

COURSE : DISASTER MANAGEMENT (MA/ MSc PART I)

Paper : II

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Topic : Role of Mass Media

MASS MEDIA

Media is the organized means of reaching a large number of people. It could be print, broadcast or display type. Although it mainly reports about the event related to disasters but it has an important role in guiding, aiding and assisting in disaster management. Media covers disasters as:

- These are unusual events with huge losses and trauma.
- Plight of victims
- Faults and mismanagement in system.
- Help in fund raising and relief.

In disasters like floods and cyclones, which are to be predicted in time, media has been playing its role in spreading information to the concerned quarters in the past. However, there needs to be concerted activities to be taken up by media for the message to be received by all concerned well in time.

Role of Media: The following three broad classifications are there which include:

1. Informative – Mitigation measures, accurate and unbiased coverage, post disaster impacts and needs.
2. Suggestive – Options for public / governmental attention, expert opinion and solutions.
3. Analytical – Review and updating of existing disaster management plan for all stages viz. preparedness, mitigation, rescue, relief and rehabilitation.

Reporting of Disasters by Media: The media should:

1. Be unbiased
2. Be sensitive to social norms and not intrude privacy of individuals and families.
3. Avoid inciting one group against another.
4. Journalists should not be ill prepared to cover disasters and not add to confusion – develop disaster correspondents.
5. Make available greater space and broadcasts related to disaster aspects in the form of brief spots, interviews and full-length features.

Technology can help media through (1) Space and satellite technology (2) High-tech computers (3) Sophisticated media techniques especially for weather forecasting and reporting.

Measures related to that can be taken by media could be grouped as:

Before Disaster:

1. Keep a check on various agencies.
2. Educate people on their activities that lead to disasters.
3. Sensitise policy maker to larger issues leading to disasters.
4. Suggest measures to prevent disasters and motivate people to act upon them.
5. Technique for permanent solution for weaker sections located in vulnerable spots.
6. Integrating disaster management with social and developmental activities.
7. Building partnership between media and other organizations.
8. Conduct studies and research on role of media in disaster management.
9. Develop training material, do's and don'ts, case studies, facilitate local prevention and mitigation projects.
10. Design an information campaign for local media with community involvement.
11. Enhance cohesiveness at local level between disaster management committee, government, institution, voluntary organization, community, corporate and the media.

During Disaster:

1. Scotch rumours to prevent panic and confusion, help in maintaining morale and self-confidence.
2. Establishing contacts.
3. Identify needy spots and assisting authentic and NGOs.
4. Appeal for assistance from outside.
5. Media organizations take lead in relief and rehabilitation projects.
6. Protect the people and resources from bogus individuals or organization indulging in nefarious or fraudulent activities.

Disaster broadcasting: The stage of disaster broadcasts should be considered in following:

Stage 1 damage is relatively light: Disaster Broadcasting commences when the disaster is expected to directly influence the area in the next two days, or if the Administration and

other such agencies announce a storm or flood alert, and disasters in public facilities is anticipated. TV frequently broadcasts ways to avoid disasters in the form of scrolls and spots.

Stage 2 heavy damage is anticipated: Disaster Broadcasting commences when the disaster is expected to strike the same day, or if structures collapse, massive flooding, gas explosions and other large-scale disasters or accidents are foreseen; or when airplane crashes, train derailments and other large-scale traffic accidents have occurred on which news reports should be urgently broadcasted. "Breaking news" in the form a special broadcast, is organized to swiftly report disaster status. It may be of up to an hours duration.

Stage 3 massive damage is expected: Disaster Broadcasting commences when the disaster is expected to hit very soon. It commences in the case of cyclones, earthquakes, fire accidents, collapse of public facilities and other massive disasters in some regions or nationwide. In response, all regular TV and radio programs are immediately suspended, and "breaking news" is rapidly set up to provide in-depth reporting on the status of the disaster. For phase 3, a disaster broadcasting special coverage team is organized without delay. Moreover, disaster broadcasting at this phase is carried out without any restrictions on broadcasting time. The supplemental agencies have to be involved for disaster broadcasting and a joint press corps with other domestic broadcasting companies be organized to operate.

Early Warning

Value of timely and effective warning is critical and requires awareness of threat and consequences that needs to be communicated. It entails integrating education, sciences, culture, communication, infrastructure and information. These are to be aimed at a broad spectrum of several actors like governmental agencies, NGOs, corporate, institutions and the community. Improvement of weather presentations on TV and radio is essential so that specific valuable information like early pin point detection and forecasting of natural calamities are relayed to people.

Media must form part of the local warning system. The agencies involved in early warning operate with the media in a system for coordinating disaster related information among the institutions and organizations. The appropriate, judicious and helpful warning of any disaster is by itself a worthy objective in averting losses and protecting resources. It entails not only the detection and issue of alert but needs to specify responsibilities, ensure public understanding to generate desired response. Relevant warning is dependent on following abilities:

1. Technical: Receipt and analysis of data to identify a risk threatening a vulnerable population.

2. Sharing information among various expert groups.
3. Issuing alerts and commencement of specific activities by authorities based on forecasts.

To accomplish meaningful warnings, there is a heavy reliance on telecommunication and the media. This also requires assimilation of ready access to global, regional, national, state and local warning systems. For improvement in early warning measures, integration with following fields is required:

1. Global climate variation and change like El-nino.
2. Global environmental issues like regional consequence of fire, smoke and haze.
3. Collaboration on telecommunication.
4. Space technology applications.
5. Public private partnership at local community levels.
6. Social science and public information activities to increase local comprehension and response to warnings.

A forecasting and warning system would require close cooperation between the departments like metrology, hydrology along with administration, civil defence, fire brigade, etc. The media, especially electronic, can play an important role in dissemination of warning to the public. In a detailed scheme, importance of “switching on” the system by issuing first warning is to be stressed. This first warning must be sufficiently accurate and timely to achieve a successful alert and response of these authorities and the population. An inaccurate or delayed first warning could lead to panic and cause greater damage.

Mass media has an important role to play in disaster preparedness, disaster response, and disaster recovery. They have to be informative, analytical and suggestive. It is becoming important that special orientation programmes are conducted for the media persons in order to sensitise them with regard to various facets of disaster management. Both the print and electronic media have a rather qualitative role to play in preparing the community and other stakeholders for better management of disaster.