

DISASTERS AND SECURITY

~ A WISCOMP Forum ~

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**THE FORUM REPORT**

**DRAFT, NOT FOR CIRCULATION, CITATION OR PUBLICATION**

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## ISSUES RAISED BY THE FORUM

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### **Disasters as opportunities or opportunism?**

The opening session of the Forum framed disasters as opportunities for political breakthroughs and for renewing efforts towards unmet developmental goals including disaster preparedness. However, in a subsequent session, Dr. S.P. Udayakumar eloquently asked, “ How many more opportunities do we need?”

Disasters were seen as highlighting missed opportunities of the past and creating openings for a renewed commitment:

1. to shift the discursive frame so human and state security are related in different ways;
2. to addressing structural inequalities and vulnerabilities;
3. to institutionalize gender mainstreaming and lobby for gender equity in laws and policies;
4. to build the capacity of civil society to coordinate, collaborate and strategize, in an accountable and introspective mode;
5. to public and media education on a host of issues include appropriate response.

The large influx of NGOs into a disaster-hit area (sometimes called a “stampede,” sometimes a “feeding frenzy”), some of the problems caused by mandate-driven interventions or interventions that are not contextualized and a lack of integrity on the part of some relief teams formed part of the discussion highlight the problem of distinguishing between opportunity and opportunism.

### **Conflict, development and disaster**

Both in analytical and practical terms, much of the discussion at the Forum may be said to have illuminated the interconnectedness and the interface between conflict, development and disasters. This interface has the potential of being what Anitha S. described as a “toxic cocktail,” reinforcing pre-existing vulnerabilities and creating new insecurities for individuals, families and communities. This “toxic cocktail” is one of conjunctions between the development and security discourses.

Session after session returned to structural inequality which runs as a common thread through analyses of development, conflict and disasters. Structural inequalities of income and access to opportunity and political power determine vulnerability to natural disasters, because of poor housing, undiversified and fragile livelihoods and neglected civic amenities, among other things. They also get reinforced in the post-disaster context through discrimination in the distribution of relief and in the planning of reconstruction projects. Gender is one dimension of structural where this is evident, whether in the recognition of male heads of household alone or in the impediments to transferring land title to women survivors. Another is caste, and reports of discrimination against Dalits in the post-tsunami context were cited.

The violence that lurks within societies with deep inequalities surfaces to further hurt victims of disaster, and the Forum highlighted problems like trafficking of women and children to illustrate this. Structural inequality is one of the causes of conflict and when disaster assistance is given on the basis of ethnic or religious identity, particularly, it has the potential to create conflict. Socio-economic inequalities, the impact of development projects and environmental degradation and conflicts create a situation in which disaster-induced displacement is only the newest layer. Differences in attention and assistance generate resentments and polarize divided societies further. While conflicts are often characterized as human-made disasters, what conflict and disaster situations have in common and where they differ was the subject of some speculation.

Herein lies the argument for including disaster preparedness and mitigation in the development agenda of a society. Existing social justice programs make a difference to the relief and rehabilitation process. Development plans should take into account vulnerability to disasters. The importance of ecologically sound, sustainable development is that it mitigates vulnerability to disaster, as some field accounts substantiated.

### **Working with the state**

Failures of the states of South Asia to reduce the vulnerability of their people to natural disasters, to provide relief and envision reconstruction animated each and every session. There was however an acknowledgment that trenchant critique must be followed by an engagement with the state. The state can be a structurally capable actor, but for it to realize this potential, three conditions must be met: (1) it must be responsive; (2) it must place human security at par with if not ahead of state security; (3) it must work with local communities to plan for contingencies like disasters.

Beyond critiques of the state, there was also a critique of civil society for not having forced the political mainstreaming of disaster-related issues. Meghna Guhathakurta asked why after all these decades and disasters, disaster planning was not on the agenda or election platform of any South Asian political party. The failure of civil society to make an issue of disaster prevention and disaster mitigation is undeniable.

Facilitating dialogue and coordination between NGOs and relevant state agencies was therefore seen as an important pre-disaster exercise. The objective of such a dialogue from the point of view of civil society would be to ready governments to be proactive, to make governments responsive to the lessons learnt from previous disasters and to influence the policies and actions of the state. From the point of view of the government, dialogues would offer a way to share information and coordinate work so that resources are not wasted.

Another area of concern was the sidelining of local governments. Emergencies elicit centralized responses; when they also draw a massive influx of outside players into the affected community, local governments are left out of the loop when needs assessments are made, plans are drawn up and resources allocated. Since outside organizations are unlikely to stay indefinitely, this leaves a weakened local administration to pick up the threads of a reconstruction process it had no part in strategizing.

Last, discussions of the state's role are incomplete without a discussion of the role of the military. Militaries play an important part in rescue and relief operations in the immediate aftermath of disasters, and this is a role in which people accept their presence. Nevertheless, in the Forum discussions, participants expressed concern about the long-term impact of a military presence anywhere.

### **For NGOs, An Agenda for Reflection**

As trenchant as critique of the state was, participants in the Forum also raised questions about the quality of understanding that NGOs sometimes brought to specific situations and the honesty with which some work has been undertaken. Some of the problems recognized included the challenge of balancing the NGO's mandate with local circumstances and needs, sustained engagement over a period of time, building capacity rather than creating aid dependency and ensuring accountability for their activities. Collaboration, proper needs assessments, strategic thinking, introspection about mistakes and learning, transparency and communication and coordination of relief efforts were the solutions that came up in these discussions. More concrete proposals are included in the last section on future measures.

