

Introduction

VISION OF THE DOCUMENT

The need for an effective disaster management strategy to lessen disaster impact has increasingly been felt in many quarters. Strengthening of organizational structure of disaster management and reorienting existing organisational and administrative structures have been of prime concern. To achieve these objectives, a High Powered Committee (HPC) on Disaster Management was constituted with the approval of the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Shri J. C. Pant, former Secretary to the Government of India.

The original mandate of the HPC was confined to preparation of plans for natural disasters only. It was felt in deliberations of HPC that man-made disasters also be included in the holistic approach for preparation of plans, which was then approved by the Prime Minister.

The following document of the National Disaster Response Plan has been the outcome of extensive consultations and deliberations with all concerned ministries, and departments at the Centre. The HPC has also initiated the process of State and

The High Powered Committee on Disaster Management has taken into account the lessons and learning from past experiences and the work of many international organizations in the preparation of the National Disaster Response Plan. In essence, the work of the HPC has been twofold – bringing and assimilating knowledge and, understanding the commonalities of response actions by learning from past experience.

District plans in order to bring about cohesiveness and uniformity in the formulation of disaster plans in all states and districts all over the country.

It has also taken into account the work and learning of many international bodies, international agencies and Disaster Management Plans of many other countries. The work of the the HPC for the preparation of the National Response Plan has been two-fold:

- ◆ Bringing together a wide range of disaster related readings and processes from all over the world and trying to understand the various systems of response that have been implemented all over the world.
- ◆ Trying to understand the common element of response in order to bring out a well thought-out and planned Response Mechanism for our country. It has also taken into account the lessons learnt from past experiences.

However, this has been the first attempt to assimilate and bring out a common plan for the Centre for at least the thirty-one disasters identified by the High Powered Committee. It has a multihazard approach and incorporates the 'Culture of Quick Response'. The extensive consultations have led to the emergence of many new concepts for the execution of the plan: Trigger mechanisms that identify the sequence of events after a disaster and the L concept that identifies four levels of response, namely L0, L1, L2, L3 are just some of them. Although the Centre plays a supportive role to State governments, it has to be prepared for L3 level of disasters and maintain close monitoring of L2 as well as L1 disasters that affect different parts of the country. It is also required to keep itself updated on various disasters that have occurred all over the world. Therefore, the approach to the plan has been to identify all common elements of response. This acts as a base plan or a

generic/modular plan for all response activities. It provides a framework around which other agencies and departments can outline their own activities for disaster response.

This plan will then be supplemented with specific disaster plans to take into account the peculiar conditions that might arise due to the specific disaster. However, these specific plans will have to be dealt with, in detail, in order to provide and account for all disasters in India.

Preparation and planning well in advance have been reflected throughout the plan. The checklists and handbooks that will make this plan operational have also been identified. Planning and preparation have been given a lot of importance as it is better to be totally prepared rather than go unprepared and add to the chaos at a disaster site.

EVOLUTION OF THE DOCUMENT

Vulnerability of the Indian sub-continent towards disasters, both natural and man-made, is widely recognized. India is vulnerable to various natural disasters like floods, droughts, cyclones, earthquakes, landslides, avalanches, forest fires and the like. Losses caused by disasters continue to mount year after year. The need for an effective disaster management strategy to lessen disaster impact is increasingly being felt in many quarters and also for strengthening of organizational structure for disaster management. Alongwith, regular updating of Codes/Manual/Disaster Plans of the states on the basis of experience gained and technological developments should be done. To achieve these objectives, a High Powered Committee (HPC) on Disaster Management Plans was constituted with the approval of the Prime Minister under the chairmanship of Shri J. C. Pant, former Secretary to the Government of India.

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The enhanced **Terms of Reference** of the HPC are as follows:

1. To review existing arrangements for preparedness and mitigation of natural and man-made disasters including industrial, nuclear, biological and chemical disasters,
2. Recommend measures for strengthening organizational structures, and
3. Recommend a comprehensive model plan for management of these disasters at the National, State and District levels.

There were some additional considerations by HPC like forecasting and warning systems, response mechanisms, development programmes, development of human resources, public awareness, proactive measures, information technology, networking/coordinating, periodic updating of building practices and codes, structural measures, state-of-the-art Control Rooms and other matters.

APPROACH OF THE HPC TOWARDS MANAGEMENT OF DISASTERS

The approach of the HPC is holistic, inline with the Yokohama strategy evolved during the International Decade of Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR), i.e. planning for prevention, reduction, mitigation and preparedness and thereafter response plan to reduce the loss of lives and property due to disasters.

Efforts of HPC are not to develop a plan de novo, but to build on what exists at different levels and streamline such bottlenecks as may be existing considering the very large number of disasters that occur in different parts of India.

It was felt that the generic categorization of disasters would help in preparing disaster management plans. This generic categorization of disasters is in no way intended to disturb the handling of specific disasters by various departments and ministries at the Centre or the State level according to existing rules of business of the government. In fact, all conceivable disasters would fall in one or the other of the five sub-group categorizations as mentioned in the course of this report.

ROLE OF THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

- ◆ Monitoring and Support
- ◆ Knowledge Networking
- ◆ Documentation
- ◆ Financial Matters
- ◆ Evaluation
- ◆ Building up inventories
- ◆ Initiating Community Awareness programmes
- ◆ Training of community cadres for response and relief operations through a participatory approach
- ◆ Generating awareness through media and workshops for students

This document of the National Response plan only highlights the activities of 'immediate response' for an L3 disaster.

