PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND THE THIRD SECTOR FOR DISASTER RESPONSE IN INDIA: LESSONS TO LEARN
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PROPOSAL

Recent disasters of `Katrina’ and `Tsunami’ have claimed over thousands of life in different parts of the USA and South Asia. Over time, different regions of India have experienced a wide range of natural disasters-hurricanes, earthquakes, and floods that have caused massive destruction. To minimize the grave consequences, the nation must respond effectively. Effective disaster response requires combining technology, meaningful resource allocation, active information systems, strong institutional capacity, and most importantly, strong partnerships among various key players such as government organizations, communities and non-governmental organization (NGOs).

The literature on government-NGO partnerships during times of crisis, focused on the South Asia region is scarce. Partnerships among the key players have been viewed in the literature as very important for effective disaster management.(Bhatt, 1998; Bhatt, Mehta, & Khosala, 1998; Bhatt, 1999; Dynes, 1999; Fernando, 1999; GSDMA, Sept. 2001; Khan, 1999; R.C.Sharma, 1999; Sampath, 1999; Watchtendorf, 2000). Mostly in partnership literature scholars have tended to look at NGO-government relations only from one-sided perspective. Dennis Young (Young, 1999, 2000) is amongst the very few who does look at both sides of the relationship. Till date, mostly normative investigations have been conducted in this area. The present research is an empirical study designed to assess the barriers faced by both, government and NGOs, as participants in joint actions in India at the time of disasters.

This qualitative study attempts to understand the tensions between government and NGOs when they are working together during the phases of disaster relief, rehabilitation, and mitigation. The aim of this study is to identify the constraints and advantages faced by participants from both sides during joint actions for disaster response. It also attempts to understand the complexity of the relationship and the interdependence of government and NGOs so as to facilitate and encourage collaboration. The findings will provide insights for improvement in inter-organizational relationships for successful joint actions in future years.

The research was conducted in two cities of Gujarat, Ahmedabad and Bhuj *, after one year of the January 2001 earthquake. A semi-structured interview protocol was used to interview a total of 30 individuals- 11 from the government, 11 from NGOs, 5 from international NGOs, 1 from an academic institution, and 2 from an organization associated with media and communication (n=30). The sample from the government consisted of the municipal commissioner, District collectors, District Development Officers (DDO), and officers and staff of the task force of Gujarat State Disaster Management Administration (GSDMA). To get the NGO perspective on issues, directors of NGOs, program managers/leaders, and team members were interviewed. Most of the interviews ranged from 90 minutes to two hours. The researcher was accompanied by a trained assistant for the interviews. Some interviews were tape-recorded; for others, the researcher and her assistant both took extensive notes during the interview and compared them subsequently to produce as complete and accurate a record of the interviews as possible. The data was coded for analysis.

* Bhuj, located in the Kutch region and the epicenter for earthquake, was devastated and shattered to the extreme.
Preliminary results appear to indicate that organizational constraints, information management constraints, policy and implementation constraints and operational constraints are observed. Organizational constraints deal with issues of leadership, coordination, trust, and communication. Information management constraints address issues in database creation and information sharing. Policy and implementation constraints deal with issues in the implementation of policy at various levels, and operational constraints deal with legal and accountability issues.

This study is relevant to the conference themes in several aspects as it discusses prevailing tensions in NGO relations with the government at length during the insecure times. Paper also contributes knowledge to the field of disaster management by proposing the “lessens to learn” for the effective crisis management.

References


