FLOODS IN UTTARAKHAND:
A NEW DEAL RELIEF

All India Disaster Mitigation Institute
July 2013
Experience Learning Series 60
All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI), Gujarat, is a community based action research, action planning and action advocacy organisation now spreading it’s work beyond India. It works towards bridging the gap between policy, practice and research related to disaster risk mitigation, in an effort to link the local community and policy level activities across the system.

AIDMI’s innovative approach for disaster risk reduction includes: Capturing and spreading new ideas, building local capacity of communities, research and knowledge sharing, policy round tables, and pilot projects that step by step manage the system.

AIDMI was established in response to the repeated 1987-89 droughts in India. It has evolved from a project in 1989 to an autonomous organisation in 1995. During its evolutionary journey, AIDMI has developed four security programmes. These are: (a) Food Security, (b) Water Security, (c) Livelihood Security and (d) Habitat Security. The four jointly contribute to building Human Security. Disaster victims also have Human Rights to achieve this Human Security.

Regarding work process, AIDMI considers four phases of disaster management when implementing its Human Security approach: Relief Phase, Rehabilitation Phase, Recovery Phase and Risk Reduction. All these four phases must be taken into account with both action and learning to help communities effectively reduce disaster risk. AIDMI sets agendas, shapes knowledge, and pilots projects in favour of the poor and excluded among disaster victims and the vulnerable.
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The loss of life and assets in Uttarakhand after the sudden floods is most heart wrenching. At least 16 lakh people in four districts of Uttarkashi, Chamoli, Rudraprayag and Garhwal were affected by the June 16 rains and floods. The death toll, according to the state’s disaster management minister, Yashpal Arya, is estimated to have crossed 5,000. Tens of thousands of people have lost homes and livelihood and losses estimated to be above Rs.3,000 crore. With potable water almost non-existent, hundreds of people from neighbouring villages have complained of fever and diarrhoea. Heroic efforts of India Armed Forces and members of National Disaster Management Force to rescue lives by reaching out continues to seem not adequate. It is therefore not too early to start thinking about the nature and extent of relief and political economy around it.

The Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s Rs. 1000 crore relief package to Uttarakhand is indeed timely and decisive: gone are the days when the central team from Delhi would visit the victim state to assess the loss and damage over weeks and the victim states’ humble team would repeatedly run up to Delhi with inflated and revised memorandum of demand for relief. Negotiations and the party politics around it would go on over months due to the political and economic interests of the politicians, thus dragging out the supply of materials and relief which in turn causes more damage and loss to victims, their lives and their livelihoods. However, the Uttarakhand flood relief announcement seems to have

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3 Don’t blame nature for the Uttarakhand flood disaster, G. Sampath, Thu, Jun 27 2013. 02 44 PM IST, Livemint, http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/HzKmWekwYO0YKv8N6dZIn/Dont-blame-nature-for-the-Uttarakhand-flood-disaster.html?facet=print
changed this pattern. If that is so, it is now possible to think of a new deal in terms of relief package but sadly it has opened another area for political action around media visibility. Disasters attract media, and media attracts politicians. This claim to media visibility reached its height with the visits of Narendra Modi and Rahul Gandhi to name only two. The intentions were humanitarian. But what this cost was time, and took time away from thinking about relief for India’s citizens. What can be the key features of such a new deal? Let us draw from India’s own experience.

Cash transfers to poor households is now on our national agenda. The rural development ministry as well as the Planning Commission is making best efforts to pilot cash transfers as an anti-poverty measure. Cash transfer has not only worked as development agenda but has also worked in disaster situations in India. But cash transfers is not on relief agenda. The All India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI) has made cash transfers to disaster victims since the 2001 Gujarat earthquake relief, and has done so for over nine disasters in the last twelve years, reaching upto 26000 families. This decade long experience shows that if planned well and independently monitored, relief as cash transfer is time and cost effective. Cash transfer as relief can still be misused but the misuse is easy to spot and misusers are easier to track down. Cash transfer takes cash directly to the victim and cuts out the cost of time and money that relief material businesses cause.

