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## **Direct Public Involvement in Governance: Making Disaster Management Effective, Efficient, and Sensitive**

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### **Abstract**

*The Disaster Management Act of 2005 attempts to provide an elaborate organizational structure and procedures for the government machinery for tackling the challenges posed by disasters. In India, disasters and their impacts are highly diverse in nature and widely dispersed in locations. Hence, it is impossible even for elaborate government machinery, on its own, to capably address complex and diverse issues involved in disaster management. At the same time, the efforts for disaster management by government agencies often demonstrate different deficiencies such as inefficiency, ineffectiveness, and insensitivity.*

*The view from the below (of disaster affected people), which emerges from the action research conducted by Prayas in the wake of disaster in Maharashtra, suggests multiple levels of causes that underlie these deficiencies. These deficiencies, the paper suggests, are the effects of three levels of causes. The roots of these causes could be traced to the failure of indirect mechanisms for ensuring accountability of the government that are built in the current design of democratic politics. Hence, an alternative approach to improving governance in disaster management would be to develop and nurture intense and direct public involvement in key governance functions related to management of disaster. The paper suggests different mechanisms at the state and local levels for ensuring public involvement in the governance of disaster management. When operationalized, these mechanisms will make efforts for disaster management by government agencies more effective, efficient, and sensitive.*

### **Introduction**

In the year 2005, people from the Konkan region (the western coastal strip of the state of Maharashtra, India), including the city of Mumbai, experienced an unprecedented rainfall. The whole region was badly hit by the disaster of floods and landslides that followed. The official government figures suggest that about 70,000 Ha of agriculture land and about 2500 houses were damaged in the disaster.

The authors, as part of members of the NGO called Prayas based in Pune, were involved in providing relief to the disaster affected people (henceforth referred to as DAPs) in Konkan. During the relief operations, it was realized that the DAPs dwelling in the remote and hilly

parts of rural Konkan, would be unable to voice their problems and demands before the government machinery, and hence would be left out of the rehabilitation programs. This prompted the team to undertake advocacy effort to raise voices of these DAPs, mainly those from the vulnerable sections of the society. The objective was to highlight the problems and demands of the neglected DAPs before the mainstream actors and decision makers.

The team undertook a study for documenting experiences of the DAPs, their problems and demands, and their understanding of the causes underlying the disaster. The methodology used for the study was a rapid and qualitative survey, using the tools like village meetings and interviews with the villagers and experts. A schedule of open-ended questions was prepared and administered to respondents from different sections of society such as farmers, tribal people, women, and experts. The study was conducted in forty-seven villages, representing eight blocks of the Raigad and Ratnagiri districts of the Konkan region. A comprehensive but reader-friendly report of about seventy-five pages in the local Marathi language was published.

The report was helpful as an advocacy tool because of its focused analysis of the problems of DAPs and lucid articulation of their demands and aspirations, especially of the vulnerable sections of the society like small and marginal farmers, tribal people, *dalits* and women. The report presented the "view from below" towards critical gaps in the disaster management. Follow-up activities like press conferences, seminars, and presentations and meetings with members of the state legislative assembly and legislative council were undertaken.

This action-research conducted in the aftermath of the disaster, highlighted some of the very crucial and grounded issues of governance in disaster management (henceforth referred to as DM). This paper builds on these insights.

## **1.0 Symptoms of Ineffectiveness, Inefficiency, and Insensitivity**

This action-research in Konkan was focused on gaining the understanding of the viewpoint of actual disaster affected people (DAPs). The DAPs shared critical observations with researchers about their experiences during the disaster, indicating different levels of ineffectiveness, inefficiency and insensitivity on the part of government agencies in management of the disaster. These observations could be seen as symptoms of ineffectiveness, inefficiency, and insensitivity embedded in efforts for disaster management by government agencies. The broad categories of these symptoms of ineffectiveness, inefficiency and insensitivity in DM are presented in Table 1. For explaining these categories, some representative examples of the symptoms are presented in the subsequent discussion. These examples are drawn from the critical observation shared by the DAPs in Konkan. They are related to the four broad areas of DM, viz., rescue / relief, rehabilitation / reconstruction, mitigation, and prevention of disasters.

