UNIT 25 INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES

Structure

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25.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit you will be able to:

• discuss the role of International Agencies in Disaster Mitigation;
• describe the important International Agencies in Disaster Mitigation;
• explain the mechanism of financial assistance by international bodies; and
• understand Government’s Policy for international assistance

25.1 INTRODUCTION

"Red Cross" is the first organized trans-national or international effort to provide relief to those affected by war—a manmade disaster. With the experience gained in attending to the Austrian and French victims of the Battle of Solferino in 1859, J.H.Dunant, a Swiss Philanthropist and Humanitarian, founded the International Committee of Red Cross in 1863 in Geneva when delegates from 14 countries adopted the Geneva Convention. Dunant received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1901 and the International Committee of Red Cross was honoured thrice with the Nobel Peace Prize (1917, 1944 and 1963). It shared the 1963 Nobel with the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies", also headquartered in Geneva. Both the organisations complement each other. While the International Committee deals mainly with war like situations, the League provides relief after natural and manmade disasters and helps the development of national Red Cross Societies.

This background of international assistance since the 19th century has provided a great deal of experience and precedent on which other disaster assistance programmes developed. Thus today, there is a reasonably clear understanding, by both donors and recipients, of what is involved in disaster assistance generally. Also, the increasing interdependence of nations tends to give disaster assistance a respectable image and makes it an acceptable part of international relations. It is agreed that all disaster assistance programmes have their difficulties. However, the fact remains that the overall concept of international disaster assistance is currently recognised by most nations as being valid, practicable and productive.
Disaster Management:
Role of Various Agencies

25.2 INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES INCLUDING
UNITED NATIONS: ROLE AND IMPORTANCE
IN DISASTER MITIGATION

The increasing population and infrastructural growth worldwide has resulted in
worsening the effects of disastrous events (natural and manmade). The fast
development of communications and the visual impact of television images has
upgraded the awareness and sensitivity worldwide irrespective of the location
where the disaster occurred. The world witnessed a few terrible disasters which
took unprecedented toll of life and property and their effects are still being felt
decades after their occurrence. The Bangladesh Cyclone (1970), the Bhopal Gas
Leak (1984) and the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant Disaster (1986) made the
United Nations (UN) to take cognizance of the situation leading to the 1989
Resolution of the UN General Assembly that set forth an international
framework of action at national and international levels and also provided an
international structure with scientific, technical and financial support. The most
important follow up was the launching of the International Decade for Natural
Disaster Reduction (1990-2000) which is better known by its initials IDNDR. A
mid-way review of IDNDR was taken by the UN Conference on Natural Disaster
Reduction at Yokohoma (Japan) in 1994 when the Yokohoma Strategy was
adopted.

In line with the thinking within the UN, major international funding agencies
increasingly recognise the benefits of funding disaster related projects.

However, a critical fact to be recognised here is that it must be the prerogative of
a stricken or potential recipient country to decide whether or not it needs
international disaster assistance.

International agencies provide assistance at various stages as follows:

1) Pre-Disaster Assistance

Pre-disaster assistance from international sources takes on a variety of forms.

(i) Assistance in prevention/mitigation

a) Assistance in building a system of dams, aimed to prevent flooding.

b) Development of monitoring and warning systems.

(ii) Assistance in Preparedness

a) Provision of assistance in the formulation of plans at national and
regional levels;

b) Provision of assistance in establishing and developing disaster
management structures or key points; for instance, the establishment
of a national disaster management centre, office or section.

c) Provision of systems and facilities in the form of warning systems,
communication systems, emergency operations centres; emergency
broadcasting systems;

d) Stockpiling of emergency items, such as generators, chain saws,
shovels, water purification plank, cooking equipment, shelter
materials, medical equipment.
2) Assistance in Response Operations

As with pre-disaster circumstances, assistance in response operations can also take various forms, like;

a) Monitoring and warning of potential disaster impact.

b) Post impact survey for instance, aerial photographic or visual reconnaissance.

c) Provision of emergency assistance teams; for instance medical teams, other specialist teams.

d) Provision of emergency equipment and supplies; for instance communications, power generator, clothing, shelter materials, food transport and medical supplies.

e) Provision of specialist personnel; for instance, to install and operate water purification plant.

f) Temporary provision of major response capabilities for instance, helicopter capability for various emergency roles (including survey and assessment and food distribution, shipping capability for movement of heavy/bulky supplies, offroad vehicle capability.