The international NGOs such as Save the Children, Plan, CARE and others have used cash transfer in Odisha after the 2011 floods with ECHO (European Union) funds. The experience of these longstanding international humanitarian players suggest that cash transfer as relief reduces time, transaction costs, and increases household impact on recovery. In addition as Ray Kancharla of Save the Children noted at the review workshop of the 2011 floods, the impact of cash transfer on children and mothers is most encouraging. Indeed these organizations have found that women are, upon receiving cash transfers, more likely to spend the money on their children’s basic needs and use it for establishing new enterprises. Cash transfer has successfully been used in Sri Lanka after the 2004 tsunami. In Pakistan, US$325 million were disbursed for flood damage compensation to over one million families in Punjab by issuing debit cards. Cash transfers can be a key feature of the new deal of relief in Uttarakhand. The national objective of financial inclusion will be even better served by such a change in the relief package.
The utilization of central relief by the states is not always time bound. The utilization decisions of central relief are often taken without enough transparency. This is not because of corruption or lack of understanding but because officials in the national and state authorities do not have time and space for learning from others so that they can make system wide improvement such as using cash transfers for relief and recovery. The Uttarakhand flood is an opportunity to find ways of offering time and space to national and state authority officials for learning from others so that they can make system wide improvements. Exceptions are important but system wide changes are even more important for widespread impact. Needless to say that this will call for strengthening public finance syssem in Uttarakhand which may in anycase be a welcome step as AIDMI work on District Disaster Management Plans in several states has found that the State Disaster Management Authorities need such strengthening.

The relief can replace what is lost, or relief can also be a starting point for new ways of development, development that is protected from disaster risk, development that is climate smart—green and clean—in the long run. No other region needs such “green development” more than our Himalayas. The work of Chandiprasad Bhatt in Uttarakhand has pointed this need now for almost half-a-century. Though half-a-century is not a long time to point out an urgent change in our Indian context. The use of solar and other forms of renewable energy in building community-level energy security cannot now be left behind. New homes and public buildings-schools and hospitals included—must use solar and renewable energy. I-Set, an international think tank with leading NGO SEEDS in Gorakhpur has shown ways to build “green shelter” that has smaller carbon foot print in its construction as well as sustenence. Dr. Ashok Khosla and his team at Development Alternatives has made a case for use of eco-materials across almost every geo-agro-climatic zones of India. The Uttarakhand government has also been constructing a number of hydro-electricity power plants, but caution must be exercised to ensure that this does not cause environment degradation and exacerbates existing flood risks. Work of Practical Action in Nepal inspired by E.F. Schomacker has found smaller, safer, and sustainable hydro-power units for Himalayas.

Environmentalists say that the disaster in Uttarakhand was inevitable due to rampant construction, felling of trees and building of dams in the name of development. They warned that it will
continue if the state doesn’t change track\textsuperscript{5}. May be this relief is not only an opportunity to change track but change the direction and the pace too. From more growth to green growth and higher rate to wider spread of growth. Imaginative relief in Uttarakhand must reverse this by using solar and wind power in its villages and towns. By doing so Uttarakhand can be a model to the rest of hilly India on how to go about a different—greener and cleaner—development path. Rs. 1000 crore is not a small sum to pilot creating a “green economy” through relief and recovery. Initial steps may include additional forestry plantations with MGNREGA resources as a part of the relief, recovery planning, and reconstruction processes. Such large amounts offer an opportunity to invest in long term economic growth of victim citizens and sustainable development.

Rethinking roads and railways in high altitude across India may soon be on public investment agenda as we need roads and railways and thus must find better and safer ways to build and develop them.

