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STUDY ON MINISTRIES RESPONSIBLE FOR VARIOUS CATEGORIES OF DISASTERS

Study on Ministries Responsible For Various Categories of Disasters

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Abstract – Institutional arrangements for disaster response are the heart of disaster management systems. There is no dearth of personnel, both civilian and military, experienced in handling situations arising out of natural disasters. However, there certainly is a pressing need for improvement and strengthening of existing institutional arrangements and systems in this regard to make the initial response to a disaster more effective and professional. Most of the resources and expertise needed already exist with the Government.

Key Words; Disaster, Professional, Natural Disasters, Expertise.

INTRODUCTION

The following decision-making and standing bodies are responsible for disaster management at the Central level:

- Union Cabinet, headed by the Prime Minister.
- Empowered Group of Ministers, headed by the Deputy Prime Minister
- National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC), under the chairmanship of the Cabinet Secretary.
- Crisis Management Group (CMG): under the chairmanship of the Central Relief Commissioner comprising senior officers from the various Ministries and other concerned Departments which reviews contingency plans, measures required for dealing with a natural disaster, and co-ordinates the activities of the Central Ministries and the State Governments in relation to disaster preparedness response and relief.
- Technical Organizations, such as the Indian Meteorological Department (cyclone/earthquake), Central Water Commission (floods), Building and Material Promotion Council (construction laws), Bureau of Indian Standards (norms), Defence Research & Development Organization (nuclear/biological), Directorate General Civil Defence provide specific technical support to coordination of disaster response and management functions.

• The setting up of a National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) is being contemplated by the Ministry of Home Affairs as the proposed apex structure within the government for the purpose. Amongst other major organizational initiatives, it is proposed to:

- (a) Establish a specialised and earmarked response team for dealing with nuclear/ biological/chemical disasters;
- (b) Establish search and rescue teams in each State;
- (c) Strengthen communication systems in the North Eastern Region.

The responsibility to cope with natural disasters is essentially that of the State Government. The role of the Central Government is supportive in terms of supplementation of physical and financial resources. The Chief Secretary of the State heads a state level committee which is in overall charge of the relief operations in the State and the Relief Commissioners who are in charge of the relief and rehabilitation measures in the wake of natural disasters in their States function under the overall direction and control of the state level committee. In many states, Secretary, Department of Revenue, is also in-charge of relief. State Governments usually have relief manuals and the districts have their contingency plan that is updated from time to time.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The district administration is the focal point for implementation of all governmental plans and activities. The actual day-to-day function of administering relief is the responsibility of the Collector/ District Magistrate/Deputy Commissioner who exercises coordinating and supervising powers over all departments at the district level. Though it may not be a common phenomenon, there exists by and large in districts also a district level relief committee consisting of officials and non-officials.

The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments recognise Panchayati Raj Institutions as 'Institutions of self-government'. The amendment has also laid down necessary guidelines for the structure of their composition, powers, functions, devolution of finances, regular holding of elections and reservation of seats for weaker sections including women. These local bodies can be effective instruments in tackling disasters through early warning system, relief distribution, providing shelter to the victims, medical assistance etc.

Other than the national, state, district and local levels, there are various institutional stakeholders who are involved in disaster management at various levels in the country. These include the police and para-military forces, civil defence and home-guards, fire services, ex-servicemen, nongovernment organisations (NGOs), public and private sector enterprises, media and HAM operators, all of whom have important roles to play.

The Indian Armed Forces are supposed to be called upon to intervene and take on specific tasks only when the situation is beyond the capability of civil administration. In practice, the Armed Forces are the core of the government's response capacity and tend to be the first responders of the Government of India in a major disaster. Due to their ability to organize action in adverse ground circumstances, speed of operational response and the resources and capabilities at their disposal, the Armed Forces have historically played a major role in emergency support functions such as communications, search and rescue operations, health and medical facilities, transportation, power, food and civil supplies, public works and engineering, especially in the immediate aftermath of disaster. Disaster management plans should incorporate the role expected of them so that the procedure for deploying them is smooth and quick.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The Government of India is a member of various international organisations in the field of disaster response and relief. While, as a policy, no requests for assistance or appeals are made to the international community in the event of a disaster, assistance offered suo moto is accepted. Linkages exist with the following organisations:

a) UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), which has been made responsible by UN General Assembly mandate for all international disaster response.

b) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), responsible for mitigation and prevention aspects of disaster management.

c) UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) System. Streamlining Institutional Arrangements for Disaster Response

Institutional arrangements for disaster response are the heart of disaster management systems. There is no dearth of personnel, both civilian and military, experienced in handling situations arising out of natural disasters. However, there certainly is a pressing need for improvement and strengthening of existing institutional arrangements and systems in this regard to make the initial response to a disaster more effective and professional. Most of the resources and expertise needed already exist with the Government. What needs to be streamlined is how they should be integrated, trained and deployed. Some of the areas where improvement is urgently needed are:

Integrated planning for disasters, including the integration of relevant Armed Forces formations into disaster management planning at all levels from District to State and Central Government. Setting up of a modern, permanent national command centre or operations room, with redundant communications and data links to all State capitals. The national command centre or operations room needs to be manned on a 24-hour basis by professionals to cater for instant integrated response. There needs to be a properly equipped operations room at the State level as well.

Establishment of a national stand by, quick reaction team composed of experienced professionals, both military and civilian, drawn from Central and State Government staff to respond immediately by flying in a matter of hours an experienced response team to the locations when a disaster strikes. This team can be organized and run professionally on the same lines as the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) teams.

Creation of urban search and rescue capacity at all levels, by establishing a fully equipped Search and Rescue unit, as part of the fire service in all State capitals, with trained staff and modern equipment such as thermal imagers, acoustic detection devices etc. This is of immediate relevance since a major weakness exposed in the Gujarat earthquake was a lack of specialised urban search and rescue capability in India.

Media policy geared to handling the growing phenomenon of real time television reporting, which

generates enormous political pressures on a government to respond rapidly and efficiently. This needs attention since the effect is going to increase, not decrease in future.

CONCLUSION

Closer interface with and better understanding of the international system for disaster response, and putting in place, systems for dealing with international assistance once it comes in e.g., customs, immigration, foreign policy implications etc. A greater appreciation is needed of the speed and automation of modern international response to a natural disaster. Closer interaction is required between of the Ministry of External Affairs and the relevant inter-national agencies concerned with disaster response.

Standard procedures for dealing with domestic humanitarian and relief assistance from non-government sources. Procedures and systems need to be set out to avoid confusion and ensure best utilisation of the assistance being offered, just as in the case of systems for international assistance.

REFERENCES

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (FAO) early warning of impending food crises, and assesses global food supply problems.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) transfer refugees, internally displaced persons and others in need of internal or international migration services.

The Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) assistance and advice to governments and other actors on human rights issues, sets standards and monitors rights violations.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) disaster-prone countries in contingency planning and with disaster mitigation, prevention and preparedness measures.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) international protection and assistance for refugees, stateless persons and internally displaced persons, particularly in conflict-related emergencies.

The United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) works to uphold children's rights, survival, development and protection by intervening in health, education, water, sanitation, hygiene and protection.

The World Food Programme (WFP) is the principle supplier of relief food aid.

The World Health Organization (WHO) technical guidelines for health action in crises and pre-deployment training courses .

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

.The International Committee of the Red Cross

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

ICRC collaboration with WHO, the Health Emergencies in Large Populations (HELP)

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3 The University of Wisconsin Disaster Management Center offers courses on management of refugee and displaced persons operations.

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5 Davis, Cuny, Krimgold, in **Issues and Problems in the Provision of Shelter and Housing: A Review of Experiences and Lessons from Recent Disasters**; ARTIC, India, 1978.

6 Cuny, op. cit.

NOTES

* "Assistance" in refugee operations applies to relief and material aid prepositioning supplies, designating sites for the arrivals, and attempting to determine the health and nutritional status of the people when they arrive (remote detection).

** The term "unaccompanied minors" is used in lieu of orphans because relatives, extended family members, and even parents can often be found after careful searches among the refugee populations.