### **Gender, women and disasters**

Acknowledging and sidestepping the slippery gender versus women's issues, Forum participants identified three concrete concerns beyond women's special needs and vulnerabilities.

Disaster relief programmes sometimes self-consciously re-tool and empower women. The twin imperatives of scale and sustainability were however discussed at some length in the session on gender. Clearly, to empower women in one or two villages is not enough; how to replicate success across a district or state needs to be considered. The second question is whether there is a return to the old order when NGOs leave a site. Some participants made a strong case for thinking beyond relief projects and of institutional and legal reform if post-disaster changes were going to last. Whether civil society has the capacity to do this was questioned, however.

Related to the argument that change comes through a long-term, structural perspective rather than emergency projects, is the argument that changes introduced are most effective when they are contextualized. Culture, the presence of conflict and legal frameworks were three specific modifiers that were mentioned. To empower women, facilitate change in gender roles and gender relations, sensitivity to context is a pre-requisite, without this being reduced to cultural relativism.

Returning to the conflation of gender with women's issues, the practical concern of including men in gender projects was discussed from a field perspective.

### **Children, child rights and disasters**

Forum participants made an unequivocal case for specifically and separately considering the problems and rights of children in disaster contexts, rather than treating them as an afterthought to a discussion on women. At different points, issues that concern them like adoption of orphans, interrupted schooling and trafficking were brought up but there was no space to explore or explicate them.

## **Disaster preparedness**

Four dimensions of disaster preparedness came up during the discussion: (1) Vulnerability mapping; (2) Contextualizing preparation; (3) Learning from past experience, both positive and negative; (4) Preparing the ground for state, civil society and grassroots collaboration. Many concrete suggestions for action along these dimensions were made at the Forum, ranging from creating databases of actors, mandates and areas of operation to creating context-specific disaster preparedness manuals for public education. These are listed in the last section of this report.

## **The importance of public education programmes**

If opportunities for change are not to be missed, a shift in the discursive framework is required from thinking solely of state security to thinking of human security. Disaster preparedness training was also suggested as a way to build the capacity of society, local communities in particular, to take care of themselves in an emergency.

## II

### SUMMARY OF FORUM SESSIONS

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#### Session I

##### FRAMEWORKS: DISASTERS AS PIVOTAL MOVEMENTS

The occurrence of natural disasters is beyond the control of human beings; however, disaster management and disaster preparedness which are centered on human beings are also about power relations, access to resources and how to distribute them. With this preface, Dr. Meghna Guhathakurta narrated the experience of Bangladesh in the aftermath of the November 1970 cyclone. In the absence of help from West Pakistan, the influx of international assistance, the arrival of international NGOs and media attention highlighted the plight of East Pakistanis. The relief-workers who came bore witness and testified to what followed during the war. The NGOs trained a cadre of leadership for the emerging nation-state. The Bangladesh experience was one example and Guhathakurta identified certain political lessons to be drawn from it: that natural disasters can threaten state sovereignty, especially if there is already internal conflict; that disasters also threaten people's security and indigenous knowledge; that disaster management and preparedness are signifiers of governance quality. One of the most crucial things is that people feel isolated—physically and mentally—and feel totally alone; the first and foremost thing is to reconstruct communication and if diplomacy helps, that should be taken into account, as with cyclone diplomacy in South Asia.

Dilip D'souza underscored the political opportunity presented by disasters with a recollection of Berlin in the last months of the second world war. Disasters are best viewed as opportunities, despite their tragic impact. A society's best response to disasters is not hand-wringing as moving on with a constant pragmatism about what needs to be done. It is viewed this that they become pivotal moments for societies. Returning to the German example, D'souza pointed out that the great calamity of World War II redefined Germany, taking them from decades of sabre-rattling to the model of pluralistic democracy that they are today, free of Nazis and the horror of the Nazis.

Geetalakshmi's presentation sought to further this view. Vulnerability mapping has been taken up in coastal districts, she pointed out, in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami. Vulnerability mapping does not help in just identifying communities in need but also aids in providing them with resources and training. A second area of change following both the 2003 Gujarat earthquake and the 2004 tsunami was government-NGO collaboration, where mutual distrust has been replaced by the desire to do something together for society.

Disasters are opportunities to put new structures into place, for long-term development and for reducing vulnerability to future disasters. Each disaster contributes to this, and accelerates a process already in place. Saying this, Ramona Miranda outlined a livelihood-centered approach to disaster mitigation. Disaster-hit communities need to get back on their feet more than they need handouts. For this they need not just the implements and tools, but training, structures and governance patterns. One strategy to facilitate this is to encourage people to diversify their livelihoods because people with strong and diversified livelihoods recover faster; disasters are an opportunity for this. Livelihood issues are at the heart of vulnerability analysis and of reconstruction and infrastructural support.

## **Session II**

### **GENDER AND DISASTERS**

The session chair, Mina Swaminathan, began by drawing attention to three sets of issues the Forum concept paper identified for the discussion: the impact of disasters on women, the agency of women in the process of rehabilitation and whether disasters bring about any change in gender relations.