### ***1.1 Symptoms of Ineffectiveness***

#### **1.1.1. Failure to Reach Needy DAPs in Time**

- Many tribal communities were denied the immediate cash assistance declared for flooded houses, though their houses were severely damaged. This was on the excuse

that the tribal houses located in the hilly areas were damaged due to heavy rainfall and not directly due to floods.

- The flooded houses located mostly in urban cities and towns received immediate cash assistance even if water just touched their houses and even if there was no major loss of household necessary items.
- The small and marginal farmers with no reserves to cope with crop losses were eligible for small amount of cash assistance, while the large commercial farmers growing cash crops and having enough reserves to cope with disaster on their own received larger assistance.

**TABLE 1. CATEGORIZATION OF THE SYMPTOMS OF INEFFECTIVENESS, INEFFICIENCY AND INSENSITIVITY IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT**

<i>Symptoms of Ineffectiveness</i>	<i>Symptoms of Inefficiency</i>	<i>Symptoms of Insensitivity</i>
1. Failure to Reach Needy DAPs in Time	1. Delayed Relief	1. Insensitivity towards Needs of DAPs
2. Improper Damage Assessment and Reporting	2. Limited Outreach of Relief Efforts	2. Insensitivity towards DAPs in Non-registered or Illegal Settlements
3. Inadequate Relief-Rehabilitation Efforts	3. Incomplete Damage Assessment	3. Insensitive to DAPs from ST or Tribal Communities with Special Vulnerabilities
4. Inadequate Disaster Preparedness	4. Delayed or No Compensation or Rehabilitation	4. Insensitivity towards Special Needs of Women (Especially Young and Pregnant)
5. Complete Absence of Measures for Mitigation and Prevention	5. No Access or Application of DM Plans	

- Assistance was declared for commercial fruit growers for loss of fruit trees but not for poor small farmers and landless for loss of their valuable small animals like sheep, goat, and hens, on whom they were depended for earning their livelihoods.
- The poor share-croppers and tenant farmers did not receive any assistance as many of them did not have the legal of proof of ownership over land.
- Poor households were denied assistance on the excuse of incomplete records of ownership of land, houses, or other damaged resources.
- The poor wage-laborers in unorganized sectors working on daily wages, who lost their wages due to damage to agriculture, brick-kilns, and other rural enterprises, did not receive any assistance.

### 1.1.2. Improper Damage Assessment and Reporting

- Important types of damages that adversely affected livelihoods of poor households, such as damage to stored fuel wood, small animals, damage to fodder were omitted from the assessment exercise by the government.
- Systematic methodology was not followed for collecting information and data and thus no scientific knowledge-base on damages to crops, soil, water conservation structures, animals could be developed. This was mainly because participation of research or academic institutes like local agriculture university was not sought. Hence, it was not possible for the government to develop a comprehensive agriculture rehabilitation plan.
- Loss of human life during the disaster was recorded, but the lives lost in the days after the disaster were not recorded. This was despite the fact that such deaths could be the direct results of the disaster, possibly due to the outbreak of diseases after disasters or due to injury and illness caused during the disaster.

### 1.1.3. Inadequate Relief and Rehabilitation Efforts

- Inadequate material support was given in the form of relief to DAPs, .e.g., kerosene was given but not stoves, rice was given but not pulses.
- Illegal extraction—while distributing immediate cash assistance—of about Rs. 100-200 per household was reported at some places. In some instances, cash assistance was diverted to non-eligible households against commission.
- No comprehensive plan was prepared or assistance was provided (except for one-time cash assistance) for rehabilitation of livelihoods of households of women, who lost their husbands during disaster.
- No comprehensive plan was prepared for rehabilitation of agriculture-based livelihoods.
- No effort was made to rehabilitate DAPs affected in 1989.
- There was no attempt for large-scale implementation or regional up-scaling of an innovative and simple campaign of rice-seedling donation, successfully implemented by a block agriculture officer.

### 1.1.4. Inadequate Disaster Preparedness

- DM plans lacked updated information, including contact details of key officials and services, and hence proved ineffective.
- DM plans are available only in English language and hence could not be effectively useful for many government employees and other volunteers who did not have command over the language.
- There was no early warning system to inform heavy or sudden rainfall (like cloud-burst) or floods. There number of rainfall measurement systems in the region was grossly inadequate.

