

LESSONS FROM KERALA FLOOD RELIEF 2018

TOWARDS INTEGRATING AN INCLUSIVE, GENDER SENSITIVE DISASTER RELIEF PLAN

The Floods of August 2018 in Kerala is a convincing statement that natural disasters are becoming increasingly common with a cascading effect on communities and infrastructure.

Our multi-country research collaboration which analysed the relief operations of Kerala floods, was based on primary research with 921 affected inmates of relief shelters , 24 camp managers and 317 volunteers along with rapid evaluation of secondary data. Despite many significant advances in the state for improving preparedness, response and recovery programs for Disaster Management, the need for an effective interconnected management plan emerged as a severe gap, calling for ways to develop programmes to manage and mitigate the multiplying risk occurrences.

The study finds gaps in existing policies evidenced through weaknesses in governance and institutional capacities. We recommend steps for a gender sensitive, inclusive relief management plan that enhances preparedness, management and transition of communities to work in tandem with authorities to alleviate the effects of recurring disasters that the state seems to be prone to.

RELIEF CENTRES AS MULTI-STAKEHOLDER SPACE FOR POSITIVE ACTION

Relief shelters for the flood affected were managed by citizens with the help of local government. This points towards the potential of a relief centre plan with active involvement of citizens which could be institutionalized at the local government level. It could also pave way for a new approach in disaster relief management focused on local community capacity building with inclusivity and gender sensitivity at its core. Here, we outline the policy changes which could institute a new Kerala model of resilient relief centres taking lessons from the Kerala floods 2018.



KEY FACTS

- Kerala is categorised as a multiple hazard prone state by the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority.
- The August 2018 floods and landslides affected 5.4 million people, displaced 1.4 million and claimed 433 lives along with massive destruction of infrastructure and livelihood.
- Numerous impromptu relief camps were established through crowd funding and provisioning along with the use of social media platforms for instantaneous communication.
- Relief centres, managed by local citizens with the help of local government officials, functioned as the immediate and primary space for action for the disaster affected.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. ABSENCE OF STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE (SOP) FOR ESTABLISHMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF RELIEF CAMPS

Natural disasters including deluge generally occur suddenly and do not provide any lead time for elaborate planning or execution of relief operations. Flood relief camps 2018 was a classic example where many impromptu camps functioned through a process of trial and error. Absence of clear SOP with detailed policy frame work, action plans and guidelines, duties and responsibilities of Government functionaries and other stakeholders, identification and retention of usable facilities/buildings and flexibility in administrative and financial regulations led to many oversights. These include power struggles, absence of structured functioning, conflicts over alleged inequality in distribution of supplies and inability of camps to meet minimum relief standards.

- Detailed SOP in relation to relief centres need to be prepared and popularized
- Precise check list to be shared with camp managers at the very beginning
- Transparency and accountability in receipt and distribution of supplies need to be emphasised

RECOMMENDATION

The District Disaster Management Plan (DDMP) is to be made more specific and functional with respect to relief centres

“Certain local leaders demanded relief supplies in bulk without proper authentication which led to exchange of angry words”
Co-ordinator, City camp

2. ABSENCE OF DISTINCTION BETWEEN TEMPORARY RELIEF SHELTERS AND ENLISTED RELIEF CAMPS

Relief camps which form the immediate primary space for displaced persons from their homes should not be located within danger zone of the disaster and must be equipped with minimum essential infrastructure. Our research shows that a few camps had to be abandoned due to inundation and many lacked even potable water and sanitation facilities. It is quite natural for people to seek the nearest possible shelter offered by compassionate citizens. While such buildings certainly offer immediate relief, they cannot and should not be considered as enlisted relief camps. Functioning of the former during floods 2018 caused hardships to those with diverse needs particularly women, elderly, sick and people with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATION

Enlist/Equip/Popularise designated relief centres in response to varied expected intensity of the disaster

- Equip enlisted centres with facilities
- Popularise/share the list among the local community.
- Authorities to make arrangement for transferring persons from non designated to designated camps

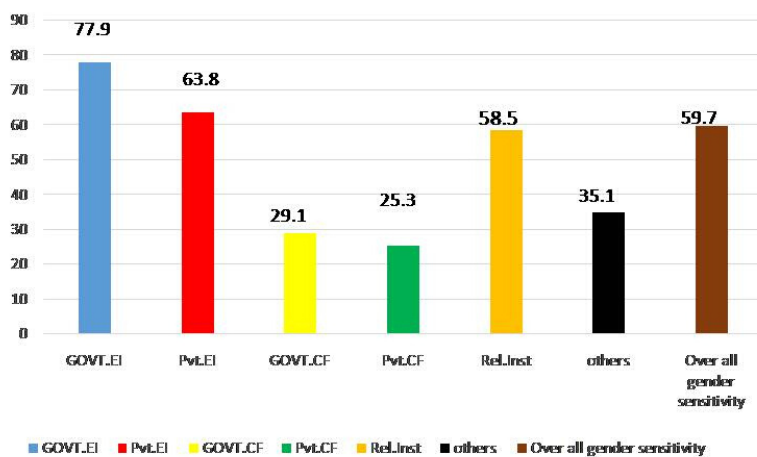
“ I was menstruating during the flood. But due to inadequate bathroom facility I chose not to overcrowd the available toilet for the sake of inmates and ended up with vaginal infection. ”