The first response to the tsunami as to other disasters was to mobilize support from experts for relief but the level of support was so great that Bharti Patel's organization, Svaraj (Oxfam India), moved to put together teams of environmental, development and gender experts to work with local communities and institutions to assess opportunities for change and risk mitigation. In Cuddalore, this led to an integrated focus on the link between gender equality, sustainable development and disaster reduction, recognizing the role of women before, during and after disaster. At such times, it is important to look not just at economic recovery but to examine what social justice programmes exist locally. Patel identified three key considerations for thinking about women and disasters: environmental sustainability, existing cultural values and norms and bridging the rich-poor gap, an omnipresent source of vulnerability that makes a natural hazard a disaster.

The differential impact of disasters is due to the existence of structural inequality and discrimination socially, economically and in terms of caste and gender, P. Tamizholi said. If disasters are an opportunity for women to change, the practical problem is whether agencies in the field have the skill to facilitate gender mainstreaming and inclusive participatory processes. The partnership between civil society and government needs to be sensitized to the gender component in terms of mobilization, discussions and dialogues and most importantly gender-mainstreaming is necessary and women's participation should not be restrained. Mutual learning is needed in these areas. Finally, Tamizholi raised the practical constraints that limit women's participation in post-disaster context, returning to the question of structural inequalities in a society.

Why were three districts in Kerala so much more vulnerable than others, Anitha S. said was a question that women raised in the aftermath of the tsunami. Discussions that followed covered the geomorphology of the coast, developmental activities along the coast (mining, intervening with the coastline, destruction of vegetation) and other factors that created a 'toxic cocktail' that made them especially vulnerable. Women were aware of these factors but it was only the tsunami which gave them that opportunity to verbalise their thoughts. Even Panchayat members had not had that chance. The post-tsunami forums on rehabilitation opened up the question of long-term planning and mitigation with regard to both tsunami and monsoonal vulnerability of the coastline. The tsunami brought to the fore everyday disaster issues like lack of toilet facilities, lack of potable water, women's reproductive health issues and nutritional status of women. NGOs have been complicit in casting women as victims alone, something women have resisted. After the tsunami, religious divisions have also appeared where they did not exist before, exacerbated by the distribution of post-disaster assistance. The prescription of anti-depressants which is creating dependence in some patients and the experimentation with women's bodies with a view to reversing tubectomies was also highlighted. Women became very eloquent about corruption and the apathy of the system. The innumerable surveys administered are seeking distorted figures and information in the absence of good data; Anitha S. raised the issue of remaining honest in troubled times.

P. Chandran began by describing the work of the Swayam Shikshan Prayog. Disasters give communities a chance to come forward and improve their situation. They force us to not only look at livelihood but also rebuilding and rehabilitation. They help break norms like caste and gender; women need to be involved in reconstruction processes. When you involve women in disaster-response it opens up a new world for them. Post-earthquake in Gujarat, women have become the managers of local communities. In Cuddalore and Nagapattinam, local women learned that widow's pensions have been increased; they went to the pension office and got their correct dues. Chandran's organization has taken women from rural Maharashtra and Gujarat, who experienced the Latur and Gujarat earthquakes to tsunami areas, to share information. Women in all these areas had a chance to learn from each other.

The discussion that followed centered mostly around women's agency and factors that affect it and intervention frameworks and strategies. There was concern that the different needs of women (for instance, when it comes to organizing medical camps) were not being taken into account and that media coverage of disasters is neither sensitive to gender issues nor to the dignity of those affected. Additionally, the fact that state security rather than the dignity of human life was at the core of decision-making was also stressed. The need for networking not just with other NGOs but also with local government was brought up.

#### 1. The agency of women

Women's agency in post-disaster situations was felt to be affected by the socio-cultural context, the overlay of conflict and disaster and existing policy structures.

The participants from Kashmir argued for a contextual understanding of women's involvement. Social, cultural and religious factors apart, it was pointed out that Kashmiri women and children have also borne the brunt of more than fifteen years of insurgency and counter-insurgency operations. The rules of engagement in conflicts and disasters were different, Arjimand felt. Where women have already been involved in existing structures, there is space for post-disaster agency. However, to create new spaces that challenge patriarchal structures is harder. Swarna Vepa mentioned self-help groups and said that while they have been used by various agencies, this has not been documented. She also raised the concern that while self-help groups did give women a space they lacked, the ensuing community work increased their overall burden.

Bhavani Fonseka pointed out that pre-disaster government policy on women and girls creates structural impediments to women's rights post-disaster. For instance, if land ownership laws regard men as owners then it is hard to obtain land title for female heads of household. She pointed out that the law recognized male-headed households and therefore women get left out in the distribution of relief materials by household because they are not recognized as heads.

#### 2. Intervention frameworks and strategies

Four aspects of intervention frameworks were discussed: how to institutionalize post-disaster changes, how to balance mandate-driven assistance, and whether to adopt the perspective of women or of gender (and how to involve men in change), all of which leads to the question of how to frame interventions.

Discussions of women's roles in specific districts led P. Thamizoli to point out that while women are better mobilizers, it was necessary to look at how their capacity could be formally institutionalized. He asked whether NGOs had the capacity to institutionalize such change? Gender mainstreaming needs to be seen as a process. C.V. Raghavulu reinforced this point saying that post-disaster changes tend to be episodic

rather than long-term. Where local governments take root, there is more sustainable empowerment of women. Even where there were panchayats headed by women, only isolated examples of patriarchy being broken. Change occurs at micro-points, not everywhere. Mina Swaminathan, the session chair, had earlier questioned the scale of change as well. Bharti Patel raised the question of how to learn from what change there is. Ashok Aima suggested organized meetings with local community heads, that would help understand local sensibilities and create area-specific interventions. Two participants, Mirak Raheem and P. Chandran narrated instances where women were warned not to get involved with NGOs and reconstruction work.

