

DILEMMAS OF DECENTRALIZING DISASTER MANAGEMENT

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India is seeing an upward surge when it comes to creating a disaster resilient country and building a risk reduction consciousness which is here to stay. The effort put in by the Indian Government towards mainstreaming disaster risk reduction deserves praise by all means. As a nation state, we are among the early birds to have committed to putting in place the Sendai Framework for action. The New Delhi declaration 2016 also showcased the commitment that must be shown towards disaster management and its processes. But as fragmented efforts continue to happen in the sector, are we lost in translating global policy frameworks into local action. There is no doubt that the Disaster Management Act 2005 has proved an extra-ordinary instrument for helping India mainstream disaster management into a 21st century success story given her historical context of being surrounded by a baffling social division, ethnic diversity, conflicting priorities and poverty amidst plenty. But the current manner of execution is the source of India's major weakness. The majoritarian action that needs to occur requires an elaborate political arrangement willing to work with civil society and communities towards decisive on-ground commitment guided by evidence based public policy and public health.

Grand planning at NDMA Bhawan at Safardung enclave will not translate into changing local bodies and the way they think. The judiciary in India turns an indifferent eye and often refrains from

interfering and even interpreting the DM Act 2005. What then India needs to do in-order to realize the Prime Minister's 10 point agenda for a resilient India? The solution lies in the questions we raise.

Strengthening State Disaster Management Authority (SDMAs) by a multi-pronged approach which is target based and achievable is a good way to get started. SDMA's today do not know how to facilitate research and developmental assessment; in fact the cadres have little idea at all of what it really means barring a few select states. There is a political turf war on pressing priorities like either drought or floods where political mileage supersedes the benefit that may direct occur to the masses. The professionals working in the sector of Disaster Management, both young and young in heart bring value and conviction towards shaping the country and making sincere efforts to build a resilient nation state. The nature and approach of Disaster Management departments in every state must change. Conducting needs assessment, workshops, seminars and public drills must become a way of life. Disaster Risk Reduction is a process to cherish, not a burden to be borne. Advisory councils with domain experts must be created as enshrined in the DM Act 2005. The apathy of District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) needs to be understood. They do not have untied funds to conduct any meaningful risk reduction effort. The public health consequences of disaster get only a top dressing space in the disaster management plan. The global policy frameworks are never discussed at State Disaster Management Authority meetings, if at all they happen, even rare at District Disaster Management Authority meetings. The case in point is what good such frameworks hold if it does not reach the last man on the local ground? There are hardly some districts in India who are pro-active in ensuring a disaster management plan which matches theory and practicality. Unless officials are held accountable, expecting miracles is a fool's prerogative. In addition to that, working together with line ministries and departments will be a humongous task for disaster professionals. I would like to leave a twofold thought process to all policy analysts and my dear fellow citizens. The democratic process of disaster management decentralization must leave us with two things. The first, it must be a sustainable effort and the second, it must have a value proposition of quality. Let us identify the visible and reviving forces necessary to create a sustainable planet which is inclusive of the idea of India and bring value to our governance mechanism and bureaucracy to function at optimum levels as expected. Second is to infuse quality whose presence is never acknowledged but whose absence is widely noted. The pursuit of quality would require marrying global policy frameworks in disaster risk reduction to local wisdom involving all stakeholders in the marital union to build resilience.

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