CHAPTER 6

RESPONSE OF STATE AND
NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS TO FLOODS
This chapter examines the role of state and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), in the flood response. The presence of the agencies of the state and its influence on disaster recovery in the study area is examined through a framework which has its origins in the provisions of the Indian constitution.

The State shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of undeserved want.

(Article 41, Part IV—Directive Principles of State Policy, Constitution of India)

The Legal services Authorities Act of 1987 (Section 12[e]) gave clarity to what these ‘other cases of undeserved want’ were. It defined a person with circumstances of undeserved want as being a victim of a mass disaster, ethnic violence, caste atrocity, a flood, drought, earthquake or industrial disaster.

The Act had provisions for free legal aid to persons affected by disasters. But it also went a step further. In cases of mass disasters where there was 'loss of life, becoming homeless, destruction of person and property, damage to environment and the degree of the damage... such that it exceed(ed) the coping capacity of the community of affected area, .... the Legal Services Authorities shall endeavour to help the victims and the local administration for reducing the further damage and assisting them to adopt disaster mitigation policies and strengthening their capacities.'

In order to give effect to the above objectives the Supreme Court designed a scheme named “Scheme for Legal Services to the victims of disasters through Legal services Authorities”. The Scheme provided a useful framework to examine the response of different institutions in the context of the floods and effect on vulnerability. The framework has nineteen elements that are grouped into the following eight categories:
a) Timely intervention
b) Co-ordination
c) Supervision
d) Ensuring access to basic necessities of life
e) Promoting health and mental health
f) Focus on groups with special needs
g) Support in legal requirements
h) Facilitating longer-term rehabilitation

### Table 6.1

**Framework to examine institutional response to disasters**

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<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Elements of intervention</th>
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<td>Timely intervention</td>
<td>• Ensuring immediate help by Governmental and Non-Governmental Agencies to the victims.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Co-ordination</td>
<td>• Coordinating the activities of different departments of the Government and the NGOs for bringing immediate relief.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Supervision</td>
<td>• Supervising the distribution of relief materials.</td>
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<td>• Supervising the construction of temporary shelter or transporting the victims to a safer place.</td>
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<td>• Supervising the reunion of families.</td>
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<td>• Supervising the restoration of cattle (livestock) and chattel (personal possessions).</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Ensuring access to basic necessities of life</td>
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<td><strong>6. Focus on groups with special needs</strong></td>
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<td>• Supervising the health care and sanitation of the victims and preventing the spread of epidemics.</td>
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<td>• Arranging for physiatrist’s help / counselling to the victims who are subjected to physiological shock and depression on account of the disaster.</td>
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<td><strong>7. Support in legal requirements</strong></td>
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<td>• Supervising the needs of women and children.</td>
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<td>• Assisting in the rehabilitation, care and future education of orphaned children</td>
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<td><strong>8. Facilitating longer-term rehabilitation</strong></td>
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<td>• Assisting the victims to get the benefits of the promises and assurances announced by the Government and Ministers.</td>
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<td>• Taking steps for appropriate debt relief measures for the victims.</td>
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<td>• Assisting in the rehabilitation of the old and disabled who lost their supporting families.</td>
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<td>• Arranging Bank Loans for restarting the lost business and avocations.</td>
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Adapted from “Scheme for Legal Services to the victims of disasters through Legal services Authorities”, Supreme Court of India Legal Services Committee, hlsla.nic.in/schemes/disasters_scheme.pdf

**Timely intervention**

The Panchayat Development Officer (PDO) said that he had sent specific information to all the villages in the panchayat that they needed be ready to evacuate, but the
people did not heed his advice. When asked who had given him the information, he claimed that he had given it on his own “risk” since he saw the situation was turning bad. The panchayat members of the study villages refute this claim and said that the village panchayat office was closed all through the severe rains.

One of the members said,

‘He makes such claims to make himself seem good. He was not even to be seen when the floods occurred. Even after the floods, he was only seen when materials (flood relief) came. None of our villages received any of the materials like vessels and tarpaulin sheets that were sent for flood-affected families.’

The response of the government machinery was delayed in the floods of October 2009 and began only on the third day of the floods. The headmaster of a primary school from one of the study villages said, ‘... there is so much of discussion about delay in response by the Government in the newspapers. Here nobody talks about it, because there is no delay, there is complete absence of any help from the Government. The people don’t expect it also because they know nobody will come from the Government in the first few days after the rains. It is between them, their people and God.’

**Box 6.1**

**Lack of information regarding flood affected villages**

A village in the study area was cut-off for six days since the rains began. When an NGO approached the taluk administration for details of affected villages on the fourth day (October 3, 2009), they did not have any details. The program co-ordinator of the NGO said, ‘The least they could have done is collect information about the affected villages, but they did not even do that. We were giving information to them after visiting all the villages first-hand. How will they respond if they don’t even know who is affected?’

The delay in response and poor preparedness came in for criticism from the Karnataka State Human Rights Commissioner Justice S. R. Nayak, a former chief justice of the Chhattisgarh High Court. He raised the issue of the Karnataka chief minister and his
cabinet colleagues being busy attending a BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) "chinthan baithak" or introspection meeting in Mysore while rain and floods ravaged vast areas of the state. The Government responded by issuing statements that they would ‘disclose his background to the public.’

**Box 6.2**

**Questioning the state: A response**

Representative of the Karnataka government in New Delhi, vented his ire against the chairman of the State Human Rights Commission Justice SR Nayak, for condemning the state government’s handling of the flood situation. He said, “Who is Justice SR Nayak to question the government? Who gave him the right to defame the government? First of all, who is he? He should perform his duties properly as the head of the human rights commission and not act as a politician and blame the government.... Justice Nayak should act and react within his limits.... I have been observing Justice SR Nayak’s working style. It is not the duty of the chairman of the Commission to question the Chintan Baithak organised for the BJP ministers..... Will things fall in place if he sits here and blames the government? Why hasn’t he visited the flood-hit areas? Has he even donated towards the relief operations?... Justice Nayak doesn’t know the ground reality. He is trying to gain mileage from the situation like a politician. It would be better if restricts himself to his limits, or we will disclose his background to the public.”