### 1.1.5. Complete Absence of Measures for Mitigation and Prevention

- There was no awareness or effort to study the ecological causes and impacts of landslides or floods in Konkan. Hence, no data-base for planning measures for prevention and mitigation of disasters is available. Only one rapid study of landslides

was made by the Geological Survey of India, but the agency did not come out with a publicly available report.

- There was no effort to identify ecologically fragile and vulnerable ecosystems at local level. There are no separate norms for construction in such vulnerable areas. For example there is need for separate norms for construction affecting natural drainage system in highly vulnerable hilly areas.
- No action has been taken against illegal constructions existing inside the flood line of rivers and streams.
- No assessment and action program has been conceived for rehabilitation of ecological damages like landslide-induced soil erosion that will continue for many years.
- No effort has been made for mitigating possible damages in future due to cracks and cavities occurred during the disaster.
- No mitigation and prevention measures are contemplated even where communities face danger of repeated disasters, with higher intensities, caused by construction activities under infrastructure projects (like railways, highways) or industrial projects (like chemical industries).

## ***1.2 Symptoms of Inefficiency***

### **1.2.1 Delayed Relief**

- Relief material reached in many areas 15 days after the disaster.
- The delay in provision of relief material to the remote villages was more than 15 days.

### **1.2.2 Limited Outreach of Relief Efforts**

- No relief material reached in many of the remote tribal hamlets.

### **1.2.3. Incomplete Damage Assessment**

- No assessment was carried out in many remote tribal hamlets.
- In many villages, all households were not covered under assessment exercise.
- At many places, government officers did not visit the actual site, nor did they make personal observations of damaged sites as expected.

### **1.2.4. Delayed or No Compensation or Rehabilitation**

- No compensation was paid to agricultural damages, even after completion of one year.
- DAPs faced many procedural hurdles to access the scheme for agriculture rehabilitation, such as difficulties in submitting photographs of agriculture land before and after the rehabilitation work.
- Reconstruction of basic amenities in many tribal and other remote communities with low political influence was delayed or did not take place.

### **1.2.5. No Access or Application of DM Plans**

- DM plans were not available in easily accessible places even in government offices.
- DM plans were not put to use before, during, or after the disaster.

- Copies of the DM plans were not made available to all government departments and offices including police stations.

### ***1.3 Symptoms of Insensitivity***

#### **1.3.1 Insensitivity towards Needs of DAPs**

- Facilities required for daily life were inadequate in most of the temporary shelters created for landslide affected communities
- There was no system for registering and responding to the complaints and suggestions of DAPs on their difficulties or grievances.

#### **1.3.2 Insensitivity towards DAPs in Non-registered or Illegal Settlements**

- No relief was made available to tribal and other hamlets or settlements that were not registered in the government records.

#### **1.3.3. Insensitive to DAPs from ST or Tribal Communities with Special Vulnerabilities**

- There was no special effort to hasten the provision of assistance to tribals, who have to migrate in search of wage labour, if the assistance does not reach in time.
- Timely and additional assistance was not provided to tribal communities who are entirely dependent on daily wages, when they faced acute shortage of employment opportunities after the disaster.
- Unfair treatment was meted out to tribal people in providing facilities in temporary rescue shelters. For example, tribal people were not provided tin-shades as was the case for the farmer community, and instead were housed in a dilapidated workshop.

#### **1.3.4. Insensitivity towards Special Needs of Women (Especially Young and Pregnant)**

- No special efforts were made to communicate with women to understand and fulfill their special needs in the aftermath of disaster. For example, separate, safe, and hygienic urinals for women were not available in most of the temporary shelters.
- Similarly, there was no effort to provide adequately nutritious food for the anemic pregnant women.
- In Konkan, due to the migration of male population to Mumbai, there is high incidence of women-headed households. Women from these households cultivate paddy on their own. These women found it very difficult to put in additional heavy labor to restore the damaged agriculture lands. There was no special consideration to provide additional assistance to such women-headed households.

