



Integrating Governance and Disaster Risk Reduction: The Case of Odisha

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Abstract: The significance of good and effective governance is acknowledged as a critical factor in reducing disaster risks. Numerous stages of governance, ranging from international to local often interact with each other to address social, economic, and environmental issues. In this paper, I explore the path of the state of Odisha's DRR strategy – a move from a response-focused approach to a preventative one as well as how it integrated governance with DRR.

Keywords: (Governance, Adaptive governance, Disaster Risk Reduction, Odisha, Sustainable development)

Introduction

The significance of good and effective governance is acknowledged as a critical factor in reducing disaster risks. Numerous stages of governance, ranging from international to local often interact with each other to address social, economic, and environmental issues. The Rio+20 outcome document calls for “disaster risk reduction and the building of resilience to disasters to be addressed with a renewed sense of urgency in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication, and as appropriate, to be integrated into policies, plans, programmes and budgets at all levels and considered within relevant future frameworks.” (United Nations, 2012). It further explains “governments at all levels as well as relevant sub-regional, regional and international organizations to commit to adequate, timely and predictable resources for disaster risk reduction in order to enhance the resilience of cities and communities to disasters, according to their own circumstances and capacities” (United Nations, 2012).

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Recently, the key aspects of governance - accountability, transparency and partnerships – have played a significant role in reducing disaster risk, which delivered an affirmative environment for stimulating “adaptive governance”. Adaptive governance encourages adaptive capacity, “the ability of a system to adjust to climate change (including climate variability and extremes) to moderate potential damage, to take advantage of opportunities, or to cope with the consequences” (IPCC, 2007). To that end adaptive ability is mirrored in the capacity of a system to recover from disasters or shocks by reforming the functions of an organization. Adaptive governance has been an important mechanism in DRR that produces institutional capacities to monitor pre and post disaster knowledge from different types of sources, such as those from indigenous communities and satellite systems. Moreover, good governance benefits from efforts which can integrate other institutional mechanisms that convey perspectives of multiple stakeholders.

This concept of disasters as ‘natural’ got a paradigm shift with the “International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR)” during the 1990s – particularly at the “Yokohama Strategy for a Safer World (1994)” – and consequently the “UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR)” in 2000, retitled in 2019 as the UNDRR. A change in emphasis towards “looking disasters as social and the increasing emphasis placed on disaster preparedness (as opposed to responsiveness) was further institutionalised with the introduction of the Hyogo Framework for Action in 2005, and in 2015 with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction with its four action priorities related to understanding and strengthening disaster governance to manage disaster risk, and ‘Building Back Better’ in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction. The current UN terminology regards Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) as ‘the policy objective of disaster risk management’, with disaster risk management being the application of DRR strategies to prevent, reduce and manage disaster risk”. (Ogra et. Al., 2021: 1). Resonating these changes within the UN, India undertook a key modification in its method by introducing the Disaster Management in 2005. Consequently, the state of Odisha also made several changes in its effort to prevent disasters.

Odisha: A Disaster-prone State to a Global pioneer in DRR

Due to the geo-climatic conditions, Odisha is considered as one of the most disaster affected states in India along the east coast. The state has a 480 Kms of coastline that is frequently affected by tropical cyclones. It has 11 major river systems, which create recurrent floods. Since two-third of the total cultivated area being rain-dependent,

drought creates a grave risk at regular intervals in the event of failure of Monsoon. Some parts of the state also come under Earthquake Risk Zone-III (Moderate Damage Risk Zone). Odisha has tropical climate featured by medium to high temperature, high humidity, short and mild winter. The mean yearly precipitation is 1503 mm. The coastal part of the state is often hit by natural hazards like flood and cyclone almost every year.

The super cyclone of 1999 that killed more than 10000 people is marked as a turning point in Odisha's DRR trajectory. Following this, the cyclone-prone state decided to safeguard its people from future disasters - setting the goal of 'zero-human casualties' – it also emerged as a global pioneer in disaster management. In this paper, I explore the path of Odisha's DRR strategy – a move from a response-focused approach to a preventative one as well as how it integrated governance with DRR.

Odisha witnessed a paradigm shift in her approach towards DRR as its emphasis of the Disaster Management Policy was on “total risk management and vulnerability reduction by strengthening the physical infrastructure as well as bio-physical, psychological, social and economic status of the people and to make the people increasingly disaster resilient as well” (Government of Odisha, 2005). In this process, the state made several initiatives to reform the disaster prevention mechanisms.

Odisha: Principles of the Disaster Management Policy

- Take a proactive approach to disaster management and promote a culture of prevention and preparedness among individuals and institutions.
- Follow a multi-hazard approach to disaster management
- Shift from a relief and welfare approach to a rights and entitlement-based approach to humanitarian assistance.
- Since sustainable development will not be possible without the active involvement of the communities, make the vulnerability reduction programmes community driven.
- Integrate Disaster Management into Development Policy and Planning.
- Institutionalise efficient, well-coordinated and participatory disaster management initiatives as one of the basic ingredients of good governance.
- Ensure quality at all stages of emergency management including prevention, mitigation, relief and reconstruction and make their adoption mandatory. For doing so, universally accepted minimum standards will be adopted. If necessary, the standards would be modified taking into account local conditions and customs.

