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Mitigating The Risk Of Disaster Through Community Engagement And Disaster Preparednesstraining – With A Special Reference To Samiyarpettai- A Model Village At Cuddalore District, Tamilnadu

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28. MITIGATING THE RISK OF DISASTER THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND DISASTER PREPAREDNESS TRAINING – WITH A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SAMIYARPETTAI- A MODEL VILLAGE AT CUDDALORE DISTRICT, TAMILNADU.

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ABSTRACT

T*his paper analyses; how the community based approach and orientation on Disaster mitigation and preparedness program has tremendously helped the communities to survive through the course of natural calamities, such as Tsunami. Furthermore, the paper engages to study the effectiveness of community engagement and their active participation in the Disaster mitigation management program. In turn how, the program devolved the community members to take precautionary action and as a result to safe guard their lives from the perilous disaster situations. Taking the " Samiyarpettai" – a small marine village exist in coastal line of Cuddalore district, Tamilnadu, as a special reference. And how the initiative in disaster management training to the people of Samiyarpettai has empowered to survive when tidal waves of tsunami struck the village in 2004, Dec.*

KEYWORDS: Community Engagement, Vulnerability, Mitigation.

INTRODUCTION

Thirty five years ago (Maskey 1984) the paper on community based hazard mitigation was presented in the proceedings of International Conference held in OchoRios. The presentation gained its significance as engagement of communities has been the key factor to reduce the risk of the disaster. The paper stresses the involvement of community should be regarded as foremost and inevitable approach to mitigate any life- threatening disaster, Through this paper, we focus to throw light upon ; why the poor rural communities are vulnerably exposed to the natural disaster.? There are various characteristics which could be deemed as reasons. The vital among the different factors which has been indicated; that is inequalities in socio- territorial resources. To be more specific and clear the resources pertaining to social needs, safety of territorial living and social infrastructure were not distributed in the equitable mode. The poor

communities who had occupied the disaster-prone areas left with no other alternatives for secured and safer living. They were marginalized to be habituated in the undervalued lands, hazard prone sites and to built housings which are fragile and vulnerable to disaster.

In the essence of disaster management, it is necessary to analyse the system of resource distribution and other social issues that has pushed the majority of the marginalized rurals to become victims of natural disaster.

IMPERATIVES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In order to reap the effective results through Disaster Preparedness training , the communities need to be actively engaged with a clear framework instructing with indicators: What can be achieved as a community with the initiatives that reflects ownership. To understand community engagement, we need to look through the lens of research orientation. It is defined as " Community Engagement is the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity , special interest , or similar situation to address the issues affecting the well-being of those people , it is a powerful vehicle for bringing about environmental and behavioural changes that will improve the health of the Community and its members it often involves partnership and coalition that help to mobilize resources and influence systems , change relationship among partners and serve as catalyst for changing policies, programs and practices(CDC 1997)

Community based approach grounds on the principle of consultation, involvement, information and empowerment. Community Engagement can be envisaged as multi-dimensional concept that can be identified in the above-mentioned perspectives. The baseline model for community approach must focus on long term -sustainable engagement. To intersect community and engagement, the prime focus must concentrate to reform from "individuality to inclusivity". The inclusiveness must ensure diversity within any community.

In building relationships within community 'trust' takes the crucial place for its long term and successful engagement. Without purposeful establishment of trustful relationship, bonding of community may fail, thus leading to the infractions in the development process of community engagement.

Throughout the formal initiation of community engagement, the channels of communication plays instrumental role in determining the definitiveness of trust building. The propensity of effective communication ensures the long term engagement of the community. The most inevitable factor that encounters community engagement could be 'conflict' which would have been ignited by value clashes and disagreements, these two dimensions has proved to be crucial facets of community conflicts. Immediate address to the frictions of conflict would comprehensively determine the progress of community building.

In the context of community and engaging it constructively in disaster mitigation can be possibly achieved by building their capacities, ultimately strengthening its preparedness. In such a way gaining the capacity to undertake localized disaster mitigation mechanism, such as ensuring accesses to safe land area and availing the service of public works department ensures mitigation to avert the risk of disaster.

In the attempt of engaging communities in the process of mitigating disaster, the two components have to be taken into account. First, development of socio-cultural and political baseline. The communities which are identified as poor and vulnerable and seek resolutions to their local problems, such as related to the basic standards of living and the socio-political risk factors, also unemployment, poverty, communal clashes and intolerance. Second, persuade community participation in the government-based disaster mitigation programs. For example: Samiyarpettai – a remote coastal village of Cuddalore district and its community's active participation in disaster mitigation programs which has enabled the village of samiyarpettai to reduce considerable death toll during the tsunami of 2004 Dec., on the other hand which had caused irreparable damages to many villages of the Indian Ocean.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE HAZARD PRONE COMMUNITIES

In the light of socio-economic status the interaction within the community and other groups reflects to be the underlying element of community based approach. The harmonizing parameter which are highly relevant for identifying the socio-economic factors have been included, such as: social cohesion, team

spirit, responsiveness towards the mechanism of evacuation, traditional skills and intermixing with the community.

In the milieu of coping capacity, it differs from house to house in the existing community. The indicator such as promise for employment, when they have been evacuated to different habitation, certain household may incline positively for such policies, whereas on the other hand there are households which could be non-receptive.

The degree of intermixing among the community members varies from moderate to poor. In connection with the small marine villages which are on the coastal line of the Cuddalore district, a study reveals that twenty percent of the household in Madhavapallam habitation are willing to take up community responsibility. In contrast the other coastal villages such as Annappanpettai, Velinganpettai, almost all households were considerably willing to engage as community thereby taking responsibilities with an ownership attitude to overcome the risk of natural disaster, such as tsunami.