## **2.0 Diagnosis of the Symptoms**

During the action research, we interacted with many individuals from different sections of society other than the local DAPs. Also, as part of the follow-up, we undertook various activities for dissemination and advocacy on the demands of the DAPs. This gave us an opportunity to interact with different actors including members of the state legislative assembly and the state legislative council, state-level officials, local grassroots organizations, local and state media persons, and also staff of academic and educational

institutions. During interaction with these actors, apart from sharing experiences and difficulties of DAPs, we also asked for their analysis of the causes underlying these symptoms of ineffectiveness, inefficiency, and insensitivity in DM. This also helped us analyse and identify variety of causes underlying the symptoms of ineffectiveness, inefficiency, and insensitivity.

Learning from these interactions, we try to present the diagnosis of the symptoms in this part of this paper. In this diagnosis, an attempt has been made to present different levels of underlying causes as they unfolded before us. The first-level causes contain various causes identified by government officers and other social actors. Through further analysis of these first-level causes, we try to present the second and third level causes that we discovered during our effort to analyze the first-level causes.

## ***2.1 First Level Causes***

The first level causes underlying the symptoms of ineffectiveness, inefficiency, insensitivity that were shared by government officials and other social actors are presented here. In order to explain these causes, some examples are provided for each of the nine first-level causes.

### **2.1.1 Lack of Clear-cut Official Norms, Rules, Guidelines, or Procedure**

- For example, there were no clear-cut criteria for selecting the most needy beneficiary or clear-cut procedures for prioritizing assistance based on livelihood vulnerability.
- No standard procedures and formats were laid down for assessment of damages, especially to help focus on the poor with higher vulnerability to disaster impact.

### **2.1.2 Inadequate Allocation of Financial Resources**

- For example, adequate funds were not available at the local level to begin immediate procurement of relief material or to maintain adequate and continuous stock of relief material to be used in case a disaster strikes.

### **2.1.3 Degeneration of DM Systems due to Neglect**

- For example, the district-level DM plans, which had been prepared with large expenditure, were not updated and, hence, could not be put to use effectively at the time of disaster.

### **2.1.4 Pressure of Dominant Groups**

- For example, the local-level socially, politically, and economically dominant groups exerted pressure on the local administration to give priority to themselves in getting assistance, even sometimes at the cost of delay in assistance to more needy DAPs.
- There is pressure from such dominant groups for not taking actions against the illegal and hazardous constructions that caused or aggravated the disaster.

### **2.1.5 Inadequate Allocation of Human Resources**

- For example, the local administration is very short of human resources for conducting a comprehensive assessment of damages, especially in rural areas.

#### 2.1.6 Inadequate Allocation of Material Resources at the Local Level

- For example, in rural areas it was not possible to gain access, on urgent basis, to grains and other material required for livelihoods needs of DAPs, due to very limited stock maintained by the traders and government agencies.

#### 2.1.7 Neglect / Apathy on the Part of Government Officers

- For example, some vulnerable households in villages and remote hamlets are not covered in damage assessment due to sheer neglect and apathy on the part of the lower-level officers. Similarly, many households did not receive any relief for the same reason.
- In many cases, compensation to agriculture damages is delayed for years, due to neglect and apathy on the part of the middle and higher level officers.

#### 2.1.8 Lack of Awareness and Understanding

- For example, the awareness about the gender aspect of the disaster management is very low among the government officials and other actors, which results in failure to help women facing disaster, by providing what they need.
- There is hardly any knowledge, data, or understanding of the ecological processes and their relationship with disasters. Hence, there are limitations on evolving effective and appropriate prevention measures.

#### 2.1.9 Lack of Capabilities and Sensitivities

- For example, there is complete lack of capabilities and sensitivities needed for handling participatory processes at village level or for gender sensitive communication during disaster management.
- There is no demonstrated capability and experience in evolving a multi-stakeholder partnership or mobilizing resources from private sector for effective DM.

In summary,, the first-level causes underlying ineffectiveness, inefficiency and insensitivity in DM, as seen from the standpoint of government officers and other social actors, could be organized in the following manner:

- 1 Lack of Comprehensive Policies and Procedures
- 2 Inadequate Allocation of Financial, Material and Human Resources
- 3 Pressure of Dominant Groups
- 4 Degeneration of Systems due to Neglect
- 5 Neglect and Apathy by Officers
- 6 Lack of Awareness and Understanding
- 7 Lack of Capabilities and Sensitivities

### **2.2 *Second Level Causes***

The first level causes as seen from the standpoint of other social actors were further investigated by Prayas team. The basic questions for this deeper diagnostic analysis were: why the first-level causes arise in the first place and continue to haunt despite recurring

incidence of disasters? What make it so difficult for the government authorities to respond to disaster in effective, efficient, and sensitive manner?

