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Strengthening the Humanitarian System: From India to South Asia

Photo: AIDMI.

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Advocating Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience Building in South Asia since 2005

INTRODUCTION

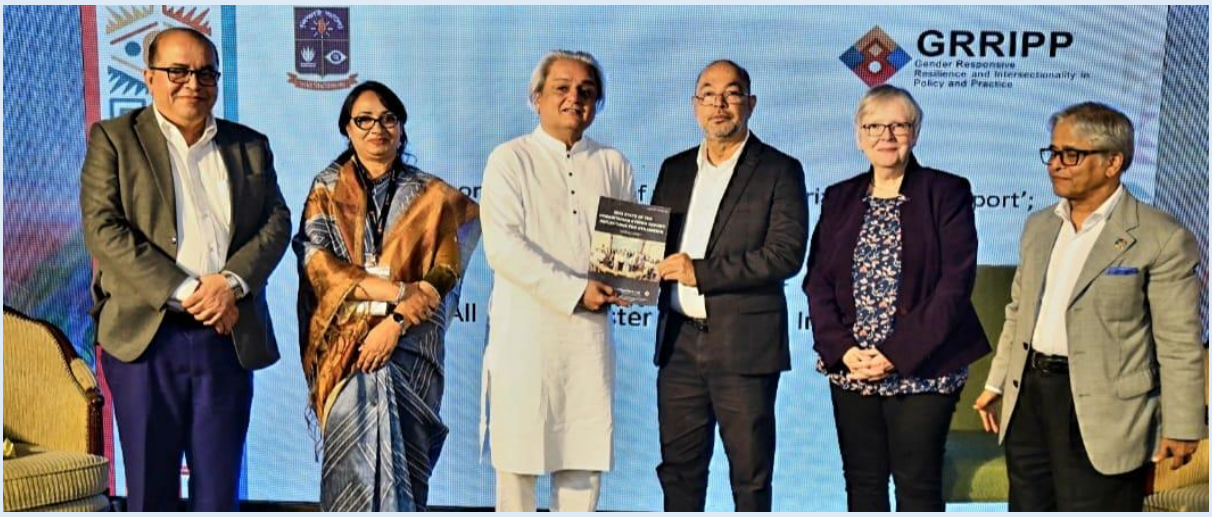
By ***Dr. Jennifer Doherty,*** *ALNAP, UK*

I was grateful for the opportunity to participate in the Delhi launch of the Strengthening the Humanitarian System in India (SHSI) report in April. As described in that report, the conception of the Strengthening the Humanitarian System arose from discussions between the All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) and the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) at the launch of the 4th edition of ALNAP's State of the Humanitarian System (SOHS) report in 2018. As an author of the 5th edition of the SOHS exploring global aggregated trends in humanitarian action, I'd been eagerly anticipating this new publication created by AIDMI, Sphere India and WFP as a useful deep dive into a national system in a country that has strong experience of responding to multiple types of humanitarian threats.

This issue of *Southasiadisasters.net* is titled *"Strengthening the Humanitarian System: From India to South Asia"* provides a series of useful reflections on the content of the SHSI report as a detailed overview of India's humanitarian structures and policies, while also providing forward-looking options for implementing some of its recommendations. It is a useful compilation of perspectives from different types of humanitarian actors focused both on the national and state level, with contributions focused on Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Tamil Nadu. The articles cover some topics of clear importance for India but also for humanitarian actors in other countries to consider, particularly issues of migration, disaster risk reduction and preparedness that are of growing importance globally given the increasing threats of climate-related disasters.

I look forward to seeing how the SHSI report is used in India and in other contexts that face similar humanitarian challenges. The first edition of this India report is a useful baseline for ongoing review and the clear set of recommendations that it provides will enable future assessments of progress. I will watch with interest how the SHSI evolves and what practical and policy actions it inspires. ■

2022 SOHS Reflections for Utilisation



Dean of Social Science, Provost Open University, Director AIDMI, Minister for Disaster Management, Professor of UCL, and VC of Dhaka University share SOHS utilisation report at GRRIPP Conference, Dhaka. AIDMI shares SOHS utilisation report with Bangladesh Minister for Disaster Mitigation on September 18, 2023, encouraging to leverage local finance for gender, intersectionality, and extreme heat and floods resilience at GRRIPP Conference by Dhaka University. ■

By ***Mihir R. Bhatt,*** *AIDMI, India*

Addressing Humanitarian Needs in South Asia: What Role for Research and Innovation?

*By **Vishal Pathak,** AIDMI, India*

Roundtable at the World Conference on Humanitarian Studies in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on November 5, 2023. Photo: AIDMI.

Here are the key takeaways from a recent roundtable discussion hosted by the AIDMI in partnership with Elrha and Deakin University at the World Conference on Humanitarian Studies in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on November 5, 2023. AIDMI is one of the first local action-research organisations that promotes convergence between humanitarian action, disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation.

In the pursuit of enhancing humanitarian response, R&I has the potential to improve the way the humanitarian sector uses evidence, identifies and scales solutions and, in turn, contributes to the improvement of the lives of people impacted by crises.

As part of the Global Prioritisation Exercise (GPE) for humanitarian research and innovation (HRI), we conducted regional consultations in the South Asia region, and the preliminary findings of this exercise were discussed by experts representing a range of perspectives, including operational specialists and academics at the roundtable.

The panellists shared the following useful insights on solutions for addressing humanitarian needs in the South Asia region:

1. GREATER FUNDING FOR CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

Colette Fearon, Director of Impact and Engagement, Elrha, chairing the roundtable, underscored the need for substantial financing. This is essential to support the research

Research can help forecast and characterize humanitarian crises, understand the scale, distribution, and types of needs arising, inform humanitarian action, and monitor progress. Research has a crucial role to play in helping improve the ways in which the humanitarian sector mitigates and responds to crises and serves populations in need. Innovation can play a critical role in humanitarian crises by providing new and more effective solutions to the complex problems that arise during such emergencies. Strategic investments in research and innovation and appropriate utilization and uptake of research and innovation findings can help improve the way the humanitarian sector uses evidence and identifies and scales solutions and, in turn, contribute to improving the efficiency of the humanitarian response. A successful humanitarian innovation process[1] is an iterative process of identifying, adjusting, and diffusing ideas for improving humanitarian action that leads to consolidated learning and evidence, an improved solution for humanitarian action, and wide adoption of an improved solution. Inclusion of affected people, efficiency, and unique impact are also three additional criteria for successful innovation.

AIDMI's work on humanitarian systems – global system with ALNAP and Indian – system with WFP and Sphere India, shows that research and innovations keep the system healthy, dynamic, and effective. AIDMI's work in South Asia also shows that most research and innovations are supply driven, that is, focus on what the system can offer but not on what the system wants. Further, most research and innovation agenda builds on past research and innovations, but not what the practitioners want. It is in this light that AIDMI accepted the invitation to join GPE exercise by ELHRA and Deakin University to study the demand side of research and innovations in South Asia.