3) Assistance in Recovery Programmes

The post-disaster recovery process usually consists of a series of distinct but inter-related programmes, for instance, covering infrastructure, medical and health system, education facilities, and so on. International assistance may therefore be directed towards a specific recovery programme, or comprise some form of contribution to overall recovery. Therefore, they may take the form of:

a) Financial grants or credits

b) Building Materials

c) Technical Equipment

d) Agriculture rehabilitation

e) Extended feeding programmes

f) Specialists or specialist teams

g) Food for work

4) Assistance in Future Development

In many cases, international assistance in post-disaster recovery may develop or merge into long-term development programmes, for instance, development of transport systems, building of dams and embankments.

Pre-disaster assistance and assistance in future development tend to be of a routine nature and can be processed in a routine manner. Assistance in response operations and recovery programmes usually has a high degree of urgency, which necessitates quick processing.

In some circumstances, problems can arise locally. For example, the affected community may become totally or over-dependent on aid. In such a case, original and traditional customs of combating disaster have been eroded. In these circumstances self-coping mechanisms of rehabilitation have to be strengthened.
Rapid injection of aid especially food items can upset a local economy. This particularly applies when local markets and rural production are interdependent. Such a situation adds considerably to the problem in immediate post-impact conditions.

Over supply of aid is another well known problem area which can particularly apply to severe and widely publicised disasters. The Maharashtra Earthquake (1993), the Andhra Cyclone (1996) and the Gujarat earthquake (2001) are good examples of over supply of aid by international agencies. It may result in aid of unsuitable varieties being showered on a stricken people with little or no regard for its usability or the amount of aid already received.

The work of international agencies depends very significantly on the understanding between the agencies and recipient nations. Most of the major problems in international assistance can be avoided if a few basic factors are recognised. Assistance agencies need to exercise a sensitive approach and practice.

When assistance is needed, the recipient nation is usually in some form of post-impact shock. In such a situation, the recipient may have difficulty in identifying assistance needs.

The desirable concept is one of a mutual relationship throughout the whole process of preparedness, response and recovery. In this way, when assistance needs to be applied, it is merely one phase of an ongoing dialogue, rather than a sudden shock response to an already traumatised recipient country.

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) Describe different stages at which International Agencies provide assistance for disaster mitigation.

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2) Mention any four forms of assistance in recovery programmes provided by International Agencies.

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25.3 IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES IN DISASTER MITIGATION

There are four major categories of International agencies active in disaster mitigation.

Category I: Core Agencies of the U.N.

Department of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-DHA), Office of Disaster Relief Coordinator, Geneva. The agency assists in disaster assessments and relief management. It also advises on hazard risk assessment, mitigation planning and implementation. It provided the secretariat for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) and now houses the secretariat for its successor programme viz., the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR).

FAO-Food and Agriculture Organisation

It offers technical advice on the reduction of vulnerability and monitors and advises in food production. It is headquartered in Rome.

United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS), Nairobi

It advises on settlement planning that will reduce risk and on post-disaster reconstruction.

UNDP:

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with headquarters in New York incorporates disaster mitigation in developmental planning and also provides financial aid for technical assistance for disaster management. It offers administrative support to resident coordinator and advises on flood loss prevention, mitigation and management through agencies such as UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP, Bangkok). UNDP has sanctioned the project to the Ministry of Agriculture (Govt. of India) on "Strengthening Disaster Management capacity" for the country.

UNESCO:

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in Paris funds research in disaster mitigation and strengthening of heritage structures against flood and earthquake damage. It is supportive of flood management programmes and runs a publications programme.

Category II: United Nations Agencies with Support Roles in Disaster Mitigation

The United Nations Centre for Regional Development provides training and research in regional development and planning and related fields, for developing countries. Its projects focus primarily on research and training, but include advisory services and information dissemination components. Its operational units include the Regional Disaster Prevention Unit (RDPU).

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) perceives and includes disaster mitigation in its environmental programming. It has a working relationship with the UN Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) (Habitat) and has its own publications programme.
The UNICEF (United Nations Children's Emergency Fund) attends to the well-being of women and children including that at the time of disaster. It collaborates with the World Health Organization (WHO) and World Food Programme (WFP) in social programmes, including improvement of water supply, sanitation and health. Besides running its own publications programmes, it is now entering into disaster preparedness, planning and mitigation work in alliance with other agencies.