The recent disaster of floods in Uttarkhand should also be considered an opportunity to implement the suggested actions in the State Action Plan on Climate Change of the Government of Uttarakhand\textsuperscript{6}. The Statement on the Uttarakhand Catastrophe by India Climate Justice\textsuperscript{7}, endorsed by number of organisations, demand action on a number of grounds and offers valuable suggestions for integrating adaptation measures into relief and risk reduction agendas. It demands:

- That the governments at the central and state level retreat to a low carbon pathway of development that has equity, decent employment, and sustainability at its core.
- That the planning and construction of dams in the entire Indian Himalayas be reviewed, and that all construction be halted until such a review is carried out.
- That the use of explosives in all such infrastructure development works is completely stopped.


\textsuperscript{6} Available at http://www.uttarakhandforest.org/Data/SC_Revised_UAPCC_27june12.pdf

• That, given the likelihood of extreme rainfall events and other climate extremes in the future, extensive and sub-regional warning systems are put in place urgently across all the Himalayan states, the coastal areas and beyond.

• That a proper assessment of the carrying capacity of specific ecosystems is carried out.

• That the stretch from Gaumukh to Uttarkashi be declared an eco-sensitive zone without further delay.

• That a river regulation zone be enforced such that no permanent structures are allowed to be constructed within 100 metres of any river.

• That the residents and their organizations are thoroughly consulted in a democratic plan on climate change, in the revival of the local hill economy, and the generation of decent employment.

• That all working people be compensated for the loss of life and livelihood, and that urgent plans are put in place for the revival of local livelihoods and agriculture.

• That the central government learn from the Uttarakhand catastrophe and put in place prior adaptation measures not just for the mountainous regions but beyond, the coastal and the drought-prone interiors as well.

The above ten points throw light on key areas that must be discussed and debated by the citizens of Uttarakhand to plan their own recovery as well as shape ongoing development. The opportunity to discuss should benefit not this or that group but all citizens. The recent announcement by Uttarakhand Chief Minister to start tabulating gross environment product (GEP), a measure of the health of the state's natural resources is welcome step. In many ways this may be a better and faster way to introduce a state to what is being called green finance: finance for adaptation and mitigation activities.

Provision of relief cannot be confined to the government. Relief can leverage on private sector investment such as in insurance or risk transfer pools and enterprise development. The companies who operate from the region of Uttarakhand, directly or indirectly, can come forward to work with small and medium enterprises and develop new deal relief measures. In addition to providing shelter relief and compensation for loss of assets the corporations can offer economic stabilization funds to small business and the building up of business environment and local markets. They can also assist in cluster development, providing training, offer employment and mentor the business owner. In this process businesses owned by women cannot receive low or limited priority.
The tourism sector in Uttarakhand needs a review now more than ever before. Tourism officials have pointed out that floods in Uttarakhand have brought down business to 20-30 per cent, and this number will only increase in coming months. It will take years to rebuild these small and micro enterprises. The losses to informal sector enterprises and its workers could be far greater and more devastating. UNDP's ongoing global study in Japan, Mexico and India indicates that small and medium enterprises are not only good local decentralized engines of economic growth and markets but are also builders of social capital after a disaster. The study results also show that disasters affect them more disproportionately and therefore relief and compensation need to pay more attention to their capital skills, and market needs. Agencies such as the World Bank who are invited by the Finance Minister to help rebuild economy can start with the small and medium enterprise livelihoods in the form of series of private sector development initiatives.

Similarly, there cannot be any better opportunity than this to offer affordable and suitable multi-hazard insurance coverage to the victims and the vulnerable citizen in Uttarakhand. Priority insurance coverage for women and children, schools and education buildings, health centres and local roads, and jobs and income for women are invariably left out in the relief and preparedness efforts. Insurance coverage to these sections of citizens and sectors of economy is overdue. Tour operators may have to leave rescue of their clients to public authorities but at least own up the responsibility to protect the local economy and ecology it has used by offering insurance protection.

