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Bringing Community-Based Disaster Management (CBDM) Training To South Asia: Through Local Language Courses

BACKGROUND

Present day disaster planners/ managers and relief workers agree that communities can indeed be empowered to cope with natural hazards in their locality. This is a more positive approach to disaster management, when compared with the traditionally accepted emergency relief handout method. CBDM or community-based disaster management emphasizes that through capacity building, communities can be better prepared to face future disaster situations and manage their risk.

The concept of CBDM recognizes that the commonly applied top-down initiatives fail to address specific local needs of a given community, it fails to heed local knowledge, or take into account available resources and capacities that exist within communities.

When applied, CBDM approach aims to enhance organizational skills of disaster-prone communities, strengthen their livelihoods to withstand the ravage of a prolonged period of disaster, establish early warning systems that could protect lives and possessions, resolve existing conflicts and impart appropriate training and technological knowledge as necessary. However this CBDM approach, as developed by ITDG, does not transfer the entire responsibility of disaster management to the community; it recognizes that the state has a role to play in reducing risk by managing disaster situations and maintaining appropriate structures.

OBJECTIVES

The aim of developing a training curriculum and guidelines for CBDM was primarily encourage the 'paradigm shift'- to change the focus of disaster managers to look at communities as active partners rather than helpless victims; the shift from relief to risk mitigation. Another aim was to make the training available at low cost, in local languages to disaster managers at grassroots level in South Asia.

ACTIVITIES

In 1996, ITDG took a lead in introducing formal CBDM training in South Asia. In partnership with the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) in Bangkok, several workshops were held to develop the initial curriculum. The training manual was produced so that it could be used by different stakeholders- government department officials, NGO staff, field assistants, community-based organizations etc. The training methodology aimed at incorporating aspects of community participation and community capacity-building in to the disaster management process.

In the early years of CBDM training, all courses were conducted at the Bangkok-based ADPC. This was an expensive exercise for many potential participants in South Asia. Therefore, the regional program 'Livelihood Options for Disaster Risk Reduction (LODRR)' coordinated by ITDG South Asia, incorporated plans to bring the CBDM methodology down to local-level training; reaching the grassroots level organizations in South Asia.

In 2000, under the 'Capacity Building towards Localized Approaches' component of the LODRR program, the first batch of trainers was trained; participants were drawn from India and Sri Lanka initially, to begin the localizing process. Thirteen members from eleven selected partner organizations from India and Sri Lanka were given comprehensive guidance on translating the training methodology in their own countries to reach the provincial, district and grassroots levels. Upon return, these trainers worked on adapting the international course syllabus to suit national needs and context. Most importantly these trainers had to translate the course contents to local languages that were understood by a majority of people in each country.

The salient elements of the syllabus developed by ADPC and Duryog Nivaran are listed below.

- Disaster Situation in Asia
- Paradigm shift in addressing disasters
- Importance of community-based approaches
- The Disaster Crunch Model
- Community-based disaster management process
- Community-based risk assessment
- Strengthening local capacities
- Planning at the local level

ACHIEVEMENTS

Since 2000, one local training program had been conducted in India (in Hindi), and two courses in Sri Lanka (in Sinhala and Tamil). Plans to conduct a second course in India are under way. These programs filled a lacuna that had existed in the field for many years, and the demand grew in Sri Lanka. CBDM is incorporated in to national-level training projects for government officials conducted by the National Disaster Management Centre (NDMC), which is the state's apex body managing disasters. The head of NDMC was a recipient of CBDM training in Bangkok at one of the initial courses.

The local-language courses in Sri Lanka were coordinated and conducted by Centre for Housing, Planning and Building (CHPB) while in India, ITDG worked in partnership with a local organization called Knowledge Links.

Having a large number of NGO staff attending the course also has many benefits, it ensures that the concept will be carried forward in individual projects of these organizations. In India, the Hindi-language course was attended by UNDP local staff, staffs from major NGOs like Oxfam, Care etc. This, and the wide spectrum of stake holders who have benefited through this training also augurs well for replication of the training and the incorporation of its salient components in to other programs.

An important aspect of the curricula is the practical component. Participants are given the opportunity of applying field-based tools by visiting projects which have applied the CBDM approach. In Sri Lanka, course participants visited the arid village of Mahameddawa and in India, the chosen site was Lalwadi in Rajasthan. Both were pilot demonstration sites for LODRR's drought mitigation component.

In Pakistan, an interesting development took place. Although there were no formal plans, a local NGO with the assistance of UNDP and Oxfam adapted the curricula and conducted training programs for organizations in the districts of Badin and Quetta, especially involving the decentralized structures of government in rural Pakistan. Two of the training sessions were aimed at media and their role in facilitating the CBDM approach.

FUTURE

Future plans for CBDM training include curriculum revision, which is underway, in order to make the training more relevant and practical for local-level South Asian organizations.



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