- Srikanth Hunasawadi, Dhananjay Kumar warns justice Nayak, DNA, October 6, 2009

The delayed intervention by the Government and its impact on the people was also highlighted by the media.


- *No home, no hearth, Karnataka flood victims flock to cities*, Indo-Asian News Service (IANS), October 23, 2009

Responses from all the three study villages indicated that there had been no response from the state administration till the third day after the floods. A young person from Thaminala who co-ordinated a lot of the rescue work in the village said, ‘some of our
friends were in the taluk headquarters on October 2nd which was the third day of the rains. They went to seek help as were stuck in the villages, but there was nobody there.’ On being asked about the delay in responding to the floods, the Executive Officer (EO) of a Taluk Panchayat dismissively said, ‘… people always complain. There is nothing we can do to make everybody happy.’

Several villages were marooned even six days after the rains started and the areas needed to be reached with food and other relief materials on an emergency basis. But no relief reached the villages. A young graduate from one such village to the south of the study area said, ‘… we went hungry for almost four days after all our food were exhausted. When the waters receded, we went out and found food by ourselves.…’

The Secretary, Disaster Management, Government of Karnataka, Shri. H.V. Parshwanath pointed to the obvious when he ‘acknowledged that there has been delay in reaching relief in some areas’ and attributed it to ‘difficulties in reaching those areas due to either poor connectivity or (because) the places were inundated.’ (Karnataka banks on people’s generosity to rebuild flood-hit, Indo-Asian News Service (IANS), October 6, 2009). Such a response from a person who was tasked with co-ordinating the flood response in the state, reflected the lack of alternatives being used such as use of water or aerial routes being used to reach the people trapped in inundated areas. Karnataka is a state which has an Air Force base, and the Hyderabad Air base was also close to the area. However many people don’t buy the argument that poor connectivity and inundation was the cause of the undue delay. A member of the people’s health movement, who has been part of many relief and rescue operations and had worked closely with the Karnataka state government on disasters reacted,

‘…these are lame excuses. Inundation in floods is expected. It is not an extraordinary event. The problem is that in spite of being hit by floods in 2007, the Government has not put a plan in place to deal with the problem. They don’t have information on the affected villages, vulnerable spots, and rescue routes. Then how will they respond? Most of the time they follow a blind and unplanned approach.’

The experience of the people from the inundated village strengthens this view,
‘... we saw helicopters flying over us many times. We waved and waved, but
only once a few food bags were dropped. Most of us were in the school
building standing on benches and we couldn’t go out. We also couldn’t reach
the food packets immediately as we couldn’t get across to it. Just on the other
side of the river the neighboring villages which had access to unbroken roads
and could reach the market easily received so many packets of food which
were dropped from the helicopters. We think it is because the pilot could see
them. If they don’t see you, you story is finished …’

In one of the study villages when the people complained to a team of state officials
that nobody had come to their rescue or relief even weeks after the floods, the
Panchayat Development Officer (PDO) threatened them in front of the team. This was
reported by the panchayat ember of the village. He said,

‘The PDO just began shouting at us in front of the team. He said many things
– “you people don’t pay your taxes properly. Who gave you the authority to
talk like this? I will ensure that you don’t get any other facilities also if you
don’t keep quiet, first pay your taxes and then talk.” We just kept quiet and
the team also kept quiet. What can we say?

As seen from the above responses, the response of the Government officials on the
delay ranged from being dismissive to pointing out the obvious and often untenable
reasons, to the more extreme one of threatening action on those people affected by the
floods who raised the issue of Government delay in responding to the floods. The
delay by the Government led to loss of life, property and ‘undeserved want’ in the
form of hunger, thirst and lack of shelter in the affected villages.

A positive feature in the flood response of October 2009 was the deployment of the
120-member National Disaster Response Force (NDRF). The team which was
stationed in Pune was well-equipped to recue people stranded in the marooned
villages. Eight helicopters and 38 bots were being used. However the inadequacy of
the force was evident as numbers were too little to conduct search and rescue
operations in six districts – Bagalkot, Raichur, Bijapur, Koppal, Bellary and Gulbarga.
Without adequate reinforcement of trained personnel from the state forces, the
effectiveness of the central forces was often limited.
The official of one of the state disaster response agencies who was involved in sending detailed situation reports all through the floods to the concerned political leaders said,

‘we worked through the night on those days sending hourly reports of the flood situation. But the Government was headless at that time. Since the ministers were all away at the political party meeting (‘Chintan bhaitak’), and a crisis in the Government was just starting, the senior officers close to the minister were also busy. I personally called up and asked these officers in the revenue department if anything was being done, but nobody knew anything.’

The above statement also reflected the gap in terms of effective political leadership to ensure that timely intervention took place in response to the floods. The apparatus to collect information had been put in place, and information was being generated as envisaged, but the body which could turn the information into proactive measures was missing.

The gap arose because of the political processes in the state where the Chief minister’s authority and position was being threatened by some of his cabinet colleagues owing their allegiance to the Karnataka’s Minister for Tourism and Infrastructure. The power struggle also had subsequent ramifications on the flood relief process, when the Chief Minister imposed a cess of Rs 1,000 on every lorry transporting iron ore – a decision that would affect the business interests of the state minister directly. The cess was imposed by the chief Minister ‘to raise money for the flood victims in the state,’ (Sanjana, The revenge of the Reddy Republic, Tehelka Magazine, Vol 6, Issue 45, Dated November 14, 2009). A few hours after the announcement by the Chief minister, the Minister along with his family members announced a project for flood relief and rehabilitation, separate from what had been announced by the state government. They announced a separate housing project worth Rs. 500 crores for the flood-hit victims in north Karnataka to build 50,000 houses. However by October 2010, only 658 houses which amount to less than two percent of the promised houses had been built (Houses for flood affected, The Hindu, October 2, 2010).
Co-ordination

‘State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA) in slumber’
- Deccan Herald, Bangalore October 7, 2009

This headline in a national newspaper was regarding the authority which had been mandated by the Disaster Management Act, passed by the Indian parliament in 2005, to handle disasters in each state. The eleven member authority had not met even once since it was reconstituted in January 2009 with the Chief Minister as its ex-officio Chairperson and the Revenue Minister as its vice-chairperson. An official of a Disaster Monitoring Centre in the state who had been privy to the work of the SDMA said,

‘A plan has been prepared under the auspices of the Revenue Department. It has personnel drawn from the police, fire and emergency services and home guards, to be deployed under a unified command, in the case of disasters. It was prepared based on the guidelines issued by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA). But it is for the SDMA to finalise the plan and give its official approval. In the absence of an official endorsement, the plan is invalid and remains just a document. The differences between the chairman and his deputy is well known. So, no meeting has taken place, and we still don’t have a plan even though so much effort and people’s time has gone in preparing it. By the time the plan is approved, circumstances would have changed and new plans will have to be prepared, making this whole exercise useless.’