We realized that the seven first-level causes listed above are linked basically to two broad factors that allow the government authorities to escape from taking progressive actions on the first-level causes, which allows perpetuation of ineffectiveness, inefficiency, and insensitivity. These two factors are seen as the causes underlying the first-level causes, hence, they are termed here as second-level causes: (a) Lack of Adequate Influence and Pressure from DAPs on Government Authorities, and (b) Treatment of DM as Non-core Activity by the Government.

#### 2.2.1 Lack of Adequate Influence and Pressure from DAPs on Government Authorities

In all the above-mentioned examples, one can see that most of the first-level causes could be effectively addressed if the DAPs themselves or other actors on behalf of the DAPs (such as concerned civil society organizations) are able to exert influence and pressure on the makers and implementers of decisions in the government to take progressive actions.

There is a wide gap between the DAPs and the higher-level government officers when it comes to communication or negotiation. This gap makes it impossible for the DAPs to exert any influence and pressure on the state machinery to take progressive actions. The DAPs also lack the capabilities and confidence needed for conducting a meaningful and empowering communication and negotiations with the government authorities.

The case of a village called Niwsarbaug in Konkan is a good example demonstrating the lack of influence and pressure of the DAPs. Being situated in a hilly area that is vulnerable to high rainfall and slope failures, the villagers have been making demands to Konkan Railway Corporation for rebuilding the railway track that passes through the village in a safe and secured manner. In 2005 and again in 2006, the village experienced the disaster due to failure of hill slopes and incidence of cracks in the ground that ran right through some houses of poor villagers. Even after repeated complaints, the villagers could not force the Konkan Railway Corporation to take any positive steps to mitigate and prevent occurrences of such impacts of disaster.

#### 2.2.2 Treatment of DM as Non-core Activity by the Government

On many occasions, it appears that the government authorities neglect DM because they do not consider DM as their core activity. The government authorities view DM as something thrust upon it.

In many examples cited to explain the first-level causes, a common trend can be identified that the polity at large and the administration have not been very serious in evolving effective, efficient, and sensitive mechanisms for DM. This is true at both the state and local levels.

In this regard, a comment by a senior member from the highest level of state bureaucracy is eloquent. During interactions with the disaster affected farmers, this senior bureaucrat explained to DAPs (seeking his assistance) that the disaster is a natural phenomenon and not caused by the government and hence the government cannot be held responsible for it and DAPs should, in fact, not expect compensation from the government for damages due to the disaster. Such examples suggest that the government authorities fail to see DM as the

issue that severely affects the well-being of many of its citizens, and, hence, DM needs to be given high priority in the job-description of the government.

### ***2.3 Linkages between First and Second Level Causes***

The linkages between the first and second level causes underlying the three deficiencies in DM are numerous. An attempt is made here to explain these links through some examples.

#### **2.3.1 Lack of Adequate Influence and Pressure from DAPs on Government Authorities**

The dominant groups are able to exert pressure on the administration in getting the priority attention or in diverting a large portion of assistance for their own benefits, mainly because the DAPs from poor and vulnerable sections of society are not able to exert any influence or pressurize government authorities for safeguarding their own interests. In the case of the disaster in Konkan, the tribal communities hardly had any contact with the local and state administration to voice their needs and assert their right to get due priority in getting government assistance. As a result, the semi-urban and well-off households were able to secure larger part of the government and private assistance, even if they had suffered limited damage and had much higher coping abilities.

The absence of pressure from DAPs or from the other well-meaning actors working on behalf of the DAPs is also one of the main reasons why there is no serious action towards ensuring adequate resource allocation for DM. The government is spending enormous amounts on other issues and sectors including urban infrastructure, but many households affected by landslides in Konkan in July 2005 have not yet received any rehabilitation assistance. The government could escape the responsibility of rehabilitating these poor rural households because the rural households are not only geographically far away but also politically remote to exert any influence on the government.

Similarly, the neglect and apathy about DM at local level as well as the degeneration of overall DM systems (that had been built earlier) continue over the time, mainly because there is hardly any public pressure on the government in this regard, once the disaster is over.

