

# Beyond preparedness

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## **Long-term recovery is a key aspect of disaster management, but it is neglected in the Disaster Management Act**

Recent reports suggest that the Union Cabinet will be taking up the proposal to amend the Disaster Management Act of 2005, which largely focuses on improving preparedness, providing immediate relief, and protecting infrastructure. However, it neglects a key aspect of disaster management – long-term recovery.

The Disaster Management Act was enacted to effectively prevent, mitigate and prepare for disasters. It came into being on the heels of three major disasters in the Indian subcontinent: the 1999 super cyclone in Odisha, the 2001 Bhuj earthquake, and the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. The Act mandated the creation of the National Disaster Management Authority, State Disaster Management Authorities, and District Disaster Management Authorities. It laid down the framework, roles and responsibilities of these bodies to formulate and implement disaster management plans at their levels.

The Act rightly emphasizes the need to move from responding to disasters to effective preparedness, which has led to most States investing in resilient infrastructure, early warning systems and evacuation. However, steps towards recovery and rehabilitation of disaster-affected people are hardly discussed. How has this imbalance in priorities shaped disaster management since 2005?

## **Fragmented Outcomes**

- The Act's enormous emphasis on preparedness has translated into timely warnings, relief shelters and massive evacuation exercises. All these steps have reduced casualties.
- Further, the National Disaster Response Fund and State Disaster Response Funds have helped guide immediate relief in the aftermath of disasters. Post-disaster rehabilitation and recovery are left to respective Ministries and Departments. However, only select States like Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Odisha have department-level disaster management plans.
- This inconsistent manner of implementation is akin to how the National Disaster Management Plan was drawn up in 2016, 10 years after the enactment of the Act.
- While integrating post-disaster rehabilitation measures with existing development schemes can be seen as the right step towards mainstreaming disaster management, it is marred by poor implementation and lack of intent from different ministries and departments. For instance, post-disaster housing reconstruction activities in Odisha are aligned with Central and State housing schemes such as the Biju Pucca Ghar Yojana and the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana.
- However, evidence from research in Ersama, Odisha, shows that pucca houses built under these housing schemes were dilapidated and uninhabited in several places because of costs associated with reconstruction.

## Focus on Long term Recovery

- Scholarship on disaster management conceptualizes recovery as action taken to rebuild lives once the hazardous situation has passed. However, this has been commonly interpreted as providing food, water and medicines. Even in instances where States have moved beyond this, long-term recovery measures have largely focused on addressing physical vulnerabilities such as the provision of shelter.
- While these interventions are crucial, long-term recovery needs much more, but it is tricky because everyday vulnerabilities stemming from poverty are accentuated by recurring hazards.
- Recovery measures should address inherent vulnerabilities pertaining to livelihoods, education, water, sanitation, health, and ecology of the disaster-affected communities. Intangible losses such as psychosocial needs of the communities should be given equal emphasis.
- Long-term recovery needs to be thought of alongside development in an integrated and comprehensive manner by combining with health, skill building, and livelihood diversification schemes. This would ensure that communities have, at the very least, recovered to a new normal before the next disaster strikes. This understanding is crucial to the lawmakers looking to amend the Act.

**SOURCE:** *The Hindu*