In the absence of a working relationship between the top authorities of the SDMA, the co-ordination of disaster response efforts was not visible. The effects of that were seen in the nature of the response co-ordination. There were multi-power centres and directions going to the field. The official of the disaster monitoring centre said,

‘The last time when floods affected the region in 2007, Karnataka was under President’s rule. The Governor’s office was in touch with us regularly and action was taken by all the departments together. Things moved much faster. The line of command was clear. This time it seems like the right hand does not know what the left is doing……. We were asked to send materials for a press
release regarding the floods. We carefully compiled the figures and sent it across. The next day when we saw the newspaper reports we were very shocked, the figures were completely different. When we enquired, we found that they had used information sent by another department which was not even involved in the flood response.’

Many of the flood relief centres or ‘ganji kendras’ (gruel centres) which had been opened on the initiative of the local revenue officials under the leadership of the District Commissioners (or ‘Collector’) was completely shut down or partially closed due to lack of any direction and budgetary support. In one such centre in the study area, a local NGO was approached by the team running the ganji Kendra. They requested the NGO to continue the centre. The program co-ordinator of the NGO said, ‘We were shocked to hear that they were shutting down the centres when people didn’t even have the energy to get up and walk. They said that money had not been released since three days. They somehow managed to continue the centre by buying materials from their own money. We can’t blame the officials. Though we shouted at them for being heartless, it was only because they had concern for the people that they came to us. In many other places, the Government people just took away all the materials like stove and kerosene and left. We quickly spoke to our family and friends and raised the money for the centre. We continued running the centre for eight more days, till the people could find food for themselves.’

Box 6.3
Food shortage in relief camps

AM had just delivered two days before the floods. She had come to her parents place for delivery from her husband’s house. Only two meals were being served in the camp, in the afternoon and evening. When the quantity of food was further reduced in the camp, her mother gave up her food so that her daughter who was nursing the newborn could have sufficient food. On the second day, the mother collapsed and had to be hospitalized for more than a week for fatigue.
Due to political differences between the top leaders of the SDMA, and the subsequent lack of direction from the revenue Department which had gone through all the effort of preparing the disaster preparedness plans, the Home Minister of the state, a medical doctor by profession played an important role. He enjoyed the confidence of the Chief Minister (CM). The official of the disaster monitoring centre said,

‘The state Home Minister played an important role. At first he didn’t get involved at the state level. He was able to mobilise the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) units for relief wherever they had a strong presence. But after the public spat between the CM and the Reddy brothers, Acharya was given the role of co-ordination. Being an RSS worker himself, he was also getting field information from them directly. There were allegations that he was open only to the RSS when he wanted to shift the entire relief co-ordination to Hubli, where the RSS has a strong base. But better sense prevailed. And not only that, he was open to everybody. In fact he was in such a bad position when he started out that he was ready to accept help from any quarters.’

While the leadership of the Home Minister helped to give a public face to the disaster relief efforts of the government, the co-ordination was not linked to the plans prepared by the Government under the SDMA. The resources which had been identified were not deployed as in the case of the joint action teams. The Government was relying on the district administration to do the needful and released money to them. Rupees 100 crores was divided among the flood affected districts, after a decision was made at the state level.

The Prime Minister was invited by the Chief Minister of both Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka to conduct an aerial survey of the flood affected areas. The Chief Minister of Karnataka had informed the media on October 3rd, after the first day of his visits to the flood affected areas that he had written to the Prime Minister ‘to declare this unprecendedent situation as a national disaster and to release Rs.10,000 crores to Karnataka for necessary rehabilitation work. The Chief Minister also appealed to the Prime Minister to release the first instalment of relief immediately (Deccan Herald, Oct 4, 2009
The Prime Minister’s visit to Raichur accompanied by the Chief Minister ensured a lot of media coverage for the flood affected situation in Raichur district. (Similarly Smt. Sonia Gandhi visited Bellary after she landed at the Jindal air strip in Bellary and the situation there received wide coverage). The officials from the state and ministers from the state and central ministers hailing from Karnataka were in Raichur for the visit. This ensured that many of the micro-level problems in the flood relief in those districts received maximum media coverage and political attention. The media even questioned the Prime Minister on these problems and he replied, ‘I am not here to discuss the nuts and bolts. I leave that to the state Government.’ (The Economic Times, October 10, 2009)

As a result of those visits and promises made to people while in Raichur, the Chief Minister went back to spend Diwali with the people in the relief camp. This presence also helped in attracting other resources to the district. The media reports were very crucial for people and agencies to decide where to intervene, in the absence of any definitive figures on loss and destruction coming from other flood-affected districts, and more importantly, due to the lack of any single co-ordinating agency at the state level. For instance, UNICEF chose Raichur in Karnataka to support relief operations. Similarly NGOs and other voluntary groups and Bangalore and other places rushed to Raichur after reading media reports about the situation in Raichur.

An NGO worker from Bagalkot who was involved in the flood relief works in the study area said, ‘There were so many people, buses, cars and trucks reaching Raichur, but in Bagalkot you could count the number of people coming for relief work on your fingers. Even ten days after the floods, we were the only people from outside the area to be working in the region.’

