



Role of youth in disaster management

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Abstract

Catastrophes, whether caused by nature or by humans, threaten communities all over the world. Young people, because of their vigor and innovation, are key players in action in the wake of a disaster. Natural disasters pose a great threat to India. India has undergone a number of natural disasters during the last decade which have resulted in the loss of hundreds of thousands of precious lives as well as massive economic damages. Landslides and avalanche hazards are major threats to the hilly regions of India. Some of the root causes of these disasters could be unplanned development and scientific urbanization, indiscriminate deforestation, removal of forests, and population pressure. The consequences that follow disasters are dire, and it is understood that the after-effects can only be mitigated with an effective disaster management plan.

This research paper explores the contributions of young individuals in disaster management, accentuating their involvement in awareness campaigns, emergency response efforts, technological innovations, and the fortification of community resilience. By scrutinizing case studies and global initiatives, the paper contends that empowering youth in disaster management not only enhances societal preparedness but also cultivates sustainable recovery.

Keywords: Disaster management, youths, involvement, risk reduction

Introduction

Disaster means a catastrophe which seriously disrupts normal functioning of a community, causing widespread human, material, economic, or environmental losses that exceed the community's capacity to cope using its own resources.

Disasters disrupt lives, economies, and ecosystems. While the ramifications of disasters are universally felt, the capacity to respond and recover varies significantly across communities. Among the most dynamic and resourceful groups within any society are its youth. The tech-savvy, physically adept, and socially interconnected youth can play a pivotal role in all phases of disaster management. Yet, despite their immense potential, they are frequently overlooked in formal disaster risk reduction strategies. This paper examines the multifaceted contributions of youth to the various stages of disaster management and proposes strategies for more effectively integrating them into formal disaster risk reduction (DRR) frameworks.

The Government of India over the years formulated strategies to cope with, prevent and mitigate disasters because of the frequency of disasters affecting the country. These policies consist of long- and short-term prevention and preparedness measures and immediate response mechanisms. They also include appropriate administrative structures to manage disaster response, financial systems to fund and facilitate them, the mechanisms to ensure that policies and strategies are continuously reviewed and revised in the light of experiences within the country and in other parts of the world.

Globally, over 1.2 billion individuals fall within the age bracket of 15 to 24. In India alone, more than 65% of the population is under the age of 35. This demographic phenomenon, often referred to as the "youth bulge," presents a strategic advantage for community-based disaster management, provided their potential is harnessed through appropriate education, training, and engagement. Youth are invaluable assets and catalysts for change. By actively involving them in disaster management, societies can cultivate a culture of preparedness, resilience, and collective responsibility. Empowered youth today can spearhead the development of safer, more resilient communities tomorrow.

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) serves as the paramount organization entrusted with the formulation of policies, strategies, and guidelines to ensure effective disaster response and risk mitigation. NDMA devises comprehensive national policies and strategic frameworks aimed at preparedness and disaster risk reduction. It collaborates with various agencies, providing support for training and capacity-building initiatives. Furthermore, it is in the process of developing a curriculum on disaster management tailored for medical and social work students.

The insights gained by the National Disaster Management Authority from the Gujarat riots highlight a crucial lesson: during the turmoil, it was the youth who played a pivotal role in mediating and fostering reconciliation between the conflicting communities. This potential for youth engagement was also evident during natural

calamities, such as the tsunami, serving as a profound revelation for the NDMA. It is imperative that disaster management be integrated into the educational curricula of schools and universities.

Case Studies

Below are some case studies reflecting the impact and involvement of youth at different levels of disaster management worldwide, including in India, focusing on their roles in preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation.

Kedarnath Floods (2013)

One of the most catastrophic events was the 2013 Kedarnath Floods which resulted from heavy rainfall, glacial lake overflow, and other factors. This disaster led to more than 5,000 deaths along with widespread destruction of infrastructure and means of sustenance. Locally organized groups like the NSS, NCC, and youth from Dehradun and Rishikesh volunteered actively for rescue operations attending to stranded pilgrims and tourists, managing relief camps, and distributing essential supplies. Resource mobilization from across the country was done by local youth-based NGOs such as Goonj and Youth for Himalayas.

Nepal Earthquake (2015)

The earthquake in Nepal on April 25, 2015 with a magnitude of 7.8 was the deadliest natural disaster in the country's history as it claimed more than eight thousand lives. It injured thousands more people. In Nepal, many young volunteers came forth to assist in the greater humanitarian effort post the earthquake. They cleared debris, distributed food, and offered first aid. NGOs like We Inspire Nepal and Nepal Youth Foundation were supporting the ground level initiatives. Students also participated in constructing provisional shelters and camp management. The volunteer force was crucial in many areas, especially rural regions for information flow and communication where official assistance was stalled.

