COMMUNITY

In case of any disaster or emergency, before any government machinery & support reaches or outside help gets galvanized, it is the Community which has to respond immediately (at the hour). As the Community plays the role of First Responder, it is critical that there is adequate awareness and preparedness at the Community level especially amongst the most vulnerable set of communities residing in the most vulnerable areas. Therefore, it would be pertinent to invest in efforts with respect to strengthening Community Risk Resilience at all levels to be able to adequately address Disaster Risk Reduction[1].

Community connections are the relationships necessary to develop, implement, and maintain an effective end-to-end early warning system. A multi-hazard warning center can only be successful if the warnings it produces reach individuals at risk and are easy to understand, resulting in appropriate responses. To assure warnings are most effective, the staff at a center must establish trusted partnerships among international organizations, governmental agencies, community leaders and organizations, businesses, and local citizens prior to issuing a warning[2].

Disasters and Communities

Disaster risk is on the rise throughout the world. Over the past two to three decades, the economic losses and the number of people who have been affected by natural disasters have increased more rapidly than both economic and population growth. The physical, social and economic losses caused by these disasters are particularly harsh for developing countries since they have a long-range effect in the development process. The impacts of the disasters are deeply related with the socio economic conditions, tradition, culture, and climate of the communities. To minimize the damages caused by disasters, various efforts have been taken by government, international communities including donor agencies[3].

Community Preparedness

Disaster preparedness provides a platform to design effective, realistic and coordinated planning, reduces duplication of efforts and increase the overall effectiveness of National Societies, household and community members disaster preparedness and response efforts. Disaster preparedness activities embedded with risk reduction measures can prevent disaster situations and also result in saving maximum lives and livelihoods during any disaster situation, enabling the affected population to get back to normalcy within a short time period[4].

Community preparedness can be thought of as the advance capacity of a community to respond to the consequences of an adverse event by having plans in place so that people know what to do and where to go if a warning is issued or a hazard is observed. This result can be achieved through the development of programs, in which communities establish plans, enhance communications, and heighten awareness among their citizens. Key components of a community preparedness program include[2]:

- Raising public awareness and effecting behavioral change in the areas of mitigation and preparedness
- Deployment of stable, reliable, and effective warning systems
- Development of effective messaging for inducing favorable community response to mitigation, preparedness, and warning communications

Community Empowerment[5]

While disasters can strike wide region or a nation, that impact is felt at the community level although it may hit one or several communities at once. It is these communities that constitute what is referred to as "disaster fronts". Being at the forefronts, communities need to have capacity to respond to threats themselves. It is for this reason that communities should be involved in managing the risks that may threaten their well-being.

While different community empowerment programmes related to disaster mitigation has achieved their objectives, they are often short term, and issues on sustainability in these efforts are rarely addressed. Government, non-government and international organizations implement various programmes before and after the disasters. Most of them are very successful during the project period, but gradually diminish as the years pass. There are many reasons for this kind of phenomena, however, lack of effective participation and capacity building of the local communities to peruse the program remains major factor for lack of sustainability.

Community Based Disaster Management (CBDM) [5, 6]

Community-based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) is an approach that seeks to actively engage at risk communities in the identification, analysis, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of disaster risks in order to reduce their vulnerabilities and enhance their capacities. Recognizing the role of communities and providing them with central and local government support is critical to maintaining and strengthening important community-based functions.

Most of disaster response can be characterized as command and control structure one that is top down and with logistic centre approach. Because of this, we observe, lack of community participation that results into failures in meeting the appropriate and vital humanitarian needs, unnecessary increase in requirement for external resources, and general dissatisfaction over performance despite the use of exceptional management measures.

Recognizing these limitations, the Community Based Disaster Management (CBDM) approach promotes a bottom-up approach working in harmony with the top - down approach, to address the challenges and difficulties. To be effective, local communities must be supported into analyzing their hazardous conditions, their vulnerabilities and capacities as they see themselves.

The CBDM approach provides opportunities for the local community to evaluate their own situation based on their own experiences initially. Under this approach, the local community not only becomes part of creating plans and decisions, but

also becomes a major player in its implementation. Although the community is given greater roles in the decision-making and implementation processes, CBDM does not ignore the importance of scientific and objective risk assessment and planning. The CBDM approach acknowledges that as many stakeholders as needed should be involved in the process, with the end goal of achieving capacities and transferring of resources at to the community, which level who would assume the biggest responsibility in over disaster reduction.

Integrating Gender Issues in Community-based Disaster Risk Management[7]

The aim of disaster risk management is to reduce vulnerabilities and build the resilience of communities to external shocks of major hazard events. The CBDRM approach advocates equal community participation and involvement. It focuses on community vulnerabilities and is couched within the broader sustainable development and poverty reduction goals. Using a gender sensitive approach ensures that DRM is conducted in a comprehensive way, addressing the needs and harnessing the capacity of all people (women, girls, boys and men) living in the community. A gender sensitive CBDRM approach can have a positive impact on many aspects of women and men's lives. Working with existing women's networks helps strengthening women's participation in the community's decision-making processes. For example, women's participation can highlight issues related to gender-based violence and strengthen women's roles in community-based early warning systems. It can also be used to elevate the role of women as leaders who can drive a risk reduction agenda in support of community development goals.

References

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