

Rights Based Approach to Disaster Response

Tsunami disaster Response: A Case study

The major disasters happening since 2000 have brought about massive financial loss which is estimated at many billions. Tsunami 2004 in south Asia, cyclones, earthquakes, floods etc have caused havoc not only from the human point of view but also from the financial point of view. The psychological and physical sufferings are all very important and contributing to aggravate the living conditions of the people who are already severely affected by situations of poverty and making them extremely vulnerable

It is at this juncture that the question of humanitarian response and the resilience of the victims need to be addressed and discussed. The Asian tsunami experience gives significant insights on how the integration of the resilience factor in the disaster response contributed to better results and aid efficiency.

Based on the tsunami experience in Karaikal and Cuddalore in south India, this paper will discuss on the need to integrate the resilience concept in the humanitarian response. After going through a brief overview of the concept of resilience, the discussion will take through on how it was integrated into the disaster response, the different aspects that need to be taken into consideration and how it contributed to an effective disaster response, thus contributing to reduce the vulnerability of the victims. Discussing about resilience, it will certainly tackle the issue of rights and the access to the rights which is the basis for making people resilient in order to overcome their plights and get back to normal life.

Resilience, the concept

The concept of resilience has come into prevalence since end 1990's, period of major disasters that succeeded one after another, the super-cyclone in India, Mitch in Latin America, Gujarat earthquake and other emergencies which were of high magnitude. It was also the moment where the humanitarian actors were raising the issue of long terms sustainable response when humanitarian disasters take place and also the need for vulnerability and capabilities analysis to disaster responses. It is at this juncture the concept of resilience was automatically included as a field of reflexion in order to promote effective rehabilitation of the victims of disasters.

The concept of Resilience is the capacity of the system or individuals in a social system to get back to initial stage of existence when it is affected by an external unforeseen factor and which disrupts its initial configuration. Resilience thus relates to the adaptive capacity to tolerate and deal with change without loss of essential functions. If the system is adaptive, then it is able to live up to the change and cope up with the new conditions. This adaptability is its resilience capacity to the new situation.

Resilience needs to be viewed in relation to a particular social system, a particular shock and a particular function. But whose

. "Resilience" can be viewed as the intrinsic capacity of a system, community or society predisposed to a shock or stress, to 'bounce forward' and survive by changing its non-essential elements and rebuild itself. This definition of resilience implies that respective systems are able to 'move on' following a disaster by mobilising available resources to maintain essential structures to adapt to new changes brought about by the disaster

resilience is it? To cope with what? And how it is to take place are some of the crucial questions that need to be raised when talking about resilience. Often there is a tendency to consider resilience as a desired end result from a transition stage to a desired normal stage. It is all about the safeguard of essential facilities to keep up normal life.

The concept of resilience has no value of judgement; it is rather neutral and refers to a state of being characterised by a way of existence in a given environment and the adaptability of the system to new changes.

In the humanitarian field, resilience is the adaptability of the victims to the key shocks produced by external factors that affect them. These key shocks are both internal and external and They can be classified as follows according to the context

| | | |
|------------|----------|---|
| Key Shocks | Internal | Psychosocial threats Economical threats Health Socio-cultural problems Physical violences |
| | External | Natural disasters Displacement Loss of assets |

At the time of crisis, Resilience is the resultant of the impact of the disaster, its magnitude, the frequency and the vulnerability of the victims before and after the crisis event. The disaster events create shocks which destabilize the victims leading to their inadaptability to the crisis situation created by the disaster event and this inadaptability is inversely proportional to their vulnerability, that is they are more resilient when they are less vulnerable and more vulnerable when they are less resilient.

