

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

Date - July 12, 2024

Time – 1000 Hrs – 1430 Hrs

Venue – Seminar Hall, District Collector’s Office, Kutchh

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. This program was supported by UNICEF. 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 for effective on-ground coordination, reassessing and updating coordination mechanisms for resilience and adaptability, and developing a yearlong action plan with DDMA. This plan encompasses necessary training programs, emergency preparedness actions, and coordination meetings to ensure preparedness and adherence to SOPs in emergencies.

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 meeting was chaired by Ms. Sushmita, Deputy Collector.

The IAG convenor introduced IAG to the new and existing members of IAG. Ms. Sushmitaji Dy. Collector (I.A.S.), the chair of this meeting and Mr. Chaudhary Dy. Mamlatdar (D.E.O.C.) invited from the District Emergency Operation Center. (D.E.O.C.) were informed about the activities that how the IAG members “sit together, work together & coordinate together”. The brochure shared also highlights the key achievements of IAG over the last 10 – 15 years.

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 and GOs 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 Apda Mitras 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.

Session by the District Authority during Cyclone Biparjoy - Mr. D.K. Chaudhary Dy. Mamlatdar (D.E.O.C.)

Mr. Chaudhary started the session highlighting their experience of Biparjoy cyclone response. Cyclone Biparjoy, a severe cyclonic storm that made landfall in June 2023, posed a significant challenge to the district. However, through a combination of proactive preparedness, swift response, and ongoing relief efforts, the district administration effectively mitigated the impact of the storm and is well on its way to recovery.

The district authority played a crucial role in preparedness measures which minimized the damage caused by Cyclone Biparjoy. These measures included issuing timely warnings and evacuation orders, pre-positioning of emergency supplies and equipment, and ensuring communication channels remained operational throughout the storm.

As the cyclone hit, the district administration implemented a well-coordinated response plan. This involved deploying rescue teams to affected areas, providing emergency medical assistance to those injured, and establishing temporary shelters for displaced residents. The official commended the tireless efforts of emergency personnel who ensured the safety and well-being of the community during the storm's peak.

In the aftermath of the cyclone, the district administration focused on relief work and damage assessment. The efforts include distributing essential supplies like food, water, and clothing to those affected, providing financial assistance for repairs, and conducting a thorough assessment of infrastructure damage. Glimpses of the ongoing groundwork was showcased during the presentation offered a visual perspective of the rebuilding process.

The district administration continues to receive vital assistance from various organizations and individuals as it works towards complete recovery. This includes the support given by IAG.

Media coverage highlighted the district's efforts and the outpouring of appreciation further contributed to a sense of collective strength and a commitment to rebuilding a more resilient community.

Session on Desertification and Land Degradation in Kutchh - Dr. V. Vijay Kumar (GUIDE)

The presentation highlighted the interaction between climate change, desertification, and the fragile ecology of Kutchh. The key takeaways from the seminar were

A Warming Trend - The rising temperatures exceed historical averages. This warming trend disrupts weather patterns, leading to erratic rainfall and an increase in the frequency and

intensity of droughts. These changes create a perfect storm for desertification, the process by which fertile land transforms into desert.

Land Degradation on the Rise - Reduced precipitation combined with factors like unsustainable land use practices and overgrazing weaken the land's ability to retain moisture and support vegetation. This creates a vicious cycle, where desertification further reduces rainfall, exacerbating the problem.

Ecological Impacts – Kutch has a very unique ecology. Desertification and land degradation threatens the survival of native plant and animal species. Changes in precipitation patterns disrupt migratory patterns and breeding cycles, jeopardizing biodiversity. The loss of vegetation also impacts soil quality and increasing the risk of flash floods, further disrupting the delicate balance of the ecosystem.

A Call to Action - Implementing sustainable land management practices, promoting water conservation, and mitigating climate change through reduced greenhouse gas emissions are crucial steps. Only through a multi-pronged approach can we ensure the resilience of Kutch's ecology in the face of these interconnected challenges.

