# Floods Again: What Can Be Done Differently?

## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Floods are the most common disaster in India. According to the World Resources Institute (WRI), India tops the list of 163 nations affected by river floods in terms of number of people. As several parts of the country face the fury of floods this year, it is worth examining what are reasons for India's high exposure to flooding and what can be done differently to mitigate the adverse impact of this recurrent catastrophe. This issue of Southasiadisasters.net is titled 'Foods Again: What Can be Done Differently' and examines all these issues.

There are several reasons for India's enhanced vulnerability to floods. For instance, the county receives 75% of its entire rainfall over a short monsoon season (June-September). Similarly, 12% of India's land area is considered prone to floods which makes flooding a perennial phenomenon in at least five Indian states of Assam, Bihar, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. More importantly, due to the advantages offered by living close to rivers, there has been a historic trend of overpopulation in India's floodplains. Climate change has compounded this problem even more. All these factors interplay with each other to precipitate regular flooding in the country to disrupt the lives of 4.85 million India's every year.

However, there are a lot of mitigation measures that can be adopted to reduce the debilitating impact of floods in India. Chiefly, district disaster management plans (DDMPs), forestry, cash transfers for flood relief, newer technology for early warning and capacity building of line departments on climate change represent an entry point to mainstream flood preparedness in the country. Read on to know more. ■  **– Kshitij Gupta**

# Floods Again: What Can Be Done Differently in South Asia?

Floods are age old but must South Asia's response to floods be age old as well? South Asia is now emerging to be a leader in reducing disaster risk. Such regional efforts were well received by Asian countries in the recent Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR) held in Delhi in November 2016.

The ongoing floods in Assam in the North East of India and Gujarat in the West of India offer an opportunity to re-look the flood response in South Asia.

Therefore, this issue of Southasiadisasters.net enlists what can be done differently. Cyclones are one such area. **Floods and cyclones** go hand-in-hand and the recent cyclone Mora in Myanmar offered an opportunity to look at floods recovery in an urban setting. New **ways must be found to deal with floods in cities** and towns that propel South Asia's economic growth. What is needed is "new dimensions" that David Sanderson and others offer in the recent book titled, "Urban Disaster Resilience".

The second area is dams. A large number of dams are built in South Asia, and many more are being built to irrigate and mange floods. **But are these dam safe from floods?** Are they safe enough to protect the development and progress that they are supposed to spawn.

Third, obvious but not well recognized area is floods and forestry in South Asia. Forests slow down run-off and thus reduce floods. Floods wash away forests. Both impact each other and yet **there is no clear direction on how to manage floods** in forests and manage forests to reduce floods in South Asia. Women leaders in Nepal are thinking and reflecting on this overlap from a leadership point of view.

The Fourth area is ongoing activities around DRR road maps. **DRR road maps do not adequately address issues of rampant and repeated floods** and how to reduce flood impact as well as its causes. A road map for flood prone areas such as Assam or Gujarat in India is overdue. Hazard specific action plans are overdue at the sub-national level. The challenge of mainstreaming floods in South Asia's DRR road maps is widely shared in civil society members in Nepal, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.

Fifth, is it smart for a city to be flooded: have water logged roads and partially submerged housing colonies? Smart City **infrastructure investments** in India **offer an opportunity to reduce** risks, if not all, at least **flood risks** faced by its economic hubs and low income communities.

Sixth, relief offered after floods is not new to South Asia. What is new is possible and now pioneering use of cash transfer in such relief. ECHO South Asia has done effective work in **cash transfer after floods** with its partners in Odisha in India in 2014. And the direction is promising.

The above six are not the only ways to deal with floods differently in South Asia. But the above are some of the key ways that need urgent and additional attention while dealing with floods in South Asia. ■