#### **2.3.2 Treatment of DM as a Non-core Activity by the Government**

There is a distinct lack of adequate and comprehensive policies and procedures on issues like selecting the most needy beneficiaries, prioritizing assistance based on livelihood vulnerability, participatory damage assessment and many other vital aspects of DM. This lacuna remains unexplained given the fact that the government had had many experiences of managing disasters in the past and every disaster could have been looked as an opportunity to develop and refine the policies and procedures in order to make them adequate and appropriate. This failure is rooted in governments' treatment to DM as a less important and non-core activity that is not worth of serious attention on continuous basis.

The degeneration of many administrative systems set by government for DM is also an example of lack of serious treatment given to DM by government. For example, the DM plans and facilities created after the Latur Earthquake in 1993 were found in dilapidated conditions during the disaster in 2005. Even the contact details of key officials in the DM plans were not updated. Such casual treatment to DM has given rise to other lacunas such as neglect and apathy of local officers on maintaining the DM systems and inadequate

allocation of resources to DM. It is also related to the low levels of capabilities, sensitivities, and awareness about DM found in lower as well as higher level officers.

#### ***2.4 Third Level Causes***

An effort to engage in further analysis of the second-level causes raised more questions. Why— despite the pitiable plight of DAPs—the DAPs themselves or the organizations and actors working on their behalf fail to exercise any influence to force the government machinery? Why—despite repeated occurrences of different types of disaster in different parts of the state—the government refuses to acknowledge the linkage between, on one hand, the recurring disasters and, on the other hand, increased vulnerability and degradation of livelihoods of poor in the state? Why the government is able to shrug off its responsibility, despite the conclusive and repeated evidence that the failure on part of the government aggravates the natural disasters and their impact on people?

Efforts to find answers to these questions led us to a realization that the root-cause of these maladies lies in the absence of effective accountability of government authorities, when it comes to their duties towards serving the larger public interest or the interests of poor and vulnerable sections of society. It was found useful to treat this absence of accountability at two levels in a separate manner. Thus, the following two factors are seen as the core causes or the third level causes underlying ineffectiveness, inefficiency, and insensitivity on the part of the government machinery in DM.

- 1 Lack of Accountability of Government Authorities at Local Level
- 2 Lack of Accountability of Government Authorities at State Level

The state and local level government authorities are not moved by repeated efforts by DAPs in Konkan to voice their grievances and register their complaints. The DAPs openly shared with the researchers that the local-level politicians or government officials are not going to work on their problems seriously and they themselves are not in position to make these local level political and administrative functionaries to take them seriously. Many civil society organizations (CSOs) have also experienced that the DAPs and CSOs have no tools for influencing the DM-related processes promised or conducted by the state government. They have no means to force the government machinery even to provide detailed reports on the exact number of DAPs, damages suffered by them, or regarding actions taken and un-fulfilled promises.

The neglect of DM by government authorities is the direct outcome of lack of accountability of both, the political and administrative actors at the state level. This lack of accountability at the state level is also witnessed in sectors other than DM. But, in the case of DM, it is further aggravated by the combination of two critical factors: (a) episodic occurrence of the disasters, often in geographically dispersed and temporally staggered manner, and (b) short public memory including the memory of media. Once the immediate impact of disaster is healed, attention of the media and the public at large wanes fast. Thus, these factors pose additional challenges in ensuring accountability in matters related to DM.

### **3.0 Prescription: Public Involvement in Governance**

The discussions in the earlier parts of the paper lead us to the position that ineffectiveness, inefficiency, insensitivity in DM are embedded in causes operating at various levels. Further, at the root of these causes lies the lack of accountability of government authorities at the state and local levels. In the democratic political systems, the political and administrative functionaries in the government are expected to be ultimately accountable to people and hence are expected to serve the public interest. In this background, the insulation of government authorities from accountability is a failure of the conventional mechanism for accountability provided in the democratic systems, mainly the elections. Elections are expected to ensure accountability of elected representatives, who are expected to hold the government and administration accountable on behalf of citizens. In this sense, it is an indirect mechanism of accountability. Unfortunately, many distortions and perversions have crept in this indirect accountability mechanism. Detailed analysis of these distortions and finding prescription on these ills is not the subject matter of this paper. Hence, the option of rejuvenating this indirect mechanism of accountability is not discussed here. Instead, the paper explores the alternative route of direct mechanisms for ensuring accountability of the government authorities towards the DAPs in particular.