The villagers assemble for informal meetings to discuss about risk exposure and design survival strategies to mitigate disaster. Regarding vulnerability, there is a dynamic phenomenon which is oriented in the aspect of how it is modified in the shorter duration. Although, the initiatives of the community is effectual, but their predominant expectation lies on the administrative authorities need to interact and consult the respective communities before establishing policies, plans and programs and monitoring of the disaster mitigation planning. The criterion of the community engagement can be stabilized through participatory and transparent approaches. Taking these small marine villages into consideration the majority of the households are assured of source of employment except Annappanpettai and Samiyarpettai.

RANGES OF VULNERABILITY AT THE HABITATIONS OF THE COMMUNITY

The early warning of disaster for coastal villages are generally communicated to the community through various media such as community leaders, television media, over the telephones from friends and relatives. Predominant members of the population have been responsive to the early warnings and takes precautionary steps to move to the safer places. The habitation area of the coastal villages of Cuddalore maximizes its rescue operations with trained manpower and provides shelters sufficiently up to the range of twelve habituating villages.

The local authorities are capable to provide safe drinking waters, emergency first aid assistance,

food grains and kerosene in the event of disaster . Mock drills are regulated .In the context of vulnerability index among marine villages : Samiyarpettai and Pudupettai found to be in acute level. The study also reveals that Samiyarpettai is found to be most vulnerable habitation in the year 2010-11. Through the sensitization program and disaster risk management training offered to the community of samiyarpettai under UNDP -initiatives have reduced loss of lives ,when tsunami struck in 2004. Samiyarpettai suffered less death toll as compared to nearest Pudukkuppam which had identical size and habitation of Samiyarpettai. This implications only indicates that vulnerability is at lower range when the community is better prepared and equipped in the event of Natural Disaster.

5.Samiyarpettai- a Model village in Mitigating Disaster- Tsunami(2004).

Samiyarpettai , a marine village exist at the coastline of of Cuddalore district, Tamil Nadu. It is considered as small village with the habitation of less numbers of households compared to other villages that is surrounded. Although , tsunami which struck Samiyarpettai in 2004 , it could only devastate the Catamarans, fishing boats and the living houses. But the lives of the people were considerably saved from the ferocious tidal waves . There were only less number of death toll which were counted up to 30.

The UNDP – funded (United Nation Development Program) ‘ Disaster management and Mitigation Awareness Program’ organized to impart an effective design of the training module to the people community of Samiyarpettai. The people’s active involvement and participation in the training sessions paid a rich dividends at the time of Tsunami Attack. The villagers took precautionary measures through the enlightenment received from the Disaster Mitigation Program.

The community of Samiyarpettai adopted the ability in sensing the early signals of the tidal waves on the previous day. The members of the community prudently shifted to the safe zone and other shelters as oriented and trained in the Disaster Mitigation Program. Even the assistant Collector of Cuddalore “Anu George” pointed out that Cuddalore is one of the seven districts among various other districts identified as multi-hazard prone zone.

The villagers of Samiyarpettai were approached to adhere Community Engagement process, thereby forming several groups which were trained in the context of easy- to -follow rescue operations. The other needs like food, provisions , mobile phones and vehicle facility

arrangement responsibilities were taken care by the respective groups.

The surrounding villages of Samiyarpettai such as Puthukuppam, Parangipettai experienced heavy death toll . Unlike those villages Samiyarpettai attributed to lower death rate ,because of the training imparted on Disaster Management. The folks of the village testified that training on how to mitigate disaster and natural hazards proved to be highly effective as enhanced the capacity of the community to protect the lives from the devastating tsunami,2004 Dec

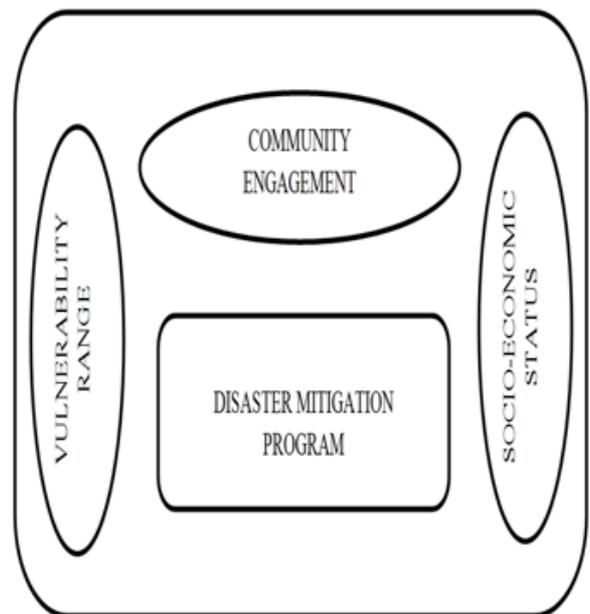


FIG 1. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

CONCLUSION

The natural disasters are unavoidable , it is not about that the disaster could be prevented but the degree of vulnerability such as loss of lives and livelihood can be reduced . Considering, the model village that of samiyarpettai , the disaster of tsunami was mitigated through disaster management program . The maximum number of death rate were reduced through such “ Disaster Preparedness Initiatives”. This paper suggest a constant preparation through training on disaster management, in the process of Community Engagement which shall produce effective results in managing the natural hazards

Furthermore, through this paper, we efforted to envisage the effective community engagement must be locally based and active partnership between government authorities and communities have proved the effectiveness of sustainable disaster mitigation. The success of reducing the risk of disaster at hazard

prone zones could be evidently possible by establishing Community Engagement process and preparedness training to mitigate the disaster such as Tsunami of 2004 Dec.

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