**– Mihir R. Bhatt**

# Floods in India in 2017

As India is lashed by an above normal monsoon, several states of the country are suffering from a flood situation. The most adversely affected states include Gujarat, Assam, Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh. As photos and videos of inundated streets and submerged houses from different parts of India make rounds on the electronic and print media, it is high time to ask some important questions. Questions like 'What makes floods in India so destructive and debilitating' need to be answered. Similarly, given the widespread death, destruction and displacement brought by the floods it is important to ask why isn't there a statewide mechanism for better preparedness.
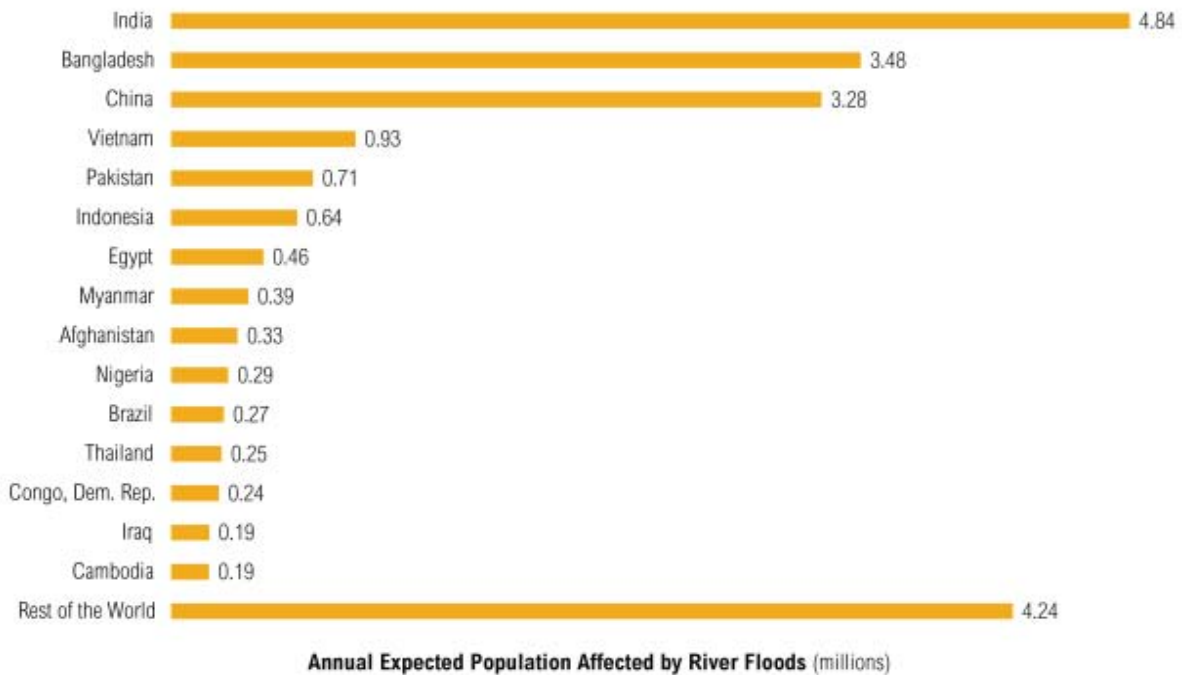
It is already known that 83 people have died this year due to these floods and close to 1.5 million have been displaced in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.[1] According to the United Nations' Global Assessment Report (GAR), India loses close to US $ 7 billion on account of floods on average annually. Given the great human and economic costs incurred by the country due to the wrath of the floods, it is imperative to build resilience to it. This resilience can be built up in many forms.

In the face of this disaster, the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and the Indian Air Force (IAF) have rescued 400 people stranded due to floods in different parts of Gujarat. Similarly, the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) has done effective work in evacuating people and shifting them to relief camps from some of the most flood affected districts in the state. Such efforts are praiseworthy but the larger problem of flooding needs to be tackled through proper preparedness and mitigation measures. According to the World Resources Institute (WRI), India has most number of people in the world exposed to the risk of flooding. *(See the graph below captures that)*

Given the enormity of the problem, there needs to concerted efforts in making the country better prepared for these recurring floods. A robust way of mitigating the impact of

## 15 Countries Account for 80% of Population Exposed to River Flood Risk Worldwide

| Country | Annual Expected Population Affected by River Floods (millions) |
|---|---|
| India | 4.84 |
| Bangladesh | 3.48 |
| China | 3.28 |
| Vietnam | 0.93 |
| Pakistan | 0.71 |
| Indonesia | 0.64 |
| Egypt | 0.46 |
| Myanmar | 0.39 |
| Afghanistan | 0.33 |
| Nigeria | 0.29 |
| Brazil | 0.27 |
| Thailand | 0.25 |
| Congo, Dem. Rep. | 0.24 |
| Iraq | 0.19 |
| Cambodia | 0.19 |
| Rest of the World | 4.24 |

**Annual Expected Population Affected by River Floods** (millions)

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1 http://www.firstpost.com/india/monsoon-alert-8-dead-in-floods-across-india-more-rains-in-store-says-weather-forecast-3824715.html

floods is through preparedness at the sub-national levels. India already has a National Disaster Management Act, which mandates all the districts in the country to prepare an annual District Disaster Management Plan (DDMP). However, most of the times, these DDMPs are seen as an instrument to facilitate post-disaster response and relief operations.

