

## **COURSE : DISASTER MANAGEMENT (MA/ MSc PART I)**

### **Paper : II**

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### **Topic : Evacuation In Disasters**

**EVACUATION** : The term “evacuation” refers to moving people at risk to safer environment. The evacuation of communities, groups or individuals is a frequent requirement during response operations. Evacuation is usually PRECAUTIONARY – in most cases undertaken on warning indicators, prior to impact, in order to protect disaster- threatened persons from the full effects of the disaster- and POST-IMPACT – taken up in order to move persons from a disaster-stricken area into safer, better surroundings and conditions.

Populations at risk are those groups of people adversely affected by a disaster – natural or man-made – who have been placed in situations where they are at an increased risk. They are at risk because of the disruption or loss of their normal community and social support systems that provide the critical elements of their survival: water, food, shelter, health care and sanitation.

It should be noted that evacuation is possible only in those events where an early warning of the forthcoming disaster is available. For example, upon receiving a warning message regarding a forthcoming cyclone or rising river levels, the population from the vulnerable areas (which are likely to be hit by the cyclone or get flooded) could be moved quickly to other safer locations. The standard Evacuation Kit for such evacuees should contain following items:

- Emergency supplies to last for at least 3-4 days (or more, depending upon the projected severity of the forthcoming cyclone/flood);
- Emergency survival kit;
- First Aid Kit and essential medical supplies
- Clothes/blankets/sleeping bags
- Food and water
- Rescue Kit containing a paddle, rope, iron hooks to tow belongings and/or other rafts, container to bail out water, torches, lanterns, candles, a transistor, an anchor, life jackets or tyres and other floatable objects.

The longer the negative impacts on populations at risk increase they are displaced from their homes. As such, it is essential that the evacuation operations are taken up by organizations that are well-trained in handling such matters. Local residents’ clubs, local organizations and local NGOs who possess the first-hand knowledge about safer and convenient grounds for moving people as well as animals could be relied upon in

working out evacuation plans. Such evacuation plans need to be well conceived prior to any disaster and should contain arrangements for stock-piling of essential supplies of food, drinking water, temporary shelter, medical care as well as special requirements of children, the aged and ailing and expectant mothers.

In India, the District Collector through the Relief Commissioner (or Relief Secretary) of the State keeps in regular contact with the Indian Meteorological Department (based in New Delhi with observation station spread out) keeping an eye on the warnings for floods and cyclones. In the event that a warning is received and an assessment of threat to people and property is made, the evacuation procedures are then initiated by the Collectorate. For example, the Gujarat Relief Manual (1982) Chapter XIX, Section 304 (1) (a) provides for procedures in setting up and operating an Evacuation Center to cope with floods and likely calamities.

This Section empowers the Collector and/or the District Development Officer (DDO) to determine in consultation with Prant Officers/Mamlatdars the safe villages/places which will serve as Evacuation Centers. The Manual further provides that each Center should cover a group of dangerously exposed village or parts thereof, the people of which should know before hand the names of such villages which will serve as their Evacuation Center.

Section 304 outlines that the Evacuation Center should be properly selected. It should be close to its groups but safe from the ravages of floods. It should be fairly big place so it can, for a day or two shelter the evacuees and their cattle and their feeding can be possible. In selecting an "Evacuation Center" the Relief Manual requires following considerations to be kept in view:

(a) safety, (b) proximity from its satellites, (c) availability of good drinking water, (d) its economic resources, (e) proximity and accessibility to its parent "Relief Center", and (f) availability of open space where carts, cattle etc. of evacuees can be kept till they move to the "Relief Center".

The Gujarat Relief Manual further requires that each of these Evacuation Centers should set up a committee of workers having organizing ability and the spirit of service. There should be a panel of messengers. It may also be necessary to select a place for use as a community godown to keep stock of foodstuff in such villages. These Centers will not be expected to shelter and feed evacuees for more than a few days. As soon as possible these people should, unless the Evacuation Center is in a position to keep them longer, be moved to the parent "Relief Center". These Evacuation Centers may appropriately be described as the "first line of defence against floods".

Once the disaster strikes, no one is spared. At times, the impact of the disaster coupled with the aggravating safety and security conditions in a particular area warrant evacuation of everyone. During such times, not only the populations at risk but those

who come to help the local authority and the affected people also have to keep ready their evacuation plans.

For example, the Evacuation Plan of the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team (known as UNDAC Team, comprising 4-6 experts who are immediately deployed to a disaster site, upon receiving request from the affected government, to assist in coordinating rescue and relief) divides evacuation operations into three categories:

- (1) Semi-Evacuation – when it is necessary to reduce personnel down to a skeleton team;
- (2) Full Evacuation – when there is enough time for the whole team to evacuate in an orderly manner and take all the equipment, vehicles etc., with them;
- (3) Emergency Evacuation – when there is time for the team to take only the most necessary equipment and vehicles. The contents of these evacuation plans are:
  - Always keep sufficient amount of money for evacuation purposes;
  - Always keep a fuel reserve ready for vehicles to be used;
  - Pin-point vehicles to be used for emergency evacuation;
  - Find potential routes to be used out of the area;
  - If possible, make agreements beforehand with authorities, border posts, NGOs etc.

Depending on the safety and security situation in a given country, the United Nations Secretary General orders evacuation (which is Phase V of the UN Security Plans) of its employees on the recommendation of the Designated Official. Evacuation of the UN employees from a country is carried out according to plans prepared beforehand and in accordance with the country-specific situation.

Evacuation is thus a constantly recurring need in disaster management. Whether there is long warning, no warning or short warning, disaster managers are required to handle the evacuation process with reasonable effectiveness. It should be noted that the evacuation decisions are like to go wrong:

- When there is insufficient study and analysis of the disaster threat;
- When preparedness levels are inadequate;
- Where the disaster-prone communities are not attuned to the possibilities and risks of evacuation;
- When everyone, including the community, is not absolutely clear about the responsibility for decision making and the evacuation process.