Bharti Patel said that NGOs come in with their own mandates and try to fulfil them rather than addressing the local situation. Picking up on Anitha S.'s point, she wondered whether it was possible for NGOs to be honest about the problems they caused. Ramona Miranda underscored this view, saying that as long as everyone (meaning both NGOs and government) get their bit, it is immaterial how many die. The credibility of NGOs depended on their transparency and on their creating participatory processes, stated Arjimand.

While this session was titled 'Gender and disasters,' most of the discussion was about women and their experience. This raised questions about whether a women's perspective or a gender perspective should be adopted. Sumona Dasgupta argued that men have to be socialized to be open to change. The traditional work of women should be recognized, Aslam Shakir added. Ramona Miranda felt that not enough was being done to build the capacity and skills of men, and Uma Vangal mentioned that young men in tsunami-affected areas had asked about forming self-help groups. Bharti Patel said that while there could be agreement that men should be involved in these processes of change, the issue that was not being addressed was 'how.' C.V. Raghavulu made the point that the grassroots reality was that the family had to be treated as a unit, rather than pitting men against women.

On the question of disasters as opportunities, S.P. Udayakumar argued that it was not mapping exercises but analysis of how we can make a change that was the order of the day. Mina Swaminathan stressed that it was important not to construct either-or frameworks, but to look at short-term and long-term solutions. Raghavulu differentiated between different phases of disasters: the rescue and relief phase on the one hand, while much of the discussion at the Forum centred on the reconstruction phase.

In her summary, the chair identified two additional issues for the Forum to think about. The first was the difference between man-made disasters (like conflict) and natural disasters. Second, she made a case for a separate session on children and their concerns rather than treating them as a subset of adult categories.

### **Session III**

#### **DISPLACEMENT AND DISASTERS**

If the tsunami had been a war, the Indian state would have been prepared, asserted SP Udayakumar. In spite of the three hours it took for the tsunami to hit the Indian coastline, there was complete state collapse on December 24, 2006, and it was the Catholic Church and NGOs which came to the rescue in Nagercoil and Kanyakumari. Rendered homeless, people took shelter in churches, but there was not enough space to cook food or for toilet facilities. Men have a completely different understanding of place and space in our culture, and how displacement affected men and women was different. The loss of livelihood bothered men more than displacement. For men, there were wine-shops and tea-shops to help them adapt, but for women there were many issues. They were unable to sleep for fear of physical safety. Men had no anxiety about sanitation facilities, but for women the lack of toilets or outdoors toilets that could not be used after dark, were real concerns. For women especially displacement leads to dispossession, which means disempowerment. This disempowerment resonates with that of Sri Lankan refugees in the same area, who have been in India for fifteen years or more, may never return, but they still do not feel welcome or comfortable here and are nostalgic and want to go back. They are blamed for local problems from lowered wages to petty crime. At a People's Tribunal in Trivandrum, more than anything else, people wanted their homes to be rebuilt but the implementation of the coastal regulation zone makes that problematic. When people finally managed to return, very few had something to return to.

K.C. Lazar's presentation drew on the Bhoomika Trust's experience in the aftermath of the Gujarat earthquake and the tsunami. He pointed out that the primary thing after the tsunami was to coordinate efforts between the government and the NGOs. Bhoomika's activities focused on restoring people's lives to a more normal routine in order to reduce trauma. They began distributing rations instead of cooked food, so that families could cook for themselves as a unit. Partnering with other NGOs to restore livelihoods, Bhoomika provided tools of trade to those who had lost them, and created a job-search service called JobLinks. Coaching was provided to those whose schooling had been disrupted. First Aid Training was introduced in schools. In addition, Lazar emphasized the importance of cultural sensitivity in the matter of food and clothing, rapid needs assessment, to provide aid to women as well and to prepare people emotionally to face disasters.

Multiple, overlapping layers of displacement obtain in many of the contexts discussed at the Forum. Speaking of these, Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury highlighted the relationship between pre-existing inequalities on the one hand and discrimination in the distribution of aid as well as human rights violations on the other. Those who went to stay in refugee camps and those who took shelter with their families received different amounts of attention. Similarly, in Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Kashmir, where disasters layered over long years of conflict-induced displacement, those displaced by the disaster received more attention and relief assistance than those displaced by conflict. There was gender discrimination as men took precedence in receiving aid. While families could not return to their homes due to coastal zone regulations, it was possible for hotels to develop their properties in spite of these regulations. Basu Ray Chaudhury asserted that a more inclusive rehabilitation strategy was required, and it cannot be an either-or situation as everyone's special needs need to be met. Furthermore, addressing the issue of honesty which was raised in the previous session, he argued for a civil society dialogue to sensitize NGOs to the need to be more accountable for the use of resources.

The discussion in this session centred on the the limitations of the state including the sidelining of local governments, but two other themes that emerged were post-disaster discrimination and different kinds of displacement.