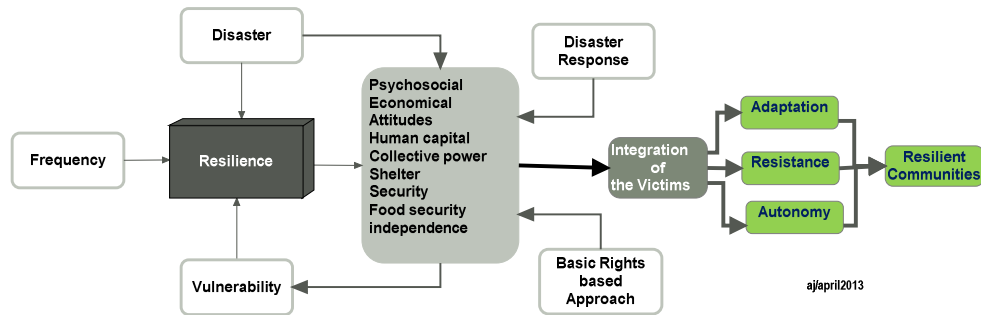
From the tsunami experience we can observe that the introduction of the Basic human Rights components through the Rights Based Approach, was one way of increasing their resilience and reducing their vulnerability. When the victims of disasters are taken charge of in a holistic manner, individually and collectively, then it is possible to put them on the road to integration leading to various levels of resilience (they adapt, they are able to resist and attain autonomy) and ultimately to a situation of community resilience. The schema that follow give a clear indication of the process, based on the experience in Sri Lanka and India.

Integrating the concept of resilience and the RBA helps us to obtain a better and complete understanding of risk and vulnerability that is often put under a simple equation :

ie. Risk = Vulnerability X Hazard.

It helps go beyond this equation and contributes to capture the impact of hazards on community capacity to make appropriate choices when normal life is disrupted.

Basic Rights based Approach in disaster response to build resilience



Resilience is determined by the nature of the disaster, the frequencies and the vulnerability of the population. Different indicators contribute to determine the shocks or stress factors.. Disaster response with a Basic Rights based Approach should act on these shock or stress factors in order to contribute to the integration of the victims by making them adaptable, resistant and autonomous, contributing to the emergence of resilient communities.

To conclude it can be observed that the integration of the resilience concept in the disaster and development field is relatively a new phenomenon which dates back to hardly two decades. To maintain and mainstream this concept with relevance in the disaster field, there is need to build a strong conceptual foundation within the disaster response. It is here the Rights based approach to the disaster response poses as a new orientation leading to a new culture of dealing with disasters not only in terms of immediate response but also in terms of preparing the beneficiaries for future disasters. Resilient communities have the 'capacity' to 'bounce forward' and move on following a disaster situation.

The tsunami experience in a village in Cuddalore District, south India

This part adopts a case study approach. Case studies 'have all the elements of a good story'. They tell what happened, when, to whom, and with what consequences. (Patton, 2002)

Kilakudirrupu (the area of this case study) is a coastal village with a population of about 150 fishermen communities and the houses were totally destroyed during the tsunami disaster of December 2004. PMSSS one of the local NGO working in the area introduced an Integral Disaster Response plan with a RBA aiming at building resilient communities. The activities were undertaken in different stages as follows.

Stage I consisted of putting the people in safe areas in tents and catering to their basic needs. This immediate response gave the possibility for building rapport with the people and organizing them into small groups. Once the groups were built, PMSSS worked with them to understand their vulnerabilities.

Stage II Consisted of analysing the data and understanding the vulnerability and the capabilities of the individuals and the community

A survey (Evaluation of Disaster impact and Need Assessments) was undertaken and it brought to evidence that the people were economical vulnerable even before the disaster, indebtedness to the local money lenders, low level of primary health care, precarious housing conditions, poverty conditions due to lack of economical means and a strong dependence on the local boat owners who exploited them and kept them in an attitude of dependence. The community was not organized with family quarrels taking place very often. Prevalence of alcoholic problems, family violence, children abandoning school were some of the social problems.

The covariate shocks by the tsunami disaster affected the community which was under psychosocial stress and highly preoccupied with their economical survival and their capacity to get back to normal life.

as a whole. The Evaluation of disaster impact and need assessments undertaken gave a certain number of indications on the vulnerability and capabilities of the population before and after the disaster events.

| | Before the disaster | After the disaster |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Vulnerabilities | Economical Poverty leading to indebtedness to the local money lenders Strong dependence on the local boat owners for survival Poor housing Lack of assets | Loss of assets Loss of houses and security Economical insecurity and even precarity Loss of livelihood means Psychosocial disorders Dependency on food aid and financial aid from outside. |
| Capabilities | -Ability to work and gain a daily wage -Work as traditional fishers to earn a living Capacity of the womenfolk to be aware of their social role | -Disruption of the ability to continue the traditional work. -Lack of economical capabilities for men and even for the women |

Stage III the villagers were soon brought together as a community and along with a community organiser they were organised into a group. The main aim was to inculcate a collective community approach and help the members to become interdependent and take up collective actions. The main focus at this stage was on community organisation, awareness building on the basic rights and also the need for creating a sense of solidarity among the people.