> "Adequate financial resources enable in-depth analysis of problems and allow humanitarian actors to pilot test and evaluate new ideas. Additionally, increased funding can improve access to technology and necessary tools, leading to more effective results."
>
> **- Colette Fearon,** *Director of Impact and Engagement, Elrha.*

[1] Obrecht, A. and T. Warner, A. (2016) 'More than just luck: innovation in humanitarian action'. HIF/ ALNAP Study. London: ALNAP/ ODI. https://translatorswithoutborders.org/alnap-innovation-humanitarian-action/

> "The consultations revealed the role of R&I in building the quality of humanitarian actions by contextualisation, culturally appropriate response, predicting and forecasting effectively, improving sector functions, enabling better outcomes, addressing reporting barriers, and suggesting various ways for timely actions."
> *- Mihir R. Bhatt, Director, AIDMI.*

process and encourage creative thinking. Adequate financial resources enable in-depth analysis of problems and allow humanitarian actors to pilot test and evaluate new ideas. Additionally, increased funding can improve access to technology and necessary tools, leading to more effective results. However, these resources should be sustainable and flexible so that humanitarian actors can be encouraged to undertake long-term initiatives while supporting the adoption and expansion of successful innovations.

2. IMPROVED COORDINATION FOR IMPACT

Enhancing coordination among humanitarian actors engaged in R&I is vital for creating comprehensive datasets and verified information. Collaboration among stakeholders, including government institutions, non-profit organisations (NPOs), academics, and the private sector, could optimise resource utilisation, minimise redundancy, and promote well-targeted humanitarian efforts. Cross-sector collaboration facilitates resource pooling, sharing best practices, and efficient data exchange.

3. HOLISTIC THINKING FOR EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS

Shifting from siloed thinking to a holistic approach is crucial. Humanitarian actors must consider all factors of a crisis and the diverse needs of affected people. This inclusive approach should cut across sectors and institutional boundaries and will help with understanding the context and planning responses accordingly. Collaborating across disciplines is essential for impactful research innovations.

4. IMPACTFUL DISSEMINATION AND FEEDBACK

Effective dissemination of R&I results is key to encouraging application. Real-time feedback enhances research implications and identifies areas for improvement. Therefore, well-organised and robust feedback systems are recommended for humanitarian organisations to fine tune the focus of their actions and improve continuously.

5. ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR R&I CULTURE

To attract talent, humanitarian agencies must create an enabling environment and offer attractive incentives. Organisations can encourage creative thinking and help young professionals explore opportunities for development and growth. By fostering enabling environments, agencies should prioritise establishing sustainable systems that identify and nurture innovations. It may entail setting up innovation labs, crisis-monitoring centres, recognition programmes, and initiatives that encourage a culture of innovation.

6. CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR INFORMED DECISION MAKING

There is a need to enhance the capacities and equip humanitarian actors involved in R&I with the necessary skills and knowledge. This encompasses providing educational training and introducing them to new tools, methods, and technology. It also entails long-term investments in R&I initiatives by donors. Investment in the capacity development of humanitarian professionals enables them to stay up to date with the latest knowledge and technology to make informed decisions and design more effective humanitarian responses.

> "It becomes very crucial to understand the perspectives of stakeholders, talking to the people, talking to different intersections of population and to understand."
> *- Prof. Mahbuba Nasreen, Dhaka University.*

> "We need a higher investment of R&I at the local level than the national level."
> *- Sajid Raihan, County Manager Bangladesh, Start Fund.*

Engagement of communities came out as a key point from the roundtable discussion. Some of the most innovative, even simple, solutions in the humanitarian sector have come from the engagement with the affected communities – listening, learning, and joint actions. Multipurpose cash transfer is one of the key examples. People informed humanitarian actors that they wanted to be able to get what they needed when and where they wanted it because they demonstrated that local communities themselves could be the best stewards of actions. By embracing these insights, the humanitarian sector can make use of the potential of research and innovation to address the challenges in South Asia and beyond. This study is of great significance for current system wide needs but also future longer term directions for research and innovations within the systems.

In the light of the regional humanitarian forum in Bangkok and COP28 in Dubai, additional attention and investments in R&I are even more urgent. AIDMI plan to develop a road map for implementing the recommendations and welcomes partners. ■

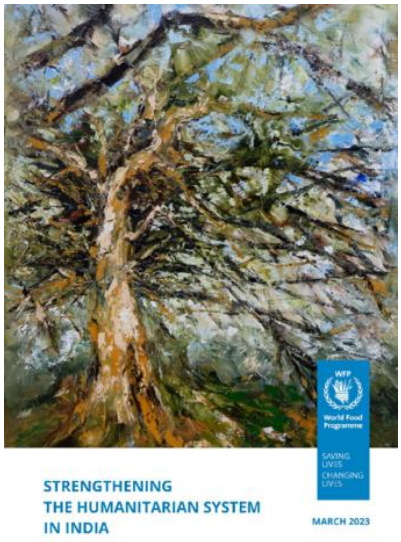
Strengthening the Humanitarian System in India

*By **Pradnya Paithankar**, Programme Policy Officer, World Food Programme (WFP), India*

Introduction

India's approach to humanitarian action has evolved from a 'relief centric' system to one that promotes preparedness and disaster risk reduction. Over the past two decades, with the support from various stakeholders, the Government has increased their investments in the humanitarian domain. The Government of India values mechanisms for timely relief, response and recovery in response to natural disasters and climate vulnerabilities and has begun implementing anticipatory actions at scale over the past decade. Most recently, India is leveraging its G20 presidency and has initiated the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) working group with the purpose of facilitating knowledge exchange and technology transfer through South-South and Triangular Cooperation for mainstreaming disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. The G20 Working Group on DRR is a pioneering initiative introduced at India's behest.

At the launch of the global report of The State of the Humanitarian System (SoHS) in 2019, it was observed that humanitarian systems are usually only studied in global contexts. These reports analyse the pattern and trend of international humanitarian assistance flowing to disaster-affected and conflict-ridden countries of the developing world and assess the effectiveness of such assistance. It was deemed important to understand the humanitarian system in India that is government-led, and its evolution from providing



Web link:
https://www.wfp.org/publications/strengthening-humanitarian-system-india-0

'charity' aid to victims of disasters, to a more rights-based approach with distinct features. This kind of study is an essential starting point to create a common understanding among stakeholders of the existing system and is presented as a knowledge product accessible to all interested with recommendations to further strengthen the humanitarian system in India. The study on Strengthening the Humanitarian System of India was initiated by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) in India in collaboration with the All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) and Sphere India.

Process

The collective effort towards developing this report was initiated through a stakeholder consultation attended by experts from the Government of India, civil society, non-government organisations, the private sector, and academia in June 2021. The consultation highlighted the need to analyse existing structures and formulate recommendations for strengthening the humanitarian system in India. The recommendations from this report are intended to be a first step towards developing an actionable roadmap for strengthening the humanitarian system in India through a multi-stakeholder approach. A Technical Advisory Group (TAG) was constituted to provide guidance to the research team and support the development of this work. The research team undertook in-depth investigations of information available and accessible in the public domain, recorded multi-stakeholder inputs through online consultations and presented its initial findings to the Technical Advisory Group for feedback, leading to the publication of the report based on an agreed framework.

