

Understanding the Dynamics of Exclusion from the Perspectives of Emergency Disaster Response

F. B. Manik Shah Mazumder¹ & Maqbul Ali²

Abstract

The grim reality of social exclusion is that it is ubiquitous and global and it has affected all countries, rich or poor, "traditional" or "modern". Social Exclusion seems to be woven into the fabric of societies, embedded in the system, with deep roots which lead to its continuous reproduction. Social exclusion affects a large number of people and takes place on the basis of race, class, caste, gender, disability, religion, geographical location and many other factors. Exclusion is often most acute when people suffer multiple layers of discrimination. Excluded groups are denied their human rights because of their place within a system of unequal social relations of power. In a non emergency situation, addressing social exclusion and fostering social cohesion is important for sustainable growth and development. Research supports that global disasters differentially impact the most vulnerable groups whose lives have been acutely affected by discrimination. The concept of vulnerability implies excluded and marginalised groups as those at higher risk from disasters. The increased frequency and intensity of manmade and natural disasters often feels like a world out of balance both environmentally and interpersonally. The concern is made worse by the fact that a large number of such groups are invisible. Disadvantaged groups such as these are seen to be exposed to higher levels of risk, and subsequently face the brunt of disasters harder than others. Issues of oppression and social exclusion compound the effects of already massive tragedies yet little consideration is given to these factors in the delivery of emergency services. The paper discusses the issues of exclusion during emergency disaster response and highlights the needs of addressing social exclusion and discrimination for minimizing loss of life and fostering recovery efforts.

Keywords: Social Exclusions, Vulnerability, Discrimination, Emergency Disaster Response.

Introduction:

India is facing the wrath of natural disasters with greater frequency and intensity and is among the most disaster prone countries in the world. Almost 85% of Indian Territory is vulnerable to one or multiple hazard. Out of 29 states and 7 union territories, 22 are disaster-prone. It is vulnerable to wind storms spawned

¹ Research Scholar, Dept of Social Work, USTM;

² Associate Professor, Dept of Sociology, USTM; Email: maqbul10@gmail.com.

in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea, earthquakes caused by active crustal movement in the Himalayan mountains, floods brought by monsoons, and droughts in the country's arid and semi-arid areas. Almost 57% of the land is vulnerable to earthquake (high seismic zones III-V), 68% to drought, 8% to cyclones and 12% to floods. During the recent years India has experience a series of catastrophic disasters compounding their pains of poverty and poor performance in various sectors of human development with devastating earthquakes, floods, cyclones and droughts playing havoc with poor communities.

Climate change is a growing challenge which is manifesting in frequent disasters. Gains of economic performance are being overshadowed by devastations caused by frequent disasters. With a very large population base and ever increasing development deficit, India is trying hard to meet the targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Terrorism, conflicts, political instability, poor governance, lack of efficient service delivery and chronic poverty has already disturbed the human development. Disasters are leveling off the meager gains accumulated over the decades in the region.

But disasters do not affect everyone equally. People who are most vulnerable and exposed to natural and man-made hazards are hit hardest when disaster strikes. The nature of vulnerability is dynamic and complex and therefore it is difficult to analyse directly. Various dimensions like social, generational, geographic, economic and political processes influence how hazards affect people in varying ways and with different intensities. The relative contribution of geophysical and biological processes on the one hand and social, economic and political processes on the other to vulnerability varies from disaster to disaster, as well as from one community to another and from one place to another.

Vulnerability can be increased through entitlements, political powerlessness or social exploitation and discrimination. The practice of discrimination is more prominent with vulnerable groups who are excluded from societies and it gets magnified even more when disasters strike. The experience of past disasters and calamities is that the excluded communities despite being most affected are discriminated in every aspect of the relief, recovery and rehabilitation works: in identifying them as victims in the disaster, in evaluating their losses, and including them in the planning, monitoring and implementation of programmes. Their social and economic fragility, inability to anticipate, cope with or recuperate from the impact of disasters makes them increasingly susceptible to disasters. In spite of forming the highest ratio in deaths and property loss, excluded communities remain the last to get relief and rehabilitation.

