

PRIORITIZE SOCIAL POLICY FOR HUMANITARIAN DISASTERS

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Disasters is a common visitor to the Indian sub-continent. Social policy in disasters can serve as a cushion to prevent the psychological burden it adds on families and can help assist in sustainable growth. Absence of a social policy will result in eternal damnation. Take for example, regions like Haiti where, what little was built also got destroyed. India is a recipient of floods and earthquakes year after year. Regions like Bihar, Assam, Uttarakhand are affected very badly due to floods and the socio-economic loss on its people is far greater. India embarked on the road to development and progress with the initiation of the Disaster Management Act 2005. However, absence of initiatives, philanthropy and interpretations have left us behind. Social policy can emerge in the form of public insurance schemes for households placed in geographically high risk zones for flooding and earthquakes. Social determinants of health in India has for decades remained confined to textbooks and the world of academia. The trickle down of its richness into the field settings, is still waiting to happen. All kinds of disasters take place, natural and man-made. Earthquakes, floods, tsunamis, airline crashes, terrorism, road traffic injuries all are part of the cycle of disaster management and demands rapid response, quick health interventions and an alert mind. Disasters often affect areas where minimal service infrastructure exist, and when the infrastructure is appropriate, the response plan is either on paper or non-existent. Magnitude of disasters require co-ordination of public sector

and private sector players and both need to include social policy in their outcomes for preparedness and mitigation. Policy guidelines should not only address victims but also to those in humanitarian emergency response. There should be a registry of trained humanitarian response experts in the country.

Our policy makers need to incline their thinking to how social factors end up determining health outcomes. The basic principle of public health efforts is to ensure that all people have equal right to health and it's the responsibility of the state to help them achieve this goal. Disasters lead to health disparities for the most vulnerable people, women, children and the elderly. Disaster adds to gross mental stress on families to such an extent that absence of social security in disasters leads to psychological instability. It is important that a social policy which provides for proper housing, gives privacy to women for their sanitation needs, ensures that overcrowding does not occur in make-shift field camps which needs to be methodically planned and systematically developed. Loss of working hours during disasters should be compensated and paid by the employers to avoid financial burden on individuals. What must be done to ensure recovery of education material for school children must be incorporated by schools in their disaster management plans.

These baby steps will go a long way to make India a disaster resilient nation and to create disaster response consciousness around the country.

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