The objectives were, 1. To describe the structure of the humanitarian system in India, 2. To analyse the type of assistance provided in response to humanitarian crises events and identify the gaps, and 3. To provide recommendations for strengthening the humanitarian system in India

This study was developed based on a desk review and analysis of primary data and secondary literature on the subject, along with consultations with stakeholders and resource persons. The study mainly used data available in the public domain, such as the internet, libraries, and

databases of partner institutions WFP, AIDMI, Sphere India, and other stakeholders. As part of the literature review, the research team referred to over 200 information sources to develop an annotated bibliography, which was further shortlisted to 89 references utilised for the report. Inputs to strengthen the humanitarian system were also sourced through 4 regional consultations that recorded 105 participants representing state governments and NGO stakeholders from 20 states and 5 union territories. The desk review was followed by several stakeholder consultations where more than 20 experts provided inputs.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In alignment with the efforts undertaken and as a first step, the study on Strengthening the Humanitarian System in India was published by the World Food Programme in March 2023. The report describes the system through the lens of adherence to humanitarian principles, the structure and guidance of the system at various levels, humanitarian financing, and national capacities. The high-level conclusions are: 1) India has well-developed humanitarian structures, 2) The humanitarian system of India is largely self-reliant, 3) The humanitarian response for saving lives is robust and effective, 4) Civil society responses to humanitarian crises are strong and pervasive, 5) Disaster early warning systems have prevented many humanitarian crises, 6) Humanitarian finance is sufficient to address humanitarian crises, 7) The Humanitarian system promotes innovations and good practices, 8) The application of technology has enabled timely assistance to people affected by crisis.

Most recently, India is leveraging its G20 presidency and has initiated the Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) working group with the purpose of facilitating knowledge exchange and technology transfer through South- South and Triangular Cooperation for mainstreaming disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation.

The key recommendations for future work documented include, (i) Developing a common humanitarian policy framework that serves as a guiding document for all stakeholders in the country; (ii) Revising the national guidelines on minimum standards of relief; (iii) Developing a model relief manual for better governance; (iv) Develop a comprehensive relief management information system; (v) Improve coordination framework for concerted action by all humanitarian actors; (vi) Emphasise a gender-sensitive and inclusive approach; (vii) Pay greater attention to training and capacity development; (viii) Establish a Centre of Excellence for Humanitarian Action and (ix) Establish a national monitoring and evaluation system for greater accountability and transparency.

This knowledge product may be viewed as a first step to share the findings from this study that can benefit both the Government of India and non-government stakeholders. The aim is to identify priority focus areas for deeper review and initiate future action towards strengthening the humanitarian system, particularly when India is poised to play a more prominent global role. This report intends to also inspire countries across the world to work together to improve the global humanitarian system through a context-specific multi-stakeholder approach.

The study is the first of its kind in India and likely one of only a few undertaken at the national level elsewhere in the world. The report is intended to be shared and used as a guiding template for similar studies in other countries, especially in developing countries, interested in improving their humanitarian system. The contexts, legacies, and frameworks of laws, institutions, standards, and practices of each country would be different and therefore the broad structure followed in this study can be adapted according to the specific contexts and needs of the countries. This report intends to provide a concrete roadmap to country leaders, and policy makers to develop roadmaps for effective response systems and inspire countries across the world to work together to improve the global humanitarian system through a content-specific multi-stakeholder approach. Interventions for context-specific approaches and interventions may also be strengthened through in-depth community studies to gain a nuanced understanding of requirements under the domain of humanitarian action. ■

Humanitarian Actions for Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation in India

*By **Vishal Pathak,** AIDMI, India*

The SOHS (State of The Humanitarian System - 2022) Report[2] is a significant and timely global report that reflects a focus on accountability to the affected populations (AAP) and locally led initiatives. Both focus areas are crucial for India. People living in places affected by disasters are becoming more vulnerable and least ready to adapt to increasingly unpredictable and extreme weather events and weather changes. Due to their poor economic condition and vulnerable location, their recovery efforts take more time and might not be a safer recovery, too. AAP and locally led initiatives not only support the effectiveness but also support filling the gaps at local levels and developing stronger linkages between humanitarian actions that reduce disaster risks and promote adaptation to climate change.

Recently launched WFP-India, Sphere India, and All India Disaster Mitigation Institute led 'The Strengthening of the Humanitarian System in India' (SHSI)[3] report describes in detail the main elements of the humanitarian system in India and its evolution from providing 'charity' aid to victims of disasters to a more rights-based approach. Relief as a right of citizens. As a way ahead, the SHSI should be used to close the gap between humanitarian action, disaster risk reduction, and adaptation to climate change. The report is also a platform and tool for capacity development for actors in the field of DRR (Disaster Risk Reduction) and CCA (Climate Change Adaptation), as AIDMI was already founded by offering two local organisations mainstream findings in their strategies.

Local partnerships among organizations working on climate change, humanitarian actions, and disaster risk reduction (and also with peacebuilding actors if required based on the local context) on the ground are needed. This can yield cumulative increases in the adaptive capacity of people, systems, and communities. This convergence supports the required development and promotion of active knowledge-sharing platforms involving climate, humanitarian, DRR, and development among governments and non-government agencies, as well as academic institutions and private sectors. The utilisation supports the required change to incorporate climate-sensitive expertise into DRR skill development at all levels. The report findings concern heatwave action planning, clean air agenda, and other local environmental issues.

Over a decade, India has reduced the loss of lives from cyclones to less than 2%. The SHS-India report will help reach 0%.

India must take the SHSI initiative ahead with sub-national and national actors to target capacity development at the district level and local platforms that push to build the effectiveness of the humanitarian system in India.

In just over a decade, India has reduced the loss of lives from cyclones to less than 2%. The SHS-India report will help reach 0%. India is now developing ambitious mitigation programmes to reduce the risk of losses from all hazards – Landslides, Glacial Lake Outburst Floods, earthquakes, Forest Fires, Heat Waves, and Lightning[4]. The SHS-India report helps operationalise these plans. The SHSI can be a crucial platform to support the ambitious projects by pushing the agenda of closer linkages among humanitarian actions, reducing disaster risk, and adaptation to climate change at local level where it matters the most. ■

[2] ALNAP (2022) The State of the Humanitarian System. ALNAP Study. London: ALNAP/ODI. https://reliefweb.int/report/world/state-humanitarian-system-2022-edition.

[3] Strengthening The Humanitarian System in India (2023), WFP India, https://www.wfp.org/publications/strengthening-humanitarian-system-india-0#:~:text=The%20Strengthening%20the%20Humanitarian%20System,a%20more%20rights%2Dbased%20approach.

