

District Level Consultation for Strengthening IAG & Enhancing Emergency Response Coordination in Vadodara

Date – November 29th, 2024

Time – 1000 Hrs – 1430 Hrs

Venue – Seminar Hall, Deepak Foundation, Vadodara

Purpose of the Consultation

The purpose of the consultation was to strengthen leadership among IAG member organizations at the cluster level and enhance collaboration between governmental and non-governmental organizations for effective emergency preparedness and response. The objectives included assessing and improving the coordination, effectiveness, and efficiency of stakeholders in the region's preparedness towards local natural hazards. Key focus areas were strengthening platform for local leadership who are engaged and experienced in different sectors. This plan encompasses necessary training programs, emergency preparedness actions, and coordination meetings with focus on different sectors to people engaged on the field.

IAG Interventions and History

IAG Convener Kirit Parmar, commenced the meeting by welcoming all attendees and providing a brief overview of the session. All the people involved in this consultation meet introduced themselves.

The IAG convenor introduced IAG to the new and existing members of IAG to each other. This program was supported by UNICEF. The participants were informed about the activities that how the IAG members “sit together, work together & coordinate together”.

The role of IAG was highlighted during cyclone Biparjoy. IAG Gujarat has managed to reach up to 1,20,000 households across three affected districts - Gir Somnath, Amreli and Bhavnagar-covering relief and response support across Shelter, Agriculture, Fishery, Animal Husbandry sectors, and compensation facilitation, in coordination with over 30 organizations of various profiles.

A key message conveyed in the meeting with the various people from NGOs was that if these organizations coordinate and prepare during the peace time then the response during the emergency time would be much more fruitful and positive.

It was also highlighted that the coordination during a disaster among the various state and central authorities is present. They work in full capacity to mitigate the impacts of a disaster. However, it is essential to improve the coordination at the taluka and district level as it more effective. The plans at this level are much more detailed. The coordination for evacuation and facilitation, search and rescue (SAR) are more effective.

The importance of having trained apdamitras and suraksha saathis with relevant knowledge of search and rescue (SAR) and first aid is essential to saving lives during a disaster event. During the fieldwork it was highlighted that the people with today's knowledge of search and rescue (SAR) and first aid could have saved more lives in the past during the Bhuj Earthquake.

In Vadodara, response coordination was a significant challenge, underscoring the need for enhanced collaboration among organizations. Despite collective efforts, there remain gaps in the integration of learnings and best practices by NGOs to achieve cohesive action.

Flood Relief in Vadodara

Vadodara was severely affected during the floods of August 2024. Mujmahuda, Akota, Kalali, Gotri & Bhayli were the areas that had been flooded during the floods.

Rapid Action by the team undertook immediate measures to assess the safety of its members and evaluate damage in the affected areas. Quick decision-making mechanisms were implemented to deploy resources effectively and ensure seamless communication across stakeholders, enabling a swift response to the crisis.

For food and Supply Distribution urgent delivery of food and essential supplies was prioritized to address the immediate needs of the affected population. Key items distributed included ration kits, medical supplies, and power banks to support both survival and connectivity during the emergency.

Community Coordination played a pivotal role in facilitating relief efforts, serving as critical points of contact between affected communities and response teams. Collaborations with local organizations and leaders enhanced the reach and efficiency of interventions, ensuring that resources were allocated to areas of greatest need without duplication of efforts.

For the flood relief efforts in Vadodara, a systematic approach was followed to ensure the effective assessment and distribution of aid. A comprehensive needs assessment, which

included family identification through a door-to-door survey helped to determine the specific requirements of each household, ensuring that relief efforts were targeted and efficient.

Following the assessment, field verification was conducted to ensure the authenticity of the information collected. Kit distribution was carried out as part of this process, with each household registered and verified to ensure proper allocation of resources. Additionally, people management was prioritized to ensure smooth coordination and distribution.

Resource mobilization efforts were intensified by reaching out to local organizations and partners, which helped to expand the scope and reach of the relief efforts. By leveraging existing networks, resources were mobilized quickly to address the urgent needs of the affected communities.

Regular follow-ups, planning, and execution ensured the proper management of data and continued monitoring of the situation. This ongoing process allowed for the identification of any gaps in service delivery and enabled prompt corrective actions to be taken, ensuring that the relief efforts were both effective and sustainable.

The prioritization of needs for the flood relief efforts in Vadodara was based on the most immediate and essential requirements of the affected communities. Major emphasis was placed on providing ration kits to address food security, followed by hygiene kits to ensure health and sanitation in the aftermath of the disaster. A significant portion of the resources was also allocated for the provision of linen kits to meet basic personal comfort and cleanliness needs. While medical kits and Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) materials were deemed necessary, they were allocated in smaller proportions due to their specific nature. Furthermore, tarpaulins were prioritized to provide temporary shelter for those whose homes were affected by the floods. Financial resources were carefully allocated, majorly towards meeting food and sanitation needs, ensuring that the most urgent requirements were fulfilled while maintaining a balance with other critical provisions.

Vadodara rural and urban were affected severely during the floods. The challenges for an urban and a rural area were poles apart. Gram Vikas Trust (GVT) contributed in the relief of rural Vadodara by assisting Aanganwadis, through resources for cooking, hot meals and potable water.

Climate Risk and Flooding

During discussions on the causes of flooding, several contributing factors were identified, highlighting the complex interplay of environmental and human-induced issues:

Global warming, coupled with increased rainfall intensity, has been a significant factor. Rising global temperatures lead to higher evaporation rates, which intensify rainfall patterns, overwhelming drainage systems and resulting in urban flooding.

