

3 DAMAGE ASSESSMENT

3.1 Introduction

Initial damage assessment is the first step in the recovery process to have a clear picture of the magnitude of damage to life, property, crops, livelihoods and infrastructure resulting from a war or a disaster. Disaster comes as a complete surprise to the people and Governments in the absence of preparedness; dumps everything into a state of confusion. In this confused state, different organizations including humanitarian organization, try to take the lead in carrying out the initial assessments to retrieve information for immediate planning and relief distribution. Most of the initial assessments are done by various agencies, is uncoordinated and leads to piece meal information gathering resulting in generating inaccurate information.

Due to uncoordinated effort on initial assessment, it is often witnessed that people who have been devastated by a

disaster are being grilled by the interviewers filling up questionnaires. These unfortunate victims are sometimes not aware of the purpose of these surveys and questions arise in their mind are: Why? What? How many? When?, etc. It was reported in Sri Lanka, after the tsunami, a surviving woman was interviewed by twelve different interviewers during the first week of the disaster. In some cases these uncoordinated information collection methodology went at such extreme stage that communities were chasing away any official who came with forms or questionnaires. These situations highlight the need for disaster preparedness and planning for management of a disaster. Who will do what, when a disaster hits?

On the flip side of the coin, it has also been witnessed that organized communities had gathered all the information accurately immediately after the disaster and they



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What Remains in Kabul

were in a position to present the information to outsiders who visited them. Through this process the community take responsibility and helps in providing immediate support to the ones who need most.

One important principle to be followed in damage assessments is the decentralization of information gathering to lowest official entity. This means that the geographical cell of information gathering has to be the smallest area covered by a Government administrative unit. Gathering information based on the existing administrative divisions, greatly helps in post disaster recovery and coordination with the local government.

One of the specifics that should be highlighted is the difference between post-conflict and post-disaster. This is an important distinction to make, as there are certain factors unique to each that will impact on how the situation assessment is undertaken. Accurate information is necessary for post-conflict and post-disaster planning. In a post-conflict situation the recovery process has to

address peace building initiatives that require long term planning and negotiation process. However, in post-disaster situation the recovery process has to incorporate disaster preparedness and mitigation measures, which largely demands rapid assessment and quick deployment of basic life support system and materials depending on types and geographical location of the disaster.

3.2 Post-conflict Planning

One of the key differences in post-conflict situations is the duration of the crisis. Many wars carry on for decades and the level of destruction that they leave behind have much deeper roots than that of a quick impact of a disaster. Perhaps the most challenging issue is the issue of trust. Unlike a natural disaster, where the enemy of the people is nature, war pits neighbors against one another. This culture of mistrust is deep-seated, and cannot be expected to fade away with the end of violence. It must be addressed and overcome. Thus, the designing of programme strategies in post-conflict circumstances is much more complex



Banda Aceh, After the Indian Ocean Tsunami

than in other post-disaster situations. The rebuilding of trust will lay the foundation for long-term peace in conflict-affected areas and therefore, any post-conflict programming requires deep understanding of the cultural and ethnic values, to ensure the recovery programme does not have a negative effect on the peace and stability of the region.

3.3 Post-disaster Planning

Despite loss of life and resources, disaster creates an opportunity to take necessary preventative measures involving respective institutions and communities. Preventative knowledge on disaster mitigation and risk reduction substantially helps the community to organize themselves after a disaster and support themselves. Disaster prevention and mitigation must be foremost considerations when preparing post-disaster recovery programmes. Natural disaster types, occurrences and geographical distribution must be considered in the planning process that will give a comprehensive picture of the situation in preparation of coordinated longer-term development plan with appropriate prevention activities in the area.

Long-term post-disaster planning can be challenging than traditional planning exercise. It requires support from all parties in terms of resources, motivation and political willingness.

3.4 Assessment Process

Starting with accounting for the dead, missing and injured and then trying to protect the survivors take first priority in the



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assessments. This assessment will provide sufficient quantified information to make priority actions for immediate recovery planning. Then there is the need to look at the problem from the point of view of the affected people. This too has to be started as soon as possible but the completion may take more time since the communities need to be mobilized to carry out the assessment. Therefore there are two parallel processes of assessment:

- 1 First by the Government agencies supported partner organisations:

Rapid Damage Assessment

- 2 The second by the affected communities supported by the Government authorities and partner organizations:

Community Damage Assessment

3.4.1 Rapid Damage Assessment

- **What is the purpose?**

The purpose of the Rapid Assessment is for the Government and the humanitarian community to get a good picture of the scale of destruction. This assessment will indicate the kinds of relief needed immediately and the approximate cost of damages to life and property. Analysis of the information will provide a picture of the kinds and scale of the reconstruction effort and its cost.

- **Who does?**

Keeping with the principle of decentralized assessment, it has to be led by the smallest administrative unit of the Government establishment. Very often this could be a village or a cluster of villages or settlements headed by an elected representative of the area with a state official in charge of administrative issues.

- **Who coordinates?**

In the damage assessment exercise coordination becomes crucial for aggregating the information at the

different tiers of the administration. Therefore it is essential that the assessment is carried out by one administrative command structure. This could be the Government agency responsible for disaster management, which has a direct link to the peripheral Government administrative structures. Coordination has to be done at the following levels and information thus generated has to be presented by these levels. These levels are as follows:

- Village or settlement level
- District or divisional level
- Region or provisional level
- National level

▪ What tools to use?

The Damage Assessment Form (Family Profile) as at Annex 005 can be used for this exercise. This information can be fed into a database system for quick analysis. One basic requirement for a disaster preparedness programme is have these forms pre-created and system established in anticipation of a disaster. In other words, Governments should not wait for a disaster to occur to design forms, establish systems and train in damage assessment.

The system will have the capacity to provide information at the lowest administrative level (village) that will be useful for the relief distribution and quick impact projects. Aggregated information and analysis can be generated for the regional and central authority. The information system will be able to



Sri Lanka

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Affected by the Tsunami

generate geographical distribution of damage and needs through GIS maps.

3.4.2 Community Damage Assessment

▪ The Purpose

The basic purpose of Community Damage Assessment is for the affected people to identify the problems and scale of the problems that they faced with in rebuilding their lives. This information will assist the community in deciding how to plan and act for recovery.

▪ Why communities should be involved in damage assessment?

- No one has a greater stake in damage assessment than affected communities
- The information will be more accurate and will reflect the opinion of a larger number of community members
- The capacity of the entire community to deal with disasters will be developed
- Decision-making measures and response systems will be more effective due to the participation of the entire community
- Local culture and values will be preserved by involving community in the process

▪ Who does?

Community Damage Assessment is carried out by each affected family assisted by the Community Development Council. Each family has to complete the Family Profile Form as at Annex 005 in triplicate. One copy remains with the family one with the CDC and the other goes to the Government agency coordinating the recovery programme. This information then entered into the computer database system. The Primary Groups and the CDC have the responsibility to ensure that the Family Profiles are completed accurately and in quick time. Then the CDC has to collect the Family Profiles and aggregate the information to prepare the Community Profile (Annex 006).