These DDMPs in fact represent an opportunity to mainstream and institutionalize preparedness against floods in the country. Key systems such as water supply, health, power, communication, housing and agriculture need to be taken into account when planning for flood preparedness as they are all affected by floods. This can be done well if the hazard and risk mapping of potential disasters is scrupulously conducted.

There is a considerable body of scientific evidence that suggests that changing climate has been a major contributing factor for all the increase in the frequency and intensity of floods. However, the line departments of the government possess only a limited understanding on this issue. Capacity building of these line departments on understanding the concepts and impacts of climate change can also lead to better preparedness and response to floods at the sub-national levels in the country.

Leveraging technology for better forecasting and issue timely warnings is key to mitigating the impact of floods. In this respect, investing in more sophisticated technology for accurate prediction and setting up of a robust network for early warning dissemination is imperative. Early warning has the potential of savings millions of lives as evidenced from Odisha State Disaster Management Authority's (OSDMA) humongous evacuation of 52,000 exposed people during Cyclone Phailin in 2013.

Ever since 1987, the All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) has worked ceaselessly to build the resilience of the country's poor and vulnerable communities. In this journey, AIDMI has found that DDMPs represent an entry point for starting preparedness work against disasters of all kinds, particularly floods. It is hoped that more scientific DDMPs which integrate climate change with disaster concerns and along with laying out provisions for building up the capacities of line departments will become the norm in the country. Such pro-active measures will go a long way in making India resilient to the risks of flooding. ■

**– Kshitij Gupta**

# Responding to Cyclone Mora's Impact

As Cyclone Mora made landfall at Cox's Bazaar in Bangladesh, I could think of no better book than "People, Aid and Institutions in Socio-economic Recovery Facing Fragilities". As this cyclone ravages through the lives and livelihoods of the fragile communities living on the borders between Bangladesh and Myanmar, this book offers many valuable lessons to plan an effective recovery. The detailed and rigorous research in this recently published book is of immediate value to those who fund, receive, deliver, and who may oppose relief.

Although the book is not about Bangladesh or Myanmar and does not exclusively focus on cyclone relief, the ethnographic case studies presented in it offer useful lenses to view the day-to-day process of relief and recovery in fragile communities



People, Aid and Institutions in Socio-economic Recovery
Facing Fragilities

Edited by Dorothea Hilhorst, Bart Weijs and Gemma van der Haar
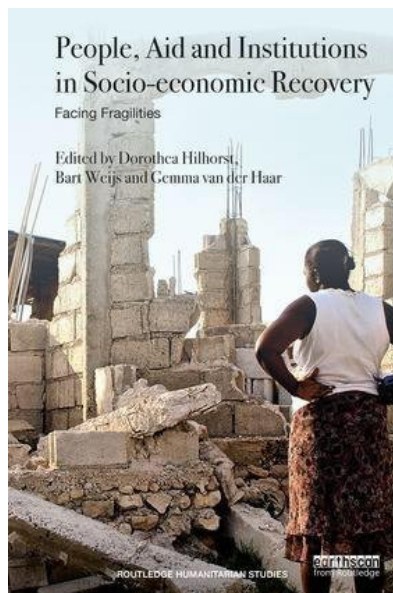
suffering sudden and additional loss or damage. Cyclone Mora also presents an opportunity to humanitarian actors around the world to make the 'Grand Bargain' of the latest World Humanitarian Summit a reality. This book can provide a robust Road Map for doing so. The response to Cyclone Mora related loss and damage has to be more embedded, offered with more humility and pursued in the development direction desired by the local citizens. This response also needs to be pushed away from universal standards and standard operational procedures to address case sensitive decisions that are people centric.

Cyclone Mora offers an opportunity to reduce risk and build prosperity among the affected communities and citizens. For this purpose, it is imperative to put knowledge into action especially in humanitarian action, otherwise its value stands to be diminished. ■

**– Mihir R. Bhatt**

# Floods in North East India

Floods in Assam have claimed 45 lives while at least 1.7 million people have been badly affected.

The Brahmaputra river, which flows from China down to India and then through Bangladesh, has burst its banks after torrential monsoon rains, swamping more than 2,500 villages spread in 24 districts of the state in Assam state over the past weeks. Among the affected districts are Lakhimpur, Karimganj and Majuli, with thousands of families losing all their valuable possessions including household items.

More particularly, situation in Lakhimpur has remained grim since the last few days after the North-Eastern Electric Power Corporation (NEEPCO) released a huge quantity of water from its Ranganadi hydro-electric project dam in Arunachal Pradesh. Over 2.80 lakh people were affected in Lakhimpur district alone, while 1.38 lakh people have been affected in adjoining Dhemaji district.