The UNIENET or United Nations International Emergency Network through a network of computers, places members of the world-wide disaster management community in direct communication with each other and provides them instantaneously with both background and operational disaster related information.

The UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) assists refugees through camps, financial grants and other assistance.

The WFP or World Food Programme provides targeted food aid, sometimes linked to 'food for work' programme for construction of flood protection structures and coordinates pre and post disaster emergency food aid. It also runs its own publications programme.

The WHO or World Health Organisation provides assistance in post-disaster rapid response. It promotes ‘health cities’ programmes and is supportive of disaster mitigation measures. It also has its own publications programme.

The WMO or World Meteorological Organisation provides technical guidance, training and coordination to the national weather services to upgrade their forecasting capabilities for the weather and climate related disasters.

Category III: Major International Agencies (outside the UN System)

The Asian Development Bank located in Manila finances projects in Asia and the Pacific. It is committed to ensuring disaster mitigation which is included in programming of its projects. It publishes mitigation handbooks. Publishing programme and advisory work is being done as part of technical assistance.

The Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre in Bangkok provides training and information services for countries in the Asia and the Pacific region to formulate policies and develop capabilities in all areas of disaster management.

The European Community Humanitarian Office is newly founded, but active in the development of disaster mitigation strategies. Its parent body, the Commission of European Communities organises funding of mitigation structures such as cyclone shelters in Bangladesh.

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) of USA promotes and disseminates results of research on the development of tenements and squatter settlements in urban area, social factors which cause or aggravate natural disasters and interventions that can limit their impact on the poorest sectors of society. It provides technical assistance to national and international agencies.

Organisation for Economics Cooperation & Development (OECD) of Europe has issued guidelines, through its Development Assistance Committee, to aid agencies on disaster mitigation.

The World Bank (IBRD-International Bank for Reconstruction and Development) offers loans for structural adjustment and projects. It plays a
catalytic role in the development of mitigation strategies. It funds large-scale flood control and water management projects, as well as running its publication programme. The Bank has recently funded the Maharashtra Earthquake rehabilitation programme in India by providing loan.

The International Federation of Red cross and Red crescent Societies (IFRS) assist programmes of the national Red-cross societies of various countries. In India, they assist and work with the Indian Red Cross Society. IFRS also publish a ‘World Disaster Report’ from its Geneva office.

Category IV: National Bodies Assisting Overseas

ODA - Overseas Development Administration (UK) operates a disaster response unit and undertakes advice and studies in disaster mitigation. It finances consultancy and construction work for post-disaster and pre-disaster preparedness. It also has its own publications programme.

OFDA - Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (USA) holds regional seminars on mitigation strategies. It also offers consultancy and issues publications.

NCDM/India - The National Centre for Disaster Management (NCDM) established by Government of India at the Indian Institute of Public Administration in New Delhi provides training, research and consultancy in different areas of disaster management in India and to countries in the South Asian region.

25.4 FINANCIAL AND LOGISTIC ASSISTANCE IN DISASTER SITUATIONS

Logistics have been described as the procurement and delivery of the right supplies in the right order in good condition at the right place at the right time. Obviously, logistics play a crucial role in disaster mitigation.

International assistance usually boosts the availability of much-needed relief commodities provided liaison between the stricken country and international donors has ensured the preclusion of unnecessary relief items.

If, however, good liaison is not maintained, inappropriate and often unusable items may be received. This can be a serious liability, since the in-country supply system may become choked and valuable local resources may have to be deployed to sort usable commodities from non-usable one. It is, therefore, normally the responsibility of potential recipients to ensure that inappropriate supplies (e.g. unacceptable foodstuffs or clothes) are made known to donors.

International relief input usually places additional demands on the in-country logistic system. This may be a crucial sector if major ports, airfields roads and railways have had their capacity reduced by disaster effects. Extra demands may also be placed on fuel and food stocks by visiting aircraft and various relief teams.

Therefore, it is clear that international assistance activities, whilst contributing many invaluable benefits also impose logistic complications. Any such complications need to the minimised through prior planning and preparedness arrangements.
In the interests of both the stricken country and the international assistance agency, it is important that no undue delays are imposed on international inputs by delays from customs or other formalities.

