

Response policy in Disaster MANAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Response is the Third stage of the disaster management cycle when a disaster has occurred or is imminent. Disaster response activities include setting up control rooms, putting the contingency plan in action, issue warning, action for evacuation, taking people to safer areas, rendering medical aid to the needy etc. Responders also need to cope with response-generated demands such as the need for coordination, communications, ongoing situation assessment and resource mobilization during the emergency period.

There are three phases in responding -- pre, during and post disaster. Predisaster response activities are launched as soon as the information about an impending disaster is received. The activities like setting up control rooms, evacuation of people, etc. are intended to reduce the impact of disaster on the life and property. Response activities during disaster are meant to ensure that the needs and provisions of victims are met to alleviate and minimize suffering. Post disaster response tries to achieve rapid, durable and sustainable recovery. In this unit we will be discussing why we need the Response plan, response plan at central, state and local level and role of other agencies in response plan.

WHY WE NEED RESPONSE PLANS

The response period is of crucial importance. When the earthquake hit Gujarat on 26th January 2001, Crisis Management Group at the Central Government level was informed but it could only meet five and half hours after the tragedy. The Natural Disaster Management Division at the Centre was told about the quake at 8:56 a.m. but medicos were sent to Bhuj at 7:30 p.m. Further, the State Government, which is primarily responsible for disaster management in India, had set up the control room by 9:45 a.m., but little was done for the next 36 hours. In contrast, the Swiss embassy, which was informed at 10 p.m. alerted all the team members of its response team within one hour and the team reached there next day afternoon, i.e. 14 hours after the request for help was made. This included the travel time from Switzerland to India. Unfortunately, formalities at the airport took two hours. Had Indian response been equally prompt, may be few more lives could have been saved. The above discussion highlights the need for a response plan. Early response is dependent on the state of preparedness and the existence of a suitable response plans. A timely response can reduce the magnitude of loss of life and property. Though, there has been a paradigm shift world over from response to culture of prevention and mitigation, the uncertainty involving

natural disaster makes it imperative to have a response plan. All disasters, including manmade disasters require a ready response plan, even if the prevention aspect has been taken care of in an adequate manner. For timely and adequate response, a comprehensive response plan is a prerequisite. These are useful for issue of warnings, serve as guide to officials at the critical time by assisting them take immediate action, time is not lost in consultation with senior officials and in getting formal approval from the authorities. 3 Any response plan is influenced by the politico-socio milieu and the public administration system. India is a quasi-federal state and consequently, the responsibilities are shared by both the Central Government as well as the state government, though the primary responsibility in the event of a disaster is that of the concerned state government. The response to disasters in India, in most cases, had been spontaneous and supply driven. However, India being vulnerable to all kinds of disasters, has attempted response plans especially for natural disasters. Since, administrative units in a district are found in three layers, we can discuss the Response Plans at five levels – Centre, State, District, Block and Village. The plans are formulated for relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction by separate agencies. Elements of these plans are discussed below.

❖ **RESPONSE PLAN AT CENTRAL LEVEL**

Constitutional and legal context of disaster management can be said to be somewhat contradictory. While, India is prone to all kinds of disasters, the subject does not find mention in any of the three Lists in the 7th Schedule. By implication, it should be the responsibility of the Central Government under the provision that subjects not listed under any List would ordinarily have to be dealt with by the Union Government. However, conventionally the primary responsibility for responding to disasters is that of the concerned state governments as most of the function in it would be considered under its domain. For ensuring appropriate policy and administrative response to natural calamities, a clear identification of the nodal organization and the pattern of interaction between the different government functionaries are necessary. Depending on the types of disaster, a nodal ministry is assigned the task of coordinating all activities of the central, state and district administration and the other support departments/ministries

<i>Type of Disaster</i>	<i>Nodal Ministry</i>
Air Accidents	Ministry of Civil Aviation
Civil Strife	Ministry of Home Affairs
Major breakdown of any of the Essential Services posing widespread and protected problems	Concerned Ministry
Drought	Ministry of Agriculture
Railway Accidents	Ministry of Railways
Chemical Disasters	Ministry of Environment and Forests
Biological Disasters	Ministry of Health
Nuclear Accident	Department of Atomic Energy
All Disasters other than the above	Ministry of Home Affairs