[4] Mishra P. (2023), Mid-term Review of SFDRR; Speech by Head of Indian Delegation; https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1925357.

SHS IN INDIA

SHS-India Report: Key Follow-up Actions

*By **Prof. Sudhakar Patra,** Professor & Head, PG Department of Economics, Berhampur University, Odisha, India*

I am profoundly impressed by reading the report on "The State of the Humanitarian System 2022" published by ALNAP which is a global network of humanitarian organisations, including UN agencies. I have also gone through the report published by the World Food Programme (WFP) entitled "Strengthening the Humanitarian System in India" published in March 2023. I came to know the contents of the report in a workshop organised jointly by the Centre of Excellence on Climate Change & disaster Resilience (CECCDR), Berhampur University and All India Disaster Management Institute (AIDMI), Ahmedabad.

The world report is prepared in 13 chapters and the India report is in 10 chapters which are prepared in a simple language with many facts and figures. The world reports look at the period from January 2018 to December 2021, as well as drawing comparisons with our previous editions to take a 15-year-long view. It has evaluated the size, shape and performance of the humanitarian system against key criteria over time. The report is a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data from primary and secondary sources based on a 12-year dataset. The report mainly focuses on the pattern and trend of humanitarian assistance flowing to disaster-affected and conflict-ridden areas of our country.

The Strengthening the Humanitarian System in India report analyses the main elements of the humanitarian system in India and its evolution from providing **'charity'** aid to victims of disasters, to a **more rights-based approach**. The report on strengthening the humanitarian system in India is the first of its kind in India and probably such studies have not been undertaken at the national level in other countries of the globe.

Workshop Local Reflections on the State of the Humanitarian System at Suryansh Hotel, Bhubaneswar on August 20, 2023.

Although the report was initiated by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) in India in collaboration with the All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI), the analysis has been designed to serve the purpose of recommending measures for further strengthening the Humanitarian System in India.

The broad objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To describe the structure of the humanitarian system in India
2. To analyse the type of assistance provided in response to humanitarian crisis events and identification of the gaps
3. To provide recommendations for strengthening the humanitarian system in India

The humanitarian structures developed in India are well-developed and are reflected not only in Directive principles of state policy in the Constitution but also in legislature, institutions and financial mechanisms. Many voluntary and philanthropic organizations are deeply involved in humanitarian work in providing aid to disaster-affected people. The Humanitarian system of India is largely self-reliant, self-sufficient and provides financial, technical and all kinds of assistance to other countries affected by disasters. The Humanitarian response for saving lives, particularly by the Government of Odisha is robust and effective which is well appreciated by all over the world. Since there is a mismatch between the demand and supply of humanitarian assistance, it is suggested that a more integrated approach is necessary in this regard.

I profusely thank ALNAP, WFP, and AIDMI for their initiatives in publishing wonderful reports. ■

REGIONAL SHARING REPORT

Regional Sharing of the State of the Humanitarian System 2022 and India Report 2023

*By **Dr. Shakuntala Pratihary**, Odisha, India*

All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) in collaboration with the Centre of Excellence on Climate and Disaster Resilience (CCEDR), Berhampur University, Odisha had organized a regional sharing of the report of the State of the Humanitarian System-2022, developed by Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP) in humanitarian action on June 21, 2023, at Bhubaneswar, Odisha. Around thirty local participants from different walks of life participated in this roundtable.

The meeting started with an opening remark by Prof. Sudhakar Patra of CCEDR, Berhampur University, highlighting the need for such collaborative initiatives and requesting all the participants for their active participation. Subsequently, the founder director of AIDMI, Mr. Mihir R. Bhatt delivered an introductory speech about the current scenario of the frequent and intense disasters and the plight of the people to cope with this situation. In this context, he also shared about the response of the various state and non-state institutions to respond to these disasters and also the responsibility of building resilient communities. Against this backdrop, Dr. Shakuntala Pratihary made a presentation of both reports and facilitated the group discussion.

The State of the Humanitarian System

"The State of Humanitarian System" is a continual report, published by ALNAP within a time gap of three to four years cycle. The first publication came in the year 2010, after intense investigation for two years from 2007-2009, about the humanitarian intervention and scope of participation in the decision-making process by the affected communities. The subsequent publication happened in the year 2012 followed by 2015 and 2018. All these reports focused on the humanitarian emergencies happening around the world followed by the intervention and participation of affected communities in the aid provisioning decisions as well as organisational transparency and accountability. The following publication of ALNAP happened in 2022 covering the assessment time period of 2018-2021 and making a comparison with previous publications expanding over 15 years' time periods. The sharing in the round table held in Bhubaneswar on June 21, 2023 focused on SOHS 2022 analysis and interpretation. The purpose of this round table was to bring awareness amongst various researchers, policymakers and field-level NGO workers to highlight the plight of people, shortage of resources, skewed allocation of resources in terms of specific regions / organisations and dominance of few countries / organisations in aid response to humanitarian crisis.

This report highlights the fact that there has been a 33% rise in the number of people suffering from food insecurity, i.e. 124 million to 161 million within the period 2017 to 2021. Along with this, the number of displaced population has increased by 129% with a total number of 89.3 million from 38.5 million in 2011. Further to this, close to 97 million people have been pushed below the poverty line because of Covid-19. This in totality highlights the fact that 255 million populations in the year 2021 are in need of support in comparison to 136 million in the year 2018, showing an 88% rise in the number of people who need support.

The response to this requirement needs 38.4 billion dollars whereas the actual availability has been little more than 20 billion dollars in the year 2021. In order to manage this resource, there are 0.632million aid workers were deployed in the year 2020 in comparison to 0.324 in 2010 However, 40% of the resources of the aid resource has gone to only five countries: Yemen (2.7 billion), Syria (2.1 billion), Afghanistan (1.8 billion), Ethiopia (1.6 billion) and South Sudan (1.3 billion). Similarly, 56% of the funding has been provided by five actors, US (31%), EU institutions (9%), Germany (8%), UK (4%) and Japan (4%). Out of this total funding, 47% during 2018-2021 has gone primarily to three agencies: WFP (28%), UNHCR (12%), and UNICEF (7%). The mismatch of the humanitarian crisis and limited resource deployment has led to an increase of conflict by 67% with a rise from 289 (2015) to 484 (2020).

Strengthening the Humanitarian System in India

India has been experiencing multiple disasters every year and similarly making an attempt to strengthen the

humanitarian response system in the country. The governance system in India is primarily federal for which the Union Government comes up with certain policy framework which helps various states to design their own humanitarian systems. This has evolved from a relief-centric programme to preparedness and risk reduction initiatives. UNWFP and AIDMI have come up with a report having a multi-stakeholder dialogue on the present status of the humanitarian system in India.