Some discrimination in the distribution of aid was a function of previous structural inequalities and some followed from the reasons for displacement. Over and above these, Swarna Vepa elaborated on an example given by Basu Ray Chaudhury in his presentation to say tsunami orphans were placed in orphanages and schools whereas other orphans in fishing communities were left unattended. Thamizoli added that while orphans were receiving such attention, there were no statistics on school dropouts and no attempt to bring them back to the classroom. Chandran added that having dropped out for a long time, children are embarrassed to return to school. Mirak Raheem mentioned night-time displacement that occurs often in Sri Lanka, where people work for years in one community and then spend the night in another one, saying that sometimes the house is there, but there is no livelihood, argued that displacement has to be seen in the larger sense, not just as people losing homes. On another note, relating to Udayakumar's point about Sri Lankan refugees still not feeling welcome in Kanyakumari, Dilip D'souza and Ashok Aima offered the example of Kashmiri refugees in Kashmir and Delhi. When displaced people live in foreign communities, they said, locals are resentful and fearful of them, leaving them no political or economic space. Meghna Guhathakurta said that disasters serve to enhance the systemic negligence of certain sectors of the state.

That states identify national interest with their survival rather than that of their citizens was a theme that resonated from the presentations through the discussion, and this priority is most obvious in times of disaster. When everything including life comes second, state security is inimical to securing people. Participants brought in examples from Kalpakkam to Kashmir to the Andamans to make this point.

While much of the discussion discussed the state as a single actor or one-level agency, Ramona Miranda and Anitha S. described the fate of local governments in disaster situations. Describing what she termed 'the displacement of local government,' Miranda said that central authorities often relegate local authorities to the sidelines in times of disasters, relocating the community before the local agencies can act. Anitha S. reinforced this by saying that in Kerala after the tsunami, NGOs dealt directly with the state government making plans for local communities, and in the absence of local government, important village resources like the *balavadis* were not rebuilt.

The problem identified by this session was how to make governments act quickly and responsively, and how to strengthen local communities and their governmental institutions. Development planning should incorporate disasters. That state institutions can act quickly in strategic areas was borne out by Aima's example of the Indian army acting in under 90 minutes after the Kashmir earthquake. Saying that Bangladesh was used to ad hoc disaster decision-making, Guhathakurta emphasized that disaster preparedness and disaster management needed to be part of the agenda of political parties and on the political agenda of a society, more generally.

The tendency for communities to grow dependent on relief was a concern raised by Ashok Aima. However, most participants were concerned that not enough relief was reaching displaced people or that it was not being distributed to everyone in need.

## **Session IV**

### **STATE, CIVIL SOCIETY AND DISASTERS**

Comparing the tsunami and the Kashmir earthquake, C.V. Raghavulu contrasted their geographical impact, the loss in human life and the amount of aid generated in their aftermath. Initial relief operations post-tsunami were quick and effective. Civil society groups engaged in this work were very diverse—from highly professional international groups to local individuals and service organizations—and differed widely in size, approach, funding and degree of professionalism. Well-funded NGOs acted unilaterally and so there was duplication of efforts and a glut of some materials and a shortage of other essential items. The highly professional groups worked transparently and were accountable for the money they spent. In India, where the state administration had experience of disasters, they coped better. Moreover, central assistance was not systematic and that led to political arguments. In Tamil Nadu, dynamic district-level officers proactively invited partnerships between the public and private sector. In the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, relief was in the hands of the army and islanders suffered as it took a long time for relief and rehabilitation assistance to reach them. After the earthquake in Kashmir, while NGOs were allowed to move around and offer help, there were no guidelines given as to where they should and should not go. There was no systematic response and no coordination with the government. The state-civil society interface after a disaster depends on individuals who make the difference in each instance.

Dilip D'Souza began his presentation with a description of unused boats lying along the beaches after the tsunami. In their haste to provide boats after the tsunami, NGOs had not taken into account that each stretch of coast required different kinds of boats and nets, and the quality of what was provided was compromised as large number of boats were hastily manufactured to meet the need that NGOs anticipated. Moreover, where several fishermen would go out together, well-meaning NGOs changed the work dynamic by giving each person a boat that they wanted to use by themselves. The fabric of the community changed. D'Souza quoted Fred Cuny's view that aid provided should reflect local needs and local culture, or else a second disaster follows the first in the form of relief and rehabilitation efforts. Drawing on his visits to many disaster settings, D'Souza said that the biggest problem after any disaster is clean drinking water; more than doctors, engineers are needed to fix the water supply. He held that NGOs need to formulate a vision for reconstruction and see it through. Their efforts immediately after a disaster are futile without sustained follow-up.

Kiruba Shankar described how the blogging community became very actively involved in the tsunami relief activities. What began very simply as visiting affected areas out of interest and documenting what was seen, generated so much interest, that without mandates to follow or overheads to worry about, "we went out and found out what the people needed and provided them with that." More documentation drew more attention, and people came forward to help. By actually visiting sites, bloggers were able to pass on specific requirements—specific fishing nets, no more clothes—and intricate details. They bought cooking vessels, photographed them and documented their deliver for people who were sending money. Blogging gave people new avenues to help and people didn't have to depend only on the Chief Minister's Relief Fund and the Prime Minister's Relief Fund.

This session brought together issues that had arisen through the day and the discussion identified certain key needs: proper needs assessment, communication and coordination of relief efforts, learning from past experience and mechanisms for accountability. Stepping beyond its primary focus on the interface between state and civil society, the discussion generated several concrete ideas for further action in these spheres.