Source: Ministry of Home Affairs

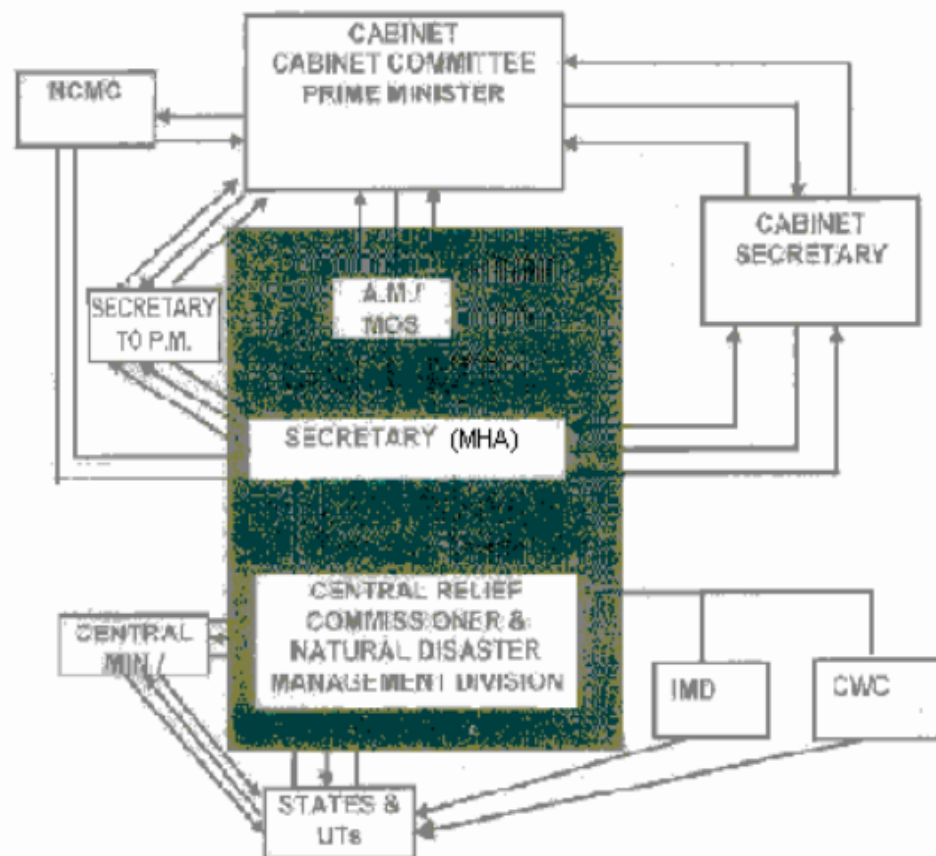
The dimensions of the response at the central level are determined in accordance with the existing policy of financing the relief expenditure and keeping in view the factors like –

- i) the gravity of the disaster; and
- ii) the scale of operation So, the Disaster Response Plan at the Central Level contains –

1. **Policy Response Policies** reflect the intentions of the government and give directions to administrative efforts. The National Government adopts and implement large scale disaster response using variety of models. Models of organizational decision-making are applicable to public policy decisions. Prime Minister, Cabinet Committees and the Home Minister provide the policy response to any calamity. Home Minister is key functionary, because the Ministry of Home Affairs is now the nodal agency for natural disaster management, except for drought and epidemics. Earlier, this responsibility was with the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation. Association of highest ranking offices helps in giving the necessary thrust to disaster response. The objectives of policy response are to empathize with the victims and to sub-serve, long term and shortterm objectives of the government.
2. **Administrative Response** Policy response determines the scope of administrative response. Latter is basically implementation of the will of the government. To enact the above, the central government needs to have all the information related to a calamity for making an assessment of the situation and advising the policy-makers. In view of the resource constraints of the states, they make request for central assistance, hence the additional response of the center is in the form of assessment of the requirements of the state and to commit the resources both financial and