The Urban Heat Island effect also contributes to this challenge. Urban areas, dominated by concrete and asphalt surfaces, retain heat, altering weather patterns and increasing rainfall intensity, which exacerbates flood risks.

Paving over natural soil with impervious materials like concrete and asphalt reduces the land's ability to absorb water, leading to excessive runoff during heavy rains. Similarly, blockages in rivers and drains caused by encroachments, waste dumping, and sediment accumulation obstruct natural water flow, causing water to overflow into nearby areas.

Covering open drains with reinforced concrete (RCC) slabs further restricts maintenance access, making it difficult to clear debris and manage blockages effectively. This leads to reduced drainage capacity and waterlogging.

The degradation of ponds, which are essential for water retention and flood mitigation, has also been a growing concern. Once neglected, these natural reservoirs are now slowly coming back to life in some areas, highlighting the importance of restoring and preserving them for flood management.

Industrial Disaster Risk

As of 2020, Gujarat has 36,726 registered factories employing 18,97,211 workers, including 3,59,029 individuals in hazardous jobs. However, the staff strength at Director Industrial Safety and Health (DISH), responsible for worker safety, is critically low, highlighting a gap in ensuring the well-being of those in high-risk occupations.

Past industrial disasters in Gujarat that highlight the potential dangers:

- **August 3rd, 2021:** An explosion at the SRF Ltd's Dahej facility resulted in one fatality.
- **June 3rd, 2020:** A major incident at Yashvi Rasayan Pvt Ltd claimed five lives and injured 57 others.

- **April 10th, 2022:** An explosion at Om Organic in Dahej tragically took the lives of six individuals.

Furthermore, within Gujarat, Bharuch leads with 128 Major Accident Hazard (MAH) units (13.43% of the state's total), followed by Vadodara (8.1%), Ahmedabad (4.8%), and Morbi (41.44%). This concentration of hazardous facilities underlines the urgency of strengthening industrial safety measures and emergency response protocols in these districts.

It's important to note that this report focuses on Vadodara, and the statistics for MAH units pertain to the entire state of Gujarat. While the Visakhapatnam gas leak disaster (2020) occurred outside of Gujarat, it serves as a chilling reminder of the potential consequences of industrial accidents.

Challenges

The emergency response faced significant challenges due to the lack of electricity and mobile connectivity, which hindered the flow of critical information. This disruption complicated coordination and slowed the dissemination of updates. Many affected individuals sought temporary shelter in under-construction high-rise buildings instead of official relief camps. These makeshift arrangements limited their access to adequate sanitation facilities and safe drinking water.

Efforts to connect with emergency services were also undermined, as the contact numbers provided by the VMC were often non-functional or redirected callers without resolving their concerns. Essential items such as undergarments and personal hygiene products, including toothbrushes, were unavailable, with the limited cash allowances proving insufficient to meet these needs.

Identifying and prioritizing aid delivery to the most vulnerable populations presented further difficulties. Many individuals were unaware of the importance of retrieving critical documents from their destroyed homes, leading to complications in accessing services later. Communication regarding relocation plans often failed to reach lower socio-economic groups, particularly those in informal settlements or slums, leaving many uncertain about the next steps.

Resistance to evacuation was common, especially among individuals unwilling to abandon livestock, highlighting the critical need for integrated animal welfare considerations in relief plans. Furthermore, a lack of effective communication and coordination between affected

communities and local authorities exacerbated these challenges, impeding the delivery of timely and efficient support.

Good Practices/Success

Despite these challenges, several good practices emerged during the emergency response. Community leaders played a pivotal role in establishing vital connections for relief efforts, effectively minimizing the duplication of services. Regular Inter-Agency Group (IAG) meetings strengthened coordination among stakeholders, fostering a unified approach to addressing immediate needs.

Small-scale, daily needs assessments, informed by training in the Joint Rapid Needs Assessment (JRNA) methodology provided by IAG Gujarat, helped prioritize resource allocation effectively. Collaborations with Urban Health Centres ensured timely access to first aid kits and essential medicines.

Community leaders also actively participated in decision-making processes, particularly in the distribution of cash allowances, ensuring that relief measures were both equitable and need-based. Donations received through platforms were promptly distributed, providing timely support to affected communities.

Way Forward

To address future emergencies more effectively, dedicated funding should be allocated for emergency response efforts. A multi-sectoral approach must be adopted, mobilizing experts from various fields to provide comprehensive support. Reproductive health needs, including contraception, should be incorporated into relief efforts.

Animal rescue must be integrated into emergency response plans, recognizing the health risks posed by displaced animals and the emotional attachment many communities have to their livestock. Coordination within the IAG clusters can be further strengthened through team-building initiatives to enhance collective action.

Targeted awareness campaigns are crucial to educate communities on the importance of preserving critical documents during emergencies. Developing strategies to identify and support vulnerable populations, including individuals living in slums, children, pregnant women, and people with disabilities, will ensure that no one is left behind.

Equitable distribution of resources must be prioritized through transparent and accountable systems, ensuring marginalized groups receive necessary aid. Culturally sensitive accommodations for livestock in evacuation plans will increase community cooperation in emergency responses.

Building stronger linkages between local authorities, NGOs, corporations, and healthcare providers is essential to creating a unified response mechanism. Partnerships with private sectors, philanthropic organizations, and international agencies will pool resources and expertise, while integrating animal rescue and public health measures into emergency preparedness plans will help mitigate secondary crises.

Photographs

