

Role of NGOs in Disaster Management

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Abstract: *Non - Governmental Organizations play a significant role in managing any disaster. They are not just responsible for conducting donation drives but they are also trying to re - emphasize on community support. Such community building exercises by the NGOs are not just focusing on taking donations/food supplies from different social groups across the country. But these activities rekindle the humanitarian values and uplift our spirits to connect with fellow humans at a deeper level. Disasters maybe man - made or natural but it is the only time when we truly understand the value of unity. As a nation, we shall face them and community participation is one of the essential components that most NGOs work on. Thus, this paper will try to assess different levels of community participation reinforced by NGOs in - case of handling such ‘uncanny’ calamities and disasters. Also, the researcher aims to narrate her experiences as a social worker and highlight how she managed to raise funds for such disasters.*

Keywords: NGO, Community Development, Community Participation, Autoethnography, Disaster Management

1. Introduction

Non - Governmental Organisations or NGOs are non - profit and voluntary organisations that work for addressing societal and developmental issues at the ground level (Mondol et. al., 2015). Therefore, these NGOs play a significant role in disaster management too as they are the ones who are seen as ‘quick responders’ in such adverse situations. Some of these non - profit organisations collect funds, provide relief materials, organize health camps, get involved in rescue operations, arrange temporary shelters and so on during any kind of disaster (Mondol et. al., 2015). In reality, they are the voice of masses. So, they represent communities who want to help victims of such disasters. Thus, these organisations also play a key role in community development and enhancing participation by various unaffected communities when it comes to managing a disaster. Most NGOs are harbingers of human rights and are crusaders at such difficult times. Thus, the main focus of NGOs in disaster management is majorly focusing on two aspects: relief and development. But there are NGOs that train and educates people on handling such disasters too. So, the type of work done by NGOs depends on their scope, vision, mission and funding.

‘Emerging trends in managing natural disasters have highlighted the role of NGOs as one of the effective alternative means of achieving an efficient communication between disaster management authorities and affected communities (Mondol et. al, 2015)’. NGOs are not just involved in the activities during the disaster but they are also engaged in pre - disaster and post - disaster activities too. NGOs are also playing a key role in planning and advocacy. They are in contact with village representatives and district administration so that they are aware of any upcoming disasters or forecasts beforehand. They also organize several training and capacity building programmes to increase resilience. During the disaster, they are responsible for warning dissemination, immediate rescue, first - aid, supplying food, medicines and other relief materials as and when required, ensuring proper sanitation and hygiene and engage in impact assessment of the disaster too. During post disaster, they majorly focus on rehabilitation, assist people to seek financial aid and monitor programmes related to re -

settlement and other issues faced by people after the disaster (Mondol et. al., 2015).

Here, the paper will highlight several instances wherein the researcher participated in NGO - related activities during the Kerala floods 2020. The instances are personal orations of researcher and bears a significance as the researcher is an insider and positions herself as a knower of her actions. The paper is not just a mere description of experiences of the researcher but it will also reflect on how NGOs use social media to bridge the communication gap between affected and unaffected communities. Indeed! Social media has played a vital role in communication and was significantly used by NGOs for fundraising activities. Certain posts and campaigns on Instagram and Facebook posted by NGOs and other governmental organisations helped in handling the menace created by natural disasters. All the more, digitization has not just made people aware of what was going on but it also helped people to contribute instantly. In this paper, the researcher intends to focus on the aspect of digitization too.

2. Methodology

The researcher aims to conduct qualitative research in order to understand the role of NGOs in disaster management. In particular, the researcher aims to understand how NGOs use social media to bridge the gap between affected and unaffected communities. For analysis, the researcher is willing to use narrative analysis and storytelling because the nature of research is self - exploration and is exclusively built on experiences. According to Medez (2013), narrative writing allows researcher to question internal conditions such as feelings and emotions, external conditions like the context, environment and the temporal dimensions of past, present and future. In this case, the researcher aims to understand the three different phases - pre - disaster, during disaster and post - disaster within the context. In order to achieve this objective, the researcher to build on her experiences. Therefore, she will be using autoethnography to highlight her experiences. The use of autoethnography will empower the researcher to provide unique insights of her journey as socially - conscientious social - worker who is willing to stand for humanitarian causes and work for the

betterment of the people. Hence, this research acknowledges the feminist experiences of the researcher as a fund - raiser and awareness creator. The researcher identifies herself as a knower and will narrate her experiences as a community developer.

3. Analysis and Discussions

Kerala Floods, 2020

Kerala battled with 'furious' flooding in 2018 and 2020. More than 483 people died during 2018 Kerala floods and more than a million people had to evacuate during that time due to lack of substantial planning. It was unexpected like most natural disasters. In 2020, people were ready to face it. But the context was different. It was pandemic and rescue operations demanded such intensive care too. Two natural disasters hit the humankind at the same time. Firstly, it was COVID'19 and secondly, floods that causes damaged worth crores. Although, the district administration was quite ready to carry rescue and evacuation operations but space was till constricted and people also had to maintain social distancing. So, it was difficult. Various organisations including Goonj, Smile Foundation and others organized campaigns on social media to help victims who were suffering due to Kerala floods. Various media agencies also broadcasted the initiatives taken by people during this time. Around 6300 relief camps were set up and four teams of NRDF were sent to help people in flood - affected areas (Zachariah, 2020). Even the state government initiated campaigns on social media to invite volunteers and special forces to conduct rescue operations. (Zachariah, 2020). During that time period, I was working with Project CLAP, a Delhi - based NGO where I was working on SDG 5 i. e., Gender Equality. Our NGO conducted fund - raising campaigns to help people in Kerala. Our team member's father was in Army who helped our organization to manage funds and sent it via help of his friends who were involved in rescue operations. It is also important to understand how digital payments have also helped governments to take call on such emergency situations. Most individuals came forward to help Kerala and made digital payments using PayTm and other apps like Google Pay, Phonepe, etc. to support rescue operations. Almost all these apps prioritized donations regarding the same. Facebook also supported the campaign and then the campaign started trending on various other social networking sites too. Another major fundraising platform that was commonly used during that time was Ketto. org, a crowdsourcing platform. Some of the NGOs also used this platform to collect funds and send it for the same. There were numerous instances where I used Ketto to collect funds. But this was the first time, I used Ketto to extend my support to my fellow humans.

During such unprecedented times, WhatsApp communication also helped people to become the part of solution. Likewise, our NGO Project CLAP focused on WhatsApp Messaging and sharing QR Code within our friend circles, relatives, colleagues, etc. to receive payments and transfer payments simultaneously. Hence, NGOs are definitely 'quick responders'. There were several NGOs who planned engaging social media content to create awareness among people and reach out to more people for help. Even during such campaigns, the use of QR code was quite

prominent. Therefore, we can see observe the power of social media and digital platforms in addressing such emergency situations. The virtual community is similar to the real community and is the face of present reality now. Thus, using social media can be a boon in such circumstances.

Not just that! Digital communities are faster spaces and such communication can also help people to connect with each other's emotions. Here, I did not belong from Kerala but I could still feel the pain when watching disheartening pictures of flooding over flooding our television sets and social media platforms. These social media platforms can be used for creating awareness or showcasing different facets of disasters and other relevant facts related to them. But it is also important to curb fake news and report them as a responsible citizen.

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