Kerala Floods (2018)

Kerala's floods which took place in 2018 remains one of the most devastating floods recorded in Indian history reshaping the socio-economic structure of the state resulting in the dislocation of over one million people. Many volunteers belonging to NSS and NCC were on the front-line managing shelters, aiding in rescue missions, controlling relief distribution, and managing shelter halls. Social media was buzzing with youth run campaigns that subsequently raised funds and helped locate missing persons. The efficient response and action facilitated by the state during the crisis was mainly due to the energized and fast-moving attitude of the youth.

COVID-19 Pandemic

Public life all around the world was heavily impacted as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, triggering a global health emergency. In India, voluntary organizations such as NSS, NYKS (Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan), and NCC were of immense benefits as they organized vaccination drives while educating people about hygiene and social distancing, helping manage quarantine centres.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are:

1. To understand the disaster management cycle
2. To examine the role of youth in disaster risk reduction
3. To highlight the challenges faced by youth in disaster management.
4. To suggest recommendations to combat the disasters with better efficacy.

Disaster Management Cycle

Disaster Management cycle encompasses a series of activities designed to mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from catastrophic events. It comprises:

1. Mitigation

It encompasses the mitigation of the detrimental impacts of disasters. This includes proactive measures undertaken prior to a disaster to diminish risk and enhance resilience.

2. Preparedness

It guarantees a state of readiness, strategic foresight, and exhaustive training to respond with effectiveness. It encompasses advanced warning systems, emergency simulations, evacuation protocols, and the meticulous accumulation of resources, among other measures.

Disasters happen anytime and anywhere; thus, we may not have much time to respond. An earthquake, flood, tornado, winter storm, highway spill or hazardous material or any other disaster could cut water, electricity, and telephones-for days, require evacuation or confine your family at home for days. After a disaster, local officials and relief workers cannot reach everyone immediately. So, we should be aware and prepared to cope with the emergency until help arrives.

3. Response

It provides expeditious assistance during and subsequent to a disaster to protect lives, alleviate health ramifications, ensure public safety, and meet the essential needs of the affected population. Its objective is to deliver medical support, shelter, nourishment, and potable water, as well as to conduct search and rescue operations. The deployment of NDRF teams and the distribution of relief materials are meticulously orchestrated by the NDMA.

4. Recovery

It endeavors to restore a sense of normalcy, focusing on reconstruction and rehabilitation. This encompasses the revitalization of infrastructure, the restoration of livelihoods, the provision of psychological support, and the facilitation of economic resurgence, among other initiatives.

Effective disaster management is predicated upon a cyclical and continuous process that seamlessly integrates risk mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. Each phase intricately informs the subsequent one, cultivating enhanced resilience and alleviating vulnerability to future adversities. The youth, due to their considerable demographic presence and inherent capabilities, can render substantial contributions at every stage of this multifaceted process.

Discussion

Role of Youth in Disaster Management

The youth play an indispensable role in disaster management as proactive contributors to the establishment of resilient communities. As a substantial segment of the population, young individuals are quick learners and highly adaptable, enabling them to positively influence families and peer groups. With their vigor, creativity, and capacity for rapid mobilization, these dynamic individuals can make significant contributions across all phases of the disaster management continuum.

1. Awareness and Education

Youth can act as catalysts for information dissemination, amplifying awareness through educational institutions, social media platforms, and community outreach. Peer-to-peer educational campaigns have proven effective in advocating for safety protocols and fostering a comprehensive understanding of risks. Engagement in mock drills and disaster preparedness initiatives significantly bolsters both individual and communal readiness.

Youth-led endeavors serve to enlighten communities regarding disaster vulnerabilities through workshops, drills, and social media outreach. Educational institutions actively involve students in disaster simulations, first-aid training, and risk assessment projects. For instance, in Japan, youth partake in earthquake preparedness drills, ensuring swift evacuation and responsive measures. Awareness campaigns can be executed focusing on earthquake safety or flood preparedness, thereby enhancing community resilience.

2. Emergency Response and Relief

Youth organizations such as the National Service Scheme (NSS), the National Cadet Corps (NCC), and Scouts and Guides have historically undertaken significant roles in rescue, relief, and rehabilitation efforts. During the COVID-19 pandemic and major flooding events, youthful volunteers provided invaluable assistance in medical support, the distribution of relief materials, and community outreach initiatives.

These young volunteers engaged actively in search and rescue operations, administered first aid, and facilitated the distribution of essential supplies. Moreover, youth have adeptly utilized applications like Ushahidi and various social media platforms to monitor disasters and coordinate aid efforts. For instance, during the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, young volunteers harnessed mobile applications to locate survivors and effectively direct rescue teams.