To start with there was agreement that after a disaster, both short and long-term vision was required. A proper assessment of needs should include both immediate survival needs and long-term rehabilitation needs. Understanding the ecology of the region is a vital input. P. Chandran pointed out that communities can articulate their needs and wants, and what is needed is to tap into that local knowledge. Bharti Patel reminded the Forum that learning from past experience and past mistakes is important.

In the role of the state and civil society preparedness is the primary thing. There has to be coordinated effort and the civil society as well as the government needs to be involved to get accurate information. The lack of fit between items donated and actual needs was the theme of many interventions. Dilip D'Souza's presentation had offered examples of unusable boats and old clothes. Anitha S. said fishermen were given motorized boats but no one had thought about where they would get the fuel. Ashok Aima mentioned tents and sleeping bags sent to Kashmir that were useless in the cold weather.

Information on what is needed and what materials should be sent to disaster-hit communities, needs to be disseminated to the public as well. D'Souza was emphatic that without discouraging the urge to give, we need to promote a better understanding of people's needs. Ashok Aima suggested that an online data should be made available explaining what is required so that there is no mismanagement. Uma Vangal said that the media, both traditional and emerging media like blogs, can help in this effort, but both NGOs and government exclude the media from their efforts. Ramona Miranda raised the question of sensitizing the media to preparedness issues rather than the sensational aspects of disaster.

On the relationship between state and civil society, Raghavulu suggested that basic relief should be left primarily to the government, and NGOs, most of whose mandates do not go beyond relief, may be better suited to work in the reconstruction phase. Ramona Miranda gave the example of NGOs in Sri Lanka failing to involve the Fisheries Ministry in their efforts to underscore the need for a dialogue between state agencies and NGOs. Related to this, many participants felt that NGOs should develop local links in the community. As Ashok Aima put it, NGOs need to start local linkages, engaging local people, training the local youth and creating multiple layers of skilled reliefworkers who would not need to be paid. Early warning systems cannot be put in place, Arjimand stressed, without the cooperation of government, NGOs and local communities.

The issue of accountability came up in different ways. The question of trust (or rather, lack of trust) was raised by several people. As Arjimand put it, forming an NGO is a constitutional right but with moral implications. Kiruba Shankar mentioned it as a reason that bloggers found themselves buying and delivering materials. Ramona Miranda and Ashok Aima brought this up when discussing why people hesitate to give money to NGOs. Dilip D'Souza said that he felt it was more important to press for accountability, not for people who give the money, but those who receive it. Udayakumar felt that those who had less funding and were working in disaster education in Kanyakumari did a better job, while fraud was rampant in many NGOs and government.

Aima suggested setting up a corpus fund at the state level to build a reserve for NGOs to use in post-disaster settings.

Arjimand said that foreign money was not always a bad thing and is useful for both rehabilitation projects and institutional capacity-building. However, Mirak Raheem said that because international NGOs are the big spenders in these situations, they are given importance at the expense of the local bodies that actually do the work. Ramona Miranda said that when money started coming in from abroad after the tsunami, it often came with specifications as to which community it should benefit.

Finally, responding to Raghavulu's question as to whether NGOs work better under a democracy or militaristic regime, Meghna Guhathakurta gave the examples of Bangladesh and Pakistan, two homegrown military regimes with contrasting views. In Bangladesh, political parties were banned but the military regime sought the help of NGOs. In Pakistan, NGO activity was restricted.

## **Session V**

### **DISASTERS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

With the tsunami, there was an opportunity for the two parties to the Sri Lankan conflict to work together for a humanitarian purpose. Bhavani Fonseka described the Post-Tsunami Operations Management Structure (P-TOMS) that was agreed upon by the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam as one of the key mechanisms for realising this opportunity. P-TOMS set up a centralized structure, which left very little voice for local communities although it had a district-level presence. The structure was also politically problematic because each side wanted full control over its areas, and felt they should be in sole control of the resources and the distribution in their areas. Relief was distributed on an ethnically differentiated basis, whereby Muslims felt left out and minorities ignored, until the court stopped this practice. The same mindset and attitudes hamper post-disaster relief as do conflict resolution.

Mirak Raheem underscored the potential for disasters to be times when warring parties can build bridges and using that momentum, dealing with more intractable issues. This happened initially in Sri Lanka, but soon the problems which dogged the peace process came to haunt the humanitarian disaster. The longer the P-TOMS negotiations went on, the more power and hegemony issues predominated, as both parties feared their rivals would take control of financial resources, territory or even hearts and minds. The LTTE feared the people were warming to the military; the government was afraid that international actors in LTTE areas were setting up relationships with them. P-TOMS process mirrored the conflict resolution process. Finding ways to build mutual trust, bringing a transparency to negotiations and encouraging public debate and consultation is a way to facilitate both such post-disaster negotiations and peace processes. What is good for people and society should not get left out. P-TOMS had a three-tier structure on the levels of district, community and the central authority, but while the tsunami affected people within a small area of those districts, district demographics empowered local majorities. Old conflict issues over land and resources re-emerged in a new form.