The Key Recommendations

1. Developing a common humanitarian policy framework as the guiding document for all the stakeholders.
2. Revising the national guidelines on minimum standards of relief.
3. Model relief manual for better governance.
4. Comprehensive MIS (Management Information System).
5. Coordination framework for humanitarian actors
6. Gender-sensitive and inclusive approach framework
7. Training and capacity development
8. Establishing a Centre of Excellence for Humanitarian Action
9. Developing monitoring and evaluation systems.

This has set the ball rolling and will surely inspire various states to undertake state-specific assessments of the humanitarian systems. Subsequent to this, the reforms will also unfold in various disaster-prone states ultimately addressing the needs of the vulnerable population.

Odisha Roundtable

After the sharing of both these reports, there were a lot of discussions about strengthening the humanitarian system in Odisha. Odisha has been experiencing disasters every year and has also done pioneering work in facilitating disaster preparedness and promoting resilience. Odisha State Disaster Management Authority (OSDMA) has been playing a pivotal role in response as well as preparedness activities. However, most of the participants felt that there was a greater need for assessing the humanitarian systems in Odisha.

In this context, **CCEDR proposed to facilitate a study on the humanitarian system in Odisha in collaboration with AIDMI and UNICEF.**

The participants in the round table were represented by various institutions: UNDP, WFP, UNICEF, Berhampur University, AIDMI, TATA Steel and national/ international NGOs like OSVSWA, UNNYAN, Centre for Child and Women Development (CCWD), Society for Women Action Development and contributed in analysing the current humanitarian systems and suggested for improvements to reach out to the vulnerable communities. Odisha is a disaster-prone area and this is going to be really helpful for the state governance system to bring efficient building resilience in the society.

The meeting ended with a vote of thanks by Ms. Shakuntala Pratihary. ■

Knowledge products in local language Odia.

UNDP PERSPECTIVE

UNDP Perspective on Humanitarian System: Top Two Agenda

*By **Abha Mishra,** Head of Officer, Odisha, UNDP India*

One of the key purposes of the UN, as stated in the United Nations Charter, is "to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character." In areas beyond the relief capacity of national authorities, the organization through its key agencies like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other relevant UN bodies have provided technical assistance and coordinated humanitarian relief for emergencies as well as Post-Crisis and Disaster Recovery Support due to natural and man-made disasters.

UNDP currently working in 170 countries has strong commitments to ensure development approaches address underlying causes of humanitarian and peacebuilding needs; and to lead relevant international deliberative fora and inter-agency mechanisms to ensure development perspectives are ingrained deeply in our joint approaches to resolving the causes and consequences of crises.

The prevailing extreme weather conditions have increased the disaster intensity and frequency and highlighted the current condition of the state institutions, making it harder for communities to prepare for disasters and build resilience. The felt need is to address the complex and multidimensional drivers that are accelerating humanitarian needs.

Thus, donor funding needs to be more flexible to cater to changing requirements and partners need to be more transparent and accountable on how the limited humanitarian funds are spent. Reducing vulnerability at source is critical and mandates donors including investors to move away from short-term project financing to long-term and collective outcomes based on longer timelines. Developing creative financing tools like risk insurance and cash payments based on risk analysis, to the traditional mix is the way forward. To ensure the sustainability of these efforts, it is also important to manage and reduce risk through partnerships with local actors. Unless we take these steps, we will not get ahead of the curve and will always be at a high risk of relapse leading to growing inequality, displacement, conflict, and the gap between needs and response will only grow worse.

The humanitarian System must rise beyond the challenge, as business as usual is not an option anymore because humanitarian actions, development programmes and peacebuilding are needed at the same time. The mixed approach would support communities to be strengthened before, during and after the humanitarian response. Thus, reducing the vulnerability to future shocks contributing to peace and sustainability and ensuring that the community not only survives—but thrives. ■

HUMANITARIAN SYSTEM

Strengthening the Humanitarian System in India: Agenda for FIN India Trust

*By **Joëlla de Ruijter,** FIN India Trust, Tamil Nadu, India*

Climate change and the rise in population, asks for an updated approach to floods. There are phenomena that are important when looking at the creation of flood resilience in policy-making but which are just merely considered. After research, five issues came to light that are not at all, or insufficiently on the policy agenda. These issues do not stop at country borders but need to be addressed worldwide. This shows the imminent importance of the SHS India Report, published by WFP India.

- Currently, measures for flood resilience are mainly structural based. The main part of resources is invested in the building and upkeep of structures to keep water between boundaries and try to get the water to sea as fast as possible. This approach is

nonetheless unsustainable, it controls the symptoms but does not control the root of the problem. Lacking measures with the nature of strengthening crucial buildings such as hospitals and infrastructure to withstand floods.

- Next up, is the issue that most policies are still focused on "healing" from a disaster such as flooding and less on preventing it altogether. Less focus should be put on repairing damages and after-the-fact aid. Instead, more focus should be put on measures that for example, increase a village's capacity of water drainage, which shrinks the chance of the village being underwater.
- Rivers and waters are more often than not shared with neighbouring countries, making water drainage and flooding a multinational issue. Countries should work together with their river-sharing neighbors to make an adequate plan of action. The problem here is that communication and cooperation are still lacking, leading to countries only preparing their own land and people. While, when forces are joined together, preventative action against floods can be more effective.
- The rate of urbanization is ongoing. This is especially important considering that India has over 30 percent of its inhabitants living in its cities. However, the issues with stronger, more resilient housing and water drainage are lacking in the slums but also house the most people.
- Disparities of flood resilience between regions. Governments and local governments, each decide differently on how to create resilience, leading to a disparity of flood resilience. This also ties together with funding, some areas in the country might have more funding accessible for resilience measures than other areas of the country.

For FIN, the SHS India Report is of great value, especially because there is a lack of data and data collection needed to create better strategies. With this report, the Friend In Need India Trust (FIN) can have a better impact on flood resilience in small communities by training and giving out information as well as try to help and warn policymakers of the issues and what can be done to make flood resilience in India of a satisfactory level that saves lives and maintains livelihood. ■

Source: Fish found floating in India hospital as rains claim 80 lives. A woman walking along a waterlogged corridor at Nalanda Medical College. (AFP, 2018.)

LOCAL ROLE

RWI Role in India's Humanitarian System

*By **Prabhakar Nanda,** General Secretary, Rural Welfare Institute (Gramya Kalyan Samstha), Puri, Odisha, India*

Rural Welfare Institute (RWI) was established in 1979 at the remote village Hansapada in Puri district Odisha having 30 no of members. Puri district is generally vulnerable to floods and Cyclone every year. It causes loss of lives, Property, crops and livelihood. Keeping it in view RWI has started humanitarian support service to the victims since 1980. Gradually RWI is appreciated by block and district administration and other donor agencies. It attended various trainings, workshops, exposure to Bihar, Nepal and Bangladesh on disaster management. Also associated with other active NGOs by forming "Puri District Disaster Mitigation Forum - PDDMF" supported by Oxfam. These processes enable us to reach the vulnerable community to learn about their condition, practices and problems.