This paper is presented based on the review of studies from emergency disaster responses across India from 2007 and an in-depth study generated from participation in multiple workshops on inclusive approach to disaster response. It reflects the experience of disaster recovery works in Assam Flood 2007, Bihar Kosi Flood 2008 and Cyclone Aila 2009. The paper tries to analyse how exclusion and discrimination happens during disaster response and why it continues to be a consistent problem in emergency programming. It examines the existing commitments in international standards for humanitarian aid to address the issues of exclusion and discrimination for Aid effectiveness.

Conceptualizing Social Exclusion in the context of Emergency Disaster Response

Social exclusion has existed in all societies with varied forms and perceptions at different stages of their development. This paper uses a broad definition of social exclusion as a conceptual framework, which originated in European social policy literature and has been applied in developing countries.

Social exclusion relates to the alienation or disfranchisement of certain people within a society. It is often connected to a person's social class, caste, educational status, living standards, geographical locations and how these might affect their access to various opportunities. It also applies to some degree to the disabled, to minority men and women of all races, and to the elderly. Anyone who deviates in any perceived way from the norms of a population can become subject to coercion or subtle forms of social exclusion.

In social science literature, there is general agreement on the core features of social exclusion (Buvinic, 2005). Social exclusion is defined as social process which involves denial of fair and equal opportunities to certain social groups in multiple spheres in society, resulting in the inability of individuals from excluded groups to participate in the basic political, economic and social functioning of the society.

Amartya Sen draws attention to various meanings and dimensions of the concept of social exclusion (Sen, 2000). Distinction is drawn between the situation where some people are being kept out (or at least left out), and where some people are being included (may even be forcibly included) – at greatly unfavourable terms; and describing these two situations as “unfavourable exclusion” and “unfavourable inclusion”. “Unfavourable inclusion”, with unequal treatment, may have the same adverse effects as “unfavourable exclusion”.

As elsewhere in the world, social exclusion is rampant in India. It is associated with gender, caste, ethnicity, language and faith (Gardner and Subrahmanian,

2006). Other factors resulting in discrimination and oppression include widowhood, orphanhood, disability or intellectual capacity (Barrientos and Hulme, 2010). Processes of political or economic discrimination, societal exclusion, or acts of deliberate social and physical violence, are based on one or several of these identity vectors. They systematically reinforce each other, and contribute to poverty, discrimination, marginalization and powerlessness from one generation to the next. During disaster response the process of relief and rehabilitation has seen the exclusion of several groups of people because of a complex matrix of reasons relating to factors as diverse as inherent vulnerability and active discrimination, as well as systematic deficiencies.

The Dynamics of Social Exclusion in Disaster Response:

Process of exclusion: The processes of exclusion observed during the Emergency Disaster Response are as follows-

- The excluded groups/communities were not included in the damage needs assessment by Government as well as NGOs, given the social taboo faced by aid workers.
- The nature of the occupation of excluded groups kept them away from any relief distribution.
- Many a time NGO partner dropped them from the beneficiary list acting on the suggestions of the back donors as they were not seriously affected.
- The communities who do not speak the mainstream language are denied participation in all efforts of disaster relief, recovery and rehabilitation.
- The groups who are extremely poor, with no representation/representative in positions of power are excluded in beneficiary selection process.
- The communities who live in isolation during normal time are not provided information during emergency disaster response. This kind of groups or communities also lack recognition from mainstream communities.
- The relief needs of certain tribal groups differ from majority but these are overlooked.
- Considering the legal entity of the person concerned of certain affected communities they are denied aid. These invisible people were excluded from the targeted approach methodology.
- The need assessment does not always reflect the special needs of groups like children, pregnant and lactating mothers, etc. No efforts have been made for deeper analysis to understand grades of vulnerability.