- Attempt harmonious blending of all disaster management interventions with local cultural ethos.
- Focus on protection of the environment.
- Promote inter-agency coordination and cooperation for Disaster Management.
- Involve all stakeholders in disaster management and define their roles in different stages of disasters.
- Create an enabling environment for ensuring higher participation of all stakeholders
- Work on legislation(s) to provide statutory backing to essential disaster management functions and agencies.
- Establish a trigger mechanism for emergency operations.
- View people as valuable partners and strengthen community-based coping mechanisms for dealing with disasters.
- Promote a spirit of volunteerism, develop a cadre of well-trained volunteers whose services will be utilised during emergencies.
- Document and use people's indigenous knowledge, whenever possible.
- Share information and knowledge about disasters and their management with all stakeholders.
- Develop a network amongst various disaster management entities using OSDMA as the main hub.
- Establish an Institute dedicated to conducting research, development and training on disaster management related activities.
- Make Disaster Management a part of the educational system and curricula.
- Decentralise management of disasters to the Block, Gram Panchayat / Municipality levels and strengthen their institutional and functional capacities to be effective as the first responders to disaster events.
- Ensure that humanitarian assistance is provided in an equitable, consistent and predictable manner.
- Emphasize participation of women in all stages of Disaster Management and recognise their special problems in disaster situation.
- Recognise the higher vulnerability of children, elders, physically and mentally challenged, during and after emergencies and design interventions accordingly.”

Source: Government of Odisha (2005)

The mismanagement of 1999 Odisha super cyclone made it clear that there was failure of the institutional setting of the state in disaster risk management as a result it established new institutions for the DRR. The formation of Odisha State Disaster Management Authority (OSDMA) was a reaction in creating a foundation that could take up DRR efforts at the state level. “The 1999 cyclone triggered a long-term, strategic plan to promote DRR in all the levels of society in Odisha. The newly established OSDMA was created to increase community resilience, to promote a culture of preparedness towards natural and man-made disasters and to coordinate the activities of NGOs and other humanitarian organizations. OSDMA was built keeping in mind the lessons from the 1999 cyclone, combining the building of infrastructures such as cyclone shelters with vast capacity building and awareness raising programmes in disaster risk reduction, such as Community-based Disaster Preparedness Plans” (Walch, 2018: 7-8). The OSDMA has invigorated learning and innovation by giving importance to both structural non-structural measures.

There was a change of government following the 1999 super cyclone that improved commitment to support local capacities in DRR. The new government under the leadership of Shri Naveen Pattnaik, made sure that all aspects of DRR be integrated with the usual development planning at all levels. Moreover, pertinent departments assign a definite share of the plan budget to assume preparedness and prevention measures. The Government of Odisha deliberately endorsed programmes and schemes to expand the ability of the State and the people to be better equipped to counter disasters. “Community Based Disaster Management Plans and mock drills will be undertaken to ensure better preparedness. Efforts will be made to minimize vulnerability of disadvantaged groups like women, children, elders, physically and mentally challenged, and other marginalised groups. Aspects of reducing/minimising long-term impact of various disasters on these vulnerable sections will be an integral part of the strategic plan” (Government of Odisha, 2005). Pradeep Jena, the former Chief Secretary to the Government of Odisha argued, “but empowering communities is just one part of the solution. Building disaster-resilient infrastructure is equally important. Since this requires collaboration between several government departments, OSDMA has taken the lead in putting in place critical infrastructure that protects the lives and livelihoods of the people. The World Bank, along with several other multilateral agencies, has been privileged to partner with the OSDMA, helping to strengthen it in its formative years” (Jena and Kouame, 2023).

Given that the government was serious for an effective DRR, a “trigger mechanism” was in place that guaranteed “warning dissemination, quick/ advance mobilisation of

human and other resources, prompt evacuation and rescue operations as well as steps for recovery and reconstruction” (GoO, 2005). In this process, “Specialised Action Group(s) (SAGs)” were constituted, which were sanctioned with the mandatory training and equipment to empower them to perform “search and rescue work, establish communications, provide emergency medical services, set up temporary shelters, maintain law and order” (Ibid). Importantly, Government of Odisha in its resolution dated the 4th march 2005 on the state disaster management policy gives importance to the vulnerable groups in the event of a disaster. “A systematic risk assessment for different types of disasters will be undertaken and coordinated by the OSDMA. Attention will be paid to the special needs of the vulnerable sections, which comprise the old, the infirm, the physically and mentally challenged, women, children, and other disadvantaged groups. While community involvement and response to disasters will be encouraged and promoted, women self-help groups will receive special attention. Special attention will also be given to highly vulnerable and remote areas” (Ibid).

Conclusion

Considering the importance of governance in DRR, the Government of Odisha augmented the role of the local self-government institutions significantly. Since people are the first responders in emergencies, importance was given to strengthen and empower people and local institutions and their functionaries, to effectively discharge their functions. The aim was to promote active community participation in DRR. Thus, effective governance, learning from the past disasters and community involvement in decision-making helped Odisha to set a benchmark in DRR.

Declaration

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