In Arjimand's view, conflicts themselves are disasters. His account of Kashmir after the earthquake reinforced the view that the opportunities that disasters offered for conflict resolution have not been fully utilized. He said there was a deficit of trust on either side of the border between the civilian agencies of the state (at both the national/central and the regional/provincial levels) and the people. By contrast, after the earthquake, armies on both sides and common people responded far sooner than the civilian government. The armies are stationed in hard-to-reach strategic areas where access and population movement are strictly controlled. On the Indian side, there was one month of free movement to those areas and then the curbs were restored. Whatever sharing of goods was there, was cosmetic. An opportunity was lost as Pakistan opened all areas to international visitors. NGOs and civilians were free to visit Kashmir on the Pakistan side, while they were debarred on the Indian side. This is counter-intuitive; it would have made more sense for a democratic polity to have free movement. Arjimand made the case for a more proactive conflict resolution discourse that facilitates the creation of collaborative systems for humanitarian crises. Warring factions should be engaged by NGOs in this enterprise. These can become the bases for other types of collaboration.

Aslam Shakir said that the biggest disaster that Maldives faced was not the tsunami but the combination of natural disaster with an autocratic regime. The international attention received by the Maldives after the tsunami has exposed the wide

socio-economic disparities in that society and the undemocratic and corrupt practices of the ruling regime.

The discussion in this session centred around spelling out the nature of the conflict resolution opportunity in times of disasters. It also raised the question of post-disaster situations creating more conflict and the differences in needs, if any, between the post-conflict and post-disaster contexts.

One theme that ran through the presentations was that disasters presented an opportunity to sow the seeds for a functional cooperation that could yield returns for the conflict resolution process. In the case of Sri Lanka and Kashmir, several people expressed the view that an opportunity had been lost to do this. P. Chandran pointed to the experience of Aceh, where the tsunami facilitated a reduction of violence. In Kashmir, Arjimand said that on both sides of the Line of Control, there was an interest—and in terms of ground realities, an imperative even—to open the border. In some cases, help was available one kilometre away on the other side, but politics made it impossible to access and people had to wait hours for help to reach them from distant places.

Some of the obstacles to using this opportunity were identified. In Sri Lanka, the tsunami was preceded by high-profile killings, and Mirak Raheem said there was a feeling on both sides that they had been trapped into the P-TOMS negotiations. The failure of these negotiations has reinforced the idea on each side that it is impossible to work with the other. Bhavani Fonseka alluded to the negative impact of conflict on disaster relief, saying that in Sri Lanka, after 20 years of conflict there is exhaustion, slower assistance and more ethnicized assistance.

Post-disaster in South Asia, even as the opportunity for peacemaking was lost, all sides were seen as capitalizing on the disaster for their benefit, creating new conflict or deepening existing conflict. This happened in two ways. The first was the communalization of the relief efforts. The second was that militant groups may have seized the opportunity that states let slip. Anitha S. said that even in Kerala, where society is supposed to be progressive, discrimination against the Dalits and members of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes existed. Communal forces engaged in relief work differentiated between Christians, Muslims and Hindus. Uma Vangal had also observed communal polarization after the tsunami in Tamil Nadu. (Ramona Miranda had also said in a previous session that as foreign contributions came in, they came with specifications as to which community should benefit from them.) Anitha S. used the term 'congealed violence' to describe developments in Kerala and the Maldives. Shruti Bhatnagar and Dilip D'Souza both asked whether militant groups had been more active after the disasters. Participants from Kashmir and Sri Lanka thought this might be the case but were unable to say for sure. Arjimand said that post-quake efforts have been used by radical groups in their rhetoric. Ramona Miranda said that the tsunami relief work of the Janata Vimukti Peramuna helped them make political and electoral gains. She came back to a point that Meghna Guhathakurta had previously made—that leftist parties fear an erosion of their support base by NGOs.

The trust deficit issue drew some comments. Swarna Vepa said that while in Sri Lanka and Kashmir, the conflict situation had strengthened mutual mistrust, in Ladakh, heavy military recruitment left few locals trained in medicine and engineering and that led to resentment and mistrust.

The question of accepting foreign assistance and opening access to international and local NGOs was also discussed. R.S. Vasan argued that both post-tsunami and earthquake, the main reason that India turned away outside assistance was to protect

strategic military positions in the Andaman and Nicobar islands and in Kashmir. Dilip D'Souza challenged such a notion of self-sufficiency and was joined by others who criticized the precedence given to military security over human security. In the Maldives, the tsunami revealed the government's lack of resources in spite of the country's economic growth. This in itself, drew international attention to the state of affairs within and funding came to be tied to some political measures. Like Aceh, international attention may be said to have had a salutary effect in the Maldives.

Finally, there was a brief discussion on whether trauma counselling was available, whether it was gender sensitive and whether it was different for disaster and conflict contexts. Manjri Sewak raised the question, and Mirak Raheem said conflict trauma counselling had been incorporated into the post-disaster counselling. Arjmand felt that the contours of disasters and conflicts are different. Describing the Kashmiri environment now as "highly charged" and lacking in entertainment or social support, he cited an Action Aid survey that found that 85% of Kashmiris now suffer some mental illness. When all are victims of trauma, he said, it is hard for them to rise above it to help others. He also mentioned that in all these years of conflict, there were hardly any orphanages that had come up. Sumona Dasgupta described WISCOMP's Athwas initiative—a community-based approach to conflict transformation that moved away from the medicalized western discourse on post-traumatic stress disorder to a contextualized understanding of how many kinds of experience and fears are fused in conflict zones.

