

# The Kashmir Earthquake 2005-Lessons Learnt.

Dr. G.M. Dar,

Centre for Disaster Management, , J&K, IMPA, Srinagar 190001.

**Abstract:** *The recent Earthquake which hit both parts of Kashmir on Oct. 8<sup>th</sup> 2005, has unveiled many aspects of the picture. While on the one hand it has revealed that there are limitations viza-viz resources related to search and rescue, on the other it has also told upon our poor state of preparedness viz-a-viz Disaster Management. However, the presence of the Army and other paramilitary forces along the LoC and the affected areas of Uri and Tangdhar proved to be a blessing for the area as it was the security forces which could manage to reach the victims within 20 minutes of the event. Several gaps were found especially with regard to poor communication network, lack of adequate health and sanitation facilities and above all absence of any Disaster Management Plan. The strengths that were witnessed in the aftermath of the killer quake was the quick response of all the stake holders especially the Govt. Agencies and the Non-Governmental Organizations and other social service organizations. The relief material which poured in from every nook and corner of the country was an exemplary strength of the secular India. The adoption of most of the villages by the various agencies especially the NGOs revealed that, 'although economic resources have a boundary, human hearts don't have any'. The discussion paper aims at highlighting the roles played by various agencies especially the NGOs and the strengths and weaknesses experienced during the different stages of post-earthquake phase. The strengths can be taken forward and the weaknesses can be looked into, to turn them into strengths in future events. It may not be out of place to mention here that in certain areas where some NGOs have adopted the villages for Reconstruction, the people feel that they are part of their families. This is the greatest reward for any NGO.*

## Key Words

**Damage      Response      Rehabilitation      Shelter      Reconstruction**

## INTRODUCTION

Life gives us memories-both sweet and harsh, but some events leave behind them such imprints which are non-erasable. One of such events that will be remembered for centuries together is the massive Kashmir Earthquake of 8<sup>th</sup> October, 2005, which shook both parts of Kashmir killing around one lac people and injuring thousands of others and rendering lakhs homeless. The earthquake measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale epic entered near Muzafarabad (POK), occurred at 9.20 am (IST) with tremors and aftershocks which continued for months together. Every here and there, it was chaos, crises, hue and cry. Shouting, crying and weeping were the only scenes which one could encounter. The intensity as usual, was maximum near the epicenter which is indicated by the quantum of damage witnessed in the POKs capital Muzafarabad, where hardly any construction could be seen standing. As is said these natural disasters don't make any discrimination between age, caste colour, creed, sex and religions, as such any body who came in its way fell prey to it and many precious lives were lost. The communication was the first casualty as most of the effected area is hilly and as such establishing the communication links was the biggest challenge before the authorities. There were few areas where the search and Rescue teams could not manage to reach even after 5 days.

In parts of J&K the areas which are close to LOC including Poonch, Rajouri, Baramullah and Kupwara Districts, the response was undoubtedly far better. Not because we were comparatively well

prepared, but because the damages on this side of the state were comparatively much less as compared to the other side. Another important factor was the presence of Army in these areas who are always alert to face any eventuality. In addition the Administrative response and the role played by various organizations especially the NGO's was really commendable.

However, many lessons were learnt and on the basis of these lessons and experiences precautions can be taken to handle effectively, such situations in future. The same has been discussed in the following paras.

### ***AREAS EFFECTED***

In view of the fact that the killer Earthquake was epicentered at Muzaffarabad in Pakistan Administered Kashmir (PAK), the areas adjacent to the LOC were also effected badly. While as the districts of Baramulla and Kupwara in Kashmir Division were the worst hit, the Pooch district, in Jammu Division also witnessed extensive damages to property. The death toll in the district however was minimal as 10 deaths were reported from here. The three Tehsils of Uri and Baramulla in Baramulla district and Karnah in Kupwara were the worst hit where hundreds of deaths have been reported with thousands of others with major and minor injuries. Official figures reveal that **1300 deaths** were witnessed in Jammu and Kashmir. Accordingly **4500 people** were injured and left disabled and **32000 houses** damaged (the J&K Earthquake: Damage and Needs Assessment Report- September, 2006).