The Janaarogya Andolana – Karnataka (JAAK, People’s Health Movement in Karnataka), a voluntary network of organisations working on health issues in Karnataka organised a meeting of its network members from different flood affected districts of Karnataka. The purpose was to identify gaps in relief work and unreached areas. One member of the network said, ‘the problems were wide-spread and the response was very limited. All the resources seemed to be going only to Raichur and Bellary when Sonia Gandhi visited. There were very little news from other places in
Response of State and NGOs to floods

The work of JAAK was an example of co-ordination by NGOs to maximise the effectiveness of the outreach. This was also seen in the context of other disasters such as the Indian Ocean tsunami where many NGOs specialised in disaster management assisted the district administration in setting up relief co-ordination units mostly housed in District Magistrate’s office complex itself. These co-ordination units helped in matching need with resources by directing relief agencies and volunteers to the areas with unmet relief needs. The centres also played the role of information centres where any information regarding the disaster, relief and details of intervention were compiled and disseminated. The floods in Karnataka did not see such efforts at the district levels. However at the state level, a flood relief website was prepared (http://www.karunadu.gov.in/floodrelief2009) in association with a private software multinational company Cisco, as part of their corporate social responsibility. The website was more of a fund-raising site for flood relief, with information on Government orders, appeals and disaster relief efforts. Closely linked to the co-ordination of the activities was the need for supervision of relief work at all levels to ensure that what was being planned was actually reaching the field.

**Supervision**

As seen in the flood response, the distribution of relief materials is one of the most crucial elements of the relief process, as it enables basic survival of the affected families who have lost their possessions in the disaster. As seen in the earlier section, the opening of gruel centres were key to survival in the most affected villages. The absence of it or reduction in quantity led to starvation and loss of health. In all the study villages, the residents reported that they had not received any relief materials from the Government (except rice gruel). However reports by the state government in the local news papers indicated that ‘relief materials had reached all the flood affected
families and there was no shortage of funds.’ (Relief before Deepavali: CM, Bangalore: DHNS, Oct 12, 2009)

Box 6.4

**Stories of hunger during the immediate aftermath of the floods**

Stories of hunger during the immediate aftermath of the floods abound. All houses interviewed for the study had stories of hunger to recall.

‘…food was never sufficient…” (a 6 year old girl)

‘…we got only two meals…. at one ‘o clock and six ‘o clock…” (a 17 year old man)

‘…we are not used to eating rice… we begged the (relief) centre people that we would cook jolada roti (jowar roti) on our own, but they didn’t do it…” (a 31 year old woman)

‘…only small children (below five years) got milk. I didn’t get milk. I only got rice..’ (a 7 year old boy)

‘… everyone was always hungry…”

Similar stories also appeared from other districts.

“We have not eaten anything since last night. The gruel centre was our only source of sustenance,” said Renuka B. Kathimare amid cries of her three hungry children..... After providing exactly seven lunches and seven dinners, the district administration has concluded that Mandrali village’s flood-affected residents have had enough “free food” and must for themselves from now on (and shut the centre).

- Sudipto Mandal, Gruel centres in Karnataka, The Hindu, 10/10/09)

The Bagalkot district Zilla Panchayat Officer while commenting closure of *ganji kendras* in the study areas said, ‘the field officers had been given full freedom to keep the centres open till as long as there was a need. It they shut the centres down, then the need must have been met.’

This raises the question as to who decides whether there are any unmet needs. It is the people’s word against that of the people running the gruel centres. The need for a accountability mechanism is evident here, which entails supervision of the claims being made by the field officers. The NGO worker who managed the gruel centre
after the Government officials stopped mid-way highlighted the need for supervision lucidly. She said,

‘Managing a relief centre is a very difficult task. It is physically, mentally and emotionally draining. People have lost everything and are often very unreasonable in their complaints and demands. But we have to understand their situation and be calm. The government officials who are always used to being in the upper hand will not tolerate all this. They are also waiting for the smallest chance to close the centre. This is not to say that there are no good government officials. There are a few, but our experience with most others has been very disappointing.’

Speaking specifically about the relief centres in the study villages she said,

‘... he (the Bagalkot district Zilla Panchayat Officer) is not right in saying that the field officers were the ones who decided to stop the gruel centres. It was clear that lesser and lesser money and materials were being sent to the centres and finally all payments were stopped. The officials showed us the bills and records. This is just an attempt to pass the blame. The problem is that none of the senior officials or ministers knew what was happening. When our great MLA visited the flood affected villages twelve days after the floods, the people refused to meet him asking him where he had been all these days. How can a junior officer with no field experience be the decision-maker on when relief must be stopped, even when people are going hungry? Has he conducted a survey or is he a nutrition expert? What is the role of senior officers? Shouldn’t they verify if what is given by the junior officers is accurate?’

None of the study villages received any vessels or food grains from the Government as relief other than the food allotted under Public Distribution System. The panchayat member of one of the villages said,

‘lot materials like vessels, bed sheets, tarpaulins and food grains came to the panchayat. We were promised these materials, but nothing reached us. Our panchayat president is useless. He cannot get anything from the panchayat. When we later asked the officials about those materials, they said that it had been distributed to the most affected villages. Our village is 100 percent fully affected. We are so affected that we will be shifted to a new place. If we didn’t
The process of distribution of relief materials by different agencies caused stampedes and riot-like situation in all the three study villages. One NGO, had members with experience in relief work in other disasters such as the Indian Ocean tsunami and earthquake in Gujarat. Their intervention made a change in one of the villages, Khyada, which also positively impacted further distribution processes in the village. A youth from Khyada who was involved in preparing a list of households for the NGO said,

‘most NGOs and kind-hearted people came with materials, stopped their vehicles on the road outside the village and began distributing things to all who came there first. That was the first time we saw them and after that we haven’t seen them. Some households got more things as all their members would be present there, while some households would get nothing because they were behind in the queue. When there was a shortage, people who didn’t get anything would get upset and begin abusing those who came to distribute the materials. Lots of fight used to break out between those who got materials and those who didn’t. Only … (NGO) came the day before the distribution, they contacted me to make a list of all the households (he was an active member of the dalit youth group). The previous evening, they formed a committee of village elders with people from all the sections (dalits, OBC and General), they beat the dongura (drums) and read out all the names of households. If anyone’s name was left out, they could come forward and add their names at that time. They said that no more additions would be done the next day. Many people whose names were not on the panchayat list came forward to give their names as they were a separate unit and were staying separate away from the main household after marriage. The committee would say if what they said was correct, and then their name would be added to the list. The next day, the relief materials of 5kgs rice, 3 kgs dal, 1 litre oil and a blanket was distributed to all the households whose name was on the list. We used that list for all the people who come to distribute in the village after that.’