Session on Vulnerability Assessment of Coastal Marginalised Communities Through Participatory Process – Abhishek Fullonton (UNICEF)

The presentation focused on the study of the vulnerable coastal communities in Kutch, Morbi, and Devbhoomi Dwarka districts. The study involved eight Inter Agency Group (IAG) partners and covered 520 families across eight blocks. It employed a mixed-method approach using household surveys, focus group discussions, and data analysis across various sectors like housing, sanitation, and healthcare.

Key Findings:

- The study identified marginalized clusters facing remoteness, limited government support, and lack of access to basic services and social security schemes.
- Semi-pucca houses were dominant, and most communities faced a challenge in receiving cyclone warnings beforehand. Evacuation was successful in most areas, with schools and public buildings serving as shelters.
- Distance to schools were the primary reason for limited attendance of children. The lack of transport to and from schools further exacerbated the attendance in schools.
- Drinking water supply is limited to water tankers and community standposts in these settlements. Studied settlements predominantly have hard water and are commonly affected by kidney stones and fluorosis.
- Studied settlements have mixed access to sanitation with single pits individual HH toilets and community toilets.
- Access to safe menstrual hygiene practices is limited due to limited knowledge and resources.
- Studied settlements have limited access to healthcare services and facilities due to lack of local transport and roads being inundated during an emergency.

- Over 50% of settlements report access to ICDS services.
- Majority of the studied settlements are occupied with migratory families who travel seasonally and without necessary documentation which limits their access to basic services.

Community Specific Vulnerabilities:

- **Pastoralists:** Cyclone disrupted veterinary services for weeks, impacting animal health.
- **Fishing Community:** Many experienced damage to nets and boats. Some reported receding or encroaching sea lines and reduction in mangroves.
- **Salt Pan Workers:** Dilution of salt and brine due to the cyclone significantly impacted their livelihoods.

Impact and Recommendations:

Climate change is amplifying the challenges faced by these marginalized communities. The study recommends creating databases of such communities, improving infrastructure and services in remote areas, enhancing early warning systems, and developing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for evacuation and disaster response. These measures aim to strengthen the resilience of these communities in the face of climate threats.

Key discussion points and suggestions by DDMA and IAG Representatives

There was an open discussion where all the members participated and contributed in giving key points and suggestions. The participants gave their key inputs and recommendations to strengthen coordination at the district level. All the members contributed based on their experiences. The IAG members discussed some key points on how IAG and its members can enhance their emergency preparedness and strengthen the coordination between the IAG members and the Government organization. The key suggestions and discussion points were:

By DDMA Kutch- Key Points for IAG Gujarat Consideration

1. **Support for Cyclone Shelters:** Local IAG members may assist in the utilisation, operations and maintenance of Multi-purpose Cyclone Shelters (MPCSs) in Kutch. This will help familiarize the community with these facilities.
2. **Temporary Shelters and MPCS Support:** Temporary shelters and MPCSs require support to safely provide relief and accommodation.
3. **Distribution of Food Packets:** During relief distribution, special consideration may be given to children, lactating women, and pregnant women. Food kits can include nutritious products such as milk, dry fruits, and other essential items.
4. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** IAG members can support public awareness campaigns in high-risk areas of the district. These campaigns can focus on emergency preparedness and response for local hazards such as cyclones, floods, heatwaves, cold waves, water chlorination, hygiene practices, and safe evacuation procedures.

5. **Research on Minimizing Hazard Damage:** IAG organizations can support research initiatives aimed at minimizing damage from natural hazards and share their findings with DDMA.
6. **Support for Cattle:** Consideration should be given to the needs of cattle during and post emergencies. Ensuring the safe evacuation and well-being of livestock can help the local community feel safer and more satisfied during evacuations.