The three affected tehsils constitutes of **49827 house holds** with a population of 3,54,421 (Census of India, 2001) Uri and Karnah Tehsils as a whole are rural while as in Baramulla tehsil **64% people** live in rural areas. In Uri tehsil alone **569 persons** lost their lives in the Earthquake. As per the Damage Assessment Report published jointly by the University of Kashmir, TISS and Actionaid International (India) about **40.3%** of the total deaths were the children below the age of 10 years indicating the vulnerability of the children. It has been reported in the above report that **265 persons** from the three tehsils reported disability as a result of the earthquake. In terms of loss of life Kamalkote village in Uri tehsil witnessed the maximum damage with **84 deaths** followed by Gwalta **67** Bandi Sarai **53**, Sultan Dhaki **46**, Kundi Bajrala **39**, Nambla **34** and Dardkote **31**. The death toll in the Kashmir Division in the earthquake is given as under:

**NO. OF DEATHS (DISTRICT WISE) IN KASHMIR DIVISION**

<b>District</b>	<b>No. of Deaths</b>
Baramulla	673
Kupwara	274
Srinagar	2
Budgam	1
Pulwama	0
Anantnag	0
<b>Total Kashmir Division</b>	<b>950</b>

In addition there were some losses of life in the Army, the BSF and the CRPF as well. Similarly some people were also reported missing from all the affected areas especially Uri.

***IMMEDIATE RESPONSE***

In the aftermath of the devastating earthquake and the fast approaching winter, the difficult terrain, cut off roads, power supply, water supply and other communication links, shelter, food and clothing was the immediate necessity for the survivors.

However, as indicated above that most of the area falls near or on the LOC as such presence of Army there is inevitable. This proved to be the biggest blessing for the area especially at this crucial juncture where-in the army airlifted hundreds of the injured to the different hospitals. This was despite the fact that some of the army Jawans posted in forward positions also lost their lives in the earthquake (plate 1). The Administrative response was also quick and it was for the first time that the government machinery managed to reach quickly the far flung affected areas as never before.

## Plate 1



Not only the Army and the State government did reach out to the remotest corners for search and rescue, relief and aid but the role played by the different Non- Governmental Organisations (NGO's and other civil societies will be remembered for ever. The contributions made by the local charitable trusts, voluntary associations, the

National and the International NGO's in terms of provision of immediate relief in the shape of food, temporary shelter, other essentials, medical aid utensils etc, have been widely acknowledged by one and all. It is encouraging to note that some of these organizations have taken up projects not only for rehabilitation and reconstruction but even livelihood. In fact the presence of these NGO's has helped in real terms to the survivors and as such has supplemented the efforts of the government to a large extent.

In terms of compensation the government has already released the 2<sup>nd</sup> installment of Rs.6000/= per fully damaged house. As such the total amount received by a survivor for his fully damaged house is as under:

a)	Installment (for temporary shelter)	Rs.30,000.00		
b)	Incentive for a temporary shelter November, 30 <sup>th</sup> ,2005	Rs. 5,000.00	Completed by	
	Ist Installment for Reconstruction of the House	Rs.40,000.00		
	IInd Installment for Reconstruction of The House.(Released in Oct. 2006)	Rs.60,000.00		

As such the relief in terms of cash given for a fully damaged house amounts to Rs.1,35,000.00 which itself indicates that the government has tried its best to give the maximum possible relief to the victims of the earthquake. This has been possible only with the help of the Central government which stood all along with the people of the affected areas. This excludes the relief items given by the government in terms of tents, food items, utensils, medicines, ply sheets, CGI sheets blankets, other household items etc. In addition to this the Non-Governmental Organisations also systematically tried to distribute the relief material both in kind and cash among the affected people. The villages were adopted by the NGO's for relief and reconstruction. However, during the process many new things got revealed. The role played by all the three agencies viz the Army the Government and the NGO's and Civil Societies was undoubtedly exceptional but some limitations and short-comings were also witnessed in the process. These can be broadly categorized into two parts as under:

### ***STRENGTHS***

1. Presence of the Army in the two border districts of Baramulla and Kupwara proved to be a blessing for the affected people as the Army was the first to reach to these areas. The air sorties of the Air Force helped many people save their lives by timely evacuation and medical treatment (Plate 2).

**Plate 2**



2. The people from the lesser affected villages in these areas rushed to help in search and rescue without waiting for anybody's appeal for help. In addition, the turmoil in the state for the last 15 years has made the people habitual of giving and receiving help to each other at the time of crises.
3. The Administrative response also was very quick during this devastating earthquake. The Deputy Commissioner and the Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) of Baramulla alongwith other functionaries could manage to reach Uri at around 1.00 p.m. on the day of the disaster. Even the Divisional Commissioner's team of officers from Srinagar alongwith Civil Defence, Fire & Emergency Services personnel could manage to reach the affected areas in the afternoon on the same day.
4. The local NGOs, charitable trust, and civil societies without waiting for anything immediately rushed for search and rescue of the affected people. This undoubtedly supplemented the efforts of the government in handling this event. This was followed by heaps of relief material of immediate nature pouring in from all directions from every hook and corner of the country. Even some international NGOs also came with some relief material and provided succor to the people. The relief items included food packets, medicine, clothes, polysheets, ply board, CGI sheets, blankets, utensils and all other essential commodities.

In view of the ensuing harsh winter in a tough terrain the first priority before the people was that of temporary shelters and with the support of the NGOs/INGOs this herculean task was accomplished successfully. There has not been a single death reported from these areas for want of shelter during the winter. In fact the scheme of an incentive of Rs. 5000/= for any of household who would complete the construction of his temporary shelter by end of November 2005, proved to be a wonderful decision as almost 80% of the people had got their temporary shelters erected by the stipulated date.

5. Since the extent of damage was limited to the three tehsils viz Uri, Baramulla and Karnah (Tangdhar) as such the relief efforts were to be confined to these areas only. Otherwise if the extent of damage would have been on a large scale it would have been very difficult to cater to all the areas.
6. Village adoption by the different NGOs again helped the NGOs in concentrating their activities in the specified area. Otherwise, over-lapping of activities which at times becomes unavoidable, would have created lot of confusion.

7. The claims of the people for damage assessment and compensation were settled on spot. For settling of the claims and disputes about the compensation, the Hon'ble High Court of Jammu & Kashmir introduces the Lok Adalats wherein cases were settled and decided on spot in the affected areas itself.
8. Role played by the media was really commendable. Any place where no search or rescue and relief teams would reach, media would highlight the same and the next day everybody would try to reach out to these areas. In addition media through different channels would highlight the needs and problems and would suggest the remedial measures to wipe off the tears of the survivors. The role of local print media, the national and international level print and electronic media and of course the local stations of Doordarshan and Prasar Bharti (Radio Kashmir) really deserve an appreciation.
9. The infrastructure especially the school buildings, Anganwari Centres, Health Centres etc. were temporarily restored in pre-fab structure.

### **WEAKNESSES**

1. Poor preparedness with the people, the govt. as well as the Civil Societies. There was hardly any preparatory spade work done to deal with such a calamity. This would demand that the resources available at different places should have been identified to avoid any delay.
2. Lack of coordination among the various agencies both at the governmental level as well as the NGO level was witnessed every here and there. The functionaries of various agencies were blaming each other for any shortcomings whatsoever.
3. Overlapping of activities was also witnessed on a large scale. Ideally it would have been in the interest of the affected community that one organisation would venture in only one activity and specialize in that activity only. Otherwise it has been seen that everyone would venture in pre-fab shelters or medical aid without any know how etc.
4. There was total emphasis on relief by all the agencies and least on preparedness, prevention and planning. This created some confusion in the area as people were seen assembling the sheets both Ply & CGI even after the erection of shelters.
5. Lack of awareness about the dos and don'ts in case of a natural disaster was yet another lacunae in the area as whole. For example few people who would otherwise come out of a house during the shaking event went inside when they observed the trees shaking outside.