get the materials, then who got it? They would have sold the entire stock and made money.’
The program co-ordinator of the village who was in-charge of the distribution said,

‘In spite of all the precautions we took, there were still small fights. One person had two wives and he wanted both of them and their children to be listed as separate households though they lived together. Another person’s brother had migrated six years back, but he wanted his brother’s name to be added on the list, as he could collect the materials. Many devadasis were not on any list as some of them lived together in the same house. When such situations arose, we had to make on the spot decisions on how to handle it. The local committee (comprising of people from different communities) did not agree to add any of the three cases, since they said that it would lead to lots of problem. Everybody had a relative who had moved away long back, they said, and if we were to add all their names there would be no end to the processes. Secondly they reasoned that, if those who were away were not affected by the floods, then why should they receive relief? The man with two wives was also considered a single unit and not listed as two. But, in the case of the devadasis, we (the NGO) intervened and asked the committee to consider the devadasis as separate units, even though they lived together, because all of them had children and some of them even had grandchildren. The community accepted these decisions because it was coming from them and not from us. Otherwise all of them would have eaten us alive even if one person’s claim was rejected, however unreasonable it was.’

The NGO allowed the devadasis to be treated as a separate unit since they had children, but they did not apply the same principle to the man who had two wives, in spite of each of them (the wives) having children of their own. The use of a human rights gaze where every child or person had a right to appropriate relief irrespective of their ‘deeds’ or those of their family members would have ensured that they too got a similar treatment. While this observation was brought to the attention of the NGO’s program co-ordinator she smiled and said, ‘I had never thought of it that way. But yes, we all have our own biases. And in a tense situation you have no time to think about things. You have to act quickly so your innermost beliefs affect your decisions.’

The active involvement of the NGO in eliciting the participation of the community and influencing the outcomes through a supervision of the process was effective in
reaching out to every house in the community. These processes are time-consuming and demands active involvement at the field level. The pulls and pressures of the normal relief process itself is quite taxing and takes a toll on those who are involved in it. All the Government officers who were part of the field relief operations, interviewed for the study said that it was one of the most harrowing time of their careers. One of them recounted,

‘Everybody thinks Government money is their money, and so wherever we took relief materials, everybody wanted everything. How can we control such big crowds? They would not let us take materials to the next village. People would just stop the truck and gherao us. They would then climb into the truck and take whatever they wanted. It would start with little children and then older people would join in. If people got angry, they were even ready to beat us up. It takes only a small reason to stop a fight. In case of shortage, where we are not able to cover all the houses, people would be even ready to stone us or tie us up.’

The fear of the people, coupled with a feeling of lack of support from their superiors was one of the reasons that effective relief material distribution by the Government did not take place.

**Box 6.5**

**Responses of field officials about the flood relief experience**

‘When things go wrong we get blamed …’
‘I have never felt so humiliated….. sahebru (the senior officer) told in front of the people who complained that he would initiate an enquiry against me…’
‘… are they people or animals? We never wanted to go back. The people in the office don’t understand.’

The lack of accountability and supervision transmitted down the hierarchy. While the field officers were given charge of ensuring that the materials reached the flood affected people, there was neither support in implementing the decision nor supervision to ensure that the tasks were carried out properly. A taluk panchayat official said,
‘I was given food materials and told that it should reach these... these... villages (showing a list of eight villages). There was no money for transport and no vehicles were given. People don’t understand these things and accuse us when relief materials go missing..... I am not saying that there has been no loss, but most of the materials were sent to the villages. Most of the materials were distributed here itself to the panchayat members in the presence of the panchayat president of their villages. What they did with the materials we don’t know. How can they blame us?’

As seen in the study villages, amidst all the changing of hands and transmission of responsibilities from the various hierarchies of the Government to the panchayat members to the villages, there were significant leakages in the materials and in some cases no materials finally reached the village. With no documentation or supervision, it was difficult to pin-point the source of the leakages or to plug it effectively. The lack of supervision by authorities also resulted in poor quality of constructions of temporary shelters. Many of the agencies involved in the temporary shelter work had no prior experience of constructing shelters. The work was ‘outsourced’ to NGOs, corporates and religious institutions, in addition to different Government agencies. A disaster monitoring centre official said,

‘... that (outsourcing) was the only way of reaching atleast a part of the affected people. The Government acting alone would have been a disaster. But when they got so many people involved, they should have laid down proper guidelines and enforced them. Unfortunately, that did not happen. That is one of the lessons of this response.’

**Box 6.6**

**Injury due to poor construction of temporary shelter**

The tin-sheet roof of one of the temporary shelters in Khyada village which had not been securely fastened flew away in the winds and landed on the feet on a young girl slicing her toes.

As seen above, the bulk distribution of materials and lack of accountability in ensuring that the materials reached the affected people became a moral hazard in the
face of insufficient supervision and monitoring. The experience of the researcher in post-disaster relief distribution of relief materials including the post-flood situation of 2009 in Karnataka has shown that, the process is fraught with risks, unless it is meticulously planned and effectively. Even then, one can only minimise the risks and have to be prepared for different contingencies. All the processes involved in relief distribution from needs assessment, procurement, storage, transportation, distribution and follow-up – are all fraught with risk of errors of judgement, malpractice by those involved, pilferage, undue claims by those who are not affected or by the more powerful communities and attacks by miscreants among affected communities when things don’t proceed according to their wishes.

The district-level Government functionaries admit that they were ‘totally caught sleeping (unawares), and with little support from the state level, (they) were only happy that one more task was taken care of by somebody else.’ The question of overseeing any of the works did not arise considering the shortage of personnel, and the lack of preparedness to deal with the shortage.

**Ensuring access**

‘… water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink.’

