UNIT 18 COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND AWARENESS

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18.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading the Unit, you should be able to:

- explain the concept and importance of community participation and community awareness in the context of a disaster;
- describe ways and means of creating community awareness; and
- discuss the techniques for effective community participation in disaster management.

18.1 INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, the term community participation is being used in all development processes in the country. Donors like World Bank, Asian Development Bank, UN Agencies as well as NGOs are increasingly demanding that the development programmes should have involvement/participation of recipient communities. This holds true for programmes related to disaster management as well. For effective participation by communities, proper awareness is a prerequisite. This Unit deals with the important aspects of community participation and awareness in the context of disaster management.

18.2 COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION IN DISASTER SITUATION

Community Awareness and Participation

Community Awareness: There will be more effective participation if the community is aware about its vulnerability and the risk involved in various types of disasters in that area or State. Awareness is one of the most important aspects of disaster preparedness. People can be made aware by formal and informal methods for different aspects of disasters. Government, NGOs, Media, Technical Institutions, etc., can create the desired awareness in the area of disaster mitigation and preparedness. An alert community will take active part in any disaster reduction/mitigation programme and will provide more inputs in terms of local knowledge and available resources. They will be ready to accept all initiatives taken by Government, NGOs, or other external agencies and participate in the programme in case they are also involved in decision making at all stages of the project.
Community Participation: There may be many definitions of community participation, but three concepts are commonly used in most of the development programmes. These are:

1) **Participation as Community Contribution**: Most of the time, this type of participation is found in development programmes. Communities provide free or partly free labour and other resources to the programmes ("Shramdaan" or "dhandaan") but no part in planning and decision making. Even if they are consulted through participatory approach or direct discussion, their suggestion are either not incorporated in the final programme or are modified according to the ideas of local administration or donor agency. In most of the reconstruction and rehabilitation projects, this approach is being followed very often. It is noted that this type of community participation is perceived by local people as cheap or free labour option by the project authorities.

2) **Participation as by the project Authorities**: This type of participation is to build up community leadership and organization. This could include formation of local committees, Task forces, Youth clubs, small cooperatives or associations to work in disaster preparedness, mitigation and relief. In India, Panchayats may be considered as effective community organizations. The Panchayats are having elected members of all sections of the society. There is representation of women, and weaker section of the society which are highly vulnerable to any type of disaster.

3) **Participation as Community Decision Making**: In this type of community participation, community takes decision at all stages, from project formulation, funding to implementation. Technical staff and funding agencies are assigned only advisory or regulatory roles. This form of participation is a means of empowering local people to make their own decisions concerning their disaster preparedness, mitigation or relief and rehabilitation programmes. In other words, it is handling over control of programmes to the beneficiaries, which external agencies adopting a supporting as compared to a controlling role.

In disaster management, community participation has more significance as all the programmes, short term or long term are for the benefit of the community. Therefore, there is a need for continuous interaction between community, local administration and other agencies involved from the initiation of the programme/project up to its implementation and monitoring. This interaction can be visualized as shown in Figure 1.

![Figure 1: Interaction of Community with Various Organizations Involved in Disaster Management](image-url)
The three forms of community participation listed above cannot be entirely exclusive. In most of the programmes, it is a mixture of all three forms. While community participation in decision making may be the underlying principle on which a programme is based, it is likely that community will contribute labour and resources, and further, that some form of community organization will be established, or existing organization strengthened.

**Importance and Need of Community Participation**

A disaster management project is likely to fail if the goals and methods did not fit the needs and capacities of the intended beneficiaries. There is a need for radical changes in the attitude of programme implementation authorities as well as funding agencies. Recently, World Bank and other donor agencies have moved towards procedures which allow target communities to be involved in programme planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation in many human settlements projects and disaster management programmes. This concept is shown in Figure 2.

![Figure 2: Community Participation Concept in Disaster Management](image)

There are many practical benefits or advantages in having community participation in disaster reduction or rehabilitation programme. The more important benefits are discussed below:

1) **Cost Reduction**

If Community is involved in planning, implementation and monitoring, cost of project is reduced considerably. Otherwise, a big sum will have to go to outside agencies.

2) **Efficiency**

As project is of direct benefit to the community, participation of local people allows for more efficient use of programme resources.

3) **No Misunderstanding with Administration**

If people are working with administration, there is understanding and transparency and therefore less problems due to misunderstandings between implementation agencies (Government or Non-Government Organizations) and the community.

4) **Socio-Cultural Acceptability**

The community involvement will solve one of the important problems of most of the projects, i.e., socio-cultural Acceptability of these projects by the local people, as the implementation agency is from outside and not having knowledge of local social structure, culture, tradition and economy of the area.
5) **Self-reliance and Self-dependence**

Community participation provides people with the opportunity to take control over their own lives and feel self-reliant. Otherwise, for even small mitigation measures, community will be dependent on outside agencies or on Government.