Example of Exclusions from Recent Emergency Disaster Response in India:

- a. **Hierarchy of Gender:** This was observed in some cases wherein woman having voice faced exclusion. The woman, who raised their voice against

exploitation of the dominant groups, was dropped from the beneficiary list from the government and even the NGOs despite being needy. The stories of such exclusion were reflected due to complain response mechanisms established by some agencies.

- b. **Cross boundary tracking leads to exclusion:** During the time of relief distribution cross boundary tracking by aid agencies and government leads to exclusion of needy disaster victims. This kind of exclusion is more common in cross border (international) tracking.
- c. **Caste hierarchies:** The exclusion based on Hierarchies of Caste was observed in almost all disasters in India where exclusion was exemplified in unwritten laws and social sanctions for different communities. In the tsunami affected areas, the unwritten law is that Dalits cannot own a boat and fish in the sea, so they fish in the backwaters- catch certain kinds of low value fish. Another instance of exclusion was observed during Tsunami was that the Erula community who were given land by the district administration was not allowed to live in the same space by the dominant caste fisher folks. They are allowed to settle in the places close to their community people and far away from their livelihood.
- d. **Inadequate attention leading to inadequate compensation:** It has been observed that certain areas receive higher attention about the disaster affects then others. The areas receive higher attention receive more aids leading to the exclusion of the areas that receive lower attention but extremely affected by disasters. Immediately after the tsunami there was a big earthquake in the Andaman Islands and large tracts of land and livestock were lost by people who lived on it, but they didn't receive any compensation for the earthquake as it was presumed that only the coastline was affected. Compensation was only awarded to people affected by the Tsunami but the destruction that affected the middle portion of the island after the earthquake found no mention.
- e. **Locational hierarchies:** Exclusion of communities and people were also led by the lack of coordination between units, even after some good resource centres were set up by the government. Media also played a great role in misinforming the aid agencies to certain locations while excluding the others. Implementation continued to be a big issue owing to the operation of locational hierarchies.
- f. **Appropriateness of relief packages:** On the issue of gender sensitive relief package, donors sometimes do not encourage if it's not properly monitored during distribution, and that it's not just enough to put things like sanitary napkins in the package and not educate people on how to use them. There is no monitoring on whether people are using them appropriately. In many instances, tarpaulin sheets have been sold off by

beneficiaries almost immediately for ready cash which is the primary need. Children's needs often get missed out while making relief packages.

- g. **Need assessments:** It has been observed that there was a big gap between need assessment and what the actual need of the area is. There are instances from Tsunami response where cartons of tinned food were not distributed because of perceptions of donors that these people "will not need them/ will not use them." This also adds to the element of exclusion.
- h. **Family based relief distribution:** The issue of defining a family size was raised, which has been debated across all organizations and forum. What is the average family size? Given the altruistic nature of the family, is it enough to give the package to the head of the family and expect equitable distribution? Is it fair to make such assumptions given the reality of invisibilisation of women's needs within the home? Will it be equitable for the orphaned child, the widow within the household? The average size of the family is also a relative term. In Andaman the average size is 35 members and this was a big problem when giving houses to people during *Tsunami*.

International frameworks and state accountability:

The principle of non-discrimination and the right to equality are core human rights principles that are enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all international human rights treaties. Some of the international framework that highlight issues of exclusion and discrimination and emphasize on promotion of human rights are discussed below:

- UN Human Rights bodies, including the former UN Sub-Committee on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, UN Treaty Bodies and UN Special Procedures have persistently raised their concerns on caste-related human rights violations and continue to urge Governments to strengthen the protection of affected people through legislative, policy, institutional, budgetary and other measures.
- In 2002, the UN Committee on Racial Discrimination (CERD) adopted General Recommendation to end discrimination based on work and descent. This framework which applies equally to states and to all local, national, sub-regional and international governmental and non-governmental organisations, also stipulates specific measures to address the problem of exclusion and discrimination in situations of humanitarian crises, such as internal conflicts, wars, or natural disasters.

