capabilities of the administration and the resilience of the people.
 - Although sporadic, community-based rehearsals are being held at the community level, a nationwide exercise has not taken place yet under the Disaster Management Risk Programme. The HPC had recommended the last week of April to be earmarked as the ‘Plan Updating Week’ and the first week of May as the ‘Rehearsal Week’ every year. A nation-wide observation of these weeks would automatically increase awareness and motivate people to follow a culture of safe development, on the one hand, and facilitate revision of plans, on the other. Although accepted in principle, this practice has not been implemented on a country-wide basis yet.

- Due to the increased complexity of the impact of disasters in urban areas, metropolitan and mega-metropolitan areas and the localities within them merit a closer look in terms of disaster preparedness and planning. Disaster management plans should be developed for cities in vulnerable areas. Although separate city plans may have to be prepared for hazard-prone cities, indicative guidelines and coordination mechanisms need to be incorporated into the respective plans.
- Successful integration of higher and lower levels of governance determines the feasibility of a plan. A plan has to be integrated horizontally with the development plan of the area as well as vertically with the next level for it to be viable.
- The National Act has mandated the NDMA and the National Executive Committee to prepare and execute the National Disaster Response Plan. It remains to be seen whether a new plan will be prepared or whether the existing NDRP will be adapted by NDMA. The existence of a previous National Disaster Response Plan, accepted by the government, could lead to duplication if a new plan is prepared, it would be better to modify the current NDRP to the changing situation. At present it is not clear what the status of the present NDRP will be if an entirely new plan is prepared.
- The National Act also provides for state and district disaster management authorities, and these are still in the process of being notified in various states.

It is expected that the disaster management planning process in India will see many changes in the near future. The central theme is the belief that a community prepared and aware about disasters will be a resilient community, duly empowered by a newly-created disaster management (DM) structure, and working in cohesion across all sectors will help realise the national objective of communities resilient to disasters throughout India as a whole.