*The Rime of the Ancient Marinere*, Taylor Coleridge, 1798

The biggest casualty in the under-preparedness was that access to basic necessities of life such as drinking water, food and shelter was inordinately delayed or did not reach the villages at all. All the study villages suffered shortage of drinking water in the first few days after the floods. Though drinking water tankers were deployed, they would be empty before they reached the study villages, as the people from the villages en-route would stop them and fill-up all the water. This ensured that villages closer to the taluk centre would get water while those which were away would not have access to water.
Box 6.7
Lack of potable water after the floods

- ‘For three days we survived on rain water collected from the ground, but after three days, people started feeling sick with stomach pain and loose motions. The people in the camp decided not to drink the water from outside, but how long can we survive….’
- The water outside was black and filled with dirt. We didn’t even have extra cloth to separate it. We just cupped water with our hands and drank it.
- My children were crying for water. We were all hungry, but they were crying for water.
- ‘We would send complaints to the taluk panchayat everyday, and after three days, they finally arranged that empty tankers would go from Badami, but would refill only at Hole Alur (closer to the study villages) and then supply to our villages.’

As discussed in several other sections of the thesis, food was an important concern, which like water was in short supply as food stocks had been washed away in the floods. The government ensured that the Public Distribution System (PDS) was restored soon enough, but the loss of ration cards created problems of access to food for those whose cards were swept away. This aspect is discussed in greater details in the section on legal support.

Confusion prevailed in the area as there were rumours that entire villages would be relocated. The Government took time to decide how many villages to relocate and where to relocate them. Land prices had gone up when the proposal to the government to shift villages became known. Land owners also refused to sell land for rehabilitation purposes. The CEO of Bagalkot panchayat said, ‘on one side there was pressure from the media and MLAs to speed up the rehabilitation process. We were initially asked to use Government land and procure the remaining at existing market price. But people were quoting exhorbitant rates because they knew we were under pressure to buy the land quickly. If we used force, it would backfire on us. We had to move very carefully and try and convince the owners which is a very time-consuming
process. Many of the owners would disappear making us wait endlessly to meet and convince them. Some of them approached the courts.’

Another official from the panchayat office said,

‘… finally what worked was force (coercion)….People were not giving in…. greed was main… The owners were threatened that the District Commissioner (DC) would issue an order to take their land for a public cause at the rate fixed by the government. Once the order was issued, there was no scope for bargaining. That idea was successful. Some people gave in fast. For some, the DC personally visited and convinced them. But getting the land was easy compared to what dealing with all the construction.’

At the time of the study, which was about two years after the floods of October 2009 and over five years after the previous floods of July 2007, households still lived in 10’ X 10’ temporary houses made of tin-sheets in the study villages, because the reconstruction of houses were still not complete. Many of the corporate bodies and voluntary agencies who had promised to build houses immediately after the floods withdrew from their commitment. This affected the planning of resettlement and the schedule of building permanent houses went awry.

**Support in legal requirements**

The study revealed that awareness on legal and other norms related to flood relief was very poor in the area. This fact was used to exploit the flood affected people. One of the key ways of exploitation was in withholding information. The panchayat member of Khyada said,

‘… when we went to the taluk panchayat they said no norms had been fixed for assessing damage and relief. We told this to the people. But when the officers came for assessment they told that they were following government norms. People asked me, ‘what kind of a member you are?’ They thought that I was not giving them information because of my power.’

Even elected representatives of the panchayat were not given information regarding norms. A senior office of Taluk panchayat when asked about this issue said, ‘if they know what the norms are, they will manipulate things to fit the norms.’ A similar
thought was echoed by an official of zilla panchayat. He said, ‘if we want to see that correct people get the benefits, we can’t be very open. You think for yourself. If we tell them the criteria, won’t everybody ask for benefits? Everybody thinks if the Government has given him (somebody else) something, then I should also get it. It does not matter if he has lost more or if I didn’t lose anything. He got something, so I should also get it.’

The fear of manipulation and the prospect of being flooded by requests which they foresaw and feared not being able to handle, were the top reasons given by officials for not sharing crucial flood-related information to people. A related fear was about people misusing the floods to create false entitlements such as land, ownership documents, electoral ids and ration cards.

‘The people are waiting for opportunities like this to create false identification documents’, a senior officer of the Zilla panchayat said. The officer defined legal rightholders as those whose names were not in the panchayat land records. As seen in the study, this effectively excluded the landless, those families which had moved out of their parents’ house after marriage and homeless people in the village. In addition it also created barriers for those who had lost their legal documents in the floods. This criteria adopted by the government not only perpetuated existing vulnerabilities, but also exacerbated it by causing further denial of rights.

‘My husband’s brother’s family did not get anything though they have been living separate for the past thirteen years and they have three children, as the land patta is in joint name. Even we did not get any ration since the ration shop refused to give us ration without the ration cards. Many people like us were affected. We had to bring grains from Badami for the first time in our lives.’

- A women whose house was completely destroyed in the floods

The assessment of damage and distribution of compensation was given using the list of landholders from the panchayat records.
An 8’ X 10’ temporary house (shed) in Khyada has 16 members. Three families live in the space as they were allotted only one shed. The three families lived in three different houses before the floods, all of which were destroyed in the floods of October 2009. However the land patta was in a single name – that of their grandfather. One of the householders explains, ‘we tried many times to get the land records speerated. They made us run around, pay bribes and yet they didn’t do the work for us. Today we got one shed for all our three families. Our entire village is getting shifted. Tomorrow when new houses are distributed, we will all get only one house for all the three families. Where will we go?’

A similar case was seen with families who were affected in the floods of July 2007. Several homeless, landless and nuclear family units (those who had moved out of their parents’ home after marriage) were accommodated in the temporary shelters as their place of dwelling had been destroyed. The housing norm passed by the Government of Karnataka (under President’s rule) in 2007 had promised houses for all those in temporary shelters. However the revised norms under the ‘shifting village scheme’ provided houses only for those whose names were on the panchayat list of home owners. This effectively ruled out houses for homeless, landless and nuclear family units in the resettlement villages.

A resident of the temporary shelter said,

For five years, we have lived in these tagdu-mane (tin sheets) leading worse than animal lives in the hope that we will soon be moving to our own houses. If we knew that we were not going to get anything, we could have migrated to Managalore or Mumbai and made our living. We wouldn’t have suffered here like this.’