- Special legislation outlawing discrimination exists in India apart from constitutional safeguards. States are also responsible for ensuring that citizens are safe from preventable disasters and for providing appropriate aid in accordance with human rights laws and norms during an emergency. Where the capacity of the state or state institutions is overwhelmed during a disaster, other humanitarian actors, like UN agencies, NGOs, religious institutions, community groups, etc. can support them. All humanitarian work, whether by state or non-government organisations, however, should be guided by humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality, humanity and independence, and international human rights law.
- The principles for humanitarian relief and disaster aid have a distinct history going as far back as the Convention establishing an International Relief Union in 1927. Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions refers to the need for humanity, impartiality and “absence of adverse distinction” in assisting civilian populations in armed conflicts. Over time, these humanitarian ideals were expanded to apply to agencies providing assistance after natural disasters and conflicts.
- The requirement to ensure that humanitarian aids are distributed impartially, solely on the basis of need, and without discrimination between or within affected populations has been reinforced in recent years by commitments to transparency, participation and accountability in guidelines and tools for the sector. In 1991, while setting up the department for humanitarian affairs, the United Nations laid down certain broad principles to guide humanitarian assistance, followed in 1994 by the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief.
- Efforts to strengthen accountability in disaster assistance efforts led to the first Sphere Handbook in 2000, and the adoption of the Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, which sets out for the first time what disaster-affected people have a right to expect from humanitarian assistance. The Sphere Project’s Humanitarian Charter’s ‘Protection Principles’ and the ‘Core Standards’ outline the standards for a balanced representation of vulnerable people in discussions with disaster affected populations. Founded on the principle of humanity and the humanitarian imperative, Sphere Principles and Standards include the right to a life with dignity, the right to receive humanitarian assistance and the right to protection and security.
- Requirements to prevent any form of discrimination fall under wider notions of non-discrimination and impartiality and are specifically referred to in the 2011 edition of Sphere Standard (The Sphere Project, 2011). It states clearly that the right to receive humanitarian assistance is a necessary

element of the right to life with dignity, encompassing the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, water, clothing, shelter and the requirements for good health, guaranteed in international laws. It sets out the responsibility to ensure that humanitarian assistance is available to all those in need, particularly those who are most vulnerable or who face exclusion on political or other grounds. The Sphere Charter outlines the responsibility of humanitarian actors to assist people to claim their rights, access available remedies from the government and recover from the effects of abuse. This makes it imperative for the humanitarian community to assist the victims in the realisation of their rights and entitlements in cases where the lack of enumeration and required documentation results in inadequate or even non-compensation of losses. For the purpose of vulnerability assessments, the Sphere Charter calls upon the humanitarian agencies to compose aid workers' teams with a balanced ratio of women and men, ethnicity, age and social background, keeping the local culture and context in view. Only when the vulnerabilities are identified, can programme designs be inclusive and responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable. The Sphere Charter clearly sets out the need to take additional measures to ensure equitable access to minimum standards (in water supply, sanitation and hygiene promotion) for all groups.

- After the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, held in January 2005 in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan, many organisations adopted Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) policies. The conference provided a unique opportunity to promote a strategic and systematic approach to reducing vulnerabilities and risks to hazards. It underscored the need for, and identified ways of, building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters. It adopted a 10-year plan to make the world safer from natural hazards, the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), which included a requirement for states to take into account vulnerable groups when undertaking DRR planning.

- The principles of impartiality, participation and informed consent and transparency, also form the cornerstones of the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) Standard (HAP Standard, 2010). This practical tool is specifically designed for organisations that work with people affected by or prone to various forms of crises, including disasters. It enables the organisations to design and implement programmes that are accountable to the beneficiaries. What distinguishes HAP from other standards is that it includes a certification mechanism and external verification audits of organisations that apply for certification. Other relevant standards for the humanitarian sector are provisions for strengthening transparency, accountability and inclusion like the Good Enough Guide to impact

measurement and accountability in emergencies, especially in the acute phases of a crisis.