6) **Coverage**

More people will be benefited by the project, if there is community participation.

7) **Sustainability**

In community participation, people have a sense of involvement and ownership in the programme. The project will sustain for long as community will do the follow-up, maintenance, and make all efforts for its sustainance.

**Check Your Progress 1**

**Note:**

i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit

1) List the usual types of community participation.

2) Write down five most important advantages of community participation.

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**18.3 ENSURING COMMUNITY AWARENESS**

**Importance of Community Awareness**

The main aim of community awareness programmes is to make the community more informed, alert, self-reliant, and capable of participating in all activities and programmes of disaster management in close collaboration with government and non-governmental organisations. The awareness will not only promote community participation but also enable them to understand the following:

1) What can be the impact of a particular disaster and what an individual, a family or community can do to reduce its impact and save life and property.

2) Government's plan for disaster reduction and available assistance in time of disasters.
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3) Government's limitations of resources and responsibilities.
4) Need to cooperate with government to overcome the crisis and recover the community as it is in their own interest.
5) Implementation of self-preparedness measures whenever required.
6) What community can do till any external help is available?

Type of Awareness required

The community should be provided all necessary information available with administration. The flow of information should continue even in the normal non-disaster periods. People should know that the community and government have common goals and are interdependent in coping with disasters. They must work together at every step to overcome the problems which arise and to restore things to normal.

Community should be aware of the relevant details of the disaster management systems such as the following:

i) Designated shelters at the time of disaster. It may be school building or other safe place, where people can immediately reach in disaster situation.

ii) Rescue operation, evacuation procedure, the shelters.

iii) Special warning signals, if any.

iv) Role of community in providing relief and rehabilitation programmes.

v) Role of community in proper storage and distribution of relief supplies.

vi) Providing correct information to the authorities such as actual needs and priorities of the affected community.

vii) Providing correct information to the media.

viii) Checking rumours.

ix) Help most vulnerable section of the community (old or disabled people, women and children).

x) Provide information on past experiences.

Methods to Create Public Awareness

There are various means for creating public awareness. Some important methods are listed below:

1) Use of media and press
2) Short films/Folk songs
3) Posters/cartoons/charts/photographs/exhibitions
4) Organising training camps
5) Short street plays in fairs/religious functions/other celebrations and occasions of public gathering
6) Through schools/colleges
7) Special lectures by community leaders or well known persons of the area
8) Group discussions among Mahila Mandals, Youth Clubs, Senior Citizens

Community awareness is the key to community participation. Well informed and well aware people will have more role-clarity in disaster reduction and
preparedness programmes. They will be able to contribute their best if they know the issues involved as well as various participants in the past disaster management instances and their own expected roles in the process. They will become more self-reliant in the long-run and less dependent on the government or any other external agency. The most important benefit of the community awareness is that they will be able to judge their strength and the weakness and to identify the areas in which they really need outside assistance.

18.4 TECHNIQUES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Techniques of Community Participation tried by CASA

A good example of community participation was initiated by CASA (Church’s Auxiliary for Social Action) after the 1977 cyclone in Andhra Pradesh, by creating awareness among the rural communities and building up a network of community based peoples’ representative institutions in the project area. These bodies are operational, effective and visible in the villages. CASA organised the following in the affected villages:

1) Village Development Associations
2) Disaster Task Forces
3) Youth Groups

There is a positive impact of these village level organisations as people are able to take decisions on their own. This has created confidence, a feeling of dignity, pride and self-reliance among the local people. The idea of disaster task forces at the community level has proved to be a good technique and is described below.

Disaster Task Force (DTF)

Local men and women constitute a disaster task force after a series of discussions, which can work not only for disaster preparedness but in arranging emergency evacuation and relief within a village. Identification of the members of DTF is done by local people themselves. They are documenting all proceedings of meetings and selecting their own office bearers. They allocate responsibilities to the members and mobilise resources for emergencies.

The major responsibilities of members of DTF are:

1) Monitoring advance cyclone warnings on radio, television and telephone and inform local people verbally or thorough loud speakers.
2) Alert relief helicopters with red flags in marooned villages.
3) Collection of essential commodities like food, medicine, firewood, drinking water, etc., and stockpiling them.
4) Managing emergency kitchens.
5) Liaison with state government & NGOs, for post-disaster support and rehabilitation.