Promoting health and mental health

In spite of the high rate of illnesses and higher chances of epidemics, there were no outreach activities conducted by the health department in the study villages. The only intervention was distribution of bleaching powder. These were sprinkled in the paths besides roads and used for disinfecting water.
In the study, it was found that most households used large quantities of bleaching powder since the water was being collected from ‘dirty places’ (stagnant puddles on the roads and fields). There was no training or instructions provided on the use of bleaching powder for disinfecting water. The World Health Organisation (WHO) norms included in the Manual on Water and Environmental Sanitation for Disaster management (Ponnuraj, 2006, p. 43) says,

*One-eighth of a teaspoonful of bleaching powder is sufficient to disinfect 10 litres of water. The water has to be rested for 30 minutes after mixing with the powder.*

But oral accounts of people who used chlorine to disinfect the water reveal that the quantities used were much more than the recommended dosage and they did not give it the ‘resting time’ to allow the chlorine to work on the water.

**Box 6.9**

**Voices of the people on usage of bleaching powder in drinking water**

- We would mix a bit of bleaching powder in our tumbler before drinking the water. (a 14 year old)

- A lot of bleaching powder was given from the panchayat office. We put some outside on the roads where (stagnant) water collected. Remaining we put in our pots of drinking and cooking water. (a 37 year old woman)

- The bad smell and taste (due to chlorine content) was there, but we drank it because it protects us from germs in water (a fifth standard student).

The psycho-social dimension of the flood response was largely met through community members supporting each other. This is detailed in the section on social groups in the following chapter. People supported each other, especially in the immediate aftermath of the floods. In the longer term, the ensuing conflicts over relief materials and struggle for compensation caused rifts among community members. The response of fear, grief, anger, despair, numbness, intrusive memories, and despair were reported by many households as reactions in the immediate after-math of the floods. But these can be said to constitute ‘normal responses to an abnormal event’ (NDMA 2009). While an in-depth assessment of the psycho-social impact would be
required to study if they continued long enough to cause abnormal patterns of
behaviour and long-term mental effects, some instances of people not going to work
even two years after the floods and not having an interest in anything else was
reported from the study area.

**Box 6.10**

**Lack of interest in work**

DM, is a 41-year old mason, who rushed home on hearing news about the floods,
from Mangalore. His household lost their house and all household goods in the floods.
He has refused to leave the temporary shelter or to find work anywhere, since then.
He said, “I will do all that after moving in to my new house (being built under the
resettlement scheme).” His wife said that he was even scared of letting her go to
work, and would be very upset if the children were late from school.

The floods also affected those with existing mental illness by exacerbating their
conditions.

**Box 6.11**

**Floods and person with mental illness**

A household in Thaminala which had over four acres of land, lost a lot of their
standing crops and suffered major damage to their house. The woman of the
household who had earlier episodes of mental illness went into severe depression. The
family members are devout Muslims and went to different shrines to pray for her
healing. When asked why they did not approach any medical facility, they said that
there were no such facilities nearby where they could go to.

Psycho-social intervention was completely absent from the Government. NGOs and
other health institutions also did not intervene in this regard. After the involvement of
a range of mental health initiatives in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami, it
was expected that psycho-social care would be part any disaster response initiative.
Several valuable resources on psycho-social care in disaster response had been
generated by NIMHANS (National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences,
which ironically is located in Karnataka itself), World Health Organisation – South
East Asia Region Office (WHO-SEARO), The International Council of Voluntary
Agencies (ICVA) and the National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM),
Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Government of India. However, there was no psychosocial care provided in the study villages in the post-flood situation. In the absence of action by the state government, it would become the role of Central entities like National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM) to become the institutional memory keepers of disaster response from across the country and to help concerned state to play different roles. While laying down policies and guidelines are useful roles being played by the NDMA, the flood response has shown that in the context of lack of adequate readiness to respond, the guidelines won’t be put into use adequately, or not at all, as in the case of NDMA guidelines on Psycho-Social Support and Mental Health Services in Disasters. It is essential that NDMA then helps to plug the gap by working with the state governments in bringing in these neglected elements into the disaster response. Also, several states may not have sufficient human resources in terms of trained personnel to carry out these specialised tasks. It could then play a role in ensuring cross-learning and matching the need with resources from across the country.

**Focus on groups with special needs**

The impact of life in relief camps and temporary shelters on women, especially those with small children and infants were highlighted by many households in the study. A women from Khyada said, ‘we were staying in the Government School for a long time. Though the men used to sleep outside once the rains had stopped, all of us had to stay awake as there was no space inside for everybody. My baby was a few days old and it was very difficult. The other women took good care of me and even gave me their food and warm clothes for the baby. But with everybody around it used to be difficult to rest. And the waters had not gone down, so we could not go to the toilet. I had some problems after the delivery and before I could go to the doctor, the floods started. I was tired (due to excessive bleeding) and could not go to the hospital because there were no vehicles running at that time….. no doctors or ANM nurse visited the school. Those who could would walk upto Badami or Hole Alur or Badami for treatment and to buy things.’ The disruption caused by the floods also affected vaccine schedules as no health services were functioning for over two months.
Facilitating longer-term rehabilitation

‘Words are plentiful, deeds are precious’

- Lech Walesa, First President of Poland and Noble Peace Prize winner (1983)

The aftermath of the floods saw many promises being made about the longer-term rehabilitation of flood affected people. A few of them are examined, two years after they were made. A total of 57851 houses were to be built under the Aasare scheme of the Government of Karnataka, and handed over to the flood affected families by June 2010, a deadline later extended almost by a year to May 2011. However in May 2011, only a quarter of the promised houses had been built, including those built by Government and private donors. (The Hindu, May 12, 2011). Over 45,000 people in the flood-affected areas who had been promised houses in safer locations would not receive houses. The Revenue Minister blamed it on the private donors who withdrew from the project. He said,

‘Some of the donors who took huge publicity after they made commitments to build houses for the flood victims, have withdrawn from the project’ (ibid).