6. There has been no long term mitigation measures. This Earthquake should have been taken as an alarm for future since the whole area is seismically very sensitive. Nature had provided us with an opportunity to rethink and reconstruct our houses atleast earthquake resistant upto a particular limit. But unfortunately people have again constructed similar houses without taking into account any consideration for earthquake resistant structures. Although the govt. had appointed some engineers to supervise monitor and guide the constructions but practically it has hardly any impact on ground. Rarely a few people have constructed the new houses as per the recommended design by using the RCC beams and columns. This is partly attributed to the hilly terrain where the building material is very difficult to be carried, and partly to the unaffordable prices of the building material in this difficult terrain.

7. There was also absence of a uniform procedure for assessment of damages. A Revenue Officer would assist it as per his departmental procedure while as an engineer has his own measuring rod. This created some confusion. For example, few houses which were declared fully damaged by a Patwari ( the Revenue Official at the Panchayat level), was declared partially damaged by an engineer. To settle the claims, as indicated above the Hon'ble High Court came into picture in the shape of Lok Adalats and decided hundred of cases on spot.

8. The need for the Community Based Disaster Management (CBDM) was badly felt in these areas. Had the exercise been carried out in advance, had the roles been defined in advance many mis-happenings would have been averted.

9. The absence of a Resource Inventory was yet another weakness that was felt strongly. The facilities available with different departments/agencies if mapped earlier would have been utilized in a much better and efficient way. There would have been less confusion as to whether some of the injured to be shifted to Srinagar or the facility is already available at Baramulla or any other place. This would also ensure about the usage of resources available with the various NGOs as well, e.g. if the blood was not available in the govt. Blood Bank, the same could have been made available by some charitable blood bank like the Hussainee Blood Bank.

10. The identification of temporary shelters should have been made in advance. A place identified as a temporary shelter against floods may not necessarily be a temporary shelter against Earthquakes.

11. Lack of facilities for stock piling of relief material was yet another problem faced by one and all. In fact, the relief material that poured in from different parts of the country was to be dumped at Police Control Room Srinagar where from it was dispatched to the quake hit areas of Uri and Tangdhar. This caused delay and twice and thrice loading and unloading of the relief material. It would be ideal if at least one such facility is created at each district headquarter of the country to avoid delays in future.

12. Nature and quality of relief material also needs to be taken into account. For example, the clothes like (Dhoti) aren't used in Kashmir while as people had donated the same. This resulted simply in dumping of the clothes in open field (plate 3) wherein the non-locals were seen doing pick-n-choose.

**Plate 3**



## ***CONCLUSION***

There is no doubt in accepting the reality that the post-earthquake scenario in Kashmir was handled with lot of care, efficiency and responsibility. But many lessons have been learnt. In fact the concerned agencies should look into this aspect as an opportunity to build up our base for a disaster free society. The strengths need to be carried forward and the weaknesses need to be looked into so that these are taken as signals to be avoided.

There is a dire need to launch a massive awareness campaign and capacity building programmes both for the govt. as well as the NGO sector so that a force or team of efficient Disaster Managers is created. Further the resources at the state, national, regional and international level need to be pooled together. In addition the experiences learnt, the best practices and other inputs need to be shared mutually. The alternate communication systems need to be strengthened throughout the country since everything now-a-days depends upon how fast things are communicated. In addition all those who perform outstanding tasks in the wake of any disaster need to be rewarded/encouraged.

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