- Camp Manager, Paravur

3. NON-RECOGNITION OF DIVERSE NEEDS OF VULNERABLE GROUPS

Disasters adversely impact the most vulnerable groups with gender, age, disability, health status etc having cross-cutting impact. Non-recognition of such diverse needs is against the core humanitarian principle of inclusion and will add to magnifying their already existing vulnerabilities. Documentation of inmate details was very weak in relief camp 2018 and did not capture such special needs. Consequently gender sensitivity indices of sample camps varied significantly across different categories of institutions and was very low in some revealing that gender needs were not always met. Even the limited data maintained by camp managers was not available with official authority, reflecting overall weak documentation process.

GENDER SENSITIVITY INDEX BY CATEGORY OF INSTITUTION



ABBREVIATION

- **GOVT.EI**- GOVERNMENT EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS
- **PVT.EI**- PRIVATE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS
- **GOVT.CF**- GOVERNMENT COMMON FACILITIES
- **PVT.CF**-PRIVATE COMMON FACILITIES
- **REL.INST**- RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS
- **OTHERS**- OTHER BUILDINGS

- Comprehensive registration/ documentation framework to identify physical & psychological needs of aged, sick, women, children, disabled etc.
- Inmates including vulnerable groups are to be included in camp management
- Instituting a feedback/complaint redressal system

RECOMMENDATION

Devise mechanisms to promote inclusiveness and gender sensitivity of shelter centers

4. SPURIOUS REGISTRATION:

Efficient camp functioning was adversely affected by mismatch between documented and actual number of inmates. Misinformation about links between camp registration and relief compensation led to false registration by people who were not inmates .

RECOMMENDATION

Dispel misconceptions linking disaster compensation to shelter camp registration

- Clarity on non linkage of post disaster benefit distribution to registration in relief camps.
- Same to be communicated widely to the public.

"My sister in law was a cancer patient and she needed frequent juices to keep her Hb count from going down. We felt guilty about asking for food frequently."

- Neena aged 50

5. PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA DUE TO APPARENT AND NOT SO APPARENT FACTORS

Once past the initial shock, the primary concern for camp inmates were strategies to recover from financial damages incurred. Absence of risk transfer mechanisms adversely affected their resilience and bounce back capacity. Although most camp inmates had received immediate cash assistance of Rs.10000, this was insignificant relative to the damages incurred. Thus, there is an urgent need to develop a time bound comprehensive plan to rebuild individual lives..

Apart from the commonly reported damage to households and household items, inmates were also observed to lament over loss of important documents and irretrievable articles of emotional value such as photographs, pets etc. Services of professional teams to identify and address such post-disaster trauma was found only in one third of sample camps. This being a prerequisite for transition from relief to recovery, the disaster management policy may also include popularisation of insurance, counseling facilities etc to mitigate mental trauma.

" I cannot get over the fact that I lost my collection of poems which I had penned down over the years after I was confined to a wheel chair. I was hoping to publish it sometime. "

- Sreedharan aged 58 years

" I was very scared I would lose my late mother's photo. I took only that with me when water levels started rising around our house "

- Samantha aged 21

- Popularise insurance and other low-cost risk transfer mechanisms.
- Link local counselling units to enlisted camps.
- Promote awareness to digitize/safekeep - important documents, eg. opening digi-lockers.

RECOMMENDATION

Institute and implement measures to address/mitigate mental trauma

6. AMATEUR VOLUNTEERING, MIS-MATCH OF DEMAND AND SUPPLY IN RELIEF MATERIALS

Crowd sourcing of relief supplies through extensive use of social media was a distinguishing feature of floods 2018. This was largely managed by volunteer networks, consisting primarily of youth-both male and female-driven solely by humanitarian concern and no prior experience or training. Due to absence of co-ordination, supplies were often not need based and their distribution not uniform.

"When we posted requirements in social media, supplies would keep coming long after the needs were met which at times led to waste of perishable items like cooked food "

Anitha aged 27
- volunteer in a relief camp

RECOMMENDATION

Integrate volunteer groups in each locality/ relief centre, equip with skill based training in DM

- Integrate volunteer groups under the aegis of local government/ relief centres and impart skill-based training.
- Experience sharing to be an integral part of such training.
- Promote awareness on authentication strategies in usage of social media.

CONCLUSION

The success of any disaster management policy lies in its ability to be inclusive, catering to diverse needs of target groups.

This requires a multi-sectoral approach emphasizing the important role of all stakeholders to recognize the needs of vulnerable groups and institutionalize gender sensitive and equitable relief centres within the larger context of a disaster management plan. Implementation of the above policy recommendations will undoubtedly increase efficiency, decrease risk and help put forth a new model of relief centres rooted in informed management and decentralization.

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This is a policy brief prepared based on the research on 'Evaluation of the Kerala Model Relief Centres: Integrating a Gender sensitive disaster management plan,' undertaken by the above mentioned team during 2018-2019. A detailed report of same will be published shortly.



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