Initially, the people were unorganized and the community was male-dominated. We (RWI) conducted FGD from time to time with various stakeholders to find the problems and solutions. It helps us to form Women SHG, Village Level Disaster Risk-reduction Committee-VLDRC, Taskforce etc. They were imparted training under Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction Management (CBDRRM) project on SHG management, vulnerability study through PRA, Hazard mapping, resource identification, Communication, muck drill, early warning, rescue, relief, community kitchen, shelter management, health and sanitation, coping mechanism, carcass disposal, animal care, livelihood restoration etc. These trainings promoted many skilled persons as well as developed human resources in the community. It helped the community to mitigate disaster in next years.

RWI has formed a Block Level Disaster Mitigation Forum-BLDMF by associating 15 grassroots-level NGOs and sharing the learning from PDDMF. We used our learning in the management of Super Cyclone on 29th Oct 1999. Digital media was not available at that time like today except Radio and Land phone for early warning which was totally defunct. The rural people couldn't get quick information about cyclones. A large no. of thatched houses was devastated in this cyclone except rarer buildings. There were Many casualty and animals lost. Four blocks in Puri district were severally affected. RWI conveyed the BLDM Forum meeting and opened Information Center immediately. It collected loss and damages, and assisted outside relief distributors. The volunteers helped to clean the road and electric pole. On 2nd November RWI started a community kitchen at 10 clusters for 2000 families for 15 days. Many agencies i.e. Oxfam, CARITAS (PREPARE), ODMM, REDCROSS, CAPART, and OVHA had provided relief materials to cyclone victims. Oxfam Odisha Livelihood Employment Restoration Program – OOLERP was launched in Puri district through PDDMF and RWI implemented it in Kakatapur block. RWI also managed Environment and public health program there and the super cyclone rehab program implemented in Nimapada block.

Community-level meeting on DRR issues.

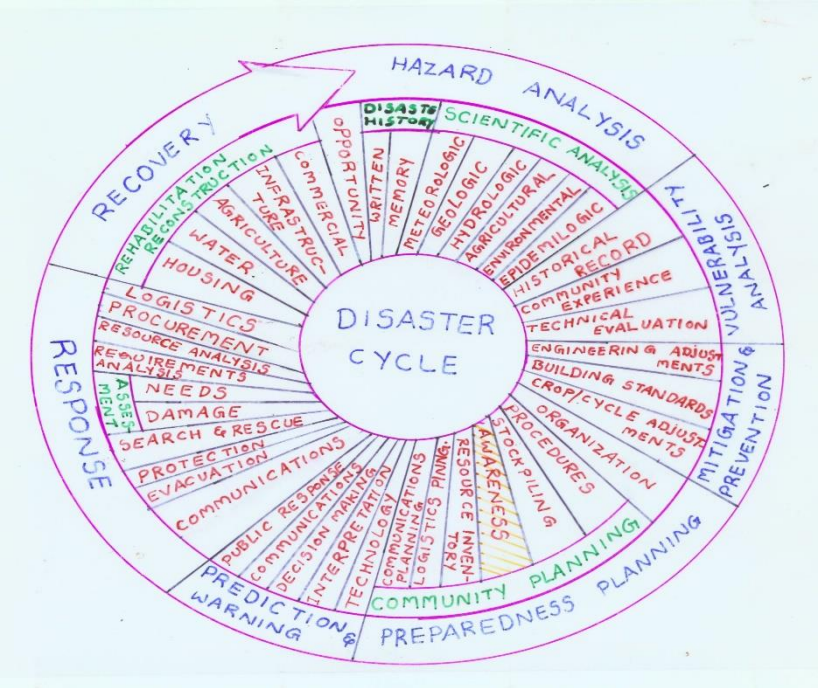
Till today RWI has addressed no of calamities in Puri district and smoothly managed humanitarian support aided by Diakonia, CONCERN World Wide, NABARD, Smile Foundation, Aide-et-Action, National agro foundation, Mandelzweig etc.

Today we feel proud that many volunteers, member of CBOs are involved in disaster mitigation in the community with devotion, dedication and determination. ■

Strengthening the Humanitarian System in India

*By **Meda Gurudutt Prasad,** CADME, Andhra Pradesh, India*

Andhra Pradesh is a state that has suffered the most from the adverse effects of severe cyclones, floods and drought. It is estimated that about 44% of AP's total territory are vulnerable to tropical storms, floods and related hazards while the coastal belt is even more vulnerable to Natural disasters and state's population is compounded by the recurrent impact of disasters. The coastline between Nizampatnam and Machilipatnam is prone to storm surges. The fertile delta areas of Godavari and Krishna rivers which contribute substantially to the state's economic prosperity are prone to frequent floods and cyclones and drainage problems more so in the aftermath of cyclone.



Community Involved Disaster Assessment, Logistics Planning, and Communications Planning.

Community Based Disaster Preparedness

CADME has initiated community based disaster preparedness program at vulnerable villages and child centered disaster preparedness at vulnerable schools of Andhra Pradesh. The following modules to capacitate the vulnerable communities to combat the disaster situations:

- Vulnerability Analysis
- Warning and Evacuation
- Emergency Medical Care
- Emergency Rescue
- Relief Camp Management
- Contingency Plan Development
- Disaster Drill

Identification of Risk Places and Vulnerable Groups in the Village Resource Inventory.

Warning and Evacuation: The task force is responsible for warning the villagers about the impending cyclone and the damages expected. It should clearly instruct where when and how the people should reach a safe shelter. Preplanned timely evacuation has to be coordinated by task force.

Emergency Medical Care: In the event of a hazard, the affected village is in general separated from the outside world and medical facilities are jeopardized. To extend first aid to the victims during a disaster in order to save lives and to arrest the further deterioration of health, the trained task force community in the village should undergo for intensive training on Emergency Medical Care.

Emergency Rescue: Rescue measures greatly help in saving the lives of people in disaster times. Keeping in view of this, we prepare the communities to combat the disaster situations and capacitate them in all rescue measures.