**International Financial aid in disaster situations is released via four main channels**

1) The United Nations contribute funds for disaster situations which are released on request from the stricken country. This assistance is channeled through the appropriate UN agency such as, UNHCR or UNWFP or UNICEF or UNDP.

2) Developed nations usually have some funds set aside for disaster situations in the under-developed world. The amount they release is determined by a variety of factors like the magnitude of the tragedy, the relations between the two countries, etc.

3) International bodies like the European Union have also been assisting the disaster-affected countries.

4) Countries may have bi-lateral agreements among themselves that may include the clause that if either country is stricken by a disaster, the other will help with the required form of assistance - monetary or otherwise.

Major disasters impose a tremendous strain on a country’s financial and other resources. In such a situation it is almost impossible for it to cope on its own without financial aid from international agencies. In such a scenario, when aid starts flowing from various quarters, it becomes very essential to keep track of the amounts coming in and to ensure that they are utilised in an appropriate manner.

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**25.5 INTERACTION AND COORDINATION WITH GOVERNMENTAL AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS; GOVERNMENT’S POLICY FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE**

All international agencies require clearance from the national government.

The international agencies operate at different levels. They usually have a branch head office in the national capital and some branches at state levels. The head office regulates the flow of funds; receives orders and instructions from the agency headquarters and passes them on to the branch offices. It also liaises with the national government and finalises operational details.

Non-Governmental Organisations usually work in close conjunction with the international agencies. The agencies normally work through NGOs. They finance the specific project and the NGOs do the ground work. This way, the country gets the financial aid of the international agency and the agency, in working through local organisation(s), gets a true picture of the events and is able to utilise its resources more effectively.

Alternatively, the agencies might fund and carry out a programme on its own after first getting clearance from the governmental. Sometimes, these agencies simply fund the government programmes in part or as a whole.
The policy of Government of India with regard to external assistance for relief in the wake of disasters is not to issue a formal appeal, either directly or through any national or international agency, to request relief assistance from abroad. However, any assistance donated on a voluntary basis is accepted and acknowledged as a token of international solidarity. If the assistance is in cash, it is to be sent to the Prime Minister’s National Relief Fund. If it is in kind, it should preferably be routed through the Indian National Red Cross.

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 the core agencies of the U.N. working for disasters mitigation.

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2) IBRD stands for:
   a) International Bank for Rural Development  
   b) International Bureau for Reconstruction and Development  
   c) International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.  
   d) International Bank for Reconstruction Development.

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3) Mention the salient features of Government’s Policy for international assistance in the event of disaster.

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25.6 LET US SUM UP

When a major disaster strikes, it becomes very difficult for the country to manage the rescue and relief work and consequent rehabilitation on its own. In such a situation, the assistance of international agencies is required, particularly in developing countries. With the increasing recognition of the importance of disaster related matters, more and more agencies are now providing aid in this field. There are four major types of international agencies active in disaster management. They interact with the national and state/governments and get an idea of the amount of money and type of material that are required immediately. Many of the international agencies work in close conjunction with the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

25.7 KEY WORDS

Self-coping : To be able to manage by itself
Infrastructural : Collective term for fixed installations including roads, communications, bridges, etc.
Reconnaissance : Process of surveying or inspection or gathering information
Transnational : Across nations
Traumatised : Upset, shocked

25.8 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS


The Institution of Civil Engineers (1995), *Mega Cities; Reducing Vulnerability to Natural Disasters*, Thomas Telford, London.

25.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1) Your answer should include the following points:
   - Pre-disaster stage
   - Response Operations stage
   - Recovery Programmes stage
   - Future Development stage

2) Your answer should include the following points:
   - Financial grants or credits; Building Materials; Technical Equipment; Agriculture Rehabilitation, Food for Work.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Your answer should include following points:
   - UN-DHA, UN-FAO, UNESCO, UNDP
2) Your answer should include the following points:
   - International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

3) Your answer should include the following points:
   - Government of India's Policy is not to ask for external assistance
   - If aid comes voluntarily, it is accepted as token of international solidarity
   - Cash aid goes to PM's National Relief Fund and material aid should be routed through Indian Red Cross