#### ***3.1 Systemic or Conceptual Level Prescription***

Thus, the key to addressing the problems of three crucial deficiencies in DM is to help DAPs and the other actors hold the government authorities accountable for its decisions and actions on the matters related to DM. The follow-up advocacy activities on DM undertaken by Prayas (during the action-research) helped us gain understanding of the ways in which such accountability can be increased at the local and state levels. The following are the prescriptive measures which would effectively increase the direct accountability at the local and state levels.

##### **3.1.1 Increasing Transparency and Participation at the Local and State Levels**

Ensuring accountability has two preconditions. First, it requires full and timely information on decisions and actions of government authorities. Thus, unrestrained transparency towards common citizens and even vulnerable sections such as DAPs is the precondition for ensuring accountability. Second, if a citizen is excluded from the process of governance, he or she cannot hold the authorities accountable. Thus, accountability also requires that the citizens (or DAPs) have adequate and appropriate opportunities to participate in the process of governance. Thus, meaningful and effective participation is another precondition for effectively ensuring accountability of government authorities.

DAPs are not able to hold the local government authorities accountable, unless they have relevant information on crucial matter such as the results of damage assessment, government promises, and actual action taken by authorities. Using such information, DAPs and the civil society organizations can hold the government authorities accountable. Further, this information should be in such form and at such place that the local communities can comprehend and access it without any hindrance. The case of the DM plans prepared by the Government of Maharashtra is an example wherein the government could not provide relevant information in easily comprehensible and accessible manner to local communities.

At the state level, the government should be transparent on the policies, procedures, and performance of the government in DM. After the disaster of 2005, the Chief Minister of Maharashtra declared that a comprehensive bill would be tabled in state assembly, which would cover all aspects of DM. But until today, the government has not provided information on the framework or content of such a bill. Unless government shares the information on the draft of the bill, the civil society organizations cannot participate and influence the process of policy making.

Unless the proposed act and the newly-established state-level DM agency provide appropriate opportunities for participation by civil society organizations and citizens, the state government cannot ensure full cooperation from people. Such opportunities will also enable the civil society organizations to directly exert influence on functioning of the government and increase the accountability.

### 3.1.2 Increasing Media Pressure

The media can play a vital role in ensuring accountability of the government towards effective, efficient, and sensitive DM. The media has power to expose the symptoms of failure and also the underlying causes of the three deficiencies. The resultant pressure forces the government to act in the interest of DAPs.

One very critical problem in this regard is that the media attention to DM is also sporadic and depends largely on the occurrence of disasters. In this regards, strategies will have to be evolved for building media pressure on a continuous basis. Another problem with media is rooted in the poor network of state-level media with sources (of news) from rural and especially remote areas.

Both the above problems can be addressed by working towards establishing strong links and partnerships between the media agencies, on one hand, and, on the other, DAPs and civil society groups supporting the cause of DAPs. The media pressure will be more effective, if it is backed by grounded civil society interventions.

### 3.1.3 Increasing Involvement and Capabilities of Civil Society

It was found that if the civil society has to take the advantage of the mechanisms for transparency and participation in order to increase accountability of the government, then the civil society organizations (CSOs) should be able to increase their advocacy activities by manifold.

CSOs will have to start intervening in the decision-making, implementation, and regulation processes of DM, by using a combination of facilitative and adversarial advocacy strategies. CSOs should also make a proper mix of reactive and proactive advocacy efforts. For example, while demanding for smooth and early rehabilitation efforts, proactive work for making government policies and actions responsive to needs of DAPs should be pursued.

### 3.1.4 Some Additional Precautions

While operationalizing these measures for increasing direct accountability, the following aspects should be kept in mind:

- Synergy will have to be built in these efforts by forging collaborations between local and state-level civil society organizations, primarily to make effective use of the spaces for transparency and participation.
- Efforts for bringing in direct accountability will require support from various actors for conducting analysis and advocacy. For example, support from academic institutions will be required for research and analysis, while financial support will be required for advocacy efforts from the funding institutions.
- There is also need to develop close connections between the state and local level activities. Two-way communication of information is necessary between the state-level activities and the local-level activities. Also, the state-level advocacy activities will have to be aimed at creating spaces for transparency and participation at the local level.