This stage is a turning point in an active process of self-rights, learned resourcefulness and growth. It consisted of enhancing the ability to function psychologically at a level far greater than expected given the individual's capabilities and previous experiences. The fishermen come together, aware of their rights and their capacities and it is at this juncture the RBA awareness-building builds them into a community of right holders capable of demanding their rights. Activities such as community capacity building, mitigation, emergency preparedness planning, housing and livelihood activities which have great impact upon response and recovery operations are undertaken.

The notion of strengthening the capacity of the victims (often the poor) is to organize them together and to recognize their common interests in working for a better future. It Refers to specific approaches, strategies, and methodologies used for the purpose of improving the performance of individuals,

Capacity here is used to mean a combination of all the strengths and resources available within a community, society or organization that can reduce the level of risk, or the effects of a disaster. Capacity may include physical, institutional, social or economic means as well as skilled personal or collective attributes such as leadership and management. Capacity may also be described as capability (UNISDR, 2004). Thus, capacity building in this study is understood as a process by which individuals, organisations, institutions and societies develop abilities to perform functions, solve problems and set and achieve objectives to enhance sustainable disaster resilience. Capacity is often coping implying that society has mechanisms to mitigate and adapt to hazard events. In a range of studies, there is evidence that coping mechanisms which are short-term can undermine long-term capacity of mitigation and adaptation.

communities, and community organizations to carry out particular functions, meeting a hierarchy of needs which all need to be considered in a logical order for effective response.

It is a process by which individuals, organisations, institutions and societies develop abilities to perform functions, solve problems and set and achieve objectives. It is a process of empowering the people.

Stage IV is the moment where the community as an organised corpus and aware of its status as right holder and their legitimate rights to claim for their rights becomes a reality. The community along with the panchayat¹ leader, the PMSSS director and the community leaders was able to meet the local collector and demand for their rights to safe houses with all the necessary facilities. The community was also given the livelihood possibilities and the fisher men in this village were organized into cooperatives, capable of managing their own business without any external intervention. Different facilities were given to trigger a relevant economical activity.

At this stage, the long term recovery in the disaster response has 'naturally' become the responsibility of the affected communities and they were empowered to manage their day to day activities. The psychosocial accompaniment was indispensable to help them come over their difficult situation and become aware of their rights and claim them as any normal citizen.

For PMSSS the major challenge was to initiate this integrated holistic approach with long term perspective having in mind the disaster prevention aspects.

Stage V. The long term recovery plan was more focussed on the construction of houses, with the creation of a housing committee entrusted with the task of proposing models of houses to the leaders of the peoples' organisation and at the same time negotiating with the collector to obtain the necessary authorisation to get government lands and build the houses. The members were demanding for their land deeds and house entitlements.

Here the government was playing its role as the duty bearer before the community which was organised as right claimers. The beneficiaries were able to make the authorities respond to their demands.

The houses once they were built were given to the people as a community and each family having an entitlement given by the government and owning the house. The government and international agencies through PMSSS and the local communities gave the people livelihood opportunities, education for the children, access to primary health and also a special focus to genders, wherein the women's group became a means for promoting microfinance activities to enhance their economical capacities. PMSSS along with international partners was able to introduce training on early warning systems to disasters and also help the beneficiaries to be prepared to face future disaster situations.

Stage VI was more a moment of consolidation of the activities, phasing out strategies and making the people self reliant and autonomous. The community oriented activities were taken over by the community members who continued to play the role of community organisers. The women in the women's group were prepared to stand for the panchayat elections.