In island district of Majuli, the Brahmaputra has caused three breaches on its embankments, inundating houses of over 50,000 people. Over 50 families have lost their homestead and cultivation land due to massive river-bank erosion caused by the river.

Union Minister of State for Home, Kiren Rijiju, accompanied by a team of officials from Niti Ayog, NDRF and Union Home Ministry, have been visiting the affected places in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh to take stock of the floods and landslides that have claimed several lives. Fourteen persons were buried alive after a massive landslide wiped out half of Laptap, a village in Papum Pare district in Arunachal Pradesh on July 11.

India's Prime Minister expressed his anguish over the human suffering, with thousands of people seeking shelter in more than 300 relief camps set up by the state authorities in Assam. Authorities have declared a "maximum health alert" to stop the spread of disease, a common feature following such floods.

The floods have not spared endangered one-horned rhinoceros in Kaziranga National Park, a UNESCO world heritage site. The flood waters have swamped the park with more than 90% park under water, according to Assam Forest Minister Pramila Rani Brahma.

## Assam Floods

The death toll in the Assam floods climbed to 69 as four more deaths were reported on July 18, while nearly a million people remained affected in 16 districts in the state in one of the worst floods disaster in recent years.

The worst hit district in Assam is South Salmara where 125,040 people are affected, while in Morigaon district nearly 100,000 people are facing the flood fury as the state authorities struggle to reach out to affected populations spread in vast areas.

According to ASDMA, the swirling waters claimed four more lives and almost a million people have been affected in Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Biswanath, Nalbari, Barpeta, Bongaigaon, Dhubri, South Salmara, Goalpara, Morigaon, Nagaon, Golaghat, Jorhat, Sivasagar, Karimganj and Cachar districts.

The water in the Brahmaputra and the Barak rivers, and their tributaries, have been showing a receding trend at several places in the state with cessation of rainfall.

But the Brahmputra is still flowing above the danger level at Dhubri, Dhansiri at Numaligarh in Golaghat, and the Barak at Badarpurghat in Karimganj, and Kushiara river at Karimganj. About 20% area of the Kaziranga National Park is still inundated, which has affected about 35 anti-poaching camps at Kohora, Bagori and Bishwanath ghat.

The current wave of floods has badly affected animals and poultry in the flooded districts covered by forests. A total crop area of 205,587 hectares have been affected in 29 districts, the ASDMA report said.

Altogether 15,205 people have been rescued by the national and state disaster response forces, Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), army, police, forest police, and district administrations.

Around 122,850 people have taken shelter in 334 relief camps where they have been provided with food, tarpaulins, disinfectants, candles, drinking water and medicines, the ASDMA said. ∎

**– Vandana Chauhan**

## Floods in Gujarat

Gujarat continues to witnesses heavy rains across the state that has led to flooding in various parts. According to the Gujarat government's emergency control room, five people including two women died when lightening struck them in three separate incidents in the state. In two incidents of lightening, four people were killed in Ahmedabad district and one in Morbi district.

With five deaths, total 65 people have died in rain related incidents in the state since June 1st while 21 have died since July 14 when the state came under spell of incessant rains which still continue in July 24 to 26 spell. ∎

**– Vishal Pathak**

# Making Dams Safer

## *Is there a need for a national framework for investing in Dam safety?*

One of India's largest hydro development projects, the Narmada Dam in Gujarat, has received the final clearance from the Narmada Control Authority (NCA) giving a go ahead to the Gujarat government to close the Sardar Sarovar Dam (SSD) gates on the Narmada river. This marks the completion of the project, almost 56 years after the dam's foundation was laid by the then Prime Minister in 1961. Perhaps it is time to think of the various ways of reducing the risk of extreme events like earthquakes, droughts or floods on projects such as the SSD.

These risk reduction activities can be led by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) which plays the key role in guiding national investments for disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities across India. Similarly, this effort can also be complemented by the Gujarat State Disaster Management Authority (GSDMA) which builds the resilience of the citizens of Gujarat to the various disaster risks faced by them. The draft Dam Safety Bill is being finalized by the Ministry of Water Resources, of Government of India.

The NCA permitted increasing the dam's height by lowering of 30 sluice gates and impounding of water in the reservoir upto its Full Reservoir Level (FRL) of EL 138.68 metres.

The latest move by NCA will lead to completion of the project and will result in an increase in the dam's storage capacity from 1565 million cubic metres (MCM) to 5740 MCM and also lead to a rise in hydro power generation from current 1300 MW to 1450 MW.

The water audit (use for agriculture, industrial and domestic purposes) can provide useful findings for future risk reduction actions for the National Water Development Agency (NWDA) and other water institutions.

