

Chapter – XI: Conclusions

Disasters lead to disruption of normal life. They can also result in significant loss of infrastructure, population and government facilities. There is a distinct increase in the frequency of disasters in the country and their impact in terms of casualties and damage. Besides natural disasters, the potential of manmade disasters is increasing manifold with increased urbanisation and development. The importance of disaster preparedness, more specifically, disaster mitigation and prevention efforts cannot be overstated in such a scenario.

On the basis of this Performance Audit, we have the assurance that there was an increased awareness about disaster preparedness and the need for disaster risk reduction in the country. National level legislation had established a multi level institutional set up. Funding arrangements for response related work was clearly laid down and nodal agencies and departments identified for handling specific disasters. Significant progress had been made at the state level on early warning and communication systems.

NDMA is chaired by the Prime Minister of India and has an overarching presence in the field of Disaster Management. The National Act and the policy have been formulated. The responsibility for preparing the National Plan vests with National Disaster Management Authority. However, the National Plan for Disaster Management was yet to be finalised even after six years of the Act coming into force. The national guidelines developed by NDMA were not adopted and applied by the nodal agencies and state governments. As the Apex body, NDMA did not take effective measures to ensure the application of its Guidelines.

NDMA's project management capacity was deficient. As a result, none of its mitigation and vulnerability mapping projects was completed. Its internal systems also needed strengthening as the business rules were yet to be finalised and manpower issues were to be resolved. The important aspect of mainstreaming disaster preparedness with the flagship social sector schemes was yet to be taken up by NDMA.

Certain issues relating to funding arrangements needed to be streamlined by MHA. Delays in remittance of funds from State Disaster Response Fund to districts, delays in submission of Utilisation Certificates by states and grant of National Disaster Response Fund for work other than response, were a few causes of concern. In our opinion, the establishment of specific Disaster Mitigation funds at the national, state and district levels, as envisaged in the DM Act, would be a significant step towards achieving the goal of disaster mitigation.

Response to a specific disaster is perhaps the best test of the level of disaster preparedness. We looked into the disaster response efforts to ascertain their effectiveness. The reaction of the National Disaster Response Force was an essential element of our tests. We noted that it was not yet established as a well equipped, well trained specialised force. Further, we noted that the deficiencies in this regard were not recognised and remedied especially in

terms of deployment of suitable manpower, equipment and training. The Force Standard Operating Procedure are yet to be finalised and communicated to the states. Diversion of this Force for non-disaster events needs to be checked. The Force did not have sufficient manpower and no single chain of command had been established.

We noted that IMD, ISRO and other agencies had established early warning systems for tsunami, cyclones, etc. However, we found that due to lack of monitoring and timely inputs from all participants, most projects regarding the dissemination of data to stakeholders were still incomplete. In many cases, the equipment procured for these projects were lying uninstalled.

We noted deficiencies in preparedness for manmade disasters. The nodal ministries had established structures but their functioning needed to be strengthened at the ground level. The Ministry of Earth Sciences seems to be unaware of its role in disaster management. Comprehensive documentation and reporting of nuclear and radiological disasters, forest fires and chemical disasters was badly needed. Legislation needs to be updated for biological disasters. To ensure effective control over these disasters, vigilance at the entry points to the country needed to be further strengthened and laboratory facilities also needed urgent upgradation.

To consolidate the efforts already made for disaster preparedness, it is essential that the NDMA effectively discharges its statutory responsibilities and the roles and responsibilities of other entities are clearly demarcated, documented, disseminated and monitored.

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