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MANAGEMENT OF DISASTERS THROUGH GOOD GOVERNANCE

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Since ages, we are trying to manage disasters causing all sort of havoc in our lives. With all the tremendous progress in various aspects of advancements in technology and science, we failed with the supreme power of disasters killing thousands of people and destroying lives and properties. Disasters at many times could be prevented with mitigation measures, but for that we need good management practices and practitioners. India has been a victim to every form of destruction. To some extent, the exploitation of natural resources is also a cause for such calamities. The recent incidents of flash floods in Uttarakhand, torrential rains in Chennai, longest heat waves in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, fire accident in Puttingal Devi temple in Kerala, massive fire at National Museum of Natural History, Pathankot terrorist attack, road accidents, are few disasters that remind us about our weaknesses and areas we need to improve through good governance. Good governance is a key of all development practices.

In India, good governance has its own history. The focus of goal oriented change moved from government to governance after the World Bank report entitled Governance and Development (1992) on third world countries to surface the rampant mal governance, characterised by an ineffective enforcement of laws, delays in administrative decisions and actions, ambiguity and complexity in procedures, low ethical standards, least involvement of citizens in the administrative process and hazy accountability prevalent in these countries. The governance was supposed to go beyond the traditional structure of the government system. Thus, the emphasis shifted from structure to process i.e. government to governance. Thus governance was viewed as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development.

Broadly, governance has three interrelated aspects: the form of political regime of a country, process by which authority is

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exercised for managing socio-cultural resources for development, and capacity of government to design, formulate and implement pertinent policies and decisions.

UNDP defined governance as the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences. Governance encompasses, but also transcends, government. It encompasses all relevant groups, including the private sector and civil society organizations.

Good Governance is about the best possible process for making and implementing decisions. Thus, in new dispensation, government is a part of governance. The notion of good governance has been adopted as the guiding spirit of administrative transformation in India through a series of deliberations. The seven characteristics specified by World Bank regarding good governance includes: Political accountability, Participation, Rule of Law, Bureaucratic effectiveness, Freedom of

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information and expression, Sound administrative system and Cooperation.

There is no single and exhaustive definition of good governance nor is there a delimitation of its scope, that commands universal acceptance. However, there is a significant degree of consensus that good governance relates to political and institutional processes and outcomes that are deemed necessary to achieve the goals of development.

In the context of disaster management, the paradigm of good governance reinforced smart, effective, transparent, citizen-centric, responsive, compassionate, accountable and ethical management of disasters. It does not include only post disaster activities but also the pre disaster processes to minimize the losses occur due to disaster. National Disaster Management Policy, National Disaster Management Act, NDMA, NIDM, Guidelines on different disasters issued by NDMA, etc. are some of the measures taken by government that reflect good governance. If we follow the basic rules of management than good governance is equated with sound development management with its four key facets viz., public sector management, accountability, legal framework for development and information and transparency.

Like disaster management, good governance is a global issue that is interlinked with the objective of facilitating holistic and multidimensional development. There is a noticeable interdependence between good governance and balanced and speedy development – one leads to the other.

The instrumental nature of governance implies that the four ‘pillars’ of good governance are universally applicable regardless of the economic orientation, strategic priorities on policy choices of the government. According to World Bank 2000 and Asian Development Bank, 1998, there are four eminent components of good governance i.e. accountability, transparency, predictability and participation.

Besides these, the UNDP (1997) identified six components of good governance. They are rule of law, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity effectiveness and efficiency, and strategic vision.

To meet the culture of mitigation and disaster risk reduction, the good governance process should be an integral part of the planning and delivery of core development services that includes infrastructure, safety & security of community, health and environment. Unfortunately, none of the assessment



report supports that development plans are coordinated with disaster risk reduction activities. The easy going approach and failure to embrace disaster mitigation and disaster risk reduction in development policies, planning and implementation leads to other unmanageable risk of disasters like the present floods in Uttarakhand resulting loss of lives and livelihood. The important features of good governance must ensure:

Accountability: Accountability is the capacity to call officials to account for their actions. Effective accountability has a major component in the form of answerability. Before, during and after the disaster, all the concerned officials are answerable to their actions. Good governance ensures all the strategies of public accountability through legislative, judicial and executive process. The frequency of man-made disasters like one took place in Dhaka and the losses occur due to natural causes could be reduced to a great extent if the accountability is fixed well in time.