Gujarat should share the lessons -on how to move faster, and effectively - from this 56-years of hydro development journey which can be useful for the fast expanding Indian Rivers Inter-link project and for making it ecosystem based.

This additional storage of SSD would irrigate about 8 lakh hectares of land, mostly in water starved areas in Saurashtra and North Gujarat. It is now time to think of more measures needed to protect irrigation and arrest water starvation in these areas. Further, this increased storage level can have long term benefits in providing effective balance to deal with flood and drought situations in the catchment areas.

About one crore people would get assured drinking water and irrigation facilities. The SSD would primarily meet the water requirement of drought prone and desert areas of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. In some ways SSD is one of the biggest anti-drought and anti-desertification measures in India.

The time has come to protect SSD, the life line of Gujarat, from all kinds of disaster risks, including that of floods and earthquakes by

## Reducing Disaster Risk

**Water:** There is a total of 28 million acre feet water of Narmada in SSD. The state wise distribution is thus: 18.25 MAC to Madhya Pradesh, 9 MAC to Gujarat, 0.5 MCA to Rajasthan and 0.25 MAC to Maharashtra. How to protect this water flow from floods and drought?

**Electricity:** Total 1450 MW hydro power to be generated at the dam site by SSD. Madhya Pradesh gets lion's share with 57% total power to be generated, Maharashtra gets second largest portion of 27% and Gujarat gets 16 % of power. What can be done to reduce flood, cyclone, and earthquake risk faced by this hydro-power grid?

**Canal Network:** Total 71,747 km long canal network of SSD spread in over 20 districts in Gujarat. So far, the authorities have completed 47,104 km long network, which means 66 % works stand completed. Who will reduce risks of disasters faced by these canals?

**Project Affected Villages:** Total 244 villages in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat have been affected, submerged fully or partially due to SSD. From these villages, 46,840 families have been resettled and rehabilitated with compensation by the authorities. What measures are needed to make these families and villages resilient to disaster and climate risks?

considering the recommendations of the national authorities and the Sendai Framework.

The Environment Sub-group of NCA chaired by union secretary of environment and forest had reviewed implementation of environment safeguard measures and recommended lowering down of the gates for completion of the project. The disaster risk faced by the dam and canals need to be assessed and reduced.

The Resettlement and Rehabilitation sub-group chaired by the Union Secretary of Social Justice & Empowerment had also reviewed the rehabilitation and resettlement of project affected families as per the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal (NWDT) Award and the Supreme Court order was delivered in February 2017. The next step is to build the resilience of these families to the disaster risks they face.

As the SSD project stands completed after 56 years of its inception, perhaps it is time for a little introspection. We should introspect on how to make the SSD resilient to the various climate and disaster risks so that the gains that it delivers to the people are safeguarded. What is needed is a framework to reduce disaster risks faced by SSD. Under the leadership of NCA, GSDMA, and NDMA, the SSD can become India's first SFDRR compliant dam.

### Dam Safety Measures in India

Close to 80% of India's 5,198 large dams are over 25 years old and are confronted with safety challenges. Many experts believe that the wear and tear along with the sub-par maintenance of these dams is jeopardizing their safety. The most worrying are those dams that lie in high seismic zones and can be destroyed by medium to high intensity earthquakes. In this context, it is essential to review the safety measures and policies in place to protect the big dams and economic growth of India.

The Central Water Commission (CWC), which is the apex organisation for water resources management, in 2006, asked the states to come up with an emergency action plan for large dams and laid down guidelines for that purpose. The ministry of water resources, too, in 2011 came up with crisis management plans for states to handle dam related contingencies and asked them to set up dam safety organisations. So far, half of the states have complied with the directions of the water resources ministry.

The government has prepared a draft law for ensuring dam safety and has circulated to the states. CWC is running a six year Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project with financial support from the World Bank. It covers 5% of the unsafe dams spread across seven states. This scheme needs to be extended to include all the unsafe dams in the country and it needs to be continued even after its scheduled culmination of 2018.