The ongoing study of the potential of micro-insurance to reduce risk by MicroSave in five Asian countries with the support of the UK based Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) shows that the months after a disaster are one of the most suitable times to introduce new and structural changes in risk transfer practices and institutions. Universal insurance coverage of the poor in Uttarakhand is now possible to achieve if we start thinking about a new deal of relief package. Thanks to the intervention by the Finance Minister who asked the LIC to do away with the usual seven years waiting period for the settlement of claims in cases of missing persons, the LIC will now make it easier

from Uttarakhand calamity victims to obtain payment. But this is not enough; the state of Uttarakhand need to do more to cover more people and losses as may God forbid similar catastrophic events with even more severe consequences could occur. In any case, as the National Disaster Management Authority is trying to come up with something concrete on risk transfers for India, it can consider piloting an initiative in Uttarakhand. AIDMI has demanded universal disaster risk coverage of all poor among citizens who hold MGNREGA card. Relief in Uttarakhand can be a first step towards this. The General Insurance Corporation can accelerate the process.

Such a new deal relief will help to improve the picture of what seems to be a mixed performance in rescue and response after the floods. The heroic efforts of local citizens and army have become blurred with stories after stories of neglect and delay. The spreading anger and frustration will ebb and attention will turn towards the constructive challenge of designing and implementing relief. Such a new deal will also address the growing feeling among the local citizens that too much government attention is given to the rescue of tourists at the cost of attention to the loss of local lives and the future of local citizens.

According to media reports, when the floods struck, about 28 million tourists were visiting the state, while the local population is close to half that number. While most media reports only reported about the tragic state of pilgrims and tourists, the extent of the damage and loss to the local population was ignored and at present is still unclear. The region will face harsh winters in a few months time and all are concerned that people may not have enough shelter, warm clothing and food if relief and rehabilitation work do not proceed at a fast pace. But urgency must not kill the need to better plan and ponder strategic actions in Uttarakhand.

Relief is often confined to short-term measures and used to serve short-lived purposes. Such interpretation often aggravates or

leaves existing vulnerabilities unaddressed. The State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA) constituted in 2007 needs immediate support to successfully manage the current surge in demand for relief and linking the relief with rehabilitation and long-term development so that it emerges as a strong and credible agency in the state. In the end performance of National Disaster Management Authority is dependent on what the State Disaster Management Authorities are capable of doing. In its performance audit report of 2013\(^1\), the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) had highlighted that the Uttarakhand SDMA had not formulated any rules, regulations, policies or guidelines for disaster management in the state. The report also highlighted that the Geological Survey of India had identified 101 of the 233 Uttarakhand villages affected by the disaster of 2008 as vulnerable, but the state did not make any arrangements for the relocation of these villages in the past five years\(^2\). "While we have identified 101 villages in Uttarakhand which are at high risk for land-slides, but we have neither money nor land to resettle them" Suneel Muttoo, Secretary, Dept. of Disaster Management admitted in September 2010\(^3\). Can current relief measures effectively pave path for addressing long-term risk reduction issues such as those faced by these 101 villages in the state? AIDMI’s ongoing review of 20 DDMPs across India found that one way move ahead is to start developing governance improvement and capacity development in public sector management from relief to recovery stages.

Leaders for a new humanitarian action that builds on the past but takes a leap onto the future must be found. Let relief to Uttarakhand define the new generation relief package in India, one that helps victims recover faster and better, and which puts India in the leadership position for defining the future of humanitarian action in the Asia-Pacific.

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\(^1\) Uttarakhand Flood Situation is Catastrophic; Large Dams Partially to Blame Says ActionAid, http://www.webwire.com/ViewPressRel.asp?ald=176347#.Uc0QR_Wqmps


\(^3\) CAG report: No disaster management in Uttarakhand, Posted by: Anisha, Published: Monday, June 24, 2013, 18:17 [IST], http://news.oneindia.in/2013/06/24/u-khand-tragedy-cag-submits-report-1244367.html

\(^4\) Dealing with Disasters in Uttarakhand, Understanding how the Government does and does not work Dr NitinPandey, 16-Sept-2010, http://www.pandeyji.com/uttarakhand/114.cfm
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