



Action advocacy to ensure right to livelihood risk reduction and beyond

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Introduction

The livelihood security of the urban poor, which unprotected in normal times are undermined by disasters and uncompensated in post disaster recovery efforts. The urban poor perceive provision of food, water and shelter as a source of protection and support of their income earning activity. Better food means better nourishment that is reflects in their productivity. Proximity and regular supply of good water means less time spent on fetching it from a distance or waiting for it. This means more time for work. Safer shelter means safer place to work, safer place for keeping raw materials and safety of their families when they are away. Protection of livelihoods of the urban poor is a prime mover for achieving security for their future

What happens to the livelihoods of the urban poor when a disaster strikes?

Their economic and social condition renders them defenseless from the onslaught of disasters and the sustained after effects. Source, support and sustenance of their work are affected adversely. They suffer loss of income and assets. Handcarts, sewing machines and wheelbarrows are damaged and buried under fallen roofs and walls. Shelters, which double as workplaces for the poor, are destroyed. Economic links are damaged and local markets are destroyed. Worse, in the relief process their long-term needs are ignored. These sections are not able to withstand the impacts of disasters or recover like the better-endowed sections of the society. More often than not, without outside support, this section of victims is unable regenerate their livelihoods to secure their lives again. Even though the poor are known to take rational decisions in the face of disasters and are ready to invest in disaster-proofing techniques that will make their lives safe, every step they take is hinged on their livelihoods.

This paper delineates the findings of a research study, supported by the ProVention Consortium of the World Bank, and conducted by the Disaster Mitigation Institute (DMI), Ahmedabad among the slum dwellers in Bhuj, (Western India), who are still recovering from the January 2001 earthquake. The results indicate that overall social development of a region is in itself an effective risk reduction measure and outlines a roadmap for investment in human capital, social or economic, as an aid to livelihood risk reduction. This approach interlinks recovery and mitigation of disasters to existing efforts in developing countries focusing on improving its social indicators like literacy, and initiatives to create safety nets like micro –credits and micro-insurance.

Background of the study

The Stimulus

The internal and external drivers that stimulated the concept of the original research study — ‘Action Advocacy for Livelihood Risk Reduction and Beyond’ — have been summarized into a set of three questions:.

How can we develop a framework of sustainable livelihoods in a disaster prone pocket?

What role does a need-based livelihood relief have on the lives of disaster prone urban poor?

What role does reducing risks to livelihoods have on the development of a state, country and region? What works for risk reduction and why?

Most of them are direct. The study has attempted to get the answers from the ground reality in the fourteen earthquake affected slums in Bhuj, still recovering from the January 2001 earthquake.

The target population

The approach to the research study was both quantitative and qualitative, and the interest is to make generalizations concerning livelihood recovery pattern of a group of slum-dwellers in Bhuj.

For this the study focused on 1100 livelihood beneficiaries of Disaster Mitigation Institute (DMI) in Bhuj. A brief introduction to organization is given in Box 1.

Box 1: Disaster Mitigation Institute and Human Security

Disaster Mitigation Institute (DMI) is a community based action research, action planning and action advocacy organisation that bridges the gap between policy, practice, and research from the community to the national level. Established after the 1987-89 repeat drought in Gujarat, it has four programmes: livelihood security; food security; shelter security; and water security. Its activities are organised around its activity centres: **Livelihood Relief Fund (LRF)**; Emergency Food Security Network (EFSN); Water Security Programme (WSP); Emergency Health Unit (EHU); Organisational Resources (OR); Learning Resources (LR) and Action Research and Review Services (ARRS). DMI’s mission is to reduce the vulnerability of poor communities by increasing mitigation efforts through learning and action.

DMI’s LRF was created as an activity centre after the cyclone that hit the western port of Kandla situated in the western coast of Gujarat in June 1998. Since then, LRF has grown steadily to reach out to victims of the Kandla