

SOCIAL ISSUES DURING DISASTERS

Human Settlement, Refugee problems, Political, Social, Economic impacts of Disasters, Gender Equity issues during disasters, principles of psychosocial issues and recovery during emergency situations

4.1. Human Settlement:

Human Settlement means cluster of dwellings of any type or size where human beings live. For this purpose, people may erect houses and other structures and command some area or territory as their economic support-base. Thus, the process of settlement inherently involves grouping of people and apportioning of territory as their resource base.

4.1.1. Human settlements and natural disasters:

- The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) appreciate the opportunity to address the issue of past and future progress on human settlement.
- The natural disasters witnessed over the past months; Bam, the Tsunami, Katrina and others, are only a reminder of how critical sustainable urban planning and construction are to reducing vulnerability and risk, particularly in hazardous locations.
- Construction site planning and city development must be guided by a disaster-prevention culture, planned in a way able to absorb population growth, with adequate water, sanitation and waste management to ensure a healthy environment and reduce or avoid diseases and epidemics.
- RC/RC societies around the world have implemented community-based settlement programs that contribute to this objective, both during and after disasters hit and as longer-term activities.

- One such example is the Zenhoun project run by Egyptian Red Crescent following the powerful earthquake which struck Cairo in 1992 leaving thousands without homes or livelihoods. Since then, an integrated approach with ministries of health, social affairs and education, the Governor of Cairo, the local government in Assalam City and elected representatives of the community has successfully made Al-Nahda a safe home for some 240'000 people.
- During the earthquake last month, in Pakistan administered Kashmir, in just one single school 250 young girls bodies were pulled from the ruins.
- Poor people, particularly the poorest of the poor, are more vulnerable to the downward spiral. They are often more prone to disease and disasters due to their habitat and their situation, and additionally they have more limited access to social support systems.
- To improve their lives we must start with vulnerability and risk reduction and resilience and capacity building. We must remember the lessons of the recent past. Populations are more and more concentrated in urban areas according to the report of the Institute for Environment and Human Security of the United Nations University in Bonn.
- Environmental deterioration already displaces up to 10 million a year and the situation could get worse. Confronting this trend and reversing it takes time.
- The benefits of laws, policies, and programs mitigating this risk must be thought through and continually and carefully modified to achieve their desired results.
- 10 years ago, more than 5000 people perished in the city of Kobe, Japan. The loss of so many lives, in a country where so much effort had been made to prepare for earthquakes, shocked observers worldwide.
- As we remembered them on 17 January this year in Kobe, before the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, we must continue pursuing the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 to reduce the vulnerability to hazards.

4.2. Refugee problems:

Whenever one hears the word 'refugee', there are many terms and phrases that spring to mind-'human rights', 'mass exodus', 'violence', 'national security', etc. A refugee is defined as "*a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being mistreated for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country*".

Or

"*a person who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it*".

- This definition is given by the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, a crucial treaty in international refugee law. The treaty entered into force approximately half a century ago on 4 October 1967 and 146 countries are parties to the protocol.
- India in its 70 years as an independent nation-state has seen its fair share of refugee problems. And of course, it started with Partition itself.

4.2.1 The refugee of Partition:

- Though people who crossed over the newly formed boundaries between India and Pakistan-by choice or forcibly-didn't lose their nationalities, they were still forced to live the lives of a refugee.
- Refugee camps across north India served as homes for those who had borne the brunt of Partition.
- The national capital of Delhi in particular saw a huge influx of refugees. The numbers were such that an entire city-Faridabad-had to be built to rehabilitate refugees who were living in appalling conditions in various camps.
- The scale of the problem was an unprecedented challenge for the young government, and it was only through the efforts of many-including, notably, the social reformer and freedom fighter Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay that the rehabilitation of the Partition refugees could be carried out.

4.3. Political issues of Disasters:

All Disasters are Political:

- Whether we want to believe it or not, political considerations are a significant factor in the preparation, response, recovery and mitigation of disaster events.
- Politics is an integral element of the disaster and that element has to be dealt with just like any other disaster impact.
- Virtually every state has disaster legislation which allows for special powers and authorities to be exercised by duly elected officials.
- Elected officials can accelerate assistance.
- Most outside resources which come to a community are accessed through a governmental (political) process.

- Disasters lead to some complexity where the problems involved/generated are strongly political in nature, such as communal bias in distribution of relief, relocation of communities, compensation disbursement etc.
- The process of requesting, justifying and acquiring such assistance is one of the most "political" of all disaster actions. Generally, elected officials are the most effective persons we have in expediting this assistance.
- Finally, we need public support. Elected officials represent the people and in a democratic republic, the people's representatives hold the ultimate authority.
- They also are the most appropriate spokespersons when it comes to providing guidance to the public and obtaining public support for disaster related actions.

The following issues influences on Political issues:

- Social issue like lack of homogeneity in the population causes division between different sections of the people based on religion, region, language, caste and race.
- Economical issues like poverty, unemployment and development
- Terrorism, naxalism, Religious violence and caste related violence also impact on Political.

4.4. Social Impacts of Disaster:

It includes:

- the impact of disaster and assist effort affect the property, capabilities and ability to recover of different social groups
- impacts on the local socioeconomic structure, including how people work and earn a living;
- impacts on people's access to wealth;
- impacts on managing land and other resources; and
- impacts on how people cope, including through migration

4.5. Gender equity in Disaster:

- Natural disasters affect women, men, girls and boys differently. In fact, in many contexts, due to socio-economic conditions as well cultural beliefs and traditional practices, women and girls are more likely to be disproportionately affected by disasters, including through loss of life during and in the aftermath of disasters, loss of livelihoods and productive assets, and increased gender-based violence.