material. So, the administrative response broadly relates to operational requirements and provision of central assistance as per existing policy. The operational requirements can be classified into primary relief functions and secondary relief functions. The contours of operational aspect depend on the intensity of the disaster. If its management is beyond the capacity of the state government, the operational requirements are greater, otherwise the centre's responsibilities are restricted to monitor the relief work utilizing the Calamity Relief Fund (CRF). This Fund is the main source of funding for disaster relief and rehabilitation. A schematic diagram of administrative machinery to provide central response is given below:

ADMINISTRATIVE MACHINERY FOR CENTRAL RESPONSE



CABINET COMMITTEE

Depending upon the intensity of a disaster, there is provision of constitution of a cabinet committee for effective implementation of the response plan. The Home Secretary is responsible for providing all the necessary information to this committee and seek directions from it, if required. If such committee is not constituted, all matters relating to response are reported to the Cabinet Secretary.

National Crisis Management Committee

A National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC) has been constituted in the Cabinet Secretariat under the chairmanship of the Cabinet Secretary. The other members of the Committee include Secretary to the Prime Minister, Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs and Directors of Intelligence Bureau, Research and Analysis Wing. An officer of the Cabinet Secretariat is the Convenor of the Committee. The Committee has been given the powers to give directions to the Crisis Management Group (CMG) as deemed necessary. The Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs is responsible for ensuring that all developments are brought to the notice of the NCMC promptly.

Crisis Management Group

CMG functions under the chairmanship of the Central Relief Commissioner and consists of senior officers from ministries and departments like Finance, Food Civil Supplies, Power, Urban Development, Rural Development, Health, Planning Commission, Women and Child Development etc. The Resident Commissioners of the states affected by major natural calamity may be co-opted on the CMG during the period of crisis. The Group meets at least twice in a year in the months of December/January and May/June and as often as may be required by the Relief Commissioner. The functions of the CMG are as given below:

- i) review every year the Contingency Plans formulated by the Central Ministries/Departments;
- ii) review the measures required for dealing with a natural calamity;
- iii) coordinate the activities of the Central Ministries and the state governments in relations to disaster preparedness and relief; and
- iv) obtain information from the nodal officers on measures relating to the above.

The responsibility of preparing the Contingency Plan of the Ministry/Department, as mentioned above, is that of the nodal officer, who is not below the rank of a Joint Secretary of each ministry/department. The Detailed Action Plan, as it is known, clearly lays down the channel and manner of interaction, between agencies engaged in these functions, details of the contact points and the specific measures and time-frames for their implementation.

Relief Commissioner

The Relief Commissioner, in the Disaster Management Division functions as the nodal officer to coordinate relief operation for all natural calamities. He/she is assisted in the discharge of duties by the Additional Relief Commissioner and an Emergency Operations Centre (Control Room). The Control Room functions full scale round the clock after receipt of first information about the occurrence of a major calamity and does so for the period the Commissioner deems appropriate for dealing effectively with the crisis. The Relief Commissioner receives information relating to forecast/warning of then natural calamity from the Director General, India Meteorological Department or from the Central Water Commission on a continuing basis. This information is then passed on to the Secretary (Ministry of Home Affairs) and through him the Home Minister, the Cabinet Secretary and Secretary to the Prime Minister and further through them, the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and the National Crisis Management Committee. If required, this information is also sent to different Central Government Ministries/Departments and the state governments for appropriate follow up action.

