

Addressing Uncertainty in NDM Act in India

The National Disaster Management Act of 2005 (NDM Act) is under discussion and countrywide inputs are being sought to make this act more result oriented on the ground. An important part of this discourse which is centred around disaster management legislation in India should focus on addressing overall risks and the underlying factors associated with it. One such underlying factor of risk is uncertainty.

Uncertainty-related to disaster and climate risk is set to increase in the coming years. This uncertainty will not only have a natural science aspect to it but also a social science one. The impacts of uncertainty across social dimensions of age, caste, gender, ethnicity, etc. will lead to greater complexity and expose a greater number of people to newer problems. This in turn will have large scale implications for the policy and practice of resilience building in India.

A four year project by researchers from the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Sussex, UK in collaboration with some other Indian researchers has tried to shed some light on this important theme. The project is supported by the Research Council of Norway (RCN) and led by the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU), Norway. Under this project, three

Round Tables were held in Gandhinagar, Mumbai, and Kolkata to discuss the implications of climate change uncertainty. Prior to the Indian round tables, the evidence from the project was shared with the global policy experts and the academia of the RCN through a round table in Oslo. The feedback from the Oslo round table was incorporated in the dissemination design of the Indian round tables.

The findings of the Round Tables are useful for NDM Act review. The following are some of the most useful lessons emerging from these roundtables that can be used as inputs to the ongoing discussion around the NDM Act revision process.

Climate change related uncertainty is understood differently by different sets of people. People from at-risk local communities experience it differently from how climate scientists, experts and policy makers represent and conceptualize it. The first lesson emerging from these roundtables is the need to bridge the gap of understanding of climate related uncertainty amongst various stakeholder groups. NGOs, academics and civil society organizations can play a major role in reconciling these disparate perceptions and priorities. Similar Round Tables among these various stakeholder groups will be useful in

reviewing the Act from the top and middle and below, from policy and practice points of view.

Two, the findings on political economy of knowledge and how it gets shaped by incentives, dynamics and economic and social position tell us that the revision of Act must turn this political economy in favour of ensuring more resources to the marginalized communities at the local level.

Three, to what extent-according to project evidence on uncertainty-does the discrepancy between the understanding of uncertainty in disaster risk become a barrier to social transformation necessary for a sustainable recovery after a disaster. The NDM Act must offer opportunities to actively and directly understand all such barriers faced by at-risk communities due to climate change uncertainty.

Four, the Uncertainty mandate incorporates the idea of facilitating common spaces approach to bridge the different perspectives of uncertainty from 'above' and 'below' in order to foster more productive and socially just ways of dealing with uncertainties. The NDM Act revision must open up common spaces for all-women, tribals, minorities, daily wage labourers-to bridge the gap between their different perspectives.

Five, round table methodology as a means to co-produce knowledge inspite of its limitations and scope for fine tuning can be picked up by NDM Act as a legal and valid way to plan, monitor, operate and evaluate its processes and procedures.

The revised NDM Act may achieve faster and better results if the above and findings and lessons from the three Round Tables on uncertainty are taken up and addressed in the said Act. ■

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