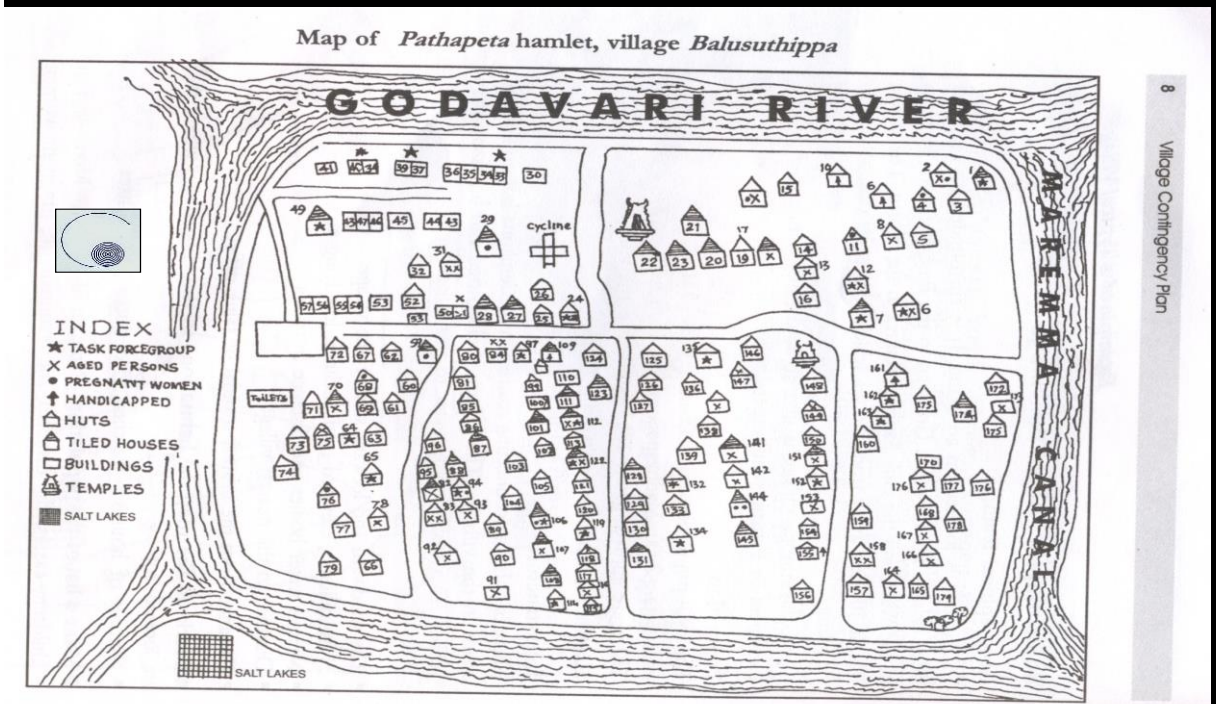
Relief Camp Management: Preparing the local Task force to extend relief measures to the vulnerable people, Relief camp management is the key module

Contingency Plan Development: Contingency Plan is developed by Local Community in five stages:

1. Discuss what happened in the village during the last disaster.
2. Make a description of the village
3. Listing what causes damage in the disaster and where?
4. Assessing who is at risk and what is at Risk?
5. How to mitigate the Risk?

Risk Mapping: The risks identified by the Community at the village shown in a diagram or map pinpointing places/areas

Village level contingency plan developed by Village community and Task force group members along with VAO and Sarpanch



infrastructure/ individuals/ groups and so on is called a "Risk Map". Risk Map is different from one school to another, community to another even place to place in a small geographical area.

The components of a Risk Map Plan will be as follows:

- Elevated areas
- Building
- Pucca houses
- Cyclone shelters
- Safer roadways
- Safe place to store books, records and daily use materials
- Government members of different information and emergency centers like police stations, ambulances, fire stations, hospitals etc.

The safer place of the village should be identified/ marked specifically in the plan.

Safety Plan Includes:

- Persons take up the responsibility
- Where (Where to go)
- By whom (Who is responsible)
- Why (Why should we go)
- How (How can we go)
- When (When should we go)
- With (Mode of transport) and so on

Disaster Drill: After having gone through all the modules of Disaster preparedness training the trained communities are expected to conduct the Disaster Drill at regular intervals to familiarize their roles and responsibilities in pre-during and post-disaster situations. ■

Disaster Drill.

Humanitarian Research and Innovation Priorities for India

*By **Mehul Pandya,** AIDMI, India*

The "Strengthening the Humanitarian System in India" report identifies several key priority areas for research and innovation related to humanitarian action. These areas, outlined below, aim to strengthen the current system and ensure a more efficient, inclusive, and responsive approach to managing humanitarian crises.

1. Humanitarian Policy Research: There is a need for a comprehensive study on developing a common humanitarian policy framework. Such research would entail analyzing existing frameworks, conducting stakeholder consultations, and studying best practices around the globe. The policy framework should incorporate humanitarian principles and establish a robust accountability mechanism.

2. Relief Standards and Guidelines: Constant analysis and updating of relief standards encompassing speed, quality, adequacy, monitoring, and transparency of aid is crucial. Research should focus on identifying gaps in the current standards and proposing novel approaches to enhance disaster relief effectiveness.

3. Relief Management Information Systems: Technological innovation in information management systems for disaster relief is a promising research area. It would involve developing a comprehensive, IT-enabled system to capture all information on disasters and relief operations, thereby improving transparency and accountability.

4. Collaboration and Coordination Mechanisms: Research needs to address the development of an institutionalized framework for collaboration and coordination among all humanitarian actors - government bodies, NGOs, civil society organizations, and others. This would necessitate a deep dive into current collaboration practices, identifying bottlenecks, and proposing mechanisms for improved coordination.

5. Gender-Sensitive and Inclusive Humanitarian Action: Understanding and addressing the unique needs of vulnerable groups such as women and children during humanitarian crises is a crucial research area. Developing gender-responsive and inclusive disaster response services calls for extensive gender and social inclusion research in the context of humanitarian action.

6. Training and Capacity Development: Developing impactful training packages for humanitarian action is an area that needs research. This should involve an assessment of current training programs' efficacy, understanding training needs, and crafting comprehensive training modules covering different aspects of humanitarian action.

7. Leveraging Technology: Research into the application of technology, like remote sensing, GIS, AI, and others for humanitarian action, can revolutionize the sector. This includes practical and timely early warnings, damage assessments, and facilitating timely aid to victims. This area also covers information and communication technology for managing pandemics and other public health crises.

8. Disaster Data Analytics: With the advent of big data, machine learning, and artificial intelligence, there's a growing need for research into how these technologies can help predict, manage, and recover from humanitarian crises. This could involve creating predictive models for disasters or building AI systems that can help coordinate disaster response efforts.

9. Mapping Vulnerabilities: Researching and identifying areas of high vulnerability to natural disasters, socio-economic crises, or health emergencies can help develop effective risk reduction strategies and improve resilience. Innovative mapping techniques using satellite imagery or geographic information systems could play a significant role.

10. Psychosocial Support Systems: Humanitarian crises often have profound psychological and social impacts on affected populations. Innovative mechanisms for offering psychosocial support, leveraging technology or community-based interventions, are an emerging field of research.

11. Next-Generation Logistics: The logistics of aid delivery during a crisis is a crucial part of humanitarian responses. Innovations such as using drones for aid delivery, AI-powered logistics

management, or advanced resource tracking systems are pivotal.

12. Remote and Automated Emergency Responses: Research and innovation in automation and remote operations can transform emergency response mechanisms. Remote and automated solutions can improve response times and outcomes from telemedicine to automated early warning systems.