## **Session VI**

### **DISASTER DIPLOMACY**

C. Raja Mohan began by saying that when disasters represent a discontinuity of process which forces or should force warring parties to rethink political assumptions. This moment for reflection brings international and media attention. The altered balance of power does not alter the logic of the conflict, and this creates an opportunity for political intervention. After the Kashmir earthquake, it was assumed that the positive momentum of the peace process would further catalyse such a rethinking by India and Pakistan. However, this did not happen. Raja Mohan recounts that Pakistan spent the first few days after the earthquake strengthening border security and was hesitant to accept help from India. States hesitate to take steps that can weaken their negotiating positions. The achievement in Kashmir has been to avoid the weakening of the peace process. Raja Mohan asked: given two civil conflicts, Sri Lanka and Aceh, you have two different outcomes after a disaster; what are the factors that produce positive and negative outcomes? His presentation also mentioned a change in Indian policy post-tsunami when Indian ships were sent beyond the subcontinent with aid, and India agreed to work with other countries outside the UN framework to coordinate tsunami assistance.

Military barriers do not matter in a crisis, in Ashok Aima's view. The government has understood the need to productively engage the society and to have resources in place in case a disaster like the Kashmir earthquake happens again. This calls for an integrated approach and cooperation between India and Pakistan. State-NGO dialogue was also necessary to build inventories of resources available in such situations to create a better synergy of relief and reconstruction efforts. NGOs should help train networks of local youth to respond to disaster situations.

As Raheem put it, during disasters, windows of opportunity open violently but also shut the same way. Three days after the tsunami, three weeks of face-to-face negotiations without intermediaries began towards creating a mechanism for distributing disaster relief. In the process of creating a post-tsunami mechanism, the Sri Lankan government tried to engage the international community, but not the public for whom the mechanism was being created. In the Sri Lankan case, donor conditionalities became irrelevant as there was enough money available without them.

The sessions on conflict resolution and disaster diplomacy complemented each other, with the discussion in one continuing into the next. The brief discussion that followed this session brought the previous one to closure, identifying a few key concerns relating to disaster diplomacy.

Meghna Guhathakurta suggested that cooperation in tertiary and secondary sectors (such as the reconstruction of infrastructure) would serve better than summit diplomacy in times of disasters. The involvement of the national and foreign military in relief operations or the declaration of a national emergency may militarize the situation and result in regime destabilization, and here she reverted to her opening example of East Pakistan in 1970-71. Arjimand cautioned that disaster assistance should not be diverted to paying for relief operations, such as helicopter services in the case of the Kashmir earthquake. Raja Mohan said that in the face of a difficult relationship, offers of help should be made that do not make the other side look weak. Limited offers based on reciprocal understandings were more likely to be accepted and therefore to further cooperation. In closing, he raised questions about the possibility of suspending politics in such situations, and said we need to go beyond platitudes to find solutions to real problems like helping families that are divided by a border to reconnect.

## III

### THE WAY AHEAD

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Discussions at the Forum generated a list of ideas for follow-up action. In addition, participants also committed informally to making specific contributions based on their specialization and location.

#### **I Taking the Forum forward**

- A Preparation and dissemination of the Forum report, using old and new media;
- B Organizing similar programmes at the community level in order to share experiential learning and analytical perspectives;
- C Documentation of discussions at these programmes.

#### **II Learning from disasters**

- A Creating a consolidated picture of what has happened, how and what the follow-up is and compiling lessons learned;
- B Multipronged analysis of what happened including a socio-economic, ecological and political audit and livelihood and vulnerability mapping through the creation of process documents;
- C Learning from mistakes made: Compilation of best and worst practices.

#### **III Rethinking NGO strategies**

- A Developing an institutional approach that will work to transform and optimally use existing institutions;
- B Sensitivity training for fieldworkers on special needs groups like children;
- C Drawing up contingency plans in consultation also with the army, etc.;
- D Engaging particularly constituencies like holding a Children's Parliament to find out children's perceptions of their needs;
- E Building strengths of local communities to deal with disasters.

#### **IV Network-building:**

- A Sharing field experiences across contexts;
- B Alliance-building between NGOs and others "with helicopter view" on the one hand and local communities on the other hand;
- C Devising means for coordination of efforts between different organizations have different mandates, recognizing and learning, need to flag coordination with state and with each other;

- D Activity analysis to prevent duplication of efforts;
- E Building a database listing area, activity and agency to synergize efforts.

**V Public education about disasters**

- A Promotion of the concept of human security as a counterpoint to a state-centric view of security;
- B Compilation of information about existing laws, resources and programmes relevant to post-disaster relief and reconstruction;
- C Making information widely available about what to do in a disaster situation, what to send to a disaster-hit area and how to choose between NGO recipients;
- D Creating a workshop module for disaster preparation with area-specific, context-sensitive training manuals;
- E Media articles and other documentation on missed opportunities and promises that were not kept to victims of disasters.

**VI Political mainstreaming of disaster-preparedness issues**

- A Using 'Right to Information' and similar transparency and anti-corruption laws to follow up on post-disaster promises;
- B Dialogues with government officials and with political party representatives to create awareness of disaster-related concerns;
- C Setting the agenda of a regional political debate on disaster prevention and mitigation.

**VII Policy advocacy:**

- A Lobbying governments to be more proactive about disaster prevention;
- B Have a clear operational frame at the national level;
- C Joint monitoring centres for early warning on disasters;
- D Creating legal structures that facilitate the construction of more equitable conditions after disaster than prevailed before;
- E Lobbying for enforcing existing zonal regulations;
- F Child rights issues (including adoption policy and procedures).

**VIII Areas for further research**

- A Operationalizing 'human security' in the South Asian context;
- B Integrating disaster mitigation and development, especially the problems of small countries.