Needless to say disaster preparedness needs to be an integral part of these safety measures to prevent any mishaps. Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation with the financial support from the World Bank has embarked upon a six year Dam Safety Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP) in the year 2012. Under this project, comprehensive rehabilitation and improvement of 225 large dams are carried out in seven States. In addition, institutional reforms and strengthening of regulatory measures related to safe and financially-sustainable dam operations are carried out. The seven states where the project is being implemented are: Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, and Uttarakhand. A national framework for investing in dam safety will make India's dams and related economic growth safer. ■

**– AIDMI Team**

# Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2017

India can not isolate itself from global humanitarian assistance, its impact, and its thinking as India itself is more and more actively reaching out to the victims of natural and extreme climate events in its neighbourhood. The latest Global Humanitarian Assistance Report (GHAR) 2017 offers both, lessons for India to take on its humanitarian agenda, as well as what India should avoid. Flexibility of financing is a key to higher impact and channelling funding through local people and organisations is a proven way to better performance. ■

# Women's Leadership in Forest Recovery in Nepal

A Round Table discussion on "Agriculture, Environment and Forestry: Role of Women's Leadership" was held in Ahmedabad on July 10, 2017 with women leaders from Nepal who have been working on key issues of sustainability and conservation in Nepal ever since a devastating 2015 earthquake had hit their country.

The role of small business in forest produce trade; the scope for green bonds to invest in forestry; and linking forestry recovery with national development planning came up in the discussions.

The leaders discussed ways to feminize forestry activities in favour of work, income, and ecosystem away from profits, timber trading, and singular business interests.

The leaders agreed that there was a need to rethink the very foundations of modern forestry with historically grounded, highly current, and well



Photo: AIDMI.

argued lessons from ongoing recovery in Nepal. The earthquake recovery may deepen the inequality between those who benefit from forests and those who do not. For the people dependent on forests for their livelihood, the aftermath of the earthquake mattered more than the actual earthquake.

In addition needs capability building were discussed, which included ways of understanding multi-sectoral forestry needs of women; disaster vulnerability of forests; integrating women's livelihoods and protection programming for forestry recovery; and understanding new stakeholders in forestry recovery.

The participants pin pointed four areas for more work in building resilience of forests to disasters: formal and informal institutions; forest households; forest produce markets; and forest related policies such as water harvesting, and carbon sink.

It was concluded that more investment was needed in building capabilities of local leaders to find local ways to plan for DRR compliant forestry in the districts. A pedagogy of risk reduction is needed for the forests of the past, present, and the future. ■

**– Mihir R. Bhatt**

# DRR Road Maps of Indian States

Each state of India needs a Road Map to implement its State Disaster Management Plan. The following are the opportunities and challenges to support state level disaster risk reduction (DRR) Road Map for making India safer from disasters.

## Opportunities

1. The state DRR Road Map is an instrument that integrates priorities of SFDRR and SDGs and NDCs. It ultimately targets poverty reduction and provides policy support to the state as well as national development agenda.

2. Strategic priorities and actions for the disaster prone geographical areas and populations can be converged in the Road Map.

3. The Road Map can be a valuable source to plan and initiate risk avoidance, risk transfer, risk sharing and residual risk management between two disaster responses in the vulnerable states. In Assam the ASDMA is engaged with AIDMI, ACT and others to develop a risk transfer approach to the Road Map.

4. Recent interest in and action on heat wave preparedness in cities



*District level stakeholders' consultations on making district disaster management plan pro-poor of Puri, Odisha.*

in India offers a way ahead to find support for making such a state level Road Map.

## Challenges

1. The sustainability of DRR institutionalizing process is challenging. It requires long term planning and commitment of human and financial resources. The Road Map needs to link short-term targets with long term targets.

2. The engagement — vertically and horizontally — of institutions requires pro-active role for DRR Road Map making which must be flexible and usable.

3. The Road Map must not be just a list of 'stations'. It must have practical guidelines for the planning and implementation of the activities. Without this the journey can be finished by missing all the stations on the road.

4. The initial orientation and stakeholder engagement in preparing of the state DRR actions is not only for increasing ownership but also for preparing an enabling environment for local implementation. Thus, the Road Map needs to ensure that the process is detail oriented.

5. The state DRR Road Map should not only deal with the finance and planning but also with planning of human resources across the state that deal with DRR (and not only disaster management). ∎

**– Vishal Pathak,** AIDMI

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*For more information:*
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2. Asia Regional Plan for Implementation of the SFDRR 2015-2030 (2016). http://www.ndmindia.nic.in/AsiaRegionalPlan.pdf.
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# New List of Smart Cities is a New List of Disaster Risk Reduction Opportunities

The Government of India has announced a new list of 30 cities to be added under the ambit of its flagship scheme called Smart City Mission last month. This new list offers opportunities to reduce a wide range of disaster risks faced by the citizens of urban India.

Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala, Naya Raipur in Chhattisgarh and Rajkot in Gujarat figured in the new list of 30 cities announced for development under the Government of India's Smart City Mission. This mission is one of the most ambitious initiatives by the Government of India in terms of financial resources allocated, cities covered, citizens involved and a leap ahead planned in technology: digital and other. Some of the best firms and experts—from UK, France, Japan, China, and Singapore—are involved in making this mission a reality.

