

**Civil Society Organizations (CSOs): Partners in Disaster Reduction  
And Humanitarian Response  
4 May 2006 8:15 – 9:45 a.m.  
NGO/Civil Society Room HITEX #1  
Hyderabad International Convention Centre  
Hyderabad, India**

**Ms. Rekha Abel, Catholic Relief Services, India, Moderator**

Nongovernment organizations (NGOs) play major roles during disasters, from response to recovery and rehabilitation. There is a need to shift from a single organization response to networking and coordination. NGOs need to deliberate on how to be more effective and share their experiences with donors. It is also crucial to reduce the impact of disasters and strengthen communities.

**Mr. Amod Mani Dixit, Executive Director, National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET), Nepal**

Mr. Dixit identified the following issues in disaster reduction and preparedness:

- Capacity building – Capacity building is usually centered on making buildings stronger against earthquakes. However, focusing on building codes alone is not really the answer to being prepared for an earthquake. For example, in India, 90% of buildings built hundreds of years ago were built without codes.
- Going the 'last mile' – Most concepts are not treated down to this last mile. Services of NGOs and CSOs are needed to ensure or facilitate this process.
- Knowledge in disaster management traditionally has been only taken from the West because we think it exists there. This is not entirely true.
- The conventional "top-down" needs to be complemented by a "bottom-up" approach. This concept is adopted by members of the Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network (ADRRN). NGOs and CSOs need to work with government agencies to solve problems. NGOs demystify science and technology to the grassroots so that communities can be empowered.
- Similarity of problems means that there will be a similarity of solutions. It is important to transfer life lessons, adopt technology that is effective, and build capacity in the affected communities. For example, experience in Banda Aceh when ADRRN worked with government and community to internalize the concept of risk of earthquakes and the importance of seismic resistant technology and building codes, should be replicated in Pakistan.
- In Banda Aceh, ADRRN also worked with local government, academics, and professionals who were taught engineering and appropriate techniques to make buildings safer.
- Usually, communities start rebuilding immediately after earthquakes. We need to assist them in rebuilding safer infrastructure. In Pakistan, 1,710 people received training (government officials, engineers, architects, contractors, builders and carpenters) on techniques of building seismic resistant structures. Partnering with local NGOs, the Pakistan Government aims to build better housing through a central reconstruction committee and other relevant authorities and communities. The process has just started. It is envisioned that more will be trained and communities can be empowered.
- Success depends on the understanding of local cultures, communities, and how NGOs and their networks work, such as the ADRRN. Potential opportunities are

understood by those involved in the process. These then need to be formalized and supported by those with capacity and resources, like the Asian Development Bank.

**Mr. Manu Gupta, Managing Director, Sustainable Environment and Ecological Development Society (SEEDS), India**

- There is a need to learn from disasters, e.g. the recent Pakistan earthquake.
- India has experienced several major disasters in the last 10 years. Since the cyclone in 1999, there has been no uniform or proper distribution of knowledge or response systems. During the Gujarat earthquake, management of response issues was not ideal and after the Indian Ocean tsunami, all stakeholders were equally unprepared in the management of response. The main question is, are we really learning from these disasters?
  - At the community level, there is a need to understand and appreciate livelihood issues before we can design reduction strategies. How do we develop strategies as part of regular development program on how to reduce vulnerability which is well-established by national agencies in status reports?
- Four areas of intervention include:
  - a) Promote building safety – government, corporation, house owners, masons, construction workers, - need for basic anti-seismic features. Opportunities are lost every time as we do not pay attention to this as part of the strategy.
  - b) Community Based Disaster Management needs to be part of the implementation strategy. Dialogue among NGOs and other stakeholders and the communities is essential. This can create a process of feedback that goes into the systems, institutionalized into process and then used to formulate strategies
  - c) School safety programs are essential for disaster reduction. Daily risks in their house zones, and other natural or complex risks, take them through the process of learning and mitigation to reduce overall risk
  - d) Open learning concept – lessons at field level are not satisfactorily translated to the relevant stakeholders. There is a need to go to the field to teach those with no opportunity to be exposed to formal learning. Day to day experience of NGOs can provide lessons to the stakeholders.
- ADRRN should carry out tsunami learning in whatever we are implementing in the field. All partners should use this to institutionalize more open learning, and stressing it to communities in order to empower them.

**Ms. Merlie M. Mendoza, Executive Director, Tabang Mindanaw, Philippines**

- In the conflict-ridden regions of the Philippines, in particular, the Sulu Islands, Tabang Mindanaw provides assistance to displaced survivors of war, as well as rehabilitation of drought areas.
  - In a situation of chronic violence, the main issues to be addressed include governance, risk reduction, and peace-building.
  - The major challenges are consistent: the local government is not present or hardly participates. In addition, there is an absence of livelihood programs, poor access to education, and unhealthy environmental and economic conditions.