Control Room

The Control Room is intended to be the nerve center of all emergencies and is therefore adequately equipped and optimally located. The disaster may strike outside office hours as well and the arrangement for that is through a Night Duty Cell and a telex facility. The responsibilities of the control room are as given below:

- (i) collect and transmit information concerning any calamity and relief;
- (ii) keep close contact with the governments of the states affected by a calamity;
- (iii) interact with other Central Ministries/Departments in connection with natural calamities and relief;
- (iv) maintain records containing all relevant information relating to action points and contact points in Central Ministries/Departments/State Governments; and
- (iv) perform such other functions and duties as may be entrusted by the Relief Commissioner

The Duty Officer of the Control Room

The officer is an official of sufficient maturity to understand the seriousness of the information reports and convey to the Secretary, MHA/Relief Commissioner/Additional Relief Commissioner accordingly. His functions are listed and these indicate the course of action that he/she is required to take on receipt of messages of a particular nature. He contacts the members of CMG and the essential personnel of the Control Room. He also communicates with the Control Room of the concerned state government.

Financial Resource

CRF was created as per the recommendation of the Ninth Finance Commission. Constituted by each state, it is used for meeting the expenditure for providing immediate relief to the victims of cyclone, drought, earthquake, fire, flood and hailstorm. Of the total contribution 75% is contributed by Central Government and the remaining amount comes from the resources of the state governments. This amount is contributed on annual basis. Another source is the National Calamity Contingency Fund, which was set up on the recommendation of the Eleventh Finance Commission to provide assistance for immediate relief and rehabilitation. National calamities of cyclone, drought, earthquake, fire, flood and hailstorm, considered to be of severe nature requiring expenditure by the state governments in excess of the balances available in their respective CRFs qualify for relief assistance from this Fund. Prime Minister's National Relief Fund is another source of funds available for relief to persons affected by disasters. Created shortly after independence, it provides immediate relief to people in distress. The Fund depends entirely on voluntary donations received from the public. Besides providing relief to the families of those killed, it grants assistance to families affected.

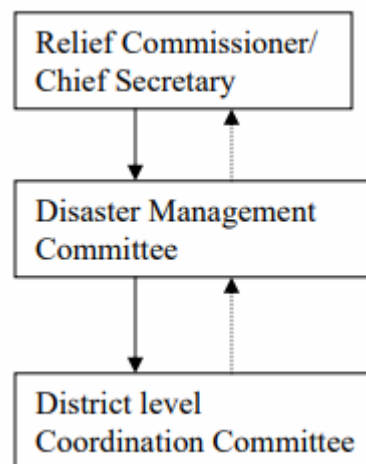
❖ STATE LEVEL RESPONSE PLAN

As mentioned above, the primary responsibility of disaster management is that of the state government concerned. Central government intervenes only when the response to the disaster is beyond the capacity of the state government. So, effectively the state has to have a

response plan which enables effective and prompt response and provides for roles both for the central as well as the district level roles. Apparently, coordination is the main feature of response plan at this level. Coordination is also important when we consider the fact that a disaster is not geographically confined and may affect several districts. Defining the role and responsibilities of each actor and committing resources, both material and financial, are the components of the state level response plans as well. Administrative mechanism for response at state level is given below

State Relief Commissioner

Most of the states have Relief Commissioners, who are in charge of the relief measures. In others, the Chief Secretary or an officer nominated by him is in charge of the response activities. He heads the Disaster Management Committee and takes all the measures for setting up of the Control Room in case of disasters. He is the link between the Centre and the District Coordination Committee. The communication lines are along the lines shown below:



State Crisis Management Group (SCMG) The SCMG functions under the chairmanship of the Relief Commissioner/Chief Secretary and consists of Senior Officers from the Ministries/Departments of Revenue, Home, Civil Supplies, Power Irrigation, Water Supply, Panchayat, Agriculture, Forests, Rural Development, Health, Planning, Public Works, and Finance. Some other officials, like local army commando, may be co-opted if the Relief Commissioner/Chief Secretary deems it appropriate for effective response. The Group adheres to the instructions and guidance received from time to time from the Government of India and formulates Action Plans for dealing with different calamities. The responsibility of approving the district level response plans has also been vested in this Group.

State Level Control Room

An Emergency Operation Centre (Control Room) is established by the Relief Commissioner of the state as soon as the news about a disaster or impending disaster is received. The Action Plan is usually on the lines of the Central Plan. However, given the area-specific vulnerabilities, each state incorporates those features which may make response appropriate. The control room gathers all the necessary information from the designated officials and keeps updated information about the Air Force, Navy and the Army for quick interaction and response.