This latest announcement takes the number of cities covered under this initiative to 90. These cities have been selected for part financing of projects by the Government of India under this scheme.

An investment of Rs 57,393 crore (US$8,902,936,365) has been proposed for development of these 30 cities. Of the planned expenditure, Rs 46,879 crore (US$7,271,301,617) will be for core infrastructure and Rs 10,514 crore (US$1,630,683,011) for technology-based solutions in public transportation, solid waste management and augmenting civic centres. With this, the total investment approved under the smart city plans of 90 cities has gone up to Rs 1,91,155 crore (US$29,649,643,989).

Of the 30 cities announced this week 26 have proposed affordable housing projects that benefit the urban poor; 26 cities will be taking up school and hospital projects; and 29 will be taking up redesign and redevelopment of roads. These proposals offer opportunities to make urban shelter safer from earthquake, flood, to fire disasters; reduce loss and damage caused due to disasters to schools and hospitals; and invest in what is being called "green" and "blue" roads and urban infrastructure. Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) with Atkins of UK and Dhan Foundation in Tamil Nadu have designed such "blue" and "green" infrastructure projects for the city of Madurai.

All the 30 cities will put in place integrated command and control centres that enable coordination among various agencies for better service delivery and effective management of scarce resources such as water and power. These command and control centres offer an opportunity to include disaster response and preparedness as a key urban function. In addition, ongoing work of Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) with Action for Climate Today indicates the management need to prioritize the potential of risk insurance in addressing climate and disaster risks in cities.

The challenges faced by cities of India to reduce disaster risks includes lack of nation-wide city-to-city urban humanitarian response system.

For such a system, a sound understanding of vulnerability and needs for safety in urban India as well as integration of livelihoods of the citizens is needed.

According to Shri Naidu, Union Minister for Urban Development, the citizens and city governments proposed the projects for fixing the infrastructure deficit in their respective cities. So in many ways Smart City Planning has been a bottom up process where cities have a say in how to make a city smart as well as safe. Ongoing research work on uncertainty of Dr. Parth of IIT with experts from UK and Norway in Mumbai indicates that more such bottom up, and top-down consultations processes take place, the greater are the chances for active urban transformation that is "green" fair and sustainable.

Shri Naidu also launched the City Liveability Index (CLI)—a first of its kind Pan-India—which will help a city to know where it stands in ensuring the quality of life to its citizens. The CLI, with suitable changes, can also tell the city how safe the lives of citizens are. Such a CLI will help cities find ways to prevent new and reduce existing disaster risks through the implementation of integrated measures. The CLI exercise will be taken up in 116 cities–covering all smart cities, capitals and cities with over one million population each, he said, adding the first ranking will be out in 2018.

Under the Smart City Mission, the Government of India provides Rs 500 crore to each city over a period of five years for implementing strategic projects. Launched on June 15, 2015, the Government of India proposes to develop 100 smart cities under the mission that will launch India into a trajectory of rapid economic growth and shared urban prosperity. This growth and prosperity must be protected from various disaster and climate risks and the mission offers an opportunity to do so. In the end, it is indeed smart to be safe. ■

**– AIDMI Team**

# Cash Transfer in Humanitarian Action: Local Lessons for Global Use?



Photo: AIDMI.

*Clients in Ketakipatna gram panchayat, Puri district brought their Afat Vimo insurance policies when asked about it and shared the importance to local authorities.*

India has become a leading lab for social security and cash transfers innovations. According to the World Bank Group's report 'The State of Social Safety Nets 2015', India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) which provides a social security net to 182 million beneficiary (15 per cent of India's population) is the world's largest public works programme. The report ranked India's Janani Suraksha Yojna with 78 million beneficiaries' mothers as the top-most social security programme with conditional cash transfers and the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme as the second-largest unconditional cash transfer social security progamme in the world.[1] Similarly, the Direct Benefit Transfer of LPG, the PAHAL scheme, has been acknowledged by the Guinness Book of World records as the largest cash transfer programme in terms of number of households with 12.57 crore households receiving cash transfer as of 30th June, 2015. As on December 3, 2015, 14.62 crore LPG consumers have joined the PAHAL scheme and are receiving the subsidy directly into their Bank Accounts.[2]

## Introduction

Cash transfer in humanitarian action is now a well-accepted idea and several pilots that co-create knowledge and build capacities on this theme are well under way across the world. Even the June 2016 released National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP) of India highlights the role of cash for work in early recovery (03-18 months).[3] The Ministry of Home Affairs (Disaster Management Division) in a letter dated April 3rd, 2017 has stated that effective from April 1st, 2017, State Governments should invariably use Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) into the account of beneficiary to provide various kinds of beneficiary oriented assistance under SDRF/NDRF.[4] This, AIDMI finds, is one of the most important steps in making humanitarian action more citizen oriented.