### ***3.2 Practical Aspects of the Prescription***

Based on the discussion till now, some practical actions are suggested in this section. However, while designing and implementing the practical actions, the challenges posed by the episodic and dispersed nature of disaster incidences need to be considered.

#### 3.2.1 Dedicated State-Level Advocacy Agencies

Concerted efforts should be made to evolve and nurture state-level agencies that can take-up public interest advocacy on DM. Such agencies should work on a continuous basis towards maintaining public attention and pressure during the times of disaster as well as during the times of peace. Such agencies can take up the task of bringing in direct accountability of the state-level authorities, by continuously monitoring of decisions, actions, promises of the concerned authorities, and disseminating information on this through media and other channels. The state-level agencies can also take-up the role of facilitating communication between the local agencies and the state-level authorities. Due to the episodic nature of disasters, it is very difficult for the local agencies to devote fully to the work of advocacy on DM. Thus, state-level, specialized agencies for advocacy in DM become all the more important.

#### 3.2.2 State and Local-level Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

DM is a sector where almost every type of public and private organization, institution, and professional-individual has a role to play. Looking at the dispersed and localized nature of most disasters as well as the complexities involved in different aspects of DM, it is clear that the government alone cannot handle the diverse and multiple tasks involved in DM effectively. Hence, there is a need for evolving and institutionalizing a multi-stakeholder partnership for joint design and implementation of various projects and activities in DM. However, we realized, through our efforts, that the success of such a partnership could be guaranteed only if the government becomes one of the prime partner and active supporter of the partnership.

### 3.2.3 Participatory DM Planning and Implementation

The DM plans prepared after the earthquake of 1993 by Government of Maharashtra did not involve comprehensive participation of the civil society during the formulation and implementation stages. This is one of the main reasons of ineffectiveness of the plans in delivering results during the disasters of 2005. Learning from the experiences of Maharashtra, we came to the conclusion that henceforth any such process of developing and updating DM plans at the state as well as local levels should be carried out only through wider and meaningful participation of civil society organizations. During our action-research, we realized that the DM plan could be seen as a high-potential tool for spearheading a campaign for public involvement in governance of DM.

### 3.2.4 Developing and Using Monitoring Tools

As seen earlier, because the disasters are episodic and the span of public and media attention is very short, it is difficult to maintain continuous pressure on the government. In this respect, it would be highly beneficial to develop and employ tools for continuous monitoring, assessment, and dissemination of information on the performance of government in DM. Utilization of such tools on a continuous basis will help maintain the public attention and interest in DM. This will help increase participation of citizens and DAPs in governance of DM. It will help maintain public pressure on the authorities as well.

## **Conclusion**

The action-research conducted in the aftermath of the disaster in 2005 in the state of Maharashtra, India, provided insights into the causes that lie at the core of the ineffectiveness, inefficiency, and insensitivity in the handling of disaster management by government agencies.

The paper suggests a categorization of the multiple causes at three different levels that underlies these deficiencies. The critical observations of the disaster affected people, when analyzed, leads to the first-level causes. There are seven such first-level causes: (a) lack of comprehensive policies and procedures, (b) inadequate allocation of resources, (c) pressure of dominant groups, (d) degeneration of established systems, (e) neglect and apathy by officers, (f) lack of awareness and understanding, (g) lack of capabilities and sensitivities. Further analysis of these first-level causes suggests that they are the outcome of two second-level causes, viz., (a) lack of adequate influence and pressure from DAPs on state machinery and (b) treatment of DM as non-core activity by the government. Finally, the paper concludes that the second-level are, in turn, rooted in the third-level and the core or root cause, viz., lack of accountability of government authorities at the state and local level.

The paper further argues that the electoral process, the main indirect democratic mechanisms for ensuring accountability, has failed to safeguard the interests of the disaster affected people and the society at large. Hence, there is a need to evolve direct mechanisms for ensuring accountability of government agencies based on the principle of direct public involvement in governance functions. Such direct public involvement will be possible only if there are adequate mechanisms for transparency and participation in the governance system. It will also require that civil society organizations are capable to intervene in the governance functions and there is strong and continuous support from the media.

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