3. Innovation and Technology

Young engineers are pioneering the development of cost-effective sensors for the detection of floods and earthquakes. Youth-led startups are deploying drones for comprehensive damage assessment and harnessing artificial intelligence to anticipate the impacts of disasters. Tech-savvy young individuals are capable of creating applications, GIS-based tools, and advanced early warning systems. Startups spearheaded by young entrepreneurs have crafted innovative disaster communication tools and AI-driven predictive models. For instance, in the Philippines, youth technology groups have established disaster alert systems specifically designed for regions susceptible to typhoons.

4. Community Resilience and Social Mobilization

Youth volunteers possess the capacity to deliver trauma care and mental health support to communities in distress. They can engage in reconstruction efforts, advocate for green technologies, and contribute to sustainable rebuilding initiatives.

Youth movements possess the remarkable capacity to galvanize communities for initiatives such as environmental clean-ups, effective waste management, and afforestation campaigns in flood-prone regions,

thereby mitigating soil erosion. Campaigns orchestrated by youth organizations frequently gain traction more swiftly, as evidenced by the aftermath of the 2004 Tsunami and the Kerala floods of 2018.

Challenges Faced by Youth in Disaster Management

The youth have immense potential in disaster management, but they also face several challenges that limit their effective participation. These challenges can be structural, social, or resource based. The youth encounters barriers such as:

1. Lack of training and formal education on disaster management

Many youths are unaware of disaster management practices or lack access to formal training. Though technologically expert, many young individuals remain untrained in the utilization of disaster management tools such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), drones, or emergency applications. Educational institutions frequently fail to provide comprehensive training on disaster preparedness. Consequently, youth may be willing to help but lack the requisite skills to respond effectively.

2. Limited representation in planning and policy-making bodies

Disaster management plans and policies often undervalue youth or fail to formally acknowledge their contributions. Decision-making entities may overlook the inclusion of youth perspectives. As a result, the innovative ideas and fervent energy of young individuals remain significantly underutilized.

3. Lack of Coordination with Authorities

Often, there exists a lack of a definitive channel through which youth can engage with governmental or disaster response agencies. Their initiatives may be haphazardly organized or redundantly executed. This disarray diminishes overall efficacy and may even engender confusion during critical emergencies.

4. Lack of Resources and Support

Youth often do not have access to essential resources like equipment, funding, or transportation. NGOs and government agencies often overlook youth-led initiatives. Therefore, it puts limits on youth ability to take independent actions.

5. Social, Psychological and Cultural Barriers

In some communities, youth especially girls face restrictions on mobility or public participation. Elders may not take youth seriously or discourage them from involvement in disaster-related work due to safety concerns. Youth involved in disaster response may experience trauma, stress, or burnout. They may feel overwhelmed by the scale of destruction and helplessness. Such experiences can adversely impact their mental health and diminish their long-term motivation.

Recommendations for Enhancing Youth Participation

It is necessary to increase youth involvement in disaster management in order to overcome the aforementioned obstacles, with a focus on developing their skills, encouraging their participation, and making sure they are acknowledged at all levels. Here are some suggestions in this regard:

1. Integrate disaster education into curriculum. Youth need to be taught about basic disaster preparedness, first aid, climate change and disasters.
2. Conduct workshops, organize mock drills, and tabletop exercises to build practical skills.
3. Governments ought to include youth representatives in disaster risk reduction (DRR) planning.
4. Offer capacity building programmes to train youth in disaster response, leadership, and technology.
5. Create digital collaboration networks and funds for youth-led disaster management.
6. Encourage partnerships between youth and seasoned emergency personnel.
7. Establish youth disaster task forces under district authorities at the local level.
8. Provide funding and mentorship to youth in DRR.
9. Ensure youth representation in community disaster management committees.
10. Use digital platforms to train, coordinate, communicate and mobilize youth volunteers rapidly.

In nutshell, by empowering youth through education, technology, policy inclusion, and community engagement, we can harness their potential to transform disaster management into a more proactive, inclusive, and resilient system.

Conclusion

Youth are not just future leaders but active agents in disaster management today. Their creativity, adaptability, and passion make them indispensable in mitigating risks and aiding recovery. By formalizing their role through education, technology, and policy support, societies can build more resilient communities. Youth represent a potent force in the realm of disaster management. Societies can improve their immediate disaster response and cultivate a long-term resilience culture by actively and methodically involving them. It is not only strategic, but also imperative to invest in young people as partners in disaster management.

As responsible members of our nation, young people ought to be actively involved in the nation's disaster preparedness initiative. Young people are leaders, problem solvers, and visionaries in addition to being recipients of humanitarian aid. It is more important than ever to invest in young people as partners in humanitarian action as the world struggles with complicated and compounded crises. Trusting and empowering our youth is the first step in creating humanitarian systems that are inclusive, resilient, and adaptable.

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