However, the figures indicated that private donations greatly exceeded the expenditure by the state. Even after excluding all the initiatives done privately by voluntary groups, NGOs and individuals, the donation by individuals and corporate groups added upto Rs. 637 crores, while in comparison the expenditure by the state had been only Rs.455 crores (ibid). An NGO co-ordinator from Bagalkot who has been campaigning for early completion of the resettlement houses involved in the flood relief said,

‘The Government blames the people for its faults. When floods came, people donated generously and took up relief and rehabilitation in a big way. Otherwise even 5000 houses would not have been built. Tell me, where are the Chief Minister and Revenue Minister today (at the time of the interview)? The Chief Minister is in jail for giving away land to his family, and the Revenue Minister’s family members are in jail for illegal mining. When there were divisions between the Chief Minister and Revenue Minister over the cess on mining companies for flood relief, he had even threatened to disclose how the flood relief money was being swindled. They know public memory is short and they can get away with anything.’
The Government officials too shared their resentment over having to face the people’s ire after being promised houses and then not being able to fulfil the promise. One taluk panchayat level officer said,

‘When Government announced the list of villages to be resettled, everybody dreamt of having a new house with proper facilities in a safe place. When the people come and ask us why construction is not starting, we have to tell them that all that news is just hot air, and they won’t be getting any house. The people think we are responsible for their loss. Recently one Panchayat Development Officer (PDO) committed suicide not able to bear the pressure from the people and elected (panchayat) members. Many others have threatened to resign.’

Another official from the Gram panchayat reported,

‘people are not making any changes or spending money on repairing their houses because they think they will be relocated shortly. They should have been told if there was a change of plans. But there is no official announcement about the change of plans.’

Some of the private organisations too went back on their commitment made during flood relief. In one instance, officials of a mutt (a religious body) withdrew from their commitment to build houses in Khyada after the local community questioned them for starting construction work before the entire land for rehabilitation had been purchased.

A youth leaders who was in the forefront of the struggle said, ‘we were promised plots of 30’X50’ after the floods of 2007, for those who owned plots bigger than 30’X40’. All the others were promised plots of 30’X40’, including the homeless. But after the recent floods, the Government decided to build uniform 30’X40’ houses for all, and in the process also left out names which had been included the last time. We sent a petition to the Government and asked the mutt leaders to wait till the Government had made a final decision on this issue. But they went and poisoned the mind of the Government officials and went away. Next time when we went to the DC to ask him the status of our petition, he said, he would issue ‘shoot-at-sight’ orders if we acted smart, and brought in Karnataka Land Army to complete the work.’
The permanent shelters construction work in Khyada was done by outsiders, with very little labour involvement from the local areas, under the protection of three bus-loads of policemen stationed there 24 hours a day. Entry of outsiders were restricted and strictly monitored.

**Saving money through Self Help Groups**

Though the concept of women’s Self Help Groups (SHG) is wide-spread in Karnataka through the patronage received from the government through the ‘stree shakti’ scheme, the study villages did not have even one functioning self help group. It was seen that financial inclusion was almost completely absent with very few members in each village having a bank account. The nearest bank was in the next panchayat. There were no avenues for savings or opportunities for loans from formal banking systems. SHGs were formed in the study villages (and other villages) by the NGO separately for women and youth. For the first time in their lives, the members of the group had access to a savings account in the bank through the SHG. They also gave loans to each other as part of internal lending. The interest received was shared by the members of the group.

**Box 6.12**

**Formation of Self Help Groups by an NGO**

An NGO which came in to the area as part of the flood relief had identified those who had not received any compensation in each of the study villages, either due to discrimination or other reasons such as administrative oversight. They ensured that relief materials reached the affected families, either directly through relief distribution by the NGO or by bringing the cases to the notice of government officials, or by highlighting different cases before the media.

Once the relief distribution phase was over, many of those who had been reached by the NGO requested them to stay back and work with them, especially in dealing with problems of lack of employment. Recalling the period, a senior community organiser of the NGO said, ‘We used to be flooded with phone calls from the people saying “please don’t leave us now. Start some training program or anything......... and we will learn and participate. We have no option here except to go to Mangalore
After discussion with our other team members, we said, ok, we will give it a try. We started off with forming self help groups in all villages, which would become the central point of our work. Our entire work would revolve around these groups which we formed. Later we also formed village development committees which was a federation of these self help groups in each individual village.’

After the formation of the SHG, the members were supported in opening a bank account by the NGO. The SHG members were trained by the NGO in operating a bank account and maintaining the books of account.

**Approach to disaster response**

The pointing of fingers by the former Revenue Minister of Karnataka at the private donors for not completing the shelter rehabilitation work, as seen in the earlier section, was not an isolated incident. The approach of the Government, soon after the floods in October 2009 has been that of relying on external agencies for the relief and asking the Centre to provide assistance. Initially, it was the request for Rs.10,000 crores from the centre. This was followed by requests to ‘religious and educational institutions, software companies, NGOs and the public to generously help’ in the rehabilitation process (Karnataka banks on people’s generosity to rebuild flood-hit, 06 October 2009, IANS). Rs. 637 crore was raised from individuals and corporate groups, compared to the Rs. 455 crore spent by the state Government. The media highlighted that the amount spent by the Government on relief and rehabilitation was only a little over four times of what was donated by the former Chief Minister to temples within Karnataka and in neighbouring states.

The low spending of the state has left behind a spate of broken promises in the form of damaged houses and houses in unsafe location waiting to be rehabilitated (25.9% of the promised 57851 houses). This should be seen in the context of government’s own figures from the Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre (KSNDMC), which indicated that the monetary equivalent of socio-economic losses which Karnataka has faced in the last decade was about Rs. 75,000 crores, owing to 11 floods and 10 droughts (DNA, November 11, 2011). The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has also classified Karnataka as the ninth
natural-disaster prone state in the country. Private agencies like Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS) have set up disaster response teams (SDRT) in Karnataka while Oxfam India has prepared detailed disaster contingency plans for the state.

An official of the Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre (KSNDMC) said, ‘we always take a reactive approach and run around after the disaster occurs. This is very negative. We have set up infrastructure to monitor natural disasters, people are in place to ensure continuous monitoring, but still suffer great losses when disasters strike. This is because we lack behind in preventive action and preparedness.’

The ‘negative’ approach of the government is also reflected in the draft Karnataka State Disaster Management Policy in a section ironically titled Financial Sustainability. It states, ‘It is not possible for the GoK (Government of Karnataka) to bear all the costs of disasters on a sustainable basis, or provide rehabilitation on a long-term basis.’ This is despite the acknowledgement in the introduction that ‘Disaster Risk Reduction needs to be an essential part of a state's investment in sustainable development.’