By IAG member organisations and other participants-

1. To strengthen coordination between government organizations (GO) and IAG members such meetings can be conducted twice a year. Additionally, follow-up actions and evaluations from previous meetings can be reviewed to ensure continuous improvement and effective collaboration.
2. IAG members to share relevant data with district authorities and vice versa during emergency for enhanced response.
3. IAG members to assist in emergency evacuation of communities in hard to reach areas. Additionally, as part of emergency preparedness, IAG members to undertake awareness campaigns to ensure safe evacuation.
4. IAG members can assist in training and educating children and youth on different kinds of disasters and its impacts. They can help their family members understand the possible risks by staying in a hazard-prone area, thereby reducing their vulnerabilities.
5. Veterinary services for cattle as part of emergency response and recovery needs to be explored.
6. IAG members recognise the scope for integrating emergency preparedness as part of GPDP and will need to drive risk informed GPDP and increase awareness of social schemes.
7. IAG members on the ground can assist the district authority in making a district-level vulnerability mapping for drought prone communities.
8. The Suraksha Sathis (Community based volunteers) at the village level need to be prepared in coordination with the community members, local authorities and IAG members.
9. Regular meetings to be conducted between the IAG members, the District Emergency Operation Center (D.E.O.C.), and the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) to discuss common or pressing agendas and understand the system's strengths and challenges.
10. IAG members need to integrate climate change adaptation, mitigation, and disaster risk reduction strategies into their core operations.
11. Flooding has become a major challenge in urban areas. Hence, DRM plans for urban areas and IAG interventions needs to be explored.
12. IAG to coordinate with other resourceful networks in the area for enhance emergency response coordination.
13. Increase awareness of communities on available social schemes especially related to ICDS services, insurance, health and livelihood.
14. The IAG Members unanimously agreed that Mr. Manish Acharya of Setu Abhiyan and Mr. Harish Hurmude of Khamir would be the lead persons in Kutchh.

These key discussion points highlight the crucial need for improved communication, decentralization, and coordinated efforts between NGOs and government organizations to

enhance emergency preparedness and disaster management. Implementing these measures will significantly bolster the resilience and response capabilities of communities facing natural hazards.

Vote of Thanks - In the end the convenor of IAG extended gratitude to all attendees for their participation and contributions to the meeting. A special vote of thanks was given to The District Collector, Dy. Collector and Dy. Mamlatdar (D.E.O.C.) for chairing the session and allowing us to conduct the meet in their premises and providing assistance in helping IAG conduct its consultation with the NGOs and the Government authorities.

The IAG also extended their gratitude to the NGOs who travelled a considerable distance for participation. Their insights of the field and the experiences they brought significantly contributed to the discussions.

Participants

Sr. No.	Name	Organization	Contact No
1.	Ms. Sushmita, Deputy Collector (I.A.S.)	Collector's Office, Kutchh	9560479649
2.	Mr. D. K. Chaudhary	Kutch Disaster Management	9898599487
3.	Mr. Manish Acharya	Setu Abhiyan	9825777343
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15.	Mr. Pawan Upadhyay	Setu Abhiyan	9714605062
16.	Mr. Jayesh Lalka	Kutch Fodder, Fruit & Forest Abhiyan (KFFFA)	9825858919
17.	Dr. V. Vijay Kumar	Gujarat Institute of Desert Ecology (GUIDE)	9825083869
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25.	Ms. Kavita Mehta	Sahjeevan	9825633295
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27.	Ms. Aruna Vipul Dholakiya	Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan	8511156771
28.	Mr. Vimal Mehta	Red Cross – Bhachau	8758752666
29.	Mr. Abhishek Fullonton	UNICEF – Gandhinagar	8117884067
30.	Ms. Kamini Katiyar	UNICEF – Gandhinagar	9819196087

31.	Mr. Kirit Parmar	Unnati Ahmedabad	9913818047, 7984942506
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Photographs



Strengthening District Level coordination in seminar hall of Collector's Office