Conclusion

There are numerous opportunities for research and innovation to strengthen India's humanitarian system. Central to these possibilities is an inclusive and comprehensive policy framework. This will require extensive study and consultation to ensure that it accurately reflects on-the-ground realities and aligns with humanitarian principles. Technological innovation also emerges as a significant factor, presenting opportunities to improve various facets of the system, from relief standard guidelines to information management systems. As our access to and understanding of advanced technology improves, it's clear that these tools have enormous potential to revolutionize disaster response and humanitarian action, whether through use in early warning systems or in coordinating disaster response efforts. There is also a clear need for research and improvement in gender-responsive and inclusive disaster responses, training and capacity development, and stakeholder collaboration and coordination mechanisms. Ultimately, the identified areas for research and innovation are interdependent and need to be explored holistically to create an efficient, responsive, and robust humanitarian system in India. This holds the potential to significantly optimize the handling of humanitarian crises domestically and transform India's humanitarian system into a model for other countries to emulate. ■

2022 SOHS Reflections for Utilisation Launch at Odisha

Photo: AIDMI.

AIDMI's Special issue of Southasiadisasters.net on"2022 State of the Humanitarian System Report: Reflections for Utilisation' launched in Inaugural Session at the International Conference On Climate Change, Disaster Resilience and Human Wellbeing (ICCCDRHW), September 16, 2023, Odisha, India. ■

*By **Vishal Pathak,** AIDMI, India*

REFLECTION FOR UTILISATION

Utilisation of SHS-India: Key Innovation Themes for India

By **Kshitij Gupta,** *AIDMI, India*

Strengthening the Humanitarian System (SHS) in India is a flagship report launched by a consortium of agencies comprising the World Food Program (WFP, India), SPHERE India, and the All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI). This report was conceived at the presentation of the global state of the humanitarian system report in 2018 in Delhi and Lucknow by AIDMI and ALNAP. This report was the result of a series of stakeholder consultations and a detailed literature review surrounding the humanitarian system in India. Twice, the national consultation process was carried out. The Technical Advisory Group guided the report content. An action-oriented document, the SHS not only describes the humanitarian landscape in India for the first time in this detail but also prescribes solutions to make it more effective in addressing the needs of crisis-affected populations of India.

In today's context of complex crises and pervasive technological solutions, humanitarian innovation has assumed great importance. Humanitarian Innovation can be defined as an iterative process that identifies, adjusts and diffuses ideas for improving humanitarian action (Obrecht and Warner, 2016). In the context of the humanitarian system in India, the following themes in innovation have been identified for new funding, programing, projects, and research in India.

The following are the key innovation themes for India:

Agency of Affected Populations (AAP)

- There is a lot of scope to pilot and scale up innovations for addressing accountability to affected populations in humanitarian action in India. The Sphere Standards provide a framework to guide AAP in the design and execution of humanitarian programs. AIDMI work offers tools, concepts, and direction for accountability affected populations. Possible innovations in compliance, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that identify gaps and embed accountability in humanitarian interventions can be a way forward. More importantly, such accountability must lead to the agency of the affected population as soon as possible. AIDMI is busy making such an agency of the affected population possible among thousands of affected farmers.

Early warning systems

- Over the past two decades, early warning systems in India have improved considerably reducing loss of life and damage to livelihoods. This can be evidenced by the reduction in mortality caused due to timely evacuation during floods and cyclones. However, there is further scope for innovation in relaying the warnings of impending extreme events to the at-risk populations through big data, digitalisation, technology transfer, social media outreach, and behaviour change in favour of advanced anticipated action. AIDMI in 2018 initiated a regional review of the early warning system under Duryog Nivaran to make it better, faster, and more anticipatory.

Accelerating climate change actions

- There is evidence that climate change is going to increase the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events.[5] Climate change is also exposing newer geographies and populations to newer risks and hazards more rapidly each year. For instance, heat stress has emerged to be a great risk that is adversely affecting human health, livelihoods and well-being each year in additional locations and communities. Innovations to understand the complex impact of climate change and design solutions that address this complex impact to prevent a humanitarian crisis from precipitating are sorely needed in India. Such innovations can be governance mechanisms (heatwave guidelines), technology innovations (low-cost coolers in low-income areas), urban planning innovations (green and blue infrastructure) as well as community-based innovations (awareness programs and community-dialogue to foster behaviour change). Since the year 2012, AIDMI has been implementing findings of SREX

[5] WMO (2022), Climate change and extreme weather, https://public.wmo.int/en/resources/world-meteorological-day/world-meteorological-day-2022-early-warning-early-action/climate-change-and-extreme-weather#:~:text=The%20occurrence%20of%20extreme%20events,Every%20bit%20of%20warming%20matters.

IPCC at the local level in India and around India.

Victim-centric innovations

- Technological innovations can play a vital role in providing humanitarian assistance to crisis-affected populations in India. However, there is a need to make such innovations more victim-centric and contextual so that they can effectively carry out their mandate. Such victim-centrism has been intended in policies and plans but not so much in actions. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the initial phase of vaccine rollout was done through a technological portal called COWIN which the majority of the country was unable to use. Similarly, the diversity of India (geographical, climatic, regional and cultural) also necessitates the design and adoption of varied context-specific innovations. Victims must have more voice, visibility, and recognition in the humanitarian system in India at all levels. In 2002, AIDMI initiated the first-ever DEC evaluation of the Gujarat earthquake where the victims offered performance ratings to the DEC members INGOs on the first nine months of relief work.

Operational innovations in humanitarian action

- Specific innovations to improve humanitarian operations also have a lot of potential in India. For instance, developing a database of humanitarian crises in India should be a top priority because it would improve how the sector functions. Such data would prove critical in assessing how well the humanitarian sector is addressing the needs of the affected populations and what changes need to be made in the interventions to make them more suited to their needs. Such data will shape decisions, and debates. Technology and innovation have a big role in capturing and leveraging data. AIDMI currently working on Disasters and Data overlaps and gaps from the demand side.
- Similarly, social innovations in the humanitarian sector that use minimal technology also have a lot of potential to improve the provision of assistance to affected populations. Social protection from life to livelihood to health to shelter for migrant populations is one such social innovation. Another social innovation measure can be a focus on circular economy with a focus on forming meaningful connections between the market and the communities using, reusing and recycling as much energy and materials as possible.

All the aforesaid areas for innovation in the larger humanitarian landscape in India look promising as well as profitable, for the economy and society. It is now up to the humanitarian stakeholders (government, donors, agencies, academics and communities) to pilot, scale up and embed these innovations for improved delivery of assistance to affected populations in India. This is a good way for humanitarian system to strengthen in favour of the victims. ■

WAY AHEAD

Priorities from SHS-India to SOHS Next Report

*By **Mihir R. Bhatt,** AIDMI, India*

The following have come up as themes for the next SOHS global report from the SHS-India report and discussions around it.

- More accurate understanding of humanitarian loss and damage, including valuation.
- Role of research and innovations in making humanitarian systems more effective and less costly.
- Future cities in future humanitarian systems.
- Preparedness demands emerging from extreme events that are outpacing current forecasts.
- Spotting place and role for creativity in the humanitarian system.
- Harnessing private capital for global humanitarian goods.
- Strengthening e-learning in the humanitarian system. ■

Photo: AIDMI.

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