Progressing in stages gave the possibility for introducing a holistic approach to the disaster response, integrating the RBA as a basis for building the resilience of the individuals and the community. Risk

¹ Local political structure

identification, Vulnerability capability assessment, monitoring and early warning, Knowledge and education, Reduction of underlying risks factors and Disaster preparedness were understood and integrated as basic rights making the people resilient. With their different capabilities enhanced the beneficiaries were prepared to face future disasters with more preparation and with the ability to get back to normal life.

The monitoring of the program achievements also gave the possibility to establish criterion for measuring resilience of the victims and they were classified into three major categories :

Self-efficacy

Capability of the individual or the community, to be reactive, in dealing with the consequences of the future hazards.

- Awareness on early warning systems
- Capacity to take appropriate actions at times of disasters
- Taking initiatives to mitigate the effects of disasters (savings, food safety measures, primary health care etc)
- Access to information and security
- Awareness on ones rights and access to aid facilities.

Sense of community

This refers to fostering a community of interest, shared visions and interdependency among the members of the community. This is a leading factor to community cohesion. Here it is also a question of the utilisation and optimisation of social capital, and committed involvement in community response following disaster. The sense of community gives important information, on how the community is united and the level of support that can be obtained from the members as a collective body.

- Community participation in collective decision making
- Capacity to take collective action and claim for the rights
- Capacity to mobilize the different duty bearers to respond to the basic needs

Coping mechanisms

This refers to how the community members and the individuals respond to the effects of the hazard, how they are in a position to address the problems posed by the events and how they are in a position to confront the stress situations. Here it is also a question of analysing the various facilitators that contribute to resilience; the emotional capacity of the beneficiaries and how people or individual are able to address the issues related to vulnerabilities and come over them.

- Capacity to organise the community at the time of disaster and mitigate risk factors
- Collective knowledge on the different risk factor and the right attitude to be kept up
- Interdependency when it comes to sharing of resources within the community (microfinance, IGP etc)
- Capacity to address issues related to vulnerabilities and find means to overcome them.

Resilience building through rights based approach: Process or an outcome?

From the above discussion it can be inferred that resilience building through the RBA is a process. The different short term and long term orientations contribute to building resilience of the community and the individuals in stages. They ultimately lead to the autonomy of the individuals and the community, capable of acting on their own when future disasters happen. Even though it can be argued that resilience is an outcome and its importance is recognized, yet when we reason in terms of different stages of resilience, then we are referring to different levels of achievements with radical changes and new strategies which will be needed to sustain them. Thus considering the process-oriented approach, the focus will be more on the different steps to be undertaken in order achieve resilience through the different stages.

The case study favours the argument that in the disaster response, both resilience and vulnerability are states or conditions, which are defined by processes including physical, social, political and economic processes. In the resilience through the RBA model, the processes take the form of learning in enhancing sustainable livelihood (capital) assets to reduce life risks, shelter and security. They are viewed from the basic rights perspective. It is about affected individuals, groups and communities, leading the process of building their own capacity. Here the model is a resilience building process with different stages of building resilience for the victims, ultimately leading to their autonomy both as individual and as a community.

This process is to be understood from the contiguuum approach wherein the disaster response is a sequence of different activities aimed at building the resilience of the communities as right holder through a series of capacity building which will ultimately lead to enhance their resilience at the time of future disasters.

Conclusion

Integrating the basic human rights dimension in the disaster response is essential to build resilient communities which will be able to confront the risk of future disasters. In this regard, the Rights based resilience model helps to address the disaster situation not only in terms of risk and vulnerability, but also, more in terms of a process, for empowering the community to be able to cope up with future disasters and being able to get back to normal life.

It is a process oriented model which needs to be strategically prepared with relevant capacity building and preparing the beneficiaries to become right holders. As seen in the example, NGOs as civil society organisation, will have to play the role of mediators at least in the beginning to mobilise the duty bearers to act in favour of the communities and fulfil their duties.

In this regard , one of the success factors will be the governments which are capable of heeding to the peoples need as right claimers. Fragile states or corrupted states will not be able to fulfil such needs of the people and it is here the role of the civil society organisations becomes capital in order to motivate and mobilize the victims as right bearers and claim for their basic rights.

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