Transparency: Transparency entails easy and low cost access to relevant information that helps in decision making during disasters. It also helps in policy decisions at the time of emergency. It also helps to

meet the emergent needs of affected community.

Predictability: Predictability is about the fair and consistent application of laws, policies and regulations. It ensures that even in the situation of emergency during disaster the rule of law and equality before law together strengthen predictability.

Participation: Participation ensures the involvement of beneficiaries and people affected by government policies and decisions so that the government can make informed choices with respect to their needs and demands. It also means that all groups particularly the most vulnerable, should have opportunities to participate in the process. Participation can be promoted through public private partnership, community based organisations, NGOs and other national and international organisations working for the interest of public. Participation generally depends on ability of the people to participate in the government policies and decision making for the disaster survivors, their willingness to participate and contribute to disaster affected and the opportunity to participate and help the affected community.

Strategic Vision: The government and public ought to have a broad and long term perspective on good governance and disaster resilient development along with



the clear strategies required for development. Development must be supplemented with disaster risk reduction process.

Rule of Law: This means that decisions are consistent with relevant legislation or common law. Legal frameworks formed for the interest of public should be fair and enforced impartially, particularly the laws related to the people affected by nature's fury or man-made disaster.

Equality: All citizens of India have the right to equality in the eyes of constitution. They are entitled for equal opportunities and support from the government. Equality should be accompanied with the freedom to choose. During and after the disaster, the administrative support and compensation must reach to all the men and women equally.

Responsiveness: Good governance is responsive to needs, demands and aspiration of common people. It ensures that all the citizens affected by disasters get the support from the government. It is equally important that the institutions with the sufficient managerial and coordination capacity to and manage and integrate the efforts of relevant sectors and account for vulnerable and poor communities.

Consensus Orientation: All the policy decisions taken for the welfare of people including disaster risk reduction, mitigation, preparedness must reach a broad consensus in society. Decisions should not be imposed on them. Rather the opportunity should be given to public to share their issues, ideas and suggestions to overcome the problem. The principle of ensuring that the voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable are heard in decisions about the allocation of resources affecting them for sustainable disaster recovery.

Effectiveness and Efficiency: Good governance must utilize its resources very effectively to meet the needs of vulnerable people. Its efficiency could be achieved only when the system works to reduce the risk and vulnerability of its people with the disaster and the government has the capability to handle any sort of disaster.

Under the umbrella of governance, all the disaster mitigation, risk reduction, preparedness activities are undertaken. The developmental principles of good governance equally applies on disaster management activities. To make the system more efficient we need to refocus on the babu bureaucracy i.e. the babu substantially influencing the decisional process in governance system and the mind set of Indian senior officials. He

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prefers to perform routine tasks of administration in a regulated manner and do all interpretation of laws, rules and codes in a conventional manner. Even during the disaster situation, the babu mentality of obstructing, counter-questioning, doubting, objecting and procrastinating does not allow decisions to be made rationally and swiftly, unless the political or administrative leadership assets effectively that does not happen often.

An important recommendation of ARC pertaining to the reduction in the number of hierarchical levels generally involved in decision making should be only two and each level should be empowered to dispose of a substantial amount of work on its own. To make the process of governance really good, we need to regulate the information, skills and attitude of middle and lower level functionaries through motivation. Than only we can get the desired results to meet the challenges of disaster risk reduction in development plans and disaster response mechanism with minimum time loss.

Besides, there is also need of intolerance towards inefficiency, ambiguity and indecisiveness. Common man does not expect high from government system and has accepted the inefficiency as natural. This approach does not lead us to good

In short, we may say that it is only governance, that influences the way whole system decide their actions to manage the disaster related activities. The culture of preparedness accepted as a part of good governance may not only help to prevent and reduce fatal results of dangers but also develops a sense of social responsibility and orderliness in public life. Through good governance only, we may secure justice, empowerment and efficient delivery of services.

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