The world is rapidly urbanizing and cash transfers in urban crisis are quicker and more effective. Cash transactions are a way of life for the urban poor and an important consideration to participate in disaster risk reduction or adaptation activities. An IIED study, "A review of evidence of humanitarian cash transfer programming in urban areas" notes that "because most urban markets are diverse and responsive to increased demand, cash in these contexts allows people to efficiently and effectively meet a range of needs whilst also contributing to economic recovery through multiplier effects".[5]

It was in 1998, after the Kandla cyclone on the coast of Gujarat that AIDMI, with Oxfam GB, initiated its first cash transfer to the small

1  PTI 2015. The Times of India. MNREGA world's largest public works programme: World Bank. http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/MNREGA-worlds-largest-public-works-programme-World-Bank/articleshow/47978976.cms
2  Press Information Bureau 2015. PAHAL-Guinness world record. http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=132587
3  National Disaster Management Plan, 2016. *A publication of the National Disaster Management Authority, Government of India*. May 2016, New Delhi. http://ndma.gov.in/images/policyplan/dmplan/National%20Disaster%20Management%20Plan%20May%202016.pdf
4  Ministry of Home Affairs, GoI 2017. Letter dated April 3rd, 2017. http://ndmindia.nic.in/DBTrelief06042017.pdf
5  Gabrielle Smith and Lili Mohiddin. 2015. A review of evidence of humanitarian cash transfer programming in urban areas. IIED Working Paper. IIED, London. http://pubs.iied.org/10759IIED

businesses that had lost all. Since, cash transfer is used by AIDMI in over 9 disasters and across 6 states of India directly and 12 disasters and across South Asia with other partners. AIDMI is currently working on ways by which cash can be used to make urban recovery faster and safer and arguing that can there be universal basic cash relief? The following insights have emerged from AIDMI's work across 66 cities over past 15 years in India.

## Local Lessons

So what are the local lessons of cash transfer for global use in shaping international humanitarian action?

First, there is no universal framework that defines the scope and purpose of cash transfer in humanitarian action that the national authorities have agreed to and wish to use in humanitarian action.

Second, the objectives of cash transfer may change from context to context and there is no global support to offer this flexibility to local actors.

Third, the progress so far is scattered and uneven. Targets are needed to use cash transfers for reducing losses and accelerating the recovery of livelihoods.

Fourth, a consensus on the top 3 to 5 priorities from a myriad priorities needs to be achieved to avoid unnecessary confusion. Fifth, the guiding principles of cash transfer need to be spelt out as well. How can cash transfer and minimum wages (such as MGNREGS) go hand in hand? Can electronic payments with cash transfers lead to greater accountability?

Sixth, fair estimation of contribution to larger socio-economic and ecological development must be made. Cash-based programming must lead to job-creation and local market development without any adverse consequences on ecology.

## Way Ahead

These local lessons are highly relevant to South Asia, including Nepal where donors such as ECHO and UNICEF along with other agencies have used cash transfers in earthquake recovery efforts.

While EC considered cash transfers as the preferred mechanism for relief assistance, particularly in the Kathmandu Valley[6], "UNICEF supported the Government of Nepal to provide emergency cash transfers to more than 430,000 vulnerable people in 19 districts most affected by the earthquakes".[7]

Using cash as a leading option in responding to emergencies is gaining policy momentum world-wide. Newer forms of cash transfer approaches and operational modalities are being tried and tested. The following are needed to make cash transfers more effective a) co-creation of knowledge with local actors, and b) capability building of local authorities and NGOs and citizen groups to monitor, measure, and enhance its re-generative impact on the economically weaker sections of society. ■

– Mihir R. Bhatt

6 EC Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection 2015. Nepal Earthquake. ECHO Crisis Flash No. 10. http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/documents/deve/dv/echo_crisis_flash_10_nepal_earthquake_/echo_crisis_flash_10_nepal_earthquake_en.pdf
7 UNICEF. Nd. Reaching The Most Vulnerable: Cash Transfers As An Emergency Response In Nepal. http://unicef.org.np/latest-updates/videos/2016/06/17/reaching-the-most-vulnerable-cash-transfers-as-an-emergency-response-in-nepal
8 Barnaby Willitts-King and John Bryant 2017. Scaling up humanitarian cash transfers in Nepal. ODI Working Paper 503. https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/11284.pdf