- There is a critical need for a clear governance framework for peace and security. Governance and empowerment should look at capacity building, participatory mechanisms, basic human rights, and religious freedom. Fair media and business communities should also be involved in the process.
- In the area of bridging relationships, relevant stakeholders need to have ownership of the problems and challenges, and be able to face them. Only then can a plan of action be designed. There is a need for transparency in the evaluation process. There is also a need to engage leaders and citizens, define who they are, provide guidance and build governance.
- We need to develop integral leaders and social reform, and build trust with the communities. If these issues are not addressed, there can be violence from empowered citizens.
- We also need to look at justice. Peace is in the hands of the people. NGOs need to be peace builders. Historical injustices will develop into social injustice. Social reform must consider peace and governance. For example, in Sulu, basic rights such as clean drinking water are not available. Around 90% of water in Sulu is neither clean nor potable.

**Dr. Tan Tay Keong, Executive Director, Singapore International Foundation (SIF)**

- Accountability issues in disaster response are a difficult and lonely process; these have challenged NGOs and CSOs.
- Disaster response is about project management i.e. moving/mobilizing resources to achieve objectives for benefit of someone. It faces changing needs and circumstances, especially in post-conflict/disaster conditions.
- Good project management needs to achieve optimal outcomes. There is always a trade off between time, resources (money and people), and scope of promises.
- The question is how can there be flexibility in the field that can be managed with transparency and accountability? There is a need to set systems when changes can be made:
  - a) Work development framework – the acceptable range for changing timelines, resources and scope,
  - b) Manage the obstacles (in the form of risk) – anything that might jeopardize the integrity of project and organization:
    - Lay out the risk areas
    - Identify potential consequences
    - Use mitigation measures to minimize consequences
    - Consider the funders vs. project management vs. beneficiaries relationship
    - Also look at risks related to resources, scope, and time.
- These are the steps to take:
  - State clearly the objectives and process related to delivery and accountability
  - Identify those involved in projects: volunteers, beneficiaries, project managers
  - Develop agreement with funders
  - Put in place systems to manage the process, and state under what conditions they can be altered and how this can be done keeping in mind the risks of corruption and non-delivery

- Disaster Management is just as much about managing changes and circumstances; document these in advance for improved accountability.

**Dr. Jemilah Mahmood, MERCY Malaysia**

- Asia is the most disaster prone region in but the strength of NGOs in forefront is not recognized enough. Donors and media do not focus on hardworking local and Asian NGOs (97% of the response to the Gujarat earthquake was from local stakeholders, including NGOs).
- In the response to the Indian Ocean tsunami, thousands of NGOs appeared, locally and internationally, creating local concerns about accountability.
- In 2002, many Asian NGOs felt it was time to form a network to share and learn and thus the birth of the ADRRN which now has 30 members
- There is a perception that southern NGOs are unreliable, corrupt, have no standards, etc. We need to prove that these problems are not restricted to Asian NGOs only.
- ADRRN is not just about disaster response; we need to identify causal and pre-disposing factors that needed to be mitigated. A network is able to bring together reduction and response experts – it brings a comprehensive approach or Total Disaster Risk Management. As NGOs, we have a responsibility, and we should not leave communities more vulnerable than when we found them.
- There is a need for financial institutions and the corporate sector to work with NGOs. One example is when ADRRN shared the story of “Inamura No Hi” with Acehnese. The project was funded by Citigroup. ADB needs to invest in NGO and CSOs to enhance and ensure better work in future.
- NGO networks need to respond and to share. There is a need to change mindset of communities. NGOs and CSOs can do this very well as the way we work, think and respond is very much community-based, and is different from government and other agencies.
- NGOs can train each other. There is a common factor of Asians that define us. We bring added value and can lead in humanitarian response. There is a need to build confidence, a need to adhere to codes of conduct and standards. Transparency and accountability to donors and beneficiaries is essential and use a participatory approach at all times.
- As a network, we need to build and showcase capacity, and prove our capability and what it takes to make that happen.

**Mr. Tadashi Kondo, Country Director, India Resident Mission, Asian Development Bank**

- ADB policies are accessible through the ADB website:
  - ADB’s policy on cooperation with NGOs – defines the way we cooperate /interact with NGOs and CSO. ADB involves NGOs at various stages of program formulation, project processing, and technical assistance processing. ADB acknowledges NGOs as they support objectives of ADB.
  - Integrate disaster and emergency assistance policy
    - Previous ADB focus was on reactive response
    - New policy – include post-emergency response as well as Disaster Management

- In India, ADB work is still in a reactive mode, but is implementing two major interventions: Assam – flood control, eastern India - coastal management.
- ADB advocates strengthening partnerships with NGOs and CSOs to effectively deliver on the financing of disaster response. Response and preparedness are applied through quick deployment of people to emergency situations.
- Tsunami assistance has become successful through NGO and CSO participation. The “Inamura No Hi” folklore - knowledge transfer from old to young, disaster management concept, financial support, community participation and strong ownership – provide useful lessons for all of us.

**Rapporteur : Ms. Zu Mian, MERCY Malaysia**