The responsibilities of the Control Room are:

- (i) to transmit the information about the developments as a result of natural disaster to the Relief Commissioner on a continuous basis till the situation improves;
- (ii) to receive instructions and communicate them to the appropriate agencies for immediate action;
- (iii) to collect and submit information relating to implementation of relief measures to the Central Relief Commissioner; and
- (iv) to keep the state level authorities apprised of the developments on a continuing basis.

Financial Resources As mentioned above, states contribute to CRF, which is available to them in the event of any disaster striking it. Besides that, there are two more resources. The Chief Minister's Relief Fund has been set up on the pattern of Prime Minister Relief Fund. This fund becomes handy to provide immediate relief to the victims of disasters. Besides that, the concerned state government sanctions expenditure to meet relief expenditure from within its resources, which include its share of various developmental and employment generation programmes.

❖ DISTRICT RESPONSE PLAN

District administration is the focal point for the preparation of Response Plan at the district level as it is the point of public service delivery and responsible for directing, supervising and monitoring relief measures for disasters. Appropriately, the Collector/Deputy Commissioner is expected to draw up a response plan for the whole district for all kinds of disasters to which the district might be prone. Inputs are also taken from the local defence forces units in preparation of these plans. These plans are then approved by the state government. These lay

down specific action points, key personnel and contact points. Moreover, plans are periodically reviewed and updated in the light of lessons learnt in dealing with calamities from time to time and the technological advancements. Usually, this period of review is one year. Administrative Machinery at the District Level is given below.

District Relief Committee

A district level relief committee consisting of official and non-official members including the local legislators and the Members of Parliament is set up in each district to review relief measures.

District Control Room

The Plans envisage setting up of a Control Room in the wake of natural calamities for day to day monitoring of the rescue and relief operations on a continuing basis.

❖ Village Level Response Plan

Village level response plans entail hazard specific measures being undertaken by communities who are most affected by such events. This community based approach has been in existence in many disaster prone countries such as Philippines, Bangladesh and Nepal, but in India it gained momentum in the aftermath of the super cyclone of Orissa in 1998 and the earthquake of Gujarat in 2001. Major impetus for this has come from the intervention of United Nations. Apparently, this is new initiative and at an All India Level 125 of the most vulnerable districts falling in Gujarat, Orissa, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Assam, Meghalaya and Sikkim are being covered for preparing response plans among other measures. The procedure is to form a Village Disaster Management Committee in the village. The Committee includes members ranging from Panchayat representatives to school teachers to community leaders. The response plan is developed by the community through the nominated representatives. The plans have information on resources, vulnerable elements and standard operating procedures for response groups. The plans are also ratified by the concerned Gram Sabha. The plans identify response groups, which will play an active role in the pre, during and post disaster scenario. In due course, it is proposed to form Village Task Forces (VTFs) at the community level aimed at preventing high degree of loss of life, livelihoods and property. The members would be selected from among motivated and responsible volunteers with the relevant skills. These VTFs would be formed for functions like early warning and communication,

evacuation and temporary shelter management, search and rescue, health and first aid, relief coordination, water and sanitation etc.

ROLE OF OTHER AGENCIES IN THE RESPONSE PLANS

Many international agencies respond to disasters, some as part of their mandate and some on humanitarian grounds. Foremost of them is United Nations, which provides a support system and cooperates with increased information database, a forum for communication, a format for coordination and increased efficacy through pooled resources. A mandate issued by the UN General Assembly has ensued in setting up of a standing UN-Disaster Management Team (UN-DMT) in each country with the primary purpose of ensuring a prompt, effective and concerted response by the UN system at country level in the event of a disaster. Some of the major agencies under the aegis of the United Nations are Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator, United Nations Development Programme, Food and Agriculture Organization, World Food Programme, World Health Organization, UNHCR, UNESCO and UNICEF. International donor agencies prefer that resources made available by them are disbursed so as to bring clear benefits to the affected community. The response plans at various levels should have a mechanism to integrate such efforts so that responses are prompt and effective, and there is no duplicacy of efforts and wastage of resources.