- The People in Aid Code of Good Practice, an initiative to strengthen management and human resource strategies in humanitarian aid, include the commitment to promote inclusiveness and diversity.
- The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) was evolved in 2014 as result of a 12-month, three-stage consultation. This is a direct result of the Joint Standards Initiative (JSI) in which the HAP International, People in Aid and the Sphere Project joined forces to seek greater coherence for users of humanitarian standards. The JSI consulted more than 2,000 humanitarian workers in head offices, regions and in disaster-prone countries. The feedback highlighted the need for the harmonisation of standards, with communities and people affected by crisis at the centre and humanitarian principles as the foundation. During the process humanitarian workers, communities and people affected by crisis, several hundred Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and networks, governments, United Nations and donor agencies, and academics rigorously analysed the content of the CHS and tested it at headquarters and field level. It is the intention of the boards of HAP International, People In Aid and the Sphere Project that the CHS will replace the 2010 HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management, the People In Aid Code of Good Practice in the Management and Support of Aid Personnel and the Core Standards section of the Sphere Handbook. These standards also laid emphasis on taking steps to ensure that marginalised and disadvantaged groups are appropriately represented. It further highlights the need of identifying and acting upon potential or actual unintended negative effects in a timely and systematic manner. The CHS has laid emphasis on providing information to vulnerable and marginalised groups in respectful and culturally appropriate way through formats and media that are easily understood. It ensures inclusive representation, participation and engagement of communities and people affected by crisis at all stages of the work paying particular attention to the gender, age and diversity.
- The Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, held from 14 to 18 March 2015 in Sendai, Miyagi, Japan has adopted “Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030” based on national and regional progress reports as well as other global reports on implementation of HFA. During the World Conference, States also reiterated their commitment to disaster risk reduction and the building of resilience to disasters to be addressed with a renewed sense of urgency in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. It emphasizes on the need for an all-of-society engagement and partnership through empowerment and inclusive approach.

It further stresses on accessible and non-discriminatory participation, paying special attention to people disproportionately affected by disasters.

Conclusion:

India is facing unprecedented challenges due to disasters. The conflict and insurgencies are in increasing trend. Further climate change is acting as a catalyst to increase the frequency, intensity and pattern of natural disasters. In addition to acute poverty and lack of livelihood options in rural areas, frequent disasters has forced poor people to migrate to the cities and settling down in vulnerable and unhealthy locations. These recurrent disasters have resulted in unsustainable livelihoods, contributing towards huge acute and chronic malnutrition and health issues. Lack of access to proper hygiene and sanitation and access to education further deteriorate the situation of the affected communities. Furthermore, the affected people are undergoing different level of psychosocial stress due to conflict and damages caused by disasters to life and livelihoods. The support provided by the government depicts a poor picture and politically motivated. Poor, marginalised and vulnerable people have limited access to the services.

Field-research as well as conceptual analysis reveals processes of exclusion during disaster response in different forms. It is observed from seemingly invisible disparities related to public status and opportunities to inequalities in terms of entitlements and ownership of resources. It results in inequitable outcomes due to unequal access to public goods and services and denials/discriminations. The outright domination and violence due to exclusion leads to deprivation and poverty.

Although there is constitutional and legal provisions to deal with exclusions but implementation and adherence depends on whether the state enforces its own laws. Across exclusion affected countries, enforcement of laws and implementation of policies is inconsistent and often extremely weak. In India, the body of legislation meant to protect Dalits, Adivasis and Minorities etc. to improve their situation is extensive, but political will to ensure implementation is often lacking.

There is a need for more effectively functioning state mechanisms as well as close monitoring of the implementation of specific provisions and legislation where it exists. Measures to address all forms of discrimination must also be integrated across all other relevant legislation and policies including in disaster management laws. There is, however, little specific mentioning or focus on issues of discrimination or the risk of exclusions in a disaster context.

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