- Gender inequality in social, economic and political spheres has resulted in vast differences between men and women in emergency situations, concerning matters such as, household decisions about use of relief assets, voluntary relief and recovery work, access to evacuation shelter and relief goods, and employment in disaster planning, relief and recovery programs among other areas of concern in disaster relief.
- In many cases, women have limited access to formal disaster management mechanisms or to any kind of information and resources related to disaster preparedness and prevention. Furthermore, women's accumulated skills, experiences and capabilities in times of natural tragedy are often not adequately identified, recognized and promoted, as women's participation in disaster risk reduction (DRR) decision-making processes at all levels throughout the world is particularly low.
- Hence, an effective gender-sensitive DRR strategy should both help take better into account women's vulnerabilities in specific cultures without forgetting to highlight women's potential and capabilities in order to prepare, confront, and recover from disasters.
- For some years now, the international community has recognized the need for, and has committed to, focus on gender equality and women's empowerment in DRR.
- For instance, the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 (HFA), the global blueprint for DRR which came out of the 2005 World Disaster reduction Conference held in Japan, acknowledged the importance of the constructive role played by women in DRR.
- More recently, recommendations on gender-sensitive DRR and the promotion of a stronger role of women in building resilience were presented at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Japan (14-18 March 2015) and incorporated into the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 adopted by UN Member States on 18 March 2015.
- Disaster mitigation as also response policy, particularly concerning control over relief resources have to factor this component in decision-making with a view to making it more equitable and on the whole, more effective.

4.6. Economic Factors:

- Positive correlation has been evidenced between poverty, disasters and environmental degradation.
- Relative vulnerability of people is comparatively much higher in third world countries than in the developed world.
- As per United Nations estimates, although least developed countries show less physical exposure to hazards (11%) they account for far greater number of casualties, (53%).
- On the other side, the most developed countries represent more (15%) physical exposure to hazards and account for significantly less (1.8%) victims.
- The inference drawn is that the magnitude of disaster suffered is directly correlated to the level of development, which explains largely the fact of the Third World accounting for significantly more losses than the developed countries.
- This difference is shown by a list of disaster events and fatalities over 1960-81.
- Japan suffered 43 earthquakes and other disasters and lost 2,700 people that mean 63 deaths per disaster. Peru suffered 31 disasters with 91,000 dead, a vast majority lost in the single event of the 1970 earthquake.
- Major disasters, such as the droughts, disrupt and destroy local economies and bring about shortages in neighbouring regions resulting in innumerable international refugees and stimulate aid programmes to the extent that the consequences of environmental hazards are truly global.
- Poverty situation increases vulnerability to disasters and contributes in enabling poverty. In order to facilitate sustainable development, it is essential to eliminate this vicious circle. Sustainable development, with emphasis on the long-term and intergenerational aspects enables us to face challenges. Compatibility between economic growth and sustainable development demands a method to measure the kind of growth that encompasses all important aspects pertaining to quality of life, such as human exposure to risk situations and lifestyles.
- It is proposed that risk reduction strategies targeting poverty should involve local institutions more meaningfully and focus on providing alternate livelihood options to the poor and providing safe working

environment by reducing occupational hazards which increase the vulnerability of the poor to hazardous events.

4.7. Principles of psychosocial issues:

i. Human Rights and Equality:

- Promote and protect the human rights of all affected person, especially vulnerable groups such as women and girls
- Promote equity and non-discrimination, ensuring that mental health and psychosocial support services are available to all affected people regardless of gender, age religion, ethnicity etc

ii. Participation:

From the on-set of an emergency involve local communities and local stakeholders (including vulnerable populations and NGOs representing the LGBTI community, women with disabilities, etc., as much as possible) in all steps of programming, including the assessment, design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation stages

iii. Do no harm:

- Mental health and psychosocial support programs have a high potential to cause harm because they deal with highly sensitive issues. As such, it is extremely important to ensure that such programs do no harm
- Remain alert to possible adverse effects during programme planning. In addition, measure and record unintended negative consequences through programme monitoring and evaluation. Such unintended consequences might include: cultural, economic, political, psychological, security and social issues (adapted from WHO, 2012)
- Reduce the risk of harm in various ways, such as:
 - Participate in coordination groups to learn from others and to minimize duplication and gaps in response
 - Design interventions on the basis of sufficient information
 - Commit to evaluation, openness to scrutiny and external review
 - Develop cultural sensitivity and competence in the areas in which you intervene/work
 - Remain updated on the evidence base regarding effective practices

- Develop an understanding of, and consistently reflect on, universal human rights, power relations between outsiders and emergency-affected people, and the value of participatory approaches

Build on available resources and capacities:

- iv.
- Build local capacities, supporting self-help and strengthening the resources already present.

- Externally driven and implemented programmes often lead to inappropriate mental health and psychosocial support and often the sustainability is limited

Integrated support systems:

- v.
- Focusing on stand-alone services, for example those dealing only with people with specific diagnoses, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, can create a highly fragmented care system. In order to avoid this, ensure that interventions and programming are as integrated as possible

- Integrate psychosocial support programs and activities into wider systems such as: existing community support mechanisms, formal/non-formal school systems, general health services, general mental health services, social services, etc., as well as well as other services and community support which address violence against women and girls, such as: reproductive health, antenatal care, infant and young child nutrition, child protection, microfinance initiatives, and existing community-support mechanisms, such as women's support groups (adapted from WHO, 2012). This will ensure that psychosocial support programs reach a wider population and carry fewer stigmas. Experience has also shown that integration often increases programme sustainability

vi. Multi-layered supports:

- In conflict and post-conflict humanitarian settings, people are often affected in different ways and as such require different kinds of support
- Organize mental health and psychosocial support response programs by developing a layered system of complementary services (e.g. basic amenities for women and children, such as food) that meet the specific needs of different groups