Role of Voluntary Sector and NGOs in Response

State intervention in almost all the welfare activities is being supported by voluntary sector and non-governmental organizations, and responding to disasters is no exception. The tenacity of the local community and voluntary groups helped the state to cope with the calamities. The past two decades have seen emergence of this sector in a big way. Today we have local as well as international agencies which are very active during disasters. For example, Oxfam, Care or Ramakrishna Mission respond to almost every disaster with timely and effective relief operations. In fact, Dasholi Gram Swarajya Mandal in Uttaranchal has integrated forest response management with disaster mitigation. The tasks performed by the NGOs is beneficial for downscaling the impact of disasters. There are various types of NGOs like NGOs with dedicated field operations and resource back up, development technology related NGOs or simply educational institutions. Therefore, the plans should integrate their role to structure their responses. This would require assessment of their areas of strength. Voluntary sector and NGOs are better equipped to handle accident relief and post disaster rehabilitation work.

Role of Community Based Organisations (CBOs) in the Response Plans

It has been observed that the people who are affected most by a disaster are the first one to respond to various needs of the victims. The cooperation of such people has prompted the policy makers to formulate community based approaches. CBOs are now increasingly becoming integral part of the Response Plans. Efficacy of CBOs has been noticed especially in places where the response from the state has not been prompt or adequate due to either lack of infrastructure or inadequate arrangements, which is quite often a case in developing countries like India. Apparently, CBOs are small and grass-root agencies with informal structures but having a good grip on the local situation. As past experience is one of the factors that influences response, in some places which are very vulnerable or prone to disasters, one finds formally structured CBOs as well.

Emergency Supplies

Emergency supplies are crucial and comfort the affected people immediately. These supplies come mainly from four sources: i. Governmental sources, ii. International agencies, iii. NGOs & CBOs, and iv. Individuals. Minimum standard of relief requires supply of food, medical aid, water and sanitation facilities, and shelter must be adequately provided. Response plans need to identify the supplies and their sources, and if they are coming from more than one source, then its coordination. A sample of organizations and supplies provided by them is given below:

<i>Agency</i>	<i>Response</i>
District Authorities	Evacuation, Food through PDS, Water and Sanitation, Monetary Compensation, Medical aid, Construction Material
Defence Services	Evacuation, Airdropping of Food in inaccessible areas
International Agencies	Medical aid, Food Supplies, Tents
NGOs and CBOs	Food, Utensils, Clothes, Water & Sanitation, Medicines

Communication Network

Efficacy of administrative response is closely linked to effective communication network. This network enables the sharing of information by the concerned agencies which enables implementing effective strategies. Establishing a reliable communication network demands broad understanding and ability to use the capabilities of communication tools, and the application of information. Plans are only as good as the quality of information. Technological advancements, particularly in the last two decades, have provided some very potent tools to the disaster responders. Two information innovations have brought about unprecedented changes:

- i) Computer-mediated communications via the Internet and the World Wide Web and the unprecedented amount of information that these modes of delivery and communication make available. Computers and networks have the prospect of making it more feasible to collect, consolidate and disseminate information. They also reduce the decision-making time. Their significance for Response Plans is that they prompt immediate action. Coordination also becomes easier and cost-effective.
- ii) Geographic information System (GISs) are computer based tools and procedures that capture, store, analyse and display spatially referenced data. Since disasters are geographic events, mapping of disasters and threats can be done and in fact has been attempted through GIS and remote sensing. GIS also enables modeling, which is very important for formulating an effective Response Plan. Further advantage of GIS is in preparing evacuation routes, emergency shelter placement etc. For example, information about closed roads and infrastructure damage can be coded into a GIS and rough maps can be provided to emergency personnel on that basis. However, in a disaster situation all available communication sources are important. The use of HAM radio has been effective and also local innovative means adopted.