Extending the concept, a few villages of District Machilipatnam mobilised varying amounts in cash from local households and established a Disaster Relief Fund. This fund is mobilised, monitored and managed by the local disaster task force. For example, in Lankapalli village, profits from the annual auction of a
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A fresh water fish tank totalling Rs. 1500/- was deposited in the fund, by DTF members. In other villages, a contribution ranging from Rs. 10 to Rs. 50 per household per year was collected and used for purchase of materials and food not available in case of emergencies.

CASA also organised training programme for the members of DTFs and community leaders. Such common programmes created inter-village networking which helped considerably in the dissemination of ideas regarding disaster preparedness through common meetings of neighbouring villages. Consequently, there exist DTFs in neighbouring villages as well laying a strong foundation for disaster preparedness promotion and related activities on a wider scale.

Community Participation in Specific Hazard Mitigation

Apart from role of community in post-disaster activities, they can play major role in pre-disaster activities such as disaster mitigation and preparedness. A few examples of community participation in specific disasters are given below:

1) Floods
   i) Awareness of flood plains and construction of flood resistant houses by using water resistant material and strong foundations.
   ii) Clearance of sediments.
   iii) Construction of dykes and embankments.
   iv) Afforestation in catchment areas.
   v) Evacuation operations.
   vi) Appropriate agricultural practices in flood plains.

2) Landslides
   i) Identification of active landslide spots.
   ii) Avoid commercial and residential constructions in hazard prone areas.
   iii) Making strong foundations of structures.
   iv) Contribution in slope stabilization through terracing and forestry.
   v) Compaction of ground locally.
   vi) Making rockfall barriers.

3) Drought
   i) Watershed management, construction of check dams, reservoirs, ponds, water tanks, wells to utilize every drop of water.
   ii) Afforestation and catchment area treatment.
   iii) Changing cropping patterns.
   iv) Live-Stock (Cattle) Management.
   v) Encouragement to non-agricultural vocations and small industries.

4) Cyclones
   i) Construction of wind resistant houses (which can be rebuilt easily).
   ii) Avoid loose material such as metal/aluminium sheets, which can blow away and cause damage or injury elsewhere.
iii) Construction of multi-purpose cyclone shelter.
iv) Deploy battery operated communication systems, use of transistor radios.

5) **Earthquakes**

i) Construction of earthquake resistant buildings in highly seismic areas following the building codes.

ii) People in vulnerable areas should be provided with knowledge of first-aid and fire-fighting.

iii) Retrofitting of weak buildings.

iv) Storage of fire extinguishers, excavation tools at some known places.

v) Training of masons in the highly seismic areas, so that they can construct safer buildings.

**Check Your Progress 2**

**Note:**

i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit

1) List out four important methods for creating public awareness.

2) Write down five points highlighting the role of community in mitigating floods.

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**18.5 LET US SUM UP**

In disaster management, there is need of active community participation and awareness. Only Government efforts or NGOs help is not sufficient to reduce disaster impacts or mitigation and preparedness. Awareness is needed at all levels of the society. It can be created through media and press, exhibitions, training camps, schools, colleges, ad community discussions.

Community participation is needed as it is more cost-effective, efficient and provides self-reliance and confidence to the vulnerable community.

Community participation in specific disasters like floods, landslides, will be different. So community should be aware about the disaster possibility and risks involved and act accordingly for mitigation and preparedness.
The main aim of community awareness and participation is to have well informed, self-reliant, confident and well-prepared community which can independently take decisions, and use local knowledge and resources in disaster situations. The community participation also includes community’s cooperation with Government, non-governmental organizations or external funding agencies at every step of disaster mitigation, preparedness and recovery. When community is working with Government or NGOs or external agency, there is total transparency and no room for misunderstanding.

### 18.6 KEY WORDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exclusive</td>
<td>Separate from each other</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Government Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior Citizens</td>
<td>Elderly persons (generally beyond the age of 65 years)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>Maintainability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Target Community</td>
<td>Community aimed at</td>
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### 18.7 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

- Kumar, Jayant (1995), ‘Community Based Disaster Management - A Case Study From Coastal Andhra Pradesh’ (Mimeograph).

### 18.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

**Check Your Progress 1**

1) Your answer should include the following points:
   - Participation as community contribution.
   - Participation as by the project Authorities
   - Participation as community decision making.

2) Your answer should include any five of the following:
   - Cost Reduction; Efficiency; Self-reliance; Socio-Cultural Acceptability; Sustainability; Wide coverage and good understanding with the administration.

**Check Your Progress 2**

1) Your answer should include the following points:
   - Use of media and press; Short Films; Organising Training camps; Posters/Cartoons, Group Discussions.

2) Your answer should include the following points:
   - Awareness of flood plains, Clearance of sediments, Construction of embankments Afforestation in catchment areas; Evacuation operations.